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*SIF and the emergence of independent film and video in Sheffield*

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**SIF AND THE EMERGENCE OF INDEPENDENT FILM AND VIDEO  
IN SHEFFIELD**

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF  
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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the emergence and development of independent film and video culture in Sheffield using a case study of the Sheffield Independent Film group (SIF) as a lens through which to frame the moving image community of the period loosely defined, 1976-1985.

The study will ask: what were the enablers for SIF's establishment? Who were the primary figures and filmmaking groups at its centre, and what types of production were being made? How did SIF's strategy evolve during this period? What was the relationship between production in Sheffield and the wider British film and video of the time? What role did local and national government policy play in developing a moving image culture in the city? As the second half of the 1980s begin, what future did SIF and its members face?

Answers to these questions will enable new light to be shed on the relationship between regional film and video development policy and entrepreneurial activity in the cultural industries and, for the first time, unveil the neglected history of an independent moving image praxis in South Yorkshire.

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## **CANDIDATE'S STATEMENT**

This fundamental aim of this thesis is to investigate the emergence and development of independent film and video culture in Sheffield using a case study of the Sheffield Independent Film group (SIF) as a platform to examine the wider movement. It has used a collection of primary and secondary sources, including archival collections held at Sheffield Hallam University, Victoria and Albert Museum, and Sheffield City Archives; oral testimony, and an interdisciplinary approach to using both written sources and audio-visual works as research. The author wishes to thank first supervisor Niels Petersson, and co-supervisor Anthony Taylor, for their kind assistance and feedback. The author also wishes to extend acknowledgments toward the eight official interviewees invited to participate, and the countless others who shared in their recollections. Particular thanks go to Colin Pons, whose co-operation in accessioning the SIF archive into Sheffield Hallam University was invaluable to the research, and Paul Haywood who made available his personal archive of Psalter Lane student film and video to the good of this, and future, projects. It is to Paul who this work is dedicated, as he sadly passed away at the projects' conclusion in Spring 2017. It is hoped that the thesis which follows is the beginning of a new preservation initiative to help care for this historically overlooked period of film and video activity in Sheffield.

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

**ACGB** – Arts Council of Great Britain

**ACTT** –The Association of Cinematograph Television and Allied Technicians

**AIP** - Association of Independent Producers

**AVEC** – Audio Visual Enterprise Centre

**BFI** – British Film Institute

**C4** – Channel Four

**CIQ** – Cultural Industries Quarter

**DEED** – Department of Employment and Economic Development

**EEC** – European Economic Community

**ERDF** – European Regional Development Fund

**IFA** – Independent Filmmakers Association

**LFMC** – London Filmmaker’s Co-Op

**NFS** – National Film School

**RAA** – Regional Arts Association

**RFT** – Regional Film Theatre

**RTS** – Red Tape Studios

**SCC** – Sheffield City Council

**SFC** – Sheffield Film Co-op

**SIF** – Sheffield Independent Film

**SYCC** – South Yorkshire City Council

**YAA** – Yorkshire Arts Association

## INTRODUCTION

Sheffield Independent Film group (SIF) was established in 1976 by a group of practising film-makers, students and scholars to help emerging film and video makers and to facilitate moving image activity in the city. The core aims for the group were to provide:

- collectively owned equipment available for hire on a sliding scale of rates
- training in all aspects of film and video
- technical and administrative support
- screenings and discussions<sup>1</sup>

These primary objectives would evolve over time, but the abiding mission statement to 'enhance the quality of life for its members' though funding redistribution, training programmes and equipment provision remained the case until the liquidation of the organisation in 2013.<sup>2</sup> In the national context a long-running, non-profit film and video group such as SIF is rare, so it merits a rich analysis.<sup>3</sup> Notable alumni include Hollywood feature directors, award-winning

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<sup>1</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection, 'Notes on a Sheffield Independent Film Catalogue, 1984' (Anon. 1984).

<sup>2</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection, 'Forward to 2000', (Anon. 1994), p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> In the national history, the only similarly long-standing company of this kind is *Video Engineering and Training* (VET), London. Established in 1985 and still operating.

documentary, music video, animation and commercial makers, video artists, sound recordists, film festival producers, media lecturers, technicians and arts funders.<sup>4</sup>

The dissertation will locate SIF at the centre of the analysis. It will demonstrate that SIF played a central role in facilitating moving image activity in the region. It does not, however, claim to be an exhaustive history of the organisation during a phase marked by what one former SIF member called a transition from being a 'group of well-intentioned individuals to becoming a business'.<sup>5</sup> Nor, does it exclude the activity which occurred outside of the SIF base. Rather, it will use SIF as a metaphor for the wider cultural industries development in the city. Its evolution from a chaotic, 'touchy-feely'<sup>6</sup> co-operative to an organisation with over a hundred members, management structure, policy documentation, and an ongoing relationship with the City Council reads like an abridged history of cultural change in Sheffield during the 70s and 80s. As the SIF group and its aims and agenda developed over time, its membership changed in many ways, making for a necessary study. Where the broad narrative of regional film development across the country at this time shares many similar characteristics, I will argue that SIF and the Sheffield moving image community represent an unexplored area, worthy of new research.

The thesis will adopt approaches from both political economy and cultural studies. Methods to researching the cultural industries have been informed by a range of work which investigates cultural and economic policy as devised by national and

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<sup>4</sup> See David Slade, Dawn Shadforth, Peter Care, Sandra Hebron, Adrian Wooton, Peter Care, Mark Herbert, Eve Wood, Barry Ryan, George Shaw, Derek Hayes, Nick Park.

<sup>5</sup> S. Reynell. Sound engineer and record label owner, freelance. Conversation with author, 24 May 2016. Personal communication.

<sup>6</sup> C. Pons. Course Leader, MA Filmmaking, Sheffield Hallam University. Conversation with author, 29 July 2016. Personal communication.

local government and examines how these strategies impacted on regional cultural production.<sup>7</sup> The thesis will interpret this literature and apply it to the Sheffield perspective. Furthermore, the study will position the Sheffield movement in the context of what Raymond Williams first formulated as 'the structure of feeling', a concept to help frame the lived experience of the quality of life at a particular time and place.<sup>8</sup> When analysing culture, states Williams, one should understand that inside the dynamics of an institution (or place) there is a complex set of processes at play; a structure of socially entwined relationships within and between practices which occur. In 1981 Stuart Hall developed Williams' theory: 'the purpose of the analysis [must be] to study how the interaction between all these practices and patterns are experienced as a whole, in any particular period'. This is its 'structure of feeling'.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, this work will attempt to explore the multiple inter-relationships between individuals, collectives, institutions (formal and informal) and government bodies (local and national).

A research project conducted in 1997 explored Williams' concept via a comparative study of two cities, Manchester and Sheffield. It proposed that within both distinct localities there was 'a given inheritance of geographical form, climate, industrial base, labour market and labour history, cultural mix, conflicts and contests with other neighbouring cities ... that define it with an identity'.<sup>10</sup> To paraphrase Williams, this dynamic can be thought of as a 'local structure of feeling'. As the

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<sup>7</sup> See D. Hesmondhalgh, *The Cultural Industries* (Sage, 2013), S. Frith, 'Popular Music and The Local State' in *Rock and Popular Music: Politics, Policies, Institutions*, edited by Tony Bennett, Psychology Press, pp. 15-24 (2003).

<sup>8</sup> Williams first used this construct in his *A Preface to Film* (Film Drama Limited, 1954), developed in *The Long Revolution* (Chatto and Windus, 1961) and extended and elaborated throughout his work, in particular 'Marxism and Literature' (1977) from *A Tale of Two Cities* (Routledge, 1996).

<sup>9</sup> S. Hall, 'Cultural Studies in Two Paradigms', in *Culture Ideology and Social Process* (B T Batsford Ltd., 1981), p. 22.

<sup>10</sup> I. Taylor, K. Evans, P. Fraser, *A Tale of Two Cities: Global Change, local feeling and everyday life in the North of England. A Study in Manchester and Sheffield*. (Routledge, 1996), p. 32.

thesis will discuss, Sheffield's inimitable topography and inaccessibility to national infrastructure coupled with its closely regulated city council spending and narrow traditional economies meant that there was an almost 'enclave mentality' in the local structure of feeling during this period.<sup>11</sup> The thesis will reflect this historical sensibility, not in an analysis of the local industries of steel and coal which Taylor describes, but via a study of the moving image community in Sheffield (1970-1990).

In more recent times, the decades old and often-elusive 'structure of feeling' construct has been under revision and re-appropriation by authors from different areas of the research spectrum including urban studies, television studies, social sciences, regional studies.<sup>12</sup> As a result, we must be cautious to overestimate the value of Williams' text in the modern analysis. Nevertheless, in the context of this thesis, the theoretical basis of a 'local structure of feeling' is a sound one. I will broadly suggest that understanding SIF and the development of moving image in the city can best be approached by utilising the concept as a foundation for research. By seeing it as a shifting set of processes in the lived experience of places, people and spaces, we can explore the ways in which film and video developed in this city (and the *types* of media works produced there) and make a claim that they are inimitable to Sheffield circumstances.

The period covered runs from the foundation of SIF in 1976 to 1985, although there will be attention paid to the key contexts that bookend both dates. 1985

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<sup>11</sup> D. Hill, J. O'Connor, 'Contemporary Culture and Structural Change in Manchester', City of Sound, [http://www.cityofsound.com/blog/2002/11/cottonopolis\\_an.html](http://www.cityofsound.com/blog/2002/11/cottonopolis_an.html), accessed 9 March 2017.

<sup>12</sup> H. Mommaas, 'Modernity, Postmodernity and the Crisis of Social Modernisation: A Case Study in Urban Fragmentation' in *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* Vol. 20 No2 1996, B. Best, 'Raymond Williams and the Structure of Feeling of Reality TV', in *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* Vol. 2 No. 7, (2012), pp.194-203, P. Dirksmeier, 'Providing places for structures of feeling and hierarchical complementarity in urban theory: Re-reading Williams', in *Urban Studies* Vol. 53.5 (2016) pp. 884-898.

signals a convenient point of conclusion for the study. SIF faced a new set of challenges and opportunities and in this year it published a series of policy papers and strategy documents for the next decade as it became a significant voice in the SCC's proposed CIQ project. This thesis then, represents a period of film and video development in Sheffield *before* any clear sense of organisation and professionalisation took root. There remains a vast resource within the SIF archive concerning the path it would travel into the 1990s and beyond, but it is beyond the scope of this project.

To paraphrase independent scholar Julia Knight<sup>13</sup>, when it comes to moving image preservation, the overriding emphasis is on preservation and study of purely moving image artefacts and artist' materials, yet institutional records provide a crucial context which are often neglected. As a result, the research focus of this work is mainly cultural and historical, not aesthetic. This does not omit brief analysis of specific films or makers, but this will always be in the context of the industrial and political culture of the independent cinema; the processes that make art, not just the text but its production and consumption.<sup>14</sup> The unifying methodology of much regional film historiography, therefore, is foregrounding the significance of case studies in understanding the structural dynamics of institutions.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> In the 1980s, Julia Knight was co-manager of Albany Video and Commissioning Editor for *Independent Media* magazine, she is now Professor of Moving Image at the University of Sunderland and is responsible for the Film and Video Distribution Database (FVDD).

<sup>14</sup> D. Reekie, *Subversion: The definitive history of underground cinema* (London, 2007), p. 5.

<sup>15</sup> Includes work on the Birmingham Film and Video P. Long, Y. Baig-Clifford, R. Shannon, 'What We're trying to do is make popular politics: The Birmingham film and video workshop', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 33 (3), (2013) pp. 377-95., Amber Films in Newcastle, P. O'Reilly, 'I Will Survive': Forty Years of Amber Films and the Evolution of Regional Film Policy' in *Networking Knowledge: Journal of the MeCCSA Postgraduate Network*, Vol 1, No 2., 2009, P. Thomas, 'The British workshop movement and Amber film' in *Studies in European Cinema*, Volume 8 Number 3, (2001), pp. 197-200, and regional film policy more broadly, J. Knight, 'The 'Alternative End of

In the case of the Sheffield movement the study was fortunate to have one of its chief protagonists, Colin Pons, in full support. His vast paper-based archive, dating from 1983 (the year in which he joined SIF) to 2013 (the year SIF closed) has been deposited at Sheffield Hallam University where it sits next to the IFA archive (itself a donation by the scholar and important Sheffield film and TV activist, Sylvia Harvey). These collections contain financial records, AGM, monthly meeting and conference minutes, funding applications, council and local government reports, feasibility studies, correspondence, promotional literature, photographs, journals and diaries, draft proposals and budget reports. Both the SIF archive and the IFA have been invaluable in shaping this study. For institutional background on the Arts Council of Great Britain and the Yorkshire Arts Association, the archive at the Victoria & Albert Museum has been vital to the research of grant-aid activity in the region. Locally, the cinema collection at Sheffield Library and Archives service features primary sources on the evolution of the Anvil Civic cinema - Sheffield's first municipally funded cinema.

The early period of research is defined by a lack of formal documentation and archival resource. To help fill narrative gaps and to understand the complexity of practice and agency in these crucial foundational years, I have conducted interviews with a select group of SIF founding members. Many of these players are still engaged in media employment, so aside from being difficult to track down for interview, are limited by the usual pitfalls of much contemporary oral history (fading memory, nostalgia bias) and issues concerned with film and TV oral

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Marketing: Building Audiences for Artists: Community Film and Video in Britain Since 1980', in *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, Vol.29, No.4, December 2009, pp. 457-462.  
Knight's The Film and Video Distribution Database is a significant primary resource for building case histories of groups in this time.

testimony more generally.<sup>16</sup> The interviews followed two distinct methodologies. Firstly, where the candidate was available for a meeting a series of general questions about Sheffield film and video history were sent in advance alongside more detailed personal prompts relating to their background. Second, where the interviewee was not accessible questions were sent via email to be answered and sent in reply electronically. The in-person interviews were conducted and recorded by the author in informal locations (i.e not a professional recording studio) in Yorkshire 2016. The emphasis here was on loose, unstructured discussion but directed by the original advance questions. Selecting the candidates for interview was a difficult process - dictated by time and geography. The network of interested contacts available grew to a larger number than what the one-year project could contain, and my own personal circumstances had a significant effect.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, the candidates selected were carefully chosen in response to their -perceived- contribution they made to the Sheffield project. For example, there was a voice given to surviving lecturers of the Psalter Lane Art School (Paul Haywood, Tom Ryall), SIF co-founders (Peter Care, David Rea, Russell Murray), mid-1980s protagonists (Simon Reynell, Nick Cope), and important SIF/SCC players (Colin Pons, Sylvia Harvey). While this represents a diverse list of experiences and yielded a wide-ranging interview response, because of time constraints it is unfortunate that I could not trace interviews with members of the women's film group Sheffield Film Co-op, minority film collective the Asian Youth Movement, surviving employees of the SCC, or activists and educators from other parts of the country.

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<sup>16</sup> See R. Perks and A. Thomson ed. *The Oral History Reader* (Routledge, 2006). Larson, M. 'Steering Clear of the Rocks: A Look at the Current State of Oral History Ethics in the Digital Age' in *The Oral History Review*, Vol. 40, No. 1, (2013), pp. 36-49., P. Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford University Press, 2000), J. Caldwell, *Production culture: Industrial reflexivity and critical practice in film and television* (Duke University Press, 2009).

<sup>17</sup> During the research process I was living and working in London, away from primary sources and interviewees.

Nonetheless, the interviews used within the thesis add substantial primary context to an area with limited access to historical source material. It will use its archival evidence alongside oral history to determine the routines and rituals at play in this period of Sheffield film and video; unpacking the economic and political forces that shaped roles, technologies and resources. 'It is this connection between macro and micro contexts which can illuminate an otherwise narrow case study', suggests Caldwell.<sup>18</sup>

The thesis will follow a chronological structure with some overlap across themes and periods. Chapter One draws a picture of the various currents prevalent in Sheffield and South Yorkshire in the years directly preceding SIF's conception in 1976/77. It will explore the idea that the origins of an independent film culture in the city were first cultivated in the Sheffield City Polytechnic Art school in the late 1960s and early 70s. Concurrent to this development, the state-funded Regional Arts Associations began to recognise the importance of film as a medium and established the Yorkshire Arts Association (YAA), while nationally the very idea of an 'independent film' practice was in born. Technologically, the rise of portable video equipment gave credence to a new platform for local broadcasting via the government sponsored Cablevision station, itself a product of distinctive Sheffield circumstances. The chapter unpicks the 'local structure of feeling' in the city at this time, specifically within its embryonic moving image sector.

Chapter Two begins with a section on the genesis of SIF and the early material which the membership base worked on. The analysis here is largely drawn from

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<sup>18</sup> J. Caldwell, *Production culture: Industrial reflexivity and critical practice in film and television* (Duke University Press, 2009), p. 10.

oral testimony of those surviving protagonists engaged in establishing SIF. The thesis then studies Sheffield politics of the early 1970s, as the traditional Labour party base which had served the city for generations began to erode. Further, it examines the newly elected Sheffield City Council led by David Blunkett and the 'new left' Labour politics which rode against the backdrop of a recently elected Conservative government; this will be particularly important in framing the SIF group within local cultural policy development. 1981-82 witnessed a number of key events in the growth of regional independent film practice and this period saw an unprecedented outbreak of independent film and video production in the city.

Although Channel 4 was critically important, distribution and exhibition was still one of the great challenges for regional moving image groups to overcome. Chapter Three will therefore assess the contribution of the local council in funding the municipal Anvil Civic Cinema to support independent film exhibition and also how Sheffield City Libraries were engaged in new means of video distribution practice. Chapter Three will survey the intersection between the music and moving image scenes in the city, by looking at the industrial band Cabaret Voltaire and SIF co-founder, Peter Care.

A coda will then extend the analysis as it discusses SIF's direct involvement in the new strain of cultural policy activity. 1984/85 witnessed a series of SIF strategy papers designed to make sense of the new dynamic in cultural production, while the group itself began to work with the SCC on a more direct level and for the first time drew up a formal document to apply for more funding and increased grant-aid support.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection. SIF, 'Application To Sheffield City Council – The Three Options', (September 1985).

To date there have been no detailed studies about this area of South Yorkshire film development. This history can help build on the growing body of work on regional film in the UK, which itself is part of a revisionist film history that refocuses attention in British film culture of the past 30 years away from a London-centric, homogenous narrative toward the local.<sup>20</sup> Jack Newsinger's 2009 thesis is arguably the broadest contemporary history of regional film development policy and many of his arguments will form the backbone of this thesis. However, while Newsinger writes in detail about the franchised workshop groups<sup>21</sup> and the New Labour forged Regional Screen Agencies, his focus on the early Yorkshire movement is fleeting. This study will aim to redress these gaps. Moreover, Newsinger concentrates on independent filmmaking as a by-product of organised grant-aid support and, though important to this thesis, he excludes those liminal areas (community video, music video/visuals, student film) which are significant to the Sheffield community and this research.

It is worthwhile to demystify some of the terminology applied in the thesis. Firstly, the word which sits at the centre of much dialogue, *independent*. The historical discourse here has been typified by fragmentation across formal, aesthetic and institutional lines; a debate between 'avant-garde film and video' (film and video made by artists) and 'independent film and video' as part of a broader movement which included the avant-garde but also makers, practices and genres conceived as independent of the ideological and industrial structures of mainstream cinema and television (sometimes referred to as oppositional, alternative, counter).<sup>22</sup> Given its heterogenous membership, SIF stands somewhere in the middle of this complex

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<sup>20</sup> See footnote 13.

<sup>21</sup> Specifically, Amber, in Newcastle.

<sup>22</sup> D. Reekie, *Subversion* (Wallflower, 2007), p. 2.

discourse. In this thesis, *independent* will be routinely applied as an umbrella term to encompass all the productions made by SIF members. The name SIF itself went through a couple of semantic changes; SIFG (group), SIFL (limited), SIFC (company) so in the interests of simplicity, the thesis will always use SIF.

This period is also defined by a shift along technological lines, as portable video technology becomes more readily available. The use of 'film' here will refer to creative works shot by 'film-makers' on cellulose acetate even if intended for broadcast on television. 'Video' on the other hand, will be exclusively used for works produced on video-tape to be distributed across a multiplicity of platforms (VHS sales, television, music video, 'blown-up' to film for screenings).

It is also worth qualifying the term, 'regional'. This study of Sheffield film and video will inevitably cross geographic borders into those groups active in South Yorkshire and its surrounds (neighbouring Yorkshire regions, East Midlands, Nottinghamshire, Lancashire). Although it is principally a study of the Sheffield region, there is a danger of ignoring the collaborative nature of much film-making in this period. While the level of practice was rarely conducted across transnational boundaries, much activity was, often by necessity, written, filmed, edited, distributed in various regions of the UK (including London). Regardless, the thesis aims to position Sheffield film and video in this time as a distinct region, and will solely focus on moving image projects made by SIF and its members working in the city. By realising this, to quote Newsinger, the 'regional can emerge as a progressive

site within British film culture in opposition to a market dominated by a centrally-located and conservative “national” cinema’.<sup>23</sup>

As a subsidiary output to the main thesis it is hoped that the archival research materials acquired in development will be donated, catalogued and deposited in conjunction with the special collections archive at Sheffield Hallam University. Moreover, the common production formats used by independent practitioners during this period (8mm/16mm/U-Matic/VHS/Video-8) are under serious threat of degradation and playback obsolescence. As a result, it is an archival imperative to rescue vulnerable moving-image of this nature from the lofts, offices and sheds of those film-makers responsible before it is too late. This activity will not only inform the thesis itself, by allowing a platform to watch the content itself, but will stimulate further research and engagement with Sheffield’s independent moving image film heritage and mark the region as an important site in Yorkshire, and British, filmmaking culture.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **FILM AND VIDEO IN SHEFFIELD BEFORE 1976**

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<sup>23</sup> J. Newsinger, *From the grassroots: regional film policy and practice in England*. (PhD thesis, University of Nottingham, 2010), p. 10.

Organised film making in the city of Sheffield did not begin in 1976 with the establishment of SIF. In fact, South Yorkshire has a proud tradition of moving image production dating back to the early cinema age. The Sheffield Photo Company (est. 1900), for instance, was one of the first film groups to exploit the potential of outdoor filming and pioneered the 'chase genre' of early film.<sup>24</sup> This chapter will argue that the roots of an independent sector which flourished from the mid 1970s onwards were first sown in the Psalter Lane Art School during the late 60s. Its embrace of technology and new pedagogical methods will be analysed in the national context of a developing film education curriculum. The post-war formation of the Arts Council of Great Britain (ACGB) began a process of slow decentralisation in arts patronage and grant-aid support to the regions, culminating in the foundation of twelve Regional Arts Boards. In 1969, the Yorkshire Arts Association (YAA) launched and three years later a dedicated Film and TV unit was formed with a remit to support the region's moving image production, exhibition and education provision. This section will discuss the foundation of the YAA, and how it supported filmmaking in Sheffield. The late 60s and early 70s witnessed a growth in arts collectives and pressure groups that sought to realise political, social or formal aesthetic change through filmmaking practice. To frame the South Yorkshire experience in this wider context there will be a short assessment of the wider moving image landscape in England, and the birth of the Independent Filmmakers Association (IFA). Finally, this chapter turns to an emergence from commercial broadcasting; the local television channel which appeared in Sheffield, Cablevision.

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<sup>24</sup> R. Benfield, *Bijou Kinema: A History of Early Cinema in Yorkshire* (Sheffield City Polytechnic, 1976), p. 6.

## **Psalter Lane**

In 1950, the long-established Sheffield College of Arts and Crafts was renamed the Sheffield College of Art, and a year later it moved to the former Bluecoat School on Psalter Lane. It would remain there until its closure on 31st August, 2008. During this period, it witnessed profound reform. In the 1960s, a series of central government legislative recommendations aimed to change the nature of Arts Education in Britain, culminating in 1968 with the provisional approval of sixteen colleges becoming amalgamated Polytechnics – with Sheffield among those selected. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 1969, Sheffield Polytechnic was formed by the merger of Sheffield College of Technology and Sheffield College of Art. It was designated to create the idea of the Polytechnic as a new kind of higher education institute.<sup>25</sup> It is necessary therefore to position the Psalter Lane art school as an integral mechanism in creating a thriving moving image culture in Sheffield. Its importance in the establishment of SIF and other film groups should not be underestimated, and the institution should also be recognised as a leader in the national history of film education. What follows is an overview of Psalter Lane during the formative years of institutional film education (1964-1976).

Following World War II, two different models of arts education emerged – ‘the professional school in the form of a national academy, often linked with theatre and music, and the art school which found its home inside a larger university or college of arts.’<sup>26</sup> Under the chairmanship of Sir William Coldstream a report in 1961 outlined new requirements for an award, Diploma in Art and Design, which would shape the future of education for the next decade. The Secretary of State for

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<sup>25</sup> Sheffield City Polytechnic. *School of Art Prospectus, 1970-71*, Sheffield, p. 8.

<sup>26</sup> C. Young, R. Dyer et al. ‘Film/Television’, in Ken Robinson, ed., *The Arts and Higher Education*, (Gulbenkian and the Leverhulme Trust, 1984), p.184.

Education and Science (1964-67), Anthony Crosland, soon integrated the Diploma into a new network of Polytechnic colleges (by 1969, forty colleges of art had been assimilated, including Sheffield). Meanwhile, Jennie Lee (Minister for Arts), pushed the agenda toward the establishment of a national film school, which culminated in the Lloyd Report (1966) and the opening of the National Film School in 1970. Arts Education was changing.<sup>27</sup> On the fringes of the 60s counterculture the 'art school was also the base of much English experimental filmmaking... its emphasis on co-operative film production, the use of shared facilities and pooled resources and expertise was echoed in the culture of the London Film Maker's Co-op(LFMC).'<sup>28</sup> The LFMC membership sat in close alliance with the Slade School of Fine Art and the Royal College of Art; reliant on staff, equipment, exhibition space. This model of interdependency between art colleges and local artistic communities would be an important agent in the evolution of experimental practice in the coming decades – an archetype that soon spread.

As the 1970s gave rise to developing areas of study the nascent area of film education underwent an important evolution. Initially, it appeared to be struggling to survive, but by the end of the decade it was flourishing both in schools and higher education.<sup>29</sup> Outside of the London schools, Psalter Lane was one of the earliest adopters, and its film equipment list became an attractive proposition for budding students from around the country: 'I moved to Sheffield [from the respected Maidstone College of Art] because I had been told the facilities were

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<sup>27</sup> S. McDonald, *The History and Philosophy of Art Education* (James Clarke and Co Ltd, 2004), p.355

<sup>28</sup> C. Meigh-Andrews, *A History of Video Art* (London, Bloomsbury, 2007), p.95.

<sup>29</sup> V. Porter, 'Film Education in the 1970s', in Justin Smith and Sue Harper, ed., *British Film Culture in the 1970s: The Boundaries of Pleasure* (Edinburgh, University Press, 2011), p. 62.

excellent and there was a positive ethos about independent production.’<sup>30</sup> Students of the Film Studies / Film History Diploma also benefited from large library collections of film slides, film theory books, a screening theatre and established film lecturers spreading the New Cinema doctrine of psychoanalysis, semiotics, Barthes, and Lacan as advocated by journals like *Screen* and *Cahiers du Cinema*.

The earliest reference to Psalter Lane embracing the new currents in film and art education is in 1967 when ‘the liberal studies department at Sheffield obtained a clockwork Bolex and Barry Callaghan encouraged the first tentative student productions.’<sup>31</sup> This period of pedagogy was marked – as in the national picture – by an uncertainty of definition. In the 1960s and early 1970s, there remained an institutional discomfort about the cumbersome requirements of filmmaking: expensive equipment, expert technical knowledge, the necessity for collective labour, and need for collaboration with film technicians collided with the nineteenth century art school and its romantic ideology of ‘individualism’, ‘genius’, ‘freedom of self-expression’ and educational assessment more generally.<sup>32</sup> Film-making and film studies sat uneasily on the curriculum at Psalter Lane – but it was not without support. The main enablers charged with realising this complicated dialectic between theory and practice were Barry Callaghan (filmmaking), Paul Haywood (documentary practice), Tom Ryall and Gerry Coubro (film studies). Callaghan’s name, in particular, often appears in this narrative as a key player in the development of student practice and the wider film and video community. He

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<sup>30</sup> R. Murray, Senior Lecturer in Media Practice, Nottingham Trent University. Email to the author, 4 June 2016. Personal communication.

<sup>31</sup> *Sheffield Media Show – Flickering Projection In The Future*, <http://www.rewind.ac.uk/documents/Pictorial%20Heroes/PH091.pdf>, accessed 17 Feb 2016.

<sup>32</sup> S. Frith, and H. Horne, *Art Into Pop* (Methuen and Co, 1987), p. 33

was variously a senior board member on the YAA film and TV unit, associate editor of the *Screen* journal and avid folk music ethnographer.

The Head of the Faculty of Art and Design at this time was William S. Taylor.<sup>33</sup> He was Dean of Psalter Lane during 1972-75 and gave Paul Haywood his first job in the profession, 'he made the whole thing happen really, he facilitated the filmmaking thing to be established within the institution.'<sup>34</sup> Crucially, Taylor also had links to the London publishing industry. He floated the idea of a manual on filmmaking to Thames & Hudson and commissioned Barry Callaghan to write it. The 164-page tome was an early outlier in this period, 'designed to be used by students and staff in art colleges, teacher training colleges, polytechnics.'<sup>35</sup> Acclaimed British documentary director Basil Wright<sup>36</sup> described the book in his introduction to the Thames & Hudson edition as 'the best book of its kind I have ever seen, both in term of thoroughness and imaginativeness.'<sup>37</sup> Here was a manual on film-making production endorsed by a documentary pioneer, with the nationwide distribution, commissioned by a respected artist and written by a Sheffield Polytechnic lecturer. The manual helped legitimise film-making education in the UK and located Barry Callaghan in the School of Art and Design at the heart of this development. To be awarded this level of recognition was a significant moment in the Sheffield history. Later, when future SIF director Colin Pons arrived in Sheffield (having read the manual during studies in Canada), he described 'being in

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<sup>33</sup> Having studied at the Sheffield School of Art (1936-39) and at the Royal College of Art, he then taught at the Schools of Art in Sheffield, Rotherham and Chesterfield and exhibited widely including at the Royal Academy, the Society of British Artists and The Sheffield Society of Artists.

<sup>34</sup> P. Haywood, Fine Art Lecturer, Sheffield Hallam University, Retired. Conversation with author, April 16 2016.

<sup>35</sup> B. Callaghan, *The Thames and Hudson Manual of Film-making*, (Thames and Hudson, 1973), p.7

<sup>36</sup> Director of *Song of Ceylon*, (1934), *Night Mail*, (1936).

<sup>37</sup> B. Callaghan, *Film-making* (1973), back sleeve.

awe' upon meeting Callaghan - purely because of the book's influence on him.<sup>38</sup> We can take Meigh-Andrews' general assessment of the role national art colleges played in the history of British video as a template for studying the organisational structure in Sheffield: 'facilities [were] used not only by students but also by the practising artists who taught them, both as part-time and permanent staff ... which gave artists access to facilities, and provided students with an increased awareness of video.'<sup>39</sup> Barry Callaghan's experience is characterised by this work: part of the formal institution, but with external ties outside it, he forged close personal connections with students and the burgeoning independent film and video culture in the region to influential effect.

By the mid-70s the Faculty of Art and Design began to restructure modules along clearer lines; the Department of Audio Visual Communication was established and 'Film Making' was offered as a supporting study in the BA (Hons) Fine Art.<sup>40</sup> Elsewhere, the SEFT<sup>41</sup> drove a revamp of the *Screen* journal and the Polytechnic of Central London integrated new intellectual developments in film criticism, film theory, semiotics, and contextual studies into its prospectus.<sup>42</sup> Now situated in the Department of History of Art at Psalter Lane, Film Studies mirrored these changes, proposing to 'look in detail at films utilising a range of critical strategies, such as notions of narrative structure as developed by Christian Metz'.<sup>43</sup> Additionally, there were now part-time and evening courses entitled 'The Political Film: Form and Ideology'. David Rea (a SIF co-founder), was one of the beneficiaries of this new

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<sup>38</sup> C. Pons, Course Leader, MA Filmmaking, Sheffield Hallam University. Conversation with author, 29 July 2016. Personal communication.

<sup>39</sup> Meigh-Andrews, *A History of Video Art*, p. 66.

<sup>40</sup> Sheffield City Polytechnic. *Faculty Of Art and Design Prospectus, 1975-76*, Sheffield, p. 8.

<sup>41</sup> Society of Education in Film and Television (SEFT).

<sup>42</sup> P. Whannel, 'Film Education and Film Culture', *Screen*, Vol.10, (May/June, 1969), p. 49.

<sup>43</sup> Sheffield City Polytechnic. *Faculty of Art and Design Prospectus, 1975-76 - Part Time and Evening Courses*, Sheffield.

part-time course. Rea was working in the oil business in Saudi Arabia before moving to Sheffield to pursue film-making when he landed on the ‘unofficial one year course for mature students... it was not so much a structured course as an opportunity to make a film of my choosing using the facilities at the college.’<sup>44</sup> This flexibility enabled mature students and budding filmmakers with different backgrounds to come to Psalter Lane and watch films at the campus theatre, experience equipment and learn among a diverse melting-pot of students of all ages. This idea of a shared community of practice<sup>45</sup> is borne out by filmmaker Nick Cope’s own recollection of the time: ‘everyone was just really interested in doing what everyone else was doing, a really vibrant sort of scene.’<sup>46</sup>

The development of film education at Psalter Lane art school before the period of SIF’s foundational years (1976-1980), therefore, is a story of local and national currents. The government reform of the art school, post-Coldstream, had a significant effect on regional film education. Post-1968, the tremors of the London counterculture slowly spread across the country and a radical thought and philosophy into the new Polytechnic network. At Sheffield, there was an evident enthusiasm to develop the art school into a centre of excellence for moving image production. Important individuals such as Barry Callaghan and Paul Haywood were advocates of this new doctrine, and helped build connections with the burgeoning independent film groups and institutional structures in the region (and beyond).

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<sup>44</sup> D. Rea, Film-maker, freelance. Conversation with the author. Conversation with author, 23 May 2016. Personal communication.

<sup>45</sup> A concept first discussed by anthropologist Jean Lave and educational theorist Etienne Wenger in 1991 - a community of practice is a group of people who share a common interest in the sharing of knowledge, experience and equipment.

<sup>46</sup> N. Cope, Lecturer in digital media production at Xi’an Jiaotong-Liverpool University. Conversation with author, April 17 2016.

The thesis will further dissect these pivotal interrelationships between art school and SIF in Chapter Two.

### **The Yorkshire Arts Association (YAA).**

As infrastructure was gradually established, money was still deficient. One of the repositories for grant-aid funding in film-making during this period was the YAA. In 1970, the YAA supported a film called *Spacemen Have Landed in Leeds*. This documentary signalled the first involvement of a RAA in supporting filmmaking practice in the region. For the next twenty years the YAA film unit would fund and administrate a period of film and video production, facilitating considerable development in this nascent sector. The evolution of filmmaking in Sheffield and the foundation of SIF would not have been possible without grant-aid assistance from the YAA. It is important, therefore, to consider its early history.

Patronage for the moving image sector was first awakened during the war years, as new precedents for state control of the film economy (in reaction to aggressive Hollywood tactics, and the fear of a U.S. film monopoly) were introduced and fed into the broader strategy of post-war nationalisation.<sup>47</sup> The ACGB was established in 1946, at this stage it was predominantly concerned with the tensions inherent in reshaping state patronage of the 'high arts.'<sup>48</sup> In 1951, the foundation of BFI Experimental Film Fund (later realised as the BFI Production Board c. 1966), emerged as a response to the Eady Levy.<sup>49</sup> Effectively, this was the initiation of the modern independent sector. The BFI became the first semi-autonomous state

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<sup>47</sup> M. Dickinson, *Rogue Reels: Oppositional Film in Britain, 1945-90*. (British Film Institute, 1999), p. 66.

<sup>48</sup> S. Blanchard and S. Harvey ed., 'The Post-War Independent Cinema – Structure and Organisation', in J. Curran, *British Cinema History*, (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1983), p.7.

<sup>49</sup> A levy imposed on box-office receipts, intended to foster uniquely British film production, established in 1950 (<http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/1011995/>, Accessed June 2016)

agency which did not itself make or commission film projects but funded them by selection from a narrow pool of applicants.<sup>50</sup> Meanwhile, the ACGB continued to direct its financial provision into an exclusive group of prestigious metropolitan institutions, reinforcing the legitimacy of arts as the national (high) culture; a welfare state socialism promoting the concept of art as a social service.<sup>51</sup> Inevitably, this led to a growing body of regional voices agitating for state money to be re-directed into non-metropolitan areas. However, it was over a decade after the ACGB was born that the first RAA became established in the South West of England (1956), with the aim to cede responsibility of funds to the regions, promote the wider devolution of arts provision, and serve local accountability and local democracy.

Broadly speaking this was an era of ambition towards de-centralisation in the arts following the Labour election victory of 1964. In the moving image the lead organisation was the Northern Arts RAA. Its grant-aid funding came from a variety of sources<sup>52</sup> and in 1966 it was significant in recognising film as an art form when it established a separate panel and budget to cater for the medium.<sup>53</sup> The early growth of the film workshop group Amber, based in Newcastle, became reliant on Northern Arts funding and provided the model for others to follow. Three years later, on the 21<sup>st</sup> June, 1969, the YAA was launched at the Guildhall in York with keynote guest and arts patron Lord Feversham declaring:

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<sup>50</sup> D. Reekie, *Subversion : The definitive history of underground cinema*. (London, 2007), p. 95.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. p.95.

<sup>52</sup> BFI, the ACGB, the Crafts Council, Local and District Council bodies.

<sup>53</sup> P. O'Reilly, 'I Will Survive': Forty Years of Amber Films and the Evolution of Regional Film Policy' in *Networking Knowledge: Journal of the MeCCSA Postgraduate Network*, Vol 1, No 2., 2009, p. 5.

The development of the arts outside London has been boosted within the last ten years by the conception of the Regional Arts Association as a body capable of harnessing the three forms of modern patronage, private, industrial and state, at both central and local levels, towards helping the artist and his audience.<sup>54</sup>

While the YAA was founded in 1969 (and hesitantly supported amateur productions like *Spacemen Have Landed in Leeds* (1970), and folk documentary, *Owen Bit Bog Oil* in 1972) it was not until 1973 that it fully recognised a burgeoning moving image culture in the region and formally established its film and TV panel. Prior to this institution film and moving image funding was discussed on the visual arts board. Among the members to attend the first panel held at Gylde House in Leeds were local Arts patron Oliver Worsley (chair), member of a Leeds cine-club, Alan Sidi, filmmaker Alan Coulson, TV producer Stuart Josephs and Sheffield Polytechnic's Barry Callaghan.<sup>55</sup> The make-up of the TV and Film panel would fluctuate throughout the 1970s and 80s with many members of the SIF / Sheffield community heavily active at various points. This local membership was one of the important features of the new YAA panel, and unlike previous sources of centralised funding, it gave rise to a diverse selection of ideas selected from a pool of filmmakers, scholars and practitioners based within the region. Alongside approving applications for funding and advice, one aspect of this new panel was the provision of scarce equipment resources to budding filmmakers. Under the management of Jim Pearse, the Yorkshire Communications Centre was opened in Bradford during 1975 with funding from the YAA to support the hiring of 8mm,

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<sup>54</sup> 'Yorkshire Arts Association Inauguration', Arts Council of Great Britain Records (1927-199), Victoria and Albert Museum. Archive Boxes - ACGB/111/5.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

16mm and early portable video equipment.<sup>56</sup> This was the articulation of a long-standing need in the region for a base in which filmmakers could borrow equipment and meet like-minded artists. Its dynamics would be imitated by SIF two years later.

Filmmaker Richard Woolley's experience represents a case study for this period of YAA grant-aid support. After graduating from the Royal College of Art and following a spell making structuralist film in Berlin, Woolley moved to Yorkshire where he proposed a project to the YAA and the ACCGB experimental fund for £5,000. The grant was successful and the final result, made with equipment resource from the Communications Centre in Bradford, was the thriller, *Elusive Crime* (1976). During the production, as was common at a time of no-formal waging, the 'only person who got paid was the actor and that had to be kept from the sponsors.'<sup>57</sup> Woolley would make another film under similar financial constraints (*Telling Tales*, 1978), before being offered a substantial budget by the BFI Production Board (or the 'pools bonanza' as he called it), with properly waged crew, and the opportunity to shoot on 35mm for his project, *Brothers and Sisters* (1980). This was a turbulent time for the YAA and the RAA network more generally as the increase in community film groups soon outgrew the funds and equipment resource available. Promising filmmakers like Woolley were having to move elsewhere – geographically, financially – to improve their prospects. Despite the critical success of *Brothers and Sisters* the film was beset by distribution problems and Woolley was forced to return to the smaller pool of RAA finance for future projects.

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<sup>56</sup> Yorkshire Arts Association, Arts Council of Great Britain Records (1927-199), Victoria and Albert Museum. Archive Boxes - ACCGB/111/5, Minutes of the meeting of the Film and TV panel held at YTV, Leeds on Monday 3rd May 1976 at 4.30 PM.

<sup>57</sup> BFI Regional Conference Report, 'Independent Cinema and Regional Film Culture', (BFI, 1981), pp.18-19.

However, while sitting on the YAA board in 1982 he wrote about the benefits of working on 'artisanal' YAA projects: 'I can be half a film officer, help other people with their films and work on smaller projects... it makes life as an independent filmmaker very feasible and rewarding'.<sup>58</sup> Within a support organisation like the YAA, then, emerging talent could develop small-scale, low-risk projects. This was crucial to the flowering of an independent film and video culture in the region, and in a sense served as a research and development lab for the centralised British film industry. However, even though Yorkshire was the second largest RAA, the typical budget for a project was still insufficient. In 1980 the typical RAA budget for a film stood at £5,000 while the average project supported by the BFI Production board was £90,000.<sup>59</sup> In Sheffield in 1979, the SCC withdrew its subscription to the YAA because it felt arts projects in the city were not getting enough support. The conflict lasted a year during which time the SFC's Jenny Woodley made a plea to *The Star*, writing that 'to remain outside the Arts Association means cutting the city off from the thousands of pounds available... it is a sheer nonsense.'<sup>60</sup> Despite this ongoing fragility the YAA still had an active role to play in supporting the establishment of SIF and the many splinter groups which emerged in the early-mid 1980s. The thesis will cover this in Chapter Two.

At this stage, the complexities of regional organisation and state-funded film finance can perhaps best be considered as part of a wider movement in which 'film makers whose work [did] not fit into the dominant system of production and exchange' began to argue for the development of a oppositional or parallel cinema

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<sup>58</sup> *York Film, Reel Practice: A Directory of Independent Film from the Northeast*, 1981, p. 5.

<sup>59</sup> J. Curling, 'A Declaration of Independence' in *Screen*, (Jan/Feb 1983), Vol. 24 Issue 1, p.53-61.

<sup>60</sup> J. Woodley, 'Artless Thinking', 21 February 1980, in *Yorkshire Arts Association, Arts Council of Great Britain Records (1927-1999)*, Victoria and Albert Museum. Archive Boxes - ACGB/111/5

practice, what filmmaker Peter Wollen called a 'Counter Cinema'.<sup>61</sup> This revealed itself variously in the founding of alternative media collectives, low-budget distribution networks, innovative exhibition spaces, scholarly platforms for new film theory, and politicised pressure groups such as the Independent Filmmakers Association (IFA).

### ***Independent Cinema?***<sup>62</sup>

The roots of the RAA/ ACGB project began in the 1940s as a calculated manifestation of the government's desire to decentralise state finance to the arts. State intervention in support of filmmaking became legitimised. It was from within this *dependent* culture that the *independent* ideology began to take root. The 1950s also witnessed the emergence of the 'Free Cinema'<sup>63</sup> documentary movement which can lay claim to the aesthetic beginnings of an alternative means of production. Meanwhile, in early 1960s USA, the 'New American Cinema' began to materialise amid new organisational forms (the co-op tradition of distribution and exhibition) and a wave of adventurous artists who were at the forefront of the movement: Warhol, Brakhage, Mekas. Inspired by this activity, a group of filmmakers founded the LFMC in 1966. Much has been written about the LFMC<sup>64</sup> and the effects of the London counterculture more broadly, but it is important to recognise that the framework it established (media agnostic production, training networks, a correlation between distribution and exhibition) would inform other

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<sup>61</sup> S. Harvey, *Independent Cinema?*, West Midlands Arts, 1978, p.6.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, p.8.

<sup>63</sup> Free Cinema was the general title given to a series of six programmes of (mainly) short documentaries shown at the National Film Theatre (NFT) in London between February 1956 and March 1959, these were the precursor to documentary work from makers like Lindsay Anderson, Tony Richardson Karel Reisz. (Accessed, <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/444789/> Accessed January 2016)

<sup>64</sup> D. Curtis, *A History of Artists' Film and Video in Britain, 1897-2004* (BFI, 2006), D. Curtis, *Experimental Cinema - A Fifty Year Evolution* (Delacorte Press, 1972), M. Webber, *Shoot Shoot Shoot Shoot: The First Decade of the London Film-Makers' Co-operative 1966-76*, (Lux, 2016).

splinter groups.<sup>65</sup> The conscious effect of the LFMC in Sheffield, however, seems to be moderate, with early SIF protagonists aware of activity in the capital but feeling ‘no direct communication or affiliation’.<sup>66</sup> Nonetheless, the foundations were set for this *type* of audio-visual collective to exist.

In 1974 these diverse strands, together with radical activists, and academics formed the IFA. At an early conference, they promulgated the notion that ‘Independence’ was not to be understood in economic terms; rather, ‘it was a cultural, aesthetic and political conception...’<sup>67</sup> It declared that state patronage was a necessary evil and the real ‘struggle’ was based on pushing the agenda toward inclusivity; challenging all aspects of mainstream, ‘dominant’ film practice and widening access to areas of production and distribution. The core SIF group seem to have been aware of the IFA and its pressure strategies but not implicitly influenced by its activity, let alone engaged in any direct correspondence with the association. The IFA’s lasting influence on the Sheffield project can be felt through their longstanding agitation for a ‘Fourth Channel’, a campaign that first began to stir in 1970.<sup>68</sup> The direct impact of C4 on Sheffield will be discussed fully in Chapter Two.

Moreover, one of the key advocates of the IFA doctrine was scholar Sylvia Harvey. In the late 1970s and early 80s Harvey wrote and delivered a number of texts which promoted the IFA position of developing an ‘oppositional’ space in tandem

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<sup>65</sup> In London, Cinema Action (1968), Berwick Streets Collective (1972), Liberation Films (1972), London Women’s Film Group (1972), Four Corner Films (1973), and Newcastle’s Amber (1969).

<sup>66</sup> R. Murray, Senior Lecturer in Media Practice, Nottingham Trent University. Email to the author, 4 June 2016. Personal communication.

<sup>67</sup> IFA Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collections. ‘Independent Film-making in the 70s: An introduction discussion paper from the Organising Committee of the IFA Conference’ (Anon. May 1977).

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

with the battle to engage mainstream audiences. She expounded theories to transform the independent sector across all areas of exhibition, distribution and production; in Harvey's words, 'central to the distinctive methods of working is the organisation of tasks of production in collective and less conventionally hierarchical ways.'<sup>69</sup> Harvey also wrote of the need to work in alliance with a 'variety of existing movements: with the Trade Union movement, the women's movement, and with community centres.'<sup>70</sup> This assured rhetoric would resonate in the policy papers and funding documents which Harvey, while allied to SIF, assembled during the 1980s. And while that decade saw the IFA fragment amidst internecine debate and division, the very notion of independence in moving image which it sought to promote was carried on in regional spaces like SIF. In fact, they expanded this notion further. It can be argued that SIF operated simultaneously *dependent* on state-finance, *independent* in ideology, and *interdependent* within a 'local structure' of individuals, institutions, and informal collectives.

That Sheffield had a well-connected individual such as Sylvia Harvey to champion the 'cultural right of expression'<sup>71</sup> in the regions, to connect with sympathetic London-based film and broadcast voices (Alan Fountain, Simon Blanchard, Peter Sainsbury) and be respected by a number of central institutions (C4, IFA, BFI, Higher Education), was pivotal to the maturation of SIF as an organisation in the 1980s. The wider evolution of an independent moving image culture in the Sheffield city region owes a debt to her innovative practice.

## **Sheffield Cablevision**

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<sup>69</sup> S. Harvey, *Independent Cinema?*, 1978.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> S. Harvey, 'Cinema: Dead or Alive?'. Paper from the Independent Cinema and Regional Film Culture Conference, University of Warwick, 19 – 21 September, 1980.

Cable television in the UK emerged during the 1950s television boom.<sup>72</sup> It thrived in this new age because of certain problems with the nascent receiver technologies. The city of Sheffield, nestled in surrounding hills and valleys, was a perfect topography for the cable industry to roll-out its new cabling equipment.<sup>73</sup> Moreover, some 20,000 council homes were forbidden to erect aerials by the city council due to planning restrictions.<sup>74</sup> In 1963 understanding that colour television and improved UHF signalling was imminent, cable company British Relay (BR) chose Sheffield as one of the test areas for the introductory PAYTV experiment. To help make cable television an economically viable proposition BR/PAYTV installed 1500 metered sets in Sheffield as major sporting events and Hollywood movies were piped into people's homes for a nominal fee.<sup>75</sup> This experiment was short-lived however as the incumbent Labour administration discontinued the PAYTV model, refusing permission for further expansion. Nonetheless, the notion that existing cable technology could be exploited to reach local viewers, and the potential for local business to use this platform was not lost.<sup>76</sup> Moreover, a city like Sheffield stood to benefit from the idea of cable television which vaguely promised to fill the void in a major city without a local broadcaster – a *fundamental* infrastructure deficiency at the heart of the Sheffield film and video history.

In 1972 BBC2 established the Community Programmes Unit with a remit to focus on access and exhibition for local communities using newly developing portable

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<sup>72</sup> Sales increased from 350,000 units in 1950 to 10,470,000 sets across UK homes in 1960, in, H. Nigg and G. Wade, *Community Media: Community Communication in the UK: Video, Local TV, Film, and Photography* (Regenbogen-Verlag, 1980), p. 25.

<sup>73</sup> Areas such as Sheffield were shielded from VHF frequency transmitters resulting in poor rooftop aerial reception and the necessity for cable television to circumvent these geographic limitations.

<sup>74</sup> *The Bizarre World of Hyper-Local TV*, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-23906703>, accessed 8 August 2016.

<sup>75</sup> IFA Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collections. 'Application to C4 Television Company Limited for Capital and Revenue Funding For An Open Access Media Facility In Sheffield', SFC (no date).

<sup>76</sup> *Community Video* – Ed Webb-Ingall,, <http://www.lux.org.uk/blog/community-video-3-community-tv>, accessed 21 June 2016.

video technologies like the Sony Portapak. Propelled by activist voices like John ‘Hoppy’ Hopkins community video was given its official platform through the BBC series, *Open Door*. A year later the Conservative government saw the commercial potential of this new medium and granted its first licences for the origination of programmes on local television networks. The first of the stations granted permission in 1972 was Greenwich Cablevision in South East London, followed by networks in Bristol, Swindon, Wellingborough, Milton Keynes, and Sheffield.

The Cablevision studios were based at Matilda Street and with BR money amassed an array of equipment<sup>77</sup> and studio space which included a production technical area, transmission control room, news and continuity studios. It sat in the frequency band on the fourth channel and coverage was locally restricted to transmission time on community problems, sports clubs, building developments and municipal affairs. Attending a live broadcast launch from the City Hall on September 1<sup>st</sup> 1973 was the Minister of Posts and Telecommunications, Sir John Eden:

Cablevision’s success will largely depend on its ability to give the viewer something extra to what is already obtainable from the other services ... this experiment and especially viewer reaction to it, will help guide the development of cable television in this country.<sup>78</sup>

With backing from central government, who saw the commercial potential, Cablevision still needed a local creative element to make programming worthy of

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<sup>77</sup> Equipment came from de-commissioned ITV cameras, 16mm/35mm telecine and VTR machines.

<sup>78</sup> Anon, ‘Sheffield giving the viewer something extra’, *The Stage and Television Today* 4821, 6 September 1973, p. 12.

the community ethos at its heart. In a city with little history and experience of broadcast experience (let alone infrastructure) this talent pool emerged from an unlikely source.

Sheffield was bypassed for the siting of the original ITV contract<sup>79</sup> and so local radio station BBC Radio Sheffield (est.1967) was the sole broadcast voice in the city.<sup>80</sup> It was at the BBC where four local women met Education Officer, Dave Sheasby, who suggested that they make a series of local radio programmes entitled *Overall Not Just a Pretty Face*, each exploring different demands of the women's liberation movement.<sup>81</sup> In 1971 issues that were at the forefront of this moment included: equal pay, education and job opportunities, free contraception, abortion rights, free twenty-four hour nurseries. Christine Bellamy, a young mother herself, joined forces with Jenny Woodley, Gill Booth and Barbara Fowkes to make the radio series. Sheasby taught them how to edit and record sound professionally and the women soon seized on the new technological opportunities which Cablevision offered. The technical department at Cablevision was a male dominated environment and when Bellamy, Booth, Woodley and Fowkes approached the station to make a film about the poor provisions available for Sheffield mothers and their children, they were met with laughter: they thought '[we] were a joke... referring to us as "our four housewives."<sup>82</sup> *Women and Children Last* (1974) was their first production for Cablevision and, despite the challenges and discrimination they faced from male engineers, the process was an invaluable learning platform in the mechanics of making a TV programme. Bypassing the traditional hierarchical

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<sup>79</sup>In 1967, Yorkshire Television won the pan-northern franchise, and was founded in nearby Leeds.

<sup>80</sup>Hallam FM launched in 1974 as the commercial alternative.

<sup>81</sup> *Becoming SFC* – Angela Martin,

<https://womensfilmandtelevisionhistory.wordpress.com/2014/04/04/becoming-sheffield-film-co-op/>, accessed 15 January 2016

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

nature of TV production, the women made *Women and Children Last* by allowing each member equal time on each aspect of the process; they were all director, cameraperson, interviewer, editor.<sup>83</sup> This spirit of collaboration was in evidence on their second Cablevision piece, a plea for more nursery places and child minders for working mothers, *Mind My Child* (1975). Speaking to the local press Woodley admitted, 'the film obviously had its technical shortcomings, but Cablevision has given us the opportunity to make our own programmes, have total control over the content and presentation, and access to the video equipment.'<sup>84</sup> The group's next proposal, *A Woman Like You* (a film about women's choice over abortion) was dismissed by the station, uncomfortable over its subject matter sitting next to local sports coverage, celebratory civic events, and mainstream pop concerts. The project would resurface under the aegis of SIF as the four women would formally collectivise as the Sheffield Film Co-op (to be explored in Chapter Two).

In 1975 station manager John Brand reported on the – relative – success<sup>85</sup> of the Cablevision experiment and pleaded with trade magazine *Broadcast* for laws to be relaxed in a bid to capture necessary advertising income. Unfortunately for Brand, and for Cablevision the station did not make a profit by 1979, despite his appeal to the advertising sector. <sup>86</sup> Simply, audience reach was not big enough for business investment and the new Labour government began dissolving the cable television network. Cablevision ceased broadcast on January 2<sup>nd</sup> 1976 and with the exception

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<sup>83</sup> P. Roberts, 'TV Mums Show Up City Centre Shopping Problems', in *Sheffield Telegraph*, 1974.

<sup>84</sup> P. Roberts, 'SFC', *Sheffield Telegraph*, 9 July 1975, p.12.

<sup>85</sup> Sheffield Cablevision had a daily audience of 26% of its 100,000 available viewers, in *Broadcast* 837, (1975), p.33.

<sup>86</sup> Brand said "[I]t costs £70,000 a year to keep the station going and while advertising is not a licence to print money we might make a few sixpences, and the backers might make a profit by 1979, we have a plan, but it doesn't mean we are trying to be a mini-YTV, or a mini-BBC. We just want to be Sheffield Cablevision'. From Anon, 'There is a cable success story - and Sheffield's 26% proves it', *Broadcast* 837, 17 Nov 1975, p. 12.

of Swindon Viewpoint,<sup>87</sup> the UK-wide local TV experiment closed operations by the end of the year.

The Cablevision pilot was only fleeting, yet it remains an important moment in the development of moving image culture Sheffield. In a large city without a major broadcaster Cablevision offered a space for individuals to learn the craft and work with professional film and portable, low-gauge video equipment for the first time. The absence of a recognised national broadcaster in the city and the particular impact that placed on film and video development is a recurrent theme in this history and will be discussed throughout. Cablevision gave a section of the local demographic a chance to make content raising issues and concerns about their city which had previously gained little attention. The short-lived Cablevision project therefore demonstrates evidence of the 'local structure of feeling' during this pre-history.

A conflation of factors unique to Sheffield gave rise to its existence and I argue that its failure to establish on a long-term basis (and thereby denying the city local broadcasting infrastructure) only provided motivation and newly discovered technical skills to a group of film-makers who would serve as important components in the development of the SIF membership, the SFC. In the minutes of a YAA meeting a few days after Cablevision stopped, Barry Callaghan 'reported on the closing down of this scheme and his opinion that the equipment and premises

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<sup>87</sup> Swindon were given a generous endorsement by the nearby EMI factory. Anon. 'Local TV-Radio & Syndication: Cable Station Exits; Only 1 Left', in *Variety* 281.10, January 14, 1976, p. 55.

not be wasted'.<sup>88</sup> He, and others, ensured this loss would be turned into opportunity as momentum gathered pace during the second half of the 1970s.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **SIF AND INDEPENDENT REGIONAL FILM (1976-1985)**

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<sup>88</sup> Yorkshire Arts Association, Arts Council of Great Britain Records (1927-199), Victoria and Albert Museum. Archive Boxes - ACGB/111/5, Minutes of the meeting of the Film and TV panel held at YTV, Leeds on Monday, 5<sup>th</sup> January 1976.

The concise details of when the Sheffield Independent Film Group (SIFG, its first abbreviation) was founded in late 1976 and early 1977 are hard to define. This was a story of informal meetings in Sheffield pubs and offices assorted voices from the art school, the local community, experienced and inexperienced, joining together to build a solution for better access to funding and moving image equipment in the city. As a result, the opening section of this chapter is mainly constructed from oral testimony. SIF did not begin to produce any formal documentation (business meetings, committee agendas, financial records) until 1984.<sup>89</sup> Any attempt to formulate strategy and coherent proposals was often met with apathy, and some areas of the membership were avowedly ‘anti-meeting’,<sup>90</sup> while work patterns appear to have been ad-hoc. In essence, the SIF membership at this stage was comprised of recent graduates and amateurs – not professionals. It is no surprise, then, that SIF has undocumented beginnings; thereby making a detailed history. However, we must still focus attention on *why* the group was founded, the common set of needs that led to its establishment and some of the types of projects its members were involved in during this formative period.<sup>91</sup>

The chapter will then turn to a brief historical overview of local politics in the city to help frame the political culture in which a group like SIF operated, and assess when the roots of SCC media policy began to develop. It will conclude with a large section detailing a number of key events in 1981-1985 that witnessed the growth of regional independent film practice, and gave rise to an unprecedented outbreak of film and video production in the SIF membership. I will argue that this was a

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<sup>89</sup> At the time of writing documentation of this period has yet to be uncovered

<sup>90</sup> S. Reynell, Sound engineer and record label owner, freelance. Conversation with author, 24 May 2016. Personal communication.

<sup>91</sup> At the time of writing, the only available SIF film catalogue does not adequately cover the period 1976-1980. More research is required here.

pivotal moment for the Sheffield development, and this chapter's length will reflect that.

### **Outgrowing Psalter Lane**

As the study established in Chapter One, the Psalter Lane Art School provided the central base for equipment resources to students, post-graduates and self-taught practitioners. To accommodate future growth in 1973 Barry Callaghan foresaw the creation of SIF and proposed funding plans for a new 'special equipment house' based on open access, to be built away from the Polytechnic.<sup>92</sup> Mounting demand in Sheffield on the over-used facilities at the college led to tension between Psalter Lane and newly graduated filmmakers who were increasingly choosing to remain in Sheffield. Consequently, Callaghan and Haywood declared that the college could no longer loan equipment to graduates. However, the pair did advise a body of students (which consisted of Peter Care, David Rea, Russell Murray, Jenny Woodley among others) to come together to form a new group and apply for capital funding. To do this they needed a bank account, yet Care Rea, Murray and Woodley were either unemployed or students. Lecturers Barry Callaghan, Paul Haywood and YAA Officer, Alf Bower were working and so the trio had to act as guarantors for a bank account to be created in order to allow SIF to continue their application for funding. The group set-up as a company limited by guarantee some time in 1976.<sup>93</sup>

The first source of money for equipment provision and rental of premises arrived from the Gulbenkian Foundation. In 1976 the society published a two-hundred-

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<sup>92</sup> Yorkshire Arts Association, Arts Council of Great Britain Records (1927-199), Victoria and Albert Museum. Archive Boxes - ACGB/111/5, Minutes of the meeting of the Film and TV panel held at YTV, Leeds on Tuesday 18th September 1973.

<sup>93</sup> P. Haywood, Fine Art Lecturer, Sheffield Hallam University, Retired. Conversation with author, April 16 2016.

page treatise on 'Support For The Arts In England'. The paper was critical of the current provision for promotion of film in the regions stating 'film production hardly exists outside the London area' and admitting that regional film societies were heavily under resourced, reliant on RAAs, and seemed 'to find more difficulty than in other areas of arts provision.'<sup>94</sup> The paper serves an example of the first Gulbenkian Film Award Scheme at the Bradford Visual Communications Centre, operated by the YAA which 'enables them, with a minimum of technical equipment, training and expense, to involve local people in the direct experience of expressing their own thoughts and feelings.'<sup>95</sup> Seeking similar opportunity the embryonic group of practicing filmmakers in Sheffield applied to the Gulbenkian and received a capital grant of £3,000 to 'buy an Arriflex VL camera and some sound equipment.'<sup>96</sup> In the same year the AIP reported that the YAA Film Panel had doubled their expenditure on film production grants, thanks mainly to the initiative and pressure shown from Sheffield filmmakers 'who have organized themselves into an independent film group with over 25 members.'<sup>97</sup> Ostensibly, SIF were in need of extra production equipment to service their small membership base and they also felt it necessary for the development of the group to find suitable accommodation. The grant given by the YAA in 1978 was £4,000 for equipment and rental costs.<sup>98</sup> A facility was found at Howard Road, in the suburb of Walkley, and the group moved into a 'crumbling two-up-two-down'<sup>99</sup> in alliance with the

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<sup>94</sup> Lord Redcliffe Maud, *Support for the Arts in England and Wales*, (Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1976), p. 164.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. p. 165.

<sup>96</sup> D. Rea, Film-maker, freelance. Conversation with the author. Conversation with author, 23 May 2016. Personal communication.

<sup>97</sup> Anon, 'Yorkshire Arts and Regional Film Making', *AIP & Co.* no.10, (July 1978), pp.3-4.

<sup>98</sup> Yorkshire Arts Association, Arts Council of Great Britain Records (1927-199), Victoria and Albert Museum. Archive Boxes - ACGB/111/5, Minutes of the meeting of the Film and TV panel held at YTV, Leeds on Tuesday 18th September, 1978.

<sup>99</sup> C. Pons, Course Leader, MA Filmmaking, Sheffield Hallam University. Conversation with author, 29 July 2016. Personal communication.

Untitled Gallery, which shared the ground floor.<sup>100</sup> Upstairs, SIF had a meeting room, two editing bays (one 'ratty Steenbeck'<sup>101</sup>) and storage cupboards. The house at Walkley became the informal headquarters of SIF for the next decade.

The composition of this early SIF group is characterised by its diversity. The membership was broad-based and formed from a combination of people with assorted interests. It comprised of people like Peter Care and Russell Murray from the Psalter Lane filmmaking course who wanted to be filmmakers or second wave feminists of the SFC. Learned structuralist film theorists like Richard Woolley, mature students like David Rea, and the paternal creative instincts of senior members, Haywood and Callaghan were all part of the body. Care, recalls SIF being 'about encouraging people to make films, whether for personal reasons or for left-wing political purposes.'<sup>102</sup> In many respects this ambiguous space, to the left-of-centre, is emblematic of the SIF institution; at its core it was not about radical politics, instead it was more a shared environment for people who approach film and video in different ways. The more politicised groups which emerge among the SIF membership following C4's arrival in the 1982 will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter. An underlying idiom from SIF campaign literature over the next decade merits restating in full: 'The membership have in common the fundamental need for equipment and technical back-up, for contact and support from other filmmakers and for training to develop their skills.'<sup>103</sup> SIF member Simon Reynell extends this apolitical message further, 'there was nothing

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<sup>100</sup> Untitled Gallery later became the Site gallery and followed SIF into the CIQ in 1988.

<sup>101</sup> C. Pons, Course Leader, MA Filmmaking, Sheffield Hallam University. Conversation with author, 29 July 2016. Personal communication.

<sup>102</sup> P. Care, Film-maker, freelance. Email to the author, 18 February 2016 . Personal communication.

<sup>103</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection. SIF, 'Application To Sheffield City Council – The Three Options', (September 1985).

particularly alternative ideologically about them, SIF was really useful as an organisation to get little bits of money from funding sources, and of course help with equipment.<sup>104</sup> Despite a roughly formed 'constitution' there seems to be no dogmatic philosophy at the heart of the SIF project, rather a loose set of aims to make films and share equipment. Even an attempt at meeting regularly and critiquing each other's work, was only partially realised – 'that kind of stuff was very informal'.<sup>105</sup> The last word serves as a perfect symbol of the early SIF group.

At this stage in the late 1970s the SIF model was not particularly new practice in England. Collectively owned equipment resources had a long tradition in the amateur-cine clubs which emerged in the post-war period and which manifested more formally in the late 1960s counterculture.<sup>106</sup> In Bristol, 1975, at the National Festival of Independent British Cinema the conference keynote indicated that the strength of an independent cinema lay within the diversity of its members.<sup>107</sup> The local group, ICW, declared that it is not 'the province of a group of filmmakers who are concerned with one particular type of film; the very heterogeneity is the foundation of its ability to develop and respond.'<sup>108</sup> In 1979, the Birmingham Film Video Workshop was established and many of its egalitarian principles of work sharing, servicing a local community of beginners *and* experienced individuals, while providing a centre for meetings, screenings, and training were tenets of the

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<sup>104</sup> S. Reynell. Sound engineer and record label owner, freelance. Conversation with author, 24 May 2016. Personal communication.

<sup>105</sup> D. Rea. Film-maker, freelance. Conversation with the author. Conversation with author, 23 May 2016. Personal communication.

<sup>106</sup> Drury Lane Arts Lab is the chief example in P. Thomas, 'The British workshop movement and Amber film' in *Studies in European Cinema*, Volume 8 Number 3, (2001), p. 198.

<sup>107</sup> Independent Cinema West

<sup>108</sup> J, Furse, 'Application for Grants to Cover The Capital Cost of Developing A System For Independent Film Production at Independent Cinema West in Bristol.' In *What Was British Independent Film* – Colin Perry, <http://www.lux.org.uk/blog/what-was-british-independent-film-part-1>, 2014, accessed 9 May 2016.

SIF agenda that would define its thirty year existence.<sup>109</sup> As the later part of this chapter will investigate, the collaborative nature of the SIF membership allowed a vital creative energy to take hold in the 1980s. In 2007, Colin Pons neatly summarised the abiding SIF legacy by stating: ‘the real power of SIF was, and still is, the membership.’<sup>110</sup>

While SIF shared many parallels with other equipment workshops and collective spaces operating in the country within the tightly concentrated Sheffield context one of the crucial elements of SIF was its close dialogue with the art school in nearby Psalter Lane. One of the most essential voices of the early SIF membership was the SFC. As Chapter One discussed, they were among the most experienced filmmakers in the city; they then secured funding for film stock from the YAA, and made *A Woman Like You* (1976) using SIF and Psalter Lane equipment. SFC members Jenny Woodley, Christine Bellamy, and Moya Burns were instrumental in SIF organisation and all were recent graduates of the college.<sup>111</sup> Barry Callaghan introduced the SFC to the YAA’s film officer Jim Pearse and as they began to understand the mechanisms of grant-aid application Woodley et. al., spent much of the late 1970s lobbying for funds on behalf of the nascent SIF group. Although *A Woman Like You* was made in collaboration between the YAA, SIF and Psalter Lane, this flow and exchange of equipment and resources would soon be slowed. In the new decade, as SIF’s base grew (and its equipment became exhausted), Paul Haywood recalls that the group became unhappy about students using both SIF

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<sup>109</sup> P. Long, Y. Baig-Clifford, R. Shannon, ‘What We’re trying to do is make popular politics: The Birmingham film and video workshop’, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 33 (3), pp. 377-95. (2013).

<sup>110</sup> Pons, C. ‘Five Screens Short of a Load’ in M. Dunford, ed., *Inclusion Through Media* (Open Mute, 2007), p. 4

<sup>111</sup> *Becoming SFC* – Angela Martin, <https://womensfilmandtelevisionhistory.wordpress.com/2014/04/04/becoming-sheffield-film-co-op/>, accessed 15 January 2016.

resources *and* Psalter Lane equipment: 'we had to make sure students couldn't actually become a member while still at college ... it became important for us [the art school] to be a freestanding entity so we stepped back.'<sup>112</sup> Nonetheless, as the essential need for Psalter Lane equipment resource diminished, there still remained a mutual dependency. In the testimony of SIF members a crucial theme resonates: 'one of the things that SIF did, it was a place where students could go after they graduated, they didn't have to go to London to work on film – they could do it here in Sheffield.'<sup>113</sup> While this was not a universal path the fact remains that in its early years of SIF establishment, those active agents discussed above were heavily reliant on Psalter lane, and vice-versa.

A second reason why the SFC was such a vital cog in the SIF membership came from its second wave feminist ideology. However, because of a lack in experience, the SFC did not know what they might prefer to do or would be good at, so film and video shoots featured a gender neutral crew.<sup>114</sup> This had an undoubtedly progressive effect on the men in the SIF membership, 'with the formation of the SFC, and Richard Wooley's work there was a greater understanding of feminism among SIF members.'<sup>115</sup> And although there were some internal dialogues that needed to be resolved<sup>116</sup> the idea that a feminist filmmaking group working with male counterparts on an equal field is progressive. It was this commitment –

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<sup>112</sup> P. Haywood. Fine Art Lecturer, Sheffield Hallam University, Retired. Conversation with author, April 16 2016

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> *Becoming Sheffield Film Co-op* – Angela Martin, <https://womensfilmtelevisionhistory.wordpress.com/2014/04/04/becoming-sheffield-film-co-op/>, accessed 15 January 2016.

<sup>115</sup> R. Murray. Senior Lecturer in Media Practice, Nottingham Trent University. Email to the author, 4 June 2016. Personal communication.

<sup>116</sup> 'I remember being caught between supporting the ideals of feminism, trying to support feminist filmmakers but wearing winkle picker shoes and going out nightclubbing' from P. Care. Film-maker, freelance. Email to the author, 18 February 2016. Personal communication.

conscious or otherwise – to diversity that would characterise the next wave of groups which joined the SIF group in the mid-late 1980s.

Aside from the sparse funding available at the YAA, SIF members also had the occasional opportunity to make films funded by the SCC. The two archetypes of the council film in this period are thus: First, the promotional corporate film made in direct alliance with the SCC to reposition Sheffield's image and help attract business to the region. Second, the SCC realised that the traditional industries were crumbling, so they commissioned the SIF membership to document the aging proponents of steel crafts, or 'little mester' trades.<sup>117</sup> SIF member David Rea was commissioned to work on *Free For All* (1976) and *Your Move Next* (1981). Both aimed to show Sheffield in a positive light (surrounding countryside, Crucible Theatre, the University) with the aim of building internal confidence; improving Sheffield's outward image; attracting inward investment; and developing a long term plan for the economic diversification of the city<sup>118</sup> in a Blunkett-led administration attempting to transform and raise civic pride.

In the late 1970s the Sheffield cutlery industry was beginning to erode as East Asian imports were allowed to flood the market. SCC approached Paul Haywood to document this dying industry and SIF members made a series of films called *Trades and Crafts of South Yorkshire*.<sup>119</sup> The SCC paid material costs for the 16mm, and in an age when film was expensive and difficult to fund, here was a chance for

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<sup>117</sup> 'The phrase Little Mester is a regional term used to describe Sheffield's self-employed cutlers who rented space in factories and had their finished goods sold by the factory owner', from <https://web.archive.org/web/20080516070957/http://www.made-in-sheffield.com/people/littlemesters-pt1.htm> (Accessed 12 October 2016)

<sup>118</sup> P. Seyd, 'The Political Management of Decline: 1973 -1993' in L. Binford et. Al., *A History of the City of Sheffield, Vol. 1*. (Sheffield Academic Press Ltd., 1993), p. 151.

<sup>119</sup> The series is in the process of being collected, but remains improperly documented or archived.

students and SIF members to work on 16mm productions at little cost.<sup>120</sup> The catalogue is marked by such films which paradoxically celebrate Sheffield's industrial heritage yet are made in socio-political circumstances set to derail that history. Furthermore, the limitations and long-term sustainability of this type of work are evident; although the SCC and corporate interests paid a small wage, SIF members needed to do 'four or five of those a week' to make even a threadbare living from filmmaking.<sup>121</sup> This shifted in the 1980s, as previously unimaginable opportunities developed for the SIF membership and its growth increased exponentially.

### **Sheffield Politics, Local Government And The Moving Image**

It is useful here to present an historical overview of local politics in Sheffield during this period to help understand the position of moving image and municipal support of the arts in the context of local city governance. This may help unpack the motivations behind such engagement projects as the council funded SIF films. In the 1970s SCC had been controlled by the Labour party for an almost unbroken spell since 1926. A turbulent period in the mid-late 1970s however provided the greatest challenge to the traditional Labour party in the city's history. The SCC had a long record of practising a form of paternalist municipal socialism based on high expenditure on local services and welfare provision.<sup>122</sup> In the post-war period, the Labour council built concrete social housing, negotiated slum clearances, stimulated educational development and local art programmes, and devised schemes to protect the local environment. However, the city council was dependent

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<sup>120</sup> P. Haywood. Fine Art Lecturer, Sheffield Hallam University, Retired. Conversation with author, April 16 2016.

<sup>121</sup> P. Care. Film-maker, freelance. Email to the author, 18 February 2016. Personal communication.

<sup>122</sup> P. Seyd, 'Radical Sheffield: from Socialism to Entrepreneurialism' in *Political Studies* XXXVIII (1990), pp. 335-344.

on central government and played a limited role in pursuing economic development. It was therefore ill-equipped for dealing with the widespread effects of the economic and social crises which the city would face in the latter half of the 1970s.

The Local Government Act of 1972 reflects the erosion of traditional hierarchies within the Labour Group and the new District Labour Party would have an effect on how the city was run in the early 1980s. In addition to local political instability, the national and local economic landscape was equally uncertain. The global oil shock of 1974 and the increasing speed at which trade and manufacturing was evolving, dealt a nationwide blow to British industry and Sheffield was among the hardest hit. Its status as a centre for production with an economy heavily reliant on its manufacturing sector left it highly vulnerable in the face of industrial decline. To compound the problem many of Sheffield's steel firms had failed to adapt to changes in the market as the country began to de-industrialise, increasing their competitive disadvantage.<sup>123</sup> Meanwhile, corporate restructuring within the steel and heavy engineering sectors greatly reduced local control of production and the number of major headquarters in the city fell steadily.<sup>124</sup> Within this context, discontent among SCC grew.

In this fragile period structural reforms to local government introduced through the Local Government Act undermined an historically safe group of council personnel and politics. A new tier of local government slowly emerged: the abolition of the aging aldermanic group, and the newly created metropolitan

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid. pp.335-334.

<sup>124</sup> P. Lawless, 'Partnership in urban regeneration in the UK: The Sheffield central area study', in *Urban Studies* 31 (8): 1303. (1994), p.3

borough council election of 1973 encouraged novices to become candidates, some with different educational and occupational backgrounds from what had gone before.<sup>125</sup> This young group of university educated politicians were often natives of the city and fiercely socialist in political principle. They would form the insurgent 'New Left' group which took over the City Council in 1980.

David Blunkett's election as Sheffield's Labour leader in 1980 cemented the New Left's emergence to power. Over the next five years key symbols of this local programme of socialism were: flying the red flag from the Town Hall on May Day, establishing an annual council-sponsored Marx memorial lecture, twinning the city with communist cities in the Soviet Union and China, establishing the city as a nuclear-free zone, and contributing £100,000 to the miners' support fund.<sup>126</sup> Twentieth century Sheffield politics is enmeshed with the abiding myth of a 'Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire' of this period, perpetuated in part by the national press. Accurate classification of the Labour politics of SYCC remains a difficult challenge. 'Sheffield's socialist claims mask a conservative reality which is dispersed in the neighbouring authorities of Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham, and the internal factionalism of city council politics is much more nuanced than first appears.'<sup>127</sup> The decade is marked by a complex transition in policy; a restructuring of local economy based around support for traditional labour industry toward a phase of collaboration with local business and capital interests. Space is limited here to understand the complex mechanics of this, but the new decade witnessed a significant moment in the framework of local media policy development.

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<sup>125</sup> P. Seyd, *The Political Management of Decline*, (Sheffield Academic Press Ltd., 1993), p. 153.

<sup>126</sup> P. Seyd, 'Radical Sheffield: from Socialism to Entrepreneurialism' in *Political Studies XXXVIII*, pp.335-344, (1990), p. 337.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

Within the Blunkett-led administration the economic policies of the early 1980s were centred on halting unemployment by lobbying against industrial closures; promoting public sector employment; and, crucial for this thesis, *initiating and supporting projects for 'socially useful' production*.<sup>128</sup> The Department of Education Employment (DEED) was established in 1981 to help drive 'non-traditional' job creation, business opportunities, and training needs identified by those activities which were yet to be labelled the cultural industries: film, music, arts, media production.<sup>129</sup> The DEED is widely regarded as the first of its kind outside of London; a regional government department which attempted to shape cultural and employment policy in a climate of central Conservative government cuts.<sup>130</sup> It represents, to some extent, a marked shift from the old Labour of the 1970s. A proactive programme of policy papers and grant-aid provision for the arts in Sheffield followed over the next decade and SIF exploited this to further their position (to be discussed in more detail in the coda).

The resources available to implement this idea were initially slim. In the face of heavy de-industrialisation and rising unemployment DEED was given a relatively meagre £18 million between 1981-88.<sup>131</sup> Yet the language at the centre of the early DEED project was optimistic, ambitious, and unusual in the context of time. Such policy is now commonplace in urban regeneration programmes, but in the Sheffield

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<sup>128</sup> I. Strange, *Public-Private Partnerships and the Politics of Economic Regeneration Policy in Sheffield* (PhD thesis, University of Sheffield, 1993), p. 133.

<sup>129</sup> N. Oatley et al. 'Sheffield's cultural industries quarter', in *Local Economy*, 11:2, pp. 172-179, (1997) p.172.

<sup>130</sup> See L. Moss. 'Sheffield's cultural industries quarter 20 years on: What can be learned from a pioneering example?', in *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, Vol. 8, Issue. 2, 2002, 211-219, J. Montgomery, 'Cultural Quarters as Mechanisms for Urban Regeneration. Part 1: Conceptualising Cultural Quarters', in *Planning Practice & Research*, Vol. 18, Issue 4 (2003), pp. 293-306, F. Bianchini, & M. Parkinson, eds., *Cultural Policy and Urban Regeneration: The West European Experience* (University of Manchester Press, 1996).

<sup>131</sup> A. Digaetano, P. Lawless 'Urban governance and industrial decline. governing structures and policy agendas in Birmingham and Sheffield, England, and Detroit, Michigan, 1980-1997' in *Urban Affairs Review* 34 (4): 546-77, (1999).

context, these embryonic ideas were already starting to be constructed on the unique circumstances of the city's economic, social and cultural identity. As Steven Mallinder argues, 'the absence of an effective entrepreneurial infrastructure subsequently required municipal strategies to catalyse regeneration through local creative production.'<sup>132</sup> One area of 'creative production' was film and video. For Sheffield's burgeoning moving image sector it was not really until 1985 when these ideas began to penetrate into DEED consciousness through the writings of Sylvia Harvey and progressive SCC staff such as Paul Skelton. While it is problematic to overstate the importance of local politics, the narrative of moving image development in Sheffield owes much to sympathetic – if not universal – SCC support of the cultural industries. I argue that the penetration of influential SIF ideas within the SCC was integral to this maturing dynamic, especially in the latter half of the 1980s.

### **Independent Regional Film Culture, C4 and SIF**

In the years between 1980-1984, the prospect for an organised regional film culture to emerge from the foundations which groups like SIF had cultivated in the late 1970s became a reality. The BFI realigned its policy outwards to the regions and produced a polemic called *The New Social Function of Cinema* advocating the new doctrine. Meanwhile, the IFA challenged the homogeneity of mainstream broadcasting by campaigning for a 'fourth channel' and the trade union ACTT set out a new code of practice in an attempt to regulate fragile working patterns in the sector. In 1982 C4 arrived with a bold remit (and a claim on regional voices) and the ACTT instigated the Workshop Declaration.<sup>133</sup> In Sheffield two franchised

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<sup>132</sup> S. Mallinder, 'Sheffield is not Sexy' in *Nebula 4.3*, September 2007, p. 307.

<sup>133</sup> ACTT Declaration, [http://www.luxonline.org.uk/histories/1980-1989/actt\\_declaration.html](http://www.luxonline.org.uk/histories/1980-1989/actt_declaration.html) (Accessed 6 July 2016).

workshops were set up and a number of splinter groups formed – using SIF as the central equipment hub. SIF itself witnessed a dramatic spike in its membership base<sup>134</sup> and equipment use increased to the point of saturation. As a result of this activity, the organisational dynamic was forced into change. This was a period of unparalleled production activity in Sheffield and it is no overstatement to suggest that the region became one of the major centres for independent film and video making outside of London.<sup>135</sup> This extended section then, will attempt to unpack these interconnected narratives and aim to shed further light on an historical moment which, while partially documented at national and regional level, has largely been forgotten in the South Yorkshire context.<sup>136</sup>

### **The Social Function of Cinema and the BFI**

If we interpret Higson's stance that 'the 1970s can be regarded as a transitional period for British cinema ... a complex process of diversification and renewal',<sup>137</sup> then the BFI was caught in a similar evolutionary moment. In 1974, a former BBC producer, Barrie Gavin, came into the organisation with a remit to shift Production Board spending away from the early 1970s fiction trend and move support into the new territory of social and political documentary. 12 of the 32 films produced under his short employ were political documentaries.<sup>138</sup> His successor, Peter Sainsbury, took on Gavin's mantle and delivered a further radical (regional) shift in BFI strategy. Reacting to the new modes of independent cinema, Sainsbury aimed to build up a distribution and exhibition network within the BFI by pursuing 'active

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<sup>134</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection. Sheffield Independent Film, 'Draft Report from Sheffield Independent Film', (Anon. May 1985). Unpublished.

<sup>135</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection. Sheffield Independent Film, 'Draft Report from Sheffield Independent Film', (Anon. May 1985). Unpublished.

<sup>136</sup> See footnote 13 for references.

<sup>137</sup> A. Higson, 'A Diversity of Film Practices: Renewing British Cinema in the 1970s', in Bart Moore Gilbert (ed.), *The Arts in the 1970s: Cultural Closure?* (Routledge, 1994), p. 237.

<sup>138</sup> Work came from from London makers, Berwick Street Collective, London Women's Film Group, Newsreel, in R. Shail eds. *Seventies British Cinema*. (BFI; Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p.170.

collaboration with non-commercial outlets such as film studies departments, film societies, film makers' workshops, RFTs and independent cinemas.<sup>139</sup> One of the most telling activities of Sainsbury's restructure was the dissemination of IFA affiliated theorists, makers and activists into the BFI Production Board including representatives from the ACTT (Alan Lockett), regional workshop production (Alan Fountain) and intellectual community (John Ellis, Tony Rayns, and Sheffield's advocate, Sylvia Harvey).<sup>140</sup> The BFI now imagined the new independent culture as an interlocking initiative which crossed over the public and the private spheres, and within this context a new desire for regionalism was apparent.

In September 1980 the second Independent Cinema and Regional Film Culture Conference<sup>141</sup> took place at the University of Warwick which recognises this swing. The introductory speech is typical of the new dialogue, while suggestive of the possibilities for the new fourth channel:

'We have seen a gradual rise of a range of alternative' and independent film-making practices which can now make significant claims for recognition as the true "New British Cinema". With the prospect of C4 on the horizon, the introduction is stimulated by the potential of new modes of exhibition, and an erosion between the traditional borders of commercial and independent cinema and 'broadcast television'.<sup>142</sup> Importantly, for this study, Sheffield scholar Sylvia Harvey was allowed the keynote platform and was erudite about the prospects of an

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid. p.170.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid. p.170.

<sup>141</sup> The first had taken place in York, 1979 which discussed 'general more progressive aspects of regional film culture in relation to workshops, production, non-RFT exhibition, education and documentation centres', in A. Fountain, 'Channel 4 and Independent Film'. York Film. York Film, Reel Practice: A Directory of Independent Film from the Northeast, 1981.

<sup>142</sup> Harvey, S. 'Cinema: Dead or Alive?'. Paper from the Independent Cinema and Regional Film Culture Conference, University of Warwick, 19 – 21 September, 1980.

independent cinema. Perhaps referencing what she saw in the Sheffield situation, Harvey spoke of 'inadequate funding' from the ACGB, BFI, and RAA's which 'emerge against all the odds out of film makers' savings and a few donations.'<sup>143</sup>

Harvey would continue her advocacy role for an established regional film culture in the BFI's 1979/80 catalogue, *The New Social Function of Cinema*. Space is restricted here to fully untangle this important document of the political/aesthetic movement, but it is beneficial nonetheless to reference the contents. From the front cover (Soviet red, stark constructivist design) onwards, the articles within define the prevalent mood. SIF's Richard Woolley writes about his BFI funded feature *Brothers and Sisters*, while Sylvia Harvey questions the notion of 'Independent Cinema and Cultural Democracy' and the BFI head of distribution, Ian Christie, illustrates the role of RFT's in the subsidised exhibition sector.<sup>144</sup> One of the most insightful features in the context of this study is written by Alan Fountain. In 'Questions of Democracy and Control in Film Culture' he argues that the emergence of regional film workshops is 'the most significant [development] within any area of British film culture at the current time.'<sup>145</sup> Elsewhere, Fountain is less optimistic about the BFI's expansionism. He rails against the 'undemocratic' nature of the organisation and suggests that the 'Institute's contact with its various "constituencies" is principally conducted through informal channels and is, invariably, self-selected and self-perpetuating.'<sup>146</sup> Alan Fountain became a key figure in challenging the 'self-selected body of filmmakers' by promoting regional film and video making when he was selected as the commissioning editor of the

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> There is an overview of RFTs and workshops in 'The Cinema Workshops – New Models of Cinema' looking at London's Cinema Action, Four Corners, and Nottingham's New Cinema.

<sup>145</sup> A. Fountain. 'Questions of Democracy and Control in Film Culture'. Stoneman, Rod and Thompson, Hilary. (Eds.) *The New Social Function of Cinema*. BFI, 1981, p. 166.

<sup>146</sup> A. Fountain, 'Questions of Democracy and Control', p.164.

new C4 . His words here represent a 'local structure of feeling' that behind the BFI regional film rhetoric sat something more elitist, whose basis and access to funding resources was dominantly metropolitan. The increasingly selective nature of BFI funding was evident in the £480,000 Production Board budget given to London film-maker Chris Petit in 1979 for his piece, *Radio On*.<sup>147</sup> The success of this picture, in turn, created a new BFI enthusiasm to exploit the growing market for a high-budget 'art cinema' as characterised by Laura Mulvey, Peter Wollen, Sally Potter and particularly Peter Greenaway's *The Draughtsman Contract* (1982). The latter film's rising budget impacted on the funding of more modest regional enterprise, including the SFC who were forced to delay their *Red Skirts On Clydeside* project because of under-funding.<sup>148</sup> As the BFI became interested in establishing a British Art Cinema, with increased production values and London-centric resources, their role in the regional film network became advisory and distant. This diminished situation provided an opening for a new broadcasting space to feed on the growth of independent regional film networks. Nonetheless, in Yorkshire, the BFI continued to support the YAA and provided small funding opportunities for specialist film officers, RFT's and film festivals to flourish.<sup>149</sup>

### **York Film Festival**

The first York Film Festival was founded by the collaborative forces of the city's two alternative film groups: York Independent Film (set up by Sally Anderson, Jean Stewart and Janet Tovey) acted as a regional centre 'where experience and interest in film could be co-ordinated', and York Film, a production-based group founded to

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<sup>147</sup> R. Shail ed., *Seventies British Cinema*. (BFI; Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p.72

<sup>148</sup> *Becoming SFC* – Angela Martin,

<https://womensfilmandtelevisionhistory.wordpress.com/2014/04/04/becoming-sheffield-film-co-op/>, accessed 15 January 2016

<sup>149</sup> *York Film, Reel Practice: A Directory of Independent Film from the Northeast*, 1981.

stimulate and co-ordinate independent film activity in the York area.<sup>150</sup> Both groups were financially supported by the YAA and BFI and the first festival in September 1981 was intended to showcase current and new practice from the 'North Eastern Regions.'<sup>151</sup> The programming featured work from across the region and there also ran a series of discussion sessions and talks from local filmmakers including Richard Woolley (whose BFI backed *Brothers and Sisters* also screened). In itself, a weekend of independent film and video like this was a fascinating first for the North Yorkshire region, but it was the festival catalogue that represents the true barometer of local feeling for 'an urgent need in effective co-ordination of independent regional activity on a national level.'<sup>152</sup> From page one, the writers of the festival booklet announce their intentions with a parodic fairy tale of a filmmaker from a 'region, far, far away' who applied for grants, but found funding hard to come by, and started an organisation to fight for change. 'Then, a booming voice was heard from the Great Metropolis. WE (the booming voice always spoke regally) ARE PLEASED TO PROMOTE FILM CULTURE IN THE REGIONS – THIS MEANS YOU! WE SHALL HOLD A CONFERENCE.'<sup>153</sup> But the film-maker realised 'something was wrong – nobody actually saw the film, s/he couldn't face going through it all again just to get the film screened. So s/he and the film stayed at home, where they lived happily ever after, undisturbed by dreams.'<sup>154</sup>

This satire spoke to the temperature in the regional independent film and video movement c.1981. Despite the positive rhetoric coming from 'Great Metropolis'

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Defined here as Yorkshire, Humberside and the Northern Region, Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> I. Christie 'Notes on the BFI and Regional Film Culture' in *York Film, Reel Practice: A Directory of Independent Film from the Northeast*, 1981, pp. 7-8.

<sup>153</sup> 'Editorial' in *York Film, Reel Practice: A Directory of Independent Film from the Northeast*, 1981, p. 2.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid. p.2.

organisations, the reality at York Film festival was a distance removed. For most of the filmmakers catalogued in the directory the fundamental problem in the face of budgets cuts and 'mounting political conservatism' was 'no easy access to outlets and no certain assurance of the continuation of our working practices.'<sup>155</sup> Nonetheless, the directory which follows the propaganda reads like an important lost collection of rarely seen films made by individuals who went on to full professional careers in the industry.<sup>156</sup> Elsewhere, the range of production is defined by a heavy Sheffield bias; denoting that even in the early 1980s the SIF membership were the most active group in Yorkshire. The fact remains, however, that many of these titles – as the mock fairy tale intimates – were left unwatched outside of rare provincial regional film festivals like York Film. In 1981, the outlet for exhibition and distribution was predominantly a closed shop.

### **ACTT and The Workshop Declaration**

In 1978 the IFA produced a white paper called *The Future of the British Film Industry* on policies and proposals to build an authentic independent British film culture and to challenge the BFI Production Board and its ambiguous regional policies. While initial government response was apparently receptive, it soon became forgotten as the Labour government fell in 1979.<sup>157</sup> The IFA was originally established to challenge the hegemonic nature of television's three channels. Debate about the possibility of creating a fourth channel had provisionally begun as early as 1970 and in 1975 an enquiry into Broadcasting by the Annan Committee

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid. p.2.

<sup>156</sup> A fine example is *Being Paolo – Some Paintings By Paolo Uccello* (1975). Directed by original SIF member Alf Bower in association with SIF, YAA and the NFS, crew includes future Coen Brothers cinematographer Roger Deakins, classical composer Donald Fraser, and long-term NFS lecturer Tony Gurrin.

<sup>157</sup> S. Blanchard and S. Harvey, 'The Post-War Independent Cinema – Structure and Organisation', in J. Curran, *British Cinema History*, (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1983), p. 18.

further pushed the agenda. Sensing progress, the IFA reported that 'only with restructuring the broadcasting system, and the national culture as a whole, [can we] benefit from the rich and varied contribution that independents can make though the medium of television.'<sup>158</sup>

While fundamental to the thinking behind the establishment of a 'Fourth Channel', the IFA's radicalism, identity problems and divisive factionalism had no place in a commercially driven independent market such as the one which C4 ultimately engendered. As the 1980s progressed its impact waned considerably.<sup>159</sup> Nonetheless, through lobbying for a new mode of television broadcasting, the IFA remains an important agent in this history. Furthermore, its campaigning of the ACTT is noteworthy. By 1979 following pressure from the IFA, the ACTT had organised an independent film sub-committee to establish a Code of Practice, which recognised 'non-mainstream' production to open up membership, and give access to low-budget production funds to those regional representatives without union membership.<sup>160</sup> In South Yorkshire and SIF this was a significant moment. The ACTT was a London-based professional union and the Code represents a devolved movement of the power to unionise in the regions. Before the Code SIF members like Russell Murray saw the ACTT's strict membership criteria as 'a barrier to independent filmmakers, in as much as individuals would collaborate in different roles on different productions' thereby making ACTT membership untenable.<sup>161</sup> The Code therefore was a formal recognition of a new type of integrated

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<sup>158</sup> IFA Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collections. 'IFA Report, 1975 (Anon).

<sup>159</sup> S. McIntyre, 'Art and industry: regional film and video policy in the UK' in A.Moran, ed., *Film Policy: International, National and Regional Perspective* (London and New York, 1996), p.45.

<sup>160</sup> P. Thomas, 'The British workshop movement and Amber film' in *Studies in European Cinema*, Volume 8 Number 3, (2001), p.198.

<sup>161</sup> R. Murray. Senior Lecturer in Media Practice, Nottingham Trent University. Email to the author, 4 June 2016. Personal communication.

collaborative practice which defined the activity in groups such as SIF. The Code was designed to prevent the worst aspects of casualised film and video making; an attempt to regulate an often unethical, freelance industry.<sup>162</sup> This model was further extended in 1982 with the Workshop Declaration, which was explicitly intended to encourage 'the cultural, social and political contribution made to society by the grant-aided and non-commercial' wing of the new independent sector and was described by a set of requirements which workshops had to accept.

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To become franchised under the declaration's criteria, prospective workshops had to meet minimum funding levels, constant wage rates, declarations of non-profit distribution, and retain minimum working (four) numbers. While this rigid set of requirements kept some of the Sheffield fraternity from applying,<sup>164</sup> the 1982 Declaration offered a chance for select filmmakers in Sheffield to stay in the region and earn a modest living. In the words of a SIF report, 'their skills can [now] be turned into ways of working which are socially useful to the areas in which they live.'<sup>165</sup> Moreover, the enfranchised workshops' improved resources afforded wider opportunity to meet the demands of the C4's broadcasting standards, and they were now committed to producing and completing one hour of television production a year.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> For a more detailed overview of how the Franchise worked to help filmmakers refer to, [http://www.luxonline.org.uk/histories/1980-1989/actt\\_declaration.html](http://www.luxonline.org.uk/histories/1980-1989/actt_declaration.html) (Accessed 17 August 2016)

<sup>163</sup> F. Oppe, J. Curling, 'A Declaration of Independence', *Screen*, 24:1 (Jan-Feb, 1983) pp.53-54.

<sup>164</sup> David Rea was forthright in interview about not presenting his (and Richard Hines') company Banner Films under the Declaration; seeing it as a limiting practice.

<sup>165</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection. Sheffield Independent Film, 'Draft Report from Sheffield Independent Film', (Anon. May 1985). Unpublished.

<sup>166</sup> *Becoming SFC* – Angela Martin, <https://womensfilmandtelevisionhistory.wordpress.com/2014/04/04/becoming-sheffield-film-co-op/>, accessed 15 January 2016.

The thesis will discuss the two enfranchised workshops in the SIF membership (Steel Bank and SFC) later in this chapter. However, it is important to recognise that in this period half the ACTT members in Sheffield were not in permanent groups and many SIF members did not have union tickets.<sup>167</sup> As a result, the remaining chapter will also discuss the amorphous collection of groups and individuals who characterise part of the Sheffield movement during this time. Before that, the next section presents a short summary of the foundation of C4 and its impact on regional film and video.

### **Channel Four**

In the 1970s following graduation Alan Fountain became active in the Nottingham region as an IFA activist and East Midlands Film Officer. He then joined the BFI production board before being awarded the job as first commissioning editor for independent film and video by the chief executive of the new C4, Jeremy Isaacs.<sup>168</sup> At a roundtable event in Berlin, shortly after appointment, Fountain suggested that in the 1980s the main problems for the film and video sector outside London was – even with the new ACTT Declaration in place –building a regional film culture of production and exhibition in a time of deep national recession.<sup>169</sup> Under his stewardship C4 would attempt to offer succour to the embryonic culture.

The new channel had a Parliamentary remit to promote experimentation and innovation. Its commissioning policies, driven by Fountain's existing knowledge of the sector, were aimed at representing, in his own words, 'voices from different

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<sup>167</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection. SIF, 'Application To Sheffield City Council – The Three Options', (September 1985).

<sup>168</sup> Alan Fountain – Obituary, Jeremy Isaacs <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2016/apr/12/alan-fountain-obituary>

<sup>169</sup> K. Wetzel, 'Independent British Film Roundtable – Berlin', *Views*, Autumn 1983.

parts of the country, from different regions; a strong idea of class, a strong idea about gender difference and feminism, the gay movement and the importance of involvement of filmmakers from the black community.<sup>170</sup> To help realise this vision, rather than producing its own material, C4 would operate as a publisher-broadcaster and 'buy-in' programming from the 10 initially franchised workshops.<sup>171</sup> Upon its launch in 1982 C4's publicity declared that the 'funding of film workshops represents a unique cultural partnership' and it would make 'a significant contribution towards strengthening regional film culture from which the Channel can confidently anticipate the emergence of a wide range of imaginative and unusual work.'<sup>172</sup> Between 1982-85, the availability of C4 finance for regional production allowed South Yorkshire filmmakers to explore themes often ignored or trivialised by conventional media (gender issues, class identity, ethnicity, youth) and to create content unique to the South Yorkshire experience. In 1983, the money available for Workshop groups came via £650,000 from C4, £130,000 from the BFI Production Board, and £40,000 from the regional production fund.<sup>173</sup> This unparalleled level of funding systematically altered the landscape in Sheffield and South Yorkshire. Although only two franchised groups fell under its direct influence, SIF would receive a significant windfall from C4, and in turn this led to an expansion in film production across the wider region.

### **Sheffield Workshops**

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<sup>170</sup> P. Long et. al, 'What We're trying to do is make popular politics': The Birmingham film and video workshop.'" *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 33 (3): 377-95. (2013), p. 383.

<sup>171</sup>P. O' Reilly, 'I Will Survive: Forty Years of Amber Films and the Evolution of Regional Film Policy' in *Networking Knowledge: Journal of the MeCCSA Postgraduate Network*, Vol 1, No 2., (2009), p. 6.

<sup>172</sup>J. Newsinger. *From the grassroots: regional film policy and practice in England*. (PhD thesis, University of Nottingham, 2010), p. 65.

<sup>173</sup> J. Curling, 'A Declaration of Independence' in *Screen*, Jan/Feb 1983, Vol. 24 Issue 1, p53-61.

Alan Fountain was committed to developing policies that benefitted the regional sector and his enthusiasm, particularly for the East Midlands/South Yorkshire area, had a profound effect. By 1985 C4 had commissioned twelve programmes from the Sheffield area and bought seven in for broadcast.<sup>174</sup> The two franchised groups tasked with making these programmes for television were Steel Bank Films and the SFC.

Following university, Cambridge graduates Simon Reynell and Dinah Ward moved to Sheffield ('because of the socialist politics in the city – and it was cheap') and Reynell secured a part-time job with SIF on a very low wage, part-time basis promoting screenings.<sup>175</sup> Reynell and Ward represent the politicised spectrum of the SIF membership base and they started Steel Bank, 'naïvely, to change the world' through film and video. Under Fountain's remit, Steel Bank received a commission to make a documentary about steel redundancies, Reynell left SIF and the collective became an ACTT franchised Workshop. This, as Reynell recalls, was 'extraordinary' that C4 gave money to people with 'terribly little experience'. A common motif running through interviews with SIF members of this period was the fundamental importance of the C4 influx, and Reynell echoes this feeling: 'something that had previously been very marginal, Arts Council backed, suddenly became a thing where you could at least sometime think about earning some money, an income.'<sup>176</sup> In the years 1984 / 85, Steel Bank were given a three year workshop contract from C4 which gave full employment to four members and created two new full time

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<sup>174</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection. Sheffield Independent Film, 'Draft Report from Sheffield Independent Film', (Anon. May 1985). Unpublished.

<sup>175</sup> S. Reynell. Sound engineer and record label owner, freelance. Conversation with author, 24 May 2016. Personal communication.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

jobs.<sup>177</sup> Following a well-received 16mm fiction film, *Winnie* (dir. Peter Biddle, 1984),<sup>178</sup> Steel Bank embarked on a series of political documentaries and activist videos. The first bought by C4 was *Notts Women Strike Back* (dir. Dinah Ward, 1985) in which a women's action committee at a Nottinghamshire pit talk about their experiences of the miners' strike. Emblematic of Ward and Reynell's politics the group also made documentaries about all facets of the post-industrial trauma unravelling in Sheffield and surrounding regions during this period. Other examples include, *Firth Derihon – A Successful Struggle* (dir. Simon Reynell, 1985) about a factory faced with closure in Tinsley, Sheffield; local transport, *The Road to Ruin* (dir. Dinah Ward, 1984)<sup>179</sup>; and *Darfield Main Must Stay* (dir. Dinah Ward, 1985) which was 'made at cost to support the (successful!) campaign against closure of the Darfield Main Colliery near Barnsley.'<sup>180</sup> Interestingly, many of these titles were made for Trade Union use and although only a handful secured broadcast, they achieved some traction through VHS circulation and local screenings (this mode of exhibition and distribution will be discussed further in Chapter Three). Blunkett's SCC now supported politically suggestive documentaries and Steel Bank were one of the groups to benefit. The DEED sponsored a series of videotapes, *Electrify for Jobs*, that were used in campaigning for network electrification of British Rail and shown at various conferences in the region.<sup>181</sup> This type of council subsidised work is an extension of the films which were made

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<sup>177</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection. Sheffield Independent Film, 'Draft Report from Sheffield Independent Film', (Anon. May 1985). Unpublished.

<sup>178</sup> *Winnie* was sold via London agent Jane Balfour Films and sold to 'at least 5 European countries', in ed. E. Greenhalgh, S. Harvey, *Cultural industries: A report to Sheffield city council / interim report number 1*, (Sheffield City Polytechnic. Centre for Popular Culture, Sheffield City Polytechnic, 1988).

<sup>179</sup> Synopsis, 'in the face of central government attacks on local transport in the force of metropolitan county council abolition, rate capping and proposals for privatisation ... makes the case for properly funded local transport systems' from SIF Catalogue, 1986.

<sup>180</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection, 'Sheffield Independent Film Catalogue, 1986' (Anon. 1986).

<sup>181</sup> -The 'Triple Alliance Conference, Phoenix 2 Steel Conference, Sheffield Electrification Campaign conference, and a Labour Party Conference Fringe Meeting', from Ibid.

in the early years of the SIF membership. However, while those titles (*Free for All* in 1976, and *Your Move Next*, 1981) are light-corporate films concerned with improving Sheffield's outward image and attracting investment, three years later, the dogma was evidently angrier as Thatcherite policies began to have a dramatic impact on the region's industry – and its political film culture.

The thesis has already discussed the genesis of the SFC, but it is important to briefly note the groups' important relationship with C4. In 1980, SFC received revenue funding from the YAA Community Arts Panel, which enabled them to join the ACTT and begin their first fully waged work as filmmakers. In 1982, they became an ACTT-franchised workshop, and began the 16mm film, *Red Skirts on Clydeside*, a project on the 1915 rent strike in Glasgow. The first phase of this film's production was funded by the BFI (£41,916) and the SCC (£8,826), and the final film was broadcast on C4 under the Workshop Agreement in 1984.<sup>182</sup> In 1985, they received a significant injection of money from C4 with total grants and fees of £92,653<sup>183</sup>. This enabled the SFC to make a sequence of film and video works which variously studied the role of Sheffield women in WWII (*Women of Steel*, 1984), women and children living on low wages (*Let Our Children Grow Tall*, 1986), and community centres (*Changing Our Lives*, 1984). The Co-operative nature of these films' production histories is notable. All were 'researched and scripted collectively, discussing the aesthetic considerations: film, style, sound etc.' and this integrated practice was marked by sharing knowledge. This process was heavily influenced by the politics of the early women's movement, 'based on informal collective working

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<sup>182</sup>M. Dickinson ed., *Rogue Reels: Oppositional Film in Britain, 1945-90*. (British Film Institute, 1999), p. 300.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid. p.300.

and skill sharing.’<sup>184</sup> However, as the stakes grew and money from C4 increased, this way of producing films became harder to realise. A founder member, Jenny Woodley later recalled, ‘I think one of the things we learned was the need for proper structures and that included a definition of the responsibilities of the management committee...’<sup>185</sup> At the SFC tensions erupted between friends; they were at a point of great transition with large amounts of money, proper wages and the need to employ freelancers. A way to cope with this culture-shock was to implement the rules of management and administration– ‘in spite of all their political beliefs, they were now *employers*.’<sup>186</sup> This sense of change was keenly felt by many groups in Sheffield, and it took time, according to Woodley, for them ‘to realise that they moved into being a small business.’<sup>187</sup> This shifting dynamic was also strongly evidenced at SIF level, and will be analysed later in the chapter.

*Red Skirts on Clydeside* was broadcast on Fountain’s *Eleventh Hour* while the series *People to People* also offered a platform for groups like the Co-op. In many cases, the signal carrier for these new productions was the emergent video format. From the SIF perspective previous attempts to deliver broadcast standard material via video were met with indifference; simply, the equipment at their disposal was not up to the exacting criteria of the BBC. However, in the egalitarian spirit of the new channel the rules were gently relaxed. As Colin Pons recalls of C4, ‘there was a guy there called Ellis, you always had to convince him that you’d achieved broadcast standards, and there was a good reason it should be transmitted ... that was very

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<sup>184</sup> *York Film, Reel Practice: A Directory of Independent Film from the Northeast*, 1981.

<sup>185</sup> ‘SFC in Interview’ in M. Dickinson ed., *Rogue Reels: Oppositional Film in Britain, 1945-90*. (British Film Institute, 1999), p. 294.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.* p.295.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.* p.294.

liberating.’<sup>188</sup> The positive benefits of having fully waged employees and increased money surrounding the SIF membership is clear. A study of credits suggests that the franchised groups were able to give additional freelance employment to other SIF members. While the money was small, ‘thirty quid here and there’,<sup>189</sup> this new model served as a distant parallel to the well-established broadcast industry already in place in London, Leeds (YTV), and Manchester (Granada). However, for Sheffield to create a sustainable broadcast infrastructure (and regular waged employment for its media workers) like its sister cities of the North, it required much more than the impetus which C4 provided. SIF needed to evolve to meet this approaching challenge.

### **SIF in the 1980s**

This period witnessed a notable expansion of the SIF membership and as a result its ‘anarchic hodgepodge’ of an organisational structure was forced into reassessment.<sup>190</sup> In 1983 SIF had 41 members but by 1985 it had 120. Of the original 22 members who founded the group in 1976, 16 were now making a waged living from film and video projects.<sup>191</sup> One of the main drivers for this membership growth was the money Alan Fountain and C4 invested into the group, and the arrival of Colin Pons in Sheffield only advanced this development.

In the late 1970s Colin Pons studied for a BA at the Hull College of Art, and shortly after was offered the job of technician in its newly established film department.

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<sup>188</sup>C. Pons. Course Leader, MA Filmmaking, Sheffield Hallam University. Conversation with author, 29 July 2016. Personal communication.

<sup>189</sup>S. Reynell. Sound engineer and record label owner, freelance. Conversation with author, 24 May 2016. Personal communication.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection. SIF, ‘Application To Sheffield City Council – The Three Options’, (September 1985).

While working on a film commission about the Humber Bridge, he met a fellow technician from Sheffield called Gary Wraith. Some years later, while studying for a masters at Reading, Pons received a call from Wraith to come and work in Sheffield on a film that SIF co-founder David Rea was directing.<sup>192</sup> Pons walked into SIF in 1983 and saw an equipment pool which was in a 'pretty poor state ... over-faced by the usage of it all', with no one looking after it. Before shooting started at SIF he began 'soldering leads together and making things work'.<sup>193</sup> David Rea saw this and invited Pons to become a two-days-a-week technician on a temporary contract. Pons was struck by the diverse membership of filmmakers working in SIF at this point, and he saw that this was a place where 'what I felt politically, and what I felt artistically could be combined.'<sup>194</sup>

Pons and Hattie Coppard (SIF's administrator and only other employee at this point) first met Alan Fountain and Caroline Spry of C4 in 1984 at their base in Howard Road. Following a positive meeting, Pons recalls that the pair 'went out and bought Filofaxes... we had made it as media executives ... but we didn't know what we were doing!'<sup>195</sup> Nonetheless, C4 appeared impressed by the SIF spirit which had already manifested in their backing of the SFC and Steel Bank. Pons suggests that part of the SIF charm was the collective nature of the group and the fact they still worked in a 'crumbling rented building with and outside toilet' – a world removed from the film and TV companies of Soho.<sup>196</sup> This provincial charm is perhaps symbolised by the terms under which C4 made their first significant

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<sup>192</sup> C. Pons. Course Leader, MA Filmmaking, Sheffield Hallam University. Conversation with author, 29 July 2016. Personal communication.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> C. Pons, 'Five Screens Short of a Load' in M. Dunford, ed., *Inclusion Through Media* (Open Mute, 2007), p.17.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid. p.22.

investment. In late 1984, the channel provided SIF with a U-Matic Video Camera, Sony Portapak, and video edit suite worth £23,000. This funding injection promised a systemic change in the way SIF members could run its productions. The enthusiasm from Alan Fountain for the Sheffield project is defined by support of this size. However, the edit suite was only given to SIF on the proviso that C4 still owned the equipment for the first four years and this did not include sufficient maintenance and replacement provision.<sup>197</sup> Furthermore, in the fast-changing environment of film and television technology the equipment itself was already some way behind acceptable broadcast standards. The amount of money coming into Sheffield production was now higher than it ever was, yet much of it left Sheffield again because SIF's initial base of (C4 bought) equipment and facilities were not of the quality required for broadcast.<sup>198</sup> While these limitations presented opportunities for alternative exhibition and distribution modes (see Chapter Three), the inescapable problem over access to professional standard equipment is apparent (and will be a recurring theme throughout the remainder of this thesis). I argue that, even with the best intentions of Fountain and C4, the financial commitment made to SIF in 1984 was still some distance from providing a sustainable platform. Paradoxically, the success of C4 production money put a lot of strain on SIF, as it was now trying to be both a grant aid subsidising body (supporting low-budget community activity) and a facility house to C4 television productions, in the hope that the one could subsidise the other. This dialectic created an existential moment for some members as Pons recalls, 'we were dabbling on the edges of something, with massive amounts of money involved.

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<sup>197</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection. Sheffield Independent Film, 'Draft Report from Sheffield Independent Film', (Anon. May 1985). Unpublished.

<sup>198</sup> 'Production money is now approximately £30,000 per half hour transmission' in SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection. SIF, 'Application To Sheffield City Council – The Three Options', (September 1985).

Whereas all we had was good intent and broken equipment. We had to change things.’<sup>199</sup>

The organisational nature of the SIF group at this stage was still that of an open-access collective, not far removed from the first years of its establishment. They did not have a formal management committee but a series of group meetings were often held to discuss new equipment, new projects and hire rates for facilities.<sup>200</sup> The members’ group meetings often descended into trivial discussions about spending money on blinds for the studios, or small increases in hire fees. One of these meetings was recalled by three different interviewees for this project.<sup>201</sup> During this gathering in a room of ‘rising damp, with water coming in from the leaking attic roof’, SFC member Angela Martin (‘who’d been in been away in London and seen how proper edit suites were ran’) stood up and declared: ‘the problem with this organisation is it has a poverty mentality.’<sup>202</sup>

The comment struck Pons especially, who reflected on the ‘almost apologetic, Northern’ way in which SIF had gone about ‘challenging the hegemony’ to this point.<sup>203</sup> Not only did this meeting represent a catalyst for implementing change in SIF policy, it also hastened plans to move SIF into more suitable premises and demand further investment from the SCC to help realise these aims. The early seeds of SIF’s transition from ‘touchy feely’ co-operative to a media business were now sown.

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<sup>199</sup> C. Pons. Course Leader, MA Filmmaking, Sheffield Hallam University. Conversation with author, 29 July 2016. Personal communication.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> Pons, Rea and Reynell, all recall the meeting in question, c.1983.

<sup>202</sup> C. Pons. Course Leader, MA Filmmaking, Sheffield Hallam University. Conversation with author, 29 July 2016. Personal communication.

<sup>203</sup> S. Harvey. Retired author, scholar, policy DEED, Sheffield Hallam University. Conversation with author, 11 June 2016.

The revised rate sheet which developed from the increased facility use also became a key tenet of the SIF (re)organisation following watershed moments like the 'poverty mentality' meeting. An early version of the hire list stated that SIF rented its production facilities on a 'differential, and sometimes payment deferred basis, so that well-funded groups working for television [i.e. Steel Bank] pay a much higher rate than groups or individuals who may have no income but the dole.'<sup>204</sup> This was a means of retaining the original SIF community spirit of open access, but it was devised as a way of sustaining the organisation. However, as Jenny Woodley remembers (from her perspective), 'if you raised money and bought equipment, that in turn meant lots more people who hadn't necessarily got any money to make a film would want to join' and use that equipment.<sup>205</sup> The very concept of an open-access workshop like SIF was called into question. Woodley recalls tensions like: 'should we just be here to administer equipment? If we have just bought a rather sophisticated camera, do we hire it out to people who join the group just in order to make their first film and might damage it?'<sup>206</sup> This was a fundamental flaw in SIF's desired expansion. The group admitted in 1985, 'we cannot accumulate enough revenue to replace and expand equipment in order to compete commercially for professional business of our members'.<sup>207</sup> Within this complex set of factors, a positive spirit nonetheless still pervades the core membership. When asked about whether equipment use and hire rates led to any tensions, David Rea used a turn of phrase which succinctly characterises the SIF group of this period.

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<sup>204</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection. Harvey, S, 'Some Notes on a Media Policy for the 1980s', (March, 1985).

<sup>205</sup> J. Woodley, 'SFC in Interview' in M. Dickinson ed., *Rogue Reels: Oppositional Film in Britain, 1945-90*. (British Film Institute, 1999), p. 294.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.* p.295.

<sup>207</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection. Sheffield Independent Film, 'Draft Report from Sheffield Independent Film', (Anon. May 1985). Unpublished.

I think the dynamic could be described as '*competitive collaboration*'. There was quite a bit of people working on other people's films – a bit like being at college. But we were all pitching for the same small pots of money, and the same equipment resource – hence the competition.<sup>208</sup>

The abiding SIF narrative of this period in its history is defined by this local structure of feeling in '*competitive collaboration*'. Technical credits from SIF catalogues feature a list of the same names working on diverse projects, in differing roles; an interlocking practice of independent film and video. Rea himself recalls being in a relationship with Christine Bellamy (SFC), while he worked on their films. He shot material for Steel Bank, while Simon Reynell 'used to record sound for Banner Films, as did Christine Bellamy (SFC)', and the feature *Winnie* was a collaboration between Steel Bank, Banner, and SFC members, some of whom lived in the same house.<sup>209</sup> Reynell extends the '*competitive collaboration*' analogy by suggesting that while those making pop video and those political film-makers were at different sides of the ideological spectrum, there was no antagonism between the two parties. Rather, a mutual belief in 'the common ground of needs' emerges where 'everyone knew that in terms of getting any money into the sector at all, it made sense for us to be kind of united.'<sup>210</sup>

This sense of unity and collective spirit was tested after the C4 boom, and it would be challenged further still after 1985. Nonetheless, with the evidence presented

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<sup>208</sup> D. Rea. Film-maker, freelance. Conversation with the author. Conversation with author, 23 May 2016. Personal communication.

<sup>209</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection, 'Notes on a Sheffield Independent Film Catalogue, 1984' (Anon. 1984).

<sup>210</sup> S. Rea. Sound engineer and record label owner, freelance. Conversation with author, 24 May 2016. Personal communication.

above I argue that the SIF of the early 1980s was a special historical moment in regional film. Even when troubles with equipment provision were at the core of debate the group rode the momentum of '*competitive collaboration*'<sup>211</sup> to create a body of work unique to the South Yorkshire region.

### **Next Generation SIF Groups**

In a *Screen* article written on the Workshop Declaration film-maker Jonathan Curling claimed that, 'the independent sector still continue[d] to exist within those practices which are not necessarily at the moment franchised.'<sup>212</sup> The widening SIF membership, therefore, was also defined by a number of individuals and groups who worked within and without subsidy and who often worked on productions for nothing at all.

Original SIF founder David Rea set up Banner Films with Barnsley filmmaker and writer Richard Anthony, brother of the novelist Barry Hines.<sup>213</sup> Feeling too restricted by the ACTT criteria, the pair never wanted to be a franchised workshop. Nevertheless, Banner submitted an idea to Alan Fountain and they soon received their first commission.<sup>214</sup> *After the Ball* initiated a series of videos made on the miners' strikes, nannies' rights, and SCC rate-capping which fell under the *A Tale to Tell* anthology – a series of four 26 minute programmes. The production was principally made on SIF's newly acquired Sony Video Camera, which Rea concedes was 'disappointing quality wise' – nonetheless it still reached broadcast on C4 in

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<sup>211</sup> When I suggested Rea's comment to other SIF members, there was a consensual agreement that this is what the SIF group dynamic could best be summarised by.

<sup>212</sup> J. Curling. (1983). 'A Declaration of Independence' in *Screen*, Jan/Feb83, Vol. 24 Issue 1, p53-61.

<sup>213</sup> Richard Hines adopted the pseudonym, 'Anthony' to distance himself from his brother who was, at this time, at the peak of his popularity.

<sup>214</sup> D. Rea. Film-maker, freelance. Conversation with the author. Conversation with author, 23 May 2016. Personal communication.

August 1983. Their next significant production was a diptych of films which reflected the miners' strike from the grass-roots perspective. *Coal Not Dole* (1984) and *Here We Go* (1985) were shot on Betacam video, edited offline at SIF, but still had to be taken to London for online edits.<sup>215</sup> These films were shot from the picket line and gave striking miners a voice; far removed from mainstream news reporting of the situation. Although never broadcast, they were assembled and distributed on the *Miners' Tapes* VHS collection. One noticeable aspect of Banner Films was the fundamentally collaborative nature of production; Peter Care was co-editor, Angela Martin camera, Christine Bellamy on sound.

Another SIF group who shot and made films from the picket-line were Active Image as founded by John Hanlon and John Goddard from Rotherham. SIF members, Steve and Lynn Colton's parents were miners and with rented SIF equipment they produced the documentary diary, *Get It Shown* (1984) in the mining village of Kiverton Park. Its stark style evidently appealed to Fountain, as it was bought by C4 for broadcast in 1984.<sup>216</sup> A year later the group was commissioned by Fountain again to make four documentary programmes about agricultural workers in Lincolnshire. Active Image was an atypical collective of this period, as it combined political documentary with making pop video. They had a direct connection, via Sheffield bands, to the metropolitan record industry, as demonstrated by the two videos Peter Care directed for Active Image (Kane Gang c/o London Records) and the promo John Hanlon made for *The Enemy Within* (c/o Rough Trade).<sup>217</sup> This

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<sup>215</sup> In the analogue domain, Offline editing is part of the post-production process of in which raw footage is copied and edited, without affecting the camera original film stock or video tape. Once the project has been completely offline edited, the original media will be assembled in the online editing stage.

<sup>216</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection, 'Sheffield Independent Film Catalogue, 1986' (Anon. 1986)

<sup>217</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection, 'Notes on a Sheffield Independent Film Catalogue, 1984' (Anon. 1984).

area of SIF growth between pop music and the moving image will be discussed in the next chapter.

The SIF membership also began to evolve along diverse class, race, and gender lines. In Sheffield, an Asian Youth Movement (inspired by similar AYM activist groups in Manchester and Bradford) was established around the campaign to 'defend Ahmed Khan who was arrested after defending the restaurant where he worked from a racist attack.'<sup>218</sup> The AYM groups saw the importance in 'organised resistance' through independent media and self-published polemical magazines and newspapers. In Sheffield the AYM (led by Ram Paul and Mukhtar Dar) produced a trilogy of U-Matic videos in 1984/5 called *Towards Resistance*, *Ba Ba Bakhtara* and *Self Defence*,<sup>219</sup> underlined by the maxim, 'spontaneous struggle is not enough; an organised response to racism is essential to our future life in this country.'<sup>220</sup> Woman's Own Pictures were an all-female video collective established in 1984 to respond to what they saw as a male bias in the media coverage of the miners' strikes. *No Turning Back* was a U-Matic film focused on documenting those 'militant mining women who were active in every part of the strike organisation.'<sup>221</sup> Funded by the SCC and DEED, it is interesting to note the catalogue entry purge the title of 'director' from its credits; *No Turning Back* was instead 'produced' by ten women, including the future director of the London Film Festival, Sandra Hebron.

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<sup>218</sup>Asian Youth Movement, <https://libcom.org/files/politics%20of%20asian%20youth%20movement.pdf> (Accessed 01 September 2016)

<sup>219</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection, 'Sheffield Independent Film Catalogue, 1986' (Anon. 1986)

<sup>220</sup> <https://libcom.org/files/politics%20of%20asian%20youth%20movement.pdf> (Accessed 01 September 2016)

<sup>221</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection, 'Sheffield Independent Film Catalogue, 1986' (Anon. 1986)

In addition to the production groups mentioned, there were 67 other members of SIF in 1985. Most of these were active film or video makers. Some were engaged in production with the following groups: Rotherham Film and Video Unit, Youth Action Video Group, Flix (a company funded under Manpower Services small business scheme), Sheffield University Broadcast Society, and the Chilean Video Group.<sup>222</sup> While documentation is scant for these collectives, it demonstrates that the SIF membership was expanding into wider areas of the South Yorkshire region, and minority ethnic, class, and gender groups were also becoming engaged in film and video. And while it is important to understand that these particular groups were operating on tiny funding grants or zero budgets, it was significant that SIF was no longer solely the domain of a small group of educated Psalter Lane graduates with access to established mechanisms of grant-aid subsistence.

The number of individual freelancers who made up the SIF membership was also rising. The 1980s experience of Tony Riley makes an interesting case study. He had worked on the climbing documentary *A Great Effort* in 1976 (dir. Jim Curran) and was subsequently engaged as a lighting cameraman for SIF groups, including Active Image. At the same time, he was also beginning to work in the freelance sector as a cameraman for Panorama and ITN and he crewed for the Sean Connery film feature, *5 Days One Summer* (1982).<sup>223</sup> His trajectory serves as a precursor to the future patterns of film and video employment which would typify the second half of the 1980s for many SIF members. Although the foundation of C4 in 1982 promised (and delivered) much, it was in some respects 'a deeply ambiguous affair, for while it opened up funding channels for independent film and video, the public sphere

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<sup>222</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection. SIF, 'Application To Sheffield City Council - The Three Options', (September 1985).

<sup>223</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection, 'Notes on a Sheffield Independent Film Catalogue, 1984' (Anon. 1984).

that it opened onto was neo-liberal.’<sup>224</sup> A de-regulated freelance culture emerged based on competitive commissioning processes and for SIF’s newly unionised film and TV workers like Tony Riley and Simon Reynell the only solution to survive in this climate was not to fight for state-subsidy and C4 money, but to begin the ‘slow drift into freelancing.’<sup>225</sup>

Nevertheless, the period between 1980-85 witnessed a dramatic and important increase in the access to production, exhibition and distribution for many in the Sheffield city region and C4 was central to this expansion. However, while paper-based documentation exists, the great void in this history for the researcher is access to the films and videos themselves. As the thesis will explore in Chapter Three, if a project was not part of the C4 machinery, many films were simply left ignored and subsequently lost for decades. It is hoped that the current research strengthens the ongoing archival process to reclaim access to this important body of regional film and video.<sup>226</sup>

## Conclusions

As the 1980s progressed the independent sector drifted closer to the aesthetic norms and functions of mainstream broadcasting<sup>227</sup> and this impacted heavily on

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<sup>224</sup> *What Was British Independent Film* – Colin Perry, <http://www.lux.org.uk/blog/what-was-british-independent-film-part-1>, (2014), accessed 9 May 2016.

<sup>225</sup>S. Reynell. Sound engineer and record label owner, freelance. Conversation with author, 24 May 2016. Personal communication.

<sup>226</sup> This process is underway and will be extended during my PhD project for the Heritage Consortium, Independent Film and Video in Yorkshire, (1970-1990). Moreover, a consortium led HLF bid is being written to establish an Artists Film and Video Archive in the region.

<sup>227</sup> The critical history and aesthetic function of commercial broadcast television has been written about extensively by in R. Clyde Allen, *The Television Studies Reader* (Psychology Press, 2004). A detailed overview of the medium is out of scope for this thesis. It is hoped that the reader of this

the Sheffield project post-1985. The C4 supported groups typically survived on one commission a year, and there was 'barely enough work of this kind to sustain these specialists in the city on a full-time basis; consequently, the vicious circle of skilled workers leaving to work in one of the broadcasting centres continued.'<sup>228</sup> SIF did not have enough commercial projects among their membership (which paid hire fees) for their equipment to be used to capacity. Meanwhile, the national 'independent' sector was evolving. As C4 matured so did the desire to commercialise its output. This, as Reynell suggests, had a deeply negative impact on the spirit of the alternative film and video movement: 'a lot of people just jumped from being very independent with a big 'I' into working for C4 and it just sort of petered out.'<sup>229</sup> His own Steel Bank collective succumbed to the new C4 freelance culture 'characterised by the corporate commissioning process.'<sup>230</sup> The channel was now primarily negotiating with established production units, and so the opportunities in Sheffield for new members to break into the metropolitan system and earn a living, became ever harder to achieve. If the initial idea of the 'fourth channel' which the IFA propagated in 1972 was a total revision of the 'bourgeois broadcast sphere into a socialist one', the reality in 1985 was loaded with compromise.<sup>231</sup> As C4 slowed down SIF funding the looming economic crisis for SIF was evident, a new set of reoriented policies were required. The ramifications of this new dialogue will be discussed in the Coda.

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current work will understand the basic critical differences between 'independent' and 'mainstream' television.

<sup>228</sup> E. Greenhalgh, S. Harvey, *Cultural industries: A report to Sheffield city council / report number 2, Sheffield's audio-visual, music and printing and publishing industries final report and recommendations*, (Sheffield City Polytechnic. Centre for Popular Culture, 1988), p. 69.

<sup>229</sup> S. Reynell. Sound engineer and record label owner, freelance. Conversation with author, 24 May 2016. Personal communication.

<sup>230</sup> E. Greenhalgh, S. Harvey, *Cultural industries: A report to Sheffield city council / report number 2, Sheffield's audio-visual, music and printing and publishing industries final report and recommendations*, (Sheffield City Polytechnic. Centre for Popular Culture, 1988), p. 70.

<sup>231</sup> *What Was British Independent Film* – Colin Perry, <http://www.lux.org.uk/blog/what-was-british-independent-film-part-1>, 2014, accessed 9 May 2016.

Alan Fountain continues to support the Sheffield sector, and from his position as the influential Commissioning Editor at C4 (and future roles in higher education), his personal connection to key figures such as Pons, Haywood and Harvey only benefitted the city's media development. As Haywood suggested, 'he was important, he was so committed, he held SIF as a model for people to emulate nationally.'<sup>232</sup> The period 1982-85 offered a brief glimmer of possibility for the SIF membership to challenge the homogeneity of the centralised London broadcast monopoly. C4 and particularly Alan Fountain as central protagonist served a tangible platform of funding, equipment and infrastructure provision. In 1988 the DEED understood that this set of factors had 'enabled the emergence of an embryonic television industry in Sheffield'.<sup>233</sup> While in some respects this was pertinent analysis, I question whether the 'embryonic industry' ever really matured from this stage. The severe implications of not having an established broadcaster in the city is a motif which repeats in a post-1985 landscape of media policy development.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **EXHIBITION, DISTRIBUTION AND THE IMPORTANCE OF MUSIC**

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<sup>232</sup> P. Haywood. Fine Art Lecturer, Sheffield Hallam University, Retired. Conversation with author, April 16 2016.

<sup>233</sup> E. Greenhalgh, S. Harvey, *Cultural industries: A report to Sheffield city council / interim report number 1*, (Sheffield City Polytechnic. Centre for Popular Culture, Sheffield City Polytechnic, 1988).

This chapter will attempt to unravel the alternative non-broadcast modes of moving image exhibition and distribution which came to the fore in Sheffield during the period under research. The first section will present a short history of cinema-going in Sheffield and the opportunities available to SIF members to watch (and screen) film from outside the Hollywood mainstream. This culminates in a brief study of the UK's first municipal cinema, The Anvil. The emergence of the video format as a production and distribution mode characterises this period.<sup>234</sup> As a result, the chapter will discuss innovative practices in video distribution by the SCC and then the VHS label, *Doublevision*. The band Cabaret Voltaire were at the heart of much radical new multimedia practice in Sheffield and there follows a section on the audio-visual work which develops within this axis. A common thread running through this account is the importance of music for the evolution of film and video in Sheffield. The chapter, therefore, concludes with a summary of music video in the SIF context. This chapter explores new areas in historical regional film and video development often ignored in favour of the dominant C4 workshop / state subsidised narrative.

### **Exhibition On Screen**

In Callaghan's film-making manual of 1973 his final words of advice for marketing and screening a finished project are worth repeating: '... a film is made for an audience; once the time and money have been spent on making a film, it is a pity to leave it rolled up in a can for ever.'<sup>235</sup> Unfortunately for the growing SIF membership, even allowing for the emergence of C4, getting work seen and distributed widely was still the greatest challenge – many works simply remained

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<sup>234</sup> Video exhibition and projection was prohibitively expensive and still beyond the financial means of many in this period, (see Dickinson, *Rogue Reels*, p. 193).

<sup>235</sup> B. Callaghan, *The Thames and Hudson Manual of Film-making*, (Thames and Hudson, 1973), p.174.

unwatched. In mid-1970s Sheffield seeing cinema from outside the Anglo-American orthodoxy was difficult. One of the few places for alternative film was at Psalter Lane. It became a home for students and non-students to watch art-house films and repertory cinema rented via the 16mm print circuit of which the Polytechnic was a member. The college also acquired a redundant 35mm projector from a local Catholic school and a body of enthusiastic current students and graduates willing to facilitate screenings helped out.<sup>236</sup> Their involvement serves as further evidence of the local art school as enabler for film and video work experience in careers not restricted to production.

During the early years of SIF Steel Bank's Simon Reynell remembers an environment where 'if you wanted to see anything you had made, you had to work to create a situation to make it shown. There was no art cinema in Sheffield, so all we had were various informal places.'<sup>237</sup> The frequency of these showings was sporadic: once a month at the library theatre or in the back room of pubs such as The Beehive, heavy 16mm projection equipment was carried across the city to small gatherings of cineastes.<sup>238</sup> Underpinning this activity was a pursuit of the cinema of social function or 'counter cinema'. A school of thought developed among practitioners who realised that it was not enough to produce a culture which counters the mainstream at the level of production, 'it must also be in opposition at the level of consumption', transforming the way cinema was exhibited.<sup>239</sup> Here,

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<sup>236</sup> Technicians to have assisted during this period include Ian Wilde (future Showroom cinema director and programmer) and Dave Godin (Senior Film Officer, Anvil Cinema), from T. Ryall. Film Studies Lecturer, Sheffield Hallam University, Retired. Conversation with author, June 1 2016.

<sup>237</sup> S. Reynell. Sound engineer and record label owner, freelance. Conversation with author, 24 May 2016. Personal communication.

<sup>238</sup> These screenings were often informal, and at this stage of research undocumented. As a result, it is difficult to understand how many people came. A suggestion is that screenings usually comprised a large percentage of the SIF membership at any one time – so this would be 30-60 members.

<sup>239</sup> S. Harvey 'Independent Cinema?' West Midlands Arts, 1978, p19. Sylvia Harvey was a chief proponent of this idea, resident of Sheffield, and SIF confidant. This notion was adopted by London

films were *made by* the community and designed to stimulate a two-way dialogue *with* the community – the process was not complete until the finished films had been screened and discussed *amongst* the local network of art-film fans and community groups.<sup>240</sup> In Sheffield the SFC emphasised a support for the model of ‘active distribution’ by organising screenings in local halls and social clubs with speakers, question and answer sessions, and supporting literature to go out with the films. Writing in the early 1980s of this process, ‘we welcome screenings where discussion with the audience can take place. This relationship with an audience plays a vital role in the continuing development in our film practice.’<sup>241</sup> At surface level this notion of immersive exhibition for the local community was progressive. While this model may have some community video workshop groups<sup>242</sup> and other small arts organisations, those with more ambitious goals thought that they ‘were consuming a lot of energy creating the scene this way, [and] I’m not sure whether it was the best way to propel forward what was going on.’<sup>243</sup> As the SIF membership increased its output and sought to meet the demands of an incipient professionalism so the need grew for more formal, sustainable spaces in which to screen it.

The Cineplex on Charter Square opened in 1972 as a commercial enterprise and for the next decade was one of few cinemas in the city to operate 16mm *and* 35mm<sup>244</sup> projection and serve mainstream Hollywood cinema alongside infrequent foreign

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collectives such as The Other Cinema, or Newcastle’s Amber as a means to circumvent traditional modes of passive exhibition – even if it meant comprising audience numbers.

<sup>240</sup> P. Thomas, ‘The British workshop movement and Amber film’ in *Studies in European Cinema*, Volume 8 Number 3, (2001), p. 197.

<sup>241</sup> J. Dovey and, J Dungey, *The Videoactive Report* (Videoactive, 1985), p. 47.

<sup>242</sup> M. Brocklesby. ‘The Development of Film and Video in Sheffield’, Paper from the Sheffield City Council Libraries – Future Visions conference, December 14 1984. Unpublished.

<sup>243</sup> C. Pons. Course Leader, MA Filmmaking, Sheffield Hallam University. Conversation with author, 29 July 2016. Personal communication.

<sup>244</sup> In the 1970s, orthodox cinemas would typically project 35mm.

language film.<sup>245</sup> David Williams (Cineplex manager) was instrumental in floating the idea of a 'Sheffield Independent Film Week' in 1979. Running in December the week was primarily used as a showcase for the SIF membership.<sup>246</sup> Supplementary finance for the festival came from the YAA and SCC and as a matter of policy the schedule was comprised solely of Yorkshire productions.<sup>247</sup> Reporting on the event for the AIP, filmmaker Tony Trafford called the week a 'fantasy on paper – a daydream of an expanding British Cinema', with full attendances most nights, and a programme composed of narrative, documentary and experimental work. 'For SIF, there is the ultimate encouragement of knowing that there is an audience if they can go out and get it.'<sup>248</sup> Early in 1983 Cineplex faced closure, but in a measure of increasing municipal integration with the cultural sector of Sheffield, it was taken over by the SCC to become the Anvil Civic Cinema - the first municipally run cinema of its kind in the UK.<sup>249</sup> Upon welcoming patrons to The Anvil, Julian Spalding (Director of Arts, SCC) defines the buoyant, socialist rhetoric of the Blunkett-led City Council and its commitment to supply funding for the arts:

'A cinema for the 80s needed, we felt, to be a cinema for the public, not in a reach me down way, but in true egalitarian spirit. There is no reason why a cinema should not be both popular and experimental, entertaining and educational, accessible and stylish.'<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> C. Shaw. *Sheffield Cinemas: Past and Present* (Sheffield Local Studies, 1999), p.12.

<sup>246</sup> 20 paid members at this time

<sup>247</sup> C. Pons. Course Leader, MA Filmmaking, Sheffield Hallam University. Conversation with author, 29 July 2016. Personal communication.

<sup>248</sup> T. Trafford. 'Sheffield Independent Film Week', *AIP & Co.* no14, January 1979, p. 21.

<sup>249</sup> C. Shaw. *History of Sheffield Cinemas*, p. 12.

<sup>250</sup> 'October/November', *Anvil Civic Cinema Programmes, 1983 – 1990* (Sheffield Local Studies Library, 791.43 SQ).

The man tasked with realising these ambitions was music industry veteran and recently graduated Psalter Lane Film Studies mature student, Dave Godin.<sup>251</sup> In his opening programme notes (designed in vivid red Constructivist style by local graphic artist, Sergio Bustamante), Godin references Soviet film director Vsevolod Pudovkin, and promotes a diverse bill of foreign language cinema, Hollywood classics, and a YAA sponsored season on Latin American Cinema. In 1983 the programme is closed by a series of films designed to 'counter the portrayal of war as glamorous and exciting' as part of the 'Steel City –Peace City, CND Annual Conference' in Sheffield. This was a cinema with Socialist ideals surging through its messages and films; a tangible cultural emblem of the 'Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire' subsidised by a SCC yet to begin its shift toward the business oriented cultural industries project. However, the Anvil still needed centralised state support (BFI) to survive in a competitive climate during a challenging time for cinema-going, more broadly. Most cinema chains during this period were dictated by programmers based in London headquarters with little interest in regional cinema. Even in a semi-autonomous council funded and BFI supported theatre like the Anvil, complete freedom of programming was very rare because of the high costs of promotion and advertising.<sup>252</sup> Nonetheless, under Godin's stewardship the early years of the Anvil appear to have been a success. The programme was diverse and admissions steadily grew to reach over 50,000 in the first year, with the programme declaring it had consistently higher average attendances than those at

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<sup>251</sup> Before moving to Sheffield in the late 1970s, Dave Godin was an advocate of black soul music; a journalist, record company adviser, record shop owner, activist and most famously first coined the term, 'Northern Soul', <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2004/oct/20/guardianobituaries.artsobituaries>, accessed 9 May 2016.

<sup>252</sup> S. Harvey, Cultural industries: A report to Sheffield city council / report number 2, Sheffield's audio-visual, music and printing and publishing industries final report and recommendations, eds. E. Greenhalgh, (Sheffield City Polytechnic. Centre for Popular Culture, 1988), p. 72.

commercial cinemas in the region.<sup>253</sup> In March 1985 the cinema held the seventh annual Sheffield Independent Film Festival and featured a host of members' works (including a premiere for the Steel Bank film, *Winnie*). SIF films<sup>254</sup> and YAA supported work nestled alongside those productions from the BFI sponsored avant-garde, regional films such as *Tyne Lives* (Amber Films) and a season of Jacques Tati work. For the SIF membership to share a bill with this range of cinema was an important milestone; independent film made in Sheffield was being shown in the correct context. Interestingly, some members from the SCC who supported the Anvil would often turn up at the SIF festivals with mixed-results. 'A lot of the councillors were ex-steelworkers, it was kind of that attitude, "I know what I like" so they would come and see stuff that SIF members were making and you could see the puzzlement on their faces.'<sup>255</sup>

As the latter half of the decade approached questions began to be asked about the long-term sustainability of the Anvil. Like other embryonic SCC projects of this period, the Anvil appears to have been 'established without a clear understanding of the implications of public cinema provision, its initial policy and direction was confused.'<sup>256</sup> In a competitive new era of cultural industries discourse, the Anvil cinema simply was not making enough money to survive. In this pressured economic climate, a bitter dialogue unfolded in the pages of its programme. Admission prices were raised, the previously left-field programming was replaced by Hollywood content, the Soviet-inspired graphic design style was phased out and

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<sup>253</sup> 'October/November', Anvil Civic Cinema Programmes, 1983 – 1990 (Sheffield Local Studies Library, 791.43 SQ).

<sup>254</sup> The Anvil did not, at this stage, have a video projector.

<sup>255</sup> C. Pons. Course Leader, MA Filmmaking, Sheffield Hallam University. Conversation with author, 29 July 2016. Personal communication.

<sup>256</sup> *The Report of Sheffield City Council's Media Policy Group*. Sheffield City Libraries and Sheffield City Council, (Anon. 1985), p. 2.

Godin himself openly railed against the perceived 'anti-Anvil meanies.'<sup>257</sup> By June 1990 Godin announced the proposed end of the Anvil, 'despite the tremendous support it has from the community, and the mounting opposition to its closure.'<sup>258</sup> On 3<sup>rd</sup> November 3<sup>rd</sup> 1990 the cinema officially closed.<sup>259</sup>

As a case study in the city's burgeoning CIQ project the Anvil Cinema represents a precursor to the new language of public-private partnerships, feasibility studies and urban regeneration developments which characterise the post-1985 SCC / SIF dialogue. Against a backdrop of fragile funding support it chiefly survived for seven years not by its 'long-term strategy' and 'enterprise plans', but on account of the film passions shared by its Senior Film Officer and a growing regional film network with appetite for adventurous programming. A cinema for the Sheffield community: audience and filmmaker alike. The Anvil was launched without very much of a film culture or tradition to build upon, and a contemporary article in *Sight and Sound* declared that Sheffield's Anvil should be regarded as one of the top six specialist cinema locations outside of London.<sup>260</sup> Perhaps its most important legacy in the scope of this thesis was the foundation of a cinema for Sheffield which broke the dominant mode; it enlarged the range of choice in the city and helped challenge the stranglehold of mainstream Anglo-American programming by giving an exhibition platform to the burgeoning independent film sector.

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<sup>257</sup> 'March 1990', Anvil Civic Cinema Programmes, 1983 – 1990 (Sheffield Local Studies Library, 791.43 SQ).

<sup>258</sup> 'Save The Anvil', Anvil Civic Cinema Programmes, 1983 – 1990 (Sheffield Local Studies Library, 791.43 SQ). In 1990, a group from the local community establish a 'Anvil Defence Committee - Alf Billingham, Hillary Bronski, Scott Dullcie, Mike Elliott, Ian Giheapy, Paul Moore, Chris Newey, Lorna Share, Tim Whitten.

<sup>259</sup> The final night was a triple bill of Cinema Paradiso (dir. Giuseppe Tornatore, 1988), The Smallest Show On Earth (dir. Basil Dearden, 1957) and Les Enfants Du Paradis (dir. Marcel Carné, 1945).

<sup>260</sup> 'March 1984', Anvil Civic Cinema Programmes, 1983 – 1990 (Sheffield Local Studies Library, 791.43 SQ).

## Video Distribution

While the Anvil was one of the few places in the region offering cinema exhibition to the SIF membership, and C4 served as a broadcast platform for a select few workshops, the rise of video distribution and non-conventional exhibition was equally important.<sup>261</sup> In 1985 SIF work was beginning to penetrate places like the 'TUC and Labour Party Conferences; community centres, local schools and colleges; pop concerts and festivals; film societies and nightclubs...'<sup>262</sup> Despite the positive rhetoric, SIF also admitted that distribution needed 'considerable development.'<sup>263</sup>

SIF members' work was not usually made with commercial incentive in mind, and was often too niche for television or even film distribution.<sup>264</sup> As Chapter Two discussed, it was characterised by largely non-professional production values, hyper-regional themes, politically radical motifs, and was often formally experimental. This tells us that if distributors were to deliver such content to audiences they would have to engage in intensive marketing and resource heavy distribution methods; luxuries which small collectives based under the SIF umbrella could not afford.

In this environment as the means of (video) production became more liberating so too did the possibilities of developing innovative new modes of video distribution for a wider market; forms of circulation which lay outside the dominant markets of

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<sup>261</sup> Julia Knight has written extensively on the area of independent distribution networks from this period and the next section will position her detailed studies in the context of Sheffield.

<sup>262</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection. SIF, 'Application To The Council - The Three Options', (September 1985), p. 10.

<sup>263</sup> 'Application To The Council - The Three Options', p. 3.

<sup>264</sup> R. Murray. Senior Lecturer in Media Practice, Nottingham Trent University. Email to the author, 4 June 2016. Personal communication.

mainstream cinema, centrally controlled broadcasting and political censorship.<sup>265</sup> In 1984/85, the South Yorkshire region was embroiled in the social and political tensions of the miners' strikes. SIF groups often worked for nothing on unfunded projects in support of the South Yorkshire and East Midlands movement – and video was the central production device. *Coal Not Dole, Here We Go*, (Banner Films, 1984), *Notts Women Strike Back*, (Steel Bank, 1984), *Get It Shown* (Active Image, 1984) were just some of the VHS documents from this period made *and* self-distributed by the SIF community. These tapes allowed members of the NUM and the TUC to express their side of the narrative, both during *and* after production of the tapes.<sup>266</sup> Six films were packaged into three VHS tapes (and re-branded as the *Miners' Tapes*) for distribution among the NUM network of members and the wider trade union community. With the help of a BAFTA endorsed launch, conservative estimates gauge that approximately four to five thousand copies of the VHS cassettes were circulated.<sup>267</sup> The subsequent publicity and fundraising generated stand as an important element of the miners' strike cultural history. In the context of this type of moving image work, these sales represent an exceptional success in creating audiences for independent political video. A fleeting moment, perhaps, but one which is a unique product of the 'local structure' in place across South Yorkshire and the East Midlands regions during a troubling period. That some of the *Miners' Tapes* were bought and broadcast by C4 is even more fascinating. This was a radical, regional community *video* practice endorsed (if not wholly supported) by the British broadcast industry. A work that reached through and

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<sup>265</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection. Harvey, S, 'Some Notes on a Media Policy for the 1980s', (March, 1985), p. 5.

<sup>266</sup> It was common for Union members to organise screenings around these Miners tapes, evidence of the so-called 'active distribution' as sought by groups like SFC.

<sup>267</sup> J. Knight, 'The 'Alternative End of Marketing: Building Audiences for Artists: Community Film and Video in Britain Since 1980', in *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, Vol.29, No.4, December 2009, p457.

beyond the mainstream to foster some semblance of regional pride in the face of looming political and personal turmoil.

During this same period the DEED published a collaborative paper which proposed to 'support video and film production distribution practice.'<sup>268</sup> Progressive regional bodies such as SCC and the GLC were beginning to debate the merits of backing media policy to establish alternative distribution systems via pre-existing council infrastructure.<sup>269</sup> The plan for achieving this was the formation of a council-supported video library. Sheffield was one of the first in the country to recognise video as an important cog in the modern library service. The Central Library, under new director Pat Coleman (c. 1983), sought to acquire video production equipment available for loan to community groups while making independent distribution of video through its library service a central facility. An important study on video from the time notes that 'the collection includes popular feature films, educational tapes and locally-produced campaign tapes, including work from local producers such as SFC and Steel Bank. It is planned to expand the acquisition of such independent work.'<sup>270</sup> Typical of this kind of community provision to promote localism, there was a sliding scale where campaign and local productions were free to rent. While the report heralds the innovative nature of this development, it states that Hollywood features were still most popular and the 'distribution of radical and campaign material from shelves dominated by entertainment was proving problematic.'<sup>271</sup> Although the usage for independent film and video through the Sheffield library system appears to be low, the establishment of a

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<sup>268</sup> The Report of Sheffield City Council's Media Policy Group. Sheffield City Libraries and Sheffield City Council, (Anon. 1985), p. 2.

<sup>269</sup> 'Whose Telly Anyway? Robin Gutch presents from a recent conference on access television' in *Screen* (1984) 25 (4-5), p. 122.

<sup>270</sup> J. Dovey, and J. Dungey, *The Videoactive Report* (GLEB, Videoactive, 1985), p. 83.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.* p.84.

library based media resource remains an important historical moment in the scope of this thesis. It once more serves as an indicator in which direction the SCC/ DEED initiative was heading towards the second half of the 1980s: an increase in cultural funding provision through local services.

The problems of independent video distribution described above are underlined by the inescapable fact of its 'disappointing take up.'<sup>272</sup> Much content from the radical, politicised section of the SIF membership sat in libraries or played to local trade union branches; without marketing, promotion or exhibition opportunities these titles had little scope to disrupt the dominant model and reach new audiences. However, one SIF subculture which exploited the emergent format, had a pre-existing audience base, and was largely freed from the manacles of grant-aid subsistence were the makers operating on the fringes of the music industry. The next section will provide an overview on how music impacted on the moving image community in the city of Sheffield during the video period.

### **The Importance of Music**

In 1973 Psalter Lane Fine Art student Richard H. Kirk formed an industrial music group called Cabaret Voltaire with Stephen Mallinder and Chris Watson. A local fanzine, *Gunrubber*, stated that 'they defy categorisation ... they involve elements of humour, electronics, film and theatre.'<sup>273</sup> At the same time, in an early 1970s indicator of municipal arts funding, the SCC supported a theatre space called Meatwhistle. Here, a group of like-minded young people from the region came together and a community of multi-media artists who were driven by 'gross-out

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<sup>272</sup> 'Despite national figures which suggest the first five years of the decade witnessed VCR usage increase by 35%' in SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection. Sheffield Independent Film, 'Draft Report from Sheffield Independent Film', (Anon. May 1985). Unpublished, p. 3.

<sup>273</sup> *Gunrubber* fanzine, 1977, January (Anon.)

aesthetics and us-versus-the world conspiracy theories' began to emerge.<sup>274</sup> Alongside Cabaret Voltaire, other bands such as Clock DVA, The Future (later The Human League) and Musical Vomit found 'a mind space where concepts and ideas could be given full reign and experimented with ... [Meatwhistle] gave inspiration, support and guidance to many who created and enjoyed their time there.'<sup>275</sup>

Cabaret Voltaire was the most developed outfit of this nascent scene, 'like godfathers, they encouraged everyone around them,'<sup>276</sup> and in 1978 they signed to London record label Rough Trade. With this financial injection became gatekeepers to a new studio complex – Western Works.<sup>277</sup> They rented rooms on the top floor of a building at the corner of Regent Street and Portobello, and in a city with limited provision for musicians it was unsurprising that the Western Works became a magnet for the multi-media community, 'like the [Warhol] Factory but on a fifty-pence budget'.<sup>278</sup>

Meanwhile, under the guidance of Callaghan and Haywood, the art school was producing graduates like SIF co-founder Peter Care who graduated from the college in 1976. A significant Care production was the YAA sponsored *Johnny Yesno* (1981). Care had received minor funding for the kitchen-sink drama *Future Blues* (1978) and forged a solid relationship with YAA's Film Officer, Jim Pearse. He then applied for a much more ambitious project. *Johnny Yesno* is a surreal underground short belonging to the avant-garde tradition of Kenneth Anger and the Kuchar Brothers,

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<sup>274</sup> M. Fish, *Industrial Evolution: through the 1980s with Cabaret Voltaire* (Poptomes, 2002).

<sup>275</sup> Adi Newton Interview, [http://www.artcornwall.org/interviews/Adi\\_Newton\\_.htm](http://www.artcornwall.org/interviews/Adi_Newton_.htm) (Accessed 15 Feb 2016)

<sup>276</sup> M. Fish, *Industrial Evolution: through the 1980s with Cabaret Voltaire* (Poptomes, 2002), p. 66

<sup>277</sup> Cabaret Voltaire in Sheffield, <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/news/nr/cabaret-voltaire-gig-sheffield-1.369119> (Accessed 12 March 2016).

<sup>278</sup> M. Fish, *Industrial Evolution: through the 1980s with Cabaret Voltaire* (Poptomes, 2002), p. 22

transposing the West Coast film noir of Chandler and Siodmak to post-industrial South Yorkshire.<sup>279</sup> It was entirely filmed in and around Sheffield and the Pennines, and its production crew featured SIF members Russell Murray, Alf Bower, (photography), Moya Burns (sound) amongst others. The film was near-finished during 1979 but much like other YAA productions of the period, it sat in gestation awaiting distribution and completion funding.<sup>280</sup> During this period, Care had cut together a rough edit of the film to music from Cabaret Voltaire's 'The Voice of America'. It was this version that he screened for Kirk, Mallinder and Watson when approaching them with the idea of producing a new soundtrack for his film.<sup>281</sup> The trio scored a new industrial recording and the first official collaboration between Care and Cabaret Voltaire was sealed. Once *Johnny Yesno* was completed, Care began to help with projections, shooting new material and facilitating visuals for Cabaret Voltaire live shows.<sup>282</sup> Given his reputation post-*Johnny Yesno* as a filmmaker with a strong vision and technical expertise, Care was asked by Richard Woolley to be director of photography on the BFI funded feature, *Brothers and Sisters*. However, the BFI sought more experience and so it over-ruled Woolley's personal request. As a consolation, 'Woolley worked hard at getting me [Care] a job in the sound department, which got me my union ticket, and that allowed me to freelance as a sound assistant for a couple of years, this enabled me to keep filmmaking, either on SIF projects or for Cabaret Voltaire.'<sup>283</sup> This further established Woolley as an important agent in this history with significant contacts to (unionised) industry.

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<sup>279</sup>Influential but rarely seen, David Lynch is said to be amongst its admirers. In K. Hollings, liner notes found in, *Johnny Yesno Redux* (2013) [DVD]. Directed by Peter Care. UK, Mute.

<sup>280</sup>Yorkshire Arts Association, Arts Council of Great Britain Records (1927-199), Victoria and Albert Museum. Archive Boxes - ACGB/111/5, ACGB/11/24, ACGB/95/49. Unpublished.

<sup>281</sup> In K. Hollings, liner notes found in, *Johnny Yesno Redux* (2013) [DVD].

<sup>282</sup>P. Care. Film-maker, freelance. Email to the author, 18 February 2016. Personal communication.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid.

Another Psalter Lane Fine Art graduate was Phillip Wright, who was also taught by Peter Care during his own short-term stint as teacher at the college.<sup>284</sup> In its early incarnation, Wright was the 'Director of Visuals' for the Human League and his slide shows quickly became a key component of live performance.<sup>285</sup> The band played their first live show at Bar 2 Psalter Lane art school in June 1976 and Wright joined the group shortly after, first as video member then as keyboard player. At this same time, SIF member David Rea worked with Wright on the video for their single 'Empire State Human'. Bands such as these afforded vital opportunity to the embryonic SIF membership to practice in the medium of music video/visuals. In fact, this period is marked by an increase in so called 'expanded cinema', a cross-pollination at the intersection of sound, music, moving image and live performance.<sup>286</sup> The use of visuals for music is often overlooked as an ephemeral practice; projected visuals as part of a performance were rarely recorded, documented or archived.<sup>287</sup> However, in this period, as video became a more affordable medium these performances would offer filmmakers a chance to use multi-projection and sound system playback to create immersive environments that would engage the audience in a so -called 'sensorium'.<sup>288</sup> In the mid 1980s, Psalter Lane student Nick Cope was an advocate of the new video language, who thought 16mm was 'prohibitively expensive'. He formulated innovative practice of shooting on the cheaper S8mm format, filming these projections and taking the

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<sup>284</sup> Ibid.

<sup>285</sup> Biography, The Human League, <http://www.billboard.com/artist/415341/human-league/biography> (Accessed 05 July 2016)

<sup>286</sup> See G. Youngblood. *Expanded Cinema*. (Studio Vista, 1970), p.64.

<sup>287</sup> The use of visuals during music performance has a history dating to the 1950s, and became a significant element of 1960s London counterculture, as Op Artists such as David Medalla (as part of the Exploding Galaxy at the UFO Club) projected psychedelic 16mm imagery behind bands like Pink Floyd, Soft Machine, and the Crazy World of Arthur Brown.

<sup>288</sup> N. Cope. *Northern Industrial Scratch: The history and contexts of a visual music practice*. (PhD thesis, University of Sunderland, 2012), p. 56.

results into the video suite at SIF. For Cope, he was 'deliberately not making music videos, it was supposed to be about flipping the promo around'. In 1983 he was 'roped in' as 'on-stage camera' for a Cabaret Voltaire gig at the Octagon in Sheffield University. The stage array was technically challenging: the band had built a twelve TV 'video wall' made from heavy duty DER TVs, and 'wired it all up so they were playing videos and a live camera and mixing them all together.'<sup>289</sup> These were advanced, low-budget, avant-garde processes. Displaced from the formal gallery setting and relocated in the club environment; an important foreshadow to the scratch video movement and an aesthetic which would become co-opted by MTV.<sup>290</sup>

This period was typified by the collaborative dynamic between the experimental musical fraternity, the SIF membership and the Meatwhistle 'graduates' of performance art and theatre. A community picture emerges of social and artistic interaction, and a new-wave of music praxis that was characterised by the possibilities of the moving image, particularly the nascent video format. It must be noted, however, that not all Sheffield bands were aligned to this art school driven, electronic/industrial music network. The successful metal and rock scenes in Sheffield which gave rise to bands such as Def Leppard followed a different path to that of Cabaret Voltaire and the Human League and were less associated with multimedia and art school practice. As a result, they remain out of scope for this study.

### ***Doublevision, Distribution and Music Video***

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<sup>289</sup> N. Cope. Lecturer in digital media production at Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University. Conversation with author, April 17 2016

<sup>290</sup> The fast-cutting style and chroma-noise FX of MTV videos were typical tools in the Scratch video movement.

As evidenced in the previous section, the area of regional video needed ‘considerable development’ in distribution if it was to survive.<sup>291</sup> It was in this space where the embryonic independent music industry was the central proponent in establishing innovative new models.<sup>292</sup> Sheffield’s Cabaret Voltaire (now minus formative member Chris Watson) and a music manager from Nottingham issued a VHS called *Doublevision Presents: Cabaret Voltaire* (DV1, 1982). It became the first independent music video release in the country. *Doublevision* exploited the potential of the new video culture in ways that the application-driven bureaucratic YAA/BFI production funds would not always allow; giving creative freedom to pioneering film and video-makers such as Richard Heslop, Peter Christopherson, Derek Jarman and experimental music artists like Tuxedomoon, Lydia Lunch and Throbbing Gristle.

Paul Smith was a music promoter from Nottingham who set up a club night of music video and experimental music projected on ‘ten cheap second-hand TV’s and a signal distribution box from a local TV shop.’<sup>293</sup> In South Yorkshire Cabaret Voltaire had just achieved ‘indie’ success with their *Red Mecca* LP.<sup>294</sup> Smith contacted the duo about starting an ‘independent music video label’ and the collective began making DV1 with source content filmed by the band and Peter

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<sup>291</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection. SIF, ‘Application To Sheffield City Council – The Three Options’, (September 1985).

<sup>292</sup> Rough Trade are the catalyst behind a collective of independent labels to set up ‘The Cartel’, a nationwide distribution network for independent music video producers across thirty record shops. It was hoped that this model would evolve to create audiences for different types of video work. While this proved much more difficult in practice, the mechanics of getting independent audio-visual product to market were now in place.

<sup>293</sup> Interview with Paul Smith of Blast First Petite,  
<http://www.sonicyouth.com/gossip/showthread.php?t=8342>

<sup>294</sup> Released and distributed by Rough Trade, and reached No.1 on the independent chart  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red\\_Mecca](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red_Mecca), accessed 18 September 2016.

Care.<sup>295</sup> However, not all parts of the process could be completed in Sheffield and Nottingham – the master editing was done in Manchester at Factory’s (record label) editing suite.<sup>296</sup> As we have seen, this migration was a prevailing pattern in many works of this research period. Nonetheless, *Doublevision* DV1 was a landmark aesthetic moment; its unique lo-fidelity assemblage of music video, surreal performance art, and mock-television news presentation defied classification by the BFI, and the music press had little comprehension of where to place a review. Shortly after, Factory established the IKON video label and numerous other VHS imprints followed.

If we take the conception of ‘counter cinema’ as being in opposition to the mainstream not solely at the *production* mode but also at the level of *consumption*, then *Doublevision* is the very distillation of this idea. The VHS label (birthed at the genesis of MTV) is almost anathema to the polished major label music video. Mallinder argued, ‘the idea of the music business promo video we find annoying ... we want *Doublevision* to be a total alternative video label which will bring out films and performances which might not be mass-marketable.’<sup>297</sup> Cabaret Voltaire saw the video label as a means to circumvent traditional media and broadcasting – a counter MTV. However, behind the surface, the lure of financial capital was still evident. It transpired that Virgin gave Cabaret Voltaire money from advertising revenue to use clips from their *Doublevision* catalogue.<sup>298</sup> Moreover, as the *Doublevision* project grew and Cabaret Voltaire’s relationship with Rough Trade

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<sup>295</sup> It was edited on SIF’s Sony 440 U-Matic, and crudely duplicated with ‘6 VHS and 2 Betamax machines’ and hand-copied batches of tapes from the Lo-band U-matic master machine which lived in the back bedroom of Smith’s terraced house in Nottingham Interview with Paul Smith of Blast First Petite, <http://www.sonicyouth.com/gossip/showthread.php?t=8342> accessed 8 July 2016.

<sup>296</sup> M. Fish, *Industrial Evolution: through the 1980s with Cabaret Voltaire* (Poptomes, 2002), p. 45.

<sup>297</sup> V. Vale, *Industrial Culture Handbook (Re/Search)* (V/Search Publications, 1985), p. 46.

<sup>298</sup> M. Fish, *Industrial Evolution: through the 1980s with Cabaret Voltaire* (Poptomes, 2002), p. 250.

(and subsequently Virgin) flowered, Peter Care became absorbed by the aesthetic and economic possibilities, 'their video label was a more attractive proposition for me by now than SIF. They were basically producing and distributing their work autonomously, to a small but highly influential audience', and getting paid for it.<sup>299</sup>

Between 1983/4, Peter Care's involvement with SIF was diminishing as the appeal of directing music videos for Sheffield bands, and increasingly London acts, took over his time. In this same period, Cabaret Voltaire moved from Rough Trade and released their LP *Crackdown* for major label subsidiary Some Bizarre.<sup>300</sup> *Crackdown's* packaging featured the band cradling a Sony Portapak AV-3400 camera; an unwieldy grey box. For a critically acclaimed band like Cabaret Voltaire to be showing off the Portapak on the sleeve of their new album is testament to the power of this new medium. In fact, the machine birthed one of the band's most creative video projects, music promo "Sensoria". The video's centrepiece effect was constructed with a custom-made camera rig designed by artist and engineer Tony Hill that seemed to transcend gravity entirely. Care had seen a film show presented by Hill at Psalter Lane and wanted to use his ingenious 'up and over' device for future projects. The shoot took place in an abandoned hospital<sup>301</sup>using SIF equipment and then rough-edited on SIF's Sony 440 suite.<sup>302</sup> With Virgin money (and ambition) behind the project, Care had to take 'Sensoria' elsewhere for professional mastering, 'the only way you could master on-line, do a decent sound mix, or colour-correct film or video was by going to London.'<sup>303</sup> Upon release, it

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<sup>299</sup> P. Care. Film-maker, freelance. Email to the author, 18 February 2016. Personal communication.

<sup>300</sup> At this time, Some Bizarre was run by well-connected Soft Cell manager and eccentric music impresario, 'Stevo', in M. Fish, *Industrial Evolution: through the 1980s with Cabaret Voltaire* (Poptomes, 2002), p. 132.

<sup>301</sup> The hospital where the post-nuclear apocalypse drama, *Threads*, had recently been filmed.

<sup>302</sup> S. Alexander Reed. *Assimilate: a critical history of industrial music*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. xiii.

<sup>303</sup> P. Care. Film-maker, freelance. Email to the author, 18 February 2016. Personal communication.

barely screened on television, but it did find its way onto the series, *Max Headroom* and was selected for the newly formed music video art collection at Museum of Modern Art (MOMA), New York. In his own words, this level of recognition helped Care launch a career in directing music videos, 'especially in the USA.'<sup>304</sup>

The 'Sensoria' video (and related works)<sup>305</sup> serves as microcosm on this phase in South Yorkshire moving image culture. Foremost, 'Sensoria' was very much a product of Sheffield: its chief protagonists taught, lived, were educated and worked in the city; its disused post-industrial spaces allowed for rehearsal and filming opportunity; and SIF's equipment base allowed for the video to be made in the first instance (albeit with assistance from a London facilities house). Furthermore, in Cubitt's thesis on the video, he argues that 'Sensoria' and their 'video work more generally [is] an indicator of the transitional phase between pop video and the art sector.'<sup>306</sup> This is realised not only in Care's aesthetic, but the use of Tony Hill's 'up and over' rig. Hill would use this same device to establish himself as a prominent video artist, exhibiting in galleries across the world. Its acquisition into the MOMA video collections is testament to this position of (Sheffield) music video as art. The more experimental audio-visual work of SIF members often found itself somewhere in this space, between the art gallery and the nightclub. Without full support from the broadcast industry, this was frequently the environment where SIF members could exist. Furthermore, 'Sensoria' and *Doublevision* represents a time when the independent record industry embraced the commercial and artistic

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<sup>304</sup>Ibid.

<sup>305</sup> During the *Crackdown* video sessions Care also shot the videos (on Super8mm) for 'Loosen The Clamp', 'Invocation' and 'Yashar'. 'Invocation' had a strobe effect that was made at Stevo's house and aided by Peter Christopherson (Throbbing Gristle, Psychic TV and Coil). P. Care. Film-maker, freelance. Email to the author, 18 February 2016. Personal communication.

<sup>306</sup> S. Cubitt, *Timeshift: On Video Culture* (Routledge, 1991), p. 89.

possibilities of VHS distribution. This, in turn, impacted on the development of a more coordinated SIF strategy for distributing work on tape when it could not be broadcast or screened in cinemas. The emergence of independent music video, therefore, was vital to the development of an experimental moving image culture in Sheffield.

For Care, 'music video was a way of evolving avant-garde filmmaking. It was such a great media to continue experimenting with, and to work with intelligent, film-savvy musicians was a huge pleasure.'<sup>307</sup> I suggest that independent music video production in a city like Sheffield serves as a point of difference to the London avant-garde film elite; a response to the theoretical activism and Fine Art practice of London based groups of the time. The dogmatic voices of the London independent cinema 'rejected box-office success, popularity, entertainment and even pleasure. Instead they chose the independence of state subsidy and the economy of art.'<sup>308</sup> Music video and expanded visual practice in Sheffield (and elsewhere) had the possibility to transcend those barriers of 'Fine Art' and 'Artists Video' and situate the aesthetics of experimental film in front of an active (and often dancing) music audience. Loosened from the restrictions of state-subsidy, and given open-licence by sometimes anarchic, independent record labels these (Double)visions could be released on tape and distributed autonomously. Yet, as David Rea's experience demonstrates, music video production in Sheffield was not confined to the fringes of experimental/industrial music. If opportunity surfaced, SIF members were not troubled to work on more commercial projects, 'I worked with Pete Care shooting stuff for Clock DVA and Hula but soon after, I directed a

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<sup>307</sup> P. Care. Film-maker, freelance. Email to the author, 18 February 2016. Personal communication.

<sup>308</sup> D. Reekie, *Subversion: The definitive history of underground cinema*, (Wallflower, 2007), p.164.

Black Lace video, “I Speaka Da Lingo” in Doncaster!’<sup>309</sup> and Care himself shot Bananarama videos while still in contact with SIF. In this sense, as the more radical Sheffield music video productions were routinely dismissed by the increasingly hegemonic MTV network, mainstream projects like this still offered vital work experience.

However, it is also argued that the informal nature of working in music video (whatever the genre) is manipulative practice. The area effectively operates as an unpaid R&D wing for the industry as a whole. Its existence, as Garnham suggests, ‘fulfils a very important function for the cultural industries because it enables them to shift much of the cost and risk off their own shoulders and on to this exploited sector.’<sup>310</sup> In spite of this, the medium allowed a generation of SIF members to operate equipment, gain experience and work on low-risk products. The music community in Sheffield was the incubator for such activity, and Pons still believes that ‘most innovative periods of SIF’s history were characterised by successful Sheffield music bands – it was time of the most energy.’<sup>311</sup> Alongside Peter Care, later SIF members to have emerged from this music video space include David Slade who worked on Warp Records’ 1990s music videos before a Hollywood features career, and Dawn Shadforth in the 2000s, who worked in the city using SIF equipment, before directing a succession of influential Kylie Minogue videos.

The 1980s witnessed a spike in music video production and SIF was at the fulcrum of activity. The increase in equipment demand from filmmakers and musicians to produce music video (and broadcast films) was also marked by strain in the SIF

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<sup>309</sup> D. Rea. Film-maker, freelance. Conversation with the author. Conversation with author, 23 May 2016. Personal communication.

<sup>310</sup> N. Garnham, ‘Concepts of culture: Public policy and the cultural industries’, in *Cultural Studies Volume 1*, (1987), p.85.

<sup>311</sup> C. Pons. Course Leader, MA Filmmaking, Sheffield Hallam University. Conversation with author, 29 July 2016. Personal communication.

membership. A new sheet was drawn with different hire rates for different projects. If it was for a corporate or commercial client such as C4, SIF would charge, but 'if it was for the music makers we wouldn't charge because they didn't yet have money.' This experience led to one of the 'first kind of management things' as Pons worked out a rate sheet for the group's expanding membership.<sup>312</sup> It is an important moment in the SIF narrative; a step towards professionalism and a recognition that the diversity of its members' output – and funding sources– would require careful management. In the early 1980s a situation developed where SIF equipment was 'in almost continuous use – sometimes for 24 hours a day.'<sup>313</sup> While this is a marker of success without a source of significant capital funding available the group had limited resources to replace over-used equipment or expand its stock in line with members' (and the industry's) changing needs. This also points to further potential weaknesses in the SIF hire model. As broadcast standard video technology improved, a situation developed where unless SIF upgraded its equipment provision the fragmentation of its growing membership could occur. By 1985 'it was increasingly necessary for the funded members to look outside of SIF for equipment if they are to produce work of broadcastable [sic] standard.'<sup>314</sup> Furthermore, although music video was generating essential creative energy for SIF members, often the videos were made for little or no money, and this meant SIF had an inexperienced membership base growing faster than the amount of commercial work which paid hire fees. The economics of this situation were not sustainable, and Pons realised this.

Peter Care's own exodus owes much to this set of factors. Following 'Sensoria' he

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<sup>312</sup> Ibid.

<sup>313</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection. Sheffield Independent Film, 'Draft Report from Sheffield Independent Film', (Anon. May 1985). Unpublished, p.3

<sup>314</sup> Ibid. p3

joined the Limelight agency and made quick-turnaround music videos for mainstream acts, mainly American, who happened to be in the country for a limited time. A typical week would consist of formulating 'ideas on the Monday, shooting Thursday, editing on the weekend and by Monday be back on another shoot, with the next band. It was what we needed up here [in Sheffield], to ensure that sort of capacity, but it never came.'<sup>315</sup> Ultimately, this demand on Care's time, and the guarantee of a rolling salary, forced his –and others – move from SIF to London opportunity. Nonetheless, as Peter Care's career moved onto mainstream pop music video, he retained an affinity for SIF allies and often used them, as crew, on shoots.<sup>316</sup> This sense of mutual support pervades the Sheffield story. He remains one of the most successful filmmaking alumni to have surfaced from the SIF membership.<sup>317</sup>

Despite SIF membership growth<sup>318</sup> and an active music/video community, many Sheffield bands and their record labels still chose London-based production companies for music videos; partly because of equipment shortage but primarily because the sector was more developed and could offer a more complete service.<sup>319</sup> The close contact to personnel at London record companies and increasing connections between the large labels and MTV meant that Sheffield's isolation from the record industry itself was becoming a problem in building viable music video production provision. In an attempt to reverse this talent drain and to help build an

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<sup>315</sup> C. Pons. Course Leader, MA Filmmaking, Sheffield Hallam University. Conversation with author, 29 July 2016. Personal communication.

<sup>316</sup> Ibid.

<sup>317</sup> Peter Care left Sheffield in 1984, lived in London for two years, and has been in Los Angeles since 1986. His career post-Sheffield saw him collaborate with R.E.M., Bruce Springsteen, Roy Orbison, Depeche Mode and New Order on music videos, direct a series of high-profile U.S commercials and a debut Hollywood feature, the *Dangerous Lives of The Altar Boys* (2002).

<sup>318</sup> In 1983, SIF had 41 members, in May 1985 it had 120 – from May 1985 'Draft Report', p.3.

<sup>319</sup> E. Greenhalgh, S. Harvey, *Cultural industries: A report to Sheffield city council / report number 2, Sheffield's audio-visual, music and printing and publishing industries final report and recommendations*, (Sheffield City Polytechnic. Centre for Popular Culture, 1988), p.78.

autonomous audio-visual sector in the city, the SCC established proactive policies for variations in modern municipal enterprise. This development will be summarised in the Coda.

## Conclusions

Reekie writes that although ‘media theorists have long been fascinated with modern pop music as a mass industry, its true significance as a radical culture lies in its localised diversity and diffusion as a national network of independents, amateurs, semi-professionals and specialist audiences.’<sup>320</sup> This position is evident in the Sheffield context. Colin Pons suggests that the avant-garde film making of this period (represented by the LFMC) ‘didn’t have that political edge which the Sheffield films had, or indeed the *music edge*.’<sup>321</sup> The audio-visual work created along the *Doublevision* / Cabaret Voltaire axis was a conflation of localised factors dispersed within a national independent record label scene to create a film and video practice that was radical and *unique* to the city. On remaining in Sheffield during this time, Kirk and Mallinder spoke of being away from ‘supposedly advantageous distractions that London offers’ and claimed that staying in a mutually supportive network of filmmakers and musicians ‘allowed us our identity.’<sup>322</sup> I argue that the fundamental national inter-connectedness of the ‘indie’ record industry (as defined by labels like Rough Trade) was a forgiving space for a regional music/video/film sector to evolve in Sheffield (albeit one still in need of London). In contrast, the larger issues which SIF faced (equipment provision, lack of paid projects, no broadcast infrastructure) in the later decade were more entrenched and harder to overcome. It is therefore apparent that the ‘localised

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<sup>320</sup> D. Reekie, *Subversion: The definitive history of underground cinema*. (Wallflower, 2007). p.206

<sup>321</sup> C. Pons. Course Leader, MA Filmmaking, Sheffield Hallam University. Conversation with author, 29 July 2016. Personal communication. [Italics mine].

<sup>322</sup> M. Fish, *Industrial Evolution: through the 1980s with Cabaret Voltaire* (Poptomes, 2002), p. 46.

diversity' in the music sub-culture of Sheffield synchronously fostered a vital film and video practice to emerge.

A memo from 1989 between senior BFI employees, reporting on a conference about arts funding, which embodies these ideas further, is worth quoting here:

The Sheffield people left me with the strong impression that the entire Sheffield media development hangs on one single fact: the existence of successful chart topping bands in Sheffield ... the most vivid impression I carried away from the day was how thoroughly the Thatcherite approach had penetrated even into the head of her so-called opponents.<sup>323</sup>

While this overstates the importance of music to the Sheffield film and video development, to the author writing this memo it is fascinating that three years on from 1985, he finds the 'Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire' deeply enmeshed in the 'Thatcherite approach'. The 'approach' here is defined by the establishment of the CIQ in 1988 and the wave of media policy papers and strategy reports which speak of 'integration, co-ordination, networking, and creative public/private partnerships' – policies written to improve Sheffield's chances of offering training and sustainable employment solutions in the cultural industries.<sup>324</sup> It is to this development where the thesis turns in its coda.

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<sup>323</sup> P. Willemen, 'Funding and Development Memo to Wilf Stevenson, Building the Arts into London', Source. Directorate Files, D71AB BFI Special Collections. Unpublished.

<sup>324</sup> For example, E. Greenhalgh, S. Harvey, *Cultural industries: A report to Sheffield city council / report number 2, Sheffield's audio-visual, music and printing and publishing industries final report and recommendations*, (Sheffield City Polytechnic. Centre for Popular Culture, 1988), p.78.

## **CODA**

### **AFTER 1985**

In late 1984 SIF was on the brink of great flux: its equipment provision was over-used, membership numbers grew as the volume of paid projects were diminishing; the suburban SIF headquarters were becoming unfit for purpose and the underlying financial state of the organisation was unstable. As a result, the organisational structure was starting to look increasingly fragile. Colin Pons, Hattie Coppard and SFC's Chrissie Stansfield began the process of building a steering committee to help guide the organisation through these complex times. A set of strategy documents submitted to the SCC were realised - spearheaded by the 'Application To The Council'; the first in a series of reports 'unleashed on our poor unsuspecting members, all suggesting the need for rather large scale changes.'<sup>325</sup>

Later in the decade (1986-88), reports were commissioned by DEED and the SCC in a bid to document and provide recommendations to the cultural industries.<sup>326</sup> This kind of activity resonated with a desire for thinking of the cultural industries in 'terms of a return on public investment, a new era of local and regional

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<sup>325</sup> C. Pons. 'Five Screens Short of a Load' in M. Dunford, ed., *Inclusion Through Media* (Open Mute, 2007).

<sup>326</sup> Here defined as: audio-visual (film and TV), music, printing and publishing.

development policy, regeneration and job creation... and an increasing emphasis on entrepreneurialism in the public and private sectors.'<sup>327</sup> Importantly for this study, one of the chief architects of this new phase in policy development was Sylvia Harvey, now a DEED employee. Positioning these documents at its base, this coda will assess the the shifting paradigm of the SIF strategy and summarise the mid-late-decade activity in cultural industries policy.

### **Notes on a Media Policy**

The first significant event of 1984 on new media policy was coordinated by Andy Stamp, Community Coordinator of Central Library. The *Future Visions: Development of Film and Video in Sheffield* conference was designed to 'get people's ideas on what media needs the community has and to come up with proposals that will result in new media technologies being shared by the whole community.'<sup>328</sup> This conference was the culmination of the new Media Policy Group which met 12 times over the year; it was chaired by Councillor David Skinner with a diverse membership of representatives.<sup>329</sup> The group yielded a report which was 'almost certainly certainly the first report of its kind to be produced anywhere in the country.'<sup>330</sup> The eight page document defined a series of proposals for the SCC to follow and its focus was centred on the film and video axis, with suggestions on how to improve community access, education, ethnic representation, film production, exhibition and distribution, chief among the concerns.<sup>331</sup> The Media

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<sup>327</sup> D. Hesmondhalgh, *The Cultural Industries*. 3rd edition, (SAGE, 2013), p. 158.

<sup>328</sup> M. Brocklesby, 'The Development of Film and Video in Sheffield', Paper from the Sheffield City Council Libraries – Future Visions conference, December 14 1984. Unpublished.

<sup>329</sup> Members from SIF, SYCC, YAA, ACTT, BFI, IFA, C4 were all regular attendees.

<sup>330</sup> E. Greenhalgh, S. Harvey, *Cultural industries: A report to Sheffield city council / report number 2, Sheffield's audio-visual, music and printing and publishing industries final report and recommendations*, (Sheffield City Polytechnic. Centre for Popular Culture, 1988), p.78.

<sup>331</sup> *The Report of Sheffield City Council's Media Policy Group*. Sheffield City Libraries and Sheffield City Council, (Anon. 1985).

Policy Group's most important contribution to the discourse was that it served as a model for participatory, cross-sector public policy making; it reads as a precursor to the latter decade of public-private enterprise strategy and as a foreshadow to the SIF organisation of the 1990s.

With SIF embedded in the Media Policy Group, the organisation began drafting policies concentrated on their own requirements. Before this point, SIF had made distribution catalogues and meeting agendas on 1970s typewriters but with the arrival of home computing and the purchase of SIF's Amstrad the administrative process improved. For Pons this was an especially liberating moment. He is dyslexic, so word processing meant that 'all of a sudden, for people like us, we could appear to be literate!'<sup>332</sup> It was at this time when he started moving away from his role as technician and began working with Harvey to position the SIF group as a 'genuine force.'<sup>333</sup> In fact, it was Harvey who wrote the March 1985 document 'Some Notes On A Media Policy For The 80s'<sup>334</sup> and six months later SIF produced the first formal document which aimed to add weight to the theory. The 'Application to The Sheffield City Council' is noticeably different to what had transpired before - even in appearance. Bound in yellow card, laminated in plastic and with graphic design embellishments, this was the most professional document the group had yet produced. It is broken into five sub-sections: a report detailing the development of SIF and Sheffield film and video; a 'Capital Funding' chapter with expenditure analysis, cash flow and balance sheet; a 'Development Over The Next Three Years' mapping potential growth and development areas; 'The Three Options' sets out possible funding scenarios (based on detailed financial forecasts);

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<sup>332</sup> C. Pons. Course Leader, MA Filmmaking, Sheffield Hallam University. Conversation with author, 29 July 2016. Personal communication.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid.

<sup>334</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection. S, Harvey, 'Some Notes on a Media Policy for the 1980s', (March, 1985), p. 1.

and an Appendix including comprehensive SIF equipment list c.1985.<sup>335</sup>

Space is limited here to fully unpack this work, but it is evident that the 'Application to The Sheffield City Council' is a significant milestone in SIF history, and it points the way to the future path film and video development would take in the city. Its touchstones remain similar to those which SIF were founded on, but with a maturing sensibility; a document which speaks to the age of the 'Media Policy' and the shared public/private goals of regeneration and employment creation. To remedy the prevalent issues regarding equipment, the report gives a detailed breakdown of purchase funding required to improve the situation. The ambitious 'Option Three' suggests that if funding proposals are met, SIF would become the 'major professional independent film and video facility in the north of England... for the independent film-maker, to first time learner to professional television producer.'<sup>336</sup> The weight on which the 'Application...' places on funding for equipment provision suggests that Pons, Harvey et.al understood the speed in which this area was evolving - and the risks of Sheffield being left behind. To underline this point, SIF admit that 'equipment is the lifeblood of the group... it was the original reason for SIF's foundation.'<sup>337</sup>

An area hitherto marginalised in SIF literature is the provision of film and video training. 'Development Over the Next Three Years' states that they were providing '28 courses covering all aspects of film and video making', and were beginning a programme of training as recognised by the ACTT in association with the IFVA.<sup>338</sup>

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<sup>335</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection. SIF, 'Application To Sheffield City Council - Development Over the Next Three Years', (September 1985).

<sup>336</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection. SIF, 'Application To Sheffield City Council - The Three Options', (September 1985). Unpublished.

<sup>337</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection. SIF, 'Application To Sheffield City Council - The Three Options', (September 1985), p. 8. Unpublished.

<sup>338</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection. SIF, 'Application To Sheffield City Council - Development Over the Next Three Years', (September 1985). Unpublished.

Elsewhere in the city, Sheffield Media Unit (SMU) was established in 1984 with a commitment to training programmes running concurrently with production projects. They produced a commercially successful book, *The Television Programme* (1985), which was sold nationally and delivered the provision of 5 months' full-time courses in 'Vocational Communications' jointly funded by the SCC and European Social Fund.<sup>339</sup> The Media Policy Group also recommended that training of the 'new media communications' should be an integral part of education in schools to 'create a high level of critical awareness' and to help 'develop methods of understanding dominant prejudices.'<sup>340</sup> Training and access workshops which had always been a loose part of SIF activity, were now becoming more structured. Jenny Woodley suggests that this increased interest in providing training provision was not strictly based on benevolence, however. The BFI Education Officer of the time, Colin McArthur, pursued a notion of integrated practice which 'meant that every group like SIF which wanted money from the BFI *had* to be engaged in exhibition, *education* and distribution.'<sup>341</sup> The educational training provision was a way for the mid-1980s SIF members to retain the 'touchy feely'<sup>342</sup> elements of an earlier age while appealing to the new requirements of cross-sector funding and improving employment prospects for the wider city community. Both the SMU and SIF's development in this area was dependent on resources from the SCC and to the EEC Social Fund; the latter serves as an early example of the ways SIF funding strategy would turn look to the EEC in an age of increasing domestic cuts.

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<sup>339</sup>'The courses include an introduction to computers, photography, sound, video, careers advice and the completion of a practical project' in E. Greenhalgh, S. Harvey, *Cultural industries: A report to Sheffield city council / interim report number 1*, (Sheffield City Polytechnic. Centre for Popular Culture, Sheffield City Polytechnic, 1988)

<sup>340</sup> *The Report of Sheffield City Council's Media Policy Group*. Sheffield City Libraries and Sheffield City Council, (Anon. 1985), p. 4.

<sup>341</sup> 'J. Woodley and the Sheffield Film Co-op interviewed by M. Dickinson' in *Rogue Reels: Oppositional Film in Britain, 1945-90*. (British Film Institute, 1999), p. 298.

<sup>342</sup> C. Pons. Course Leader, MA Filmmaking, Sheffield Hallam University. Conversation with author, 29 July 2016. Personal communication.

These documents resonate with a recurring motif of this study: ‘the growth of a media economy in Sheffield depends on the involvement of all the major broadcasting channels.’<sup>343</sup> Sheffield’s lack of a broadcaster in the city, and the infrastructure weakness that this created, was remedied for a short time with the C4 boom. But the prevailing mood in these papers states that while C4 funding was welcomed, without a central broadcaster to help create regular waged work, the SIF membership remained disenfranchised. Therefore, ‘the Simon Reynell’s the Dinah’s [Ward], Russell Murray’s couldn’t work all the time in Sheffield’ and had to freelance in London or Manchester.<sup>344</sup> To achieve this ‘crystal in the solution’, Harvey and SIF campaigned for the SCC to back these policies seriously.<sup>345</sup> She argued that maintaining C4, BFI and YAA support was integral, but only with the additional support of the SCC could the film and video project in Sheffield grow. It was hoped that by relying on a cross-section of funding provision ‘the burden of responsibility would not fall too heavily on a single funder’<sup>346</sup> and the campaign to attract regional and national broadcasting resources continued in the 1990s.<sup>347</sup>

The mid-1980s SCC shift from sole provider in services and facilities to increasing partnerships with voluntary, independent and commercial sectors was integral to the way SIF operated in a time of disjointed national government. Nationally, The

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<sup>343</sup> *The Report of Sheffield City Council’s Media Policy Group*. Sheffield City Libraries and Sheffield City Council, (1985), p. 3.

<sup>344</sup> C. Pons. Course Leader, MA Filmmaking, Sheffield Hallam University. Conversation with author, 29 July 2016. Personal communication.

<sup>345</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>346</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection. SIF, ‘Application To Sheffield City Council - Development Over the Next Three Years’, (September 1985). Unpublished.

<sup>347</sup> In 1988 the Department of Trade and Industry and the Home Office commissioned a feasibility study into a new terrestrial channel. ‘The Fifth Channel’ franchise campaign was fronted by Harvey and Pons on secondment into the DEED and, while ultimately unsuccessful, it allowed for wider support from the council network. This activity led to a range of projects including an SCC media development fund and the establishment of the Yorkshire Screen Commission.

Arts Council of Great Britain picked up these same themes with a 1985 project loaded in the language of investment portfolio and illustrated with the machinery of the 'cultural industries'.<sup>348</sup> The YAA plan of 1988 also echoes the discourse, as it encouraged a shift from directly funded municipal enterprise to increasing partnerships with the commercial sector. The report suggests that it was fundamental to develop 'mixed funding packages appropriate to different purposes to include direct grant-aid, interest free-loans, venture capital, sponsorship'.<sup>349</sup> In late 1980s Sheffield, this theoretical language would manifest in practice with the Cultural Industries Quarter (CIQ).

### **Cultural Industries Quarter**

In 1982 the DEED sought to explore the potential for a municipally owned recording studio to emulate recent Sheffield pop bands'<sup>350</sup> chart success and also develop a platform to provide services for employed musicians to raise finance, and utilise music's assumed ability to create wealth in an urban regeneration. After capital costs were met by £350,000 from the UK Government Urban Programme and SCC, Red Tape Studios opened in 1986, with the intention of providing infrastructure for sound engineering training and rehearsal space, initially for unemployed musicians and the wider community.<sup>351</sup> At this point, SIF admitted that they had 'long since outgrown their present premises', and the Howard Road building was no longer suitable for SIF expansion.<sup>352</sup> Over the next three years the group would integrate with the DEED and plan strategies to move from their

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<sup>348</sup> I. Strange. *Public-Private Partnerships and the Politics of Economic Regeneration Policy in Sheffield* (PhD thesis, University of Sheffield, 1993). Unpublished, p. 83.

<sup>349</sup> R. Betterton. *Towards a Cultural Plan for Sheffield in the 1990s*. (Sheffield Hallam, Sheffield City Council, Yorkshire and Humberside Arts Board, 1993), p. 13.

<sup>350</sup> See The Human League, ABC, Chakk, Hula, Cabaret Voltaire, et.al.

<sup>351</sup> L. Moss. 'Sheffield's cultural industries quarter 20 years on: What can be learned from a pioneering example?', in *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, Vol. 8, Issue. 2, 2002, p.213.

<sup>352</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection. SIF, 'Application To Sheffield City Council - Development Over the Next Three Years', (September 1985). Unpublished. p. 3.

Howard Road premises and into the area surrounding RTS. While a full history of SIF's role in the CIQ development project is out of scope, it is important to note that strategy was now being directed by a small group of co-ordinators (Hattie Coppard, Suzanne Phillips, and Pons) and SCC aligned strategists like Sylvia Harvey. However, while SIF was now a structured, hierarchical organisation Pons is keen to stress that the membership continued to volunteer on producing newsletters, helped with accounts and eventually helped paint the building.<sup>353</sup> SIF managed to negotiate generous funding for the new CIQ space from the BFI, C4, YAA, SCC and an Industrial Improvement Area grant, yet still they did not have enough money to finish construction work. In a move which caused tensions among the SIF group, Colin Pons decided to put a second mortgage on his house to help finance the move. This dramatic proposal caused some issues, 'as some of the board got it, and some of the board were quite unhappy about: because it just changed the power balance.'<sup>354</sup> SIF officially moved into their new CIQ Brown Street offices in 1989. If there is a metaphor for a 'new way of doing things' this was it. This action placed Pons at the top of the management committee and the informal collective of 1976 had drastically shifted. Conversely, there is something anarchic and true to the original SIF foundation about this move. It reflects on Pons' personal commitment to sacrifice personal capital for the good of the Sheffield project, and further positions him as a key agent in the city's cultural history.

The late 1980s witnessed SIF and its various umbrella interests formally expand into the CIQ area: a new period of public-private partnerships became a reality. SIF

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<sup>353</sup> Pons, C. 'Five Screens Short of a Load' in M. Dunford, ed., *Inclusion Through Media* (Open Mute, 2007), p.77.

<sup>354</sup> C. Pons. Course Leader, MA Filmmaking, Sheffield Hallam University. Conversation with author, 29 July 2016. Personal communication.

became a leading voice in its continued development. The project culminated in the building of the Workstation / Showroom project (of which Pons was appointed Chairman of the Board).<sup>355</sup> This strain of cultural industries policy connected to a desire in national and regional politics to think about culture and media in terms of a return on public investment. This climate, as Hesmondhalgh implies was 'fuelled by increasing doubts on the legitimacy of 'high cultural' forms... shaped by economic neo-liberalism and a breaking down of long-standing forms of cultural hierarchy...'<sup>356</sup> This, in turn, drove local governments like SCC to shift policy toward regeneration, employment creation and public-private partnerships. The earlier notion (as discussed in Chapter's One and Two) that independent cultural production might be a stimulus for progressive social and political change was being slowly eroded. However, in Sheffield and thanks to activists at the heart of the SIF, the new policies still 'supported local infrastructures, to the lasting benefit of symbol creators who wanted to work in the city.'<sup>357</sup> It was only in the 1990s that the field moved on from advocacy and case studies (as defined by the nascent activity of SIF in 1985), to the maturity of theoretical debate. In the SIF context, the physical embodiment of this transition, was the move into the Brown Street premises.<sup>358</sup>

At local and national policy level the creative industries were now recognised as drivers for economic regeneration and employment creation; SIF and the multitude of companies which migrated into the CIQ Workstation complex are testament to

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<sup>355</sup> A development which raised over £2,500,000 of investment, the majority of which was private sector generated alongside core support from the SCC using public funds as the leverage tool for private money. From I. Strange, *Public-Private Partnerships and the Politics of Economic Regeneration Policy in Sheffield*, p.235.

<sup>356</sup>D. Hesmondhalgh, *The Cultural Industries*. 3rd edition, (SAGE, 2013), p. 168.

<sup>357</sup> Ibid.

<sup>358</sup> Ibid.

this. In the mid-decade the National Lottery funding scheme and SIF's pioneering exploitation of European development money for film also shapes the period.<sup>359</sup> I propose that the exploratory work first set forward in the 1980s by SIF and DEED, dramatically altered the landscape of the local cultural industries (especially the moving image). The SIF institutional archive documents this process and, while it has been out of reach for this project, there is definite scope for future researchers from the schools of urban planning, cultural studies and communication studies to analyse this this significant collection in further depth.

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<sup>359</sup> Pons, C. 'Five Screens Short of a Load' in in M.Dunford, ed., *Inclusion Through Media* (Open Mute, 2007), p.78.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis has presented an historical study of film and video development in Sheffield during the period, 1976-1985. It has used the non-profit moving image access group Sheffield Independent Film as the foundation from which to draw much of the narrative, and it has argued that SIF was an integral part in the emergence of independent cultural production in the city. While SIF was an important agent in local moving image development, the thesis has also analysed the impact of further individuals and institutions which contributed to the culture (SCC, BFI, YAA, C4, the music industry, the Psalter Lane school of art).

It has attempted to challenge the canon of independent film and video history by growing a research area that refocuses attention in British film culture away from a London-centric narrative toward the regional. The thesis has aimed to build on such a narrow historiography, specifically from the South Yorkshire and Sheffield perspective. As a result, it is the first academic survey of this particular period and place. The current research, therefore, is a noteworthy addition to the literature and is an original contribution to knowledge - shedding new light on a previously ignored area. This thesis has endeavoured to shape a period understanding through the abstract concept of a local structure of feeling; 'a given inheritance of

geographical form, climate, industrial base, labour market and labour history, cultural mix, conflicts and contests with other neighbouring cities ... that define it with an identity.’<sup>360</sup> The development of film and video in Sheffield during this period is characterised by interrelationships inside and outside of this local structure.

Chapter One positioned the Sheffield City Polytechnic school of art as an integral facilitator for an independent moving image sector to be nurtured. In the wider socio-political culture, the growth in state patronage towards the regions manifested in the establishment of the Yorkshire Arts Association. The YAA’s Film and TV Unit was driven by a dynamic Sheffield representation and this led to a swing in funding provision for the local moving image sector. From its topographical position surrounded by South Yorkshire hills, Sheffield was chosen as a pilot for the burgeoning cable television network to roll-out its new broadcasting technologies. Cablevision was a fleeting, but important, moment offering promise of broadcast infrastructure to a city that needed one to be able to compete with its neighbouring Northern cities.

This set of factors led to the establishment of SIF in 1976. Chapter Two explored the foundation of the group and its genesis as a democratic open access moving image collective. SIF acted as a ‘safety net’<sup>361</sup> for film and video graduates to fall into after college. To continue learning the craft – and remain in Sheffield. This period was marked by the slow erosion of traditional local Labour politics in the city, toward the Blunkett era and the DEED which promised to initiate and

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<sup>360</sup> I. Taylor, et al., *A Tale of Two Cities: Global Change, local feeling and everyday life in the North of England. A Study in Manchester and Sheffield*. (Routledge, 1996), p. 9.

<sup>361</sup> P. Haywood. Fine Art Lecturer, Sheffield Hallam University, Retired. Conversation with author, April 16 2016. Personal communication.

supporting projects for 'socially useful' production.<sup>362</sup> As we have seen, SIF and independent moving image benefitted from this political shift. Between 1981-85 a series of local and national events engendered a space in Sheffield for unprecedented independent film and video practice. The study of these events and the cultural artefacts which arose, has been the main thrust of this thesis. Here, I have argued that the wider SIF membership, for the first time, had a platform to challenge the homogeneity of the centralised London broadcast monopoly and build its own sustainable infrastructure which could benefit both those filmmakers enfranchised by C4, and the new-wave community groups starting to emerge. This rise in C4 production provision initiated its own set of complexities, and forced the SIF group into fundamental organisational change. As the nature of post-1985 C4 commissioning changed, so did the act of being independent. It 'was no longer an act of conscious political autonomy or radical opposition; it was to be a freelancer in the deregulated media industry.'<sup>363</sup> The new reality was reflected in those interviewees I spoke to, who, facing a lack of Sheffield opportunity, were forced into moving from the city toward freelance, short-term media employment. The late-decade SCC/SIF municipal strategies as discussed in the Coda were an attempt to counter this talent drain from South Yorkshire.

While the original C4 ethos became compromised, this period nonetheless yielded a series of Sheffield film and video works inimitable to the regions' politics, culture and history; and with objective distance, stand up to critical re-assessment. The extended analysis of the SIF catalogue in Chapter Two was designed to highlight

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<sup>362</sup> I. Strange, *Public-Private Partnerships and the Politics of Economic Regeneration Policy in Sheffield* (PhD thesis, University of Sheffield, 1993), p. 133.

<sup>363</sup> D. Reekie, *Subversion: The definitive history of underground cinema*. (Wallflower, 2007), p.3.

the rich diversity in film and video practice of the period; a history that demands further investigation.

'Equipment is the lifeblood of the group... it was the original reason for SIF's foundation.'<sup>364</sup> This sentence has preoccupied much of the thesis. The evolving tensions over equipment has been a recurring motif of this work. In setting up as both a grant aid subsidising group (supporting low-budget community activity) and a facility house to C4 television productions, in the hope that the one could subsidise the other, the SIF model became defined by its equipment usage versus the projects its members were engaged in. The research has explored this dialectic throughout, and it is apparent that SIF, despite best efforts, was often left behind in the technological race for the broadcast ready equipment needed to sustain it. Even when it did receive an injection of funds (like the £23,000 from C4), there was a deficiency in paid commercial projects to maintain its expensive existence. One area which the Sheffield audio-visual movement was relatively immune to these issues, was in DIY music video.

Chapter Three discussed the audio-visual work created along the *Doublevision/Cabaret Voltaire* axis. It suggested that localised factors dispersed within a national independent record label network helped create a vital film and video practice that was radical and *unique* to the city. The interconnected nature of the burgeoning independent record label scene allowed for Sheffield audio-visual creatives to establish a practice that was simultaneously part of South Yorkshire, but also part of the London record industry. The emergence of VHS was a key conduit of expression in the modes of production and distribution for this community. The

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<sup>364</sup> SIF Archive, Sheffield Hallam Special Collection. SIF, 'Application To Sheffield City Council – The Three Options', (September 1985), p. 8.

SCC were attuned to this new mode and opened a library provision to cater for the rising community video practice in the city – among the first of its kind in the country. In a bid to further document viewing habits during this period, Chapter Three also explored England's first municipal cinema, The Anvil. The cinema's demise can be seen as an early 1980s indicator of the direction SCC policy was heading; a phase of thinking about the arts in 'terms of a return on public investment, a new era of local and regional development policy, regeneration and job creation... and an increasing emphasis on entrepreneurialism in the public and private sectors.'<sup>365</sup>

Within this new era the SIF group was still reticent about betraying its collective roots: 'while [we now had] a management committee, we still didn't want to call it a committee or board. And then we realised we had appointed 'coordinators' which was really just another word for managers. Which we really didn't want to accept!'<sup>366</sup> Nevertheless, after 1985 the SIF group became engaged in existential change - 'a new way of doing things' took hold. For the remainder of the decade Pons, Harvey et.al produced a series of documents and strategy papers to position moving image development at the heart of the SCC policy. The enduring impact of this strategic change was deemed outside the scope of the current thesis, but it is hoped that the Coda presented can serve as trigger for future study.

In 1988 the DEED produced a report which advanced a pessimistic idea that the city of Sheffield had fundamental weaknesses in its provision for media services: the lack of a broadcaster, the deficiency in communications (telephone access was not a feature for 20% of the population), the absence of a major civic airport and

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<sup>365</sup> D. Hesmondhalgh, *The Cultural Industries*. 3rd edition, (SAGE, 2013), p. 158.

<sup>366</sup> C. Pons. Course Leader, MA Filmmaking, Sheffield Hallam University. Conversation with author, 29 July 2016. Personal communication.

inferior transport links within and without the city, were all cited as integral problems. Moreover, the area continued to receive negative press and insufficient central funding, linked to its former identification as the 'Socialist Republic'.<sup>367</sup> The same report theorised that Sheffield's labour and politics base was historically crippling; an over-reliance on manufacturing industries had stifled cultural and economic development, while some of its politicians were mired by 'a tendency to see things cultural as peripheral, not quite real, not quite solid.'<sup>368</sup> Couple this with the problems of an unbalanced, concentrated film and broadcast industry rooted to the metropolis, (with decades of investment in technology, training, and permanent employment behind it), and it is fascinating that the SIF members managed to produce any work of note at all in this context. Newsinger's history of independent film and video practice is summarised by the following statement (which I quote in full), and is applicable to the Sheffield moment:

Although the economics of regional film production (the availability of equipment and facilities, the availability of production funding and the ideological position of the organisations that administer it) place firm limits on the size, scope, and character of production activity, at certain times grassroots groups have been able to influence, as well as being influenced by, institutions, subject to external factors.<sup>369</sup>

While this theory is true of the role the grassroots SIF group played in Sheffield, I also extend it by suggesting that the limitations, and relative cultural and economic

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<sup>367</sup> E. Greenhalgh, S. Harvey, *Cultural industries: A report to Sheffield city council / report number 2, Sheffield's audio-visual, music and printing and publishing industries final report and recommendations*, (Sheffield City Polytechnic. Centre for Popular Culture, 1988). p. 162.

<sup>368</sup> Ibid, p.162.

<sup>369</sup> J. Newsinger, *From the grassroots: regional film policy and practice in England*. (PhD thesis, University of Nottingham, 2010). Unpublished, p. 39.

poverty at play in South Yorkshire engendered a sense of rich possibility, defiance and difference. Pons, somewhat romantically, suggests that Sheffield film and video development was unique because - 'we were able to think differently... we weren't trying to protect a status quo'.<sup>370</sup> The SCC fashioned this sentiment in a similar tone: 'the very smallness of the sectors in Sheffield can be turned into strengths, [assisting] the process of of integration, co-ordination, and creative networking.'<sup>371</sup> The sense of mutual support or 'competitive collaboration', which defines much of this narrative (whether radical filmmaker, music video director, community video activist - or all the above ) remains one of the great strengths of the Sheffield project in the years 1977-1985. Moreover, this thesis has suggested that within the passionate local demographic there existed a network of individuals with deep personal connections to seats of organisational, structural and financial power which could sway the momentum in Sheffield's favour: see Sylvia Harvey (IFA / DEED), Alan Fountain (C4), Barry Callaghan (Psalter Lane / *Screen*) Richard Woolley (BFI, YAA), Colin Pons (SCC/ DEED) and Paul Skelton (DEED), Jim Pearse (YAA).

It is this community feeling that underscores the research period; in times of economic instability, the moving image community in Sheffield turned to collaboration and integration to drive cultural production. Initially, this was in the Socialist collectivist spirit (bound by student-forged friendships and common need for equipment), but as the 1980s wore on, it became a mutually beneficial association based on professional, cross-sector, public-private partnerships.

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<sup>370</sup> C. Pons. Course Leader, MA Filmmaking, Sheffield Hallam University. Conversation with author, 29 July 2016. Personal communication.

<sup>371</sup> E. Greenhalgh, S. Harvey, *Cultural industries: A report to Sheffield city council / report number 2, Sheffield's audio-visual, music and printing and publishing industries final report and recommendations*, (Sheffield City Polytechnic. Centre for Popular Culture, 1988). p. 162.

However, even in the compromised age of cultural industries discourse, the SIF membership held on to the principles it was initially founded on, to enhance the quality of life for its members through funding redistribution, training programmes and equipment provision.

‘We didn’t have much, but what we did have was each other...’<sup>372</sup>

### **OPPORTUNITIES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

This thesis has offered a critical assessment of an underexplored period in British cultural history. It is hoped that it will serve as a platform for further research. Fortunately, a large number of SIF’s former membership is still active, and while a core has been interviewed for this work, further oral testimony demands collecting. The SIF archive itself is a rich resource which must be sufficiently catalogued, enabling access to historians studying the CIQ development and wider cultural industries project, post-1985. My own PhD research now moves toward connecting independent film and video in Sheffield as part of a wider movement in Yorkshire (c.1970-1990), thereby extending this history. Moreover, it is hoped that this work is the catalyst to a new phase of archival preservation for the documents, films and video works of this period. It is an archival imperative to rescue moving image of this kind from physical degradation and playback obsolescence before it is too late.

As the time of writing (October 2016), the author is in discussion with a number of partners across the region to establish a ‘Yorkshire Independent Film and Video Archive.’

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<sup>372</sup> Pons, Colin. Course Leader, MA Filmmaking, Sheffield Hallam University. Conversation with author, 29 July 2016. Personal communication.

Potential Strategic collaborators include the Yorkshire Film Archive, Sheffield Hallam University, The University of Leeds, The British Film Institute, The British Library, Film Hub North, Pavilion North Leeds, London Community Video Archive – Goldsmiths.

It is hoped this feasibility study will lead to a formal application to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for grant-aid funding, and begin the necessary process of discovery, preservation, cataloguing and access to a generation of film and video artefacts from the Yorkshire region.

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### **SELECT FILMOGRAPHY\***

*A Mysterious Devotion* (1973). Directed by Alf Bower. UK, Sheffield Polytechnic and National Film School.

*Custard* (1974). Directed by Phillip Austin and Derek Hayes. UK, Sheffield Polytechnic of Arts and Design, Yorkshire Arts Association.

*A Great Effort* (1976). Directed by Jim Curran. UK, Unknown.

*Free For All* (1976). Directed by David Rea. UK, SCC.

*The Elusive Crime* (1976). Directed by Richard Woolley. UK, Yorkshire Arts Association.

*The Party At Diamond Jacks* (1976). Directed by Alf Bower. UK, Yorkshire Arts Association.

*The Worp Reaction* (1976). Directed by Tony Trafford. UK, Yorkshire Arts Association.

*Future Blues* (1978). Directed by Peter Care. UK, Yorkshire Arts Association.

*Jobs For The Girls* (1978). Directed by Jenny Woodley. UK, Yorkshire Arts Association and Manpower Services.

*Pink And Green* (1978). Directed by Shirley Cameron. UK, Independent.

*Telling Tales* (1978). Directed by Richard Woolley. UK, Yorkshire Arts Association.

*Brothers and Sisters* (1980). Directed by Richard Woolley. UK, BFI.

*Memo* (1981). Directed by Ann Foreman. UK, Yorkshire Arts Association.

*Riots* (1981). Directed by Mukthar Dar. UK, Independent.

*Johnny Yesno* (1981). Directed by Peter Care. UK, Yorkshire Arts Association.

*Your Move Next* (1981). Directed by David Rea. UK, DEED.

*A Question Of Choice* (1982). Directed by the Sheffield Film Co-op. UK, Yorkshire Arts Association.

*Doublevision Presents: Cabaret Voltaire* (1982). Directed by Peter Care and Cabaret Voltaire. UK, Doublevision.

*Cold Steel: Four Redundancies* (1983). Directed by Steel Bank. UK, Channel Four.

*A Tale To Tell* (1984). Directed by Richard Anthony. UK, Banner Film and Television, Channel Four.

*After The Ball*. (1984). Directed by Richard Anthony. UK, Banner Film and Television, Channel Four.

*Changing Our Lives* (1984). Directed by Christine Bellamy. UK, BFI, and SCC.

*Coal Not Doal* (1984). Directed by Richard Anthony. UK, Banner Film and Television, Channel Four.

*Firth Derihon - A Successful Struggle* (1984). Directed by Simon Reynell. UK, Steel Bank Film Co-Op.

*Get It Shown* (1984). Directed by Steve & Lynne Colton. UK, Active Image, Channel Four.

*No Turning Back* (1984). Directed by Women's Own Pictures. UK, SCC DEED.

*Notts Women Strike Back* (1984). Directed by Dinah Ward. UK, Steel Bank, Channel Four.

*Winnie* (1984). Directed by Peter Biddle. UK, Steel Bank.

*Sensoria* (1984). Directed by Peter Care. UK, Virgin/EMI.

*Darfield Must Stay* (1985). Directed by Steel Dinah Ward. UK, Steel Bank, Channel Four.

*Here We Go* (1985). Directed by Richard Anthony. UK, Banner Film and Television.

*Metal On Fire* (1985). Directed by Flix. UK, SCC, Arts Department.

*Self Defence* (1985). Directed by Asian Youth Movement. UK, Independent.

*To Be A Yellowbelly* (1985). Directed by John Goddard / John Hanlan. UK, Active Image, Channel Four.

*Psalter lane: A viewing* (2001). Directed by Sheffield Hallam University, TV Studio (UK, Sheffield Hallam University, Television Studio).

*Johnny Yesno Redux* (2013) [DVD]. Directed by Peter Care. UK, Mute (2013 edition).

*The School of Art*. (2013). Dominic Higgins. UK, Sheffield Hallam University.

\*(a detailed filmography of this period is available from the author)