

# INDEPENDENT VIDEO

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# VIEWS

## THE SERIOUS MOONSHINE.

Pat Sweeney listens to Joram ten Brink of Moonshine Video explain how he put his art on the Front Line

"When I started the workshop at Moonshine I didn't know what the hell I was doing or was supposed to do. So I got on the bus and went over to the Albany and asked Tony Downumt - what is community video?"

Whatever Tony Downumt told Joram ten Brink on that September afternoon in 1981 it doesn't appear to have had much effect as Moonshine went on to develop their own distinctive approach to community video programming.

Moonshine is a community art centre in the north-west London borough of Brent. Since its formation in the mid-seventies it had been a traditional arts centre with a strong focus on drama. The arrival of a video artist called Joram ten Brink in 1981 changed all that. Today the centre contains a video workshop with one full-time and one part-time worker, a print room and shortly, a sound recording studio. Joram had studied music and anthropology, and after getting involved in Super-8, spent a year studying film at Middlesex Polytechnic. It was as a video artist that Joram first became involved with Moonshine working on a tape about nuclear conflict entitled 'FUTURE TENSE', and it was his interests as a video artist which determined the model of community video he was to develop through the workshop.

"Moonshine was and is an attempt to carry the old style film workshop model with that of the community video workshop. The workshop is engaged in mixed production, i.e., we do community tapes, tapes on community issues, tapes solicited by the community, as well as, more personal, more artistic work.

I have never had much enthusiasm for the idea of the worker serving a large constituency like some kind of video trouble-shooter. From a very early stage I decided the best approach was not that of the workshop, with our limited assets, going to the community, but getting the community to come to us. It seemed to me that the best way of maximizing the effect and efficiency of the workshop was to involve as many people as possible in its activities. Hence Moonshine has a lot of personnel, not only a couple of paid workers, but a support group of about 10-50 people who are all too varying degrees actively involved in the workshop.

Because I am a video artist, who has continued to produce his own work within the workshop context, I used the carrot of free use of facilities to persuade video artists and aspiring video makers to come into the workshop to work on their own personal projects. We would provide the facilities for free, train, and teach them, in exchange for their agreeing to work on community tapes.

I suppose I made use of people's desire to make tapes to create a pool of affiliated workers who, whilst not paid, by the workshop, were allowed access to the equipment on the understanding that they could use the skills they acquired to support the wider social activities of the workshop.

Some people have gone into commercial work, which brings me particular pleasure, because one function of the workshop is as a community resource and training centre, which gives people new perspectives

and equips them with, hopefully, marketable skills."

The results of this mixed production model were recently on display at South Hill Park, during its recent series of workshop screenings in the new Video-theque. Certainly the preponderance of video art was not what one would expect from an inner London borough. Joram's FIRST, LET US KILL, about an Argentine artist in political exile in England, showed his intense preoccupation with the issues of violence, authoritarianism and nuclear conflict. STONE (Nancy Grozier/John Clancy) could have come straight out of the LVA. It pondered the meaning of sculpture in a series of pans and zooms on pieces of..... stone. John Goff, Moonshines new part-time worker, is perhaps the model pupil of Joram's school of video artists tempered by community involvement. His TRANSITIVE & STORY OF TWO SLEEPERS were sensitive, elegant and eloquent art videos. MOVING ON FROM ARLINGTON HOUSE (Philip O'Shea), a fragment from a large-scale documentary on Camden Town's infamous refuge for the homeless, the helpless and hapless, was a more conventional instance of community video. Proving Joram's method: I noted that John Goff was cameraman on the documentary. Much more to my taste was LIFE (Rene Lee, Beejay Johnson, Gerrard Johnson) a music video whose synthetic reggae soundtrack accompanied a series of poignant still images transferred to tape which illustrated a lyric which managed to be both mordant and mournful.

The mixed production method certainly makes for an interesting and varied programme of exhibition work, but it hath charms beyond the appeals of appearance.

1 IN 44, the Nottingham Youth Theatre's excellent video on youth pregnancy is one of Joram's favourite tapes, and an important indice of his aesthetic/political concerns.

"The interesting thing about 1 IN 44, which was an extremely subversive tape, was the avoidance of the usual drama/documentary cliches. Its ability to integrate a critical treatment and analysis of the subject, with a visual style which questioned and undermined conventional codes of representation. That is always also my ideal.

For me, one of the problems with much community video, is that it has often, uncritically, perpetuated mainstream visual conventions. Questions of the representation of images and visual information are in my opinion as important as questions of simple access to equipment or broadcast television, or indeed responding to needs and bringing forward issues which are neglected by the media, which are, and have always been, the bottomlines, so to speak, of community video practice.

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.

For instance, at the moment, a group of video makers from Moonshine are doing a tape with ASTMS on unemployment, and they are adding their own critical concern with images of the political concerns of the union, in a manner, which ultimately will benefit the project."

The Moonshine axiom is to concentrate energies and resources. Hence they "concentrate on training strategically well-placed members of the community - youth workers, social workers, etc" - who can directly plug their skills into their own constituencies.

Channel 4 was good for Moonshine, indeed, though it is funded by GLAA and indirectly through the local council (as part of the art centre), it could hardly have reached its present position without the input of resources under the Fountain

Plan for workshops. None of this, however, blinds Joram to the problems enforced on the sector by the industrialization process initiated by the C4/ACTT workshop declaration.

"Channel 4 has undoubtedly done a lot for the sector. But I feel that the channel has pushed some parts of the sector too far, too fast, forcing some workshops to prematurely become production houses for broadcast television.

My argument was, and still is, to fund video workshops for three, four, or even five years, allowing them to organically evolve towards broadcast television production. By creating a strong production infrastructure, supplying product for television would be a natural extension of that process. The danger of forcing the pace of industrialization is that workshops will leave the community behind in the race to generate product. I believe Alan Fountain intended a policy similar to the one I have outlined, but has been pressurized into prematurely squeezing product out of the sector."

Even before the publication of the Hunt Report, Moonshine, though there were no imminent plans to cable Brent, were interested in the possibilities of cable. At the time they worked on a pilot community news programme.

"We did that simply in order to ascertain the feasibility of providing a community news service to a prospective cable network. To find out how fast we could respond to events? How comprehensively we could cover them? How much it would cost? How many workers would need to be involved? etc.

So I have been particularly disappointed by the subsequent history of cable. But I still believe that cable will eventually solve the dominant problem of community video distribution."

On the subject of distribution Moonshine have recently begun monthly screenings of workshop video, making them the only public viewing outlet for community video in London. The initiative appears to be successful. The first screening of Luton 33 video attracted 25-30 people, and Moonshines own screening attracted an audience of 50. Chapter video will be the next workshop to undergo screening at Moonshine.

"The screenings are very important. Not only do we invite workshops to come and show their work, but we invite them to discuss with us, and members of the general public, their own experience of community video. And in turn we visit them with our tapes. We also intend to develop a series of media studies seminars in tandem with the screenings."

This interview was one of Joram ten Brink's last official functions as director of Moonshine video. Exhausted by the "70 hour weeks..the knives, gangs and break-ins", which were a regular feature of community programming in Brent, he is moving into free-lance production. His place as full-time workers is to be taken by Atalia Shaw and INDEPENDENT VIDEO wishes them both well in their respective futures.

Moonshine would be interested in arranging workshop screenings with other workshops. If you would like to participate contact: Atalia Shaw/John Goff. Moonshine Video, Victor Rd, London. NW 10. Tel Nos (01) 969 7959/9996.

