

**Lights, Camera, Action!**

Enacting Citizenship through Community Video:  
The Case of Southwark.TV

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

*... Community access video is not alone in the world. It is an integral part of a much wider international movement, a movement with many powerful historical forebears, to open up media communication, to liberate it from the straight jackets imposed subtly or unsubtly by the power that be, to extend our connections with each other and to expand our awareness of each others' situations and problems. That is the name of the game, which is played in a lot of stadiums. (Downing, 1991 p. 7)*

Recent developments in information communication technologies have marked the advent of a new era. With the digitalization of information systems, modern society has seen a drastic change in various economic, cultural and political sectors of society. Often referred to as the *Information Age*, this era has created a progressively interconnected and interdependent society where traditional notions of space and time are often questioned. Combined with increasing deregulation and privatization trends, our globally networked society has led to the emergence of powerful transnational corporations (TNCs). The increasing dominance of TNCs has created a situation where unbalanced flows of information are perpetuating economic, political and social disparities across the globe, ultimately awarding the control of information and capital to a very select few (Mohammadi, 1997). The dominance of TNCs is most prevalent in the realm of media and communications where seven large transnational corporations, all originating from North America and Europe, control the majority of media flows (McChesney, 1997). Consequently, the majority of information is flowing from Western “first world” countries into the “third world.” (Rodriguez, 2001 p.5)

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the United Nations developed the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) in hopes to rectify imbalances in

media flows. Stressing the widening gap between media have and have-nots, NWICO aimed at putting “electronic media in the hands of citizens and communities who [were] traditionally denied access to the production and distribution of media messages” (Rodriguez, 2001 p. 2). Furthermore, NWICO flagged the harmful effects of global mass media on local culture, charging it with wiping out cultural difference to facilitate market expansion (Dagron, 2007 p.206). Despite NWICO’s failures to challenge the dominance of global media giants, many argue that the current situation of the media sphere is not as hopeless as one might expect. Taking a more nuanced approach to examining global culture, several academics argue that while economic forces are striving to uniform and homogenize markets, cultural forces are strengthening diversity, pluralism, and difference (Silverstone, 2001 p.17; Rodriguez, 2001 p.60) Several academics point to the prevalence of locally based activities in the midst of globalizing processes. For example, despite a scaling up of information and communication processes via satellites to international and global levels, a scaling down of information and communication processes to regional and local levels has simultaneously occurred (Hollander, 2002 p.31). Such a scaling down, for example, includes the explosion of local radio stations across Europe. Furthermore, developments in new communication and information technologies (ICTs), like the digital palm recorder, have given way to independent media production and enabled more people to participate in production practices than ever before (Protz, 1991 p.38; Buckingham et. al, 1995 p.9).

Community media is a pertinent site to examine how locally oriented productions are utilizing new technologies to engage citizens in media distribution and production practices. As Dagron (2007) iterates, community media has the ability to “think locally first” in order to consolidate cultural identity, reflect on community needs, and defend human values, cultures, languages and beliefs (p.206). Conversely, one wonders whether the emancipatory potentials of new technologies are greatly overstated. Although developments in ICTs do “afford a measure of decentralization in the production and distribution of communicative forms and practices, there is a related tendency for these emerging systems to become reconstituted into ever more centralized production and distribution systems” (p. 11).

The following dissertation aims to uncover whether community media has the capability to utilize new information technologies to engage citizens who have been traditionally denied access to media production and distribution practices. Specifically, this dissertation examines socially marginalized groups within an urban context and their involvement in community video to determine the emancipatory potentials of new information communication technologies. Divided into four main chapters, this dissertation will begin with a literature review that examines notions of community, community media, citizen participation, social inclusion/exclusion, and video production. After touching upon pertinent theories in these fields, this dissertation will outline the chosen research method to explain why a case study of Southwark.TV was best suited for this study. Subsequently, an analysis and discussion will follow revealing the pertinent empirical findings from the Southwark.TV case study. Finally, this dissertation will conclude with a summary on what can be learned from the Southwark.TV experience regarding community video projects and their ability to empower marginalized groups.

## **2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1: What is Community Media?**

On its website, Southwark.TV is described as a “venture into community media” (Southwark.TV, 2008). At first glance this statement may appear to be a self-explanatory, but a more in-depth look reveals the ambiguities and complexities of this statement. Community as a concept has always been difficult to pin down. Contrasting it against the notion of society, Tönnies (1963) conceptualizes community as a “big family” where the presence of “close concrete human ties” and a “collective identity” exist. Conversely, society “represents a colder, unattached and more fragmented way of living devoid of cooperation and social cohesion” (Tönnies, 1963 check (Bailey et al., 2008 p.8). There are a myriad of qualities, sometimes contradictory, that are attached to the notion of a community. A community is conventionally identified with regards to its geographical dimensions often referring to a neighbourhood, village, town, or city (Jankowski, 2002 p.5) Conversely, a community, like a Diaspora, can also “extend across conurbations, nations and continents” thus bypassing a geographical definition (Bailey et al., 2008 p.

8). Community can also refer to a community of interest involving a group of people who share cultural, social or political interests. Moreover, an interpretive community or community of meaning can refer to symbolic constructions of community that take culture rather than structure as their point of departure (Bailey et al., 2008 p.10). Anderson (1983) utilizes such an approach in his construction of the 'imagined community' where the nation, in other words a political community, is imaginary "because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communication" (p.15).

Recent developments in ICTs such as the emergence of the Internet have also added to new formulations of community. Online or virtual communities are resulting in electronic networks of interactive communication that are replacing face-to-face interactions (Rheingold, 2000). Ultimately, the term 'community' has become a fluid concept. Howley (2005) states:

Social life is no longer clearly bounded and such hitherto taken for granted categories of experience, identity and community perhaps above all, neither any longer have any real meaning nor the capacity to provide the kind of securities they once did. This postmodern world, for better and for worse, is a fluid one (p.15)

Southwark.TV refers to community in an equally fluid fashion. Initially, Southwark.TV was created to serve the geographic community of Southwark, a borough in South London that comprises the neighbourhoods of Peckham, Nunhead, Camberwell and Dulwich. Many partners of Southwark.TV like Youth Animation Media (YAM) are located in Southwark and involve members who reside in the area. Nevertheless, many partner organizations also operate outside the Southwark jurisdiction and participate on grounds of a shared interest in video production. Taking into account the online component of Southwark.TV, one also has to acknowledge community as a network of virtual interactions.

Communities are complex social universes with a myriad of interpretations. They are also expressions of commonality as well as of differences. (Dagron, 2007 p.201) Community, is again a fluid and contingent concept where "belonging to a community does not necessarily exclude affinities towards other communities or social structures"

(Bailey et al., 2008 p.10) Nevertheless, a real community cannot exist unless we focus on groups of people as a central component and their frequent direct (or in-direct) contact amongst one another to foster a sense of belonging and sharing (Sthapitanonda and Thiropantu, 2007 p.151; Bailey et al., 2008p. 9).

The difficulties associated with adequately defining the term 'community' have, no doubt, confounded the study of community media (Howley, 2005 p.5). The term 'community media', which first emerged in the 1960s, has come to embody a variety of activities. These activities range from local radio to webzines to graffiti to the online network of Indymedia (Fuller, 2007 p.4). Consequently it has been difficult to pin down a definition for community media that encompasses all these activities yet distinguishes them from other media practices. As Dagon (2007) states, "we can group [community media] experiences according to some of their features, but they hardly respond to the same common features, except in general" (p.197). In addition, the label 'community media' is often used synonymously with other types of media practices including 'alternative media', 'participatory media', 'local media', 'self-governing media', 'indigenous media' and so forth (Rodriguez, 2001; Dagon, 2007) Thus, community media has become a catch-all phrase "that embraces a variety of media forms and practices, some participatory in nature, others not, that may or may not have very much relevance to geographically situated communities" (Howley, 2005 p.4). As a result, much confusion has resulted due to the theoretical underdevelopment of community media.

Several theoretical approaches have been utilized to better develop a definition of community media. One frequently referred to definition of 'community media' views the concept through a lens of 'alternative media'. Community-oriented alternative media are often viewed as "hopeful options to counterbalance the unequal distribution of communication resources that came with the growth of big media corporation" (Rodriguez, 2001 p.4). Alternative media "grow, like native plants, in the communities that they serve, allowing spaces to generate historical memories and analyses, nurture visions for their future, and weed out the representations of dominant media" (Kidd, 1999 p.116). They are alternatives to the mainstream proving that media can exist independent to the state and market (Bailey et al., 2008 p.18) Notably, the view of 'community media' as an 'alternative' to something is limiting because it entraps community media into

binary thinking (Huesca & Dervin, 1994). Consequently, rather than defining community media in terms of what it is, this perspective limits community media to understandings of what it is not.

A second lens through which to examine 'community media' relates the idea to public communication. Utilizing a holistic approach, Hollander et al. (2002) look at community media as a form of public communication where publics are made and created within the context of a specific community; however, unlike mass communication, a public communication that targets large-scale populations, community media operates on a smaller-scale (p.23). Consequently, 'community media' is understood as "small-scale forms of public communication – that is public communication within a neighbourhood, a village, town or suburb" (Hollander, et al., 2002 p.23). Looking at community media as a form of public communication creates a more holistic approach that challenges the thinking of communication as a one-way, linear process; however, limiting it to understandings of 'small-scale' hinders its potential to analyze certain phenomenon of indefinable scale such as online digital networks. References to "small-scale" media are limited to geographical dimensions and fail to explore how the local in 'community media' can extend such boundaries. Nevertheless looking at community media through this lens stresses its pertinence as a transformative process where the private individual experience is transformed into a public collective experience (Hollander et al., 2002 p.4).

Perhaps the best solution to understanding community media is through a more contextual approach. Since community media comes in all shapes and sizes (legal, pirate, commercial, non-commercial, professional, amateur, local, diasporic etc.) and have differing functions in various regions around the world, each historical and cultural context has produced a unique situation for community media (Fuller, 2007). Conversely, conceptions of community media require a strong conceptual framework that enables academic researchers to draw concrete conclusions. Consequently, many have drawn from other disciplines to develop an appropriate framework from which to analyze community media. The most suitable framework for understating Southwark.TV has found its roots in theories of radical democracy. Bailey et al. (2008) point out the importance of using a political perspective to analyze media when they state:



...Media do not operate or function in a vacuum, but are embedded in economic, political and cultural settings, be they local, national, regional or international. That is why, to understand (the importance of) [community media] we need to situate them in the political and democratic theories that have provided theoretical and intellectual support for their identities and practices (p.4)

Building on Downing's (2001) concept of rhizomatic media, Bailey et al. (2008) develop a panoptic perspective that "facilitates an appreciation of the diversity and multiplicity of alternative media initiatives" (p.xv). Combining traditional theories of alternative media, community media and civil society media, they posit rhizomatic media as the most appropriate lens through which to understand alternative media. The concept of rhizomatic media acknowledges a connection to communities, distinctiveness from mainstream media and a "fluidity of the boundaries that we construct between alternative and mainstream, between civil society, the state, and the market" (p.xv). The metaphor of the rhizome, referring to non-linear, anarchic and nomadic connections, becomes particularly pertinent when looking at community media because it highlights structures where organizations "can remain grounded in local communities and become simultaneously engaged in translocal networks" (Bailey et al., 2008 p.20). Conversely, Rodriguez (2001) reveals the underlying link between all forms of community media as the expression of "will and agency of a human community confronting historical marginalizing and isolating forces, whatever these may be" (p.63). Subsequently, drawing from the feminist theories of radical democracy she coins the term 'citizen media' as a more appropriate framework through which to understand community media. She states:

'Citizen media' implies first that a collectivity is *enacting* its citizenship by actively intervening and transforming the established mediascape; second, that these media are contesting social codes, legitimized identities, and institutionalized social relations; and third, that these communication practices are empowering the community involved, to the point where these transformations and changes are possible (Rodriguez, 2001p. 20).

By drawing on theories of democracy, citizen media takes community media out of the obscure and highlights their potential as sites for legitimacy, empowerment and citizenship.

## 2.2: Beyond the Political

Classical theories of democracy point to participation as a key component for enacting citizenship. Traditionally, participation refers to activities such as voting, lobbying and protesting. In recent years, however, new visions of the ‘political’ have emerged that challenge traditional notions of participation. Conceptualizing the political is no longer limited to examining formal political system, institutions or political procedures (Bailey et al., (2008) p.5). Instead new perspectives that include the school, the family, the workplace, the community and the media as “equally valid spheres for political-democratic activities” have presented the political as a dimension “inherent to every human society and that determines our very ontological condition” (Bailey et al., 2008 p.5; Mouffe, 1997 p.3). Thus, the discipline has stretched to encompass more social and cultural perspectives allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of democratic participation and citizenship.

Social links to the political are prevalent in perspectives on civic engagement. Many discourses around civic engagement maintain that interactions within the social sphere leads to healthy political societies (Putnam, 1995). Specifically membership to a variety of associations is regarded as an extremely important practice for creating a culture of political participation – the prerequisite for a healthy democratic society (Greer, 1967 p.259). Examples of associational membership include belonging to a religious denomination, joining a labour union or volunteering with a local organization. Even meeting weekly with a bowling club can be regarded as an expression of civic engagement (Putnam, 1995). Although these structures of association are not specifically political in nature, combined, they promote mutual respect, trust and relationships of reciprocity and cooperation (Harrison et al., 2002 p.258). Structures of association facilitate coordination and communication; as well as broaden a participant’s sense of self while enhancing their “taste” for collective benefits (Putnam, 1995 91-99). Consequently, participants are more likely to engage in local politics, spend time with their neighbours and express social trust resulting in a more participatory culture among communities (Harrison et al., 2002 p.258). Arguments exist that claim civic engagement is on the decline in countries like the United States (Putnam, 1995). Conversely, several academics have revealed new sites for civic engagement, which often include everyday creativity,

and individual entertainment activities involving the use of ICT and new media. Even though these sites do not necessarily result in a mass of collective action, some argue that the civic significance of their actions should not go unnoticed (Burgess et al., 2006 p.6).

Democratic participation also moves beyond the political realm in some of the latest formulations of citizenship. Traditionally citizenship was viewed as a legal status: one is in which you were born or granted on the basis of some essential characteristic (Rodriguez, 2001 p.20) Gradually citizenship became understood as a composition of social, civic and political rights that are universally available for all citizens; however, this definition has not gone uncontested (Marshall, 1950). Utilizing a feminist framework, Mouffe (1992) challenged Marshall by envisioning citizenship as a “form of identification or a type of political identity that is to be constructed rather than empirically given (Mouffe, 1992, p. 231) Expanding on this idea, the concept of cultural citizenship was developed to highlight the critical implications of culture when realizing one’s own citizenship. Specifically, cultural citizenship examines how everyday socio-cultural processes can provide subordinate groups the ability to claim public rights and recognitions, to foster a sense of belonging and to transform the voiceless vulnerable individual into a full-fledged citizen (Rosaldo, 1999 p. 260). Furthermore, ‘cultural citizenship’ offers subordinated communities “the possibility of legitimizing demands made in the struggle to enfranchise themselves... these demands range from legal, political and economic issues to matters of human dignity, well-being and respect” (Rosaldo, 1994 p.57). Generally, the study of cultural citizenship has focused on marginalized ethno-cultural groups like ‘Latinos’ in the United States, but cultural citizenship can extend to groups like youth, women, homosexuals and people with disabilities (Stevenson, 2003).

Many argue that despite these socio-cultural perspectives, the political, as traditionally understood, is mainly concerned with power acquisition. Wolin (1992) reveals the critical role of power in discussions of citizenship when he states:

[Citizenship] is about the capacity to generate power, for that is the only way that things get established in the world. And it is about the capacity to share in power, to cooperate in it, for that is how institutions and practices are sustained (p. 250).

Consequently, political participation is about reducing power imbalances, in other words, about creating an equal ground between the oppressors and the repressed (Bailey et al., 2008 p.12). Conversely, Ong (1999) argues that citizenship is a dual process: “a process of self-making as well as of being-made within the webs of power linked to national states and civil society” (p.264). Therefore, there is a limit to how much a citizen has the agency to reduce these power imbalances. Stretching beyond the nation state, a cosmopolitan perspective of citizenship highlights the role of civil society in examining processes of normalization, individuation and globalization. Citizenship becomes the contested desire to create communication and dialogue within a cultural society, which advocates the deconstruction of boundaries and oppositions that prevent the politicization of everyday life (Stevenson, 2003 p.2).

Frequently, investigations of political participation have increasingly turned their sights to the ‘everyday’ as a crucial site for understanding citizenship. Burgess et al. (2006) iterate: “Citizenship is practised as much through everyday life, leisure, critical consumption and popular entertainment as it is through debate and engagement with the capital ‘P’ politics” (p.1). Nevertheless, power relations remain critical dimensions to these everyday activities. Wolin (1992) states:

A political being is not to be defined as the citizen has been, as an abstract, disconnected bearer of rights, privileges and immunities, but as a person whose existence is located in a particular place and draws its sustenance from circumscribed relationships: family, friends, church, neighbourhood, workplace, community, town, city. These relationships are the sources from which political beings draw power-symbolic, material, and psychological...(p.252)

Consequently, group and community dynamics become pertinent to processes of empowerment. In essence, citizens enact their citizenship on a day-to-day basis, through participation in family, in community and even, as we shall further explore, in routine communication and media practices.

### 2.3: Mediated Participation

In quotidian politics, the stark divide between the political and the non-political dissolves. This is most evident when examining mediated forms of citizenship. Hermes (1998) points to everyday engagement with popular media as a means of enacting one’s

citizenship. Reading a feminist detective novel or watching daytime television, for example, should be awarded political value as these practices allow an individual membership to different (but often overlapping) communities, which should ideally constitute a national political culture (p.169). Conversely, Miller (2006) strongly contests the value of popular culture. By failing to provide adequate reporting on fundamental issues such as war and the environment, Miller argues that popular fiction television narratives have distracted audiences from pressing political dilemmas. Subsequently, television audiences have grown to be ignorant, passive receivers of information.

On the other hand, the rise in community media challenges the notion of an increasingly passive audience during the Age of Information. Instead, the media are regarded as tools that empower audiences. Specifically, community media allow for two-way communication, an interactive process between both senders and receivers of messages (Hollander et al., 2002 p.21). Therefore, distinctions between media producers and media consumers collapse, as local populations are able to exercise power and control over media production and/or distribution (Howely, 2005 p.3). Moreover, community media connect people to participatory politics. Their 'two-way' character make them a highly active form of communication, a dialogue that is not an end in itself, but a means to a more deliberative democracy (Sthapitanonda and Thiropanu, 2007 p.152) Bailey et al. (2008) outline the positive participatory effects of community media when they state:

Participation in the media deals with the participation of non-professionals in the production of media output (content-related participation) and in media decision-making (structural participation). Firstly, these forms of media participation allow citizens to be active in one of the many (micro-) spheres relevant to daily life and to put into practice their right to communicate. Secondly, these forms of micro-participation are considered to be important because they allow people to learn and adopt a democratic and/or civic attitude, thus strengthening (the possible forms) of macro-participation, as well as the civic culture (p.11).

Finally, community media are a collective experience (Dagron, 2007 p.197). By multiplying the number of communicators, community media transform the private individual experience into a collective public experience, a fundamental ingredient to community building (Hollander et al., 2002 p. 26).

Janowitz (1952) argues that community media are an asset to building communities. He posits community newspaper readership as a contributing factor to the integration of people within a community. Conversely, others argue that community media are the result of an already integrated local community (McChesney, 1997). Determining whether the media, specifically ICT-based media, can aid in processes of integration is relevant in this era as communities witness increases in cultural plurality and division. Urban areas in particular, represent intense concentrations of difference and are encountering many difficulties in creating cohesive communities where equal participation is available to all members. Discourses regarding theories of inclusion/exclusion have become particularly popular as a result.

### 2.3: How Does Exclusion Fit In?

Traditionally, groups who are excluded or marginalized are seen as lacking the necessary capabilities to function fully in society. Durieux (2005) refers to the notion of 'less ability' which designates "vulnerable groups as excluded or at risk of exclusion because of such factors as lack of skills, lack of income, age, gender, disability, etc." (p.77). Perhaps, however, the cause of marginalization is one of structure rather than agency. One can experience overt forms of exclusions like being denied the right to vote or one can experience less obvious forms of exclusion like being denied forums for expressing one's own identity. Inclusion/exclusion is a hot topic in the realm of ICTs. The digital divide is often regarded as "the ICT translation of a wider debate on social exclusion and poverty" (Brands & Risen, 2005 p.23).

One must, again, be aware of the binary division that arises from discourses around inclusion and exclusion. A social subject rarely has a single identity; instead, it has multiple, heterogeneous identities and therefore experiences different levels of inclusion/exclusion at various times. Each social subject will experience processes of inclusion/exclusion in different ways according to other social dimensions such as gender, social class, age and so forth (Mouffe, 1997 p.90). Thus, taking into account the fluidity of identity, several academics like the postmodernists have "moved away from the more structural, objective explanations of exclusion to identities and subjectivities, thus emphasising a theoretical and empirical dichotomy between structure and agency"

(Wyatt et al, 2000). Ultimately, one must take a fluid and multi-dimensional approach to understanding and interpreting marginalization because processes of inclusion and exclusion are not static (Brants & Frissen, 2005 p.26).

A multitude of solutions have been developed to tackle issues of inclusion/exclusion. Again, developments in ICTs are often credited as possible sites for battling issues of inclusion/exclusion. Many theorists argue that developments in digital media are providing possibilities for social inclusion that were otherwise inconceivable. In his investigations of online-networked communities, Urrichio (2004) looks at peer-to-peer communities as a new site for cultural citizenship where relationships are de-hierarchized and decentralized, thus allowing for more egalitarian relationships to emerge. Burgess et al. (2006) expand on these ideas with their discussion on online consumer-created content. They conclude, “fostering human talent and digital creativity outside formal school or workplace environments will favourably nurture societal and cultural values – promoting a socially inclusive innovation culture and economy” (Burgess et. al, p.2). Furthermore, ICTs are credited for giving those marginalized a voice. For instance, Silverstone (2002) points to the Internet as a virtual ‘global commons’. He states:

Less visible, always vulnerable, arguably mostly still virtuous, are the various attempts by minorities and those on the margins, the oppressed, repressed and displaced, to claim and to use electronic media for their own projects: for community and identity, for mobilization and agitation: to claim and to sustain, one might suggest, grazing rights on the common electronic pasture, and to seek to manage them. (p.15)

Can it nonetheless be said that new ICTs alone are agents for social inclusion? The history of media and communication practices in the United Kingdom present contradictory results in the emancipatory capabilities of ICTs. Often media technologies in the UK operate contradictory means for social inclusion. For example, public service broadcasting institutions like the BBC “saw their role as one of promoting assimilation and did not deem it necessary to treat members of Britain’s ethnic communities as citizens with specific needs and cultural rights” (Tsagarousianou, 2002 p.214). Consequently, programs were developed like BBC’s *Black Londoners* that portrayed ethnic groups as people who needed to adapt to the ‘British way of life’, and were often ghettoizing and alienating the communities they were supposed to address

(Tsagarousianou, 2002 p.214). Over the years, progress has been made with an increase in localized specific community media that cater to the taste and interests of minority communities. Nevertheless, this progress is often attributed to media policies acknowledging the paternalistic behaviour of media organization rather than actual advancements in ICTs. Conversely, the following section will investigate how ICTs, specifically digital video, possess intrinsic functions that enable social inclusion.

### 2.5: It's Digital, so What?

Advancements in digital technologies have changed the landscape of video production. With increasingly affordable technologies such as the portable digital camera and user-friendly digital editing software, video production has become a household activity. As Buckingham poignantly states “the *home* has no longer become a site simply of media consumption: it has also become a key site for *production*” (Buckingham et. al, 1995 p. 10). One can even find audio-visual recording options in commonplace devices such as mobile phones. Furthermore, with the advent of the Internet, new venues have emerged that are now able to showcase these smaller, non-professional productions. Websites like *Youtube* or *Google Video* have demonstrated a striking increase in home video production. On the other hand, the use of video by non-professionals begins quite some time before the advent of digital technology. Community video projects were prominent since the early 1970s. Nevertheless, characteristics inherent to digital video do make video production more accessible than ever. Consequently, some argue that community video projects now provide more opportunities for participation than ever.

Community video projects have not always included productions that were very participatory in nature. Many often used the label “community” to describe documentaries that represented issues in the community, but were often produced by professionals (Protz, 1991 p.34). Conversely, many credit new advancements in technology as an enabling force for more participatory video productions. Often many of these projects have different objectives: for example, some videos are made that document community group initiatives for the purpose of evaluating group decision-making processes; others are made that depict fictional narratives for the purpose of entertainment. Generally, however, community video production has become more about



the benefits of video as process rather than video as product. Buckingham (1995) argues that “the *process* of production – and the conceptual understandings that can be acquired through reflecting on that process- are hence of much greater significance than the *product*” (p.11). The benefits of concentrating on production as process are articulated by CENDIT (1991) who states:

Video as Process is a mediated process of decision-making.... participatory communication is a process wherein people themselves control not only the media decision-making process and the content of media productions, but also the means of media production and the resulting media materials. In this sense, the main objective of participation communication is not to produce media materials per se, but to use process of media production to empower people with the confidence, skills, and information they need to tackle their own issues and to provide them with the media tools necessary to articulate their experience and intentions.

Processes of video production can strengthen individual and collective identities. Video production generally requires the involvement of several members working in various aspects of the production process like acting, directing, lighting, sound and editing to create a final product. Therefore, questions arise about how the group wants to capture the image, the event or the story. If this story is personal, it can become highly self-reflexive and lead to greater questions about one’s individual and collective identity. Rodriguez (2001) highlights the process of identity deconstruction and reconstruction in participatory video production when she states, “looking at oneself and one’s world through the camera’s viewfinder provides a different point of view from which to draw images to constitute one’s identity” (p.119). Furthermore, editing becomes a process that forces participants to be aware and critical of their own identity all the while interpreting identity as a process of perpetual construction.

The cooperative nature of video production also has community-building potential. Lourenco (2007) demonstrates the community-building characteristics of video production when she examines community video productions like the Brazilian Maxambomba in South America. Lourenco (2007) states:

Such symbolic aspects and tech effectiveness of tools, like cameras and microphones, can actually amplify aspects of human interaction. The general acknowledgments of community video as an access channel to a neighbour’s expressions led Maxambomba’s crew to take part in several rituals. Through numerous interactions with communities, it built its image as a communication catalyst and respected social player. (p.97)

Although, video production does not necessarily have to be a collective activity, like other forms of cultural production, it is inherently a social process because “it is based in social experience, in a social dialogue with others (real or imagined), and it uses socially-available resources for producing meaning” (Buckingham et al., 1995 p. 210)

Processes of video production can also contribute to developing media literacy. Buckingham et al. (1995) argue, “there are conceptual understandings of the media that can *only* be fully developed through the experience of production itself” (p. 12). Learning media language, in other words, becoming familiar with lenses, frames, angles, zoom-ins, and zoom-outs lead to new ways of looking at television programming and film. Rodriguez (2001) explains the pertinent benefits of television media literacy when she states:

The proximity between the medium and the community dispels several myths created by society that tends to put on a pedestal anything and anyone involved with the mass media. For a community with its own local television, media production becomes more a craft than a sophisticated, high-tech enterprise; what has been defined as televisable by the big media comes into question when seeing one’s own houses, parks, and neighbours on the electronic screen... (Rodriguez, 106)

Furthermore, engaging in video production and learning about the ins and outs of producing video products makes one “more critical of professional media, less receptive to its messages, and generally more media literate as the technical process becomes demystified” (Protz, 38). Therefore, participating in video production helps citizens, especially those left in the margins, become more aware of mainstream media as a process of construction.

On the other hand, focusing on ‘video as process’ rather than ‘video as product’ can often hinder the quality of the video production, which could have severe repercussions. A poor product can look amateur, which can also threaten the survival of community media. Vittet-Philipped & Crookes (1986) express the weaknesses in amateur community video when they state: “...the rejection of a professional approach to broadcasting ... the use of low-power transmitters and of poor wave bands, the parochialism of programme content, have condemned [community media] to the outer fringes of the system and, therefore, sometimes to extinction” (p.13). Furthermore, a ‘good’ video product is necessary for creating a sense of accomplishment and legitimacy

for the media producer. Ultimately, the debate of process versus product is not a sustainable one as both are required to create meaningful video productions for community members. Perhaps, this is where the contributions of digital technology to video production become most pertinent. With technological developments like home digital editing software, professional video tools have become more accessible to the common public, thus raising potential for high quality production among community video projects.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

This dissertation takes a qualitative approach to determine whether technological developments can enable marginalized groups greater participation through community video projects. Although qualitative research is not representative of the target population, it is exploratory in nature and its strength resides in “eliciting depth of thought and breadth of comments and ideas” (Reagan, 2006 p. 74). This dissertation also selects a case study as the most appropriate form of research. According to Creswell (2003), case studies are those “in which the researcher explores in depth a program, an event, an activity, a process” (p.15). Notably, they are bound by time and activity, but researchers have the flexibility to collect detailed information using a variety of collection procedures. Most importantly they allow for more holistic approaches to research where relationships and processes, rather than outcomes, become the focus of research. Denscombe (1998) illustrates how case studies are more conducive to looking at processes when he states:

Relationships and processes within social settings tend to be interconnected and interrelated. To understand one thing it is necessary to understand many others and, crucially, how the various parts are linked. The case study approach works well here because it offers more chance than the survey approach of going into sufficient detail to unravel the complexities of a given situation...it follows from this that within case studies there is a tendency to emphasize the detailed workings of the relationships and social processes, rather than to restrict attention to the outcomes from these. (p.31)

Since a case study is well adept to examining processes and relationships it is very appropriate for examining situations of participation, citizenship and community. As

previously mentioned, participation, citizenship and community are incredibly complex social situations. Consequently, the case study, which deals well with the subtleties and intricacies of a situation is very useful for a study on community video media. Specifically, this dissertation has selected the community organization Southwark.TV as the case study subject. Located in one of South London's central borrows, Southwark.TV engages participants from a diverse set of backgrounds - many of whom find themselves marginalized within the larger urban and national landscape. Consequently, Southwark.TV is a pertinent platform from which to investigate the activities of marginalized groups involved in community video projects.

Building from the case study approach, this dissertation chose a *mélange* of methods to examine Southwark.TV, including in-depth interviews and participant observation. In-dept interviews are generally conducted one-on-one where the interviewer asks the interviewee a set of questions. Unlike a survey, an in-depth interview allows the interviewee to get into the interviewees mind. Reagan (2006) elaborates:

Instead of just finding out “I like it” or “It’s just OK”...[the interviewee] can probe for why people said what they did, and can keep on probing. These probes may produce other comments and insights that the respondent would never have mentioned without the probes. (p.76)

Due to complexities of citizenship and community media, interviews were effective in gathering data that would otherwise go under the radar in survey research. In order to gather a full understanding of the Southwark.TV, interviews were conducted with coordinators, members, partners, contributors and affiliates of the organization. Specifically, the founder and executive director of Southwark.TV was a principle interviewee along with several of his associates. Furthermore, as Southwark.TV is a collective of community groups, coordinators and participants from the partner organizations were also interviewed. These organizations include Youth Animation and Media (YAM), Freewheelers Theatre Group, the Rockingham Somali Support group and the media class of Southwark College.

This dissertation utilized two types of interview methods: semi-structured and structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews were used during initial encounters with Southwark.TV members, partners, contributors and coordinators. These interviews were conducted in-person during visits to London between May 23<sup>rd</sup> and June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2008.

Each interview was recorded and lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. Due to some instances of language and cultural barriers, semi-structured interviews proved effective to relieve initial anxiety and enable the development of a wider dialogue. In secondary communications, structured interviews using a written questionnaire were conducted via electronic mail to clarify and elaborate on responses given during the initial set of interviews.

In addition to interviews, participant observation was also chosen as a secondary method for collecting information. Participant observation allows the researcher to directly encounter local meanings and practices; therefore, avoiding mediation by the respondents' personal judgements regarding what should and should not be discussed (Weinberg, 2002 p.135) Furthermore, what participants may find meaningful and important in their activities, may be nonetheless, difficult to express in words. As Weinberg (2002) points out, "sometimes people find certain things hard to discuss precisely because they consider those things so profoundly meaningful" (p.135). This method was utilized to observe the video pre-production, production and post-production practices of Southwark.TV. Specifically, two video projects were chosen for observation. The first was on May 24<sup>th</sup>, 2008 with YAM where the final preparations for an upcoming music video shoot were observed. These preparations involved both YAM youth and coordinators and took place over a session of three hours. The second was on June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2008 with the Freewheelers Theatre Group where the planning, shooting, editing and viewing of several video productions were observed. These activities involved coordinators and Freewheeler company members, and took place over a session of five hours. First hand observation helped grasp complex matters like power relationships among group members that other research methods could not. Furthermore, combining in-depth interviews with participant observation enabled a more holistic approach to understanding community video projects and the participants they involve.

Lastly, access to internal and external resources for Southwark.TV and its partner organizations was also integral to gathering supplemental information. Such resources included documents detailing historical, structural and personal accounts for Southwark.TV and its affiliates as well as electronic versions (online or in DVD format) of former video productions created by members of YAM, Freewheelers, Southwark

College, the Rockingham Somali Support Group and other partners of Southwark.TV. These resources contextualized many of the responses given by interviewees and helped visualize the scope of productions produced by Southwark.TV and its partners.

Despite the beneficial information collected from interviews and participant observation, several limitations were present during the empirical research process. A leading limitation involved the closure of many Southwark.TV projects and programs. Due to grant cutbacks from the government, many projects were shut down; therefore, making it difficult to understand how the organization previously functioned in the height of its operation. Luckily, access to coordinators and contributors who also participated in the early days of the organization were able to provide a more comprehensive picture of the past, and consequently, present activities of Southwark.TV.

#### **4. ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION**

In 2002, Southwark.TV sprung as a new community media initiative in the South London borough of Southwark. Under the tag “TV”, Southwark.TV established itself as an “open-access community media service”, where local community groups were encouraged to participate in various aspects of video media production (Southwark.TV, 2008). Although, video is the primary medium through which Southwark.TV formulates its media projects, the organization also utilizes visual art, music production, and radio broadcast among other forms of media. Furthermore, the various forms of media overlap within individual projects as well as through the use of multi-media platforms such as the Internet. From a festival of film and photography, to talk show series, to educational and training opportunities, to technical and financial provisions, Southwark.TV seeks to “engage and inspire the community” (Southwark.TV Executive Director, 2008). Members include student and youth groups, pensioners, refugee artists, mental health groups and wheelchair users just to name a few. Located in London, a locale marked by a large concentration of difference, Southwark.TV was chosen as an interesting case for study because of diverse social, cultural and economic backgrounds that exist among its many members. Consequently, Southwark.TV presented many opportunities for

examining relationships of inclusion/exclusion within a community media context. Furthermore, as a pioneer in showcasing video productions online, Southwark.TV provided an interesting case to examine how new information technologies impact processes of video production, and more broadly, community media production. The following section will utilize the qualitative data collected from the Southwark.TV case study to examine whether new technologies are enabling marginalized groups greater participation and opportunities for empowerment through community video projects.

#### **4.1: Production as Social Capital**

The Freewheelers Theatre Company, a central partner of Southwark.TV, uses creative production as a means for providing people with physical and/or mental disabilities a venue for individual and collective expression. Freewheelers began as a dance and theatre company, but with the help of Southwark.TV, recently expanded to include video production as one of its primary activities. The company has, thus, invested in its own camera, sound equipment, desktop computer and digital editing suite. The Chief Executive of Freewheelers emphasizes the value video production has brought to Freewheelers when she expresses the widespread interest and enthusiasm members have met with new media additions. According to the Chief Executive, when the cameras were first brought out everyone became really excited at the thought of being able to use them. Furthermore, the Director of the Rockingham Somali Support Group expresses a similar sentiment with regards to a few video collaborations done between members of the support group and the Executive Director of Southwark.TV. For example, many of the youth in the support group were extremely excited to take part in a series of short fictional narratives and have since then expressed interest in wanting to do more video production. In fact, this great interest has prompted the Director of the Rockingham Somali Support Group to apply for funding in order to produce Somali TV, an offshoot project of Southwark.TV.

Due to the star quality of film and television, video production generates a buzz and excitement that increases levels of participation within already established community groups. Furthermore, increasing participation with video production allows for a demystification of mainstream audio-visual production, allowing participants to

become more informed and critical of media processes. This process of demystification is most evident in the animation production practices of Youth Animation Media (YAM). YAM is an organization that engages youth in animation and video production. According to a teacher of YAM, projects like stop-animation media productions take hours to produce thirty-second clips. Consequently, youth learn about the large amount of time and effort needed when producing short animations. Nevertheless, they are always excited to participate because the final product is still received with a certain level of fascination. Consequently, the excitement generated from film and video production incites greater and more frequent levels of participation in creative media projects.

Involvement with Southwark.TV has allowed people to participate in ways they normally would not. Manifestations of participation range from everyday activities such as voicing ones opinions to engaging in media production to delegating a community-wide event. Hoccheimer (2002) iterates:

[Community media] involves the desire and abilities of many people to take power for themselves to speak and to act where none had been legitimated in the past. This is true not only for those who had been politically or economically disenfranchised from the formal systems of power, but also those who traditionally had been socially and culturally silence. It requires not only a restructuring of media systems within states, but also a rethinking of power relationships between people (p. 320).

When a long-time company member of Freewheelers was initially asked by the Executive Director of Southwark.TV to produce her own video project, she declined. Despite the Executive Director's enthusiasm and offered assistance in helping her produce a film she would find personally relevant and interesting, the company member insisted she had no story to tell. As a wheel-chair user, this company member had experienced various forms of social exclusion. Many believe that social exclusion has incredibly negative effects on the psychological well being of an individual. Brants & Frissen (2005) elaborate on the direct effects of social exclusion to the human psyche when they state, "the main deprivation people suffer when in degrading positions of social exclusion is not so much lack of food, money or work, but rather a deprivation of value, meaning and self-respect, which leads to stigmatisation impeding full social acceptance" (p.24). Notably, after participating in several video projects, the company member changed her outlook on video production and pitched the *Transport Story*, a documentary that dealt with the lack



of local transportation providers for wheelchair users. The company member professes that the confidence she gained from working on other video projects helped her not only voice her opinion regarding an issue, but also voice her desire for self-expression. Furthermore, previous participation in video production helped this company member realize that it was within her capabilities to produce a video, something one year ago, she would have never felt possible. Participation in video production provides people faith in themselves: faith in their abilities to articulate their needs and desires, faith in their own abilities, strength and destinies (Hochheimer, 2002 p.326) Consequently, production can play an important role in developing the self-esteem of participants “by holding them responsible for learning from each other and from themselves” (Lourenco, 95).

The confidence that one earns from participating in video production can also translate into participating in other realms of social life. The Southwark Pensioners Action Group produced several short videos with the help of Southwark.TV to express their concerns with various local issues. Many of the Pensioners felt that if it were not for the support and guidance of Southwark.TV, they would not have been able to engage in most of the forums are now engaging in. Southwark.TV not only provided them with the resources to produce short videos, but also the confidence and know-how to use new media tools like the Internet (Southwark.TV Executive Director, 2008). Although most Pensioners still refrain from regular use of the Internet, after accessing their video productions online, they at least were better able to understand the utility and possibilities of this new media.

Engaging with community video production can enable people to participate more widely in their local community. After becoming skilled in video recording, the youth of YAM were regularly commissioned by the local government to document the political proceedings of certain Peckham Council meetings. On the other hand, such a commission made YAM members commissioned employees rather than actual participants of political proceedings. Conversely, a student from Southwark College, took the skills he learned from the classroom and Southwark.TV to document the proceedings of a Brixton Youth Forum. Notably, the student is an active member in the Brixton Road Youth Community Centre (BRYC) where he volunteers as a football coach and holds the position of BRYC council treasurer. A film he is currently making regarding the BRYC forum has enabled

him, as well as other members of BRYC council, to reflect critically on their decision-making processes (Southwark College Student, 2008). Although the student's involvement with video production has allowed him to expand the horizons of his participation at the BRYC, it did not lead to new sites for participation. The student was already a member of the BRYC before he began his classes at Southwark College or his work with Southwark.TV. Thus, can participation in video production truly create politically and socially awakened citizens?

Ultimately, participation in community video production alone constitutes an everyday form of enacted citizenship. Community media, in this sense, are some of the many types of organizations active in the realm of civil society; therefore enabling citizens to be active in one of the many micro-spheres relevant to daily life, to organize different forms of deliberation, and to exert their rights to communicate. Such a right to communicate was evident with the previously addressed Freewheelers company member, who prior to her involvement in video production, felt she had no story worth telling. Consequently, this micro-level of participation allows people to learn and adopt more democratic and civic attitudes, thus strengthening possibilities for macro-participation (Bailey et al., 2008 p.xiii). As Putnam (1995) puts it best, the participants of Southwark.TV are "learning to participate by participating."

#### **4.2: Professionalism & Legitimacy**

Southwark.TV and its partner organizations not only provide equipment to various community groups, but also provide professional expertise on how to use this equipment and produce video projects. Although this expertise is often warranted as necessary, the control and power that a professional instructor might exert on students could have negative repercussions on the goals of the community video project. Most notably, control could subvert the autonomy of community media participants. Protz (1991) articulates the importance for participants to control production process when he states:

Even when the groups are not directly in control of the technical "they nevertheless can retain control and authorship by being fully involved in all phases of decision-making during their generation, production and editing. Videotape then acts as a tool for articulating the perspective of

such groups on the particular issue of priority.... in many instances, the purpose of such tapes is to challenge some existing level of power that has initiated policy or action against the interests of the group. By organizing and articulating its perspective and experiences of the given policy, the group can argue its case for change. (Protz, 36)

Therefore, when professionals are involved in production processes, their role should be minimal so as not to undermine involvement from participants in decision-making processes.

Among several of the Southwark.TV projects, much effort is made to protect participant control in the decision-making process. At YAM, the leading instructor for the video workshops tries to limit her involvement to purely technical detail in hopes to have the youth develop their own narratives and conceptual approaches to projects. For example, when the group began working on a music video, they not only developed the story narrative, but also utilized music they had produced for the soundtrack. Furthermore, similar participant control over the decision-making process is evident at Freewheelers. Since Freewheeler members are often less physically able to get involved in technical practices, the Executive Director of Southwark.TV makes a concerted effort to have all members make most of the structural and content related decisions. For example, each Freewheeler member has their own personal project to work on so they are able to control all decisions regarding plot construction and casting.

Nevertheless, at Freewheelers the instructors usually control technical aspects of production. The instructors are often seen in charge of preserving the conventions of video production to ensure all rules of production like continuity are met. The editing process more than anything becomes a site where instructors often have complete technical control. When conducting a video workshop, the Executive Director of Southwark.TV holds the mouse and walks through the various editing steps with company members while he edits their videos. Consequently, he often determines the final cut of their video, which has a tremendous impact on the overall message of the film. The control the Executive Director exerts is most prevalent in the online showcasing of Freewheelers' video projects. In this case, he is the only one who posts the videos online. Although the Executive Director is adamant that he developed the Southwark.TV website in user-friendly way so that community members can post their projects online, very few members of Freewheelers have felt comfortable to do post videos themselves. Such

technical control has an effect on the power relationships between instructor and participant.

Such shifts in power are most notable at YAM when examining the direct involvement of a certain successful director at the organization. At age twelve, this budding filmmaker was one of the first members to be involved with YAM. Now at age twenty-four he is a coordinator at YAM and mentor for many of its youth members. His strong talents in video production have recently led him to win a five million dollar grant for his upcoming film. Now the director is somewhat of a celebrity at YAM and many youth members often interpret YAM as his project instead of their own. For instance, many of the youth often believe that YAM's equipment belongs to the director and is not available for their own personal projects. The instructor at YAM once had to remind them that the equipment, in fact, belongs to them and encouraged them to take advantage of the resources for their own creative endeavours. This situation illustrates how the youth feel somewhat subordinate to the director and his activities.

On the other hand, the presence of such professionalism can have positive effects. A local and involved music producer points to the appreciation young artists express when they have the opportunity to work side-by-side an industry professional. She emphasizes that such collaboration creates a sense of legitimacy on the part of the young artist. Dunsmore & Lagos (2008) discuss manifestations of this legitimacy when they state, "video production can serve as a validating environment [where] participants speak in their own repertoire of media comprehension and expression" (p.7). Furthermore, the "high-status" society has given to audio-visual communication technology, specifically to film and television, leads participants to feel empowered when using these technologies (Rodriguez; Protz). Using the term Television as part of the name for a community video project has often been a method for legitimizing a project's work. We have seen it with groups like TV Viva and TV Maxambomba who use it to signal their worthiness as a credible alternative to commercial or state owned television stations. Therefore, it is no surprise that Southwark.TV, an online community video-sharing platform, has used the title TV in its name, even though it does not operate officially as a broadcasting channel.

This desire to experience a certain level of professionalism was noted when a community video project facilitator spoke of the screening she once coordinated for a

youth video project. In an attempt to connect the project with the community as well as give it some 'street credibility', the facilitator had arranged to have the film shown outdoors and projected on the facade of a building. To her surprise, many of the youth participants were alarmed at this choice and disappointed that their film was not shown in a cinema theatre. For them the theatre represented a level of legitimacy and professional recognition for their talents and capabilities.

As noted, having one member assert a certain level of power and control, like the instructor, can often lead to a sense of credibility and empowerment for other members. Conversely, it can also lead to a situation of inability and subordination. Ultimately, the relationships between instructor and participant are much more complex than the binary of powerful and powerless; however, a certain amount of attention must be kept to ensure that participants and their activities are not being compromised by technical processes that exist within these community media projects.

### **3.1: Voice of the Voiceless**

The group members of Southwark.TV are very heterogeneous. Although members of Freewheelers, for example, experience a certain physical or mental impairment that prevents them from various levels of inclusion, they also experience different levels of inclusion/exclusion depending on factors like gender and socio-economic background. Southwark.TV seeks to "provide a space for voices in the community that may otherwise go unheard" (Southwark.TV Executive Director, 2008). For example, inherent technological qualities that exist within video production processes have allowed members who were more vulnerable and marginalized in these groups to express themselves in ways they were unable to do so before. For example, a Freewheelers company member possessed an impairment that prevented her from participating in the company's live theatre performances before the introduction of video. This Freewheelers member is deaf and mute and therefore requires the services of an interpreter who signs to enable her communication with a second party. Consequently, she could not operate within the conventions of traditional theatre. With the introduction of video, the Freewheelers member now has a significant presence in live theatrical performances. With the help of video technicians and an interpreter, she now prerecords

her performances, which are then projected during live theatrical events and layered with dialogue or subtitles. Consequently, her performance and expressions are incorporated in live theatrical events and her voice is no longer excluded from this form of expression.

The Southwark.TV online component is also viewed as another technological characteristic inherent to the organization that allows various marginalized voices to be heard. Burgess et al. (2006) state:

Digital storytelling and the Internet are helping [citizens] claim a place in the mediasphere, contributing to their visibility, their sense of engagement in their community and credibility among both policy-makers and their peers. The use of digital storytelling and the Internet works to complement rather than replace existing traditional activities that build civic engagement (p.11).

Conversely, several people argue whether the Southwark.TV website is actually enabling new voices to be heard. Community members outside the organization rarely watch much of the work posted on Southwark.TV. A media studies instructor at Southwark College iterates that although many of his students learn from the videos they produce and post on the Southwark.TV website, they receive no confirmation on whether these videos are being actively watched by the audiences they set to address. Initially, Southwark.TV instructed his students to create several short videos aimed at encouraging community members, who often felt unheard, to speak up by engaging with the website and the various organizational opportunities it presented. Surprisingly, the students received very little feedback- online and offline - from members of the community, and felt that their projects had no substantial value for the greater community.

In addition to the sentiments expressed by the students of Southwark College, behaviours from other partner organization indicate similar thinking. When asked if YAM had continued to post videos on the Southwark.TV website, all coordinator drew a blank. Furthermore, a Freewheelers member also failed to post his production of *Top Wheel*, a quality parody of the show *Top Gear*, on the Southwark.TV website. The Freewheelers creator of this hopeful series expressed his desire to create a regular audience for the show among and beyond the disabled community, but when asked how he will reach this objective, his answers remained very vague. Ultimately, he hoped posting it on the web would help in this initiative, but he posted the show on *Youtube* and refrained from using Southwark.TV as an operative media platform. According to

Sthapitanonda and Thiropantu (2007) communications between people is “the basis for making the voice of the less privileged heard” (p. 153). Unfortunately, the communication that occurs on the Southwark.TV website does not appear to be a two-way communication. Not only is the general public not involved with the website, but the partner organizations themselves are not interacting via the online platform. This lack of inter-partner online communication will be discussed at greater length in the following section.

#### **4.1: The Media that Builds Communities**

Unfortunately, Southwark.TV does not foster relationships between its partner organizations. When asked if they have met or worked with other Southwark.TV partners, all partner organizations I spoke to replied no. Moreover, many of the younger members of YAM were completely unaware of the existence of Southwark.TV. Although Southwark.TV was pertinent to the founding of YAM (the Southwark.TV Executive Director provided the organization with its first camera), relationships between the two organizations seem to have dwindled. Many of the older members of YAM, remember Southwark.TV from the monthly film showings the Executive Director would host at the elephant theatre where YAM and other video production groups in the local community would showcase their work.

In many cases, it would appear that these live events were more effective in creating relationships and developing community ties than the online platform of the Southwark.TV website. Janowitz (1967) expresses the importance of physical locality especially in the urban setting when he states:

If the term “urban community” has any distinctive meaning, it is because it connotes more than the dense aggregate of human settlement. It must imply the special consequences of locality on social organization and cultural values...The urban community, like any social system, encompasses a process of communications and a system of values. It implies sentiments and attachments to a geographical area, no matter how transitory or complex (vii).

Although here Janowitz refers to urban community during the industrial era, several rules still apply in the information age. The effects of a live event as a community-building tool are very evident in *March of the Human Rights Juke Box*, a project coordinated by

the previously mentioned music producer. The project, which initially set out to produce music tracks with various members of the Southwark community was taken to the streets by showcasing a Juke Box in a live march. This event not only united these various artists whose musical productions were played on the Juke Box, but also united the local community and helped them spread their voice as far as Canada.<sup>1</sup> The Executive Director of Southwark.TV stresses the importance of live event to the Southwark.TV project when he lists the three components he felt were pertinent for its success: the website as project showcase; video production and broadcasting components as valuable transferable skills; and live event as community-building tool.

Nevertheless, the web does provide a new site for community-building possibilities that should not be overlooked. The previously mentioned filmmaker from YAM, for example, earned his remarkable grant through his involvement with the *Filmmaka* website, a site that links filmmakers with other filmmakers around the world. Furthermore, many of the youth from YAM have utilized *Youtube* as a venue to showcase their work. Southwark.TV was initially conceived prior to the landing of Youtube and other online video sharing platforms; however its purpose to cater towards expressions within the local community continue to make it a unique website for members of the video production world. Southwark.TV is particularly relevant because it involves members who experience different levels of inclusion/exclusion and are not necessarily able to access websites like *Youtube* for various reasons. For example, members of the Pensioners Action Group or Freewheelers require a more locally oriented site with the support of face-to-face as well as online interaction to carry online production and exchange. Moreover, members who do not have access to a personal home computer also require the organization to supply equipment in order to access any online content. Consequently, online and offline interaction should both be deemed indispensable to Southwark.TV. Howley (2005) expresses the benefits to community media in the 'real' and 'virtual' world when he states:

In the face of the homogenizing influence of national media industries and the encroachment of cultural forms produced and distributed by transnational corporations, community media provide a measure of local

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<sup>1</sup> While in Canada, I spoke with a colleague, who knew of the Juke Box Project March and described it as an important cultural event that happened in London.



cultural autonomy in an increasing privatized, global media environment. Furthermore, as a physical as well as virtual (i.e., electronic commons) community media organizations are one of the few remaining public spaces where community members can gather to debate political issues, to celebrate local cultural heritage, and to join together as a community. In this respect, then, community media are strategic initiatives to counteract a climate of political apathy and social alienation that confounds a sense of belonging in local communities (p.35).

Perhaps one of the main issues to the lack of utilized potential for the Southwark.TV website involves issues of legitimacy. The previously mentioned teacher from Southwark College points to the unappealing aesthetics of the website. He reveals that his students believe this is one of the determining factors that dictate why community members do not utilize the site. Although such a statement is hard to prove within the context of this study, it is evident through these comments that the quality of the website has an impact on how the youth feel about the utility of their work. Thus, the lack of an appealing website can lower the level of pride and self-esteem contributing partners earn through collaboration with Southwark.TV. The Executive Director of Southwark.TV excuses much of the website's 'amateur' appearance when emphasizing his desire to keep the site as user-friendly as possible. According to Haydon, much of the aesthetic is a result of the open access features of the website enabling anyone to post anything at anytime. However, in an effort to make the website as democratic as possible, much of the benefits which could be drawn from the website are lost.

## **5: Conclusion**

Southwark.TV has experienced many setbacks in recent years, most notably a major cutback in government funding. One of the major structural deficiencies of community media is the shortage of funding these projects encounter (Lourenco, 2007 p.94) Consequently, many of the live events that were once integral to the organization have ceased to exist. The lack of live events has severely hindered the amount of interactions partner organizations have with the local community as well as amongst themselves. As mentioned earlier, several members like the youth at YAM are no longer aware of their affiliation with Southwark.TV, greatly hindering the organization's ability

to build community ties. Nevertheless, despite these setbacks, Southwark.TV has created a legacy of community video production in the south borough of London.

The greater impact of this legacy resides in the political realm where processes of citizenship are often overlooked. Too frequently, community media are “dismissed for not having enough political potential to contribute significantly to the construction of democracy” (Rodriguez, 2001 p.22). Usually this dismissal is correlated to the short life cycles they experience, which is generally related to problems of funding. On the other hand, instead of thinking of democracy as an ultimate goal or final state-of-things to reach, “we should look at how democratic and non-democratic forces are being renegotiated constantly, and how citizens’ media can strengthen the former, thus contributing to the – although sometimes ephemeral-swelling of the democratic (Rodriguez, 2001 p.22) Community video media, is thus an opportunity for everyday political expression. It allows for participation and group negotiation; it builds self-esteem and legitimizes identities; it gives a voice to the voiceless and builds community ties. As Bailey et al. (2008) state:

[Community media] is important for daily life, for personal and collective politic, and for our sense of identity and belonging. This sense of belonging takes diverse forms: participation in more formal ‘politics’ as well as in the banality of daily life, for instance, the ability to have one’s voice heard at a Sunday open market. At all those levels alternative media are inclusive of and go beyond the political realm and reach the everyday life of individuals and communities (p.xi).

Community video media ultimately creates a site for enacted citizenship. Community video production allows for cultural recognition and civic engagement. Although developments in ICTs do not necessarily enable greater forms of participation, and in certain cases hinder it; they must also be examined through an enacted approach where interdependencies between human activities and social structures are exposed. Ultimately, one’s ability to utilize ICTs as means of empowerment depends on social structures, such as processes of social inclusion/exclusion that exist within community groups and a wider urban community. Furthermore, social structures like processes of inclusion/exclusion, are also affected by the agent’s capacity to utilize ICTs for empowerment, such as the use of digital video production in the case of Southwark.TV.

The following dissertation utilized the strengths of a case study to examine the processes and relationships that occur during productions of community video. First this paper outlined theories and discourses concerning community, citizenship, marginalization and video production to develop a thorough understanding of community media and its emancipatory possibilities. Afterwards, through the analysis of data collected from in-depth interviews and participant observation, this dissertation outlined the main sites for processes of participation, legitimacy, empowerment and community-building in Southwark.TV. Finally this paper concluded that community video projects can enact forms of citizenship where the emancipatory potentials of digital video are determined by the actions of Southwark.TV community members as well as by the social structures in which they operate.

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