

A Regional Company? RED Production and the Cultural Politics of Place¹

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My work for Channel 4 is driven not by a dull plea for regional television, but for the more exhilarating thought that some of Britain's best companies work from a regional base in creative cities far from London. We work in an industry that seems myopically obsessed with one creative city – London. It would be a great step forward if regulators and broadcasters could escape from this deeply parochial mindset. (Cosgrove in Kidd and Taylor 2002: 27).

Our fundamental DNA is Mancunian. We're a Manchester company in every sense. We were established here. We film here primarily. We're based here, our offices are here. Most of our work is done here. We're not interlopers who move in and out, or who open a brass-door company ... and I think that impacts on our work and our taste and the things we make as well. (RED CEO Nicola Shindler, interview, May 2018).

Introduction

The first epigraph above is the voice of Stuart Cosgrove in 2002 in his then role as Channel 4's Head of Programmes, Nations and Regions advocating the importance of regional television production. Cosgrove identified RED Production in Manchester as one of a select number of small, dynamic companies that 'by their nature, are closer to ideas, popular influences and cultural change', which need to be nurtured and supported if the notorious metropolitan bias of UK broadcasting is to be challenged and a broad and diverse production base maintained. Fifteen years later, several of the other companies Cosgrove mentioned have folded but RED has continued to thrive to become the largest and most important television drama production company based outside London, and whose core identity, as its CEO Nicola Shindler makes clear, is Mancunian. This article will explore the significance of RED's location in the north-west of England, analysing the complexities of its positioning as a 'regional' company contextualised within the broader issues surrounding regional television production created by the politics and regulation of UK broadcasting. In analysing regional production, this study employs the broadcast regulator Ofcom's distinction between regional production – in which a regionally-based company makes programmes for national (and possibly international consumption) – as opposed to regional programming that refers to productions made for local consumption (Ofcom 2010). However, as will be demonstrated, regional production companies have to deal not only with London's continued dominance, but also, in ways that were not visible to Cosgrove in 2002, the profound effect of what is becoming an increasingly globalised industry.

This analysis contributes to what has become a pressing debate for academics, industry practitioners and media policy makers about the nature of the relationship between London and the regions and small nations (Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales) in the UK's film and television industries, a debate that stretches back to the beginnings of broadcasting in this country though with much longer historical roots. A 2017 survey by Oliver and Ohlbaum for the producers trade association PACT revealed the continued dominance of London-based productions, which constituted 66 per cent of UK primary commissions leaving about a third

spent in the rest of the UK (PACT 2017: 27). The major public service broadcasters (PSBs) are currently under pressure from both the government's policy to support regional economic growth and Ofcom that has set a quota for the percentage of network hours and production spend for each company: 50 per cent for the BBC, and 35 per cent for ITV and Channel 4. In response, the BBC's new charter (1 January 2017) made a renewed commitment 'to reflect, represent and serve the diverse communities of all the United Kingdom's nations and regions, and, in doing so, support the creative economy across the United Kingdom' (Public Purpose 4). All three PSBs have committed to an 'Out-of-London' policy agenda designed to rebalance power and production spend between an increasingly wealthy global metropolis and outlying centres. At the time of writing various cities have been ardently wooing Channel 4 as the preferred location for its national headquarters or one of its 'cultural hubs'.²

A great deal is at stake in this debate because, as Mike Kidd and Bill Taylor argue in *Television in the Nations and Regions*, television is considered to play a 'crucial role in expressing and exploring our changing sense of community... [It] is often described as part of the glue that binds us together socially and geographically' (2002: 4). Television can only play this role effectively, they argue, if the UK has a broad and diverse industry that recognises the value of regional production in fostering and supporting new creative personnel and ideas, encouraging investment and economic growth, and avoiding an inexorable talent drain to London. Ten years earlier, a very similar argument was proposed by the contributors to *The Regions, the Nations and the BBC* (Harvey and Robins 1993), which sought to influence BBC policy in the run up to its charter renewal in 1996. More recently, Ofcom reiterated the importance for the PSBs to reflect 'regional stories, characters, places and issues' to ensure that television 'reflects and responds to all the identities and communities of the UK's increasingly diverse society, and ... help to maintain viable communities in the nations and regions' (2005: 56). To this end, it has undertaken a major assessment of current regulations and provision in its *Review of Regional TV Production and Programming Guidance* (March 2018).

This article's concern with regional diversity and representation recognises the importance of space and place and forms part of the 'spatial turn' across the humanities (Franklin 2015: 1). It draws on the work of business analysts who have emphasised the importance of place for industrial production. In his seminal work, Michael Porter argued for the significance of clusters, which he defined as 'geographic concentrations of interconnected companies, specialized suppliers, service providers, firms in related industries, and associated institutions (e.g. universities, standards agencies, trade associations) in a particular field that compete but also cooperate' (2000: 15). Clusters, he argued, were a ubiquitous and yet paradoxical late twentieth century phenomenon because 'the enduring competitive advantages in a global economy lie increasingly in local things – knowledge, relationships, motivation – that distant rivals cannot match' (1998: 78). In *The Cultural Economy of Cities*, Allen J. Scott argues that place has a particular significance for creative production because of the ways in which place and culture are intertwined (2000: 3). He contends that places are social as well as economic entities that 'leave deep traces on the form and cognitive meanings of products (and above all cultural products) as they emerge from localized systems of industrial activity' (2005: xii). Creative producers, Scott maintains 'tend to accumulate place-specific cultural associations' and these 'symbolic and sentimental assets' derive from the 'distinctive historical associations and landmarks' that make each particular place unique (ibid.: 7).

Scott's insistence on the importance of the symbolic, cultural and historical dimensions of place, acts as valuable counterweight to much work on clustering that 'does not engage with the interactive and iterative relationship between cultural production' and place (Lee et. al

2014: 224) and which is unable to comprehend the broader temporal and cultural dynamics (Pratt 2004). The influential work of the think-tank Nesta, including *The Geography of Creativity in the UK* (2016), for instance, is predicated on a narrow econometric analytical framework. Thus this article foregrounds the importance of cultural traditions as well as economic factors in understanding the influence of place on creative production and that only by examining the historical evolution of particular regional concentrations (clusters) can we hope to understand the causes of why they grow and change. My argument is that the best way to apprehend what Scott identifies as the importance of the emotional, affective affiliations that creative workers have for the location in which they are situated, which leave their mark on production practices as well as representations of place contained in cultural products themselves, is to undertake the detailed empirical examination of the production cultures of individual companies. In doing so, the article will emphasise different levels of regional influence, examining the differing power dynamics in play between various agents.

The analysis of RED Production is informed by two site visits that included extended interviews with its CEO Nicola Shindler, Head of Production (Michaela Fereday) and Creative Director (Caroline Hollick), as well as with Cat Lewis who runs another independent production company, Nine Lives Media, located close to RED, and Mark Senior, CEO of the facilities company Dock 10, who provided an invaluable perspective on the development of MediaCity. All unattributed quotations are from these sources.³ It also draws on other interviews that Shindler has given, a comprehensive search of the trade press and on various secondary sources from a range of disciplines, notably the work of Jennifer Johns (2004, 2010) who has conducted the most detailed analysis of Manchester's film and television industries though from a different perspective to the one adopted for this article, which emphasises the importance of individual production companies. The focus on RED's geographical location and its local, regional, national and international networks rather than its internal structure and organisation and its programming make this a companion piece to an earlier analysis (Spicer and Presence 2016), as well as complementing the other articles in this special issue.

A Northern Company: The North of England as a Discursive Region

It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss in detail the complexities of the debates about how regions are defined but a few prefatory words are in order. Rather than being precisely geographically demarcated areas with fixed borders, regions should be understood as porous and discontinuous discursive constructions created by economic, symbolic and social geographies that are constantly being refashioned by those with power and influence (Allen, Massey and Cochrane 1998: 1-2, 117, 139; Royle 1998: 10; Rawnsley 2009: 20). Regions, no less than nations, are 'imagined communities' that 'are to be distinguished, not by their falseness/genuineness but by the style in which they are imagined' (Anderson 1983: 15). As cultural constructions, regions have 'place-images' that, over time, accrete to form a 'place-myth', which defines a region as much as its geographical features and the built environment (Shields 1991: 61).

At its broadest level, RED's location in Manchester is part of the 'place myth' of 'the north' a discursive construction that has become deeply embedded in popular consciousness as one 'half' of England's notorious north-south divide (Smith 1994; Wrightson 1995; Baker and Billinge 2004; Kirk 2009). Although this division has deep historical roots (Jewell 1994), its modern form is the product of the industrial revolution (Ehland 2007: 15) in which new urban centres grew up in the north of England whose size, wealth and prestige challenged London's

hegemony. Manchester was pre-eminent amongst this group, recognised as the world's first and foremost industrial city. German commentators coined the term 'das Manchestertum' to designate what they saw as a new type of city that was redefining the nature of work, urban organisation and institutions to facilitate the English ideology of free trade and economic individualism and create a new class fraction of mercantile entrepreneurs, 'Manchester Men', such as Richard Arkwright (Wyke 2016). Patrick Joyce has argued that in the nineteenth century these industrial processes forged a 'robust provincialism', in which the articulation of particular qualities, experiences and places promoted a class-conscious northern identity that was anti-metropolitan, forging a distinctive and demotic 'northern mythology' with radical and reformist connotations (1991: 318). As Dave Russell has shown this positive construction of the north as the location of a predominantly working-class, industrial culture, imbued with authenticity and moral worth has enjoyed a 'deep and continuous existence' through to the present (2004: 268-69). It has produced a set of character traits: northerners are thought to be independent-minded, plain speaking, hard-working and practical, with a 'down-to-earth' approach to life, all of which contrasts with the bourgeois southern 'other', aloof, reserved, privileged, pampered and complacent (ibid.: 277-78; Martin 2004).

As with all of England's northern industrial cities, Manchester suffered from a severe and protracted de-industrialisation in the twentieth century as the UK changed from a manufacturing to a service economy that favoured London and the south-east. This economic decline fed into a countervailing imaginary, the 'pathos of an oppressed region', in which the main tropes are poverty, exclusion, drabness, economic deprivation and marginality (Mazierska 2017: 3-7). These competing discourses mean that the northern imaginary fluctuates as Raphael Samuel argues, at times, as in the films of the New Wave writers and filmmakers in the 1950s and 1960s, it was confident and affirmative but by the 1980s and the onslaught of Thatcherite policies, this image had evaporated leaving the region to become 'a byword for backwardness and provincial narrowness' and an index of a deeply divided Britain (1998: 166; see also Woolridge 2003: 25). Although this image of decline and decay persists, it now competes with a more dynamic version of northernness as Manchester, like many other 'post-industrial' cities, is undergoing urban renewal and 'rebranding', spearheaded by the creative industries and the cultural economy (Zukin 1995; Vall 2011: 127-29; Miles 2013). Commentators have argued that the north region is itself changing quite fundamentally with a new divide emerging, not north-south but between the 'southern north' and the rest of the old northern region. The southern north – Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield and Hull linked by the M62 motorway – is becoming a distinct region because its cities are experiencing rapid economic growth and urban regeneration. It is predicted that this 'northern powerhouse' will draw the southern north away from the influence of the wider north towards London (Hughes and Atkinson 2018; see also Robson 2016: 383; Atkinson 2017: 163).

These shifting discursive constructions of 'the north', inform the sensibility of Nicola Shindler and several of her leading writers, and thus RED's production strategies and programmes. However, these broad discourses were filtered through the policies and practices of British broadcasting and the production culture of Granada Television, which form the immediate historical context in which RED was formed.

Broadcasting and the Regions I: The BBC and the Dictatorship of London⁴

An abiding problem for RED or any other regionally-based company is, as Stuart Cosgrove intimated, the dominance of British broadcasting and especially the BBC by a London elite that has been very reluctant to acknowledge the rich variety of regional talent. Although the

BBC established the headquarters of BBC North, originally a very large region covering the entire area between the Midlands and Scotland, in Manchester in April 1929, as Asa Briggs's history of the BBC makes clear, the corporation never accorded its regional outposts autonomy or the necessary finances to implement any major changes in the structures and patterns of British broadcasting. Hence the repeated attempts by Regional Directors to argue for more funding and independence and their persistent criticism of the corporation's London bias. In 1943, John Coatman, the North's Regional Director, advocated that 'powers of control' should be devolved to the regions because 'the best broadcasting is that which is in most direct touch with the life of the people' (1979: 82). In 1949, the Northern Region Advisory Council pressed for 'much wider freedom for the North', attacking the limited scope that regional talent was accorded because of the 'dictatorship in matters of opinion and taste from London' (ibid.: 305). Briggs describes the valiant efforts of regional staff to promote their region's culture, notably the 'enterprising and exuberant' E.A.F. Harding, Programme Director of the North Region from 1930 to 1939 with his rallying cry, 'Anything London can do we can do better' and his determination to recruit from the region itself if possible (ibid.: 330). Paddy Scannell and David Cardiff argue that the North Region 'had a most clearly developed character and style of broadcasting before the war' (1991: 334), creating a 'distinctive brand of regionalism' which foregrounded the everyday lives and aspirations of 'ordinary working people' both in the content of the programmes and their audience address, which was in sharp contrast to the London-based national programming during the 1930s (ibid.: 349, see also Scannell 1993).

However, these limited and temporary successes in the development of a regional presence on radio existed within the context of what Briggs characterises as the BBC's 'doctrine of centralization' that, like other twentieth century mass media, 'bolster[ed] London's supremacy' to the detriment of the 'proud "provincialism" of the Victorian age' (1965: 308). Under the guidance of its founding Director General John Reith, the BBC considered itself a national broadcaster dedicated to diffusing the culture and tastes of the metropolis (Vall 2011: 17-63; Genders forthcoming). The advent of television with its far greater capital costs, intensified this process as television was 'organised from the start on a national basis, and as its coverage spread, the regional activity that was permitted was grafted on to a national system. It could not develop "from below"' (Briggs 1995: 623). Thus the BBC bought Mancunian Films' studio, a converted Methodist Church on Dickinson Road, Rusholme as its very modest northern television base in 1954. It was not until 1975 that the corporation invested in a purpose-built studio, New Broadcasting House on Oxford Road near Manchester's City Centre. This was symptomatic of what Donald Read considers to be the BBC's failure to support a 'vigorous outward-looking regionalism', content to produce 'inward-looking' programmes designed to be confined to their own regions rather than presenting the region to the nation (1964: 253).

Broadcasting and the Regions II: 'Granadaland'

By contrast, Read (ibid.: 254-55) considers that Granada, produced a 'strong regionalism', a much more militant version than the BBC, hence its greater importance in the development of Manchester as a broadcasting centre, its enhanced level of influence and its more direct and enduring legacy for RED Production. Granada Television was formed in the mid-1950s as a subsidiary of Granada Group Limited, the film exhibition company run by the Bernstein brothers Cecil and Sidney, which was awarded one of the four original ITV franchises for the North of England on 25 May 1955 and began broadcasting on 3 May 1956. ITV was conceived as an interlocking set of strong, autonomous and distinctive regional broadcasters to counteract the BBC's London bias that had been criticised in the Beveridge Report (1951)

(Briggs 1995: 352). Despite his admiration for the BBC, Bernstein saw his ideological mission as a committed socialist to forge a different type of broadcaster: 'The [north] represented a part of Great Britain that was independent in character and remote from the metropolitan traditions of the BBC. If any English region could contribute to a change in the face of broadcasting this was it' (in Buscombe 1981: 121). In its submission to the Pilkington Report in 1960, Granada argued that it had 'set out to create a vigorous non-metropolitan programme making industry in the North-West capable of representing the people of the area nationally as well as regionally' (ibid.: 127). To achieve his vision, Bernstein ran the company with an enlightened and fairly benevolent despotism, frugal and tightly controlled financially but with a flair for showmanship worthy of his idol, P.T. Barnum. In contrast to the timidity of the BBC, Granada set about making its regional presence felt by immediately erecting the UK's first purpose-built television centre – and the most modern in Europe – on Quay Street in central Manchester, which one commentator described as rising 'sleek, green and glamorous above the shabby greys and mouldering reds around the River Irwell' (Benedict Nightingale, *Guardian*, 22 August 1966, in Buscombe 1991: 66), the outward form of the gaiety and flamboyance symbolised in the company's name. Bernstein thought broadcasters had a civic responsibility and was determined to contribute to the amenities and cultural life of the city, 'so that the centre of Manchester may become an attractive place where young people can live and enjoy themselves' (ibid.: 67).

These infrastructural and civic investments were part of Bernstein's creation of 'Granadaland', as it was dubbed in the press, a regional 'imaginary community' that 'situated the north in public consciousness' (Hallam 2003: 20). Originally 'Granadaland' covered Lancashire and Yorkshire, North Wales and most of Cumbria but was redefined when the franchises were renewed in 1968 with Yorkshire Television taking responsibility for the eastern part of the region. This refocusing enabled Granada to develop a more coherent identity centred on Manchester and the north-west (Cooke 2012: 50). Crucial to its construction of a strong and distinctive regional voice was Granada's commitment to innovative programming and development that was the fruit of its policy to recruit and train its own personnel in-house rather than use BBC-trained ones, resulting in an ethos of '[e]xperimentation, risk, attention to detail and personal initiative [which] were encouraged under tight budgetary control' (Producer/Director Richard Everitt, in Finch 2003: 104). Director Michael Apted recollected that, in contrast to the rigidities of BBC training, Granada's more fluid system encouraged autonomy and experimentation that gave a 'sense of power and confidence in the building' (in ibid.: 77). He contends that Granada was animated by a 'genuine populist drive to be passionate and accessible' that was imbued with the creative strengths of the region: 'It wasn't an accident that this was happening in Manchester, as it was part of a bigger picture. Most of what was best in popular music, writing and sport was coming out of the north. There was a vigour and muscularity in the air that Granada was putting on television ... underneath there was a powerful humanity and willingness to take on social and civic responsibility' (ibid.). Another director, Christopher Morahan, recalled 'a strong sense of a non-conformist, alternative, un-London view which I found very stimulating' (ibid.: 63).

There is no doubt an element of retrospective myth-making in these recollections but Granada was exceptional among the ITV franchises in its commitment to cultivating the strengths of its local culture. This was the result of the commitment of Bernstein and his enlightened Head of Programming Denis Forman – characterised as 'one of the foremost guardians of public service broadcasting within ITV' (Goddard et. al. 2007: 12) – to programme quality rather than business efficiency; Forman considered that 'the true value of our business lies in our programmes' and that talent 'is of its nature nonconformist' (in

Franklin 2005: 91, 94). Under Forman's direction, Granada cultivated a generation of in-house producers such as Peter Eckersley (Head of Drama) who were given a considerable autonomy to take risks and to experiment supported by a second generation of senior management appointed from within, notably David Plowright, who embodied the Granada ethos (Potter 1990: 43). This enabled Granada to develop a strong reputation for high quality production standards and story writing both in factual television and drama. Bernstein was keen to develop drama considering that 'writers are the most important people. We hope to find and develop a team of creative people who will give us the best of their work.' (in Buscombe 1991: 27). Granada nurtured a new generation of northern writers including Jim Allen, Brian Clark, John Finch, Arthur Hopcraft, Harry Kershaw, Hugh Leonard and Jack Rosenthal, all of whom were adept at finding drama and humour in stories of everyday life.

As Julia Hallam argues, the drama Granada developed had a strong northern orientation and a staunch social message promoting a social realist style that focused on authentic depictions of ordinary life (2003: 17), which connected powerfully with the nineteenth century tradition described by Joyce and the pre-war regional radio drama on the BBC. Although, as Lez Cooke's demonstrates in his detailed study, Granada gradually produced its own distinctive 'quality' regional drama, the more important development was *Coronation Street*, set in an industrial working-class district and populated by ordinary realistic characters, which began broadcasting in December 1960. It was this serial that became the icon of Granadaland, a continuous low-cost production that depicted a distinctively northern working-class community that was popular with audiences in the franchise area and nationally (Paterson 1981: 55, 59). *Coronation Street's* enduring success provided a training ground for numerous writers including, in the longer term, Paul Abbott and Sally Wainwright who have become central to RED's stable, as have RED stars such as Suranne Jones and Sarah Lancashire.

However, although *Coronation Street* endured, in the 1980s, Granada's production of regional broadcasting and Northern-set drama declined in favour of filmed series such as *Agatha Christie's Poirot* (ITV: 1989-2013) with higher production values that were orientated to a global market through Granada International (Cooke 2012: 99, 185). This shift was symptomatic of wider changes both within Granada and the whole ITV network as UK broadcasters increasingly looked to sell programmes outside their national boundaries. Raymond Fitzwalter's threnody *The Dream that Died* charts the effects of this process at Granada, detailing the gradual unravelling of Bernstein's original vision as, under the accountancy-driven leadership of Gerry Robinson, Granada switched from a programme-led to a market-led ethos designed to maximise profits. From 1993 commissioning decisions were made in London, programme budgets were cut, and the commitment to programming from the regions eviscerated, leading to the spiralling decline of Manchester as a production base (162-72). In a new era of de-regulation in the 1990s, Granada Media Group engaged in a series of take-overs: Thames (1994); Yorkshire/Tyne-Tees (1997); Anglia Television, Meridian Broadcasting and parts of HTV (2000); and Border (2001) before merging with the other corporate giant Carlton Communications in 2003 to form ITV plc in 2004. Only local news broadcasting and *Coronation Street* survived the drift south as the company's senior executives, ensconced in LWT Tower overlooking the Thames, directed a global corporation without cultural or emotional ties to Manchester or regional programming (Liddiment 2003).

RED Production and the Rise of the Independents

At the same time as Granada was scaling down its regional presence, the BBC, through John Birt's rationalizations, dramatically reduced resources and commissions to all regions including the north and recentralized production in London. This process, as Georgina Born

points out, was at odds with its newly-minted policy of ‘regional proportionality’ in which 33 per cent of all network television was to come from the regions (2005: 323). This downsizing of the BBC and the erosion of ITV companies’ regional presence in the 1990s created a production void that was filled by new raft of independent production companies (indies) as the structure of the UK’s television industry changed from a duopoly to one typified by the proliferation of small independent companies (Darlow 2004; Lee 2018). Their development was encouraged by policy changes: the 1990 Broadcasting Act required the BBC and ITV to obtain at least 25 per cent of their programmes from outside sources. These new indies augmented the ranks of companies established after the advent of Channel 4 in 1982, a ‘publisher-broadcaster’ that relied on independents to produce its programming. Their development was characterised by churn, instability and precariousness, but their situation was improved by the 2003 Communications Act. This altered the terms of trade enabling indies to retain secondary and ancillary rights to their programmes thus affording the potential to exploit their products more effectively. This was a major change from the previous framework in which their participation was limited to a one-off production fee with broadcasters retaining the rights for repeats and onward distribution. The 2003 act also increased the quota for independent production commissions to 30 per cent for the BBC and 50 per cent for ITV.

Cooke argues that it is ‘[i]ndependent production companies [which] are maintaining the regional traditions established by Granada and the BBC English Regions Drama: nurturing regional writers and regional actors, filming in regional locations, portraying regional culture and regional identities for both regional and national audiences ... [acting as] a progressive counterbalance to the more conservative regional drama produced by the national broadcasters and which are enjoyed by regional audiences’ (2012: 187-88). RED Production, established in 1998, exemplifies his general argument. Its founder and CEO, Nicola Shindler, was typical of the new breed of indie entrepreneurs, though at twenty-nine, she was considerably younger than the majority who were in their forties (Johns 2004: 224). She had worked in London for most of the 1990s as a script editor and then assistant producer on prestigious drama series including *Cracker* (Granada, 1993-5) and *Our Friends in the North* (BBC, 1996). By this point Granada’s drama department had relocated to London but several programmes on which she worked, including *Cracker*, were set in Manchester and she travelled there frequently during production. This increased Shindler’s determination to return to the region in which she grew up – Rochdale, ten miles north-east of Manchester – and she set up RED by renting space in Granada’s Quay Street Studios. Although this decision was a lifestyle choice, it was made economically viable through a ‘sweetheart deal’ by which the BBC and Channel 4 each provided Shindler with seed funding to develop three projects a year. The BBC’s decision was designed to fulfil its quota requirements, Channel 4’s by the advocacy of two former colleagues at Granada, Catriona MacKenzie and Gub Neal, who had moved to Channel 4’s drama department. Channel 4’s regional policy has, fairly consistently, been to develop long term sustainable growth in production by working with ‘production companies and talent with genuine roots and commitment to a given region’ (Channel 4 2017: 9).

As Jennifer Johns has shown (2004: 219-228), the presence, even in reduced form, of the BBC but particularly Granada, was attractive to several indies as there was an existing infrastructure of post-production facilities, distribution outlets and above all creative talent that make a Manchester location economically viable. Johns argues that the region’s reputation and the ‘spinning out’ of activities created connections between indies and broadcasters and between the indies themselves, which shared untraded interdependencies: a

pool of freelance labour, technological and cultural knowledge, ideas, skills and expertise (ibid.: 245). Creative clusters, almost always concentrated in cosmopolitan cities, act as talent magnets for ambitious, innovative and creative people (Scott 2005: 2-6; Karlson and Picard 2011).

Although RED benefitted from using Granada's post-production facilities, RED's ethos, identity and production policies were also a direct inheritance from the broadcaster. In interview, Shindler is acutely conscious of that legacy: 'I came in at the tail end of Granada and there was a group of really talented people who were based in the north and who I wanted to use and thought were great. All the writers I worked with had brilliant strong voices.' (in Perraudin 2016). Shindler conceives of RED as 'carrying on the mantle because what Granada meant to me was a place where writers thrived, where the top talent could make really interesting, innovative programming. ... There was an air of creativity in the corridor and that's what I really wanted to carry on here.' Her admiration for Granada's major writers – she mentioned Jack Rosenthal and Tony Warren, *Coronation Street*'s creator specifically – is because of their 'wry sense of humour; they've got that warmth even when things are very dark, a lack of pretension, telling a good story as well.' The strength and vitality of Granada's writers are, in her view, inseparably linked to the positive values – a direct, no-nonsense work ethic and sense of honest endeavour – that, as discussed, are central elements of the discourse of being northern: 'Manchester's very much an industrial town and there is that in the atmosphere as well, even though obviously all the industry's gone ... people work hard and play hard because it's an industrial town and the approach to television was no different really.' Shindler contrasts the northern tradition of honest toil with the primping and posing of metropolitan sophisticates:

Is there a 'Manchester way' of doing things? Yes, definitely. It's very hard to define when you are in the middle of things but I think we're more direct. I think we mess around less. I think we're less pretentious. I think we're very practical as in we want to work so we don't say we're working unless we're filming. There's a feeling when you walk around Soho that there's a lot of people who have scripts under their arms but that doesn't make them a producer. Whereas here, we get our nose stuck in and we work hard and then we go home, which is different from London where there's a media world that then has a party and then has a meeting, then you meet an agent. We don't do any of that. We work really hard and go home. We're more practical.

RED, as Shindler has repeatedly insisted, is a 'writer's company' and it is through the work of its writers that the Granada legacy is most strongly present. RED's first two series – Russell T Davies's *Queer as Folk* (1999-2000) and Paul Abbott's *Clocking Off* (2000-3) which established its reputation – were by ex-Granada writers. Davies had worked as a producer and writer on various productions for Granada and BBC Manchester, and Abbott worked on *Coronation Street* before joining *Cracker* where he first encountered Shindler; Sally Wainwright is another ex-*Coronation Street* alumnus. These writers continue the Granada tradition of finding drama and pathos in ordinary, everyday situations in original drama. Their work also develops the Granada legacy of using regional settings to provide a strongly-rooted authenticity and distinctiveness. Such settings can be regionally and historically precise but can also serve as visual or narrative shorthand for wider socio-economic representations (Dobson and Rayner 2016: 5). *Queer as Folk* was set in Manchester's 'gay village' on Canal Street; *Clocking Off* in a Manchester textiles factory. RED's two longest-running series both scripted by Wainwright – *Scott and Bailey* (2011-16)

and *Last Tango in Halifax* (2012-16) – have northern locations. The first is a crime drama featuring two female detectives who are members of the fictional Manchester Metropolitan Police’s Major Incident Team; the second is a drama about love in old age, set in West Yorkshire. Wainwright’s multi-award-winning *Happy Valley* (2014-16), a dark and compelling psychological crime drama focusing on a woman police sergeant damaged by her daughter’s suicide, is also set in West Yorkshire.

It is beyond the scope of this article to examine the regional settings of these programmes in any detail. However, a number of commentators have argued that their use of locality is an important and distinctive element in their aesthetics, character development and audience appeal. As Faye Woods demonstrates in this issue through a close reading of some of the programmes authored by Wainwright, their resonance comes through interweaving place with the character’s emotional drama. Wainwright, in particular, has been strident in proclaiming the importance of place: ‘I am proud to write northern drama and it is about people who don’t think that the be all and end all is to go and live in London.’ (in Gorton 2016: 83). A Manchester setting is equally important for Davies and Abbott. However, as Cooke indicates, although these settings may evoke recognition and delight for northern audiences, their appeal is much broader. They are regional dramas which, like their predecessors at Granada, address the nation generally; as Shindler contends: ‘I don’t think we make regional shows. I think we make shows about human beings and the themes and ideas behind them are universal.’ Although the table of RED’s productions included on p ? demonstrates that the majority have northern settings, there is no expectation that this will be the case as the criterion is the quality of the story which, while entertaining and having a broad appeal, is also challenging and provocative with a critical stance on society: ‘I’m not for drama that just sits in the background. I like it to push its way forward and to make people talk and to make you think’.

As commentators have noted, part of RED’s ‘provocative’ identity is its reworking of the Granada legacy of social realism. Its early series in particular adopted the fast-paced stylishness that was inspired by ground-breaking American series such as *ER* (NBC, 1994-2009) and *Sex and the City* (HBO, 1998-2004), using mobile camerawork, fast cutting, a creative use of colour in the mise-en-scène and a lively music track (Cooke 2005), all of which distinguished RED’s output from their Granada avatars. It was one of the ways, Shindler reflected, in which RED challenged the ‘it’s grim up north’ stereotype (see Perraudin 2016). This is illustrated by the generic hybridity of *Clocking Off* with its ‘frenetic, experimental, colourful and cinematic’ aesthetic in which the ‘representations of the characters’ lives can be seen as extensions of the geographical landscape’ (Johnson 2013: 48). This vibrant visual style illustrates Cosgrove’s contention that these small indies were closer to the dynamics of social and cultural change in particular localities than the larger broadcasters whose production slates they were in the process of replacing.

RED’s aesthetics were complemented by its reconfiguration of the class and gender politics that had characterised Granada’s output. Although RED’s programmes continue to focus predominantly on the northern industrial working-class, *Last Tango* depicts the northern middle-class as does *Exile* (2011) or *Pat & Cabbage* (2013). RED’s oeuvre includes Russell T Davies depictions of gay relationships (*Queer as Folk*; *Bob and Rose* (2002) and the 2015 triptych: *Banana*, *Cucumber* and *Tofu*). There is a pronounced focus on female protagonists at the centre of many of its dramas, including Paul Abbott’s *Linda Green* (2001-02) starring Lisa Tarbuck or *Leaving* (2013) starring Helen McCrory. Kristyn Gorton has argued that RED’s dramas, particularly those by Wainwright, expand the genre of social realism by

giving it a female voice, dissecting what ‘feeling northern’ means to women as well as men and bringing fresh conceptions of Northern, working-class women to the screen (2016: 75). She contends that in contradistinction to the dominant northern depiction of working-class male anger, frustration and sense of entrapment, RED’s female protagonists, though equally angry at what they perceive as indifference or injustice, remain active protagonists who struggle to find the deeper connections to the communities in which they work rather than desire to escape. Helen Piper discusses *Happy Valley*’s protagonist, sergeant Catherine Cawood (Sarah Lancashire), as a feisty, combative, uncompromising heroine, who challenges the generally more constricted representations of working-class women on British television (2017: 183).

This important revision of northern discourse and of the Granada legacy through the use of female voices is characteristic of RED’s production culture. The actress Suranne Jones, for instance, was encouraged to propose her character for what became *Scott and Bailey* and starred in *Unforgiven* (2009) an uncompromising drama about a woman released from prison. RED’s production of Sue Perkins’ semi-autobiographical drama *Heading Out* (2014) about her experiences as a gay woman, is further evidence of the company’s willingness to open out a broad canvas of female experiences. This can be attributed not to a conscious policy but to RED complexion as a company with a woman founder and CEO, which employs women in most of its key positions and which has a majority of female employees – 21 out of 24 contract staff. In her analysis of RED, Ruth McElroy (2017) emphasises the importance of women securing prominent and influential positions in the television industry – more commonly than in film – and argues that these broader changes, while far from universal, have helped shape what appears on the screen. In this issue, Beth Johnson explores the subject further, discussing Shindler as ‘quietly feminist’, one who, rather than pursuing an explicitly feminist agenda, creates the conditions in which women feel supported.

As an independent producer, although Shindler had control over the production culture and policies of her own company, she was dependent on the legacy of a broadcaster and changes in broadcast regulation. RED also benefitted from other forces beyond her influence: Manchester’s earlier cultural revival that spearheaded its urban regeneration. The ‘Madchester’ music scene that began in the late 1980s with its internationally celebrated bands, such as The Stone Roses and Happy Mondays, recording studios (Factory) and record labels was the catalyst for this revival by creating a regional music scene that rivalled London, celebrating Manchester’s cultural heritage and promoting the city as the nation’s music capital (Russell 2016: 280; Atkinson 2017: 156-57). Creative companies such as RED situated in central Manchester were, by association, endowed with the music scene’s qualities of dynamism, innovation and youthfulness. In the process, the gaunt empty factories, hard manual labour and a dour and grimy image that have characterised a de-industrial north became ‘Old Manchester’, replaced by a more dynamic, gentrified inner city offering bars, nightclubs, upmarket restaurants, stylish accommodation and luxury shops that appealed to the tastes of a new cosmopolitan middle class (Robson 2016: 359; Atkinson 2017: 157-60). Shindler named her company in homage to Manchester United (The Red Devils), which not only announced RED’s regional location but also associated it with the UK’s most successful football team that dominated the Premier League during the 1990s. As Scott argues, these symbolic associations and assets are important in generating an interest and excitement in the cultural products of a particular region.

Recognising how it has benefitted from a Manchester location, and as another mark of the Granada legacy, is RED’s commitment to building a sustainable industry. Shindler’s

assertion that ‘We’re not interlopers who move in and out, or who open a brass-door company’, is partly a reference to the activities of some companies in circumventing the current Ofcom regulations that govern regional production spend by making use of the lower rates of pay for ‘regional’ productions while the commissioners stay in London where post-production also takes place. RED is part of Indie Club, a grouping of independent producers led by Cat Lewis of Nine Lives Films, that is campaigning for Ofcom’s regulations to be tightened to try to ensure responsible and sustainable regional production that creates jobs for local people, using local suppliers, including kit hire companies and post-production houses as well as offering new jobs for entrants. Indie Club’s concern is to create a ‘proper, long-term strategy for out of London production’ that ‘leaves a legacy’ in terms of talent development and infrastructure (Lewis 2018: 35). As Lewis argues, London’s continued dominance undermines the possibilities of a creative meritocracy and upward social mobility, as well as lessening the diversity of voices in UK television production. As part of this commitment, wherever possible, RED recruits local talent. It has also undertaken a joint initiative with Channel 4 to launch Northern Writers, which solicits scripts from new writers in north-west of England, which forms part of RED’s long-term strategy to make it possible for a new generation of northern talent to stay in the north rather than have to migrate to London (Brown 2001; Channel 4 2017: 15).

RED Relocated and Realigned: MediaCityUK and Studiocanal

As has been demonstrated, RED’s initial formation, identity and production policies were a legacy of ITV’s regional franchises and the proliferation of small indies. Its current and future identity is being shaped by its adaptation to very different forces: its move out of central Manchester to MediaCityUK built on a disused industrial area on Salford docks, two miles to the west and its acquisition by the French media corporation Studiocanal, both of which occurred towards the end of 2013. These developments, although not directly connected, are the result of the increasing internationalisation of the UK’s broadcasting industry.

The origins of MediaCity lie in the BBC’s decision – under pressure from the Labour government in the run-up to its charter renewal in 2007 – to increase its regional presence and hence be more representative of the nation as a whole by relocating a significant portion of its operations out of London. New Labour (1997-2010) was committed to encouraging significant regional growth through establishing Regional Development Agencies and was particularly keen on urban regeneration that was led by the creative industries (Lee et al 2014). In ‘Building Public Value’ (June 2004) the then Director General Mark Thompson announced the corporation’s intention to move five departments – Children’s Television, Sport, Radio 5 Live, the Breakfast Show and Research and Development – to create a second major centre in Manchester. Thompson expatiated about a ‘transformational impact on the creative industries and media talent base across the North of England’, with the BBC helping to create ‘a multimedia digital broadcasting factory from scratch with new, more flexible, more creative ways of working, far greater porousness and collaboration with partners and external providers, and a workforce developing entirely new skills to meet the challenges of the next decade and beyond’. After some debate about locations in central Manchester, a much larger 200 acre site was chosen in Salford Quays, the now disused docks on the Manchester Ship Canal where freight used to be loaded and unloaded. The first phase was finished in 2011 and the BBC completed its relocation into Dock House by April 2012. In March 2013, ITV, having sold its historic Quay Street studios, moved into MediaCity’s Orange Building, which now contains Shiver, the factual arm of ITV studios and one of the

largest providers of factual entertainment in the UK and *Coronation Street*, the one drama production that had remained in Manchester.⁵

The concept of a 'media city' was to be not merely an industrial park but a place for leisure and recreation with shops, bars and restaurants, hotels and living accommodation, and educational establishments including the University of Salford's Media School. MediaCity formed part of the broader urban regeneration of The Quays, a joint initiative between Salford and Trafford Borough Councils, which included opening The Lowry Arts Centre and the Imperial War Museum North in 2000 and 2002 respectively thus making the area a tourist destination (Robson 2016: 367-68). However, its primary purpose was to create the largest purpose-built media centre in Europe and thus make Greater Manchester a 'media hub' that would be part of 'an emerging system of global media cities within a world-wide urban network' (Krätke 2003: 607) and attract international firms. Such global hubs are often much more closely connected to other hubs than their own region. This has less of an issue for RED than some Manchester firms because, as the only drama company, it has always been more connected to broadcasters and global networks than other media companies in the region. The development also attempted to connect the broadcasting sector with Manchester's strong IT cluster (Cook and Johns 2011: 186). Although not yet able to entice American companies, MediaCity is now the northern base for the Dutch-owned 'megaindie' Endemol Shine, representative of the recent developments in UK indie production in which smaller firms have been absorbed into huge global corporations (Chalaby 2010). Mark Senior, the CEO of Dock 10, the facilities company that runs MediaCity, predicted that more London indies will recognise the need to have offices in the regions. He considered that as the media industry becomes more globally interconnected it will become 'less reliant on the guy round the corner' and look to a number of 'core providers of facilities and skills'. MediaCity has been advocated by the think-tank ResPublica as the logical place for Channel 4's relocated headquarters to ensure it is part of a global rather than regional network (Williams 2017b).

The development of MediaCity has been controversial. The general BBC 'lift and shift' strategy of establishing 'centres of excellence' in various regional locations has been criticised for its failure to work with the indigenous talent that already exists in the region (Harvey 1993). The mere fact of 'moving production out of London ... does not in itself constitute a commitment to regional creativity and cultural diversity (Davis 1993: 79). In his critique, Brett Christophers argues that its creation took no real account of the wider economic-geographical reality of Salford, one of the UK's most economically and socially deprived areas, and was noticeable for the absence of local community input. In his view it exemplified a neoliberal 'tradition of market-oriented and property-led urban development strategies framed around place-marketing, interurban competition, and gentrification' (2008: 2314) in which the BBC's primary motivation was to placate political pressure rather than contribute to strengthening regional voices. A House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts Report was also quite critical, arguing that the BBC risks becoming overly dependent on the site owners Peel Group for its long-term success. As one committee member observed: 'You have given Peel Media this great monopoly up here in Manchester and a lot of money, from which you are going to find it difficult to get out.' (House of Commons 2013: Ev. 10) A recent report by Centre for Cities (August 2017) was also highly critical, arguing that only a third of the predicted 15,000 jobs had been created and of these, a further third were relocations from elsewhere in Greater Manchester and therefore the effect on local employment was 'negligible' (Jones 2017). The BBC disputed the findings, claiming that the new cluster was worth £3.1 billion to Greater Manchester's economy, double what it was in 2010 and that the number of media professionals working in MediaCity had risen

sharply even though employment in media elsewhere in Greater Manchester had declined between 2011 and 2016 (Williams 2017). Ofcom's 2015 PSB Review noted that although the BBC's move to Salford had increased production levels in that region it had resulted in 'large reductions in the Midlands and east of England' and reflected that 'there is clearly a trade-off between creating sustainable regional hubs, and ensuring diversity of supply from around England' (Ofcom 2015: 9). Despite criticisms, the scheme is considered to be a success and in September 2016 a £1bn 'phase 2' expansion of the site was approved that will double the size of the complex, providing additional television studios and production space alongside shops, offices and a hotel (Pidd 2016).

RED's move to MediaCity was, however, through necessity rather than inclination and shows how the level of control by individual companies is limited. Once ITV moved, along with its post-production facilities, continuing in Quay Street was untenable. Shindler opined: 'We need to work very closely with a post-production company because we have... masses of hours coming through. I need to be in a building that has edit and grading suites and dubbing theatres, and when ITV moved I wasn't left with an alternative.' RED is now in ultramodern steel and glass offices on the second floor of the Dock 10 building (the White Tower), which handles all its post-production needs. On an economic and logistical level, Shindler acknowledged that MediaCity was a 'brilliant idea ... it feels like a great place if you're young and working in the television industry and you meet lots of likeminded people and there's an ease to it'. She also accepted that it had arrested the decline of Manchester as a production base and would encourage new entrants to 'set up their own companies one day. It'll take some time, but I think having MediaCity and having moved half of the BBC here is absolutely the right thing. I think it will work in the long run.' (in Perraudin 2016). Shindler recognised that its development has enabled her to maintain a Great Manchester base through which RED can continue to contribute to the region's economy and encourage local talent.

However, for RED itself the move had certain disadvantages and ran counter to Shindler's personal preferences: 'I don't like being outside of Manchester because I feel that we're a Manchester company and it's quite isolated ... I would much prefer to be in the centre of Manchester ... I don't want to be stuck out in Salford.' However, the drawbacks to being located in MediaCity were not simply personal preference and the inability to nip out from work to do some shopping but the alienating corporate conception of MediaCity that lacks intimacy and history:

It is a different kind of entity. It feels very different. That's one of the things that I don't feel quite at home with. It feels – it's not how modern the buildings are – it's just the atmosphere doesn't feel as creative to me. I know that's ridiculous. Saying that a building makes a difference, but I kind of think it does. It's a bit blander here. It hasn't got character. Quay Street had character. It was more intimate. You could see the nicotine on the walls. That made a difference because you thought about the previous meetings that took place there. I was conscious of that history in the pores of the building. Maybe we'll leave that history, but it's not quite here yet [smiles].

It is revealing that Shindler feels she has to justify regarding the affective, emotional dimension of the change as important but her evocation of the intangible and elements that are conducive to creativity are a striking instance of Scott's argument concerning the significance of the place-specific 'cultural and sentimental assets' that derive from historical associations. Shindler delineates Quay Street's sense of intimacy, a communion with those who had occupied the building and met and discussed their projects whose material trace is

the ‘nicotine on the walls’ and above all a deep sense of tradition summed up in her memorable phrase: ‘I was conscious of that history in the pores of the building.’ Shindler’s estrangement from MediaCity’s bland, identikit modernity was echoed by Cat Lewis, who also recognised the value of the development but who ‘loved being in the centre of Manchester ... You felt very much a part of the city. Whereas this is a bit more American, you know? It’s got less character.’ As an ersatz city, MediaCity lacks history and also a strong sense of place as it is one, substitutable, link in a supranational network of global media hubs. It is noteworthy that in September 2012 the facilities company known as The Studios rebranded itself as Dock 10, in an attempt to endow the firm with historical associations: Manchester Ship Canal included plans to build a Dock 10 and therefore this new media facility was the imaginary fulfilment of the locality’s industrial heritage. This rebranding encapsulates the shift from the exchange of utility goods to symbolic merchandise that characterises the post-industrial city (Vall 2011: 133; Atkinson 2017: 161).

As Christopher Meir’s analyses in this issue, RED’s acquisition by Studiocanal has had significant consequences for the company’s identity and production policies. RED is now part of a large European conglomerate whose priorities are not the UK regions or nation but the international marketplace. As Gillian Doyle (2018) has shown, this change of ownership is characteristic of a broader realignment in the UK’s television industry in which indies have been taken over, for the most part, by American multinationals. This has attractions for indies because it offers greater resources, a global distribution network and the bargaining power of a large corporation to negotiate sales. This was particularly important for RED which, like many UK companies, has concentrated on series with high production values – High End Television (HETV) – that, from April 2013 has attracted tax relief but for which commissioning fees are no longer sufficient to cover production spend, necessitating advance sales and/or co-production deals. As Meir demonstrates, RED has benefitted from Studiocanal’s resources and its bargaining power, especially with the new commissioning giants such as Netflix that financed *Safe* (2018). The dangers, of course, are that the indie will lose its creative independence. Shindler has repeatedly claimed this is not the case and Caroline Hollick, RED’s Head of Development, contended that Studiocanal has been ‘respectful of RED’s creative integrity and does not get involved in detailed decisions about specific productions’. There are strong continuities in RED’s outputs post-acquisition as the company continues to produce original drama with regional settings and persists in securing the majority of its commissions from the UK broadcasters with which it worked previously. Nevertheless, as Meir details, there have been significant changes particularly in terms of choice of writers and the depiction of space and place as exemplified in the crime dramas that originate from the American author Harlan Coben, including *The Five* (2017) and *Safe*.

Although Shindler may have wished to remain independent, the acquisition by Studiocanal was her deliberate choice in the face of a necessary adjustment to a changed marketplace. Her comments in public and in interview make abundantly clear the importance of Studiocanal being a European rather than an American company and therefore one that might be more culturally sympathetic to RED’s ethos and productions. Coben, for instance, is an American writer whose reputation is very high in Europe. Her choice mirrors that of another supposedly quintessentially English company, Aardman Animations, which switched to an alliance with Studiocanal in 2013 having worked previously with US majors (Spicer 2017: 312-13). Thus, as Meir argues, RED is in the process of a complex process of adaptation to a changed media landscape. Although the ‘new King Kongs’, the SVOD platforms such as Netflix, are often perceived as hostile predators, they often serve to introduce a global audience to a broad mixture of programming that companies such as RED can exploit. Such an adaptation is an

economic necessity if a television company is to survive but it is also part of a broader cultural realignment. Without abandoning its regional roots or altering its fundamental commitment to producing quality drama, RED has accepted the need to discover and explore new forms of belonging, new alliances and affiliations and, as Kevin Robins and John Cornford remarked in a different context, attempting to couple a regional identification with ‘a recognition of the equal validity of identities that are not primarily about territorial attachment’ (1992: 25) is a legitimate strategy for production companies. This is because an older conception of a region as a settled community is giving way to globalisation that has stimulated the formation of multiple, overlapping and contradictory identities that are ‘less geographically focused’ but which also ‘have their legitimate claims to expression’ (ibid: 24-5). We can therefore expect that RED will continue to adapt as it responds to future economic, social and cultural changes.

Conclusion

This article has attempted to demonstrate the importance of place for creative production companies and how it shapes both their outputs and production cultures. In contradistinction to the prevailing econometric approach, the analysis has emphasised the profound importance of cultural traditions, emphasising the deep historical roots RED draws upon as a northern company. Those traditions and predispositions were filtered through Granada which – unlike the BBC with its relentlessly centralising mentality that refused to accord the nations and regions autonomy and agency – was a militantly regional company using its Manchester locality to forge a powerful imaginary community, Granadaland. It was Granada’s policy of encouraging experimentation and risk-taking that empowered writers to develop their own voice, which enabled RED to forge its core identity as a ‘writers company’. This legacy also encouraged RED to have the confidence to locate itself as a Mancunian company whose productions embodied a similarly robust and ‘outward-facing’ regionalism that portrayed the northern region to the nation at large, exploring universal themes and issues but often within a specifically regional setting and with authentically northern characters. However, as has been shown, RED actively reworked the Granadaland imaginary by reconfiguring the aesthetic style and gender politics of social realism and in so doing forged its own distinctive presence and identity in response to changing social and cultural conditions within the region. RED’s productions have, fairly consistently, provided the ‘exhilaration’ Stuart Cosgrove was looking for in regional television, acting as a powerful and insistent reminder of the creativity and distinctiveness of a regional voice and its importance in providing a diverse broadcasting culture. Without losing its regional base, RED has adapted, so far very successfully, to the changing landscape of UK television that has become increasingly international.

However, I want in conclusion to return to the broader issues, broached in the introduction, that have underpinned this analysis, the deeper level of broadcasting policy, shaped as we have seen by political pressures, over which RED has little control. The most important is London’s continued domination of UK television production. A recent PACT report found that because the principal networking decisions remain in the capital, difficulties in accessing London-based commissioners is a barrier to growth for regional indies (2013: 10). The BBC may have ‘shifted and lifted’ part of its operations to MediaCity but, as Shindler reflected ruefully: ‘What hasn’t happened and what was never going to happen is the commission has moved out of London. The whole industry is still totally London-centric. All decisions are made in London. I have to travel to London at least once a week, twice this week. There’s absolutely nobody from drama who comes up here. So it all still happens in London.’ It appears unlikely that the Out-of-London agenda will significantly alter those economic and

logistical structures that continue to be the result, as Cosgrove argued, of a metropolitan elite's 'deeply parochial mindset'.

In addition, although the BBC's enforced policy of having a regional presence continues to sustain television clusters in Bristol, Cardiff and Glasgow as well as Manchester, they are currently corralled within a centres of excellence framework that concentrates on particular genres rather than creating broadly-based regional hubs. Thus it is unhelpful for RED that the BBC designated Cardiff as its centre of excellence for drama. This centres of excellence structure represents continued control from the London where all the key decisions are made rather than offer control to the regions and develop distinctive regional voices. It is not, therefore, the equivalent to the more fundamental reorganization of British broadcasting that occurred when a regionally franchised independent television network was introduced in the 1950s. As has been shown, it was the development of a regional broadcaster, Granada, which had a full range of programming and which was committed to using regional talent and forging its own, distinctive non-metropolitan voice, that was instrumental in creating the conditions in which indies such as RED could form and develop their own distinctive creative identities. The resources and convenience afforded by MediaCity as a global hub enable RED to stay in Greater Manchester if not in the city centre, but they do not appear to be conducive to creativity. By the time of its move to Salford, RED had the size, confidence and network of relationships that enabled it to sustain its creative momentum, but it is difficult to imagine how a company just starting out in MediaCity would achieve this, particularly one specialising in drama. International conglomerates such as Studiocanal are prepared to work with companies that are already established and successful rather than with ones that are evolving. One therefore needs to question whether the current policies are creating the conditions to sustain and nurture a new generation of regional indies that will provide the diversity of voices that are necessary for sustaining a healthy television industry, **one that** has a strong regional presence and which can continue to reimagine the complexities of place.

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² It has perhaps been forgotten that this is a re-run of very similar debates over twenty years ago in the long run-up to the introduction of Channel 5 in March 1997; see Blanchard 1990. In October 2018, Channel 4 announced that its regional headquarters would be in Leeds and its two cultural hubs would be in Bristol and Glasgow.

³ The first interview with Shindler was conducted in April 2014, the second in May 2018 along with the other interviews. I am very grateful to all those who generously agreed to be interviewed and for the insights they provided. I would like to thank Peter Atkinson for his help in arranging the interview with Cat Lewis.

⁴ Broadcasting regions were often based on the coverage of transmitters rather than any appreciation of their cultural coherence. In responding to this challenge, BBC personnel often showed a rather fanciful sense of cultural imaginaries. The BBC's 1934 yearbook proclaimed that the West Regional Station transmitter that served Wales and South-West England, 'reunites the Kingdom of Arthur after centuries of separation by the Bristol Channel'.

⁵ Bernstein was shrewd enough to ensure that the building could be converted into a hotel should the independent television not be a viable commercial venture. After the move to MediaCity his foresight was vindicated as the conversion is about to begin in September 2018. (I'm grateful to the Granada tour guide for this information.) Part of the Granada complex has been used as an art centre and the whole area is now being redeveloped.