

Damsels in Distress? Women film directors and British cinema funding post-millennium

By Stella Hockenhull

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On 28 March 2013, a small group of British female academics submitted written evidence of their findings to a Commons Select Committee concerning the dearth of British women film and television directors within the industry.¹ Entitled *Women in the Workplace* (Conley et al. 2013), part of that report contained evidence from Directors UK, an organization formed in 2008 that calls itself ‘the voice of British film and television directors’ (Conley et al. 2013). A professional association with over 4,500 members, Directors UK explicitly expressed concern over the paucity of female film and television directors within the British media industry, although the period from 2000 to 2010 saw a rise in female film directors, reaching a peak in 2009, when they accounted for 17.2 per cent of British film directors overall.² The increase coincides with the initiation of the UK Film Council (UKFC) and its changing policies concerning the encouragement of greater diversity and equal opportunities within the film industry. Within a historical context and in light of funding and UKFC policy, this article analyses its impact on women film directors in British cinema post-millennium.

That women film directors in Britain (and indeed internationally) constitute a small percentage of the workforce is not a new phenomenon; indeed, during the preceding century women were also under-represented within the UK film industry. Before World War II there was little opportunity for women directors, particularly in directing fiction films and, according to Sue Harper, ‘[i]n the 1930s, women experienced extreme difficulties breaking into the technical side of production, and also into the union, the ACT’ (2000: 191). However, to a certain extent, the outbreak of war in 1939 redressed this issue. This period, in particular, saw a rise in women film directors, with figures such as Jill Craigie scriptwriting and directing both documentary and feature films, and Muriel Box making her directorial debut with her Ministry of Information short documentaries. Both were influential in their output, albeit their working lives were short-lived in post-war society,³ as Cranston and McGahan point out:

[a]lthough British documentary, and the Documentary Movement in particular, had spawned a number of talented and prolific female directors including Ruby and Marion Grierson, Jill Craigie, Margaret Thomson, Evelyn Spice and Kay Mander [...] [by] 1947 documentary directing, like most post-war professions, was rapidly becoming the preserve of men. (2010: 231)

For the most part, after World War II and into the 1960s women directed children’s films. Whereas in the 1950s Kay Mander worked on *The Kid from Canada* (1957) and Margaret Thomson directed *Child’s Play* (1954), the subsequent decade saw a dramatic decline in films directed by women with only a handful on release during the entire period. Examples include Sarah Erulkah, who directed the children’s film *The Hunch* in 1967, and Jan Darnley-Smith’s film *A Ghost of a Chance* (1968), a

whimsical story about a group of children trying to protect a historic landmark aided by a group of ghosts. In addition, in 1962 Joan Littlewood's comedy drama, *Sparrow's Can't Sing*, was produced by the Associated British Picture Corporation, which also owned its own group of cinemas thus providing a distribution outlet for the film – a significant advantage for all film directors.

The following decade was a more prolific period for women, particularly those focusing on avant-garde and feminist cinema, and a number of production, exhibition and distribution networks were built up which privileged or specialized in films directed by women, including the London Film-maker's Co-op, the Cinema of Women, the Berwick Street Collective and the Other Cinema. Avant-garde directors such as Sally Potter also began their careers in the 1970s, first writing then directing *Thriller* (1979),⁴ a protest about female death in classical tragedy and financed by the Arts Council. Laura Mulvey's work, however, might be considered the most prominent during the 1970s, her scholarly feminist writing underpinning titles such as *Penthesilea, Queen of the Amazons* (1974), a film co-directed with Peter Wollen, and *Riddles of the Sphinx* (1976), a conversion of the Oedipus myth and funded by a £20,000 grant from the British Film Institute (BFI). Indeed, the bulk of the female-directed films during this period shied away from the mainstream, seeking not only alternative funding but unconventional audiences in addition. In 1972, the Edinburgh Film Festival included a women's section for the first time and, as Harper concurs, '[t]he 1970s represented a high-water mark in terms of formal innovation for women film-makers' (2000: 206) operating outside the mainstream in terms of both funding and style.

If the 1970s was a decade of experimental cinema for women, then in the 1980s, with the advent of Channel 4 and its commitment to film funding, a number of

changes occurred. Perceiving itself as a publishing house, Channel 4's policy of devoting a quarter of its viewing hours to feature films resulted in a plethora of independent filmmakers supplying low-budget productions to the channel and, by 1990, it had partially funded 170 films by independent production companies. In 1979 a group of women had convened to discuss how this new channel might aid their position in broadcasting and they moved on to form the organization known as the Women's Fourth Channel Lobby, later to become the Women's Broadcasting and Film Lobby. Apart from concerns over female representation on television, the group also called for an improvement in employment and training opportunities. While highlighting the lack of women in governing and senior administrative positions, they also noted a shortage of women involved in programming for television. Following a policy to support British talent, Channel 4 Films subsequently funded Sally Potter's *The Gold Diggers* (1983) and later Gurinder Chadha's *Bhaji on the Beach* (1992). Nonetheless, despite a continuation of the 1970s strong women's avant-garde trajectory, along with an injection of funding from Channel 4, women remained under-represented as directors. Sally Potter continued her career with films such as *Orlando* (1993), a highly aesthetic and radical feminist film made on international funding and a relative success at the box office. Christine Edzard, who had founded Sands Films with her husband, Peter Goodwin, built her reputation on historical dramas such as *Biddy* (1983) and *Little Dorritt* (1988). Financed through private loans and Goodwin's money, Sands Films continued to provide an outlet for Edzard's career. *The Fool* (1990), based on Henry Mayhew's seminal work entitled *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851), and her contemporary version of *As You Like It* (1992) comprised her directing career for

the remainder of the decade until the release of *The Children's Midsummer Night's Dream* in 2001.

The decade leading up to the millennium witnessed both television and Arts Council funding for female film directors, but not in plentiful supply. Distinct examples include film directors such as Antonia Bird who, in 1994, directed *Priest*, a film sponsored by the BBC and Miramax. Bird eventually returned to television directing with serials such as *A Passionate Woman* (2010) and *The Village* (2013), having previously worked on episodes of *EastEnders* (1985–86), *Casualty* (1986–87), *Morse* (1992), *Peak Practice* (1993) and *The Men's Room* (1991), amongst others. Channel 4 sponsored Hettie MacDonald to make *Beautiful Thing* (1995), a social realist low-budget film starring Meera Syal, and Sally Potter garnered Arts Council lottery funding for *The Tango Lesson* (1997), an international co-production. The BFI and Channel 4 sponsored Carine Adler's drama about mortality entitled *Under the Skin* (1997) and Andrea Weiss's documentary entitled *A Bit of Scarlet* (1996). In the same year, Coky Giedroyc was awarded Arts Council lottery funding, a Channel 4 subsidy and sponsorship from the BFI for her hard-hitting drama, *Stella Does Tricks*, about a prostitute attempting to start a new life in Glasgow. Later in the decade, the benefits of lottery funding were evident in films such as *Amy Foster* (directed by Beeban Kidron, 1997) and Lynne Ramsay's *Ratcatcher* (1999). In sum however, between 1990 and 1999 less than forty films which achieved theatrical release were directed by women and, despite the fact that many of these were supported by the Arts Council and Channel 4, the majority were privately funded.⁵

As noted, the year 2000 was an important turning point for British cinema funding because it witnessed the initiation of the UKFC under the chairmanship of Alan

Parker. A government quango, and originally entitled the Film Council, the UKFC was a public body set up by New Labour under John Woodward to direct lottery funding into filmmaking. Its remit was to finance British-made films which would entertain and be shown in multiplex cinemas across the country, and arguably it proved instrumental in encouraging a large number of new directors and offered financial support to British cinema. The UKFC took over the functions of the existing structures of the Arts Council England Lottery Film Department, British Screen, the BFI and the British Film Commission, and its purpose was to create a coherent umbrella structure for film, whether on the production side or in terms of finance. It was divided up into three separate funds: the Premiere Fund led by Robert Jones, a former film distributor and producer; the Development Fund led by Jenny Borgars, formerly head of British Screen; and the New Cinema Fund run by Paul Trijbits, a Dutch-born film and television producer. Script development became a priority following the disasters of the preceding decade, where accusations were levelled concerning quality (see Petley 2002) and, therefore, the Development Fund became important in terms of supporting and guiding projects at the outset. As the UKFC's *Second Three Year Plan* from April 2004 to March 2007 stated, the Development Fund exists 'to broaden the range, ambition and diversity of UK film projects and talent' (UKFC 2004: 30). Projects successful at this stage included Danny Boyle's *Millions* (2004), Dominic Savage's *Love and Hate* (2005), and female directors Emily Young's *Kiss of Life* (2003) and Amma Asante's *A Way of Life* (2004). Much later, the production of *We Need to Talk About Kevin* (2011), Lynne Ramsay's adaptation of Lionel Shriver's commanding novel, was supported by the UKFC Development Fund for the sum of £18,510.

Expressing a commitment to equal opportunities, particularly in terms of gender, ethnicity and disability, in 2003 the UKFC set up a working party entitled the Leadership on Diversity in Film Group led by the co-chairman of Working Title Films, Tim Bevan, who was later to become chairman of the UKFC. Subsequently publishing its findings ‘as a paper for consultation’ it acknowledged the fact that,

[c]ontemporary British society today is simply not reflected in the industry’s current workforce or in on-screen content and portrayal. Although under-representation, say, for women, minority ethnic groups or disabled people, has been recognised and discussed by the film industry over a number of years, very little has been done to change the situation. We all acknowledge a deep sense of frustration at the slow pace of progress in this area over the years. (Bevan 2003: 2)

Furthermore, the paper noted that there are ‘formidable barriers’ into the profession regardless of ethnicity and gender, and that the profile of the workforce ultimately impacts ‘on the stories that are told, the way they are told on- screen, the levels of access to film for potential audiences and, in terms of content and portrayal, the images of Britain and the concepts of “Britishness” around the globe’ (Bevan 2003: 5). The committee’s aims to achieve a more diverse workforce ‘behind, and in front of the camera across the film sector value chain (development, production, post-production, distribution and exhibition)’ (Bevan 2003: 6), also noted the paucity of women in certain grades. Indeed, although women accounted for a large percentage of the workforce, particularly in cinema exhibition, and areas such as wardrobe and costume, there remained a disproportion of directors, the report noting that ‘[l]ast November, the BFI counted only eight films directed by women out of a total of 350 that were made in the UK’ (Bevan 2003: 9). The stated aims of the article in terms of

gender were to monitor progress carefully and examine future fiscal policy and the advantage of co-production treaties for potential benefits. The report followed the appointment in 2002 of Marcia Williams, the new Head of Diversity whose role it was to administer the development and implementation of the UKFC strategy on diversity including funding. The report for the year ending 2004 expressed its commitment to ‘improving diversity and inclusion across the industry’, and went on to state that

we are now working with the industry to help change attitudes and working practices. Our aim is to deliver an industry workforce that more accurately reflects the make up of the UK population and ultimately we aim to ensure that a more diverse range of British films is offered to audiences across the UK. (UKFC 2004)

Apart from sponsoring a number of films by black and Asian filmmakers as part of the remit, the UKFC sponsored the Women in Film and Television Awards, the largest annual event in the United Kingdom which celebrates women in the industry.

An ongoing problem for all filmmakers is the distribution process, and this situation for women was not helped by the withdrawal of funding for Cinenova, the United Kingdom’s only distributor of women’s films in Europe.⁶ Even if a film manages to gain a distributor, an additional difficulty is manifested through its release pattern. Historically, many British films have struggled to gain access to multiple screens and, as Angus Finney notes, ‘[t]he traditional system for distributing independent films has been in a critical condition for the past decade [...]. Independent movie-going audiences present a host of different challenges

compared to the Studio roll-out of tent pole and larger budget releases' (2010: 100–01).

However, the Diversity report's stated aims also encompassed distribution and exhibition, particularly their Specialised Films Print and Advertising initiative with a remit to 'embrace films that are specialised because of their ethnicity, sexuality, or disability related subject matter, or because of the identities of the filmmakers' (Bevan 2003: 15). Thus, ultimately films such as Andrea Arnold's *Fish Tank* (2009) benefited from this through the Cinema Access Programme, the Digital Fund for Non Theatrical Exhibition, the Digital Screen Network, and Capital Funding.⁷

The working group that was set up also sought to redress the balance in the film industry by less rigid working structures, stating its aims in 'developing flexible working and remote access policies and potentially a flexible benefits package' (Bevan 2003: 15). Additionally, and to further promote diversity, in 2005 the UKFC hosted Breakthrough Brits,

an event in Los Angeles, which aimed to raise the profile of British female filmmaking talent by honouring 13 British women from various film disciplines who are tipped for mainstream success. New contacts were made and at least one job has been secured as a direct result of the event. (UKFC 2006: 9)

As a consequence, whereas in its early stages UKFC policy had made little or no mention of gender inequalities, towards the mid-period of its existence it sought to redress any disparity in equal opportunities, particularly in terms of gender, ethnicity and disability. In its *Group and Lottery Annual Report and Financial Statements for*

the year ended 31 March 2007, under the heading of ‘Diversity and Inclusion’, the UKFC’s stated aims were to

help achieve a more diverse and inclusive workforce and film culture, and ensure that the funds meet their diversity targets for women, black and minority ethnic groups, disabled people and regional applicants as well as overall content or portrayal targets. (UKFC 2007a: 9)

A later report reinforced the responsibility of the UKFC by specifically noting its sponsorship of two female directors, Sam Taylor-Wood and Clio Barnard, amongst others,

whose film careers we helped launch and who have gone on to become internationally regarded filmmakers. In funding Sam Taylor-Wood’s first feature, *Nowhere Boy*, an enormously talented artist has developed into an acclaimed film director [...] while Clio Barnard was named Best New Documentary Filmmaker for *The Arbor* at Tribeca. (UKFC 2010: 5)

If, as noted above, 2009 was a reasonably prolific year for women filmmakers, then the decade witnessed this rise gradually. Indeed, in 2002, women directors accounted for only eight UK films produced, increasing to twelve the following year. Although there are few specific statistics available relating to gender in the intervening years, the BFI monthly, *Sight and Sound*, features reviews on six female-directed films in 2004, five in 2005 and nine in 2006, suggesting a small fluctuation. From 2007, however, official figures were released which related specifically to gender; in that year 6% of British films were female-directed, 11.5% in 2008, 17.2% in 2009,

12.5% in 2010, 15% in 2011 and 7.8% in 2012, thus providing a better representation of the situation.⁸ The dramatic rise between 2008 and 2011 coincides with an increase in UKFC funding for women in those particular years and also, arguably, the requirements placed on the UKFC to disclose figures relating to gender. For example, in 2007 only two films, *Brick Lane* (directed by Sarah Gavro) and *Death Defying Acts* (Gillian Armstrong), received UKFC funding, rising to three in 2008, namely *Incendiary* (Sharon Maguire), *French Film* (Jackie Oudney) and *Kicks* (Lindy Heymann). In 2009 six female-directed films were in receipt including Sam Taylor-Wood's *Nowhere Boy* (UKFC/Film4), Sally Potter's UK/US co-production *Rage*, Andrea Arnold's social realist film *Fish Tank* (BBC/UKFC), Jane Campion's *Bright Star* (Aus BBC/UKFC), and documentaries by Katherine Araniello and Holly Lubbock entitled *Follow Me on My Journey* (UKFC) and *Fezeka's Voice* (UKFC), respectively. In 2010 Clio Barnard received UKFC grants for *The Arbor*, a low-budget documentary which received support from the Development Fund, and is one of several films displaying a raw and realist style, and Gillian Wearing for *Self Made*. As noted, 2011, which saw the closure of the UKFC, was a slightly less plenteous year for the release of UKFC funded films, but included Andrea Arnold's *Wuthering Heights*, Lynne Ramsay's *We Need to Talk About Kevin*, Carol Morley's *Dreams of a Life*, Phyllida Lloyd's *The Iron Lady* and Debbie Isitt's *Nativity 2: Danger in the Manger*.⁹ Despite the disproportion of male and female output, women directors in this year equalled their male counterparts in the receipt of lottery money.

Many of the UKFC-sponsored female-directed films went on to receive critical acclaim and various accolades: Andrea Arnold's *Red Road* (2006) won the BAFTA award for best newcomer, and her later film, *Fish Tank*, won best director in the

2009 British Independent Film Awards and the 2009 Jury Prize at the Cannes Film Festival. The UKFC also aided the development and production of Jane Campion's UK/Australian production, *Bright Star* (2009), and invested in Esther Campbell's short film, *September* (2008) which won the BAFTA Short Film Award. Towards the latter part of the UKFC's agency, funding of £300,000 was received for the production of Arnold's adaptation of the classic, *Wuthering Heights*.

If the UKFC is deemed significant in supporting projects directed by women, another important factor in the success of films such as *Wuthering Heights* and others might be attributed to film producer Tanya Seghatchian, who became UKFC Head of the Development Fund and subsequently Head of Funding from 2010. Indeed, from this period, film funding at BBC Film, Film4 and the UKFC all lay in the hands of women. As Rachel Millward, the founder/director of the women's film festival Birds Eye View, wrote in *The Independent*: 'Much has been made of the "three musketeers" of independent film finance – Christine Langan of BBC films, Tessa Ross at Channel 4 films, and Tanya Seghatchian, who takes control of the UK Film Council's funding in April' (Millward 2010). Tessa Ross was the Controller of Film and Drama for Channel 4; Christine Langan is Creative Director of BBC Films; and Seghatchian, who joined the UKFC in April 2007, had overseen two major reorganizations: the merging of the UKFC's disparate development and production offices into a single unified Film Fund in early 2010 and, following the closure of the UKFC, the transfer of the Film Fund to the BFI in 2011. Described by *The Guardian* as 'the most powerful woman in the British film industry' (Dawtre 2010), Seghatchian had access to both the Premiere Fund and the New Cinema Fund, a sizeable budget enabling her to support the production of both small- and large-scale projects. Stated aims such as looking 'for creative excellence in the shape of great

vision and good stories' (quoted in Dams 2011), meant that films such as Lynne Ramsay's *We Need to Talk About Kevin*, Arnold's *Wuthering Heights*, Barnard's *The Arbor* and *The Iron Lady* (Lloyd), all 'currently show the breadth and ambition of our investments' (quoted in Dams 2011). All three women worked closely together and had 'an easy collegiate relationship' (Curtis 2010). Although Seghatchian's interventions in the funding of female directors are not transparent in any documentation, this triumvirate authority did indeed prove advantageous for directors such as Sam Taylor-Wood with *Nowhere Boy* (Channel 4 and UKFC) and Andrea Arnold with *Fish Tank* (UKFC New Cinema Fund and Development Fund in association with BBC Films). The UKFC *Annual Report* for 2008 made specific mention of Seghatchian's arrival and her intentions which necessarily and indirectly mentioned the work of women in the industry:

After a strategy of investing in script development at every budget level, the Development Fund has refocused its support for talent and screenplays with the launch of two distinct funding channels under its new head Tanya Seghatchian. The first is aimed at emerging filmmakers who have not made a feature film or who have not yet had a feature film released theatrically or broadcast on UK television, while the second is aimed at filmmakers and production companies with a demonstrable track record of success in feature filmmaking. The fund will continue, however, to support world-renowned British talent through a discretionary signature awards scheme. Films backed by the fund include Polly Stenham's adaptation of her own critically acclaimed play *That Face*, Bruce Robison's *The Peculiar Memories of Thomas Penman* and Patrick Marber's *Don Juan in Soho*. (UKFC 2008: 6)¹⁰

Furthermore, whether incidentally or not, the numbers of female directors increased dramatically following Seghatchian's appointment; in 2010/11 58% of the lottery

funding was awarded to males and 42% to females, whereas the year before it was less evenly split with 70% of the funds awarded to men and 30% to women. Nevertheless, while priority was given by the UKFC to first- and second-time filmmakers and women appeared to benefit from strategies put in place by this organization, particularly since its Diversity and Inclusion policy, support was also declared for established figures such as Stephen Frears, Mike Leigh and Ken Loach. On the other hand, it may be no coincidence that the *Annual Report* for 2006/07, published in August 2007 (after Seghatchian's initial appointment), was the first to indicate a firm commitment to women and, thereafter, UKFC documentation called for greater equality in terms of gender.¹¹ While it might be inappropriate to suggest that Seghatchian deliberately injected finance into female directed films, the latter period of the UKFC saw an increased number of women directors in receipt of funding.¹² Indeed, a whole array of UKFC-funded documentary films emerged such as Carol Morley's *Dreams of a Life* (2011), a disturbing account of a woman who died of natural causes and whose body lay undiscovered in her home for three years.

Undoubtedly, the UKFC was significant in augmenting British cinema output, but this was not the only source of funding for films directed by women; a number were released which received alternative backing, such as Meneka Das's *Little Box of Sweets* (2006) and Lucy Walker's *Blindsight* (2006), both of which were privately funded. Similarly, Gurinder Chadha's *Angus, Thongs and Perfect Snogging* (2008), a box office success making nearly £1 million on its UK opening weekend, was a co-production with Germany and the United States, sponsored by Paramount and Goldcrest. Indeed, the two years from 2008 to 2009 also witnessed eleven female-directed privately funded films or films supported by television channels, including Lone Scherfig's *An Education* (2008) funded by the BBC. Joanna Hogg, who began

her career as a stills photographer making 8mm films inspired by Derek Jarman, received no support for *Archipelago* (2011). Despite later receiving much acclaim and recognition¹³ with a recommendation for Best Film at the London Film Festival 2010, Hogg was not funded by the UKFC;¹⁴ instead *Archipelago* was sponsored by Wild Horses Films, a small production company run by fellow National Film and Television School graduate, Gayle Griffiths. Simultaneously, and also without access to lottery funding, Emily James made *Just Do It: A Tale of Modern Day Outlaws* in 2011, a UK/US production, the director raising money through crowdfunding, an innovative way of gaining sponsorship through the web to finance projects.¹⁵ Crowdfunding was pioneered by filmmaker Franny Armstrong who raised money for her film about climate change, *The Age of Stupid* (2009).¹⁶ Similarly, social media has had an effect enabling filmmakers to disseminate their own stories using mobile phones. As Meg Carter (2011) suggests, ‘with built-in video cameras now the norm for mobile phones, anyone can be a film-maker’, thus ‘social media is influencing documentary-makers too’.

The UKFC was not without its critics. Sophie Fiennes, who had previously received Film Council funding in 2002 via the New Cinema Fund for a UK/France documentary entitled *Hoover Street Revival*, did not benefit directly from lottery funding for her later releases, which included the documentary entitled *Over Your Cities Grass Will Grow* (2010) based on the life of the German artist Anselm Kiefer. Instead Fiennes was forced to seek alternative sources to finance her ideas. Indeed, the controversy was exposed by the *Guardian* film critic Charlotte Higgins, who revealed that Fiennes had unsuccessfully approached the UKFC, Arts Council England and Tate Media as potential funders for her film, only to be rejected. As Fiennes herself points out,

[t]here is nowhere you can go to in Britain; there are very few pots of money, unlike in France. I did go to the Film Council, to the New Cinema Fund and I was sharply turned away on the basis that they had urgent narrative priorities. (quoted in Higgins 2011)¹⁷

This is not to suggest that female film directors were less likely to be funded by the UKFC, or indeed to make applications, particularly in its final years of existence. Proportionally they appear to have benefited on an equal level with their male counterparts.¹⁸ Indeed, in justification, while there are no public records available for past applications in terms of gender, an overview of films released during the period suggests that limited funding was available for filmmakers, irrespective of sex, and that many were forced to raise finance privately. Similarly, those involved in large-budget projects tended to seek external funding, often relying on US studio support.

Notwithstanding Seghatchian's influence within the UKFC, she was left little time to make a more significant impact before its closure, and she ultimately resigned her post in 2011. Subsequently, the Film Policy Review Panel published an independent report in January 2012, which commenced with the words – demonstrating the success of British cinema in the first decade after the millennium –

British film is going through something of a golden period [...]. The astonishing success of *The King's Speech*, of course, heads the list; but add to that the final *Harry Potter*, *The Inbetweeners*, *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*, *Shame*, *Wuthering Heights*, *We Need to Talk About Kevin*, *Johnny English Reborn*, and quite a few others, and it's an impressive picture. ([Department for Culture, Media and Sport](#) 2012: 2)

Unsurprisingly, the bulk of these films were UKFC-funded, and dominated by male directors. In its place, the BFI has become the government's lead agency for film. Keen not to underplay the scarcity of women working within the industry, the BFI notes that,

the UK film industry has a tendency to over-representation of white males and under-representation of women and people from diverse groups [...]. There is also a deficit of female writers and directors. In 2010, only 12% of writers and 13% of directors of British films were female. This despite the fact that some of the most successful British films in recent years (e.g. *Harry Potter*, *Mamma Mia!*, *Nanny McPhee*, *StreetDance 3D*, *Kick-Ass*, *Bend it Like Beckham*, *Bridget Jones*) have been originated and/or written and/or directed by women. ([Department for Culture, Media and Sport](#) 2012: 69)

The vestiges of UKFC support lingered on for a short period. Phyllida Lloyd released *The Iron Lady* in 2011, the biopic of Margaret Thatcher, which was a UK/France co-production, and Sophie Fiennes's UK/Ireland documentary *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology* (2012) also received assistance, along with Emma Davie and Morag McKinnon's *I Am Breathing* (2012), a film about a sufferer's fight for survival against motor neurone disease. However, Creative England has now taken over the mantle, providing, what it terms, 'bespoke support' for filmmakers. Recently, they have entered into a four-year deal with the BFI to provide funding for film releases, which comprises work by a number of female directors including Lynne Ramsay's short entitled *Swimmer* (2011) and *One Mile Away* (2012), the Edinburgh International Film Festival award-winning film by Penny Woolcock,

which was supported through Creative England's West Midlands Production Fund and Channel 4.

Conclusion

In sum, despite a relatively productive era in avant-garde filmmaking in the 1970s, the twentieth century witnessed few female directors working within the British film industry. The first decade post-millennium, however, saw a considerable fluctuation with a major rise overall, chiming with the instigation of the UKFC. Certainly, the government quango was instrumental in funding British film directors and film production in general, and arguably its activities and strategies also accounted for a rise overall in women film directors. Undoubtedly, the UKFC supported British films irrespective of gender, while their Diversity strategies made specific recommendations, seeing an increase in women directors in its ten-year lifespan. Nick James, writing in 2010, observed this rise, noting a bold and exploratory edge. He compares female output favourably with some of the more prominent high-profile feature films released that year such as *Another Year* (directed by Mike Leigh), *Tamara Drewe* (Stephen Frears), *127 Hours* (Danny Boyle) and *Never Let Me Go* (Mark Romanek) and sees a future for many of the directors discussed in this article. As he points out,

whereas five years ago it was hard to find women directing films in the UK other than a few well known names, women film-makers are now everywhere you look. The best known have intriguing films in the pipeline – Lynne Ramsay with *We Need to Talk About Kevin*, and Andrea Arnold with her version of *Wuthering Heights*. Cannes this year showed Sophie Fiennes' *Over Your Cities Grass*

Will Grow, a superb portrait of the artist Anselm Kiefer at work, and Lucy Walker's exposé of the burgeoning nuclear threat, *Countdown to Zero*. Our film of the month, *Perestroika*, comes from experimental film-maker Sarah Turner. Among forthcoming films we're looking forward to covering are *The Arbor*, Clio Barnard's marvellous extemporised study of 1970's playwright Andrea Dunbar, and *Self-Made*, the first feature film by artist Gillian Wearing, which depicts amateur volunteers responding to a teacher of the method school of acting. We hear very good things, too, about Joanna Hogg's follow up to *Unrelated*, entitled *Archipelago* [...]. [These films] show, in their risky variety, that things have changed for the better – that British cinema is more adventurous culturally than at any time in the last decade or so. And even if it's not for British critics to decide if they're the 'best in the world', it is a moment worth a flag or two. (James 2010: 5)

If women remain outnumbered as directors, a recent report from the BFI suggests an encouraging state of affairs for women in the future while retaining an obligation to recognized time-honoured British directors. As the BFI's new director, Ben Roberts, suggests, '[t]here is a strong showing from emerging women filmmakers in the latest round of projects to receive lottery funding, but we are still committed to established talent such as Mike Leigh, Ken Loach and Lone Scherfig' (Roberts 2013: 14). Future BFI projects with secure commitments include Esther May Williams's *Light Years*, Debbie Tucker Green's *Second Coming* and Jane Lightfoot's *The Incident*. Clio Barnard was awarded £618,600 for *The Selfish Giant* (2013), a contemporary adaptation of Oscar Wilde's story which contains all the ingredients of a social realist film. Similarly, Joanna Hogg was awarded £430,194 towards her latest project entitled *Exhibition* (also known as *London Project*), which premiered at the Locarno Film Festival in August 2013. If, as Ben Roberts points out 'we are comfortably committed to supporting those filmmakers whose output remains steadfastly British,

who encourage first-class performances from their cast, and who continue to punch above their weight internationally' (2013: 14), then the film achievements of women directors to date operate as testament to this level of commitment and worth, and their presence within the industry might become more visible.

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Suggested pull quotes:

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Endnotes

¹ Dr Hazel Conley, Queen Mary, University of London; Dr Susan Durbin, University of the West of England; Professor Sian Moore, University of the West of England; and Dr Tessa Wright, Queen Mary, University of London. See Directors UK (2013).

² In the same year women comprised 34 per cent of the National Film and Television School graduates in Directing.

³ Although Box continued directing into the early 1960s she eventually turned to writing. Indeed, many producers questioned her competence and she experienced male prejudice.

⁴ Although Potter had worked prior to this with the London Filmmakers' Co-op making experimental films and multi-screen installations (see Mayer 2009).

⁵ Figures obtained from *Sight and Sound* 1992–99.

⁶ Cinenova is now run on a volunteer basis only (see Fowler 2002).

⁷ *Fish Tank* took over £100,000 in its opening weekend in the United Kingdom. Its world total was nearly £1.3 million. Film distributor Artificial Eye received a Print and Advertising award of £70,000 to double the film's release from 20 to 40 screens. Marketing was aimed at a younger audience with an online campaign using website and online virals, aided by exclusive films of Katie Jarvis and social networking (see <http://industry.bfi.org.uk/15889>). However, as David Gritten comments, Arnold is successful in Europe and the United States but not in the United Kingdom: 'as soon as she returns to her native Britain she falls victim to a distribution system that leaves her films largely unseen. *Fish Tank* [...] will not trouble the upper reaches of Britain's box-office charts. It is opening on just 45–50 screens [and] is likely to run only briefly at most of these venues' (2009).

⁸ The UKFC Group and Lottery Annual Report for year ending 2011 states that up to £1,085 million may potentially be transferred from the National Lottery Distribution Fund to the Olympic Lottery Distribution Fund to meet the costs of the Olympic Games. In the period to 2012 the UKFC was committed to contribute up to £21.8 million. In the event, a total of £5,866 was transferred.

⁹ In comparison, in 2008 for example, five male-directed films received UKFC funding and six in 2009.

¹⁰ While there is mention that Polly Stenham's play, *That Face* (2007) is to be adapted to the screen this has not yet happened. However, *Variety* reports that Clio Barnard is due to direct a screen adaptation of Stenham's second play, *Tusk Tusk* (2009). (Simon 2013).

¹¹ A report published in 2003 entitled *Success Through Diversity and Inclusion* presented an overview of 'Women in Film', but not specifically female directors. However, it did report that out of 350 films made during 2002 only eight were directed by women (Bevan 2003).

¹² This is not to suggest that male-directed films were not in receipt of UKFC funding. The following were all recipients: Steven Shiel's *Mum and Dad* (2008), a horror/torture porn film; Duane Hopkins's social realist film *Better Things* (2007); Michael Winterbottom's ghost story, *Genova* (2008); *Hush* (Mark Tonderai, 2008); Richard Jobson's *New Town Killers* (2009); *Three Miles North of Molkom* (Robert Cannan, 2009); Jon Amiel's Darwin biopic *Creation* (2009); and Stephen Poliakoff's dark drama *Glorious 39* (2009), amongst others.

¹³ One reviewer, Jonathan Romney described it thus: 'what we see in *Archipelago* is an auteur consistency that's familiar in French directors, but rare among Brits, Mike Leigh being an obvious exception. Even so, Hogg brings a new fine-tuning to *Archipelago*, not least in the visual control: in Ed Rutherford's photography of moody, static, claustrophobic interiors and in the windblown, weirdly tropical Tresco landscapes. In its almost militantly undemonstrative way, *Archipelago* is a major achievement – a very adult film about people who can't quite grow up' (Romney 2011).

¹⁴ Although it is unclear whether Hogg applied for funding, Catherine Shoard notes that 'not that the UK Film Council was especially forthcoming when it came to *Archipelago*, whose £500,000 budget was partly stumped up by an aesthetically sympathetic Japanese businessman' (Shoard 2011).

¹⁵ See <http://justdoitfilm.com/fund>. Accessed 3 April 2014.

¹⁶ For further reading see Kate Bulkley (2010). In an attempt to gain funding through this method a workshop was held in December 2013 covering the principles of best practice. The key figures involved were all female including Danae Ringelmann, co-founder of Indiegogo, an organization keen to democratize fundraising; Susan MacLaury, an executive director of the non-profit film production company, Shine Global; Jeanie Finlay, a British artist and documentary filmmaker; Lizzie Gillett, the producer of *The Age of Stupid*; and Mia Bays, film producer of both documentary and fiction.

¹⁷ However, although Fiennes failed to gain UKFC backing in the production process, she eventually received £8,000 for the film's promotion.

¹⁸ In 2008–09 for example, eleven male directors received UKFC support compared to nine female directors during the same period.