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Community based video - is the force with us and if it is how long will it stay?

In the last couple of years there have been a number of significant developments that have moved community based video activity along to new and ^{exciting} existing thresholds that five years ago were the stuff of dreams. More projects laying their hands on U-matic equipment: the boom in the domestic video market which has broadened dramatically the opportunities for distribution on cassette format.

The advent of Channel 4 and its supply of much needed resources to ^{many} ~~any~~ groups; ⁿ the opportunities provided by the channel of getting some community originated product down the tube - even on lower band. Finally to keep the list short and general, the very speculative possibilities that the introduction of cable might generate.

Combine all this with the fact that in real terms the community video movement is still but a pimple on an elephant's arse.

What has been achieved in the last ten years? A relatively small collection of groups and individuals have managed to survive the trip so far, keeping alive the notion that radical video product and processes can exist and have resonance outside the context of Broadcast TV and in a direct and dramatic way relate to the 'stuff' of peoples lives. Getting it down the tube is to some extent icing on the cake.

Given that the pimples on elephants arses get squashed when elephants sit down, various questions occur to me concerning the means by which we are able to consolidate what exists and develop a strategy for survival which does not necessarily depend on the divine interveniton of Channel 4. A cable contractor, the BFI, GLC, Uncle Tom Cobley and all.

I do recognise that when opportunities present themselves they do need grabbing - when vacuums form and a gate is opened some enterprising young spark will fill

it up with something - are there the human resources available to grab the emerging opportunities? In my opinion it is not yet clear what the impact of grabbing particular opportunities might be to the fabric of community based video activity. For instance, having worked for almost a decade in what feels like the extreme margins of Moving Picture History, using burnt out equipment, and becoming fairly burnt out ^{our} ~~themselves~~ [▲]. In true Star Wars style we discover that the force is with us and Channel 4 gives us a substantial, (in our terms) amount of money to re-equip and employ a technician. The answer to all our dreams!! The attractions that new opportunities present are often tempting. A commission from Channel 4 if successful might automatically lead to a second, third, fourth.....will we reach a stage where the meagre energy ~~and~~ ^{and} human resources of Community Video activists particularly the bigger and uglier ones, are totally absorbed by the priorities of unexpected stardom, and/or the pressure of producing quality alternative product ^{for Broadcast} and adopting traditional broadcast ^{practice to} achieve that aim efficiently? What might develop if community based projects are not institutionally secure? Will a significant migration take place of experienced activists, who as a result of financial insecurity or because they need a change of terrain to avoid 'burning out' opt for the possibly more lucrative and glam opportunities that seem to be emerging? As 1984 approaches could we see the emergence of the 'Community Video Work Executive'?

Because of its history and its developing relationships to:

- a. its participants
- b. the technology it has used
- c. its funding sources
- d. its ideology
- e. its audiences

Both community based video and video art activity can only be seen to date to have had marginal impact on popular cultural form and until recently have

remained within the ghettos of art house consciousness and local community politics.

Compare this with the popular boom in video cassette since 1980 and I suppose all one can do is stand back in awe at the work that needs to be done.

Perhaps we should begin by considering how to secure some kind of base for community based video outside the realms of broadcast. If the gravy train from Channel 4 dries up as it looks like doing at the moment - how do we go about capitalising new and emerging projects and recapitalising existing uses during the next five years? (it won't be cheap). More importantly, how do we secure adequate revenue funding to have enough people "on the ground" sustaining and developing practice. In the past these questions have been answered, and will continue to be for the foreseeable future by individual groups assessing the local options and attracting whatever funding is available and realistic in the local circumstances RAA, local authority, MSC etc. In the future, both Channel 4 and the BFI are obvious sources of finance. However, Channel 4 will require, and rightly so, quantifiable feedback, direct or indirect, in terms of its programming. The BFI on the other hand tends to use prestige and 'quality' as a central aspect of its currency. The BFI is presently developing a not inconsiderable part of its future funding policy around the media centre concept. which seems to be an overtly capital led policy which doesn't always take into account the ^{context} context of its location, or the activities the resource is meant to facilitate. I would draw an analogy with the Welsh Arts Council Policy of some years ago of developing theatres and arts centres around Wales (overtly capital led). It is regarded today in many quarters to have been a mistake of not insignificant proportions.

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