

# Working with mixed methods aided by a computational ontology to address how film audiences form in regional contexts

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*God's Own Country (2017)*

# Outline

- Introduction to the project: research questions and themes
- The theoretical context of our research
- Film in contemporary society / Culture and inequality
- Methodology and research design
- Policy trends
- Secondary data analysis - film consumption
- Audience interviews
- Film elicitation groups
- Survey
- Working with the data using a computational ontology
- Diverse film culture and understanding regions as relational

## Nicole (North East interviewee)



“It’s pleasurable, it’s something that I enjoy doing, but it opens you up to different cultures, different people, different ways of living, different ideas about the world, I think it’s really important to watch things that you might not necessarily choose to watch actually because they might surprise you...”

# Introduction to the project: research questions and themes

## Project Team

- <https://www.beyondthemultiplex.net/project-team/>

## Central research question

- How do audiences engage with and form around 'specialised' films in four English regions?

## Specialised film

- The project focuses on how audiences form around specialised film in relation to mainstream film. Specialised film includes small-scale, foreign language, documentary, and films with unconventional narratives or themes.

## Research themes

- Theme 1: Regional specialised film consumption
- Theme 2: The meaning of specialised film for regional audiences
- Theme 3: Place, venue and events
- Theme 4: Policy and industry

## The theoretical context of our research

- History of audience research and media: popular entertainment ‘but much of life has little connection with it’ (Hoggart, 1957) – now audiences are ‘everywhere and nowhere’ (Bird 2003)
- Theory – and its circumstances (Katz, 1980)
- ‘Behavioural approach – rise/power of media corporations’; ‘cultural studies - increasing affluence and inequality (post-war consumer boom)’; ‘postmodern turn – spectator/performance paradigm’ – now participation, why now?
- Repositioning of audiences BOTH - we are continually and unavoidably audiences at the same time as consumers, relatives, workers, citizens and publics AND current media environment is reshaping opportunities for people (as individuals, audiences, mediated publics) to participate in mediatized society (Livingstone 2013)
- Passive, active — a participatory audience is more social than active audience that sought to critique structuralist accounts of inscribed readers
- New possibilities for action, interaction and participation (Carpentier, 2012)
- Intersections – levels/types of audience participation and levels/types of mediated participation (publics also being audiences)

## Film in contemporary English society

- Provision of mainstream film is good across England; however, provision of specialised films is low across the English regions outside London, which limits the opportunities for people to experience a more diverse film culture.
- Film audience experience is changing in range and type through online consumption and new modes of theatrical exhibition such as boutique cinemas (Christie, 2012), as well as changing audience profiles and demographics (Friedman et al., 2015).

## Wider context of cultural inequality

- Cultural inequality, access and diversity (see O'Brien, D., & Oakley, K. (2015). Cultural value and inequality: A critical literature review. A report commissioned by the AHRC Cultural Value Project)
- Cultural production, distribution and consumption
- Cultural geography and regions (How Audiences Form – Pilot Project). Multi-dimensional (not strongly determined by distribution, socio-economics and cultural backgrounds)

# Mixed-methods and using a computational ontology

- Working with mixed-methods – (see Crossley, N. and Edwards, G. 2016 or Mason, J. 2011)
- Qualitative and quantitative methods
- Developing a computational ontology iteratively to formally describe the film audiences under investigation

<http://www.visualdataweb.de/webvowl/#iri=https://www.dhi.ac.uk/san/btm/btm.owl>

- Using the ontology to understand the relationships between different kinds of data
- The ontology has the potential to make visible connections between datasets that we might not otherwise see

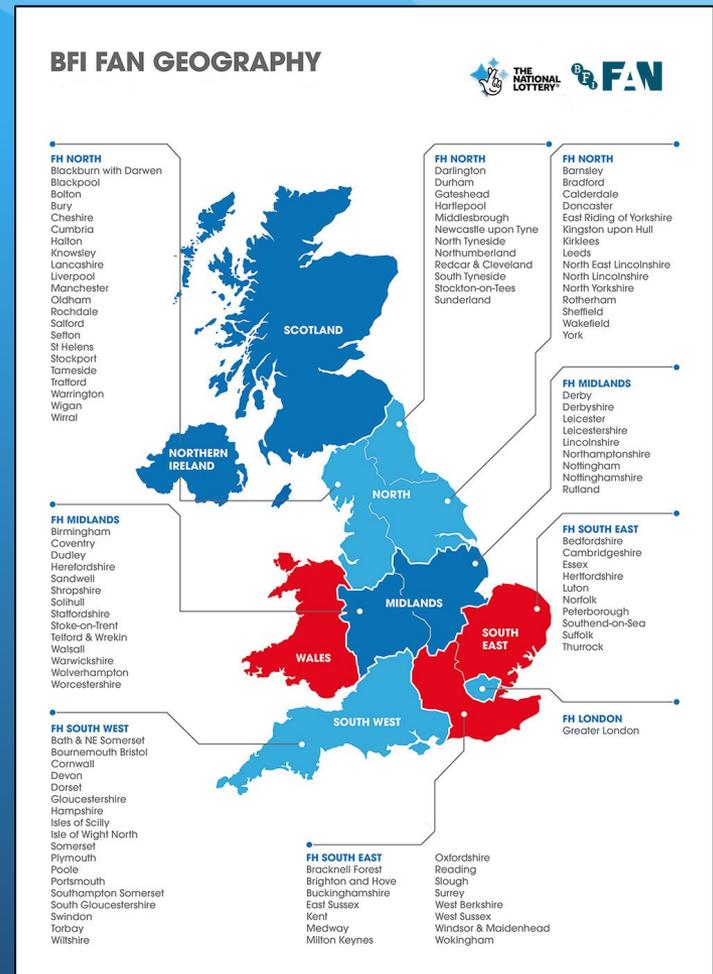


# Methods and data collection

- National film policy and industry analysis to assess regional access to film (1997 to present) – discourse and quantitative analysis
- Secondary data analysis to develop socio-cultural backgrounds of film audiences nationally (DCMS 'Taking Part' survey 2016/2017 and BFI 'Opening Our Eyes' survey, 2011, analysis using R)
- 200 semi-structured interviews (50 in each region) to understand film, cinema and film events from people living in English regions
- 16 film-elicitation groups (4 in each region) to explore the meaning of film for audiences
- 25 'elite' interviews with film policy makers, regional exhibitors, and distributors to understand the concerns and approaches to regional film provision
- A longitudinal survey (of three waves, 5000 followed by 500 followed by 250) in our regions to understand patterns of film consumption through time

# Film Audience Policy Trends

- 2001 - UKFC publish 'Specialised Distribution and Exhibition Strategy for the UK' which provides a working definition of 'Specialised Cinema'
- 2011 – After UKFC closed, BFI becomes the UK's lead agency for film audience development alongside other organisations such as the Independent Cinema Office, Into Film, Cinema for All and Arts Council England.
- BFI Funding Priorities in Film Forever (2012-2017) "Strategic Priority One: Expanding education and learning opportunities and boosting audience choice across the UK."
- Greater focus on audiences and diversity. 2012 - Film Policy Review Panel publish an independent report for DCMS: 'A Future for British Film: It Begins with the Audience...'
- As part of the BFI 2022 national/regional devolution strategy, the BFI Film Audience Network created eight Film Hubs



# Secondary data analysis: patterns of film consumption

## Context: Eclectic consumerism?

- Some evidence to suggest that patterns of consumptions are changing (Friedman et al., 2015)
- Limited systematic empirical analysis of patterns of consumption within cultural forms.
- Few studies of the consumption of cinema in relation to sociological debates of cultural consumption, exception Chan and Goldthorpe's (2010). Explanations need to go beyond a highbrow model or the under theorised notion of 'omnivore' consumption (Peterson and Simkus, 1992) to consider new ways of making distinction within cultural consumption (Friedman et al. 2015).

## Debates around cultural consumption

- A Bourdieusian (1984) framework - strong link between social, economic and cultural capital and types of cultural consumption.
- Weberian approaches - status mediates an homology between class and consumption (Weber, 1968; Chan and Goldthorpe, 2007a, 2007b). Weber (1968) argues that class and status are distinctive and not strongly determined by each other.
- Bauman (1998, 2001) takes an individualising perspective arguing that individuals' construct 'selves' through consumption practices, which shifts the focus from 'habitus to freedom' (Warde, 1997, p. 8) in consumer choices.

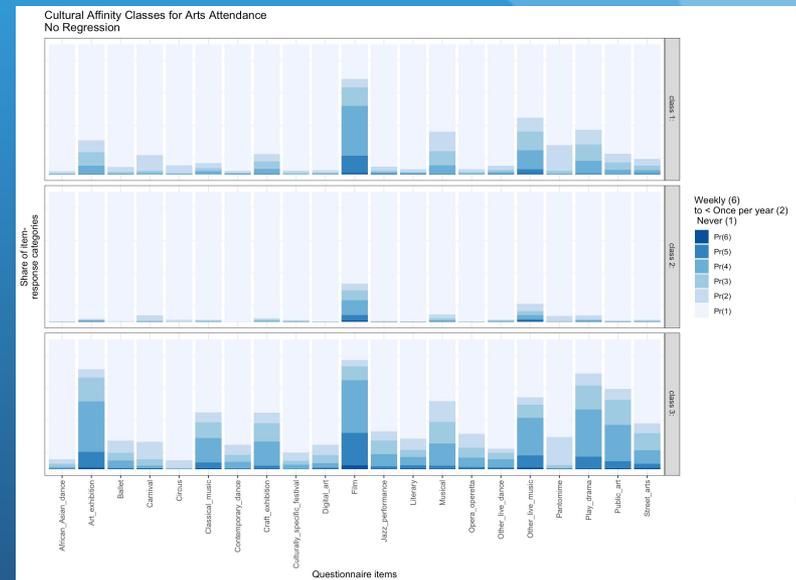
# Secondary data analysis: patterns of film consumption

Our analysis addressed preferences, attendance, and perceptions of film and cultural consumption, investigating how these related to socio-economic, status and wider cultural preferences.

## Where does general film consumption sit against overall cultural consumption?

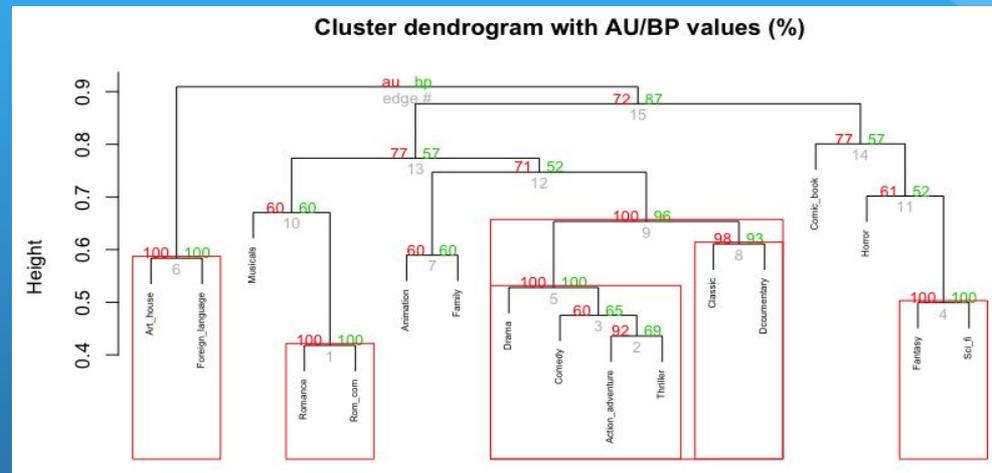
The table shows the distribution of three latent classes within the dataset. This indicates that all three classes are more likely to consume film at the cinema than engage in any other form of cultural activity.

- **Class 1:** general consumers who have a high probability of consuming a wide range of culture, such as films, theatre, music and art exhibitions. Film has the highest probability of consumption.
- **Class 2:** limited consumers, who have a low probability of consuming culture across all areas. Film at the cinema has the highest consumption, followed by live music.
- **Class 3:** general consumers with specific cultural interests who have a high probability of consuming culture across all categories. The probability of them attending film at the cinema is highest of all three groups.



# Preferences of film consumption: clusters of genres

Is there any differentiation within film consumption, by genre preferences and actual film genre viewing?



Five distinct sub groups (clusters):

1. Arthouse and foreign language film
  2. Romance and romantic comedy
  3. Drama, comedy, action and thriller
  4. Fantasy and sci-fi
  5. Classic and documentary
- Art house film/foreign language form a distinct cluster, and those who prefer such films are a distinct group that consumes film across multiple genres and formats
  - Those who view film in many formats also watch art house and foreign language film, even if they do not prefer these genres

# Film consumption and audience demographics

## Findings

- A key conclusion is that there is a distinguishable genre of arthouse and foreign language film and there is a specific group of consumers who prefer such films and who also consume films across many genres.
- Furthermore, those who view many different genres also watch arthouse and foreign language films, even if they do not prefer these.

People who watch art house or foreign language film are more likely to be:

- under 55
- earn over £30,000 per annum
- hold a degree or higher qualification
- live in a city

Education is a key factor, with more advanced education participation linked to a more than doubling in the likelihood of being a general consumer of all types of film, or a consumer of arthouse and foreign language film.

# Film consumption and audience demographics - findings

- The distinctiveness of arthouse and foreign language film consumption may point to a cultural variation within different groups of 'omnivores', as noted by Hanquinet (2013).
- The actual consumption of film does not neatly fit the model of 'omnivores', 'paucivores' and 'inactives' as defined by Chan and Goldthorpe (2010).

We therefore classify:

- 'Extensive omnivores', consumers who watch all genres and arthouse and foreign language film; they are general consumers with specific interests.
- 'Basic omnivores', consumers who watch all genres but who do not have a specific favourite genre such as arthouse and foreign language film; they are general consumers.
- Given most people watch film, 'inactives' is not a strong group; they are limited consumers.

# Audience Interviews: understanding film practices and the meaning of film for audiences

- 200 semi-structured interviews with audiences across the North East, Yorkshire and the Humber, North West and the South West
- Aiming to understand how people engage with film at the regional level
- Multiple recruitment strategies, using snowball sampling through social networks and community organisations
- The interviews explored film practices and experiences regarding what people watch, relationships with venues, experiences of film events, the use of digital platforms, and the meanings audiences take away from film watching
- **PROCESS OF CODING – MATT TO ADD**
- Analytical themes: audiences, practices, value of film and cinema, place, reasons for watching

# Differentiating film experiences

## Sharon (North West)



“again it totally depends on different films, as I’ve described liking the feeling of going to like the arty ones and I quite like feeling a bit snooty (Laughs). ‘Oh yes, I’ve just been watching a film that was made in Budapest about er...(Laughs), it was fascinating’. I do love being a bit of a snob. I love watching children’s ones because they can make me laugh and they can make me cry...”

# Film audiences as relational and interactive

## Interview analysis theme: Practices

- Viewing practices
- Ways of watching film
- Practices of watching at the cinema or other venues
- Practices of watching at home
- Shared viewing practices
- Sharing films
- Interactions around film
- Film-related practices and the influence of film-watching
- Doing while watching
- Choices and behaviours

# Meaning and interpretation: film elicitation

- 16 groups (4 in each region) to explore the meaning of film for audiences
- The groups were structured using 4 clips in each group (taken from a selection of 8 films: Call Me by Your Name, Dark River, God's Own Country, Happy End, I, Daniel Blake, Loveless, The Eagle Huntress and Things to Come)
- The films were selected to represent typical independent cinema programming, with a range of British and foreign language titles
- The discussion in the groups was designed to explore the ways in which audiences interpreted and constructed meaning in and through the films (Livingstone, 2017)
- The groups were diverse, with participants drawn from a range of social groups. Levels of participation in film culture were also mixed

# Focus groups - A sensory appreciation of film style

- **Touch** – ‘...there’s also the tactile, the feeling of the cloth, the getting into bed, the sounds was all there, it felt as if he was breathing on her back, so there’s a tactile sense of that. The way that she opened the fence, the door... and then the piece of rope, it evoked sensations’
- **Empathy** was mentioned repeatedly and **frustration** was mentioned a number of times, eg in *I, Daniel Blake* participants felt frustration from empathising with the characters in the Job Centre
- **Physical reactions** – ‘it made me feel sick, just sympathising with the situation’, ‘The first scene was quite cold, when they were stood on the top of the hill it felt quite dark. Similarly, with the water scene I felt again quite cold’. People mentioned feeling ‘uncomfortable’, particularly when they were lingering shots. On the other hand, people mentioned feeling ‘calm’ because of the slower pace: ‘I think every shot was pretty similar and it was stationary, it lingered for a very long time... It made you take everything in a bit more than normal’
- **Relating with characters** – ‘I could completely see what they were feeling, relating to my own experiences, just from the way that they hugged’

# Survey: patterns of audience formation at scale

Aim to capture patterns of audience formation at scale: demographics, cultural interests, how often they watch films, what types of films they watch, what venues and/or media they use for watching films.

Three wave survey across four region - the North East, Yorkshire and the Humber, the North West and the South West.

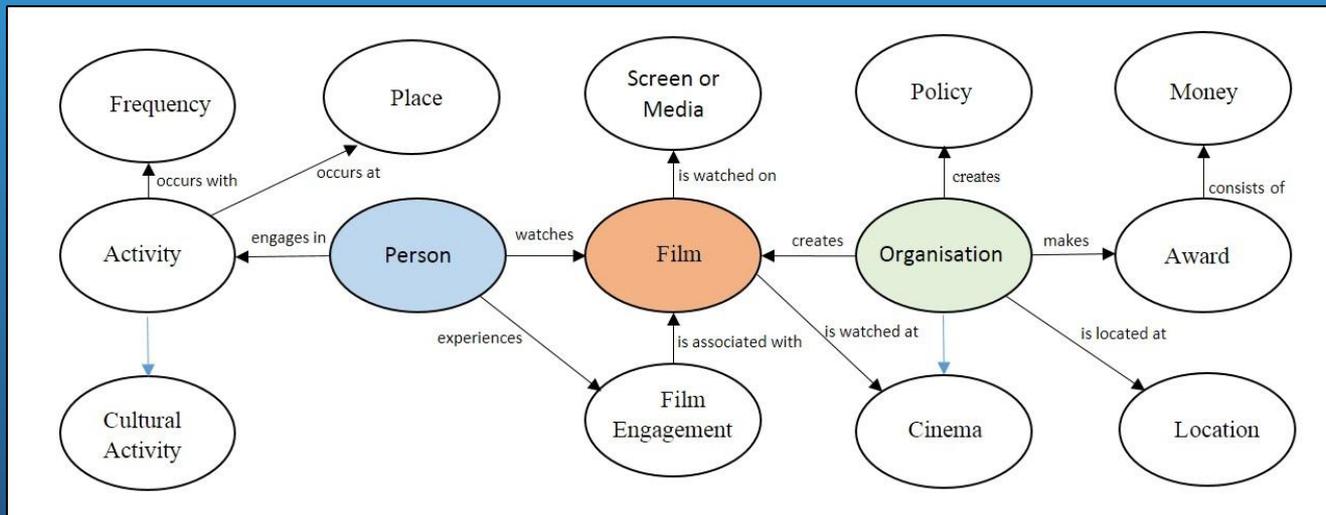
**Wave One** – Aug and Sept 2018 (5,071 responses) – questions related to secondary data analysis plus consumption of specialised film including location and types of films watched with elements developed from the interview analysis.

**Wave Two** – Oct and Nov 2018 (547 responses) – completed by those who were identified from the first wave as having watched a specialised film of any kind in the preceding 12 months. The questions covered the details of the last five films watched by the participant of any kind including film, genre, venue, who watched with and what the experience was like.

**Wave Three** – Jan 2019 (317 responses) – questions repeated from Wave Two.

# Computational ontology – working with the data

- Coding
- **Technical details of the ontology database – TO ADD**



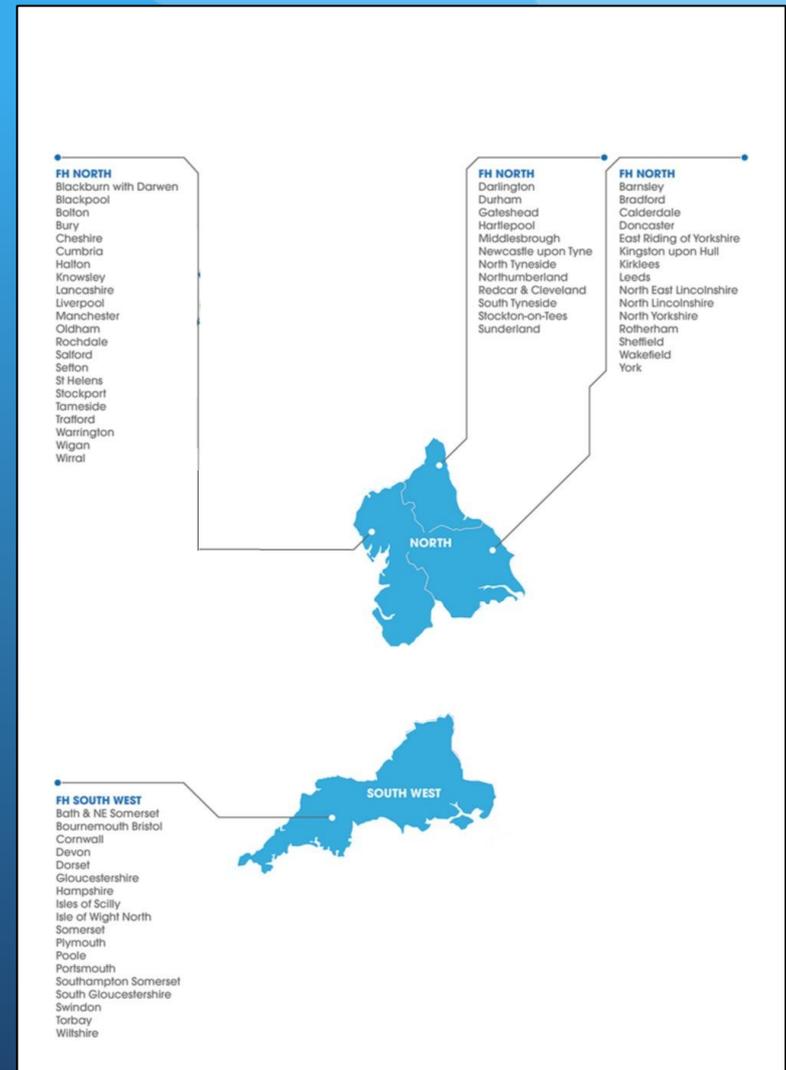
# Conclusions – so what?

- Diverse film culture
- Understanding regions as relational

## Working towards regional patterns of (diverse) film exhibition

- Sites and situations of different degrees of diverse film exhibition across our four regions
- Sets of existing relationships - the context in which audiences may find themselves in
- Possible / potential relations of local engagement in diverse film exhibition
- Dynamic and changing over time – possibility of new and changing relationships

- 1 - Diverse across all areas of film exhibition
- 2 - Narrow diversity relative to size
- 3 - Small, independent but temporally limited
- 4 - Commercial dominance
- 5 - Limited or no diversity





## Thank you

Beyond the Multiplex: Audiences for Specialised Film in English Regions. Funded by the Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC).

Find out more about our research and sign-up to our newsletter at <https://www.beyondthemultiplex.net/>

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