

Roger Shannon, 23/07/11

Roger Shannon was the co-ordinator and a founder member of Birmingham Film and Video Workshop. He also produced a number of their films.

Interviewer: Ieuan Franklin.

[BFVW or BF&VW – Birmingham Film and Video Workshop

CCCS – Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies]

IF: Yeah, so, the project is about C4's support for low-budget film, which of course includes the workshop movement. So maybe we could start with talking about the kind of origins of that...

RS: Origins in Birmingham?

IF: In Birmingham. The Birmingham Arts Lab and things like that...

RS: The Birmingham Arts Lab was a mixture of all different types of art activities, and there was a cinema there, which was a very well-regarded independent arts cinema. Um there was also some filmmaking there, which went under the name of Birmingham Film Co-op, and that was in line with a number of other film co-operatives around the country and effectively the co-ops were usually um based around a bank of equipment you know an editing bench maybe a camera maybe some sound recording equipment. And then independent, individual filmmakers would use that material to make their own films. At the time there were various strands of independent filmmaking. Not very narrative based and not, in a sense, very documentary based but they were perhaps described as structuralist filmmakers or filmmakers who were playing with the physical materiality of film, as such. Often with small grants from the Arts Council or from the branch of the Arts Council in Birmingham, which was [called] West Midlands Arts. And um in 1979 I responded to an ad that was in the papers for someone to co-ordinate, be the co-ordinator for a new project which was called Birmingham Film Workshop, and that idea seemed to emanate from developments at both local level and national level. The national level was the growing influence of the Independent Filmmakers Association, which was a broad political and cultural organization which not only had filmmakers in it but academics, exhibitors and policy makers. And that operated nationally. It also was beginning to have regional groupings as well. And I think some impact on the policy at the BFI. At another level the West Midlands Arts had quite a good film officer there, Frank Challenger. And also as one of the advisers to him he had recruited Alan Lovell, and Alan Lovell was a veteran of cultural politics of the 50s associated with the New Left, Stuart Hall, Raymond Williams etc. and also of the you know discussions about independent film which were raging at Screen conferences in Edinburgh in the early to mid 70s I think? You know what was the right position on avant-garde cultural politics. You know, was it a formalist tilt or a more content-led tilt? Which, you know, were the arguments.

So Alan was appointed to the film panel, and I think was more interested in trying to create a climate where a more politically engaged filmmaking could emerge. And the idea of a film workshop was a notion that in a sense was sort of antithetical to a loosely formed co-op, it was more a sense of collaboration, working together, collective endeavour. Rather than, you know, an individual filmmaker on his own, a sort of version of the artist in the garret kind of notion. So I went in as co-ordinator. I'd just completed a Masters degree at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham under Stuart Hall, and one of the areas that I'd done a bit of work on in the dissertations was the Grierson documentary film movement of the 30s, and also the workers newsreel, and the oppositional filmmaking tradition there. So this idea appealed to me. Interestingly they weren't interested in appointing a filmmaker, they were interested in appointing a kind of amateur, cultural policy person rather than...I mean I'm not a filmmaker, I'm a film producer...so I took the position on, and it was based at the Arts Lab and then the Workshop began from there. And Channel 4 began in 1982 so we had 3 years where we um kind of created a particular momentum, and the momentum was really built around a number of things. One of them was encouraging filmmakers like Yugesh Walia, who was an Asian at the time young filmmaker, and the Workshop really helped him with 3 films, which were about the black and Asian experience in Birmingham – *Mirror Mirror*, *Sweet Chariot* and *African Oasis*. And some other people from around the Co-op may have worked on the films, people like Brian Byrne and others. And the other thing we did was, we began a series of kind of public events or discussions to sort of raise the ante in kind of...and picked up what was going on in places around the country.

So we would run sort of themed film seasons at the Art Lab, or run them over weekends where we were picking up on things about news and documentation, and include films that were from the 30s which were reflective of that [view], and other examples of current independent filmmakers from around the country who would come and show their films. There was quite a lot of interesting filmmakers who had come out of the Royal College of Art in the mid 70s under the tutelage of Stuart Hood, who was a Professor of Film and Television there. They were very Brechtian, very Godardian in influence, and in a way were trying to create a kind of Godardian cinema in the UK. So you'd have Jan Worth, Frank Abbott, Geoff Baggott, Alan Fountain...associated with that kind of thing as well, I don't know whether Alan had been there. But there was a group of them, and they kind of got dotted around the country, and started to develop those projects. Quite a big influence on Birmingham for me was the Amber crowd, Amber Films, who I had known previously when I...after doing my first degree at Teesside Polytechnic I lived and worked in Newcastle for a year, and I got to know the Amber people. I knew Murray from '76 or probably earlier – he used to come down to Teesside Art College and teach a day a week at the Art College, and I got to know them then. I kind of knew their approach, and I quite liked the work they were doing about documenting the working-class culture in the North East. And the other thing that we established was a steering group, which was a sort of mix of filmmakers, academics, that kind of thing. And on that you had people like Charlotte Brunsdon, who had been a colleague of mine at CCCS, Trevor Boden, who was helping to set up a Film & TV course at West Midlands College where Dick Hebdige was a teacher um...So there was quite an influence of the sort of cultural studies ideas as well, in the mix. And some other people were on that steering committee you know – I mean somewhere I've got a list of them. It was a debate-centred approach. So um and then as a Workshop we

began to get involved with the national discussions within the IFA and a kind of notion of a workshop unit or model was emerging and people like Jonathan Curling and Fizzy Oppé and a couple of others were writing papers principally to lobby the BFI to begin to fund regions in that way. And they were also beginning to get a presence on the BFI Production Board. And also in the run-up to the set-up of Channel 4, the IFA was quite influential in lobbying for a space on the Channel. But the workshop model was very much something that the IFA was discussing, and at times it revealed splits in terms of the orientation of, should it be open for everybody in a particular kind of setting, or should it be a small group of people. And in the end the idea was that it would be a small group of people rather than a loose affiliation. I think in some parts of the country they might have run it as a loose affiliation but in Birmingham we ran it as quite a tight group and I think others did as well.

But the 2 things that were argued in the Workshop kind of policy papers from that time...I may even have them...in the attic...was um um sorry - the union [ACTT] were very influential as well, and that's often neglected. But the union under Roy Lockett's help, Roy Lockett was the Deputy General Secretary. The issue about the union at the time was that you couldn't you know get a job unless you had a union card, and you couldn't get a union card until you had a job. And it was kind of you know if you were in Birmingham and you had a union card you could get jobs in TV, and you could be there for a long time. But if you were trying to make unusual films, or make a feature film or a documentary you couldn't unless the union were involved and gave it a particular accord and put their blessing on it. The good thing about the union in their support for the workshops was that in a workshop setting they were happy to see cross-grading to take place, which meant that if you went out on a film shoot, you might have researched the idea but at the same time on the shoot you could swing the boom or be camera assistant. All these things were never possible on traditional filmmaking commissions, films or TV programmes. It kind of freed up the kind of quite solidified craft elements. At the same time the union were happy to see that copyright was vested collectively within a workshop. These things were quite important because it meant that um the practice of a workshop when they got to the point where Channel 4 got involved, the argument at Channel 4 was that as a workshop you are giving this workshop an amount of money and we negotiated it so that we offered to Channel 4 a programme of work. And the programme of work would include - well, depending on where you were (which workshop) - but for us in Birmingham the programme of work was a strand of exhibition and educational activity. Um a strand of um research and um developmental work around areas to do with young people, to do with media and politics, to do with women and film. I had hoped that Yugesh would become a member of the workshop, but he decided to go into his own company. And therefore we would have included issues around race. So in some sense we were a kind of emblematic, kind of politically-focused cultural unit at the time, with issues like women, the media etc. Other workshops were more...were defined in different ways, so you had women's' workshops, you had animation workshops, you had Amber with their very um I would say Griersonian approach. But in Newcastle you had Trade, and Trade were very much a kind of you know kind of...Straub-Huillet, kind of Marxist filmmakers which took the avant-garde notion to a particular extreme of aesthetics. So they were very different from Amber, even though they were you know, both sides of the Tyne.

So um with the steering group supporting certain kind of developments, and an emerging reputation with films that Yugesh had been making, and a reputation for

having kind of public debates in Birmingham, we were able to get ourselves singled out as one of the key workshops that were originally funded by the BFI and Channel 4. And I think in fact Birmingham was a signatory to the declaration along with about 8 or 9 others. The Union was a signatory, the BFI was, Channel 4 was, and I think the Arts Council was as well. The Workshop Declaration was a magnificent piece of cultural brokering and policy-making, and in many ways prefigures what is the situation now, because if you're in a production company making films, you know, if you're making the tea you may end up swinging the boom. That's how it works now. The internal division of labour is not segmented and hierarchical, on craft patterns. It's based on the impact of the technology, different types of skills, multi-tasking, multi-skilling etc. Fluidity, response, instead of a kind of stodgy um...But you know the Union played a role in taking something up that led to that. It's quite significant. And so Birmingham [Film and Video Workshop] began in '82 with funding from Channel 4 for a programme of work, and throughout the 80s till 1990 I think - there was a demise in the end, which I think Alan Lovell documents somewhere in Screen. The key individuals who came in from December '79 until sometime in 1982 there was just myself...a number of people on the steering committee became paid members of the Workshop, and that was Alan Lovell, Rob Burkitt, Heather Powell, Carol Klein, Jonnie Turpie and myself. Interestingly Rob Burkitt had been at the CCCS as well, with me, and became a kind of kind of media researcher, looking for angles on films which were to do with media and cultural politics. Alan Lovell had his own background in independent cinema anyway, um Jonnie Turpie had come to Birmingham...to um Wolverhampton Poly to be a fellow there, he'd been at the RCA. And he was interested in moving from doing graphic stuff, posters and photography and design into trying to make that work into a moving image...to use video and to work with young people. And Heather Powell had been on the steering committee and she was a Birmingham woman who'd been trained as a jeweller, and she wanted to get into film so she kind of came in through that way. She made...they all then had film projects, which we then all worked on, under those kind of strands in a sense. So that's why we ended up with a series of films that Jonnie Turpie took on, took under his wing, and developed them in particular ways. Then so did Rob Burkitt, Alan Lovell and Heather. I kept a sort of coordinating role alongside all of them. I didn't have a particular, that's my strand, or whatever. But everyone got involved, and crewed when they got made. And then we brought in other people as needs be. Because you can't all be immediate experts in camera...Some Workshops were fully functioning, technically competent units, and at the same time could direct and produce. That's mostly where you have a group of filmmakers who come together at College. Black Audio were like that, Sankofa were, and Amber were - they'd come out of Uni together, started to bond, and created...Whereas in Birmingham it was more a case of um you know kind of almost like selecting people for particular strands of development, in a way. So every year then we were funded to um produce a programme of work which included a number of films. Although not specified in advance as you would if you were a production company. The interesting thing about the programme of work that Channel 4 commissioned was that, if, out of that programme of work, a film or films were produced, the Channel had to then buy the licence. So what they gave you in advance as a programme of work wasn't...by the licence [?] ...So I mean if you're a production company you get a gig off Channel 4 now, and even then, even then an independent production company getting a commission to make a programme, you would get 50k to make the programme and um by doing that Channel 4 would own it. And then they could transmit it, however

many times. Now we might get every year 150-200 thousand from Channel 4 to do a programme of work. Now in some cases that didn't lead to films. I mean we always produced a number of films a year. Some workshops might not produce a film from that, from the argument that what they were doing with that money was creating the environment from which films might come. But that money wasn't considered part of the purchase of the programme, so Channel 4 then had to buy the licence. I mean, not an enormous amount of money in terms of what they were putting in. And Jeremy Isaacs, who was the Chief Exec of Channel 4 was rock solid behind the idea of having this flotilla of workshops around the country as a contribution to a growing sense of you know independent cinema in the UK. [IF: He took it seriously...] Yeah.

IF: Yeah. That's very interesting. Maybe we could talk a little bit about video. Because it seems that the Birmingham workshop was maybe the workshop that kind of got started with video from the word go in a way.

RS: Yeah I mean we changed the name to incorporate video after....probably in '83 or '84 whereas previously it had been film, everything had been shot on film. We had a French Éclair camera. Actually the camera that Black Audio shot *Handsworth Songs* on! Because when they were making that film they borrowed a lot of the equipment. The video impetus was primarily I think through Jonnie Turpie's interest. And um he was shooting on you know on U-matic then but increasing the technical proficiency all the way. So um when new technical advances came in with video he would incorporate them in his work. But he was really the one who drove that. It's interesting, I mean one of the criticisms of the workshop films and the period of the workshop is that often...and one reason Vivid went back to, in a sense, reclaim the Birmingham Film and Video Workshop was that often in the histories of the workshop movement it's generally those workshops that are primarily film which are remembered. And also those that might have had a relationship to film releases and film festivals. So Black Audio were often singled out, Amber were as well, and one or two others. And often Birmingham isn't. Um so when Vivid decided to reclaim it we had a long discussion about this, and 2 or 3 of the themes that came through about this was, as you say, we had a strong video element. Now that's often not what people assumed workshops were about. Except I have to say that because of the way video is, and was at the time, it was one of the ways you could be a collaborator more effectively than probably film. [IF: In editing particularly]. Yeah, it's often a very collaborative process. And also, video was also something that, at the time, didn't lend itself to feature film. Except we did do a feature film in 1985, called *Out of Order*, but often it wasn't [associated with feature films] - it was often connected and associated [instead] with television. And so in some of the histories, some of the significant work we were doing isn't reflected on. I think it was the work with young people, and video work, that uh in hindsight, characterises the most innovative work of the workshop...in my view. Um because it generally was used as a way of developing a new way of trying to work with young people, and then incorporate in that work both aspects of collaboration mostly associated with I would say a kind of youth and community work, outreach etc. But then infused with something that was quite smart about images and graphic use. So you see in some of the early work that Jonnie was doing, stuff that was picked up later by the youth programmes on Channel 4. You could see a lineage there. [IF: The playfulness of the use of graphics]. Yeah – banging text up on the screen. I think that's sort of been neglected really. It doesn't surprise me that ultimately where Jonnie Turpie's career went was into independent production companies, setting up Maverick, and in that direction.

The other films, I think are very strong and solid films. But I think the single aesthetic intervention you could attribute to BFWW was in that area. It also overlapped into some work that Carol Klein [did]. But Carol Klein wasn't in the original set-up; she came in a couple of years later. But she did quite a bit of work around girls, with *Girl Zone*.

IF: I saw *Girl Zone*. I wanted to ask you about that. Because um in a book I saw a reference that suggested it might have been partially influenced by Angela McRobbie.

RS: I think it probably might have been. Yeah, there was a lot of that. Angela is a friend of mine, she had been at the CCCS, would have known the work that we were doing. She may even have been in Birmingham then. But yeah, there was something of Angela's interest in girl's subcultures would have been reflected in what Carol was doing. So you've got quite a number of nice companion pieces. The film that I think people picked up on...there were 2 films really that Jonnie Turpie was doing with the young people in Telford. There was like *What They Telling Us It's Illegal For?* which was about home taping. It's basically the same discussion I suppose that's going on now about downloading. And the 2<sup>nd</sup> film was called *Giro: Is This the Modern World?* which was about youth unemployment. And in both these films the approaches to, you know, [were] infused at the time by the kind of ideas about the way news and current affairs was being deconstructed by academics like Ian Connell and the Glasgow Media Group. So they you know did interviews with Ken Livingstone or other senior folk but they confronted them in ways that weren't the usual...paying lip service to authority figures. They were young people asking questions that they wanted to ask, in the way they wanted to ask them. Set up in an interview situation...they would, you know, work it out in advance with Jonnie. And a guy who worked with Jonnie quite closely, on a kind of freelance basis was Graham Peet. Graham Peet, whose father was a very well known documentary filmmaker, who died not long ago. Graham Peet's father was from the Donnellan kind of generation. [IF: Was that Stephen Peet?] Yeah, it might have been. And Graham Peet was working in Telford in a kind of where you know youth and community and community arts mixed and merged. So Graham was working with these young people there, and Jonnie would go over once or twice in the evening with video gear, and begin kind of sculpting stuff...So they would then crew on these things, do the interviews. And both of those were then broadcast on Channel 4. I mean there's no way they could become films, you know go to Oberhausen or Berlin, which was the usual circuit that an Amber film would go on, or a Black Audio film. But we probably reached bigger audiences I suppose. That led to a series, which was quite an innovative thing for a workshop to do, which was called *Turn It Up*. Often these titles come from me, 'cos I pun around. Turn It Up was a series of, I think it was 6, half hours, where material came in from young people and then was put into a sort of magazine programme, and some young presenters would then say, 'have a look at this now'. So *Turn It Up*, [the title] was like, you're turning up stuff from outside, but you're turning it up in a way that you're having a look at something. So that was a series that Jonnie mainly looked after, but the stuff came in from different places. There may well have been a girl one in that as well.

And then the other route, the media and politics route, which was really Rob Burkitt and Alan Lovell, they started by looking at...it's a fascinating film called *Traces Left*, which we got into because we had been screening these films from the

30s. And one of the films we screened from the news and newsreel seasons had been *Hell Unltd*. Which was an animated film, a short film about the war and the build-up of arms in the 30s. And Norman McLaren made it. I don't know how, but we found out that a really key collaborator on the film was Helen Biggar, a Glaswegian animator/activist, who shot the stuff in Spain, in the Spanish Civil War. So we dug around a bit, and made a film about her. And she was this fantastic character, who was in the radical cultural politics of the period, but has basically been forgotten about. We interviewed a number of people from that radical cultural politics period who were still alive. I think it went into the London Film Festival. I mean I don't even know where there's a print for that now. There's a Glaswegian academic doing a study of Helen Biggar, she's been digging around it now. That was a very I would say a very you know conventional approach to the documentary. Whereas often within the kind of independent film [scene] of that period deconstructing the documentary was a sort of *sine non qua* of doing anything. You know, you had to, you know...everything had to be revealed. But that wasn't really Alan's style, so he did a very I would say a conventional documentary approach. And then they did a couple of other films, one of them was about pirate radio [*The Black and White Pirate Show*]. Which was effectively about...the law at the time, to do with...and they did another called *Are You Being Served (Well)?* Which again was um...we'd established a number of links with the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom, which is a kind of – I don't know whether it's still existing - it was a sort of lobby group. We ran a number of events with those, and I think one or two of those ideas came out of that...there may be one or two others. And then Heather Powell developed an idea which became the film *Property Rites*, which was a film based on a real event in Birmingham in the 1700s or 1800s, which was rape case. And she then dramatises the investigation of that case in her film *Property Rites*. So that's about sexual politics and history. She then made 2 other films, with Carol closely involved, and other people. One, *Paradise Circus*, which was about women and architecture, so it's all about why certain civic spaces in the middle of Birmingham were designed in a particular way that seemed to obfuscate the movement of women with prams and so on. So it's a feminist take on architecture. I think there's another one, but I can't remember the title – it might be listed in there, is it in there? [Looks at Vivid exhibition programme...] Oh maybe that's it then...The young people in Telford called themselves the Dead Honest Soul Searchers, basically the DHSS. I think those should be back on telly.

IF: One thing that struck me about them was that, I haven't seen *Out of Order* but what I've read of it suggests that it used the vocabulary of TV, and had an interest in the form, whereas other things that got on the Eleventh Hour, were only preaching to the converted.

RS: I think so, I think that's probably true. The politics that were there in BFVW were never such that it was as evident as the others... [IF: It was more accessible] Yeah, we were also one of the key workshops that were involved in the *Miner's Tapes*. You can buy the *Miner's Tapes* from the BFI. I've bought. There were 5 of the *Miner's Tapes* on a DVD and one of ours is on there, and maybe we did 2, I can't remember now. But ours was about women that had got involved in the strike, it's not just jam sandwiches, and there's another one about the role of the media, which I'm sure Rob must have been involved with, because he was on top of that stuff all the time. But in things like *Out of Order*, and the documentaries *Giro* or whatever, there's an interest in politics which is not the usual left view of politics. You know so it's no surprise that

the you know with Amber it's the politics of the major kind of labour aristocracy – shipping, mining, you know. We were doing things about young people and popular culture, so it was the politics of popular culture, which was the influence of the Centre (CCCS). Politically we were more akin to Black Audio because of their interest... [IF: An interest in history as well]. Yes. But not necessarily an orthodox one. We weren't necessarily continuing the British documentary tradition of looking at the working class issues. Not that Amber just did that, they were more sophisticated than that obviously, but Eleventh Hour, if you were on the left it was your hour. Not necessarily an entertaining hour, you know! Have you been in touch with Alan Fountain or Rod? [IF: We've interviewed Alan]. You can get Rod in Ireland. [IF: Yeah, Alan said we should do that especially because he's got a good memory and he was always good at note keeping]. Yeah, he's at the Galway Film School.

IF: One thing I was going to ask you, I haven't read it yet, but uh I've seen there was a publication that the Workshop did which was a series of debates about Channel 4.

RS: Oh yeah we did that; I've got a copy of that somewhere. I mean that's one of the things that we were sort of, part of our identity or DNA, we were very much into, which was to you know have a political space for discussion of film and the media. And we did these 4 debates. One of them we had the big Welsh champion for S4C there, I can't remember his name now [Rhodri Williams], and another one was about issues of race, and we had you know we did them at the Arts Lab, we would probably get about 80 to 100 people at each one. And people came from different parts of the country because it was defining a moment in a way. [IF: Did it have an impact do you think?] It was part of an impact. One of the things that that side of things led to was that...I'd been working with the workshop since '79. We then got enfranchised status in '82, which led to us getting every year annually supported by the BFI and Channel 4. And then alongside the debates about Channel 4 we had a debate about cable TV. We did a big debate about *Boys from the Blackstuff*, which was...and a couple of others. Somewhere all the posters, I don't know if all my posters are still with Vivid, they will have...but they were really good posters. Some of them were influenced by Jonnie Turpie - doing you know stuff that he would have got taught at the Royal College of Art in terms of graphic design kind of thing. And then there was a season of Latin American films. So we were showcasing movies that were coming from parts of the world that maybe didn't always get a viewing in Birmingham. So quite a bit of this work fed into the film festival. I began a film festival in Birmingham in '85, and it was influenced by this debate-centred approach to the media. And in that festival we had an annual Cities and Media event, where we discussed how cities were showcased in film, and how cities could showcase themselves back. That led to people setting up film commission, film offices, you know come and make your film here. We also had an annual Raymond Williams memorial lecture, which we did with Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. And then we had a strong, what we called Third Cinema focus, picking up on discussions that were happening in the third world, that were 'we don't want to be the third way between Mosfilm and Hollywood'. And that festival I ran from '85 to '92. By 1987 I was on that full time and I'd kind of moved off the workshop by that point. And then the workshop continued but I wasn't so much involved.

And then Channel 4 decided to withdraw from this area of support. I mean picking up on one thing I was saying earlier is that, talking about Birmingham and its identity more televisual identity, and more video identity, is that occasionally when it



gets to an anniversary I always try to suggest, isn't this an opportunity to do a retrospective of workshop films. When we got to the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the workshop declaration, and that would have been 2007, I remember mentioning it, and someone at the BFI said, well where are the films? And that's one of the critiques that comes back about the workshop work, is like where are the films? Which is partly unfair because the workshops weren't necessarily about the creation of a generation of auteurs. It was about what was called for a while social practice. If you go back to the BFI's annual Yearbook, one issues there's a whole issue called the Social Practice of Cinema, which I suppose is the BFI at its Althusserian moment. And so there were articles in there, about the social practice of cinema. The workshops weren't thinking about how do all of us come behind a Derek Jarman figure. But I do know what they mean when they say where are the films, because I do think there were a lot of films and filmmakers who came through the workshops and have go on and the workshop was a way of talent scooping them up. Because you would never, when you think about black filmmakers in the UK, it's John Akomfrah or Isaac Julien, in the area of internationally recognised art cinema. And how did they get...? And there's not been many since. There's a woman making a film in Birmingham at the moment, Penny Woolcock, she was one of the people working at Trade for a while. It's funny because we were trading memories, and she said Trade was a very union-influenced you know lots of blokes, lots of great blokes but she said there were so many committees involved in Trade...it was a sort of...Some workshops were like that, a kind of mirror image of a labour movement/trade union/borough council over-democratized way of creating decision making. Which is interesting. But I have thought that this a retrospect...there is a need at some point for a retrospective of the Channel 4/BFI influence and I don't just mean the feature films but the work that we did here, the work that obviously Black Audio and Sankofa did. Amber are perennially retrospected. But there's lesser known ones, Penny came through Trade, there were Asian developments as well. And also some great Welsh ones...there was a group of women who ran one...called Red Flannel. I don't know what happened to them, I used to know one of them. She was a teacher a Wolverhampton Poly and then moved to Wales. And there was an animation workshop in Liverpool called Jackdaw. I don't know whether they were an enfranchised one...but they did quite a lot of interesting work, as did Open Eye in Liverpool. I don't know where that material's gone, because no-one's done a job on them like Vivid did on us. Did you get *Mirror Mirror* from them? [IF: Yeah, I watched it there in Vivid yesterday]. Yes they've got all the material on DVDs I think. Um I'm worried about what happens to all of that material you see, because Vivid may go under. [IF: Yeah they've had their funding cut]. They did quite a lot of work in pulling together things that have been dissipated. Because like Amber have continued you know, and others have as well, but quite a lot of workshops dissipated and I don't know what happened...I'm probably the most vocal and active, because the other's don't really get involved in the same way, which I think...it may be just; well, it's over. 25 years ago now. So why bother? But I think there was...what was interesting about what Vivid had done is that one of the refrains about Birmingham Film and Video Workshop over the years was that, what people said was, it had a big influence and impact because it led to Endboard being set up, that's Yugesh's company. It led to Maverick being set up. It was in the lineage of those. It led to this the Film Festival being set up. As though it was only consequences [a means to an end] rather than actual production. So what Vivid have done in trying to get stuff out is make a link to a moment in Birmingham's independent film history of which there's not a great deal,

but link it to other things that have gone before. And I think it's helped people like Paul [Long] and others locate film things [historically] in Birmingham, so it does buttress up against the Philip Donnellan kind of stuff. We were doing stuff that was um I mean at the same time we were doing this stuff you've got fantastic documentary stuff coming out of Central, fantastic drama, fiction, coming out of Pebble Mill. And so we were doing something that was complementary to that.

Because in some places workshops had to be like 'the industry' because you know you didn't have the big footprint of the television station on your doorstep. I mean that's why, you look at film developments out of a place like Liverpool or Sheffield, firstly they don't have a big BBC TV presence, and also they don't have a big...ITV is in Manchester and BBC North is in Manchester, Yorkshire TV is in Leeds, BBC Yorkshire is in Leeds. So in places like Sheffield and Liverpool, and one or two other places, Nottingham as well, you get a different kind of fibre of development. Because I mean Nottingham didn't have Central or a big BBC so you have a sense where, you know, I've always thought that that gave them a little bit more freedom to you know...I mean as soon as you do anything here, in those days as a filmmaker, you'd very quickly end up taking a job at Central or Pebble Mill... [IF: You get absorbed by one of the big broadcasters...] Yeah, because the big TV footprint is there, Sheffield and Liverpool had greater scope for independence. Because ultimately that's led to Shane Meadows I think. The East Midlands had a long tradition of independent filmmaking predating Shane Meadows. After Alan Fountain, he created quite a vibrant atmosphere in Nottingham, then after that you had this very interesting project which Peter Carlton ran, now Peter Carlton ended up as a Senior Exec at Film4 but now is one of the key people at Warp. And Shane Meadows has come through, local support from the East Midlands, and he works at Warp you know. [IF: Oh right, yeah. There's the Regional Arts Association's involvement there...and uh Robin Gutch is now at Warp...] ....Yeah Robin operates out of London I think but Warp are very solid regionally-based...But it's interesting, you look at Liverpool, Nottingham and Sheffield and maybe one or two other cities that don't have, that weren't at the epicentre of the convergence of the BBC Region and the ITV region – what happens when you're in another place that's got a strong regional identity, when you don't have those big bastions...Birmingham's always had both...So ultimately I think people often...end up feeling that that's where they'll get a job or to get....You almost feel like you have to make something that's professional like they make. Whereas like you might not want to when you're [somewhere else].

IF: You tried to help the kind of independent audio-visual sector in the Birmingham and the West Midlands generally...

RS: ...Yeah. How are we doing for time? [Looks at IF's photocopies]. Oh can you send this to me? *Acceptable Levels* is a great feature film...because I think if you did...all of these, you could put a good season together of all of these. [IF: Absolutely yeah, I wonder if online something can be done]. Have you seen the Cinema Action film about um Raymond Williams [*So That You Can Live*]? It's great. We'll have to talk another time about...The Welsh situation was great. Sometimes anniversaries are a good thing to do something on. [IF: Talks about planned conference]. The BFI had a big event about Channel 4 and they didn't have anything about workshops. I'm part-time at Edge Hill University, that's just near, close to Liverpool as you can get really, just on the green belt. And um I've been asking around about where did Open Eye stuff go, and where did Jackdaw go, because there must be stuff up here that's

languishing [IF: in people's houses]. Yeah, or in the basement of a cultural institution and they've forgotten. There might be a fuss when something closes down, and oh we'll take it for you. The person who receives it after a while goes to another job, something comes in and they don't have a clue what it is. [IF: Talks about need to collect and archive workshops films and artist's film and video]. The work with young people, it was effectively done by an artist. That's how I would describe Jonnie Turpie, as an artist working with video in this form. Do you know Fizzy Oppé? She's a film producer and she was heavily involved in developing the film workshops. She works in Cardiff, and her partner is a filmmaker as well, called Ieuan....