

Appendix:

Play for Today: A statistical history

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Abstract:

This appendix presents an original statistical analysis of Play for Today (BBC1 1970-84). It begins by defining what counts as a Play for Today. It then presents six specific data-sets examining the following: (1) the output of Play for Today in different periods; (2) the duration and scheduling of plays; (3) their originality; (4) the use of film or video; (5) audience viewing figures and (6) the number of television repeats. It also compares the data to indicate the construction of a privileged Play for Today canon which ignores a large 'lost continent' of Plays for Today.

Keywords: Play for Today; BBC; statistics; duration; scheduling; originality; aesthetics; film/video; viewing figures; repeats; canon.

Introduction

This appendix provides an original and detailed statistical survey of Play for Today (BBC1 1970-84) in order to assist our understanding of the strand and assist further study of television drama series. It begins with a justification for what is to be classified as a Play for Today. It then provides a periodisation of Play for Today according to the quantity of plays made by specific producers. This is followed by information on Play for Today's position in the schedule and its durational flexibility. The extent to which Play for Today primarily showcased originality is then tested by investigating how many were new works or were adaptations of existing material in other forms. The article then considers how many of the plays were shot on film and how many on video. A historical overview of the strand's viewing figures then follows. A final section explores how many Plays for Today have been repeated on British television with a view to establishing which Plays for

Today have benefited the most and whether there exists a ‘canon’ of culturally privileged Plays for Today.

Methodology

This appendix uses quantitative data-sets developed within an MS Excel spreadsheet. The data-sets are derived from several sources. The Trodd Index of filmed television dramas compiled by the Play for Today producer Kenith Trodd (1983), was invaluable in estimating numbers of film and majority-video productions, supplementing the author’s own close viewing of numerous Plays for Today. There are, however, no exact numbers yet of the specific *types* of video production – whether studio or Outside Broadcast – or exact breakdowns of how many video plays were totally studio-made or included filmed inserts.

The strand’s viewing figures were gathered via Audience Research Reports, Daily Viewing Barometers and, from autumn 1981, BARB daily summaries: all were accessed via the BBC Written Archives Centre or the British Library. To garner information on repeats, BBC Genome was used to identify all BBC repeats of Plays for Today. To identify the small, but significant number of non-BBC repeats during the 1990s and 2000s, Ian Greaves and various newspaper digital archives provided vital help. With the exception of *Oy Vay Maria*’s replacement of the planned repeat of *Gotcha/Campion’s Interview* on BBC1 on 15 August 1978, no unscheduled repeats have as yet been identified. Drawing on my MS Excel data-sets, I have used the programming language R to create plots to support my statistical analysis; this data visualisation was developed using a specific software library within R, ggplot2: the resulting plots are shown in Figures 1 to 5.

What counts as a Play for Today?

There are many different estimates as to the total number of Plays for Today: Lez Cooke (2015) refers to 298 while the documentary *Drama out of a Crisis: A Celebration of Play for Today* (BBC4, 12 October 2020) counts 300. Much here depends upon whether the estimates includes censored productions or ones shown

in the Play for Today time slot but not made by the BBC. According to my own – strict - criteria, 294 Plays for Today were broadcast on BBC1 from October 1970 to August 1984. To come to this number, I have applied four main criteria:

1. It must have been made by the BBC.
2. It must be credited as a ‘Play for Today’ in the *Radio Times*.
3. It must have been broadcast during 1970 to 1984.
4. Its first broadcast must be as a Play for Today, not as part of another strand or series or serial.

Thus, two censored Plays for Today *Brimstone and Treacle* (1976) and *Scum* (1977) are not included. Neither are *The Write-Off* (12 November 1970) or *Reddick* (18 February 1971) which appeared under the Play for Today banner in the *Radio Times* but were made by the Canadian Broadcasting Company (CBC) rather than the BBC. By the same token, I have excluded David Storey’s *Home* (6 January 1972) which was made by the CBC and National Educational Television (NET), owned by the US Corporation for Public Broadcasting. I have also excluded dramas first shown in a different context and only repeated under the Play for Today umbrella such as *Our Day Out* (originally BBC2, 28 December 1977), *The Vanishing Army* (BBC2, 29 November 1978) and *The Black Stuff* (BBC2, 2 January 1980), as well as Jim Allen’s historical series *Days of Hope* (BBC1, 11 September – 2 October 1975). My data counts *Gotcha* and *Campion’s Interview* separately despite being broadcast on the same night (12 April 1977), as they involved different creative personnel. However, portmanteau dramas which involved the same crew throughout – *Orkney* (13 May 1971) and *Clay, Smeddum and Greenden* (24 February 1976) – are counted as one Play for Today. I omit 24 one-off dramas shown in Play for Today’s time slot but not using its name, running from from Brian Phelan’s *Being Normal* (27 July 1983) to Terence Hodgkinson’s *Brigadista* (5 February 1985).

Periodisation of Play for Today by producer output

Across its fourteen-year timespan, there were fifteen series of Play for Today, which generally ran from autumn to the following spring; numbers of plays averaged around twenty per run. The following section provides an original historical periodisation of four Play for Today eras: defined primarily by which producers commissioned most work during each era.

Era 1: 1970-73 – McDonald-Shubik

Between 1970-73, 66 Plays for Today were broadcast across three series. Until 1972, the strand was controlled from London, with projects being allocated on a broadly 50:50 basis between Irene Shubik and Graeme McDonald. Until he was succeeded by Christopher Morahan in 1972, Gerald Savory was Head of Plays, agreeing budgets and production aesthetics while sometimes having final approval over projects. Shubik (2000: 105, 110) praises Savory's key role in ensuring that the expensive, all-film *Edna, The Inebriate Woman* (1971) was made. The Shubik-McDonald duopoly ended in June 1972 with the first Play for Today produced by David Rose's English Regions Drama unit at BBC Birmingham's Pebble Mill. Significantly, early 1973 saw the return of Wednesday Play producer, Tony Garnett, and Kenith Trodd's debut as a Play for Today producer.

Era 2: 1973-77 – McDonald-Trodd-Rose

In this second era, 84 Plays for Today were broadcast across four series and commissioned by a greater range of producers. Most prolific were Graeme McDonald (28), Kenith Trodd (18) and David Rose (15). Women producers included Ann Scott (5), Anne Head (1) and Margaret Matheson (3) whose first Plays for Today were screened in April 1977. Christopher Morahan was Head of Plays until he was succeeded by fellow ex-director James Cellan Jones in April 1976; Cellan Jones continued the policy of giving producers scope to develop their own idiosyncratic projects.

Era 3: 1977-82 – Matheson-Eyre-Trodd

In mid-1977, producer Graeme McDonald left after overseeing 96 productions for the Wednesday Play and Play for Today strands since 1967. He was followed by Margaret Matheson and, in 1978, Richard Eyre, who produced nine and fourteen Plays for Today respectively during an era that consisted of five series and 112 episodes. Other lead producers included Innes Lloyd (13), Kenith Trodd (8) and John Norton (6). Eyre notes how producing Play for Today was a ‘formidable task’ and how it was ‘very, very difficult to get ten pieces in a year of great quality’, crediting fellow producer Trodd as being ‘very smart’ for only doing five a year.¹ David Rose produced just seven Plays for Today in this period, a reduction partly attributable to his mammoth film project *Artemis 81* (1981) – shown on BBC1 broadly in Play for Today’s time slot – whose budget was probably reallocated from two Plays for Today.² In addition to Matheson, Anne Head (5), June Roberts (4) and Ann Scott (3) made significant contributions. James Cellan Jones continued as Head of Plays before being replaced by Keith Williams in April 1979.

Era 4: 1982-84 – Wearing-Shallcross-Parr-Rogers

Keith Williams was BBC Head of Plays during this final era, being replaced by the docudrama-centric Peter Goodchild in April 1984. In contrast to previous periods, this fourth era witnessed the diminishment of producer power. The 32 Plays for Today across three series were produced by *eighteen* different producers. The four most regular producers – Michael Wearing (5), Alan Shallcross (4), Chris Parr (3) and Colin Rogers (3) – produced just under half of the output, in contrast to Shubik, McDonald, Trodd and Rose producing 87 per-cent between 1970-77. This shift towards *more* producers each making *fewer* commissions contributed significantly to Play for Today losing its clear identity in its final years, becoming more miscellaneous and less consistently risk-taking in its approach.

Play for Today in time

In 1970, when renamed from the Wednesday Play, Play for Today was re-scheduled from its customary Wednesday to Thursday. Replying to a letter in the *Radio Times*, BBC Head of Drama Shaun Sutton claimed Play for Today was a ‘series of plays for the *present* day, not for any particular day. It will not be shifted about’ (Farquhar 2021: 32-33). However, in October 1972, it *did* shift to Mondays and, over the subsequent twelve years, it was moved around with little discernible pattern, moving from Monday to Thursday to its most common day, Tuesday, where it finished its fifteenth and final series in 1984. 30 Plays for Today had their original broadcasts on Monday (10.2 per-cent), 106 on Thursday (36.1 per-cent) and 157 on Tuesday (53.4 per-cent). The anomaly was Jeremy Paul’s *A Walk in the Forest* (14 May 1980), the only Play for Today to have been screened on Wednesday, if at 11:05pm.³ The patterns regarding Play for Today’s start and end times are revealed in Figure 1:

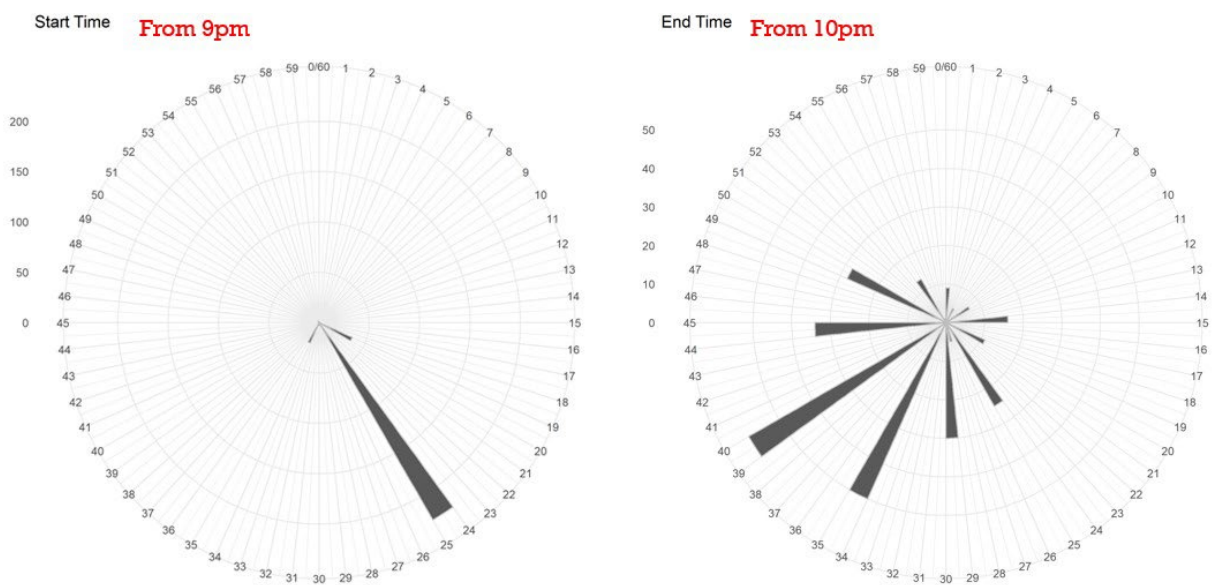


Figure 1: Clock plots. Left shows Play for Today's starting times; right shows its end times.

In the case of Play for Today's start-times, there was a clear, regular clustering around 9:25pm, the time when 223 Plays for Today – 75.9 per-cent of the total – were scheduled to commence. Furthermore, 284 Plays for Today – 96.6 per-cent – began between 9:20-9:35pm. This reflects its fixture-like status in the schedules following the Nine O' Clock News. Significantly, the plot on the right, showing end times, reveals how the schedule was built around Play for Today, which seldom ended at a set time. The most frequent end-time was 10:40pm but there were myriad variations within the range between 10:25-10:50pm.

This reflects the varying lengths of Plays for Today and indicates the unusual freedom from the constraints of a set end-time that makers enjoyed. While the mean average length of a Play for Today's was 72.3 minutes – the range of lengths is extensive. The two shortest Plays for Today last 27 and 41 minutes – Brian Clark's *Campion's Interview* (12 April 1977) and N.F. Simpson's *Thank You Very Much* (11 November 1971) – while the two longest are late-era filmed productions: Jim Allen's *United Kingdom* (8 December 1981) and Robert Smith's *Z for Zachariah* (28 February 1984), which last 147 and 118 minutes respectively.

The originality of Play for Today

The perception that Play for Today showcased new work is broadly substantiated by the figures: 236 Plays for Today were original, amounting to fractionally over four in every five.⁴ However, a significant minority of 58 originated from other media. It was theatre was the *primary* external source for Play for Today. 26 were derived from previous stage productions, such as David Edgar's *Baby Love* (7 November 1974), adapted from a stage play first performed at the Leeds Playhouse in 1973, and Trevor Griffiths's *Comedians* (25 October 1979), originally staged at the Nottingham Playhouse in 1975. Eighteen Plays for Today were originally published as prose fiction, as in the case of short stories by William Trevor and Lewis Grassic Gibbon or novels by John Wain and Paula Milne. A further nine

came from radio plays, several by the noted radio dramatist Rhys Adrian, and included the very first Play for Today, Alan Sharp's *The Long Distance Piano Player* (15 October 1970), which was originally broadcast on the Third Programme (17 August 1962). Finally, five Plays for Today originated in non-fiction sources, such as *A Child of Hope* (24 April 1975), John Elliot's dramatization of Joel Carlson's autobiography *No Neutral Ground* (1973, and *Through the Night* (2 December 1975), which Trevor Griffiths based on his late wife Jan's unpublished diary from her time in hospital being treated for breast cancer. Jack Rosenthal based his script for *Spend, Spend, Spend* (15 March 1977) on interview transcripts with Vivian Nicholson published in a book co-written by Stephen Smith.

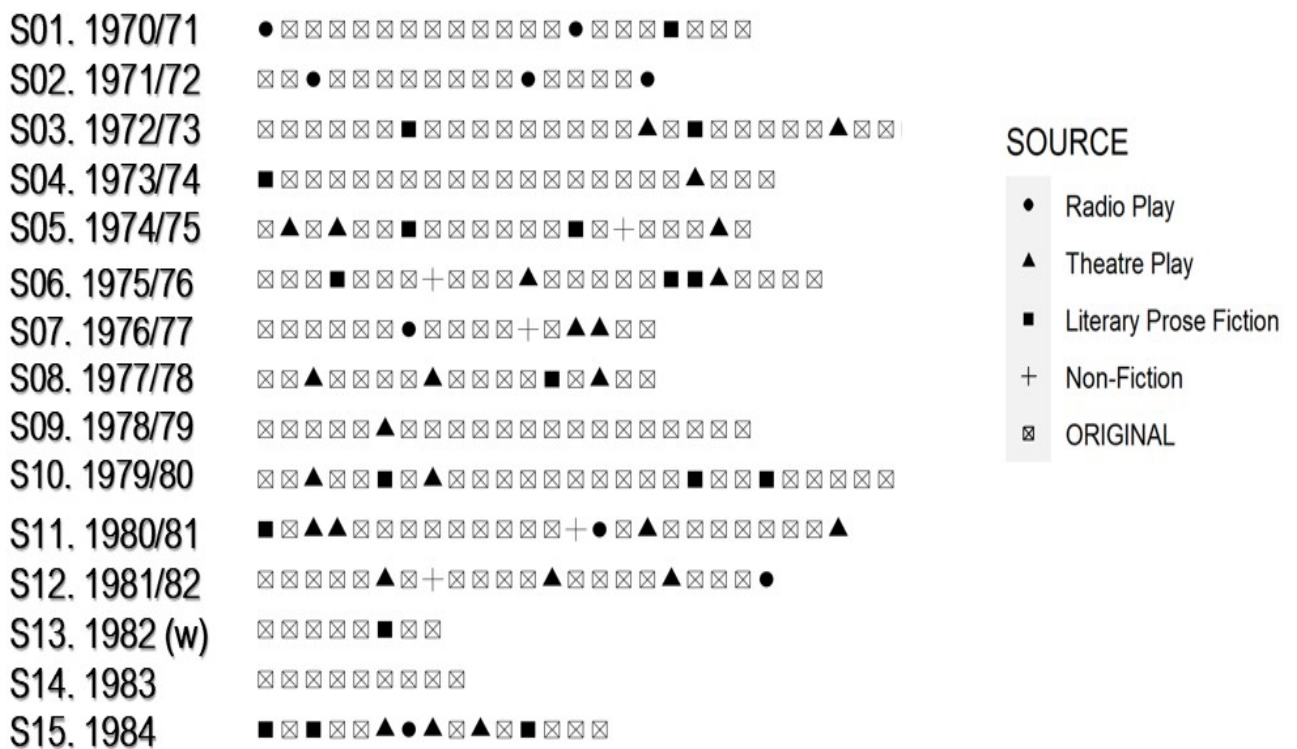


Figure 2: Sources per *Play for Today* series.

Figure 2 shows the chronological order of sources per series. From 1973-82, theatre adaptations were a consistent part of Play for Today's yearly roster but rose during 1977 to 1981 when twelve Plays for Today were derived from stage plays (12.8 per-cent of programmes during this time, compared with an overall

proportion for the strand of 8.9 per-cent). This phase of Play for Today runs from Barrie Keeffe's *Gotcha* (12 April 1977) to David Leland's *Psy-Warriors* (12 May 1981), both of which were entirely video productions making stylised creative use of the BBC's Television Centre studios.

Indicating a general decline in authored single television dramas, Play for Today between 1982 and 1984 had the lowest proportion of original plays: 75 per-cent. As Figure 2 indicates, there was an increase in Plays for Today from prose fiction sources, and a final spurt of theatre-derived plays from March-July 1984. Contemporaneously, writers nurtured by the single play were increasingly working on serial or series drama: for example, Alan Bleasdale's *Boys from the Blackstuff* (BBC2, 1982), Willy Russell's *One Summer* (Channel Four, 1983) and Alan Plater's *Beiderbecke* trilogy (Yorkshire Television, 1984-88).

Film versus Video

Although the most-remembered Plays for Today are often those shot on 16mm film, a clear majority were shot on video, mostly in the BBC's Television Centre studios. An estimated 98 were all-filmed productions (33.3 per-cent), while 196 were mostly or wholly shot on videotape (66.7 per-cent).

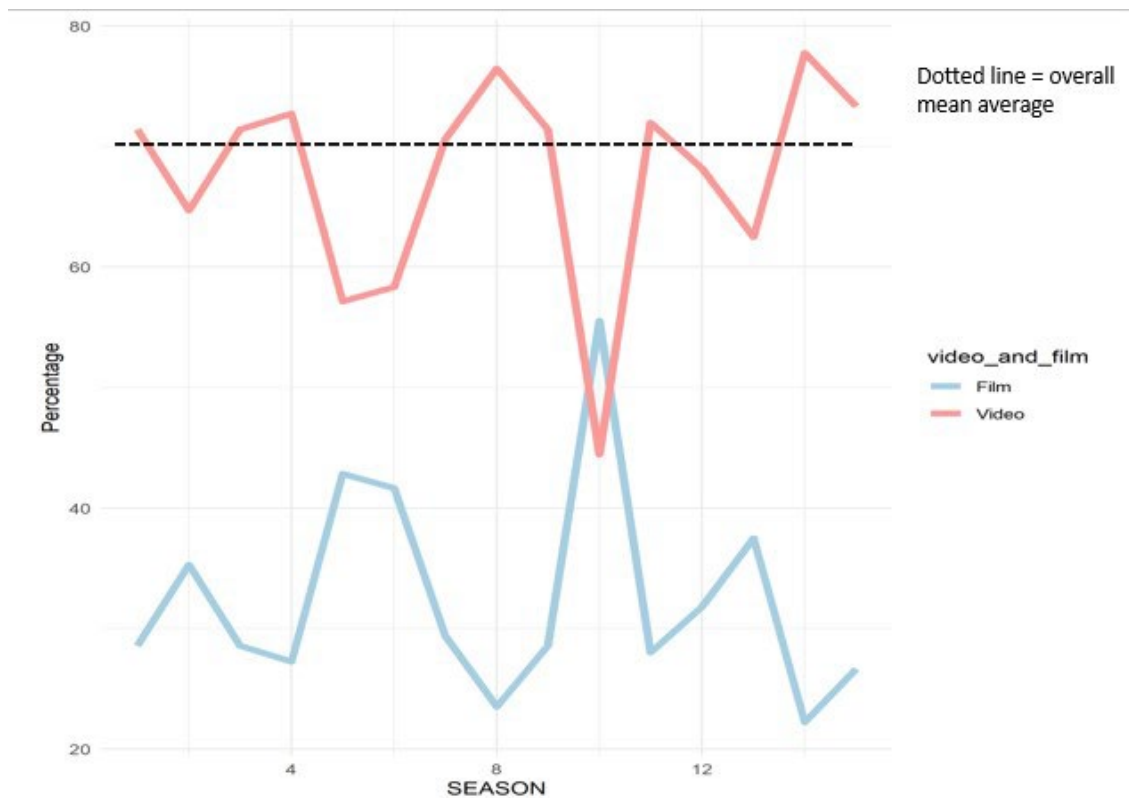


Figure 3: Percentages of all-filmed and majority or all-video Plays for Today per series.

Figure 3 shows the fluctuating percentages per series of Plays for Today shot wholly on film as opposed to those either totally or *mostly* shot on video. Video was, consistently, the majority aesthetic in all but one series. However, film did increase in the second series (1971-72), before declining, then markedly increasing to 42.2 per-cent across the fifth and sixth series (1974-76). This correlates with the ascendancy of David Rose’s English Regions Drama unit. By comparison, the arrival of Margaret Matheson as producer in 1977 correlates with a particularly high number of video productions: in the eighth series (1977-78), just 23.5 per-cent of Plays for Today were filmed. However, it is also the case that Rose produced occasional video-studio Plays for Today and Matheson some filmed ones.

The proportion of film actually exceeded video in the tenth series (1979-80), as Lez Cooke has identified (2015: 150). However, this series also included superlative all-studio video plays such as *Comedians*, a rare Richard Eyre studio

production. By the fourteenth and fifteenth series (1983-84), Play for Today output was far lower, with a significant three-quarters made up of video productions. This was in part the consequence of the exodus of many film-favouring Play for Today creative alumni to David Rose's Film on Four strand for Channel Four (launched in 1982) but also reflected economic necessity and the need to maintain the use of electronic studios. Philip Martin's *The Remainder Man* (2 November 1982), a black comedy directed in bare theatrical style on video in the studio by Richard Wilson, is indicative of the economic constraints of the time and was inevitably overshadowed by being broadcast on the day of the launch of Channel Four.

Most neglected of all Plays for Today, aesthetically, are those shot on video *outside* the studio on Outside Broadcast (OB). This is sometimes criticised for having a flat look but, as Billy Smart argues, 'flexible' OB video's replacement of 16mm film for location sequences in *Coronation Street* in 1988 enabled a greater volume of material to be shot in 'the places and institutions of the wider world' and permitted 'a more mobile mise-en-scène' (2014: 72). Earlier, Rod Allen had noted how BBC and ATV employees were resistant to the use of OB as they saw the 'unfamiliar armies of engineers, planners and VT operators' impeding the directors' 'creative act' (1977: 15). However, OB video's evocative, mobile everydayness was vividly utilised by Play for Today directors such as Alan Clarke in *Funny Farm* (27 February 1975) and Jon Amiel in the neglected *Gates of Gold* (8 March 1983).

Reception of Play for Today: viewing figures

Across Play for Today's fourteen-year run, its mean average audience was 5.63 million viewers. Figure 4 shows an overview of the mean average viewing figures per series.

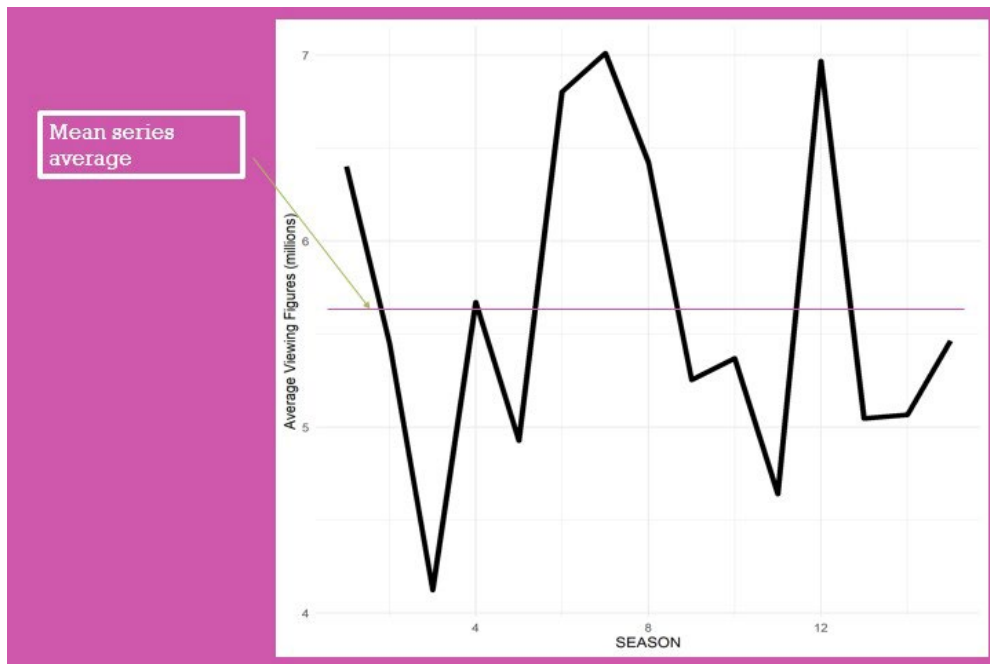


Figure 4: Average audiences per *Play for Today* series, 1970-84.

The line shows a complicated ebb and flow in the size of *Play for Today*'s audiences. Notably, the first series achieved average audiences nearly 1 million higher than the last series of Wednesday Plays in 1969-70 which represented a significant revival in popularity. However, following the popular success of Jeremy Sandford's landmark filmed *Play for Today Edna, the Inebriate Woman* (21 October 1971), which achieved an audience of 9.44 million, no *Play for Today* obtained anything like as many viewers for some time. The lowest series average was 4.12 million in 1972-73. While hardly poor on its own terms and exceeding the mean average audience achieved by a prestige BBC1 series such as *Churchill's People* (1974-75), it is low in comparison to *Play for Today*'s impressively high overall mean average.⁵

From January 1973, *Play for Today* audiences steadily increased: reflecting the increase in Rose's Pebble Mill-based productions. Colin Welland's *Kisses at Fifty* (22 January 1973), a majority video-studio play with filmed inserts, was the first to gain over seven million viewers since *Edna* and demonstrates how *Play for Today* expanded its audience via an accessible and heightened form of social realism. The

revival in popularity peaked when Play for Today obtained its highest ever series average of 7.01 million viewers in the seventh series (1976-77).⁶ Jack Rosenthal's *Spend, Spend, Spend* (22 March 1977) gained the largest ever *Play for Today* audience of 13.13 million according to the BBC Audience Research Department.⁷

There was a slight ratings decline in Play for Today's more politically challenging Matheson-Eyre-Trodd era, though it usually obtained audiences exceeding five million and enjoyed a notable final hurrah in popularity during the twelfth series (1981-82), which averaged 6.97 million viewers. However, significantly, audiences fell by 2 million during the thirteenth and fourteenth series 1982-1983. There was, however, something of a recovery in the final 1984 series, whose average of 5.46 million was only just below the strand's fourteen-year average and higher than the Wednesday Play's final 1969-70 run. Made on both film and video, *Z for Zachariah* (28 February 1984), *Under the Hammer* (27 March 1984), *Rainy Day Women* (10 April 1984) and the very last Play for Today *The Amazing Miss Stella Estelle* (28 August 1984) all gained between 6-9 million viewers.

Afterlife: Play for Today repeats and canon formation

Plays for Today have been repeated on British television 193 times, from *Robin Redbreast* (BBC1, 25 February 1971) to *Just A Boys' Game* (BBC Scotland, 25 June 2021): an average of just under four repeats a year.⁸ The line plot in Figure 5 indicates the number of Play for Today repeats per year from 1971 to 2021. These include repeats of all 294 Plays for Today as defined by my criteria but exclude the eleven plays repeated under the Play for Today banner in March to July 1971: nine Wednesday Plays, plus Obi Egbuna's *Wind Versus Polygamy* (originally shown via BBC2's Theatre 625, 15 July 1968 and also repeated as a Wednesday Play, 27 May 1970) and Barry Bermange's *Scenes from Family Life* (originally shown as one of BBC2's six Plays of Today, 25 September 1969).

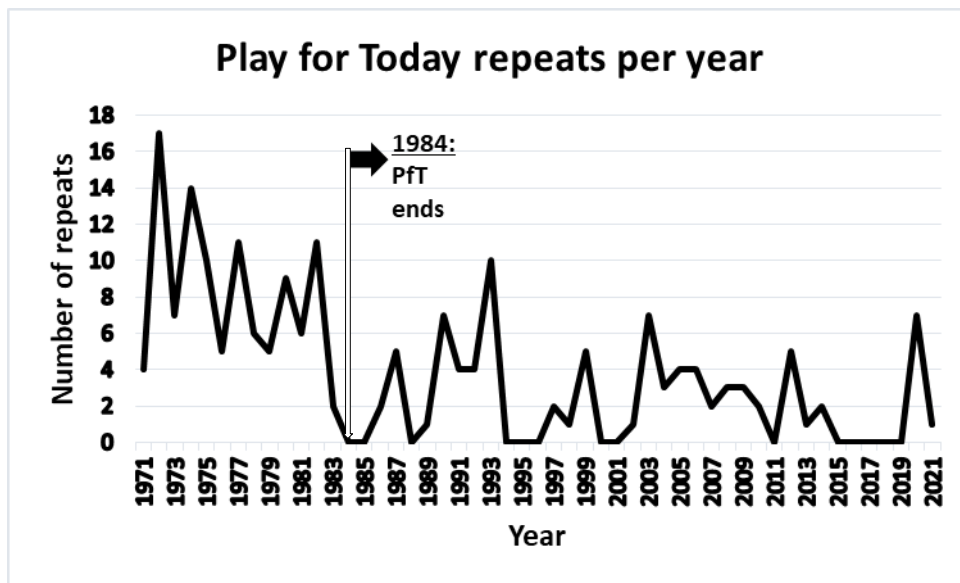


Figure 5: Number of Play for Today repeats per year.

Figure 5 shows a healthy picture throughout the 1970s, with at least five Play for Today repeats a year, often in the strand’s usual time slot in summer months. The highest number was seventeen in 1972 and an increase was registered during BBC Television’s fortieth anniversary in 1976. However, after 1982, the customary summer repeats used between series were largely discontinued. Following a healthy 11 repeats in 1982 – including a Mike Leigh season in September – there were no repeats *at all* from June 1983 to November 1986. Alongside Channel Four’s emergence, this surely contributed to Play for Today’s waning profile in its final phase.

There was a significant televisual revival of Play for Today in summer 1990 due to Channel Four’s repeat season *Film 4 Today*, commemorating David Rose’s career; this was followed by several similar retrospectives. In 1993, ten repeats were screened on BBC2, as part of seasons celebrating producer-director Richard Eyre and ‘classic BBC plays from the 60s and 70s’, plus Mike Leigh’s *Nuts in May* (13 January 1976) repeated on 27 December as part of comedians Vic Reeves and Bob Mortimer’s curated evening of viewing, *At Home With Vic and Bob*. Later, the

launch of BBC Four in 2002 had some effect, with Play for Today initially figuring among a rich offering of archival drama repeats; though this declined in the 2010s. The fiftieth anniversary year, 2020, saw a welcome seven repeats, including six on BBC Four, equalling 2003 as the highest number since 1993.

In terms of *which* Plays for Today have been most revived, Figure 6 shows a ‘premier league’ table of Play for Today repeats. Seventeen have been repeated three or more times.

#	PLAY FOR TODAY with series & episode number beforehand (Aesthetic key: V = all-video, Vf = mainly video, with filmed inserts, F = all-film)	Year of original tx	No. of repeats
1	08.03: <i>Abigail's Party</i> V	1977	11
2	07.01: <i>Bar Mitzvah Boy</i> F	1976	9
3	06.12: <i>Nuts in May</i> F	1976	8
4	06.10: <i>Rumpole of the Bailey</i> Vf	1975	5
5	09.14: <i>Blue Remembered Hills</i> F	1979	5
6	10.05: <i>Just A Boys' Game</i> F	1979	5
7	03.20: <i>Hard Labour</i> F	1973	4
8	05.15: <i>Just Another Saturday</i> F	1975	4
9	07.12: <i>Spend, Spend, Spend</i> F	1977	4

10	08.01: <i>Stronger than the Sun</i> F	1977	4
11	02.02: <i>Edna, The Inebriate Woman</i> F	1971	3
12	02.11: <i>Stocker's Copper</i> F	1972	3
13	02.17: <i>The Fishing Party</i> F	1972	3
14	04.12: <i>Joe's Ark</i> Vf	1974	3
15	08.14: <i>The Spongers</i> F	1978	3
16	11.07: <i>The Flipside of Dominick Hide</i> Vf	1980	3
17	12.16: <i>Too Late To Talk To Billy</i> Vf	1982	3

Figure 6: The most-repeated Plays for Today. Those with the same number are listed chronologically from earliest first.

A further 22 Plays for Today have been repeated twice. As with the top seventeen, there is a general trend for those in the strand's first half – the first to seventh series (1970-77) – to have been repeated more often.

Figure 6 also reveals the dominance of all-filmed Plays for Today amongst repeats, amounting to 68.8 per-cent of those most repeated (Figure 6). Perhaps, unsurprisingly, the most-repeated is *Abigail's Party* (1 November 1977), the regular revivals of which have strengthened its position as the Play for Today most likely to be recalled by the British public. This theatre-derived video-studio play – the *only* studio-only play to have been repeated more than twice – has featured wearily often as the synecdoche of Play for Today: its image accompanying most press articles to mark the fiftieth anniversary. However, there is, to draw on Julian Petley's (1986) discussion of British cinema, a vast 'lost continent' of Plays for Today: 186 episodes have *never* been repeated. 108 have, though mostly during

the summers of 1971-82. Only 39 Plays for Today have been repeated twice or more: a figure increased by four by BBC Four's fiftieth anniversary repeat season.

Interestingly, Plays for Today by its more radical or eclectic producers have been frequently repeated: Tony Garnett (three repeats per Play for Today produced), Margaret Matheson (1.5), Richard Eyre (0.9), Kenith Trodd (0.6); Irene Shubik (0.81), Graeme McDonald (0.84) and David Rose (0.81). This contrasts especially with Pharic Maclaren's BBC Scotland-made Plays for Today (0.18) or the video-centric output of Innes Lloyd (0.35).

It is pertinent to consider whether initial viewing figures, the perceived quality of filmed productions or the kudos of particular writers caused certain Plays for Today to be revived more on television than others. There is a definite, if slight, correlation between viewing figures and repeats: original broadcasts of those Plays for Today in Figure 6 achieved a mean average of 7.06 million viewers. In terms of all 108 Plays for Today that have been repeated, the audiences for first broadcasts averaged 6.31 million whereas those never repeated averaged 5.23 million. This trend, however, hides many exceptions. Seven Plays for Today whose audiences exceeded 10 million have never been repeated, including *The Other Woman* (6 January 1976), *A Story to Frighten the Children* (3 February 1976), *Scully's New Year's Eve* (3 January 1978) and *A Cotswold Death* (12 January 1982). In addition, the BBC often chose to repeat perceived high-quality productions that had reached lower-than-average audiences on first broadcast, in some cases due to a late scheduling. *Speech Day* (26 March 1973), *Catchpenny Twist* (5 December 1977) *Destiny* (31 January 1978), *Comedians* (25 October 1979) and *A Walk in the Forest* (14 May 1980) all added significantly to their audience figures when repeated.

There is a marked linkage between a Play for Today's use of film and the likelihood of it being repeated: 56, or 51.9 per cent, of the 108 plays that were repeated are all-film, far exceeding the overall third of the strand which were film. Furthermore, 77.4 per-cent of Plays for Today never repeated are majority or

wholly video productions. The mean the average number of repeats for a filmed Play for Today is 1.14, whereas the figure is 0.41 for a videoed Play for Today. Such statistics highlight that it is plays shot on video that primarily make up the strand's lost continent. This privileging of all-filmed productions through repeats has occurred to a far greater degree since the strand ended. Of the 86 repeats since 1984, 36 per-cent have been primarily video productions compared with the 64 per-cent that were filmed. This may be compared with the period 1970-84 when 47 per-cent of repeats were videoed and 53 per-cent were filmed. Furthermore, 31 all-filmed Plays for Today have been released on DVD or BluRay – 31.6 per-cent of the total produced – whereas just 15 primarily videoed Plays for Today have been made available this way: a mere 7.7 per-cent. This imbalance has scarcely been rectified by the BFI's first three BluRay volumes: 13 of the 20 productions included are all-film.

There are also significant biases in terms of which Play for Today writers (or devisers) have had their plays repeated. Jack Rosenthal's Plays for Today have been repeated 13 times, Dennis Potter's 14; Mike Leigh leads with 24. Their dominance has expanded exponentially since 1984. However, while they are significant Play for Today figures, they have come unfairly to overshadow the work of many other distinguished writers. Colin Welland's five Plays for Today have only received a combined total of six repeats. *Your Man from Six Counties* (26 October 1976) has never been repeated, though it was included in the BFI's first Play for Today BluRay release in November 2020. Arthur Hopcraft's two Plays for Today have only received two repeats, with *Wednesday Love* (8 May 1975) never having been rescreened. Julia Jones's four Plays for Today have received a mere three repeats and *none* of these have been in the last 45 years. There have been no repeats *at all* of the Plays for Today by many of its 200 or so writers, including Caryl Churchill, Alma Cullen, Marcella Evaristi, Stephen Fagan, Ron Hutchinson, Bernard Kops, David Leland and Peter Prince. As such, the combination of repeats and commercial releases has helped to construct a 'canon' that is formed,

disproportionately, of filmed Plays for Today made by relatively few critically-acclaimed figures.

Conclusions

Data of Play for Today's viewing figures reveals the strand's cultural reach and centrality over fourteen years: its mean average audience was an impressive 5.63 million viewers. Higher audiences on first broadcast correlated to a greater likelihood of being repeated, though detailed analysis reveals that specific Plays for Today that originally gained low audiences did significantly better when repeated. Play for Today's large audiences, quantities of repeats and its status as a fixture in its 9:20-9:25 pm starting-time slot showed the strand was highly valued by the public and the BBC. Its standing and commitment to creative autonomy was demonstrated by its lack of a set end-time. However, the slight decline in viewing figures from 1982-84, and the striking fall in the number of Plays for Today repeated after 1982, shows that the strand had lost much of its former centrality within both public consciousness and the BBC's scheduling. The data also reveals how Play for Today has been associated disproportionately with the use of film as a result of repeats and distribution through other media. The 2020 *Drama out of a Crisis* documentary partly sought to rectify this by featuring twelve, out of 28 Play for Today clips, shot on videotape. However, the data analysed in this appendix suggests the existence of a canon consisting mainly of all-filmed Plays for Today by Mike Leigh, Dennis Potter and Jack Rosenthal who have become increasingly identified with the strand since 1984.

Acknowledgements

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Notes

1. Richard Eyre, interviewed by author, 16 November 2020.
2. Jenny Brewer, interviewed by author, 7 July 2021.
3. This was one of five Plays for Today in the third Matheson-Eyre-Trodd era to be shown at 10pm or later. These were, in ascending order of lateness: *Comedians* (1979), *Psy-Warriors* (1981), *The Legion Hall Bombing* (1978), *Campion's Interview* (1977) and *A Walk in the Forest* (1980). Due to scheduling changes to accommodate *Election '74 Question Time* programmes, both *Joe's Ark* (14 February 1974) and *Hot Fat* (21 February 1974) started at 10:45pm and 10:40pm respectively.
4. Both *O Fat White Woman* (4 November 1971) and *Scully's New Year's Eve* (3 January 1978) are included as originals. William Trevor's associated short story was not published until 1972; Alan Bleasdale's Scully character had appeared on radio and in print but not, it appears, in this particular story.
5. *Churchill's People* was, initially, shown on BBC1 in the same post-news time slot of 9:25pm on Mondays that Play for Today had occupied in 1972-73. However, after a disappointing start, it was moved to time slots of 10:15pm or later, where it did reasonably well. Overall, *CP's* average audience was 2.51 million.

6. However, it is worth noting that audiences for The Wednesday Play during its second to fifth runs from 1965-69 exceeded this figure. The second series (1965-66) obtained a mean average of 8.16 million viewers.
7. According to ITV's Joint Industry Committee for Television Audience Research (JICTAR) data, Robert Holman's *Chance of a Lifetime* (3 January 1980) achieved *Play for Today's* record audience of 14.5 million (Gambaccini and Taylor 1993: 355). According to BBC data, however, Holman's play had 12.9 million viewers. While JICTAR employed a mixed method of meters, interviews and diaries, the use of meters tended to inflate audience numbers compared with BBC Audience Research Department figures, which measured attentive viewing across a whole programme.
8. *Robin Redbreast* was repeated just 77 days after its first broadcast due to its broadcast being cut short due to an electricians' strike.

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