

Presentation for:

Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) Annual International Conference 2023

29 August-1 September 2023

Royal Geographical Society.

Dr James Fair – Principal Academic in Film & Television Production, Bournemouth

jfair@bournemouth.ac.uk

The local artisan: Are there values and qualities in other fields of ethical consumption that can be established as qualities in cinema?

To answer this research question, I will briefly define what I mean by the term 'ethical consumption' and establish its values. I will then present a case study where I believe some of these values are being demonstrated in relation to cinema and filmmaking, and finally, I will attempt to answer a further question – are there ways in which we can help audiences to consume cinema ethically?

In this presentation, I refer to ethical consumption using the definition provided by Banaji and Buckingham (p.1198, 2010) as 'consumption decisions that are made on the basis of concerns to do with human rights, environmental sustainability, animal welfare, Fair Trade, or humane working practices.' This definition is not particularly contested, but the validity of whether such a thing as 'ethical consumption' can exist is. Scammell (p.354, 2000) argues that it is a form of political consumerism and it 'exposes the potential power of consumers as citizens and provides incentives to business, which regulation increasingly does not, to mind

corporate responsibility to and dependence on democracy.’ Banaji and Buckingham (p.1201, 2010) and other authors identify conflicting arguments, that ‘far from representing a challenge to power of global capitalism, ethical consumption is merely an individualistic strategy that is complicit with neoliberalism.’

Aside from whether it is a political act or not, Wheale and Hinton (2005) found evidence that consumers *do* make ethical decisions in their purchases, but it varies between types of goods (e.g. food goods more so than brown goods like TVs or stereos) and that the ‘ethical drivers’ differ depending on the product (overall, environmental issues tended to outweigh human rights and animal welfare across the goods). It should be noted that these results most likely differ in recent years due to increased awareness of the issues than when the study was conducted in 2005. More recently, Edmond (2023) identified evidence of ‘careful consumption’ specifically in media, and specifically in light of the MeToo and Black Lives Matter movements. Examples were given of consumers reappraising the work of Woody Allen and boycotting Disney in relation to representation in *Mulan*. This demonstrates an ethical concern both for the film as a *product*, but also for the *process of how it is produced*.

Having established what I mean by ethical consumption and identified some of its values, I wish to present a case study of a particular production which I believe takes these concerns into account.

I would like to examine *Enys Men* (pronounced *Enys Mane*). For those who don’t know the film, I will commit the academic high treason of paraphrasing from a Wikipedia page:

“Enys Men (Cornish for 'Stone Island') is a 2022 British experimental folk horror film shot, composed, written and directed by Mark Jenkin. Shot on 16 mm film, it stars Mary Woodvine, Edward Rowe, Flo Crowe and John Woodvine.

The film was shot during the COVID-19 lockdown, and the crew prioritised creating a small carbon footprint during production.”

The film was produced by Denzil Monk through his production company Bosena with money and support from Film Four and Falmouth University’s Sound/Image Cinema Lab and distributed by the British Film Institute (BFI). It is Mark Jenkin’s follow up film to Bait (2019) which received wide acclaim and won a BAFTA for Outstanding Debut.

Bosena’s website homepage is bilingual with both Cornish and English language description and describes the business as ‘an ecosophical film company’. I believe this refers to a philosophical commitment to living and working in ecological equilibrium and harmony.

The ‘About’ page includes a short statement about the business:

“Bosena is an independent film production company founded and managed by producer Denzil Monk. Ecosophically minded. Creatively driven. Rooted in Cornwall.”

There is then a definition and translation of the business name.

Then there is a series of logos referring to different ethical concerns. I shall briefly go through each of these in turn, using their own descriptions which are found on each respective website.

Accredited Living Wage Employers from the Living Wage Foundation.

“We celebrate and recognise the leadership of responsible employers who choose to go further and provide a decent standard of living by paying the real Living Wage, adopting Living Hours and Living Pensions as well as wider good employment practices.”

BAFTA Albert:

“We are leading a charge against climate change; uniting the screen industries to make a positive environmental impact and inspiring audiences to act for a sustainable future.”

They do this through tools like carbon calculators and editorial recommendations and best practice case studies etc.

Cut It:

Cut It's tagline is Crew Led action for the Climate Crisis, but it is not clear from their website whether they are still functional or not, having last posted news in 2020.

The Film & TV Charity:

“If you work behind the scenes in film, TV or cinema, The Film and TV Charity is here to support you. Whether you’re a researcher or a writer, in casting or production, editing or sales, distribution or exhibition, we’re ready to help.... You can expect a friendly ear at the end of our 24/7 Support Line, as well as access to financial advice and support, and help with everything from mental wellbeing, discrimination and harassment, to a whole host of practical tools and resources.”

Raising Films:

“Raising Films calls on the UK screen sector to recognise the value of its parent and carer members and ensure that the best possible working practices are available to them. We challenge the sector to find ways to prevent the loss of talent and enable the working parent and carer community to grow in number so that all voices can be heard.”

Black Voices Cornwall:

“In 2020 a group of optimistic professionals living in Cornwall decided to be the change they wanted to see in their hometowns. Moved by the local outcry during the Black Lives Matter movement, they wanted to find ways to improve the lives of local people experiencing isolation, prejudice or discrimination because of their ethnicity. Today, the organisation delivers positive, fair and meaningful solutions in rural communities; empowering local authorities and organisations to be more inclusive, celebrating diverse cultures, building communities and driving equality for one and all.”

So here is evidence of a production company clearly wishing to establish that the business aligns to a series of ethical values, as demonstrated through their involvement with these different ethical organisations. I believe that this approach evokes that of a **local artisan**, promoting tradition (Cornish language/16mm etc), proud of the locale and the 'independent' nature of their business.

It is therefore apparent that there are values and qualities of ethical consumption that can be established as qualities in the production of cinema. However, the Bosena website isn't selling *Enys Men* directly to consumers. It could be described as a business-to-business website; Bosena's transactions will be with organisations like Film Four and BFI, not cinema audiences. None of these ethical considerations are immediately apparent from the movie's poster or product packaging. How can we establish these qualities more broadly in cinema consumption if the audience is not necessarily made aware that they even exist?

Edmond's recent paper (2023) on the 'careful consumption' of media explains that it often falls to an individual's responsibility to identify the ethical concerns associated with the products they consume. I would argue that it is evident when researching *Enys Men* and Bosena that it was produced with ethical considerations in mind, but it is not immediately evident from the product itself. The BFI's press release for the film does not mention these ethical considerations either, beyond the fact that it has a strong Cornish connection.

Given that Film Four, Falmouth University and the BFI all make commitments to various ethical considerations, it is not immediately clear without further research whether there was

a conscious decision to omit this information from the press release, or whether it was an oversight.

The promotional material does contain mandatory age certification labelling, in this case, rated at 15. In the case of BAIT, later releases include the endorsement of BAFTA, which appears as a badge of quality and peer esteem. I would be interested as part of our discussion as to whether people felt as if a policy around labelling, like those found on food stuffs, would be a possible way of establishing these qualities with cinema audiences, and helping to inform decisions for ethical consumers. Would existing frameworks, like B-Corps and Fairtrade, make this a simpler concept for audiences to understand?

One concern is that optional labelling, rather than mandatory regulated labelling, would lead to an expanded 'market for virtue' (i.e., more overall consumption, adding environmental niche markets to capture certain consumers while others ignore it altogether.) Is adding a fairtrade label to a chocolate bar as powerful as adding an 'unfair trade' label? Can we ever establish other qualities in cinema unless all products are held to the same standards?

Alternatively, perhaps other tools like websites, browser plugins or apps would provide platforms where ethical consumers can examine in more detail the decisions around consumption choices. Edmond (p100, 2023) cites Rotten Apples (a site that helps visitors find articles pertaining to sexual misconduct allegations of key crew and personnel), but I am not aware of similar things existing in one unified space for environmental issues in filmmaking. Again, does this help inform existing ethical consumers but ignore or remain irrelevant to consumers who are unaware of ethical decisions?

To summarise: I believe that there is evidence of audiences wishing to consume cinema ethically, and there are producers who believe that they are making films with such considerations. However, there remains a gap between communicating these concerns between audiences and producers. I've presented a couple of options that draw upon existing frameworks to create discussion on this topic and perhaps influence policy in these areas.

Thank you for listening.

Bibliography:

Albert website. <https://wearealbert.org/about/>. Accessed 29th August 2023.

Banaji, S. and Buckingham, D., 2010. Young people, the Internet, and civic participation: An overview of key findings from the CivicWeb project. *International Journal of Learning and media*, 2(1), pp.15-24.

BFI press release. <https://www.bfi.org.uk/news/enys-men-release-date#:~:text=News-.Enys%20Men%2C%20the%20new%20feature%20from%20visionary%20Cornish%20film maker%20Mark,BFI%20Southbank%20and%20BFI%20Player>. Accessed 29th August 2023.

Black Voices Cornwall website. <https://www.blackvoicescornwall.org/about-5>. Accessed 29th August 2023.

Bosena website. <https://www.bosena.co.uk> . Accessed 29th August 2023.

Cut It website. <https://cutit.org.uk>. Accessed 29th August 2023.

Edmond, M., 2023. Careful consumption and aspirational ethics in the media and cultural industries: Cancelling, quitting, screening, optimising. *Media, Culture & Society*, 45(1), pp.92-107.

Film and TV Charity website. <https://filmtvcharity.org.uk/about-us/> . Accessed 29th August 2023.

Living Wage Foundation website. <https://www.livingwage.org.uk/who-we-are> . Accessed 29th August 2023.

Raising Films website. <https://www.raisingfilms.com/about/> . Accessed 29th August 2023.

Scammell, M., 2000. The internet and civic engagement: The age of the citizen-consumer. *Political Communication*, 17(4), pp.351-355.

Shriver-Rice, M. and Vaughan, H., 2020. What is environmental media studies?. *Journal of Environmental Media*, 1(1), pp.3-13.

Thompson, C.J. and Kumar, A., 2021. Beyond consumer responsabilization: Slow Food's actually existing neoliberalism. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 21(2), pp.317-336.

Wheale, P. and Hinton, D., 2007. Ethical consumers in search of markets. *Business Strategy and the Environment*, 16(4), pp.302-315.