

CH4 : THE ELEVENTH HOUR : SOME VIEWS

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At a day event in early July held in that cultural fortress known as the ICA , a heterogeneous collection of people gathered to discuss the Eleventh Hour. It was one of those events where much was said and little achieved. Where the cultural jostled with the political , and where the main feeling was one of frustration.

This is not to criticise the quality of the presentations of those speaking from the panel however.

ALAN FOUNTAIN

Alan Fountain began by giving a brief financial report on the affairs of the 11th Hour between November 1982 and September 1984 , when three and a half million pounds will have been spent - giving an average cost of £30,000 - £35,000 per programme.

The workshops have received monies in the following ways :

First Year - Total of £875,000

86,500 Capital , 19 film workshops

430,000 Programmes of work , 8 film workshops

under the Workshop Declaration

47,000 Revenue , smaller film workshops

200,000 Capital , 10 video workshops

130,000 Programmes of work to video workshops

Second Year - Total of £580,000

- Programmes of work , 7 film workshops

under the Workshop Declaration

- Smaller amounts to video workshops

for work

Alan intends that between 3/4 and 1 million pounds will be allocated to workshops annually , and is currently in discussions with CH4 management on that subject.

Alan then went on to list some of the problems encountered in the past year in operating from Television with a sector which , for ten years , has worked around the idea of social practice. What subset of those practices are transferrable to Television? - while recognising that TV is almost exclusively interested in product. Alan was initially against the idea of an 11th Hour slot as such - he wanted to see independent material across the whole scope of CH4 programming and scheduling , however the Channel has not been as progressive as was hoped for. He has found that the sector experiences problems in producing for Television , and is concerned to understand the extent to which the sector sees working for TV as intervention into Film & TV production , or as another source of funds alongside existing funding bodies outside TV.

Alan continued by describing what he felt were the distinctive features of 11th Hour programming , and highlighted some of the difficulties experienced by producers. Most 11th Hour commissions have not appeared on TV - but will start being transmitted this Autumn. He indicated that ideas developed by the sector over the late 70's have been blocked by the Channel to an unanticipated extent , and referred to the thorny notion of contextualisation. In general he felt that the 11th Hour programming was on the move from being described as Alternative to being known as Oppositional. The characteristics of the slot were described as follows:

- offering fairly regular programmes which people on the Left in this country would find supportive and challenging.
- being concerned with cinemas of the third world.
- a slot where feminist producers could expect a fair deal, and have their ideas strongly supported.
- having a formal difference by considering the aesthetics of dominant forms , and by enabling experiment in film & video.

He felt that it was very important to continue the work already begun on the IFA contract - particularly where it facilitates distribution of product outside the institution of Television.

To initiate debate on the day , Alan then presented a set of 'Problems for the Future' as he saw them. These ranged from : "How is the sector changing because of its engagement with CH4 , and how can it protect its autonomy?" to "What is the collective identity of the sector - there are those who see CH4 as a source of funds for a personal project , while there are those who would see it as a means of broadcasting a political view."

And suggested a rallying call "Can the 11th Hour be seen as a space for the re-identification of the Left in a Thatcherite Britain ?"

Alan imagined a network of film and video workshops around the country funded from a variety of sources to preserve autonomy. He sees this network as helping to rebuild forces in the country and to vanguard the Left. But he ended by reminding the audience that CH4 is not a disinterested funder of political activity - it is a commercial TV company.

#### PANEL OF 11TH HOUR VIEWERS

A panel of 'viewers' , consisting of John Wyver (ex City Limits TV critic) , Claire Johnston (Teacher & Writer) , and Lynn Lloyd (Vice President of ACTT) then gave their views on one year of 11th Hour programming.

John Wyver assumed the main reason for the sector to embrace TV was to broaden its audience. He therefore criticised the slot for not engaging with TV properly (except for the Ireland series) , and felt that often the programmes did not make sense.

Claire Johnston felt that the 11th Hour address was self-reflexive , and closed rather than open - that those who made the programmes were so close to the arguments , they could not appreciate how their programmes might (or might not) be received.

Lynn Lloyd gave a very down to earth critique. She feels that TV should communicate. She welcomes the opportunities given to the sector through the 11th Hour , but was of the opinion that many programmes were incomprehensible , and that contextualisation does not make good Telly. (Lynn liked "The Filleting Machine"). She thought that experiments on TV should work , and that messages should be got across.

#### OTHER SPEAKERS

Murray Martin of Amber films , Newcastle , talked about the evolution of the sector's involvement with the ACTT , and about the development of the Workshop Declaration.

Some of my own comments at this point : It is interesting to consider the rift that developed between the IFA and Newcastle in the light of London region's reluctance to accept certain arguments for being recognised by the ACTT. It was the regional workshops and some London based workshops and individuals who first accepted the value of joining the ACTT. Many IFA regions are based around single workshops and their associated work , but London region is not.

The majority of the active members of London region at that time tended to be academics and theorists who had only a passing or intellectual interest in Trade Unions. The possibility of actually joining a Trade Union was not welcomed by these people initially. It was while this conservative reaction was being argued into acceptance that a rift developed. I hope the time has come to bury the hatchet, now that the IFA membership has welcomed the ACTT Workshop Declaration nationally.

Peter Wollen spoke next and claimed there was not enough inaccessible material on TV, and that TV was a dying institution anyway. He was roundly criticised for these remarks, but returned to explain that he felt minority programming was important, and that Cable TV was the thing of the future.

Sally Hibben and Tony Kirkhope spoke about problems of independent film & video distribution now that CH4 broadcasts it all, and Roy Lockett gave an impassioned defence of the Workshop Declaration. Fizzy Oppé spoke about the role of the IFA which she saw in a positive light.

#### QUESTIONS

I felt that several questions were posed in the course of the day, questions which need to be discussed by the sector as a whole, questions which once again highlight the different views and aims of the IFA membership.

- How can film & video materials produced in the course of workshop or group practice be presented in a Televisual way?
- In what ways is the sector prepared to act as a politically coherent force, and what ideologies might be embraced to inform this action?
- Much discussion centred around minority programming.  
What is a minority group? Is there a majority group?  
Are we using the right words?
- How can the sector use other media to increase the public awareness of the sector's work, and to build an audience?

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