

<b>Institution: University of the West of England, Bristol</b>		
<b>Unit of Assessment: 34</b>		
<b>Title of case study: The Radical Film Network: building alternative film cultures</b>		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2013-2020</b>		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Dr Steve Presence	Senior Lecturer	2010 – present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred: September 2013 – December 2020</b>		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No</b>		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b>		
<p>Research by Steve Presence at UWE combining historical and contemporary analysis of organisational forms, network theory and underpinning conceptual frameworks, has been central to the establishment, growth and development of the Radical Film Network (RFN), which Presence co-founded in 2013. The RFN has transformed a dispersed cultural field – composed of activists, academics, artists, filmmakers, distributors and exhibitors – into the world’s largest network for alternative film culture. Presence’s research has helped build a diverse global community, cultivated shared objectives, and generated multiple national and international collaborations (conferences, festivals, workshops) facilitating knowledge exchange and influencing practice. The RFN has increased the visibility and coherence of alternative film culture and enhanced its impact on society and culture, within the screen industries and trade union movement, within research and education, and with multiple audiences.</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b>		
<b>Conceptualising the field and establishing a community</b>		
<p>Presence sought to identify the factors that were likely to drive successful and sustainable cultural networks and collaborative practice across alternative film practice. Research by Presence (<b>R1-6</b>) analysed factors that contributed to the earlier splintering of activist film culture since 1990, developing a conceptual framework for alternative film culture that unifies the historically divergent political and aesthetic avant-gardes. <b>R1</b> and <b>R2</b> identified the Independent Filmmakers Association (IFA, 1974-1990) as the central agency in the development of an alternative film culture in the UK, which succeeded in enabling interaction between the two avant-gardes and fostering a rediscovery of previous periods of radical British film culture. <b>R2</b> analysed network theory and identified three key properties of cultural networks (identity, internal organisation, external relationships) that are central to forming an effective and coherent community. <b>R3-6</b> investigated historical and contemporary alternative film organisations and explored their multiple inter-relationships.</p>		
<b>Analysis of funding, policy and institutions</b>		
<p><b>R1-6</b> analysed the economic, historical, institutional and socio-political contexts of alternative film cultures, exploring how these contexts shaped their formation, activity and the challenges they faced. <b>R1</b> and <b>R2</b> compared the IFA’s organisational structures with the</p>		

RFN's to show the extent to which well-funded policy frameworks in the 1980s also created a culture of dependency that ultimately limited long-term sustainability. The research showed that because contemporary funders such as the British Film Institute are unable to support diverse, multidisciplinary and international entities, the RFN's voluntary, decentralised structure (in which activities and decision-making are devolved to the membership) is desirable as well as necessary to sustain alternative film culture. **R1**, **R2** and **R6** explored the complex, occasionally fraught, historical relationship between contemporary radical film culture and HEIs. This work demonstrated how successive RFN conferences have developed a model of knowledge exchange that successfully facilitates interaction and collaboration between researchers and the RFN's diverse stakeholder community.

### Case-study analysis

The discussion of concepts and policy in **R2-6** were informed by detailed case studies based on extensive empirical research. These research outputs examined production companies and video-activist groups (**R3**, **R5**, **R6**), film festivals and exhibition collectives (**R4**), television series and commissioning departments (**R6**), and counter-cultural networks (**R2**). The research demonstrated strong continuities among these diverse entities across historical periods and separate areas of activity. For example, the IFA strongly affected key commissioning departments in Channel 4's early period (**R6**); and groups such as Despite TV and Undercurrents profoundly influenced some of the UK's leading video-activist organisations (**R3** and **R5**). These insights directly informed the RFN's aim to enable inter-generational and cross-disciplinary collaboration (**R1** and **R2**).

### Building the infrastructure

These findings, in turn, directly informed the development of the RFN's visual identity, branding and network infrastructure, all of which benefitted significantly from the AHRC network grant (**G1**). The RFN website is a key element of this infrastructure. It provides a central platform for the network's identity and internal organisation (**R2**) and its directory of affiliated organisations and accompanying global map – now the largest searchable database of radical film organisations in the world – has been a major pathway to impact that nurtures the RFN's diverse international community and facilitates its impact on wider society.

## 3. References to the research

**R1** Presence, S. (2020) 'Admin will make or break the rebellion: Building the Radical Film Network.' In: Presence, S., Wayne, M. and Newsinger, J., eds., *Contemporary Radical Film Culture: Networks, Organisations and Activists*. London: Routledge, pp. 9-18. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351006385-1>

**R2** Presence, S. (2019) 'Organising counter-cultures: challenges of structure, organisation and sustainability in the Independent Filmmakers Association and the Radical Film Network.' *Screen*, 60:3 (Autumn), pp. 428-48. <https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/hjz022>

**R3** Presence, S. (2016a) 'The Contemporary Landscape of Video-Activism in Britain'. In: Mazierska, E. and Kristensen, L., eds., *Marxism and Film Activism: Screening Alternative Worlds*. Oxford and New York: Berghahn, pp. 186-212. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt9qctfk.12>

**R4** Presence, S. (2016b) 'One screening away from disaster: Precarity and commitment in the Radical Film Network's community exhibition sector'. In: Malik, S., Chapain, C. and

Comunian, R., eds., *Community Filmmaking: Diversity, Practices and Places*. London: Routledge, pp. 210-25. <https://uwe-repository.worktribe.com/output/899785/>

**R5** Presence, S. (2016c) 'Reel News in the Digital Age: Framing Britain's Radical Video-activists'. In: Tzioumakis, Y. and Molloy, C., eds., *The Routledge Companion to Cinema and Politics*. London: Routledge, pp. 103-111. <https://uwe-repository.worktribe.com/output/910533/>

**R6** Presence, S. (2014) 'Maintaining a Critical Eye: The political avant-garde on Channel 4 in the 1990s'. In: Mee, L. and Walker, J., eds., *Cinema, Television and History: New Approaches*. Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp. 85-101. <https://uwe-repository.worktribe.com/output/822214/>

#### Evidence of the quality of the supporting research

**G1** Presence, S. *The Radical Film Network: Sustaining Alternative Film Cultures*, AHRC International Research Networking Award, 2015-18, £44,426.

#### 4. Details of the impact

##### Building a global community

Since 2013, the RFN has transformed a dispersed and fragmented cultural field into a globally interconnected community. Presence's work in founding, managing and maintaining the network, informed by his body of research, has been instrumental in bringing practitioners together. The RFN's website's (**S1**: <https://radicalfilmnetwork.com/>) Directory and World Map lists 207 affiliated organisations from thirty-seven countries in four continents. Its international mailing list includes almost 700 individual users (**S2**, p3).

In a 2019 RFN membership survey, 91% of respondents reported that the RFN had generated a sense of community (**S2**, p10), connected people who '*would never have connected otherwise*' (p22) and built

*'a culture of activist and resistant cinema practice, from production and exhibition to distribution and research, that is international'* (**S2**, p24).

As the organiser of Tolpuddle Radical Film Festival attests,

*'It is thanks to Steve's work in establishing the RFN that there is now this community in place'* (**S3**).

Testifying to the impact of this inter-generational community, ex-IFA coordinator and filmmaker, Sue Clayton, describes the network as having connected successive generations of alternative film activists and created '*a global set of relationships [of] incalculable influence and significance*' (**S4**, p1). For example, in 2019 the RFN established a new team of volunteers to secure the future of the long-standing London Socialist Film Co-operative (**S5**).

##### Generating knowledge exchange

86% of members said the RFN impacted on their practice (**S2**, p11), from filmmakers who became

*'more informed on, and applied as a result, modes of participatory art production from around the world'* (p18)

to distributors and film festival organisers whose work has been shaped by the network. Gareth Evans, curator of moving image at London's Whitechapel Gallery and inter/national festival programmer, describes the RFN as providing access to

*'an extraordinary range of material that we would never otherwise have come across, nationally and internationally'.*

It is, he says, *'an essential toolkit for my activities as curator'* (S5, p2).

The RFN has organised several major inter/national events, including eight multidisciplinary international conferences (150+ delegates) in major cities, including New York (2017), Dublin (2018) and Berlin (2019) (S1). RFN members host conferences and events in partnership with local organisations, community groups and universities. This collaborative model has fostered knowledge exchange and influenced members' activities. For example, in 2018, the RFN member who coordinated a series of more than 70 international events commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the May '68 uprising, describes how the entire project, from inception to delivery, emerged from and was shaped by the RFN's *'knowledge sharing processes'*. These included workshops *'at consecutive RFN conferences'*; extensive discussions on the mailing list; a shared Padlet research board with contributions from across the network; and input from affiliated international organisations that commemorated the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2008 (S6, p1). One member remarks,

*'The aims and scope of the RFN are ambitious and valuable. Thanks to Steve Presence and those who have organised such fascinating and rewarding events!'*  
(S2, p22)

### Impacting on wider society

The RFN has enhanced the profile of and engagement with alternative film culture in wider society, particularly within the cultural industries and trade union movement. It has secured significant funding from mainstream cultural institutions for its members' work and helped them reach new audiences. The Senate Department for Culture and Europe funded (€35,000) the 2019 RFN meeting in Berlin for example, that attracted 1,500 visitors (S7); the RFN film festival and conference in Glasgow in 2016 was co-funded by Creative Scotland (GBP10,000) and the British Film Institute (GBP5,000), and co-hosted by the Scottish Trades Union Congress and University of Glasgow. This festival had 1,745 admissions and reached audiences *'from communities who would not normally attend festivals or screenings'*, and who attended events at venues and organisations *'not traditionally associated with cinema or arts culture'* (S8, p6).

In 2014, RFN activities facilitated the formation of the Tolpuddle Radical Film Festival at the Tolpuddle Martyrs' Festival, the second-largest trade union event in the UK. Organisers note that the festival

*'wouldn't have existed in its current form had it not been for Steve Presence and the Radical Film Network'* (S3),

emphasising that the collaboration has given the radical film community *'far greater impact and prominence'* among the trade union movement than previously (S3). The RFN's partnership with Sheffield Doc/Fest – the third-largest documentary film festival and marketplace in the world – has increased the visibility of alternative film culture in the screen industries. The partnership provides discounted access for RFN members each year and has resulted in several panels and screenings at the festival. According to Doc/Fest's

Deputy Director, this collaboration ensures that the *'radical voice is heard as part of our conference programme'* (S9).

The RFN has also enhanced the careers of many of its members. One member notes how she secured a permanent job in the exhibition sector partly as a result of her work with the RFN (S6). Filmmaker Paul Sng describes the RFN as a *'vital resource'* that helped him secure relationships with national and international activist networks, film festivals, distributors, exhibitors and broadcasters and find audiences for his first two feature documentaries (S10).

#### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

S1 RFN website: <https://radicalfilmnetwork.com/>

S2 RFN Members' Survey 2019 results: narrative report, summary of answers and anonymised data

S3 Testimonial from Co-Founders and Co-Directors of Tolpuddle Radical Film Festival, contact details provided with source submitted to the REF

S4 Testimonial from Sue Clayton, Professor of Film and Television, Goldsmiths University of London, contact details provided with source submitted to the REF

S5 Testimonial from Gareth Evans, Adjunct Moving Image Curator, Whitechapel Gallery, contact details provided with source submitted to the REF

S6 Impact Summary of 1968 Project by the Festival Co-ordinator

S7 Report on RFN Meeting Berlin 2019

S8 BFI Film Hub Scotland report on RFN Scotland Festival 2019

S9 Testimonial from Deputy Director, Sheffield Doc/Fest, contact details provided with source submitted to the REF

S10 Testimonial from Paul Sng, contact details provided with source submitted to the REF