

# Participation

**The Film and Video Workshop  
Movement 1979 — 1991**

**VIVID, Birmingham**

**2 July — 1 August 2009**

**VIVID**

UK FILM COUNCIL  
LOTTERY FUNDED



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## INTRODUCTION

### **“Participation” by Yasmeen Baig-Clifford**

A question which arose early in the development of this exhibition and archive project was “why is the theme of ‘participation’ crucial to the investigation of the film and video workshop movement?” As an organisation which has worked with creative, intensive workshopping and lab environments over the past few years, we have several responses to this.

The first says something about process – the notion of ‘workshopping’ suggests a trying out, experimentation, a play with process. For us, this is true of the ethos out of which VIVID grew, and of the imaginative approach required of film makers working outside of the commercial mainstream. Secondly, workshop practice often has a political agenda (usually left field) of social or cultural inclusion and cultural construction. The notion of the workshop in film making could, to an extent, be compared to the theatre practices of Augusto Boal, who through his highly influential book ‘Theatre of the Oppressed’ circulated techniques which encouraged processes of interaction in theatre through dialogue and exchange, encouraging a direct and open dynamic with disenfranchised social groups. The methodology of the workshops, embracing co-operative or collective working and taking work directly out to audiences through television, festivals and screenings, training and exhibition projects, created a space where agendas could be questioned and challenged.

In the UK, the provenance of the film workshop movement preceded the 1984 ACTT Film Workshop Declaration through the activities of radical groups such as Cinema Action and the Berwick Street Collective in London who had been operating on an ad-hoc basis since the 1970s producing experimental films with social themes, such as Berwick Street Collective’s seminal 1975 film ‘The Night Cleaners’. Similarly, Amber had been working out of the North East since 1969. At the beginning of the 1980s, as Roger Shannon and Paul Long discuss in their texts, new broadcaster Channel 4, was instrumental in opening up opportunities for regional film production outside of the constraints of inflexible intergrade working practices and an absence of funding outside of the miniscule grants available through the Regional Arts Boards and the BFI. When the Conservatives under Margaret Thatcher announced their intention to develop a new channel it was very much from an angle of opposition to the entrenched and heavily unionised practices prevalent at the time. Independent production companies – especially through the Independent Film-Makers Association – and film makers began lobbying as to the form this channel might take. The IFA had been formed in 1976 to act as a voice for film makers operating outside of the mainstream broadcast structures and their remit included those working on the fringes as well as artist film makers looking to broaden their reach.

The groundbreaking agreement came about in 1984 because the ACTT, IFA, the Regional Arts Board officers and the BFI lobbied hard and Channel 4 in turn responded with imagination and commitment in making a new scale of funding available for innovative and experimental work for broadcast. As a cultural partnership, it was arguably unique worldwide. Moving image production and broadcast was opened up to a much wider group of people than had previously had a voice in broadcast media. Channel 4 went on air on 2 November 1982, and under this brief to ‘innovate’ they broadcast work previously felt unsuitable by other channels as well as commissioning new fiction material under the Commissioning Editor Alan Fountain for the Eleventh Hour experimental slot. This slot introduced new forms to television as well as embracing the work of the film workshops of which some of the best known examples are Black Audio Film Collective’s *Handsworth Songs* (1985), an exploration of memory and the roots of protest in Britain’s colonial past and Amber’s sustained series of films made with and about working class communities in the North East. At its height, Channel 4 contributed around £2 million per year to a network of 12-15 workshops – no small investment and this investment was partnered by regional arts associations, local authorities, charitable bodies and the BFI.

The workshops represented in the first part of VIVID’s exhibition had varying aims; but were collectively engaged in addressing the key issues of finding alternative means of distribution, production and exhibition outside of the established broadcasters. For the workshops, this resulted in regional and localised issues and themes being taken to a

far bigger national audience through the new platform of Channel 4, giving space to critical social themes of industrial decline, construction of second generation Black and Asian identities and the new and urgent voice of British youth.

### **Part One – The Film and Video Workshop Movement 1979-1991**

Participation is an exhibition and archive project centred on the emergence of new film forms, radical politics and practices, led by the workshops, in the 1980s. Unearthing the archives of challenging, polemical and oppositional groups operating during a period of economic and social upheaval, the works presented react to and document the rise of Thatcherism and the social and cultural events the period from 1979 engendered: inner city disturbances, the miners strike, and increasing social disparity.

Presented into two parts, Participation brings us rarely seen works from key film and video workshops and groups who operated across the UK and in this first exhibition presents key works from the organised workshop movement including Amber, Belfast Film Workshop, Birmingham Film and Video Workshop, Black Audio Film Collective, Frontroom, Sheffield Film Co-op and Sankofa.

Central to the archival element of the exhibition is the unearthing and digitization of the little known yet groundbreaking work of the Birmingham Film and Video Workshop. Discussed in more detail by Roger Shannon from his perspective as the group's Coordinator, the BFVW (originally the Birmingham Film Workshop) are notable for having produced the UK's first feature shot on video (early innovation from Jonnie Turpie, now best known for his pioneering work with Maverick) and were ahead of the industry in bringing work made in collaboration with young people to the mainstream through Channel 4. Participation - Part Two will develop key texts and a new public digital resource of moving image documents from the period 1979-1991, mixed with first hand accounts from the period, bringing together film makers for the first times in decades. It further recuperates selected works from the archives and brings these together with new narratives written about and with the former members of the BFVW and those who worked with them.

The workshops were – and still are, for some, such as Amber, still exist - motivated by a desire to effect social change, and forge new approaches to political and social themes that emerged nationally. The workshops were instrumental in bringing other voices to mainstream media - and are still impacting on mainstream practice today.

**Yasmeen Baig-Clifford**

**Director of VIVID and curator of Participation**

**June 2009**

# ESSAY

## A brave cultural experiment

by Paul Long | Birmingham School of Media | BCU

In 1982, the Association of Cinematograph, Television and Allied Technicians (ACTT, later BECTU) issued a declaration concerning the nature of film and television production in the UK. In conjunction with the British Film Institute, English Regional Arts Associations and the Welsh Arts Council, the 'Grant-Aided Workshop Production Declaration' was 'formulated to acknowledge the specific and exceptional conditions prevailing in the cultural and grant-aided sector... designed to encourage the development and growth of stability and permanent employment in this sector'.<sup>1</sup> This was the culmination of the union's campaign against casualised working conditions and low wages in the sector: in independent film this sometimes meant no wages. The declaration established and guaranteed ongoing financial support for organisations in the independent film and television production sector that worked on a non-commercial, non-profit basis.

The declaration 'franchised' ten organisations including the Sheffield Film Co-Operative, Cardiff's Chapter, Retake, Sankofa, Front Room, Trade Films in Tyneside and the Birmingham Film and Video Workshop. Most significantly, those workshops underwritten by the declaration were also guaranteed an outlet for their work on broadcast TV through the association of one other crucial supporting partner: the newly inaugurated Channel 4.

While the activities of organisations such as the Birmingham Film and Video Workshop predate this moment, as VIVID's important project will illustrate, the ACTT Declaration defined them, in part, and allowed them unprecedented breathing space until Channel 4 finally withdrew its support in 1991. However, amidst the recent celebrations of 25 years of the channel, what is noticeable is that there has been little or no acknowledgement of the existence of the workshops, let alone an appreciation of their cultural value or assessment of their legacy. For instance, there's nothing in Maggie Brown's official story of Channel 4, 'A Licence to be Different'.<sup>2</sup> Of course, this might be a pragmatic oversight; after all, as is suggested in 'Thank You', a celebratory book published by Channel 4 itself in its jubilee, and given out to all of its collaborators from over the years, there are around 3269 production companies who have supplied programmes to it.<sup>3</sup> No mention there either however.

On the other hand, these absences might suggest that there is little to recall or celebrate about the workshops. After all, many might fondly discuss the contribution of 'Brookside', or even 'The Word' or 'Max Headroom', but few have much to say about the material broadcast in the 'Eleventh Hour' slot, which regularly played host to the output of the workshops. Nonetheless, we should ask: why did the ACTT issue this declaration? Why was an intervention by a union deemed to be necessary and what were its results? What was a film and video workshop, what kinds of work did they do and why were they significant? Indeed, were they significant at all?

Some of the wider events of the period serve as index to the fractious political and social climate in which the ACTT made its declaration and amidst which the workshops emerged and played a part. Most significant I think is the election in 1979 of the Conservative Party, driven by a radical agenda. The coming of this 'new right' marked an overt challenge to the long period of post-war consensus politics and all of the hard-won entitlements that went with it. As the party's election manifesto of 1979 declared: 'the years of make-believe and false optimism are over. It is time for a new beginning'. By 1981, Prime-Minister Margaret Thatcher began to rail against those voices in her cabinet advising caution. Labelled 'wets', she marginalised traditionalists, consolidating a project of de-regulation and privatisation informed by monetarist economic policies. In the same year 'moderates' in the Labour opposition, disillusioned by militancy, broke away to form a new Social Democratic Party under the leadership of Roy Jenkins. In March 1981,

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<sup>1</sup> ACTT (1984). 'Grant-Aided Workshop Production Declaration', London: ACTT, p. 10

<sup>2</sup> Brown, Maggie (2007), 'A Licence to be Different: The Story of Channel 4', London: BFI.

<sup>3</sup> Various (2007), 'Thank You', London: Channel 4/4 Talent.

serious social fractures were signalled too in the actions of figures such as Bobby Sands and other IRA prisoners who, while incarcerated in Long-Kesh Prison (the notorious 'H-Block'), began their fatal hunger strikes as they sought special category status in recognition of what they argued was a political struggle against British rule in Northern Ireland. Throughout 1981, civil disturbances – or uprisings or riots - depending upon your perspective, scorched inner-city areas such as Brixton in London, Handsworth in Birmingham, Chapeltown in Leeds and Toxteth in Liverpool. These were suppurations of tensions between communities and a police force empowered by the hated 'sus' laws that effectively authorised the harassment of ethnic minorities.

In the following year, unemployment reached a post-war record in the UK, rising above three million – a burden worth bearing for those who wished to see market forces unleashed. In March, Argentine scrap merchants planted a flag on the island of South Georgia, an act that led inexorably to the Falklands War. The resulting conflict would translate too into confrontations between Government and its 'enemy within', namely any individual or group who sought to resist the Thatcherite project.<sup>4</sup>

Powerful unions such as the ACTT, not to mention the monolithic television companies, the BBC in particular, were the objects too of political suspicions and reformist scrutiny. One thing that the Conservative government inherited from the previous administration was the 'Annan Report' on Broadcasting in the UK (1977), the recommendations of which seemed to speak to its preferred policies. The report had proposed BBC and the ITV companies should rely less on their own in-house productions and 'buy in' more programming from independent companies. Such a move could challenge the institutional lethargy of the BBC, extending market competition while undermining restrictive union practices.

It was in this spirit that Channel 4 was conceived as a 'publisher' broadcaster and within its first few years it is estimated that alongside the workshops, more than 1000 independent production companies sprang up in response, signalling the entrepreneurial zeitgeist. Perhaps: in the resulting diversity of programming and panoply of voices clamouring for a space to be heard however, the results, initially at least were rather different from the rather anodyne consumer spree of viewing that was anticipated. In this sense the workshops were an important aspect of how Channel 4 came to give voice to the pluralism of the 1980s and countervailing social visions, many of which sat unhappily with the government that authorised it.<sup>5</sup>

Film scholar John Hill has suggested how, in spite of the growth of a primarily commercial independent sector, the term 'independent' proved to be misleading. He writes that 'In the case of the Department of Independent Film and Television [the department at Four under Alan Fountain responsible for the workshops]... however, the idea of independence was specifically linked to a tradition of social and aesthetic radicalism, outside of the mainstream of film and television production'.<sup>6</sup>

The workshop declaration was primarily a trade union agreement concerned with working conditions and rights to work produced. It allowed 'cross-grading' for workers in small organisations, i.e., individuals were able to take on different production roles without incurring the wrath of the union. It sought also to produce a model of 'integrative practice': alongside production activity, workshops were required to attend to issues of distribution, educational work and the provision of film and video equipment to those seeking access and expression. This was a vision of independence

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<sup>4</sup> For context and concise overviews of the period, see: Tiratsoo, Nick, (ed.) (1998). 'From Blitz to Blair: A New History of Britain Since 1939', London: Phoenix. Seldon, Anthony & Collings, Daniel (1999). 'Britain Under Thatcher', London: Longman. For a cultural round-up see: Friedman, Lester D (2006). 'Fires Were Started: British Cinema and Thatcherism'. London: Wallflower Press.

<sup>5</sup> For further insight, see: Harvey, Sylvia. 'Channel 4 Television: From Annan to Grade' in Hood, Stuart (ed) (1994). 'Behind the Screens: The Structure of British Broadcasting', London: Lawrence and Wishart.

<sup>6</sup> Hill, John (1999). 'British Cinema in the 1980s: Issues and Themes'. Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 57. See also, Downumt, Tony (2007). 'On the occasion of Channel 4's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary: An interview with Alan Fountain. Former Channel 4 Senior Commissioning Editor', in 'Journal of Media Practice', Vol. 8., No. 3.

motivated by a politics of social action rather than commerce, one carried over into aesthetics in 'the explicit belief and with the explicit intention of encouraging the cultural, social and political contribution made to society by the grant-aided and non-commercial production activities historically undertaken by persons and organisations in this sector'<sup>7</sup>

Although there are important antecedents, Sheila Whittaker dates the history of a coherent movement around independent filmmaking in Britain to 1974 and the formation of the Independent Film-maker's Association (IFA).<sup>8</sup> The IFA had been an influential voice in lobbying the ACTT and signatories to the workshop declaration, so gaining some ground in its attempt to establish support for organisations such as Cinema Action, which toured factories, pubs and Trade Unions, Amber Films, the Berwick Street Collective and the London Women's Film Group.

Here, the very concept of a workshop is itself worth dwelling on for a moment in order to understand the debt to the independent sector and its various ambitions. While the use of the word applied to arts and intellectual work has roots in the various activities of the co-operative and socialist movements, its modern coinage and currency can be dated to 1968 and the efflorescence of the radical cultures and organisations such as those mentioned that emerged at that time. The employment of workshop served to conjure up an artisanal, collective ideal as well as a sense of a possibility of creative labouring (thus signalling a political affiliation), of skills that can be learnt. This usage involves, on one hand, an implicit demystification of any kind of activity that has been seen historically as the preserve of an elite or a clique whose 'talent' or gifts are accepted as intuitive, natural and thus unassailable. On the other hand, the term claims such activity in the name of a purposeful collective of equals – be it the study of history, creative writing or indeed the production of film and television programmes.

The purpose of such workshop activity was to seize control of the means of production in order to intervene in and challenge habitual modes of representation. A sense of this purpose was highlighted in a valediction for the workshop movement written in 1991 by Alan Lovell. Film theorist, educator and member of the Birmingham workshop, Lovell identified two central characteristics of the movement. The first was a tendency, 'founded on a political dissatisfaction with the inadequate or inaccurate representation of the working class/oppressed groups on film and television'. The second was 'a cultural tendency founded on a dissatisfaction with, and a desire to improve, the cultural/artistic levels of the film and television industries'.<sup>9</sup> The advent of video, cheaper lightweight equipment as well as the relationship with TV enabled the workshops to build upon these tendencies.

In the same piece, Lovell, announced the ending of 'a brave cultural experiment', albeit 'without the lessons being properly analysed'<sup>10</sup>. Space precludes an analysis of the reasons for the end of the workshop agreements with Channel 4, although one should not assume that the work of the workshops themselves ended with this relationship. What the workshops produced, how they worked and deeper insights into why they did what they did and to what degree it was successful is surely for us to consider as a result of the Participation project. Through this project, I suggest that we'll learn some of the answers to the questions I asked above, as well as something of the broader context touched upon here in which the workshops played a part.

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<sup>7</sup> Quoted by Whitaker, Sheila. 'Declarations of independence' in Auty, Martin & Roddick Nick (eds) (1985). 'British Cinema Now', London: BFI, p. 87.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. For extensive contemporary coverage of IFA, the coming of Channel 4 and the workshops see the journal 'Screen' circa 1974-91.

<sup>9</sup> Lovell, Alan (1990) 'That was the workshops that was' in 'Screen', Vol.31, No.1, p. 104

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 102.

# ESSAY

## Birmingham Film and Video Workshop / BFVW

by Roger Shannon | Professor, Film & Television, Edge Hill University, Liverpool and Producer, swish Ltd, Birmingham

The Birmingham Film Workshop began in December 1979, when I took up the post of Co-ordinator. I'd recently completed an MA at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at the University of Birmingham, and had begun to attend film events in the West Midlands, mostly enabled and supported by West Midlands Arts. Not being a technically trained film maker, I saw my role as that of facilitator, enabler, and fund raiser -, part amateur, part organic intellectual. I was also obsessive about cultural politics and policies - a 'policy wonk' before that term was coined, and a vocal partisan for regional non metropolitan culture. CCCS had also given me a grounding in radical cultural theory, which I was now keen to see if I could embed it in Birmingham.

The Birmingham Arts Lab was the home for the Workshop, and for the first two years or so, while bigger plans were being hatched, I ran the Workshop much like the London Film makers Co op. That is, there was a bank of film equipment, admittedly very limited in this period, which film makers could use for 16mm films. The Film Panel at West Midlands Arts, chaired by film educationalist Alan Lovell, had agreed to fund this. Two active film makers at that time were Brian Byrne and Yugesh Walia. I had coincidentally known Bryan Byrne from our respective time in the North East, and at the Workshop he made two films, MR SKIPPER and MEDIUM SLICE OF LIFE, energetically reflecting artistic life in bohemian Moseley.

With both film makers I formed a creative bond, and a number of films emerged in the period 1980/1982, which had the effect of getting the Workshop in Birmingham noticed, especially Yugesh Walia's trilogy of films, MIRROR MIRROR; AFRICAN OASIS and SWEET CHARIOT. These films garnered a number of important film Festival invitations, to Edinburgh, Newcastle and London. They also introduced a distinct feature of the emerging Workshop ethos - that of partnership building within communities. Both SWEET CHARIOT and AFRICAN OASIS, part funded by the Arts Council, were produced in association with cultural organisations in Handsworth.

To complement such film making activities, educational and exhibition activities were embarked on to introduce to Birmingham audiences a wider diet of independent film, frequently offering up alternative histories, empowering images and politicizing aesthetics. They also injected into the public parlance ideas about film as something more than mere entertainment.

To provide guidance and advice a Steering Committee was established in 1980 composed of film makers, community activists, arts administrators, educationalists, academics, and funders, whose backing I found crucial as the Workshop's activities, and ambitions, began to reflect regional and national nuances, drawing on arguments about the nature of independent film from the BFI, the Arts Council, the IFA etc.

In the run up to the launch of Channel 4 in late 1982, the Workshop had begun to play a role regionally in the West Midlands, but also nationally with both the BFI and the film/television union, ACTT. The Workshop profile at this point also shifted, strategically, from a Co Op model to that of a Workshop model (that is, from a loose assembly of individual film makers to a small group of film makers working together on shared projects).

The IFA, ACTT and BFI all played a key role in arguing that the new television channel, Channel 4, play a significant part in supporting regionally based independent film making; and via this set of cultural alliances the notion of the 'Workshop Declaration' was formulated. From the very first days of the new Channel – Autumn 1982 – Birmingham Film and Video Workshop was annually financed to develop and produce a 'programme of work'

A number of Steering Committee members joined the Channel 4 backed Birmingham Film Workshop in 1982/83 embarking on 'programmes of work' that linked education, exhibition and production, and reflecting the core ambitions

of this growing group of film makers at the Workshop – Rob Burkitt, Carola Klein, Alan Lovell, Heather Powell, Roger Shannon, Jonnie Turpie. These programmes of work were pitched annually to both Channel 4 and the BFI and became the Workshop's creative identity and niche. The respective backgrounds of the group members were very different; not all had worked in film previously, although their involvement on the Steering Committee had made them aware of the cultural positioning of the Workshop and its place within the existing policies of the funders.

The Channel 4 finance, coupled with funding from the BFI and WMA, and backed by ACTT's negotiating muscle, enabled the Workshop to grow into a collective of film makers, working full time across a range of films and videos. With Jeremy Isaac at the helm of Channel 4, and Alan Fountain heading up Channel 4's Department of Independent Film and Video, the Workshops benefited from a deliberate policy of wanting to reflect a much broader set of cultural experiences than the duopoly of UK television had hitherto presented on the BBC and ITV.

The Workshop's output in the 1980's amounted to over 25 films, including documentaries (for example, TRACES LEFT, AFRICAN OASIS, GIRO – IS THIS THE MODERN WORLD ?, GIRL ZONE, PARADISE CIRCUS), dramas (SWEET CHARIOT, PROPERTY RITES), shorts (MEDIUM SLICE OF LIFE), feature film (OUT OF ORDER), series for television (TURN IT UP), campaigning films and tapes (PUT PEOPLE FIRST, MINERS TAPES), debates on media policy (ARE YOU BEING SERVED WELL ?, THE BLACK AND WHITE PIRATE SHOW).

BFVW's films were broadcast by Channel 4, and were also distributed theatrically by the Workshop. The films were invited to UK and international Film Festivals – London, Edinburgh, Newcastle, Berlin, Locarno, Hamburg, Sydney, New York, Frankfurt, Cologne, Copenhagen, Paris.

All were developed and produced in a spirit of collaboration and participation, involving many individuals and organizations across the city and the West Midlands. Three key themes emerged in BFVW's 'programme of work', and are represented comprehensively in its filmography of over 25 films – culture and politics; collaboration with young people; the rights of women.

The Workshop's films were umbilically linked to an integrated activity of Education and Exhibition, sometimes growing out of a programme of screenings, sometimes providing a context for collaboration and participation. For example, a series of screenings titled NEWS AND NEWSREELS, which drew on the film work of radical groups from the 1930's to the 1960's, led to research into the work of the neglected Scottish film maker and animator, Helen Biggar, whose collaboration with Norman McLaren had produced in 1936 the blistering satire of the 1930's arms race, HELL UNLTD.

BFVW research culminated in the creative documentary TRACES LEFT (1983) which portrayed the sculptor, film-maker and set designer Helen Biggar, and traced her work with Norman McLaren, the Glasgow Unity Theatre Group and the independent film production group, Glasgow Kino, amidst the political and cultural ferment of Glasgow in the 1930's and 1940's.

Collaboration with a quartet of teenagers in Telford – the Dead Honest Soul Searchers, aka DHSS – led initially to a sequence of documentaries, beginning with the home taping inquiry WHAT THEY TELLING US IT'S ILLEGAL FOR ?; later on to the production of a feature film, OUT OF ORDER, and subsequently a television series for Channel 4, TURN IT UP. This creative collaboration with young people was innovative in its application of graphics, video technology and the form of the documentary, and clearly had an influence on the direction that subsequently youth television on Channel 4 and BBC took in the 1980's.

The BFVW film PROPERTY RITES experimented with drama and documentary forms, combining both in its re telling of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Birmingham historical event – the case of Mary Ashford. The film investigated assumptions underlying common attitudes to sexual violence, and by using a mixture of fiction and documentary material unravelled a version of history, previously hidden.

The Workshop from its very beginning embarked on an educational and exhibition strategy that led to films being screened in unusual venues, linking in to audiences familiar to those places - eg Star Club in city centre Essex Street, Tindal St School in Balsall Heath, Carrs Lane Church Centre, the Birmingham Arts Lab itself in Aston, Digbeth Civic Hall, SPAM in Saltley, Handsworth Cultural Centre in Handsworth. BFVW involved itself with communities spread across Birmingham and far away from the city's traditional bohemian centres. These screenings introduced little seen films to new audiences, drawing on film traditions from Latin America, independent cinema in the USA, and the UK, India and Africa, and representing the power and impact of non mainstream cinema.

In recognition of such 'outreach' educational work the Workshop was the recipient of the first BFI Paddy Whannel Education Award in 1981, named in honour of the film educationalist, Paddy Whannel, who had been a key figure in the British Film Institute's educational work throughout the 1960's and 1970's.

The Workshop's Educational activities were influenced by the presence in the city, and at the University of Birmingham, of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies – CCCS - which under the inspirational leadership of Stuart Hall had revolutionised the understanding of popular culture and the media. The deconstruction of cultural and media forms embarked on by CCCS - news, realism, soaps, television, cinema - from Marxist and Feminist perspectives was mirrored in the wider educational ambitions of BFVW.

As it emerged across the country, the Workshop Movement represented a new type of mutual (film) society. Productions by one Workshop in one city were supported by Workshops in other cities and regions. An example of such mutuality was BFVW's assistance and contribution to the making of HANDSWORTH SONGS by Black Audio Film Collective in Birmingham in 1986. Film and Video Workshops across the whole of the UK, including BFVW, also came together to collaborate on the production of the ground breaking MINERS TAPES, which represented, and gave voice to, the striking miners, as they challenged the politics of Thatcherism in the 1980's. This pan regional experiment in factual film making received the BFI's Grierson Award for Documentary in 1984.

The Workshop Movement was not an aesthetic monolith, but represented a diversity of cultural and political approaches to film making - the campaigning films of the Sheffield Film Co- op; the Brechtian inspired Trade Films in Gateshead; the Griersonian themes in the Newcastle based Amber Films; the politics of deconstruction in Black Audio Film Collective; the attention to sexuality and masculinity in the films of Sankofa.

BFVW also played a key role in kick starting both Birmingham's wider engagement with the Creative Industries and the city's recognition of the part that the media can play in urban regeneration. BFVW conferences and events in the 1980's – on the new Channel 4; on Cable Tv; on Images of Young People; on Boys From The Black Stuff - introduced to both the Birmingham City and the West Midlands County Council pioneering strategies for regional creative economies.

The Birmingham Film and Television Festival which began in 1985 developed out of BFVW and in its debate-centred profile mirrored much of the discursive spirit of the Workshop. The Festival annually premiered and showcased UK and international cinema, drawing heavily on the city's cultural and ethnic diversity, and in its 'Media and the City' forums fostered, firstly, the growth of the UK City Film Commissions, and, subsequently, in 1989 the establishment of Birmingham's Media Development Agency (which in 2000 was folded into Screen WM, the regional screen agency).

A local legacy of BFVW lies in the attention it paid to regional media policy. With the Birmingham Film Festival and the Media Development Agency, it is possible to see in the lineages of film production, cultural expression, economic regeneration and the creation of regional media policy the paving stones for the more formal and institutional role that the UK Film Council established for the regional screen agencies, when they emerged at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## EXHIBITION

THU 02 JUL – SAT 01 AUG 2009

### **BIRMINGHAM FILM AND VIDEO WORKSHOP**

#### Yugesh Walia

##### **Mirror Mirror (1981 | 16mm | colour | 25 mins)**

Focuses on the conflicts faced by young Asian women growing up in Britain and features a single working Indian woman in her twenties, whose thoughts and recollections of conversations comprise the dialogue.

##### **African Oasis (1982 | 16mm | colour | 33 mins)**

Documentary about the activities of the Handsworth Cultural Centre in Birmingham, a community based arts project initiated and funded by the Probation Service. Features the Kokuma Dance Company and shows the operation of the music recording studio providing facilities for local reggae, disco and punk groups, and the building of an African village near the rear of the Centre.

#### Brian Byrne

##### **Mister Skipper (1981 | 16mm | colour/b&w | 8 mins)**

A breezy short featuring an interview with a local artist, Mike Skipper, who wishes to make a living by selling artefacts door to door.

#### Alan Lovell

##### **Traces Left (1983 | 16mm | colour | 20 mins)**

Set against the political and cultural ferment of Glasgow in the 1930s and '40s, the film considers the story of Helen Biggar, a sculptor who worked with Norman McLaren in making the anti-war short Hell Unltd.

##### **Are You being Served (well)? (1986 | UK | colour | 59 mins)**

Looking at the threat to the principle of public service in broadcasting as a result of cable and satellite broadcasting systems. The film considers the relation of the British Broadcasting system to the public and the degree to which it has become sensitive to government pressure.

##### **The Black and White Pirate Show (1987 | 16mm | 60 mins)**

The history of pirate radio from the Sixties to the Eighties, using archival and contemporary footage, and interviews. Explores the effect of Radio Caroline on youth culture and the BBC, and why black music stations were established in the 70's and 80's.

#### Heather Powell

##### **Paradise Circus (1988 | 16mm | colour | 62 mins)**

The design and planning of cities from a woman's point of view, focusing on Birmingham. It includes interviews with the residents of the Castle Vale housing estate, women architects and planners.

##### **Property Rites (1984 | 16mm | colour | 59 mins)**

Property Rites is an investigation into the ways in which attitudes to rape are constructed and maintained. It's starting point is an investigation into the controversy surrounding the death of Birmingham woman Mary Ashford in 1817. Cathy, the fictional central character decides to search for Mary's real identity. Described by The Guardian as an 'ingenious film'.

EXHIBITION: THU 02 JUL – SAT 01 AUG 2009

**Carola Klein**

**Girl Zone (1986 | video | colour)**

First shown on Channel 4 under the ELEVENTH HOUR:TURN IT UP series with a sub-title SPECIAL INVESTIGATORS. Documentary which uses drama, interviews and actuality footage to explore stereotyped assumptions about gender and 'what girls want'. Made by 12-15 year old girls in the West Midlands. Music track includes Madonna, Blondie, Sophia George, Janet Jackson and Fuzzbox.

**Jonnie Turpie/ Dead Honest Soul Searchers**

Produced collaboratively by Jonnie Turpie and the Dead Honest Soul Searchers (DHSS: Mandy Price, Vanessa Bradley, Anthony Campbell, Stephanie Cryan and Glyn Rowlands) and Graham Peet.

**What They telling Us it's Illegal For? (1984 | colour | 52 mins)**

A group of young people from Telford New Town examine the statement that 'Home taping is illegal' which was at the time printed on record sleeves, then investigate the official reasons for the prohibition. They speak to the British Phonographic Industry, The Tape Manufacturers Group, Island Records, David Toop (musician), Paul Weller of the Style Council, and groups of young people who use tape to compile, collect, and create their own music. First shown on Channel Four Television in the PEOPLE TO PEOPLE slot.

**Giro – Is this the modern world? (1984 | colour | 40 mins)**

Giro works again with the Dead Honest Soul Searchers to raise questions about unemployment and its effects on young people. Like **Girl Zone**, the work gives young people a space in which to counter and question assumptions made about them. In it, a group of young Midlanders set out to explore the benefit system, cross-examining a government minister, pop stars and Ken Livingstone along the way.

**Jonnie Turpie/Dead Honest Soul Searchers**

**Out of Order (1987)**

Produced and scripted collaboratively by Jonnie Turpie and the Dead Honest Soul Searchers, Graham Peet and Howard Schuman

The first feature length video to be shot for cinema release in the UK. This third collaboration between BFVW and DHSS was originated from the experiences of a group of unemployed friends in Telford, and takes a satirical look at life in Thatcher's Britain in which alienated young people clash with the police. The plot centres on a young unemployed man, Anthony, who joins the police force and the hinges on the shocked reaction of his friends – shoplifters, radio pirates and Telecom Billy (a telephone fetishist played by Pete Lee-Wilson).

'This offering from the Birmingham Film and Video Workshop gleefully rips off the good bits of TV, video and cinema techniques, and stirs them up into a tangy salmagundi of styles (...) The result doesn't say anything new about the joys of living in Thatcher's Britain, but the means by which the message is put across is both witty and wacky'. (Time Out Film Guide 1987). Soundtrack features The Smiths and Fine Young Cannibals.

EXHIBITION: THU 02 JUL – SAT 01 AUG 2009

## **POGUS CAESAR**

**Slide installation of photographs taken during and in the wake of the Handsworth disturbances, 9th - 11th September 1985.**

Birmingham film maker and photographer Pogus Caesar found himself in the centre of the riots and managed to document these images using a small camera. The stark black and white photographs provide a valuable record of the raw emotion, heartbreak and violence that unfolded during the disturbances. Within the set of images, film maker John Akomfrah is captured, beginning the filming of the work that would become the acclaimed film, 'Handsworth Songs'.

What is now known as the Handsworth Riots lasted for two days. In the aftermath, well over 1500 police officers were drafted into the area and 50 shops were either burnt or looted. Damage to property was estimated at hundreds of thousands of pounds, 35 people were injured or hospitalised, 2 people unaccounted for and tragically 2 people lost their lives.

**Oom Gallery Archive**

## **ITV**

**Excerpt from Central Lobby (Programme 061) (1984 | colour | sound | 25 mins)**

Central Lobby - a political magazine series produced by Central TV in the '80s – features a report from Birmingham where the Birmingham Film and Video Workshop is producing a series of promotional videos for striking miners. Throughout the strike the miners have been critical of the media and have decided to produce and distribute videos giving their views. These videos produced by volunteers are backed by the NUJ and ACTT trade unions. We see clips from the videos as well as their production in Birmingham. Between four and five thousand copies of these were distributed in Britain, with others, often appropriately dubbed, sent to sympathetic groups throughout Europe and in Japan, the US, and Australia. The tapes were free to the miners and the miners' wives support groups, and otherwise were rented or sold for modest fees on a sliding scale, with profits returned for further production or donated to the miners' Hardship Fund.

**Film courtesy of MACE.**

EXHIBITION: THU 02 JUL – SAT 01 AUG 2009

## **TURC VIDEO**

**Rights – Wot Rights! – excerpt (UK | video | colour | 20 mins)**

**Rights – Not Wrongs! – excerpt (UK | video | colour | 28 mins)**

**Put People First – (UK | video | colour | 12 mins)**

TURC Video was set up by Birmingham Trade Union Resource Centre in 1982 to help Trades Unions take advantage of the advent of the VCR. TURC saw the potential for easily distributed video tapes to improve communications and promote discussion; their productions aimed to be short and punchy for use at meetings and discussion groups rather than be viewed in isolation at home like a TV programme. TURC Video's first production, made with the help of BFVW, was "Put People First", a video commissioned by the union NALGO, looking at their campaign to stop the privatisation of public services. This was followed by union recruitment videos aimed at young people on government backed Youth Training Schemes (Rights – Wot Rights! And Rights – Not Wrongs!) and a video for the National Union of Journalists, The Journalist's Tale.

On these, TURC Video collaborated with Guardian cartoonist Steve Bell, who had worked on Grapevine magazine in Birmingham in the 1970's, Animation City and Bob Godfrey Studios to produce animations which were used as entertaining chapter headings in the videos.

The TURC Video approach to developing their work was pragmatic. A combination of grant aid and income from commissioned videos financed the purchase of camera and editing equipment which was then used to make campaign videos supporting union campaigns such as the Miners' and Seamen's Strikes, Anti-Apartheid and anti-deportation campaigns. Use of the equipment was also offered to other campaign groups, community groups and artists who couldn't otherwise afford access to what at the time was the dominant means of visual communications. In 1991, with the support of the Economic Development Unit of Birmingham City Council and West Midlands Arts, TURC Video joined with the community arts organisation Wide Angle and in 1992 was established as Birmingham Centre For Media Arts - now known as VIVID.

## SCREENINGS

**WEEK ONE: THU 02 – SAT 04 JUL 2009**

Friday 03 July | 6 PM | admission FREE

### **BIRMINGHAM FILM & VIDEO WORKSHOP**

To celebrate the launch of Participation, Roger Shannon will introduce a selection of films from Birmingham Film & Video Workshop.

Saturday 04 July | 2 PM | admission £5/£3

### **SANKOFA/ ISAAC JULIEN**

**Territories (UK | 1984 | video | 25 mins)**

Julien's first work for SANKOFA formulates a singular black film aesthetic. Through superimposition, voiceover and contrasting sounds, the first part of the film considers black cultural experience through carnival and conflict with a white police force; set against a second part in which Julien places us in inter-subjective space through a complex play of race, class and sexuality.

**Looking for Langston (UK | 1989 | B/W | 16mm | sound | 40 mins)**

Described by *Isaac Julien* as neither documentary nor narrative, but a meditation on the life of gay black American poet Langston Hughes, the film explores the repressed lives of similar artists in Harlem society of the 1920s and 1930s. A lush fantasy in black and white, documentary and archival footage is intercut with a dramatised narrative. The images are framed by voices reading from the poetry and essays of Hughes and others.

Opening with Julien playing the role of the dead artist in his coffin, the personal nature of the film is made explicit, establishing *Julien* as a gay black artist in his own right.

## SCREENINGS

WEEK TWO: THU 09 – SAT 11 JUL 2009

### AMBER FILMS

Amber, and particularly founder member Murray Martin, had a central role in the development of the Workshop Movement and their work has remained true to that practice ever since. The freedom that the Workshop Agreement allowed has enabled an engagement with communities and individuals that bears fruit over time, with peripheral relationships formed on one project often re-appearing as major characters in a film years later.

#### Thursday 09 July | 2 PM | admission FREE

##### **T.Dan Smith (UK | 1987 | colour | 85 mins)**

The story of the corruption of T.Dan Smith, a local boy made good turned visionary politician. Royal television Society Best network programme, 1988.

#### Friday 10 July | 2 PM | admission FREE

##### **Seacoal (UK | 1985 | 16mm | colour | 82 mins)**

Amber's first feature is an award winning film which through a combination of documentary and dramatisation tells the story about a community who make their living by gathering coal off the beach – an activity banned in 1979. Using both professional actors and local people playing themselves, the film makers portray the effects of the ban on the lives of a group of seacoalers with a vivid authenticity.

#### Saturday 11 July | 2 PM | admission £5/£3

##### **In Fading Light (UK | 1989 | 16mm | 103 mins | colour)**

A beautiful documentary influenced drama, telling the tale of the upheaval caused in a fishing village by the arrival of a young woman. Silver Medal, New York 1990.

#### **Excerpts from the Who's Next for Privatisation? (1986) and Shields Stories (1988) tapes.**

The screening will be introduced by Ellin Hare who has been a member of Amber since 1981, previously working with **Frontroom** and **Belfast Film Workshop** who made **Acceptable Levels** (also being screened in this season). Her arrival coincided with a shift in Amber's work to more ambitious drama projects and she was centrally involved in every feature film produced since then (three of which, Seacoal, T.Dan Smith and In Fading Light are being screened at VIVID). Her interest is in the particular experimental line between drama and documentary, fiction and real life, which Amber has constantly played with. Ellin will show clips from other projects worked on during the five year North Shields residency.

#### **Thursday 9 – Saturday 11 July | admission FREE**

##### **Writing In the Sand (UK | 1991 | 16mm | colour | 43 mins)**

A lyrical work composed entirely of stills, evoking the magic of a North Eastern family's day out on a windswept beach.

## SCREENINGS

**WEEK 3: THU 23 – SAT 25 JUL 2009**

**Saturday 18 July | 2 PM | admission £5/£3 | introduced by David Lawson**

### **BLACK AUDIO FILM COLLECTIVE**

Established in 1982 and dissolved in 1998, the seven-person Black Audio Film Collective (BAFC) is widely acknowledged as one of the most influential artist groups to emerge from Britain in recent years. John Akomfrah, Lina Gopaul, Avril Johnson, Reece Auguiste, Trevor Mathison, David Lawson and Edward George produced award winning film, photography, slide tape, video, installation, posters and interventions. Their first film *Handsworth Songs* won seven international awards in 1987; in 2007, they were the subject of a major retrospective 'The Ghosts of Songs' curated by The Otolith Group.

#### **Handsworth Songs (1986 | 60 mins)**

A reflexive, groundbreaking exploration of memory and the roots of protest in Britain's colonial past. Filmed in Birmingham and London in the wake of the 1985 inner city uprisings, *Handsworth Songs* was Black Audio Film Collective's first major success and led to workshop accreditation. Shown internationally at film festivals and theatrically in the UK, the film provoked a major controversy in the press on its release with extensive discussion between Salman Rushdie, Darcus Howe and Stuart Hall. Multi award-winning film, including the BFI Grierson Award 1987.

#### **Seven Songs for Malcolm X (1993 | colour/b/w | 52 mins)**

Black Audio Film Collective applied their distinctive experimental approach to form, technique and narrative in a story which considers the life and death of controversial Black American activist Malcolm X. Using interviews, dramatic reconstructions, archive film and a reading from his autobiography, the work is a multi-stranded, poetic essay shot by cinematographer Arthur Jafa, who worked with Spike Lee on *Crooklyn* (US, 1994). The reference to the number 7 has both a literal significance - the documentary is divided into seven sections - and mythic aspirations - *Malcolm X*, a seventh son, was assassinated by another seventh son, Gabriel Prosser.

SCREENINGS

WEEK 4: THU 23 – SAT 25 JUL 2009

Thursday 23 July | 2 PM | admission FREE

**SHEFFIELD FILM CO-OP**

**Jobs for the Girls (UK | 1979 | colour | 29 mins)**

Drama about a girl who becomes an apprentice motor mechanic. Funded by the equal Opportunities Commission, Manpower Services and Yorkshire Arts Association, this work looks at the pressures to conform to feminine stereotypes.

Friday 24 July | 2 PM | admission FREE

**FRONTROOM/ BELFAST FILM WORKSHOP**

**Acceptable Levels (1983 | colour | 26 mins)**

Highly regarded expose of media attitudes to the state and representation of Northern Ireland in the early 1980's. Frontroom's first film dramatises the arrival in Belfast of an English TV crew who, pursuing a documentary on 'a typical Catholic family' witness the aftermath of the death of a young girl by plastic bullet.

## SCREENINGS

WEEK 5: THU 30 JUL – SAT 01 AUG 2009

Thursday 30 July & Friday 31 July | 2 PM | admission FREE

### THE BERWICK STREET COLLECTIVE

**Nightcleaners Part 1 (UK | 1972-5 | sound | B&W | 16mm & video | 90 mins)**

Nightcleaners Part 1 was a documentary made by members of the Berwick Street Collective (Marc Karlin, Mary Kelly, James Scott and Humphry Trevelyan), about the campaign to unionize the women who cleaned office blocks at night and who were being victimized and underpaid. Intending at the outset to make a campaign film, the Collective was forced to turn to new forms in order to represent the forces at work between the cleaners, the Cleaner's Action Group and the unions - and the complex nature of the campaign itself.

"A film that places the nightcleaners' campaign within a series of broader political discussions formulated as an 'open text' which asks as many questions about its own status as a film as it does about the socio-political issues that are its subject. No engaged person should overlook its challenge" (Tony Rayns, Time Out).

"A landmark work of British political cinema and of collective and feminist film-making" - Annette Kuhn

Saturday 01 August | 2 PM | admission £5/£3

### ICO ESSENTIALS: PROTEST

*Essentials: Protest* presents iconic cine-pamphlets, cine-manifestos and film-essays that mobilised the social energies of discontent, crisis and struggle that convulsed the 20th century. Drawing upon aesthetic traditions of negation, critique and provocation, these artists use the political forms of montage, collage and appropriation to produce radical interventions. Including: Jean Vigo, Harun Farocki, Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet, Santiago Alvarez and Jorge Furtado. Curated by [The Otolith Group](#), [Kodwo Eshun](#) and [Anjalika Sagar](#). Courtesy Independent Cinema Office.

## CREDITS

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UK Film Council is the UK's lead film body, ensuring that film's economic and creative interests are properly represented in public policy, and using Lottery money and Government grant making to deliver lasting cultural and economic benefits through creativity, industry and education. For more information visit <http://www.ukfilmcouncil.org.uk>

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