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Introduction: Film Policy in a Globalised Cultural Economy

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This special issue on ‘Film Policy in a Globalised Cultural Economy’ is devoted to the changing economic and technological context in which filmmaking occurs, the policy responses that these changes have generated and their consequences for the pursuit of cultural objectives. The issue offers discussions of the general economic, technological and political shifts shaping the global film industry as well as case-studies examining the specific policies adopted by different states. While these indicate how governments have been obliged to respond to the economic and technological changes wrought by globalisation they also highlight the variations in approach to film policy and the continuation of tensions between economic and cultural, and public and private, objectives.

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The past two decades have witnessed major changes in film industries worldwide in response to both economic globalisation and technological developments. The dominant position of Hollywood movies in the global film market has remained largely uncontested but Hollywood itself has become increasingly international in its operations whilst ‘regional’ screen industries such as those in East Asia and in the Indian subcontinent have (re-)emerged and developed new forms of collaboration. Such phenomena suggest the multiplicity and complexity of film production-to-consumption chains developing in many parts of the world in parallel to, and sometimes in alliance with, Hollywood. The film industry worldwide has also undergone major technological developments in terms of film shooting, distribution and exhibition. Digital screens

have increased whilst the use of computer graphics and related digital technologies has transformed not only the process of filmmaking but also the content and modes of consumption of film. Changes such as these have also posed new economic and cultural challenges for policy-makers and led to a degree of rethinking of how film policy objectives are to be conceived, defined and implemented.

It therefore seems to be an appropriate time to put together a special issue of the *International Journal of Cultural Policy* devoted to a discussion of the changing economic and technological context in which filmmaking occurs, the policy responses that these changes have generated and the consequences that they have had for cultural objectives. This also possesses a particular relevance to the discussion of creative industries policy that has occurred in this journal as well as within cultural policy studies more generally. Analyses of the creative industries were initially focused on the definition of the term, its ambiguity and the problems of measurement that it generated (e.g. Galloway and Dunlop 2007). Others have focused on the policy background to the emergence of the term and the significance of its shift away from the idea of the 'cultural industries' (e.g. Garnham 2005). Subsequently research has paid attention to the local and regional application of the creative industries policy and offered assessments of its efficacy (e.g. Kong and O'Connor 2009). There has also been a growing concern about the ways in which labour within the creative industries has been exploited (e.g. Banks and Hesmondhalgh 2009). Much of this discussion, however, has focused on the creative industries as a whole and on 'policy' conceived in a relatively abstract way. What has been much less examined is the effectiveness of concrete policy programmes for a specific industry and the impact that this policy discourse has had upon specific cultural forms.

Film, in this respect, would appear to provide a valuable focus for a more detailed empirical examination, or case-study, due to the way in which film policies have, right from their inception, traversed the supposed split between culture and industry. Indeed, as Hill (2004, p.32) has argued, the historically ambivalent status of film ‘as industry, entertainment, and, in some cases, “art”’ has meant that the film policies adopted by states and film agencies have been underpinned by a variety of industrial, social and cultural imperatives. The commercial and industrialised character of the majority of filmmaking has meant that many states – long before the advent of a ‘creative industries’ discourse – have conceived of film policy primarily in terms of economic measures in support of a commercial film industry rather than as an intervention on behalf of cultural, or artistic, activities. In this respect, what David Hesmondhalgh (2007, pp.138-9) has referred to as a widespread definition of ‘cultural policy’ in terms of ‘the subsidy, regulation and management of the “arts”’ has only applied to certain aspects of film policy in specific countries (such as Sweden’s support after the Second World War for the ‘quality film’ discussed by Hedling and Vesterlund in this volume).

However, the policy interventions by governments on behalf of a privately-owned, commercial film industry may also be seen to fall within the broader sense of cultural policy identified by Hesmondhalgh (*ibid.*, p. 138) which he characterises in terms of the pursuit of ‘an impact on the primarily symbolic domain’ within a specific - regional, national or supra-national - political or geographical space. As a number of the contributions to this volume indicate, one of the features of the global industry has been the dominating presence of Hollywood and the relative decline of specifically ‘national’ cinemas. In this respect, the desire to assist domestic film

production has rarely been based on economic considerations alone but has also been underpinned by an interest in sustaining diverse forms of national, as well as regional, cultural expression. In this respect, the central tension of film policy has often been identified in terms of a clash between the pursuit of economic objectives (such as full employment, inward investment and knock-on effects for other industrial sectors) and cultural ones (such as the defence of national culture, the promotion of cultural diversity and support for film as an artistic practice similar to other ‘high cultural’ forms).

However, as many of the articles suggest, the increasing globalisation of the film industry, driven in particular by neo-liberal economic forces, has also meant that the identification of ‘national’ film industries or ‘national cultures’ has become much more problematic. As such, contemporary film policies have tended to rely less upon ideas of the ‘defence’ of national industries and cultures than a concern to reposition ‘indigenous’ film activity within the global market-place and engage in pursuit of ‘transnational’ opportunities for funding and creative collaboration. ‘Transnationalism’ is, however, a multi-faceted phenomenon and, as the essays that follow show, has involved both an alignment with Hollywood and the cultivation of alternatives to it (as well as a demonstration of a variety of economic and cultural features).

To this extent, the terrain of film policy has clearly shifted but also continues to display many of the same preoccupations, and tensions, evident in earlier periods. Thus, while film policy has clearly been affected by the ‘creative industries’ agenda, the emphasis upon economic impact and ancillary effects that this has entailed has not led to quite the same kind of ‘paradigm-shift’ that it has in more traditional forms of arts and cultural policy. Similarly, due to filmmaking’s long association with private commercial interests, it has rarely been endowed with the same artistic and cultural

status as other cultural forms or been identified as central to the ‘public interest’ in the same way as other media (such as television). Accordingly, many of the tensions that have historically been identified with film policy – economics versus culture, high versus low, public versus private -continue to be evident in the contemporary moment while, at the same time, acquiring an added dimension as a result of the changing ecology of film production, distribution and exhibition and the challenges that it has posed.

As an issue of an academic journal, this is not, of course, the place to collate ‘country reports’. Rather the aim of the issue is to take stock of current developments in the field of film policy, identify the global context in which these have occurred and examine some of the specific policies adopted by different countries and industry players. In this respect, the articles illustrate how the policy responses to neo-liberal globalisation possess a number of affinities but also vary according to the specific geographical, economic and cultural circumstances in which policy decisions are made and the political priorities of those in government.

In the opening essay, Michael Curtin indicates how the transnational flow of media imagery facilitated by market liberalisation and new technologies has led many national and local governments to develop film policies that will stimulate local content likely to appeal to resident populations, create employment and benefits for local economies and achieve a degree of ‘soft power’ in the cultural and ideological sphere. However, although he identifies the rise of new ‘transnational media capitals’, he is sceptical of the general value of film policies geared towards the support of the ‘creative industries’ and global competitiveness, arguing that these have encouraged a global system of production that benefits the major film producers (and media conglomerates)

more than local economies. He places particular emphasis upon the way in which global competition for inward investment has led to ‘a crisis for creative labour’ in which the status and working conditions of workers within the film industry are being progressively undermined. As a result, he calls for a new form of film policy based on the idea of ‘stewardship’ that relies less upon an appeal to ideas of political sovereignty and ‘national culture’ than of ‘media diversity at various social, cultural and geographical scales of operation and significance’.

As with much discussion of film policy, Curtin’s article focuses on how states and agencies respond to the economic and ideological might of media conglomerates, especially the major Hollywood entertainment corporations. Paul McDonald’s article, however, looks at this issue from the opposite end, raising the question of how Hollywood itself may be seen to formulate and pursue its own forms of film policy. Taking the issue of copyright infringement, or film and television ‘piracy’, as his focus, he considers the ways in which the anti-piracy policy of the trade association, the Motion Picture Association of America, has, in effect, assumed the status of semi-official American film policy. Identifying how the MPAA has mobilised its own form of ‘creative industries’ discourse to lay claim to the benefits of copyright for the US economy and creative workers, McDonald then proceeds to examine the range of legal, political and discursive strategies that the MPAA has employed in pursuit of tougher measures against both domestic and international ‘piracy’. Although recognising Hollywood’s need for copyright, McDonald identifies some of the problems involved in the MPAA’s actions before concluding that the industry’s overweening reverence for copyright may, in fact, have turned into an obstacle preventing it from

‘conducting any fundamental rethink of how copyright can most effectively operate in the online economy’.

John Hill’s article on British film policy is also concerned with the way in which policy has been framed in relation to the economic power of Hollywood. Although globalisation may be seen to have involved an erosion of national sovereignty, Hill points out how the idea of the ‘national’ continues to maintain a potency for national governments and the implementation of film policy. However, by tracing the history of legal definitions of a ‘British’ film he also indicates how nationality has been defined in such a way as to accommodate ‘transnational’ Hollywood production. Focusing, in particular, on the introduction of a Cultural Test for British films in 2007, Hill identifies how a policy apparently directed at ‘culturally British’ films has also facilitated the subsidy of big-budget Hollywood productions through the use of tax credits (which is itself a product of the inter-state competitiveness engendered by the global system of production described by Curtin). However, as Hill also points out, this is not an entirely new development given the manner in which industrial – rather than cultural - concerns have shaped definitions of a British film since as far back as the 1920s.

A re-articulation of the national and transnational may also be seen to have been a characteristic of developments in German cinema. Randall Halle traces the specific circumstances governing German audio-visual policy in the post-war period and the adoption of a subsidy system for film production that made possible the emergence of the New German Cinema of the 1970s. However, in the face of what Halle refers to as ‘market permeability’ and ‘technology shock’, he argues that there has been a shift away from a national model of subsidy towards a European transnational

model that emphasises transnational audience appeal rather than the construction of national citizenship and the pursuit of profitability rather than cultural value. Although Halle identifies the debates and controversies to which these developments have led, he also argues that they should not be viewed negatively but rather as opening up new potentialities for European films and audiences.

Similar shifts are also evident in Swedish film policy. Olof Hedling and Per Vesterlund identify the importance of the principle of ‘quality’ that historically underpinned the employment of public funds in support of film. However, they also indicate how a policy in support of a small national cinema has also been transformed by the discourses of transnationalism and regionalism. The Nordic Film and TV Fund has encouraged a new culture of co-production while the introduction of regional funds in support of film and television production, primarily on an economic basis, has placed a new emphasis upon incentives for inward investment (and led, as a result, to a degree of de-centring of the production infrastructure). Although Hedling and Vesterlund argue that such developments have involved a re-calibration of conceptions of the public interest rather than a simple substitution of economic for cultural goals, they also identify some of the conflicts that have resulted, particularly in the field of labour relations (providing, in so doing, a specific example of the more general trends discussed by Curtin).

Armida De la Garza’s account of developments in Mexican cinema reveals similarities with changes in Germany and Sweden but also a degree of divergence. For De la Garza, the onset of neo-liberal policies in Mexico led to the transformation of the kind of ‘nation-building’ cinema that existed prior to the 1980s into what she characterises as ‘a kind of genre, catering for a very small niche audience both

domestically and internationally'. In tracing this development, she also draws attention to the separation of production from the exhibition sector which she argues may have been strengthened by the economic changes but has also led to a reduction of the choice available to audiences in mainstream cinemas. In this respect, she also places an emphasis upon the importance of policies that go beyond support for film production and identifies, in particular, the adoption of educational policies aimed at widening audience access and strengthening cultural diversity.

The final two articles develop the issue's themes in relation to rather different political and cultural contexts. Focusing on the growth of co-productions between the People's Republic of China and South Korea, Brian Yecies discusses the ways in which these have strengthened each country's film industry by raising budgets, opening up the Chinese market, consolidating technological expertise and building upon the international appeal of Korean cinema. Although Yecies highlights the role of the official co-production treaty between the two countries that was agreed in 2014, he also argues that this, in effect, followed in the wake of numerous informal agreements and collaboration amongst Chinese and Korean filmmakers that had already evolved as part of a desire to build filmmaking capacity and achieve international success.

By way of contrast, Nobuko Kawashima argues that Japan has exhibited a degree of 'Galápagosization' in the way in which it has resisted global trends towards inter-regional competition for financial investment and increased co-productions. She links this to the relative absence of either economic or cultural policies explicitly directed at the film industry. However, although Japan may be perceived as lacking an explicit 'film policy', film has, nonetheless, emerged as the object of economic and cultural policies related to the cultivation of 'soft power' and nation-branding. This has

been most evident in the promotion of the idea of ‘Cool Japan’; however, as the spread of activities associated with Cool Japan has expanded, so the conception of the public value of film has largely been confined to that of a vehicle for the promotion of other industries.

Taken together, what the various articles reveal is the significance of film policy initiatives across the globe and the range of economic and cultural issues with which they have been concerned. While they all indicate the manner in which states in particular have been obliged to respond to the economic and technological changes wrought by globalisation, they also demonstrate the variation in responses to these shared challenges. In doing so, the articles also highlight the ways in which film policy occupies a significant place at the intersection of economic, cultural and political debate. As such, the collection of papers that follow not only provides a wide-ranging account of how policies have been conceived and implemented in relation to a specific industry but also contributes to a wider debate on the economic and cultural consequences of ‘creative industries’ discourse and policy.

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