

# 'tun yuh hand and meck fashion'

## The Container Project

**Mervin Jarman is co-ordinator of the Container project, an operation to take a mobile media centre to the streets of Jamaica. The Container is represented at: <http://www.container.access-it.org.uk>.**

**Jarman is also part of the London based Mongrel collective. He was interviewed by Matthew Fuller.**

Matthew Fuller: Can you let us know what the Container project is? In simple, straightforward terms — what is the actual physical make-up of the project? The technology?

Mervin Jarman: The Container is an effort to take creative computer technology to ghetto people and deep rural communities in the Caribbean. The physical thing is made up of a shipping container on wheels converted into a mobile workstation/access unit. Transportable by truck, it'll be equipped with some 14 workstations and a server networked with local area network access and remote Internet connection. The Container will make its maiden voyage into the Caribbean where its first port of entry will be Jamaica. We are then hoping to move into Trinidad, St. Lucia, Monserrat, St. Vincent and a number of other Islands over a 5-year period. This of course is subject to negotiations...

As far as the people goes... We are aiming to engage people effected by various divides — be that political or social. It is true to say that a vast majority of the Island's underprivileged won't deliberately stay in that scenario if given a choice, and this is absolutely what this is about. It's about giving people incentives to feel good about themselves without being patronised.

Most of the people that will gain access to the Container are no different to you and I except that they have no significant reasons to interact with computers, as it is not presented to them in a meaningful way. This is to say in a way that it becomes relevant to their every day activities as determined by them.

Our main target group is therefore going to be some hardcore bad boys/girls. People from a non-digital low-educational background who have not been working with other types of artforms. Thus never had the time or incentive to investigate what computer technology can or can't do for them in a constructive and creative manner.

MF: What is going to happen in the Container? What might be going on on a typical day? What is its relationship to say the different music scenes in Jamaica? At the same time you're going to be pulling in digital art stuff from all over? It sounds like a crazy mix.

MJ: Crazy and mix-up it will be indeed — thing is as a youth growing up in Jamaica we had a kind of figure head in folklorist Mrs. Louise Bennet-Cobally affectionately Miss Lou — now Miss Lou always say fe her Auntie Rochi used to say 'tun yuh hand and meck fashion' which is the mentality responsible for Jamaica's creativity and dynamic energies. So yes indeed the Container shall see a very interesting explosion of creative flair, I can't give you any specifics but I can guarantee a dynamo of exciting activities.

The technology will emphasise interactive digital media plus some basic life skills thus the technology is about resourcing humans with communicative skills and tools.

My hope is to get more ghetto people to develop an appetite for using computers productively and if I can pass on the little that I have come to know to at least one person then I would be grateful.

MF: Why is it important for you personally to do this?

MJ: This is as significant to me now as football was in my early development. As a socially recreational activity football kept me out of many mischief and strife. It also expanded my social group taking me into places that would otherwise be inaccessible to the likes of me. The same is true for computer technology — especially interactive media where now I am celebrating in circles that's usually the domain of the reserved. Whilst there most people see me as unique, exotic, all kind of shit. Not to say I don't appreciate all the attention, but there is something inside that keeps reminding me that this is only happening because I got a chance and this chance was the privilege to work with some brilliant computer artists and technicians at a time when I had no knowledge or experience with computers. This also came about because, before that, Artec's programme at the time allowed me to investigate my own resolves based around topics that mattered to me.

So in a sense this is what I would like to achieve through the Container project: a lot more "socially acceptable" outcasts or outsiders. People who have a hell of a lot more to contribute to society than the misery that gets strapped to us.

MF: So, what kind of effect do you see the project having for other people?

MJ: Hopefully, in terms of the non-computer-educated participants, it will stimulate them into using computers as a tool to enhance their craft. For the learned digital artists and others that will participate in the project that this experience helps to rejuvenate their creative genes and influence them in a more communal outreaching approach to their work if this is not already the case.

MF: How is the Container being put together in terms of sourcing finances, material, computers, satellite time and all the many other things that you need to get the thing done?

MJ: This again is another milestone in the dynamism of the media that I now have the privilege to work in and the kind of people that I get to work with or meet as a result of my work. It is largely based on their good sense and generosity, where people have given time to help to administrate, donate equipment, and just to share ideas or contact details of people who they think might be able to help out.

So most of the efforts so far have been from donations of some sort or another. However, we are still hopeful that we will be able to attract some kind of sponsorship from business or anyone else. The container and the shipping costs have been donated by JP Fruit Distributors, and various amount of time and effort by a group of people already too numerous to mention in this interview.

For all the other things, we are still seeking sponsorship commitments from companies or other kinds of organisation that will be offered advertising profile as a result of their participa-

tion.

MF: What kind of kit do you need?

MJ: Along with the kit for use in the actual container we are asking people, companies, organisations etc. to donate material. A basic unit should be a PC with 166 Mhz Pentium processor, 32 MB memory and 15" monitor capable of 800 x 600 pixels — 16 bit colour. Or a Performa Mac/ Power Mac with similar capabilities with a baseline modem speed of 28.8kbps connectability. These computers along with peripherals like printers and scanners will be given to community groups that have participated in the Container project on its tours. These will provide connection to the Container project team and the World Wide Web and allow the community to continue to push things after the Container has left a site. If anyone has anything like this, or access to resources we'd love to hear from them!

We are also advocating for sponsored connection for public access and are focussing on both local and international telecommunications companies to assist us in this quest. Satellite time, or other ways of connecting to the net, is going to be important.

MF: What should people do if they can support the Container with resources?

MJ: Get in contact with me immediately <[mervin@mongrel.org.uk](mailto:mervin@mongrel.org.uk)> or any one you know that is affiliated with the project.

MF: What is the situation with regard to the net in Jamaica? Any good initiatives worth checking out? Are there any organisations or groups of people that you will specifically be collaborating with?

MJ: In Jamaica there is a number of interesting developments taking place around the media however many of these take a kind of corporate approach to their initiative and that is primarily because these users/ developers are from uptown so that's what is accepted by their peers. But by all means — type Jamaica into any search engine and you will be bombarded with a catalyst of interesting sites.

MF: This is a very informal model of going about getting it done. It's a different way of going about things than most people would try in say, the UK and the rest of Europe where you'd get jumped on by x-amount of bureaucracy before things could get moving. On first hearing, the idea of just getting on and doing something this major, sounds almost unfeasible. Is Jamaica any different?

MJ: When we start talking bureaucracy, in Jamaica it's no different from anywhere in the world. The thing is what would seem normal time span for as huge a land as Europe or even the US seems like eternity to the average man in the street and we are not known for our patience. My old lady used to say 'always take the bull by the horn' — so when you see the need to do certain things you just have to go out and do it.