Rod Stoneman, 10/02/12

Rod Stoneman Rod was Deputy Commissioning Editor at Channel 4's Independent Film and Video Department, 1983–1993.

Interviewers: Justin Smith, Rachael Keene, Ieuan Franklin

JS: …Obviously you've got a sense of what our project's about. Ieuan's the post-doctoral researcher on the project, Rachael's 1 of 2 PhDs and Rachael's focus of her study is on the commissioning of independent film and video work that you were very much involved with at Channel 4, and really the scope of the study is to look at film in its broadest definition, and Channel 4 as a programmer, scheduler, broadcaster of film material and programmes about film. So we're talking to John Ellis about his *Visions* series and so on and so forth, as well. And our particular interest, which of course you yourself have written about very eloquently in a number of articles is about that extraordinary kind of moment of the way in which Channel 4 became this opportunity for a lot of diverse …grassroots…non-commercial filmmaking to reach new audiences and for a very very limited kind of period, in a way, and what the trajectory of that was. Now we have spoken to Alan Fountain some months ago now Rachael wasn't it, it was about a year ago wasn't it? We spoke to Alan and he said obviously you have to speak to Rod – but problem, Rod's in Ireland but anytime he's over you should speak to Rod so here we are…I was very interested if I can do the…turn the tables on you, and a personal anecdote, that you were at [the University of] Kent I understand – did you teach at Kent?

RS: No, no…I was an undergraduate – I did Eng Lit.

JS: Oh you were an undergraduate….right yeah, I did too.

RS: Oh really? I was in Rutherford.

JS: So was I.

RS: Same epoch, type of thing?

JS: It would have been early '80s. So you would have been working for Channel 4 by the time I graduated. But I was there when certainly Ben Brewster was there, Steve Neale was there, John Ellis was there.

RS: So Film Studies was just starting.

JS: It was just starting. Because I did English Literature…the idea of [studying film] was extraordinary…I used to go along to all the film lectures!

RS: At the point when I was there, which was 72 to 75, film wasn't a formal subject but it permeated other courses so I could actually see 5 or 6 films a week without any effort because there was the Canterbury Film Theatre, there was the Student Film Society, there was the Humanities Films, and then…certain threads. For me because I did Eng Lit as well, which I thought was a very good place, good thing to do. [RK: Yeah] Why, were you there as well?

RK: Uh no, but I did study Literature, and I think that a lot of the kind of techniques and theories can be applied to film…

RS: Totally…and actually at that point in the mid 70s largely through Stephen Bann who taught History, and History of Art… I remember a kind of epiphany with a module on new criticism and structural criticism. So even if it was being applied to literature, it was the beginning of French structuralism coming into the domain of the Anglophone academy … and because Canterbury has got many good and bad things about it, but somehow its geographical placing connects it, involves an openness to the continent. It really does feel as if…it's not so difficult to hear about new currents and new ideas taking place in Paris. And Stephen Bann was really the most brilliant and generous person to open that: "let's try to think about what we can take from semiotics". It was a very pluralist approach because semiotics connected with new criticism in literature: Richards, Leavis et al, reading texts very carefully and precisely. It wasn't such a heresy in a way.

JS: No no it was a remarkable time. Interesting also from the point of view of Channel 4, we were having this conversation earlier that …it always seemed to me there was a certain strand of an intellectual engagement, an intellectual seed-bed, if you like, that was underneath what Channel 4 was about. It's not accident, in a sense, that John went from teaching film at Kent and making *Visions*, and you know. But I think there's a deeper, broader intellectual underpinning of the project that was Channel 4.

RS: But that's wider in a way because there was a sense in which Channel 4 became a space where a dissident intelligentsia that had actually been excluded from the public space, in general actually, but specifically television…. were allowed access and so John Ellis, together with Simon Hartog and Keith Griffiths formed Large Door. Tariq Ali, together with Darcus Howe, formed Bandung…. if anything the left intelligentsia was depleted, the magazines went to waste, the conferences slowed down *because* suddenly there was a new and much more exciting, more demanding activity – to take our ideas to a public space. And actually also it paid a bit better! And I'm absolutely clear in my mind, (it was delayed 10 years for me because I went to the Irish Film Board,) but by the 1990s those people were going back into the Universities because television was no longer interested in working with them or even hearing what they had to say.

Channel 4 started by making an absolutely explicit point of welcoming a proportion, not all by any means, but a proportion of people who had worked outside television. So Liz Forgan was women's editor of the Guardian, Naomi McIntosh was an academic with the Open University. And people were explicitly seen as introducing fresh ideas to television whereas before, and I actually think, *since*, television is a career field for people, where if you get your foot in the door then you can follow some kind of 'professional' career path within it for the rest of your life. But it really isn't interested in bringing in new voices anymore…Because actually the things that we did to work within television are not so complex or difficult, you can learn them quite quickly. Certainly, commissioning is not a difficult thing to learn. There was a real sense of a kind of brave opening to other parts…especially, I remember I worked in a gallery called The Arnolfini in Bristol, and we had a session, where someone from BBC 2, someone who actually should have been at a braver end of the BBC, saying "oh we can't have your kind of films (referring to small independent

films) – on *our* television", so there was that absolute sense of possession, a public medium which was theirs. And this was enforced by a completely arguable and dubious division between the professional and unprofessional. '*We* can do it - therefore we are professionals', so that goes round in a circle and is self-fulfilling. You can't do it and you are non-professionals, we might interview you if you are lucky. I had come there via UKC, to the Slade Film School, and the Arnolfini Cinema in Bristol, and you know I felt like a very strange emigrant with a passport from the London Filmmaker's Co-op and *Screen* magazine inside the apparatus, but I wasn't alone because the place was a ferment of fresh ideas that had entered television with the Trojan Horse of Channel 4. I met someone at the IBA, you know, the regulator at the time, and they said 'It was obvious C4 was a bunch of film students conducting a revolution'. Actually I think we should have been so lucky - I don't think it was film students having a revolution *but* you know that kind of misperception came up just because we were opening British television out a bit.

I feel very strongly as soon as we go anywhere near any aspect of Channel 4 is that there's a complete mismatch, in the way that, in lots of different places, people look at Channel 4 as this entirely marvellous moment. I'm meant to be talking about *risk* in Copenhagen in June, and as soon as they saw Channel 4 on myone paragraph CV, they said 'Drop it all, and talk about early Channel 4'. And that's because they're so fascinated by what was achieved there. I'd just like to say that the 10 years experience of Channel 4 was brilliant, exhilarating, exciting….but also very frustrating and constrained because we couldn't go far enough, or fast enough, we kept on being blocked, in terms of budget, schedule, what could be achieved at that time. So whatever we wanted to do actually we ended up as completely fucking gradualists… in our experience there was not the space or the capability to push policies or programmes in as innovative a direction as the actual legislation suggested. We could have gone a lot further given half a chance! But, apart from doing things at a sensible pace, (remember Isaacs said "Different, but not that different") and the actual structure was quite inertial. So obviously I find it very strange when people look back and characterise it as achieving utopian television, where actually, we should have been able to do more. By now new generations should have been in there, pushing the project since. I put stuff in front of students at the Huston [School of Film & Digital Media] in Galway, and often they will say incredulously 'that was on television?!'

JS: Well and that was the feeling at the time, too, for somebody watching it, like myself, a student at the time, and thinking 'That was incredible, I've never seen anything like that on television before…in terms of audio-visual material, I've never seen anything like this, it's absolutely extraordinary. It's like seeing a Picasso when all you've been seeing is Constable. It was an extraordinary moment. Before we get onto the rather negative or pessimistic sense of what happened to that vision, can I ask you about…the aspiration that you and people like Alan who came from the BFI Production Board and so on, those disparate filmmakers, or makers of independent film, had for the Channel, before it started?

RS: Well, in a way the debates and developments of independent film production in the late 70s was what enabled us to begin to make a wide range of different kinds of film and put images and sounds together in different kinds of ways, to talk about it, to form an organization like the IFA which was trying to organize the sector, to have *Screen*, even though it was heavy and intimidating to some people. It was coming up

with bright ideas - *Screen* was mostly focused on classic Hollywood cinema, but its ideas could be re-deployed. And the whole project was a very open and pluralist endeavour which said there is something in common between those making very polysemic or even completely abstract and experimental films – that's legitimate and interesting and in fact there is a tradition of it. Those filmmakers can connect with others making militant and politically committed films was also completely legitimate and with its own tradition–they were even digging up strange things that left British filmmakers had done in the 1930s, …a little bit of history was coming into all this. And then there was a whole range of other films, (such as Alan would have been involved with at the British Film Institute Production Board) which would have been semi-narrative, experimenting with the politics of form…Frankly many of them are almost unwatchable if you go back to them now, but it was an attempt to say 'Can we explore radical form, have something to say, but say it in a different way?' So that project in its very variegated way *had been* established and explored, and there were workshops and there were conferences and there were screenings and I was involved in organizing the South-West film tour, because I come from Devon, where people went round half a dozen venues for a week, showed their films and discussed them with local audiences. Because in some strange political/psychotherapeutic way, an important part of the endeavour was a more *interactive context* for the film, so it wasn't just 'I'm posting you something to stick on a projector'. It was more "I'm going to introduce a film, you're going to look at it, and then we're going to talk about it." And that, even if it wasn't transposable into the television sphere, was an important part of the ethos.

But it all this adds up to saying, by the time that in 1982 a television opportunity opened, even if we hadn't realized we were prepared for it, we were in a good state to try to hit the ground running, and make best use of it. We knew what *we* wanted to do… to innovate in form and content and to extend the range of programming available on British television in the wording of the original Act. You know – they didn't have to ask twice! We were ready. I saw the CFP for the conference, if your focus is on film that's absolutely clear and fine, but by the time we went into television, that may have been the starting point but increasingly we moved into an engaged project with the various specific forms and formats of television, (a lot of which is film – short films, long films, fiction films, documentaries) but we also began to develop television magazine programmes, for example, which are not normally understood in filmic terms. Obviously I don't think we're defining film as 'stuff which has sprocket holes' you know…but we wanted to also do things which only television could do, which includes interesting scheduling, and cross-connecting programmes in television format. And I just…and you have to stop me if I'm using too much of your (…I almost said tape) digital memory chip! But I think that not only does the trajectory start in independent cinema, take the same approaches to television, but it *can* also be projected forward towards the potential of media in the digital age, at a time when television is, for better or for worse, changing dramatically at the very least, and being replaced by other formats. Look at the front page of *The Guardian* today; it's a picture of a wounded person from Homs taken from a YouTube video… that citizen journalism connects with the 'direct speech' that was integral to People to People and our approach generally.

JS: Yeah, exactly…

RS: So if we talk about the conference, having thought about it a little if I was to suggest a contribution I could make, I can do archaeological work. I mean I feel that I was in the field digging up bones for a few years, and now working in the University, I'm trying to lay them out, construct the skeleton and make sense of it. But what might actually be more interesting than that is to project forward, and ask what dimensions of the more interesting signifying practices (I'm taking a word from your book on 'Cult') of early Channel 4 might be worth considering going forward in a new epoch of digital media that we find ourselves in?

JS: I think that would be fabulous, don't you?

IF: Oh yeah.

RS: Rather than looking back completely, it might be a matter of looking forward…and I should dig out Isaacs' Edinburgh speech, to see what we could take from it that's relevant to the future as well as to the past.

JS: I think that's fabulous…our project is historical, it is archaeological but equally, as you well know, there's very pressing issues around the present funding of commercial feature film in this country, and Channel 4 and the BBC's part of that, and the BFI's part of that, now that they've taken over from the Film Council, with our lottery money. And where is the voice of…where are the ideas about that other stuff, your stuff, in this mix? Because it's not on the agenda really, I think it's a very interesting point, don't you?

RS: Well, let's think about it – apart from 'Risk' in Copenhagen, there's a big conference on television in Oregon in March, and they wanted me to introduce extracts from Channel 4, and while I'm happy to do it, I actually think it's more interesting if one is to look over one's shoulder at the past, but it should be for the precise purpose of projecting forward, to try to say how dimension of this experience might be mobilised as we think of new possibilities which include some of the lessons from history. One of the principles that guided us was 'direct speech', whether it was community access in *People to People* programmes, or it was feature films from Burkina Faso or Vietnam, we should always aim, in relative terms, to facilitate people speaking directly, instead of parachute journalists explaining what their lives mean. Sometimes it's professional filmmakers working collaboratively with mining communities in Wales, during the Miner's Strike for instance, or the gay community in *Out* or the Irish in London. There was always had to be that full sense of collaboration which meant that the finished film is realised in complete agreement with the community being represented.

JS: The voice of the people…

RS: In a way yes, in a different way direct speech can also include a fiction film from, I'd say, Latin America or Africa, because it transmits the texture of life from there. And I think digital media actually enables one to think in a much more extensive way about how direct speech can occur. And if you…this may be an obscure academic reference, but if you look into 1948 UN Declaration of Human Rights, you'll see No. 19 includes the right to "impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers". However the important question is, while anyone can go to Speaker's Corner, anyone can go on the Internet, how does one organize some social space for direct discourses? It's a process of selection and choice, there's no

way around it, but it is essential to take some direct speech into a public debate. You need to ensure social and national collectivity and a public connection at the moment of transmission, which shares an experience and encourages interaction. *The Guardian* did it because they chose a still frame from a YouTube video and put it on their front page. But how can one think that through in TV or post-TV terms is the current question, I suppose.

JS: That's very interesting, and in a way it goes back in a way to what Channel 4 was doing, in a sense it was that editorial frame um….

RS: The programming our Department did was part of the whole mix. The mixture is crucial… the colours on the '4' which spun apart on the logo, were crucially a graphic version of Isaac's absolutely correct principle at the beginning of it all: radical pluralism. If our overall approach was to be summarised I would say, it was our desire to be a strong part of the mix, being part of a pluralist approach was because, even if you had Stalinist aspirations, there is no way you're going to dominate the domain culturally or politically. You know it is difficult to get your toe in the door of the space of public representation, let alone your foot or whole body. Occasionally one has moments when one thinks we haven't got it all right, isn't it healthy to have a range of voices and versions? It's an arrogant thought I know - that in the open field, where there are a range of images and sounds, a range of voices – maybe some of *our* perspectives will come through successfully. Our perspective is aesthetic but also political, because you can go into any bar and talk to a few people and probably find, at least some quite reasonable and occasionally radical views about, the relationship between men and women, about the war in Iraq or Ireland, about the threat to the planet, about the meltdown of the economy. But you *don't* find them in the public media! There's a kind of huge disconnect between my experience of talking to most people, and what is represented as *doxa*, or common sense. We were just trying to chip away at how everything could be understood and open it up a bit to other ideas. The encounter with unexpected things like avant-garde movies on television must be seen as part of the suggestion, outrageous though it may sound to some, that there are a wider range of things that you can do in film than what you see in the commercial cinema.

JS: Aesthetic pluralism. Absolutely. Did you…I mustn't hog the questions; these guys are going to ask some questions. Did you not sense there was always going to be a kind of trade-off in bringing those things to television, despite what freedoms you might have – a) you alluded earlier to the way in which, fairly quickly, experimenting with the form of television became a preoccupation for some of those filmmakers, and inevitably so, because many of them were self-reflexive practitioners in whatever medium they were working in, so that was inevitable but b) that that trade-off, in a sense, which was about, here's some money to make your work, and here's the promise of unprecedented access to a much wider audience than you'll ever get to see your work anywhere else, against here's your ghetto in the schedule, be grateful for it. You know, you're going to be compromised, effectively, restricted in your freedom.

RS: But there's always…there's always elements of compromise involved. I came across a wonderful line, from Orson Welles actually, the other day, he said 'The lack of limitations is the enemy of art'. Which is a pretty reasonable point, especially from him!

JS: He'd know that…

RS: He'd know that, yeah, pour me another sherry! Compromise is a very pejorative word, but you could use another word, you could say effective engagement. I came into this room and we're having a conversation and therefore need to interact. I have to listen to you and see where you're at, and you're polite enough to listen to me. So you know, that times a hundred thousand is the process of the institution of a television company, there has to be some sense of the the effect of what you're transmitting, and how it will work with a mass audience or elements of an audience or a niche audience. Maybe this is why I could work inside Channel 4 without any kind of great equivocation or guilt because the possibility of interacting with an audience seemed to me to mean that, even if what you wanted to do was to play with and push at the extreme boundaries of form or politics, it was a fantastic privilege and possibility to be grasped. If there was material which was outside the parameters of 'normal' transmission, say, explicit sex or relentless violence, you had to address the issue. I have been involved in censorship but 1) it was always with the agreement of the filmmaker, (because *they* didn't need a lot of persuasion to say look it's worth it to do this, to get it on television) and 2) we would nearly always use black boxes to cover the offending element, in fact Makevejev put goldfish over the tumescent genitals in *WR* [*Mysteries of the Organism*] - this is a device which shows people what they're not seeing. You don't need to see the actual thing, to know that you're not seeing someone having sex. It's OK. It *is* an example of compromise, but it's a negotiation of engagement. Taking as much of the opportunity of being able to say what you want to say, without completely blowing it…

RK: In terms of things like scheduling, did your Department have control over where your commissions were placed in the schedule, or was that something that was under discussion with other Departments?

RS: It was always under discussion with the Scheduling Department and the hierarchy. It became more negotiable as we gently moved forward in the Channel. Our department's budget increased tenfold from 1982 - 1992 as did the hours of output, and access to earlier, more flexible places in the schedule got much better in the 10 years I was there. I mean there was a sense that might be changing again, at the point when I went to Ireland to do something different. We were doing things like *South* and *Out* and *Critical Eye*, we were getting into the schedule of the mid-evening, whereas our Department began literally at *The Eleventh Hour*, at 11pm on Monday night. We managed to hold onto that and extend outwards into more accessible parts of the evening schedule. But no commissioning department could absolutely assume they have a particular time for a new series, there was always a little bit of pushing and shoving to get in the right place in the schedule, depending on what audience you were trying to reach. Something like *Cinema from Three Continents*, a mixture of films from the South, was at 10 o'clock on Sunday nights for about 30 weeks a year. It was a fantastic place to transmit those films! I mean, how many subtitled films of any sort do you encounter on mainstream media these days? At exactly the point when people are flying planes into office blocks, we don't really have any sense of the texture of everyday life or the interaction of different generations in a Muslim country, for example! That's just one example of what's gone a long way backwards.

RK: I'm kind of intrigued by the Scheduling Department – I haven't really found any information about that yet. That's something I need to explore. I've looked at the schedule itself, but just getting a sense of what kind of power they might have wielded at the time. I get the impression that maybe now schedulers are even more powerful now than they probably were then.

RS: You would have to trace your way to a woman called Gillian Braithwaite-Exley, because she was Head of Scheduling, for most of the 10 years I was there. The scheduling department is also, an instrument, but they have real expertise about our schedule and the pattern of other television stations' schedules. If they whispered in the ear of the Head of the Factual Department, or the Chief Executive, you know "I really think we're really going to kill Friday evenings if we put *People to People* go [out] in that slot", you're not going to overturn that advice. It's a delicate thing there because they have the expertise; they're watching the other channels' strategies. But in the end control over the schedule lay with the hierarchy, John Willis, Liz Forgan, Jeremy Isaacs, Michael Grade who all took a detailed interest in it. So, to summarise, the scheduling department doesn't have a simple or direct power because they're listening to the commissioning departments, and *crucially* they're talking with the Chief Executive or Head of the overall Factual Department where we were lodged. The other aspect of this that's worth bearing in mind is that, when we spent quite a lot of money on doing a magazine programme like *The Media Show*, or *Out*, of course we would fight to put it in a strong place in the schedule, because that's what it was made for. And frankly, I don't think we had too much resistance, it was sort of 'oh yes, that's going to be a programme about the media, and it has cost a lot to make so it's got to be *viable*' – to use neutral terms – for a mid-evening slot. When it came to *Midnight Underground* – that's why we called it midnight? 'Cos one was never trying to get it in the early evening…and who would want to watch Kenneth Anger at 7 o'clock at night?

RK: Different audience…

RS: Yes and the amazing thing which is invisible as a result of the change in the television climate that's blown it all away, is that when you put difficult stuff on, quite strange films like those in *Midnight Underground*, which had a linking title sequence and was presented by Benjamin Woolley to help introduce the films to a wider audience. But it was on at midnight and got reasonable audiences.

There was one point before I left Channel 4 when I thought, somewhat mischievously, what can I do to really push the boat out, what can I show that they will really hate? I got these 3 black-and-white interviews with Jacques Lacan and I thought well no one understands Jacques Lacan, we got John Forrester from King's College to do what in the end were triple-decked subtitles (because Lacan's discourse was so complex and indeed opaque,) trying to translate what the great man had to say. And these programmes were put out at 1.30 in the morning, and, do you know what? We had 250,000 people watching them! Whether that was taxi drivers…or insomniacs I don't know, but they watched them! And that's an extraordinary multiplication of access to an intellectual provocation, frankly. So, in summary, my perception would be that if you think about it and you package it properly you can screen almost *anything...*

I remember there was an interesting moment when Eckart Stein from ZDF came to the Channel 4 Programme Review. By the way, to understand Channel 4, the Programme Review was a key moment on Thursday mornings when all the commissioning editors were in one room…they're discussing 3 programmes which are chosen from the week before, but also things are announced, policy is discussed. It's like the moment where you know the pivotal people are all in one room. The BBC could never have done a programme review meeting like that; they would have to hire a stadium. But we were a small scale operation and it was *always important* and interesting to see how any programme that other people had made, let alone our programmes, was discussed.

And Eckart Stein who commissioned *Das Kleine Fernsehspeil* for ZDF, which was like a precursor of the *Eleventh Hour*. Eckart Stein came once and he was talking about really amazing programming taking place on I think it was Dreisat [3sat], including acres of inventive filmmaking by the German filmmaker Alexander Kluge. And everyone was going "wow, and you put that on? and that too - for so many hours a week!" and…someone said, "And what's your audience?" And he said "Well, between 0.5 and 1% of the overall TV audience…" and you could see everyone sitting back in their chairs. Because you know for Channel 4 was about 6% from the get-go, and carried the notion was there's a minimum critical mass, which would be actually around 10% - by the Grade years we were getting 12% or 13%. So I mean there's a significant number of people, which is taken to be a television audience, if not you're almost… narrowcasting somehow. This is obviously way before the Internet. RK: That's really really useful…

JS: Ieuan –

IF: yeah just in relation to that, did you have evidence of reaching beyond that audience you envisaged for something like *The Eleventh Hour*? Presumably you wanted people to stumble across this in the viewing schedule, but were there phone calls and letters and things?

RS: The scale of even the early years of *The Eleventh Hour* was so much huger than the space of cinema exhibition, let alone independent cinema - that we knew what we did should be thought through, in terms of wider publics. I can give you a small example, I remember someone on *The Media Show* doing an interview, and saying BFI this and BFI that, and we had to say hold on - everyone I know intimately understands what that acronym stands for, but there are quite a lot of people out there who say 'BFI what?' - who have no reason to know. And it's absolutely crucial that we think things through…say "British Film Institute", because it's crucial that our discourse is open to a wider audience, and from the beginning the numbers would indicate…if we showed even one of Godard's films from the Dziga Vertov period, we'd be getting to a few hundred thousand. A good run of, say, *Pierrot le Fou* would still only get to about 60 or 70 thousand in cinemas.

The notion of the audience was distorted - whatever class they came from, most commissioning editors' sense of the audience ended up being heavily biased towards taxi drivers, a key and influential group, because often at Programme Review, you'd hear "I met a taxi driver who watched my Polish opera! Who liked this or hated that" Because even if they'd came from the back-streets of Birmingham, by the time they were TV execs they'd be in a cab on the way to some airport…And the

cab driver would say "Oh you work for Channel 4?". Then, so that was their disproportionate sense of the audience, and source of authentic feedback.

And another strange version of audience research, I already mentioned we'd been putting extreme experiment and visually-based, non-narrative material out through *Midnight Underground* or *Dazzling Image*, and there would often be calls in the duty log from advertising agencies, because they would have their researchers sniffing it out- "What can we look for and replicate in order to sell another commodity?" My memory of that was when I screened some scratch video done by the Luton group about John Heartfield, the photomontage artist, and they were doing a fast video montage. And the next morning there was a duty log with a researcher from Saatchi & Saatchi who wanted to get in contact with "John Heartfield". And I actually rung them back and said 'John Heartfield died about 30 years ago, and anyway he was a German Marxist who wouldn't work for you fucks anyway!'

JS: But actually there's another point there, which is the whole history of Channel 4's idents and its interstitials and all those things, which does borrow a lot [RS: Totally…] from that sensibility of mix-it-up television, which came from the avant-garde.

RK: TV interventions.

JS: And that's still there today, with all these kind of cranes and pylons, you know.

RS: That's true and I think it's…you know it's not a completely bad thing being reappropriated and used in the station's interstitials, Fincher acknowledged his redeployment of Brakhage in the title sequence of *Seven*; because the avant-garde can always do other things, you know, at greater duration or more rigorously. So even little fragmentary glimpses are part of a different graphic environment …in a way you could say it's all recuperation, but it's still good to have a more lively visual graphic sense coming through.

IF: Could I ask about the um…process of commissioning workshops because I think you wanted to have that emphasis on commissioning rather than always buying stuff in even though it was more expensive I suppose, and you do I think you mention in one of your articles that some of the workshops actually yielded editorial decisions and left that up to your Department in terms of competing ideas for projects and things like that.

RS: There's a little bit of disingenuousness about the whole workshop commissioning basis, and you might get different versions from different people, *Rashomon*-like. The workshops had developed their basis of considerable autonomy; on a long-term approach, they weren't just doing single films and then dissolving; and a regional emphasis for most of them; on a relationship with the community. And this was reflected in giving a few of them 3-year contracts, and a few of them money for equipment. But it's also true that year by year when we knew our overall budget, and then within that budget we'd separate the workshop money. We'd then meet all the workshops and we'd say what are you planning to do? Because I mean we could fund basic overheads but we couldn't put large amounts of money in anyone's hands on the basis of "let us know when you've made something". We had to know what the money would be spent on, roughly speaking, when it would be finished, how long the programme would be and whether we wanted it for the schedules. So those kind of commissioning processes frankly still

happened with autonomous regional workshops. There was some difference in that when the Miner's Strike happened, then the workshops (that had equipment which we'd funded) could react extremely quickly and easily – maybe now most filmmakers can, but in those days the workshops were unique in having the means of production and therefore being able to respond, this wasn't journalistic, but they'd be able to take on things which developed at short notice. The question of autonomy isn't quite as protected or clear cut as they would have it. And if one was talking about what's in the rough cut of a programme I wouldn't have a different relationship with them sitting in the cutting room than with any other independent. And by the way it was the same, when I worked in the Irish Film Board. The notion that you could stomp in, wearing jackboots, playing Harvey Weinstein, that's total fantasy and nonsense anyway. Because all the filmmaker has to do is to say, OK you have the legal right to do it, but you can take my name off it. I've very rarely found it difficult to say to a filmmaker well, that end is not working, what shall we do about it? And the filmmaker reacts "I absolutely refuse to touch it". Most filmmakers are trying to make the thing work and they respond if there's a rational worry about some aspects of it. And sometimes we would say, especially with feature films, let's test this. And I know there can be a sort of apprehension about testing as that's what Hollywood does., But my approach to testing was always let's *see* what people say and if there isn't a problem so much the better. If there is a consensual response saying "Great film, pity about the music", surely we all want to think about that? So it wasn't a kind of studio approach insisting on changing the ending because some exec thought so. Maybe a rather respectful, responsive relationship with filmmakers has its limitations in that there are some films which in retrospect could have been better which went on air, but I think that's a price worth paying. Sure you may not rush to commission them again immediately, but you have to say in the end, after some discussion, or even protracted discussion, in the end this film has to be the filmmaker's decision.

JS: What about that issue around that question of quality, did the IBA lean on Channel 4 about the quality television issue around the kind of…material you were commissioning?

RS: What would you mean by that, quality in what sense?

JS: Technical quality.

RS: No, actually that had not come up. I mean Channel 4 had an Archive Exemption so, if you wanted to show say Kevin Brownlow's restored *Napoleon* then no one's going to say there's too many scratches.

This is getting too anecdotal, but I'll tell you strange story about that. At one film festival I came across a film about the Barcelonan architect Gaudi, and it began with one of the only actual pictures of Gaudi himself, which was a hand-cranked, black and white, silent, shot of a man crossing the street and getting into a tram. And then it went on 'this is an interview with the priest who was his schoolteacher...', and in black and white this priest sort of sucked his pipe and said 'oh yes he was always interested in stalactites...' So it all goes on right, and I think we gave it to the Arts Department to show, when Michael Kustow was there, and it went down to telecine. And then the report comes back [which said] 'This is technically difficult. The opening shot is scratched, and the black and white is..." And I said 'Well, actually you see the whole thing is a fake. None of the material in it is authentic – it's been entirely faked,

and those filmmakers spent a long time...scratching their old ORWO film and leaving it on the floor of the cutting room so that it should look rough, so we accept". And the technical engineers said "Sure archive exemption," and it went through... So we never had technical quality programmes – as for the quality of the word 'quality'...

JS: Yeah. No no no. That's the sense in which I was referring 'cos I...

IF: I suppose with early video there was an issue, I suppose, with using formats like U-matic...

RS: We did show low-band U-matic which was normally non-broadcast quality, but it always depended on the programme. And I remember talking with the Chief Engineer, and he said actually the difference between broadcast standard formats and non-broadcast standard formats is that a broadcast camera will keep going in difficult light conditions when a domestic camera or a semi-professional camera would have given up by then, so there's limited situations where you get better quality images. Doing an interview in this room, with reasonable lighting, actually you can't tell much of a difference [between the formats]. Some people might have thought it was a technical problem when some of the filmmakers from the early days would always pan away from someone as soon as they began talking, but that was an intentional 'Brechtian' textual strategy, it was not actually a technical mistake [all laugh]!

IF: One thing Alan Fountain said in an interview that he seemed to...he said something about the Department, [that it] seemed to exist in a critical vacuum to some extent, and I think he was interpreted as talking about the fact that after a while, maybe after the Workshop Agreement, the kind of independent film sector wasn't engaging so much with the Department. And I wonder whether, was, you know, was there still a good healthy relationship there, with dialogue going on about....

RS: That's a quite complex question and I'm not sure I can answer it very coherently. I think one thing is simple and is straightforward. The context of debate around independent film, both around screenings as I mentioned, and around the sector, what it was doing, and how it was working, withered and dried up. But that was, mainly in my view, because people were busy doing other things, including making programmes. I used to work in SEFT, the Society for Education in Film & Television, and we organized several events and debates. I don't know, maybe some of the people were busier, and maybe the energy just went elsewhere. But our department would have appreciated more response and debate, even if it was - heaven forbid - critical. That would have been fine, but it just began to fade away – the magazines around independent film didn't attend to issues about independent film on television.

It's difficult to answer your question because there may be another level of relationship which changed, which are to do with...I have to use the rude word 'power', because, even if we tried not to relate to filmmakers on those terms, in the end implicitly we had access to power and to money. There would be some filmmakers, that I was very glad to be able to preserve another register of relationship, we'd be able to have a meal and we were not going to talk business. We might debate films or talk politics, but we weren't going to discuss their next commission. But, it's like talking to someone who you know is going to interview you for a job tomorrow - there's always a level of inhibition, it is slightly tricky. Within the

Department our decision-making was affecting people's lives, and at some level they're always conscious of that and I suppose that had an effect on our interaction with the sector.

Screen started off being interested in Marxism, psychoanalysis and semiotics in relation to classic [Hollywood] cinema, and just occasionally looked over John Caughie's shoulder towards television. Even more occasionally they turned their attention to independent film, but by and large never really used its intellectual scrutiny to look at what seemed to us, (because we were in the middle of it,) the most important thing going on, which was taking international cultural and political filmmaking out into a public domain. And we missed the old debates and arguments – it was non-existent.

IF: I suppose it was smaller journals like *Framework* and *Afterimage*, but they were quite precarious, they were very under-funded...

RS: Is there even one issue of *Afterimage* which dealt with what was going on in British television...?

IF: Oh, well...I was thinking more of *Framework*...

RS: That's true, *Framework* was a bit more engaged. I've done some writing for both magazines, and they have wide ranging mixtures of things, but no-one really exploring the decisive opportunity of television during that epoch or exploring how this space is different from gallery screenings or cinema screenings or educational work really. When Marc Karlin did 4 programmes on Nicaragua, they were not paid as much attention as when he did one feature length film which was shown at the ICA, it's only on one cinema screen but it's an important one, and here's the new Marc Karlin film.

We were used to a serious critical context – not too po-faced I hope, but the ideas were quite heavy and rigorous, and that never seemed to catch up with the incursion of independents on television or other dimensions of the Channel. For example personally I'm completely uninterested in sport in all its forms – but Channel 4 tried in the area of sport, to extend what we can see, just in the same way as we are doing in documentary or low budget fiction. So sport on Channel 4, as you might remember, included sumo wrestling, American football, the Tour de France [JS: horse racing] well, horse racing had been elsewhere, but it at least we introduced a much wider repertoire of sports. I've never really had a sense that anyone noticed the cultural and social implications of these innovations.

The final complaint, which you have probably heard a much stronger version from Alan – is that within those few books that actually talk about Channel 4, our Department is never there! Look at the books by Dorothy Hobson or Maggie Brown - I think we fell out of the index when they went to print! I mean this isn't egotism… [JS: its history] Yes it's history, we made a contribution to the enterprise, but - from contemporary perspectives - that seems peripheral, even invisible. It's extraordinary, a kind of erasure…

JS: I think this is why it's so important to talk to you, to talk to Alan, and to focus on your work as a part of the overall conference, and certainly in the publications that we're planning. Because it seems to me that there's one or two things that've

happened a) that it's written out of history or b) almost as badly there's the golden age, the kind of golden halo thing around it, which you sometime find academics talking about. Oh there was this brief moment when 'to be young and a card-carrying Marxist was very heaven' and so on, in television terms. Between the two of those things, there's the 'truth' whatever that is! That's most interesting to us. But how else did the work of the Department change? We've touched on *Midnight* [*Underground*] and *Eleventh Hour* let's say during the later part of the '80s. In terms of the kind of commissioning, the kind of work you were commissioning, in terms of pressures on the slot, or changing scheduling…

RS: The main things that developed were gaining extra budget and extra schedule space to push some of the strategies into magazine formats and take them to more accessible places in the schedule. There's the change from *Visions* to *The Media Show* for example, there's *Critical Eye* for angles on current issues and *Out* on gay sexuality, there's *South*, in terms of filmmaking from Africa, Asia and Latin America. And, still an incredible range of documentaries and fiction going into *the Eleventh Hour*. I think *People to People* continued but didn't expand – it had been there from the start, actually Paul Madden had been the first commissioner of *People to People* and then we took it over. Another change was the shift from the clusters and seasons of feature films like *New Cinema of Latin America*, *Africa on Africa*, *Vietnam Cinema*, when we then got a Sunday evening slot for *Cinema from Three Continents*. And so it became a place 'for people who are interested in cinema, and for people who are interested in the wider world, the whole world, there's a relevant screening late on Sunday nights', well 10 o'clock is not that late for viewing films… After I left the Channel they closed the slot down and Peter Salmon, the then Head of Factual, was heard to exclaim "World Cinema – that was the past".

RK: 'Cos in the early schedule there's quite a lot of themed seasons, particularly with cinema, across different types of cinema…did your find that there was cohesion between, say, your department's commissions and programming, and, say, film purchases on the part of Derek Hill. Were these things joined up across…?

RS: Not at all – Derek Hill just went and bought a lot of stuff independently. But when a general Channel 4 season was coming together, we would have input to it, and everyone would be contributing. It might be something wonderful and strange like the mini-season on trains and trainspotting. And Richard Kweitniowski had done a brilliant short called *Flames of Passion*, (which is the title of the film being shown within *Brief Encounter*,) a sort of gay *Brief Encounter* in black and white, and not really *about* trains although of course there are trains in it…so it went into the train season… [RK: We all know what trains mean anyway] [JS & IF laugh] Absolutely, so we can be clear about that.

John Willis was putting together a season called *Banned* a season about censorship*;* an absolutely brilliant chess move which meant we could show more very borderline material. Under the auspices of a season about censorship you could transmit films that you never could show at any other time. I remembered that Derek Hill had bought *WR*, nothing to do with us, and it had lain there as everyone thought it couldn't be shown on television. But I went down to the basement, got it out, rang up Dusan Makevejev and he put goldfish over the explicit images of genitalia. And then I commissioned Simon Hartog to make a half-hour programme interviewing him that went in front of it, so it all came together in the context of the *Banned* season.

But there's another story in *Banned* – when I saw John Willis' original schedule, there was a little film called *Death of a Terrorist*, and it was a half-hour programme made by Canadian television, interviewing Mairead Farrell, who was, (I'm using neutral language here,) one of the members of the IRA active service unit shot on Gibraltar. And I said to John, "This the most gross hypocrisy, because this half-hour is made from an interview that the Derry Workshop did for *Mother Ireland*, the film the Channel 4 Board (that viewed the entire programme) wouldn't let us screen; if you're talking about what's banned you ought to show what was banned within Channel 4. Also we shouldn't have to pay for the purchase of a foreign programme interviewing Mairead Farrell because we've already got it in a much more intelligent programme about Republicanism and Feminism made by one of our workshops. And he had the grace to say, "Yes good point". So anyway *Mother Ireland* was eventually shown and, guess what - nothing happened. We put it on television, and there wasn't an immediate uprising on the streets. [RS note - I wrote the detailed story in a short piece for an encyclopaedia on censorship about *Mother Ireland* or in *Seeing is Believing: The Politics of the Visual*].

I think that Derek Hill was buying before the Channel was on air…maybe in the early years but then there was a purchasing department. Maybe he was a sort of stringer for that.

JS: Do you know what happened to Derek Hill? Is he still alive?

RS: No, that's what I wondered…

RK: He's really mysterious…

JS: He's this mysterious figure…

RK: No-one seems to know what happened to him…

RS: Maybe part of that mystery, is the strangest thing that happened, when he was doing this extraordinary work, someone who'd been involved in film distribution, being given a relatively limitless chequebook to acquire the cornucopia of wonderful films that had never been on television. And somehow he went off the radar in a festival in India, and I believe he had some kind of a breakdown had to be calmed down and brought back. And I guess he was fine again afterwards but...

RK: Oh that's interesting, because they're, his papers are at the BFI, they haven't been catalogued, they're not on the...they're not listed. But I've been looking through them, and you know there's lots of really great stuff, but there's lots of letters and telegrams saying 'I hope you're better now' or 'I hope you've recovered' but no-one actually says [from what]. So that must have been then.

RS: That's fascinating.

RK: Fascinating papers, but I really want to know what happened in the end....

RS: Perhaps it's like saying to any one of us: "eat and drink anything you want". OK for the first few marvellous bottles and the first few delicious plates; but then what do you do? Perhaps it's too overwhelming and you can't go on, and he was buying so much good stuff, maybe suddenly it all got too much.

RK: I get the impression he was just doing so much as well because he had his own projects mixed in. [RS: That's right, that's it...] He literally has festival files from practically every international [film] festival every year, so it seems he was constantly attending things, he knew everyone, obviously really really busy.

RS: That's interesting. I wonder where he went from there. It's like Michele Breton, the French girl who played Lucy in *Performance*, what happened to her?

JS: Indeed. What did happen to her?

RS: Well she's not the Colin McCabe's BFI Classics book, but there's a strange story in the other book by Mick Brown, with all the sections in alphabetical order, on *Performance*. JS: I can't remember that (!)

RS: OK well actually it's quite cultish...it has a section on her, that she went to Afghanistan and India, had serious addiction problems, but eventually went back to live in Berlin and she said that she had thrown her life away... ....

JS: ...But yes these things....I mean talk about burn-out, and these sort of individuals at 4 ploughing their kind of lone furrows or personal passions, I mean Chris Griffin-Beale, another figure in that ilk. And I mean we've...part of the project is to digitize the whole back-run of the weekly Press Information Packs that Chris Griffin-Beale and his office produced [RS: Excellent], which we're doing in partnership with the British Universities Film & Video Council. They're putting it on a website, with the blessing of Channel 4, and they've provided us with a tremendous resource for interrogating the schedule and so on...

RS: Chris was a brilliant guy, one of those people who really always presented himself with a sort of unkempt look, with little stubs of cigars. But he did such excellent work – knew how to play the press and wanted to get provocative programmes out...a bit like Don Christopher, who was one of Channel 4's bravest lawyers. Some media lawyers are like the sort of parody of a trade unionist – 'The answer's no - what's your question?' [RK & JS laugh] But Don wanted to find ways to transmit risky films. I brought back Godard's *Histoire(s) du Cinema* – Godard's sitting there, in Rolle, with VHS's of every film he wanted to show he had completely ripped off hundreds of sequences with no copyright clearance. And I asked Don "Can we get this on?" And he said 'Hmmm yeah maybe we can use fair dealing - the right to quote for the purposes of criticism?' and pushed it through. Chris was [also] like that.

Actually your talking about digitizing, has made me think of something which...we'd have to put on a future agenda, I'm not ready for it now. But down in Torquay, in the basement in Devon, I have 3 or 4 cardboard boxes of all the most interesting memos from my time in Channel 4, of *all the stuff that needs an asbestos box to contain it*. At some point this should be given to a researcher so at some point maybe, not for this current project, but if you're in the long term interested in that dimension of stuff.... [JS: We are...] it ought to be looked at and thought about.

JS: Yeah. Well that's very very interesting, we certainly would [be interested]...Our funders, the Arts and Humanities Research Council operate this kind of 'follow-on funding', they call it. So if you do well the first time you get to ask for some more please.

RK: An extension of the project, which would make absolute sense.

JS: Interestingly, there's a similar thing around Chris Griffin-Beale – he kept a diary, which his widow has. [RS: Oh right...] And we're very keen to chat to her, because I think that would make a very...but anyway that's another story. We're going to dedicate the digital archive to his memory. [RS: Great, lovely]. Yeah he was an interesting character. Ieuan, go on.

IF: Oh I was just going to add that there's other kind of uncatalogued things, like the...John Ellis has got some papers about *Visions*.

RK: Oh yes we're going to start working through those soon which should be good. Obviously we've interviewed John, and I've been watching all the *Visions* episodes. That's another one of those things, that I mean, he unashamedly has said, we made it for people like us, you know people who were interested in screen theory, academics...there wasn't a sense of really...trying to aim it at a wider audience. You know it was very much influenced by academic discourse of the time.

RS: It's certainly influenced by academic discourse at this time, but I think I would dispute that it was particularly influenced by academic discourse at the time it was made. Knowing Simon Hartog and Keith Griffiths (the other two producers with John) that would not be the case. Also he was commissioned by people who were anxious to get an intelligent programme on cinema to a non academic audience that was not interested in screen theory – this may be a rationale after the event! We knew who was doing it in Large Door, and it was not theoretical or solipsistic [RK: No].

I made a programme for Large Door called *Italy: the Image Business* in 1984, basically it was about Italian cinema at the moment when television destroyed it, they didn't know what was coming because Berlusconi hadn't turned up yet, but private television was making an incursion into the three RAI stations. And the last 20 minutes of the programme is one of the last interviews with Sergio Leone, he'd just made *Once Upon a Time in America*. [RK: I've seen that one actually...] I could make that because I was a freelance half-time consultant at Channel 4 at the very beginning, and could still make a programme outside. But then obviously when I became full-time I couldn't be on both sides of the table. So my feeling is, both as a one-off programme maker, and as a Channel 4 commissioner, that I don't accept that Large Door [*Visions*] was made "just for ourselves", it was for *an audience*.

At the...BFI Channel 4 [25th] anniversary conference, what was most disappointing about that was that, despite being held in NFT1, it was entirely confined to a predictable university format of parallel sessions and keynotes by, with and from academics – a missed opportunity when they could have involved a wider group of filmmakers, critics, *members of the public* ...?

JS: It was the catalyst for me, for this investigation, because I couldn't believe that film was so written out of that event...it was the missing piece.

RS: Completely...It was such a missed opportunity because there are some conferences on [say] Deleuze and Documentary which are [always] going to be part of the academic industry. But when there is a conference which can open out, that's an opportunity that should be taken - isn't that what we always wanted to do?

But what I was also going to say about the Channel 4 anniversary event, John seemed to say that Channel 4 had made a contribution to television, which ingested

it and went on all the better for it. Well obviously that is not quite my perspective, I think we were beginning to make a significant contribution and we should have been able to extend and catalyze change more and more and that just wasn't allowed to happen; so that makes me a little bitter and twisted of course. Secondly, there was a young woman, Hannah Andrews, who did a conference report for *Screen*, and she described my plenary session talking about our department and showing clips as '...and Rod Stoneman did this that and the other which was interesting, but adds up to nostalgia.' And I very much reject that, not because it's critical but because, nostalgia is a kind of redundant love for the past as the past, whereas the politique has to be about the possibilities of doing things differently now and in the future. And I'm not in the heritage trade!

JS: Precisely. Yeah. And that's precisely that other fictional view that it was a golden age, and there it was, and that it was this thing in the past that we can all look back at lovingly.

RS: I'm completely uninterested in that. It was not experienced as a fully formed golden age at the time and there is no basis for nostalgia now.

JS: There was an awful lot of that...atmosphere in the air...and if we can go back to the cult perspective, it's because a lot of people like me, who were young or were students at the time, and were watching it, and were growing up with this stuff, and had never seen film like it before. And....you know and were tremendously excited and we'd never seen the like of it again, and that's why people get nostalgic, but we can't afford to be subjective...and sentimental about that, we've got to look at why it can't exist anymore, and how it might exist [again] and the other things you were talking about.

RS: Yes we'll talk more about that and we'll talk more about the notion of opening that out taking it forward or to doing things differently in the current situation which is a very different landscape indeed.

JS: I really like that...can we ask you to go back to that, the kind of how did it all fall apart, or how was that opportunity missed or lost or attenuated and sort of the last part of your phase at 4, and why you went to Ireland?

RS: OK well I went to Ireland because, Channel 4, like any job, takes a few years to roughly get the hang of it and then you get used to it and then at some point you're treading water. Perhaps it's something of a 10 year cycle. And after 10 years I came to the point where there was a sense of the climate closing in and I needed to do something different? And also Britain in the 80s and early 90s that was an arctic epoch of Thatcher and Major and all their works. The usual mixture of the personal and historical!

But in television terms, I would account for the erosion and the gradual seeping away of all the best bravest aspects of the Channel 4 initiative as really the result of a large scale cultural and political climate change, a movement in the social formation without being too historical materialist – because I was never a card-carrying Marxist and am not now, actually maybe *now* is the time to become one – but I would say that there are 2 factors: the release of aggressively commercial multi-channel television which gradually forced public service television onto the back foot. Satellite and cable getting their act together - "57 channels and nothing on" as Bruce

Springsteen put it and making more money faster. This meant people began to get more timid and eventually a retreat turned into a rout. I met Michael Jackson at the Cannes Film Festival in the mid-90s, and he was there in the carefully-torn jeans that rich people tend to wear. And he said nervously, "Oh it's not like when you were at Channel 4 Rod, it's very tough now" and you could see the stress on the guy, already by '96 or '98 he was watching the audience figures and feeling under pressure, and making different kinds of decision as a result of that. At the same festival Film on Four operatives explained to me that they tended to work afternoons and evenings - "so they could be on the phone to LA". O tempora O mores!

The changing and increasingly competitive television situation – not just Channel 4 - gradually shoved public service television backwards. I also think that there's a kind of major political context, which follows the fall of the [Berlin] Wall in '89 and the end of the Cold War, there were lots of areas of British society, including education and health, which suddenly found *themselves* being pushed backwards because there was no big challenge to the notion of an unconstrained free-market neoliberal version of capitalism. There may be a few layers of this overdetermination. I think a lot of people who want a simple and Manichean explanation would tend to say, when Channel 4 began to sell its own advertising - *that* was the end.

I disagree with that, because I actually think it was a much more complex, slow process, and it was not like saying this was the simple mechanism which changed us. Also people tend to project a very negative picture of Michael Grade... there a various views... Of course he's been everywhere in television, of course he's a denizen of light entertainment, it follows in the family.... But my direct sense of him was that he's a public service broadcaster, he didn't want to spend a lot of time talking about it every day of the week, but he supported our work within the mix of the Channel. In fact Alan would tell you that he gave us better spaces in the schedule than Jeremy did, actually. I mean if anyone sold the pass, as they say in Ireland, that would be Michael Jackson, and even then I can understand his motives a bit. He was afraid that multicoloured pluralism is not viable or marketable in a multichannel situation and so he thought "We're gonna have to form a simpler brand, we're gonna be a youth brand". Well, I wouldn't and couldn't support that to my dying day, but I can see a certain logic. I mean it's not a kind of whim, to say that we need to be less mixed and contradictory, we need to be a more simple recognisable thing. I would have perhaps thought about another version of branding, but I think that Jackson was the decisive turning-point, and his era was the decisive change in the identity and aims of Channel 4.

JS: That's very interesting actually, because the shift to the multichannel environment in which we now live. One of the things that John Ellis said to us...we asked the question, *Voices* was such an extraordinary, intelligent magazine programme about film, do you see the current provision in that area on television as being entirely a kind of return to Barry Norman on the sofa kind of film criticism. And he said, no multichannel television has given us Mark Cousin's epic *Story of Film*. And there may be a glimmer of light there, in that if we've got to have a brand identity, we might have a channel that could do something else.

RS: And maybe as bandwidth allows we're heading for a global version of niche television, where people in Birmingham and Bogota and Melbourne can all watch *Visions*, actually, you said *Voices*, but *Voices* was also an interesting programme.

But an innovative programme that extended the boundaries of the talk show. I think that's a good point about Mark Cousin's work on BBC4.

I've never watched any BBC4 but everyone says it's the last place in British television which comes close to the work that Channel 4 was doing. But obviously it's also trapped a tiny, a much smaller audience and much smaller budgets. I saw Mark filming interviews with Gaston Kaboré at the FESPACO Film Festival in Ouagadougou. they set up and filmed him talking to Gaston while I was there with a group of African students doing a newsreel workshop during the festival, and apparently I got into the shot! But the crew for the interview was just John Archer, ex-BBC Scotland, and Mark...but basically 2 people. If *Visions* had done that, they would have had, a small but a viable crew, they would have had, at least 4, maybe 5 people going there to set it up, to fix it and film it, and someone to research and another to direct it. They would have been paid properly to do it properly, and fair play to Mark and John, achieving what they did – but they could achieve better production values with better resources.

JS: Channel 4 had a long history of film, well a relationship with Irish film, was there any link between that and the job that you went to?

RS: Not much, Jeremy Isaacs had done that series on the Troubles, he had a better sense of Irish culture and Ireland overall, and you know he appointed John Ranelagh, who was a commissioning editor for the bizarre combination of Science, Business and Ireland in early Channel 4. An ex-Tory party researcher who was alleged to have a close working relationship with the CIA. I looked after the workshops that our Department funded in Belfast and Derry, but there was no other connection. And I guess that the films that...actually the BFI had done films like *Maeve* with Pat Murphy and some films with Joe Comerford so there were, you know interesting films coming through from that nearby island.

JS: Yeah, I 'spose I was thinking of the kind of Neil Jordan phenomenon.

RS: Well he was supported by Film on Four and had a brilliant success with *The Crying Game*, and that actually was part of the background which led to the Irish Film Board being reconstituted, which led to a job ad in *The Guardian*, and led to me going to Galway.

JS: So there was a connection!

RS: Yeah.