

**Paul Morrison**  
**Edited LCVA interview**  
**Interviewer: Ceridwen Williams**  
**Transcribed by Ceridwen Williams**

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## **Revolutionary ideals**

**Portrait of of Paul Morrison**  
**Born 1944, London (UK)**  
**Film writer-director**  
**Community video/film Activist**

I was born in 44, at the end of 1944 when the bombs were still dropping over London, the V2 bombs. So I was born into an atmosphere of a lot of fear My grandfathers were calling themselves anarchists, socialist anarchists then, they wouldn't set foot in a synagogue. And you know my parents were members of a Labour Party and I delivered Labour Party leaflets, kind of as a kid up...and down the street. So there was that, kind of fear and a strong sense of justice and anger about not wanting to be controlled, you know. And then, as a kid I was interested in putting on...I liked making up stories, writing stories, putting on shows that were shows, and puppet shows making up puppet shows. I wrote a comic, you know. So I was kind of interested in all that stuff. And, from a young...you know I used to read out my stories in class, and then I got pushed towards sciences. You know sciences were supposed to be what was happening in the kind of late 50s early 60s. And it was completely inappropriate for me... wasn't where I was at all. And, luckily what happened was I bunked, a group of us bunked off school after our exams, kind of after our A-levels and we went off and made a film. We made a sort of Keystone Kops comedy film, which was a lot of fun and sort of very exciting, and editing was kind of a magical process. We shot it on Super 8 or something...maybe it was even Standard 8. And I was sort of hooked. So I went to university when I went out I was going to read - because I'd did maths, a lot of maths at A-level - I was going to read civil engineering. My first day at university, I changed to maths and then I changed to economics. And that was as close as I could get to something that was kind of humanist, and creative - and I did try to do as much sociology as I could within the economics degree. And then afterwards went to film school. Kind of, did a lot of theatre and then went to film school afterwards. And then, went to America as a postgraduate. Kind of still in economics. And that was a time of the Harvard sit-ins and the student protests and all the rest of it... And I became politically radicalised.

American friends were facing the draft, or were they going to burn their draft cards or... you know, it was very real. And then there was, and then gradually the more you learnt about Vietnam war he more you learnt that the whole education system and the you know, industrial complex was sort of all meshed in - that America was a kind of war machine and indeed still is in many ways.

## **Joining the BBC**

I was sniffing at, wanting to do drama really but I didn't know how to find my way in so I

actually joined the BBC current affairs which made sense in terms of what I'd been studying. So I was this sort of BBC current affairs person by day and this kind of revolutionary hippie person by night. I remember having to go... I worked on this daily current affairs program, a bit like NEWSNIGHT is now. And I had to go do, I was sent off to do a story on the...well I probably suggested ...a story on the Isle of Wight about Bob Dylan coming over to play the Isle of Wight. So, I kind of failed to get an interview with Bob Dylan. Kind of filmed his press conference and concocted some kind of story, flew it back, flew back with it on little bi-plane or something. Got the story out on Friday night. Met up with my friends, put my hippie gear on, drove down back to the Isle of Wight. I had a press pass, and went to the Isle of Wight Festival as a punter.

### **Moving on to Inter-Action**

Even while I was at the BBC, I've been helping out at Inter-Action filming stuff. Because inter-Action had been going on already since '66 or '67 or something. So I met the guy that ran it and filmed some stuff for them and helped them out a bit, and then I sort of decided that I needed to commit myself to... It was a very...you know at that time the BBC felt, now it's sort of almost feels radical because politics has shifted so much to the right, but at that time it felt like it was the establishment somehow. And when you went, like to interview striking Ford workers or whatever, you were going as...they didn't really trust you, you know, you were going as a member of this... no matter how much I said 'look I...' And also I was still terribly young, and you have a lot of power and responsibility. And what they want you to do is just reiterate a sort of accepted, you know what's acceptable, the kind of middle-ground face of you know, the world. And I wasn't on the middle ground. And I felt like I was having to... I was being even too much power for someone as ignorant as I was about real life...

And there has been lots of times since that I regretted it because life would be a lot easier if I had stayed. But this felt like the right thing to do at the time...leave and throw in my lot with the community arts project.

### **The Inter-Action lifestyle**

We were all living in short term housing that the council supplied, so these were houses that were about to be knocked down... we had for six months or a year or whatever. And we had a shop that was the office, like...a store front. And there were maybe 30 or 40 of us. We basically, any income that we earned that was outside of Inter-Action, we'd put into the communal pot and we each got seven quid a week spending money. But all our meals were cooked communally and taken communally... And it was fun and we were young and it was OK. Sometimes there was enough to buy a chocolate bar or whatever!

### **ED Berman methodology**

A lot of the emphasis was on theatre. There was a street theatre troupe, and there was a sort of experimental theatre group that was developing. And they also put on ...it was a lunchtime theatre. And it was also, a lot of emphasis was on kind of group work, round a kind of model that ED Berman, the director of Inter-Action, had developed. And it was a way of people getting to know one another and create stories together, really.

### **Battling top-down media representation**

I started developing that, so that when a group of kids or a group have created their story then we filmed it. You know, we started trying to. And the kids filmed it, and think in the, in the ideology part of it was we're giving power back to, back to people who think that film and TV is just something that you receive. I mean of course now it's so radically different because anybody can make a little film on their phone ... And there's the sense that a lot of people have that power. How they use it, I don't know... But at that time - I have to ask you to imagine this - it's like in the media were something out there, and, and something that was done to people rather than that some people, people felt they had any control of. And so at the same time - so on the one hand I would be developing stories with kids maybe and they would be performing them. Just very crude, very simple you know, but fun you know. And for them to see themselves back on telly again, was mind blowing you know. 'Woow, I'm on telly' you know...

### **Working in the local community**

And then we also started working with some community groups, for them to make their own films - we worked with the local Troops Out movement, we worked with a tenant's ... or residents group that we'd helped to start, in order to campaign...for this site that we were working on - which was a sort of a bombsite really - to be turned into a park and adventure playground and something for the community.

The summer programme with the kids would be building a giant model that you could climb over. We did a dinosaur one year and a Gulliver another year you know, within which you could act out, create you know little stories and theatre and you know, you'd have a dinosaur song and a dinosaur story, you know. And there were jumble sales that hundreds of people came to and there was a festival, and people were singing into the night...and it was very local.

### **I still wanted a revolution**

I mean Inter-Action was a bit wishy-washy politically. And so their focus was less political, although some of us within Inter-Action did encourage a couple of shows that were more political. I was sort of quite realistic at another level you know, because, you know you meet a lot of people in the community and you realize that they're a million miles away from whatever dream you might have about what kind of society you wanted to live in, and that they didn't want that - they might want a place like for their kids or a park, but they didn't necessarily want a revolution.

### **Troops Out**

The Troops Out movement wasn't just Irish, there were people who were campaigning for the troops to come home. So we made a little campaign film. I mean the problem that we had - and that I think community video had - was distribution, at that time. You know, we didn't have social media that we could then put our little films up on and anybody could watch them, you know at any time - or we didn't have an Internet that we could put there. So it really meant people taking the films around to public meetings and gatherings.

I don't think it was successful in terms of helping to create a mass movement around Troops Out - for the reasons I've just mentioned. But it was successful in bringing a group of people together. And for them to feel they have the power and the authority to create

something that was their own, that expressed their own beliefs and you know, argued for something that, that was a 'not allowed' argument to have on national television. So, so in empowering those people it was successful. In ... helping to make Troops Out common policy it didn't work.

### **John Hopkins fixed our cameras**

The equipment didn't get very well maintained, and we all went to Hoppy Hopkins when we ran into technical problems.

We'd go and ask him for help in when we got stuck technically - which was quite often. Quite often ... things didn't work. Everything was so much more unreliable then but these days you just know that that's going to work, don't you?

### **Big Flame**

A group of us started talking together about going to live in the East End and working collectively, politically in a more explicit revolutionary political project which was Big Flame. And ... that was mixed group, women and men, and we bought a little house, squatted in our house and rented a third house within a small area and started working together.

Going down to Ford Motors and a couple of us went to work in Ford's, and we made contact with Shop Stewards in Ford's, or with activists... and were leafleting every week down at Ford's early in the morning. So this was the sort opposite of going down as the BBC.

### **Newsreel**

Around this time also we, some of us who had been at the BBC formed this group called the Newsreel collective to make films, campaign films.

There were about seven or eight of us with different kinds of media skills and we wanted to make films to help the revolution basically! So we made, you know after, we made films about unemployment... made a film about housing called *Housey Housey*, because housing had become such a lottery - I mean compared to now, at least there was some council housing... new council housing being built. Made a film to help the... Women's Right to Choose abortion campaign. We made a couple of films in Portugal at the time of the revolution in 1974, against Salazar - the dictator. We... then we got a ... we made an anti-racist film with some Bangladeshi young people in the East End called *Divide and Rule Never* - and that was about the same time as Rock Against Racism.

### **Counter culture**

It was a terribly exciting time we had high ideals. And we... and you know, I don't regret trying out some of the things we tried out. And working together on a shared project was magic sometimes, you know, really was, and living collectively had moments of magic and taking care of other people's children and so forth, was kind of like... we weren't as ambitious as ... the time we got to Big Flame, we weren't pooling all our money or anything like that. You know, we weren't living on the seven pound a week or anything like that.

Part of the "revolution", you know, part of that time involved a lot of self-denial, like on the

NEWSREEL films we didn't put credits on so, you know, we didn't...and in fact even on the NEWSREEL films, although I was pretty skilled as a director, you know I would encourage somebody else to direct a scene or whatever you know. We would try and work collectively. So there was a lot of kind of self-abnegation kind of involved, and that was partly personal and partly the climate of the times ... You gave yourself to a higher 'cause'. The main problem was the 'ideology' was non-possessiveness. And we didn't believe in marriage and we didn't believe in the family as an institution and ...we were trying to remake ourselves at a personal level as well as at a political level.

But some of what we tried to do on the level of personal politics was beyond human - as humans we have needs and are fallible in ways that I hadn't taken account of.

Quite a few of us either went into therapy or got interested in therapy during that period as well, because we were making ourselves unhappy because - and we didn't know how or why, and we are we started something called Red Therapy which was trying to appropriate some of the methods of therapy but using it in a kind of self-help way. In order to stop feeling so screwed up.

### **I had always wanted to be an artist**

I think the thing that I was in denial about for a long time was wanting to be, quote, "an artist", you know - and to make something that was my own...that was beautiful and interesting and thought provoking and emotionally engaging.

All the time really I wanted more control, and I wanted to tell my stories in my way. And that was what led me towards fiction. I think it had always been there since shooting that film at school ...So I started writing screenplays. And about the fourth screenplay I wrote, somebody showed an interest. And that was the beginning of the third career or fourth career or whatever....