The History Boys?: Masculinity, Memory and the 1980s in British Cinema, 2005 – 2010

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The thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the University of Portsmouth

School of Media and Performing Arts – University of Portsmouth

May 2015
Abstract

This study will consider the function of cinema in British society’s ongoing relationship with the 1980s. Its focus on a key period of recent British film history acknowledges popular culture’s flourishing identification with this decade, reflected through a number of media including literature, music and fashion. I argue that with seventeen films set in the 1980s and produced between 2005 and 2010, British cinema is at the centre of this retrospective, providing a unique perspective on our relationship with the era. But what are the determinants of this mediated reminiscence and what does it say about the function of cinema in rendering the past? I contend that a key aspect of this channelling of popular and personal memory is the role of the writer and director. Nearly all male and mostly middle-aged, the films’ creative agents present narratives that foreground young male protagonists and specifically masculine themes. These thematic concerns, including patriarchal absence and homosocial groups, whilst anchored in the concerns of their 1980s socio-political landscape also highlight a contemporary need for the films’ authors to connect to a personal past.

Through reference to sociological, cinematic and political discourse, amongst others, this study will also consider the role of memory in these films. It will contend that the films present a complex perspective of the 1980s, highlighting an ambivalent relationship with the period that transcends nostalgia. The thematic structure of this work will allow a full analysis of the films’ relationship with key aspects of the 1980s incorporating a consideration of critically neglected texts that, I argue, demonstrate a strong mediated relationship with the 1980s. Additionally the study’s unique perspective on a specific period of the recent past and its mediation through film will ensure it has a key contribution to current thinking around the relationship between contemporary masculinity, British cinema and the 1980s.
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Declaration

Whilst registered as a candidate for the above degree, I have not been registered for any other research award. The results and conclusions embodied in this thesis are the original work of the named candidate and have not been submitted for any other academic award.
Acknowledgments

I am very thankful to my PhD supervisors, Dr Justin Smith and Dr Christine Etherington-Wright, for their patience and support over the course of this work. They have consistently set the bar high in respect of the standards expected. The staff at the School of Media and Performing Arts at the University of Portsmouth, over a period of a number of years, have also been tremendously supportive.

Working for HMRC throughout this project has required a great deal of flexibility on behalf of my employer. I have benefited enormously from having such a supportive and evolved line manager as Kev Glover. His understanding removed a great deal of stress at crucial times and for that I am deeply appreciative. I am also indebted to my colleagues on the Senior Leadership Team at Portsmouth. Many covered my absences, which were often physical and sometimes just in spirit. They also offered words of support, and, occasionally, engaged in debate. My colleague and friend Paul Jenkins is especially noteworthy for understanding the magnitude of my task.

The sacrifice of my family has been immense. Financially, I am appreciative of my father’s early help. My family have all supported me emotionally throughout the last nine years of study. I have been particularly overwhelmed with the unconditional support of my daughters, Devon, Amy and Lucy. Their acceptance of what must have seemed to be a perverse set of priorities has been touching. My wife, Cheryl, is at the heart of this work, evident in her encouragement to undertake the initial degree and then PhD, and removing obstacles at every step. Her faith in my capabilities, and constant support in my studies, has been the ultimate inspiration. Without her cajoling, sacrifice and love, this project would never have been completed - and yes, this really is it now.
Dissemination
Presentations


2014, May  ‘Hit me with your bio-pic: Cultural memory, fidelity and the reimagining of a pop icon in Sex and Drugs and Rock and Roll’. Paper presented at the Life through the Lens: The British Biopic in Focus conference, University of the West of England, Bristol, UK.

2014, June  ‘Thatcher’s Men: Authorship, Masculinity & the 1980s in Nick Love’s The Firm’. Paper presented at the “It’s a Dishonest Con!” Realist Film and TV after Alan Clarke, Humanities Research Centre, University of York, York, UK.
Introduction

Aims

This thesis has four main aims. The first of these acknowledges Britain’s fascination with the 1980s, as demonstrated through popular culture and the mass media. The key question here is: what has been the specific contribution of British cinema to this wider cultural engagement with the 1980s? There were seventeen films made between 2005 and 2010, all set in the 1980s. How do we account for this trend? The second, and related, aim is to use this body of films to address questions about the function of popular cinema in representations of the recent past. How do these films contribute to our cultural understanding of historical periods, particularly those still dominant in popular memory? The third aim is to identify, and explore, the cultural capital of the creative progenitors of the films selected. Provenance and agency are important considerations here. The seventeen films only have one female director and no female writers, indicating the importance of the role of gender in their presentation of the 1980s. Finally, this thesis will consider this body of films within their critical, and academic, context. Can we see, in the reception of these films, a correlation with the heritage film? Assessing the position of these films within an emerging ‘new heritage cinema’, will allow a consideration of this cultural construct, as well as its usefulness in determining the role of these films in the medium’s interaction with the 1980s.

Rationale

The 1980s has emerged in recent years as a site for remembrance, and reimagining, in British popular culture. Film is just one medium with an intense engagement with the decade. Others, such as theatre, music, television, literature and fashion have regularly plundered
the 1980s, for inspiration, to parody or, simply, to critique. The popular press have fuelled this interest, with an almost constant stream of articles comparing contemporary Britain with the 1980s. Whilst of course, nostalgic activity is not restricted to that decade, I will argue in this thesis that the 1980s occupies a unique place in our cultural, social and political history. Indeed, our recent fixation with the past suggests that its legacy is far from settled in the cultural psyche. Furthermore, popular media engagement with the decade has established a number of characteristics that can be seen to define our current relationship with the 1980s.

The 1980s have, therefore, emerged as a site for cultural and media recycling, a place of nostalgic rediscovering, or even personal reassurance. If our engagement with the 1980s is different to that of, say, the Seventies, why is that? Perhaps the answer lies in the decade itself, specifically its social, cultural and political environment. Our engagement with the decade, through whatever medium, focuses on these components of the 1980s. It is from this interaction, that specific characteristics of our contemporary relationship with the 1980s emerge. Margaret Thatcher is, I contend, at the centre of this relationship. 1980s Britain was dominated by the political ideology and personality of Thatcher. As prime minister for the entire decade, her association with the 1980s, particularly in terms of contemporary memory, is a strong one. Thatcher serves a number of purposes in facilitating the bond between contemporary, and 1980s, Britain. This is strengthened not only through nostalgia, but a very personal response to the decade, particularly from men. Thatcher can be seen, therefore, as the gateway to the 1980s for many of these male authors, not only in British cinema, but literature. A further convergence is apparent here, and particularly useful in this consideration of the characteristics of the popular cultural texts that engage with the 1980s. The emergence of a number of novels and memoirs recalling a very personal 1980s is reflected in the films of this study. These male, middle-aged authors, recalling their 1980s youth, are doing so in the pursuit of nostalgic gratification, or so it seems. Viewers of these
films are assailed by popular culture signifiers of the period, whether it be the music, clothing or toys of the era. These, I argue, satisfy a nostalgic impulse on behalf of the films’ authors, be that director, writer or both, as well as the audience. This focus on the artefacts of the time also makes a clear association with a universal childhood, whilst presenting the 1980s through an autobiographical prism.

A consideration of these characteristics of the 1980s-set film, which emerged between 2005 and 2010, is perhaps complicated by the most dominant one: masculinity. With so many men, mostly of a similar age and background, recalling their 1980s childhood at the same time, a number of issues emerge. What is significant about the years 2005 to 2010 for instance? This thesis will, therefore, explore the cultural and social landscape of contemporary Britain, to consider what this kind of engagement with the recent past tells us about the 1980s, and more importantly, our contemporary selves. Guffey’s assertion, that any commentaries on the past provide a line of continuity to the present, is therefore, an important consideration here (2006, p. 21). It is difficult to envisage any set of circumstances whereby cultural engagement with the past cannot be considered as a discussion of the present. Additionally, this examination of the influence of the present on our interpretations of the past, must consider the filmmakers’ approach. Why do particular music tracks, or particular clothes or specific 1980s artefacts, appear in these films? What is the relationship between these signifiers of the 1980s and what does their inclusion tell us about our own relationship with the decade? The 1980s is not, of course, an easily definable era in popular culture terms, despite claims to the contrary. Its music and clothing, in particular, was diverse and varied, reflected in the number of different subcultures that emerged from the decade. The way in which these authors interact with the 1980s, through these films, is, therefore, a vital concept to consider here. What do their choices tell us about our own relationship with the 1980s? The 1980s was a divisive decade and one that induces mixed reactions, even now.
So why is it that filmmakers, particularly male ones, still want to revisit the decade and we, the audience, emerge from the experience of viewing the films with, what Brabazon terms ‘secret happiness’, despite the decade’s flaws? (2005, p.40). The characteristics of British cinema’s relationship with the 1980s, briefly summarised here, are explored in more detail in the next section, Research Contexts. Whilst a number of these characteristics, as indicated earlier, are shared with other media, British film’s response to the 1980s, in a short time period, is I argue, a unique one.

Whilst some, like Brabazon, have examined the influence of the 1980s on popular memory, the precise function of British cinema within the wider cultural engagement with the decade has not, until now, been explored. This study will therefore focus on the unique qualities of these 1980s films, particularly in respect of their authorship. For a number of British films to emerge, over a short period of time, with a shared setting, shared themes and a similar authorship is, I argue, not a coincidence. Echoing a similar response to the 1980s from other media, it is vital that British cinema’s contribution to this phenomenon is fully examined. This examination, through the course of this thesis, will consider how the precise role of the films’ masculine agency differs from that of cultural forms. Why do some authors distance their films from the 1980s? This occurs in a number of cases here, such as Is Anybody There? (Crowley, 2008) and Starter for 10 (Vaughan, 2006). This reflects, I argue, the depreciating value of 1980s nostalgia as cultural capital, which is not apparent in other media.

**Research Context: Definitions and Parameters of this study**

These films share many commonalities, apparent in their narrative, authorship and production history. In considering these, I have identified a number of key terms, or recurring themes – nostalgia, media recycling, British cinema of the 1980s and masculinity. These four
constituents of the texts, and provenance, of these films, are integral to our understanding of this body of films. There is some common ground here with other cultural forms. Nostalgia for example, is, of course, a determinant in the wider cultural engagement with the 1980s. These terms, however, all play a dominant role in what I will demonstrate is film’s specific response to the 1980s. This section will map these topics, their role within these films and their influence on our cultural understanding of the 1980s.

Wider issues of definition are also important here, but these, of course, come with a caveat. Many of these terms, detailed below, have multiple meanings depending on the context of their usage. I do not intend, therefore, to provide ‘hard and fast’ definitions, only interpretations which will be consistently applied throughout this study.

**Nostalgia**

Whilst Chapter One will consider the cultural function of periodisation, it is important to state here that I subscribe to the approach adopted by John Hill in his work on 1980s British cinema. He argues that it is far more important to focus, ‘on how texts are activated in relation to specific socio-historical contexts’, rather than conventional notions of periodisation (Hill, 1999, p.xi). This pragmatic way of dealing with historical representation is, I argue, reinforced by Schacter’s work on personal memory. His theory that the human memory is defined by its recollections of ‘event-specific knowledge’ emphasises the role of emotion in our relationship with the past (1996, pp. 89-90,91). Boym’s work reinforces this, specifically linking personal recollections with the unreliability of memory, whilst arguing ‘nostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one’s own fantasy’ (2001, p. xiii). These theoretical discussions of memory are helpful for my analysis of authorial responses to the 1980s in these films, for they introduce the notion that nostalgia is predicated on an ideal of the past that is focused on the familiar and, specifically,
home. With films like *Son of Rambow* (Jennings, 2007) and *The History Boys* (Hytner, 2006), projecting an idealised childhood, these narratives are clearly based on a nostalgic perspective. Any discussion of nostalgia and film must also consider cinema’s unique capacity to ‘reawaken a sense of the past’ (Jameson, 1993, p.197). These films are clearly a representation of a memory of the 1980s, rather than the 1980s itself. In most cases it is very clear that, particularly with their use of irony and fantasy, that the 1980s being portrayed is an idealised one and from a subjective viewpoint.

Of course, there is far more to the relationship between author and film than just nostalgia. The authors’ decision to set the films in the past, often of their own childhood, may be a nostalgic impulse, but the content of the films is far more complicated. Many, like *This is England* (Meadows, 2006), present a divided and disconnected society, attractive to only the most avid 1980s fan. The diversity of these approaches to mediating the 1980s, indicates a complex relationship between contemporary British cinema and the decade, attracting both those with memories of the period and those without. The self-propagating nature of film and other forms of popular culture, also means the image presented of the 1980s is a recycled one akin to photocopying a photocopy. These ‘mediated memories’, as Grainge terms them, present a challenge to popular and personal memory due to their ‘artificiality’ (2003, p. 7). The notion that our relationship with the 1980s is not a genuine one, but constructed through the mediated representations available to us in our contemporary digital world is, of course, not a new one. The 1980s I argue, however, have been subjected to a greater abundance of media recycling than any other decade, with many media engaging with, and re-imagining, the iconography of the decade.
Media Recycling

The media recycling of the 1980s takes a variety of forms, but is most reliant on an identification of the period’s iconography. The distinctiveness of the 1980s, as demonstrated through many forms of popular culture, is predicated on the decade’s specific identity. This iconography, and the cultural signifiers that act as shortcuts to the period, are then recycled and referenced by popular culture in future years. This returns me to a dominant concern of this thesis: what constitutes the 1980s in the memories of these authors? The seemingly arbitrary nature of cultural nostalgia, in its constructed hierarchy that privileges certain 1980s items over others, suggests the contemporary version of the 1980s is a simulacrum of the original. Additionally we must also look at how this cultural recycling works across media. Many present the 1980s for nostalgic purposes, as in the case of television dramas such as Ashes to Ashes (BBC, 2008). In these examples, signifiers of the age such as large mobile phones and Rubik Cubes are in abundance and used comedically, constantly reminding the audience of the setting, whilst forging an affiliation through its post-modern mocking of the past. But the placement of such obvious 1980s clichés as these, cannot simply be explained as a nostalgic gesture. For some, specifically the films of Nick Love, such as The Business (2005) and The Firm (2009), they serve as self-conscious parodies of the era. These ironic responses to the decade effectively allow the audience to have it both ways: they can nostalgically indulge in the signifiers of the era whilst distancing themselves from it with a knowing detachment. The recycling of these images and sounds in contemporary culture, allow an insight into how we respond to the 1980s with the films presenting different layers of nostalgia for the decade. Whilst The Business reclaims the 1980s as a ‘cool’ era with its glamorous setting and romanticising of the period, other authors, however, try to ensure their film avoids any association with this burgeoning cultural movement.
Perhaps it is the saturation of the past into our contemporary lives which has produced, in some quarters, a wider social apathy for cultural nostalgia. There is certainly evidence of this, with many directors and writers distancing themselves from such a notion being referenced in their film. Peter Harness, the screenwriter of *Is Anybody There?*, acknowledges this to me, perhaps unwittingly, when he explains how he wanted to avoid the film being a ‘nostalgia trip’ or an ‘80s film’. Those terms, for him, have a connotation of ‘naffness’. Harness’s comments appear to concur with Lowenthal’s contention that nostalgia is increasingly seen as ‘a topic of embarrassment and a term of abuse’ (1989, p. 20). But whilst Boym argues that nostalgia, perhaps unfairly, is often seen as ‘something of a bad word’, these different levels of nostalgic engagement are a recurring concern of the films in this survey (2001, p. xv). This is reflected in the diverse ways in which they engage with the 1980s. Consequently, cinema’s place within the wider phenomenon of cultural recycling of the 1980s is determined, I contend, from a precise set of circumstances. These are, understandably, heavily influenced by the pervasive nature of cultural nostalgia. It is partly this influence that, not only presents the 1980s as a unique and complex era in cultural representation, butforegrounds cinema’s unique capacity to render it.

**British Cinema and the 1980s**

It is important to remind ourselves that all cultural forms have their own, internal histories. The contemporary books, plays and music that interact with the 1980s, should be seen not just as part of a wider cultural phenomenon around the 1980s, but a continuation of the medium’s own past. Cinema is, of course, no different. We must consider these films within their wider critical context and history, in order to calculate their contemporary relevance. The British film industry has, itself, changed drastically since the 1980s, particularly in respect of funding and distribution. Thatcher’s free market policies fragmented the cultural
industries and film, in particular, has had to redefine itself to attract investment. This has had an inevitable effect on the films themselves. Filmmakers have not only had to respond to changes in the industry, with the proliferation of independent production companies, but also inevitable social and political shifts. The heritage film is a specific example of how the politics of the 1980s influenced British cinema, with the shadow of these films still hanging over it.

Powrie identifies a number of films, similar to the ones of this survey that, he argues, reflect the sensibilities of the heritage film. He describes these as, ‘the rite of passage film set in the past, focusing on child or adolescent protagonists, most of which appeared in the 1980s’ (2000, p.316). Like the heritage film, Powrie assures us that these films share ‘a fascination with difficult moments in the national past which indicate contemporary fears’ (2000, p.316). This group of films, including *Hope and Glory* (Boorman, 1984) and *Distant Voices, Still Lives* (Davies, 1988), have a number of commonalities with the films of this survey, specifically their recent past setting and autobiographical provenance. How they represent a line of continuity between heritage films and those of this survey will be considered in detail throughout this study. Whilst Powrie, perhaps unconvincingly, indicates that the ‘alternative heritage’ films of his survey reflect the ‘male posturing and violence’ of the heritage film, I argue the masculine focus of the films of this survey have more in common with earlier British films. A number of the films here can be seen to have their antecedents in the British New Wave, particularly in respect of their representation of an angst-ridden, male protagonist and social realist aesthetics. Spicer, does, however, argue that even working-class heroes like Arthur Seaton (Albert Finney) in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (Reisz, 1960), were direct descendants of earlier cinematic, masculine incarnations, often played by actors such as Michael Redgrave (2003, p.150). These characters can also be
seen to re-emerge in the social realist films of Channel 4 that, with the heritage film, dominated the British film industry’s output in the 1980s.

**Masculinity**

Among the writers and directors of the seventeen films in this survey, there is only one female, Kari Skogland, the Canadian-born director of *Fifty Dead Men Walking* (2008). In part, this highlights the ongoing gender imbalance in senior creative roles within the British film industry, but it also indicates the special significance of the masculine author in these films. Such a dominance presents a particularly masculine perspective on the 1980s which, I argue, has a major influence on how the decade is represented. Additionally, any subsequent recycling of the images presented in these films would, I argue, have to negotiate an inherently male subjectivity. Consequently these perspectives are reinforced and propagated throughout popular culture’s subsequent, and ongoing, engagement with the 1980s. In short, the male perspective on the 1980s is the prevailing one, as these representations enter the recycling process. This disproportionate perspective is further complicated when we consider the age of these writers and directors. With a mean age across all these films of 40.46 years old for writers and 38.6 for directors, a picture begins to emerge of the average agent involved in the writing and directing of these 1980s focused films. Detailed in Appendix 2, the average creative agent in these films is white, male and aged in his late 30s. His formative years were, of course, in the 1980s, when he was fourteen or fifteen years old in the middle of the decade. It is likely at this age, therefore, that he was heavily influenced by the culture of the time, with fashion and music playing a key role in his life, as with most teenagers, and this is reflected in the fact that these signifiers of the decade dominate the visual and aural landscapes of many of these films.
The strong presence of the authors’ personal memory is apparent in the number of these films based on original screenplays. With many of the films incorporating a heavily autobiographical narrative it is often the director himself, as in *The Business* and *This is England*, who assumes responsibility as writer, for rendering his own younger self on screen. This personal focus on the 1980s has a great deal more resonance for an audience of a similar age and background and with a personal recollection of the decade. These autobiographical accounts of the past are presented in diverse ways, from the realism of *This is England* to the fantasy of *Son of Rambow*. These all, I argue, encompass nostalgic notions of masculinity. Only one film of this study, *Sex and Drugs and Rock and Roll* (Whitehouse, 2009), doesn’t have a male protagonist in his early 20s or younger, although its narrative focus is often on the leading character’s son, Baxter (Bill Milner). This focus on young males in the 1980s is, of course, reflected in the films’ themes and concerns, which are often universal ones associated with childhood and coming-of-age.

Membership of subcultures, a key 1980s signifier, is revisited by five of these films, with four, *Rise of the Footsoldier* (Gilbey, 2006), *Cass* (Baird, 2008), *Awaydays* (Holden, 2009) and *The Firm*, focusing on homosocial groups within the football hooligan fraternity. The hooliganism that blighted British football in the 1980s, is presented in these films, on the whole, as heroic. This indicates, I argue, a particularly male nostalgic impulse in respect of the 1980s. These films’ recognition of an outdated mode of masculine behaviour, through violence and misogyny, clearly belongs in the past, but is perhaps, still attractive to many middle-aged men.

This section has explored four key aspects of contemporary British cinema’s engagement with the 1980s. Each of these is a vital consideration, as this work examines the films and their social, political and cultural context. These topics appear dominant when we consider the commonalities between these films because of the symbiosis that ties them. In
these films the masculine provenance is, of course, linked to contemporary society’s nostalgia for the 1980s, which is demonstrated by the way we recycle the media of the period. It is the link between these elements, explored in Chapter One that presents British cinema’s interaction with the period in different terms to that of other popular culture.

**Primary Sources**

Primary research, particularly interviews, has been a vital aspect of this project for three important reasons. Firstly, the study’s focus on contemporary films means there is a dearth of historical data. Secondly, the films’ poor critical and commercial reception restricted even further the data available, and finally, the thesis’ focus requires recovery of evidence of the films’ authorship and provenance.

With a few exceptions, this body of films represents a period of low-budget, independent filmmaking in Britain. Additionally, aside from perhaps *This is England* and *Son of Rambow*, many were poorly received - critically and commercially. This is perhaps understandable, for many of the films lack the sophistication of those with larger budgets, apparent in uneven performance style, unconvincing mise-en-scène and implausible narratives. Perhaps it is this that has deterred much discussion of these films, either in academic circles or in the popular and cinematic press. I argue that the films’ flaws, together with their rendering of personal memory do, however, indicate a very specific response to the 1980s.

This section is in four parts, firstly exploring the films themselves. Understanding the cultural function of these films is vital, particularly in respect of how they attempt to rehabilitate the 1980s. A consideration of the films: textually, through production context and marketing, will explore this relationship. This section’s second part, on primary interviews, predominantly focuses on the author. The commercial appeal, and critical
responses, to a number of these films, required, I felt, a personal response to their authorship. I interviewed two of the films’ authors, as well as others from the wider cinema and political worlds, to gain a greater insight into the perspective of these films. Thirdly, this section will consider the wider phenomenon of 1980s cultural nostalgia, with a consideration of popular culture. Whilst predominantly focused on film, it is important to consider the influence of other forms of popular culture, either of the 1980s or contemporary, 1980s focused, texts. This will allow film’s function within these 1980s retrospectives to be fully explored. Finally, other primary sources will consider the importance of critical reviews and marketing materials, in the films’ interaction with the 1980s.

**Films**

The focus on British films made between 2005 and 2010, reflects a noticeable spike in cinema’s response to the 1980s. Although, during these years, the numbers of 1980s-set films were still moderately small, accounting for just 1.74 per cent of UK independent films in that six year period, they are significant for other reasons. As indicated in Appendix 2, in 2009, at their height, the number of British 1980s-set films released accounted for 4.58 per cent of the year’s total output for UK independent film. But of course, we mustn’t look at these figures in isolation, but rather in the context of the industry’s relationship with the 1980s, before and after this six-year period. Whilst a small number of such films appeared prior to 2005, notably *Twenty-Four Hour Party People* (Winterbottom) in 2002 and *Billy Elliot* (Daldry) in 2000, the numbers were not significant. In fact, only three British films set in the 1980s were released between 2000 and 2004. A similar situation has arisen since 2010 with the notable exception of course being the Thatcher biopic *The Iron Lady* (Lloyd, 2011), discussed in detail in Chapter Two.
Whilst the preponderance of these films during this period, justifies the focus of this thesis, defining the 1980s is slightly more problematic. The term 1980s, is, in itself, a disputed one, consequently open to interpretation. As I indicated earlier, Hill’s approach is one that I will adopt here in mapping the parameters of a 1980s films. The temporal location of these films, for the purposes of this work, therefore occupies three distinct categories. The first of these is the dominant one, those films that are firmly set in the 1980s with their narratives often centred on a particular year, occasionally denoted by an intertitle on screen. The temporal setting of *This is England*, for example, is clearly defined as being the summer of 1983. The second category includes films that are less precise with their setting. The narratives of both *Rise of the Footsoldier* and *Cass*, for example, use a broad timeframe over a period of many years and multiple decades. It is these films that have required a deeper consideration. One question I had to ponder was whether the temporal setting, not exclusively in the 1980s, prevented the film from being included, on account that it was not strictly a 1980s text in terms of setting. I did briefly look at screen time. How much time do these films devote to the decade? Does that change my thoughts on their status as 1980s films? Taking into account Hill’s perspective, as well as Jameson’s concept of periodisations, discussed in more detail in Chapter One, it was clear to me that the definition of the 1980s that I needed to apply to these films had to be far looser than initially predicted. I therefore concluded that the decision as to whether a film was included in the survey should be based, not on precise temporal location, but on sensibility. The visual style, themes and narratives of these multi-decade films aligned them with the more overtly 1980s-set films. This also explains my inclusion of the third category of film, including *Control* (Corbijn, 2006), and *Awaydays*, predominantly set in 1979. The Britain presented here, on the brink of Thatcherism, shares a common visual and narrative landscape with the other 1980s-set films of this survey, particularly in respect of codes of masculinity.
The inclusion of a wide range of films does, however, bring further limitations. My consideration of which films to use as case studies (since I couldn’t hope to address all seventeen titles in the same depth) has been informed predominantly by the project’s thematic framework. I have adopted such a structure to the film analysis based on common narrative concerns: Politics, Masculinity, Patriarchy and Family, and Youth. Whilst this structure raises the spectre of a potentially inductive approach, I would argue that these themes are recurrent ones, not just in the films themselves, but in other examples of recent popular texts that engage with the 1980s. The case studies have therefore be selected on the basis of their engagement with much broader concerns in this phenomenon, as already discussed.

**Interviews**

I conducted a number of interviews for this study. Those that have informed this thesis are broadly from the world of cinema, specifically the author of *Clubbed* (Thompson, 2008), Geoff Thompson, the author of *Is Anybody There?*, Peter Harness, and actor/director Phil Davis. In addition to these I conducted a short, but useful, telephone interview with Tony Benn. After reading Benn’s diaries then attending a talk by him, I subsequently met the man who was seen as the spokesman for 1980s socialism. Benn’s perspective was an important one. He maintained that Britain had not moved on as a society since the 1980s and, controversially, was still in the grip of Thatcherism. When I discussed Britain’s contemporary relationship with the 1980s, it was Thatcherism, and it’s poisoning of New Labour, that dominated our discussion. Benn’s perspective is a vital one in this study’s focus, for it represents that of one the 1980s most vocal opponents of Thatcher. We can see, in Benn’s comments in Chapter One, how the 1980s have influenced contemporary Britain. Tony Benn sadly died in 2013 but his contribution to the thesis’ aims is, I hope, clearly visible.
Phil Davis, in the realms of television and film, is equally successful. Davis’s perspective, relayed in between theatre performances, was useful in a number of ways. As an actor he has appeared in some seminal 1980s films, including *High Hopes* (Leigh, 1988) and *The Firm* (Ashton and Clarke, 1989), but as a director he also made a 1980s-set football hooligan drama *i.d.* (1995). Davis was therefore able to provide an insight into the politically charged British cinema of the 1980s, whilst discussing his own successful efforts to recreate 1980s subculture.

The most useful personal contributors, in respect of interviews, were Peter Harness and Geoff Thompson. Not only do these men fit the generational demographic identified above, but their accounts of a very personal 1980s provided differing perspectives, highlighting the artist’s relationship with the past, and the difficulties in negotiating that. Harness, writing an original screenplay, learnt like Thompson, that authenticity is not necessarily what is required in a film. Harness found his script was irrevocably altered with the production’s acquisition of an A-list actor, Michael Caine. Thompson’s script was also changed in the adaptation process, but as a result of self-censorship rather than outside forces. How the author amends the rendition of their own past to accommodate collaboration is a key factor in this thesis’ discussion of the layers of nostalgia in these films. The input of both men’s perspective, through these interviews, ensures the voice of the author, a key component of this work’s analysis of masculine authorship, is heard here. Without this primary research, which allowed a very specific line of questioning, the full extent of the role of the author in these films’ interaction with the 1980s, would not have been completely realised. Additionally, the role of the screenwriter is important here and we must be careful not to conflate it with that of a book author. As both Peter Harness and Geoff Thompson indicate, the screenwriting role is a collaborative one, relying on a level of compromise absent from the authorship of novels. Such interviews are, of course, vital in
giving this work a broad perspective but must be supplemented through more widely available material, specifically through reviews, articles and books. The focus here shifts on to the views of these authors, specifically in respect of how they provide a perspective on contemporary attitudes to the 1980s.

**Popular Culture**

Aside from film, this thesis engages with a number of other cultural forms such as music, literature, theatre, fashion and television. Each is important, not only because of its interaction with the decade in the 1990s and 2000s, although I argue this is significant and diverse, but because of its 1980s roots. An analysis of how the cultural forms that are engaging with the 1980s today, interacted with the decade’s social, political and cultural environment at the time, will provide a useful insight into media recycling. Television is particularly important here. As a vehicle for nostalgia it has become increasingly influential, and the 1980s is a decade that, as Chapter One argues, television nostalgically embraced very early on.

How different media interacts with the 1980s is also a useful consideration. There is evidence that as we move further from the decade, popular culture’s relationship with the 1980s is changing. Music, for example, has embraced 1980s nostalgia through band reformations, 1980s festivals and re-releases, but only relatively recently has it attempted to re-invent the decade’s sounds. Fashion has followed a similar route, firstly copying, then parodying and then interpreting. As already acknowledged, the 1980s-set literature, through novels and comedy-memoirs, share commonalities with the films of this study. The role of masculinity in these personal recollections of the 1980s is an important factor here, with a number of authors, such as Nick Hornby and Tim Lott, using male protagonists to negotiate the 1980s. Such a narrative device occurs throughout a number of later books, all adopting
a personal approach to the period, albeit within a comedy framework. This appropriation of humour to represent 1980s masculinity is a useful and important consideration when we examine the narratives of the films.

**Other Primary Sources**

A number of other primary sources are useful for my purposes. These are broadly split into two distinct sections, those related to the individual films, and those associated with a wider interest in the mediation of the 1980s. The first category contains reviews of the films, marketing data and industrial materials, such as press packs or industry statistics. The film reviews and the marketing materials provide a useful insight into the films’ engagement with a wider audience. How a distributor markets a film and how a reviewer receives it, is often outside the control of the films’ author. The role of universally acknowledged themes and signifiers becomes more important here, with the marketing of the film, or a critical review, inflating the significance of certain, usually nostalgic, elements. Materials, such as reviews, posters and trailers, are supplemented by sources within the British film industry, specifically the UK Film Council, British Film Institute and the Film Distributor’s Association. All have provided invaluable material, specifically statistics and reports on the evolution of the industry over the period discussed. Marketing material from the Film Distributors Association, reproduced, in part, in Appendix 3, has been useful in tracking the spread of marketing across various media.

The second category in this section addresses more generic responses to the 1980s, usually in the popular press. The newspapers, particularly broadsheets, are helpful here with a number of recent articles recalling the 1980s. These often compare contemporary Britain and the 1980s. Sometimes such comparisons are clumsy, perhaps based on a tenuous connection. The Royal Wedding of 2011 is a case in point. Keen to forge a connection with
the revered Princess Diana, a number of 1980s-centred articles appeared. Such documents are, of course, also useful as a barometer of society’s wider fascination with the 1980s, whether that is through politics, fashion, television or cinema.

All these sources are vital to this thesis’ aims of assessing the films’ cultural and social impact in their rendering of the 1980s. They reflect not only the importance of the films themselves, but the context of their production, socially and culturally, as well as within the British film industry. By focusing on a number of neglected and undervalued texts this study is far more reliant on sources that interact with the films’ authorship, as well as the wider cultural phenomenon of the 1980s. The secondary sources detailed next, complement the primary material discussed here.

**Secondary Sources**

To facilitate a full understanding of the diverse range of sources on which this work relies, I have split this section on secondary sources into a number of sub-sections. These: Social Histories, Memory and Nostalgia Studies, Memoir and Biography, Film and History and Masculinity Sources, all contribute a wide-ranging perspective on both how the films interact with the 1980s and their wider cultural function. Such an approach also allows a consideration of the constituents of such retrospectives, which are, of course, not restricted to cinema. The first category, Social Histories, for example, is an important part of any cultural or social remembrance, as Chapter One contends.

**Social Histories**

I have consciously focused, up to now, on British popular culture’s relationship with the 1980s, but it is important to note that there has also been a prominent social and political
engagement with the era. The emergence of historical interest in the period is an important development in the evolution of 1980s cultural nostalgia. In common with other periodisation centred on decades, the precise timing of the publication of a number of political/social histories of Britain in the 1980s, is significant. Currently there are only three such monographs: *No Such Thing as Society* (McSmith, 2010), *Rejoice Rejoice* (Turner, 2010) and *Bang! A History of Britain in the 1980s* (Stewart, 2013). But these historical accounts of the social, political and cultural changes during the 1980s, act not only as a barometer of contemporary Britain’s relationship with the 1980s, but also, like the films, present the past refracted through contemporary concerns. Additionally, their usefulness for the purposes of this thesis differs from many of the other sources detailed here, particularly those with a cultural focus. Historians such as Evans, perhaps surprisingly, warn against imbuing such discourses with any more credibility than is warranted, arguing that ‘the professionals’ truth is no more true than that of any other group in society’ (Evans, R.J, 1997, p.205).

But while these histories of the 1980s tend to occupy a more privileged position in their recalling of the era, perhaps most notable in their scant regard for the decade’s popular culture, they provide a useful perspective on contemporary Britain’s relationship with the era. Stewart, for example, argues for the decade’s unique properties, stating that the rapidity of change in the 1980s produced transformation in Britain, ‘more profound than that which was wrought during the seventies’ (2013, p.461). The examples he uses, however: the end of the Cold war, industrial unrest and subsidies to nationalized industries, amongst others, may not of course, be universally accepted as positive changes. But what is undeniable is that these are all politically driven. It is here that these social histories are particularly useful in my assessment of contemporary’s Britain’s relationship with the 1980s. Stewart’s concluding argument, that the 1980s is so entwined with the Thatcher legacy as to be indistinguishable, is a compelling one (p.473). This influence can be determined further
through recourse to both McSmith’s and Turner’s books both of which select their titles to reflect Thatcher quotes. These historical accounts’ recalling of Thatcher indicates just one way in which we engage nostalgically with the 1980s.

**Memory and nostalgia studies**

As already established, an understanding of the role of memory - personal and popular - as well as the emotion of nostalgia, is crucial in interpreting the relationship between these films and the 1980s. A number of authors are useful here in opening up this vast subject. Boym (2001) specifically, writes succinctly of the emotion’s correlation with our childhood. This analysis of the effects and determinants of nostalgia chimes strongly with a number of films in this survey, specifically in respect of their representation of their author’s childhood. Eakin (1985) and Marcus (1994) both broaden this perspective, with Marcus’ discussion on the subjectivity of presenting a personal past, against the objectivity that social historians strive for, particularly useful. The recalling, and in these cases, the subsequent rendering, of autobiographical memory, reflects the theories of Schacter who challenges the authenticity of memory, arguing that such recollections have a hierarchy, with ‘event-based knowledge’ positioned at the bottom of this order. As these are ‘individual episodes that are measured in seconds, minutes, or hours’ the ability of the human memory to retain specific details of the events is low (Schacter, 1996, pp. 89-90). Detail subsequently gets lost and, occasionally, events merge. Schacter’s ideas around the role of the human brain and the fallibility of memory, are important considerations when we explore how the films of this study present the 1980s, particularly in respect of notions of authenticity.

Sirota’s book on the pervasion of the 1980s in contemporary US society - *Back to our Future* - discusses a number of topics closely associated with this thesis (2011). Although more concerned with the legacy of the 1980s than its interaction with personal and popular
memory, the work is significant for being the only book-length account of the role of the 1980s, cultural, politically and socially, on contemporary society. Sirota goes as far to argue that, ‘Now today, almost every major cultural touchstone is rooted in the 1980s – whether obviously or subtly’ (2011, p. xx). Brabazon in her book on Generation X and memory is equally dogmatic in her assessment of the 1980s, arguing our relationship with the decade is a gendered one, because ‘The memory of the 1980s remains almost captivatingly masculine’ (2005, p. 72). But, both authors approach their subject in differing ways. Brabazon is interested in the emotional connection to the past, through experiences and artefacts. Sirota’s approach is more definitive. He comes from a nostalgic, personal perspective, sometimes even echoing those newspaper articles that search for a correlation between the past and the present. These differing methodologies indicate, once again, the complexity of our relationship with the 1980s.

**Film and history**

The ability of these films to evoke an emotional reaction to their content is undeniable, highlighting the function of film as a cultural gateway to personal memory. As Grainge states, memory has become a vital part of cinema language because, ‘...film itself has become central to the landscape and production of contemporary cultural memory’ (2003, p.10). The power of this mediation on the human memory is referenced by Schacter, who asserts ‘the subjective sense of remembering almost invariably involved some sort of visual re-experiencing of an event’ (1996, p. 23). Of course, the reliability of that ‘visual re-experiencing’ is not guaranteed, whatever the medium, but cinema’s role is a hugely influential one. Grainge’s assertion of cinema’s place as ‘central to the mediation of memory on modern cultural life’, is one that this thesis will seek to explore, with particular regard to
these films (2003, p. 1). But, of course, other academics have examined such concerns already, albeit outside this work’s specific focus on the 1980s.

The work of Rosenstone, particularly in Visions of the Past (1995) and History on Film, Film on History (2006), has been instrumental in ordering this perspective. By arguing that an adherence to historical accuracy or a notion of fidelity can be counter-productive, he suggests we detach ourselves from traditional concerns about the role cinema plays in representing the truth. Such a shifting of viewpoint, Rosenstone maintains, allows us to accept Lerner’s argument that cinema’s function is to operate ‘poetically and metaphorically’ (2006, p. 35). This reminder of film’s ability to engage the senses and reach an audience on an emotional level, is a vital component to our understanding of how these films react to the past. It also distances us from concerns around authenticity and truth, dominant in social history approaches to the past.

Whilst these theoretical approaches provide a consideration of the wider discourse on film’s role in representing the past, we must not forget that cultural conditions also provide fertile ground for retrospective and nostalgic behaviour. As Samuel argues, ‘memory is historically conditioned, changing colour and shape according to the emergencies of the moment’ (1994, p. x). British cinema’s response to contemporary conditions was particularly noticeable in the 1980s, specifically with the heritage film and the volumes of academic discourse it provoked. Authors like Fitzgerald (2010) and Powrie (2000), with their argument for widening the heritage tag, are important in this discussion. Fitzgerald’s identification of a new strain of heritage film in the 1990s, reflecting a modernist approach concurrent with the incoming Labour government’s social agenda, is one that, on the surface, appears remote to the films of this survey. Whilst I am unconvinced that films such as Atonement (Wright, 2007) have enough in common with heritage films to warrant this comparison, despite their focus on those at the top end of the social strata, Fitzgerald raises interesting points. His
concentration on texts that focus on middle-class male anxiety, such as *Closer* (Nichols, 2004) and *Notting Hill* (Michell, 1999), do highlight an important commonality with the films of this study. The line of continuity between heritage films and those of this survey, is reinforced through other key texts including Monk’s work on post-heritage (1995) and, that of the aforementioned Powrie (2000, p.316-326).

**Masculinity**

The centrality of masculinity in this thesis requires recourse to a number of different sources: sociological, cultural and political. Spicer’s important work on masculinity in British cinema, as already discussed, is a vital consideration in placing the male perspective of these films within their wider industrial context. The ‘types’ of cinematic masculine representation that Spicer identifies, specifically the ‘damaged man’, are useful archetypes when considering the wider cultural context of the films of this survey (2003, p.161-183). Other texts, such as Faludi (1999), provide a sociological perspective on the shifting notions of masculinity throughout the twentieth and twenty first century, particularly in respect of seismic cultural events and their impact on gender codings. The role of culture in the social construction of men in Britain of the 1980s and onwards is a crucial consideration when analysing these texts and their provenance. The social constructions that emerged at this time, as a response to the changing role of men within British society, are clearly defined by MacKinnon (2003), in his book on the phenomenon. Highlighting the role of popular culture, advertising and men’s magazines, in the creation of the ‘new man’ and ‘new lad’ codings of masculine appearance and behaviour, MacKinnon’s work is advanced by Nixon (2001). His analysis of the British advertising industry in the 1980s and 1990s, maps mass media’s influence on these constructions. Crewe (2003) and Benwell (2002) also focus on the role of the magazine industry in propagating a version of maleness that reflected their readership. These
constructions, I argue, are identifiable in the coding of masculinity in films like *The Full Monty* (Cattaneo, 1997), *Nil by Mouth* (Oldman, 1997) and *The Business*.

The male authorship in these representations of homosociality is, of course, no coincidence, and is similarly reflected in a number of novels and memoirs that appeared during the 2000s. A focus on a personal, and a male, 1980s was adopted in novels like *The Line of Beauty* (Hollinghurst, 2005) and *White City Blue* (Lott, 1999). Lott then followed the latter book with a scathing indictment of a politically and socially divided Thatcher’s Britain in *Rumours of a Hurricane* (2002). The personal connection to the period became more explicit with a number of memoirs, often focusing on the decade’s most polarising figure. *How I Killed Margaret Thatcher* (Cartwright, 2012) and *Maggie and Me* (Barr, 2013) both presented the author’s childhood through the prism of Thatcherism, whilst others packaged their past in more light-hearted terms. With a focus on a personal childhood, the 1980s in books such as *From Working Class Hero to Absolute Disgrace* (Foster, 2009) and Manzoor’s *Greetings from Bury Park* (2007), is presented as a place that, despite its traumas, is ultimately, one of refuge and safety.

The variety of discourse here is wide, reflecting the scope of this work. However, it is important that the combination of the sociological, cultural and political perspectives are balanced. As the work of Nixon and MacKinnon demonstrate, the versions of masculinity available in the films of this survey are reflective of a wider social and cultural phenomenon, arguably driven by political changes. Perhaps then, it is not a coincidence that so many of the 1980s-set memoir and novels discussed here, focus on Margaret Thatcher.
Methodology

As the sources indicate, whilst this work is concerned with the films’ temporal setting, it is not a historical investigation in itself. It is the relationship between these films made in contemporary Britain, with the 1980s, that is of greater interest. The methodology used in such a project must therefore acknowledge these dual concerns. In 1986 Elsaesser documented this difficulty arguing that ‘To do film history today, one has to become an economic historian, a legal expert, a sociologist, an architectural historian, know about censorship and fiscal policy, read trade papers and fan magazines …’ (p. 248). Discourse on methodologies involved in film history has, of course, developed since Elsaesser’s intervention.

The nature of this project with its focus on the films’ text, their authorship and a wider social and cultural interest in the past, encompasses much of what Chapman, Glancy and Harper term *The New Film History* (2007). The authors define this term in respect of three key areas. Firstly, they require a ‘greater level of methodological sophistication’ including an awareness of the films’ social and production context (2007, p.6). Secondly, they foreground ‘the central importance of primary sources’ (2007, p.7). Finally, they recommend ‘an understanding that films are cultural artefacts’, which requires a consideration of the films’ formal properties outside of purely narrative readings. This methodology is, of course, conflicts with that of Rosenstone, as discussed earlier. Whilst Rosenstone’s approach is far more philosophical and speculative, it does, like Chapman et al, acknowledge the importance of production context. I feel that both models, therefore, can add to the methodology needed to explore this work’s focus on the films’ social, cultural and industrial influences. I have, therefore, identified three modes of investigation required for a thorough
consideration of this thesis’ aims: Interview Analysis, Discourse Analysis and Textual Analysis, detailed in the following sections.

**Interview Analysis**

The role of primary research, and specifically interviews, is, as already stated, a pivotal one in a project of this nature. This has especially been the case in respect of the adaptation process, a procedure particularly fraught when converting autobiographical material. It is significant, therefore, that authors were addressing the 1980s through their work in a far more subconscious way than I had previously realised. This highlights one of the strengths of conducting interviews, that of allowing a subject to procrastinate or linger on facts, or decisions, previously buried as distant memories. Of course, whilst the interviews I conducted added a great deal to this thesis’ argument around the role of masculine authorship in films set in the 1980s, there are a number of disadvantages with this approach.

I was aware that I was discussing a subject that had an impact on many people, not just the author. His very personal work had been appropriated by a larger body of people, becoming a film production rather than a personal story. Soliciting responses that focused on the personal and not the corporate, was a difficult task, particularly in the circumstances of a telephone interview. The restrictions presented by such a medium included a lack of access to body language or facial expressions. Such rudimentary factors in effective communication can inhibit specific lines of questioning. With purely verbal responses, questioning is far less nuanced or reactive. This is further complicated by the interviewee’s right to consider his responses and make any changes to the agreed text. It is perhaps a measure of the emotiveness of this work that such a right was exercised in almost all cases where an interview was sought.
Whilst this work is greatly enhanced by the contribution of all the interviewees, specifically in providing a hitherto hidden perspective on authorship, interviews with others may have advanced this discussion. Although there is a great deal of material in journals and the popular press about directors like Shane Meadows, some of the lesser-known ones, such as Justin Kerrigan, director of I Know, You Know (2008), are less well represented. Unfortunately, I was unable to secure interviews with either of these men, despite efforts, but I believe a wider range of authorial input would have expanded my work on the personal, therapeutic nature of authorship in these films.

**Discourse Analysis**

Whilst there are, of course, a number of distinct advantages to speaking to those agents involved in the films directly, the writings of others will provide alternative perspectives. These views derive from a myriad of sources: books, journals, newspapers and magazines, in particular. Discourse of interest here encompass a range of subjects, mirroring the scope of this work and incorporating sociological, popular cultural, historiographical and cinematic perspectives. Analysis of such discourse is a vital component of my methodology. Analysis of the writings of a number of authors - in respect of the films’ social and political context as well as the textual perspective, for example - is vital if we are to fully understand their influence. In particular, their relationship to politics, of the 1980s and of contemporary Britain, is crucial to comprehend.

It is, perhaps, of little surprise that the shadow of Thatcherism hangs over many of these contemporary films, but I believe it is of more interest to consider how their political perspective compares with the films of the Thatcher era. If they are, as I contend, far less polemical than their predecessors, why is that? And what does that indicate about current British society’s relationship with its 1980s past? Again, it is useful to reintroduce my
discussion with Tony Benn at this point. Thatcher’s successors, Gordon Brown and Tony Blair, Benn told me, came to the conclusion that, ‘there could never be another Labour election victory unless it adopted Mrs Thatcher’s economic policies’. This of course, was the origins of New Labour. Others, like left-wing journalist Owen Jones, argue that the legacy of Thatcherism is even more invidious than that, for he states it laid, ‘the intellectual foundations of radical right-wing ideas (before) popularizing them to a mass audience’ (2014, p.45). However, Benn and Jones’ point does have a currency beyond party politics. If true – and I believe the evidence of both prime ministers’ record in office indicates Benn is right – a decision was made by the Establishment in the early 1990s that the divisive and corrosive politics of the 1980s was to be accepted as being not only a component of mainstream British politics but its central plank.

Raymond Williams’ essay, ‘Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory’ (1973) is, perhaps, a logical reference point when considering the relationship between Benn’s analysis of contemporary British politics and this work’s focus on popular culture. Williams’ notion of ‘incorporation’ is a particularly helpful concept which, I believe, can help clarify this connection, particularly around the notion that the subsuming of Thatcherism into established politics has normalised, or ‘incorporated’, her ideology. We know that Thatcher’s politics were not universally popular in the 1980s, the record of social unrest of that period is testament to that, but perhaps we need to be reminded of how far-reaching the scope of Thatcher’s plan to end consensus politics in Britain really was. In Williams’ parlance, the social values and practices espoused by Thatcherism; free market thinking, rolling back the state and a focus of meretricious behaviours to encourage social aspiration, were firmly in the residual category of the superstructural model. Williams acknowledges that whilst residual social practices are, ‘at some distance from the effective dominant culture’ incorporation of these values is often inevitable if there are to make sense to society (1973,
The reason for this incorporation is, of course, difficult to ascertain. In political terms the desire to win elections, to promote a political ideology, is a strong driver. New Labour realised that Thatcher and her governments, as well as those of her immediate successor, John Major, won elections despite their unpopularity amongst swathes of the electorate. But, in cultural terms there are surely other influences on the way we, as a society, deal with our political past.

A brief comparison of the political tone set in some British films of the 1980s and the contemporary 1980s-set ones, dealt with in more detail in Chapter One, demonstrates this political shift. The polemic of a number of British films, specifically those from a social realist perspective, such as *Letter to Brezhnev* (Bernard, 1985) and *My Beautiful Laundrette* (Frears, 1985) is palpable even when viewed now. Bernard’s film, in particular, is an eviscerating condemnation of the effect of Thatcherism on working-class communities and particularly noteworthy for its rare use of female protagonists. In fact both films, in common with a number of British politicised social realist films of the 1980s, present identity politics as central to their critique of 1980s society, much like the British New Wave films of the 1950s and 1960s. But while there is nothing in any of the films of this survey that approaches the uncompromisingly political response of films like *Letter to Brezhnev*, there is certainly a trace of a unease with contemporary gender politics which allows them to present 1980s masculinity through a nostalgic prism. The incorporation that Williams describes is, perhaps, now being reflected in the diffident way in which the contemporary films treat Thatcherism. But we must be careful here. Williams argues, quite rightly, against Marx’s notion of reflectionism in the relationship between the base and superstructure, also highlighted by Chapman, Glancy and Harper (2007, p.6). Whilst arguing for a *New Film History* they state the usefulness of a ‘process and agency’ methodology which, crucially, considers how ‘films
are shaped and determined by a combination of historical processes ... and individual agency’ (2007, p.6).

As this thesis argues nostalgia is also a strong component of the provenance, and content, of these films. It is here we can see how another aspect of Williams’ work can be applied to the methodology I adopt. Many of the authors of these films assume a policy of disavowal when it comes to publicly, and textually, addressing key aspects of the 1980s. This is particularly obvious with Steve McQueen, specifically, denying any political narrative viewpoint in his film *Hunger* (2008), discussed in more detail in Chapter Two. But can this disavowal perhaps, also be viewed as a nostalgic response? I argue that many of the films, in their political perspectives can be viewed as nostalgic for the residual practices of the past; those that have now become normalised and incorporated into our contemporary social and political fabric.

The films symbolise this most commonly with their engagement with the 1980s through popular cultural signifiers such as pop music and clothes. These symbols of the past, regurgitated and re-presented for a modern audience, are in many respects a nostalgic reflex. They are a recalling of a much happier past, a time remembered with fondness. The 1980s as a unique space in our contemporary memory is a vital consideration of this work and again the work of Williams is useful in ordering this perspective. In discussing what he calls ‘structures of feeling’ - describing this ‘in a sense (as) a culture of a period’ - it is here perhaps, that Williams’ ideas can be interlaced whilst considering the perspectives of these films (1981, p.48).

Mulling over the nebulous nature of cultural memory, Brabazon asks a useful question which may help us assess Williams’ theory of ‘structures of feeling’:
Complexity and diversity are always lost at the moment identity is categorized and commodified, how do we (con)textualise torn movie tickets, sweat on a dance floor, fingerless gloves and a pair of Raybans?’ (2005, p. 19).

Williams argues such perspectives are formed by a ‘selective tradition’, informed by a cultural and political elite who, in effect, select the popular memories of a period for future consumption (1981, p.50). Returning to our previous example, we can detect, perhaps, how the Establishment has facilitated Thatcherism’s shift from the residual to the incorporated. Arguably therefore, the memory of Thatcher, and the 1980s specifically, is a conditioned one. These films, I argue, even in their nostalgic nature, are an attempt to reclaim the period from its incorporated status. Whilst Williams warns against underestimating the power of interpretation in favour of the selective approach, these texts clearly embrace both aspects, perhaps acknowledging their conflict between the personal and the political. This is particularly evident in the manner in which these films engage with 1980s masculinity. Whilst they are arguably conservative in their rendering of a very traditional form of masculinity there is a hint of a more nuanced nostalgia for that model.

The 1980s as cultural capital is an emerging theme here which can only be truly evaluated through a consideration of sources across popular culture. As with all these media, film has its own history, one that influences its contemporary form. Discourse of film historiography allows an insight into the evolution of this form. Reference to Chapman et al again, is vital here. To fully place the films within their social context we must consider their evolution. Film histories not only trace the industrial changes in film, usually through social and political means, but address the production context of the films. This discourse, as the heritage film demonstrates, ensures that the political, social and industrial context of these films, allows a tracing of their influence not only across other media, but within film history as well. I contend that such an approach anchors the textual readings of these films.
Textual Analysis

There are a number of recurring questions that require recourse to a thorough analysis of the films’ visual and narrative properties. For example, exactly how do these films represent the past and how do they negotiate notions of authenticity, specifically in terms of mise-en-scène? Additionally, close readings of a number of these films, selected by thematic content, will allow a consideration of how the films’ authors render their personal memories of the 1980s. Textual analysis will allow a consideration of not only how the 1980s are presented in terms of signifiers, and why such signifiers are selected, but what the films tell us about their author’s masculine perspective on the period.

Politically these films require a much more thorough textual reading and this has been aided by the aforesaid interviews with specific authors, but in assessing these perspectives recourse is also required to the films of the 1980s, the counterparts of the films of this survey. It is here that, as Chapter One details, the evolution of popular culture, and cinema’s, relationship to the socio-political elements of the decade can really be ascertained. Williams argues that it is often studying the, ‘arts of a period, taking these to include characteristic approaches and tones in argument, (that) are of major importance’ (1973, p.48) in determining the context from which these films emerged.

My methodological focus on these three categories of investigation, as already noted, clearly acknowledges Chapman, Glancy and Harper’s approach to film history. But I must also acknowledge the influence of Rosenstone’s work on my methodology. His speculative approach to film’s function in representing the past, is a progressive one, which, I argue, goes to the heart of the emotional relationship between film and nostalgia.
Structure

The structure of this thesis has a number of different considerations. Its thematic approach will ensure the key topics, discussed in Research Contexts - nostalgia, media recycling, British cinema and masculinity – are fully examined within the context of these films’ relationship with the 1980s. My approach will incorporate the lifecycle of the films, from provenance to reception, as outlined in the section on methodology. Chapters Two to Four will adopt this thematic structure, firstly dealing with the theoretical and practical aspects of the chapter’s topic. This will lead to three case studies, all adopting a wide-ranging consideration of the chosen film. Chapters One and Five differ slightly in structure because of their function of placing the films within the wider phenomenon of media recycling.

Chapter One, 1980s British Cinema and Cultural Nostalgia, maps the cultural conditions of these films, specifically the origins of the 1980s nostalgic impulse. The first chapter therefore, involves a charting of 1980s cultural nostalgia. The origins of this phenomenon will be traced through three distinct sections, focusing on 1980s cultural nostalgia and British cinema of that period, before examining the films of this survey, their patterns and commonalities, detailed in Appendices One and Two. This chapter’s aim, therefore, is to position film within the wider cultural engagement with the 1980s, whilst establishing their function, as a body of films, within historical British cinema. Concluding by focusing on the films’ common features, the chapter will broaden its analysis of cultural signifiers to include the emphasis of the second chapter, Politics, Society and Thatcher: Iconography and ideology in contemporary 1980s films.

In Chapter Two therefore, the emergence of Thatcher as a signifier of the period will be discussed. The place of Thatcher in popular, personal and cultural memory, will be established to determine her ongoing influence on representations of the 1980s. The case studies, Hunger, Cass and Is Anybody There?, will then demonstrate how the personal and
political iconography of Thatcher is appropriated in these films. The different methods of engaging with 1980s politics through personal, direct and indirect representations is a key consideration here when determining the legacy of Thatcher on the 1980s.

The theme of masculinity, dominant throughout this work, starts to emerge in Chapter Three; Masculinity, Patriarchy and Family. The shifts in social and mediated constructions of masculinity will be considered in this chapter’s first section which will focus on how British cinema responded to the changes in the coding of gender following the Second World War. The case studies of this section: Clubbed, I Know You Know and The Firm foreground male authorship as a dominant factor in their presentation of a subjective 1980s. How the author presents a personal 1980s, arguably present in all these films, through individual recollection and visual style, allows an analysis of the role of patriarchy in these films.

Gender also dominates Chapter Four, Youth and the 1980s: Nostalgia, Popular Culture and Authenticity, with the focus on young, male protagonists, introducing new perspectives on the films’ relationship with nostalgia. The notion of differing levels of nostalgia for the 1980s is one that is acknowledged by many of these films’ agents. In this chapter the emergence of an ‘alternative 80s’, one that exists as a darker, less glamorous, version of that presented through cultural nostalgia, will be considered in respect of the authors’ attempts to distance their film from traditional perspectives of the decade. The case studies of this chapter: The History Boys, Starter for 10 and The Business, rely very heavily on 1980s cultural signifiers, specifically musical ones. How these produce different perspectives and meaning is a key area of exploration in this chapter’s exploration of the different layers of nostalgic engagement in the 1980s.

Finally, Chapter Five, Constructing the 1980s: Marketing and Critical Reception, explores notions of nostalgia in the reception of this body of films. This chapter brings the
thesis full circle. Whereas Chapter One explored the notion of 1980s cultural nostalgia, its origins and its influence on British cinema, this chapter explores its reverse. The body of films discussed over the course of this thesis indicates, I argue, a major contribution to 1980s cultural nostalgia. What is the extent of that contribution? Through a discussion of the marketing and critical reception of *The History Boys*, *Son of Rambow* and *This is England*, the influence of this thesis’ key concerns, media recycling, British cinema, nostalgia and masculinity can be traced with specific regard to critical responses to British cinema’s contribution to the 1980s retrospectives.

This work will begin by exploring what I mean by media recycling and 1980s cultural nostalgia. How do these terms help us relate to that decade? This is perhaps best explained by a consideration of the origins of 1980s nostalgia before introducing the films, their commonalities and the context in which we must view them.
Chapter One - 1980s British cinema and cultural nostalgia

Introduction

British cinema’s recent response to the 1980s, almost two decades on, is part of a much broader, cultural reappraisal of the period. Such interaction, through critique, re-invention and parody, indicates a continuing fascination with the era, specifically through music, fashion, television, theatre and literature. All these cultural forms have adopted distinctive 1980s retrospectives in recent years. This chapter aims to trace this activity, how it differs from medium to medium and, most importantly, its determinants. Through this analysis, the place of film - and specifically the films of this survey - will emerge, enabling us to locate British cinema’s unique contribution to 1980s cultural nostalgia. The 1980s is, of course, not unique in its ability to stir cultural memories and mobilise nostalgia. I will, therefore, draw on key literature about society’s cultural interactions with the past in order to assess the place of the 1980s within this phenomenon of cultural recycling.

The concept of cultural recycling is one that is predicated on the labelling of the past to enable easy recollection. It is important therefore to initially consider what I mean by the 1980s. This will involve an examination of the notion of periodisation: the categorising of the recent past into handily identifiable units, as a sort of cultural shorthand. Such analysis will provide an insight into the media’s fascination with the cultural past, creating the foundation for a fuller consideration of the nature of retrospectives, particularly those that preceded the 1980s. The chapter will therefore, be most concerned with the methodology of cultural retrospectives. Making a clear distinction between social and cultural engagement with the past, it will assess, in its first section, the symbiotic relationship between social histories and cultural recycling, in an attempt to understand the diverse ways in which British society responds to the 1980s. This section will end with a comprehensive history of 1980s retrospectives, beginning with a profile of Peter York, the architect of many of the
subsequent revivals. This will allow a full consideration of the role of popular culture in this recycling process. With different media re-presenting and engaging with the 1980s in diverse ways, the function of cinema as a unique medium for re-visioning the past begins to emerge here.

Section Two will then trace the cultural recycling of the 1980s through the medium of cinema. An examination of not just the film industry of that period, but the types of films being made, will consider how the films of this survey are a component of British film history, as well as a wider cultural engagement with the past. Questions around the influence of, not just the heritage films of the 1980s but others sponsored by Film4, on contemporary authors and directors are, of course, useful. Here, notions of heritage will be explored with a short summary of initial interventions into the heritage film debate and the political background to the films. What are the lines of continuity between these films and those of my survey? Such considerations should be borne in mind when focusing on the films’ gender perspective. The evolution of the heritage films’ focus on male characters should, then, be considered through recourse to ‘post-heritage’ cinema which, I argue, with reference to Powrie’s ‘alternative heritage’ films, present a class-centric perspective of British masculinity (2000, pp. 316-326). Powrie’s theory of a number of period-set films in the 1980s and 1990s with a young, male, working-class protagonist, whilst continuing themes from the British New Wave and perspectives from heritage films, also resonates with the personal stories of this study’s films.

The final part of this section will introduce the films themselves, their authorship and their thematic and narrative concerns. With seventeen 1980s-set British films all released between 2005 and 2010, this section will first consider some of the broad commonalities between them, developing key themes and concerns with a focus on authorship and production context. These themes, detailed in Appendix 1 and considered throughout the
next four chapters, are, I argue, the dominant concerns of the films, and their authors. Initially, therefore, we must consider the determinants of this relationship which, I contend, lays with a wider cultural engagement with the past. It is, however, the 1980s that I argue dominates much of the recent social and cultural nostalgic activity.

British cultural nostalgia: History, memory and the 1980s

Historical, cultural and social contexts

The fascination for a recent past, coloured by personal and popular recollection, is one that has developed in recent years as a response to a number of social, cultural and political imperatives. With the means, and the opportunity, to access the past, increasing, through digital means, we are now living in an era where the past is often documented by visual media. The focus on the recent past, of course, has the benefit of first-hand knowledge - subject to the vagaries and inconsistencies of the human memory – but can now often be supplemented by a plethora of documentary evidence, from a multitude of media. But the prevalence of this material has not only increased our access to the past but also changed our relationship to it. The pervasiveness of nostalgia-centred activity, exemplified by popular culture’s fascination with the past, has also highlighted how it is packaged for nostalgic rediscovering. The method of categorising the past through a cultural appreciation of ten year spells, or ‘decade-based revivalism’, is a mode of remembrance increasingly appropriated, particularly by the media, in recalling our cultural past (Guffey, 2006, p. 115). This process of engaging with recent history has dominated notions of nostalgia associated with popular culture for many years, and is a phenomenon that has grown, with the media, and television in particular, adopting easy categorisations to present tightly packaged
memories within the constraints of a decade specific label. Whilst largely confined to cultural nostalgia – presenting the past through easily identifiable cultural artefacts - the use of periodisations, such as the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, has increasingly been adopted by social historians. One, Marwick, acknowledges the reductiveness of this specific packaging of the past, particularly its nebulous nature which doesn’t conveniently ‘coincide with decades’ (1998, p. 5). However, as he goes on to contend, the past, ‘is so extensive and complex’ that it is the unwieldy nature of history which requires some form of structure and order, which of course periodisation seeks to do (1998, p. 5). Others, like Jameson, have ideological issues with the way periodisations assert a ‘historical period as massive homogeneity’ (1991, pp. 3-4). The notion that this categorising of the past presents a history confined by the parameters of an authorial construct, is at the centre of Jameson’s argument (1991, p. 5). He illustrates the result of these manufactured memories in visceral terms, arguing that periodisations create ‘an increasingly closed and terrifying machine’, which ultimately entraps the reader within the confines of the author’s creation (1991, p.5). This can be particularly problematic in respect of social history. Whilst the adoption of periodisations automatically implies a tacit agreement between reader and author around the parameters of the temporal scale of the book, as Marwick states, they also act as a shortcut to the past (1998, p.5). But whilst the decade centred focus of such books seems like an artificial construct, social historians such as Dominic Sandbrook, argue for a more focused consideration demonstrated by period’s that are grouped by their ‘own flavour and personality’ (2010, p. 10).

This highlights a clear distinction between social and cultural history with decades defined far more precisely by authors like Marwick, who argues they ‘contain a certain unity’ with ‘identifiable points of change’ in any period of social history (1998, p.5). It is interesting, therefore, that another social historian, Sandbrook, tends to avoid over-categorising his work, preferring to focus on four-year periods instead of decades, despite this approach
being no less problematic. Sandbrook’s methodology highlights a key function of social history which serves to determine social trends through a tracing of important events within an era. Sandbrook’s argument that there is a great deal of continuity between the 1960s and 1970s, and with the 1970s and 1980s, seemingly dispenses with the notion of decade-centred periodisations in respect of social history (2010, p.10). However, the question of how we define a decade through seismic events is clearly an important departure point for this discussion. Identifying the main cultural or social-political points of a decade is often a process that starts from a retrospective position, with many of a period’s signifiers closely associated with social and cultural memory, rather than global or national ‘events’. It is here that the social and political elements - most often addressed in social histories - and the popular cultural elements, domain of the cultural historian, dovetail. How each informs our relationship with the recent past, and the 1980s in particular, is a vital consideration, as is their positioning in the evolution of decade based nostalgic activity. Harper and Smith, in their tracing of the roots of 1970s retrospectives, argue that social histories of the period only began to emerge in 2006, ten years after the cultural revisiting of the era, indicating that the process of recollection and recycling is an incremental one which proceeds through a number of different levels (2012, p. 1). There is evidence that the recycling of many decades, through cultural and social engagement, has followed the pattern identified by Harper and Smith, perhaps echoing the oft-repeated theory that decades are recycled and recalled in twenty-year cycles.

The 1980s’ unique relationship with contemporary Britain has, in contrast, developed at a much quicker pace, allowing us to trace its provenance by considering the era-defining events which dominate the decade, as documented in the social histories of the period. Writing on the 1970s, Beckett identifies the lightning rod for all of these as Thatcherism, with its principal disciple setting the tone for the socio-political environment in
the ensuing years (2009, p.520). But whilst there is consensus here, with the 1980s being defined by Thatcher’s premiership conveniently spanning 1979 and 1990, the precise starting point of Thatcherism’s social and cultural impact is contested. Beckett states that 1982 marks the start of Thatcher’s ideology finally taking root in British society, indicating the decade started here. Collins (2000) agrees, but argues that it was the Falklands conflict that acted as the catalyst for the beginning of the 1980s and the end of the ‘Long 1970s’ with its precarious economics (Beckett, 2009, p. 518). Interestingly, such distinctions did not trouble the authors of a number of 1980s social histories which began to emerge in 2010. Turner with Rejoice Rejoice (2010) and McSmith with No Such Thing as Society (2010), take, as their book titles suggest, Thatcherism as the glue which binds the decade’s themes together. However the books, in common with a later social history by Stewart (2013), focus on the 1980s as a whole, perhaps indicating a wider marketing consideration. The structure of these books, however, ensures a wide-ranging consideration of the decade, covering all of its major cultural, political and social events. This is further evidence, I contend, of social history adopting the periodisation criteria of popular culture, albeit when addressing loftier material. It is interesting to note that while both Turner and McSmith’s books are dominated by the key ideological tenets of the decade: The Falklands War, free market economics and international relations, they also acknowledge the influence of popular culture. Turner’s book is, in fact, structured around 1980s pop music lyrics. Whilst the academic interest in the 1980s has developed within a broader curiosity for social history, the nature of these revivals indicates a distinctive aspect of society’s engagement with the 1980s, rooted in the decade’s own relationship with the past. Peter York, cultural guru, argues that adherence to the twenty year rule of revivals would ensure the 1980s recycled the 1960s but, with limited exceptions, this was not the case, with the decade more focused on the ‘exciting present and
its imagined future’ (2010, p. 15). The 1980s therefore, appeared to emerge even in the early 1990s as a decade that could not be neatly pigeon-holed.

**Recycling 1980s popular culture**

Although I contend that the haste with which the 1980s was resurrected for the gratification of popular culture is a factor in how contemporary Britain views the period, the medium in which this initial retrospective emerged is particularly noteworthy. Although the 1980s have subsequently been widely explored by many media, including theatre, literature and, of course, cinema, all of which I will explore later in this section, it was television which first approached a retrospective of the era, a mere six years after the decade ended. The six-part BBC series, *Peter York’s Eighties* (Bruce, 1996), attempted an analytical - albeit superficial - approach to revisiting and reviving the decade. The series was accompanied by a book as well as a *Radio Times* article and newspaper attention (York, 1996). Interest in the decade, even at this early stage, was sufficient for a wider cultural engagement with the 1980s which attracted the disapproval of at least one journalist. Connolly’s response to this, ‘six-part analysis of quite ridiculously recent social history’ was a vociferous attack on the recycling of recent history (1995). But, perhaps indicating that he expected little better from television, he saved the most opprobrium for ‘high art’s’ engagement in this nostalgia stating, ‘The National Portrait Gallery, God help us, is chipping in with an exhibition of paintings, photographs and sculpture of people of the decade’ (1995). The curator of this premature revisiting of the 1980s, and perhaps more deserving of Connolly’s condemnation, was Peter York.

York’s status as chronicler of the decade’s cultural changes, is one that evolved throughout the 1980s. It began in 1982 with the publication of his seminal commentary on the upper classes, *The Sloane Ranger Handbook*, co-authored with Ann Barr (1982). Their
thesis was based on a developing anthropological shift in British society, emphasised by the deepening divisions in its composition, particularly in respect of wealth and poverty. The book focused on an elite group, termed the Sloane Ranger by the authors. These women were born into wealth, and often aristocracy, and were ‘self-consciously disconnected from modern egalitarian or even meritocratic assumptions’ (Stewart, 2013, p.414). Whilst seemingly at odds with much of British society, the book was extremely popular, selling a million copies in its first two years (Stewart, 2013, p.415). This may, of course, have been linked to the book’s artwork. With a picture of the ultimate Sloane Ranger - Lady Diana Spencer - on the cover, the authors specifically forged a connection with a nostalgia for British heritage and social aspiration. The success of the book reinforced York’s role as the cultural arbiter of the 1980s which continued even beyond the decade’s end when he re-emerged questioning British society’s relationship with the 1980s.

York’s assertion that we were unable to make sense of the 1990s because the 1980s were unresolved, seems now to be a superficial response to a decade that was only six years old. But in his 1996 analysis of the legacy of the 1980s, through his book and television series, York makes an important point that closure was complex because, ‘People were in denial. They were conflicted about the eighties’ (1996, p. 18). This conflict is perhaps at the heart of the 1980s appeal and succinctly highlights the variance in responses to one of the most divisive decades in the twentieth century. Despite his rationale however, York’s early reappraisal of the period, in a class-conscious review of the 1980s, appears to ignore these complexities. Whilst for many, the connotations of the period are predominantly negative, with the widening of the division between rich and poor and social unrest amongst the working classes, York takes an elitist position preferring to focus on the privileged few who could have come from the pages of The Sloane Ranger Handbook. He indicates that the middle and upper class view of the decade has been omitted and that they should not feel
guilty for profiting from the decade in which, ‘Britain felt it could achieve anything’. Peter York’s early intervention in the revisiting of the 1980s goes on to indicate that it is their guilt that needs resolving before society can move on. York’s perspective does not however, engage with that of working-class disaffection which dominates both social histories of the 1980s and the backward-looking films that begin to emerge in the 1990s (1996, p. 18). It is, perhaps, because of York’s marginalising of the lower strata of British society, that despite all his attempts to provide closure, the 1980s as a site of nostalgia is still widely visited. York did, however, acknowledge more populist subjects in his series, as the focus took an occasional nostalgic angle, concentrating on the era’s popular culture, specifically clothing, technology and music. Peter York’s Eighties, ultimately, became a prototype for a new type of television, fascinated with celebrity and ‘expert’ talking heads’ responses to the past and, specifically, popular culture. The evocation of nostalgia through popular cultural means was, of course, a primary function of York’s programme and is one which has dominated mediated versions of the 1980s ever since.

**Popular cultural responses – Music, fashion, television, theatre and literature**

Following York’s early instigation of this discussion about the legacy of the 1980s in Britain, the decade has been constantly revisited by popular culture. Whilst television has been at the forefront of much of this engagement, the worlds of fashion, theatre, literature and cinema have all consistently contributed to 1980s nostalgia over the past two decades. Following the success of York’s 1996/7 revival it was, in fact, popular music which developed perhaps the most long-term nostalgic association with the era. 1980s pop groups were revitalised, sometimes even reforming, for the Here and Now pop music tour events, which began in 2001. Still touring, these events focus exclusively on 1980s acts and have subsequently become popular with ‘nostalgics’ keen to reconnect with their past, often, it
must be said, in an ironic way. These popular and lucrative events essentially acted as a live version of the popular compilation albums, of which the 1980s-centred ones were, even then, beginning to emerge with increasing regularity. In retrospect Here and Now can also be seen as a precursor for the early 2000s trend for festivals, with their audience dutifully migrating to retro-festivals as the first decade of the new century progressed. Currently the most popular of the 1980s-themed festivals is Rewind (2009 – present) which plays to 40,000 people each summer in dual locations at Henley-on-Thames and Perth, Scotland. Such mechanisms for engaging with 1980s music, supplemented by 1980s-centred radio and television channels, have proved so popular that some bands have broken free from the retro shackles of the tours. Groups like Heaven 17 and Aha now tour regularly on an independent basis and whilst most of their songs are from their back catalogue, they have gained greater credibility through their association with, and influence on, younger bands like La Roux and Little Boots. These pop artists emerging in 2008-2009, spearheaded a revival of 1980s music that not only embraced the music of the past but reimagined it for a new generation. Whilst the style of music recalled mostly 1980s electro-pop bands like The Human League, the styling of upcoming musicians, like Hurts, also borrowed from the era, reflecting fashion’s ongoing fascination with the 1980s.

These contemporary perspectives of the past are, of course, an important component of retro, often associated particularly with popular music. They are perhaps, though, most common in one of the most influential engagements with recent decades: clothing and style. Fox demonstrates fashion’s constant re-imagining of the past by recalling how the Seventies’ embraced Fifties Rockabilly in films like That’ll be the Day (Whatham, 1973). As she recounts, a similar look reappeared the following decade but with subtle differences as the retro style of Rockabilly became the modish Psychobilly in the 1980s (Fox, 1995). Of course, as Dolce and Gabbana emphasise, the process of appropriating past styles
is not purely aesthetic but can reflect ‘a new mood and, perhaps more likely, a need to be associated with that mood’ (Quick, 1995). For new young designers emerging, the desire to re-interpret the recent past, regardless of first-hand experience of it, is difficult to resist. Hemingway suggests such interest in the 1980s is a healthy one, for as earlier adopters he implies stylists have a duty to re-invent the past for subsequent generations (BBC, 2010). Others, like Cartner-Morley, argue that such retro designing implies a lack of inspiration. The journalist’s implication that fashion reinvents rather than creates perhaps says more about the industry than it does about 1980s style (2000). But this unique identity, associated with many aspects of the decade’s popular culture, is, in terms of fashion, specifically linked with Thatcherism. The clothing which perhaps best represents the 1980s - big-hair and shoulder pads for women and red braces and pinstripe suits for men - is associated with the boom aspect of 1980s Britain, fuelled by Thatcher’s free market ideology. Channelling what Hawkins calls a ‘greed is good’ ethos, serves as a controversial reminder of the 1980s’ negative connotations with elitism and profligacy (2001). The theme of Thatcherism as a destructive social force is one which also emerges as a focus for other revisionist cultural forms, specifically theatre.

The polemical stance taken by this medium in respect of its portrayal of the 1980s in recent years, acknowledges the visual and aural presence of Margaret Thatcher. As I argue in Chapter Two, her distinctive appearance and style has been constantly revisited on film and is also apparent in contemporary plays, which engage with the Thatcher decade. Productions like Little Madam by Graham in 2007, Eldridge’s 2006 production of Market Boy and Thatcher the Musical by Cooke in 2006, placed the former prime minister firmly at the centre of the 1980s revival. Indicating the schismatic nature of Thatcher, the latter play was described as, ‘extraordinarily affectionate’ (Gardner, 2006) to the former premier, whilst others, like Cavendish, describe Ed Waugh and Trevor Wood’s 2009 production at the Shaw
Theatre in London, *Maggie’s End*, as attracting an audience that, ‘cling to their Thatcher-hatred like children to a snotty comfort-blanket’ (2009). Such controversy around Thatcher, whilst not restricted to popular culture as the response to her death attests, does however, indicate the polemical relationship that British theatre has with the 1980s. Billington traces this relationship back to the 1980s with the first example of British theatre’s satirizing of Thatcher as early as 1980, in Howard Brenton and Tony Howard’s *A Short Sharp Shock* (Billington, 2013). Such attacks on the prime minister and her policies then became prevalent throughout the decade, from Caryl Churchill’s 1982 production of *Top Girls* to Ayckbourn’s *A Small Family Business* in 1987. This, of course, reflected not only British theatre’s anger with the government’s free market policies which withdrew much state subsidy for the arts, but a wider artistic dissatisfaction for the prevailing political ideology of the 1980s. The remnants of this can still be seen in many of the recent 1980s-centred plays such as *Maggie’s End* and Tom Green’s 2008 production of *The Death of Margaret Thatcher*. These plays, although still recalling the era through the legacy and iconography of Thatcher, are much darker and far more personal than the 1980s offerings. In both of the aforementioned plays, for example, the focus of the narrative is on Thatcher’s legacy, seen through the prism of her death. This fascination for Thatcher as a symbol of the 1980s - albeit in almost entirely negative terms - emphasises the level of prominence she has been assigned in appraisals of the decade. Politically, others have indicated it also signifies the failure to properly assess her legacy underlining, perhaps, a clear determinant for subsequent reappraisals of the period (Cavendish, 2009).

Thatcher’s reputation fares only marginally better in literature. In *The Line of Beauty* (Hollinghurst, 2005) she appears as an ephemeral being, idolised by those that serve her, yet her political legacy is treated with little deference. Hollinghurst explicitly views the decade through the prism of the social and personal consequences of Thatcherism, albeit from a
privileged middle-class vantage point. Catherine - one of the few characters who rebels against the blinkered, elitist view that dominates the majority of the book - laments, ‘The 80s are going on for ever’; whilst most of the other characters rather hope they will, as they revel in the power, wealth and status Thatcherism has conveyed upon them (2005, p. 393).

Ironically, it is AIDS, a disease associated with a class of people who were far removed from the character’s own lives, which ultimately ends their privileged lifestyle, underlining the often repeated 1980s soundbite that AIDS had no regard for social status. Whilst The Line of Beauty’s protagonist, and author, is a gay man, its perspective is shared by other books set in the 1980s and which centre masculinity in their narratives. Tim Lott’s novel Rumours of a Hurricane (2002), for example, traces the 1980s lives of a working-class couple, Charlie and Maureen. But it is the male member of the family with whom the reader is invited to identify, specifically in his attempts, in the face of increasing change, to restore traditional gender roles, specifically within the family unit. Whilst the couple initially benefit from Thatcher’s domestic policies, through her courting of the aspirational working classes with privatisation and home ownership, the book highlights the dangers inherent in such aspiration. The crushed hopes of many who believed economic freedom and social mobility were at their fingertips is presented predominantly through Charlie’s subversion from radical socialist to embracing the trappings of capitalism and the lure of entrepreneurialism. Rumours of a Hurricane is a cautionary tale, echoed by other 1980s revisionist novels like Stars are Stars (Sampson, 2006), which chart the cost of placing individual aspirations in the hands of Thatcherism, particularly for those at the lower end of the social class system.

As this chapter attests, the determinants for these cultural and social retrospectives are complex. Brabazon argues that the 1980s has a unique pull on us which transcends nostalgia, ‘because they were years of desire: they offered much – tantalised - teased – licked the lips of power – but delivered on few of its sensual pleasures’ (2005, p. 40).
Arguably, as some of the male-centred literature explored earlier indicates, the lack of these pleasures is something felt most by the British male. This relationship is epitomised most clearly within cinema, with the roots of its unique connection with the 1980s lying within the decade’s own relationship with the past. There is a clear link, I argue, with Thatcherism and the rise in society’s engagement with British history during the 1980s and it is indisputable that this correlation had a wide impact on British cinema, both of the time and in contemporary terms. The Thatcher governments were responsible, in pursuit of free-market economics it should be noted, for a major shift in British attitudes to their history as well as provoking a major debate within cinema around the function of new perspectives on the British past.


**The 1980s and British heritage**

The 1980s was perhaps the first decade, since the Sixties, when British cinema was most directly influenced by the prevailing political and social environment. With a large number of politically influenced films emerging during the 1980s, Quart argues that the decade’s ‘film renaissance stands as one of the more positive by-products of the Thatcher ethos, though in an almost totally oppositional and critical manner’ (2006, p. 16). Whilst the number of British films produced in the 1980s was still very low, there were signs of improvement with Walker reporting that the 31 made in 1984 was the highest for some years (2004, p. 3), but it was perhaps the cultural impact where the films were most influential. In this respect we must
not ignore a marginalised, albeit important, strand of British filmmaking in the decade: the oppositional art film. Directors such as Peter Greenaway and Derek Jarman, despite major funding issues, produced vitriolic attacks on the Thatcher governments through films like *The Cook, the Thief, his Wife and her Lover* (Greenaway, 1989) and *The Last of England* (Jarman, 1988). Politics was also close to the surface of the two types of film that dominated British cinema in the 1980s: the social realist film and the heritage film, both of which have become hugely influential. It is certainly clear in their narratives, mise-en-scène and political perspectives that the films of this survey owe the British films of the 1980s a huge debt. This is particularly evident in the way both era’s films engage with the politics of the 1980s although in vastly different ways, highlighting in particular, how influential the heritage film has been within British cinema over the past thirty years.

The roots of the heritage film debate lie in the early years of the Thatcher governments, with the 1980 Heritage Act and its amendment in 1983. In line with Thatcher’s free-market ideology, the 1980 Act abolished traditional funding bodies for heritage sites in an attempt to commodify the tourist industry. Whilst new bodies like English Heritage were created, with an enhanced government subsidy, the ultimate aim was, as Hewison contends somewhat cynically, to force consumers to pay for things that were previously available by right (1995, p. 212). Subsequently many of Britain’s historical monuments were commercially marketed for the first time. Whilst this freed the state from some of its historic burden, the 45 per cent of historic homes owned privately also provided a windfall to some key individuals and non-government heritage organisations like The National Trust (Hewison, 1987, p. 27). This policy was successful, as intended, and increased visits to historical sites throughout the 1980s. In 1985 alone, there were 67 million visits to historic buildings with 1724 heritage sites open to the public (Hewison, 1987, p.27). Of course, not all these tourists came from abroad and the impact on Britons’ own relationship with the past, through
greater access to it, was considerable. Additionally, although these policies were born from a desire to bring the tourist industries into the free market, rather than being based on the ‘vagaries of critical debate’, they did have far-reaching effects on how Britain viewed, and engaged with, their past (Higson, 2003, p. 14). This was exemplified through renewed enthusiasm in popular culture that reflected a broader interest in nostalgia, and particularly those associated with Britain’s past. Whilst nostalgic television scheduling, like The Antiques Roadshow (BBC, 1979 - ), was not exclusive to the 1980s, the popularity of such programmes not only reflected a new wave of engagement with heritage but also created new consumers, with the value of the past as a commodity increasingly scrutinized. The most visual personification of how these policies, and Thatcher’s regressive focus, affected 1980s British culture is perhaps exemplified by the heritage films which emerged.

**Heritage and Social Realist Films of the 1980s**

The heritage film, as widely acknowledged, was often set in a pre-World War 2, rural England and based on established, and specifically English, literature. Its subsequent popularity perhaps indicates the insular nature of the British film industry at that time. The 1980s was the first period for many years when British films had not been financially protected in some way. Thatcher’s disdain for the arts, and approval of a free-market environment, meant much of the government subsidy British cinema had previously attracted, was withdrawn and the industry was at the mercy of Hollywood. This indicated that, despite a long battle within the industry between ‘a mix of industrial, cultural and social motivations’ (Higson, 2011, p. 40), the political bean counters had triumphed. It is perhaps ironic then, that the British film industry’s most successful export at that time was a type of film that embraced British national identity, albeit one set in a traditional past, and often made by the distinctly non-British producer, Merchant Ivory. The impact on the nation’s cinema of the changing
socio-political climate in 1980’s Britain is well documented, with continuing debates still reliant on the initial responses - from Higson (2003) and Craig (1991) - on the significance and preponderance of heritage films. Their argument - that the elitist and backward-looking ideology of Thatcherism strongly influenced the themes and visual styles of certain British costume dramas of the decade – roots the discussion firmly within the politics of the era.

Higson is first to acknowledge the films’ political character, and indeed that of the subsequent debate. In retrospect, though, he does accept that his original intervention in the heritage film debate was essentially a ‘leftist cultural critique’ (2003, p. 80). The importance of Higson’s early work in identifying these films, and initiating a debate on them, however, justifies the reiteration of some of his initial points, specifically in respect of their political perspective. For Higson the right celebrates the films’, ‘joyously patriotic take on a traditional, authentic, indigenous Englishness’, while the left’s view bemoans the films’ problematic use of nostalgia (Higson, 2003, p. 75). This is demonstrated, Higson argues, in the films’ need to, ‘promote the out-moded and elite cultural values and social relationships of a country-house version of Englishness’, (Higson, 2003, p.75). The status of the heritage film in the 1980s and 1990s, as Higson indicates, was therefore predicated on readings of social class.

The other dominant category of British film produced in the 1980s – the social realist drama – epitomised by My Beautiful Laundrette and Letter to Brezhnev, had a far more polemic perspective on Thatcherism and social division. But, as discussed, much of their political content is centred on identity politics. Unusually, Letter to Brezhnev focuses on young, female working-class protagonists, and films like My Beautiful Laundrette and Sammy and Rosie get Laid (Frears, 1987) express social alienation and political engagement through the issues of race and sexual identity. By politicising issues of gender and identity the social realist films of the 1980s arguably recall the disaffection felt by many of the male
protagonists of the British New Wave films, yet in the later films identity politics transcends traditional class interests. Characters like Arthur Seaton from *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* rebelled against British society’s expectation of them as young, working-class men, Johnny (Daniel Day-Lewis), in *My Beautiful Laundrette*, is similarly responding to a society that fails to accept his sexuality. There are also differences, of course, and these are centred primarily around representations of masculinity. Arthur Seaton’s particular coding of masculinity is coherent with the period’s relationship with working-class manual labour. Much of Seaton’s behaviour is therefore linked to an ongoing class struggle, whereas in the 1980s films this link is far less explicit. The later films prefer to view their protagonist’s masculine characteristics through the prism of identity politics.

Regardless, it was perhaps inevitable that these films would be juxtaposed against the heritage film’s perceived elitist version of the past. This debate is characterised by The Sunday Times’ invitation to the historian and government advisor, Professor Norman Stone, in 1988. As Monk (2002, p. 190) notes, the invitation to Stone for comment on six contemporary British films, indicates a commissioned piece, with Stone’s response not particularly unpredictable. He lambasted the messy structure of films such as *The Last of England*, as well as the polemical narratives of *My Beautiful Laundrette* and *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid*. For Stone the films confirmed his belief that the British film industry was, ‘dominated by left wing orthodoxy’ (1988, p. 22) and presumably, in his view, justified his government’s austerity in all things cultural. But the article is also significant for what it tells us about the preferred cinema of Stone, and perhaps by association, the establishment. He talks a great deal about the films he does enjoy, with a strong sense of nostalgia surfacing when he recalls the pleasure of watching old black and white films made for an ‘intelligent audience’ before the experience was destroyed by the 1960s films, which channelled ‘sensationalism and the urge to shock’ (Stone, 1988, p.23). Whilst the article demonstrates
how remote the government’s perspective of British culture was, Stone does however acknowledge, seemingly with a lack of irony, that the films he viewed may have suffered from a dearth of funds. Stone ends his article on a positive note, declaring, ‘we still produce some good, and even very good, films of a traditional kind. Passage to India (Lean, 1984), A Room with a View (Ivory, 1985) and Hope and Glory show what can be done’, he says (Stone, 1988, p.23).

Like the ideology it was aligned with, the heritage film evolved, re-emerging in later decades as a post-modern, ‘androgy nous (and) ambiguous’ film (Monk, 1995, p.33) re-branded as ‘post-heritage’ because of ‘their refusal to fetishise the past’ (Higson, 2001, p.256). Films such as Shakespeare in Love (Madden, 1998) were self-conscious, playing with their audience’s expectations of a period film, mixing fact with fiction, and embracing a more evolved stance on sexuality and gender identity (Monk, 1995, p.33). These period films mixed the contemporary with the past - often incorporating a popular music soundtrack - whilst simultaneously acknowledging the importance of the heritage film’s provenance in literary adaptation. Whilst the heritage film was evolving, other films began to emerge which also focused on a traditional view of British national identity. These, like their predecessors the heritage film, spoke clearly about Britain’s perception of itself whilst focusing their commercial aspirations firmly on an American market which responded positively to a simulacrum of Britain’s past (Fitzgerald, 2010, p. 47).

These films, often produced by Working Title, were released in the 1990s and into the 2000s and attempted to update the heritage films’ class-based perspective for a contemporary audience. Titles like Four Weddings and a Funeral (Newell, 1994), Notting Hill and Bridget Jones’s Diary (Maguire, 2001) differed from their predecessors in their contemporary, rather than period, setting, but acknowledged their forbears influence. Bridget Jones’s Diary (1997) for example, is based on Helen Fielding’s reworking of the
heritage staple, *Pride and Prejudice* (Austen, 2003). But whilst the geographical locations of the films generally moved, from post-war home counties to contemporary London, the narratives retained the nostalgic value of their predecessors through a precise representation of middle and upper-class consciousness (Hill, 1999, p. 79).

In some respects, therefore, the films of this survey share a number of characteristics with both the original heritage films of the 1980s and 1990s and what Fitzgerald terms ‘new heritage’ – those focusing on middle and upper class concerns of the 1990s and new millennial British male. Essentially backward-looking and with a political perspective, the 1980s-set films made between 2005 and 2010 are also class conscious albeit rooted in working-class perspectives. It is, of course, the heritage film that most invites this comparison and whilst I have already suggested that a political reading of these films is a complex, and perhaps, unfulfilling task, the same could also be said of the films of this survey. It is useful here to refer to Higson’s deconstruction of *Howards End* (Ivory, 1992) in his 2003 monograph, *English Heritage, English Cinema*. This case study highlights the pitfalls of assessing these films in respect of their political sensibilities, with Higson particularly applauding their ‘ambivalence’ (2006, p.149). Higson goes on to applaud the film for championing liberal values, drawing attention to its denouement which, he argues, reinforces its authors social values by introducing a ‘crisis of inheritance’ which sees Henry Wilcox’s (Anthony Hopkins) property passed down the family’s female lineage (2003, p.151).

Many of the films of this survey present an equally confused political perspective. *The History Boys*, for instance, embraces a number of aspects of the heritage film and the later class-centred Working Title films. Arguably the film aesthetizes nostalgic cultural forms in much the same way as the heritage film does. But whereas the camera in films such as *A Room with a View* focuses on the accoutrements of the upper class occupants of country-houses, in *The History Boys* the signifiers are often aural. As Chapter Four indicates,
the film has a nostalgic, elitist perspective with a focus on the art, film and music of the 1940s which sets it apart from contemporary society as much as the heritage film did from the 1980s.

As I have suggested, in a comparative sense, it is logical to view 1980s British cinema and its perspective on politics predominantly through the heritage film. However, social realism will often give a less nuanced and perhaps, more honest, perspective. A direct comparison is available between British films of the 1980s and their contemporary counterparts with *The Firm*, originally made in 1989 and again in 2009. The original, directed by Alan Clarke, was ostensibly a study of the growing football hooligan fraternity. Whilst around since the 1980s the average hooligan gang had evolved during the boom years of Thatcherism with many embracing the social mobility afforded by an ideology that rewarded individualistic endeavour. They are hints of this in the script which describes Bex’s parents’ home as ‘right-to-buy’, a reference to the Thatcher experiment of selling council homes to their residents at deflated prices, ostensibly to increase the Conservative vote. With such a political perspective it is surprising that Nick Love, in remaking the film, removes all reference to this aspect of the original. Of course, as I argue in Chapter Three, there are commercial concerns but there is also the question of political affiliation. An unashamed Thatcherite Nick Love’s perspective on the 1980s, as *The Business*, attests is sometimes ambiguous but never nuanced.

Leggott argues that films like, *Billy Elliot, This is England, The Business* and *The History Boys*, would suggest a film culture that is more comfortable assessing the legacy of preceding political ideologies than attending to those of the present* (2008, p.43). As the examples above demonstrate, the reality is far more complicated. Whilst, in the contemporary 1980s-set films, none are as directly polemical as *Sammy and Rosie get Laid* or even indirectly critical of the government as in *The Cook, the Thief, his Wife and her Lover,*
many of them are critical in a more subtle manner. This is perhaps most apparent in the manner in which both the 1980s films (particularly the social realist ones) and those of this survey, negotiate the socio-political landscape of 1980s Britain. The representation of Thatcherism in the British films of the 1980s was a confident one, particularly in respect of identity politics. Whilst the films of this survey do not share the earlier films disaffection with racial or sexual identity they are profoundly insecure about masculinity. This is evidenced by films like 

Clubbed and Is Anybody There? - which foregrounds an unreliable father figure within an autobiographical narrative. Many of these films indicate a nostalgic view of the traditional coding of masculinity available in the 1980s, particularly in respect of masculine tribal affiliation. This prompts questions around how secure contemporary middle-aged men feel in their gender codification.

It is this dichotomy, of those nuanced criticisms and the celebrations of Thatcherism, probably best demonstrated by Nick Love films, which provides that line of continuity with films of the 1980s, and subsequent years, whilst simultaneously providing a new perspective on the decade’s politics. Returning to Raymond Williams’ work on base and superstructure the perspectives offered by the later films against the earlier ones is a further indictment of how Thatcherism has been incorporated into contemporary culture. This is most apparent, as I indicate in my introduction, when looking at renditions of masculinity in these films.

1980s British cinema and notions of masculinity

Many of the films that Norman Stone objected to, not coincidentally I imagine, were products of perhaps the 1980s most prestigious force in British film, Channel 4. Built on an ethos of backing British filmmakers, the channel created its film commissioning arm, now Film4, in 1982, to discover and promote new, young, British filmmaking talent (Brown, 2007, p.29).
The channel’s devotion to British film influenced the film culture of the decade immensely, with the funding of 170 films, all from independent producers, across the 1980s (Giles, 2006, p. 62). Film4 were, of course, responsible for many of the heritage films of the 1980s and 1990s, specifically those of Merchant Ivory. With an oeuvre that includes not only films of an imperial past, but the social realism of Stephen Frears’ early output, the channel was one of the most prolific, and eclectic, of film producers in the 1980s. Their influence, in terms of not just narrative and visual style, but also in financing independent British film, is apparent in the films of this survey. Although only two were financed by Film4, many others received financial assistance from television production companies such as Channel 4 and BBC, an activity virtually unheard of prior to Film4’s inception. Additionally, there is a line of continuity linking many of these television-funded films. For Auty, the style of Film4’s early output, outside of the heritage film, is constrained by the specific aesthetic demanded by television work which encourages directors ‘to favour the outside world over the film’s ‘own world’’ (1985, p. 63). This ultimately leads, he contends, to a domination of social realism over genre films in the oeuvre of Film4 (Giles, 2006, p. 62). Arguably this style of filmmaking is now the domain of low-budget British independent directors with interiors and character-based narratives dominating these films. We can see this legacy in films such as This is England and The History Boys and, indeed, their repeated showings on television emphasise that perhaps this is where they are more comfortable, with their heavy use of interior space and reliance on dialogue. It is perhaps not a coincidence then that Shane Meadows has since made two sequels to This is England, both for television.

Giles contends that the coherence in the Channel 4 films is evident in their thematic commonalities of disturbance ‘framed and contained by ... structures of reassuring normalcy’ (2006, p. 62). In many ways these films act as a counterbalance to the ordered and structured narratives of the past in the heritage film, by focusing on predominantly working-class
protagonists and their disillusionment with the present and their concerns for the future. It would appear then that these films, emerging from a divided and depressed society, were responding, as arguably heritage films were, to the socio-political environment through recourse to the film grammar of a very traditional British institution. On the surface, at least, the social realist dramas of the 1980s had more in common, with the British New Wave of the 1950s and 1960s than with the contemporary costume dramas.

As with the later films, the social timing of the British New Wave is, of course, crucial. Presenting a post-war predominantly young, male view of a future that rejects a replication of your parent’s past, was a vital component in representing an aspirational generation where work was not defining but a means to increased leisure opportunities. For some, like Hill, however, films like Room at the Top (Clayton, 1959) and Saturday Night and Sunday Morning, provoked deeper questions of the determinants for their protagonist’s disaffection. Hill’s conclusions place the disillusionment of characters like Arthur Seaton within an internal displacement, rejecting a wider societal problem. His argument that ‘The blame, instead, would seem to attach to the individuals themselves, either as willing victims or bearers of ‘bad faith’” indicates the films operate outside the social and political concerns of the time but, like many of the social realist films of the 1980s, place the burden of disaffection on male characters (Hill, 1986, p. 139). This is further echoed in the post-Thatcher dramas of the 1990s, with Hill arguing that both acknowledge a ‘concern for the decline of the traditional working-class’ and, of course, the predominately male workforce in the working-class industry (2000, p.178). Films like The Full Monty and Brassed Off (Herman, 1996) reflect the anxieties of the earlier films’ male characters for an undefined future and these concerns re-emerge in films like Is Anybody There? However, there is another category of film, deriving from the 1980s and 1990s, that focuses on the British New Wave’s concentration of young men attempting to escape their family or social status.
Powrie identifies a number of working-class nostalgia films, all of a realist nature, emerging from the 1980s onwards. His analysis of what he terms ‘alternative heritage’ enables us to trace the roots of the 1980s-set films of this survey not just back to the New Wave films of the 1950s, but to the heritage films of the 1980s (2000, p.316-326). ‘Alternative heritage’ films, contends Powrie, have four common components. The first is the working-class or lower middle-class protagonist. The main character is also always young and male, as seen in the World War 2-set Hope and Glory. Secondly, the films are always set outside London. In common with the works of Shane Meadows and the regional texts of I Know You Know and Fifty Dead Men Walking the regional setting is vital to the film’s narrative. The Liverpool of Terence Davies’ Distant Voices, Still Lives and The Long Day Closes (1992) is an integral character in his films. Thirdly, the narratives of these films according to Powrie, are fragmentary, often lacking in chronology. Finally, but crucially, these films also represent a ‘site of the struggle between extreme and disruptive male violence, and a maternally-centred communal binding’ (Powrie, 2000, p. 325). These films, and Powrie’s theories, demonstrate not only that films featuring a young-male protagonist and set in the recent past were emerging in the decades before 2005, but, I argue, recycle elements of both British New Wave and heritage films.

Powrie argues that these films present a bottom down view of British heritage, highlighting a further distancing from the upper class dominated view of Englishness presented by the heritage films. Additionally, their themes of young, working-class males centred in a rite of passage narrative are specifically set in a recent past, often informed by the author’s personal experience. Whilst this overt use of personal memory adds a ‘cosy nostalgia’ in their recalling of the recent past, their themes and preoccupations embrace an anti-nostalgia view, specifically in their recalling of the patriarch (Powrie, 2000, p. 316). It is
this aspect of the evolution of the heritage film that I argue resonates through the 1980s-set films which emerged between 2005 and 2010.


Authorship

Commonalities in the films of this survey are numerous but varied. The most significant, in terms of this study, are the age, gender and social status of creative agents, age and gender of the protagonists and the themes and concerns of the films’ narratives. A full analysis of the data that informs these commonalities is available in Appendix 2. Initially, if we look at the films’ provenance we can see obvious similarities in narratives, themes and visual style, indicating striking consistencies, particularly in respect of key creative agents. Whilst it is vital to acknowledge the contribution of all creative agents to a film, for the purposes of this survey I have been selective in determining the key personnel for analysis. Due to reasons of space but, more importantly, the level of influence - specifically in respect of the independent, low-budget status of many of these films - this survey will concentrate primarily on the roles of the films’ director and writer. Additionally these functions on a production are particularly influential when the film is based on an original screenplay which is the case in the majority of these texts.

With only seven of the films deriving from adaptations this indicates a reversal of current trends in British cinema which has seen a proliferation of adaptations in recent years. The top 200 international films between 2001 and 2010 produced 34 that derived from UK
story material (UK Film Council, 2011a, p.58). Of those the vast majority, 76 per cent, were adapted from novels (UK Film Council, 2011a, p.59). This lack of original, British, material has understandably prompted concern from some quarters. Fitzgerald argues that this impacts on the next generation of British auteurs because, ‘there seems to have been a falling away of young (or youngish) British directors producing a body of work that might be considered worthy of gaining the authorship tag’ (2010, p. 115). Fitzgerald argues this is in part due to the humble status of the British film industry and its constant battle against the lure of Hollywood for its creative agency. This is exemplified by star directors like Christopher Nolan and Joe Wright who opt for big budget Hollywood projects, in contrast to the less commercial options afforded in the UK (2010, p. 116). This prevailing trend in British cinema perhaps echoes that of the 1980s and 1990s when directors such as Ridley Scott and Alan Parker were lured to Hollywood. The lack of a ‘big name’ director does, however, seem to have reduced the numbers of adapted screenplays. When considering the films of this survey this figure stands at just 53 per cent. These figures are significant because, as Fitzgerald has intimated, there is a correlation between original, often personal, stories and independent cinema. This is highlighted by the UK Film Council’s assertion that between 2001 and 2010 only three per cent of the top 200 international films that relied on UK story material, were based on original screenplays (UK Film Council, 2011a, p.59).

These figures assume a further correlation between studio films and box office success, but also facilitate an exploration of the creative agency behind a small, low budget feature. It is likely this would be based around a concentrated body of people, leading to a more personal perspective and less reliance on external sources. This, Boozer argues, provides a sense of freedom unavailable in environments where producers have greater control. Outside such productions, he states, directors will often write their own scripts, ‘because the source material is to be given a very personal or very specialised interpretation’
This is demonstrated by the five films in this survey which rely on the director either wholly or part writing the screenplay. All depend heavily on autobiography, a factor which also emerges in adapted sources. The two films adapted from novels, *Awaydays* and *Starter for 10* are both essentially coming of age narratives written from a very personal perspective. Whilst marketed as novels, both authors suggest a high level of autobiography within the final text of both book and film. Acknowledging the marketing advantages of authenticity, Nicholls specifically states how both the book and the film of *Starter for 10* were ‘a fairly accurate account of my feelings and behaviour at that time’ (2006, p. 24). As Chapter Three will argue, the desire to present fidelity to a personal history is, perhaps, understandable but in most cases this aspiration for authenticity also applies to the period in which the film is set.

*Autobiography*

This emphasis of getting the period ‘right’ indicates, perhaps unsurprisingly, the commonalities in age amongst these agents. As Chart One in Appendix Two details, most of the 28 people involved in the writing and directing of the seventeen films surveyed here, were born between 1966 and 1972, with the most prevalent birth years being 1969 and 1972. Whilst this may indicate that the films’ emphasis on the 1980s is, therefore, simply a reflection of the key agents’ formative years, there are other significant factors which must be examined when considering the role of the decade within the personal memory of these filmmakers. A key one, of course, is gender and with almost all twenty-eight being male the narratives’ thematic concerns, and the facilitation of personal memory, become far more significant. Additionally as already discussed, in most cases the films represent the writers’
and directors’ personal experiences as young males in the mid-1980s, with the role of the young, male protagonist echoing that of the author. The resultant focus on subcultures, male bonding and patriarchy is, therefore, a key consideration when discussing the films’ narratives in subsequent chapters.

Whilst my earlier discussion on periodisations considered the categorising of ten-year cycles of social and cultural history, it is perhaps significant how many of these films are precise in their temporal setting. Some films, such as *Cass*, *The Rise of the Footsoldier* and *Sex and Drugs and Rock and Roll*, weave their storylines between three, or four decades, with the 1980s aspect often determining the bulk of the narrative. In most cases, these multi-decade films have subtitles which place the storyline precisely within a certain date or year. Where a precise year can be ascertained from the remaining films, as detailed in Appendices One and Two, the most prevalent year of setting is 1983, with a more general early 1980s dominating most narratives. Such a precise placing of the narrative is significant when considering the 1980s within the wider realm of decade based revivalism. Whilst clearly the exact year of the films’ setting is significant, and reinforces the earlier discussion around the importance of events in periodisations, there is a much more personal perspective here that defines the temporal setting. The importance of the films’ association with the early 1980s, and 1983 in particular, may therefore provide a correlation with the films’ setting and the age of the creative agent and is ultimately developed when we consider the films’ thematic concerns.

The most dominant thematic focus in the narrative of these films is that of the coming-of-age narrative. Most of the films are concerned, in various ways, with the negotiation of the journey from childhood to an approximation of adulthood for their young, male protagonists. For some, like Shaun (Thomas Turgoose) in *This is England*, Carty (Nicky Bell) in *Awaydays* and Dom (Calum McNab) in *The Firm*, this experience involves membership
of a subcultural group, usually football hooligans. The homosocial relationships within these groups are vital for the protagonist’s transition between childhood and adulthood. Their narratives are often structured around a young male, in a dysfunctional family and with an absent or inadequate father. The protagonist’s disaffection then often results in an increased influence of a charismatic, older man. This substitute patriarch theme, echoed in other films such as *Is Anybody There?*, dominates these films, indicating their level of anxiety around masculinity and fatherhood. Taking into account the age of the agents involved in these films it also indicates a particularly personal response to changing gender roles.

It is that recollection of a 1980s childhood which unites, I argue, many of these films and their authors. Some, like *Awaydays* author Kevin Sampson, acknowledge this correlation, arguing that such concerns run through all writers of such material, ‘I’d say we’re all nostalgic for our coming-of-age and as such we're inclined to romanticise those times’ (Brooks, 2009). Others, like Meadows (*This is England*) and Jennings (*Son of Rambow*), have also created autobiographical films heavily reliant on personal and cultural memories, whether real or imagined, giving a strong impression of middle-aged men attempting to reconnect with their formative years through cinematic texts. Often these memories are rendered by signifiers of the period. This iconography is presented in diverse ways from the garish ‘casual’ clothing of Nick Love’s criminal fraternity in *The Business*, to the gothic student fashion of *Starter for 10*. Others, like *The History Boys*, attempt to bypass the fashion of the era but, despite a desire to position the film in a fictional 1980s, director Hytner cannot ignore the influence of perhaps the 1980s most enduring signifier, pop music. The boom years of the late 1980s is visible in films like *The Business* and *Clubbed* complete with disco or new romantic music recalling the glamorous aspects of the decade. The alternative, post-Punk, 1980s with its dark, gothic music of The Cure and New Order is also apparent in films such as *Awaydays* and *Starter for 10* presenting, aesthetically at least, an alternative side to the decade. Of course,
as the next chapter will consider, the backdrop to all these versions of the 1980s is the socio-
political landscape. Thatcherism dominates these texts informing their textual elements as 
well as their autobiographical provenance.

**Conclusion**

The notion of cultural recycling is one that I will revisit throughout this study. The ways British 
society engages with its past and the various media that facilitate that engagement, are a 
vital consideration when exploring contemporary British cinema’s relationship with the 1980s. This chapter has considered how the concept of cultural recycling and its relationship 
with social history informs our contemporary relationship with the 1980s. Additionally the 
role of culturally constructed modes of accessing the past, through periodisations, help place the role of cinema in the wider cultural and social engagement with the 1980s.

The 1980s as an instantly recognisable decade, through its music, clothing or 
iconography, has seen many different cultural forms reclaim its identity. The relationship between theatre and Thatcher is one that I have argued was forged in the 1980s when 
theatre felt more disenfranchised than other cultural forms, due to the Government’s 
withdrawal of much of the state’s art funding. There are, of course, traces of such polemic responses in the films of this work. I have considered how the 1980s British film industry, 
through the growing influence of funding from television companies, a predilection for English heritage and a strand of polemical anti-Thatcher narratives, has influenced British films of the 1990s and 2000s. Continuity between these films, and specifically those of this survey, are apparent, with the provenance of these independent films indicating a particular personal response to the 1980s which echoes the films of that era. Additionally, there are
clear narrative and thematic commonalities with a dominant focus on national identity, masculinity and subcultures. As already indicated the dominance of Thatcher, both as a personality and in her political ideology, shadows all the films of the 1980s and, arguably, those since. How her personality and politics influence the films of this survey will be discussed in the next chapter.
Chapter Two - Politics, society and Thatcher: Iconography and ideology in contemporary 1980s films

Introduction

The 1980s is so intrinsically linked with Thatcherism that it is seemingly impossible to disentangle the two. The immense social changes effected under Thatcher’s premiership have made her a polarising figure. Her authoritarian personality, coupled with her rigid and traditional political views informed, uniquely among British Prime Ministers, a definable ideology: Thatcherism. Whilst Hadley and Ho prefer to assess the Thatcher legacy as a personal one, stating, ‘it is the symptom, Thatcher’s persona, rather than the wound of her politics that is remembered’, as these films attest, it is both which dominate their narratives and their agency (2010, p. 5). This chapter will therefore consider how Thatcher, through her politics and a carefully constructed image, still dominates our notion of the 1980s, particularly its mediation.

It is, of course, the politics of Thatcher which have had the biggest impact on the British political, social and cultural landscape. The ideology this spawned was administered by three Conservative governments during the 1980s, with Nigel Lawson occupying the crucial role of Chancellor of the Exchequer during much of that period. His definition of Thatcherism is therefore one which addresses both the intentions and effects of her policies. He maintains it was ‘a mixture of free markets, financial discipline, firm control over public expenditure, tax cuts, nationalism, “Victorian values” (of the Samuel Smiles self-help variety), privatisation and a dash of populism’ (1992, p.64). These policies, by the end of the 1980s
had, notes McSmith, created ‘a wealthier, more mobile society – except for those who were shut out of the world of work, whose numbers were higher than in 1980’ (2010, p. 298). For some, like the late Tony Benn, the socialist ex-MP and scourge of the Conservative Party in the 1980s, the politics of Thatcherism had an irreparable impact on contemporary politics in Britain. I discussed with Benn the issue of New Labour’s adoption of a number of Thatcherite policies in the 1990s which he argues, ‘extend(ed) the influence of Thatcher’s thinking’. This, as Benn stated, has provided a line of continuity between the politics of the 1980s and those of today. The politics of Thatcherism are, therefore, still apparent in contemporary Britain, ensuring both her ideology, and her image, remain a constant presence in print and visual media. This is most apparent in the mediation of the Thatcher image and her politics, presented in the British films of the both the 1980s and now.

The first section of this chapter will initially consider the role of Thatcher and the media in marketing her image. The role of the prime minister’s PR staff, the media and Thatcher herself, will be assessed in considering the evolution of her image, which now forms part of popular memory. This will lead to a more specific discussion around the mediation of this image. The representation of Thatcher and her politics in British cinema, I argue, can be categorised in three distinct, but not mutually exclusive ways. She is presented as a real figure, often sympathetic, in biopics or historical re-enactments, whilst other films present her in less personal terms, focusing on her political work. These are often a direct commentary on her policies, such as My Beautiful Laundrette or Cass, or more nuanced indirect representations of Thatcher’s Britain, such as Is Anybody There? These different ways of engaging with Thatcher, in both the 1980s and in contemporary films, will be explored textually and in terms of authorship and production history, followed by case studies which consider the determinants for these representations.
The first case study, *Hunger*, directly engages with a 1980s political issue, the 1980-1981 Maze prison hunger strike. However, here, director Steve McQueen argues he is distancing his film from its political context, choosing to present Thatcher in a purely aural way. This highlights a recurring theme in many of these films, where the narrative attempts to distance the film politically from the 1980s, as also seen in this chapter’s third case study, *Is Anybody There?* Despite the director’s intentions, I argue *Hunger* is a polemical study of a pivotal point in Thatcher’s first term as Prime Minister. By focusing on the voice of Thatcher, McQueen highlights the importance of the spoken word within the broader political relationship between Thatcher and the IRA. How McQueen chooses to present Thatcher and what this choice tells us about his relationship with the 1980s is an important consideration of this case study. The focus on a film which also explicitly engages with a political issue is further exemplified in my second case study, *Cass*.

*Cass*, set across many decades but ultimately focused on the issue of football hooliganism in the 1980s, also includes a number of aural archival sources. Unlike *Hunger*, Thatcher’s speeches in *Cass* are complemented by visual representations of the prime minister. Thatcher’s appearance in the film, reinforcing her pivotal role in the political response to football-related violence in the 1980s, is a key narrative choice for director Jon.S. Baird. This link between the politics of the era, emerging subcultures and a shift in the coding of masculinity, is explored through recourse to a discussion of the cinematic representations of what became known as the ‘English disease’, which started with the Alan Clarke directed, *The Firm* (1989). It is important to consider at this point the appeal of the mediated football hooligan as an indicator of our contemporary relationship with the 1980s. What is the audience for such films and what is the role of their 1980s setting in invoking nostalgia for a masculine stereotype of the past?
The final case study considers a film which presents the effects of Thatcherism with no direct reference to the politics of the time. *Is Anybody There?* is a film, which I argue, gently probes the politics of the period of its setting, with its focus on a family breakdown amidst the parents’ attempt to embrace Thatcher’s enterprise initiatives by setting up their own business. *Is Anybody There*’s representation of the clash of social aspiration, family duty and shifting gender roles, is, in many ways the story of Thatcher's Britain. Again, as with *Hunger*, evidence of an authorial distancing from any political context is apparent through my personal discussions with Peter Harness, the film’s writer. Harness's admission that the film is based on his own childhood and was originally far more polemical in its depiction of Thatcherism will be explored to ascertain the function of the writer and director in these films’ representations of 1980s politics.

This chapter in its analysis of the significance of Thatcher in a number of films in this survey, highlights some recurring themes for this project. I will argue that the Thatcher image acts as a cultural signifier of the 1980s. Such shortcuts which are often cultural, such as music, fashion and toys, are particularly popular ways of stirring memories of the 1980s. Thatcher’s role within that is, of course, crucial. But in many of these films’ critiquing of Thatcher we can also see a rejection of the orthodox, nostalgic perspective of the 1980s emphasised in initial mediated versions of Thatcher’s image.

**Thatcher as icon: Mediated representations of Margaret Thatcher**

**Margaret Thatcher: The marketing of an icon**

Margaret Thatcher was the first British Prime Minister of a new media age, an age that has seen an unprecedented level of scrutiny of those in the public eye. Consequently, this has
required those who receive such attention to respond and engage with the ‘celebrity’ process in increasingly sophisticated ways. As Thatcher discovered early in her career, even a sartorial blunder, which she was prone to, could potentially alienate millions of voters, or at least this is what the media inferred. For example, her penchant for wearing a hat in public was soon dispensed with on the suggestion of her advisers, for precisely this reason. Thatcher was unaware, it seems, of the elitist connotations of such attire, particularly the day after 1981’s Toxteth riot (Webster, 1990, p. 81). Of course, it is highly probable that Thatcher’s image initially became a discussion topic for the British media primarily because of her gender, but it is also true that for the first time, a politician’s sartorial choices became a topic of debate in Britain. In a sea of grey suits, as The Iron Lady memorably portrays, Thatcher’s ‘glamour’ was palpable. The media seized on this to add much needed colour to British politics at the detriment of the less sartorially gifted Leader of the Opposition, Michael Foot. The attention to Thatcher’s look and style over the eleven years of her premiership, and her response to it, was to have a lasting effect on how we engage with the 1980s. Thatcher iconography has subsequently developed through mediated versions of the period as a key signifier of the decade.

If the media was responding to Thatcher through a gendered perspective this was arguably only as a response to Thatcher’s careful cultivation of this image. In the male dominated world of British politics she needed to create an image which was non-threatening, even if this was against her own personal ideology. The masculine demeanour, satirised by Spitting Image (Fluck and Law, 1984-1996), was to come later. Thatcher’s entry into the upper echelons of British politics required a far more anodyne image. To achieve that she uncharacteristically sought help, subsequently appointing a political adviser whose role was to ensure that she always presented herself in the most flattering way, personally and to her electorate. Gordon Reece was to become therefore, the most important figure,
aside from Thatcher herself, in the construction of her image in the 1970s and 1980s. The
public persona he manufactured is widely acknowledged as a key factor in Thatcher’s appeal
to the electorate in 1979 ensuring her first tenure as Prime Minister. He argued early in her
career that a feminine image was necessary if Thatcher was going to appeal to normal
working-class voters of both genders, and it was from here that Thatcher began to be
presented to the media as a humble housewife. Such an image had two main advantages: it
disarmed male voters who perceived a female politician as threatening, or possibly even as
a feminist, whilst simultaneously gaining the female vote. After all, women voters it was
supposed, would empathise far more with a working wife and mother like themselves. The
media happily distributed this image of Thatcher to such an extent that some commented
that it looked as if Thatcher’s ‘major preoccupations in these months were dusting furniture
and cooking breakfast’, such was the number of times she appeared in the media in this guise
(Webster, 1990, p. 49).

Thatcher as a non-threatening housewife was the prevailing image adopted by the
Leader of the Opposition - as she was in the late 1970s - and embraced wholeheartedly by
popular culture. This stereotype even appeared in a James Bond film, For Your Eyes Only
(Glen, 1981). As discussed in more detail later in this chapter, the film presents Thatcher
tackling international espionage whilst cooking dinner for husband Denis. Whilst such
representations of the Premier are emblematic of a wider misogyny in British media at the
time, the film responded to an approved narrative set by Thatcher’s advisers. But it was the
newspaper industry which did most to propagate these images of Thatcher, with many
political cartoonists preferring to focus on what they perceived as Thatcher’s middle-class
upbringing. As Thatcher became accepted by the political establishment and possibly even
destined for the highest office, Reece began to adjust this image from, ‘A suburban lady in a
hat’ to an everywoman who could appeal to all social stratas (Pearce, 2001). The media also
began to focus on other evidence of Reece’s influence, including a softening of Thatcher’s voice and a subsequent shift in the housewife persona. It was this change which facilitated what is now accepted as the popular view of Thatcher. Newspapers in the early 1980s began to describe her in more masculine terms whilst presenting the predominantly male politicians around her as weak and ‘wet’. At this point, when she became prime minister that we see Thatcher accentuating previously repressed male attributes: aggression, a lack of empathy and uncompromising language.

The collusion between Thatcher and the media in respect of her public image, becomes much more obvious here with the press dutifully reporting every stylistic flourish of the prime minister, often accompanying it with overtly masculine imagery. Although this image became more prevalent in the latter part of the 1980s, despite various adjustments to her image, her fashion style remained feminine and rarely incorporated trousers. This was even the case on those occasions when Thatcher adopted a military style uniform, but, of course, her appearance often had a connotation of its own (Webster, 1990, p.83). Although these occasions were relatively rare, they became more common following the Falklands War and early events in Northern Ireland, such as the 1981 hunger strikes. These appearances had the effect, not only of presenting the prime minister as a warrior, but also inviting the media to comment, often through a gendered perspective, on her bravery. Partington’s comments on her arrival in Belfast shortly after Lord Mountbatten’s murder by the IRA demonstrate these dual concerns: ‘It was a heart-stopping day for security men, because Mrs Thatcher was determined to be seen as well as to see – battle-kitted in the border bandit country or formally dressed on the streets of Belfast’ (1979). It is unlikely that such reporting of a male politician would have focused so explicitly on his dress sense.

Such coverage, increasingly orchestrated and encouraged by Thatcher and her advisers, also invited the media to compare her to great British historical figures. Whilst such
comparisons had been made before, specifically when Thatcher had demonstrated an assertive, uncompromising approach to any resistance to her Government’s policies, it was in 1982 that they became common media parlance. This followed a series of interviews and media appearances where Thatcher herself compared her achievements defeating the Argentinian forces to those of Boadicea and, in particular, Churchill. There is evidence that on this occasion even her advisers had felt she had gone too far. A rear-guard action that attempted to feminise the ‘warrior’ image being perpetuated through the media, was subsequently overwhelmed by one that fused power with regal femininity (Webster, 1990, p. 85). The Queen’s absence at the Falklands’ victory parade, together with Thatcher’s use of regal language, ‘we have become a Grandmother’, allowed a revised image of Thatcher as sovereign to emerge, which she was very keen to project (Webster, 1990, p. 85). As indicated in Chapter One, this image, not coincidentally, corresponded with a prevalence of heritage-centred iconography and discourse. Thatcher’s increasingly frequent forays into a conflation of the roles of monarch and prime minister not only betrayed her own aspirations but reinforced Britain’s strong sense of national identity in the 1980s. Whilst this is apparent in the heritage films of the decade, as discussed, it also emerges later with the mediation of Thatcher in iconographic, as well as political, terms which dominates the films of this survey. But this fascination with Thatcher by filmmakers, inspired by Thatcher’s own careful construction of her image, began much earlier.

**The mediation of Thatcher**

Thatcher’s regal behaviour, strange as it appeared to many, was largely ignored by the British media. Whilst occasionally acknowledging her actions, newspapers refrained from any sharp criticism of them, perhaps reflecting her post-Falklands popularity at this time (Webster, 1990, p. 107). Television satire, which had always found Thatcher’s extreme personality an easy target, did respond however, with shows like *Spitting Image* and *The New Statesman*
(Gran and Marks, 1987 – 1992) often presenting an exaggerated version of Thatcher as monarch. As the Falklands War faded and Thatcher reverted to a more traditional role, her image on these shows was gradually supplanted by the masculine one which populates popular memories of the 1980s. The presentation of Thatcher in such mediated forms often, therefore, suggested she was uncompromising and formidable, characteristics honed through the Falklands conflict and the 1981 hunger strikes. It was this focus on Thatcher’s masculine, confrontational personality which became the prevailing mediated image during the 1980s. In *Spitting Image* she was only represented in feminine terms when in an emphasised position of power, such as acting like a headmistress whilst chairing cabinet meetings. This mediated response to Thatcher’s dominance of 1980s British politics was not shared, however, by cinematic representations of contemporary British society, which focused on her policies as well as her personal image.

As discussed earlier, the character of Margaret Thatcher, prime minister, appeared in a Bond film, *For Your Eyes Only*. Her representation in this film was clearly a response to her prevailing public image at that time, that of world leader/housewife. In a surreal sequence that thrusts two modern icons of Britishness into the same narrative, Thatcher phones Bond - from the kitchen of No.10 Downing Street - to congratulate him on a successful mission. Significantly, Thatcher is initially filmed from the neck down, dressed in an apron. Her distinctive voice is first heard talking to Bond, before she turns to camera revealing that it is not the Premier herself but a popular television impressionist, Janet Brown. Whilst this slow revelation indicates the director’s building of anticipation for a Thatcher appearance, there is a self-conscious irony in the use of a celebrity imitation. In a similar way to Meryl Streep’s performance in *The Iron Lady*, the anticipation of the ‘reveal’ of the impersonator is presented as being an event in itself. The marketing of *The Iron Lady*, a film which will be discussed more fully in the next section, indicates precisely this, with a
focus in the teaser trailer on Thatcher’s advisers before, finally, she, or Streep, is revealed. The conjoining of celebrities with the iconography of Thatcher is arguably problematic in presenting Thatcher in both these versions of the past. In Streep’s case with an icon playing an icon.

Here we can see three broad categories of films that deal with Thatcher beginning to emerge. A number, like *The Ploughman’s Lunch* (Eyre, 1983), address her politics in a very direct manner. This film uses genuine footage of the 1982 Conservative Party Conference to drive a narrative that questions Thatcherism’s attempt to airbrush out the national past. The film’s unpartisan approach to presenting the current government is apparent in its appropriation of strident Thatcher speeches after the Falklands victory (Quart, 2006, p. 25). Other films replicate this direct commentary on Thatcher and her politics such as *My Beautiful Laundrette* and *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid*, both of which are unequivocally critical of the socio-political landscape in 1980s Britain. In these films the dialogue is explicitly critical of Thatcherism and, crucially, set against a backdrop of social unrest, racial hatred and class division, leaving their meaning unambiguous.

Quart also acknowledges a number of other films which, on the surface, can be seen as less polemical. The films in the second category of Thatcher-related imagery in British cinema lack any direct criticism of the political policies of the time but are openly hostile to the ethos or culture Thatcherism was creating (Quart, 2006, p. 22). Arthouse film directors, such as Derek Jarman and Peter Greenaway, used their creativity to critique Thatcherism through allegory and metaphor, rather than direct means, resulting in low-budget art functioning as polemic. Whilst Greenaway’s *The Cook, the Thief, his Wife and her Lover* critiqued the divisions in 1980s Britain, there are no explicit references to Thatcher. By focusing on the callousness and lack of empathy from the ruling elite to those who served them, Greenaway presents a world of division, rich and poor, beauty and ugliness, allowing
the audience to draw their own conclusions. The film’s protagonist, Spica (Michael Gambon), is the personification of Thatcherism: a badly behaved, rich tyrant who is also a cultural philistine. His wife Georgina’s (Helen Mirren) response is to seek the sophistication of another man, Michael (Alan Howard), whilst her husband cakes his enemies in excrement before setting the dogs on them.

The final category of mediated response to Thatcher has emerged more recently and is that of the biopic, which often involves a direct representation of her image. Primarily the domain of television, a number of films have endeavoured to liberate Margaret Thatcher from the social and political context of popular memory and in this sense they act as the antithesis of many of the 1980s ‘social issue’ films. Whilst these renderings of the life of the former premier seem to have culminated in The Iron Lady, this film was preceded by at least two other versions of the Margaret Thatcher story. Whilst Margaret Thatcher: The Long Walk to Finchley (McCormick, 2008) and Margaret (Kent, 2009) both appeared as television dramas, they predicted The Iron Lady’s more sympathetic portrayal of the former prime minister. Both portrayed Thatcher as a vulnerable but strong individual and presented, possibly for the first time, a more humanised figure. It is apparent, however, that even at this point, almost twenty years since Thatcher was in power, for reviewers, it is her politics which are remembered and any attempt to overlook the past is quickly challenged. Eyre, for example, criticises Margaret Thatcher – The Long Walk to Finchley for being ‘long on feelings, short on ideology’ (2008). But the manner in which these films deal with their subject indicates a further progression of the Thatcher image. Whilst the ‘celebritification’ of politics is perhaps complete now, with an industry emerging of Tony Blair-related films, in the 1980s such reverence was reserved for royalty. Perhaps indicating how Thatcher’s regal aspirations have in fact evolved, these biopics echo a growing preponderance in the British film industry for royal biographies. Nairn argues in 1994, that such media activity can be traced to the
death of Diana, Princess of Wales, since when the media status of the royal family has become far more ambiguous (1994, p. 35). This is reflected in the increased number of mediated versions of the lives of historical members of the Royal Family. The popularity of films like Mrs Brown (Madden, 1997) and The Young Victoria (Vallee, 2009), as well as a greater accessibility to the younger royals, in particular, has clearly contributed to a wider interest in the institution. Arguably this may have its roots in the heritage films of the 1980s whilst the recent cinematic successes such as The King’s Speech (Hooper, 2010) have allowed the royal bio-pic to gain international success. The emergence in 2012 therefore of a re-imagining of Thatcher as elderly and vulnerable in The Iron Lady was perhaps predictable, whilst highlighting the diverse ways British cinema interacts with this subject.

Thatcher in contemporary cinema: Revisionism and nostalgia

If, as Hill asserts, the ‘best historical films ... Interrogate the past for the sake of the present’, The Iron Lady highlights a major shift in British society’s relationship with Thatcher (1999, p. 156). The film also stirred up traditional social and political divisions, perhaps predicting the reaction to her death two years after its release. Right wing commentators, such as Finkelstein, were happy to applaud the films ‘homage to Mrs. Thatcher’s strength of character’ (2012). Others, like Moore, viewed the film’s representation of a divisive period of British history as reductive and simplistic, specifically highlighting the narrative’s failure to engage with Thatcher’s ideology (2011). Ultimately however, the film’s critical reception focused predominantly on the visual and aural presentation of Thatcher rather than in terms of the politics she represented. This premise that the elderly and frail Thatcher in The Iron Lady is somehow divorced from the context of our popular memory is, of course, a problematic one. For some critics, like Lloyd, Thatcher’s legacy does not permit a suspension of disbelief, for Streep’s central performance in The Iron Lady, ‘is arguably too likeable in
comparison to the lady herself’ (2011). The film’s marketing indicates how emotive the Thatcher image is for some, stirring up personal memories obstinately linked to our own recollections of Thatcher’s dominant years. When Jeffries surveys the first look at Streep as Thatcher, he describes the mediated version of her, within the context of his own memories of the person beneath the image: ‘It shows her sporting a perfect simulacrum of Thatcher’s 1982 look – the honeyed ice cream swirl of a hairdo; the softly glowing yet indomitable pearls; the parted mouth and raised eyebrows that suggest seduction but threaten, in extremis, symbolic castration’ (2011). Again Jeffries uses gendered terminology to present his memories of the 1980s, as he conjures up a visualisation of Thatcher as a feminine yet dominant woman.

*The Iron Lady’s* facilitation of Thatcher’s image returns us to the three categories of Thatcher film previously discussed. These, I argue, are also reflected in contemporary British cinema, particularly the films of this survey. The social division of Thatcher’s Britain for example, clearly visible in 1980s films such as *Letter to Brezhnev* and *Rita, Sue and Bob too* (Clarke, 1987) is echoed in contemporary films such as *Son of Rambow* and *Is Anybody There?* The legacy of Thatcher dominates the mise-en-scène and narratives in these films which focus on the disadvantaged, working-classes and their communities, whilst avoiding any direct references to the politics or the personality of Thatcher. But even here we can see variances in this presentation. Goodridge argues *Son of Rambow* avoids ‘England’s clichéd greyness’ in its fantasy-centred narrative which foregrounds director Jennings’ sense of fun (2007). There is, however, a more conventional presentation of family dynamics in *Son of Rambow* as Chapter Five indicates. With both young male protagonists Will Proudfoot (Bill Milner) and Lee Carter (Will Poulter) effectively fatherless, the narrative sets up a coming-of-age story framed within family dysfunction. Further consideration of the film’s concession to 1980s politics should also be given to Carter’s family circumstances. It is implied that his
parent’s residence in Spain, minus children, is funded through their retirement home business. It is difficult not to detect a commentary on social mobility here and the individualism that Thatcherism promoted. *Is Anybody There?* is a much more conventional presentation of Thatcher politics, as the case study in this chapter attests. The greyness absent from *Son of Rambow*, is in abundance here, as is the dysfunctional family, also striving to keep a business afloat at the expense of the nurturing of their only son. These films are often implicit in their critiquing of 1980s politics allowing them to function on a number of levels.

The final category of films identified here are those which present Thatcherism in an explicit manner, often incorporating archival footage to present Thatcher in unambiguous terms. I have discussed how *The Ploughman’s Lunch* does a similar thing in 1983 but contemporary examples are, understandably, far more common. These films rely on a number of ways to critique Thatcher and her politics, from the use of archive footage in *Cass* to aural representations of her speeches in *The Business*, *Hunger* and *This is England*. This use of her speeches, often without their visual context, is a recurring theme in these films and will be explored in more detail in the case study of *Hunger* later in this chapter. In *The Business*, for example, the viewer does not observe Thatcher herself. Instead we see Frankie (Danny Dyer) watching her on television, delivering the famous ‘The Lady’s not for turning’ speech. The connotation of this image is reinforced when Frankie complains of the lack of ambition in Britain and decides to leave the country. In *This is England*, Thatcher’s voice permeates the narrative as it imbues the film’s themes of alienation and identity against the background of the Falkland’s War. As this chapter attests, her image and voice are used for far more political purposes in both *Cass* and *Hunger*.

These categories are imprecise but indicate the differing cultural purpose of contemporary cinema’s representation of Thatcher and her politics. The decontextualizing
of Thatcher in the biopics, and *The Iron Lady* specifically, has proved controversial, permeating a wider discourse on the mediation of her image. But, I argue, Thatcher iconography exists beyond merely visual signifiers. For many the carefully modulated voice, itself a carefully constructed component of the Thatcher image, is a signifier of the 1980s in itself.

**Hunger and the aural presentation of Thatcher**

As we have seen, the image of Thatcher as an immoveable and dogmatic force was fostered by the media during her first term as prime minister. The unfolding events in Northern Ireland, at a particularly disruptive time in the province, provided the new Conservative government with its first real political test. Subsequently, the escalation of a dispute in some of Ulster’s prisons over the right of inmates to wear their own clothes, provoked, for the first time, a ruthless and uncompromising response from Thatcher. I argue that this dispute and Thatcher’s reaction to it provide the foundation for much of our popular and cultural memory of the prime minister. The housewife image was finally buried in combative speeches where Thatcher displayed no compassion for those she saw as enemies of the state.

Steve McQueen’s 2008 film *Hunger* forensically documents the demise of one of those prisoners, Bobby Sands. Sands, who was on hunger strike in protest at the British government’s refusal to acquiesce to key demands of the men in the Maze prison in Belfast, is depicted in a very personal account, slowly starving to death. The story works on a number of different levels, incorporating national and personal concerns. The dominant one, though, is about a man dying for his principles and it is the universality of this story that ultimately transcends the film’s overtly political perspective. But the film’s representation of the 1980s
and specifically Thatcher’s involvement in Sands’ death, also presents us with a useful contemporary view of the decade that questions the role of personal memory in these mediated accounts of the 1980s.

Hunger: Production and historical context

Hunger was Steve McQueen’s first feature film. An acclaimed director now, before becoming a filmmaker McQueen was a renowned conceptual artist, even becoming official war artist for the British forces in Iraq in 2006. The resultant work, Queen and Country, depicting all the British soldiers who had died in the conflict on a sheet of stamps, brought McQueen to public prominence as a provocative artist. McQueen’s interest in video installations indicates perhaps, that his move into filmmaking was not entirely unexpected, although the first subject he tackled was one which was always likely to be controversial. In fact Felperin argues that a few years prior to Hunger it would have been unlikely that anybody would be able to make a film about the politically divisive figure of Bobby Sands (2008). Whilst the roots of Hunger’s narrative are situated in the 1960s and 1970s when the Northern Ireland ‘troubles’ began, the situation which exploded there in 1980/81 is one that I argue helps define the socio-political landscape of the 1980s.

By 1980 Northern Ireland had become a breeding ground for sectarianism, fuelled by the religious divide and compounded by a growing social and economic problem which, in the 1970s, gave the province the distinction of having Britain’s highest rate of unemployment and a disproportionate level of poverty (Critchfield, 1990, p. 219). As the decade progressed, the inhabitants saw little improvement in conditions, with the Conservative government presiding over a reduction of 40 per cent of the province’s manufacturing jobs (Critchfield, 1990, p. 223). Its decline in economic and employment terms served to further marginalise Thatcher, with her government blamed for overseeing
Northern Ireland’s descent into economic oblivion. It was against this backdrop that the sectarianism which blighted the 1970s began to infiltrate the British mainland. The foundation for these attacks, however, was formed at the beginning of Thatcher’s tenure as prime minister.

At the heart of the argument which motivated the hunger strikes was Thatcher’s insistence that republican prisoners in HMP Maze should not be treated as political prisoners and therefore be denied their own clothes and exemption from work detail. This was, on the face of it, only a reaffirming of the previous Labour Government’s stance. The prisoners had been protesting against this directive since 1976 when the government had revoked a previous agreement to allow the prisoners special category status. The blanket protest, which was a refusal to wear a prison uniform, became the dirty protest when some prisoners refused to wash or leave their cells. McQueen’s roots as an artist are clearly visible in the rendering of these scenes in *Hunger*. The swirls of excrement on the cell wall adopt a kaleidoscope of patterns as the camera revolves slowly toward it. Here the political struggle in its most base form is rendered as art by McQueen. This is contrasted with the economy of a scene of an orderly sweeping urine from the prison walk way. Lasting nearly five minutes the only sound is the rhythmic brushing of a fruitless menial task.

On becoming prime minister Thatcher reaffirmed her government’s position but, in a crucial sign of her characteristic intransigence, used emotive language, saying any wavering in government policy would wrongly give ‘the perpetuators a kind of respectability, even nobility’ (Thatcher, 1993, p. 390). In October 1980, only eighteen months into Thatcher’s premiership, the protest progressed to a hunger strike. This tactic had been successful in 1972 and the prisoners were rewarded with an equally supportive response from the government early into the protest in 1980. The confusion around whether the British government had acquiesced to the hunger strikers galvanised a young prisoner, called Bobby
Sands, who began preparing a more strategic and organised hunger strike which started in 1981. But Sands’ status as a republican terrorist was not as controversial as the British media had first indicated. He was in prison serving fourteen years for possession of arms rather than any particularly violent sectarian act (McSmith, 2010, p. 210). As Hunger indicates, in its pivotal scene chronicling a fictional conversation between Sands (Michael Fassbender) and the priest Father Dominic Moran (Liam Cunningham), Sands was also intelligent and political in his thinking. His argument that the previous hunger strike failed for want of a clear strategy is compelling, as he details his intention to stagger the hunger strikes to maximise their political impact. Sands’ introduction of a strategy whereby a number of men began refusing food at two weekly intervals - thus accentuating the impact of their actions - was a shrewd, calculated reaction to the resistance of the British government. But as McSmith notes, Sands and the other prisoners ‘had no insight into the psychological make-up of the woman in Downing Street. In their isolation, encouraged by one another, they overestimated the impact of their protests’ (2010, p. 209).

McQueen professes ambivalence to his story arguing that the film, despite its source, is not a political one but a ‘humanist’ account of Sands’ demise (Crowdus, 2009). He further explains that the origins of his attraction to the story of Bobby Sands lay in first-hand memories of watching television in the 1980s. Fascinated by the image of Sands on the news, which was accompanied by a number denoting the days he had been on hunger strike, McQueen quizzed his parents on the man’s significance. This indicates a very strong, early resonance with Sands and his struggle, for McQueen, which resurfaces in his later interviews. In describing his initial research, McQueen highlights how the events of 1980-81 in the Maze prison have been forgotten, deemed unsuitable for nostalgic rediscovering. The twenty-fifth anniversary of Sands’ death was ignored by the British media, he argues, whilst the less important Falklands War is widely commemorated (2008). The hunger strike, for him, is,
something which is still being resolved, something that still reverberates, but it has been swept under the carpet’ (Brady, 2008, p. 32). McQueen’s authorship is an important consideration here, particularly in the context of a subject, which as he indicates, still provokes extreme reactions over a quarter of a century later. As co-writer of the screenplay, as well as the film’s director, McQueen’s relationship with Thatcher is important to ascertain, particularly as it appears it was essentially informed by the mass media. Only twelve years old when Bobby Sands died, McQueen argues he was prevented from forming an opinion of Margaret Thatcher. His parent’s dislike of her, resulted, he states, in them switching off the television set whenever Thatcher appeared. It is difficult to see how McQueen could claim, even as a child, that this was neutral behaviour. When pressed, he argues that his opinion of Thatcher is an objective one, stating that in the narrative his perspective reflects that of the film’s key characters, ‘I am the priest! I am Bobby Sands’ (McQueen, 2008).

Hunger and Thatcher: Iconography and aural representation

McQueen’s claim that his film is not political and focuses purely on the concept of an idealised individual, prepared to die for his beliefs, is reinforced by others, like Crowdus (2009). He positions McQueen at the opposite end of the mediated political spectrum to Ken Loach stating ‘Hunger is a decidedly nonpartisan work, not interested in scoring political points’ (2009). Such a view is, however, difficult to defend when a more detailed analysis of how McQueen decides to render Thatcher in his film is conducted. In an otherwise aurally restricted narrative, it is the voice of Thatcher which acts as the overriding sound of Hunger. Although she only appears twice during the course of the film, on both occasions it is in aural form and never visually. Additionally, I argue, it is significant that hers is one of the first voices in the film. Hunger’s virtually silent opening sequences, focusing on the sombre aftermath of Sands’ death and the brutalisation of the prison officers, is punctuated after ten minutes,
by Thatcher’s disembodied voice. Whilst the short speech played against a backdrop of snow, falling outside the peculiarly picturesque prison, serves a narrative purpose by essentially explaining the roots of the prisoner’s argument, it is also clearly a political speech: ‘There is no such thing as political murder, political bombing or political violence. There is only criminal murder, criminal bombing and criminal violence. We will not compromise on this’ (Thatcher, 1981). Delivered in Belfast to an assembled group of politicians, churchmen and dignitaries Thatcher’s distinction between political and criminal, outlined in this speech is confrontational and intransigent. Her quote that ‘we will not compromise on this’ is unequivocal. Such a speech, particularly so early in the film, sets out the British government’s stance in opposition to the film’s protagonists. In reality such rhetoric had become increasingly common, consolidating Thatcher’s reputation as a tenacious and inflexible politician. However, even for her, this response to what was still essentially a humanitarian crisis, despite its political framework, was surprising, indicating a much deeper level of intransigence than had been previously witnessed. Her speeches on the subject clearly reflected her personal feelings perhaps more than they did her Governments. She was keen not to underplay Sands’ relatively minor crime arguing, ‘Murder is a crime. Carrying explosives is a crime. Maiming is a crime. It must stay a crime in the ordinary sense of the word’ (Thatcher, 1980).

_Hunger_ not only emphasises the uncompromising nature of her words but draws attention to what, for many of us, is an icon of the 1980s; that instantly recognisable voice. Like much of her image, Thatcher’s voice had been carefully cultivated. This involved, most famously, hiring a vocal coach to modulate it, because of the difficulty in being heard in the House of Commons, and because others found it ‘grating’ (Thatcher, 1995, p. 295). Webster also forwards a view that such adjustments were needed for reasons of class, as her ‘voice was the other major sign that she came from the top drawer’ (Webster, 1990, p. 29).
Thatcher’s voice re-emerges in *Hunger*, an hour later, heralding the start of the third act which documents in quiet detail Bobby Sands’ agonising demise. Again the positioning of the speech is crucial and indicates a political intention on behalf of the director. Thatcher signals the end of any negotiation around the political status of prisoners and her speech is pivotal in its finality:

> Faced with the failure of their discredited cause, the men of violence have chosen in recent months to play what may well be their last card. They have turned their violence against themselves through the prison hunger strike to death. They seek to work on the most basic of human emotions—pity—as a means of creating tension and stoking the fires of bitterness and hatred. (Thatcher, 1981)

Again delivered at Stormont, nearly three months after the first speech in *Hunger*, her words here act as a useful narrative tool in leading to the final act detailing Sands’ death, they also contain, as with the first speech, key aspects of Thatcher’s inflexibility toward the prisoners. Her words accusing the IRA of ‘stoking the fires of bitterness and hatred’ serve no narrative purpose, other than to emphasise Thatcher’s callous perspective. This, I argue, heavily politicises the film’s climax, with the next twenty minutes of narrative devoted to a visual representation of Bobby Sands’ death. McQueen is careful how he positions these pieces of dialogue as well as their content, but it is the use of Thatcher’s voice and not her image, or any other broadcast of her politics, which is the crucial factor here. This is particularly apparent in the juxtaposition between the visuals which overlay the speech sequences, and are presented as internal - within the province – and her words. By emphasising the uncompromising nature of her voice and words without physical representation, Thatcher is rendered as an interloper, a foreign invader into the quiet narrative of the film. It is that voice that recalls the 1980s to anybody who experienced it. Acknowledged in *The Iron Lady’s* trailer, Thatcher’s voice is an important cultural signifier. Strident and uncompromising, it is
often used, as in *This is England*, to recall conflict and inflexibility, yet only in *Hunger* does it infuse the film’s narrative with strong political substance.

**Hunger and the Thatcher legacy**

*Hunger*’s use of Thatcher’s voice, that clearly recognisable icon of 1980s Britain, is of course calculated to provoke its audience, nostalgically and polemically. It is, I argue, impossible to present her words in a context of principled suffering without conveying a sense of her lack of compassion. But the use of these speeches also emphasises the role of the voice in the conflict between the IRA and the British government during the 1980s. The degree of importance Thatcher placed on oral presentation is clearly discernible from her efforts to master it. Thatcher’s own recollections of this period also betray her thoughts on her public image. Having taken lessons from Laurence Olivier on projecting her voice, she reflected on the similarities between a politician and an actor, particularly in respect of performance. Where Olivier preferred a darkened auditorium, obscuring the audience, Thatcher preferred the opposite. All her speeches were lit to ensure she could see her audience, respond to their reactions, and tailor her speech accordingly (Thatcher, 1995, pp. 295-296). It is, perhaps, this understanding of the power of oration that allows a more nuanced view of how she reacted to the growing power of Sinn Fein, the republican political wing in Northern Ireland, within the British media.

In 1988 the Thatcher government introduced a measure of censorship by adding a notice to the 1981 Broadcasting Act. The notice stated that any broadcast of ‘any words spoken... by a person who ... represents or purports to represent’ a listed organisation or ‘the words support or solicit or invite support for such an organisation’ would be prohibited (Miller, 1994, p. 55). Essentially the Thatcher government was attempting to silence the IRA’s political arm, Sinn Fein, which, because of its status as a legitimate political party, was seen
as ethically problematic and difficult to police. The BBC responded by allowing Sinn Fein’s leader, Gerry Adams’, words to be broadcast when he spoke of local political issues, but not national ones. This situation reached farcical heights when media broadcasters used subtitles or actor’s voices when offending individuals were interviewed. However, the draconian actions of the Thatcher government had their desired effect. The ban saw Sinn Fein interviews on British television reduce by 63 per cent in the twelve months following the ban (Miller, 1994, p. 57). But the significance of Thatcher’s unusual response to ‘the troubles’, in the context of her own awareness of public image, must not be overlooked. Extremely aware of oratory power, to the point that she carefully cultivated her own, the impact of silencing the IRA in this manner is not merely ironic but deeply cynical. How this particular tool is used in the shaping of public perception has even greater significance when we consider how Thatcher is aurally rendered in Hunger.

The film’s use of the speeches of Margaret Thatcher, significantly using original archival copies rather than a reconstructed version, clearly implies a polemical context, but indicates a much deeper significance. By rendering her invisible in his film, McQueen subverts Thatcher’s government’s actions in 1988 when Sinn Fein, the voice piece of Bobby Sands seven years earlier, were rendered silent. Additionally, the placement and rendering of Thatcher’s voice reinforces the popular view of her legacy and that of the 1980s. Her intransigence and disengagement with a human crisis further enhances her carefully cultivated image as a tough female politician in a male world. As Webster concedes, the events around the hunger strikes were pivotal for Thatcher’s image and in the year following Sands’ death her persona ‘focused particularly on her dominance’ (1990, p. 72).

Hunger, despite its director’s protestations of being apolitical, emphasises this representation of Thatcher, but significantly, achieves it through purely aural means, concentrating on her words and voice. Unlike The Iron Lady, Hunger eschews acting and
characterisation for an authentic presentation of key Thatcher speeches. The positioning of these, within a wider narrative more concerned with the internal conflict of Northern Ireland, provides a reading that is in opposition to director McQueen’s assertion that the film is not political. *Hunger* also allows a full analysis of the importance of Thatcher’s voice in cultivating her public persona and how mediated representations, like this film, use it for narrative purposes.

The film’s reception, perhaps indicating Felperin’s earlier concerns, focused on McQueen’s motives. Many felt any film about Bobby Sands must have a political agenda. Porter’s description of the film as a ‘memorial to the IRA hunger striker Bobby Sands,’ perhaps indicates how divisive the film was and how emotions around ‘the troubles’ were still running high, despite relative peace in the province (2008). As Porter suggests, it is impossible to divorce the film from the political ideology with which it engages. Whilst McQueen chose to present an individual struggle, the sparse dialogue in favour of a distinctive visual style prevents a strong identification with Sands the man. McQueen’s protestations, therefore, that the film is apolitical appear to lack credibility, particularly in light of other remarks he makes about the film’s subject. Ultimately perhaps McQueen’s aim for *Hunger* ‘to provoke debate in the audience, to challenge our own morality’ is achieved (Crowdus).

**Politics and Thatcher Imagery in *Cass***

The Thatcher administrations were plagued by social unrest and political conflict during the 1980s, from the issues in Northern Ireland through to inner city riots and the 1984-1985 miners’ strike. Perhaps the one which dominated the decade, however, was that of football hooliganism, which, like the ‘troubles’, was an unwelcome inheritance of the 1970s. But
despite its provenance in an earlier decade, the subject of football hooliganism, and its subcultural connotations, has the greatest affiliation with the 1980s. It is perhaps unsurprising therefore, that this activity has been reflected in a number of British films of recent years. This survey alone has many films which focus on male-dominated subcultures with four of those, Cass, The Rise of the Footsoldier, Awaydays and The Firm concentrating specifically on the football hooligan element. As this section’s analysis of Cass will demonstrate, the function of the film’s focus on traditional notions of masculinity is a purely nostalgic one, aimed primarily at a middle-aged, male audience. The correlation between those activities and the role of Thatcher in the 1980s will also be explored and it is here that, conversely, the nostalgic association with the 1980s is forged. This is particularly the case with Cass’s provenance in the real-life of a notorious football hooligan which, I argue, gives the narrative a particularly pejorative perspective which glamorises its subject.

**Cass: Production, social and political contexts**

Cass Pennant was the leader of the feared West Ham Inter City Firm - immortalised in Alan Clarke’s television drama, The Firm - throughout much of the 1980s. Following two spells in prison, which his website describes with no sense of irony, as being a consequence of him becoming ‘a target for the authorities’, Pennant turned to writing, starting with his autobiography (Pennant). Meanwhile filmmaker Jon S. Baird met Pennant whilst they were both working on hooligan film, Green Street (Alexander) in 2005. Subsequently reading Pennant’s book, Baird was surprised that it focused more on his ‘identity struggle’ than football violence thus enhancing its commercial potential (Baird, 2008, p.1). Its tracing of his life as a black child adopted by a white working-class couple transcended the hooliganism element, which Baird knew would be likely to deter investors (Baird, 2008, p.5). For Baird the story had enough potential to attract financing from the UK Film Council because, ‘It was a
British story; it was a true story; it was a period piece; it was about social history; it was about race; it was about adoption, and it was a story of redemption' (Baird, 2008, p.5). It was these elements of the film which allowed him, extraordinarily for a first-time director, to pre-sell the film based on just an outline of Pennant’s story (Baird, 2008, p.5). The success of the film, however, was dependent on a good screenplay. Having spoken to a number of writers, Baird was eventually persuaded by his producer to write the script himself. The result, whilst still framed around Pennant’s hooligan activities, focuses predominantly on his attempts to belong to a society which shunned minorities. Pennant’s decision to join, and later lead, a subcultural group is perhaps therefore, within this context, easier to understand.

Director Baird was keen to ensure Cass was loyal to its source material. By casting Pennant as an extra in the film as well as employing him as a consultant, the film was far more likely to be authentic in its rendering of Pennant’s past (2008, p.7). This contributes, I feel, to the film’s reverence for its subject, which in key sequences, discussed later, becomes problematic. Wilding argues, for instance, that the film’s outdated version of masculinity is one that may jar with a modern audience (2009). Baird’s reliance on the realism of the authorship is, of course, a common trait of biographical adaptation. Marcus argues, ‘the value of autobiography is seen to lie in its ‘‘insider’ quality’’ (1994, p. 5) and it is precisely this component that attracts readers to the memoirs of ex-hooligans like Pennant but which, as Pearson contends, are as prone to unreliability as any book. Baird argues however, that his closeness to Pennant, and Pennant’s involvement in the film, ultimately produces a more authentic text (2008, p.7). But arguably it is the ‘urban myth’ of real-life characters like Pennant that attracts a certain kind of man to these stories and it is this, that I argue, explains the popularity of these 1980s-focused subcultural films. This nostalgia is, of course, extricably linked to the lawlessness of the time.
During Pennant’s period of subcultural infamy there was a growing media debate around the determinants of this unrelenting type of anti-social behaviour. Following the Popplewell report, which looked at the non-hooligan related Bradford stadium fire, Thatcher was keen to exploit the author’s assertion that violence is endemic within all societies. Perhaps unwisely quoting biblical references Thatcher subsequently distanced herself from an interviewer’s assertion that the violence on the terraces was related to divisions in society and, therefore, politically determined (1986). The reality however, according to Popplewell, was far more complicated. He concluded that social class was becoming an increasingly important factor in the creation of these hooligans. But, he affirmed, rather than Thatcher’s policies provoking a backlash by the poverty-stricken working class, it was aspirational lower-middle class men who were more likely to be attracted to the subculture. Despite a refutation of this model by Dunning, the stereotype of the Thatcherite football hooligan had been created (1986, p. 227). A further report takes this notion of Thatcherite values leading to anti-social behaviour, by linking it inextricably to her policies. Reacting to violence by English fans abroad, the report by the Sir Norman Chester Centre for Football Research concludes that the fans were, the specific product of an upwardly mobile and ‘detached’ faction of the ‘Thatcherised’ working class which has a certain residual solidarity born of neighbourhood and gender, but is generally individualistic, chauvinistic and racist (2001). The correlation between 1980s football hooliganism and the policies of Margaret Thatcher are much disputed, but the report indicates that the selfish, individualistic values that Thatcherism is believed to have encouraged are visible in a section of the hooligan fraternity. Consumerist and modestly wealthy, the hooligans now commonly seen in the cinematic representation of the 1980s were, at that time, other than in documentaries or current affairs programmes, still absent from television or cinema screens. It was only in 1989 when
The Firm, a BBC2 film, first presented a Thatcherite football hooligan and inadvertently created a cinematic stereotype.

**Football hooliganism and British cinema**

The Firm critiqued the notion of the lower middle class Thatcherite hooligan. Centering on Bex (Gary Oldman), a well groomed estate agent who, on the surface, appears to be a typical young Thatcherite, director Clarke presents the protagonist as a professional. Married with a child, owner of a smart car and his own property, Bex seems to be a typically aspirational product of Thatcher’s Britain. However, Clarke’s savage indictment of Thatcher’s meritocratic view of society subverted this image of prosperity in suburbia. Bex is also a violent football thug, leader of a group which has little interest in the game, only the violence that follows it. This mediation of the correlation between the football hooligan of Popplewell’s report and Thatcherism, was a crucial one which has influenced almost every film on the subject since and skewed the popular view of the motivation of the average 1980s football hooligan. Mediated versions of this character involved, in many cases, a narrative interest in the psychology and sociology of members of this subculture. Often this is portrayed through a television report or interview, linking, as The Firm does in a pivotal scene with Bex’s group watching television, the fiction of the narrative with the reality of its subject. Such a device has its roots in the seminal television documentary on the subject, Hooligan (Stuttard, 1985), which inspired Clarke’s film. Hooligan was the first time factual television has seriously engaged with this subject and its probing style is reflected in a number of films on this topic. Of course, it is the ultimate irony of The Firm that Bex has an ‘A’ level in sociology.

The psychology of the football hooligan is central to the debate regarding determinants of the 1980s hooligan. Whilst Clarke’s film can be read as an intervention on
the debate around the rise of Thatcherism, with its focus on ‘blinding materialism’ (Cropper, 1989), Clarke is keen to repeat the football hooligan’s mantra that there is no sociological or psychologically depth to what they do. When watching the sociologist’s debate on television in The Firm one of Bex’s group even remarks, ‘Why don’t we just tell him we like hitting people’? This is echoed by Phil Davis, director of 1980s-set football hooligan film, i.d. (1995) and star of The Firm. He agrees his research uncovered nothing sinister about the psychology of the average football hooligan of the decade. In a personal discussion he stated, ‘I mean you know the big thing about football hooligans at the time was everyone was saying why they do it. There are lots of things about youth unemployment, the lack of opportunities...which were completely spurious. They did it because it was fun.’ Arguably, Davis’ and The Firm’s contributions to the debate on the determinants of football hooliganism concur with many of those associated with the actual and mediated versions of this behaviour. Broadly speaking there is a reluctance to analyse or indulge in any academic dialogue around the subculture. By marginalising the behaviour of the individuals as a personal whim, those that participate presumably hope to avoid any strong analysis of their psychology, an element demonstrated by the script of The Firm as well as subsequent subject-related British films.

The Football Factory (Love, 2004) was the first of these. Released in May 2004 it did not perform particularly well at the UK box office, partly due to negative publicity focused on its violence and poor critical reviews. Whilst many of these were aimed at the ‘risible plot (which) could have been cobbled together by a bunch of 10-year-olds,’ and its shallow characterisations, there were wider criticisms regarding methodology and motive (Williams, 2004). Director Nick Love was then forced to defend his methods, which included the use of convicted football hooligans as extras in the film (Goodchild, 2004). The criticism of Love’s film was intense, as it has been of other similarly themed films, highlighting a recurring media
outcry when such titles are released. It is this perception that cinema glorifies football
hooliganism which, I argue, is at the centre of the mediated relationship with a particular,
masculine past and represents, in itself, a form of nostalgia. Whilst The Football Factory was
only a modest box office draw, it was far more popular on DVD, selling 1.5 million units in
the UK home entertainment market. This feat was replicated by Green Street, released in
September 2005, which became the eighth highest rental and sell through DVD, with UK
origins, in 2006 (UK Film Council, 2007, pp.115 and 117). Cass did not initially replicate this
popularity, performing poorly at the UK cinemas and grossing a paltry £133,896, over just 40
screens, in its six weeks of release. However, it also performed much better in the home
entertainment market, subsequently reaching tenth on the list of best-selling UK
independent DVDs of 2009 (UK Film Council, 2011a). Its success in the home entertainment
market, echoing that of other hooligan films, may indicate a specific mode of nostalgic
activity on behalf of the consumer. Specifically, the success of The Football Factory and, to a
lesser extent, Green Street in the ancillary market, appears to have highlighted a male-
dominated desire to engage with the subculture of the football hooligan in the comfort of
their own home. Whilst the demographic of this audience is difficult to ascertain it is no
coincidence that it has been further exploited, with documentary series like The Real Football
Factories (Day). This series attempted, in 2006, to document a social history of the football
hooligan, albeit heavily sensationalised. The six part series, hosted appropriately enough by
Danny Dyer, appeared to be more concerned with lionising the ‘hard men’ of the 1980s in
the same way the films do.

The documentary focus on the real hooligans not only glamorises these men but also
reinforces their status as celebrities. Well known within their own subculture, and notorious
within their local community, many hooligans of the 1980s capitalised on this and became,
perhaps surprisingly, authors. Pearson maintains that the first hooligan memoir appeared as
early as 1987, but it was not until the 1990s, once their principal activities had been curtailed by CCTV and government legislation, that many of the more notorious participants in the 1980s hooligan scene began writing their life stories (2011). Dubbed by Redhead as ‘hoolie porn’ these ‘hit and tell’ accounts increased greatly from 2002, before slowing by the decade’s end. Their popularity was exploited by other hooligan related books, such as the A-L and M-Z of Britain’s Hooligan Gangs (Lowe and Nichols) which were published in 2005, sold out within a year, and exploited a growing market for real-life violence (Redhead, 2010). The authenticity of the events which these books recount are, however, questionable, with Pearson’s research indicating that even members of the hooligan gangs felt they were ‘misleading, self-serving, unreliable and on occasion delusional’ (2011). Pearson states the dubious content of these books is attributable to a combination of ego with many of the ‘top boys’ wanting to take credit for being the ‘hardest’ hooligan and, conversely, a fear of retribution, demonstrated by a playing down of personal accountability. Ultimately, Pearson feels the memoirs are somewhat embellished as they omit many of the more mundane events in their protagonist’s ‘career’, in an effort to glamorise the authors past life. This effort to instil a level of nostalgia is clearly apparent in contemporary, mediated images of football hooliganism, many of which, like Cass, were set in the 1980s.

**Thatcherism and Cass**

*Cass*’ narrative begins, not in the 1980s but the 1960s when Pennant is a child. Most of its action, however, is centred on its protagonist’s association with football hooliganism in the 1980s and accordingly includes a number of visual and aural Thatcher references. As in *Hunger* their narrative positioning is a crucial consideration, with Thatcher situated, interestingly, as part of the problem rather than the architect of the solution. This is demonstrated in the film’s most striking moment of Thatcher imagery, situated at the crucial
point when the protagonist orchestrates his biggest fight. The shots of Thatcher giving an interview on her government’s response to football violence, are intercut with Pennant’s arrangements to travel to Newcastle to seek revenge on another football gang. Thatcher’s speech, edited into four sections, is described in the script as ‘Thatcher’s famous rant promising to rid the country of hooliganism’ (Baird, 2008, p.92). Rather than being an uncontrolled tirade, however, Thatcher’s words are well considered and measured, particularly if we compare them to those she directed at the hunger strikers, discussed earlier in this chapter. But when she says, ‘I wish we could get those responsible, I wish we could get them before a court and stiff sentences so that they stop anyone else in their tracks from doing this’, her emphasis on punishment and responsibility, rather than considering the determinants of such behaviour, appears anachronistic and out of touch (Thatcher, 1985).

But we must put these words into context, something Cass fails to do. The speech was delivered on the morning after the Heysel stadium disaster in Belgium, when 39 Juventus fans were killed after Liverpool supporters had breached a fence separating fans. In this context, the shots of Pennant and his cohorts selecting men and weapons for a trip to Newcastle seems insensitive, particularly when edited with that speech. If Baird’s intention here is to highlight the powerlessness of both political intervention and the ramifications of hooliganism, he has succeeded, albeit in a scene which appears to glorify football violence. This is where the film’s thesis becomes very problematic, something I argue that is intrinsically intertwined with its provenance and loyalty to its source. The subjectivity of the narrative here trumps its moral perspective.

The film goes on to make further political points. Pennant’s voice-over states that the police were becoming increasingly violent at this time, describing them as ‘Thatcher’s firm’. Set across scenes of police brutality in the miners’ strike, the narrative appears to indicate that the political response to social unrest was an excessive one. By juxtaposing
footage of the violence of Heysel and the miners’ strike unrest, the film goes on to makes a dubious correlation between the two. The images of this wider social unrest also, interestingly, appear in some of the film’s marketing materials. Cass’ low profile marketing campaign and small budget did not prevent it from an inventive use of Thatcher’s image. The film’s poster understandably foregrounds the character of Cass with a despondent girlfriend behind him. Underneath the film’s title is a picture of his hooligan gang. Their posture is aggressive and confrontational, and, whilst there is no indication in the graphic of their subculture, it is clear they are a group of men prepared for conflict. Furthermore, indications of the film’s themes are apparent not only in its tagline ‘The Hardest Fight is Finding Out Who You Are’ but in the critical reviews quoted at the top of the poster. The quotes refer to other titles such as The Football Factory and This is England, thereby highlighting the film’s focus on the 1980s and, specifically, strong representations of masculine subcultures. This is further emphasised by the poster’s background, composed of a series of lightly focused images, including newspaper headlines and policemen. The most prominent, however, is a head and shoulders image of Margaret Thatcher positioned next to that of the protagonist. Indicating a key element of the film’s marketing, the poster emphasises the film’s 1980s elements, particularly the political ones, despite its narrative spanning three decades. This theme extends to the trailer which begins with archive footage of football violence and the miners’ strike, with Cass’ voiceover reinforcing his subculture’s place within the social disruption of the time. A subtitle states it is 1983 and Thatcher again appears, reinforcing her role in the social division of the time.

Critics have highlighted how the film links football violence to Thatcherism and it is Cass’ clumsy association with politics, I would argue, that is the most problematic aspect of the film. For example, the social inequities of the period are presented in unequivocal detail as Pennant’s employment, which he describes as being one of ‘Maggie’s miserables’, is seen
as underpaid and exploitative. The film appears to indicate that a movement into such violence is inevitable when society provides nothing to fill that void. The voice-over’s assertion that such employment, through work schemes, was effectively state sponsored slavery reinforces this. Further blame is laid at the government’s door in the television interview scene. Pennant cites unemployment as a determinant for disaffected youth, of which his pastime is an example, but goes on to complain about the loss of national identity with many of his thugs coming straight from the Falklands’ battlefield.

Ultimately the film’s problematic relationship with the politics of the time is linked to its loyalty, even reverence, for its source material which seriously affects its ability to give an unbiased view of 1980s masculinity. Unfortunately, Baird’s attempts at fidelity were perceived by some as a lionisation of Pennant, with critics arguing the film glorified a practice, which, whilst rare now, is still considered abhorrent. Critics also denounced the film’s treatment of 1980s politics with one arguing that it represented nothing more than a ‘limp indictment of Thatcherism’ (Quinn, 2008).

Whilst Cass’ engagement with Thatcherism is an awkward one, the film can ultimately be read as a simplistic, and possibly revisionist, view of 1980s football hooliganism. Its rendition of a traditional subculture, and its codification of masculinity, are dominated by a nostalgic reflex on behalf of its authors. Consequently, therefore, Thatcher’s role in disbanding a subculture and, by association, the modes of masculinity that bound it, is overstated in the film. Ultimately, few films in this survey are as explicitly critical of Thatcher, but Cass does represent an extreme oppositional view of the politics of the time. In this respect it is one of the few films of this survey that aligns itself with the political perspectives of British cinema in the 1980s. Whilst the tribal nature of 1980s masculinity dominates many of these films, and is absent from most 1980s films, it shares a politically oppositional view of Thatcherism. Such unambiguity is absent from other films, like Is Anybody There? Although
far more subtle in their presentation of 1980s politics as the next section indicates, their provenance is from a similarly oppositional place.

**The gender politics of Thatcherism in *Is Anybody There?***

*Is Anybody There?* traces the story of a young boy, Edward (Bill Milner), who spends his days in the retirement home run by his parents, friendless and surrounded only by pensioners in various states of mental fragility. Set in what appears to be the early 1980s – the film is not specific about this – the narrative follows its protagonist as he bonds with Clarence (Michael Caine), a new ‘guest’ at the retirement home. Sharing Edward’s love of magic and the unknown, Clarence encourages his protégée to view ageing in a less pejorative way. The film is also a consideration of British masculinity, with Edward’s father, Steve (David Morrissey), experiencing a form of existential, gender crisis. Much of this, the narrative implies, is a result of Thatcherism’s emphasis on social mobility, embracing free markets and the consequences of her policies for families, and men in particular. This perspective on the correlation between Thatcherism and masculinity is one I discuss throughout this work but which I feel is most obvious, albeit in an understated way, in this film. A personal telephone conversation with the film’s screenwriter, Peter Harness, was particularly illuminating in this respect. His acknowledgement of the films’ personal provenance, whilst also trying to distance it from being an autobiographical 1980s film, provides an insight into the film’s production process. This has informed this case study’s perspective on 1980s politics and masculinity through its relationship with its author.
Is Anybody There?: Politics and authorship

Is Anybody There? differs greatly from both Cass and Hunger, specifically in terms of its political content. Unlike the earlier films, Is Anybody There?, is not an issue-based narrative and, on a simplistic level, the film seems to avoid their polemical content. It is perhaps more understandable that both the previous case studies are associated with 1980s politics, because Thatcherism cannot be divorced from the subjects of the hunger strikes and 1980s football hooliganism. Is Anybody There?, I contend, is similarly polemical in its outlook on 1980s British politics, but in a more discrete way, particularly in respect of its symbolism, preferring to deal with questions of 1980s politics in an indirect manner. There are no Thatcher speeches – or any reference to her - but the film’s portrayal of masculinity is one which is extricably linked to the socio-political environment of that period. This, perhaps, reinforces the point that Harness made to me when discussing the influences of the film. He was adamant that he, ‘didn’t want it to be a nostalgia trip in any way. It’s set in a place which is very far away from current trends. Things like that would only be peripheral in such a setting. I didn’t want to do a 80s film. I wanted to do a film about childhood and change’. Undoubtedly Harness has achieved his goal. The film is clearly a rites of passage narrative but the childhood it presents is a temporally specific one which has the political landscape permeating every frame. Is Anybody There? avoids any direct representation of Thatcherism but under closer scrutiny the film appears to be critical of 1980s social policy, arguing that Thatcher’s pursuit of free market ideals unfairly marginalised the very family values she championed.

To use my early categorisation of how these films interact with 1980s politics Is Anybody There? can be bracketed with a number of British films that use Thatcherism as a backdrop to their narrative. Is Anybody There? shares commonalities with a coruscating
study of Thatcher’s Britain, Mike Leigh’s *High Hopes*, particularly as it embraces key Thatcherite values such as entrepreneurship. *High Hopes* is, of course, more explicit in its polemic. Naming the family cactus Thatcher for example because, as the film’s protagonist Cyril (Phil Davis) says, ‘it’s a pain in the arse’, is unequivocal in its meaning. In a discussion with Davis he assesses Leigh’s motives in making *High Hopes* as political, stating, ‘Thatcherism at its height was very harsh and I think the film was a response to that’. The film does contain some explicitly polemical elements but, overall, it is a gentle study of a group of people in 1980s Britain. It is only in deeper readings that we can see how Leigh presents the film as a class-centred commentary on the inequities of Thatcherism. Contemporary films, of course, have a much more difficult task in tackling Thatcherism in implicit ways. The political points of a film like *Is Anybody There?*, for example, which addresses the financial imperatives of setting up a business in the perilous financial environment of the 1980s, are perhaps much harder for an audience to comprehend as it is temporally removed from the 1980s. Where the films of the 2000s, and those of the 1980s, can engage a contemporary audience is, of course, with the adoption of universal themes. As with *Is Anybody There?* the narrative of *High Hopes* is ultimately most interested in how the ramifications of the pervasive political climate impacts on the family as a whole and specifically the male protagonist. *High Hopes* appears to argue that Cyril is invisible to the corporate world he serves. This is demonstrated in one of the films many ironic scenes as he ascends in a lift full of office workers whilst dressed in his motorcycle courier attire. Such scenes highlight the film’s preoccupation with a Britain that is only concerned with, ‘money, social status, or material goods’ (Anon, 1989). For Steve in *Is Anybody There?* this translates into a similar crisis, generated by his diminishing role within the domestic setting.

The political nature of the narrative in *Is Anybody There?* is however a disputed one. Whilst Harness, in our conversation, is unequivocal in that he does not, ‘think of it as a
political film in any way’, there were clearly conversations early in the production process about the role Thatcher would play in the film. Additionally both Harness and director Crowley suggest that Thatcher’s 1987 ‘no such thing as society’ speech was a major influence on the film’s themes. The proposal to base the film around this crucial political speech was to show, Harness states, ‘the notion of how people can reach out to each other in different ways and how people can get left by the wayside’. There is, however, a dispute over the degree of influence this exerted in the original conception of the film. For example Crowley, in his interview for the film’s DVD release, states that Harness’ original two page script treatment addressed the subversion of Thatcher’s philosophy of an individualistic society (Crowley, 2008). This is still detectable in the film’s focus on the positive nature of community. Both sites of this communal living, the family and care home, are initially presented as areas of conflict: fragmented and disjointed. It is only at the film’s denouement that integration and acceptance occurs. But Harness suggests these indicators of the socio-political environment of 1980s Britain are coincidental and dismissed, in our discussion, the more obvious Thatcher references in the original script as ‘vague asides’ that never ‘made it anywhere near the finished film’. I contend, however, that Harness’ original thesis is still visible in the finished film. The message of Is Anybody There? reflects that there is such a thing as society and communities can work together for a common cause. Its rejection of the Thatcher speech which inspired it, is, I argue, unequivocal and presents just one of the narrative’s rejections of 1980s political policy. This is most evident in the film’s portrayal of a family under pressure as a direct result of embracing the central policies of Thatcherism such as ‘care in the community’ and the enterprise culture. Whilst these scenes acknowledge a wider social impact on the family, it is, arguably, the traditional head of the family who finds his new role most difficult to negotiate. The male anxiety exhibited by Steve can be read as a precursor to a wider ranging crisis in masculinity which enveloped the 1990s. This
is epitomised by the rise of the ‘new lad’ and ‘new man’ gender codings, discussed in Chapter Three.

**Gender anxiety in Is Anybody There?**

As the film indicates, the 1980s heralded an important shift in working practices, one that questioned traditional gender roles, firstly in the workplace and, subsequently, within the domestic space. The socio-economic shift, from a predominantly manufacturing industrial base to one predicated on a service industry, resulted, during Thatcher’s premiership, in a reduction of manufacturing workforce of 42 per cent (Evans, E.J, 1997, p.33). Whilst this provoked a crisis in the male-dominated traditional industries, it also provided opportunities for unskilled, low paid and part-time work. Because this work understandably attracted female workers, it had a devastating effect, not only on a family’s income, but also its gender dynamic, with many males feeling emasculated by no longer being the patriarchal ‘breadwinner’ (Evans, E.J, 1997, p. 33). This shift in the source of economic means, from the male head of the family to a shared or female dominated one, was to have a major socio-economic effect on the British family. In Campbell’s study of these changes in the early 1980s, she found the first signs of these shifting roles in the homes she visited. Travelling the UK in the footsteps of George Orwell’s *Road to Wigan Pier* (1937) study of poverty and depression, Campbell visited homes at the height of the 1980s recession and Thatcherism’s impact (Campbell, 1984). The men in these homes, she found, were reluctant to relinquish control of the family budget, despite a reduction in their personal economic means. She found them often feckless and irresponsible, even leaving bills unpaid as they secured the rights to the weekly benefit giro. The males of the household were clearly struggling to adjust to their diminished role within the home and, she found, it was always the women of the households, ‘who pick up the tab for men’s mismanagement’ in such working class families (1984, p. 76).
It is these gender anxieties within the domestic space that *Is Anybody There?* engages with. This is particularly apparent in the character of Steve who struggles to cope with a role which now requires him to be an equal partner. His articulation of the opportunities he has missed and his lack of independence, echoes the existential crisis felt by many 1980s men. Steve’s attempt to locate his masculine identity in a changing society is echoed in other ‘male anxiety films’ response to the 1980s.

Whilst *The Full Monty* was made before *Is Anybody There?* its setting is 1996, at least ten years beyond that of the later film. Consequently, whilst sharing male anxiety traits, *The Full Monty* demonstrates that masculinity, particularly around work, has, by the 1990s, become more assured. When Gaz (Robert Carlyle), *The Full Monty’s* protagonist, predicts, early in the narrative, that women are taking over and ‘in a few years, men won’t exist, ‘cept in a zoo or something’, he is genuinely concerned for the future of the male species. However, the remainder of the film is devoted to men reclaiming their masculine ground, albeit through employment in a female dominated service industry. This concern about the future role of the British male is also at the root of Steve’s ennui in *Is Anybody There?*, with the character also conflicted between his duty as father and husband and his desire to reassert his sexual identity. His clumsy attempts to impress the teenage help Tanya are predictably doomed, but demonstrate the desperation and confusion he feels around the male’s place in the work/home space at this time. This recalls Farrell’s observation around *The Full Monty* which implies that, ‘women now control the public sphere of work as well as the private sphere of the home’ (2003, p. 120). Whilst Gaz and his friends reluctantly embrace the enterprise culture to restore their economic means, Steve is still struggling to comprehend the gender role changes which Thatcherism provoked. Much of the humour in *Is Anybody There?* lies within the audience’s recognition of this with Steve projected through gender terms as laughable and misguided.
This approach of presenting 1980s masculinity as a gender crisis is a recurring motif, not just of the films of this survey but earlier 1980s based films such as *Billy Elliot*. The determinants of this focus on masculinity in contemporary 1980s films, are, of course, largely defined by the male writers and directors. As explained in Chapter One, the age and gender of these agents and their focus on a very personal past indicates more, I suggest, about contemporary masculinity and the changes it has undergone than the 1980s itself. In *Billy Elliot* this is exemplified by the role of Billy’s father, Jackie (Gary Lewis), who is presented in very traditional terms, as a noble but authoritarian coal miner, fighting not just for his principles but for his male pride and his family’s economic future. Whilst these scenes unfold against a backdrop of the erosion of traditional masculine industries and, it is inferred, the masculine role in society as well, much of this is projected as comedy. In *Billy Elliot* this is represented by Jackie’s exasperated reactions to Billy’s attempts to learn ballet and the subsequent revealing of his homosexuality. As the film progresses, of course, Jackie accepts Billy’s dream, subsequently putting family values before his own orthodox standards. More comedic value is elicited at this point and Jackie’s volte face clumsily illustrates how out of date those traditional values seem to a modern audience. Laughing at outmoded traditions, particularly those associated with unfashionable gender constructions, is of course, a long-standing component of nostalgia-based comedy but in these films the subject is invariably the patriarchal character. *Is Anybody There?* is no exception and comedy is elicited from the narrative’s broad depiction of Steve and its employment of 1980s cultural signifiers.

*Is Anybody There?* is a film which, despite its setting, avoids many of the clichés of the ‘Eighties film’, with few concessions to the popular culture of the period. When the film does acknowledge the cultural legacy of the period it is presented in a self-conscious, ironic manner. This approach, I argue, elicits comedy from the audience’s recognition of signifiers such as music and clothing. Consequently Steve’s behaviour, and his interaction with these
signifiers, such as the song ‘Come on Eileen’ (Rowland, Paterson, Adams, & Mann, 1982, track 10), at his son’s birthday party, is presented as comical and old-fashioned. In an attempt to present a generational divide, Steve is portrayed as out of touch, demonstrated most poignantly in his mode of dress. His attempts to be fashionable in a double-breasted flying jacket and mullet are deliberately designed to present the character as anachronistic and tragic. For some, like Aftab, the haircut is just an attempt to ‘obtain maximum laughs with his coiffure’ and the film descends into one of the many ‘Eighties tribute movies’ (2009). It is important to note, however, that whilst the film descends briefly into stereotypical 1980s mode, the mullet hairstyle is finally removed at the film’s climax with Steve taking his parental duties seriously. The gender crisis is over, the film concludes, with Steve embraced back into the family unit. The film also implies, however, that it was his reluctance to accept the changing role of the male in 1980s society which ultimately threatened the security of the family. Of course this is no ordinary family, and it is within this unit and the means of production that gives the biggest clue to how the film interacts with Thatcherism.

**Presenting Thatcherism in Is Anybody There?**

*Is Anybody There?* displays its 1980s roots most explicitly in its engagement with the politics of the period. Whilst the film avoids an explicit criticism of Thatcherism, its portrayal of a family which embraces its encouragement of social aspiration and free market economics, indicates that the political message from the original script is still apparent. This is most evident in the domestic setting of the film which has a dual function as a workplace. Edward’s parents, Steve and Cath (Anne-Marie Duff), run a care home in their own large, remote house, signifying them as early adopters of Thatcher’s enterprise culture. Whilst the narrative follows the family’s wider issues, particularly the deterioration of the relationship between Edward and his father, the responsibility for this, as the film indicates, is Steve and
Cath’s endorsement of a particular tenet of Thatcherism. Consequently, a close reading of
the film’s narrative indicates the anxieties within Edward’s family are closely associated with
the parents’ business. The resultant tension emphasises a recurrent anxiety within British
society during the 1980s, namely the conflict between enterprise, employment and domestic
life.

The narrative highlights the family’s business as a risky venture and one which causes
considerable financial and emotional hardship for the characters. Whilst no indication is
given of Steve and Cath’s previous occupations, the film emphasises Steve as the reluctant
partner and who is most concerned with the financial implications of the business. In an echo
of Lott’s 1980s spanning novel Rumours of a Hurricane, Steve and Cath, whilst not
immediately oblivious to the risks of becoming self-employed, appear caught up in the
promise of social mobility that Thatcher’s policies, specifically linked to the enterprise
culture, invoked. As in Rumours of a Hurricane, the pursuit of financial security is ultimately
seen as a damaging one for the family unit. Is Anybody There’s narrative gives no indication
that the business is run for greed – it is more likely one of necessity – but the attraction of
such entrepreneurial activity in the late 1980s had a close correlation to wealth creation.
Whilst celebrity businessmen like Richard Branson and Alan Sugar emphasised the
meretricious aspects of business, for many, like Charlie and Maureen in Rumours of a
Hurricane and Steve and Cath, the price paid for their aspiration was much higher. Both
couples share a lack of business acumen and a naive understanding of enterprise, at odds
with Thatcherism’s pronouncements that the enterprise culture was for all. Despite the
working-class being encouraged to embrace invention and aspiration in their career choices,
the 1980s economy, underpinned by Thatcherism, made any such venture risky and
potentially disastrous. Ultimately, there were many others like these characters, who felt the
option of being self-employed, despite these risks, was better than attempting to find work
with a new employer in a deflated job market. The attraction to the enterprise culture was such that by the end of the decade the self-employed comprised eleven per cent of the British workforce (Campbell, J. 2004, p. 245).

Steve and Cath’s choice of business also has a political significance. The Conservative government’s introduction of a ‘care in the community’ policy allowed individuals far greater input into the care of the elderly or mentally ill. By shifting responsibility for the vulnerable to local authorities, rather than the state, Thatcher intended that people would be treated in their own homes. For Campbell, ‘This was a rare instance in the Thatcher years of giving more responsibility to local authorities’, though, of course, the responsibility was on local councils to find, and fund, care for the most vulnerable members of society (2004, p. 554). The advent of the enterprise culture resulted in more businesses being created, specifically to care for the elderly. However, as *Is Anybody There?* demonstrates, this sets up a conflict between social care and financial reward, with the family anxieties within the narrative stemming from this conflict. Whilst Steve highlights his priority of business over family when he tells Edward it will cost him ‘fifty quid a week’ if he wants his old bedroom back, Cath seeks to include the residents as part of her extended family, including eating Christmas lunch with them. Of course, the decision for the couple to embark on such a challenging business may be an altruistic one. It seems clear that Cath was driving the venture, and it could be summised that her benevolent nature prompted her desire to care for the disadvantaged and vulnerable abandoned by Thatcherism. The film’s presentation of masculinity, as shown through the character of Steve, is however, a far more self-centred one.

It can be argued that Harness’s screenplay avoids becoming a ‘80s film’, in the sense that *The Business* and *Son of Rambow* are, however, its indirect criticism of 1980s society is very apparent. But the film is one of the few in this survey which avoids typical 1980s
references, such as anachronistic clothing or heavily nostalgic music. Its rural setting, generic costume and lack of a soundtrack ensure that the narrative embraces an understated version of the decade with its, ‘unforced 1980s period details’ (Hunter, 2008). Instead it tackles a far more subjective theme, that of the effect of 1980s politics on masculinity and the family. Whilst it is unequivocal in its conclusion that Thatcherism inflicted a great deal of damage within the family unit and irrevocably changed traditional notions of masculinity, how the authors of this film interact with these perspectives is perhaps most interesting. Is Anybody There? is one of a number of films that this thesis engages with, which attempts to distance itself from its roots, with an anti-nostalgia perspective. When Harness explains he didn’t want Is Anybody There? to become nostalgic, or particularly 1980s, in style or tone, he is highlighting the concerns of many, that nostalgia pieces, particularly in respect of the 1980s, are somehow artistically inferior; something considered in more detail in Chapter Five.

**Conclusion**

A 2012 poll confirmed Margaret Thatcher as the country’s second most respected politician behind Boris Johnson. Whilst this was undoubtedly a response to an outpouring of nationalistic fervour after the Olympics and the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee, which would be expected to favour Thatcher’s association with patriotism, it does indicate that, for many, she is still an inspirational figure (Wintour). Perhaps more importantly, such polls highlight the pervasive influence of the former Premier. Still politically, and socially, vital even twenty years after she left office, Thatcher has become a lightning rod for much of our relationship with the 1980s.

The representation of Thatcher across popular culture, and in cinema in particular, has reflected this fascination with 1980s politics, personified in the presentation of the former prime minister. As this chapter has demonstrated, this representation of Thatcher
iconography and politics, indicates a conflicted response to Thatcher, one which has difficulty divorcing the person from the politics. Yet these films also serve a number of common functions. *Hunger* and *Is Anybody There?*, whilst arguably distinct political texts, have directors or writers who distance themselves from the political elements of their work. This, I suggest, is an attempt to avoid comparisons to ‘1980s nostalgia’ films, which focus predominantly on the signifiers of the period, presenting the decade in far more elegiac terms. Harness articulates this in discussing the provenance of *Is Anybody There?* Arguably our association with Thatcher to the 1980s, as this chapter maintains, has suggested a similar relationship between the two, indicating, for many, that the image and politics of Thatcher aid remembrance of the decade.

Broadly, in common with most of the films of this survey, *Hunger, Cass* and *Is Anybody There?* are critical of the Thatcher governments. *Hunger* is directly political, and it is impossible to view the film in anything other than polemical terms. The film’s partisan position is reinforced by Steve McQueen’s background – in an anti-Thatcher household – and comments about Bobby Sands’ treatment by the British government. *Cass* is just as unequivocal, but here the focus begins to turn to a dominant aspect of these narratives: masculinity. By embedding traditional masculine behaviours within a dominant male subculture of the 1980s, Baird provides a restrictive commentary on the decade. *Cass* is unapologetically nostalgic for the 1980s just as much as it is anti-Thatcher in its tone, but it is a nostalgia for tribal affiliation amongst males that the director chooses to foreground. This elegiac recalling of traditional male behaviours is echoed in *Is Anybody There?* which in its subtlety and its author’s disavowal of any political narrative, presents the 1980s as the period when the issue of male anxiety dominated. Whilst these films differ in their nostalgic representation of specific masculine behaviours – *Cass* is a subcultural affiliation and *Is Anybody There?* focuses on a domestic and economic diminishment of male power – their
conclusions are the same: contemporary middle-aged male anxiety has its roots in the social and economic changes in 1980s Britain.

For some, the ramifications of the policies outlined in this chapter can be detected in the current generation. The children of Thatcher’s Britain are now parents, and it is the influence of their values, that some argue, inform the children of today. In 2004, Ward and Woodward reported a head teacher’s concerns that, ‘the selfish values of Thatcherism have filtered through to the present generation of schoolchildren and bred a rise in aggression and bullying in schools’. The ultimate irony, therefore, is that the politics of Thatcherism are seen to have had the opposite effect to their intention. Her original agenda was predicated on traditional family values and was the platform on which she fought, and won, the Conservative party leadership in 1975. Her embrace of such values, at that time, was interpreted as a counteraction to the ‘moral anarchy’ in the wake of the permissive society prevalent in Britain at the time, (Samuel, 1994, p. 11). However, Thatcher’s yearning for the domestic space to adopt a puritanical shift to the Victorian family was, it appears, fruitless, with only ten per cent of families fulfilling Thatcher’s ‘normal’ criteria (Hill, 1999, p. 11). The following chapter will look more widely at how the male authors of these films attempt to reconcile their own childhood through a number of films focusing on masculinity and the family.
Chapter Three - Masculinity, patriarchy and family

Introduction

The dynamic of the British family began to alter as the socio-economic changes of the 1980s took hold. With the number of women in part-time work increasing dramatically, and traditional blue-collar work receding, gender expectations within the family unit became less defined. The changing role of the British male, specifically, has attracted most attention amidst these developments. Monk identifies British cinema of the 1990s as being dominated by images of ‘men and masculinity in crisis’ (2000, p. 156). But this mediated gender anxiety can be traced back to a much earlier period in British cinema, a medium, which, in one form or another, it had been apparent for many years.

Faludi argues that we must consider the aftermath of the Second World War to locate the roots of contemporary anxiety around the status of men in society. The first section of this chapter will therefore map the changes in coding masculinity, from this period. Faludi argues that the war represented a watershed for masculinity and patriarchy, with existing fathers, ‘with all the force of fresh victory and moral virtue behind them, seemingly unfettered in their paternal power and authority, (failing) to pass the mantle, the knowledge, all that power and authority, on to their sons’ (1999, p. 597). How the social coding of masculinity changed in this environment will also be considered, particularly with recourse to the mediation of the male, specifically through British cinema. The archetypes which emerged from this medium, such as ‘the corrupted serviceman’, as outlined by both Chibnall (2009, pp.375-386) and Spicer (2003 and 2009), are useful developments to consider through recourse to a number of related British films. Notions of masculinity in British cinema will then be tracked through another major social change for men: Thatcherism.
The demise of much of Britain’s manufacturing industry and its effect on a generation of working-class men in the 1980s was only partly mitigated by the rise of the service industry. Whilst household incomes dropped, gender roles changed and for the first time since the Second World War British working-class men, in particular, were disenfranchised, whilst frozen out of an evolving employment market. Chambers argues the effects of Thatcherism were felt in ‘the rise in post-divorce families and the increase in women’s employment coupled with rising male unemployment’ (2001, p.99). This was reflected in a number of British films in the 1990s and 2000s and their representation of the British male, particularly in those films which dealt with the legacy of Thatcherism, such as *Naked* (Leigh, 1993) and *Brassed Off*. This coincided with a shift in the social coding of masculinity, predominantly driven by consumerism and the rise of the ‘men’s magazines’ in the 1980s and 1990s. The importance of both the ‘new man’ and its response, the ‘new lad’, in contemporary notions of masculinity, is difficult to understate particularly within British cinema where both archetypes are in great abundance.

The presentation of masculinity in the narratives of this chapter’s case studies - *Clubbed, I Know You Know* and *The Firm* – will be considered through recourse to these social constructions which emerged in the 1980s and 1990s. However, the focus on the authors in these sections of the chapter will not only require textual analysis of the films’ narrative but a consideration of production history. How were the films’ directors and screenwriters influenced by shifting constructions of gender in the late twentieth century? This chapter will therefore rely heavily on the personal testimony of the films’ authors, primarily through journal and newspaper interviews. In the case of *Clubbed* I will refer specifically to the telephone conversation I had with its author, Geoff Thompson, about the process of writing and adapting his 2001 book *Watch my Back*. *Clubbed*’s perspective on fatherhood is a unique one amongst these films because it is presented through the point of view of the patriarch.
The role of Thompson, therefore, is crucial and his honesty and directness in discussing his feelings about the film allows a consideration of the role of catharsis in authorial relationships with the 1980s, particularly in respect of patriarchy. This theme is continued in the chapter’s second case study - *I Know You Know*.

For writer/director Justin Kerrigan, *I Know You Know* represented a lengthy and expensive therapy session, which allowed him to gain some closure on his dysfunctional relationship with his father. How Kerrigan negotiated financing to make the film, whilst ensuring the personal elements, specific to his memory, were not compromised, will be considered whilst exploring the key pre-production issues he faced. The role of the author and his relationship with very personal material, highlights the conflict between fact and fiction. Arguably, *I Know You Know* is the most obvious example of that in the films of this survey. Extensive material around the pre-production and production phases of this film is therefore vital in understanding how the film was eventually made. This section will therefore employ a number of media reports surrounding this, both nationally and regionally, to reflect the films need to present its specific geographic area to secure funding.

The chapter will conclude with a study of Nick Love’s 2009 remake of *The Firm*. This section will consider the role of the author in the film’s perspective of fatherhood and the 1980s, followed by an analysis of how the characters of Bob (Eddie Webber) and Shirley (Camille Coduri) and their relationship with their son, Dom, is rendered. As the only positive portrayal of family life in these case studies, this case will consider the director’s own perspective through interviews and articles about his research process. This is of particular interest with regard to the film’s specific rendering of the look and style of the 1980s, with authenticity an important consideration for director Nick Love. Topics of authorship and autobiography are key aspects of *The Firm’s* provenance but resonate throughout this chapter. The role of the male author engaging with a personal 1980s involves many emotions.
including nostalgia and cartharsis. This chapter will therefore consider the determinants of the agent’s interaction with that past.

**Masculinity and the family: Social constructions and cinematic representations in post-war Britain**

**Coding masculinity: The male in post-war British society and cinema**

The social shifts in gender roles which began to emerge in post-war Britain were, of course, symptomatic of a broader, global response to the changing economic, and social demands on men. The impact of the wars on a generation of men who fought has resulted, Faludi states in her US-centred exploration of Twentieth-century masculinity, with a number of them unable to continue normal family relationships on their return (1999, p. 6). Eley observes that it was through the ‘ground of culture’ that many commentators attempted to analyse these changing mediated and social constructions of masculinity (1995, p. 17). Indeed, Hollywood explored the concerns primarily through a series of science-fiction films such as *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (Siegel, 1956) and *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (Arnold, 1957). In the latter, protagonist Scott Carey (Grant Williams) is betrayed by his employer before suffering the ignominy of depending on his wife (Randy Stuart) to protect him from household pets. In this film post-war man is figuratively reduced to an inconspicuous cipher, a clumsy allegory it seems for how the Hollywood studios, if not society as a whole, engaged with masculinity following the Second World War. British cinema, understandably, was also mediating a difficult time for men through a number of related representations.
Spicer’s tracking of changes in post-war British film highlights the availability of a number of different male archetypes for a growing cinema audience. These represent, he contends, an important indicator of social taste as well as changing public attitudes to masculinity. Highlighting the cultural importance of cinema as a social medium, particularly just after the war, he states the male stars ‘represent easily recognised types of masculinity which have been socially, culturally and historically constructed, embodying important beliefs about power, authority, nationality and class’ (2009, p. 296). This new found influence was, of course, partly a result of changing social structures following the end of the war. The shift of women into the workplace during the conflict, and the resultant confidence and freedom felt by many of them, was not easily reversed. It is therefore this realisation that the traditional gender dominance has shifted, particularly in the workplace, which provides one determinant that prompted a number of different masculine mediations to emerge in the years following the war. Perhaps the most dominant of these was in films that Spicer describes as populated by ‘handsome but dangerous men’ (2009, p. 297). Films such as *The Wicked Lady* (Arliss, 1945) and *The Man in Grey* (Arliss, 1943) were often period pieces, made by Gainsborough studios with dashing leading men, such as James Mason and Stewart Granger. They were of course chiefly made for a female audience as most men were still serving in the forces at this time. For many women, following the war and waiting for normality to be restored, a gallant, but dangerous antagonist became a popular attraction in a period where escapism and romance were much in demand.

Emerging at the same time, but persisting into the 1950s, was the male from a series of ‘psychological melodramas’, which focused on a ‘misfit, often a fugitive, usually innocent and falsely accused, but always tormented, desperate, unable to find a safe haven or a secure identity’ (Spicer, 2009, p. 298). Clay identifies how this wave of crime films, such as *The October Man* (Baker, 1947) starring John Mills, and *I Became a Criminal* (Cavalcanti, 1947)
with Trevor Howard, acknowledge the difficulties of many men, who were often suffering psychological trauma, to assimilate back into society (1999, p. 57). For Clay, however, there is a distinction between the British and US cinematic presentation of these social issues. This is particularly apparent, he detects, in a sense of unease within the British film’s narratives around how society treated these men on their return from war (1999, p. 57). This hint that maybe the establishment was complicit in the men’s subsequent alienation is an important component of these films’ commentary on post-war masculinity and is reflected in the themes of films such as *The League of Gentlemen* (Dearden, 1960). Unable to fully integrate into society following the Second World War a group of men replicate their wartime platoon’s hierarchy in a criminal gang. Whilst indicating an unwillingness to move on from the structure of war *The League of Gentlemen*, in common with many other films of the era, also emphasises the security male camaraderie engendered, particularly when replacing that of family life during the war. This emerging conflict for men in respect of their dual role, of protecting their family and fighting for global freedom, is also evident in films like *Great Day* (Comfort, 1945) where Captain Ellis (Eric Portman) speaks for many when he articulates his, ‘failure to live up to what he understands to be a man’s role’ (Spicer, 2009, p. 298). Of course by the time he has returned home the function of men in British society had changed forever.

The world had irrevocably transformed for British men re-joining society in the 1950s, with cinema representing this shift through a number of representations of masculinity. Perhaps aware of the adverse effect of excessive introspection, the film industry attempted to rally the returning men with a series of films re-enacting great events of the war, whilst championing British heroes. John Mills’ series of ‘inspirational leaders’ in films such as *Scott of the Antarctic* (Freind, 1948) and *Morning Departure* (Baker, 1950), demonstrated how the British film industry was not only trying to engender a feeling of patriotism following a post-war ennui, but also reflecting its changing audience, now
dominated by men. A softer side of masculinity began to develop in 1950s films like *Doctor in the House* (Thomas, 1954), which introduced sensitive, middle-classed characters like Dr Sparrow (Dirk Bogarde). Often bumbling and seemingly useless, but with a charm and boyish good looks, Sparrow shared many characteristics with the persona adopted by Hugh Grant in the ‘new man’ films of the 1990s. As Spicer contends, traditional male characters are still glimpsed in the comedy framework of the *Doctor* films. This is clearly visible in the character of Grimsdyke, played by Kenneth More, but even here the equitable treatment of his wife barely masks that he is essentially just, ‘a modernisation of the debonair gentlemen’ character normally played by the popular actor (2009, p. 300).

British cinema of the 1960s was dominated by representations of the ‘alienated young man’, with the decade bookended by social realist depictions of young, rebellious men railing against society (Spicer, 2003, p. 156). It is the ‘angry young man’ of the British New Wave which, perhaps, best encapsulates the class-centred response to tradition and the establishment, that both theatre and cinema embraced. Later in the decade, Lindsay Anderson’s *If* (1968) offered, in a narrative fusing social realism with fantasy, ‘an instantly recognisable inverted image of the action hero – narcissistic, arrogant, macho’ (Spicer, 2003, p. 159). This anger, it seems, had dissipated by the 1970s together with any progressive representation of masculinity in British cinema. The decade was, of course, a low point in British cinema, reflected in the dominant male characterisations of the period. Channelling traditional modes of masculinity the sexploitation films that dominated much of the output of the British film industry traded on the good looks, cheeky charm and unlimited libido of characters like Timmy Lea (Robin Askwith) in the *Confessions* films (Columbia Pictures, 1974-1977). This was echoed in the continued popularity of another franchise, the *Carry On* films (Rogers, 1958-1992), and their embrace of a new social liberalism. Whilst previously ‘pushing the envelope’ in respect of exaggerated depictions of traditional gender roles, the *Carry On*
films of the 1970s presented their audience with new extremes of male behaviour. Unreconstructed, male characters, played by actors such as Sid James and Bernard Bresslaw, can perhaps be seen as a distant cousin of the ‘new lad’ who emerged in the 1990s, obsessed with traditional male concerns, particularly sex. The social constructions which emerged in the 1980s and 1990s, such as the ‘new man’ and the ‘new lad’ represented a huge shift in the codification of masculinity and was one that, for the first time, was predicated on the consumer power of the modern man.

**Developing social constructions of masculinity: The ‘new man’ and the ‘new lad’**

Nixon identifies three consumer markets responsible for distributing the ‘new man’ construction from the mid-1980s. But whilst ‘menswear, grooming and toiletries’ dominated men’s consumer habits, providing an extensive shop window for these images to be consumed visually as well as financially, it was the men’s lifestyle magazine that had the biggest influence (2001, p. 374). Traditional male magazines, dominated by pornography, were supplemented by male interest titles like *Arena* (Bauer, 1986-2009) launched in 1986. This magazine, joined in subsequent years by titles like *GQ* (Condè Naste, 1957 - ) and *Esquire* (Hearst Magazines, 1933 - ), was aimed at an increasing number of men who embraced, what were then considered, traditionally female interests. Whilst acknowledging male pastimes with articles on cars and technology, the magazines began to devote a growing number of pages to men’s appearance and grooming. Men were encouraged to think of themselves in increasingly narcissistic terms, which, of course, involved spending more money on clothes, grooming products and toiletries. This new coding of 1980s masculinity or ‘new man’ as it was soon labelled, was not just reflected in the magazine’s articles or adverts for grooming products. Glossy photo shoots, similar to those which traditionally dominated women’s publications like *Vogue* (Condè Naste, 1892 - ), began to appear in these magazines,
presenting perfectly coiffured and tailored men as a new ideal version of masculinity. *Arena*, in particular, also acknowledged the intellectualism of its audience, introducing more cerebral interviews which ‘tended to examine their (subjects) mental complexities whilst also celebrating their implicitly ‘masculine’ characteristics’ (Crewe, 2003, p. 34). Nixon notes that it was not long before a discourse emerged, recognising the social and cultural relevance of this new gender coding (2001, p.374). Mort emerged as one of the first to comment in his essay ‘*Boy’s Own: Masculinity, Style and Popular Culture*’, that the imagery presented in these magazines, ‘offered a new, more sexualised representation of the male body in ways which drew on codings traditionally associated with representations of femininity in consumer culture’ (Nixon, 2001, p.374). With the male models making direct eye contact with the (presumably) male reader, the magazines, it was argued, were narrowing the space ‘between traditional homosexual and traditional heterosexual social constructions’ (Nixon, 2001, p.379). This ‘ambivalent masculine sexual identity’ was also apparent in the body image on show in the magazines (Nixon, 2001, p.379). The models in these advertisements, and those for grooming products which had begun to infiltrate wider media, such as television, presented a combination of traditional male and female looks. Nixon, in his description of a Brylcreem advert in 1985 describes the model as having ‘strong masculine features with elements of softness or sensuality. Thus strong chin, nose and jaw-line were mixed with very glossy hair, dark seamless skin, and full lips’ (2001, p.374). The softness described by Nixon therefore was, in most cases, supplemented by a hard, muscular body emphasising the masculinity and definition of the model. But it was the perceived feminisation of the 1980s male that saw a further progression of the ‘new man’ construct.

Whilst the ‘new man’ was encouraged to embrace traditionally feminine activities, such as grooming, without fear of being labelled homosexual, others wanted to reclaim traditional notions of masculinity. Again men’s lifestyle magazines were at the forefront of
this shift. The launch of *Loaded* magazine (Simian Publishing) in 1994, signalled a move away from displays of ‘masculine sensuality’ to a much harder look, demonstrated by the inclusion of more muscular bodies, reclaiming the masculine image from an increasingly feminised aesthetic (Nixon, 2001, p.381). The pages of *Loaded*, therefore, were filled with more traditionally masculine images of men and, to avoid any doubt that the magazine’s target audience were young, heterosexual men, images of scantily-clad female models were also introduced. But for all its traditional masculine imagery this social construction of the ‘new lad’ was, like *Loaded*, ultimately an ironic creation. The ‘new lad’ it was claimed was essentially a ‘new man’ whilst he was with women. Polite, interested and attentive the ‘new lad’ was as interested in his appearance as ever. It was only when he was with other men that he reverted to traditional behaviour (Nixon, 2001, p.380). But despite its derivative nature the construct was adopted by other magazines, like *Arena*, who shifted their perspective to take into account this lucrative new audience. More articles on traditional male pursuits, particularly working-class ones, like football, cars and sex, therefore emerged to cater for this developing demographic.

By the mid-1990s popular culture also became aware of this new market developing. Novelists such as Tony Parsons and Nick Hornby presented their books’ protagonists, the modern man, as white, metropolitan and independent. But whilst such characters, who emerged in the films of novels, such as *About a Boy* (Weitz and Weitz, 2002) and *Fever Pitch* (Evans, 1997), appear to have more in common with the ‘man’ archetype rather than its ‘lad’ offshoot, areas of commonality between the two are apparent. Showalter, for example, highlights the literary characters’ resolutely defiant, ‘fear of the final embrace of marriage and adult responsibilities’ (2002). Additionally whilst these protagonists often have a profession, their interest in work is minimal in comparison with their passion for their social activities. Perhaps echoing the ‘new lad’ bible, *Loaded*, often the characters in these novels
and films were ‘anti-aspirational’ (Nixon, 2001, p.382). For example, as Spicer notes, Will, Hugh Grant’s character in About a Boy, is a, ‘contemporary Man About Town, another archetype, sophisticated, witty, unencumbered and urbane’ (2004, p.77). But Spicer also acknowledges that Will is also ‘in a self-enclosed world where he luxuriates in the meticulous pleasure of the discriminating modern consumer’ (2004, p. 85). This predilection for self-absorption, commitment aversion and attempts to escape maturity and responsibility is further amplified by the ‘new lad’s’ more traditional version of masculinity.

The proliferation of this masculine codification was supported by wide television exposure, predominantly in British comedy shows, such as Men Behaving Badly (Nye, 1992-1999) and later Game On (Stroud, 1995-1998), which presented the men as selfish, self-absorbed and juvenile. It was the female characters who were coded as sensible and reasonable, whilst the males pursued their own interests, often in exclusively male groups. In these programmes, whilst some of the male characters had occupations, the focus is on the home, where the men are portrayed as children and the females as matriarchs. For MacKinnon, the response of such shows in the 1990s to the ‘new lad’ was the opposite to representations of men in the previous ten years, when they were far more likely, than women, to be defined by their work with, ‘The latter ... shown more often than men in the setting of their home, though their time divided relatively equally between home, work and other activities’ (2003, p. 66). This representation of men defined by work, as seen in 1990s films like Brassed Off and The Full Monty, indicates, I argue, a shift in the representation of masculinity in British films, following the 1980s. As Spicer indicates, ‘the legacy of Thatcherism has created a degraded underclass and a pervasive sense of social and psychological damage’ and it is this legacy, I argue, that can be detected in the masculinity of British films in the 1990s and 2000s (2003, pp. 203-204).
**Contemporary British cinema and the 1980s: Masculinity, patriarchy and the family**

The ‘new lad’s’ return to traditional notions of masculinity was soon reflected in the representation of men in British cinema of the 1990s. Chibnall’s assertion that ‘In the four years between April 1997 and April 2001 at least twenty-four British underworld films were released, more than were released in the twenty years before 1997’, indicates a robust response to the new social constructions emerging (2009, p. 376). Whilst films such as *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* (Ritchie, 1998) and *Face* (Bird, 1997), contain traces of the wartime dislocation which affected the males of earlier films, they also have a clear continuation with those films in their depiction of male camaraderie and, I would argue, their explicit unease with the changing profile of women in society. Directors like Guy Ritchie, at the forefront of a wave of such films in the 1990s, foregrounded narratives which reduced women to objects of desire, whilst coding masculinity through a very traditional mode of violence and sexual prowess. For Monk, the preponderance of such films had a clear determinant with, ‘the apparent ascendancy of women in the post-industrial workplace herald(ing) a resurgence of masculinism and misogyny’ (2000, p. 157). Monk’s suggestion that the rise of ‘new laddism’ and its mediated form, is a by-product of Thatcherism’s modernisation of the manufacturing industry, is therefore a recurring one. Whilst Gilbey’s assessment of Ritchie’s films does not explore the determinants of the gender representation therein, he does indicate that the absence and treatment of women in these films is a calculated effort to marginalise and demean them, presumably to the advantage of the films’ representation of masculinity. This, he argues, is an attempt to highlight the films’ real themes which are focused on ‘the fabric of male relationships’ (1998). The male of the crime films of the 1990s and 2000s, is an uncomplicated person obsessed with violence, whilst craving like-minded, male company, recalling the traditional masculine representations in the early post-war era. The dialogue of films like *Lock, Stock and Two*
**Smoking Barrels** is littered with references to traditional male interests such as football and sex within a framework of profanity. But there was also another emerging representation of masculinity in 1990s British cinema. Whilst the dysfunctional patriarch had always been a recurring character in British cinema, a dominant association with the 1980s emerged in films of the 1990s and 2000s.

The character of the flawed father is also a common one in British cinema but was particularly strong in the post-industrial films of the 1990s, like *Brassed Off* and *The Full Monty*, both of which foreground damaged patriarchs, unable to perform their traditional duties. Such a portrayal is also a recurring one in the films of this survey. In Chapter Two I argued that films such as *Is Anybody There?* demonstrated the effect on the 1980s family of the reduction in the economic means of the traditional male breadwinner. Consequently, the character, Steve, becomes disillusioned and directionless, reduced to becoming a comic diversion in anachronistic 1980s clothing. A similar representation of the ‘flawed father’ is available in *The Full Monty*. A key incentive for Gaz to put on a strip show with his friends is to ensure an income which will enable him to pay his ex-wife arrears of child maintenance, which, the audience is led to believe, allows him to assume his full parental role. Whilst Gaz reflects the immaturity and lack of responsibility associated with the ‘new lad’ the film does at least acknowledge his attempts to restore his patriarchal role through economic means, albeit one that involves his participation in a traditionally female activity. Other films in the decade emerged which depicted a different version of this archetype. In films such as *16 Years of Alcohol* (Jobson, 2003) and *The War Zone* (Roth, 1999), the male working-class father is a tyrannical patriarch who inflicts physical and psychological damage on the entire family. The representation of ‘violent and abusive working-class fathers, wrecking the lives of those around them including the traumatised son’ (Spicer, 2003, p. 196), is of course, one that resonates through the films of this survey, particularly in *The Kid* (Moran, 2010) and *The
Business, but is most obvious in another film of the 1990s, Nil by Mouth (Oldman, 1997). In Gary Oldman’s autobiographical account of his childhood the violence is cyclical, with Ray (Ray Winstone) haunted by his own abusive youth at the hands of his father. This film, too, also presents a specifically gendered space to replicate the traditional division between the sexes, particularly in working-class families.

This is first apparent in the opening scenes of the film, with Ray ordering drinks at a working men’s club. Monk observes that this scene serves to present the division of gender in Ray’s world (2000, p. 164). Ray delivers drinks to two separate groups at the club. The first, predominantly female, include his wife and mother-in-law, and the second, with whom he chooses to sit, include his all-male friends. This gendered compartmentalising of Ray’s life is even more obvious in the next scene when his friend Mark (Jamie Foreman) visits him at home. The men talk in the living area while the women stay in the kitchen. When Ray’s wife, Val (Kathy Burke), attempts to join in the conversation, she is ridiculed by the men, who are clearly irritated by her interjection. She then retreats back to the female coded space of the kitchen where she sits quietly until her mother arrives. This scene is reversed at the end of the film after Val has given Ray an ultimatum following her beating at his hands. This scene indicates a rapprochement between, not only Val and Ray, but all the males and females in the narrative. The men sit with the women in the kitchen, with the conversation clearly controlled by the women. When Ray interjects for clarification on a particular point he appears confused, whilst Mark remains uncharacteristically silent. The response to Ray’s inquiry is dealt with confidently by Val but the men are left looking subservient to the women. In the man’s world which Nil by Mouth defiantly depicts, moments of female superiority such as this are, however, always of a temporary nature and, the film implies, the cycle will continue. But whilst the film is predominantly about Ray and his role as father and son, his daughter Michelle (Leah Fitzgerald) is a quiet addition to many of the domestic
scenes, providing one explanation for the film’s title. When Ray finally gives in to emotional honesty, he implies his own childhood, and relationship with his father, is to blame for his behaviour. His account of his father is echoed by Val’s description of Ray, implying a biblical notion that fatherhood is a cycle and their sins are revisited. Whilst the film’s resolution indicates the cycle can be broken, the narrative’s insistence on Ray’s behaviour being informed by his own experiences argues for a more open reading.

In many ways Nil by Mouth presents the male as an extreme version of the gangsters of Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels. Ray is only comfortable in the company of other men, treats women as sex objects or servants, and has no meaningful relationship with his daughter. But in its mise-en-scène, I also argue that the film presents another version of post-Thatcher Britain. Ray has no visible means of support, seems to live on the margins of society and relies on the black market for consumer goods. The legacy of Thatcherism is apparent in Ray’s identity crisis, clutching on to traditional notions of masculinity, whilst, reluctantly acknowledging, like Arthur Seaton, that he doesn’t want to follow the same path as his father.

Other films address the ramifications of Thatcherism in more explicit ways, and in the films of this survey, it is often through a narrative concern with the absent father. The two protagonists in Son of Rambow are both effectively fatherless, seeking a patriarchal role model in the Rambo film First Blood (Koetcheff, 1982). In the case of Lee, the lack of strong parental guidance is linked to his parents running of a care home, a theme echoed by Is Anybody There? Unlike the business in that film however, Lee’s parents’ appear to have made a success of theirs, providing the means for them to spend long periods in Spain. Their son is therefore effectively abandoned because of his parents’ increased economic means. He forges a bond with similarly disenfranchised Will and the film suggests that their relationship, and the strong community it builds with the other children, replaces the void
they have in their domestic lives. The inference here is that whilst both of Lee’s parents are absent, it is the lack of paternal guidance that forges a bond with Will and is, ultimately, most damaging.

Cinematic representations of masculinity in these films therefore reflect the shifting social constructions of gender in Britain. With the political, social and cultural changes of the 1980s came an erosion of the traditional gender divide with men, in particular, often lacking the economic means to assume the role of bread winner in the domestic space. Such conflicts are presented in these films primarily through the representation of young, male protagonists, often lacking a patriarch (This is England, Son of Rambow) or with a dysfunctional or absent one (I Know You Know). The commonality of themes amongst these films, of coming of age narratives or conflicts with father-figures, together with the autobiographical nature of many of the films, indicates that childhood in the 1980s, particularly for the authors of these films, was a time of anxiety. This, together with the age of the creative agents, suggests that such anxieties are revisited in an attempt to resolve these issues. Whilst some present these memories through recollections of their childhood, some like the author of Clubbed, project it through the prism of fatherhood.

**Autobiography and patriarchy in Clubbed**

Clubbed is an adaptation of a memoir by Geoff Thompson, Watch my Back, which tracks the author’s past as a doorman in the nightclubs of Coventry during the 1980s and 1990s. The film is a relatively loose adaptation of the book, focusing predominantly on Thompson’s redemption and spiritual awakening. The film’s protagonist Danny (Mel Raido), based on Thompson, is estranged from his wife and children. Echoing the narrative of The Full Monty, he has an ultimatum from his ex-wife. He must either provide a stable environment for his
two daughters, get a job and a home, or never see them. However, Danny’s job as a nightclub bouncer, whilst enabling him to forge important friendships, ultimately gets him into trouble with local gangsters. Of course, for all the problems Danny’s actions cause, they are ultimately in pursuit of his familial goals: to win back his wife and children. The film, as this synopsis indicates, has a simplistic story about masculine insecurity and homosocial bonds, set against a backdrop of 1980s clubland. As my discussions with Geoff Thompson indicate – and these form the basis of much of this section – the film disappoints on many levels. It has huge narrative issues, both structural and in straining credibility, as well as a lack of cohesiveness between scenes, leaving the viewer unconvinced of the motivation for particular actions by the characters. Critical reviews were unanimously negative, with Jenkins in *Time Out* summing it up as a, ‘comically inept and unfocused piece of filmmaking’ (2009).

The film does, however, have qualities worthy of analysis, particularly in its provenance and production history, highlighting the unique costs involved in presenting a personal view of the 1980s to a contemporary audience.

**Clubbed: Provenance and production history**

The story of *Watch my Back* and *Clubbed* is ultimately an example of the importance of the personal journey involved in filmmaking, rather than the end product itself. Thompson’s working-class background and menial job, restricted him, he believes, from achieving much. With support from his second wife, he wrote his memoir, often in the lavatories of the factory in which he worked. Following the publication of his book, Thompson wrote a play based on episodes in *Watch my Back*. *Doorman*, like the book on which it was based, was an episodic account of events in a Coventry bouncer’s working life and its success resulted in Thompson being asked to write a short film on the same subject. His script for, what became known as, *Bouncer* (2002, Clifford), attracted the attention of Ray Winstone who agreed to play the
film’s protagonist. The inclusion of a big name actor clearly helped the film’s profile, and, in 2003, it secured a BAFTA nomination for best British short film. The publicity and attention this success garnered, provided Thompson with the impetus to adapt the script again for a further film, Brown Paper Bag (Clifford, 2002), also starring Winstone. This film’s success at the 2004 BAFTAs, securing the award which eluded Thompson’s previous film, was a vital factor in the evolution of Clubbed. Unfortunately, the UK Film Council’s award of £10,000 to Thompson to develop the script into a feature length film was, however, the only funding available.

Formosa Films were subsequently appointed principal producers and they attempted to finance Clubbed’s £2 million budget through a number of different channels. The company, owned by Clubbed’s director Neil Thompson, rely predominantly on raising capital through the Enterprise Investment Scheme (EIS) which allows stakeholders to buy shares in the production company for a minimum outlay of £5,000. Government legislation allows investors to take advantage of five different levels of tax relief within the EIS, including offsetting the investment as loss relief against other income. Other advantages for the investor is an involvement in making the film, which Neil Thompson states involved, ‘one of our investors who wanted to read the script just before we started pre-production (on Twenty8K (Kew and Thompson, 2012 ). We want to encourage them as much as possible - we give them access to everything. He (the investor) came up with a fantastic idea for the end, which we shot’ (MacNab, 2006a). For Clubbed, Formosa Films combined EIS investment with funding from regional agencies, Screen West Midlands and Advantage West Midlands, in return for a positive portrayal of the local environment. This ensured much of the filming was done in, and around, Coventry and Birmingham. The film also benefitted from the film tax credit scheme allowing the production company to file the film’s budget of £2million as a production loss for tax purposes.
Thompson acknowledges that the adaptation of his book was a tortuous process for him, causing personal conflicts in respect of fidelity to his memories and loyalty to his friends and family, as he was torn between telling the truth of his experiences and protecting those he was portraying. Whilst he contends, in a conversation with me, ‘one of my earlier drafts was so autobiographical that I thought if it was ever filmed it would destroy everybody I know. I just wasn’t prepared to do that,’ he does indicate that ultimately the film ended up too remote from his own memories. Thompson’s reluctance to transpose the honesty of his book into the film’s narrative, is an important point which emphasises the unique, and problematic, function of film within autobiographical discourse. Dooley and Kavanagh’s analysis of Plato and Socrates’ thoughts on authorship are useful here. For them ‘Genuine meaning always communicates through the medium of the voice: a living presence, which accompanies what it means to say’ (2007, p. 23). Although the representation of reality through a living presence in film is a mediated one, it does, arguably, suggest an enhanced level of reality for its audience through its visual rendering. For Thompson this rendition exposes his subject far more than his book, but he acknowledges he has since found a method of writing which recognises the unique properties of the medium to engage with an audience’s perception of reality, whilst protecting his subjects. This heavy reliance upon authenticity and the ‘truth’ in autobiographical writing is a key aspect of film adaptations. Eakin’s statement that ‘The presence of fiction in autobiography ...tends to make us uneasy, for we instinctively feel that autobiography is – or ought to be – precisely non-fiction’ can equally be applied to those films, like Clubbed ‘based on a true story’ (1985, p. 6). Thompson does indicate, ‘later on I learned how to be personal in my writing without hurting people’, highlighting, perhaps, that it is often the subjugation of personal truth which eases the adaptation process.
**Clubbed, as with all good adaptations, keeps not only to the spirit of its source but includes a faithful representation of key scenes. One sequence in which the narrative remains close to its source material, is in Danny’s transformation from bouncer to writer, represented in scenes which highlight the difficulty Thompson had in finding time to write. The self-reflexive sequence of Danny writing in a toilet cubicle at work, allows an insight into a process which began with the memoir and ended with the script of *Clubbed*. Ostensibly the narrative purpose of this sequence is to act as a counterpoint to the violence and aggression in the earlier parts of the film, arguing that Danny is a thoughtful and sensitive character. This is further emphasised by the narrative’s omission of many of the book’s less savoury aspects, including Thompson’s own prison sentence for violence. *Clubbed*, despite its adherence to many of the book’s themes and events, is therefore a much different beast to *Watch my Back*. This is, in part, due to the very personal provenance of the book.

The inspiration for *Watch my Back* lies in an aspect of Thompson’s life which he eventually addressed through a process of self-analysis. Despite its themes of redemption and self-improvement the cover of the memoir’s first edition pictured Thompson wearing a knuckle-duster, with the tagline, ‘I train for the first shot - it's all I need’. This focus of the book’s marketing, with a concentration on a very traditional mode of masculinity, appears to be designed to attract a specifically male readership, one attracted to conventional forms of masculine behaviour. Whilst this contrasts with the book’s message, that individuals must look within themselves to overcome difficulties, specifically in dealing with anger, it does highlight a concentration in the 1990s and 2000s of young, male centred literature depicting such acts. *Watch my Back* can be placed within the ‘hoolie porn’ books of this era, discussed in Chapter Two, in its presentation of masculine behaviour which, in the early 2000s, contrasted sharply with the feminised, more sensitive image of men in books like *About a Boy* (Hornby, 1998). Additionally Thompson’s book has an episodic structure which, despite
its spiritualist themes, occasionally veers into masculine bravado. In this respect it shares commonalities with the versions of masculinity which were present in dominant British film genres of the time, such as the gangster film discussed in the previous section. Guy Ritchie’s position at the vanguard of these representations invites a comparison between the protagonist of Watch my Back and those in films like Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels. The correlation between Ritchie’s version of masculinity, explicitly linked to violence and illegality, is replicated, in less stylistic ways, in Thompson’s book, and slightly less so, in the film Clubbed. Thompson’s/Danny’s frequent fights with local thugs, often on the street and often in front of his children, are presented in very masculine terms emphasising that the protagonist is ultimately fighting for his family and suggesting that such actions, no matter how they were provoked, are a universally accepted defence. For the protagonist, however, failure in these conflicts results in humiliation. He is a weak and ineffective father and this is reinforced by his ex-wife’s brutal assessment of him.

**Masculinity and fatherhood in Clubbed**

With the funding finally in place, Clubbed went into production on 12 May 2008, with the final script abandoning the structure of Watch my Back for a fuller narrative which expanded on events and characters from the book. For example, in his memoir, Thompson’s ex-wife is only occasionally mentioned as are his children. The film addresses this by extending the role of Angela (Maxine Peake) and her daughters, thus softening the male-centric approach of the book, and focusing on the universal theme of a patriarch fighting for his family. Consequently, despite some violent scenes, Clubbed becomes a film about a father and a husband’s responsibility and his struggle to maintain that balance, rather than a series of anecdotes from a nightclub bouncer. This switch in focus is a crucial one which allows the
story of masculine redemption to operate in a far more universally accepted framework than that of the book. Additionally, I would argue that the book’s focus on a particular brand of masculinity, aligned with traditional notions of working-class male behaviour, makes the it a difficult read. Consequently its narrative relies heavily on violence which in many scenes is glamorised or glorified. The determinants of this change in perspective around masculine behaviour between the book and film, are difficult to ascertain but I argue that the film’s shift to represent elements of the ‘new man’, absent in Watch my Back, is a representation which is apparent in other films of the era. Chambers recalls this shift in Hollywood filmmaking in the 1990s which moved from portraying ‘the responsibilities of paternity as a burden and a threat to personal independence’, to one of, ‘caring, sensitive and responsible white fathers’, (2001, p. 104). This change in perspective is apparent in two of Clubbed’s most important scenes.

Although the film’s pivotal scene; the fight in the working-men’s club, which sees Danny humiliated in front of his children, plays only a minor role in Watch my Back, the film elevates it to a central position. By doing so it becomes a vital component in the development of Danny and, more specifically, his role as a father, which is more severely undermined in the film than in the same scene in Thompson’s book. The extension of a single episode into a vital piece of narrative may be a symptom of making the film dramatically interesting. However it also serves to place the film’s view of masculinity firmly within the family unit. Yet within this perspective of a 1980s’ father struggling to maintain his family, there is a criticism of the inequality between the genders at the time. Danny’s living conditions are contrasted sharply with those of Angela’s. It is implied that his ex-wife has kept the family home, a pleasant terraced house, while Danny is relegated to a bleak, run-down block of flats. Whilst the audience is treated to a number of shots of Danny and his daughters approaching the family home, often in sunshine, the flat is often shot at a distance,
one of many grey anonymous buildings. Additionally when Danny is shown inside the flat we can see it is sparsely furnished. There is also diegetic sound of children shouting and glass breaking, indicating anti-social behaviour on the estate. The inference is clear – that the family home represents sanctuary and safety, whilst the errant father is relegated elsewhere.

As already noted in this respect, Danny has much in common with Gaz in *The Full Monty*. Both are estranged from their families through determinants which are not made explicit. It is clear, however, that they have transgressed to such an extent, that it has become their responsibility, rather than their ex-wife’s, to broker a return to normal relations. Both men, it is implied, have poor parenting skills and, as a consequence, have the additional burden of finding a job to restore the economic parity desired by their ex-wives. Any normal relationship with their children is, therefore, contingent on this, as well as repentance for their misdemeanours. The importance of financial security and the onus on the man to provide it, is a clear characteristic of both these films, which in this respect adopt a traditional view of masculinity. Angela’s requirements from Danny in *Clubbed* are, however, more ambiguous, as she appears repelled by his overtly masculine actions, particularly his aggression. Conversely, however, indicating one of the film’s least plausible traits, she defends him for these acts. This is presumably because of a recognition that he acts out of loyalty rather than a deficiency in the script, although this is unclear. Angela also goads Danny by mocking his masculinity. Her claims that he is weak are often accompanied by threats to prevent him having access to his children, thus reinforcing the association between fatherhood and traditional aspects of masculinity. For some, like Chambers, Danny’s predicament was a common one for men in this era. Arguing that there was a shift in the social perception of fatherhood in the 1980s, particularly following divorce, 1990s men were, ‘often conceived as a failure in fatherhood because they do not appear to adjust smoothly to the new role’, (2001, p. 100). Both *The Full Monty* and *Clubbed* attempt to negotiate the
changing role of fathers in British society in this period. *Clubbed*, however, struggles to place these concerns within a credible framework of changing social constructions of masculinity. This is perhaps because of its limitations in respect of performance and script, both of which were heavily criticised in the film’s reviews.

**Clubbed: Critical and commercial reception**

*Clubbed* avoids much of its source material’s grittier and more personal elements, and in doing so highlights a number of changes made during the adaptation process. The film’s use of specific 1980s signifiers and iconography, is also a feature absent from Thompson’s book. This is most apparent in a number of sequences focusing on the club scene at the time. As I will detail in Chapter Four, the 1980s dance/club sequence is a recurring feature of 1980s-set films, apparent in not just *Clubbed* but *Starter for 10, The Firm, The Business* and *Son of Rambow*, amongst others. As *Clubbed* demonstrates, such scenes present a number of the era’s cultural signifiers. Of course music is a dominant one, and *Clubbed* opts for a soul and funk soundtrack with specifically 1980s tracks, by the likes of Chic and Patrice Rushen, alternated with 1960s soul classics by artists like Wilson Pickett. The camera moves amongst the dancers, highlighting the 1980s costumes and mise-en-scène with particular attention reserved for the club’s neon accessories. This focus on an easily recognisable 1980s iconography is replicated in the film’s title sequence which, like *The Firm*, presents the film title in pink neon tubes. It is in this presentation of the 1980s that the film gains most of its criticism.

For Scott in *Sight and Sound* the film appeared to be, ‘set in an approximation of the 1980s, a virtual decade remembered only in cultural detritus’ (2009). The focus on the film’s lack of historical accuracy is one which is echoed by other critical reviews, particularly those by Jenkins (2009) in *Time Out* and Mintzer in *Variety* (2009), and is one which reverberates
throughout the film. The clothing in particular is anachronistic, reflecting broad subcultures, with Danny often dressing like a 1980s Ska fan wearing a Fred Perry polo shirt and pork pie hat, whilst the film’s thugs are dressed in the skinhead uniform of green flying jacket and Dr. Marten boots. Whilst historically accurate, these modes of dress feel like contrived, self-conscious signifiers of the time, rather than the uniform of the characters. In mitigation, director Thompson is praised for some for his rendering of the 1980s (Malcolm, 2009) (Smith, 2009) but ultimately as Scott summarises, ‘Clubbed is a conservative caricature of our recent pop-cultural history’ (2009). The film did, however, continue the promotion of its 1980s imagery in its marketing and this is particularly evident on its, now archived, website. Although Thompson’s book does not particularly foreground the 1980s, the film’s appropriation of the decade in narrative and marketing, highlights a broader strategy of promoting a film’s 1980s setting. This is apparent in the marketing of many other films of this study regardless of their narrative content. Clubbed, however, had many post-production issues. In my discussion with Geoff Thompson, he indicates that this phase was arguably the most problematic, with the process of attracting a distributor and marketing the film, particularly difficult. This wasn’t helped when Clubbed only managed to secure a very inexperienced distributor which, it seems, ultimately hindered commercial success. Route One was a distributor with no previous film experience and no online presence. Whilst, as Thompson admitted to me, this wasn’t the sole reason for the commercial failure of the film, it was certainly a factor, with the company unable to adequately promote the film to a wider audience. This underlines a crucial point for British independent film. As the UK Film Council’s annual report attests, the distribution of British film is dominated by big companies with 94 per cent of box office revenue in 2010, handled by only ten distribution companies (2011a, p.61). The choice of an effective distribution company is, therefore, a key factor in ensuring a film’s commercial success.
Eventually the film went on general release in the UK for only two weeks in January 2009, opening on just thirty screens and ending on just seven. The film’s total box office of £22,346 did not, therefore, greatly assist the producers in recouping their £2 million budget. In my discussions with Thompson, however, he is reluctant to attribute blame for the film’s commercial, critical and personal failure to one specific area, preferring collective responsibility, ‘The film wasn’t good enough, not because of the director, or the producer or writer. I think it was a combination of all those things’, he says. Ultimately, Thompson accepts that the film didn’t turn out as he hoped because of the compromises he made with his material, highlighting that for him, the process of writing, whether as literature or for screen, is a very personal act which allows him to reconnect with himself and his past. Although he acknowledges the experience of Clubbed has made him a better writer, he argues that the process is one of ‘atonement’ and ‘deep cleansing’, allowing his autobiographical material to serve as a cathartic and therapeutic mode of engagement with the past. Other writers and directors have used their films for a similar purpose, but arguably, Justin Kerrigan, in writing and directing I Know You Know, invested more than most in bringing the story of his childhood to the screen.

I Know You Know: Fatherhood and catharsis

Like Clubbed, I Know You Know is a deeply personal film. Both, in their rendition of very personal stories, also provided their authors with a difficult, but cathartic experience. I Know You Know was also commercially unsuccessful but, unlike Clubbed, the process of making the film, rather than any subsequent commercial or critical success, provided writer/director Justin Kerrigan the closure he was seeking on the past. The film’s focus on a dysfunctional relationship between a young boy and his father directly replicates that between Kerrigan
and his. Maintaining the temporal and geographical setting of 1980s Wales, Kerrigan attempts to authentically render his childhood. The implausible narrative, depicting Charlie’s (Robert Carlyle) descent into mental illness through a fantasy world of espionage, is the backdrop to another examination of a difficult father and son relationship, albeit one which serves as therapy for its author.

Authorship and autobiography in I Know You Know
Kerrigan began the pre-production process for I Know You Know after completing his 1999 film Human Traffic. The commercial and critical success of that film, which for some, perfectly captured the 1990s rave culture, seemingly propelled the Welshman to financial and creative security. Authorial and legal disputes, however, tarnished that experience, with Kerrigan subsequently involved in a financial dispute with the film’s producers. A DVD of the film, Human Traffic Remixed, which included a fundamentally different edit to the original film, with additional CGI shots and a revised opening, was subsequently released without Kerrigan’s approval. Legal action threatened by Kerrigan against the film’s producers was, therefore, framed around authorial control. This argument, which for the director resulted in an inferior version of his own product being released, not only goes to the heart of theories of authorship but also assists in our understanding of Kerrigan’s next work, I Know You Know. Perhaps the most personal film of all of those in this survey, the project became for Kerrigan an all-consuming, but uniquely intimate, project which engrossed the director for ten years, whilst providing a cathartic outlet which enabled him to come to terms with notions of fatherhood and family.

The origins of I Know You Know lie within the relationship between Kerrigan and his father. Although Frankie Kerrigan had been estranged from most of his family, his death in 2000 had a profound effect on his son, launching a process of reflection, grieving and,
ultimately, atonement. Kerrigan’s starting point for this process was one of personal memory. Whilst his childhood recollections of his father appeared to be positive ones, Kerrigan felt that because he had been the only person close to Frankie at the time of his death, ‘his memory lay with me’ (Johnston, 2010). The film, and its production process, was Kerrigan’s response to negotiating the past, because, as he maintains, filmmaking ‘was the only way I had of dealing with those personal things’ (Johnston, 2010). It is apparent from a very early stage in the pre-production process that the intensely personal nature of the film presented an obstacle to obtaining financial backing for the film. This personal connection that Kerrigan felt to the project can, I believe, can be traced to his methodology. Attempting to order the memories of his father, Kerrigan filled fifty sketchbooks with every personal recollection he had, and it is these books which formed the basis of the script (Johnston, 2010). The script developed through numerous drafts as universal themes began to emerge and, although Kerrigan aimed for, ‘the ultimate father son story’, it was vital that it attracted a wider audience (Johnston, 2010). Kerrigan, in his video diary, details the laborious process of seeking backers, only for some, like Pathè and the BBC, to withdraw. Although, even at that early stage, he acknowledged that you should, ‘never write anything too personal’, it is apparent that he was unable to compromise on much of the film’s content (YouTube, 2010). The ‘truth’ that Kerrigan sought is clearly incompatible with a commercial film script, the story eventually going through some forty drafts.

Kerrigan’s project was ultimately saved by a film industry figure with good connections, together with an awareness of a project’s commercial appeal. Sally Hibbin, the producer of Ken Loach films’ Land and Freedom (1995) and Carla’s Song (1996), sent the script for I Know You Know to Robert Carlyle, with whom she had previously worked. As with Michael Caine in Is Anybody There?, Carlyle’s influence in gaining finance for the film, provided vital box office cachè. Whilst the actor’s reason for engaging with the script,
however, was a strictly personal one – he had recently lost his own father – his involvement made the film a much more attractive proposition for prospective investors. The Wales Creative IP Fund was just one of many regional producers which helped to fund *I Know You Know*, ensuring the local environment played an important part, not only providing locations for the film, but also actors and personnel (Price, 2008). The involvement of these agencies provided much needed finance for the film, however, the conditions which had to be met to secure this money, were inflexible, restricting the geographical location in which the film was made. Additionally because of the film’s 1980s setting, a location was needed which bore little resemblance to contemporary Britain. The first choice of Cardiff was quickly deemed to be too modern to replicate a 1980s setting and it was eventually decided that nearby Bridgend would ensure the film achieved the, ‘traditional 1980s feel’ it craved (Anon, 2007).

Whilst some attention to 1980s detail is evident in the film’s setting, it is less obvious in the character’s clothing, except with Charlie, who presents a version of masculinity which seems to be based on 1970s archetypes, complete with Jason King moustache and his car, a Jensen Interceptor. The 1970s masculinity theme is further evoked in the film’s opening scenes when Charlie makes his entrance from a private jet. The scene is accompanied by music that recalls the Blaxploitation films of the 1970s, echoing throughout the film, with shades of *Tubular Bells* (Oldfield, 1973, track 1) and the ‘Theme from Shaft’ (Hayes, 1971, track 1) appearing periodically. The use of 1970s, rather than 1980s, iconography may be a reflection of the film’s broader themes, specifically the presentation of Charlie, in his fantasy world, as a James Bond/secret agent character acknowledging other mediated versions of spies available at that time.
Representations of fatherhood in I Know You Know

I Know You Know’s presentation of masculinity is one which is filtered through Kerrigan’s own personal memory. I argue that his proximity to the film’s central relationship presents ambiguities within the narrative which highlight a lack of authorial objectivity. This conflict is most obvious in the film’s closing scenes, when the narrative implies Charlie’s ashes are sent into orbit. The voice-over of Justin Kerrigan, providing a eulogy to Frankie, as well as footage of Frankie’s ashes on a rocket, blurs the lines between fact and fiction. It is precisely in this space that the film, like Clubbed, demonstrates an indulgence of its author and a dismissal of audience expectation. The importance to the audience of the film’s authenticity is, of course, debatable, but Kerrigan’s displacement of the film’s protagonist with a personal and authentic response to the narrative indicates he considers this to have a greater value than most. His subjective response to a personal past recalls Thompson’s reaction to his initial script of Clubbed, amending its content because of its personal nature, ‘I completely rewrote Clubbed because I recognised in the early version that I completely mangled my ex-wife’s character and I didn’t think that was right’. Of course Thompson’s reason for making these changes are also purely personal, with no acknowledgment of how such decisions affect the film’s commercial reception. Kerrigan’s failure to clearly delineate fact from fiction, conflating the character Charlie with his father Frankie, in I Know You Know may also be a factor in many key textual aspects of the film which present the father-son relationship as surprisingly strong despite the tensions which clearly surround the pair.

Despite Charlie’s obvious mental illness and erratic behaviour, his son, Jamie (Arron Fuller) is unwaveringly sympathetic to his father. Whilst initially based on deluded aspirations, he believes his father is going to deliver on his promises, the sense of disappointment which Jamie feels when he realises this is not the case, is fleeting and superficial. The father-son relationship is therefore presented as a rarefied one where the
child seems to be endowed with unexpected levels of emotional maturity, including high levels of forgiveness and understanding, unusual in a child of that age. I argue that Kerrigan’s refusal to compromise in rendering his personal memory is demonstrated with a ‘rose-tinted’ view of childhood, indicating an element of revisionism to the text, whereby he is projecting his adult self onto Jamie. There are further indicators that the relationship between Charlie and Jamie is one of peer rather than parent. Jamie eschews the conventional method of addressing his father, preferring to refer to him by his first name. Such an approach implies a blurring of the father-child relationship, complicated by Charlie’s inability, and lack of willingness, to impose any parental discipline on his son. This is left to Charlie’s step-father, Ernie (Karl Johnson), who attempts to impose parameters on Jamie’s lifestyle, leading to a predictable confrontation. Charlie’s dubious parental skills are not, it seems, criticised through the narrative in any way. Arguably, this is to elicit sympathy for Charlie’s mental state, but this is never fully explored, with the narrative preferring to project fatherhood as a role reliant on providing love and fun rather than conventional boundaries to govern behaviour and development.

Ultimately the structure of Charlie and Jamie’s relationship reverses when the child assumes the parent role in a bar, where Charlie’s delusions become apparent to a wider audience. Frustrated with his own inadequacies and the limitations of his fantasy life, Charlie becomes drunk and abusive in Jamie’s company, leaving his son to moderate Charlie’s behaviour. They both leave the bar, after the aborted mission, with Charlie drunk and angry and Jamie acting as protector. Whilst this role-reversal may appear troubling in its imbibing of a young child with adult responsibilities, reinforced by his mature response to the situation, it is something which the narrative indicates Jamie is used to. It does, however, highlight the arc the characters have followed, from the stereotypical father-son scenes earlier in the film. Echoing the male bonding scene in The Business, I Know You Know provides
a conventionally structured sequence of Charlie teaching Jamie to drive a predictably masculine sports car.

Ultimately, for Kerrigan, the most important aspect of the film is its adherence to the truth, or at least a truth recognized by the director. Whilst its portrayal of 1980s masculinity is clearly confused, and ultimately filtered through a contemporary perspective, what is important here is the role of the author in the film’s production. Kerrigan’s insistence that dramatic licence had no part to play in his film not only rejects commercial demands but indicates a heavy reliance on the therapeutic properties of cinema. For Kerrigan the most important aspect of the film was his desire that he ‘just wanted it to be true’ (Johnston, 2010). It is, however, this insistence on keeping to such a personal story that, Kerrigan acknowledges, caused him most problems in the film’s pre-production phase.

**Marketing and reception of I Know You Know**

The 1980s setting of *I Know You Know* is particularly understated, and confined predominately to a comic version of a 1980s father, echoing my discussion of *Is Anybody There?* in Chapter Two. This may in part be due to the film’s status as a British, independent, low-budget release, restricting much expenditure on props or costumes. Consequently, whilst the film does not appear to have any glaring period inaccuracies, save for an inkjet shop in the High Street, it opts for a toned down version of the 1980s, in a manner similar to *Is Anybody There?* This is also reflected in the film’s marketing, which, sparse though it is, focuses on its autobiographical provenance and highlights its genre tendencies as a thriller instead.

The marketing of the film did, however, cause problems around its main themes which are predominately linked to Charlie’s mental illness. The producers made this potential
obstacle into a positive marketing tool by collaborating with a mental health charity, MIND, and The Big Issue, to promote the film. This resulted in a premiere sponsored by the charity and promoted on their website. Of course a major contributing factor to the success of any marketing campaign would have been the appearance of the film’s most well-known face. However, due to a burgeoning Hollywood career Robert Carlyle was unavailable to participate in publicity for the film. Subsequent marketing was therefore limited with much of it restricted to the local, Welsh press. But the film’s subsequent performance at the box office was seemingly hindered by its distributor, Network Releasing. As with Route One and Clubbed, Network Releasing was a small, independent, speciality distributor and focused primarily on re-releases. It only distributed its first original release in 2008. However, Network Releasing created a website which provided links to a synopsis, trailer and positive reviews for the film, although these do not seem to have prevented poor ticket sales, with no evidence available of any box office takings on the UK Film Council listings.

Critically, despite the comments on the website, the film was received surprisingly well. With most critics acknowledging, and commending, the film’s personal provenance, the content was, however, criticised by French in The Observer (2010), who acknowledged that the film ‘loses its initial grip’. Others, like Kemp in Total Film (2010), praised the film specifically for the central performance by Carlyle. However, for the film’s director, the commercial and critical reception was secondary to the filmmaking process. In the film’s press pack, Kerrigan acknowledges that he’d been, ‘burning to tell this story all my adult life. It is personal’ (The Little Film Company, 2009). The individual investment that Kerrigan made in mediating his story was, for him, therefore, a crucial part of the filmmaking process. The satisfaction was in the writing of the film and the acknowledgement that its events had been rendered accurately, in accordance with his own memory, which allowed him to reconcile the relationship with his father. Ultimately I Know You Know represents a cathartic process
of atonement for Justin Kerrigan, emphasising the role film has in addressing these autobiographical concerns. For other authors, like Nick Love, a less personal approach can be taken through adapting other people’s material, which raises different questions of authorship.

**The Firm: Family and subculture**

Although *The Firm* shares the authorial concerns of both the previous case studies, its personal view of the 1980s - presented through the prism of a member of a football hooligan gang – is, however, complicated by the film’s source material. Nick Love’s film is based on a 1989 television film, *The Firm*, directed by Alan Clarke and written by Al Ashton Hunter. When Love insisted that the film was his, ‘most personal yet’, it seems, therefore, to be a curious claim. Indeed, this is further problematised by the director’s insistence on using a possessory credit, seemingly distancing the film from its original authors (Maher, 2009). As Love was keen to stress, however, his film was not a remake. It does, however, retain the characters and overarching story of the original. Both narratives follow Bex and his football hooligan gang, the Inter-City Firm, focusing on the rivalry with fellow hooligan group The Buccaneers, and the personal antipathy felt between Bex and his nemesis, Yeti. However, Love’s film omits the wider social commentary of Clarke’s film, which traces the effect of Thatcherism on working-class, aspirational young men. Consequently, as Rolinson argues, the original film became probably the, ‘definitive statement on hooliganism’, whilst Love’s film was widely criticised, predominantly because of his temerity, in many critics’ eyes, to remake a ‘classic’ (2004, p.136).

Like Clarke’s film, Love focuses his narrative on issues of masculinity and subculture. But the original film’s specific concerns, primarily Bex and the dynamics of the football
hooligan groups, are marginalised for a study of young recruit, Dom. Whilst the new film is ostensibly about Dom's attempts to fit in with the wider group as it rampages across the country, Love is most interested in the, seemingly homoerotic, relationship between Dom and Bex, and in Dom's domestic life. In this respect the film represents a departure from the other films of this survey in that it presents a uniquely positive view of 1980s family life.

**Authorship and adaptation in The Firm**

Al Ashton Hunter’s creation, Bex, in the original *The Firm*, is undoubtedly a monstrous character. Arrogant, intelligent and calculating, he is the ultimate individualist. Even when, as at the climax of the film, the odds are stacked against him and his support has dwindled, his self-belief remains intact. McNab’s assessment of him therefore as ‘a true Thatcher’s child’ appears to be a fair one (1998). Capturing the spirit of Thatcherism in Clarke’s film, with a focus on an emerging Thatcherite subculture: consumerist, individualistic and aspirational, is one of its most enduring legacies. Yet the film is, for others, also a milestone in technical filmmaking, with Clarke’s trademark tracking shots mirroring the strutting arrogance of its estate agent cum football hooligan protagonist (Venner, 2001). Love’s remake acknowledges his own reverence for the source material, with numerous homages to Clarke, such as the name of the estate agents for whom Bex works: Hunter, Ashton and Clarke, and the inclusion of a number of tracking shots mirroring those of the original. By foregrounding his admiration for the source film, Love also attempts to stave off criticism for adapting what, for many, is a classic piece of filmmaking. Unfortunately, despite Love’s insistence that his casting was hampered by an attempt to find a lead actor who was, ‘someone who wasn’t intimidated by Gary Oldman’s brilliant performance in the original film’ (Love, 2009), critical responses focused firmly on the film’s status as a remake. Many
reviewers, therefore, had difficulty divorcing the content of Love’s film from Clarke’s, despite a clear demarcation in the film’s narrative.

Many of the reviews of Love’s film take an elitist stance. We should remember that not only is the original The Firm a revered text, but Clarke’s short, yet polemical, career was widely respected. Clarke’s reputation as a filmmaker has since been recognised in both critical and scholarly terms, most recently by Rolinson (2004). Love, by contrast, makes populist films, often about young, working-class men in homosocial groups. Unpopular with film critics, Love’s films are often derided, particularly in broadsheets. Such criticism is often brutal, as with Patterson (2009) in The Guardian who states Love’s films have an ‘absolute absence of depth, soul or class, the glitzy style entirely bereft of content or ideas, the inability to put any ironic distance between film-maker and subject, and the seemingly neurotic need to plunder, again and again and again, the work of his elders and betters’. Of course, much of this criticism is class-centred, with many of the more low-brow publications providing far more enthusiastic assessments of Love’s work. It is against this background of disapproval of the director, that we should consider the response to his version of The Firm and, in particular, his authorial claims on the film.

Unsurprisingly, most reviewers consider Clarke’s film to be of superior quality, but for some, like O’Hagan (2009), the focus on the original text produces a visceral response to Love’s film. For O’Hagan, the adaptation of somebody else’s material, even if that process involves restructuring, still places the author as the writer of the original text (2009). The use of the possessory credit, therefore, implies that the authorship has transferred to Love and, for O’Hagan, ‘it’s just wrong to see Love’s name in pink neon, colonising a work that isn’t properly his’. The journalist’s argument: that the film is rightfully a collaboration between Alan Clarke, the original director and Al Ashton Hunter, its original author, betrays a commonly articulated affinity to the original source material. Love’s version of a well-loved
original, therefore, does what any good adaptation must do. Boozer argues that a film does not need to be a faithful adaptation and only needs to provide ‘the essence’ of the source text through audio-visual ‘equivalents’ (2008, p. 9). The Firm remained faithful to its source in many respects, with a number of key scenes retained, the main characters in place and the period setting remaining. Love’s response, indicating the film was effectively a personal reimagining of Clarke’s film, was a limp defence of his motives. These are further undermined by his claims that he had ‘new light to shed’ on the original film and even more unconvincingly that ‘nobody has made a film about the casual experience’ (Love, 2009).

However, Love did introduce a personal perspective to his film by acknowledging the Dom character was drawn from his own experiences. Trawling his own past ultimately enabled Love to develop a further, more universal theme, of family relationships, by introducing new characters into the narrative: Dom’s parents, Bob and Shelley. But Love also distanced himself further from Clarke’s film, by implying a shot by shot remake of the original film would not have fulfilled him as a filmmaker. This comment raises a further, important point, around the cultural merit of adaptations. Love’s inference that a film which incorporates autobiography and a narrative ‘journey,’ provides a more creative experience for a filmmaker in comparison to a remake, is, perhaps, misleading though. The conscious manner in which he distances his film from Clarke’s, also allows Love to dissociate his work from the critical reviews comparing the two films. With Love’s fondness for plundering nostalgia and historical cultural texts, it is perhaps this that provides the more likely reason for his claims that The Firm was not a remake.

Other reviewers, like Johnston, were more concerned with Love’s rejection of the original film’s social agenda, heavily influenced by Thatcherism (2009). As I discussed in Chapter Two, the stereotype of the young, professional Thatcherite turned football hooligan, had been in circulation for some time, following the Popplewell report into the Bradford
Stadium disaster. *The Firm* was the first film, however, to render a character in that way. For Johnston, Clarke’s film was important for its representation of a derided subculture in a progressive way. He argues its portrayal of a group membership that transcended normal social boundaries of class and status was not only ground-breaking but socially significant. Love’s dismissal of this, by effectively ignoring this strand of the narrative, Johnston implies, results in *The Firm’s* inferior status (2009). It is not clear why Love does not pursue the original’s political agenda, although the passage of time, and the relevance of those issues to him, are likely to play a role in that decision. Whilst Clarke had a reputation for being a left-wing filmmaker, apparent from his critiques of Thatcherism in *The Road* (1987) and *Made in Britain* (1982), Love is far less critical of the politics of the time, preferring to concentrate on the cultural and nostalgic aspects of the period.

**Authorship and 1980s iconography**

The autobiographical provenance of *The Firm* is a recurring feature of Love’s 1980s, films (see *The Business* for a further example). It is clear however, that his nostalgia for the period is firmly linked to the cultural aspects of the 1980s, demonstrated by the iconography which permeates both *The Business* and *The Firm*. For some of the other films in this survey, the 1980s act as a political or temporal backdrop to universal themes. For Love, however, the era in which the film is set, is an integral part of the narrative. Arguably this disproportionate attention to detail distracts the audience from some of the sketchier elements in his plots and characterisations. *The Firm* does, however, explicitly showcase its 1980s pop cultural intentions, specifically at the beginning of the film, as the opening bars of Soft Cell’s “Tainted Love” (Cobb, 1981, track 2) play over the credits. Love’s attention to soundtracks is one which reflects his own youthful memories of the era. The fusion of disco and New Romantic music evokes an upbeat 1980s, contrasting with the dystopian sounds of Joy Division in *Awaydays,*
a similarly themed film, set at the tail end of the decade. The music, of course, serves a narrative purpose, as well as signposting the era in which the film is set. The strong presence of ‘Tainted Love’ for example, can be seen to foreground the tensions of the homoerotic relationship between Dom and Bex.

If ‘Tainted Love’, as a much repeated signifier of the 1980s, sets up the aural representation of the decade at the beginning of the film, Love does the same visually with opening credits which recall Clubbed’s glossy perspective of the period. Love’s foregrounding of the film’s temporal setting extends throughout the film, with the characters’ almost impenetrable vocabulary and a very precise adherence to the clothes worn by that subcultural group. For Love, it was this aspect, the costume design, which provided the necessary realism formed by his personal experience. Whilst he argues the attention to detail in his films is important, the implication is that such precision is less of a concern to the audience than it is to the director (Solomons, 2005). Frankie and Dom, the protagonists in both Love films, The Business and The Firm, appear to value their clothing above all else. Both films contain fetishistic shots of the men, carefully choosing an outfit from racks of neatly arranged clothing. In addition, both films contain repeated scenes of shopping for clothes in sports shops. Love’s admiration for the 1980s ‘casual’ clothing even extends to the marketing of the film which included the website being dominated by aspects of the film’s look, including a three part ‘essay’ on the clothing.

*Textual representation of masculinity and the family in The Firm*

Beyond its nostalgic value, the clothing plays an important narrative role in the film. Bex, in particular, is presented as narcissistic and self-absorbed. His attention to his appearance, and seeming disregard for how much he spends on it, is presented in fetishistic terms by Love. Whilst his wife chides Bex for his appearance, ‘you look like an ice-cream’, this is done, as
with Bob and Shelley later when Dom appears similarly attired, as a good natured response to his dress. Of course, there is a homoerotic element to this, with the theme threading through the film’s narrative. Much of this is centred on Dom’s emulation of Bex, and often this is through a focus on clothing. Whilst Love’s fascination with the casual culture is, of course, at the heart of this representation, it also reflects the changing social codings of men as discussed in Chapter Two. The feminisation of males, as displayed in early social constructions of masculinity in many men’s magazines, is articulated most clearly by Bex’s Lieutenant, Trig (Doug Allen). When Dom appears at the pub dressed in the same tracksuit as Bex, the group’s code has been broken. Trig’s brutal, and public, humiliation of both men, but particularly Dom, indicates that there is a very fine line between attention to appearance and projections of a feminised, homosexual masculinity. But whilst the casual clothing presents a mechanism for portraying bonding between Dom and Bex, whilst underlining the adulation Dom feels for Bex, it also highlights a generational divide.

The relationship Dom has with his parents is often filtered through conversations foregrounding this division, and much of the film’s comedy derives from Bob and Shelly’s remoteness from their son’s world. These conversations are centred predominantly on Dom’s fascination with ‘casual’ clothing, emphasising Bob and Shirley’s lack of understanding of their son’s interests. Of course, such generational divide and misunderstandings are a staple of comedy films, particularly those aimed at the young. In contemporary terms, the television series *The Inbetweeners* (Beesley and Morris, 2008 -2010) parodies these characteristics, with the ‘parent’ characters, specifically the fathers, self-consciously setting out to embarrass their prodigy with their own tales of sexual indiscretions. There is no trace of such post-modern irony in *The Firm*, but equally Love avoids implicating Bob and Shelley in Dom’s descent into subcultural thuggery. This is a departure from the perspective of other films such as *This is England* and *Is Anybody There?* where the actions of the protagonist are
clearly presented as being a result of patriarchal discord. Love also shoots a number of scenes within Dom’s home with many of these portraying Bob and Shelley alone together. They clearly share many aspects of their life, such as leisure and social pursuits, including shopping, exercise and watching television. This presentation of a middle-aged, working-class, married couple at ease with each other is a rare example of familial contentment, specifically in the 1980s-set films of this survey. Additionally, there is little discord between parents and child, other than a few arguments over Dom financing his own social life. Love’s presentation of family life for the young working-class male in 1980s Britain is a counterpoint, therefore, to one presented of 1960s Britain in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*. Whilst in the same way as Arthur Seaton’s parents, Bob and Shelly’s leisure time revolves around the television, unlike the earlier film there is no resentment of that from the protagonist, indicating a domestic space less riven with tension. Significantly however, the film’s only moment of patriarchal tension comes when, unhappy with Dom’s adulation of Bex, Bob confronts the older man to reassert what he feels is his own diminishing patriarchal power. In a scene reminiscent of *This is England*’s depiction of the fight for Shaun’s (Thomas Turgoose) patriarchal loyalty between Woody (Joe Gilgun) and Combo (Stephen Graham), Bob asserts his authority over the unremorseful Bex. Ultimately, the film implies, this is unnecessary as, unlike Shaun, Dom is clearly aware and responsive to the role of family and his parents in his life, even though he is part of a strong, masculine collective. The film ends, therefore, with Dom back within the family unit with very little disruption to the relationships in that stable group. While *The Firm*, argues that a strong parental foundation does not necessarily prevent young males from wanting to become members of male dominated groups, it does present a positive image of 1980s domestic life and, particularly, of fatherhood.
The presentation of patriarchy and masculinity through the character of Bob is not, however, a progressive one. Whilst he presents a stable, economical and emotional framework for Dom, Bob appears to have difficulty in interacting with others in Dom’s life, preferring the safe, comedic world of the domestic space. Bob’s parenting, although inadequate, does allow a limited dialogue with his son and in this respect it contrasts sharply with the version of masculinity on display elsewhere in the film. The subcultural group is one which refers to women solely as sexual objects and considers all men outside the group, and some inside, as potential enemies, who can only be overcome by force. It is this aspect of the film, reflecting a form of masculinity which many felt was extinct, that was the focus of much of the publicity when the film was released on 18th September 2009. Despite the success of other hooligan films like The Football Factory, The Firm was only moderately successful at the box office grossing £869,680 over five weeks in the UK, losing a great deal of ground after its positive opening on 265 screens. With a large drop of 54 per cent in ticket sales in the second week the film became one of Love’s least successful films.

**Conclusion**

It is of interest, but perhaps not surprising, that with these films’ focus on patriarchy and notions of the 1980s family, their provenance is similar. All purport to be based on an original screenplay, although as the final case study argued, this definition is debated in the case of The Firm and Nick Love. I contend that whilst these three films are particularly useful for this discussion on masculinity within the family, they are merely reflective of the large number of films in this thesis which engage with similar themes. The disproportionate focus on original stories in the films of this survey, of course, indicates the personal nature of the narratives, one which is often autobiographical. This, as we have seen in these case studies,
prompts an authorial introspection, which I argue is absent from adaptations. This is specifically the case with the 1980s with each of the three authors engaging with the era in diverse ways. *Clubbed* begins, like *I Know You Know*, as a therapeutic exercise, enabling Geoff Thompson to reconcile his past. The 1980s here, at least in Thompson’s book, is an indistinct one, devoid of cultural and political signifiers. It is only in its cinematic rendering that the era’s iconography is visually imagined and the personal story of Thompson’s past is amended. For Thompson, this presents a conflict between authenticity and a reluctance to present those close to him in a realistic fashion. But the film is interesting for our purposes of examining masculinity in its portrayal of changing 1980s notions of how a man is expected to act. Echoing *The Firm’s* merging of masculinity with homosocial groups with a penchant for violence, *Clubbed* does initiate a move towards a more family-orientated ‘new man’ version of masculinity. Its authorial roots, are however, echoed in that of *I Know You Know*.

Justin Kerrigan, like Geoff Thompson, treats the writing process as a cathartic experience, but unlike Thompson, the compromising of his original source material is more subtle. Whilst Kerrigan’s adherence to the fidelity of memories of his father are occasionally challenged in the pre-production phases of *I Know You Know*, his control of the subject material remains intact. Arguably this is a result of Kerrigan acting as writer/director, allowing him a greater level of input into the final product. However Kerrigan’s aim of using the process of filmmaking as a therapeutic tool in coming to terms with the past, although echoed by Thompson at a simpler level, is a key determinant of the final product. This, for Kerrigan, supersedes the film’s function as a commercial artefact.

Nick Love is the most commercial director of these case studies and whilst his films are moderately profitable, particularly in the home entertainment market, the personal attachment he acknowledges in *The Firm* suggests a shift in his motivation to make this particular film. Love’s reimagining of a cult classic provokes a further argument around
authorship and other people’s material. Whilst Love’s assertion that the original film was one which inspired him to become a filmmaker, indicates that, for purists, he is unlikely to tarnish its reputation, his shift in narrative focus was controversial. Additionally Love’s possessory credit for the film which he described as his most personal, indicates that personal memories can be projected onto an existing text to allow a fresh reading, and one which is adjusted and moulded to create a new narrative.

Yet it is the films’ negotiation of changing social constructions of men and patriarchy in their foregrounding of the male protagonist and the family, which is the main concern of this chapter. Whilst the perspectives are all different, their acknowledgment of the shifting roles of fathers and the family are consistent. Traditional representations of the male, as demonstrated by the mediated versions of the ‘new lad’, in films and television, became more prevalent in the 1990s and 2000s. These films acknowledge this, as they attempt to present these relationships through the prism of a changing working-class family. In all the films it is the father and child relationship which takes precedence over all others, a further indication that, even in films of subculture like The Firm and This is England, it is that relationship which transcends all other concerns.

Whilst I have argued that both Clubbed and I Know You Know avoid many of the obvious 1980s signifiers they are not devoid of nostalgic tendencies. Representation of traditional masculine roles, such as breadwinner and provider, run through both these narratives, presenting a very orthodox version of masculinity. Whilst both films avoid engaging politically with the era their presentation of traditional masculine behaviours indicates an elegiac response to the decade. The Firm, however, presents 1980s masculinity as far more secure - within the framework of a nurturing family. Nick Love’s 1980s, as we will also see in the next chapter with The Business, indicate a broadly supportive political perspective. Love embraces and celebrates the meritocracy Thatcherism provided and his
films reflect this. In *The Firm* the strong, traditional, masculine characters dominate indicating, perhaps, that Love’s nostalgic approach is less secure in contemporary codifications of masculinity.

Much of this chapter has been concerned with the correlation between authorship and memory. It has therefore demonstrated how, in three key films of this project’s survey, authors Geoff Thompson, Justin Kerrigan and Nick Love have projected their own personal experiences, as they recall them, onto a film text. Many factors influence the rendering of those memories, including the authors’ own relationship to the 1980s and the influence of popular and cultural memory. But while for all of them the fidelity to the story is crucial, their ability to recall an authentic event is debatable. Schacter argues that personal memory operates on a hierarchical structure: the lifetime period, general events and event-specific knowledge. The passage of time, of course, amends these memories or inhibits the process of recalling them. Consequently, the ability to recall event-specific knowledge which Schacter describes as, ‘individual episodes that are measured in seconds, minutes, or hours’, become impaired. These, he says, begin to merge together as soon as a year after their occurrence (Schacter, 1996, p. 91). Such memories, flawed as Schacter indicates, are associated with our childhood. This is one reason, I suggest, that the authors of these personal accounts of the 1980s are of a similar age. It is this association, of the 1980s and the personal experience of coming-of-age, which is the focus of the next chapter.
Chapter Four - Youth and the 1980s: Nostalgia, popular culture and authenticity

Introduction

The focus on male characters, and their perspectives, in this survey's films, exhibited through their representation of family, masculinity and subculture, is noticeably demonstrated in the narratives featuring patriarchal conflict. As the last chapter argued, the role of the father, whether through biological/subcultural affinity or absence/presence, is a recurring theme here, emphasising changing societal concerns around that pivotal family relationship. This prominent consideration of the father, results in a number of young, male protagonists emerging throughout these films. It is the function of this chapter to consider this representation and its social and cultural determinants, through recourse to a number of key films engaging with notions of youth.

The correlation between these films and the wider cultural phenomenon of a male-centric nostalgia for the 1980s, specifically in the literary world, will occupy a central place in the first section of this chapter. The predominance of white, male, middle-aged authors responding to a 1980s childhood is, I argue, a major determinant in the types of film which emerged during this period. This will allow the case studies that follow, to be placed within their social and cultural context. Discussion of this literary trend, drawing on the portrayal of a personal 1980s youth in memoirs by Manzoor (2007) and Collins (2004), will be supplemented by consideration of the fictionalising of such events. In novels such as Hollinghurst's *The Line of Beauty* and Sampson's *Stars are Stars*, the 1980s was the autobiographical context to many literary titles in the early 2000s. Whilst such books have a personal perspective, the politics of the period often seeps into their narratives, highlighting
this significant aspect of the decade. Why these, usually male, authors, in both literature and the films of this survey, interact with the decade in this way, is a key consideration of this chapter.

In ascertaining the role of youth, and specifically male youth, the choice of films for this chapter will not only consider specific times in their young protagonist’s life, thereby providing a perspective on universal aspects of youth, but also a particular authorial approach to the decade. The case studies of this chapter - The History Boys, Starter for 10 and The Business - all approach their version of the 1980s from very different perspectives, whilst providing diverse, but broadly nostalgic, views on the decade. With the films’ overwhelmingly male-orientated perspective of the 1980s, it is also interesting to consider specific accounts of the phenomenon of retro. Reynolds (2012) is particularly useful here, particularly in his analysis of the relationship between nostalgia, popular music and masculinity.

Perhaps indicating its function as a normalising and universal aspect of young lives, education also emerges as a strong theme in both the literary and cinematic modes of remembrance. The role of education is not, however, concentrated purely on institutional themes, although many of the films focus on school or university and others contain classroom scenes. This chapter will consider the theme of education as an institution within British cinema, but will also consider the broader definition of the word, particularly within the coming-of-age narratives which the films encompass. Each presents its youth protagonist as entering a formative period in their lives, and their reliance upon an older man for guidance and succour indicates that the process of education is, in these films, not merely confined to the classroom.

The case studies will take a chronological approach to these themes, as dictated by the films’ narrative focus on their protagonists, starting with The History Boys, which contains
the youngest students, on the brink of university life. Conversely, the film also provides us with the oldest writer or director of any of these films in Alan Bennett. Bennett writes *The History Boys* as a paean to his own, 1940s, childhood, despite setting it in 1983. This device introduces a new layer of engagement with the 1980s. Whilst Bennett’s story is personal, must of its autobiographical content has been supplanted from a much earlier decade. Additionally, indicating perhaps Bennett’s discomfort with the 1980s, his story is peppered with popular cultural references of his youth. This introduces the notion that an author can use the 1980s to bridge his own childhood experiences with that of the film’s, presumably middle-aged, audience. Bennett’s appropriation of a universal nostalgia, rather than a 1980s specific one, indicates the power of the personal in rendering notions of nostalgia. A thorough analysis of the film’s provenance as a play, and its unique production history, supplied in this first case study, will allow a more thorough consideration of the author’s role in establishing the basis of authenticity in representations of the past. In this case, I argue it is presented through fidelity to the source material rather than the temporal setting, and this will be explored through recourse to production and authorial material.

Arguably Bennett, and director Hytner, are more concerned with *The History Boys* operating as a commentary on changing educational practices, whilst also facilitating a discussion on post-Blair Britain, than with the 1980s. The conflict between the educational ideologies of old-school teacher Hector (Richard Griffiths) and new broom Irwin (Stephen Campbell Moore), as facilitated by headmaster Felix (Clive Merrison), stresses the role of culture in preparing the boys for a future, increasingly defined by educational achievement. Their working-class background is significant here, as they attempt the perilous journey to higher education, a theme echoed by *Starter for 10*, the narrative of which moves into the early days of university life in 1985.
The second case study, Starter for 10, indicates a distinct continuity with those 1980s memoirs discussed in the first section of this chapter, although Nicholls' book (2004) is in fact a novel based on his own experiences of the time. Nicholls’, and director Vaughan’s, rendering of their university years of the 1980s rejects The History Boys’ narrative of the life-changing experiences of an inspirational teacher, for the personal and cultural associations of new acquaintances. The film is consequently a far more conventionally nostalgic approach to the 1980s, conflicting, I argue, with the agents’ desire to avoid the film being a ‘cheesy ‘80s movie’ (Neal Street Productions, 2006). Questions of adaptation, first considered in the preceding case study, will focus on how the novel of Starter for 10 takes the themes of class, coming-of-age and confused identity, and reconfigures them to appeal to an audience beyond the ostensibly middle-class one of The History Boys. The film’s appropriation of the book’s tone sees more overtly nostalgic 1980s signifiers appearing, which appeal to an audience that engages with the film beyond its narrative. How Vaughan balances the political aspects of the narrative with the retro populism which, although absent in the book, aided the film’s marketing, will also be a key consideration of this section.

Production history and the commercial imperative for cinema to engage with a young audience, specifically through marketing, dominates this chapter’s final section which considers the overt nostalgic signifiers of The Business. The film’s association with Vertigo Films, its production company, is a vital one to examine, particularly in relation to its cultivation of a youth audience. The role of The Business’ director Nick Love, and specifically his fascination with the authenticity of his rendering of the 1980s as discussed in Chapter Three, indicates the film’s cultivation of a middle-aged, male audience familiar with the cultural signifiers of that era. This section will, therefore, examine the determinants of this and with reference to critical responses to The Business, consider the place of the film, and

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its appropriation of 1980s popular culture, within the wider survey and films and debate on 1980s nostalgia.

The contrasting manner in which these films depict 1980s youth, yet attract both a youth audience and those with first-hand experience of the 1980s, will be visited throughout these case studies. How each film also presents the 1980s as a focus for nostalgia, either for the past of the author, as in *The History Boys* and *Starter for 10*, or the hyper-reality of the 1980s, as seen in *The Business*, will also allow a fuller understanding of the role of author interaction with the era, in the films of this survey. This will initially be considered through a wider cultural survey of male memory through autobiography and literature in the following section.

*Masculine memories: Youth, education and the 1980s*

*Male memory and the 1980s – A cinematic and literary perspective*

Most film narratives in my survey reflect, in one way or another, their authors’ or directors’ personal perspective on the 1980s. Often the memories of author and director conflate to present a version of a shared past. There are some exceptions, such as *Hunger* and *Sex and Drugs and Rock and Roll*, for example. But even in these cases, the attention to fidelity to the past is strong. In the case of *Sex and Drugs and Rock and Roll*, a bio-pic of punk singer Ian Dury, the star’s son, Baxter, worked on the film, to ensure it presented an accurate rendering of his life (Cooper, 2009). Most of these films therefore are personal stories, presenting the 1980s childhood of their authors, but also suggesting a confessional and personal relationship with the decade. Universal themes are addressed, particularly in respect of youth and family, but the films, I argue, act as a powerful medium for re-interpreting the
author’s youth. Such a desire to revisit the past indicates a nostalgic impulse, although I acknowledge in Chapter Five this isn’t always apparent in the finished film. Boym contends that such a ‘longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed’ is a key component of nostalgia, and it is this link, not just to a personal past but a 1980s male childhood which binds many of these films’ themes (2001, p. xiii).

Concurrent with this series of films exploring the 1980s childhood of their authors, were a series of memoirs, broadly comic, all written by men of a similar age and presenting a version of their memories of the 1980s. These books presented the authors’ experiences in episodic form, with a penchant for highlighting the period’s anachronisms with a particular regard to the popular culture of that time. The concentration on children’s television programmes and 1980s clothing, ultimately leads, in most cases, and in common with these films, to meanderings on the school years of the author. In Manzoor’s ethnic-centred memories, for example, he echoes the spirit of The Business through his obsession with the ‘casual’ clothing of the period, resulting in him distractingly doodling ‘the logos of Sergio Tacchini and Fila in the back of my exercise books’ (2007, p. 65). The educational theme is echoed in Collins’ remembrances of the same period, although these progress the narrative to his college years. His account is, therefore, much more student-centred, but, like Manzoor, the focus is still on the experience of education and his personal influences of the time, thus presenting a major component of both the literary and cinematic representation of male memory of the 1980s. Other, similar titles followed, like Foster’s From Working Class Hero to Absolute Disgrace: An Eighties Memoir (2009), indicating the appetite for male-focused 1980s nostalgia continued into the second decade of the century. Meanwhile, the nostalgia-laden memoir was being adapted by other literary genres which fused nostalgia for the 1980s with a semi-autobiographical, or other fact-based, narrative.
The title of *Starter for 10* highlights the novel’s reliance on cultural nostalgia, with its association with the renowned catchphrase of one of the decade’s most popular television shows, *University Challenge* (Granada, 1962-). This approach, to entice an audience to buy a book which combined the universal themes of nostalgia and youth, was, however, successful with the novel achieving gross sales of £1,457,366 in its first year of publication (Anon, 2005b). Numerous other 1980s-set memoirs have appeared in later years, all revisiting the period through a popular culture prism with some, like *Maggie and Me* and *How I Killed Margaret Thatcher*, more politically centred than others. All of these titles, despite their political predilections, engage with the cultural, political and social aspects of the era in varying degrees, whilst attempting to negotiate the 1980s through the universal and the personal. Additionally, in common with their cinematic equivalent, these works are all authored by predominantly white, middle-aged males. Such an absence of female authors seems disproportionate; perhaps more so than the similar disparity in the film industry, but evidence does suggest that such writing is predominantly the domain of men. In his study of these discourses, Douglas surveyed a number of autobiographical texts to assess commonalities and differences, highlighting the dominance of the male author in these traditional modes of autobiography. He argues the phenomenon does indicate perhaps predictable trends concerning the tendency of male writers to occupy more traditional modes of life writing, and the contrary tendency for women writers, writers from minority cultures, and nonprofessional writers to be involved in the more therapeutic modes (2010, p. 87). The memoirs and autobiographical screenplays discussed here, arguably serve a number of functions, including a commercial one, for their author. Additionally, as Chapter Three explored, there is evidence that they enable the therapeutic process for their author, as demonstrated by Kerrigan’s *I Know You Know*. However, the precise determinants of these forms of remembrance can only really be considered through recourse to the texts.
themselves and their themes and narrative. One theme, that of education, is of course tied to many recollections of youth and appears throughout the 1980s-set memoirs and novels. *Starter for 10* in particular foregrounds the 1980s educational experience in its exploration of early university life for its protagonist, Brian (James McAvoy).

**Childhood nostalgia: Memories of a 1980s education**

The 1980s-centred literature that emerged in early 2000s, perhaps demonstrates that the middle-aged contemporary male has an affinity with a simpler time, with less responsibility. Of course, this search for such a state of mind, rooted in childhood and often associated with anxious males, is a construct. Boym argues that ultimately, such individuals are trying to connect to a ‘fantasy’ of the past (2001, p.xiii). Smith agrees, arguing that this idealised representation of our childhood, available across popular culture texts, merely attempts to recreate ‘a world of long-lost innocence which never actually existed’ (2010, p. 217). These representations, idealised as they are (and *Son of Rambow* is, perhaps, the best example here), do suggest, however, that these mediated versions of our youthful past are the ones with which we feel most comfortable, hence their self-propagating tendency. In film and literature, such representations are often packaged as popular memory, particularly when the authors stress the authenticity of their rendering. This can often evoke a false memory for the audience, allowing them to recollect an event or period propagated through media, but never experienced. The search for a universal history through shared popular memory is, therefore, often facilitated by common signifiers, typically those from popular culture. These sequences, particularly in cinema, recall Douglas’ theory of ‘culturally available templates’, allowing a shortcut to childhood memories (2010, p.23). Douglas argues that childhood memory is mediated through a variety of culturally available artefacts, such as photographs, nursery rhymes and classic toys. The availability of these reminders construct
codes of behaviour in engaging with memories of our childhood. Film, by its nature as a visual and emotional medium, embraces many of the elements of these memories, repackaging (what are for some people) personal remembrances as popular and cultural nostalgia (Douglas, 2010, p. 23). Education’s dominant role within our childhood, for example, elevates schooling to a status of reverence for many, as the time in which allegiances were formed and life skills developed.

Films such as *Son of Rambow* and *Is Anybody There?*, adopt the environment of secondary school as an indicator of the social alienation of their protagonist. This approach, of presenting disenfranchised youngsters disconnected from both home and school life, is a common trait of the ‘school film’, particularly in recent years. Perhaps its most successful incarnation is the character of Billy Casper (David Bradley) in *Kes* (Loach, 1969), who, like Will (Bill Milner) in *Son of Rambow*, becomes more disenfranchised, the greater exposure he has to the educational environment. The only light relief in *Kes*, echoed in *Is Anybody There?*, is the narrative foregrounding of the teachers’ own alienation from the system of which they are part. Mr Sugden (Brian Glover), the sports teacher in *Kes*, demonstrates his occupational frustration by instigating overly competitive football matches. The laconic Mr Kelly (Ralph Ineson), in *Is Anybody There?*, however, demonstrates his own disaffection, with lamentations against the political correctness of using ethnic names when providing examples of mathematic equations. They are both, therefore, as disenfranchised as their charges. Johnson argues effectively for *Kes*’ place within a larger number of dark ‘disillusionment’ films, set in the world of education, which emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s (2011, p.33). These films, such as *To Sir, With Love* (Clavell, 1967), presented children, as well as their teachers, as disenchanted with the British post-war education system. Students were often portrayed as unruly, even murderous, particularly in perhaps the most famous of these, *If...* As argued in Chapter Three, *If* presents a dystopian picture
of masculinity, as well as a Britain divided by class and social standing. The lineage of the films in this chapter, in respect of their negotiation of education and class, can clearly be traced to Anderson’s film and its fascination with the social hierarchy in British educational establishments. It should, however, be noted that an oppositional representation of education was emerging in British cinema at that time. The students in the whimsical comedies of the St Trinian’s films (Searle, 1954 – 1966) and Please Sir! (Stuart, 1971) were, as befitting their genre, more comical than dangerous. Johnson (2011, pp. 33-34) argues that British cinema in later decades, turns to a critique of changing educational policy such as Clockwork Mice (Jean, 1995), before the mood is lifted through the class conscious, ‘cynical and sometimes manipulating’, and overtly nostalgic, Harry Potter films (Warner Bros, 2001 – 2011).

Nostalgia is, of course, at the heart of many of this survey’s films’ relationship with education. Their association with 1980s schooling however, is a far more personal one than the historical ones discussed. This is particularly apparent in Starter for 10 which Nicholls acknowledges is deeply rooted in its autobiographical provenance (2006b, p. 24). But Nicholls’ response to his youth is not uncommon, and is certainly not restricted to the 1980s, although I argue that the unique draw of the 1980s for British middle-aged males is significant.

Recreating the 1980s: A masculine perspective on cultural nostalgia

As already indicated, there is an element of universality around the notion of middle-aged authors and filmmakers writing about their youth in the 1980s. Such reminiscences, facilitated through a number of media, can perhaps be simply dismissed as just another symptom of middle-aged men reaching a crucial time in their lives. Becoming a father, awareness of your mortality and legacy, and greater responsibility – all synonymous with
middle-age - are key contributors to this condition. But I argue that the 1980s has a unique role within this introspective behaviour, beyond its status as merely the site of the memory. The films of this chapter demonstrate that the relationship between the 1980s and masculine memory, as filtered through British cinema, extends beyond nostalgia. Brabazon attempts to pin down the elusive quality that makes the 1980s such a prepossessing age. She argues that the decade had the unique ability to promise a tantalising and seductive adulthood which, for the 1980s child, gave hope for a fulfilling a prosperous future (2005, p.40). Unsurprisingly, this instilling of early aspiration for those so young is, Brabazon argues, an effect of Thatcherism and, specifically, its endorsement of meretricious values. This argument that a capitalist’s nirvana was promised for those that worked hard for it, but was ultimately out of reach for many, recalls the narratives of a number of the films of this survey, and recent novels, set in the period. For example, we have seen how Steve in Is Anybody There? is ultimately defeated, and his family fractured, when the reality of entrepreneurialism finally hits him. Steve, like many, was aspirational but was ultimately ill-equipped to face the free-market world he was joining.

Our memory of the 1980s, as a unique period in our recent history is, I argue, predicated on this association with aspiration and unfulfilled hope. Brabazon goes on to suggest that these qualities make the period an attractive one for Generation X, for, as she argues we ‘remember this time – no matter how unpopular or excessive it may appear – with secret happiness’ (2005, p. 40). I acknowledge that many of these films present an idealised version of the 1980s, at least through their use of nostalgic signifiers. What is more difficult to detect in the films discussed here, however, is the optimism Brabazon indicates is inherent in our contemporary view of the decade. Whilst they present the 1980s in a number of different ways, as this work has demonstrated, it is unwise to assume that it is a universally positive one. The unique cultural appeal of the decade goes beyond, therefore, a universal
attraction to our youth. Landesman argues that the end of the 1980s is synonymous with the demise of a care-free masculinity when ‘one morning, we all woke up and found we were married, with kids and mortgages’ (2010). This comment perhaps acknowledges the view of many men, but the reality is that their relationship to the 1980s is linked to specific experiences and objects, a cultural nostalgia, which these films, on the whole, engage with. Popular culture’s ongoing relationship with the 1980s is, therefore, a culmination of the search for that past, but as Brabazon indicates, these men are perhaps searching for something tangible, yet long lost: ‘How do we (con) textualise torn movie tickets, sweat on a dance floor, fingerless gloves and a pair of Raybans?’ (2005, p. 21). It is this quest that is at the heart of the cultural signifiers that are presented throughout these films with their iconography highlighting a curiously male mode of engaging with the 1980s.

The nostalgic association with the decade, for these men, can perhaps also be explained through a consideration of the male’s relationship with music, collecting and memory. Brabazon’s illuminating discovery that, ‘Popular memory does not signal the end of history, but a collectivising and preservation of ‘private’ experiences that rarely survive beyond the death of the subject’, brings a new perspective to the role of male memory of the 1980s (2005, p. 19). Arguably, film facilitates the survival of the author’s memories and, perhaps even more importantly, allowing their life beyond death. But the memoirs and screenplays that emerged in the 2000s, also demonstrate a specifically male collective memory around the 1980s.

The male predilection for collecting objects is well-documented, with the impulse strongest at two crucial periods in their life, between seven and twelve-years-old, and again in their forties (Reynolds, 2012, p. 88). Whilst, in the early childhood period, this is likely to take the form of a collection of toys or trading cards, such as Top Trumps, referenced in the marketing of *The Business*, later in life the middle-aged collector is likely to be more
obsessive, with a trait specifically linked to music fandom. For Reynolds, this older collector is of great interest, because his fixation with collecting music, traditionally in the form of vinyl, indicates that, ‘masculinity (is) in retreat from the mess and risks of adulthood into a more orderly world of obsessive fandom’ (2012, p. 100). This statement echoes the social constructions of the ‘new man’, and ‘new lad’, reinforcing 1990s and 2000s man’s attempt to revert to childhood. But perhaps, as Rettenmund indicates, this compulsion is a specifically 1980s one. Arguing ‘The children of the 80s have a thirst for knowledge, lists and details’, Rettenmund indicates that the contemporary male’s fascination with that decade is culturally defined (1996). The collection of memories and the desire to document them at a crucial time in their life, as these agents do, is not only a therapeutic process but a cathartic one. Individuals who engage with their past and their youth, arguably demonstrate the male’s penchant for reassembling their past. Whilst collecting records from our youth in our middle-age indicates a connection to the safety and lack of responsibility inherent at that time of life, the displacement of memories of that period onto film arguably displays a similar nostalgic affiliation. In music, these middle-aged collectors are rewarded by 1980s band reformations and nostalgic pop festivals, all designed to allow access to a retrospective music collection. For film, this process is arguably facilitated by the texts of this survey: memories served up in cinematic form to those who remember the period and desire to recreate it. Of course, this emphasis on constantly looking back has its disadvantages, with Reynolds arguing that with so much nostalgia, it is difficult to see how innovation and progress cannot be compromised (2012, p. xiv).

The revisionist nature of these films, with a focus on the past, or at least a contemporary view of it, indicates a number of different perspectives upon how authorial memory is rendered. For Maher, some, ‘elide real political context in favour of crowd-pleasing, quick-fix nostalgia’ (2006b). Maher’s argument centres on a recurring motif which
is visible in at least two of the films of this chapter. Both Nick Love and Tom Vaughan argue that their films, *The Business* and *Starter for 10*, present the 1980s in a far more authentic way than preceding films. Here 1980s iconography is presented as a token of fidelity to the era, with Love, in particular, placing his rendering of a ‘true’ 1980s as a clear arbiter of credibility stating, ‘if you recreate the 1980s, you’d better get it right or people in their mid-thirties will come and bawl at you. Clobber, music, Porsches - people were mad into this stuff and you can’t mess with their memories’ (Solomons, 2005). Love’s assertion, that the director owes a duty to the audience in his representation of his own and popular memory, is a useful one to which we will return throughout this chapter. Counterpointing Jameson’s theory of the ‘nostalgia film’, predicated not just on the faithful recreation of a period, but of an indication of the past, or activity, which evokes nostalgia in the viewer, Love’s assertion ignores cinema’s ability to locate the essence of a time through its unique modes of mediation (1993, p. 196). *The History Boys* perhaps better demonstrates Jameson’s assertion that the nostalgic film essentially creates a, ‘sense of the past associated with those objects’, highlighting the varying levels at which the authors of these films operate in their presentation of the 1980s (1993, p. 197).

The first case study of this chapter, *The History Boys*, explores 1980s youth and education. Its author’s perspective, however, casts new light on the provenance of these films, specifically in its appropriation of cultural signifiers from another age. This facilitation of the 1980s, through a personal memory for a different era, raises a number of questions around the function of the decade in British cinema. Through a consideration of *The History Boys*’ fusion of 1940s and 1980s popular culture, therefore, I will consider the role of the ‘older’ author and the conflict between authorial and marketing concerns in rendering the past.
Authorial memory and adapting The History Boys

Authenticity and adaptation: The History Boys from stage to screen

In its provenance as a film which does not come directly from the experiences of a Generation X filmmaker, The History Boys occupies a unique position amongst the films of this survey. Its author, Alan Bennett, was 72 when the film was made and only marginally younger when he wrote the original stage play. It is perhaps understandable, therefore, that whilst the film is set in the 1980s it is much more interested in reflecting Bennett’s own experiences of school many years earlier. Despite the considerable age gap, the process Bennett adopts in adapting his own childhood in The History Boys, is, in many ways, similar to that of filmmakers like Garth Jennings (Son of Rambow) and Nick Love. Although the film lacks little affinity for the 1980s, I argue that its characters betray their author’s past more clearly than any other film here. As Hector, the film’s flawed but motivational teacher, suggests, ‘gobbets’ of the past can be reconstituted to indicate awareness and knowledge. Bennett’s recycling of 1940s pop culture, an echo of his own past, is often displayed in re-enactments by the students, acting as an important mode of remembrance within this narrative. Consequently, the film’s perspective on the past, which I argue is still broadly nostalgic, is somewhat confused, attempting to fuse Bennett’s personal experience with a disconnected version of the 1980s. Bennett, and director Hytner’s, interest in the 1980s, therefore, is restricted to educational and ideological areas rather than pop cultural aspects, although the film does incorporate some of the era’s music.

Bennett acknowledges that his own education echoes that of his narrative. Although the practice ended in the 1980s, the students of The History Boys are preparing for matriculation, for Oxbridge, in their seventh term at secondary school. The narrative’s foregrounding of the, essentially working-class boys’ experiences, emphasises cultural and
social constrictions, but mostly highlights the roles of ideological adults, intent on shaping the still impressionable boys. The Headmaster, Felix, in particular, feels their entry to Oxbridge would carry kudos for his school and enlists a young teacher, Irwin, to prepare them for the exam. Irwin’s style, dubbed the third way by Bennett in one of his many allusions to New Labour, contrasts with that of Hector, the sexually frustrated but inspiring teacher, who rejects exam preparation for a more holistic view. The boys, Hector feels, need to be more rounded individuals, aware of popular culture and low and high art, even if, as in the case of poetry, they do not yet have the life experience to make sense of it. Of course, the adults who act as guides and inspirational figures for the boys, are all deeply flawed and ultimately disappoint the young men. All except Mrs Lintott (Frances de la Tour), the sole female amongst the main cast and ultimately the boys’ only constant, as her authoritative position at the film’s climax, charting the boys’ subsequent journey into adulthood, attests. It is important here to delineate between the play and the film, although their provenance is remarkably similar.

The play, launched at the National Theatre in 2004 and also directed by Hytner, was an immediate success. With its narrative emphasis on high culture, education and class, its core audience was predominantly middle-classed. Bennett and Hytner’s task, therefore, was to adapt an enormously successful play into a film which could be adapted for mainstream cinema and maximize its commercial potential. There was, in fact, a precedent from a decade earlier, when Bennett’s The Madness of King George (1994) transferred successfully from stage to screen, again with Hytner directing both productions. The method of repeating that process, however, was hindered with The History Boys, not only because of funding and commercial shifts in the film industry in the intervening years, but with the agents’ desire to keep specific aspects of the original production, deterring potential financers. Whilst investors were initially attracted to the film because of its clear commercial value as a known
product, its intellectual themes and high art references were more attractive to an arthouse, rather than multiplex, audience. Producer Kevin Loader was, however, happy to sell the film to a number of big financers. Investment from both BBC Films and Fox Searchlight subsequently facilitated the film’s pre-production in June 2005 with a view to filming in the summer of that year (Austin, 2006, p.6). Fox Searchlight’s involvement, in particular, highlighted the commercial concerns of big investors. Whilst this deal provided a level of security for the producers, the involvement of a major US studio, albeit a subsidiary, can often impact upon creative control. This control was challenged by the producer’s initial reluctance to accept Hytner and Bennett’s insistence that the film reunited the cast from the original theatrical production. Whilst the actors were mostly unknown outside the UK, both men felt that the production’s integrity was linked to this decision. Whilst acknowledging that for some investors this caveat acted as a deterrent, Hytner argues that eventually his financers accepted his decision to maintain a line of continuity and familiarisation, which was essentially around keeping the shape and structure of the original artefact (Haun, 2006). The use of the original production’s cast and crew also allowed those involved to maintain ownership of the product. This device, commonly use to ‘brand’ a product and present a mark of quality, was, in this case, used to extend the life of the play, essentially presenting a very similar product to film audiences. Despite pressure for big name stars, the production team resisted the pressure to make the film a more attractive proposition to Fox Searchlight’s marketing team and subsequently reduced the film’s budget to just £2 million. To achieve this, cast and crew were asked to defer their fees, as were the film’s lawyers, with Loader insisting that the set was devoid of extraneous equipment (MacNab, 2006b, p. 12). This insistence on an economical workplace was driven by his desire to ensure the budget was on the screen (Forde, 2005). Whilst there is no reason to doubt that this was the case in The History Boys, the mise-en-scène demonstrates few concessions to the film’s 1980s
setting. Bennett and Hytner’s detachment from the era is palpable in the film’s lack of engagement with it, with some reviewers arguing that the decision to set the film in the 1980s as ‘baffling’ (Toy, 2007). But, the film’s period setting is of significance for political and ideological purposes, highlighting the film’s social, rather than cultural, nostalgia for the period.

The History Boys and the displacement of personal memory

The History Boys, perhaps uniquely in this survey’s films, exemplifies how the 1980s can serve as a backdrop for a level of popular memory beyond the merely cultural or political. Whilst the text is clearly autobiographical, with Bennett aligning himself with the Posner (Samuel Barnett) character, it is far less reverential in its autobiographical rendering of the 1980s than the other case studies here (Hytner, 2006). This is surely connected to the lack of affinity Bennett has for the period, demonstrated by his misguided assertion that, ‘Luckily the eighties were a period with no special sartorial stamp, no wince-making flares, for instance’ (2005, p. 400). Bennett’s naivety around the cultural impact of the 1980s may be a tongue-in-cheek remark but appears to be a statement echoed by the film’s director. Consequently the film, other than exhibiting a reliance on some key pop tracks in the early part of the film, appears to pay little attention to the popular cultural influences of the era. It does, however, indicate a persistent nostalgia for an earlier age, in its channeling of the music of George Formby and Gracie Fields as well as films like Brief Encounter (Lean, 1945) and Now, Voyager (Rapper, 1942).

Narratively, these artefacts are re-enacted, recycled and subverted as a demonstration of Hector’s unorthodox teaching style and his attempts to produce rounded, cultured individuals, whose knowledge is not based on simple facts and figures. Ultimately, in Hector’s view, these cultural excursions produce self-aware, diverse students who act as
a counterpoint to Irwin and Felix’s production of an automated, albeit still successful, breed of individual, cultivated through their preference for exam success. These temporally significant cultural references do, however, serve a further purpose in presenting the author’s own influences and inspirations. Whilst critics like Hanks (2006), dispute the credibility of 1980s schoolboys, however cultured, listening to Gracie Fields and quoting Now Voyager, the inclusion of these, albeit incongruous, references, clearly signpost Bennett’s own cultural influences from his childhood. Again, Boym’s association with childhood and nostalgia is useful to recall here and this linking of a ‘yearning for a different time – the time of our childhood, the slower rhythms of our dreams’ (2001, p.xv) with contemporary masculinity, emphasises that, for many authors, the temporal location of their childhood is non-specific. The History Boys’ displacement of Bennett’s own youthful remembrances, therefore, presents us with a new form of nostalgia in these films. The necessity of placing the film’s narrative in the 1980s is no obstacle to Bennett’s presentation of his own cultural influences. This mechanism of conflating nostalgia for different periods in the same text, suggests nostalgia can be evoked through a representation of a non-specific past. In the case of The History Boys, such nostalgia is directed at the universal experience of education and, specifically, school. For Bennett, I would argue, the temporal setting is almost irrelevant in recalling childhood. The nostalgia presented here, therefore, is not for the 1980s but for the essence of a universal childhood.

Even within this framework of cultural referencing, however, the choices made by Bennett are significant for our analysis of the film’s cultural capital. McFarlane’s criticism of the film, which essentially argues that the adaptation is one of personal history, is predicated on the film’s cultural associations with the author’s past, and overlooks the significance of the artefacts presented (2007, p. 24). Perhaps anchored in the film’s provenance as a play, the inclusion of more high-brow and classic texts indicates not only the aspirations of the
characters but that of the film’s author in attracting a more culturally informed audience. This projection of the past, through the prism of 1940s culture, interacts uncomfortably with the film’s more populist cultural nostalgia associations, such as those from the 1980s. This indicates, perhaps, a conflict between the author’s cultural references and those of the film’s producers, and specifically, its marketing team. Felperin seems to highlight this when she alludes to the film’s token efforts to engage with the temporally specific youthful concerns of the characters. The use of 1980s music is fleeting and, for her, it briefly and unsuccessfully tries to, ‘counteract the incongruity of youngsters in the plot who like to sing Rogers and Hart’s “Bewitched” and Edith Piaf’s “L’Accordeoniste”’ (2006).

But, even here, the film attempts to engage with a version of the 1980s that is at odds with many traditional nostalgic 1980s texts. Tracks like “This Charming Man” by The Smiths (Marr and Morrissey, 1983) and “Blue Monday” by New Order (Gilbert, Hook, Morris and Sumner, 1983) indicate an attempt to evoke an edgier, darker side to the 1980s, often packaged as ‘alternative’ in terms of music and style. This concept will be explored more fully in the Starter for 10 case study but indicates both films’ attempt to distance themselves from the overtly nostalgic view of the 1980s, epitomised by New Romantic pop from artists like Duran Duran and Wham. Hytner and Bennett’s attempt to position The History Boys outside of the 1980s mainstream, indicates a self-consciousness that is not readily apparent in the films more obvious focus on an earlier decade’s cultural signifiers. But, ultimately, The History Boys’ wistful reminiscences of the 1980s are confined to pedagogical ideology, intimating a longing for the return to a less rigid approach to teaching, in the hope that those who negotiate it would ultimately benefit.
‘Pass it On’: The representation of post-Thatcher teaching methodology in The History Boys

The abolition of the Oxbridge entrance exam in the early 1980s signifies for Bennett a turning point in educational policy. The History Boys’ attempt to present this shift in ideology is summarised by Hytner as,

the final battle ground between Hector’s romantic idealistic view of education and the much more utilitarian target-driven view represented by the Headmaster. For there to be a proper battle-ground you need to go back to the 80s for it to be actually fightable in a school (2006).

Bennett is therefore unequivocal in his recreation of this as an elegiac swansong to a more educationally equitable era (2005, p. 400).

But in aligning itself to Hector’s more inclusive style of teaching, an indication in itself of the film’s preference for traditional over modern, the narrative introduces a further anxiety in its interaction with the past. Whilst Hytner indicates in the film’s press pack that Irwin, ‘is very much a product of the 80s’, he is clearly ideologically aligned with New Labour (Fox Searchlight, 2006, p.7). For some critics, like Cameron-Wilson, this is most apparent in his Tony Blair-like appearance, but it is also demonstrated in the narrative critiquing of New Labour, highlighting the film’s contemporary sensibilities rather than its historical ones (2006). These political dimensions were inherent in the original play but modulated in its film adaptation, although the allusions to New Labour are still very apparent. This is most noticeable in Irwin’s appropriation of ‘spin’. His sound bite of ‘Who cares about the truth?’ whilst contrasting with Hector’s traditionalist view of imparting knowledge rather than a process of successfully passing exams, indicates a deeper societal retreat from honesty and personal accountability.

Hector’s tutoring of Posner through a deconstruction of Hardy’s “Drummer Hodge” is the most explicit example of Bennett’s thesis. The sequence is long and deliberate, with
only the two characters on screen throughout. But, as demonstrated by its position at the film’s middle point, it is the most crucial scene of the film. Following Felix’s disastrous meeting with Hector - when the teacher is confronted with his indiscretions with the boys - the scene allows Hector a moment of self-reflection. His admission that Hardy’s life was, ‘saddish but not unappreciated’ indicates a level of self-awareness, whilst avoiding repentance. The scene is also important for its commentary on Hector’s skills as a teacher, for this dissection of a poem goes beyond literary analysis. The transferring of emotional intelligence at the centre of this scene is also the heart of the film. Hector is explicit with his methodology, explaining the feeling when a writer articulates an emotion or response that a reader felt was unique to them. Hector is not teaching poetry to Posner he is imploring the boy to explore his surroundings, to enquire and question. These are life skills, Bennett seems to be saying, and cannot be taught by passing exams. Jays argues that this scene also operates on a political level critiquing a more Thatcherite approach of learning, epitomised by Irwin and the Headmaster (2006, p. 23). But here there is a further distinction worth making. The film never seems to suggest that Felix’s values are shared by Irwin, but it does indicate that they are compatible. Whilst Felix wants the boys to gain Oxbridge entry to improve his school’s and, by association his own, social standing, he is less concerned about how it is achieved. Irwin, on the other hand, is far more idealistic and believes the ‘spin’ he espouses, although ultimately he is unmasked as a man who is not devout about his convictions. This blurring of Irwin’s character, together with the revelation at the film’s climax that he became a television historian, reinforces Jay’s assertion that Irwin’s ideology is linked to Thatcherism (2006). The same criticism can also be directed at Felix, who when faced with Hector’s impending retirement, faces his options stoically. His response is arguably aligned with contemporary thinking. Perhaps when he says of Hector, ‘there’s inspiration, certainly, but how do I quantify that?’, he is speaking for Bennett, acknowledging
the defeat of traditional teaching. On the DVD commentary of the film Hytner argues the battle is still being fought, but *The History Boys* ultimately strikes a sombre tone for characters like Hector, who concedes retirement and ultimately death (Hytner, 2006).

*The History Boys’* lament for a pre-Thatcher past may account for its reluctance to engage nostalgically for the era of its setting. With Bennett’s left-leaning sympathies I would not expect the film to present the 1980s socio-political environment in glowing terms. However, whilst it is more concerned with Blairite politics even here we can see a reaction to what Williams described as ‘incorporation’ (1981, p.9). Bennett does not focus his anger on Thatcher for changing the education system in Britain for the worse but on Blair for not reversing her policies. This makes *The History Boys* a unique film amongst those of this survey in that it effectively ignores the architect of the residual social and political culture to chastise those that kept its legacy alive.

In popular culture terms, as well, the film is confused. Whilst its interaction with the music of the 1980s indicates its aversion to the populist elements of the decade it does share characteristics in this respect with another education-centred, 1980s-set film. *Starter for 10* does, however, despite its intentions, operate at a far more populist level than *The History Boys*.

**Starter for 10 – Nostalgia for an ‘alternative’ 1980s**

*Perspectives on youth and class in Starter for 10*

*Starter for 10*, like *The History Boys*, presents its version of the 1980s through an educational environment, although in this case it is the less structured world of university which is explored. Unlike *The History Boys* however, the film’s focus is far more on the associations
and relationships formed at the institute, rather than any critique of teaching technique or education in general. Social status is, again, a recurring motif, as Brian, a working-class, fatherless young man from an undetermined seaside town, gains a place at Bristol University. The film, in its opening scenes, indicates Brian’s success is a result of shared experiences with his father, notably watching University Challenge on television, as a child. The class-centred nature of the programme, encouraging as it did, interaction from all social strata through the medium of television, allowed, briefly at least, a mediated equalisation of social class, as living rooms across the country competed with the elite contestants. This levelling of social status, perhaps foreshadowing John Major’s ‘classless society,’ appears to motivate Brian following the loss of his father, to go to university in a period in which, the narrative emphasises, such social mobility was rare. His rites-of-passage story is then projected through misunderstandings, strained relationships and a struggle to find a new adult identity in a predominantly comedic series of events. Brian evokes the protagonist from many of the lad-lit novels of Nick Hornby or Tony Parsons as he negotiates, badly usually, the pitfalls of teenage female relationships in a disarming manner, reminiscent of a character played by Hugh Grant. As Brian attempts to balance his responsibilities with old friends and new, whilst negotiating his team’s progress in the University Challenge competition, he is also faced with his mother’s growing independence, evidenced by her burgeoning relationship with an ice-cream salesman, Des (John Henshaw). The audience’s growing awareness of the futility of Brian’s pursuit of the sexy Alice (Alice Eve) recalls Yorke’s assertion that the needs of the protagonist often work in opposition to his desires (2013, p. 12). The audience is left in no doubt during Starter for 10 that, in Brian’s case, the mature and sensible Rebecca (Rebecca Hall) is far more appropriate for him, despite his carnal desire for the mendacious Alice, as she will guide him safely through this difficult phase.
Brian’s relationships with the few adults in Starter for 10 are also problematic, in part because they are all presented through his own point of view. This approach differs greatly from the omniscient narrative of The History Boys which allows a far more rounded view of all parties, particularly key adult relationships. In that film, for example, the audience is aware of the internal dilemmas of Irwin as he considers a relationship with Dakin (Dominic Cooper) because he discusses it, albeit reluctantly, with both Mrs Lintott and Hector. Starter for 10’s restricted narrative prevents the audience identifying with the adult characters in the same way. Whilst portrayed in a comedy style, the adult characters are ultimately presented through the subjective filter of the teenage Brian. His mother’s attempts to evolve from being an unhappy middle-aged parent into a free-spirited singleton following Brian’s enrolment at university, is tempered by Brian’s disapproval at his mother’s liberation and choice of partner. His awareness of his mother’s sexual needs, demonstrated when he disturbs her in the bath with Des, is mirrored by Brian’s discomfort at Alice’s house. Her parents’ naked night-time sojourns indicate a Bohemian nature at odds with Brian’s worldview of middle-aged, suburban behaviour. So, whilst the narrative grapples with Brian’s struggle to attain the emotional maturity required to negotiate post-university life, his attempts to achieve this are underpinned by a sense that, based on the examples available to him, adulthood is as irreverent and self-absorbed as adolescence.

The restrictive narrative presented in Starter for 10 is, of course, a vital component in producing not only a youth-friendly film for marketing purposes, but also an authentic representation of the period, as based on author Nicholls’ memories. Acknowledging the autobiographical nature of the novel upon which the film is based, he argues that politics and class were not only major considerations in his recollections of the time but of any representation of that era (2006b). Consequently, the film echoes The History Boys’ use of the educational establishment as a mechanism for exploring the class-based interaction
between the privileged and working-classes. The film however, goes on to examine this dynamic through Brian’s peer, and specifically male, relationships. Although Brian spends much of the film torn between his love interests, Alice and Rebecca, it is ultimately his sense of guilt about his treatment of his hometown friends, Spencer (Dominic Cooper) and Tone (James Corden) which drives the narrative. His alienation from them as he becomes accepted at university, further heightens the division, farcically exemplified with Spencer’s arrival at the university and his subsequent fight with Patrick (Benedict Cumberbatch).

Whilst Brian’s rite-of-passage is concluded in a formulaic way with his rejection of the glamorous but manipulative Alice for the more cerebral and radical Rebecca, the film does at least, through this decision, indicate an acknowledgment of Brian’s character development. Additionally it introduces an admission of Brian’s acceptance of the politics of the period. This contrasts with Brian’s initial introduction to the subject when, in his letters home, he betrays a lack of understanding of the issues he professes to support. These sequences may be an attempt, by the film’s makers, to highlight the transitory nature of 1980s politics on the young. It was unarguably a politicised time but, presumably, left many students unaffected. The narrative therefore seems to indicate that for Brian, unlike Rebecca, a protest or a demonstration requires no ideological or political affiliation. Conversely then, this indicates that there is an element of peer pressure in Brian’s actions. It is not recorded whether in Nicholls’ experience this is representative of himself or his experience of students but, for some critics, the manner in which the film engages with politics is flawed.

Johns’ criticism that the film’s, ‘portrayal of radical student politics is confined to the occasional placard waving’, implies the tacit link between the 1980s and the protest politics which Starter for 10 represents (2006). The correlation between the decade and its politics is so strong that the thought of anybody not being affected or engaged in it appears to be
anathema to many critics. This is reinforced by others, like Lawrenson, all of whom dismiss Rebecca’s attempts to politicise Brian and his acceptance of her (and her ideals) at the film’s conclusion (2006). Arguably, it is this problematic portrayal of politics which concerns most cultural commentators. Whilst Rebecca is clearly campaigning against Thatcher’s Government policies, nuclear disarmament and the miners’ strike, the narrative is keen to distance itself from any commentary on the policies themselves. This approach, I argue, is one which also serves to highlight the author’s desire to remain detached from a purely nostalgic piece, which, he suggests, was designed to avoid parody (Neal Street Productions, 2006). There is further evidence of this in the way the film portrays other cultural signifiers of the period. The engagement with fashion and music, in particular, indicates, I argue, a move to present a version of the 1980s which has been labelled ‘alternative’ in its appropriation of non-mainstream music and clothing.

**Alternative 80s? Levels of remembrance and notions of nostalgia**

Whilst the level of personal experience rendered in Nicholls’ book, is that of the author’s, the film introduces another level of personal identification. Although the screenplay is also written by Nicholls, the director Tom Vaughan also declares a personal affinity with the story, which he contends, ‘felt so close to me, that was so personal to me’ (Neal Street Productions, 2006). This response to Nicholls’ script could be seen as canny marketing, but there is also an indication that this betrays Vaughan’s own affiliation with Nicholls’ experience, perhaps highlighting the duality of the narrative, as a representation of universal, as well as personal, experience. This clearly presents problems with how the period is rendered. Perhaps conscious that they were making a deeply personal film set in a time which many still held in great affection, Nicholls and Vaughan were cautious about how they achieved the authenticity they desired without it descending into, ‘a cheesy 80s movie where the viewer
spends the whole time laughing about haircuts and shoulder pads’ (Neal Street Productions, 2006). This comment introduces a new level of nostalgic capital which, I suggest, has a strong connotation with the visual medium of film.

Already, by 2006, the 1980s revival had spawned a number of films and television programmes which attempted to engage their audience through cultural signifiers. Nicholls’ desire to avoid these obvious indicators of the past indicates a growing concern that the whole notion of nostalgia was becoming hackneyed or ‘an affectionate insult at best’ (Boym, 2001, p. xiv). For film, this concern, I argue, is amplified, as attention on the 1980s became more focused in the 2000s and more and more films attempted to avoid becoming an archetypal nostalgia film. Part of the problem with this portrayal of the 1980s is, it seems, a notion that the appropriation of the cultural signifiers was becoming lazy and predictable in their easy referencing of the period. Others argue that a purely nostalgic approach to the decade is appropriate and timely whilst acknowledging that the line between nostalgia and parody is perilously thin (Maher, 2007). If we also consider the issue of the cultural capital of nostalgia, the concept of how a film narrative deals with the 1980s becomes much more problematic. As indicated earlier, many of the strong musical indicators of the era are associated with images of wealth and excess, as demonstrated in The Business. The correlation to the cultural representation of the 1980s with its boom years is an undeniable one, enhanced by television programmes, like I Love the ’80s (BBC, 2001), which focus on these elements. As Thorn, herself a part of the 1980s music scene in Everything But the Girl, argues in her memoir of the period, ‘It may have been Thatcher’s decade, with vacuous social climbers such as Duran Duran sometimes held up to represent the whole period, but it didn’t feel like that at the time’ (2013, p. 158).

The less mainstream aspects of the decade are, therefore, often side-lined in nostalgic tributes to the era. This aspect of the decade was one which engaged with the
political struggle of the time, whilst providing its own post-punk mode of dress and music, with bands like Echo and the Bunnymen and The Cure presenting a darker side of the decade. It is this perspective with which *The History Boys* engages in a notional way and that *Starter for 10* attempts to align itself with, in an attempt to create distance from traditional notions of nostalgia. Consequently, the film bypasses the usual upbeat 1980s music as seen in films like *Son of Rambow* and *The Business*, and instead focuses on the post-punk music of The Cure, The Psychedelic Furs and The Buzzcocks. *Starter for 10*’s showcasing of this music does, admittedly, distance itself, as the makers envisaged, from the nostalgic signifiers of the more mainstream version of the 1980s. I argue however, that substituting these aural signifiers only introduces a different perspective of nostalgia and one that is, arguably, as ‘cheesy’ as that in any other film with Duran Duran and Soft Cell on its soundtrack. This is reinforced by the film’s reviews, many of which focused on its nostalgic value. For some reviewers, like Maher, the film ignored the important issues of the period in favour of a, ‘jaunty pop tune or a wacky haircut’ (2006b).

Of course, there is also a broader issue of cultural capital here. The music of *The History Boys, Awaydays*, and *Starter for 10* has a greater cultural value today. Its edgy appeal allows it a strong, loyal and cult audience whereas the mainstream pop, whilst arguably more widely played, is seen, to a modern audience, as a lighter, less serious option. Of course, these bands are extremely popular, as festivals and tours attest, but arguably they are viewed on a different, more ironically nostalgic level, by their audience. Fashion is treated in a similar way, with the more obvious signifiers of the period presented as parodic, and again *Starter for 10* attempts to avoid this. Nicholls argues his approach, to dress his cast in more non-descript clothing of the period, was a far more authentic one, attesting that, ‘Fashion-wise the mid-eighties were actually quite gloomy; there wasn’t a kind of peacock quality people associate with the era. The dress was more utilitarian, darker-hued, not particularly
glamorous or ostentatious’ (Neal Street Productions, 2006). But again, this approach, authentic or not, finds little favour with the critics. Conversely, this time the film is criticised for its non-adherence to the stereotypical representation of the 1980s. Collins articulates possibly a wider held view, based on our own expectation of any mediated version of the 1980s. When he complains of the film, ‘Where is the highlighted, backcombed hair?’ he is speaking from a culturally privileged perspective, familiar with the recycling of 1980s popular culture (2007). But despite this uneven criticism of the film’s aesthetic and aural style, Starter for 10 does demonstrate a convention apparent in many of these 1980s-set films which emphasises the importance of nostalgia in its narrative.

The role and function of the dance scene in 1980s-set films

As we have already seen, the dance scene, whether in a nightclub or party, is an integral feature of many of the 1980s-set films. Partly this is because it allows many of the signifiers of the era to coalesce in a significant part of the narrative. In common with Clubbed, The Business has much of its action set in a nightclub, thus ensuring the fashions, décor and music of the time are centre-stage. But the scene functions in other ways, providing a familiar association for those with first-hand knowledge of the decade, allowing easy identification with the environment and, possibly, triggering personal associations. For many, their memories of the period are often rooted in leisure and organised social events, and it is the memories of those associations and, perhaps, the song which was playing at the time, that remain strong. Reynolds attests, it is often the music, in particular, which spark those memories with, ‘… the fixation on music as an aid to remembering, or as a form of memory preservative’, in its ability to transport its audience to an earlier life (2012, p. 117). But again, the ironic rendering of these signifiers surfaces. The ‘dad’ dancing of Steve in Is Anybody There?, a universal signifier of awkwardness and embarrassment, can be contrasted with the
strange posturings of Bex in *The Firm*. Whilst the latter is ridiculed by Dom, director Love’s intentions are clear, and it is the character of Bex who remains cool whilst his derider suffers a bloody nose.

*Starter for 10* uses a Tarts and Vicars party scene as the structural mechanism which amalgamates these nostalgic signifiers. The dancing is uncoordinated and the fashions, predominately due to the party’s theme, are exaggerated. But it is the scene’s use of music which is most significant in its rendering of nostalgic emotions for its audience. The scene is dominated by the use of New Order’s ‘Blue Monday’, which although seen as part of the era’s ‘alternative’ side, has a strong connotation with 1980’s electronic music. Its constant reappearance on compilation albums celebrating the decade is easily identified, but its place within these films also signifies its cultural importance. In *Starter for 10*, ‘Blue Monday’ dominates the first social event of Brian’s new life, predicting a shift from the temporally insignificance of his home town, to the vibrancy of student life in 1980s Bristol. The song also appears in *The History Boys* at a similarly critical narrative juncture. Confusingly, the film’s opening indicates a much earlier period film in its depiction of Posner riding an old-fashioned bicycle through car-less streets whilst the strains of Gracie Fields are played on the soundtrack. The only indicator of the film’s period setting is Posner’s use of headphones, only visible as the scene comes to an end. It is at this point that the opening bars of “Blue Monday” replace Gracie Fields, and an intertitle, placing the narrative in 1983, restores order. The irony of this scene is, of course, that the intended jarring of a 1940s environment with a 1980s one is reversed for much of the rest of the film - *The History Boys* is far more comfortable in the earlier decade. ‘Blue Monday’s’ status as the best-selling twelve-inch single of all time also signifies the track’s cultural capital, perhaps determining its appropriation in these films. The association with a record which is explicitly linked to an outmoded format, elevates its cultural standing, particularly with those who have first-hand
experience of the period. This notion of the music being of a higher cultural position because of its status as a vinyl collectible – “Blue Monday” was also notorious for making a loss because of its expensive gate-fold sleeve - goes to the heart of Reynolds’ notion of collecting, which as I have previously argued, is a condition predominantly found in middle-aged men.

*Starter for 10* however, seems to strive for a form of nostalgia which is just out of its reach and the film falls between the two stools of ‘alternative’ 1980s and a more conventional rendering of the period. This is apparent in the manner in which it engages with nostalgic, popular culture elements of the period as well as its politics. Politically the film is quite naïve, engaging with politics in a broadly populist manner. The 1980s are well known as a period of social dissent. The film portrays this as a rite of passage for its protagonist without attempting to explain the politics behind the social unrest. *Starter for 10*, in common with *Is Anybody There?* avoids any association with Thatcherism, and specifically criticism of it highlighting the commercial difficulty for filmmakers in engaging with 1980s politics.

The film was, however, a moderate commercial success taking £627,102 during its UK run, where it appeared on 86 screens and was number eleven in the box office chart in its most lucrative week. Critically the film received good notices. Whilst some criticised it for its overly nostalgic elements the film was commended as having, ‘an outstanding cast – all resolutely refusing the ironic nod and wink to the era’, (Quinn, 2006). Whilst *Starter for 10* resisted the temptation to send up the decade the next case study, *The Business*, indulges in heavy doses of irony whilst respectfully adhering to a code of fidelity to the decade in which it is set, which a contemporary audience may expect.
The glamour ’80s? Visual style and youth in The Business

Produce The Business: Vertigo Films and the youth audience

The influence of Nick Love, author and director of The Business, on the completed film is perhaps more pronounced, particularly in its notions of nostalgia, than that of any of the other writers and directors discussed here. Much of this is due to Love’s fascination for the 1980s, which, as the film’s star Danny Dyer indicates, is bordering on obsession (Anon, 2005a). Love has, of course, made other features which have had nostalgic tendencies, with the subject of popular culture always to the fore, as in The Sweeney (2012). But it is the two period dramas, set in the 1980s, The Business and The Firm, which indicate Love’s comfort zone. His attention to period detail, from buying authentic clothing on Ebay to securing the rights to the soundtrack in advance, indicates a director who craves an authenticity in his rendering of the era (Solomons, 2005). When Love argues his passion for the authenticity of the period’s clothing and iconography is driven by his audience, he indicates that, for him, the film is part of a commitment he has to others who share his passionate attachment to the era (Solomons, 2005).

But Love’s nostalgic approach to The Business works on a level beyond that of appealing only to those who witnessed the decade first-hand. His association with production company Vertigo Films, as well as his own experience of making youth-orientated films, highlight the film’s attempt to reach a far younger audience - one which is attracted to the film’s ironic rendering of the period as well as its universal themes and rite-of-passage narrative. Such marketing is indicative not just of a Nick Love film but also a Vertigo Film production. The Business was Vertigo Films’ third feature since their creation in 2002, in which time the company’s aggressive philosophy had become more focused. The Football Factory and It’s all gone Pete Tong (Dowse, 2004), were, like The Business, low budget,
independent, British films, aimed at a young and predominantly male audience. There were other commonalities, with all three titles sharing an emphasis on pop culture, laddish behaviour and violence, reinforcing Vertigo’s credentials as edgy, commercial and modestly successful. This success, which in later years became far less modest, was based on a business model formulated by Vertigo’s founders James Richardson and Alan Niblo, together with their distribution head Rupert Preston. The essence of this model, articulated by Preston as being simply to, ‘keep budgets at the right level’, required the company to pre-sell their films where possible, to ensure distribution and exhibition deals were finalised before shooting (Lodderhose, 2010). Smaller budgets, of course, restricted Vertigo films from attracting big name actors, resulting in many of their early films being populated with minor names from British television. Such a policy did, however, have its advantages, one of which was the cost, with many cast members accepting percentage points on the film’s profit in exchange for smaller fees (Dawtrey, 2005). Such a policy enabled *The Business*, in common with previous Vertigo films, but uncommon in this survey, to be financed without recourse to funds from the UK Film Council or major television or film companies. The resultant success of *The Business*, which saw it move into profit through its pre-sales strategy, consolidated Vertigo’s position as a leading UK independent production company (Jaafar, 2005). Further success followed with Vertigo increasing its output from an average of three films a year to twelve in 2008, including *Streetdance 3D* (Giwa/Pasquini, 2010), their most successful film to date. Additionally, clearly hoping to capitalise on his early collaborations with Vertigo, Nick Love became a partner in the company, ensuring his films continue to be financed and distributed by them. As Dawtrey argues, Vertigo’s success is fundamentally about control: ensuring budgets are minimised, films are pre-sold and distribution rights retained (2005). But it is the identification of a core audience of 15 – 24 year-olds, one which represented 38 per cent of
the British cinema-going public in 2005, that is at the heart of both Love and Vertigo’s success (British Film Institute, 2013, p.142).

**Authenticity and irony in The Business’ engagement with nostalgia**

Director, Nick Love, and production company, Vertigo Films, shared a creative and commercial vision, specifically in terms of their desire to bring low budget films to a youth audience. But it is Love’s passion for the 1980s, demonstrated in *The Business*, which presents us with a new layer of appeal for this young, and predominantly male audience. The role of the film’s retro features, and specifically Love’s fanaticism for the 1980s, is therefore crucial in our understanding of the film’s audience. But the male fantasy narratives which drive both *The Business* and *The Firm*, with the young male protagonists plunged into a world of violence and male bonding whilst clad in iconic Sergio Tacchini, indicates a broader audience is being sought by Love.

Whilst the films here are all set in the recent past, there is I feel, a trace of Jameson’s theory of pastiche in how they represent the era. Jameson’s notions of postmodernism in this representation of the past is available in the way some, specifically *The Business*, use irony to present the period, based on their audience’s preconceptions of the 1980s. For Grainge, this involves presenting, ‘cultural stereotypes of the past’ in order to recycle the era to a contemporary audience (2002, p. 29). The plundering of the past for signifiers of style and meaning associated with the era, acknowledge that this iconography has already been refracted through many other mediations in the corresponding years (Grainge, 2002, pp. 29-30). In Love’s case he is acknowledging first-hand associations with the period whilst accepting its lack of credibility to an audience which only has recourse to mediated memories of the 1980s. Further evidence of the director reaching out to those with personal experience of the decade is clearly visible in the promotion of *The Business*. With Vertigo’s reputation
for, ‘innovative marketing – including online campaigns, guerrilla initiatives and music-friendly promotions’, the appropriation of a nostalgia-heavy campaign, with an emphasis on the film’s retro perspective was unsurprising (Mitchell, 2008). Later replicated in The Firm, the marketing campaign for The Business foregrounded the film’s music with a wide variety of popular tracks on the website and in the trailer. These tracks, as I will argue later, provide a narrative on the 1980s themselves, recalling the glamour and prosperity of the age. This is in contrast to the soundtrack of the darker Starter for 10.

Further analysis of the marketing materials provides evidence of an engagement with a culturally literate 1980s audience, the website delving deeper into the childhood of its audience by assuming a detailed knowledge of the period’s artefacts. For example, it includes a section introducing the film’s characters through the prism of a pack of Top Trumps, a popular childhood card game of the 1980s. Often based on technology or transport, these cards appealed almost exclusively to boys who compared the cards’ metadata to win hands and, ultimately, the game. The appropriation of this game on the website, where character traits fill in for technical detail, implies a high level of cultural competence for the visitor and prospective viewer. Additionally, the site is aimed at those with extensive knowledge of the cultural icons of the period with the male perspective overtly pursued. After comparing the characters’ expertise in fields of sex, violence and drugs, the website visitor is invited to read vanity quotes about the film from publications like Zoo (Bauer Media, 2004 -). Whilst low end ‘lads mags’ are balanced with quotes from, inter alia The Times newspaper, the most dominant comments are confined to notes on the film’s more masculine elements or its engagement with nostalgia. The retro aspect of the website is further enhanced with a feature on iconic 1980s memorabilia such as the Porsche Carrera and Rubik’s Cube and an inevitable focus on clothing, specifically Fila sportswear. These features are all accompanied by a looping 1980s soundtrack, serving as a constant
reminder of the narrative’s roots. The tracks chosen indicate an important consideration in the music used in the film, presenting a specific view of the 1980s, but also emphasising the importance of music to Love’s personal memory of the period. It is this choice of music, sourced before the script was written, which betrays Love’s perspective of the 1980s, which is perhaps unique amongst the authors of this survey. Love’s version of the decade, exhibited through his use of music as well as narrative, is one which emphasises the glamour and hope of the period, whilst ignoring the social division and political disconnect. It is here that The Business, in its presentation of the 1980s, parts company with many of the other 1980s-set films of this work and risks alienating some of its audience.

As Gill argues, any mediated version of the 1980s is fraught with difficulties, as he describes his own reaction to watching such representations, ‘I kept thinking, it wasn’t like that, it didn’t feel like that’ (2010, p. 16). Of course, Gill is only highlighting the discrepancy between our own memories of the period and what we feel is the inauthentic mediated version. But I argue there is an element of elitism in his criticism, indicating the cultural capital in associating an era with a certain look or sound. As discussed earlier, in respect of Starter for 10, for many critics, a film which avoids the politics of the period is often derided as inauthentic. The Business’ unabashed perspective on the decade through the prism of its glamour can be seen to dismiss the injustices and division which defined 1980s Britain, with the film preferring to sympathise with a group of men at the opposite end of the social strata. Additionally, glamorising the film’s characters’ lifestyle introduces an amoral element to the narrative which, arguably, reinforces a 1980s characteristic in itself. The narrative celebration of the mostly exiled, ex-pat community of Spain in the 1980s, presents the audience with three characters, Charlie, Sammy and Ronnie, with names that recall the 1960s ‘heyday’ of the Kray and Richardson gangster families. The men also sound and act like gangsters, but are arguably as much part of Thatcher’s Britain as those who remain in
the UK, as perhaps their ritual eating of a traditional Sunday lunch indicates. Whilst *The Business* tacitly acknowledges the correlation between the actions of Charlie and friends and the 1980s, through a crude montage sequence, their subsequent corruption of Frankie (Danny Dyer) is, perhaps, the only concession the film makes to their immorality. However, even this is neutralised with Frankie’s climactic declaration that he, ‘tried the lot, and won, and drove off into the sunset’, which can be read as a victory speech to the children of Thatcher’s Britain and the decade of greed.

Love’s 1980s perspective does not just cater for those with first hand memories of the era. With a young, male protagonist, a coming-of-age narrative and an emphasis on music, glamour and fashion there is also plenty to engage a much younger audience. But here, nostalgia is still a crucial element. With the rise in popularity of retro festivals and pop tours in the early 2000s, specifically those centred on the 1980s, *The Business* can be seen as an attempt to repackage the decade for a young, male audience. Graham acknowledges the duality in the marketing of such a film, when he quotes British film industry insider Peter Carlton as declaring that the key audience for such a film would be, ‘those who lived it the first time round, and another, younger one, which is interested enough in that time to want to see it on screen for the first time’ (2011). For this ideal audience to be reached, however, I argue it requires an element of irony in the way the nostalgic aspects of the film are presented. One of the attractions of second-hand nostalgia is the kitsch nature of the clothing or artefacts of the past. Of course, there is no personal affiliation or loyalty to a period if there is no direct experience to ground it. This irony is apparent in Love’s work, which relies heavily on humour. The reputation of the 1980s as a decade of bad taste is knowingly referenced by Love throughout the film and is exemplified in Charlie’s conversation with his interior designer. His demand that he, ‘get rid of that Spanish-fied shit. I want red, black and chrome everywhere’, is a tacit acknowledgement of a particular style
of 1980s interior design, as well, of course, of Charlie’s own cultural and social standing. Whilst he may have reached the stage of lower-middle class through his criminal activities, he, like Valerie in Mike Leigh’s *High Hopes* (1988) will only ever be nouveau riche at best.

**Looking the business: Visual style and fashion**

*The Business* begins with a number of short scenes of Frankie in London at the beginning of the 1980s. The palette replicates the dismal life he leads on a housing estate with no prospects and an abusive family life. This contrasts deliberately with the over-saturation of the scenes when Frankie arrives in Spain. Love explains that the intention was to ‘assault the senses’, effectively creating a hyper-reality which, arguably, glamorises as well as exaggerates the attraction of the era (Love, 2005). The, ‘vibrant colour palette of cobalt-blue skies and garish coloured threads’, begins to slowly soften from the moment the men’s cocaine addiction takes hold (Cameron-Wilson, 2005). The de-saturation that follows, is subtle and gradual, leading to the film’s penultimate scene which Love describes as ‘tobacco-stained’ and ‘like a western’. The film’s final scene, Frankie’s redemption, sees the colour returning, signalling the completion of his coming-of-age.

This leaves the vast majority of the film with a vibrant, sunny palette, presenting the 1980s in a similar way to one of the more glamorous pop videos of the decade. The combination of the sun and opulence recalls the Duran Duran ‘Rio’ video (Mulcahy, 1982) or, as Ide (2005) maintains, ‘*Club Tropicana* come to life’, in its presentation of a 1980s for the elite: the rich, the beautiful and the popular. The film’s visuals also, arguably, have a nostalgic childhood element to them, one that recalls memories of childhood summers and holidays abroad. These memories have a strong resonance for us, perhaps because they are often the fondest and represent a period of openness and freedom. Love’s film captures the lethargy of his characters’ sitting by the pool gaining a suntan, and contrasts it with the energy
inherent in the men’s criminal activities. Despite the heat the men manage to remain impeccably dressed, with the iconic 1980s clothing arguably constituting a character in itself.

But as always with the director, it is Love’s association with the fashions of the era which are of most significance. Choosing the clothing and ensuring it was authentic was an integral part of his pre-production work. Research involved reviewing magazines of the period to ensure that the relevant clothes fitted the precise year being depicted. Additionally, the film’s low budget meant that funds were short for such expenditure and Love resorted to sourcing from Ebay and markets, with only small numbers coming from suppliers like Sergio Tacchini and Adidas (Ide, 2005). For Love, this approach (whilst it relied on appealing to a young audience’s second-hand nostalgia of a time which they had not personally experienced) was an important element in attracting such a young demographic.

It was vital that the film’s 1980s elements did not alienate them and he aimed to draw, ‘them into the era gradually’ (Vertigo Films, 2005).

For some, however, the film’s nostalgic overtones were excessive, with The Business criticised for a, ‘lurid fetishisation of era-specific ephemera (from Fila sportswear to Frankie Goes to Hollywood music’ (Leyland, 2006) and it’s, ‘lame attempts at punching nostalgia buttons – such as its predictable soundtrack and comedy fashions’ (Jolin, 2006). The film did, however, have moderate success at the UK box office, and, in terms of the number of prints, it was the 18th most popular British film of the year (Adler, 2006). Whilst Love’s populist, nostalgic approach failed to draw many positive critical reviews, his and Vertigo’s reaching out to the youth market ensures his films remain profitable. Ultimately however, Love is realistic about his audience. Vertigo’s attention beyond the theatrical life of their products requires their business model to ensure the home rental market is adequately catered for. When Love says, ‘with lad’s movies, there’s only so much you can achieve theatrically’, he
acknowledges that the life of *The Business* lies in repeated, home viewings (Lodderhose, 2010).

**Conclusion**

This chapter has demonstrated many of the diverse ways in which the films of this survey interact with the 1980s, particularly in respect of depictions of youth and the courting of a young, male audience. As we have seen, this cannot be easily categorised as a wholly nostalgic engagement, with the films presenting the 1980s in ways which indicate a number of different levels of perspective. Whilst the narratives, visual style and appropriation of cultural signifiers of the period tell us a great deal about our contemporary perspective of the 1980s we must consider the author’s personal relationship with the period. As I have discussed throughout this work, the commonalities amongst the films’ key creative agents is striking. In their social and ethnic background, age and gender, the writers and directors of these films, I argue, represent a group of artists who, in their body of work spanning six years, have presented a specifically masculine view of the 1980s. This perspective is one that is hugely influenced by popular culture as much as personal memory. The ability of these cultural signifiers to constantly appeal to new audiences, ostensibly through their nostalgic properties, ensure they will continue to dominate subsequent mediated responses to the 1980s. But within these perspectives there are distinct differences, indicating, as Chapter Three argues, that the author has his own particular agenda in dealing with a very personal past.

*The History Boys* is a 1980s-set film, but, with few thematic or visual indicators of the era, could easily have been set in an earlier time. Bennett’s comfort zone is undoubtedly the period of his own formative years, the 1940s. As Jays indicates, in an interview with Bennett,
the demise of the social standards he holds dear indicate his well-known political views. Jays argues that ‘Bennett’s preferred period is the mid twentieth century’ before quoting the author’s explanation for the decline in standards as, ‘those values of modesty and decency were overturned in the 1980s by …. Margaret Thatcher’ (2006). But whilst the film avoids any direct criticism of Thatcherism, preferring to dissect New Labour’s corrosive influence on educational standards, Bennett’s political views may indicate another way the film interacts with the 1980s. Whilst Bennett’s popular cultural references are those of his own youth, it is the ideology of the later decade which is recalled in the film’s focus on education. The concentration on targets and academic results in schools was intensified during the Thatcher era, and according to Kenny, echoed in the US by the Reagan administration, with both governments adopting an ‘anti-education stance’ (2006). The decision to set the play, and subsequent film, in the 1980s, therefore, was one influenced by changes in educational policy with the narrative set within a framework of changing pedagogical ideology. Ultimately therefore, The History Boys has a great deal to say about 1980s politics and its influence on contemporary society, exemplified most effectively in the Drummer Hodge sequence which demonstrates that education extends beyond conventional learning. Although the film has a fragmented relationship with the popular culture of the era, emphasising that its nostalgia is rooted much earlier in the century, it still presents an author looking back at his own childhood, as well as one shared by the current generation of middle-aged parents.

Starter for 10 has firmer cultural roots in its affiliation to a wider literary concern around the 1980s. The film’s subsequent reliance on broader nostalgic signifiers of the 1980s is, perhaps, surprising. The determinants of this are surely rooted in the film’s commercial aspirations, requiring a wider audience drawn to comedy and easily recognisable signifiers of a recent decade. Clearly the end result contrasts with the filmmaker’s intentions, and the
inclusion of darker, ‘edgy’ 1980s pop tracks indicates this. But the film does highlight, perhaps more successfully than any other film here, that the 1980s cannot easily be categorised in respect of its popular culture. Cultural nostalgia prefers to present a glossy, colourful era, dominated by bands like Wham! and Duran Duran, who showcased their affluence through expensive videos. But musically, the period was also known for what I have termed an ‘alternative’ scene, dominated by independent music made by bands like The Smiths and Echo and the Bunnymen. Their initial dismissal of big music labels indicated a lack of interest in the commercial value of their music. Rejecting the main tenets of Thatcherism, this austere attitude was reflected in their dark, anti-commercial clothing (Stewart, 2013, p.296). The political aspect of this anti-celebrity movement was emphasised further, when a number of artists, led by Paul Weller and Billy Bragg, created the Labour supporting Red Wedge (Harris, 2003, p.151). Starter for 10’s attempt to distance itself from the aspirational elements of 1980s music and fashion are, however, ultimately unsuccessful. Whilst having connotations of coolness, the ‘alternative’ version of the 1980s is accessed by the film in a particularly nostalgic fashion, much as The Business engages with mainstream 1980s nostalgia.

Nick Love clearly reveres the 1980s. His attention to detail in rendering the period, appears to extend beyond mere accuracy and taps into a personal value system closely associated with the decade. The Business typifies the type of 1980s film that Starter for 10 distanced itself from. But there is also a healthy dose of irony and self-consciousness in Love’s rendering of the period. His pastiche of the era goes further, however, and indicates that, in popular cultural terms, the 1980s was sliding into parody. This state of affairs was one hastily seized upon by the film’s distributors, keen to provoke interest in their films through any means possible. The Business’ political perspective also sets it apart from the other case studies here.
Whilst Starter for 10 avoids any explicit political critique, possibly in an attempt to appeal to a broader audience, The History Boys has a very strong political perspective, particularly in relation to its impact on contemporary education. Bennett’s film is very much about contemporary Britain and the legacy of Thatcherism in our schools. But, like Tony Benn, he retains the most opprobrium for New Labour and their reluctance to roll back Conservative policies. Whilst clearly anti-Thatcher in tone, The History Boys moves the argument on in political terms. The Business, meanwhile, is unequivocally nostalgic not only in its rendition of an uncomplicated version of masculinity but in its linking that with the politics of Thatcherism. The Business could easily have become an indictment of Thatcherism with its loose morals and broad-brush characterisations of 1980s archetypes. However, Nick Love turns it into a celebration of Thatcherism with a protagonist whose aspirations are inextricably linked to Thatcher’s ideology.
Chapter Five – Constructing the 1980s: Marketing and critical reception

Introduction
This chapter extends my previous analysis of the phenomenon of the cultural appeal of the 1980s beyond the films’ provenance, production and textual analysis, in a consideration of marketing and critical reception. Previous chapters have considered how the films’ provenance and textual considerations present specific versions of the 1980s. This chapter will consider how these representations shift when appropriated by distribution and marketing. An analysis of the methodology used by distributors in marketing the films, and a consideration of the audiences with which they are engaging, will be a key part of this chapter. The role of nostalgia is, of course, important here and this will be further considered by recourse to the films’ critical reception. This analysis extends that of earlier chapters’ focus on authorship, whilst also considering the films’ distribution. The role of the distributor in presenting a ‘narrative image’ is often an overlooked one. In these films set in the 1980s, the perspectives of the distributor and the reviewer allow a more holistic view of the function of British cinema in 1980s nostalgia.

The first of four sections in this chapter will therefore focus on the role of distribution and marketing. This overview of the wider function of marketing within British cinema will commence with an examination of the distributor’s role. For films with low budgets such as those discussed here, a major distributor is out of their reach. The distributor’s role, to promote and publicise the film is, therefore, more important for these films. This section’s analysis will position the distributor as central, not only to the commercial success of the films, but their public presentation of the 1980s. Marketing techniques will therefore be considered, through recourse to a number of theoretical responses, in particular, from Ellis
(1992) and Kernan (2004). A more concise consideration of how these techniques are applied will be contemplated in section two, which will consider three case studies in detail.

In all the case studies - The History Boys, Son of Rambow and This is England – there is a marked difference in the presentation of the 1980s in the films’ marketing, as opposed to that of the narrative. This section will consider the methods used in the marketing of the films, whilst exploring the determinants of these differences. Of course, the audience demographic which the distributor is attempting to reach, is important here, particularly in respect of similar discussions in previous chapters. The films’ attraction to a young, male audience who may not remember the 1980s, is therefore an important consideration. The differing marketing techniques which promote engagement with the decade are a vital consideration when assessing the role of the films in the wider cultural engagement with the 1980s.

The third section of the chapter initially examines the critical responses to these films. The broad range considered will emphasise the different levels of engagement with the 1980s. It is particularly interesting here to see how popular publications like tabloid newspapers differ to the broadsheets in their perspective of the nostalgic elements of the films. These perspectives, often reflecting the publication’s readership, provide an insight into the influence and role of 1980s-set contemporary British cinema. The focus on the critical reception of individual films will lead to the final section which considers the wider phenomenon of the 1980s in British cinema.

Whilst this work is the first study to consider cultural recycling and popular nostalgia with specific reference to British cinema in the 1980s, others, particularly in British broadsheet newspapers, have also briefly considered its determinants and influence. This chapter’s final section will initially involve a consideration of how Hollywood is interacting with the decade. Then, through recourse to a number of articles in British broadsheet
newspapers, focusing on both US and British films which emerged between 2006 and 2009, I will consider the determinants, as defined by these journalists, for this phenomenon. A consideration of the cultural conditions which influenced these differing responses to the 1980s, as defined by the journalists, will be followed by an analysis of their commonalities in approach. The chapter’s final focus on the media’s analysis of the phenomenon of the 1980s in film, I argue, highlights the growing influence of the decade not just in cinematic terms but in the wider cultural sphere.

Selling the 1980s: Distribution, promotion and audience

Marketing films: Theories and approaches

The process of marketing a film begins, of course, with the involvement of a distributor to ensure the film reaches its desired demographic. For low budget films, such as those covered in this survey, the prospect of securing one of the ‘big 6’ Hollywood distributors affiliated to a major studio, is often unrealistic. Warner Bros, Twentieth Century Fox, Paramount, Universal, Disney and Sony dominate the British film distribution industry, accounting for nearly 80 per cent of the total UK box office takings between 2004 and 2010 (British Film Institute, 2012, p. 78). Although the producers of some of the 1980s-set films discussed in this project, such as The Firm, The History Boys and Son of Rambow, did sign a distribution deal with a major US company, these examples are in the minority, with most producers of British films relying upon small independent distributors to ensure their film received a wide audience. The context to this model of distribution perhaps lies in the accessibility and affordability of the means of film production. Whilst technological advances have ensured making and editing a film is much easier, this proliferation in production has not translated
into a higher number of theatrical releases. Finney sums up this dichotomy when he asserts that, ‘Bringing an independent film into the marketplace is now arguably a harder task than finding the finances and resources to produce and complete it’ (2010, p. 100). Finney articulates a widely held view that it is in the distribution part of the filmmaking chain where films are most at the mercy of economic and industrial factors.

For those producers fortunate enough to have a distributor with the connections and economic range to ensure their film reaches as many cinemas as possible, the next phase of the selling of their product is the marketing. Marketing, according to Ellis, functions to facilitate the film’s ‘circulation outside its performance in cinema’ (1992, p. 31). The role of marketing in the lifecycle of a film is one which, in recent years, has been the subject of much critical debate, as its influence on popular culture is increasingly assessed. There has been much debate in the media around the manipulative nature of film marketing, specifically in respect of the level of narrative detail a trailer offers (Saner, 2011). As such discourse demonstrates, audiences are now becoming much more conscious of the manipulative nature of marketing. Kimmell, in fact, argues that there is now evidence of audiences resisting such ‘rhetorical persuasion’ (2005, p. 258). Of course, such familiarity with the techniques of film marketers present the industry with a further problem: how to breach these defences.

Ellis has written extensively on this subject with his account of the role of marketing in establishing the ‘narrative image’, particularly useful in such analysis. He argues the function of a film’s marketing is to present to a prospective audience a ‘promise’ of the film, the ‘narrative image’, to create a desire to purchase a ticket to see it. This discussion has subsequently been extended by Elsaesser, who suggests the marketing materials forge a contract with the film’s audience (2001, p. 12) . This ‘agreement’ is, Elsaesser contends, contingent ‘not (on) the product itself and not even for the commodified experience that it
represents, but simply for the possibility that such a transubstantiation of experience into commodity might ‘take place’ (2001, p.12). This acknowledgment of the relationship between the way the film is marketed and the potential audience, is extended by Gray who argues that film marketing materials act as ‘entryway paratexts’, in the way they represent an initial access to the wider text being sold (2010, p. 23).

Gray’s theory owes a lot to Genette’s work on paratexts which focused on literary texts – those elements such as title pages, indexes and covers which surround the main text. For Genette these paratexts were a vital component of the main text for they presented the reader with the, ‘possibility of either stepping inside or turning back’ (1997, p. 1). Gray argues marketing materials operate in a similar fashion, contending that they ‘are not simply add-ons, spinoffs, and also-rans: they create texts, they manage them, and they fill them with many of the meanings that we associate with them’ (2010, p. 6). The relationship, therefore, between a film and its marketing is, as Gray contends, a symbiotic one with the paratext able to, ‘energize, contextualize, or otherwise modify textuality’ (2010, p. 23). Grainge further argues, that marketing films is also about creating associations with outside texts. Relationships are therefore often formed through reference to ‘texts across media’, highlighting the self-reflexive nature of intertextuality in cinema generally (2008, p. 11). It is here that the films’ marketing’s deployment of signifiers of the period, such as iconic 1980s music or a 1980s associated artefact like Rubik’s Cube, work to reaffirm selective associations for the audience and, in some cases, to create new ones by subverting existing preconceptions. Of course, precisely how these associations are forged depends on the techniques used in marketing the film.
**Marketing films: Techniques and strategies**

Although there is evidence that distributors are relying on new and cheap marketing media, like the internet, traditional forms of marketing are still considered the most efficient way of attracting attention to a film. Marich argues that trailers and television commercials are still the ‘most important promotional materials’ in film marketing, because they are the modes, ‘proven to be the most effective in selling movies to consumers’ (2009, p. 47). The trailer, in particular, can occupy a space as a, ‘unique short film’ in its own right, provoking wide-ranging discussion amongst its viewers (Johnston, 2009, p.2). The cultural importance of trailers is reinforced by both Medhurst (1998) and Lodderhouse (2007). Whilst the former contends that they ‘must be the only form of advertising consumers go out of their way to see’, the latter cites a 2007 survey demonstrating that 34 per cent of cinema-goers feel their viewing experience would be adversely affected if advertisements and trailers were withdrawn. This is despite the reputation of the trailer, as described by Burkeman, of being, ‘a difficult thing to love. They lie and deceive, and when they’re not lying or deceiving, they’re being too honest, revealing the plot’ (2005). Burkeman’s reference to the popular image of trailers as ‘misleading’ is defended by Kernan arguing that the trailer’s re-ordering and re-interpreting of scenes from the film’s narrative ‘construct a new, trailer logic, differing from (yet, obviously, related to) the narrative logic of the film’ (2004, p. 10).

This ‘trailer logic’, for Kernan, creates a further layer in the audience’s relationship with the film. The trailer’s ability to invoke an emotional response in just two minutes, relies not on the film itself, but the audience’s anticipation and desire to see it. The response is akin to longing, or ‘nostalgia for a film we haven’t even seen yet’ (2004, p. 8). The feeling of familiarity which a trailer can evoke, together with desire, fuses the past and present within the audience’s mind. This is a particularly useful concept when we consider films, like some in this survey, which are set in the past and deliberately intend to invoke a nostalgic emotion.
through the narrative of the film. As the following case studies will demonstrate, nostalgia pervades these trailers, sometimes more explicitly than others. Arguably, it is central to the function of film marketing to evoke a longing, a desire, to both see the film and engage with, what the narrative image presents, as a nostalgic film. This is demonstrated by the selective nature of film marketing, specifically in the trailer. By focusing on certain aspects, whether sex, violence or the star, for example, a trailer can present a very subjective view of a film. This has a parable in the films of this survey, with certain cultural signifiers that, the filmmakers assume, provide a ‘hook’ for their audience. Whilst the popularity of the trailer remains undiminished, the film marketer now has a wider range of strategies available. As indicated earlier, online marketing has only complemented and not, so far, replaced, traditional modes of marketing. Whilst the total spend on advertising by UK distributors fell by 4.6 per cent (£8 million), between 2007 and 2010, the bulk of that reduction was in press advertising, which suffered a 21.03 per cent drop in funding (Film Distributor’s Association, 2011, p. 42). As Appendix Three demonstrates, online marketing has increased over the same period by 15.81 per cent. These figures indicates a small shift in advertising behaviour, but it is important to note that online film marketing still only constitutes a small proportion of the overall marketing spend. This is, in part, because the ratio of cost to benefit, of online advertising is far greater, with many of the gains of an online presence coming from the word-of-mouth response which the material generates (Finney, 2010, p. 131).

Online marketing is, however, becoming more important, as the following case studies demonstrate. Of course, the technology is improving, and at the time these films were made much of the social media used in contemporary campaigns was untested. Their use of online marketing is, therefore, minimal, focused on websites rather than the intense social media campaign, often associated with mainstream, Hollywood cinema. The film website, as Telotte, argues, is, however, a vital component in any film’s marketing campaign.
The value of a website in promoting a film is rising and is a form of marketing ‘that can provide an extremely cost-efficient yet information-intensive medium for promoting the movie’ (2001, p. 32). All the following case studies incorporate a web presence into their marketing strategies, with the first of these, *The History Boys*, using the model as a gateway for a younger audience. It’s expected middle-aged demographic, however, is targeted through traditional aspects of the marketing campaign.

**Marketing the 1980s: Case studies - The History Boys, Son of Rambow and This is England**

The commercial success of *The History Boys*’ was heavily influenced by the producers’ distribution deal with Fox Searchlight, a subsidiary of Twentieth Century Fox. Fox Searchlight’s gravitas as an ‘indie’ distributor, reinforced by the financial clout of its parent company, ensured the film received a wide circulation in the US and the UK. Demonstrating that the connection between film and distributor is one forged by many associations, for *The History Boys* it was the UK production company, DNA Films, which was instrumental in facilitating that association. The origins of DNA Films, and the company’s subsequent success, have been informed, according to Fitzgerald, by two factors: ‘utilising Lottery money and at the same time holding hands with a Hollywood major, which ensures that the films (they produce) are at the very least guaranteed a release and adequate promotion’ (2010, p. 8). Whilst such associations are essential to any company’s success, it is also the quality of their productions which has made them an alluring prospect for potential filmmakers. DNA Films’ success with Danny Boyle’s *28 Days Later* (2002) would, of course, also have attracted
investors keen to do business with a company which can turn low-budget British independent films into commercial, and critical, successes. Additionally Boyle and DNA Films’ John Hodge and Andrew McDonald, also have a long-term association, established with the director’s debut, *Shallow Grave* (1994), and subsequent success, *Trainspotting* (1995). Perhaps not coincidentally, *Trainspotting* is notable for, not only being a low-budget success, but for its huge impact on later film marketing strategies. Its pervasive advertising, which promoted the *Trainspotting* ‘brand’, more than repaid the large sums its distributor Polygram invested in marketing the film (Lury, 2000, p. 106).

Other professional affiliations also help to attract a good distributor. It is clear that financial decisions, such as appointing lawyers for *The History Boys*, had a major impact in attracting Fox Searchlight to the project. Proof of the industry’s dependence on connections is evident here. Both lawyers who handled *The History Boys*, Charles Moore and Miles Ketley, based with company Wiggin, had previously worked for Fox Searchlight, undoubtedly helping ensure the film received adequate exposure to that distributor (Adler, 2005). Moore and Ketley, aside from being well connected, also recognised how *The History Boys*’ provenance as a stage show, and its subsequent theatrical success in both the UK and the US, would have aided its attraction to a major US studio. The publicity and exposure of that theatre run had generated an audience, whilst simultaneously creating interest and potential for a larger one. Perhaps proving Grainge’s assertion that ‘contemporary cinema is defined by the migration of texts across media’, the marketing of *The History Boys* reinforces the connection between the new text and the successful stage play (2008, p. 11). The film’s poster celebrates the success of the play, including foregrounding its Tony Award wins (see Appendix 3, figure 1). Such a focus implies that the film, as well as the play, is already a success. Marketing which implies, as in this case, that a huge audience has already made the text successful, generates a ‘must-see’ aspect to a film, underpinned by a social need to conform to the attitudes and
behaviours of others. Such methods of marketing are essentially a more focused version of the ‘word-of-mouth’ strategy which Kerrigan indicates is, ‘central to the market success or failure of a film’ (2010, p. 115). In the case of *The History Boys*, success is inferred by the distributor through ‘word of mouth’ from one text to another.

The role of Fox Searchlight in the marketing of *The History Boys* was also one of self-promotion, with the distributor a significant online presence. The website, in particular, implied an important relationship between the promotion of the film and the major studio which owns the distributor, with the film’s online presence linked to the distributor’s own website. This allows Fox Searchlight to appropriate the website for *The History Boys* to showcase other material it distributes or produces. As the film website no longer serves a promotional purpose (as is the case with *The History Boys*), Fox Searchlight has appropriated it for its own purposes. When active, *The History Boys*’ website differed little in content from others in this survey, with cast biographies, video interviews and the trailer embedded or linked to the site. But the film’s website, unlike the wider marketing campaign, indicates a precise connection, through music, with the 1980s. Although, as discussed in Chapter Four, this cultural association with the decade is present in the film, it plays a far less explicit role than the website implies. Whilst it does not include music from the era, the site embeds a series of links about 1980s music, employing extraneous musical references as key signifiers of the period. With no narrative connection to the 1980s music scene, this clearly indicates the distributor’s aim of attracting an audience based on the narrative’s temporal setting, whilst underlining the power of music to evoke nostalgia.

The trailer continues this association, accentuating the film’s relationship with the 1980s through a narrative image based on nostalgia and comedy. Whilst I acknowledge this is an aspect of the narrative of *The History Boys*, it is foregrounded far more in the trailer. As discussed in Chapter Four, 1980s music in *The History Boys* initially grounds the narrative in
that era, before giving way to an original soundtrack. The trailer, however, uses iconic, upbeat 1980s pop music, such as The Smiths and New Order - music which has a distinctive role in the film’s narrative - before introducing 1980s tracks, like Pigbag, which, whilst capable of inducing nostalgia, plays no part in the soundtrack of the film. The trailer ends with a Blur track ‘The Universal’ (Albarn, Coxon, James and Rowntree, 1995, track 7) which appears to be selected for its anthemic qualities, although its association with New Labour introduces a further layer of association with the film. As argued in Chapter Four, the film has a strong relationship with Blairite politics of the 1990s. Blur were, of course, central to the BritPop movement which was intrinsically linked to Tony Blair’s vision of a ‘Young Britain’.

Arguably, The History Boys’ marketing campaign has a dual approach, reflecting the distributor’s intention to secure a diverse audience. Whilst the film’s online marketing acknowledges the importance of a young audience, it is likely the middle-aged and middle-classed are the film’s more likely demograph. Such an audience would be attracted by the film’s provenance as a successful stage play, and, it is this aspect upon which the poster focuses. With most trailers shown in cinemas and online, perhaps the distributors felt a younger audience was more likely to engage with that media. The trailer and the website’s appropriation of music, perhaps attracting second-hand nostalgia, I argue, used media more likely to be viewed by younger people. Certainly this approach was successful, as the film secured healthy UK box office receipts of £4,077,000 with an additional $2million in its limited release in the US. The History Boys’ box office success is only eclipsed by one other film in this survey. Son of Rambow, discussed in the next case study, and which, not coincidentally, also benefitted from a major distributor.
Son of Rambow

*Son of Rambow*, a rites of passage, 1980s-based drama, was a surprise hit at the Sundance Festival in 2007, particularly in light of its very British perspective. Critics argued that its subsequent deal with Paramount Vantage for worldwide distribution rights, in exchange for $8 million, was one which would leave the major studio struggling to break even (Koehler, 2007). Perhaps it was the film’s autobiographical perspective on the author’s 1980s childhood in a leafy corner of Britain, which attracted the distributor. It is likely, however - based on the subsequent marketing campaign - that the film’s universal theme of childhood innocence, together with its evocation of nostalgia was the chief attraction.

The campaign which followed was extensive, with a very clear focus. Unlike *The History Boys*, the 1980s setting of *Son of Rambow* is referenced through all media in its marketing strategy. But ultimately, I argue, its association with the era is less specific, with a narrative image which evokes a universal, rather than a temporally specific childhood and, particularly, one devoid of contemporary society’s technology. This becomes apparent from the beginning of the film’s lifecycle, when we consider the construction and design of its title. Initially drawing on the audience’s knowledge of 1980s action films, and those specifically associated with VHS, like *First Blood*, the title then subverts these associations by adding a W to Rambo. The use of a different font, in a childish scrawl, on the marketing material of *Son of Rambow*, emphasises the home-made aesthetic of the film. This, of course, provides the basis for the narrative - of childhood home movies - but it also recalls pre-school television of the 1980s, another key cultural signifier for the middle-aged to engage with their past. This theme of infant creativity recurs throughout the marketing materials, with the poster also adding a ‘child’s’ drawing of a plane and a bomb circling the W. This focus on art and the past has important connotations in how the film is marketed.
The 1980s was probably the last non-computer era for children, and consequently it has the most resonance for those parents seeking memories of a ‘traditional’ childhood, with little or no electronic stimulation. *Son of Rambow* therefore, serves to prompt an elegiac recollection for those in the audience who are parents, with the narrative repaying their interest with a plot which highlights the carefree outside world of their youth. Of course, for those people the message is clear: our children are worse off for not having that experience.

The film’s UK promotional poster (see Appendix Three, Figure Two) also attempts to entice this demographic with its evocation of an idyllic childhood. The tagline ‘Finally an action hero we can all relate to’, simultaneously recalls the grainy home entertainment experiences of the intended audience’s youth, whilst suggesting once again that the past, at least in respect of childhood, was more fulfilling than the present. This is reinforced by the comedic images of the boy protagonists, Will and Lee, on the poster. Whilst their pretence at being an adult is a universally appealing image, the poster also suggests that being a child is far more fun than adulthood.

This theme is present in the film’s other marketing media, with the website, in particular, embracing the technological icons of the age to accentuate its separation from contemporary society. The site contains references to the technology which facilitates the film’s narrative, through a montage of clips in a retro home movie style, but even this recalls a more innocent time. This use of outdated technology is repeated in the hyperlinks to navigate the site – VHS tape icons. Again the fonts - also used for the menu on the subsequently released DVD - are childlike, appearing to be written in crayon. The 1980s are therefore well represented here, and, like the film, the site presents the characters as emerging from a more innocent time. The feeling of nostalgia is further reinforced by the site’s appropriation of music. In common with the other case studies, the role of music in the promotion of this film is disproportionate in comparison to its narrative function. Although
music, as in many of these films, plays a dominant role in *Son of Rambow*, its function is often diegetic: in the Common Room, in Lee’s brother’s car. As part of the marketing however, and specifically on the website, it has a much more central, and evocative role. Opening the website, the user is immediately assailed with 1980s music, emanating from a virtual jukebox embedded into the site. Whilst this introduces a level of interactivity to the browsing of the website, in common with many of the films in this survey, it also, I argue, elevates the importance of the music. Many of the films that appropriate music in this way do not foreground this cultural signifier in their narratives. The use of 1980s popular music in the marketing of these films is therefore disproportionate to its function within the films themselves. Interestingly, *Son of Rambow’s* trailer avoids showcasing the film’s music except for a clip of David Bowie’s ‘Rebel Rebel’ (Bowie, 1974, track 6), a song which, whilst indicating a nostalgic aspect to the films performs a further narrative function in its referencing of the two protagonists.

The film’s evocation of the past is, therefore, a universal one, but from a specifically British perspective, as demonstrated by its marketing. Highlighting the film’s recreation of a typically British childhood, the poster reproduces a quote positioning *Son of Rambow*, accurately I think, within a small number of British comedies, such as *Hot Fuzz* (Wright, 2007). The similarities are obvious - both films rely on a sense of nostalgia for style and setting whilst dealing with comedy in an exaggerated or absurdist fashion. Of course, whilst *Son of Rambow*, like *Hot Fuzz*, presents the past as provincial, it has its tongue firmly in cheek, as demonstrated by the broad characterisations of the schoolchildren. This is particularly the case with the popular, albeit uncharismatic, exchange student, Didier, who represents the embodiment of every British child’s version of a ‘cool’ Frenchman. This self-conscious parochialism, recalling a bygone Britain, expands the film’s audience beyond pure nostalgia, but has its disadvantages, particularly in respect of its commercial appeal. Goodridge argues
it is precisely this particular brand of Britishness that made *Son of Rambow* ‘culturally specific’ and therefore difficult to market to international territories (2007, p. 39).

The marketing of *Son of Rambow* unashamedly embraces the film’s 1980s setting through a foregrounding of a number of cultural signifiers, specifically music. It does, however, stop short at its press material’s promise that the film will evoke memories of ‘Space Dust, Smelly Rubbers, Barbara Woodhouse and Boy George’ (Paramount Vantage, 2007). The marketing campaign does however, acknowledge the 1980s through its evocation of a universal and traditional childhood. This, it can be argued, is a non-specific past, one which features in the memory of many of those who view the film, whatever their age. The past here is one almost devoid of technology, with the only acknowledgement of contemporary life: the video camera, the mechanism by which childhood friendships are broken. This is a childhood of infantile creativity and outdoor play, represented in the marketing as idyllic, whilst the film’s narrative concerns of dysfunctional families and patriarchal loss are over-looked. Such themes are also evident in *This is England*, the marketing of which focuses on similar signifiers of the era. Where *Son of Rambow* argues that the past is a less complicated place, *This is England* suggests the 1980s are closer than we imagine. The marketing of this film, detailed in the next section, emphasises this connection throughout.

**This is England**

The use of cultural signifiers of the 1980s has been a recurring theme in the marketing strategies of these films but is arguably most obvious in *This is England*. This is particularly noticeable in the trailer, and the film’s, foregrounding of a number of archival clips from the period, in an effective opening montage. The full montage, as seen at the beginning of *This is England*, begins with trivial, pop cultural items, including television ‘personality’ Roland
Rat, the aerobic craze and the advent of home electronics, all designed to evoke nostalgia in the audience. The clips become progressively darker in tone, as director Shane Meadows foreshadows a more political narrative, with clips of social unrest, followed by images of Thatcher juxtaposed with graphic footage of the Falklands war. The function of this montage in the narrative is clear. Placing Thatcher between images of the Falklands indicates culpability but also highlights the film’s contemporary sensibility. Thatcher and the Falklands can perhaps also be Tony Blair and Iraq.

A contrast in perspective is also available if we consider the shift between the popular cultural references and the montage’s later, darker images. Perhaps recognising the sense of nostalgia familiar news clips can evoke, Meadows’ montage avoids this by inserting clips never previously broadcast, often because they were too graphic. This, I argue, provokes a contemporary reaction to the scenes, akin to seeing something for the first time. This intended response to the clips means this sequence, unlike the earlier, familiar pop cultural images, operates outside traditional nostalgia narratives. The film’s post production supervisor, Helen de Winter, indicates the clips were chosen purely, ‘to establish the period and locale’. The use of grainy, analogue footage does support de Winter’s argument, prompting perhaps, emotive responses to the events presented, but I argue the re-editing of the footage for the trailer presents a different meaning to similar footage in the film (Mutter, 2008). The trailer also opens with the montage, but a heavily edited one. Whilst images of Thatcher are included, the main clip of her driving a mechanical digger is intended to evoke a comedic response. The rest of the clips are popular culture ones, such as Duran Duran, aerobics and Rubik’s Cube. Although the Falklands are alluded to in the trailer’s darker second half, the political connotations of the film’s montage are absent. Of course, such overt politicising of a narrative is often excised from a trailer to avoid alienating an audience; but in this case the trailer only serves to romanticise the 1980s through this sequence,
something Meadows’ film tries to avoid. Interestingly, the music which plays across the trailer montage is one absent from This is England and its soundtrack. The track ‘It’s a jam in the streets’ by John Holt (Holt, 2005, track 1) is a far more upbeat reggae song than the ‘54-46 was my number’ from Toots and the Myhall (Hibbert, 1968) played at the same point in the film. As we have seen in both Son of Rambow and The History Boys, such an addition to a trailer is not uncommon. As Kerrigan argues, there are often two reasons for this: ‘the trailer may be finished before the film soundtrack is finalised or the film music is not seen as effective in communicating the essence of the film in the trailer format’ (Kerrigan, 2010, p. 131). It is unclear, in this case, why the music was changed, but the different tempo, I argue, presents a more upbeat, less melancholic perspective, consistent with the lighter tone of the montage in the trailer.

The soundtrack itself, echoing the shift in narrative, almost exactly halfway through the film, is an eclectic one. Whilst little known reggae/SKA tracks are used, original music written for the film is also included and these are intermingled with recognizable 1980s pop tracks like ‘Come on Eileen’ by Dexy Midnight Runners and Soft Cell’s ‘Tainted Love’. As already discussed, both these tracks emerge in other films in this survey, emphasising their cultural significance in recalling the era for a contemporary audience. This music is additionally available on the This is England’s website which, while it includes the whole soundtrack, preferences the electro pop, new romantic populist songs over the narrative-driven SKA tracks. As with both The History Boys and Son of Rambow, this seems to be orchestrated to position the film’s nostalgic elements over narrative ones, and it is the medium of music which once again facilitates that remembrance. It is also arguable whether the audience being sought here is necessarily just one with first-hand knowledge of the era. The rise of 1980s nostalgic music events, as detailed in Chapter One, can be seen to encourage a broader interest in the music of the era, with many becoming hugely popular
with those who experienced the period at first hand, as well as their children. Supporters of such events argue that new generations engage with this music in their childhood, through their parents (Burston, 2007). This level of interest introduces a new nostalgic element to the appeal of these films. Whilst we most commonly associate nostalgia for the recent past with those that actually experienced the era, the phenomenon of second-hand nostalgia must also be considered. It can be argued that these films attract such a form of nostalgia, often a focus on the young. These individuals are likely to have been exposed to the 1980s by their parents with the attraction for the period also one for their own childhood, when the sounds and fashions of the 1980s were still apparent in their parents’ influences. This is evident in The Business (Love, 2005) with the music used – both in its narrative and on the website – depending on a heavily nostalgic element, which Ide describes as, ‘a greatest hits compilation of every seminal track you can remember from the 1980s heyday of Top of the Pops’ (2005).

The placement of music in the marketing of This is England and the positioning of 1980s iconography within the trailer, I argue, indicates a desire to attract a nostalgic audience, with a focus on the more popular cultural signifiers of the period. This indicates how the marketing campaign embraced the film’s 1980s heritage. However, an apparent reluctance to foreground the film’s nostalgia, absent from marketing materials is, perhaps indicative of an avoidance of the film’s socio-economic roots in Thatcherism. This is most obvious in the film’s poster. Both the poster and website hint at the political elements of the film’s narrative, with prominent images of inner city housing estates acting as aesthetic associations with Thatcher’s Britain. The poster (Appendix 3, figure 3) is most explicit in this imagery. Its dominant image, of a gang of skinheads staring, menacingly, directly at the camera, is emphasised by its prominent tagline – ‘Summer 1983. A Time to Stand Out From the Crowd’. This links the film narratively and temporally to Thatcher’s Britain, whilst hinting
at a contemporary perspective. As Savage argues, the title of *This is England* indicates the present, and whilst the film is set in the 1980s, a clear parallel between contemporary Britain and the recent past is being explored (2007, p. 38).

As already indicated, the film was a critical and commercial success, particularly in the ancillary market. Its first showing on UK television on Film 4 in June 2008, secured the channel a 5.1 per cent share for that time slot. Additionally the film’s one million viewers was, at that time, almost unprecedented for a small, cable channel (Davidson, 2008). The film also subsequently performed well on DVD, with the 2010 UK Film Council report placing it at number eight in the top ten of UK independent video film retail titles. This, it should be added, was over three years after *This is England*’s theatrical release (UK Film Council, 2010, p. 102). Whilst gender specific data is not available in respect of these sales, the film’s themes of 1980s subculture are likely to have chimed with a similar audience as those engaged with the football hooligan films discussed in Chapter Two. As already discussed these films often perform well in the ancillary market, perhaps due to the affiliation they engendered in middle-aged males.

In summary, the importance of a US studio-affiliated distributor, as seen with *The History Boys* and *Son of Rambow*, cannot be understated, particularly in respect of the quality and breadth of the marketing campaign they facilitate. The campaigns for all three films used a much broader perspective in presenting the paratexts inherent in marketing. The narrative images presented by these texts often emphasise their 1980s connection, often through a pronounced use of music, whilst attempting to evoke nostalgia in the audience. As we have seen in *This is England*, contentious associations with the era are edited or erased, presenting a homogenised view of the past for the purposes of enticing an audience to buy a cinema ticket. The focus on nostalgia continues when we consider how these three films were critically received. Whilst I argue the films are less nostalgic for the 1980s than their
marketing implies, the pejorative reviewing of these films, where nostalgia, in many cases, equates to formulaic filmmaking, contrasts sharply with the distributors foregrounding of these aspects in marketing materials.

The 1980s in contemporary British cinema: Critical responses

The History Boys

The History Boys was received in a predominantly positive way by critics, with the focus on the adaptation process, and specifically, in common with the marketing campaign, a comparison of the film with the play. This inevitably led to many commentators focusing on the play and the film’s famous, and mercurial, author. As a ‘national treasure’ Alan Bennett was subjected to a great deal of criticism and antipathy, with many critics unable to divorce their dislike for Bennett from the film (Frank, 2006). Hitchens (2006), in The Mail on Sunday, uses his review to observe that, ‘if only the author had freed himself from ‘his political partisanship’, The History Boys, ‘could have been a great film’, rather than a, ‘poverty-stricken dud’. Hitchens’ response is, of course, extreme, but not particularly surprising given his famously excessive views. But a wider engagement with the aspirations of The History Boys, particularly in respect of its associations with classic literature and high art, is prevalent in these reviews. Calhoun in Time Out (2006), analyses Bennett’s adaption whilst also referencing Joe Orton’s work. This acknowledgement of the cultural competence of Time Out’s readership seems to mirror that of The History Boys audience, but other reviewers are less certain about the adaptation. Whilst many of the critical responses to the film focus on its theatrical provenance, their response to it is broadly a negative one, with the film criticised most robustly for its staginess. It seems that whilst some critics could forgive the
film for displaying its theatrical roots others could not. So whilst Edwards (2006) in the *Daily Mirror*, summarised *The History Boys* as ‘stagey and dull’ and Tookey (2006) in the *Daily Mail*, dismisses it as ‘filmed theatre’. Other critics were more generous in their appraisal of the film’s origins. Maher (2006a) in *The Times* was far more accommodating of the film’s previous incarnation, arguing that it may be ‘stagey, but maybe that’s the point’, and French (2006), in *The Observer* also acknowledged what could have been potential flaws, by indicating that his fears the film ‘might be overly theatrical’, were unfounded, with the acting style, in particular ‘nicely toned down’. Rayns in *Sight and Sound* agreed, arguing that the play has been ‘opened out’ for the cinema and that its subject matter ‘fits into a tradition that is more cinematic than theatrical’ (2006, p. 58). Broadly the reviews in British newspapers were split between the tabloids who ‘loathed’ it (Frank, 2006) and broadsheets who found it ‘supremely entertaining’ (Sandhu and Robey, 2006). Bradshaw, writing in *The Guardian*, was one of the few broadsheet critics who dissented. Also highlighting aspects of the film which may work well in the theatre but, in his view, not on film, he emphasised the, ‘highly worked dialogue that is exhilarating in the theatre, but rather unreal-sounding on the big screen’ (2006).

Aside from the film’s theatrical origins, the critical response focused, in the newspaper reviews at least, on the correlation between the film’s setting and its authorship. Calhoun pointed out the film’s personal provenance by highlighting its use of re-enactments of both *Now, Voyager* and *Brief Encounter*, arguing that Bennett’s reference to both in his memoirs are ‘a distinct sign of how personal this film is to him’ (2006). Calhoun’s in-depth consideration of the subjective nature of the script concluded that whilst Bennett admitted the events in the film were not from personal experience, the narrative could perhaps also be seen as ‘wish-fulfilment’. It is unclear, therefore, considering the film’s focus on the ‘subjunctive’, whether Bennett’s fantasy past, that *The History Boys* evoked, is ironic or
intentional. The respect for Bennett which emanates from Calhoun’s review is palpable, but other, mainly tabloid, sources are less generous. Whilst Tookey, in The Daily Mail, dismisses The History Boys as ‘a feeble, poorly made film’ he does, at least, acknowledge Bennett’s cultural standing, likening criticism of him to ‘running amok with an axe through Buckingham Palace’ (2006). But he also bemoaned the lack of any evocation of the 1980s, arguing that the soundtrack of 1980s music is ‘imposed’ with the films, and Bennett’s, heart more focused on the narrative’s recalling of Gracie Fields and poets Hardy and Housman. The film’s dismissal of 1980s cultural signifiers is replaced, Tookey argued, with cultural references which, ‘reflect not the tastes of students in their late teens in 1983, but the memory of a man who is now in his 70s’ (2006). Others agreed that the film’s temporal setting seemed to be an odd decision, and the film ultimately could have been set ‘anywhere in England at any time in the past few decades’ (Calhoun, 2006). Even the film’s most ardent defenders, like French, agreed that the lack of social context was a problem, with the narrative containing, ‘no reference to the Falklands war, unemployment, Sheffield’s dying steel industry or the rise of the SDP’ (2006).

But, as I have indicated earlier, The History Boys like Son of Rambow, presents a non-specific past. In this case, a past which facilitates the narrative motivation of the extra term for potential Oxbridge students, abolished in the 1980s. It is perhaps not surprising then that the reviews of the film focused more on the political past, specifically the film’s associations with Thatcher and Blair. As Chapter Four contends, the film, despite its setting, has more in common with the New Labour era than Thatcherism. For many critics the two are conflated, so the ‘meretricious’ Irwin adopts personality traits from Thatcher but applies them to his pupils in a Blairite manner (Jays, 2006, p. 21). This perhaps recalls Tony Benn’s comments to me, cited in Chapter One, that the difference between the two are, in fact, imperceptible.
*The History Boys* ultimately came with considerable expectations and, for many, disappointed. Critics alighted on its supposedly left-wing author and imprecise use of its 1980s setting, but reserved most opprobrium for its foregrounding of its theatrical origins — a key signifier of its middle-class pretensions, according to many tabloid reviews. Original screenplays, like *Son of Rambow*, with little of the associations of *The History Boys*, are likely to side-step many of the criticisms levelled at that film. Whilst the 1980s signifiers were well-received with this film, its fantasy elements were not.

*Son of Rambow*

*Son of Rambow* received a consistent reception with almost all reviews recommending it as a film ostensibly for children, but with an ‘eye on cinema-accompanying parents with oodles of Eighties nostalgia’ (Ross, 2008). Ross, writing in *The Spectator*, also argued that the film’s formulaic approach left her cold and she argues that the film has, ‘everything except . . . well . . . any real or convincing charm’. For others, the film’s evocation of innocence and childhood were, ‘impossible to dislike’ (Ide, 2008) and *The Daily Telegraph* declared it a ‘defiantly quirky British comedy’ (Sandhu and Robey, 2008). The main focus of these reviews was, however, the film’s evocation of the 1980s through a non-naturalistic visual style. Many of the reviewers struggled with the 1980s being presented in a fantasy narrative. Ross (2008) assuming the film was seeking realist credentials, argued that it struggled to ‘achieve believability’, whilst the synchronised dancing in the common-room scene stretched credulity too far, for some (Anon, 2008). Perhaps this lack of acceptance of the film’s attempt to present a childhood of the past, is best summed up by Robey writing in *The Daily Telegraph* (2008). His argument that the scene in the cinema, at the start of the film, which playfully shows the entire audience smoking, is ‘contrived’, overlooks the film’s intention to present a childhood which, ‘was not a slice-of-real-life’ (Jennings, 2008). Scenes such as the one in
the common room, are presented in a manner consistent with Jennings’ imagination rather than his actual memory of the events. This indicates, in the director’s approach, an acknowledgment of the unreliability of memories, specifically those from childhood. It is perhaps ironic, therefore, that the film is also criticised for its conventionality, with some reviewers highlighting the formulaic ending as being too neat, ‘contrived and overblown’ (Ide, 2008).

A more consistently received aspect of the film was its recreation of 1980s Britain. Despite an acknowledgment that the setting was not authentic, the film, unlike The History Boys, was praised for avoiding, ‘Britain’s clichéd greyness’, of the period (Goodridge, 2007). Perhaps echoing French’s muted criticism of The History Boys, Landesman in The Times (2008), notes that the film ‘avoids any serious thoughts about the 1980s’, before arguing that, ‘Son of Rambow must be the first film set in 1980s Britain that doesn’t mention Mrs Thatcher, yuppies or the miners. It is warm and whimsical, looking back with unapologetic nostalgia on the innocent side of a despised decade.’ Others focused on the positive associations with the decade, clearly on show within the film’s visual style. Phelan and Walsh (2008), in The Independent, praised the film because, ‘The re-creation of the period details is spot-on’. Jolin in Empire (2008) echoed that statement, contending that, ‘There’s an almost overwhelmingly reassuring feel to the re-creation of time and place’. This nostalgic association with the 1980s is one which was greeted with most enthusiasm by the tabloid newspapers, with Solomons (2008), writing in The Mail on Sunday, recalling how the film, ‘effortlessly recaptures the early Eighties, London suburbia and the heady thrills of being a child’. The People goes as far as to conduct its entire review in 1980s style, with Bacon initially reminiscing on his early memories of VCRs before concluding Son of Rambow, ‘makes you misty-eyed for being young’ despite its ‘easy nostalgia gags’ (2008). Bell in Sight and
Sound agreed, stating director Jennings has, ‘An eye for the idiosyncratic details that bring an era to life’ (2008).

So, whilst Son of Rambow was critically well-received, reviewers were split about its evocation of the 1980s. Many revelled in its use of the decade’s popular culture, whilst others felt its fantasy elements undermined its credibility. Such discussions highlight a recurring theme in the critical reception of these films, and it is one countered by director Jennings’ claim that the film was conceived as a fantasy rather than a slice of social realism (2008). The expectation of these films to present a realist account of the 1980s, for example, with authentic clothing and cars, restricts a more fantasy-inspired narrative like Son of Rambow, which ultimately demands its audience suspend its desire for authenticity. Jennings’ perspective, however, is not shared by other directors, with some, like Meadows with This is England, preferring a far less nostalgic presentation of the past.

This is England

As possibly the best known of the films in these case studies, This is England is also potentially the most divisive. Its portrayal of the 1980s, and specifically the skinhead subculture, saw it declared by Hunter in the trade paper Screen International (2006), as a, ‘provocative journey into the disenfranchised underbelly of Thatcher’s England during the 1980s’. Others were less impressed by its political posturing. The Mail on Sunday felt the film’s ‘several long rants about England, immigrants and direct action’ ultimately only ensured that, ‘our enjoyment (of the film) diminishes accordingly’ (Bond, 2007). The political aspect of the film, as The Mail on Sunday’s review indicated, is one which features heavily in its reviews. The response to the film is often, therefore, dictated by the political affiliations of the newspaper in which the review appears.
Frank, writing in *The Star*, conflated the film’s politicised narrative with its technical achievements arguing it, ‘simply relies on a series of underwritten situations, knee-jerk politics and enough foul language to make it a dead cert for a late-night slot on Channel 4’ (2007). Tookey in *The Daily Mail* went further, by arguing the film’s ‘glib and spurious parallel between the rise of the National Front and the, then Prime Minister’s reconquest of the Falklands’, ensures the film becomes a ‘risibly belated example of Thatcherbashing’ (2007).

The focus on politics in these reviews is important to consider, because it highlights, once again, the role of Thatcher as a flashpoint in many ruminations on the 1980s. Despite the film appearing sixteen years after Thatcher left office, the reviews indicate, certainly in respect of the right-wing press, that any criticism of her, however implicit, requires a defence. Although this strong focus on politics resonates throughout many of these reviews, the narrative’s association with nostalgia is also acknowledged by critics, albeit in a far more positive way. This is particularly pertinent for the aforementioned montage sequence. Bond, in *The Mail on Sunday*, reviews this sequence purely through reference to its nostalgic signifiers, seemingly ignoring the bleak tone of the sequence’s later clips. He argues that, ‘You can’t fault the Eighties iconography in Shane Meadows's new film, *This Is England*, Mrs Thatcher, Space Invaders, Blockbusters, they’re all there’, whilst ignoring the montages less celebratory clips. By marginalising the sequence of images of wounded soldiers, as Bond does, it is arguable that he considers them to be too polemic for comment (2007).

Christopher, in *The Times*, was more even-handed with his appraisal of the sequence. He highlighted the film as an anti-nostalgia piece, stating ‘The news clips that open Shane Meadows's skinhead film *This is England* are a perfect mix of tabloid nostalgia and absurd TV. What a weird and unpleasant land Britain was in the early 1980s’ (Christopher, 2007). Landesman (2006) in *The Sunday Times* continued this theme by arguing that Meadows, ‘has no interest in cosy nostalgia’.
Of course these differing responses to the use of nostalgic signifiers in Meadows’ film are adapted according to the readership of the publication printing them. *The Sun’s* focus on ‘The set, costume design and blistering blue beat soundtrack’, which make the film a ‘highly enjoyable nostalgia trip’, is a good indicator of their readers’ desire to engage with easy nostalgia (Vaughan, 2007). With most readers of the newspaper between the ages of 42 and 43 and likely to be male and working-class, the attraction of a nostalgia-fuelled 1980s film is likely to be greater than the more nuanced narrative of *This is England* (Marshall, 2013). Sandhu, in the *Daily Telegraph*, acknowledges this by voicing his concerns that Meadows’ film may have followed a path familiar to nostalgics when ‘For one horrible moment, it looks as if Meadows is forgoing the misty-eyed social realism with which he made his name in favour of “I Love the ’80s”-style irony-overload’ (2007). As Sandhu indicates, the way in which *This is England* interacts with its setting, and the notion of 1980s nostalgia, is an important one, which ultimately decides whether a critic deems the work to be ‘serious’. Solomons in *The Observer* (2006), details exactly how easy it is for directors to fall into a pattern of reproducing cultural signifiers as a means of engaging a nostalgic audience. He does, however, praise Meadows for resisting the ‘cheap’ route which can be ‘little more than set-dressing or an excuse for a soundtrack’ (Solomons, 2006)

As these reviews indicate, much of the focus, aside from that of the 1980s setting, is on Meadows himself. *This is England* was clearly Meadows’ most ambitious, and personal film to date, and one which undoubtedly cemented his reputation as an important, emerging British filmmaker. These reviews certainly substantiate that, with most, despite what they think of the film, praising the filmmaker. Interestingly, for the broadsheet newspapers, it is not only the film’s dynamism which is worthy of note but the personal nature of the narrative. Perhaps recalling a long tradition of young British filmmakers drawing on their own experiences, Christopher (2007) argues that *This is England*, ‘is by far his most personal and
powerful testimony’, whilst Bradshaw in The Guardian declares ‘this personal theme here finds its richest and maturest expression yet’ (2007). The focus on Meadows in these reviews, whilst a positive aspect of the film’s critical reception, must be viewed in perspective. The film’s political stance was criticised widely, highlighting a difficulty in any rendering of the 1980s. Meadows’ attempts to draw a parallel with contemporary Britain, described by Landesman in The Sunday Times as ‘clumsy and fatuous’, allowed many reviewers to decry its partisan view of Thatcherism (2006). Ultimately, it seems, a concentration on the popular cultural aspects of the period is likely to ensure the film is received more positively, particularly with tabloid newspapers.

Interestingly, one critic, Solomons, in The Observer (2006), did highlight how This is England was influencing a wider body of films engaging in the 1980s. By indicating that the 1980s cannot be divorced from politics he states, ‘Coming so soon after the film of The History Boys was widely (and, I think, harshly) criticised for ignoring politics, Meadows’ new film shows the power of using a shared social history’. The final section of this chapter will consider critical responses to this wider phenomenon, this ‘shared social history’, in contemporary cinema and, specifically, their understanding of the determinants of this.

**Cinema and the 1980s: Critical responses to the broader phenomenon**

As noted in previous chapters, the number of films included in this survey indicates a broad consideration of the prominence of the 1980s in contemporary British cinema. This is a phenomenon which, I have argued, represents a specific response to a wider cultural interest, increasingly reflected in mainstream North American cinema. Significantly, despite many newspaper articles focusing on Hollywood’s fascination with 1980s remakes and
sequels emerging towards the end of the 2000s, the growing cinematic interest in the 1980s is first noted in response to British cinema.

Maher, writing in *The Times* in 2006, was the first to react to the emerging wave of films, although he does so with a note of caution (2006b). Indicating that the early examples of British cinema engaging with the 1980s were from a broadly nostalgic perspective, he legislates against presenting a revisionist view of the decade. Praising *This is England* for combining a pop cultural perspective on the past with one that is ‘also rooted in the experiential realities of the decade’, his contribution to this debate is a prescient one (2006b). Arguing that, ‘Nostalgia will only get you so far. After that, the real work starts’, he acknowledges the decade’s place in our cultural past (2006b). This is a theme which, as we have seen in the films’ critical reception, can still be divisive. Maher’s article was at the beginning of this wave of British films and many that followed failed to heed his warning. By 2007, the attention had shifted to Hollywood films, many of which, whilst focusing on the 1980s, were doing so in a far more explicitly nostalgic fashion. In a 2007 article, also in *The Times*, Maher develops his argument around cinema’s interest in the 1980s. Focusing on the major US studio’s output, he discusses a large number of remakes of 1980s films, due for release. The article refers to an analyst from *Variety*, Archie Thomas, who, whilst noting the fashionable nature of the 1980s, does not venture any further analysis around the determinants of this trend, only its pervasiveness in wider society. Noting that the films are all remakes of 1980s films or television shows, such as *Clash of the Titans* (Leterrer, 2010) and *The A Team* (Carnahan, 2010), the unsurprising conclusion is drawn that commercial needs are driving the trend, with a 1980s nostalgic audience keen to reconnect to their cultural childhood. Whilst Maher’s article does acknowledge the role of wider culture in nostalgia, it is Brooks in *The Guardian* who argues for the link between these texts and our childhood.
Writing in 2009, Brooks focuses on *Adventureland* (Mottola), a 1980s set Hollywood film of that year. The film, like the following years *Hot Tub Time Machine* (Pink, 2010), is a rare text in that it shows Hollywood engaging with the 1980s through an original screenplay. Although these films still have little in common with the personal dramas which typify the British film industry’s engagement with the era, they are also removed from the Hollywood output dominated by remakes and sequels of 1980s film and television. Up to this point, the majority of 1980s-referencing Hollywood films relied on cultural memory for their nostalgia value. These films were often remakes, or reboots, of popular 1980s television shows or films and, accordingly, attracted an audience eager to engage with the 1980s through its popular culture. Later films, like *Hot Tub Time Machine*, were equally nostalgic, but at least they relied on an original screenplay, much like their British counterparts, albeit limited in both originality and creativity. Brooks, however, delves deeper into the determinants of all these films, concluding that the process of reflecting on the past and attempting to restore, it is an evitable one that touches us all. The existential crisis which affects a number of middle-aged men, as Brooks implies, is palpable for, ‘There can be no more telling sign of middle age than seeing the era of your youth repackaged as history and discussed as a kind of wild, exotic dark age’ (2009).

The British broadsheets continued their assessment of this phenomenon with a number of articles in 2010, when the cinematic nostalgia for the decade was arguably at its height. It is Maher, again who shifts the debate from the audience to the producers. He argues that it is ultimately the self-regarding nature of studio executives, many of whom were 1980s youths that drive the phenomenon. Remaking the films of their youth is ultimately an altruistic response, as Doug Belgrad, president of Columbia Pictures argues ‘There’s a fondness for that culture for those of us who came of age with it, and now we want to share it’ (Maher, 2010). With the large number of 1980s Hollywood remakes and sequels
which continued to emerge in the early 2000s, the commercial agenda for this nostalgia is also clear. In Britain, however, as this work has shown, the attachment to the 1980s, specifically for men, is demonstrated in a much more personal manner, often through an original, autobiographical screenplay. This is due primarily, I suggest, to the differing business models in the film industries in the respective countries. Maher points out that the 1980s revival in American cinema was driven by the studio executives, whereas, in the UK, I argue, the model for independent film allows that same personal attachment to a project to be determined by the writer and director, often the same person. This approach which allows the agents to be much closer to their film’s source material, is apparent in all the films of this survey, indicating a clear difference between the two industries and their relationship with the 1980s. Whilst the US has revitalised our childhood films with a contemporary perspective, the British scene is dominated by original dramas. It is true that Hollywood has engaged with the 1980s through original screenplays, but films such as these belong to a wider contemporary wave of cinema: the middle-aged ‘lad’ films which are about reclaiming lost youth. This is most often recreated in a contemporary setting, but in the case of Hot Tub Time Machine it is a literal interpretation, involving time travel. The 1980s are therefore portrayed in the film as the focus of the protagonists’ idealised past, before being evoked, purely for nostalgic purposes, in an extended fantasy sequence. The 1980s in this film is evoked for a modern audience to ridicule as being uncool. It is a marker of distance, rather than empathy.

Shane Meadows acknowledges this contemporary perspective on the 1980s, but puts his relationship with the era in personal terms, describing it as a ‘exciting, mental time… the last hurrah for that kind of tribal identity. People really wore their hearts on their sleeves’ (Brooks, 2009). In differentiating the two approaches epitomised by the Hollywood and British filmmakers, Brooks argues that the extremely personal approach favoured in the UK
is a subjective one which perhaps only highlights a universal nostalgia, for the end of your youth, regardless of the period. But Brooks also legislates against an intimate relationship with 1980s nostalgia because of its ability to ‘play tricks on the memory and reorder the past’ making it look ‘warmer, safer and more seductive when viewed through the rear-view mirror of advancing age’ (2009). These films therefore, engage with our contemporary relationship with the 1980s, whether through personal memory, cultural nostalgia or an anti-nostalgic response. Whilst the filmmakers and executives who make them are responding to their own childhood, their films ultimately present a collective past, one with which we all engage in diverse ways.

**Conclusion**

By focusing on the marketing and critical reception of these films this chapter has articulated the shift in debate around British cinema’s continued engagement with the 1980s, into a broader field. Through the analysis of three key films, used as case studies, it is clear that the narrative’s nostalgic focus, in films like *Son of Rambow*, is one which can be interpreted, or re-imagined, in multiple ways. Nostalgia, as in the marketing of that film, becomes less temporally specific, with a recalling of a universally traditional childhood becoming the focus of attention. In many respects the marketing campaigns for all these films are less interested in the 1980s than they are in a past which will indulge their key audience’s desire to reminisce. Where we see a more nuanced, 1980s specific approach, is in the online marketing, albeit in its infancy at the time of these films’ release. I argue the focus on 1980s iconography and music, much more apparent on the film websites, indicates a focus on a younger audience who engage with 1980s nostalgia in wholly different ways to those that lived through it.
It is in the field of critical reception where I feel the mass media’s relationship with 1980s Britain is most concerted. Nostalgia for the 1980s is categorised by journalists, in particular, in cultural terms. The measure of a ‘quality’ period piece, as we saw in the critical reception to *This is England*, is often predicated on the narrative avoiding nostalgic clichés and embracing serious political points. Of course, opinions on this approach seem to be split, with tabloid newspapers campaigning against political rhetoric, whilst commending pop cultural references. This, I argue, is a political debate, split broadly along the lines of the political affiliations of newspapers. The positive critical reception of *Son of Rambow* is, perhaps, best understood within this framework. The film’s fantasy narrative distances it from any serious analysis of the 1980s, arguably making it more palatable for critics.

The wider debate about contemporary cinema attempting to reconnect to the 1980s is one which grew during the five years on which this work is focused. Many of the broadsheet newspapers have revisited the debate over the years, and their analysis, although slow to come to conclusions around the determinants of this phenomenon, serve to highlight the different approaches in the UK and US. For British independent filmmakers however, it is clear that whatever the role of 1980s nostalgia in their films, the marketing and the critical reception of the text is difficult to control. To use Stuart Hall’s theory of Encoding and Decoding (1993), the audience’s decoding of a film’s meaning can become subordinate to its interpretation of the text (Hall, 1993, p.30). Such a response provides an audience with varying versions of the 1980s, depending on its own decoding of the images, often influenced by the personal experiences of the individuals within that audience. Whilst these films’ representation of the past feeds into later media interpretation of the 1980s, so too do the paratexts which surround it, producing new texts and new interpretations of the decade.
Conclusion

Findings and Reflections

In this thesis I have explored how the films selected represent a considerable intervention in the wider social and cultural phenomenon of reappraising the 1980s in contemporary British popular culture. I have also argued that the 1980s is not only a distinctive period in terms of how we recall and engage with it, but that British cinema has reimagined it in a unique way. The dominance of discourses of masculinity in these films, in the context of their production histories, is perhaps their most prominent shared feature. This observation raised questions about how these films render a subjective, personal past. Another dominant theme of this work, that of memory and nostalgia and their function in constructing specific versions of the past, emerged from that discussion. Finally, I considered the place of these films in the wider framework of British film culture, highlighting the significance of their production over a six year period.

It is useful here to reiterate the key aims of this work:

- To consider the contribution made by British cinema to a much larger phenomenon of the media recycling of the 1980s.
- To assess the capacity of British cinema to mediate the past. I argue that cinema is a particularly effective medium in rendering the past, but what is it role and function in doing so, specifically in relation to other cultural forms?
- To explore the films’ authorship, with a specific regard to assessing the relationship between the 1980s and masculinity, as presented by these films’ reimagining of the 1980s.
To examine this body of films’ contribution in terms of their critical framing.

Where do we position these films in respect of film studies concepts? Is there, for example, a correlation between these films and the heritage film, or those of the British New Wave? And what does the positioning of these films, in critical terms, tell us about our relationship with the 1980s?

We are now in a position to provide some answers to these questions. Through this thesis’ thematic approach, a number of key considerations has emerged within each chapter. The next section will examine these in turn.

**Summation**

The notion of the 1980s as a unique period in recent British history has developed throughout this thesis. Chapter One considered the decade as a contemporary cultural phenomenon, whilst also mapping its fascination for social historians. The notion that each decade has its own distinctive identity, familiar in its culture, politics and landscape, is one that, I argued, may have ceased with the 1980s. This may explain why social historians, like Dominic Sandbrook, have distanced themselves from decade-based nostalgia, preferring a more precise temporal framework, through which they can engage with key events in recent history. Whilst I have not suggested cultural history will adopt similar methodology, there are signs, in the muted response to the 1990s for example, that the 1980s may be the last era to be recalled through decade-centred periodisations. Of course, if we subscribe to the rule of the ‘twenty year revival’, the 1990s has yet to reach its peak in respect of cultural retrospectives.

The distinctive nature of the 1980s, at least in contemporary British society’s memory, was informed by popular culture’s resistance to move on after the decade ended.
An emerging interest in the 1980s, fuelled by retrospectives and television programmes over a number of years, presented the decade as current and vibrant. Later media also focused on the positive, nostalgic aspects of the 1980s with television, in particular, celebrating the decade’s energy. Cinema has, on the whole, felt conflicted with that presentation of the decade.

In this study of an important body of British films, it was vital to place them within their critical context. The influence of both the heritage and social realist films – key productions of 1980s British cinema – is apparent in the films of this survey. Of course, the heritage film in particular, has a deep seated association with Thatcherism, something I argue it shares with the later films. But, as Chapter One demonstrated, it is subsequent versions of the heritage film, as discussed by Powrie (2000) and Fitzgerald (2010), that position the 1980s-set films within the ‘new heritage’ films of the new millennium. Chapter One’s final section explored the critical positioning of these films. Through an examination of their provenance and agency, in particular, a number of commonalities emerged. Whilst similar, in respect of age and gender, the writers and directors of these films presented very personal accounts of the 1980s. These, I argued, suggest our relationship with the 1980s is much more complex than at first imagined and not always constrained by notions of nostalgia. Politically, for example, the films of my survey represent a radical shift in British cinema’s relationship with the 1980s.

The polemic that characterised the British film industry’s output in the 1980s, particularly in social realist texts, is, on first viewing, absent from many of the later films. They are much more conservative in their political perspective, and whilst it is clear that most are critical of Thatcher and the legacy of her ideology, they are reluctant to explicitly declare this. It is clear in my interview with Peter Harness and the comments of Steve McQueen that any suggestion that their film has a political ‘agenda’ is firmly rejected. But of course, except
in the case of the shallowest reading, it is clear where the films’ political sensibilities lie. We must acknowledge the commercial impact of an overtly political film, even one that engages with politics of thirty years ago. But I also detect that this disavowal of the politics of the period is a result of the adjustments being made by contemporary males in coming to terms with changing gender roles. What these films do seem to agree on is their author’s yearning for a more uncomplicated, regressive masculinity. Of course, this has political connotations for, arguably, the contemporary British male is heavily influenced by the political policies of Thatcherism.

Alternative perspectives on the 1980s, highlighting the diversity of our relationship with the decade, began to emerge here. The role of the male author is a vital one in these films, and this work, reflected through, not only their production context, but narrative and visual style. The overtly masculine themes of these films, coupled with their autobiographical provenance, indicated that a very subjective and personal 1980s was being evoked. One of this thesis’ key findings, the concept that the 1980s means so many different things to different filmmakers, is illuminating. Additionally, the diverse modes of engagement with the decade, all through this one medium, indicates a conflict in perspectives. Many of these films have indicated their authors’ inability to reconcile a very personal 1980s. This is demonstrated by an authorial inclination to distance themselves, not only from their films’ temporal content, but also, any narrative notions of nostalgia. I argued Margaret Thatcher has increasingly been mediated in nostalgic terms and, as Chapter Two demonstrated, her influence, politically, is apparent in many films of the 1980s and since. That chapter explored the extent of her role, within the production history and narrative of the films of this survey and earlier, concluding that many failed to differentiate between Thatcher, the image, and Thatcherism, the politics. Thatcher’s image in these films is, therefore, presented not only as a signifier of the era, but a pejorative one, denoting its polarising effect on British society in
the 1980s. Of course, there is little doubt that the 1980s political landscape, and specifically Thatcher’s domination of it, contributed hugely to the decade’s place in contemporary memory. However, I argue that this conflation of the Thatcher image and her politics, particularly in British cinema, is significant to our understanding of the relationship between contemporary Britain and the 1980s. Thatcher’s function in British films is reflected in three distinct categories, detailed in Chapter Two: those films that focus on Thatcher the personality, those that present her politics directly and those that present her politics in an indirect fashion. Thatcher herself, and her advisers and the media, are, of course, complicit in these representations, specifically of the Thatcher image. *Hunger* showed us that the voice of Thatcher - a further 1980s signifier, I have suggested - still has the authority to evoke very specific memories of the decade. The use of Thatcher’s voice is very significant, for it is used, in almost all cases in these films, to vocalise the intransigence of 1980s politics. In many of the tributes to Thatcher, after her death, it was precisely her uncompromising nature, and unshakeable self-belief, that was recalled. It is this trait, I have argued, that has become one of the defining memories of the 1980s, as reflected by Thatcher’s appearance in these films. Of course, the irony is that the use of Thatcher’s voice in this way is intended to evoke negative memories of the 1980s, whilst the tributes presented this aspect of her character as a positive feature.

The recurrence of Thatcher imagery in these films, as with all signifiers, not only roots the narrative in a particular temporal period, but also invites a strong response. Of course, sometimes the reactions are nostalgic, but in most cases Thatcher’s inclusion in the film’s narrative, as in *Hunger*, was a critical one. I argued that despite Steve McQueen’s assertion that his film is not political, echoing Peter Harness’ defence of *Is Anybody There?*, both films presented Thatcher and her ideology in highly critical terms. It is, however, the authors’ distancing of their film from the 1980s and its politics, which is of most interest. It highlights
a recurring theme of this thesis, that of the artistic credibility of the 1980s films. The evidence I presented during these case studies indicated how difficult it is, in the case of 1980s-set films, to remove their narratives from their political context.

Unlike the direct approach of *Hunger* and *Cass*, the chapter’s final case study, *Is Anybody There?*, engages with Thatcherism in a more oblique manner. The film subtly critiques Thatcher’s governments’ policy of selling social care provision and the effects of the free market on the British family. *Is Anybody There?*, in its focus on a dysfunctional family and a distant patriarch through the eyes of a male child protagonist, highlights the corrosive nature of Thatcherism on the young, and, the narrative implies, on contemporary Britain. I argue that we must consider this film within the context of its provenance. Harness admits that it was originally inspired by a Thatcher quote and was broadly critical of her policies. But his denials that the finished film has the same perspective are, I feel, disingenuous. *Is Anybody There?* is distinctly anti-Thatcher in much of its outlook, depicting the aspirational nature of 1980s political ideology as an obstacle to family unity. Its themes of family and masculinity are central to this thesis, and many of the films in this survey, and were the focus of Chapter Three.

The dominance of the masculine point-of-view in these films, filtered through their male provenance, is a key factor in their narrative themes. The films’ very personal perspective on the 1980s was explored, as Appendices One and Two corroborate, by a repeated focus on homosocial groups, subcultures, family and, specifically, patriarchy. The changes in the social construction, and mediation, of the British male, of course, played a crucial role in these texts’ introspective tendency. Whereas the depiction of the ‘maladjusted veteran’ perfectly encapsulated post-war masculinity, the self-reverential films of this study captured the culture of later male codings, the ‘new lad’ and the ‘new man’ (Spicer, 2003, p.161). This focus on male authors, writing from an autobiographical perspective, was at the
centre of Chapter Three’s case studies. The personal stories of Geoff Thompson and Justin Kerrigan, were particularly helpful to our understanding of the contemporary middle-aged male’s relationship with his past and, particularly, the 1980s.

It was very apparent in these case studies, particularly with *Clubbed* and *I Know You Know*, that the authors’ investment in their scripts, certainly in respect of personal memory, was immense. Whilst such a stake in a very personal story, was not rewarded commercially (both films were poorly received at the box-office), there is evidence that they performed a therapeutic, almost cathartic, function for their authors. For Kerrigan, this was effected through the rendering of the difficult relationship with his father, and for Thompson, it was about revisiting the break-up of his marriage. As both men indicated, dealing with the personal ramifications of rendering your past on screen, can present problems with personal affiliations, whilst also presenting opportunities for closure. This discussion in Chapter Three, indicated the wider psychological function of film and memory. Whereas previous studies, such as Cook (2005) and Grainge (2003), have considered the textual and reception aspects of personal memory in cinema, there has been little research conducted into the therapeutic effects of rendering a personal past on screen. Kerrigan’s account of the making of *I Know You Know*, detailing the pain and personal anxiety involved in the production of the film, introduced a further complication into this analysis of the relationship between the 1980s and contemporary British cinema. The function of filmmaking to exorcise personal demons associated with the 1980s is, I argued, a compelling aspect of the authorship of these films.

Nick Love is perhaps the archetype of the ‘1980s film’ director. His two films, *The Business* and *The Firm*, are similar in theme, visual style and sensibility. The 1980s, for Love, is a toybox, full of signifiers, specifically music and clothes. His manifestations of 1980s popular cultural nostalgia have none of the self-consciousness of other films, such as *Starter for 10* or *Is Anybody There?* Love, therefore, is unapologetic about his passion for the 1980s,
proudly centering his nostalgia on the screen. Love’s two 1980s films are also peculiarly compelling. Narratively simplistic, and featuring some dubious acting, both *The Business* and *The Firm* nonetheless, capture a colourful, vibrant 1980s. This may not be the 1980s we remember, but it is the one we wish we had lived. Love entices the viewer into his version of the 1980s with a promise of uncomplicated nostalgia. Additionally, his assurances that *The Firm* is a ‘personal film’ indicates, perhaps, that for some filmmakers, authenticity in mise-en-scène, narrative and thematic content, is vital for an honest rendering of the period.

Nick Love is, perhaps, the most interesting of the directors here for his relationship with the 1980s is the most honest. *The Business* is probably the only overtly pro-Thatcher film here. The film’s premise that, whatever the circumstances, the triumph of the individual is the ultimate goal shines out from every frame. Love presents regressively masculine characters, indicating a longing for traditional gender roles, but it is his embracing of Thatcher values that makes the film look most old-fashioned. Frankie’s life of crime, deception and hedonism could, in another director’s hands, been presented as anachronistic, but Love uses *The Business* to celebrate what he clearly feels is the opportunities that the 1980s presented to the young. Of course, to a contemporary audience such individualistic behaviour seems incongruous and the narcissism that dominates both *The Business* and *The Firm* can only now be attractive to the shallowest of audiences. Chapter Four explored this correlation between nostalgia and authenticity, with a particular focus on the themes of youth and education, evident in the case studies: *The History Boys*, *Starter for 10* and *The Firm*.

It is perhaps understandable, considering their focus on youth and nostalgia, that a number of these films use education as the backdrop to their narratives. Schooling is, of course, a key component of our young lives, occupying a dominant place in our memories, even if this is often a polarised one. Of course, any rites-of-passage narrative will inevitably
focus on key, formative events in a young protagonist’s life. Education will therefore often feature heavily in such texts, particularly those with a personal, even autobiographical provenance. This is the case, not only in a number of these films, but a great deal of the 1980s-set novels and memoirs of the 2000s. Also written by middle-aged men, the similarities with the films’ provenance indicates a wider social phenomenon in these years. These books were often light-hearted, sometimes political but always personal. The dominance of subjective, male narratives about the 1980s, across popular culture, is therefore, difficult to deny.

The diverse nature of authorship and memory was explored in the chapter’s case study on The History Boys, which rendered a non-specific 1980s, more temporally aligned to its author’s own youth in the 1940s. The History Boys engages with nostalgia, but its authors’ elegiac recollections are far more focused on his own 1940s childhood than the films version of the 1980s. Consequently, the 1980s in that film is a curiously detached one, reflecting perhaps, Alan Bennett’s disconnection with the decade. I established in Chapter Four that whilst the film was confused about its relationship with the 1980s, the marketing, particularly in the use of nostalgic signifiers, was much more assertive. Bennett’s misplaced nostalgia is contrasted with Starter for 10’s ambition to present an alternative version of the 1980s, one that acknowledges the failures of Thatcherism, albeit in muted terms, but also critiques its effect on future politics. Additionally, the film’s attempt to explore the ‘indie’, or gothic, side to the decade, ultimately fails, as the narrative veers between mainstream nostalgia and a darker 1980s, populated by music from the likes of The Cure and Echo and the Bunnymen. Again, it is the authors’ desire to distance themselves from a mainstream version of the 1980s that is most revealing. The search for a personal 1980s, devoid of the mainstream signifiers dominant in Nick Love’s films, is particularly apparent in Starter for 10. Ultimately, though, it also resorts to caricature and stereotype and is, ironically, as dependent on 1980s
cultural signifiers as the final case study here, *The Business*. An unashamedly nostalgic paean to the hedonistic 1980s, *The Business* crams every 1980s cliché possible into its narrative, albeit with affection and a healthy dose of irony. *The Business* demonstrates, perhaps, that a traditional 1980s film, full of obvious reverence for the period, can be made without the angst associated with other, more serious, films. It is, perhaps, ironic, therefore, that where many of these films steer away from a mainstream depiction of the 1980s, it is in their marketing that the signifiers of the period dominate.

Chapter Five brought the thesis back to its roots, discussed in Chapter One. Whilst that chapter explored the origins of 1980s cultural nostalgia, specifically in terms of audience demand, the final chapter ended with a consideration of the reception of these films. The chapter’s case studies - *Son of Rambow*, *The History Boys* and *This is England* – demonstrated how 1980s iconography and nostalgia is evoked through marketing. The films’ paratexts, I argued, present a new narrative image, one that is often in contradiction to the films. For example, the trailer for *This is England* is carefully constructed to present a depoliticised version of the 1980s. The film’s iconic opening montage is edited and reconstructed to focus on 1980s popular culture, rather than the film’s politicised perspective. By removing Thatcher from her political context as the trailer does, she is merely a cultural touchstone for the 1980s, symbolising in the montage, the decade’s popular culture, rather than its politics. *This is England* is as critical of Thatcherism as *The Business* is celebratory, but once again in the marketing of the film we see that tone shifting. Overt criticism of Thatcher is rare in these films, as opposed to those of the 1980s, but in the marketing campaigns it is entirely absent. Whilst *This is England*, like *The History Boys*, focuses on Thatcher’s legacy, it is also very critical of the divisiveness Thatcherism instilled. The celebration of an extinct brand of tribal masculinity is, of course, dominant but in respect of politics *This is England* is unequivocal in presenting subculture as unifying.
Nostalgia is also very apparent in the critical reception of these films. In what can be seen as a continuation of the narrative image presented by the films’ marketing, many critics concentrated on the evocation of the 1980s, specifically Thatcherism, often in detriment to the film’s narrative. Whilst this view was predictably reversed in more high-brow publications, it does perhaps vindicate the decision of filmmakers like Steve McQueen and Peter Harness to distance their films from the divisive nature of 1980s politics.

Finally, Chapter Five considered other discourses around these 1980s-set films. Such analysis indicated that this phenomenon has not gone unnoticed, and is also echoed in several Hollywood films, which demonstrate a similar fascination with the decade. But it is the unique way in which British cinema interacts with the 1980s, as established by these films that is of central interest. Their specifically masculine re-imaginings reveal a number of different strands of interaction with the period. Often this is nostalgic, sometimes political and occasionally purely personal. The next section will attempt to untangle these knotted threads of collective memory.

**Outcomes and Future Research**

**Aims and Outcomes**

I stated, in my aims, that this work would explore popular cultural engagement with the 1980s and, specifically, British cinema’s contribution to that. I have identified some commonalities in contemporary popular culture’s fascination with the 1980s. In particular, I have explored similarities in the provenance of literature’s relationship with the 1980s and that of film, specifically in their middle-aged, male authorship from a personal perspective. Additionally, the recycling of media in these films, particularly their reliance on cultural signifiers such as clothes and music, resonates through a number of texts across these forms,
specifically visual ones, like television. But film’s engagement with the period is far more complex and confused than that of other media. For example, the authorship of these films is very specific, mostly men in their late 30s, and it is inevitable their shared perspective would be reflected in the concerns and perspective of the films. Additionally, with most of the films presenting a version of the author’s own life, this perspective is not only masculine, but personal. Unlike other media, ultimately these films constitute a body of work with a common provenance, indicating a social and cultural engagement with the 1980s that is not reflected elsewhere.

My assertion, that this response to the 1980s is a unique one, is reflected in my consideration of cinema’s function within these cultural retrospectives. I have established that film influences, and is influenced by, a broad range of media, and this is particularly the case for the 1980s. The decade’s shadow is everywhere, it seems, and film has been particularly receptive. It is perhaps useful again here to locate the differences between film’s engagement with the 1980s and that of other forms of popular culture. Whilst, as I have indicated, the 1980s-centred novels and memoirs of the 1980s, like these films, present a gendered response to the decade, they are also comedic, relying heavily on humour. It is important to note the function of humour in the films, particularly noticeable in the portrayal of the patriarch in narratives such as *Is Anybody There?* Humour, like a number of elements of these films, is presented as a mechanism to distance our contemporary selves from the 1980s. This, perhaps, reflects the author’s desire to retreat from any acknowledgement of the person he was or, more likely, the person he has become.

Film evokes the act of remembering but does so through both subjective memories and objective, historical reality. By doing so, it demonstrates a unique capacity to articulate, perhaps awkwardly, the generational frustrations of a whole class of ordinary young men for whom the 1980s represented (in terms of family, relationships, subcultural identity) a brutal
kind of disenfranchisement. It is for this reason, I contend, that the authors distance themselves from the 1980s they evoke. This brings me to an analysis of the cultural capital of these films’ authorship.

The personal relationship between the authors and the 1980s is clear. Indeed, the notion of middle-aged men revisiting their childhood through the medium of film, is, of course, nothing new. In the 1980s and 1990s, Terence Davies, for example, made a number of nostalgic studies of his childhood, including *The Long Day Closes* and *Distant Voices, Still Lives*. But this study has demonstrated that the volume of contemporary films about the 1980s, made by similarly aged men, together with the commonalities in themes, constitute an important mediated discourse on current attitudes to the 1980s. This, I argued, is informed by the age, gender and personal involvement of the creative agents in the narrative. With most of the films featuring a male protagonist, usually a child, teenager or one in his early twenties, the narrative perspective is a masculine one, often centred on a coming-of-age story. Understandably perhaps, with these elements informing the themes of the films, further commonalities emerged. The films focus on homosocial groups - often subcultural in composition – and present commentaries on the fragmenting of the family unit, with particular emphasis given to the importance of the patriarchal figure. The father-figure binds many of these films, but their representation is diverse. Shaun’s father, in *This is England*, has died, whilst Lee’s, in *Son of Rambow*, has deserted him. Protagonists in many of these films have patriarchs who are present in their lives, but they belong to a no less dysfunctional family. Here, as in *Is Anybody There?*, fathers are presented as distracted and subjugated. They are often childlike, as in *I Know You Know*, unable to deal with modern life in a rational way. These fathers, in almost all cases, struggle to form positive relationships with their children. As *Clubbed* indicates, specifically in Geoff Thompson’s attempts to render a truthful past that doesn’t alienate others, the legacy of these relationships is visible in the
work of these authors. It is perhaps here that the relationship between the authors and the 1980s is most subjective. There is a sense, therefore, that the authors of these films are reflecting on their own unresolved youth. It is only when they reach their adulthood and perhaps have children themselves, that these experiences can be reconciled. Ultimately, this is what these films try to do for their authors, resolve the past. How these men attempt to do this differs, of course, but these films, I argue, represent a collective attempt of this resolution. With a number of these films suggesting a link between the ‘absent’ father and Thatcherism, a connection is also apparent between the personal nature of these narratives and, other, national concerns, specifically the socio-political landscape of the 1980s. But whereas the representations of masculinity on display here are broadly traditional they are treated with a certain degree of reverence. Humour is used but often this is affectionate, barely disguising the nostalgia felt for a version of masculinity which was already under threat in the 1980s. As the 1980s gave way to the 1990s, as Chapter Three demonstrated, a less traditional codification of masculinity – the New Man - became acceptable. In the 2000s the version presented in these films is barely recognisable, but, I argue, still coveted by their authors. In political terms nostalgia for the 1980s is also present, specifically in The Business, but most of the films are critical of the Thatcher era, even if they long for its relatively uncomplicated gender positions.

For some, as in Hunger and Cass, the 1980s are encapsulated through an evocation of Thatcher and the politics of the time. But, despite the films’ explicit correlation between Thatcher and the 1980s, there is a distinctive unwillingness from authors to acknowledge this. This thesis has demonstrated that authorial engagement with the 1980s, outside the films themselves, has a very subjective nature. It is clear that all these films engage with the decade in varying ways, often nostalgic and occasionally political, but their authors’ reluctance to recognise this, is an important finding of this work. It is important to make the
distinction here between the author and the film. I have argued that a number of films, such as Starter for 10 and Is Anybody There?, narratively, and visually, align themselves with 1980s nostalgia or politics, despite their authors’ disavowal of that. But even here I detect different layers of reluctance. Both McQueen and Harness distance themselves from the era’s politics. Thatcher’s death reinstated old divisions about her politics and it is here I think that we get to the heart of this distancing from 1980s politics. Clearly these authors embrace the freedom to critique the 1980s and its legacy, ostensibly through its politics, but seem equally keen to avoid any direct commentary on Thatcherism, preferring more oblique engagement.

Perhaps this is a media issue. It is clear from Chapter Five that Britain’s dominant right-wing press are vociferous in their condemnation of any film that is critical of Thatcher. Understandably any commercial work would want to avoid such criticism where possible. But I think this issue is more fundamental than that and transcends the boundaries of popular culture. The legacy of Thatcher, as Tony Benn argued, has been subsumed into contemporary consensus politics. In Marxist terms, as Williams writes, it is now incorporated and has become part of our normal social code. This may explain why the films of this survey are far less polemical than those of the 1980, when the ideological battlelines were more starkly drawn. In Williams’ terms Thatcherism is no longer a residual or alternative culture (1973).

In short, the fight against the prevailing political attitudes engendered by Thatcher is continuing but the embers of the political fire lit by films like My Beautiful Laundrette are barely discernable.

But the evocation of Thatcher in these texts is important for other reasons. Her presence overshadows their themes of familial disconnection, patriarchal confusion and masculine discombobulation. This is particularly evident in the films about subcultures, a feature of the 1980s that is still a popular focus of nostalgia for middle-aged men. The 1980s is strongly associated with tribal identity but it is particularly significant that four films (Cass,
Awaydays, The Firm and The Rise of the Footsoldier), highlight the role of football-related male subcultures. For many, the demise of football hooliganism, precipitated by the Conservative Government’s overseeing of CCTV cameras and legislation around foreign travel by supporters, is evidence of a successful curbing of anti-social behaviour. However, it seems for others, it is also an indicator of an erosion of male identity. Of course, this may be further evidence of Thatcher being an ‘easy target’ for left-wing nostalgics, but also indicates the draw of the 1980s for the middle-aged male, and its association with a restriction in such homosocial activity. The foregrounding of tribal affiliations in many of these films, and their attraction to a specifically domestic audience via home entertainment, should also be considered in political terms. The nostalgia for a time when unrestrained traditional masculine behaviour was de rigueur is palpable in these films and indicates not only a lament for those times but anger for the imposition of new codes of masculine behaviour. The ultimate irony, perhaps, is that to relive traditional masculine behaviour contemporary males are forced into a traditionally female domestic space.

My final aim was to place these films, as a body of work, within their critical and academic context. I have argued that the roots of this study’s films can be traced to both dominant types of 1980s British cinema: the social realist drama and the heritage film. These share similarities with a body of films that emerged in the 1990s, identified by Powrie (2000) as ‘alternative heritage’, which focused on young, male protagonists in the recent past. Higson progresses this extension of the heritage film tag, recognising the emergence of a number of films, which I argued share characteristics with those in this survey. His acknowledgement that ‘period films with earlier settings are the products of a modern media industry’ was an early indicator of the importance of such films for cultural historians (Higson, 2003, p.34). Whilst Higson has revisited the function of these films, most recently in 2011 when he focused on their regional, rather than national, concerns, his initial appraisal
of these ‘cultural heritage’ films appears not to have been updated (2003, p.34). This work has sought to do this, identifying a specific body of films and placing them within their social and cultural context, whilst acknowledging their place with the study of film.

Higson is correct, I believe: a number of these films, as this thesis has argued, rely on a cultural, rather than national, heritage for their historical focus. They also reject later versions of the heritage film, particularly Fitzgerald’s understanding of the ‘new heritage’ films of contemporary Britain. This London-based, ‘new man’ version of modern masculinity, evident in films like *Four Weddings and a Funeral* is traded for a more traditional, regionally-centred style, highlighting their historical perspective and their lineage with the new wave films of the early 1960s.

I argue, therefore, that these 1980s-set films are, collectively, important to our understanding of the relationship between contemporary British society and the 1980s. Emerging within a relatively short period of filmmaking, these films present an important and fascinating insight into contemporary masculinity’s relationship with the past. It is here, and in political terms, that the films differ from many of those that were made in the 1980s. Whilst national issues are considered, such as in *Hunger* and *This is England*, these films are far more concerned with engaging in a personal past. It is in the autobiographical responses to the 1980s that we can detect the disaffection of a generation. These films indicate their authors are trying to negotiate their way around the 1980s, but in specifically subjective ways, with the 1980s presented through particularly personal perspectives and less concerned with the identity politics that defined the earlier films. Common themes, therefore, emerge, specifically associated with masculine perspectives, such as the role of the father and homosocial groups. These, I feel, are the touchstones of the decade for these authors, as is Thatcher. However, the way each author deals with the themes and topics that interest him, differs. Perhaps this reflects their own values and memories, but I suspect it is
something more fundamental than that. Almost all the authors attempt to distance
depicted in their film. They are happy to accept the narrative’s
autobiographical, and subjective, elements, but a 1980s cloaked in humour and irony
indicates a lack of resolution for these men. Such tools allow the author to disengage from
any meaningful analysis of the period. Some, like Nick Love, use a post-modern reflexivity to
engage with the decade. To Love, an authentic tracksuit is vital to his rendition of the 1980s,
regardless of the limited scope of recognition. Others, like Nichols, author of Starter for 10,
a ‘1980s film’ must be avoided at all costs as the recycling of the decade’s media and
artefacts, only highlights the ‘naffness’ of the decade. Similarly for Harness, with Is Anybody
There?, distancing his work from its obvious Thatcher references allows his authorship to be
seen as more original and somehow less derivative. But, of course, what they all have in
common is a need to address the 1980s, to engage with it and ultimately to reconcile their
contemporary selves with the decade that shaped them and the generation of British men
they belong to. This approach differs markedly from earlier films that engaged with the 1980s
and its legacy, such as Naked and The Road. These films were far less ambiguous in their
approach to the 1980s and it is perhaps here, in the looking back to a recent past, that we
can determine the unique perspective cinema has in trying to reconcile the 1980s. It is
perhaps that distance, that perspective, together with the subjective nature of these
accounts which determines the precise nature of contemporary British cinema’s rendering
of the 1980s.

Other films, such as Is Anybody There? and The History Boys, seemingly avoid much
commentary on the era. Aside from short sequences, each containing iconic 1980s music,
such films resist any overt 1980s references. But, I argue these films demonstrate a key point
for this thesis. They cannot avoid the 1980s even if, in some cases, they try to. It is here that
the important issue, of our relationship with 1980s nostalgia, is fully addressed. The
spectrum of films discussed here, all engage with 1980s nostalgia, even when trying to avoid it. The disavowal of the 1980s dominates the provenance of these films, with only Nick Love unashamedly embracing the decade’s nostalgia, albeit at the safe distance afforded by post-modern irony. The authors of many of the other films argue they want to avoid the politics of the period or any accusation they are making a ‘1980s film’. This question of credibility in respect of the 1980s is inherent in the films’ authorship and can only be resolved it seems, through humour and pastiche.

Ultimately the perspective of the 1980s offered by these films is vastly different from those made in the decade itself. Politics and identity were inextricably linked in the earlier films as youthful narratives grappled with Thatcherism’s negative influence on gender, race and sexuality. Perhaps then if it can be seen that these films present any kind of progressiveness in the legacy of Thatcherism it is that many of these issues are absent from the later films. Whilst this may indicate they have disappeared from the social and political agenda, the issue that is most apparent indicates a more worrying escalation. The dominance of a ‘male anxiety’ narrative in these films is an important, and obvious, component which, I argue, creates a coherent approach to the legacy of Thatcherism. Almost without exception the films present a nostalgic, sometimes elegiac, response to traditional notions of masculinity, emphasising the shifts in the social construction of masculinity in the intervening years. These films are vital in ordering that perspective - how men have changed since the 1980s and how they feel about that. But the films still indicate an uneasiness with those gender constructions and, perhaps more obviously, the legacy of Thatcherism. This is explored in the films’ narratives through a wider consideration of the 1980s.

Throughout this work I have discussed in great detail the important role of cultural recycling, not just in these films but in popular culture generally. The films evoke memories of the 1980s through a rendering of specific cultural signifiers, constructed to instill nostalgia
but, in many respects, lacking any real narrative purpose. The reoccurrence of such symbolism across many of these films, and other media, highlights I argue, the important role they play in engaging with the 1980s. Whilst, as I have demonstrated, many of these films had a very limited audience, their role in propagating a specific version of the 1980s is much more influential than their box office figures indicate. Whilst I have focused on a six year period of filmmaking, later films, such as *Pride* (Warchus, 2014) present the 1980s in similar ways, substituting overt politics for nostalgic symbolism. In a sense, perhaps this is not surprising. A key theme of this work is the journey of Thatcherism from radical ideology to an incorporated and consensual mode of politics. The politics of the 1980s are now acceptable, possibly diluted somewhat from Thatcher’s original vision but still dominant in contemporary Britain. But as these films demonstrate, it is not just the politics of the period that are still with us. The films common preoccupation with, and unresolved reworking of, the 1980s indicates that the desired closure on the decade is still out of reach.

This work’s title starts with the curious question *The History Boys?* The question mark is there for a reason. In this work I have explored the legacy of the 1980s; politically, culturally and socially, and whilst many of these films are based on their authors’ desire to reconcile or close the 1980s, I am unconvinced any achieve their aim. This raises the question of whether the 1980s are really yet history. The difference between the recent past and the historical past is the ability of historians to provide us with critical distance and a sense of closure. You may recall my earlier discussion around Peter York’s assertion all those years ago – in 1996 – that we cannot move on until we close the decade (1996, p.18). Nearly twenty years later we have learned a lot about the 1980s, particularly in respect of its impact on contemporary masculinity, but closure, I feel, still eludes us. I have discussed how these films act, in a way, as therapy for some of the authors working through their 1980s youth. I think, however, we can go further and argue that collectively these films, and the other cultural
artefacts that engage with the decade, indicate Britain as a society is still grappling with its recent past. Whilst the films serve to act as a social and cultural panacea for our 1980s anxiety, ultimately of course, such a state is unobtainable because the 1980s are as much part of our present as they are our past. It is perhaps not surprising that these films fail to come to terms with the 1980s when, as a society, Britain is still contending with that issue.

**Future Research**

This thesis has addressed all of its aims but, of course, there are always aspects which would benefit from further analysis. In the case of a contemporary study, such as this, there is always the advantage of a greater temporal distance from the films, to allow further development of some of the ideas explored. It is clear that these films constitute a body of work that address a contemporary fascination with the 1980s, within a specific, six year, time frame. The engagement with the period, through cinema, before and after 2005 and 2010, is negligible. However, British films based in the 1980s are still emerging and, whilst small in number, their perspective on the 1980s will be a useful one to consider. Perhaps these films will be assisted by the 2013 death of Thatcher and the annual release of government papers from her era as prime minister. Certainly 2014’s *Pride* is the first dramatic film since *Billy Elliot* to set its narrative around the 1984/85 miners’ strike. Whilst critically well received, the film does exhibit a number of interesting features that resonate with the films of this survey. With a cast that includes *This is England* star, Joe Gilgun, and Shane Meadows collaborator, Paddy Considine, it is difficult to ignore the influence of the earlier films. This is, perhaps, most apparent in the film’s opening montage scene, using archive footage of the Miners’ strike, and which echoes the start of *This is England*. Ultimately, the film appears to be more akin to *Starter for 10* in its 1980s sensibilities, promising a politicised realism but delivering a nostalgic sentimentality. It does, however, demonstrate that the influence of
these films on mediated versions of the 1980s continues. Further research should, therefore, explore the self-propagating nature of these films. How do they influence other cultural texts and what does this tell us about our ongoing relationship with the 1980s?

Secondly, I feel further analysis of the development of this relationship with the 1980s, particularly as it continues to evolve, would be useful. I have identified a number of different facets of these authors’ engagement with the 1980s, but there is evidence that these are continuing to develop. As with fashion and music, those without first-hand experience of the decade will, it is supposed, start to engage with the decade, filmically. These agents’ influences are likely to be those that lived through the decade, specifically parents, as well as popular culture. The films discussed here are, therefore, likely to influence, and in some cases, inspire, new filmmakers producing their own version of the 1980s. It is likely, therefore, their perspective on the 1980s will be filtered through these films’ male prism.

These films have raised a number of key issues regarding contemporary Britain’s relationship with the 1980s, the specific function of film in mediating that, and the role of masculine agency within that relationship. This thesis’ examination, and exploration, of each of these issues, enhances current academic and media work on nostalgia, cinema and masculinity. The topics that have emerged, such as media recycling, nostalgia, and the role of Thatcher, all reflect the films’ personal and masculine authorship. This does not, to use an over-used phrase, represent a contemporary ‘crisis in masculinity’, nor does it particularly demonstrate that the 1980s male was any more anxious than at any other time. These films do, however, indicate that modern British, male filmmakers are not only nostalgic for the 1980s, although this takes many forms, but unable to reconcile them. With the death of Thatcher, a key influence on 1980s popular memory, maybe we are closer to this closure. However, I contend that her legacy has a greater influence than her physical presence. Closure for the 1980s is not, I believe, within reach yet, nor may it ever be, but Freedland’s
assertion that, ‘burying the 1980s is not a straight-forward business’ is, perhaps, far easier to agree with (2013).

Finally, this work has, I hope, extended thinking on how we explore and reconcile popular culture’s relationship with the past. Film has a vital role to play in these associations. In this thesis I have demonstrated the importance of film in developing that relationship, as well as its role within the broader pattern of media recycling. This approach can, I believe, be adopted across different mediums and different decades in order to interrogate the past through popular culture. Ultimately though, I hope this work allows us to rethink the function of film, and its value, in memorialising the recent past.
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Appendix 1 - Individual Film Data

Overview
This appendix details key data for the seventeen films of this survey. The data included is broadly split into three categories – provenance, production and narrative – representing this thesis’ core focus. The data for each film is presented in a single table, arranged in release date order. Appendix 2 – the Commonality Survey – supplements this information with a fuller consideration of its collective influence.

Guidance Notes
The writer of the film, as shown in the following tables, is deemed to be the person that wrote the screenplay, as detailed in the film’s credits, regardless of the source material. The writer and his date of birth is detailed first, followed by the director. Where no date of birth is known this detail is noted as N/K (Not Known). Where the screenwriter and director are the same, only one name and date of birth will appear. For reasons of space only the main three production companies are quoted. Where budget and/or UK box office data is not known this detail is also noted as N/K.

As this project demonstrates, many of these films’ consider specific issues, however, the category of narrative theme here is concerned with the films’ overriding, rather than specific, perspective. Additionally, the films’ precise temporal setting is not always easy to determine. Some films will clearly signpost this with a subtitle on screen or an indicator in the script. Otherwise, this detail may be available from articles or interviews with key creative agents. Where a precise year or period is not available, I have estimated it through a close visual reading of the film text.

Sources:
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<td>Carnaby International PLC Flakjacket Films Hanover Productions</td>
<td>Source Material</td>
<td>Original Screenplay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budget</td>
<td>£2m</td>
<td>UK Box Office</td>
<td>£170,397</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK Distributor</td>
<td>Optimum</td>
<td>Narrative Theme</td>
<td>Subculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting</td>
<td>1980-2000</td>
<td>Protagonist Gender/Age</td>
<td>Male 20s</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Control</strong></th>
<th>Released in UK 5/10/2007</th>
<th>Writer/Director (DOB)</th>
<th>Matt Greenhalgh (1972) Anton Corbijn (1955)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Production Companies</td>
<td>Northsee Ltd Warner Music UK Becker Int</td>
<td>Source Material</td>
<td>Biography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budget</td>
<td>£4.5m</td>
<td>UK Box Office</td>
<td>£596,145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK Distributor</td>
<td>Momentum Pictures</td>
<td>Narrative Theme</td>
<td>Music Biopic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting</td>
<td>1978-1980</td>
<td>Protagonist Gender/Age</td>
<td>Male 20s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Son of Rambow</strong></td>
<td><strong>Released in UK</strong></td>
<td><strong>Writer/Director (DOB)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Garth Jennings (1972)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Production Companies</strong></td>
<td>Hammer and Tongs, Celluloid Dreams, Arte France Cinema</td>
<td><strong>Source Material</strong></td>
<td>Original Screenplay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Budget</strong></td>
<td>£4m</td>
<td><strong>UK Box Office</strong></td>
<td>£4,176,522</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>UK Distributor</strong></td>
<td>Optimum</td>
<td><strong>Narrative Theme</strong></td>
<td>Coming of Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Setting</strong></td>
<td>1983/84</td>
<td><strong>Protagonist Gender/Age</strong></td>
<td>Male Child</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Cass</strong></th>
<th><strong>Released in UK</strong></th>
<th><strong>Writer/Director (DOB)</strong></th>
<th>Jon.S. Baird (1972)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Production Companies</strong></td>
<td>Cass Films, Goldcrest, Independent</td>
<td><strong>Source Material</strong></td>
<td>Biography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Budget</strong></td>
<td>£1m</td>
<td><strong>UK Box Office</strong></td>
<td>£133,896</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>UK Distributor</strong></td>
<td>Optimum</td>
<td><strong>Narrative Theme</strong></td>
<td>Subculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Setting</strong></td>
<td>1972-1993</td>
<td><strong>Protagonist Gender/Age</strong></td>
<td>Male 20s</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Clubbed</strong></th>
<th><strong>Released in UK</strong></th>
<th><strong>Writer/Director (DOB)</strong></th>
<th>Geoff Thompson (1960), Neil Thompson</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Production Companies</strong></td>
<td>Fomosa Films, Clubbed Ltd, Formosa Films</td>
<td><strong>Source Material</strong></td>
<td>Autobiography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Budget</strong></td>
<td>£2m</td>
<td><strong>UK Box Office</strong></td>
<td>£22,346</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>UK Distributor</strong></td>
<td>Route One</td>
<td><strong>Narrative Theme</strong></td>
<td>Subculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Setting</strong></td>
<td>Late 1980s</td>
<td><strong>Protagonist Gender/Age</strong></td>
<td>Male 20s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hunger</strong></td>
<td>Released in UK 31/10/2008</td>
<td>Writer/Director (DOB)</td>
<td>Enda Walsh (1967) Steve McQueen (1969)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
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<td>---------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Production Companies</strong></td>
<td>Blast! Films Hunger Ltd Film4</td>
<td><strong>Source Material</strong></td>
<td>Original Screenplay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Budget</strong></td>
<td>N/K</td>
<td><strong>UK Box Office</strong></td>
<td>£801,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>UK Distributor</strong></td>
<td>Pathè</td>
<td><strong>Narrative Theme</strong></td>
<td>Political biopic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Setting</strong></td>
<td>1981</td>
<td><strong>Protagonist Gender/Age</strong></td>
<td>Male 20s</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Fifty Dead Men Walking</strong></th>
<th>Released in UK 10/04/2009</th>
<th>Writer/Director (DOB)</th>
<th>Nicholas Davies (n/k) Kari Skogland (n/k)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Production Companies</strong></td>
<td>Running Man Ltd Running Man Productions (Canada) Ltd Future Films</td>
<td><strong>Source Material</strong></td>
<td>Autobiography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Budget</strong></td>
<td>£6m</td>
<td><strong>UK Box Office</strong></td>
<td>£388,554</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>UK Distributor</strong></td>
<td>Metrodome</td>
<td><strong>Narrative Theme</strong></td>
<td>Political biopic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Setting</strong></td>
<td>1988</td>
<td><strong>Protagonist Gender/Age</strong></td>
<td>Male 20s</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Is Anybody There?</strong></th>
<th>Released in UK 01/05/2009</th>
<th>Writer/Director (DOB)</th>
<th>Peter Harness (1976) John Crowley (1969)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Production Companies</strong></td>
<td>Heydey Films Big Beach Productions BBC Films</td>
<td><strong>Source Material</strong></td>
<td>Original Screenplay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Budget</strong></td>
<td>N/K</td>
<td><strong>UK Box Office</strong></td>
<td>£454,189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>UK Distributor</strong></td>
<td>Optimum</td>
<td><strong>Narrative Theme</strong></td>
<td>Coming of Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Setting</strong></td>
<td>1987</td>
<td><strong>Protagonist Gender/Age</strong></td>
<td>Male Child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Awaydays</strong></td>
<td>Released in UK</td>
<td>Writer/Director (DOB)</td>
<td>Production Companies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22/05/2009</td>
<td>Kevin Sampson (n/k)</td>
<td>Red Union Films</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>The Firm</strong></th>
<th>Released in UK</th>
<th>Writer/Director (DOB)</th>
<th>Production Companies</th>
<th>Source Material</th>
<th>Budget</th>
<th>UK Box Office</th>
<th>UK Distributor</th>
<th>Narrative Theme</th>
<th>Setting</th>
<th>Protagonist Gender/Age</th>
<th>Setting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>I Know You Know</strong></th>
<th>Released in UK</th>
<th>Writer/Director (DOB)</th>
<th>Production Companies</th>
<th>Source Material</th>
<th>Budget</th>
<th>UK Box Office</th>
<th>UK Distributor</th>
<th>Narrative Theme</th>
<th>Setting</th>
<th>Protagonist Gender/Age</th>
<th>Setting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex and Drugs and Rock and Roll</strong></td>
<td><strong>Released in UK</strong></td>
<td><strong>Writer/Director (DOB)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Production Companies</strong></td>
<td><strong>Source Material</strong></td>
<td><strong>Budget</strong></td>
<td><strong>UK Box Office</strong></td>
<td><strong>UK Distributor</strong></td>
<td><strong>Setting</strong></td>
<td><strong>Protagonist Gender/Age</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8/01/2010</td>
<td>Paul Viragh (n/k)</td>
<td>DJ Films</td>
<td>Original Screenplay</td>
<td>£2m</td>
<td>£427,956</td>
<td>Entertainment Film Distributors</td>
<td>1970s – 1990s</td>
<td>Male 20s/30s</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mat Whitecross (1978)</td>
<td>Lipsync Productions</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Prescience Film Fund</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Kid</strong></td>
<td><strong>Released in UK</strong></td>
<td><strong>Writer/Director (DOB)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Production Companies</strong></td>
<td><strong>Source Material</strong></td>
<td><strong>Budget</strong></td>
<td><strong>UK Box Office</strong></td>
<td><strong>UK Distributor</strong></td>
<td><strong>Setting</strong></td>
<td><strong>Protagonist Gender/Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Nick Moran (1969)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 2 - Commonality Survey

This document summarises and examines the individual film data from Appendix 1. It is intended this survey will complement the more detailed information in the thesis, specifically around the films’ origins, creative agency and thematic content. The first section – Provenance and Authorship – will consider the commonalities in these films’ source material. The personal background of the films’ writers and directors is a crucial element of this exploration of the films’ provenance. Secondly I will look at Production and Distribution, including a consideration of the model for funding small British independent films, particularly in respect of their relationship with regional production companies. The final section covers the textual aspects of the films with a consideration of their narrative and thematic concerns.

For the purposes of this survey the term ‘independent British film’ is deemed to be that defined by BIFA – the British Independent Film Awards. They state certain criteria must be met for a film to be defined in this way such as;

- If a major studio funds the film the total budget must not exceed £20million
- The film is produced or majority co-produced by a British company OR
- Is in receipt of at least 51% of its budget from a British source or sources OR
- It qualifies as a British film under the Department of Culture, Media and Sport guidelines AND
- Includes sufficient UK creative elements

http://www.bifa.org.uk/rules-of-eligibility#sthash.n6slA99d.dpuf
Table 1: Analysis of the films’ key production/authorial data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No of Films</th>
<th>Director Age Range</th>
<th>Mean Age (Director)</th>
<th>Writers Age Range</th>
<th>Mean Age (Writer)</th>
<th>Co-Production Countries</th>
<th>Most Common Production Companies</th>
<th>Most Common Distributors</th>
<th>Most Common Source Material</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>34 - 50</td>
<td>38.6</td>
<td>28 - 72</td>
<td>40.46</td>
<td>USA 8</td>
<td>Sole UK 8</td>
<td>UK Film Council 4</td>
<td>6 – Optimum Releasing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: IMDB, BFI, UK Film Council, Film Index International
Provenance and Authorship

Sources
The origins of this survey’s seventeen films are surprisingly limited in their scope, with the large number of original screenplays contrasting greatly with the prevailing trend in British and Hollywood cinema for adaptations (see Chapter Five and Table One above). Eight of the films are based on original screenplays, five are based on biographies, two on novels, one a play and one an adapted screenplay. Whilst it may be expected that those films based on an original story would reflect the authors’ personal experiences, it is perhaps of more interest to see a high level of autobiographical material in those screenplays adapted from other sources. Many directors including Vaughan (*Starter for 10*) and Love (*The Firm*) have acknowledged how the source material they adapted resonated with their own memories and experiences of the 1980s. The number of directors who were also involved in the films’ screenplay is particularly high as well. There are eight films where the director has either written or co-written the screenplay. Again this indicates a high level of personal input from the creative agents involved in writing and directing the films.

Creative Agents
If we take into account directors that also wrote the screenplay of their film, there are twenty-eight writers and directors on the seventeen films researched. Only one, Kari Skogland the director of *Fifty Dead Men Walking*, is a woman. Their most common year of birth is 1969, with 1972 the second most prevalent, indicating an average age of 15 in the mid-1980s. Chart 1 below, displays this data with the line graphs detailing the ages of all writers and directors, separately and combined. Of course with Nick Love’s two film credits in this survey, both as writer and director, the preponderance of the year of 1969 here is perhaps easy to explain. It is important, however, to note that this age data should be read in conjunction with the later section of this survey on the films’ thematic and narrative

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concerns. The correlation between the male-centric coming-of-age narratives and director/writers who would have been a similar age to their protagonists, at the time of the films’ setting, is clearly evident here. This correlation is even more apparent when the dates of birth of the writers of the films that were made from an original screenplay, are considered. The chart also includes this data – as a bar chart – together with the dates of birth for the seven writer/directors. This project’s focus on authorship and the films’ personal perspective on the 1980s means that the focus on both these categories is an important consideration in respect of the provenance of these films.
Chart 1: Dates of birth of authors and directors of 1980s-set British films 2005-2010
Production and Distribution

Production
As Table One shows there was a clear reduction in the number of UK independent films over the period of this survey. The 34 per cent decrease between 2005 and 2010 highlights an increasing difficulty in producing films within the British film industry without US or studio financing. This is even more apparent when considering the number of production companies used to fund the films of this survey. Over 70 production companies are credited with the making of these seventeen films. Some, like the UK Film Council, BBC Films and Vertigo Films, reoccur in the production credits of these films, with the UK Film Council the most prolific, part-funding 23 per cent of the total.

These statistics are useful, less for the activities of the large investor, but for the proliferation of the smaller ones. Evidently, the films have taken advantage of the free market of film financing, encouraged particularly since the 1980s, to obtain funding from a myriad of investors, including those from abroad. Whilst eight of the films are purely British financed the other nine include foreign financing from USA, France and Canada, amongst others. Perhaps more important, however, is the role of regional investment. Five films used regional production investment which incorporated funds from the East Midlands, Northern Ireland and Wales. The organisations that contributed funds often have a desire to raise awareness of positive aspects of their environment. Yorkshire Forward which help to fund This is England state on their website that they acknowledge the long-term effect of their investment, which, ‘aims to develop a long-term and successful production sector in the region’ (Yorkshire-forward.com, 2008). This move to a more regional focused production ethic is reflected in filmmakers such as Shane Meadows, who proudly associate themselves with their particular locale. Clearly, this has an impact on not only the creative process but also on the film text itself.
**Distribution**

The contemporary concerns of independent UK filmmakers are summarised by Kermode’s declaration, ‘as anyone who knows anything about UK film production understands, the real problem here in Britain is not so much funding as distribution’ (2011, p. 234). This is borne out by the UKFC’s own figures which highlight that 24.7 per cent of the 457 UK films shot in 2003, 2004 and 2005 remained unreleased in 2010 (UK Film Council, 2011, p. 66). Additionally, ten distributors shared 94 per cent of the UK box office, making it increasingly difficult for smaller distribution companies to maintain a strong presence in the industry. However, in the context of this survey one distributor, Optimum Releasing, dominates. Optimum, now rebranded as StudioCanal to enforce its identity with its French parent company, specialises in character-driven, often independent, projects from UK and Europe. Their status means they often attract talented new directors like Shane Meadows, with films like *This is England*. Optimum handled the UK distribution of this and five more of the seventeen films here. This 35 per cent market share is far higher than any other distributor in this survey. Only one other distributor, Pathè, handled more than one film.

The distribution situation in the British film industry is, however, far more complex than this survey implies, with 98 companies involved in the distribution of UK films in 2010 (UK Film Council, 2011, p. 77). Additionally of the six films Optimum distributed here, only two performed well at the UK box office – *Son of Rambow* with receipts of £4,176,522 and *This is England* with £1,539,372. The other films, although poor commercial performers on their cinema release, became moderately successful through the ancillary market, with *Cass* becoming the 10th highest selling UK independent film on DVD in 2009 (UK Film Council, 2010, p. 84). This highlights a significant shift in the business model of low budget British films emphasising the importance of the home entertainment market in a film’s cultural and
fiscal lifespan. It is vital, therefore, for a producer to secure a distributor that would facilitate such activity.

The correlation between a low status, small distributor and commercial failure is very clear when surveying these films. *Clubbed*, for instance, was handled by a distribution company – Route One – which has no online presence and, it appears, has not distributed films either before or since. The films publicity was then handled by a PR company Premier PR, perhaps contributing to the film’s commercial failure (see Chapter Three).

**Table 2: Analysis of 1980s-set British films 2003-10 within the wider context of UK Independent film production**

Source: UK Film Council – Statistical Year Books (2004-5 to 2010)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No of UK Independent films produced in UK</th>
<th>No of 1980s Set Films</th>
<th>Percentage of 1980s films</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>973</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1.74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Narrative Concerns

All the films of this survey have some element of their narrative set in the 1980s, with one exception – Awaydays, which is set in late 1979. Most of the narratives of these films are set in England, with two set in Northern Ireland – Hunger and Fifty Dead Men Walking - and one, I Know You Know, in Wales. The Northern Ireland films are significant for their engagement, not with the 1980s per se, but the political climate in that region of the UK. Both of these films focus on the culturally specific issue of the ‘troubles’ in the province. Whilst the films raise issues which had a wider impact, their focus is on the political and personal struggles of the people of Northern Ireland rather wider societal ones. Both films were part funded by Northern Irish investors, indicating these films’ reliance on small, often regional investors. Both of the Northern Irish films also have a strong link to British politics, particularly Thatcherism, with archive news reports of Thatcher speeches prominent in Hunger, as discussed in Chapter Two. Cass is much more explicit, with Thatcher’s voice and image appearing sporadically to underline her uncompromising approach to football hooliganism. This film also introduces a theme which recurs throughout this survey - that of the family and a young male protagonist searching for a father figure. This, of course, reflects the particularly personal provenance of these films which have a heavy autobiographical stance. With the majority of the agents involved in these films British men in their late 30s, this indicates a personal response to their formative years, as seen in their choice of protagonist. Chart 2 categorises the age and gender of these. With the exception of one – Ian Dury in Sex and Drugs and Rock and Roll – they are all males under thirty years old. This preoccupation with young males between the ages of 11 and 25 is reflected in the films’ emerging themes.

Subcultural groups dominate the films’ thematic concerns. The male dominated world of many subcultures is epitomised by football hooligans, a feature of four of the films – Cass, Awaydays, The Firm and The Rise of the Footsoldier. Football hooliganism and its
associations with the 1980s through the related tragedies of the period, and its strong political links, together with its representation of masculinity is clearly a strong 1980s signifier. Additionally directors Nick Love and Shane Meadows have both admitted their involvement in subcultures in the 1980s.

Another commonality is the prominence of pop music in the films. Two films are musical biopics so music naturally features heavily in the context of the narrative, often diegetically. Another, *Clubbed*, has a narrative centred on a 1980s nightclub. The music, therefore, is integral to the film’s plot and is consequently foregrounded in many scenes. Other films use music to bond characters, often in subcultural narratives like *This is England* and many more use it in explicitly nostalgic terms creating a correlation between the audience and a shared past. However, even within the football hooligan films where music and fashion figure prominently there is not a generic musical link. Some like *Awaydays* focus on dark, gothic music, whilst others like *The Firm* are much more mainstream in their musical associations, predominantly using new romantic music on the soundtrack. In total, seven of the films in this survey produced soundtrack albums featuring 115 different tracks (not including original score tracks). Only one track was used twice – “Tainted Love” by Soft Cell – in *This is England* and *The Firm*. The most played artist across the soundtracks is The Cure with seven different songs used. In part, this is due to *Starter for 10’s* narrative use of the band. However, the group are used on two other soundtracks – *Awaydays* and *Son of Rambow* – which maybe makes the use of their songs significant for nostalgic purposes. This strong focus on the music, with many of the film’s websites foregrounding the musical elements, highlights the strong nostalgic drive of the films marketing. This, together with the young male protagonists in a coming of age narrative, indicates the desired audience demographic is broadly within the range of that of the author/directors.
The centering of masculinity, highlighted in the subcultural texts and male protagonist, is even more apparent within the films’ narratives, which in many cases focus on the role of the father within the family unit. Significantly many of the films present a protagonist with an absent father – *This is England, Son of Rambow, The Business, Starter for 10*, and *The Kid*. Whilst others portray a fractured relationship with the father – *Clubbed, Cass, Is Anybody There?* and *I Know, You Know*. In many cases the films project a family split predominantly with a focus on the male child. Resolution is often achieved only when the child accepts a new patriarch or resolves his differences with the initial father figure. Importantly, as with *This is England* and *Cass*, the family that is presented as a unifying one is not necessarily a conventional nuclear one. These texts introduce the notion that the family unit can be of a diverse structure. Interestingly, there is only one film that presents a conventionally structured family that appear stable and happy. Despite this, in *The Firm*, the protagonist, Dom, joins a group of football hooligans. Crucially, however, in this film his rebellion is portrayed as an attempt to gain peer approval rather than any attempt to rebel against his family.

The question of gender in 1980s set films is an important one. Whilst most films are male-centric the dominance of young male protagonists and the importance of the patriarch in these films is disproportionate. Additionally the themes involving groups of men bonding through subcultures or as groups of friends marginalise the female characters. Consequently, women play little or no part in many of these texts, except to provide a love interest or as a matriarchal figure.
Summary

The analysis of these films examined in this survey, prompts a number of important considerations. The role of masculinity within these films, through authorship as well as textual elements, emerges as a dominant characteristic. How the 1980s are portrayed through a masculine prism with a specific focus on the family, nearly thirty years is also an important part of my research here. Additionally this personal response to the era raises the issue of what kind of nostalgic engagement is being conducted. Many films like *The Business*, *The Firm* and *Starter for 10* explicitly showcase the cultural signifiers of the era, often accompanied by a nostalgia inducing soundtrack. Others engage in the 1980s socio-political environment (*This is England, Is Anybody There*?), highlighting a less direct version of nostalgia and arguably even an anti-nostalgia for the 1980s. Whilst initially it would appear the more nostalgic films are of a greater concern to this thesis the others do provide an interesting contrast in respect of the phenomena, particularly in respect of shared themes and political content.

British politics of the 1980s are a key component of the media, and popular culture’s, recycling of the decade. This is also apparent in these films which appear to engage with Thatcherism in a number of ways. Some, like *This is England* and *Is Anybody There?* highlight the personal and national concerns surrounding government policy of the time. Both, importantly, then relate those policies to the impact on the family. Others, like *The Business* and *Cass* use Thatcher imagery to ensure the film’s narrative has a clear 1980s signifier. Additionally, the use of Thatcher’s voice is a common feature of these films, indicating her speeches and rhetoric are seen as symbolic of the time.

Finally, an interesting aspect that has emerged through this research is the one of regionalism. Through the changes in film funding and the reduction in government support of the past few decades directors have sought new ways of financing their productions. With
the lottery funding through the UK Film Council creating regional funds there has been much greater emphasis on foregrounding local environments and local issues in British films. This is very apparent in the films of this survey. Such focus has expanded from pure funding and location to encroach on some director’s filmmaking ideology. Shane Meadows is a perfect example of this with his use of local non actors and adherence to regional accents. In a less pronounced way films like I Know You Know also incorporates its Welsh setting in an intimate and personal way.

PROTAGONISTS IN 1980S-SET BRITISH FILMS 2005-2010

- Male Child, 4, 24%
- Male Teenager, 5, 29%
- Male 20s, 7, 41%
- Male 30s, 1, 6%
Appendix 3 Marketing Data and Materials

Chart 3: UK Film Distributor’s Media Advertising Spend 2007-2010

UK Film Distributors' media advertising spend

Source: FDA Yearbook 2011
Chart 4: Share of marketing budget for UK film distributors on aggregate amounts 2007 – 2010

Source: FDA Yearbook 2011
Figure 1: The History Boys UK Theatrical Poster
Figure 2: Son of Rambow UK Theatrical Poster
Figure 3: This is England UK Theatrical Poster
Please complete and return the form to Research Section, Quality Management Division, Academic Registry, University House, with your thesis, prior to examination.

### Postgraduate Research Student (PGRS) Information

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