

# Arts Council Exhibitions

## London

HAYWARD GALLERY

### **The Arts of Islam**

From Spain to India: treasured objects from 1100 years until 4 July

SERPENTINE GALLERY

### **Howard Hodgkin: 45 paintings 1949-75**

1-31 May

### **Summer Show I**

selected by Eduardo Paolozzi

5-27 June

ICA Institute of Contemporary Arts

### **Peruvian Ground Drawings**

until 2 May

## Regions

BASINGSTOKE, Central Library

### **English Cottages and Small**

**Farmhouses** (documentary)

8-28 May

BIRMINGHAM, Kind Edward's School

### **Photographs of Paul Nash**

until 16 May

BOLTON, Museum and Art Gallery

### **Order and Experience**

An exhibition of American Minimalist prints until 8 May

BRIGHOUSE, Smith Art Gallery

### **Bill Brandt Photographs**

19 June-11 July

BRIGHTON, Gardner Art Centre

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KING'S LYNN, Fermoy Art Gallery

### **Drawings of People**

(Arts Council Collection)

until 8 May

LEEDS, University Gallery

### **Felix Vallotton**

25 May-11 June

LEEDS, City Art Gallery

### **Edward Ruscha: prints and**

**publications 1962-74**

5-27 June

LEIGH, Lancs, Turnpike Gallery

### **Howard Hodgkin: 45 paintings 1949-75**

5-26 June

LIVERPOOL, Sudley Art Gallery

### **Frank Meadow Sutcliffe 1853-1941**

(photography)

29 May-20 June

MANCHESTER, Didsbury College of

Education

### **Cut Folded and Tied: prints and**

**drawings by Richard Smith**

until 14 May

MANCHESTER, City Art Gallery

### **Paul Nash Retrospective**

until 2 May

MANCHESTER UNIVERSITY,

The Manchester Museum

### **Patterns of Islam** (documentary)

until 4 July

MANCHESTER, Peterloo Gallery

### **Drawings of People**

(Arts Council Collection)

8 June-4 July

NEWCASTLE-UPON-TYNE, Laing Art

Gallery

### **Eduardo Paolozzi**

until 16 May

NEWCASTLE-UPON-TYNE, Sunderland

Art Gallery

### **Arshile Gorky: paintings and drawings**

5 June-15 August

PENZANCE, Penlee House

### **English Cottages and Small**

**Farmhouses** (documentary)

until 8 May

SHEFFIELD, Graves Art Gallery

### **Arshile Gorky: paintings and drawings**

until 2 May

SHEFFIELD, Mappin Art Gallery

### **Pages and Fuses and other prints**

**by Robert Rauschenberg**

29 May-20 June

SOUTHAMPTON, Art Gallery and

Museum

### **Order and Experience**

An exhibition of American Minimalist

prints

15 May-6 June

STAFFORD, Museum and Gallery

### **Bill Brandt Photographs**

until 4 May

STEVENAGE, Leisure Centre

### **Frank Meadow Sutcliffe 1853-1941**

(photography)

until 14 May

### **Photographs of Paul Nash**

31 May-18 June

SUTTON, New Central Library

### **Tony Ray-Jones: the English seen**

(photography)

until 8 May

WAKEFIELD, Art Gallery

### **Sculpture purchased for the Arts**

**Council Collection by Bryan Kneale**

29 May-20 June

WARMINSTER, Arts and Civic Society

### **Bill Brandt Photographs**

17 May-5 June

WORKINGTON, Carnegie Theatre and

Arts Centre

### **Cut Folded and Tied: prints and**

**drawings by Richard Smith**

29 May-19 June

YORK, City Art Gallery

### **'Just What Is It . . . ?'**

**Pop Art in England**

29 May-4 July

## Scottish Arts Council

ABERDEEN, Art Gallery, Schoolhill

### **Jewellery in Europe**

until 8 May

EDINBURGH, Scottish Arts Council

Gallery, 19 Charlotte Square

### **New Acquisitions**

1-16 May

### **Eduardo Paolozzi**

22 May-27 June

EDINBURGH, Fruit Market Gallery,

29 Market Street

### **Paintings by Harold Cohen**

1-29 May

### **New Work by Eduardo Paolozzi**

5 June-3 July

EDINBURGH, Scottish National Gallery

of Modern Art

### **Sculpture purchased for the Arts**

**Council Collection by Bryan Kneale**

1-23 May

GLASGOW, Third Eye Centre,

350 Sauchiehall Street

### **Jewellery in Europe**

19 May-6 June

INVERNESS, Eden Court Theatre

**Patrick Caulfield** recent prints

**John Houston** paintings

**Glen Onwin** installations

until 9 May

KIRKCALDY, Museum and Art Gallery,

War Memorial Grounds

### **Eric Schilsky: sculptures and**

**drawings**

until 23 May

PERTH, Museum and Art Gallery,

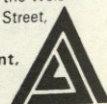
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### **Eric Schilsky: sculptures and**

**drawings**

14 June-3 July

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Guildden Road Eviction. Camden Council evicts squatters' drug self-help rehabilitation unit. October 1973 (reportage).

meta-communication, and differs from the communication of information.

This may sound like yet another call to élitists world-wide. But remember it is made in the context of a changing society. Why should art be the domain of the few and not the many? Shouldn't democratisation of culture, and in our case the liberation of communications technology for public access, be an integral part of our actual art activity? 'What we demand is the unity of politics and art, the unity of content and form' (Mao Tse Tung).<sup>15</sup> We demand the unity of technology, art and politics; the unity of information, meaning and effect.

<sup>1</sup> T. Tomita, 'The Volume of Information Flow and the Quantum Evaluation of Media', *Telecommunication Journal*, Geneva, Vol 42, No 6, 1975.

<sup>2</sup> Claude E. Shannon and Warren Weaver, *The Mathematical Theory of Communication*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1949.

<sup>3</sup> Dallas W. Smythe, 'Agenda- Setting — the Role of Mass Media and Popular Culture in Defining Development', *Journal of the Centre for Advanced TV Studies*, London, Vol 3, No 2, 1975.

<sup>4</sup> H. D. Lasswell, 'The Structure and Function of Communication in Society', 1948, in L. Bryson (ed.) *The Communication of Ideas*, Institute for Religious and Social Studies, New York, 1964, quoted in D. McQuail (ed.) *Sociology of Mass Communications*, Penguin Education, UK, 1972.

<sup>5</sup> Raymond Williams, *Television — Technology and Cultural Form*, Fontana/Collins, London, 1974.

<sup>6</sup> Ludwig von Bertalanffy, *General System Theory*, Penguin, UK, 1968.

<sup>7</sup> John F C Turner, lecture series on User-Controlled Housing, Architectural Association, London, 1974.

<sup>8</sup> John J. Steele, unpublished work, London and Los Angeles, 1974-5.

<sup>9</sup> John C. Lilly, *The Human Biocomputer*, Sphere/Abacus, London, 1974. (First published 1967, USA).

<sup>10</sup> Stuart Hall, *eg.* statement of views in 'The Television Discourse — Encoding and Decoding', *Education and Culture*, Council of Europe, Strasbourg, No 25, 1974.

<sup>11</sup> Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1957, published in English by Paladin/Granada, UK, 1973.

<sup>12</sup> Norbert Wiener, *Cybernetics*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1948.

<sup>13</sup> W. Ross Ashby, *Design for a Brain*, Chapman and Hall, UK, 1952; and *An Introduction to Cybernetics*, Chapman and Hall, London, 1956; Methuen, London (paperback), 1964.

<sup>14</sup> Stafford Beer, *Designing Freedom*, Wiley, London, 1975; and *Platform for Change*, Wiley, London, 1975.

<sup>15</sup> Mao Tse Tung, 'Talks at the Yanan Forum on Literature and Art', (1942), *Selected Works*, Vol 3, English Translation, Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1965.



# A PROVISIONAL OVERVIEW OF ARTIST'S TELEVISION IN THE US

David Ross

'The history of art is the history of the purpose of art.'

John Graham, 1932

The simple fact that contemporary artists are actively working with tools of television production and distribution is no longer a source of widespread bemusement. In general, making videotapes has become as common an activity as printmaking, photography, and drawing. As John Baldessari said, '... to have progress in TV, the medium must be as neutral as a pencil.' Clearly, the advent of this kind of art making has provided artists with a set of tools for dealing with some of the more interesting philosophical and pragmatic problems confronting them today. Though these issues are only peripherally related to television per se, there is a real correspondence between the emerging political and aesthetic philosophies that have accompanied recent radical activity in art and mass communications.

Elie Faure, the pioneering film aesthetician writing in the twenties, noted that film essentially constituted an architecture of movement. Perhaps it is becoming increasingly possible to see video as an architecture as well – an architecture of intention and a provisional architecture too. Its history, like art itself, is the history of its purpose. Television is no longer viewed as an activity of the culture but rather one that is the culture. As a result, the video work that has emerged in the past ten years has tended to reflect both a direction and mood in many ways broad and undefined.

Video allows the artist the opportunity to address a number of vital concerns in relation to the viewer. First of all, an essentially personal statement can be relayed (in a very direct way) in a mode that is as singular and personal (in scale and intensity) as face-to-face communication. Further, the time-based nature of the statement adds a captivating element to the message which the artist can either exploit (by extension over a long period of time, creating a resultant boredom/tension/release cycle) or bypass (by creating work that is immediately gratifying). In other words, the real-time consciousness of the viewer becomes the blank canvas, which can obviously be dealt with in a variety of ways. On a socio-political level, video is an effective and non-precious activity aimed, primarily, at extending the range and breadth of the artists' commitment to, and relations with the audience. The notions of a dematerialized art, which united a highly diverse group of sculptors, dancers, poets, painters and documentarians in eclectic multi-media investigations into the nature of art, seem to have gelled into a set of activities called (fairly ineffectively) video art. Within this set, the creation of videotapes accounts for a great deal of the activity, although it is important to note that many important video works involve the sculptural manipulation of video tools themselves, live performances, or, in some instances, the manipulation of complete television systems from production to broadcasting. As co-equals, working with a medium that has little traditional grounding, video artists (a term some consider derisive) find themselves involved in a

generalized exploration of the nature of communication rather than the nature of the medium itself. Some artists may explore the relative qualities of illusion drawn between video and other forms of documentation, while others may work with the kind of light emitted by a television tube, or the similarities between video systems and neurological processes.

Whichever approach is adopted when working with videotape, the artist cannot ignore either the presence of the display monitor or the potential of indiscriminate anarchitectural delivery of the work to an isolated, yet comfortable and secure audience. Video works created with an understanding of the audience often seem out of place in the context of an art gallery – the works become filmic (in delivery) and their original intention is easily perverted. This is a problem that will persist until museum advocacy for this kind of artist-public communion reaches the point where it will be as commonplace for museums to have their own television channels as it is for them to house and maintain gallery spaces. Nam June Paik summed up the basis for this kind of thinking in a 1972 collage *Do You Know* (dedicated to Ray Johnson, one of the first correspondence artists). Paik added a few lines to an early forties magazine ad which queried: 'how soon after the war will television be available for the average home?' His response becomes a leading question for the seventies: 'how soon will artists have their own TV channels?' The point to be made here is that in the midst of a deepening political, economic and ecological crisis, we are witnessing a very real revolution in areas of communications and control – a revolution as powerful as that which followed the introduction of movable type. Communications systems have outgrown the need for mediating institutions; museums must stop translating and start transmitting. Artists have recognized their right and responsibility to create not only works of art, but the support and distribution system that serves as the context for the work as well.

'I had a seven-channel childhood.'

Bill Viola, 1973

What exactly is meant by the term video art? We can attempt to define it as any art work involving video tools: television cameras, video sets, videotape recorders or projectors, and a variety of image-processing devices or television systems in general. Sculptural works that make use of video tools are still primarily sculpture, dealing with spatial, temporal and systemic problems and often with psychological and metaphysical attitudes as well. The term video might be applied to videotapes shown in the closed-circuit context of a museum, the commercial gallery, or a collector's home, while the same videotape shown through open-circuit transmission via broadcast or cable TV might be called television purely as the result of the basic socio-economic difference between the two.

Though contemporaneous with the heyday of the somewhat faddist art and technology movement of the



early sixties, the origins of 'video art' now seem far removed from all that activity. 'Video art' did not develop only as a result of artists' fascination with the technology of video per se. It would seem rather to have resulted from the more or less random coalescence of a wider range of specific aesthetic issues which eventually led to the development of a generalized orientation away from the making of art objects.

The earliest art works incorporating video were realized by Paik and Wolf Vostell, working in collaboration with Stockhausen at the experimental centre of the West German radio network (WDR) in Cologne. Paik and Vostell were among a rapidly growing number of artists who brought musical and theatrical concerns with structured time and its obverse, randomness and indeterminacy, to the visual arts. These artists, who regarded Marcel Duchamp, cybernetician Norbert Wiener and John Cage as somehow central to their concerns, formed Fluxus, a loosely knit group, in New York; it had first flourished in Europe. Paik, originally a composer/musician, began his experimentation with TV by distorting the television image mechanically, placing magnets on the screen and maladjusting components within the set itself, 'preparing' the television set in an electronic analogy to Cage's prepared piano. Vostell and Paik first used prepared televisions in 'de-collage' performances (Vostell's brand of happening) late in 1959. By 1963 Paik was exhibiting his prepared televisions at the Gallery Parnasse in Wuppertal and Vostell was displaying his own de-collaged (*ie* partially demolished) sets at New York's Smolin Gallery.

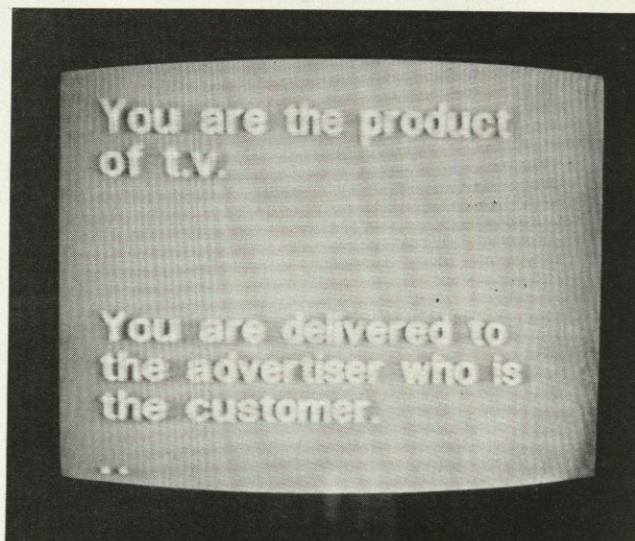
Paik himself had been in New York for barely a year when the Sony Corporation announced their intention to market a portable television camera and recorder at approximately  $\frac{1}{20}$  the cost of all previous television production equipment. Paik made arrangements to buy the first unit to be delivered for sale in New York, in late 1965, the same year that Marshall McLuhan published *Understanding Media*.

The situation that existed before the introduction of relatively inexpensive consumer grade  $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch equipment was analogous to that of a culture possessing a tightly controlled radio industry and no telephone service at all. Until 1965, television tools were used almost exclusively by large corporations and major political parties for one-way delivery of pre-packaged information; no provisions existed for the use of the same tools and delivery system for communications relating to the needs of the individual. The ' $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch revolution' led not only to the possibility of utilizing decentralized distribution systems such as cable TV, adapted to minority needs in a pluralistic society; it also greatly expanded the potential of video as a medium for making art.

By this time, Fluxus events and the Happenings organized by artists such as Allan Kaprow, Charles Frazier, Claes Oldenburg, Robert Whitman and Jim Dine had opened up new attitudes in American art towards interdisciplinary works, emphasizing the need for an art that was informed by the general culture as well as informing the culture. These early events in America – and in Europe and Japan during the crucial decade of 1956-66 – are the precursors of most video and performance activity currently taking place in the United States.

The period from 1969 to 1970 saw the beginning of official art world recognition of artists' work in video. In late 1969, Nicholas Wilder, a Los Angeles art dealer, made the first sale of an artist's videotape in the United States – Bruce Nauman's *Video pieces a-n* – to a European collector. In the same season, New York dealer Howard Wise (whose gallery was the home of a great deal of the Kinetic Art of the early sixties), held an impressive exhibition of young video artists working in New York entitled 'TV as a Creative Medium,' including works by Paik, Frank Gillette, Ira Schneider, Paul Ryan, Eric Siegel and others. In contrast to Nauman's early video work, which was an extension of

his body-oriented post-minimalist sculptural activities, the works in the Wise exhibition tended to be more openly involved either with the socio-political aspects of television as the dominant information system or with the technical possibilities of synthesizing television images with computers and similar electronic devices. The split between those artists who were primarily involved in the relationship between art and the culture, seeing television as a way to integrate the two, and those who merely adopted these newly developed techniques as yet another tool on which the artist might draw, seemed formidable at that time. Interestingly, in the past year or so that dichotomy seems virtually to have disappeared. Many more sociologically inclined artists such as Beryl Korot have found it necessary to tighten and expand the formal elements in their work, while a more formal sculptor, Richard Serra, produced the purely didactic *Television Delivers People* in 1973.

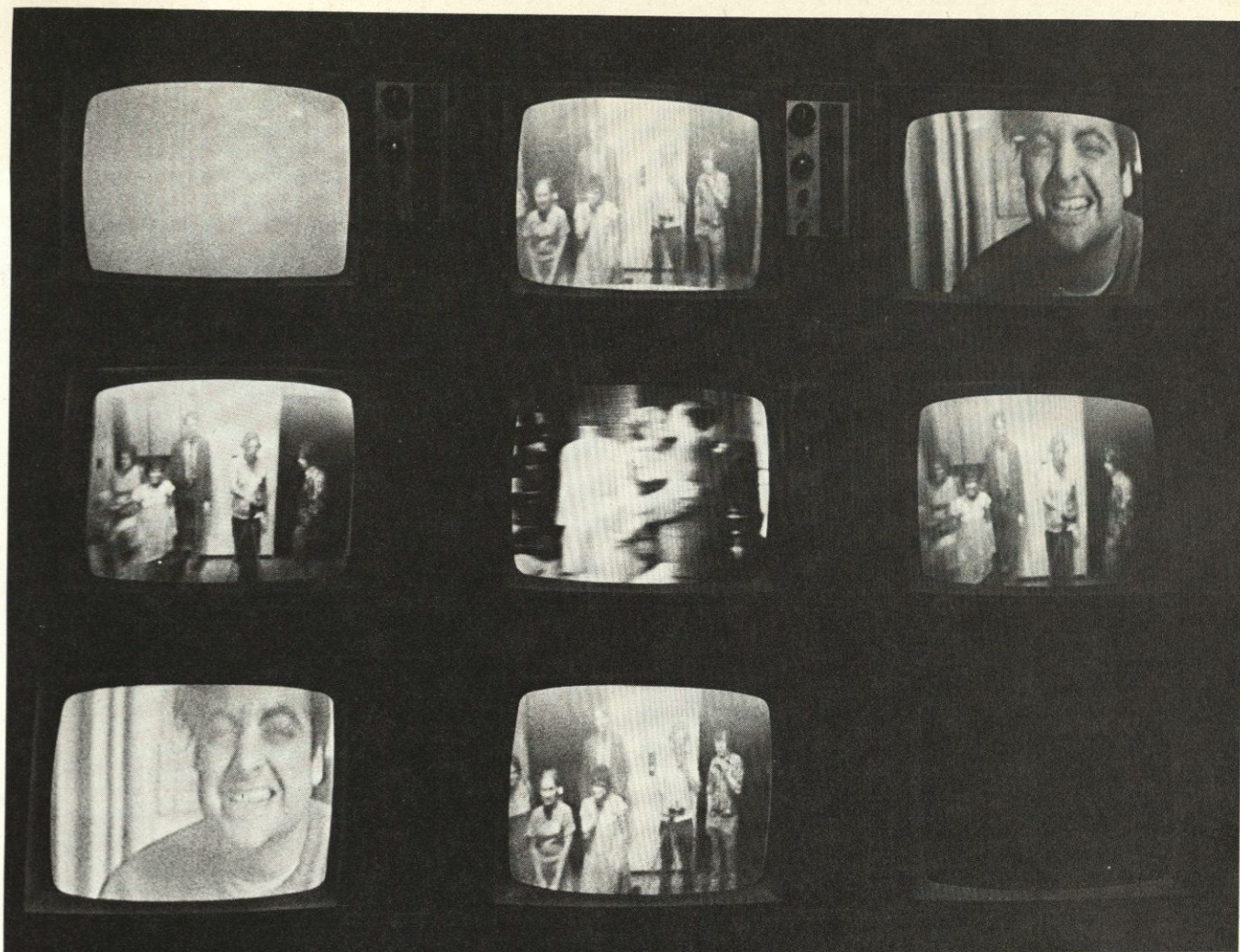


Richard Serra *Television Delivers People* 1973

The Wise exhibition featured one work that remains interesting to date, though not for reasons that were obvious in 1970. *Wipe Cycle*, a multi-monitor work by Frank Gillette and Ira Schneider, was (as Schneider noted at the time) an attempt to 'integrate the audience into the information.' That integration included manipulation of the audience's sense of time and space, giving the work the combined impact of a live performance and a cybernetic sculpture. The piece consisted of a bank of nine monitors programmed into four distinct cycles including two pre-recorded tape inputs, a live camera on an eight and sixteen-second delay loop, a mix of off-the-air programmes, and a unifying grey wipe that swept the field counter-clockwise every few seconds. At the time, it was felt by critics like Richard Kostelanetz that the piece was an investigation into the nature of information, concerned primarily with the effect of shifting time orientation. Now the piece seems to underscore the peculiarity of the naiveté demonstrated by American video artists who saw the ability to produce video work on low-cost video equipment – divorced from any consideration of real distribution – as a revolutionary occurrence. *Wipe Cycle* can now be seen as a clear statement of the artist's continuing position well after the fact in relation to what may be television's most significant aspect and salient feature – indiscriminate transmission. Furthermore, the piece, by its elaborate structure (imitating industrial multi-media displays in form, but surpassing them in complexity) was one of the first to indicate that in lieu of broadcast access, and in consideration of the conditions imposed by the gallery, installation works involving technical capabilities of television not possible in transmission could be employed to somehow correct the out-of-placeness of television in such a loaded context.

By 1970 the first American museum exhibition of





Ira Schneider and Frank Gillette *Wipe Cycle* 1969

video art had been organized by Russell Connor and mounted at the Rose Art Museum of Brandeis University outside Boston. At that time, the predominant attitude of artists working with television can perhaps be summed up in a line from Gene Youngblood's *Expanded Cinema*: '... contemporary artists have realized that television, for the first time in history, provides the means by which one can control the movement of information throughout the environment.' Partially in response to the rapid popularization of the work of Buckminster Fuller, and partially to the emergence of ecological consciousness in general, early video work tended to reflect an emphasis on and understanding of the environmental impact and capabilities of television in the broadest sense. The Brandeis exhibition occurred almost exactly a year after Gerry Schum broadcast the film 'Land Art,' inaugurating his pioneering video gallery which was less concerned with video than it was with broadcasting primary information about artists' work directly to the home. A year later the first museum video department was established at the Everson Museum in Syracuse, New York, naming this writer as its first curator. The Everson opened a closed-circuit gallery specially designed for video viewing, and continues its series of video-oriented exhibitions which offer a wide range of work.

The phenomenon of museum involvement with television and video came about in response to two factors: the growing interest of artists in the medium, and the growing involvement of museums themselves with social issues beyond a purely aesthetic context — an involvement that has been prompting museums to re-evaluate their role as a community resource. While the Everson Museum and the Long Beach Museum of Art in California are as yet the only such institutions with separate video departments, an increasing number of museums throughout the country have had at least a

fleeting relationship with television in the form of closed-circuit in-house exhibits. Several larger institutions, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the Cleveland Museum, produce educational television based on their collections, while the Boston Museum of Fine Arts continues to produce a series of broadcast programmes on art initiated in 1953.

With the exception of the new Long Beach Museum, now under construction, museums have yet to extend their involvement with television to include their own broadcast stations, or cable television systems using low-cost equipment, in an attempt to redefine the basic elements of museum architecture broadly enough to include such an obvious feature of the environment. In this respect, museums rank far behind banks and theatres, which have at least figured out how to make their architecture responsive to changes in architecture necessitated by the American dependence on the automobile.

At the 1975 conference of the American Association of Museums in Los Angeles, the issue of validating modern art was discussed at length by a panel of museum directors representing some of the most prestigious modern art museums in Europe and America. Although they differed on many points, most seemed to agree that museums do play a significant role in validating a small segment of the vast amount of art that is produced in the world today, by giving their tacit or indirect approval of a particular artist or a specific school. The point was never made, however, that the validating process is reciprocal: artists validate museums and galleries just as collectors, etc., etc. The character of much recent post-object art has tended, paradoxically, to intensify the self-referential and closed nature of this system, while at the same time making its tautological aspects uncomfortably clear. Though this has not led so far to any significant change in the



operation of the museum/gallery/collector system, it seems increasingly probable that the art itself will somehow obviate the entire validating process. Since video, like much conceptual performance work, is essentially uncollectable, its patrons must focus on the sponsorship of inquisitive rather than acquisitive activity. The role of the museum in regard to video art may well become that of a catalyst for the development of museum-operated art-specialized television channels, as well as an immediate though temporary physical location for the exhibition of the video work of Campus, Gillette, Schneider, Kos, Graham, et al.



Dan Graham *Present Continuous Pasts* 1974

If American museums are in a unique position to encourage this kind of 'disinterested' patronage, they can also contribute substantially to the much-needed task of defining and protecting the rights of the visual artist in relationship to the rest of society. In all the other arts, the artist's prerogative to maintain some degree of control over the way his or her work is used for the commercial or political benefit of other individuals or institutions is generally accepted; these rights are even defined by law. So far as video is concerned, the rights of the artist can easily be protected by a well-written contract not substantially different from those currently used in the recording and publishing industries. As for other kinds of visual art, including more traditional, object-based forms, the particular example of video art may help to focus attention upon the problem and to provide a model for the exercise of this urgent and significant responsibility.

Most of the video work being made by artists in the US today can roughly be divided into three major categories: varieties of videotape, performance pieces involving video tools either directly or as secondary material, and sculptural constructions. These seemingly clear-cut distinctions are, unfortunately, significantly blurred by the fact that many works contain elements of more than one category, with economic and other contingencies determining the nature of any particular presentation. Frank Gillette's videotape *Tidal Flats*, for instance, was installed as a part of a complex installation (*Quidditas*) which featured twelve segments of tape playing asynchronously on three distinct video systems aligned to create a montage of three congruent images in constant flux. At another time, segments were seen in a single monitor version, when all the work was broadcast on public television. Similarly, a number of tapes are either records of performance pieces or, like Vito Acconci's *Claim Excerpts*, 1973, were originally simultaneous video-documentations of performances where the action was visible to the audience, within which we pigeon-hole the works of artists using video tools often purely for the convenience of critical discussion, and in no way reflecting a priori decisions by the artist.

Still, it is important to remember that the physiological phenomena of television viewing play a

significant role in determining the relationship between the viewer and the work. The sociological implications of a medium designed and developed for casual home-oriented serendipitous access are in a way perverted when videotapes are shown in a public gallery space. While these sociological and psychological factors are only rarely the subject of artistic inquiry into the medium, they often bear heavily upon the artist's primary intention. This nearly inescapable distortion of intention must be acknowledged and suffered, as the ideal situation for viewing artists' videotapes is yet to come.

The same is true in relation to ownership, and the non-commodity status of much video. One of the most interesting uses of video has been to extend and intensify the experiences of performance works. Compared to the ephemeral nature of performance art – apart from 'residue' such as documentary material or preparatory scores – videotape may seem to be a fairly permanent record of activities and ideas. In reality, however, the shelf life of videotape, as yet undetermined, is estimated at ten to fifty years. The video image, though recapturable and in a way objectified on tape, retains its temporary nature and is thus denied the status of a precious object. Its use, as the content for a broadcast (which becomes the complete work), is that of a relegated part of the whole.

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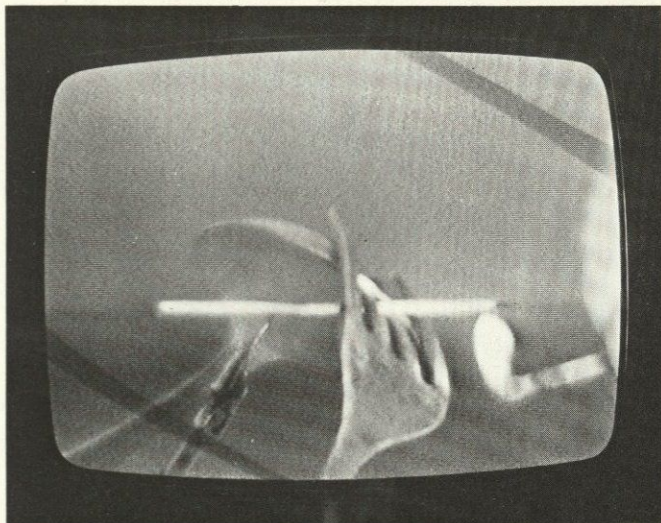
Vito Acconci is an artist who uses video in conjunction with performance. A poet of the 'New York School' in the early and middle sixties, Acconci became widely known at the end of that decade for his increasingly personal performance pieces, then termed 'body art.' His emphatic use of autobiographical information, stylised into a near-violent exploration of his physical self, has been presented both as live performances and as sculptural installations. The latter pieces normally involved some kind of pre-recorded narrative information. At first this was on audio tape or film; more recently, Acconci has come to use videotape and closed-circuit video systems. Like William Wegman, Acconci works with the particularly intense and intimate relationship that can be generated between a lone television monitor and a viewer, regardless of the surrounding context or lack of context. Unlike Wegman, however, Acconci does not explore the relationship that develops. Rather does he intensify it, turning it on full blast in an effort to transfer the full intensity of the experience. In *Pryings*, one of his earliest and least verbal tapes, the artist is seen trying to force open and gain entry into any and all of the orifices of a woman's face. His persistence outlasts the running time of the tape, as does the persistence of the woman under attack who manages to persevere in her attempt to guard her metaphysical privacy. In later



Vito Acconci *Undertone* 1973



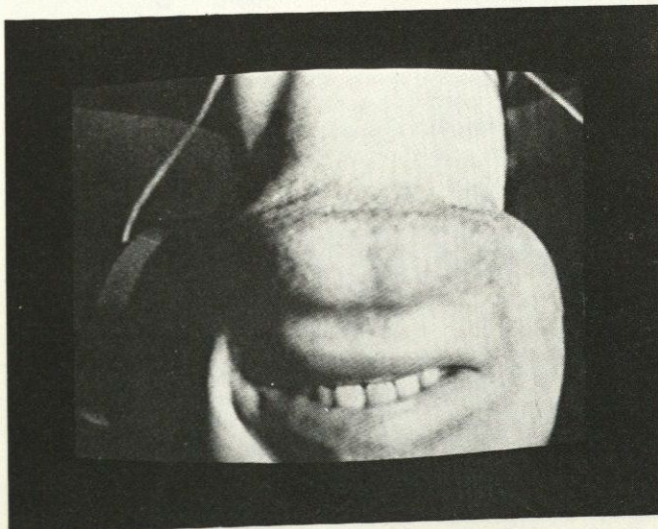
tapes, Acconci developed his use of the medium's psychodramatic possibilities still further. In *Undertone*, he is able to pry into his own subconscious and at the same time monitor the viewer's concurrent prying, while *Face Off* reveals through the artist's rather monotonous yet direct monologue the intimacies of a sexual activity throughout the entire tape.



Terry Fox *Children's Tapes* 1974

In a way related to Acconci, Terry Fox's *Children's Tapes* demonstrates the artist's commitment to the ritual aspects of performance, divorced from the performer's physical presence. Fox sought a way to translate his performance activities into video, maintaining the involving immediacy of the experience. He decided to follow a series of interesting, if somewhat slow-moving, tapes documenting his performances (shot by George Bolling) with a tape of his own. Fox reasoned that the taped piece might be successful if it could appeal to his young son, whose response to a televised experience was instinctive for one familiar with the medium since birth. Using much of the same symbolic lexicon present in most of his performance works, Fox created a series of active tableaux involving, among other things, a spoon, a burning candle, small bits of cloth, and a tin bowl. By interweaving these elements, Fox illustrated a series of basic scientific postulates involving balance, evaporation, expansion and in the case of the rudimentary fly trap, a slapstick illustration of behavioural psychology. The results are amusing and engrossing, leading the viewer well beyond the literal activity to an elegant and understated view of a very private world.

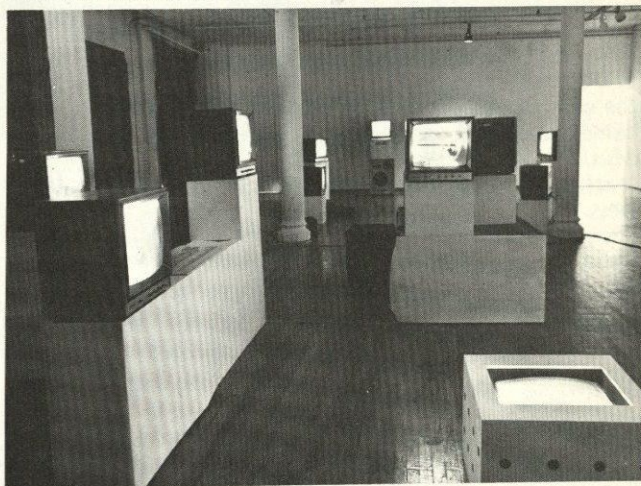
Yet another relationship between performance and video is explored by Bruce Nauman, the first artist to



Bruce Nauman *Lip Sync* 1969

show videotapes in an exhibition in the US. In *Lip Sync*, Nauman, like Acconci, used his own body as primary material for the creation of a gestalt, attempting to link the sculptural tradition to the phenomenological aspects of avant-garde dance and related body movement work. This sixty-minute tape, originally presented at the Nicholas Wilder Gallery in Los Angeles playing continuously on a monitor mounted on top of a sculpture pedestal, was not necessarily meant to be viewed from start to finish, but could be approached and contemplated as a sculptural object. Clearly, Nauman was not unaware of the time-based nature of the medium, nor did he decline to explore the effect of time upon perception, for such exploration is implicit in the situation he established. Rather, he wanted to avoid connections with the theatricality of film showings, and to break away from the rigid, structured relationships implied in that approach. Performance, sculptural installation, and the making of a self-contained videotape are all components of the work, which juxtaposes two entirely different temporal frames of reference.

Time is consistently the most difficult element for video artists to deal with. Short of creating a series of closed loops, as Ira Schneider did in his environmental video installation, *Manhattan is an Island*, the artist's



Ira Schneider *Manhattan is an Island* 1974

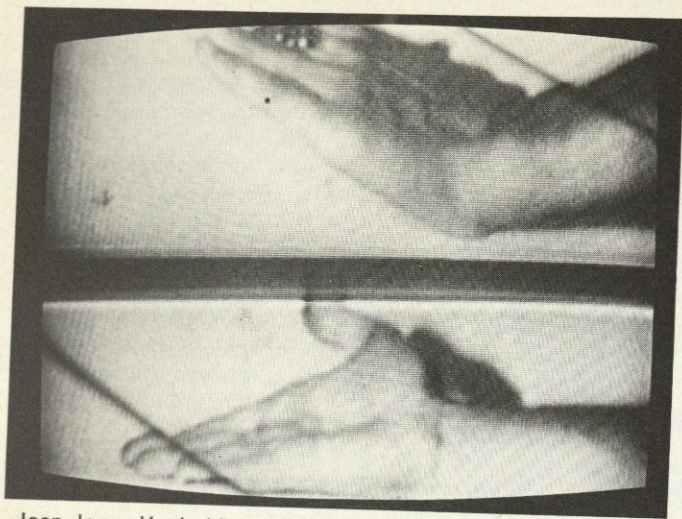
choice is to use short or long periods of time that are either acknowledged and dealt with, acknowledged and left alone, or not acknowledged at all. In Schneider's *Manhattan*, the artist arranged a series of monitors in a topological configuration outlining Manhattan Island. One tape, played on the perimeter monitors, shows a view of the island from a tour boat circling the city, while another grouping added material shot on the streets uptown, etc. The effect of the piece was a complex landscape study containing not only a feel for the madness of the urban crush, but a sense of the city's metabolism as well.

In the videotape *Vertical Roll*, Joan Jonas presents not just a tape of a tape of a performance, but records the image of that tape on a playback monitor — the playback undergoing a slow vertical roll. The tape thus contains a continuous circumstance, the playback roll, within a specific time-frame, creating a kind of temporal topography. The acknowledgement of time in this work is both disturbing, in that it jars the sense of propriety in the visual image, and reassuring, in that it provides a steady, rhythmic measure which underscores the viewing experience.

Paul McCarthy's taped performance works, in the tradition of Nitsch's *Orgy-Mystery Theatre*, allow the viewer access to a sensibility that needs the removal with retained intimacy that video is able to provide. In works like *Sauce* and *Glass* the viewer is given immediate access to re-lived psychotic episodes that deliver an intensity much more easily apprehended in the safety of the televiewing context.

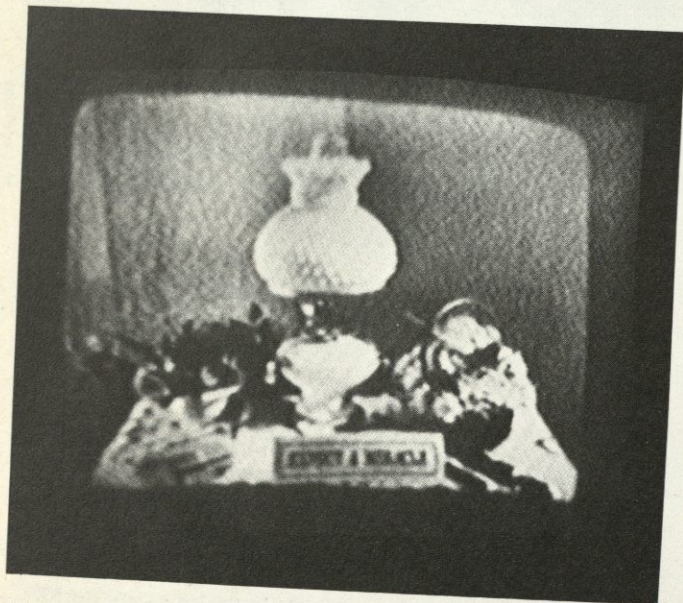
Similarly, the one-to-one video space allows a kind





Joan Jonas *Vertical Roll* 1972

of immersion to occur that heightens the bone-bare reductive elements of a Richard Landry work like *Quad Suite* – a tape focusing in a four-way split screen on the lips and fingers of a Landry flute piece, double-tracked in stereo video and audio. In curious contrast, Charlemagne Palestine's videotaped performance works *Body Music I* and *Body Music II* (both produced in Florence at Art/Tapes/22) illustrate how an intensity can be generated by the integration of the camera into the core of the work rather than establishing the camera-eye as a neutral observer to the action. In *Body Music II*, Palestine transformed what in *Body Work I* reached the viewer as the observation of an observer's view by locating the camera within his own action – literally extending his eye to include the viewer's as well.



Nancy Holt *Underscan* 1974

In contrast, Nancy Holt (*Underscan*), and Beryl Korot and Ira Schneider (*Fourth of July in Saugerties*), employ a traditional literary arrangement to portray

differing points in historical time. The basis of Holt's work is a recollection of family history, while Korot and Schneider (co-editors of the alternative media journal *Radical Software*) have borrowed from the Kino-eye theories of early Russian revolutionary film-makers like Dziga Vertov, investigating aspects of video reality in relationship to real time and place – in this case, the experience of a patriotic celebration in a small town two hours north of New York City.

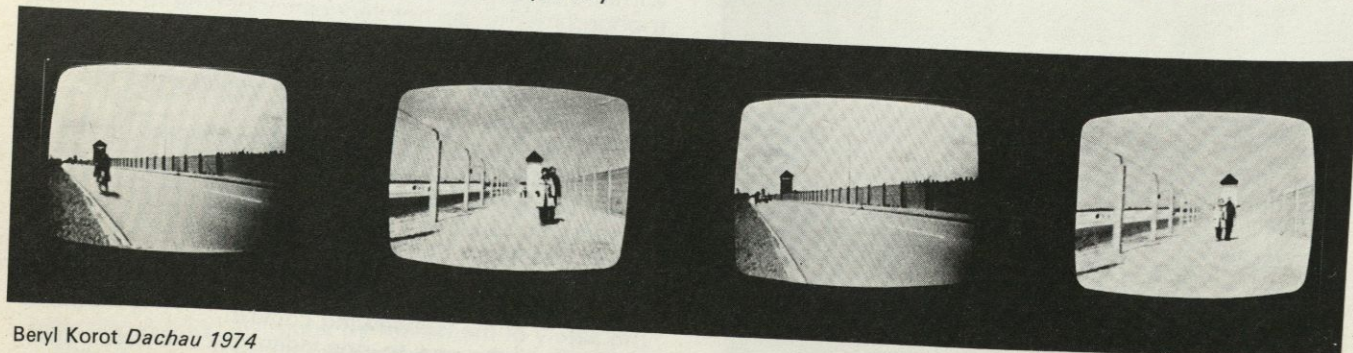


Beryl Korot and Ira Schneider *Fourth of July in Saugerties* 1972

It is interesting to note that in multiple monitor works like Beryl Korot's *Dachau* 1974, where a short real-time activity is separated into four time-strands and then re-woven with the precision of a complex weaving, the artists are once again dealing with the fact that the work is being shown in a gallery situation closer to theatricality (in its publicness) than television should be. This underscores the curiously sculptural qualities which the television set assumes when taken out of the normative home context.

Paul Kos, a San Francisco artist closely associated with video installation work, created *Cymbals/Symbols: Pilot Butte* at the De Young Museum in San Francisco. In this piece, Kos integrated the soundtrack of the piece (at one point the pun: 'there are tiny sounds in the desert; there aren't any sounds in the desert') with a pair of tin sheets which had been rigged to act as loudspeakers. The tin speakers literally and figuratively completed the word play, and in a real sense served to materialize the notion of opposition at work.

In his most recent work, *Tokyo Rose*, Kos again extends the field of his tape by surrounding it with a sculptural context which uses the television image as bait to lure and capture the viewer. Approaching a large mesh cage lit from angles so oblique that one can hardly see inside, the viewer hears a droning seductive voice (Marlene Kos, the work's co-author) coaxing: 'you can't resist', 'come in', etc. Once inside, you see her face, taped behind a screen on which flies land and take-off, still enticing the viewer in sensual rhythmic cadence to give up, stay with her, etc. Beyond the



Beryl Korot *Dachau* 1974



obvious play of screen/material and screen/video, the combination works in a way like Nauman's screen room to heighten the viewer's sense of place and passive condition in relation to the work itself.

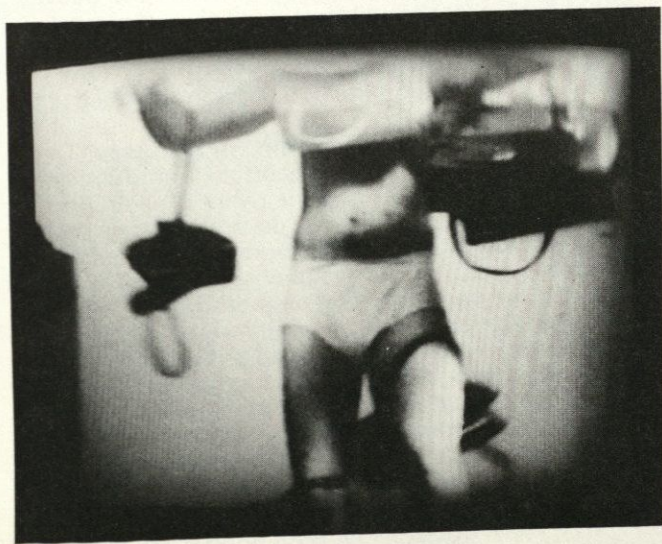
Juan Downey's multiple-channel works that comprise his Video Trans Americas series are built from tapes edited to be played simultaneously in pairs. Structured with incredible precision, works like *Nazca*, *Inca*, and *Cuzco* develop temporal harmonies and



Juan Downey *Inca One & Two*

displacements within the stereo organization, leading the viewer through an active experience of real-time apprehension in the mystical spaces he seems to conjure rather than merely record. The notion of the artist as cross-cultural communicator, as Downey describes it, speaks to both the inherent architectural properties of communications systems — even those as rudimentary as one in which the artist makes tapes in a caravan, shooting in one town, editing on the road, and showing the work to the people of the next town. His acknowledgement of the difficulty inherent in re-creating that kind of experience in the gallery space that one senses in his highly mannered end-works, reconfirms the fact that artists must see video works as no more than a function of a peculiar architectural equation involving both a sense of space and time.

In contrast to these artists who use the technical potential developed by commercial TV for phenomenological investigations, William Wegman employs its stylistic conventions like those of the TV pitch-man and stand-up comic. Taken out of context through the use of low-resolution monochrome video and a kind of exaggerated self-consciousness, these



William Wegman *Selected Works/Reel No. 1*

devices concentrate both on the aesthetic factor of the relationship between the viewer and the work itself, and on the social factor of audience relationships with TV programmes in general. Wegman's tapes are authentically humorous in their confrontation between traditional comic expectations and his droll deadpan style. His interest in psychology, as well as his sense of humour, is particularly evident in the tapes featuring his stoic Weimaraner hound, Man Ray, which play on the dog's behavioural quirks and responses so as to change radically our notions of behavioural psychology and TV humour.

Another artist who explores viewer relationships with television is Douglas Davis, who has been unusually successful in integrating into his work an understanding of the political and sociological implications of video. In his *Austrian Tapes*, a record of a live performance



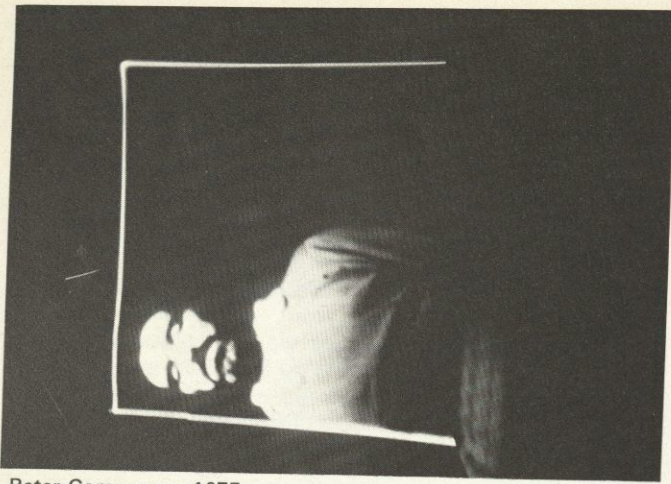
Douglas Davis *The Austrian Tapes 1974*

broadcast on Austrian television in the summer of 1974, Davis specifically attacks the prevailing notions of viewer passivity, in relation to both television and art in general. By suggesting and actually acting out a direct encounter with the viewer, in which the participant is invited to undress in front of the television screen and touch like parts of the body with the artist, Davis at once exploits latent fears of the cold impersonal medium and emphasizes its one-to-one nature (the intimacy of the viewer-monitor relationship, in contrast to the mythical 'mass audience'). There are few artists who have so thoroughly explored this aspect of the medium; perhaps only Joseph Beuys and Hans Haacke have gone so far in their exploration of social and political systems in general.

Peter Campus deals with video systems as direct functions of reality. His colour tape *Three Transitions* investigates the disparities between mechanical perception and the depth of human perception, modified as human perception is with the capacity for understanding. As well as making tapes, Campus creates complex sculptural systems using television cameras, video projectors and picture monitors as primary structural elements while relying upon light-defined fields. Campus also relies on the process of familiarisation, as the viewer gradually comprehends how he or she has become an integral part of the piece. *sev*, 1975, represents a major stage in the growth of his work. A body of work which is characterized by this kind of 'live' video installation.

In *sev*, Campus continues to create an induced experience with the viewer-participant effected neither by the artist nor the viewer directly, but by the work itself in conjunction with the passage of time. Less diffuse than many of Campus' earlier works, *sev* exists as a concentrated cluster of light glowing in a severely darkened space. The video projector is placed quite close to the wall, casting an extremely intense image of the participant-viewer which imparts a sense of looking





Peter Campus *sev* 1975

through the wall rather than onto it. Ultimately this work, like *mem* (1974) and *Anamnesis* (1973), induces in the viewer a condition in which the notion of fixed points of reference gives way to the experience of multiple points of view and multiple points in time. *Anamnesis*, probably more than any of Campus' earlier works, represents the previous phase of this artist, originally schooled in experimental psychology. In a way far more elegant and surely more deeply moving than the illustrations used to illuminate the theories of Gestalt psychologists like Edgar Rubin, Kurt Koffka or Wolfgang Kohler, Campus creates experimental epistemologies which provide the situation in which a participant will formulate a learning experience to support the reality of his immediate perceptions of the situation Campus has created. In *Anamnesis*, meaning to recollect or to reproduce in memory, the viewer enters a large dark space to find one pool of light created by a narrow focused spotlight. Upon entering the lighted field, the viewer/participant sees his or her image video-projected, life-size, on the facing wall. As the viewer stares at his or her image, he is unaware that it is composed of a live, real-time video signal as well as an image taken off a delay loop three seconds past and superimposed upon the live image. It is only upon moving that the viewer/participant discovers that he is pulling a three-second time trailer behind, at every instant leading to some sort of mediation between the two dissimilar though simultaneously apparent points in time and space.

**'... with video you can do everything and still watch - it's a continuation of your life.'**  
**Nam June Paik, 1975**

Finally, we must consider *TV Garden*, 1974, Nam June



Nam June Paik *TV Garden* 1974

Paik's tour de force consisting of twenty-five colour TV sets all playing Paik's international version of 'American Bandstand', *Global Groove*, in all colours, shades, and hues. In an essay written in 1965, Paik noted that 'Cyberneted art is very important, but art for cyberneted life is more important, and the latter need not be cyberneted'. Combining interests in Zen, cybernetics, painting, musical composition, and a global politics devoted to survival and constant change, Paik blazed the trail for a whole generation of video and conceptual artists.

Bevan Davies

The *TV Garden* featuring *Global Groove* is indicative of Paik's eclectic character. The garden is indeed real, as the array of television sets nestles among dozens of live greens, some of which partially obscure the view of certain screens while others frame as many as three sets at a time. The tape itself starts out with a Broadway version of a sixties rock and roll dance set to Bill Haley's 'Rock Around the Clock.' The scene changes rapidly to a Korean drum dancer, then to Allen Ginsberg as his face is distorted by a video synthesis process invented by Paik and the Japanese engineer Shuya Abe in 1969. The tape continues to jump wildly from a Navajo Indian, to the Living Theatre, to a Nigerian dancer, to a thirties 'fan dancer,' and back to rock and roll. Originally produced to be a broadcast on a United Nations' satellite, the whole collage was a spoof on Marshall McLuhan's notion of global village. Implicit in Paik's tape is the threat of the possible misuse of global communications systems in a commercially overdosed fashion, analogous to the fate of US telecommunication ever since 90% of all available VHF broadcast frequencies were awarded to commercial developers way back in 1953. But on a far simpler level the work is as enjoyable as Paik could make it; it is a concerted effort to make a truly avant-garde form both entertaining and effective.

There is no way in which a completely comprehensive view of American video activity could be presented; but, probably more important, it is doubtful whether such a view should be presented. The range of artists using television for one reason or another is not enough to warrant any categorical statement of their similarity based on the use of a particular medium. There exists, after all, a tendency towards the narcissism of the performer as well as a tendency towards the anonymity of the documentarian; a tendency towards the straightforward representation of realities acknowledged in any number of ways as well as the creation of abstract, non-representational imagery; and all of this within what is too often simplistically labelled 'video art'. Clearly, the development of artist's use of television is the result of a number of simultaneous phenomena, some of which are grounded in the advance of communications technology, some of which are grounded in art's recent tumultuous history, and some of which are the direct result of a more general planetary malaise involving politics, biology and the complex interface that links them both. Like other forms of contemporary expression, the roots of artist's television in America are deep and complex.

In 1934 Walter Benjamin, writing in his essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', noted that in the early part of the twentieth century a good deal of futile thought was devoted to the question of whether or not photography was an 'art'. The primary question, Benjamin observed, had not been raised: had the very invention of photography not transformed the entire nature of art? Likewise, the current boom in video work should not prompt us to debate over the legitimacy of this work's claim to art-ness, but should lead us to examine changes effected by video throughout art - and, by extension, throughout the full range of our cyberneted society.



# SOME NOTES ON VIDEO ART IN BELGIUM

Jan Debbaut

Writing in the abstract about the video works of artists independently of these works themselves always seems to me a precarious enterprise. Whether this writing deals with installations or tapes, the printed word (with a few stills as illustration) usually remains meaningless compared with the direct spatial experience or with the evolution in time of a specific visual language. However, the video work of some young Belgian artists has been little shown so far (either in Belgium or abroad), and so it has remained almost unknown. Apart from a few sporadic initiatives by some smaller galleries, this work has only been accessible through four major events up to now: the '3rd Triennial' (Bruges, summer 1974), 'Artists' Video Tapes' (Palais des Beaux Arts, Brussels, February-March '75), 'Foto, Film and Video by Belgian Artists' (Elsa Von Honolulu Gallery, Ghent, March '75) and the '5th International Video Encounter' recently organized by the International Cultural Centre in Antwerp (February 1976). That is why a very general description is justified by the need to make some names and works more widely known.

Even if I just wanted to give a broad, general survey of video production in Belgian art, I would inevitably go further than a mere encyclopaedic enumeration of names and data; one immediately feels the need for a relevant approach, a structure to order the material. This poses another problem in writing about video art, a problem which already reveals an essential feature of video art in general. Video, a medium with an already extremely diversified range of specific properties and novel possibilities for the artist (on various levels), is in its turn completely integrated in the complexity of current artistic activity, which can no longer be assimilated or clearly structured by the individual. That is why I wonder whether the creative use of this medium within numerous divergent currents and trends in contemporary art can be approached as a phenomenon in itself (something most critics and magazines do now seem to worry about; land-art video, body-art video or computer-generated video, the medium is the message). Or to put it another way, I wonder whether this phenomenon does function as an independent object of cognition which can be grasped in a purposeful manner with our traditional models of art science and criticism. What will be the 'statute' under which the use of video is later recorded in the history of art of this decade?

Within the Belgian context, 'Video Art' is certainly not an autonomous current, a new direction which can establish itself within contemporary art by a theoretical or stylistic conception of art on its own. This somewhat defective and deceptive term is only a common denominator for a certain media choice by some young and generally plastically working artists. Every one of them, for himself, from his own angle, and mostly only for the realization of only a few of his or her works, chooses the specificity of this medium for personal and very divergent problems of theory and practice. General descriptions, like this article, do not allow the integration of video work by a specific artist in a more comprehensive analysis of his total practice. And that, in my opinion, is another less than favourable feature of most literature on video art. The work and the artist are a priori done an injustice.

The relatively late introduction of video hardware in Belgium (compared with other European countries),

especially in the cultural infrastructure, has had a direct impact on the quality and the quantity of the works already realized. Until very recently not a single art school, academy, gallery or museum possessed video equipment. Because of this lack of hardware and production possibilities the number of artists that have already experimented with the medium is extremely low. Apart from some scattered experiments (and the Antwerp group ARFO's remarkable initiative called 'Continental Film and Video Tour', which showed experimental films and some early videotapes in a touring coach), most of them only started to work with video regularly from 1974. This probably happened under the influence of the international and very strong promotion of video art through a number of greater events organized in the neighbouring countries (like 'Impact Video' at Lausanne, 'Prospect' at Cologne, 'Art-Video Confrontation' in Paris and a number of Video Encounters organized by CAYC through Europe). This international 'pressure' was translated by some Belgian artists into a rather hasty over-fascination (which explains why their motivation to start working with video is sometimes rather vague), and by the organizers of events and exhibitions (such as museum and gallery directors) into a restraining reserve caused by fear of the unknown.

On the whole, the Belgian realizations up to now may be characterized as 'portapak-video', at least produced with extremely simple hardware (the only one that has been available for this purpose so far). About 80 per cent of these works were made with the equipment of Continental Video at the International Cultural Centre in Antwerp. Apart from the County Museum for Modern Art of West Flanders at Ypres, where the curator Willy Vandebussche admitted some art tapes into his collection at an early date, the ICC is the only centre with a representative collection of the Belgian production in this area. So far tapes have been made by artists such as Jacques Charlier, Leo Copers, Pierre Courtois, Erik de Volder, Daniel de Waele, Hugo Duchateau, Lili Dujourie, Jacques Evrard, Filip Francis, Hugo Heyrman, Jacques Lennep, Jacques Lizene, Danny Matthys, Guy Mees, Ludo Mich, Nicola, Jacques-Louis Nyst, Raoul Vandebloom, Christine van de Moortel, Hubert van Es, Philippe van Snick, Mark Verstockt, and the group 50/04.

Probably the simplest and most straightforward application of video within contemporary art is its use as a very practical means of registering and distributing art forms with an 'einmalig' character tied to a dynamic lapse of time, such as actions, performances, and happenings. With recordings like this the artist often does not turn directly to the creative potential of a specific video language, but rather gratefully takes advantage of the sociological implications of this new technology. With portable equipment, extremely smooth and mobile shooting at low cost becomes available to the non-specialised individual. The copying possibilities and an enormous distribution potential break through the myth about the 'pièce unique' in art. Tape-recording facilitates a more frequent and intensive exchange of information. Tapes can travel more easily, independently of the artist. In this way video is an important factor in the democratisation of art.

Most of the tapes already realized in Belgium belong to this 'category'. *Art and Music* by Jacques Charlier,