

Institution: King's College London
Unit of Assessment: UoA35b
Title of case study: SPECTATORSHIP, AUDIENCES, AND FILM CRITICISM: LINKING RESEARCH TO POPULAR WRITING AND THINKING ABOUT FILM
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>This case study examines the impact of Catherine Wheatley's research into spectatorship, audiences, and critical contexts through engagement with the popular press and public-facing media institutions. It focuses on Wheatley's work with <i>Sight & Sound</i>, the monthly consumer magazine published by the British Film Institute, which reaches beyond academia to a cine-literate but non-specialist audience. Her research has influenced discussion and criticism of cinema for a large, interested cine-enthusiastic audience as well as contributing to broader public debate and cultural discussion of cinema through mass-media appearances. She has also judged a competition for budding female critics, encouraging more women to write thoughtfully on film, and nurturing a new generation of women critics through which her research has been able to influence the practice of film criticism more widely.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Catherine Wheatley's research focuses on questions of spectatorship (what it is to view films and how the process of meaning-making happens) and film audiences (who watches films and what cultural expectations and interpretations they might bring to the works). The research is guided in part by a concern with how film is subject to processes of cultural translation: how, for example, film is perceived and received as it crosses European and international borders; and how it is written about by critics and thus 'translated' for readers of writing about film.</p> <p>Wheatley's research since she arrived at King's in 2011 is consistent with her longer standing fascination with relations between films and audiences, evident in her PhD research on the Austrian auteur Michael Haneke (subsequently published in revised form in 2009 as a prize-nominated monograph). Wheatley's continued interest in the film-criticism interface led to the publication, in 2012, of a short chapter ('The Reputation') on Alfred Hitchcock's reputation in the BFI book <i>39 Steps to the Genius of Alfred Hitchcock: A BFI Compendium</i> (3.3). This chapter examined the director's role in the construction of his own critical reputation, as well as charting the shifts in the popular critical and academic assessments of Hitchcock's work over a period of nearly 100 years.</p> <p>This strand of Wheatley's work was developed further in her research into French cinema's exhibition, distribution, marketing, and reception in Great Britain, which paid particular attention to the manners in which critical discourses shape notions of film. The resulting monograph, co-authored with Lucy Mazdon (Southampton University) was published in 2013 (3.2). Matters of audience expectation and response also converge in several articles written by Wheatley and published in journals and books. Her contribution to Tina Kendall and Tanya Horeck's <i>The New Extremism</i> considered the peculiarly uncomfortable experience for viewers of a body of cinema that is known for its graphic depictions of sex and violence (3.4). Wheatley has also written on the evocation of ad hoc families in the works of Claire Denis, a director whose films, Wheatley argues, are aimed at forging an analogous relationship of community or 'family' amongst Denis's spectators through their aesthetic approach to audiences (3.5).</p> <p>In 2012 Wheatley published a monograph on Haneke's internationally renowned film <i>Caché/Hidden</i> (3.1). The 2005 film won the Best Director prize at Cannes in the year of its release, and has gone on to become one of the most financially successful French-language films at the UK Box Office of the past ten years. Looking at the various frameworks through which the film has been discussed in the popular press, Wheatley asks why it appeals to such a wide range of film viewers. She argues that <i>Hidden's</i> multiple thematics allow it to be read and responded to in a very</p>

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wide variety of ways by a wide variety of international audiences, and that this plurality of meaning accounts precisely for its popularity.

Wheatley continues to explore these central questions of spectatorship and film audiences in her current research on the relationship between iterations of Christianity in contemporary European film and attitudes towards religion in today's Western society. A significant focal point within this research is what spectatorial and critical responses to films featuring Christian references might suggest about broader societal trends, but also how the shape of the critical establishment within the West might sculpt existing attitudes towards Christianity.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

3.1 Catherine Wheatley, *Caché* (London: BFI, 2012) ISBN 9781844573493. Commissioned book, peer reviewed by editorial board.

3.2 Catherine Wheatley and Lucy Mazdon, *French Film in Britain: Sex, Art and Cinephilia* (Oxford and New York: Berghahn, 2013) ISBN 9780857453501. Monograph written for academic press, peer reviewed.

3.3 Catherine Wheatley, 'The Reputation', in *39 Steps to the Genius of Alfred Hitchcock: A BFI Compendium* (London: BFI, 2012), pp.140-141, ISBN 9781844575343.

3.4 Catherine Wheatley, 'Ulrich Seidl and the Limits of the Real' in *The New Extremism: Contemporary European Cinema*, eds., Tanya Horeck and Tina Kendall (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011) ISBN 9780748679102. Chapter in edited collection.

3.5 Catherine Wheatley, 'La famille Denis', in *The Films of Claire Denis: Intimacy on the Border*, ed., Marjorie Vecchio (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013) ISBN 9781848859548. Chapter in edited collection.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The main impact of Wheatley's research expertise into spectatorship, audiences, and film criticism comes through her publishing relationship with *Sight & Sound*. The Editor of the journal terms her 'a key contributor to *Sight & Sound's* understanding of contemporary cinema' (5.7). The consumer magazine reaches a large audience of cine-enthusiasts (as well as an academic readership) and sells approximately 20,000 copies internationally per year, giving Wheatley's research-led writing a huge reach (5.5). It reaches the public consciousness in particular through its lists of the greatest films of all time, which are produced every ten years. Most of Wheatley's contributions to the magazine are also available online and her writing contributes to an on-going cultural debate across blogs and amongst other critics (5.5; 5.2). Her research into how critics affect the films that they write about, and the manner in which they can influence cinema audiences is instrumental in equipping her for the role of critic and the inspirational impact that she has had on new female talent, referred to below. Her public-facing work encourages both her readers and other critics to reflect upon the practices of film criticism and film viewing, and on the most appropriate methods to create an informed film-going public.

Wheatley has been writing an average of two reviews of European films per month since 2005 (an approximate number of 72 reviews since arriving at King's) (5.5), which relate to her research referenced in sections 2 and 3 in varying ways. For example, a May 2012 review of *Delicacy* argues that since the film is based on a novel that is celebrated in France but little known to international audiences, it appeals to different knowledge frameworks for international viewers (the film's casting and use of the romcom's genre conventions) than for domestic spectators, for whom the film's authorship is the primary reference point. This reading, informed by Wheatley's research into global audiences, was discussed on the website *The Case for Global Film* (5.2). Her July 2012

review of *Polisse* – which discussed the manner in which the film’s admixture of serious subject matter and comedic tone is highly problematic for spectators – was likewise debated on the website *Philmology*, in a piece on the relationship between empathy and exploitation (5.2). Wheatley also produces longer pieces directly based on her research interests: for example, the interview piece ‘‘Tis a Pity She’s A Whore’, (*Sight & Sound*, vol. 22, i.2, February 2012), with French director Bertrand Bonello, is heavily informed by Wheatley’s research into spectatorship and the ‘New Extremism’ (5.2).

In 2011, the arts charity IdeasTap wrote that Wheatley is one of several ‘powerful female writers’ spearheading a move against male dominance of the industry (5.2). As a result of her research interests in film criticism and work for *Sight & Sound* outlined above, Wheatley was involved that year in running and judging a competition to find new female talent for the magazine, geared towards encouraging more women to write about film in an informed manner (5.1). The competition fielded 106 entries from a total of fifteen different countries and the website received 17,000 unique hits (5.1). The winning writer was awarded a year’s mentoring with Wheatley, drawing on her research expertise into how criticism frames film and affects audience perceptions. The two runners-up also received remote coaching (5.7). The winning writer has gone on to have several of her reviews published in *Sight & Sound*: the online editor writes that ‘thanks to Catherine’s good counsel and attention’, she (the winning writer) has become ‘a firm and valued contributor’. The winning writer described Wheatley’s mentorship as ‘a practical and constructive initiation into the world of film criticism’, stating that she was ‘grateful to have been paired with a critic whose work was an inspiration to [her]’ (5.7). Wheatley has thus influenced the practice of film criticism through nurturing a new generation of women critics, and this will reap further impact in time.

Wheatley’s work with young female writers builds on her own commitment to bridging the gap between popular and academic writing. Whenever possible, she parlays her academic interests into reviews or features for popular media. In October 2012, for example, she reviewed the director Michael Haneke’s *Amour* for *Sight & Sound* and alongside the *Independent* film critic Jonathan Romney for Radio 4’s *The Film Programme*, in both cases focusing in particular on why the director is so revered by critics, building on the research for her monograph on *Hidden* (5.6). The live programme had an estimated total of 1,230,000 listeners and the programme has been downloaded from the BBC website 12,761 times. The programme was ranked 113th in the UK’s podcast chart in June 2013 with a total of 25,319 downloads. In December 2012 she appeared on the *Today* programme to discuss the impact of technological innovations in cinema on how films are received by their audiences in different historical eras and cultural contexts (5.6). In March 2013 she revisited the programme to discuss the particular popular appeal of character actors, and how audiences relate to these figures differently from how they might relate to better-known stars (5.6). As a result of these radio appearances Wheatley’s research ideas have reached millions of people and informed cultural debate around perceptions of cinema on a very broad level: the estimated total number of listeners for the *Today* programme is 10,754,000 (5.6).

Wheatley’s work with BFI publishing has also allowed her to build on and develop the department’s existing relationship with BFI Southbank. As part of the BFI’s Hitchcock season, she contributed to a panel event on ‘Hitchcock and the Critics’, alongside Laura Mulvey, Henry Miller, and Geoff Andrew, attended by 193 members of the public (5.3). Here she discussed the manner in which international audiences have had their relationship to Hitchcock’s films mediated by the critical climate within which they have viewed and re-viewed them. Similarly, following the publication of Wheatley’s short guide to Michael Haneke’s film, *Caché* (3.1) (international sales of 882 copies), in February 2013, she presented an early film of Haneke’s (*Benny’s Video* (1995)) as part of the BFI’s Philosophical Screens series, to a capacity audience of 103, introducing the film and leading the ninety-minute discussion that followed with the general public (5.3; 5.4). In this context, her research comes full circle, as she is able to share information about who Haneke’s film viewers are, and how they receive and understand his films.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

Impact case study (REF3b)

[All website references below last accessed 17 October 2013]

5.1 Website for the BFI women's writing competition:

<http://www.bfi.org.uk/women-film-female-film-reporter-competition>

<http://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/sight-sound-magazine/comment/female-film-reporter-competition-results>

Figures provided by *Sight & Sound* Online Editor.

5.2 *Ideastap* blog: <http://www.ideastap.com/IdeasMag/The-Knowledge/women-writing-about-film>

'The Case for Global Film': <http://itpworld.wordpress.com/2012/06/19/delicacy-delicatesse-france-2011/>

Public reviews of Wheatley's BFI guide to *Caché*:

<http://www.amazon.co.uk/Cache-Hidden-BFI-Film-Classics/dp/1844573494>

<http://www.filmwerk.co.uk/2012/03/01/bfi-film-classics-cache-review/>

<http://www.electricsheepmagazine.co.uk/features/2011/01/13/haneke-bitte/>

<http://harpymarx.wordpress.com/2009/11/05/hanekes-das-weise-band-the-white-ribbon/>

<http://www.philmology.com/?p=2031>

<http://blackandbluedanube.com/danube-notes/film-notes-revanche/>

5.3 Figures provided by Assistant Programme Coordinator at the BFI Southbank.

5.4 Figures provided by Senior Marketing Executive, Palgrave MacMillan and by BFI Filmstore.

5.5 Figures provided by BFI.. Samples of Reviews online:

<http://old.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/contributors/catherine-wheatley.php>

5.6 The Film Programme broadcast: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01ntjpx>

iTunes charts: <http://www.apple.com/euro/itunes/charts/podcasts/top10podcasts.html>

iTunes charts: <http://www.apple.com/euro/itunes/charts/podcasts/top10podcaststvfilm.html>

Figures provided by, BBC and RAJAR UK (www.rajar.co.uk).

5.7 Corroborating statements:

- Editor, *Sight & Sound* (Impact of Wheatley's regular contributions to *Sight & Sound*)
- Online Editor, *Sight & Sound* (Impact of Wheatley's participation as writer, judge, and mentor for 'Women on Film' competition and campaign)
- Winner of the women's writing competition and Wheatley's mentee (Impact of Wheatley's mentoring)
- Education Curator of Public Programmes, BFI Southbank (Impact of Wheatley's research as part of overall King's collaboration with BFI Southbank).