[Theories of narrative]

Key concepts

Traditional narrative structures – **Three Act Structure**	Act One (Equilibrium)	Outline of a harmonious world with a flawed central hero – their flaws construct the underlying motivation that propels the film forward – the film's narrative arc seeks to repair an intrinsic part of the flawed hero, whatever the external conflict may be.
	Act Two (Disequilibrium)	Introduces narrative disharmony – actions of an antagonist that the central hero is tasked to defeat via quest or journey – quest to negotiate internally oriented goals – requiring them to gain a renewed self-knowledge – hero to overcome a series of obstacles to restore story's initial harmony – character conflict and protagonist/antagonist flash points.
	Act Three (New Equilibrium)	Third/final act of three-act structure works towards final confrontation – obstacle that lead character must overcome to fully achieve their quest – once completed, harmony is restored – harmony and order introduced at beginning is now reshaped for the better – first-act vulnerabilities overcome – transformed on quest, barriers transcended, self-actualised.
	Essential effects and processes of three-act narratives	• **Linear storytelling** – conventional narratives use cause-and-effect, where character action produces a story event that produces further character action – plot events in three-act narratives unfold chronologically – method manufactures narrative suspense – audience positioned to expect the plot to resolve in a final climactic moment where the film's hero final overcomes the lead antagonist. • **Single character focalisations that audiences can easily align with** – three-act narratives foreground experiences of one central character – repercussions of narrative events centre upon effects they have on lead protagonist – quests outlined in narratives tend to coalesce around the actions of central figures – single character focalisations prompt audiences to create connections with lead protagonists – aligning their perceptions and emotional reactions with film leads. • **Character transformations reinforce social norms** – sub-plots of three-act narratives often involve themes of character repair – resulting transformations that protagonists undergo provide audiences with narrative instruction or a film template to perfect their own lives. • **Narrative disequilibrium outlines 'otherness'** –three-act narratives require a disruptive force to disturb the harmonious world depicted at the start of the film – often, those disruptive forces produce ideological effects by outlining unacceptable social norms or by foregrounding socio-cultural fears.
Microcodes and three-act narratives	Location changes	Transitions between one act to another might be inferred through location changes.
	Act transitions and costume changes	Costume change infers important moments of narrative transition – colour coding and costume styling used to connote character interiority during narrative stages.
The traditional function of dialogue in narratives	Moves the story forward	Characters use dialogue to tell us where they are going or to give an indication of their future actions, thus signposting the cause-and-effect dynamic of film narratives to audiences.
	Provides psychological insight	Scripts use speech to voice thoughts of characters – show-don't-tell technique can reveal character interiority through actions, symbolic expressions and via the use of subtle dialogue cues that provide hints and suggestion for audience's to decode character thinking.
	Defines character relationships	Spoken exchanges also help audiences to decode the relationships that exist between characters, offering viewers moments that unify or disconnect key characters.
	Privileges central characters	Lead-character dialogue usually foregrounded as first or last line of speech in scenes – lead characters are privileged through dialogue arrangement that places protagonists at centre of conversations – heroes are spoken to not spoken at.
	Provides ideological alignment	Where audiences are aligned with central characters, the dialogue can affect a powerful presence – dialogue replaces thinking processes of audiences and effect a subtle ideological presence.
Propp's character types	Hero	Central character whom audiences align with – seeker-hero (strength/courage) and victim-hero (heal internal).
	Villain	Fights or pursues hero of story and often infers characteristics that audiences are positioned to reject.
	False Hero	Largely villainous role by usurping true hero's position – unmasked in last act.
	Helper	Accompanies hero on quest – saves them from struggles on journey – pivotal role to transform hero for quest.
	Princess	Goal/reward obtained by hero when their quest is successfully completed.
	Princess' Father	Often sets the hero difficult tasks to prevent hero from marrying the princess.

Key concepts

Structuralist analysis of narratives	Character-driven oppositions	In opposition, audiences align with some characters and are positioned to reject others.
	Narrative oppositions	Actions might be repeated or reframed using oppositional content – cross-cutting as typical editing approach.
	Thematic oppositions	Films often convey themes using a contradictory set of ideals.
	Stylistic oppositions	Encoded using oppositional or juxtaposed aesthetic styles.
	Genre-driven binary oppositions	For example: technology vs humanity (sci-fi) – deeply entrenched within genres – become rote narrative ingredients.
Ideological effects of oppositions		Determining an ideological effect of binary presentations requires identifying which binary state is foregrounded and privileged to the audience – privileged binaries convey the producer's ideological agenda.
Genre and narrative	Familiar story paths	• Films within the same genre often share similar story structures – ordered using similar narrative events- • Thrillers have an enigma-based story structures with early narrative episodes used to outline a central mystery that the film's protagonist must solve. • Horrors are identifiable through their use of survival-based narrative quests where protagonists are subjected to ever increasing levels of threat from whatever antagonist form is given.
	Pre-defined narrative resolutions	Genre-driven labelling provides films with familiar route maps to use in film narratives and dictates story endings.
	Genre-driven subtexts	Genre-driven products often deal with similar subtextual themes or meanings.
	Genre subversion	The subversion of genre-based rules delivers audience impact –repositions audience in unique ways.

Genre	Science Fiction	Crime	Horror
Common thematic binaries	Aliens/humans, exploitation/freedom, knowledge/ignorance, machine/man, man/nature, reality/deception, technology/humanity	Chaos/order, choice/necessity, corruption/ innocence, freedom/duty, guilt/innocence, law/justice, lawfulness/lawlessness, morality/greed, power/weakness	Chaos/order, darkness/light, death/life, known/unknown, past/present, reality/supernatural, reason/madness, religion/disbelief, repression/acceptance
Emotional pleasures	• Spectacle • Exploring the unknown	• Action • Character conflict	• Fear • Suspense
Dominant narrative structures	• Quest-based storytelling • Survival-based narratives	• Tragic downfalls • Revenge-based narratives	• Decoding enigmas • Survival-based narratives
Genre	Romance	War	Spy/Thriller
Common thematic boundaries	Experience/youth, family ties/romance, friendship/betrayal, loneliness/ belonging, masculinity/femininity, relationships/freedom, romance/money	Allies/enemies, duty/morality, experience/innocence, family/duty, home front/the front line, honour/self-interest, sacrifice/self-interest, survival/patriotism	Democracy/tyranny, heroism/greed, hunter/hunted, intellect/action, order/chaos, patriotism/treachery, state/individual, surveillance/subterfuge
Emotional pleasures	• Sentimentality • Nostalgia	• Action • Patriotism/nostalgia	• Action • Suspense
Dominant narrative structures	• Love conquers all • Unrequited love	• Quest-based storytelling • Survival-based narratives	• Decoding enigma • Revenge-based narratives

Marx, hegemony and apparatus theory

- Ideology refers to the **unwritten rules** that inform our culture.

- Karl Marx initially argued that the **ruling class** – the mine owners and industrial capitalists of the late nineteenth century, were able to exploit the working poor, not only through physical coercion, but also more **subtle ideological means**.

- Marx tells us that religion in the Victorian era taught the poor to accept poverty as an inescapable fact of life, and that if destitute miners and factory workers endured **impoverished conditions** they would be rewarded in heaven.

- Antonio Gramsci suggested that **subordinate classes** are sub-consciously controlled by the invisible grip of **hegemony** – the various sets of ideologies that unwittingly control our behaviours and ideas.

- Gramsci believed **hegemony** are subject to constant change with competing groups/ideas affecting control of attitudes/beliefs that dominate at any one time.

- Theodor Adorno suggested that culture played a vital role in **hypnotising** powerless sections of society into blind acceptance of social positions – subtle ideological control through **ideological state apparatus (ISA)**.

- Adorno believed ISA is largely controlled by **dominant social groups** who use culture to align wider society to their world view.

- Apparatus theorists argue that film has an ability to **suture** us into the fictional world of cinema-based narratives – the psychological experience of watching a film 'stitches' audiences into the cinematic worlds they encounter – POV cinematography, character alignment, vicarious immersion – can all subtly rewire **subconscious** thinking without spectator awareness.

Cinema and counter-cinema

- Apparatus theorists argue that film is an effective ideological persuader as it demands our undivided attention – film presents us with **role models and ideals** that can easily take root in the darkness of cinema auditoriums.

- The fledgling 1934 Nazi government made a concerted move to control the German film industry – **propaganda** films to convince audience of far-right racial ideals.

- Britain established the Ministry of Information in 1939 to openly make and distribute **propaganda** films that sought to sustain Homefront morale during WWII.

- Apparatus theorists also suggest mainstream films inadvertently reflect the **dominant ideologies** of their social and historical contexts.

- Consider: the changing role of female characters in 60-year Bond franchise – **emerging influence** of feminism in framing the franchise's female leads.

- Inadvertent ideological effect of mainstream cinema is also constructed by **character hierarchies** presented by films – gender, class, race of lead characters reinforce wider social inequalities.

- Film is a place where **prevailing attitudes** and ideologies can be challenged – a rich tradition of subversive and counter-cultural filmmaking through the history of cinema.

- For example: British New Wave of 1960s (A Taste of Honey, A Kind of Loving, Saturday Night and Sunday Morning) **foregrounding issues** of class-based injustice, racial prejudice and gender inequality.

- Rich tradition of **subversive British film-making** continues today in the social realist output of Mike Leigh, Ken Loach & Shane Meadows.

Structuralism, Todorov, formalism, ideological effects of narrative transformation

- **Levi-Strauss' structuralism and ideology** – structuralists suggest that themes, narratives and characters are composed using oppositional states – they not only inject conflict, drama and excitement into film stories, but also produce ideological messaging through the privileged presentation of one oppositional state over another.
  - Levi-Strauss' theory suggests that binary oppositions also serve to outline behavioural taboos that audiences are positioned to reject and those attitudinal ideals that we ought to embrace.
  - Structuralist critics would suggest that privileged characters foreground the attitudes, values, norms and behaviours that audiences ought to embrace, while the attitudes and outlooks of those characters defeated are outlined as taboo and non-ideal.

- Todorov argues that stories are conventionally structured using three identifiable movements or pulses of action – **equilibrium, disequilibrium, new equilibrium** – each narrative stage can convey ideological effects:

- **Ideologies constructed by equilibrium stage** – represents a set of ideals that the central character often tries to recover during their narrative journey – harmony at the start of narrative is often flawed or defective – propels central character(s) to seek change – audience may be aligned to those desires and effect similar changes in their own lives.

- **Ideological effects constructed through narrative disequilibrium** – use of transgression also conveys powerful ideological presence – when rules or social norms are broken prompting lead characters to seek repair, embarking on narrative journey – outlines taboo attitudes and undesirable behaviours that audiences are invited to reject.

- **Ideological effects constructed through new equilibrium** – most ideologically potent stage, largely driven by character-based transformations that occur in this stage – restores harmony – central characters must change in some way – transformations outline beliefs, attitudes that audiences are positioned to internalise as ideals.

Stereotypes and ideology / Stereotype transcoding

- **Character-based analysis provides another powerful tool to explore ideological film effects** – Stuart Hall is particularly interested in the way that film and media products construct representations of powerless social groups.
  - Hall argues that real world social hierarchies are reflected by the characters of film products and that the ready-made character traits of stereotypes reinforce entrenched negative perceptions of marginalised racial groups and other disempowered members of society.
  - Stereotyped characters are widely used in film, usually to produce audience-based character recognition or to provide ready-made story frames for scriptwriters and directors to work within.
  - Hall suggests that films tends to author stereotypes of powerless groups because filmmaking is likely to be financed and produced by elite social groups who use their cultural influence to maintain their status in society.

Stereotype transcoding

- Hall reminds us that films are places where ideologies can be contested, and by using transcoding, that cultural products construct representations that challenge racial, gender or ability-based stereotypes:
  - **Character countertypes** – characters who invert racial, gender or ability-based stereotypical traits – Black leads who reject violent action in favour of care, Disabled characters who play a lead role in rescuing others rather than in a victim-based narrative.
  - **Appropriated stereotypes** – when films actively embrace negative behaviours associated with a stereotype but in a manner that creates character appeal rather than 'otherness' – stylised renditions construct character alignment.
  - **Deconstructed stereotypes** – when filmmakers effect simplistic representations of characters at the start but use the remaining narrative to explore the effects of stereotyping on the character – in effort to explain why such behaviours exist.

Absent representation

- Films can also construct ideological effects as a result of absence of social groups within narratives – the lack of visibility of key social groups within mainstream films can help to marginalise such groups in the real world.

- Despite recent improvements, Black representation in mainstream film continues to be problematic.

- The UCLA 2019 Hollywood Diversity Report identifies that:
  - just 27.6% of lead roles were played by Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) actors in 2019.
  - significantly up from 13.9% return of 2016.
  - but much lower than 72.4% of lead roles played by White actors.
  - just 15.1% of Hollywood films directed by BAME filmmakers in 2019.
  - females accounted for 44.1% of lead roles in 2019.
  - 15% of films made by a female director in 2019.
  - 18.6% of Hollywood films featured LGBTQ+ characters.
  - 56% of gay characters featured in major film output receiving no more than 3 minutes screen time in films that they appeared in.
  - no major Hollywood releases in 2019 featured a transgender character.

Feminist ideological approaches

- Laura Mulvey draws upon Althusser's approach and Freudian Psychoanalytic theory to explore the ideological effects of film in terms of gender
  - influential 1973 essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema': outlines a feminist analysis methodology that can still be applied to today's contemporary film output.

- **Film based representations of gender are largely constructed by men**
  - Mulvey points to the practical impact of masculine domination of the film industry, reminding us that film producers, scriptwriters and directors are mostly male and that cinematic worlds, characters and stories offered to audiences reflect a masculine perspective.

- **Cinema viewers are aligned to masculine viewpoints via the male gaze**
  - Mulvey further argues that cinema experience principally offers audiences what Freud called scopophilic pleasures – that the dark world of cinema auditoriums constructs voyeuristic or sexual viewing pleasures – and because filmmaking is dominated largely by males, film narratives predominantly work to satisfy male-oriented fantasies.

- **That the male gaze objectifies femininity**
  - Females in film are constructed as passive and objectified
  - objects that male characters pursue with sexual intent or who might be offered up to the gaze of a film's male lead without a female character's objection
  - Mulvey discusses the way that women are routinely filmed in films and points to the ubiquitous use of soft-focus tilt-down compositions in Classical Hollywood output to frame female actors
  - Mulvey argues that this widely used shot composition constructs a passive representation of femininity.

- **The male gaze is internalised by audiences**
  - Mulvey further tells us that the male gaze aligns both male and female spectators with passive female ideals – female objectification is internalised as a social norm.

Challenging ideological approaches

- Many theorists now believe that audiences read films as active rather than passive spectators – key criticisms of post-Marxian, formalist, structuralist and feminist approaches might include the following objections:

- **Audiences don't decode films in the same way** – most ideological approaches outlined assume that spectators decode films using universally applicable processes – individual audience members interpret films using their own perspectives/outlooks in a way that might lead them to accept or reject the ideological effects of a film narrative.

- **Audiences don't readily align with characters of the same gender** – female viewers can just as easily align with male protagonists, and internalise the male gaze as an active rather than passive participant – audiences might also align themselves with secondary characters or even antagonists and internalise values that aren't obviously privileged or foregrounded by narratives.

- **Counter cinema effects limited viewership** – the ideological effect that counter cinema might produce is constricted due to limited distribution to independent cinemas – counter cinema is watched almost exclusively by educated middle-class audiences who are probably already predispositioned to the political messaging that such films might offer.

- **Contemporary character-construction is complex** – the notion films give simplified binaries is questionable – lead characters can be contradictory, contemporary films often use constructed irony to modify seemingly simplistic binaries.

[Contemporary British Cinema Since 1995]

A fragmented landscape	Film form: British documentary realism	British documentary realism, gender and race	The commercialization of British realism	Genre hybridization and transnational cinema	British science fiction
• Hollywood's big budgets have overshadowed British film production, making it harder for UK filmmakers to find the financial backing or sufficient audience interest to make domestic production truly sustainable. • Despite that, UK-based production does periodically achieve huge commercial success despite a low-budget presence and art-house dominated distribution. • For most UK producers, commercial success is usually limited or is used as a stepping-stone to bigger Hollywood financed project. • The UK film industry offers us a fragmented and often eclectic cinematic history – a discontinuous history of ever-changing genre-driven output. • 1990s = more commercially-oriented cinema – an eclectic mix of laddish gangster flicks and optimistic reworkings of British social realism, where films like The Full Monty and Billy Elliot reflected the growing economic optimism of the New Labour era and the cultural cool of 1990s Brit Pop. • The early 2000s are notable for their horror-oriented offerings: Danny Boyle's 28 Days Later (2001) and Neil Marshall's Dog Soldiers (2002) as notable successes for British filmmakers.	• British filmmaking traditions: low-budget documentary style social realism (Loach, Leigh, Meadows, Wheatley, Arnold, Ramsay, McQueen, Jenkin). British social realism has endured as a result of the BBC and BFI's role in funding UK production, whose diversity-oriented remits provide an easy fit for British documentary realism's regional settings and working-class characters. • **Working class settings** – British social realism provides us with narratives that document the lives of real people in marginalized communities – Fish Tank (Arnold) is set in a council estate in a deprived area of East London – Loach's Sweet Sixteen is located in the council tenements of Inverclyde – narrative backdrops with raw and authentic purpose – enabling an exploration of UK regions that commercial cinema often neglects to represent. • **Non-professional actors** – star power is rarely used in British realism – Directors cast unknown actors or non-professionals to play key roles – actors are often chosen because of their real-life experiences of the issues covered in story content, thus enhancing the authenticity of narratives. • **Victim narratives** – often British realism places flawed or victim-based characters in plots that often resolve in tragic endings – characters often are depicted as outsiders to their communities – narrative treatments of leads often work through episodic structures depicting a series of events in which central protagonists are overwhelmed by the worlds they live in. • **Political/ideological subtext** – as a natural extension of victim-based narratives, realist films often deliver overt political messages – Loach openly draws attention to the political purposes of his films and their underlying intent to draw attention to social injustice issues. • **Documentary aesthetic** – a range of defined stylistic devices associated with the British social realist aesthetic – handheld camerawork and long-takes are often used to produce an observational/docu-realist film style – natural lighting and minimal sound scores further affect the sense that these films are representative of a working-class reality. • **Alternative production practices** – realist filmmakers also employ a range of alternative production strategies to help concentration realism effects – Leigh uses improvised performances and minimal scripting to lend his films a sense of legitimacy – Loach and Arnold film their stories in chronological order, often revealing crucial plot points to actors during takes to engineer authentic character responses.	• The British realist tradition has focused upon gender-based issues – using film narratives to explore the shifting expectations of both women and men in contemporary Britain. • Films have sought to identify the destructive effects of toxic masculinity and female objectification – or to explore the search for alternative male identities in the wake of shifting gender roles prompted by feminism – social realism has attempted to diagnose how gender and class intersect – to scope how poverty magnifies gender-based inequalities in the UK. • Shane Meadows' ground-breaking 2006 film This is England explores the loss of traditional masculine identity in 1980s Britain – two contrasting portraits of the responses men constructed in the wake of mass male unemployment during the period, wherein Woody's community-oriented masculinity is set against Combo's retreat into English nationalism and racist scapegoating - Meadows' film narrates the presence of a dark masculine energy that the film's male characters exercise in a bid to reclaim lost patriarchal power – Combo's self-destructive impulses ultimately come to dominate in the film – a masculine explosion that ripples through Meadow's portrayal of 1980s Britain with deadly consequences. • Leigh's Secrets and Lies explores racial difference, offering us a shame-filmed narrative that probes racial sexual taboos while also narrating the diminishing power of white working-class communities – Leigh's film constructs a positive take on inter-racial relations in Britain in the late 1990s – offering us a narrative where characters connect rather than disconnect – narrates the working class shift towards more middle-class aspirations – a shift that Leigh questions via the hollow emptiness of Maurice's dysfunctional presence in the film.	• British realism is applied in different ways by different filmmakers (Leigh and Loach) sculpt realist films using their own quirks and peculiarities. • Leigh's use of black humour produce a lighter, bittersweet take on the genre when compared to Loach's harder narratives and political sloganeering. • From the mid-1990s onwards, a distinctly different and more commercially viable form of realist filmmaking became visible - a form of British filmmaking that pushed realism beyond arthouse cinema distribution and into the mainstream. • Realist films in the 1980s and early 1990s often authored unequivocal critiques of the Conservative government of the period – Mike Leigh's 1993 film Naked – constructed a condemnatory portrait of youth unemployment, homelessness and middle-class apathy – films of the mid-1990s onwards were buoyed by a more optimistic outlook, partly inspired by New Labour's landslide election victory in 1997 – enabled by Multiplex cinemas that gave commercially minded British filmmakers more opportunity to screen films that could compete with mainstream Hollywood fair. • Creation of the National Lottery in 1994 also helped a raft of new filmmakers find the finance for productions. • 28 Days Later was co-financed by Lottery cash to the tune of £3 million and helped Danny Boyle resurrect his career after the lacklustre audience response to The Beach. • Film Four – not only supplied filmmakers with new sources of funding but also provided films with readymade television audiences via guaranteed Channel 4 screenings and later through pay-per-view Film Four subscription services. Commercial needs of Film Four prompted those films made under its banner to affect a more accessible or mainstream tone. Established auteurs like Loach and Leigh were also funded as a result of their ability to command pre-sold audiences for their films. • British realism tilted towards upbeat filmmaking – Brassed Off (1996) was set in industrial working class heartland of Barnsley but effected an unusually cheery story – tragic resolutions of documentary realism for a feel-good ending that celebrated working-class community. • British realism was refashioned for youth audiences – Danny Boyle's Film Four adaptation of Trainspotting (1996) revelled in Irvine Welsh's working-class Scottish setting – offered audiences moments of levity via a blackly comic take on underclass drug addiction. • Trainspotting's working-class tenements are constructed with stylized flourishes that lift the movie beyond a documentary-oriented aesthetic – expressive lighting, jump-cuts, freeze frames and a cult soundtrack to nurture film's alt-cool status for Britpop audiences – a slickly packaged version of social realism whose white-on-orange posters made Danny Boyle a household name.	• The success of Trainspotting can be owed to its hybridized narrative and its packaging of documentary realism within an audience-friendly heist narrative framework. • Boyle's multi-genre filmmaking formula continues to be used by contemporary filmmakers like Ben Wheatley who use social realism to affect a British feel to films while packaging the low-fi style of British realism within a more conventional and entertainment driven narrative framework. • Edgar Wright's Shaun of the Dead use story structures that are wholly designed to construct appeal for a global audience – loosely labelled transnational cinema, these sorts of films work within established narrative forms and deliver genre-driven storytelling to garner commercial success – Wright constructs a sanitized version of England that can be easily understood by cinemagoers outside of the UK – Shaun and Liz are easily decodable stereotypes – Barbara and Philip are the quintessential essence of middle-class England – David is the dastardly false hero who must be unmasked at the end of the story – Wright's zombie survival storyline trades in a deluge of intertextual references that draw from the American film industry – however, the film's London setting is devoid of non-white leads – SOTD minimizes realism, instead deploying action-based storytelling to deliver a representation of Britain that constructs global appeal.	• A long tradition of science fiction filmmaking exists in the UK – driven in part by the reputation of the British SF canon which includes H.G. Wells, J.G. Ballard and George Orwell. • Big-name directors such as Stanley Kubrick adapted Anthony Burgess' A Clockwork Orange. • Alfonso Cuaron adapted PD James' Children of Men. • British SF is synonymous with an aesthetic style and form of storytelling that feels different to mainstream Hollywood SF with lower budgets of UK-funded films necessitating a small-scale application of the genre. • **Realism is affected instead of CGI rich spectacle** – with limited budgets, British SF often constructs dystopian visions using settings that look and feel realistic – instead of transporting audiences to off-world locations or using ornate tech-based settings, British SF conventionally deals in narratives that are geographically relatable - aliens in British SF tend to live amongst us rather than in distant galaxies or far-away worlds – low-fi emptiness of Boyle's 28 Days Later stands out as a prime example – Glazer's realism in Under The Skin affects a no-frills approach. • **Slower paced narration and horror-based verisimilitude** – without the energy of CGI-driven spectacle, British SF tends to progress at a much slower or introspective tempo than Hollywood equivalents – Garland's Ex Machina is enigma-driven, slow-moving and with intensity to compliment the narrative structure and themes of the underlying creepy intrusion of technology into a world that feels familiar. • **Limited finance restricts casts** – restricted budgets tend to produce films with smaller casts – British SF tends to lean towards a more subjective storytelling style – filmmakers focus on psychological effects of dystopian fears outlined in plots. • **Political dystopian subtexts** - British SF use dystopian settings to readily critique authority unlike Hollywood SF which tends to create humans versus alien binaries with romance-based subplots – UK SF is austere and fatalistic, exploring wider social themes or political issues.