



WOMEN and new TECHNOLOGY

By Catherine Russo

Telemanita

is a center dedicated to training women in the use of electronic technologies.

Since 1992, more than 40 women have been trained in video production. The courses offered are: basic video production, editing, sound, and lighting.

Our courses include media literacy education with a gender perspective. Our goal is to encourage women to develop new ways of seeing the images they consume and then to think about new ways of producing images that empower women.

We analyse the communications industries and examine their biases. In 1995, we designed a ten-day workshop for 18 women. The first days were spent in deconstructing media images and analysing their patriarchal content. For the remainder of the workshop, women wrote scripts, including documentary, drama, and ex-

perimental pieces and produced a video.

Groups that have produced videos at Telemanita include: Madre Tierra—Guatemalan women refugees from Las Chavas; a young girls' gang from Mexico City, Sipam; a women's health centre in Morelos that runs a recycling centre; students from the University of San Luis Potosi and Las Reinas; and a group of older women who run workshops on women and aging.

We also produce videos for other groups. We produced a video for the sixth and seventh Latin American Feminist Conferences and another for the fourth Lesbian Feminist conference in Mexico.

CATALOGUE ON WOMEN'S WORK

Over the past two years, we have trained ourselves to use the Internet. This year, we began training other women, too. We produce an electronic bulletin called 'Video Red Mujeres,' which is sent over the Internet to 35 groups involved in women

and communications projects. This bulletin is produced in Spanish and English and open to others wishing to receive information about new video productions, new technology, and other news affecting women producers.

The goal is to share information, which is hard to come by, especially in Latin America. One of our goals is to develop this bulletin into a conference. We are dedicating our services to organise, translate, and distribute the bulletin. It includes the responses we have received from members, as well as information we have come across that seems useful.

We feel that a conference of this sort may just flounder without a group assuming responsibility for some time. Many fine videos are produced and sparsely distributed. In addition to disseminating this information via the bulletin, we are presently producing our first catalogue of video productions by women in Latin America. We highly recommend the productions included in this catalogue to groups who need educational videos. The themes include domestic violence, pre-natal care, women and AIDS, environmental issues, women and religion, sexual preference, sexuality, and others. We have produced three women's video festivals in Mexico City and sent video festival packages to groups in other parts of Mexico and Latin America.

BETTER TRAINING WITHOUT MEN

It is our experience that women learn better in groups without men. They are not as afraid to appear stupid and ask more questions. They more eagerly pick up the equipment

without deferring to the men in the group. Women have been taught to be intimidated by technology. We have created our own production manual where we break down the terminologies and concepts of production.

In the very first class, we pass around the camera and let women shoot whatever they like. As the classes progress, they can view their progress from that very first shoot. The classes include anywhere from five to ten women and run over three weekends for a total of six days.

A VERY IMPORTANT PART OF THE INTERNET TRAINING IS TO HAVE A VERY KNOWLEDGEABLE AND PATIENT TEACHER. IT IS ONE THING TO KNOW THE INFORMATION AND ANOTHER TO BE ABLE TO PASS IT ON.

It is our experience that women in Mexico and Central America most often need additional one-on-one training sessions after the workshops. We encourage these women to continue working with us and to produce their own piece as soon as possible. Otherwise, time passes and the task seems overwhelming.

We are here to help develop a script, make a production plan, look for funding, and help with the actual shooting and editing. Most women who come to our courses need all these types of assistance. They also need access to equipment.

Our Internet training began last year. For a while, it was difficult to work with "La Neta" and we still have problems because of the poor tele-

phone service available. We have to pay for long distance calls to Mexico because that is the closest node and this has made it difficult to really investigate with Netscape.

Many women's groups in Latin America do not use Internet services or, if they do, only one woman in the group knows how to use it. Phone lines are still very expensive and so it is hard to dedicate the office line to women learning and using the Internet.

A very important part of the Internet training is to have a very knowledgeable and patient teacher. We ourselves have had the experience of learning from people who were also learning from people who were also learning and it was frustrating to feel we were wasting time through lack of basic knowledge. Someone who knows how to *teach* is also important. It is one thing to know the information and another to be able to pass it on. Internet training for women must be consistent. The women must be able to practice regularly so as not to forget the skill.

Finally, we have designed and are presently giving a media literacy course for fifth and sixth graders. The concept of media literacy does not exist here and we have not been able to define it in a few words in Spanish. We are looking for media literacy material that is easy to use or to translate. We would also like to hear of experiences in training young students as well as adults. We would also love to share our experiences.

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