

# SCR RE

FAQs about video activism

by david widjington



# SCREENING THE REVOLUTION

[...]

there will be no pictures of pigs shooting down  
brothers in the instant replay.

[...]

The revolution will not be right back after a message  
about a white tornado, white lightning, or white people.

[...]

the revolution will not be televised, will not be televised,  
will not be televised, will not be televised.

the revolution will be no re-run brothers;  
the revolution will be live.

— Gil Scott-Heron<sup>1</sup>

## what is a video activist and why is that different from being a non-activist videographer?

It's important to begin by defining "activist," which can mean someone who opposes inequities in the world, in his/her community, and who works actively towards a more just society. A video activist is incredulous by nature and is concerned with the popularization of alternate truths that encourage social justice by getting visual information about an issue to an audience beyond the people directly involved. In contrast, a videographer who does not consider herself an activist may make films that do not necessarily advocate for social justice. Social change is not the primary purpose of her work. This separation is not necessary clear, as non-activist videos—whether as documentaries or as works of fiction—can also have a strong impact on the viewer and promote introspection about social issues.

People who characterize themselves as activists are engaged in activism every day. Their activism is not limited to public demonstrations of dissent. Activism is highly political but it is also inherently social and is inescapably

linked to the personal. Social justice is central for the video activist, influencing decisions, relationships, topics of conversation, and the direction of their videos. A self-proclaimed video activist looks through a camera's lens as influenced by her approach to activism. The camera becomes a tool of choice for social change, much like the megaphone, litigation, a can of spray paint, a website, and/or poetry may be among the tools of choice for others.

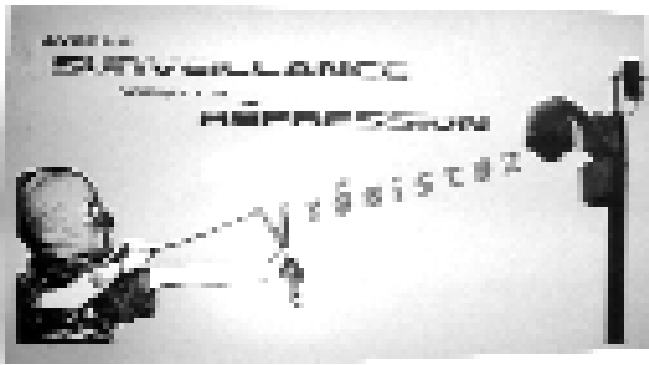
Another important factor that may define a video activist is her relationship with a community of activists. Videographers with reputations as activists are regularly invited by organizers to film non-publicized actions, often receiving little information before the action other than where to meet. Within an action or demonstration, a video activist's role is to document the event with images. The resulting footage can be used by campaign organizers to advance an agenda through the creation of promotional or educational videos. It is equally useful as a debriefing and self-criticism tool for activists seeking to determine the relative success of a campaign or action. For those arrested, the footage can potentially help them formulate a legal defence. It may also help in the identification of police infiltrators masquerading as protesters—caught on-the-fly making an arrest. The images can also provide important historical documentation of a changing society from the perspective of those who are actively attempting to change it, and by providing an alternative to the status quo perspectives most often shown on television.

Despite all the potential uses of a video activist's footage of demonstrations, it cannot be overstated that video activists are not limited to filming demonstrations or interviewing protesters. Any issue can be the topic of an activist's video because mass convergences do not monopolize organized denunciations of an established order. Highly subjective references and deeply personal experiences can equally challenge the policies and perspectives of the status quo. Images of a neighbour being forced into the streets by an inability to pay speculative rent increases, scenes of large swaths of deforested land, or an anecdote of a racist exchange can also denounce unjust situations. A video may deliberately omit status quo points of view because they are sufficiently represented in mainstream media. This subjectivity may also distinguish video activism from traditional documentary journalism, which pretends to be what doesn't exist: objective. Video activists do not fane objectivity, but proudly engage in presenting opinions—marginalized or otherwise—aimed at inspiring public debate and encouraging action to instigate change.

Video activism reaches beyond video making. It also delves into the process of organizing by forming collective structures to assist in the production and distribution of activist videos. Based in Montréal, the *Collectif de vidéastes engagéEs Les Lucioles* (Les Lucioles Video Activist Collective) is one such example. It was formed in the spring of 2002 to provide video footage for *Le centre des médias alternatifs du Québec* (CMAQ - Québec Indymedia), but altered its mandate during its first meeting to produce video for distribution anywhere. Four months after its founding, the collective hosted the first public screening of its works, which quickly evolved into a quasi-monthly event with a consistently-packed house. At each screening, the collective invites an alternative media group to present their medium to the audience in an attempt to promote alternative information and encourage the habit of seeking out multiple sources of information. During intermission, the event becomes a democratic platform, when Les Lucioles offers an amplified soapbox to community organizers with news and announcements to share and the screenings have become convergence spaces for many local and regional activists. Three years into the project, Les Lucioles show videos from other local, regional, and international videographers and have developed an extensive archive of nearly 20 VHS & DVD compilations of each of their premiere screenings.

The strength of such a collective is the diversity in content and form of their videos; a diversity that is unique to autonomous media. Take for example Santiago Bertolino's 2003 video *QU'EST-CE QUE L'OMC...?*<sup>2</sup> (WHAT IS THE WTO...?). In this film, we see footage—recorded by three Les Lucioles members—of the mass arrests during the mini-ministerial WTO meetings and protests in Montréal. Their cameras were recording from both outside





“with surveillance comes repression. resist.”

and inside the police barricades, as observers of the arrest and among those arrested, respectively. The footage from within

the encirclement of riot police, as they sealed off the entire street, was unique because mainstream television cameras recorded only from the outside at a safe distance, as mandated by police.

Just as different activists have diverse priorities, video activists have different approaches to their films. One such example is Joachim Luppens’ 2003 stop motion animation, *ASPHYXIE ALIMENTAIRE*<sup>2</sup> (FOOD ASPHYXIATION), which has vegetables escaping from their Styrofoam and cellophane prison only to return after witnessing the murder of other escaped cellmates by knife wielding hands. *VOL SOCIALEMENT ACCEPTABLE*<sup>2</sup> (SOCIAALLY ACCEPTABLE THEFT), by Julien Boisvert and Stéphane Lahoud, follows a student through a supermarket who steals expensive food for a Christmas dinner she is hosting for her mother and her mother’s girlfriend. This 2003 work of fiction plays poverty versus profits during a season with intense societal pressure for mass consumption. The short video *L’INCONSCIENCE*<sup>2</sup> (UNCONSCIOUSNESS), submitted anonymously to Les Lucioles, portrays a hidden character brushing her teeth in full view of a running tap with the sound of teeth brushing in the background. The viewer is forced to watch as the water pours down the drain for the entire brushing. This short video, which links personal hygiene to water conservation, has the potential of entering a viewer’s personal space every time he/she brushes his/her teeth and may debatably have greater impact on the viewer than the same issue treated in documentary style.

at large protests like the summit of the americas in québec city in 2001, there were hundreds of video cameras recording all aspects of the mass convergence. what has made video such a prolific tool for activists, and why are so many people now using video?

Activists are not the only ones carrying video cameras these days. The police have also discovered the utility, accessibility, and malleability of video.

Surveillance cameras blink at us from in front of television monitors and behind secure walls. They film protesters as a means of intimidation, to gather evidence against them, and to develop their own database of activist portraits for face-recognition technology like they did in the London Borough of Newham on October 14, 1998.<sup>3</sup> Add to this the number of cameras carried by activists themselves, and the answer is yes, there are a lot more cameras at demonstrations these days. The accessibility and relative affordability of video technology—the cameras for capturing images, the computer and software for processing the images, and the DVD burners, video projectors, and websites used to screen and show the videos—have made potential filmmakers out of anyone with the inclination.

Most people know someone with a video camera used for weddings, birthdays, holidays. There are interesting issues or stories that need to be recorded and retold that are not necessarily about celebration. The latent video camera that is sitting in a friend's or a sibling's closet is just begging to be used. Like all technology, as it ages, it becomes cheaper, which may explain why video is increasingly used to communicate dissent.

Video hasn't always been as prevalent as it is today. Nam June Paik was among the first to film with a portable video camera when—in 1965 from inside a taxi—he filmed Pope Paul VI parading through New York City. He later screened his footage in Greenwich Village. Video had the perfect formula to attract growing numbers of videographers: a video camera's portability made it possible for a one-person film crew. And in addition to its manageable size, video cameras were much cheaper than their film predecessors. The images could be instantly played after being recorded without further processing and video cassettes could be reused.

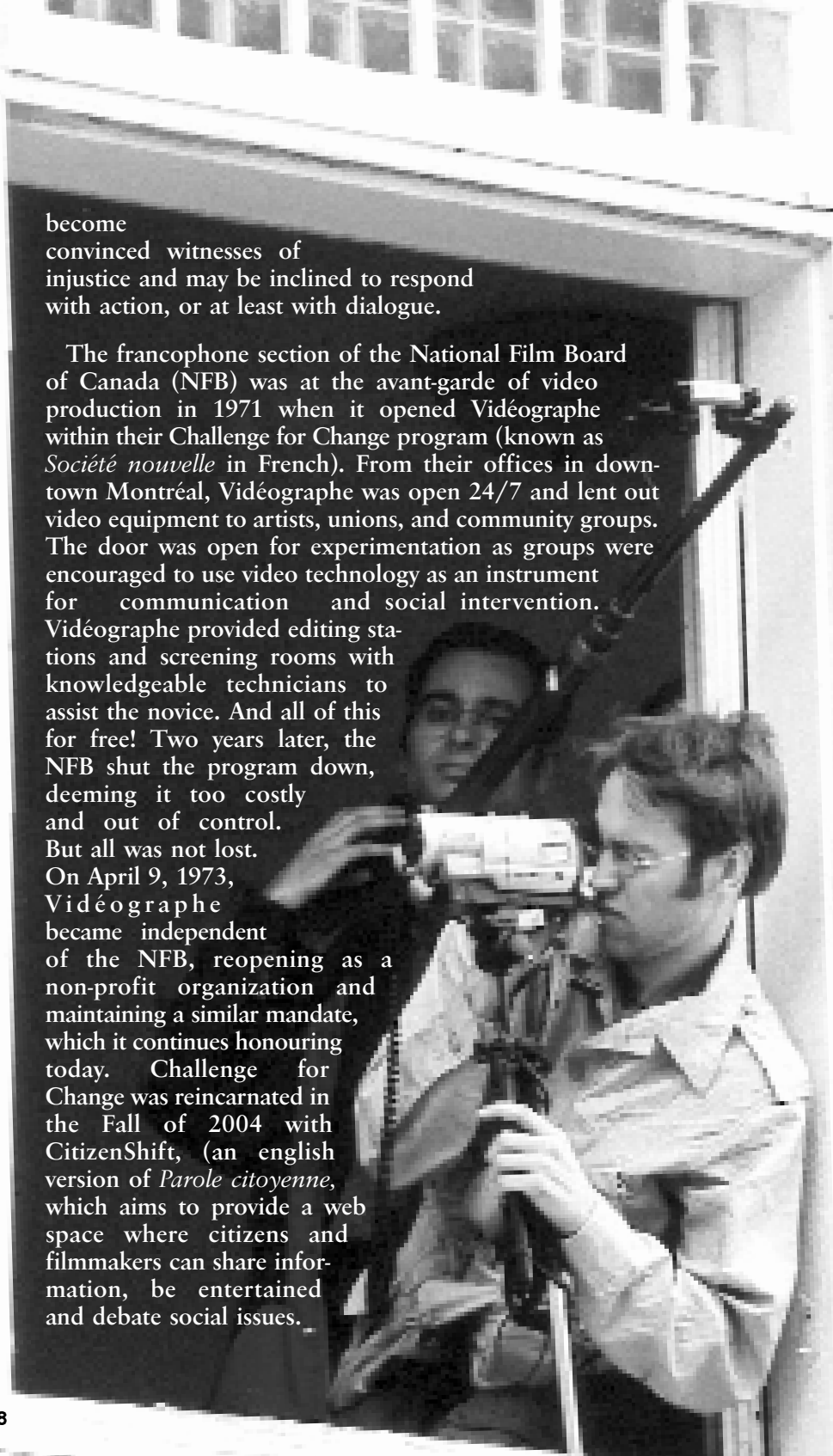
If *AMERICA'S FUNNIEST HOME VIDEOS* marked the death of the home video with its television premiere in 1990, then George Holliday introduced video activism to the mainstream on March 5, 1991, with video footage he took from his apartment balcony in South Central Los Angeles. He captured, and had broadcast, police officers beating Rodney King. There were Scott-Heron's images of "pigs shooting down brothers"<sup>1</sup> replaying over and over again on prime-time television. Holliday's 81 seconds of footage helped transform the personal video camera from an accessory for nostalgia into an effective, prevalent tool for social justice reclamation and human rights advocacy. Visual proof is very influential—viewers

become convinced witnesses of injustice and may be inclined to respond with action, or at least with dialogue.

The francophone section of the National Film Board of Canada (NFB) was at the avant-garde of video production in 1971 when it opened Vidéographe within their Challenge for Change program (known as *Société nouvelle* in French). From their offices in downtown Montréal, Vidéographe was open 24/7 and lent out video equipment to artists, unions, and community groups. The door was open for experimentation as groups were encouraged to use video technology as an instrument for communication and social intervention.

Vidéographe provided editing stations and screening rooms with knowledgeable technicians to assist the novice. And all of this for free! Two years later, the NFB shut the program down, deeming it too costly and out of control.

But all was not lost. On April 9, 1973, Vidéographe became independent of the NFB, reopening as a non-profit organization and maintaining a similar mandate, which it continues honouring today. Challenge for Change was reincarnated in the Fall of 2004 with CitizenShift, (an english version of *Parole citoyenne*, which aims to provide a web space where citizens and filmmakers can share information, be entertained and debate social issues.



the discreet filming of rodney king's beating shows that human rights abuses may be more prevalent when violators feel as though they are untouchable because of their status within an established power structure. is the medium of video good at preventing human rights abuses?

George Holliday's videotaped images—as interpreted by Witness, an international organization that uses video and technology to fight for human rights—gave the beatings impact with an urgency that words alone are unable to provide. His footage did not prevent the incident but was used in a trial against the police officers who assaulted King, which didn't really help the case, considering the acquittal of the police. However, Witness claims to prevent human rights abuses with the use of video cameras.

Witness empowers grassroots movements by providing them with computers, imaging and editing software, satellite phones, and email. The organization provides training to use all of this equipment to communities in distress. This allows them to collect images, which are regularly included in official human rights reports governments give to the United Nations, to counter information presented by the same government officials who commit the human rights abuses. Communities using video equipment can develop a self-protecting voice with their footage but only after the images have been seen by others or included in official reports. There are times when human rights abuses have been prevented by the presence of rolling cameras, which shield the abused with potential visual evidence against the perpetrators who are reluctant to continue abusive behaviour when witnesses are present. And a camera can have the effect of impersonating a witness or group of witnesses. Public opinion can be swayed to support vulnerable people and their communities against oppressive measures by the state, by corporations, and others.

The cameras Witness provides can link local and international communities. Compromising footage gets screened and campaigns develop in support of the abused, beyond the immediate area where the abuse is taking place. But the relationship between the local community and the international presence can be particularly precarious. An international observer with a camera may more easily deter abuse in their presence than a local using the same camera, therefore alternate strategies are needed to empower people—whoever they are—behind the camera. For example, since it's more risky for the human rights abuser to implicate foreigners



than it is to further abuse the locals, international observers may want to flaunt their cameras, openly promoting the fact that they are filming, while locals may need to be more discreet.

This prevention strategy has been successful for Witness and those they support. The Witness-type strategy has also been successful for groups like *Projet Accompagnement Québec-Guatemala* (Québec-Guatemala Accompaniment Project), the International Solidarity Movement, *Comité chrétien pour les droits humains en Amérique latine* (Christian Committee for Human Rights in Latin America), the Iraq Solidarity Project, and others who send international observers on-location with vulnerable communities to prevent abuse with their presence. Cameras can have the same effect—even after international representatives have gone—but only if that footage has an escape route to an audience that is prepared to popularize the abuses and take action to prevent their repetition. So, cameras can prevent abuse, but it seems only after initial abuse has begun.

**is there collaboration on videos that address issues that straddle international boundaries other than acting as witnesses for prevention purposes?**

When filming an issue in one place, a videographer could easily include images from a related issue somewhere else in the world: the treatment of homelessness in Montréal versus a refugee crisis in Darfour, inexpensive goods in local stores and sweatshops in Mexico, or resource extraction by an Alberta corporation in Colombia and human rights abuses near their oil wells. Communication between media activists from different continents is as diverse as the issues they follow. Just as capitalism crosses borders to increase profits for those with the most capital, collectivism promotes global collaboration among video activists who share raw footage, exchange and translate films, and often work as a group on a single film whose topic is not limited to a single location.

Practitioners of video activism are as transnational as the corporations they denounce in their films. When a fight for access to water in one hemisphere is linked with a struggle for shelter in another—with convincing images to back up both claims—video activism thrives. As interaction among activists from different backgrounds, continents, and ethnicities expands, established colonial relationships between the haves and the have-nots have the potential to crumble with irrelevance. So instead of

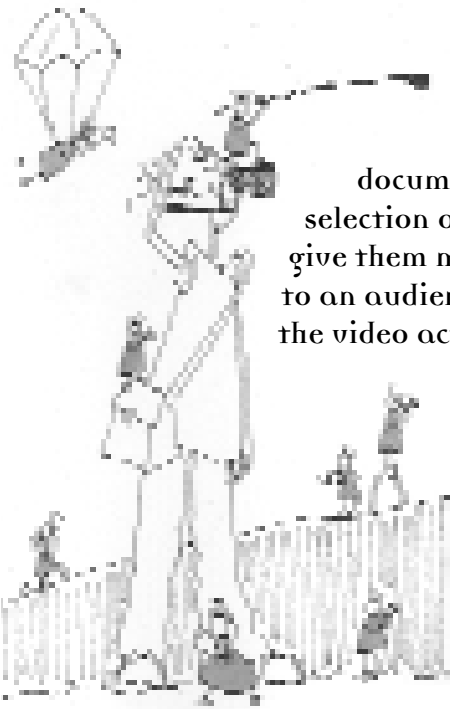
privilege imposing an assistance model of interaction, where aid, knowledge, technology, and expertise flows downward to those labelled as “under-developed,” a model of collaboration is used whereby assistance is horizontal and of multilateral benefit. A videographer from Saskatoon shouldn’t need to go to Chiapas, Mexico, to capture successes of the indigenous struggle to accentuate his video about native self-determination in Saskatchewan. Networks are developing that could allow an unfettered exchange of images for both community’s benefit. Copyleft<sup>4</sup> is de rigueur in video activist circles where information exchange and solidarity outrank capitalist tendencies of ownership.

Big Noise Tactical Media is a “collective of media-makers [from] around the world” who base their collaborations on the plurality of their unified voices. Their 76-minute film, *THE FOURTH WORLD WAR* (2003), was produced by “a global network of independent media and activist groups” in a common effort to oppose war. They create media as an anti-capitalist tactic that has them embedded within resistance movements in provisional collaborations. Big Noise makes a distinction between temporary and permanent structures of resistance. A permanent willingness to develop alliances—and a temporary, malleable capacity for actual collaborations on projects—is their tactic to avoid being criminalized by capitalism’s hold on systems of justice. As projects begin and end, different collaborators enter and leave the common effort with a fluidity that defies detection. Such a collaborative effort created the film *KILOMETER 0 – THE WTO IN CANCÚN* (2003) about protests against the WTO in Mexico, which was an Indymedia co-production with Mexico’s *Acción Informativa en Resistencia* (Informative Action in Resistance), Big Noise Tactical Media, Promedios, Denver Revolution, and *Calle y Media* (Street and Media).

Another example of a transnational alliance was initiated by Angad Bhalla’s 2003 film *UTKAL GO BACK*. The footage of a community in active struggle against global mining interests was taken while visiting Kashipur, India. After showing the film in Montréal, local activists initiated a campaign directly pressuring project shareholder—Alcan—where it is headquartered. Alcan’t in India is a transnational campaign acting on multiple fronts, displaying that collaboration is the nutrition for the collective’s appetite, both within a collective and among them.



“no to the free trade area of the americas.”



documentary filmmaking implies putting a selection of images in some sort of sequence to give them meaning and to transfer that meaning to an audience. what are some of the challenges the video activist faces at this stage in the process of making a video?

It's important to note that an activist video is not by definition a documentary film that tries to capture a slice of reality by following real people through real events. Like those described earlier, there exists a wide range of activist video styles and genres. There are fiction, animation, mock news casts, music-style video clips, sampling, and other genres that effectively impact the audience with a unique approach to an issue or cause. The downfall of video activism would be to stick to the predictable genre of following protesters through a snake march, then capturing the arrests toward the end. This is necessary but it's only a sliver of the potential.

Whatever genre of video the activist chooses, there are indeed challenges in putting it together. One of the bigger challenges during the production of a video is the editing phase because too few people have access to editing stations with powerful enough computers to handle the editing software and the massive file sizes. Even fewer people have ever used editing software.

Video neophytes regularly approach recognized video activists to ask for assistance on a film with footage that has been sitting in a drawer. Before really getting into video, some activists didn't know what to do with all the high-8 or mini-DV cassettes that were accumulating in boxes under their beds. They watched unedited footage by connecting their cameras to a TV or VCR. Video editing capabilities have only recently developed into powerful, affordable software created for the home-based personal computer rather than solely for commercial film production. Take a few zeros off the price, include most industry standard features, and more people will buy it and share it with friends.

Besides the technological challenges, choosing which footage to keep and which to discard is highly subjective, and since the recording is often

improvised at unscripted events, the editor may be left with hours of footage with divergent themes and mixed qualities to choose from. There is occasional pressure from the main actors in a filmed event or action to take the video in a certain direction in line with a campaign strategy or to get the video out quickly to promote the cause at an upcoming scheduled event. Depending on the level of collaboration between videographer and actor, this added pressure can help or hinder the editing process and the quality of the final film.

It is because of these challenging factors that many video activists have organized themselves as collectives to share experience, equipment, tactics, footage, editorial input, and film credits during the production of a video. Two members may film an event, another may film subsequent interviews, while a fourth may digitize and edit the footage, and another may translate and prepare subtitles, then another may export the final film on a DVD and design its cover, while yet another may organize a screening event. The collective organizational structure is common among media activists who share the burden of equipment ownership, and the benefit of expertise.

**short of taking formal courses in video production and post-production, how have video activists democratized the production of videos to produce the high quality films we are getting used to seeing?**

On any one website or at any single night of screenings there is a gamut of film quality. And quality does not refer to the subject or to the approach, but rather to the comprehensibility of the subject, to the camera skills in the footage, to the sound quality of the recordings, to the footage selection made by the editor, and to the effects and transitions of those images in the final film. One of the challenges for the media activist, whether in audio, text, or video, is to develop a pool of creators who are familiar with the technology, have access to it, and are prepared to put in the time needed to develop a story and follow it through to a conclusion.

A quick scan of activist organizing will show a lot of activity going on within a collective structure, where the members take the time to discuss issues, make decisions by consensus, share skills and responsibilities, and take collective credit for their successes. It is within this structure that skills are most often transferred from one activist videographer to another. The mentor-apprentice relationship is often informal and the

teaching/learning that takes place is bi- or multi-lateral. When a common objective binds the collective to a series of shared tasks, both learning and teaching embellish the landscape. When a collective collaborates with others in a coalition, skills are shared beyond the initial group.

There have also been considerable efforts to formally teach videography skills to others. Vidéographe is still actively training people in the community to use video equipment, although they no longer do so for free. Other recent initiatives have introduced marginalized people to video and trained them with skills to produce their own independent videos. In November 2001, *Télé sans frontières* (TV Without Borders) was initiated to provide training to young people—with space reserved for street or marginalized youth—to learn to produce their own videos, which are later screened on the organization's website and on Télé-Québec, the provincial public television station.

The francophone section of the National Film Board continues to play a role in the development of independent filmmakers. In June 2004, it supported the brainchild of filmmaker Manon Barbeau, who sought to provide a creative outlet for indigenous youth in Québec via an itinerant production suite called the Wapikoni Mobile (Wapmobile). The 34-foot RV had enough space to receive 12 creative producers at once and included the latest equipment to film, edit, and screen the finished videos produced by native youth from the Atikamekw and Algonquin Nations. The Wapmobile returned to Montréal in November of that year and transformed itself into *Vidéo Paradiso* for several weeks. It was parked in Square Viger (a popular hangout for homeless youth) to offer video training for any street youth interested in taking the challenge. They later drove to Québec City to repeat the process. By December, *Vidéo Paradiso* had an 81-minute compilation of video shorts. Wapmobile's federally-funded equipment was passed on again in collaboration with *Dans La Rue* (In The Street)—a street youth support centre—by lending its equipment to support an integration program where homeless youth are guided through a steep learning curve of expression through video.

Montréal seems to be a hotbed of video activity but it is certainly not the only place where videographers are sharing their skills. In Chicago, Street Level Youth Media is a non-profit organization that puts the latest video technology into the hands of urban youth to produce a quarterly

30-minute interactive TV program. The show, called *LIFEWIRE*, airs on a Chicago public access cable TV and involves about one thousand youth per year in Street Level's programs, which go beyond video training.

In addition to these, and other, training programs, one can find activist handbooks and 'zines developed by video activist collectives to initiate the beginner.<sup>5</sup>

**AN IMPORTANT MEDIA-RELATED ISSUE IS ACCESS—ACCESS FOR independent media producers to broadcasting, print, or screening opportunities, and access for media consumers to independently-produced information. what's the use of making videos if no one will be able to see them?**

Taking footage with a video camera is relatively easy. Editing the footage is somewhat more difficult because of the technology issues mentioned earlier. Screening or broadcasting to an audience adds new challenges to the equation. The absence of permanent distribution venues—whether on TV, at movie theatres, or in film rental outlets—has forced activists to improvise with a diversity of tactics for getting their videos to an audience. The most prolific spaces for viewing the work of video activists is certainly the internet, either directly from video collective websites, from Indymedia sites that invite autonomous submissions of videos, or from other sites that promote video production and include activist films in their repertoire. Too many sites (even activist ones) force potential viewers to buy their films, without the option of viewing them online or downloading them for free. This may be due to video's large file size and space limitations on the servers used to host their websites. It may also be explained by a historical and cultural bias within capitalist systems that is difficult to shed, where one is expected to (at least) recuperate one's costs. Other reasons include fundraising efforts to subsidize court costs for activists arrested within the context of a video, for financing further video productions, or to help acquire equipment to continue the practice. This is understandable but if video activists are concerned with the popularization of alternate truths, efforts must be made to get the videos seen by as many viewers as possible. If free distribution is required to reach a particular audience, then free access should be provided.

Video networks have developed on the web as distribution hubs for activist videos, which are sold, downloaded, and viewed online. The Video Activist Network is probably the most popular site to view and buy videos

from activists around the world. The website includes links to other videographers and activists, and how-to manuals. Indymedia's NEWSREAL is another source for prolific web distribution, as is its cousin, EUROPEAN NEWSREAL. Other than internet streaming, creative initiatives and collaborations have emerged to get independent/alternative video images to a receptive audience.

The Toronto Video Activist Collective (TVAC), which has been around since 1999 to, in their words, "shamelessly promote social and environmental justice issues through the production and distribution of activist videos."<sup>6</sup> They sporadically hold screenings and distribute VIDEO ACTIVE compilations in select retailers in Toronto. TVAC has distributed its work in collaboration with Satan McNuggit Popular Arts (SMPA), which was established to "actively support initiatives to [...] replace corporate and statist models of media production."<sup>7</sup> SMPA may be found at alternative book, 'zine, and music fairs where they sell their wares directly to the public.

*Le Rézo*, a network of alternative screening venues (in cabarets, bars, cafés) throughout Québec, was created to bypass corporate theatre chains' inaccessibility to independent film productions. They screen a rotating selection of films, scheduled months ahead of time and promoted via internet networks and through supporters living in the areas where screenings are held.

Les Lucioles have developed a modest distribution network of supporters that extends beyond those who attend their regular screenings. They established a subscription program with college groups, student unions, teachers, and NGOs, by accepting donations in exchange for a selection of their compilations. Their videos are also screened at fundraising parties, conferences, festivals, and ad-hoc events, often organized by people with a stake in one of their films.

The growing popularity and number of issues-inspired videos being produced and needing audiences, will only encourage more initiatives to get dissenting images to people who want to see them, to those who don't, and, more importantly, against the wishes of those who would prefer the images to stay out of sight. Based on the volume of activist videos being made by a diversity of producers, on the high quality of their productions, and on the popularity of screenings, there is reason to be optimistic.

has television become the vaulted bastion of the corporate elite or is there room in for independent, even dissenting, voices on tv?

Community television seems to be in an uphill battle in Canada. In 1997, the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) devised Bill PN 1997-25, effectively allowing cable companies to provide public access TV channels at the cable company's discretion and on their own terms. According to Star Ray TV, a community television station that has been trying to get a low-power broadcast license since 1999, "the result of this policy has led to much frustration for local and independent producers who seek public access to their local 'community channel.' Today the vast majority of cable companies use these channels as little more than promotional vehicles to sell their other services, and are anything but accessible to the general public."<sup>8</sup> As cable companies centralize their production facilities, they close community production studios, effectively removing the community from the production.

A more recent CRTC notice (2002-61) officially recognizes the autonomous community TV station model, which exists, for the moment, only in Québec. The notice guarantees a minimum of 30% public access programming—produced by community stations and broadcast by cable distributors—making it virtually impossible for cable distributors to ignore content provided by community stations located within their network.

The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), as a public broadcaster representing the national community, should also open its studios to a percentage of content, produced by people who are not staffed by the broadcaster, but who come from the community as volunteers or are otherwise paid by the broadcaster for content provided. CBC producers have, in the past, disallowed video activists to provide their own images to represent themselves—to avoid biased reporting. This is probably more representative of a producer's tactic for self-preservation, rather than an attempt to maintain broadcasting integrity. As the ratio of advertising increases on CBC television, it seems unlikely that alternative, confrontational content will increase with it, although a program like ZEDTV, which invites autonomous submissions via the web, have introduced a breach in CBC's methods for acquiring content. This breach needs to be ripped open to allow dissenting voices to take a greater portion of the public airwaves



what do you see on the horizon for video as a source of autonomous media? is the activist video, like the home video, already dead?

What lies ahead for video production will follow what has already happened with print publishing. Small press publishing has become an important source for some very unique and high quality literature that is taken seriously by authors and readers. The books coming from small publishers are often better-designed, unique objects that are increasingly supported by independent booksellers.

When desktop publishing became the norm, anyone with a computer and the typesetting software could publish a book and print as many copies as a budget could afford. Video production has reached the desktop, and now it's taking off. So expect a lot more video productions, more unique ways of showing them to an audience, and more support from indy video retailers whose customers will increasingly ask for independent/alternative productions. And with activism and dissent on the rise, expect to see increasing numbers of activist videos on neighbourhood walls, on café screens, and on festival schedules. Just as innumerable photocopied 'zines are flogged and traded, now-standard DVD burners are multiplying copies of activist videos for easy hand-to-hand distribution.

But are there enough video (media) activists out there? The debate continues as to whether too much information will drown the consumer. Information, disinformation, misinformation, propaganda, and all other forms of knowledge transfer should not be discouraged. Audiences need to develop instincts to seek out many sources of information—not just what they agree with—from all types of media, not simply the medium that gets to them first. Media activists who create information and pass it along to others, need to promote the multiplicity of sources to their audiences and to others who passively receive information from monolithic corporate spindoctors masquerading as news providers.

The revolution—in whichever form it assumes—is indeed being screened. Unedited footage is being shared by producers who have only met through email. Collaborative projects are ongoing between community workers, social justice promoters, media activists, and event organizers, creating networks that make it easier for videographers to film, edit, and

screen their works. As the proliferation of information from community groups around the world is more easily shared and accessed, divergent struggles are being linked. Perspectives within activist videos are widening, even when local issues are the focus, making them more interesting and more relevant in a globalized world. More videos are being seen by larger audiences who expand their knowledge base to better defend and debate issues of concern. Permanent production and viewing alternatives are enduring in full support of the ad-hoc initiatives that preceded them.

If video activists continue to experiment with video, the medium, as a tool for dissenting voices, will survive. As long as the growing global community of social-equity advocates persist with the struggle for justice, and video activists capture and share their enthusiasm, the medium will prosper. This is the future of video activism.



**NO MORE  
SMOG  
IN SANTIAGO**

## notes

<sup>1</sup> These lyrics are excerpted from the introduction “The Revolution Will Not be Televised,” in Scott-Heron, Gil. (1970). *Small Talk at 125th & Lenox*. New York: World Publishing.

<sup>2</sup> These are videos that were either produced by Les Lucioles or were shown during their premiere screenings and included on one of their compilations.

<sup>3</sup> Newham, England has 140 CCTV cameras and 11 mobile radio units that disregard the Data Protection Act. These cameras capture images for the Mandrake Face Recognition System. The information was taken at: <http://www.spy.org.uk>. More about British video surveillance (with aprox 1.5 million recording cameras, a 1 camera : 50 people ratio). Published online at: <http://www.notbored.org/8june01.html> [accessed March 23, 2005].

<sup>4</sup> Please see page 4 of this book for Cumulus Press’ definition of copyleft as it refers to this particular volume.

<sup>5</sup> A few titles are: *Guerrilla Video Primer* by the Cascadia Media Collective; *Video Activist Handbook* by Undercurrents; Paper Tiger TV’s *How-To Resources to Video Activists*; GNN’s *How To Shoot a Guerrilla Video*; I-Contact’s *Video Activist Survival Kit*; the *Human Rights Witnessing Training Manual* by Witness; and *Le petit guide pratique (The Little Practical Guide)*, by Les Lucioles.

<sup>6</sup> Taken from TVAC’s Background History. Published online at: <http://www.tvac.ca/about/history.html> [accessed April 1, 2005].

<sup>7</sup> Taken directly from their manifesto. Published online at: <http://www.satanmacnuggit.com/manifesto.htm> [accessed April 1, 2005].

<sup>8</sup> From a press release dated, October 15, 2002, *CRTC Threatens Community TV Operator With Criminal Charges*. Published online at: <http://www.srtv.on.ca/press10.html> [accessed April 1, 2005].

## web resources

Alcan't in India: [www.saanet.org/alcant](http://www.saanet.org/alcant)  
Big Noise Tactical Media: [www.bignoisefilms.com](http://www.bignoisefilms.com)  
Calle y Media collective: [www.calleymedia.org](http://www.calleymedia.org)  
CitizenShift: [citizen.nfb.ca](http://citizen.nfb.ca)  
Denver Revolution: [deproduction.org](http://deproduction.org)  
European NewsReal: [newsreal.indymedia.de](http://newsreal.indymedia.de)  
Guerrilla News Network: [www.guerrillanews.com](http://www.guerrillanews.com) or [www.gnn.tv](http://www.gnn.tv)  
I-Contact: [www.videonetwork.org](http://www.videonetwork.org)  
Indymedia Québec: [www.cmaq.net](http://www.cmaq.net)  
Indymedia's Newsreal: [newsreal.indymedia.org](http://newsreal.indymedia.org)  
Informative Action for Resistance: [kloakas.com/aire](http://kloakas.com/aire)  
International Solidarity Movement: [www.palsolidarity.org](http://www.palsolidarity.org)  
In the Street: [www.danslarue.org](http://www.danslarue.org)  
Le Rézo: [www.cocagne.org/FCCV](http://www.cocagne.org/FCCV)  
Les Lucioles Video Activist Collective: [www.leslucioles.org](http://www.leslucioles.org)  
National Film Board of Canada: [www.nfb.ca](http://www.nfb.ca)  
Paper Tiger TV: [www.papertiger.org](http://www.papertiger.org)  
Parole citoyenne: [citoyen.onf.ca](http://citoyen.onf.ca)  
Promedios: [promedios.org](http://promedios.org)  
Québec Alternative Media Network: [www.reseaumedia.info](http://www.reseaumedia.info)  
Québec-Guatemala Accompaniment Project: [www.paqg.org](http://www.paqg.org)  
Québec Public Interest Research Group: [ssmu.mcgill.ca/qpirg](http://ssmu.mcgill.ca/qpirg)  
Satan McNuggit Popular Arts: [www.satanmacnuggit.com](http://www.satanmacnuggit.com)  
Star Ray TV: [www.srtv.on.ca](http://www.srtv.on.ca)  
Street Level Youth Media: [streetlevel.iit.edu](http://streetlevel.iit.edu)  
Television Without Borders: [www.telesansfrontieres.com](http://www.telesansfrontieres.com)  
Toronto Video Activist Collective: [www.tvac.org](http://www.tvac.org)  
Undercurrents: [www.undercurrents.org](http://www.undercurrents.org)  
Video Activist Network: [www.videoactivism.org](http://www.videoactivism.org)  
Vidéographe: [www.videographe.qc.ca](http://www.videographe.qc.ca)  
Wapikoni Mobile: [www.onf.ca/wapikonimobile](http://www.onf.ca/wapikonimobile)  
Witness: [www.witness.org](http://www.witness.org)  
Working TV: [www.workingtv.com](http://www.workingtv.com)