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Although Video in Pilton began as the now 'classical' community video project, working on a housing campaign in a working class district, it was clear from the start that we would be looking to avoid at least two of the conventions that community video had held so dearly throughout the seventies. The first, was a doctrinaire commitment to 'process' work at the expense of any 'product'. Whatever the reason for this commitment - whether it came from a genuine desire to open up the exploration of the medium for as many people as possible, without introducing the false constraints of broadcast-dominated production values, or whether the early practitioners were unsure of their own ^{production} skills, is a matter for further debate. What we hoped to do, was to attempt to synthesise both 'process' and 'product', so that, on the simplest possible level (VHS) people would be able to both discover the potential of video for themselves, and also work on ways of communicating that to other people in the area (and beyond, hopefully). The second 'convention' was that the only appropriate form for community video was the campaign-agit-prop documentary. This particular form of pigeon-holing working class life, underestimates the other cultural forces at work within the community, and also restricts any attempts at experiment within video itself.

Nevertheless, the starting point was the campaign video on housing "It's Now or Never". Sony Rovers and VHS equipment were borrowed, the Action Committee paid for the tapes, and the University offered free editing facilities. Through the Action Committee, four or five local tenants wanted to get involved in the final production. So we began work, with some preliminary training, but the majority of experience coming through the actual weeks of interviews and research. Those who saw themselves as interviewers, were encouraged to become 'technicians'; and those who felt most at home with the

headphones on, began to discover their skills as interviewers. None had been anywhere near to video before this project, and now, two years later, they are still, in different ways, involved with video work.

The fact that they are still involved is perhaps because of our working methods. First of all, we identify groups who are active in the area, and would benefit from the introduction of video into their activities. Secondly, responding to the 'networks', the inter-connecting relationships that exist within any working class area - which means that work undertaken in one group, filters through to a variety of others. Thirdly, by prioritising work with tenants groups, ranging from action committee videos, through to tenants workshops, where methods of organization and communication are explored. Although, it should be remembered that tenants groups are not a constant force; they often have periods of intense activity, that are followed by relative inactivity.



And so, during and after the production of 'It's Now Or Never',
 the Joint Steering Group of Tenants began
 to see the educational potential of this work. The local High school
 had received three years funding from the EEC to develop towards a
 Community School, and by the end of the first year, the actual
 'community' involvement was seen to be negligible. A 'Communication
 Skills' project was suggested to the school, and eventually incorporated
 into the Van Leer Project. It's important to emphasize here that
 local support existed for the creation of Video in Pilton, not
 because of the work of one video -person, but because of the
 identified need (in an area sufficiently run-down to receive a grant
 from an EEC "poverty programme") for an educationally-based project.
 Although video would be the core of this scheme, other 'communication
 skills' like public speaking, looking critically at the ^{media}, printing
 leaflets, would also be incorporated, as far as possible.

^{in this context,}
 So, work began, with one paid worker, and the promise of some
 VHS equipment. Our first concern was to record the local Gala, with
 a clear eye to the strategic importance of covering the event - making
 immediate contact with a large number of local folk, who would become
 both audience and producers of future videos. As well as broadening
 our contacts, we were also looking for the opportunity to explore
 the visual potential of the medium in a more creative way, and we
 made contact with a group of local unemployed teenagers who were
 full of ideas, and saw themselves as a band in search of a rock video.
 The outcome of this collaboration was a Tarkovsky-like surreal fantasy
 'The Art of White Rabbits', and the spawning of a real rock band.

A class of 11 year olds in one of the local Primary schools, began improvising a script for a five minute Space Adventure, as an entry for the JVC Video Competition. At the end of a week's preparation, they had refined the script, made the costumes and props, and were ready to learn the basics of VHS production. Everyone in the class, astronauts and all, were able to operate the camera, as some became 'film crew' and others, 'actors'. Their imaginative work received prizes at both national and international level, and the school kids were thrilled to see themselves on STV. As a result of this good publicity, we were able to put our community festival videos into the local commercial video shops, and broaden our network further.

Meanwhile, at the High School, an Under 5's Centre was established for the parents of adult students coming into the emerging Community School. We wanted to set up an ambitious project that would train the mothers (in the absence of any men) in using the video equipment, and also produce material that could be shown outside the Under 5's Centre. The production side was to be in three stages. First of all, a programme that looked at the ways that children used play both individually, and in groups, and the way the mothers responded to their children. Secondly, a programme that looked at the relationship between the school as provider, and the mothers as consumers of education. Were the specific needs of people within this community being met by the educational framework of the school? How easy was it for the adult student to fit into the school environment? And the third part (the most difficult) was to look at alternative educational models that might be suggested by part 2. It was expected that this sort of scheme would take at least a year to complete, and what has happened is that by September '83, we were at the point of editing the second part when all our source tapes were stolen. We are now re-shooting some of the material that was gathered, as well as running open workshops ('process') for a new generation of adult students in the school.

Some of the mothers who have been involved at the Under 5's Centre have gone on to work on other projects. For example, "Picnic at Gypsy Brae" was the record of the contribution of an outside theatre/music group to summer playschemes where each scheme was able to contribute something towards a day Carnival/Performance by the sea. One of the mothers was involved with filming a good deal of the preparations and performance, and then went on to work on a Womens Health Project, and to teach her own workshops to both youth workers, and mothers in another Nursery. One of the team that made 'Art of White Rabbits' is now teaching video skills, and has just produced a local Gala tape by getting the involvement of the Gala Committee, in editing decisions. Some of our most successful tapes have been in collaboration with a local drama group 'Razzle Dazzle', where their performances have been seen by womens groups, and used on University Community Nursing courses as an invaluable teaching aid. Another local tenant has gone on to set up his own video/photography projects on a near-by estate, and managed to find the necessary funding. All the examples, show the importance of 'networking', to preserve the dynamic of the project.

Having spread our skills and resources around the area, we are now in a position to draw on these contacts to work on a project that will seek a wider audience (schools, trades unions, womens groups...) and will mean using the very different production values of U-Matic instead of the traditional low-risk VHS. At the same time the 'process' work continues in schools and tenants groups, and by drawing on this area of work, we're able to enrich the new work we undertake.

Because, Video In Pilton began out of the Development of a Community School, the educational dimension has always been an important one. Access to it should be seen ^{to be not just} the right of the privileged few. As well as offering power, education has had the effect of isolating those it has benefited, and sets them in competition against each other.

The sort of model we hope to be working towards is based on the sharing of ideas and experiences. This collective learning sees education as allied to action. It doesn't seek to abstract knowledge and remove it from everyday experience ; learning and doing need to be integrated, the one supporting and enriching the other. Our concerns are the ways in which the dominant media are outside the control of the people of this area. We are redressing this balance, in a small way, by means of alternative t.v., by putting some of the power back into the hands of those who are traditionally seen as the consumers of culture. What we hope to achieve is a reversal of the role of the consumer, into the producer of a different more relevant world view which takes peoples needs into account.

. How do we assess the strengths and weaknesses of this particular way of working? First the merits : because the people making the tapes are on the 'inside', they are able to bring a greater insight into their work, unlocking areas of experience that is not available to the outsider. Secondly, as these people become more confident with their video skills, there is a ripple effect, bringing more people in, and extending the range of skills. Not only are technological skills discovered and enhanced, but general analytical, decision making skills are stimulated - so that editing a tape, can lead onto how to deal with the press, run a playgroup, speak at a public meeting, or even come to a Video Festival in Bracknell!

However, we would be foolish to dismiss the many problems that arise out of community video of this sort. The most important thing is that the community we work in is subject to the unsympathetic policies of central or local government. West Pilton has, for example, changed quite radically, since the District Council decided to sell 700 houses in the area. At this present moment in time, the streets are emptying, the ^{steel} shutters are going up, and morale is very low with the few tenants who remain. We are having to seriously consider, how we can best serve both the remaining tenants and the ^{also} surrounding areas, where there is more potential activity. Secondly, we are vulnerable to having our equipment and tapes stolen, in spite of the steel fortress we have built around them. Thirdly, we have to keep an eye open for the exploitative use of the equipment - whether that's capitalistic, or pornographic. And finally, there is the matter of representation : does everything have to look like it does on the telly? In some areas we have made great steps forward ; in others, the struggle continues.....

After the initial wave of euphoria about community video, there has been a period of silence from the funding bodies, who were unwisely asked to sit through contextless process work, and asked to respond 'critically'. Basically, they didn't know how to view it critically, or applied the wrong criteria. Many community video workers were seduced away from the difficulties of creating on the estate into the glamorous world of C 34, or ^{now} turn to working ^{exclusively} with middle class pressure groups. ^{However} As things get worse within the estates, it should be remembered that there is still exactly the same need to articulate through video, an oppositional culture from the working class, especially as one reflects on the ^{future} effects of cable t.v. within the inner cities. What we are looking for is a truly democratic use of video.

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