

Channel 4 and British Film Culture Conference

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Activism on the Airwaves: Radical Documentary on Channel 4 in the 1990s

Steve Presence, University of the West of England

Published research on aesthetically and politically radical film broadcast on Channel 4 focuses almost without exception on the Independent Film and Video Department and the work they broadcast during the 1980s, as part of *The Eleventh Hour* (1982-8) and *People to People* (1983-7) series. Implicit in this is the assumption that after the close of the decade such oppositional material virtually ceased to be broadcast on British television. In this paper I want to provide a corrective to this historical record, looking at a handful of films indicative of those broadcast as part of the channel's *Critical Eye* series (1990-4), including *The Battle of Trafalgar* (1990), *Operation Solstice* (1991) and *Proud Arabs and Texan Oilmen* (1994). While *The Eleventh Hour* and *People to People* series broke new ground in the broadcast of radical moving image work in the UK, such a focus on the achievements of the Independent Film and Video Department in the 1980s has resulted their continued and important efforts in the 1990s being overshadowed to the point of obscurity. In contrast to the critical and popular assumption that the broadcast of oppositional documentary in Britain ceased in the 1980s, I will argue that *Critical Eye* provided a platform for explicitly political documentary until well into the 1990s, and that even after the demise of the series such work continued to be produced and circulated, albeit without the major broadcast platform Channel 4 had previously provided.

Indicative bibliography

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