

Impact case study (REF3b)

Institution: University of Kent
Unit of Assessment: 35, Music, Drama, Dance and Performing Arts
Title of case study:
Making films and changing lives: enriching community life and film culture through <i>The Arbor</i>
1. Summary of the impact
<p>Conceived, directed and edited by Clio Barnard, <i>The Arbor</i> (2010) explores the life, work, and legacy of the playwright Andrea Dunbar. Among many other prizes and nominations, the film won the <i>Grierson Trust Award for Best Cinema Documentary</i>, and <i>The Guardian First Film Award</i>, both in 2011. It has achieved a wide-ranging and significant impact, informing public debate, transforming the lives of those depicted in and working on the film, bolstering cultural heritage in West Yorkshire, generating sustainable employment in the film industry, influencing fellow filmmakers and making a significant contribution to UK cultural life.</p>
2. Underpinning research
<p>Barnard's <i>The Arbor</i> [2] combines one of the traditional imperatives of documentary filmmaking – the exploration of the lives of specific individuals and their communities – with an innovative and reflexive approach to documentary form. The film focuses on Lorraine Dunbar, one of Andrea Dunbar's daughters, tracing the development of life on the Buttershaw Estate in Bradford (where Andrea Dunbar was raised and the setting for her plays) across a thirty-year period, through the lives of the two women and their families. Research on the film was supported by an AHRC Research Leave Award in 2009.</p> <p>Barnard's practice-as-research has a sustained focus on the relationship between the norms of fictional and documentary filmmaking, a question she has pursued in video works, installations, and films. In <i>The Arbor</i>, one of the principal strategies pursued by Barnard involves the careful combination of audio interviews with the subjects of the film, with shots of the subjects played by actors, often situated in imaginary or remembered spaces (rather than the spaces in which the interviews took place). The film thereby fuses, through meticulous lip-synching, a documentary record of real persons recounting actual events with partly fictionalized visual representations. In this way <i>The Arbor</i> invites spectators to be more conscious of the fictional elements woven into documentary films.</p> <p>Dunbar's experiences on the Buttershaw Estate were articulated in her plays, including her first play <i>The Arbor</i> (1980), as well as <i>Rita, Sue and Bob Too</i> (1982), and <i>Shirley</i> (1986), readings of which, directed by Barnard, were performed at the Young Vic immediately following the release of Barnard's film [3]. Dunbar's <i>The Arbor</i> was performed on Brafferton Arbor [1] – the street on which Dunbar's family lived, and the inspiration for the title of her play - during the filming of Barnard's <i>The Arbor</i>, and parts of the performance were incorporated into the film.</p> <p>In 2000, Max Stafford-Clark – the Royal Court director who had nurtured Dunbar – commissioned Robin Soans to write a new work on the Buttershaw Estate. Soans' play, <i>A State Affair</i>, which focussed on the effects of cheap heroin on the estate, was a work of 'verbatim theatre,' harvesting dramatic material from transcribed interviews with Dunbar's family and associates. Barnard's <i>The Arbor</i> was conceived as a third work, creating an informal trilogy of representations of Buttershaw, tracking community life and social change – as well as the lives of particular individuals – over a thirty-year period. In adapting Soans' verbatim method to the context of filmmaking, Barnard's new work was designed to reflect on the history of Buttershaw over this period; on the impact of the earlier representations on the lives of those living on the estate; and on the manner of the estates' representation across the three works in the 'trilogy'. Barnard's own reflections on the research outcomes of the project were the subject of a presentation at the Slade and her MeCCSA ((Media, Communication and Cultural Studies Association) plenary presentation in 2012 [4, 5].</p> <p>The research was undertaken at Kent by Clio Barnard: Lecturer (2002-2006), Reader (2006-Present).</p>

3. References to the research

Research outputs:

1. Promenade performance of **Andrea Dunbar's *The Arbor*** (1980), **directed by Barnard**, on Brafferton Arbor, Buttershaw Estate, Bradford (September 2009). The performance was filmed, and extracts embedded within Barnard's *The Arbor*.
2. ***The Arbor* (Clio Barnard, 94 minutes, September 2010)** – theatrical release in the UK, USA, Canada and Ireland. DVD release March 2011. UK television broadcast, More 4, December 2011. (REF Output No. 1)
3. Reading, **directed by Barnard**, of Andrea Dunbar's plays ***The Arbor, Rita, Sue and Bob Too*** (1982) and ***Shirley*** (1986) at the Young Vic Theatre, London (October 2010).
4. [Research seminar](#), Slade School of Fine Art, 23 November 2011.
5. [Plenary lecture](#) at the MeCCSA (Media, Communication and Cultural Studies Association) annual conference, January 2012.

Project funding included:

AHRC Research Leave award (£24.5K, Sep – Dec 2009), 'Buttershaw: questioning realist screen and verbatim stage representations of the Buttershaw Estate, Bradford.' Ref: AH/G006822/1

4. Details of the impact

The Arbor premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival in March 2010 and was released theatrically in the UK in October 2010, following its UK premiere at the London Film Festival. The film subsequently featured in 80 festivals internationally. Within the UK, approximately 8,000 people saw the film in cinemas, 169,000 through a Film4 television broadcast and over 5,000 copies of the DVD have been sold. *The Arbor* also reached a large international audience through theatrical, broadcast and DVD release, and as an in-flight film showing on all Virgin Atlantic international routes from March-May 2011 through which the film was available to some 1.5 million passengers.

Social and political impact

Hosted by Lord and Lady Irvine, and organised by the film's funders, *Artangel*, in conjunction with the pioneering charity *Kids Company*, the film was screened in the House in Lords in October 2010. Director and founder of *Kids Company*, Camila Batmanghelidjh, introduced the film to MPs, Members of the House of Lords and other policy makers. She described how the film revealed the catastrophic effects of abuse, neglect and poverty upon individuals, families and the wider community and how this corresponds with her charity's aim to provide practical, emotional and educational support to vulnerable inner-city children. The Westminster screening brought these issues into the political sphere in a direct manner that allowed Batmanghelidjh to show the 'visceral experience of what chronic abuse and deprivation really feels like', and to discuss this with those in government 'who don't have proximity to the issues' [8].

Echoing Batmanghelidjh's testimony on the impact of the film, but describing a very different audience, the nephew of Andrea Dunbar, Richard Dunbar, a youth and social worker in Bradford, explains how *The Arbor* 'made people affected by the issues... understand that what they had to say mattered and that people in power needed to hear what they had to say.' Furthermore, he attests that the film resulted in significant debate in Bradford around poverty, class and how 'community is defined' [7].

Impact on Dunbar's family, the local community and West Yorkshire

Research on the film involved personal engagement with members of Dunbar's family, associates and other members of the local community over a number of years. The film had a transformative effect on those whose lives it depicted, with testimony from family members and residents pointing

to the impact the making of the film had on their understanding of the history and social dynamics of Buttershaw (the setting of the film). 'Being involved in making *The Arbor* was very positive for me,' wrote Ann Hamilton, foster parent to Lorraine Dunbar. 'It was a chance to look back, to look at your own life...It helped me get over it, helped me to come to terms with it. It helped me move on' [9]. Many local residents conveyed to Barnard the impact the film had on the wider community. Vinette Robinson wrote that '*The Arbor* struck a particular chord in me because it reflects the world that I grew up in. I grew up on the Ravenscliffe estate in Bradford and my Mum lived on [Brafferton] Arbor as a girl. As a mixed race child of that era I recognise many of the prejudices that Lorraine faced and I was surrounded by the same social reality. I think that the film deals with these complex and difficult issues with commendable honesty.' Richard Dunbar further testifies to this particular effect, explaining that the 'reason for this is that Clio spent several years building positive relationships with community members, understanding the issues that they were experiencing on a daily basis and giving them a voice by communicating their words through the film' [7]. Buttershaw resident Natalie Gavin saw her life transformed by the film when she was cast, via an open session at a secondary school on the Buttershaw Estate, to play the part of Andrea Dunbar and The Girl. She has been employed in the film and television industry since the film's release, including appearances in the BBC dramas *The Syndicate* and *Prisoners' Wives*, and has said that '*The Arbor* meant everything to me. It gave me the opportunity to show my talent through Andrea's words. It was the start of my career' [6].

The Arbor directly employed 31 actors and 69 crew members and the services of 23 independent companies were drawn upon, the majority from the local community. The film thereby allowed cast and crew to gain substantial experience and obtain on-going industry work, as well as generating significant and sustainable employment in an area facing acute levels of entrenched deprivation. David Wilson, Director of Bradford City of Film, describes *The Arbor* as a key element in the 'Yorkshire film landscape.' When Bradford was established as the first UNESCO City of Film – a permanent designation recognizing that the 'popularity and accessibility of film [can be used] as a major tool for regeneration, cultural development and social inclusion' – *The Arbor* was one of the films cited in Sydney's bid to become the second UNESCO City of Film [4]. Barnard extended her contribution to the local cultural heritage generated through *The Arbor* by successfully campaigning for a Blue Plaque in commemoration of Andrea Dunbar, at her former home on Brafferton Arbor.

Impact on the UK and International Film Industry

The Arbor was discussed and debated widely across the UK and US media by journalists, broadcasters and cultural commentators [1, 2]. The film was described by award-winning British director Stephen Frears as 'a game changer with intellectual, political and emotional punch...which should inspire a new generation of British filmmakers' [5]. *The Arbor* won 10 national and international film awards, including the aforementioned *Grierson* (the Chair of the jurors, Mandy Chung, describing the film as 'a moving and original film whose courageous creative approach makes a lasting impact') and *Guardian* awards, alongside the *Best New Documentary Filmmaker Award* at the Tribeca Film Festival 2010, and the *Sutherland Award* and *Best British Newcomer at London Film Festival 2010*. It was also nominated in the category of *Outstanding Debut by a British Writer, Director or Producer for BAFTA 2010* [3].

The media and peer interest in *The Arbor* has benefited the UK Film Industry in a number of ways. Tabitha Jackson, Commissioning Editor (Arts) at C4, noted that 'the critical acclaim the film garnered made the argument for backing experimental documentary an easier one to have' [10]. The success of *The Arbor*, her debut feature, launched Barnard's directorial and screenwriting career and paved the way for the making of her much-lauded *The Selfish Giant* (2013). Developed and backed by the BFI Film Fund and Film4 and released by the UK's leading independent distributor, Artificial Eye, the film won the Europa Cinemas' Best European Film Award at the Cannes Film Festival, after playing as part of Directors' Fortnight, and is now on international release. Barnard has explained in interviews how *The Selfish Giant* 'grew out of *The Arbor*,' with both films set and shot in Buttershaw and surrounding areas and dealing with issues around extreme socio-economic deprivation. *The Selfish Giant* had a budget of £1.5m, with a cast of over 30 listed actors, many drawn from the local community, including the two leads, and a production

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crew of 90 industry professionals. All of this activity and employment arose directly as a result of *The Arbor* and as such the film has improved the human and capital infrastructure of the UK film industry by creating sustainable employment and wider prospects for numerous individuals.

To conclude, the production of *The Arbor* had multiple impacts at individual, community and industry level. At individual level, the film enriched the lives of those directly involved in the film. At community level, the film created sustainable employment and furthered community cohesion, self-esteem and self-confidence. At industry level, both national and international, the film contributed to both the level of physical and human capital investment in the industry, as well as contributing to the sustained viability of the film industry. Not least, through its impact on its audience, its outstanding critical acclaim, and its exploration of important societal challenges, *The Arbor* has made a powerful and significant contribution to UK cultural life.

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

- 1. Reviews** of the *The Arbor* corroborate the social, political and artistic significance of the film, as well as the national and international reach of its impact. See for example Peter Bradshaw, *The Guardian*, 21st October 2010: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2010/oct/21/the-arbor-film-review>; David Thomson, *The New Republic* May 20th 2011; Barbican screening and interview: <http://www.tnr.com/article/film/88732/the-arbor-clio-barnard-andrea-dunbar-playwright> <http://www.barbican.org.uk/film/event-detail.asp?ID=13960>
- 2. Feature articles and interviews** further corroborate the impact of *The Arbor* on film critics and film culture, nationally and internationally. Feature article, *New York Times*, Dennis Lim, April 22nd 2010: <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/24/movies/the-arbor-revisits-the-troubled-life-of-andrea-dunbar.html>
- 3. The 10 awards** won by the film corroborate the impact of *The Arbor* on filmmakers and other members of the film industry. Eg. Best Newcomer and Sutherland Award at London Film Festival 2010: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2010/oct/27/clio-barnard-award-london-film-festival>; Grierson Award for Best Cinema Documentary 2011: <http://www.imdb.com/news/ni17548795/>
- 4. David Wilson, Director, Bradford City of Film** can corroborate the significance of *The Arbor* for the creative, cultural, heritage and tourist industries of Bradford and West Yorkshire: <http://bradford-city-of-film.co.uk/>
- 5. Stephen Frears**, film director, can corroborate the impact of *The Arbor* on filmmakers and other creative personnel, and the significance of the film for the British film industry.
- 6. Natalie Gavin**, actress, can corroborate the transformative role of *The Arbor* on her own career.
- 7. Richard Dunbar**, Bradford social and youth worker, nephew of Andrea Dunbar, can corroborate the significance of *The Arbor* for himself as a member of the Dunbar family, and for the Buttershaw community, especially for young persons on the estate and in the wider Bradford area.
- 8. Camila Batmanghedilj**, founder of Kids Company, corroborates the impact of the special screening of *The Arbor* at the House of Lords in October 2010, organized jointly by Artangel and Kids Company: http://www.artangel.org.uk/projects/2010/the_arbor/about_the_project/the_arbor
- 9. Ann Hamilton**, foster parent to Lorraine Dunbar, can testify to the benefit of the film for those represented in the film.
- 10. Tabitha Jackson**, Commissioning Editor (Arts) C4, can corroborate the positive impact of *The Arbor* on the commissioning and development of innovative documentary filmmaking.