



CHANNEL 4: 40 YEARS OF REVOLUTION

Access / Direct Speech

This event will also now include Deborah Wearn discussing (with clips) how Channel 4's access policy allowed her to present a 1982 on-screen piece about Sexism in Rock.

Access programmes commissioned by early Channel 4 enabled communities of interest to define and express themselves by 'speaking directly', shifting the balance of power and altering the processes of mediation previously brought by 'television professionals'.

In 1972, during the debates about proposals for a new fourth channel, Anthony Smith wrote of the process of 'readjusting the relationship between the small elite of professional communicators and the public they serve, from a sort of hypodermic one in which a vast public is supposedly "entertained" by specialists into one in which there was more actual exchange with the public.' The metaphor of television's 'hypodermic' extraction of peoples' views and injection of entertainment is memorable and compelling.

Ten years later when Channel 4 was established there was already some continuity, with Paul Bonner and Mike Bolland having experience in the BBC's Community Programme Unit which produced *Open Door* and then *Open Space*. Different parts of Channel 4 embarked on programmes and series based on direct speech from communities which minimised the processes of mediation from 'television professionals' and shifted the balance to participatory access and interactivity.

This approach informed many areas of Channel 4 and extended to perspectives in Britain and beyond. The appointment of Sue Woodford-Hollick as a specific Multi-cultural Commissioning Editor in 1981, followed in 1985 by Farrukh Dhondy in 1985; Darcus Howe and Tariq Ali produced *Bandung File* and *South*, which ran for two series in 1991 and 1993.

The 'People to People' strand was commissioned by Paul Madden, Commissioning Editor for Single Documentaries, and the Independent Film and Video Department led by Alan Fountain. It placed emphasis on marginalised and voiceless communities in Britain and abroad; the longer term engagement with a nascent Black workshop sector providing some continuity for the work of the Black Audio Film Collective, Sankofa and Retake.

Article 19 in the 1948 UN 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights' asserted that 'Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression ... to receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.' This principle should counter the imposed monoculture with a diversity of voices emerging from autonomous production structures all over the world. But inevitably these voices of small independent producers look for adequate financing and, when films are completed, have to overcome significant barriers to distribution. The exercise of meaningful freedom of expression involves delivery, distribution and access to direct speech and the arguments continue; a Campaign for Media Democracy is active and has recently issued a *Manifesto for a People's Media*.

For the first phase of Channel 4 this endeavour was sustained through the various genres of documentary but also fiction filmmaking from the Global South, the continued screening of seasons like 'Africa on Africa', 'New Cinema of Latin America', 'Vietnam Cinema' as well as the Sunday evening scheduling of 'Cinema of Three Continents'. Gaston Kaboré's *Wend Kuuni*, a feature film made in Burkina Faso, is screening this month at BFI Southbank as an example of this. *South* and *Free for All* were attempts to create magazine programmes with direct speech for a specific British audience. It is only through the transmission of direct speech in all its forms that the misapprehensions of prevailing media may be countered and the unconscious and naturalised assumptions that continue to dominate the field of television can be challenged.

Rod Stoneman

The Work They Say Is Mine

Dir: Rosie Gibson, 1986. 52min.

Although the new channel had no specific commissioning department for programmes made by or for women, there were current affairs series which explored womens' perspectives on current affairs such as *Broadside* and *20/20*, and individual feminist programmes such as *The Work They Say Is Mine*. Screened on 'People to People' 1 June 1986, it had been shot by an all women crew and made collaboratively with women of different generations on the Shetland Islands. Rosie Gibson used interviews, songs and dramatisation to imaginatively connect with a way of life that has been similar for generations, telling the story of the knitters, their skilled and creative work and how they tried to make a living for themselves and their families within an unfair bartering system on the island.

The film won the Television and Radio Industries Club of Scotland (TRICS) Award in 1987.

Women of the Rhondda

Prods: Esther Ronay, Mary Capps, Margaret Dickinson, Mary Kelly, Brigid Segrave, Humphrey Trevelyan. 1972. 20min.

Women of the Rhondda, one of the first feminist films shot in the UK, was made collectively in 1972 and shown as part of the 'Women Direct' series on 'The Eleventh Hour' in January 1985. This season was built with purchases and not commissioned programmes from Circles, a London-based distributor. It draws on oral history methods to present a radically new representation of labour from the perspective of working class women.

Face of Our Fear

Dir: Steve Dwoskin, 1992. 55min

Acclaimed underground filmmaker Steve Dwoskin made *Face of Our Fear* which was commissioned by Alan Fountain for the launch of Channel 4's season 'Disabling World' initiated by the Education Department in 1992. Using clips from a range of historical feature films to synthesise many of the dehumanising aspects attributed to the disabled by the media, Dwoskin set out to find a new image of disability, 'not to have one made for us'.

Further reading

<https://lux.org.uk/dwoskin-project-blog-21-diary-of-a-wheelchair/>

<https://www.bfi.org.uk/features/disability-season-national-film-theatre>

Rachel Garfield and Henry K. Miller, *DWOSKINO: the gaze of Stephen Dwoskin* (LUX, 2022)

PEOPLE TO PEOPLE: THE WORK THEY SAY IS MINE

Director: Rosie Gibson
Production Companies: Avonbridge Film,
Scottish Film Production Board
Producer: Penny Thomson
Script: Rosie Gibson
C4 tx 1.6.1986
52 mins

THE ELEVENTH HOUR: WOMEN DIRECT:
WOMEN OF THE RHONDDA

Produced by: Mary Capps, Mary Kelly, Margaret Dickinson,
Esther Ronay, Brigid Segrave, Humphrey Trevelyan
With:
Doreen Adams
Alice Boxall
Beatrice Davies
Mary Elizabeth Davey
C4 tx 14.1.1985
20 mins

FACE OF OUR FEAR

Director: Stephen Dwoskin
Production Company: Stephen Dwoskin
Producer: Stephen Dwoskin
Commissioning Editors: Alan Fountain,
Sue Shepherd
C4 tx 22.3.1992
55 mins

Regional screenings and events will be taking place at these venues
across the UK (please go to **bfi.org.uk/whatson** for links): Arnolfini,
Bristol; Filmhouse Edinburgh; Queen’s Film Theatre, Belfast; Y Drwm,
National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth

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CHANNEL 4: 40 YEARS OF REVOLUTION

Music & Youth: The Tube + Discussion & Q&A

Fri 2 Sep 18:20

Comedy: Discussion & Q&A

+ The Comic Strip Presents: Five Go Mad in Dorset

Tue 6 Sep 18:15

Channel 4’s TV Drama Revolution: Discussion + Q&A

Sun 11 Sep 14:15

A Very British Coup + intro by author Chris Mullin

Sun 11 Sep 16:30

Diversity: Handsworth Songs + Q&A with
John Akomfrah + Panel Discussion & Q&A

Mon 12 Sep 18:15

Out and Proud: Veronica 4 Rose

+ Out on Tuesday + intro by original

Channel 4 Commissioner Caroline Spry

Thu 15 Sep 18:15

Access / Direct Speech: The Work They Say Is Mine
+ Women of the Rhondda + Face of Our Fear

Tue 20 Sep 18:15

Channel 4: The Television Revolution

Fri 23 Sep 18:20

Controversy: Jesus the Evidence + V + Mother Ireland

Sat 24 Sep 18:00

Who Needs Channel 4?

Wed 28 Sep 18:20

Channel 4 Then and Now conference

Fri 23 Sep 10:00–17:00 and Sat 24 Sep 10:00–17:00

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with unrivalled riverside views of Waterloo Bridge and beyond, a delicious
seasonal menu, plus a stylish balcony bar for cocktails or special events.
Come and enjoy a pre-cinema dinner or a drink on the balcony as the sun
goes down.