

Mike Catto's bullet points_from Belfast Beyond The Box Office - June 2010

- *To respond to the core word 'Cultural' as used in the report and in the presentation.* In Northern Ireland this word has different connotations and is often used to denote the Protestant/Planter/Unionist tradition in opposition to the Catholic/Gael/Republican traditions. Many of the films (both dramas like Hidden Agenda and docs like Mother Ireland) made in and about NI during and after the Troubles are seen (erroneously) as favouring the Republican tradition.
- *To unpick some issues of impact in a multi-platform age.* Several feature films and made-for-TV film dramas did not achieve the normal criteria for popular success, but were often shown to quite substantial niche audiences in the Irish diaspora. This continues with the growth of digital distribution and access.
- *To address some issues in 6.6 Northern Ireland: the shadow of the Troubles. I don't want this to become a polemic but there are some points that need to be made about the differences that have prevailed that make them different from, say, Scotland, Wales or other 'Regions and Nations' (to borrow a BBC term). These are :*
- *The role of the BBC NI drama department under Robert Cooper in the 1980s in foregrounding NI issue dramas that, like Elephant (Allen Clarke/Danny Boyle) moved from studio plays to film dramas.* It is difficult to underestimate the impact of Elephant despite the BBC choosing not to re-screen it. It both achieved a *samizdat* success, even in the old days of VHS...and it influenced Gus Van Sant....
- *Post 2006, how do we position successfully recognised features such as Steve McQueen's Hunger and Oliver Hirschenger's Five Minutes of Heaven into the equation? Worthy of being case studies or merely footnotes?*
- *The role of documentaries in exploring issues, from Shellshock Rock to Mother Ireland and beyond.* These have narratives that complement, even subvert the sometimes didactic and simplistic tropes found in feature films. The report as a whole – and this is not a major criticism – recognises the fiction feature film as normative. Where this was not the case, ie here in Ulster, should the tradition of *engage* documentaries and shorts not be given greater emphasis?
- *Question: Where do we place non UK films that feature NI story-lines (often risibly) ? Do we ignore them or do we try to contextualise them.* When I visit places in Europe, North and Central America it is often the "Hollywood" representations and imaginings of Northern Ireland that are best known and these have to be addressed rigorously.
- *The specific issues of having a neighbour, the Republic of Ireland, which, for years dominated the film making scene on the island.* That relationship, whether in terms of anti-British films like *Mise Eire* or in terms of production, deserves at least a footnote to explain the strangle British model of film making in the Republic....
- *The growth of and need for a wider digital distribution of the many excellent shorts made by NI and ROI film-makers who grew up during and after The Troubles.* This is self evident and I can add that we in Ulster would benefit from wider access to the shorts/docs/dramas from other parts of the UK. A member of the audience mentioned Amber Films from NE England and that was a pertinent example. The BFI has done a good job with the Miners' Films etc but we need more of the same....and the back catalogue of BBC docs including the little praised work of the late Denis Mitchell in the 1950s, eg Morning In The Streets.