

29 The Scottish Dimension in Film and Television

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LOCAL AND GLOBAL DOMAINS: 'SCOTTISH' FILM AND TELEVISION?

The concepts of 'Scottish' film and 'Scottish' television provoke challenging questions about what constitutes the national dimension in culture. Attributions of national character bring complications, about history, society and culture, as well as economics, politics and psychology. This is why they tend to produce debate or dissent more often than consensus. Film and television extend further an older argument about the local traits of cultural output, such as literature and painting.

For quite specific reasons it may be (even) harder to define the Scottishness of a film than the Scottishness of a novel. Many theoretical complications surround the notion of *authorship* as a general proposition, in all expressive forms, but particularly in film and television.¹ Films are produced not only by a team of specialists (writers, directors, cinematographers and others) but also by an industrial infrastructure with determining influences on production. This 'industrial' aspect of film and television raises questions yet more awkward than those concerning the effects (for example) of the economics of publishing or exhibition upon the respective forms of writing or painting: 'culture often depends on economics, and in no form of expression do money and art come closer than in cinema'.²

Determining the features of a cultural geography of film and television is in practice very difficult, even just at the literal level of mapping creative involvement; if indeed it is the creative dimension which determines 'national' identity. Judgments about the national dimension of a film can be made variously because of where it was shot; or financed; or by whom it was directed; or by whom it was written; or on what theme. The ensuing space for debate is further widened by sub-national and specifically regional considerations, as in the instance of the very small but interesting Scottish cinema set in the Highlands and Islands. These questions of provenance are to an extent applicable also to television.

The present exploration of the Scottish dimension of screen culture is not intended necessarily to valorise 'Scottishness' as a characteristic. Several later works of English director Ken Loach have been shot in and around Glasgow, two of them (*Carla's Song*, 1996; and *Ae Fond Kiss*, 2004) focusing on international or multi-cultural themes; the latter completing an informal trilogy begun by *My Name is Joe* (1998) followed by *Sweet Sixteen* (2002). The question of how 'Scottish' this work may be is not only complex, but in a sense contrary to the spirit of Loach's themes, which offer a broadening of national and ethnic frames of reference. All four of these films, however, were scripted by Scots screenwriter Paul Laverty, a former Glasgow lawyer; and Loach and Laverty have been in the habit of talking about their work as a shared vision. Whether it is enhanced or diminished by debating its 'Scottishness' is uncertain.³

The work of director Bill Douglas, which might appear to offer a straightforward instance of 'Scottish' film-making, is of such considerable worth precisely because of characteristics clearly placing it within European fiction and film

traditions embracing Dostoevsky, Dovzhenko and others. Moreover, the impact of Douglas' *Trilogy* (*My Childhood*, 1971; *My Ain Folk*, 1973; *My Way Home*, 1979), not least in recollection, is much enhanced by its later and radical Egyptian location, through which its cultural horizons are redrawn.⁴ These dimensions do not necessarily make the *Trilogy* less Scottish, of course, but at the very least they construct a form of Scottishness which is crucially in dialogue with cultural life elsewhere.

Other kinds of engagement have been made by Scottish cinema with Europe, from Timothy Neat's *Play Me Something* (1989) to Lynne Ramsay's *Morvern Callar* (2002) albeit that the latter, largely faithful to Alan Warner's novel, achieves the transition from Scotland to Europe with a casualness and flatness which realizes at most a climatic contrast. Timothy Neat's film shifts between the island of Barra, rural northern Italy and Venice; its minimal reception in Scotland, compared with its success at the 1989 Barcelona Film Festival, is also instructive.⁵ The trajectory from Scotland to other lands which characterises Douglas' *My Way Home*, Loach's *Carla's Song* and *Morvern Callar* (respectively to Egypt, Nicaragua and Spain) suggests a motif worth considering alongside the established migratory tendencies and diasporic self-imagination of the Scots. (At least one critic commented on the later *Red Road*'s rendering of a Glasgow which might have been envisioned by Antonioni).

Ramsay's earlier *Ratcatcher* (1999), along with the work of Peter Mullan and Gillies Mackinnon (*Small Faces*, 1995), signalled new directions for Scottish film authorship after the work of Bill Forsyth and Charlie Gormley (*Heavenly Pursuits*, 1986) from around the start of the 1980s. Forsyth's *Gregory's Girl* (1981) was an international hit of enduring, if periodically fey, intelligence (a part-sequel, *Gregory's Two Girls*, appeared in 1999), comprising, along with 1983's *Local Hero*, the cornerstones of Forsyth's often admirably idiosyncratic output, which though limited in scale has done much to make plausible the notion of a new Scottish cinema. The work of Mullan and Ramsay, certainly in the latter's first feature, has been distinctly harder-edged and ideologically engaged.

Douglas and Loach – placing them together productively keeps open the question over what constitutes a 'Scottish' film – present differing instances of a cinema producing a cosmopolitan and reflexive version of Scottishness in which local and international elements combine to exceed the sum of their parts. Television is not excluded from this possibility, though usually it has excluded itself, with the obvious exception of its extensive role in underpinning Scottish film production (one of a number of senses in which the two media are in practice often closely related).⁶

Much television output, however, in fields such as drama and comedy, focuses on local cultural idiosyncrasy, sometimes enhanced or manufactured. A long line of Glasgow-centred comedy series by BBC Scotland and associated independent producers have mined local seams for comic potential, with positive and negative effects, the best, from *Para Handy* to *Rab C. Nesbitt* and *Still Game*, creating very broad appeal from local material, in the latter instances maintaining a sometimes painful social realism.⁷

The complexity of these questions about the identity of screen product also arises because of considerations of audience. In the globalised world, there is now a transnational economy producing constant development in the status of the dimension of the local, both as culture and as economic commodity.

Additionally, given the particular circumstances of Scotland's media industry relationships with England, there have been, and long preceding the intense phase of globalisation after the 1960s, particular cross-border considerations governing media production in Scotland, which merit separate analysis. When we come to consider the

potential audience for Scottish television production, for example, there is both an English and a 'global' audience to be considered; but the former is generally more important.⁸

A film or a television programme made in Scotland may need to appeal, perhaps even principally, to an audience beyond Scotland, usually for pressing commercial reasons (for cost reasons, radio is often very different in this respect⁹). Scottish cultural producers in other media such as the novel and painting, and three-dimensional arts, are often influenced, out of similar motives, to produce work for a wider audience. However, the financial risk involved in the frequently expensive business of film and television may necessitate greater accommodation of forms and contents accessible and attractive to cross-border audiences.

In many instances of media production, there has to be a careful calculation about the economic consequences of 'local' contents. Roland Robertson's succinct definition of globalisation as 'the twofold process of the particularization of the universal and the universalisation of the particular'¹⁰ still (despite subsequent critique of this position) offers a helpful shorthand introduction to the phenomenon.

Contemporary Celtic music might serve at the local level as an example of this dialogic process, and – at the global level – world music (whether they find their way into film and television or not, though often they do). Celtic rhythms are absorbed into music defined as 'world music', while, simultaneously, Celtic music redefines itself to accommodate influences from global sources, inflecting them in specific and local fashion. At a further stage of development, we might say that global cultural forms are by definition composed of diffuse local elements and that local culture (music, film, television, and so on) may have absorbed global elements. *May have*, because such processes of influence, exchange, hybridisation, are not themselves universal.¹¹ Not all forms or instances of culture are equally involved therein. But there is nonetheless a globalising tendency which, albeit with a pre-history as old as international exploration itself, intensified greatly with new media, travel and other technologies, and novel forms of transnational capital and political change after the 1960s.¹²

There is a commercially limited but culturally significant international market for local cinematic oddities, which may feature in art houses, and afterward on the few available arts slots on television, and on DVD. A film such as Finnish director Aki Kaurismäki's *The Man Without a Past* (2002) is an example for which, however, it is hard to find Scottish equivalents, nor does Scotland seem to produce directors like Kaurismäki, though probably it should. Scotland's cinema has until recently seldom engaged with the more complex Scotlands of her literature (or even the darker worlds of some of her television), though that has shown signs of change. *Young Adam* (2003) featured Ewan McGregor in David Mackenzie's sombre adaptation from Alexander Trocchi, a film of bleak and intense introspection unleavened even by the dark quirky humour of the same year's *Wilbur (Wants to Kill Himself)*, a Danish-Scottish-Swedish-French co-production, directed by the Danish director Lone Scherfig and transposed from Denmark to Scotland. By the time Andrea Arnold's *Red Road* (2006) maximized Glasgow's potential for producing landscapes of alienation, the opportunity for a new kind of Scottish film very far removed from Forsyth's world was clearly visible. The same year's Scottish-themed *True North* relocates similar levels of seriousness about human politics to rough seascapes, as the crew of a bankrupt trawler turn to human smuggling in the North Sea. (Scotland has also featured much more incidentally in many other films, often impersonating another location, for example in George Clooney's 2005 Canada-set *The Jacket* in which

scenes were shot in West Lothian, Glasgow and Lanark, a sand quarry in the latter simulating Iraq).

It becomes difficult, within the knowing world of postmodern culture, in which loss of 'authenticity' is a major theme (especially in the domain of electronic media), to distinguish the 'expression' of local themes from their 'performance'. The production of self-conscious forms of local cultural product, often collapsing into kitsch, or even setting out quite consciously as kitsch, has for much longer than the history of the screen media made the boundaries of 'authentic' and 'manufactured' locality very misty, in Scotland as much as anywhere. The Highland Scotland of popular myth, for example, has long come to be seen in some accounts as a retrospective creation¹³ while accounts of Scottish history from both outwith and within her borders are themselves open to challenge; for example, as perpetuating myths of Englishness.¹⁴

In an introduction to a collection of poems representing the long history of verse about the nature of Scotland and Scottishness, Douglas Gifford and Alan Riach noted that the poets who attacked the Union in 1707 'carry the weight of both popular moral force and their own individual judgement':

When political expediency and economic viability (on the one hand) and romantic identification of self and nation and transcendent idealism (on the other) are separated and polarised, the exaggerations and contradictions may lead to political disablement and a sense of disenfranchisement. The Union, like the 1560 Reformation, may well have brought about a number of 'dissociations' in Scottish sensibility.¹⁵

This analysis is in a long tradition emphasising fissure in the Scottish mental landscape, with reference points in literature from James Hogg's *Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* through Stevenson's *Jekyll and Hyde*, to Gregory Smith's notion of the 'Caledonian antisyzygy',¹⁶ developed by Hugh MacDiarmid in his poem of the same name. 'In such a context', continue Gifford and Riach, 'kitsch might be a strategy of preservation, and irony might be a saving grace'.

The ironical mode of much critical comment on Scottish film and television, and the attraction of kitsch for academic writers on the Scottish media, may be a dimension of this strategy. Since the kitsch in question, as in the instance of Hollywood films such as *Brigadoon* and *Braveheart*, is chiefly not of Scottish provenance at all, there arises the suspicion that some writers on Scottish media culture have found addressing kitsch more fun than addressing Scottishness.

Attempts to define recurrent discursive strands in Scottish film and television¹⁷ have sometimes over-emphasised the local specificity of forms both of kitsch and parochialism. The much-valourised 'discursive modes' discovered or reworked from literary criticism for the screen in the 1980s were 'tartanry', 'kailyard', and 'Clydeside-ism', which as putative categories lacked critical development, though their assertion served the purpose of opening a long-overdue phase in the debate about Scottish identity and representation.¹⁸ In fact it was always very unlikely that even a small country's screen culture could productively, for critical purposes, be squeezed into two or three discursive categories¹⁹.

After the debates of the later twentieth century over postmodernisation and globalisation, the argument about what is truly local ought to have lost every shred of innocence. Postmodernism theory emphasised notions of cultural hybridity, the sovereignty of consumption, transnational capital and globalisation (sometimes with

an accent on Americanisation); but at its more sensitive it has left plenty of room for acknowledging the continuing vigour of local cultural and political processes.

There is no evidence that culturally specific forms and contents within Scottish film or television (as in other small countries) must necessarily be obsolescent merely, for example, because these countries are small and other media production centres, such as Hollywood and London, large. However, both practically and theoretically, the question of financial investment in local cultural forms is a more troublesome matter. Specifically *economic* pressures in the field of cinema and television mean that creative and expressive potentials are often harshly limited or altogether occluded because the commodity functioning of these forms takes precedence.

The United Kingdom has always found it difficult to sustain a film industry through lack of an investment infrastructure. Television production in the UK presents a varied pattern but has particularly strong concentrations in London. For other small countries such as Norway and Ireland, the ability to maintain indigenous cultural production calls for strategic commitment. Scotland is like Ireland in having an anglophone audience well-disposed to American and London-based media product; and also unlike either Ireland or Norway in being a still - at least in significant part - stateless nation.

As we shall see, political decision-making about media matters was reserved to Westminster in the devolution settlement. This does nothing to place local media production in a more comfortable position. Despite impressive growth in some sectors of television production in the late 1990s and beyond, Scotland's screen production base is in constant need of being resecured (which in turn implicates a broader set of cultural questions²⁰), and by 2007 there were drops in important figures, for example for network TV production in Scotland. At the start of the new century there were significant gaps – well over six months, for example, between the completion of *Late Night Shopping* in 2000, and the start of *Morvern Callar* some months into the following year – in feature film production; as well as continuing uncertainty over the media portfolio of the major commercial player in television, SMG, and shifts in ownership elsewhere.

SCREEN FICTIONS

Border considerations

In Scotland, dissociation is not a preserve merely of the mental landscape. For film and television, the border with England creates another sort of relational tension, and here these two domains of screen production, film and television, differ in some substantial ways. To pursue this stage of the argument it is helpful to start with a rough sort of map of media production and consumption as a whole.

While the Scots generally read local newspapers and listen to local radio stations, they watch films mainly made in the United States; and much of what they watch on television (while also often produced in the USA) is made in England, generally London, though sometimes in English regional centres such as Manchester.

For television, the question of England is central. It is true that minorities of Scots read English newspapers and listen to London-based radio stations, but it is in the domain of television that the London base for production of key forms such as news and current affairs, drama and soap opera (here there are other regional players, too) is a major factor. The view of the world which emerges from television viewed in Scotland is not in general a Scottish view.

Put differently, ideological production in television in the UK is strongly influenced by London, both in what is produced there and also through what is imported through London, generally from the United States. Whereas both newspapers and indigenous talk radio (such as BBC Radio Scotland) are able to speak to the Scottish media consumer from inside the nation (though the Scottish media can also address the nation with values external to Scotland²¹) television as a general rule is – ideologically speaking – beamed in from outside. Both the BBC and the commercial stations which serve Scottish viewers (Scottish Television, Grampian and Border) can ‘opt out’ of UK schedules to a significant extent, making space for local programming, but major forms of entertainment and much news and information are generated and produced outside Scotland. This is an economic fact as much as an ideological characteristic, and helps explain the limited quantity of media production in Scotland.

However, Scottish-based television production nonetheless offers a more encouraging example of a viable critical mass than cinema. Television in Scotland has a long record of successful and distinctive productions which have made their mark among the UK television audience as a whole, as well as some distinctive successes at the local level. Long-running series such as *Dr Finlay’s Casebook*, initially from the BBC, first broadcast in 1962, and Scottish Television’s *Taggart*, a largely continuous presence since first broadcast in 1983, along with many others which have carved out a presence on the national networks, attest to some considerable vigour in indigenous production.

Some programming has been exported beyond the UK, a dubbed version of *Taggart*, for example, having enjoyed a considerable vogue in France in the early 1990s, where it was sometimes possible to discover two episodes simultaneously on different stations (the original *Taggart*, Mark McManus, in a long black coat and a red scarf, dubbed with a gruff French voice, was a very passable Gallic detective, hinting at subsequently unexplored export potentials; though *Taggart* was still showing on French television in 2005, and did well in other markets). But the battle for funding has traditionally been centred on access to the UK networks, for which Scottish television producers compete with London, English regional, and other interests. A contemporary twenty-first century series such as the BBC comedy *Still Game*, popular both in Scotland and on trial runs on the BBC network, still had to await a lengthy decision process to achieve full access to the UK audience, long after its inception in Scotland. Many Scottish programmes widely acknowledged to be of good quality have not necessarily received substantial audiences in England (John Byrne’s *Tutti Frutti* and the later *Your Cheatin’ Heart*, respectively in 1987 and 1990, are among a number of such instances).

There have been various ways of comprehending the limitations on one nation’s cultural exports to other nations and specific conclusions drawn over screen exports, and also Scotland’s in particular.²² Despite a very few adventurous forays beyond the diet of mainstream television, Scottish output often requires to submit to external expectations. Rural drama exploiting the Scottish landscape (such as *Strathblair*, *Hamish Macbeth*, *Monarch of the Glen*, and *2000 Acres of Sky*) or urban drama often focused on crime or social problems have been easier to sell to the network than other products. Examples of the latter range from *Taggart* and the late-1980s *The Justice Game* to *Rebus*, made from 2000 onward by SMG TV/Clerkenwell Film Productions out of Ian Rankin’s novels. These urban accounts are at worst robust and entertaining and usually better than that, often dealing seriously with character and location.

The rural, highland or island landscape has also offered the background for soap opera (*Take the High Road*, from 1977, later abbreviated to *High Road*) and reality TV and 'docu-soaps' (*Castaway 2000*). Its cinematic equivalents have been found in films such as Forsyth's commercially successful *Local Hero* (1983) and Ian Sellar's *Venus Peter* (1989) as well as in Hollywood and other external forays into the Scottish Highlands and Islands.²³

BBC Scotland launched an urban soap opera, *River City*, in 2002, with which it more or less successfully persisted despite a long absence of encouragement from viewers and critics. Within a pattern of choice established by the *Taggart-High Road* dialectic, it was set in a fictionalised version of the lower socio-economic Glasgow west end neighbourhoods of Partick and Whiteinch (a resolutely middle class soap opera set in one of Glasgow's several affluent suburbs has been an unexplored alternative).²⁴

The need to fulfil expectations can be seen not just in cinematic and televisual themes and forms but likewise within the specialised apparatus of media production such as acting. Scottish actors such as Ken Stott, Robert Carlyle, Robbie Coltrane, David Hayman, John Hannah and others have often found themselves (this can apply equally to film and television) in assertive, threatening or emotionally disturbed roles, in some sense fulfilling outside assumptions about the Scottish, or certainly the Scottish male, character. This is not by any means universal, in television or cinema, as testified by further work both by these actors and others including Bill Paterson, Ewan MacGregor, Brian Cox, Dougray Scott, Alan Cumming and James McAvooy..

But such tendencies point to the easier assimilation beyond Scotland of certain versions of Scottish culture and psyche than others, and perhaps also an easier external identification of Scottish character in male form (it would be challenging to assemble a comparably salient female cohort).²⁵ Sometimes in television drama there has appeared to be a disproportionate Scottish salience; but often in productions with no economic connection to Scotland (suggesting an interesting comparison with politics).

Transcending reactiveness

The sometimes dark fictions of urban life which have emerged from Scotland can also far transcend any limitation of type and proclaim themselves as a true Scottish screen genre. Writer Peter McDougall's television trilogy with director John Mackenzie (*Just Another Saturday*, *The Elephant's Graveyard* and *Just a Boy's Game*, shown on the BBC respectively in 1975, 1976 and 1979) and the later *A Sense of Freedom* (transmitted in 1981), based on Jimmy Boyle's autobiography, comprises some of the strongest drama seen on British television. Other occasional series such as BBC Scotland's *Takin' Over the Asylum* (1994) have contributed to the sense of a substantial and distinctive body of Scottish screen production; its writer Donna Franceschild's *The Key* (2003) was a three-part political drama on a vast twentieth-century canvas stretching to the 1990s from the second year of World War I. (Scottish television drama has been addressed more comprehensively elsewhere.²⁶)

If there is a central spine which can be attached to the notion of a characteristically Scottish film and television product, then Bill Douglas' *Trilogy*, the McDougall/Mackenzie and Loach/Laverty partnerships, and the developing career as director of Peter Mullan must be located there, alongside some of those television series whose writing, directing and acting has achieved a transcendence of rural or urban stereotype – both *Dr Finlay's Casebook* and *Taggart*, especially in their earlier incarnations, are central candidates for inclusion. The team of director Danny Boyle,

writer John Hodge and producer Andrew McDonald who were behind the stylish and iconoclastic thriller *Shallow Grave* (1994) went on to enjoy yet greater international success with the far more satisfying *Trainspotting* (1996), which still represents the high point of Scottish popular cinematic success. At another pole of Scottish culture, the BBC Scotland film production *Mrs Brown* (1997), which won Dame Judi Dench an Oscar nomination, suggested further potential for exploring historical territory while eschewing mere costume drama. The work of more peripheral independent film makers such as Margaret Tait is also helping to redefine the nature of Scottish film culture as it receives new critical attention.²⁷

Add to these (along with the developing cinematic culture of films such as *Red Road*) many less visible but valuable achievements – such as Pelicula Films' drama-documentary for Channel 4, *Gramsci: Everything That Concerns People* (1987) with a Scottish-inflected account of central elements from the life of Antonio Gramsci; or BBC Scotland's four-part adaptation of Dario Fo's *Mistero Buffo* starring Robbie Coltrane (1990); or (both worthy and visible) Michael Caton-Jones's imaginative *Brond*, from Frederic Lindsay's novel (Jam Jar Films for Channel 4, 1986); and the Oscar-winning Peter Capaldi short *Franz Kafka's It's A Wonderful Life* (1994) – and not only does the sense emerge of a distinctive Scottish screen identity, but also of wider boundaries of achievement than might be discerned by looking at the core output. If it is the case that some satisfying exceptions to safe and popular fiction programming are now becoming historically distant, then that may be a function of a decline in contents visible in the British and American media generally.

BEYOND FICTION: ACTUALITY IN FILM AND TELEVISION

It is worth considering the institutional growth of Scottish cinema and film culture before looking at Scotland's role in the development of documentary film, and at the non-fiction field in cinema and television more generally. (Institutions of broadcasting are considered separately in the following section.) A Scottish Film Council had been established in Glasgow, in 1934, shortly after the establishment of the British Film Institute, emphasising a pattern whereby state encouragement of film-making and the growth of spectator-centred film culture (many film societies appeared from the late 1920s) both took a Scottish institutional form. The Scottish Film Council's successor, Scottish Screen, was formed in 1997, and subsumed the functions of various other earlier bodies such as the Scottish Film Production Fund, Scottish Screen Locations and Scottish Broadcast and Film Training. Film production or training bodies, sometimes focusing on the marketing of locations (such as the Scottish Highlands and Islands Film Commission, and the Glasgow Film Fund) have emerged to consolidate the infrastructure of cinema. The involvement of television companies such as BBC Scotland and Channel 4 in the production of film (including a number of those listed above) has been a significant expansion of their activity.²⁸

Despite a stalled attempt in the mid-1940s to set up a Scottish National Film Studios with the idea of producing Scottish-focused fiction film,²⁹ it was in the field of documentary that a distinctive body of work had already emerged. Even before the founding of the first government-sponsored Films of Scotland Committee in 1938, Scottish film had tended toward what would later be characterised as documentary output, and the seven films made for the Glasgow Empire Exhibition (*The Face of Scotland*, *Wealth of a Nation*, *The Children's Story*, *Sea Food*, *They Made the Land*, *Scotland for Fitness* and *Sport in Scotland*) inaugurated an era which was to make a specialty of non-fiction cinema.

This output was (indirectly and intermittently) influenced by John Grierson (1898-1972), the force of whose creative and philosophical personality was felt in his native land, as elsewhere, though he worked variously in England, Canada and France until the 1950s. Films of Scotland also owed much to the vision and zeal of Forsyth Hardy, who spent almost twenty years as director of the organisation,³⁰ which much depended (with variable effects) on sponsorship – from industry, banking and public and governmental institutions. The second Committee was set up after the war in 1954 and produced films until 1982, and a number of films were also produced in the interim period between the two Committees, as the result of various activities of the Scottish Office. It was under the umbrella of the Scottish Council Development and Industry that Films of Scotland was resumed in 1954.

These nearly 170 documentaries made from 1938 until 1982 offer an intriguing if generally selective, curiously external account of Scotland, which is also often arch or self-consciously in love with the poetic; though a number of the films are of cinematic interest beyond their local contents.³¹ Paul Rotha's *Children of the City* (1944) is admirable both formally and for its social realism, shot with a severity of *mis-en-scène* which makes everything of Dundee's cityscapes. There are many films in this realist tradition and others with less sombre concerns from the Films of Scotland stable, which are well worth an interest they no longer receive, though in their time they often played to large cinema audiences (if generally in addition to main features).

John Grierson stands prominently in a short line of Scottish screen pioneers of world status. John Logie Baird had produced what is widely acknowledged as the first real television picture in his laboratory late in 1925 (though yet earlier experiments had produced precursors);³² then demonstrating it publicly early in 1926; making the first transatlantic television transmission in 1928; and producing regular thirty-line broadcasts from 1929.³³ Alan Archibald Campbell-Swinton had as early as 1907 envisaged a form of electronic scanning system using a cathode ray tube. His findings were described in *Nature* in 1908, ideas which he further refined and which helped lead to the practical development of television.³⁴ It might be argued that he is television's true inventor (but there are many claimants).

Grierson's contribution was creative and stylistic and his achievement as a film-maker, as a producer and theorist, and as a cultural entrepreneur, was very considerable. He founded the Empire Marketing Board Film Unit in 1928 and its successor, the GPO Film Unit in 1934, and gathered around him other film-makers of great talent, including Paul Rotha and Alberto Cavalcanti. His own early *Drifters* (1929) is a landmark of the documentary form and films made under his aegis included Basil Wright and Harry Watt's *Night Mail* (1936). The term 'documentary' was Grierson's own. For over two decades he was a dominant force in documentary film, helping draft the National Film Act of Canada in 1939, where he was Government Film Commissioner, and founder and Head of the National Film Board of Canada. Later he was Director of Mass Communications for UNESCO in Paris, and subsequently Controller of Films at the Central Office of Information in London, latterly presenting *This Wonderful World*, his own documentary film programme on Scottish Television.³⁵

Scottish documentary has, like the form generally, now mainly moved to television and the output of BBC Scotland, Scottish Television, Grampian and Border, and the growing Scottish independent sector, has continued the tradition there. 'Actuality' programming ranges very widely on Scottish television, from news and current affairs, through 'docu-dramas', to documentaries variably in the cinematic

tradition. Independent companies of different sizes and specialisms from Pelicula Films to Wark Clements (the latter merging in 2004 with the other leading Scottish independent, Ideal World and then being taken over in later 2005 by London-based 'super-indie' RDF; a reminder of the provisionality of Scottish media ownership and control) have continued the actuality tradition in Scotland, respectively in work such as the Scottish Television/Pelicula Films *Against the Tide* (2003) on the life of George Orwell; and series on World War I and on European themes.

The long-running BBC Scotland current affairs programme *Eorpa*, in Gaelic with English subtitles, provides a model for a distinctive Scottish view of Europe which only periodically emerges elsewhere in the Scottish media. Arts and entertainment programmes from the Scottish television companies have encompassed a Gaelic cookery programme (*Haggis Agus*) from Scottish Television and a variety of arts programmes by different hands (including Scottish Television's long-running *Don't Look Down*) which with other achievements have contributed to a discernible Scottish media identity. It is also enriched by sports programming, in which the BBC and Scottish Television place much faith. It is in mediated sport that national identity often speaks most loudly, though not always most sensitively.³⁶

Debate over the institutional context for Scottish television news is addressed below. Much debate over the establishment of a separate Scottish television news provision,³⁷ to replace the full spectrum of London-based news (Scotland's current television news is 'local') has led nowhere. Meanwhile, the new Scots who have arrived from other parts of the globe often struggle against miscomprehension or invisibility in the media.³⁸

INSTITUTIONAL DISCONTENTS

The first cinema films had been exhibited in Scotland in 1896, as part of the rapid spread of the Lumière brothers' discoveries of 1895, and the Scots became eager consumers of cinema.³⁹ Glasgow had at various times in the 1920s and 1930s well over a hundred cinemas while many smaller cities and towns also enjoyed rich provision, and those without permanent capacity were often visited by touring exhibitors. The major UK exhibitors Associated British Cinema (ABC) eventually came under the control of the Glasgow lawyer John Maxwell who had built the Scottish Cine and Variety Theatres chain during World War I;⁴⁰ and the other major chains, such as Gaumont and Odeon, quickly established themselves alongside many local mini-chains. An enduring pattern soon emerged whereby Scots were by some calculations the UK's most enthusiastic cinema-goers. Glasgow in particular was large enough to house several cinemas of significant architectural and design merit such as the celebrated Green's Playhouse. But the UK's worst cinema disaster occurred close by in Paisley on 31 December 1929, when seventy-one children died amidst the panic in the Glen Cinema caused by black smoke issuing from a film reel box, an event which subsequently led to the installation of push bar fire doors on all cinemas.

Larger if much less lethal questions of the fitness of media institutions lie at the core of the history of the media in Scotland. The regulation of matters such as the safety of cinemas, and of the moral contents of cinema and television, have followed an overall British pattern. The censorship and subsequently 'classification' of Scottish cinema and television output conforms to the British pattern; though laws outside the media domain, but which impact on it, may operate differently – for example the Obscene Publications Act does not apply in Scotland, its effect being enacted by the Civic Government (Scotland) Act, 1982. Glasgow is one of those localities in the UK

in which local councillors have from time to time more vigorously than others exercised their right to ban the exhibition of films (infamously, Joseph Strick's 1967 *Ulysses*) otherwise passed by the British Board of Film Censorship (renamed the British Board of Film Classification in May 1985).

Even more important institutional questions surround television in all its aspects, and other aspects of film (production in particular).

The BBC's Scottish television broadcasting dates from 1952 (programmes began with the funeral of King George VI), radio operations having commenced in Glasgow in 1923.⁴¹ Scottish Television (for many years STV, then later part of the Scottish Media Group) began operations in Glasgow in 1957 with a curious song-and-dance spectacular, presented by James Robertson Justice, of Scottish vernacular life. Grampian and Border commenced broadcasting in 1961, the latter offering a distinct instance of cross-Border provision; the former was eventually and controversially subsumed within SMG in 1997.⁴²

It is very likely that the concern over monopoly in the Scottish media – for some time from the late 1990s SMG also controlled the *Herald* group newspapers – though real, was nonetheless limited by a perception that SMG represented 'local' control; though this, as in all other instances of Scottish media control, is not within the legislative remit of the Scottish Government and Parliament, which did not receive powers over media matters in the devolution settlement. After some political infighting to prevent SMG disposing of its press operation to the *Scotsman*'s owners, the Barclay brothers, for 'monopoly' reasons, the *Herald* and its sisters papers were sold to an American company, precisely illustrating the fragility of the local dimension in media ownership. Nothing in particular keeps SMG 'Scottish'; it just happens to be so, thus far, and only in a manner of speaking.

The Communications Act of 2003 set up a new regulatory body, the Office of Communications (Ofcom) which as well as coupling broadcasting with telecommunications matters, replaced a number of previous regulatory bodies such as the Independent Television Commission, the Broadcasting Standards Commission and the Radio Authority. The Ofcom proposals were the subject of much speculation in Scotland since they appeared to weaken rather than strengthen the Scottish voice in media governance;⁴³ its Advisory Committee for Scotland has met regularly since 2004 but its influence has been hard to estimate.⁴⁴ Almost certainly, the development of both economic and cultural policies in Scotland are affected by the reservation of political oversight of media matters to Westminster.

Questions of under-development of Scottish media institutions have remained remarkably constant both before and after devolution, despite a crises of 'Britishness' signalled well before the decision of the 1997 Blair government to set up a parliament in Edinburgh.⁴⁵ As is well understood, Scottish institutions have been the guarantor of a sustained Scottish national identity⁴⁶ rather, say, than language, with the exception of Gaelic.⁴⁷ Scotland's media institutions are, in the dimension of their Scottishness, comparatively fragile compared to those, say, of education, law and religion (or sport).

Various 'representative' mechanisms have exemplified the ramifications for media control of the uneasy condition of Scotland as a nation, heightened by the sort of contradiction which sees Holyrood supposedly responsible for cultural policy while Westminster still retains political oversight of media matters. Under the terms of the BBC Charter of 2006, the former Broadcasting Council for Scotland, a group of lay people with an 'advisory' role in the BBC's Scottish operations, became (in parallel with the representative bodies for Wales and Northern Ireland, and England and the

English regions) the Audience Council for Scotland, and its previous national governor became the BBC Trust member for Scotland. These councils have been associated with the Corporation's concept of Scotland (like Wales and Northern Ireland) as that oxymoronic compromise, a 'national region'. The troubled role of Controller of BBC Scotland has attested to the need for Scottish representation, though as with Ofcom there is no sense of any real strengthening of Scottish powers in these more recent developments. In BBC parlance at other places and other times, Scotland is still just a 'region'. The 'nations and regions' agenda is only a phase of the BBC's handling of these matters, paralleled by a similar language elsewhere, such as in Channel 4 (and Ofcom). After devolution these and similar compromises are stalked by contradictions setting political, cultural and economic imperatives of different agencies at odds with each other. In 2008, Scottish Screen was set to be merged with the former Scottish Arts Council in a new body, Creative Scotland, but this process was proving fraught. Meanwhile, the initiation of the Scottish Broadcasting Commission by the First Minister in the summer of 2007 proved an interesting addition to the broadcasting landscape from the second half of that year, its final report due in late summer 2008.

This scene is further complicated by convergence in the communications industries. By the end of the twentieth century the pattern of media consumption was undergoing a steady development with the increasing adoption of digital channels. As yet this trend toward digital viewing has not at all diminished English and especially London dominance of the television landscape within UK-derived programming. However an increasing, though as yet small, minority of viewers has been starting to seek alternative providers, for example of Indian sub-continental language programming from a range of broadcasters, but also of anglophone news provision from several providers in the US, Europe, the Middle East and Russia. In the production realm, policy changes signalled by around 2005 promised some expansion by the BBC, and other broadcasters, beyond the M25, but in 2008 scepticism was still widely expressed in Scotland over the adequacy of existing structural organization of broadcasting in relation to its effects on Scottish needs; and the Broadcasting Commission was expected to provide its own input to the debate.

The digital present is still an uncertain guide to the digital future. In this new, dangerous and jostling environment the small players will require to be very fast on their feet.

CONCLUSION: REPRESENTATION AND POWER

With communications developments in the early twenty-first century shifting to the mobile telephony field, accentuating as yet imperfectly grasped trends toward convergence, it is worth noting the strictly local interest of these debates about Scottish media culture. They occur amidst epic shifts in global communications trends which will implicate Scotland's media culture as much as any other, and which place the protection of Scottish cultural interests on a much more complex field of play. And yet 'local interest', is, in another sense, everything. The future of the media is far from being a negative projection for local voices. Digitisation creates space for great multiplicity of product. It is only that we have no guarantors of its future provenance.

Why do these questions matter? The possibility can be taken for granted of over-estimating the effects of the media in culture, if placed beside the alternative drivers of the domestic sphere and peer contact, of institutions of education, of society and politics, of working life, of vocations, of leisure practices. Yet at the same time the gradual transformation of much of culture into media culture steadily continues. It

is to a very significant degree within the space of media culture that we have to negotiate Scottish culture. Globalisation makes it all the more important that a local politics develops which can negotiate where possible with transnational agents.

Were there a Scottish media strategy under Holyrood's political oversight, as a component of cultural and economic strategy, what would its goals be? To make money and create employment, certainly, not least to develop and consolidate a more secure media production base than currently exists, thereby initiating further economic development.

The cultural motive, too, behind such a relocation of political responsibility in Scotland would seem obvious: if so much of culture is now media culture, it can hardly be satisfactory that both the Scots and their elected representatives in Edinburgh should be powerless over the disposition of ownership and control of the Scottish media, making a chimera of the notion, in present circumstances, of a Scottish media policy; and undermining any claim to be able to pursue a rational cultural policy. Political responsibility for the media lies, in some perspectives, at a frontier post on the road between the current Scottish parliament and that of an independent nation state. Many in the Scottish political classes would prefer not to stray too close to it. (In practice, in the telecommunications field, there has already required to be the occasional raid: but that is a different story.)

These various developments, in turn, take place against a background of increasing involvement on the part of younger media users with newer and often more interactive media forms, through mobile communications and Internet usage (for example on social networking sites). The adequacy of the old producer-consumer model through which cinema and television have been generally understood was increasingly obsolete as the twenty-first century developed, and interactivity and user-generated content became increasingly important. How will traditional media require to adapt to these changed times, and what will be the Scottish content of new media forms and technologies?

Meanwhile, the nation requires redress of under-development of various kinds in its social and cultural life. Scotland needs more inclusion, compassion and cosmopolitanism, and revitalised social and economic ambition. The growth of culture is both a central concomitant, yet also in part a precondition, of these developments. Increasingly inseparable from culture are the media. In this nexus of forces lie interesting questions about Scotland's political future as well as the direction of Scottish broadcasting and cinema.

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