UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

FACULTY OF LAW, ARTS & SOCIAL SCIENCES

School of Humanities

British Audiences and Approaches to European Cinema: Four Case Studies of Responses to French and Swedish Film in the UK Today

Two Volumes: Vol. I

by

Ingrid Maria Stigsdotter

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

March 2008

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF LAW, ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES

Doctor of Philosophy

BRITISH AUDIENCES AND APPROACHES TO EUROPEAN CINEMA: FOUR CASE STUDIES OF RESPONSES TO FRENCH AND SWEDISH FILM IN THE UK TODAY

by Ingrid Maria Stigsdotter

This thesis provides an analysis of audience responses to four case study films, *Amélie* (*Le Fabuleux destin d'Amélie Poulain*, 2001), *The Dreamlife of Angels* (*La Vie rêvée des anges*, 1998), *Faithless* (*Trolösa*, 2000) and *Show Me Love* (*Fucking Åmål*, 1998). The empirical data was collected at screenings in Hampshire and West Sussex in 2005.

The author argues that contextual factors are equally or more important than the film text itself when it comes to determining its potential meanings. The study explores how cultural differences and preconceptions about French, Swedish and European culture among British film audiences influence their approaches to specific films. In the process, the research provides a British reception perspective on the relationship between British, European and American film cultures.

The findings challenge assumptions about detached, analytical art cinema audiences, suggesting that European cinema in Britain can function as an escape from everyday reality and provide viewers with strong emotional experiences. The author discusses gendered differences that can be observed in the audience research findings, but acknowledges that viewer identities are multifaceted and complex.

The thesis sheds light on the relationship between academic studies of film consumption and market research carried out by the film industry, and the findings have implications beyond the discipline of film studies, intersecting with debates in sociology, cultural studies, and psychological theories relating to human perception.

List of Contents

List of Tables

List of Illustrations

Acknowledgements

First of all, I want to express my deeply felt gratitude to the research participants who completed questionnaires at screenings of the four case study films.

My supervisor Lucy Mazdon and advisor Tim Bergfelder have guided me through the long journey of doctoral research, and without their intelligent criticisms the arguments presented in this thesis would have been much less coherent and sophisticated. When I first contacted Tim with my original idea for a doctoral proposal, he encouraged me to apply for the School of Humanities Major Studentship at the University of Southampton, and this became my source of funding for three years of full-time research. My thesis was conceived of independently from Lucy's AHRC-funded research project on French cinema in Britain since 1930, but her research assistant Catherine Wheatley and Cécile Renaud, whose PhD is connected to the project, have generously shared their research findings with me.

The writing process would have been less enjoyable without the other PhD students in the Film Studies Department. Mark Aldridge, Katia Maciel and Françoise Schiltz deserve special mention because of their help with proof-reading at the final stage of revision. They have also helped shaping and sharpening my thinking about film over the past few years, and I am very pleased to count such brilliant researchers among my friends. Mike Hammond has been a fun and inspiring teaching colleague, and I feel privileged to have received feedback on my research from Pam Cook before her retirement from teaching. Students that I taught have also influenced my ideas about film interpretation and audiences, and I am particularly indebted to the undergraduate film students who helped evaluating pilot versions of the questionnaires in 2005.

My first experience of British academia was at the University of East London, where I was welcomed by a friendly and approachable team of tutors including Biddy Peppin and Andrew Stephenson. At Birkbeck College, University of London, Laura Mulvey arranged the MA internship at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) that sparked my interest in film audience research. Amy Sargeant also worked at Birkbeck at that time, and her seemingly unwavering faith in my abilities has remained a great comfort in moments of self-doubt.

Among the many scholars at international conferences who have provided useful comments on this research, I would like to thank Isabelle Vanderschelden and Darren Waldron for giving me the opportunity to publish an early version of my second chapter in their book *France at the Flicks*. Olof Hedling invited me to discuss the British reception of *Faithless* at Lund University's Centre for Languages and Literature, where Mariah Larsson also provided helpful reading suggestions for my discussion about Sweden and liberalism in the 1960s. Ginette Vincendeau and her colleagues at King's College, London gave me permission to conduct audience research at a public screening of *The Dreamlife of Angels*, and although I was not able to include this material in the thesis, I thoroughly enjoyed the MA seminar that I was invited to attend.

In order to collect data outside of the university context I collaborated with helpful individuals at independent cinemas and film societies: Ellen Cheshire at the Chichester Cinema in New Park (who also invited me to Chichester College), Olivia Hamilton at the Lighthouse in Poole, Louise Scutts at the Harbour Lights Picturehouse cinema, Mike at the Winchester Film Society, and the programmers of the Phoenix Film Society in Southampton.

At the University of Southampton, Mary Stubbington in the postgraduate office and Carol Churchouse in the Film office deserve special mention for their helpful and efficient support during my research candidature. The kind and helpful library staff at the Avenue campus always processed my requests for audiovisual materials swiftly. My research has also benefited from the assistance of knowledgeable library staff at the British Film Institute in London, the Swedish Film Institute in Stockholm, and the Cinémathèque française in Paris. My Paris-based research was made possible by a one-month residence in the Centre culturel suédois' guest apartment at the Hôtel de Marle. I also want to thank the Swedish National Archive of Recorded Sound and Moving Images (Statens Ljud och Bildarkiv) in Stockholm whose excellent interlibrary loan service has been very useful.

I am deeply grateful to my family, especially my parents, Inga-Brita and Stig Östenson, who have always encouraged my interest in art and culture. As a writer and editor, my sister Anna Alsmark has been a great inspiration, but so have the real (medical) doctors in my family, my brother Sten Östenson and sister Christina Rydberg.

Days working from home have often been pleasantly interrupted by meetings with Lara Thompson, and I hope that I shall be able to return her thesis proof-reading services very soon. Both locally and internationally, many dear friends have been patient and understanding when work commitments turned me into an elusive presence in their life. Nina Albrecht has been my closest friend for almost two decades, and I hope that she will always continue to share her clarity of thought and wisdom with me. Komal Parekh has supported me with her open mind and great listening skills ever since I moved to London. Philip Jones has been my favourite companion at gallery visits and ridiculously long London walks for almost as long, but his wide-ranging knowledge about the most obscure topics continues to baffle me on a regular basis.

It seems strange to me now, but without this PhD, I might never have got to know Kelly Robinson. Her efforts to understand my ideas even when at their most muddled have contributed greatly to clarifying the argument of this thesis. I am delighted that Kelly is now my curatorial collaborator as well as the most wonderful companion to the cultural events that London has to offer.

Chapter 1. Introduction

On Saturday 23 August 2003, I was at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) in London, attending a film season of recent Swedish films entitled 'Beyond Trollywood'. If anyone had observed my behaviour in the cinema on that day, they might have concluded that I was more interested in the audience than in the films. To a certain extent they would have been right, because the season marked my first experience as a film curator, and I was extremely interested in seeing how audiences responded to the programme I had put together. As part of an internship associated with my studies for an MA at Birkbeck College, University of London, I had spent several months selecting film titles, negotiating booking fees, organising print transport and preparing marketing materials. Prior to this, I had been interested in film primarily as an artistic medium, but this practical work placement made me realise that even programming for a highly specialised cinema like the one at the ICA involves careful consideration of who the audience might be for a specific film or season, and how to reach that audience. Furthermore, the project heightened my awareness of how different cultural contexts create different expectations; the foreignness of the films made it possible for me to incorporate titles that had been box office smash hits in Sweden in the season, despite the fact that the ICA essentially is known as a cinema dedicated to alternative film culture.

During a sold-out screening of Lukas Moodysson's *Show Me Love* (*Fucking Åmål*, 1998), one of the case study films considered in this thesis, I asked myself: Who are these people? Why are they here? What do they get out of seeing this film? What are their expectations? And what does it mean to go and see this specific film, originally produced and released in a different national culture, in a British cinema today? Since that evening five years ago, my interest in film audiences has deepened and matured in many ways. An important part of that trajectory has been the research project presented here, in the form of a doctoral thesis investigating the impact of cultural difference, including preconceptions about French, Swedish and European cinema, on the ways in which British cinema audiences interpret recent Swedish and French films.

My research sets out from the hypothesis that when it comes to determining a film's potential meanings, the context of film viewing, whether in terms of wider social, historical, economic and political circumstances, or in terms of more local, personal or psychological factors that are significant to the individual viewer, is equally or possibly even more important than the film text itself. This chapter will explain how my approach relates to relevant research strands within film studies, as well as sociology and cultural studies. Furthermore, since many debates relating to the concept of film reception base their arguments on specific psychological theoretical frameworks it will be necessary to situate my model in relation to such theories, although as will become clear, even though I am interested in individual and personal experiences of film viewing, I tend to focus on the social rather than the psychological dimension of these phenomena. I will discuss concepts such as art and popular cinema, as well as national cinemas and their relationship to Hollywood. The focus on Swedish and French cinema in Britain will also allow for discussions of nationally specific and transcultural frameworks for film interpretation, and an analysis of how British audiences understand Britain's relationship to other European cultures.

Sociological and cognitive approaches to film viewing have so far been unable to provide a comprehensive explanation of how film spectators assign meaning to feature-length fictional narratives experienced in complex viewing circumstances. They have also failed to distinguish between distinctive spectatorial pleasures offered by different kinds of films. My thesis makes the case that it is important to acknowledge generic as well as linguistic and cultural differences between films. I will therefore discuss specific film viewing experiences and acts of interpretation, as opposed to film viewing in the purely perceptive sense of looking at moving images on a screen, or cinema-going as one social activity among others. I approach the film viewing experience as a process involving an embodied spectator carrying out the act of interpretation in a specific moment and a particular place, with the aim of analysing how real audiences respond to individual films.

This chapter will provide an overview of my approach, and explain how I contextualise material, framing the time and space in which the films were screened to research participants in order to place these film viewing experiences in a broader social and historical context. Furthermore, I will attempt to show how my four case study films relate to contemporary British film culture, and more specifically, place the films within the context of recent Swedish, French and European cinema in Britain.

Empirical Audience Research

The Film Audience: A Multidisciplinary Topic

In his original preface to *Sociology of Film*, written in the 1940s, J. P. Mayer suggested that it was the task of the psychologist to explain why people go to the cinema, while the sociologist should investigate 'the effect of films on people's minds',[1] but he also admitted that he found it difficult to approach the topic because 'so many disciplines appear to meet when one attempts a sociological analysis of film: Psychology, Ethics, History, Political Science'.[2] There are many differences between Mayer's audience study and my research project; my thesis does not for instance attempt to provide a systematic psychological explanation for people's appetite for screen entertainment, nor does it deal with the debate over the alleged effects of media on viewers. Moreover, *Sociology of Film* was published in the early post-war period, when visits to the cinema could be described as a leisure activity enjoyed by the British masses. My audience research, on the other hand, was carried out in an era when the digital media landscape with its individualised consumption patterns, including file sharing and downloading across national boundaries, is beginning to make established models for understanding mass media, together with the notion of a national audience, seem increasingly obsolete. Finally, unlike Mayer, whose respondents mainly discussed popular Hollywood productions, I am concerned with European cinema, a film category that appears to be of interest to only a small subsection of the British cinema-going and film consuming population. Nevertheless, despite our distinct areas of interest, Mayer's statement about

[1] Jacob Peter Mayer, *Sociology of Film, Studies and Documents* (London: Faber and Faber, 1946, second edition 1948; reprint edition New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1972), p. 17.
[2] Mayer, *Sociology of Film*, p. 11.

the multidisciplinary nature of the relationship between films and society is just as relevant today as half a century ago. To his list of disciplines with a stake in film audience research we might now add cultural studies, anthropology, media studies, psychoanalytical and cognitive approaches to psychology, and of course, film studies. These disciplines belong to different methodological traditions, each with their own sets of special concerns and problems, and this makes a clear understanding of the theoretical and methodological questions at stake particularly important in this project.

Film audiences attracted scholarly attention early on in the history of film,[3] and have continued to be explored in various academic disciplines and cultural traditions. Historically speaking, the assumption that films affect viewers in particular ways has been the most common motivation for film audience research. For example, Leo A. Handel's 1950 overview of audience research in Hollywood film argued that an improved understanding of audience preferences would not only facilitate making films that people wanted to see, but would also make it possible to incorporate social messages into films without alienating the audience.[4] The Hollywood Production Code in the classical era is only one example of industrial practices directly or indirectly guided by the conviction that films have an impact on social mores, and the effects of films on viewers have often been thought of as quite specific, in particular when it comes to the effects of violent or sexually explicit film material. Arguments linking audiences' attitudes and actions in real life to fictional film content are often rooted in behavioural theories that ignore individual or social factors that might mediate the viewer's encounter with material on the screen.[5] The question of the impact of films on human behaviour is far from resolved, but my research approaches the relationship between audience and film from a rather different angle. Instead of debating whether or not viewers are changed by their film consumption, I am interested in to what extent

[3] See for example Emilie Altenloh's 1914 PhD thesis, *Zur Soziologie des Kino* published in part as 'A Sociology of the Cinema: The Audience', trans. by Kathleen Cross, *Screen*, 42.3 (Autumn 2001), 249-293. This work on early cinema audiences in Germany has affinities with contemporary cultural studies/sociological approaches in its non-judgemental perspective on consumption.

[4] Leo A. Handel, *Hollywood Looks at its Audience: a Report of Film Audience Research* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press: 1950), pp. 60-61. See also Janet Staiger, *Media Reception Studies* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), p. 37.

[5] Staiger, *Media Reception Studies*, pp. 53-59. Staiger provides a detailed overview of the strong case against 'media effect' claims, but also shows how more nuanced, recent behavioural work ties in with cognitive psychology.

people change the films they see. That is, the focus of my research is on how and why different viewers highlight different aspects of the same film, occasionally leading to conflicting interpretations of the same narrative content. Film viewers, in this scenario, are not passive recipients of narrative flow, but *agents* taking part in the *activity* of film interpretation.

Film Viewing: A Social Activity within the Context of Technological Change

Work on film audiences carried out within a sociological framework has explored the function of cinema-going as a leisure activity. In the British context, an example of this approach is David Docherty, David Morrison and Michael Tracey's 1987 publication, *The Last Picture Show?*.[6] During the 1980s, as video technology and satellite and cable TV were entering the mainstream, cinema figures plummeted except for a few high-profile releases, and to view films in the cinema could be described as 'a minority experience'.[7] Between 1981 and 1990, there were less than 100 million cinema admissions per year in the UK.[8] In 1991, however, this trend turned around, and since then, admissions have been above 100 million per year, and steadily increasing.[9] Docherty et al. argued against the prophecy that cinema was a dying cultural form by demonstrating that home entertainment provided different kinds of spectatorial pleasures to cinema: a video-evening at home was '*not a night out spent at home*'.[10] In 2002, admissions at the UK box office reached the highest number since the early 1970s.[11] This development appears to be connected to changes in infrastructure, with the so-called fleapit cinemas of the 1980s increasingly being replaced by modern multiplexes. Multiplex cinema culture might have reduced the diversity of films on offer in Britain, but cinema admissions in the UK have stayed relatively stable since 2000.[12]

---

[6] David Docherty, David Morrison and Michael Tracey, *The Last Picture Show? Britain's Changing Film Audiences* (London: BFI, 1987), pp. 20-23.
[7] Eddie Dyja (ed.), *BFI Film & TV Handbook 2003* (London: BFI, 2002), p. 44.
[8] Dyja (ed.), *BFI Film & TV Handbook 2004* (London: BFI, 2003), p. 39.
[9] Dyja (ed.), *BFI Film & TV Handbook 2003*, p. 40.
[10] Docherty et al., *The Last Picture Show?,* p. 61 (emphasis in original).
[11] Dyja (ed.), *BFI Film & TV Handbook 2004*, p. 39.
[12] Dyja (ed.), *BFI Film & TV Handbook 2002* (London: BFI, 2001), p. 37, Dyja (ed.), *BFI Film & TV Handbook 2003*, pp. 40-41, 44, David Hancock, 'Fragmented film: Understanding the consumption habits of global film audiences', report presented at the conference *Engaging with Audiences: Measuring and Capturing Elusive Movie Consumers*, London, 8 November 2006.

It is nevertheless important to acknowledge that cinema today is only one among a possible range of spaces in which films can be consumed. The technological changes of the past decades have multiplied the options of how to view a film. DVD has eclipsed VHS as the main form of home entertainment, and video-on-demand is growing in popularity, presenting audience researchers with new challenges.[13] Barbara Klinger has described this situation in terms of a 'schizophrenic identity for cinema, derived from its shifting material bases and exhibition contexts'.[14] While differences between consumption in public and private spheres remain important, the improved technical quality of formats other than 35mm film means that a high definition home cinema system may provide a superior viewing experience to that of a small, antiquated cinema screen in a run-down independent cinema. As Klinger argues, 'the home has been equipped and acculturated to produce its own kind of connoisseurship, its own brand of fascinations'.[15] These changes have forced scholars interested in the sociological and anthropological aspects of film viewing to pay more attention to the specificities of time and space in relation to cinema-going.[16] Inspired by such initiatives, I will attempt to show how the environment and atmosphere in which the research screenings I organised took place compared with the ways in which research participants normally consumed films. But rather than adopting the sociological perspective of film viewing as one leisure activity among many, which leads to the idea that audience research should concentrate on 'how films fit into people's everyday lives',[17] I wish to emphasise the social significance of choosing to view one particular film over another. Although I am

---

[13] Hancock, *Fragmented film*, and Mike Gubbins, 'The Movie Business Challenge: Understanding, monitoring and engaging the modern movie audience', keynote presentation, *Engaging with Audiences*. As well as creating new challenges, VOD may of course also offer new opportunities for audience studies, as at least legally downloaded media may help researchers ascertaining who is downloading what and where.

[14] Barbara Klinger, *Beyond the Multiplex: Cinema, New Technologies, and the Home* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006) p. 2.

[15] Klinger, 'The Contemporary Cinephile: Film Collecting after the VCR' in *Beyond the Multiplex*, pp. 54-90 (p. 55). For more on the consumption and collection of film in the context of the home, see Uma Dinsmore-Tuli, 'The Domestication of Film: video, cinephilia and the collecting and viewing of videotapes in the home' (unpublished PhD Thesis, Goldsmiths' College, University of London, November 1997).

[16] Mark Jancovich and Lucy Faire with Sarah Stubbings, *The Place of the Audience: Cultural Geographies of Film Consumption* (London: BFI, 2003), James Hay, Lawrence Grossberg and Ellen Wartella (eds), *The Audience and the Landscape* (Boulder: Westview, 1996).

[17] Docherty et al., *The Last Picture Show?*, p. 4. See also pp. 32-34 on film as leisure.

concerned with the context of film viewing and the multiple possibilities of film interpretation, the four case study films considered in this thesis are not interchangeable; each film opens up its own spectrum of potential interpretation strategies. However, by identifying similarities and contrasts between the case studies, the research will contribute to a better understanding of the place of European cinema in Britain today.

Film shares with television the capacity to incorporate into narrative form representations of many aspects of the worlds of leisure and work that we know, as well as completely imaginary universes. While television today plays a more central role in most people's lives than cinema, a considerable amount of TV programming time is occupied by feature films, and with the proliferation of special film channels and pay-on-demand services included in digital packages, feature-film viewing on television and computer screens continues to grow. According to David Hancock, Senior Cinema Analyst for *Screen Digest*, cinema has two markets; the market for a particular film, and the market for leisure activities.[18] As a leisure activity, cinema has to compete with DVD viewing, video games, socialising in bars and cafés, theatre, bowling, live music and lots of other activities, from across the spectrum of so-called high and low culture, but we should also consider the market for a particular film, competing with other films. An understanding of film viewing as first and foremost a social activity undermines the notion that viewers can experience films as individual works of art, as opposed to interchangeable products for consumption. Of course in specific historical and cultural contexts the individual film can appear less significant than the notion of going to the cinema.[19] However, in the British context, films with a soundtrack in a language other than English are usually distributed on a small number of prints to select cinemas, and often screened as part of an art-house programming strand. Because of British viewers' limited access to popular European cinema, they are much more likely to perceive these films as artistic products worthy of serious attention than popular English-language films

[18] Hancock, *Fragmented film*.

[19] Cf. Nicholas Hiley, ''At the Picture Palace': The British Cinema Audience, 1895-1920' in *Celebrating 1895: The Century of Cinema*, ed. by John Fullerton (Sydney: John Libbey, 1998), pp. 96-103. Hiley is concerned with the tendency among silent film historians to focus on individual film prints and treat stylistic changes as evidence of audience taste development. As Hiley rightly points out, this approach does not take into account the full complexity of the relationship between production, exhibition and film audiences (pp. 96-97).

available throughout the multiplex chains. Exclusivity allows the films to retain something of the 'aura' that Walter Benjamin suggested mechanical reproduction would destroy, and regular attendance and loyalty to specific cinemas or film societies could be seen as a kind of ritual, with the art cinema as a secularised temple.[20]

Cultural Studies and the Active Viewer

Psychoanalytical approaches to film viewing have suggested that films 'position' spectators in front of the screen,[21] while public debates about audiences often have tended towards an image of the film viewer as a passive recipient of harmful media effects.[22] In the 1980s, developments in cultural studies compelled film scholars to recognise that consumption, rather than production, is at the core of the economy in our society,[23] and an interest in 'appropriation, transformation, [...] collage, montage and sampling of ready-made objects and discourses'[24] spread from television studies to research on film audiences. Cultural studies deal with the social and historical contextualisation of culture, the agency of individuals and social groups, and their experiences of pleasure.[25] For my aims in this thesis, this approach offers some tools that

---

[20] 'It is significant that the existence of the work of art with reference to its aura is never entirely separated from its ritual function. In other words, the unique value of the 'authentic' work of art has its basis in ritual, the location of its original use value.' Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' in *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1999), pp. 211-244 (p. 217).

[21] '...the position of the spectators in the cinema is blatantly one of repression of their exhibitionism and projection of the repressed desire onto the performer' (Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' in *Visual and Other Pleasures* (London: Macmillan, 1989), pp. 14-26 (p. 17). Originally published in *Screen,* 16.3 (1975), 6-18. See also Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*, trans. by Celia Britton, Annwyl Williams, Ben Brewster and Alfred Guzzetti (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982 edition), especially Part III: 'The Fiction Film and its Spectator: A Metapsychological Study', pp. 99-147 and Jean-Louis Baudry, 'Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus', originally published in 1970, trans. by Alan Williams in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, ed. by Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 6th edition 2004), pp. 355-365.

[22] Cf. Julian Petley, 'Us and Them', in *Ill Effects: The Media/Violence Debate*, ed. by Martin Barker and Julian Petley (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 87-101, Guy Cumberbatch and Dennis Howitt, *A Measure of Uncertainty: The Effects of the Mass Media* (London: John Libbey, 1989), David Gauntlett, *Moving Experiences: Understanding Television's Influences and Effects* (London: John Libbey, 1995), Martin Barker, 'Film Audience Research: Making a Virtue out of a Necessity', *Iris*, 26 (Autumn 1998), 131-47, David Buckingham, *Moving Images: Understanding Children's Emotional Reactions to Television* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996).

[23] Thomas Elsaesser, *European Cinema: Face to Face with Hollywood* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005), p. 281.

[24] Elsaesser, *European Cinema*, p. 281.

[25] Staiger, *Media Reception Studies*, pp. 78-79.

can help me to reframe the picture, in order to arrive at a more sophisticated understanding of the viewer as active interpreter, while acknowledging the difference between various kinds of films, as well as between different media.

An important question facing researchers with an interest in the process of film viewing is to explain why interpretation is variable, but at the same time appears to occur within certain boundaries. Stuart Hall's model for how readers decode texts is a useful starting-point for this debate. Hall identified three different ways of dealing with texts, labelled hegemonic, negotiated and oppositional readings. The hegemonic or preferred response fits in with dominant ideological values, while the negotiated response is more individualised. Finally, the oppositional response rejects the text's intended message, and might offer a contrary interpretation, known as 'reading against the grain'. A problem with this theory is that oppositional readings depend on hegemonic readings, since it is impossible to oppose a particular interpretation without first identifying the text's intended message. Furthermore, while most commentators who view films as polysemic and think that context has an impact on interpretation would probably agree that a majority of viewer responses are 'negotiated', to describe them as such tells us little about the actual viewing experience itself. Janet Staiger has criticised Hall's model for assuming that texts are unified rather than contradictory, for failing to satisfactorily explain the phenomenon of spectatorial pleasure, and for creating ideal readers through categorisation by socioeconomic group, rather than acknowledging the possibility of multiple identities.[26] I am interested in to what extent films have a definitive meaning, and what audiences get out of their film viewing experience, and because like Staiger, I consider social identities as multiple and complex, I have tried throughout this thesis to avoid making simple links between sociological or statistical categories and film tastes.

[26] Staiger, *Media Reception Studies*, pp. 79-87. *Interpreting Films: Studies in the Historical Reception of American Cinema* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 73. For further details of the influence of Hall's theory and its shortcomings, see Thomas Austin, *Hollywood Hype and Audiences: Selling and Watching Popular Film in the 1990s* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), pp. 17-19.

Audience Research and European Cinema

A significant question explored by Cultural Studies scholars has been the possibility of an active and positive engagement with classical Hollywood films and other forms of popular media.[27] Researchers have set out to re-evaluate popular forms of culture traditionally perceived as 'low-brow' in order to validate the interpretations of spectators, listeners, and readers that challenged the critical consensus. Recent work on film audiences has therefore concentrated mainly on popular film. This is perfectly understandable considering that critics and scholars traditionally have dedicated a disproportionate percentage of their writing to films seen by very few actual viewers. The trend does however mean that while the past few years have seen a number of important publications on audiences for Hollywood cinema and other popular film traditions, the audiences for films with a more narrow appeal have been largely neglected. The focus on European cinema in this thesis means that already in terms of content, the project diverges radically from most of the theorists that have influenced my approach. Because I investigate film reception outside of the popular mainstream, I have not been able to replicate any existing methodological models for the analysis of popular film audiences, since I am dealing with a different range and quantity of material. As we shall see, these issues are further complicated by the fact that the distinction between popular and elite culture is not clear-cut within the context of European cinema. Two of the four case study films considered here (*Amélie* and *Show Me Love*) were massive box office hits when released within their original national context, but only the former could be described as achieving a level of popular success in Britain. Despite the fact that art cinema is clearly defined at least in part by its context, ideas about specific textual characteristics and interpretative strategies associated with art cinema are pervasive.[28] A significant implication of my research findings is the suggestion that British audiences for European cinema experience their engagement with such films in ways that resemble

---

[27] Cf. Helen Taylor, *Scarlett's Women: Gone with the Wind and its Female Fans*, (London: Virago, 1989), Jackie Stacey, *Star-gazing: Hollywood and Female Spectatorship* (London: Routledge, 1994), many of the contributions to *Identifying Hollywood's Audiences: Cultural Identity and the Movies*, ed. by Melvyn Stokes and Richard Maltby, (London, BFI, 1999).

[28] David Bordwell, 'The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice' in *The European Cinema Reader,* ed. by Catherine Fowler (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 94-102 (first publ. in *Film Criticism*, 4.1 (Autumn 1979), 56-64). I will discuss Bordwell's formalist account of art cinema in further detail later on in this chapter.

descriptions of popular film consumption – through strong emotions and fantasies of being transported away – rather than through the detached, analytical approach traditionally associated with art cinema.

The Elusive Viewing Experience: Audiences and their Interpreters

Another important point is the difference between research on historical and contemporary audiences; my focus on reception in contemporary Britain gives me the opportunity to decide whether or not to use empirical audience research, whereas scholars investigating earlier historical periods do not usually have this choice. Keeping these reservations in mind, one of my most important sources of inspiration has been Staiger's call for research aiming 'to illuminate the cultural meanings of texts in specific times and social circumstances to specific viewers'.[29] While Staiger's term 'historical reception studies' echoes the fact that most of her research deals with non-contemporary reception contexts, it can also serve as a useful reminder that historical context is relevant to contemporary phenomena; the historical events of the future. I share Staiger's view of interpretation as a process constantly in change, where the meaning of a particular film depends on the audience viewing the film, as well as the moment and context of reception.[30] In early publications, Staiger expressed scepticism about the value of empirical audience research, thereby prompting criticism from Thomas Austin.[31] Austin's study of popular American film in Britain in the 1990s is relevant to my thesis not only because of the proximity in terms of geographical and temporal context, but also because much of the material for *Hollywood Hype and Audiences* was obtained through small-scale questionnaire-based audience surveys.[32] As Austin suggests, data obtained through surveys can be a significant tool in film reception study methodology provided that the collected data does not claim to give direct access to the thoughts of respondents, but represents 'a mediation of the moment of film reception, an

---

[29] Staiger, *Perverse Spectators: The Practices of Film Reception* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), p. 162.
[30] Staiger, *Interpreting Films,* p. 9. This perspective also fits in with the approaches taken by many of the contributors to the first part of Melvyn Stokes and Richard Maltby's *Hollywood Spectatorship: Changing Perceptions of Cinema Audiences* (London: BFI, 2001).
[31] Austin, *Hollywood Hype and Audiences*, pp. 25-26, 35 (note 38).
[32] Austin, *Hollywood Hype and Audiences*, p. 14.

experience which can only ever be retrieved through the operations of language'.[33] When I analyse responses from film viewers, my thesis offers a version of events several times removed from the original experience, affected by the viewer's attempt to describe an experience in his or her own words, and my attempt to interpret these words. There is no ultimate solution to this problem, but the best way forward seems to be a self-reflexive approach, pointing to the mediated nature of these processes rather than presenting my research as a definite, unambiguous interpretation of viewer responses.

This 'moment of film reception' is a psychological as well as a social process. A psychoanalytic approach would assume that the most important aspects of film interpretation are handled unconsciously, thus making responses from real film viewers pointless unless subjected to psychoanalytic interpretation. I am convinced, however, that audiences have the ability to provide the researcher with important (if not complete) information about their own interpretation. I do not deny that unconscious thought processes are likely to be at work in film interpretation. However, hypotheses about unconscious responses absolve the researcher from having to provide evidence that anyone in the audience study actually interpreted the film in this way. We cannot ask audience research participants to contribute anything beyond their conscious thoughts about a film. Respondents are likely to (consciously or unconsciously) adapt their answers to suit their own self-image, but this does not make the responses less interesting, and by allowing participants the opportunity to remain anonymous (not just in published material, but also to the researcher) it is possible to eliminate some level of anxiety about wanting to answer 'correctly'. As a film researcher, conscientious and critical reflections on films form part of my job, and yet I would describe many of my own film interpretations as characterised by complex ambivalence rather than by unambiguous precision. With that in mind, it would seem preposterous to request unequivocal reliability from research participants, most of whom approach film viewing as a pleasurable leisure interest rather than a profession.

One alternative to psychoanalytical approaches to film viewing is the model set out by cognitive theorists. The most prominent advocates of cognitive approaches to film

[33] Austin, *Hollywood Hype and Audiences*, p. 26.

viewing are David Bordwell and Noël Carroll. The title of their influential volume *Post-Theory*[34] relates to a wish to move away from what Bordwell terms 'grand theory', an all-encompassing theoretical framework used as the basis for all research, examples of which, he argues, includes cultural studies as well as psychoanalytic film theory.[35] However, while Bordwell and Carroll's alternative model of small-scale research projects based on historical or scientific data has inspired interesting projects, cognitive research has been unable to provide film studies with any real insights about film reception beyond basic perceptive abilities.[36] This is not entirely surprising, since it is much easier to prove that a viewer can see something than to make claims about what the perceived object or scene means to the viewer. Cognitive research into film spectatorship has also generally conceived of film as limited to visual perception, ignoring the aural component of the film medium, and using micro-scenarios or very short film sequences, cognitive experiments often reduce the complexity of the process involved in the viewing of full-length feature films.[37] In cognitive theory, viewer activities are generally perceived as being orientated towards a specific task, typically working out how a narrative is unfolding, and responding more or less automatically to cues in the film. Amongst research in this vein, Murray Smith's study of emotional engagement with film characters has provided a systematic and nuanced set of terms for theorising viewers' relations to on-screen characters.[38] However, as I apply some of those terms to my discussion in Chapters 2 and 3, it will become apparent that the emotional responses from participants in my study are too diverse to be explained satisfyingly via Smith's text-centred model, where 'the viewer' is not individualised nor contextualised. Although the most persuasive cognitive accounts describe the film

---

[34] David Bordwell and Noël Carroll, eds, *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996).

[35] Bordwell, 'Contemporary Film Studies and the Vicissitudes of Grand Theory', in *Post-Theory*, pp. 3-36 (pp. 12-13).

[36] Cf. Joseph Anderson and Barbara Anderson, 'The Case for an Ecological Metatheory' in *Post-Theory*, pp. 347-367.

[37] See for example Géry d'Ydewalle, Geert Desmet, and Johan Van Rensbergen, 'Film Perception: The Processing of Film Cuts' in *Eye Guidance in Reading and Scene Perception*, ed. by Geoffrey Underwood (Oxford: Elsevier Science, 1998), pp. 357-367. Tim. J Smith, *An Attentional Theory of Continuity Editing* (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2006), available online <http://homepages.inf.ed.ac.uk/s9732397/publications/smith_ATOCE_2006.pdf> [accessed 11 August 2006], Julian Hochberg and Virginia Brooks, 'Movies in the Mind's Eye' in *Post-Theory*, ed. by Bordwell and Carroll, pp. 368-387.

[38] Murray Smith, *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion, and the Cinema* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

viewer as a fairly dynamic figure, their goal-driven film interpreter remains too much of an abstract ideal to be of real use to my study. I take the view that film studies should recognise 'film viewing' as a social activity taking place in a real time and space, and involving a range of complex cognitive processes, but film research should also aim to further our understanding of individual films and their relationship to film culture more broadly. Viewer, film and context relate to each other in a dynamic relationship, where the meaning of films depend on a range of contextual factors surrounding the viewing experience and interpretative strategies linked to the social and psychological background of individual viewers. However, as I have already made clear, this emphasis on what viewers bring to the film and how the experience is framed does not mean that I see individual films as interchangeable. A study of interpretation should attempt to explain why respondents make the decision to spend two hours in front of a film rather than doing something else, but also why they choose to see one particular film rather than another.

The Appropriation of Social Science Research Methods: Issues and Problems

Films' ability to offer viewers emotional experiences, including pleasure, is clearly an important motivating factor for audiences, but cognitive hypotheses about viewing pleasures are based on 'ideal', abstract spectators.[39] By contrast, my project will analyse empirical audience data collected from real film viewers. Empirical audience research has been used within the film industry since the early days of cinema, but it entered academic film studies via the social sciences, when audience research methodology was imported from sociology, or more indirectly, from cultural studies. The employment of these research tools within film studies is still controversial. As Robert Allen puts it, there is still an 'ambivalence over the nature and relevance of empirical research'[40] among film scholars, and there is little consensus regarding procedures or methods that can be used in more than one study, or how to systematically evaluate the usefulness of these methods.[41] One reason to proceed with caution is that film scholars often lack training in

[39] Staiger, *Media Reception Studies*, pp. 90-92.
[40] Robert C. Allen, 'Relocating American Film History', *Cultural Studies*, 20.1 (2006), 44-48 (p. 49).
[41] Both Barker and David Morley touch on this problem in a special issue of *The Communication Review* focussing on audience research. Cf. Barker, 'I Have Seen the Future and It Is Not Here Yet...; or, On

behavioural and sociological research methods, and therefore may design empirical experiments or analyse the results in a manner that is considered unprofessional by qualified social scientists.

Quantitative empirical research methods are useful for getting information about a particular group, for making comparisons between groups, and to demonstrate the extent of a particular phenomenon or relationships between phenomena. They are however unsuitable for dealing with complex textual evidence.[42] Qualitative empirical approaches like interviews, action research, ethnographical studies and focus groups can explain social processes or provide in-depth understanding of a problem, and are useful for setting up hypotheses, constructing theories and interpreting an issue in detail, but they require particular skills when it comes to evaluation and interpretation.[43] These research methods are however not diametrically opposed to each other, and in my research, I combine quantitative and qualitative material in order to set individual responses in a social context.[44]

Most cultural and media studies work on audiences has been based on data from a very small number of respondents, or collected without paying sufficient attention to the problem of selecting participants.[45] Research based on small or arbitrarily selected samples runs the risk of being dismissed as a series of subjective accounts, from which it

---

Being Ambitious for Audience Research', *The Communication Review*, 9.2 (2006), 123-141 (pp. 126 and 129-130) and David Morley, 'Unanswered Questions in Audience Research', *The Communication Review*, 9.2 (2006), 101-126 (p.106).

[42] Staiger, *Media Reception Studies*, p. 164.

[43] Idar Magne Holme and Bernt Krohn Solvang, *Forskningsmetodik: Om kvalitativa och kvantitativa metoder* (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2nd ed. 1997), pp. 76-77.

[44] On the need to use both quantitative and qualitative methods when analysing audiences, see Andy Ruddock, *Investigating Audiences* (London: Sage Publications, 2007), pp.4-5 and 28.

[45] This includes research that has become very influential, like Ien Ang's *Watching Dallas*, a study of the television series' international popularity based on the analysis of merely forty-two letters (*Watching Dallas: soap opera and the melodramatic imagination* (London: Methuen, 1985). Gauntlett gives a succinct account of the problems with Ang's approach in the introduction to his *Creative Explorations: New Approaches to Identities and Audiences* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 6-7. An example of problematic audience recruitment is Tom Stempel's study of cinema-going in the US, which did not employ any systematic kind of sampling process. *American Audiences on Movies and Moviegoing* (Lexington, Ky: University Press of Kentucky, 2001).

is difficult to establish wider implications.[46] Since questionnaires require a written response from participants, this method of data collection is usually considered more suitable for brief answers than in-depth exploration of respondents' thoughts and ideas, but I nevertheless decided to opt for this method, since it would allow me to study a wider set of responses than would have been possible using interviews, discussion groups, or other forms of interactive observation. I collected a total of 217 questionnaires from 188 participants,[47] providing a much larger scope of views than would have been possible through interviews or group discussions. Most qualitative research assumes that variation in responses stops being of interest above a certain point, where the sample is judged to represent a fair selection of the group in focus. However, due to the lack of research on audiences for European film, it is impossible to establish with any statistical certainty what a representative selection of British viewers of Swedish, French or European cinema would be. Furthermore, in order to reduce my own influence on audience responses to a minimum I mainly used open-ended questions,[48] resulting in a high level of variation between responses. Consequently, in order to find interesting parallels and make useful comparisons a larger number of questionnaires was necessary.

Data Collection: Practical, Ethical and Methodological Considerations

In order to avoid extensive reliance upon the local student population when recruiting a research audience for the study, collaboration with independent cinemas and film societies proved useful. Four of my research screenings took place at the University of Southampton, but I invited participants to these screenings by distributing leaflets about

---

[46] See Richard J. Murphy's critique of Barker's use of empirical research in 'The Act of Viewing: Iser, Bordwell and the 'Post-Theory' debates in contemporary Film Studies' in *Comparative Critical Studies*, I.1-2 (2004), 119-145 (p. 138).

[47] Twenty-nine respondents came to more than one screening, which is why there were more questionnaires than participants. The research was collected at eight core screenings at the University of Southampton and the Chichester Cinema at New Park, with additional material for the *Show Me Love* case study supplied at the Winchester Film Society (based at the Screen cinema in Winchester), the Harbour Lights Picturehouse cinema in Southampton and Chichester College. At the main screening locations, where all four films were shown, the programme running order was as follows:
Avenue: 1) *Amélie* 2) *Show Me Love* 3) *Faithless* 4) *The Dreamlife of Angels.*
Chichester: 1) *Show Me Love* 2) *Amélie* 3) *Faithless* 4) *The Dreamlife of Angels.*

[48] Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Evaluation Methods* (Beverly Hills; London: SAGE Publications, 1980), p. 28.

the film season at specialised cinemas in and around the city of Southampton,[49] as well as across the University, at sites where students and staff could be expected to have an interest in film and/or foreign cultures,[50] and at cultural venues and events that attract visitors from outside of the academic community.[51] The limited number of Swedish film releases also had an impact on my selection of films as a whole. As I could not simply use a selection of current films on offer, the focus of the project was changed to recent rather than contemporary film, and I decided to work on four reception case studies, two Swedish and two French films released in the UK between 1998 and 2001, and available on video and/or DVD: *Show Me Love* (*Fucking Åmål*, 1998), *Faithless* (*Trolösa*, 2000) *The Dreamlife of Angels* (*La Vie rêvée des anges*, 1998) and *Amélie* (*Le Fabuleux destin d'Amélie Poulain*, 2001).[52] The decision to screen films that were already available in home entertainment format complicates the research in the sense that the season functioned as a repertory programme of recent film, likely to attract a slightly different audience to those attending new theatrical releases. However, as I have already mentioned, film is increasingly consumed outside of the theatrical context. Furthermore, in the case of *Amélie*, the time lapse between theatrical release, DVD release and research screening allowed me to study the long-lasting effect of the film's marketing campaign as well as audience familiarity with the DVD version. Such observations could not have been made in an audience study at the time of the original release, and they open up interesting questions about film connoisseurship in relation to new technologies. In addition to the university-based screenings, I showed the same films as a part of an educational programme at the Chichester Cinema at New Park, a small cinema affiliated to the 'EUROPA' network[53] and located at a community centre in Chichester. I recruited research participants for these screenings through the cinema's

[49] The Harbour Lights Picturehouse cinema in Southampton, the Lighthouse cinema in Poole, and the Screen cinema in Winchester.
[50] The Student Union Film Society, and the Avenue campus, where most Humanities subjects (including Film and Modern Languages) are taught.
[51] The Nuffield Theatre, the Turner Sims Concert Hall, and the Phoenix Film Society.
[52] My selection of these films is a crucial decision that must be defended in order to justify the validity of the experiment as a whole, and I will deal with this in the section on European national cinemas below. From here onwards, I will be using the British distribution titles for the case study films.
[53] This network, created in 1992 with support from The European Union's MEDIA programme and the CNC (Centre National de la Cinématographie), provides 'financial support to cinemas that commit themselves to the programming of a significant number of non-domestic European films and to the organisation of promotional activities concerning European films for young audiences.' <http://www.europa-cinemas.org> [accessed 18 January 2007].

normal programme/newsletter in its electronic and printed formats. The eight screenings at the University and the Chichester Cinema in New Park, which provided me with a core set of responses, were all programmed as a season of French and Swedish cinema, free to the general public in exchange for their completed questionnaires.[54] Through two pilot studies, I developed questionnaires designed to gather information about the respondents' pre-knowledge, expectations and film preferences, their reactions to and evaluation of the specific film, and their opinions concerning its target audience and generic aspects. The fact that audiences knew that they were going to be asked to complete a questionnaire after seeing the film is likely to have affected both what kinds of audiences attended the screenings and the viewers' approach to the film. My method for collecting data probably attracted respondents who were already inclined to consider films as worthy of serious discussion and confident to share their thoughts about film viewing and interpretation. Such characteristics may be particularly common among well-educated audiences, and as I will discuss in further detail later on, this study was dominated by middle-class respondents with a high level of education.

The data upon which this thesis is based was collected in line with relevant ethical guidelines for research involving human subjects.[55] Earlier on, I referred to Austin's description of empirical audience data as 'a mediation of the moment of film reception...retrieved through the operations of language',[56] and when analysing the questionnaires, I have tried to keep in mind the range of factors affecting each individual respondent's attempt to express in words their immediate reaction to a film, acknowledging the limitations imposed by the space available on the questionnaire sheet, the time,[57] and of course the questions asked in the first place. In a project of such a modest scale, a good response rate is vital, and I therefore asked respondents to complete and return their questionnaire before leaving the screening room. As a consequence, people had less time for reflection than if they had been allowed to return

[54] The number of questionnaires collected for each film at these core screenings tally at around forty. Further audience responses relating to one of the Swedish films, *Show Me Love*, were obtained from Southampton's Harbour Lights Cinema and the Winchester Film Society at the Screen Cinema, and I also visited an A' level Film Studies class in Chichester, who viewed this film as part of their curriculum. Cf. Chapter 5.

[55] For a full account of the ethical considerations informing the study, see Appendix D.

[56] Austin, *Hollywood Hype and Audiences*, p. 26.

[57] Screenings took place in the evening, and some participants were keen to leave as soon as possible.

questionnaires later, but in the interest of obtaining as much information as possible, and responses not only from viewers who reacted strongly, and therefore were more interested in sharing their experiences, this appeared to be the best solution.

My interpretation of viewers' responses was encumbered by troubles ranging from the very mundane – illegible handwriting – to the metaphysical difficulties involved in any form of text interpretation. To present responses from participants in the project in a manner that is digestible and interesting involves making choices about which views and topics to represent, because not everything can be included. The selected material is furthermore not presented in raw form in the discussion, but is analysed and interpreted by the researcher. It is therefore important to remember that as a researcher, I affect the outcome of the project not only by the questions I chose to ask and the way in which I collected data, but also by constructing a necessarily selective image of the research audience in my writing.[58]

A self-reflexive and critical approach is essential in a project dealing with the many layers of mediation involved in analysing audience interpretations. When analysing the questionnaire material, I have tried to approach viewers' responses with the 'respect, modesty and reflexivity' advocated by Ann Gray.[59] At times, references to my own experiences of film viewing, of being part of an audience, or of responding to a film in a particular way form part of the discussion. This is a deliberate move away from the traditional suppression of the first person in academic writing, where as Gray points out 'the author is hidden behind the screen of objectivity and implied neutrality in the text'.[60] If my subjectivity surfaces overtly only intermittently throughout the thesis, it is because my aim here is to give a voice to other film viewers. My personal views are only of interest insofar as it is important to acknowledge that I do not pretend to represent objective, neutral knowledge, and that I am aware that my approach to the audience responses is one among many possible ways of using this material. But this relativism does not make the research less significant or original, and to claim that

[58] See Ann Gray's discussion of 'the author in the text' in *Research Practice for Cultural Studies* (London: Sage, 2003), p. 174
[59] Gray, *Research Practice for Cultural Studies*, p. 189.
[60] Gray, *Research Practice for Cultural Studies*, p. 177.

empirical audience research is fruitless because of these problems would be an easy way out; instead, I have tried to make this interpretation of interpretations[61] more grounded in fact by attempting to set the research audiences and their reception moments in a precise context.

Contextual Factors

European Cinema, British Context

In a project emphasising the role played by contextual factors in shaping film interpretation, the issue of how to contextualise the research material itself is clearly crucial. Since the 1970s, cultural studies have made important contributions to our knowledge about cultural consumption in the context of everyday life, showing how different social groups have used cultural products to express a sense of identity,[62] and how individuals see their consumption of culture as relevant to their life situation more broadly.[63] My research relates to this tradition, in that when I describe the audiences participating in my research, I consider a variety of issues connected to their social and cultural background, such as age, gender, class and nationality, and I attempt to relate these issues both to the formation of social identities and to the role of film consumption in constructing a self-image.[64] My aim throughout this thesis will be to treat participants' views respectfully, but at times, my analysis will draw parallels between respondents' interpretations and identity issues that they may not explicitly have addressed, and may even disagree with.[65] In order to explain how my small-scale project can be useful for

---

[61] A 'viciously circular' activity, as Staiger pointed out in *Perverse Spectators*, p. 174.

[62] Cf. Stuart Hall, *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain* (London: Hutchinson in association with the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, Birmingham, 1976) and *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London: Sage Publications, 1996), Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Routledge, 1979) and *Hiding in the Light: On Images and Things* (London; New York: Routledge, 1988), Alan Tomlinson, *Consumption, Identity and Style: Marketing, Meanings and the Packaging of Pleasure* (London: Routledge, 1990), Jonathan Friedman, *Consumption and Identity* (Chur, Switzerland: Harwood Academic, 1994).

[63] Within literary studies, Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985) was groundbreaking, offering a feminist account of women reading romantic literature, focussing on the motivation behind the book consumption as much as the interpretation process. Within film studies, examples include Taylor's *Scarlett's Women* and Stacey's *Star-gazing*.

[64] Austin, *Hollywood Hype and Audiences*, p. 20

[65] Readers can make up their own minds about whether my interpretation seems reasonable by consulting the original audience responses in Appendix B.

research into British cinema culture more widely, I also need to discuss the question of exhibition context, including the space and atmosphere in which the screenings took place. Another important tool for contextualising viewers' interpretation in this thesis is the analysis of critical reviews and other forms of media coverage, including marketing, which helps identify the 'pre-existing horizon of interpretations',[66] or 'framework of knowledges'[67] within which individual responses to films can be understood.

In their book on the media controversy surrounding David Cronenberg's *Crash* (1996) on its release in Britain, Barker et al suggest that a 'national film culture' can be thought of not just in relation to films produced within a specific national context, but also with reference to film reception, in order to describe 'ways of understanding and responding to films within different countries'.[68] In this sense, my thesis can be understood as belonging within research on the national film culture of Britain, but it does so in a very specific way, looking at attitudes and perceptions among a small subsection of the British film viewing population with a specialised interest in European cinema. In the four chapters dealing with the French and Swedish case study films, I occasionally make reference to reactions in the films' countries of origin; in particular when there are remarkable differences in terms of how the films were received, since this helps elucidate what is unique to the British film reception context. Generally, however, I have aimed to stay as closely focussed on the British context as possible. This contextualisation has involved studying critical attitudes to French, Swedish and European cinema in the British press as well as the way in which these types of films are distributed and exhibited in the UK. In relation to French film, my work connects with Lucy Mazdon's Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded project 'French Cinema in Britain since 1930'[69] despite having been conceived of completely independently from this project. The structure of film exhibition and distribution in the UK features prominently in this thesis, where alongside journalistic criticism such practices are

---

[66] Tony Bennett cited in Staiger, *Media Reception Studies*, p.82.
[67] Stuart Hall cited in Staiger, *Media Reception Studies*, p.82.
[68] Martin Barker, Jane Arthurs and Ramaswami Harindranath, *The Crash Controversy: Censorship Campaigns and Film Reception* (London: Wallflower, 2001), p. 24.
[69] Cf. the conference *Anglo-French Cinematic Relations since 1930*, University of Southampton, 14-16 September 2007. See also Catherine Wheatley and Lucy Mazdon, 'Intimate Connections', *Sight and Sound*, 18.5 (2008), 38-40.

presented as highly significant contextual factors framing audience responses to French and Swedish cinema. Mazdon and her research assistant Catherine Wheatley map out French cinema in relation to British exhibition and distribution practice, but by using empirical audience research, an approach that does not feature in Mazdon's project, my work can be seen to complement her study. Furthermore, while Mazdon traces the presence of French cinema historically in the UK since the coming of sound, my study is concerned with British audiences in the very recent past, and film history features in my project only as a contextual factor, albeit a highly significant one.

Specialised Cinema Audiences in the UK

The UK Film Council has charted the market for what they call 'specialised cinema', an umbrella term incorporating subtitled foreign language releases, together with English language films that fall outside of the mainstream commercial sector, such as archival re-releases, documentaries, and English-language films dealing with difficult subject matter and/or using an experimental formal language.[70] That an agency backed by the government with the aim 'to promote the widest possible enjoyment and understanding of cinema throughout the UK'[71] lumps together all non-English language film, regardless of genre, in the same category as experimental film, is very telling of the current situation of European cinema in the UK. The research compiled by KPMG[72] is thus concerned with a much broader category of films than my work on European, and more specifically Swedish and French cinema, and although the report is detailed, it is based mainly on quantitative rather than qualitative material. The document does however provide a helpful starting-point, because even though statistics on specialised

---

[70] Pete Buckingham, *UK Audience Development Scheme: Context, Strategic Fix and Audience Issues*, 6 July 2005 Presentation, PowerPoint available from 'Cinema Going' section of UK Film Council web site <http://www.ukfilmcouncil.org.uk/usr/downloads/audience_development/ADS_Support_050805.ppt> [accessed 12 February 2007]), KPMG, *Film Council Specialised Exhibition and Distribution Strategy* (2002), Film Council website <http://www.ukfilmcouncil.org.uk/information/statistics/> [accessed 26 October 2006]. The latter document will be referred to as 'KPMG' from here onwards.

[71] <http://www.ukfilmcouncil.org.uk/> [accessed 5 March 2007].

[72] KPMG is a commercial research consultancy dealing with 'audit, tax, financial and risk advisory' across many sectors, including media and entertainment. The company was created in 1987 when Klynveld Main Goerdeler (KMG) merged with Peat Marwick International (PMI). See <http://www.kpmg.co.uk> [accessed 3 January 2007]. KPMG generally provides services to the private rather than the public sector, so the Film Council's decision to commission this company to carry out the research reflects their investment in the business aspect of film over any question of artistic value.

cinema do not tell us how prominently European, French or Swedish films feature within this category, the profile of audiences for specialised cinema, estimated to just under 6% of all admissions to British cinemas,[73] is likely to be significantly more similar to the profile for consumers of European cinema than to the British cinema audience in general.

Age and Film Consumption

The average age of British film viewers is much higher in specialised than mainstream cinema audiences.[74] According to KPMG, the share of specialised cinema viewers under twenty-five years old has been declining since the late 1980s. The frequency of cinema-going in the UK is higher among young audiences, but attendance appears to be increasing more in higher age groups.[75] The share of viewers over thirty-five taking part in my research project was slightly smaller than in KPMG's figures for specialised cinema, mainly because the screenings based at Avenue Campus attracted a large number of students, many of whom were in their twenties,[76] but on the whole, the overall research audience was more similar to the audience for specialised cinema in terms of age profile than it was to the British cinema-going population at large.[77] Film viewers over the age of thirty-five were more likely to be low-level film consumers, while those who viewed five or more films per week were most often found in the youngest audience group. Many of the respondents under the age of twenty-five were students, an audience group with more time for film consumption than those in full-time employment, and indeed, 58% of research participants who consumed high levels of film were students. However, when it came to viewing films in the cinema, the oldest viewers were most likely to list cinema as their main format of film consumption, whereas no research participants under the age of twenty, and only three respondents under thirty years old, reported viewing films mainly in the cinema. Predictably, age was also a dividing factor in terms of domestic film viewing technology. The average age of

---

[73] Buckingham, *UK Audience Development Scheme* (figures refers to 2003). See also KPMG, p. 10.
[74] See **Figure 1**, Appendix A (all illustrations are to be found in this appendix).
[75] KPMG, pp. 10, 115.
[76] The average age of Avenue viewers was thirty-three, against forty-four for the New Park audience and forty-seven in the Winchester group.
[77] See **Figure 10**.

viewers who listed DVD as their main format for consumption was thirty-four, while the corresponding age of those who indicated that they saw films mainly on video was forty-two. Furthermore, among those who mentioned that they downloaded films from the internet, only one person was over thirty, and the majority of downloaders (75%) consisted of students in their twenties. Prior experience of film viewing and pre-knowledge of different kinds of films varied greatly depending on viewers' age and background, and throughout this thesis, I will frequently come back to the significance of this in relation to film interpretation.

Gender and Film Consumption

The gender profile of the general cinema audience in the UK is fairly even, with 48% men against 52% women.[78] There are however significant differences in terms of age groups; in 2005, more men than women in the age groups fifteen to twenty-four and twenty-five to thirty-four went to the cinema, while audiences over the age of thirty-five were dominated by female spectators.[79] KPMG's report did not reveal whether these age patterns were relevant to specialised cinema audiences, but film exhibitors did report a slight majority of female customers for specialised film.[80] Overall, my research audience, consisting of 55% women and 45% men, seemed to confirm these observations. Interestingly, however, the relationship between gender and age in the research audience profile was the opposite of that demonstrated in the British cinema audience overall. Among the youngest viewers in my project, 64% were female, and also the group of twenty-five to thirty-four-year-olds was dominated by women, at 61%. By contrast, only 45% of the viewers over thirty-five were female.[81] The 55% male share of this audience group is somewhat surprising, considering the reported dominance of female viewers among older cinema-goers in the UK cinema audience generally.[82] Another interesting finding relating to gender and age could be identified among members of the audience who reported going to the cinema at least once a week. Men

[78] KPMG, p. 111.
[79] Hancock, 'Fragmented film'.
[80] KPMG, p. 116.
[81] See **Figure 15**.
[82] The findings must be considered with caution, since my study does not carry statistical validity, but it would be interesting to investigate whether European cinema and/or specialised cinema also more generally tend to attract younger women and older men.

were in the majority among these frequent cinema-goers,[83] and while a fair number of these men were in their forties and fifties, there were no women at all between the ages of thirty-eight and fifty-seven in this category. By contrast, among viewers who went to the cinema less than once a month, women dominated,[84] and a significant number of women in their late thirties, forties and fifties belonged to this category. This could be explained by the fact that women in these age groups often combine work outside of the home with taking a higher responsibility than men for domestic work and children.[85] Supporting this gender division was the fact that although television was the dominating film viewing format for the overall research audience, more women than men were listing television and video as their main formats of film consumption, and it was more common for men than for women to view film primarily on DVD or in the cinema. In the category of 'other' viewing formats, it is also worth noting that more men than women mentioned downloading films via the internet. These trends seem to reinforce traditional gender divisions between new and old technologies and private and public spheres.[86] In the one research group consisting of only viewers under twenty years old, female students were more likely than male students to be frequent cinema-goers,[87] but in all other audiences the gender-divided consumption tendencies held true also among younger viewers, although to a slightly less marked extent than in the case of the over thirty-year-olds.

Middle-Class Audiences

The interest in social class among film audience researchers appears to have declined in recent years, as emphasis has been placed on other identity issues,[88] but an overview of socioeconomic background among specialised film viewers in the UK shows that it is still a highly relevant factor. 51% of the British population belong to the ABC1 grades, but these social groups account for a disproportionably large share of the UK cinema

[83] 58% versus 42%.
[84] 60% versus 40%.
[85] The number of housewives in the research audience was low as **Figure 23** shows.
[86] Cf. Klinger, *Beyond the Multiplex*, pp. 63-64.
[87] The Chichester College A-level students who completed a questionnaire after seeing *Show Me Love* as part of their Film Studies course.
[88] Staiger, *Media Reception Studies*, p. 163.

market overall.[89] This trend is even further accentuated in the specialised cinema audience, where the ABC1 group accounts for 70% of the viewers. The C2DE group, with less money to spend on leisure activities, generally tends to attend fewer arts events than the more affluent social classes.[90] The inconsistent level of detail in the information provided by research participants in this project with regards to their occupation means that it is difficult to place respondents firmly in one socio-economic category, but it is evident from the data that the audience taking part in the study was dominated by the ABC1 group, and that this tendency was much stronger than in the UK Film Council estimate of specialised cinema goers.[91] Their definition of specialised cinema includes English-language films, and although research in this area is limited, there seems to be a widespread consensus at least within the British film industry and press that subtitled films appeal to a narrower and more high-brow audience than specialised cinema with an English soundtrack. Certainly, British viewers familiar with European languages are likely to be more numerous in the ABC1 socio-economic categories, since these groups include the most educated parts of the population as well as those with a life-style incorporating foreign travel. As this study will show, many responses to the films could be described as characterised by a tourist gaze,[92] so an interest in travel may be particularly significant. However, one of my chapters deals with a subtitled film, *Amélie*, that did manage to reach a broader British audience, and this will allow for interesting comparisons with the other three case studies.

Cultural Roots and Linguistic Skills

Considering that my research deals with British audience responses to Swedish and French cinema, two examples of European national cinemas, it is clearly vital to address the issue of national identity, but this aspect of viewers' identity is not necessarily straightforwardly connected to the nationality stated in a passport. Rather than focusing closely on respondents' nationality, I have therefore tried to arrive at a contextual

---

[89] The socio-economic grading system used by the National Readership Survey is rather crude, but its widespread use in market research and advertising means that data on film audiences tend to be categorised in this manner. For an explanation of the categories see Appendix E.
[90] KPMG, pp. 112-116. See also **Figure 2**.
[91] See **Figure 23** to **Figure 26** and **Figure 31** to **Figure 34**.
[92] Cf. John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze* (London: Sage, 2nd edition 2001)

understanding of their cultural background by analysing their attitude towards different cultures, their linguistic skills, and additional information occasionally provided in open-ended questions. It should be clear from the outset that 'British audiences' in this project is a broad concept referring to viewers of European film in Britain, whatever their citizenship, background or national identity. The audience groups included both monolingual and multilingual British respondents, as well as participants originating from other anglophone parts of the world. A fair number of research participants had languages other than English as their mother tongue, and many viewers were fluent in several different languages.

English was the mother tongue for 71% of research participants, and 10% stated that they did not have any knowledge of other languages.[93] The 2001 census did not include questions about linguistic proficiency, but according to the BBC, an overwhelming majority of the British population are monolingual English-speakers.[94] It is difficult to pinpoint the exact distinction between being monolingual and having poor skills in other languages, but in any case, it is clear that the members of this research audience who had English as their first language were more linguistically skilled than the UK population as a whole. This was not unexpected, since their occupation often hinted at high levels of education.[95] The 27% of participants who indicated that their first language was not English were even more linguistically skilled, as they all spoke English (generally to an advanced or fluent standard) in addition to their mother tongue, and often one or several other languages. The majority (60%) of respondents who reported viewing non-English language European films every week had another language than English as their first language, so within my research audience there appeared to be a link between linguistic diversity and consumption of non-anglophone European film.

---

[93] See **Figure 52**.
[94] BBC website http://www.bbc.co.uk/languages/european_languages/countries/uk.shtml> [accessed 24 Oct 07].
[95] See **Figure 31**.

Cinephilia and Film Viewing Formats

In Britain, the consumption of European cinema and other subtitled films is a question of taste, which brings us to the issue of film consumption and cinephilia. The 'intense loving relationship with the cinema'[96] thus labelled is usually associated with the experience of the dark movie auditorium and film viewing as a form of ritual,[97] and it is commonly assumed by critics as well as film studies teachers that to see a film 'properly' means to see it on a big screen.[98] Indeed, although the majority of my research screenings used DVD[99] projection onto screens that were smaller in size and of a poorer quality than those available in most cinemas today,[100] I based my decision to collect audience data at public screenings on the premise that a large screen creates a more powerful viewing experience. To 'go and see a film' involves entering a public sphere, and becoming part of an audience whose overall make-up is beyond any individual viewer's control. When films provoke strong emotions, this is likely to be experienced differently depending on whether the reactions occur in a public or private context. However, despite the fact that this research was carried out at public screenings, with films projected on large screens, it is important to keep in mind that for the majority of respondents, in particular the younger audience members, film viewing is primarily associated with television and secondarily with DVD and other home entertainment formats, and to view a film on the large screen is therefore something of a special occasion.[101] In my research audiences, the average age of those who listed cinema as their main format for film consumption was forty-eight, that is to say ten years older

---

[96] Christian Keathley, *Cinephilia and History or The Wind in the Trees* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), p. 2.

[97] For more on cinephilia in relation to the study, criticism and history of film, see Keathley, *Cinephilia and History*. For approaches applying the concept of cinephilia to film viewing in the home, see Klinger, 'The Contemporary Cinephile' and Dinsmore-Tuli 'The Domestication of Film'.

[98] Klinger, *Beyond the Multiplex*, p. 54.

[99] In the case of *The Dreamlife of Angels* a VHS tape was used because no subtitled DVD version of the film was available on the European market.

[100] *Show Me Love* was also shown on 35mm at Winchester Screen (as part of the Film Society programme) and Harbour Lights in Southampton (as part of an educational season).

[101] See **Figure 41** and **Figure 43** to **Figure 47**. It is worth noting in passing that for the younger viewers who consume film primarily on television, there are few opportunities for familiarisation with foreign language cinema in Britain today, since non-Anglophone film are shown almost exclusively on specialised digital channels rather than on terrestrial television.

than the average age of research participants overall.[102] Furthermore, the respondents who saw films mainly in the cinema could be divided into two different age groups: those between twenty-three and thirty-three years old – mainly students and creative professionals – and those over the age of fifty. Not one single research participant between thirty-three and fifty listed cinema as their main format for film consumption, very likely because viewers in this age group often are in the middle of career and family life.

Contemporary film enthusiasts are likely to spend more time with their DVD collection than in the cinema, and as Klinger has pointed out, this means that it is no longer possible to contrast the spellbinding effect of cinema projection with the distracted viewing practices of film consumption in the home, as advanced home cinema technology and special edition DVD extras create new 'mesmerizing apparatuses' for contemporary cinephiles.[103] Nevertheless, a link can be made between high levels of film consumption and frequent cinema-going. Even if the overwhelming trend among participants in this study was to consume films mainly on television, 35% of those who viewed more than five films per week also went to the cinema once a week or more. Frequent cinema-goers in the research audience also consumed higher levels of non-anglophone European film, and were less likely to list television as their main film consumption format. Almost half of research participants who viewed non-English language films every week were frequent cinema-goers, and among those who went to the cinema once a week or more, television was the primary viewing format for only 22%, in contrast with the overall research audience, where the corresponding figure was 36%. The audience members least likely to list television as their main format for film consumption were those aged twenty-five to thirty-five, presumably because they have a higher disposable income than younger students, while at the same time a more outgoing, sociable life-style than older viewers.

[102] The composition of the overall audience in terms of age, and how it relates to different screening venues, will be discussed later on.
[103] Klinger, *Beyond the Multiplex*, p. 55. See also Dinsmore-Tuli, 'The Domestication of Film'.

The Cultural Context of Film Exhibition

Cinema-going requires the selection of a particular cinema to attend, and although European films can be shown in many kinds of theatrical venues, including mainstream cinema circuits, most of them tend to be exhibited in independently programmed cinemas[104] or independent circuits, such as the City Screen network.[105] The expansion of multiplexes across Britain in the past decades has posed a threat to smaller, independent cinemas, and speculations about over-saturation of the cinema market surface on a regular basis. Some smaller cinemas have indeed been forced to close, and most multiplexes have not been particularly adventurous in their programming; they tend to programme many screenings of the same blockbuster films rather than mixing different kinds of film titles. Therefore, while the number of cinema screens in the UK has multiplied in the past decades, the range of films available to cinema-viewers has not necessarily increased. The remaining independent cinemas have however modernised, some of them forming small chains or networks, and many have been refurbished, often with a bar-café, and sometimes with spaces dedicated to art exhibitions and/or educational activities.[106] Although this means that these venues, also known as 'art houses' or 'art cinemas', are very different in character from the multiplex environment, it could be seen as a cultured alternative to the fast-food restaurants, bowling clubs and game arcades associated with the multiplex. This is connected to the issue of taste and class. Many of those involved in the distribution, marketing and exhibition of European film in the UK conceive of the British audience for specialised cinema as middle class, middle aged, and slightly conservative in their tastes,[107] preconceptions that surely affect the kinds of films selected for distribution, as well as how they are promoted. At the same time, the very notion of art cinema entails expectations of something artistic and thus presumably more challenging than mainstream cinema. We will see this

---

[104] The Chichester New Park Cinema and the Lighthouse cinema in Poole are examples of this kind of venue, although as a member of the EUROPA Network, the New Park cinema is contractually bound to include a certain percentage of European releases in its programme.

[105] The Harbour Lights Cinema in Southampton is a member of this programming circuit.

[106] *BFI Film & TV Handbook 2002*, p. 37, *BFI Film & TV Handbook 2003*, pp. 40-41, 44.

[107] Mandy Kean, in the panel session 'Cinema Strikes Back?: What role can and does exhibition play in marketing film to consumers?', at the conference *Engaging with Audiences*. Also implicit in Jason Klein's presentation at the same conference: 'Navigating the Online Universe - Leveraging the Interactive Space to find and engage your audience'.

exemplified throughout this thesis by research participants' references to the films' avant-garde or artistic qualities, whether through auteurist approaches to the director as a creative personality (*Amélie*), references to formal aspects (editing and camerawork in *The Dreamlife of Angels*, narrative structure in *Faithless*) or non-mainstream themes (gay love in *Show Me Love*). Writing about British middle-class expectations of French cinema, Wheatley and Mazdon suggest that audiences 'wish to sample the safely exotic',[108] an expression that I will return to specifically in relation to the French case studies, but that also seems to pertinently describe attitudes across the four case studies considered in this thesis.

To visit an art cinema rather than a multiplex is to choose a more culturally prestigious film viewing environment. In her overview of the history of the art cinema movement in the USA, Barbara Wilinsky argues that American 'art houses' in the early post-war period attracted new audiences by presenting visitors with an atmosphere that differed from mainstream cinemas, not just by differentiated film programming, but also through additional cultural and culinary offerings, as demonstrated by the following quote:

> The sure-seater has a subtle snob appeal that helps at the box office. You go into a theater that has a few tasteful paintings in the lobby and a maid serves you a demitasse of coffee. You've just paid top admission prices, but the coffee creates a pleasant aura. Then you're shown to a comfortable seat in a well mannered audience.[109]

Until fairly recently, the consumption of European cinema in Britain has been associated with flea-pit cinemas run by impoverished independent exhibitors rather than with any sense of luxury. From the 1990s onwards, however, as mainstream film consumption increasingly moved into large multiplex chains, the character of the contrast between 'mainstream' and 'alternative' film exhibition spaces has shifted. Although many of the smaller cinemas lack the advanced technology installed by the bigger chains, individual exhibitors as well as small independent chains have been refurbished with plush furniture and stylish wine bars, and they often run educational and artistic activities. The multiplex projection equipment may offer film audiences a superior audio-visual quality,

---

[108] Wheatley and Mazdon, 'Intimate Connections', p. 39.
[109] Stanley Frank, 'Sure-seaters Discover and Audience', *Nation's Business*, January 1952, p. 69, cited by Barbara Wilinsky, *Sure Seaters: The Emergence of Art House Cinema* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), p.1.

but art cinemas counter this by special events for members only and attractive and trendy interiors, creating a different more exclusive atmosphere, and thereby providing an alternative social space, contrasting with the homogenous mass-consumption experience of the multiplex.[110] Art cinemas thus seem to reinforce the distinction between mainstream and independent film culture, even when they stress their wish to attract a wide range of audiences in their marketing message.[111]

Although 'art cinema' is a concept that has been used to describe films that conform to certain textual characteristics, in Britain it is fair to say that to a certain extent, art films are defined, in a circular fashion, by their site of exhibition. The majority of my research screenings took place in a university lecture theatre and a community centre education room at no cost for attendants other than the requirement to complete a questionnaire. Considering my discussion of art cinema above, this setting did not replicate the sense of exclusivity associated with stylish surroundings and membership schemes, but the educational aspect of the art cinema experience was present in the prevailing atmosphere.[112] It is worth keeping in mind that within this educational context, participants might engage with questionnaire research in more (self-) reflective and critical ways than if they had attended a regular cinema screening.

Screening Locations and Audience Groups

There were significant differences between the audience groups at each screening location, and since these differences affected the composition of the audiences for the individual films, they are worth exploring at some length. Screenings at the Avenue university campus attracted, as might be expected, more students and a younger audience than the other locations. The Winchester respondents were older; over 90% of participants at this screening were in paid employment, and almost 80% were over thirty-five years old. The New Park cinema audiences included more employed viewers than the Avenue audience groups, but also a significant number of students. In addition,

[110] Mandy Kean, in the panel session 'Cinema Strikes Back?: What role can and does exhibition play in marketing film to consumers?', at the conference *Engaging with Audiences*.
[111] Cf. City Screen Website <http://www.picturehouses.co.uk/city_screen.aspx> [accessed 4 January 2008]
[112] Indeed, the Chichester audience attended my screenings as part of the New Park cinema's popular education programme.

a much larger share of retired viewers attended the New Park screenings than any other venue. These findings reflect the demographic age profiles of Chichester, Southampton and Winchester respectively.[113] In terms of occupation sector, managerial positions were slightly more common among viewers in the New Park audience, which makes sense considering that those in employment often had reached the peak of their career. Avenue and New Park attracted more high-level film consumers than Winchester. Predictably, more viewers attending the New Park and Winchester screenings listed cinema as their main format for film consumption, but interestingly, considering that the Avenue screenings took place outside of a conventional cinema context, the Avenue audience groups included a higher share of respondents who went to the cinema once a week or more.

Among New Park respondents, half of those in between the age of fifteen and twenty-four were high level consumers, as opposed to 16% in the research audience overall, and they were also more likely to list television as their main consumption format. The New Park viewers between twenty-four and thirty-five, by contrast, appeared to consist of cinema-goers rather than home entertainment viewers; no one in this group listed DVD or video as their main consumption format, but over 30% saw films mainly in the cinema, to be compared with a corresponding figure of 10% in the research audience overall. In the audience groups under thirty-five, there were also many more frequent cinema-goers in the New Park groups than in the overall audience. The overall film consumption level among the twenty-five to thirty-five-year-old New Park participants was however extremely low, with over 80% of viewers viewing films less often than once a week.

The Winchester audience included more low-level film consumers, as might be expected considering that no students attended this screening, and most viewers were in paid employment. Among those who attended the Winchester screening, there were however fewer respondents than in the New Park or Avenue screenings who went to the cinema less than once a month. Although a large share of the Winchester audience (almost 60%) consumed non-English language European films less often than once a month, their film

[113] See **Figure 3** to **Figure 5**.

consumption was less dominated by English-language films than was the case for research participants attending the Avenue and New Park screenings, who had a higher consumption level of European film, but whose consumption was more dominated by English-language fare.[114]

In terms of audience members' national and linguistic background there were significant differences between locations.[115] The Winchester audience was most strongly dominated by native English-speakers at over 90%, while one third of the Avenue audience had a mother tongue other than English. The highest percentage of monolingual English-speakers were found in the New Park audience, where one fifth of participants did not speak any language other than English. New Park also had the lowest share of multilingual respondents, at 16% compared to 21% in the Winchester audience and 35% in the Avenue audience. Knowledge of French was common in all audience groups, but slightly more common among respondents attending the New Park and Winchester screenings. However, no one who attended these screenings spoke Swedish, whereas one tenth of the viewers attending the Avenue screenings had some knowledge of the language.

The University of Southampton accommodates many international students, and since the research screenings took place at the Avenue campus where Modern Languages are taught, it is hardly surprising that these screenings attracted both more non-British respondents and more British multilingual viewers than the Chichester New Park screenings. In order to expand the project's cross-cultural dimension, that is, the question of whether viewers with in-depth knowledge of a film's original language and/or culture interpret it differently from those who had no or little personal experience of the culture, I circulated information about the Avenue screenings to the university's Nordic Society, Alliance Française de Southampton, and the Hampshire Anglo Scandinavian Society. This explains why 11% of the Avenue audience members spoke Swedish, and why the Avenue screenings also attracted several viewers proficient in

[114] These differences are partly explained by the fact that the majority of Winchester respondents most were members of the Winchester Film Society, and therefore would have seen a wide range of non-English language films through the WFS programme.
[115] See **Figure 52**.

other Scandinavian and Nordic languages.[116] As defined by the UK Council, the category of specialised cinema includes films targeted to minority groups with cultural connections to and/or linguistic roots in countries outside of the European continent, such as Bollywood cinema. When these audiences, who are still underrepresented among Britain's higher socioeconomic classes, go to see non-English language films in the cinema, they are likely to choose non-European films over European ones, and they are therefore more likely to appear in the statistical results of the KPMG report than as participants in my study.[117] The questionnaires did not include questions about ethnic background, but with a few exceptions[118] the research audiences analysed here were overwhelmingly white.

Audiences and Identification

General discussions of the relationship between films and audiences often raise the issue of whether or not viewers can 'relate to', 'recognise themselves in', or 'identify with' characters on the screen.[119] As the shared roots of the words indicate, the concepts of identity and identification are closely related. However, because the question of identification has been at the core of many debates surrounding film reception, the term has become very loaded. The notion has been particularly important within feminist film theory and psychoanalytically informed accounts of spectatorship, and many different hypotheses about identification patterns and objects of desire in relation to the gendered spectator have been proposed.[120] My own position in relation to psychoanalytical approaches to film spectatorship is that while I have often appreciated individual interpretations of films using psychoanalytic concepts, I find the general application of such theories to the study of film audiences problematic. When approaching responses

---

[116] The national and linguistic diversity of the Avenue audience makes it slightly atypical of British audiences for European cinema, at least outside of metropolitan multicultural areas, but this is compensated for by the fact that the empirical data that I have collected on the topic of language and screen translation may prove useful to other researchers in future projects.

[117] The KPMG report did however suggest that ethnic minority audiences are underrepresented in current audiences for specialised cinema. KPMG, p. 11.

[118] Some of the international students who attended the Avenue screenings were of Asian origin.

[119] Cf. Julia Hallam with Margaret Marshment, *Realism and Popular Cinema* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 131.

[120] For a brief overview with references to key figures in this debate, see Staiger, *Media Reception Studies*, pp. 143-150.

from real film viewers who have agreed to participate in a research project it is important to show respect for the views they express in their questionnaires. Although at times my contextualisation of their comments may lead to a conclusion that participants may not have expected, I try to locate responses in relation to such contextual factors as the viewing context and the social or and cultural background of the viewer. By contrast, a psychoanalytical framework would insist on the importance of unconscious processes with the result that no evidence is needed other than a belief in the theory itself. In order to avoid coercing viewers into confirming psychoanalytical theories about identification, I asked respondents if they found it 'easy to engage emotionally with the main characters in the film' rather than whether they 'identified' with anyone. Interestingly, many viewers nevertheless opted to discuss their engagement in terms of identifying (or feeling unable to identify) with characters, proving that the concept has a wide currency beyond critical and theoretical debates. According to Smith, this 'folk model'[121] of explaining viewers' relationship to characters on the screen is unproductive because it reduces viewer responses to a binary model where 'we either identify, or we don't'.[122] However, while it is true that respondents' in this study use the concept of identification in unsystematic and sometimes contradictory ways, what concerns me here is not the exact nuances of these statements. I am rather interested in the link between 'identity' and 'identification', in the sense that research participants' comments about how they related to characters might reveal something about their self-image as film viewers. Furthermore, it is relevant to ask to what extent their social and geographic sense of belonging in the world might interplay with their enjoyment of European cinema.

Reactions to films cannot be explained as the effect of one single aspect of any individual's selfhood, and it is important to remember that several identities may intersect in one single viewer.[123] Viewers' ability to relate to characters on screen is not simply a question of recognising traits from their own personality or reality. Such a conception of the relationship between viewer and fictional characters disregards the experience of being transported to another world that I will argue is an essential

[121] 'a widely used and understood mode of describing and explaining a common experience, but one which lacks comprehensiveness, coherence and systemacity.' Smith, *Engaging Characters*, p. 2.
[122] Smith, *Engaging Characters*, pp. 2-3.
[123] Staiger, *Media Reception Studies*, pp.141-142.

attraction not only of so-called escapist popular cinema, but also of less mainstream forms of entertainment, where the opportunity to explore another culture can be an important aspect of the film's appeal to audiences. My thoughts about the connections between film viewing and travel have been influenced by Giuliana Bruno, who has written about the parallels between cinematic and touristic explorations.[124] This is a theme that I will return to, because as Jeffrey Ruoff states in his introduction to an anthology on the travelogue film, cinema is a medium that creates relations in time and space, and one of the key characteristics of film has always been its presentation of the world 'through images and sounds of travel'.[125]

European Cinema and Cultural Distinction

In a report on audience development in the specialised cinema sector,[126] Pete Buckingham of the UK Film Council made an interesting observation in relation to the audience group he called 'aficionados'; viewers who consumed mainly English-language titles with familiar casts, but were willing to try out 'foreign, more thought-provoking' films with actors they did not know, even though they were 'likely to reject the more extreme examples of specialised material'.[127] Buckingham claimed that these film viewers were likely 'to portray themselves as more discerning than other film-goers, even to the extent of describing themselves as 'anti-Hollywood' – even though they still predominantly see mainstream American films'.[128] My research supports this claim, because a comparison between the consumption patterns of research participants and their comments on European and Hollywood film shows that respondents who consumed few European films but were high-level consumer of American cinema still commonly criticised American film while praising European cinema. This seems connected to a tendency among some participants in this study to use their consumption

[124] Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film* (New York: Verso, 2002), pp. 76-82.
[125] Jeffrey Ruoff, 'The Filmic Fourth Dimension: Cinema as Audiovisual Vehicle' in *Virtual Voyages: Cinema and Travel*, ed. by Jeffrey Ruoff (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 1.
[126] Buckingham, *UK Audience Development Scheme*.
[127] Buckingham, *UK Audience Development Scheme*.
[128] Buckingham, *UK Audience Development Scheme*.

of European cinema as a sign of cultural distinction.[129] However, at least *Amélie* and *Show Me Love* (and arguably also *The Dreamlife of Angels*) had a decidedly popular dimension when released in their original national context. As we shall see, this meant that when audience members attempted to articulate elite taste through their preference for European film over Hollywood, they also had to develop strategies for dealing with the tensions between 'art' and 'popular' elements, either by downplaying aspects of the film that could be seen as appealing to a more popular audience or by finding arguments for rejecting the film.[130]

Texts, Viewers, and Contexts

Research on popular film audiences has shown that extra-textual information can have an important impact on film viewers. Austin has proposed a triangular model for investigating the relationship between films, their audiences and the context of reception,[131] linking film consumption to 'institutional contexts and commercial strategies and practices'.[132] The main focus of Austin's book is the marketing, distribution and reviews surrounding a film release and 'how audiences negotiate such mechanisms of 'hype'',[133] but he also stresses that contextual factors do not determine reception. According to Austin, films are 'never infinitely polysemic',[134] because he argues, following John Corner, that well-established 'systems of signification' are available to most viewers in a particular national or social context, limiting the ambiguities of the texts.[135] I support Austin's call for a multidimensional approach to film audiences in order to counteract the tendency of cultural studies scholars to

---

[129] Although the term 'distinction' here nods to Pierre Bourdieu (*Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. by Richard Nice (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984)), my approach to audience identities in this thesis differs from Bourdieu's in that it is much less squarely focussed on class, allowing for other factors to affect taste. Considering that Bourdieu carried out his research in a specific a historical moment – 1960s France – it is also problematic to build on this work within contextualising the cultural practices and the society described in the study.

[130] For more on cultured audiences' and the articulation of taste, see Austin's discussion of *Bram Stoker's Dracula* in relation to 'cultural' and 'subcultural' capital in *Hollywood Hype and Audiences*, pp. 129-133.

[131] Austin, *Hollywood Hype and Audiences,* p. 2.

[132] Austin, *Hollywood Hype and Audiences*, p. 14

[133] Austin, *Hollywood Hype and Audiences*, p. 14.

[134]Austin, *Hollywood Hype and Audiences*, p. 19.

[135]Austin, *Hollywood Hype and Audiences*, p. 19. The term 'systems of signification' is borrowed from John Corner, 'Meaning, Genre and Context: The Problematics of "Public Knowledge" in the New Audience Studies' in *Mass Media and Society*, ed. by James Curran and Michael Gurevitch (London: Edward Arnold, 1991), pp.267-284 (p. 272).

uncritically celebrate consumption.[136] Nevertheless, although marketing and other forms of publicity clearly play an important part in setting audience expectations, and thereby shaping an interpretative framework surrounding individual films, the print and advertising budget for the British release of a European film is usually very small, and the marketing of these films is therefore much less prominent than in the case of Hollywood cinema. Furthermore, my research screenings took place several years after the films' original release, so it is not surprising that few respondents mentioned the original marketing campaigns. The few references to marketing campaigns all appeared in questionnaires completed at screenings of *Amélie*,[137] a film that as we shall see was released in a manner that contrasted greatly with the general norms for marketing and distribution of European cinema in the UK. Therefore, the systems of signification that most of the participants in this study draw upon could be theorised as constructed less on the basis of marketing materials and more on the basis of expectations from previous film viewing experiences and possibly also from a critical discourse about European, French and Swedish cinema.

Buckingham's report highlighted the importance of reviews and articles in printed and online sources like the *Guardian Guide*, *Empire, Sight and Sound* and *IMDb* for the most knowledgeable groups of film viewers,[138] and some participants in my research project did mention that they used printed, broadcast or online media to gain information about films. The limited advertising budget available to most distributors of European films amplify the importance of critical discourse when it comes to raising awareness about and interest in European cinema. British press coverage relating to the four case study films is therefore relevant to this study even though my research screenings took place several years after the original release dates. Rather than demonstrating the influence of specific reviews, however, responses show the influence of a more general contemporary British critical discourse relating to European and French, and to some extent Swedish or Scandinavian cinema. In order to analyse the contemporary critical discourse in Britain concerning concepts such as European, French or Swedish film I

[136] Austin, *Hollywood Hype and Audiences*, pp. 2-3, 13-15.
[137] See questionnaires A6, A12, A22, and A28 in Appendix B. All transcripts of respondents' questionnaires appear in this appendix, and from here onwards, when I refer to audience comments in the thesis, I will simply list the number of the relevant questionnaire.
[138] Buckingham, *UK Audience Development Scheme*.

have studied reviews of the case study films in magazines and newspapers and used keyword searches for expressions like 'French film', 'Swedish film' and 'European film' within the British news material available through the digital database Lexis-Nexis.[139]

The way in which Swedish and French films are treated and understood in their original national contexts is often very different from their reception in Britain. In my thesis, I analyse how audiences in Britain deal with linguistic and cultural differences when interpreting films. In order to deepen my understanding of the specificities of the British context I have studied the Swedish and French media reception to the four case study films, and compared and contrasted this with the general critical discourse surrounding Swedish and French film in Britain, as well as reviews of the actual films in the British press.[140] The key focus of the thesis is however the findings obtained through the questionnaires collected at research screenings. When I refer to the critical reception of a case study film in its country of origin, it is with the specific aim of shedding light on some core difference between the British reception context and its French or Swedish counterpart.

While considering how to approach the viewers, their interpretative strategies, and the contextual materials shaping their experience, it is important not to lose sight of the four case study films around which this thesis is structured. Although my research aims to counter deterministic accounts that privilege the text by giving examples of multiple responses to individual films, the reason that each case study has its own character is not just dependent on viewers and contexts, but also closely connected to the differences between the four films. Their variety in terms of theme, style and structure means that different issues are raised in audience reactions to each film, and Appendix C contains

---

[139]< http://www.lexisnexis.co.uk/index.htm> [accessed 29 Oct 2007]. The Lexis-Nexis database provides access to archival material from the following British national newspapers: *The Daily Telegraph, Sunday Telegraph, Daily Mail, Mail on Sunday, Financial Times, The Guardian, The Observer, The Independent, Independent on Sunday, The Mirror, Sunday Mirror, News of the World, The People, The Sun, The Times, Sunday Times* and *Sunday Express*. It also features material from *The Scotsman* and *Scotland on Sunday*, as well as from a wide range of regional publications (including London's *Evening Standard*) and important magazines like *The Spectator* and *The New Statesman*.

[140] Lexis-Nexis news material has been supplemented with press cuttings from the archives of the Swedish Film Institute Library in Stockholm, the Médiathèque in Paris, and the British Film Institute in London.

fairly detailed plot synopses that will help clarify some of the audience comments for readers who have not seen the films.

European National Cinemas

Swedish and French Cinema in a British Context

According to Thomas Elsaesser, European national cinemas are national and international at the same time, although they perform at these two levels in different cultural realms:

> Nationally, art cinema participates in the popular or literary culture at large, [while] [i]nternationally or transnationally, each national cinema used to have a particular generic function: a French, Swedish or a New German film set different horizons of expectations for audiences.[141]

My research project aims to investigate to what extent labels such as 'French' and 'Swedish' film still function in a generic fashion in Britain today.

In his groundbreaking 1989 article 'The Concept of National Cinema',[142] Andrew Higson wrote that the concept of the 'national' had been applied to cinema in four different ways; firstly, through production and, to a lesser extent, exhibition and distribution within a particular nation; secondly, by searching for shared themes/styles/world views in cinematic texts; thirdly, through a consumption-based approach focused on audiences, often voicing anxiety about Hollywood dominance; and finally by focussing on 'quality' or 'art' cinema, ignoring the existence of popular cinema.[143] In *French Film: Texts and Contexts*, Susan Hayward and Ginette Vincendeau attempted to bridge what they saw as a division between approaches to French cinema in the disciplines of Film Studies (often auteurist and not paying enough attention to

---

[141] Elsaesser, *European Cinema*, p. 467.
[142] Andrew Higson, 'The Concept of National Cinema', *Screen* 30.4 (1989), 36-47.
[143] Higson has revised his model in later publications, acknowledging that transnational hybridity makes it problematic to label films in national terms even when they appear specifically related to a particular national heritage. Cf. The Instability of the National', in *British Cinema, Past and Present,* ed. by Andrew Higson and Justine Ashby (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 35-47 and 'National Cinema(s), International Markets and Cross-cultural Identities', in *Moving Images, Culture and the Mind,* ed. by Ib Bondebjerg, Ib (Luton: University of Luton Press, 2000), pp. 205-214.

cultural specificities) and Modern Languages (often failing to problematise the notion of French cinema as a reflection of French society, and insufficiently attentive to the film medium and industry).[144] By placing emphasis on reception, my approach could be described as adding 'film viewers' to Hayward and Vincendeau's 'texts and contexts', arguing that the audience is an equally important element to consider in relation to national cinemas.[145] Because the focus of my research is the British reception context, I only refer to production trends in French and Swedish cinema when attempting to explain to what extent the films distributed in the UK differ from the Swedish and French cinema known to audiences in Sweden and France. Furthermore, since my interest lies within the area of audiences and the ways in which they make meaning out of the films, I do not search for textual similarities across a body of films. Despite this difference in focus, my research nevertheless has implications for debates about the national cinemas of France and Sweden. Susan Hayward's book *French National Cinema* locates 'the national' in the film texts themselves, in their discursive surround and in their material existence (the prints stored in archives and distributed and exhibited in cinemas). Hayward specifies that there is never one national cinema, but always 'mainstream and peripheral cinemas',[146] and she further points out that while French popular cinema dominates mainstream culture, critics and historians of French cinema have often treated commercially marginal work as central. Acknowledging that French cinema can be different things depending on who is responsible for the definition, Hayward also recognises that the national is articulated through differentiation from others, and identifies Hollywood as French cinema's Other.[147] However, this Other dominates French film culture at the level of reception, since French audiences – like audiences in most other European countries, including Britain and Sweden – watch more films from Hollywood than native productions. At the same time, France is more successful than most other European nations when it comes to exporting films to other territories. This suggests that an understanding of French cinema outside of its national context is highly relevant to debates about French national cinema.

---

[144] Susan Hayward and Ginette Vincendeau, 'Introduction' in *French Film: Texts and Contexts*, ed. by Susan Hayward and Ginette Vincendeau (London: Routledge, 2nd Edition, 2000), pp. 1-8 (p.1).
[145] 'Context' can of course incorporate film audiences, but I want to highlight the importance of reception more explicitly.
[146] Susan Hayward, *French National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2nd Edition 2005), p. 6.
[147] Hayward, *French National Cinema*, p. 8.

Although recent Swedish cinema has been less widely circulated internationally than contemporary French cinema, historically, some Swedish films have been extraordinarily successful on the international market. In particular the work of Ingmar Bergman has received attention from critics all over the world, and at the pinnacle of his career his work could be seen as epitomising the notion of European art cinema. This means that Swedish national cinema also has an international dimension that so far has not sufficiently been taken into account in publications on Swedish film. Although cinema is increasingly recognised 'as a global or transnational cultural commodity'[148] to use Will Higbee's expression, the constant stream of publications outlining the film histories of different nations suggests that once the problems with the concept of the national have been acknowledged there is a tendency to revert to business as usual. In Martin O'Shaughnessy's *The New Face of Political Cinema*, the international dimension of the films in question is referred to only in a brief comment on the fact that the book covers both films that have not been exported and productions with international distributors.[149] From a reception perspective, it would be interesting to investigate the factors determining which of the films were exported, and how audiences outside of France engaged with the political elements that O'Shaughnessy identifies in the films. My thesis will be able to touch upon these issues by discussing audience responses to *The Dreamlife of Angels* in Chapter 3.

Since the publication of *French Cinema in the 1980s*[150] where questions surrounding the national in French cinema were perhaps insufficiently problematised, Phil Powrie's work on French film has become more attuned to the complexities surrounding this notion. *French Cinema in the 1990s* includes a section of essays grouped under the heading 'Defining the "national"', and in his introduction Powrie admits that it is

[148] Will Higbee, 'Towards a Multiplicity of Voices: French Cinema's Age of the Postmodern: Part II – 1992 – 2004' in Hayward, *French National Cinema*, pp. 293-327 (p. 297).
[149] Martin O'Shaughnessy, *The New Face of Political Cinema: Commitment in French Film since 1995* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), p. 5.
[150] Phil Powrie, *French Cinema in the 1980s: Nostalgia and the Crisis of Masculinity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

difficult to define French national cinema 'in a televisual global market'.[151] In *The Cinema of France* Powrie also refers to transnational aspects of the history of French cinema. Yet, he still defines the films discussed in the latter book as part of French national cinema because of their 'French director and/or stars',[152] and although he acknowledges that the selection of films in an English-language publication on French cinema necessarily differs from the selection that would figure in a French-language anthology, the question of how this relates to film audiences remains undeveloped. Higbee argues that recent developments in French film poses problems for 'the notion of a French national cinema that has traditionally defined itself against Hollywood',[153] but his focus on recent cinema presents this as a new development, obscuring the complex history of the relationship between European national cinemas, Hollywood and other film cultures. The tendency to focus on the dichotomy between Hollywood and the national in discussions of European national cinemas means that relationships between other national territories are overlooked. By asking questions about which types of Swedish and French films manage to find distributors in Britain, this thesis investigates attitudes towards particular constructions of what counts as 'Swedish' and 'French' from a different perspective. My research thus contributes to debates concerning national cinemas by placing two French and two Swedish films within British film culture and exploring how audiences approach the films within this context.

The relationship between the films explored in the four case studies and the notions of art cinema and popular film culture is of particular importance to my discussion of the exhibition, distribution and consumption of French and Swedish cinema in the UK. My research points to the difficulty in making such distinctions by highlighting that what counts as artistic or popular is linked to cultural context. Furthermore, reactions from audiences in this project will cast doubt upon traditional ideas about the 'analytic' or 'distanced' film viewing strategies of cultured film audiences, since as we shall see, many respondents tended to stress how the films affected them emotionally, and seemed

---

[151] Phil Powrie, 'Heritage, History and 'New Realism': French Cinema in the 1990s' in *French Cinema in the 1990s: Continuity and Difference*, ed. by Phil Powrie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 1-21 (p. 19).
[152] Phil Powrie, 'Introduction' in *The Cinema of France*, ed. by Phil Powrie (London: Wallflower, 2006), pp. 1-9 (p. 2).
[153] Higbee, 'Towards a Multiplicity of Voices', p. 298.

just as inclined to experience the film as an opportunity to 'get away' from their everyday life as any popular film audience. Although my thesis is not about films made in Britain, it is about British film culture, and in line with Higson's argument, I have attempted to take into account the whole range of films in circulation, as well as the places of consumption, the existence of sociologically different audience groups and aspects of extra-textual materials relevant to film reception, such as marketing and criticism.[154] Following Higson, Elsaesser has challenged the traditional view of European cinema as an expression of the national identity of various countries, arguing that the concept of national cinema 'makes sense only as a relation, not as an essence, being dependent on other kinds of filmmaking'.[155] Furthermore, he has stressed, 'a national cinema by its very definition, must not know that it is a relative or negative term'.[156] This explains why positive, absolute definitions of for example 'Swedish' or 'French' national identity in film remain fairly common, despite increasing awareness in academic circles of how problematic the concept of the national actually is. Indeed, as Nestingen and Elkington observe, in relation to Scandinavian cinema most English-language publications still 'take the national category as a given'.[157]

'Foreign-language' Film, Audience Expectations, and European Cinema

When considering the circulation of films in Britain in the years leading up to my audience research screenings in 2005, the most conspicuous trend is the British box office's domination by one or two extremely successful releases, such as *Star Wars Episode I* in 1999, and the *Harry Potter* and *Lord of the Rings* films between 2001 and 2005. Although the research audiences participating in this project compared the case study films not only to other French or Swedish films, but made references to films from a wide range of national backgrounds and genres, the films studied in this project were rarely compared with Hollywood blockbusters, except in cases where viewers were defining European cinema negatively, by explaining what it was not. Non-anglophone

---

[154] Higson, 'The Concept of National Cinema', pp. 44-45.
[155] Elsaesser, *European Cinema*, p. 147.
[156] Elsaesser, *European Cinema*, p. 147.
[157] Andrew Nestingen and Trevor G. Elkington, 'Introduction: Transnational Nordic Cinema' in *Transnational Cinema in a Global North: Nordic Cinema in Transition*, ed. by Andrew Nestingen and Trevor G. Elkington (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005) pp. 1-28 (p. 12).

European films are usually placed, by critics and audiences, and to a certain extent also exhibition, distribution and film marketing professionals, within the category of 'foreign-language film'. More than a third of UK releases in 2006 were foreign-language films, but they generated only 3.5% of the UK box office.[158] Among the range of films available to British film viewers, foreign language releases thus count as a minority taste. In fact, even within the context of foreign-language cinema, in terms of cinema admissions European films are increasingly outperformed by other non-anglophone films. As Wheatley and Mazdon point out, in the past decade, the top position on the British foreign-language box office chart has often been occupied by non-European films.[159] This reflects the increasing interest in Asian and Latin-American cinema as well as Hollywood investment in such productions. In 2001, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (*Wo hu cang long*, 2000) was a resounding foreign-language success. Three years later the Hong-Kong/Chinese productions *Hero* (*Ying xiong*, 2002) and *House of Flying Daggers* (*Shi mian mai fu*, 2004) were able to build on this success, and the only non-anglophone film to attract more British viewers to the cinema than these two titles in 2004 was Mel Gibson's Aramaic epic *The Passion of the Christ* (2004), a film that benefitted from the brand name of a major Hollywood star as well as a massive American publicity campaign. Japanese cinema, in particular animation, also featured repeatedly on the lists of successful foreign-language releases in the UK, and some of these productions, for example *Spirited Away* (*Sen to Chihiro no kamikakushi*, 2001) also benefited from American investment. Similarly the successful Spanish-language Latin-American films *Maria Full of Grace* (*Maria, llena eres de gracia*, 2004) and *The Motorcycle Diaries* (*Diarios de motocicleta*, 2004) were American co-productions.

When discussing non-anglophone film distribution in Britain, it is important to mention that in terms of box office figures, Indian films are by far the most successful foreign language releases in the UK. These films receive extremely little coverage in the mainstream press, but they are popular with the nation's large Hindu-speaking population and released in cinemas in culturally diverse areas. Whereas many of the foreign-language titles seen as art cinema receive considerable critical attention in

[158] UK Film Council Statistical Year Book 2006/07, p. 59 available from <http://www.ukfilmcouncil.org.uk/yearbook> [accessed 14 January 2008].
[159] Wheatley and Mazdon, 'Intimate Connections', p. 39.

broadsheet newspapers and specialist press, Bollywood films are doubly marginalised, ignored by highbrow criticism because they do not aspire to art cinema status and by the mainstream popular press because of their cultural and linguistic difference.

Because my research aim was to explore the interpretative approaches of viewers with an interest in European film, the leaflets that I distributed in order to recruit respondents emphasised the fact that the films shown were French and Swedish, and that the research project concerned audiences for European cinema in Britain. Most of the respondents could therefore be presumed to be at least curious about films labelled as 'French', 'Swedish', and 'European', and in some cases fairly knowledgeable as well. Participants were often able to articulate their viewing preferences in more or less precise terms that can be related to genre, national origin or authorship. Many viewers contradicted themselves by claiming to have no expectations at all of the individual film, while giving detailed descriptions of what they expected from 'a French film' or 'a Swedish film' in another section of the questionnaire. Like many other contradictions in audience responses, this paradox appears to be caused by participants being reluctant to relate the specific to the general, a tendency that will be analysed in further detail in the case studies and the concluding chapter. The actual viewing experiences of particular French and Swedish films often did not match the generalisations associated with those national labels. When asked about their expectations of French, Swedish and European cinema, some respondents used exclamation or question marks to indicate how difficult they found it to come up with an answer that was not already obvious ('in French!', 'subtitles!!', 'Film from Europe! What else?'), and the range of associations these labels provoked among participants made it clear that to define French, Swedish and European cinema at reception level actually is a rather complicated business.

Defining French, Swedish, and European Cinema

A crucial question for my thesis is to what extent the four case studies can be seen as representative of the reception of French and Swedish cinema in Britain. In this context, it is vital to understand the various ways in which the concepts of Swedish and French cinema are being used in contemporary discourse, and explain what I take them to mean

in this project. A narrow, production-focused definition might restrict itself to films shot in the geographical areas designated as 'France' and 'Sweden' respectively, by crews and casts of French/Swedish nationality, and funded by French/Swedish companies, individuals and/or institutions. However, filmmaking has always been an international industry, and this definition would disqualify many of the most famous examples of French and Swedish national cinema. European film production history is not just a history of national cinemas, but also a history of co-financing agreements and collaboration across national boundaries. Within the last few decades, the European Union's MEDIA programme has provided a strong financial encouragement for filmmakers to turn towards co-production, and all of the case studies in this thesis except *The Dreamlife of Angels* are examples of such collaborations. Furthermore, the crews of most films made today, including all of the films studied in this thesis, are multinational, with casts that often involve actors of several different nationalities. The tensions between the national labels attached to the case study films, the British national context in which they were screened, and the notion of European cinema will be explored throughout this thesis and discussed in detail in the concluding chapter.

As Michel Gyory explains, in the European film industries, 'the concept of nationality of a film is often primarily connected to the financial aspects of the film business'[160] since the film's nationality will have economic implications, in particular in terms of eligibility for public subsidy. This functional economic approach is however complicated by the cultural and artistic status of films, and their perceived relationship to a national cultural heritage. The problem is illustrated by Jean-Pierre Jeunet's follow-up to *Amélie*, *A Very Long Engagement* (*Un long dimanche de fiançailles*, 2004), co-produced by a French company that was accused and found guilty of acting as a French front for the American studio Warner Brothers, in order to help the production qualify for subsidies as a French film.[161]

---

[160] Michel Gyory, 'Making and Distributing Films in Europe: The Problem of Nationality', report commissioned by the European Audiovisual Observatory (Jan 2000), available online from the European Audiovisual Observatory < http://www.obs.coe.int/online_publication/reports/natfilm.html> [accessed 19 August 2007].

[161] John Henley, 'Amelie Follow-up not French Enough for Funding, Court Rules', *Guardian*, 27 Nov 2004, News section, available online <http://www.guardian.co.uk/france/story/0,,1361015,00.html> [accessed 4 March 2007], 'Amélie Follow-up Fights to Prove It's French', *Guardian*, 6 Nov 2004, Film

Only a minor percentage of the films produced and distributed in France, Sweden and continental Europe as a whole are selected for British distribution, and the horizon of possible interpretative frameworks therefore shift as French and Swedish films cross the border to Britain. Since the companies distributing European cinema in the UK often operate with very small financial margins, films that do not conform to the conventions associated with a particular type of cinema are overlooked. As Jonathan Romney observes in relation to the distribution of French cinema in Britain, the selection British audiences get to see is 'shaped by distributors' preferences, prejudices or habits'.[162] Indeed, the UK Film Council's audience development scheme for 'specialised cinema' stressed that it was important for audiences that 'country of origin fits with genre'. According to the Film Council's qualitative research findings, the types of audiences distributors were encouraged to focus their marketing efforts on were 'highly sensitive to the stereotypical warning flags that they associate with specialised film', and among the negative factors figured 'cultural dissonance', exemplified by the concept of a 'German comedy'.[163] This particular argument is contradicted by the British success of *Goodbye Lenin* (2003), but the partial selection of films for British distribution, together with more general British attitudes towards other cultures, and the films' 'discursive surround',[164] as represented by film reviews and marketing, restrict the potential meanings of Swedish and French films for British audiences.

An important question for this thesis to address is whether a project focussing on productions from just two Western European nation states, Sweden and France, can claim to say anything about the reception of 'European cinema'. As a result of the long-standing tradition of state support for and high cultural status of film in France, together with fairly efficient protectionist measures, France is probably the most successful producer of non-English language films in Europe. Furthermore, the vigorous activity of

---

section, available online <http://film.guardian.co.uk/news/story/0,,1344956,00.html> [accessed 4 March 2007].

[162] Jonathan Romney 'French Exceptions', *Sight and Sound*, 18.5 (2008), p. 42.

[163] Buckingham, *UK Audience Development Scheme.*

[164] Austin, *Hollywood Hype and Audiences,* p. 13, Klinger, 'Film History Terminable and Interminable: Recovering the Past in Reception Studies', *Screen*, 38.2 (1997), 107-128. Klinger attributes the term 'discursive surround' to Dana Polan.

the agency Unifrance in support of French cinema, together with the fact that France is a larger and a more central European nation (both figuratively, and literally in terms of geographical location) than Sweden means that French cinema is much better known and represented internationally than Swedish film. Indeed, only the popular Bollywood cinema discussed earlier in this section is more successful than France when it comes to the number of non-anglophone films exported to Britain today. The number of feature-length Swedish fiction films given a British release between 1998 and 2005, on the other hand, came to a total of only eight films. In this sense, Sweden can be seen to exemplify the difficulties that many smaller film-making European nations face when attempting to export their films to anglophone territories. The French and Swedish film industries do however have a number of things in common as well. In the history of film as an art form, as studied by cinephiles and critics, both nations represent distinguished traditions, associated with internationally renowned auteur filmmakers, specific film styles, movements and periods. Funding from the MEDIA programmes is also available to film producers in both countries because of their European Union membership. It is also important to note that both Swedish and French film production is dominated not by the films usually exported, but by popular genre films – a fact that makes it particularly interesting to study their reception in the British national context and how audiences approach the idea of the artistic versus the popular in relation to French, Swedish and European cinema.

French Cinema in Britain

French cinema occupies an unusual position on the British market in comparison with other non-anglophone cinemas. Every year, around thirty French language film titles are distributed in the UK, even though only a handful of these perform well at the box office.[165] *Amélie* is the only recent French film to top the UK box office chart for foreign-language releases,[166] and in 1999 and 2003 there were no French-language titles at all on the foreign language top ten lists. However, this did not affect the number of French-language titles that were picked up by British distributors in subsequent years.

[165] UK Film Council Statistical Year Books 2004/05, 2005/06 and 2006/07, available from <http://www.ukfilmcouncil.org.uk/yearbook> [accessed 14 January 2008].
[166] Wheatley and Mazdon, 'Intimate Connections', p. 39.

The persistent presence of French film on the British market is closely related to the support for French film distribution in the UK by the promotional agency Unifrance and initiatives such as the French Film Festival. The history of French cinema in the UK is also relevant here. As I have shown in this chapter, audiences for European film are on average older than other British cinema audiences. Some respondents in the over thirty-five age group that dominated the audiences participating in this project were old enough to have seen European films in the cinema in the 1960s, the period most strongly associated with the concept of European art cinema. Across the four case studies in the next four chapters I will be able to demonstrate how the reputation of French and Swedish films from this period continue to affect expectations among audiences today.

As Wheatley and Mazdon point out, the history of French cinema in Britain is tinged with both high and low cultural connotations. In the early sound period, the 'Continental Cinemas' found a place for French films within London's cosmopolitan and intellectual culture. However, after the second world war, when Hollywood failed to provide British second- and third-run cinemas with the B-movies needed to fill their programmes, French cinema represented approximately half of the European films imported to make up for the lack of American products. This meant that British audiences encountered French crime genre films and a fair amount of representations of France that could be described as 'sexy and sordid'.[167] As we shall see, this historical background can still be perceived to resonate with responses from audience participants in this study.

Art Cinema, Popular Film, and Auteurism

Mazdon has argued that the distinction between 'art' and 'popular' film designations should be problematised also within the French context. Discussing the most internationally known and perhaps most influential period in French film history, she calls attention to the fact that even if the French New Wave films were aesthetically innovative and broke with mainstream practices in France at the time it would be misleading to label them as art cinema. The directors of the New Wave were influenced by popular Hollywood cinema, and some of their early films were successful on the

[167] Wheatley and Mazdon, 'Intimate Connections', p. 39.

French box office.[168] Conversely, despite the impressive French audience figures for Claude Berri's Marcel Pagnol adaptations *Jean de Florette* and *Manon des Sources* (both 1986), often perceived as launching the genre of French heritage cinema,[169] it is problematic to consider these films as examples of popular cinema, because they are closely related to the socialist culture minister Jack Lang's ideal of a 'cultural cinema for the masses'.[170] Debates surrounding the French heritage films of the 1980s and 1990s centred on their arguably nostalgic representation of history,[171] and I will return to these issues in Chapter 2, because questions regarding nostalgia and memory have a particular resonance in relation to my discussion of *Amélie*.

Another important issue relating to the tensions between art and popular cinema is the notion of the auteur. This French word was adapted into English-language film terminology as a result of the New Wave, and French cinema in Britain remains closely connected to the idea of the director as auteur.[172] Powrie highlights the paradox surrounding the relationship between French auteur films and popular cinema, arguing that because authorship has played an important role in marketing films, auteur cinema has historically been 'central to French film production and its sense of cultural worth'.[173] Yet, at the same time, in terms of formal features, auteur cinema places itself 'in opposition to mainstream cinema'.[174] My audience research will highlight how additional contradictions and ambiguities arise when authorship is considered in relation to film reception. In the French case studies, we will see that some viewers treated Jean-Pierre Jeunet, the director of the more popular out of the two films, as an auteur. The director of the *The Dreamlife of Angels* on the other hand was unknown to British audiences, despite the fact that Erick Zonca's association with 'new realism' means that

---

[168] Lucy Mazdon, 'Introduction' in *France on Film: Reflections on Popular French Cinema*, ed. by Lucy Mazdon (London: Wallflower, 2001), pp. 1-9 (p. 4).
[169] Cf. Powrie, *French Cinema in the 1980s*, p. 13 and 'Heritage, History and 'New Realism'', p. 2.
[170] Mazdon, 'Introduction' in *France on Film*, p. 6. See also Wheatley and Mazdon, 'Intimate Connections', p. 40.
[171] Cf. Powrie, *French Cinema in the 1980s*.
[172] Powrie, *French Cinema in the 1980s*, p. 4, Romney, 'French Exceptions', p. 42.
[173] Powrie, 'Heritage, History and 'New Realism', p. 1
[174] Powrie, 'Heritage, History and 'New Realism', p. 1. See also Higbee, 'Towards a Multiplicity of Voices', pp. 313-314.

he can be connected to the reinvigoration of the auteur figure in French cinema of the 1990s.[175]

French Cinema in Britain since 1998

My thesis presents French cinema in Britain through two detailed case studies, rather than a wide-ranging overview. Since my area of interest is film reception, an important issue is the extent to which films discussed in this thesis have been accessible to British audiences, and the first chapter will deal with *Amélie*, the most successful French film at the British box office ever.[176] *Amélie* is crucial to any consideration of recent French film in Britain, because as Chapters 2 and 3 will demonstrate, the film has made a significant impact on audience expectations of French cinema. *The Dreamlife of Angels* presents a very different reception scenario, in particular since the research audience who came to see the film was older, more culturally diverse, and probably more similar to a traditional art cinema audience than the group of viewers who contributed to the *Amélie* case study.

So how do these two films compare with other French films distributed in the UK in the recent past? If we take 1998, the original theatrical year of release of *The Dreamlife of Angels* as a starting point for a very brief overview, we can note that several French films that have been seen by fairly large cinema audiences have featured starring performances from Daniel Auteuil or Gérard Depardieu, sometimes playing against each other, as in the 2001 comedy *The Closet* (*Le Placard*) and the 2004 crime thriller *36 Quai des Orfèvres*. As Powrie explains, the genres of comedy and *polar* (also known as *film policier*) have a long history of stable production and popularity with audiences in France.[177] Thrillers like *Read My Lips* (*Sur mes lèvres*, 2001) and *Hidden* (*Caché*, 2005), also distributed in Britain, can thus be related to a tradition of French cinema exploring criminal themes.[178] However, as Wheatley and Mazdon observes in relation to *Tell No One* (*Ne le dis à personne*, 2006), a more recent film that attracted good audience figures

[175] Cf. Powrie, 'Heritage, History and 'New Realism', pp. 8-9.
[176] As of October 2007. Cf. Vanderschelden, *Amélie*, p. 86.
[177] Powrie, 'Heritage, History and 'New Realism', p. 2.
[178] For more on the French thriller/crime genre, see Guy Austin's chapter 'The *polar*' in *Contemporary French Cinema* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), pp. 99-118.

in Britain, such genre films also have strong connections to the conventions and formulas of American filmmaking.[179]

Among French films that have achieved respectable box office results in Britain we find adaptations of literary classics (*Time Regained* (*Le Temps retrouvé*, 1999)) and contemporary high-brow literature (*The Pianist* (*La Pianiste,* 2001)); the stylistically wide-ranging films of François Ozon (*8 Women* (*8 femmes*, 2002), *Swimming Pool* (2003)) and comedies involving Agnès Jaoui and Jean-Pierre Bacri mocking the behavior of the French middle classes (*Family Resemblances* (*Un Air de famille,* 1996), *The Taste of Others* (*Le Goût des autres*, 2000), *Look at Me* (*Comme Une Image,* 2004)). Another strand of French cinema that has received much publicity in Britain in recent years, if not necessarily high audience figures, include a number of films that have stretched the limits of what is deemed acceptable in representations of sex and violence (*Romance*, 1998, *Baise-Moi*, 2000, *Fat Girl* (*À ma soeur!,* 2001), *Irréversible* (2002)). Wheatley and Mazdon cites the BBFC's reference to *Romance* as a 'a particularly French piece in the frank way it addresses sexual issues'[180] in order to argue that the discourse surrounding these films foregrounds expectations of explicitness created by sensationalist French films available to British audiences in the 1950s and 1960s. *Romance* is particularly interesting here because as Mazdon has highlighted, although the film was considered as a serious auteur work, it employed pornographic imagery. While pornography is not usually discussed under the label of popular cinema, it is most definitely not a high cultural form,[181] and the media debate surrounding the film increased its audience figures.[182] These observations once again alert us to the complexities surrounding the notions of art and popular cinema.

French films distributed in the UK in the past decade also included comic book adaptations, perhaps most notably the two Astérix films (1999 and 2002), animations (*Belleville Rendez-Vous* (*Les Triplettes de Belleville*, 2003), *The Magic Roundabout* (*Pollux - Le manège enchanté*, 2005)) and documentaries (*Être et avoir* (2002), *March*

[179] Wheatley and Mazdon, 'Intimate Connections', p. 38.
[180] Wheatley and Mazdon, 'Intimate Connections', p. 39.
[181] Mazdon, 'Introduction' in *France on Film*, p. 7
[182] Unlike the other films with sexually explicit themes cited above, *Romance's* British audience figures landed it a place in Unifrance's annual Top-Five lists.

of the Penguins (*La Marche de l'empereur,* 2005)). Among the genre films that have been popular in France, Christophe Gans' special-effects-heavy adventure and horror films (*Brotherhood of the Wolf* (*Le Pacte des loups*, 2001), *Silent Hill* (2006)) have found their way to the UK, as have a number of low-brow action and crime comedies, like the *Taxi* serials (four films between 1998-2004).

Although the French films distributed in Britain represents only a small segment of the films produced in France, the sheer number of films distributed means that the films discussed include a fairly broad variety.[183] However, with the exception of *Amélie*, films that could be described as national blockbusters in France generally have a negligible impact at the British box office. This can be illustrated by comparing the French and British audience figures for the four French films from 2001 with French ticket sales that landed them a place on the list of greatest box office hits since 1945 published by the Centre National de la Cinématographie (CNC).[184]

Film Title	French Cinema Admissions	UK Cinema Admissions
Amélie (*Le Fabuleux destin d'Amélie Poulain*)	8,512,682	1,000,107
Would I Lie to You? 2 (*La Verité si je mens ! 2)*	7,403,299	N/A
The Closet (*Le Placard*)	5,292,200	87,881
Brotherhood of the Wolf (*Le Pacte des Loups*)	5,096,992	93,087

Table 1: British and French Admissions to French National Blockbusters of 2001.
Source: *Lumiere.* <http://lumiere.obs.coe.int/web/search/> [accessed 14 January 2007][185]

[183] The diversity of the films from the 1990s analysed in Mazdon's book on popular French cinema also reminds us of the wide range of recent French production even when only films that can in some way be related to the idea of the popular are considered. Cf. Mazdon, *France on Film.*
[184] CNC statistics <http://www.cnc.fr/d_stat/fr_d.htm> [accessed 6 March 2006]. *Would I Lie to You? 2* is the 2001 sequel to *Would I Lie to You?* (*La Verité si je mens*, 1997). According to Lumiere, the 1997 film has been shown to British cinema audiences, but the total UK admission figure is just 1248, so it is not surprising that the sequel was not picked up by a British distributor.
[185] Unless otherwise stated, admission figures for this thesis have been obtained from the European Audiovisual Observatory's database Lumiere. Because box office receipts rather than admissions figures are the norm in the UK, the figures provided by Lumiere have been estimated by dividing box office receipts by the average ticket price for the relevant year. Complementary statistics regarding the British film market comes from the UK Film Council.

Mazdon notes that the first Luc Besson-produced *Taxi* film (1998) was released on the British market in both subtitled and dubbed formats in an attempt to reach audiences who do not normally watch foreign-language films. The film's tagline 'Hollywood doesn't make them like this any more'[186] explicitly connected it to classic Hollywood genre cinema. However, the British box office results for this film and its sequels were disappointing. Wheatley and Mazdon suggest that they were too far removed from British audience expectations of French cinema.[187] Luc Besson's work as a director, writer or producer in English-language film production[188] might be seen to contradict this argument, because his most successful English-language film, *The Fifth Element* (*Le Cinquième element*, 1997) is legally defined as French, not an international co-production. Nevertheless, a large share of the film's audience in Britain surely associated the film with its Hollywood star Bruce Willis rather than with its director. Because Willis' career has been so closely identified with Hollywood action movies, *The Fifth Element* will have been perceived by many of its international viewers as an American film.

In recent years, France has been involved in a number of successful international co-productions, and many of these films appear on Unifrance's annual lists of UK's most popular French films, but they have generally not been publicised as French films on their British release.[189] Because of the confusion that different definitions can cause, it is important to point out that throughout this thesis I work with a reception-based definition of French cinema in Britain, arguing that a film distributed in Britain is French when it is reviewed, marketed and interpreted by audiences as a French film. This usually means films set in France and with a French-language soundtrack. The plural composition of audiences does however mean that conflicting views do occasionally

---

[186] Mazdon, 'Introduction' in *France on Film*, p. 5

[187] Wheatley and Mazdon, 'Intimate Connections', p. 39.

[188] Including *Jeanne d'Arc* (1999) *The Transporter* (2002), and *Kiss of the Dragon* (2001).

[189] These productions include the Almodóvar films *Live Flesh* (*Carne trémula*, 1997) and *All About My Mother* (*Todo sobre mi madre*, 1999), Lars von Trier's *Dancer in the Dark* (2000) and *Dogville* (2003), Walter Salles' international breakthrough film *Central Station* (*Central do Brasil*, 1998), and Danis Tanovic's European war drama *No Man's Land* (2001).

arise with regards to a film's national identity, and such variations in responses can be particularly revealing. By considering how British audiences approach the two French case studies considered in this thesis my research will make an important contribution to English-language publications on recent French cinema, bringing a novel perspective to existing critical debates and opening up new areas of enquiry.

Swedish Cinema and European Co-Productions

As in the case of French cinema, my definition of Swedish cinema in this thesis is reception-based, taking the view that a film that is perceived by the British film industry, critics and audiences as Swedish becomes Swedish regardless of its production background. An overview of Swedish cinema in Britain similar to the discussion of French cinema above is unnecessary and indeed impossible, because as mentioned previously, very few Swedish films have been shown in Britain in the past decade. *Faithless*, the first Swedish case study, is based on a screenplay by Sweden's most famous filmmaker, Ingmar Bergman, while the directorial output of Lukas Moodysson, whose *Show Me Love* is considered in Chapter 5, accounts for the majority of Swedish films distributed in Britain between 1998 and 2005. It might therefore seem fairly straightforward to accept the two Swedish case studies as accurate representations of recent Swedish cinema in the UK. However, the limited distribution of Swedish film in Britain means that many research participants had seen few or no Swedish films prior to attending my research screenings. The framework in which audiences place Swedish cinema appears to be even less based on pre-knowledge of Swedish (film) culture than is the case with French cinema. If Elsaesser is correct when he observes that the generic function of the national can offer films a 'name recognition beyond the director: the firmer a national cinema's generic image, the better (for) the brand',[190] the generic 'brand' of Swedish cinema currently seems to have an unstable and hazy image among British film audiences.

Today, most Swedish films are co-produced with other Scandinavian countries, in particular Denmark, a successful player in recent European film production following

[190] Elsaesser, *European Cinema*, p. 467.

international interest in the Dogme 95 movement. There are however also many examples of wider European collaborations. *Faithless*, the case study explored in Chapter 4, was funded with Swedish, Italian, German, Norwegian and Finnish capital; its director, Liv Ullmann, is Norwegian,[191] and part of the film plot takes place in Paris. Nevertheless, at the point of reception, most films tend to be slotted into one national category, regardless of production context or whether the plot extends across national boundaries. Following this trend, *Faithless* has been received as a Swedish film by critics and audiences both in Sweden and on the international market. Similarly, despite the legal battle over *A Very Long Engagement's* legal status, the appearance of the American star Jodie Foster in the film, and a plot extending across both sides of the Franco-German frontline, Western international critics and audiences saw it as a French film about WWI. Gyory points out that the complexity of the legal criteria determining a film's nationality varies greatly between different countries. The French system used by the Conseil Supérieur de l'Audiovisuel (High Audiovisual Council) to judge if a film is of 'French original expression' is one of the most complicated.[192] The legal definition used by the Swedish Film Institute (SFI) is more straightforward,[193] sidestepping the problem of considering the film's relationship to Swedish culture by taking a purely economical approach. In the British context, an important distinction should be made between French and Swedish cinema in that while confusion regarding the national status of films perceived as French tend to occur regarding Hollywood productions with French settings,[194] when it comes to Swedish cinema, British audiences often fail to distinguish between different Scandinavian countries.[195]

European Art Cinema: Formalist Accounts and the Exportability of Sex

I will treat European art cinema in this thesis as a category defined primarily at the level of reception and exhibition, but within film criticism and theory, it has been common to

[191] Furthermore, she was born in Tokyo and has lived in London as well as New York, apart from Sweden and Norway.
[192] See Appendix E: 'Nationality and French Film'.
[193] See Appendix E: 'Nationality and Swedish Film'.
[194] For example Lasse Hallström's *Chocolat*, starring Juliette Binoche, which several audience research participants appeared to regard as an example of a French film. Cf. A9, D33.
[195] This issue will be explored in further detail in the Swedish case studies, in particular in Chapter 5.

describe art cinema at a textual level. The most influential formalist account is David Bordwell's 'The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice', an analysis of a range of (mainly European) films produced from the late 1950s until the 1970s.[196] Bordwell argues that viewers of these films treat their variations from the Hollywood norm as signs of realism, either as objective verisimilitude, with an almost documentary value, or as subjective truth related to authorship; that is, the idea of directorial self-expression. Relying on the notion of an ideal spectator, Bordwell's argument does not differentiate between viewers, but rather suggests how an ideal spectator might approach a film that fits his characterisation of art cinema. Staiger has highlighted a problem with such ideal spectators in her work on the critical reception of European art cinema in the US after WWII, detailing how viewing strategies for art cinema were developed in relation to existing conventions of interpreting 'serious' films as the works of auteurs communicating with their audience.[197] She suggests that in the early post-war period, critics defined films as art cinema on the basis of subject matter rather than style, but, she writes, this strategy was modified in the late 1950s to early 1960s in order to account for formal innovations that became associated with directorial authorship.[198]

Staiger's observations indicate that what counts as art cinema has changed over time, but the meaning of the concept of art cinema can also be culturally specific, and thus the same film can be received quite differently in different national and cultural contexts.[199] Elsaesser has argued that the relative success of European 'art films' outside of their home markets in the early 1960s was largely caused by their frank depiction of issues that Hollywood censorship had kept off-screen:

> [T]he labels "art" and "European" began to connote a very particular kind of realism, to do with explicit depiction of sex and drugs rather than political or aesthetic commitment.[200]

---

[196] Bordwell, 'The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice'.
[197] Staiger, 'With the Compliment of the Auteur: Art Cinema and the Complexities of its Reading Strategies' in *Interpreting Films*, pp. 178-195.
[198] Staiger, 'With the Compliment of the Auteur', pp. 194-195.
[199] As exemplified by the way in which critics responded to David Cronenberg's *Crash* (1996) in Britain, France and the US. See Barker et al., *The Crash Controversy*, pp. 15-25.
[200] Elsaesser, *European Cinema*, p. 146.

As Elsaesser points out, the exportability of European art cinema was a short-lived phenomenon, as post-Production Code Hollywood caught up with the expectations of young audiences, and the production of pornography without artistic pretensions became widespread in some European countries.[201] Nevertheless, whether from association with art cinema or pornography, sexual explicitness did feature prominently among research audiences' expectations of European cinemas, as we shall see. Attitudes towards the depiction of controversial material vary in different cultural contexts, and although the past decade has seen film censorship in the UK becoming increasingly liberal in terms of depictions of sex, the British censors are still stricter than most of their European counterparts. This is reflected by the fact that most of the case study films were given a higher age certificate in the UK than in their country of origin. French and Scandinavian films have been the subject of censorship debates both historically and contemporarily, and because such debates tend to be coloured by sensationalism, hints about controversial content are never far from the surface in British media discourse relating to French and Swedish cinema. I have already mentioned that French films are frequently associated with sex, but connotations of sexual explicitness appear even more closely connected to Swedish cinema. In Chapter 4 I will discuss this in relation to film history, but also in relation to cultural stereotypes and media discourse more generally. This sensationalist aspect of European cinema clashes with its image as an elitist cultural form. I will demonstrate how such contradictions are articulated by research participants, sometimes highlighting the ways in which viewers construct an image of themselves as culturally distinguished through their comments on film consumption. Relevant to this issue is the fact that although European films have often served the function of transcribing national cultural heritage from other art forms onto the film screen, in other cases, such films have functioned as a form of 'celluloid tourism', identified as culturally specific and part of a national tradition only by viewers external to that culture.[202]

[201] Elsaesser, *European Cinema*, p. 147
[202] Elsaesser, *European Cinema*, p. 150.

Cinema as Tourism: Exploring Otherness in European Cinema

Giuliana Bruno has written suggestively about the parallels between cinema, travel and tourism, arguing that cinema was 'born in the arena of tourism',[203] and describing tourism and film viewing as similar in the sense that both activities are popular leisure activities associated with pleasure and involving the consumption of images and spectacle.[204] Furthermore, both touristic journeys and the travel of the imagination that takes place in the cinema are necessarily temporary,[205] offering film spectators and touristic travellers '[c]ultural and emotional (dis)placements, as well as journeys between the familiar and the unfamiliar, the ordinary and the extraordinary'.[206]

Because the dominant Other of European film culture is Hollywood,[207] an important aspect of my project will be to consider how British audiences articulate this relationship. Although Britain has been a member of the European Union since 1973, and non-British commentators (European and others) frequently refer to the UK as a European nation state, British people often treat Europe as their Other.[208] As an island separated from 'the continent' by the English channel, and with linguistic and cultural connections to the North American continent, Britain shares with the USA the tendency to consider European cinema as one category among other 'foreign-language' (i.e. non-anglophone) films. The fact that the language spoken in Britain is the same as in the USA, the globally dominant film producing nation, also means that Hollywood arguably has become part of British national culture to an even greater extent than is the case in non-anglophone European nations. In countries like France and Sweden, the national boundary-blurring that occurs in UK/US co-productions like *Notting Hill* (1999) or *Bridget Jones' Diary* (2001) is less common, partly because the French and Swedish

---

[203] Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*, p. 76.
[204] Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*, pp. 79, 82
[205] Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*, p. 82
[206] Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*, p. 83.
[207] Elsaesser, *European Cinema*, p. 300.
[208] Since I do not approach audiences or spectatorship from a psychoanalytical perspective my use of the notion of the 'Other' throughout this thesis might seem incongruous. However, like 'identification', 'otherness' is a concept that has become generalised also outside of a strictly psychoanalytic framework, and it provides a useful trope for describing the way in which audiences differentiate between themselves and others.

languages on the soundtrack tend to consign the films to a specific national film heritage.[209]

European Cinema: A 'Readerly' Audiovisual Experience?

Elsaesser has drawn attention to

> ...the importance of the spoken word, of the vernacular, the texture of speech and voice for our idea of a national cinema, and indeed for the European art cinema as a whole.[210]

Certainly, the sound of different European languages seems to be an important part of the experience of consuming European films. I conceive of reception as an *audio*-visual experience, and although I refer to research participants as 'viewers', I consider their experiences of sound and language as equally interesting and important as their comments on filmic images. One of the most tangible differences when comparing the exhibition and distribution of French and Swedish films in their country of origin with their presentation in Britain is the addition of a written version of the dialogue in the form of subtitles inserted on the film, necessary because of the linguistic difference of the film.[211] The use of a language other than English on the soundtrack is such an obvious characteristic of European films shown in the UK that most film scholars simply acknowledge this as one of the main reasons that these films appeal to a limited audience. I have been inspired to investigate this area further by Atom Egoyan and Ian Balfour's use of the trope of the subtitle as a metaphor for 'foreignness' in film.[212] Unlike screen translation theorists, however, I will not attempt to assess the

---

[209] This can of course be misleading when it comes to francophone cinema considering that films are produced also in French-speaking territories in Europe, North America and Africa. However, this national boundary blurring remains within French-speaking films – the relationship between France and Hollywood is a quite different matter.

[210] Elsaesser, *European Cinema*, p. 150.

[211] The other main method of screen translation, dubbing, is no longer widely used in the UK for contemporary feature films. It was applied to popular co-productions (adventure serials, westerns, horror films) in the 1950s-1960s, generally using dubbing actors with American accents for distribution in anglophone territories. Although the differences between the processing of subtitled and dubbed film is a neglected area of research that has advanced surprisingly little since Handel's brief 1950 survey of preferences in an unspecified Latin American country (Handel, *Hollywood Looks at its Audience*, p. 221) my thesis will not cover this issue, since all of the films considered here were released in subtitled format.

[212] Atom Egoyan and Ian Balfour, eds, *Subtitles: On the Foreignness of Film* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2004).

effectiveness of the subtitled translations of the films, but consider how subtitles, in a more general way, affect the viewing experience of research participants.[213] Although cognitive theorists tend to oppose the use of the words 'reading' and 'text' in relation to films, here we have an example of the insertion of a real text, making it necessary for the viewer to read (in a literal sense) and interpret moving images simultaneously. Is subtitled cinema a 'readerly' cinema? Many research participants reported that viewing a subtitled film forced them to concentrate more, but does this mean that they have a more intellectual engagement with the film? Psychoanalytical film theory defined non-mainstream spectatorship negatively, stating that unlike classical Hollywood cinema, avant-garde film does not draw spectators into the fiction.[214] Subtitles are often regarded as something that distracts the viewer from narrative flow, and could therefore be related to Brechtian epic theatre with its emphasis on reading, and to Brecht's theory of the alienation affect.[215] Benjamin's notions of distracted and concentrated viewing also rely upon the notion that different kinds of texts do different things to spectators.[216]

Art and Popular Cinema: Film Viewing and Emotions

Beyond the abstract models of spectatorship outlined above, discussions of such viewing experiences are rare because most work on film audiences' emotional reactions has focussed on popular cinema.[217] As Smith suggests, crude assumptions about the emotional impact that different kinds of films have on audiences are widespread:

> Some kinds of fiction elicit univocal, or mixed but complementary, emotional responses, while others invite conflicting and ambiguous emotional responses, and this division corresponds in general to the ranking of what our society deems 'serious fiction' (or 'art') over 'mere fantasy' or 'entertainment'. And all too often this dichotomy is assumed to be isomorphic with a divide between 'Hollywood movies' and 'art films'.[218]

---

[213] This question is raised in Chapter 2, and discussed in further detail in Chapter 4.
[214] Staiger, *Media Reception Studies*, p. 133.
[215] Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. and trans. by John Willett (London: Methuen, 1978 edition). On epic theatre, texts and reading, see pp. 37-38 and 43-44. On the alienation effect, see pp. 91-99 and 143-145.
[216] Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', pp. 232-235
[217] Several examples can be found in books on audiences and reception edited by Melvyn Stokes and Richard Maltby – in addition to those already cited *Hollywood Abroad: Audiences and Cultural Exchange* (London: BFI, 2004). See also Sue Harper, 'Moved to Tears: Weeping in the Cinema in Postwar Britain', *Screen*, 37.2 (1996), 152-173.
[218] Smith, *Engaging Characters*, p. 229.

As I have already mentioned, Smith's account differs from mine in that he leaves little room for variations in terms of how different viewers engage with the same film, but his point here is important. The crude dichotomy that he identifies also affects the reception of European films in Britain, in the sense that popular elements in films labelled as European art cinema tend to be neglected or downplayed in British criticism.

Popular cinema is often described as manipulating audience emotions,[219] whereas art films are associated with intellectual detachment. I suggested earlier on that audience engagement with European cinema could be usefully related to the theme of travel and tourism. In this context, Bruno's ideas about the emotional impact of (real and imagined) travel are particularly interesting, as they seem to offer up a space where the relationship between intellectual analysis and sensory experience can be reconsidered in relation to film viewing. For Bruno, who constantly plays on the connections between the words motion (as in motion picture) and emotion, cinema can function as 'a receptacle of imaging that moves, a vehicle for emotions'[220] and allow the 'analytical imagination' to travel in 'pursuit of sensual pleasures'.[221] Throughout the thesis, I will trace echoes of these evocative descriptions in comments from audience research participants, highlighting the importance of European cinema as an instrument for cultural, geographical and emotional explorations. I will show that films sometimes seem to trigger memories of emotional experiences, of journeys and previous experiences of film viewing, and I will therefore return to the importance of memory in relation to film interpretation in the concluding chapter.

With a few exceptions,[222] research on cross-cultural reception has primarily dealt with blockbuster phenomena.[223] Most of the studies that have attempted to engage with real

---

[219] Cf. Smith, *Engaging Characters*, p. 229.
[220] Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*, p. 207.
[221] Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*, p. 173.
[222] Cf. Ingrid Stigsdotter and Tim Bergfelder, 'Studying Cross-Cultural Marketing and Reception: Ingmar Bergman's *Persona* (1966)' in *The New Film History: Sources, Methods, Approaches*, ed. by James Chapman, Mark Glancy and Sue Harper (Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 215-228.
[223] Cf. Ulf Hedetoft's article on the reception of Saving Private Ryan in France, Denmark and the USA, 'Contemporary Cinema: Between Cultural Globalisation and National Interpretation' in *Cinema & Nation*, ed. by Hjort and Mackenzie, pp. 278-297, Ernest Mathijs, ed., *Lord of the Rings: Popular Culture in*

art cinema audiences were carried out in the 1980s, and apart from generally being limited in scope, they were also concerned solely with the North-American context.[224] Barbara Wilinsky outlines a historical background for the reception of art cinema, as does Staiger from a different angle, but these authors are mainly concerned with the American reception context, and their work does not deal with the present situation.[225] Furthermore, research on the reception of art cinema has so far largely been based on critical reception. As Staiger rightly points out, this really is an 'optional' leisure activity, so it clearly makes sense for discussions of European cinema audiences in Britain to focus on 'cooperative and knowledgeable viewers'.[226] However, British audiences for French and Swedish cinema do not exclusively consist of critics, educational professionals or students. It is the aim of this thesis to investigate how film audiences in Britain today make sense of French and Swedish films, and what they get out of their viewing experiences. The main focus of my analysis in the next five chapters will be the written commentary from film viewers who attend art cinemas, film societies and other forms of specialised screenings in contemporary Britain, and who agreed to take part in my research project in 2005.

Global Context (London: Wallflower, 2006). For a slightly different perspective on the issue, see Sonia Livingstone's article: 'On the Challenges of Cross-National Comparative Media Research', *European Journal of Communication*, 18.4 (2003), 477–500.

[224] Bruce Austin, 'Portrait of an Art Film Audience', *Journal of Communication*, 34.1 (Winter 1984), pp. 74-87. Ronald J. Faber, Thomas C. O'Guinn and Andrew P. Hardy, 'Art Films in the Suburbs: A Comparison of Popular and Art Film Audiences' in *Current Research in Film: audiences, economics and law*, Vol. 4, ed. by Bruce Austin (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex, 1988), pp. 45-53.

[225] Staiger, 'With the Compliment of the Auteur' pp. 178- 195 and Wilinsky, *Sure Seaters.*

[226] Staiger, *Media Reception Studies*, p. 137.

Chapter 2. *Amélie*

In 2001, a series of popular film hits helped French cinema take back a considerable share of the market from their Hollywood competitors at the French box office. Among these films, the biggest sensation was Jean-Pierre Jeunet's *Amélie*, which unlike the other national blockbusters had art-house credentials as well as popular appeal.[1] The French reception of *Amélie* involved reports of deeply moved French audiences, high-profile politicians trying to associate themselves with the film, and a critical debate that questioned the appropriateness of the film's nostalgic representation of Paris, as well as its relationship to French cinema on the one hand and Hollywood on the other. This debate has already been well documented,[2] and in this chapter, my main focus will be *Amélie's* reception in Britain, where the film attracted over a million cinema-goers in the autumn of 2001, and in particular the responses of participants attending my research screenings in 2005. However, critical descriptions of *Amélie* as nostalgic will still be relevant to the discussion, because as we shall see, viewers often described their emotional reactions to the film in terms that can be linked to recent debates about cinema, nostalgia and memory.

Amélie's exceptional success in what is reputedly the most difficult market for non-English-language productions in Europe was partly the consequence of an ambitious marketing campaign, but the film clearly also struck an enduring chord with British audiences. It has enjoyed a successful career as a home cinema product, and it was voted "London's favourite French film" by readers of the website *France in London* both in 2004 and 2006, beating the heritage favourites from the eighties, *Jean de Florette* and *Manon des sources*, as well as the successful French-Italian co-production *Cinema Paradiso* (1989)[3] and Luc Besson's action movie *Léon* (1994). This lingering interest, long after the hype surrounding the theatrical release has subsided, indicates that the high box office figures were not exclusively the effect of publicity and marketing.

---

[1] After *Amélie*, the most popular French releases of 2001 were *Would I Lie to You? 2*, *The Closet* and *Brotherhood of the Wolf*, all productions that followed popular genre conventions to a greater extent than *Amélie*. Cf. Table 1, Chapter 1.

[2] Cf. Ginette Vincendeau, 'Café Society', *Sight and Sound*, 11.8 (August 2001), 22-25, Dudley Andrew, 'Amélie, or Le Fabuleux Destin du Cinéma Français', *Film Quarterly*, 57.3 (2004), 34-46.

[3] A curious contender for the title, considering that the film's language and setting, as well as the majority of the cast, are Italian.

Analysis of box office figures, marketing strategies and reviews can be helpful, but such approaches have still been unable to produce a satisfactory explanation of why British audiences liked *Amélie* so much. In this chapter I will use qualitative audience research in an attempt to uncover clues and new insights into the film's enduring appeal.

Young Audiences and Home Entertainment

The average age of research participants attending the *Amélie* screenings was twenty-nine. To put this figure in context, the average age for participants in the two Swedish case studies was forty-three, and for viewers of the second French film it was thirty-nine, so clearly, *Amélie* attracted a much younger audience than the other films in the series.[4] In contrast with the other screenings, where between 14 and 21% of viewers were retired, participants in the *Amélie* case study were students, housewives, or in paid employment, but no pensioners took part in this case study.[5] The Southampton screening of *Amélie* was dominated by students to a greater extent than other films in the research screening series. This can be partly explained by the fact that it was the first film in the season, and information about the programme had not yet been disseminated widely enough outside of the university community.

However, almost half of the audience viewing *Amélie* at the New Park cinema also consisted of students,[6] the majority of whom were seventeen-year-old A-level students, which means that the average age of the New Park audience for this particular case study was just twenty-seven. This is in itself highly unusual, because the New Park cinema is a venue popular with the city's retired population, who also attend other activities at the New Park community centre. The overall age and occupation profiles for this screening location reflect this fact; across the four case studies, the average age of New Park participants was forty-four.[7] It therefore seems as though *Amélie* genuinely appealed to a younger, more student-dominated audience than the other case study films. *Amélie* research participants who were not students tended to work in administration, education,

[4] See **Figure 12**.
[5] See **Figure 23** and **Figure 27**.
[6] A28, A29, A36, A37, A38.
[7] See **Figure 11**.

or the public sector. In comparison with other case studies, there was an absence of viewers in managerial positions or employed in professions involving technical or other specialised qualifications. Therefore, although the socio-economic profile of *Amélie* viewers would clearly still qualify as middle-class, in contrast with the other research audiences there were fewer participants who would fit into the highest socio-economic categories.

One characteristic of the *Amélie* audience was the large share of respondents who could be described as *Amélie* fans. In contrast with the other case studies, where approval rates were around 80%, every single person who completed a questionnaire at the *Amélie* screenings indicated that they liked the film. Over half of the research participants had already seen the film, and some specifically pointed out that they owned the DVD,[8] but still they were attracted by a public screening of the film. Two thirds of these 'serial viewers' had seen the film more than once before, in one case as many as ten times.[9] In relation to repeat viewings of films, Barbara Klinger has observed that a large part of the audience figures for cinema box office hits consist of viewers returning to see the same film several times, and since young audiences are more likely to spend time and money on seeing a film several times, many of these viewers are young adults and teenagers.[10] A fair number of participants in my study had first seen *Amélie* in the cinema,[11] and in some cases even in a French cinema.[12] The most commonly cited ways of seeing *Amélie*, however, were through home consumption formats like DVD, video or television.[13] The tendency in the research audience overall to list television as the most important film consumption format was strongly pronounced in the *Amélie* case study, and in comparison with other case studies, it was also more common for members of the *Amélie* research audience to list other home entertainment technologies, rather than cinema screenings, as their main format for film consumption. In particular, 36% of *Amélie* respondents under the age of twenty-five reported seeing films primarily on

[8] A4, A12, A37.
[9] A37.
[10] Barbara Klinger, *Beyond the Multiplex: Cinema, New Technologies, and the Home* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), p. 135.
[11] A8, A12, A15, A21, A23, A34, A39.
[12] A5, A6, A16, A17, A26, A27. I will return to these viewers at a later stage, since for some of them, the film appears to be associated with nostalgic memories of France.
[13] A2, A4, A5, A6, A12, A15, A17, A21, A23, A32, A33, A35, A36, A37, A38.

DVD or video, to be compared with less than one fifth of participants in this age group in the research audience overall. This shows that the *Amélie* audience was not just younger and more comfortable with home entertainment technology than other case study audiences, but that young members of the *Amélie* audience were also more likely to consume films on DVD and television than participants in the same age group across the study as a whole.[14] Repeat viewings of films are even more significant to consider in relation to film consumption in the home, and as Klinger points out, when dealing with audiences who have grown up during the 1980s and later, it is important to keep in mind that for viewers in these age groups, films have always been available to buy or rent and manipulate by remote controls in order to 'suit personal needs and desires.'[15]

Amélie Fans and the Spectacle of Digital Technology

As I mentioned, several audience members already owned the *Amélie* DVD, and some respondents also specified that they had gained extensive knowledge about the film from DVD extras,[16] in one case even highlighting the action of going through 'all the extras'.[17] Extra features have now become so standardised on DVDs that viewers expect the film they buy or rent to contain 'behind-the-scenes' information about the making of the film, and are likely to be disappointed if this is not the case.[18] When asked to select aspects of the film that they liked, viewers who had seen *Amélie* more than four times prior to the research screening often mentioned the use of special effects, colour filters, and other issues related to the making of the film,[19] including fairly specialised information such as 'the added green and red'.[20] As Klinger observes, special effects is an aspect of film culture usually associated with Hollywood blockbusters.[21] The advanced computer-generated imagery (CGI) effects in *Amélie* could, as Will Higbee points out, be seen as an attempt to compete with Hollywood on its own terms by using

---

[14] Across the project as a whole, only two participants under twenty-five viewed films mainly in the cinema, and neither of them were members of the *Amélie* audience (D25, S22).
[15] Klinger, *Beyond the Multiplex*, p. 137.
[16] A2, A36.
[17] A2.
[18] Klinger, *Beyond the Multiplex*, p. 61.
[19] A4, A36, A37.
[20] A37.
[21] Klinger, *Beyond the Multiplex*, p. 61.

'technology as spectacle'. [22] Higbee is writing specifically about the appearance in recent French cinema of what he calls the 'spectacular genre film', exemplified by *The Fifth Element* (*Le Cinquième element*, 1997), *Taxi* (1998), *The Crimson Rivers* (*Les Rivières Pourpres*, 2000) and *Brotherhood of the Wolf* (*Le Pacte des loups*, 2001).[23] He contrasts this kind of film, characterised by its flagrant use of American genre conventions, with the French heritage film 'whose identifiably French cultural and historical focus attempts a clear differentiation from Hollywood'. [24] Since Higbee's claim that *Amélie's* use of CGI offers its audiences 'the visual pleasure of technology as spectacle'[25] appears to chime with research audiences' interest in this aspect of the film, the notion of spectacular genre cinema is clearly applicable to *Amélie*. However, with its 'Parisian cafés and cobbled streets', *Amélie* has also been described as the urban equivalent of the postcard representation of Provence in the French big-budget heritage productions of the 1980s and 1990s.[26]

I will return to *Amélie's* relationship to technological spectacle on the one hand and French heritage on the other at a later stage, but at this point, it is sufficient to note that the sophisticated post-production work on *Amélie* appears to have contributed to the film's appeal for young viewers. While knowledge about the special effects involved in the film's making may have been obtained from other sources, this information is included in the additional material section of *Amélie* DVD editions, and there is a clear correlation between such comments, references to the DVD and multiple viewings. It therefore appears likely that respondents had increased their knowledge about the film's production background from the bonus material on the DVD. Whether or not this is typical of foreign language releases in the UK today, or breaks with the general trend, is difficult to ascertain. Viewers in this research project were more likely to consume film on television and in the cinema than on DVD, but the consultation of DVD bonus materials and interest in special editions does fit in with cinephile culture among art

---

[22] Will Higbee, 'Towards a Multiplicity of Voices: French Cinema's Age of the Postmodern: Part II – 1992 – 2004' in Susan Hayward, *French National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2nd Edition 2005), pp. 293-327 (p. 299).
[23] Higbee, 'Towards a Multiplicity of Voices', p. 298.
[24] Higbee, 'Towards a Multiplicity of Voices', p. 298.
[25] Higbee, 'Towards a Multiplicity of Voices', p. 300.
[26] Catherine Wheatley and Lucy Mazdon, 'Intimate Connections', *Sight and Sound*, 18.5 (2008), 38-40 (p. 40).

cinema audiences, often fuelling auteurist tendencies by providing features like interviews with the filmmakers and the director's commentary on the film. In any case, the emphasis on special effects in this case study is on the whole unrepresentative of responses to European or French film in the research audiences. The references to DVD and digital technology in audience comments seem to fit in with the younger demographic of *Amélie's* audience in comparison to the other case studies.

A French Chick-flick? Romance and Gender

This research audience was slightly dominated by female respondents; in particular there were more women than men under the age of thirty-five.[27] Some audience members were of the opinion that *Amélie* had a specific appeal for female spectators.[28] Only one of the research participants who emphasised *Amélie's* feminine appeal was a man, and the women tended to highlight aspects of the film that placed it in the romantic comedy genre, often using this expression to describe the film.[29] Vanderschelden has suggested that *Amélie's* use of 'the conventions of romantic comedy' is partly responsible for the film's success with audiences, pointing at parallels between the protagonist of Jeunet's film and the characters played by Julia Roberts in *Notting Hill* (1999) and Meg Ryan in *Sleepless in Seattle* (1993), also attractive young women trapped in a 'lonely urban lifestyle'.[30] Women who did not explicitly describe *Amélie* as having a specifically feminine appeal often highlighted the romantic aspect of the film when attempting to categorise the film.[31] In relation to gender, my research findings resonate with Klinger's observations on the preferences that the students in her audience study expressed in relation to films chosen for repeat viewings. Gender divisions in Klinger's research appeared in relation to films with advanced special effects, mainly but not exclusively action films (favoured by men) and films characterised as 'chick-flicks', including romantic comedies (favoured by women).[32] The emphasis on special effects was noted

[27] See **Figure 14** and **Figure 19**.
[28] A9, A11, A14, A15, A36.
[29] A11, A14, A26.
[30] Isabelle Vanderschelden, *Amélie* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), p. 36.
[31] A4, A8, A11, A15, A30, A31, A34, A37, A39.
[32] Klinger, *Beyond the Multiplex*, pp. 143-147.

by participants in this case study, two of whom were young male students,[33] but *Amélie* could also be seen as a romantic comedy, and one female respondent even used the expression 'chick-flick' to describe the film.[34]

Klinger has suggested that the chick-flick, often neglected by critics despite its significance at the box office, has taken over the derogatory connotations that historically belonged to the term 'woman's film'.[35] However, it should be noted that the female respondent who used this term to describe *Amélie* employed it with specific ramifications, defining the film as a case of 'French art house' meeting the chick-flick genre.[36] Male participants focused less on the romantic aspect of the film, describing *Amélie* as a French fairy-tale dealing with contemporary issues[37] 'drama',[38] 'art-house',[39] or evading the genre question by simply emphasising the quality of the film.[40] Only two male respondents described the film as a romantic comedy. One of them added a question mark after the term,[41] signalling his hesitation, while the other distanced himself from the term by specifically pointing out that romantic comedy was not normally a genre that he favoured.[42] We can therefore conclude that men were disinclined to associate themselves with the rom-com genre, presumably because romantic comedies are perceived as having a feminine gendered address. As Thomas Austin highlights, to analyse audience research in relation to gender identities is a tricky business, because although gender has a biological materiality, behaviour and attitudes associated with masculinity and femininity are socially constructed and therefore fluid and subject to ongoing definition and revision.[43] Film taste and viewing habits are part of this (re)construction of identity.[44] By responding to questions about their reaction to a film, participants in this study may have felt conscious about the way in which the

---

[33] A29, A34, A36.
[34] A14.
[35] Klinger, *Beyond the Multiplex*, p. 145.
[36] A14.
[37] A21, A23.
[38] A7, A19.
[39] A3.
[40] A22, A24.
[41] A5.
[42] A36.
[43] Thomas Austin, *Hollywood Hype and Audiences: Selling and Watching Popular Film in the 1990s* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), pp. 66-68.
[44] Austin, *Hollywood, Hype and Audiences*, p. 84.

research generated a record of their media use, issues that are often bound up with a sense of identity. In the *Amélie* case study, the romantic elements of the film seemed to compel some male viewers to reassert their masculine self-image by emphasising other aspects of the film.

Male Viewers, Aesthetic Appreciation, and Authorship

In Klinger's audience study comedies and independent films were the types of films that caused least gender-based division, with comedies appearing to have a particular appeal for repeated viewings at home, since they seemed suitable to watch in the company of friends.[45] However, Klinger's research is based on data from young American students, and concerns the almost exclusively American mainstream films that made up their favourite films for repeat viewings, while my research took place in Britain, within the context of a series of screenings of European films. Even if the *Amélie* case study attracted more young viewers than the other films in the screening series, young students were nevertheless in a minority in this audience. Furthermore, *Amélie's* subtitles alone place it outside of mainstream film culture in Britain. When male participants in my study looked for an element other than romance that could justify their appreciation of *Amélie*, they tended to appeal not so much to its comic qualities as to its status as an auteur film of aesthetic distinction.

A number of viewers, all but one male, drew parallels between *Amélie's* visual style and other films by Jean-Pierre Jeunet. In particular, they compared the film to the two feature films that Jeunet co-directed with Marc Caro in the 1990s, *Delicatessen* (1991) and *The City of Lost Children* (*La Cité des enfants perdus*, 1995).[46] These films established Jeunet's reputation on the international festival circuit, and their reception in France as well as on the international market followed a pattern more typical of art cinema than was the case with the distribution and reception of *Amélie*. To emphasise a sense of continuity between *Amélie* and these earlier films could therefore be seen as a way of underlining its status as an auteur film. One participant in my study specifically

[45] Klinger, *Beyond the Multiplex*, p. 149.
[46] A5, A12, A15, A21, A23.

pointed out that he was familiar with the 'director's other films (except *Alien 4*)',[47] but otherwise no one mentioned the Hollywood assignment that Jeunet took on after leaving the partnership with Caro, and before making *Amélie*. In general, it might be assumed that the audience for *Alien Resurrection* (1997) perceived this globally targeted English-language blockbuster primarily as a sequel, an intertextual format that is not very highly regarded by critics, and rarely approached in purely auteurist terms. Many viewers taking part in my study may not even have been aware that Jeunet directed this film. However, among male research participants who introduced auteurist terminology in their comments, it was fairly common to compare *Amélie* to Jeunet's most recent film, *A Very Long Engagement*, released in Britain the same year as my research screenings took place.[48] This film, also starring Audrey Tautou, as well as other members of the *Amélie* cast, was nicknamed 'Amélie at war' by British critics, who drew parallels between the characters played by Tautou in the two films.[49] It is likely that *A Very Long Engagement's* relative success at the British box office is at least partly related to audience expectations of an *Amélie* sequel. This is interesting to consider in relation to comments from auteurist research respondents; despite being perceived partly as a sequel, *A Very Long Engagement* appears to be seen as an acceptable part of the Jeunet auteur oeuvre, whereas the *Alien* film either slipped under the radar or was seen as somehow not fitting in. Jeunet thus seems to conform to expectations of 'Jeunet' films only when he makes films in French.

Repeat Viewings and Cinephilia

Klinger suggests that 'indulgence in repeated screenings of the same film reflects on the viewer's taste more extensively and thus requires a rationale',[50] and this is something that came through strongly in the responses of viewers who had seen *Amélie* many times before this research screening.[51] For example, a young female student who had seen the film on DVD at home around ten times before taking part in the project stated that 'It

[47] A12.
[48] A6, A32, A36, A37.
[49] Amelia Gentleman, '*Amélie* Goes to War', *Guardian*, 4 November 2004, Friday Review Section, <http://arts.guardian.co.uk/fridayreview/story/0,,1343112,00.html> [accessed 19 January 2008].
[50] Klinger, *Beyond the Multiplex*, p. 159.
[51] A2, A4, A5, A15, A21, A36, A37.

was different seeing it on big screen – possibly more amusing'.[52] A public screening of the film on a big screen provided a different experience, making it worthwhile despite all the previous viewings. Some comments also point to a particular enjoyment in the process of repeated viewings as offering a combination of familiarity and surprise. For example, a French respondent who had not seen the film since it came out in cinemas in France claimed that *Amélie* was characterised by unexpected elements and surprises, but also reported that on this second viewing, 'I noticed more details and enjoyed it in a special way since I knew in advance what would happen'.[53] Such distinctive enjoyment associated with pre-knowledge of the plot also featured prominently in Klinger's research on repeated viewings.[54] A male teenager wrote in relation to his multiple viewings of *Amélie* that 'the more you watch it, the more you notice smaller details and extra information and links you previously missed'.[55] This implies that the film is so rich that it requires several viewings in order to be fully appreciated, a view that fits in with another trend in Klinger's audience study; students participating in her project often justified their pleasure in reviewing foreign and art films by claiming that the fullness of the art work was such that not everything could be taken in on a first viewing.[56] A greater number of women than men were serial viewers of *Amélie*, but male fans of the film were more likely to emphasise the film's aesthetic qualities when justifying their approval.[57] Once again, this could be seen as a defensive mechanism, associated with the fact that some men appeared to find it problematic to enjoy a film that could be perceived as a romantic comedy.

This is closely related to another interesting issue that appeared to divide the audience along gender lines. A number of viewers taking part in the *Amélie* case study demonstrated traits associated with the specialist type of film audiences known as cinephiles, buffs, or connoisseurs, such as an explicit interest in the director behind the film and a tendency to bring up formal aspects of filmmaking and/or underlying themes

[52] A37.
[53] A27.
[54] Klinger, *Beyond the Multiplex*, pp. 152ff.
[55] A36.
[56] Klinger, *Beyond the Multiplex*, pp. 156-157.
[57] A5, A21, A36. Cf. the similarity with Klinger's research, *Beyond the Multiplex*, p. 162.

to motivate their evaluation of the film.[58] Respondents with such tendencies did not fit into a specific group in terms of age, or occupation, but the majority of these viewers were men. This male dominance might partly be explained by the fact that there appeared to be a connection between film connoisseurship and a high level of cinema attendance in the research audience. Three quarters of the specialist viewers in the *Amélie* audience stated that they went to the cinema at least once a week, and in the overall research audience, it was much more common for men than for women to be frequent cinema-goers. However, this trend may also be connected to questions of genre and gender, and the justifications for seeing a film that I outlined earlier on in this chapter. Male viewers who liked the film were often inclined to employ a language associated with connoisseurship, discussing the director's skill in creating visual effects, rather than focusing on narrative themes. This fits in with the wider tendency among male respondents to detach themselves from the film's romantic elements in their answers, seemingly in order to negotiate their film taste within boundaries of what they perceived as appropriate masculine behaviour.[59] It is difficult to avoid mentioning romance in a description of *Amélie's* plot, but a discussion focussing on colour, camerawork and editing makes it possible to sidestep the film's romantic character.

The remaining quarter of viewers with connoisseur tendencies were not frequent cinema-goers, and how often they viewed films in other formats varied, but they did share another characteristic; their film consumption was not dominated by English-language films. Although a higher share of participants in the *Amélie* case study reported seeing European non-English language films every week than was the case in the research audience overall, the film consumption in the *Amélie* audience was nevertheless clearly dominated by English-language productions, just as in the rest of the research case study audiences,[60] so to have a consumption profile where non-anglophone films feature as strongly as films with an English-language soundtrack clearly differentiated the connoisseur viewers from the majority of participants.[61] It is worth noting here that

[58] A5, A12, A15, A21, A23, A24, A28, A29, A32, A33, A34.
[59] Cf. Austin, *Hollywood Hype and Audiences*, p. 67.
[60] See **Figure 55**.
[61] The majority of participants whose first language was not English still viewed more English-language than other films, but the domination of anglophone products was not as pronounced as in the case of native English-speakers.

film consumption habits and knowledge about film form part of research participants' cultural capital.[62] The assertion of taste made to the researcher by outlining film viewing habits leads helps to construct a self-image, and in the case of connoisseur viewers, this self-presentation might be seen as linked to middle-class values.

A Marketing Success Story: *Amélie's* British Distribution

When research participants explained what they knew about *Amélie* before seeing the film and where they had found such information, it became obvious that hearsay was extremely important, as the most common sources of knowledge about the film prior to the first viewing were recommendations from friends or family.[63] Some respondents indicated that they had seen *Amélie* reviewed in the press[64] or on television,[65] and a couple of respondents also referred to the internet as a source of information[66] but of particular interest is the fact that several viewers referred to materials that can be linked to the film's marketing campaign, including trailers[67] and the film's poster.[68] One participant noted both the ubiquity of the film poster and the DVD, stating that 'my neighbour has a poster on display near their window [;] the DVD is also featured prominently in shops'.[69] In comparison with other case studies, this is highly unusual as respondents attending screenings of the other three films did not make any comments that could be specifically linked back to marketing campaigns. Viewers' awareness of the film's marketing paraphernalia attests to the success of the PR campaign work surrounding *Amélie* generally, and specifically the marketing effort behind *Amélie's* British release. The British distribution company Momentum Pictures explicitly aimed

[62] Cf. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. by Richard Nice (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984). When discussing consumption of and attitudes towards film among the participants in his study, Bourdieu observed that the habit of going to the cinema was less closely linked to cultural capital than knowledge of facts about films, such as the names of directors. Respondents with a higher level of cultural capital were better at remembering names of directors than actors, and also possessed more knowledge about films that they had not seen themselves. Bourdieu argued that this was because such viewers approach films as they would approach works of art of a higher status (canons in literature, painting, music etc), with a particular disposition directed towards recognising the originality of the work or the stylistic movement to which it belongs (p. 26 and p. 564, note 14).
[63] A4, A9, A11, A14, A17, A18, A20, A22, A23, A25, A29, A30, A35, A36.
[64] A36, A11.
[65] A37.
[66] A7, A11.
[67] A6, A12, A28.
[68] A22.
[69] A3.

to make it 'the biggest French film ever in the UK',[70] and the release was sponsored by Cognac Martel and backed by an unusually large marketing budget that among other things paid for trailers being shown with the American blockbuster *Planet of the Apes* (2001).[71] Of course research participants may have come across the trailer in other contexts, for example on the internet, and it is important to keep in mind that some viewers might have encountered marketing material outside of the British national context, since several respondents had seen the film in France[72], Spain[73] or Germany.[74] Nevertheless, two of the three participants who referred specifically to the trailer were British viewers who had seen the film in Britain.[75]

The difference between the *Amélie* audience and the audience groups participating in the other three case studies is clearly connected to the film's unusual original reception. Having established that the effects of the British marketing campaign for *Amélie* could still be perceived several years after the film's theatrical release, it is therefore important to explain how the British release deviated from normative French film distribution in the UK. *Amélie* was released in Britain on eighty-two prints in October 2001, taking over £500,000 on its opening weekend, expanding to ninety-eight prints in the second week, and eventually showing at 115 cinemas at the same time, including not only art cinemas, but also multiplexes.[76] Blockbusters often open on around 500 British screens, and so-called event films, like the *Harry Potter* series, can be distributed on over one thousand prints, but the average foreign language title is released on fewer than ten prints.[77] Although *Amélie's* opening performance was far from the multimillion opening weekends of any of the films in the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, it brought in more revenue

---

[70] Sheila Johnston, 'A French Fairy Tale', *Times Magazine*, 29 September 2001, p. 40. An aim that they managed to fulfil – at the time of writing, no French film has succeeded in breaking its British box office record.

[71] According to Isabelle Vanderschelden, the British promotional campaign cost £600,000 (*Amélie*, p. 86).

[72] A5, A6, A16, A17, A26, A27.

[73] A15.

[74] A6, A17.

[75] A12, A28. These native English-speakers may have been from another anglophone country, but nothing in their responses suggests that this was the case.

[76] Alan Morrison, 'Subtitle Bout', *Empire*, 150 (2001), p. 44.

[77] *UK Film Council Statistical Yearbooks* (2002-03 and 2003-04), <http://www.ukfilmcouncil.org.uk/yearbook> [accessed 19 January 2008], UK Film Council, 'UK Film Council Increases Film Viewing Choices for UK Audiences', UK Film Council website, News section <http://www.ukfilmcouncil.org.uk> [accessed 18 October 2006]. Cf. Richard Mowe 'Vive le Cinema', *Scotsman*, 25 October 2001, p. 8.

in its first weekend than most French films do throughout their whole UK run. In the British press, the film was publicised through tie-ins with French food, drink and fashion brands, and it received an unusual level of publicity, including coverage in popular newspapers that often neglect foreign-language releases.[78] The scale of *Amélie's* achievement at the British box office becomes apparent when considering the results of the most successful French titles at the British box office in subsequent years.

Film Title	Production Year	UK Cinema Admissions	British Release
Amélie (*Le Fabuleux destin d'Amélie Poulain*)	2001	1,000,107	2001
8 Women (*8 Femmes*)	2001	106,413	2002-03
Belleville Rendez-Vous (*Les Triplettes de Belleville*)	2003	135,433	2003
Look at Me (*Comme une image*)	2004	123,673	2004-05
A Very Long Engagement (*Un Long dimanche de fiançailles*)	2004	335,734	2005

Table 2. The Most Popular French Films at the British box office 2001-2005.
Source: *Lumiere*. <http://lumiere.obs.coe.int/web/search/> [accessed 14 January 2007]

Between 2000 and 2005, only two non-English language films were more successful in the UK than *Amélie*: Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, a multinational co-production with considerable American input, and Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*, an American production filmed in Latin, Aramaic and Hebrew. Although *Amélie* was shot mainly on location in Paris with a largely French cast and crew, it was co-produced by the German company MMC Independent GmbH, making the film eligible for subsidies from the Rhineland-Westphalia region, and facilitating distribution in Germany. At the time of Miramax's Oscar campaign, when *Amélie* was screening in US cinemas that reportedly had not shown a French film since the release of *Birds of a*

[78] Cf. Matthew Bond, 'Forsake Sin for Divine *Amélie*', *Mail on Sunday*, 7 October 2001, pp. 66-67, Viv Groskop, ''Enjoy!: I'm the Girl in that Movie!', *Sunday Express*, 30 September 2001, p. 57, Trudie Le Marie, 'Pop Some of These in Your Bag', *Express*, 5 October 2001, p. 49, Neil Roberts, 'It Gauls Me but Amelie Is So Good', *Sun*, 6 Oct 2001, [n.p.], Paul Ross and Shebah Ronay, 'French Dressing is Sweet and Sour', *News of the World*, 30 September 2001, [n.p.].

Feather (*La Cage aux folles*, 1978), an article in *Le Monde* described *Amélie* as international since its conception, and the film's producer Claudie Ossard confirmed that it had been intended for an international market already at writing stage: 'We sold *Amélie* on the basis of the screenplay to almost all of the big territories, including the US'. [79] This comment is particularly interesting in consideration of the fact that the film was criticised by some French critics for pandering to an American (or Americanised) market.[80] As I will show later on in this chapter with support from comments made by participants in my audience study, the representation of France and Paris in *Amélie* could be likened to a tourist gaze,[81] and in that sense could be seen as particularly suited to international audiences.

Contradicting Expectations of French Cinema

Amélie's record at the British box office shows that the film managed to attract viewers who do not usually watch French film. This appears to have been the case also with members of the *Amélie* research audience. Over one fifth of respondents contributing to the case study were extremely low consumers of European films, who viewed non-English language films from Europe about once a year, or even less often.[82] The other case studies attracted a smaller share of such viewers,[83] and in fact, many of the people who came to later screenings in the series appear to have avoided the first one because they had already seen *Amélie*, in some cases possibly also because they favoured less accessible/popular films. Some participants in this case study were aware that *Amélie* had an unusually broad appeal for a French film in Britain – for example, a male respondent in his mid-twenties wrote that *Amélie* was 'popular to a certain extent among both people who watch world cinema and people who usually watch mainstream

[79] Claudie Ossard in Claudine Mulard and Thomas Sotinel, '*Amélie Poulain*, un tour du monde en 17 millions d'entrées', *Le Monde*, 1 January 2002, [n.p.]. [My translation from the French original : 'Nous avons vendu *Le Fabuleux Destin* sur scénario à presque tous les grands territoires, y compris les Etats-Unis'].

[80] Cf. [n.a.], '*Le Fabuleux Destin d'Amélie Poulain* de Jean-Pierre Jeunet', *L'Humanité*, 25 April 2001, [n.p].

[81] For more on this concept, see John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze* (London: Sage, 2nd edition 2001).

[82] A4, A13, A14, A26, A28, A29, A30, A31.

[83] 8% for *Show Me Love* (10% if considering only the New Park and Avenue audiences, and not the Winchester group) and around 15% for *The Dreamlife of Angels* and *Faithless*.

cinema'.[84] For a few viewers, *Amélie* contradicted expectations of foreign language in general and French film specifically. A young female student wrote that it was 'different to any other I'd ever seen so in many ways it contradicted my previous conceptions of what foreign films were like'.[85] For this respondent, who had a limited prior knowledge of non-English-language films, *Amélie* seemed to have led to an interest in world cinema, but also viewers who were already confirmed admirers of French film were sometimes surprised by aspects of the film. A professional woman in her late twenties wrote that although she expected *Amélie* to be 'arty' and 'filmed exceptionally well as most good French films are' she 'did not expect it to be so funny.'[86] Audience expectations are often linked to the notion of genre,[87] and many respondents in the *Amélie* audience stated that they found it difficult to classify the film.[88] This is not an unusual problem, since genres tend to be flexible and hybrid rather than fixed and clear-cut, but *Amélie* appeared to combine generic cues that the audience found difficult to reconcile. The film's 'feel good' qualities were highlighted by some viewers,[89] but it was also fairly common to use terms such as 'arthouse', 'independent' or 'alternative' to characterise the film.[90] Such categories were often combined with more popular connotations, as in 'Arty with a twist of rom com!',[91] or 'French art house meets chick flic'[92]. As we can see in the latter example, respondents sometimes used the words 'French' or 'foreign' to qualify their classification.[93] With this in mind, it is interesting to compare audience responses with the film's British media reception. *Amélie's* UK release took place less than a month after 9/11, and this led critics to contrast the film's

[84] A3.
[85] A37.
[86] A33.
[87] Thomas Elsaesser suggests that the national label attached to European cinemas functions as a form of genre. See *European Cinema: Face to Face with Hollywood* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005), p. 467.
[88] In the questionnaires, I did not use the term "genre", but opted instead for the vaguer "type", so that those who were not in the habit of differentiating between films in this manner would not be induced to do so.
[89] A5, A10, A12, A18, A28.
[90] A3, A8, A13, A14, A17, A39. It is worth keeping in mind that the experience of taking part in an academic study might influence viewers to emphasise *Amélie's* high-brow or artistic connotations, rather than popular aspects of the film.
[91] A8.
[92] A14.
[93] Cf. 'French romantic comedy' (A30).

message of optimism with the global shock over the terrorist attacks on New York.[94] The *Sunday Times* suggested that *Amélie* would meet with disapproval from elitist critics in Britain because it defied certain expectations of what a French film should be like, or what French culture was about:

> There is a certain type of British highbrow who will forgive the French anything: the gloom of existentialism, the grossness of snails in garlic, Sartre's apologies for Stalinism, the sight of a starlet with hairy armpits–but a happy, upbeat, feelgood French film? Yeuuch![95]

Gloomy existentialism figured also in the *Daily Telegraph's* description of *Amélie*:

> It is miles from the sort of fare that once made French cinema famous, with an almost total absence of existentialist angst or Gauloise smoke.[96]

An earlier article in the *Sunday Times* had similarly contrasted *Amélie* with the tradition of angsty auteur cinema:

> Unlike some of the doom-laden – and commercially unsuccessful – French films beloved of Parisian cinema purists, Amelie Poulain neither analyses society's troubles nor dwells on the difficulties of finding happiness.[97]

The *Spectator* confirmed that *Amélie* violated expectations of what a French film should be like:

> Amelie is a feelgood film in the sense that it feels good about the things French films usually make you feel bad about; what would in normal circumstances usher in prolonged existential gloom is here played for laughs.[98]

These quotations suggest that if 'French film' could be used as a generic label, these critics were not comfortable fitting that tag next to the 'feel-good' label. The stereotypes in the quotes refer sweepingly to French society as characterised by gloomy

---

[94] Andy Dougan, 'Feelgood Film of Year', *Glasgow Evening Times*, 4 October 2001, [n.p.], Peter Preston, 'Soft Choux Shuffle', *Observer*, 7 Oct 2001, [n.p.], [n.a.], *South Wales Echo*, 'French Feel-good Hit of the Summer', *South Wales Echo*, 20 October 2001, [n.p.].
[95] Cosmo Landesman, 'Joie de vivre', *Sunday Times*, 7 October 2001, Features section, [n.p.].
[96] Patrick Bishop, 'Will We Fall under the Spell of French film Without Tears', *Daily Telegraph*, 10 August 2001, p. 9.
[97] Matthew Campbell, 'Chirac Pins Hopes on the *Amélie* Effect', *Sunday Times*, 10 June 2001, [n.p.].
[98] Mark Steyn, 'Relentlessly Quirky', *Spectator*, 13 October 2001, p. 74.

existentialist philosophy, but some expressions that connect more specifically with the idea of a French film culture can be connected to the kinds of French films that have been distributed in British cinemas in the recent past and historically. As Lucy Mazdon explains, the early films of the French New Wave filmmakers generated such interest in Britain in the late 1950s and early 1960s that expectations of experimentation and innovation can still be traced back to this legacy.[99] Some of the critical quotes certainly seem connected to this historical legacy ('the sort of fare that once made French cinema famous'). Comments about 'Parisian cinema purists' and 'commercially unsuccessful' films concerned with existential or socio-political problems could however also be related to more recent developments in French cinema. As Phil Powrie explains, French cinema of the 1990s saw both a reinvigoration of the figure of the auteur and a renewed interest in socio-political issues.[100] The partly overlapping phenomena of the *jeune cinéma français* and 'new realism'[101] will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 3, but for my purposes here, it is sufficient to note that a fair number of these films were distributed in Britain. They were therefore likely to figure in the framework of associations for British critics approaching *Amélie* in 2001.

Hype, Buzz, and Viewers' Personal Relationships to a 'Special' Film

Although many research participants explained that the film contradicted their expectations of French cinema, or that they did not usually watch French films, it was also clear from their responses that the film's theatrical and DVD releases managed to create a hype or buzz around the film, in particular through word-of-mouth rumours; many viewers reported that they had seen the film because of recommendations from friends.[102] This tendency is most vividly illustrated in the comments made by a French

---

[99] Lucy Mazdon, 'Introduction' in *France on Film: Reflections on Popular French Cinema*, ed. by Lucy Mazdon (London: Wallflower, 2001), pp. 1-9 (p. 4).
[100] Phil Powrie, 'Heritage, History and 'New Realism': French Cinema in the 1990s' in *French Cinema in the 1990s: Continuity and Difference*, ed. by Phil Powrie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 1-21 (pp. 8-9 and 12-15).
[101] The former term refers to directors who were either fairly young of age or new to filmmaking (Cf. Claude-Marie Trémois, *Les Enfants de la liberté: le jeune cinéma français des années 90* (Paris : Éditions du Seuil, 1997), Michel Marie (ed.) *Le Jeune cinéma français* (Paris : Nathan, 1998), and René Prédal, *Le Jeune cinéma français* (Paris : Nathan, 2002)). On 'New Realism' see Powrie, 'Heritage, History and 'New Realism', Higbee, 'Towards a Multiplicity of Voices' and Martin O'Shaughnessy, *The New Face of Political Cinema: Commitment in French Film since 1995* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007).
[102] A2, A17, A18, A23, A25, A28.

female postgraduate student in her early thirties who came to the film with very high expectations because 'it is the only movie on which all my friends agree, they all want to see it again and I wondered why...' She was worried that she might be disappointed since the film had been so highly recommended, but she was pleased to report that she had the same reaction as her friends: 'I want to see it again! :)'.[103] The 'smiley' symbol ending this comment chimes with the response of a younger female student who wrote that before seeing the film for the first time, she had heard 'that it was a very good movie, a special one. It succeeded all my expectations as it really made me smile days afterwards'.[104]

So what was it that viewers liked so much about *Amélie*? I mentioned previously that some respondents had initially seen the film in France, and two of the French participants referred specifically to their cultural background when explaining how they were able to relate to characters in the film.[105] However, for one of these respondents, the fact of being of a similar age and personality to the film's main characters appeared to be more important than nationality,[106] while the other French viewer stated that he found it easy to engage emotionally with the characters 'because the story takes place in Paris, where I lived for many years'.[107] Although this might simply mean that his familiarity with the setting made him feel more engaged and interested in what happened to the characters, the fact that he brought up his past life in Paris in relation to a question about *emotional* engagement could also potentially signify that the emotional impact of the film was associated with memories of this city.

This is interesting when we consider that two German students who had seen the film in France also referred to memories in their responses. Some of these comments evoked a sense of longing or melancholia. For one respondent, a man in his mid-twenties, the accordion-dominated music in particular was associated with a melancholy state of mind,[108] while the other student, a woman in her late twenties, specifically pointed out

[103] A18.
[104] A2.
[105] A5, A27.
[106] A27.
[107] A5.
[108] A6.

that her experience of viewing the film at the research screening was affected by the fact that 'it's a romantic film and my boyfriend is far away'.[109] The latter comment is an example of a very personalised response to the film, and when set in the context of the viewers' other comments, where she made it clear that she had seen the film not just in Paris, but specifically in Montmartre, it could be described as, to a certain extent, nostalgic.

Nostalgia: Critical Debates

Anne Friedberg defines nostalgia as 'a painful return, a longing for something far away or long ago, separated by distance and time'.[110] Pam Cook goes further in suggesting that the yearning is for 'something that is known to be irretrievable, but is sought anyway'.[111] It is important to distinguish between on the one hand emotional responses to films that articulate nostalgia for a different time or place or something irretrievably lost (nostalgia as a potential audience reaction) and on the other critical descriptions of a filmic text as nostalgic (nostalgia as a textual property).[112] The notion of nostalgia frequently cropped up in reviews of *Amélie* at the time of its original release, and the French critical debate surrounding the film was particularly concerned with the film's relationship to Paris and to the past. French reviewers with a positive reaction to the film often connected their discussion of *Amélie* to French artistic traditions by reciting key names (Marcel Aymé, Brassaï, Marcel Carné, Philippe Delerm, Robert Doisneau, Georges Méliès, Georges Perec, Raymond Peynet, Jacques Prévert, Raymond Queneau, Jacques Tati, Alexandre Trauner, François Truffaut...) as a kind of quality assurance.[113] Homages to historical representations of Paris were also cited by those who saw the film

---

[109] A17.
[110] Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 188.
[111] Pam Cook, *Screening the Past: Memory and Nostalgia in Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 3.
[112] Cf. Philip Drake, ''Mortgaged to Music': New Retro Movies in 1990s Hollywood Cinema' in *Memory and Popular Film*, ed. by Paul Grainge (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 183-201(p. 188).
[113] Robert Belleret, 'Les bonnes idées de Jean-Pierre Jeunet et de son dialoguiste Guillaume Laurent', *Le Monde*, 9 May 2001, [n.p.], Danièle Heymann, 'L'Amie *Amélie* repeint la vie aux couleurs du bonheur', *Marianne*, 30 April 2001, [n.p.], Bernard Morrot, '*Amélie* ou les sensations de la petite enfance', *Marianne*, 14 May 2001, [n.p.], "T.S.", 'Quand 'Quand Georges Perec rencontre Marcel Carné' *Le Monde*, 25 April 2001, [n.p], [n.a.], '*Le Fabuleux Destin d'Amélie Poulain* de Jean-Pierre Jeunet', *L'Humanité*, [n.p].

as regressive and nostalgic, but they held up these intertextual references as evidence that the film was obsessed with an idealised French past.[114] In film criticism and scholarship, the term nostalgia usually comes with negative connotations; when contemporary films with a historical setting are criticised for being 'nostalgic' the implication is that they idealise the past and therefore arguably represent a conservative, regressive outlook. However, according to Cook, such critiques can often themselves be accused of nostalgia, since they appear to hark back to a time when history was able 'to produce convincing and objectifiable accounts of the past', lamenting the idea of film audiences being 'duped into accepting inauthentic versions and forgetting the 'truth''.[115] The second point is particularly relevant in this context, since it suggests that that textual nostalgia is seen to affects the way in which audiences view the real world.

A reader familiar with *Amélie*[116] but unfamiliar with these debates might object at this point that Cook is writing about representations of history while *Amélie* is set in 1997, only four years prior to the film's actual release date. Set in the present, but described by critics as an example of postmodern nostalgia, *Amélie* relates to the Marxist scholar Fredric Jameson's concept of the 'nostalgia film'. In 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society' Jameson suggested that contemporary art has lost its faith in innovation and originality with the result that cultural production is becoming increasingly self-referential and backward-looking.[117] As an example of this, he discusses films that attempt to 'reawaken a sense of the past' and represent 'specific generational moments of the past'.[118] Jameson expands the notion of nostalgia film to include films with a

---

[114] Serge Kaganski, '*Amélie* pas jolie', *Libération*, 31 May 2001, Rebonds section, p. 7, Vincent Ostria, 'Occupons-nous *d'Amélie*', *L'Humanité-Hebdo*, 22 September 2001, [n.p.].
[115] Cook, *Screening the Past*, p. 3
[116] Or with my synopsis of the film in Appendix C.
[117] Fredric Jameson, 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society' in *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern 1983-1998* (London: Verso, 1998), pp. 1-20 (p. 7). Originally published in *Postmodernism and Its Discontents: Theories, Practices*, ed. by E. Ann Kaplan (London: Verso, 1988), pp. 13-29. The essay synthesises arguments from two earlier articles, 'Postmodernism and the Consumer Society' in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. by Hal Foster (Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press, 1983), pp. 111-125 and 'Postmodernism: The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism', *New Left Review* 146 (1984), 59-92.
[118] Jameson, 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society', p. 7. His examples include *American Graffiti* (1973) and *Chinatown* (1974), but also *Star Wars* (1977), a film set in the future but in Jameson's view a pastiche of Saturday afternoon serials from the 1950s. Similarly, for Jameson *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981) is not only set in the past, but also functions as a pastiche of adventure stories from the 1930s and 40s.

contemporary setting but imbued with a vaguely archaic mood that impels the audience to associate the story with 'some indefinable nostalgic past...beyond history.'[119] It is this kind of vague archaism that *Amélie's* representation of Paris connoted to some critics.

Here it is useful to return to Higbee's discussion of the digital special effects in *Amélie.* As well as the saturated colours that research participants commented on, Jeunet removed dirt, graffiti and other non-picturesque elements from the film's Paris streets. By using contemporary locations in this way, Higbee suggests, the film constructs 'a picture post-card Paris that reflects the director's nostalgia for the France of his childhood'.[120] Other modern elements removed from the streets included cars, and, with the exception of the character played by Jamel Debbouze, the ethnic diversity that characterises Montmartre today. This issue, closely connected to the difficult question of how film should approach the politics of representing different ethnicities,[121] was one of the motivations behind the ideological attacks on *Amélie* from French leftist critics.[122] The debate can be further contextualised by noting that during the 1990s, international perceptions of French cinema were dominated by the heritage genre. Mazdon links the promotion of these films set in a historical France to anxieties about French national identity in a society affected by immigration and cultural globalisation.[123]

As Paul Grainge points out, whether or not nostalgia in contemporary film culture is perceived positively or negatively, critics tend to agree that 'film itself has become central to the landscape and production of contemporary cultural memory'.[124] Jameson's reaction to the nostalgic mode in film is decidedly disapproving, as he claims that 'we seem condemned to seek the historical past through our own pop images and stereotypes

---

[119] Jameson, 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society', p. 9.
[120] Higbee, 'Towards a Multiplicity of Voices', p. 300. In interviews at the time of the film's release, Jeunet talked about the project as involving a return of his roots after working in Los Angeles. Cf. [n.a.] 'Les délices d'Amélie', *Le Point*, 20 April 2001, [n.p.]. Alain Riou, 'Jean-Pierre Jeunet, le retour: *Amélie jolie*', *Le Nouvel observateur*, 19 April 2001, [n.p.]
[121] Cf. Stuart Hall, 'New Ethnicities' in *Identities: Race, Class, Gender, and Nationality*, ed. by Linda Martín Alcoff and Eduardo Mendieta (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), pp. 90-95.
[122] Most famously Serge Kaganski in 'Amélie pas jolie', p. 7 and 'Pourquoi je n'aime pas Le Fabuleux destin d'Amélie Poulain', *Les Inrockuptibles,* 31 May 2001 [n.p.].
[123] Mazdon, 'Introduction' in *France on Film*, pp. 7-8
[124] Paul Grainge, 'Introduction' in *Memory and Popular Film* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 10.

about the past, which itself remains forever out of reach.'[125] Other theorists have proposed that we should approach nostalgia from more flexible perspective and not regard it as intrinsically negative. Friedberg claims that although nostalgia can represent a 'return to outworn values' it also 'has the potential to reinvent the past, to contrast its values in a critical combination with the present.'[126] Cook is more cautious about ascribing a critical quality to nostalgic films, but she suggests that viewing the relationship between history, memory and nostalgia as continuous and non-hierarchal might be a productive way forward:

> the three terms are connected: where history suppresses the element of disavowal or fantasy in its re-presentation of the past, nostalgia foregrounds those elements, and in effect lays bare the processes at the heart of remembrance.[127]

This allows nostalgia to be seen as a way of dealing with the past, rather than as an inherently 'reactionary, regressive condition imbued with sentimentality'.[128]

Amélie's British Reception: 9/11, Feel-Good Films, and Art Cinema

Reports on the way in which French left-wing commentators had ascribed ideological messages to the film appeared in British newspapers already before *Amélie* was released in Britain,[129] and a number of commentators drew parallels to the debate surrounding *Notting Hill* in the UK two years earlier.[130] The audiences in this study appeared to be unaware of the ideologically coloured debate surrounding *Amélie*, but as we shall see, some viewers realised that the film might be accused of sentimentality or regressive values.

Four years after the original release, not a single participant in my audience research project acknowledged awareness of the media furore surrounding *Amélie's* French

---

[125] Jameson, 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society' in *The Cultural Turn* (London: Verso, 1998), p. 10.
[126] Friedberg, *Window Shopping*, p. 189.
[127] Cook, *Screening the Past*, p. 4.
[128] Cook, *Screening the Past*, p. 4. See also Powrie, *French Cinema in the 1980s*, p. 8.
[129] John Lichfield, 'French Elite Horrified as Feelgood Film Seduces Nation', *Independent*, 2 June 2001, Foreign News section, p. 15.
[130] Stuart Jeffries, 'The French Insurrection', *Observer*, 24 June 2001, Review Section, p. 7, Jonathan Romney, 'A Sickening Ray of Sunshine', *Independent on Sunday*, 7 October 2001, Features section, p. 11, Richard Mowe, 'Cherchez la Femme', *Scotsman*, 4 August 2001, p. 14.

release. Certain respondents would have been too young in 2001 to take an interest in this, but it is worth pointing out that the debate was covered extensively (if often mockingly) in British broadsheets in 2001,[131] and that the research audience included several participants who had seen the film in France when it was first released.[132] However, while the French debate attracted attention in Britain during the summer of 2001, when *Amélie* was released in the UK, shortly after 9/11, British critics appeared more interested in the film's 'feel-good' function than in the film's ideological message. The exact details surrounding *Amélie's* critical reception were not referred to in audience responses, but when justifying why they liked the film, some of the fans' comments had a defensive tone. They seemed aware that not everyone shared their enthusiasm for the film, but appeared to feel hostile towards other people who failed to appreciate it. Some of them may also have been suspicious of my academic approach to a film that they felt strongly about on a personal level. For example, when asked if anything in the film seemed confusing or strange, a man who had seen *Amélie* three or four times before coming to the research screening wrote that 'if people want to they can understand', and in response to the question of what kind of audience the film was aiming for the same viewer wrote that '[e]verybody wanting to open him or herself for it will be touched'.[133] A female respondent in her early thirties who had not seen *Amélie* before, but appeared to have become an immediate fan, thought that it addressed 'anybody who hasn't forgotten that he [*sic*] is still a child inside'.[134] The reference to an inner child is interesting here, as it suggests that this viewer felt that the film allowed her to return mentally to a childlike state; the very definition of the psychological concept of regression, here perceived as a positive experience.

Some viewers were reluctant to see themselves or the film as part of the commercial film market. This approach was most strongly articulated by a male student in his late twenties, who wrote that 'the film comes from the desire of its creators to express themselves', and did not think that the film was aimed at 'any particular type of

---

[131] For example in the articles cited above by Lichfield, Campbell, and Jeffries.
[132] A twenty-five-year-old German audience member normally resident in France had followed the debate surrounding A *Very Long Engagement* and the problem of deciding whether or not a film was French, but he did not mention anything about the debate surrounding *Amélie*.
[133] A6.
[134] A18.

audience'.[135] Most respondents appeared to share his sense that the film was an artwork of great value with its origin in genuine creative inspiration, and had not been made in order to please audiences.[136] This is likely to be connected to viewers' self-images; at least some of the participants associated themselves with elite taste cultures rather than with mainstream popular cinema, and for these respondents it was important to stress *Amélie's* status as art cinema.[137] Some of the comments had an almost aggressive undertone implying that people should like *Amélie*, and if they did not, they were simply not open-minded enough. Other viewers did however acknowledge the possibility and validity of other responses to the film, like the woman in her thirties who wrote that 'some might find it a bit too whimsical and the ending too happy but not me'.[138] In this context it is interesting to point out that one of the participants in the study was a film studies teacher, who had not seen the film before, but reported that many of her students 'name it as their favourite European film'. As might be expected from someone teaching film, this respondent showed that she was conscious of its crowd-pleasing reputation when she wrote that the film 'thankfully, wasn't as sentimental as I feared it might be'.[139] In relation to her apprehensive approach to sentimental fiction it is interesting to consider Murray Smith's observation on different evaluations of films' emotional impact:

> Some fictions which elicit strong emotional responses are lauded for their sincerity and profundity, others – usually when they effect an imaginative recasting of the spectator's beliefs and values in a direction that they do not like – are rejected as 'manipulative'.[140]

In serious film critical discourse, it is generally films labelled as art cinema that are associated with emotions in a positive way, whereas popular genre films are frequently accused of manipulating audiences emotions in negative reviews. What is 'popular' and what is 'art' is not determined by textual properties, but is also affected by the context of consumption. However, in relation to *Amélie's* formal properties, the notion that *Amélie*

---

[135] A22.
[136] A3, A5, A6, A17, A18, A21, A22, A23, A24, A25, A27, A29, A33, A35.
[137] Cf. Bourdieu, *Distinction*, p. 26. See also note 62 above .
[138] A33.
[139] A11.
[140] Murray Smith, *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion, and the Cinema* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 229.

manipulated its spectators was one of the key criticisms mounted towards the film.[141] The slightly defensive responses from research participants cited above imply that some of them were aware that *Amélie's* digitally modified, glossy and cheerful post-card image of Paris would not be to everyone's liking. However, the film was clearly less divisive in Britain than in France, as reflected by references to the French debate in the British press, with some of the broadsheet commentators mocking the arguments in France as a comic example of French left-wing intellectuals over-reacting.[142]

A Tourist Gaze?

As previously mentioned, the audience participating in this case study consisted overwhelmingly of well-educated white middle-class individuals. As Richard Dyer has shown, whiteness has historically been privileged on the screen, and this has arguably contributed to cultural blindness when it comes to filmic representations of race.[143] The absence of non-white characters in a film like *Amélie* is similar to so many other films set in France that it might be perceived as 'natural'. This is likely to be even more common among non-French spectators who are likely to know France primarily through temporary visits, and might be considered to approach the culture with a tourist gaze.

As I observed in the introductory chapter with reference to Giuliana Bruno, touristic travel and cinema's imagined travel experiences are linked through their impermanence; the holiday and the film viewing inevitably ends with a return to everyday life.[144] Bruno suggests that cinema and tourism are connected in other ways, too, explaining how travel discourse in the 18th century articulated thoughts about new visual experiences

---

[141] Kaganski compares Jeunet's wish to control every corner of the image to propaganda and commercials; that is, films made with the intention to influence their audience in specific ways. Cf. 'Pourquoi je n'aime pas Le Fabuleux destin d'Amélie Poulain', [n.p].

[142] Lichfield wrote 'Could the most popular French film of the year, or many a year, be a two-hour, party political broadcast for the far-right National Front and Jean-Marie Le Pen? If you watch Le Fabuleux Destin d'Amelie Poulain, this may not occur to you, unless you are a French intellectual'. In 'French Elite Horrified...', p. 15. See also Charles Bremner, 'French Split by Cinema Success', *The Times*, 8 June 2001, p. 19.

[143] Richard Dyer, *White* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 1-13.

[144] Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film* (New York: Verso, 2002), p. 82.

that seem to point forward towards the use of establishing and travelling shots in film.[145] Considering the interconnections between the development of cinema and of tourism, it is not far-fetched to relate filmic representations of spaces and places considered 'touristic' to the notion of the picturesque. This concept was coined by Alexander Pope to describe a scene suitable as a subject for a painting, but in association with the Romantic Movement, the term came to assume a wider meaning in relation to tourism and the aesthetics of landscape design.[146] Sue Beeton argues that for tourists who have visited a specific place, a film where this place is represented through picturesque imagery can function as a souvenir, bringing back memories, but also allowing the viewer to imagine alternative travel stories apart from the personal experience and memory of the place.[147] In relation to the phenomenally popular *Amélie*, the process went one step further, as its Montmartre locations became popular tourist attractions for fans of the film.[148] However, in representing an image of France reminiscent of those on offer in a souvenir gift shop or a postcard stand, *Amélie* also fits within an established tradition. Annette Kuhn has suggested that French New Wave films featuring the cafés and nightlife of Paris as well as sunny excursions into the countryside offered international viewers places and spaces that 'correspond to a tourist's view of France in general and of Paris in particular'.[149] Furthermore, Guy Austin has described Claude Berri's adaptations of Marcel Pagnol's *Jean de Florette* and *Manon des Sources* in the 1980s as visualisations of 'sentimental tourism'.[150] The success of these films triggered the production of French big-budget heritage productions aimed to create a 'popular quality cinema' for French and international audiences in the 1980s and 1990s. For Wheatley and Mazdon, the safe exoticism of heritage cinema is representative of British audience expectations of French cinema today, offering 'recognisable genres and forms but also providing an opportunity for cinematic tourism'.[151]

---

[145] Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*, p. 172.
[146] Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*, p. 192.
[147] Sue Beeton, *Film-Induced Tourism* (Clevedon; Buffalo; Toronto: Channel View Publications, 2005), pp.16-17.
[148] Catherine Rebuffel, 'Partir. Visiter Montmartre. Dans les pas d'Amélie Poulain', *La Croix*, 23 February 2002, Votre guide section, p. 18, Sheila Johnston, 'A French Fairy Tale', p. 40.
[149] Annette Kuhn, 'The French *Nouvelle Vague*' in *The Cinema Book* (2nd edition), ed. by Pam Cook and Mieke Bernink (BFI: London, 1999), p. 83.
[150] Guy Austin, *Contemporary French Cinema* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), p. 162.
[151] Wheatley and Mazdon, 'Intimate Connections', p. 39.

When considering *Amélie's* relationship to international audiences and tourism, it is worth noting that although as I mentioned earlier in this chapter, French critics with a positive response to *Amélie* emphasised its references to national culture, those who disliked the film sometimes suggested that it pandered to an American or Americanised market.[152] Here, Hollywood's status as French cinema's Other is articulated[153] in a discourse where Jeunet is associated with American cinema because of his reliance on special effects as well as his experience of working within the American studio system.

Relating to *Amélie*: Recognition and Distinction

The two German students who had lived in France were keen to highlight how their knowledge of French culture enhanced their appreciation of *Amélie*. This is interesting both considering the emphasis in the French press on the film's relationship to a specifically French cultural heritage, but also in relation to my earlier observations on how individual audience members distinguished themselves from others by underscoring their elite film taste. By telling the researcher about their experience of living in France these respondents were able to describe their relationship to the film as a privileged one. One of them stressed that his familiarity with Paris meant that he could 'understand some jokes others don't: actors, word-games, places',[154] while the other student suggested that French films 'create a very special atmosphere' and that viewers who did not love this French atmosphere would not be able to enjoy *Amélie*.[155] Despite the fact that these viewers were not French, they used their sense of superior knowledge of French culture to establish a special, privileged relationship with *Amélie*. By contrast, a twenty-year-old native English-speaker who had previously lived in France, and for whom the film brought back memories from this experience, wrote that 'the film seems to work as well with an English audience', and claimed that being 'the story of one individual' it did 'not raise many cultural issues'.[156] This comment touched on a number of issues that frequently emerged in audience responses to *Amélie*. Firstly, many viewers claimed that the film dealt with universal themes. Secondly, the fact that the film

[152] [n.a.], '*Le Fabuleux Destin d'Amélie Poulain* de Jean-Pierre Jeunet', *L'Humanité*, [n.p].
[153] Cf. Hayward, *French National Cinema*, pp. 8 and 13.
[154] A6.
[155] A17.
[156] A21.

focused on an individual story, rather than wider cultural issues, is important for two reasons: many viewers appeared to relate to the film very strongly through personal identification with the protagonist, and some respondents also described *Amélie* as conveying a message about personal empowerment and the worth of the individual.

One viewer specifically related her engagement with the character of *Amélie* to the fact that she was young and female herself,[157] and two other women also thought that being close in age to the main characters made it easier to relate to the story.[158] However, the most common trend was to explain emotional investment in the protagonist through identification with her shyness and difficulties when it came to relationships with other people. For example, a female student in her mid-twenties wrote about 'the feeling of being different; too introvert; the difficulty of relating to people; the strange chains of thought!',[159] and others wrote about social awkwardness, the wish to escape reality, and lack of self-confidence in romantic relations.[160] Two men mentioned the film's music when discussing how they became emotionally involved with the world of the film.[161] Since I have identified nostalgia as a significant concept both in relation to the critical discourse surrounding *Amélie* and to audiences' emotional experiences of the film, it is worth pointing out that the accordion-based soundtrack for the film is an element that can be seen to contribute to the film's nostalgic effect. Powrie has noted how nostalgia entered medical discourse in the 18th century when it was used to describe a disease afflicting homesick Swiss soldiers. Apparently, music with specific local connotations was mentioned as a factor triggering the symptoms.[162] Powrie discusses the importance of the musical soundtrack in French heritage films from the 1980s that he defines as nostalgic. These films employed traditional European classical music and in doing so emphasised high cultural values as well as underlining the place of the film within a European tradition.[163] *Amélie* of course does not have the kind of European orchestral score Powrie writes about, but instead the film could be seen as underlining its

---

[157] A31.
[158] A13, A27.
[159] A25.
[160] A20, A37.
[161] A6, A19.
[162] Phil Powrie, *French Cinema in the 1980s: Nostalgia and the Crisis of Masculinity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. 15 and 19.
[163] Powrie, *French Cinema in the 1980s*, p. 19.

Frenchness through the association between accordion music and French national culture.

Amélie Poulain: An Engaging Character

Several participants went into considerable detail describing the film's close focus on the protagonist. One woman in her late twenties wrote about the main character:

> [H]er eyes are very engaging. Very dark and show a lot of emotion. She also looks straight at you, where else the other characters don't. It's almost as if she's letting you in on her story.[164]

Similarly, according to a nineteen-year-old male student:

> The inside view of what is going on inside of Amélie's mind allows the viewer to get close to her. It's very personal and focused on 'her' world and in many ways I was able to connect to her thoughts.[165]

Amélie remains the focal point for the film's multiple narrative threads as the agent whose interventions in the lives of other characters instigate narrative progression. These quotes exemplify what Smith calls 'alignment'; focus on the experiences and storyline of a character (attachment) and/or insights into the character's thoughts and feelings (subjective access).[166] The latter occurs not only through Audrey Tautou's acting, but also via a voice-over supporting what is shown on the screen and through the non-diegetic music.[167] When spectators do not merely understand the feelings of characters on the screen, but an emotional response in the viewer is triggered by something happening to a character Smith calls this 'allegiance'.[168] Amongst the participants in the audience study, a professional woman in her mid-thirties who found it easy to engage with the protagonist due to the focus on 'Amélie's view of the world and emotional intensity' wrote:

---

[164] A33.
[165] A23.
[166] Smith, *Engaging Characters*, p. 146, 150.
[167] As Smith points out, the important role played by music in revealing characters' mental states is an area in need of further research. *Engaging Characters*, p. 151.
[168] Smith, *Engaging Characters*, p. 187.

> ...when Nino walked out of the café, her collapsing in a puddle of water summed up my reaction to his leaving perfectly![169]

This example of a viewer describing her own emotional response as identical to that of the protagonist is particularly interesting since it refers specifically to an effect achieved through digital manipulation of the filmic image. By contrast, a seventeen-year-old A-level student cited this particular scene as the one thing she did not like about the film. It is perhaps telling that this respondent did not describe her viewing of the film in terms of emotional engagement; in her view, the film was 'about the little things that make people's lives' and 'not so much emotions'.[170] For this viewer, who did not feel connected to the main character, Amélie 'melting in the café' seemed 'a bit stupid'. Here the limitations of Smith's perceptive account of how viewers engage emotionally with characters become obvious. Because his work on emotional engagement ultimately takes the text rather than the viewer as its starting-point when elucidating interpretative strategies, there is no room for explaining variations in responses – why one viewer professes allegiance with the protagonists while another is not moved by the story.[171] It is worth noting that the youngest participants in this case study were those most likely to declare that they felt emotionally detached from characters, although their stated reasons ranged from being (too) young[172] to unfamiliarity with the cultural environment.[173] My empirical research here serves to highlight the need for studies of film interpretation to acknowledge that the relationship between film and viewer is not a question of one-way transmission, and that the reception process therefore merits as much attention as the text itself.

Close identification with the main protagonist stretched across gender divides. A respondent in his mid-twenties found it easy 'to engage with Amélie the protagonist as she was someone who is truly individual and because of this an outsider'. He felt that his

---

[169] A34.
[170] A38.
[171] Hallam and Marshment replace Smith's notion of 'allegiance' with a range of different types of alignments (intellectual, interest, concern, moral, aesthetic and emotional alignment) but also in their model, the focus is on the text rather than on the viewer. Julia Hallam with Margaret Marshment, *Realism and Popular Cinema* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 134.
[172] A36.
[173] A29.

interests, and particularly his taste in film, placed him outside of the mainstream, in a position resembling that of Amélie. This is a clear example of a research participant explicitly articulating his self-image as someone with an elite taste in film. At the same time, he noted that the film 'focused on people's obsessions', which he thought facilitated identification on a general level, since, in his words, 'we all have those'.[174] A French male student of the same age also recognised himself in the film, as a day-dreamer 'waiting for something special'.[175] Many of those who were most enthusiastic about the film stressed how it dealt with issues that everyone could relate to: 'things from our everyday life'[176] and 'humankind's basic wants, needs, fears and hopes'.[177] In the words of one female student, 'Everyone is afraid to [take] risks, would like to fall in love and want life to be a bit more magical sometimes'.[178]

Dreams, Magic, and Reality

Usually 'magic' is perceived as extraordinary and therefore antithetical to ordinary life, but the last statement above suggests that by connecting the film to their own dreams, research participants could relate *Amélie* to everyday reality. For Bruno, cinema's connection to 'daydreaming and fantasy, and the experience of this state as phantasmagoria of visual space'[179] provides a link between film and tourism. This comparison between touristic travel and film viewing is not corroborated by my research, but audience comments certainly demonstrate that *Amélie's* fantasy elements were highly rated by viewers, who applied terms like 'dreamlike', 'fairy-tale' or 'magic' to their descriptions of the film.[180]

Although the dominant reaction was that characterisation made it very easy to engage with the storyline in *Amélie,* some respondents expressed reservations about the depth or development of the characters.[181] This did not hinder their enjoyment of the film; indeed

---

[174] A3.
[175] A6.
[176] A18.
[177] A39.
[178] A2.
[179] Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*, p. 83.
[180] A2, A5, A6, A11, A12, A15, A17, A18, A19, A21, A22, A28, A34, A37.
[181] A12, A27, A32.

one of them had seen *Amélie* six times before taking part in the research project and clearly loved it.[182] One viewer found the characters 'too dreamlike' to identify with, but was of the opinion that this might in fact have enhanced her experience, stating that 'it's exciting to see to what extent people are different from each other'.[183] For another respondent 'the idea of travelling'[184] helped in engaging his emotions. These two statements, linking the film viewing experience to travelling or to observing characters from a distance, as in a dream, could be seen to fit in within a broader tendency of characterising *Amélie* as providing a different, slightly magical or exotic reality.[185] This creates a form of escape that enables the viewer to 'transcend everyday life',[186] as one respondent put it, or 'get away from everyday life for two hours'[187] in the words of another participant. As Klinger points out, films can offer comfort not just through familiarity and affirmation, but also by their transformative ability, providing viewers with access to worlds that are unfamiliar and exotic.[188] The references to magic and fairy-tales in research participants' responses showed that escapism often was an important aspect of the film viewing experience for this case study audience.[189] Although as I suggested earlier on, the experience of daydreaming and fantasising could be related to everyday life in the sense of being part of research participants' imaginary world, some respondents emphasised the relationship between *Amélie* and reality in a more traditional, mimetic sense.[190] For example, a respondent in her mid fifties who found *Amélie's* fast editing slightly confusing wrote that these fast movements made the film resemble life itself,[191] while a male respondent in the same age group thought that the film reflected the 'complexity of life'.[192] One young male student went even further, claiming that the film 'showed a normal everyday life with its complications' and 'everyday social matters involved in real life'.[193] The more common approach was however to see the film as being about the relationship between imagination and reality,

---

[182] A12.
[183] A17.
[184] A19.
[185] A2, A5, A6, A21, A28, A34, A37.
[186] A19.
[187] A17.
[188] Klinger, *Beyond the Multiplex*, pp. 166-167.
[189] A2, A5, A6, A17, A19, A21, A28, A34, A37.
[190] A1, A18.
[191] A1.
[192] A24.
[193] A7.

about highlighting the wonder and beauty in the little details of life, and perhaps showing that magic and fantasy have a place within the real world.[194]

A Reassuring Message about Self-Empowerment

In the research project overall, it was fairly common for participants to turn against my question about the relevant film's 'overall meaning', stating that they did not think that the film they had seen had an unambiguous message that could be easily summarised in a few words. Some respondents who attended the *Amélie* screenings did express such concerns,[195] and one viewer thought that the film was not serious enough to have a deeper meaning.[196] In general, however, viewers seemed to feel that this was a film with a message, and they often articulated this message in specific moral terms. Indeed, a male student in his late twenties specifically pointed out that what he liked about *Amélie* was that it kindled 'a desire to be good and strengthens the intuition to tell right from wrong, good from bad'.[197] Respondents' summaries of *Amélie's* overall meaning can be seen to reflect what they were able to get out of the film, and they emphasised aspects of the film that appeared to confirm their own outlook of life. Thus, a young female doctor enjoyed the presence of a range of characters that were all flawed in some sense, writing that 'you can recognize some of these flaws in yourself but be reassured that they are OK and you can still be successful'.[198] Another woman, a teacher in her mid-thirties, described the film as 'a fable about lost opportunity and regret',[199] an evocative comment in relation to the theme of nostalgia. In general, participants saw the story as hopeful and optimistic, and wrote about the need to take risks try to realise one's dreams,[200] stating for instance that 'everybody will find love if they try hard enough',[201] but when looking at the responses in close detail, they also show some interesting contrasts. For some viewers, the film's moral lesson was about the importance of relationships between people, friendships, love, or even human interaction in general, as

---

[194] A6, A7, A12, A16, A23, A26, A33, A34, A35, A38.
[195] A3, A20, A22.
[196] A21.
[197] A22.
[198] A35.
[199] A11.
[200] A1, A4, A6, A7, A12, A15, A20, A23, A27, A36.
[201] A14.

exemplified by a forty-year-old woman who wrote that 'people do need people to survive'.[202] Other responses were much more focused on the needs and opportunities available to the individual. A young male viewer thought that the film's protagonist 'spent too much time pleasing others and losing out herself', and he therefore argued that the film showed 'that you need to put aside time for yourself'.[203]

There was a strong pattern in responses to see *Amélie* as being about the importance of taking positive action to change your own life for the better,[204] with viewers using expressions such as 'self empowerment and acceptance of self'[205] and 'possibility for transformation'[206] to describe the film. Several respondents seemed to like particularly that *Amélie* showed collective happiness as connected to individual fulfilment.[207] This is exemplified by a woman in her early thirties who interpreted the film as showing that 'if you want to make people happy, you also need to take care of yourself ', adding that the film might function as an alternative to therapy in order to help people appreciate life.[208] This is related to *Amélie's* 'feel-good' character, but the identification of a therapeutic function can be compared to Klinger's research on repeat viewings. In my account of interpretations of *Amélie's* overall meaning, I have referred to both first time viewers and committed fans, but looking specifically at the responses of those who had seen the film before, some correspondences with Klinger's findings can be found. Klinger has suggested that repeat film viewings can provide a nostalgic and potentially therapeutic form of escapism.[209] As I discussed at length earlier in this chapter, when perceived as a textual characteristic, nostalgia is often burdened with negative connotations, a tendency that manifested itself clearly in *Amélie's* critical reception. I also showed that critical discourse frequently slips from text to audience, criticising films not just for being nostalgic but for inducing nostalgia in its viewers. In Klinger's account, on the other hand, nostalgia is considered not as a textual property but as an emotional reaction experienced by members of the film audience. In this context, nostalgia can be perceived

[202] A8.
[203] A29.
[204] A8, A28, A29.
[205] A39.
[206] A30.
[207] A17, A23, A32, A36.
[208] A18.
[209] Klinger, *Beyond the Multiplex*, pp. 151-152.

as valuable for its soothing or healing effect. Klinger writes that viewers' familiarity with films that they have already seen leads to a sense of 'comfort and mastery', and she points out that many of her audience respondents liked to view their favourite films when they were in new and unfamiliar surroundings, because it helped them feel at home.[210]

Although no respondent in my study described this particular experience, a woman in her early thirties who had seen *Amélie* three or four times before the research screening wrote that 'the "feel-good" factor is always there'.[211] This is how she perceived the film's depiction of the world:

> [A] universe not quite realistic: life appears almost simple and easy. Almost like an adult point of view on a child's vision of the future. (Does it make sense?).[212]

In combination with the reference to the film's feel-good character, this description of a simplified world associated with childlike vision, seems to confirm Klinger's points about nostalgia and the sense of security that familiarity breeds. Once again, a research participant seems to perceive filmic regression as a valuable part of the viewing experience. Drawing attention to the notion of the 'feel-good' film, Klinger further argues that viewers familiar with the emotional effects of certain films can use them as a form of self-help, 'a means of shifting from life's problems to an imaginative landscape that temporarily relieves the stresses of the real world'.[213] As I have already shown, for some participants in this case study, *Amélie* was connected with specific memories of France or of previous viewings of the film, sometimes associated with nostalgia or melancholy.[214] Other viewers appeared to focus on aspects of the film that seemed particularly relevant to their lives in order to play around with important issues on an imaginary plane. A nineteen-year-old male student explained that the scene where the protagonist's neighbour 'tells her that messing up one defining moment (meeting her man) could change the rest of her life' made him feel anxious, as he asked himself

---

[210] Klinger, *Beyond the Multiplex*, p. 154.
[211] A5.
[212] A5.
[213] Klinger, *Beyond the Multiplex*, p. 164.
[214] A6, A17, A21.

'"Would I seize the moment?"'.[215] Many of the repeat viewers also appeared to come back to the film for reassurance through its affirmative, optimistic message.[216]

Gender-Specific Tendencies

In this chapter, I have identified notable differences between the way in which men and women approached *Amélie*. In Klinger's audience of repeat film viewers,

> ...male viewers were more likely than female viewers to discuss aesthetic appreciation as a prime motivation for repetition, with women citing other reasons for re-viewing as more compelling (such as therapy and nostalgia).[217]

In the *Amélie* audience, female viewers dominated the share of the audience that had seen the film several times to an even greater extent than they dominated the audience overall, and as I have already demonstrated, in the case study as a whole, male viewers were more likely than female participants to discuss their enjoyment of the film in relation to cinematography, special effects and other formal elements. Men who had seen the film several times, did refer to the film's 'feel-good' and 'uplifting' qualities when explaining why they liked the film,[218] and female repeat viewers also discussed the film's visual qualities.[219] Furthermore, both male and female fans liked the film's use of music and cinematography. Nevertheless, men who saw the film several times expressed more interest in narration, rating the script, plot, and editing,[220] while female repeat viewers often referred to characters and the magical atmosphere, in particular in relation to colours.[221] These findings must be approached cautiously, considering the limited scope of the study, but I will return to the gender differences found in the *Amélie* audience throughout the thesis in order to explore similarities and contrasts with the other three case studies.

---

[215] A23.
[216] A12, A16, A17, A26, A33, A35, A39.
[217] Klinger, *Beyond the Multiplex*, p. 162.
[218] A12, A23.
[219] A4, A15, A17, A33, A34, A37.
[220] A5, A6, A23, A36.
[221] A2, A4, A8, A15, A16, A26, A33, A34, A35, A37, A39.

French Cinema and Sex

Considering the differences that I have observed in responses from male and female members of the *Amélie* audience, it is interesting to look at how viewers reacted to the film's representation of sex. Earlier in this chapter, I discussed how in the British critical discourse surrounding *Amélie's* release French cinema tended to be associated with feel-bad rather than feel-good experiences, leading *Amélie* to be seen as an aberration from the norm. London's *Evening Standard* also saw the film as an anomaly:

> [A] feelgood French movie in which there are no adulterous couples, no gangs of disaffected Algerians or Moroccans roaming the streets and no unshaven flics mooching around in leather jackets planting drugs, consorting with prostitutes or shooting suspects.[222]

References to 'adulterous couples' and 'prostitutes' in this description of a typical French film suggests that in addition to the existential angst and representation of social ills referred to earlier, the representation of French cinema in the British press also involves a certain amount of sexual explicitness, or at least illicit sexual adventures. This is particularly interesting in relation to the expectations of French cinema listed by contributors to the *Amélie* audience study. When asked to articulate their expectations of French film, a number of female viewers in their late twenties and early to mid-thirties used terms such as 'intense', 'oversexed', and 'sometimes too much',[223] while a twenty-year-old male student wrote that he expected French films to be 'raunchy'.[224] A certain level of sexual tension, possibly excessive and explicit clearly featured among viewers' expectations of French cinema. This tendency was not limited to the *Amélie* research audience, but also widespread and indeed more pronounced among participants in other case studies.[225] These research findings provide empirical evidence of associations between French cinema and sex among British audiences, connotations that Wheatley

---

[222] Neil Norman, 'The End of le Monde as We Know It', *Evening Standard*, 26 July 2001, p.32.
[223] A17, A18, A34.
[224] A21.
[225] Cf. D8, D21, D34, D36, D40, S5, S27, S30, S45, S46, S50, S54, F5, F19.

and Mazdon argue are historically rooted in the export of French films with sensationalist themes in the early post-war period.[226]

Although *Amélie* contains references to sex and pornography (for example, some of the film's action takes part in a sex shop in the Pigalle district), the film's central romance appears curiously asexual and innocent, a fact highlighted in several British reviews of the film.[227] For a teacher in his early fifties, a self-proclaimed 'big fan' of 1970s and 80s French cinema, the film's innocence appears to have been a positive factor, because although he did not refer specifically to the film's representation of sex, he wrote that *Amélie* 'restore[d] faith' after he had found French films 'becoming a bit Hollywood/psychotic' in the 1990s.[228] This is particularly interesting in relation to the film's alleged nostalgic aspect. For this viewer, it seems as though the film elicited nostalgia for memories of watching French cinema from an era that he saw as more innocent. His comment also highlights *Amélie's* paradoxical status in relation to recent French spectacular genre cinema as theorised by Higbee.[229] On one level, the film could be seen as spectacular in its use of advanced digital technology, frequently associated with Hollywood blockbuster cinema. As we have seen, this aspect of the film clearly appealed particularly to young audiences. However, on another level, for this audience member in his early fifties, *Amélie's* gentle romance, absence of violence and use of picturesque Paris locations seems to have provided a contrast both with other CGI-heavy French productions such as *The Crimson Rivers* or *Brotherhood of the Wolf* and films courting controversy through their representation of sex and violence, like *Romance* (1998) and *Irréversible* (2002). It thus seems as though *Amélie's* complex relationship to genre cinema, French film history and Hollywood may have contributed to its wide audience appeal in Britain.

---

[226] Wheatley and Mazdon, 'Intimate Connections', p. 39. See also my discussion of French cinema in Britain in Chapter 1.
[227] Steyn, 'Relentlessly Quirky', Romney, 'A Sickening Ray of Sunshine'.
[228] A24.
[229] Higbee, 'Towards a Multiplicity of Voices', p. 298.

Another male respondent in the same age group specifically commented on the sex scenes in *Amélie* as an aspect that he disapproved of, stating that they seemed 'unnecessary' and that he 'thought it out of character for Amélie on her first "date"'.[230] It might be tempting to relate his comments to the fact that like the respondent cited above, this viewer was among the older participants in this case study. Participants under the age of twenty did indeed express more explicitly positive comments about scenes featuring sex; for example, they were more likely to select the café-toilet sex scene or the scene where Amélie counts the orgasms of the city of Paris as examples of aspects of the film that made them laugh.[231] However, several fairly young female audience members revealed seemingly old-fashioned values when expressing their opinions about sex and nudity on the screen. One female postgraduate in her late twenties wrote that she did not enjoy what she called 'the underlying "over-sexed" atmosphere which prevails in many/most French films',[232] and therefore she had a negative response to the subplot concerning the romance between the pathologically jealous man in the café and Amélie's colleague. Another woman of the same age wrote that she felt 'uncomfortable' about the naked woman seen in the sex shop where the character of Nino worked.[233] Nevertheless, there are some significant differences between the comments made by these female respondents and the man who found the sex scenes unnecessary. The woman who complained about sexual overload in French cinema explained that the affair between the obsessively jealous character played by Dominique Pinon and the hypochondriac played by Isabelle Nanty at first made her laugh, but that upon reflection the story made her sad, because 'it's not about true feelings of love, but only about sex, control…'.[234] The second female respondent who criticised nudity in the sex shop did not specify why she felt uncomfortable with this, but it is possible that her discomfort was connected to a dislike for pornography, a stance that can be associated with a feminist critique of the objectification of bodies, rather than prudishness about nudity.[235]

---

[230] A20.
[231] A36, A23, A29, A37.
[232] A17.
[233] A33.
[234] A17.
[235] A33.

By contrast, the male viewer appeared to stand for more traditional conservative values in his distaste for the idea of a young woman who has sex on her first date.[236]

'Very funny if you can keep up with the subtitles'

Participants in the *Amélie* case study who only viewed European films about once a year, and thus by implication must have viewed a limited number of French films in the past, very often referred to the film's nationality when asked what they knew about *Amélie* prior to seeing the film.[237] Since for these respondents, to see a French film was an unusual thing to do, its Frenchness seemed highly significant. A number of these viewers found some aspects of the film confusing,[238] as in the case of a male A-level student who wrote that 'by the time I had figured something out something else threw me off'.[239] This kind of reaction did not feature among responses from those with an average or above average consumption of European films. It is hard to know whether the student cited above found the film challenging because he expected it to be difficult, or whether his lack of experience in processing subtitled text at the same time as following the moving images made it hard to follow the film, but it is worth noting that 'subtitles' featured among the responses given by low-level consumers of European films when asked about their expectations of French film.[240] By contrast, another viewer with limited experience of subtitled cinema reported that reading subtitles and following the on-screen action at the same time presented 'less of a problem than I thought it would be'.[241] This comment is interesting because it hints at the wide-spread perception in Britain that subtitled cinema equals difficult films. Because *Amélie* was publicised prominently in the British press, and reviewed in publications that do not usually pay much attention to non-English language film, the critical reception of *Amélie* in the UK gives an interesting overview of how the perception that subtitled cinema requires hard work from film audiences is sustained in British media discourse.

---

[236] A20.
[237] A4, A14, A29, A30, A31.
[238] A14, A28, A29.
[239] A29.
[240] A4.
[241] A30.

Critics presumed that their readers had an aversion to subtitles, and often contrasted the displeasure of reading subtitles with the pleasure of film viewing. An article in *The Mail on Sunday* proclaimed that *Amélie's* introductory sequence was 'very funny' if the spectator could 'keep up with the subtitles',[242] while *Time Out's* reviewer stated that it was 'tempting to skip the subtitles to fully appreciate the visual feast'.[243] For *The Birmingham Evening Mail*, the subtitles did not present a problem, but this was only because the director had done such an extraordinary good job, succeeding in making the viewer 'forget that this movie has any subtitles at all [...] they simply melt into the picture'.[244] As these quotations suggest, *Amélie's* status as a subtitled film was set in opposition to the film's accessibility and potential for visual pleasure and fun.

As the title of Atom Egoyan and Ian Balfour's book *Subtitles: On the Foreignness of Film* suggests, subtitles signify 'foreignness'.[245] However, *Amélie* became known to the British public not just as an unusually popular *foreign* film, but also specifically as a *French* film. When asked about their expectations of French film, participants in the *Amélie* case study wrote about artistic quality,[246] feeling, atmosphere and emotion,[247] defined French cinema negatively, in relation to what it was not,[248] or provided a series of non-evaluative comments relating to setting, language, or music.[249] By contrast, when asked directly which aspects of *Amélie* could be seen as specifically French, respondents tended, with the exception of a couple of viewers who emphasised the film's artistic quality,[250] to avoid the rather abstract concepts that had dominated their descriptions of 'French film'. Instead, respondents often provided fairly tangible examples relating to

---

[242] Bond, 'Forsake Sin for Divine *Amélie*'. This quote provided the title for a much earlier version of this chapter, first presented as a conference paper at *Issues in Popular Contemporary French Cinema* (Manchester Metropolitan University 12 -13 January 2006) and published in amended form in the conference proceedings. Cf. Ingrid Stigsdotter, ''Very funny if you can keep up with the subtitles': the British Reception of *Le Fabuleux destin d'Amélie Poulain*' in *France at the Flicks: Trends in Contemporary French Popular Cinema*, ed. by Isabelle Vanderschelden and Darren Waldron (Basingstoke: Cambridge Scholars, 2007), pp. 198-211.
[243] Susan Sharpe, 'Tautou Recall', *Time Out*, 5-12 September 2001, p. 23.
[244] Graham Young, '*Amélie's* a True Ray of Sunshine', *Birmingham Evening Mail* , 5 October 2001, Life Magazine, pp. 40-41.
[245] Egoyan and Balfour, eds, *Subtitles*.
[246] A2, A3, A6, A7, A8, A11, A12, A14, A20, A21, A32, A33, A37, A38, A39.
[247] A8, A11, A17, A18, A21, A28, A31, A34.
[248] A11, A23, A37.
[249] A4, A9, A28, A36.
[250] A33, A34.

the soundtrack, such as the French language or the accordion music,[251] or pointed to highly visible aspects of the *mise-en-scène*.[252] In particular, they found that the film's music, colour and setting in a Paris neighbourhood with its street-life and café culture contributed to the creation of a French flavour or atmosphere. This reinforces the connection between *Amélie* and the notion of a touristic postcard representation of France, and the emphasis on the visual is further exemplified by audience comments that can be linked to the film's colourfulness.

Amélie's distinct use of colour appeared to play a particularly significant role in viewers' perception of the film. This is reflected in the film titles that viewers listed when asked about other films that *Amélie* reminded them of. Apart from other Jeunet films,[253] the titles included *The Wizard of Oz* (1939),[254] *Y Tu Mamá También* (2001),[255] *Chocolat* (2000),[256] *Cinema Paradiso*,[257] *The Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004),[258] *House of Flying Daggers* (2004),[259] *Edward Scissorhands* (1990)[260] and *Arizona Dream* (1993).[261] Although respondents often referred to similarities on the level of sentiment, the common denominator seemed to be a visual style characterised by colourfulness, with connotations of magic, or something that could be described as quirky hyperrealism. It is worth noting that with the exception of auteurist associations to Jeunet's other films, the intertextual connections that viewers made to other films ranged across nationalities and genres. Indeed, despite the film's cinephile references to French film history, prominently discussed in French reviews, and mentioned in several of the more high-brow British newspapers,[262] *Amélie* did not remind this audience of any

---

[251] A2, A6, A9, A15, A18, A19, A24, A28, A29, A30, A32.
[252] A2, A3, A4, A6, A9, A14, A18, A21, A23, A24, A27, A28, A29, A30, A33, A35, A36, A37, A38, A39.
[253] A5, A6, A12, A15, A21, A23, A32, A36, A37.
[254] A28.
[255] A35, A38.
[256] A9. This viewer never specified whether she meant Hallström's film starring Juliette Binoche or Claire Denis' very different film *Chocolat* (1988), but her comments about similar music together with the fact that she was not a regular viewer of European film suggests that she probably meant the Hollywood film. See also notes 238 and 244 in Chapter 3.
[257] A33, A39.
[258] A27.
[259] A21.
[260] A34.
[261] A19.
[262] Jeffries, 'The French Insurrection', Romney, 'A Sickening Ray of Sunshine' and 'France's New Wave –Big Bucks and Bangs', *Independent on Sunday*, 10 June 2001, Features section, p. 2.

French films other than those made by Jeunet. If respondents noticed the film's nods to French cinema history they did not find it interesting or noteworthy enough to bring it to my attention. Likewise, although *Amélie's* use of saturated colours clearly formed part of the film's attraction for the audiences in my study, in relation to the controversial absence of multiculturalism in Jeunet's vision of Montmartre the research participants proved colour-blind.

New Expectations of French Cinema?

Many research participants were of the opinion that *Amélie* could have been set anywhere in the world and had few links with French national culture.[263] While this may partly be explained by the fact that a viewer who genuinely enjoys a film is likely to consider any aspects of the story that may have gone over his or her head irrelevant, it also reminds us that professional critics and Film Studies scholars tend to approach films in a rather different way from consumers for whom film viewing is a leisure activity. In this respect, my research provides important insights into what the notion of French cinema means to British film audiences today. Many contributors to this case study did not have an extensive pre-knowledge of foreign-language film, and while as we have seen, some viewers explained that *Amélie* contradicted their existing expectations of French film, a seventeen-year-old respondent with little previous knowledge of French cinema wrote that 'this has created an expectation'.[264] This comment is particularly interesting, because although the film was described by British critics at the time of its release as challenging stereotypical expectations of French cinema, for a substantial group of viewers taking part in this project, *Amélie* was already seen as the prototype for a 'French film'. Wheatley and Mazdon argue that although British critics often emphasise the challenging or risqué connotations of French films, in reality it might be more useful to think of French cinema in terms of its reliability in attracting 'middle-class audiences who wish to sample the safely exotic'[265] to the independent cinema circuit. At the same time, they point out that 'popular French films that fail to match

[263] A11, A12, A19, A20, A21, A31, A35, A39.
[264] A29.
[265] Wheatley and Mazdon, 'Intimate Connections', pp. 38-39.

elitist British expectations can cause as many problems as those deemed too difficult',[266] citing the poor box office performance of the action-comedy *Taxi* in the UK and negative critical reactions to the thriller *Tell No One* (*Ne le dis à personne*, 2006) as evidence of this.[267] For a French film to succeed in Britain it must in their view provide audiences with a certain level of familiarity combined with the 'opportunity for cinematic tourism'.[268]

In relation to the tradition of representing the south of France and Paris through postcard-like imagery,[269] Wheatley and Mazdon observe that the popularity of idyllic visions of France overseas can be linked to the production of American-produced anglophone films like Ridley Scott's *A Good Year* (2006) and Lasse Hallström's *Chocolat* (2000). The latter film, interestingly enough, appeared to be perceived as French by a student in her mid-twenties, who wrote that she expected *Amélie* to be similar to Hallström's film, adding that 'it did seem typically French', as though Frenchness was the quality the films had in common.[270] A participant in the case study of *The Dreamlife of Angels* considered in the next chapter also saw similarities between *Chocolat* and *Amélie*.[271] This suggests that the idealised and glossy images of Provence and Paris that have figured in recent popular films set in France, whether French-produced or not, have made a significant impact on British audience expectations of French cinema. Critical writing on French cinema, however, tends to focus on films of 'French original expression'.[272] Therefore the impact on audience perceptions of French cinema of films that are not French according the criteria stipulated by the Conseil Supérieur de l'Audovisuel is rarely considered.[273]

The most direct evidence of *Amélie's* status as a new epitome of French cinema in this case study audience, apart from the young male student cited above, came from a female

[266] Wheatley and Mazdon, 'Intimate Connections', p. 40.
[267] Wheatley and Mazdon, 'Intimate Connections', pp. 39-40.
[268] Wheatley and Mazdon, 'Intimate Connections', p. 39.
[269] Cf. Mazdon, 'Introduction' in *France on Film*, p. 9.
[270] A9.
[271] D33.
[272] See Appendix E: 'Nationality and French Film'.
[273] Wheatley and Mazdon's research in progress is an exception to this rule, but as I pointed out in the introductory chapter, their approach differs from mine by focussing more on distribution and exhibition practices and by not using audience empirical audience research.

postgraduate student in her mid-twenties who wrote that the label 'French film' for her connoted '[s]omething like Amélie'.[274] Considering that several audience members referred to the 'quirkiness' of the film's characters as something they connected with French film,[275] or rated the 'quirks' of the main character as one of the film's main attractions,[276] it is telling that the adjective 'quirky' frequently appeared when *Amélie* audience participants articulated their expectations of French film.[277] Several other comments about French cinema could also easily be connected to *Amélie* and to recent developments in French film discussed in this thesis. For example, one A-level student wrote that he expected a French film to feature Paris, but then went on to specify that the film would have a rural, rather than a big city setting.[278] This might seem as a contradiction in terms, but supports Wheatley and Mazdon's assertion that *Amélie* is the urban equivalent to the countryside as represented in heritage cinema as well as in popular films set in a prettified present,[279] and goes some ways towards explaining the film's appeal to British audiences. The Montmartre depicted in *Amélie* functions as an old-fashioned village community where everyone knows each other; an idea of big city life that might be encountered in tourist brochures but possibly also in selective memories from holidays or romantic films seen in the past, and the dreams and fantasies associated with such memories.

The comments cited above are representative only of film viewers attending screenings of *Amélie*. Even more significant as proof of the film's impact on audience expectations were the links made between *Amélie* and French cinema in responses collected at screenings of other films, from film viewers who did not take part in the *Amélie* case study. Contributors to the Swedish case studies frequently named *Amélie* as a salient example of French cinema,[280] and an A-level student taking part in the *Show Me Love* case study even wrote that 'before Amélie I would not have known what a French film would [have] been about.'.[281] As we will see in the next chapter, a couple of viewers

[274] A15.
[275] A8, A34.
[276] A4.
[277] A12, A20, A35, A39.
[278] A36.
[279] Wheatley and Mazdon, 'Intimate Connections', p. 40.
[280] F28, F29, F35, S77, S79.
[281] S77.

who took part in the second French case study, *The Dreamlife of Angels*, managed to find ways of relating that film to *Amélie*,[282] while another member of that audience wrote that he expected French film to be 'rather like *Amélie* slightly quirky'.[283] This observation once again points to the connection between quirkiness, *Amélie*, and audience expectations of French cinema, noticeable across the research audience as a whole.[284]

The way in which this chapter has demonstrated the influence of *Amélie* on viewers' expectations of French film is highly significant in relation to this study as a whole, because it indicates that when a French film manages to cross over from the art cinema margins of British film culture into the multiplex mainstream, the effects on audience perceptions can be powerful and long-lasting. The paradox here is of course that regardless of its content or style, the new prototype of French cinema in Britain was distributed, exhibited and reviewed in a manner that was highly unrepresentative of French film releases in the UK. In fact, the release on many prints with a large marketing campaign is more similar to the release model used by Hollywood studios, and while British critics may have written about the film's Frenchness and relationship to French culture, the very fact that they were writing so much, in particular in more popular publications, marked their response out as different from the general treatment of French cinema in the British press.

To begin my audience research analysis by looking at *Amélie*, rather than any of the other case study films, has been extremely useful, since its status as the most successful French film in Britain in terms of box office performance[285] means that *Amélie* clearly has made an impact on British audiences' expectations of French cinema, an impact with ramifications far beyond the reactions recorded in this individual case study. However, it was also useful in another sense, since the research audience's overwhelmingly enthusiastic responses forced me to reflect upon my own reservations about the film. *Amélie* interests me as a social phenomenon, but on a personal level, I would describe its

[282] D33, D34.
[283] D38.
[284] D16, F25, F41, S67.
[285] Isabelle Vanderschelden, *Amélie*, p. 86.

cartoon-like characters and predictable if impressively detailed narrative as profoundly irritating. The experience of subjecting myself to repeated viewings of *Amélie*, as I did within the context of this research project, was therefore not at all pleasurable. The contrast between my own reaction and that of the *Amélie* fans in my study made me consider how my own taste, preconceptions and prejudices inform the strategies that I employ when interpreting and evaluating films. I encountered the same film as the respondents in this study, but my position as a film researcher placed me in a slightly different viewing context, approaching the viewing of *Amélie* as work rather than entertainment. To what extent was my reaction connected to awareness of the critical debate in France and to my pre-knowledge of French and European film history? The third element in the text-context-viewer matrix is the question of my own identity, as a university-educated, white Swedish woman from a middle-class background who has lived in France, speaks several languages and has a fairly extensive knowledge of French cinema. It is possible to imagine an individual corresponding to that description thoroughly enjoying *Amélie*, and to recognise this is to admit the difficulty in analysing matters of taste. The research participants contributing to this case study, more than half of whom had seen *Amélie* more than once, clearly responded to the film in ways that were fundamentally different to my own reaction. The accumulation of film viewing moments experienced by *Amélie* fans, who had seen the film many times before, must contribute to their interpretation in a different way to the single viewing experience of those encountering the film for the first time, and is likely to involve 'an intense process of personalization' comparable to that described by Klinger in relation to her research on repeat viewing.[286] As this chapter has demonstrated, *Amélie* was an exception in terms of its popularity, and the film remained exceptional within this project, attracting a different kind of audience in comparison with the other case studies. However, *Amélie's* British reception is extremely important, because as we shall see in the following chapters, the film has made a significant impact on audience expectations of not only French, but also European cinema, and thus helped shaping the overall image of such films among their British audiences.

[286] Klinger, *Beyond the Multiplex*, p. 139.

Chapter 3. *The Dreamlife of Angels*

In the second chapter we looked at *Amélie,* a film that is of major importance to any study of contemporary French or European cinema in Britain today, since it appears to have significantly affected expectations of French films in the UK. *Amélie's* cobbled Montmartre setting fits into a long tradition of films offering audiences what might be described as a tourist gaze on France,[1] because Paris and the South of France have historically been privileged as locations for French cinematic representations.[2] As an alternative to the exceptional reactions to *Amélie's* chic urban fairytale in Britain, this chapter will focus on Erick Zonca's first feature film *The Dreamlife of Angels*. Set in post-industrial Northern France, this film exemplifies a recent trend in French and European cinema towards regional filmmaking supported by European Union funding strategies.[3] *The Dreamlife of Angels* was described by *Cahiers du cinéma* at the time of its French release as fitting very neatly into international expectations of French 1990s cinema, and corresponding particularly well to the idea of French contemporary cinema promoted at the Cannes film festival.[4] *Cahiers'* suggestion that Zonca's film epitomised ideas about French film export is particularly interesting considering that, as I have shown in previous chapters, a fairly wide range of French films have been in circulation on the British market in the past decade, while findings presented in Chapter 2 indicated that *Amélie* has now become the prototype of a contemporary French film for British audiences. Before showing to what extent the research audience participating in this case study differed from the audience attending the *Amélie* screenings I will therefore discuss the context in which *The Dreamlife of Angels* was produced and released with reference to critical labels such as *le jeune cinéma français* and 'new realism'.

---

[1] Cf. John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze* (London: Sage, 2nd edition 2001).
[2] Lucy Mazdon, 'Introduction' in *France on Film: Reflections on Popular French Cinema*, ed. by Lucy Mazdon (London: Wallflower, 2001), pp. 1-9 (p. 9).
[3] Such support mechanisms are also highly relevant to recent developments in Swedish cinema, and I will therefore return to this issue in Chapters 4 and 5.
[4] ['*La Vie rêvée des anges* s'approche avec une netteté rare de l'idée que l'on a, aux quatre coins du monde (à Cannes notamment), d'un film français des années 90']. Emmanuel Burdeau, 'L'étincelle et la cendre', *Cahiers du cinéma*, 527 (1998), pp. 71, 73 (p. 71).

Le jeune cinéma français, New Realism, and Political Cinema

In critical debates, *The Dreamlife of Angels* has often been labelled as an example of *le jeune cinéma français* or 'new realism', two concepts that partly overlap in terms of the francophone[5] films from the late 1990s and onwards that they attempt to designate. The term *jeune cinéma* features in the titles of three French publications concerned with 1990s French cinema[6] and has also appeared in the British quality press.[7] As Isabelle Vanderschelden has pointed out, it is easier to define *jeune cinéma* negatively than positively; it is most definitely not 'a spectacular, genre-based, big-budget cinema'[8] but there are variations in terms of which films are included under the definition and why. The label has been applied to a diverse group of filmmakers, newcomers or fairly young in the 1990s. The Franco-German television channel ARTE's initiative *Tous les garçons et les filles de leur âge* (1994), a series of nine films commissioned from directors including Claire Denis and Olivier Assayas is a useful starting-point for a discussion of the *jeune cinéma* concept, since the series arguably played an important role in constructing the notion of a 'young', new cinema in France, thereby reinvigorating the auteur cinema tradition.[9] Each film in the *Tous les garcons...* series focussed on the adolescence of the individual filmmaker.[10] However, as Will Higbee points out, it remains ambiguous whether it is the filmmakers, the themes addressed in the films or the protagonists who are supposed to be 'young', or whether the concept of *jeune cinéma*

---

[5] My focus in this chapter will be primarily on films made in France, but it is worth noting that critical debates concerning *jeune cinéma* and 'new realism' sometimes also concern film productions set in Belgium. As I will show later on, the work of the Dardenne brothers and other Belgian filmmakers featured in research audience comments on *The Dreamlife of Angels*, reminding us of the problems associated with the concept of national cinema.

[6] Claude-Marie Trémois, *Les Enfants de la liberté: le jeune cinéma français des années 90* (Paris : Éditions du Seuil, 1997), Michel Marie (ed.) *Le Jeune cinéma français* (Paris : Nathan, 1998), and René Prédal, *Le Jeune cinéma français* (Paris : Nathan, 2002). Prédal's book also extends its focus into the new millennium.

[7] Cf. Jonathan Romney, 'J'aime L'amour', *Guardian*, 22 January 1999, p. 19.

[8] Isabelle Vanderschelden, *Amélie* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), p. 15.

[9] Phil Powrie, 'Heritage, History and 'New Realism': French Cinema in the 1990s' in *French Cinema in the 1990s: Continuity and Difference*, ed. by Phil Powrie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 1-21 (pp. 8-9). Although Zonca was not one of the *'garçons'* in 1994, his second feature-length project following the success of *The Dreamlife of Angels* was a TV-film for ARTE, *Le Petit Voleur* (1999). An in-depth discussion of film production practices in France in the 1990s is beyond the scope of this thesis; for an interview of the increasingly important interrelationship between French television and cinema became during this period, see Powrie, 'Heritage, History and 'New Realism', pp. 8-15.

[10] Will Higbee, 'Towards a Multiplicity of Voices: French Cinema's Age of the Postmodern: Part II – 1992 – 2004' in Susan Hayward, *French National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2nd Edition 2005), pp. 293-327 (pp. 314 and 316).

refers to the expression of a 'youthful' sensibility.[11] For Higbee, the notion of 'youth' is inapt because he argues that one of the more significant changes in French cinema in this period was the emergence of films addressing themes around race, ethnicity and cultural identity in contemporary French society, and the concept of *jeune cinéma* fails to articulate this development. He therefore prefers discussing the relevant films as representing a 'new realism' in French cinema.[12]

Even if post-colonialism is not explicitly addressed in all of the films thus labelled, the issue is relevant because of the link between changes in 1990s French cinema and the protests against right-wing legislation affecting France's illegal immigrant population in February 1997.[13] French filmmakers were actively involved in the protests, and they appear to have functioned as a catalyst for change, marking the beginning of a renewed interest in socio-political issues in French cinema. With narratives focussing on questions like 'immigration, racism, unemployment, exclusion and social fracture'[14] many French films made in the late 1990s could be described as examples of 'social realism', a critical label that as Julia Hallam and Margaret Marshment explain has been applied by critics to 'films that aim to show the effects of environmental factors on the development on character through depictions that emphasise the relationship between location and identity.'[15] Like many of the other films labelled as *jeune cinéma* or 'new realism', *The Dreamlife of Angels* combines low-budget production values with a setting in a contemporary provincial reality and a focus on people in the social margins.[16] Historically, cinematic social realism has been linked to 'gritty' and 'raw' depictions of urban life, often using an 'observational' style and 'episodic' narrative. In contemporary cinema, however, the stylistic and narrative features of social realism have become increasingly eclectic, with influences from both the modernist avant-garde and popular melodrama among the aesthetic strategies at work.[17]

---

[11] Higbee, 'Towards a Multiplicity of Voices', p. 315.
[12] Higbee, 'Towards a Multiplicity of Voices', pp. 310, 316-317.
[13] Powrie, 'Heritage, History and 'New Realism'', pp. 10-11. Higbee, 'Towards a Multiplicity of Voices', p. 308.
[14] Higbee, 'Towards a Multiplicity of Voices', p. 308.
[15] Julia Hallam with Margaret Marshment, *Realism and Popular Cinema* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 184.
[16] For more details on the film, see the synopsis in Appendix C.
[17] Hallam and Marshment, *Realism and Popular Cinema*, pp. 184 and 192.

To designate *The Dreamlife of Angels* and other French auteur films from the same period as 'new realism' rather than 'social realism' is to suggest that the films' treatment of the socio-political dimensions of everyday life differs from how previous generations of filmmakers have tackled such issues.[18] Martin O'Shaughnessy defines new realism stylistically, in terms of 'an unpolished, naturalistic image' and seemingly loosely structured 'episodic plots', and thematically, explaining that the films deal with 'contemporary socio-political issues and debates, such as unemployment, the *banlieu* or the world of work'.[19] In combination with the use of non-professional actors such characteristics fit into historical traditions of social realism on screen, but O'Shaughnessy argues that the films also feature 'melodramatic qualities' such as 'the production of moments of confrontation and collision; the corporeal and the gestural; the restoration of ethical transparency to a world that has become opaque; the emotive focus on individuals and families rather than abstract forces'.[20]

This emphasis on the individual as opposed to the collective, together with the filmmakers' limited connection to traditional leftist party politics thus appeared to differentiate French filmmakers in the 1990s from historical precedents of realism in French cinema.[21] In France, some critics described new realism as pseudo-political because of the films' inability to offer solutions to the social problems they depicted. By contrast, Martin O'Shaughnessy argues that the 1990s saw a genuine and potentially fruitful return to political cinema in France.[22] My research in this chapter partly challenges this claim, arguing that audience interpretation should be taken into account into any discussion of whether political cinema can be deemed successful or not. O'Shaughnessy relates his analysis to the French socio-political context and critical debates, but his approach to the films' political dimension is essentially based on analysing the texts and does not problematise the issue of how audiences in France or

[18] Higbee, 'Towards a Multiplicity of Voices', p. 310.
[19] Martin O'Shaughnessy, *The New Face of Political Cinema: Commitment in French Film since 1995* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), p. 135.
[20] O'Shaughnessy, *The New Face of Political Cinema*, p. 136.
[21] Powrie, 'Heritage, History and 'New Realism'', pp. 12-15. See also Higbee, 'Towards a Multiplicity of Voices', pp. 307-308.
[22] O'Shaughnessy, *The New Face of Political Cinema*, pp. 21-35.

elsewhere might react to the films. The findings from my audience study of *The Dreamlife of Angels* will therefore be particularly interesting to consider in relation to O'Shaughnessy's work. Because the research audience included some French film viewers, I will also be able to explore differences between French and British responses to the depiction of social reality in Zonca's film.

The Dreamlife of Angels Travels to Britain

In France, *The Dreamlife of Angels* was a minor box office hit, one of the few examples of this type of auteur cinema from the 1990s that actually proved popular with audiences.[23] The interest in the film followed partly as an effect of the publicity generated in the wake of the 1998 Cannes film festival, when Elodie Bouchez and Natacha Régnier were awarded with a shared Best Actress award for their performance in the film. The attention *The Dreamlife of Angels* received at Cannes also helped selling the film to many territories outside of France, and probably secured its release in Britain, where Zonca's film managed to attract audience figures of around 57,000 in 1998. This figure translates to roughly 6% of the number of cinema-goers who came to see *Amélie* in 2001. Although the admissions look negligible in that comparison, in fact *The Dreamlife of Angels* was one of the most successful French films of its year at the British box office.[24] It has also been shown on British television and released on VHS, and although it was not yet available on DVD in the UK in 2005, at the time of writing a British DVD is reportedly set to be released in the near future.[25]

Both French and British critics compared Zonca's film to the work of the British directors Mike Leigh and Ken Loach, as well as earlier traditions of 'kitchen-sink'

---

[23] Isabelle Vanderschelden, *Amélie* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), p. 15.

[24] A truth moderated by the fact that French cinema lacked a real success with British audiences in 1998; this year the highest admissions recorded for a French-language film were those for *Le Bossu* (between 75,000 – 79,000), whereas in most years since 1997 at least one French film has drawn around 100,000 spectators at the British box office.

[25] According to Sonali Joshi, whose translation company has provided the subtitles for the new version. Sonali Joshi, 'In Other Words: The Role of Subtitles in Film Exhibition and Distribution in the UK and France', paper presented at the conference *Anglo-French Cinematic Relations since 1930*, University of Southampton (14-16 September 2007).

drama in British film culture.[26] That comparisons to British film culture were frequent also in the French reception *of The Dreamlife of Angels* makes it particularly interesting to consider its British reception and whether or not the audiences participating in this project also connected the film to these British filmmakers, who are often described as realists.

The Research Audience Profile

Research participants attending screenings of *The Dreamlife of Angels* were on average thirty-nine years old, that is, very close to the average for the overall research audience,[27] but ten years older than the average age in the *Amélie* audience. In terms of distribution across age groups, the *Dreamlife* audience matched the overall research audience profile almost perfectly.[28] The film attracted an equal share of male and female respondents, and none of the different age groups was dominated by women or men.[29] This audience departed from the dominant tendencies concerning viewers' occupation in the project as a whole in that a lower share of respondents than in any of the other case studies was in paid employment. The reason for this was that *The Dreamlife of Angels* attracted a larger share of students than any of the Swedish case study films, and in contrast with the first French case study, this audience also included a significant share of retired respondents, as well as several housewives.[30]

In comparison with the other case studies, a more significant share of participants in the *Dreamlife* audience could be categorised as high-level film consumers.[31] Respondents in the youngest and oldest age groups (fifteen to twenty-four, and over thirty-five years old) were much less likely to list television as their main format for film consumption, and more likely to consume films mainly in the cinema than was the case for the same

---

[26] In their discussion of realism and British cinema Hallam and Marshment focus on films produced during World War II and the 'New Wave' cinema of the late 1950s and early 1960s, but for contemporary audiences, the films of Loach and Leigh are likely to be more relevant examples of realist aesthetics in British cinema. *Realism and Popular Cinema*, p. 33.
[27] Thirty-eight years.
[28] See **Figure 12**.
[29] See **Figure 14** and **Figure 20**.
[30] See **Figure 23** and **Figure 28**. For details of the professional sectors in which *Dreamlife* research participants worked, see **Figure 36**.
[31] See **Figure 40**.

age groups in the overall research audience.[32] The remaining age group (twenty-five to thirty-four years old) was more likely to go to the cinema once a week or more than both younger and older viewers, but they also consumed many films in other formats, in particular on television and DVD, and therefore did not list cinema as their main film consumption format.[33] Among members of the *Dreamlife* audience who were over twenty-five years old, the share of high-level film consumers was lower than in the same age groups in the overall research audience, but younger participants in the *Dreamlife* case study had an extremely high film consumption level, with around 60% reporting that they saw more than five films per week. This contrasts sharply with a corresponding figure of 30% for this age group in the overall research audience. One fifth of the youngest audience members in this case study audience were also frequent cinema-goers, a figure well above the average for this age group in the study as a whole.[34] The audience for *The Dreamlife of Angels* thus appeared to take a keen interest in film. In particular, the younger participants in this audience went to the cinema much more often, and also saw more films on average than the younger members of the *Amélie* audience.

The share of audience members for whom English was not their mother tongue was higher in the case of *The Dreamlife of Angels* than in the other case studies; this was also the most linguistically skilled audience.[35] Almost 40% of participants were non-native English-speakers, and the share of participants who stated that they had intermediate to fluent command over three or more languages was almost as high.[36] As in the project overall, the majority of non-British viewers were foreign students attending the university-based Avenue screenings, but also at the New Park screening about a fourth of the participants were non-native English-speakers. Most viewers with a non-English mother tongue had a European cultural background, with German and French respondents being the two largest groups among the non-native English speakers, but the

[32] See **Figure 44** and **Figure 49**.
[33] See **Figure 49**.
[34] See **Figure 44** and **Figure 49**.
[35] See **Figure 53**.
[36] 36%. In the other case studies, this figure was much lower: *Amélie* 29%, *Show Me Love* 24%, *Faithless* 27%.

Avenue screening also attracted some Asian students.[37] The linguistic and cultural diversity of this audience probably explains why English-language films dominated film consumption to a lesser extent in this group of viewers than was the case in the research audience overall. It also explains why a higher percentage of the *Dreamlife* audience reported that they consumed European non-English-language films every week.[38] In comparison with the *Amélie* audience, respondents taking part in this case study thus generally had a wider frame of reference when it came to situating *The Dreamlife of Angels* in relation to other non-Hollywood films from France, Europe and the rest of the world.

Audience Pre-Knowledge

In the last chapter, I discussed interpretations and comments made by an overwhelmingly enthusiastic audience, including the multiple repeat viewers that I described as *Amélie* fans. Also those who saw *Amélie* for the first time often had some pre-knowledge of the film through word-of-mouth recommendation or marketing. This case study presents a rather different picture. None of the British participants made reference to any pre-knowledge about *The Dreamlife of Angels* prior to seeing the research screenings advertised.[39] Two students, from Germany and Spain respectively, had heard about the film from friends,[40] and the German student specified further that the friend who had recommended the film to her was French.[41] A Dutch viewer wrote that while she had not heard of the film, she recognised the face of Elodie Bouchez, and she explained that in her home country she used to go to see 'arthouse movies', including French films, and might have come across the actress in one of these films.[42] Out of the four French audience members taking part in this case study, three had heard about the film's reputation prior to it being advertised in the research screening

[37] Three viewers (19%) were from Asian countries.
[38] Why *The Dreamlife of Angels* should attract more non-British viewers than the other films in this study is unclear, and considering the small number of participants we are dealing with, it may be a coincidence without any wider significance.
[39] Or in the case of those who had seen the film before, prior to seeing it in the programme for the relevant cinema or film society.
[40] D18, D20.
[41] D18.
[42] D19.

context,[43] for example by reading the French film magazine *Positif*[44] or following media coverage of the Cannes film festival and similar events.[45] One of these viewers applied auteurist interpretative strategies to the film, discussing the meaning of *The Dreamlife of Angels* in relation to the intentions of the director, whom he referred to by name.[46] Since these three viewers were of a similar age and attended the same screening, it is likely that they all knew each other, and any generalisations about the film's reception in France, Britain and other countries on the basis of this very small sample of viewers must of course be approached with extreme caution. It is nevertheless interesting that so many non-British viewers (even of a fairly young age) had heard of the film, while British viewers on the whole had not. It seems as though *The Dreamlife of Angels'* successful box office record in France, possibly in combination with the fact that Zonca followed up his debut feature with an acclaimed TV film, *Le Petit Voleur* (1999) for the high-brow TV channel ARTE the following year, has led to a reputation that still lingered on in France several years later.[47] By contrast, any publicity generated by the film's release in cinemas or on VHS in Britain appeared to have been forgotten by 2005.

Repeat Viewing, Memory, and Emotion

More than a tenth of the viewers attending the screenings of *The Dreamlife of Angels* had already seen the film once before, but these repeat viewers were very different from the enthusiastic fans of *Amélie*, who had often seen Jeunet's film several times before coming to the screening. Most of *The Dreamlife of Angels'* repeat viewers actually did not remember that they had seen the film before until the film started.[48] One viewer did not realise this until quite far into the film,[49] and the others often did not remember clearly in what context they had seen the film before.[50] Although most of the repeat viewers had a positive response to the film,[51] it clearly had not made a particularly

[43] D25, D26, D27.
[44] D25.
[45] D27.
[46] D26.
[47] Since ARTE is a bilingual French-German venture, this might also account for awareness about the filmmaker in Germany.
[48] D21, D29, D35.
[49] D29.
[50] D7, D21.
[51] D26, D27, D29, D35.

strong impression the first time around. The limited impact seemed connected to a lack of emotional engagement with the film. It is worth pointing out here that most of the participants with vague memories of their previous viewing experience were over sixty years old.[52] It is well known that short-term memory deteriorates with age, and one of these viewers, a retired man, even complained about his bad memory,[53] but it is also possible that people closer in age to the protagonists felt touched by their fates in a different way, and therefore were more likely to remember at least the emotional effect that it had, if not the details of the film.

The only repeat viewer who seemed to have been strongly affected when he first saw *The Dreamlife of Angels* was a twenty-six-year-old French man who had previously seen the film on French television.[54] He explained that he 'didn't remember much about the story itself', but he had found it very powerful, and noted that he 'was definitely as hurt by this second view as the first time'.[55] For this respondent, Zonca's film provided a tense and moving viewing experience. By contrast, older repeat viewers did not describe their reactions to the film in emotive terms. As Siri Hustvedt asserts with reference to contemporary neurological research, 'emotion consolidates memory. What we don't feel, we forget'.[56] In the previous case study, I showed that memories often played an important role in viewers' responses to *Amélie*, whether the memories were of times spent in France or of earlier experiences of watching the film, but responses to *The Dreamlife of Angels* raised the question of what it is that makes a viewing experience memorable, and not just pleasant.

As we shall see, the film audience engaged with characters in different ways and experienced a range of emotional reactions to the film, so this chapter will continue to problematise Murray Smith's textually based explanation of emotional responses to filmic characters. His concepts of alignment and allegiance, as discussed in Chapter 2, are helpful ways of giving nuance to viewers' engagement with film characters, but his

[52] D7, D21, D29.
[53] D29.
[54] D26.
[55] D26.
[56] Siri Hustvedt, 'The Places that Scare You', *Guardian*, 6 October 2007, Saturday Review section <http://arts.guardian.co.uk/art/visualart/story/0,,2184670,00.html> [accessed 8 October 2007].

model presumes that textual properties elicit responses from audiences, and does not explicitly acknowledge that contextual factors play an important role in shaping the film viewing experience and the way in which audiences relate to characters.[57]

Age, Gender, and Identification

Debates about spectatorship and audience identification strategies have often focussed on gender issues, but the male gender of the viewer cited above clearly did not affect his ability to emphasise and feel affected by what happened to the two young women at the centre of the story, or his enjoyment of the film. Among the wider audience for *The Dreamlife of Angels*, a couple of men in their late twenties to early thirties indicated that the gender of the protagonists hindered emotional engagement,[58] and one young woman specifically stated that she found it easier to relate to the characters because they were female.[59] However, for most viewers under thirty-five, the ability to identify with characters did not seem to be dependent on gender. Although many female respondents felt emotionally connected to the character of Isa,[60] comments made by other women revealed a sense of detachment from the protagonists. A young female civil servant wrote:

> [A]lthough the characters seemed well developed and multi-layered I found it hard to understand them well [.T]he issues they deal with in the film are not things I have any experience with – I felt for them – pity, despair but as the title suggests they seem to live in some sort of dream.[61]

Similarly, although it was slightly more common for male respondents to have difficulties when it came to engaging emotionally with the protagonists,[62] a twenty-five-year-old man employed in local government wrote that he could identify with Isa's 'struggle to escape monotony',[63] while a male PhD student in the same age group felt

---

[57] Cf. Murray Smith, *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion, and the Cinema* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 146-151 and 187. Also see the section 'Amélie Poulain: An Engaging Character' in Chapter 2.
[58] D17, D24.
[59] D8.
[60] D8, D11, D18, D19, D20, D23, D27, D35, D37.
[61] D14. I will comment on the way in which the film title appeared to guide interpretation strategies later on in this chapter.
[62] D10, D17, D24.
[63] D13.

that 'most issues addressed by the film relate to personal experience'.[64] The various comments cited above suggest that the baggage that viewers bring with them to a film might be more important than its textual properties. This reinforces the challenge established in the previous chapter to Smith's text-focussed work on audiences' emotional investment in film viewing.[65]

Although this case study audience did not express the kind of unanimous praise seen in the previous chapter in relation to *Amélie*, around 80% of those who attended the screenings of *The Dreamlife of Angels* explicitly described their experience of the film as positive. Among the remaining 20%, about half actively disliked the film,[66] while the other half were unsure, or had an ambivalent response to the film.[67] There were however some interesting differences between men and women. All of the respondents with an explicitly negative response to *The Dreamlife of Angels* were men, while the two participants who reinforced their affirmative responses to the question of whether they liked the film by adding 'emphatically'[68] and 'very much'[69] to their answers were female. The film had both supporters and detractors in various age groups, and as we have seen, many men liked the film and felt moved by the performances of the main actresses, but for those who demonstrated the strongest reactions to the film, whether positive or negative, it appeared to be perceived as something of a woman's film. In my discussion below I will account both for viewers' likes and dislikes as well as ways in which they related to the protagonists, because as we shall see, to analyse what viewers disliked about a film can sometimes be as revealing as focusing on what they enjoyed.

Among older male viewers, it was common to express a sense of detachment from the main characters,[70] whereas most female respondents over thirty-five years old indicated that they felt able to engage emotionally with the protagonist in some way.[71] However, some participants who stated that they were able to connect with the characters on an

[64] D6.
[65] Smith, *Engaging Characters*.
[66] D5, D10, D17, D31, D38.
[67] D7, D14, D21, D41.
[68] D28.
[69] D18.
[70] D5, D31, D38.
[71] D1, D2, D28, D30, D33, D34, D39, D41.

emotional level expressed their engagement in terms that were rather distanced, while others clearly felt very powerfully moved by the film, so to gain a real sense of what the notion of emotional engagement meant to the research participants it is necessary to look closer at individual responses.

Cinematography, Emotional Involvement, and Memories

Some viewers suggested that formal aspects of the film, including naturalistic acting performances and aspects of the film's cinematography, such as close-ups and hand-held camerawork, could help the viewer feel involved.[72] A French woman in her twenties wrote that 'it's directed by hand, the characters are so close to us',[73] drawing connections between camerawork and the film's relationship to reality. For an older woman, the protagonists' 'naturalness, gestures and facial expressions made them seem vulnerable and likeable', and she also found the 'close-up shots very vivid'.[74] Such comments are interesting since they remind us that although much of my focus in this thesis is on film viewers and context, the formal differences between films and their textual properties are nevertheless highly significant. The positive reaction to close-ups cited above was contrasted by a male viewer who disliked the film.[75] He described *The Dreamlife of Angels* as a 'female buddy film' appealing to a gay (presumably lesbian) audience and specifically named the close-ups as one of the things that he disapproved of.[76] This viewer thought that the fact that the protagonists were female hindered him from engaging with them emotionally, and it seems as though camera movements inviting the viewer close to the characters made him feel uncomfortable.

Another common interpretative strategy was to describe the characters in order to explain why they were easy or difficult to relate to. Most viewers found themselves empathising with Isa, who was generally perceived as a sympathetic character, associated with compassion, care, openness, gentleness, truthfulness and a courageous

[72] D9, D12, D16, D22, D26, D27, D28, D30.
[73] D27.
[74] D28.
[75] D17.
[76] D17.

approach to life.[77] Marie, on the other hand, alienated many respondents by her self-destructive and aggressive behaviour.[78] As one woman in her late twenties wrote, 'she withheld so much of herself and wouldn't let other characters, or the viewer near.'[79] However, another woman in the same age group pointed out that to be 'irrational' and difficult to understand seemed to be 'part of her character',[80] while an older man described Marie's 'neurosis' as 'acceptable – just'[81] within the film's verisimilitude. Another participant reported that although he initially found it difficult to relate to Marie's character he gradually 'built up a picture of her psychology'[82] and came to understand her. Some of the younger viewers took a more sympathetic view of Marie's predicament. The French man who had seen the film before wrote that on this second viewing of the film, he tried 'to follow Marie's path to her self destruction with more attention', and wished he could help her.[83] Another respondent, a woman in her early twenties, wrote:

> [Y]ou could see from their actions that both women wanted a better life, both wanted love, but the one (Isa) still had the power to work for it, the other (Marie) cried out for love and destroyed herself by this.[84]

Although I tried to keep a critical distance to my own opinions about the case study films while devising the methodology for this project, like most other people who write about film professionally, my decision to take on this line of work stems from a passionate interest in film. In terms of emotional reactions, film scholars are not any less subjective than other film viewers. However, such responses should be honestly acknowledged and discussed in a reflective and critical manner. At this point, it therefore seems appropriate to discuss my own personal investment in *The Dreamlife of Angels*. I first saw the film in Paris at the age of twenty, and since then, I have reviewed it several times in a range of different circumstances prior to the research screenings. My university education means that I am now able to set the film in relation to other films in

[77] D1, D2, D11, D19, D21, D32, D33, D37, D41.
[78] D11, D13, D21, D22, D31, D32, D35, D37.
[79] D11.
[80] D35.
[81] D32.
[82] D22.
[83] D26.
[84] D18.

a different way to when I first saw it, and as I have become more aware of formal elements I would describe my perspective as increasingly analytical and detached. Nevertheless, I still clearly remember that as a twenty-year-old I felt strongly affected by *The Dreamlife of Angels*. I also have a vivid memory of the context in which I saw the film, in a cinema in Paris with three friends, two of whom had a similar reaction to mine, valuing the powerful viewing experience highly, and a third person whose response to the film was so hostile that our post-viewing discussion almost turned into an argument.

Reviewing the film at the research screenings reminded me of the person I was nearly ten years ago and about my friends from that time, especially when reading comments made by viewers who were the same age as I was then. Barbara Klinger compares repeated viewings of loved films to a form of self-help, arguing that 'film can be used as therapy as well as a nostalgic means of comfort that helps viewers to escape, forget, or remember'.[85] The therapeutic unveiling of my own past connected to *The Dreamlife of Angels* was a far less reassuring experience than that referred to by one of Klinger's audience research participants, who compared watching favourite films 'with a blanket on the sofa' to the comfort of 'putting on an old pair of sneakers'.[86] My own personal anecdote is of course not sufficient evidence of the importance of being close to the protagonists in terms of age and experience, but it is interesting to observe that the person who seemed most able to accept and understand the character of Marie was one of the youngest participants in this case study, a nineteen-year-old student, who wrote:

> Marie was passionate, desperately unhappy. Very much in need as though she was being strangled, slowly. I think everyone can relate to that, every once in a while. I could.[87]

Noting how this respondent stressed the potentially universal aspect of her own experience, it is worth pointing out that research participants across the project as a whole tended to either categorise their own experience as 'natural' or 'universal', or to emphasise how specialist knowledge or sensitivity allowed them to appreciate aspects of films that other viewers might not understand. This viewer, who represented the former

[85] Barbara Klinger, *Beyond the Multiplex: Cinema, New Technologies, and the Home* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), pp.151-152.
[86] Klinger, *Beyond the Multiplex*, p. 154.
[87] D19.

category, explained that 'Marie's violent outbursts to Isabelle and Chriss were things I could relate to, if not in that extreme.'[88] Her ability to relate directly to the more destructive elements of the protagonists' personalities was fairly unusual, but several respondents compared the main characters to friends or relatives; in particular Isa seemed to remind several viewers of a friend or someone they had known in the past.[89] This recalls O'Shaughnessy's observation that 'new realist' films have an 'emotive focus on individuals and families rather than abstract forces',[90] suggesting that *The Dreamlife of Angels* managed touch a chord with viewers by appealing to a personal rather than a socio-political experience of reality.

Identification and Distantiation Strategies

Not all of the participants had a sympathetic response to the characters. Marie evoked strong negative reactions, with viewers describing her as 'unemotive and self-orientated'[91] or 'vicious and nasty'.[92] One respondent exclaimed that she 'seemed to take after her mother - little time for her!'[93] A young man wrote that he felt sympathy for the characters, but that at the same time, he was critical of their behaviour:

> [Y]ou tend to think harshly about their lack of enterprising initiatives. They just survive, they are so disillusioned. They should be more active in finding a job.[94]

Research participants' comments about emotional engagement could be placed across a spectrum ranging from complete rejection to close identification, with pity, critical sympathy and warm empathy in between. Some film viewers appeared able to find ways of connecting imaginatively to fictional characters despite not feeling in any way similar to them, while other respondents looked for character traits that they could identify with in order to engage with the film. Furthermore, for some research participants it was not sufficient to recognise themselves in the characters; they wanted to find a positive

---

[88] D19.
[89] D1, D8, D13, D19, D36, D40.
[90] O'Shaughnessy, *The New Face of Political Cinema*, p. 136.
[91] D37.
[92] D21.
[93] D31.
[94] D25.

recognition of sympathetic character traits in the film. For these viewers, the fact that the protagonists sometimes behaved in ways that were not logically motivated, and that there were negative sides to their personalities – the very things that other viewers considered human or realistic – made it impossible to like them or to be interested in what happened to them.

Among the viewers with an ambivalent response to the film, the female civil servant in her early twenties mentioned previously wrote that she felt uncomfortable about 'the idea of taking over someone's home whilst they are in a coma without any thought for that person', and that 'it's sad to think that the character felt suicide was their only option and that she didn't ask Isa for help'.[95] For this woman, the suicide at the end of the film and the depiction of Marie unscrupulously taking advantage of someone else's tragic fate made for uncomfortable viewing. Having attended two of the other screenings in this research project, this respondent was of the opinion that *The Dreamlife of Angels* appealed to an 'older audience' than *Amélie* and *Show Me Love*, the other two case study films that she had seen.[96] Despite in many ways being very different types of films, *The Dreamlife of Angels, Amélie* and *Show Me Love* are all films with young female characters at the centre of attention. However, a key characteristic that *Amélie* and *Show Me Love* have in common, but that *The Dreamlife of Angels* lacks, is a conventional happy ending. We might therefore assume that the research participant cited above thought that mature audiences would be better equipped to deal with this aspect of the film, especially considering that she described the film's end as 'particularly uncomfortable'.[97] Although some research participants who thought that *The Dreamlife of Angels* appealed mainly to a mature, adult audience would have concurred with this respondent's opinion about the age groups addressed by the film,[98] other viewers, including many respondents who liked the film and were themselves under thirty years old, on the contrary described the target audience for *The Dreamlife of Angels* as young.[99]

---

[95] D14.
[96] The Avenue screening series that this viewer attended showed the films in this order: 1) *Amélie* 2) *Show Me Love* 3) *Faithless* 4) *The Dreamlife of Angels*.
[97] D14.
[98] D2, D10, D27, D40.
[99] D1, D4, D6, D8, D11, D23, D34, D37, D38, D39, D42.

A woman in her sixties with ambivalent feelings towards the film wrote that she thought it was aimed at an audience that was '[m]ature (not in years necessarily)'.[100] She highlighted that this might not necessarily be a question of age, thereby distancing herself slightly from the target group. This happened consistently across the project as a whole in the three case studies where some viewers reacted negatively or hesitantly to the film in question.[101] In the case of *The Dreamlife of Angels,* respondents with negative or ambivalent reactions varied in terms of age and gender, and as a result their descriptions of the film's target audience also diverged significantly. Thus, in contrast to the young woman who thought that the film would appeal to an older audience, a sixty-year-old man described the film as targeted towards the 'young (under thirty years) and more female than male',[102] while a female viewer in her early sixties thought that the film's target audience consisted of women in their twenties, 'possibly low achievers',[103] clearly not a category in which she would place herself. Although the latter respondent did not explicitly state that she disliked the film,[104] she was unable to find any redeeming features in the film's characters, and indeed, the only positive thing about the film in her eyes appeared to be that 'it's a side of life about which I know nothing, so it's interesting to see',[105] revealing an extremely distanced perspective.

The tendency to explicitly detach oneself from the film's target audience was particularly strong among male viewers who disliked the film.[106] Respondents often described the film as appealing to a different age group than the one they belonged to.[107] Participants with a negative response often articulated their dislike in terms of not being able to care about the characters, as in the case of one man in his late fifties who compared the film to Ken Loach's work and 'kitchen sink' realist films, but deemed *The Dreamlife of Angels* less emotionally effective because 'most of the characters had no

[100] D41.
[101] As in so many other things, the *Amélie* case study was unique in involving only positive respondents.
[102] D21.
[103] D7.
[104] She wrote that she would rate it '6/10'.
[105] D7.
[106] As mentioned earlier, some viewers described the film as addressing a female audience (D10) or even a gay female audience (D17).
[107] D10, D21, D38.

connection other than they just met'.[108] His references to specific examples of British cinema are consistent with critical writing about Zonca's film, because reviews often compared the filmmaker to Loach and Mike Leigh. The comments thereby place *The Dreamlife of Angels* within a realist cinematic tradition. It is worth noting that this British viewer compared a French realist film negatively with established conventions in British cinema. It might therefore be the case that this viewer felt more comfortable with realism in British films, associated with his own culture, but expected French cinema to represent a form of cinematic tourism offering a more appealing depiction of reality. On the other hand, Loach could be seen to represent a more traditional approach to social realism, so it might also be new realism's alleged departure from established models that annoyed this respondent. Whatever the reason for his rejection of the film's realism, his criticism focussed on the main characters and their relationships. In his view, the protagonists appeared to be 'shallow', and once this had been established, he did not care about them. He also wrote that the relationships seemed 'alien' and 'did not add up',[109] possibly indicating a problem with the structure of the film. Two other viewers who responded very negatively had similar problems with the film. One of them, a young man, contrasted the protagonist of this film with the eponymous heroine of Jeunet's film:

> With a film like *Amélie*, you learn to like the main character. There was no build up to Isa and I never really felt sorry for her – she also seemed forthright and mischievous at some points and subdued and submissive at others.[110]

Apart from reminding us of *Amélie's* impact on audience expectations of French film, this comment is interesting because it provides an example of a viewer who felt uncomfortable when characters behaved in a contradictory manner that was not explicitly justified in the story. The same viewer described the plot as confusing because it lacked closure in relation to Sandrine (the comatose girl), and because he did not understand why Marie killed herself.[111] The viewing experience appears to have been a deeply negative one, as he thought the film consisted of 'long drawn out scenes of

[108] D38.
[109] D38.
[110] D10.
[111] D10.

nothing' that did not add up to a plot and had no conclusion, 'obvious themes' or 'message'.[112] The use of words here is revealing, since they indicate that unlike the majority of viewers who liked the film, this respondent appeared to prefer film narratives with themes or messages that were unambiguous.

Editing and Film Structure

An older participant, a man in his late sixties, also thought that he knew too little about the characters to feel emotionally engaged, and found the protagonists unsympathetic.[113] Like the younger critical viewer, he seemed to have found the film confusing, but he articulated this problem more specifically in relation to the film's formal structure, writing that 'some sequences seemed irrelevant, or out of context',[114] He clarified this by stating that '[e]diting was poor. Some sequences seemed incomplete. Several sudden jumps between unrelated sequences'.[115] These two viewers shared a negative, confused experience of the film, but while one of them was disturbed by the film's apparent lack of closure and unclear message, the other was irritated by the film's sudden cuts. The differences could here be related to age and film consumption patterns. The younger man had a high-level film of film consumption, but viewed mainly English-language films, while the other respondent, who was forty-seven years old, consumed fewer films, but about the same amount of English-language as non-English-language films. Since he had probably developed these viewing habits over many years, this respondent can be presumed to have had a more wide-ranging experience of world cinema than the teenage research participant, whose film consumption would have been dominated by Hollywood films to a considerable extent. It follows that the older viewer ought not to be surprised by the film's loose structure or lack of conventional closure, since these characteristics have been associated with European cinema at least since the beginnings of neo-realism in post-war Italy. A clue to his problems with the film may be found in the fact that he described it as 'reminiscent of Nouvelle Vague films'.[116]

---

[112] D10.
[113] D5.
[114] D5.
[115] D5.
[116] D5.

Apart from demonstrating that this French film historical moment still remains influential in shaping ideas about French film in Britain,[117] this comment could be related to the use of fast and unconventional cutting techniques in the oeuvre of some French New Wave directors. Jean-Luc Godard has often been credited with introducing into the cinematic mainstream the disorientating edit known as the 'jump cut' in his debut feature *A Bout de Souffle* (1960), and one of the things that this viewer complained about was 'sudden jumps'. Because of the way in which human sight ability changes with age, older viewers often find such stylistic features more disruptive than younger viewers. It is also worth considering that, in addition to the physical and age-related dimension of cognitive abilities, the speed of film cutting in general has increased gradually since the end of the classical Hollywood period,[118] which means that younger film viewers have grown up with different editing norms. Fast cutting practices in television and music video editing have added to this phenomenon. Such common-sense assumptions appear to be confirmed by my audience research, since most of the respondents who complained about fast editing and camera movements were over fifty years old, and no one under thirty had any objections to fast cuts.[119]

A Poignant or Depressing End? Closure and Interpretation

As I mentioned earlier, one of the hostile audience members complained that *The Dreamlife of Angels* did not have a straightforward message, and that it lacked closure.[120] It is therefore interesting to consider what the film meant to other viewers with a less negative reaction, and in particular, how different viewers responded to the film's end. The film ends with Marie's suicide followed by a sequence showing Isa at a new job, seated at a work station among many other women in a large factory. As we shall see, the final sequence was seen by some research participants in this study as shaping the film's overall meaning in a significant way. However, one female respondent, who was hesitant as to whether she liked the film or not, described Marie's

[117] Cf. Mazdon, 'Introduction' in *France on Film*, p. 4.
[118] David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction* (McGraw Hill, Boston; London: Seventh Edition, 2004), p. 327. See also David Bordwell, *On the History of Film Style* (Cambridge; MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 263.
[119] A1, A28, S23.
[120] D10.

suicide as the film's 'last scene'.[121] For this particular research participant, the sudden death of Marie followed by the sound of 'children playing in the background', showing 'life continuing without Marie'[122] appears to have had an overwhelming impact; despite the fact that she completed my questionnaire immediately after the screening, she had already forgotten the closing sequence.

The suicide scene made a strong impression on several other viewers. The French man who saw the film for the second time wrote that '[t]he end is atrocious. Marie['s] straight fall with a noise is a disturbing silent shout of despair.'[123] Other respondents were more interested in the final shot of Isa in the electronics factory, discussing this scene in some detail. In contrast with the young man who was unable to find any meaning or logic to the structure of the film, a frequent cinema-goer, whose film consumption was not dominated by English-language films, wrote:

> One aspect I liked was the obvious symmetry/formalism of Sandrine gradually coming to life and Marie 'gradually dying' i.e. approaching suicide. It made me think about what it means to be alive and/or in a coma. The common element was Isa, who tries to help both Sandrine and Marie. She almost has a role of saviour (is it significant that we see her in a church?), certainly one of communicator. Her communication is always, or very often successful: when she meets Marie, when she talks to Sandrine etc. I thought that the ending was particularly significant – she has to put the right wires in the right holes, and this means knowing which colours 'communicate' (does the supervisor use this word?). The supervisor then says "You must have been doing this all your life"! It has a sort of double meaning; putting the right things together/ making the right decisions. I thought it was very good.[124]

For another viewer, like the previous respondent a frequent cinema-goer in his mid-twenties, the same sequence was a disappointment:

> I thought that for a film that had lingered on its main characters for so long, to suggest that each of these women lived the same way [...] in such an obvious way struck me as cheap.[125]

[121] D14.
[122] D14.
[123] D26.
[124] D22.
[125] D16.

The first of these two respondents adopted an original and multi-layered interpretative strategy that allowed him to see the final scene as celebrating the qualities that he appreciated in the main character. The second viewer's way of making meaning of the final sequence is more conventional, in the sense that many film critics also interpreted this scene as establishing a link between Isa as an individual and the female factory workers as a collective.[126] Unlike these reviewers, however, this respondent felt uncomfortable about seeing the narrative's central protagonist being reduced to part of a collective.

The film's ending also alienated viewers longing for an upbeat message, as in the case of a female researcher, who found the film's suggestion 'that there's no escape. That life is a cycle' depressing.[127] The consumption profile of this viewer shows that she did not view films every week, and the films that she did see tended to be English-language productions rather than non-anglophone films, so it is tempting to explain her negative reaction to the un-happy ending as partly related to being used to more mainstream film types. By contrast, for a male research participant in his mid-twenties, the ending of *The Dreamlife of Angels* was 'moving and poignant bringing the story together by ending the dream'.[128]

Realism, Reality, and Hollywood Happiness

A young German student with a high level of film consumption not dominated by English-language films liked the fact that *The Dreamlife of Angels* 'dealt with a serious topic and that it wasn't one of these "We-are-all-so-happy" Hollywood films.'[129] Although as Hallam and Marshment point out, the narrative device of happy endings is probably as old as story-telling itself, and is a common convention in films from all over the world, it has become particularly closely associated with American genre films.[130]

---

[126] Cf. Gavin Smith, 'La Vie rêvée des anges', *Sight and Sound*, 8.11 (1998), p. 64, Trevor Johnston, 'Party Girls', *Scotsman*, 29 August 1998, p. 6.
[127] D11.
[128] D13.
[129] D18.
[130] Cf. Hallam and Marshment, *Realism and Popular Cinema*, p. 63.

For this viewer, *The Dreamlife of Angels'* seriousness signalled its difference from European cinema's Other, Hollywood.[131] The tendency to define Zonca's film as 'realist' is connected to its perceived relationship to Hollywood. Cinematic realism is created through formal conventions that vary in different local and historical contexts, '*not* a single, homogenous mode that always works in the same way'.[132] It does however occupy a paradoxical position within critical debates. Throughout film history, critics have approvingly labelled films that in their view offer a more truthful representation of social reality than mainstream cinema as 'realist'.[133] However, the ideological critiques of the 1970s perceived the seamless mode of narration described in Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson's *Classical Hollywood Cinema* [134] as the logical heir to the classic realist novel of the 19th century. In such accounts, realism has been accused of reinforcing the status quo of dominant ideology. Contrasted with avant-garde and experimental film forms realism appears to pretend to offer a natural reflection of the world rather than a representation shaped by social and historical context.[135] According to this critique of illusory realism, 'Hollywood constructs false (idealised, utopian) constructions of the real world which are validated through mimetic (realist) strategies.'[136]

Hallam and Marshment propose an understanding of realism as 'a hybridised continuum of signifying conventions',[137] and they identify realism as a feature of popular Hollywood genre cinema in terms of mise-en-scène and character behaviour that seems plausible within the film's fictional world.[138] However, for many of the audience members who contributed to this case study, the emphasis on special effects and spectacle in contemporary Hollywood cinema was contrasted with a more 'authentic' representation of the world in European cinema. Research participants thus employed what Hallam and Marshment terms the 'critical rhetoric of realism' that traditionally has tended to criticise Hollywood and other mainstream cinemas for their presentation of

[131] Thomas Elsaesser, *European Cinema: Face to Face with Hollywood* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005), p. 300.
[132] Hallam and Marshment, *Realism and Popular Cinema*, p. xvi (italics in original).
[133] Hallam and Marshment, *Realism and Popular Cinema,* p. xiii, 3-4.
[134] David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985).
[135] Hallam and Marshment, *Realism and Popular Cinema,* pp. xiii, 10.
[136] Hallam and Marshment, *Realism and Popular Cinema,* p. 98.
[137] Hallam and Marshment, *Realism and Popular Cinema,* p. 100.
[138] Cf. Hallam and Marshment, *Realism and Popular Cinema*, p. 63.

'unlikely situations and unnatural events'.[139] Indeed, aside from the actors' performances and the appealing character of Isa, characteristics associated with the critical definitions of realism were among the things that respondents liked most about *The Dreamlife Angels*.[140] A forty-year-old man stated that the film was 'sometimes a bit slow' and 'repetitive', but he then qualified his comment, exclaiming 'but that's how it is in real life!'[141] The fact of being like 'real life' was here assumed to carry a value in itself, making up for any dullness caused by slow tempo and/or repetition. In this context, and thinking also about negative audience comments about confusing structure and editing discussed earlier on, is it useful to consider Torben Grodal's observation about what he calls 'emotional realism'; that is, when deviations from the smooth narration associated with classical filmmaking subject the viewer to stressful and nervous experiences that in themselves are seen to strengthen the film's reality effect.[142]

A postgraduate student in his early twenties whose first language was Chinese[143] stated that he liked the film's portrayal of 'the real world and the life of low class people. They live in poor conditions and have a bitter life.'[144] Among viewers whose consumption was dominated by English-language film, terms like 'documentary'[145] and 'semi documentary account'[146] were used to describe Zonca's film. Other respondents characterised it as 'real life'[147] 'taken from life'[148] and 'life portrait'.[149] Such expressions imply a close relationship between filmic fiction and reality,[150] and this reality effect can

---

[139] Hallam and Marshment, *Realism and Popular Cinema*, p. 77.
[140] D3, D6, D12, D27, D31, D34, D37.
[141] D40.
[142] Torben Grodal, 'The Experience of Realism in Audiovisual Representation' in *Realism and 'Reality' in Film and Media*, ed. by Anne Jerslev (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2002), pp. 67-91 (p. 78). The notion of a 'reality effect' as used in this thesis is intended to describe an effect that is accepted as 'realistic' by the film audience; it is thus a more basic definition than *l'effet du réel* as theorised by Roland Barthes, and should be considered as separate from the specific semiotic connotations of his argument. Cf. 'The Reality Effect', originally published in 1968, trans. by Richard Howard in *The Rustle of Language*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), pp. 141-148.
[143] It is not clear from his comments whether his country of origin was mainland China or another Chinese-speaking territory.
[144] D12.
[145] D23.
[146] D1.
[147] D39.
[148] D18.
[149] D25.
[150] The two latter viewers were not native English speakers, and might have chosen different terms if writing in German or French respectively.

be related to formal aspects of the film. Like many contemporary fiction filmmakers, Zonca has copied aspects of the documentary look such as non-classical lighting, focus and framing and handheld camera movements. The implication of such strategies, as Grodal highlights, is that the film appears to have been made in 'un-staged nonfiction conditions'.[151]

Film Taste, Class, and Politics

As I explained in the introductory chapter, the research audience participating in this project consisted primarily of film viewers from the middle to upper socio-economic categories.[152] It is therefore interesting to consider how they approached the fact that the protagonists of *The Dreamlife of Angels* live on the margins of society, in a reality far removed from that of the British research audience not just geographically, but also in terms of its focus on a different social stratum. One respondent who worked in a managerial position reacted in a manner that was possibly connected to his class identity. He wrote that he disliked the final scene because it 'demonstrated the reality of life, drudgery of unskilled work',[153] a comment that might reveal a sense of discomfort caused by being reminded of the situation of people less fortunately placed in society than himself.

The Chinese student cited above suggested that the film addressed 'low class people',[154] but this perception of the film's target audience was an exception to the rule. Most research participants characterised the audience in terms of having a particular sensibility as 'cinema enthusiasts',[155] viewers with a taste for 'ambitious'[156] or 'serious'[157] films, who did not go to the cinema just 'for amusement',[158] but 'sensitive' and 'intelligent' viewers 'willing to learn something'.[159] Some respondents defined the

[151] Grodal, 'The Experience of Realism in Audiovisual Representation', p. 77.
[152] See **Figure 23** and **Figure 31**.
[153] D42.
[154] D12.
[155] D32.
[156] D24.
[157] D18.
[158] D18.
[159] D19.

target audience negatively as 'not the 'standard Hollywood' audience',[160] and one student wrote that the 'long crying scene in the church' was something that mainstream audiences would have disliked. This allowed him to distance himself from the average cinema-goer, emphasising his cultural distinction by asserting that he, by contrast, found that particular scene beautiful.[161] A teacher in his early fifties specified that '[t]he French and English audiences would be different. In France, I think mainly younger people (student age to under fifties) who like regular cinema'.[162] Although this viewer did not specify in what way the British audience for *The Dreamlife of Angels* would differ from the French audience, he seemed to think that the film would attract older viewers with a less mainstream film consumption profile.

As I indicated earlier in this chapter, many viewers in this case study consciously or unconsciously regarded themselves as different from mainstream popular cinema audiences in Britain. However, if it was common for viewers to identify with film tastes that could be described as elite and thus implicitly associated with a higher social stratum, most respondents stayed away from the issue of class in their comments. This is particularly interesting considering that critical and scholarly debates surrounding the film have tended to focus on socio-political questions and the representation of work, unemployment and class,[163] and it raises questions about how the notion of political cinema relate to film audiences.

It was more common among professional respondents than among students to associate specialised or elite film tastes with the middle or upper social classes. One young student explicitly wrote that *The Dreamlife of Angels* had an appeal that was not necessarily limited to a particular class.[164] This might be connected to the fact that for people in full-time education, who do not yet know where they will fit in society, Britain's class system may appear less significant and more fluid than for those in full-time

[160] D22.
[161] D22.
[162] D3.
[163] O'Shaughnessy, *The New Face of Political Cinema,* pp. 84, 100-101.
[164] D19.

employment. Furthermore, in the UK, both staff and students in the Higher Education sector are more likely to be from a middle-class than a working-class background.[165]

A local government employee in his mid-twenties described the film's ideal audience as 'a somewhat 'highbrow' one, an 'arty' kind of audience who enjoy contemplating the abstractness of the film',[166] while a retired university teacher wrote that the film was aimed at a 'middle class intellectual'[167] audience. A British student in his early twenties wrote that he thought the film would appeal to a 'socially/sociologically interested viewer'.[168] This provided him with an apolitical way of suggesting that film viewing might function as a way of gaining insights into different parts of society. By contrast, one of the French participants was of the opinion that the film would appeal to 'cinema lovers' and 'left-wing voters', but specified that it was not aimed at 'working-class people'.[169] This statement implies that although the film deals with social concerns and according to this viewer would attract people interested in improving the lot of the socially marginalised, it was not intended for those with personal experience of economic hardship.

Content, Style, and Interpretation

As Grodal observes, realism is often associated with downbeat rather than upbeat representations of the world, and he notes that we base our understanding of concepts such as 'realism' and 'reality' on 'normative evaluations of what is typical of real life'.[170] Grodal suggests that the tendency in realist representations to focus on misery rather than the bright side of life can be understood not simply in terms of a 'a political wish for advocating empathy, but also a feeling that pain and deprivation are more real than pleasure'.[171] Similarly, films about ordinary people tend to be perceived as more realist than depictions of celebrities; a film about a family on a council estate is more

[165] Across the audience study as a whole, research participants often revealed a blind spot for areas where their collective as opposed to individual identity raised problematic questions.
[166] D13.
[167] D33.
[168] D9.
[169] D25.
[170] Grodal, 'The Experience of Realism in Audiovisual Representation', p. 70.
[171] Grodal, 'The Experience of Realism in Audiovisual Representation', p. 87. As Grodal points out, Freud labelled psychological mechanisms linked to pain the 'reality principle'.

likely to be considered as realist than a portrayal of the royal family, regardless of the fact that technically, both films can base their representations on real-life models and use formal strategies associated with realism.

Considering that many people characterised the film as 'serious' and commented on gloomy aspects of the narrative such as Marie's suicide and her destructive relationship with Chriss, it is worth noting that a fair number of those who liked the film also managed to find a hopeful message or promise of change in the film. They often referred to Isa as the source of this optimism. Few of these viewers were high-level film consumers, and they almost invariably tended to watch more English-language productions than non-anglophone films.[172] Research participants in this case study whose consumption was not dominated by English-language films were much more likely to rate the realistic aspects of *The Dreamlife of Angels* than to discuss hopeful or optimistic readings of the film.[173] Among films available to British film audiences, non-English language titles are on average less likely to fit into the 'feel-good' category with uplifting messages and happy endings than the big Hollywood productions that dominate the UK market. Viewers of *The Dreamlife of Angels* who were more accustomed to English-language films seemed inclined to look for a more positive message in the film, whereas those respondents who saw at least as many or more non-English languages films tended to focus on formal film aspects including cinematography, acting, structure and mise-en-scène that contributed to the film's reality effect.

Melodrama, Moral Messages, and Emotion

It was also more common for viewers less accustomed to non-English-language film to summarise the film's overall meaning in slightly moralistic terms, emphasising the responsibility of the individual. A young female student wrote '[l]ife continues - only you can change it to make it better. We're all responsible for our own lives'.[174] In a slightly different vein, but still emphasising the need of individual action, a forty-year-old man wrote that the film's message was 'You cannot rely on anybody but

[172] D8, D11, D16, D19, D28, D33, D42.
[173] D3, D6, D12, D25, D27, D34.
[174] D37.

yourself'.[175] For a young female student, the film showed that 'there exists two kinds/categories of people, those who despite hardships of life [...] succeed at the end, and by contrast [...] people who do not want to try'.[176] These interpretation strategies recall the tendency among *Amélie* viewers to interpret the film in moral terms as confirming their view on how life should be lived. In this context, it is interesting to reconsider O'Shaughnessy's claim, quoted in the beginning of this chapter, that new realist films incorporate melodramatic elements such as the 'restoration of ethical transparency to a world that has become opaque' and an 'emotive focus on individuals and families rather than abstract forces'.[177] Historically, melodrama has been associated with popular cinema and with a female audience. Furthermore, melodramatic qualities are seen to elicit emotional viewer responses, whereas it has generally been accepted as a given in debates around art cinema and realism that formal innovation cues viewers to interpret films intellectually rather than emotionally.[178] As O'Shaughnessy writes:

> Whereas realism in its more objectivist variants might be associated with a cold, analytical eye, melodrama calls for strong emotional engagement through the staging of heightened conflicts and through a characteristic recourse to suspense and brinkmanship.[179]

Realism and melodrama are often defined as binary opposites in critical discourse; while realism is associated with 'authenticity and truth', melodrama stands for 'exaggeration, sensationalism and sentimentality'.[180] O'Shaughnessy summarises conventional perceptions of the relationship:

> Associated to a high degree with a flat, dedramatized and documentary-like recording of the world, realism would seem irreconcilable, on the surface at least, with the heightened and contrived effects of melodrama as well as with the declamatory and apparently artificial nature of the theatrical. [181]

---

[175] D40. Similarly, a housewife in her early fifties thought that the film's message was '[l]ife is what you make it' (D39).
[176] D23. Cf. the following statement from a research associate in her late twenties: 'you get from life what you put in – two people can be in the same social/economic situation, but if their outlooks are different then what they experience will also be different. It's about engaging with life' (D11).
[177] O'Shaughnessy, *The New Face of Political Cinema,* p. 136.
[178] Hallam and Marshment, *Realism and Popular Cinema*, p. xiv.
[179] O'Shaughnessy, *The New Face of Political Cinema,* p. 132.
[180] Hallam and Marshment, *Realism and Popular Cinema*, p. 19.
[181] O'Shaughnessy, *The New Face of Political Cinema,* p. 131.

However, drawing on Peter Brooks' *The Melodramatic Imagination*,[182] O'Shaughnessy argues that 'realist and melodramatic drives can exist in complex and productive tension'.[183] With specific reference to realism in recent French cinema, he describes films like *The Dreamlife of Angels* as melodramatic and theatrical; thematically, by 'drawing on highly charged stories of individuals...as a way to dramatize contemporary systemic violences' and formally, by 'restoring eloquence to a real that no longer speaks to us adequately'.[184] O'Shaughnessy's discussion of melodramatic characteristics such as 'climactic moments when characters confront one another with full expressivity to fix the meaning of relationships', using 'accentuated gestures and statements'[185] provides a perceptive description of Zonca's film, and may provide a textual clue to research audience interest in the relationship between characters. Furthermore, the film's emotional impact appeared to be a highly significant aspect of the viewing experience for audiences in this case study. Indeed, as will become clear in the next two chapters, the tendency to emphasise emotional reactions was widespread among participants in the project as a whole. By acknowledging the co-existence of melodramatic and realist elements in *The Dreamlife of Angels* and the importance of viewers' emotional responses to the film, this thesis poses a challenge to traditional distinctions between art and popular cinema. The findings raises questions about how we define the formal characteristics associated with these film forms and the ways in which audiences approach and interpret the films.

Personal Responsibility and Crushed Dreams

Respondents who disliked the film also contrasted the two protagonists through moral value judgments, as in the case of two research participants in their early sixties who defined their overall interpretations of the film as, respectively, 'Isabelle who had a warmer heart survived, cold hearted Marie did not',[186] and 'in life you get what you

[182] Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976).
[183] O'Shaughnessy, *The New Face of Political Cinema,* p. 131.
[184] O'Shaughnessy, *The New Face of Political Cinema,* p. 131.
[185] O'Shaughnessy, *The New Face of Political Cinema,* p. 132.
[186] D21.

deserve'.[187] One of the French respondents provided a slightly contradictory explanation of the film's message. He wrote that 'life is a cycle, you either accept it and get on, or you can't fit', a view somewhat similar to the interpretation cited above that emphasised personal responsibility. However, he then stated that 'you are conditioned to leading a "loser" life when raised that way',[188] a statement that seems decidedly deterministic in its view of social conditioning. A few other viewers also thought that there were limits to what individuals could change about their lives,[189] but these respondents tended to show more empathy towards the characters, describing them in terms that suggest that they were seen as equals to the respondent rather than 'losers'. A forty-year-old housewife who felt depressed by the film's bleakness but still liked it thought that *The Dreamlife of Angels* showed 'how easy it is to give up and give up upon our dreams'.[190] Referring to 'our dreams' implies that the respondent was thinking about humanity in general rather than the situation of two specific characters in a particular social and cultural context, but it also means that unlike some of the other viewers, who detached themselves from the characters in their answers, this research participant included herself in the same reality as the characters.

Similarly, a man in his mid-twenties wrote:

> Isa is very cheeky, lives on her wits, is full of personality and wanders freely however, in the end she succumbs. Marie dreams of romance with a man like Chris, but this is finally doomed. In short the film is about how the world around us crushes our dreams.[191]

This downbeat view of how society curtails the opportunities of individuals clashed with that of a young female viewer who thought the film was 'about forgiveness, understanding, unhappiness, balance. Sandrine lives and Marie dies. Somehow it ends HOPEFUL'.[192] Despite interpreting the overall meaning of the film differently, neither of these two viewers judged the characters. The young female student wrote:

---

[187] D7.
[188] D25.
[189] D1, D13, D34.
[190] D34.
[191] D13.
[192] D19.

> I liked how both girls were portrayed, in all their differences and, especially Marie, with all their faults. Yes, could not help but feel sympathetic towards them. Marie's violent outbursts to I[sa] and C[hriss] were things I could relate to, if not in that extreme. Isa's thoughtful yet happy-go-lucky demeanour was touching. All in all, I feel like maybe this movie made me a little less judgemental. The scene in which Isa promotes Marie: does the little difference in class matter?[193]

This is one of the few specific references to class among audience responses, and interestingly enough it is a paraphrase from the film's dialogue, reminding us that although research participants in general appeared reluctant to discuss questions around class, such issues are specifically addressed within the film narrative itself.

Dreamlife and Reality

In addition to the interpretations described above, a few other tendencies can be identified among viewers' interpretative strategies. Respondents who did not like the film were less prone to engage with the film's overall meaning in any detailed manner, and often simply stated that its theme had to do with friendship.[194] Other research participants discussed the relationship between dreams and reality,[195] or thought that the theme of the film was real life and how to deal with it.[196] Although these interpretations came from viewers with varying levels of pre-knowledge of French and other non-English-language films, viewers who on the whole consumed mainly English-language films and/or had a low level of film consumption were much more likely to describe the overall meaning of *The Dreamlife of Angels* in terms of a moral message. I already noted this trend earlier in relation to issues surrounding realism, and there were many examples of viewers with limited previous exposure to European cinema summarising the meaning of the films in terms like 'try to find your dreams and live them every minute and every second',[197] or 'don't be frivolous with life'.[198] Viewers who were more sceptical about interpreting films in such simple terms, and less likely to want to find a straight-forward moral message in the film generally consumed more films, and in

[193] D19.
[194] D5, D10, D17, D41.
[195] D12, D16, D26, D29.
[196] D4, D6, D18, D27, D28, D33, D36, D42.
[197] D16.
[198] D36. Cf. also 'enjoy life but remember – it's only one!' (D24).

particular had more experience of non-mainstream films made outside Hollywood. As in the *Amélie* audience many viewers referred to the relationship between dreams and reality in their comments. In the case of *The Dreamlife of Angels*, however, it is worth noting that the film's title seems to have prompted viewers' thoughts in this direction.

Authorship, Film Style, and Gender Differences

In the previous chapter, I suggested that for viewers with cinephile tendencies, an auteurist approach could help emphasise the artistic aspects of the film over its popular elements and thus confirm respondents' self-images as culturally distinguished, discerning film consumers. Since the New Waves of the 1960s and the rise of the New American Cinema, the concept of the director as creative force behind the film has become widely popularised, extended from the realm of art cinema to popular film culture, and increasingly used as a marketing strategy. Young British audiences today are therefore just as likely as – or perhaps even more inclined than – older viewers to pay attention to the name of the film director. Jean-Pierre Jeunet, the director of the film considered in the previous chapter, is associated with a specific style, and many *Amélie* audience members were familiar with other parts of his oeuvre.

Amélie's digitally manipulated mise-en-scène offered viewers a stylised vision of Paris that drew attention to its status as a fiction constructed by a creative personality. By contrast, the realist film language employed by Zonca in *The Dreamlife of Angels*, partly derived from aesthetics associated with documentary filmmaking, could be seen to strive towards the illusion of representing 'real' reality, as opposed to the vision of the filmmaker.[199] At the same time, there are of course many auteur directors who are associated specifically with realism; in David Bordwell's definition, one of the key characteristics of art cinema is the tension between 'realism and authorial expressivity'.[200] *The Dreamlife of Angels* was Zonca's first feature film. Neither his second feature-length film *Le Petit Voleur*, produced for French television, nor his short films were available to British audiences at the time of the research screening.

---

[199] Of course, as Hallam and Marshment point out, the documentary claim to present 'the real' is today in itself a contested area, subject to debates and controversy. Cf. *Realism and Popular Cinema*, p. 226.
[200] David Bordwell, 'The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice' in *The European Cinema Reader*, ed. by Catherine Fowler (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 94-102 (p. 98).

Therefore, although viewers often discussed their experience of *The Dreamlife of Angels* in relation to the film's theme and style, it is not surprising that they tended to refer explicitly to the actors' performances than to the direction. At the same time, it is worth mentioning that the two respondents who mentioned to the director in their comments were men. This is interesting when we consider that the viewers who discussed Jeunet's contribution to *Amélie*, with specific references to the film's aesthetics, were also overwhelmingly male. The only participant in this case study who made an explicitly auteurist statement, referring to Zonca by name and discussing the film's meaning in terms of directorial intent, was a French research participant in his mid-twenties.[201] His references to the Dardenne brothers and Mathieu Kassovitz indicated that he placed *The Dreamlife of Angels* within the broader framework of the *jeune cinéma* or 'new realism' discussed at the beginning of this chapter. The films associated with these labels tend to be examples of auteur cinema. In his focus on film style, this French respondent resembled auteurist male viewers in the *Amélie* audience, who often referred to stylistic aspects of the film in order to motivate their value judgments. Two men in their late fifties in the audience for *The Dreamlife of Angels* specifically named the 'handheld camera' as an aspect of the film that they particularly liked.[202] In an inverse reaction, a few male respondents cited elements of cinematography and editing when explaining what they disliked.[203] Female viewers who referred to stylistic aspects of the film in their comments tended to focus on the setting and locations, in particular the apartment where many of the scenes between Isa and Marie take place,[204] although a couple of women in their mid-twenties commented on *The Dreamlife of Angels'* 'undramatised style'[205] and 'the way it has been filmed'[206] when they motivated their appreciation of the film.

As I mentioned earlier, one female viewer in her late fifties was particularly impressed by the film's use of close-ups,[207] and another woman cited 'camera work' among the things that she liked about the film,[208] so to state that male viewers were more technical

[201] D26.
[202] D38, D42.
[203] D5, D17.
[204] D8, D11, D14.
[205] D35.
[206] D27.
[207] D28.
[208] D34.

in their analyses of the film's attraction would be too simplistic. The one positive aspect about the film that achieved consensus among viewers across the board in terms of age, gender, and film consumption habits was the quality of the acting or characterisation.[209] Viewers who combined a high level of non-English-language film consumption with frequent cinema attendance and/or high film consumption, and thus might be considered slightly more specialist in their viewing practices, were more likely to discuss the *performance* of the actresses, while those who were less accustomed to viewing large amounts of different types of films often wrote about what they liked about the *characters*.

French Cinema and Sex

Although some respondents in the *Amélie* case study associated French cinema with sexual explicitness, this tendency was stronger in the audience for *The Dreamlife of Angels*.[210] Many respondents reported that they felt uncomfortable during the sex scenes between Chriss and Marie.[211] The most frequently cited reason for this reaction was that the scenes had a violent undertone and, as one viewer put it, 'it wasn't clear what was wanted and what was forced'.[212] One young woman seemed to be uncomfortable with the idea of on-screen sex scenes in general, regardless of the context,[213] and a man in his mid-twenties explained that 'this was my first screening and I didn't want it to look like I came to see sex!',[214] an interesting statement since it demonstrates the importance of the film viewing context for members of the audience. To view a sex scene alone or in the company of people you know can be very different from experiencing sexual explicitness on the screen in a public screening among strangers.

The fact that *The Dreamlife of Angels* did contain sex scenes meant that in comparison with *Amélie*, there was less disparity between respondents' expectations of French film and their descriptions of what appeared to be culturally specific in this particular case

---

[209] D1, D2, D4, D5, D8, D10, D11, D16, D17, D19, D23, D25, D26, D31, D33, D34, D35, D40, D41.
[210] D8, D11, D21, D36, D39, D40.
[211] D5, D8, D16, D18, D21, D23, D30, D36, D37.
[212] D8.
[213] D37.
[214] D16.

study film. Thus a forty-year-old man, who expected French films to involve 'lots of talking' and 'liberated sex scenes!' described 'the casualness of the sex scenes'[215] as a French characteristic in Zonca's film. As I suggested in the introductory chapter, there are historical connections between the export of European art cinema to anglophone territories and expectations of a kind of risqué realism associated with 'explicit depiction of sex and drugs rather than political or aesthetic commitment'.[216] As Joel Black argues with reference to contemporary film culture and the increased use of graphic material in films, physicality and explicit sex in cinema today can also be seen as creating a reality effect through viewers' heightened awareness of the use of film as 'photographic evidence' and surveillance in relation to crime.[217] However, in this research audience, the association between sex and French cinema did not seem to connect with realism. One young woman described French films as 'funny, erotic, bright, good music, good food shown', and went on to cite scenes showing 'sex' and 'cooking' as examples of what made *The Dreamlife of Angels* seem French to her.[218] Her comments do not conjure up an image of graphic realism, but rather a feel-good film, fulfilling an appetite for food and sex whilst entertaining through humour and music.

French Culture: Visions from Across the Channel

None of the French research participants thought that sex scenes or nudity was a particularly French characteristic; they were more likely to associate French films with particular qualities, in particular in terms of story-telling and acting[219] or simply with the French language.[220] The French respondents cited the film's realism, reliance on acting performances, setting and rough look as examples of the film's French identity.[221] This suggests that for these viewers, auteur cinema rather than popular genre films defined French national cinema. One of the French respondents also provided a specific

---

[215] D40.
[216] Elsaesser, *European Cinema*, p. 146.
[217] Joel Black, *The Reality Effect: Film Culture and the Graphic Imperative* (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 8.
[218] D8.
[219] D26, D27.
[220] D25.
[221] D25, D26.

suggestion about how first-hand experience of French culture might affect interpretation of the film:

> The job market for instance is seen very differently in France and England, because of a higher unemployment rate (which was already true at the time).[222]

The same viewer, a man in his mid-twenties, also described 'women rebelling' as a French theme. This idea has some similarities with the comments made by a female French respondent of a similar age, who thought that French cinema was characterised by 'characters with a lot of personality',[223] and singled out 'the attitudes of the girls (strong personality)',[224] as an aspect of *The Dreamlife of Angels* that she saw as specifically French.

It is interesting to contrast these ideas about strong French women on the screen with the views of a British woman in her late twenties, whose expectations of French film was summarised as 'odd, very inward-looking, possibly a bit full of itself...Oh, and nudity'.[225] For her, the most culturally specific thing about *The Dreamlife of Angels* was the 'club owner with his multiple lovers and the women accepting this'.[226] A comparison of these seemingly incompatible interpretations – on the one hand, a representation of French women as strong, feisty and rebellious, and on the other what appears to be a criticism of women putting up with men behaving in unacceptable ways – makes it clear that viewers look for evidence that support values that they already have. Whether or not the film characters Marie and Isa do or do not correspond to the notion of strong female characters is irrelevant; the interesting point is that viewers interpreted the female roles in a manner that confirmed their pre-existing ideas about women's position in French society. The interpretation thus says more about the opinions of the respondents themselves than about the content of the film, supporting my hypothesis about the importance of context over text. With regards to the British woman cited above it is important to keep in mind that one statement taken out of context cannot explain the

[222] D26.
[223] D27.
[224] D27.
[225] D11.
[226] D11.

often complex set of emotions and thoughts that a film can provoke. This particular viewer provided detailed comments on the film, and her responses are very interesting because of the nuances articulated through the contradictions between her answers. For example, she associated Isa with 'unassailable optimism', yet the film gave her 'the sense that there's no escape', and when asked how she would categorise the film she wrote that 'it was a fairly serious film although it didn't always feel like it'.[227] While the French respondents who referred to strong female personalities in French culture clearly saw this as a national character trait evident in *The Dreamlife of Angels*, it is important to acknowledge that appreciation of one's 'national heritage' can arguably be reinforced in a different cultural context, whether through nostalgia or simply through pleasure in being reminded of little details such as the sound of the language or the look of everyday objects.

I have dwelt upon the difference between responses from French research participants and other audience members not in order to suggest that British viewers have an erroneous idea about French film or culture, or that the views of these particular French viewers should in any way be seen as representative of French audiences more generally. However, the lack of references to sex, angst, and philosophy in the responses from French research participants serve as a reminder that when British audiences associate these themes with French film culture, they are using a specific interpretative framework based on expectations built up in relation to critical discourse and the kinds of French films that have been circulating and achieved success on the British art cinema circuit.

Intertextual Frameworks

In the second chapter, I discussed how viewers approached *Amélie* in terms of genre, showing how the film was perceived by some (mainly female respondents) as a romantic comedy and by other (mainly male participants) as an auteur film. Participants attending the screenings of *The Dreamlife of Angels* tended to define the film with the generically

[227] D11.

vague classification 'drama'.[228] However, many viewers also referred to the film's artistic quality, its realism or seriousness, thereby placing it in the category of art cinema,[229] while a few respondents labelled the film according to its nationality.[230] One of the latter viewers compared *The Dreamlife of Angels* to titles from 1980s and 1990s French auteur cinema, with examples including *Vagabond* (*Sans toit ni loi*, 1985), *La Cérémonie* (1995) and *The Green Ray* (*Le Rayon vert*, 1986).[231] This man was fifty years old, and currently a low-level film consumer who tended to view mainly English-language films, but it seems quite likely that he had consumed more French films in the past. Another one of the respondents who had placed emphasis on the national identity of Zonca's film simply stated that it had the 'familiar sombre even pace of so many French films'[232] without providing any examples. Similarly, one man claimed that although *The Dreamlife of Angels* did not remind him of any specific film, it was 'unmistakably French'.[233]

When viewers compared *The Dreamlife of Angels* to other French-language films, they usually referred to titles released in Britain during the five years preceding the research screenings, such as *Baise-moi* (2000),[234] *The Son* (*Le Fils*, 2002),[235] and *Ultranova* (2005).[236] The slightly earlier *La Haine* (1995)[237] also featured, however, reflecting its impact on British audiences. The episodic narratives of *The Son* and *Ultranova* depict the lives of ordinary people in non-metropolitan areas and their style corresponds to the idea of 'new realism' in French cinema as described in the beginning of this chapter. Both films are however Franco-Belgian co-productions set in Belgium, which highlights the fact that it can be reductive and misleading to pigeonhole films according to national production background or setting; it also suggests that it may be beneficial to consider

---

[228] D10, D11, D14, D24, D26, D27, D35, D37, D38, D40, D41, D42.
[229] D3, D4, D7, D8, D13, D14, D18, D19, D22, D24, D31, D34, D36, D39.
[230] D29, D31, D32. It is worth noting that research participants might have been more likely to categorise the film as 'French' had they not already been explicitly invited by the researcher to see a French film and asked questions about the film in relation to its nationality; in this context, to describe the film as 'French' might have been seen as too obvious.
[231] D31.
[232] D32.
[233] D36.
[234] D11.
[235] D26.
[236] D25.
[237] D26.

'new realism' as a transnational European trend. Depicting demoralised youth involved in violence, drugs, and controversial sex scenes, *Baise-moi* represents the more controversial side of recent French auteur cinema referred to in Chapter 1. Despite more widespread success with audiences, to a certain extent *La Haine* can be placed in the same category of French cinema due to its sensationalist treatment of social problems in the *banlieus*. Research participants with a broader awareness of recent French cinema were thus able to place *The Dreamlife of Angels* within an intertextual framework similar to the strategies employed by British critics. However, as I have argued in previous chapters, for viewers less familiar with French cinema, setting can take precedent over language when it comes to defining Frenchness. In this case study, this was exemplified by two different viewers who were reminded of *Chocolat* (2002) when watching Zonca's film.[238]

Many viewers also compared *The Dreamlife of Angels* to non-French productions, linking the film to on the one hand productions that have been defined as realist in critical discourse and on the other films that seemed to connect with Zonca's film on a thematic level, such as the focus on female friendship or the topic of suicide.[239] Almost all of these films were European, indicating that respondents generally perceived *The Dreamlife of Angels* as a 'European film' regardless of whether or not they saw it as representative of French cinema.

The *Amélie* Effect

In Chapter 2, I showed that respondents across the research project as a whole drew connections between *Amélie*, quirkiness, feel-good qualities and French film. On the basis of these findings, I argued that expectations of French cinema in Britain have altered as a result of *Amélie's* popularity. Although the audience for *The Dreamlife of*

[238] D8, D33. As in the case with respondent A9 (see note 256 in Chapter 2), it is possible (but not probable) that these viewers could have meant Claire Denis' *Chocolat* rather than Hallström's *Chocolat*. Another respondent (D6) compared the film to *The Dreamers* (*Les Innocents*, 2003), a French-British-Italian co-production with an American character at the centre of the story.

[239] D2, D3, D6, D10, D12, D13, D15, D16, D17, D18, D19, D22, D38. The Spanish film *Talk to Her* (*Hable con ella*, 2002) which shares with Zonca's film the theme of a character interacting with a comatose person also featured in three responses. (D27, D29, D30).

Angels included three participants who had also attended a screening of *Amélie*,[240] Jeunet's film featured in responses from viewers who had seen *Amélie* independently, separate from this research context. I have already mentioned that a young man who was very critical of *The Dreamlife of Angels* contrasted Isa with the eponymous heroine of Jeunet's film.[241] Another respondent who explicitly stated that he expected a French film 'to be rather like 'Amélie' slightly quirky'[242] also had a negative response to *The Dreamlife of Angels*. British critical discourse surrounding Zonca's film tended to place it within the context of realism, either by relating it to other French or European films or by comparing it to British social realism. By contrast, *Amélie* was not seen as realist, and both positive and negative reviews in the British press described Jeunet's film as unrepresentative of French cinema. At the level of production, there are in fact some interesting links between the two French case studies in this thesis. Both films received financial support from French television, and there are overlaps in terms of the TV companies contributing to the productions. Yann Tiersen, whose soundtrack for *Amélie* was a huge success, also wrote the music for *The Dreamlife of Angels*. *Amélie* can be connected with the *jeune cinéma français* discussed in this chapter via Jeunet's directorial back catalogue – his collaborations with Marc Caro have sometimes been placed in this context – and via Mathieu Kassovitz, playing Amélie's love interest Nino in Jeunet's film but even more famous as the director of *La Haine*. Zonca's film was a minor hit with French audiences, so within the French context, both films could be seen as examples of auteur cinema with popular appeal, even though of course *Amélie* box office success was exceptional. In the British context, however, critics approached *The Dreamlife of Angels* as an example of realist French art cinema for elite audiences, whereas *Amélie* was discussed in terms of its extraordinary popularity, and therefore perceived as antithetical to new realism.

My research confirms that Jeunet's film appealed to a younger audience with a more popular film taste. However, there were significant overlaps between the French case study audiences; also among research participants who liked *The Dreamlife of Angels*, *Amélie* was considered as a benchmark of French cinema against which other films

[240] D3, D13, D14.
[241] D10.
[242] D38.

could be measured. When a young female student stated that she 'wasn't crazy about Amélie',[243] the fact that *Amélie* was the first title that came to mind when she described her expectations of French cinema demonstrates how the film has come to dominate the public conception of contemporary French cinema in Britain. Contrasting with the critical tendency to see Jeunet's film as fundamentally different from other French films, one female viewer in her early fifties wrote that *The Dreamlife of Angels* 'had a very familiar feeling – *Amélie/Chocolate*' [*sic*].[244] Somewhat more hesitantly, a forty-year-old woman also drew parallels between the films, explaining that *The Dreamlife of Angels* reminded her '[p]erhaps a tiny bit of *Amélie,* although *Amélie* was basically very positive but perhaps in the attention to detail, observation of the characters – direction'.[245]

A student in his mid-twenties identified contrasts rather than similarities between the films:

> [I]t didn't seem French to me [...]. I suppose I have an image of France from – most recently – *Amélie* and even *Moulin Rouge* [2001]– which paints a far prettier picture of life there.[246]

His comment suggests that the privileged status of Paris as a location in French cinema has had a significant impact on audience expectations and therefore can be more important than production background or language when British audiences think about Frenchness and film. The respondent expected a French film to be 'a quirky tale', but specified that 'it would depend on how old, I've seen some old Godard pictures and even earlier films with a more serious tone'.[247] For this viewer, seriousness belonged to historical French cinema, while contemporary French film was associated with the more upbeat, glossy character of *Amélie*. These considerations also came into play when he tried to define his expectations of European film:

---

[243] D19. She thereby becomes the only research participant in this project to be explicitly negative about *Amélie*.
[244] D33. See note 238 above and note 256 in Chapter 2.
[245] D34.
[246] D16.
[247] D16.

> I guess, gritty. It's hard to make generalisations because something like *Taxi* [1998] and *Amélie* sit next to *Three Colours Red* [1993] and *Metropolis* [1927]'.[248]

Despite indicating that he did not view European films very often, this frequent cinema-goer nevertheless demonstrated an awareness of the fact that European cinema exists in a wide range of forms, popular as well as highbrow, and thus did not necessarily equal 'art cinema'. Such awareness was not common in this case study audience, nor indeed was it well represented in the research audience overall. Even a respondent who cited *Le Père Noël est une ordure* (1982), *Nikita* (1990), and *March of the Penguins* (*La Marche de l'empereur*, 2005) as evidence of the wide range of films belonging under the heading of French cinema, wrote that 'formulaic films' like the *Taxi* series were 'rare'.[249] Considering that the same viewer defined European film as 'rarely violence [*sic*] with large effects' and '[q]uality films that are thought provoking',[250] the label of European cinema here still seems to connote art rather than popular cinema, even if the notion of French cinema included a slightly wider range of films for this respondent. Such comments, together with viewers' tendency to compare *The Dreamlife of Angels* to other European films, indicate that if French cinema in Britain today represents the 'safely exotic', as Wheatley and Mazdon suggest,[251] the broader and more abstract term European cinema still retains strong connotations of art cinema, realism and intellectual concerns.

New Realism, Neo-Realism, and Cinematic Slum Tourism

The research participants considered in this chapter were on average older with more marked cinephile tendencies than *Amélie* audience. Younger respondents in particular went to the cinema more often, had much more knowledge about film and a broader framework for comparing films than their counterparts in the first case study. The audience for *The Dreamlife of Angels* was also more linguistically skilled and culturally diverse than the research audience as a whole. An interesting contrast with the *Amélie*

---

[248] D16.
[249] D42.
[250] D42.
[251] Catherine Wheatley and Lucy Mazdon, 'Intimate Connections', *Sight and Sound*, 18.5 (2008), 38-40 (p. 39).

case study was that the age of the protagonists – more or less the same in the two films – seemed to affect audience engagement with the characters much more in the second case study. This might be related to the sensation of nostalgia and timelessness that has been ascribed to Jeunet's film. A vaguely old-fashioned fairy-tale set in a touristic Paris familiar as the location of so many other French films might lend itself better to engage the emotions of older research participants than a portrayal of the unemployment and poverty among young people in the contemporary urban landscape of a non-touristic French northern city. The issue of class and economic situation is probably also significant, because although viewers preferred to discuss the film's address to audiences in terms of taste rather than socio-economic category, this case study concerns a largely middle-class audience engaging with a film portraying working-class protagonists on the verge of homelessness. Interestingly, students were particularly resistant to use terms relating to class in their comments on the film, but while they tended to stay away from the socio-political dimension of the narrative in their comments, they seemed able to connect strongly to the young protagonists on an emotional level. The reluctance to discuss class-related issues in this middle-class audience suggests that their approach to representations of social marginalisation from an external, privileged perspective has become naturalised; the question of class appears to fade into invisibility in a process similar to that described by Richard Dyer in relation to whiteness and race.[252]

The notion of elite audiences consuming films about the lower classes, and specifically the lower classes in other countries, in what could be termed a form of cinematic slumming has a long history within the context of art cinema. The neo-realist movement in Italy in the early post-war period is an emblematic example of this. Popular audiences in post-war Italy preferred the commercial cinema that neo-realism reacted against, so it is largely because of the favourable reactions from critics and art cinema audiences abroad that neo-realism has become canonised as a significant milestone both in the history of cinematic realism and of European cinema.[253]

---

[252] Richard Dyer, *White* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 1-13.
[253] Hallam and Marshment, *Realism and Popular Cinema*, pp. 6,17 and 41.

In comparison with the *Amélie* case study, it was easier to draw parallels between viewers' description of *The Dreamlife of Angels* and their expectations of European cinema. In his discussion of 1990s French cinema, O'Shaughnessy points to formal similarities between new realism and Italian neo-realism, noting that both sets of films combined melodrama and realism.[254] However, although De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves* and *The Dreamlife of Angels* make for an interesting formal comparison,[255] O'Shaughnessy's focus on the French context means that he neglects parallels in terms of export and international critical attention.[256] When considered in relation to issues concerning audiences, reception and cultural transfer, his argument about the use of melodrama in new realist films could be seen as having implications that contradict his definition of recent French cinema as politically committed. The tension between melodrama and realism that O'Shaughnessy identifies in films like *The Dreamlife of Angels* seems in fact to allow audiences to engage with the film in an apolitical way. Audiences in this case study seemed to focus on the emotional turmoil of the protagonists rather than on the representation of material poverty and social insecurity, enjoying the emotional intensity of the relationships between characters without necessarily engaging with the characters' social situation on any deeper level. This could be seen to undermine O'Shaughnessy's claim about the political potency of new realism. Furthermore, as the differences between responses from French and British respondents in this case study indicate, the political dimension of a film is likely to be construed differently when the film is viewed by an audience approaching the topic from a different cultural perspective.

Expectations of French film and ideas about what seemed particularly French in *The Dreamlife of Angels* were markedly different among French research participants on the one hand, and the rest of the audience on the other. These contrasts illustrated in an interesting way the different approaches people take when asked to define something that they associate themselves with, and when defining Other cultures and identities.

---

[254] O'Shaughnessy, *The New Face of Political Cinema,* pp. 179-180.

[255] Apart from stylistic affinities and a concern with unemployment, both films feature memorable references to Hollywood; cf. the job interview in the Hollywood bar in *The Dreamlife of Angels;* and the Rita Hayworth poster in *Bicycle Thieves.*

[256] For more on the significance of neo-realism's international reputation see Hallam and Marshment, *Realism and Popular Cinema*, p. 41.

Touching upon one of the issues that has dominated debates about viewers' engagement with film narratives and their characters, in this case study gender often seemed less important than age, with older viewers appearing less moved by the film and in addition sometimes annoyed or distracted by disorientating editing or cinematography. However, the strongest positive responses to the film came from female participants, while the viewers with the strongest negative reactions were men. Because all of the participants in the *Amélie* case study liked the film, *The Dreamlife of Angels* is the first chapter involving both negative and positive audience reactions. We therefore saw the first examples of negative or ambivalent viewers articulating their distance from the film by describing its perceived target audience as a kind of Other, a tendency that, as the following two chapters will show, ran through the project as a whole.

It was possible to distinguish between viewers who wanted the film to have an ambiguous or complex outcome, and respondents who did not like its lack of closure. The latter research participants were often more used to mainstream English-language film productions than European cinema, and several of these viewers seemed to look for a simpler, more upbeat message in *The Dreamlife of Angels* than respondents who were accustomed to a wider range of films. By contrast, viewers with cinephile tendencies seemed to enjoy the process of engaging with the research questionnaires, and often provided detailed and fairly complex answers to my questions.

For some respondents, whose expectations of French cinema were connected to the safe exoticism of *Amélie*, French heritage cinema, and other films discussed in the previous two chapters, *The Dreamlife of Angels* contradicted expectations of French cinema. It did however correspond to expectations of serious realism in European cinema. The sensation of imaginary travel in relation to the non-touristic locations in Zonca's film might seem diametrically opposed to *Amélie's* post-card representation of Paris. However, recalling Giuliana Bruno's point about the temporary nature of touristic and cinematic journeys,[257] it might not be too far-fetched to see *The Dreamlife of Angels* as a

[257] Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film* (New York: Verso, 2002), p. 82.

cinematic equivalent to the concept of slum tourism.[258] Like many of the other French new realist films, it provides British audiences with an intense, emotional visit to a social reality that they are unlikely ever to participate in, inevitably followed by a presumably reassuring return to their own world.

In the concluding chapter, I will return to the question of how audiences define Other cultural identities in film, and also expand on the relationship between individual case study films and the notion of European cinema. First, I will however discuss two further case studies, moving on in Chapters 4 and 5 to analyse audience responses to recent Swedish films, and thus considering a European national cinema less well represented in Britain than French cinema.

[258] Cf. Amelia Gentleman, 'Slum Tours: A Day Trip too Far?', *Observer*, 7 May 2006, Travel Section, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/travel/2006/may/07/delhi.india.ethicalliving> [accessed 15 August 2008]

Chapter 4. *Faithless*

Faithless was directed by the Norwegian actress and filmmaker Liv Ullmann, who adapted it from a screenplay written by Ingmar Bergman. Bergman, the only Swedish director to achieve truly global fame in the post-war period, has been described as 'the very epitome of the "art cinema" director',[1] and among all the auteur-directors of the 1960s, he is perhaps the filmmaker whose work has been most closely associated with his personal life.[2] Bergman's screenplay for *Faithless* was openly autobiographical, but the film is of course not a 'Bergman film' in the traditional sense, since he did not direct the film. Once he had entrusted Ullmann with the script, Bergman did not contribute further to the filmmaking process, and apart from appearing at a press conference in Stockholm to announce the film project in May 1998,[3] he did not take part in the promotion of *Faithless*. Nevertheless, Bergman featured very prominently in all of the press coverage for the film, both in Britain and elsewhere. Thomas Elsaesser has described Bergman as a 'mountainous shadow rising and looming over Swedish cinema, and even contemporary Swedish culture',[4] and the filmmaker's name recognition is such that *Faithless'* British distributor Tartan clearly tried to use his auteur status as a brand name when publicising the film in Britain. However, familiarity with Bergman's work is not as wide-spread among contemporary British film audiences as it is in critical circles, as will become apparent from my analysis of audience responses.

In this chapter, I will discuss the context in which *Faithless* was released in the UK in 2001, and explain why the film contrasts with other Swedish productions made in the same period. I will also examine Sweden's reputation as a liberal society and how this connects to its cinematic history, in order to show that associations with liberal attitudes have had a lasting influence on British audiences' expectations of Swedish film. In this

---

[1] Thomas Elsaesser, *European Cinema: Face to Face with Hollywood* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005), p. 145. See also David Thomson, 'Once, the Films of the Great Swedish Director Was a Matter of Life and Death', *Independent on Sunday*, 5 January 2003, [n.p.].
[2] See Elsaesser, *European Cinema*, p. 149.
[3] Anders Bryngelsson, 'Bergmans nya Liv – nu får hon göra hans film', *Aftonbladet,* 9 May 1998, [n.p.], Tomas Höjeberg, 'Bergman möter pressen', *Arbetet*, 9 May 1998, [n.p.], Mats Bråstedt, 'Bergmans film om kvinnorna: Lena Endre och Liv Ullmann i nya "Trolösa"', *Expressen*, Section Nöje, 9 May 1998, [n.p.].
[4] Elsaesser, *European Cinema*, p. 133.

context, it will be important to consider the fact that during the late 1960s and early 1970s, Bergman's groundbreaking films were not the only examples of Swedish cinema in Britain. Other films, generally less original in terms of style or theme, but even more groundbreaking in terms of their sexual explicitness, were imported and shown in British cinemas. At the same time, the representation of sex in Bergman films has been an important factor in public discourse surrounding the films, and several of the director's films were the subject of censorship controversies at home and abroad; the Swedish censors' decision to release *The Silence* (*Tystnaden*, 1963) uncut paved the way for the production of Swedish sexploitation films that were exported to other national territories, including Britain. One of the key issues in this chapter will therefore be a discussion of the problematic and often blurred boundary between controversial, sexually explicit art films and popular sexploitation films. My analysis of audience research will show that this aspect of Swedish film history, and echoes of its reputation that can be found for example in contemporary television, still have an effect on British audiences' expectations of Swedish cinema today.

Age and Film Consumption

With an average age of forty-three, participants in the *Faithless* audience were older than respondents taking part in any of the other case studies.[5] *Faithless* attracted fewer students than the two French films, and in comparison with *Show Me Love* fewer respondents in this case study were in paid employment. The reason for this is that the audience included several retired participants, as well as some viewers who were either housewives, on sick-leave or unemployed.[6] Because of a technical error, a page containing questions about viewers' linguistic background and film consumption habits was missing from eleven out of the forty-one questionnaires collected at screenings of *Faithless*. The respondents for whom this information is missing were members of the Avenue audience between twenty and thirty-eight years old, with an average age of

[5] In fact, the *Show Me Love* audience had the same average age, but in addition to the Avenue and New Park audiences taking part in all four case studies, the audience for *Show Me Love* incorporated an additional group of participants, the Winchester audience, dominated by viewers over thirty-five. If they were removed from the equation, the average age of the *Show Me Love* audience was reduced to forty.
[6] Also, a larger share of this audience than in any of the other case studies did not specify their occupation. See **Figure 27** to **Figure 30**.

twenty-six, so it is important to keep in mind that for the age groups fifteen to twenty-four and twenty-five to thirty-five, data about film consumption and languages are incomplete. However, it is still possible to state with certainty that there were fewer low-level film consumers in the *Faithless* audience than in the research project as a whole, and that it was much less common for these viewers to consume film mainly on television than for participants in the other case studies. None of the older viewers in this audience viewed film mainly on DVD or video. Respondents over thirty-five were also more likely than their counterparts in the research audience overall to list cinema as their primary film consumption format.

Cinema-going appeared to play a more prominent part in the consumption profile of participants in the Swedish case studies than for respondents attending the screenings of French films.[7] This is understandable, because although Swedish films are rare in British cinemas, fewer Swedish films are available in home entertainment format with English subtitles than is the case for French films, and Swedish films appear on British television much less frequently than French films. In the *Faithless* audience, very few respondents did however go to the cinema once a week or more; no one in the youngest audience group, and just over 10% of those over thirty-five years of age were frequent cinema-goers, contrasting with a corresponding figure of 20% in the research audience as a whole. One in ten of the participants in this case study reported that they consumed European non-English language films every week, a higher figure than was the case for the overall research audience, and fewer respondents in the *Faithless* audience viewed such films less often than once a month. Nevertheless, the tendency for English-language film to dominate audiences' film consumption was even stronger among participants in this case study than in the overall research audience.

[7] See **Figure 42**. As more and more films become available on DVD, with some Swedish films that have never been released in the UK now available to buy online with English subtitles, it would make sense for such viewers to consume more films on DVD, but the older participants in this study did not seem to have grown accustomed to DVD as a major consumption format.

Swedish Cinema in the New Millennium: Co-Productions and Regional Centres

When *Faithless* was released in Sweden in 2000, the films that dominated Swedish media attention were products of the new regionalism kick-started by the success of Lukas Moodysson's first feature film *Show Me Love* in 1998. *Show Me Love*, the film considered in Chapter 5, was the most popular Swedish film of 1998, only outperformed at the box office by the American blockbuster *Titanic* (1997). The phenomenal success of this Danish-Swedish co-production, the first feature-film shot at the studios of the recently established regional film centre *Film i Väst*, marked the beginning of a new phase of regional film production in Sweden. This new development saw regional film centres supported by European funding programmes challenging Stockholm's traditional place at the centre of the Swedish film industry.

Like *Show Me Love*, *Faithless* was a European co-production, but unlike the collaboration between Swedish Memfis and Danish Zentropa at Film i Väst, Sweden's public service broadcaster SVT produced *Faithless* with Italian, German, Finnish and Norwegian co-investment. Shooting took place in Stockholm and Paris, rather than in any of the new regional film production centres. As Olof Hedling has pointed out, although new Swedish auteurs like Moodysson and Josef Fares have become associated with regional filmmaking, the regionalisation of the Swedish film industry has on the whole led to an emphasis on filmmaking as a means towards economic regeneration rather than as an outlet for artistic expression.[8] This change in attitude marks a break with the Swedish art cinema tradition institutionalised by the Swedish Film Institute in the 1960s. Hedling cites several examples of projects that have been changed to suit the locations available at the various regional film centres, and he contrasts this with Ingmar Bergman's use of the island landscape of Fårö for expressive purposes from *Through a Glass, Darkly* (*Såsom i en Spegel*, 1961) onwards.[9] This landscape that Bergman the director and screenwriter has made his own is the home of the character 'Bergman' in *Faithless*, and in a way, the location therefore announces the film's connection to an

[8] Cf. Olof Hedling, '"Sveriges mest kända korvkiosk" – om regionaliseringen av svensk film', in *Solskensklandet: Svensk film på 2000-talet*, ed. by Erik Hedling and Ann-Kristin Wallengren (Stockholm: Atlantis, 2006), pp. 41-42.
[9] Hedling, '"Sveriges mest kända korvkiosk"', pp. 42-43.

earlier, auteur-centred tradition of Swedish filmmaking, prior to the regionalisation of the Swedish industry.

The Release of an International Art Film

Faithless premiered at the Edinburgh film festival in August 2000, but the film did not go on general release in the UK until February the following year, when it was released by Tartan Films on five screens and seen by around 24,000 British cinema-goers. In 2001, Swedish films sold more cinema tickets in the US and Europe than at home in Sweden, and this despite high admission figures on the national market. The British share of European admissions to Swedish films rose considerably during this year, reaching a level resembling the average corresponding figure for French film.[10] The concentration of several Swedish film releases within a short time period led British commentators to discuss the phenomenon in terms of a Swedish cinematic renaissance.[11] One of these films was Moodysson's *Together* (*Tillsammans*, 2000), released in Britain by Metrodome on sixteen screens. With UK admission figures approaching 160,000, it was the second most popular European film in Britain in 2001, beaten only by *Amélie*. *Together* not only did well in British cinemas, but the film also featured in many critics' yearly Top Ten lists. Roy Andersson's Cannes-awarded *Songs from the Second Floor* (*Sånger från andra våningen*, 2000) had also drawn critical attention to Swedish cinema early in 2001. It is therefore possible to talk about a media buzz around the 'new Swedish cinema'[12] in high-brow critical circles at this point, and *Faithless* did to a certain extent become associated with this renewed interest in Swedish film.

In terms of box office performance in Sweden and Britain, *Faithless* fitted the bill of an art film better than a primarily commercial production. Despite being released on twenty-two copies in Sweden, a fairly large figure for a Swedish production, *Faithless* attracted a total of just under 67,000 Swedish viewers.[13] It did not do well outside of the

---

[10] See **Figure 7** and **Figure 9**.
[11] Tom de Castella, 'Porn Again', *New Statesman*, 15 September 2003, [n.p.], Stephen Applebaum, 'Swede and Sour', *Sunday Herald*, 15 July 2001, p. 4.
[12] Cf. Stephen Dalton, 'Stephen Dalton's New Swedish Cinema', *The Times*, 21 July 2001, Saturday Features, [n.p.].
[13] The most popular Swedish films in the year 2000 achieved admission figures of about 800,000.

metropolitan areas of Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö, and it would have been considered an economic failure had it not been for pre-sales of international distribution and broadcasting rights.[14] The filmmakers were clearly aware that the Bergman connection would ensure interest abroad, and the film's co-production agreements guaranteed its release in a number of European territories. To a certain extent, it could be argued that *Faithless* was already from the start targeted primarily at the international art cinema circuit.[15] The Swedish critical establishment reviewed *Faithless* fairly positively,[16] but it had its international premiere at Cannes, and a significant amount of the Swedish press coverage focused on the film's international success.[17] When *Faithless* went on general release in Sweden, Swedish critics had more reservations about the film than their international colleagues.[18]

After Cannes, *Faithless* was shown at other international festivals, including at Edinburgh, and exported to over twenty different countries. So far, so typical for a European art film. However, an unusual feature of the film's reception was the focus on the film's screenwriter rather than on its director, traditionally the figure associated with film authorship. Even though Liv Ullmann was actively involved in publicising the film, whereas Bergman stayed away from publicity, the author of the screenplay always remained at the centre of the discussion, also in interviews with Ullmann. Ever since the first press conference about the film, the filmmakers made it clear that the story was based on an episode in Bergman's life, and just as a biopic tends to bring about discussions about the real, biographical individual, the inclusion of the character 'Bergman' in the film led reviewers to speculate about the links between reality and fiction.[19] In the decades since Swedish television first broadcast *Fanny and Alexander*

---

[14] Bråstedt, 'Publiken sviker Liv Ullmann's svartsjukedrama "Trolösa"', *Expressen*, 19 September 2000, [n.p.].
[15] Although the release on over twenty copies suggests that the distributors hoped that it would have more of an appeal for native cinema audiences than it actually did.
[16] Gunnar Bergdahl, 'Det sanna Cannes', *Aftonbladet*, 17 May 2000, [n.p.], Bernt Eklund, 'Passion på liv och död', *Expressen*, 15 September 2000, [n.p.].
[17] Bråstedt, 'Succé för "Trolösa" i Cannes', *Expressen*, 15 May 2000, [n.p.], Annika Gustafsson, 'Gott betyg för Trolösa', *Sydsvenskan*, 16 May 2000, [n.p.], Kristina Torell, 'Endre är favorit i Cannes efter galavisningen', *Göteborgsposten*, 16 May 2000, [n.p.], Jeanette Gentele, 'Lena Endre har stora chanser att vinna', *Svenska Dagbladet,* 14 May 2000, [n.p.].
[18] Jan-Olov Andersson, 'Lena Endre gör stark roll', *Aftonbladet* , 15 September 2000, [n.p.], Gustafsson, 'Moget om människor fångade i passion', *Sydsvenskan*, 15 September 2000, [n.p.].
[19] For more details on the film, see the synopsis in Appendix C.

(1982), Bergman's official farewell to cinema,[20] the director wrote extensively about his personal life and family background, and his writings have entered the Swedish public domain through a range of cultural forms, including books, a TV series and films.[21] Therefore, the fact that the autobiographical nature of *Faithless* was commented upon extensively in the Swedish press is not particularly surprising, as commentators felt the need to place the film within a larger set of autobiographical texts. However, internationally, these materials are only familiar to avid Bergman fans, and the focus on Bergman in the British critical response to *Faithless* therefore must be seen rather as the combined result of marketing and of a general tendency to associate Swedish cinema with Bergman.

Ingmar Bergman: Audience Awareness and Attitudes

Considering this tendency among critics, it seemed relevant to investigate whether pre-knowledge of Bergman's work affected the interpretation of the film among participants attending the research screenings of *Faithless*. Five respondents had already seen *Faithless* when it was first released in British cinemas. One of them was a film research student in his mid-thirties whose comments revealed a familiarity with Bergman's work, and whom appeared to perceive the film as part of Bergman's auteur oeuvre.[22] Among the other repeat viewers, only one person, a woman in her early sixties, related *Faithless* to other films by Bergman.[23] The other three respondents who had seen the film before seemed to be motivated to see it again simply because they thought it was an engrossing drama, and the issue of who had written or directed the film did not play a significant

[20] Even though *Fanny and Alexander* is not a direct depiction of Bergman's own childhood, it incorporates references to the director's family history, and the Ingmar Bergman website describes it as 'his most autobiographical work'. Cf. 'Film < Fanny and Alexander < Sources of Inspiration', *Ingmar Bergman Face to Face*, <http://www.ingmarbergman.se> [accessed 10 April 2007].
[21] Cf. Ingmar Bergman, *Laterna magica* (Stockholm: Norstedts Förlag, 1987) and *Den Goda Viljan* (Stockholm: Norstedts Förlag, 1991). The latter book was made into a screenplay for Swedish television, directed by Bille August (*Den Goda Viljan / The Best Intentions*, 1992). That same year, Daniel Bergman, the son of the famous filmmaker, directed the film *Söndagsbarn/Sunday's Children* (1992) on the basis of a screenplay by Ingmar Bergman about his early relationship with his own father. A few years later another Bergman-scripted drama about his parents appeared on SVT, this time directed by Liv Ullmann (*Enskilda Samtal / Private Confessions*, 1996).
[22] F18.
[23] F12.

part in their interpretative approach.[24] Indeed, the fact that these three respondents did not see *Faithless* primarily as a film written by Ingmar Bergman was reflected in their comments. One man wrote that he had not seen any other film that resembled this one,[25] while a female respondent in her mid-thirties stated that she 'spent a lot of time wondering who the older man was'.[26]

Although this sense of confusion appeared in many responses, it was more common among viewers who did not recognise the old man played by Erland Josephson as the director Bergman. In the flyers/programmes advertising the screenings and in my introduction to the screening I mentioned the fact that the film was scripted by Ingmar Bergman.[27] The appearance of his name in some of the questionnaires therefore cannot be taken as evidence that respondents had any pre-knowledge of or interest in his career, or had indeed seen any of his films; it is necessary to look for more detailed references in order to draw such conclusions. Since Bergman's best-known films were made in the 1950s and 1960s, it is worth noting that the only respondent under forty who made detailed references to Bergman was the film research student who had already seen the film at the time of its original release.[28] He explicitly linked *Faithless* to *Scenes from a Marriage* (*Scener ur ett äktenskap,* 1974) and stated that aspects of the film that he saw as Swedish – 'The light from the window, the slowly increasing eruption of emotions' – might be more representative of Bergman than of Swedish film more generally. Although this student certainly would have been aware of the fact that the film was directed by Ullmann, not Bergman, he nevertheless related several aspects of the film to Bergman's authorial influence, and he explicitly stated that his 'knowledge of Bergman' had an affect on his interpretation of *Faithless*. His comments therefore indicate that he saw *Faithless* to some extent as a Bergman film.

---

[24] F1, F9, F36.
[25] F9.
[26] F1.
[27] This probably led some participants who might otherwise not have thought about Bergman to consider his involvement in the film, but since the film was marketed and sold in Britain on the basis of Bergman's reputation, and reviewed and publicised with constant reference to his name, it would have seemed incongruous not to mention Bergman's contribution to the film, in particular as the programme gave a brief summary of the plot, introducing the characters, including Erland Josephson as 'Bergman'.
[28] F18.

Three other men and four women provided responses that indicated familiarity with Ingmar Bergman's work. With the exception of one forty-year-old man,[29] these research participants were all over sixty years old in 2005.[30] This suggests that even if younger research participants might have heard of Bergman, only respondents with strong cinephile tendencies, or a professional interest in film history, were familiar with Bergman's work. He seemed to influence expectations more through his reputation than via direct experience of his films. In this context, it is interesting to note that two young Swedish students who attended my screening of *Faithless* did not mention Bergman at all in their questionnaires in relation to *Faithless* or their expectations of Swedish cinema more generally.[31] In *Måndagar med Bergman*, a study of Swedish audiences attending repertory screenings of Bergman films at a Stockholm cinema in the early 1990s, Birgitta Steene reported that several of the younger research participants had become curious about Bergman after encountering his international reputation when travelling abroad, often as students.[32] A circular development seems to have been going on in the making of Bergman's reputation, whereby his status within Swedish culture partly has been formed through his international success. When Sweden joined the EU in 1994, it became easier than it had been before for Swedish people to spend time studying or working in other European countries, and this has arguably resulted in an increased self-consciousness about the status of Swedish national culture abroad. As a Swedish citizen who from the age of seventeen has spent most of my time in other European countries, and who have met many other Swedes with similar experiences, I could bring up a range of anecdotes supporting this claim, but it is also revealing to consider the Swedish news coverage of Bergman's death in July 2007. Both broadcast and printed news media were completely dominated by this event for a considerable amount of time, and much emphasis was placed on the unique position of Bergman abroad.[33] Paradoxically, while it is now commonplace to state that Bergman equals

---

[29] F2.
[30] F6, F12, F16, F21, F38, F39.
[31] F27, F28. Only one of these two participants actually confirmed that she was Swedish, but the other person has such a characteristic Swedish-sounding name that if he is British he must be connected to Sweden through his family.
[32] Birgitta Steene, *Måndagar med Bergman* (Stockholm: Symposion, 1996) pp. 205-206, 213-214, 215-216.
[33] See for example *Svenska Dagbladet's* special Culture section on Bergman , 31 July 2007, <http://www.svd.se/kulturnoje/nyheter/> [accessed 5 August 2007] and *Dagens Nyheter's* web page

Swedish cinema abroad,[34] as my research will show, in Britain today, admiration for Bergman seems to be widespread only among audiences in their sixties or older, a few cinephile viewers in other age groups, and professional film critics. Among critics, it is mainly the older ranks of writers, reminiscing about watching Swedish cinema in the 1950s, who still appear to be interested in Bergman's work.[35]

Authorship, Gender, and the Ullmann/Bergman Connection

Returning to the audience research, it is worth remembering that in the French case studies, I found that male research participants referred more often to the film's director, and also tended to comment more on technical elements, in particular aspects of the film associated with directorial style, than female respondents, who were more inclined to refer to the films' subject matter than male viewers. In the case of *Faithless*, the actors' performances and the film's unusual narrative structure seemed to be among the film's main attractions for both men and women.[36] However, male participants more often referred explicitly to the making of the film in their comments, discussing its 'story line',[37] 'the direction of photography and the mise-en-scène',[38] 'the scenography, and the photo',[39] or describing it as 'beautifully filmed and directed'.[40] Female viewers, on the other hand, tended to mention the film's setting or its characters when giving examples of things they liked about the film.[41] They also referred to its effect on the audience, and in particular its emotional impact much more often than their male counterparts.[42] I will return to the question of film viewing as an emotional rather than intellectual experience at a later stage in this chapter, but at this point, the most important thing to note about these gender differences is that while male viewers in this study made fewer explicit auteurist comments than male respondents in the *Amélie*

---

dedicated to Bergman, with several articles on the international reactions to news of his death, <http://www.dn.se/DNet/jsp/polopoly.jsp?d=2712> [accessed 28 January 2008].

[34] Astrid Söderbergh Widding, 'Filmexperiment som lade grund till storheten', *Svenska Dagbladet,* special Culture section on Bergman , 31 July 2007, pp. 4-5

[35] Thomson, 'Once, the Films of the Great Swedish Director…', [n.p.].

[36] F7, F15, F16, F18, F31, F36, F37, F38, F39.

[37] F11.

[38] F18.

[39] F27.

[40] F38.

[41] F1, F4, F7, F12, F16, F19, F20, F25, F28, F41.

[42] F2, F15, F22, F28, F39.

audience, this might in itself reflect the fact that the question of authorship was complicated by the film having been written rather than directed by Bergman.

Among the viewers who did signal some familiarity with Bergman's work, the majority were born in the mid-1940s. This means that while they may not have seen *Wild Strawberries* (*Smultronstället*, 1957) or *The Seventh Seal* (*Det Sjunde Inseglet*, 1957) on their original British release in the late 1950s, they would certainly have been old enough to hear others talk about the films, and they may very well have seen films like *The Silence* and *Persona* (1966) when they were first shown in the UK in the 1960s. For at least two such respondents in my research audience, authorship did seem to play a significant part in their interpretation process and contribute to the pleasure they gained from the viewing experience. A female artist explained that the film fulfilled her expectations, being 'very Bergman-like – dealing with relationships and their affect on others. Intense, moving'.[43] Her thoughts prior to seeing the film included wondering whether the story was based on the relationship between Ullmann and Bergman. The British publicity surrounding *Faithless'* British release suggested that the film actually was a fictionalised account of Bergman's and Ullmann's relationship, as reflected in the Edinburgh film festival catalogue entry: 'The film is filled with autobiographical details relating to Bergman and Ullmann's relationship as long term collaborators and lovers.'[44] The film's director has been closely associated with Bergman ever since her breakthrough role in *Persona.* In addition to their professional relationship, Bergman and Ullmann had a highly publicised private relationship, beginning as an affair on the set of *Persona* and continuing for five years, during which time they lived together and had a daughter, which means that Ullmann's past relationship to Bergman did bear some resemblance to the domestic situation depicted in *Faithless*. The festival catalogue suggested that the role of Marianne was based on Ullmann, and many British critics

[43] D39.

[44] Ali Kayley, 'Faithless (Trolösa)', Edinburgh 54th Film Festival Catalogue (2000), p. 98. Liv Ullmann and Erland Josephson memorably played the protagonists in Bergman's TV film *Scenes from a Marriage* , and observing that Josephson portrayed the character of Bergman in *Faithless* under Ullmann's direction, several critics saw *Faithless* as a kind of sequel to the film. Cf. David Parkinson, 'Faithless', *Empire* 141 (2001), p. 62, Simon Hattenstone, 'A Lifelong Liaison', *Guardian* , 3 February 2001, Weekend section, p. 26.

interpreted the film's romance along these lines.[45] An article in *The Guardian's* weekend magazine drew parallels between *Faithless* and the break-up between Bergman and Ullmann, as well as between the character Marianne and Ullmann in their real and fictional struggles to combine the roles of actress and mother.[46] Although Ullmann did point out in several interviews in the British press that the sexual entanglements in the film were not based on her relationship with Bergman,[47] only the *Sight and Sound* review provided a detailed account of the real-life background to the story,[48] and even articles that did not explicitly describe *Faithless* as being about Ullmann and Bergman still regarded their relationship as highly significant in the context.[49] Although the viewer who was curious about how the real relationship between Ullmann and Bergman might relate to the fiction of *Faithless*[50] did not mention reading any articles about the film, it seems as though some aspect of the publicity surrounding *Faithless* in Britain had affected her approach to the film.

Film critics and feature writers draw upon the material supplied to them by distributors, as well as their own pre-knowledge. If the film distributor hinted at parallels between the film and the real relationship between Ullmann and Bergman, this could provide an interesting angle for reviewers.[51] When *Faithless* was released in Sweden, critics had a broader framework of reference to work with, and if an editor were concerned that the

[45] Anthony Quinn, 'Faithless', *Independent*, 9 February 2001, Review section, p. 10, Nicholas Barber, 'An Elderly Screen', *Independent on Sunday*, 11 February 2001, Culture section, p. 3, Allan Hunter, 'Yours Faithfully', *Scotland on Sunday*, 6 August, 2000, p. 14, Neil Norman, 'The Pursuit of Liv', *Evening Standard*, 8 February 2001, p. 32, Alexander Walker, 'Sins in a Cold Climate', *Evening Standard* , 8 February 2001, p. 29.

[46] Hattenstone, 'A Lifelong Liaison', p. 26.

[47] Liv Ullmann interviewed by Geoffrey Macnab, 'Crimes and Misdemeanours', *Sight and Sound*, 10.12 (2000), p. 31, Liv Ullmann interviewed by Fiona Morrow, ''Jealousy is Bergman's Great Weakness'', *Independent*, 19 January 2001, Review section , p. 11.

[48] Philip Strick, 'Lies and Whispers', *Sight and Sound*, 11.2 (2001), pp. 32-33, 41. In Sweden the fact that Bergman's inspiration for the screenplay came from his relationship with the journalist Gun Hagberg, which ended many years before Ullmann met Bergman was openly acknowledged by the filmmakers and widely publicised.

[49] Morrow, ''Jealousy is Bergman's Great Weakness'', p. 11. Cf. Parkinson, 'Faithless', Peter Bradshaw, 'Island of the Avant-Garde', *Guardian*, 9 February 2001, Section 2, p. 15, Sheila Johnston, 'Out of Bergman's Shadow', *Daily Telegraph*, 17 August 2000, p. 21.

[50] D39.

[51] I have not managed to get hold of any British press releases or other material from the distributor, Tartan, that would provide concrete evidence of this. I only have the Cannes press book, which does not provide any clue as to why British commentators would interpret the love story as being about Ullmann and Bergman. However, it seems to me significant that the suggestion was made in the information distributed at the Edinburgh Film Festival, as this was the film's first presentation to the British public.

readership might not be interested in in-depth discussions of the film's references to Strindberg, classical music and other aspects of high culture, they could spice up the coverage with some gossip about the actors, who were well-known to the Swedish public. In Britain, this was not a viable strategy, so the film's main selling-point was, in high-cultural terms, its internationally renowned screenwriter. However, there is an association between Swedish film and titillating nudity that can be called upon to raise less high-minded points of interest, and as I will show in the next section, sexual explicitness on the screen is an area that allows high and low cultural expectations to blur.

Swedish Cinema and Sex: Historical Context

When publicising *Faithless* in interviews with the British press, Ullmann was described as 'embodying a mysterious and distinctly European sex appeal',[52] and readers were told that 'it is impossible to look into Liv Ullman's eyes and not think about sex'.[53] Despite a long and varied career, Liv Ullmann is most famous for being one of the 'Bergman actresses' whom David Thomson has argued personified 'cool, cerebral eroticism' in the 1960s.[54] His phrase 'cerebral eroticism' is interesting in itself, as the 'cerebral' has the function of elevating the 'erotic', placing it beyond the purely physical at an intellectual (and therefore respectable) level. It is worth pausing here to focus for a moment on the expectations of Swedish cinema articulated by one of the respondents who considered Bergman's and Ullmann's involvement in the film as highly significant. This viewer wrote that he expected 'any film associated with Liv Ullmann and Bergman to be a masterful study of human emotion'.[55] However, the aspects of the film that seemed 'Swedish' to him were its '[i]ntense, hypnotic quality' and the fact that it involved '[a]n exploration of love and emotional entanglement'.[56] He also expected Swedish films to be '[o]vert, romantic, explicit'. In order to understand why this respondent used the phrase 'sexual drama' to characterise *Faithless*, and described Sweden as a 'liberal

[52] Marcus Dunk, 'She Came to Fame through Lover Ingmar Bergman's Films', *Express*, 27 January 2001, Section LW, p. 36.
[53] Norman, 'A Liv Less Ordinary?', *Sunday Herald*, 11 March 2001, p. 4.
[54] Thomson, 'Once, the Films of the Great Swedish Director...', [n.p.].
[55] F38.
[56] F38.

society' characterised by an 'openness and extrovert approach to life',[57] we need to consider the formation of British perceptions of Swedish culture in general, and film culture specifically, in the early post-war period.

Already in 1950, the Swedish film critic Gerd Osten described the sexual explicitness of Swedish cinema as 'notorious'.[58] The respondent quoted above would have been around twelve years old when a suggestive nude bathing sequence in the Swedish film *One Summer of Happiness* (*Hon dansade en sommar*, 1951) caused a stir on its British release in 1952.[59] Lena Lennerhed argues that this film, one of Sweden's most successful exports ever, 'consolidated for decades ahead the idea that Swedish love was connected to summer and nature, and even more importantly: that the "Swedish girl" wanted to make love'.[60] A fifty-seven-year-old male participant in the *Show Me Love* case study, who described his expectations of Swedish cinema along the lines of 'beautiful people (!), nature and natural experiences'[61] seemed to confirm such connotative links between Swedish beauty, nature and sex.[62] However, the real breakthrough (or breakdown, depending on one's perspective) relating to sex in Swedish cinema occurred in the liberal climate of the 1960s, when Swedish censorship regulations were altered in significant ways, and it will therefore be useful to provide a brief historical overview of Swedish censorship practice before discussing the specific expectations of my research audience in further detail.

In the 1960s, the Swedish Social Democratic government carried out a wide range of radical reforms in social policy, responding to demands from the liberal student movement, and in the process, Swedish censorship practices were liberalised.[63] In 1963, the Swedish censors were given instructions to take into account the artistic value of a

[57] F38.
[58] Gerd Osten, 'Svensk ensamhet' in Gerd Osten and Artur Lundkvist, *Erotiken i filmen* (Stockholm: Wahlström & Widstrand, 1950), p.21.
[59] Ismene Brown, 'Top Five Male Nude Bottoms', *Daily Telegraph*, 9 March 2002, p. 6.
[60] Lena Lennerhed, *Frihet att Njuta: Sexualdebatten i Sverige på 1960-talet* (Stockholm: Norstedts, 1994), pp. 91-92. [My translation from the Swedish original: 'befäste för decennier framåt föreställningen att svensk kärlek hörde samman med sommar och natur, och ännu viktigare: att den "svenska flickan" ville älska'].
[61] S54.
[62] S54. Even though this particular viewer actually referred to the winter season, rather than to the summer of the 1951 film title.
[63] Lennerhed, *Frihet att Njuta*, pp. 172-173, 190, 197.

film, and the government appointed a special committee that should be consulted if the censors considered cutting or banning films of 'considerable artistic value'.[64] The committee was dominated by cultural personalities with radical political ideas, and soon after its creation, Ingmar Bergman's *The Silence* was approved for cinema exhibition despite two sequences of unprecedented sexual explicitness.[65] However, only a few months later, Vilgot Sjöman's social problem film *491*, based on a critically acclaimed novel about a group of youth offenders, was not just cut, but banned out-right.[66] The ban led to the most high-profile debate about film censorship in Swedish history. The producers appealed against the decision, and the film was eventually released in cut format, but more significantly, the controversy led to a public investigation into censorship in 1964.[67] The Swedish government did not yield to the public investigation committee's suggestion that censorship should be abolished completely, but the concept of 'public decency'[68] was removed from Swedish law in 1970, and this, in practice, made non-violent pornography legal in Sweden, as long as it did not involve children and was not displayed publicly.[69] Looking back from the perspective of the late 1970s, Harry Schein, co-founder of the Swedish Film Institute and a key player in the Swedish film culture of the 1960s summarised the development:

> As soon as a respected filmmaker had conquered a new territory, a slightly less respected filmmaker moved in. 'Why I am not allowed to show what Bergman can show?' was the eternal question and it could never be answered.[70]

The result of this was a proliferation of Swedish pornographic materials in the 1970s, many of which found their way across to Britain. Although the British censors have tended to be stricter than their counterparts in other Western European countries, the availability of sexually explicit materials in the UK increased enormously during the

---

[64] Lennerhed, *Frihet att Njuta*, pp. 173.
[65] Alf Montán in *Expressen,* 15 September 1963, [n.p.], cited by Lennerhed, p. 170. On its British release, *The Silence* also encountered problems with the BBFC. Cf. [n.a.] 'Ingrid Thulin', *The Times*, 10 January 2004, Features, p. 50.
[66] Lennerhed, *Frihet att Njuta*, pp. 170-171, 198.
[67] Lennerhed, *Frihet att Njuta*, p. 186.
[68] 'tukt och sedlighet'.
[69] Lennerhed, *Frihet att Njuta*, p. 197.
[70] Harry Schein, 'Det hände på 60-talet' in *Svensk filmografi 6: 1960-1969*, ed by Jörn Donner (Stockholm: Svenska Filminstitutet, 1977), p. 29. [My translation from the Swedish original: 'Så snart en respekterad filmare erövrat ett nytt territorium ockuperades det av en något mindre respekterad filmare. 'Varför får jag inte visa vad Bergman får visa' blev den ständiga frågan som aldrig kunde besvaras.']

1960s and 1970s. Legal confusion following the Obscene Publications Act and corruption in the Metropolitan Police's Obscene Publications Squad (also known as the 'Dirty Squad') allowed the dissemination of sexually explicit material to expand in Soho's red light district, and Clarissa Smith argues that this can be specifically linked to an increased level of supply following liberal changes to censorship in Sweden and Denmark. Legal loopholes and slippery definitions made it difficult to prosecute pornographers, and a number of high profile legal cases involving works that were seen to have artistic value, such as *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, served to sway public opinion against the nanny state:[71]

> [T]hese cases introduced the idea that artistic intention removed indecency and/or obscenity, further inscribing the cultural high/low split with a legal definition of merit and confirming for some that there was one law for the arty liberati and another for Joe Bloggs, who just liked looking at girls.[72]

Like Schein, Smith points to the problematic relationship between art and pornography, high and low culture, in the context of sexually explicit material, and it is interesting to consider this in relation to Bergman's films. Following the success of Mattson's *One Summer of Happiness* in the early 1950s, Bergman's films were sold in the US with English-language titles that suggested soft pornography rather than high art. Thus *Summer Game* (*Sommarlek*, 1951) became *Illicit Interlude*, *Summer with Monica* (*Sommaren med Monika*, 1953) became *Monika: The Story of a Bad Girl*, and *Night of the Clowns* (*Gycklarnas Afton*, 1953) became *The Naked Night*.[73] The international distribution of Bergman' films can therefore be seen as having depended on an emphasis on sex over art already at a fairly early stage of his career. In fact, as Tim Bergfelder and

---

[71] Clarissa Smith, 'A Perfectly British Business: Stagnation, Continuities, and Change on the Top Shelf', in *International Exposure: Perspectives on Modern European Pornography, 1800-2000* ed. by Lisa Z. Sigel (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2005), pp. 150-151. As evidence of the increase in sexually explicit materials from Scandinavia, Smith refers to the number of Scandinavian books and magazines confiscated by British customs; rising from only 5,600 in 1960 to over two million in 1969.

[72] Smith, 'A Perfectly British Business', p.151.

[73] Linda Haverty Rugg, 'Globalization and the Auteur: Ingmar Bergman Projected Internationally' in *Transnational Cinema in a Global North: Nordic Cinema in Transition*, ed. by Andrew Nestingen and Trevor G. Elkington (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005) pp. 221-241 (pp.233-234).

I have shown in our cross-cultural reception study of *Persona*,[74] the prominence of sex in art cinema marketing strategies means that discourses surrounding Bergman's films have always straddled the border between the sensational and the serious. This ambivalence is clearly perceptible in the comments of a female viewer participating in my project, who described her expectations of Swedish film as 'perhaps adult material but creative'.[75]

Swedish Sin: An Enduring Label

In the *Faithless* research audience, references to the sexual connotations of Swedish cinema that seemed to originate in knowledge of 'adult' aspects of 1960s art cinema were most common in the responses of male viewers, who would have been old enough to see Bergman's films in the cinemas in the 1960s,[76] but also some younger female research participants connected Swedish cinema to Swedish liberalism, showing that the reputation is still firmly entrenched in Britain today.[77] A recent example of the enduring nature of this stereotype can be seen in the marketing materials promoting a season of 'Swedish erotica' at the ICA in London in October 2007. The programme celebrated 'the golden era of Swedish sexploitation' with a selection of films from the late 1960s and early 1970s,[78] and the ICA newsletter stated:

> These films had such an impact that many of us still associate Sweden with skinny dipping, promiscuity and voluptuous blondes, and this weekend of films won't do much to change that perception.[79]

The curators were clearly aware that they were perpetuating a myth, as their inclusion of a talk on 'The Origins of Swedish Sin' in the programme shows, but in the British media the myth is often used without this level of self-reflexivity. For instance, in 2001, a

[74] Ingrid Stigsdotter and Tim Bergfelder, 'Studying Cross-Cultural Marketing and Reception: Ingmar Bergman's *Persona* (1966)' in *The New Film History: Sources, Methods, Approaches*, ed. by James Chapman, Mark Glancy and Sue Harper (Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 215-228.
[75] F4.
[76] F21, F38.
[77] F1, F3.
[78] The season included the sex education film *Language of Love* (1969) referred to by Schein above, a film that led to a demonstration in London on its original release, and has become immortalised as the film Travis Bickle chooses for his date in *Taxi Driver* (1976).
[79] ICA website <www.ica.org> [visited 30 September 2007] and ICA October 2007 printed programme bulletin, p. 8.

Scotsman columnist described Moodysson's *Together* as 'a Swedish film, the kind with subtitles before you ask',[80] and when in 2005 Welsh football player Ian Rush was given a walk-on role in Mårten Klingberg's Swedish film *Offside* (2006), he reported to the *Liverpool Daily Echo* that his 'mates raised an eyebrow' when he revealed the nationality of the film.[81]

Another important channel for the continued perpetuation of this stereotype, perhaps particularly important for younger British audiences, is the British TV series *Eurotrash*, running from 1993 to 2005, and starring Swedish glamour model and *Playboy* Playmate Victoria Silvstedt as a guest presenter.[82] A major part of the programme consisted of clips showing people in European countries doing bizarre things, generally involving nudity, sex or sexual innuendo, and Scandinavian countries appeared to be the favourite alongside Germany. Silvstedt has continued to develop her 'blonde bimbo' persona in films like *She Said I Love You* (2001) and *Boat Trip* (2002), playing characters whose stereotypically Scandinavian names ('Inga', 'Ingrid'...) are tailored to fit this image. When a respondent in her early thirties who made it clear that she had never seen a Swedish film before *Faithless* wrote that she associated Swedish film with something 'sexual', but that *Faithless* contradicted her expectations because she had anticipated 'a little light heartedness?',[83] the kind of media persona that Silvstedt represents seems relevant to the contextual framework needed to explain such attitudes.

Scandinavian Gloom

The link between Sweden and liberal ideas clashed with the tendency among respondents to associate Swedish national culture with introspection[84] Bergman was

[80] Seonag Mackinnon, 'Ideas With Flare?', *Scotsman*, 25 July 2001, p. 7.
[81] Ian Rush, 'Acting up in New Role', *Liverpool Daily Echo*, 18 October 2005, First Edition, Sport section, p. 4.
[82] The production company Rapido Television claimed in 2004 that the series' 'remarkable 10 year broadcast track record boasts national audience shares of over 20%, and millions of viewers centring around the 16-34 demographic. Statistics show that each year, new generations discover the programme, reflecting an overall fan-base of countless millions, in the UK alone. Surprisingly, the programme is watched by 45% women and almost half of all viewers are ABC1s.'
<http://www.rapidotv.net/shows/shw.10.php> [accessed 17 April 2007].
[83] F26.
[84] F7, F16, F17.

described by *The Times* as 'the master of tortured, introspective dialogue'[85] and by *The Scotsman* as 'a man who epitomises the dark side of Scandinavian film-making' and the latter article also stated that Bergman often had 'been criticised for being too brooding, too northern in spirit'.[86] Many of the negative connotations of Swedish cinema that appeared among research participants' comments, such as 'anguished', 'dull/slow', 'dark', 'depressing' and 'hard work' were linked to this stereotype.[87] One respondent described Swedish national culture as '[o]h so serious - not much humour!' and Swedes as 'a serious lot!'[88] It is however important to point out that even if for many of the participants in this project, such perceptions might be linked to Bergman films, such ideas about Swedish society were already in circulation in British media when Bergman's film started to gain fame outside of Sweden.

Lennerhed has demonstrated how in the mid 1950s, reports about Sweden as a society characterised by extrovert sexuality on the one hand, and gloomy introspection on the other, began to surface in both Britain and the US. She argues convincingly that this functioned partly as a conservative counter-reaction to earlier positive anglophone accounts of the Swedish welfare state, as represented by Marquis Childs' 1936 book *Sweden – the Middle Way*.[89] British and American commentators criticised Swedish liberal attitudes towards sex, holding up compulsory sex education as the ultimate example of an intrusive nanny state, and arguing that Sweden's 'middle way' between capitalism and socialism could have dire consequences for the individual, leading to 'spiritual misery and alcoholism, suicide and promiscuity'.[90] Sexual liberation was seen as the result of a political gamble labelled 'The Most Daring Experiment in the World',[91] where sexual promiscuity lead to emotional dullness and depression.[92] This shows that associations between Swedish culture and 'propensity to suicide'[93] must be considered

[85] Roger Boyes, 'Bergman Denounces 'Whores' of Cinema', *The Times*, 30 December 2000, Overseas news section [n.p.].
[86] Adrian Morgan, 'The Dark Side of Bergman', *Scotsman*, 25 August 2000, p. 3.
[87] F7, F10, F30, F41.
[88] F6.
[89] Lennerhed, *Frihet att Njuta*. See especially Chapter 4 'Den svenska synden', pp. 89-111.
[90] Lennerhed, *Frihet att Njuta*, p. 309 (Quote from the English-language abstract).
[91] Jon Collen, 'The Most Daring Experiment in the World', *Daily Sketch*, 19,20,21,22 September 1955 [n.p.].
[92] Lennerhed, *Frihet att Njuta*, p. 92.
[93] F7.

in relation to wider cultural debates, rather than as a reflection of Bergman's reputation.[94]

Sex and Scandinavia: High-Brow and Low-Brow Cultural Forms

In the *Faithless* audience, comments about the film that could be linked to 'Swedish' liberal values referred mainly to openness regarding sexual matters.[95] Although some viewers described introspection and seriousness as examples of Swedish characteristics in the film, they seemed to link this to the Scandinavian literary tradition of Strindberg and Ibsen, rather than to modern Swedish society. [96] Considering that Bergman had a distinguished career as a theatre director alongside his work in film, it is interesting to note that when asked if the film they had just seen reminded them of any other films, two members of the *Faithless* audience referred to literary personalities, famous for their contribution to modern theatre.[97] By contrast, participants in the other case studies tended to cite only film titles, with the odd reference to television. Indeed, for audience members who had the prerequisite knowledge to identify references to literature and theatre, intertexuality appeared to be one of *Faithless'* attractions. At the same time, this might also act as a barrier to enjoyment for those unfamiliar with the relevant traditions.

A professional woman in her late thirties thought that 'openness with nakedness'[98] might be an example of something particularly Swedish in *Faithless*, but she also revealed that the film defied her expectations because she 'was comparing it to a Danish (?!) film I saw once, but it was nothing like it'.[99] The reference to Denmark has both historical and contemporary relevance. Danish society has a reputation for sexual permissiveness akin to the notion of 'Swedish sin', and having legalised pornography in 1967, Denmark became a prime exporter of pornography to Britain. More recently, however, the success

---

[94] Cf. Herbert Hendin's *Suicide and Scandinavia* (1965) and Roland Huntford, *The New Totalitarians* (London: Allen Lane, 1975), in particular Chapter 15: 'The Sexual Branch of Social Engineering' (pp. 325-337). It could in fact be suggested that Bergman's international career was helped by this discourse, since it provided a context for the darker elements of his films.
[95] F1, F3, F25, F38.
[96] F6, F7, F11, F16, F21.
[97] Ibsen (F11) and Harold Pinter (F2).
[98] F25.
[99] F25.

of Dogme films has influenced international perceptions of Scandinavian cinema, including Swedish film, and the explicit sexual content in recent Dogme films has contributed greatly to the films' profile in the British media. Lars von Trier's controversial *The Idiots*, for example, included professional porn actors among its cast, and featured a group sex sequence that lead the BBFC to give the film an '18' certificate. Participants in this project often failed to distinguish between Swedish, Danish and Norwegian films. For example, a professional woman in her late twenties explained that she expected Swedish films to provide 'something a bit different (e.g. Dogme films) focused on people and relationships'.[100] She also stated that *Faithless* reminded her of Lukas Moodysson's *Together* 'for the examination of social relationships and how they interweave'.[101] In Sweden, where *Faithless* and *Together* overlapped at the box office for a short while in 2000, the films were in fact often seen as representing opposing approaches ideologically as well as in terms of style.[102] In Britain, however, so few Swedish film titles are released that in order to make sense of the films, British audiences seem prepared to look for similarities and parallels rather than differences between the films.[103]

Although the sexual connotations of Swedish cinema could be observed in responses from across the case study, and indeed the research audience as a whole, expectations of explicit sex were most prevalent among viewers who would have been old enough to have encountered Bergman's classic films as well as more low-brow Swedish and Danish sexploitation films in British cinemas during the 1960s and 70s. However, a number of women in their twenties and thirties also compared *Faithless* to French

[100] F19. The way in which the different Scandinavian nations are confused with each other when films from these countries are released in Britain will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 5.
[101] F19. This audience also included other participants whose expectations of Swedish film appeared to be informed either by Dogme or Moodysson films (F10, F29, F33, F40).
[102] The debate centred on the alleged ideological implications of each film's representation of family relationships. In particular, commentators who identified strongly with the way of living shown in *Together*, which is set in a 1970s left-wing collective, felt betrayed by the fact that some of the characters were selfish and lacking in empathy despite pretending to live in a spirit of togetherness. Maths Jesperson, 'Alla är trolösa tillsammans', *Sydsvenskan*, 10 November 2000, [n.p.], and Margareta Zetterström, 'Att leva i kollektiv gemenskap eller förtvina i ett egoistiskt vakuum', *Sydsvenskan*, 3 November 2000, [n.p.].
[103] In Sweden, around twenty new feature-length fiction films are classified by SFI as 'Swedish' every year, and even if Swedish critics often discuss the films' relationship to Swedish society when reviewing the films, their national origin does not function as a generic label, because the films range from comedies to dramas, horror films, social problem films, detective stories, and other genres.

sexually charged dramas such as *Une Liaison Pornographique* (1999),[104] *5 x 2* (2005)[105] and films directed by Catherine Breillat,[106] thereby placing the film in a Western European tradition of serious dramas where sex plays an important role in the plot, and indicating one of the ways in which the concepts of 'Swedish' and 'French' cinema may connote similar associations in the minds of British film viewers.

The Emotional Experience of Film Viewing

Despite all the references to sex cited above, many of those who contributed to this case study seemed much more interested in *Faithless'* ability to produce a powerful emotional reaction than in its representation of sex. In discourses surrounding art cinema it has been common to assume that such films stimulate viewers' intellect rather than their emotions. This notion is reinforced by the fact that the terminology of popular film genres – horror, thriller, weepie – often seem to emphasise emotional responses. Audience reactions in the *Faithless* case study contradicted the assumption that viewing serious art films involves an intellectual rather than an emotional engagement with the film. Comments relating either to the on-screen depiction of emotions or to the individual respondent's emotional experience of seeing *Faithless* appeared in at least half of the questionnaires. Stereotypical ideas about women being more 'emotional' in their film viewing than men were not confirmed, except possibly in the sense that *Faithless* did attract a higher percentage of female viewers among participants over thirty-five years old than was the case for the research audience overall.[107] The tendency to discuss the film's emotional aspect was divided fairly evenly between the sexes, and among viewers in all age groups. A pattern does however appear when we distinguish between the 78% of the viewers who responded affirmatively to the question of whether they liked the film, and those whose reactions were negative or ambiguous.

---

[104] F41.
[105] F31. This comparison came from a student in her early twenties who wrote that she was 'not used to these kinds of films', but the parallel is interesting considering François Ozon's deliberate homage to Bergman in *5x2*.
[106] F19.
[107] See **Figure 21**.

As I noted in the previous chapter, respondents who actively disliked *The Dreamlife of Angels* invariably reported having difficulties engaging emotionally with the main characters, and this trend continued also in the *Faithless* audience. A male participant in his mid-thirties felt unable to engage with any of the main characters, in particular 'David who seemed to have no redeeming feature whatsoever',[108] while another man in his early fifties was able to relate only to the character of the child.[109] When interviewed about the film, Liv Ullmann often referred to audience reactions, reporting that young men had expressed concern and anger regarding the treatment of the child in the film, and she pointed out that in her adaptation, she emphasised the child's status as a victim, whereas Bergman had seen Marianne as the film's victim, and had not even thought of the effect on the child. Ullmann believed that the difference between Bergman's original idea and the reaction from men who had seen the film marked a shift in attitudes, showing younger men to engage in their role as fathers very differently from men in Bergman's generation.[110] The observation is worthy of note, despite its anecdotal nature.[111] Some of the younger research participants reported that they found it hard to relate to the main characters in *Faithless* because of their age or life-style,[112] and there were some interesting comments from viewers whose responses to the film were neither straightforwardly positive nor negative, such as the young female student whose reply to the question of whether she liked the film or not was '[t]oo sensitive, I was not in the mood for such a heavy suffering film' [*sic*].[113] Unlike the straightforwardly hostile respondents who distanced themselves from the film's characters, this person clearly felt emotionally affected by the film. Indeed, it seems as though she was quite overwhelmed, describing *Faithless* as 'quiet' yet 'intense' and explaining that the film was different from the kinds of films she was used to. Nevertheless, the ability of *Faithless* to convey emotion clearly also played into the aspects of the film that she liked, as demonstrated

---

[108] F40.
[109] F33.
[110] Morrow, ''Jealousy is Bergman's Great Weakness'', p. 11, Macnab, 'Crimes and Misdemeanours', p. 31.
[111] And despite the fact that it is difficult to regard Bergman, married five times, and fathering nine children to six different women, as representative of his generation's approach to fatherhood.
[112] F27, F30.
[113] F31.

by her view about Lena Endre having 'very good face expressions and you could see her emotions'.[114]

Among the majority of viewers who stated that they liked *Faithless*[115] expressions like 'emotionally charged'[116] and 'very emotional and intense'[117] were used to describe positive aspects of the film. One regular consumer of foreign-language film specifically listed the fact that *Faithless* 'expected [the] audience to take part emotionally' as one of the things she liked most about it. For this viewer, the whole point of the film was that it functioned as 'an emotional experience. Trying to understand the human condition'.[118] A woman in her late twenties made a distinction between emotional exhaustion and absorption, explaining that she had expected *Faithless* 'to be harrowing and emotionally draining, but instead it was absorbing'.[119] Such accounts do not suggest a coldly detached intellectual audience, but rather film viewers who experience an intense emotional engagement with the film. The earnestness of respondents explaining their emotional reactions contrasts sharply with the sardonic description of *Faithless* offered by a review in *The Sunday Telegraph*:

> It's the sort of film in which characters say, "I've never felt such pain" – and that's even before the story starts going all Swedish and pear-shaped. [120]

The same writer described Bergman as 'the Gloomy Swede himself', thereby suggesting that 'going all Swedish' in this context refers to the stereotype of Scandinavian culture as depressive and suicide-prone.[121] While this critic responded to the film's bleakness almost as if dealing with the parody of a serious art film, the research participants taking part in my project tended to take the film very seriously indeed, and they often appeared to be strongly affected by it. An overwhelming majority of respondents confirmed that the film made them feel anxious or uncomfortable at some point, and this tendency was stronger among those who liked the film than those who disliked it or were indifferent,

---

[114] F31.
[115] About two thirds of the audience.
[116] F26.
[117] F10.
[118] F2.
[119] F19.
[120] Anne Billson, 'Faithless', *Sunday Telegraph*, 11 February 2001, p. 8.
[121] Billson, 'Faithless', p. 8.

once again reinforcing the link between appreciation and the film's ability to engage emotions, and supporting Ullmann's description of the film as a thriller.[122] Several viewers spontaneously referred to the soundtrack, listing the 'heartbeat/breathing noise, over the top of the film'[123] and 'the depressing voice and the repeated pattern of clock-music'[124] as specific sources of anxiety. The link between soundtrack and audience reactions is an aspect of the film viewing process that is need of further research, as has been suggested by Martin Barker and his research team in their report on film audience responses for the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC).[125]

Gender and Identification

Among respondents who had a positive response to the film, some viewers specifically pointed out that they had difficulties relating to the male characters, in particular David.[126] Many of these respondents, although not all, were female, and one woman spontaneously asked 'is that because I am female and they are male or because of their flawed characters?',[127] an interesting comment since it raises the impact of gender on identification. As I mentioned in the introductory chapter, this issue has been high on the agenda within spectatorship debates since the 1970s. In Chapters 2 and 3, I showed that some female participants in the French case studies appeared to agree with the notion of gender-specific identification. Similarly, in the *Faithless* audience, a young woman believed that she understood Marianne even though she disagreed with her behaviour because of being female.[128] Another woman diagnosed the anxiety that *Faithless* made her feel as 'over-identification through personal experience'. This viewer expected to relate to the characters in a way that matched the narrative of her own life-story; she explained that having recently been deceived in a manner similar to Markus in the film,

---

[122] William Russell, 'Cannes Heat', *The Herald*, 11 May, 2000, p. 4. The director described the film as 'not a thriller with murders, but one in which a soul is murdered'.
[123] F25.
[124] F32.
[125] Martin Barker and Melanie Selfe, 'Researching Risky Audiences', paper presented at the conference "Who Are These People?" 22-23 March 2007, Edinburgh Filmhouse. The full research report (Barker et al., *Audiences and Receptions of Sexual Violence in Contemporary Cinema*, BBFC Report, March 2007) is available to download from the BBFC website <http://www.bbfc.co.uk/downloads/index.php> [accessed 5 November 2007].
[126] F7, F20, F25, F39.
[127] F39.
[128] F22.

she had 'expected to loathe Marianne and David'. Instead, to her surprise, she ended up feeling that her 'sympathies were with Marianne'.[129] Male respondents did not seem to find it problematic that the film encouraged more sympathy for Marianne than for the male protagonists. By contrast, one woman specifically pointed out that rather than relating to the female protagonist, she empathised with the 'husband and child', whom she saw as 'innocent victims'.[130] This comment is interesting in that it disregards the narrative twist at the end of the film, when we find out that Markus had himself had a lover for many years before the affair between Marianne and David started, and that the child Isabelle had been aware of Markus's infidelity without telling her mother. I highlight this audience comment not in order to label it as erroneous, but because it shows that for this viewer, a strong emotional attachment with certain characters seemed to override the logic of the plot structure, contradicting the view of theorists who describe interpretation primarily in terms of cognition.

Class, Taste, and Imaginary Journeys

One critic described *Faithless* as a 'tragic love story for highbrows',[131] and social class distinctions appeared to play a more important role in audience reactions to this film than in any of the other case studies. As we saw in the French case studies, when respondents described the film's perceived target audience, they usually included or detached themselves from that audience, depending on whether they liked it or not. Among viewers who did not like *Faithless*, participants in their twenties described the film as appealing to older, serious audiences, and in particular married people with experiences similar to the characters.[132] Respondents in their fifties and sixties, who might fit that description, but nevertheless disliked the film, detached themselves by suggesting that the film had an appeal only for Swedish[133] or intellectual[134] viewers. By contrast, among those who liked the film, viewers of all ages used words like 'mature',

---

[129] F19.
[130] F10.
[131] Cosmo Landesman, 'Faithless', *Sunday Times*, 11 February 2001, [n.p.].
[132] F27, F30, F31, F32.
[133] F33.
[134] F14, F34.

'experienced' or 'adult' (rather than old) to describe the film's audience.[135] Instead of 'intellectual', a term that seems associated with a certain cold detachment, they claimed that the film would appeal to 'reflexive', 'intelligent', 'sophisticated', 'passionate', 'thoughtful', 'open-minded' and 'sensitive' viewers.[136] Three viewers in their thirties with a negative or ambivalent response to *Faithless* emphasised the film's art-house character.[137] For one of them, a man in his mid-thirties with a wide knowledge of international film culture, the wealthy, artistic lifestyle of the characters was clearly connected to his hostile reaction, as he professed a strong dislike for the film's 'selfish middle-class lifestyles', and stated that it made him long for Ken Loach.[138] Indeed, this presumably left-leaning respondent whose profession as an environmental planner could be seen to signal an interest in the society around him interpreted the overall meaning of *Faithless* as confirming 'that the upper/middle-classes are fucked'.[139] Another viewer felt 'slight contempt, rather than compassion', and singled out 'David wallowing in his own self pity' as a particular cause for annoyance.[140]

For a professional woman in her mid-thirties who liked the film, however, the film's setting and 'middle-classness' provided a particular pleasure, because in her view, the comfortable and aesthetically pleasing lifestyle created a 'contrast with the characters' demise'.[141] Here, the privileged situation of the characters was understood not as a result of the narrow world-view of the filmmakers, but as an effective backdrop for the dramatic structure. A couple of respondents referred specifically to the 'creative' characters[142] or the 'theatre and music world inhabited'[143] as an aspect of the film that they liked.[144] Since the professional careers of these research participants were within the financial/legal sector and education respectively, their enjoyment of the artistic environment in the fictional narrative may be understood in terms of a kind of celluloid

[135] F3, F6, F11, F17, F21, F28, F29, F35, F37, F39.
[136] F2, F8, F19, F21, F26, F36, F38.
[137] F13, F40, F41.
[138] F40.
[139] F40.
[140] F13.
[141] F1.
[142] F4.
[143] F7.
[144] F4, F7.

tourism, an idea which also is interesting to consider in relation to the film's foreignness and linguistic difference.

Cultural Specificity and Universality in Subtitled Format

Following a general trend across the research project as a whole, it was more common for viewers whose first language was not English to state that they thought that knowledge about Swedish national culture was significant in relation to their interpretation.[145] A young student of Swedish origin was of the opinion that 'there are ways in which people act and behave that are particular to the Swedish culture. People seem distant but at the same time quite intimate'. She saw 'the manner in which the characters expressed themselves – with few words' as a particularly Swedish aspect of the film.[146] However, another student of a similar age stated that her 'knowledge of Swedish culture [was] mainly based on stereotypes, which the film didn't use at all'.[147] A retired woman stressed that there was a difference between awareness of Swedish cinema and knowledge of 'real Swedish life'.[148] Respondents who liked the film often described it as 'universal',[149] a tendency exemplified by a female respondent in her late twenties: 'Surely these are universal human responses to universal human situations?'[150] Despite claims about the universal appeal of the film's subject matter, most research participants were however aware that this film was not accessible to a mass audience. As discussed above, the film's restricted audience appeal could be explained with reference to age or class, but some viewers made distinctions between audiences interested in serious cinema rather than popular entertainment. Here it might be relevant to return to an issue raised in Chapter 2, namely the distinction between English-language films and subtitled cinema. Although I focus on this question in only two of the four case studies, respondents throughout the project often commented on the fact that the films in the research screenings series were subtitled, and sometimes they linked this to the issue of accessibility, as exemplified by a participant in the *Show Me Love* case study who wrote

[145] F16, F28, F32.
[146] F28.
[147] F31.
[148] F2.
[149] F9, F37, F39.
[150] F19.

that the film was aimed at 'anyone who can read the subtitles'.[151] This viewer was unable to read without her spectacles, and she therefore thought of subtitles as a physical obstacle that she had to overcome.[152] The sensory processes involved in film viewing were highlighted by several older research participants, whose responses indicated that subtitled films cater for audiences who find it hard to pick up the dialogue of mainstream English-language films. Thus, the most senior participant in the project, an eighty-three-year-old man, wrote that he was 'delighted to have subtitles' because of his hearing impairment.[153]

While there are clearly many factors contributing to the ageing audience demographic for European cinema in Britain that I described in the introduction to this thesis, the fact that older cinema-goers may find it easier to deal with English subtitles than modern English-language soundtracks is an interesting point that is rarely mentioned in debates about subtitled cinema. However, besides affecting viewers' differently depending on their level of vision and hearing, subtitles can also represent an obstacle to film interpretation in a more symbolic manner. In the anglophone context, subtitles have often been seen as a barrier preventing audiences from engaging emotionally with the film,[154] a phenomenon that we saw illustrated in the second chapter when British journalists contrasted *Amélie's* popular appeal with its subtitled format. The viewing of subtitled cinema involves the processing of two simultaneous channels of information, oral and written dialogue, and the additional concentration needed has often been used to claim that such films can only be enjoyed by an intellectual, highly educated audience. The enjoyment of popular cinema in subtitled form in non-anglophone countries demonstrates that this is a question of habit, rather than an essential characteristic of subtitled cinema. Nevertheless, it is very difficult to change such anglocentric perceptions in Britain, since they also inform the decisions made by distributors when picking up foreign-language titles for the British market. Native English-speakers in the *Faithless* audience often stated that they needed to concentrate more when viewing a

---

[151] S51.
[152] By remembering to bring her glasses!
[153] F9.
[154] Virgil Grillo and Bruce Kawin, 'Reading at the Movies: Subtitles, Silence, and the Structure of the Brain' in *Post Script*, 1.1 (1981), p. 29. Cf. Antje Ascheid, 'Speaking Tongues: Voice Dubbing in the Cinema as Cultural Ventriloquism', *The Velvet Light Trap*, 40 (1997), p. 38.

subtitled film, but their responses also indicated that this heightened attention might have positive implications. For example, one woman thought that non-English language films made audiences 'feel more involved' because of an increased level of concentration.[155] Another participant wrote:

> Language becomes more important, because the words are on the screen – words become more significant and I try to engage more with the characters because their language removes them from my sphere of direct experience.[156]

Some respondents stated that they preferred the experience of viewing non-English language film,[157] and one woman wrote about the 'added attraction of the foreign'.[158] It is interesting to compare the comments above about foreignness and characters in a different 'sphere of direct experience' with the views of participants in the *Amélie* case study, who as we saw in Chapter 2 linked the film viewing experience to the idea of travelling or observing characters from a distance.[159] More unfamiliar to British audiences than French, the Swedish language can for some viewers represent an even more exotic foreign experience. We can see this also in critical writing on Swedish cinema, as exemplified by the following passage from David Thomson, reminiscing about discovering Bergman films in the late 1950s:

> The Swedish language was blooming in our mouths with its gentle, pious, slightly smug closed vowels and its swallowing syllabics. We mimed the word Smultronstället from the dark as Victor Sjöström and Bibi Andersson uttered it in *Wild Strawberries* [1957]. [...] A year or so later, when the Royal Dramatic Theatre of Stockholm brought Bergman's production of Ur-Faust to London, in Swedish, there were some of us who crowded the gallery, trying to soak up the rainfall sounds of the language.[160]

The sonic qualities of Swedish and the exoticism of foreign languages more generally did feature among research participants' interest in Swedish and European film. One native English-speaker who had a professional interest in languages stated that he liked 'to hear the foreign sounds' even when he had no knowledge of the language spoken in

---

[155] F10.
[156] F19.
[157] F3, F12.
[158] F7.
[159] A17, A19.
[160] Thomson, 'Once, the Films of the Great Swedish Director...', [n.p.].

the film. Because he was disappointed by *Faithless*, his only enjoyment of the film consisted of 'hearing the voices of the Swedish actors'.[161] Clearly, the film's 'foreignness', made tangible by the imposition of subtitles on the screen and the sounds of a foreign language on the soundtrack, can be an important part of the film viewing experience for audiences who expect European film to provide 'a view to other cultures through film'.[162]

In this chapter, I have attempted to highlight *Faithless'* paradoxical status as a film that was released on the British market in the context of the critical hype surrounding the 'New Swedish Cinema' in 2001, but yet remained closely associated with a tradition of Swedish filmmaking that belongs to the 1960s and 1970s, and that is in many ways diametrically opposed to dominant trends in the Swedish film industry today. Adding to this paradox is the fact that British journalists and audiences are often more familiar with older traditions of Swedish filmmaking than contemporary developments. This tendency was clearly perceivable in the *Faithless* research audience, and the fact that this case study was dominated by more mature film viewers probably reinforced the trend.

Faithless was conceived already at production level as a film destined for the international art cinema circuit, with media attention focusing on Bergman's contribution to the film. In the research audience, confusion regarding the film's authorship caused by having a famous director as screenwriter and a famous actress as director was reflected mainly in the responses of male respondents. As we saw in the French case studies, male participants often referred explicitly to the film's direction, but in relation to *Faithless*, they tended to focus more on cinematography and storyline, thus dissociating authorship slightly from the director. The most remarkable aspect of the audience responses to this film, however, was the way in which viewers seemed to articulate their experience as an emotional rather than an intellectual process, confirming the need to consider the idea of emotional literacy in relation to film audiences and their viewing experiences.[163] Respondents engaged strongly with the film's characters, countering the clichéd notion of art cinema audiences as distanced or detached from the

[161] F33.
[162] F4.
[163] Cf. Ruddock, *Investigating Audiences*, p. 27

narrative. Film scholars, whose job it is to look at films analytically, have tended to assume that 'art cinema audiences' deal with films in a similar way to academics or critics approaching a film professionally.[164] My research indicates however that although British audiences attracted to a film like *Faithless* might be willing to accept a slower narrative pace than the average British cinema-goer choosing to see a popular genre film, their interpretations were just as dependent on emotional responses as the viewing experiences of audiences for a Hollywood romance or thriller. Furthermore, for some viewers, the film viewing seemed to function as an exotic journey, suggesting that 'escapism' from everyday reality is not restricted to fantasy genres or 'feel-good' films. The real difference seems to reside within perceptions of what it means to consume a particular type of film. Both within media discourse and among the audiences participating in this project, distinctions are often being made between popular and art cinema, and to see a Swedish, French or European film is still perceived as something more akin to attending an art exhibition or a serious play than to relaxation with Hollywood entertainment. Nevertheless, the emphasis on the emotional impact of *Faithless* within the research audience is reminiscent of the excessive or cathartic feelings associated with melodramas or 'weepies', staple genres within popular Hollywood cinema that remind us that Hollywood is not always about happy endings. In Chapter 2, I analysed audience responses to a French popular film that ended happily, while Chapters 3 and 4 have focused on films with a more serious tone. In the final case study, I will consider another film with a happy ending, and look at how British audiences make sense of generic elements associated with a particular Hollywood genre when encountered in a Swedish film.

[164] This is to a certain extent an idealised image of professional film writers and their interpretative strategies, as scholars and journalists do not always maintain an analytical, reflective approach to film viewing.

Chapter 5. *Show Me Love*

With a total admission figure of over 800,000 at the Swedish box office, Lukas Moodysson's first feature film *Show Me Love* dominated the Swedish box office in 1998; only the global blockbuster *Titanic* was more popular with Swedish audiences. As the first film made at *Film i Väst*, the recently launched production centre in Western Sweden supported by European funding programmes, *Show Me Love* came to illustrate the regionalist trend in Swedish film production at the turn of the millennium. The film's unexpected commercial success led Swedish politicians in post-industrial towns plagued by unemployment to start viewing film production as an attractive opportunity for creating new jobs, as well as a positive, modern image for their region.[1] Indeed, *Show Me Love's* original title *Fucking Åmål* took on a symbolic significance: by referring to Åmål, a real place in Western Sweden, the film literally put regional filmmaking in Sweden on the map.

Like the first case study in this thesis, *Show Me Love* was exceptionally popular in its home market, but unlike *Amélie*, it did not repeat this box office success when exported to Britain in 2000. A first feature of an unknown filmmaker, *Show Me Love* was released on five prints with a very modest marketing campaign. In this chapter I will argue that another factor hindering the film from achieving the kind of box office success that Moodysson's subsequent feature *Together* experienced in Britain in 2001, or the endorsement that British critics gave to the director's third film *Lilya 4-ever* (2002) in 2003, was the issue of genre. *Show Me Love's* relation to international trends in the representation of teenagers on film, and in particular Hollywood high-school movies, affected generic expectations and responses in my research audiences as well as among British critics. This chapter is based on a larger set of audience responses than the other three case studies because it is based not only on empirical material collected at the University of Southampton's Avenue Campus and the New Park Cinema in Chichester, but also on questionnaires collected from members of the Winchester Film Society, who

[1] Cf. Olof Hedling, '"Sveriges mest kända korvkiosk" – om regionaliseringen av svensk film', in *Solskensklandet: Svensk film på 2000-talet*, ed. by Erik Hedling and Ann-Kristin Wallengren (Stockholm: Atlantis, 2006), pp.19-49.

saw *Show Me Love* as part of their 2005/2006 programme at the Screen Cinema in Winchester.[2] Although some of the differences between these screening locations were addressed in the introductory chapter, it will be necessary to examine the make-up of the Winchester audience in further detail here. In addition, I obtained a set of questionnaires at a college in Chichester where students saw *Show Me Love* as part of their A-level course in Film Studies. This group differs significantly from the other audiences in this case study, not just in terms of age and pre-knowledge about European cinema, but also because they did not choose to see the film in question, but were obliged to attend the screening as part of the curriculum.[3] These special circumstances will be kept in mind throughout the chapter, and when I discuss the demographic characteristics of the audience in the next section, the college audience is not included unless this has been specifically indicated.

The Winchester Screening: Audience Profile Impact

Because *Show Me Love* was the first film in the series to be screened at the New Park cinema, the research screenings had not yet been widely publicised in Chichester, and the audience for *Show Me Love* at New Park was therefore unusually small in comparison with other screenings at this venue. The two largest groups of responses for this case study came from the Avenue and Winchester audiences. The average age of viewers attending the screenings of *Show Me Love* in Chichester, Southampton and Winchester was forty-three. This figure was affected by the fact that the Winchester group was dominated by older viewers.[4] A majority of these older research participants were male,[5] and therefore men over the age of thirty-five make up the largest group of viewers in the *Show Me Love* audience as a whole.[6] In contrast with the Avenue and New Park audiences, the Winchester group did not include any students; over 90% of participants in the Winchester group were in paid employment, and viewers in this

[2] The film was also screened at the Harbour Lights cinema in Southampton, but only one questionnaire was obtained from this audience group.
[3] The students had chosen to take the A-level Film Studies course, but that does not necessarily mean that all of the screenings were of films that they would have volunteered to see in their own spare time.
[4] See **Figure 11**. The average age of viewers attending the Winchester screening was forty-seven, and without this group, the average age would have been forty.
[5] See **Figure 18**.
[6] See **Figure 22**.

audience who did not receive a salary were either housewives or retired.[7] The Winchester group also included more respondents involved in creative and technical professions, and research participants with qualified jobs within health, social care, and IT.[8] This audience could therefore be described as more markedly dominated by higher socio-economic categories than the research audience as a whole. Since working professionals dominated the Winchester group to a much greater extent than was the case in the New Park and Avenue groups, the types of jobs held by members of the Winchester audience had a strong affect on the occupational profile of the *Show Me Love* audience overall.[9]

The fact that the Winchester audience was dominated by native English speakers to a higher degree than other research screenings also reflects the linguistic background profile of the *Show Me Love* audience, with over 80% of participants listing English as their first language. The share of the audience for this film with some knowledge of Swedish was higher than in the case of the French case study films, but similar to the audience for *Faithless*, indicating that the research screenings of Swedish films attracted some viewers with a specialist interest in Swedish culture, as well as a few native Swedish-speakers.[10]

In comparison with the other case studies, a larger share of the audience attending *Show Me Love* screenings could be characterised as low level film consumers.[11] Once again, the additional screening in Winchester played a significant part in this, since the Winchester group included more respondents who did not view films every week,[12] possibly because so many of the participants in this group were at the height of their professional career and too busy working full-time to allow for the high levels of film consumption of students and retired people attending screenings in other locations.

---

[7] See **Figure 26**.
[8] See **Figure 34**.
[9] See **Figure 38**.
[10] See **Figure 52** and **Figure 55**. Swedish-speakers attended the screenings partly as a result of the fact that information about the film programmes had been distributed to the Nordic Society at the University of Southampton, and the Anglo-Scandinavian Society in Winchester.
[11] See **Figure 40**.
[12] See **Figure 39**.

However, the peculiarities of the Winchester audience do not fully account for the low level of film consumption in this case study audience overall.

Young Film Viewers and Film Consumption

The youngest viewers attending the screenings of *Show Me Love*, those aged under twenty-five years old, were more likely to be low-level film consumers than was the case for the same age group in the overall research audience.[13] Over one quarter of fifteen to twenty-four-year-olds in the study as a whole were high-level film consumers, but this only applied to one in ten young viewers of *Show Me Love*. There were also more frequent cinema-goers among these younger participants than in the corresponding profile for the research audience overall. In this group, as well as among the viewers between twenty-five and thirty-four, it was more common for viewers to list cinema as their main format for film consumption than was the case in the overall research audience. *Show Me Love* viewers under thirty-four were more likely to list television as their main format for consumption in comparison with the overall research audience profile, and an unusually low share of audience members between twenty-five and thirty-four listed DVD/video as their main format for consuming film.[14]

The overall implications of this was that respondents belonging to the younger age groups in this case study tended to challenge the general trend among younger viewers, which was to see many films, but to consume these films mainly at home on television or DVD. With an unusually high frequency of cinema-going and low DVD consumption, younger respondents participating in this case study demonstrated a viewing behaviour more similar to older participants in the study as a whole. Why this is the case is not clear,[15] but it makes it particularly interesting to contrast responses from the Avenue, New Park and Winchester audiences with the material collected at Chichester College. The college students participating in my study were all between

[13] 40% against around 25%.
[14] See **Figure 44** and **Figure 51**.
[15] Since the audience for European cinema in Britain appears to be ageing, and the Swedish case study audiences in this project had a higher average age than the audiences for the two French films, it may be the case that viewing Swedish cinema has become associated with mature audiences, and that young viewers who do see these films are film consumers whose habits are more 'mature' than those of their peers.

seventeen and nineteen years old, and their film consumption profile conformed to habits associated with young viewers in the study as a whole, rather than to the untypical consumption patterns of the younger *Show Me Love* respondents outlined above. Thus, all of the Chichester College participants consumed film every week, with almost 80% viewing more than five films per week, and none of them listed cinema as their main format for film consumption.[16]

Audience Pre-Knowledge

Only three out of the over ninety respondents in this case study had seen *Show Me Love* before coming to a research screening, so repeat viewers accounted for a much smaller share of the respondents in comparison with the audiences discussed in previous chapters.[17] One of these three repeat viewers (all of them women) did however resemble the enthusiastic *Amélie* fans discussed in Chapter 2 in that she was a fairly young university student who counted *Show Me Love* among her favourite films, owned it on DVD, and had seen it six or seven times before coming to the research screening.[18] As a Film Studies student and frequent cinema-goer with a good knowledge of European film, this viewer was more of a traditional cinephile than the other two repeat viewers who did not go to the cinema or watch films particularly often. Because of their cultural background, these two respondents were nevertheless more aware of European film culture than the average British research participant. One of them, a Belgian student in her early twenties, had seen only one part of the film before, when it was shown on Belgian television,[19] while the other repeat viewer was part-Swedish and had seen the film 'shortly after it premiered in Sweden'.[20]

To conduct film audience research when a considerable amount of time has passed between the film's original release and the collection of audience responses means that it becomes important to take into consideration whether or not research participants were in a position to take note of the original publicity surrounding the film in question. Like

[16] See **Figure 43**.
[17] S27, S35, S32.
[18] S27.
[19] S32.
[20] S35.

The Dreamlife of Angels, the film considered in Chapter 3, *Show Me Love* was released in its country of origin in 1998, but the gap between the research screening and the original British release was slightly smaller than in the case of *The Dreamlife of Angels*, because *Show Me Love* was not released in the UK until the year 2000. However, five years is still a long time when it comes to remembering publicity, in particular about a film that received little attention in the press and was promoted on a minimal marketing budget. For the youngest participants in this case study, the A-level students at Chichester College, it would not even have been legal to see *Show Me Love* in a British cinema in 2000, since the film was given a '15' certificate by the BBFC. It is therefore hardly surprising that the college students' only prior knowledge about the film was the information that their teacher had given them. Among more mature research participants, in particular those over thirty years old, it was fairly common to have some pre-knowledge about the film beyond the information provided in the programme advertising the research project. Some respondents remembered reading reviews of the film when it first came out,[21] while others reported having been aware of the film's presence at film festivals in the late nineties.[22]

Lukas Moodysson: Auteur in the Shadow of Bergman?

When *Show Me Love* was first released in the UK, it was seen by only around 27,000 British cinema-goers. Most viewers with prior knowledge of the film appeared to have heard about it not at the time of its original release, but rather because they had seen later films by the same director.[23] When *Show Me Love* was picked up for UK distribution in 2000, Swedish cinema had been more or less absent from the British market for several years, but as I explained in the previous chapter, the following year the British share of European admissions to Swedish films rose considerably.[24] Moodysson and his second film, the comedy *Together* was at the centre of the hype

[21] S29, S55. One additional respondent also referred to reviews, but this was because he was in charge of putting together programme notes for the Winchester Film Society Programme (S74).
[22] S23, S48.
[23] S6, S12, S13, S30, S34, S35, S38, S39, S55, S57, S61.
[24] See **Figure 7**.

surrounding the 'new Swedish cinema'[25] The director's third feature, *Lilya 4-ever*, a dark film about the trafficking of teenage prostitutes from Eastern Europe, was seen by fewer British cinema-goers than *Together*,[26] but it was admired by large sections of the British press.[27] Since cinephile viewers often read film criticism in specialist magazines and quality newspapers, *Lilya 4-ever* could therefore also be seen as contributing to entrench Moodysson's status as an auteur-director.

An analysis of British press reactions to the release of *Together* in July 2001 shows that most commentators felt compelled to place contemporary Swedish cinema in relation to the oeuvre of Ingmar Bergman. The *Sunday Herald* stated that '[r]eceiving a letter from Ingmar Bergman congratulating you on your first masterpiece sounds like the stuff of dreams. But that's what happened to Swedish poet-turned-film-maker Lukas Moodysson'.[28] An article in the *Financial Times* mocked the Swedish film industry by making it sound as though it revolved entirely around the search for a new Bergman:

> Soon after Ingmar Bergman stopped directing, the search began for a successor. Talent scouts roamed Sweden armed with clipboards and questionnaires. If you looked lean, pale and visionary you could be pulled from your Volvo and forced to answer questions about God, pain and art. A nation had lost its movie Messiah. It must quickly find another. Now we can all relax. 30-year-old Lukas Moodysson has been enthroned, at least temporarily, as the new Ingmar. Even the Master called him a master after Moodysson's superb first feature.[29]

A 2003 *New Statesman* article summed up the recent upsurge in Swedish film exports by stating that Swedish cinema had 'emerged from its post-Bergman hibernation', and labelled Moodysson the 'Angry Young Man of Swedish film'.[30]

---

[25] Stephen Dalton, 'Stephen Dalton's New Swedish Cinema', *The Times*, 21 July 2001, Saturday Features [n.p.].
[26] UK admission figures for Lilya 4-ever in 2003 according to Lumiere: 45,547.
[27] Cf. Peter Bradshaw, 'Run For Your Life', *Guardian*, 25 April 2003, Friday Review section, p. 16, Gulliver Cragg, 'Views and Reviews: the Week in Arts: the Week in Review', *Independent*, 26 April 2003, p. 18.
[28] Stephen Applebaum, 'Swede and Sour', *Sunday Herald*, 15 July 2001, p. 4.
[29] Nigel Andrews, 'Laughing at a Sacred Cow', *Financial Times*, 12 July 2001, Arts section, p. 12. Features on Moodysson in *The Independent on Sunday* and *The Guardian* during the summer of 2001 also referred back to Bergman's description of *Show Me Love* as ''a young master's first masterpiece''. Lee Marshall, ''I'd Love to Become the Abba of Swedish Film'', *Independent on Sunday*, 1 July 2001, p.10, Steve Rose, ''I've Tried So Hard to Fit in'', *Guardian*, 5 July 2001, Features pages, p. 11.
[30] Tom de Castella, 'Porn Again', *New Statesman*, 15 September 2003, [n.p.]. Cf. Applebaum's description of Moodysson as 'the man most likely to lead Swedish cinema into a shiny post-Bergman era',

In the *Show Me Love* research audience, participants referred directly to Bergman in their responses.[31] Some of their expectations of Swedish film, such as 'slow-moving, earnest and thoughtful, with stark landscapes – maybe featuring Death',[32] or 'introspective, serious, angst/anxiety ridden'[33] also seemed closely connected to stereotypical accounts of the famous filmmaker's oeuvre in British critical discourse.[34].

It is worth noting that all of the respondents cited above were men in the age group of thirty-five years and upwards, and that the majority of these viewers were over sixty years old. These perceptions are therefore likely to have been formed in relation to discourses surrounding Swedish cinema in the fairly distant past, so they are not necessarily closely connected to contemporary film culture or the marketing and publicity surrounding recent film releases.

Auteurism, Cinephilia, and Gender Differences

In the first French case study, I found that male viewers were much more inclined to refer to Jean-Pierre Jeunet's directorial style in their comments about *Amélie* than female research participants. In relation to *The Dreamlife of Angels* there was less of a correlation between gender and auteurist interpretation strategies, but that might have been because very few viewers were familiar with the director at all. In the *Faithless* audience, the issue of authorship was complicated by the fact that a famous auteur had written, but not directed the film, and male viewers tended to comment on stylistic issues without focussing on direction. In the case of *Show Me Love* several female viewers mentioned having seen other films directed by Moodysson.[35] However, only

---

'Swede and Sour', p. 4. For more evidence of Moodysson's reputation as 'enfant terrible' of Swedish cinema, cf. Rose, ''I've Tried So Hard to Fit in'', p. 11. See also Sheila Johnston's description of the director in *The Daily Telegraph*: 'Much admired for his art [...] he is equally notorious for his outspoken opinions and his readiness to berate the establishment' 'Filmmakers on Film', *Daily Telegraph*, 19 April 2003, p. 20 and Sean O'Hagan's description of Moodysson as 'the most hated man in Sweden' in 'Moody by Name', *Observer,* 13 April 200, Review section, p. 9.

[31] S6, S20, S25, S52, S67.

[32] S59.

[33] S58.

[34] S55. Cf. also S31, S57.

[35] S27, S35, S39 S55.

two of these respondents, the film student who had seen *Show Me Love* several times before[36] and an artist in her early thirties, a frequent cinema-goer who consumed films mainly in the cinema, and was familiar with a wide range of European films,[37] discussed the film in a way that emphasised the contribution of the director. Among male research participants, auteurist approaches were much more common. Several men listed the fact that *Show Me Love* was Moodysson's first feature as the main thing they knew about the film prior to seeing it.[38] Comments such as 'I expected a Moodysson film to be thought provoking'[39] and 'the director's style is unmistakable'[40] exemplify how the film's message and style could be related to the director as an auteur. Other male participants made connections between the film and its director in more indirect ways.[41] The age of these male auteurists ranged from twenty-three to sixty-six, and included students as well as professionals from all of the screening locations except Chichester College. The one thing the respondents with the most explicitly auteurist tendencies had in common was the fact that they all went to the cinema at least once a week,[42] a habit that they shared with the two female auteurists discussed earlier on.[43] Auteurist interpretation strategies thus appear to go hand in hand with a high frequency of cinema-going.[44]

Women taking part in this case study wrote that they liked the subject matter, the convincing portrayals of teenage life and small-town boredom,[45] while male viewers were more inclined to emphasise the style of the film when justifying their enjoyment.[46] This is similar to the trend we observed in relation to *Amélie*, which men tended to see as an auteur film and women as a romantic comedy, but as I will show in this chapter, *Show Me Love* involves further complications in terms of its perceived genre, because

---

[36] S27.
[37] S55. The other two female viewers who referred to Moodysson's oeuvre did not really apply auteurist interpretation strategies when discussing *Show Me Love*, but rather stated as a matter of fact that they were familiar with one or several other films by the same director (S35, S39).
[38] S12, S61.
[39] S6.
[40] S30.
[41] S13, 34, S38.
[42] S6, S30, S61.
[43] S27, S55.
[44] Except when the films consumed in the cinema are mainly English-language mainstream films.
[45] S1, S3, S10, S17, S24, S25, S27, S47, S55, S64, S79, S86, S91.
[46] S5, S6, S12, S31, S33, S34, S41, S49, S54, S56, S57, S58, S59, S61, S63, S92.

both male and female viewers struggled when it came to deciding whether the film was an example of art cinema or a popular film.[47]

European Cinema, Hollywood, and the Question of Genre

When European films are distributed in the UK, their foreignness tends to become added to the generic traits that categorised their release in their original reception context. This means that *Show Me Love* was described in British reviews as a 'Swedish teen movie'.[48] Foreign language films are generally exhibited in art-house cinemas that attract a different audience demographic from multiplexes, and this contributes to the perception of these films as different to Hollywood genre films. In the context of my audience study, this perception was reflected in the words of one of the research participants who exclaimed, when asked if *Show Me Love* reminded her of any other films, that it was 'European cinema not Hollywood',[49] implying that European films have no generic relationship to each other. To divide films into different genres was something audiences associated with Hollywood and mainstream film culture, as demonstrated in the comments made by two other respondents, who described *Show Me Love*, respectively as 'romance'[50] and 'feel-good',[51] but added '(hate categorising films!)'[52] and, tellingly, 'why categorise/limit? This isn't Hollywood!'[53] It is interesting that these respondents, who expressed such distaste for the idea of labelling films, classified *Show Me Love* in terms closely associated with popular cinema. However, genres are, in Steve Neale's words, 'ubiquitous, multifaceted phenomena', and it is unhelpful to see them as restricted to popular culture or commercial Hollywood cinema.[54] Even when viewers describe something as a non-generic film, this in itself is a way of categorising the film in relation to other types of films, and therefore implies its own set of expectations.

---

[47] For more details on the film, see the synopsis in Appendix C.
[48] Tom Dawson, 'Show Me Love', *Total Film*, 39 (2000), p. 98.
[49] S1.
[50] S66.
[51] S74.
[52] S74.
[53] S66.
[54] Steve Neale, *Genre and Hollywood* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 28.

In the British press, *Fucking Åmål* was perceived as an 'international entry in the high-school romance genre',[55] and compared to American teen pictures. Some respondents in my audience research study found the film similar to Hollywood high-school dramas,[56] but others defined it in explicit opposition to this kind of film.[57] While an overwhelming majority of viewers appeared to see the fact that *Show Me Love* was about teenagers as significant when attempting to characterise the film,[58] there was some confusion as to which age group the film was attempting to address. It is interesting to consider this in relation to the film's original release in Sweden in 1998. Swedish critics praised *Show Me Love* for providing a portrayal of growing up in *landsorten*, provincial Sweden, that young people outside Stockholm would recognise and be able to identify with. *Show Me Love's* comic elements and non-urban setting led some observers to see it as challenging what they saw as the dominant trend in Swedish youth films of the 1990s towards sensationalising inner-city crime, drugs, violence and explicit sex. [59] The absence of such themes actually contributed to the film's box office success, because it meant that viewers from eleven years upwards were allowed to see the film, in contrast with the '15' certificate given to most other youth films in Sweden.[60] This perceived family-friendliness contrasts starkly with the British critical discourse surrounding *Show Me Love* when it was showing at the Berlin film festival. Articles in the British press placed considerable emphasis on the original title *Fucking Åmål*, defined by the *Financial Times* as an 'up-yours title'.[61] The *Guardian* even included it in a list of films 'set to trouble the British Board of Film Classification'.[62] When the film was shown at the Toronto Film Festival later that year, the *Guardian* quoted Moodysson as explaining the

---

[55] Trevor Johnston, 'Show Me Love', *Time Out*, 1-8 March 2000, [n.p.].
[56] S20, S79, S34, S36, S58, S71, S78, S81, S85, S91.
[57] S30.
[58] S2, S3, S4, S5, S6, S7, S8, S9, S10, S11, S12, S13, S14, S15, S16, S17, S18, S19, S20, S23, S24, S26, S27, S28, S29, S30, S31, S34, S35, S36, S37, S38, S39, S42, S47, S50, S52, S55, S57, S58, S59, S60, S63, S64, S68, S69, S71, S76, S77, S79, S80, S81, S82, S83, S84, S85, S86, S87, S88, S89, S90, S91, S92, S94, S95.
[59] Anders Marklund, *Upplevelser of svensk film: En kartläggning av genrer inom svensk film under åren 1985-2000* (Lund: Critica Litterarum Lundensis, 2004), pp. 124-127. Bo Ludvigsson, 'Starkt och modigt om att finna sitt liv', *Sydsvenskan*, 23 October 1998, [n.p.], Jonas Cramby, 'Fucking great!', *Expressen*, 23 October 1998, [n.p.]. Examples of violent youth films cited in the articles include *Stockholmsnatt* (1986), *Sökarna* (1993) and *30:e November* (1995).
[60] Marklund *Upplevelser of svensk film*, p. 136.
[61] Nigel Andrews, 'Flapjacks and Fury from the Zoo', *Financial Times*, 20 February 1999, Arts section, p. 7.
[62] Derek Malcolm and Amelia Gentleman, 'Festival Films', *Guardian*, 22 February 1999, p. 5.

change of title as motivated by the fact that 'the original sounds like a Turkish porn film'.[63] By placing the film within the context of adult entertainment and censorship issues, the British critical discourse contributed to expectations of controversy and edginess, playing along with the historical associations between Swedish cinema and censorship debates discussed in Chapter 4.

In terms of box office performance, *Show Me Love* transcended the youth film genre in Sweden, attracting around four times the typical audience for a Swedish youth film.[64] This was largely due to its success with adult audiences, but in light of the hesitation among research participants in this case study as to what kind of audience *Show Me Love* was aimed at, it is interesting to consider that within the film's original audience, the '11+' certificate expanded the film's potential audience to cinema-goers that were *younger* than the typical youth film audience. By contrast, some participants in my research project specifically pointed out that the film was intended for an audience older than the film's protagonists, who are supposed to be fourteen and sixteen.[65] One woman in her mid fifties who saw the film's target audience as '[m]iddle class, middle-aged or slightly younger' exclaimed 'what would a teenage audience make of it??'[66] while another female respondent in her mid-thirties wrote:

> [T]he audience I saw this film with were all adults, but I felt it would be a good discussion starting point for young people. I am not sure whether young people particularly in the UK would watch it.[67]

What do such comments tell us about attitudes towards young British film audiences among older viewers? The former respondent suggested that teenagers would not have the maturity or culture required to enjoy the film (whereas the middle-class, middle-aged audience she felt it was aimed towards supposedly would). The latter viewer thought that young people would benefit from seeing the film, but expressed uncertainty as to whether it would be seen by British teenagers. Her statement did not make explicit

---

[63] Peter Bradshaw, 'Twinkle, Twinkle Megastars; Hollywood Premieres and More from Quirky Dogme 95', *Guardian,* 24 August 1999, p. 12.
[64] A Swedish youth film typically attracts between 200,000-300,000 viewers at the Swedish box office, according to Marklund, *Upplevelser of svensk film,* p. 125.
[65] S21, S22, S38, S65, S74.
[66] S65.
[67] S62.

whether or not this was due to lack of interest from the young viewers themselves, or because of their limited access to foreign language film in mainstream viewing formats. A sixty-year-old man wrote that 'Swedish teenagers [are] like British ones – shatters my 1960s idealisation of Scandinavians!'[68] This comment exemplifies a trend among adult research participants, who sometimes demonstrated a negative attitude towards teenage culture in Britain and perhaps towards young people in general. The most striking statement along these lines came from a male respondent in his fifties, one of only five participants in the case study who actively disliked *Show Me Love*.[69] He wrote:

> I'm not very interested in teenagers like this. If I want to see stupid teenagers I don't have to travel far from home.[70]

Although such negative reactions to the film were unusual, clearly some of the viewers over thirty-five, the dominant age group in this case study audience, expected Swedish films to provide a more grown-up artistic experience, far removed from stories that might appeal to what one viewer described dismissively as 'a teenage "yoof" audience'[71]. A female respondent in her thirties wrote that the characters in the film were 'younger than audience rating – not fair!'[72] Indeed, British cinema-goers in Elin's age group (fourteen) would not be allowed to see *Show Me Love* in a British cinema. This is indicative of the fact that, as I mentioned in Chapter 4, the censorship tradition concerning sexual matters is stricter in Britain than in Sweden and most other European countries, not just in terms of what is shown on the screen, but also in relation to implied sexual content and language. Many youth films from countries with a more liberal censorship tradition will therefore automatically target an older audience when shown in Britain, thus potentially creating a sense of uncertainty in terms of the film's genre.

---

[68] S57.
[69] S36, S43, S60, S68, S71. More than 80% of participants answered yes to the question of whether they liked *Show Me Love*. In addition to the five clearly negative viewers, there were respondents who stated that they did not know if they liked or disliked the film, who did not answer the question, and who wrote 'quite' or 'in general yes', that is, indicating some reservations or a certain ambivalence in a generally positive response.
[70] S43.
[71] S20.
[72] S48.

Coming-of-Age and 'Alternative' Themes

It was fairly common for research participants to describe *Show Me Love* as a coming-of age drama, sometimes by comparing it to films like *Stand by Me* (1987) or *My Life as a Dog* (*Mitt liv som hund*, 1985). Films depicting memories of childhood may be appreciated by teenagers, but the format of voice-over narration guiding viewers to events happening in the past could be seen to primarily address an adult audience remembering their own past experiences of growing up. Nordic cinema has established a reputation on the international film festival circuit with coming-of-age dramas,[73] and *My Life as a Dog* was one of the most successful Swedish-language films in the 1980s. Among audience research respondents who used the term 'coming-of-age' or the similar 'rite-of-passage' in order to describe *Show Me Love*[74] only a couple of respondents appeared to be conscious of this tradition in Scandinavian cinema,[75] but viewers often compared *Show Me Love* to other Scandinavian films. They also found similarities with films from other European countries.[76]

For some respondents, *Show Me Love* represented a subversive alternative to American mainstream teen films.[77] It was fairly common to compare the film to American indie films like *The Virgin Suicides* (1999), *Boys Don't Cry* (1999), *Welcome to the Dollhouse* (1995), *Ghost World* (2001), *Bully* (2001), *Kids* (1995), *Elephant* (2003), *Garden State* (2004) or *Thirteen* (2003), but interestingly, a number of research participants found *Show Me Love* similar to television dramas or series, and here, references to teen-oriented British, French and Swedish programmes appeared more frequently than comparisons with American dramas.[78] The film was also compared to British or non-English-language European dramas involving young protagonists exploring their sexual

---

[73] Trevor G. Elkington, 'Costumes, Adolescence and Dogma: Nordic Film and American Distribution' in *Transnational Cinema in a Global North: Nordic Cinema in Transition*, ed. by Andrew Nestingen and Trevor G. Elkington (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005), pp. 31-54 (p. 39). Elkington is writing about the American reception of Nordic films.

[74] S2, S8, S9, S28, S38, S50, S55, S59.

[75] S35, S38.

[76] S25, S29, S33, S34, S35, S38, S39, S43, S48, S51, S56, S57, S58, S69, S73, S77, S87, S93.

[77] S2, S3, S4, S7, S9, S10, S11, S14, S15, S18, S19, S23, S27, S29, S31, S35, S38, S40, S43, S47, S48, S49, S55, S56, S59, S61, S62, S72, S74, S78, S80, S82, S92, S94.

[78] S9, S17, S23, S35, S78. This is very interesting, as in the study overall, there is otherwise very few examples of viewers relating films to television culture.

identity such as *Summer Storm* (*Sommersturm*, 2004), *My Summer of Love* (2004), and *My Beautiful Launderette* (1985). In this context, *Show Me Love's* non-Americanness was significant in establishing the film as 'alternative'.

Serious Art or Comedy? Self-Images and Film Categorisation

Many respondents seemed to place *Show Me Love* within the category of art cinema, as indicated by their references to the film's realism, its depiction of current social issues, its value as an educational tool or political statement, or its documentary style.[79] Although some viewers saw *Show Me Love* as simultaneously a work of art and a teenage film, and used generic constructions like 'social comedy'[80] to indicate the fact that it contained both serious and comic elements, many viewers approached the film primarily as a serious drama or an auteur film, describing it as a non-genre film aimed at 'liberal film-festival goers',[81] or 'adults, people interested in other than mainstream films'.[82] Other respondents identified straightforward generic elements such as comedy[83] and romance[84] in the film, but very few viewers over the age of thirty-five drew attention to the film's comic aspects. Almost half of the responses that used terms like 'love' or 'romance' to describe *Show Me Love* came from the A-level students at Chichester College. Older audiences were thus less inclined to focus on the lighter side of the film, such as its use of humour and its happy ending. This might be connected to research audiences' tendency, repeatedly observed in previous chapters, to characterise a film that they approve of in a manner that supports their perception of themselves. For younger audiences, it seemed natural and unproblematic to enjoy *Show Me Love* as a teen romance, whereas some older viewers, in particular those keen to emphasise their consumption of film as a cultural and intellectual activity, preferred to see the film as non-generic.

---

[79] S1, S3, S4, S6, S7, S14, S15, S16, S17, S18, S19, S21, S22, S23, S24, S25, S26, S27, S31, S32, S33, S34, S35, S40, S41, S46, S48, S49, S50, S51, S52, S55, S56, S57, S58, S59, S61, S62, S63, S73, S74, S75, S76, S77, S78, S81, S82, S83, S87, S92, S94, S95.
[80] S21, S57.
[81] S4.
[82] S22.
[83] S11, S13, S21, S25, S28, S30, S36, S37, S57, S70, S73, S74.
[84] S5, S10, S11, S13, S15, S28, S39, S42, S44, S50, S66, S77, S87, S88, S89, S90, S92, S93, S94, S95.

Scandinavian Quirkiness

As we saw in Chapter 2, the term 'feel-good' was often applied to *Amélie*, and *Show Me Love* also prompted respondents to use the term;[85] one woman in her mid-twenties even compared Moodysson's film to *Amélie*.[86] The same viewer found Moodysson's film similar to the Norwegian comedies *Elling* (2001) and *Kitchen Stories* (*Salmer fra kjøkkenet*, 2003). Another respondent, like the previous one a member of the Winchester Film Society, stated that he liked films from Norway because of their quirkiness.[87] Considering the rarity of Norwegian films on the British market this is almost certainly a direct consequence of the fact that *Kitchen Stories* had been shown in the Winchester Film Society's 2004/05 season, and *Elling* in the 2003/04 season. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, participants in this project often failed to differentiate between Scandinavian countries when discussing films from this part of the world. To British viewers, the linguistic and cultural differences between Danish, Swedish and Norwegian culture are imperceptible, and it is not uncommon to see critics and exhibitors mix up the national status of films from the Scandinavian countries. Conversely, within the Scandinavian reception context such differences are very significant. Despite the strong tendency towards co-production between Nordic countries, film consumption in Scandinavian countries tends to concentrate on the films perceived as national productions (Swedish, Danish and so on) on the one hand, and Hollywood on the other.[88] Most films from neighbouring countries are marginalised in the same way as other non-national, non-Hollywood films. Because of the increasing international visibility of Danish cinematic culture in recent years, some Danish films have been successful on the Swedish market, but although the Scandinavian countries export more film titles to each other than to the UK, their Scandinavian admission figures are usually low outside the country of origin.

---

[85] S51, S57, S74.

[86] S51. It is worth pointing out that this was a Winchester respondent who had not attended any of the *Amélie* research screenings, and was unlikely to have heard of them, since the *Show Me Love* screening in Winchester was marketed separately from the other screenings, through the Winchester Film Society.

[87] S61.

[88] For a more detailed discussion about national, transnational and international aspects of Scandinavian cinema, see Elkington and Nestingen's introductory chapter in *Transnational Cinema in a Global North*, pp. 1-28.

Kitchen Stories, the film referred to by the respondent above, is a comedy telling the story of Swedish social scientists travelling across the border to Norway in the 1950s with the intention of studying the kitchen behaviour of Norwegian bachelors. Apart from being co-produced by Sweden, some of the main characters are Swedish, so it is not surprising that when the film became a minor festival hit, there was some sense of confusion as to whether the film was Norwegian or Swedish.[89] In the British context, *Kitchen Stories'* co-production status was often mentioned, and since the failure of Swedish and Norwegian characters to understand each other plays a significant part in the plot, the film is likely to have been remembered as 'Swedish' as well as 'Norwegian'.[90] In Sweden, on the other hand, *Kitchen Stories* was perceived as a Norwegian film, despite the participation of well-known Swedish actors, and the film achieved only 20,705 cinema admissions in Sweden against 85,182 in the much more sparsely populated Norway.[91] The poor box-office performance in Sweden must at least partly be attributed to the fact that *Kitchen Stories* was marketed and released as a 'foreign' film.

I have highlighted this particular example of a film that was perceived very differently in Sweden and the UK because it illustrates how 'Swedish film culture' is formed in the minds of British audiences by factors that will not be obvious to a researcher considering only 'Swedish' films that fit into a traditional, nation-centred account of the Swedish film heritage. Given the limited British distribution of Scandinavian films outside film festivals, it is worth noting that *Kitchen Stories* was shown not just in Winchester, but also in Chichester and Southampton between 2004 and 2005.[92] It therefore seems as though a direct link can actually be established between this film and research participants' expectations of quirky comedy in Swedish and Scandinavian cinema. The fact that viewers were able to link *Show Me Love* to other recent Scandinavian films

[89] It was exported to at least eighteen European countries.
[90] *Kitchen Stories* was in fact the only film with Swedish production credits to receive distribution in the UK in 2004.
[91] The Norwegian population (4,564,855 in 2003) represents just over half of the Swedish population (9,011,392 in 2004) . Sources: Statistiska Centralbyrån, < http://www.scb.se> and Statistisk sentralbyrå, <http://www.ssb.no/> [accessed 4 March 2006].
[92] http://www.winchesterfilmsociety.co.uk/voting2004-2005.html [accessed 5 March 2007], Phoenix Film Society <http://www.thephoenix.org.uk/films04.html> [accessed 5 March 2007]. The film was also shown at the Chichester Cinema at New Park in 2004.

shows that expectations of Nordic film culture are changing, as these films are very different in character from the Bergman films of the 1950s and 1960s.

Swedish Cinema and Sex: The Dogma 95 Connection

Apart from 'quirkiness'[93] some viewers wrote about Swedish films 'dealing with taboos honestly – mental health, sexuality etc',[94] introducing frankness as a national characteristic, and sexuality as an important aspect within this context. One member of the Winchester Film Society identified a 'similar feelgood factor' in *Show Me Love*, *Together* and the Norwegian comedy *Elling*,[95] but he nevertheless described his expectations of Swedish cinema as '[g]loomy introspection; sex; stylish camerawork'.[96] The association between Swedish cinema, sex and controversial topics that I linked to the history of Swedish film in Britain in Chapter 4 often surfaced in audience responses to *Show Me Love*,[97] and the reference to 'introspection; sex; stylish camerawork' appears more suited to Bergman's oeuvre than to *Show Me Love* or *Together*. For this sixty-year-old respondent Bergman's films were indeed familiar ground. The way in which different types of Scandinavian cinema informed his approach came across more clearly when he explained what elements of *Show Me Love* he would describe as specifically Swedish: 'The explicitness of sexuality; frank language; a kind of earnest self absorption (cf. Bergman) – but also droll humour and irony'.[98] These words bring together many of the sometimes contradictory expectations of Swedish film that could be observed in the research audience as a whole.[99] Another factor that I briefly mentioned in Chapter 4, and that played an important role in shaping research participants' expectations of Swedish cinema is Dogme 95.

---

[93] S5, S27, S29, S51, S72, S87.
[94] S51.
[95] S57. As mentioned before, *Elling* was shown in the 2003/04 WFS season.
[96] S57.
[97] S30, S34, S35, S36, S46, S51, S53, S54, S57, S60, S65, S66, S76.
[98] S57.
[99] Further examples of expectations of Swedish cinema or culture in *Show Me Love* audience that seem related to Ingmar Bergman and 1960s art cinema, including some negative comments can be found in S3, S31, S43, S65, S67.

The high level of media interest in the first two Danish Dogme films, *Festen* (1998), and *The Idiots* (*Idioterne,* 1998), released in the UK during spring 1999 after gathering much attention on the international festival circuit, is an important contextual factor effecting the reception of Moodysson's films in Britain. As I mentioned in my discussion about the reception of *Kitchen Stories* above, outside Scandinavia film audiences often have only a vague awareness of the differences between Sweden, Norway and Denmark. British viewers often find it difficult to distinguish between Norwegian, Swedish and Danish, and therefore cannot identify the nationality of a film by the language spoken in films from these nations. The confusion does not just occur in comments from audience research participants in this project or in British film reviews; also British marketing professionals sometimes get the countries mixed up. For example, the Barbican Cinema's March 2007 programme listed the production country of Susanne Bier's *After the Wedding* (*Efter brylluppet*, 2006) as 'Sweden'. A well-known Swedish actor, Rolf Lassgård, plays one of the main characters in the film, and the Danish director Susanne Bier has made several feature films in Sweden, but the fact that the main language spoken is Danish together with the Copenhagen setting means that Scandinavian audiences would see the film as Danish.[100]

It is worth noting that, with the exception of the Western-European project *The Idiots*,[101] the early Dogme films were all Danish-Swedish co-productions. *Show Me Love* was also a Swedish-Danish venture, co-produced by Swedish Memfis and Zentropa, the Danish production company behind *The Idiots* and *Mifune* (*Mifunes sidste sang,* 1999). Indeed, according to a *Guardian* interview, when distributors were fighting over Søren Kragh-Jacobsen's *Mifune* at the Berlin film festival, the director 'insisted anyone who wanted it must also show a sweet little Swedish film called Fucking Amal' [*sic*],[102] showing that collaboration between the Scandinavian partners continued beyond production. While Swedish and Danish audiences would likely protest loudly if anyone described *Festen* as

[100] Interestingly, the Swedish Film Institute's film database lists *After the Wedding* as a Danish-British co-production, not a Danish-Swedish collaboration, as indicated by the Internet Movie Database. Cf. Svensk Filmdatabas <www.sfi.se> [accessed 6 January 2008] and IMDb <www.imdb.com> [accessed 6 January 2008].

[101] Co-produced by Denmark, Sweden, France, the Netherlands and Italy.

[102] Søren Kragh-Jacobsen interviewed by Fiachra Gibbons, 'Of Chastity and Chickens', *Guardian,* 1 October 1999, Friday Review, p. 12.

Swedish or *Show Me Love* as Danish, British confusion over the nationality of Scandinavian films is in a way more warranted than might be expected, albeit possibly for the wrong reasons.[103]

A *Guardian* headline to a report from the 1999 Toronto festival, 'more from quirky Dogme 95',[104] shows important similarities between British critical discourse surrounding the upsurge of Danish cinema in the late 1990s, and the language used by respondents in my research project. Although only two members of the *Show Me Love* audience mentioned Dogme directly when articulating their expectations of Swedish film,[105] the term often cropped up in other comments,[106] and viewers clearly drew parallels between *Show Me Love's* low budget and rough aesthetics, and Dogme films that they had seen. One female student in her early twenties described her expectations of Swedish films in these words:

> Something domestic, dealing with a disruption in family relations, quirky random humour, perhaps stylistically and technically something more akin to Dogme films, more daring and unconventional than other types of films.[107]

Another viewer in her early fifties expressed quite literally the confusion regarding national identity in Scandinavian film that I discussed above, when she wrote that she thought of Swedish films as '[w]hacky, thought-provoking (*Together*) – or was it Danish?'.[108]

---

[103] Since the focus of this thesis is reception rather than production there is no room to explore the national in Nordic film production any further here, but it is worth noting in passing Mette Hjort's observation on the problem: 'The concept of national cinema has no doubt always been something of a regulative idea, a vision in tension to a certain extent with the transnational realities of cinematic production that have characterized filmmaking for many decades'. Mette Hjort, 'From Epiphanic Culture to Circulation: The Dynamics of Globalization in Nordic Cinema' in *Transnational Cinema in a Global North*, ed. by Nestingen and Elkington, pp. 191-218 (p. 191).

[104] Bradshaw, 'Twinkle, Twinkle Megastars...', p. 12.

[105] S15, S27.

[106] S6, S15, S61, S73, S29.

[107] S27.

[108] S29.

National or Universal Themes?

When asked about aspects of the film that seemed culturally specific, non-British research participants and viewers who had some specialist knowledge of Swedish language or culture more likely believed that such knowledge had an impact on their interpretation of the film.[109] This corresponds with a general tendency in the study as a whole. However, a 'half-Swedish' respondent who thought that her background helped her 'understand the way the characters act' qualified this statement by reflecting that she might be 'underestimating the intelligence of other viewers'.[110] Many respondents, in particular those under twenty-five, stated that they knew very little about Swedish culture generally and Swedish film specifically.[111] One female student in her early twenties described *Show Me Love* as her 'introduction to Swedish culture', adding that her 'perception of Swedish culture' probably had been influenced by the film.[112] Another woman in her thirties similarly wrote that having never been to Sweden, *Show Me Love* allowed her to encounter 'scenes of everyday life – housing estates, the school, television, general street scenes' that 'all help to give a fine idea of what that small town in Sweden is like'.[113]

A Canadian woman in her late twenties wrote that 'the small town isolation experienced by the kids is also faced by many teens in Canada'[114] and many respondents were of the opinion that growing up in a small town was a universal theme that would resonate with audiences across the world.[115] Still, some viewers in the over thirty-five age group pointed out that the theme would be more readily accessible to audiences in European or western societies.[116] In this context, a male respondent who felt that the film was 'more

---

[109] S12, S32, S33, S35, S38.
[110] S35.
[111] S4, S5, S6, S10, S13, S14, S19, S20, S21, S22, S23, S24, S27, S28, S32, S37, S47, S49, S51, S59, S61, S62, S64, S67, S68, S71,S72, S74, S79, S80, S82, S83, S84, S85, S86, S87, S89, S90, S93, S95. Around a third of viewers in the twenty-five to thirty-five and thirty-five plus groups made statements along these lines, but among viewers under twenty-five this increased to over 60% (both in the Chichester College group, and in these age groups at the other screening locations).
[112] S27.
[113] S62.
[114] S25.
[115] S2, S9, S11, S17, S18, S25, S28, S37, S41, S44, S47, S51, S55, S69, S74, S77, S78, S88. All of these viewers had English as their first language, and the majority consumed mainly English-language films.
[116] S3, S7, S18, S29, S59, S65, S69.

of a gay/teen film than a Swedish film' made an interesting tautology when he described the film's topic as 'universal to the Western experience'.[117] As an intermediate-level Arabic-speaker, this PhD student was probably less eurocentric in his outlook than most of the research participants in this study. Yet, his phrase nevertheless reduced the universe to the Western world, and with the exception of some cinephile viewers with an interest in Asian cinema and a few non-European international students this attitude was fairly widespread in the research audience overall.

Among viewers who were prepared to make suggestions about what might be considered specifically Swedish about the film two main tendencies could be observed, one relating to very tangible elements present in the film, and the other concerning more abstract ideas about Swedish culture and society. The Swedish language – 'I know that's an obvious answer but it immediately gives the film a different feel',[118] as one multilingual research student put it – would fit into the first strand.[119] The cold weather[120] and activities such as ice-hockey, a popular sport in Sweden,[121] also provided concrete examples of cultural specificity. Some respondents also observed that the way in which Agnes' birthday was celebrated seemed particularly Swedish.[122] Scandinavian decor and urban design were also seen as contributing to *Show Me Love's* Swedishness.[123] A woman in her mid fifties was of the opinion that not enough of the setting and 'ambience' was shown to create a specific cultural atmosphere,[124] but this probably says more about what this respondent wanted to get out of seeing a foreign film than about the film itself. *Show Me Love's* Northern European townscape and interior sequences were perhaps not exotically foreign enough for this viewer. Some respondents referred to the teenagers' style of clothing and look as peculiar to Sweden,[125] and the youngest respondents, the Chichester College students referred to the stereotype of

---

[117] S18.
[118] S21.
[119] S3, S5, S21, S32, S47, S56, S68, S69, S75, S77, S85, S87, S88.
[120] In fact, only one of the viewers commented on this aspect of the setting specifically in relation to *Show Me Love* (S28) but several people mentioned it when discussing their expectations of Swedish cinema (S29, S32, S54).
[121] S25, S29, S32.
[122] S29, S31, S38, S49, S50, S55, S62.
[123] S45, S48, S58, S77. One observant A-level student even noted that the flushing mechanisms in Swedish and British toilets are different from each other. (S92).
[124] S46.
[125] S4, S11, S39, S51.

blond-haired Swedes.[126] Interestingly, however, no one described Elin as a blond bimbo. Instead, a female student who was clearly aware of this cliché, as her reference to 'bimbos' when describing her expectations of Swedish film showed, selected the 'ugly boy with blonde hair' as typically Swedish.[127]

A number of female respondents in their twenties and thirties alluded to the fact that the costume, hairstyles and music seemed evocative of the late 1980s rather than mid- to late 1990s,[128] and thus hinted that Sweden was behind the rest of Europe in terms of fashion.[129] Several female respondents, including two Chichester College students[130] and one sixty-year-old participant in the New Park audience also commented on the soundtrack as being particularly Swedish.[131] For the latter viewer, it was the 'bad' quality of the music that she associated with Swedish culture, and a young woman in the Winchester audience agreed with her, describing the soundtrack as 'cheesy'.[132] Many male research participants would have disagreed with this statement, as they frequently listed music among the elements they liked.[133] The young students in the Chichester College audience were particularly interested in the musical soundtrack,[134] and several respondents in this group complained that the music clashed with other aspects of the film.[135] Particularly interesting because it reveals a clash of generic expectations is a comment made by one student, who wrote that *Show Me Love* was a 'realism type film but had Hollywood like music'.[136]

---

[126] S86, S91.
[127] She probably meant to refer to the character of Markus (S91).
[128] S39, S50, S51.
[129] These viewers did not seem to consider the possibility that this backwardness might have been intended by the filmmakers in their representation of a small-town setting out of touch with the capital. A key issue here is probably the fact that Elin complains about 'raves' going out of fashion before they even arrive in Åmål. In a discussion after the screening at Chichester College several or the students told me that they found it confusing that characters in a film that was supposed to take place in the 1990s were talking about rave culture, something that for these young students belonged to the (for them) very distant 1980s.
[130] S91, S93.
[131] S3.
[132] S47.
[133] S12, 34, S46, S59, S61.
[134] S77, S91.
[135] S81, S82, S86.
[136] S82.

The Image of Liberal Sweden

It is worth making a few brief points here about audience reactions to *Show Me Love* that are relevant to the image of Sweden in the research audience as a whole, and relate to the history of the Swedish nation brand as discussed in the previous chapter. Viewers often pictured Sweden as a progressive welfare society characterised by a high standard of living and liberal attitudes, in particular in the area of sex. A male respondent in his early sixties summed up some of the more salient reactions when describing what he saw as specifically Swedish in *Show Me Love*:

> 1) the tolerance of adults
> 2) the liberal/ valuing explanation of lesbianism from the apparently conventional mother to her son
> 3) the high level of technology available to the young people.[137]

A positive image of Sweden as a liberal, tolerant and wealthy society dominated perceptions among participants in this case study, but some viewers also identified downbeat messages in *Show Me Love*, with references to material welfare without happiness, depression, suicide and alcoholism. The notion of Sweden as a liberal society was often associated specifically with the film's adult-child relationships.[138]

The issue of sexual liberation was a contested area. One woman in her mid-fifties wrote that 'interest in sexual freedom is what I 'know' about Swedish culture. It is something Swedish filmmakers can offer other societies'.[139] Conversely, a sixty-year-old man who disliked the film referred dismissively to the 'obvious Swedish hang-up on sex'.[140] Some viewers spontaneously contrasted the society portrayed in the film with British culture and values. These respondents seemed to consume Swedish or European film partly to demonstrate a critical or distanced attitude towards aspects of British culture.[141] A male research participant in his mid fifties described British values as 'Victorian' in

---

[137] S58.
[138] S4, S16, S39, S63.
[139] Cf. S65.
[140] S60.
[141] S35, S36, S54.

comparison with *Show Me Love*,[142] and a medical student in her mid-twenties who described herself as half-Swedish appeared rather more fond of her Swedish than her British heritage, considering that she wrote that *Show Me Love* was Swedish in its 'honesty, frankness, tenderness, openness (opposite to most British things)'.[143]

Most of the research participants were supportive of the 'Swedish' liberal ideals that the attitudes of teachers and parents in the film represented in their eyes.[144] Nevertheless, a respondent in his early fifties suggested that '[m]aterialism but no happiness' was a characteristic of Swedish society and followed this with the statement '[w]orking mothers are the norm'.[145] If a causal connection is assumed between the two claims it becomes very similar to the critical, anti-liberal accounts of Swedish society that I discussed in Chapter 4.

Lesbian Love: Identification and Distantiation

In the previous three case studies, I identified a number of interesting contrasts between male and female respondents in relation to genre and authorship or film style, but I also argued that for most male audience participants, the idea of being able to connect emotionally to a female protagonist was not problematic. All four case study films have women at the centre of the story, but *Show Me Love* is the only film in the series showing two women becoming romantically involved with each other. Only a couple of respondents referred directly to the same-sex romance when describing the film, using the terms 'high school dyke romance'[146] and 'gay love story',[147] but the fact that the film dealt with homosexual love and the relationship between two young girls did figure prominently in viewer comments.[148] One participant in this case study spontaneously identified himself as gay, and for this man in his mid-thirties, sexual orientation was highly significant in shaping his response to *Show Me Love*.[149] He explained that he had

[142] S54.
[143] S35.
[144] S4, S16, S58.
[145] S12.
[146] S55.
[147] S18.
[148] S2, S3, S4, S7, S9, S11, S17, S18, S25, S27, S28, S43, S51, S55, S57, S75, S80, S87, S92, S95.
[149] S18.

grown up 'in a small town where to be gay was something to be ridiculed', and he therefore found it very easy to relate to the predicament of the protagonist. He felt strongly affected by scenes involving 'homophobic ridicule', and described *Show Me Love* as a 'standard parable of coming out: facing the fear, confronting it, rewarded by happiness'. In his view, the treatment of sexuality was the most important aspect of the film, as demonstrated by the fact that he described it as 'more of a gay/teen film than a Swedish film.' At the same time, this respondent acknowledged that *Show Me Love* addressed not just a 'gay audience' but also a 'broad young audience' and the fact that he used the word 'didactic' to describe the film indicated that he thought it would be able to convey a message of tolerance to a non-gay audience. For him, the most positive thing about *Show Me Love* was that it treated '(homo) sexuality, even in teenagers, as valid, normal, worthy of championing'.

In contrast with this viewer, who fully embraced the film's gay element, some respondents who liked *Show Me Love* nevertheless seemed compelled to distance themselves from its lesbian theme. A man in his late sixties wrote that he had 'no personal experience of the frustrations they suffered',[150] while another male respondent in the same age group was at pains to point out that he 'was not convinced that Elin and Agnes were true lesbians rather than having a teenage crush on each other'. In particular, he felt that Elin 'was reacting against her rather oafish boyfriend'.[151] This attempt to 'straighten' *Show Me Love's* protagonists is reminiscent of a tendency in Swedish media at the time of the film's Swedish release. Feminist writers reported that the Swedish press response to *Show Me Love* played down the significance of the film's lesbian theme, thereby reflecting how experiences specific to homosexual individuals in general, and lesbians in particular, are marginalised in a society where heterosexuality continues to be the norm.[152]

Another man in his mid-thirties wrote that he could engage with the protagonists because it was a 'good depiction of teenage life', but made the rather obvious point –

[150] S63.
[151] S2.
[152] Cf. Jenny Linder, 'Drömmen om Elin – det lesbiska temat i Fucking Åmål speglat i svensk press', 'C-uppsats' (undergraduate essay - 60 points) University of Stockholm, Autumn 2001 (unpublished – available at SFI library).

considering that another section of the questionnaire asked him to state whether he was a man or a woman – that he was 'not female (or lesbian)'.[153] A slightly younger woman wrote that she had hesitated about whether or not to go to the film, but was pleased that 'not too much was made of the lesbian aspect of the relationship'.[154] These approaches to the *Show Me Love's* gay theme from respondents who liked the film suggest that for many viewers, an ability to connect the narrative in some way to their own experiences is very important. This might be particularly important in a film dealing with a painful coming-of-age theme, because for the film to be successful, viewers must be able to feel some level of empathy with the protagonists.

Negative Reactions to *Show Me Love*

The minority of research participants who did not enjoy *Show Me Love* often found the film's subject matter or protagonists too far removed from their own concerns to become involved.[155] In particular, two older male viewers with very negative reactions expressed a strong dislike for the characters.[156] Both of these respondents explicitly distanced themselves from the film's perceived target audience on several levels. One of them asked rhetorically whether the film was aimed at 'lesbians?' or 'Swedes?'[157] The other man's suggestion that *Show Me Love* targeted a 'teenage "yoof" audience' has already been cited earlier in this chapter, and in addition, he described the film as a 'chick flick', a slightly dismissive term for a film appealing to women.[158] To further distance himself, he observed that the film's subtitles were 'in Yankee speech' and that it therefore seemed 'aimed at the North American market'. This statement suggests an anti-American or at least anti-Hollywood stance that was fairly widespread in the research audience.[159] Negative attitudes towards American culture were just as common among participants like the viewer cited above, whose consumption was dominated by English-

[153] S73.
[154] S50. It is worth pointing out that while this comment may sound hostile towards representations of homosexuality on film, it is not clear from the context why the viewer felt this way; her caution may have been caused by the fact that lesbian relationships are common in pornographic and soft-pornographic materials addressed towards heterosexual men.
[155] S14, S20, S36, S37, S38, S43, S68, S72.
[156] S20, S43.
[157] S43.
[158] S20.
[159] Cf. S15, S51, S66, S71, S77.

language films and who saw a very limited number of European or other non-English language films, as among those viewers who actually consumed more European films than American ones.

Although many British critics liked *Show Me Love*, some of them criticised its generic formula, placing it in a high-school genre that was perceived as American. According to *Empire's* reviewer:

> [S]uch stories of hesitant lesbianism are ten a penny on the American indie scene and all this one seems to have done to set it apart is locate the action in a Swedish secondary school rather than in an alternative lifestyle bookshop or a health food café.[160]

Similarly, a review in the *Sunday Times* stated that:

> There is nothing new about well-intentioned, liberal movies in which young people realise they are homosexual, then deal with whatever temporary crises arise from this bombshell. Any addition to this genre needs to have a strikingly original twist if it is to seem at all novel. Lucas [*sic*] Moodysson's film, from Sweden, fails this test. Its plot is assembled from ready-made clichés.[161]

Some research participants, including viewers with a generally positive response to the film, would have agreed that *Show Me Love* included a number of clichéd ideas, in particular with regards to its representation of lesbianism.[162] However, these responses were sometimes contradictory. A man in his mid-twenties claimed that *Show Me Love's* 'plot line of lesbianism' was 'a bit clichéd' because this theme had 'featured in mainstream UK TV drama'.[163] At the same time, he wrote that there was still 'a lot of prejudice' around the issue of homosexuality, and that this issue was 'not tackled much in films'.[164] Other respondents keen to promote the validity of same-sex relationships

---

[160] David Parkinson, 'Show Me Love', *Empire* 130, 2000, p. 22. Coincidentally, Parkinson's vaguely mocking description of alternative lifestyles is similar to comments made by an audience respondent who thought that the film was aimed at 'your average art house movie goers and probably the alternative lifestyle crowd' (S25).

[161] Edward Porter, 'Show me love', *Sunday Times*, 5 March 2000, [n.p.]

[162] S25, S40, S60, S91.

[163] The respondent cited *Tipping the Velvet* (2002) and *Sugar Rush* (2005-2006) as examples (S40).

[164] S40. He thus seemed to suggest that the theme was over-represented on television and under-represented in film, but did not make clear what it was that he thought was wrong with *Show Me Love's* depiction of the topic.

were more supportive of the film's handling of this topic.[165] It is also worth noting that none of the viewers who expressed reservations about the film's representation of homosexuality made any statements to indicate that they were gay, lesbian or bisexual, so their criticism was not based on feeling that their own sexual identity was misrepresented.[166]

Mainstream or Alternative? *Show Me Love* as Teen Pic

One woman in her early twenties described *Show Me Love* as 'a cult film, whether for film students interested in independent cinema or the queer community', thereby drawing connections between various non-mainstream audience groups. As a film student this viewer was nevertheless aware of the fact that 'within Sweden it would appeal to a larger variety of people, just through publicity, through being a nationally produced film'. This respondent particularly liked that the film depicted potentially lurid themes such as 'teen drinking' 'teen sex' and 'the lesbian kiss' without 'sensationalizing'.[167] British critics often referred to realism in order to differentiate *Show Me Love* from American teen movies, as exemplified by this quote from *Sight and Sound*:

> Unlike the well-groomed stars of such Hollywood entertainments as *Cruel Intentions* [1999] or *10 Things I Hate about You* [1999], these young people are not allowed to play at being adults, but are trapped in a real teen purgatory.[168]

Other reviews echoed this view of the film, associating American teenage films with gloss, polish, and superficial appearances and contrasting this with the real emotions of *Show Me Love*.

Opinions among the participants in my case study were divided between those who found Moodysson's film similar to other teen movies, and those who thought it provided a refreshing contrast from these films. Although not all of these respondents specifically

---

[165] S5, S11, S51, S55, S66.
[166] As already mentioned, the one viewer who described himself as gay had a very positive response to the film.
[167] S27.
[168] Liese Spencer, 'Show Me Love/Fucking Åmål' *Sight and Sound*, 10.3 (2000), p. 52.

referred to the US in their comments, their use of the American expression 'teen movie'[169] and references to 'high school'[170]as well as the film titles cited suggest that many participants compared *Show Me Love* to American teen films.

Some of the older research participants seemed to look down on teen films as a genre not sophisticated enough to suit their taste. For example, one man in his early fifties wrote that *Show Me Love* was 'more of a 'teen' movie than I expected. Perhaps expecting more reflective scenes'.[171] This viewer nevertheless liked the film, as did a man in his late sixties who described *Show Me Love* as 'good uncomplicated entertainment', but pointed out that generally, he tended to avoid 'this type of adolescent genre'.[172] Although neither of these respondents were high-level consumers of non-mainstream film, their comments indicated that they took a considerable interest in cinema as an art form. Among viewers with a negative view of the film, comparisons with Hollywood were frequent, as exemplified by a woman in her late fifties who wrote that the film reminded her 'of too many 'teenage' films (eg: John Hughes)' that she had watched with her children in the previous decade. This respondent was disappointed with *Show Me Love*, and explained that she had expected it to offer something 'more different from the normal 'Hollywood' perspective of young people'.[173] The fact that Hollywood representations are acknowledged as being 'normal' is revealing, confirming that for British film audiences, the dominant cinematic narratives about teenage years are provided by American film and television. The same viewer stated that she 'wanted realism but felt this was not achieved'.[174] From her comments, it is possible to infer an association between realism and Swedish or European cinema, contrasting with non-realist Hollywood genre films. Although the two male respondents had a more favourable view of *Show Me Love*, their comments also suggest that its similarities with American genre cinema jarred with their expectations.

---

[169] S6, S30, S77, S82, S85, S87, S91.
[170] S4, S25, S52, S55, S60, S77, S78.
[171] S12.
[172] S63.
[173] S71.
[174] S71.

Other viewers from the same age groups who liked Moodysson's film seemed unaware of the fact that some of the themes it dealt with, including lesbian relationships, have been portrayed also in American youth films from the same period, and they therefore saw *Show Me Love's* content as more original and daring than might be warranted. This is probably connected to the fact that these viewers were not particularly interested in American high-school films, perceived as intended for a younger audience and less worthy of attention than European cinema. When the female audience member cited earlier in this chapter asked incredulously what a teenage audience might make of *Show Me Love*,[175] she was not necessarily just underestimating teenage film viewers, she was also characterizing *Show Me Love* as a European art film, a category that suited her perception of her own film taste better than a genre film with a teenage theme.

Chichester College: A Teenage Audience

Considering the confusion regarding *Show Me Love's* status as a film for or about young people the comments made by teenage participants in this case study are of particular interest. These respondents were not random teenagers recruited at the local multiplex, but a group of Film Studies A-level students. They could therefore be presumed to have a greater interest in film and a more marked curiosity about different kinds of cinema than their peers. However, *Show Me Love* was the first subtitled film shown on the course, and many of the students had little or no previous experience of non-anglophone European cinema. Although they all consumed large amounts of film, they generally had seen very few non-English language films. These viewers were still within the core target audience for teen films, and therefore did not express the kind of stigma attached to liking high-school films that comments made by older viewers suggested. They also found the existence of generic traits recognisable from American teen movies in a Swedish film less problematic than older research participants. However, as Film Studies students, these viewers were beginning to form strategies for the assessment of film as a serious art form, and it was clear that some of them were becoming increasingly aware that certain aspects of popular cinema were perceived as antithetical to the notion of a quality film. One young man was not convinced about the *Show Me*

[175] S65.

Love's happy ending, writing that while he was 'pleased for them', the happy ending was also 'unrealistic'. In his view, this was partly remedied by the fact that *Show Me Love* 'wasn't a Hollywood Blockbuster which was good'.[176] A dichotomy seems to be developing, with realism on the 'good' side, while 'Hollywood', 'blockbuster' and 'happy ending' belong on the 'bad' side.

Two students in the Chichester College audience explained in some detail why *Show Me Love* seemed different to other high-school films that they had seen. A seventeen-year-old female participant wrote that she liked that it was 'different to other teenage films' because it was 'not just based on humour / sex / sexuality'.[177] For her, the fact that sexual content and issues were alluded to rather than represented graphically on the screen made it different from the crude antics of films like *American Pie* (1999) and its sequels. A male viewer of the same age, who wrote that *Show Me Love* reminded him of other 'teen movies' revealed that the film rather contrasted with his expectations of 'foreign films':

> [T]he feelings expressed were universal. I sometimes find it hard to connect with foreign films, because of the different culture, but I found it easier as it was Western European, and the society had the same set up and views as the one I am in.[178]

He went on to state:

> [A] lot of the foreign films [I have] watched have had violence and nudity and I expected this to be along these lines too. As well as the stereotypical view of lesbianism, it went against my expectations.[179]

Once again, *Show Me Love's* lack of explicit sex was highlighted and perceived as something of a surprise.[180] While this is connected to general expectations of European

---

[176] S77.
[177] S89.
[178] S77.
[179] S77.
[180] It should be noted that in order to get the students interested and make sure that as many of them as possible turned up to the screening, the teacher at Chichester College appears to have emphasised the film's sensational reputation by telling them that it involved 'Swedish lesbians', and this is reflected in their responses, as many of them use this term to define their pre-knowledge about the film. This is a wry reminder that sometimes academics are just as guilty as journalists and marketing professionals when it comes to perpetuating stereotypical views of national cinema.

film in Britain, the film's controversial original title might have something to do with this. Even though the official UK title is *Show Me Love*, the film is generally referred to as *Fucking Åmål* AKA *Show Me Love* in British publicity and marketing materials.[181] In an anglophone context *Fucking Åmål* seems to connote a more provocative and explicit film, and the title certainly provoked interest and reactions from research audiences. Several audience members specifically referred to the original title when asked what they knew about the film before coming to the screening,[182] and one male respondent in his mid fifties specifically expressed a dislike for the title *Fucking Åmål*, arguing that it hindered attempts to 'encourage a wide audience' for this type of film.[183]

Hollywood Genres and European Cinema: Translating Globalised Culture?

The change of title from *Fucking Åmål* to *Show Me Love* affects how the film is perceived, but the meaning of the original title also immediately shifts when it is used in an anglophone territory. The original title comes from a statement uttered by Elin, 'it's just because you live in fucking Åmål', with the English swear word incorporated into the Swedish dialogue and pronounced with a Swedish melody of speech. Anglophone viewers are able to appreciate the comic effect of the English expletive within the Swedish dialogue when they view the film,[184] but the written title does not convey the gentle comedy of the scene. Considering that many research participants were keen to separate American teen movies and US film culture more generally from a European cinema tradition, it is interesting to note that already the original title of *Show Me Love* illustrates the absurdity of attempting to neatly separate off Swedish film culture from Hollywood in a global context where everyday Swedish language is permeated by popular American culture. Although the confusion surrounding the film's title(s) reflects the reality of translation problems more generally, it also seems to demonstrate the problem facing *Show Me Love* in the British market. Although Moodysson's film is Swedish and European, it belongs to a genre perceived as American, as evidenced by a woman in her mid-twenties who wrote that she was 'surprised at how un-

[181] Cf. British VHS release, Moodysson DVD box set and posters.
[182] S21, S65.
[183] S53.
[184] As confirmed by laughs at research screenings.

Swedish/generic'[185] *Show Me Love* was. For this viewer, 'generic' and 'Swedish' were incompatible categories.

Thomas Elsaesser has described the transnational journeys of European films in terms of a 're-assignment of meaning', and a 'fluctuation of critical, cultural and economic currency',[186] and my study of audience reactions to *Show Me Love* demonstrates that this occurs not exclusively at the level of critical reception, but also among British film audiences.

In this chapter, I looked at two additional audience groups apart from the New Park and Avenue audiences who took part in all of the case studies. One of the additional research audiences involved viewers that were on average older than the rest of the participants, and the other one consisted of young film students. This case study was therefore able to explore interesting contrasts between respondents in terms of taste cultures, consumption patterns, and perspectives on European cinema and Hollywood genre film. We saw that even without the influence from the Winchester group, *Show Me Love* attracted viewers with a higher average age than the French case studies. Furthermore, with the exception of the Chichester College students, young audience members in this case study consumed film in ways that were more similar to older research participants than to viewers of their own age in other case studies.

In previous chapters, it became clear that research participants were keen to find characters that they could relate to in the films. Furthermore, viewers with a positive response to the films often identified similarities between themselves and specific fictional characters, whether in terms of age, sex or personality traits. In the *Show Me Love* audience, the lesbian love story provided an interesting example of how such interpretative strategies could work. While a gay respondent celebrated the homosexual theme, some heterosexual viewers tried to straighten the characters, in order to make them fit in better with their own identities and experiences. We could also see how certain viewers with a negative reaction used this aspect of the film as an excuse to

[185] S70.
[186] Thomas Elsaesser, *European Cinema: Face to Face with Hollywood* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005), p. 147.

distance themselves from it. Other viewers associated the issue of homosexuality with Sweden's reputation as a liberal society and its associations with liberated sex, showing how British audiences use this stereotype to make sense of different types of films under the umbrella of 'Swedish film'.

Another significant aspect of this case study was the way in which audiences articulated their views on American and European film culture, and how they placed *Show Me Love*, a popular Swedish genre film released in Britain as a European art film, in relation to Hollywood and European film traditions. Contradictory responses with regards to the case study film's relationship to American and European cinema appeared more frequently in the *Show Me Love* audience than in the other three case studies, but evidence of similar ideas can be found across the project as a whole, and this is one of the themes that will be explored further in the concluding chapter.

Chapter 6. Conclusion

As I explained in the introduction, my approach to the national identity of films in this research project takes reception rather than production as its starting point. Using this perspective, I place films within the context of French or Swedish cinema when they are reviewed, marketed and perceived by audiences as French or Swedish films. This is usually but not always connected to both geographical setting and language spoken on the film's soundtrack. Often the perceptions of critics, audiences and the industry overlap, but occasionally film viewers in this project described American-produced English-language films like Lasse Hallström's *Chocolat* as French. In addition, films made in Norway, Denmark and Iceland were sometimes referred to as Swedish, as a consequence of British audiences being unable to distinguish the Nordic cultures from each other. In the previous four chapters I have attempted to analyse the responses of film audiences in Britain viewing recent French and Swedish films, but as the title of the thesis suggests, another key aim has been to explore what European cinema means in Britain today.

European Cinema: British Critical Discourse and Changing Audience Perceptions

In British journalistic discourse, the term 'European cinema' appears much more frequently than that of 'European film'. Conversely, the attributes 'French' and 'Swedish' are more often seen in conjunction with the word 'film' than 'cinema'.[1] While 'film' can refer to a specific title as well as to a broader grouping of films, 'cinema' in this context refers to an overview of a wider range of films, but cannot be applied to a single title. The spectrum of definition that these two notions offer in relation to cinematic cultures and products can be compared to the degree of specificity and elusiveness associated with the politico-geographical designations of France, Sweden, Great Britain and Europe. The three country names designate specific geographic areas, and although the national borders have changed many times, in the early twenty-first century, the positions of France, Sweden and Britain on the European map are generally considered unproblematic. Europe on the other hand is not a nation-state and does not

[1] Confirmed by searches using the terms in the Lexis-Nexis database.

have one official language; the word is sometimes used to designate a political entity (the European Union) and sometimes a geographical region, but exact boundaries of this geo-political zone are open to debate. As I mentioned in the introduction, even though Britain is a member of the European Union, in British discourse 'Europe' often designates the countries on the other side of the English Channel (the European continent), with the result that Europe frequently plays the role of Other to Britain.

This image of Europe as Other is relevant to both positive and negative reactions to European cinema in Britain. When I surveyed the British critical reception of *Faithless*, I came across a review in the *Mail on Sunday* that seemed to have a broader relevance for this project. The article mockingly placed *Faithless* within the genre of 'European relationship movies':

> European Relationship Movies are all about talking and silences, during which clocks tick or wine pours. They have little action (I don't mean car chases [,] getting up from the table would be a start) and loads of smoking and sobbing. They are often enlivened by very frank sex. [...] European Relationship Movies are best left to the French and the Swedes, who have a way of making us listen to their self-indulgence. The Spanish [...] are too excitable; the British are too awkward with intelligent conversation, unless in period costume.[2]

This quote suggests that the two national cinemas explored in this thesis excel at producing slow-moving, serious dramas spiced up with eroticism. The notion of a European tradition where sex plays an important role in the plot is thus one of the ways in which the concepts of Swedish, French and European cinema may connote similar associations in the minds of British film viewers. This connection could explain why respondents in the *Faithless* case study compared this Swedish film to the French films *5x2* and *Une Liaison Pornographique*, as well as to the work of Catherine Breillat.

As the sister publication of the tabloid newspaper *Daily Mail*, Britain's second best-selling daily after the *Sun*, the *Mail on Sunday* is associated with anti-liberal 'middle-England' values, including a negative attitude to the European Union. The quote above exemplifies the crude stereotypes attached to European national cinemas and cultures in

[2] Jason Solomons, 'Naked Ambitions', *Mail on Sunday*, 11 February 2001, p. 71.

the discourse of British popular news journalism.[3] The derisive tone of the *Mail on Sunday* piece contrasts with wistful references to 1960s European cinema in an interview with Liv Ullmann published around the same time in Britain's leading left-leaning liberal daily the *Guardian*:[4]

> This was the golden age of European cinema. Godard and Truffaut in France, Bunuel [*sic*] in Spain, Fassbinder in Germany, Antonioni in Italy, Tarkovsky in the Soviet Union and, of course, Bergman in Sweden. The golden age of cinema full stop [...]. Those were the days when films were taken seriously. And no one's films were more serious than Bergman's. It was cinema as psychoanalysis. His movies didn't have plots, as such, let alone special effects. Yet they were gripping.[5]

The articles cited above formed part of the publicity surrounding the release of *Faithless*, a film associated with Ingmar Bergman and a bygone European art-house tradition.[6] A few of the older participants in this audience study might have agreed that the European art cinema of the 1960s represented the 'golden age of cinema full stop', but on the whole, the respondents who contributed to this research project were interested in contemporary European cinema. With the exception of a few film students, younger viewers had a limited knowledge of Swedish and French film history; their comments rarely referred to films made before the 1990s.

The research findings demonstrated that British audiences no longer associate French film exclusively with serious art cinema. *Amélie's* influence on audience perceptions of contemporary French cinema in Britain presents us with a paradox, because while the film's success at the British box office was highly unusual for a French film, and critics defined *Amélie* in terms of its difference from typical expectations of French cinema, the audiences participating in this project saw *Amélie* as normative. French cinema has acquired a more popular image in Britain – largely thanks to *Amélie* – but the vaguer term of European cinema still appears to carry strong connotations of characteristics

---

[3] The political leanings of *Daily Mail* readers in April 2005 was 57% Conservative, 24% Labour and 14% Liberal <http://www.ipsos-mori.com/polls/2005/voting-by-readership-q1.shtml> [accessed 6 February 2008].

[4] According to the April 2005 MORI poll cited above, the voting intentions of *Guardian* readers at this time was 48% Labour, 34% Liberal and 7% Conservative <http://www.ipsos-mori.com/polls/2005/voting-by-readership-q1.shtml> [accessed 6 February 2008].

[5] Simon Hattenstone, 'A Lifelong Liaison', *Guardian* , 3 February 2001, Weekend section, p. 26.

[6] Cf. Cosmo Landesman, 'Faithless', *Sunday Times*, 11 February 2001, [n.p.], Marcus Dunk, 'She Came to Fame through Lover Ingmar Bergman's Films', *Express*, 27 January 2001, Section LW, p. 36, Hattenstone, 'A Lifelong Liaison', p. 26.

traditionally associated with art cinema, such as seriousness, an interest in life on the margins of society, and realist aesthetics. *The Dreamlife of Angels* was often placed by critics within the context of a new realism in French cinema, but for the research audiences in this project, the film's art cinema credentials could be linked to the film's European identity and was not necessarily considered specifically French.

Britain, Europe, and Hollywood: Otherness and Self Perception

Realism has also often been associated with British cinema, but most of the participants in this study did not place British film within the category of European cinema. The viewers who did were tellingly enough often originally from other European countries, and frequently had a positive attitude towards British cinema.[7] This brings to mind the high status of contemporary social realist British directors like Ken Loach and Mike Leigh on the European continent, where their films have received numerous awards. Contrasting with this positive view of British film among non-British European research participants, some British respondents specifically argued that British films did not belong under the label of European cinema, as exemplified by the viewer who wrote that European films were 'made on mainland Europe – thus excluding the UK'.[8]

This respondent defined European film as 'an alternative to typical formulaic Hollywood and British film'.[9] Hollywood's position as the dominant Other to European film culture was as widespread among the audiences in this project as it is in critical and academic discourse. In Chapter 5, I showed that many research participants had strongly negative views of Hollywood genre cinema, and in some cases their opinions suggested anti-Americanism on a broader scale. Yet it was evident from viewers' comments that Hollywood was still the norm against which other cinematic forms were measured and valued. As an anglophone island to the west of the European continent, Britain's relationship to European and American culture is a contested issue. For some respondents, like the viewer cited above, British cinema was closely and negatively connected to American popular film culture, but more often the idea of British film

[7] D6, D26, F22, F23, F25, F32, S23, S54.
[8] S59. See also A7, A13, A23, D7. D10, D31, S11, S27, S35, S72
[9] S59.

culture was simply absent from viewer comments, suggesting a void between the imagined binaries Hollywood and Europe. The lack of references to British film culture in audience responses is linked to the fact that British participants thought that the project was about French, Swedish and European cinema and thus not about British film, but it also seems to indicate British viewers' unwillingness to define their own culture in simplified, generalised terms. This could be seen also in relation to issues other than nationality. Respondents with extensive knowledge about a particular topic were sometimes reluctant to discuss it, because their expertise made them aware of complexities that could not easily be reduced to a few lines in a questionnaire. Those who perceived themselves as being ignorant about an issue also replied curtly to the questions. Therefore, the most detailed answers usually came from viewers who did not regard themselves as having in-depth expertise, but still felt that they knew enough to make comments about the topic, approaching it from an outsider's point of view.

This tendency can be likened to the process of visual perception itself. At an ideal distance, we see a simple outline, but if we get too close to an object, we see too many details and our sight is blocked from perceiving its outline. Of course, if we are too far away, the object disappears completely. It seems as though many of the British participants in this project were willing to generalise about European cinema precisely because they were observing it from afar, and did not see British film culture as part of it. To a certain extent, this trend applied also to viewers' descriptions of French and Swedish cinema; the more familiar with the film culture they were, the more difficulty they had when it came to summarise their expectations of the national cinema. It is easier to define the distant Other than the Self, but respondents' attitudes to Others – other cultures, other national cinemas or other audiences – can often reveal just as much or even more about viewers and their self-perceptions as we can learn from their actual descriptions of themselves.

Issues Around Frenchness, Swedishness, and 'Foreign Film'

Audience members in the French case studies usually had some prior experience of French film culture. By contrast, the pre-knowledge about Swedish cinema among

respondents in the Swedish case studies was limited. Fewer of these viewers were therefore confident enough to make statements about what might be 'Swedish' in *Faithless* and *Show Me Love* than was the case with participants in the other two case studies, who were often more willing to comment on the 'Frenchness' of *Amélie* and *The Dreamlife of Angels*. As I have shown, very few Swedish film titles are released in the UK today, and since the existing films are given limited releases with little publicity, it is difficult to talk about a presence of Swedish film culture in contemporary Britain. Together with the co-production status of many Scandinavian productions, and the frequent interchange of actors and film personnel between Sweden, Norway and Denmark, this means that 'Swedish cinema' is an unstable and indistinct label for British audiences, who find it difficult to distinguish the Swedish language and cultural conventions from other Nordic cultures. The idea of Nordic or Scandinavian cinema therefore seems more applicable within a British reception context than the notion of Swedish cinema.

It is important to keep in mind that we are discussing the specific national reception context of Britain here. In Scandinavia, the Nordic or Scandinavian film label is problematic, as film viewers who see themselves as part of a particular cinematic culture define their own culture by differentiation from others. Scandinavian audiences are thus likely to perceive films primarily as Swedish, Danish and Norwegian, and may question the notion of a Scandinavian shared film culture, as indeed do film scholars in the region; in *The Cinema of Scandinavia* Tytti Soila describes the concept as 'synthetic'.[10] Then again, Swedish viewers would also be likely to reject many of the ideas about Swedish national identity offered by British film viewers. Similarly, in one of the French case studies, *The Dreamlife of Angels*, we saw that French research participants identified aspects of French film culture and national identity in relation to the film very differently from other audience members. I argued that the difference between the responses from French research participants and other audience members should not be interpreted as evidence that British viewers had an erroneous idea about French cinema or French culture. Rather, the differences showed that the interpretative frameworks

[10] Tytti Soila, *The Cinema of Scandinavia* (London: Wallflower, 2005), p. 1

available to British film audiences are constructed on the basis of their encounters with French culture, which are naturally different from the experience of French viewers.

Chapters 4 and 5 pointed to Ingmar Bergman's unique place within Swedish film culture. My research shows that his legacy is fading from the collective consciousness of contemporary British audiences, but in the past, Bergman's success abroad and subsequent international fame contributed to his acceptance in Sweden. The circular development whereby Bergman was sold overseas as a uniquely Swedish auteur, but not fully embraced at home until the Swedish establishment realised his importance as an ambassador for Swedish national culture abroad is well-documented, but such observations have generally been made within an auteurist framework, or in research closely focussed on the Swedish reception context.[11] For film reception scholars, the peculiar nature of Ingmar Bergman's national and international fame and his relationship to the concept of Swedish cinema highlight the importance of cross-cultural research approaches.

Just as Scandinavian cinema makes more sense from a non-Scandinavian perspective, European cinema is a concept that seems to function mainly by negative definition, through contrasting comparisons between European and non-European film cultures. Research audiences often compared European cinema to films from Asia and Latin-America, and sometimes seemed to consider 'foreign film' – generally meaning 'foreign-language film', and thus not including American cinema – as a single category, opposed to anglophone film. This lends support to Thomas Elsaesser's suggestion that European cinema should be seen as one area of enquiry within the larger category of world cinema.[12]

---

[11] Birgitta Steene's study deals with the reception of Bergman in Sweden, so even though some members of Steene's research audience acknowledged that Bergman's fame abroad affected their own interest in the director, his international reputation is not explored in this book. *Måndagar med Bergman* (Stockholm: Symposion, 1996).

[12] Thomas Elsaesser, 'European Cinema as World Cinema' in *European Cinema: Face to Face with Hollywood* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005), pp. 485-513 (p. 485).

Film Consumption and Identity: Elitist and Populist Interpretative Strategies

The national background of viewers and the films they encountered in this study is only one of many identity issues affecting audience responses. Research participants' interpretative approaches were frequently closely linked to whether they were discussing something they associated themselves with, or defining Other cultures and identities.[13] A single questionnaire often contained opinions that seemed to contradict or cancel out each other when scrutinised and compared in detail. Such contradictions arose when different questions connected with different aspects of a respondent's identity. Viewer identities are not monolithic, but rather consist of a complex set of values, ideas and affiliations. This means that any word used to describe a viewer (for example 'female', 'teenager', 'cinephile', 'gay', 'local government employee' 'student', 'father', or 'pensioner') is a simplification that fails to accurately convey the composite nature of that person's identity. Nevertheless, film viewers' ideas about their own identities are often bound up with their film and media consumption. In Martin Barker's words:

> What we choose to engage in as audiences, from the most routine to the most devoted, is a part of how we conceive of ourselves. Our identities are engaged in multifarious ways in our media/cultural engagements.[14]

Many of the participants in this project regarded film as an art form, and thought that films should convey an important message as opposed to just entertaining the audience. This means that in comparison with more mainstream audiences, they consciously defined their engagement with films as an artistic interest, as opposed to a leisurely distraction.

In the case study considered in the previous chapter, I observed that the film consumption among A-level students who saw *Show Me Love* as part of their Film Studies course was markedly dominated by popular Hollywood cinema in comparison with other research groups. These viewers were not self-consciously trying to live up to the idea of being an audience interested in European cinema, as other research

---

[13] A prime example of this was the contrasts between the responses among younger and older respondents to *Show Me Love's* teenage theme.

[14] Martin Barker, 'I Have Seen the Future and It Is Not Here Yet...; or, On Being Ambitious for Audience Research', *The Communication Review*, 9.2 (2006), 123-141 (p. 126).

participants might have done. Nevertheless, the responses from these young students clearly articulated the binary contrasts between Hollywood and European film cultures that also characterise British critical discourse about European cinema. Some of the students were in the process of developing an elitist approach to film interpretation similar to strategies observed in many of the other audience groups. The research findings indicate that there is no such thing as an unmediated encounter with a film; taste patterns are developed in relation to pre-existing conceptions of what a good quality film is, and such evaluation models help shaping viewer responses to individual films.

The study showed British audiences for European films defining themselves and others in relation to French culture, Swedish culture, Hollywood and European cinema. When discussing the audiences for these films, viewers tended either to envisage their own taste as universal or argue that a specific taste was required to appreciate the film. The former, more populist approach saw research participants downplaying cultural differences, trying instead to identify elements in the films that ought to be enjoyable and make sense to viewers from different cultures. The latter, more elitist stance was common among respondents whose consumption of European cinema seemed to fit in with a wish to differentiate themselves both from mainstream British culture and Hollywood, and by implication, the audiences associated with those cultural categories.

Many research participants preferred films that did not propose a positive solution to the narrative, valuing the perceived realism of open-ended and downbeat film endings, but other viewers criticised the depressing aspect of such endings and celebrated the uplifting prospect of a happy end. Members of the *Amélie* audience were particularly fond of 'life-affirming' or 'feel-good' qualities. Viewers who usually consumed mainly English-language film had a tendency to look for a less complex and more upbeat message when trying to determine the meaning of a film, while respondents with a high consumption of non-English language films were less inclined to look for positive uplifting or moral messages and more willing to accept films that were critical or pessimistic about society, or had an ambiguous meaning. It is difficult to determine if the latter tendency within this context should be understood as a requisite for becoming interested in European film, an effect of already being accustomed to the consumption of

European cinema or simply a reflection of what viewers thought counted as good taste within the context of art cinema.

As I suggested above, respondents were divided between those who were convinced that if they liked a film, other people would have the same kind of experience, and those who considered themselves as part of an elite group in terms of taste, and therefore actually preferred to see the potential audience of films they liked as rather limited. The latter group tended to emphasise the relevant film's status as 'art' or the work of an auteur, whereas the former audience members tended to focus on the film's realist credentials, often in order to argue that people would like the film because it provided an accurate representation of real life, or portrayed emotions truthfully. These audience responses often say more about the cultural baggage that viewers bring with them to the cinema, and their preconceptions about themselves and their relationship to the rest of the world, than about actual film viewing experiences or individual interpretations of the films.

The perception of European cinema as inherently more difficult, serious and artistic than Hollywood was wide-spread among research audiences and many participants actually seemed to embrace this. A taste for Swedish, French, Scandinavian, European, 'foreign language', 'alternative' or 'independent' cinema could be an important part of a viewer's cultural identity, offering a way of showing disapproval of and resistance to various aspects of Hollywood, American, or British mainstream film culture. As Janet Harbord argues, '[i]f arthouse cinema functions through a notion of independence, implicit to its identity is that which it is independent of'.[15]

The tendency to associate European film with art cinema and alternative film cultures illustrates a problem that European cinema faces in the British market. For British cinema-goers who regard themselves as having an edgy or artistic taste outside of the mainstream, the notion of popular European cinema is not attractive, so when film distributors and marketing professionals try to expand the audience for European films, they simultaneously risk alienating part of their core audience. At the same time, as we saw in the four case studies, different viewers described the films in very different ways;

[15] Janet Harbord, *Film Cultures* (London: Sage Publications, 2002), p. 43.

respondents with a self-professed taste for 'alternative' or 'independent' cinema who enjoyed *Amélie* or *Show Me Love* tended to place the film within this category. Conversely, viewers with a positive response to these films who saw their own film taste as within the mainstream stressed their popular and universal appeal. The problem occurs not at the level of film interpretation, but rather is connected to the image of European cinema and the way in which it is shaped in marketing discourse.

Popularity, Genre, and Authorship

I will return to the issue of film consumption and marketing at the end of this chapter, but staying focussed for the moment on the question of art and popular cinema specifically in relation to this audience study, it is worth noting that the most striking contrasts between the research project's audience groups were to be found when comparing the *Amélie* audience with the other three case studies. The research audience for *The Dreamlife of Angels* had more in common with the Swedish case study audiences than with the first French case study. Members of the *Amélie* audience were younger and had a limited pre-knowledge of European film, and in comparison with the other three case studies, the film consumption profile of this audience veered towards the mainstream. In addition, the *Amélie* audience unanimously praised the film, whereas all of the other case studies included a small minority of research participants whose response to the film in question was either negative or ambivalent.

Amélie was the most commercially successful out of the four films by a long way, and comments about the film in relation to French and European cinema in questionnaires collected at the other case studies confirms its lasting influence in Britain. *Show Me Love* had been a national box office hit in Sweden on a scale comparable to *Amélie's* success in France, so in that sense also Moodysson's film can be described as popular, although this was not the case within the British reception context. *Amélie* and *Show Me Love* both end happily, and were referred to by some audience respondents as having a 'feel-good' element. The two 'feel-good' case studies generated interesting audience comments when it came to the issue of genre. *Amélie* retained some of its reputation as a popular phenomenon when released in the UK, so the fact that the film had a popular

appeal did not seem to trouble the majority of the participants. Nevertheless, some members of the *Amélie* audience pointed out that they were surprised that it had been so popular, and specifically defined the film as an example of artistic rather than popular filmmaking. I noted that (mostly male) respondents in the *Amélie* audience often emphasised the director's achievement and the film's stylistic qualities, seemingly in order to remove it from the feminine connotations of romantic comedy. Similarly, members of the *Show Me Love* audience, in particular male respondents and older research participants, focussed on the film's realism, European specificity and non-normative sexual theme in order to stress the film's artistic and adult appeal over its teenage romance aspect and comic elements.

Despite the fact that both *Amélie* and *Show Me Love* included elements that viewers recognised as generic, these two case studies generated auteurist interpretative strategies in relation to their directors, Jean-Pierre Jeunet and Lukas Moodysson. The only research participant who mentioned Erick Zonca's name in his questionnaire was French, and although some respondents in the audience for *The Dreamlife of Angels* referred to cinematography and other stylistic film elements, there were few comments in this case study that could be directly linked to an auteurist approach. For some participants in this project, like the viewer who wrote that he liked 'directors who happen to be from countries such as France, Germany, Scandinavian countries, Italy etc', the filmmaker was seen as the core of the film, providing an explanation for the film's theme or style.[16] Other respondents did not know anything about the individuals who directed the films shown in this series of screenings, and for some of them, the film's national identity made it possible to place it within a broader cinematic culture. The knowledge that a film was 'French' or 'Swedish' could thus provide audience members with shorthand answers to questions like 'why does the film look like this?' and 'why does it deal with this or that theme?'. Both nationality and authorship could contribute to the construction of interpretative frameworks that gave meaning and artistic coherence to the films.

[16] F18. See also A5, F12, F39, S15, S20, S52.

Differences in responses from men and women indicated that the idea of the director as auteur was more firmly established among male research participants. The focus on the performance of the actors and the film's emotional impact rather than its direction in the *Faithless* case study might therefore be partly explained by the fact that this audience was dominated by women. However, it could also be the case that when male participants in the *Faithless* case study expressed their enjoyment of the film's photography or script rather than referring to the director's achievement, they were signalling hesitation regarding the film's authorship, because as we have seen, *Faithless* was directed by Liv Ullmann, but scripted by Ingmar Bergman, Sweden's most famous auteur-director.

Realism, Touristic Imagery, Sex, and Linguistic Difference

For participants in this study, European film seemed to represent the opposite of popular Hollywood cinema – intellectual, challenging, serious, intelligent, and realist art cinema. The idea of realism was especially central in respondents' approaches to *The Dreamlife of Angels* and *Show Me Love*. In their descriptions of these films, viewers sometimes used the concept of 'documentary' almost as if it were a synonym for 'realistic' or 'realist' despite knowing that they were looking at a fictional film. In comparison with *Amélie*, *The Dreamlife of Angels* appears to have been received in my audience primarily as a European realist film and secondarily as a French film. Although many of the French 'new realist' films were distributed in Britain, their audience figures have been negligible in comparison with films representing idyllic rural settings or chic Paris locations. The perception of *The Dreamlife of Angels* as a European film can also be connected to historical and recent non-French realist films, including examples of recent British cinema; it is worth keeping in mind that both British and French critics – albeit in different ways – compared *The Dreamlife of Angels* to the work of Mike Leigh and Ken Loach. *Amélie* with its touristic postcard image of Paris and feel-good character suited the research audiences' ideas about contemporary French cinema better. These audience expectations have been strongly influenced by *Amélie's* British box office triumph; paradoxically, what made Jeunet's film exceptional and untypical has contributed to establish it in the mind of British audiences as the French film *par excellence*.

I have returned to Wheatley and Mazdon's suggestion that French cinema offers British audiences safe exoticism at several occasions in this thesis.[17] Despite its risqué connotations, in comparison with Swedish cinema, the sexual subtext associated with French films also appears to have the safer undertones. Some audience members in the Swedish case studies focussed on the trope of non-normative, taboo or immoral sex – homosexuality and female masturbation in *Show Me Love*, adultery in *Faithless* – as representative of Swedish film. On the whole, *Show Me Love* seemed to be perceived as either Scandinavian or European through associations with Dogme 95. *Faithless*, on the other hand, was linked to the notion of European art cinema and associated specifically with Swedish film history through the involvement of Ingmar Bergman and Liv Ullmann. In responses to the latter film, an emphasis on artistry and literary and theatrical traditions was notable.

For British audiences 'European cinema' generally means films in a foreign language, and one of my original motivations for undertaking this research was an interest in linguistic differences and the problems of screen translation. As the project developed, audience responses suggested that more general attitudes towards other cultures were more important than specific linguistic knowledge when it came to explain and understand British audiences' engagement with European film. Because all of the case study films were subtitled, respondents' comments about different translation methods have not been discussed in the case studies themselves, but a few points are worth bringing up in this concluding chapter. When asked whether they preferred subtitled or dubbed films, nine out of ten members of the research audience listed subtitling as their preferred screen translation method, and among viewers with English as their first language, everyone under the age of thirty-six preferred subtitling.[18] The majority of the native English-speakers who preferred dubbing or did not have a preference were over fifty years old, which means that their film viewing history went back to a time when it was more common to dub European films into English. Respondents often made extremely hostile comments about dubbing, using multiple exclamation marks to vent

[17] Catherine Wheatley and Lucy Mazdon, 'Intimate Connections', *Sight and Sound*, 18.5 (2008), 38-40 (p. 39).
[18] See **Figure 57** and **Figure 58**.

their frustration at this form of translation, seen as ruining the original artwork. This suggests that to be fiercely opposed to dubbing is an important attribute of the value-system informing the discourse on European cinema in British art cinema circles. Among non-native English speakers, some younger viewers preferred dubbing, or stated that it depended on the kind of film, but these respondents had generally grown up in cultures like Germany or France, where dubbing still is a major form of audiovisual translation.[19]

Respondents' comments about linguistic translation often supported my hypotheses regarding respondents' self-perception. For example, one woman in the *Show Me Love* audience wrote that to watch a film in a language other than English was an experience she saw as slightly 'more challenging', and this made her 'feel a bit more worthy afterwards!'[20] This clearly fits in with the idea of European film as both more difficult and more rewarding than Hollywood film; a cultural form used by film viewers to signal an oppositional stance in relation to mainstream cinema. Linked to this positioning were viewers' attempts to associate themselves with or dissociate themselves from the case study film in question by means of describing their attitude to the main characters. This trend could be seen across the project in the three case studies that included negative audience reactions. Research participants also tended to attach themselves to or detach themselves from the relevant film's perceived target audience depending on whether they had a positive or negative response to the film. By doing this, they also defined their self-image as film consumers. Thus, some older respondents with a negative

[19] The issue of translation is one area where the empirical material collected for this study goes far beyond what I have been able to discuss in the thesis itself. The presentation of primary audience data in Appendix B has an independent value apart from supporting evidence for this thesis, as it can be consulted by other researchers in the future. For example, it could be interesting to compare the comments about the experience of viewing films with English subtitles from research participants accustomed to dubbing with comments from native English-speakers. The material might also shed light on the effect of English-language subtitles on the viewing experience of research participants from non-anglophone countries with a subtitling tradition (British film viewers with English as their first language can choose whether or not they wish to expose themselves to subtitled cinema, and the connotations of subtitles are therefore radically different in the British context than in non-anglophone subtitling territories). My research indicates that cross-cultural audience research could help developing our understanding of the cultural factors that affect film interpretation, including issues surrounding translation. The variety of linguistic backgrounds among participants in this project means that some of the empirical data concerning language issues could be a useful starting-point for hypotheses about the effect of multilingual skills or extensive experience of subtitling on film viewing strategies and consumption habits.

[20] S50.

response to *Show Me Love* and *The Dreamlife of Angels* claimed the films addressed a young audience on account of its young protagonists, while young viewers who disliked *Faithless* thought that it was a film for mature audiences. The simple, cheerful ending of *Show Me Love* proved to some of the older respondents that it was an unsophisticated genre film for teenagers. For male research protagonists with negative responses to the films, the fact that all of them involved female protagonists provided one way of detaching themselves from the film's audience, as they could label the film in question as a woman's film.

Identification, Distantiation, and Gendered Differences

Contrasting with such negative responses and detachment strategies, respondents who liked the films included themselves in the film's potential audience through references to age, sex, culture, education, world-view, or intelligence, or simply by arguing that the relevant film had a universal appeal. The case studies of *The Dreamlife of Angels* and *Faithless* provided interesting examples of how viewers related to characters on a spectrum ranging from close identification to complete rejection. In comparison with the other case studies, viewers clearly found it more difficult to like some of the main characters in these films. Their protagonists acted in ways that were not always unambiguously motivated by the narrative, contrasting with the fairly simple girl-meet-girl plot of *Show Me Love*, and even more with the cause-and-effect rollercoaster ride of *Amélie*. One young respondent, whose experience of European cinema prior to the research screenings appeared to have been limited to fairly easy-going comedies, had an extremely negative reaction to *The Dreamlife of Angels*, and he explicitly contrasted Isabelle, the protagonist of that film, with the eponymous Amélie.

The strongest positive reactions to *The Dreamlife of Angels* came from young women, and one of the most enthusiastic responses to *Show Me Love* was from a gay man. This suggests that identity issues like viewers' age and gender might influence their response to a film. Patterns of emotional engagement with film characters are however rarely as simple as these examples suggest, since individual film viewers construct their self-images in relation to complex and sometimes conflicting identities, rather than

presenting us with one single, coherent persona. Many participants in this project were able to relate to fictional characters that they considered very different from themselves. Indeed, the notion of identification seemed to be more important as a strategy to motivate disapproval of a film, in the sense that male respondents could claim not to be able to relate to female characters, or a young viewer could excuse his or her rejection of *Faithless* by stating that it was impossible for someone of his or her age to understand older married characters at that stage in their life.

Simple generalisations about 'male' and 'female' responses should be avoided on account of viewers' multifaceted identities, but the audience reactions in my research findings did present some notable patterns in relation to gendered identities. Male respondents tended to discuss depictions of relationships between characters as a particular reason to like a film, while women were more likely to stress the quality of the acting performances, or point to individual characters, and explain why they liked them. This was especially apparent in responses to *The Dreamlife of Angels*, where men wrote about 'the tense relationship between Isa and Marie'[21] or 'the two girls' interaction with each other' and '[t]he bouncer's relationship with the girls',[22] while female participants expressed their liking for 'Isa – a lovely character played by a lovely actress',[23] or in the words of another respondent, 'a mixture of 'gutsy' street kid and nice child.'[24]

Also with respect to these differences between how men and women approached relationships between characters or individual performances, there were more similarities between the audience for *The Dreamlife of Angels* and the Swedish case studies, whereas *Amélie* diverged slightly from the overall tendency. Although women in the *Amélie* audience focused on characters in their explanations of why they liked the film to a greater degree than male respondents,[25] none of the participants in this case study discussed the relationships between the characters. This might be related to the fact that the focus of *Amélie*, as suggested by the film title, remains very closely on one individual protagonist. Although one female viewer in the *Show Me Love* audience listed

[21] D17.
[22] D29.
[23] D11.
[24] D1. The same viewer 'also liked the two bouncers that the girls went out with'.
[25] A4, A8, A16, A17, A26, A31, A35, A37, A39.

'the relationship between Elin and Jessica – a very accurate display of sisterly love/hate relationship'[26] as something she liked in the film, most women in this audience highlighted the acting performances of the teenage protagonists, or wrote about particular aspects of their characters that they liked.[27] Male respondents, by contrast, emphasised 'the honest approach to relationships',[28] 'the contrast between the two main families',[29] and the 'handling of the relationship between Elin and Agnes'[30] in their answers. In the *Faithless* audience, women once again focused on individual characters, emphasising the quality of the 'acting which was excellent especially Marianne'[31] and the film's 'creative emotional characters'.[32] Acting was clearly one of the film's main attractions, highlighted also by male respondents, but men in the *Faithless* audience were also explicitly interested in the 'complex relationships'[33] between the characters in the film.[34]

So what might the wider implications of these gendered differences be? I would argue that we should consider this in relation to the tendency among male research participants to focus on issues around style, authorship and the way in which films were constructed. The film consumption patterns of male research audience members who were frequent cinema-goers and/or viewed a high level of non-English-language film seemed to conform more to traditional notions of cinephilia. To describe one's enjoyment of the way in which a film depicts the relationship between two characters suggests a more distanced perspective than to express sympathy for an individual character, in particular if the character's name rather than the name of the actor is used, and the interpretative strategies of male research participants often implied a position – real or imagined – of analytical distance. By contrast, comments made by female viewers more frequently suggested immersion in the viewing experience. In the *Amélie* case study, I argued that men placed emphasis on the film's visual style and authorship in order to remove it from

[26] S39.
[27] S7, S19, S21, S22, S28, S29, S45, S51, S52, S78, S94.
[28] S69.
[29] S59.
[30] S61. See also the reference to 'family dynamics' in S73.
[31] F36.
[32] F4.
[33] F17.
[34] F23.

the feminine connotations of romantic comedy. Perhaps within the context of art cinema, not just romance, but the whole idea of immersing oneself in the fictional narrative in an 'escape from reality' is associated with feminine film consumption?[35]

*E*motion: Imaginary Journeys, Feeling, and Cognition

The idea of escapism can be connected to the sensation of travelling through film viewing. One of the main attractions of European cinema for participants in this project was the opportunity to explore another culture on the screen. To escape from the everyday to a fictional universe is an image of film consumption frequently associated with popular film culture, but my research shows that the armchair-travel experience has a strong appeal also for audiences with more specialised film tastes.

Through the notion of 'emotional mapping',[36] Giuliana Bruno connects cinematic space and the way in which films allow us to explore different places to emotional experience. Bruno writes about 'an unconscious topography in which emotions can "move" us'.[37] The concept of '*e*motion' brings together the image of film as a metaphorical means of transportation and the idea of emotional arousal caused by the film viewing experience.[38] In relation to the *Faithless* case study, I noted that while men in this audience focused on technical elements, women often discussed the film's emotional impact. However, it was not only female respondents who wrote about how *Faithless* made them feel, and across the research project as a whole, men and women who responded in a positive way to the films almost always defined their viewing experiences in emotional terms. Reviews cited throughout this thesis have shown British critics describing Swedish and French films as boring, pretentious, or depressing. Indeed, even positive critical accounts tend to emphasise the appeal to viewers' intellect,

---

[35] This research is not conclusive, but it opens up a set of questions that would merit further investigation. In particular, it would be interesting to ask audiences for mainstream English-language productions in Britain similar questions. If audiences for popular film did not exhibit the same gender-divided patterns in their responses this might indicate that the style- and auteur-focused approach to film that dominates critical discourse is an approach particularly favoured by men.

[36] Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film* (New York: Verso, 2002), p. 245.

[37] Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*, p. 245.

[38] Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*, p. 207.

but for participants in my study, European films were able to provide a wide range of strong emotional experiences, including thrills, excitement, joy, sadness, anger and suspense. As some of the negative responses in my project indicated, three of the case study films were also perceived by a minority of respondents as boring, uninteresting, slow, narrow-minded or depressing.[39] However, the findings demonstrate that audiences with a positive attitude towards European cinema are just as likely to enjoy these films for their emotional impact as for intellectual stimulation. In fact, it is not just contemporary advocates of the notion of 'emotional intelligence'[40] that consider the division between emotion and intellect to be unsatisfactory; in a philosophical essay published in 1878 entitled *The Balance of Emotion and Intellect*, Charles Waldstein discussed the interrelationship between feeling and cognition, and condemned the tendency to favour one over the other.[41]

Memory, Emotion, and Audo-Visual Experience

In Chapter 3, I suggested that emotions play an important role in making memories last. The completion of an audience research questionnaire requires the respondent to recall the film, but film interpretation is always about remembering, because during and after a particular viewing experience, spectators remember other films and relevant information that help them situate the individual film in a wider context. The effect that emotions have on viewers' interpretation of a film is an area where research in cognitive psychology and affective science can help us understand audience reactions.[42] In 'Memory for Emotional Events', Reisberg and Heuer distinguish between visually and

---

[39] Conversely, my own reaction to *Amélie* was almost diametrically opposed to the euphoric responses of participants in the first French case study.

[40] The term first appeared in the 1980s, but became popularised through a range of self-help manuals during the 1990s, and throughout this decade psychologists debated the scientific validity of the concept. Cf. Gerald Matthews, Moshe Zeidner and Richard D. Roberts, *Emotional Intelligence: Science and Myth* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2002), pp. 3-6. The authors argue that the popularity of the term 'is part of the current zeitgeist of modern Western society, which is increasingly recognizing the importance of emotions' (p. 8).

[41] Charles Waldstein, *The Balance of Emotion and Intellect: An Essay Introductory to the Study of Philosophy* (C. Kegan Paul & Co: London, 1878), pp. 5-11.

[42] Ed S. Tan's *Emotion and the Structure of Narrative Film: Film as an Emotion Machine*, trans. by Barbara Fasting (Mah-Wah, N.J: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1996) attempts to combine psychological research on emotions, film viewing and cognitive psychology, but the study is restricted to classical Hollywood cinema, and since Tan's account is heavily influenced by the text-centred theories of Bordwell and Carroll, the possibilities of different audience experiences within this account is limited.

thematically induced emotion, the former being caused by visual stimulus used in a laboratory environment, and the latter referring to emotion caused by 'issues and information that are pertinent to our lives, goals, and values'.[43] Film is an (audio)visual stimulus that may lead audience members to experience emotional arousal, and research screenings could be described as a kind of extended laboratory experiment, but if a film deals with themes that viewers see as important and relevant to their lives in some way, it could also seen to induce emotion thematically. Furthermore, 'emotion seems to have a positive effect on memory, increasing memory vividness, accuracy, completeness, and longevity'.[44] This may explain why viewers often described how the film affected them emotionally, or used emotional terms to express their reactions; the feelings they experienced when they saw the film were probably more vivid in their minds than the actual details of the narrative or the visual look of the film.

Clearly, knowledge from cognitive psychology can be of use to research on film audiences' emotional experience. Other areas that could benefit from a similar interdisciplinary approach are the interrelated questions of film sound, linguistic difference, and the physical processes involved in reading subtitles while listening to the soundtrack and following the moving images on the screen. Many of the participants in the *Faithless* case study referred to aspects of the film's soundtrack when describing how the film affected them, and *Show Me Love's* use of popular music made viewers reflect on the film's relationship to Hollywood. *Amélie's* accordion soundtrack was often cited among the things that made the film seem particularly French. *The Dreamlife of Angels*, where non-diegetic music is used only in the final scene, was the case study where sound featured least frequently in audience comments, but even in relation to this film, some viewers with knowledge of the French language expressed delight at hearing the film's naturalistic dialogue. The importance of the film soundtrack, not just in terms of music or dialogue, but also the sound of the human voice, as well as other sonic

---

[43] Daniel Reisberg and Friderike Heuer, 'Memory for Emotional Events' in *Memory and Emotion*, ed. by Daniel Reisberg and Paula Hertel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 14.
[44] Reisberg and Heuer, 'Memory for Emotional Events', p. 35. James L. McGaugh agrees that 'emotionally arousing events' create strong memories (*Memory and Emotion: The Making of Lasting Memories* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2003), p. 116). For more recent research on the relationship between emotion and memory, see Bob Uttl, Nobuo Ohta and Amy L. Siegenthaler, eds, *Memory and Emotion: Interdisciplinary Approaches* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006).

elements accompanying the image is an underexplored topic in film audience research to this date. The effect of simultaneous reading, viewing and listening processes on interpretative strategies also requires further attention. These aspects of the film viewing process often seem to be unconscious. Subtitling professionals aim to create a translation that does not intrude upon or distract from the narrative, and although non-diegetic music sometimes draws attention to the film soundtrack, the most common function of sound in narrative cinema is to support rather than disrupt the progression of the film story or comment upon the imagery. It is therefore difficult to assess these issues by asking research participants about their experience after the event. However, although references to the soundtrack tended to be vague and generalised, they appeared so frequently in viewers' comments that I would argue that future research in this area, perhaps using research methods that would allow the recording of audience reactions during a screening, is imperative if we want to deepen our understanding of the film viewing experience.

Conflicting Views of Film Audiences: Psychoanalysis and Market Research

In the introductory chapter, I mentioned the debates about film spectatorship associated with the journal *Screen* in the 1970s. Ideological critique, informed by psychoanalytic theory and structuralist thought, accused the narrative flow of classical Hollywood cinema of lulling passive spectators into accepting the traditional gender roles and non-progressive politics allegedly promoted in these films. From this perspective, viewers were seen as placed in a particular position by the textual properties of the film. French film critic Jean Douchet's description of his film viewing practices as a cinephile provides a wonderful counter-image to the idea of the film positioning the spectator:

> I have to enter the auditorium by the right-hand stairway and aisle. Then I sit to the right of the screen [...] I've positioned my spectatorial body with minute care, adopting three basic positions: stretched out on the ground, legs draped over the seat in front of me, and finally, my favorite but the most difficult position to achieve, the body folded in four with the knees pressed against the back of the seat in front of me.[45]

[45] Jean Douchet quoted by Christian Keathley in *Cinephilia and History or The Wind in the Trees* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), pp. 6-7 (Trans. by Timothy Barnard. Originally in 'La fabrique du regard', *Vertigo* 10 (1993), 33-36.).

Many of the *Screen* theorists were influenced by Althusserian Marxism, and concepts like Laura Mulvey's notion of the male gaze amounted to a critique of commercial mainstream film practices. It is therefore not surprising that there have been few interconnections between such academic models of film spectatorship and the audience research carried out by the film industry in order to assess the viability of film projects and marketing campaigns.[46] Market researchers, as Webster and Phalen point out, see audiences as 'consumers who enter the marketplace and select the products that suit their tastes.'[47] Empirical data about audiences obtained through market research are shaped by the interests behind the research, and as Harbord argues, it is therefore important not to see this kind of information as transparent evidence of audience reactions:[48]

> Market research generates its own systems of classification, priorities, emphases, so that any enquiry into the findings of market research is also an exercise in how marketing executives are framing audiences.[49]

My research considers film viewing not just as a physical and mental process, but also as a form of consumption, and the questionnaires I used to collect empirical data have some similarities with surveys used for commercial purposes. The study distinguishes itself from market research in that the aim is not commercial gain, and although I have made use of data published or commissioned by the UK Film Council, an agency keen to promote the interests of the British film industry, I have approached this material with due caution. For a film to count as 'popular' it must be seen by many people, and box office performance is thus considered a vital part of popular cinema culture in Britain. This is less the case with non-anglophone European cinema, and box office figures therefore feature much less frequently in discussions of such films. Academics writing about art films have often neglected to discuss their commercial value, but no matter how heavily state-subsidised, and regardless of the aesthetic value that we ascribe to these films, they still circulate on the British market, where distribution and exhibition follow the rules of capitalism. Throughout this thesis I have situated each of the case

---

[46] For a useful overview of these issues, see Pamela Robertson Wojick, 'Spectatorship and Audience Research' in *The Cinema Book*, ed. by Pam Cook and Mieke Bernink (2nd edition, 1999), pp. 366-272.
[47] James G. Webster and Patricia F. Phalen, 'Victim, Consumer, or Commodity? Audience Models in Communication Policy' in *Audiencemaking: How the Media Create the Audience*, ed. by James S. Ettema and D. Charles Whitney (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1994), p. 27.
[48] Harbord, *Film Cultures*, p. 77.
[49] Harbord, *Film Cultures*, p. 83.

study films within the context of British theatrical film distribution, analysing their release, box office performance, critical reception, and where appropriate, their availability in home entertainment formats.

It is not my aim to argue that commercial research methodologies for the study of film audiences should be uncritically accepted by academics. Market research generally relies primarily on quantitative data and tends to place film viewers neatly into boxes of consumer identities that do not allow for the complexity or contradictions that characterise the audience participating in this study. This partly explains why market research studies of film audiences so often fail to correctly identify the trends they set out to predict. To acknowledge that audiences for Swedish and French films in Britain are involved in commercial film consumption does not necessarily mean that we must accept the simplistic perspectives on film consumers used by marketing professionals. What I have tried to import from commercial audience research is an approach to European cinema that places film consumption in the material reality of contemporary Britain. At the same time, I recognise that participants in this research project are men and women of different ages and from different backgrounds, who identify with a wide variety of values and ideas, all of which affect their identities as cultural consumers.

Limited Access: The Marginality of Foreign Language Film in Britain

I mentioned earlier on in this chapter that some participants seemed to enjoy the sensation of belonging to an elite audience with a minority taste culture; I also suggested that this made the business of publicising and marketing European cinema difficult. To emphasise a film's popular aspects or entertainment value might alienate those who turn to European cinema in order to find serious artistic values, but to stress those very values might restrict the film's appeal to new audiences.[50] How viewers acquire such taste cultures in the first place is another interesting question. Not all viewers who grow up

[50] Interestingly, the UK Film Council's Audience Development Scheme discourages marketing efforts towards elite audiences (or 'film buffs' in their terminology). Cf. Pete Buckingham, *UK Audience Development Scheme: Context, Strategic Fix and Audience Issues*, 6 July 2005 Presentation, PowerPoint available from 'Cinema Going' section of UK Film Council web site <http://www.ukfilmcouncil.org.uk/usr/downloads/audience_development/ADS_Support_050805.ppt> [accessed 12 February 2007]), p. 27.

surrounded by a particular set of cultural values end up enjoying the same kinds of films. However, since foreign language film releases generally and European films specifically almost never appear on prime time television and only very rarely figure in the programming on offer at multiplex cinemas, most British film viewers have very limited opportunities to develop a taste for non-anglophone European films. The declining numbers of students learning foreign languages in British schools and universities means that fewer young Britons encounter audio-visual products from the European continent through education. According to the KPMG report, the average age of British film viewers is much higher in specialised than mainstream cinema audiences, and the frequency of cinema-going appears to be increasing more among older than younger people. Trends relating to audience age and cinema-going frequency thus indicate that British theatrical distributors and exhibitors of European films are failing to develop new audiences among the younger generations.

An overwhelming majority of respondents in my research project watched films mainly at home, primarily on TV, but also on DVD and video or through internet downloads. Some young film viewers rarely went to the cinema at all. The changing film consumption patterns in the UK present researchers with new challenges. The availability of foreign-language films in Britain is increasing with new formats for film consumption such as digital television channels, pay-per-view TV, internet downloads, and DVD sales. As the release windows between cinema, DVD and digital services and television shrink, European films' ever-diminishing cinema runs may end up functioning simply as marketing opportunities for sales in other formats. Indeed, most film releases today are likely to generate more income through auxiliary markets than through the cinema release itself. A film's theatrical release is however still at the centre of marketing and publicity efforts, and the national press publicity associated with a theatrical release plays a key role in spreading information about new European film releases.[51]

[51] With the exception of some special interest film categories, European films are not generally released in the UK solely in home entertainment formats. Of course, this does not stop viewers from getting hold of European films online from other markets through online shopping and auction sites or illegal downloads. Such activities are likely to be carried out mainly by younger audiences, who are more comfortable with new technologies and less frequent cinema-goers. Only film viewers who have already developed an interest in Swedish, French and European cinema via established mass media channels are likely to

Amélie's cinema admission figures in the UK, extraordinary within the British reception context, were the combined result of a successful marketing campaign and word-of-mouth recommendations, but it was also connected to the decision to show the film on eighty-two screens, many of which were located in multiplexes.[52] One of the factors contributing to the low admission figures for European films in Britain is the fact that they are generally given short runs in a few independent cinemas, in contrast with big American releases that remain showing across major cinema chains for extended periods. Of course, this is a two-way process; cinema managers book European films for short periods because they do not expect that many people will come to see them. It is not a simple case of cause and effect, however, because the small British companies that distribute European films cannot expect to recoup potential losses from one release in the way the international distribution arms of large American studios can, and they are therefore unable to invest heavily on print and advertising, which means that European films are released on a limited number of prints and rely on reaching its potential audiences through critical press coverage rather than advertising.[53]

Momentum Pictures' decision to release *Amélie* in a wide range of cinemas across the UK was a daring strategy that worked. *Show Me Love* and *Faithless* were both released on only five screens, and their box office figures were fairly similar.[54] The box office revenue of Moodysson's second film *Together,* released by Metrodome on sixteen screens, was almost seven times as large.[55] When we discuss the accessibility of different films, we need to take into account not just whether or not the film is perceived as enjoyable or interesting by viewers, but also the physical accessibility of a print in a relevant cinema, and the availability and dissemination of information about the film.

---

consume films like the ones considered in this thesis using these formats, and an important question for future research is how these viewers make decisions about which films to download.

[52] UK Nielsen Edi Database.

[53] In the past few years, the UK Film Council has launched a number of initiatives to boost the print and advertising revenue of small films that have been deemed to have the potential to reach larger audiences. Cf. information about the Print and Advertising Fund on the UK Film Council Website <http://www.ukfilmcouncil.org.uk/media/pdf/b/o/PandAGuidelines_Jan_08.pdf> [accessed 13 February 2008].

[54] UK Box Office Totals: *Show Me Love* £117,359 in 2000, *Faithless* £111,382 in 2001 (UK Nielsen Edi Database). *Show Me Love* had much smaller takings than *Faithless* on its opening weekend, so it must have continued to attract new audiences longer than the latter film.

[55] UK Box Office Total £715,858 (UK Nielsen Edi Database).

The impact of marketing has been considered in this project mainly in relation to *Amélie*, because this was the only case study where audience members made references to the way in which the film had been marketed. The fact that Momentum's campaign was remembered several years after *Amélie's* theatrical release confirms its success.[56] Audience research carried out in conjunction with a film's original theatrical release on the British market could tell us more about the impact of less exceptional marketing efforts, and to what extent they affect the ways in which audiences approach individual films.[57]

European Cinema and *E*motion

Do viewing processes and spectatorial experiences differ significantly between audiences for popular and other types of films? The question is of obvious interest to producers, distributors and exhibitors of non-mainstream films. Participants in this project overwhelmingly described their enjoyment of the individual films using emotional terms. This suggests that what they gained from the film viewing experience was not so different from the catharsis associated with popular Hollywood cinema. It therefore seems as though European cinema could be psychologically accessible to a larger audience if the factors determining physical accessibility became more favourable. However, these factors include not just information about and availability of films, but also viewers' acceptance of subtitles, which seems to arise from practice at an early age. The prejudices against subtitled film in the UK will not be overcome by the success of an individual film like *Amélie*, described by critics as enjoyable and fun *despite* its subtitles. If the perception of European subtitled cinema as difficult or tiring is going to change, it will be necessary to devise new ways for the British public to encounter and become accustomed to other linguistic cultures through mainstream film viewing formats, so that they are given the opportunity to develop consumption habits in

[56] Since product placement is associated mainly with Hollywood blockbusters, it rarely figures as a topic of debate in relation to European cinema. However, as Isabelle Vanderschelden has observed, several British advertising campaigns launched in 2004 mimicked *Amélie* in order to sell products such as cars and insurance (*Amélie* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), pp. 89-90) – another proof of the film's exceptional status.

[57] This could be done in a series of case studies structured around existing platforms for European cinema exhibition in the UK, for example through collaboration with an independent cinema, or a selection of cinemas belonging to the European cinema network or City Screen's Picturehouse franchise chain.

this area of audiovisual culture. Rather than criticising film journalism or marketing professionals, film scholars who want to contribute to a change in this field should perhaps aim to gain influence within the domain of cultural and educational policy in the UK.

To conduct research with a small demographical sample requires caution with regards to making grand claims about 'British audiences', but the overriding themes and patterns that can be observed across this study nevertheless have wider implications within the context of film audiences for European, French and Swedish cinema in Britain. The contemporary British image of French national cinema appears to be less serious and high-brow than it was before the release of *Amélie* in 2001. Although not all of the research participants in this project saw *Amélie* as the most salient example of contemporary French cinema, the box office performance of Jeunet's film and the way in which distributors and exhibitors have tried to build on that success story has had a significant impact on British audiences' attitudes towards French film, leading to expectations of colourful glossiness and gentle comedy. In the case of Swedish cinema, expectations of sex and gloom inherited from the 1960s and from clichéd descriptions of Bergman films were still prevalent among older audiences, but in the case of younger respondents the influence of Dogme 95 and the success of a few recent Scandinavian comedies on the British market could also be detected. However, many viewers simply did not know at all what to expect from Scandinavian film culture, let alone Swedish cinema. This finding must be seen as rather alarming for the future of Swedish cinema in Britain, considering that the research screenings were promoted to an audience with an explicit interest in European cinema.

One of the primary aims of this thesis has been to show that despite its problems and limitations, empirical research can provide us with significant knowledge about audiences' engagement with films; knowledge that cannot be obtained by other methodological means. The four case studies have provided insight into the ways in which film audiences in Britain with an interest in French, Swedish or European cinema approach films from France and Sweden. The thesis has also offered a British reception perspective on the relationship between British, European and American film cultures.

Occasionally, I compared the films' reception in their countries of origin with their box office performance and critical reception, because the contrasts between these different reception contexts helped to shed light on the particularities of the British market. On the whole, I have however remained closely focused on the specificity of the time and place in which these audience screenings occurred.

In contrast with textual analysis, where the researcher merely claims to have found an interesting way of understanding a film – which in itself can be enough to infuriate those who interpret it very differently – or spectatorship theory, where the audience remains an abstract and elusive construct, empirical audience research makes claims about the real experiences of actual film viewers. This makes for a challenging but also fascinating research process. My subjective views will have affected the outcome of this project in the sense that another researcher might have chosen to ask the audience different questions and to highlight other themes and topics when analysing the responses. However, the findings do not simply confirm views that I had prior to undertaking the research, and when analysing the opinions, taste cultures and values of the individuals who contributed to the study I have tried my best to avoid facile simplification. Apart from indicating how film scholars can engage usefully with real audiences, incorporating methods and perspectives from a wide range of disciplines and fields, the findings challenge assumptions about detached, analytical art cinema audiences. My analysis of audience responses suggests that in addition to realism, social commentary and artistry, European cinema offers its British audiences *e*motional[58] experiences traditionally associated with popular Hollywood cinema, such as cathartic release and the sensation of travelling to a cinematic space that is at the same time both familiar and foreign.

[58] Cf. Bruno's notion of *e*motion discussed earlier in this chapter. *Atlas of Emotion*, p. 207