

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

In and out of the FilmFour Lab: Digital Experiments

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This paper will examine some of the ways in which digital technology has been used in the production of low-budget cinema supported by Channel 4's film-making arm, FilmFour, since 1998. In doing so the paper will consider two key areas: firstly, FilmFour's department for experimental low-budget cinema, the FilmFour lab; secondly, the relationship between FilmFour and the production company Warp Films, particularly their digital division, Warp X.

The FilmFour Lab was created in 1998 as a department within the newly-autonomous FilmFour Ltd. Its aims were to support artists in low-budget experimental work. One of the key ways in which this was done was to fund *digital* film projects. In this paper, I analyse two examples of digital filmmaking in the early 2000s supported by the FilmFour Lab - *Daybreak* (Bernard Rudden, 2000) and *My Brother Tom* (Dom Rotheroe, 2001). I seek to complicate the conception that digital technology usage represents a *de facto* 'experiment' in film form.

The head of FilmFour Lab, Robin Gutch, stepped down in 2003, and would later become the managing director of Warp X. Supported by the Low Budget Film Scheme, Warp X's stated aim was to 'harness cutting edge digital technology' in both film production and distribution. I explore some of the similarities and differences between Warp X's strategy and that of the FilmFour Lab, particularly around using digital technology for low-budget projects.

By examining the FilmFour Lab and Warp X partnership, this paper will explore how Channel 4's filmmaking arm responded to the challenge of digital change.