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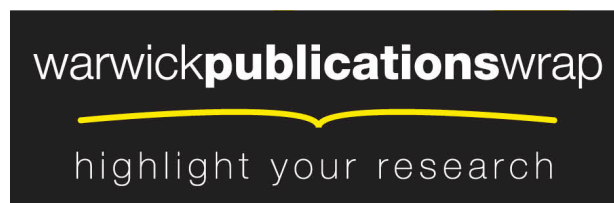
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‘It’s a Film’: Medium Specificity as Textual Gesture in *Red Road* and *The Unloved*

Charlotte Brunson

British cinema has long been intertwined with television. The buzzwords of the transition to digital media, ‘convergence’ and ‘multi-platform delivery’, have particular histories in the British context which can be grasped only through an understanding of the cultural, historical and institutional peculiarities of the British film and television industries. Central to this understanding must be two comparisons: first, the relative stability of television in the duopoly period (at its core, the licence-funded BBC) in contrast to the repeated boom and bust of the many different financial/industrial combinations which have comprised the film industry; and second, the cultural and historical connotations of ‘film’ and ‘television’. All readers of this journal will be familiar – possibly over-familiar – with the notion that ‘British cinema is alive and well and living on television’. At the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, when ‘the end of medium specificity’ is much trumpeted, it might be useful to return to the historical imbrication of British film and television, to explore both the possibility that medium specificity may be more nationally specific than much contemporary theorisation suggests,¹ and to consider some of the relationships between film and television manifest at a textual level in two recent films, *Red Road* (2006) and *The Unloved* (2009).

The transitions in the broadcast environment, which demand the recognition, as Bennett and Strange (2011) argue, of ‘television as digital media’, are simultaneous with parallel shifts from celluloid to digital in film production which have occasioned a substantial debate about ‘the end of cinema’ and a flourishing of moving image

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exhibition in non-theatrical spaces such as art galleries.² As the end of a media culture dominated by the traditions of British public service broadcasting accelerates, it is more possible to identify what has been specific to this culture.³ What may now be needed is a more integrated history of the twentieth-century audio-visual landscape than the disciplinary and institutional divides between the study of film and the study of television always register. In 1986, at the beginning of an article in which he analyses cinema and broadcasting together, John Caughie observed that 'histories of British cinema and of British broadcasting serve to establish their separate chronicles and developments. What they often miss are the terms by which these separate developments and the ideological impulses behind them can be seen to belong to the same culture' (1986: 189). Caughie traced the role of 'independence' and 'public service' in the shaping of British cinema and British broadcasting. Twenty-five years later, each of these formations is more attenuated, while the shift to digital has substantially complicated what might be considered both constitutive of and distinct about broadcasting and cinema. Here, I will outline the ways in which the relationship between cinema and television in the British context is discussed, before analysing in more detail how some twenty-first-century texts negotiate this relationship. This will necessarily include a rather compressed argument, and I should state at the outset that I consider one of the problems with much discussion of convergence and the move to digital to be the implication that medium specificity used to be clear and now is not. On the contrary, I see the question of medium specificity, and the search for an artistic practice which is specific to the particular medium (however defined), as the dominant project of twentieth-century art. This is what modernist art is concerned with, and these concerns shape twentieth-century film and television, even in Britain.⁴ Thus when, in the second part, I discuss the ways in which some twenty-first-century digital work defines itself as film rather than television, it should not be inferred that this distinction was simple in the twentieth century. The rhetorics of what is and isn't considered properly 'cinematic' and 'televisual' in twentieth-century Britain requires its own patient history.⁵ But firstly, how is the scholarship on the audio-visual landscape patterned?

The first observation must be that to a certain extent, the study of British cinema and that of television have been constructed against each other. The study of British cinema has taken place between the Atlantic and the Channel, often yearning for Hollywood, but also attentive to the national-ness of 'European' cinema as a model for validating specifically British forms and genres. These

cinematic interlocutors have taken precedence over television, despite the recognition, in nearly all accounts of British cinema, of the importance of British television in terms of both economic support and training.⁶ The Britishness of British cinema (or its Englishness, or Scottishness), and its relation to British history have been shaping concerns, morphing into questions of how, and in what terms, the products of such a chronically unstable industry, often dependent on multinational funding, can be considered British at all. This is matched by the way in which the study of television has deliberately ignored consideration of film in its endeavour to establish a medium-specific discipline, and indeed, in its commitment to the popular, has been equivocal about 'serious drama' as part of the remit of television studies.⁷ In turn, criticism of 'authored' television drama has had a tendency to ignore the broader televisual environment.⁸

Running through these divisions are the cultural resonances of film and television as media. My interest here is not so much in the distinction between the 'movie movie' and the 'TV movie' elegantly deconstructed by Martin McLoone (1996), but in the mode of attention which each medium is seen to merit. Despite the persistence of the 'glance/gaze' distinction, empirical research on how people watch television demonstrates that viewers can choose, in relation to a favourite programme, to watch with fierce attention, often arranging to avoid domestic distractions.⁹ Conversely, it is clear that going to the cinema was often an activity in which film spectatorship was substantially subordinate to social and, frequently, sexual interest in other audience members.¹⁰ However, the dominant characterisation of television in both everyday and scholarly literature is as a medium of distraction while cinema is one of concentration. To cinema is granted the possibility of aesthetic seriousness, while television – in blatant disregard of the history of much British television (and film) – is thought of as trivial.

This journal provides an interesting case history here, with its progenitors, firstly the newsletter of the *Society for the Study of Popular British Cinema* and then the Flicks Books-published *Journal of Popular British Cinema*, both excluding television, which appears in the title only with the move to Edinburgh University Press in 2004 when the 'popular' disappears. The original project is cinéphilic rather than addressed to a popular culture which would include television. The assertion of the popular in the early titles is, at least in part, a precisely targeted assertion of the vibrant, unrespectable cinema championed by, for example, Steve Chibnall and Julian Petley, and is set against both British 'quality' and 'art' cinemas and, to abbreviate,

'BBC culture'.¹¹ 'B' movies were more interesting than bad (or even good) television.¹² The 'integrated' journal has created a significant space in which to address the British audio-visual landscape, but most individual articles focus exclusively (and for very good reasons – I'm not arguing for a facile inter-disciplinarity, or that these histories are not separate, as well as intertwined) on either cinema or television.

Coexisting with these disciplinary separations, there are certain topics on which film and television are addressed together. These are principally, the careers of individuals, Channel 4's involvement in film production, adaptation, and particular themes of representation. Studies of Alan Clarke, Stephen Frears, Tony Garnett, Verity Lambert, Mike Leigh and Ken Loach of necessity address both media, although often, as with Danny Boyle, the television work, if it is addressed at all, is conceived of as an apprenticeship.¹³ The opening of Channel 4 in 1982, with a publisher rather than a producer model of broadcasting, a commitment to film investment and a public service remit which privileged catering to minority tastes, contributed to a flurry of discussion about 'convergence' between film and television during the 1980s. Christine Geraghty (2005) has usefully outlined the contours of this debate in relation to *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1986), a television-funded film which had a successful theatrical release and which in many ways epitomises the success of 1980s Film on Four. Particular topics of representation, such as Black Britain (Malik 2002), Scotland (Petrie 2004), Northern Ireland (McIlroy 1998; Pettitt 2000) and 'the North' (Russell 2004) have also crossed media, as does study of the adaptation of the work of, say, Jane Austen and Charles Dickens.¹⁴

In this context, there have been some interesting recent inclusions of television drama in work that defines itself as being about cinema. Thus the second edition of Friedman's *Fires Were Started* adds a chapter on *Boys from the Blackstuff* and *Threads* (O'Sullivan 2006), and Rosalind Galt's *The New European Cinema* (2006) concludes with *Our Friends in the North* (BBC, 1996). This 'slipping in' of television testifies to recognition of its importance to the British audio-visual landscape but, paradoxically, denies its specificity by annexing it to film.¹⁵ The key argument against this view is found in John Caughie's *British Television Drama* (2000), where he argues for the significance of British television drama – rather than film – in understanding the engagement of British culture with modernism. This identification of the cultural centrality of mid-century British television is gaining depth in some of the recent work on the 1970s. Most notably, Dave Rolinson's analysis of 1970s television films allows a recasting of the debates about the decline

of the television play (and, during the 1960s and 1970s, the debate among TV practitioners about using film),¹⁶ while John Hill's 2011 book on Ken Loach situates the television work, and television as an institution, as both generative and determining. The 1970s might, indeed, prove particularly interesting here.

For example, a film such as *The Long Good Friday* (1980), made at the end of the 1970s, was principally funded through television money (Lew Grade's ITC films, through its subsidiary Black Lion Films), with a producer, Barry Hanson, who worked mainly for Thames Television (the Independent Television London weekday franchise in this period). Its director, John Mackenzie, who first worked for the BBC in the 1960s, directed the avant-garde *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black Black Oil* (1974) which was written by John McGrath, as well as other notable 1970s television plays, but the television and film work is rarely referenced together. The look of the film, its grubby realist, late 1970s London, has close affinities with popular television series of the 1970s such as *The Sweeney* (ITV, 1975–8) and *Out* (ITV, 1978), which in turn were made for independent television by Euston Films, a wholly owned subsidiary of Thames.¹⁷ This world, dominated by white working-class machismo and entrenched family loyalties, with cockney characters sharing a culture on both sides of the law, could also be found in 'high-end' BBC British television drama, such as G. F. Newman's *Law and Order* (1978), four films directed by Les Blair, in which, as with *The Long Good Friday*, the Irish war is shown to resonate on the mainland¹⁸ and unlike in *The Sweeney*, the police can't be trusted to get the right man. In *The Long Good Friday*, though, the use of film and understated direction enter into a direct dialogue with the strategies of *The Sweeney*. These are all works emerging from the same mid-1970s London culture which can usefully be understood in relation to both film and television.

However, this more integrative critical and historiographical project is impeded by the connotational registers of film and television and the way in which film exudes a glamour never attained by the more domestic medium. Despite the distinguished record of, for example, BBC Pebble Mill or Granada in making high-quality British television drama,¹⁹ still it is television that is the less prestigious partner in the film/television duo. But it is not just critical historiography that is affected by the meaning of the two media. For makers, too, the kudos has been with cinema, and these issues of cultural prestige—which many scholars have mapped over a derogatory 'feminising' of television—persist in a digital twenty-first century. The actual changes in British television in a multi-channel environment (the greater

dependence on cheaper formats such as reality and game shows, the decline in the mixed schedule, the increased divide between prestige and banal television) in combination with increased digital production and single-screen delivery (to computer screens of one kind or another) means that it is now even more important for work which may well be funded by television to distinguish itself from – and it saddens me to say this – what ‘television’ now means.²⁰ It is with this ‘gesture’ of distinction that the rest of the essay will be concerned in relation to two films which inhabit their relation to television differently.

Desperate girls

Writing in the late 1990s, in an attempt to think across film and television, I discussed the ‘desperate girls’ who were the heroines of *Stella Does Tricks* (1996) and *Under the Skin* (1996), films by first-time female directors in the 1990s, Coky Giedroyc and Carine Adler respectively (Brunsdon 2000). These heroines, I suggested, were haunting shadows of the successfully achieving superwoman with which feminism was then associated in the popular media – young women who not only did not ‘have it all’ but actually had almost nothing, except their own considerable spirit and ingenuity, young women forced into commercial sex (Stella (Kelly MacDonald)) or expressing, through indiscriminate and damaging promiscuity, grief, anger and self-hatred (Iris (Samantha Morton)). If the 1950s in British culture had given us ‘Angry Young Men’, the 1990s, at the tail end of what had started in 1979 as the Thatcher government, had brought forth desperate girls. Since then, strikingly, their ranks have been increased, to considerable critical acclaim, by the eponymous heroine of Lynne Ramsay’s second feature, *Morvern Callar* (2002), Jackie and Mia in Andrea Arnold’s two features, *Red Road* and *Fish Tank* (2009), and Clio Barnard’s Artangel-produced dramatisation of the life of Andrea Dunbar, *The Arbor* (2010). What is notable is that so many talented female directors working in the cinema are leading their work with ‘fucked-up’ heroines.

Considering the 1990s, I wanted to draw attention to the coexistence of these desperate girls within British subsidised cinema and their less unhappy sisters on mainstream British television. For the 1990s saw an expansion in the production of female ensemble dramas such as *Playing the Field* (BBC, 1998) and *Real Women* (BBC, 1998), written by Kay Mellor and Susan Oudot respectively, in which ensemble female casts dramatised the different ways of ‘being a woman’ that seemed

to have become available. Serial television drama, as opposed to the single 90-minute feature, offered more space for equivocation about a woman's lot, and more chances for more characters to make more choices. Since then, of course, *Sex and the City*, which first aired in the US on the subscription channel HBO in June 1998, has made these characteristics of the female ensemble drama rather more widely recognised, and there is an extensive feminist and fan scholarship.²¹

By juxtaposing the desperate girls with the female ensemble dramas I was suggesting that there was some benefit to be gained by considering fictional femininities across film and television. This juxtaposition is informative about the way in which narrative modes currently conventional to film and television (the single feature and the episodic series) enable the telling of particular kinds of story. Each type of story (the enacting of the desperation of the desperate girl, the varied and representatively diverse feminine choices of the female group) bears witness to the paralysis which continues to attend the project of female subjects starring as agents in their own stories. At the same time, through these stories we may trace the reverberations of feminism in popular culture, the multiplication of prime-time fiction focused on women and the increased recognition of the attractions of the female audience. The transitions within, in particular, the institutions and structures of the television industry are also significant, with the shift to 'independent' production and its consequence for female career patterns. The consideration of film and television together gives us a richer understanding of particular work in each medium in a shared cultural context.

This argument could be continued into the decade which is the topic of this special issue, with the BBC's *Mistresses* (2008–) (in which four female friends fall in and out of love, jobs and marriages) as the most obvious post-*Sex and the City* ensemble drama for comparison with some of the films already mentioned. However, one of the characteristics of the changing broadcast environment is that national television is much less easy to specify, which in turn has methodological implications, restricting any simple recourse to 'national' readings.²² Instead, what I want to do here is slightly different, in that I want to concentrate on two 'desperate girl' films, *The Unloved* and *Red Road*, and consider their relationship with television. Each was made with the participation of television, Channel 4 in the case of *The Unloved* and BBC Films in the case of *Red Road*. But it is not the financial contribution of the broadcasters that interests me but the manner in which each digitally shot film textually differentiates itself from the connotations of this source of funding. Hence my title: 'It's a Film'.

The Unloved: 'something a bit different'

The Unloved exemplifies the intimacy of British film with television and recalls the social ambition of British television drama, despite clearly being conceived by its producers as a film. Premiered on Channel 4 on 17 May 2009 and billed by the *Radio Times* as 'drama of the week', it received a theatrical release the following year. It is directed by Samantha Morton who had previously featured in the 1995 female ensemble drama *Band of Gold*²³ and starred in both *Under the Skin* and *Morvern Callar*. Morton's career, with performances in these and other films distinguished by a luminous vulnerability, has been accompanied by a continuous strand of publicity about the difficulty of her own childhood and she has made public statements about the inadequacies of the 'care' system for young people. *The Unloved*, which traces the plight of an 'at risk' eleven-year-old, Lucy Manvers (Molly Windsor), was developed by Morton, written by Tony Grisoni from Morton's material and produced by Kate Ogborn (producer of *Under the Skin* and *Stella Does Tricks*). Publicity for *The Unloved* declared that Morton chose television for a first screening because of the wider, domestic audience it would attract. In language that recalls justification for the mixed schedules of public service broadcasting in the last century, Morton speaks of wanting 'kids who normally watch *EastEnders* to find it on television and see something that feels a bit different'.²⁴

For the television premiere, *The Unloved* formed the dramatic centrepiece of Channel 4's 'Britain's Forgotten Children' season.²⁵ Some of the ad-breaks within season slots included very short films about child neglect and abuse, which directed viewers to the Channel's website. *The Unloved* itself has a concluding title which refers to the number of children in Britain in care:

71,476 children are in care in the UK

36,405 children are on the 'at risk' register in the UK

The film was then given a very limited theatrical release by the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) in February 2010, which then marketed it as an ICA DVD.

This exhibition history alone exemplifies the continuing complexity of the film/television distinction in the British context. On television, *The Unloved* came in at over two hours, with about twelve minutes of advertising per hour. As a theatrical feature, however, it runs at 103 minutes. Critical response to the film was spread over two years, responding to both the television and the film releases, and involves a wider range of commentators than would have been the case had

there been only a television or film premiere. The film reviews in 2010, where *The Unloved* was juxtaposed not with the generic variety of television but with other, often higher-budget productions (most notably the Jeff Bridges vehicle *Crazy Heart*), tended towards the briefly sympathetic.²⁶ On the other hand, the earlier responses of television critics, while generally favourable, were marked by self-consciousness about the 'worthiness' of the film's topic, expressed most elegantly by Tom Sutcliffe in the *Independent* on 18 May 2009:

Weighing in to a drama like this would be tantamount to saying that you don't give a damn about abandoned children or that you'd prefer it if Channel 4 had run a repeat of *A Place in the Sun*. It's one of those dramas that allow commissioning editors to hold their heads up when people start muttering about the public service remit . . . All of which is not the preamble to dissent, but a way of saying that although *The Unloved* was pretty much guaranteed a good review anyway, it really really deserved it on this occasion.²⁷

The 'really really' in the last sentence captures the tension between the socially worthy and the aesthetically achieved which so often marks discussion of British cinema. This review installs British public service television at its core, suggesting that the perception of public money spent on television predisposes critical judgement in favour of the 'serious and sombre subject' handled non-exploitatively. The *Daily Telegraph* review by Michael Deacon on the same day, rather less kindly projects self-consciousness onto the drama, nominating its aesthetic as characteristic of 'BAFTA [British Academy of Film and Television Awards] Land':

It was, from start to finish, powerful. Admiring it, though, required an ability to stomach not just the cruelty and ugliness, but also the setting: a place called BAFTA land. In BAFTA land, a lot of time is spent staring wordlessly out of windows and into the middle distance in grim towns. Mundane events, such as the riding of an escalator, or a walk through a shopping centre, are shown taking place in real time, even if they do nothing to advance the plot or give insight into character. There are frequent scenes in which a character, standing alone, gazes at a bleakly beautiful urban sight: dead leaves skittering across a pavement or a dew-heavy cobweb clinging to a wire mesh fence.

What I want to argue about *The Unloved* is that it makes a series of textual gestures which declare its aesthetic seriousness as cinema, even though it was part-funded by, and premiered on, British television.²⁸ It is on these textual gestures—characteristics of 'BAFTA land', if you will—which claim a certain mode of attention that designations of

'film' and 'television' will increasingly be based in the digital twenty-first century. Deacon identifies 'time spent staring wordlessly', the use of real time at narratively insignificant moments and 'bleak' urban beauty as significant strategies within the film to announce its award-readiness. His criteria implicitly demand sound-led, plot-driven *mise-en-scène*. He neglects the way in which the film's strategies give Lucy's drama a sense of place, of a real world, Nottingham, with its mixture of former factories, nineteenth-century civic buildings, shopping centres, terraced streets and green open spaces through which she must journey in search of care. Lucy's plight in the film is to be homeless. She starts off living with her father (Robert Carlyle), she is taken to a care home, she has previously had a foster home and she knows where her mother (Susan Lynch) lives. But in none of these places is she nurtured or safe. She is 'in care' but without care. While this impression is produced partly through what befalls Lucy in each of these places, it is also conveyed through her passages between them—with long, static shots as the small figure sets off away through early morning streets, caught against skylines, traipsing over rough ground. These long-held land- and city-scape shots emphasise how vulnerable, but also how intrepid, Lucy is. Their pace works within the film to demonstrate Lucy's labour, her effort to find succour, but also to demonstrate her situatedness. This child, in care and not in care, in a recognisable British city now—but also on television, where the look of the film indicates that it is 'something a bit different'.

While there are many reasons to suppose that title, pre-title and opening sequences of films are likely to have been made with particular care, these sequences have additional medium-specific demands put on them in the context of broadcast television flow. The broadcast environment of television is both busy with interstitial material such as ads and previews, and organised through repetitions which are often sound-led, such as announcers calling viewers to a favourite programme or theme tunes doing likewise. *The Unloved* was broadcast at 9.00 on a Sunday evening, traditionally the slot for less demanding drama than this on both the BBC and ITV, although it is often used as a film slot on Channel 4. It was preceded by a channel ident and, over the logo, the announcement that 'Now on Four the Britain's Forgotten Children strand continues. Samantha Morton directs Robert Carlyle in a film drama, *The Unloved*. With strong language, substance abuse and scenes which some viewers might find upsetting, we get a child's view of life in a children's home.' However, what comes next is nothing to do with a child's view of life in a children's home, but is instead an advertisement for Compare the Market.com, 'sponsors of drama



*Fig. 1. Lucy in the first shot of *The Unloved*.*

on Channel 4'. The film then immediately separates itself from this environment with a plain red title on black accompanied by birdsong. The film title fades to black and a child's voice intones: 'The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear?', a prayer followed by the introduction of the ethereal, jangly music which will form Lucy's theme throughout the film and which continues over the first shot of the film, a high shot looking down on a young girl in school uniform (Lucy) lying at the foot of the staircase in a domestic hallway (Figure 1). This shot is held for fourteen seconds, and is followed by a closer, floor-level, eight-second shot of the back of the girl's head, cutting back to the first camera position which is then held for thirteen seconds while the passing of the day is signalled through changing light on the motionless figure.

This opening sequence is noticeably composed and formal. There is a narrative enigma available in the juxtaposition of the apparently fallen girl and her rhetorical question: 'Whom shall I fear?', but this is less important than the length of the shots and the refusal of any movement. This scene is organised through the opposite of classical cinema's cutting on action; it cuts on stasis. And so the viewer is held back from the scene and from involvement, tutored in an appropriate distance from what might follow. But the viewer is also tutored into paying attention in a way which is quite distinct from the huckster injunction to 'Compare the Market.com', a direct address which, paradoxically, necessitates disengagement from the screen. Here, the precise, modest, differentiated sound and the motionless images invite

scrutiny. Through these textual strategies this drama declares that it is 'not television', even while it is on television, a point later made narratively with an excerpt from Vigo's *L'Atalante* (1934) shown on television in the children's home. This emphasis on the still image also suggests affinities with other strongly 'photographic' British films such as Gideon Koppel's *sleep furiously* (2007), Duane Hopkins' *Better Things* (2008), Anton Corbijn's *Control* (2007) and Steve McQueen's *Hunger* (2008), hinting at the increased importance of the unmoving camera to 'not being television' and to identifying art cinema.

Red Road

Red Road was Andrea Arnold's first feature film, although she had already won an Oscar for her short film *Wasp* (2003). It was the first of a proposed three-film suite to be made in Scotland under the Advance Party initiative, as a Sigma (Glasgow) and Zentropa Entertainments (Denmark) production, with additional funding from the UK Film Council, Scottish Screen, the Glasgow Film Office and BBC Films in association with Zoma Films and Verve Pictures. While this complex funding web has been typical of non-mainstream film-funding for some years, the innovative aspect of the Advance Party scheme is its attempt to develop a degree of continuity of character – and creative culture – across three films. The production notes describe this as follows: 'The idea behind Advance Party is that the same group of characters would be given to three different directors who would each have to develop a film around those characters. All the films would shoot for the same length of time in the same city, Glasgow.'²⁹

Red Road, which premiered in 2006, was the first film in the trilogy to have been completed, with the film-makers Morag McKinnon and Mikkel Noergaard engaged for the other two and participating in the set-up discussions. At the time of writing, McKinnon's *Donkeys* has been screened in Scotland.³⁰ The Advance Party, to which Lars von Trier has given significant support, has its clearest connection with Dogme and its 'Vow of Chastity' through 'The Rules' drawn up by Lone Sherfig and Anders Thomas Jensen which stipulate the constraints within which all the film-makers must work and which include the demand that all of the characters, cast with the same actors, must appear in each of the three films, although they 'may be weighted differently as major or minor characters'.³¹

Mette Hjort (2010) has written in detail about the Advance Guard initiative as an example of what she calls 'affinitive and milieu-building transnationalism', exploring the relation between the Scottish and



Fig. 2. Jackie in front of the screens in *Red Road*.

Danish participants within this innovatory context which mobilises 'creativity with constraints' in order to develop and sustain the cinema of small nations. This production context suggests that it is easier to identify this 'culturally British' film as international art cinema than as straightforwardly Scottish or Danish, and also reveals an extreme self-reflexivity about the film-making process. This self-consciousness is manifest textually within the opening minutes of the film. Abstract, blurry images in the pre-title sequence become identifiable as screens, and their location is shown, after the title, to be a vast bank of monitors. The editing then cuts between the bank of monitors, with a woman (Jackie (Kate Dickey)) sitting at a control console, close-up images from individual monitors and extreme close-ups of Jackie's face as her eyes scrutinise and select images. She sits in front of the wall of screens, scanning the monitors and selecting individual images for close attention on a desk-top monitor. (Figure 2). The images which she selects, though, do not seem to be images of criminal acts in the night-time city but, instead, images of individuals—an office cleaner going to work, a man taking a dog for a walk—with which she seems to be familiar, smiling fondly and with amusement as she keys in the monitor number and uses the joystick to zoom into the image.

The film is, from its inception, explicitly self-reflexive, indicating that its story will be constructed through, and in relation to, a heroine who negotiates images for a living, sifting through myriad scenes for potential or actual significance and making narratives through the relations between screens. In the first few minutes, the viewer must

contemplate the almost indecipherable opening montage of degraded CCTV images, and then learn to negotiate the relationships between these multiple images of the Glasgow citizenry which collate their city and Jackie's gaze, mobilised through the joystick as she zooms in and out of scenes which catch her attention. Several different orders of image/reality relations are proposed: the real of the city, captured through the ubiquitous CCTV cameras, appearing mainly through grainy, barred images; Jackie's workspace, the conventional diegetic world of narrative cinema, constructed as a dark, studio-like space dominated by the huge bank of monitors, in which Jackie and her fellow-operatives sit in the dim light, scrutinising their city and its inhabitants; and, articulating the two, Jackie's attentive gaze, created through cutting between extreme close-ups of her face, her hand on the control and close-ups from zoomed-in selected images. Film direction is itself staged in the opening set-up of Jackie's world in *Red Road*: the silent world 'out there' and the animation of this out-there world through Jackie's interest in particular figures who recur in the vision-fields of different cameras. The narrative of the film explores the bringing together of these initially separate domains, finally demonstrating Jackie's redemption through her ability to participate in the out-there world. She achieves this integration through making a story happen to characters she finds in the city screens, which in turn reveals her story to the viewer and enables her to work through its trauma.

Jackie's job, as CCTV security officer, provides a contemporary form for what many reviewers recognised as a familiar, self-reflexive cinematic tale of surveillance, ranging from Fritz Lang's *Dr Mabuse* to James Stewart in *Rear Window* (1954) to Michael Haneke's more recent *Caché/Hidden* (2005).³² CCTV technology, and most particularly the repeated banks of screens which characterise Jackie's workplace, *City-Eye*, are used here to draw attention to Glasgow as a 'seen' city, the cameras ceaselessly and impartially recording banal everyday life. In terms of narrative and character, Jackie's tender expression in relation to what the viewer soon learns are repeated characters in the sites which she regularly observes shows that she watches these myriad worlds with emotional engagement (the ailing, much-loved dog) and an eye for the quirky (the office cleaner dancing as she works). Jackie is shown to have humanity and humour in her dealings with the silent monitors. But the massed screens, the cupboards storing videotapes and the later plot developments which utilise the street cameras also work to shift the recognisable story of the cinematic surveillant-voyeur into a more dispersed diagnosis of a city under surveillance: a culture

awash with images in which no action passes unrecorded. The film is set simultaneously in a real, location-shot Glasgow and a more abstracted city of screens and cameras. The setting of this story is a place of many images and it is thus imperative that the viewer is assisted in understanding the type of attention necessary. This, I propose, is enacted in the third scene of the film, when Jackie arrives home.

As she had left work, a friendly colleague had enquired whether she was going out as it was Friday night, and she replies with what is shown to be deadpan irony: 'You know me, Angus, party-animal'. As she walks home alone, silhouetted against revelry in the streets. Jackie is filmed letting herself into her flat, the frame as cramped as the corridor, while she juggles keys and the post she has picked up as she tries to turn on the light. There is a cut to a television screen, showing some kind of light entertainment, and Jackie opens her post as she waits for the microwave, the over-excited soundtrack of the game-show filling the flat as the camera moves into close-up of an envelope containing a wedding invitation. The extreme close-up moves down the white card of the invitation to pause on a handwritten exhortation at the bottom: 'Please, please come it's been too long', and then there is a cut to another extreme close-up of Jackie's face as she concentrates on the card. The camera then cuts back to the television, creating a contrast between Jackie's serious face, pale with only minimal make-up, and the television image of a high-production blonde woman, all gleaming teeth and shiny bouncy hair, being encouraged in an evidently amateurish basketball shot, the soundtrack rising to a crescendo. Jackie's hand moves into the image and abruptly turns the television off, and the camera lingers for a moment on the emphatically blank television screen in the sudden silence. The next shot returns to Jackie at the screen-bank of her work.

In many ways, this is a fairly straightforward 'single woman comes home to her flat' scene, an arrival marked, with earlier technologies, in films such as *Klute* (1971), by the protagonist entering her home and immediately turning on a telephone answering machine to listen to her messages, then opening the fridge to reveal appropriately low food stocks. The dependence on domestic technologies, rather than human beings, functions to underline the solitariness of the heroine. Here, the cut directly from her entry to the television screen suggests that one of Jackie's first actions on arriving home, before opening her post, is to turn on the television to produce some kind of broadcast conviviality. She may not be a party animal but, the scene suggests, she habitually

seeks the illusion of electronic sociability. When she turns the television off, apparently better to concentrate on her post, her action intimates the seriousness, and the challenge, of this wedding invitation which she has received. So far, almost nothing has been disclosed about this character, except that she works in front of a bank of CCTV screens, she wears a wedding ring and she is not a party animal. The handwritten note on the invitation shows that she has had intimate connections that now seem in abeyance. The sudden silence, after the television is turned off, grants the invitation a problematic status at odds with the conventional associations of weddings.

So the brief appearance of live television in this scene, with its accompanying rather inane soundtrack, can be fully accounted for in relation to character and narrative development. The use of the television tells us that Jackie is used to living alone and that this wedding invitation is a big deal. However, I suggest that this brief blare of television also functions in another way. This third meaning is not derived from the world of the film, but instead concerns the ontological status of this unfolding fiction. It is about the film-ness of the film, and the use of television in this scene is a gesture which claims that the drama which we will be watching – on whatever type of screening device – is to be understood as a film, not as television. This scene is an example of what I am nominating medium specificity as a textual gesture rather than as any property of the audio-visual artefact itself.

My hypothesis is that as consumption of audio-visual fiction becomes increasingly ‘platform indifferent’, or, at least, ‘platform unpredictable’ – that is, film-makers and the makers of television drama can’t predict the devices on which their fictions will be watched – then it is becoming correspondingly important for the work itself to prescribe textually the kind of attention which it requires. While part of this labour is typically performed by publicity, billing and scheduling, or through affiliation with movements such as ‘slow cinema’, this is also sometimes carried out, as here, through the rhetorical invocation of twentieth-century meanings of ‘film’ and ‘television’ within the text.

Within the world of *Red Road*, it is possible to speculate that Jackie turns off the television because its banal hysteria interferes with the impact of the wedding invitation. The invitation, so evidently a challenge to Jackie, is also a promise for the audience that, through the wedding, more will be disclosed about this quiet character who now lives by herself but evidently did once have close relationships. There is also a clearly signalled promise of realism in the contrast between

the blonde television woman and Jackie's face framed with dark, nondescript dark hair: the contrast of the two modes of femininity. The sudden silence and the blank television screen when the game show is cut off provide a little quiet space in which the audience, as well as Jackie, can contemplate what might happen next. Evidently, what might happen next, the scene shows, will not involve the shouty, hyped-up, faked climax of the television game show, and will not be something that can be watched while you are also heating up a microwave meal for one and simultaneously opening your post. In this invocation of the bad, affect-less falsity of the television world, a world which one cannot watch, while simultaneously turning to it for company, the film demonstrates the kind of attention which it solicits. And this—serious, quiet, concentrated—is, for the reasons which I have outlined, most economically designated as 'not like watching television'. This is an instance of medium specificity as a textual gesture, when it is not the material support, or a set of conventions or protocols, or the institutional context which defines medium specificity, but the mode of attention invoked.

Conclusion

I began this article by considering the contours of scholarship on the British audio-visual landscape, and I want to conclude by returning to these matters. Lucy and Jackie are the protagonists of films which I have used to propose certain ideas about the conceptualisation of film and television in a digital age. The terrain which I have traversed in this piece has both international and national dimensions. Discussion of medium specificity, laments for the end of cinema and theorisation of post-cinema, post-television and the aesthetics of new media are international. In this international context, where discussion can take place at quite a high level of abstraction, I have argued for the importance of the national, the historical and the specific (particularly in its industrial, institutional and textual forms) in the conceptualisation of what we might mean by film and television. It is a particularly British heritage which brings the poetic social realism/social problem of *The Unloved* to Channel 4 at 9.00 on a Sunday night, funded by television but looking like art cinema. It is a strategy in 'the cinema of small nations' which engenders *Red Road*—which feels so much like a British film but was funded in Denmark and Scotland. In each case, I have argued that it is through textual gesture that the film declares its 'film-ness', and that this cleaving, within the text, to the

category of film is a significant move in our understanding of medium specificity in a digital twenty-first century.

By publishing the article in the *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, I make a further argument. Through the history which I have sketched here, I believe that this journal is particularly well suited to developing a history and criticism of British cinema and television which traverses media, institutions, practitioners, critics, audiences and industries, in the ebb and flow of particularity and broader argument. This will entail scholarship which is sometimes about cinema, sometimes about television, and sometimes about movements between and across culture, media, forms and genres. This critical history will be made partly through a collage of different, separate projects over a longer period. But this particular, historical, nationally specific scholarship must not remain island-bound, and must engage with the broader theorisations of moving image media in an international context. Only in this conversation can a scholarship which is adequate to the changing conditions and manifestations of cinema and television be made.

As for Lucy and Jackie themselves, their stories are rather different. A child and a widowed mother – it is not really appropriate to link them together as ‘desperate girls’, but I hope that the ‘girlification’ of women which I have performed here will be forgiven in a larger argument about the noticeable persistence of an inconsolable femininity in the heroines of female-directed films. As the ‘purchasing power’ of post-feminism diminishes in the cash-strapped West, and as more and more studies show that it is women with caring responsibilities who are most hard hit by the cuts, perhaps this desperate femininity will extend its age range. Will it be better or worse to be speaking no longer of desperate ‘girls’? But the point is perhaps a wider one in a special issue devoted to the first decade of the twenty-first century. British cinema and television have a long history of attention to ordinary lives and social deprivation – phrases that have become devalued in the contemporary marketing rhetoric which passes for politics nowadays – which means that they have the aesthetic resources to respond to the new age of austerity as triumphant neo-liberalism exacts its prices. Another way of looking at some of the films I have mentioned here, along with *Tyrannosaur* (2011), *Wuthering Heights* (2011), Shane Meadows’ various revisitings of *This Is England* for television, but also low-budget genre fiction like *Attack the Block* (2010), is as contributors to a twenty-first-century audio-visual landscape of desperation. There is more to come – if only the funding can be sorted.

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Notes

1. McLoone's 1996 discussion of medium specificity, which is attentive to national variation, is thus more germane than Carroll's (2003), although both emphasise contingency rather than essence.
2. The Anglophone literature alone is too lengthy to reference fully, but see, for example, on the post-medium condition: Krauss (1999); on television: 'The Ends of Television' conference at the University of Amsterdam, 2009; Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson (2004); James Bennett and Tom Brown (2008); Graeme Turner and Jinna Tay (2009). On cinéphilia, the discussion includes: Paul Willemsen (1994); Susan Sontag (1996); Marijke de Valck and Malte Hagener (2005), particularly the essay by Thomas Elsaesser; Laura Mulvey (2006); Christian Keathley (2006); Mark Betz (2010). On the aesthetics of new media, Lev Manovich (1999) has been influential, as have Bolter and Grusin (2000).
3. See Brunsdon (2008) for a more developed argument about the specificity of the British context in relation to television.
4. For differently inflected discussions of what modernism might mean in the British context in relation to television and film see Caughie (2000), Mulvey and Sexton (2007) and Orr (2010).
5. Andrews (2012) explores the importance of institutional nomination to the identities 'film' and 'television drama' in the British context.
6. See, for example, Auty and Roddick (1985: 27–30); Higson (2003: 113–18); Hill (1999: 53–70); Leggott (2008: 18); Petrie (2000: 123–47); Sargeant (2005: 248–51, 295–9); Street (2009: 28–30).
7. This is a complex argument which I am making too rapidly, and requires attention to the different institutional and disciplinary contexts in which television has been studied which include, using rather different paradigms, sociology and drama. Television studies, as a discipline, has tended to produce itself between these: see Fiske (1987) and, ten years later, Geraghty and Lusted (1998). Miller (2010) devotes nine pages (out of 189) to (UK and US) television drama.
8. See the shift between Brandt (1981) and (1993). But see also Cooke (2003), which combines television studies approaches with the study of television drama.
9. See Morley (1986); Gray (1992).
10. See Kuhn (2002).
11. See Petley's influential 'lost continent' chapter (1986) and Chibnall and Murphy (1999); Murphy (1998) and Street (1996) provide early accounts of what becomes the journal project. Cook (1996: 10–40), offers a germane feminist critique of British cinema historiography.
12. This sensibility has affiliations with what Jeffrey Sconce (1995) has identified as the enthusiasm for 'paracinema' and a contemporary manifestation in the DVD versions of low-budget mid-century British films marketed by the BFI as 'The Flipside'.
13. The Boyle of *Inspector Morse* seems unknown to many fans of *Trainspotting*.
14. Adaptation study, a burgeoning field, has its own well-documented issues in relation to medium-specificity. See, for example, Geraghty (2008). Higson (2010) includes

- television in what he refers to as the 'Austen screen franchise', although the book is nonetheless titled *Film England*.
15. O'Sullivan (2006) is very attentive to the specificities of the use of film and videotape in *Blackstuff*, while Galt (2006) notes the serial structure of *Our Friends in the North*. This is not a point about what these authors say about these productions, but one about the post-1950s critical historiography of British audio-visual fiction which grants primacy to cinema, annexing television drama when it suits. Barr (1986) includes two essays on broadcasting and cinema which specifically address the relation and is not an example of what I am calling 'slipping in', even though the subtitle of his book is *90 Years of British Cinema*.
 16. See Rolinson (2010), and also his 'Viewing Notes' for the 2011 DVD release of *Tales Out of School: Four Films by David Leland*. See also Cooke (2003: 90–127) and Andrews (2012) on *Penda's Fen*.
 17. Alvarado and Stewart (1985) provide a rich account of this environment while Chibnall and Murphy (1999: 13) place *The Long Good Friday* in relation to television.
 18. In *Law and Order*, IRA activity affects the price and supply of weapons. Lez Cooke (2003: 115–18) discusses the television programmes together.
 19. See Lez Cooke's (2012) history of regional television drama which focuses on Granada between 1956 and 1982 and English regions drama between 1972 and 1982.
 20. See Helen Wheatley (2004) for an argument about spectacular television in relation to 'ordinary' TV.
 21. See, for example, Arthurs (2003) and Ball (forthcoming 2013).
 22. See Turner (2009) for the general argument about national and television and Brunsdon (2010) for discussion of 'post-broadcast' interpretation.
 23. *Band of Gold* (1995–7), written by Kay Mellor, was set in Bradford among women working as prostitutes, and Morton's part, a runaway working the streets underage, is that of a 'desperate girl'.
 24. Interview with Samantha Morton, ICA press notes, February 2010, held at the BFI National Library.
 25. *The Unloved* has a characteristic funding pattern for low-budget British cinema, drawing on both television and European funds, and being partly supported by Revolution Films. Production companies are listed thus: Film4 presents in association with EM Media and Revolution Films a Revolution Films Production. Developed with the support of Channel 4. Part funded by the European Regional Development Fund, co-financed by EM Media.
 26. Xan Brooks, *Guardian, Film and Music*, 19 February 2010; *The Times, T2*, 19 February 2010.
 27. See also Katherine Flett, 'Little girl lost—but who cares?', *Observer Review*, 24 May 2009; Sam Wollaston, 'Last night's TV', *Guardian Review*, 18 May 2009.
 28. Arguably, a particular kind of British cinema, which, in an earlier moment, Christopher Williams (1996) characterised as a 'social art cinema'.
 29. Production notes on *Red Road*, <http://www.vervepics.com/redroad> (accessed 17 July 2007).
 30. *Donkeys* had a difficult production process which included casting James Cosmo instead of the late Andy Armour. See Jane Graham, 'The beast of burden of cinema', *Guardian Review*, 19 November 2011.
 31. Production notes on *Red Road*, <http://www.vervepics.com/redroad> (accessed 17 July 2007).

32. Phillip French, 'Down and out in gritty Glasgow', *Observer Review*, 29 October 2006; Peter Bradshaw, 'Stars of CCTV', *Guardian Review*, 27 October 2006; Jonathan Romney, 'Sealed with a Glasgow kiss', *Independent on Sunday*, 29 October 2006; Hannah McGill, 'Mean streets', *Sight and Sound*, November 2006, pp. 26–8; Lake (2010).

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