

Table of Contents

Peer Pressure: V2V meets P2P 1

Peer Pressure: V2V meets P2P

ByJJ King

Peer-to-peer networks may have given media owners a nasty (and much bemoaned) headache, but they've done little to address the crucial issue of media independence. Fileshare systems, which enable massive, distributed, networked sharing activity, offer unrivalled opportunities for short circuiting the intellectual property regimes that control the media industry. But as long as the files that are shared over such structures are the heavily promoted, merchandised and overcoded properties of Hollywood and the music industry, how radical can our 'revolutionary' fileshare economies really be?

Step up V2V, a filesharing syndicate that came out of the first D-A-S-H workshops held in Weimar, Germany, in May 2003. V2V aims to build an open publishing framework for the distribution and syndication of independent, political and left-field video material across the current filesharing domains. The initiative, based on key assured servers and RSS (Rich Site Summary) feeds, would allow for sharing across many different infrastructures – including Gnutella, Edonkey and the recently heralded BitTorrent. By providing a stable backbone for the syndicate's files, as well as hash keys to identify media, V2V neatly sidesteps the central problems of P2P: unreliability, unavailability and deliberate spamming from media conglomerates wanting fileshare out of the way altogether.

The group behind V2V, including members of video collectives and media activists from New York, Rome, London, Berlin and Munich, see their activities as part of the ongoing attempt to get cinema to catch up with the technology surrounding it. They're not talking about special effects. The V2V-ers see their syndication system as 'distribution for the digital multitudes': 'we believe in open source images,' they write in their most recent (unofficial) manifesto, 'empowering collective story-telling, sharing of content, skills and resources; enabling multiple connections between creative nodes and networks. Production and distribution will finally merge into a process of sharing your images with others. Film that everyone can edit, change and forward.'

Admirable utopianism aside, the V2V project is important in many respects, not least in its attempt to populate the mass-media saturated peer-to-peer systems with truly independent content. The project's consideration of the central issues of artists' and subjects' rights, and experimentation with the Creative Commons license and open video codecs, suggest a thorough commitment to establishing a sharing infrastructure for community-produced, community-consumed film. If successful, V2V could breathe new life into the stultifyingly commercialised 'commons' of P2P.

The next set of Dash Workshops will take place in Rome in July 2003 [<http://www.d-a-s-h.org>]