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## PRIDE REVISITED: CINEMA, ACTIVISM AND RE-ACTIVATION

# Precursor of *Pride*: The Pleasures and Aesthetics of *Framed Youth*

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This article explores the causal links between the 1983 Channel 4 documentary *Framed Youth: Revenge of the Teenage Perverts* and the feature film *Pride* (2014), via *All Out: Dancing in Dulais* (1986). It will be argued that *Pride* — the story of miners' support group Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners (LGSM) — would never have been made if it had not been for its precursors, with several members of LGSM having previously 'cut their teeth' in queer video activism, including documenting the activities of LGSM on videotape. A case will be made for *Framed Youth* and *Pride* as examples of media texts that are radical and educational, but which also have popular appeal and generate pleasure and nostalgia for audiences. The origins of *Framed Youth* in the conjuncture of radical theatre and community video will be outlined, including the project's synergy with Channel 4's original remit (Channel 4 was the majority funder of the project and broadcast *Framed Youth* in 1986). Attention will be devoted in particular to the neglect of considerations around audiences in the independent film and video scene. *Framed Youth* and *the Miners' Campaign Tapes* (1984) are cited as notable historical exceptions, due to their imaginative and successful approach to building audiences through distribution and exhibition. The article will conclude by considering the 'pros and cons' of the fact that the story of LGSM eventually found expression in a feel-good 'retro' feature film, rather than an activist or political documentary.

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## Pits and Perverts, Strikes and Dykes

Building on recent scholarly and public interest in the story of Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners (henceforth LGSM), as portrayed in the recent British feature film *Pride* (Warchus, 2014), this article aims to uncover an important strand of the ‘pre-history’ of this group. Whilst the role of the Young Communist League (YCL, the youth wing of the Communist Party of Great Britain) in the political pre-history of LGSM has recently been uncovered (Smith and Leeworthy, 2016; Francis, 2015), the involvement of key LGSM members in video activism has not hitherto been documented. My focus is thereby on collaborative/activist video projects that ‘paved the way’ to (the story of) *Pride* – in particular, *Framed Youth: Revenge of the Teenage Perverts*<sup>1</sup> (1983/1986) by the Lesbian and Gay Youth Video Project, which was funded by the Greater London Arts Association and Channel 4. Made by a group of young gay men and lesbians learning and sharing video skills under the direction of Gay Sweatshop theatre activist Philip Timmins and the media activist and writer Andy Lipman, and drawing on the resources of the Albany and Oval Video Workshops, *Framed Youth* was in retrospect a model of the use of video to facilitate media activism and community education (despite being made before video equipment became affordable, accessible and portable). The resulting collective videographic account of queer life in the Thatcherite 1980s achieved critical plaudits including the prestigious Grierson Documentary Award in 1984.

In this article I will establish a causal chain that runs from *Framed Youth* to *Pride*, via *All Out: Dancing in Dulais* (1986),<sup>2</sup> and I will also make links with *the Miners’ Campaign Tapes* (1984) in painting a picture of community video during the period.<sup>3</sup> *Pride* has allowed a new generation to learn about this remarkable story of cross-cultural solidarity between a mining community in South Wales and the gay and lesbian community in London, which is also a story of radical democracy – the

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://youtu.be/gw9uNZcKV1c> or <http://www.the-lcva.co.uk/videos/594bb17f0609e223a0d38a67> (accessed 15 March 2019).

<sup>2</sup> See <https://youtu.be/IHJhbwEcgrA> (accessed 15 March 2019).

<sup>3</sup> There are a number of characteristics which these works share (beyond this causal chain), including: their use of pop music; their bold use of colourful graphics; and their wit and panache.

building of democracy around difference, in order that oppressive power relations in society are made visible and re-negotiated (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001).

That many young people will identify with the activists in *Pride* is without doubt. That they would trace a path back to *Framed Youth* – a preeminent example of the kind of 1980s ‘vibey’ aesthetic which is now highly fashionable and emulated as a ‘retro’ style – is far less certain, and this article represents an attempt to map the route.<sup>4</sup> As with *Pride*, an engagement with *Framed Youth* may serve to reinforce a sense of connection with past activists that provides inspiration in the contemporary moment.<sup>5</sup> Whilst I have used the term casual chain, the article is informed by Boym’s concept of ‘nostalgic dissidence’, which ‘breaks with the conventions of writing history, seeks out hybrids of past and present, and refuses the pressure of absolute teleology’ (Barlow, 2007: 249). In this respect nostalgic dissidence mirrors video’s ‘blithe violation of the notion of time’s irreversibility’ (Millner and Larsen, 1985: 26) in its ability to literally recall past moments, often in juxtaposition and combination.

My reference to the ‘retro’ aesthetics of *Framed Youth* is thus not incidental, as the tape’s period-specific aesthetics become a marker of time’s passage, which is also highly germane to the period detail within *Pride*. The establishment of a timeline provides multiple points of departure for an exploration of pleasure in (radical) documentary, and the challenge for filmmakers to create work that is politically critical, but which has popular appeal and generates pleasure and nostalgia for audiences. This has obvious relevance to *Framed Youth* as an anarchic and playful tape that strays very far from documentary’s ‘discourse of sobriety’ (Nichols, 1991: 3), as we will see. But it is also germane to the fact that the story of LGSM eventually found expression in a feel-good ‘retro’ feature film, rather than an activist or political documentary.

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<sup>4</sup> *Framed Youth* can also be seen to have anticipated the anarchy and amateurism of Youth TV – and the establishment of the late-night schedule as a ‘playground’ for youth programming – that was to follow in the 1990s, particularly on Channel 4.

<sup>5</sup> To quote labour organiser Charles Taylor discussing Stoney and Helfand’s documentary about the US cotton mill workers’ strike *The Uprising of ’34* (1995), ‘it gives people a heritage that they can be proud of, a heritage they can organize around today’ (quoted in Whiteman, 2002).

My establishment of linkages between *Framed Youth* and *Pride* aligns closely with Whiteman's argument about the need to take a broader view of the political impact of a documentary film, which is worth summarising here. According to Whiteman (2002: n.p.), to assess impact adequately we must '*evaluate the entire filmmaking process*, including both production and distribution, and not simply the finished product' (emphasis in original). Secondly, we must also consider 'the *larger political context*, including relevant social movements [...] a film's potential effects on its producers and other participants involved in production, on activist groups that might contribute to or use the film' (Whiteman (2002: n.p., emphasis in original). The third principle that Whiteman stresses is that a documentary's impact is most likely to be on discourses outside the mainstream, 'since social movements often strive to sustain alternative spheres of public discourse' (2002: n.p.). As he goes on to note, many political documentaries never achieve widespread distribution and do not enter mainstream public discourse, 'but still have an impact in certain subcultures, mobilizing activists working to create social change' (Whiteman, 2002: n.p.).

All three elements (process/context/discourses) will be considered here in relation to *Framed Youth*. Whilst *Framed Youth* did not necessarily enter mainstream public discourse, it certainly transcended its marginal status (as a small 'minority arts' production) to achieve an impressive measure of accessibility and popular appeal. This was achieved through: its innovative form and style; its utility as a media text distributed and exhibited in education and social work circles; and through the potent nature of its impact upon the viewer. A simple index of the success of *Framed Youth* is that it almost immediately launched a number of fascinating careers, including filmmakers (Constantine Giannaris) and future pop stars (Jimmy Somerville and Richard Coles). But, following Whiteman, we are concerned here with the deeper (potential) effects on producers, participants and activists, which were longitudinal. As Jeff Cole recently recalled when asked about the subjects discussed on-camera by participants in *Framed Youth*:

We were asking about their relationship with their parents, family, coming out. Their sexual relationships, their partners, any discrimination and violence

that we'd been suffering [...] But then there's a more political dimension. Some people were interviewed and talked about it more politically, Mark Ashton in particular [...] Mark says, you know, he couldn't see himself as gay and not [also] question the whole society that he was in. And I think that was true for me, definitely. I could see that I was discriminated against and therefore I had sympathy and empathy with other groups of people and other minorities [...] I saw myself as a socialist [...] I think quite a number of the people in the group were quite radical and wanted to change the world (2016).

It is difficult to assess the extent to which the experience of making *Framed Youth* (over an 18-month period) was actually consciousness-raising, but it certainly had a catalysing effect on a number of participants, whether this was in terms of the cathartic or therapeutic effect of 'speaking out', or in terms of reinvigoration and the desire to express their political affiliations in further audio-visual work. Cole (2016) noted that it had 'a profound effect' on 'several of us [who] really wanted to carry on making films'; 'it may well have influenced other people in ways that we've got no idea'.

Cole and three other participants – Nicola Field, Constantine Giannaris and Clare Hodson – would go on to not only form a production company, Converse Pictures, but also play a role in LGSM, forming the core of the larger LGSM 'video group', which included Mark Ashton. During 1984–5 they documented the activities of LGSM on videotape and produced from this a video entitled *All Out: Dancing in Dulais*. *All Out* was originally intended as a means to show the mining community in Dulais where the money came from and that there was a groundswell of support well beyond the ranks of LGSM. The video, which was distributed by Albany Video, was also used by activists in community screenings, sometimes supported by an exhibition of posters, photographs and press cuttings that was available to accompany the tape, which Diarmaid Kelliher has described as 'central to LGSM's attempt to shape their legacy' (2014: 253).

*All Out: Dancing in Dulais* did help to secure this legacy, as it provided an invaluable historical record (of people, events, quotes, fashions, banners and more)

that Stephen Beresford drew upon when writing the script for *Pride*.<sup>6</sup> Thanks to *All Out* the whole story – including ‘actors’ (e.g. Mark Ashton), events (e.g. the Pits and Perverts benefit concert) and locations – came to life. The character of Jeff in *Pride* (played by Freddie Fox) is (very loosely) based on Jeff Cole, and, crucially, *Framed Youth* and *All Out* are inextricably linked to *Pride* as they both feature interviews with Mark Ashton (played by Ben Schnetzer in *Pride* – see **Figure 3**), lynchpin of LGSM, talking candidly and articulately about his first sexual experiences (in *Framed Youth* – see **Figure 1**) and the importance of supporting the miners’ strike (in *All Out* – see **Figure 2**).



**Figures 1–3:** Screengrabs of Mark Ashton from *Framed Youth* (Lesbian and Gay Youth Video Project, 1983/1986) and *All Out: Dancing in Dulais* (Converse Pictures, 1986), and Ben Schnetzer as Mark Ashton in *Pride* (Matthew Warchus, 2014).

<sup>6</sup> Cole has suggested that the main reason *Pride* was made about the London LGSM was because it was documented in videographic form, whereas in fact similar support groups had sprung up around the country. The video of *All Out* uploaded to YouTube by Cole also provided a useful list of contacts, in the form of the on-screen credits. Beresford had encountered the story before but until he discovered *All Out* it had a status akin to folklore in queer and socialist circles – it was often spoken of as an example of cross-cultural and cross-class solidarity, but was not documented in any form.

## Not a 'Straight' Documentary: The Aesthetics and Impact of Framed Youth

*Framed Youth* was a collaborative project designed to devolve authorship and agency to non-professionals in making a video to combat discriminatory and homophobic attitudes in society. Andy Lipman defined the broad aims of the project as follows in November 1982:

We'll be breaking the silence and aiming to do something about the invisibility of young gays. But it's no good just presenting their lives and problems. We have to break down other people's assumptions (quoted in Heron, 1982).

*Framed Youth* thereby fits Thomas Waugh's definition of the 'committed documentary', as a tape that has a goal of 'socio-political transformation', takes an 'activist stance' and is subject-centred; 'not only about people engaged [...] in struggles, but also [made] *with* and *by* them as well' (1984: xiv, emphasis in original). Furthermore, the initiators and co-ordinators of *Framed Youth*, Philip Timmins and Andy Lipman, had thought about the video's potential use and impact throughout the entire process – planning, production, distribution and exhibition – which is another defining principle of the committed documentary, according to Whiteman (2002).

*Framed Youth* was also a uniquely cross-media documentary, an aspect inseparable from the other features enumerated above. It had its origins in radical theatre, utilised the relatively new medium of video (a medium which facilitated its distribution) and was broadcast on Channel 4 (in 1986 and 1989), the channel whose remit to encourage alternative voices it was designed to fulfil. Lipman and Timmins had met due to their involvement in writing and performing in productions for the radical theatre companies Gay Sweatshop and Red Bucket, chiefly at the Oval Theatre. In 1979–80 Timmins had co-written and staged a successful youth theatre production for Gay Sweatshop, entitled *Who Knows?*, about the thrills, trials and tribulations of being young and gay, which played to school groups at the Royal Court Theatre. Timmins and Lipman had also begun experimenting with the use of



video in theatre productions under the name Gay Video Project. Under this banner, and with the support of Oval Video, Lipman devised and produced an ingenious and hilarious spoof police training video about policing the gay community, *Watch Out: There's a Queer About* (1982),<sup>7</sup> which provided a great deal of accurate information on the laws and acts of Parliament concerning gay men, drawing on Lipman's legal training and experience as a practicing solicitor. Shortly afterwards, when Channel 4 was preparing to launch, Lipman and Timmins conceived the idea of organizing and facilitating something similar to *Who Knows?* for the medium of television: a documentary (rather than a drama) created by a group of young non-professionals that were receiving training in video production (Timmins, 2018). Winning the backing of Channel 4's first Chief Executive, Jeremy Isaacs, the Lesbian and Gay Youth Video Project, as it became known, was to align closely with Channel 4's remit to create television that was innovative and which gave voice and representation to minorities.

*All Out: Dancing in Dulais*, which, as previously mentioned, formed an invaluable foundational text for the screenplay of *Pride*, was facilitated by the receipt by Converse Pictures of a development grant from Channel 4. This support was a direct result of the critical and popular success of *Framed Youth*, although the grant was not tied to any particular commission or completed television programme.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, we can assert that if *Framed Youth* had not been made it is quite likely that the LGSM story would not have been documented in audiovisual form at all. This may appear to be something of a moot point, but it allows us to consider *why* it is important that this story has been documented in audiovisual form.

There is, for example, the issue of the consistently overlooked psychological, affective and sensory dimensions of solidarity, which are best conveyed through film and video (and which are likely to be conveyed even more powerfully in future through Virtual Reality). Jane Gaines' concept of political mimesis is relevant here.

<sup>7</sup> See <http://www.the-lcva.co.uk/videos/594b0999e9dcb81559980baa> (accessed 25 March 2019).

<sup>8</sup> A number of funding applications within a GLC file relating to the *Framed Youth* project provide evidence for this. See 'Lesbian and Gay Video Project' file, London Metropolitan Archives, GLC/RA/GR/02/090.

In exploring what she terms 'images of sensuous struggle', such as rioting or bodies moving as a mass in demonstrations, Gaines notes:

The [film] makers [...] use images of bodies in struggle *because they want audiences to carry on that same struggle* [...] The whole rationale behind documenting political battles on film, as opposed to producing written records, is to make struggle visceral, to go beyond the abstractly intellectual to produce a bodily swelling [...]. The reason for using films instead of leaflets and pamphlets in the context of organizing is that films often make their appeal through the senses to the senses, circumventing the intellect (1999: 91, emphasis in original).

The films under discussion, whilst not necessarily making struggle 'visceral', contain enough 'queer activist fervour' (Hilderbrand, 2006: 310) to make the chest swell with pride or solidarity. Unlike the other films *Framed Youth* did not show much public protest (aside from brief shots of Greenham Common women and clips of demonstrations) and was far too laidback to induce viewers to rise out of their seats and take to the streets. But we must not overlook the 'mobilizing force of emotions' (Hilderbrand, 2006: 305) channelled by queer video activism during the period (Hilderbrand uses the phrase to discuss the AIDS activist group ACT-UP). Within a counter-public sphere, *Framed Youth* contributed to the education of young people and the catalysing or reinvigoration of activists. It also certainly made its appeal 'through the senses to the senses', particularly in its vibrant use of music and colour. The opening minutes, for example, weave together a diverse mix of video footage and stills of the group handling the video equipment during the production process and in social settings, soundtracked by the song 'Love is a Stranger' by Eurythmics. It thus reflects the aesthetics of club culture which figured so dominantly in the countercultural lesbian and gay scene at the time.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Dance music was beginning to sweep up and mobilise young people by what music critic Simon Reynolds termed a process of 'molecular agitation', in a rather similar manner to Gaines' political mimesis. Reynolds noted that 'if house, acid, new beat etc. are radical, it's a radicalism that's inseparable from their simple effectiveness, pure pleasure immediacy' (1990: 178).

I have written elsewhere (Franklin, 2014: 120–1) of the way in which *Framed Youth* anticipated the advent of 'scratch video', an underground form of video art which itself anticipated contemporary remix culture in its imaginative and satirical use of footage 'ripped' and recycled from film and television.<sup>10</sup> The press release for *Framed Youth* resists the temptation to draw attention to its lively aesthetic, however, revealing that the intention had been to communicate a 'strong and angry statement' to a young audience, rather than being 'just another documentary of a minority'.<sup>11</sup> It goes on to describe *Framed Youth* as being 'aimed at primarily young audiences in schools, youth clubs and community groups', and it was indeed valued by social workers and educators because it spoke to young people from positions – and in a language – that they could understand (Swanson, 1986: 64).

As intended by Lipman and Timmins, *Framed Youth* was used as a tool to challenge the discrimination and stereotyping that was perpetuated or unchallenged within the media and the educational system at the time. *Framed Youth* generated the dominant share of Albany Video's bookings, and served to, almost single-handedly, sustain their distribution service for several years (Downumt, cited in Franklin, 2014: 122). A document within the Greater London Arts Association file for the 'Gay Video Project' (as it was originally known) gives a sense of the initial demand for screenings, detailing hires and purchases, during the last four months of 1983.<sup>12</sup> In total, 37 organizations and five individuals hired the tape during this period, and a further three organisations purchased the tape outright. The list includes colleges, polytechnics, university societies

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<sup>10</sup> The term 'scratch' was borrowed from the DJ 'scratching' then emerging from the New York hip-hop scene, and videos were shown at nightclubs like The Fridge in Brixton. Will Fowler has recently (2017) documented the influence of scratch on music videos during the 1980s and makes parallels with the deft mixing of different sequences and formats (e.g. Super 8, 16mm, television reportage) that could be found in contemporaneous avant-garde work such as *Territories* (1984) by Isaac Julien, who appears in *Framed Youth*. It was no accident that Andy Lipman was to become the key journalistic proponent of the art of the video remix as video editor at City Limits.

<sup>11</sup> Framed Youth Press Release, 'Lesbian and Gay Video Project' file, London Metropolitan Archives, GLC/RA/GR/02/090.

<sup>12</sup> 'Framed Youth – Hires and Purchases', 'Lesbian and Gay Video Project' file, London Metropolitan Archives, GLC/RA/GR/02/090.

and student unions; youth clubs, projects and centres; gay groups and societies, unemployment projects or groups; film and video collectives; arts organizations; and broadcasters.

Timmins and Lipman had originally intended to bring the project to secondary schools in order to gather feedback and shape the video, but this proved too difficult to achieve in a political climate that was building towards the implementation of Section 28 legislation, which prohibited the 'promotion' of homosexuality in schools maintained by local authorities. Even gay teachers in the UK appeared to be polarised over the appropriateness of the use of *Framed Youth* in the classroom, due primarily to its irreverence and subversive sensibilities (Anon. 1987: 67–76).<sup>13</sup> The only documentation that describes its actual use in the classroom can be found in a Dutch study of 1988, which used empirical evidence to demonstrate that the video was 'effective in reducing discriminatory attitudes in secondary school groups' (Franklin, 2014: 123).

In focussing on the use of *Framed Youth* by educators, social workers and activists we must not overlook the importance of its broadcast on Channel 4, as part of a youth season entitled *Turn it Up* (Franklin, 2013). *Framed Youth*, unlike most other film and video workshop productions, had been made with the specific goal of being broadcast from the outset. When discussing radical film and video intended either partly or primarily for use as a tool in community screenings there is an attendant danger of characterising the television viewership of this work as passive and atomised. By contrast, it can be argued that in the case of *Framed Youth* the medium of television deepened the scope and potential for validation and parasocial interaction, a concept developed by Horton and Wohl in 1956 to explain how viewers or listeners come to regard media personalities as friends and role models:

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<sup>13</sup> A video made for the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA), entitled *Different Story: The Lives and Experiences of a Group of Young Lesbians and Gay Men* (1988), has been cited as the first video to be shown into schools to combat homophobia. *Framed Youth* predates this, although its use in schools was probably not widespread. Only two schools were listed in the hires and purchases document referred to above, for example.

The enactment of a para-social role may therefore constitute an exploration and development of new role possibilities [...] the media present opportunities for the playing of roles to which the spectator has – or feels he has – a legitimate claim, but for which he finds no opportunity in his social environment. This function of the para-social then can properly be called compensatory, inasmuch as it provides the socially and psychologically isolated with a chance to enjoy the elixir of sociability (2004: 379).

Whereas Horton and Wohl were writing exclusively about the viewer's relationship with actors or television celebrities, the facility of video in documenting the lives of 'real people' (and the possibility of videotapes acting as a record of these lives) enabled a form of parasocial interaction that was of a different order. The reciprocal or 'mutual' development (Horton and Wohl, 2004: 379) of the relationship was no longer unfeasible. The appeal of this parasocial dimension of *Framed Youth* for those still 'closeted' cannot be underestimated:

I met two young men who were about 14 when it was shown in 1986 – they recognized me from it. They'd...recorded it...without their family knowing... They were able to sneak down...record it on the family's video recorder, and then watch it at various other times later on. These two guys actually watched it probably hundreds of times. They felt like they knew us and one of them actually I met through the college I went to...I was teaching him... how to use a video camera and he came up to me and said 'Oh Jeff Cole!' and I was like 'Oh! how do you know my name?', but I just assumed he'd seen it on the wall or something...He felt like he knew me, because he'd seen me on the video and because he'd heard me listening to people, because you often see the back of my head in some of the [interview] shots, he felt he was able to talk to me. And so he talked to me about the fact that he'd lost his friend [in a fire], and we became friends (Cole, 2016).

Cole's testimony here resonates with Hilderbrand's analysis of the video medium's ability to evoke cultural memory 'as a kind of affective history comprising (inter)

personal pleasures and experiences that are often mediated' (2006: 306); affect here can be thought of as 'profound experiences of emotion, deeply felt relations and reactions that [...] may be fleeting or may have lifelong effects on our perspectives and actions' (Hilderbrand, 2006: 306).

As a project developed with television in mind, *Framed Youth* was nonetheless keyed to the receptivity of fairly broad audiences. In a review for *Monthly Film Bulletin*, Pam Cook noted that it clearly presented 'its arguments for debate among a general audience as well as within the gay movement itself' (1983), and in an unpublished article about the making of *Framed Youth*, Constantine Giannaris recalled envisioning a '*mainly straight* young audience' (n.d., emphasis added). In this context it is worth noting that, as the aforementioned Dutch study appeared to confirm, the parasocial dimension of *Framed Youth* offered the possibility of reducing prejudice between majority and minority group members in an educational context.

The collaborative aspect of *Framed Youth* entailed a radical departure from the conventional documentary approach in representing minorities. Even in the 1978 US documentary *Word is Out*, the filmmakers had, in the words of Richard Dyer, only intervened 'as interviewers, sympathetic and friendly yet clearly placed differently from the interviewees – them, the film-makers, looking at, investigating them, the gays' (1979: 29). In *Framed Youth* there is no such distinction.

In its liveliness and refusal of generic boundaries, *Framed Youth* eschews documentary's 'discourse of sobriety' (Nichols, 1991: 3) – the hidden assumption at the core of the documentary genre that the imparting of information is more important than form, style or pleasure. Situating *Framed Youth* within the history of documentary (sobriety) is aided by the revelation that Edgar Anstey, doyen of the British documentary film movement and Chairman of the Grierson Awards, had initially resisted the selection of *Framed Youth* for the award. In a revealing unpublished document on the short list, entitled 'Audience, Language and Literacy', Anstey (c. 1984) admits that the 'stimulating jury discussions' made him reconsider his initial verdict, which was that the video was 'uneasily self-conscious about its technical treatment'; 'I became relaxed [...] about the award going to what in the craft-conscious thirties would have been dismissed by most of us [in the documentary film

movement] as an “illiterate” film’. It is perhaps not surprising that the 77-year old, who had played a key role in inventing the vox-pop (in 1935’s *Housing Problems*) and had been hostile to the maverick tendencies of the Free Cinema group of the 1950s, had initially been resistant to giving the award to the anarchic *Framed Youth!* Nevertheless, Anstey notes that the jury ‘appraised *Framed Youth* primarily in terms of the film-maker/audience relationship’ (n.d.) and it was clear that Anstey recognised the parasocial dimension of *Framed Youth*, at least as espoused by his fellow jurors.

Waugh has cited *Framed Youth* as an example of what he terms ‘collaborative vérité’, where events proceed ‘with all participants aware of and consenting to the camera’s presence and with an unspoken but visible collaboration shaping the event’, adding that ‘this mise-en-présence occasioned by the camera provides just enough artifice to break up the naturalistic surface of the event and reveal its true political insight’ (2011: 209–10). Waugh also helps us to situate *Framed Youth* in the history of documentary and perhaps also gives us an insight into the connection between this ‘mise-en-présence’ and the parasocial dimension. However, this ultimately represents only one strand (albeit a vital one) of the complex aesthetic range of *Framed Youth*, combining as it does life history and proto-scratch (video) techniques, authenticity and artifice, in unpredictable and uneven measure. A large part of the charm of *Framed Youth* resides in its gung-ho, freewheeling approach, making extensive use of freeze-frame, slo-mo, vox-pops and a collage of found footage. As the video artist Richard Fung commented in Toronto’s gay and lesbian periodical *The Body Politic* in 1984:

There is an irreverent combination of every gimmick young producers are warned to avoid: keying, colourizing and montage techniques are applied to campy footage from old Hollywood movies, television news shot off the screen and on-the-street interviews with questions like ‘What if your daughter told you she was a lesbian?’ This style not only makes the video interesting, it increases its useability with a youth audience (quoted in Franklin, 2014: 120).

It should not be assumed, however, that the group that formed the Lesbian and Gay Youth Video Project simply adopted an ‘anything goes’ approach. Jeff Cole has

discussed his participation in a year's worth of regular meetings at Philip Timmins' flat, where the group:

Created a bit of a curriculum of filmmaking for ourselves, you know, and studying what other people have done, but also experimenting with how you could use a camera and looking at the possible effects...a camera has on a situation...It was a bit like doing a university degree (Cole, 2016).

A great deal of thought and rationale was attached to particular devices and approaches, such as the use of freeze-frames during interviews (see **Figure 4**). Cole has explained that the group made full use of the technology available at the Fantasy Factory post-production facilities house, which helped to mitigate or conceal some of the faults in filming:

Because we were in this edit suite that had a freeze-frame still store which was like the height of video effects at the time, we started...experimenting



**Figure 4:** Freeze-Frame of Royce Ullah [R] being interviewed by Toby Kettle [L], *Framed Youth* (1983/1986).



with using stills of interviews rather than having...juddery zoom-ins or whatever. And that worked really well because it meant that you actually became much more aware of what people were saying when you didn't have the distraction of a moving image. It became quite a feature of the way it was edited. And it also meant that people could edit the sound just how they wanted it, rather than what actually people said. So it was incredibly manipulative but in a way that was telling the truth.... They way we were editing it was actually to make people sound better rather than, you know, take things out of context... (2016).

As we have seen, *Framed Youth* also bears the traces of newer, shorter forms such as music video and scratch video. Tony Downmunt has commented that 'it wasn't a documentary – in a way – at all, it was much more of a sort of cabaret celebration based on those workshops, that group workshop process' (2013), which underlines the way in which the project interfaced between techniques and approaches utilised in theatre and in community video to encourage performativity.

### **Beyond the Ghetto: Community/Activist Video in the 1980s**

This article is informed by and concerned with the historic moment of the 1984-5 Miners' Strike, when groups and factions with different identities but shared experiences of oppression worked together to attempt to win their struggle. This pertains most closely to the story of LGSM, which is chronicled in *Pride* (2014). But there are other examples of rapprochement that are relevant to the precursors of *Pride*. In 1985, the video artist and gay rights activist Stuart Marshall noted in the film journal *Screen*:

For the last ten years the two major independent video communities – video artists and social action/agit-prop video workers – have been separated by major ideological differences. In Britain this gap is now beginning to close as community video workers increasingly question dominant televisual forms [...] It is also becoming evident that the historical distance between independent film and video producers is beginning to close ... (1985: 71).

Evidence of the closing of the 'gap' referred to by Marshall could also be found in the *Miners' Campaign Tapes*. Made and distributed to document and support the miners' strike, the tapes were a notable example of collaboration between artist and activist 'factions'.<sup>14</sup> Like LGSM and other support groups, the *Miners' Campaign Tapes* allowed non-miners to play a vital role in the strike effort (Shaw, 2012: 167), for example by donating money or by circulating or screening the tapes. The tapes covered subjects and issues that mining communities felt the media were ignoring, with the constant focus on the picket lines and on violence, and gave a voice to women, similarly overlooked. On television miners and their families were largely absent, 'talked about and spoken for, but [unable to] speak themselves' (Todd, 1985: 21). The *Miners' Campaign Tapes* project, like *Framed Youth*, intended to expose the objectification experienced by a subaltern group (e.g. through a critique of media coverage) and to offer an opportunity for self-representation. These tapes were thus totemic of Channel 4's remit in terms of a 'shift in the democratic ideal of representation to one based on speaking "from" a community instead of being spoken for' (Arthurs, 2004: 28). The resulting tapes were also significant for their experimental form and style, as well as their content, and this also spoke to Channel 4's remit to experiment and innovate. As Joram ten Brink observed in 1984 of the work he was then producing and facilitating at the Moonshine video workshop in London:

One of the advantages of putting artists to work on community tape projects is that debates on questions like representation and style, which are frequently absent from such projects, tend to naturally emerge out of the coupling of video artists with ordinary video activists (quoted in Sweeney, 1984).

This meant an integration of critical analysis of a subject with a visual style that had the potential to question and undermine conventional modes of representation. Another remarkable tape from the period was *Ceiber: The Greatest Improvisors in the World* (1985), about the closure of Penrhiwceiber colliery in the Cynon valley in

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<sup>14</sup> This initiative involved collaboration between: the video artists Mike Stubbs, Roland Denning and Chris Rushton; video-based workshops such as Chapter and Birmingham Film and Video; trade unionists; and miners and their wives (Elwes, 2005: 118).

1985, which was made by the Community Video Workshop in Cardiff with a group of miners from the pit who were trained in video production skills.

Alternative or community media projects have sometimes been criticised for a lack of professionalisation, particularly a neglect of distribution, marketing and promotion, which has sometimes meant remaining in an 'alternative ghetto' (Landry et al. 1985: 95, 101). Channel 4's *Eleventh Hour*, in which radical or avant-garde work (including *Framed Youth*) was transmitted, was also thought to be something of a ghetto, partly because of its late-night slot. Some of the output from workshops or video artists was made for (or in the tradition of) small-scale cinema viewing with committed audiences, rather than for television, and making the transition to work made explicitly to suit television as a medium, or for more generalised audiences, took some time. In programme notes for *Mistaken Identity* (1985), which was broadcast in the same youth season (*Turn it Up*) as *Framed Youth*, its director Karen Alexander (1985) discussed her motivation behind facilitating a vibrant cabaret approach to the tape:

As video makers who are aiming our products at communities of interest we are very often removed from the consumption stage of our work; to produce is all. Consequently [...] we are so concerned with the soundness of our argument, we forget to think about how it looks, choose to ignore form for ideological reasons, or just forget that at the end of the production we want people to sit and watch what we have produced.

There has traditionally been a 'suspicion of cinematic pleasure' within avant-garde film culture, as it was felt that 'if one experienced pleasure when one watched a film, then one was being ideologically manipulated' (Marshall, quoted in Chamberlain et al. 1993: 43). Stuart Marshall added that notion of pleasure itself 'is [thus] something to be struggled with and contested':

In terms of the funding agencies, be they the British Film Institute (BFI) or Channel Four, they've got a particular idea about what pleasure is: it hinges on this notion of a completely homogenous audience who all sit and

look at a piece of work and respond in exactly the same way. However, I find an enormous perverse pleasure as a gay man in seeing the ideological structures of our society undermined and subverted (quoted in Chamberlain et al. 1993: 45).

Marshall here identifies another vital aspect that connects *Framed Youth* and *Pride*: the viewer's pleasure resides not just with engagement with the form, but also in the subversion of the status quo. By contrast, a reluctance or inability to fully address and interrogate issues of form, pleasure and medium (specificity) – akin to 'documentary sobriety' – has often tended to result in independent work having marginal cultural or political impact. *Framed Youth* and the *Miners' Campaign Tapes* were key exceptions to this tendency towards marginality. It is likely that this was also because they actively developed specific audiences, uses and forms of distribution, reaching those who mattered most to their respective causes (and a broader audience via television). And, of course, this involved fully utilising the affordances of video as a medium in production as well as distribution. Referring to the screening of *Framed Youth* during the AFI Video Festival in 1985, Millner and Larsen note:

A sense of collective autobiography, which videotape in its accessibility can afford much more directly and immediately than film, so informs the sexual politics here that straight audiences would be hard put to ghettoize sexuality so glibly in the future (1985: 26).

The candour of this collective (auto)videography can be attributed to the long gestation of the project's production process (around 18 months), which meant that participants had got to know each other very well and were used to being filmed and interviewed. As Pom Martin recently noted in an interview with the present author, after many months of 'having a camera around we could be quite natural with it' (2017). Video has allowed greater flexibility for those seeking to explore serious issues, since tape was relatively cheap and could be reused, which facilitated here both in-depth interviews and scratch video experimentation (hence the unusual mixture of the two).

In relation to the position taken more recently by Sandoval and Fuchs (2010), *Framed Youth* demonstrates the dangers of reductionism in assigning participatory projects a 'marginal' status. As part of their attempt to disavow 'participation' as the *sine qua non* of alternative media, Sandoval and Fuchs have argued that an emphasis on participatory processes within alternative media circles – and a lack of professionalism – has hindered the potential of projects to reach audiences and communicate critical content. They go so far as to state the following about small-scale alternative media projects:

In many cases, they will remain an expression of lifestyle politics that please and console their producers or even become ideologies that forestall collective political struggles because these producers find no time for political activism and consider their individual product as a sufficient statement. But a statement that does not reach the masses is not a significant statement at all, only an individual outcry that remains unheard and hence ineffective (Sandoval and Fuchs, 2010: 143).

I would like to argue that, on the contrary, it was the participatory nature of *Framed Youth* that empowered members of the group to develop a political awareness and performance of citizenship which moved beyond subcultural 'lifestyle politics', carrying through into various kinds of activism, including solidarity with the striking miners in 1984–85. We should not forget, of course, the role of Philip Timmins and Andy Lipman as facilitators in the production of the tape:

[The] whole process was contained within a structure of support, with our roles of facilitating the ideas with practical organization within the budget limits, building confidence and encouragement in their abilities and talents and mediating moments of conflict and despondency (Lipman, n.d.).

Contrary to the idea that 'these producers find no time for political activism and consider their individual product as a sufficient statement', the progression from

*Framed Youth to All Out* provides a concrete example of the move beyond personal experience of oppression as the precondition for politicization and towards the recognition that other social groups, class fractions and minorities experience some of the same kinds of oppression.

Whilst it is true, then, that radical media need not necessarily be participatory (Downing, cited in Sandoval and Fuchs, 2010: 147), it is also the case that participatory media need not necessarily be marginal. *Framed Youth* exposes the limitations of such an assumption, as a project that emerged from the margins and made incursions into the outer reaches of the mainstream, winning the prestigious Grierson Award in 1984 and being shown on Channel 4 in 1986 and 1989. This move from the periphery to the centre epitomises the idea of 'documentary subjects becoming agents in the making process' (Rose, 2014: 201) which was constitutive of the project itself.

## Conclusion

At the beginning of this article I discussed the challenge for filmmakers to create work that is politically critical but also pleasurable and accessible, in the context of the fact that the story of LGSM eventually found expression in a feel-good feature film, rather than an activist or political documentary. This has wider relevance in terms of the struggle for the 'progressive' within popular culture. Rhian E. Jones regards Owen Gower's hard-hitting 2014 documentary *Still the Enemy Within* as a necessary supplement to *Pride*, in terms of emphasising the sense of bleakness and anger bound up with the strike's defeat:

If considered purely in terms of popular resistance to neoliberalism's shock-troops, *Pride* could be dismissed for pulling its punches, since it shows little of the high political stakes invested in the outcome of the strike or the police occupation, brutality, and harassment to which mining communities were subject (2014).

In this context it is interesting to revisit Peter Stead's thoughts on British social realism (from the end of the 1980s):

Film comedies in Britain still seem to pull their punches a little and it is almost as if the industry has deliberately refrained from making a totally challenging and anarchic social comment in *The Boys from the Black Stuff* vein [...] The writer Hanif Kureishi is on record as suggesting that in the Britain of the 1980s 'everything is so horrific' that people are no longer interested in social realism but the whole point about comedy, as he was well aware, is that it can achieve a cutting edge denied straight documentary even as it appeals to mass audiences (1989: 217).

It was not until the highly successful films *Brassed Off* (Herman, 1996), *The Full Monty* (Cattaneo, 1997) and *Billy Elliot* (Daldry, 2000) that British cinema would reflect the industrial decline and unrest that had occurred during the 1980s – in other words, after a 'safe' interval of time. But despite their use of comedy in the service of social comment, the primary focus of these films is on the social mobility unleashed by the performing arts (Wayne 2018: 179) as an escape route from a working class environment characterised by insularity and intolerance. By contrast, in *Pride* music, dance, singing and other kinds of performativity take place in an extemporaneous manner – leaving aside the issue of whether the impression of spontaneity is conveyed – within local/community settings (rather than commercial or institutional settings), and are integral to encounters and bonding taking place in the here and now.

In terms of a broadening of appeal, *Pride*, like its precursors, 'demonstrates that partying and protesting are [a] set of categories that needn't be mutually exclusive' (Jones, 2014), underlining the remarkable earnestness *and* vibrancy of (gay liberation) activism in the Thatcher years, and retaining humour and a political edge. Stephen Beresford's discovery of *All Out* and use of the video in developing *Pride* shows that (to quote Hilderbrand on AIDS activism videos) 'the footage can function as a source text to recapture moments of queer activist fervour' (2006: 310). The availability of such media texts also plays a crucial role in the construction and development of popular historical narratives, especially when some details of the Miners' Strike of 1984–5 are unknown or hazy at best (Jones, 2014).

What happens when activism becomes archive and vice-versa? In recent years we have seen the relaunching of LGSM and other Miners' Strike support groups, and forms of grassroots public history such as the LGBT strand of the King's Cross Story Palace project, which have been catalysed in the years following the release and success of *Pride*.<sup>15</sup> Recent years have also seen projects and events on LGBTQ+ history and archives, such as those initiated or hosted by London Metropolitan Archives. Such initiatives suggest that what might be termed queer vernacular culture can now be heard more audibly in the institutional context into which it is sublimated (Howard, 2008: 2005), given that, for subaltern groups, entrance into the archive is not always easy to secure.

Like *Pride* itself, grass-roots initiatives offer nostalgic pleasures, but it should also be emphasised that, as Raymond Williams points out, nostalgia can be enabling, acting as a catalyst for the recovery or regeneration of historical discourses (quoted in Shaw, 2012: 124) that can stimulate activism in the present moment. We can also think of more critical responses to the film's nostalgic representational strategies. For example, the brief comedic allusions to separatism and the establishment of Lesbians Against Pit Closures (LAPC), interpreted by some as needlessly dismissive (and compounded by the unrepresentative shortage of female activists in the film), has been a spur for the creation of a new documentary called *Rebel Dykes*, which is currently in development. This documentary promises to illuminate the subcultural context and structure of feeling in which *Framed Youth* and LGSM emerged and developed, with Trill Burton and Pom Martin from *Framed Youth* (aka The Bell's resident DJ duo the Sleeze Sisters) among its interviewees. *Rebel Dykes* itself is amassing an impressive archive of ephemera, photographs and videos, in addition to many hours of original audio and video interviews.

Looking forward, it can be hoped that the success of *Pride* – and the rediscovery of *Framed Youth* and *All Out*, with their collective auto/videography – will also

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<sup>15</sup> We can also think of social media groups – despite problematic issues of data ownership and privacy – as useful spaces for camaraderie, networking and the sharing of artefacts and ephemera (such as press cuttings or photographs).



contribute to debates about the role of emotion in the historicizing process. Perhaps such media texts can encourage the initiation of oral histories, and (auto)biographical approaches to 'history from below', in the tradition of the History Workshop movement. Daryl Leeworthy has recently written about the oral histories collected by the South Wales Coalfield History Project in the run up to, and during, the 1984–5 Miners' Strike, and that:

By ensuring that the interviews were recorded 'in the heat of the moment', it is possible for generations who did not live through the strike to hear (and understand) the emotions of those whose lives were turned upside down by what was going on. Significantly this also means that those perspectives had not been tempered by the calming waves of distance and time (2012: 828).

A sense of anger and betrayal still lingers around the events of the Miners' Strike, which makes the idea of a historical perspective on the miners' strike that is detached, coolly neutral and objective even harder to imagine or endorse. As Rhian E. Jones points out (2015), 'the tangle of story and history surrounding the strike suggests that the event and what it stood for are not "just" history yet [...] the Eighties hot war of government against people hasn't cooled'.

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The author has no competing interests to declare.

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