

Another Standard

Community, Art, Culture and Politics



YOPs on YOPs

Interview with Ken Worpole
Reviews • Arts and Communities 2000 • News
Community Radio • People's Stage Tapes

Summer '82



The National Playing Fields Association

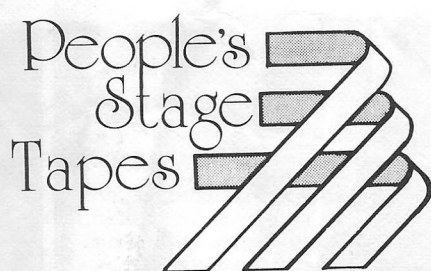
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Another Standard

Community, Art, Culture and Politics

Another Standard is published by the Shelton Trust. It is edited and designed by Mediumwave, and printed by Little @ (01 488 0602). All contributions are welcome. They should be sent to Another Standard, c/o Mediumwave, 3/4 Oval Mansions, Kennington Oval, London SE11.

The views expressed in Another Standard are not necessarily those of the Shelton Trust.

MSC Funding and Community Art

The Manpower Services Commission has now become the largest single funder of the voluntary sector in the U.K. And community arts, a small, but representative part of the voluntary sector, accurately reflects the advantages and disadvantages of MSC funding.

The advantages are not hard to list. At a time when all the other funding agencies are working to reduced budgets, MSC, or more properly the Special Programmes Division, has money — big money. Money for wages. Ironically the kind of cash that has traditionally been the most difficult to obtain flows freely. That's some advantage. The prospect of doubling or trebling staff is almost irresistible.

So much for advantages.

But are the disadvantages so easy to list? Everyone readily agrees on the limitations for an individual project: the annual turnover of people, restrictions on recruitment, the amount of time regular staff spend on supervision. But these limitations can be got around, it is claimed. And they often are.

There are, however, more serious problems for the voluntary sector — and by implication the community arts movement — to consider.

MSC isn't really a funding agency at all. Special programmes aren't an odd kind of grant; they are an exercise to take certain kinds of people off the dole queue. So unlike the ACGB which has a policy on promoting the arts or the DoE whose Urban Programme seeks to regenerate inner cities the MSC has no policy. And no recognition of capital or revenue needs.

There are two results of this. Most funding agencies are reluctant to joint fund projects with major MSC funding. They have, not unreasonably, a horror of having to pick up the bill for MSC workers. In addition the lack of policy in terms of the clients or projects leads to MSC having a preference for larger projects, since they are easier to administrate, and certain kinds of work, like environmental work, because it is easier to maintain.

The paradigm has become the large mural team desperately scrounging paint and a van and being turned down for revenue support by an RAA.

The second problem relates to the 'dilution' of community arts activity. Increasingly MSC area boards are supporting groups which have no link with established community arts projects, and very often have no real experience of community arts work. Where such projects are set up the work carried out in the name of community arts has little connection with the body of knowledge and practice that has been developing for more than a decade. It has, very often, more to do with mobile arts and crafts or leisure classes.

Of course not all wholly MSC supported projects are bad. But the extent of their very rapid growth means that inevitably many are. In the North of England, for example, just four wholly MSC projects have between them a larger annual budget and employ more full-time community artists than Northern Arts Community Arts Panel. At a recent ACGB conference, Roger Lancaster, Assistant Director of West Midlands Arts Association, reported a similar pattern in the West Midlands.

At best this dilution may simply mean more repeats of the MSC mural team in the North West which had to go around and paint over its unwanted (by residents) work on gable ends. It may also mean that groups who have struggled to develop a style of work related to long term development find themselves confused with well meaning 'cowboys'.

In any event we seem quite powerless to control this growth or even to introduce some discussion of 'standards of work'. For Area Boards are singularly undemocratic even by the standards of our more usual adversaries the Regional Arts Associations and the Arts Council. Their inflexible mixture of officers, trade unionists and local businessmen means little skill or advice is available in assessing an impracticable or over ambitious scheme.

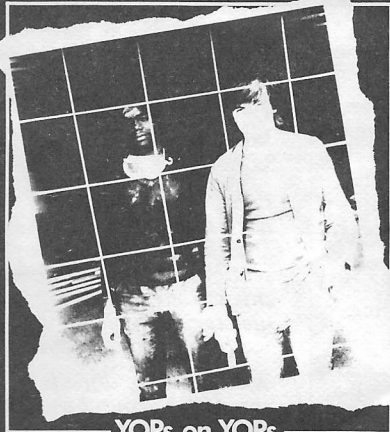
Finally there are important financial implications for community artists. Local Authorities are now making extensive 'replacement' use of MSC labour in non—or weakly unionized sections. Why should a local authority give you a grant when MSC workers will do the same job at a fraction — to them — of the cost? And if you work for a group that needs fees earned from 'servicing' carnivals, playschemes ect have you noticed how many 'free' MSC teams there are touring?

So, although we may as individual organizations deal with MSC and use its support wisely if not well, there is a very real threat to the continued development of community arts work. It comes not from the cuts, nor from the policy vacillations of anyone, but from the unguided intervention of MSC.

We urgently need, at local and national level, to feed into MSC an awareness of policies that will promote community arts; we have to build links with MSC groups working outside the 'mainstream'; and we have to carefully monitor the financial implications for ourselves.

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Write to:

Another Standard,
3/4 Oval Mansions,
Kennington Oval,
London SE11.

Dear Community Artists,

At the beginning of the Arts Council of Great Britain Community Arts Committee you and your fellow workers campaigned vigorously for people on the committee who could represent your views. You wanted some of us who were practising in the field to report faithfully the committee's deliberations and decisions. You lobbied us for financial support and to come and see your work regularly and we, according to our individual interests and sometimes inclinations, responded accordingly.

In 1977/1978 Carol Kenna and I called mass meetings of all London Community artists and requested information from regional ACAs just before grant-giving time. We had accepted an informal mandate from the ACA and were determined that you should be as involved as possible in the cake-cutting ceremony.

On each occasion the cake was predicably too small and you rightly refused to divide it, instead insisting upon our lobbying from within for more money. This we did with varying degrees of success until it became apparent that further pushing would only serve to alienate the already suspicious and defensive Council to an extent that would put all funding seriously in jeopardy.

Devolution was upon us and we concentrated our energies on achieving a sizeable sum of money for each devolved region which would allow for a boost for existing clients, new developments and badly-needed training funds.

The background to the above which was perhaps never clearly understood is that no member of any ACGB committee is allowed to represent any group or organisation. I am there by invitation as an individual with knowledge of a field of work.

Community artists feel that anyone who accepts such a position has swapped to "the other side" and has no right to expect support, let alone

sympathy from a struggling and impoverished movement.

I am asking for neither, but I'm still in there, a member of the regional committee (that's the one that partially funds your Regional Arts Association and keeps an eye on community arts policy and funding throughout the country) and its new sub-committee for Combined Arts which advises on funding for community arts national clients arts centres and the old "special applications" clients.

All I am requesting from you is information. Is your RAA supportive of community arts? Are there developments in your area? Is there any effective training programme?

It's obviously more helpful to me if you write to me in groups, be they ACA representation or those of like-minded individuals. On the whole I am not able to affect the funding of individual devolved clients but if there's a crisis let me know.

I'm travelling around quite a bit at the moment so if I'm able to visit and you think it would be helpful I'll try to do that too.

Keep in touch.

Best wishes.

Pippa Smith.
c/o Welfare State International,
Community Arts Team
1 Croxteth Road,
Liverpool 8.

Dear Another Standard,

I am writing in response to the interview with Robin Guthrie in the March issue.



Robin Guthrie

I enjoyed reading it, and frankly it was good to see you taking more space in order to treat your topics more seriously.

I would like to take issue with the points he makes about

so-called national community arts clients. He says they are 'operating not as touring companies but as national resources.'

This is an odd kind of chop-logic which seems to me to be dangerously close to the kind of special pleading which he claims elsewhere does not go on.

National resources, he says, 'can offer a fresh set of insights to an area'. He doesn't explain why a touring company cannot do just this, nor does he explain how it is done.

I don't frankly believe that there is any place for 'national' clients in the community arts movement, and Robin Guthrie's verbal sleights of hand have not convinced me.

I don't doubt that these 'national' clients are doing good work; some of them. But whatever it is they are doing it is not community arts.

They move from place to place with little long term commitment to an area. How can they have? There are so many places they must visit that long term relationships must come to be seen as a handicap, a burden. If they keep going back to places they will never visit anywhere new, and that is what they are all about.

We must move beyond the naive position of believing that everybody who is doing good work is one of us.

The national clients are not community artists.

Delroy Wallace,
Liverpool 8.

This is not a point of view that a lot of people would share (particularly the national clients). They would argue that this debate has already been had and won.

Obviously, as your letter shows, they are not as right as they think. Or perhaps, it's just that you can't have a good debate too often.

Dear Another Standard,

It was good to read the article about Charivari. The problem with *Another Standard* and magazines like it have always been their theoretical leaning.

Can we have more articles from the grass roots please?

Helene Bille,
London NW3.

We intend to have a couple of articles each issue which will deal with specific aspects of the work of a community art group.

Incidentally, we forgot to give Charivari's address at the end of last issue's article. It is Charivari, 16 Felix Road, Felixstowe, Suffolk.

Dear Editors,

I appreciate what I think you are trying to do with the 'new-look' *Another Standard*. The longer articles certainly allow subjects to be covered rather than merely skimmed.

Don't let this happen at the expense of the shorter news items which the old *Another Standard* used to carry, and which I for one found useful on more than one occasion.

After all one of the primary functions of a magazine like this should be to keep people in touch with what's happening, shouldn't it?

Jan Jones,
London SW9.

Point taken. This issue we have expanded both the news and the reviews sections slightly. In doing this we have taken a particular tack, which we would welcome your comments on.

What we have done is to omit the AFCA Round the Regions section from the news and include various bits of AFCA news in the other articles.

We have concentrated in the news and reviews on covering items which we think might turn out to be helpful or to spark off debate of one sort or another.

We have avoided trying to be topical in the up-to-the-minute sense, which seems to us a pretty ridiculous goal for a quarterly magazine to aim at anyway.

Is this what you mean by keeping people in touch? Or should we be doing something else?

Banner Theatre Company.

An article appeared in the *Guardian* on 14th March 1982 entitled 'CLAMP ON CRE GRANTS AFTER JOB ROW'. The article attacked Banner Theatre, accusing the collective of misuse of CRE funds and racial bias in its employment policy. Banner rejects these allegations.

Any community organisation having doubts about Banner as a result of this article is welcome to inspect the documents relating to the issue and discuss the matter with us.

Please contact us at:
173 Lozells Road,
Lozells,
Birmingham B19 1RU.
(021) 551 3671

From the Banner Collective.

Please keep your letters as brief as possible. For reasons of space those letters marked with an asterisk have been edited.

THE STATE OF THE ART



Art under Attack: Mural Damaged

For three years Dave Biddington has worked on a large mural on the side wall of the building used by the Basement Community Arts Project, in Tower Hamlets in the East End of London. The mural, which is in Cable Street, depicts the battle of Cable Street, when Moseley's Brownshirts were successfully prevented from marching through the area. This was an exceedingly important event at the time, and has passed into local mythology.

Dave Biddington is painting the mural in an unusual and painstaking technique, which involves applying layer upon layer of a special, almost translucent paint and slowly building the colours onto the wall. The advantage of this technique is that when the mural is finished it will be almost invulnerable to weather conditions.

One night recently somebody climbed the scaffolding and covered a large section of the mural with racist graffiti. Ironically, the attempts to make the mural difficult to damage in the long-term make it almost impossible to remove the graffiti. A group of London muralists are at the moment holding a series of meetings to decide how best to save the mural. (Photo: Kate Kelly, Basement Project).

At the Arts Council

The Arts Council of Great Britain has now finalised the new-look Regional Committee which includes a Combined Arts Sub-committee.

It is this sub-committee which will from now on house the Arts Council's interest in community art. It will have responsibility for the remaining national clients, which have not been devolved to the regional arts associations, and for overseeing the development of community arts policy in the regional arts associations.

The chairman of Regional Committee is John Last, who is a Merseyside County Councillor and Director of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Society.

The new Sub-committee is chaired by William Forster, who is head of the Adult Education Department at the University of Leicester and chairman of the East Midland Arts General Arts Panel.

The rest of the panel are: Oliver Bennett, John Cumming, Buchi Emecheta, Christopher Kerr, Jan Murray, Bob Ramdhanie, Philip Rawson, Pippa Smith and Richard Welton.

Pippa Smith is the only member of this sub-committee who remains from the old Community Arts Sub-committee.



Edit Video

Fantasy Factory, the video resource based in North London, have two new video editing systems.

They have installed the first Convergence/5850 editing system, which features a Convergence 103B joystick edit-controller running three Sony 5850 front-loading

U-matic editing VTRs.

They also have a VHS-to-VHS editing system (*VHS Squared*) which is unique in Britain. Its primary aims are simplicity and very low cost.

The system comprises two National Panasonic NV 8200 editing VCRs, with NVA 960 edit-controller; plus a Sony 6 into 2 audio mixer.

This system has been designed with beginners in mind. At £25 for 24 hours, for subsidised clients, Fantasy Factory say that it is the cheapest automatic editing system for 3,000 miles in any direction.

Fantasy Factory can be contacted 24 hours a day on 01-405 6862. You can write to them at 42 Theobalds Rd, London WC1X 8NW.

Using Local Radio

The National Extension College and Community Service Volunteers have published a *Local Radio Kit*, for use by community groups and other voluntary agencies.

The purpose of the kit is to help groups make the most efficient use of their local radio station.

The kit comprises a card game which is designed to familiarise people with local radio and help identify appropriate ways of using it.

It also includes a handbook of information, ideas, contact addresses etc; a flowchart to guide you through the various stages of programme-making, a diagram of a typical local radio studio, and a cassette which demonstrates interview techniques, and provides opportunities for practice.

Together these cover such areas as: what local radio can do, how to approach the station, how to interest the station in your activities, how to get a clear message across, how to make your own programme and how to plan follow-up activities.

The kit costs £5.95 and can be obtained from the National Extension College, 18 Brooklands Avenue, Cambridge CB2 2HN.

We hope to include a review of the kit in a future issue.

Raising Money

The Directory of Social Change is running a series of fund-raising seminars in the Autumn. These cost £25 each (including lunch with wine), or £85 if you attend all four.

The seminars are *Raising Money through Legacies* on October 12th, *Raising Money through Lotteries* on October 13th, *Raising Money through Advertising* on October 18th and *Raising Money for Capital Projects* on October 19th.

The seminars will include speakers with legal and practical experience of the subjects. They are being held in Central London.

The full programme and further details are available from Michael Norton, the Directory of Social Change, 9 Mansfield Place, London NW3 1HS. You can phone him on 01-794 9835.

What Conference?

Rural Challenge, the conference which was due to be held in May at Ludlow, was cancelled.

The organisers said that poor advance booking was to be blamed. There simply didn't seem to be enough interest to justify holding it.

A conference is being held in Loughborough in September, though. This is being organised by the WEA, and follows on from Sir Roy Shaw's discussion about art and education.

It is being held on September 10th, 11th and 12th. For more details contact the Shelton Trust, or your regional AFCA.

Action on Employment Videos

The Social Arts Trust have a series of tape/slide and videos called *Community Action on Employment* available for hire.

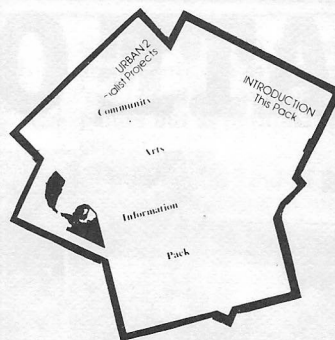
The series includes *Alston Moor - an appraisal*, which looks at sixteen months in the life of a village hit by a foundry closure.



Don't destroy - redeploy! is a set of posters, slides and stickers which provide a record of a publicity campaign run by men at NEI Parsons in Newcastle to encourage work-sharing and not redundancies.

The third in the series is *Lee Jeans*, a tape/slide presentation in which 240 women involved in the Lee Jeans factory occupation talk about how they organised a successful sit-in.

If you would like to book any of these, or to find out more about them contact the Social Arts Trust at First Floor, Exchange Buildings, Quayside, Newcastle; or phone them on 0632 616581.



Pack Out!

The Community Arts Information Pack is now available. This pack aims to give a broad view of what is happening nationally in the field of community art, by highlighting the work of a number of groups in different fields.

There is a discussion of the Pack in the review section at the back of the magazine.

The pack is available by post from the Shelton Trust, The Old Tin School, Collyhurst Road, Manchester M10 7RQ. It costs £1.50 (including postage).

Eastern Arts takes over

Eastern Arts Association has taken over full responsibility for community arts in its region. It has set up a sub-committee of the Management Committee to advise on, and administer, policy towards general and community arts.

The subcommittee has eight members, of whom five are members of the Eastern Arts management committee.

The other three members are from general and community arts groups in the region. They are Michael Hooton, from the Wells Arts Centre, Paul Jolly, from the Luton Community Arts Trust, and Taffy Thomas of Charivari.

Pippa Smith attends as an ACPB representative.

Hold the Front Page (Exclusive)

Karen Merkel has joined the board of directors of the Shelton Trust, as the director from the Greater London area. She is a member of Free Form, and sits on GLAA's Community Arts Panel.

She was reported to be 'thrilled' at her appointment.

Thinking Aloud

with
T.P. Harcourt

Community arts and community work often seems to get confused in the minds of the poor punters. They do in my mind too, especially in their madder moments.

I have the dubious pleasure of helping out at a weekly legal advice session which gives me a chance to observe the local community workers communing.

Last week I found out something about them which I thought was quite personally revealing; and its not often that happens, I can tell you.

None of them (that is none of the three of them) can stand parrots. I like to think this is because they have some hidden significance for them.

I found this out because an old man whose legal problems seem both relatively trivial and almost interminable came in to see me.

He came in as he often does as much for the company as for the advice. He didn't really expect to get his money back, but he did have high hopes of a cup of tea and a chat.

He usually got one but this time he was out of luck. The community worker who was on what I like to call support duty that night took one look at him and turned her back. He had his parrot on his shoulder.

She didn't actually say, 'I can't give you a cup of tea, you've got a parrot on your shoulder' of course. She just pretended he wasn't there and then, when it was pointed out that he was, found something else to do.

It was a quiet night and he stayed for some time. In the end he made the tea himself and entered the realms of the self-supporting. Before he did this though he told me that it was not the only time that this had happened.

He had brought the parrot once before, and had been asked to leave, and subsequently told that the weekly workers' meeting had democratically decided that nobody could be advised with a bird on their shoulder.

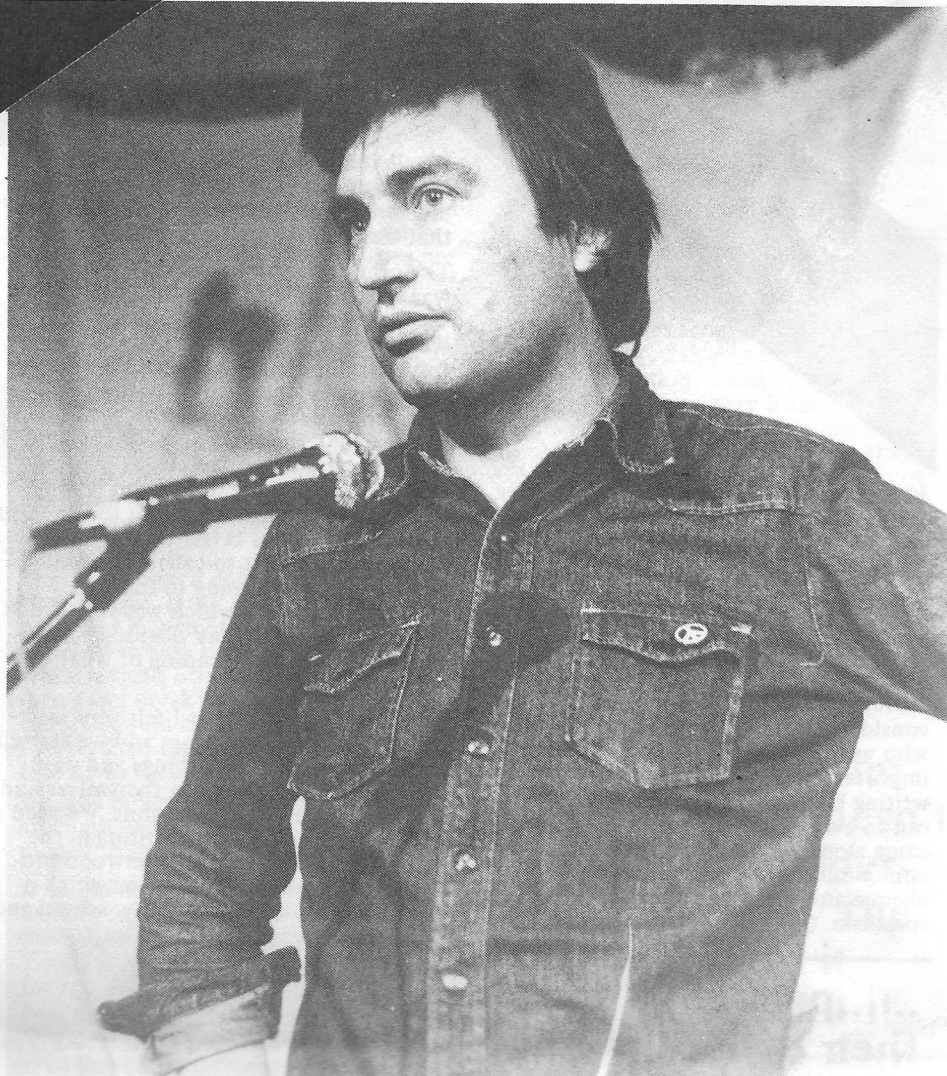
Unless it was the bird that needed the advice, presumably.

GUARANTEED
'no solid literary merit'
- The Arts Council of Great Britain



Ken Worpole was co-editor of 'The Republic of Letters', a recently published book which describes the work, successes, struggles and aims of the Federation of Workers Writers and Community Publishers and its member groups. Ken worked for many years at Centerprise, a local bookshop and cultural centre in Hackney in London.

The views expressed in this interview are Ken Worpole's personal ones and not necessarily those of the Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers.



Photograph of Ken Worpole by Eamonn Duggan

KEN WORPOLE

Talks to Dermott Killip

The Greater London Council has recently set up an Arts Board with a budget of over £1 million specifically earmarked for community art and ethnic art. This prompted you to write a polemic in the London magazine 'City Limits' in which you attacked community art: You wrote: "Much work done under the label of 'community arts' has been very good. Much hasn't. But whilst it all goes on under the one name, one's expected to approve the job lot. With no attempt on the part of the 'community arts' movement to substantiate its historical, political or aesthetic foundations, then approval, en bloc, can't be given, and certainly not now when funding issues assume crucial political significance."

Why did you write the polemic in City Limits?

I didn't write it to be spiteful or anything like that. It was a response to what had happened a few months before I wrote it when several people in left theatre and various people I'd known over the years were saying to me that this was a great breakthrough and that community arts

had finally arrived. Because I'd been working in the same period - the seventies - they assumed I should be very pleased, but I was stopped in my tracks because I'd always thought the things I'd been involved in weren't community arts. There seemed to be a lot of confusion because these people with years of experience in the theatre and poetry weren't differentiating at all; they thought it was

.....a lot of the left's criticism has been about the politics of content.....

all one thing. I wanted to sit down and write a polemic in the hope of clarifying some issues. It also seemed to me that Tony Banks (*chairman of the new Greater London Arts and Recreation Committee*) was going round saying he had a new arts policy yet his thinking, seemed to me,

to be so woolly and his use of the term community arts seemed, to me, so undifferentiated that there was no way of telling the good from the bad.

A lot of it had just seemed to me over the years fairly kind of 'bread and circuses', nice, amenable, pleasant and useful, but without any long-term strategy. I think - and this is a terrible thing to say - in times when money really is scarce then you do have to have certain kinds of priorities. The other thing I said in it was that because I was very keen on the original community festivals it did seem to me that the initial dynamic for them had organically disappeared and they were being kept alive in a very sort of substitutionist way.

Could you explain that.

Well, they were being 'town hall-ified'. Whereas originally they were partly alternative culture.

The word community in community art is very confusing. It's a word that's also used in the Federation's title.

Community was a word that was won by the radicals between 1968 - 72 and then has been won back since, so that all the state and local forms of the state are now labelled as community. You have community prisons, community childcare, community education, community schools. It is a word that has now been completely taken over by the state.

GUARANTEED
'no solid literary merit'
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Many community artists use community as a euphemism for working class.

We often use the word local, as in local publishing, in the same way.

What sort of people was the polemic you wrote aimed at?

I suppose I was hoping that some labour movement activists who had never considered culture terribly important and who were now being pushed to consider it important weren't simply going to start writing blank cheques and handing them out to everybody because those people came along and said that they were community artists and must have a cheque and that this was the way to socialism.

.....people do have their own relationship with Literature, but it's not in that kind of religious way of relating to tradition.....

You started off as a teacher didn't you?

I came into teaching in a fairly round about way. I was in the building trade for 5 years and very interested in the Young Socialists in the Labour Party. The Labour Party I was in, in 1960, was still then a fairly working class party, the South East Essex branch, and fairly well self-educated.

I left grammar school, and there was very little cultural activity at grammar school, but funnily enough I did find some of the Labour Party into trad jazz and Italian neo-realist films like the Bicycle Thieves. It was a tremendously energetic period. I got to respect their interest of being political and interested in culture. That seemed to be a natural part of politics.

Was that just what these activists did in their spare time or was it an integral part of being in the Labour Party at that time?

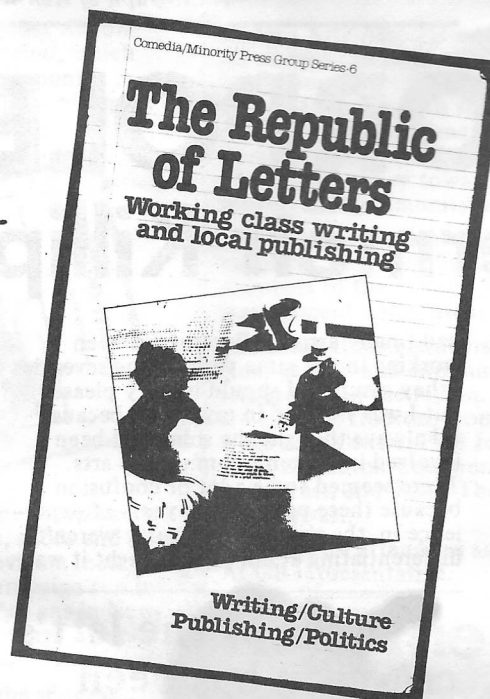
No it was inseparable, it was part of being in that party. Yet by 1965 when I moved to Brighton and rejoined the Labour Party it wasn't there at all. I think that has now disappeared. Even the new new Labour Party is very economist.

I really enjoyed teaching English; I got a lot out of it myself, personally. It always did seem to me that English was a part of that tradition

The other thing was at that time, just as I was starting english teaching in 1969, it was the beginning of the History Workshop and one of the main focusses for radical criticism at that time was school books, they were a bastion of received values and standards. So while I was teaching the thing about what kind of books you use in the classroom was becoming very, very important. It did seem to me very early on that the children wrote these things better anyway. Particularly if it was that so-called 'relevant' material - of boys going to football matches and so on, which was very crude and stereotypical. They obviously had a much clearer understanding of what was going on.

So as an English teacher I felt very interested in children's writings and we started duplicating poems and things and used what the kids had written themselves and also used them in other lessons. We used a lot of the children's own writing in the classroom. Then Vivian Usherwood produced all those brilliant poems which were initially duplicated in the school and then sent down the road to Centerprise.

I remember at this time we tried to construct a new C.S.E. mode three English syllabus for Hackney Schools which actually included a lot of this type of work - Hoxton Childhood and so on - but it didn't get through.



You left teaching to work in Centerprise.

Centerprise had started (nothing to do with me) I knew about it, I knew the people involved in setting it up and once it got going and looked like it was going to survive they were delighted with the idea of actually publishing. When Vivian Usherwood's poems sold like hot cakes, it was obvious that here was a new readership. The demand was so enormous they couldn't print it fast enough.

Centerprise started publishing in 1973, probably the first of the local publishing projects. By 1973 we were corresponding with Scotland Road writers' workshop in Liverpool, which was set up by David Evans who got a temporary job, an extension studies class, to do something with the working class. He was going to run a literature class and when people turned up he asked them whether a literature class was what they wanted. It turned out that they were much more interested in talking about a rent strike, trade union struggles and local history. So clearly from the beginning they were more interested in what was going on around them.

Then Strong Words was set up in 1974 and by 1976 there were about 9 projects we corresponded with.

.....all the state and local forms of the state are now labelled as community.....

When the Federation was started it was a voluntary federation of independent local groups. By 1976 the idea came up that it would be nice to have an anthology. We didn't have any money and we applied to the Arts Council for a grant and got it. By 1978 more groups had joined, there was an awful lot of administration and it was suggested that we get a full-time worker. There were some people in the Federation who said or who thought we shouldn't apply for money to the Arts Council. I myself have deep reservations about it.

Do you think that the Federation shouldn't have a paid worker?

I've nothing against paid workers. It's what they're substituting for. The arguments against having a full-time worker for the Federation would be that it would disenfranchise some people if applications, correspondence, travelling and so on were clustering around one person, who would filter information. What we'd have eventually would be that activists would end up as unpaid managers over a paid employee. You have to work out a system to overcome this. You can't stick your head in the sand and say 'no we won't have a full-time worker' many cases the main question is sooner or later? My criticism of a lot of things about having a paid worker is that people want them immediately without being clear about what actually needs doing.

So a joint application went to Gulbenkian and the Arts Council. Gulbenkian were very keen and said to the Arts Council do you want to join us in this project? They said no, so the Gulbenkian paid for the first three years.

Republic of Letters graphically describes the battles the Federation has had with the Literature Panel of the Arts Council. Were they going on at this time?

At the time when there was this ideological battle with the Arts Council, the

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'no solid literary merit'
— The Arts Council of Great Britain

Gulbenkian grant had more or less finished and an application was made to the Arts Council and we asked to go and meet the panel. They said this was unprecedented, but they would allow it and we sent them some representative publications. By the time we got there obviously one or two people had read some of the publications, but there was no way they could have absorbed what it was all about.

What did they say about your application?

At first they said it wasn't Literature, it was social work or therapy. They suggested that we should go down the road to the community arts committee, which is where, I think, the resentment for community arts got more entrenched, because we felt that's what they're using community arts for, that's their ploy — anything radical either from a new form or a new constituency (obviously the working class is that for the Arts Council), their reply was send them down the road to the community arts committee.

.....I'd always thought the things I'd been involved in weren't community arts.....

The arguments the Federation had with the Arts Council weren't weren't just about money were they?

There are two arguments. First of all over status. Even if every single piece of work produced by every group was rubbish how could you possibly say that nothing would develop out of it. The fact of course was that this was not the case at all. A lot of the writing was very, very good and was being done by lots of people in different parts of the country: a lot of parts where Arts Council money never reached. But they have no sense of what the next generation of writers may be like or where they may come from. They have no sense of black constituencies or feminist constituencies, they have no sense that literature is an historical tradition. They are metropolitan orientated, but it's more than that, they have no sense that literature needs some kind of organisational support.

The most amazing statement they made was that they didn't want any more writers. That's a terribly important way of seeing culture — as something simply produced within a known constituency, a finite range of things that can or will be produced.

You said in your polemic that community artists should have sought money from the traditional panels rather than letting the Arts Council set up a separate community arts panel. You argue that this leaves the other panels free from intellectual challenge and lets them maintain their conservative reality.

The Arts Council does have this very large budget. It is a very conservative body and it is emotionally and politically attached to very tight genres and forms. While radicals often try to mix these forms and break away from them and I think it would have been more political to have kept on at the specific panels to face up to their own contradictions.

We, as a federation, when we discussed it at length, were agreed that we wanted our money from the Literature Panel.

It would have been possible though, wouldn't it, to have tried to raise money from other sources i.e. the Trades Unions, Labour Movement. Or for the Federation to have tried to become financially self-sufficient and therefore financially independent of the state?

Yes that's right and when I worked at Centerprise the dream was that one day we would be self-sufficient. I think that's ideal.

In the Federation I suppose it is our dream, it was our dream and is potentially realisable in the Federation, if we didn't have a paid worker. We do have a bankers order system and we do cover all our administration costs through money we raise, but it's just that we want a full-time worker and it is seen as very desirable by some. There are within the Federation some people who have felt that there is no way we should have a full-time worker. Unfortunately the old things people used to talk about - the alternative sources of money, the Trades Unions, the Labour Movement - just aren't there.



Yet the first Trade Unionists and socialist activists were in real terms a lot poorer than today's, but they managed to start financially independent cultural alternatives. Isn't it still possible to do that today?

I think we're in a very different historical situation than earlier periods of, as it were, radical culture. Just historically if you back simply to the 1900's you have a genuine market economy i.e. what wages you earned you simply spent on the market. Taxation, direct or indirect, only claimed something very little whereas now some 60 — 70 per cent of people's earned income disappears in taxes without any choice and there's a massive amount of lack of people's freedom to spend on what they want. You have to get some of that money back from the state.

.....There are other ways you judge aesthetics that the Arts Council doesn't take into consideration — simply the fact that does it work or doesn't it.....

In the 'Republic of Letters' the Federation attacks the Arts Council's criteria and judgements of standards, but the Federation proposes no alternative standards or criteria. Why?

I don't think you can lay down standards. If you take poetry the only objective thing you can say is about certain technical matters — rhyme, structure, forms i.e. sonnets, narrative or ballads. Then you move from the technical to the aesthetic — does it avoid cliché? You've got to have aesthetics but you must put the aesthetics into a social context.

Then there is the problem of the selective tradition where you tend to think that everything written in the Nineteenth Century is terribly good, yet what we get is only one per cent of it and the rest is rubbish. We don't see a relationship between the best that has ended up as part of the selective tradition and the rubbish.

There's always a relationship between the best and the rubbish, which is what interests me particularly at this moment. For example whether Dashiell Hammett or Hemingway was the first to make the breakthrough to the vernacular style. Even things that you think of as the best have a relationship with things that aren't the best, there's always a dynamic. I think that a lot of people with the Arts Council's ideology forget that, that the good actually has to have a relationship with the things out of which it comes. Their criteria are a-historical and simply concerned with the printed poem read by the isolated reader. They also ignore the social context.

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We’ve approached aesthetics from the other end. Writing is best done with other people, learning from other people, listening and talking about things and taking advice and so on. This is how the workshop works, by learning from others and absorbing other truths.

There are other ways you judge aesthetics that the Arts Council doesn’t take into consideration — simply the fact that does it work or doesn’t it? If you try to do a funny piece of writing and people don’t laugh then you put it away. If people read something and it clearly works, people really do say that is terrific, it registers. Other times it doesn’t work

What sort of relationship does the Federation have with the ‘great’ works of Literature of the past?

You mustn’t think that the Federation has a defined ideology at all. There are great debates. One is that there’s a workerist mentality — that the Literature of the past is bourgeois because it was produced by another class under different conditions.

.....otherwise just the work happens and it’s simply a series of disconnected, atomised projects that if the economics change will disappear

How do people in the writing groups you’ve known see the ‘great works of the past’?

There is a know nothing attitude amongst a lot of people — ‘I wrote this I’ve never read any poetry and I’m very proud I’ve never read any poetry’. To which I would reply that you’ve done well to do that, but it’s not something to be proud of that you’ve read no one else’s poetry, because one can only learn from it. No one would say I want to be a cabinet maker but I’d never look at the furniture anyone else has ever made.

People bring to the groups their own experience of English writing — often a very bad experience from when they were at school. People have read say, Sylvia Plath or been terribly influenced by Steinbeck or Wilfred Owen’s poetry,

certainly the older generation of people. So people do have their own relationship with Literature but it’s not that kind of religious way of relating to tradition. There’s a radical critical relationship with writing of the past.

What kinds of debates go on in writers’ workshops; what are they like?

.....the most amazing statement they made was that they didn’t want any more writers.....

It really does depend, they’re all very very different, and people come along with very very different conceptions. That’s all part of the great debate that has gone on. Some Some older people feel that there is no place for swearing but younger people feel it should be in. That’s still unresolved but all groups have met that as an issue. Then there’s the whole thing about sexism, calling girls chicks and so on, which may be O.K. if it’s a character speaking but not otherwise. Now all groups have to go through what is a massive political and aesthetic argument and to come out the other end is an amazing achievement.

Writers’ workshops are a much freer setting for this than any other setting I know. I’m a member of the local history workshop and it’s much harder. The older people whose memories are the subject matter say ‘you either have my version or you don’t’ and their version may end up with ‘it was alright ‘till the blacks came along.’

Now it’s much harder to argue against in a history group, whereas in a writers’ workshop it always seems much easier. If someone reads a story you can say look it doesn’t work: if the person’s as racist as you say they are they wouldn’t do this, or if the wife is as silly as you say she is how come she’s done this? The political contradictions are also aesthetic ones and that’s very interesting.

You have said that community art can sink into an uncritical populism and it’s true that the working class gaining hold of the means of expression does not necessarily mean that what they will then say will be particularly progressive or even have much relationship to socialism, so what’s the relationship between working class writing and socialism?

It can be a relationship of content i.e. the left’s ability to learn something from reading it. The major thing we’ve learnt in the last few years is really the breakthrough about forms and the process of production — that actually is a much more radical thing, the politics of production is as important or is maybe more important than the politics of

content. You have to work out a balance between these things, but a lot of the left’s criticism has been about the politics of content.

What sort of things have they been criticising?

They’re about why so many older people write perpetually about their childhood with nostalgia or romanticism. Everyone knows the world is a better place than it was 50 years ago. Everybody knows that. Most people in the end would agree with that, but with major reservations. The thing is that a lot of the left leave out those reservations and don’t stop to listen to what those buts are. Those buts might have shown us a very different way to proceed with the socialist project. The Labour Party and the Trade Unions need to listen to them and not just be command parties

There’s a certain kind of expression that one can learn an awful lot from. One of the problems of the socialist project is how little actual knowledge it has of what people say and think. Obviously we could have learnt fairly early on, had we had this type of thing, just how people felt about the paternalism of the state and the N.H.S. How distant they’d become from the paternalistic state.

.....Even things that you think of as the best have a relationship with things that aren’t the best, there’s always a dynamic.....

Why are you encouraging people to write? Do you think writing is always a good thing?

At a simple level yes. It would be nice to be more sophisticated than that, but at a simple level that’s right. I think people do look at the world more critically once they’re interested.

What do you hope writing the ‘Republic of Letters’ will achieve?

The ‘Republic of Letters’ has unfortunately antagonised some people who see it as a small group making a name for themselves on other people’s experience and trying to intellectualise. I think that is sad that this is seen, otherwise the work just happens and it’s simply a series of disconnected, atomised projects that if the economics change will disappear and might well have never existed. ‘Republic of Letters’ is an attempt to put a few more details on the map.

Thanks.

The Republic of Letters costs £2.95 and is available from bookshops or from the publishers, Comedia, 9 Poland Street, London W1V 3DG (01-437 8954) ISBN 0 906890 12 8

Using Technology at the Grass Roots

by Tish Stubbs

For years we've toted our reel-to-reel tape recorder around Devon collecting folk songs, music and lore at grass-roots level; cultural materials which form the very heart of our community arts activities. *People's Stage Tapes* is a direct attempt in using and controlling technology to allow us to share and circulate these materials, above and beyond the continued live interaction that we organise or participate in. Let me describe the philosophy behind putting the tapes to work, and how we go about getting the cassettes together.

Folklore exists as artistic expression of, within, and for a community, be it a community of age (children's lore), area (village, street, geographical region), interest (hobby groups, political groupings), work (office, factory, agriculture), leisure (pub sessions, family life) or whatever.

Sometimes that expression is focussed in one person, sometimes it is dispersed throughout a group of performers. Either way the cassette tape can be used to encapsulate and reflect that expression, and the community itself can be involved in preparing the tape.

Once the master tape is made you don't have to press an initial run of a thousand or two thousand to make it 'worthwhile', as with LP's. The primary market for the

than any individual might spend on their favourite hobby, and, because there's no need to accumulate large stocks, running costs are kept very low. Consequently you can produce an inexpensive, good quality product at the end of the day, which no-one feels ripped off by purchasing.

Encouraging cultural diversity, passing round skills and repertoire, giving communities confidence in mastering technology. We feel these are legitimate and desirable goals for community artists to pursue, and will certainly give *'People's Stage Tapes'* plenty of scope for development over the next few years.

Encouraging cultural diversity, passing round skills and repertoire, giving communities confidence in mastering technology.....

tape is the community that's documented. If anyone else is interested over and above that, fine. Just run off what you need when you need it. Since you're not haunted by the spectre of mass marketing you can actively encourage all the nooks and crannies of human culture, unlike record companies, which at present process everything into bland mush in order to 'sell', and what they can't process they ignore.

I hope it doesn't sound too clinical, or cynical, to present a community as a market. I use the word to depict the field of interest in the tape, rather than to conjure up exploitative connotations. After all, a small-scale cassette-producing enterprise need cost no more to set up



YOPs on YOPs

Telford Community Arts and Jubilee Community Arts are two projects based in the West Midlands. They have both been working recently with unemployed young people, many of whom have, at some stage, been placed on a variety of YOP schemes.

Cynthia Woodhouse, from Jubilee, and Graham Woodruff, from Telford, describe the work they have been involved with and, using the particular experiences of young people on YOP schemes, begin to debate both the 'opportunities' that YOPs offers many young people and the wider implications of the continuation of this form of employment programme.

Telford Community Arts

Last year, four Telford youths, Chris, Julie, Georgina and Nick, made a film about their experiences of 'Telycop', a YOP community work project which included community arts.

The film makers interviewed the area organiser for YOP projects and talked to a number of youths who were either on a scheme or who had recently finished. They also acted out situations which they thought showed what they felt about the scheme.

One question asked in the film was "what effect does a YOP scheme have on full-time employment?" A scene shows two coffee bar assistants (acted by Georgina and Julie) caught having five minutes with their feet up while the YOP teenagers make the sandwiches. The result? The women are put on short time.

"Now we've got the Telycop people to do the work, you see," the supervisor explains, "we can do without you."

"But I can't manage on twenty hours!" "I'm sorryit might be me next what with the cuts."

In another episode, the camera zooms into a close-up of the £23.50 wage as it is handed to Chris. We see Chris' hand as he divides the money into piles:

"£10 for Mum, £5 for travel, £3.50 for Club (he picks up the remaining £5) Bloody hell! Is that all I've got for a week?"

Another question the film asks is "will it help us to get a real job afterwards?" Several youths on the scheme are asked what jobs they hope to get. The answers include: "Work in a Children's Home..... Looking after old people.....Community work.....Nursing.....Nursing..... Nursing....."

The film makers don't think they've got a chance in hell of getting that kind of job. Unemployment in Telford has gone up from 8% to over 20% in three years and Youth Unemployment in the south of Telford is over 40%.

"They say that 50% of people on Telycop get a job after. But we've talked to people who've been on Telycop, and, well, 90% of them haven't got a job. And if they do get one, it's in the army or the police."

They were told that all sorts of employers would come and talk to them about the sorts of jobs they had on offer. In fact only two came — the army and the police. The film makers' reaction to that comes over in a scene acted out by Chris, Nick and Julie in an army recruitment office. (A scene that has taken on an added meaning since the Falkland crisis.)

The views expressed in the film — that YOP schemes are underpaid, a stunt to keep the unemployment figures down, detrimental to full-time workers and leading to nothing but the dole or the forces of law and order — are echoed time and time again in conversations with young people in Telford.

So why does the Community Arts movement put its stamp of approval on YOP and proudly advertise its association with YOP (as in the recent publication, 'Community Arts in YOP', published by the Shelton Trust)?

For years now we have aligned ourselves with working people's struggles to improve the quality of life. Now we find ourselves associated with a programme regarded by both the young people involved and by the Labour Movement generally as being underpaid, exploitative, detrimental to those looking for apprenticeships and detrimental to the employment and wages of full-time workers.

What's happened?



Jubilee Community Arts

Jubilee Community Arts has been working in Sandwell for the last seven years with kids and adults drawn from tenant's groups, community and ethnic minority organisations, trades unions, youth clubs and playgrounds.

The team of seven works with these groups on community events, playschemes, campaigns and arts projects using drama, video, photography, printing, environmental arts skills and a converted double-decker bus.

While working on a council estate with a drama group producing a performance, we came into contact with a group of local lads who were coaxed by the drama group into helping with the props, sets and stage management.

They were in their last few months at school and wanted to find something interesting to do, so they persuaded their headmaster to give us a space and then time to work with us.

After the performances of the pantomime ended, the lads asked us to continue working with them, mostly because working with us presented an escape from the school atmosphere. So we continued to work with them on various activities which eventually developed into a photographic project.

Recently we heard that most of the lads we'd worked with and lots of others in the area were out of work and bored, so we have been working with them again. Since we last met them most of them haven't had jobs, but all of them have been on YOP's training schemes and this is what they have to say about theirs:

"It's rubbish, it's hard labour. I know a chap who worked in a foundry, he was doing the same work as a bloke getting £100 a week and he was getting £23.50." "It's cheap labour. They make chaps redundant and then have YOPs." "If it hadn't been for YOPs, they would have had to employ somebody to do that job."

"You get £17 a fortnight extra to work 80 hours, and then you have to pay fares." "All I did was gardening. I can do that at home. There wasn't any training all they did was give one a spade."

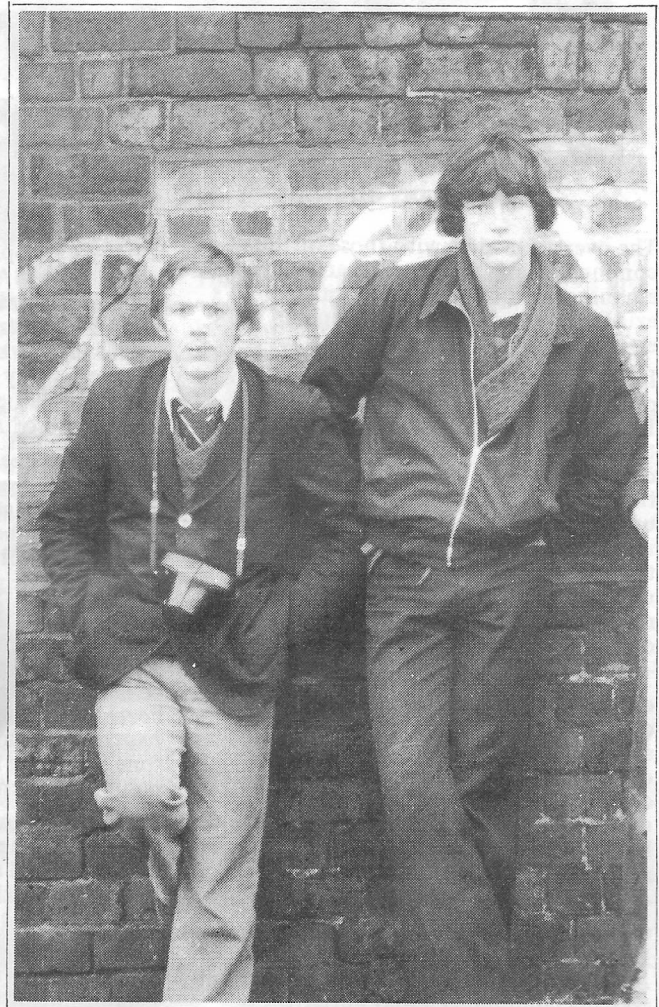
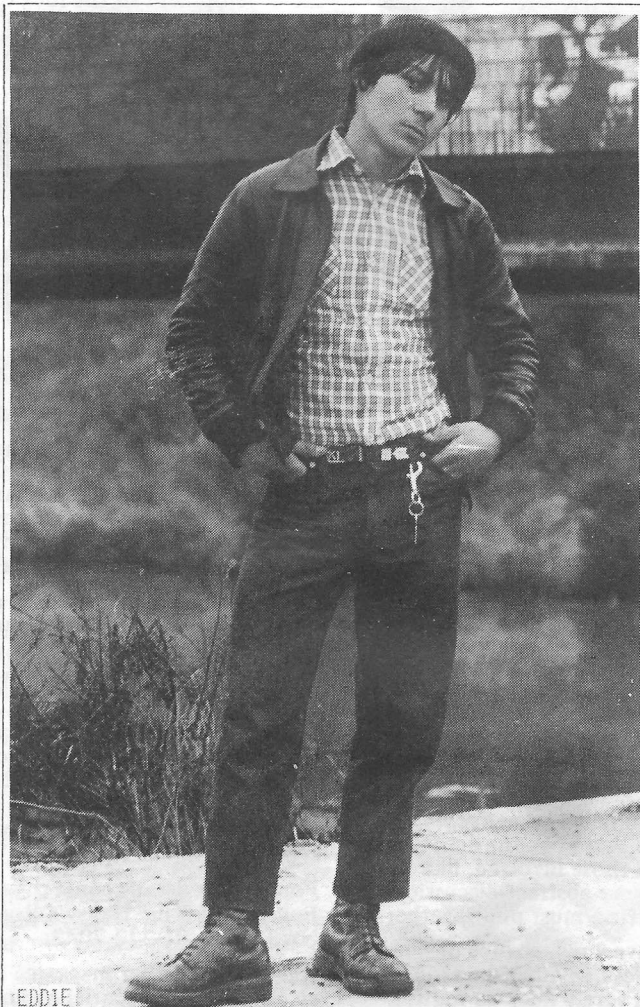
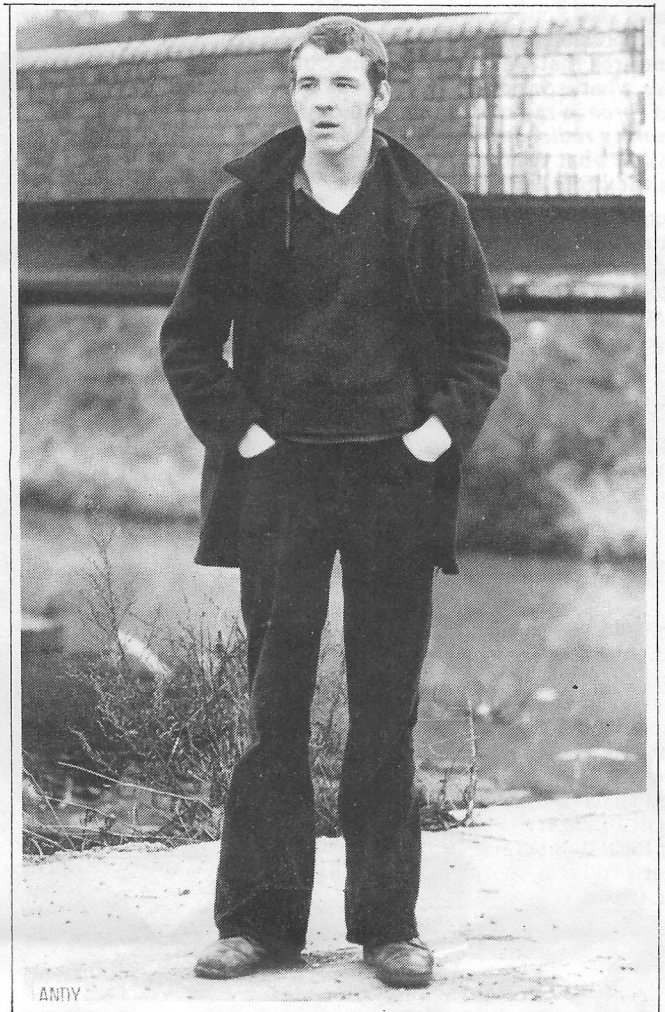
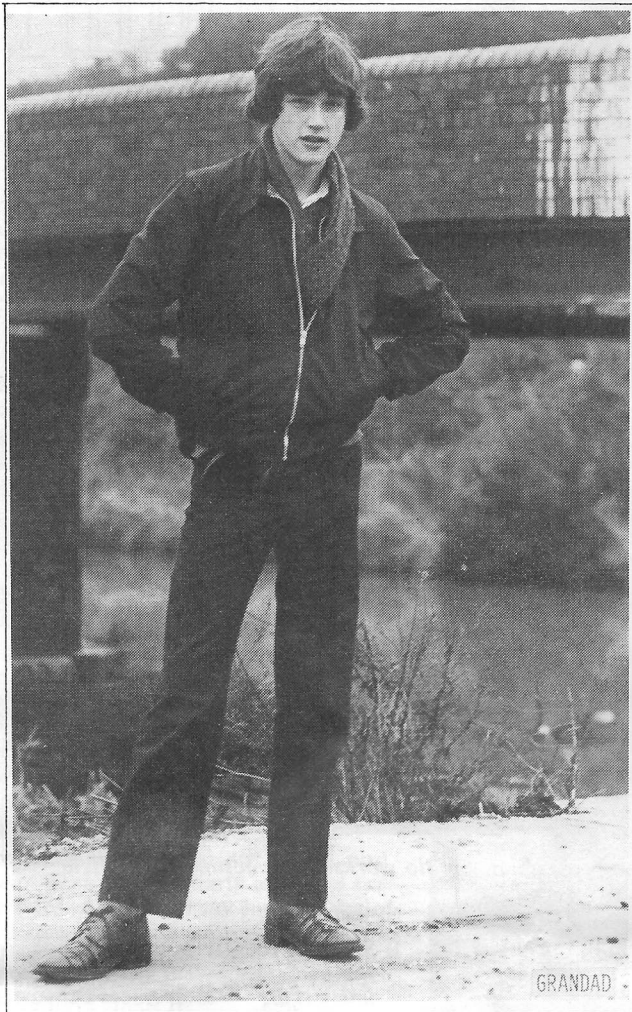
Despite their dislike for YOPs, they are constantly asking us to start a YOPs scheme and take them on. We asked them why if they thought YOPs schemes were a waste of time.

"But it's interesting what we do with you, cameras, drawing and that. We like it." "It's more useful, at least I know how to develop photographs!" "Anyway you'd treat us right." "If some bloke gets a schen together clearing the backs around our way, we'd do it. They need doing — if we didn't have to travel far and we could work with our mates, we'd do it."

We explained that we were trying to support the disapproval that many young people have of YOPs by not sponsoring any schemes ourselves — but it's a difficult argument.

"Oh go on — do it for us, we won't tell anyone."

The photographs opposite were taken by young people during a portrait project they were involved in at the Jubilee Community Arts Project.



I have some sympathy for the frustrations of Vic Drill (letters, March issue), commenting on your Community Communications issue. No doubt in your supplement it was impossible to mention everything – but one area that was ignored is the campaign for what is variously called *free radio* a *third force* in radio, or most commonly *community radio*. In what follows I'll try to outline what community radio is and where the campaign for it has got to.

Contrary to the impression given by Vic, the pirates (many of whom I'm sure he would admit are little more than enthusiasts playing at DJs) are not the only activists struggling to 'free the airwaves'.

Moves to do this can be traced as far back as 1951¹, but for our purposes stem from the intervention of COMCOM (the Community Communications Group) in the debate following the publication of the official Annan Report on the future of broadcasting in 1977.

Commenting on the report, COMCOM proposed the establishment of a *third force* of community radio different from the BBC and IBA local stations in that they would serve smaller communities or special interests; there would be a special emphasis on encouraging community and non-professional participation in programme making and running stations; they would be financed from a variety of sources including listener subscriptions, limited advertising, central and local government funds etc; and they would be under local democratic control through listener/producer co-op or non-profit public trusts.



Commonsound community radio workshop in action – Sheffield.

A Third Force by Simon Partridge

The overlap in aims with those of the community arts movement hardly needs emphasising, nor does community radio's evident application in the audio and spoken arts.

In December 1980 with the publication of the 3rd Report of the Home Office Local Radio Working Party (HOLRWP) the Home Office formally recognised community radio by devoting Part II to the topic, and concluded: 'while community radio offers some interesting possibilities, it is not clear to us that it should take priority....nonetheless, the opportunities might be followed up at an appropriate time, and we remain of an open mind on this subject'.

This lukewarm response prompted a vigorous reply on April 3rd 1981, from a coalition including COMCOM, hospital, student and cable broadcasting. This saw community radio as a 'natural development of public service local broadcasting' and urged the Home Secretary to 'stimulate boldly this form of broadcasting through authorising now a pilot scheme'.

The most recent initiative was the resolution sent from the Cardiff Community Radio Conference at the beginning of April 1982. The 120 delegates from countywide community radio initiatives – varying from community radio projects,

radio workshops, social action radio within BBC and IBA local stations, pirates⁴, and a semi-legal Irish community station unanimously called on the Home Secretary 'to license transmission frequencies for community radio outside the BBC and IBA....along the lines of the open letter sent to you of April 1981'.

The conference was generally thought to have been a great success and agreed to establish on a standing basis. The next meeting⁵ has been fixed for September 25th in Central London, where we will review further progress and see how we can keep up the pressure.

In the meantime COMCOM has been informed that the HOLRWP is likely to be reactivated specifically to look at the licensing of community radio and the expansion of local radio in London – this time including reps from the community radio movement.

The moral seems to be *keep on keeping on* – which means that both the activists on the ground and those involved, like COMCOM, with more abstract discussions with the Home Office, must pull together.

United we now have a real chance of 'freeing the airwaves'. Divided the radio Establishment will surely keep us waiting for another 30 years.....

Notes:

1. See my recently published book *NOT the BBC/IBA – The case for community radio*, which traces the history of the development of the idea of community radio; gives examples of existing community radio in the USA, Sweden and Australia, and four experimental projects in the UK; and ends by suggesting that if the Home Secretary does not sanction some community radio pilot schemes soon, widespread radio piracy must be expected.

Part 2 provides a series of practical *how-to-do-it* guides on setting up and running a community station, as well as plentiful sources of further help and information.

It is available from radical bookshops, or from Comedia Publishing, 9 Poland Street, London W1V 3DG – price £1.95

2. The 3rd report is available on request from Robert Hazell, Home Office Broadcasting Department, Queen Anne's Gate, London SW1 9AT – to whom you should also write if you are interested in setting up a community station.
3. Copies of this open letter are available from the Community Communications Group, 92 Huddleston Road, London N7 0EG – price 75p, incl. p&p, payable to the group.
4. If you wish to make contact with progressive pirate broadcasters you can do so via London Open Radio, 2 Warwick Crescent, London W2 – who also coordinate the *Free the Airwaves Campaign*.
5. For further details contact Peter Lewis, Relay, 33A King Henry's Road, London NW3 – tel: 01-722 7043.

Relay is the 'other magazine about the airwaves' – an essential means of keeping in touch with latest developments.

PROJECT REPORT

Manoeuvres began in December 1981. It was started by Rosie Lehan, Rachel Mundy and Jackie Wilford, whose aim was to create a community dance group working from a base in central Lambeth.

They felt that although it was possible to attend dance classes within the borough, and although it was possible to see dance groups perform, there was no group committed to developing dance from within the community, and performing these dances with/to local people.

It ought to be possible, they reasoned, to use dance, as other groups have used photography or printing, and build a community arts practice from it.

They approached Lambeth Amenities Services and were offered free use of a multi-purpose hall during weekday afternoons for a trial six month period. In exchange they were required to 'foster dance in the community'. Effectively Lambeth were buying their services in kind, rather than money.

This six month period has just ended, and it has not been a particularly easy one for Manoeuvres. Although they had the use of the hall free they received no income from the group, and indeed in order to 'pay' for the hall they had to use time they could otherwise have spent raising money.

Two of them are part-time students and the other is unemployed. As Rachel said when we spoke to them, the lack of any joint income had a draining effect on the group's morale, since it meant that they had to keep looking out for themselves when they should have been looking after the group.

She, like the others, had had to do periodic bouts of temporary office-work simply to make ends meet. This had meant that the group had inevitably gone through times when it proved almost impossible to get everybody together at the same time.

Their progress had therefore been slower than they had originally anticipated, and their initial plans had had to be somewhat trimmed. Their lack of income had not been the only factor in this; there had also been their constant desire to get things right.

They all believed that it would be disastrous for everybody concerned if community dance were to become synonymous with second-rate dance. They refused therefore to be rushed in any way which they felt would sacrifice or endanger their standards.

Rachel explained. 'In the beginning some things were tried too early. We went out into the community to teach before we were ready as a group, because we felt that this was what was expected of us, what was required, and it didn't work.'

Some individual sessions went well and others didn't, but as far as the group were concerned there was nothing consistent developing out of them. The classes did not seem to feed into or grow out of their work as a group.

MANOEUVRES

A COMMUNITY DANCE GROUP



**Wed 23rd June 7-30 at
Longfield Hall
Knatchbull Rd SE 5
Fri 25th June 7-30 at
Stockwell Hall
Binfield Rd SW4**

When they realised this they made a firm decision that they would have to spend the bulk of the first six months working to achieve an internal group coherence. They needed to get to know each other as dancers and to achieve a unity based on that.

'We were worried that Amenities would say that we were letting them down', Rachel said, 'but we weren't. We were simply doing the preliminary work that had to be done, and we were doing it as fast as we possibly could.'

The problems Manoeuvres have faced are ones that a lot of groups working in community arts have to face. Things often seem easier from a distance, and so it often seems reasonable to funding bodies or sponsors to expect results swiftly, if not immediately.

Close-up, however, arts activities are complex things. They are usually an amalgam of different activities, which can be linked together in a multitude of ways, some much more useful than others.

This activity is far from simple. It is a process of continuous building, and like all building it requires firm foundations. If there are no foundations then the building will collapse.

Manoeuvres have met this problem head-on. They have refused to be hurried in any way which would jeopardise their long-term goals, and in doing this they have risked straining their relationship with their sponsoring agency.

They are reasonably confident about the future, however. As far as they are concerned the performances they undertook in June for the Brixton Festival concluded the first stage of the project. They have now achieved a group feeling and a group methodology. More importantly, perhaps, they now have some tangible results which they can take into the community for comment.

This comment and the resulting dialogue will be the beginning of the second stage. Moreton Blessing.

Arts & Communities 2000

David Harding explains

The new concepts of arts and communities in this country have become well developed. There have been similar movements in other Western countries and the sharing of experience has been an important factor in the development of the work.

Two examples of this have been the impetus we have gained from the mural movement in the USA, and the role of the socio-cultural animateur in France. The evolving role of the arts in the community in this country, especially at this time with reference to political, social and economic factors as well as artistic, has therefore great implications for, at the very least, many Western countries.

There is an urgent need, at this time, to explore ways of continuing and enriching this evolution.

...the new concepts of arts and communities in this country have become well developed.....

Over the years there have been several major conferences in the UK, bringing together many hundreds of people to discuss the work, consider what has been achieved, and share ideas and experiences. Such conferences normally include a variety of people, in addition to practitioners, who have a right to hear about and see examples of work that has been done — arts administrators, local authority officials, elected representatives, students, newcomers to the work, funding agents etc.

While such conferences are important, in a general sense, to inform, instruct and 'convert' they do not enable experienced practitioners to share their experience at a deeper level.

At the present time concern has been expressed by a number of practitioners for an opportunity for those who share similar degrees of commitment and experience and who are working towards similar goals to come together for thought, study and analysis of the direction in which arts and communities must go. There is a strong feeling that there must be a deepening of the philosophical and intellectual base to the 'movement' to give it the strength with which to tackle the rigours of the 1980's and beyond — a future of high technology, a dramatic increase in 'leisure time' due to what must now be described as permanent unemployment, increasing unrest among certain sections of society.

This cannot be achieved in a conference-style situation with a large, diverse group of people but requires the opportunity for a moderate number of experienced practitioners to come together in a reflective environment to work in seminars, workshops and discussions, informed and directed by three nodal or key papers, given as lectures relating to basic issues crucial to the event. It would consolidate the present position and provide a springboard for the future development of the work.

Although the event would necessarily be limited to about 50 people and would last for only a few days, the hope would be that those days would affect the practice of those people, and through them many others for years to come.

Participants would be offered the rare opportunity to present personal experiences, not general theories, to others who would be capable of responding on the level required — an inward look to provoke an outward response. Philosophy would emerge through practice.

Crucial to the event would be a common level of experience at the start — there would be no time or desire to explain the basis of the work done or indeed to cover old ground or issues, whether political or pragmatic.

...the intention is to invite 50 or 60 people for a few exhausting days of brainstorming....

There would be a rubbing together of people and ideas to create a new awareness based on new insights into the experiences of others — individual experiences would be subjected to compassionate and sensitive, but critical and searching examination. Activists would have time to reflect, to work with each other, to criticise, to argue, to receive information in an atmosphere of trust and shared desires and beliefs.

The intention is to invite around 50-60 people to Dartington for a few exhausting days of brainstorming sessions, individual discussions and practical workshops.

...there would be a rubbing together of people....

Dartington offers facilities and the environment ideal for the consultation/workshop as well as providing ample space and access to the necessary equipment and resources including studios, darkroom, cameras, galleries, dance studio, theatre and conference rooms. It also provides an opportunity to work in an atmosphere free of interruption and diversion.

There is a need here for some length of time other than the length of a normal weekend conference, not for people to get to know each other but rather that philosophy might develop over the longer period. It is for this reason that 3 to 4, even to 5 days would be needed.

Participants would be drawn from practitioners throughout the UK. Obviously the small number presents a serious problem of exclusivism and selectivity. We have considered various ways of choosing participants and feel that whichever method is used many experienced people will be unable to attend.

We now feel it is appropriate to invite Community Arts activists, from whatever background to apply to come to the event or to nominate others to attend. We ask anyone interested in attending (or in nominating anyone) to write by July 17th to the address below. In the application you should indicate something of your background in the arts, give some idea of how you feel the workshops/seminars should be organised, and indicate if you would be able to make a direct workshop contribution.



We want as wide a representation of practitioners as possible, people who are themselves in touch with a variety of 'networks' through which the results of the event could be channelled.

Participants must have the ability to relate practice to theory, to be reflective, to communicate and not be dogmatic, and above all, demonstrate, through vision, a concern for the future. It is essential that participants have a clear understanding of their work in relation to a contrasting future of high technology and massive unemployment.

The maximum number is fixed owing to space problems and problems of finance. In the event of the organisers having to restrict numbers we would hope to ensure a proper balance was maintained with regard to male and female, cultural mix and geographical spread as well as art-bias.

...we would hope to ensure that a proper balance was maintained with regard to male and female.....

The detailed programme of the event will be based on personal and group contributions received. It will be essential that participants feel free to respond to the event in a way most relevant to their needs and wishes – e.g. by setting up discussions with individuals or in small groups; by offering workshops; by circulating written thoughts etc.

There must be room for ideas to be followed through and thoroughly explored – the event should have an accumulative effect on the participants with each session being of relevance in a 'total context' which in turn has an effect on our day-to-day practice.

We hope this event will add to a number of conferences and gatherings over the next 18 months.

Write with applications or nominations to:

The Administrator,
Arts & Communities 2000,
Dartington Hall,
Dartington.

Owen Kelly disagrees

In my opinion there are a number of very powerful arguments for not participating in this conference.

In the first place the conference is, by design or accident, an attempt to import into the field of community art the kind of free-loading conferences that we have always claimed we are against. This would be the first conference in the history of the movement which is free to its participants, and would inevitably, if it were successful, set a precedent which would prove irresistible for funding agencies.

It would prove irresistible because it would be so *nice and tidy* from the point of view of the funding bodies.

When we have held conferences in the past they have always been paid for by the fees paid by those attending, propped up sometimes by a guarantee against loss from somebody. This has meant that the structure of the conferences have been unpredictable, because those attending have been self-selecting. They have traditionally been organised on a first-come, first-served basis.

It is very difficult to claim that these conferences represent anything except the more-or-less idiosyncratic views of the particular people attending.

This conference however is different. It has a predetermined number of free places, for which community artists are invited to enter. In the awarding of these places the judges decision is final, but we are told that they would ensure that 'a proper balance was maintained between male and female, cultural mix and geographical spread as well as art-bias'.

On the face of it this is wonderfully fair, but the *effect* of this process will be to give the conference the spurious appearance of being representative. This is what makes it so tidy for funding agencies. It is no longer a rag-bag of the interested, it is a body representing the various views in the field, and its reports can therefore be seen as representing the state of the art.

How neat! You fund one of these every now and again and get a report which you can fairly claim is definitive, and which will probably contain most of the names anyone will recognise within its list of contributors.

There are disadvantages to this of course. Firstly it divides the movement into those who have attended (been chosen to attend) and those who haven't. Secondly it devalues the other 'less representative' conferences.

The organisers of *Artists and Communities 2000* will probably argue that they intend none of these things, and I for one believe them. That isn't the point however. The point is that, in organising the conference in this way, they are bringing these things about.

The other conferences will be devalued, by the same processes that we can observe for ourselves in other areas with which we are familiar. I have been at a meeting where a local councillor told a group of fifty or so local tenants that he could not deal with them because they 'were not representative'. Ad hoc groups are never welcome in bureaucratic power structures, and our previous structures have always been ad hoc.

This conference sets out to change that. It is being sold as more than it is, as more than it can be, and if it receives our support and succeeds it will make the things we organise on an open basis seem less than they are.

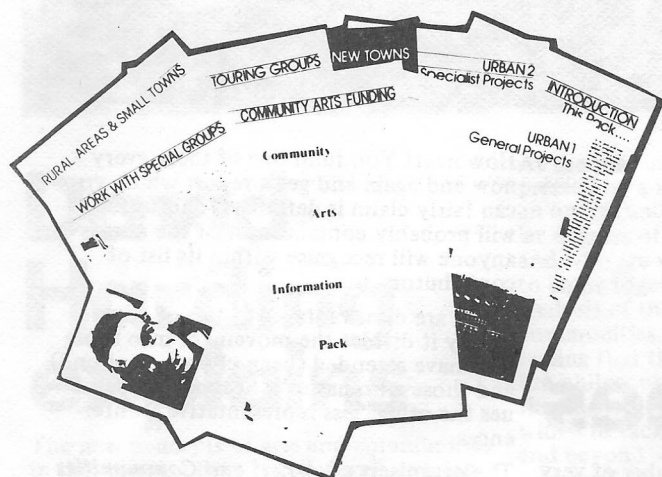
We will have sold ourselves out again.

There are a number of other arguments that could be made in answer to David Harding, not least of which is my belief that his criteria for attendees are impossibly unrealistic. The diverse nature of community arts (with its lack of any central organisation) means, for example, that any discussion that refuses to look at the 'basis of the work' will go nowhere because there are no two community art groups in the country who have 'a common level of experience' which they could take for granted, unspoken.

It is regrettable that the organisers chose to set up the conference in this way. But they have, and in doing so I believe they have forfeited the right to our support. More importantly, I don't believe we can afford to support them.

See you somewhere else.

Reviews Reviews Reviews Reviews



Community Arts Information Pack

"The main purpose of this pack", says Ros Rigby in the introduction, "is to give practical examples of exciting community arts in progress".

It certainly does that, and although the reader will automatically turn to the area or the community group with which he or she is most familiar first, the pack is attractive and readable enough to tempt one further.

Starting as I did from my interest in, and familiarity with, Jubilee Community Arts, I was surprised to go further and discover the depth and the diversity of different projects.

I am sure from my own reaction that the CAIP will meet what I believe are its objectives — it will stimulate existing Arts Groups to develop and to move into new, and for them untried, areas; it will also (and probably even more importantly) bring those who don't have active groups to understand the potential of what they are missing and prod them into action.

Who, for instance, could read the section on community television in Gateshead without wanting to consider trying a piece of that particular action? The same applies to the work of Shape in Greater London with disabled people and other special groups. How many elderly people are there

in this country whose memories will die with them and leave the working class with a totally unrepresentative chronicle of their history unless community groups find ways to record and preserve our real past?

The number of Arts Groups who are now moving into areas of work connected with the problems of mass unemployment allow the pack to demonstrate that community arts, far from being static, can respond to the needs and demands of the town in which they operate. The special problems facing women and the various minority ethnic groups are also areas which can give impetus to arts groups, as the pack demonstrates.

The obvious weakness of the information pack is on the vital question of cash. At a time when cuts in public spending are hanging an axe over many valuable arts projects, I felt that the many and varied sources of finance which do still exist did not receive sufficient attention in the two pages which talk about funding.

Another area in which community arts projects are starting to experience difficulties is that of political interference by its paymasters. When working with community groups at a time of reducing local services, arts groups are

bound to be seen to be taking sides and supporting (through the offer of resources etc.) groups who are in conflict with authorities who have power over funding.

The way through these problems and how community arts groups can be effective, retain credibility and ensure survival are nettles which have to be grasped, and even if it is too early yet to provide all the answers we at least have to begin to put the questions. This pack would have been a good place to pose them.

None the less, the Community Arts Information Pack is a valuable and long-overdue contribution. Because of it existing projects will improve and grow and new ones will come into existence. It should be forced into the often unwilling hands of local councils, charities and government departments with the message that community arts is not a luxury which can be first on the block at a time of financial cutbacks.

Indeed, as the pack demonstrates, community arts often provide the stimulus for self-help which can improve and develop our communities at small overall cost. With their limitless variation and their work-intensive, non-bureaucratic, co-operative structures, community arts projects are damn good value for anyone's money

John Edwards.



Poster Film Collective

This year the Poster Film Collective is ten years old, and they have just shown a large retrospective exhibition of work done in their first decade.

The exhibition ran for a month at the Cockpit Theatre in Central London and finished on July 13th.

The work of the Collective is interestingly problematical when seen from a community arts perspective. They have always rejected the 'neighbourhood' aspects of community arts, arguing that these are diversionary, and have also been wary of the traditional community arts drum-beating about the benefits of demystifying every little technical detail.

Their work is therefore different from the work you would expect to find produced by, say, the average print-shop. At the same time it could be argued that it in fact contains more of the ideas and visions that were the original reason for the development of the community arts movement than you would find in the average 'community arts poster'.

Their work, as shown at the Cockpit, doesn't aim to demystify techniques at all in any banal sense. The posters don't look as though they are first time efforts, nor do they seem the product of some design system meant to make it easier for the uninitiated. On the other hand they *do* demystify ideas and imagery in a way that is powerful and intelligible.

The posters they produce are the result of months and sometimes years of research. They are not simplistic, nor are they organised around single design features or slogans-of-the-moment. They are complex pieces of work which contain many elements: photographs, hand-writing, cartoons, etc.

They have often been criticised for this approach, yet ten minutes in the Cockpit shows beyond doubt that visually it works, and two hours there shows that it successfully conveys a lot of valuable information and ideas with clarity and yet with real passion.

Most impressive for me was the large series called *Between Past and Future* which gives an overview of crucial points in the history of women in Europe. The posters are complex; they don't propose any solutions, but they certainly raise the right questions in what seems to me a right way.

Their work raises a number of questions for the community arts movement, or at least that part of it that uses visual design. The Poster Film Collective have evolved a method of working which challenges not only traditional individualistic art practice (including its 'radical' practitioners like Conrad Atkinson) but also traditional community arts practice.

How are we going to respond?
Marion Rose.



Figure 2 : No Platform For Heels.

Do It Yourself

Independent record and tape production has been a (small) force in British rock music since 1977, when a number of groups such as the Desperate Bicycles found that it was relatively easy and relatively cheap to get 500 or 1000 copies of a single pressed and sold.

These groups were often based in a particular area, with little or no intention of moving out of it. Others were concerned with demystifying the production and distribution of music. Were they community artists?

Some of them were undoubtedly pop-stars-in-waiting, putting out their own stuff in the hope of catching the eye of a record company. Others shared the same kinds of goals as the community arts movement, except that they funded their activities themselves. Audience and performers were often interchangeable, and came to be a self-sustaining community.

Some of these latter groups appear on a compilation LP, the second in a series, called *No Platform For Heels*.

The compilation was organised by the Instant Automaton, who are one of the pioneers of the d-i-y recording scene who have resolutely refused to become part of the music-biz, as it is perceived by balding men with pina colodas and tour jackets.

The record was co-operatively financed by the groups who appear on it. Each group (there are 10 on the LP) provided their own finished master tape and a page of artwork or manifesto for the accompanying booklet.

They also each took responsibility for distributing at least 35 records.

The music on it varies considerably from the perhaps-to-be-expected electronics and dub impersonations to the mad pop of the Digital Dinosaurs and the near-folk of Missing Persons.

Very little of it is bad and only one track refuses to bear repeated listening. All of it is done with passion, and no expectation of a Swiss bank account.

If it's nothing to do with community arts, then you are the losers.

Andy Fraser.

The LP is obtainable for £2.50 from Deleted Records, Low Farm, Brigg Road, Messingham, Scunthorpe, South Humberside.

Politics and Policies

The Arts Council has just printed the transcripts of two lectures given on November 3rd 1981. These were the third W.E. Williams Memorial Lecture, the previous two having been given by Lord Goodman and Sir Peter Hall.

In the words of Sir Roy Shaw, in the foreword, 'it seemed that since the Arts Council is often criticised by both left and right (often for contradictory reasons), it might be interesting to invite two distinguished figures concerned with the arts in society, one from the right and one from the left, not to debate, but to present their respective views.'

Thus the lecture was split into two and turned into two short lectures, one given by C.B. Cox, a co-editor of the Black Papers and Professor of English Literature at the University of Manchester, and one given by Raymond Williams, Professor of Drama at the University of Cambridge.

That the content of the two lectures is very different, as are the political views that fire them, goes without saying. What is surprising, however, is the different level of thought that seems to have gone into the two lectures. Surprising and worrying.

Raymond Williams writes what amounts to a brief analysis of the forces that lead to the formation of the Arts Council, concluding that within these forces were a number of contradictions which were carried over into the structure of the Arts Council, and which have plagued it from its inception.

The Arts Council, he reminds us, is essentially a Keynesian body, 'which in itself goes some way to explaining its current problems'.

In a series of quotations from talks Keynes gave, he outlines the four definitions and intentions that Keynes had in

mind when he considered the role of the State with regard to the arts.

These were 'state patronage of fine arts; pump-priming; an intervention in the market; an expanding and changing popular culture.'

He then goes on to detail the problems inherent in each of these functions, and the contradictions that result from trying to carry them out simultaneously.

He concludes by suggesting that the main purpose of the Arts Council currently should be to bring these contradictions into the open and initiate public debate around them.

This, he concludes, should be 'a real public argument', which could best be brought about by opening up the structure of the Arts Council, and electing the Council.

C.B. Cox, in contrast, advances no sustained argument. Indeed one might say that he advances no argument at all. Instead he opts for the sort of rambling anecdotal style that a good after-dinner speaker might be expected to use at a dinner he is not taking very seriously.

The style seems to spring from a laziness of thought about the subject. Opinions are uttered, often with breath-taking generality, and then brushed aside without any evidence having been offered.

For example: 'From the *Lyrical Ballads* to Picasso and *Ulysses* our history was a chronicle of revolutionary works hooted and reviled by the artistic establishment of their times, appreciated by a small elite of initiates and belatedly elevated to classic status by succeeding artistic establishments. Since 1950 this has not been true. The avant-garde has repeatedly supported unsuccessful experiments.'

The argument then passes on to a mention of community arts. Now, leaving aside the question of whether the assumptions behind that statement are reasonable or not, it is very difficult to defend even on its own terms.

Firstly, evidence can easily be marshalled to show that the avant-garde has always backed unsuccessful experiments, and that for obvious reasons it is usually the small amount of successful ones that join the authorised version of art history.

Secondly, since 1950 Samuel Beckett has written his entire theatrical canon, Stockhausen has composed, as has Peter Maxwell Davis, and Joseph Beuys has done whatever it is

he does. Professor Cox may not like any of this work, but if he is prepared to claim that it amounts to no more than 'unsuccessful experiments' then I think he should at least tell us what his criteria are.

I have treated this example in some detail because I think it is typical of the approach Professor Cox adopts. In this context his remarks about community arts are worth noting, but hardly justify a lengthy reply.

The main problem, he suggests, 'is that such activity has often been politically manipulated'. By whom, how or for what ends we are not told. But then we are not told many of the things we would need to know to make sense of his observations.

We are not told for example what the terms 'real education' and 'true arts' mean in his conclusion that 'we urgently need more money for real education and for true arts'.

Reading the two lectures in this pamphlet made me worried. I think there is a preliminary battle we have to fight, before we can even get to the starting gate.

In this preliminary battle it is not right vs left, but rather it is between those who will take an argument seriously and those who refuse to engage in argument, as it has always been understood.

It is not the fact that my own views are probably nearer his that makes me think that I would much prefer to go for a drink with Raymond Williams, it's the fact that I think he is prepared to see his views change and develop, is prepared to see his opinions as contingent.

Open debate is necessary now, and it must be carried out in public, and it must be treated seriously by those who choose to participate in it.

Owen Kelly.

Arts Council: Politics and Policies is available from the Arts Council Bookshop, price 90p.

SORRY!

This is a note to apologise for the lateness of this issue. We have had what I think we could get away with calling production problems. They won't happen again.

The next issue will appear on September 24th, or as soon after that as the Post Office permits.

Why don't you join the **SHELTON TRUST**

1a WHAT IS THE SHELTON TRUST?

The Shelton Trust is the only national organisation actively promoting a wider understanding of community arts work. It is a registered educational charity supported by the Arts Council and the Gulbenkian Foundation.

WHAT DOES THE TRUST DO?

The Trust runs a number of programmes which promote community arts.

CONFERENCES AND GATHERINGS

A wide ranging programme of conferences, seminars and gatherings is sponsored and supported each year. These events are run in various locations throughout the country on a variety of topics. Recent events include a conference on "Community Arts and YOP" jointly run with the National Council for Voluntary Organisations. Other conferences the Trust has supported include both the Barnstaple and the Telford National Community Arts Conferences.

b CO-ORDINATION.

Links with other national and regional bodies are maintained. The Trust has links with the NCVO, the Workers Educational Association, the Trades Union Congress, the Arts Council, Co En Co and Regional Arts Associations.

PUBLICATIONS.

The Trust promotes a wide variety of publications including "Another Standard", a quarterly journal, providing news and comment on community arts activities, as well as reviews, interviews and details of forthcoming events.

Other publications include "Principles and Practices", a report arising from the Barnstaple Conference and a major new Community Arts Information Pack published jointly with the Council of Regional Arts Associations.

All fully paid up Trust members receive a 25% discount on all publications.

c INFORMATION AND CONSULTATION.

The Trust is able, through its network of regional directors, to provide information and advice on all aspects of community arts work to community artists, individuals, community groups, local authorities and other semi-statutory bodies.

It is in the process of jointly establishing a national community arts archive with Bradford College.

HOW IS THE TRUST RUN?

The Trust is a membership organisation and membership is open to individuals working "in or for community arts". At the AGM a board of directors is elected from the membership to run the day to day affairs of the Trust. A director is elected for each Regional Arts Association area and a number of places are available for co-option.

The directors meet once a month in Birmingham and all meetings are open to members.

- 2 For the financial year 82/83 the Trust has been given a grant of £3,200 from the ACBG. As this is less than a quarter of our original application the Trust has been unable to employ a co-ordinator. Thus the regional directors will be playing a greater role in initiating and responding to community arts activities.

The membership address for the Trust and any other information can be found from Cilla Baynes, c/o The Old Tin School, Collyhurst Road, Manchester.

3 List of Trust directors and their work telephone numbers:

Cilla Baynes	— Manchester (061) 202 2037
Nigel Leach	— Bradford (91) 23051 (co-opted)
Dave Pole	— Bristol (0272) 505724
Mike McCarthy	— Deeside (0244) 821003
Cynthia Woodhouse	— Birmingham (021) 587 1569
Chris Foster	— Salisbury (0722) 20379
Chris Humphrey	— Leeds (0532) 431005
Paul Fahey	— Northumberland (066) 575507 (co-opted)
Clare Higney	— Northampton (0604) 27158
Bernard Ross	— Newcastle (0632) 616581

- 4 A "YOP's on YOP's" booklet is being prepared by the Trust. This will be based on the experiences of teenagers on the YOP schemes and will aim to present their views about the ideas and practice of the programme with links to the new training initiative due to begin in the near future. Anyone with comments, suggestions or information please contact Chris Humphrey (0532) 431005.

- 5 The proposed Rural Arts conference, advertised in the last issue of Another Standard, has been cancelled due to lack of support.

Membership Application

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