



**DEVELOPING THE INDEPENDENT FILM AND VIDEO SECTOR' - THE BOYDEN
SOUTHWOOD/COMEDIA CONSULTANCY. 6/2/89**

MINUTES

Present: Alison Butler (IFVPA), Jane Caldwell (IFVPA), Vicky Cleaver (IFVPA), Alan Everatt (Barnet Arts Workshop), John Goff (West London Media), Janet Potter (West London Media), Tony Dowmunt (Albany Video), Linda Flint (Women's Media Resource Project), Jenny Holland (Circles Women's Film and Video Distribution), Gustav Lamche (Cinema Action), Rebecca Maguire (Aphra Video), Joan Leese (Video Engineering and Training), Sophie Pringle (Albany Video), Francis Boyd (Cultural Partnerships), Abina Manning (London Filmmakers Co-op), Sean Cubbit (SEFT), Lulce Couline (LAIFA), Frank Martin (Activision), Stephen Philip (Association of Black Workshops), June Jones (Connections), S.Grewel (Connections), Jenny Wallace (Cinema of Women), Kirk Patrick (Lambeth Video), Noreen O'Gallagher (Video Unit), Mike Stephenton (Break Away), Sue Hall (Fantasy Factory).

-----MORNING SESSION-----

1/ The meeting opened with a general discussion of our attitude to the consultancy. There was a general feeling that we had plenty of grounds to challenge the brief given to the consultants and their manner of carrying out the work. Primary among these were the consultants' lack of sympathy for the cultural-political project of the sector; their difficulty in establishing good lines of communication with the sector and a lack of proper address to the organisations that would be directly affected by proposals for changes in funding; their use of the concept of the market, which is over-simplistic with regard to an area of work which has quite complicated and ambivalent relations with the market. Alison felt particularly strongly that the consultants weren't taking on board the notion that the sector has attempted - if not always successfully - to create new demands as much as to fulfil existing ones. She suggested that a successful re-writing of the sector's rubric might involve the notion of leading the market in some respects, as well as following it.

The discussion focussed more on what the most constructive approach to the consultancy would be. Tony stressed the need to address GLA, who set the parameters of the consultancy, rather than the consultants as such. Gustav was emphatic that we needed to influence the consultancy rather than attack it, as simply attacking it would probably be completely counter-productive. Alison pointed out that the document would end up on a lot of bureaucrats' desks, and would influence policy-making, so that we needed to maximise our role in agenda-setting.

2/ CUTS: There was a discussion of the relation between the consultancy and the likelihood of cuts in funding. John drew

attention to the urgency of our position and the necessity to attempt to salvage as much as we can in the present economic climate. He said we needed to address the question of whether the consultants would be used simply to impose cuts that GLA intended to impose anyway. Jenny asked whether cuts should be opposed in principle or whether we should acknowledge some necessity for cuts and hope to limit the damage. Alison said that since the pressure for cuts comes ultimately from the government via the Office of Arts and Libraries, the question of whether or not funding bodies want to make cuts is slightly redundant. We need to address either/both government policy at a higher level and/or the search for new sources of funding and new arguments to unlock that funding. Janet said that she thought the responsibility for finding new monies still lay with the funding bodies, because groups were too small to spend much time on this themselves, and anyway groups are funded precisely for being non-commercial. The funding bodies are better placed to deal with sponsorship and other mixed-economy developments because they can provide a buffer between the groups and the "free market". It was agreed that just to challenge the idea of cuts wasn't viable, and that we need to contribute to the process of finding new alternatives. Janet asked how much unity we could actually achieve around the question of developing a mixed economy, since this was easier for some groups, eg: VET, than others.

3/ EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES: There was an extensive discussion of the relation of the consultancy to Equal Opportunities, which is specifically prioritised in the brief. A small number of people felt that we ought to be careful how we engage with this issue as it's quite possible that Equal Opportunities Policies as currently codified by funding administrators, can be used as an excuse to cut groups that the funding bodies really want to cut for some other reason. The majority feeling on this subject was that any development of Equal Opportunities Policies was a good thing, and that we should make more demands on the funding bodies in respect of this - the proper implementation of Equal Opportunities costs money.

4/ TRAINING AND THE MAINSTREAM: Abina raised the question of training. She said that the intention of the consultancy report was to ensure that all groups have a relation with broadcast, eg: through central training resources etc. It was generally felt that non-broadcast activity was important, particularly because of it's a localised and/or specialised activity, and that we shouldn't accept a definition of the sector as just a training ground for the tv industry. Stephen said that he thought we should defend the basic principle of subsidised art in the non-broadcast sector, and that access was a really important principle. Alison said that while this was true, she felt there was no longer any mileage in describing our projects simply in terms of opposition to the mainstream. We do have a variety of relationships to the mainstream, including but not exhausted by an oppositional relation. For example,

the provision of Channel 4 funding made the independent sector into an area of research and development into modes of production for de-regulated tv. This is unfortunate given the commitment most of us feel to public service broadcasting and unionised labour, but in future, we might be able to have a more productive relation to the mainstream industry if we proceed with an awareness that we do have a relation to it. Also, re-describing ourselves as an area of research and development for indigenous audio-visual production might be a crucial strategy in pursuing new funds. Gustav pointed out that by providing quality product at low cost, the sector has in fact subsidised Channel 4, and not vice a versa.

5/ CHARACTERISTICS OF THE INDEPENDENT SECTOR: Jenny said that it would be useful to examine what exactly the sector provides in return for subsidy. The main points put forward were:

- 1/ Employment.
- 2/ Education.
- 3/ Access - Arts for all.
- 4/ Political diversity and a critical film/video industry.
- 5/ Training, as a ladder to broadcast or otherwise.
- 6/ Close relation between producers and "end users".
- 7/ Quality and diversity of services.
- 8/ Equal Opportunities.
- 9/ A space for experiment and cultural innovation at arms' length from market distortion, eg: as in the distribution of third world films, etc.
- 10/ Internationalism.

Tony commented that there may be problems with expecting state subsidy for the work described above in the current political climate, where these features aren't necessarily positively valued. Gustav said that the funding we'd had to date should be described as funding for start-ups for work that needed to be continued, and that we should argue against the introduction of market distortion at this stage. Sean felt that we should prioritise cultural arguments rather than put all our energy into engaging with the notion of efficiency or "rationalisation" of provision.

6/ LONDON REGION IFVPA. Since discussion of this kind could not be concluded in one day and yet needed to be continued, it was resolved that IFVPA should start organising London Region meetings, either with special funding, or very cheaply, at which discussions of cultural arguments for the independent sector could be continued.

-----BREAK FOR LUNCH-----

-----AFTERNOON SESSION-----

An agenda was formulated as follows:

- 1/ What arguments for the sector do we want to promote (to the consultants and others)?
- 2/ Discussion of the consultancy brief.
- 3/ Discussion of the documentation produced by the consultants to date and the one-day meeting organised by Boyden and Southwood.

1/ ARGUMENTS FOR THE SECTOR. Tony thought that we should move away from a redundant basic argument for subsidy and towards new definitions related to technological and economic developments. Sean said that we should prioritise cultural criteria, highlighting areas of work only sustainable with public funds, eg: shorts; third world cinema; etc. Gustav said that we needed to do some long term planning, and that he thought our best option for survival would be to set objectives on our own terms but redescribe them in terms of the definitions favoured by the consultants' discourse. Stephen was against adopting the language of the consultants because, he said, the philosophies that went with it (eg: the "free market") were fundamentally at odds with our basic principles. Tony said that it was a waste of time trying to defend the status quo and that we need arguments for a sector which can develop beyond subsidy and the relationship with the state that involves. Jenny argued that the best way to protect the sector would be to organise it as coherently as possible so that its non-profit activities could be supported by its mixed-economy ones. Gustav said that we should argue for funds on the basis of the coincidence of our interest in production with arguments against American and Japanese technological and cultural hegemony. This meant arguing for our work on the basis of a need for indigenous production as a way of preserving national cultural integrity. He mentioned possible links between this cultural argument and current technological ones, eg: around satellite, HDTV and questions of standards. Although there was a wide range of views on this agenda item, it was agreed that the elaboration of arguments for our work was now crucial. Gustav suggested that the IFA foundation document of 1980 might be used as a basis for discussion: in effect, updated. It was agreed that Jenny, Stephen and Tony should work together on making a discussion document of this kind for the first of the IFVPA London Region meetings.

2/ THE CONSULTANTS BRIEF. There was general agreement that the brief was too narrow. Tony pointed out that the brief just talks about subsidy which seems to restrict the potential of the consultancy. We need to look at ways of extending opportunities and not just making the best of a limited one. Gustav suggested that we ask to have it extended to areas like

high-tech innovation, and cited several possible sources for this, eg: the Micro Electronics Industry Support Programme and other industry development programmes. We need to make the argument that London as a region is underdeveloped. Alison said that the investigation of opportunities for development this implied would not only make the report live up to its title, it would also re-cast the question of the market in terms of the possibility of leading as well as following a market. Sue Hall said that, considering the cost, the consultancy was far too narrow and therefore a waste of time. She emphasised the need to get the brief extended. (There was, in the course of the meeting, no final agreement on how exactly to go about this, so we need to clarify our course of action on this point).

3/ PRACTICE OF THE CONSULTANCY: This was heavily criticised on numerous counts, mainly concerning the inadequacy of consultation procedures. It was felt that the sector wasn't being listened to properly. Sue emphasised the importance of the process of implementation of the consultancy's findings - at this point, it will be crucial for us to be as involved as possible. It was agreed that Alison would write to GLA and copy the letter to Boyden and Southwood, the BFI and LBGS, making the following requests/proposals:

- 1/ To receive the report at **draft** stage.
- 2/ To be given time to circulate the draft report and then meet, under the aegis of the IFVPA, to discuss its main points. Two weeks should be adequate.
- 3/ Our comments will then be written up for discussion and we would like, a month after the meeting suggested in point 2/, to call a meeting at which we, the funders and the consultants will be represented, to discuss the report and its implementation.

-----MEETING CLOSED AT 4pm-----