

VIDEO GUIDE

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Video Works

Western Front Video

National Gallery Cuts Video Program

Photos from Video Part Four

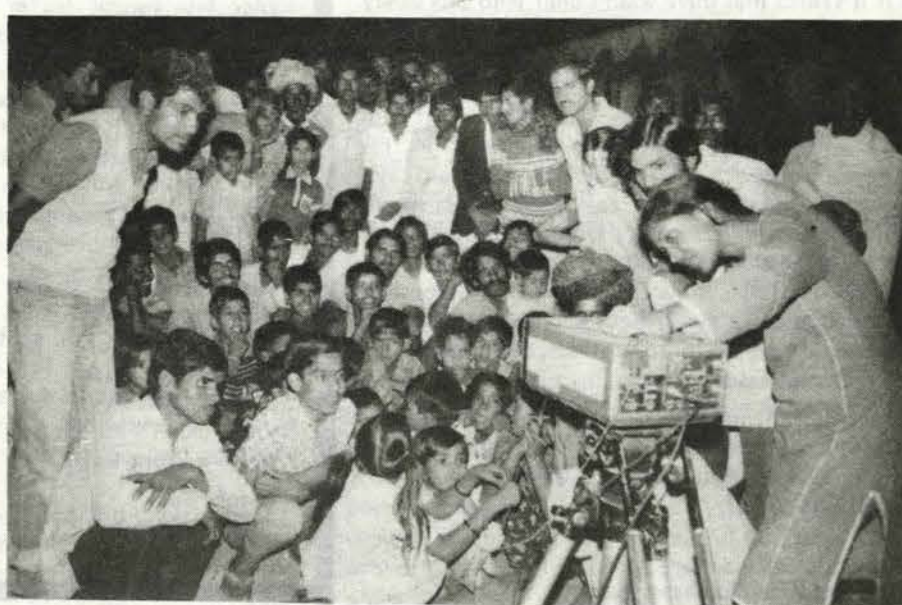
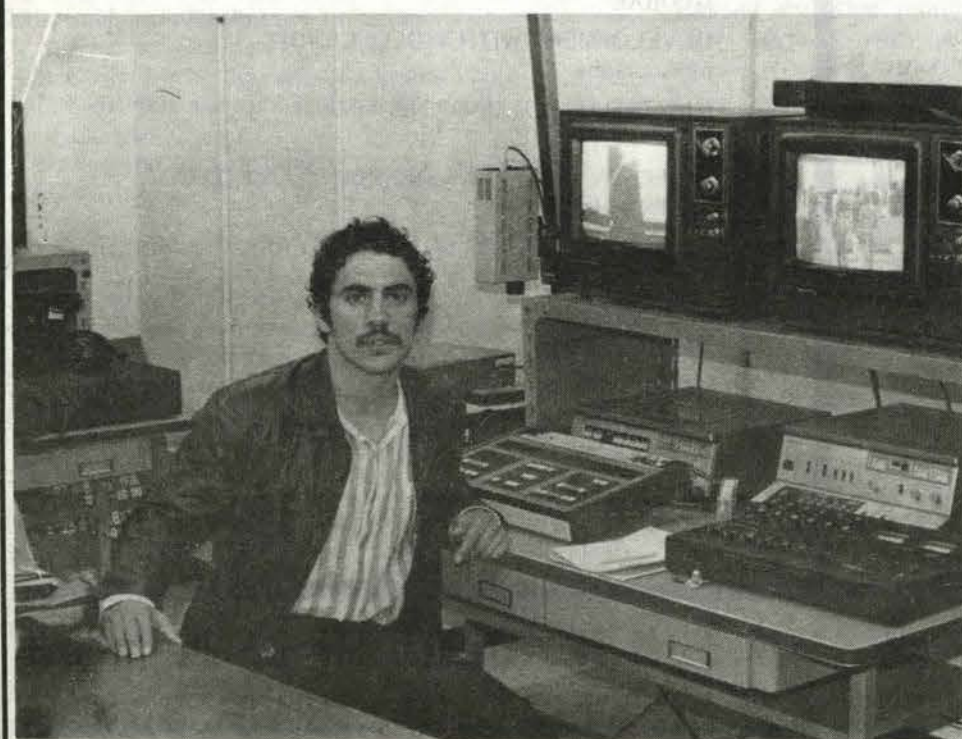
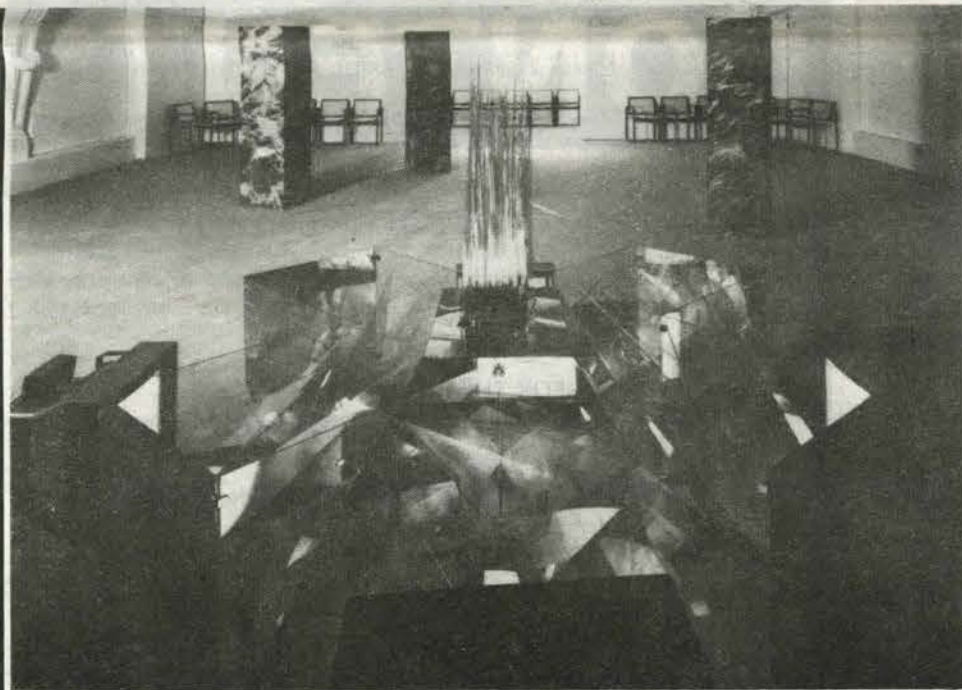
A Discussion On Video Exhibitions and Video Screenings

■ Muntadas: A Man Of His Time

Video On The Trans-Siberian Railroad

Coalition for the Right To View

Development With Video, CENDIT



National Gallery Cuts Video Program

Artists Protest

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

This letter is to bring to your attention some background information related to the termination of the video program at the National Gallery of Canada. The position of Curatorial Assistant of Contemporary Art (Video), held by Robert McFadden since November 1983, has been cut by the National Gallery in accordance with a recent directive from the National Museums Corporation to reduce personnel. The position was a term-position, not subject to the procedures governing regular staff positions, and was one of several term positions not renewed by the Gallery in accordance with its budget squeezing. Robert McFadden's last day in that position was December 13.

While the Gallery will no doubt offer vague promises of maintaining a video program despite the loss of a staff person to attend to such a program, the evidence of its history suggests otherwise. These are the statistics:

Until the Gallery hired Robert McFadden to fill the position of video curator in November 1983, the National Gallery of Canada had held only three video exhibitions. These were curated by out-of-house curators. The programs consisted of "Another Dimension", curated by Peggy Gale in 1977, "Canada Video", a program of videotapes to represent Canada at the 1980 Venice Biennale and, three years later, a presentation in the Gallery of the selections for "Canada Video". The "Canada Video" tapes were selected by Bruce Ferguson, working on a term contract. In addition, video figured as a component in two other exhibitions at the Gallery: Tom Sherman's "Cultural Engineering" in May 1983 and installation pieces by Eric Cameron/Noel Harding four years earlier.

In terms of acquisitions, the same cavalier attitude on the part of the National Gallery of Canada toward video is

repeated. Before November 1983, the Gallery had purchased a total of only 98 videotapes, and these were overwhelmingly associated with the exhibitions curated by Gale and Ferguson: 43 tapes from "Another Dimension", 12 tapes from "Canada Video" and a further 29 tapes purchased by Ferguson while assembling that exhibition. Only 14 tapes were purchased by regular staff.

In the period from November 1983 to December 1985, there have been ten video exhibitions, seven of which were curated in-house and three by guest curators.

Since November 1983, a total of 169 tapes have been purchased, and a further 36 are in the acquisition process, all on the recommendation of Robert McFadden.

It is clearly evident that, without a staff person in charge of this activity, video is not given the consideration within the regular curatorial activity of the Gallery. With only two curators of contemporary art on staff, both already fully committed within their normal sphere of activities, it is inconceivable that this already overburdened staff will have any leeway to attend to the video program as well (as they themselves have informally stated). In this respect it is noteworthy that in the forthcoming survey of Canadian contemporary art "Songs of Experience", organized by these two curators and scheduled to open at the gallery in the spring of 1986, the video component has been dropped.

In terminating the video position, the National Gallery has effectively terminated the video exhibition and purchase program. We believe that it is essential to protest vigorously against this decisively backward step, which returns video to its status as "invisible" within the National Gallery's conception and presentation of contemporary art and isolates video as an 'expendable' art form, one which can be neglected until the Gallery opens its new quarters in 1988 — or later. Programs that are cut, however, are notoriously hard to reinstate.

This withdrawal of commitment flies in the face of current international trends in art institutions. One has

only to witness the expansion of video art activities across Canada and the U.S., i.e., the I.C.A. in Boston, the Long Beach Museum in California, the expanded programming at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, as well as the widespread display of video art in the ANNPAC centres here in Canada. As for Europe, the Tate and the I.C.A. in London have an expanding video program, as has the Steidlek in Amsterdam. In addition to a growing commitment to video in the major art institutions, video art theatres are opening up in a variety of European cities. In Japan, there is an enormous amount of video art display activity within the major institutions. Further, video art seminars and video art history courses are a regular and expanding component of Fine Art departments in universities and art colleges throughout Canada, the U.S., Europe, and Japan.

There is no question that the National Gallery is not in a robust financial position. In comparing the Gallery with other major institutions, however, it is evident that the problem is not one of funds: it is one of exhibition priorities. The irrationality of the decision to terminate the program is further evidenced in considering the discrepancy between the substantial benefits in programming and prestige which have accrued to the Gallery from its video program relative to its meagre financial investment.

We demand that a clear allocation of dollars and person-hours be committed toward the maintenance of the video program. Ideally, our goal is the reinstatement of the position of video curator, with a corresponding exhibition and acquisitions budget. At the very least, we require a verifiable commitment of budget dollars and the name of the staff person encharged with the video program. (We believe this minimum requirement could not be met without, in fact, reinstating the position of video curator.)

Renee Baert
Colin Campbell

Vera Frenkel
Kim Tomczak

See also letter from Women In Focus, page 17

EDIT

We are happy to present to you Volume 8, Number 1, Issue 36. With this issue we are presenting a few changes and would like to hear your comments — your likes and dislikes. More and more we are feeling the squeeze, so changes are slower than hoped for, but still within reach.

In this issue we would like to draw your attention to two ideas: first, the letters from Renee Baert, Colin Campbell, Vera Frenkel, and Kim Tomczak (page 2, National Gallery Cuts Video Program) and Women In Focus Open Letter to Video Guide (page 17, Scanning). This is a very important topic, and we urge all of you to join the protest against this cut. Second, the legal case which concerns Paul Wong vs. the Vancouver Art Gallery and Luke Rombout. While most of us cannot judge the specifics of this case, we do have to concern ourselves with the issues that it raises: CONTRACTS. While it is hard not to think there was a contract, given the Gallery took out ads in the newspaper, what will happen if it's ruled that there wasn't one? Who gets to say what is or is not art? And how does censorship within galleries and institutions prevent our work from being shown? These are all issues we should be addressing as groups and individuals. I have personally seen what Paul Wong has suffered, with very little support from his peers. I'm not asking for support for his particular case, but support for the parts of the case which affect us all. I ask that people send letters to the Board of the Gallery (with copies to Paul Wong) and ask them why they are defending the lack of contract; or what is a responsible reason for cancelling a show? Let's get their policies out in the open and have no more surprises. See page 17 for details of the court case.

For deadlines, themes of upcoming issues, and writers' fees, please write the Editorial Board, Video Guide, 261 Powell Street, Vancouver, B.C., Canada, V6A 1G3, or call (604) 688-4336.

Shawn Preus
for the Satellite Video Exchange Society

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Thanks To:
City of Vancouver
Canada Council

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VANCOUVER GUIDE

Coalition for the Right To View

C.R.T.V.

COALITION FOR THE RIGHT TO VIEW

Since December 22, 1985, the Coalition For The Right To View (CRTV) has been meeting to oppose the government's proposal to institute the classification and censorship of video. The CRTV is also concerned about the increasing use of Canada Customs to seize books and publications concerned with sexual issues. We believe that censorship creates a climate of fear instead of creativity and critical debate.

The Coalition brings together feminists, artists, video producers, writers, gay and lesbian organizations, independent video distributors, academics, civil libertarians, and concerned individuals, who believe that censorship of video is the wrong solution to the complex problem of violence against women and children and violent pornography.

Spokesperson Sara Diamond stated, "We are angry that the provincial government cuts back on services to women and children who are victims of sexual abuse and violence, but puts resources into censoring images instead. We need sex education, social services, and alternate imagery. We do not believe that removing images of violence will make real violence disappear. We do not trust a small government agency to decide what images, sexual or otherwise, are appropriate for us to watch."

The CRTV plans the following actions:

- An ongoing lobbying campaign against the proposed video legislation;
- Screenings of video, film, and educational media resources about sexuality and other "censored" topics;
- A campaign to educate the public about the dangers of censorship.



The Coalition For The Right To View is supported by the following organizations:

Vancouver Artists' League (VAL)
B.C. Civil Liberties Association
Satellite Video Exchange Society
Vancouver Lesbian Connection
Vancouver Gay and Lesbian Community Centre
Little Sister's Bookstore
Angles Newspaper

For information contact Sara Diamond 254-8210; Bet Cecill 254-8458; or Karen Knights 876-0786.

CRTV
P.O. Box 69376, Stn. K
Vancouver, B.C. V5K 4W6

EDUCATE DON'T LEGISLATE C.R.T.V. — Coalition for the Right To View

Statement of Purpose

The aim of this Coalition is to combat government censorship, including but not limited to

- A. Proposed videotape legislation
- B. Censorship by the Periodical Review Board
- C. Censorship and banning of word and image by Canada Customs
- D. Anti-obscenity sections of the Criminal Code.

Basis of Unity

As residents of British Columbia, we are deeply concerned about the provincial government's proposal to institute the classification and censorship of video. We feel that this is the wrong solution to the complex problem of violence against women and violent pornography.

We take this stand for the following reasons:

1. Canada has a bad track record. It has often been alternate material, whether feminist, gay, or politically critical, that existing government censorship has stopped from circulation. Yet the stated purpose of the legislation has been "to protect women and children." We ask: What guarantees are there that a B.C. censor would act differently than the Ontario Censor Board which prohibited *Not A Love Story*, a feminist, anti-porn film?

We are concerned that valuable educational work will be lost through censorship.

2. It is impossible to set clear criteria for censoring images. Even proposed guidelines such as "dismemberment" or "sex associated with coercion" could be used to ban work that criticizes violent imagery. What is an "unnatural act" depends on personal opinion. One person's porn may be another's erotica. The important work of exploring positive sexual images and values could be easily jettisoned by a reactionary and far-reaching process of censorship.

3. We believe that sex education is essential. Any censorship process that makes it more difficult to provide both youth and adults with various forms of information about sex is dangerous. We oppose the suppression of images and are concerned that the government would choose to ban, rather than to educate.

4. This sweeping censorship legislation will include all video. Artist-run centres and artists will have to pay to have their work censored before it is shown. But alternative centres and individuals will not be able to afford this costly process. New imagery by artists and educators could disappear while mainstream anti-woman images on T.V. and in ads, violence on television, and soft-core porn will remain untouched.

5. We note and oppose the growing trend towards censorship across Canada including the following:

- The censorship of artistic materials under the Ontario Board of Censors;
- The censorship of materials by Canada Customs, especially the targeting of gay and lesbian images;
- The effective political censorship imposed through

cutbacks to cultural funding on a Federal level, especially as it affects independent artists.

We feel there is an alternative to censorship. We encourage the provincial government to reconsider its proposed legislation. In addition, we call on the government to do the following:

1. Fund sex education programs in the school system and the community that teach responsible, consensual sexuality in a comprehensive manner;
2. Provide resources for the victims of real violence through economic and policy support for child abuse and sexual abuse teams, services and shelters for battered and raped women, self-defense training in the school system, and other human resource services;
3. Provide policy and economic support for measures that promote equality between men and women;
4. Provide resources for artists, film-makers, video producers, writers, and publishers to develop sexual images which can begin to be an alternative to existing porn and advertising images;
5. Ensure that artist-run centres, educational institutions, art and educational materials will not be censored, either for their sexual content or social criticism.

We call on individuals and organizations to endorse this position paper. Please send a letter to the Attorney-General Brian Smith in Victoria, B.C. You can become active in the fight against censorship by contacting our organization:

CRTV
P.O. Box 69376, Station K
Vancouver, B.C. V5K 4W6



Inner Landscape — Insight Image by Ulrike Rosenbach



Teaching & Learning by Robert Filliou

Video Works

Western Front Video

by Karen Knights

It is almost impossible to imagine a time when the Western Front did not exist or, for that matter, a time when the term "video" was virtually unknown. Whether the output from The Box originated as film or video tape was of no importance — there was only television: something that was "beamed in" and "turned on", a technology of near mythic proportions and propensity. Yet, in relative terms, this naivety lasted a very short time. As the seventies neared, a very primitive and clumsy video technology came into the hands of artists around the world in the form of black and white, half inch, reel to reel portapaks. Intermedia of Vancouver purchased one in 1969. Western Front was founded soon after, and its video department has since produced an impressive number of fine works.

Colin Griffiths curated the "Video Works" screenings which took place in four sets over two days at the Convertible Showroom. The twenty-two videos were produced between 1979 and 1985 and are the work of both local artists closely connected to the Front and artists in residence. Each two hour set includes tapes of various styles and ages, although heavily weighted in favour of productions completed in the last two years, which make up half the program. Each segment is short

and diverse enough not to be fatiguing, yet it is necessary to see the entire program to properly appreciate the growth and subsequent depth of the Front's productivity.

The complete program is an impressive meld of contrasting textures and tones. The Front's influence is apparent in each tape: Kate Craig's camera work, Hank Bull's sound tracks, and David Kelln's sound engineering, for example, link several tapes by a wide range of artists. Artists in residence use the Front as a set, and house cats Oola and Spoola cameo in *Breath* and *El Nino*. The ambience of the Front itself and its own artists is always present in some form, subtle or not.

Two tapes, however, fail to fit the expected structure of a Front production. *Relican Wedding* and *Mondo Arte Cabaret* are both documentaries of 1979 art happenings. Their anarchy and 'video verite' style are interesting contrasts to the restrained and controlled intellectual studies of General Idea's *Cornucopia* and Robert Racine's study *J'aurais Dit Glenn Gould*; tapes of crystal and ice when compared to the fire and spit of these early videos. The remaining three videos from this early period are as uncluttered as *Relican Wedding* and *Mondo Arte Cabaret* are chaotic. Tom Sherman's *Individual Release*, Robert

Filliou's *Teaching and Learning as Performing Arts Part II*, and Kate Craig's powerful *Delicate Issue* examine the interactive potential of the medium using sparse visuals and dialogue. The illusion of a direct artist to viewer dialogue does not last long. The inevitable influence of the medium on that dialogue becomes apparent. In *Delicate Issue* Craig asks, "What is the dividing line between what is public and private?" as the camera explores her body in extreme close ups.

"How close can the camera be?
How close can I be?
How close do I want you to be?
How close do you want to be?"

This tape is slightly unnerving for most women who cringe at the thought of their own 'imperfect' bodies exposed to similar scrutiny. Every enlarged pore, every unwanted hair and hidden orifice laid bare to whoever, on any whim, decides to view the tape. Craig's outwardly personal introspection is an enquiry into the boundaries of the medium and the limits of the audience. Which present the greatest barriers?

"This is as close as you get.
I can't get you any closer."

Western Front's support of Performance Art is represented by two video documents: Mona Hartoum's *Variation of Discord and Division*, 1984 and Andrew James Patterson's *Passports of Love*, 1985. The aesthetic of each work is very different. Hartoum's disturbing portrait of a violent and oppressive world is visually harsh: the black and white of the newsprint stage, dirty red blood in a grey bucket, white china offering raw, severed organs. The minimal sound is abrupt and hard. Hartoum recalls all the victims of such a world. Andrew Patterson is a victim, too: a singular one, of lost love. Patterson is not of the world. He is a prisoner of his bedroom with its coloured, washed walls, feminine vanity, empty bed, spectral wedding veil and globe that tempts him outwards but never succeeds. We hear his thoughts in soft, rounded tones. The cameras (Kate Craig and Colin Griffiths) keep a tight rein on the action, never allowing the performances to lose the video or the video to dominate the performances.

The love of Dada and an inclination for the absurd and nonsensical is always in evidence at the Front. The compilation tape *Canada Shadows* is a series of experiments with shadow theatre for video. The fantastic creatures in



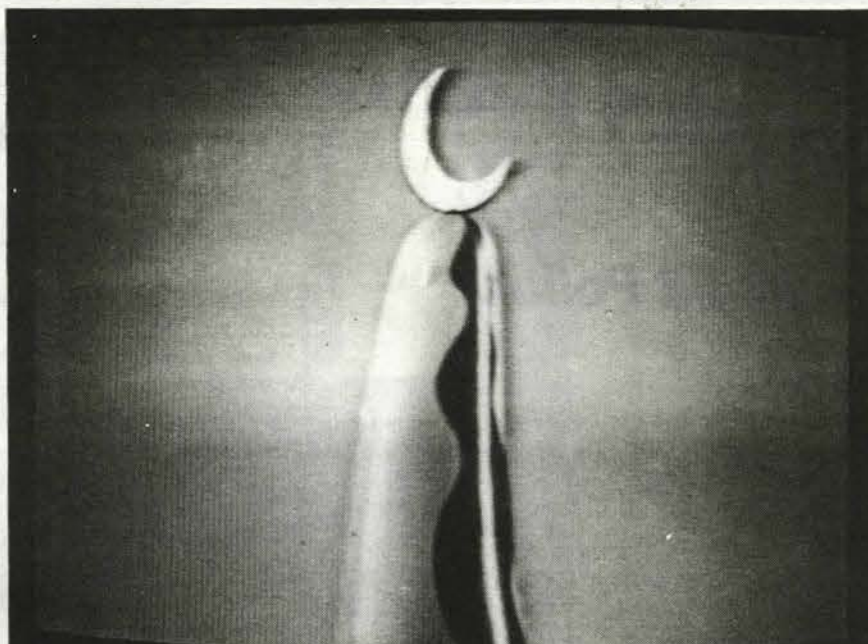
Canada Shadows by Canadian Shadow Players



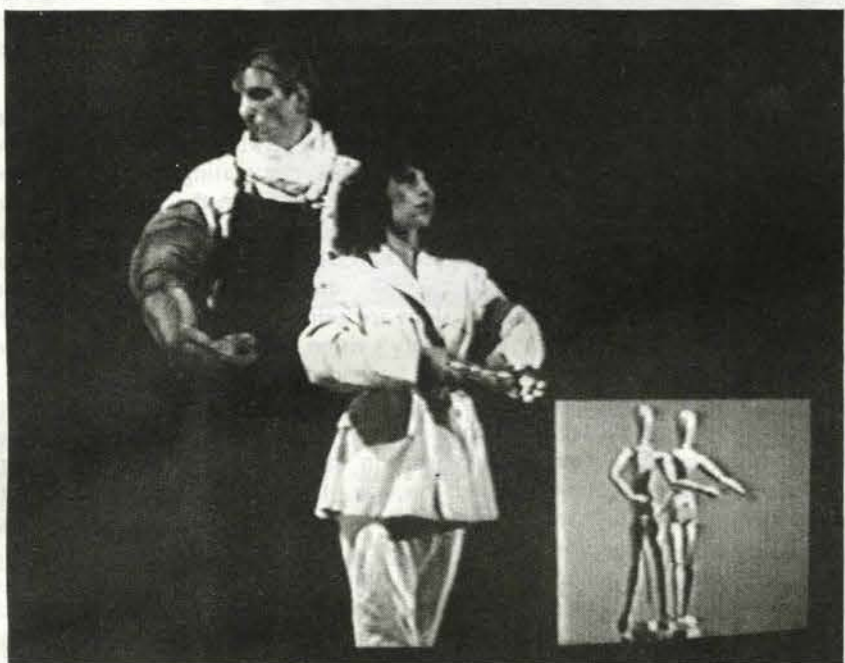
Sax Island by Hank Bull & Eric Metcalfe



Fear of Blue by Tom Dean



Cornucopia by General Idea



Unbashed Heroics by Randy & Berenicci



You Can't Drive a Car and Watch Television at the Same Time
by Tom Sherman

Snoutfigs Cathedral (text by Alfred Jarry) and the absurdly likeable *World Collage and Ballade of Madame Voque et Henris Michaud* are (dare I say it) delightful. On the slimmer side is *Sax Island*, a surreal blend of cartoon images of exotic/erotic locations coupled with bizarre, real flesh characters that float through their environment with the aid of camera tracking and zoom lenses. The world of Major-Off, Beef-Bone, and Pink-Purdah is one of intrigue, sex, violence, and their inevitable glamour. Fraser Finlayson's satire on lost stardom *Come Fly with Sonny Day* takes place in the parallel environment of Las Vegas with its palm trees, swimming pools, and neon.

These overwhelmingly male fantasies above are balanced in the program in several ways. There were many poetic tapes by women: Margaret Fabrizio's *Bruja*, Ulrike Rosenbach's *Inner Landscape — Insight Image*, and Elizabeth Vander Zaag's *TLC*, all using manipulated imagery and constructed sound to create multi-layered, fragile environments that serve as backgrounds for female visions of mystery, spirituality, and compassion. As well, Margaret Dragu's *Breath* and Tom Dean's *Fear of Blue* use

soft, minimalist images in their studies of our organic nature. Kim Tomczak investigates male/female relationships in transition through the seventies in *Paradise Lost* and Ko Nakajima creates a Buddhist meditation in *Mandala '82* in which the said mandala is systematically returned to the elements earth, wind, fire, and air after painstaking creation by human hands.

Aside from these artists, who although working with others are creating individual visions, there were tapes by artists who choose to work together: the Canada Shadow Players, General Idea, Vaerkstedt Vaerst, and Randy and Berenicci. Randy and Berenicci's *Unbashed Heroics* is a collage of vignettes on the senseless heroics of power, distorted in love or violence, which lead to personal or political masochism. Images of cock fights and mass graves share the screen with heroic posturings and stereotypical clichés of the joy of victory and the agony of love. All sound rings false, altered; all the faces are made less real through makeup and theatrics. Cities become cardboard sets — toys — destroyed on the chance whims of a lottery.

Danish Vaerkstedt Vaerst (Jesper Gundersen, Ane

Mette Ruge, Jacob F. Schokking) look at humankind's inability to get close in *El Nino*, a tape completed in 1985 which echoed the theme of a performance they did at Western Front. The tape opens with the words "Do not get too close", and the characters never do. Even during the act of dancing arm in arm, a man and woman manage to maintain an excruciating emotional distance. The tape exudes a sense of an aching aloneness through visuals like a fluid light pattern washing over a wall of grey concrete and the sound of two pairs of feet shuffling across the floor in their pathetic dance, evoking the feeling of being more than completely alone.

The diversity and quality of "Video Works" made it an exciting program. Unfortunately the structure of the screenings made it necessary to devote the majority of two days to the tapes or to view only one or two sets which detracted from the inherent strength of the complete selection. Perhaps it is time for a true retrospective at the Western Front, which, over a longer period of time, would allow greater access for the viewers and an in-depth look at the Front's remarkable contribution to video art.



Passports of Love Andrew J. Patterson



Variation of Discord & Divisions by Mona Hatoum

Everyday Events

by Jill Pollack

Two at the Table

This article will discuss the *form* of video exhibitions and video screenings. It will raise questions, to most of which I have no answers. My intentions lie more in looking at options than they do in presenting a definitive analysis.

While much has been written about individual videos and video series, as well as video technology, I have not been able to find material on the format of video presentation. Again, this could be the result of lack of ready access to the information or because a lot just does not exist. I am interested in examining some of the ways video has been treated in a gallery setting in Vancouver, when it is the primary focus of attention.

The context into which video is put and further, the temporal aspects of that context, play an enormous role in determining the expectations and perceptions which surround any given video, regardless of the content of the video. For that reason, I am making a distinction between video exhibitions and video screenings. To clarify, I am using the term, "video exhibition" to denote an in-gallery on-going daytime entity. "Video screenings" refer to nighttime events, in a gallery or other space, which occur once or over a period of days — not necessarily consecutive and not necessarily the same videos each time. In both instances, it is assumed that video stands for video-by-artists.

The House That Jack Built

In Vancouver, galleries have rarely been physical spaces built specifically for the safe housing and exhibition of art. Most had a previous function: as a store, warehouse, home, courthouse, etc. They have usually been altered to accommodate a new purpose. With one exception, they were remodelled not with exhibiting video in mind, but two- and three-dimensional art. Only the Vancouver Art Gallery set aside a specific area which

A Discussion On Video Exhibitions and Video Screenings

could be deemed a "video gallery". This observation is not a criticism of galleries, rather it speaks to the perceptions surrounding the exhibition of video vis-a-vis other artforms.

How should video be treated: should it be transposed into the same white box we struggle with when installing photography, paintings, sculpture, etc.? Does it need a separate space and is enough video shown to financially warrant it? Conversely, and because in most cases video is put into the same room where other art has been shown, does this in some way aid the viewers in their understanding and enjoyment of it? Is a video exhibition, in form and intention, like any other exhibition? And perhaps most importantly, because video exhibitions exist in such a diversity of settings, does this encourage a more creative approach?

The Sofa Solution

Although there seems to be a shift away from the incorporation of a living room atmosphere in video exhibitions, the "sofa solution" has proven to be the most consistent approach taken in video exhibitions. In my opinion, it was part of the evolutionary process of discovery; an attempt to incorporate a new medium into an existing situation.

It allowed the viewer a comfortable place to sit and watch the video, which hopefully would induce people to stay through the whole tape(s). If people are comfortable and in a familiar stance doing a familiar activity (watching a TV/video monitor), then their defenses may go down; thus allowing for a more non-threatening communication. However, it is a literal interpretation misplaced.

I do not want to re-state the video-by-artists vs. TV discussion, but the use of a sofa in a video exhibition seems, by its very existence, to deny those differences. While it acknowledges the intimate nature of watching video/TV (alone or in small groups) it also encourages a set of expectations unrelated to video. (See footnotes 3 and 4 in 'Appropriate/Distracted' last issue.)

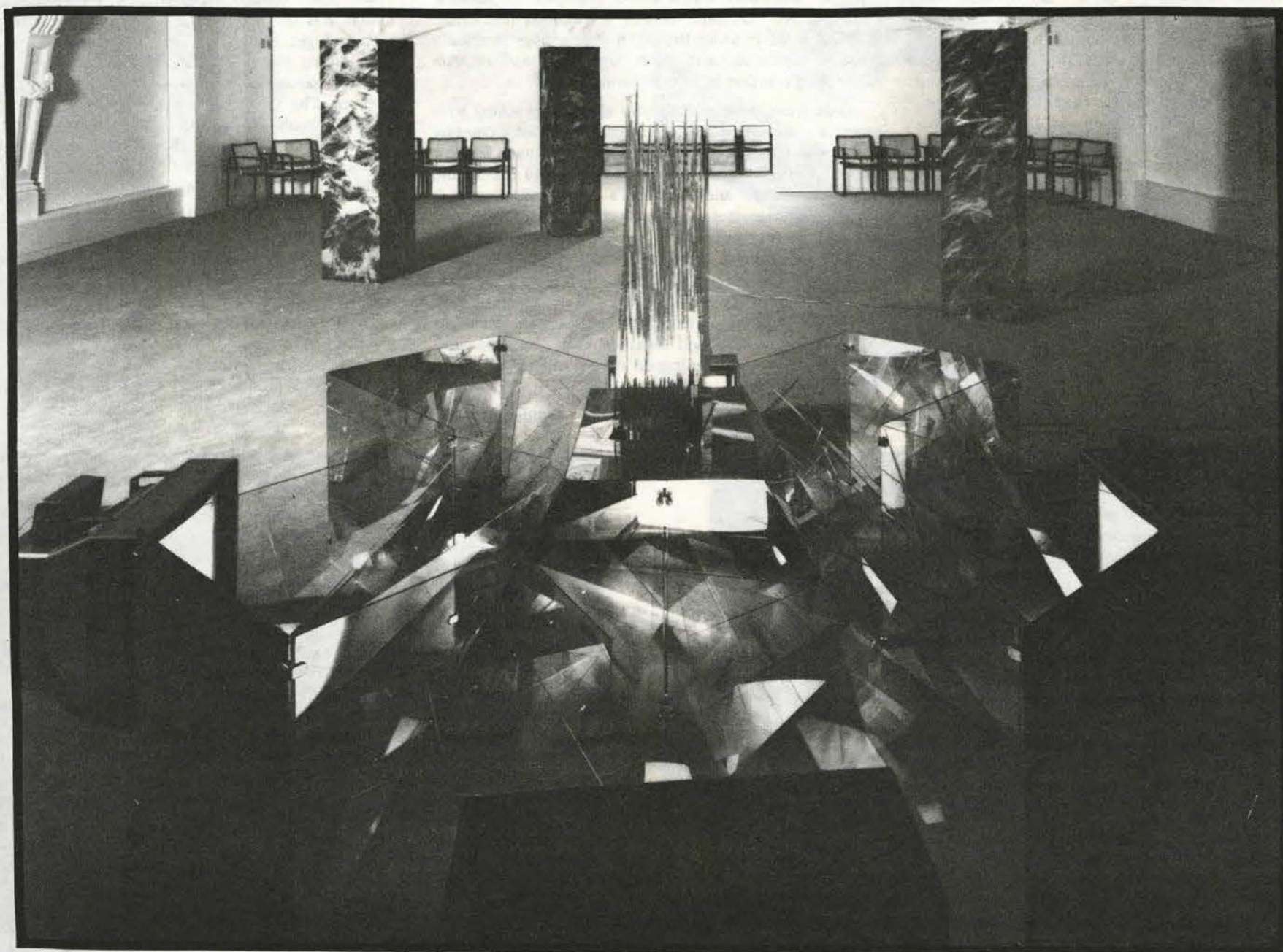
Just because it has been done before and is proble-

matic does not necessarily mean that it should be discarded. I may not appreciate this approach, but perhaps there are ways to alter it which will accentuate the non-TVness while allowing the sofa to remain. I think it would be an intriguing challenge, and it could lead to new ways of thinking about video on the parts of the viewer, the maker, and the curator/gallery.

Two-pronged Definitions

On one level, every video exhibition is a site-specific installation. While inherent in the term 'exhibition' is the act of taking the space into account, it is an overt aspect of a video exhibition. Unlike an exhibition of wall-mounted art, where the variables lie in determining placement on the wall (how many feet apart, how high, etc.), in an exhibition of video, the possibilities are more complex.

If it is a monitor-only work/series, then decisions have to be made as to the context within which it will be put. The number of monitors, the seating or viewing stance, the distance of the monitors from the viewer, the height and size of the monitor(s) must be considered. All the above factors will have an impact on the way the video is perceived. If the maker does not have a specific preference, then the decisions are going to be made according to the curator's or gallery's vision (although hopefully in concert with the artist). I wonder if, just as artists who work in other media, video artists consider the form of the presentation of their work before it is exhibited. Rarely have I found artists who, in the process of making their work, have devised the way it should be shown in a gallery. Even though the final cycle of art-making is communication, and that is one of the artist's intentions, the installing of non-installation art is usually designed (if at all by the artist) when a show is secured — not when made. Exhibiting the art is not included in the making, and we have to remember that it is the by-product of creativity which is on display in the gallery; not the creativity itself. Despite all of this, it is a responsibility which three-quarters of the exhibition quartet (the artist, the curator, and the gallery; not the viewer) must deal with.



Video installation by Nori Sato, 1984, Vancouver Art Gallery

photo by Jim Jardine, courtesy of Vancouver Art Gallery

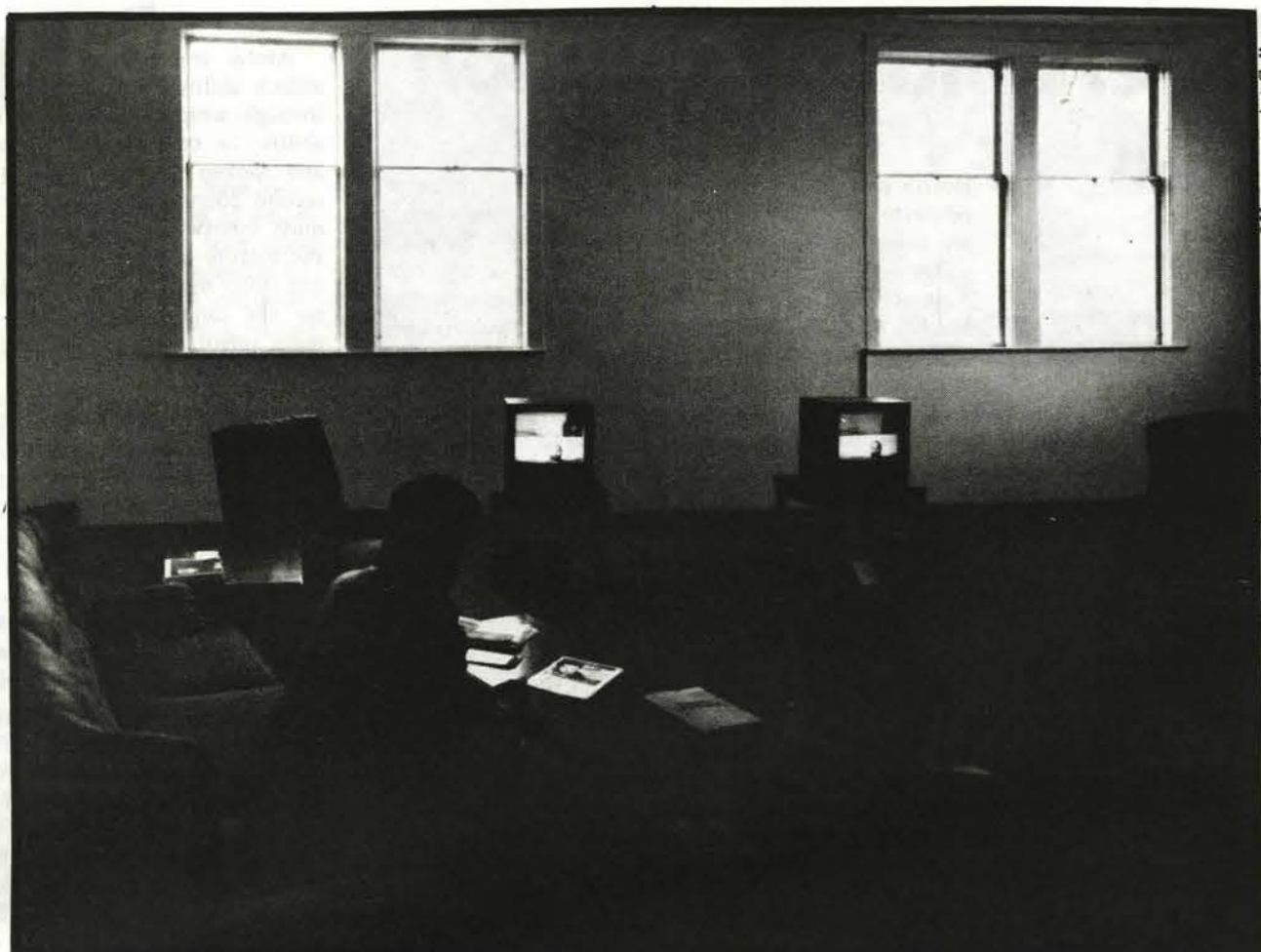


photo by Jim Jardine, courtesy of Vancouver Art Gallery

Video installation *Television Interference*, Presentation House, 1984

Fewer decisions have to be made when the exhibition is of installation video. Because the maker has ascertained the physical context, only left to work out is where in the space the installation will be put and where the viewer will be in relation to the art. More often than not, in the case of installation video, the position of the viewer is determined by the physical aspects of the installation itself.

A Square is to a Rectangle as a Monitor is to a Monitor

Within the framework of an exhibition, there are finite limitations imposed by the work. In a video exhibition, either the artist has to devise a way of dealing with the box/monitor within the box/gallery (as they pertain to installation videos), or it is decided by the artist/curator/gallery (as in a non-installation video show).

Video is confined within a 'frame' just as is much two-dimensional work. In some two-dimensional shows, the frames are uniform while what is inside the frames varies. In a video exhibition, the 'insides' are always different and the frames the same (with the exception of multiple monitors showing the same image). The monitor houses the art as the frames do, but the degree of difference between monitors is less than between frames. While two-dimensional art can be hung frameless, a video cannot be seen without some sort of monitor. I may be stating the obvious; nevertheless, it is an important point. Perhaps the presentation of video has become so formula-ized because the apparatus of video is formula-ized.

All or Nothing At All

It is interesting that the content of a particular video either plays a crucial role or none at all within the context of its presentation. In installation video, elements other than the monitor exist because of their relationship to the content of the video. These may mirror the on-screen action, complement it, or build on it. In all instances, the content of the tape is inseparably tied to the other parts of the installation. There is an interdependence between the elements. It is their totality which communicates the artist's intentions, and which creates the context.

In a video exhibition, presentation is rarely governed by what is on the screen. The content and the physical context seem to have more in common because of the medium of video than the specifics of the individual tape(s). Perhaps denying the obvious and adopting a less literal approach makes sense. By divorcing the content from the physical context, the exhibition can become the vehicle whereby ideas and images (not the video-ness) dominate. Or such an approach can achieve the opposite. It can accentuate the medium because it stands out. Depending upon the intention of the exhibition, one or the other aspects can be emphasized.

However, I am wondering how we can have a video exhibition where the video as a medium is inherently incorporated; so that what is the most prominent is the art, not the form of the art. I am not in favour of more exhibitions which are organized only around the geographical area where an artist lives or exclusively the

school they attend or other themes which are not in evidence in the work itself; rather I want to see more exhibitions of video which focus on the individual artist's concerns. If the video-ness of the video is the maker's primary intention, then the installation should reflect that. On the other hand, if the medium is used as a means of communication, as say, paint and canvas or photography, then the treatment of the work should highlight the content. It seems to me that to do otherwise is disrespectful to both artist and audience.

Once Upon a Time

Nighttime screenings are generally perceived as events. People attend specifically because they want to see video. This is different from video exhibitions, where a portion of the viewing audience are not necessarily at the gallery to see a tape. The expectations and intentions between the two also appear to vary. Nighttime screenings tend to carry similar baggage as do movies: entertainment. People expect that they will be seeing something which will amuse, challenge, provoke, etc., within a more social realm.

They are at the nighttime event with a specific purpose in mind and even behaviour and moods change. A daytime gallery environment is usually quite sombre, and there are fewer people. At a nighttime program, however, the tone is casual, looser. It resembles a movie theatre atmosphere more than it does a gallery. (This seems to be true even if the screenings take place in a gallery.)

Nighttime screenings are, on the whole, approached in the same way as smaller film houses treat their programming. Sometimes the videos are part of a series, screened over days or even weeks. Often they are thematic, sometimes they focus on a particular artist. They start at the same time as do most movies and run for about normal movie length. Where most films are not broken up by an intermission, a lots of nighttime screenings are.

But video screenings are not film screenings. The differences become apparent on-site. In terms of the physical space, the seating is rarely tiered; rather it is usually on one level. Further, there is no big screen, but multiple monitors placed throughout the space (occasionally augmented by a 'big' monitor/screen). There are fewer seats, a smaller audience and a more intimate feeling. While there may be a larger audience than during daytime gallery video exhibitions, the physical organization still retains the same form of presentation: small groups of people per monitor.

As a rule, nighttime screenings charge for admission, even at galleries where daytime programming is free. There is always some sort of introduction and either the organizer, curator, gallery representative and/or maker is present. During a daytime video exhibition, usually it is only the visitor alone in the space. As well, some type of refreshment (primarily alcoholic) is normally provided at nighttime programs.

The most profound distinction between daytime video exhibitions and nighttime shows is that people generally

watch the entire tape(s) at the evening events. The viewers expect to spend a couple of hours watching video and have gone to the event with that express purpose in mind. My conclusion is that videos put into a nighttime program are given more respectful treatment, by virtue of these established viewing trends. The artist's work will be seen from start to finish by more people than in a gallery exhibition.

Does this mean that galleries should only show video in an evening program context? Of the small percentage of the population who regularly visit galleries, an even smaller portion watch the video component. It would be a real disservice to adopt a 'head count' attitude towards the viability of in-gallery video exhibitions. Since very few shows in any media draw huge crowds, perhaps rather than cutting back exposure to any given artform, we should concentrate on increasing accessibility. It is an institutional responsibility to ensure that video is presented in such a manner so as to encourage full viewing. We must explore presentation possibilities, especially since some videos and in particular installation videos are not appropriate for a nighttime context, but *need* a gallery environment.

Further, I think it is important to respect the individual not only on the level of the treatment of the artist's work, but in regards to the viewer. Through the promotion of challenging, ideologically or aesthetically complex art, we may on the one hand be 'catering' to a few, but shouldn't we accord them importance and validity? It is not by stifling but by taking risks that we can grow. Decisions must not exclusively be made according to generally accepted, 'popular' criteria.

We propel the motion of change. How does the object look, now, now, and now again? We don't care. We ask how is it changing?

(Robert Jay Wolff, 'Curriculum for a Sculpture Class', 1941)

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Video As Personal Expression

by Jamirte Trott

Video as personal expression is here applied to video as art. This is not to say that art is necessarily "personal". Most often, art does not refer to the person who creates it and when it does, it maintains a certain degree of critical distance.

Video is not a medium given to personal intimacy. Physically, it holds a web of wires, electrodes, plugs, and cables as a sort of electronic brain inside boxes — such as the video camera, the monitor, and the synthesizer, to mention a few. Yet, as a medium, video lacks physicality; it is as abstract as time. Consequently, the work routine of a video maker invites frustrations of "bugs", and sometimes incomprehensible breakdowns calling for retracing or remapping a given circuitry, only to discover the problem as a mere faulty line or a bad cable.

Historically, video endures the psychological and contextual burden of its ancestry, broadcast television — so notorious as promotional tool and cultural manipulator. Because of, as well as, or in spite of this, television is today a mirror reflecting paragons of social/political and economic ideals for us all. Success and well being are there achieved or achievable through acquisition of specific products or adherence to prescribed social constructs. In other words, television is an ahistorical mirror of society, vested in the sensational. It was, however, this mirror-reflecting quality that first caught the artist's attention and triggered his/her desire to make video as art. Although the machine is said to alienate 'man' from 'himself', in video the artist turned to the machine perhaps as a venue back to the "self". Substantiating this are the early works of video pioneers, such as Bruce Nauman, Vito Acconci, and others.

This apparent need for self-reflection is encountered in video's immediate light-bouncing ability, a sort of catalyzer for the proverbial notion of art as "personal". As a result, we find under the umbrella of video art several styles of video production with a high dosage of "ME" content, ranging from the "look at me, I am cool" type, to the "please help me, I lost my grandmother", to the kind that screams out-right "fuck the system, I can't stand Ronald Reagan any more", or the "Hey, don't you know I hate all men, or all women, for that matter." And that is all well; everyone is entitled to "express" his or her opinion in whatever way her or she chooses. Video, or any other art, can bear any topic, but even the most interesting topic without some degree of imagination and critical distance is not art, and it is often boring. Even a documentary, a political or personal profile, or a piece of social criticism requires a certain degree of imagination so as to retain the viewer's interest. In this sense, a bad painting is much kinder than a bad video, in that the first allows instant dismissal, whereas the latter demands the spectator's undivided attention, even if unable to hold it.

Besides the valid need for video as self search, this penchant for narcissism in video may stem from many other traits inherent to the media — especially from

video's psychological inheritance of television's hype and celebrity syndrome. "Personal expression" in video as art, then, refers to the kind of video bearing a "personal" vision — be it historical, political, social, or any other context — composed within the artist's imagination and insight, thus creating a space for one or many dialogues between itself and the viewer. The ways in which this discourse is created are as varied as the artists: that is what remains "personal". Then contrary to the notion of art as "personal expression", art tends to veer away from the person as its own content and to concentrate on that person's vision and imagination.

Video art is also a misnomer in that the conventional notion of "art" applies mainly to still imagery. In an archaic or modernistic sense, popular notion favours the definition of "art" as that of painting. Within this ossified notion of "art equals painting or image", video cannot fit as art because — and only because — other arts are contained within spatial stillness and video is boundless movement of time and space. Yet, and perhaps because video was originated by artists (mostly painters) there exists a concerted effort to force video into a contextual frame of conventional art. An example of this is computer graphic "art". This suggests a clinging to the idea of "art equals painting", so let there be "video painting". (This also indicates a possible illusion that such kinds of video will raise the status of the medium and cancel some of its inherent mass media implications by transposing it to some kind of formal "expression" in a medium as incapable of surfacial enrichment as that of paint on canvas.) Video as art, or video as personal expression, if you will, starts with the understanding of the medium's unique potential: that of consolidating form and content as movement. Video as art, if you will, is time as art. As Douglas Davis says:

*"There will be no video art until we approach this medium as if it had not existed before."*¹

Bill Viola is an example of a video artist who seems to have understood this from the beginning. Viola was a painter — according to his own statement, a bad one. Since he knew painting but couldn't handle it well, he (I assume) embraced video as video — perhaps influenced by his knowledge of painting, but not as a substitute. The wide scope of his vision, his sense of poetry, and his honed sensitivity found in video a better vehicle for his personal expression. He would be incapable (I am going to assume) of transposing his perception of the movement of the subtle stirring of air, water, breath, or light to any medium, if he could not transpose it through a medium as capable of translating some of the intrinsic realities of these abstractions as video is. Yet Viola's video may appear sometimes to follow the form of painting. But unlike some synthesized or computerized art, Viola's videos carry a metaphoric language where content precedes form, even within the context of museum or gallery installations.

Perhaps unaware, or unintentionally trying to force video art into a contextual frame of "landscape/portrait painting", some video installations present "stills" of people or landscapes spread across many monitors. Such installations, like still imagery, can access the viewers' apprehension of form and content, if any, in a matter of seconds. Yet, also trying to be video, they generally run along for several insufferable minutes. Once I saw a multi-monitor installation of several views of the Machu Pichu, which, exemplifying the above, may have revealed the beauty of that Peruvian mountain, but no more, no less. It may have provided evidence of the artist's presence at the site and the spots this person chose to stand on for the camera's points of view, but from that historical place, and from this person's videotaping, there was no indication besides physical presence that they ever came together. On the other side of this polarity, we have video as alternative for TV news. Some video, supposedly addressed to mass audience, rejects video as art and confuses popular with trite, just as conventional TV does. Yet, for its flexibility, video is the medium adaptable as a tool for the raising of social consciousness. Good examples of such are Jean Luc Godard and Ann-Marie Mieville's *France/Tour/Deux/Enfants*, Isaac Cronin and Terrel Seltzer's *Call it Sleep*, or John Manning, Edward Rankus, and Barbara Latham's *AlienNATION*. The first two may not claim themselves as video art, yet all three are excellent pieces of video work. Thus the "art" in video can refer to thought, research, and yes, form, creativity, and vision.

Above and beyond tech skills, video demands the artist's ability to adopt electric pulses as the medium through which to shape his/her ideas, as well as the ability to coalesce many languages — visual, written, and spoken — and sound into a process where every second counts. Thus, like a magician, the video maker must intertwine many forms into one, while compiling the totality of his/her vision into sequential motion. The end result must also reserve a special place for the viewer, for one cannot communicate just with oneself. Among many videotapes accomplishing this is Candace Reckinger's *Impossible Love*. With a great deal of thought, creativity, and imagination, this tape summarizes the notion of "woman" as linguistic theory: that is, as a semantic premise of male desire. On the other hand, Cecilia Condit's tape *Possibly in Michigan*, albeit formulating a highly clever concept of sexuality, projects men as ridiculous and repulsive. The artist here gets too close to her own opinion, perhaps pleasing most female viewers, yet undermining the viewer in general, even if within a comic frame. This implies that that mirror-like video quality can in fact "overexpose" the personal view in the piece, requiring otherwise a great deal of critical distance.

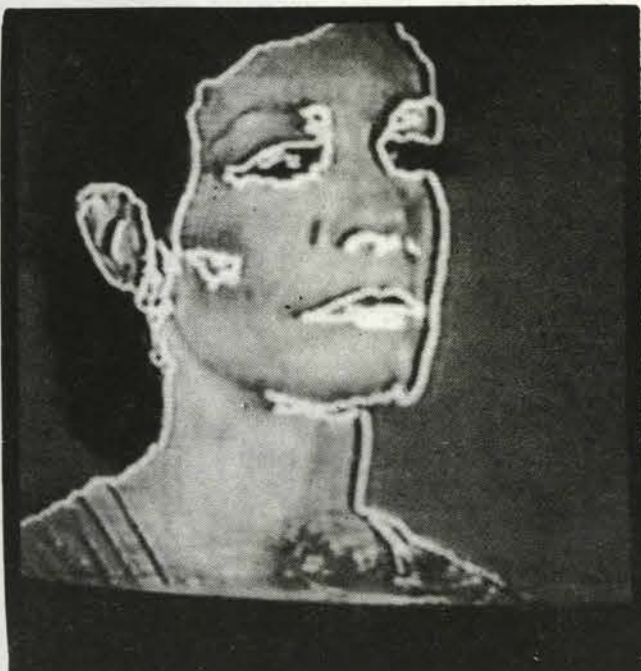
Video as personal expression, or video art, then accommodates an encompassing overture of ideas and forms as well as styles, articulated within an open space of light and motion. Filmmakers seem to have understood this from the very beginning, but then again filmmakers did not necessarily start out as artists, or for that matter, as painters. Neither did filmmaking come out of a mass communication industry. Yet the opposite can also be as relevant, in that a knowledge of other art forms and of art history can help rather than hinder the video artist. Likewise, on the road to self-assertion, video as art cannot afford impersonations of older arts executed within still boundaries; neither can it afford to seek definition as a trite version of conventional television, because either way it will straddle different positions and undermine its own, especially at the cost of those excellent and brilliant examples of video art in existence. As Charles Hagen says:

*"Video art has always seemed a way station on the road to other places, to a destination somewhere between the transformation of art and the transformation of TV."*²

To effectively transform the notion of "art", and perhaps to transform the quality of conventional television, video must stand on its own ground. Especially at the present time when other arts have turned their attention to social issues, video can well do what it does best: scrutinize and expose the nerve of historical and social myths, and work toward the raising of social consciousness as an art by itself. Joan Jonas' *Double Lunar Dogs* comes to mind as one of the best examples of video art as personal expression. It combines form, content, imagination, and vision in a hypothetical tale based on a premise of historical human folly.

Footnotes

- ¹ Davis, Douglas, "Video in the Mid-'70's: Prelude to an End/Future". *Video Art — An Anthology* ed. Ira Schneider/Beryl Korot. (Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, Inc. N.Y. 1976) p. 198.
- ² Charles Hagen, "Breaking the Box: The Electronic Operas of Robert Ashley and Woody Vasulka". *ART-FORUM* (March 1985) p. 55.



Double Lunar Dogs by Joan Jonas



Double Lunar Dogs by Joan Jonas

CENDIT

A group of people go to a village. They have video cameras, recorders, players, and a whole load of equipment with them. The villagers have never seen these things. They are familiar with the television monitor, but that's it. Why this technological invasion? A discussion takes place. The head person knew of this advent. He had been consulted. The villagers can't believe that the equipment has come for them — to learn, to use, to make programs with. They are curious and enthusiastic, doubtful and critical. The work starts, the camera whirrs. Sounds. Light. Action. But there's a difference. The subject is the village, its problems, its projects, its festivals — anything. But this time it is decided by the villagers themselves. They learn; they direct; and they document a part of their lives on video.

This is a scene often encountered in Cendit's efforts at participatory communication. Cendit, or to give its full name, Centre for Development of Instructional Technology, is in its 14th year. Based, as it is, in a country where over 50% of the populace is non-literate, it has found audio-visual media to be the most effective means of communication. India, with over 180 television transmitters and a satellite capability to reach 70% of the population, has seen a rapid increase in the use of television over the last few years. Yet most of this has been channeled for entertainment purposes, and that, too, addresses itself principally to the urban audience. The majority (about 70%) staying in the rural areas remain untouched.

A number of Indian non-governmental groups are working to use audio-visual media in an alternate way — for development, education, and documentation — to inform and motivate. Cendit is one such group. It has developed a number of video programs with the help of professionals, indigenous people, rural development workers, labour unions, women activists, environmentalists, health workers, etc.

The *Saharanpur Community Video Experiment* (1975) documents the initial efforts to use video in a rural community. The people participated in the program compilation. More important — the technology did not prove a barrier in communication. Rather, the local people, once familiar with it, found it to be a friend who listened to their problems and put them in a clear perspective. Encouraged by the success of the experiment and learning from its shortfalls, Cendit went on to document a number of other projects, always involving the people — the subjects of the program — in the effort. The development workers, the labour unions, and the women activists found such documentation not only a useful exercise but a motivational and informative tool. The *Chhattisgarh Mines Shramik Sangathan* (1984) put the formation and achievements of the labour union into a perspective which united them in their struggles. *Comrades and Bhaiyas* (1981) was made for the Workshop on Trade Unions and the Labouring Poor in India. It created an awareness of the exploitation of cheap migrant labour and the division between them and local labour. It stressed the need for unity among workers to fight such exploitation. The Mirzapur Ban (rope) Workers' Co-operative and Vikalp joined Cendit in documenting the formation of the co-operative to combat the contractors and suppliers who exploited the *Ban Workers of Mirzapur Village* (1981). Such documentation, when shown around, not only informs people but motivates them to confront their problems by uniting in action against them. This is important as other means of communication — television or the printed word — either do not reach them or are unintelligible to them.

Not all the documentaries are of success stories. Many depict an on-going struggle. *We Who Make History* (1985) examines the impact of the uncontrolled exploitation of fish resources by mechanised trawlers on the culture and economy of the traditional fisherfolk. It traces the growth and struggles of the Kerala (South Indian) fisherfolk and their formation into a union. The struggle is continuing, and the program is used by the Union to inform and unite people, to give the movement a new impetus. Another such effort was *Hum Ek Hongey* (We will unite, 1984). It was made to motivate the traditional artisans to unite against the exploiting contractors, middlepersons, and government agencies.

At times, some groups collaborate with Cendit over a number of programs. This develops a sort of a package of videos discussing their problems or documenting their struggles, their projects. Action India and Delhi Dehat Mazdoor Union (union of rural labourers, peasants and farm workers) participated in developing *Hum Bhi Insaan Hain* (We are human too, 1980), a documentation of the



An effort at participatory communication with video.

Development With Video

by Anuradha

struggle of landless peasants in a North Indian village, to obtain the land allotted to them by the government. They fought against the rich land owners and won. *Songs of Sardar* (1980) used the traditional music of Eastern Uttar Pradesh (North India) to expose corruption in the society. The songs ask the workers to organize themselves against injustice.

The use of folk songs/theatre in the videos makes the program both entertaining and informative, and the audience identifies more readily with it. This was seen in *Raja Bhoj* (1979) also. Using the traditional theatre form of North India, the film imparted a family planning message to the rural audience. Similarly, *Puppets for Development* (1983), while documenting the work in development by a puppet troupe, also passed on the unifying messages through the puppet shows. A Rajasthan (West India) folk style was used in *Role of Folk Media in Extension Education* (1984). It emphasized the need for utilizing traditional media in training the grass-roots level workers. On the other hand, *Science to the People* (1984) told the story of Kerala Shastra Sahitya Parishad (South India) which spreads the message of development through science by using folk forms.

With science comes technology, but the villagers are either unaware of this or lack the knowledge to use it. *Appropriate Rural Technologies* (1984) informs them about rural demonstration-cum-training centres which promote the use of technology to improve their daily life — through solar cookers, water filters, etc. *Ye Hai Chara* (This is fodder, 1982) instructs on the improvement of cattle fodder through urea treatment. The scientific method of *Stall Feeding of Goats* (1985) is described in another program which discusses the environmental degradation caused by unrestricted grazing.

Besides the problems and issues of united action, education, and technology, another important area is health. Inaccessibility or inadequacy of health care centres is not always the cause of lack of treatment. Many times it is paucity of information and misinformation, in the form of superstitions, which are responsible. Tuberculosis is a social stigma in many rural areas. The patient is shunned and given up for dead. *TB Ki Beemari* (The disease of tuberculosis, 1981) presents a few case studies and tries to dispel the superstitions. The problem of iodine deficiency is widespread in certain parts of India. The disorder can be combatted by public awareness and effective distribution of iodized salt. This is studied in *Will the Salt Reach Padrauna?* (1983). *A Silver Lining* (1981) details the work of the Rehabilitation Research Centre in Jaipur (West India) in developing the 'Jaipur Foot', the locally designed limb for the disabled enabling barefoot walking.

In recent years there are two issues which have acquired significance in Cendit's work. One is the environment. Among other problems, the problem of deforesta-

tion is on the increase. It leads to soil erosion and silting of rivers. An effort at regenerating the ecosystem in a Himalayan foothill village is documented in *Conservation With Development* (1980). The program also explores the difficulty of ensuring people's participation. *Wasteland Development* (1985) has been allotted to the landless in Rajasthan. The problems of their work are examined in this program.

The other issue is the status of women. Recognising that no development is possible unless the women are involved too, Cendit started examining the position of women in villages, in cities, in media. *Dohra Bojh* (Double burden, 1981) discusses the traditional values which keep rural women without education and independence. *Rural Women In India* (1982) analyses the relevance of training rural women. *Housewife/Househusband* (1983), a video in the making of which a number of young girls and boys were involved, explores the attitudes of the urban males and females towards housework. *Women In Indian Cinema* (1983, 1985) examines the female stereotypes which the Indian movies generate and how these affect the society.

At the moment, Cendit has a project on *Literacy For Women* on hand. This television series aims at motivating and informing the North Indian rural women. Thus television will be used to communicate the development message also. Cendit is trying to tap this source and make more such programs which can reach the television audience too. A computer animation series *Professor Shanku* for children; a program on breastfeeding, anemia, nutritional blindness and growth monitoring; a series on development and application of appropriate rural technology are some such programs.

The thrust of Cendit programs has always been to inform people, to make them aware, analytic and action oriented. Documenting of national calamities has acquired an importance in this task. The Bhopal (Central India) gas tragedy of 1984 was captured in *Mazdoor Bhai Tum Kahan Ho?* (Where are you fellow worker? 1985). The gas leak from the Union Carbide Factory which killed and maimed thousands of people in Bhopal is examined. The need for and the obstacles to preventing such a tragedy are brought out. The Delhi riots of 1984 which followed the assassination of Indira Gandhi have been documented too. Work is being done on developing a program.

Cendit has come a long way from its first video experiment in 1974. A number of groups and individuals have been trained in the use of video for development purposes. Many of its programs have evolved in workshop situations. The rapid television expansion has offered new channels, and the need to utilize technology for development has become more urgent. The Cendit videos not only do this but also involve more and more people in the directing of technology.

Muntadas: A Man Of His Time

by Karen Henry



"...I cannot see work in any medium as unrelated to its system of representation of the image itself, of its meaning, of its reading and of its power."

Muntadas, *Pro/Anti TV, L'Immagine Electronica*, Bologna, 1984

Some people are bridges and Muntadas is one of these. His life experience spans the continents of Europe and the Americas — a sort of synthesis of Spanish vitality with European intellectual sensibility and the American dream. He moved from Spain to the United States in 1971 because the States offered an exciting and viable context for him to pursue his art activity and to explore one of his primary tools, video. He now ostensibly lives in New York City though he maintains a consistent level of inter- and cross-continental travel that keeps him connected to a broad cultural spectrum which he focuses through a concentration on art and art production. Perhaps it is this grand level of association which has nurtured his fascination with the social context of artistic and media representation.

In the course of his work as an artist, Muntadas has moved from a more personal, sensorial focus (1973) into a developed critical analysis of the pervasive role of media in Western society. He has chosen to address this phenomenon through its own imagery and techniques exposing the seduction of media mechanisms; using video and print mediums to reflect back on their cultural meanings. Communication is a priority in his artmaking and he presents his work primarily in a broad public forum, appropriating commercial venues such as billboards (*Media Eyes*, 1981) and lighted signs (*This Is Not An Advertisement*, Times Square, NY, 1985) or photographs from "The Best of Life!" (*On Subjectivity*, 1979) or space for a video installation in a high traffic area like an urban shopping mall (*Haute Culture*, 1983-85). By placing his work in indirect relationship to the popular context, Muntadas attempts to allay the intellectual hegemony of the arts and encourage the response of a broader public. He maintains the relevance of a current and immediate response which discourages absolutes and maintains an open-ended dialogue with the audience.

While he deals with the invisible mechanisms of social control, his work is far from cryptic. He describes his approach as "a concrete conception and manner of working" (*L'Immagine Electronica*) which refers to the conceptual process by which he reveals cultural mechanisms. Muntadas defines subjectivity as the source of the creative impetus. He has coined the term "critical subjectivity" to describe this mix of creativity and social awareness from which his work arises. Despite his mistrust of the 'demagogy' of words, he is his own best ally in articulating a context for his work. He has written many fine articles and edited several books, most recently *The Un/Necessary Image* with Peter D'Agostino.

THE INTERVIEW

Karen Henry: *Why did you make the choice to work with video?*

Muntadas: Basically, I started as a painter in 1963 until 1969. At that time I think there was a lot of reevaluation of systems of representation, and I started to see a moment of crisis in painting. Then I started to work in another kind of direction doing what I call 'acciones' ('actions' in Catalan). These kinds of events were happening everywhere at the time — in the U.S. as well. It was normally events that I was planning in a much more private situation, and it became public through the media. The first period of video, from 1971-74, was for me a document of the work. Then in 1974 I started to deal with the medium itself and I did the first installation/confrontation at Automation House in New York. It was a three monitor piece with three slide projectors. Then in 1976 I did another installation at the Kitchen in New York called "The Last Ten Minutes"; it was from Argentina, Brazil, and the United States — using the last ten minutes of the television. Basically the transition of the work is from '71 to '74, this kind of 'micro-communication'. It was sensorial experience where the events take place in a more private situation and the media became the testimony. Then in '74 these micro communications became macro and started to explore more sociological environments. In '79 I think these macro communications start to come near to mega communications because this is when I start to deal more and more with media itself... if the first is like the skin, the second is the street, and the third is the visual landscape or the media. It has gone from a small cosmos to a larger cosmos. What I am more interested in is this kind of relationship between strategies and techniques and situations, and it has to do with all the manipulations of media in terms of what I think is more difficult to see, not evident, invisible.

It sounds very good to say small cosmos to larger, but now I realize that some of the work I am doing in relationship with the art context is again a little bit closer in. The art reality is where I insert my work, and it is that reality that I am interested to observe. The points of the observation and analysis of the work depend very much on factors which have to do with how you feel. I think always the work is related to the personal, sociological, political concerns.

KH: *Do you think the initial resistance of the established art world to accepting video is still a factor to be dealt with?*

M: I never feel very comfortable with the term 'video artist'. I prefer to use the term artist and I work in video. I see it in a larger spectrum. But on the other hand I think the medium itself has created a certain kind of ghetto: video artists are sometimes marginal by their own definition rather than by the art world pushing against them. This is not very popular to say. It is also a product of the contents of the tapes. In the '60s and '70s there were a lot of long tapes — I think in '74 there was a moment where the medium was killing the audience. I think the galleries were very interested but they couldn't deal with the timing. It's a problem. The art world doesn't have the time. They don't deal with film either, and I think it definitely relates to time. I see a lot of films which are art pieces. Wim Wender's *The State of Things* I think is an art piece, and it's part of my personal museum. We have to create our individual museums for film and tapes, opera, whatever.

There are two ways of understanding: art as experience and art as business. In the museum, time is money; a gallery director watching tapes all afternoon couldn't be.

A painter comes with 20 slides, and they know in 30 seconds if they are interested. Five tapes, 15 minutes each — it's totally different. And then the commercial value of the tapes — it's like a book. Video is between different systems of representation and different systems of distribution. It's close to movies, it's part of the language of television, it deals with art because most of the people who do it are artists. It can be made in multiples like a book or as a limited edition. It's a confluence of avenues of different elements. It has to be analyzed in every case by the person and how they want to see the work. Skip Blumberg sees his work for television, others want installations in galleries. I'm not sure about this exclusion by the galleries. There was a moment when the explosion of painting happened when no one could deal with a video tape. Now I think there is more pluralism in seeing things, but I think it is still a problem.

The Media and The Message

KH: *I have a quote here that you wrote: "Recently it is possible to say that painting is about mass media, film is about television, and sculpture is about the TV environment." (Pro/Anti TV: A Crossover, L'Immagine Electronica, 1984). What you were saying before — what you are expressing being directly related to the medium — is different from this in which you are saying that they are all interrelated.*

M: The first is what I say for myself, and this one I wrote about other people. I am talking about the Robert Longo paintings, or the Cindy Sherman photography or whatever. I think what I call the media landscape influences people and pushes them in directions like a kind of inspiration for the work. I don't think you can consider any of the '80s work without considering the media in terms of the subject matter. All the people are very influenced by television. If you are considering the relationship of painting to transfer [this experience], I feel like it's not maybe the medium that transmits better, but I think it should be understood more as a kind of larger atmosphere. The media environment is all around. For people born in the 1950s, it is part of their education. I think that what has been really changing is the influence of the media in the education process. In the United States it is totally a part of the culture. It is what makes the difference between the '30s, '40s, and the '50s — the mass media as part of the culture. And it needs to be seen that way. There is a big difference between Europe and the U.S. in that.

KH: *I wanted to ask you whether you felt that the use of the media itself established a language so completely that it overrode the cultural differences?*

M: Obviously the mass media tries to unify all the information all around the world. But the way that television was approached in Europe until very recently was in a very negative way. There was a very strong impulse among the intellectuals to refuse to have anything to do with it. It was very fashionable to say 'I don't have a TV', like a purist. Now it is changing. Now people go practically to the other side, and I feel like they are getting too seduced. In the States the TV is part of the information system, like the father and the mother and the TV set; a kind of babysitter. In Europe it was a moral situation, an American reality, and a danger.

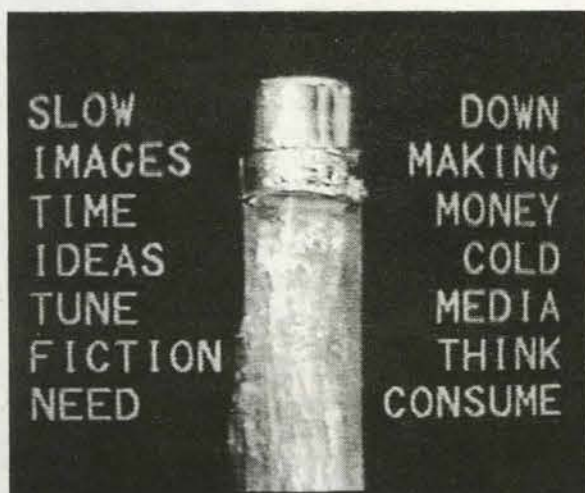
KH: *I notice in your work you use an extrapolation of language as in "watching television — reading the media; reading television — watching the media" which provokes one to stop and think.*

M: The piece *The Board Room* is a piece that I think of in terms of discourses and words. That is a clear example of what I feel: like words are losing sense. All the discourse, the speeches, in truth all this conversation, is demagogical too. I try to do a work which expresses more or less what it is, of itself, what is there, and descriptions are always problematic.

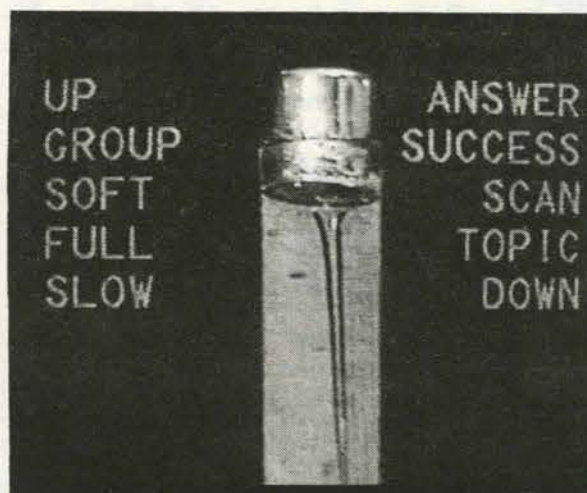
"Muntadas insists that we do not allow ourselves to become entrenched in a single historical position, rather that we observe the present tense... in hope of coming to a realization about a new expanded image possibility."

Robert Morgan, "On the Activity of Slowing Down", *Muntadas Catalogue*, Madrid 1985

M: I mentioned before this kind of crisis in ideology and thinking and, I think, methodologies too. So many years of people thinking it's totalitarianism or marxism and this is this and that. Now I think it should be considered as a separate work, not as an example of a certain methodology or ideology. The work is what it is [in relation to whatever context]. Each work can be analyzed by anthropology or sociology as an example of work in the '80s. Before I was interested in including



Media Ecology Ads 1982



Media Ecology Ads 1982

input from anthropology, from sociology, psychology — now I feel like my potential with the work has been resolved — it has these components already. It can be seen as a kind of anthropological or sociological product [a product of its context and its time]. Like an artifact.

One factor I think is important, too, is irony. When you see all these situations of crisis, of demagogical over-use, I think the irony comes from a situation of frustration. Irony comes from personal skepticism.

Between the Frames

In Between The Frames Muntadas has turned his attention from media and advertising to the arts intelligentsia, while maintaining his concern for 'cultural framing' — the context which reveals the subject to be indicative of a network of interconnecting perspectives. The series of tapes, of which only two are finished, will include chapters focusing on the galleries, the curators, the docents, etc., through the dealers and critics, eight chapters in all. The work is based on a series of extensive interviews of people within the arts establishment. The participants comment on art and artists and the business of art. The verbal information is threaded through consistent themes and held together by a visual constant which detached the viewer from the personality of the speaker and accents the relationship of the stated assumptions. What is seen and heard are representations of reality which by their seeming inconsistency serve to prod the viewer to dialogue with the information presented.

M: In Europe people did not previously approach the art situation as a business. In the States it has always been businesslike, the sense of professionalism has always been there. But in Europe it's been always a more romantic relationship. But now all the dealers and all the galleries [in Europe] take this sense of professionalism in such a way that is much more orthodox in terms of business. A Gallerist in France was talking in the tape five years ago, he would have been defending the position of the artist; now he is talking in business terms. Now they are showing work that is 'avant garde', but besides that, money. It's perfect. Before, the avant garde dealers were always showing work that didn't sell, sacrifice — the glory was the glory of suffering. Now they are keeping a credible position of respect and making money besides. I think it is a moment of change. It's a lot of natural cycles, but then it's pushed by fashion. Part of the cycle is consumerism. One of the reasons it's changing is because they have to replace new elements in order to compete.

I began in '83. I am working at all the chapters but I don't know when it will be finished and all the cross connections between chapters. Working on the chapter on

personal subjective approach, and if you want to see the total full interview with every person, I will donate the rough material to the New York Library, to see the context for the interviews: sometimes they are fifty minutes. Obviously, I make editing decisions, but I will make available all the rough material. One hundred thirty interviews have a value as a testimony. This is the field work. I see this as belonging in the public library. I see my tapes as belonging in a collection of work in the museum of modern art, to make the differentiation between what is artwork and what is pure information. As an artist, I filter the process of the work and create another structure with the rough material. I think that [to make the interviews available] was a big decision in terms of dealing clearly with the larger interviews.

I feel like all these structures and roles and materials are the subject matter for the piece. I start to see the role between the art and the artist and the audience by what I call intermediaries: people interrelated. It starts as a logical process to communicate, and this information is what I try to explore. I start with the docents as a straight forward interpretation of the work. The galleries already add another level. I feel that the critics will be the last because it's the most complex. I work in the order which I can best evolve and learn with the project, from the more simple to the more complex.

Media and Context

KH: That brings up another important issue. Video grew up out of an 'alternative' context rather than a broadcast context. Yet now there is a movement to capture broadcast time. How will that change the critical perspective, the separate values that have defined the independent use of video?

M: Alternative is a word that has already lost a lot of its sense — it needs to change because times are changing. It's a question of effectiveness. Video started as another kind of information. I think it has two groups: artists on one side and political groups on the other. Sometimes they overlapped. And they saw television as 'bad.' The establishment had already accepted TV, and TV was very distant about independents, reticent to accept them. I think all these things are changing, and I think that it is obvious it should be showing on TV. Originally they were saying that the quality was not good, but now I don't think they have any of these reasons. I think it's more like problems of format, the appeal for programming, more than other things. With the competition between cable and broadcast, they need more programming. More and more experimental programs could go in. They need to establish competition in offering these new things.

important responsibility. It's the same for somebody programming video for independents. A responsibility to educate the public.

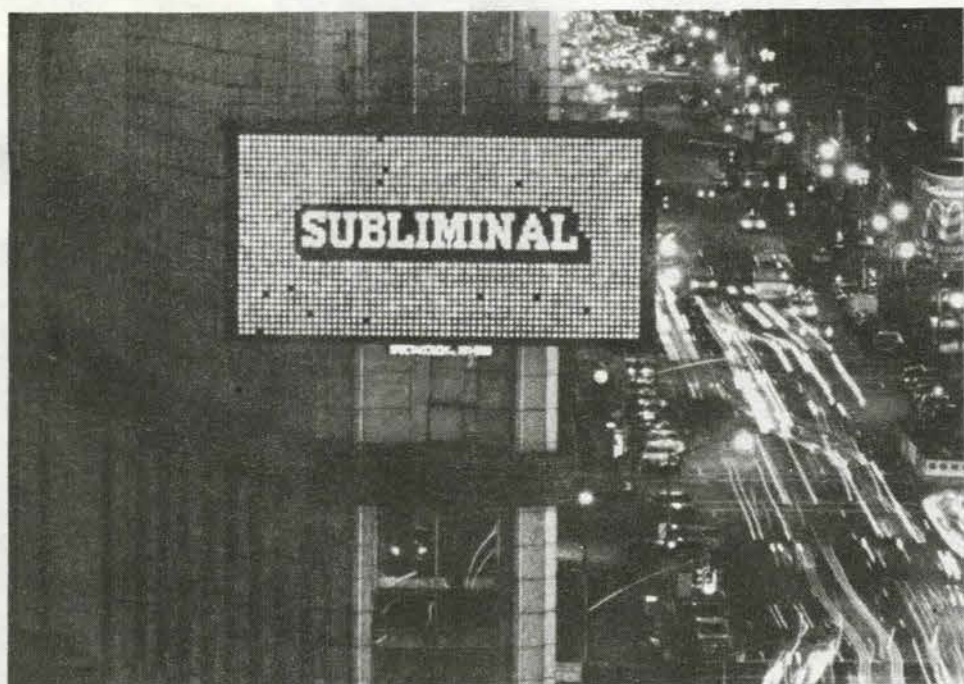
KH: Don't you have to be outside of the commercial medium to maintain the critical freedom? What kind of concessions will have to be made?

M: Alternative can mean creating your own context inside a situation like TV. I am very interested in context as subject matter: for example, *This Is Not An Advertisement* in the context of advertisements, or *Between The Frames* in relationship to the art context. Sometimes what defines the edge is the context. Questioning where the work is, what it is. I think what defines it is the audience. Because the context presents it as an advertisement — the same time, the same strategy. What defines it is the viewer in relationship to the context.

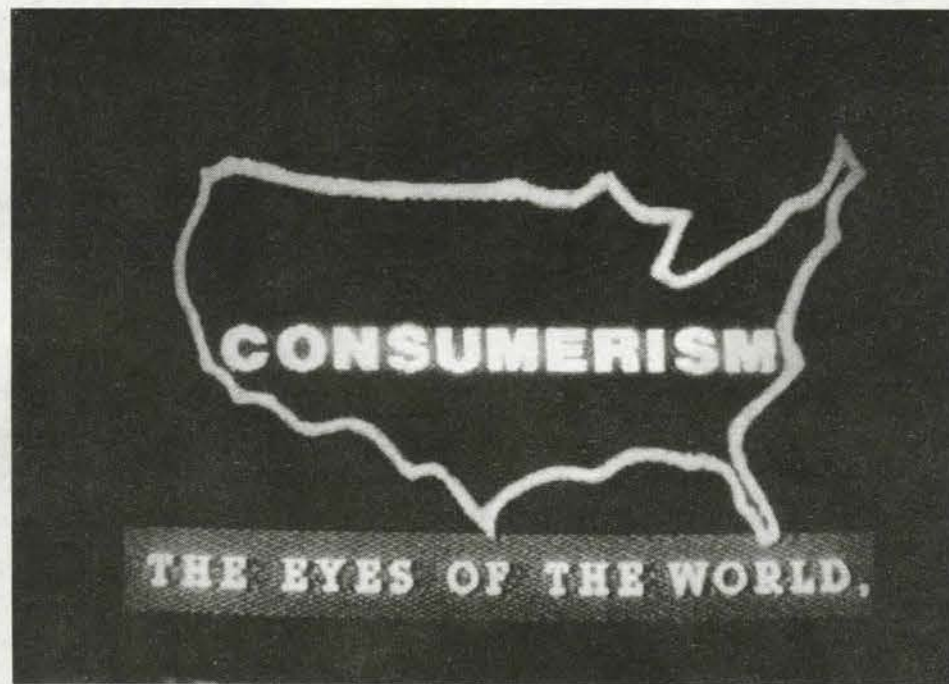
Creativity and Personal Process

KH: How has your own displacement from the culture of your birth affected your perspective on art and video and your sense of having that critical perspective, the more objective view of an outsider?

M: I think it's more the context where I am working. It seems like my interest in contemporary phenomena is related to the United States. It's the place where all these things are created. The choice to stay in the U.S. was influenced by the work and by politics; not politics in only a direct way, but under Franco it was difficult to do the work in a pragmatic sense. Franco died in '75, I think. In the United States I communicate with other artists. I was very interested in what was happening; it was all the conceptual work and I felt very close to it. It was a synthesis of my experience, a way of dealing with it, questioning the more traditional systems of representation. At that moment it was very exciting. It was part of creating a structure for the work which is very important. How you organize the life structure to live and work is an important part of production. Grant, PR, dealers — it's all a component in the work though not the most important. You need to be your own agent for the work. Somebody like Christo, for instance, has gone one step beyond the gallery. I think it's interesting how the work has been understood only from an aesthetical point of view [when the process is so unique]. I think the creative work of the moment has more to do with technology, with programming of software, creating new systems. I think we need to be reconsidering again the term creativity. It's not a question of the '60s mentality, of saying everybody is an artist, everybody is creative. It's more like the potential for creativity, to be creatively involved in what you are doing, is greater.



This Is Not An Advertisement 1985



This Is Not An Advertisement 1985

the galleries is not independent to working on the chapter about the critics. It's all one structure.

KH: How do you deal with the principles involved in using what is essentially a documentary style, which has connotations of being objective, and putting this information into your own ideological format?

M: This project is complex and I am learning a lot. I never do documentaries. *Between The Lines* was understood by people as a documentary. I never thought of it as a documentary. It is a personal construction that has sometimes the form of documentary, sometimes the form of fables. I take formats that exist already. *Between The Frames* is two elements: one is interviews and the other is the image. I wanted to use the talking heads in relation to the image to evolve to a second level of people questioning what they see in relation to what they hear. I arrived at two situations. I start the series by saying that this is a

They need to develop the audience, but I think they don't have the patience to do it — and it costs money. Going from a smaller discourse to a larger discourse with an educational process, that is one of the big responsibilities of the media. Art critics know certain information, and they go to an exhibition, and they keep to their own language when sometimes the awareness of the audience should be another kind of thing — to reach a larger audience, introducing an understanding. Most of the big newspapers don't do it. They create this mystification around the work, and then people don't venture into it. I think the big responsibility of the media is to establish the bridge between the specialized audience or discourses of production, to a larger audience. They have the knowledge and the skills to do it, but they don't. They are keeping the same kind of specialized categories or going for popular appeal: intellectual or low. Trying to enlarge the audience and the quality of the mass media is an

A system of social and theoretical dualities form the foundation for the art and life of Antonio Muntadas, and his fascination dwells in the space between them, bridging the gaps between the visible/invisible, personal/public, subjective/objective, art/life, TV/Video, mass mind/personal, European/American culture. The impetus for his work in social criticism grew out of the '60s and has matured to a level of philosophical cynicism consistent with the '80s; early evangelistic fervor is now tempered with technical skills and meticulous constructions. Muntadas throws cultural mechanisms and assumptions up for us to bump into, in a style that is overt but subtle, like the underpinnings of conscience. His artistry is in his mastery of the terms of his mediums and the orchestration of intelligent space in an open conversation with the viewer.

Video On The Trans-Siberian Railroad

by Molly Hogan

In September, 1984, I travelled on the Trans-Siberian Railroad with a group called the Planetary Rangers. The Rangers are a group of friends and friends of friends led by world travellers Molly McGinn and Gary Wintz. We were interested in promoting peace through personal contact with Soviet citizens. Some of our mottoes included "peace through fun", "let's break the rules", "frisbee diplomacy", "dance our way to disarmament". Along the way several peace meetings were scheduled, both in the Soviet Union and in the People's Republic of Mongolia. Our itinerary took us from Yokohama to Nakhodka in the Soviet Far East by Russian ferry, Nakhodka to Khabarovsk by spur railroad, Khabarovsk to Irkutsk in Siberia on the Trans-Siberian Railroad, to Ulan Bator in Mongolia by air, returning to Irkutsk by train, from Irkutsk to Novosibirsk on the Trans-Siberian, from Novosibirsk to Moscow by air, and by train from Moscow through Poland to East Berlin. We had a few days in most of the major cities, where we stayed in tourist hotels.

I found out about the trip at very nearly the last minute — July 30 to be exact — with final payment for the trip due in New York August 1. I was in San Francisco, had to retrieve my expired passport from my boat in Washington State, and set about finding out if it was possible to take video equipment into the USSR and what restrictions there might be on its use.

According to Anniversary Tours, it was OK to take video equipment as long as it was not "professional equipment". I own a Panasonic WV3230 camera and a NV8420 VCR which can easily pass for consumer equipment. My first concern was what kinds of electricity I might be encountering. Japan has 100 volt, the USSR has 220 volt, and I couldn't get any reliable information on what there would be on the train and the ship. The Soviet Consulate told me "it's a modern ship, there should be no problem." As a merchant seaman, I know that, while it is common for modern ships to have 110 and 220, there are some vessels around, even in the U.S., with 36 volt DC and other strange things. So I was not exactly reassured. I did find that Panasonic has a switchable-voltage battery charger for the 8420 batteries, 100-110-220-140 volts. I also took a voltmeter.

Another consideration was lugging all that gear around. I decided to do it because we would be on the train and ship a good deal of the time, with bus tours in the cities, and porters to transfer our luggage to and from hotels. There is very little theft or other crime in the Soviet Union, but I never allowed anyone else to carry my camera and VCR. The porters were welcome to my suitcase, but I didn't let the video gear out of my hands to avoid the possibility of damage. I chose not to take a tripod to keep the weight down, figuring that with the vibration on the ferry, train, and busses, it would not be that useful. So I went hand held all the way, and I think that was a wise decision. Tripods are a dead giveaway to other expensive equipment being nearby and make one more conspicuous while shooting. I wanted to be as low-key as possible and avoid having any tapes confiscated.

A last minute piece of information from the tour agency was that they had just found out that the Soviets would only allow five videotapes to be brought in. They didn't know yet whether this meant five for the person with the video equipment, or five tapes per person in the group, regardless of who had the equipment. I decided to take 12 tapes, for 24 hours at SP, and split them up among the group members. If a few got confiscated, it wouldn't be that much of a loss. The USSR only started producing VCRs in 1984, and there were reports of people driving 200 miles to get their names on a waiting list to get one. So I couldn't count on being able to get any supplies between Yokohama and Berlin.

A friend and I flew to Tokyo in mid-September, meeting other Rangers on the plane. We met more Rangers in Tokyo, and finally the whole group rendezvoused at Osanbashi Pier, Yokohama.

We spend two days in Tokyo, staying at a reasonably priced Japanese traditional ryokan (inn) — four in a room, futons to sleep on, private bath adjoining, choice of American or Japanese breakfast. Japan was delightful, and, of course, there were no problems videotaping. I had hoped to attend a festival out in the country, but got to Japan later than I had planned. It turned out that the place I had been planning to go had had a big earthquake

right about the time I would have been there, so it was just as well. I had heard that the Japanese are usually pleased when foreigners are interested in their festivals, and that the only video problems I would have would be all the other video cameras that would be getting in front of me.

Tokyo has a number of large train stations through which more than two million people pass each day at rush hour. One should avoid the stations at those times! I had not anticipated the endless flights of stairs at the stations. It was a killer getting around with my luggage and video gear. I bent two luggage carts the first day. Then I bought a \$30 model in the Ginza which was marginal, but survived the stairs by being carried upright and was extremely useful between staircases.

Bumping the cart up and down stairs is definitely not to be recommended. My equipment turned out to be remarkably sturdy, but the first time I tried the maneuver, my VCR let me know (by coming apart a little at the seams) that I had better cool it. We took the bullet train

(the fuse is completely buried down in the guts of the charger) and found a 2 amp fuse with which to replace the original 1 amp. All this was accomplished without much Russian on my part or English on his — but ship's engineers are the same everywhere — resourceful. They have to fix everything without the parts being available. I never did find a 1 amp fuse in the USSR — that fuse installed on the ship is still in the charger.

Entertainment was provided on board by members of the ship's crew. There was no problem videotaping, although I stayed with my policy of being low key, not pointing the camera in people's faces or rearranging people or lighting. While compromising quality at times, I think it's important not to be obnoxious. I often shot with the camera under my arm, looking down into the viewfinder. The highlight of the ferry ride was an evening of folk dancing with a group of Rumanian tourists returning from Japan. They were a most exuberant bunch of people, from all over Rumania.

Photos were not allowed from 20 miles off the coast



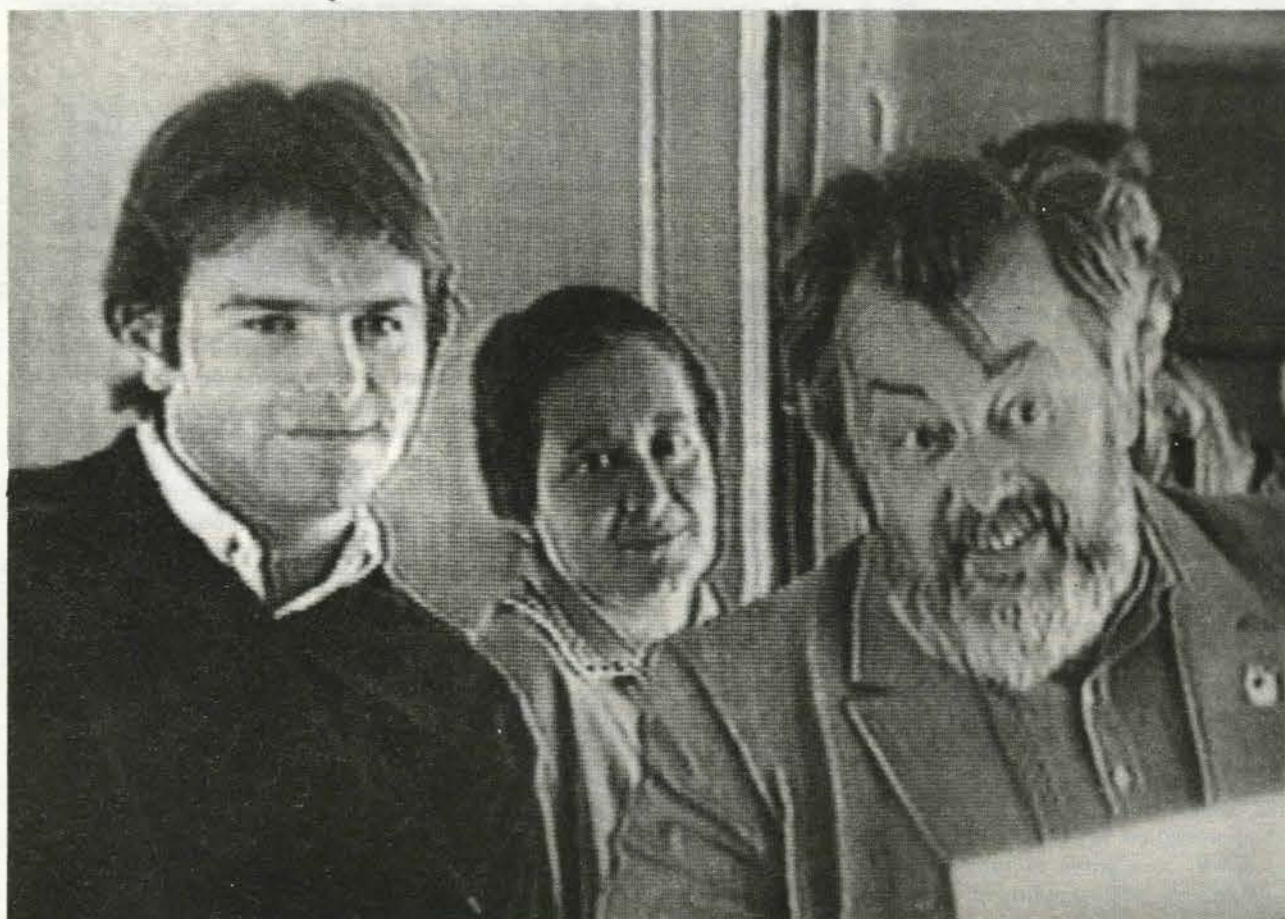
One of the chief monks, with onlookers at Gangdan Lamasery, Ulan Bator, The People's Republic of Mongolia

to Yokohama, just catching the beginning of rush hour. The train information people couldn't figure out why these crazy foreigners would want to take three trains and pay twice as much money when there was a perfectly good direct regular train to Yokohama. We explained that the bullet train was fun, and then they understood. One gets used to being very polite in Japan, but it's necessary to drop some of that and just elbow through at rush hour. It was a cliffhanger at each transfer point as to whether the seven of us, with all our luggage, would make it on to the same train, but we did.

We spent the first night on the ship at the dock in Yokohama. In the morning we had to take all our baggage off again to go through customs. The others went for breakfast (bringing me some) while I watched the luggage rather than leaving my gear or taking it with me. I was able to put the time to good use shooting some of the harbor activity, which is of interest to me. "Tugboats of the world." Another group member got lots of still shots of laundry during the trip — "Laundry of the world."

The M/V "Khabarovsk" is a comfortable enough ship. We traveled 7th or 8th "category" (there being no classes in a classless society). Beware of electrical outlets marked "shaver only". I blew a fuse in my battery charger straightaway because I foolishly believed what it said on it — 110 — not taking the time to check it. For a few dark moments I thought I had blown it for video for the whole trip, until I contacted the purser and he contacted the ship's engineer. The engineer took the thing apart

into the port of Nakhodka, and crew members were out on deck watching to make sure we took no photos. The Trans-Siberian Railroad actually goes all the way to Vladivostok, but foreigners are not allowed into that port because it is military. The spur railroad runs up from Nakhodka at night, past military installations. Our arrival in Nakhodka was a scene that "video eye" would have liked to have gotten — sliding into the dock with fall colours in the trees and a Russian tune over scratchy loudspeakers. I did tape some at the train station and from the train leaving port — nothing strategic, I trust. It is not true, what I had read, that taking pictures from a moving train or in train stations is forbidden. Our Intourist guide, Konstantin, explained that pictures of "nature" and the like are OK, but that we shouldn't photograph military installations or "specialized railway equipment" (whatever that is). With the guide present at all times, it's simple enough to check. Some group members did have film confiscated later on in the trip, but none of my tapes were taken. I always went on the assumption that the rules for photographs were the same as for video. At Nakhodka customs, we got the impression that the officials were far more concerned with what we might be bringing in that Soviet citizens might see than with what we might be photographing and taking out. We were asked if we had books or magazines, particularly religious books or anything written about life in the Soviet Union. One Ranger had his map of Japan confiscated. Konstantin explained that the reason was probably that the USSR and Japan each claim ownership of the Kuril Islands, and



Vladimir, a Russian scientist, (at right) reads a poem he wrote for Molly McGinn, on the train, with Konstantin and Vladimir's wife looking on.

the maps are drawn accordingly. The Japanese maps are not acceptable in the Soviet Union. My camera bag was searched — quite courteously (they asked me to take things out and show them) — and I was questioned as to whether the videotapes were recorded or not. I had one recorded and another partially. They asked to have the one in the VCR taken out, looked at it, called another official over to look at it, and gave it back and passed me through. A man in the group who was carrying tapes for me said he thought they were going to take them after he told them they had been recorded in Japan. But they relented and passed them. If in doubt, it seems wiser to say they're blank.

I talked to Panasonic about airport x-ray, and they had assured me that it would not hurt video. All the same, at San Francisco airport, I asked to have the video gear hand checked, which was done. Since we entered USSR from a ship, there was no x-ray there. The Soviets hand checked my gear in Irkutsk when we flew to Mongolia and did not x-ray at Novosibirsk airport. The only time anything was x-rayed on the entire round the world trip was at Heathrow in London. I figured I wasn't going to worry about British x-ray.

Charging batteries was not much of a problem. I did not charge on the trains — checking voltage, I found wildly different readings from the same outlet at different times. Since we were stopping every few days in hotels, I charged there, avoiding the shaver plugs. The hotels did

not all have hot water, but they did have 220v electricity. The longest stretch on the train was three days from Khabarovsk to Irkutsk — the heart of the trip — where many wonderful events for video occurred. I had four slip-in batteries, one hour each, which was just enough for that stretch, scrimping a bit, but basically getting all the important footage — the yellow larch forest, our conductor Olga playing frisbee and being inducted as an honorary member of the Planetary Rangers, hoki-poki (American folk dance) in the passageway with Russian translation sung by Konstantin and the conductor from the next car, and Molly McGinn's birthday party with a poem written in her honor by a Russian scientist travelling on the train (recited in Russian and English).

In Irkutsk we visited the Mongolian consulate to get our visas (there are no diplomatic relations between Mongolia and the U.S.). We had heard that the Anniversary Tours group before ours had been turned back at the border trying to enter via Irkutsk and that actually that was the first time the tour agency had sent a group that way — usually they enter from China. So we weren't sure we would get in at all, and there were horror stories about the Mongolian customs people unrolling rolls of exposed film, etc. Our experience turned out to be completely different. We found the Mongolians to have a relaxed sense of humour and a fascinating culture. The customs people at Ulan Bator airport had apparently never seen video equipment before and asked "what millimeter is this camera?" When I said "video" they

looked doubtful and asked if I had a permit to film in their country. I said I didn't know anything about a permit, and they said OK and let me go. (Molly McGinn told me later that I could have said "8mm", which passes customs everywhere.) While we were more isolated from the people in Mongolia, being driven around by bus with our guide, we were able to go into Gandan lamasery and walk around the monks as they chanted, as well as meet with the vice-kama lama as part of our peace mission. The lama was very interested to hear from Gary and Molly, who had studied Tibetan Buddhism and spent time in Tibet. The Tibetan religion was the religion of Mongolia until most of the lamaseries were closed by the present regime.

When we went into the lamasery, it had been snowing, and I had my camera wrapped in a scarf to keep the snow off. Photos were not allowed inside, but I was able to click on the audio and get some chanting of the monks. Also, from the courtyard I taped a bit of the lamas chanting and beating on cymbals through a door momentarily left open.

We actually stayed in Mongolia an extra day because of a miscommunication between Anniversary and Zhuulchin, the Mongolian state tourist agency. The Zhuulchin guides were helpful in telling us some of the rules and also how to get around them: don't take uncanceled stamps out (Mongolia has a set of Mickey Mouse scenes from the "Sorcerer's Apprentice" stamps) but just hide them in your luggage; don't take Mongolian currency out; don't take pictures on the train. When we reached the border, the officials found out I had a Polaroid and wanted a number of pictures taken of them, some wearing Gary's rubber pig mask and a Groucho Marx mask, and paid me with Mongolian coins for doing so!

The biggest hassle we had in the USSR was around currency exchange. At Nakhodka I had changed \$50 into rubles, thinking that would be a reasonable amount. But our transportation and meals were all paid for (well, almost all — a few meals slipped by); the tourist stores, which had wonderful things such as wool scarves, lacquer boxes, amber jewelry, etc., only accepted hard currency — dollars, yen, etc., so there was almost no need for rubles. Postcards, stamps, little medals, boiled potatoes, pickles, carrots and the like sold by women in train stations, were about all that could be bought for rubles. Regular department stores, where soviet citizens shop, are very expensive. Scarves costing two to six rubles were five to ten times as much in the regular stores, and selection was very limited. Also, there were long lines to wait in. So in Moscow I still had some 20 rubles left and had to change them back into dollars before leaving, as no rubles may be taken out of the USSR. The shopkeepers in Moscow are notorious for rudeness and did not completely disappoint us. The woman who changed my money had endless excuses why it couldn't be done. We finally got our money changed back with the help of our Intourist guide, but only at the very last minute. If I were to go on a similar trip again, I would not change more than \$10 at a time, and would carry some dollars in cash rather than all in travelers checks.

At the Polish border I followed my inclination to be scrupulously honest to the point of overkill, carefully listing the 20 kopecks of currency I had left. The customs man seemed a little excited momentarily, demanding to see my rubles. When I fished out this handful of small change, he snorted, "Oh, kopecks!" and didn't look at anything else I had. The Rangers in the compartment ahead of ours had their luggage thoroughly searched. While we were often rowdy and fun-loving and liked to "break the rules", I think when it comes to video, it pays to be very law-abiding in the USSR. I came out with 13 hours of raw footage which I've edited in a "home-movie" version for the Rangers. Further edits are in the works.

I would really encourage North Americans to visit the Soviet Union. It's not that difficult or, currently, expensive, and the more our people get together with the soviet people and find out that we're all just regular people, the more the cause of peace will be advanced. There's very little knowledge of the USSR in North America — some of the questions friends asked when we said we were going on the Trans-Siberian Railroad were: "you mean you can just go to Russia, just like that?" and "Oh, is it finished yet?" (The Trans-Siberian was built in 1916.) The excellent "Video from Russia" which was shown on TV depicted communication with the Russian people by a U.S. tour group composed of Russian-speaking people. The Ranger videos show what folks who speak little or no Russian can do to communicate friendship. We've heard an unconfirmed rumour that if one goes to Budapest and pays in U.S. dollars, one can get a through ticket to Khabarovsk on the full length of the Trans-Siberian, west to east, for \$70. Anyone care to check it out? You can always get to Budapest on the Orient Express.



Our conductor Olga, Molly McGinn, and Heather Farr-Lipp

An Ideal Tool For Snapshooters

by **Byron Black**

Contemporary helical-scan video production employs formats from 1-inch to U-Matic (¾") and VHS/Beta half-inch. . . and 8mm video will be widely available soon. Each of these manifests certain strengths and weaknesses, depending on the intent of the creator; all should be taken equally seriously by independent producers, for whom this article is written and to whom it is dedicated.

I worked in film/video/performance in Vancouver from 1970 to 1980, when I went to Japan to teach video at Osaka Photographic College. Up to that time I'd never worked with half-inch video; the general opinion was that Beta/VHS were useful only for off-air recording or playing prerecorded tapes; the introduction of low-cost, high-quality colour cameras and portable recorders was just ahead.

Also, like my contemporaries, I had invested so much money, time, and attention to developing a U-Matic production strategy that I had a natural reluctance to give serious consideration to half-inch. The hideous experiences of half-inch open-reel format, with its dismal quality and virtual impossibility of editing, were factors here. The visual and audio quality of Beta/VHS had not yet advanced to the point at which it could be considered a worthwhile means of artistic expression, although on my own I shot many tapes with my custom 2-camera Akai b/w ¼-inch portable unit. I had a five-hour show at VIDEO INN in 1980, entitled HIKARI ANANDA INFINITY YOSHIHARA, documenting the prenatal growth, birth, and development of a child who figured in my life; someday I'll edit these tapes, probably after transferring them to U-Matic or Beta I.

Some people have good reason for putting down anything not up to studio quality; Bill Viola, for one, has told me of his dedication to 1-inch quality for his productions. Others, primarily hardware-oriented people in production, practice a kind of elitism in which content quality is always subordinate to the price and degree of exclusivity of the hardware. This is very common in the moneyed world of rock video; often the first thing a producer will tell you is how much expensive hardware and special effects he amassed for a production.

During my first year in Osaka I examined my own attitudes thoroughly; I was teaching basic video using the Sony Beta I hardware (also known as NTSC 3.58 standard). I found that the same imperatives that had drawn me from a fourteen-year commitment to 16mm into working exclusively in U-Matic now pulled me toward a further refinement of speed and directness: industrial/educational half-inch equipment was smaller, lighter, had a greater information capacity per tape unit, and was easier to edit, thanks to high-speed search features. (This was before Sony came out with the current front-loading U-Matic machines — even the BVU-200 only had double-speed search capability.) The school was extremely considerate in terms of equipment access, and I found that the more I used it the more I liked the smaller gauge. Since 1981 most of my productions have been on half-inch, either Beta I or VHS-C.

Now it is 1986. I have moved to another country and am working in a new and high-tech studio, with Hi-Band 1-inch hardware and the latest facilities, in an Educational Broadcasting Production Centre which the Government of Japan donated to Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University for its "distance teaching" through electronic media, to students around Thailand.

One-inch certainly has its attractions. If you take a look at my chromakey-comedy, *Byron Black'n'Blue-Blind*, you can see how the stunning crispness and detailed colour of this format fits the subject; the electronic purity stays even through five to six generations.

Other subjects would not benefit from the mass of hardware and staff necessary to produce 1-inch or studio U-Matic. Anything requiring a minimum of interference in the expressive action of a subject would benefit from the low-profile, "quick-draw" aesthetic that so-called "professional" staff and equipment only slows down and frustrates.

Like other contemporary media, video requires an expert appreciation of its qualities and drawbacks. It all comes down to a series of trade-offs and compromises; only a thorough understanding of a particular medium or format can allow one to accurately assess whether it will capture and project a concept or emotive reality. In my own case, I've been learning and working since 1959, when as a teenager with a Leica M3 I started to get the picture. Now I consider that I, like a neurosurgeon, airline pilot, or corporate lawyer, have paid my dues and have an adequate mastery of the tools of my medium. On this basis I try to consider whether a medium I choose will allow a subject to share its spirit or whether it will crush and asphyxiate a plan of action.

Smaller, lighter, quicker to warm up, and better looking: I won't be satisfied with video until it gives me the same razor-sharp, quick-draw quality that is commonplace today with 35mm photography. Consider the situation in 1930 when 35mm was still called "miniature photography": there was a Luddite-tinged movement among news photographers assigned to cover courtroom dramas, all of whom used bulky 4x5 cameras, to ban the use of 35mm as unfair competition. For there was simply no way for the medium-format boys to compete with a photographic medium that offered great depth of field, quick action, extreme handling ease, close focus, little parallax, up to 36 exposures per roll, and reasonably fine grain for accurate definition.

Of course the Graflex crowd lost that battle, in the same way that the present-day priest-caste of engineers and technicians, many allied to sluggish and corrupt union procedures, must be overcome by tomorrow's producers using tomorrow's technology. Situations often demand speed and versatility; many independent producers work with extreme limitations of money, time, talent, and equipment availability, and cannot afford the indulgent quest for the perfect image, seamless and smooth, that the priest-caste adores. These independents are those to whom I direct what I intend to make a carefully-reasoned argument for half-inch video production. Incidentally, I do not mention 8mm video here because the medium is not yet widespread enough to merit inclusion; whatever arguments I make for Beta or VHS will undoubtedly

resound forcefully in favour of the new, even smaller and more compact format . . . once the same evolution of quality and reliability that we have seen in half-inch technology comes to pass.

Consider how half-inch development has leapfrogged that of U-Matic. In point of time it was developed 5 to 7 years after the first U-Matic machines came out, and it took advantage of all that had been learned about narrow-gauge, helical-scan video recording equipment and the design and manufacture of video recording tape. From the time VHS/Beta came out and caught on, there was a relentless pressure on manufacturers to continue to improve this new format, in terms of low cost, reliability, image quality and mechanical/electronic features. And the whole thing gets smaller and smaller. When you stop to consider that in 1984 the Japanese manufacturers broke the 20 million mark for the manufacture of video machines, you can see how big the stakes really are, and the nature of the savage capitalist competition between Sony's Beta and the rest of the VHSers. U-Matic development has not gone ahead nearly as quickly, in this race of technologies; the market simply doesn't offer the profits, and the medium is already showing its age. How else can you explain something like Betacam?

Meanwhile, back at 2-5-23 Sonezaki Shinchi, Kita-ku, Osaka, it was 1982 and I was determined to do a head-to-head test of Beta I vs. U-Matic. Two machines were sitting side by side: a Beta I SLO-383 deck and a Sony VO-2850. Two identical monitors were side by side above them. I plugged a new JVC KY-1900 into the SLO-383 and recorded about five minutes of test shots, under various conditions. I then recorded the same shots onto the U-Matic machine. I used a new Beta High Grade tape for the half-inch and a new KCA-30 for the U-Matic.

When I played both tapes back, side by side, it was practically impossible to tell the difference. The same subject matter, taken through the same high-quality camera — and it was practically impossible to see the difference, as recorded on videotape. Sure, there was a little more noise in the red areas, and a certain lack of crispness on the half-inch — but not enough to make up for the difference in size, cost, and recording capacity. Not when an L-500 tape, recording an hour on Beta I and two hours on Beta II cost half what a KCS-20 does, and is about a third the size. Not when the combination of camera, recorder, and necessary accessories like batteries can easily be carried by one person, even on a motorcycle (as I've often done), whereas U-Matic production tends to be an elaborate caravan of crew, cables, and cases.

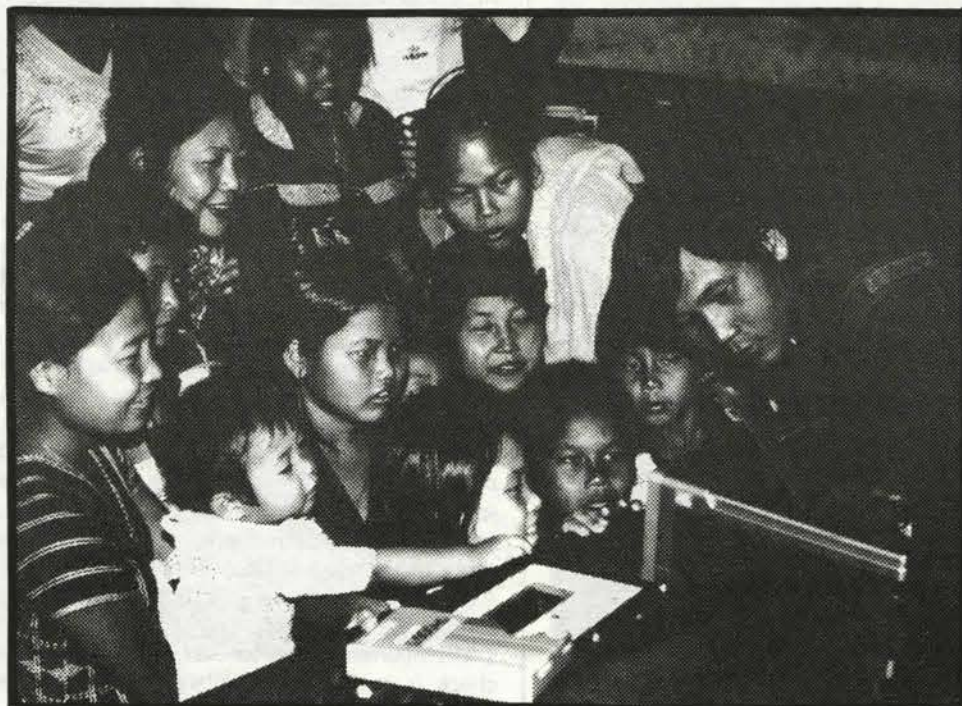
But here's the crunch: when you shoot and edit and dub and then dub some more off that one, the images may end up looking like red meat emerging from a meat-grinder. That's true. Not as much as was true before the advent of low-noise "High Grade" tape, but there is still more of a generation-loss problem with half-inch than U-Matic. So what I've been doing is to stick to U-Matic for all succeeding steps after the initial one of recording imagery: editing and dubbing onto U-Matic, in deference to convention (festivals, etc., prefer this format, at least in North America) and for the extra quality in pix and sound.

A really brave soul will perhaps stick to dub-mode editing and copying all through the half-inch snowstorm, and I'm all for her/him. I haven't tried out the newest industrial-grade VHS editors from National Panasonic and JVC, but they are probably better than the SLO-383.

Let's consider the difference in audio quality between U-Matic and half-inch. Before, only U-Matic featured 2-channel capability, and had much better audio reproduction than half-inch. Now there is "Hi-Fi Beta" and "Hi-Fi VHS" (including a portable stereo VTR from Canon) with breathtaking audio quality. One of the important features of the newest 8mm video is similar audio recording technology, allowing super fidelity response and stereo tracks.

Since I began to work in 16mm in 1965, I've struggled to own my own production and editing equipment, for maximum latitude in recording and arrangement of imagery. I believe that a producer needs his/her tools to be able to produce whenever a situation demands it, and not be at the mercy of media bureaucrats/rental houses/public access facilities. The analogy is to a carpenter, concert musician or golfer — the kind of intimate familiarity that allows total exploitation of the medium. Continuous practice with the tools of video is really part of the understanding of the medium.

The VTR/camera should ideally be like a pocket Minox still camera, always within reach for a quick snapshot. It's



Karen kids watching themselves and their friends on a small colour monitor
B SLO-340 playback

that elusive moment that becomes another treasure for the archive. This is of course impossible with U-Matic, no matter how much money one might have; with a medium like the excellent JVC VHS VideoMovie, it is already quite possible. A future generation of pocket-sized 8mm video camcorders will make it possible for an alert artist to snap up an instant or an hour from this strange and suddenly shifting world we swim in.

Editing is easier — and there are many places with reasonable hourly rates to work from. But verite shooting is *on demand* for a snapshooter. Someone working exclusively with scripts, in a studio setting, will not feel the same urgency of capture; for someone like that, 1-inch or U-Matic obviously makes more sense than Beta/VHS shooting.

Part of the problem is the history of Beta/VHS in North America: the prime application has always been delayed-viewing recording, sports recording from television, and playback of prerecorded movies. In the Third World, on the other hand, demand for video is more recent, and expanding with force and frequency — albeit for some of the same reasons (primarily playing pirated films). People in Africa/Asia/Latin America are really nuts about video: long-distance passengers in India often won't take a certain bus unless it is showing the kind of movie they like — and if it's a syrupy, weepy, song-cluttered Indian movie it will certainly be a long-distance one. In Thailand, VHS cassettes can be played almost as easily as audiocassettes, and every little town will have at least one VTR in a high school or community centre, or wealthy citizen's home. This means that VHS is a kind of lingua franca — anywhere you shoot, you can show your tapes to people. This is an important part of my own documentary production: offering my subjects a view of their world through my camera, on location, unedited.

Years ago I had to put up with the following song-and-dance, while set up to shoot somewhere like Main Street in Vancouver:

"What's that thing?"

"Oh, this? It's a video recorder. I'm recording this event."

"This is the camera here?"

"Right."

"Where's the film go in?"

"It doesn't use film. It records everything on tape, on this machine right here."

"I mean the picture, where does it record that?"

"Yes, the picture and the sound both go on tape, just like an audio cassette."

"Wow, you mean you can record it like a movie on the tape, at the same time?"

"Yes, the picture and the sound both go on tape, just like an audio cassette."

"I thought you said that. Now where do you get it developed?"

[A little annoyance creeps into my voice at this point]

"Developed."

"Yeah, does it cost the same as film to develop the tape?"

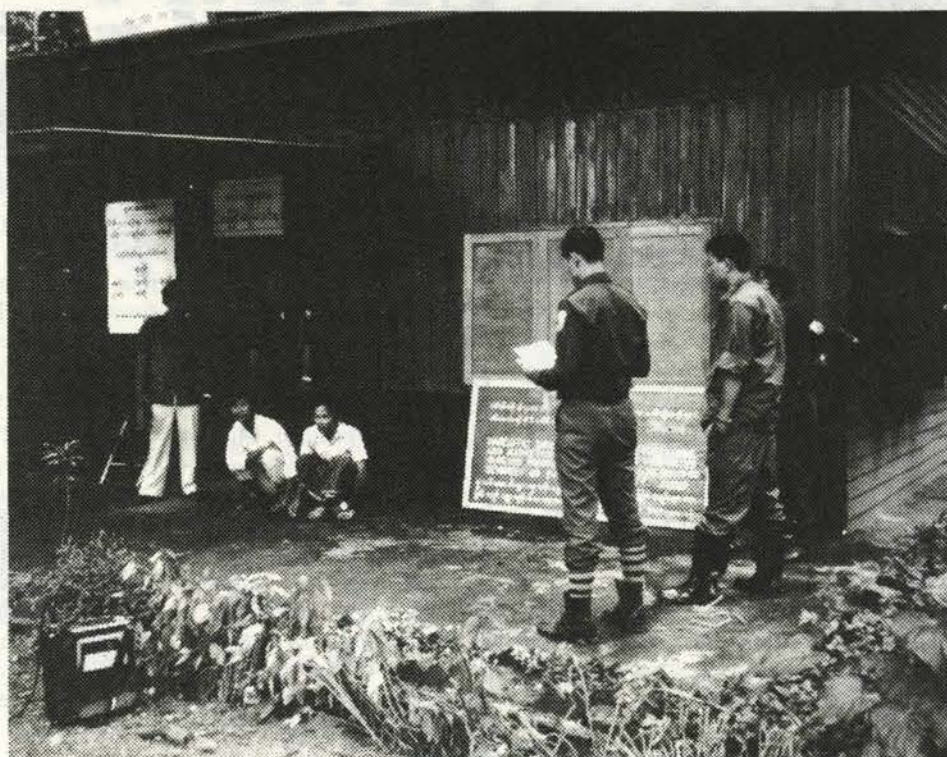
"Listen, I really haven't got. . ."

"And what kind of tape is it, black and white, or colour?"

* sigh *

Now it is 1985, and the world is bathed in video. I show up on the Burma-Thai border to shoot a tape on the Karen revolutionaries, in the middle of a dark jungle infested with mosquitoes and malaria. I stumble onto a rough wooden hut with a movie poster thumb-tacked outside. Yes, it's James Bond all right. I pay five baht (about \$.25) and go inside, to find several hundred Mon, Karen, Burmese, Indian and assorted other nationalities staring at *Octopussy*, being played in a pirated version on a Panasonic TV, sitting atop a VHS player. The film is crudely dubbed into Thai (which practically none of the audience understands any more than they understand English). What a brutal job: usually there's only one male voice and one female voice, and they each have a kill button for the sound track. When a critical line of dialogue comes up one of them will push the button, which cuts out all of the music, sound effects and dialogue on the film's sound track, so they can record a line of Thai-language dialogue. They then release the button and the normal sound track cuts back in again. Just bloody awful, by any standards. But the audience knoweth not: they are staring at Aston-Martins and glamorous dames and the Sodoms of the West. And they are *getting their education in video*.

I should mention in passing that the tape gauge chosen is less important than the quality of the colour camera



Handing out the death penalty to opium smugglers, from *War In Flowerland*
Sony B SLO-340 in foreground

being used in a shoot. The Sony DXC-1800 was a vast improvement over the DXC-1640; the M-3 is another extreme advance in sensitivity, colour, lag, contrast, and ease of handling. Some of the staff at Osaka Photographic College used to plug the \$40,000 BVP-300 ENG-type colour camera into a Beta I recorder, to document events around the school — and the results were surprisingly clean.

Now CCD-type video cameras are getting just about as small as still-cameras, and the Sony Mavica is a herald of a new "crossover" breed . . . still-video cameras.

The newest home video colour cameras give practically the same quality as the DXC-1800, and amazing sensitivity — down to under 10 lux in some cases. They are also reliable, easy to use, and reasonably inexpensive. There is a current range of one-piece "camcorders" on the market, which make for quick shooting — although I tend to think that a two-piece unit allows better control, as the VTR (the heavy piece) is around the waist, allowing a lower centre of gravity.

As for the relative difference in quality between VHS and Beta, it's problematic. Most of my shooting was on the older Beta I format, which most new Sony home decks won't even play any more (they only play BII/BIII). Sony assures me that the present-day BII is as rich and noise-free as the old BI speed. In any case, Beta is notably better in picture quality than VHS (perhaps because of the larger-diameter drum design). But 80% to 90% of the world markets have gone for VHS so in many instances it is easier to find tape/screening/service etc. than would be the case for Beta. One should really have two machines for playing and dubbing, one VHS and one Beta, but as we used to say in Texas, "People in Hell want ice water."

The same advance in reliability and quality of reproduction that happened with audio cassettes has happened with half-inch video cassettes. Remember the successive waves of Ferrichrome, Chromium Dioxide and then Metal audio cassettes? The advances in audio cassettes which brought them up to a level of quality reproduction practically as good as most 10cps open-reel decks, mainly Dolby and dbx sound suppression circuitry and the aforementioned tapes, were paralleled by dramatic advances in manufacturing quality, emulsion, and mechanical characteristics of VHS/Beta tapes in the High Grade and UX series. They really *are* different.

The other dramatic advance has been the advent of low-cost and reliable Time-Base Correctors in editing and broadcasting. Those working in video in the mid-1970's will recall how unstable and inclined to tantrums U-Matic tapes on the old VO-2850 machines could be (not to mention jamming and trying to strangle a videorecorder head drum — usually a master edit that would misbehave that way). When I was producing Canada's first arts show on Cable 10 Vancouver, "Images From Infinity", in 1974-75, the Powers That Be declined to even cablecast my 1/4-inch black and white AKAI video sequences. Instead, they would shoot them off a small monitor, using a studio camera, and record them on 1-inch IVC machines.

Years later it's a completely different story. When I won Second Prize in the 1984 "Osaka Video Contest" with a tape entitled *My Gaijin Tengoku*, I found out that a portion would be broadcast over a variety show on NHK Kansai (Western Honshu). I was quite interested to see if there would be any technical problems in broadcasting a

4th-generation dub of what started off as VHS-C original material. There were, I noted, no flagging, breakup, colour, or other problems whatsoever. Actually, if the TBC at NHK couldn't handle a tape, it simply couldn't be broadcast, as the standards for stability in Japan (North America and Western Europe, too) are so rigorous that anything not conforming could not be put on the air. But the TBC can do the job — and I'd like to recount you another example of this "image survivability".

Consider this sequence: a young boy on holiday sees a vicious-looking waterspout twisting out of a lake in Michigan. He picks up his home video camera and shoots it. Somehow, CBS finds out about the footage, persuades the lad to let them have it, and dubs it to 1-inch, for editing. An edited version makes the CBS Evening News, across North America. This program is then standards-converted to PAL, and dubbed to VHS so I can watch it in Bangkok. That works out to about 7th Generation, plus a standards-transfer. And the imagery was all there, clean as a twister. It all comes down to electronic devices like the Time-Base Corrector, that can deal with any video image, no matter how degraded.

A lot of people will be producing video tapes that require no additional editing, using the back-space feature of the half-inch VTR to assemble shots in sequence, assisted nobly by such features as digital counters, memories, built-in high-speed search and a low enough price that I can go into dangerous situations without feeling that if the equipment is destroyed I'll be paying for it the rest of my life (assuming my life isn't destroyed along with the hardware).

The only real drawback to low-cost, portable half-inch sets is that they are made of flimsy, cheap materials and are physically rather delicate. If you bang one good or yank a cable, you are liable to injure it grievously: things like plastic connectors for camera cables and chintzy little switches that snap off if you look at them crossly — that is annoying.

The ideal production strategy for an independent producer is to have two portable units for field production. One can simply be set on a tripod and aimed, to get a master shot that can be used in editing, while the other unit is hand-held and can be moved around for close-ups and various angles. The result will look like a two-camera-switcher-controlled setup. Very nice.

One of my personal goals is to develop the concept of a video sketchpad — shooting, archiving, and indexing shots that occur before me along my daily route, moment-to-moment. A dog fight in the alley. Construction workers handling large steel items. Bamboo groaning in the wind.

I've already produced one tape from material gathered in this fashion: *What's a Sentient Being Like You Doing in an Incarnation Like This?* Crocodiles, senoras shaping tortillas, politicians campaigning on New York streets, wild jungle boys playing soccer — it is stuff that when I shot, I knew was good, but I had no specific use for.

I wish I had and I know I shall have a pocket camcorder to seize the smiles and violence of this sudden, bottomless world. With it I would and will build a Great Wall of such tapes, each a crystal paragon of good colour, high sensitivity, and charming surveillance, such as I have done with my 300 hours of audio, since 1961. From this Wall, video works as yet unimagined will lunge forth to grab your sensibility and run away with it to Fort Infinity.



SCANNING VIDEO SCANNING

EVENTS

THE EAST-WEST CENTER
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THE HAWAII INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

We are now accepting film and video prints to preview for the Sixth Hawai'i International Film Festival which will be held November 30 through December 6, 1986, in Honolulu. We will be previewing film prints and video until June 3, 1986. We would be delighted if you would find a film or video for us to consider.

To be chosen for the Festival, a film must meet three requirements: (1) It must have quality; (2) It must have been produced in Asia, the Pacific, or the United States, or concern those areas; and (3) It must relate to the Festival theme.

The preview print should be submitted to The Film Committee, 1986 Hawai'i International Film Festival, 1777 East-West Road, Honolulu, HI 96848. We will return the preview print within 21 days after receiving it. If your film is selected (we will try to inform you of our selection decision by July 31, 1986), we will pay shipping fees for the Festival showings. There is no entry fee if your film is selected for the Festival.

Last year over 40,000 people attended the Festival. We are still exhilarated by the responses filmmakers, scholars, and audiences gave to our Festival whose purpose is to promote understanding among the peoples of Asia, the Pacific, and the United States through film.

Whether you suggest a film or send us a print to preview, we hope that you will mark November 30 through December 6, 1986, on your calendar. Plan now to come to Honolulu for a warm winter break and the 1986 East-West Center's Hawai'i International Film Festival!

Until then, aloha and warmest regards,
Jeanette Paulson, Co-ordinator

NYC EXPERIMENTAL VIDEO & FILM FESTIVAL

The NYC Experimental Video and Film Festival creates a single forum for video art, experimental film, and hybrid work. The emphasis is on experimental work regardless of original format or formats. The Festival is in a video format; films must be transferred. Entries must be submitted on Beta or VHS half-inch formats only. Selected finalists will be requested to send ¾ inch dubs upon notification for use in compiling a master tape of the 1986 Festival. Ten pieces will be selected and awarded \$200 each.

The 1986 Festival will be selected by three prominent members of the NYC experimental video and film community. This year's judges will include Barbara J. London, video curator for the Museum of Modern Art. All work will be prescreened by Hunter Yoder, Director of NYC Experimental Video and Film Festival. The judges will have access to all tapes submitted and may override the prescreening decisions.

Selected finalists will be requested to submit supporting material including a written description and a black and white photograph for the 1986 Festival Catalogue. This annual publication is distributed nationally to programmers, film and video libraries, and museums. It complements the traveling tour of the Festival. Rentals from the tour are distributed to the artists involved. Additional tour information is available upon request.

The 1986 Festival will be screened at Donnell Library Center Auditorium, 20 West 53rd Street, New York City, on June 5 and 6, 1986. It will be shown at two other New York City locations to be announced. ENTRY DEADLINE is April 15, 1986. Entry fee is fifteen dollars. This event is made possible with public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts through the Soho Baroque Opera Company. Entry forms are available upon request.

For additional information contact Festival director, Hunter Yoder, 331 Smith Street, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11231. (718) 858-3140.

AMERICAN FILM FESTIVAL

The 28th edition of "The American Film & Video Festival", one of the oldest and most prestigious showcases for non-theatrical media in the United States, has broken all previous records for number of submissions to its competition event. The Festival received more than 1300 individual film and video entries, besting by several hundred the previous record set in 1983, the Festival's 25th anniversary.

The Festival will take place May 27 to June 1, 1986, at the Roosevelt Hotel, Madison Avenue & 45th Street, New York City. Several thousand media users and communications professionals will be in attendance. Over 400 titles will be screened in original film and video formats in nine simultaneous screening rooms during the Festival Week. Prizes will be presented at a gala Awards Ceremony on the closing night of the Festival. An Exhibition Hall featuring booth exhibition by leading film and video producers and distributors will be open throughout the Festival Week.

For information contact Sandy Mandelberger, Festival Director, American Film & Video Festival, 45 John Street, Suite 301, New York, N.Y. 10038. (212) 227-5599.

EDWARD LAM PERFORMANCE

"Soul-Blind" (extended version, Death Mix)
with Luther Hansraj and Deborah Moss

Soul-Blind (D.M.) is essentially about simulation and use value. Simulation as copying, mimicking and repetition; use-value as comprehension or meaninglessness. Two rhetorical monologues are delivered, each referring to my 'self', discussing the nature of identity, truth, lies, and the unrepresentable.

A performance with video as part of "Luminous Sites".
Saturday, April 12, 9:00pm

Western Front, 303 East 8th Ave., Vancouver, B.C.

▲ 10th San Francisco International Lesbian and Gay Film Festival ▲

▲
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media and industry exposure, submitted works are eligible
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tary, short, super-8 and video. ▲ FORMATS accepted: 35mm,
16mm, super-8, ½" VHS and ¾" video. ▲ DEADLINE for entries is
April 15, 1986. ▲ For information and entry forms contact FRAMELINE
P.O. Box 14792, San Francisco, California 94114, or call (415) 861-524

DISTRIBUTE

Video Data Bank

Video Art Distribution: Video Tape Review 86, an annotated catalogue presenting over 500 video-tapes by 105 independent producers and 15 curated series with critical introductions, is now available for \$5.00 from the VIDEO DATA BANK, School of the Art Institute, Columbus Dr. & Jackson Blvd., Chicago, IL 60603.

MEDIA DISTRIBUTION CO-OP

A new group called the Media Distribution Co-op is offering inexpensive do-it-yourself publicity resources for musicians, filmmakers, and writers. These include specialized mailing lists, bibliographies, and a variety of other related publications. A syndicated features co-op will begin operating soon.

Some of the specialized mailing lists cover such things as entertainment columnists, film and video distribution networks, alternative movie houses, college radio stations, public access programs, specialized magazines and newspapers, various festivals, computer networks, etc.

The Media Distribution Co-op offers several publications, including Alternative Video Distribution, Developing the Press Packet, Cable TV Distribution, New Sources for Writers, Obtaining College Radio Airplay, etc.

Some of the bibliographies include graphic arts sources, 3d filmmaking, networking resources, etc.

The syndicated features co-op will help undiscovered writers and cartoonists to join together and promote their work.

For more information, write Rick Sheridan, 2912 Daubenbiss, Soquel, CA. 95073; telephone (408) 462-6245, ext. 199.

VIDEO
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NETWORK

ON THE FRINGE '86

Applications are now being accepted for individuals and groups wishing to participate in the 1986 Vancouver Fringe Festival of alternate theatre and performance art, scheduled to run September 12 to 21.

Deadline for submissions to the Vancouver Fringe is April 30, with productions accepted on a first-come, first-served basis.

For application forms, please call 681-0818 or write TheatreSpace, 1142 Homer St., Vancouver, B.C., V6B 2X1.

Statement of the DAYS OF RESISTANCE COALITION Against The Censor Board

We have joined together to protest and resist the Ontario Censor Board (now called the Ontario Film Review Board). Under the Board's newly expanded mandate, film and video are the only forms of art and communication that require government approval before they are exhibited or circulated. We know from experience that:

1. While the Censor Board claims to protect women by 'controlling violent pornography', it has a history of cutting and banning feminist and anti-sexist films;
2. While the Censor Board claims to protect citizens from depictions on (unspecified) 'community standards', it refuses to consider the context, content, and audience of any tape or film, thereby ignoring both the intentions of producers and the interests of particular audiences.

Therefore, we agree with the Ontario Supreme Court (1983) and the Court of Appeals (1984) which ruled that the Ontario Board of Censors is unconstitutional, violating the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

We are artists, feminists, community organizers, people who watch and use film and video in a variety of contexts to explore and affirm human dignity in all its diversity. As members of the Days of Resistance Coalition, we exhibit films and tapes that have not in any way been submitted to the Censor Board for prior-censorship, because we believe that our various communities can best decide what they want to see for themselves.

We call for the abolition of the Ontario Censor Board, because we know that, far from being a solution to deeply-rooted social injustices like sexism, racism, and misogyny in society, the Censor Board uses its powers to silence the legitimate voices of minorities. The Censor Board is an arbitrary, undemocratic, and repressive agency that deprives us all of our constitutional rights and freedoms — our right to speak to each other.

Censorship is a complicated issue for us all. Within this coalition, we have many different perspectives and concerns, based on our particular work and backgrounds. At each of our screenings, we invite you to come and discuss these issues from your own perspective. Join us in our Days of Resistance.

AN OPEN LETTER TO VIDEO GUIDE

The Board of Directors at Women in Focus is writing to protest the National Gallery of Canada's decision to terminate the position of Curatorial Assistant of Contemporary Art (Video). This effectively means the termination of their video exhibition and purchase program.

As a feminist arts and media centre, Women in Focus is committed to the exhibition, distribution, and production of video by and about women. We are encouraged by the growing commitment to video art by major international art museums and institutions.

While we realize that the National Gallery is subject to the pressures of financial restraint, we consider the complete termination of this position to be short-sighted. This move appears to indicate that the National Gallery considers video art to be a marginal and expendable art form.

Such a decision has broad-reaching implications which are detrimental to our national cultural identity and to our international reputation as leaders in the field of video art.

As well as affecting video artists nationally and internationally, this decision also affects the public's perception of the importance of video art and is damaging to the growth of Canadian art in general.

In the light of the above statements, we strongly urge the National Gallery to reinstate the position of Curatorial Assistant of Contemporary Art (Video).

Board of Directors
Women In Focus

PAUL WONG vs THE VANCOUVER ART GALLERY AND LUKE ROMBOUT CASE CA 41083

B.C. SUPREME COURT, Vancouver, B.C., Canada

On February 21, 1984, Luke Rombout, then Director of the Vancouver Art Gallery, abruptly cancelled the inaugural 'Videospace' exhibition *Confused: Sexual Views* scheduled to have opened on February 24, 1984. Project director Paul Wong filed a mandatory injunction to force the exhibition to open — the injunction was denied. The Vancouver and national arts communities were shocked and outraged at the action and allegations made by Luke Rombout in making his cancellation.

Negotiations by Paul Wong and supporters to settle this matter 'out-of-court' with Rombout and with the curator of the exhibition and current Director of the V.A.G., Joanne Birnie-Danzker, have been unsuccessful. The almost two-year waiting period has been a stressful, tedious, and frustrating experience. It is important for Mr. Wong to clear his name of any controversy. The artist has little choice but to proceed with civil litigation.

THE CASE:

1. There was a contract
2. There was a breach of contract by the Vancouver Art Gallery
3. That breach was induced by Luke Rombout
4. As a result of the breach the plaintiff has suffered irreparable damages:
 - loss of serious critical attention
 - loss of ability to enhance reputation and artistic credibility
 - loss of reputation due to statements made by Luke Rombout
 - loss of economic opportunities related to exhibiting in a major public institution
 - mental stress
 - the loss of ability to perform and create new work

The artist is seeking monetary damages and the immediate exhibition of the video/photo installation *Confused: Sexual Views* in its original form at the Vancouver Art Gallery.

Three days of trial have been held, and the case will continue in June. Court costs are escalating. Your support is urgently requested. Please send cheques or money order to:

PAUL WONG DEFENSE FUND
c/o The Cutting Edge
1-160 West Hastings Street
Vancouver, B.C. V6B 1G8

ARTE FIERA '86

Arte Fiera '86 is the concluding event of the 1985-86 Italian art season. It is a chance to check on current trends and to observe the emergence of new tendencies. It is both an international meeting place for colleagues and a great art show.

The new venue, a result of the increased national and international importance assumed by the fair over the past three years, means a fully autonomous service-structure capable of promoting an even wider growth for a fair which is now to be considered on the same level as other similar events in Europe.

The new two-storied pavilion, covering a total area of 20,000 sq. m., offers a wide variety of facilities ranging from telephones and bars to reception lounges and on-the-spot banking services. Self-contained and with its own completely autonomous entrance in Viale Aldo Moro, the fair is work-oriented yet relaxed and pleasurable in presentation.

Besides having totally re-thought the partition walls and lighting systems, the organizers also guarantee the presence of highly qualified galleries not only from Italy but also from Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Spain.

But Arte Fiera '86 is not only this. It is also art magazines, ceramics, Swiss contemporary art, meetings, debates, and prizes.

More than thirty European magazines will be participating and, sharing the same space as the exhibiting galleries, their presence will underline the importance the fair gives to the diffusion of modern art.

The second exhibition of ceramic art and a show of contemporary art in Switzerland continue last year's highly successful shows of ceramics and of the contemporary German art scene.

The by now traditional spring appointment with Arte Fiera is fixed this year for May 22 to 26, the most convenient and attractive period of the year in which to travel to Bologna.

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INVITATION

to participate in the next edition of the international video magazine.

VIDEOCONGRESS No. 10

Topic: DOGMA

Deadline: April 15, 1986

Apart from the topic 'Dogma', any feature about cultural events, artists, concerts, exhibitions, etc., would be accepted. Your contribution should be between three and eight minutes long and produced and sent in on U-Matic.

A copy of the final videonal and a minimum fee from sale, showings, and rental will be guaranteed.

For further information concerning concept, activities, videography, write to us:

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HARDWARE NOTES

Photos from Video Part Four

by Michael Goldberg

VIDEO PLAYBACK

Most readers of *Video Guide* will be familiar with this section of photos-from-video techniques. I thought it wise to cover it in passing, for novices or people more versed in the photographic parts of this series.

Obviously, the better the quality of the original video, the better will be photos off the screen. Even poor quality recordings can be improved somewhat in playback. A low light image can be brightened, contrast improved, and colours changed or intensified merely by adjusting the TV monitor. Grainy video images can be softened with the monitor's "sharpness" control. Better yet, if the tape is played through an "enhancer", it can be sharpened or softened to your taste (though you cannot put in information that isn't in the recording, to increase resolution . . . for that, refer to "Computer Interpolation" below). If it is a copy of a copy of . . . etc., a contour corrector (such as Sony XV-3000) will noticeably reduce the dark vertical lines at the right side of bright portions of the image (most visible around titles and subtitles). A colour corrector will not only shift the colour balance, but move the entire spectrum toward or away from a chosen hue. For example, a bluish video image can be pushed toward red and green, restoring skin tone and foliage. Designed for mistakes in lighting and the video camera's filter or "white balance" adjustment, it doesn't totally put in colours that aren't in the signal, so it works best with a video image just a bit tinted. With such an image, it will actually remove the pastel hue overall and restore a fairly clear white. A professional colour corrector (such as For-A CCS-4300) separately controls red, green, and blue levels. There are numerous dubbing enhancers and colour correctors on the market, at least in Japan. Consult video magazines for ads, and compare their features and handling in stores before you decide on one.

Sometimes picture quality or colours worsen when a tape is played on a different brand VTR from the one on which it was recorded, despite industry-wide compatibility agreements. (PAL, SECAM, and NTSC tapes, though they fit in VTRs of the other standards, won't play back properly. You require a multi-standard VTR and monitor.)

may be solved by adjusting the VTR's "tracking control". Don't forget to reset the knob in "normal" position afterward. (4) A different problem is "flagging", wherein the top of the video image wiggles, from poor tape tension. If there is a "skew" control (most home-video recorders do not have one), adjust it to tighten or slacken the tape. Flagging error is best cleared up by playing the video through a Time Base Corrector (TBC).

This is an all too brief description of video image problems. If the above does not help clear up the screen, or my description is hard to understand, consult someone who knows about VTRs.

Video S/N

The relationship of video signal (S) to unwanted, spurious noise (N) is measured in decibels (dB). The higher the S/N evaluation, the better will be the image. There is a certain amount of noise in every video recording and playback (digital video recording would change this). More noise is added when a copy is made; the picture worsens with each further generation (much like making copies of photocopies). Resolution, details in the highlights, clear vertical lines, colour subtleties (especially in the reds) tend to get lost. Thus it is best to take photos from a tape that is as close to the original as possible. If the videotape used was "high grade" — in the original, through editing, to the copies — S/N will be higher. Generally, the smaller the tape width, the lesser the quality. That is, 1" is used for broadcasting (replacing older 2" technology); next is 3/4" U-matic, used for news gathering and also by many artists. 1/2" home video is more grainy, especially if shot with a cheap camera; 1/4" (8mm) follows. This shows most in copies, though you lose less if you "copy up" the list, and lose more if you "copy down". (New Betacam and M-loading VHS news gathering camera-recorders have a signal almost as good as 1". With tape running 3 times the speed of home-video decks, dropouts soon occur.) With home video, normal speed has noticeably higher S/N than Beta III or VHS "extended time". Five or 8 hour capacity tapes are paper thin and should be avoided.

RF Playback

Most VCRs have an "antenna output", which can be

long, oblique line, which contains half the video signal you see on the TV screen. The next head records a line next to it, with the second half of the picture. To avoid flickering, the first "field", as it is called, traces every second horizontal scan line on the picture-tube, one dot at a time. As that half of the image is fading, the second video head traces the lines between the first. The two fields together comprise a full "frame" of the video image. In Europe this takes 1/25th second; in the American NTSC standard, the complete picture is canned in 1/30th second.

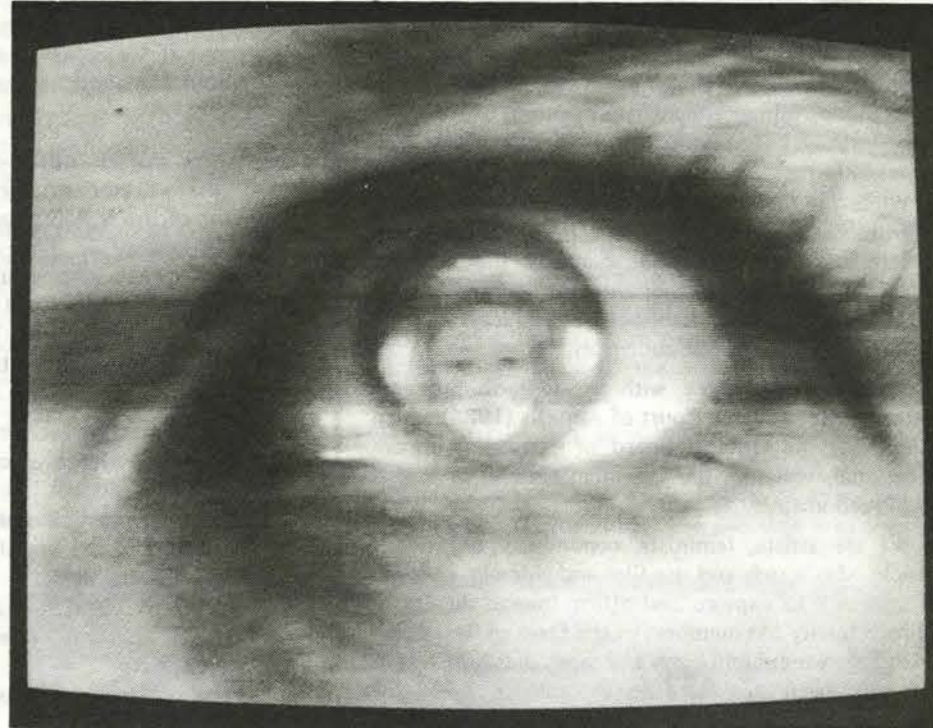
Some home VCRs give a very steady still image when the tape is stopped in "pause" mode. However, both video heads are reading the very same video signal track, and not alternate fields. If you could look very closely at the TV screen, each two horizontal scan lines are the same. There is less resolution than when the tape is playing. Putting the VCR in "pause" gives you the advantage of getting a photo of the exact instant on the tape that you want. Also, you can shoot at a slow shutter speed (1/4 or 1/2 second), with low ASA film (e.g., 64ASA) and eliminate the bar sometimes seen in photos of video shot with a focal-plane shutter camera. 3/4" VTRs rarely give a clear "still." The "noise bar" (head-switching noise) may be slowly moved out of the visible image by jiggling the videocassette gently. The Sony BVU 820 or equivalent gives excellent stills. You can copy even a home tape onto 3/4" or 1", then place the higher quality VTR in stop-action mode. I got a list of Japanese domestic home VCRs with four video heads or more which the manufacturers claimed gave perfect stills. For educational or sports purpose they may be adequate; most jittered too much for shooting a photo. So don't take their publicity at face value. Test any model before using or buying it for photographing off the TV monitor.

Frame Storage Device

Professional video editing facilities often have a TBC which can memorize a full-frame of video signal, for perfect stills. Sometimes called a "synchroniser", these frame storage devices can display either a frame or a field. In action shots, sometimes the latter is actually preferable, to minimize or eliminate blur in the part(s) of the image moving the quickest. Digital video effects



Low signal to noise ratio



Low signal to noise ratio; RF interference

Tracking, etc.

There are various types of "noise" which can appear on the video screen. The most common are dots of one kind or another flying across or floating in the image. (1) If the tape is old or has been mistreated, pieces of the metallic coating may fall off. There is then absolutely no recorded signal at those spots, and white dots or lines will always appear at that point in the tape. Most VTRs have a "dropout compensator" which cleans this up somewhat; some do a better job than others. (2) If there is "snow" all over the image, the video heads may need cleaning. (If you have no cleaner, try scanning the tape forward and backward — "shuttle search" mode — and it may dislodge dropout particles from the heads.) (3) If there are lines of "static" floating across the image, the problem

connected to any home TV antenna input or screws. You switch to an unused channel in your area (3 or 4 in North America), and adjust the TV's fine tuning for best reception. While this is convenient, especially for photos off old TVs which have no video input plug, there is definitely more noise in the image than direct video connections. For best quality playback, use a video line. Usually an RCA-to-RCA cord is used. Pro VTRs have BNC connectors; older 3/4" industrial video used large, screw on M connectors. Be sure you have the proper cable or adapters.

Field and Frame

Most video decks have two spinning video heads, one opposite the other, protruding from a slot in the "head drum". As the tape moves past, the first head records a

also incorporate a "frame buffer". Some will freeze the image as many times a second as you desire, for a strobe-like effect. This "frame-grabber" function is affectionately called a "frame bandit" in Britain. Ask for any or all of the above terms if you want professional quality stills for photographing purposes (and can afford to rent an editing suite).

VIDEO-TO-PHOTOS SPECIALIZED EQUIPMENT

In Japan there is a host of equipment specially designed for getting photos of a video image. Much of it stems from a boom in computer graphics usage. Most of the hardware described below can be found in North America and Europe, though in major urban centres only.

Portable Video Printer

The transportable version of Polaroid's Video Printer (model 4) has three different front plates, with a 35mm, 645 camera and an SX-70 camera respectively. It does not have a frame storage device built in. It takes 30 seconds to one minute to shoot a single image (in a ratio of approx. 13:13:2 for red, green, and blue filter, with a B&W picture tube). Obviously it requires a perfectly still video image as its input. I found the results disappointing, after over an hour of setup time. Contrast and colours were off, as was the 3:4 aspect ratio of the video image. Transparencies I saw made with the 8"x10" model 8, not transportable, were excellent.

A more automated portable printer is made by Nippon Avionics, their model CIR-100 Color Image Recorder.

Ricoh XR-P Camera

There are a number of programmable 35mm cameras on the market. Ricoh's XR-P is the only one to date with built-in ceramic sync specifically timed to take photos off the TV monitor. With the shutter set at TV mode and lens in the green "P" position, it shoots at 1/30 second with the "priority switch" in the centre green position (P), 1/4" in the blue (Pa) position, as well as 1/25" in the red (Pd) position, the latter for PAL or SECAM (European TV standards). The shutter speed in TV mode varies +/- 0.005%. So in a roll of 36 shots, 5 or 6 will have a thin horizontal line (2 1/2 scan lines) across the image. The XR-P has a horizontal, not vertical, shutter, for flash purposes; it is not a lens shutter camera. In its price range, it is the most convenient photo camera for video. It is also a fine camera for ordinary photographs.

Most 35mm camera TTL (through-the-lens) light meters measure illumination for less than 1/15"; many, much more briefly. How much the f-stop (iris) closes or opens depends on whether the picture tube happens to be scanning a bright part of the image (e.g., sky) or dark part (e.g., shadows). I've found variation as much as a stop in each direction, so 2/3 of the photos were under or overexposed. The new XR-P version incorporates an IC that compares the previous 1/30" of TV image and averages it out at 80% of peak illumination. If you are worried about some variation, you can leave the XR-P in TV mode, and adjust the lens aperture manually.

Colour Hard Copy Printer

Sony has finally demonstrated a production model of its Mavigraph video printer, the UP-1100. It prints an image of 118mm x 152mm (4 5/8" x 6"), or four smaller images, 4 lines/mm. Resolution is not bad; reductions look excellent. A laminator is used to put a lasting, glossy coating onto the paper. Printing time is 3 minutes.

Laser Scanning

Some professional Kinescopes (used for copying video onto motion-picture film) use a process in which bright red, green, and blue lasers scan the film. In the Laser Beam Recording system at Tokyo's Toyo Genzojo Video Center, the red is generated using Helium and Neon gases, green is from an argon laser, blue is emitted by a Helium-Cadmium mixture. The point of the laser beam is spread slightly, for a softer dot pattern. Yet resolution is not sacrificed. The resultant slide, shot with a 35mm camera using 100 ASA Ektachrome CP-135 film, is the best I have seen. Though the laser scanning is done in 1/30th second, shutter speed is 1/8" at f3.5. A TBC-synchroniser is used, as well as a Sony BVR-10 for downstream colour correction. A BVR-30 incorporates noise reduction and edge enhancement. Cost per slide is approximately \$50 US.

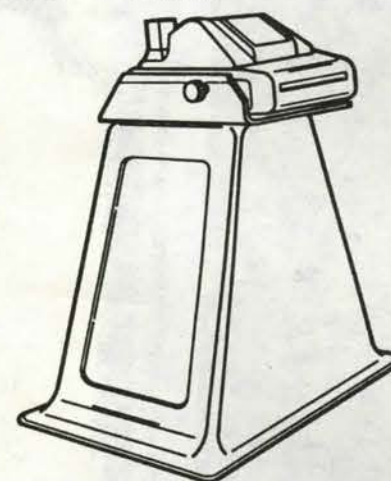
Computer Interpolation

Dai-Nippon Printing has developed a computer enhancement process especially for shooting slides of video. It actually adds lines to the video screen, giving a sense of increased resolution. The computer assesses the dots above, below, and to each side, and places a dot in between the horizontal lines of the video image. It assigns a colour value and brightness to each dot. A 525 line NTSC image is transformed into 1050 horizontal scan lines on the slide.

Of course the added lines were not recorded in the original video, they are imagined by the computer interpolation process. If the 6x7 slide is greatly enlarged, you can tell which lines are real and which are artificial. If the original video is good quality, you can blow up the transparency four times its size; thus a postcard will often look more like a photo than a video image. The computer separates red, green, and blue signals, which are photographed off a special B&W picture tube using filters, for

approximately seven seconds each. You can also control contrast in low, mid, and high ranges of each of the primary colours. Each transparency costs approximately \$20 US.

If you shoot full screen, the light meter should be perfect. If, like me, you shoot the edges of the TV screen, you should subtract 1/3 stop on the ASA dial to compensate for the dark frame. You can "lock" the meter setting up close, then move away from the screen, for an exact exposure reading. You must do it for each shot. The lock button also functions as the viewfinder light button, for reading the exposure setting in the dark. This design quirk means you must remember to press the light button again, to release the exposure lock. Aside from this small complaint, it's now my favourite camera for snaps off the screen. Despite some of the photos having a line in them, it beats setting up the 6x7 lens shutter camera and shooting extra shots half a stop each way.



TV Monitor Hood

Both Kodak and Polaroid sell a molded plastic hood for taking photos off a 10" or 12" monitor. They are handy for shooting video photos in a room that is brightly lit. Several models are available for use with a 35mm camera or an instant photo camera. I do not recommend the latter, except to test the settings, as the focus is not that precise. Use at least a 50mm lens; longer focal lengths (e.g., 85mm) will pincushion (distort) less. You may have to use a close-up adapter ring to shoot with your camera so close to the TV screen.

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