

## **Independent Filmmaking Around the Globe**

### **Dependancy and Independence In British Independent Film**

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'The future of cinematography belongs to a new race of young solitaires who will shoot films by putting their last cent into it and not let themselves be taken in by the material routines of the trade'.<sup>1</sup>

Ever since the birth of Hollywood, British cinema has lived in the shadow of its successful transatlantic friend. A common cultural heritage, a shared language and close commercial ties have cemented an inextricable connection between the cinematic cultures of the two countries. Unlike the French, the British establishment never really fully accepted film as an art equal to, for example, literature or theatre and to this day, film practice is most commonly referred to in the context of the 'film industry'. The term 'independent' is often used to describe a film which is independent of Hollywood, yet the institutional structures created to build a sustainable independent film culture in Britain often suffer from hidden aspirations to mimic Hollywood.

During the late 1970s and 1980s, there was a recognition of the need to support independent filmmaking in the United Kingdom. The establishment of Channel Four Television in 1981 emerged from this need and it was specifically charged with, together with the British Film Institute, encouraging and nurturing independent film through an engagement with small and medium sized production companies and independent film workshops. The subsequent rise in independent film production activity during the 1980s created a culture of dependency on centrally derived film policy which has, until recently, had a powerful effect on British independent filmmaking culture.

This chapter will build on a personal experience of more than 20 years of working as an independent filmmaker in the United Kingdom to explore the relationship between the independent filmmaker and the institutions established to foster independence. In particular the chapter will explore, first, the notion of independence from largely policy driven agendas of film institutions such as the British Film Institute, Channel Four Television, The UK Film Council and a number regional film bodies; second, the chapter will look at the aesthetic independence in relation to the dominant role of British television in the film sector; and, third, the chapter will explore recent trends and opportunities enjoyed by independent filmmakers as a consequence of developments in technology.

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<sup>1</sup> Bresson, R 1975, Notes on Cinematography (Urizen, New York), pp. 62.