

# **Autonomy and Dependency in Two Successful UK Film and Television Companies: An Analysis of RED Production Company and Warp Films**

## *Introduction*

Existing studies of media companies have tended to focus on large-scale corporations.<sup>1</sup> Detailed analyses of small-medium enterprises (SMEs) are almost entirely absent and yet – in the film and television production sector at least – the overwhelming majority of companies are small. In 2013, 95 per cent of film production companies had less than ten employees, and the top one hundred television production companies had an average of 32 employees.<sup>2</sup> Although a number of studies have focused on labour relationships within the UK film and television industries in the current era of ‘flexible specialisation’ and ‘networking’, they do not examine in any detail how specific companies actually work or recognise the importance of particular production cultures even for freelance staff.<sup>3</sup> This article aims to fill a gap in the literature and to suggest the value of analysing individual companies’ production cultures. Two SMEs, RED Production Company and Warp Films, have been chosen for detailed scrutiny. Both were established in the late 1990s and have enviable track records of critical and commercial success. In order to foreground issues of agency, we have chosen companies that have distinctive identities, recognised as the makers of slightly edgy, often challenging work. Each, in differing degrees, has been prepared to take creative risks and therefore afford those who work for them, particularly writers and directors, a high degree of autonomy or individual agency. Although sharing these fundamental similarities, each has significant differences that afford valuable insights into the divergences between the film and television industries, which have distinct traditions, business models and modes of production. This is the first time either company has been critically evaluated and in what follows we focus on

their formation and identity, internal organisation, external relationships and the changing ‘context of creativity’ in which each is embedded.<sup>4</sup> We use the term ‘inward industry engagement’ to describe SMEs’ constant activity of building relationships with other organisations and agents, which offers a more company-orientated focus than the individualized emphasis of the conventional term ‘networking’; and we use the term ‘negotiated dependencies’, to identify the hierarchical nature of those relationships that nevertheless have a degree of reciprocity.

The approach adopted is qualitative: an inductive, interpretative methodology that privileges the rich specificity of detailed case studies as the best way through which to apprehend phenomena, in this case the relationship between agency and institution. The analysis is based on extended interviews conducted by the authors, together with a comprehensive examination of each company’s website and any articles and interviews that have appeared in the press and trade journals. The project of which this research forms a part did not allow for a company ethnography based on extensive on-site observations.<sup>5</sup> As will become apparent, we do not ascribe any determining value to our face-to-face interviews. We acknowledge that they are socially and culturally situated discourses in which interviewees express a conception of themselves, the events recounted and the values ascribed to them that attempts to shape how they are understood. However, with these caveats in mind, they offer potentially valuable insights to be interpreted.

Our analysis is informed by four distinct but overlapping theoretical paradigms. The first is derived from organisation, business and management studies, particularly Edgar Schien’s seminal study *Organizational Culture and Leadership* that has provided the basic model through which we have structured our analysis.<sup>6</sup> Schien defines organizational culture as ‘a

pattern of shared assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved the problems of external adaptation and internal integration' that evolves over time (17). In order to understand an organization's culture, Schien argues that analysis needs to apprehend three levels: artefacts, espoused beliefs and underlying assumptions, where level denotes 'the degree to which the phenomenon is visible to the observer' (25). Artefacts refer to any visible manifestations of the organisation that include its working environment, logo, website, promotional materials and its 'artistic creations' and the 'myths and stories told about the organization' (25-6). Espoused beliefs are the company's stated strategies, goals and philosophies, which may contradict a company's actions as they are often rationalisations of what should or might be, rather than what actually is the case (28-30). Underlying assumptions are the deeply embedded, unconscious and taken-for-granted beliefs and values that are not necessarily made manifest or visible but which, Schien suggests, provide a 'mental map' that guide behaviour and are the most important determinant of an organisation's culture and are 'non-negotiable' (30-6). In practice it is often difficult to distinguish between espoused beliefs and values and underlying assumptions, nevertheless, Schien's schema provides a useful framework through which to analyse a company's culture. His injunction to uncover an organisation's basic assumptions – the 'why not the what' (xi) – is valuable in encouraging analysis rather than description, not so much what an organisation does as the underlying reasons for those actions. Schien also understands organizations as dynamic, constantly adapting to changing external forces, hence the importance of understanding their formation and evolution (87).

The second paradigm draws on the practices and procedures of the emerging sub-field of production studies, which has focused on providing detailed empirical studies of media organisations or workers, deploying concepts drawn from cultural studies to analyse media

production and which has been equally attentive to the micro practices of production cultures and to the macro economic, social and cultural contexts within which these institutions operate.<sup>7</sup> In this paradigm, ‘production culture’ is used to signify the ‘tension between individuals’ agency and the social conditions within which agency is embedded’.<sup>8</sup> However, as John Thornton Caldwell, in particular, has emphasised, media production cultures in particular are difficult to analyse because of the ‘para-industry’ that surrounds them: the ubiquitous, rhizomatic networks of industrial, cultural and corporate discourses ‘woven together by socio-professional media communities’ that complicate access to ‘what we regard as our primary objects of media research’.<sup>9</sup> In contradistinction to the emphasis on rational, calculated actions that underpins organizational studies, Caldwell calls for attention to be paid to ‘the vagaries of human subjects or culture’s thick complexities’ thereby alerting scholars to the potential importance of chance encounters, contingencies and fortuitous circumstances in determining production cultures.<sup>10</sup> Caldwell’s work is dense with occasionally over-elaborate taxonomies and does not offer clear methods to investigate media organisations, but its call for researchers to engage with the messy complexity of production cultures offers a bracing complement to Schien’s overly schematic approach.

Our analysis is also informed by a third paradigm that derives from the influential cultural sociology of Pierre Bourdieu. His concepts of habitus and the field of cultural production remain central to understanding how media agents are positioned in relation to social, economic and cultural forces.<sup>11</sup> Bourdieu understands habitus as the system of ‘durable, transposable dispositions’,<sup>12</sup> based on social background, education and training, which guide actions but that exist in a dialectical relationship with the particular field of cultural production within which agents operate and which offer, at any particular moment, possible positions that an agent can occupy. Thus Bourdieu’s work understands media producers as

always socially and culturally situated, their agency contingent upon broader socio-historical and industrial contexts, position-takings and self-perceptions.<sup>13</sup>

The fourth paradigm is derived from cultural geography that has identified the importance of place and location in analysing companies. Cultural geographers have emphasised the increasing significance of ‘cultural quarters’ and ‘creative clusters’ that offer strategic proximities of supply, both materials and a pool of freelance talent.<sup>14</sup> The importance of cultural clustering has been recognised by policy makers who now offer inducements and incentives that affect producer choice of location.<sup>15</sup> Location, as we will demonstrate, is important for both RED and Warp, which are both regional companies in industries dominated by London and the Southeast of England.

## **RED Production Company**

### *The Founder: Habitus, Espoused Beliefs and Underlying Values*

Schien’s study is preoccupied with leadership and emphasises the importance of an organisation’s founders who seeks to impose their ‘personal visions, goals, beliefs, values, and assumptions about how things should be’ on the organization (16). As will become clear, we consider that ‘impose’ is not the correct way to understand the leadership practices in the case of our two companies, but we do accept that one of the key ways to understanding either RED or Warp is to analyse the dispositions, espoused beliefs and underlying assumptions of their founders. Nicola Shindler founded RED Production Company in 1998, its name signifying her passionate support of Manchester United, the ‘Red Devils’. Shindler’s habitus

was the product of her middle-class background, education and training. After graduating from the University of Cambridge, where she directed plays as well as studied history, Shindler worked for both the BBC and Granada as a script editor and assistant producer on prestigious drama series including *Cracker* (1993-5) and *Our Friends in the North* (1996). Although the decision to found her own company and become an independent producer was a challenging and risky one, it was driven by an underlying belief in the cultural value of independence: ‘I never wanted anyone else to tell me that I had to take something on ... I just wanted to make the things I believed in’. As James Bennett has shown in his study of media producers, being ‘independent’ often functions as a ‘rhetorical ideal that offers a utopian vision’, an intangible but powerful belief that informs and inspires decisions, and which can override immediate financial considerations.<sup>16</sup> In Shindler’s case this utopian vision was to make high-quality television drama programmes that would be the equivalent of those she had worked on previously, but under her own control.

Shindler believed that the people who could realise her vision were writers: ‘for me the key to making good drama is to put the writer at the centre of it, they’re the primary creative force ... They absolutely have to be at the centre of the whole process.’<sup>17</sup> Therefore she claims the projects RED develops have been ‘entirely about the quality of the script and the idea and the writer. It can be anything and set anywhere ... I wanted [RED] to be a place where a writer can make a thing they really want to make rather than be forced into an idea that isn’t really theirs’.<sup>18</sup> Shindler’s espoused beliefs are reflected in the mission statement on RED’s website: ‘to work with the best writers on modern and innovative programming ... [in producing] some of the UK’s most popular and critically acclaimed drama series, RED is always proud to put the writer at the heart of every show’.<sup>19</sup>

The ways in which Shindler ensured the primacy of writers will be discussed in the following section, but her own underlying assumption about the value of independence needs to be complemented by what Bourdieu describes as position-taking: her understanding of the new economic and cultural opportunities opened up by the major shifts that were taking place in the production ecology of the UK's television industry as it changed from being a duopoly (the BBC and ITV) to one typified by the proliferation of small independent companies. Shindler was able to try to establish herself as an independent through a 'sweetheart deal' by which the two UK public service broadcasters, Channel 4 and the BBC, provided her with seed funding to develop three projects a year each, which afforded an initial financial security. Two of Shindler's former colleagues at Granada, Catriona MacKenzie and Gub Neal, had moved to the drama department of Channel 4, whose production model was to commission programmes from outside agencies rather developing them in-house. The BBC's encouragement stemmed from increasing pressure on the corporation to broaden its production base by funding a greater proportion of its programmes from outside sources. Thus seen in its broader cultural and economic context, Shindler's desire to become an independent producer typified what Richard Paterson has identified as a 'new class' of television entrepreneurs, disenchanted with working in large, bureaucratic corporations who became the central agents in enacting these fundamental changes.<sup>20</sup>

In interview, Shindler emphasised that her decision to locate in Manchester was also based on personal preferences. Having worked in London (where Granada's drama department was based), Shindler, born and educated in Rochdale, explained that she wished to return to the region she grew up in and to enjoy a better quality of life than was possible in the capital: 'We're based here because I'm from here, not because of a political decision based on quotas', a somewhat defensive reference to the fact that RED has never depended on regional

funding. However, this apparent vagary of Shindler as a human subject driven by emotions rather than logic, needs to be set against her shrewd assessment of the economic and cultural opportunities provided by the city's existing media infrastructure: Manchester had become England's second largest creative cluster outside London with a strong interconnected network of companies that act as a magnet for attracting talent.<sup>21</sup> RED originally rented space from Granada in its iconic Quay Street Studios in the centre of Manchester where Shindler could maintain close connections with one of her former employers, make use of its on-site post-production facilities and access the city's burgeoning film and television ecology.

#### *Internal Integration: Shared Assumptions*

Schien argues that company founders/leaders impose their beliefs and values on other members of the organisation, which become the pattern of shared assumptions that underpins its structure and actions. However, because of Shindler's espoused belief in the primacy of writers, RED is structured so that they are placed at its creative centre and rather than impose her own values, Shindler considers that her principal role 'is to enable those people to do their job well – to protect them'. RED's core writers – Paul Abbott, Russell T Davies and Sally Wainwright – are people with whom Shindler had worked previously and who were similarly disenchanted with working for large corporations. Thus they were predisposed to look for the opportunity to experiment and innovate, seeing RED as the opportunity to work on subjects of their own choosing rather than on pre-determined formats, genres or even adaptations; they also admired Shindler's professional skills as a script evaluator.<sup>22</sup> Shindler knew they shared her commitment to innovation but she also acknowledged that they were also used to operating within a commercial environment, their craft forged by working on long-running soaps that she regards as an ideal training ground because they 'work so hard



and develop a real discipline which many other dreamier writers don't understand'.<sup>23</sup> RED's first two series – Davies' *Queer as Folk* (1999-2000), centred on Manchester's 'gay village' on Canal Street for Channel 4, and Abbott's *Clocking Off* (2000-3), about a Manchester textiles factory, for the BBC – were both original screenplays, provocative, adult and challenging productions with 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), which Shindler also admired. Their critical and commercial success established RED's identity as a 'progressive company ... prepared to champion risk-taking writer-led drama with a strong regional flavour'.<sup>24</sup> According to Schien, an organisation's underlying assumptions are often revealed through the ways in which resources are allocated and the rewards and status conferred on its members (257-59). Thus although these major writers remain freelance rather than company employees, they work regularly for RED because they are treated as partners in the production process, accorded a high degree of creative autonomy. Abbott, Davies and also Wainwright are consulted on every decision about choice of director, unit producer and casting. They also frequently function as executive producers, which gives them an additional economic stake in the company as well as increased creative control. Abbott, who also wrote the successful series *Linda Green* (2001-2) for RED, created two series, *Exile* (2011) and *Hit & Miss* (2012), which were actual co-productions between RED and his own company AbbottVision, affording him equal status with Shindler.

The regional location of RED's first two series was another shared value that binds the company together. It is not simply the desire of these writers, who grew up in the Northwest of England, to stay around Manchester as a creative hub, but is also used as the setting of their dramas to give them a strongly-rooted authenticity and distinctiveness. RED's two longest-running series *Scott and Bailey* (2011-), and *Last Tango in Halifax* (2012-), both

scripted by the versatile and prolific Sally Wainwright, 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 comedy about love in old age, set in West Yorkshire. Wainwright's multi-award-winning *Happy Valley* (2014/2016), 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. A younger writer, Danny Brocklehurst, mentored by Abbott, who has become part of RED's elite corps of regular screenwriters, set his three-part crime drama *The Driver* (2014) in Manchester; he set *Ordinary Lies* (2015), a melodrama consisting of six self-contained but interlinked stories, features different characters who work at a car dealership, in Warrington. Although these regional settings are important – and convenient for location filming – they rest on a shared underlying assumption that these stories can communicate with a broad national and even international audience. Hence Shindler's repeated disavowal, in public statements and in our personal interview, of any suggestion of parochialism: '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'.

Of course, these freelance writers do not run the company, which needs to be managed efficiently to keep costs under control. What Schien labels the organization's 'systems and procedures' (264ff) are closely overseen by Shindler, but structured in such a way that she is able to remain in close contact with her writers and the creative process. She is able to work directly on projects either brought to the company or developed in-house by delegating the main responsibility for RED's financial affairs to the Managing Director, Andrew Critchley. RED has fortnightly development meetings of senior staff – Head of Production, Head of Development, Business Manager and Finance Director – which is the forum where key decisions are made about particular productions, including which producer, director,

production designer and cinematographer would be right for a particular series, and the freelance staff to be hired for specific productions. However, once the major decisions have been taken, the production team is given a high degree of creative autonomy; Shindler does not micro-manage and is rarely present on set. Shindler's management style conforms to the general conclusions of management studies that creative endeavour takes place most effectively in companies that encourage a high degree of operational autonomy and independence with a concomitant lack of bureaucratic regulations and formal structures, ones that do not prescribe too closely how creatives should function.<sup>25</sup>

Because writers are accorded the primary role in the production process, other creative personnel have more limited agency. Although RED employs several preferred actors who feature in a range of its productions, including Christopher Eccleston and John Simm, they do not initiate projects. An exception is Suranne Jones, who starred in Wainwright's *Unforgiven* (2009), and proposed the original idea for *Scott and Bailey*; she now co-stars as Rachel Bailey, the wild, hard-drinking and more ambitious of the two detectives and has become an executive producer alongside Shindler in a more ambitious three-part story 'of epic scale' to be filmed in 2016. Directors are also not initiators, typically hired late in the production process – regarded as too expensive to employ during the development phase – and thus have quite circumscribed creative input, often used for some but not all of the episodes of a series, typically two of a six-parter. Shindler emphasised that the writers and producers act like 'showrunners' in American television who lead the productions because they have to ensure 'something works with the episodes the director isn't involved with'. However, Shindler claims she is looking to empower directors – 'I think we can give [them] more leeway to set up more interesting choices in terms of design and visuals' – and thus make RED more attractive to top directorial talent by ceding greater autonomy and aesthetic opportunities.

RED, like any other business, needs to recruit and nurture emerging talent to enlarge its creative base and ensure sustainability. Schien suggests that leaders need to ensure that their values are communicated to new staff or would-be entrants (270). RED is highly distinctive for a media production company of its size in employing five script editors in a permanent staff of around twenty, which enshrines its core belief in the importance of writers, and also ensures that it is able to accept unsolicited scripts, which makes it accessible to writers even without an agent. RED combined with Channel 4 to launch Northern Soul, which solicited scripts from new writers in the Northwest of England, and more recently agreed to mentor one of the two winners of a £3,000 bursary jointly funded by Channel 4 and Northumbria University.<sup>26</sup> Here too a strong regional emphasis is apparent, one that ‘might make it possible for a new generation of northern talent to stay in the north’<sup>27</sup>, rather than, as with Shindler herself, have to migrate to London.

### *External Adaptation*

Schien emphasises the importance of studying an organisation’s attempt to adapt to external circumstances; Bourdieu also argues that individual autonomy is always positioned in the shifting forces of the field of cultural production within which it is located. Hence the need, as advocated by production studies, to relate the micro-practices of production cultures to their macro-economic, social and cultural contexts. Although, as noted, the break-up of the old duopoly created opportunities for television producers to become independent, their reliance on broadcasters for funding created a culture of dependency and crisis-management rather than promoting diversity and creative freedom. The independent sector was highly volatile with a constant churn of companies, most of which had a very precarious existence.<sup>28</sup>

RED was fortunate that the sweetheart deal that guaranteed an initial six commissions coupled with the critical and commercial success of its first two series provided a reasonably secure platform on which to build. However, as with all independents, RED's situation was significantly strengthened by government legislation. The 2003 Communications Act altered the terms of trade so that independents were able to retain secondary and ancillary rights to their programmes thus giving them the potential to exploit their products globally. 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.<sup>29</sup>

Although these improved terms of trade are vital for RED's sustainability, they do not alter its fundamental dependence on UK broadcasters for commissions: RED derives 98 per cent of its revenue from this source against an industry norm of 64 per cent.<sup>30</sup> It is the broadcaster's licence fee and distribution advance that determines the overall budget and the timetable for any RED production, and it is the broadcasters which decide on the schedule slot and whether the project is to become a single drama or a series (the norm). The decision to re-commission a series or solicit further work from the company is dependent on broadcasters' perceptions that are typically based on a combination of viewing figures, some audience research and critical acclaim. RED has no control over how its productions are marketed and promoted by the broadcasters and this para-industry celebrates the writers, actors and directors involved in any programme rather than the company that produced them. And although under the new terms of trade RED retains its secondary rights, it is the distributors that negotiate further deals. For instance, it was BBC Worldwide which brokered a deal with Netflix to provide the first series of *Happy Valley* for North American viewers. Thus although RED's choice of project is motivated by the quality of the original script rather

than any pre-determined format, the company spends very little on development before negotiating with potential broadcasters.

However, although RED, from its inception, has had to adapt to these external conditions and constraints in which the broadcasters hold the whip hand, according to Shindler there is space for creative dialogue in these discussions, hence our conception of a ‘negotiated dependency’ for these relationships. Although the conversation often starts with commissioners outlining how their brief for a particular scheduling slot is to be fulfilled, producers can pitch their own ideas and potential projects because broadcasters ‘don’t know what will work ... they will go with anything that is good ... It doesn’t matter whether it fits their specific briefs or not. ... I think that’s what’s good about British television that they’re really fluid and they react to the script.’ This (albeit unequal) exchange between producer and broadcaster contrasts strongly with what Shindler perceives as the rigidity of the American system. We need to be cautious about just how accommodating UK broadcasters are. In an earlier interview, Shindler had complained that ITV did not give the off-beat comedy *Dead Man Weds* (2005), the opportunity to find an audience and develop despite getting viewing figures that would have made it a major hit on Channel 4.<sup>31</sup> Therefore despite the fact that RED might prefer to work with public service broadcasters which would be expected to share its core values of originality and diversity, the dictates of the marketplace mean that RED has to work with a range of broadcasters including Sky. Shindler’s managerial skill has been to balance commissioners’ requirements against the freedom demanded by her writers by trading on RED’s reputation as the suppliers of quality television and the perceived strengths of its writer-led mode of production.

*Changing Contexts of Creativity: StudioCanal and the Internationalisation of Television Production*

In the febrile ecology of contemporary capitalism companies can never achieve a steady state but have to, as Schien suggests, adapt constantly to changing conditions. There have been a number of significant recent changes in the broader ecology of UK television production and in RED's own situation that have necessitated RED's further evolution. In June 2013 the company moved to MediaCityUK, a strategically engineered creative hub on the banks of the former Ship Canal in Salford. It was an enforced relocation rather than one initiated by Shindler who would have preferred to stay put: 'I'd rather be in the centre of Manchester ... I don't want to be stuck out in Salford'. However, when Granada moved to the new ITV headquarters in MediaCityUK, she 'wasn't left with an alternative' because of the economic necessity 'to be in a building that has edit and grading suites and dubbing theatres'. Despite Shindler's personal reluctance, this externally motivated adaptation brings with it major cultural as well as economic advantages. RED accrues valuable symbolic capital in being part of an extensively hyped, internationally-orientated 'Media City', where the BBC also now has a major base, a para-industry discourse that positions it as innovative and ambitious with global horizons, part of a burgeoning 'northern powerhouse' that might eventually challenge the supremacy of London as the UK's media centre. RED is now situated in ultramodern steel and glass offices whose clean lines and absence of clutter are redolent of a modern, efficient company presided over by Shindler's poised presence, named as one of the 25 most powerful females in global television in 2014.<sup>32</sup>

The move coincided with another significant change: the Government's introduction, on 1 April 2013, of tax relief for 'high-end' television in which companies producing scripted

television projects costing a minimum of £1 million per broadcast hour can recoup 25 per cent of the costs. The effect of this widely welcomed move has been to boost production levels and increase the UK's global competitiveness.<sup>33</sup> According to Shindler, increased budgets have provided greater creative freedom for her production teams: 'there's a little more time to edit, or there's a little more time to film; things that we haven't had for quite a few years now. I do think that's making a difference to what you see on screen'. These enhanced production values have contributed to the elevation of television's status, eroding the perceived pre-eminence of film as a creative medium, with most writers and actors now happy to work in either. However, Shindler also acknowledged that commissioning fees are no longer sufficient to cover production budgets and therefore advance sales and/or co-production deals are needed to leverage sufficient cash flow. This places additional pressures on SMEs, many of which have already been absorbed into conglomerated 'super-' or 'mega-indies' such as All3Media or Endemol Shine Group.<sup>34</sup> With both British and international co-productions able to qualify for tax relief, the UK television market has become much more attractive to foreign companies hence the superindies have themselves become the target of acquisitions by multinational corporations based overseas. By 2014, the UK's seven biggest superindies were foreign-owned.<sup>35</sup>

In this changed economic and cultural context, RED came under increasing pressure to sell to a larger organisation in order to gain access to the resources it needed to compete successfully for commissions. Shindler therefore looked for a partner that would give RED additional financial resources and access to international, especially North American, television networks. Having rejected offers from several companies, in December 2013 the company made a deal with StudioCanal in which the French-based film production and distribution corporation acquired a majority stake in RED, which was valued at around £30



million.<sup>36</sup> RED's success – profits climbed from £1.6m in 2012 to £3.6m in 2013 when it was named 'Indie of the Year' by *Broadcast* – made it highly desirable to StudioCanal, which was looking to increase television production to around 20 per cent of its overall output. Its then CEO, Olivier Courson, described RED as 'the perfect fit for our ambition to develop British and international content out of the UK'.<sup>37</sup>

Schien argues that mergers or acquisitions are key moments at which leaders have to reassert their core beliefs (315-16). Shindler's preoccupation was to adapt to these changed conditions without significantly compromising RED's underlying values. In interview, she argued that StudioCanal were 'mainstream auteurs', less aggressively business-orientated than their American counterparts, geographically closer, but above all having shared beliefs and values that made the two companies deeply compatible: 'The people at StudioCanal have the same ambitions as me ... to keep the quality of drama going but to look further afield and sell those shows all over the world including pre-selling'. Shindler was confident that RED's identity will remain unchanged and that the acquisition would not compromise her own autonomy: 'I feel, and it might be naïve, but I feel completely independent because there's no-one I report to in terms of what we are doing creatively. There's no one I have to ask about what direction I go in'. Publicly, Shindler has also been resolutely upbeat about the acquisition: 'The significant investment from StudioCanal gives us at RED the opportunity to meet our growing ambitions without compromising the core values of the company. I'm looking forward to ... producing ambitious, daring and engaging content both in the UK and internationally, as well as accessing their extensive library of film content'.<sup>38</sup> As Schein suggests, such espoused beliefs need to be understood as rationalisations of what should or might be rather than what actually is the case. And, as Caldwell suggests, they represent not so much 'the truth' as a strategic series of 'cultural self-performances',<sup>39</sup> part of RED's

ongoing inward engagement with the industry, designed to reassure its commissioners, its contract staff, and above all its major writers, that the company's identity and vision will remain intact.

It is too soon to assess the impact of StudioCanal's acquisition though RED has increased significantly in size with several new senior appointments or promotions, including a new post of Creative Director and extra junior staff in development and accounts, primarily to cope with the anticipated increase in projects co-produced specifically for sales overseas.<sup>40</sup>

Several forthcoming productions suggest a fundamental creative continuity: a new miniseries for Channel 4 by Davies, *The Boys*, about how young gay men in 1980s were affected by the AIDS pandemic; a second series of *Happy Valley* and further series of *Last Tango in Halifax* and *Scott and Bailey*. However, here too there are also signs of change. For the first time RED has worked with an American writer, best-selling crime novelist Harlan Coben, albeit on a ten-part original series rather than an adaptation of his existing fiction: *The Five* (for Sky) is about a group of friends reunited through a murder and filmed in Liverpool.

Previously, RED had only made one film adaptation, *Blood* (2012), from its earlier three-part television series, *Conviction* (2004), but the expectation now is that it will use StudioCanal's extensive film catalogue, over 5,000 titles, for remakes. Courson announced that he wished RED to make an additional 'international TV series' each year as part of StudioCanal's ambitions to have 'six or seven international TV series in production' annually by 2017.<sup>41</sup>

This suggests that there will be pressure from the majority shareholder to prescribe the nature of at least some of RED's output. *Variety* commented that Tandem, acquired by StudioCanal in 2012, had 'moved from high-profile and highly successful mini-series into producing recurring one-hour dramas'.<sup>42</sup> This could signpost a possibly greater uniformity in RED's

future output thereby losing some of its distinctiveness and aspects of the rooted regionalism that we have suggested form its core values.

## **Warp Films**

### *The Founders: Habitus, Espoused Beliefs and Underlying Values*

The founding of Warp Films is more complex than was the case with RED Production and Warp is less dependent on a single figure. However, it is impossible to understand Warp without analysing the dispositions, beliefs and underlying values of its founders. Warp emerged from a very different cultural formation having its origins in the success of Warp Records, the label set up in 1989 by three friends – Rob Mitchell, Steve Beckett and Robert Gordon – to distribute the electronic music that was the defining sound of Sheffield’s late 1980s ‘rave’ culture.<sup>43</sup> Warp Records’ support for new artists and innovative music enabled it to become one of the best-known independent record labels in the world.<sup>44</sup> In 1999, having produced a number of award-winning music videos, Mitchell and Beckett<sup>45</sup> founded Warp Films to extend the same artist-focused ethos to film production. When Mitchell died in October 2001, Beckett developed the company with their mutual friend, Mark Herbert, who quickly became Warp’s principal driving force, enabling Beckett to focus on managing the record label. Herbert was able to assume this position because, as Schien suggests, he shared the same basic assumptions as Beckett: ‘to give freedom to artists and to create artist-driven content’.<sup>46</sup> Herbert’s assumptions derived from his education. His background differed significantly from Shindler’s: he was born into a mining family in Doncaster and read film studies at a ‘new’ university, Sheffield Hallam, where he acquired a taste for arthouse cinema in addition to his existing enthusiasm for more mainstream films. Thus Herbert’s habitus

disposed him to revere the director as an *auteur* whose vision was the primary creative force in film production.<sup>47</sup> In addition to sharing the same values and assumptions as Beckett, Herbert brought complementary industry experience to the company, having worked as a runner and location manager on Mark Herman's *Brassed Off* (1996) and *Little Voice* (1998) before becoming a television producer on Channel 4's *Phoenix Nights* (2001-2).

Thus, unlike Shindler, who represented a new class of independent television producers, Herbert's position-taking as Warp Film's managing director was singular, inheriting a position created by a particular intervention by a successful music company rather than any structural changes within the UK film industry. Although it had experienced significant growth in the 1990s, the film industry remained haphazard and unstable. An increase in production levels has not altered its endemic problem: the dominance of American multinationals which severely squeezed production, distribution and exhibition opportunities for indigenous film-makers and therefore diminished the prospect of creating sustainable businesses; most UK production companies came together simply to make a particular film.<sup>48</sup> Warp's solution to these problems was to make low-budget films using the established strengths and financial model of Warp Records; as Herbert recalled 'rather than starting from scratch it felt like we had hit the ground running'.<sup>49</sup> Thus Warp Films initially produced short films by artists familiar to Warp Records' existing customer base before retailing them on DVD using the label's existing CD distribution infrastructure. Warp's first film, Chris Morris's *My Wrongs #8245-8249 & 117* (2002), a black comedy about a disturbed, pot-smoking dog-sitter, sold 23,000 DVDs, an exceptionally high number for a short, because Morris was well known to Warp Records' customers via his award-winning radio show, *Blue Jam* (1997-99), which the label had distributed. In addition to announcing Warp Films' quirky, left-field identity, *My Wrongs* created a network of important relationships.<sup>50</sup> Most

significantly, its lead actor, Paddy Considine, introduced Herbert to Shane Meadows, thereby initiating what has become Warp's core creative relationship. Herbert acknowledges the strong 'element of luck' involved in his encounters with both Beckett and Meadows,<sup>51</sup> a factor that Caldwell suggests needs to be recognised in accounts of production cultures.

The other key element in Warp's success has been its regional location. Although it was originally based in London because the parent company had relocated there in 1999, Herbert returned to Sheffield as soon as practicable; Warp's first 'offices' were, famously, a shed in his back garden. As with Shindler, this regional location was motivated partly by personal preferences and life-style choice (Herbert's desire to return to his roots), but also had an economic basis. During 2002-04, New Labour created nine Regional Screen Agencies (RSAs) that consolidated and expanded regional film activity through supporting low-budget film-making often using digital production technology, thereby developing a pool of creative expertise and entrepreneurial skills within a framework designed to develop a sense of community and diversity by nurturing new talent. Jack Newsinger identifies Warp as 'a new kind of small, independent, regionally based film production company that was formed to take advantage of the beneficial film-funding arrangements in the new regional production sectors'.<sup>52</sup> Herbert, who had worked for the Yorkshire Film Commission promoting the region to prospective film-makers, understood the possibilities that had opened up, hence a possible position-taking as a regional film producer.

Thus although Warp opened a London office in 2006 after the launch of its sister company, Warp X (see below), Herbert has remained in Sheffield where he benefits from the city's progressive cultural policy and infrastructure.<sup>53</sup> Warp now occupies offices in Electric Works, which promotes itself as a 'state-of-the-art office space for a vibrant community of

creative, digital and media businesses in Sheffield ... Electric Works serves as a hub for these industries and is nurturing a growing community of talented people and companies'.<sup>54</sup>

However, once inside the shiny ultra-modern building, unlike RED's somewhat austere functionalism, Warp's minimally decorated offices give the impression of a student occupation, creating a temporary feel of people who are here now but may soon move on. This apparent casualness is at once genuine and artfully studied, embodying the core beliefs of a down-to-earth company that wants to appear accessible, friendly and personal, not out to impress or create a corporate ambience. Although Herbert has his own office and sits in a designer chair, he habitually dresses in jeans and trainers with his feet on the desk, evincing the working-class blokeishness that is his public persona. In interview, Herbert averred that being outside 'the Soho film bubble' enables Warp to retain its outsider status, keeps the company grounded and helps maintain its basic assumption: a willingness to experiment and to support new talent.<sup>55</sup> Herbert's public discourse enacts these values overlaid by the conventional symbolic divide between a venal, superficial southern culture and an 'authentic' northern one: 'There's no snobbery... You go to these swanky dos that cost more than *Dead Man's Shoes* did to film and then you come home to Sheffield, play football and mates take the piss out of you'.<sup>56</sup> This no-nonsense ethos is encapsulated in the company's mission statement, at once confiding and cajoling: 'If you like predictable and formulaic storytelling, you've come to the wrong place. Sorry, we'd like to help but it's not what we do ... Commissioners, writers and directors work with Warp because we know how to support creative people and deliver visionary films and television dramas ... Warp has nothing to do with genre or format, and everything to do with providing a distinctive window on the world.'<sup>57</sup>

*Internal Integration: Shared Assumptions*

Although Beckett retains a share in Warp Films and sits on its board, he is not actively involved in managing the company, whose structure and organisation has been created by Herbert. Because of his belief in the primacy of creative talent, like Shindler, Herbert understands his principal role not as imposing his own vision but to create the conditions in which ‘visionary’ artists can flourish. Warp’s major artist is auteur-director Meadows who, before working with Warp, made very low-budget films that displayed a strong sense of the cultural particularity of the East Midlands region where he grew up. Meadows had recently suffered funder-imposed changes on *Once Upon a Time in the Midlands* (2002) and therefore was keen to work with a sympathetic producer, located in Sheffield, who would respect his creative autonomy.<sup>58</sup> Thus on Warp’s first full-length feature film, *Dead Man’s Shoes* (2004) filmed on a miniscule £750,000 budget, Herbert ensured that Meadows had complete artistic freedom: ‘Shane didn’t want to work with a script. He wanted to shoot everything chronologically and have the ability to change the film from one day to the next. *It was our job to build a structure around him that allowed that to happen*’.<sup>59</sup> Meadows and Herbert had a shared assumption that the key to successful low-budget film-making was to combine the originality and distinctiveness of art cinema with the pleasure and familiarity of genre films, thereby minimising financial risk by making potentially ‘crossover’ films that could appeal to both arthouse and mainstream audiences, thereby qualifying the all-embracing positioning adumbrated on Warp’s website that the company has ‘nothing to do with genre’.<sup>60</sup> *Dead Man’s Shoes* was a revenge thriller about a soldier returning to avenge his brother’s murder, which combined a strong generic identity with aesthetic experimentation, as in its employment of Super8 footage in the title sequence to suggest the distorting power of memory, one of the film’s key conceits.

Although Meadows is Warp's creative film-maker, it continues to encourage an eclectic mix of production modes and subject matter. Warp thereby retains its underlying values as the enabler of diverse creative talent who share its belief in experimentation and innovation and who are willing to work on low-budget films with little prospect of major box-office success because of the creative opportunities offered. For example, Warp produced Considine's short film, *Dog Altogether* (2007), and Herbert encouraged him to expand this into his debut feature, *Tyrannosaur* (2011), a visceral account of friendship amidst poverty, drug addiction and domestic abuse. Actor-director Richard Ayoade's *All Tomorrow's Parties* (2009), a documentary about the eponymous indie music festival comprised largely from the amateur footage of attendees, was another experimental, improvised production. Ayoade made several innovative, low-budget concert films with Warp before graduating to his visually distinctive debut feature, *Submarine* (2010), a poignant comedy-drama about a teenage boy's first love set in 1980s Swansea. *Le Donk & Scor-zay-zee* (2009), Meadows and Considine's improvisational mock-documentary, shot in five days for £48,000, launched Warp's 'Five Day Feature' scheme, which invited other directors to collaborate on similar productions with budgets of less than £50,000, encouraging the improvisatory, DIY aesthetic that is such a strong feature of the company. In contrast to RED, whose target is always the primetime television audience, Warp has the cultural space as the producer of low-budget shorts and features, to be more diverse and boldly experimental. And such a heterogeneous array of projects helps to ensure the company's sustainability by working with a range of creative agents at various stages in their careers: nurturing new talent and developing existing relationships while pursuing bigger projects with its more established artists.

Schien argues that as organizations evolve and grow they generate sub-cultures and that 'deciding which elements become changed or preserved then becomes one of the tougher



strategic decisions that leaders face' (317). This has not happened with RED, which has remained singular in its organisation, but Warp's successful bid for a substantial grant (see next section) enabled it to set up a sister company, Warp X, a digital film studio run by Robin Gutch. Herbert had met Gutch when he was Head of FilmFour Lab (see below), which part-funded *My Wrongs*, and his extensive commissioning experience there provided complementary expertise. More important was the Gutch's underlying assumption that the producer's role was to support creative talent 'through being highly involved with the writer and director'.<sup>61</sup> Thus Gutch was an ideal partner who could be trusted to run a separate company because Herbert was convinced that its values and ethos would mirror that of its bigger 'brother' rather than generate a competing sub-culture; both companies were able to work together to encourage a diverse array of creative talent. Gutch became a shareholder in Warp itself and, as both Managing and Development Director, was party to all its major strategic decisions.<sup>62</sup> Warp X produced ten feature films on tiny budgets – usually between £400,000 and £800,000 – from 2008 to 2013, designed to provide creative opportunities for first-time directors without the pressure for box-office success. These included controversial documentaries such as *A Complete History of My Sexual Failures* (2008); and fiction films that ranged from the brashly commercial *Donkey Punch* (2008), a titillating holiday slasher; to the crossover *Kill List* (2011), a crime thriller about two hit-men that combines domestic realism with occult horror; and *Berberian Sound Studio* (2012), an art-house film whose experimental soundtrack and visual design emulates the breakdown of its protagonist, a timid British sound engineer working on a brutal Italian horror film. In spring 2015 Gutch decided to step aside from his joint role to focus on specific film and television projects as an executive producer; Peter Carlton, who had joined Warp in 2009, assumed the role of joint Managing Director alongside Herbert.<sup>63</sup>

Herbert had first encountered Carlton in his role as a film officer working for EM [East Midlands] Media, before replacing Gutch at Film4 in 2003. As Film4's Senior Commissioning Editor, Carlton executive-produced *Dead Man's Shoes*, *This Is England* and the Warp X projects with which Film4 was involved, as well as several other innovative British films. Carlton's worldwide industry connections made him eminently suited to become head of Warp Films Europe, a role designed to develop 'bigger projects with international directing names and international appeal'.<sup>64</sup> As with Gutch, Herbert chose someone from a similar milieu with whom he had worked previously, thus ensuring that Carlton would reinforce Warp's core values. In addition to recruiting from outside, Warp nurtures its own talent. Mary Burke, who joined as a production runner in 2002, became a fourth senior producer through her ability and shared commitment to encouraging diversity and innovation.<sup>65</sup>

Like RED, Warp has developed an internal organization that provides a stable structure within which to manage specific productions and make strategic decisions about the company's direction that are congruent with its underlying assumptions. Underneath Herbert, Gutch and Carlton are nine staff working across four departments. There are weekly development meetings held in London; the management group (senior producers and Heads of Department) meets quarterly; and the board (Beckett, Herbert and Gutch, now Carlton) every six months. However, Gutch is adamant that there is no 'corporate master plan' informing these decisions, which are taken to ensure that Warp retains its underlying values: to enable creative talent to make a variety of films from original ideas.

### *External Adaptation*

However, as with RED, much of Warp's energies are outward-focused as the company adapts to external contexts. As Gutch commented: 'The bricks and mortar of the film company aren't worth anything. The value of Warp is in [its] relationships'. However, the changing economic and cultural contexts which have shaped the film industry in the UK are markedly different from those that moulded television. In contrast with the (relatively) straightforward funding mechanisms of television production through broadcasters, Warp, like all other UK independent film production companies, has to rely on jigsaw funding from a number of different sources. Herbert's skill has been to position Warp as a key nexus within this shifting field of cultural production, engaging with other industry players and various quangos in order to negotiate the finance necessary for the company to realise its ambitions.

Warp's first external funding was a £150,000 grant from NESTA (the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts) in 2001 to develop the UK's short film market. For the additional funds needed to complete *My Wrongs*, Herbert approached Gutch at FilmFour Lab, a talent development department within Channel 4, set up to support low-budget, experimental shorts and features by 'innovative but untested' directors.<sup>66</sup> The Lab's support became the initial locus for Warp's most fruitful and long-standing external relationship: with FilmFour's parent company Channel 4. Warp's original and eclectic production slate meshed with the espoused values of Channel 4, its public service remit to foster diversity and innovation. From 2004-15, Warp benefitted from a first-look deal with Film4, the film arm of Channel 4 and both Film4 and its parent broadcaster have invested in numerous Warp projects. However, because this relationship offers no guarantees, Warp has adapted, as noted above, to regional funding initiatives through Herbert's cultivation of strong relationships with EM Media and Screen Yorkshire, two RSAs based in Nottingham and Leeds respectively, which have invested in sixteen Warp productions to date. Warp has been

particularly adroit in establishing close connections with distributors and sales agents, especially Optimum Releasing (now owned by StudioCanal UK), Protagonist Pictures and Wild Bunch as institutional funders are more likely to support projects with distributors attached and the latter prefer projects with institutional backing.

Warp was able to establish Warp X through winning a major £4.5 million grant from the UK Film Council's Low Budget Feature Scheme. Warp could demonstrate, through its existing partnership with regional funders and distributors, its ability to fulfil the scheme's criteria: to revitalise the low-budget sector of the British film industry by integrating finance, development, production and distribution. Warp has also received smaller awards, including £20,000 from Screen Yorkshire in 2005 after the success of *Dead Man's Shoes*, which enabled Warp to cover its office overheads for a year thereby giving the company the space to decide on its priorities rather than 'have to jump and do the wrong projects'.<sup>67</sup> In 2013 it received £100,000 from the BFI's Vision Awards, which provided financial security over two years. Such awards are vital for Warp as they insulate the company from short-term commercial pressures and thus provide the space for Herbert, in Schien's terms, to embed his core values through developing a varied portfolio of films that its creative talent want to make.

#### *Changing Contexts of Creativity: Television Production and Internationalisation*

Like RED, Warp has recently begun a new phase in its evolution in response to changing cultural and economic contexts. Characteristically, this shift was initiated not through a 'corporate master plan' but the unanticipated success of Shane Meadows' *This Is England* (2006), a coming-of-age drama about young boy and his friends growing up in the skinhead subculture of the 1980s and their traumatic encounter with the National Front, which became

Warp's most commercially profitable film by some distance. It triggered a move into television production so that Meadows could develop its storyline. *This Is England '86* (2010) was a four-part spin-off series, shot in and around Sheffield, commissioned by Channel 4, set three years after the original film with many of the same cast and characters. Because of Herbert and Meadows' close relationship with Channel 4, Meadows was granted an unusual degree of freedom in his working methods, allowed to improvise and adapt storylines during production. The further success of *This Is England '86* – the highest-rated original drama series ever launched on Channel 4 – led to two further commissions: *This Is England '88* (2011) and *'90* (2015). This success encouraged Warp to develop other television projects including the comedy *The Midnight Beast* (2012), two series co-produced with Cuba Pictures for E4 about the eponymous online cover band; *The Minor Character*, *The Snipist*, and *Care* (2012), three one-off dramas for Sky Atlantic's 'Playhouse Presents'; and *Southcliffe* (2013), a four-part drama for Channel 4 that employed a challenging non-linear narrative to explore the consequences of a series of shootings by a local man on the community.

The financial security of the series format, the possibility of repeat commissions and the introduction of tax relief for 'high end' projects detailed previously, have provided strong economic incentives for Warp's move into television, which has become the company's primary focus. In interview, Gutch pointed out that in the current UK media ecology 'the economic reality of television just makes much more sense' and therefore very few production companies attempt to survive solely by making films. However, Herbert has repeatedly emphasised that Warp's move into television was not commercially driven, but the result of its creative personnel being inspired by the production values, quality and challenging content of American television series such as *The Sopranos* (1999-2007) and *The*

*Wire* (2002-8) and Scandinavian series such as *The Killing* (2007-12) and *The Bridge* (2011-), and therefore sensing a creative opportunity rather than ‘let’s cash in and do some TV’.<sup>68</sup> Herbert has been very careful in any public statement to suggest that this development has been made without compromising the company’s underlying values: ‘We’re looking at international productions to move the company forward. That’s the new direction we want to be but as always it’s about creating quality and supporting writers and directors.’<sup>69</sup> Nevertheless, working predominantly in television is reshaping the company, its priorities and the kind of projects it develops.

In 2013 Warp added a first-look deal with ITV’s worldwide distribution arm Global Entertainment to its existing, informal arrangement with Channel 4. Such deals enable Warp to offer attractive commissions to its writers or directors, but they also push the company towards particular kinds of production. Warp is now expected to ‘expand its TV development activity and produce more high-end drama for the UK *and the international market*’.<sup>70</sup> This was exemplified by Warp’s most expensive production to-date *The Last Panthers*, broadcast on Sky Atlantic in November 2015 with a US premiere scheduled for spring 2016, a six-part crime drama with major stars and filmed in four different countries. It was a co-production with the French company Haut et Court, with financing from Canal+, Sky, the MEDIA Programme of the European Union and the sales company Intandem Films. Gutch stated that *The Last Panthers* was ‘very important for us. It’s not Channel 4, it’s not British and it’s quality television’. The screenplay was written by Jack Thorne who had worked on *This Is England* and the three television series, but was shot through a 2:35 anamorphic lens like a feature film by the Swedish director Johan Renck whose vision – ‘different, bold, strange and weird’ – Thorne averred, ‘totally shaped the show’. In the para-industry discourses

accompanying its broadcast, producer Peter Carlton argued that the ambition was not to produce a genre piece but to construct a ‘modern European tragedy’.<sup>71</sup>

*The Last Panthers* shows strong continuities with Warp’s core values, its commitment to artist-driven work, but is a significant new departure. The complex financial packaging and increased numbers of stakeholders involved in high-end television productions have absorbed most of Carlton’s time, whilst Herbert has been preoccupied by producing *This Is England* ’90, which culminated in a feature-length episode. The scale of these endeavours means that Warp is now far less likely to put resources into a diverse slate of short films or very low-budget features. As Herbert stated, ‘six low-budget films bring in the fees of one big budget film but there’s six times the work’.<sup>72</sup> And Gutch reflected: ‘the time it takes someone to do a short, they could be developing a TV series’. Thus although Warp continues to make projects such as *’71* (2014), Yann Demange’s gritty debut feature film about a British soldier lost behind enemy lines in Belfast in 1971, or Meadows’ documentary on the reunion of the eponymous Manchester band, *The Stone Roses: Made of Stone* (2013), these pressures, and the seemingly inexorable pull of British television production towards internationalisation, might make Warp’s commitment to diversity, innovation and championing emergent talent harder to sustain.

### *Conclusion*

A fuller analysis of RED Production Company and Warp Films than is possible in a single article would have considered how workers at other levels in these companies understand their basic assumptions and are integrated (or not) into the company ethos. However, we hope that the present concentration on their leaders has afforded insights into both companies’

production cultures and has demonstrated that although RED and Warp are very different, emerging from distinct cultural formations, they have certain essential similarities. In both cases it is the founders and managing directors, Nichola Shindler and Mark Herbert, who have been crucially important in constructing their identity and mode of production. It was through their personal preferences that the companies have strong regional identities that distance them from the London-centricity of the UK media industries and is part of their distinctiveness. However, as discussed, this lifestyle choice also had an economic basis as both Manchester and Sheffield had established media and cultural infrastructures providing accessible pools of labour and postproduction facilities. It is also the founders who created (in Herbert's case partly inherited) the companies' organisation and structure, forging the 'context of creativity' in which creative agents, principally writers and directors, are enabled to pursue their artistic and cultural ambitions.

However, rather than, as Schien suggests, imposing their own values and tastes on the company, the defining feature of Herbert and Shindler's leadership is to *collaborate* with their writers and directors, encouraging and empowering them to take creative risks. Thus at the centre of RED and Warp is not a management executive class but these 'primary creatives', and both companies are organised and structured in order to ensure that they are given as much agency, in the form of creative autonomy, as possible. This freedom to experiment and innovate rather than conform to pre-determined formats or genres has been crucial to the success of both companies, ensuring that they are attractive to highly talented creative personnel. Thus rather than developing a 'corporate master plan', the strategy of both companies has evolved in order to find ways in which those shared assumptions about the cultural (and ultimately economic) value of originality and innovation can be sustained.



This drive for internal creative autonomy needs to be set against these companies' reliance on other organisations for production finance. We have shown that the term 'independent' in reality connotes a fluid network of continuously adjusting inward industry engagements that form a series of negotiated dependencies. Understanding the nature of these relationships necessitates, as we have demonstrated, paying close attention to the broader economic, industrial and cultural contexts in which these companies operate. In adapting to changing external conditions, the founders and senior producers play an even more critical role. Although these relationships are asymmetrical and hierarchical with the funders holding the whip hand, there is considerable room for agency; negotiations are typically dialogic, driven as much by mutual respect and cultural values as by institutional remit and the need for profitability. This is particularly true of the companies' relationships with public service broadcasters (the BBC and Channel 4), which play a vital role in both the television and film industries. Channel 4 in particular has similar core values to Warp and RED through its remit to encourage diversity and innovation. Warp also benefitted from funding schemes administered by the UKFC (now BFI) or the RSAs, whereas RED received significant help through its initial sweetheart deal with Channel 4 and the BBC. These arrangements provided the necessary space and time within which these companies could establish themselves and become sustainable businesses, indicating the importance for SMEs of at least a degree of insulation from the demands of the marketplace.

These contexts are historically variable and we have discussed how both companies appear to be at a threshold moment in which their internal structures and external relationships are changing significantly. The cultural convergence between film and high-end television drama, the increasing internationalisation of the UK television industry and the gravitational pull of large multinational conglomerates, has meant that both RED and Warp are expanding

and reconfiguring, with RED absorbed by StudioCanal and thus no longer an independent. In five years' time both will be, perhaps, rather different entities whose production cultures may have changed considerably. If this is the case, then the period in which these companies developed could be seen as a *particular moment* in the evolution of UK film and television industries, one that could sustain small, indigenous companies committed to providing progressive and challenging, but also highly entertaining, original fiction but which is now threatened by the increasing drive towards more corporate and less distinctive product with the emphasis on economic growth and efficiency rather than diversity and difference. However, one could also argue that both companies have the acumen, energy and resilience to resist these homogenising, globalising forces and to maintain their core values and their commitment to providing the conditions in which innovative creative agency can flourish.

Such observations are, of course, speculative and we wish to turn to the theoretical and methodological implications of our study for media analysis. We have indicated the value of using several theoretical paradigms and a diversity of sources in order to provide a multi-perspectival analysis of how companies actually work, combining theoretical approaches drawn from organisation studies, production studies, the cultural sociology of Pierre Bourdieu and cultural geography. Film and media studies, we suggest, has much to learn from management, organisational and business studies that offer general ways of thinking about how companies function. Though we diverged on occasions from Schien's understanding about how organizational cultures work, we have found his general procedures helpful, and especially his insistence that the goal of scrutinising artefacts and espoused beliefs is to understand the unstated assumptions that underpin them and thus to analyse *why* these company's operate in the ways that they do rather than simply describing their activities. This attention is, we suggest, more productive than focusing on a company's

‘brand’ because it encourages an understanding of the more deep-seated, often intangible attitudes that drive a company, which are only ever partially encapsulated by any tangible manifestation such as a website mission statement. Film and media studies need to learn from these disciplines without acceding wholly to their potentially homogenising tendencies or the drive to formulate general rules or theoretical models about how production cultures work, though it has to be acknowledged that Schien himself is highly sceptical about drawing up a typology of companies.<sup>73</sup> In resisting these tendencies we have drawn strength from the analyses of situated micro practices by production studies scholars and have given careful consideration to Caldwell’s injunction to attend to production cultures’ ‘thick complexities’ and to examine the importance of chance encounters and fortuitous contingencies in their formation alongside a careful analysis of the broader contexts in which these companies operate. We therefore concur with Lucy Küng-Shankleman who argues that every company’s production culture is unique and because its strengths and weaknesses are context-dependent, it is very difficult to draw out general rules.<sup>74</sup> Thus because of the need for detailed analysis it is not possible within the confines of a single article to make any meaningful comparisons with other SMEs that have superficial similarities with RED or Warp in terms of size and turnover.<sup>75</sup>

Although we are sceptical about the value of drawing up any general models of successful production cultures, our analysis has suggested the importance of affording creative talent a high degree of autonomy and of ensuring that the company’s structures reflect these underlying assumptions. Overall, we hope to have demonstrated that the analysis of companies constitutes a productive middle ground between a focus on individual media workers and overviews of general economic and cultural processes. Production companies are not only invisible to the general public, they are also, it appears, invisible to media

scholars who continue to be preoccupied with individual writers and directors such as Paul Abbott or Shane Meadows, without an understanding of the importance of these companies' production cultures to their creativity. We suggest that it is impossible to comprehend either the nature of cultural labour or the impact of these general processes without this level of company analysis, which enables a deep understanding of the complex and shifting relationship between institutions and agency.

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<sup>1</sup> For instance, Lucy Küng-Shankleman, *Inside the BBC and CNN: Managing Media Organisations*, London: Routledge, 2000; Georgina Born, *Uncertain Vision: Birt, Dyke and the Reinvention of the BBC*, London: Secker & Warburg, 2004. By contrast, historical film studies has a rich tradition of small-medium company analyses; see, *inter alia*, Sue Harper and Vincent Porter, *British Cinema of the 1950s: The Decline of Deference*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

<sup>2</sup> BFI, *Statistical Yearbook 2014*, London: British Film Institute, 2014, p. 232; Televisual, *The Production 100 2014*, London: Televisual Media UK, 2014, pp. 32-52.

<sup>3</sup> Studies include Gillian Ursell, 'Television Production: Issues of Exploitation, Commodification and Subjectivity in UK Television Labour Markets', *Media Culture and Society*, 20:1, 1998, 129-53; Richard Paterson, 'Work Histories in Television', *Media, Culture & Society* 23:4, 2001, 495-520; Helen Blair, 'Winning and Losing in Flexible Labour Markets: The Formation and Operation of Networks of Interdependence in the UK Film Industry', *Sociology*, 37:4, 2003, 677-94; David Lee, 'Networks, Cultural Capital and Creative Labour in the British Independent Television Industry', *Media, Culture & Society*, 33:4, 2011, 549-65.

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<sup>4</sup> See Vincent Porter, ‘The Context of Creativity: Ealing Studios and Hammer Films’, in James Curran and Vincent Porter (eds), *British Cinema History*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983, pp. 179-207. For further discussion see Andrew Spicer, A. T. McKenna and Christopher Meir (eds), *Beyond the Bottom Line: The Producer in Film and Television Studies*, New York: Bloomsbury, 2014.

<sup>5</sup> This research forms part of a European research project – ‘Success in the Film and Television Industries’ (SiFTI) – that investigates the production cultures of a wide range of small- or medium-sized film and television companies in four countries (Norway, Denmark, The Netherlands and the UK) in order to analyse why some are more successful than others (<http://sifti.no/index.php/en/>.) Over 60 interviews have been conducted for the project as a whole, including the fifteen that we have organised. For the purposes of this article that focuses on strategic vision, we have only drawn on our interviews with CEOs.

<sup>6</sup> Edgar H. Schien, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004. Further page references are given in the text.

<sup>7</sup> See Vicki Mayer, Miranda J. Banks and John Thornton Caldwell, ‘Introduction: Production Studies: Roots and Routes’, in Mayer, Banks and Caldwell (eds), *Production Studies: Cultural Studies of Media Industries*, New York: Routledge, 2009, pp. 1-12.

<sup>8</sup> Preface to Miranda Banks, Bridget Conor and Vicki Mayer (eds), *Production Studies, the Sequel! Cultural Studies of Global Media Industries*, New York: Routledge, 2016, pp. ix-xv, here p. x.

<sup>9</sup> John Thornton Caldwell, ‘Para-Industry, Shadow Academy’, *Cultural Studies* 28:4, 2014, 720-40, here p. 721; see also Caldwell, *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008.

<sup>10</sup> John Thornton Caldwell, ‘Para-Industry: Researching Hollywood’s Blackwaters’, *Cinema Journal* 52:3, 2013, 157-65, here p. 157.

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<sup>11</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, ‘The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed’, in *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993, pp. 29-73.

<sup>12</sup> Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1980, p. 53.

<sup>13</sup> For further discussion see Derek Johnson, Derek Kompare, and Avi Santo, ‘Introduction: Discourses, Dispositions, Tactics – Reconceiving Management in Critical Media Industry Studies’, in Johnson, Kompare and Santo (eds), *Making Media Work: Cultures of Management in the Entertainment Industries*, New York: New York University Press, 2015, pp. 1-21.

<sup>14</sup> See, *inter alia*, Graeme L. Evans, ‘From Cultural Quarters to Creative Clusters: Creative Spaces in the New City Economy’, 2009,

<http://dspace.brunel.ac.uk/bitstream/2438/6475/2/Cultural%20quarters%20%26%20urban%20regeneration.>

<sup>15</sup> See Caroline Chapain et al, *Creative Clusters and Innovation*, NESTA Research Report, November 2010.

[https://www.nesta.org.uk/sites/default/files/creative\\_clusters\\_and\\_innovation.pdf](https://www.nesta.org.uk/sites/default/files/creative_clusters_and_innovation.pdf).

<sup>16</sup> ‘Introduction – The Utopia of Independent Media: Independence, Working with Freedom and Working for Free’, in Bennett and Niki Strange (eds), *Media Independence: Working with Freedom or Working for Free?* London: Routledge, 2015, pp. 1-28, here p. 1.

<sup>17</sup> All unattributed quotations come from an interview with Shindler conducted by the authors at RED’s offices, 8 May 2014.

<sup>18</sup> Tim Dams, ‘Interview: Nichola Shindler, Red Production’, 3 December 2013,

[http://www.televisual.com/blog-detail/Interview-Nicola-Shindler-Red-Production\\_bid-525.html](http://www.televisual.com/blog-detail/Interview-Nicola-Shindler-Red-Production_bid-525.html).

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.redproductioncompany.com/about-us/>.

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<sup>20</sup> Richard Paterson, 'Early Independent Production Entrepreneurs in UK Television: Agents of a Neo-Liberal Intervention', *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Venturing*, forthcoming. We are grateful to Professor Paterson for allowing us access to this article before publication and for his comments on an earlier version of our article.

<sup>21</sup> Jennifer Johns, 'Manchester's Film and Television Industry: Project Ecologies and Network Hierarchies', *Urban Studies* 47:5, 2010, 1059-77.

<sup>22</sup> See, for instance, Paul Abbott's comments in the interview contained in Beth Johnson, *Paul Abbott*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013, pp. 151, 153.

<sup>23</sup> Brown, 'I never saw *Queer as Folk* as a gay drama', *Guardian*, 9 April 2001, <http://www.theguardian.com/media/2001/apr/09/mondaymediasection2>.

<sup>24</sup> Lez Cooke, 'The new social realism of *Clocking Off*', in Jonathan Bignell and Stephen Lacey (eds), *Popular Television Drama: Critical Perspectives*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005, pp. 183-97, here p. 186.

<sup>25</sup> See Howard Davis and Richard Scase, *Managing Creativity: The Dynamics of Work Organization*, Buckingham: Open University Press, 2000; Chris Bilton, *Management and Creativity: From Creative Industries to Creative Management*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2007.

<sup>26</sup> See 'Channel 4/Northumbria University Writing for Television Awards', <http://www.northernwritersawards.com/apply-channel-4-northumbria-university-writing-for-television-awards-details-70.html>, accessed 9 June 2015.

<sup>27</sup> Brown, 'I never saw *Queer as Folk* as a gay drama'.

<sup>28</sup> James Bennett 'From Independence to Independents, Public Service to Profit: British TV and the Impossibility of Independence', in Bennett and Strange (eds), *Media Independence* pp. 71-93, here at p. 79.

<sup>29</sup> *Impact of the 2003 Communications Act on UK Indie Productions*, a Report Presented to the CMRA by Olsberg SPI, 4 June 2015,

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<http://cmpa.ca/sites/default/files/documents/industry-information/studies/FINAL%20-%20CMPA%20Terms%20of%20Trade%20Report%20by%20Olsberg%20SPL.pdf>.

<sup>30</sup> See Peter White, 'StudioCanal Buys RED Stake', *Broadcast*, 5 December 2013, <http://www.broadcastnow.co.uk/studiocanal-buys-red-stake/5064296.article>; and Tim Dams, 'Top Ten Indie Themes of 2014', *Television Production 100 2014*, accessed 3 August 2015, <http://www.television.com/read-reports-surveys/33/261/Top-10-indie-themes-of-2014.html>.

<sup>31</sup> Liz Thomas, 'Scarlet Woman – Red Productions [sic] and Nicola Shindler', *The Stage*, 29 March 2005, <https://www.thestage.co.uk/features/2005/scarlet-woman-red-productions-and-nicola-shindler/>.

<sup>32</sup> 'Hollywood Reporter Names the 25 Most Powerful Women in Global TV', November 2014, <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/hollywood-reporter-names-25-powerful-738635>.

<sup>33</sup> See Kathryn Nave, 'TV Tax Relief: Too Much Success?', *The Knowledge*, 21 November, 2013, <http://www.theknowledgeonline.com/the-knowledge-bulletin/post/2013/11/21/The-TV-tax-relief-is-there-such-a-thing-as-too-much-success>.

<sup>34</sup> Jean Chalaby, 'The Rise of Britain's Super-Indies. Policy-making in the Age of the Global Media Market', *International Communication Gazette*, 72:8, 2010, 675-93.

<sup>35</sup> Mark Sweney, 'British Indie Producers a Victim of Own Success as Foreign Owners Swoop', *Observer*, 10 August 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/media/2014/aug/10/british-indies-tv-production-companies-americans-coming>.

<sup>36</sup> Mark Sweney, 'Last Tango in Halifax Producer Sells Majority Stake to French Company', *Guardian*, 5 December 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/media/2013/dec/05/last-tango-halifax-sells-stake-red-studiocanal>.

<sup>37</sup> White, 'StudioCanal Buys Red Stake'.

<sup>38</sup> Sweney, 'Last Tango in Halifax'.



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<sup>39</sup> See Caldwell, *Production Culture*, pp. 4-7.

<sup>40</sup> Stephen Chapman, 'StudioCanal Acquires Stake in Red Production Company', *MediaCityDaily*, 5 December 2013, <http://www.mediacitydaily.co.uk/2013/12/studiocanal-red-production-company/>.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> John Hopewell, 'StudioCanal Looks To Up Ante on U.S., European TV Drama Production', *Variety*, 10 March 2015, <http://variety.com/2015/tv/global/studiocanal-looks-to-up-ante-on-u-s-european-tv-drama-production-1201449556/>.

<sup>43</sup> Hillegonda Rietveld, 'Repetitive Beats: Free Parties and the Politics of Contemporary DiY Dance Culture in Britain', in George McKay (ed.), *DiY Culture: Party and Protest in 90s Britain*, London: Verso, 1996, pp. 243-67.

<sup>44</sup> Rob Young, *Warp: Labels Unlimited*, London: Black Dog Publishing, 2005.

<sup>45</sup> Gordon left Warp Records in 1991 following a disagreement over one of the label's artists (see *Ibid.*, p. 47.)

<sup>46</sup> Herbert quoted in Tom Seymour, 'Warp Films' Mark Herbert Interview', *Ideas Tap*, 2 November 2012, <http://www.ideastap.com/IdeasMag/the-knowledge/Warp-Films-Mark-Herbert-interview>.

<sup>47</sup> Andrew Bounds, 'A Warped Dramatic Vision', *Financial Times*, 29 November 2011, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/45d3712a-19d6-11e1-9888-00144feabdc0.html#axzz3ibV47Hyn>.

<sup>48</sup> Andrew Higson, *Film England: Culturally English Filmmaking since the 1990s*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2011, pp. 13-38.

<sup>49</sup> Herbert quoted in Wendy Mitchell, 'Interview with Mark Herbert and Steve Beckett', in Tommy Husband and Niall Shamma (eds), *Warp Film 10*, Sheffield: Warp Films, 2013, p. 193.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, p. 190.

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, p. 192.

<sup>52</sup> Jack Newsinger, 'Structure and Agency: Shane Meadows and the New Regional Production Sectors', in Martin Fradley, Sarah Godfrey and Melanie Williams (eds), *Shane Meadows: Critical Essays*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013, pp. 23-5, 29.

<sup>53</sup> Linda Moss, 'Sheffield's Cultural Industries Quarter 20 Years On: What Can Be Learned From a Pioneering Example?', *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 8:2, 2002, 211-29.

<sup>54</sup> <http://electric-works.net/about/>.

<sup>55</sup> Herbert quoted in interview conducted by Justin Smith at Warp's Sheffield offices, 12 November 2012. We are grateful to Professor Smith for generously giving us access to this unpublished material and for sharing his recollections of the environment.

<sup>56</sup> Rob Barker, 'Warp Films 10<sup>th</sup>: Mark Herbert Interview', *Exposed Magazine*, 2012, <http://www.exposedmagazine.co.uk/warp-films-10th-mark-herbert-interview-2>.

<sup>57</sup> <http://warpfilms.com/>.

<sup>58</sup> See Jason Scott: Shane Meadows' Positioning in the Ecology of Contemporary British Film', *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, 10:4, 2013, 829-45.

<sup>59</sup> Seymour, 'Warp Films' Mark Herbert Interview', our emphasis.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>61</sup> Interview with Herbert by Smith. Gutch had worked at the BBC's Community Programming Unit (CPU) before joining Channel 4's Independent Film and Video Department (IFVD), which he went on to lead. Both were well known for highly innovative and experimental output.

<sup>62</sup> Interview with authors at Warp's London office, 26 November 2014. All further unattributed quotations are from this source.

<sup>63</sup> Gutch, e-mail to the authors, 9 January 2015.

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<sup>64</sup> Stuart Kemp, ‘Peter Carlton to Head Warp Europe: Int’l arm for British-based Production Stable Warp Films’, *Hollywood Reporter*, 18 June 2009,

<http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/peter-carlton-head-warp-europe-85535>.

<sup>65</sup> Herbert quoted in Catherine Bray, ‘Producer Profile: Mark Herbert’, *Film4*, accessed 28

March 2015, [http://www.film4.com/special-features/interviews/producer-profile-mark-](http://www.film4.com/special-features/interviews/producer-profile-mark-herbert)

[herbert](http://www.film4.com/special-features/interviews/producer-profile-mark-herbert). Burke, left in June 2015 to become Senior Production and Development Executive at the BFI’s Film Fund.

<sup>66</sup> Hannah Andrews, *Television and British Cinema: Convergence and Divergence since 1990*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, p. 113.

<sup>67</sup> Mitchell, ‘Interview with Mark Herbert and Steve Beckett’, p. 194.

<sup>68</sup> Herbert quoted in Barker, ‘Warp Films 10<sup>th</sup>’.

<sup>69</sup> In Ian Soutar, ‘England Expects as Sheffield-shot Drama Returns to Our Screens’, *Sheffield Telegraph*, 10 September 2015, <http://www.thestar.co.uk/what-s-on/out-about/england-expects-as-sheffield-shot-tv-drama-returns-to-our-screens-1-7453811>.

<sup>70</sup> Peter White, ‘Warp strikes ITVS first-look deal’, *Broadcast*, 15 April 2013, <http://www.broadcastnow.co.uk/warp-strikes-itvs-first-look-deal/5053879.article>; our emphasis.

<sup>71</sup> See the interview included in <https://www.sky.com/watch/channel/sky-atlantic/the-last-panthers/>.

<sup>72</sup> Interview with Smith.

<sup>73</sup> See *Organizational Culture*, chapter 10, pp. 189-202.

<sup>74</sup> *Inside the BBC and CNN*, p. 202.

<sup>75</sup> Such work has been the focus of the overall project to which this analysis of RED and Warp contributes – see n. 4 above and the forthcoming collection: Eva Bakoy, Roel Puijk and

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Andrew Spicer (eds), *Creating Successful and Sustainable Film and Television Companies: A Comparative Study of Four European Countries* (Bristol: Intellect, 2017).