

Shadow Sites, Peripheral Spaces, Embodied Places: The 48 Hour Film Challenge as a Locus for Film Industry Networks of Practice

Dr Roy Hanney

Solent University

Dr Roy Hanney
roy.hanney@solent.ac.uk
07894 899 044
ORCID: 0000-0001-7374-0032
ResearcherID: A-1585-2017
Facebook: facebook.com/Roy.Hanney.CL
Twitter: twitter.com/RoyHanney
LinkedIn: uk.linkedin.com/in/royhanney

BIOGRAPHY: Roy Hanney is employed an associate professor at Solent University and is Course Leader for their Media Production programme. With close to 20 years of higher education teaching experience, he specialises in story, documentary, drama and transmedia production. His research interests include project-based learning and live projects, which have formed the basis for a recently submitted PhD thesis at Portsmouth University. He works collaboratively with other organisations in the Solent region in talent development and to promote opportunities for engagement with media practices.

School of Media Arts & Technology
Solent University
East Park Terrace
Southampton
SO14 0YN

Abstract

This paper argues for a break from the notion of small cinema as a temporally and geographically located space and reconceptualises it as a socially constructed place. A shadow site that mirrors elite forms of cinema in microcosm and as a locus for communities of practitioners that intersect primarily through project networks. This case study of a long-running 48 Hour Film Challenge in the UK asks how identity formation contributes to a sense of membership within peripheral production communities. The socialising process that confers membership, provides a basis for the development of relationships that cement the interconnectivity of the network. Emphasising fluidity over stability the paper argues that networks of practice are a dominant organising principle. The research draws on a rich mixture of auto-ethnographic reflection, observation and qualitative data gathered over a four-year period. The paper evidences the contribution that a 48 Hour Film Challenge, as a locus for networks of practice, can make to the evolution of a regional creative economy. It attests to the ways in which participation in a filmmaking and screening activity has value for early-career filmmakers through an engagement with their own personal narratives.

[Word count: 190]

Keywords

Project, Network, Peripheral, Community, Practice, Film.

Shadow Sites, Peripheral Spaces, Embodied Places: The 48 Hour Film Challenge as a Locus for Film Industry Networks of Practice

Introduction

DVMISSION 48 Hour Film Challenge (48HFC) is an annual event based in Portsmouth, on the south coast of the UK. Run by a collective of volunteers, the challenge was first established in 2006 and has delivered 17 events to date. Although it is based in Portsmouth, the challenge attracts participants from across the Solent (south central) region of the UK and annually brings around 300 filmmakers together for the challenge weekend, which is followed by the gala screening and awards night a week later. The participants include amateur filmmakers, professionals, students and freelancers of all ages and backgrounds. Many return every year to participate, and some have been participating since the first event. In addition, it is worth noting that the DVMISSION 48HFC is the only event of its kind within the Solent region that annually brings together 300-plus media creatives for a film production-related networking and community building event. Though initially envisaged by its founders as a fun and entertaining experience, there already exists a body of anecdotal evidence to suggest that the DVMISSION 48HFC has contributed significantly to the career and personal development of participants. The data providing this evidence include personal stories recounted to the organisers, comments caught on camera during promotional interviews, a qualitative survey undertaken by the organisers in 2015 and a panel presentation exploring the impact in 2016. For example, Ben Sutton (a participant from 2007 to 2015) has, on numerous occasions, related his story of how he participated for the first time at the age of 14 and then went on to participate yearly through school, college and university, where he set up his own 48HFC. Now working at the BBC as a producer, Sutton says the following about the DVMISSION 48HFC:

'As a filmmaker, I think it's really good practice, and I learn a lot each time I take part. The community is great, and it's a very nice celebration of filmmaking. DVMISSION is, like, the best film school in the world. It has taught me so much about the practice of filmmaking and has contributed to a lot of my knowledge. The experience I have gained has secured me work professionally, and I consider DVMISSION to have directly contributed to that success'.

(Ben Sutton, 2015 participant survey)

This research builds on the existing data through a series of qualitative semi-structured interviews with participants of the 2021 edition of the DVMISSION 48HFC. By undertaking an evaluation that takes as its subject the existing 48HFC, the research aims to answer the following questions:

- Do cultural events, such as the annual DVMISSION 48HFC make a valuable and accountable contribution to the ongoing development of the local creative economy?
- Does participation in DVMISSION 48 HFC contribute to the career and personal development of the participants and in what ways might DVMISSION 48 Hour Film Challenge be offering skills development opportunities for creatives in the region?
- Does DVMISSION 48 Hour Film Challenge contribute to the growth of the community, connectivity and identity of the creative and cultural community in Portsmouth and the Solent Local Economic Partnership (LEP) region?

The research responds to two recently published key strategy documents that set out clear objectives for the future development of the creative economy in the Solent region. The first document – *The Creative Network South Creative Industries Declaration* (Freeman 2019) – sets out a series of objectives that would ‘promote business incubation, pathways to employment and connectivity’ (2). The second document – *A New Strategic Approach to the*

Development of Culture in Portsmouth (Browning 2018) – is a report commissioned by the Arts Council England; it outlines a long-term strategy for the further development of the cultural sector in the city of Portsmouth. Both these strategy documents emphasise the need for a stronger evidence base supporting the development of the creative and cultural economy in the Solent LEP region, especially Portsmouth. The current density of the creative economy in Portsmouth, at 7.9%, is significantly stronger than that in the Solent LEP region (6.8%) (Browning 2019, 7). Browning (2018) argues that further work needs to be undertaken to not only acknowledge the progress that has been made in the cultural sector but also ‘make [the] case continuously, both within the city and outside, if it (the creative and cultural sector) is to win the widespread support and new sources of funding that it will require if it is to flourish in the future. And it needs robust data and a convincing communications strategy to deliver this case effectively’ (7). This research aims to develop a further body of robust evidence in support of the strategies set out in these two reports.

What is the 48 Hour Film Challenge?

The origins and development of the 48 Hour Film Challenge

The heritage of the 48HFC lies in the amateur Super 8 filmmaking of the 1960s and 1970s and the later accessibility of affordable video technologies such as Video Home System (VHS), Short-Video Home System (SVHS) and Hi8 digital video. It also has its roots in the 24 Hour Play movement that originated in the USA in 1995 (24 Hour Plays n.d), which was, in itself, inspired by the 24 Hour Comic challenge (McCloud 2021), which started in 1990. Additionally, its emergence as a practice links to a growth in low-/microbudget short filmmaking in the 1980s (Cave 2016). It is also linked to the development of alternative and underground screens for amateur filmmakers such as those who were part of Exploding Cinema (Perry 2014), which emerged from the London squatting scene in 1992. The first

documented 48HFC was staged in Washington DC in 2001 by Mark Ruppert and Liz Langston (Langston & Ruppert 2021). Their 48 Hour Film Project was franchised in 2011 and is now an international challenge that is organised annually in over 100 cities worldwide.

The idea for the first UK 48HFC originally came from DIY filmmaker Johnnie Oddball. In 2002, frustrated with the difficulty of making short films, Oddball issued a provocation to UK filmmakers: ‘On Friday, pick a title and a theme out of a film can, use it to make a film within 48 hours and then return two weeks later to watch your film on the big screen’ (Smith 2011a, 2011b). In 2003, he went on to create one of the biggest filmmaking events in British history with a national 48HFC, wherein over 10,000 people participated, producing 488 short films. The following year, he organised four more filmmaking events around Europe. Then, in 2005, he organised the first 24 Hour Film Challenge in Cannes.

A 48HFC can be thought of as a kind of filmmaking ‘hackathon’ – a time-delineated, intensive, team-orientated, rapid prototyping activity. Moreover, it could be thought of as having a competitive element that concludes with a presentation and prize-giving ceremony. Further, limited-time filmmaking can be considered a sport where participants engage in a race to the finish. The use of the terms ‘start line’, ‘finish line’, ‘awards night’, the imposition of rules, the need for resilience and the sense that the challenge is one of endurance as well as performance contribute to the sense that the 48HFC is akin to a sporting event (Mercier & Wilson 2013, 201). Indeed, the above-mentioned linguistic cues are typically used when describing a 48HFC. The 48HFC can just as easily be conceptualised as a ‘ritual celebration’ where the ‘forging of social ties’ (Karlsen & Sundnes 2017, 225) is balanced with skill development through experiential learning.

Motivation is a core theme in the literature on the 48HFC, and there is a strong sense that it is often the informal, playful nature of the event that attracts filmmakers to participate. Mercier & Wilson (2013, 65) note that participants often cite ‘taking part’ as the most important part of the event. In interviews with participants of V48, a long-running national 48FHFC in New Zealand, it is the opportunity to play, to practice for an audience and not just the competition (Mercier & Wilson 2013, 73) that emerges as the key motivational factor. The difference between those who compete and those who set out to complete is key when asking what is the ‘text of the narrative when part of the competition narrative is the experience of the weekend’ (Mercier & Wilson 2013, 62). The quality of the films can vary wildly, depending on the experience of the teams in a particular year. However, Mercier & Wilson (2013) note that in the case of V48, the quality has improved over time, alluding to the possibility that the ‘levels of film expertise and skills [...] were growing and maturing along with the competition’ (72).

The origins and development of the DVMISSION 48 Hour Film Challenge

The DVMISSION emerged as part of the first Portsmouth Screen film festival in 2006 and then split off from the festival to form a separate organisation in 2007. It then continued to stage an annual challenge in the city from 2006 to 2022 (DVMISSION 2015). Jinx Prowse, DVMISSION’s founder, came up with the idea to begin the challenge as he felt that there were no cultural events for cinema, video and film in the city. He wanted to run the kind of event that he, as a filmmaker, would want to participate in. Being inspired by filmmaking events being conducted in other cities, he came up with a plan to run Portsmouth’s first 48HFC. In the initial years (2006–2009) of DVMISSION, the Screen South/UK Film Council and Film Hampshire funded the event. In 2009, Southampton Solent University joined the funding. However, since the demise of the UK Film Council in 2010 and the downsizing of

Film Hampshire, the challenge has relied on team registration fees for its cover production expenses. Even though it is run by volunteers on a relatively small cost, the changes in the funding landscape impacted the organisers' ability to continue developing the challenge as a long-term sustainable activity. Consequently, after covering the costs of staging the annual challenge from their own funds between 2010 and 2014, the organising team introduced a sponsorship programme in 2015, which has led to higher financial stability with organisations such as Portsmouth City Council, University of Portsmouth, Creative Network South and other local businesses supporting the challenge on an ongoing basis.

Similar to other 48HFCs, the DVMISSION 48HFC spans one weekend, starting at 5pm on a Friday night, when the participating teams are given a 'film title, a film genre and line of dialogue'; these are termed as *obstructions* by DVMISSION. The teams then get just 48 hours to return on the following Sunday at 5pm with a finished two-minute film. Initially, the teams would then return later the same evening for the screening and awards ceremony; however, in 2015, the organisers decided to split the event by having the screening event the following Saturday night. Since 2017, the organisers have staged the screening and awards night as an immersive cinema experience, setting the event within a fictional world that is related to the genre and theme of that year's challenge. Serving a regional demographic based in the Solent and Southern Counties of the UK, the event also sees regular participation from teams across the UK as well as from other countries. Since 2006, the challenge has generated over 400 short films, seen the participation of around 1200 filmmakers of all ages and levels of experience and positioned itself as a premier filmmaking event that promotes talent development and the networking of creative industries across the region.

Methods

As the primary investigator on this study, I have taken a particular critical positionality – that of the ‘insider researcher’. As one of the founders of DVMISSION, I have been instrumental in its organisation, planning and development. Thus, the alignment of this research with DVMISSION’s aims and objectives not only satisfies an academic desire but also feeds into a long-term strategy for developing the DVMISSION 48HFC as a sustainable annual event. The insights that an insider researcher can bring out in the organisational context or reveal about other (often hidden) structural factors are of real value. As per Ahn (2012, 5), when conducting insider research on the Pusan International Film Festival, they found that a shared understanding often opens up the conversation between participant and researcher to a deeper and richer level of discourse.

The questions asked in this study emerge from an evaluation of data collected over an extended time period that was available as a consequence of this positionality. The data include anecdotes recounted to the organisers, comments caught on camera during promotional interviews, a qualitative survey undertaken by the organisers in 2015 and a panel presentation exploring the impact in 2016. The reflection on and evaluation of these data enabled a second phase of research that seeks to confirm an emergent hypothesis: The DVMISSION 48HFC has had an impact on its participants and has contributed to the fostering of a creative community identity in the Solent LEP region. To test this hypothesis, a series of semi-structured interviews was conducted with the participants of the 2021 DVMISSION 48HFC. Ethics approval was given by the university’s ethics review committee and all of the respondents gave verbal consent for participation and waived the need for anonymity in the research which was recorded on video. Subsequently the respondents have approved the text of this article. A total of 12 respondents participated in eight semi-structured interviews, which were conducted individually (four respondents) or in pairs (4x2

respondents), the latter being a reflection of a close working partnership between the respondents. For one of the pairs, this represented an ongoing professional relationship as film producers; in the case of the other pairs, the relationship was a result of joint participation in DVMISSION challenges over a number of years. However, in all these latter cases, the relationship also included elements of creative collaboration beyond participation in the DVMISSION 48HFC. All the respondents had participated in three or more challenges; one individual had taken part 16 times, while a pair had participated seven times. In this regard, all the respondents can be considered veterans.

At the time of the interviews, only one respondent worked outside of the creative industries (financial claims). Two of the respondents were film production students at a local university (now graduated). Two were employed in creative industries – one as a graphic designer and other as a content creator for a brewery where handling video production was part of their job responsibilities. Two were employed in education – one as a youth worker specialising in film production and other as a course tutor teaching media production at a local FE college. Only five were directly employed in video and film production, with three running their own individual production companies specialising in corporate communications and the other two being prolific feature film producers working in the horror genre.

Results

Based on the analysis of the interview responses, the reasons given by the participants for participating in the DVMISSION 48HFC included getting their creative muscles going, having an audience for their films, having a deadline to adhere to for delivering a project, being motivated enough to make a film without other distractions, having the opportunity to fall in love with filmmaking again, taking on a creative challenge, being able to encapsulate

the entire filmmaking process from script to screen in one weekend, having the opportunity to network, getting more experience as a filmmaker and having a film at the end of it. The respondents repeatedly used the terms ‘fun’ and ‘exciting’ to describe the experience, with many saying how much they ‘loved’ and ‘looked forward’ to participating every year.

‘I do it [...] because it’s the only real thing that actually keeps me making films’. (Rob Hind)
‘I was finding it hard to get projects completed, and I thought if I get involved in this, and it’s got to be done, you don’t have to come up with everything yourself. You’re going to get a prompt, [and] you’re just going to get let loose for the weekend to use whatever resources you can to get a project done, edited and sent in. I thought that would be the surest way to get a project finished and out there and entered into a competition as well’. (Billy Stevenson)

Most of the respondents confirmed they had experience in filmmaking prior to participation in the DVMISSION 48HFC. This experience ranged from personal projects to college and university projects. The depth and range of experience varied greatly with age, with the older respondents often already working in the creative industries. Some had participated in other film challenges and film festivals, while a few had professional, on-set experience in film production. However, not all the respondents had studied film production at university level – at least two had taken related subjects (journalism, acting), while a few others made no reference to a university education. All the respondents valued the experience of participation in terms of skill building, with many citing examples of how they applied this learning to their practice beyond the challenge. Indeed, technical and craft skills largely improve through an experiential learning cycle, and many respondents directly attributed the growth in their capabilities as filmmakers to participation in the DVMISSION 48HFC.

'I look back at the first film we made, and even going back to when I first started making films in 2007, I can see an improvement, and an improvement technically of how I'd film things'. (Mark Harmon)

Several of the respondents commented on the informal learning that emerges from the experience, noting that they are aware of improvements 'year on year' even though it does not feel like training. The opportunity to learn from each other, especially where a team member has specific skills such as cinematography or post-production, was another value attributed to participation in the DVMISSION 48HFC. The informal sharing of personal skillsets and knowledge exchange within the team can be a powerful driver for skill acquisition, and this was exemplified in several comments from participants. The challenge was recognised as an opportunity to work on problem solving, team work and collaboration in a highly pressurised setting. Participants learnt to make editorial judgements that would help them tell a story in two minutes.

'We've learnt more [on] how to get the exact time moments that we want. That's been such a useful skill in producing feature films, because you say, "Well, we've got a couple of minutes here. How do we fill that? How do we use that and utilise it in the best way possible?"'

(Jackson Batchelor)

Building confidence was another topic that all the respondents discussed, citing confidence as a really valuable outcome that had led to other opportunities.

'First of all, my confidence grew, [...], and I actually forgot about this, but it actually is what made me realise that I could be professional'. (Ross Sterne)

'Because it's something that we can say we've done four times now, I feel more confident in myself to say, "I can go out and create a film"'. (Oliver Mills)

The opportunity for exposure to another filmmaker's work can be inspiring, but for novices, it also introduces them to approaches and techniques that offer additional learning opportunities.

'Watching the others, that was where a lot of my learning came from – coming to the after-party and just watching all the others in the competition and just seeing little camera angles and thinking, "Oh yeah", like, not having people in full frame, having a little bit of something in the way. It's not something I would have thought of to give a cinematic look'. (Billy Stevenson)

Trying out new production roles, collaborating with new team members and stretching oneself creatively are other clear indicators of the way in which an experience such as the DVMISSION 48HFC can provide Career and Professional Development (CPD) in an industry that largely comprises freelancers, portfolio workers, microbusinesses and Small to Medium Enterprises (SME's), consequently lacking the kinds of structured CPD that might be found in other sectors.

'[Last year,] I just had so much fun working with her as assistant director and acting, and we were, like, "You should direct DVMISSION", and it was an amazing experience for her'.
(Sam Masson-Bell)

Several respondents spoke about how the experience has enhanced their professional work as feature film and corporate video producers. In this regard, the participation has also led to new work opportunities as a result of the participants producing portfolio-worthy films. Those who had won or got nominated for awards talked about how this enhances their CVs. One respondent, in particular, talked about how his awards are displayed in his office as talking points for corporate clients. Moreover, others cited examples of how participation had led to promotion or other work opportunities.

'In fact, if anything, the promotion I recently got was because I brought [out] these ideas which I learned through doing DVMISSION'. (Scott Northway)

'I'd probably have to say that taking part in DV Mission has given me the skills I need to teach the production course of Fareham. I think it made it much more likely that I got that job'. (Rob Hind)

All the respondents acknowledged identity formation as an outcome of their participation in the DVMISSION 48HFC. They used phrases such as 'becoming the person I am', 'being a creative' and 'having a passion for filmmaking' and talked about how it feels 'to be a part of the community'. This speaks broadly of a habitus that has emerged from the experience gained through adopting the identity of a filmmaker.

'A lot of people we knew in our uni classes, they'd be, like, "Oh yeah, you do DV Missions"'. (James Riley)

The communal spirit that all the respondents cited as a key value comes with doing something together. Although the teams work separately over the challenge weekend, there is always a sense that they are all part of the same experience.

'We all had something in common that past weekend; we were all doing the exact same thing'. (Oliver Mills)

'Like Sam said, there is clearly quite a big community out there, and sometimes it's not necessarily about getting to know everyone but [about] seeing that there's a lot of people who are working in the same thing as you, the same field as you. It makes you have more of an appreciation for the community at large and makes you go, "Wow, there are some amazing, talented people around". I think that's a great thing about it'. (Jackson Batchelor)

The respondents reported that there is no sense of elitism, the challenge is accessible, and anyone can participate. This seems to contribute to the sense of a supportive, communal, and social experience of participation. Additionally, a few respondents referred to the event's impact on their mental health and pointed out that the event gave them something to look forward to. Moreover, the networking opportunity was cited as an important part of the experience, with the screening and awards night offering an informal opportunity for participants to get to know each other. Although the event is not formally billed as a networking opportunity, it is clearly seen as such: The informal nature of the event naturally lends itself to the kind of networking that builds social connections rather than just business opportunities.

'With a lot of the other networking events when I read them, it's, like, show up, have a coffee, be shown a PowerPoint, speak to people in the industry. I don't want to make it sound like I'm belittling them, I'm sure they're brilliant. I'm sure for actual industry progression, it might be in some degrees better, or more advanced, because they're, like, "We need a producer; you're a producer; here's a deal"'. Whereas DVMISSION isn't outwardly networking, to the point of, like, "You need me; I need you; we should do more work". But I don't get excited with the idea of sitting in a room, watching a PowerPoint and then having to talk to people where you don't really have an introduction or an in'. (James Riley)

The shared membership of a community, the habitus that comes with this membership and the sense that everyone has had a common experience generate connections based on effect, not solely on business opportunity. Arguably, this has the potential to develop longer-lasting and more concrete relationships. Further, the DVMISSION 48HFC is, in many instances, the first time a filmmaker participates in an industry event of this kind. While some do participate in film festivals or other 48HFCs, this often happens as a consequence of participating in the DVMISSION 48HFC.

'For me, it was the first experience I'd had of a film festival or going to watch yourself on a screen and see everyone else's films'. (Jackson Batchelor)

What emerges from this networking is a complex web of interconnectivity that leads to broad opportunities for collaboration, freelancing, cooperation and resource amalgamation. This is reflected in the way in which team membership shifts and changes every year. One year a filmmaker might be in one team, the following year they are in another. Outside of the DVMISSION 48HFC, the participating filmmakers build on the relationships forged through

their membership of the DVMISSION community and establish professional working relationships.

'I've worked with the members of Sleepy Bandits a few times on a few projects and part of that was down to some of the work that I saw them do at DV Mission and some of the awards that they won'. (Ross Sterne)

'It's What are the Hours. We've worked with their director, Connor Cleary. I've worked with him as DP (Director of Photography), and I've produced a fair few times with him shooting it'. (James Riley)

In all the interviews, the respondents name checked other DVMISSION 48HFC participants and talked about how they would seek them out at the screening and awards ceremony, follow each other on social media and stay in touch throughout the year. One respondent mentioned about being recognised by another challenge participant in a local pub. This seemed a common theme with many of the respondents highlighting the way their network had expanded as a result of participating in the DVMISSION 48HFC over the years.

Conceptualising the 48 Hour Film Challenge as a pedagogy of constraint

A unifying trait of the 48HFC is the use of 'constraints' or 'obstructions' as a means of promoting creativity. These are typically a combination of factors that the filmmakers must either include or respond to, for example, genre, title, line of dialogue, props, locations and actions (Mercier & Wilson 2013, 192). A long-established practice in filmmaking examples (cf. Elster 2000) can be found in the *DOGME 95* manifesto published in 1995 by Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg (cf. Harries 2021). The pair aimed to mirror an earlier

challenge that was put forward to filmmakers by François Truffaut in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, which is thought to have kick started the French New Wave in 1954 (Harries 2021). Their aim was to ‘purify’ cinema that they believed had become bloated by large budgets, an overemphasis on special effects and the overuse of digital technology. The manifesto opposed commercial filmmaking and required those taking their challenge to simplify their approach to filmmaking and focus on storytelling, performance and theme. Another example is *The Five Obstructions* (2003), in which von Trier challenges his old filmmaking tutor and mentor Jørgen Leth to remake his minimalist poetic film *The Perfect Human* (1967) five times; on each occasion, von Trier attempts to subvert the production of an iteration of the film by placing ‘obstructions’ in Leth’s way. However, in each iteration, Leth brings forth a renewed and beautiful film that shines amidst the playful attempts at ‘ruination’ (Straten-McSparran 2020) by von Trier.

These examples highlight the ways in which constraints are believed to enhance the creative potential of filmmakers. A constraint-based pedagogy establishes the ways in which ‘art flourishes when the favoured techniques and underlying acts of style are challenged and abandoned so that the artist sees the possibility of a wholly new creation’ (Straten-McSparran 2020). Swapping professional industry constraints such as budget, executive veto, technical quality, compliance and marketing and distribution. For creative ‘obstructions’ or other compulsory elements such as strict time delineation for film duration and production window (Mercier & Wilson 2013, 62). Serves as a means for forcing upon participants a pedagogy within which their creativity is challenged through problematisation. Thus, constraints as a unifying trait of a 48HFC not only function as a structuring principle that formulates the 48HFC as a film race, ritual celebration or even as an entertaining activity, but also enhances

the pedagogic value of the 48HFC and significantly contribute to the skill development and CPD of the participants.

Peripheral practices, shadow sites and microcinema

When other filmmakers asked as to why he was doing these events and if he was doing them to get into the film industry, Oddball replied, ‘No, I’ve created my own film industry out of new talented filmmakers from all over the UK’ (Smith 2011b, 6). This is mirrored in the experience of the DVMISSION 48HFC, which appears to have generated its own ‘film industry’ from a diffuse and disparate community of creatives located, by and large, in the Solent LEP region of the UK. As a collection of practices and activities that coalesce in antithesis to mainstream cinema production and distribution, it might be possible to conceptualise the 48HFC as a manifestation of small cinema. Hjort & Petrie (2007, 2) point out that small cinema is always defined in relation to the greater one, but the ways in which the small overlaps and is integrated within the greater are noteworthy. They also suggest that, at best, it is only possible to outline generalisable features that differentiate the small and the greater. In this regard, the defining factors for small cinema include the number of participants, geographical position/scale/location, economic factors such as turnover (market values or prices of all final goods and services produced in an economy during a period of time) and relations of power and dominance such as the adherence to codes, practices and regulations or norms. The notion contrasts with mainstream cinematic production, which is cost intensive and requires an audience of scale to sustain itself (Hjort 2011, 5).

However, the claim may be too ambitious since a 48HFC arguably sits outside of the established framework of independent, locally produced, low-budget productions that circulate within and around small cinema. The nature of a 48HFC and its size, duration,

frequency and inherent instability as a sustained site of practice, along with its no-budget, DIY guerrilla filmmaking ethos, suggest that it is more appropriate to consider it as a microcinema, that is, a site of practice that interacts with small cinema in the margins. It could be seen as a peripheral space where media makers gather to engage in production activities that are central to neither mainstream nor small cinema. It is a site of practice that sits on the periphery of the periphery, echoing the formal economy yet simultaneously existing outside of the formal regulation of modes of production and exchange; thus, it exists as a shadow site. However, it also embraces an assemblage of activities, including the full cycle of production wherein the practice moves from script to screen. Including all the mechanisms of pre-production, production, post-production, distribution, exhibition, marketing and audience engagement.

In this sense, while a 48HFC is disconnected from the mainstream cinema geographically, economically and culturally, the macrocosm of the formal relations of production found in the mainstream cinema is mirrored in the informal relations of production found in microcosm. Shadow sites are largely unmapped and interact loosely with the core or something entirely outside its sphere of influence. Their economies of production and exchange operate outside of the regulated corporate economic activity. Yet, they are at the heart of the mainstream economic process (Lobato 2012, 39–41). Studies in economic anthropology have shown how informal economies or shadow economies cannot be disentangled from those that dominate. For example, Hart's (1973) study of informal employment practices among the Frafras in Northern Ghana demonstrates the importance of the informal economy for those marginalised by mainstream economic activity.

The 48HFC: Not a community of practice, but a network of practice

It is important to note that while there is a strong sense of community membership among those who have participated in a 48HFC, it is not necessarily useful to think of the challenge as a community of practice even though it may exhibit some traits typical of this form of social structuration. The film industry is primarily organised through the undertaking of projects coordinated through project networks. A project network is an iterative series of ‘unique, yet organized endeavours, undertaken by heterogeneous teams of specialized workers who collaborate to fulfil complex, interdependent tasks for specific purposes’ (Manning & Sydow 2007, 20). Production companies (network organisations) led by producers (network coordinators) enact network-based control in order to implement projects (Manning & Sydow 2007, 26). Thus, the industry is decentralised, with project networks being the primary form of relations among actors and projects being the ‘primary organising mechanism’ (Jones 2014, 59). Thus, given that the dominant organising principle of is through social relations, it is arguably more useful to think of the sector as a socially structured network of practice.

The concept of a network of practice integrates two competing tensions that exist within communities and networks: 1. Whether a community is typified by a shared identity that emerges from a set of collective intentions that aim to harness and curate particular domains of knowledge (Wenger, Trayner & Laat 2001) and 2. whether a network can be typified as a set of personal relations motivated more by self-interest than by a desire to steward a domain of knowledge or a set of professional practices (Wenger, Trayner & Laat 2001). The important difference here is that while members of a network might embrace shared repertoire, values and norms, the social relations in a community are characterised by a highly centralised, densely connected and cohesive core that sits in relation to a set of peripheral actors who are more loosely linked to each other (Juhász, Tóth & Lengyel 2020,

1). Simply put, while a community of practice is characterised by strong and stable connections, a network of practice is characterised by weak and dynamic connections. Clearly, the two overlap, and communities often develop out of networks and social actors use networks to gain membership to communities; however, a network-of-practice approach offers a better conceptual framework for understanding the value exchange that occurs in decentralised and peripheral shadow sites such as the DVMISSION 48HFC.

Networks of practice are fluid, dynamic and constantly in flux as project actors come together for short-term employment on specific projects. They move from project to project, their careers lying across a range of projects rather than within a specific company. The companies that do exist serve the function of initiating projects, financing them and managing the implementation and distribution of completed projects; thus, they enact networked-based control. A key issue for networks of practice is the way in which new entrants are trained and the way they are socialised since careers in film production require not only technical skills but also, crucially, excellent interpersonal skills. Barriers to entry into the film industry are typically elevated, and it is highly competitive especially for those seeking to work on high-profile, big-budget productions. There are no simple steps to take, and the main factor that enables success is one's ability to network with those already working in the sector. As a research respondent of a study on film industry careers says, 'You have to find people who like to make movies' (Jones 2001, 62).

However, in order to be useful to social actors seeking entry into the film industry, a network of practice needs to be actualised (Manning & Sydow 2007, 23). This occurs through participation in projects; this helps social actors to initiate relations and get recognised as project resources by the network-based control of, for example, a producer, a production

company or other network node. Repeated interactions among network members further cement relations as social actors are ‘socialised into the industry culture’ (Jones 2014, 59). This leads to their acculturation as they cross ‘inclusionary boundaries’ (Jones 2001, 64) through the mastery of the network’s knowledge requirements in matters such as what is to be done, how it is done and how to act while doing it.

This common understanding of conventions, routines, terminologies, hierarchies, and etiquette among a diverse, varied and dispersed group of people enables an individual to arrive on set to meet a group of people with whom they have never worked and still know exactly how to ‘fit in’. It is through participation in peripheral projects that new entrants gain this kind of know-how. Typically, this can be achieved by participating in the production of no-to-low-budget filmmaking or in 48HFCs, by means of internships and work placements and by helping out on sets. Participation in these kinds of activities assists with this process (Jones 2014, 68); it helps identify gate keepers, assists with the development of interpersonal skills, promotes the assimilation of industry norms and values, establishes the entrants’ reputation as someone people want to work with, expands skills in relation to competencies and capabilities (cf. Hanney 2005) and demonstrates motivation and persistence. Most importantly, it enables social actors to develop an identity as a filmmaker and a habitus that is recognisably that of a member of network of practice.

The 48HFC as lived experience

A place is something to return to – it is at once familiar, brimming with recollections. It gathers histories, things, ideas, structures, bodies, experiences and feelings and holds them in complex configurations of thoughts and memories (Casey 1996, 22–25). It maps an encounter with the social as a meaningful action that establishes systems of exchange, creates

histories and experiences and inducts new entrants within a persisting semiotic network of relations. In this way, the experience of participating in a 48HFC is manifested in the film not just as a cultural artefact in isolation but also as a signifier of a semiotic relationship within a community that coalesces through the experience. It also functions metaphorically as a site of embodied agency and action in which ‘space is no longer a category of fixed and ontological attributes, but a becoming, an emergent property of social relationship’ (Low 2009, 34).

According to Bourdieu (1985, 723), participants in a 48HFC can be thought of as agents who carry cultural capital with them into a site of practice. This capital can be recirculated through collective experience, out of which the formation of a shared identity emerges. The shared experience generates new cultural capital, facilitates the return to place – whether through participation in other 48HFCs or by returning a year later to the same challenge – and further embeds membership within habitus. Importantly, the barriers to entry into this community are very low; typically, only willingness to participate and get involved is required.

Over time, a 48HFC community experiences significant churn. Veterans move on, having exhausted the potential for their career and network development. (This is not always the case, as the DVMISSION 48HFC has teams that have been participating since year zero.) Teams also regularly reconfigure membership through a process of osmosis, splitting, branching and establishing new group dynamics. However, on a positive note, new people sign up to these challenges, attracted by the idea or often through recommendation. As novices and experts mingle, the community establishes its own set of norms, which recognise that ‘creativity is stimulated not by untrammelled freedom but by clearly defined constraints’ (Hjort 2011, 2). Gradually, the acquisition of veteran status gains prestige for participants and brings with it a sense of real achievement, ‘We survived! Don’t panic!’

Conclusion

A commonly cited belief that creativity is not the product of an individual's cognition but emerges from the interaction between individual cognition and the 'sociocultural context' (Cattani & Ferriani 2008, 825) helps understand that the transformation of creative potential occurs when groups of project actors are brought together to enact a project. This satisfactorily summarises the value of participation in a 48HFC to emerging and entry-level filmmakers. However, the situatedness of the DVMISSION 48HFC geographically, socioeconomically and culturally on the south coast of the UK not only positions participants at the margins but also isolates them from the broader networks and communities of practice.

At the time of writing, there is a clear gap between competing in the DVMISSION 48HFC and the kind of opportunities offered by organisations such as the BFI NETWORK (southwest region). The funding and development schemes offered by organisations such as the BFI operate as a point of entry into the industry for those already practicing at a high level or who have an established track record or portfolio. For many of those participating in the DVMISSION 48HFC, this is perhaps still an aspirational stage of their career.

On the one hand, respondents – when asked what the next step for them would be – expressed a desire to move forward and develop their careers as filmmakers. On the other hand, they outlined an obstacle: a lack of knowledge regarding what should be their next step, how to take that step and how to move forward. Most are unfamiliar with the landscape of support offered or the kind of CPD they might need to seek out should they wish to avail themselves some support. A recent opportunity as a judge for a local script writing competition illustrated this well. One of the more successful and long-term DVMISSION 48HFC participants, who has repeatedly won the prize for best film, had their script rejected at the first round for what can only be described as basic errors. The fact that a talented,

award-winning filmmaker lacked the basic skills that would have enabled them to progress their career was frustrating since the cost of providing the kind of CPD that would have enabled progression was potentially quite low.

Thus, organisations such as DVMISSION need to be better integrated with the regional talent development pipeline. Hopefully, this study, and others like it, will guide strategic stakeholders to acknowledge the value that a 48HFC can bring to this pipeline. As such, the study aims to initiate a conversation about how to link the aspirations of emerging and entry-level talent to the support available at a regional and national level. A further analysis of the value exchange network that underpins DVMISSION 48HFC as a network of practice would enable the identification of obstacles to progression for participating filmmakers. It would also assist with the evaluation of need in terms of the particular forms of intervention required to fill the gap between practice at grassroots level and that available at regional level, thereby providing support for those DVMISSION 48HFC participants who wish to take the next step.

(word count 8147)

References

- 24 Hour Plays. "24 Hour Plays: About." The 24 Hour Plays., last modified n.d., accessed Apr 13, 2021, <https://24hourplays.com/about/>.
- Ahn, Soojeong. 2012. *The Pusan International Film Festival, South Korean Cinema and Globalisation*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1985. "The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups." *Theory and Society* 14 (6): 723-744. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/657373>.

- Browning, Stephen. 2018. *A New Strategic Approach to the Development of Culture in Portsmouth*: Arts Council England.
- Casey, Edward, S. 1996. "How to Get from Space to Place in a Fairly Short Stretch of Time: Phenomenological Prolegomena." In *Senses of Place*, edited by Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso. Vol. School of American Research advanced seminar series, 13-52. Santa Fe, N.M.: School of American Research Press.
- Cattani, Gino and Simone Ferriani. 2008. "A Core/Periphery Perspective on Individual Creative Performance: Social Networks and Cinematic Achievements in the Hollywood Film Industry." *Organization Science* 19 (6): 824-844. <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1070.0350>.
- Cave, Dylan. "In Focus: What's Great about UK Short Films?" British Film Council., accessed 13/4/21, , <https://film.britishcouncil.org/blog/uk-shorts>.
- DVMISSION. "DVMISSION 48 Hour Film Challenge." DVMISSION., accessed Apr 13, 2021, <https://www.dvmission.co.uk/>.
- Elster, Jon. 2000. "Less is More: Creativity and Constraints in the Arts." In *Ulysses Unbound: Studies in Rationality, Precommitment, and Constraints*, edited by Jon Elster, 175-269. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Freeman, Charles. 2019. *The Creative Network South Creative Industries Declaration*: Creative Network South.
- Hanney, Roy. 2005. "Competence Or Capability: Work-Based Learning and Problem-Based Learning." *Null* 6 (2): 105-112.
doi:10.1386/jmpr.6.2.73/3. <https://doi.org/10.1386/jmpr.6.2.73/3>.
- Harries, Samuel. "What is DOGME 95." *Movements In Film.*, accessed Apr 13, 2021, <https://www.movementsinfilm.com/dogme-95>.

- Hart, Keith. 1973. "Informal Income Opportunities and Urban Employment in Ghana." *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 11 (1): 61-89. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/159873>.
- Hjort, Mette. 2011. "Small Cinemas: How they Thrive and Why they Matter." *Mediascape* Winter (11): 11-15. http://www.tft.ucla.edu/mediascape/Winter2011_SmallCinemas.pdf [file:///Users/royhanney/Google Drive/Mendeley/Hjort - 2010 - Small Cinemas How They Thrive and Why They Matter.pdf](file:///Users/royhanney/Google%20Drive/Mendeley/Hjort%20-%202010%20-%20Small%20Cinemas%20How%20They%20Thrive%20and%20Why%20They%20Matter.pdf).
- Hjort, Mette and Duncan J. Petrie. 2007. *The Cinema of Small Nations*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Jones, Candace. 1996. "Careers in Project Networks: The Case of the Film Industry'." In *The Boundaryless Career: A New Employment Principle for a New Organizational Er*, edited by Michael Arthur and Denise Rousseau, 58-75. New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Juhász, Sándor, Gergő Tóth, and Balázs Lengyel. 2020. "Brokering the Core and the Periphery: Creative Success and Collaboration Networks in the Film Industry." *PLoS ONE* 15 (2): e0229436. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0229436>.
- Karlsen, Joakim and Anders Løvlie. 2017. "'You can Dance Your Prototype if You Like': Independent Filmmakers Adapting the Hackathon." *Digital Creativity* 28 (3): 224-239. doi:10.1080/14626268.2017.1351992. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14626268.2017.1351992>.
- Langston, Liz and Ruppert, Mark. "Who we are @ 48 Hour Film Project." 48 Hour Film Project., accessed Apr 13, 2021, <https://www.48hourfilm.com/en/about>.
- The Perfect Human*. Directed by Jørgen Leth. 1967.
- Lobato, Ramon. 2012. *Shadow Economies of Cinema : Mapping Informal Film Distribution*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Low, Setha M. 2009. "Towards an Anthropological Theory of Space and Place." *Semiotica* 2009 (175): 21-37.
- Manning, Stephan and Jörg Sydow. 2007. "Transforming Creative Potential in Project Networks: How TV Movies are Produced Under Network-Based Control." *Critical Sociology* 33 (1-2): 19-42.
doi:10.1163/156916307X168575. <https://doi.org/10.1163/156916307X168575>.
- McCloud, Scott. "The 24 Hour Comic." Scott McCloud., accessed 13th April, 2021, <http://www.scottmcccloud.com/4-inventions/24hr/index.html>.
- Mercier, O. Ripeka and Challen Wilson. 2013. "'Everybody's Putting their Heart and Soul into that One Weekend': Six Motivations for Entering the 48-Hour Film Competition." *Studies in Australasian Cinema* 7 (1): 61-75.
- Perry, Kevin. "Exploding Cinema: The DIY Projectors." The Guardian., last modified -12-06T08:00:11.000Z, accessed Apr 13, 2021, <http://www.theguardian.com/film/2014/dec/06/exploding-cinema-guerrilla-projectors>.
- Smith, Phil. 2011a. *Johnnie Oddball 2003-2005 Film Challenges*. Online: Lulu.com.
- Smith, Phil. 2011b. *Jonnie Oddball: The Original Guerrilla Film Maker*. Online: Lulu.com.
- Straten-McSparran, Rebecca. "The Five Obstructions." Image Journal., accessed Apr 13, 2021, <https://imagejournal.org/article/the-five-obstructions/>.
- The Five Obstructions*. Directed by Lars von Trier. 2003.
- Wenger, Etienne, Beverly Trayner, and Maarten de Laat. 2011. *Promoting and Assessing Value Creation in Communities and Networks: A Conceptual Framework*. Netherlands: Open Universiteit, Ruud de Moor Centrum.