

Film Video

Extra

A supplement to Greater London Arts

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"A Local History"

by Sue Hall

West Kentish Town 1900-1975

20 minute black and white half-inch videotape, rough edited version.

The Brief

We see this as an effort to help bridge the generation gap, and to use the old people's information as a community resource. The old people have a lot of background information about the district which currently is not available to the community as a whole. Putting these people's stories on video tapes is one way to rectify the situation.
30th December, 1974

Some Facts

This is a social documentary videotape describing the changes in the architecture and quality of life, as observed and remembered by Old Age Pensioners.

The production has been grant-aided by the British Film Institute, with technical assistance from the British Council donated on a goodwill basis.

Production Details:

Pre-research and gathering of raw materials:	1 person-week
Shooting:	3 person-week
Post-shooting production (viewing, logging, additional shooting, editing, audio mixing):	4 person-week
First wave distribution	1 person-week

This work was, however, spread out over several months

Granted £797 Spent £650

Task Force, the commissioning agency, were responsible for setting up and arranging interviews.

Produced and directed by Sue Hall and John Hopkins, 1975.

Edited at Fantasy Factory Video Resource Centre, 130 Gloucester Avenue, London NW1

Audio Recording and Photography: Ralph Stephenson. Research: Laura Gunn

The videotape production 'A Local History' is an experimental project, and some new information which applies cybernetic methods to video production and distribution (see **Production Algorithm**) has been brought up in the course of the project.

This is the first time the British Film Institute has funded a video production. It is also experimental in that no-one in the UK has yet succeeded in producing a finely edited product, using half-inch videotape and suitable for general distribution.

We feel that the rough edit of 'A Local History' is far enough advanced to demonstrate the potential of half-inch video as a general, low-cost production medium with wide application in the public sector.

Reaction to the Tape

To date the tape has been played back a total of 62 times, mainly in local playback

situations, to old age pensioners, other people from the neighbourhood, Task Force workers and volunteers, students. Task Force are pleased with the tape and they have decided to buy a copy for their continued use in the locality. No unfavourable comments have been received from these groups, and animated conversation usually follows playback. The tape has also been shown to a number of interested experts and at an international meeting in Brussels. Paul Bonner, head of the BBC's community programme unit (Open Door) commented that it was a good example of non-directive social documentary, and compared it with the *Yesterday's Witness* programmes made by the BBC. The BFI (messrs. Gavin and Sainsbury) were, however, highly critical. While many of the BFI's criticisms are undoubtedly well founded (see below), their own actions are not beyond reproach.

Enter the BFI

The money for the project was not received from the BFI for 5 months after making the grant application, and only arrived 2 weeks before the tape was due to be premiered locally. The resultant rush job was largely of their making, and it was only a grant for work in progress from GLAA that enabled us to make the tape at all. Apparent lack of interest from the BFI in the planning stages and the original brief was the cause of a number of misconceptions which were only voiced when the finished tape was played back to them. Further, at a Seminar at the NFT where the tape was part of the BFI's "research programme".

Whatever research was done, we weren't told. . .

Criticisms made by the BFI

- 1) Some content was missing or insufficiently explored (pensions, education, housing, conditions of labour, Trade Unions). Answer: Either the tape would need to be much longer, or the variety would be more restricted. See also **Social Philosophy** below.
- 2) Doesn't fit together conceptually, and it should have been more specifically structured, with better chronology, shape and progression. Answer: the actual edit was a rush job because the money arrived late (see above). The tape was intended as entertainment (non-didactic) and not educational (didactic). See **Planning and Production** and **Social Philosophy** below. Having said this we must agree that there is some truth in these criticisms.
- 3) Because of its superficial content and non-directive nature, the tape won't solve social problems: the right questions were not asked and the right areas were not examined. Answer: the objectives of Task Force and Graft-On! differ from those of the BFI. The BFI's were not stated until the production was finished (see **Planning and Social Philosophy**).
- 4) Why weren't children involved? Answer: Task Force tried to involve local school kids but the schools couldn't co-ordinate with the shooting times, which were arranged to suit the old people. But we have been asked to show it in local schools this autumn.

Planning a Production

"After criticism of A Local History on the

grounds that there had been insufficient planning, a meeting was held with Professor Brian Lewis to examine production planning in more detail. The following is a summary of the points raised

Objectives

These must be measurable. They must be stated and agreed between all parties that have a stake in the production. If made with a specific social use as an objective then criteria, or indices of success/failure must be identified and should be measurable. If the production is part of an on-going project, there should be completion criteria (in answer to the question: How do you know when you've finished?)

Among the objectives presumed, one is to have a particular effect on target audiences. This could be stated in answer to the questions: What could a member of the audience say or do after this which he couldn't say or do before? What errors or misconceptions have been dispelled? What questions have been answered? Or, if it was produced for a client (eg. voluntary body) Does it satisfy their criteria, and what are they?

Method

If we are trying to have an effect on an audience, it should be observable. This gives an opportunity to test the product at Rough Edit stage (validation) with target audiences and experts, in the uses to which the final edit will be put. Feedback from this modifies the final edit.

But it should be noted that this course is contingent on the existence of fact, accurate editing systems; otherwise the process becomes unmanageable.

As Brian Lewis points out, the criterion "is it inherently worth while?" is also valid, particularly with innovative or experimental activities".

Social Philosophy

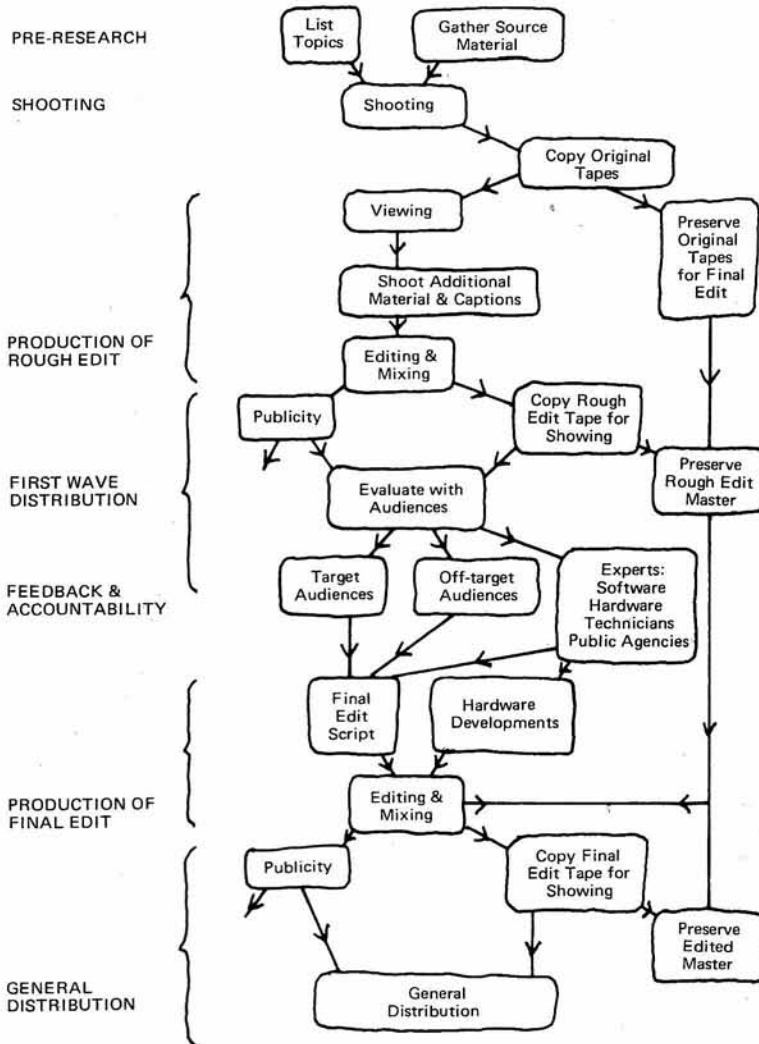
The BFI were most concerned about our social philosophy, or lack of it. Our social philosophy is to help other people express their philosophies, ie. to act as a "common carrier". Following Shannon and Weaver, information (entropy) acts in society on existing states of organisation. Any restriction of communication such as making access to broadcast TV available to only a very small percentage of the total population will restrict the information flow in society as a whole. In other words, information causes change.

We see the function of a small communications agency (ourselves) as that of acting as a common carrier for whoever approaches us. Naturally we are approached most often by groups who do not have access or any other means of expressing their point of view through the medium of TV, which in information terms has the largest channel capacity of any communications medium.

Many criticisms of the non-directive nature of the tape are now seen to be inherent in our approach.

"The extent to which a video user may exert his own social philosophy on a project is determined by his involvement in the project, which in turn depends on working methods and the nature of the project. In practice there is a spectrum of community video usage, and some confusion of language in describing it.

HALF-INCH VIDEO PRODUCTION ALGORITHM



Animation The job of the social animator is to provoke and assist communities in the articulation of their needs, sometimes using video tape, in order to cause beneficial social change. The animator would expect to play a significant role in the collection of material and its interpretation, and to provide hardware and technical assistance. Examples: *Inter Action, Challenge for Change.*

Access to Broadcast One in 20 applicants are accepted; selection is on the basis of good programme ideas, judged by the professional broadcaster who has a natural bias against inarticulacy. Once selected, professional help is provided in shooting, editing etc and strong advice is often given about programme content, the broadcaster's criterion of viewable TV operating at all times. Example: *Open Door.*

Facilitation The role of the facilitator is to assist on-going activity, or proposed activity, in which video is used. All facilitators give technical assistance; many do not intervene in any way in programme content; none intervene in social activity. A facilitator may or may not offer production services, depending on the skills and needs of the other party. Many community groups who would like to work with video resent any interference in their message by a facilitator. The facilitator's job is to act as a 'common carrier' usually on a local basis. Example: *Swindon Viewpoint Cable TV*

Hardware Pool Provides access to hardware with minimum instruction. Very little project advice. Example: *BFI, Arts Council, some of the Australian Video Access Centres.*

Advice only Information is available but not hardware. Examples: *Centre for Advanced TV Studies.*

Make a donation to the controversy! The tape can be hired from **Graft-On!**, 130 Gloucester Avenue, NW1 for £6.00 (AVW minimum rate) plus £1 (post packing and insurance) Phone 01 586 4245 (direct) or 01 828 3624 ext 758 (messages). Available on E1AJ-1 and CV2100 formats now, on both videocassette standards later in the year.

Quotations from:

Seminar Report 3, an account of the proceedings of the Seminar "Low Gauge Video as a Production and Distribution Medium", is also available price £1.50 (individuals) £5.00 (institutions).



Association of Video workers (London Region)

The Association, which was formally constituted in April this year, provides an organisation and forum for people engaged in non-profit video work in Greater London. Its aims are:-

- 1) To exchange information about possible uses of video, equipment availability and work opportunities; to organise tape showings, exchanges and seminars.
- 2) to develop access for communities in Greater London to the technology and knowledge required to produce and distribute videotapes in a communication, educational and artistic context.
- 3) To act as a pressure group to lobby for adequate finance from funding bodies such as the Department of Education and Science, Home Office, British Film Institute, Arts Council of Great Britain, Greater London Arts Association, Greater London Council, Inner London Education Authority, London Borough Authorities, Television Companies, Private Foundations and other sponsors.
- 4) To establish suitable rates and conditions for the use of videotapes by cable TV, broadcast TV, educational institutions and in lecturing and other situations.
- 5) To obtain wage parity with video workers in local government and educational establishments when doing work for these bodies; to cost our labour at not less than the TUC minimum wage when applying for funds from official bodies.
- 6) To maintain contact, co-operate or affiliate with similar organisations at a British, European and International level, when the need arises.
- 7) To represent the views of the Association to organisations carrying out research into video and associated fields.

The Association is currently engaged in negotiations with the British Film Institute and the Greater London Arts Association to enable representatives to be elected to their relevant committees and panels (on this and other issues the Association works in close conjunction with the Independent Film Makers Association). It will also be responding to the forthcoming British Film Institute discussion paper "Theories and Practices of Video in the UK", and taking part in the associated seminars.

The business of the Association is conducted by majority vote at monthly General Meetings. An informative newsletter including a report of the last meeting and an agenda for the next, is published monthly. Prospective members can join the Association at the discretion of any General Meeting upon payment of the annual subscription (currently £3.00). A constitution and further information is available from the **Secretary, Simon Partridge, 18, Wyatt Rd, Highbury, London N5 Tel. 01 359-2516.**