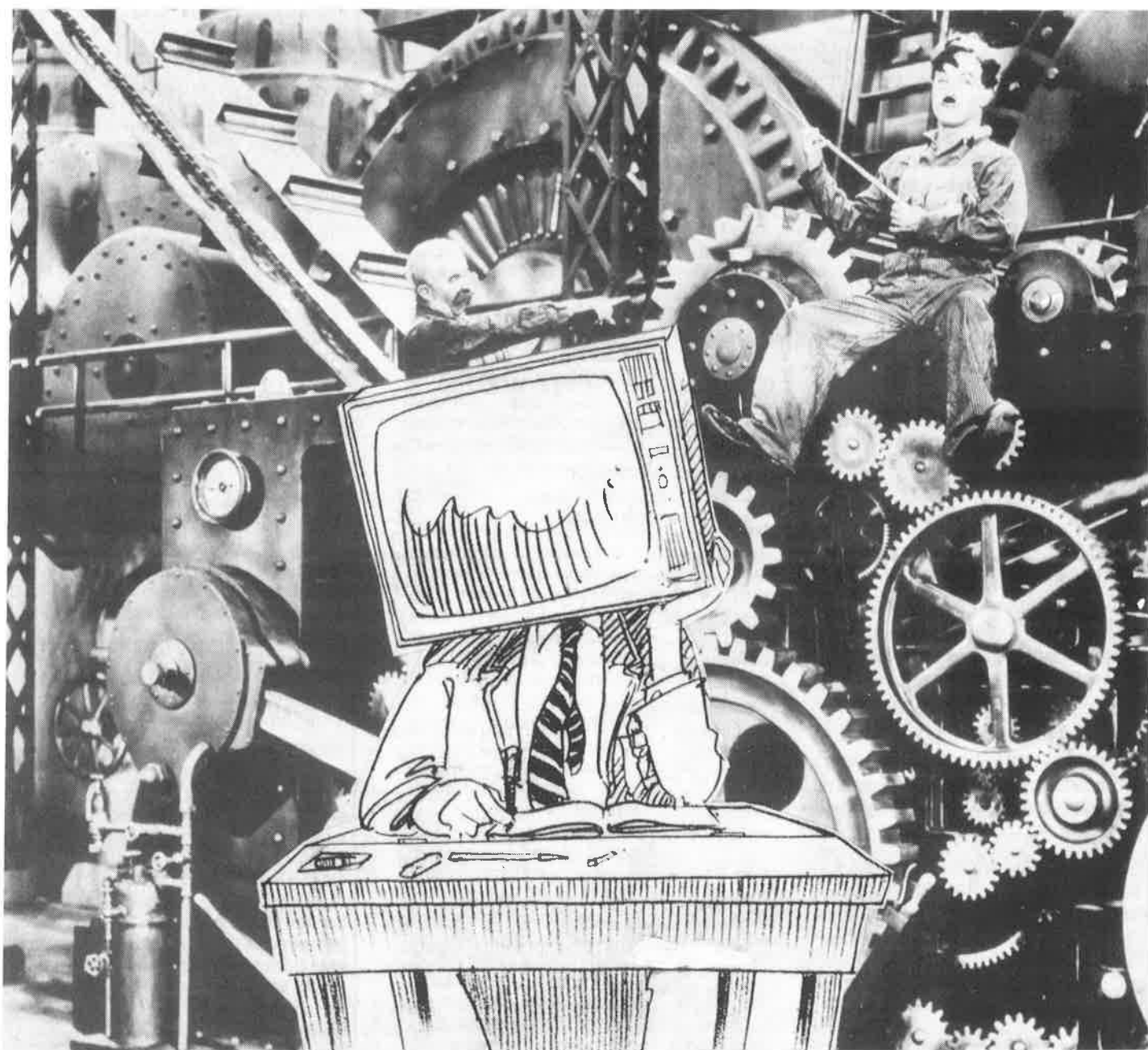


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# INDEPENDENT VIDEO

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# REVIEWS

## NEW TAPES FROM THE ALBANY

Helen Petts reviews three new tapes from Albany Video.

It is ten years since Albany Video started as a basic video resource for the local community in Deptford. Since then it has grown into a production unit working under the ACTT workshop declaration, and is one of the most established video workshops.

For the past year, they have had funding from the GLC for a video worker to work specifically with women and girls, which has resulted in a large increase in this aspect of their work. Though she has run practical workshops and organised screenings, the main priority for Carol Stevens during this year has been to work in very close collaboration with women in south London on actual productions. Three of these tapes have recently become available for distribution.

When Carol started in the post, talks had already taken place between another Albany worker, Karen Alexander, and the women trainees from Deptford Skills Centre. They had approached the Albany because they wanted to make a video about their experience of training in traditionally male dominated jobs, such as carpentry, painting and decorating and car mechanics. They felt that a video was needed to show women who would not normally consider such training, what the courses are like and how to get on them. They had very definite ideas about what they wanted and of the kind of audiences the tape would be shown to. The only thing they didn't have was the money to make it. They only had £500 which was money they had been given that had been left over at the end of the financial year. It is to the Albany's credit that they made the tape for this sum (which must have just about covered the cost of the tapes and the petrol), seeing it as just the kind of work they were funded to do.

The women in the skill centre had a large amount of involvement in the production. They decided on the editorial content, appeared in it and did the narration. After a year, *The Rough with the Smooth* was completed.

One of the things I really liked about this tape was the way that the women in it didn't come across as being trailblazers, fighting for the right to work in manual trades, but as local women – some with children, some without – who had just decided that this was what they wanted to do. Many of them describe themselves as being just a housewife before doing the course, designed to give women the opportunity to try out different manual trades. I found this far more convincing than a more didactic approach might have

been and I am sure that this tape will be responsible for persuading other women that they can do it too, especially when they hear the women at the centre talking so personally about their experiences and how proud they feel to have become skilled tradeswomen.

The second tape was made with a theatre group called 'Mother Tongues' who are a group of women in Lambeth who had never acted before. They had put together a series of sketches about how women feel about visiting the doctor and were touring it around the local mother and toddler groups and health groups. The show was aimed very specifically at women who had young children, like most of the women in the group. With help on crewing from the women workers at Lambeth Video, Carol spent two days shooting a performance, along with documentary footage and interviews about how the play, *The Drum Game*, was developed. The title comes from the way that members of the audience are encouraged to beat a drum to stop the action and question what is happening. Then the actors, still in character, have to justify their behaviour. So there is a scene where a particularly patronising doctor has to defend her attitudes to the audience. I felt this worked very well, both as a dramatic technique and to give a sense of actuality to what could have been a straight recording of a drama performance; which doesn't usually work in terms of effective video. Again, this tape was made for only £500 funding, from New Peckham Varieties.

The tape I liked the most of the new Albany Video productions, was *Netfall of Holes*,

which was made with the young women's drama group, Second Wave, who are also based at the Albany. Again, Carol didn't want to be just a fly on the wall making a record of a theatre production. Second Wave asked her to come in on their production right from the start, while they were having discussions and doing improvisations around the theme of young women and homelessness. The tape covers these sessions, addressing issues of what happens when they don't get on with their parents (most of the participants were teenagers), when they're thrown out of home, finding a flat, loneliness. With the addition of actual scenes from the finished play, both from the theatrical performance and shot in real locations, such as a hostel for homeless young women, the video gives the atmosphere of the intense activity involved in its production. Over and above this, the actual issues both the play and video address are put across with real dramatic impact. There is one extraordinary monologue where a young woman is pacing up and down, in the small living room of the first flat that she can call her own, literally going crazy with loneliness. Both this and other performances in the tape really hit you with their energy and – a word unfashionable in community video – talent.

*Rough with the Smooth*, *The Drum Game* and *Netfall of Holes* are all available for hire to promote discussions in women's groups, health groups, youth clubs and schools – from Albany Video Distribution, Douglas Way, London SE8. Tel: 01-692 6322. Hire charge is £10. Sale price available on application.



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