

REPORT TO THE ARTS COUNCIL ON FUTURE VIDEOTAPE DISTRIBUTION

by Sue Hall and John Hopkins, Fantasy Factory, May 1977.
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SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION

The research project had the following purposes:-

- * To produce a Video Distribution Handbook explaining how to put on video shows and including lists of videotapes and producers; potential venues; equipment resources.
- * To examine the spectrum of needs (survey questionnaire; audience response to a series of video shows; interviews with producers).
- * To propose a strategy to the Arts Council for the coherent development of non-commercial video distribution representing the optimum disposal of funding.
- * To identify specific interested parties, including ourselves, who are able to implement Recommendations through funding applications based on the research.
- * To gather information on North American video developments which offer useful models for projects.

We prepared the Recommendations bearing in mind the following principles:

1. Ways should be found to accommodate the diverse factions and groupings of existing and future videotape artists and producers.
2. Access to facilities should be, as far as possible, open to all non commercial video users on a first-come first-served basis.
3. Each recommendation should be aimed at the appropriate funding body and/or committee(s).
4. Wherever possible, proposed activity should be grafted on to existing activities in order to ease the pressure on funding and to ensure continuity for persons and groups with an existing commitment.
5. Over-centralisation (ie housing all facilities with one organisation) should be avoided, thereby reducing risk of failure and permitting the encouragement of diverse approaches.

Context: Many questionnaire respondents and audience members felt that some video distribution should be initiated, there being nothing satisfactory in existence at present. Video distribution requires subsidies because the gate receipts at most venues cannot yet cover the whole cost of putting on shows. Also the development of non-commercial video in the arts field in the UK has been held back by the lack of equipment funding

The key to nationally available resources for videotape distribution is the proposed National Dubbing Centre, whose existence will both guarantee the low-cost services on which several other recommendations depend, and provide a service for the individual artist or producer wishing to engage in independent distribution activities.

INTERESTED PARTIES

- Parties with a stated interest in future video distribution:
- * London Video Arts: No information has been received by us in spite of repeated requests. We have gleaned secondhand that LVA is only interested in certain types of video art (fine art) to the exclusion of eg documentary, community video, and some who describe themselves as video artists.
 - * Counteract: They see themselves as a 'socialist' organisation. We understand this to mean that they are not prepared to handle tapes without a 'social message', such as abstract art.
 - * Inter Action: Well established as a community organisation with a predominantly local constituency. Do not service video artists.
 - * Northern Arts/Aidanvision: In spite of repeated requests no definite information has been given to us. We assume that their proposed distribution scheme would primarily service producers local to Northern Arts, in particular Aidanvision.
 - * The Other Cinema: Although concentrating on film, future interest in video appears to focus on their London cinema and associated Clubroom. They are also a film distributor who last year suspended payments to filmmakers because of financial difficulties.
 - * Concord Films Council: Well established film distribution service about to begin limited video distribution by Mail Order, already handle Arts Council films, financial stability and reliability not in question.
 - * Fantasy Factory: Already managing some Arts Council video equipment at no cost to either Arts Council or users; the only established video centre making equipment and information available to non-commercial all-comers; salaries funded by Arts Council Community Arts Committee; 50% of income earned independently; in existence for three years.

ABOUT THE RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations 1,2 & 3 require the purchase of video equipment with Arts Council funding; recommendations 4,5 &6 do not.

While it may be unusual to suggest that the Arts Council should provide both capital and running costs for projects in recommendation 1, 2 & 3, at present no other public body with an obligation to finance the arts recognises any obligation to finance the purchase of video equipment. With video, unlike many other art forms, the equipment is essential to the development of the art form itself. Where recommendations are taken up, finance for the running costs would be provided by the appropriate committee(s), but finance for equipment purchase may need to be the subject of a special allocation from the Arts Council.

RECOMMENDATION 1 : TO ESTABLISH NATIONAL VIDEOTAPE HIRE SERVICE BY MAIL ORDER

While this is not intended to pre-empt other independent distribution activities, it is already apparent that the administration, publicity and quality dubbing necessary are beyond the resources of many individual producers to undertake. A single national mail order hire service would provide a much-needed outlet for producers and promoters alike. It has the advantages of continuous updating, coordinated publicity and low unit overheads.

Technical: Suggested initial standards are $\frac{1}{2}$ " open reel and Umatic. Philips VCR is not recommended because of inter-machine incompatibility which has already caused the demise of one commercially-based service.

Location: Concord Films Council is the only suitable candidate (see introduction), and they have informally indicated their interest.

Access and Relation to Producers: Concord extends a series of options to film producers by which producers receive royalties, the amount depending on the option chosen. In our view the most suitable option is for producers to supply tape copies, Concord to deduct handling charges and pass on remainder of hire fees to producers. Small grants to producers for making copies could be administered by Concord on a per-tape basis, relieving the Arts Council of extra bureaucracy. Concord is prepared to handle both art and documentary tapes.

Finance and Timescale: In the long term, (4-5 years) this would become self-supporting. In the short-term, finance is required for playback equipment (approx £2000) and making tape copies (approx £1000 per annum). This could be partly supplied by Concord (proportion of machine costs) and partly by AC Artists Films and Community Arts Committees (remainder). It would be feasible to initiate this service on a pilot basis prior to the setting up of the National Dubbing Centre, but the Centre is the key to low copying costs and high quality copies. An immediate initial allocation of £500 for copies and £1000+ for equipment would suffice, followed by several annual grants of £1000 for copying costs. Once such a scheme exists, comparable financing should be provided by the BFI enabling their film and video productions to be distributed on videotape.

To start in fiscal 77/78; will require continuing finance in 78.

RECOMMENDATION 2 : TO ESTABLISH A NATIONAL DUBBING CENTRE

The purpose of the Dubbing Centre is to produce stable, high quality distribution copies of tapes on the 3 major low-gauge video formats, from low-gauge master tapes and super 8mm film. Although there are many different producers working in several different tape formats and with a wide variety of subject-matter, one Dubbing Centre, accessible by mail or in person, could deal with all low-gauge dubbing demands. Due to the relatively high capital cost, it would be uneconomic to set up different centres, each dedicated only to one type of user.

Requirements: Video equipment to remain functioning over a period of time needs continuous checking of its performance, and maintenance where necessary. This can only be achieved by specialists who already have considerable experience of maintaining existing equipment. As both the Arts Council and the BFI have already discovered, when there is no-one available to check equipment used by many different people, it soon stops working properly.

Location: Fantasy Factory. (Other candidates London Video Arts and Inter Action are rejected on grounds of excluding certain types of non-commercial user)

Access and Users: All non-commercial videousers and film-makers irrespective of their subject matter will be serviced at a low basic rate (as with Fantasy Factory's present facility). It will also provide services to Mail Order, Distribution and Video Reference Libraries. Dubs on to 2" Quad tape would be made by arrangement with commercial facility houses as we have some experience of making arrangements at trade prices. Dubbing Centre may be accessed in person or by mail.

Technical: Experience with showings has confirmed that distribution copies must be Time Base Corrected to guarantee stable playback. The minimum equipment needed for the Dubbing Centre is as follows:

1 Sony 1/2" deck	1 Time Base Corrector
1 National 1/2" deck	1 Process amplifier
1 Philips videocassette deck	1 Waveform Monitor
2 Sony Umatics	1 Large Colour Monitor
1 Edit Controller	1 Large Black and White Monitor
1 Small Black and White Monitor with underscan	
1 Small high quality colour monitor	
1 Sync Pulse Generator	
1 Normende Flying Spot Scanner	
Cabling and environmental modifications, Audio Equipment, various	

Finance & Timescale: Unlike video production equipment which may, to a degree, be accumulated piecemeal*, it is not practical to assemble the equipment for the Dubbing Centre stage by stage. The capital cost is approx £25,000, to be provided by the Arts Council in financial year 1978/79 with the approval of Artists Films and Community Arts Committees, but not necessarily from these Committees' budgets. This is a one-off allocation for equipment purchase. We expect that by selling unused capacity commercially, it will be possible to pay for maintenance of equipment and depreciation over 5 years, enabling replacement of worn-out equipment at no extra cost. Our present income structure is capable of paying other running and staffing costs.

Once-only capital grant to be given early in fiscal 78/79.

* Note that there is a considerable overlap between equipment required for distribution and that required for production and post-production (see our application for equipment funding for 77/78 already sent to Arts Council).

RECOMMENDATION 3 : ESTABLISH NATIONAL VIDEO REFERENCE LIBRARY

Research revealed considerable demand for Video Reference Libraries. We suggest the setting up of a National Video Reference Library (as a pilot scheme) to be followed by the establishment of further such libraries on a Regional basis, at Regional Film Theatres, Arts Centres etc. Eventually, such a system should become integrated with the public library system, and receive finance from the British Library, British Council, BFI and RAAs.

A National Video Reference Library will be a showcase for British video, and will carry some tapes by foreign producers. It will help promote sale, hire, showings and exchange of videotapes. Suggested model is for users to pay a small annual membership fee (say £1.00) after which visits would be free to members. Expected users include independent producers, members of the public, promoters, arts and cultural administrators, educationists, TV station producers. Tapes may not be removed from the Library by users.

Various forms of relationship between the Library and Producers have been suggested (see survey results), and any or all of these may apply. Library and Mail Order should be separate because some producers will not agree to tapes being used for both Library and Mail Order, but will agree to one or other of these uses.

Location: For ease of access, Library should be situated in a centre of population. The Other Cinema, already operating as a cinema and club with available space, is a possible location, and they have informally indicated interest.

Technical: A minimum library requires 2 Umatic dual standard players, one dual standard colour receiver/monitor, one black and white monitor, sets of headphones, collection of tapes and catalogue.

Finance and Timescale: Initial running costs include overheads, tape acquisition fund (including dubbing costs) and (at least) part time salary for one person amounting to £5,000 per annum. Initial capital cost for equipment and setting up are approx £5000. Possible sources include AC's Community Arts, Art Films, Artists Films Committees, plus BFI Regional and Distribution Departments. It would not be feasible to set this up before the establishment of the National Dubbing Centre to provide low-cost copies and other technical back-up.

To start in fiscal 78/79; will require continuing support.

RECOMMENDATION 4 : PRODUCTION BURSARIES AT CABLE TV ACCESS STATIONS

A production bursary scheme for video artists should be instituted at existing cable TV access stations. This would be on a per-programme basis only, enabling artists to make experimental productions with local residents and station staff, as temporary artists-in-residence. Equipment, tape and transmission time would be provided by the stations. Cable production bursaries would enable potential TV producers to get some experience, thus building up a pool of people who could be expected to contribute to the future Open Broadcasting Authority (4th TV channel) and Local Broadcasting Authority as proposed in the Annan Report.

Finance and Timescale: A judicious extension of the A C Artists Films Subcommittee's Video Bursary and Filmmakers on Tour schemes would allow inclusion of fees to artists plus incidental expenses in bursaries with an initial ceiling of £250.

Cable production bursaries could be launched immediately following approval by the Committee. In the future, such bursaries might be extended to include other cable stations and certain resource/arts centres.

Location: Swindon Viewpoint and Milton Keynes Channel 40 are first choices and both have responded positively to the suggestion on an informal level.

RECOMMENDATION 5 : SUPPORT OF LOCAL ACTIVITIES

Two types of local activity have emerged in the past 18 months:

1. Video shows, treated as 'arts events' introducing the audiences to new types of content and production techniques.
2. Local newsreel services with playback in a variety of locations in the relevant neighbourhood.

Finance and Timescale: There are already examples of subsidies for both types of activity (which may overlap in some cases). Continued support for a particular show or series of showings is desirable. Appropriate sources are RAAs, AC Community Arts Committee, BFI Regional Dept.

Relation to other Recommendations: Local/regional producers have rights of cheap access to National Dubbing Centre; promoters can use Mail Order Distribution for accessing non-local material.

RAAs should encourage local newsreel services to experiment by exchanging tapes with cable TV access stations and local projects in other parts of the country, thus helping to develop horizontal infrastructure.

RECOMMENDATION 6 : INITIATE BROADCASTING EXPERIMENTS FOLLOWING THE ANNAN REPORT'S RECOMMENDATIONS

In the words of the Annan Report on the Future of Broadcasting:

"We recommend therefore that the BBC and ITV show more willingness to buy programmes and to commission ideas from independent producers. To encourage such producers at the present time will enable them to be ready to meet the demands of the 4th channel when it comes into operation ..."

"The Arts Council might wish to collaborate with the Open Broadcasting Authority to ensure that some of the productions by the companies which receive sizeable grants from the Council are made available to a wider audience through television."

The Arts Council, already a major source of funding for independent non-commercial video production, should initiate as soon as possible experiments on the above lines. Broadcast is potentially the major distribution means for most video programming because both video and broadcast use the same technology. Video, more than any other art form, stands to benefit from broadcasting.

Practically speaking, this would begin with immediate approaches at the highest level to broadcasting companies, followed by negotiations resulting in allocation of broadcast facilities and time for Arts Council financed productions, effective in financial year 1978/79 and continuing in the context of the proposed Open Broadcasting Authority.

This would give the Arts Films Committee the opportunity to finance production for broadcast. Where appropriate, other Arts Council Committees may care to consider requesting extra percentage budget allocations from the DES (through the Council) to be spent on commissioning programmes for broadcast.

(A longer version of this recommendation will be submitted to John Buston in reply to his letter of 10th May 1977).

SECTION 2 : SURVEY

PRE-SURVEY: GENERAL

Before the main questionnaire was mailed two pre-surveys were carried out. One was the mailing of a questionnaire to all Regional Arts Association Film & Video Officers and the other was the mailing of a questionnaire to all those who replied to an article in the Trade Press and in the Arts Council's Newsletter, and this was called Show Promoters Questionnaire.

MAIN SURVEY: STATISTICS COLLECTED

A three part Questionnaire was mailed to 700 known video users and other interested parties in England & Wales.

153 replies: 70 London; 83 rest of England & Wales.

123 want copy of the Handbook at cost price when published. In addition some publications asked for review copies.

70 replies from equipment resources;

94 replies from Producers

72 replies from Venues

21 replies from Arts Centres

79% of venues could put on a video show if the videotapes were provided by mail order;

74% of Producers would support the establishment of a video reference library

7 organisations are actively interested in video distribution. Those with existing and/or planned video distribution activities are:

London Video Arts; The Other Cinema; Concord Films Council; Counteract; Interaction; Northern Arts/Aidanvision; Fantasy Factory.

Detailed lists of Equipment Resources, Producers and Videotapes; Promoters, Venues, Distributors will be included in the Handbook.

Note: Educational institutions were included in the survey where they could also give access to non-educational activities. These are mainly included in the list of venues.

SUMMARY OF POINTS AND COMMENTS MADE BY RESPONDENTS

Reference Libraries:

- * On the whole respondents felt that the use of a library should be free on a per-visit basis, but some felt that there should be a membership fee or annual subscription to users.
- * A videotape library should be linked with the Public Library Service and therefore financed by local authorities.
- * Copyright should always remain with the producer, and library use should be governed by a contract stating conditions of use.
- * Tapes must be insured by the Library.
- * Tapes may be acquired by a Library under 4 different deals with producers, viz:
 1. Donation

2. Sale, price to comprise tape cost plus dubbing fee plus producer's fee.
3. Free loan at producer's discretion, producer having the right to withdraw tape at any time.
4. Hire

Shows:

- * The price of admission to a video show should be less than the price of the cheapest cinema seat.
- * Shows should attempt to promote the creative process of video rather than just allow passive assimilation of visual materials.
- * Contextual information should be provided for audiences (see Distribution).

Distribution:

- * General. there is currently no satisfactory video distribution and it would be beneficial to initiate some.
- * Context. The context for the showing of tapes should be provided by the distributor in conjunction with the producer (the artist). Ideally, this would include general background information including notes on production, technical information; notes on the particular types of video usage included in a show; a reminder of the differences between video and broadcast TV, and of the latter's shortcomings.
- * Copyright. The need for protection was stressed by many respondents.
- * Insurance. Tapes should be insured and this should be the responsibility of the distributor and/or promoter.
- * Contracts. Conditions of use should be specified in a Contract, which may additionally include specification of equipment on which tapes are to be shown.
- * Outlets/Venues. Suggestions included Municipal Festivals, Art Schools, TV Stations, Schools, Colleges, Universities Galleries, Museums, Libraries, Arts Centres, Empty Shops.
- * Style. Distribution should be informative, friendly, efficient, honest, reliable, giving plenty of feedback to producers.
- * Access. Distribution should be accessible to everyone. Community artists say they require cheap or free access to videotapes made by other groups and which have been paid for out of public funds.
- * Range of content. All genres of tape should be included. Tape catalogues should be indexed by subjects.
- * Technical. Problems of compatibility exist between different manufacturers' machines, and sometimes even between machines which are supposedly identical. Solution to this problem requires sophisticated technical equipment (see recommendation: National Dubbing Centre).
- * Models for Distribution:
 1. Arts Council Film Tour. Consists of a package comprising equipment, films (tapes) and operator. Local material could be added to programmes. This solution was rejected on the grounds that (a) 79% of the venues said they could put on shows using a Mail Order Service and (b) Capital and running costs (in the region of £15,000 per annum).
 2. Mail Order. Relatively cheap to run, should be continuously updated.
 3. Museum/Gallery Shows. Usually the work of one producer is shown for a period of weeks in a carefully prepared environment. (This model also applies to video

installation shows, which, however, fall outside our brief because they are primarily concerned with environments rather than videotapes).

4. Producer(s) present(s) own tapes and later lead discussion as in Arts Council Filmmakers on Tour Scheme. This model is used by eg The Kitchen and Anthology Film Archives, New York.

5. Other types of showings include thematic shows and local neighbourhood showings.

VIDEO DISTRIBUTION HANDBOOK: list of contents

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APPENDIX 1 : REPORT TO THE ARTS COUNCIL

APPENDIX 2 : RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

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SECTION 3: VIDEO SHOWS

LIST OF VIDEO SHOWS HELD

Cardiff:

29 OCT 76, 8 pm, 2½ hrs plus 1 hr discussion
Location: Chapter Arts Centre, capacity 60, audience 65
Type of Show: Mixed art, documentary/community, local material.

Liverpool:(2 shows)

11 and 12 FEB 1977, 8 pm, 2hrs each, including some discussion
Location: Merseyside Visual Communications Unit, capacity 70,
audiences 45 and 50
Type of Show: (1) Documentary/Community (2) Fine Art

Swindon

20 MAR 77, 5.30pm, 3 hrs live transmission
Location: Swindon Viewpoint Cable TV Station, Capacity N/A
Type of Show: Black & white only, mainly documentary/Community
with approx 50% local material.

Bracknell

29 APR 77, 2pm, 1½hrs, including some explanation
Location: South Hill Park Arts Centre, capacity 60 audience 45
Type of Show: Fine Art

INTRODUCTION

Audience Research: Members of the audience were asked to fill in questionnaires immediately after the show. Not all questionnaires were filled in exactly answering the questions asked, which accounts for the discrepancies in the numbers.

Among the questions were: Age, sex, occupation, had they seen video before, would they like more of this type of show, was more explanation needed.

We also asked people to rank the tapes shown in order of preference. From this we were able to determine profiles of reaction to particular tapes, the results of which were passed on to the tape makers. In addition we left space for people to add their comments, which have been included with the survey information where relevant.

Types of Audiences

Many types of audiences exist for video. Our starting hypothesis, namely that there were two distinct types of audience (art and documentary), was shown to be incorrect. It was based on the division within the Arts Council itself between the Art Films and Community Art committees.

As a result of information collected during the shows we now feel that the main factors determining the type of audience are:

1. Type of Venue, including habitual audience.
2. Location, whether urban or rural.
3. Average age.
4. Audience expectations which are created by 1,2,3 above plus publicity.

The Importance of Local Material

In general, an above-average favourable response was obtained for local material included in shows.

The Importance of Publicity

In all cases, the quality and extent of publicity is critical. In addition to ensuring a full house, it helps to determine the audience's expectations as to content of a show. Where a show is subsidised, the grant-giving body should take steps to ensure that adequate publicity will be given to the event before agreeing to support it.

In preparation for the shows we silk screened colourful poster blanks to be overprinted by local promoters. Press Releases and Programme Notes were circulated to local promoters in advance for pre-publicity purposes.

Payments to Tape-makers: Of our £350 budget for the series of shows, approx £200 was spent on royalty payments to tape-makers. These were paid at a rate of £20 per hour for black and white, £30 per hour for colour.

CARDIFF

An Advent video projector was used, supplied through the British Film Institute. 8 tapes were shown, including one local tape. The show was open to the general public.

Summary of Audience Research:

- * 85% of the audience filled in forms (53 people)
- * Most were in the age range 20-30, almost all in the range 16-35
- * 25% were students, two thirds were men
- * Three-quarters had seen video before
- * Almost everyone said they would like more shows of this type (only 3 disagreed).
- * The ensuing discussion attended by about half the audience, provided more information about the tapes.

Pre-publicity: Poster distribution was effective and the local paper carried an article prior to the event. A programme was printed by Chapter Arts Centre and the event was given exposure in their monthly news bulletin.

Grant -aid: A grant in aid to Chapter Centre was made by the Welsh Arts Council

LIVERPOOL

2 shows were held on successive days, one with documentary/ community tapes, the other with fine art tapes. The shows were open to the general public. 18 videotapes were shown in total, including two local tapes, interspersed by short explanations and discussions.

Summary of Audience Research:

- * 75% of total audiences filled in forms (68 people)
- *

<u>Age Breakdown</u>	Under 21	21-25	25-30	over 30	Total
Documentary	5	14	15	-	34
Art	14	12	8	-	34

- * Seen video before? YES 45 NO 4 (ratio . about 2:1)
 - * Like to see more video shows? YES 55 NO 4 MAYBE 8
 - * Did you need more explanation of the tapes provided?
 Documentary YES 9 NO 23
 Art YES 20 NO 12. Art requires more explanation
- A significant proportion of people at both shows needed more and better information about the tapes.

Pre-Publicity: A 30 second clip from one tape, plus information about the event was shown on Granada TV the night before the first show. A local radio announcement was made before the second show. Lack of detailed advance publicity (the responsibility of the local promoter) led to some people arriving on the wrong night for the show they intended to see.

Grant-aid: A grant in aid to MVCU was made by Merseyside Arts Association.

SWINDON

"This is Swindon Live", Sunday March 20th 1977. The show consisted of videotapes, discussion, live studio presentations and phone-in contributions from the audience. This was Viewpoint's first live phone-in for 10 months. 6 members of the public phoned in, 30 people visited the station during the show.

The show lasted 3 hours and included 14 videotape inserts, 5 of which were provided by Fantasy Factory. One other tape came from Channel 40 (Milton Keynes), thus establishing the principle of programme exchange between UK cable TV stations, where appropriate. Estimated audience size: very roughly 3000 based on existing research.

Pre-publicity Fantasy Factory prepared a 3½ minute trailer of extracts and links, which was cablecast 4 times in the week prior to the show. An article on the show was run in the local paper Evening Advertiser on the Friday before the show

BRACKNELL

"The showing will be ... a schools matinee and will include discussions with the children and teachers about the tapes" ... from a letter commissioning the show from South Hill Park Arts Centre.

We arrived prepared to put on a show of fine art tapes with appropriate explanations. Someone should have known that 15-year old youths on a Friday afternoon focus their attention on the approaching weekend and are not interested in what appears to be an extension of 'school'. The teachers' contribution to 'discussion' was to prevent too many pupils leaving and to keep a modicum of order. Our plans and some of the programme material had to be abandoned and the audience research was useless (the 'children' could hardly write ...)

However, despite the sudden change of plan, the afternoon was hilarious and entertaining for most people. The local tape included, which had been worked on by some of the pupils present, evoked a strong positive response.

FEEDBACK FROM PARTICULAR SHOWS

Cardiff

Chapter 2 Cinema was filled for the first time; the audience was not typical of the Centre. Analysis of the discussion following the show demonstrated a good grasp of the issues concerned in making a videotape. We understand that Chapter now intend to start regular video shows in the autumn of 1977.

Liverpool

The show stimulated requests on the availability and use of video equipment locally. We were later visited in London by a member of the audience interested in using video synthesisers.

Swindon

The show produced very enthusiastic reactions from the staff of Swindon Viewpoint. Within 3 weeks a second live, open-ended cable TV show was produced. News of our show spread rapidly through the (small) cable TV community in the UK, and a great deal of subsequent interest has been shown in experimental types of programme format.

Mike Barrett, project coordinator of Milton Keynes Channel 40, participated in the Swindon show. Subsequently Channel 40 decided to apply to the Home Office for a change in its licence to permit the inclusion of non-local and experimental non-commercial material. The Fantasy Factory/Swindon show is being cited as a precedent.

Channel 40 also expressed interest in doing a similar, though differently structured show, later this year.

SECTION 4

NORTH AMERICAN INFORMATION

Although there are obvious differences between the states of development of the independent video scenes in North America and England, the North American scene provides a number of useful models of projects existing with mixed funding ie both art subsidies and independently earned income.

In the period 1970-1976 the New York State Council on the Arts alone put over \$4.7 million into video which has resulted in the establishment of a number of organisations and activities, and a gradual evolution of patterns of activity, not the least of which is regular access by video artists to broadcasting, and the reckoning of audiences in millions rather than hundreds for these artists work.

The main trends discernible are as follows:-

1. Video is now established as a medium and art form ie its nature and development is 'understood' and accepted by administrators, artists and many members of the public.
2. The boundaries between abstract art, gallery environments and documentary art are not sharply drawn. Any one artist is likely to work in each of these fields at different points in his/her career. Some of the most interesting work in fact combines aspects of each of these types.
3. Some projects are expected to become self-supporting by the 1980s or before (distribution activities) but others will need a continued subsidy (training, production, post-production and video resource centres operating low-cost hire or free loan services).

4. Wherever concentrations of video equipment exist, they are being used for a variety of purposes, although they may have been acquired in the first place with one specific activity in mind. The fact that there is considerable overlap between equipment needed for production and post-production, and that needed for distribution (including broadcasting access), and that experimentation requires an open approach, are responsible for this situation.
5. During 1970-77 there has been a change of emphasis in the activities of art funding bodies. In 1970-74 'community video' was funded. Now many 'social services' applications are being directly funded by social service agencies, leaving the art funding agencies freer to concentrate on art activities.
6. Since 1971, Arts funding has been provided in conjunction with Public TV Stations, to finance artists' productions suitable for broadcasting--thus providing artists with access to broadcast quality facilities and a mass audience.

The interview with Lydia Silman (attached) gives a clear view of the history of video funding policy and activities since 1970 operated by the New York State Council on the Arts. The Council remains the main source of consistent and diverse support in New York State.

More detailed information collected by Sue Hall in October 1976 is available from Fantasy Factory on the following organisations and topics:

Some places in Manhattan where video is being shown regularly including The Kitchen; Witney Museum of American Art; Everson Museum; Anthology Film Archives; Cinecenter.

Electronic Arts Intermix Inc., distributor. General description of the service; Equipment available; Artists handled; List of equipment; Information to accompany tapes submitted for possible distribution.

Castelli Sonnabend Tapes and Films Inc., art distributor. General description; List of tapes handled.

The Kitchen Center for Video and Music (Haleakala Inc.), venue. General description; Programme; Contracts.

Media Bus Inc, Lanesville, the smallest TV station in America. General description; Basic video tools.

WNET TV Lab, broadcast TV studio and post-production facility. General description including list of equipment.

MERC (Media Equipment Resource Center). General description; Information for applicants; Booking forms and contracts.

Alternate Media Center at New York University School of the Arts, cable intern information and training centre. General description.

American Videotapes. Notes on a selection of tapes viewed. Tapes by Steven Beck; Ant Farm; Media Bus; Nancy Cain; Image Union; Skip Sweeny; Ed Emshwiller; Juan Downey; Douglas Davis (review).

National Film Board of Canada (Montreal). Video Distribution activities, general description including references to specific tapes.

Lydia Silman, TV/Media Associate at the New York State Council on the Arts, has been responsible for the funding of video for three years. She worked two years before that with Russell Connor. Lydia Silman, who worked under the overall direction of Peter Bradley, has been responsible for the most consistent and wide-ranging funding programs for video in New York State. Although in the past few years other funding sources have begun support of various programs in the State, the Council still remains the main source of consistent and diverse support.



Lydia Silman

interview with Lydia Silman

By
JOHN REILLY

John Reilly: In the beginning, 1970-71, New York State Council on the Arts was the first major funding organization that took this new movement — video — seriously and began to fund groups and individuals. What was that period like? What came about to cause that awareness?

Lydia Silman: That was the first year that the Council actually set up a program called "Television/Media," which was the first step. Before that, a number of video and television projects had been funded, but through the film department. At the time, Ken Dewey was working for the Council. Ken Don Harper, who directed Special Programs, and Peter Bradley, Director of the Film Program, encouraged the Council to set up a separate department. Right after that Paul Ryan was hired to direct the new program, but he left after a couple of months and Russell Connor was hired. This was the first year the Council actually recognized the medium as a creative one and set up a program where approximately \$700,000 was allocated for the year, from which twenty-one grants were made.

Also about that time many of the Video groups were just getting started and they were applying for a full range of video services, mostly lending equipment for community-oriented programming. The public television stations at that time were applying for general production money to produce programs on the other arts where the grants ranged from as little as \$3,000 up to \$70,000.

JR: They were video grants?

LS: Yes, video grants. At that time there were seven public television stations in the State and most of them received funding for one project or another. At that time, WNET-TV (Channel 13) set up the Experimental Television Laboratory with Jackie Cassen. They received a large grant in the range of \$60,000, mostly for equipment purchase, and that was the beginning of the TV Lab. That's how the Council started.

The Council wasn't quite sure what video was about, and the artists didn't really know what it was about either. There was so much to explore in the medium that they were doing everything, which I think was a very good thing. I think it was also very open-minded on the part of the Council to take a chance and support such an experimental medium.

JR: What does that say about the Council? Does it imply a certain responsiveness to what artists are

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doing? Is that part of the basis of the Council's philosophy on funding?

LS: The Council is a responsive agency. It responds to the needs of the arts organizations, the arts constituency in the State. It is responsible for making grants with public money and we don't initiate or direct programming. In fact, this is only the second year that we've ever attempted to write guidelines. And I would say that the film, television/media, and literature programs here at the Council, though not

opposed to guidelines, have tried to keep their guidelines as open and as flexible as possible because we want to be able to respond to the needs of the artist and they are changing every year. We want to encourage experimental projects.

I think that the Council is generally conservative. Most of the arts organizations they support are museums and large art institutions. I don't think there is any other program here at the Council that ever takes a chance on funding a project when they don't really know what's going to come out of it. There have been many times in the course of our six years of funding when we've received a proposal for what we didn't exactly know would happen. For example, number of people ultimately involved, final cost, etc.

This program area, over the past couple of years has been very interested in *process* — the experience that the artist has while producing an artwork. We've been making equipment available to the artist so that they can experiment without stressing the product — the end result. Of course in recent years things have changed slightly and many more artists are interested in the product, but for a while it wasn't a crucial point in terms of our funding.

JR: It's still an interesting point before we leave this part of video history that the Council was able to shift into funding video, incorporating video artists and people who work in video on its panel almost from the beginning, whereas other organizations have not found that transition as easy. If they have a film department established, they continue to heavily support film without recognizing that many people and organizations are now working in video. Peter Bradley's background is in film yet he was able to hire Paul Ryan, who had been working in video as a consultant and then Russell Connor who had put together the *Vision & Television Museum Show* at Brandeis University, and Russell, at that point, was one of the few experts in video. So the Council actually reached out and chose the right people at the right time.

LS: Yes, and for the first time this year, the Council's television and film panels are separate. That's not to say it's been bad in the past—in fact it's always been very good. There are many filmmakers who have moved into video and they've lent their expertise to reviewing many of the television proposals. They've been very helpful. The panel has always in the past been very well balanced between film critics, TV critics, filmmakers, video makers, artists and administrators in the area. We've been very fortunate in having a good working relationship with our panel and I think they have contributed tremendously to the decision-making process of the Council. I happen to think that the process that the Council goes through in order to make a grant is very fair.

JR: Let's talk about that for a moment. What happens

when a non-profit organization makes an application to your department for a grant in video. What's the procedure?

LS: The application comes in to the Council and gets logged in at the application service section. At that point the application is sent to the appropriate program department at the Council. Some applications are made up of a number of different projects, and each project will go to the appropriate program. As a result, more than one program person might be working on the same application.

I try to see to it that every applicant gets a visit. I think it's very important that they be contacted at some point in time about their application. Budgets may change from the time they send in the application to the time they get reviewed, and it's also very important to make on-site visits to get a feel for what an organization is doing. Sometimes it's not necessary — it depends on what the organization is applying for. But I certainly make every attempt to visit an organization wherever they are located in New York State. Then the staff will make a recommendation and present it to the panel which is appointed by the chairman, Kitty Carlisle Hart. The panel then makes a second recommendation and presents these two recommendations to what's called the subcommittee, which is made up of a number of council members.

JR: Dealing in that area, that specialty?

LS: Not necessarily. The members of the Council have varied backgrounds. Some of them come from business, a few of them come from the arts. We have a very good sub-committee, I feel. They have been very responsive to our needs and to the needs of the video community.

It's almost like a checks and balances system. The third and last recommendation made by the subcommittee is presented to the full Council, which then makes the final decision about the grant. So it's the Council that makes grants, not the staff or the panel. Also, it's very important to know that no panel member works for the Council. They are advisors to the staff and to the Council. They are part of the decision-making process. What is decided at the panel level is not necessarily what the Council is going to decide.

JR: Over the past six years, what trends in the area of video funding and support have you observed?

LS: At first the amount of money we had to spend increased gradually, and then when the Council's budget almost doubled, our budget almost doubled too. Then it settled into the area of \$1 million. But things have changed. Equipment costs more and it wears out and has to be replaced. Also, the video organizations are redefining their goals, they're expanding and providing many more services to the public and to artists. As I said before, I think during

the first couple of years things were sort of "anything goes." The major video organizations that we supported in the State were providing community-oriented programs: street video — taking the portapak out into the streets and giving workshops. They weren't necessarily arts oriented. Then, during the third year cable became very important, and the anticipation of cities being cabled was tremendous: an outlet was needed for the tapes that had been produced. Public access became very important. That year the Council supported many video organizations for their work with cable and their work with the community, in addition to giving various other grants to Channel 13's TV Lab and other public television stations with experimental programs. In 1973 we still had a little over \$600,000 to spend and the Council made about 39 or 40 grants. We never made very many because the money just didn't go very far.

I don't think cable really developed the way everybody thought it would. It was expensive, the cable companies were not really willing to give up time on the cable to arts organizations or even to community organizations — public access became quite an issue. Also, there were really no governmental regulations formulated to control cable systems. Everything was changing so rapidly. At that point the Council recognized the fact that we were an arts council and not a social service agency, and that many artists needed more sophisticated facilities — they were determined to produce better quality tapes. Although people were still into process and the experience of producing, many of the artists wanted to start broadcasting their tapes. In 1974 the time base corrector was developed. With a limited amount of funds we couldn't support everybody, and the arts groups themselves found they couldn't service everybody. The demand was too great from the community organizations and from the artists, and they didn't know to whom priority should be given. At that point we advised that priority be given to artists, and I think most of the video organizations felt it was a good direction to move in. I believe just about all of the video organizations that we do support, that provide services, were glad to have that little bit of direction the Council gave them. In 1974, when our budget almost doubled, one of the most important things we did was to make grants to all the public television stations for the purchase of time base correctors. I think we were the first funding agency ever to do that; in fact, I don't know of any others who have.

JR: I think it's still almost a unique gesture. I don't know of any other funding organization that set out to find an interface between the public TV stations and the artists by providing the public stations with a means of airing the artists' tapes.

LS: Now all but one of the eight public TV stations in the State has a time base corrector, and hopefully that last one will receive one, too. We felt that was very important. Since all equipment purchased with Council funds is owned by the State, the stations are required to make that equipment available to artists, arts organizations, or any other individual in the State for the transfer of works. The artists or groups have to cover tape and transfer costs, but the equipment is provided free of charge.

JR: This combination of funding arts organizations that are working in the area of video, video artists, and public TV stations, have made what is almost a unique situation in New York State where the chance for an artist to air his work occurs on a regular basis on public television. There's also a chance for the artist to have the experience of working in a larger facility, a more sophisticated facility. Would you talk for a moment about some examples of this in New York State.

LS: I would say that most of our support presently goes for media facilities to make video equipment available primarily to artists in the State. Some of them also do productions for other arts organizations, but an artist can have the opportunity of going to a center to produce a video work, and then going to another center to do post-production on the work, and then to a third facility to broadcast the work.

Right now our funding is geographically distributed equally throughout the State. We support media resource centers, as we call them, or video resource centers. In Long Island there is the Inter-Media Art Center. In New York City there are basically three centers: Global Village, Downtown Community TV Center, and the TV Laboratory at Channel 13. There is also MERC at Young Filmmakers Foundation, which is really set up just to provide equipment to artists and arts organizations, and Electronic Arts Intermix, a post-production facility. In Binghamton, there is the Experimental Television Center, the first center to have really experimental equipment. One of the first Pak-Abe synthesizers was built there.

JR: Their emphasis would be on experimentation, then?

LS: Yes, very much so. The Artists' TV Lab is in Rhinebeck, Media Bus is in Lanesville, and Ithaca Video Project does a lot of multimedia and film work in Ithaca also. Syracuse University administers two facilities: a post-production facility at the Newhouse TV Studio and an artist-in-residence program at the Synapse Studio. Then there's a small artist television workshop at WMHT, the public TV station in Schenectady. In Rochester, public television station WXXI has a substantial



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television workshop for artists. Portable Channel is located there and also Visual Studies Workshop. Media Study is located in Buffalo and Survival Arts Media has moved to Jamestown. There is a network of media centers all over the state—the only one of its kind, I think, in the world. In addition to these centers, we support some viewing or exhibition facilities like The Kitchen and Film Art Fund (Anthology Film Archives) in New York City, and the Everson Museum in Syracuse.

I think I've covered most of the programs. In addition to other grants there are some multi-arts organizations who do have video programs and who give video workshops but the ones I have mentioned are really our major organizations, primarily interested in the use of video or television as a creative medium.

JR: So, theoretically, if a person is working in video, they could go to one of the facilities that offers a course or training, such as our own or Jon Alpert's Downtown Community Television Center or they could go to the Experimental TV Lab at Binghamton and work with the Paik-Abe synthesizer and perhaps develop their work some other way.

LS: They could also go to Howie Gutstadt at Survival Arts Media, which has a brand new synthesizer designed by Bill Etra.

JR: In terms of editing a tape, where could an artist go?

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LS: There are two professional editing facilities in the State. Electronic Arts Intermix in New York City, which has the TRI automatic editing, back-spacer system, and there's Newhouse, which is a multi-million dollar facility with two inch, one-half inch, and three-quarter inch equipment, film chains, SEG's, switchers, and other equipment available on a first-come, first-served basis to artists at no charge. Channel 13's Television Lab is not set up as a post-production facility. It is used as a post-production facility for artists-in-residence who work at the Lab, but it is not really open to other artists.

There are a number of artist-in-residence programs around the State which are another very important aspect of our funding. There is The Television Lab, at which we support documentarian artists-in-residence and creative artists-in-residence. There's also an artist-in-residency at Synapse in Syracuse where artists apply for the production of creative

video works. And there's ZBS Foundation in Fort Edward, where artists can experiment with sound which is a very important component of media. There are a number of other facilities and grants—a program at WBAI in New York City where artists can do audio experimentation. I think every grant that we've made has really been a success.

JR: At this point, what is happening in the area of funding media artists or allowing them a place to work?

"We are interested in experimental uses of video, media, and the creative combination of all the arts."

LS: Over the past couple of years we haven't received that many good quality proposals for media oriented programs or multimedia programs. We have supported a few, one being the ZBS Foundation. Another one is at WBAI where artists—filmmakers, video artists, musicians, dancers—can work with experimental sound. They have a tremendous facility, one of the best equipped in the country. There's the Intermedia Foundation in Garnerville which provides space for multimedia presentations and experiments. One of the most important media grants that we give is to Elaine Summers's Experimental InterMedia Foundation, which is an organization comprised of five or six artist members and their companies. Their facility located on Broadway in New York City is set up for experimentation with all kinds of media, film, slide, dance, etc. It's a beautiful space for any media artist to work in and it is available for artists to use for presentations. Elaine Summers and her company also travel around the State presenting large multimedia performances. We've supported other assorted media projects but not very many and we'd like to encourage more. We don't support the use of radio or broadcast television simply to transmit the other arts. We are interested in experimental uses of video, media, and the creative combination of all the arts.

JR: What about relationships with museums? You've funded some of them, haven't you?

LS: Very little. The Everson Museum is really the only one that has continually applied for support and has actually set aside a department for video—not only video in conjunction with museum services, but video as an art medium, an art form, to be exhibited as such. They've had beautiful shows the last couple of years.

The Herbert F. Johnson Museum has done a little bit of work in exhibiting video and the Museum of Modern Art has begun to but we haven't supported them to date. The Whitney is beginning to get involved under their new director, John Hanhardt. Their film department is beginning to branch out into video but they've not applied for support for their video programs. The one exhibition facility that we have supported over the last five years is The Kitchen. They've developed their space into a very flexible exhibition space for media, multimedia events, and video installations.

JR: You've really provided a base of support and freedom for artists working in video to make very personal tapes and use them on a very local basis in the community or to make environmental pieces where they could be shown in the Everson or The Kitchen. You've set up facilities at the TV Lab whereby an artist can go in and really aim to broadcast his work not to 50 or 100 people, but to 200,000 or even one million. Works by Ed Emshwiller and Nam June Paik and a number of other nationally-known video artists have been supported partially by the Council through The Television Lab facilities. Literally millions of people have been able to see their work. It's a major contribution because video has grown as you pointed out. It was once a community oriented situation, often very local, and now in some cases it can be appreciated by many more people.

LS: We're very pleased, particularly by the response to the "Video and Television Review" series having completed its second year, and also by the support that the Corporation for Public Broadcasting has been giving, little by little, to the national broadcasting of some of the programs that have been produced by New York State video groups. I think that's very important. The fact that Channel 13 is willing to broadcast video works that are produced at the TV Lab and at other centers in the State is a tremendous step forward for public television. I would say that the public TV station managers of New York State are by far the most innovative of any of the station managers in the country, and the most open-minded.

JR: I think this is partially due to the encouragement that you have been able to give them and, to some extent, that the Rockefeller Foundation and other people have been able to give them. I think that an openness to work with artists is probably not something that comes completely naturally to public television as they don't normally think in those terms—and is something to be encouraged.

LS: Not only that, the engineers don't think in terms of utilizing their equipment in any other way than

the way they were taught. Many video artists have gone into public television stations, have worked there and have had a tremendous learning experience and exchange of information that has helped both the artist and the technicians at the station. We have tried to encourage this more and more. It hasn't been easy. Many of the public television stations still want to apply for funds to produce programs on the other arts. We think that's very important, but that is very costly. Not to say that television equipment is inexpensive or that setting up artist residencies in public television stations is inexpensive, but since our primary concern is the creative use of the medium, we've never been able to respond to their requests for producing programs on the other arts. We feel that those kinds of proposals belong in the respective programs with which they deal. Unfortunately, in those other departments of the Council, television projects which cost thousands of dollars are really not a priority when compared to requests for artists' fees.

In our case and in the other programs of the Council this is what is most important—that the artist get paid for his work. In the area of video, the artists are not getting paid for their work. There isn't one video organization that is making the money they should be making. For six years they've been barely existing. Unless there is more outside support generated, these video organizations won't be operating in the next couple of years. The Council budget will not necessarily increase due to the fiscal environment of the State right now. A little outside support has been trickling in, from the National Endowment for the Arts and from the Rockefeller Foundation, but we are the only organization that continually approves support for equipment purchase and general operating costs. During the past six years we have spent over \$1 million in equipment grants. By now that equipment has to be replaced. However, with our reduced budget, we really can't afford to increase the organizations' grants.

JR: How much money have you given to video over the last six years?

LS: Approximately \$4,758,000—totaling about 212 grants. Up until the spring of 1976, just in TV/Media twenty-one percent of our budget has been used for purchasing television and media equipment. This really means that in six years we've spent almost \$5 million, which is really incredible. I don't think most people realize that.

JR: I don't think there's any other precedent for organizations spending that much on video. I think that's really extraordinary.

LS: It is, and unfortunately our budget was cut for this year. The Council budget was cut about \$5

million. In television it was particularly disastrous because of equipment needs and the lack of outside support. What it means is that whereas the Council made about 38 grants last year, we will be giving fewer grants this year even with the increase in applications. It will mean a reduction in funds to the organizations that we've been supporting during the past five years. They've been providing an increase in services to meet the demand of individuals in the State and now it means they'll be cutting back on staff and services. Also, these organizations are now operating with not more than three or four administrators. It's really a terrible situation, especially when we are going to try to make a number of grants for individual artists to do their work which, hopefully, will be substantial. It was in the guidelines of our program this year for the first time. It's always important to encourage the individual in addition to the organization.

JR: I think one of the fortunate side benefits of the type of consistent funding that the Council has been able to give is that it has allowed alternatives to traditional broadcast TV and also to traditional centers of study and research and experimentation in video which have usually been the universities. You've allowed alternate organizations to exist. You've allowed more independent organizations, more arts-oriented organizations to grow over a period of time to where now, for example, Global Village can produce programming for national TV, Jon Alpert as well as others are producing this type of programming. This has really been like a hothouse, if you want to use the analogy, to allow this time period to refine ideas, to work with the equipment that the Council has provided and to allow some subsistence of the organizations and the people they've been able to train to really develop in this State. And that's really significant because no other State and no other national organization has given that type of consistent support. This is sometimes lost in the statistics but it's a very, very important component, I think, of what the Council has been able to do.

LS: We feel very good about it. I've been at the Council five years and it's certainly been an incredible experience for me. Our grantees and other constituents are fantastic. They do so much and more. I wish there were some other income to be generated, whether through grants or through providing services. I foresee that a lot of work put out by artists and organizations that we've supported, or that we haven't supported, will not be able to continue because of this problem of budget cuts. There is no other foundation, public or private, that's really contributed substantially to helping these artists and arts organizations meet their minimal needs.

JR: I think in New York State the only other foundation that has made significant grants to video is the Rockefeller Foundation and I believe most of that funding has been channelled through the TV Lab.

LS: That's right.

JR: So they've been able to reach a number of people but they haven't been able to give subsistence support to organizations and individuals in the State that really need time to develop and time to evolve a style and a means of training people and working with local artists, which is a very important factor.

LS: Hopefully, distribution systems will begin to pick up also, such as when the TV Laboratory's "Video and Television Review" series was broadcast by other television stations. I just recently heard that the Eastern Educational Network will be broadcasting a series like they did last year. Electronic Arts Intermix administers a distribution system which distributes tapes to libraries and assorted cultural institutions. It's not making a lot of money but the artist does receive some income. We have not supported that end of Howard Wise's operation mainly because with our limited funds we support the post-production facility there and we haven't even been able to support that completely. But it was a very important experiment, and has become a reality. For the video community inside and outside of the State, there aren't too many other networks for distribution. Some people have hooked up with cable companies which are showing their tapes. Cable Arts Foundation has made some inroads into getting cable companies to provide an arts channel or arts programming. Some work has been done by the Association for Independent Video and Filmmakers in the way of pay cable but mostly for independent filmmakers. There is a distribution problem. When it will really develop and blossom into an income generating system, I don't know.

JR: Well, it's significant that when we presented that year's Second Annual Documentary Video Festival at our loft on Broome Street in SoHo, we had capacity houses every night. People are willing to come down to a loft and crowd into a room with maybe 70 or 80 people to view tapes that couldn't be seen elsewhere because the distribution system really isn't there at this point. It's in the beginning stage and people are still willing to inconvenience themselves to come out and look at tapes and talk about them. The need for that is quite definite.

LS: It's very difficult making the public aware of what is really going on in the video community, what types of services they are providing for the public. In New York State, everybody is doing a tremendous job.