

## COMMUNITY VIDEO

What follows is a few notes put together by members of three community-based video workshops - Albany Video, Oval Video, and West London Media Workshop, who have all been working in different parts of London for the last 8 - 10 years. Two of us are also members of Women in Sync, who have recently set up a Women's Video Resource Centre. We do not claim to be representative of all community video activity in London, but feel our experience qualifies us to make a few general points about our area of work.

### OVERALL AIMS

Community Video starts from the assumption, shared with Community Arts and other oppositional cultural work, that the mass media and other dominant cultural institutions in our society reproduce a view of the world which excludes or distorts the experience of the majority of us, whether on the grounds of our class, race, sex, age or sexuality, in order to perpetuate existing power relations. Community Video work seeks to make facilities and training available in order that these subordinated groups can begin to represent their own lives and concerns themselves, and so challenge representations of them in the dominant culture. *help.*

### HISTORY

Community Video began with a neighbourhood focus, which to an extent it still retains. Work was done on playschemes, in youth clubs, or with campaigning tenants groups where the learning process that the group using video went through was seen as being as important as the tape that was finally produced. Video became a part of very localised community struggles. Partly because of this, and because of the poor technical specifications of the equipment available to us at the time, community video gained a bad reputation with the Arts funding bodies, whose notions of "artistic quality" it offended. The B.F.I., for instance, insisted on seeing it as "social work", rather than an experiment in an oppositional use of the medium, (and so outside their funding remit.) *?*

Later on in the 1970's the localised focus of the work began to be supplemented by issues and audiences outside of our immediate neighbourhoods. This reflected the addition in community work of issue based work to locality based work, together with the increasing prominence of struggles against racism and sexism generally on the left. These forces contributed to the production of videotapes which, though they were made by locally based groups from their own experience, were of interest to other groups city-wide and nationally. And as the end of this period coincided with the mass marketing of domestic video equipment, distribution to wider audiences became much more technically feasible.

These trends have continued up to the present so that now community video workshops are involved in a spectrum of activity from the original neighbourhood work to producing programmes for Channel 4 or cassette distribution within the growing community, educational and political networks.

THE FUTURE

For this work to survive and grow in Greater London, there are two areas of immediate need which will have to be satisfied.

- 1) Revenue Funding: the A.C.T.T. are currently drafting a Workshops Declaration and Code of Practice for video. We would hope that the relevant funding bodies will sign these agreements and come up with the necessary extra finance to implement them.
- 2) Engineering Support: Video equipment is vulnerable to breakdown and technical deficiency unless constantly maintained. We believe that we need to break our dependence on commercial companies for maintenance by setting up our own workshop(s). This would provide both a cheaper and more accessible service, and training in video engineering for women and black people, for whom few such opportunities exist.