Chapter FOUR, *Photography and the community*
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This chapter attempts to define ideas of community along socialist principles, advocating the importance of participation and a democratic voice. SB discusses systemic privilege and the marginalisation of community arts and its inherent social value. Photography and other mediums can be used with skilled community workers to facilitate self-determination and political awareness by ‘reading’ and ‘telling’ meaning.

Communities used photography and photo-murals to represent issues of re-development

p.135 “The traditional socialist belief that people should be free to group together to meet their collective needs, forms the basis of one idea about community.”

“in opposition to an increasingly centralised state purporting to satisfy social needs whilst removing the possibility of acting for ourselves.”
The state must never become a substitute for personal responsibility or private initiative. A community is an active process, constantly changing comprised of indiv.s that must not be ignored. However this premise of the larger social grouping is premised on the belief in the productive potential of collective activity, activity which contains the seeds for social change, coming together and acting out shared beliefs "The characteristics of proximity, class and so on are significant, but they are not enough on their own to create a community of commitment."

Community photography = self-determination. Relationship between our experience of the world, comprehend it, act within it, then we need to understand how the world is articulated to us and whose interests are served by controlling the various sites where meaning/value are produced - the law, education, media, religion, and so on.

Coercion of identification with ideology

"What many members workers active in this sphere advocate is that all members of a society should be able to participate in the process of social order, and that noone should be disenfranchised from this basic right. This might be termed democracy."

voice becoming truncated
speak for ourselves, informed at an indiv level, identify at a social level

1981 1% wealthy owned 23% of assets, poorest 50% owned 6%

those who control the means of prod are encouraged to develop wealth and political purchase at the expense of the workforce

"We exist in a situation where we need to buy the chance to ‘speak’, to be heard, and for the majority there is only minimal public access to the arena." Systemic privilege. Marx: ‘the class which controls material production controls mental production.’ - set of values that control the status quo, how we relate and ‘speak’ ourselves within it.
society is marketised privileging the economic as standard of value, including cultural defined by the market and ideological regime. Some art forms have greater currency, eg. fine arts; painting, sculpture, opera, literature and dance. Others such as street theatre, film, photography, poetry, performance arts become synonymous with market value rather than social value.

p.138 people participating in the production of ideas and meaning, ‘community arts’ often ghettoised into a bureaucratically controlled box; labelled as separate... commArts regarded as an approach, bringing together cultural workers and the community, involving the transferring of skills from worker to community “The intention of the work ranges from the development of personal expression and the acquisition of technical and aesthetic skills to the development of social and political sensibilities within the community.” Participation is a key concept. In terms of health, education, legislation, culture we are required to ‘consume’ centralised and autonomous services. locked into conceiving the arts as a commodity... serving the needs of a leisured society

p.139 There are alternatives, breaking down the barrier between artists and audience with involvement. The stress on the ‘appreciation’ of the arts and its implications of elitism and genius effectively remove the poss. of a majority becoming creative “Traditionally, the Eurocentric, patriarchal and commodity based philosophy of the arts in this country, which always privileges the product over the process, generates practices and objects which are elitist, racist and sexist.” The more liberal see community arts see them as a kindergarten, as a step towards an appreciation of real arts. Some see them as deviant and subversive. It might be termed support or appropriation.

p.140 community photography and subsidised photography is “due to workers in the field painstakingly educating the authorities to recognise the need and ‘value’ of these practices.” 1976, HalfMoon Photography Workshop, Camerawork magazine. to develop skills and contributing through photography towards social change. constructing archives of the present and present an alternative history and begin a process of independence from the monopoly of the industry.
At the same time they collaborated with local groups and became refined and qualified through a process of debate amongst the workers, the communities and, occasionally, the funding bodies.

Largest project in this country in terms of funding it receives.

The photographer’s relation to community activities began in late 1960s and early 1970s.

“It was only gradually that the image was acknowledged as a site for creative, social and analytical production in these community ventures.”

“A capitalist society requires a culture based on images. It needs to furnish vast amounts of entertainment in order to stimulate buying and anaesthetise the injuries of class, race and sex.”

Critiques the forms of communication and persuasion controlled by the establishment and its reluctance to ‘tell’ us anything, whilst continuing to explore alternative uses of photography and other language forms to enable us to ‘tell’ our world ourselves

Community encouraged to develop a visual literacy. Ideal situation: those who may not previously had an opportunity or desire to think through alternative methods of constructive meanings with images are presented with a choice. This choice can be acted out, with access to the means of production, guided by a technically competent and committed workforce, and the results discussed in relation to the intention and an audience’s role in ‘reading’.

How to escape the oppressive coercion of a cultural hegemony that fixes the cultural agenda. “As long as those engaged in the process are clear from what position the critique is being presented then there is an opportunity for critical analysis and understanding.”

Docklands Community Poster Project
The skills which are necessary to community projects using photography are not only visual ones - the production of the image may be only part of the process, which may involve collective debate and authorship (not easy), research and writing, design and layout processes, organisation and campaigning, and always, a consideration of the audience and how they will be able to inter-relate with the work.
An example of where policy gets created and adapted during the working process where process may be used to produce racist, sexist or commercial images.

“The major difficulty is that of effectively being employed by the state whilst working to question or undermine it.” Accountability, answering sponsors and consumers, voice in determining the running of the project

(1984) Federation for Community Photography

“the photographic practices which fall under the heading of ‘community photography’ create one of the sites of a collective and democratic cultural process - one which can help achieve the goal of self-determination and social emancipation for the communities of the present and of the future.”