

# **The Politics** **of Production:**

a report on the  
conditions for producing  
'artists' moving image'

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Commissioned by City Projects,  
written by Dan Ward

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## Foreword

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City Projects has specialised in commissioning and producing artists' moving image since 2008. We've made films of various scales and types including three long-form works. I emerged after producing 16 or so films (some independent of City Projects) feeling that the main commissioning opportunities were encouraging a scale and ambition not matched by adequate funding. At the same time, they demanded a production process approximating commercial film that was at odds with artistic production. It seemed that the films were realised despite the conditions, which at worst were unsafe (in terms of stress), and at best unlikely to produce good work/allow an experimental or artistic process.

At the same time there was a proliferation of events focused on the 'artist's feature film'. Panels of 'experts' (including commissioners who had barely been involved during production) addressed rooms full of artists, who in turn asked questions like 'but how do I get a producer?' or 'how do I raise that amount of money?'. Other events aimed at sharing knowledge between film and art sectors uniquely focused on artists learning from film (production techniques), and never the other way around. I had spent 5 or so years by this point producing works without taking an adequate fee. I could not see how more artist film producers would emerge or where the money would come from to make the work in a way that valued and allowed artistic processes unless there was a re-organisation of funding.

Keen to find a better way to work and to share some experiences, this research project started its life in 2015. City Projects applied to Arts Council England's Grants for The Arts for 'Research and Development' money, intending to produce three works which would "vary in terms of scale and approach [we would produce] them together [to allow] an investigation into modes of making moving image work". The plan was to keep a diary which would form the basis of a report to be shared on the LUX website "in order to contribute to the sustainability of the sector."<sup>1</sup> I started working with Lucy Parker, whose project on blacklisting in the construction industry was at an early stage of research. The second project was with Matthew Noel-Tod,

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1 From City Projects Arts Council England application form

who had written a feature film proposal for the ‘Experimenta Pitch’ event at London Film Festival, which we planned to begin by making a shorter work for around £30,000 (with an ACE grant); and with David Panos, who wanted to make a feature film that required at least £350,000, and would rely on accessing film funding (rather than visual arts funding).

By the end of 2015 Lucy Parker was continuing her research into blacklisted construction workers and had produced a few short films, with an additional £15,000 grant from ACE. David and I had spent a few months writing a proposal and budget for a feature film, and had applied unsuccessfully to Creative England’s iFeatures scheme, and Matthew Noel-Tod had been too busy teaching in Brighton, so the project had not progressed.

When I met Dan Ward in 2016 he had just returned from Berlin, where he had spent three years in artist and writer Hito Steyerl’s ‘Lensbased’ class at the Universität der Künste.<sup>2</sup> He was organising a series of talks discussing artists’ moving image production, and invited me to take part in an event. We ended up having a long email exchange: I was about to give up producing and he was wondering how to make work. It encouraged me to write a text about the current conditions for production, which is published on City Projects website,<sup>3</sup> and from there we re-thought how the research into this area could be steered. We wanted to speak to more artists and see what experiences were shared and to acknowledge and examine works made with smaller budgets that were produced by the artists themselves, as most are. Dan’s research and his text have gone far beyond what was initially expected. It moves from the detailed investigation of individual works and practices to look more broadly at the conditions and historical context for funding and production.

This text asks us not to accept the current conditions in which artists are encouraged to pit themselves against each other as they compete for limited commissions. It urges us to consider a structure that allows an experimental practice for projects of various scales; to value artists and filmmakers who are uniquely positioned to respond to, and engage with, our lives precisely because they are not part of a commercial industry; and to recognise their works for their cultural value. Lastly but vitally, it insists that this pool of practitioners should not be restricted to a privileged few who can afford to work for low fees. The price of that restriction is inertia at the level of the work itself.

Kate Parker, City Projects

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2 A description of the class can be found here: <http://lensbased.net/blog/index.php/about/> accessed 12 March 2019

3 Written in 2016. Edited and published in May 2019 on [www.cityprojects.org](http://www.cityprojects.org)

## Introduction

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Between struggling to pay rent (like most living in London) and managing to do just about anything else, agreeing to ‘report’ on the conditions for producing ‘artists’ moving image’ felt both personally vital to me, and a commitment I didn’t fully understand. I still don’t know what this term defines or excludes, nor did I grasp until relatively late the complex history of containment and instability it alludes to (there is no artists’ sculpture, or artists’ painting by comparison). However, researching the conditions under which this work is now made involved examining how this ‘definition’ is actually understood through a number of different economic, institutional and organisational structures. Put differently: tied to my own precarity and aversion to ‘professional practice’ was a concern that semantic definitions - no matter how meaningless – directly determine who gets to make such work, how, and to what end.

More importantly, over the last few years I’d discussed almost endlessly the various struggles faced by artists working with the ‘moving image’ (alongside similar problems in the ‘arts’ as a whole). Those just beginning struggle to access resources, negotiate low wages, high rent and debt. Others struggle to obtain support or a stable income even after years of practice (in part due to current Higher Education contracts). Collectives must essentially organise as a business to gain funding, and the few projects that acquire direct support are unable to implement process-led methods of production appropriate to their motivation. Specific to this field in comparison to others however, and why it requires particular support and attitudes, is the high cost of production and display it must negotiate. The cost of cameras, computers, projectors, lenses, and technicians/collaborators add up, and demand both a constant ‘re-skilling’ and ‘re-capitalisation’ (i.e. buying new equipment). Though moving image technologies continue to decrease in relative cost, this circumstance still inevitably leads to it being more technologically determined than most, and why it requires access to, and promotion through, specific networks of funding over which it has little input or control. Though some of these problems obviously point to wider

social, technological, and economic inequities that also manifest across cultural production, many are simply due to the role adopted by institutions that supposedly ‘represent’ this area of activity, and subsequently define the conditions in which such work is now made.

This project’s simple and perhaps naive goal, then, was to understand what varied conditions and factors existed and how they affect artists’ work, alongside the ‘sustainability’ of different types of practice. The majority of research about current conditions came via interviews with 22 artists and filmmakers, combined with specific details provided by each about money and support they have received for two to three projects (around 50 in total), and information from their ‘career’ as a whole e.g., sales of editions, grants, awards, training, education, networking, in-kind support etc. By conducting interviews with artists of different ages, experience, and approach, though unfortunately with only a handful of non-London-based artists (a problem in itself), I hoped to better understand how they made their first works, how they make a living, what support they require, what the process of being commissioned was, and how formal or informal support shapes their work. Initially we hoped these interviews could be made public; however, at the request of many, due to their own precarious working relationships, they were made anonymous and are instead referred to indirectly and sparsely quoted. Essentially, the majority of this text was generated through these conversations, expanding and linking points or information from other sources. Additional conversations also took place with around a dozen administrators previously working at the British Film Institute (BFI), London Film-Makers’ Co-op (LFMC), London Video Arts (LVA), and Arts Council England (ACE) amongst many others, and a review of various reports, histories, and accounts over the last twenty years.

Whilst not conclusive, and lacking the large number of participants required to produce ‘datasets’ such as those from the ‘Livelihoods of Visual Artists’<sup>4</sup> or the W.A.G.E. survey<sup>5</sup> (though substantiating their claims), our approach hoped to understand what challenges are faced in producing film and video work specifically, alongside how artist fees are paid (not just what they are paid), and complex questions of ‘support’.

The artists approached included those who have been practising for many years and were previously commissioned by the BFI, BBC, Channel 4, Film and Video Umbrella (FVU), Film London, and many other galleries and schemes funded by broadcasters and state bodies (as well as awarded prizes such as the Turner or Jarman); but also those just starting out who have to negotiate such structures for the first time, along with many at different stages in between. The selection of those interviewed attempted to cover various production modes or types, but did not stray into filmmakers working within the ‘independent’ film sector, and instead focused on those supported within the ill-defined existing models of the ‘visual arts’ or ‘artists’ moving image’ (I’d argue the majority of independent film and video production has migrated to the shelter of contemporary art anyway, institutionally and critically). Many

4 Livelihoods of Visual Artists Report is available online: <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/publication/livelihoods-visual-artists-report> accessed 1 January 2019

5 W.A.G.E. Survey 2010 is available online: <https://wageforwork.com/files/VuzAi3M7WGF-zCgy.pdf> accessed 15 April 2019

more terms can be used to indicate the varied economic and conceptual field circling the ‘moving image’, each term opening up more points of difference than shared ground. However, what became clear through this research are the shared problems that most face today, and through such problems, I’d argue, these varied terms could be tentatively joined together as both a broad definition (i.e. ‘artists’ moving image’ or a variation), and a renewed critical project.

The following text therefore is both a response to, and accumulation of, discussions and information from those interviewed. This is not an historical account, but concerns current institutional formations, funding, and support systems, with a glance at how things have been organised in the past. For an overview of institutional support in the UK, see material<sup>6</sup> archived at the British Film and Video Study Collection, or the Film and Video Distribution Database.<sup>7</sup> While some time is devoted to revealing key events and shifts of policy or organisation, this is not in the hope of helping artists to perform better within them, or to promote ‘transparency’ (as most problems are visible), but to understand decision-making processes generally and therefore what is actively endorsed (and repressed) through such systems. Furthermore, though the focus is on those working within the unclear boundaries of the ‘artists’ moving image’, most of what is discussed will be recognisable within cultural institutions generally and require solutions beyond specific disciplines (both short and long term).

Not everything has been covered here, nor can the undeclared and constantly fluctuating network of relations that make up cultural institutions ever be completely itemised. This text, however, masquerading as a ‘report’, tries to clarify recurring issues and their underpinning ideologies, not as conclusive or fully explanatory, but as a partial (and inevitably subjective) beginning to reopening dialogues. In short, I simply wished to interrogate how institutions and artworks organise themselves, and question how such thinking stands-up when cross-examined by need.

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6 Institutional Support for Artists’ Film and Video in England 1966 - 2003 is available online: <http://www.studycollection.co.uk/maziere/paper.html> accessed 12 May 2018

7 A comprehensive list of events between 1966 and 2000 can be found here: [http://fv-distribution-database.ac.uk/findev.html?\\_search=Search](http://fv-distribution-database.ac.uk/findev.html?_search=Search) accessed 16 April

## Professionalisation, Commercialisation, or Death! (a brief update to now)

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The many organisations, funding bodies, distributors, archives, workshops, and other informal groups that constitute experimental/avant-garde/alternative/community/collective/artists' film & video/artists' moving image and its numerous other extensions, underwent severe shock therapy at the beginning of the 21st century.<sup>8</sup> Against a backdrop of transformations in which culture became the 'creative industries', artists became entrepreneurs, and the term 'public' ceased to mean simply government-funded and instead came to connote a mixture of 'agencies' and private finance, culture and economy were subjected to a kind of general merger.<sup>9</sup> A shift that at once rationalised the cuts of the previous twenty years, and instrumentalised any remaining institutions in the service of its interests. Within film and video specifically, a medium opposed but sensitive to commercial and state restructurings, the Arts Council's Film, Video and Broadcast department closed in 1997, the BFI Production Board closed in April 2000, the Lux Centre essentially went bust and had to be transformed into LUX<sup>10</sup> in 2003, and various 'community' or member-led groups were gradually defunded and made obsolete due to cheaper digital technologies. In the process, the last remnants of a network that negotiated cinema, television, and visual art that defined and redefined the above terms, ceased to exist. 'Artists' Film and Video' at the Arts Council moved to be within the broader visual arts department, and any specific production-related responsibilities at the BFI moved to the UK Film Council (UKFC) in 2001/02, then partially back again ten years later. As a result, both (though via different reasons and forms) absolved themselves of responsibility for many artists and projects working outside, at the margins of, or in opposition to, commercial operations.

During this period, and indicative of this new direction, 'screen industry' organisations within specific regions (e.g. Film London, Screen South, Screen Yorkshire etc.) were set up as engines for commercial development, with funds designated solely for prescribed formats and private partnerships (for better or worse). At the same time, however, artist-led and community film organisations, the latter often part of general community art spaces, were reorganised to exclude from participation in their governance those they were meant to benefit – i.e., were professionalised – or closed entirely after cuts to local councils and the reallocation of funding to new

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8 This historical starting point is used simply due to the many decisions made between 1997 and 2004 shaping current policies (or lack of) for this field of activity, and the last official review of the 'sector' as far as I know, taking place in 2003/04. Much of this decision-making is also outlined in the 'Film in England' report published in 2000, which can found here: <https://www.bfi.org.uk/sites/bfi.org.uk/files/downloads/uk-film-council-film-in-england.pdf> accessed 12 January 2019

9 'Art Capital', *Art Monthly* 213, February 1997, by Simon Ford and Anthony Davies is available online: <https://www.artmonthly.co.uk/magazine/site/article/art-capital-by-simon-ford-and-anthony-davies-february-1998> accessed 23 March 2019

10 The Lux Centre was a short lived organisation created by the merging of the LVA and LFMC in 1997. A detailed chapter is devoted to its development and collapse in Julia Knight and Peter Thomas's, 'Reaching Audiences: Distribution and Promotion of Alternative Moving Image' (London, Intellect Books, 2012)



‘centres of cultural excellence’. Judy Mazonowicz describes just one example of many when she writes in ‘The Herstory of WITCH’:<sup>11</sup> “Funding bodies chose to put their money into another non-unionised [video art agency] organisation called Moviola and created a very different building – FACT\_ (Foundation for Art and Creative Technology, in Liverpool)”. Of the effects of this retrenchment, she writes “Social networking sites and the ability to take moving pictures on our telephones may help us believe we get it out there, but [...] will never take the place of the work and organisation needed to raise the money to script, edit and distribute our own films saying what needs to be said over and over again it seems. Nor the feeling of satisfaction of completing a film or video from scratch and distributing it. Still only very few of us have the means of producing meaningful work.” Such restructurings were later described as necessary for ‘stability’ due to the likelihood of decreased public funding, a term often used to mean compliant with business practice and able to attract private income/investment, without any reflection

11 See Judy Mazonowicz’s ‘Herstory of WITCH’ in Nerve issue 19, Winter 2011, also available online: <http://www.catalystmedia.org.uk/archive/issues/nerve19/witch.php> accessed 14 April 2019

**WOMENS INDEPENDENT CINEMA HOUSE**



**WITCH IS?**

A group of women, who, along with a growing number of others, are challenging womens position as second-class citizenz in society. The way we have chosen to do this is through the use of film and video. The reason for this is the power that the MEDIA exerts, particularly television, in influencing and shaping our lives. By our use of film and video we are trying to create a more positive representation of women than the one that exists at present.



**WHAT WE DO!**

WITCH originally started as a screening resource: a group of women showing films by, or of special interest to women on Merseyside. WITCH has since blossomed into a more versatile organization; campaigning and running workshops in film, video, animation and photography. This enables us to challenge the traditional woman’s role in two ways: by putting women behind the camera, as well as in front, women gain access to skills that are traditionally the preserve of men. We also change the way women are portrayed by speaking for ourselves. WITCH also undertakes production work, and is willing to accept commissions that are complimentary to our aims of promoting a positive image of women.



**WHERE ARE WE?**

THE WOMENS INDEPENDENT CINEMA HOUSE IS AT  
90-92 WHITECHAPEL, LIVERPOOL L1 6EN.  
TEL: 051-709 3087

The Womens Independent Cinema House is a Co. Ltd. by guarantee. Registration number 1826536

on how such pressure transforms the operations of these organisations. Or, as it was put in the managerial language of Arts Council England – from a report published in 2011 – “Visual arts organisations [need] to consider and debate the impact of their discomfort with ‘business’ and the ‘economy’ upon their own sustainability”, and that “. . .the development of business skills should be a priority for organisations and funders.”<sup>12</sup>

Parallel to the forming of these regional bodies, the current form of the BFI, a ‘cultural’ institution that once consistently supported the work of numerous film groups and workshops (e.g., Cinema Action, Berwick Street Film Collective, Sankofa) as well as individual artists such as Lis Rhodes, Ngozi Onwurah, Yvonne Rainer and Derek Jarman, and that also helped to develop archive projects like the African Caribbean Unit, exemplifies a similar move towards ‘sustainable (business) practice’. Today, the BFI essentially acts as a state arm whose main focus is the capturing of inward investment and development of ‘feature’, ‘flagship’ commercial projects like ‘Get Santa’ (provided with £1,235,000 of production funds), or ‘Robot Overlords’ (£915,653).<sup>13</sup> As a simple case in point, the largest monetary support in the UK for production is the tax relief programme (certified by the BFI, mostly used by six US studios), which rewards work based on scale and spending.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, most of the projects given direct production support are predictably expected to fit within particular forms or approaches, and comply with many ‘industry’ standard practices that define aesthetic outcomes, not to mention the expectation of returns on investment (some are supported explicitly to achieve this). Whilst the industry may be booming,<sup>15</sup> the BFI’s reduced objectives – now amounting essentially to the expansion of an ‘industry’ – exclude as much as they ‘develop’.

This concurrent re-organisation of funding streams and powers across cinema and the visual arts (under a newly restructured Arts Council England in 2001/02), was taken in the hope of firmly placing responsibility for differing ‘screen’ activities in the hands of specific bodies (instead of spanning several unclearly). In practice this meant the end of schemes like the Black Arts Video Project and Disability Arts Video Project at ACE, as well as the end of many collective and artist projects supported at the BFI via the peer-led Production Board. Meanwhile, the allocation of money that used to be distributed by the Artists’ Film and Video committee at the Arts Council – money set aside for a variety of projects managed by its constituents – came under the responsibility of one of these regional bodies designed to attract and promote commercial activity (initially the London Film & Video Development Agency, then Film London). These, predictably, have slowly transferred the money that has come under their control into schemes aimed at ‘professional growth’, and have

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12 See ‘Business models in the visual arts’ available online here: <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20160204122016/http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/browse-advice-and-guidance/business-models-visual-arts> accessed 22 November 2018

13 Information on BFI funding can be found here: <https://www.bfi.org.uk/film-industry/funding-awards> accessed 22 November 2018

14 For a data’ focused article on ‘screen industry’ production, see Stephen Follows breakdown online here: <https://stephenfollows.com/big-changes-in-uk-film-production/> accessed 15 April 2019

15 See ‘New Report Shows UK Tax Reliefs Fuel Boom’ (9 October 2018) <https://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/news-bfi/announcements/new-report-shows-uk-tax-reliefs-help-fuel-boom-uk-screen> accessed 4 January 2019

**Curtis, David**

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**From:** Curtis, David  
**To:** Devey, Kate; Allthorpe-Guyton, Marjorie  
**Subject:** AFV funding  
**Date:** 27 May 1999 12:00  
**Priority:** High

The figures in the Council paper stunned me. I'm not sure whether to threaten to resign, or to refuse to go. Which would cause you greater grief?

AFV is delegating £300,000 - to whom?

I've recognised all along that awards to individual artists are something that in the new environment should be handled by the RABs. So delegation of the £100,000 which we currently give to individuals should, in theory, go.

BUT - London is where the majority of artists live. And until we have secured a production fund for London (and knowledgeable staff), even that £100,000 should stay with us. I have proposed ways in which London could be endowed with money, but I can only propose. It's up to ET/Council to make it happen. We seem to be facing delegation without obligation, which is irresponsible.

Disability Arts Video is also artist-led, and national in its scope. We currently franchise it to a company which happens to be W Midlands based. Does this area of work too, just vanish, as a national commitment - in the vague hope that it might be picked up by RABs individually, just if they happen to think of it? I'm happy for it to be delegated, but as real money, and on the basis of an RAB or Agency bidding to organise a national scheme.

This still leaves £149,000 of the £249,000 proposed for delegation which is completely unexplained. And why has our education fund of £20,000 gone too?

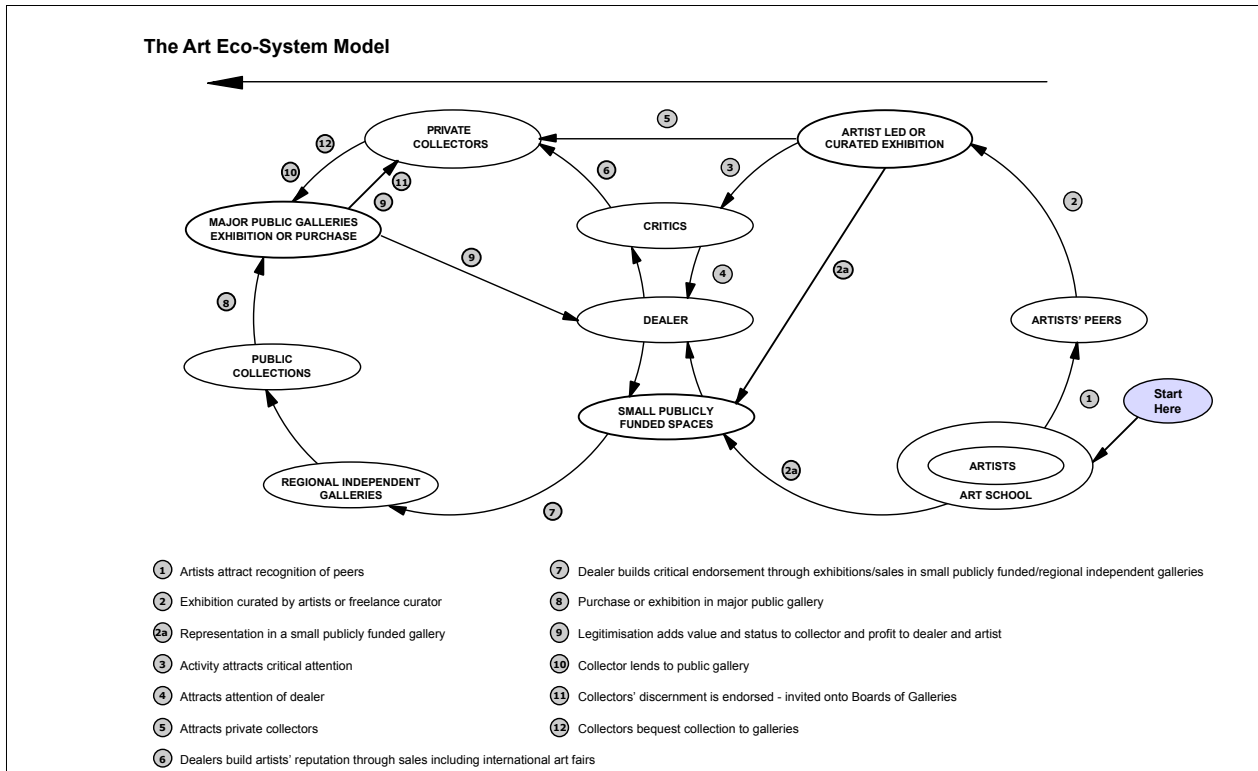
It is vital that there are substantial funds retained by Visual Arts for national touring and distribution; for education work; and sector development.

It's very hard not to see this simply as yet further erosion of ACE's commitment to AFV, following the losses we already suffered at the time of FVB's closure. This is happening, paradoxically, at a time when British f/v artists' work is pre-eminent internationally; a state not un-related to our work over the years. There are already grave fears being expressed by artists about their future support from ACE. If any of this leaks out, there'll be an explosion.

Can we meet to discuss this urgently please?

David

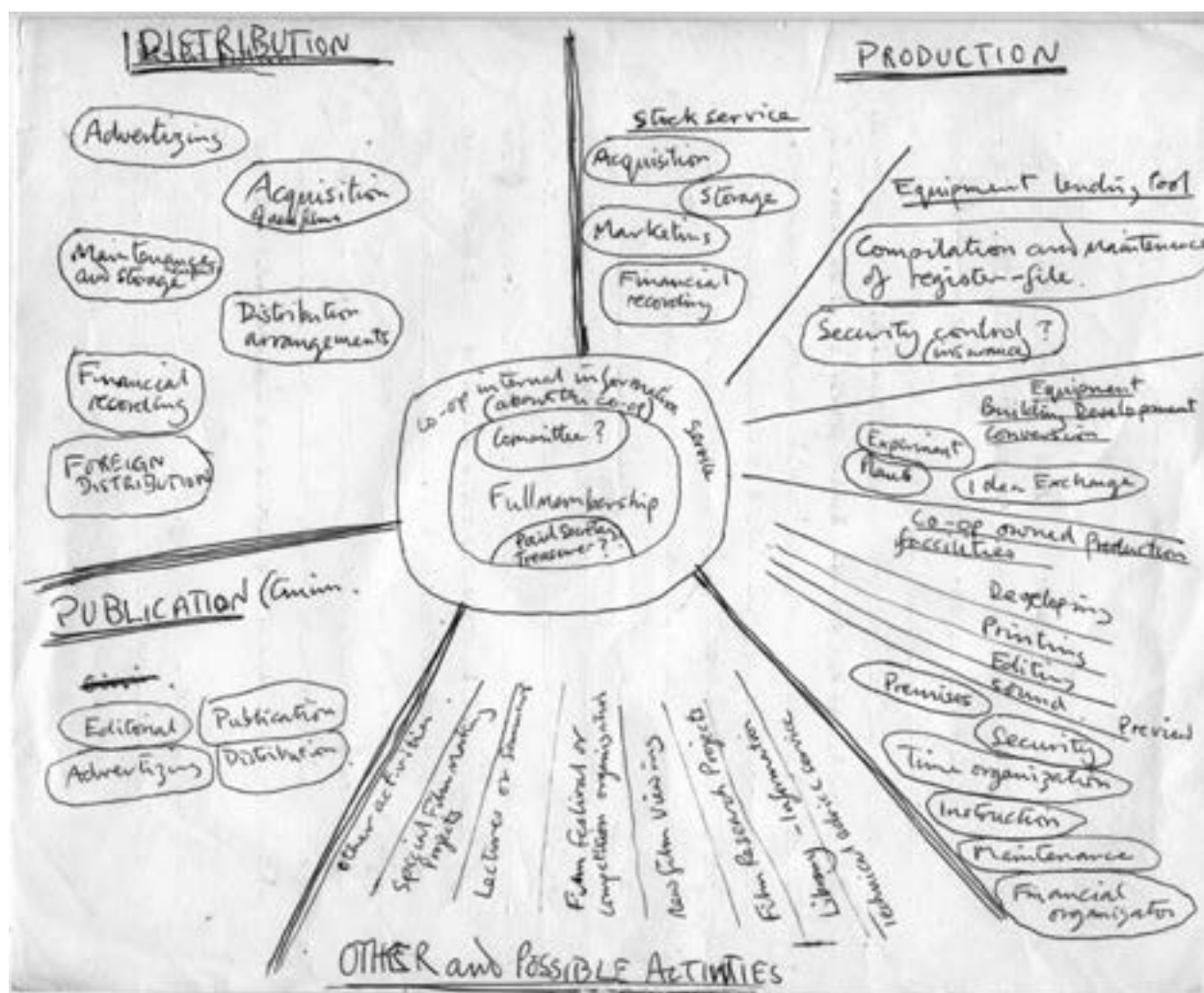
*Response To Regional delegation*



begun to borrow models from their commercial parent. This was, rightly or wrongly, in part due to 80% of applications being London-based, and also due to the perceived ‘access’ that would be provided by Film London, amongst many other expedient reasons. A by-product of which, I should add, was feminist film distributor Cinenova’s regular funding also ended in 2000, with its archive losing space at the BFI shortly after.

This reallocation meant that ‘artists’ moving image’ was now under the responsibility of public bodies with a general ‘commercial’ focus, via film organisations and visual art resources at ACE, the latter itself with a renewed focus on (and acceptance of) market forces. A re-orientation outlined most concisely in the Arts Council England publication ‘Taste Buds: How to Cultivate the Art Market’ by consultancy firm Morris Hargreaves McIntyre (an adviser on which was current Cabinet gallery co-director Andrew Wheatley). This report, published in 2004, offers a glimpse into the fundamental realignment towards the art market as the foundation for ACE’s activities and allocation of resources, as it explicitly began to encourage artists to act as entrepreneurs, reconceived the role of the public sector to work in line with the private rather than against or adjacent to it, and creating a general overlap of ‘public’ and private operations to define and critically/curatorially legitimate a field of activity. As the report confidently states, exemplifying the ‘Third Way’ politics of the time via a series of concluding objectives: “... [Arts Council England should provide training to artists] in marketing, market development, selling, web-site design and the way the art world works...”, outlining its long-criticised policy of supporting art fairs such as Frieze, and finally suggesting “...interest-free loans to encourage first time purchasers of

*‘The Art-Eco System Model’  
from ‘Taste Buds: How to  
Cultivate the Art Market’  
Courtesy of Arts Council  
England and Morris  
Hargreaves McIntyre*



contemporary art.”<sup>16</sup>

Repeating this same logic, the responsibility for the funding of individual projects was subsequently left solely to officers and closed panels – now with the equally corporate title of ‘Relationship Managers’ – deciding on artist applications via a ‘matrix’ of criteria such as audience figures, potential ‘wealth creation’, social outreach, in-kind support, project partners, etc. This process was brought into being gradually with the stated aim of ensuring that costs were tracked efficiently, effectively ending the façade of arms-length cultural policy. This ‘instrumentalised’ policy (as it is often referred to) with a focus on various ‘investment returns’ and an approximation of commercial activity, led to, for example, many organisations running into difficulty due to the eagerness of ‘stakeholders’ to undertake lottery-funded capital projects. A result of which, was the Arts Council creating a temporary ‘Recovery Programme’ to rescue ‘strategically important’ organisations who had run into such problems (the Lux Centre’s life/death played out this tendency in

*A drawing of potential activity for the London Filmmakers' Co-op, 1968*

*Courtesy of the British Film and Video Study Collection*

<sup>16</sup> See ‘Taste Buds: How to Cultivate the Art Market’ (October 2004) available online here: <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/tastebudssummary-php7xd-jde-e9KL-6-2500.pdf>

microcosm).<sup>17</sup> At ACE, funding for artists' moving image beyond the level of individual applications within visual art has since been devolved to various curators and institutions by whom 'value' could be decided – a response to the perceived elitism and lack of objectivity of the original artist-led committee, with the overt goal of democratising the distribution of funds. While in theory it may sound judicious to redistribute decision-making power, the reality of the UK and its current market-orientated 'public' institutions means that what artists get exhibited, distributed, supported and sold via galleries or commissioners (or added to the LUX collection for example – equally reliant on this network), is defined by the converging interests of markets (commercial film on one side, art markets on the other) and a handful of administrators, dealers, curators and directors. In sum, this new architecture only seems to stack hierarchies, not abolish them; or, to appropriate and rework a phrase of Ruth Wilson Gilmore's, such institutions may often support radical 'content', but they are fundamentally conservative in form.

This rehashing of events may read like a list of useless grievances, and omits many other closures (The Other Cinema for example, also closed in 2005). But the emergence of a highly competitive, individualised, and business-oriented structure of current funding and support today (both 'moving image' and elsewhere) could not otherwise begin to be explained. From top to bottom, i.e., from large organisational funding to small individual project grants, the process of securing support, whether it be money, training, exhibition 'opportunities', or equipment, is essentially defined by a series of procedures that are meant to generate 'innovation' and (commercialised) 'durability', and that require both artists and administrators to engage in efficient/useful (see bureaucratic) forms of work.

This cycle of restructuring and general shift of objectives towards commercial and 'Professional Practice' have continued apace in recent years, and the deepening of cuts has further constrained those whose work remains hostile (or at least different) to this new landscape. As reductions in funding limit the number of organisations able to support film and video specifically, promote its various strands, and create space for its idiosyncrasies (in line with developments in the arts as a whole),<sup>18</sup> the structure of such institutions comes increasingly to resemble, and to conform to the ideologies of, various market-led models that have been introduced elsewhere by the state over the last twenty years (from universities and schools to hospitals). This kind of prescriptive form manifests itself most commonly in image-making via the requirement to follow industry 'standard' processes such as scripts, shot lists, crew etc., but it also does so at an organisational level, via staff hierarchies, business plans, patron schemes, and matched income within the National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) route (as well as many other variations): processes that predictably disqualify various collective and experimental models of cultural production. It is no surprise, then, that the same ideology is

<sup>17</sup> See current LUX Director Benjamin Cook's account in *Moving Image Review & Art Journal (MIRA)*, vol. 6 no. 1 & 2 (London, Intellect Books, 2017), 'Lux et Umbra' pg. 218 - 225

<sup>18</sup> Arts Council England's budget has been cut 30% since 2010, however, lottery funding has increased 23% recently, with important consequences for its remit. See *The Art Newspaper's 'Funding the arts through the National Lottery is not a winning solution'* for a brief explanation, available online here: <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/comment/funding-the-arts-through-the-national-lottery-is-not-a-winning-solution> accessed 1 December 2018

reproduced (or at least cannot be sufficiently challenged) in the works that this system is designed to bring about.

Around the beginning of the period described, William Raban (artist and former London Film-Makers' Co-op member) wrote in *Filmwaves*, '... last year the Film, Video and Broadcast Department closed at the Arts Council and the BFI has just frozen its funding for production. The Till Report [Stewart Till was co-chairman of the Film Policy Review Group which was set up in 1997 to establish an action plan to establish a 'sustainable' film industry in the UK] shows that the grant-aided sector can expect nothing from this Labour government. What we need is a collective voice (like the Independent Filmmakers Association in the late 1970s) that can articulate an effective opposition to the free-market economics that are the root cause of the erosion in structural support for our kind of filmmaking.' The trouble with such a statement, however, and perhaps the reason no such collective voice has materialised, is the coordinates that defined the field of image-making have fundamentally been reordered (due to the changing nature of technology, property, distribution, education). As such, to request a cordoning off of a specific cultural activity from 'market forces', e.g., whatever 'our kind of filmmaking' means, ignores the broader political and economic systems it relied upon, the changed terms and oppositions of its existence today, and the networks that kept it alive at all. A 'secessionist' approach does not work. Whether such a coalition is even possible in a renewed form I'll come back to, as they say, in conclusion.

## Access to what?

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As much as this recent history outlines a transfer of power and money away from the artists and subjects directly involved, to a class of managers, companies, dealers, and administrators, collapse (of medium, technology, process, institution) is not always a bad thing. And a 'return' to a previous iteration of the organisations that folded would gloss over the (at times) bad politics involved and the hugely differing circumstances faced. For many, the broad shift to visual art has enabled a greater distribution of work (mostly due to inexpensive digital technology) as contemporary art spaces substituted for vanishing independent cinemas<sup>19</sup> – a development that subsequently led to the nascent entry of film and video into museum, state, and private collections. This essentially amounted to an institutionalisation for which many had been working toward, on the grounds that it would guarantee/protect the precarious existence and history of such work (though, as has been stressed to me, many histories are still precarious). However, conversely, I'd argue this reorientation has narrowed the definition of 'artists' moving image' to simply a component of visual art on one hand (along with its own dubious cycle of demands), and, on the other, deference to the structures of commercial film (e.g. narrative, method, distribution rights, executive demands, star actors, market share, etc.). The work of artists transitioning from the former to the latter provides a useful point of comparison, as such a transition requires the wholesale acceptance of aesthetic forms that define narrative cinema and its commodifiable structures (a speculation many artists confirmed), often with identifiable, stable 'meanings'. Artists who remain within the territory of visual art, meanwhile, may perhaps be supported in making more 'experimental', 'autonomous' work, but are forced to navigate the opaque gallery system with any potential mediating institutions having been dissolved. As Ian White acutely observed of the undeclared relationship between private gallery sales and public institutions (one that could be reworked for cinema as much as contemporary art) "... the economic history of works of art in public galleries is never made clear to their visitors; never will there be a room that we are told contains 'commercially successful work from the 1990s' even though this might be both exactly what we are seeing and its reason for being there."<sup>20</sup> This is not to say artists are unable to negotiate such demands or that 'good' work is not made; I am simply trying to make less ambiguous the demands of both visual art and commercial film, to point out their natural exclusions, and to show how such an arrangement limits the specificity, pluralism, and autonomy that many artists and administrators still hope for, in spite of various obstructions. The point is that current frameworks do not support the many unable or unwilling to enter into this new economic arrangement.

Before the latest period of transformation, however, it should be first repeated that the undermining of supposedly 'non-sustainable' organisations and modes of production has been going on for the last fifty years. And

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<sup>19</sup> This report was unable to examine a broader 'film industry' which it is often effected by, and adjacent to. For some information about key changes however, see 'Film Policy in the UK 2000 - 2010' available online here: <https://www.bfi.org.uk/sites/bfi.org.uk/files/downloads/film-policy-in-the-uk-2000-2010-an-overview-2015-07.pdf> accessed 14 February 2018

<sup>20</sup> Ian White, 'Here is Information. Mobilise', ed. Mike Sperlinger (London, LUX, 2016) pg. 58



over the last twenty or so, collectively organised projects, at least, were re-articulated in the shape of artist-run spaces with cheap equipment and unused property (of which most have by now either been professionalised or closed; Transmission Gallery still operating but is the latest to lose regular financial support).<sup>21</sup> This opposition is not new. However, unlike today, the articulation of need at broader institutional and state level, via peer-led committees, co-operatives, or council departments (those that essentially morphed into commercially focused public bodies as described), though not without flaws, exemplified mechanisms in which artists were able to at least have some influence on the terms of funding and support.<sup>22</sup> As such, these structures also enabled a broader understanding of current working practices, shifting aesthetic/political concerns, and new technological necessities, as well as creating opportunities to make demands for wider ‘membership’ in cultural production (not simply token ‘participation’, as it is framed at Open School East or similar gallery ‘educational’ programmes). With this in mind, the problems that appear could be defined more or less as an inability by artists to articulate or define their own working conditions, a refusal by various state bodies to support differing models of organising/production, and consequently, a pressure to fit within prescribed formats and networks, either via commercial organisations or publicly funded bodies imitating them (or as outlined, the two tendencies working in tandem). Before attempting to redress this imbalance, however, and to move from broader policy to specific implementation within this narrowed field (one most artists hope to enter into), how do these abstract principles and demands manifest in the infrastructures of ‘artistic’ production currently, as well as dictate real material questions like fees and access?

In comparison, previous film and video based organisations centred around the acquiring of expensive equipment (and liberation from aesthetic positions tied to their usual ‘commercial’ functions), operating at many different scales, for lack of a better phrase, as ‘assembly points’ in a discrete network. The opposite could be argued today, however: where a camera is built into your phone, editing software comes as standard, with no centralised facilities required. A similar reorganisation, but with different characteristics, could also be said of those working within ‘industrial’ models necessitating a larger set of collaborative relationships (e.g., crew, actors, producer), as technologies have reduced some of the required infrastructures for this scale of image production, and results can be achieved with relatively low costs. Yet the logic of ‘moving image’ operations generally, instead of reacting to this explosion of activity and technological change, continue (apparently can only continue) as a centralised set of commercial/‘professional’ processes, necessitating administration, ‘management’, training, and technical experience, and requiring a hierarchy of order and execution.

While there are countless minor issues, as well as temporary ‘open’ calls and schemes, and it would be impossible to investigate them all in their entirety, a few provide useful examples and point to specific problems

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21 See ‘Transmission’s Creative Scotland Funding Response Statement’ available online here: <https://mailchi.mp/5941e5be915a/transmissions-creative-scotland-funding-response-statement> accessed 26 March 2019

22 Still partially evident, ironically in Transmission’s case, at Creative Scotland via the ‘Artistic and Creative Review Framework’

commonly faced. It is also important to mention that very few ‘opportunities’ exist in general for artists’ moving image (the two largest within visual art are discussed below), which itself likely contributes to an increasingly homogenised field, as well as an outmoded architecture. Similarly, within ‘feature’ schemes like iFeatures at Creative England, or the Film Fund at the BFI (or regional ‘screen industries’), enormous amounts of administrative work are entailed, which essentially forecloses ‘experimentation’; and this foreclosure is itself legitimised as a process through which filmmakers prove an understanding of conventional ‘narrative’ production via detailed and extremely lengthy proposals from industry teams – director/producer/writer – which require months of unpaid work. As already described, these schemes are often used to represent and ‘promote’ a specific region tied to their funding (e.g., Film London, Screen Yorkshire, Northern Ireland Screen etc.) and predictably coerce filmmakers into various decision-making processes and conventions, amongst other largely administrative decisions. It is therefore a stretch to consider them as falling within an ‘artists’ moving image’ remit, which should hold opposition to such pressures as one of its central commitments.

However, increasingly many of these same processes are appearing as common practice elsewhere. Providing one example, Film and Video Umbrella (FVU) was set up by the Arts Council in 1984, initially began as a unit within the Arts Council to organise ‘touring programmes’. It has received £1,137,963 million (£379,321 per year) in the last three years from ACE – a funding stream that will continue until 2022 (54% of FVU’s overall turnover, which is estimated above £750k in total) – to commission five to six projects a year at an average of roughly £20,000. Whilst FVU has pivoted from its early focus to produce work and partner with regional galleries (amongst other activities), over-prescriptive commissioning frameworks (one artist for example was literally approached to make a film in/about a region in order to acquire funding), repeatedly employing industry technicians or producers that inevitably use ‘standard’ methods of production, and implementing short turnaround for work commissioned (obviously limiting certain practices), point to the privileging of a particular type of work on the basis of the ‘repeatable’ infrastructures put in place. The attempt to replicate ‘industry’ aesthetic standards (and therefore ideas) is itself made explicit by implementing such processes (another artist said there was a pressure to work with particular crew or producers), and provide no flexibility in the methodologies employed, while ‘open’ calls are also selected for support through inane outlines. Others follow suit, for example, a rare LUX production scheme, likely dictated by project partners the BBC, similarly calls for work that is ‘fresh’, ‘relatable’ and ‘innovative’. By accident or design, all these terms and structures affect the type of work made, and encourage an uncritical reproduction of the position of the artist, the artwork (its form) and the role the organisation plays. And perhaps due to either the transformed nature of image production from FVU’s inception or the broader structures it is aiming to fit within, perpetuates an essentially conservative idea of an ‘image-making’ process. Unlike work with many galleries that artists spoke of, where sometimes access to professional crew did allow aesthetic processes to be used that are often unattainable, due to FVU’s narrow inflexible models it

seems unable to create an ‘organic’ approach to this exchange and its eventual application. Furthermore, while boasting of achieving ‘technical’ expertise in spite of its costs (see FVU’s NPO application), there needs to be an acknowledgement that ‘industry skills and technology’ are not always better, and are in fact no longer ‘specialised’ – especially if reliance on such skills reorders the ideas and processes of the artists who make use of them, and implements rigid frameworks.

Encouraging artists into commercial film structures generally (and unsuccessfully, I’d argue), the same problems could be attributed to FLAMIN (Film London Artists’ Moving Image Network), which received £965,712 in total over the last three years in Arts Council funding (and will continue to receive the same yearly sum until 2022, amounting to £1,287,616 at £321,904 per year, with an overall turnover above £600k), yet only commissions two to three projects a year, with grants of £30,000 each (as well as administering the annual £10,000 Jarman Award). Within these production ‘awards’, most artists are given control over budgeting but fees are capped at £5,000 (a common practice), often for over a year’s worth of work, with several participants stating they gave up part of their fee in order to appropriately pay crew (who themselves often accept lower than standard rates to work with artists). Calling itself a network, though in reality it is anything but, FLAMIN has become notorious for imposing commercial commissioning rules and contracts (such as requiring a ‘script’ and recoupment of costs), providing little money but pressure to work to a particular scale and length (vaguely termed ‘long-form’), and general coercive working relationships under the logic of providing ‘expertise’ to supposedly inexpert artists. Established to reflect an ‘existing trend in current practice’, and to ‘enable artist film-makers access to more material resources and thus different aesthetic possibilities’, this ‘use of resources’ seems reckless at best and obstructive or coercive at worst. The procedures implemented seem to essentially attempt to create a training ground for artists in preparation for work within commercial infrastructures. A basic point articulated by artists and administrators during this project, is, what ‘trend’, and why ‘Film London’? As outlined earlier, the organisation is situated within a larger ‘public’ body with a commercial remit (Film London) – whose assets and ‘locations’ FLAMIN exaggerates its access to – and a transfer of funds that occurred nearly two decades ago but that apparently hasn’t been reconsidered since. FLAMIN’s structures clearly mirror film industry standards without reflection on what is made impossible via such structures – within the process of commissioning, for example, money is administered in scheduled ‘tranches’ arranged by the organisation on the condition that specific criteria are fulfilled (often provided via bullet point emails and ‘feedback sessions’), and failure to adhere to these results in money being withheld or delayed (a contractual obligation). However, this process fails even to achieve the vague aim of induction into standard ‘feature’ practices. One artist with experience working as technical crew within advertising found the imposed structure of payment to be often incongruous with the process of making, resulting in a huge amount of extra administrative work explaining decisions in granular detail. This was, they thought, demanding even by comparison with standard practice in the commercial field. The effect of such ‘feedback’, or the essentially disciplinary process it refers

to, evidently influences aesthetic decisions, as one commissioned artist simply stated ‘...everything I hate about that [film] was either suggested or forced by [FLAMIN].’ It should also be mentioned, that even with the levels of funding expended on the running of such an organisation, all artists used external producers, partner institutions, or curators for general support during the production (often paid even less than the commissioned artist).

Alongside these production ‘awards’, several ‘workshops’ and ‘training schemes’ are also organised under their responsibility, and could be read as encouraging artists to learn from ‘better’ commercial techniques, so as to ‘teach’ artists about the film industry (such as Film London’s New Approaches and the FLAMIN Fellowship), with seminars on selling distribution rights, or navigating international markets. Those who participated explained a general push toward particular models of production and in the direction of the industry – something which they had no interest in pursuing without first critiquing its assumptions. The aim of these schemes departs substantially from workshops or access to the ‘means of production’ historically, which tended to focus on a liberation from ‘dominant’ aesthetic operations, not a desire to patiently learn them.

Within visual art broadly, however (e.g., galleries, museums, commissioners without a ‘moving image’ focus), similar processes of ‘professional practice’ have increasingly appeared in the last two decades, as a number of schemes situated within galleries or various biennials enforce similar (but not as consistently failing) models of production. Today it is a given that artists will undertake weeks of unpaid administrative work in order to fill out grant applications and predict the outcomes of artistic labour (something that, it soon became obvious during the interviews for this project, was not easy to quantify), as is the expectation that they be endlessly flexible in their approach, ideas or working methods in order to gain access to institutional ‘opportunities’. If artists do not display such flexibility in pitching, reworking, or conforming themselves to a particular remit via a Projects Grant at the Arts Council or an ‘open’ call, another can be found. The ability even to apply for such ‘opportunities’ is itself an elaborate skill, and further acts to discriminate against those unable to negotiate such administrative obligations. It is depressing to look at previous applications to the Arts Council by artists who were only required to provide a single A4 page description of the intended project and some slides of previous work (with artists interviewed from this period also emphasising they were on the dole and squatting), in the light of today’s long list of outputs, partners, timelines, supporting statements, matched income, collaborator CVs, social media followers, bank accounts, and projected audience figures. Though some would argue that public funding should be accountable and ‘put to work’ in the name of efficient spending, and it is not unreasonable for other kinds of socially useful work to be undertaken by socially ‘useless’ artists, all of this should be understood in the context of a continuing erosion of the state’s support for libraries, community spaces, adult education, and other public goods (often housing ‘alternative’ forms of cultural production and distribution by accident). This erosion also adds to the homogenisation of who operates within the cultural field today, as many points of access to its resources outside of the art school system (at least in film and video) were previously located within regional councils and dispersed educational networks providing training or education, such as the Greater London Council.

Whilst the organisational and procedural circumstances now employed are

likely due to the same pressures that artists operate under when attempting to negotiate individually the bureaucracy of ‘public’ support, such demands have created an arrangement that is both in direct contradiction to ‘artists’ moving image’ and its broad definitions (opposition, difference, resistance, abandon), and the material needs of artists generally. Historically, many diverse organisational and production models were conceived in order to make far more equitable the distribution of resources, funding, and support without the need for constant individual administration, and though severely flawed, it is through those models (e.g. LFMC, LVA, Four Corners, Independent Filmmakers’ Association etc.) artists were able to define a more pluralistic account of artistic (and production) needs, alongside articulating its own forms of aesthetic/political criticism. The question that follows is, what shape should ‘commissioning’ or production mechanisms then take today, especially in a field that so quickly becomes outmoded, or otherwise subsumed under general commercial processes?

First, however, and unifying the logic of each scheme (at least in the visual arts) is the contentious question of fees. In recent years, this has come to stand in for a whole range of issues underpinned by the ‘industry standard of non-payment’, with work by W.A.G.E. and a recent ACE survey (in which moving image artists are located at the bottom of the pile) pointing to the lack of any compensation in exchange for artworks and commissions, the effect of which is further exclusions from those unable to work for expenses only. While such work is important in highlighting this discrepancy, the later recoupment of fees via the buying and selling of artworks, I’d argue, must be tied to this question more explicitly, as it further demonstrates the importance of the market as its fundamental underwriter both in an economic and critical logic.

Nearly all (selling) artists interviewed understood the issue of payment as being connected to the option of sales of commissioned work via a network of collectors who are themselves related to both public and private institutions (often as trustees, ‘supporter circles’, or else informally). Selling artists were also cognisant of the increase in value that a museum or gallery exhibition provides. Some ‘public’ organisations are more effective in developing relationships with collectors (and some behave more crassly in pursuing them); in any case, due to the necessity of arts organisations making up for lost funding, most are increasingly turning toward the sales of work commissioned as a means of funding their operations generally (see recent National Portfolio Organisation applications) and increasing the size of the fee available for artists. In turn, this tends to obscure the logic of ‘selection’ and curation from ‘open’ calls, as well as ‘artist fees’ as a simple transaction between artist and institution, as the sale price of an artwork fluctuates hugely independent of its cost of making (or an artist’s motivation for making it). For example, if the ACE recommended fee for an artist is £255 per day with ten-years-plus experience,<sup>23</sup> then, given that the amount of work involved in such

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23 See ‘Guidance on fees and day rates for visual artists 2018’ available online here: [https://static.a-n.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Guidance\\_on\\_fees\\_and\\_day\\_rates\\_for\\_visual\\_artists\\_2018.pdf](https://static.a-n.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Guidance_on_fees_and_day_rates_for_visual_artists_2018.pdf) accessed 1 December 2018

Please read the Public engagement section of our [how to Apply guidance](#) for information on how to complete this section.

**\* Who will engage with your project?**  
Think about the audiences or the people who will take part.  
You can use up to 1000 characters to answer this.

**\* How will people engage with your project and what experience do you want them to have?**  
Tell us about the ways audiences or people taking part will engage, and what they will get from your project.  
You can use up to 1000 characters to answer this.

**\* Tell us how you will make sure your project reaches people.**  
We want to know how you will make sure that the people you plan to engage will be able to experience your project. You can tell us about any planned marketing activities if this is relevant.  
You can use up to 1000 characters to answer this.

Save & Exit    Save    Save & Next    Check Spelling

Note: This formset contains mandatory fields for which no value has been saved.

commissions effectively amounts to a part-time job, lasting sometimes for over two years, a ‘recommended rate’ would be close to tens of thousands of pounds. Conversely, to calculate how much a £3,000 – £4,000 fee (an average of both galleries and commissioners from artists interviewed) works out at per day, then, assuming a similar amount of work, we arrive at an actual fee of between £30 – £40 per day. Whilst this is a crude estimate based on a small sample, the exclusion of sales from this equation ignores the broader dynamic between the institutional sites in which artworks are eventually monetised on the one hand, and those who are responsible for determining (and who have the power to determine) what will acquire value on the other. ‘Moving image’ artworks, like many ‘dematerialised’ art forms in general, are predictably unable to engender this form of exchange and essentially become caught in a cycle of endless deferral.

If the aim broadly is for financial independence in the making of work, and ignoring for a moment the complex implications of what work is and isn’t supported via such a network, then those who enter a gallery system in which editions of video are sold (usually three to five copies of one moving image work, with two ‘artist proofs’ unsold, for anywhere between £5,000 to £30,000 individually, and with the gallery/dealer taking a 50% cut) come much closer to ‘independence’ than those working within a ‘screening’ distribution process. Within the former system, selling a single work can generate as much as £30,000 to £100,000 (and those receiving awards or nominations increase their status as a ‘safe’ investment and thus resale value). In comparison, those without gallery representation can only rely upon a distribution fee of a few hundred pounds as recoupment per year via an institution such as LUX, as the collapse of the independent sector in both cinema and community cultural centres effected

## BURSARY APPLICATION

£1,250

BY

LIZ RHODES

I am applying for a bursary of £1250 to continue my work in film. Below I have given specific details of two films at present in progress. Although they outline the direction the work is taking at present it is likely that this direction will change; this is part of the nature of the work. I am therefore giving details of a 'started', rather than a finished point.

1. Lightmusic

Lightmusic is a film of 'indeterminate' form and duration; a series of distinct, but not unrelated, experiments in sound/image. The Arts Council bought a print of the film at the end of March this year. Since then I have continued to work on it, and show it in its developing stages. It is integral to the work that the film is not at any time 'complete' or 'finished': it involves continual research and remaking. I am asking for financial assistance to shoot new sequences.

New sequences proposed

1. Research into curved sounds/image.
2. Sequences of sound slipping in and out of phase with the image.
3. To shoot sections of interrelated, inter-phased sound/image fades.
4. To print new sections already shot.
5. Further research on coloured sound tracking. (I have already done short test sequences in blue and sepia.)
6. I would also like to collate the written/drawn scores of Lightmusic to be read in conjunction with the film.

2. Chamber Music

An installation requiring four projectors, four speakers and four film loops. The basic idea, as in Lightmusic, is that of images 'causing' sounds. The film loops, as it were, form the score, the projectors the instruments: the film is played as well as shown. Projectors register the changing interval between black and white on the optical sound track, which makes possible the correlation between what is seen and what is heard: in a sense we listen to what we see.

Four identical film loops are made from drawings of differently spaced

the reliance on, and transfer to, the visual art/private gallery system.

Through these interviews, however, it became clear that the market here is limited and unlikely to expand (scarcity is an important generator of value too), and the same dozen or so museums and state collections (such as Arts Council England) and the same few collectors (Julia Stoschek, Haro & Bilge Cumbusyan, and Isabelle & Jean-Conrad Lemaître, for example), came up again and again in relation to similar work types and artists. Trying to define the logic behind which artwork was and wasn't bought boils down to mere speculative trend forecasting about the tastes of the rich, rather than a useful comparative study. As one administrator put it, summing up this initial exploration, and the frustration in which it culminated: "... it turns out the gallery system didn't save everybody [that appeared to be the utopian view about ten to 15 years ago] and people see a historical approach or tradition that perhaps they want to work in but that is supported in only very limited ways and vulnerable to changing fashions." Its inadequacy is further underlined by the fact that artists entering into this economy also struggled to maintain their position. As one artist explained, it is perpetuated by '... a series of unacknowledged and unspoken agreements from galleries, dealers, museums, foundations, and the artist themselves which is fundamentally temporary'. The gradual reduction of galleries in London, due to a combination of property prices and art fairs draining resources,<sup>24</sup> also diminishes the ability of a diverse exhibition and distribution programme to survive in the long term: '... as new and 'mid-level' commercial galleries struggle to survive, the top end of the market only ever seems to be booming'. Attempts to enter into this arrangement so as to redirect its financing predictably culminated with the closure of smaller galleries amid skyrocketing property prices. It is therefore necessary for new frameworks to be identified if projects of this kind are to continue in London and elsewhere.

In short, then, we see that to the extent it is defined by the procedures of the commercial film industry and the machinations of the art market, this architecture tends to generate its own supply via 'public'-private partnerships; perpetuates relatively poor working conditions (e.g., wages, hours, flexibility/care); and disqualifies (or at least makes difficult to achieve) many diverse kinds of collective, experimental, political, and process-led work generally. If access to resources today is predicated on organising or working in line with prescribed organisational or cultural forms, either in the name of 'sustainable' practice due to permanent cuts, or on the terms of commercial activity (consultancy, enterprise, investment, collection, etc.), then the field as it now stands is effectively insulated against the political and aesthetic antagonisms that are still widely used to define and understand it. However, as others have called for, a simple 'withdrawal' from or refusal of such structures limits the ability to regain the 'means of production' (however clichéd and rearranged that term may now be) for the material benefit of producers (artists), and more speculatively, the terms of artistic or aesthetic practice it may allow. Also, and perhaps more crucially, it fails to recognise the way in which state organisations still offer some practical opportunities for transformation, and

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24 See The Art Newspaper's 'Fair's Fair? The Murky World of Stand Costs' available online here: <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/analysis/fair-s-fair-the-murky-world-of-stand-costs> accessed 21 February 2019



the inevitability that many projects will continue to rely upon them to exist in the long-term. The question faced, then, in a field that crossed established cultural boundaries (e.g., cinema, television, visual art, community film and video etc.) to create distinct political and aesthetic spaces, is what, if any, possibilities can be recuperated from the present situation? And what shape would these possibilities assume?

If genuinely different models are desired, a recognition of the differing but inter-connected problems faced by its many constituents must first take place. It is from this starting point that the pressures of current ‘support’ systems (i.e. the general necessity for various imposed activities) may either be challenged, or circumnavigated via new networks and alliances. In other words: define collective positions by artists and administrators within, against, or around what has just been described.

## I prefer a crumpled heap, history at my feet, not stretched above my head<sup>25</sup>

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At the outset of this project, a simple but defining motivation was the speculation (confirmed over and over by the artists interviewed) that most negotiations with cultural institutions (either at the level of application, production or exhibition) take several weeks of varied administrative work, which most artists are poorly trained to undertake, and which indirectly sets the parameters for what is eventually made. Confirmed also was the speculation that these administrative obligations exacerbate the lack of access to resources, as those able to cope with such demands usually come from already privileged backgrounds. If every artist applying for these small pots of money engaged in similar amounts of work, then an ‘opportunity’ that elicited several hundred applications would entail literally thousands of hours of accumulative work.<sup>26</sup> What could be achieved if such labour was put to other purposes, more closely aligned with the material need of those involved? And what might be accomplished if the ‘applicants’ were no longer required to compete with one another?

It is useful to note, before beginning to answer such questions, that the large majority of work cited within this history (as well as most work made by artists today) was not supported via individual schemes and production ‘awards’ but through workshops, art school or ‘open access’ facilities, informal collaborations, and essentially, in artists’ ‘free’ time. Historically, an after-effect of this was the development of an informal network centred around various production facilities, which played a significant role in establishing a mutually constructive set of alliances that articulated a general form of activity demanding support from state organisations (once called alternative, independent or ‘experimental’). Furthermore, the large individual productions cited at the beginning of this text, with funding from (say) the BFI Production Board, were rare manifestations of already existing aesthetic and political positions emanating from this network, and were, at least partly, under the supervision of the very community that later received said support. In recounting this history, my point is that any request for this or that change, or attempt to put forward ideas for the transformation of particular processes or institutional arrangements in various forms, is not only pointless in the absence of a broad coalition demanding it, but repeats the problems of the overly prescriptive structures currently in place. To be blunt: it is not a matter of mere technical urgency, and most of what can be changed can only be worked out in practice by those involved, not on the basis of an abstract understanding of their ‘positions’, but through the contact points of their work. Frameworks, networks, and modes of engagement should be established via collective action, initiated from an amalgamation of approaches already being drawn.

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<sup>25</sup> See Lis Rhodes ‘Whose History?’ a PDF version is available online here: <https://ia802709.us.archive.org/24/items/pdfy-317gl-cEKOkSdKY/Lis%20Rhodes.PDF> accessed 1 April 2019

<sup>26</sup> To illustrate this constant competition, the current success rate for an application under the Project Grants at Arts Council England is roughly 30%, and the new ‘Developing Your Creative Practice’ stream is 10%

As I see it, and beyond an obviously needed transformation appearing elsewhere (e.g. higher wages, lower rent, free education etc.), new plural models and ways of working must be developed which can function in both the short- and long-term. Taking cues from projects existing or being established, desirable developments can be situated along two general trajectories, on which some specific proposals can be hung (and which I've been strongly encouraged to suggest).

The first involves the obvious and long-needed confrontation with the logic of 'public' institutions, de-centring their market-focused orientation, and providing space for other forms of activity (along with the necessities/diktats that cultural institutions must follow).<sup>27</sup> To simply close one small 'scheme' or organisation so as to funnel the money elsewhere would only repeat the same problems of exclusion, commercial approximation, and poor pay described. New models of distributing funding are therefore also required (along with new flexible administrative procedures) along with any form of 'lobbying'. As outlined above, production/commissioning organisations that spend only a small fraction of their money on actual production support (and even smaller amounts on artist payment) seem to be returning to core competencies of 'management' and emphasising processes of 'best' practice. The majority of their capital however is spent on unrelated costs, such as, increasingly, the hiring of specialist staff to attract private patronage. Organisations given responsibility for 'artists' moving image' hold no centralised equipment, assets, or skills vital for the production of work, and turn to general industry technicians, rental contracts, and 'standards' to carry out these responsibilities. What these organisations are actually composed of, then, is simply an obstructive set of administrative procedures that control and organise artists' labour. From the artists interviewed, it is obvious that most know how they want to work, often have their own equipment, already work with their own crew, producers, curators, or galleries, and simply need the time, space, and money to either take time off, or pay others to do so.

Removing forms of inflexible protocol, commissioning agencies funded by ACE, for example, could then be restructured as artist- or filmmaker-led panels (or at least peer-led), placed within state bodies. Specific grants could be established, sensitive to various technical necessities, spread across various regions, and open to differing levels of funding based on the production models desired. This form of 'production' mechanism would likely generate more varied work and potentially at larger scales (if wanted), releasing capital bound up in administrative processes, and without unnecessary overheads, removing the (perceived) need for specific defining contexts and frameworks. Furthermore, such a strategic reorganisation of monetary distribution could have several useful after-effects, such as a consistent dialogue between artists and state bodies supporting them, and the legitimisation of differing working models (both artistically and collectively). The shift to regional panels could also help to address the geographical distribution of these resources, as something I've implied but not addressed, is the overtly London-focused nature of funding/support. This is something that

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<sup>27</sup> The obfuscating policy that exists today between organisations should also be questioned, exemplified by the internal draft document 'ACE-BFI Public Value Agreement', that can be found at the bottom of the page online here: <https://www.animationallianceuk.org/update-on-arts-council-englands-commitment-to-animation/> accessed 25 January 2019

has only worsened in recent years, and in the absence of specific efforts to change the structure of distribution, will likely continue to do so.

The second trajectory involves a pooling of labour, skills, and ‘representation’ via already existing networks and groups, that would be able to generate short term answers and temporary programmes along with developing concrete networks through which divergent needs can be articulated. Just as this text began by outlining the various corporate alliances between private wealth and ‘public’ institutions, a network opposing these alliances must emerge, within which practices already being developed by those operating within a field of activity can be more coherently articulated. Falling short of perfection does not mean abandoning improvement, and the creation of ‘action’ groups such as W.A.G.E., or the formalisation of peer sharing that already occurs informally, may be a simple but necessary starting point. Even for artistic labour that requires complex technical processes or equipment, little adequate provision can be found in existing schemes. Artists working in these areas would be better served by beginning to form specific representative bodies and ‘member’ organisations for their needs (such as independent ‘artists’ moving image’ associations, unions, or smaller artist-run production companies similar to Auguste Orts,<sup>28</sup> for example, or, alternatively, co-operatives like not/nowhere<sup>29</sup> that are specific to equipment and membership needs), within which it will be possible to address not only issues relating to a lack of fees and support in a ‘professional’ visual art context (e.g., crew open to experimentation, knowledgeable administrators, or equipment), but more ambitious topics like education and access (i.e. who is permitted to produce such work).

Such a DIY ethic can often quickly mimic values of entrepreneurship, individualism and (self-) exploitation. As one artist who works closely with various collaborators noted, “we don’t simply want to create a bespoke Task Rabbit...”. Yet projects of self-organisation still represent at least a chance at defining conditions that are desirable, circumventing the setting of terms by essentially antagonistic ‘external advisors’ and consultants, and is genuinely radical in relation to the cultural field’s constant individuation. ‘Alternative’ models are often described as being without definition or coherence, but they already exist informally, in the margins outside of what is currently designated ‘moving image’ or ‘artistic’ practice. In fact, I would argue that it is only through such works existing that ‘artists’ moving image’ continues to be a living culture at all. Together, they make up a system that simply needs greater development and encouragement. Such a plural focus also offers a way to begin to dismantle ideas of ‘professional’ practice and frameworks that exclude any but the most privileged, and it is also why I hesitate to reinforce ‘artistic’ and administrative divisions, as they only serve to reinforce such hierarchies (especially when the production of images today does not necessitate any extensive skill or training). Regardless, a gesture of collectivisation (at least

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28 Auguste Orts is a Brussels-based production and distribution platform founded by artists Herman Asselberghs, Sven Augustijnen, Manon de Boer and Anouk De Clercq

29 not/nowhere is a London-based artist workers’ cooperative that programmes workshops, screenings, exhibitions and other events

in representation) remains a step in the right direction, and acts in direct opposition to the highly individualised systems that dominate life, including but not exclusive to, art.

Money, process, control, access: these differing but equally constitutive parts are what have been discussed repeatedly during the writing of this text, and what I have tried to 'define' in the context of current organisational and economic logics of 'artists' moving image', in the hopes of beginning to dismantle them. A field that by virtue of its technological means is accessible to anyone with a camera and laptop, but is made up of exclusions in many more indirect forms. To me at least, this field is uniquely placed to allow a broader contribution to its own production/definition outside the rarefied boundaries of contemporary art and cinema (and their education systems), but first requires a renewed project of critique relating to its parameters of support, and a recognition that diverse practices negotiate connected obstacles. What I insist on consequently, perhaps to a fault, is the mutually constructive nature of work within experimental/political image-making, which, by its most basic and unifying definition, is opposed to free-market, conservative ideologies and 'commercial' structures (their forms, hierarchies, and aesthetic operations), and a commitment to the redistribution of 'power' to both producers and viewers alike. From community film and video to 'studio practice' through to collectively organised or 'industrial' 'narrative' projects, solidarity and a willingness to learn from diverse radical traditions is a necessity in order to do anything worthwhile at all. The aim is not to achieve greater harmony but to develop and elaborate different models of production (economically, aesthetically, structurally) devised by those working within them, and to recognise that success in one often equals gains in another. Not only should this asymmetrical community begin to question the terms and divisions that funding and support prescribes (and the division of labour within their administrative and 'creative' forms) – e.g., artist, non-artist, 'participant', filmmaker, administrator – but it should also question how these structures limit the extent to which a productive disobedience can occur. There has perhaps never been a greater necessity for new networks and organisational forms that can meet the desires of this constituency, and begin to build alliances through which connected demands can be realised.

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## **City Projects**

City Projects have commissioned and produced the following films: Solidarity (Lucy Parker, 2019, 76') Tenant (Grace Schwindt, 2012, 75') (Commissioned with FLAMIN/ Collective); Fulll Firearms (Emily Wardill, 2012, 90') (Commissioned with FLAMIN/ Serpentine Gallery, MuKHA, If I Can't Dance, Badischer Kunstverein); The Empty Plan (Anja Kirschner and David Panos, 2010, 60') (Commissioned with FLAMIN/ Focal Point Gallery, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart and Kunsthall Oslo); Abyss (Knut Åsdam, 2010, 45') (Commissioned with Film Huset); Wordland (Phil Coy, 2008, 43'). Kate Parker has also worked as an independent producer with Rosalind Nashashibi, Margaret Salmon, Shezad Dawood, Hito Steyerl, Matthew Noel-Tod, David Panos, Nissa Nishakawa & Fritz Stolberg, Mark Lewis and Beatrice Gibson.

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

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Dan Ward is an artist and writer living in London. He studied at the Universität der Künste, Berlin from 2013-16, and received a BA Fine Art from Chelsea College of Art, London in 2013. His work has been screened and exhibited at Rencontres Internationales Paris/Berlin, Haus de Kulturen de Welt, Berlin, La Gaité Lyrique, Paris, and Museum für Fotografie, Berlin. He is a regular contributor to Art Monthly, and received the Michael O'Pray Prize for Art Criticism in 2017.

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## **CITY PROJECTS**

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