Film Policy and England: The Politics of Creativity

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This essay offers a discussion of policy and its relationship to film culture in Britain focusing primarily on the last twenty-five years, and concentrating exclusively on England. Necessarily a foreshortened overview, it nevertheless seeks to cover the recurring, general reference points in policy analysis, such as the opposition between commerce and culture; the relationship between state and 'nation'; the wider cultural policy discourses within which film has taken its place, particularly that of the 'creative industries' model (CI), and, lastly the constraining and enabling socio-economic contexts within which film and cultural policy acquire their complexion in specific eras. This last emphasis, on social democratic and the neoliberal contexts, is designed to keep the political and cultural issues raised by policy developments foremost and to avoid the de-politicising lure of pragmatic 'realism' or critical timidity in assessing these developments.

Patterns of Policy

Historically British film policy has covered a range of different objectives which can be classified according to the distinctive as well as necessarily overlapping instances of the economic, cultural, social and political (Hill 2004). Whilst the coverage of the first three is familiar in the academic literature, perhaps the last tends to be given less attention. From the perspective of a left politics of film culture this is a pity. For instance, it is common for histories of British film policy to start in the 1920s with its key pieces of protectionist legislation affecting the economics of the industry in the face of Hollywood dominance, thus neglecting earlier legislation such as the Cinematograph Act of 1909. One of the effective but covert political expedients in this earlier act, the first licensing of premises with a view to audience safety in consideration of the fire hazards presented by early cellulose nitrate film stock, was to help smother the emergence of a proletarian counter public sphere constituted by the so-called 'penny gaffs' in areas such as East London with their high immigrant communities (Burrows 2004). Such moments help to remind us that policy combines

precisely formulated forms of intervention (here local government licensing) along with that which is much harder to analyse and evaluate: currents of political and ideological pressure. The 1909 Act is the beginning of that stealthy form of ruling class vigilance over a popular cultural form felt to require unique and extra controls – such as local council approval over exhibition. Such concerns speak to a recognition of film's potential political disruptiveness (the incitement to 'disorder'). As Julian Petley sardonically notes, the licensing powers of local authorities survived the end of flammable film stock (Petley 2013).

Whilst politically attentive to film, the state has nevertheless been keen to conform to a treasured national self-image: one of British democratic freedoms. This has historically necessitated maintaining the appearance of a distance between the state and regulation of the industry. Thus, Western Europe's most heavily censored film culture has been characterized by the use of para-state, non-governmental institutions such as the British Board of Film Classification in order to exert discreet, 'arm's length' political pressure in support of the status quo. The careful shadowing by the state of the radical cinema of the inter-war years is a good example of this vigilance (Petley 1986:44). This politically coercive face of the state is of course only one aspect of its engagement with film policy. Historically, interventions have sought to regulate the economics of the industry in support of commercial film production, and to achieve social aims: see for instance the support for the documentary movement under the Empire Marketing Board in the 1930s and under the Ministry of Information during WWII. As John Hill puts it, this distinctive strand of British film culture represented the "cultivation of film as a vehicle for information, instruction and the construction of citizenship" (Hill 2004: 33). To these older examples of social aims we can add the United Kingdom Film Council's (UKFC) and its successor, the revamped British Film Institute's (BFI), shared objectives of an 'inclusive' and 'diverse' film culture (BFI 2012).

Finally, historically there has been a distinctive cultural component to policy, one which as we will see has recently been expanded and transformed in importance, but which can be traced back to initiatives such as the setting up of the BFI in the 1930s with its mission to archive the national film culture and promote those aspects of film culture which were perceived to be in excess of its purely commercial qualities, including educational initiatives, the provision of forums for evaluative criticism, the

fostering of wider distribution and exhibition outlets for distinctively cultural films from outside the national culture, and the small scale support of cultural film production (Nowell-Smith and Dupin 2012).

Clearly the relationship between these different aspects of policy (economic, social and cultural) is historically mutable, however, this variability is not simply contingent on successive governmental agenda. One way of characterizing it over the post-war period would be in terms of the shift between social democratic and neoliberal state formations. The former attempted to manage the relationship between capitalism on the one hand, and social equality on the other, a concern which, as Jim McGuigan points out, expanded into the related project of fostering cultural inclusion and access (McGuigan 2004). By contrast, a tempting, but misleading view of neoliberalism would be to see it as the abandonment of social and cultural concerns to the indifference and philistinism of the market. Rather it has sought the incorporation of social and cultural policy objectives within a market which is reconfigured as their ideal medium for realization. To this extent the critical point of distinction between the two moments is the neoliberal rejection of the contradiction between capitalism and either social equality or cultural access, a contradiction which the social democratic moment had recognized as a given.

On the level of cultural policy formations this shift between social democratic and neoliberal frameworks can be roughly mapped onto the difference between the post-war 'arts and culture' paradigm (which accepted the need for cultural state subsidies because of the perceived likelihood of the market failing to provide for recognized cultural values) and that of the post 1980s 'cultural and creative industries' paradigms which conceptualised commerce and culture entering into new productive partnerships whereby culture was deemed to be less that which needed protecting from the market and more that which might flourish within it (Dickinson and Harvey 2005). With a historical tidiness, Keynes himself was involved in the institutionalisation of the former immediately after the war; the creative and cultural industries moment is however more untidy in its periodisation. Thus, Thatcher's early 1980s pursuit of *laissez-faire* accepted an opposition between the market (which the state was to leave untouched), and 'arts and culture' provision (which might require some – reduced – assistance or patronage). But this kind of opposition was by no means typical of the mature neoliberal approach to cultural policy adopted by the

Majorite Tories or New Labour in which the cultural instance was subject to an economic transvaluation which has had important results for film policy and the willingness of the state to actively engage with the film industry. Simply put, within the CI model, culture is viewed as a resource. Thus, in the contemporary 'creative economy', cultural policies rest upon economic justifications (neoliberal accountancy practices quantify the economic value of culture). Equally, in indication of the close co-operation and compatibility of the economic and cultural instances, economic policies can rest on cultural assumptions (for instance the UKFC's Cultural Test of 2007 which set cultural thresholds in exchange for film industry tax relief) (Hill 2012: 337).

With the advent of the Tory led coalition government of 2010 a largely settled pattern of policy appears to have emerged which dates back roughly to the early 90s. Before that time, in the early 1980s, commercial subsidies for the indigenous film industry were removed as Thatcher's governments abolished older, protectionist styled interventions, including the Eady Levy (a redistribution of a proportion of box office takings to producers), the Quota Act (a requirement placed on exhibitors and distributors to handle a minimum percentage of British films), and the National Film Finance Corporation (providing loans for British producers). At the same time cultural film subsidy was maintained largely through the interventions of the Arts Council, Channel 4 (C4) and the BFI, the latter two responding to lobbying by the Association of Cinematographic and Television Technicians (ACTT), and the Independent Film-Makers' Association (IFA). By such means pressure in support of a critical and public service view of film culture was sustained. By the early 90s, under John Major, help for the commercial film sector resumed in the form of tax relief and Lottery funding. From 2000 this arrangement was consolidated and rationalised through New Labour's UKFC which also took on a cultural and social remit, rendering subordinate the BFI and placing an emphasis on the expansion of the regional sector to deliver a spectrum of policy goals. These covered a social inclusion agenda which sought to develop a wider social base for cinema going by means of distribution and exhibitions strategies, a pledge to encourage diversity in the workforce, along with training and educational initiatives, and a commitment to foster an identifiable sense of national film heritage. As John Newsinger argues, after 2010 this basic mix was maintained, nevertheless, in the context of the coalition's austerity

drive there has been a weakening of the regional sector whilst, despite initial fears, support for the mainstream industry remains solid (Newsinger 2012).

State and Nation

Before we can evaluate these shifting relations between social, economic and cultural aspects of policy we need to consider the problematic historical relationship of the British 'state' to its 'nation'. Generally, it has been recognized that states can struggle to effectively formulate national film policy. Limitations are imposed by the transnational or globalizing logic of mainstream cinema, and in particular by the dominant power of Hollywood. But equally, the desirability of an uncritical defence of a putatively national culture by the state is problematic given the dangers of the falsely socially homogenized, essentialised or mythified manifestations such national cultural formations can assume (Higson 2000, Wayne 2002).

In the British case this situation contains a further complexity which can be summed up thus: the British state is historically strong whereas the 'nation' which is its object is neither unified nor, in the case of England strongly defined in terms of what many would view as authentic traditions of popular sovereignty (Gardiner 2012, Colley 2014). This underlying problem, if unaddressed, can disturb contemporary discussions of the problem of defining an authentic (or 'cultural') national cinema for the purposes of policy intervention. For some such problems appear to relate to a general condition (Higson 2000). According to a commonplace of contemporary cultural theory this is the collision between an essentialised project of national identity and the necessary actuality of cultural hybridity which is especially acute in postmodern times. There is a danger that such arguments can act to conceal the historical peculiarities in this particular state/nation relationship. The conjunction of an Englishness which lacks "clarity about boundaries and identity" with a strong imperial state, represents such a peculiarity (Colley, 2014, 60 and Gardiner, 2012). Indeed the idea of a British 'state-nation', a reversal of the accepted formulation 'nation state', emphasises this historical subordination. That is to say, this Englishness (the hegemonic core of a falsely homogenized Britishness) might be seen less as an 'expression of English arrogance' and national presumption, and instead be viewed in terms of the longevity and dynamism of a strong centralised state projecting a

capitalist culture of class and empire in order to offset the missing cultural yeast of popular sovereignty - what Linda Colley describes as a culture of "people-building" (Colley 60-1).

As a context for policy measures this legacy is both a problem and an opportunity. Thus, in its historic hyper-visibility, the Englishness of British cinema is eminently exploitable. Indeed, the strength of 'industrially' defined British cinema (as opposed to a 'culturally' defined one) is dependent in important ways on this mythic and globally recognized culture of Englishness, with all its abstract, idealized and marketable characteristics (Westall and Gardiner 2013). This is a thoroughly profitable cultural resource that the British state seems happy to support through the agency of the UKFC and at global showcase events like the London Olympics (directed by Danny Boyle). The re-conceptualisation of culture as an economic resource to be exploited is an important part of the shift at the heart of the CI model of cultural policy. Here, the profitable projection of Englishness has its popular cultural face: Bean, Bond, Potter; its canonical literary tradition: Austen to Forster; its associated imperial kudos along with its fetishised class-system imagery; and finally its self-conscious investment in and studied exploitation of a precious historicity. All these aspects constitute what Andrew Higson refers to as a "surprisingly resilient panoply of Englishness" (Higson 2010). Note these same features are emphasised in Higson's success story account of English cinema in its New Labour/UKFC moment.

It might be argued then that policy aimed fundamentally at supporting industrially British filmmaking is simultaneously, amongst other things, helping to support a regressive culturally English cinema. Indeed, it is open to doubt, as Newsinger observes, whether such policy meaningfully supports a *national* industry, as opposed say, to say a "cheap outsourced Hollywood assembly plant" with generous tax breaks soliciting 'inward investment' for the UK styled as a global 'creative hub' (2012 139). Higson, however, argues that an evolving and renewed national cinema is emerging out of such policies after what he sees as the near collapse of the early 1980s (2010 63). Placing emphasis on the benefits of the Cultural Test of 2007 he also points to the irony that its more substantive national cultural features (for instance the categories of 'content' and 'cultural contribution') were imposed on New Labour by the transnational agency of the European Commission. Equally, he highlights the fact that national film culture renewal can be seen so clearly in the work of directors who seek

to 'creatively' re-interpret it and whose reference points are clearly transnational, such as Gurinder Chadha (2010: 63). This account then places significant emphasis on the dimension of contemporary international exchanges and flows, both cultural and economic.

Commerce and Culture: Cultural Industries to Creative Industries

Claire Monk describes Higson's work cited above on contemporary British cinema since the 1990s as "consensus case studies of Englishness-for-export"; and "academic capitulation to market agendas" (Monk 2001 461). And it does seem that Higson's emphasis confirms the diminishing significance afforded to the older sense of a contradiction between commerce and culture. David Puttnam's statement "strong cultural resistance can best be built on the basis of a firm understanding of the realities of the marketplace" sums up this shift neatly (Miller 2000: 44). This is a development with a complex genealogy going back to the 1980s when attempts were made through metropolitan socialism (including the initiatives of the Greater London Council) to explore the opposition between commerce and culture in a socially and culturally progressive direction. The cultural industries strategy sought to overcome the art vs. popular culture dualism through a critique of the traditional left's suspicion of market-based forms of popular culture. This was with a view to supporting forms of independent cultural entrepreneurialism and previously marginalized social voices. As Margaret Dickinson and Sylvia Harvey put it: "The intention was to promote a new kind of popular culture led neither by remote multinationals nor by the limited cultural tastes of the local dominant class"(Dickinson and Harvey 2005 424).

The argument that Hollywood's popular cultural influence can be viewed as a potentially beneficial or critical aspect of 'cinema in Britain' because of its demotic energies and the contrast it offers with an indigenous class-bound offering, fits with this 'cultural industries' policy moment (Hill 1992, Nowell-Smith 1985). The latter's critique of an older 'arts and culture' agenda, as say manifested in the support of the independent cinema movement of the 1960s and 1970s, was aimed at combating the problem that such cultural formations often displayed a middle class bias in terms of participation and thus had inbuilt tendency to rely on exclusionary forms of cultural

capital, not to mention a relative neglect of the problem of race and racism (Dickinson 54).

The policies of the GLC were preoccupied with ideas of cultural democracy. However, from the late 1990s, under New Labour, this critical and politically radical edge to policy was subject to a significant transformation within the discourse of 'creativity' which translated the "reconciliatory logic" of New Labour's "social market" idea into policy interventions (Neelands and Choe 2010 288-9). 'Reconciliatory' because the social market (or Third Way) suggests that social (or cultural) objectives can be achieved painlessly via market means (2010 289). Thus, the social and cultural 'exclusions' of the market are lost to sight. The discourse of 'creativity' then represents a particular articulation of the commerce/culture opposition, with a marked insistence on a common core of activity/energy. As the UKFC put it: "Film is a complex combination of industry and culture. Common to both are creativity and commerce" (Newsinger 2009). If the idea of creativity attempts to establish a fundamental identity, however complex, of commerce and culture, it nevertheless remains the case, as I will argue below, that it ultimately subordinates the hopes of a progressive cultural policy to an overriding concern with satisfying dominant industrial interests. And this despite the persistence, in the case of film policy, of social and cultural aims of inclusion and diversity – aims which in the assessment of many have been weakly developed (Hill 2004, Dickinson and Harvey 2005, Newsinger 2009).

Regional Film Policy

Newsinger's work helps to show that it was in the regions during the New Labour period that the CI model of policy was most vigorously developed and also where the task of supporting a culturally 'national' cinema was principally located - in tacit recognition that the commercial mainstream could not sustain such ambitions (Newsinger 2009). The objective was to build up an industrial infrastructure upon which to sustain a wide range indigenous film cultural activity. Public subsidy was directed through Regional Screen Agencies (RSAs) to small commercially oriented independent companies (SMEs) for the purpose of encouraging training, outside investment and a network of facilities linked up to local broadcasters. This hive of

regional 'creative' activity was then presented as the point at which cultural and economic policy converged generating a virtuous cycle of 'sustainable' film culture.

It is important to note two things at this point. Firstly, that which in the CI model's application to regional policy appears to fit with the neoliberal ideology of the 'creative' spirit of the market – the emphasis on the small scale, lean, competitive, energetically entrepreneurial, and of course successful – is actually dependent on public funds. Indeed, under this regime, references to public 'subsidy' tend to be replaced by terms such as 'investment' (Hill 2010). RSAs, like the UKFC itself, were private companies operating with public money, but with limited public accountability, and they preferred to use the language of commerce.

The second point to note is that the flow of public money into private hands, overseen by industry 'experts', fits with the general eclipsing of the idea of the importance of publicly debatable notions of public interest, separable from trade interests – or rather, it indicates the democratic deficit in the CI model of policy making. This is a point made effectively by Dickinson and Harvey about the UKFC era, and it is one that remains relevant in the present BFI dispensation. Just as private companies benefit from public money disbursed by bureaucratic and professionalized experts on the regional level, so on the national level regular policy reviews are conducted by 'consultation' which necessary limits democratic discussion in the name of efficiency and superior industry know-how (Dickinson and Harvey 2005).

As Newsinger argues, the CI model has effectively depoliticized the regional film sectors, replacing the idea of film as a cultural practice exemplified by the older regional workshop model which we will consider below. One area where this problem in regional policy can be examined is that of the short film which boomed under the UKFC. The digital short represents a good example of the proposed painless convergence of cultural, social and economic policy objectives within the CI framework. What Newsinger's research illustrates, however, is how it poorly served the objectives of 'access' and 'diversity', social and cultural goals which it was deemed an ideal vehicle for (Newsinger 2009). Indeed, the intention to include groups traditionally marginalized from film culture found itself channeled into the 'institutionalized individualism' promoted by the empowered regional agencies (McGuigan 2004). The short film presented a form whose relatively rapid fabrication

and usefulness as an industry entry 'stepping stone' militated against the complex collective productive context and more erratic temporal rhythms of the residual regional workshop culture which arguably was more successful in achieving headway with objectives such as diversity and access.

Despite the rhetoric of a convergence of policy objectives, the economic one of maintaining mainstream commercial objectives remained dominant. Indeed, a key aspect of the CI model has been the fostering of a skilled, regionally based labour pool. Much of what appears to be regional 'regeneration' has been established by an expansion of the sector based on the entrenching of neoliberal labour market practices such as casualisation. Such practices fit with what critics call the New International Division of Cultural Labour whereby more pliant, less protected labour markets are prepared for multinationals and local businesses seeking to reduce labour costs (Miller 1999 38).

The vigour of this CI entrepreneurial dynamism coincided with the defeat and decline of the older model of the regional workshops. Fundamentally, the workshop principle recognized the exclusionary logics of the commercial mainstream on levels of access/participation and reception/response, logics that remain difficult to meaningfully evade by the voluntarism or 'institutionalised individualism' of the CI model. Along with the stress on collective production came an emphasis on democratic control of projects and a different conception of 'creativity', not reducible, as in the regional digital shorts boom, to eye-catching stylization or even 'innovation' around genre, but seeking to engage with a range of forms (experimental, narrative and documentary) and offering sustained attention to the politics of form. Equally, the workshops operated according to contrasting temporal rhythms which, given their detachment from commercial motives (profit), enabled what Peter Thomas calls "durational and immersive" projects embedded in specific communities. Such practices are opposed to the commodified logic of speed and market distinctiveness in which, for example, short films grab attention as a prelude to feature film production and career advancement (Thomas 2011 11).

In earlier periods, such as the 1930s and 1960s, a process of reflection and making-do was a feature of politicized film culture in what might be called its incubational stage, and as Dickinson argues, the workshop movement as a whole has strong filiations

with these traditions (1999 31). To take one example, Amber Film Collective from the north-east sought both to engage in such reflective activity (over time re-working social realist traditions in its output), and to retain as much as possible its autonomy through mixed survival strategies, including controlled engagement with the market as well as workshop grants via C4 and other funding bodies.

There has always been in such oppositional projects from which the workshops emerged an aspect of what has become known as DIY counter-culture. According to George McKay this is an informal, collectively organized culture, in which productive activities are characterized by *lending, giving, helping out* without the necessary expectation of commercial return/re-numeration (Mckay 1997). Dickinson is referring to the same phenomenon when she cites the "unofficial cottage industry" of 1960s independent film culture relying on practices of mutual borrowing, assistance, working for free on projects where there was no attempt to acquire funding and an implicit denial of market values. This was the pre-existing, enabling tradition for the first workshops (1999 30-1).

Of course, it might be argued that the labour market casualisation which is at the heart of the CI model has increasingly cynically adopted and deformed this DIY ethic to the advantage of commercial motives through practices such as 'unpaid internships'. But equally, it is interesting to see how this DIY culture re-emerges in explanations of the significance of the work of Shane Meadows, one of the key figures of the regionalization of film production under the CI model. Meadows is a determinedly regional filmmaker whose work helps to us to get a dialectical view of the relationship of policy to left critical ambitions for regional and national film culture, a view which captures such policies' consequences both negative and positive, intended and unintended. Also, Meadow's example will help us to elicit the outlines and possibilities of alternative frameworks for policy.

The Case of Meadows

The first thing to consider is the problem of origins. Read retrospectively, Meadows' critical and commercial success which was consolidated in the era of the CI model suggests a mythic vindication of voluntarist entrepreneurialism. To ironise the title of

his first feature, this is the Meadows of manic, unflagging, prolific energies, an exemplar perhaps of the nightmarish neoliberal *24/7* work culture discussed by Jonathan Crary (Crary 2013). However, Meadows short film exercises (1994-7) cannot be reduced to a sequence of 'calling cards', 'stepping stones' or 'rungs on the ladder' helping him climb out of obscurity. Instead, it might well be argued that the aura of his origins ("a filmmaker who came from nowhere" as Kate Ogborn puts it), conceals some of the residual strengths of the older, workshop paradigm which in practice overlapped with the emergent CI model during this period, before the latter was operationally formalized post-1997/2000 by New Labour's UKFC (Ogborn in Newsinger 2013 25).

It was through a strong pre-existing, local context of community access, central to workshop tradition and mediated in Meadows case through the Nottingham based workshop Intermedia, that the early shorts were made. When Meadows refers to the state giving him his break (money saved from his social security payments funding his early efforts), our attention is drawn to the Headstart scheme ran by Intermedia in the 1990s which offered training and access to equipment for the unemployed (Meadows in Newsinger 2009). Such schemes tend to put emphasis on the social aspect of policy (and the accounts Meadows gives of his experiences at Intermedia indicate the community based/pastoral ethic in operation at the time) (Wilson 2013 913). However, it is equally true that Meadows remained wary of the independent, theoretically informed leftist film culture which represented the core of the regional workshop movement during the late 1970s and 1980s - he refers to it disparagingly as "elite" "condescending" and "exclusive" and this is a judgement which speaks to the realities of the gradients of class and cultural capital in predominantly middle class independent film cultures of the time (Meadows in Wilson 2013 912). Notwithstanding this, the fact remains that the local and residual influence of the workshop moment helped Meadows and his collaborators to explore a specific working class culture of youth. Newsinger makes the important point that much of this activity was reliant on a strong local DIY counter-culture (Newsinger 2009).

Success in short films brought Meadows firmly into the orbit of the CI model, however the results of this encounter are complex, contradictory and dialectically entangled. On the one hand there was the danger of the mainstreaming of regional material, or what Mike Wayne refers to as the pressure to adapt authentic

regional/national representations to transnational logics, a development clearest in the comically inflected regionalism of the social realist tradition during this period (Wayne 2002, 2006). A film like *Once Upon a Time in the Midlands* (2002) in its mainstream casting practices (running counter to Meadows' habitual approach before and after) is in some ways indicative of this trend whereby the regional policies of the CI model acted to drain away indisputably 'homemade' or locally specific cultural energies into product for larger markets.

Equally, however, it remains true, as Newsinger observes, that regional policy under the CI model has offered provincial filmmakers' creative freedom and autonomy from London (an explicit concern of Meadows). In this respect Warp Films stands as a representative and tutelary institution for the established director, just as Intermedia did for the beginner. Warp sits in a network of regional funding institutions (co-ordinated, during the UKFC period, by EM Media, the Regional Screen Agency for the area), and has distribution partners (including C4 for broadcasting); it is integrated horizontally (through interests in music and publishing), and it is connected inter-regionally (with co-production links to the north-eastern RSA Screen Yorkshire). This enables both access to private and public funds at the same time as giving its directors a degree of local autonomy. *Dead Man's Shoes* (2004) and *This is England* (2006) - perhaps the two most critically successful of Meadows' films - were produced by Warp according to its principles of reduced budgets within 'generic niches' (Newsinger 2009). Under such circumstances Meadows' reconnected with his preferred methods, including the use of non-professional actors and improvised production practices.

These two films display the complexity of Meadows's work under the CI model as it reaches beyond the commercialized bleaching-out of regional culture that some have detected in *Once Upon a Time in the Midlands* and offers a revision of the established conventions of what has historically been the dominant form of regional film production, social realism. The key to this complexity lies in the engagement with popular culture. In the earlier 'cultural industries' model of policy, popular culture, with its relationship to mainstream markets, was recognised as a significant preference for working class audiences seeking to evade the suffocating elitism of British national culture. Hollywood has clearly been important in Meadows' development as a filmmaker. But for Newsinger, his interest in popular genres

suggests a historical contrast between the older workshop model and the depoliticizing effects of the CI model – as he puts it, Meadows' reference point is 'popular culture not cultural politics' (Newsinger 2009). Whilst Meadows is by no means an explicitly political filmmaker it is less straightforward to claim that the inclusion of popular genres within social realism necessarily depoliticizes the work. For Newsinger the compromise with 'escapism' or the capitulation to 'entertainment' takes Meadows over the traditionally designated discursive boundary within which the 'moral realism' of social realism maintains itself (Newsinger 2009). However, we might view Meadows' use of popular culture (the humour and farce as well as the generic self-consciousness) differently. The aesthetic extremism available in popular cultural genres, for instance the use of elements of horror, the gangster and western film, black comedy and satire in *Dead Man's Shoes*, helps construct a form of tragic realism which in turn facilitates an exploration of the neoliberal politics of class with its 'law and order grand guignol' (Dave 2011).

Finally, we need to consider an issue closely connected to the affect generated in Meadows' work around 'sociality'. This is a quality which is also related to the importance of popular cultural form, in this case comedy. The pleasure of sociality is clearly central to Meadows' work, and provides a further explanation of the apparent enigma of his 'origins' which avoids drawing on the competitive individualism of neoliberal ideology that is at the heart the CI model. Critics recognize a fundamental continuity in Meadows' films around the apparent 'belief in community' along with his persistent attention to the 'sociality of the group' (Monk 1999, Newsinger 2009, Dave 2011). This recurring feature appears as a thematic; as a foregrounded element of style (the centrality of improvisation) and as a production practice (DIY with its valorization of mutuality and collectivity not just as methods of oppositional cultural practice but as pleasurable ends in their own right). And, of course, it can be pushed back further into the popular cultural experiences of specific, youthful, working class communities. Indeed this overdetermination of the motif of sociality gives Meadow's work that peculiarly allegorical, self-referential transparency whereby the diegetic and extra-diegetic realms appear call to each other. Thus, to take one example, the exuberant improvisation in the films is clearly rooted in Meadows' casts' collective experiences of popular culture. As a technique, it accesses commonly held popular cultural repertoires (horror and comedy for instance) in order to act out the social

realist dramas. Popular culture then is not so much an escape from the themes of the films so much as means of collectively exploring and keeping them close to common cultural experiences.

But we can push this further and argue that this aspect of Meadows's work suggests a grounding in particular cultural values which have a political significance, even if this political significance is not explicitly formulated as such. That is to say, this thoroughgoing interest in the collective – the enjoyment of its potential inclusiveness and enabling mutuality, the 'sense of belonging and access to the social group' that is projected in so many of the films and which seems to persist even in the most extreme and destructive of situations depicted, is reminiscent of what Raymond Williams intended with his normative principle of a 'common culture' (Newsinger 2009 and Williams 1989). The latter has its origins in working class history with its co-operative institutions and their ethic of solidarity (Eagleton 2000 120, Dave 2011). However, what Williams meant by a common culture was neither to be restricted to any 'panacea of proletarian culture', nor to designate a culture of uniformity (Eagleton 2000 121). 'Common' referred to a culture that was to be understood as common in form, but not in content. A common culture is one in which the principles of cultural democracy through which cultural pluralism or diversity can flourish, rest on politically securing the 'means of community' (Williams 1984). In other words, a common culture implies a politics which vigorously acts against, rather than rhetorically deprecates, material structures of exclusion from cultural participation. 'Sociality' is the residual (and anticipatory) trace of that common culture. But the latter can only become the context of policy through what would be a fundamental re-alignment: a moving away from *cultural politics* (whose problem is that it legitimizes the nebulous liberalism of cultural difference which is so adaptable to the neoliberal capitalist realism promoted by the fundamentally industrially oriented film policy of recent years), and a moving towards the *politics of culture* (policies informed by the regulative principle of a common culture in which participatory democracy is "the condition of which culture is the product") (Eagleton 2000122).

A fundamental re-orientation of policy ambitions on the left might be guided by contemporary forms of the "politics of the collectivity" (Gilbert 2006 192). The ideal of a common culture, in its demand for at least the possibility of general participation in the making of a culture, is closely related to the idea of a creative democracy and

thereby converges with recent forms of the "anti-individualist politics of the common" which strike at the competitive individualism, authoritarianism and marketised reason of neoliberalism (2006 191). As Jeremy Gilbert argues, 'creativity' in this kind of politics is theorized as having an inherently social character, just as 'collectivity' is increasingly seen as "inherently productive" (2006 192). This re-articulation of the discourse of creativity (dislodging its limited and regressive 'social market' inflection within the CI model) helps us to get another view of the complexity of the apparent de-politicisation of a filmmaker like Meadows and to fortify those seeking to resist the 'reality-generating power of market reasoning' with its deadly insistence on its own inherent superiority over democratic political deliberation itself (McGuigan 2004: 43).

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