

<b>Institution: University of East Anglia</b>
<b>Unit of Assessment: 36 Communication, Cultural and Media Studies, Library and Information Management</b>
<b>Title of case study: Influencing DVD Release Strategies (British cinema)</b>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>Drawing on their insight and knowledge of British cinema history, Keith M. Johnston and Melanie Williams established partnerships with DVD releasing companies Studio Canal UK and Network Distributing. Applying and transferring their specific research insights and knowledge (around gender and technology in British cinema history) led to wealth creation and added value for these commercial organisations.</p> <p>This was achieved through creating a research-led strategy that identified lesser-known catalogue titles for release, and contributing research knowledge through special features material for <i>Woman in a Dressing Gown</i> (1957; 2012 DVD release) and <i>The Ealing Rarities Collections</i> volumes 1-6 (2013 DVD releases).</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>Johnston and Williams were employed to reinforce and expand the University of East Anglia's (UEA) reputation as a centre of British cinema scholarship. Developing the legacy of UEA academics such as Andrew Higson and especially Charles Barr, Williams' research pursued questions of gender through British cinema history, notably the representation of women through lesser known films such as <i>Woman in a Dressing Gown</i> (J Lee Thompson, 1957), <i>Ice Cold in Alex</i> (Thompson, 1958) and <i>Dance Hall</i> (Basil Dearden, 1950), and the work of female workers within the British film industry, particularly the 'continuity girls' who worked with directors such as David Lean. This work challenged existing preconceptions of gender within British cinema, demonstrating a feminist sensibility within specific examples of film aesthetics, narrative, and industry policy (Williams 2008, 2012), audience memory (2013b), and arguing for more attention to be paid to the 'invisible' creative input of female film personnel (2013a).</p> <p>Johnston's work focused on British cinema's adoption (and resistance to) technological changes such as colour and 3D. Challenging and expanding Barr's seminal work on Ealing Studios (3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 1999) which placed the studio within a national tradition of realism and restraint, Johnston's research revealed the studio's overlooked experiments with the spectacle offered by colour cinematography and widescreen processes (Johnston 2010, 2012). Johnston revisited all 95 Ealing films produced between 1938 and 1959 for a regular series of online articles for the Huffington Post UK (<a href="http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/dr-keith-m-johnston/">www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/dr-keith-m-johnston/</a>), also available via <a href="http://www.keithmjohnston.blogspot.com">www.keithmjohnston.blogspot.com</a>, revealing and emphasising the studios' fantastic and spectacular heritage, and further challenging traditional perceptions of its place within the British film industry.</p> <p>Identifying shared research interests (notably around Ealing Studios), Williams and Johnston developed joint projects that consolidated their expertise in this area:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A series of research reports for DVD distributing companies (detailed below) on British film titles from the 1930s to the 1960s</li> <li>• Instigating and enhancing a new collection of essays about Ealing Studios with partners from the British Film Institute and the University of Hull: <i>Ealing Revisited</i> (2012)</li> <li>• Consulting on the 'Ealing: Light and Dark' season at BFI Southbank in November-December 2012, and providing screening introductions and printed notes for selected films</li> </ul>

### KEY RESEARCHERS, POSITIONS, DATES

The research was undertaken by:

Dr Keith M. Johnston (Senior Lecturer, UEA, 2008-present)

Dr Melanie Williams (Senior Lecturer, UEA, 2009-present)

### 3. References to the research

#### KEY OUTPUTS

1. Johnston, Keith M. (2010) 'Ealing's Colour Aesthetic: *Saraband for Dead Lovers*,' *Journal of British Cinema and Television* 7, 1: pp. 21-33.
2. Johnston, Keith M. (2012) "'A riot of all the colours in the rainbow': Ealing Studios in Colour.' In Mark Duguid, Lee Freeman, Keith M. Johnston and Melanie Williams (eds.), *Ealing Revisited*, London: Palgrave, pp. 195-205.
3. Williams, Melanie (2008), 'Twilight Women of 1950s British Cinema'. In Robert Murphy (ed.) *The British Cinema Book* (3<sup>rd</sup> edition) London: BFI, pp. 286-95.
4. Williams, Melanie (2012) 'A Feminine Touch? Ealing's Women'. In *Ealing Revisited*, pp. 185-94.
5. Williams, Melanie (2013a), 'The Continuity Girl: Ice in the Middle of Fire' *Journal of British Cinema and Television* 10, 3: pp. 603-17
6. Williams, Melanie (2013b) "'Remembering 'the poor soul walking in the rain': Audience Responses to a Thwarted makeover in *Woman in a Dressing Gown* (1957)' *Journal of British Cinema and Television* 10, 4: pp. 709-26.

#### JUSTIFICATION OF QUALITY

The six research articles or book chapters went through rigorous peer-reviewing before they were accepted for publication in their respective journal titles or collections. The presence of three articles in the *Journal of British Cinema and Television* (a key peer-reviewed journal in this field), and the involvement of BFI staff as co-editors of *Ealing Revisited* with Johnston and Williams, are also strong indications of quality.

Additionally, *Ealing Revisited* was selected as one of *The Independent's* 'Books of the Year 2012' and described as 'an intriguing and enlightening collection' (Independent 2012).

### 4. Details of the impact

#### *The Process*

After the publication of his first article on Ealing's *Saraband for Dead Lovers* (Johnston 2010), Johnston contacted Studio Canal UK (then operating under the name Optimum Releasing) to discuss the release strategy for its Ealing Studios Collection range. Liaising with Candy Vincent-Smith (then Optimum's Head of Catalogue Development, DVD), it became clear that Optimum would welcome research-led support around catalogue development. Johnston and Williams were then given unrestricted (and unparalleled) access to the Optimum back catalogue of British cinema titles, and asked to use their research expertise to suggest titles, shape future catalogue development, and contribute to Optimum's commercial success.

In 2012, Studio Canal UK licensed 450 titles from its British cinema catalogue to Network Distributing, another DVD company with which Johnston had a relationship. Network's Head of Marketing, Hugh David, contacted Johnston for a series of research reports (based partly on work already undertaken, but with a focus on a range of titles from the Ealing Studios back catalogue): again, the research expertise of Johnston and Williams was sought in order to ascertain potential titles for DVD release and to support Network's commercial success through that release programme.

Studio Canal UK and Network Distributing are, alongside Granada and the BFI, responsible for releasing the bulk of British cinema DVDs within the UK. They play a significant role in the creation of the British cinema DVD canon and demonstrate the important function that academic research

**Impact case study (REF3b)**

can have on these gatekeepers, most notably around the wider cultural rediscovery and popularisation of older catalogue film titles.

*Impacts and Benefits*

## Studio Canal:

- Studio Canal UK believe that Johnston/Williams' 'academic research... translates into commercial activity' and is essential to improving 'our knowledge of the catalogue and the release potential therein' (Vincent-Smith, March 2012)
- Studio Canal's decision to re-release *Woman in a Dressing Gown* on DVD (and in a limited cinema release) was propelled by Williams' research (2008, 2013b) and recommendation of it as a key title in British cinema
- Williams' championing of the film 'as a feminist text' led directly to Studio Canal applying for funding from the Independent Cinema Office to release it as a 'culturally important film' (ibid.). The film was subsequently screened at 39 cinemas across the UK in August-September 2012
- Studio Canal noted that special features such as Williams' interview on the DVD would 'help sell DVDs' and would 'legitimise' the release (ibid.)
- The *Woman in a Dressing Gown* DVD subsequently sold 2120 units (British Video Association (BVA) figures: Green, September 2013), described by Vincent-Smith as a 'good' return for a catalogue release
- Johnston and Williams' recommendations from the catalogue also included *Dance Hall* and *Nowhere to Go* (1958), subsequently released on DVD by Studio Canal UK in 2012-13

## Network Distributing:

- Johnston's Ealing research (2010, 2012) 'directly impacted the choices and content for releases in that series [Network's *The Ealing Rarities Collection*]... the commercial value of his... contribution is large indeed' (Hugh David, February 2013)
- Network had released 6 volumes of *The Ealing Rarities Collections* (each containing four films) by the time of submission
- Johnston's research around Network's 450 licensed titles 'was huge... doing work of a depth and scale that we simply could not achieve in day-to-day industry activity, confirming some professional instincts, dismissing others, and speeding up the process as a whole of commercial assessments on this vast archive' (ibid.)
- By 16<sup>th</sup> September 2013, the first six *Ealing Rarities* collections had sold a combined total of 3827 units (Volume 1: 920; Vol. 2: 1038; Vol. 3: 739; Vol. 4: 521; Vol. 5.: 388; Vol. 6: 221) (BVA figures: Green, 2013)

The impact here, then, is a direct contribution to wealth creation within the DVD sector of the creative industries, adding value to commercial projects through Johnston and Williams' academic research and the transfer of that knowledge to specific DVD distribution partners. Williams' work on *Woman in a Dressing Gown* (2008, 2013b) impacted Studio Canal's plans for a DVD release and created cause for a nationwide cinema re-release; Studio Canal relied on Williams and Johnston to expand their Ealing DVD range; and Network planned their 2013 Ealing range around Johnston's recommendations. In all these cases, the research impact has been on the strategic and commercial imperatives of Studio Canal UK and Network Distributing.

Studio Canal UK's business benefitted economically from Johnston and Williams' research on British cinema. It continues to 'use their research to identify possible commercial areas of opportunity further in advance' (Vincent-Smith, March 2012); while Network see the collaboration as 'huge', 'making commercial assessments' that 'impacted the choices and content' of their release strategy (David, February 2013).

#### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

1. E-mail from Studio Canal UK (UK Catalogue Consultant, March 2012) – quoted above
2. E-mail from former Head of Marketing, Network (March 2013) – quoted above
3. Review 1 of *Woman in a Dressing Gown* DVD release (with reference to Williams' contribution to the disc): <http://film.thedigitalfix.com/content/id/75809/woman-indressing-gown.html>
4. Review 2 of *Woman in a Dressing Gown* DVD release (with reference to Williams' contribution to the disc): <http://www.eyeforfilm.co.uk/review/woman-in-a-dressing-gown-1957-film-review-by-neil-mitchell>
5. Review 3 of *Woman in a Dressing Gown* DVD release (with reference to Williams' contribution to the disc): <http://www.reviewedonline.co.uk/dvd/2012/0812/1608/woman-in-a-dressing-gown-dvd-film-review/woman-in-a-dressing-gown-dvd-film-review.htm>
6. Copy of *Woman in a Dressing Gown* DVD cover (indicating presence of Williams' interview in special features)
7. E-mail from Fusion Media Sales (September 2013) confirming British Video Association sales figures for *Woman in a Dressing Gown* and Network's *Ealing Rarities Collections* (volumes 1-6)
8. IOC reviews and list of cinemas that screened *Woman in a Dressing Gown*
9. *The Independent* review of *Ealing Revisited*: <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/ios-books-of-the-year-2012-cinema-8373713.html>