

**Channel 4 and British Film Culture Conference**  
**BFI Southbank, London, 1-2 November 2012**

**Participations On and Off Screen:**

**The Birmingham Film and TV Workshop and UK Film Culture.**

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Amidst the celebrations of 25 years of Channel 4 in 2007, there was little acknowledgement of the film workshop movement of the 1980s, let alone an assessment of its cultural value, political challenge and legacy. What then were the workshops, what kinds of work did they do, why were they significant and how are we to assess them? This paper explores such questions through an examination of the practices, productions, and cultural politics of the Birmingham Film and TV Workshop (BFVW).

BFVW's output from the 1980's amounted to over 25 films, including documentaries, dramas, feature film, series for television, campaigning films and tapes and an engagement with media policy. BFVW's films were broadcast by Channel 4, were distributed theatrically and were invited to UK and international Film Festivals including, Berlin, Locarno, Hamburg, Sydney, New York, Frankfurt, Cologne, Copenhagen and Paris.

This paper draws upon research developed for the Film Council supported 'Participations' project. This exhibition and archive project uncovered oral histories and rare print material and ran at Vivid Gallery, Birmingham in July-August 2009. The paper also draws on the involvement of Roger Shannon who was an original coordinator of BFVW.

We place the BFVW in its national and regional context, its work responding directly to the social and economic fault lines of Britain. We explore the contribution of BFVW to a wider film culture and indeed its overlooked legacy in a wider creative ecology, reflecting on aspects of a pre-digital moment of

participatory film production, distribution and consumption. Overall, we suggest that the moment of the workshops has much to teach us about the changing nature of the political culture and a cultural politics of creativity that conceived of producers and audiences as citizens rather than mere consumers.