

# The Conditions For Artists' Moving Image Production In London Today

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*Kate Parker, July 2016*

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A report on artists' moving image production by Dan Ward.*

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I have been working as a producer for artists' moving image since 2008 with City Projects, a London based non-profit organisation, and as an independent producer. These notes come from the experience of making a range of works with various methods of production, from ad hoc filming days with a crew of two, to three week 'film shoots' with a crew of 45 and budgets from £10,000 to £250,000, as well as conversations with many artists<sup>1</sup>. This is not an argument for or against the films I have 'produced' but is based on observations made while working on those productions.

This text is focused on London, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the formation of London Film-Makers' Cooperative. It draws on my own experience of being based in London and my observations of many other artists struggling to make work in this city. Its themes could be expanded to encompass a wider context. It understands artists' moving image (AMI) as a political activity that critically examines cultural systems, objects, language and discourse, and which ultimately aims to challenge social inequality and systems of power within an advanced capitalist system. It refers to practices that draw from a history encompassing experimental film, video art, documentary, essay film, performance art, installation art and animation.

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<sup>1</sup> For a list of works see end of text.

Artists' moving image production today has problems at every level. The new generation struggle with access to their first opportunity, established artists struggle to obtain funding or a commission even after years of practice, and the few projects that are funded struggle to find methods of production appropriate to experimental practices. Do we need to find a way to produce works differently, so that properly oppositional and experimental practices can evolve, and so that the choice of which works are made, by whom and how, is not determined by curators, funding schemes, and production modes imported from the commercial film industry?

Whilst it is hard to imagine a functioning film collective in London today, such a thing might also be urgently needed. By contrast, the culture for the presentation of moving image is healthy, as LUX continues the work of London Video Arts and London Film-Makers Cooperative and allows for works to be received and thought about collectively. Is it possible to imagine what work would be made by working together, if the field was open to a more diverse range of voices that could experiment with ways of working? As artists increasingly have foisted upon them undesirable commercial filmmaking methods, what could a culture based on shared knowledge and experiment, that is flexible enough to respond to its environment, produce? Whilst the London Film-Makers' Cooperative may have been spurred into existence by the need to share equipment, what has been lost by its demise? What of the conversations and the thinking that develop around the organisation and use of its cameras, lenses, lights and labs? Whilst we are no longer materially compelled to share equipment, should we allow the emotional and intellectual needs related to making work to be taken less seriously?

As the market increasingly determines the way that we think and act, art practice – where the success of a work relies exclusively on its ability to be critical – maintains a privileged position that is increasingly endangered. As the market promotes self-interest and digital technologies and living costs drive people into isolation, artists continue to produce work against increasingly difficult odds, managing their practices like small business owners in competition with each other for funds and commissions. Those responsible for commissioning work may still claim to support artistic production, and they may accept in principle that artistic production should be strongly independent and critical – that it should produce work that is critical of all of its own elements, the structures that allow it to emerge, its social and political context and the term art itself. The fact remains, however, that very few of them ask what kind of organisational structures can facilitate such practices. Whilst we do require more public funding for artists moving image, my aim is more to give an overview of the sector and to describe in detail the way that work is currently being made. By this means I want to show, firstly, just how many artists are excluded from taking part at all, and, secondly, how this structure might make it unlikely that the works made could be properly critical anyway.

There is often the opportunity at artists' talks and Q&As to discuss briefly how work was made and the ideas behind it. This is the case with the programmes of galleries, cinemas and festivals in London, including Whitechapel Gallery's Film Programme; the Artists' Film Club and Artists'

Film Biennial at the Institute of Contemporary Arts; the British Film Institute; Aesthetica Film Festival in York; Alchemy Film and Moving Image Festival in Hawick; International Film Festival Rotterdam; Oberhausen Film Festival and various sympathetic strands at other festivals and numerous biennials and exhibitions. This text aims to give a more comprehensive overview. I will look first at the conditions for production today, in order to outline the main sources of funding and commissioning, and then at production itself within four budget areas. I will pick out the voices that may be lost at each level as well as the barriers to experimentation in the production of the works that get made. The following aims to look at sectorial tendencies, and the accounts of particular institutions are intended to outline symptoms – no personal or institutional offense is intended. I acknowledge that no particular set of conditions or production methods leads necessarily to a good or bad work, but hope that these reflections are helpful all the same.

## Funding

An individual artist can apply for funding from Arts Council England or via the limited number of open call commission schemes. They might also be commissioned by a gallery or be awarded a residency that has a budget for production. A residency can provide a good opportunity if the host can provide in-kind (space/administrative) resources. The only commissioning for television in the United Kingdom for experimental work is Channel 4's 'Random Acts', which currently produces a series of three minute films, sometimes by open call, with a budget of £5,000. These opportunities are sparse and usually given to mid-career artists.

The main sources of funding and commissioning schemes for artists moving image are:

### Arts Council England (ACE)

ACE provides the only widely available public funding to individual artists based in England and awards up to £30,000 per project. The funding has the criteria that 10% comes from other sources (including in-kind). The funding also requires that a plan for public engagement is in place at the point of a production application, which more seriously limits the success of applications from artists that have yet to start exhibiting work.

### Film London Artists' Moving Image Network (FLAMIN)

FLAMIN Productions, funded by ACE, has run an annual open submission scheme for London-based artist filmmakers since 2009. It currently commissions three single screen films per year, providing production support and £30,000 of funding for each film (which can form part of a larger budget with additional partners brought in as long as FLAMIN are the largest contributor). It commissions projects that are 'ambitious' in premise from artists with an established practice. They have produced 19 films including Ben Rivers (*Two Years at Sea*, 86', 2011); Anja Kirscher and David Panos (*The Empty Plan*, 78', 2010); Rachel Reupke (*Wine and Spirits*, 20', 2013); Mark Leckey (*Dream English Kid 1964–1999AD*, 23', 2015).

Both ACE and FLAMIN fund 'artists' moving image' understood as artists that have a 'gallery profile'. Filmmakers who make experimental and non-commercial work for contexts other than the gallery, which may still draw on traditions of visual art and experimental filmmaking practices, are not eligible for these schemes.

### Film and Video Umbrella (FVU)

Film and Video Umbrella is a London-based charity that supports artists' moving image projects. They currently receive core funding from ACE and curate, produce and present artists' moving image and work in collaboration with galleries and cultural organisations across the UK. FVU aims to produce 5–6 projects per year, and has produced over 200 audio-visual projects including multi-screen installations and single-screen works,

many with accompanying publications. Some commissions are by open submission application, for example this year's open submission commission has a budget of £20,000.

### **City Projects (CP)**

City Projects is a non-profit organisation directed by myself (co-founded with Dan Kidner). It has commissioned and produced artists' projects since 2004, and has specialised in moving image since 2008. CP operates without core funding, working with partners on a project-by-project basis to make single channel works, which typically take a number of years to produce. CP does not limit the production to a timescale, budget or location (and attempts to bring in partners that will do the same) and has since 2008 produced 5 works with durations from 35 to 86 minutes, including three co-productions with FLAMIN where we were responsible for Production Management. Projects are selected by the director, under the guidance of a committee, there have been no open submission opportunities to date.

### **Feature Films**

Other public funding currently available for film and available to artists, is aimed at feature films. Three main funds with an open application process are (1) British Film Institute – feature film funding for directors who have a 'first feature behind them' or short film funding for directors who 'have yet to' direct a feature; (2) Creative England – regional funding across England, which is available to London-based projects working in a region – the 'iFeatures' scheme offers funding of £350,000 for 'low budget feature films' and is open to makers of 'art film & video' for artists who have had 'a minimum of one professional gallery or other public exhibition', and for films that represent/promote an English region. There is not yet evidence that these schemes would commission an artist who is not well known, or a project that was not fairly conventional. All of these schemes require detailed and lengthy proposals from filmmaking teams – director/producer/writer – which take weeks to prepare.

As artists' moving image is a critical and non-commercial form, and as 'feature film' is a commercial form, feature film production is not conceptually compatible with AMI. Though some artists may make a feature length film that might go on to achieve theatrical distribution, if at the point of proposal it aims for commercial distribution, it ceases to be an artists' project. I shall therefore leave these funding programmes aside.

### **Development Resources**

The current provision aimed specifically at developing AMI projects in the UK includes 'Experimenta Pitch', organised by LUX at London Film Festival in 2014 and 2015. This was a two-day event that brought together 10 ambitious projects (selected by application) where artists (some with producers alongside) were invited to discuss projects in development and perfect a 10 minute 'pitch'. It was hosted by two curator/producers with expertise in artists' moving image and film production from Art:Film

(International Film Festival Rotterdam). The projects were then pitched to a panel of producers and funders for feedback.

The European-wide project 'On and For Production', which ran 5 events in London, Brussels and Madrid from 2014 to 2016<sup>2</sup>, included 'a series of professional work sessions for artists to share film projects in development in order to gain conceptual and strategic feedback and to seek out prospective co-producers', and 'provide an occasion to bring together organisations, professionals and artists who have a consolidated expertise in artistic film production in order to share, discuss and disseminate different modes of working'. Both schemes bring people together for short periods and aim to help artists to develop proposals and to find co-production partners in order to pull together a reasonable pot of funding.

Film London's 'New Approaches' is a year-long development scheme, currently in its second year, aimed at 'filmmakers who have a background in contemporary art practice' wanting to develop 'feature-length productions intended for theatrical distribution'. As a new development scheme it is yet to test whether these projects, once developed, could find production funding in the region of £350,000, which is what I think would be required to realise them (if payments for artists and contributors were to be at least National Minimum Wage/London Living Wage). It could again be argued that, as a feature film scheme, it is outside of artists' moving image.

As it is so difficult to raise enough for filmmaking, these projects are entirely appropriate for that purpose, and provide important forums for the exchange of ideas and experiences. However, they cannot provide a lasting solution to the deficit in collective working and the need to gain practical experience of different types of production. There is also a tendency for these events to feel like an opportunity for artists to learn from the film industry (the industry they have already rejected!), rather than vice versa, with experts flown in to give their opinions or (hopefully) their money.

I acknowledge the importance of the Associates programme organised by LUX between 2007 and 2013 – LUX continue to initiate events and schemes aimed at production that are invaluable to the sector. Associates was a 12-month programme led by the late Ian White that brought together a group of 8 early career artists to provide a period of 'intensive development focused on critical discourse, extending to the practical and infrastructural issues that present challenges for artists working with the medium'. It did this by providing monthly critical seminars, individual mentoring from artists and curators and the production of a group project. Most of the artists that have taken part in this programme have continued to develop successful individual practices. It provides a hint of what might be possible.

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2 On and For Production is organised by Auguste Orts (Brussels), LUX (London) and Centro de Arte Dos de Mayo (Madrid) and supports film projects (individual artists with or without producers/curators).

## The Modes of Production

The four budget areas I have chosen are (1) Pre-Budget, as a way to look at works and people totally excluded from production; (2) Low Budget, for projects with funding from £500 to £30,000. This is the most widely populated category, representing artists with no or little production support, as well as projects commissioned by a gallery or institution. The upper funding limit represents the maximum that Arts Council England will currently give to an artists' project, which either an individual or an organisation can apply for (as long as they do not already receive core funding); and lastly (3) 'High' Budget, with funding from £30,000 to £100,000, representing a tiny proportion of work, and still a small budget for filmmaking. I will focus on the last area, because it provides enough resources to do something interesting, and is the most likely to adopt commercial filmmaking techniques that could hamper the work's critical potential. I will aim to show in the end that both the limited number of works made with this level of funding and the problems of production could begin to be tackled by working collectively. At every level, financial value could be exchanged for in-kind support.

### 1. Pre-Budget: Projects that don't happen

Currently many potential voices are excluded from degree courses. These are artists that may have political and critical minds but who are unable to take on the levels of debt required to study in England at present. Those that manage a Bachelor of Arts (three years of full time study) may then be unable to progress to Master of Arts or Master of Fine Arts (usually one year of full time study), which is the stage at which many first exhibitions take place. Many artists who do manage to attend a BA and MA/MFA will not find time to continue their practice after college outside of the full time work that is required to cover living costs in London.

### 2. Low Budget: £500 to £20,000

This is the budget level that an artist is likely to work with throughout their career; a small percentage will regularly receive more to produce a work. The budget would be used for some of: Location, camera, catering, transport, camera operator, crew, cast, post-production. They are likely to do their own production management, with minimal support from a gallery in the case of a gallery commission.

For either ACE funding or a first commission, the artist will need to have developed distribution contacts or gallery contacts during their time at college, but not necessarily with assistance from the course itself. Those not good at selling themselves to busy curators may be lost at this point. This in itself leads to a culture at art college and early years outside of college that is less than supportive. It is not conducive to building a confident practice that would enable an artist to take risks. Most artists will continue by organising their own exhibitions and events.

These budgets would allow only a nominal fee (£300 – £1,000 for 6 months' work), so an artist is also likely to need significant additional work.

To work in this bracket, they will need to make their work in their free time/holidays as if it were a hobby as well as carry out research, fundraise (an ACE application takes from 5 days to 3 weeks), and stay in touch with other work by attending screenings and events, generally keeping up their practice all the while.

Even with funding or a commission, when you consider the time it takes to research and produce a work, it is clear that an artist is never paid National Minimum Wage (£7.20 per hour), or the London Living Wage (£9.40 per hour). A fee should be allocated to the artist, but without adequate funding this is likely to be spent on the film towards the end of the project, at the point at which the money runs out. Art production is built on this premise. It means that most graduates do not manage to sustain a practice, regardless of their commitment and potential contribution.

Under these conditions, it is possible to produce good experimental work – but it demands that the artist has the energy to be productive in their free time, and depends on how they personally can cope with these, not insignificant, pressures and demands.

This Low Budget category (£500 – £30,000) already excludes everyone from the 1. Pre-Budget group, and further excludes all those unable to make art in their free time. You could argue that those who do manage to continue are of a certain personality type able to keep going against the odds, or they have external support.

This situation could tempt artists consciously or unconsciously towards making work similar to the work commissioned already, creating work that resembles (but might not be) art, that galleries feel safe to commission.

### **3. 'High' Budget: £30,000 - £100,000**

This is the area where I have most experience and is the level of funding that is closest to 'adequate' for making artists' moving image work. This is not to say (at all) that work cannot be or is not made for less money. Whilst today this seems like a healthy budget, in filmmaking terms it is not. In the 1980s Channel Four commissioned feature length films from artists for around £1 million; by comparison, in recent years FLAMIN have encouraged the same level of 'ambition' for projects with budgets of £35,000. I have excluded budgets above £100,000 because they are unlikely to be achieved today, and also so as create a space between artists' moving image and commercial film production, but these comments could apply equally to works over this limit.

Projects with this level of funding have the potential to do something quite interesting, but as the organisation of a work is complicated by the inclusion of more budget items, the obstacles to its experimental nature also increase. This level of funding currently excludes at least 95 percent of artists, as there are few works commissioned due to lack of funding. To realise this kind of budget could take a combination of ACE funding (to a maximum of £30,000), FLAMIN Productions funding (£30,000), contributions from galleries and museums in the UK and internationally, private funds and

contributions from trusts. To put this together usually requires many networking hours from the artist, and unpaid time to develop the work to proposal stage. Most artists will support such projects with other freelance work, mainly teaching.

Artists' Moving Image projects that are commissioned within this range offer the potential for an artist to make (practically speaking) an 'ambitious' new work. The lower end of this budget range will feel like a relatively decent budget, despite it being wholly inadequate for filmmaking, and the top end will feel like a great budget (today!), though it is still not really enough. However, I do not want to dwell here too much on the inadequate funding. For a project on this scale an artist would usually take a fee of £1,000 to £3,000, for a work that would take 12–24 months to produce, perhaps longer (to be adequately paid they should really take between £7,500 and £25,000 and work out what is possible with the rest). They might allocate this small fee to themselves, wanting to reserve the budget for items less flexible, or the fee might be a condition of the funding, or ring fenced by the gallery and paid directly to the artist. For example a FLAMIN Productions commission specifies a maximum artist's fee of £3,000, for a £30,000 work that will be realised over 12 months. They also specify that all contributors are paid National Minimum Wage (which is at odds with the artist's fee limit). The Arts Council England, who fund FLAMIN, has similarly contradictory guidance. Many large publicly funded galleries will pay around £1,000 to artists as a fee, with smaller ones paying less, if anything at all.

The largest artist's fee City Projects has paid was for its first film. This allowed for a £5,100 fee from a £23,000 budget, for a work which included at least 12 filming days, 16 research/planning days, 24 editing days and 2 performance days. This is equal to £94 per day. Since this early project we have worked on moving image works where the practical ambition of projects has increased, and we have adopted production skills from the film industry (without adopting the budgets). Since 2009 we have paid artists fees from £1,000 to £3,000, for works taking around 2 years to produce. For example one work, which was made for a budget of £55,000, paid an artist's fee of £3,000. This film was developed for (at least) 30 days over 12 months (research/ funding proposals), with one month full-time scriptwriting, two months full-time scheduling and pre-production (with a producer to organise crew/ cast/ design/ costume/ set/ locations/ scheduling), 5 days of cast rehearsal, 10 days filming, (over) 40 days of editing, and 5 days of financial administration. This is equal to an artist's fee of £20 per day. On this occasion the artist supported the production with freelance work, and could thus choose to prioritise crew, who were paid properly, over their own fees. Whilst the low level of fee was not anticipated, the reality shows a new approach is needed.

Generally speaking, in order to make a work an artist would probably need to reduce the hours they are working at their other job for the production period. If they have managed to increase their day rate since leaving education, this might be possible without external support. Assuming that this type of commission comes after a few years of practice, they may work as a lecturer on an art/filmmaking course, as many artists do. Those who are unable to take time off do what they can in the time that they have outside work, but will not have an equal opportunity to make the most of the rare commission opportunity. (Indeed, it is worth posing the question of how many artists with full time jobs even get to the point of a commission like this.) Low artist fees are likely to be paid if you attempt to squeeze a project out of a budget, which is the temptation when funding is so rare, or if artists and commissioners allow the practice

to continue, accepting low fees as a norm. The sustainable alternative is to earmark an adequate fee for artists, and to work strictly with the remaining production budget, adjusting the practical ambition of the work to this. This would mean working hard with the artist (as it is often the artist that decides to forgo a fee) to protect their pay and prevent it from being re-allocated into other production costs as the project progresses.

To apply for funding or an open call commission requires written statements, a budget and often a schedule. The funders/commissioners will often appear to want to imagine the work in advance, and whilst the artist can adapt the work and develop a dialogue about the work in the best cases, this expectation and the writing of a detailed proposal or script does effect the development of the work. Although by their very nature experimental works should be allowed to fail, many commissioners, though not all, will be too risk-averse to commission projects where they cannot already envisage a 'successful' outcome (an outcome similar in scale and form to what they anticipated at a project's outset). This type of 'success' produces something that resembles (but is not properly critical) art.

Once commissioned, the progress of a work with a larger budget will often be monitored to make sure that the work is on track for the exhibition or deadline. There is a danger here again that on encountering the work in progress, the commissioner might have in mind the work they originally anticipated, as well as the conditions of their own funding, the branding of their organisation, their sponsors and their own career. Any such outside interest will endanger the work, whose development as a critical object is at odds with these concerns. As budgets increase, there is an increased risk that stakeholders may want to comment on the work – on the 'script', approach, duration, music etc. – and the artist may be contractually bound to provide certain evidence of progress before the next tranche of funding is released.

Whilst an artist may well need help to produce the work, and feedback and interim deadlines can provide some help, when these elements are tied to the release of payments or contracts they also feel like systems of control. They do not necessarily encourage the artist to call for help if things are not on track. Being contractually bound to these kinds of conditions forces the work to operate within a commercial structure, with the project at the mercy of the nervous funder/commissioner. Projects that rely on commercial film producers and companies or feature film funds will experience this most directly. What actually would be valuable for an artist's project is help with organising things, which could mean weeks of administration support, and some independent feedback. There are a number of curators, committed to artists' projects, who produce their work, and with whom a valuable dialogue develops with an artist that positively shapes the work.

At this budget level an artist could make a more complicated work using some of the following: cast, costume, designed sets, hired equipment and lighting, crew, music, sound design or hired locations. The costs of hiring equipment, crew and cast allows for a condensed filming period from around 5 to 20 days for budgets between £30,000 and £100,000 respectively. Once the crew becomes larger than 5, expensive camera hires, crew fees, cast and location availability come into play, amongst other things, so a project

will need scheduling and organising with precise detail, as all elements are interdependent and you cannot allow any element to fail. For example, a small project with a budget of £50,000 might allow 6 x 10 hour days of filming, with a cast of five and a crew of five across a few locations, and could easily take two people four weeks of full-time work to organise. This is just the logistics, outside of reading, research, scriptwriting, costume and set design, and cast rehearsal.

At the lower end of this range (£30,000 – £50,000) projects would tend to be organised by the artists themselves under intense pressure to ‘produce’ (organise logistics) and ‘direct’ (form the conceptual content). Where possible, this could take place with the assistance of an inexperienced (more affordable) ‘production manager’, who would likely not be qualified to anticipate the scope of the proposal, and would be unable to guide the artist who has employed them to a sensible scale of production. Budgets are difficult to anticipate and rely on a clear proposal/script – something that is already at odds with an experimental practice which by definition does not know exactly what it is yet.

At the upper end of this range (£50,000 to £100,000) an artist may be able to work with an experienced Production Manager borrowed from the film industry, who will be able to organise a well-functioning ‘film shoot’, with the artist in the role of ‘director’. The Production Manager will default to the systems used in the film industry – pushing the production into a short intense filming period to make the most of the budget, bringing in specialist crew (inexperienced in artists’ moving image production), and managing/controlling the production in minute detail. To make this work the Production Manager will need to have some understanding of the needs/aims of the work, and the artist will need some understanding of commercial film production, so that they can meet in the middle. The work needs both of them in order to thrive.

The roles are inherently at odds practically (even within the film industry producer/director roles are at odds) and conceptually (as the artist also needs to produce their own work). Each comes from a specialist and complex field, so to achieve the level of understanding required will take negotiation and is potentially problematic. The cost of such expert help would usually mean that an inexperienced producer is engaged instead, which may make the negotiation of roles easier but risks the production itself spiralling out of control (though some novice PMs are excellent).

Underestimation of the scale of a production can create problems that acquire their own, independent momentum. It can lead to the exploitation of at least the artist, but probably also the production manager and others eager to take part (and willing to accept low fees), as well leading to over-pressured and possibly unsafe filming conditions. This is how in the film industry most short films and first feature films are made – with people paid ‘expenses only’ or at best the National Minimum Wage, or willing to accept waived or deferred payment in order to progress to an adequately funded film. This system excludes anyone who cannot afford to work for ‘expenses only’, and since in AMI there is no ‘next level’ (it is a sector of inadequately funded projects), this is not a sustainable way to work. Once the Production Manager has gained experience of production they are likely to need to look for

work with reasonable pay elsewhere, with the result that the knowledge that producers have of artists moving' image production is often not retained.

An artist directing a film without adequate support will be left to take the strain of any shortcomings and to direct the film in what could end up as extremely pressurized conditions. This is likely to lead to the artist exploiting themselves and others, thus creating conditions that are equally unlikely to produce the work they intend. So there is a choice between keeping productions at a limited scale, on the one hand, and finding other ways to produce work, on the other. Whilst I would not argue that a complicated or large production is necessary to make critical work, if there is something to be gained by the opportunity to experiment with cast, equipment, locations etc. – and at the same time to gain production skills and engage in critical discourse about the production of work – then working collectively could provide at least part of a solution. It could provide the education required, so that artists themselves can estimate what can be achieved with a certain budget, and can use the space of the project to work in an experimental way, rather than writing a script or proposal and then attempting to use conventional and commercial means to realize it.

In general artists currently have a choice of making modest work with budgets of up to £20,000, or importing help from the commercial filmmaking industry, forgetting that working as an artist and not in an 'industry' was a deliberate choice. The core of this argument is sadly nothing new and reminds us eerily of the conditions that led to the formation of London Filmmakers' Cooperative in the 1960s. But I hope to revive this argument and to contextualise it within a close examination of the current conditions for making work, so as to show that these conditions have not gone away, but have merely been made to appear healthy and progressive.

Art practices have since the 1960s become increasingly professionalized. To obtain their own funding, artists are required to have the skills of someone running a small business, marketing themselves to funders, commissioners and curators. Whilst I understand that public funds need to be accounted for, the conditions of funding at the levels required for filmmaking are at odds with artistic production. Whilst we might expect to jump through some hoops to make political or oppositional work, it should also be acknowledged that funds aimed at artistic production, large enough for filmmaking are in some cases practically inhospitable to critical work.

Filmmaking in general is a unique educational form based on collective working, and artists' moving image, which further insists on the production of critical objects, is in a privileged position to oppose the individualising nature of market capitalism along with its conventions and forms. Artists' moving image should be protected so that thinkers that would be useful in this arena are not excluded. Space must be kept open for the artist who completes a BA but then is consumed by a full-time job, and for the school leaver who is interested in art practice but is put off by the paucity of opportunities and opts for the safety of another career. Whilst artists' moving image practices require a certain amount of lone reflection, they also require that people think (critically) together. They necessitate collective work, not just to save money but also to create the correct conditions for thinking.

What might come of sharing knowledge and developing projects together? The gains could include: Learning to be confident with cameras, lighting, and technical equipment; discussing the merits and meaning of 'high' and 'low' production values; learning to act and to direct actors; examining the concept of 'performance'; developing knowledge of media law, and the political implications of the risks involved; understanding insurance and the responsibility of the safety of others. And whilst a degree course should approach these questions, why should we rely on formal education or stop thinking about these things together when a course ends?

As it stands, artists are encouraged to develop repeatable methods of production that they can manage mainly on their own, with a recognisable style that resembles contemporary art, that is packageable and saleable to curators, funders and exhibitors. It excludes those who cannot afford to study or maintain a practice, personalities not suited to networking, and experimental filmmakers who do not exhibit in galleries, and it does not encourage experimental practices to evolve. Artists today are expected to merely show gratitude for a commission, by accepting a low fee, and allow the rest of the economy to benefit from the effects of their work once it has been

made available for free in public galleries run by salaried staff.

If artists are making work in their free time anyway, then wouldn't it be better to adopt a system that is accessible to artists regardless of their economic situation? To develop a culture likely to lead to the production of critical works and new modes of production together, so that more ambitious works could be made with less funding? If making experimental work is taken seriously as political activism, and is already produced in the same (unpaid) manner, then why not organise the mode of production like effective political activists, with the democratic organisational systems of a trade union, so that it can complete more of its task? Whilst this will mean artists creating work in their leisure time, at least this fact will not be disguised. Organised democratically, the working process could provide respite from waged labour, more so than working at home, and at the same time provide space for the production of critical work.

The works I would like to see are unimaginable at present. What kinds of practices could emerge now, with a group of people working together, focused only on the work, each developing new skills and knowledge, and less reliant on major commissions and funding awards? If the art organisations Outpost in Norwich and Rhubaba in Edinburgh show that a critical art culture can be sustained by organising projects and exhibitions collectively, then why not expand this to film production in London? Or do these examples also expose that this is something that simply cannot happen in London today? And if so, what does this say about the future of this city?

This is not to say that artists should not continue to insist on or accept proper fees. Or that individual practices should not continue as well. It does not suggest that we shouldn't borrow what we want from commercial filmmaking practices or that we should not demand and demonstrate the need for better and increased funding. But it might be time to consider seriously forming new spaces, perhaps in new cities, where people can make films together. This is not to underestimate the difficulty of collective working. However, if we do accept the demise of collectives and only historicise their practices, we might be carelessly foreshortening the possibilities for new political and properly critical work.

## Kate Parker

Kate Parker has produced the following films for City Projects: Solidarity (Lucy Parker, 2019) (HD, 76') Tenant (Grace Schwindt, 2012) (HD, 75') (Commissioned with FLAMIN/ Collective); Fulll Firearms (Emily Wardill, 2012) (HD, 90') (Commissioned with FLAMIN/ Serpentine Gallery, MuKHA, If I Can't Dance, Badischer Kunstverein); The Empty Plan (Anja Kirschner and David Panos , 2010) (HD, 60') (Commissioned with FLAMIN/ Focal Point Gallery); Abyss (Knut Åsdam, 2010) (35mm, 45') (Commissioned with Film Huset); Wordland (Phil Coy, 2008).

As an independent producer she produced Piercing Brightness (Shezad Dawood, 2013) (HD, 75') (Commissioned by In Certain Places) and has worked as a Production Manager on: The City of Unbroken Windows (Hito Steyerl, 2018), Vivian's Garden (Rosalind Nashashibi, 2017) (16mm transferred to HD, 30'); Electrical Gaza (Rosalind Nashashibi, 2015) (16mm transferred to HD and 35mm, 17'); Eglantine (Margaret Salmon, 2015) (Super 16mm/ 35mm, Feature); From This World To That Which Is To Come (Nissa Nishakawa and Fritz Stolberg, 2014) (Commissioned by Jersey Arts Trust); One Mile (Mark Lewis, 2013) (HD, 10'); BANG! (Matthew Noel-Tod, 2012) (HD, 23') (Commissioned by Chisenhale Gallery/ Victoria Park); Lovely Young People (Beautiful Supple Bodies) (Rosalind Nashashibi, 2012) (16mm transferred to HD, 13') (Commissioned by Scottish Ballet/Glasgow International Festival of Visual Art); The Future's Getting Old Like the Rest of Us (Beatrice Gibson, 2010) (16mm, 45') (Commissioned by Serpentine Gallery).

City Projects was formed in 2003, and directed by Dan Kidner with producer Kate Parker until 2009. They went on to co-direct between 2009 and 2011 when Dan left the organisation. Kate continued as director until 2018 when she removed the post. City Projects is now run by its voluntary management committee Fani Arampatzidou, Laura Gannon, Kate Parker, and Louise Shelley. City Projects (London) Limited is a registered society under the Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014, registration No. 29667R.

## The Conditions For Artists' Moving Image Production In London Today

Written by Kate Parker, July 2016

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