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Secret City - A Reception Diary

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Preproduction

Secret City (Chanan and Salter, 2012) is a David and Goliath story. The Corporation of the City of London is at the heart of a lobbying network that spends £93m a year on behalf of finance capital. *Secret City*, which unmasks the Corporation, started out with a zero budget and was completed with university funding of just £7,200—and no budget at all for marketing and publicity. In two words, an example of 'small media'. It was made over the first nine months of 2012 by a team of four people (two academics and two interns), and then launched with a screening at the House of Commons in October. A year later, it had been screened around ninety times up and down the country, always to full houses, at community, cultural and university venues, alongside independent cinemas. This was only possible by taking an integrated approach to the use of the social media, and it demonstrates the potential of the web to discover an 'audience-in-waiting' that is not served by broadcast media or conventional film distribution—nor the expense of marketing. The parallel outlets provided by the web are vital to creating the presence that produces dissemination through the dynamics of social networking. With non-commercial production sans a marketing & publicity budget, the web becomes the crucial means for making links with cultural, community and campaign groups and thereby organising the public screenings through which the film finds an audience and enters into dialogue with them around the issues. There are many negative things to be said about the forms of sociality found on the web; this is one of the positives. From the first, the film was highly commended as, for example, "a revelatory insight into the Vatican of contemporary finance" (Lustgarten 2012) and "a powerful, fascinating and terrifying documentary" (London Film Review 2013). It was not reviewed in the mainstream press, but took the best documentary award at the London Independent Film Festival 2013. Jasper Sharp, picking his Five Best of 2013 at Midnight Eye, called it "a brilliant example of micro-budget guerrilla filmmaking that really hits its target (Sharp 2013). Not the sort of thing that will ever play on TV or in conventional cinemas, he said, it certainly needs to be seen by a lot more people, 'but its makers have been doing a wonderful job of bringing it to audiences through the festival circuit and special pop-up screenings' (ibid.).

The origins of *Secret City* go back ten years, when the film's writer and presenter, Lee Salter, worked as a researcher with three people who were petitioning the House of Lords against a bill to 'reform' the City of London's electoral system by securing plural votes for businesses. (The bill was passed and the City of London is now the only place in the country where businesses as well as residents are able to vote for local councillors) (See Salter 2004). They were a curious bunch: the political scientist Maurice Glasman; William Taylor, a vicar and dissenting Common Councillor in the City; and John McDonnell MP. Their efforts were backed by a City entrepreneur, Malcolm Matson, who had been blackballed by the Corporation when he was elected as an Alderman for his ideas about open government and transparency. This unlikely assembly of a Marxist academic, a vicar, a Labour MP, and a millionaire businessman, is joined in the film by other academics and campaigners to create a dialogical narrative of interweaving strands: the history of a city that pioneered both capitalism and empire; the impact of this concentration of financial power both at home and abroad; the effect of the City on the wellbeing of those who live in its shadow; the spiritual malaise inflicted by the single interest of financial capitalism; the lack of transparency and the influence held by the City over Parliament.

The film's director, Michael Chanan, a seasoned documentarist since the 1970s, has been working in digital video under academic aegis for about fifteen years, producing both long-form documentaries and a variety of short videos. Some of the latter were made for academic presentation, some as video diaries, others comprise a series of video blogs investigating the protest movement that appeared on the *New Statesman* website over the first three months of 2011 (subsequently gathered together as *Chronicle of Protest* (Chanan, 2011). The lessons of this experience of what is known in academic terminology as practice-as-research (or research-as-practice; we don't quite know the difference) are various. They include, from the practical point of view, the need for the digital documentarist, who is able to work alone at all stages of production, to compensate for their solitude by finding new forms of collaboration to replace the collective creativity of the film crew. *Secret City* provided the opportunity to follow a model that Chanan first employed on *Detroit: Ruin of a City* (2005), where the filmmaker engages in a full-scale collaboration with an academic investigator who brings the initial expertise and knowledge of the subject, conducts the interviews, shares the development and intellectual authorship of the script, and joins in the editing.

Production

The production of *Secret City* answered to opportunity and circumstances, after the Occupy movement took up residence on the steps of St Paul's Cathedral and immediately turned public and media attention on the City. The two of us, being anti-ivory tower academics and scholars of the media, realised that this was not just a pressing topic for academic attention, but also 'a story,' and finding ourselves especially well positioned to make it, felt a sense of urgency about doing so.

Changing circumstances redirect attention, open up spaces and change the structure of political opportunity (Tarrow 1988). It was Habermas whose often poorly understood theory of the public sphere noted the propensity for crises to loosen the world as taken-for-granted. It is during such crises that consensus is shaken, and the certainty of accepted presuppositions is suspended (Habermas 1976a: 120). It is in times of crisis that spaces are opened up—or physically occupied to the same effect—where attention turns to neglected questions, new ideas are able to take root, debate and discussion are able to flourish without the usual hegemonic constraints on public debate (Habermas 1976, 1996). *Secret City* was intended as a contribution to this expanding conceptual space, where the grip of the state and capital on the public sphere was being robustly challenged. The film wants to bring out into the open the secrecy behind the public face of the City of London, and its consequences.

Given our sense of urgency, we considered the option of seeking academic funding only briefly, since that would entail a delay of many months. Lee had already lined up several key interviews, so we just started. We soon had a short pilot to show, and broached the idea of a television sale with a sympathetic independent television documentary producer. Together we quickly reached the conclusion that UK television was an impossible prospect. The BBC, for example, would want it narrated by one of their own people, the commercial sector would want revelations. But there were not any revelations beyond the very scandal of the City's secrecy—you cannot get information about the Corporation's private accounts, for example, from a Freedom of Information request, because it is not a public body like any other local authority.

There was also a third aspect to our decision not to pursue television. The central subject of the film is the Corporation of London, and a question frequently asked at screenings is why we did not include representatives of the Corporation in the film. The question alludes to an expectation embedded in conventional forms of documentary discourse, especially as practiced in public service television with its principles of balance, fairness and impartiality — a holy trinity fitting the ethical profile of a liberal patrician ideology. It was not our purpose to produce that kind of account, which all too easily allows an entity like the Corporation to put up a smokescreen. The Corporation of London is a significant node in the global network of power. It has distorting effects, materially on London's built environment, financially on the economy, politically through its influence on government, and ideologically through the plethora of media, including the financial pages of the newspapers, whose accounts of 'economics' are really just accounts of the interests of capital. The interests of the Corporation animate British economic policy, and its voice is heard indirectly through the media all the time. They are so adept at the veiled expression of their ideological self-interest that we were sure we knew what they would say. Indeed, they had already said it in one or two corporate videos we found on the web, which we included in the film to represent their point of view—and throw it into relief. This was not only quicker and easier (as well as cheaper), but these clips took their place alongside a range of archive footage which we used to draw out the history of the representations of the City over the past century. Such representations often jar with the critiques we hear from film's contributors, and the crack that opens between them allows a more adequate comprehension of the relations between the Corporation and those it impacts upon.

Postproduction

For the same reason we decided not to wait around for funding to make the film, we also decided not to wait to get it screened at festivals, especially when one of its contributors, John

McDonnell MP, invited us to present a preview at the House of Commons, which took place in October 2012. The fact of this unusual location for a documentary film premiere in itself drew the attention of a good number of political commentators, journalists and campaign organisers who attended and helped to set the film on its way. McDonnell summed up the post-screening discussion at the premiere in the comment that the film came as a "revelation to many of our audience tonight." Several people spoke of it as very educational, one person with an eye to the lingo called it "an excellent piece of knowledge transfer", another called it "a brilliant film, with potentially far-reaching impact in catalysing a new movement for City reform. Activists will see this film and be inspired" (*Secret City* Audience Feedback 2012).

This last piece of praise inadvertently raises a crucial issue, because universities are nowadays required to report on the impact of their research in the process of bidding for research funding. What kind of far-reaching impact did this person mean? There is a fundamental problem in reporting the 'impact' of works of creative practice, like documentary films. Although very occasionally a documentary film might have real-life repercussions, it has always been rare for a film to produce a direct and concrete impact on, say, policy making, even in the days when television documentaries commanded audiences of several millions. The impact of a film is primarily aesthetic and entirely diffuse, and by its very nature cannot be pinned down or measured. Attempts to do so are always reductive, probably even more so when the work is disseminated horizontally by digital communication, and reception is atomised. But the activist knows that small media like independent video and other forms of creative practice, can and do contribute to the formation of opinion at a less visible level, the level of communities, both local and now virtual, where it connects with alternative initiatives and campaigning. The type of impact to be achieved in this arena is like all aesthetic experience, of an experiential and existential kind that necessarily falls beneath the bureaucrats' radar.

The impact of an aesthetic work begins in front of it, by enhancing and intensifying the beholder's awareness. It begins in the moment of reception, and a video or performance, say, is created for the purpose of arousing the beholder's immediate response as such, because without it there cannot be any longer-lasting impact. This is the domain of the critic, although films from the margins receive little mainstream critical attention, and only short notices on the web. (For example, according to a review by a blogger on *The Independent*, *Secret City* "is shot over the eerie tune of children singing...Oranges and Lemons, and the backing music sets an unnerving tone that is in keeping with the message of the film – that the City of London has a secretive and closely guarded history" (Spary 2013)). For our part, we followed the old practice of independent film since the 1970s where the film-maker goes out on the road with the film: almost every screening has been attended by one or both of the filmmakers, and is followed by a discussion, so we have our own testimony to the immediate aesthetic impact of the film. But it is not the kind of impact the research bureaucracy is talking about.

Distribution

We have a strong informal impression of the audience the film appealed to. The timing of the production of the film—starting while Occupy London was in full flow—meant that our interviewees not only had a strong interest in the Corporation but many were actively involved in campaigns and thus amenable to participating: each viewed the film as part of their own opportunity structure (Tarrow 1988), that is, they saw their involvement as an extension of their own political objectives, and the Occupy movement and continuing economic crisis made participation in a small media project more attractive than it might have been otherwise. Audiences were largely comprised of their counterparts and sympathisers, including people with a professional interest, expressing a range of left-of-centre political sentiments. Screenings revealed three key and partly overlapping constituencies: cultural audiences, political audiences and, let's call it, the general public. The first comprises audiences for political documentary in academia and activist cinephile groups like a film co-op in Manchester or a film club in Dublin. The second, audiences for screenings by political groups such as Labour Party branches or activist groups like an Indymedia group in Oxford, This Is Not a Gateway (TINAG) in London, and Transition City in Lancaster. The third is the broader audience at independent cinemas like the Watershed in Bristol, or in London venues like the Frontline Club and DocHouse, which includes media professionals.

The social networks were crucial to getting the film seen: those to which the writer and director were already connected, those that existed around the issues highlighted in the film, and the network that gathered around the film and its participants, were all instrumental in publicising the film and getting screenings arranged. We have anecdotal evidence that word of mouth played its part. Many requests for screenings came though the film’s website and Facebook page, with the result that many screenings were organised locally by interested activists, linked to local campaign groups involved in anti-cuts, tax justice and similar activities. Screenings in London at venues like Passing Clouds and the TINAG festival were largely populated by those involved in or close to Occupy London and similar initiatives. The film was tapping into a stratum of active concern which since the autumn of 2010, beginning with the student protests against the brutal rise in university fees, had periodically been taking to the streets in large numbers in protest against the regime of austerity imposed by the Coalition government, which was increasingly perceived as part of an ideologically motivated attack on the welfare state.

While several screenings took place in independent art cinemas, like Bristol’s Watershed, Liverpool’s Fact and London’s Roxy, not all such venues were receptive. The political economy of independent art cinemas (especially in times of recession and cultural devastation) makes them subject to many of the same compulsions as any other kind of locale, with the difference that the cinema chains are programmed centrally. The independent exhibitor uses local knowledge to weigh up films in terms of their ability to generate revenue. Would people come and see a controversial radical documentary they hadn't heard of? Some venues expressed their worry about this and were thus susceptible to persuasion. Others simply did not get back to us.

Impact

Responses to the film invariably begin with the shock of not knowing the things that the film is telling them about how the City is run and rules itself. A typical articulation of this rejoinder is "I'm a well-informed person, and I'm really angry that I didn't know any of this", or less politely, "[expletive deleted], I didn't know that!" As a blog on the screening at the Frontline Club reported, the evening's chair, Joris Luyendijk, started the discussion with the remark, "I think I had a bit of a Jimmy Saville moment, when you see something quite shocking and you realise it's been hiding in plain sight for all this time"(Ashley-Cound 2013). After that, the most common question that audiences begin to ask, not so much of the filmmakers as of each other, is "so what can we do?" This is partly the result of the film's narrative form, which provides a sketch-map of manifold political and economic problems but refrains from proposing a 'solution.' This is a little different from the dominant style of campaign documentaries nowadays available through 'niche market' web distributors like Dogwoof. As political documentaries they provide useful insights into aspects of social problems, while offering the consolation of 'happy chapters' about individual lobbying or initiatives to change particular buying habits which are claimed to make significant changes. But they generally refrain from connecting these campaigns to broader struggles or to issues of class and political economy. Films like these can be both entertaining and worthy, but remain ideologically at sea. *Secret City* is quite explicit in providing a socialist perspective, drawing its analysis from sources such as Marxist analysis and the theology of liberation, but without seeking to suggest what might be done, because we did not think we should anticipate the debate that the film wanted to raise. Indeed, just because we made the film it does not mean we have the solution! The result is that this is the very question on everyone's lips after watching it, and whatever the film's limitations and gaps, it works very well to invite debate.

Secret City situates and positions finance capitalism and the Corporation's role in that system in historical context. This context is not one of discrete historical events but of processes running both diachronically and synchronically. It is embodied on the screen by people whose experience of this context cannot be separated from those processes, and the film is thus partly narrated by people inside the system or closely interacting with it. However, unlike the expectable 'human interest' first person testimonies of the campaign genre, these are not stories of personal misfortune, but the experiences of people trying to confront an alienating institution which eludes their grasp. Audiences responded to this with complex emotions, like anger and the demand for action at the same time as the realisation that there is no quick fix, no simple 'happy chapter'. The Frontline blog quoted a contribution from an audience member who works in the City, which we like because it is close to our own opinion:

> Most people in the City are not corrupt but there are incentives within the system which cause all the problems that we have. . . . When you're in the City you understand the parameters within which you're working and you never question that and therefore it's only when you step outside and actually look . . . that you begin to question the whole rationale. And it's only when you question the whole rationale that you seen [sic] this is not about bad people or corruption, it's about a system which is clearly not fit for what we need, it dwarfs everything else. . . . It is a system that is designed in such a way that it has certain effects and that's what we need to attack. It's not the people, it's the systemic flaws. (Ashley-Cound 2013)

This is not the kind of feedback the academic bureaucrats are looking for, however. To them, it is merely anecdotal.

Lessons

In formal language, *Secret City* exemplifies the theorised practice of unbudgeted independent video documentary and comprises a critique of the relations of power in contemporary society through an investigation of one of the key institutions in the state. It is situated in the space between social protest in times of economic crisis and the unremitting attack of an ideologically motivated regime of austerity. The reach of the film is achieved through a small scale but sustained programme of public engagement through the so-called social networks, which generates the web traffic whose efficacy is demonstrated by numerous screenings, locally organised, where the film achieves its immediate impact, the physical encounter where audiences engage in debates about citizenship, economics, politics and culture. But this immediate impact is a very different animal from the category of 'impact' in Research Council parlance and the present account amounts to a critique of the bureaucratic criteria.

First there is the question of the mode of production. The capacity to adequately represent the complex character of an institution like the City is limited by both the material conditions and the subjectivity of the film-maker; a combination in which subjectivity, in the form of imagination, is able to trump material limitations, and digital videography can come into its own. In these circumstances, subjectivity is a strength, because it allows escape from conventional wisdom. The conditions of production of many liberal-activist films tell of being enmeshed in a system of commercial 'independent' production that is linked in a variety of ways to the 'industry', but the mode of audiovisual production has radically altered with digital video and the internet, and since the turn of the millennium has expanded explosively. Independent production companies act as providers of the means of sustenance to their mostly precarious workforce. The company itself, in order to pay wages and bills, and to attract funding to make and distribute activist documentaries, interfaces with festival circuits, funding bodies and niche markets through the web and direct sales. Such material relations can constrain to a significant degree the treatment of subject matter in the films that get made. It is part of this habitus (in Bourdieu's terminology) that these relations are incorporated into their conceptualisation of both the film and its 'impact'—they aim to raise awareness about a given issue without disheartening the audience and leaving them feeling debilitated or hopeless. The 'happy chapter' serves to combat this effect, to offer the hope that without too much disruption to their lives audiences can change their consumption habits to make the problem go away. In contrast, *Secret City* attempts no such closure, it raises questions and proposes discussion—and refrains from making the kind of 'policy proposals' which the bureaucratic ‘impact’ agenda operates with.

The term 'independent' which we have been using to describe the film's mode of production has always been a slippery one. One of us is able to recall the discussions about this very problem in the late 1970s, in the process of setting up the Independent Filmmakers Association (IFA, later adding video to become the IFVA). People asked, independent of what? Today it has become possible to realise the greatest degree of independence with minimal expenditure as long as you possess your own means and instruments of production, which can nowadays be purchased for less than the price of a small car. Although *Secret City* was made with zero budget — which really means that incidental expenses were paid out of our pockets — the film-makers were receiving their salaries as academics. This means that we were structured by a dissimilar environment to that of a commercial independent producer, in short, a distinct habitus, where finances operate differently and different ways of thinking prevail. This has a significant impact on the discursive structuring of the film because it means we operate under conditions of academic freedom, without having to answer to any external pressure or criteria.

However, just as commercial-independent producers are enmeshed in market relations, so academics are institutionalised in universities. They are managed within institutions and are disciplined through state-licensed bureaucratic structures that managers are paid to enforce. This discursive structure is one in which, as Howard Newby put it when he was head of the Higher Education Funding Council for England and Wales, "It was once the role of Governments to provide for the purposes of universities; it is now the role of universities to provide for the purposes of Governments" (Newby 2004). Those purposes are in a general way to serve the interests of capital, but this can be done is several ways, and much of what is encouraged or allowed depends on what sector of capital is ascendant in the corridors of power. The current expectation for academic activity in film and media in the UK is to engage and ‘enhance’ the largely commercial 'culture industry', in partnership with local or even big industry. These relations become the basis of the conceptualisation of 'impact' in the state inspection of research performance, the Research Excellence Framework (REF), that binds academics to the system. If a piece of practice-as-research like *Secret City* does not easily fit the required profile, this is partly because the whole exercise has been poorly conceived. In particular, the humanities are badly served by an underlying model which remains that of the sciences, and the results are distorted by the contortions of academic managerialism.

Liberal ideology requires that Government must still be seen to provide for the social benefit of academic activity independent of its contribution to the economy, even if the present one is loath to admit it. Academic research and production is supposed to “benefit individuals, organisations and nations by fostering global economic performance, and specifically the economic competitiveness of the United Kingdom” (Research Councils UK 2014). It is hoped that individuals, organisations and the nation might also benefit from academics “increasing the effectiveness of public services and policy” or “enhancing quality of life, health and creative output” (ibid.). If this system is biased against arts and humanities, consider who is in charge: the government minister responsible for higher education is the Business Secretary. How come? It happened on New Labour’s watch, when the first Business Secretary to take charge of universities was Peter Mandelson, who, McDonnell in the film reminds us, declared himself relaxed about the filthy rich. Mandelson represents a managerialist ideology in the interests of commercial and business criteria—criteria essentially alien to the concept and practice of academic freedom. This is the same ideology that is intent on ‘reforming’ the whole university system in the direction of market values. Anything that cannot be value-costed does not count. Humanist values of inquiry are old hat unless they can be commoditised, or at least conveniently packaged for purposes of cost analysis; hence the new emphasis on ‘robust’ evidence, that is, hard data: figures and numbers. This approach ineluctably produces gobbledygook, like the warning of a *Guardian* blogger that ‘There’s still a lot we don’t know about the relative quality profile of the output weightings’ (Miah 2012). But the policy that demands this data is itself not remotely interested in evidence as the basis for its prescriptions: its agenda is entirely ideological.

Digital critique

As a recent academic blog on the subject puts it, “The Funding Council’s overly restrictive ‘physical science’ view of how research influences policy has created an artificial minefield of pointless obstacles” (Tinkler and Dunleavy 2012). To begin with, a great deal of arts and humanities research — scholarly or creative — produces effects that are not easily measurable: the book that is ignored on first publication but turns out ten years later to have been pioneering; the artful video that circulates on the web without leaving an academic footprint (so it cannot be ‘objectively’ evaluated) — but that video is situated at the forefront of testing out new possibilities for reaching what the lingo calls the ‘beneficiaries.’ However, anyone producing work in a field like the digital arts, which engages with non-traditional forms of dissemination and reception, will have to deal with the particular problems inherent in the metrics which measure web usage, which are at best both fuzzy and evanescent — which means they are not ‘robust.’ According to an early career researcher quoted in a recent newspaper report (Tickle 2012) “It’s yet to be seen how grant-awarding bodies will measure the value of social networking”, while post-doctoral researcher Shahidha Bari makes the simple observation that “the value of research is not always something you can predict from the outset – that’s the point of research” (quoted in Tickle 2012). “Impact”, Bari continues, “reads like a policy designed to help universities appease governmental demands for justification of expenditure," but "if you're in the business of producing ideas and culture as you do in arts and humanities research, then you're not producing tangible, measurable effects." (ibid.). There may nonetheless be "non-tangible effects that are no less important" These effects involve factors like aesthetic, moral and political judgement, which are not susceptible to meaningful quantification.

Then there is the question of engagement in the digital sphere, which applies to all scholars in the humanities and is much encouraged—only for the evaluators to turn round and say that blogs, for example, do not count (perhaps because they are not peer reviewed). Part of the problem is in the mythologies of the digital domain, like the unexamined notion of the viral as a measure of impact when numbers alone tell you nothing and the viral is in fact entirely relative. You can use social media and blogging to extend the reach of your work, but this does not produce a measurable indicator of impact. As another blogger puts it, "social media metrics are often poorly calculated and even more poorly understood" (Another Rambler 2012), which does not mean your blogging is not worth the effort (as we ourselves have discovered).

The digital arts face a particular problem, because most of the works produced within the academy inevitably remain marginal, simply because the web is hugely dominated by commercial operators and popular trivia. Nevertheless, it is also very good at letting a thousand flowers bloom in its interstices. Appraising the impact of one these flowers, however, is far from straightforward. Such figures as are provided, for example, by the web platforms that carry the videos are only rough-and-ready guides to dissemination. They may tell you about the distribution of viewers across different countries, but not what kind of viewer they are, even as the video in question is clearly reaching out into the wider world. The reception of streaming video, despite the web's much touted interactivity, remains anonymous. This is connected with sociological and conceptual questions about identity which again place the administrative categories in question. The idea that impact outside the academy can be neatly separated out and measured ignores what has been taught within the academy for many years, that everyone's identity is multiple and shared with others in different groupings. A student shares a video through a social network with family or friends outside it: is she doing so as a student, or as a sister, or as a drinking companion? A university lecturer sends a link to members of his cricket club, some of whom are also academics but in other disciplines: is he doing so as an academic colleague, or a sporting pal, or as a concerned citizen?

The problem is not that targeted funding would improve results but a structural one, in which both intellectual production and social critique are disadvantaged and marginalised. The public sphere is not a homogenous arena but a network of dispersed, unequal and overlapping spaces of communication dominated by the centralised mass media which are now also embedded in the virtual domain of the web. The web is dominated in turn by gigantic players like Google, Facebook, Twitter, Amazon and some others, which serve to extend the reach of pre-existing media while also forcing corporate consolidation in the culture industry, like the 2013 merger of Penguin and Random House, which together control a quarter of world book publishing (see Rankin 2013). But the web, notwithstanding its open and borderless flows, is highly fragmented, and most of the time, rather than overcoming cultural compartmentalisation, it amplifies it. Thus, on the one hand, it reproduces the entrenched anti-intellectual populism of the centralised media, while on the other, it has opened up new spaces for ideas to circulate more or less freely through open and borderless flows, which is not always a good thing. All of which, however, would mean that 'impact' is a specious and entirely ideological concept. In the words of a comment on a leader in the *Times Higher Education Supplement*: a weird dogma to apply to the workings of the intellect, and "an excrescence of an ideology that has temporarily established its domination not only in Britain but in the Western world generally" (*THES 2012*).

The dissemination of *Secret City* is pretty small scale, precisely because it has happened outside the marketplace, an example of a new kind of artisanal cultural production in the age of global cultural monopolies. It has had a modest success that is corroborated by the figures on condition that you know how to interpret them. Of course, you can hardly use a phrase like 'modest success' in a case study where you have to talk it up. Although it is certainly an 'independent production', its fate rests on a network of relations with other organisations, institutions and interests. It is not autonomous but rather belongs in a set of relations between people, social movements, political groups, institutions and the state, no less complex than the subject matter of the film itself. As a public institution the university is not completely autonomous either, and the marketisation and commercialisation of higher education in recent years has pernicious effects on academic freedom (Barnett 2003), especially in relation to media (Salter 2012), arts and humanities. But there are good reasons why the bureaucratic management of academic research cannot be completely controlled by bureaucratic management, and while universities will be cautious about publicising work of a 'political' nature, this is still possible in the interstices of our educational institutions, even though the national research agenda is stacked against it.

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