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From: David Barras [dave@barras.demon.co.uk]
Sent: 20 September 2004 16:06
To: info
Subject: Film & Moving Image Education[Scanned]

Dear Cultural Commission,

Please find below a series of responses to the headings as asked for recently by James Boyle. Please be aware that I am writing solely from the perspective of film and moving image and that I am currently engaged in work which involves this field (as I have been for the last 11 years). I shall keep my points short and to the point but would be happy to expand upon any of them in future correspondence.

Education

It is imperative that media literacy is taken seriously. We live in a visual culture and yet we do not teach our young people the language of our culture. Young people are bombarded by media on a daily basis - adverts, TV, video games, cinema, DVD's etc. More young people experience this media than read books. Yet we place great importance on literature, English language, interpretation and creative writing and almost none on media. The majority of the population has not learned the grammar and language of new media and is unlikely to have had the opportunity to author any themselves. These core elements must be built into the curriculum. And it is not simply a case of fitting it in. It needs to be a mandatory subject for all, studied from Primary level on.

In this way, we will develop a new generation who are linguistically skilled in new as well as old media.

The Institutional Infrastructure

There are any number of small, medium and large organisations out there doing good work in the cultural sector. They often attempt to organise themselves. In my sector alone there are various disparate groupings of similar organisations, none of which agree with each other although all work in a narrow sector of the cultural marketplace.

Firstly, it should be said that money is not always the answer. A lot of cultural debate in Scotland seems to revolve around issues of funding. This is unfortunate and dissolves the other arguments which we in the cultural sector must strive to win. People should have the opportunity to express themselves in cultural terms. Organisations and individual artists can help people achieve this and each large arts institution whether it be Scottish Opera or Scottish Screen should be impacting on local communities in Scotland through schools programmes and community outreach. These things happen already but one of the major problems is continuing that contact once said project/workshop is over. In the context of film making, Sweden has a number of film making centres (I believe 17 in total) spread throughout the country which allow citizens access to resources and personnel. We have started this process with the Angus Digital Media Centre. Hopefully, the first of many such centres throughout Scotland, which can start to redress the central belt bias towards projects of this nature.

The Delivery of Services and Access to Them

This is a similar argument to the heading above. An ideal is that artists and arts organisations deliver cultural services to the population at large. Arts Centres like the new development of the Eastgate in Peebles, where the local community can experience theatre, film, arts and crafts seem to be the logical way forward for small communities outwith the major population areas. Encouraging local artists to show work as well as to attract the best of all the other arts. These venues can forge a community link

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between culture and the local populace and help bring young and old together in one space to experience culture in a venue which is exclusively for no one generation.

Marketing & Promotion

Mainstream arts and culture has money behind it already. The culture we should be promoting is that which would find it hard to be seen otherwise. This doesn't mean propping up artists whose work will never break through the mainstream for the sake of it, merely helping that artists work be seen and appreciated by the audience that does exist for it.

Encouraging Creativity

We are all creative. It is a fundamental part of being human. Our culture has never been good at nurturing creativity. It's seen as a bad career choice by many (parents, career's officers) and young people especially are often dissuaded from taking part in creative enterprises lest their academic career suffer. From school onwards we should realise that creativity is just as valid a skill to relish as the ability to do algebra. And for those who do not see it as a career path, we should still encourage creative outlets as part of a healthy, balanced lifestyle. With the advent of digital technology, we can all be photographers, musicians, movie makers, artists etc. We should not forget the vast creative mass which is unseen below the waterline. The internet is one place people can release their creativity and it has created a new gallery and marketplace for the arts and culture.

Being creative helps in all areas of life and should be actively encouraged in schools, local communities and the workplace.

We are getting it right sometimes but there are a lot of people out there who have been failed by the systems we have in place at the moment.

Main Issues in Film Making with Young People

I work for an organisation called Strange Boat. We specialise in working with young people in moving image education. In real terms, we deliver workshops and film projects across Scotland to young people of all ages. We also engage in other aspects of film, TV and video production on a fairly low level. Funding is on a project by project basis and is constantly an issue. However, we are surviving and what is more important is the issue of sustainability for the young people whom we work with. The nature of the sector is that we are 'parachuted' in to run a workshop or a project often with no follow up. The young people produce a film and that's it. It's difficult for them to then progress if film is something they are interested in. This is where a Scotland wide network of digital media centres would bridge a gap. We are not the only organisation to find this. There are several organisations within our sector who work in a similar way which means there are hundreds of young people interested in taking their film making skills further but who have no opportunity once the project is over. This urgently needs to be addressed and in some ways stems from the fact that schools do not have a dept to deal with media as a subject therefore can give no advice or practical follow up to students.

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