

Title of Case Study: Raising awareness and understanding of moving image distribution

1. Summary of Impact:

- (a) preserving and presenting cultural heritage;
- (b) helping a central London arts centre programme a public panel discussion on women's film and video distribution in the UK;
- (c) helping an artists' moving image distributor/agency to raise awareness and understanding among practising artists and a wider public of their role in delivering non-mainstream work to audiences;
- (d) contributing to arts organisations' ability to exploit their digital/online resources;
- (e) informing teaching and learning at other HEIs.

2. Underpinning research

The underpinning research (1) examined the distribution and promotion of artists', women's and independent moving image work in the UK from 1966 to 2000; (2) developed the online Film & Video Distribution Database (<http://fv-distribution-database.ac.uk>) to make freely available a selection of primary research material from the moving image distributors studied and their funders; and (3) explored ways of maximising the sustainability and visibility of such e-resources. Julia Knight was the lead researcher on all aspects of the research (Reader from 2005–11, Professor 2011–date).

The primary research material had already been located and scanned during 2003-05 while Knight was at University of Bedfordshire. The material included correspondence, funding applications, minutes of management committee meetings, promotional material, distribution activity reports, screening programmes, exhibition initiatives, policy documents, hirer feedback forms, consultancies, business plans, newsletters, funding assessment reports etc. Analysis of this material was undertaken in conjunction with developing the Film & Video Distribution Database (FVDD) during 2005–10 after Knight commenced working at Sunderland. Exploration of how best to ensure the sustainability of the FVDD and similar moving-image related online resources took place via the AHRC funded Future Histories of the Moving Image research network during 2007–09.

The research produced a book, several journal articles and book chapters, an online database (FVDD), an information website (<http://alt-fv-distribution.net>) and over 20 conference papers.

The key research insights/findings underpinning the impact are:

1. The role moving image distributors play is far more complex than just physically delivering work to a screening venue (a popular misconception), requiring ongoing engagement in promotional activity and the development of strong links with exhibition outlets.
2. A range of factors impact on what work gets taken into distribution, seen by audiences and hence the scope of moving image culture; and non-mainstream distributors are crucial to ensuring a more diverse moving image culture.
3. The challenges faced by small non-mainstream distributors – such as smaller audiences, the need for extensive promotional activity, under-resourcing, changing markets and keeping apace with new media technologies – mean they can lack commercial viability.
4. Their existence is therefore often dependent on a combination of grant aid and low-cost or volunteer labour, making them very fragile organisations; the dependence on grant aid also tends to play a key role in determining the nature and scope of the distributors' activities.
5. While the advent of digital distribution has to a certain extent made it easier, quicker and cheaper to make moving image work/resources available, issues of selection are still key and extensive promotional activity is still required to build audiences/users.

When the research was undertaken, the role of distribution in moving image culture was

critically neglected. In Film Studies, research had concentrated on analysis of film texts (together with conditions/modes of production) and spectatorship (together with sites of exhibition/consumption), while distribution remained the invisible link between the two. Hence this research represents a significant contribution to developing awareness and understanding of the factors that shape film culture. Furthermore, some of the distributors studied no longer exist, so the research also played a key role in documenting the histories of those organisations before their contribution to UK moving image culture is forgotten or lost.

### 3. References to the research (up to 6)

1. Julia Knight and Peter Thomas, *Reaching Audiences: Distribution and Promotion of Alternative Moving Image* (Intellect, 2011) (listed in REF2)

This book was the main output from two AHRC funded projects (PI Julia Knight): Independent Film and Video Distribution in the UK during the 1980s and 1990s (£130,000, 2002–04); and The Contemporary Promotion of Artists' Film and Video in the UK (£48,000, 2004–05). The manuscript was peer reviewed. A review of the book in *Journal of British Cinema and Television* (10.3, July 2013: 677–79) identifies it as an 'important assessment of distribution outside the mainstream' and asserts 'My first thought on realizing the scope of the text was: "This needs to be on next year's reading list", but my second was: "Why hasn't this kind of study been done before in this depth?"'

2. Film and Video Distribution Database (FVDD) (<http://fv-distribution-database.ac.uk>) (listed in REF2)

The online database was the main output from an AHRC funded Resource Enhancement project (Grant title: Databasing key documents and narrative chronologies of artists' film and video distributors in the UK; PI Julia Knight, 2005–08, £148,000); the final report from the AHRC graded the project 'good', and one reviewer stated: 'That material that was hard to access is now in the public domain is an excellent outcome'. The database was made freely accessible from December 2011 and formally launched in May 2012 at the Lighting the Cave symposium/Mischa Kuball exhibition in London (<http://newsevents.arts.ac.uk/event/lighting-the-cave-symposium/>).

3. Future Histories of the Moving Image Research Network website (<http://www.futurehistories.net>)

This was an AHRC funded Research Network (Grant title: Artists' Film and Video Database/Digitised Collection Projects – Addressing sustainability and historiography; PI Julia Knight, 2007–09, £24,780); the final report from the AHRC graded the project 'good'. The website includes extensive documentation of all the network's activities and findings, including the End of Award Report. A discussion of this project is included in Malcolm Dickson's 'Vide Verso: Video's Critical Corpus', in Sean Cubitt and Stephen Partridge (eds) *REWIND: British Artists' Video in the 1970s and 1980s* (John Libbey, 2012), for its engagement with the preservation of artists' moving image history in the UK (see pp. 144–46).

4. Julia Knight, 'Archiving, Distribution, and Experimental Moving Image Histories', *The Moving Image*, vol. 12, no. 1, Spring 2012: 65–86 (listed in REF2)

*The Moving Image* is the peer-reviewed journal of the Association of Moving Image Archivists, the world's largest professional association devoted to film, television, video and digital image preservation. The article was selected for a special issue on experimental moving image and the archive. One referee said the article was a 'valuable examination of specific funded research projects related to experimental film distribution and access, as well as the complications of creating digital surrogates for non-moving image primary research material that document the history of experimental media creation and distribution'. Another noted that articles like this 'with an emphasis on the documentation of circulation as part of cinema history are rare' and considered the article 'an excellent contribution' to the special issue.

### 4. Details of the impact

During 2002–05 Knight conducted two AHRC funded research projects examining the historical practices of several artists', women's and independent moving image distributors – London Filmmakers' Co-op, London Video Access, The Other Cinema, Lux, Film & Video Umbrella, Circles, Cinema of Women, and Cinenova – and their funders – primarily the Arts Council, British Film Institute, and Film London. The research involved extensive archive research via the records of these organisations, and this paved the way for the Film & Video Distribution Database (FVDD) project. Developing the FVDD required seeking permission from the organisations studied (or their successors) – as the rights holders of the material – to publish a selection of their documentation online. All the current rights holders saw the wider public awareness raising value in making the documents publicly accessible and signed permissions contracts for their online publication (obtained July 2006–October 2011).

Developing an online database raised questions/challenges that are faced by all online moving image collections and related e-resources, especially with regard to their long-term sustainability. To address this issue, Knight set up the AHRC funded Future Histories of the Moving Image Research Network which brought together participants from inside and outside academia to share information and learn from each others' practices. The network ran a workshop to enable online resource managers to acquire skills that would help them maintain and develop the use of their e-resources without having to depend on the availability of funding. Entitled 'Doing It Outside', the workshop was held in October 2008 and non-academic attendees included representatives from Picture This (Bristol), FACT (Liverpool), and Bang! Short Film Festival (Nottingham). These attendees reported that the workshop had been an energizing and valuable experience in terms of thinking about how to develop their online resources (Source 1).

Some of the distributors studied had not seen it as a priority to preserve their own histories, and the FVDD has provided a way of documenting their historical role in promoting British artists'/independent moving image work. In June 2013 Cinenova linked to the FVDD from its website to enable users to 'find out more about the history of women's film and video distribution' (Source 2) and one of its management committee members became an FVDD volunteer helping compile and upload new content (Source 3). Artist websites have also started linking to it (Source 4). FVDD webstats show that since January 2013 the number of unique visitors to the database have been steadily increasing from just under 200 to well over 300 per month. Most of the visitors are from the UK, but also come from Italy, Germany, Poland, Canada, Australia, France, India, Croatia, Netherlands, Sweden, China and Russia.

Knight's research into women's film and video distribution impacted on the programming of the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) in London. In February 2012, the ICA held a series of events focusing on the work of filmmaker Lis Rhodes, a founding member of the women's distributor Circles. The curator was referred to Knight's research which 'spurred a lot of ideas of how the program could be developed' (Source 5). Knight was invited to participate in a public panel discussion about the history of women's moving image distribution and provided access to documents from Circles. Extracts from those documents were read out at the beginning of the panel discussion to provide a historical context. The curator used the title of a co-authored article Knight had published (at <http://alt-fv-distribution.net/papers.html#articles>) to name the ICA event 'A Fragile Existence – A History of Women's Film and Video Distribution' (Source 6). The event sold out (100–120 seats) and the curator reported receiving a lot of positive verbal feedback.

The role of distributors tends to be invisible and hence little understood. Lux, the UK's largest distributor of artists' moving image, has used Knight's research to help raise awareness among their client base about the promotional activities required to build audiences for artists' moving image work and encourage artists to contribute to those activities. Firstly, Knight was invited to participate in a public panel discussion, held at Lux and entitled 'Professional Practice: Distribution Seminar' (June 2012), addressing issues of distribution for an audience

of practising moving image artists (Source 7). The organiser wanted to use Knight's research to highlight to contemporary practitioners the importance of understanding how moving image work gets seen and demonstrate parallels between historical and contemporary practices. One attendee emailed the organiser after the event, saying: 'I wanted to let you know how useful the session was on distribution ... I found the openness, and the quality of information on offer really valuable. Having attended many different events at various organisations in the past, I have found the advice LUX has to offer to be highly supportive and relevant' (Source 8). Secondly, Knight and curators/writers Dan Kidner and Elinor Cleghorn were also invited to contribute postings to the Lux Blog about the FVDD database and the histories it makes available (July 2013) (Source 9).

Finally, Knight's research has been used to inform teaching and learning at other institutions. University of the Arts London (UAL), for instance, run an MRes Art: Moving Image course in conjunction with Lux and uses both the *Reaching Audiences* book and the FVDD on the course. The course leader invited Knight to talk her students in June 2013 about doing archive research and the uses/limitation of digital resources in the study of moving image, based on the experience of her own research projects (Source 10). Students from UAL also became FVDD volunteers compiling and uploading new content to the database (June 2013). The FVDD was used on a Film History course at New York University in a session considering how digitisation might affect how we see or 'do' history (May 2012). Feedback from the students noted the value of how the FVDD enabled access to PDFs of the actual documents rather than having them only cited as evidence in a secondary historical analysis, while also prompting discussion about the selective nature of digital resources.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact [max 10, inc max of 5 individuals]

Source 1: Bang! Short Film Festival, website developer (Identifier 1)

Source 2: <http://www.cinenova.org>

Source 3: Cinenova, Management Committee Member (Identifier 2)

Source 4: <http://videocircuits.blogspot.co.uk>

Source 5: Institute of Contemporary Arts (London), Assistant Curator (Identifier 3)

Source 6:  
[http://www.ica.org.uk/31702/Talks/A-Fragile-Existence-A-History-of-Womens-Film-and-Video-Distribution-in-Fragments.html?utm\\_source=ICA+List&utm\\_campaign=d32ac998cd-Artists\\_Film\\_Club\\_Lisa\\_Oppenheim1\\_6\\_2012&utm\\_medium=email](http://www.ica.org.uk/31702/Talks/A-Fragile-Existence-A-History-of-Womens-Film-and-Video-Distribution-in-Fragments.html?utm_source=ICA+List&utm_campaign=d32ac998cd-Artists_Film_Club_Lisa_Oppenheim1_6_2012&utm_medium=email)

Source 7: <http://lux.org.uk/education/professional-practice-distribution-seminar>

Source 8: Lux, Director (Identifier 4)

Source 9: <http://lux.org.uk/blog/201307>

Source 10:  
MRes Art: Moving Image course leader, University of the Arts London (Identifier 5)