AT ARM'S LENGTH:

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ESSAYS BY JOHN WYVER, LESLIE FULLER, JOHN DOWNING
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PREFACE

When my mom wanted to get a good look at me as a kid she'd take me by both shoulders and hold me at arm's length. Most of the time I averted my eyes not entirely sure I'd weather her scrutiny. Usually I squirmed, got defensive, felt misunderstood.

That's basically what I had in mind for AT ARM'S LENGTH. It was an attempt to appraise video art, to understand how it fit into the bigger picture of culture and political economy. These essays could have been called trying-to-situate-video-art-in-the-realworld. Because even if art isn't supposed to fit into our day to day life, I'd still be troubled by its contemporary irrelevance. Art can be powerful, much more powerful than it is

today, and as a society we badly need the spirit of empowerment and pluralism that underlies video art. That spirit should reach more people.

Reaching people—the audience question—is a big problem for video. Years ago I asked an artist how he thought about his audience. "I don't", he answered. The implication was that thinking about who you were talking to and whether they would understand or care what you were saying was somehow out of keeping with being an "artist". Concern with audience was equivalent to commercialism. This tacit formula struck me as colossally stupid. First because it perpetuated the century-old chasm between the public and the avant garde, and second, because it reflected an embaressingly simplistic analysis of capitalism. Don't get me wrong, I'm not suggesting we produce video art for "mass audiences" (whoever *they* are), but solipsistic art-making is isolating—destructively so-as video art's trail-blazing twenty-five year history illustrates.

Complementing producers' unwillingness to deal with audiences' needs were curators' and critics' reluctance to strike freely and mercilessly. Dale Hoyt sums up the situation in AT ARM'S LENGTH's opening epigram: "Criticism in the video art world is a love letter disguised as discourse."

I wanted to poke a hole in this self-sufficient bubble. I looked for writers outside the video community, critics that had nothing to lose, nothing to gain, no loyalties to negotiate. I brought together a screenwriter, a specialist on international media and politics, a tv critic/producer, and a video artist. Two of them were barely acquainted with video but potentially sympathetic. A third, John Wyver, was still an outsider although somewhat more familiar with the work. The final contributor was an exception to my rule.

Jon Burris is a video artist and administrator. Given his extensive knowledge and interest in public funding, I asked Jon to write on the economics of video art. The other contributors were asked to write about individual tapes in light of broad thematic areas. I hoped we would get some fresh perspectives, and even encourage a new group of critics to write about video.

The very idea of going to "outsiders" suggests the prejudice that most deeply affects this project. Video art should be able to be understood and appreciated without extensive inculcation into video aesthetics and technology. My notion of audience requires only openness and intelligence from a viewer. When my new-to-the-field writers worried that they couldn't write about the work since they weren't experts, I argued that video shouldn't require expertise. So these critics dove in and began learning, sifting, and thinking. By the end of the process, they were well-versed if not expert. Their responses are informed, but written from the gut**.** As such, they risk being provocative. Hoorah.

As a means to getting penetrating criticism, the "outsiders" strategy was not a total success. Contributors' lack of commitment and understanding of the field was responsible for the death of more than one of these essays. I'm immensely disappointed that there is no discussion here of video's relationship to other contemporary visual art-making, or of video and its relation to technology. Additional tangents could have been developed that weren't.

Despite these regrets, I'm confident that the essays will be useful to artists and audiences eager to get beyond the assumptions of twenty years ago. The ideas clash and conflict-there is no unified thesis—but each of the essays in its own way nudges us

forward into the future. In John Wyver's essay, he muses on the state of the post-network television hegemony and asks the question: If tv is no longer just the omnipotent mind-fucker and consumer delivery truck that social critics said it was, what will happen to video art's identity? Leslie Fuller adds to the fracas, calling artists into the trenches of Tinseltown to make better television. John Downing tries to define a political aesthetic for U.S. video in the 90s. Downing's preference for the uninterpreted "voice"—self articulation structured in relatively conventional forms—may strike some readers as naive or retrogressive. But form and audience-building are political questions, and the dilemma points back to Downing's first question: *What is politics?* The final essay by Jon Burris evaluates the influence of the patron on the art—the patron in this case being public funding agencies. Video, as an "infant" art form raised in the "family" of public funding was uniquely affected by that early development.

Burris' discussion hints at unsettling questions. He reminds us that the term "underground" film was replaced with "independent" at the onset of government funding. Did early public money remove the incentive to build links to new audiences in other disciplines or political communities, or to locate alternative financial sources, thereby stamping out some of video's political potential? Could the perverse truth be that sometimes state funding lessens video's vitality and relevance—even insures its marginal status? By influencing the way in which we present our messages, the government casts our relationship to mainstream culture and politics.*

Unfortunately, the crisis at the National Endowment for the Arts has caused a new consolidation of arts support within the arts community that discourages us from considering these issues. As we fight for the survival of the agency, we should not ignore what public funding has done for us and to us. There are no absolutes here: state funding

• State funding has had other—perhaps leas fundamental, but nevertheless significant—impact on this project NYSCA's separation of video and film for instance, led to the essays dealing with issues only as they were relevant to video. Ultimately I made a single exception allowing John Downing to discuss an exceptional film an environmental issues.

AT ARM'S LENGTH also suffers from what I've come to call "the public funding time warp". Conceptualization of this project occurred so long ago that I no longer certain how well it addresses current problems in the video community. My life has moved on--as has video.

is neither entirely good or bad. But it's worth paying attention to. As a condition of the release of this year's grant award, the NEA asked The Kitchen to present an advance list of tapes for this exhibition and all other video exhibitions this season. No list. No dough. And NEA surveillance of Kitchen activities continues. As the government reevaluates its commitment to free expression perhaps the arts community should reconsider what the government's money is worth. Fighting for an unfettered grants process, the ostensible procedure of yesteryear, seems almost too good to be true in light of recent intervention. But the real danger is that the present state of siege will obscure the actual impact of funding under even the best of conditions.

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Barbara Osborn
New York City, 1990

Criticism

In the video art world

is a love letter

disguised as

discourse.

Dale Hoyt

COMING TO TERMS WITH THE FRIGHTFUL PARENT:
VIDEO ART AND TELEVISION

JOHN WYVER

For much of its brief history, video art has been searching for its reason for being. As soon as it emerged in the 1960s from the coupling of newly available technology with the New York art world, video art sought legitimation. Such legitimation was essential for artists seeking funders, for curators seeking audiences, and for critics seeking meaning. And for the most part this legitimation has been provided in the terms of either the museum or the medium that David Antin dubbed "video's frightful parent": television (Antin 1986: 149).

The museum has offered (albeit often grudgingly) an embrace in part at least because video art has been seen as extending the concerns of what Martha Rosler has identified as "old-fashioned Formalist Modernism" (Rosier 1986: 250). No such embrace,

however has been proffered either by or towards television, and the relationship has invariably been one of opposition. Especially for artists in the United States, television has offered a target for attack, critique, pastiche, appropriation and subversion**,** as well as (occasionally) envy. And for critics television has been the object against which video can be defined and defended. (It should be noted that these remarks are prompted by the history of video art in the United States. Broadcast television has been less central, though still significant, to artists' video outside the USA, in part at least because the mainstream medium has exhibited far greater variety in Europe and elsewhere.)

The inadequacies of the formalist legitimation has been considered elsewhere, notably by Rosier in her important essay, "Shedding the Utopian Moment" (Rosier: 250). This essay concerns the origins and the problems of video's legitimation *against* television. There is no doubt that the essential opposition between video and television has been central both to the preoccupation and achievements of many artists working with video and to much of the discussion about video art. But my concern is to argue that this idea was, as it remains, grounded in a narrow and limited critique of television; that it has contributed considerably to the video art world's far from fruitful hermeticism; and (perhaps most importantly) that it could prevent artists from recognizing contemporary changes within television and the possibilities that these may open up.

That television has been profoundly important in shaping the development of video art is accepted by most commentators on the medium. As the myths that pass as history have it, television and artists' video were entangled from the earliest emergence of the younger form. Most historical surveys of video art begin with the exhibitions by Wolf

Vostell (in Cologne in 1959, remounted in New York in 1963) and Nam June Paik (Wuppertal, 1963 and New York, 1965) which incorporated television sets into artworks. These artists' fascination with television and their simultaneous rejection of it (Paik distorted the images; Vostell broke, daubed with paint and even shot at the sets) were soon to become familiar concerns for many creators.

As video art has developed, many writers, including numerous artists, have accepted and asserted video's essential opposition to television. For some, this is an article of faith, as it was for the artist and critic Douglas Davis back in 1970: "The greatest honor we can pay television is to reject it" (Davis 1978: 33). Others are equally emphatic, if a little less blunt. In a recent study of artists' video, the Dutch critic Rob Perree states, "There is a fundamental incompatibility of interests and principles between the artist and the television maker" (Perree 1988: 53). And the curator Kathy Huffman writes in 1984, "Video art is fundamentally different from broadcast television and has been since its inception. Where broadcast television addresses a mass audience, video art is intensely personal—a reflection of individual passions and consciousness" (Huffman: 1984).

These commentators, along with many others, speak of television as if it were a medium defined by a single essence. They fail to recognize that their remarks draw on only *one conception* of the medium. This conception, unsurprisingly, is derived from understandings of the model of commercial network television in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s, and from the particular intellectual climate of the time, which was broadly antagonistic to popular culture.

It hardly needs stating—except that it is often forgotten—that the model of U.S. commercial network television is neither the sole nor the inevitable form of the medium. The negative and hostile attitudes toward television still held by many artists and critics today (and of course by many others) perhaps fail to take sufficient account of the extraordinary potential of television, and of the ways in which audiences use television in their lives, in their imaginations, in their fantasies. Seen in a context broader than commercial broadcasting in the United States, television is not nearly as homogeneous as the dominant conception assumes. Nor are audiences as undifferentiated and as passive as the mainstream intellectual approach holds them to be.

Consider two videotapes made in the 1970s which take television as their subject: *Television Delivers People* (1973) by Richard Serra and Carlota Faye Schoolman and the Ant Farm collective's *Media Burn* (1975). Both tapes still feature prominently in exhibitions and anthologies, and both are frequently discussed and referred to in writings about video. The central, spectacular images of the latter—a customized Cadillac crashing through a wall of blazing television sets—is also often reproduced in books and articles, as well as on postcards.

Television Delivers People simply scrolls a text of discrete sentences up the screen while Muzak plays on the soundtrack. The sentences offer a strident critique of the operations of television: "The product of television, commercial television, is the audience." "You are the product of tv." "Commercial television defines the world so as not to threaten the status quo." "You are the controlled product of news programming" (Schneider and Korot 1976: 114). The tape lasts six minutes.

Media Burn is more than twice as long as *Television Delivers People,* and considerably more fun. The tape records the preparations for the collision of car and television, the maintream media interest that the event generated, and the carnival atmosphere of the day. But the appearance of a John Kennedy lookalike introduces an element that is just as didactic as *Television Delivers People.* "Kennedy" delivers a spoof Independence Day address: "Mass media monopolies control people by their control of information...Who can deny that we are a nation addicted to television and the constant flow of media? Now I ask you, my fellow Americans, haven't you ever wanted to put your foot through your television screen?" (Schneider and Korot 1976: 11). And this, of course, is the desire acted out on a mythic level in the crash that follows.

Each tape flaunts its oppositional attitude to televsion, both in the texts quoted and in the form employed. The deadpan presentation of a text in *Television Delivers People* asserts itself against the glossy visuals of commercial broadcasting, just as the rough, video verite of *Media Burn* is intended to contrast with the far more controlled and "professional" look of mainstream news and documentary production.

Both tapes were framed by, and contributed to, the intellectual discourse about television in the United States. This discourse in turn was shaped in the 1960s in a climate antagonistic to popular culture in general, and to television specifically. For while fine artists like Warhol and Lichtenstein may have embraced television in their work, the overwhelming majority of intellectuals in the United States vehemently rejected it. In his enlightening collection of essays *No Respect—Intellectuals and Popular Culture,* Andrew Ross argues convincingly that, by the beginining of the 1960s, for many writers and critics

"...television had become the latest unredeemable object in the continuing debate about mass culture" (Ross 1989: 104-105).

In the post war world, the thinking of Frankfurt School intellectuals Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (both of whom spent the 1940s in the States) was particularly influential in framing for many American intellectuals their view of mass culture. Their ideas "reflected the breakdown of modem German society into fascism" comments David Morley, "a breakdown which was attributed, in part, to the loosening of traditional ties and structures and seen as leaving people atomized and exposed to external influences and especially to the pressure of the mass propaganda of powerful leaders, the most effective agency of which was the mass media. This "pessimistic mass society thesis" stressed the conservative and reconciliatory role of "mass culture" for the audience (Morley 1980: 1). The polemical attacks of Adorno and Horkheimer on the barbarian influences of the "culture industry" propagated the view that popular forms like the cinema and television were, in Ross' words, "profitable opiates(s), synthetically prepared for consumption for a society of automatons" (Ross 1989: 50).

Commercial television as it had evolved since 1945 appeared to many to be the embodiment of such an idea. And the quiz show scandals of 1959, in which contestants admitted that they had been prompted to cheat by the program producers, reinforced for many critics the sense of the medium as not only banal and absurd, but also deceptive and grossly manipulative. Ross quotes Gilbert Seldes asserting that, "next to the H Bomb, no force on earth is as dangerous as television"(Ross 1989: 105). And the view of television held by the social, cultural and intellectual elite of Camelot was expressed by President

Kennedy's Federal Communications Commission chairman Newton Minow in his celebrated 1961 speech attacking television as a "vast wasteland". The high-culture echo of T.S. Eliot was presumably appreciated by those concerned to preserve the cultural values of an earlier time.

Following Adorno et al, watching television in the 1960s was seen as the simple, passive consumption of "messages". A parallel strand of modernist thought lamented the unrealized potential of the mass media which, under capitalism, was a one-way process of transmission from the center band reception by the mass. One of the texts extensively quoted in critical essays about video art was Bertolt Brecht's short note, "The Radio as an Apparatus for Communication". Brecht had originally published this in 1932, but it only became available in English in a collection edited by John Willett in 1964.

> ...(Q)uite apart from the dubiousness of its functions, radio is one-sided when it should be two-... It is purely an apparatus for distribution, for sharing out. So here is a positive suggestion: change this apparatus over from distribution to communication...the radio should step out of the supply business and organize its listeners as suppliers (included in Hanhardt 1986: 53).

John Hanhardt, writing in 1984, sees television in terms exactly paralllel with Brecht's sense of radio: "(Television) was not the communications medium it claimed to

be, but rather, a one-way channel, broadcasting programmes that admitted no innovation"(Hanhardt 1984: 55-56). And this view was supported by the most fashionable guru of cultural analysis in the 1980s, Jean Baudrillard:

> (The media) fabricates non-communication—this is what characterizes them, if one agrees to define communication as an exchange, as a reciprocal space of speech and response, and thus of responsibility...They speak, or something is spoken there, but in such a way as to exclude any response anywhere. (Baudrillard 1986: 128-129)

Brecht's original ideas, together with Walter Benjamin's enthusiasm for the radical democratic potential of film (expressed in his influential essay "The Work of At in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" written 1936; translated 1969; included in Hanhardt 1986: 27-52) were taken up in the 1960s by Hans Magnus Enzensberger. Enzensberger too was convinced of the promise of media technology. But capitalism had as yet ensured that his promise remained unfulfilled. "Monopoly capitalism" he observes in "Constituents of a Theory of the Media" (1974) "develops the consciousness-shaping industry more quickly and more extensively than other sectors of production; it must at the same time fetter it" (included in Hanhardt 1986: 97).

As Andrew Ross summarizes Enzensberger's position:

> He proposed that the promises inherent in communication technology—participation, decentralization, mobilization, education—ought to be more fully realized. Every receiver is also a transmitter! Enzensberger's slogan spoke directly to ways of transforming the means of production (it had less to say about the actual conditions of consumption), and it was a direct injunction to the New Left to abandon its technophobic allegiances to pre-industrial forms of communication, and to make "proper strategic use of the most advanced media"(Ross 1989: 121).

Such brief quotations from, and summaries of, these important texts almost inevitably misrepresent their subtle arguments. But the writings are now familiar (perhaps overfamiliar) cornerstones of the understanding of television and video in the United States. The Brecht, Benjamin and Enzensberger essays are three of the introductory essays in Hanhardt's widely-read collection *Video Culture: A Critical Investigation* (alongside further chunks of cultural pessimism from Louis Althusser and Baudrillard). And the quotations above help identify the essential atittudes towards television among radical thinkers from the 1960s on: suspicion, disdain and rejection on the one hand, and the urgency of a response to expose the workings of the media and promote participation rather than passivity. These are the same attitudes exemplified by the critical writings about video quoted earlier, and by the two tapes discussed.

The broader backdrop to these debates was, of course, the political activism of the 1960s, and the anti-authoritarian impetus of much social and cultural activity. In many spheres distinct from the media there were demands for the replacement of passivity by participation, and through the 1970s campaigns for political change were often aided and documented by videomakers. The promotion of the idea of cultural participation took a number of forms, including the simple encouragement of neophytes to pick up a video camera and make their own tapes. A different strategy, drawn from the traditions of literary modernism, was the production of an open, fragmented, challenging text which would force the viewer to work to participate, so as to make sense of it. (A related approach was adopted by the makers of certain video installation works, which inserted the viewer, or her or his image, into the environment and so promoted a more active relationship with the work. Ira Schneider and Frank Gillette's *Wipe Cycle* (1969) is a significant example of this approach.)

Participation was sometimes understood in ways which may now strike us as bizarre. The most influential of the pop culture gurus, Marshall McLuhan, for example, conceived of such participation, at least with regard to television, in terms of an involuntary bodily response. His enthusiasm for cool media like television (along with the telephone and the comic strip) was based on the idea that because they were low on both definition and information, they demanded that viewers participate more by filling up the images. McLuhan, however, could be as negative towards the medium as the most entrenched ivory tower critic. This is from an extended interview published in 1967:

> TV, in a highly visual culture, drives us inward in depth into a totally non-visual universe of involvement. It is destroying our entire political, educational, social, institutional life. TV will dissolve the entire fabric of society in a short time. If you understood its dynamics, you would choose to eliminate it as soon as possible (as quoted by Ross 1989: 119).

Given the prevalence of (perhaps slightly less extreme variants of) such attitudes in the 1960s and 1970s, the convenience, and indeed the possibilities, of being able to legitimize video an *against* television are apparent. Early video exhibition titles, such as "TV as a Creative Medium" (1969) and "Vision and Television" (1970) reflect the desire both to acknowledge the frightful parent, but also to challenge it. At the time creativity and vision could be assumed to be so clearly antithetical to television, or rather to the predominant understandings of television, that just linking these qualities with the idea of television was inevitably to offer opposition to that idea. Many among the target audiences of these shows—from the art world and museums, from critics and later from funding agencies and those who sat on their panels—certainly shared the attitudes to television sketched above, and so the legitimation of the fledgling medium of video against television was perfectly acceptable, and for many must have seemed excitingly radical.

Now consider an excerpt from a videotape about television made ten years after *Television Delivers People.* The shot is of a young girl lying on the floor watching an off-screen television. As she tells her story, two adults—seen only from the waist down—appear behind her. .

> "The last time I saw my parents kiss was twenty-five years ago" she remembers, "I was lying on the living room floor watching TV. *Dragnet* was on and that music, that horribly scary music was filling the room and my soul with pure terror, it was a show about Friday's partner, who'd just been killed in action. Here I was trying to feel safe and secure in the good TV graces of Sargeant Friday and instead I was plugging my ears and shaking. That's the way I watch *Dragnet* week after week. Then my parents came in to say goodnight. They were going to a party. Mom looked so pretty in her orange sequined dress. And Dad looked so handsome in his blue metallic suit. They bent over to say goodbye and then embraced and kissed right in front of the TV set. Then they walked out just as that horrible music reverberated through the entire house. This time I didn't have to plug my ears. Their kiss made me stfong enough to watch the final credits without shuddering" (Desmarais 1990: 54).

This is from Ilene Segalove's *Why I Got Into TV and Other Stories,* a tape that seems not to be exhibited, nor to be written about, nearly as much as *Television Delivers People.* Nor does the critical consensus that exists accord Segalove's tape a reputation anywhere close to the stature of Serra and Schoolman's piece. Yet it is comparably bold and simple, and it challenges the conventions of television language at least as effectively

with its knowing re-framing of a domestic encounter. The tape (unlike *Television Delivers People)* also has great charm and humor, and it wants to be watched and enjoyed.

Unlike most artists' videotapes about television, this section of *Why I Got Into TV* is also about a particular program. The tape is so delicate, funny and pleasing that it would be too easy to overburden it with a complex analysis, but it is important to recognize that the tape explores how that program was part of one young girl's fears and fantasies, and how it became part of her life. And unlike most artists' tapes which protest the means'of television production and urge resistance, this is a tape about consumption, about watching television and making it a part of your life. Nor is consumption here simply passive reception, a process in which the viewer is manipulated by the consciousness industry. Instead, it is simply an element of everyday life, an element that gets mixed up with everything else going on, and an element that can enrich and deepen one moment of the girl's relationship with her parents.

The understanding of television encapsulated in Segalove's tape, parallels an .analysis of mass media which has been developed, primarily in Britain, over the past twenty years. This has come to be know as the "uses and gratifications" model, and its central idea is summed up in this suggestion from one of its pioneers, James Halloran: "We must get away from the habit of thinking in terms of what the media do to people and substitute for it the idea of what people do with the media" (as quoted by Morley 1980: 12).

As with the post-Frankfurt School ideas explored above, this model (and its subsequent refinements, adjustments and often radical re-workings by researchers such as

David Morley) can be presented here only in sketch form. Mick Counihan's 1972 summary, however, is useful as a pointer to the main ideas:

> ...(A)udiences were found to `attend to' and 'perceive' media messages in a selective way, to tend to ignore or to subtly interpret those messages hostile to their particular viewpoints. Far from possessing ominous persuasive and other anti-social power, the media were now found to have a more limited and, implicitly, more benign role in society; not changing, but 'reinforcing' prior dispositions, not cultivating 'escapism' or passivity, but capable of satisfying a great diversity of 'uses and gratifications', not instruments of a levelling of culture, but of its democratization (Morley 1980: 6).

It is notable, however, that ideas such as these are almost never reflected in the approaches to television within artists' videotapes. *Why I Got Into TV and Other Stories is* remarkable (as are other tapes by Segalove) precisely because it is concerned with the "uses and gratifications" that one viewer derives from one television program, and with her active and strongly participatory relationship with it. For all its seeming fragility and inconsequentiality, *Why I Got Into TV* is an important challenge to the deep-seated and endlessly repeated orthodoxy that "television delivers people".

If the reception of television can be understood as offering far more than was allowed by the ideas dominant from the 1960s on, so should the production of the medium. Twenty years ago, television in the United States comprised only network affiliates and local stations that wished to be network affiliaties, together with the worthy but desperately underfunded public broadcasting stations. PBS operators are still underfunded today, and throughout the system the underlying commercial imperative is no less important. Yet the television ecology is now far, far more varied, with numerous cable and satellite services supplementing and challenging the no longer overwhelmingly dominant networks. As the critic Marita Sturken recognized in 1984:

> Network television as we have known it is slowly becoming obsolete. Vast, expensive, centralized, inflexible, it is the dinosaur of the 1980s and 90s gradually giving way to an electronic entertainment industry that includes multiple channels, increased distribution via satellite, home recorders, and, for viewers, radically new elements of choice.

Abroad, of course, since television started, there have been alternative modes of financing, production and distribution quite different from those of the commercial networks. And in the last decade, despite the drive in many countries towards deregulation of state controls and increasing market pressures which are thought by many to stifle distinctive services, new television organizations like Channel 4, London and France's

Canal Plus and La Sept have demonstrated remarkable possibilities for the funding and exhibition of a very wide range of work.

Political, economic and technological forces working on television today throughout the world are bringing a greater differentiation and variety to the medium than ever before. To some degree, since the changes are taking place at a dizzying pace, such a statement has to be as much article of faith as informed and accurate analysis. But as the number of services throughout the world proliferates, and as audiences fragment into a multitude of new configurations, many new possibilities—for artists, just as for other moving image makers—are opened up. The appetite of this vast industry is voracious, and elements of it no longer need to appeal, as did the American networks, to the largest mass audiences. Indeed, services will increasingly target specific demographic and particular interest groups. To attract these audiences, they will also need to define and present themselves as distinct alternatives to the dominant structures.

Moreover, distribution will no longer be constrained by broadcasting models and technologies which carry their own impetus towards maximizing an audience. The idea of television already encompasses more than just what comes out of the air or down the cable. Cassettes and video games have begun to give us a quite new sense of the possibilities of the box in the corner, and this is likely to develop rapidly with, for example, the introduction of interactive compact disc (CD-I) systems in the next two years. CD-I, backed by Sony and Phillips, offers the possibility of interactive moving images for the domestic set. A wide range of uses are envisaged, including educational discs, games and interactive dramas.

The production of programming primarily intended for broadcast will inevitably continue. But this seems likely to be increasingly lower cost (or comparatively so), rapid turn-over programming, such as game shows, soaps, sports and news. Alongside this, production and distribution of discrete programs like dramas and documentaries, as well as artists' tapes, may follow more and more closely a publishing, rather than a broadcasting, model. Different sources of finance will be brought together to fund a single production, and a wide range of distribution outlets may be possible. Television exhibition may be one of these, but so, for example, will cassette or video disc distribution.

Such broad strokes of speculation can suggest that in the coming decade there will be (at least in an international context) a far greater variety of production funding and financing, the number and range of distribution systems will continue to increase, as will possibilities for exhibition, and relationships between televisions and audiences will be understood in new ways. All of which should offer important opportunities and challenges for everyone, including artists, working with moving images.

In crudely commercial terms, artists are in many ways well-placed to exploit the opportunities which are opening up. As sources of novel, distinctive and powerfully-presented ideas and images, they should be sought after by at least some of the new television structures. And as artisanal producers, their costs are often (comparatively) low, and copyrights and ownership are (comparatively) straightforward.

For two reasons, however, this essay is not intended to conjure up the vision of a new television utopia for artists' video. The first reason is, obviously, that most of the new

services already do, and will continue to share the languages, values and ideologies familiar from the commercial networks. But it seems likely that the images will no longer be as rigidly directed towards audience maximization and profit as they once were. The dominant languages will no longer be quite as dominant, and alternatives will be recognized and even valued. The contradictions of television, and of the meanings and ideas offered by it, may become richer, stronger and more exciting.

The production and exhibition contexts opening up will inevitably entail limitations and constraints, just as do those of the gallery and the museum. Television's limitations will be different, but they will not necessarily be more onerous. What seems important is that the video art world's dominant ideas about television, as sketched above, should not prevent the widest range of responses.

Recent history, however, suggests that the blinkers about television may remain. As has been suggested, the range and richness of television has rarely been recognized in the majority of tapes produced by artists. Nor has it often been acknowledged by curators and critics writing about or assembling exhibitions or programs. As David Antin observes,

> Television haunts all exhibitions of video art, though when actually present it is only minimally represented, with perhaps a few commercials or "the golden performances" of Ernie Kovacs (a television "artist"); otherwise its presence is manifest mainly in quotes, allusion, parody, and protest (included in Hanhardt 1986: 148).

In part precisely because of video art's struggle for legitimation, and an inevitable defensiveness in its early years, the form has been concerned to assert its individual and distinctive histories and traditions. As a consequence, video has been confined to a limited context, and seen as separate from developments in film, in television and in other moving image media like digital animation. There are signs that this is beginning to change, and two major European exhibitions in the autumn of *1990—Passages d'Image* at the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris and *The First Biennial of the Moving Image* at the Reina Sofia Centre in Madrid—specifically address the relationships between video and other forms of the moving image. But in the past the understanding of video as separate from related media has meant that video in the eyes of both its creators and its critics, has tended to be cut off from likely enrichment by other elements of our contemporary moving image culture.

If the dominant attitudes are to change, as' l believe they should, the shift may contribute to the possibly inevitable, and probably positive, dissolution of video art's current identity. Video art was never defined or legitimated internally either solely by technology or by a shared language. Nor, as I have argued, should it have been defined and legitimated primarily by reference to the external evil of television. Its identity, today as for much of its history, is .an institutional one, formed and sustained by now comparatively well-established structures of curatorship, criticism and distribution. Even a slowly developing market, for installations and for archive-quality museum copies of tapes, is beginning to make a contribution to this identity.

The primarily institutional nature of video art's identity today may inhibit the

development of new relationships between artists' video on the one hand and broadcast television and new forms of moving image media on the other. (And this is the other reason why my arguments are not intended to conjure up a vision of television as a new utopia for artists' video.) The possibilities that may be opening up should be explored and exploited by all those concerned to extend the potential of moving images. And arguing and lobbying and working for the presence of something called "artists' video" will be, at best, only an exceptionally limited strategy for extending this potential. It perpetuates the idea of artists' video as distinct from, and indeed opposed to, television. And the strategy will also inevitably perpetuate television's condescension towards and marginalization of artists' work.

An alternative strategy, and one that seems to offer far more possibilities, is to work to understand the many different operations of television's new structures, and to accommodate to a limited degree to these, while still offering challenging alternatives to the dominant ideas and languages of these structures. Artists like William Wegman and John Sanborn and Mary Perillo have achieved this by working within the commercial structures of the medium. Wegman's recent sketches for Children's Television Workshop are as engaging as his earlier short works and his 1988 promo (co-directed with animator Robert Breer) for New Order's *Blue Monday (Remix) is* a joyous three minutes of image-making. Both the sketches and the promo encapsulate Wegman's individual take on the world, even if they may seem as inconsequential and as fragile as Ilene Segalove's *Why I Got Into 7V.*

Sanborn and Perillo's work is seen by some as making too great an accommodation to television, so that their manipulations of high-tech wizardry drain any substance from the work. Yet their *Untitled (1989),* made with the dancer and choreographer Bill T. Jones for PBS' *Alive From Off Center,* refutes any such criticism. *Untitled* is a simple, powerful and intense dance lament for Bill T. Jones' partner Arnie Zane, who died of AIDS in 1988. Driven by a passion that is both personal and political, the tape is as moving and as memorable as the finest achievements in any medium.

Two major recent tapes that achieve a different accommodation with television, yet still remain entirely distinctive, are Bill Viola's *I Do Not Know What It Is I Am Like (1986)* and Gary Hill's *Incidence of Catastrophe (1988).* Both were part-funded by television, the former by ZDF and the latter by Channel 4, London. For all their many differences, both engage with long-established television forms, Viola's with the natural history documentary, and Hill's with the adaptation of a classic literary text. Yet both create radical alternatives to television's dominant languages, and each emerges as a complex exploration of spirituality and identity. Both are also uncompromising in their form and structure. At the most obvious level, Viola's meditative images are held far longer than television usually permits, but it is with this reflective scrutiny of the natural world that the artist undertakes his religious quest. In a parallel manner, Hill's fragmented and dispassionately cruel self-confrontation contributes to a tape that is, in the most positive sense, profoundly unsettlling. (The many problems of the strategy of working with television may be suggested by the fact

that despite supporting the production of *Incidence of Catastrophe* more than two years ago, Channel 4 has still not screened the tape.)

Each of these works by Wegman, Sanborn and Perillo, Viola and Hill offers a way forward for moving images to explore and express new ideas in new ways. Each was produced with a strand of the varied and disparate institution that television has become. Each is screened on television, as well as being shown extensively elsewhere. Each engages with television's forms, while at the same time offering alternatives. Each offers an implicit critique of the generally impoverished languages of the medium, but constructively so. Each of the works suggest that video art can see beyond the traditional attitude of rebellion towards a once-frightful parent, and so achieve a new relationship with television that both parent and offspring, together with the rest of us, will find enriching.

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Five Answers to the Question: What Has TV Meant in Your Life

TV taught me alienation. I turn it on and see something that's not me.

$75,000 on Jeopardy.

How I learned Paul McCartney got married.

Star Trek before dinner.

The only friend who hasn't run out on me.

My parents were so proud the day they saw me on tv.

LIGHT DISTANCES: AN EYEWITNESS REPORT

LESLIE FULLER

The "television generation" refers to children who grew up with four eyes and no mouth.
Fred Allen, Radio Artist

ible, simply by changing channels.

Radio, unlike children, was meant to be heard but not seen. One of the seminal conceptual artists of the mid-century, Edgar Bergen, had a child made of wood. His name was Charlie McCarthy. He was a dummy. Edgar was a ventriloquist, who threw his voice to Charlie in a radio act, even though such a trick, by popular convention, is meant to be seen in order to be appreciated,

Charlie and Edgar later became a big hit on television, too, though you could no

longer classify their *folie a deux* as conceptual. Television, like a child who is perceived to be the next messiah, was meant to be seen (and heard) by as many people as possible, all at once. But there are some very clever people out there—call them video artists—who, for the past twenty-odd years, make television that is meant to be seen by a few, at different, private moments. Inversely, imagine that the novel, meant to be seen by many, but very privately, one-at-a-time, becomes a "mass" performance event, seen by many but minus the privacy, i.e.: Pile into the bus! Next stop Madison Square Garden for an SRO viewing—page by page, via giant screen projection—of Thomas Pynchon's latest book! (His fans assemble for a Read-In. Validated Parking. Cold beer.)

If, as many artists who prefer "video" to the word "television" believe, a medium designed for mass appeal can be solemnized into a private ritual, then why can't the art sacrament be, like a papal blessing, dispensed to a teeming crowd?

I think we're entering a period in which it is "television" which is becoming "personal", while "video art," as it is called, is becoming didactic. I think that "television", which is such a child, is being deemed, in some circles, to have a postmodernism before it is old enough to have a modernism. The kid learns to read before she can walk. Precocious? Stay tuned. Stay very tuned. Whoever is talking to you about this is a dummy. With no mouth. The real voice is being thrown from a distance, even here. So, the next time you touch that dial, st

T.R. Uthco (Doug Hall, Jody Procter, Diane Hall) video artists, *Eternal Frame*

Q: Would you call this "art"?
A: It's not not 'art'.

traffic jam outside on the freeway. Here in the editing room in Burbank, California, there is a dish of trail mix on the console. Yesterday—different editing room, different part of Burbank—it was goldfish crackers. The day of the goldfish I was a writer/producer editing an NBC Television special starring Dolly Parton, Kenny Rogers, and Willie Nelson. Today, the day of the raisins and nuts, I'm researching this arts council funded essay on 'video art' and observing the editing of a public television sponsored documentary on the conceptual artist, Chris Burden. Welcome, Mouseketeers (which is what I choose to call "Baby Boomers"), to the Wonderful World of Dissonance. Cognitive, that is. Swimming pools, movie stars. From goldfish to trail mix. From high art to low art. TV is a two-faced, worrisome thing that leaves you to watch the radium blues in the night. To further mangle Johnny Mercer, that debonair

Ilene Segalove, video artist, *The Pastrami Sandwich*

TV brings some people the world. It brings some people the universe. It brought Danny a pastrami on rye.

safely graze, Don't mind me. I'm no expert on video art. I work mostly in commercial TV, music and films. And I have occasionally worked within the non-profit "art" world, in the video and audio genres. I know something about both the "rituals of Hollywood" and "the rituals of art." I've probably seen more independent television and made myself aware of more literature related to its concerns than 99% of my fellow writer types who are, first and foremost, in the entertainment field. Maybe I'm a hack manquee. I think like an artist and I work like a showbiz goon. Which means I'm simultaneously abstract and lit with a purist flame while being a workaholic careerist determined to pay my bills. NOT get rich, just pay my bills. I'm not in showbiz for the money, which probably makes me insane, and

an unreliable narrator. It's not, as a few art world cuties sometimes blandish, a form of "schizophrenia." It's just a failure (or, perhaps, a successful refusal) to cling unquestioningly to the highly standardized, "politically correct" *art vs. commerce* distinctions. I mean, the year I created a kids' puppet series for commercial TV was the same year I wrote and performed in a Nam June Paik video. The year I worked for the Museum of Contemporary Art—Los Angeles (MOCA) producing a documentary on the artistic process was the same year I spewed out a one-hour comedy pilot for CBS. And these days I'm telling a couple of big deal movie studio types to shove it for a few weeks while I finish this article, which is as important to me as a major motion picture. So I'll understand if you'd rather not read on. I'm not ins

Umberto Eco, print artist, *Travels In Hyperreality*

Once upon a time there were the mass media, and they were wicked, of course, and there was a guilty party. Then there were the virtuous voices that accused the criminals. And Art (ah, what luck!) offered alternatives, for those who were not prisoners of the mass media. ...Well, it's all over. We have to start again from the beginning, asking one another what's going on.

inserting sweet potatoes into one's privates. Me, I became aware of independent television about ten years ago, when I was introduced to it not professionally but socially, by a would-be artist—a restless cadet of the downtown New York art scene, with whom I had a personal relationship. I had a few decent credentials in entertainment writing and journalism. I was used to the grind. I identified myself as "a worker among workers",

selling words to make the rent. And yet, I struggled to carve out an artistic vision. It was not tranquil. My tendency to treat a $500 assignment and a $20,000 assignment with the same sacred zeal struck the would-be artist as profoundly foolish, even irrational. I felt then, as I feel now, that all roads—be they cheap dirt trails or gleaming Autobahns—lead to Rome. He felt that the degree of energy I put into a project should be commensurate with how much I was getting paid for it. The would-be artist and I clashed, but the concurrent exposure to the "art world" changed my life forever. Ironically, it was I, the showbiz compulsive, who turned out to be primarily attracted to "the rituals of art" whereas the would-be artist turned out to be fundamentally drawn to "the rituals of Hollywood." Sometimes the one who opens the door is the last to leave the room. You're probab

Jean Baudrillard, idea artist, *Requiem for the Media*

The present form of the media induces a certain type of social relation (assimilative to that of the capitalist mode of production). But the media contain, by virtue of their structure and development, an immanent socialist and democratic mode of communication, an immanent rationality and universality of information. It suffices to liberate this potential.

but I never craved the "artist" moniker. Maybe I didn't have enough self esteem. Still, everything I attempted—a sitcom, a TV pilot, a *National Lampoon* article—had to be a poetic masterpiece. This approach pretty much rules out any serenity in your life till you get very accustomed to it. But I don't believe in any other way of working than to give it

your all. And I'm here to tell you that it's safe to walk around the big bad world of commercial TV wearing artist's slippers.

What I tell people, and what I'm telling you, is that I make art for people who don't necessarily know what art is. If the "Homeless" deserve attention, don't the "Artless?"

My complaint is that there seem to be so few "video" and "television" people who think like "filmmakers." That is, who spend time in *both* the "art" and the "commercial" playgrounds. Only when there are more "televisionmakers", who look beyond the dreary table tennis of the standard art-commerce dialectic, to a more media-expansive, state-of-the-art endeavor, will any of us know what game we're all really playing. And

Michael Smith, video artist, "Mike"

Some people are born to win. Some people are born to lose. Then there are people like me and you.

in the days before censorship. And even though they became my closest friends, I used to feel kind of insecure around *real* artists, work-wise. My labors were contextualized so as to encourage whatever legitimate scorn artists might harbor toward low art or pop culture. But the fact is the people who have made me feel the mot secure about my work as an "entertainment" writer have turned out to be, interestingly, painters and sculptors and critics in the New York art world. It's pretty flattering to have a successful, intellectually discriminating painter put down his Derrida to read my latest screenplay. The art world types I hang around with have been my educators. They take their own work seriously. So they took mine seriously. And thanks to them, I think, I've learned

how to do that, too.

Especially this one couple I know and love, two well-respected New York painters. They'd show me their latest opera and discuss their work process with me. In return, I'd show them a batch of *Saturday Night Live* sketches or something. In fact, it was because of this couple that I wound up working on *The Tracey Ullman Show* for a while. I hadn't paid much attention to it. (I write for TV but I don't necessarily like to watch it.) Well, it was their favorite show and they got me to watch it with them. I went back to California and got a job writing for it. I told the show's producers that they had a cadre of loyal fans back east in the art world, a bunch of famous painters. This did nothing to relieve the producers' concerns about *The Tracey Ullman Show*'s continuously low ratings, but it might have helped them understand why my material, by Tinseltown standards, is always considred "sophisticated". Little do the suits know that when I'm asked to write for 100 million semi-literate viewers, their Nielsen-defined chunk of that mythical turf known as "Middle America", my own personal target audience is a handful of New York City painters. Still, they put my stuff on the air, most of the

Charles Osgood
TV commentator, on Keith Haring's subway murals, from *Famous For Ten Minutes*, by Carole Ann Klonarides, video artist

Is it "art?" There doesn't seem to be any question about it. Even though he gets fancy prices for his paintings, it's back down into the subway. Art, for the price of a subway token.

hamsters, funnels, the whole ball of wax. I wrote a couple of episodes fo the TV comedy series *Mork and Mindy* in the late seventies. At the time I was moonlighting as a counselor

to autistic kids in California. One of them told me his favorite show was *Mork and Mindy* because he felt, as an autistic, that he was an alien from another planet and could readily identify with Robin Williams' character, who actually was an extraterrestrial. I decided to write an episode in which Mork befriends a retarded teenager A) because, the romance and popularity of the film *Rain Man* notwithstanding, 50% of all autistic are also retarded, and B) because explaining autism in 22 minutes (sitcom time, minus commercials) is not viable. But my intended audience, the group of autistic kids I worked with, didn't need explanations. They were the best audience I'll ever have, even better than the painters.

A few years later, as the only non-art world person at a media arts panel at the Women's Interart Center in New York City, I used this episode as an example of how people actually make meaningful work in the corporate TV genre. The other panel participants—videoists, curators, theorists, funders, straight-up art mavens—tolerated my presence very well. My commercial television work was put into the context of the art scene and dignified, which sort of surprised me. I never told the *Mork and Mindy* producers, though, because they could have cared less. Lamentably, we

your correspondent, *Mouserpiece Theater* created by Bob Cunniff, television artist

Ah ha. You find yourself watching "Mouseterpiece Theater" for the first time and you ask yourself "Why?" The answer, dear amigos, lies in these words by Oscar Wilde: "Simple pleasures are the last refuge of the complex." I'm your host, George Plimpton, looking down with you at the bullring of those ferocious distinctions, simplicity and complexity, the prime turf of Walt Disney.

In 1947, Walt Disney produced an extremely thought-provoking motion picture, *Straight Shooters*, which starred Donald Duck and his nephews, Huey, Dewey, and Louie, the doyens of the realm of water fauna. As you watch them, please keep in mind the words of Charles Baudelaire, whose poem, *Correspondences,* is of great help in attempting to deconstruct the special world Donald Duck created for us.

Comme de longs echos qui de loin confondent
Dans une tenebreuse et profonde unite
Vaste comme la nuit and comme la clarte
Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se repondent.

(An English translation ran across the screen in chyron. A Disney short cartoon followed. We did eighty of these shows with George Plimpton in 1983-84, a direct satire on PBS-TV's *Masterpiece Theater.* Our puckish series went on to win kudos and awards and has never stopped running on The Disney Channel.)

but I don't want you thinking it's all peaches, cream and secondary application of a liberal arts education. I'm not tripping any light, Tinseltown fantastic. I'm just seasoned, by now. Though the museum world has been pretty charitable about taking my showbiz efforts seriously, the showbiz world isn't so hospitable toward the "artful" aspects of my endeavors.

Jack Webb, probably not an artist, *Dragnet*

This is the city. Los Angeles, California. I work here.

It's not that entertainment industry executives are antagonistic to adding the spice of art to their "Cream of Nowhere Soup", it's just that they tend not to believe anything really exists until they themselves have produced it. So basically, in order to get something new and interesting on the tube you have to make your executives think it's new and interesting but not all *that* new or interesting. You let them think that *they've* discovered what you've known for decades. The amount of energy involved in affecting this manipulation is usually less than what it takes to write effective grant proposals, get accepted into artists' colonies, raise independent production money, or secure a part-time teaching job at an art school. Just think

David Lynch, TV and filmmaker, as quoted by Richard B. Woodward, *The New York Times Magazine*, on the ABC-TV series *Twin Peaks*

The constraints of television, with its censors and blocks of time, don't seem to have bothered David Lynch. "We lucked out on the pilot, and everything fit just right", he says.

tion. What an independent video producer (a/k/a/ a "video artist") fears that working in big time television is like and what it actually *is* like are typically very different. One of the reasons that commercial television is so routinely lackluster and insipid is because there aren't enough "artists" willing to crack it. It's a battlefield out here. Television needs more people with artists' concerns, the same way politics needs idealists. If TV were

Cuba, and this was the 1960s, I'd say "Venceremos!" Like any jungle, there are scorpions and swamp critters, but no one ever said it was going to be Club Med. And

Bruce Ferguson,
visual arts critic and writer

The disdain in which many in the so-called "art world" hold mass television or commercial television is symptomatic of most American intellectuals' disdain for, and profound lack of interest in, public art in general.

her nude body covered with chocolate. In 1989 I was a writer/producer for a network TV special, the one I mentioned earlier, starring Kenny Rogers, Dolly Parton, and Willie Nelson, three dirt poor Southern kids who became millionaires. The executive producer was Ken Kragen, the guy who gave us *We Are The World*, and *Hands Across America*. Sort of the Mary Boone of soft pop rock. The centerpiece of the special was a six-minute music video—very high tech, very sci-fi—by the respected, offbeat music video and film director, Julien Temple. The rest of the special was a joint performance by Kenny, Dolly and Willie before a gargantuan crowd on the grounds of the Johnson Space Center (NASA) in Houston, surrounded by lots of antiquated moon rockets. Already, we're chest deep in cognitive dissonance. Plus, they hire me as the main "creative" force and I'm off and running trying to book the cast of *Serafina!* (the Hugh Masekela South African Broadway musical), Sweet Honey in the Rock, (the feminist modern gospel *a capella* ensemble), Bob Telson's music (from *Baghdad Cafe* and *The Gospel at Colonnus*) and Dr. Stephen Hawking (the physically incapacitated British physicist specializing in Black

Holes, who wrote *A Brief History of Time* on a computer that allows someone who can't move even a muscle to write a book.) If you don't think mixing up Dolly Parton and Stephen Hawking on the same show doesn't stir-fry your brain cells, think again.

No one, on this show, had heard of any of the artists I was trying to book, but neither did they object to my suggestions. The reason none of the suggestions actually appeared on this particular TV special was not because of the self-limiting nature of television, but because the aforementioned artists had scheduling conflicts with our shoot dates. And, in the case of Dr. Hawking, I assembled a filmed montage about him but threw it out of the show at the very last second because we ran out of air time, to everyone's regret, even Ken Kragen's.

Sometimes, just to see if anyone was paying attention, I'd offer to book one of Nam June Paik's favorite acts (though I didn't mention Nam June Paik by name), such as *Urban Sax*, an ensemble I'd worked with in Paris. They are thirty-or so multi-national saxophonists who dress head-to-toe in white "ghost" sheets, suspend themselves high from the exteriors of many-storied buildings, and dangle upside down while playing atonal saxophone sounds in unison. I suggested that we string a bunch of them up on one of the moon rockets while Willie Nelson sang *Stardust*. It was a kick to watch the reactions of a production staff whose main experience up till then had centered around things like *The Gong Show* and *The Kenny Rogers Celebrity Tennis Tournament*. Of course, they all thought I was an artsy fartsy hooligan, but they've all asked to work with me again anyway. And the next time, I assure you, the Stephen Hawking element won't get bumped. (note: Erroll Morris, the documentary filmmaker, turned televisionmaker, who did *The*

Thin Blue Line and *Gates of Heaven* is creating an entire special based upon *A Brief History of Time* for a new anthology series on NBC prime time TV). Steven Spielberg is the

John Hanhardt,
Curator of Video,
The Whitney Museum
of American Art,
Catalogue to the 1989 Biennial

The privileging of traditional art forms is being challenged today as artists seek to introduce art into the public sphere through the media of our time.

in *Cinema Paradiso* (Tornatore's Oscar-winning film), when the projectionist shows the movies inside the movie theater, as usual, they're movies. When, to accommodate the burgeoning crowds, he turns the projector onto the wall, and shows the same film outside so that even the fishermen in their boats can see it, it's television. Magnitude of %fl$% XXZ)&H soiu*!oo

Leslie Stevens,
Playwright/
Producer,
The Outer Limits,
a television series

There's nothing wrong with your television set. Do not attempt to adjust the picture. We are controlling transmission.

and speaking of Nam June Paik, he had to be one of the coolest TV variety show producers ever. That's what he was when I worked with him on *Good Morning, Mr. Orwell*, a live satellite, trans-atlantic variety show which aired New Year's Day, 1984, and which Mr. Paik went on to re-cut as a work of "video art". *Urban Sax* dangled from outside the Georges Pompidou Center (Beaubourg). Charlotte

Moorman, Allen Ginsberg, Laurie Anderson, Merce Cunningham, etc., performed bits in either New York or Paris. The two cities were "connected" by satellite, and the instantaneity of this global gerrymandering was the aspect Mr. Paik seemed most excited about. Oh yeah, George Plimpton was this program's emcee, too, fresh from *Mouseterpiece Theater*. I was one of two writers who were, in addition, performing on the show. Mr. Paik was doing all the things Ken Kragen does—raising money, grabbing publicity, coddling talent, raising money, promoting the show, computing budgets, raising money, hiring staff, taking meets, and raising money. Though he was by far the loosest producer I've ever worked for, Mr. Paik was no different, in his immediate objectives than any other TV mogul.

The day before the broadcast, at a Paris reception for the international press, Mr. Paik, with deadpan blitheness, introduced me—an obscure young writer who only just happened to be *dabbling* as a performer in this particular TV special—as a Big American Star, a Household Word Back In The United States. The Asian and European reporters, at least, bought it, hook, line and sinker. They pricked up their ears—more press coverage for the show and its *real* stars—and I got fussed over to boot.

Which meant I could ask skeptical, immaculately dressed French producers to bring me campari-and-sodas on the day of the live transglobal telecast, while I waited on my set, unable to leave until the satellite returned to proper functioning so that I could perform one of my little comedy bits. I got the "star" treatment. But the satellite transmission remained snafued for a long time and I put away several camparis as I remained poised, in this "on deck" mode, draped in a truly outrageous, Flopsy-Mopsy

costume from a cheap Broadway theatrical warehouse. It was a sort of Lucille Ball On Angel Dust outfit. Quite in contrast to my set, for this bit, which was the Braque wing of the Beaubourg Museum. Lots of perfect, priceless Braques—very brown and beige and subtle—behind me, dolled up like Fanny Brice at Bellevue. Unfortunately, technical difficulties forced the cancellation of this particular sketch, which was really too bad, because had the increasingly skeptical French crew actually gotten to see what was planned as a sort of *homage* to Imogene Coca, my presence in that austere shrine of western art decked out like Cyndi Lauper's idiot grandmother might have been slightly more forgiveable. But the Frenchmen had to endure it, you see, because I was a Household Word back in the States.

I was pampered and deferred to not because French TV crews are by nature sycophantic coddlers. The entire unwieldy, impossible production of *Good Morning, Mr. Orwell* happened only because of Nam June Paik's brilliance as an impresario. For sheer entrepreneurial chutzpah, I'd pick him over Ken Kragen, or Allen Carr, or Bill Graham, etc.—any of those Big Event Producers—any day of the week. Nam June struck me as a committed artist who was fearless about using certain tools of commerce for his personal ends. The difference between him and your basic showbiz tycoon is that the ends Mr. Paik so zealously serves are artistic, whereas the tycoon's standard ends are profit-oriented.

Through working under Mr. Paik, I observed how startlingly similar the means to those two ends can be. A visionary artist can also be a master at masterminding, and controlling the means of production which is what Mr. Paik did, and does. He is a wonderful example of successful audacity. Once you've accepted the implications of such

an example, it is no longer outlandish to imagine that you can beat the industry at its own game.

Shalom Gorewitz, video artist, *The End of Television*

Corporate buildings and television are both reflective of idealized realities. Both are hypnotic and narcissistic. We stare in but only see ourselves. Television consumes cultures and spits it out. It's a robotic magnifier of psychological terrain. Everything is condensed and intensified. Meanwhile, more friends, meadow-jumpers, died. Buildings continue to burn. How does one make art in times like these?

ith all this exuberant blacklisting by the extreme right.

It was the legendary actor Edmund Keane who is supposed to have said, on his deathbed, "Dying is easy. Comedy is hard." Both activities, it seems, are struggling these days for access to dignity. Performance and video artists, I'm convinced, have concretely enhanced the dignity of the term "comedy" in this country. They have brought to the genre a respect it does not basically enjoy in the film and television entertainment world. There, comedy is a child of a lesser god. The "sitcom" and other such banalities have served to convince American audiences of the uselessness of the comic form. Within the entertainment industry, comedy—like movie car crashes and TV soap operas—is perceived to be a utility more than a craft. A utility, like tap water. This comedy-on-tap approach is emphasized by the decisions of several major pay cable companies to inaugurate "All Comedy" channels, which aspire to serve up comedy on a non-stop basis.

Soon, you may be able to buy a cup of comedy at your local 7-Eleven twenty-four hours a day. "Humor"—or rather certain people's definition of it—has become the fast food of the entertainment business.

And so it's been quite valuable and inspiring for me to observe that video artists who present straightforward comic narratives in their work are allowed to enter into the same museum world programs as video artists who deal with imagery, abstraction, technology, dance, or media theory. In the universe of video art, comedy gets what Rodney Dangerfield never gets.

Unfortunately most people never see video art. Its influence is restricted. In my case, however, a little has gone a very long way. That Chip Lord's *Motorist* was featured in the Whitney Museum's 1989 Biennial ws a pleasure to many of us who not only admire Lord's work but who understand that something can be humorous, accessible, narrative, and still be considered "art".

I've followed Lord's career for a few years, ever since I just happened to be in the same room with some people who were viewing *Easy Living* back in 1984. It was unforgettable, even to someone as peripheral to "video art" as I am. There are no humans in the piece, only models of cars, houses, and suburban living. "Dollhouse" stuff. Or elements from an electric train set. A car wash. A freeway, etc. But with the complete real life sound effects. It's just another automated day of leisure in America's golden land. And everyone who was watching *Easy Living* that first time was cracking up. It was too charming to have to explain why it was so funny. If we are being subsumed by technology, if we are being depersonalized and our humanity pillaged, then what a swift

trick it was for Lord to sum up our depravity in such a cheerful way by giving us a piece about human activity minus the humans. A model movie. Triumphantly arch.

Lord seems to allow our culture's regimentation to exist without protesting it. Maybe he's just a laid back California guy, a beach bum video artist. I don't know him. But for me he locates the inscrutable romance of the Nintendo culture. Highlighting our vapidness without a sneer is an amazing talent. Lord has the expansiveness to accept the feeling reality behind the machine, to celebrate emotionalism within the very system that would stamp it out. It's not nostalgia. It's fearlessness. In *Ballplayer,* Lord reflects on the National Pastime in tandem with a meditation on the slow, very slow, healing of a broken heart. Like baseball is to some, this video is pure poetry. I guess men have feelings after all. How

Eric Fischl, painter and part-time comedian

I am the audience. I make art as a way of confronting my own sense of non-existence, to the point where I can see that it's okay.

What many "artists" do that many "entertainment writers" do not is project an assessment of their current culture. Your basic TV writer is trying to deliver the status quo. Any commentary is fresh only in the sense that "freeze dried" is fresh. What Chip Lord is able to do in *Motorist* is deliver many things a good TV writer would want to do PLUS everything a good artist would want to do.

Motorist is, however, quite laconic. It drawls. There is not enough plot or action to satisfy your basic TV executive. It is a road movie and road movies cannot help but

meander. In movies and in television, we the writers are supposed to give an "arc" to this meandering. ("Arc" is the new favorite word in Hollywood development circles. It sounds less pedestrian than "plot".)

In *Motorist*, Chip Lord proceeds with the reality-based subtlety that an actual road trip might require. It is essential to the feeling of the piece that we "experience" a long, cross-country ride. But the pace of an actual 3,000 mile drive is not what the entertainment world endorses. The entertainment value of a piece is in direct correlation to how swiftly you can move an audience through a series of events without their missing what you've skipped over. *Motorist* is paced far more in real-time than in movie-time, which is one reason why it would never work on "television". But if the piece were "compressed" into movie time, it would never work as art. To appreciate what Lord is trying to express about the car culture, we must experience some of the aimlessness and unstructured time that goes along with driving.

In the "entertainment' world, the story (arc) must resolve itself way beyond what Aristoltle proposed. Aristotle did not insist that all characters wind up happy. Lately I've been noticing that I'm not only supposed to write a happy ending, I'm supposed to show what the major characters *learn* from the events of the movie. (Morality tales, after all, would be what we could expect from a society that seems so comfortable with its Christian right wing.)

The chief paradigm that entertainment executives worship is *Rocky*, which is essentially a refurbished Horatio Alger arc. In America even a lowly bum can be a big star. Please prove this by showing us how a dysfunctional ne'er-do-well winds up Number One.

Display for us now that everything is, in fact, all right. Tell me a story, Uncle Walt.

Allen Rucker, television producer, former member of TVTV, a video documentary collective

Why so many artists hate stories is because they were inundated with such bad stories on TV when they were kids. Artists often feel they have to create a language to break out of that--to get away from the bad stories that their parents accepted without protest.

that when most of us think of "video art" we do not think in terms of story. We usually think conceptual exploration, juxtaposed images, installations, activist video, documentary, dance or theoretical investigation. Many artists will not entertain the "N" word. Narrative is anathema. It implies that you have accepted middle class strategies and values. It implies limited thinking. It is pre-modern.

Chip Lord's work is about as close as video art will get to the "N" word. I don't claim that *Motorist* should be compared to conventional narrative. The ways in which it is *not* like a story are as important as the ways in which it is. *Motorist* demonstrates how long-form, single-screen video "art" can incorporate *certain* aspects of "entertainment value" without renouncing its place on the altar of the art world.

It is worth considering whether the reverse may also be possible: that you can incorporate "art value" without renouncing your cabin on the cruise ship of the entertainment world. The wh

EXT. AMARILLO GRAIN FIELD - LATE AFTERNOON

MOTORING, by MARTHA & THE VANDELLAS CONTINUES, V.O. Near "Amarillo" road sign, ten 'fifties Cadillacs are up-ended in the middle of nowhere, partially buried. "Pop Art". Fern focuses the camera on them and races back to join Carmen and the three girls for a grinning group portrait, with Cadillacs. As they all return to the car, Athena takes out photo of the rock star, Prince, tears it up, and lets the pieces fly into the wind.

your correspondent,
Shameless, a feature film script,
Warner Brothers

ATHENA

I'm never gonna love anybody else the way I loved him. Guess there's only one thing to do. Lock up my heart, throw away the key and become a lesbian.

Candy and Cookie nod sagely. Fern nearly chokes.

and of course my admiration for Chip Lord includes his earlier work, with Hudson Marquez and Douglas Michaels, as part of the video team, Ant Farm. In the '70s Ant Farm issued a now classic video, *Cadillac Ranch*, which depicted their installation piece of ten old Cadillacs buried in an Amarillo grainfield. (Cars are clearly Chip Lord's drug of choice.) When I was writing the road movie, *Shameless*, for Warner Brothers, a friend in the art world suggested I have the characters pass by the Cadillac Ranch, since they

happened to be in the neighborhood. I looked up Cadillac Ranch in the AAA regional guidebook.

T.R. Uthco, video artists, *Eternal Frame*

Q: Is this art?
A: What it is is figuring out what it is.
Q: Well, if you get any ideas, let me know.
A: Okay. I'll keep you posted.

of the other independent television artists whose belief in humor as an art form has resurrected my own. I think I have literally looked to art world humorists, including videoists, as a source of conviction at those times when I feel the need to defend my passion for using comedy as a means to epiphany. A sampling of artists I've looked to this way, in no particular order would be:

Bruce and Norman Yonemoto (*Blinky, The Friendly Hen* is so close to my heart. I've been known to bring it to friends' homes and make them watch it, whether they want to or not. The ten-year span of "blinky" pre-dates the kind of dead-pan silliness we associate with David Letterman.)
T.R. Uthco (*Eternal Frame* shows how you can make a national tragedy redeemably hilarious. The Kennedy Assasination? Oh yeah. It was a scream. As Horkheimer is quoted in the introduction to Peter Handke's *A Moment of True Feeling*, "Violence and inanity -- are they not ultimately one and the same thing?")

Carole Ann Klonarides (*Art World Wizard* with John Torreano)
Peter Rosen (*Pressures of the Text*)
Skip Blumberg (The Charles Kuralt of the video community)
Laurie Anderson (Her choosing her own "clone" to co-host the series *Alive From Off Center*
The Management of WPIX-TV/New York (For broadcasting *The Yule Log* for hours and hours and hours each Christmas)
Chris Burden (The funniest man alive, you bet)
Ilene Segalove (*Peggy Sue Got Married* meets *The Yule Log*)
Anything by William Wegman (from Man to Fay)

Henri Stendhal
print artist,
The Red and the Black

If you want to be a wit, develop your character and speak the truth.

banana peels. Michael Smith may be one of the best known video artists around, partly because he is something of an art world fixture, and partly because his work is accessible and travels well. He seem to thrive on collaboration with artists in other media. And lately he's become known as something of an Ed Sullivan in the downtown New York art community. His cabaret shows have brought avant garde works to the attention of the non-initiated.

Nam June Paik,
"La Vie, Satellites,
One Meeting—
One Life",
Video Culture

There is no rewind button on the Betamax of Life

Michael Smith's video/stage personality, "Mike" is an ombudsman for the shell-shocked. He is the Absolute Mouseketeer. He approaches life with the Television Generation's trademark flattened affect.With the dimwitted earnestness of Mr. Magoo, "Mike" seems to be lost in someone else's bad dream. He wants to be the hero of his own life. Trouble is, he can't find his life with both hands. It's fitting that one of his pet projects is building the perfect bomb shelter (*Mike Builds a Shelter*); "Not bad", he muses significantly, "I've got two hundred boxes of crackers down here."

Possessing the opposite of the Midas touch, everything "Mike" touches turns to smegma. And yet his efforts are extremely valiant, almost reality-based. His idea of a cause is to save the leaves. The dead ones. His heart's in the right place, even though he's brain dead. I identify with this.

What inspires me about Michael Smith's body of work—in addition to its being an incredibly long-running character study—is how intimate it all is. It's as though Smith is going for an *All "Mike" Channel* on Pay TV. We see Mike do every little thing, such as selecting his clothes. He makes— as the videotape "Mike" proclaims—"the ordinary extraordinary." We can even imagine "Mike" taking a dump or flossing his teeth. His stultification is that of a life spent watching TV.

Jeff Koons, media artist on "The Late Show", *Famous for Ten Minutes*, by Carole Ann Klonarides

Wild Boy is very much embracing and loving banality. Puppy is gagging and cynical. He hates banality, when he is banality itself. The much more positive attitude as far as I'm concerned is to embrace banality and not be cynical.

wondering whether they're still boyfriend and girlfriend. Anyway, when I first began writing non-journalism about twelve years ago, I attempted to create a stage play which dealt with the coma-inducing effects of TV. I posited the idea of a disease caused by TV watching which rendered its victims paralyzed and necessitated a national telethon and a poster-child to promote a cure. I had at that time been a writer/producer for *Good Morning, America* and the experience had cauterized me with the knowledge that you can conduct an interview with Buckminster Fuller in which you sum up everything about him in six minutes.

It was while I was on staff of that show that Michael Arlen wrote a piece for *The New Yorker* on how we watch our morning news programs: We move from room to room, brushing our teeth, eating a muffin, tying a necktie, kissing each other good-bye and —incidentally—catching a fragment of morning television.

Arlen's experience in 1976 suggests the video style Michael Smith and Ilene Segalove, to name two, developed systematically over the next decade. Through inch-by-inch dedication to independent video, Michael Smith has given us an enduring Polaroid of ourselves as techno-dominated somnambulists. Smith's achievement is, of course, intended to be in the category of Chaplin, Keaton, and Woody Allen. But it is all right that he isn't that good or that interesting. "Mike" was never intended to be a film star on the Big Screen larger than life. "Mike" and the Small Screen are inviolately merged which is part of what makes "Mike" so *modern*. He is *smaller* than life.

Ilene Segalove is another artist who flirts brazenly with the "N" word. Her work is supremely accessible, yet not so accessible that you can't sit back and appreciate how smart it is. Her video pieces zero in on the narcissistic obsessions of the television

generation. Hers is the world of the Mickey Mouse Club charter member. Often, her pieces concentrate on her generation's "soma", i.e., television. In the Segalovian universe, a fitful childish population makes repeated stabs at optimism, as in *Dragnet Kiss* or *Why I Got Into Television*, or *The Pastrami Sandwich*. These are all short pieces that, like Chip Lord's work, address the human condition by eliminating humans from the picture. Segalove focuses the camera on objects rather than on people. They are objects as seen by the spaced-out. The result is a disturbingly humorous glimpse of the television culture's living room limbo. In it we're all overwhelmed. We try to reduce our confusion by adopting childhood ideation. Segalove's space cadets resemble the little boy in *My Life As A Dog*, in their stoic determination to embrace their plight. Our "plight" is the repressed despair of the technologically overdosed: All safety and high tech convenience on the outside, all quivering mystification on the inside.

Ilene Segalove and Jack Webb, *The Dragnet Kiss*

Their kiss made me strong enough to watch the final credits without shuddering.

The systematic meekness of the personality or non-personalities Ilene Segalove and Michael Smith create can be influential, even emboldening, to writers like myself. Every so often I'm asked to write a non-*Rocky* piece of material such as sketches for *The Tracey Ullman Show* where the characters are so often, like "Mike", victims of victimless crimes.

INT. A RESTAURANT

Your correspondent,
"The Real Thing",
The Tracey Ullman Show, Fox Television

TERRY KNOCKS A FORK OFF THE TABLE. LUANNE, THE WAITRESS, HANDS HIM ANOTHER. AN ELECTRIC JOLT PASSES THROUGH THE FORK AS THEY BOTH HOLD IT. IT'S TRUE LOVE. TERRY MELTS. LUANNE TRIES TO FIGHT IT.

TERRY
(A SOULFUL SILENCE)
Where have you been all my life?

LUANNE
Mississippi.

TERRY
Really?!! I won a spelling bee in third grade with that word! M-i-s-s-i-s-s-i-p-p-i!

LUANNE
(ADORING) You spelled it perfectly.

TERRY
Thanks.

LUANNE
I was never good at spelling. I like match.
And baseball.

TERRY
I was always the last person they picked to
be on the team.

LUANNE
(SITTING DOWN)I wasn't popular in
school. We were very poor.

TERRY
My folks got divorced when I was ten. Mom
moved a lot

THEY LEAN ACROSS THE TABLE TO EACH OTHER, ARDENTLY.

LUANNE

I never went to parties. I went to the movies instead. By myself.

TERRY

I saw *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* twenty-nine times.

THEY CLASP HANDS PASSIONATELY ACROSS THE TABLE.

LUANNE

I spilled Kool-Aid on Mama's new sofa when I was six. I wanted to go hide in the cellar and whip myself with old ropes.

TERRY

Old ropes! Exactly! When I broke my dad's razor I wanted to jump in a manhole with sewer rats!

LUANNE

Me too. All the time. Sewer rats.

HYPNOTICALLY, THEY GET UP AND START SLOW-DANCING TO THE TORCHY MUSIC. THE REST OF THE ROOM FADES AWAY AND A LIGHT SHINES, JUST ON THE NEW LOVERS, LOST IN A WORLD OF THEIR OWN.

TERRY
I broke my leg jumping over a fire hydrant.

LUANNE
I broke my nose in a revolving door.

TERRY
I felt so different from the other kids.

LUANNE
Always on the outside looking in.

TERRY
Never before...

LUANNE
...til now.

THEY KISS.

"Good night Gracie".

One of the interesting things about *The Tracey Ullman Show* was that its creator/producer, James Brooks is a famous, Oscar-winning film director who will not give up on the small screen. In addition to creating *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* and *Taxi*, Brooks launched (whether you like them or not) *The Simpsons*, in a television climate that was absolutely hostile to such extreme prime time novelty. Brooks could easily concentrate fully on movies but like a slowly increasing number of talented directors—he demonstrates that if he can be a filmmaker, he can be a *televisionmaker*.

John J. O'Connor,
television critic,
The New York Times
July 8, 1990

There is still plenty of junk, no doubt about it, but there is also an expanding willingness to take occasional chances...Television is far more likely than any current movie to grapple with pressing realities, from domestic abuse to the homeless to AIDS....As the opportunities for "serious" work in film are being pushed aside in the rush to blockbuster formulas, a growing number of name actors and directors are using television as an alternative outlet for their talent.

who killed Laura Palmer?

Still in the category of comedy and the "N" word, I'm struck by the work of Mako Idemitsu. In particular, her meditative, wickedly humorous piece, *Kiyoko's Situation*, which poignantly addresses the role of the woman artist in society. Idemitsu examines the outsider status of the unmarried, un-famous woman artist, and her family's stolid lack of support for her life choices. It's so lonely, so sad, and so funny. Kind of like

an after-hours-club Wendy Wasserstein on her seventh shot of tequila contemplating suicide while watching a live sex show.

I especially liked in *Kiyoko's Situation*, a scene reminiscent of David Lynch. We see Kiyoko, the despairing anti-heroine, pulling up handfuls of strange fluffy stuff. Handful after dreamlike handful. Only gradually does Idemitsu let us know that Kiyoko is obsessively, vacantly, tearing the stuffing out of a quilt. It's a startling visual "reveal" that evokes—beyond one's capacity to make anything but phenomenological connections—the character's frustration with regard to the world of domesticity.

Eric Fischl

I am making art to correct something.

particularly the situation of kids in Punjab. And of course in addition to comedy, I like other forms: **Mystery** (Cecilia Condit's *Possibly in Michigan*); **News** (Rea Tajiri's *Off Limits*); **Travel** (Juan Downey's *Return of the Motherland*; **Montage** (Edin Velez' *Meaning of the Interval*); **Romance** (early Sanborn and Fitzgerald, such as *Static*); and **History** (Steve Fagin's *The Amazing Voyage of Gustave Flaubert and Raymond Roussel.*)

That is to say, though I stumbled into the world of video art via show business, I'm not someone whose tastes are restricted to those artists who embrace the "N" word. What I am most excited by are installations. In particular works by Bill Viola, Bruce Nauman, Nancy Burson, Doug Hall, and of course, Nam June Paik.

As a brand new way of authoring an "art" experience, installation video truly separates "video" from Television-With-A-Capital-T. I guess that gives video a capital V. Video installation's practitioners are liberated from the endless frustrating comparisons

that single screen videoists live with. When video art was still fundamentally a single screen event, like Living Room Television, it had always to be defined by what it was not. It was always an alternative to something else, despite everyone's earnest denial of such a shadow existence. Installation video has given video its first healthy acceptance of a non-codependent identity.

Barbara London, Assistant Curator of Video,
The Museum of Modern Art, "Striking A Responsive Chord",
The Second Link: Viewpoints on Video in the 'Eighties

At this point there are mature artists who understand the potentials of the video medium.

homoerotica, religious icons, nude children.

I'll never forget seeing Bill Viola's Room for *St. John of the Cross* for the first time. France 1984. Discovering this installation was like visiting, involuntarily, a brand new foreign country. I had turned the corner in the museum from some predictable exhibit—more paintings, more sculpture—to find myself face to face with something that had more to do with eternity than anything I'd seen in years. You exit off the Long Island Expressway to find yourself in Annecy. What happened? There was the mountain. There was the little room with the little TV, the ceiling too low for its occupant to stand up. I had another, other worldly experience when I found myself in the lobby of the Whitney Museum a few years later, stepping into Viola's *Sleep of Reason*. I waited in semi-darkness between his millisecond nightmares. The power of Viola's situation rooms is greater than whatever analysis I come up with.

Rosalind Krauss, art historian,
The Aesthetics of Narcissism

With the subject of video, the case of defining it in terms of its machinery does not seem to coincide with accuracy and my own experience of video keeps urging me toward the psychological model.

the "chrome-a-lume" of Sondheims' *Sunday in the Park with George.*

Bruce Nauman's installation work strikes at a more intellectual level, but I still wind up hypnotized eventually. Typically I'm the last to leave the gallery, the one the guards have to wake up and drag out. Maybe I was one of those kinds who sat in laundry rooms watching the clothes dryer go around. Maybe it was much too much LSD in college. I've visited Nauman's *Clown Torture* several times now and the more I see the predictable rhythms of its endless loop of silliness and frustration the more I want to keep watching it. How can that clown be so helpless? Why is he such a jerk? What do I want to do—rescue him or torture him myself? Video installation or video epilepsy?

Nauman's 1987 installation in the Whitney Museum lobby, *The Krefeld Piece*, also fascinated me. Two very discreet video monitors gave us a repertory company of selectively different people in close up each speaking an identical series of two-word sentences: "I Love. You Love. We love...I shit. You shit. We shit." etc., over and over. As active as the sentences were was as passive as I became. I was hooked. You were hooked. We were hooked.

William Blake, *Milton*

They became what they beheld.

Also remarkable is Nancy Bursons' *A New Machine*, reprised along with *Clown Torture* in the 1989 Whitney Museum's Image World show. Burson's much praised photographic experiments which enmesh iconographic identities have led her to attempt similar experiments in video. The subject is pure identity diffusion. Her approach is pure "video game". In a quirky mixture of *The Twilight Zone* meets *PacMan*, Burson's installation lets us mingle our facial features with those of the celebrity of our choice via video tricks. Thanks to this unsettling little device, we are left with a sense that the "new machine" may not yet have a soul but at least it has a face.

We are after all in the first trimester of the fetal era of video intelligence. NOW there are interactive laser discs. THEN there was Mary Martin as Peter Pan. Peter's exhorting us in 1956 to "Clap, if you believe in fairies!" to save Tinkerbell's life was no doubt the first use of interactive video and it was built on faith. Faith in the perfectability of the television medium is why I don't give up altogether and a) go to medical school or b) write only movies which is what so many moguls in Tinseltown urge "good"writers to do. We are, they say, "too good for television". Perhaps but only through a glass darkly.

Douglas Davis,
video artist and writer,
"Essays on the Post Modern"
Video Culture

When I talk to students about video I always begin by asking them what "Television" is (because I don't know myself) and we always conclude, at the end of the session, that we aren't sure of very much. The more I work in it, the less I know.

faith to be tested. The first time I ever saw installation video, I think, was in the early eighties again in Paris, where an artist not then much known in the States Michel Jaffrenou, had set up dozens of video monitors to reconstruct the *I Ching*. The installation occupied the whole stage of a small museum theater. The audience area was crowded as it would be in a theater or film presentation. We were all willing to sit still and pay rapt attention to an absolutely non-narrative, non-theatrical, zen-like display. It had about as much momentum as a grandfather clock. And yet it was a moving experience. It's amazing how little is needed to hold our attention once we admit that we *believe*, and surrender to the alpha waves.

INT: SOUNDSTAGE - PRESENT DAY

CLOSE UP of Television Screen. On the screen, a body of blue water. nothing but water, moving in soft ripples. Seamless DISSOLVE TO smooth static on television screen, whose electronic beams also move in soft ripples on the TV surface.

(Music, ***The Water is Wide*** **continuous in B.G.)**

MARY (V.O.)

I am an idiot in a box. I have four eyes and no mouth. I chew gum with my eyes. I wake you up. I put you to sleep. I am everywhere at

once. I am on the roof. I am underground.

SERIES OF LOCATION EXTERIORS - NIGHT

(Music, *The Water is Wide* continuous in B.G.)

Cheap, hand held footage of various exteriors showing windows with the familiar blue light of a television set shining from within. City windows. Rural windows. Little houses. Big houses. Poor. Rich. Big and small apartment buildings. Hotels, motels. Limousines. Gas Stations. Bars. Stores.

your correspondent,
The Rec Room,
a post-modern TV comedy

MARY (V.O. CONT'D)

Because it's lonely out there in the world, where the deer and the antelope play in the wild blue yonder across the wide Missouri on the trail of the lonesome pine down by the old millstream where I first met you, Old Man River. You are my sunshine. And nothin' could be finer than to be up the lazy river on that long, long trail awinding into the land of my dreams, in my old Kentucky home, in my old Nebraska home, where seldom is heard a discouraging word in a surrey with the fringe on top of Old Smokey. To that valley they say you are goin', down by the banks of the O-hio, by the water gently

flowing, Illinois, way down upon the Swanee River, all the live long day. Dinah, blow your horn. Look away, Dixieland. Goodbye, Old Paint. Swing low. Because I'm lost out here in the stars by the light of the silvery moon which, all too soon, in the sweet by and by, will slowly fade to black.

FADE TO BLACK the way the old television tubes used to do very slowly leaving for awhile, a pin-sized light in the center of the screen.

"trickle down" theory. Although many show business types are getting acquainted with the varieties of video experience, there is still an enormous lack of familiarity in the "entertainment" community with video art. Most people in Tinseltown don't even know there is such a thing, and this includes people who are reasonably astute collectors or observers of modern painting and sculpture.

For some weird reason, I often get selected for unusually Middle-of-the-Road writing jobs, even though people know me as a "fringe" (i.e., "New York" writer). The more conventional the assignment, the more I try to throw in elements from my video art education. I'm always surprised by the boldness of my suggestions, and even more surprised by the mainstream producers' acceptance of what I propose. Unlike those politicians who are attempting to foreclose on the artistic freedom enjoyed by grant recipients in this country, most Hollywood producers actually understand the folly of Contempt Prior to Investigation. I'd rather deal with Sammy Glick than Jesse Helms or Oliver North. (One of the only *public* events since the Hollywood Blacklist lately that

compares to what certain politicans are trying to do to American artists is the alleged attempt by powerful CAA agents and their friends to censure anyone who had anything to do with the John Belushi book and subsequent movie, *Wired.*)

Nam June Paik,
video pioneer,
The New York Times,
November 17, 1989

It was three hundred years after the invention of the printing press before there was a Shakespeare.

So there I was accepting a job to write and put together a one-person live show for Herb Alpert, the many who gave you *The Tijuana Brass* quite a while back. What I proposed to him was a collaboration between him and a video artist. I didn't shock Alpert the way I shocked the Kenny Rogers people because Alpert is actually an abstract painter and an ardent collector of Latin American art. Furthermore, one of his last music videos was directed by none other than Zbigniew Rybczinski, the video artist known for his homage/appropriation to Sergei Eisenstein, *Steps.* Alpert has so much success behind him that he wants to take chances now. He produces avant garde jazz artists, and is starting to work with hip hop bands and has dabbled collaboratively with Soul II Soul.

As it stands now, the project will feature Herb Alpert and a large video screen broken into at least six different sub-screens. At times it will seem like a dance club, I suppose. At times like a bank lobby. But there may be times when it will have that museum/gallery feel. For one musical piece, an early Alpert hit, *Rise*, I proposed that we show on the large screen the Michael Owen/Carole Ann Klonarides video *Cascade: Vertical Landscape.* I also mentioned Nam June Paik as a possible contributor. Alpert caught and considered every video concept I threw at him and even approved a sketch I wrote for him on the NEA's proposed "obscenity oath." There

OPEN ON HERB, WITH TRUMPET

HERB

I was reading about the National Endowment for the Arts the other day. About how the Endowment is now asking artists who want federal grants to sign an oath that their work won't be "obscene." And I couldn't help noticing that none of the artists in question were instrumental musicians. They were all painters, photographers, or performers. And it made me wonder: don't they think we musicians could be obscene if we wanted to be? How come Senator Jesse Helms doesn't call me up and say, "Herb, listening to you play *Tijuana Taxi* makes me want to find a woman with a bad reputation, possibly even a transvestite, and sin with her upside down and sideways till we both turn purple." But do jazz musicians get calls like that? Nooooo! Do you see anyone picketing Wynton Marsalis concerts? Is it fair? Just because we don't use words or pictures doesn't mean we instrumentalists can't be just as obscene as any other artists if we wanted to be! You don't believe me? I'll show you. I want you all to think about the most obscene thing you can.

your correspondent,
Herb Alpert: Picture This

(TO AUDIENCE MEMBER)
You too ma'am. I know you've had the thought many times before.

(TO EVERYONE AGAIN)
Okay. Got that obscene thought in your heads? Good. I'll bet this pretty much describes what you're thinking...

HERB PLAYS A HOT, RAUNCHY PIECE OF MUSIC. VA VA VOOM. IT EVOLVES INTO A SLOW, VERY EVOCATIVE AND SEXY LOVE TUNE.
ON VIDEO SCREEN: GORGEOUSLY SHOT EVERYDAY ACTS: SCREWING IN A LIGHT BULB. SUCKING ON A POPSICLE. PLUGGING IN A LIGHT SOCKET. KNEADING BREAD. FLUFFING PILLOWS. SPRAYING WITH A GARDEN HOSE. BRUSHING HAIR. KNITTING. PUTTING A HOT DOG ONTO A BUN, etc., etc.

when hell freezes over. As for recommending Nam June Paik as a possible contributor to the project, I wouldn't automatically assume the Alpert production would be so far beneath Paik's standards, especially if he were paid enough to funnel money into one of his own pet video projects. After all, Paik was selected to design the set for the CBS News *Sunday Morning* program with Charles Kuralt back in the '70s.

John Schott,
executive producer,
Alive from Off Center as quoted in
ART news, Summer 1989

The attempt to divide the world into high art and low art is increasingly a less productive concept. Many of the techniques and moods—irony, silliness— that used to be defined as alternative have now become mainstream. MTV has to a large extent coopted the world of avant garde film and video art.

who can tell? I've seen a bunch of video art, and naturally given my background it's been interesting to me that so much falls into two categories, or traps: the phenomenological and the hermeneutic if you will. In trying to make their personal form of television as differentiated as possible from something that lowly masses would identify with, *certain* videomakers seem to either a) seek to portray Television, fifty years after its invention, as an absolute phenomenon whose astonishing effects on us have yet to be publically considered, or b) cleave to the old repetitive harangue about the propagandist nature of comercial media.

An example of the "phenomenological" trap would be Charles Atlas' *As Seen on TV* with Bill Irwin. I admire Irwin's performance work enormously. However in *As Seen on TV*, Irwin's Keatonesque dummy accidentally happens on a—gasp?!—television set! Oh, my goodness! And, he proceeds to discover, with total and childlike mystification, that he can become "trapped" inside its screen. This was intended to have a clear phenomenological treatise that is also meant, I assume, to be charming and witty. But if you are willing to go along with the fact that a television set is one hundred per cent exotic to a white male healthy blonde performer, clearly in an urban entertainment environment (Irwin is pictured with other performers at a Broadway-style audition studio), well, then you have already agreed to close off several major portions of your cerebrum. If you are

willing to continue watching the tape with what remains active in your gray matter out of respect for Irwin's obvious gifts, then you must endure Irwin disappearing from the room and into the TV set, and back into the room, many, many times, always consumed with o'erweaning puzzlement. It is a cute, but standard technical feat which Mr. Atlas repeats relentlessly, without significant variation, until we are beaten over the head with an idea that was ancient to begin with: namely, that the television image is—hold on to your hats!—quite different from a real image and is both distorting, and —whoa, now!—confining. Be still, my heart.

Ayn Foulier,
journalist and playwright,
Segue

I didn't say video artists are totally naive. But they are much more naive than artists in other media.

somewhere in between. Don't get me wrong. I love buttered toast. But it is not a taste sensation. Toast has been around. And if you present it to me on a silver platter under glass, with a sprig of parsley, and a Waterford goblet of eighty-year old Sancerre, I'm sorry. It's still toast. For decades and beyond, writers and artists have been pointing out that mechanical reproductive media, especially in the hands of the politically motivated, transform the experience of art and of reality. And for centuries prior to that it has been pounded into us that political leaders tend to use propaganda when addressing the masses. Just because artists working in electronic media have begun to read Orwell and Benjamin and the various *comme il faut* semiologists—doesn't mean we are entitled to assume our sense of revelation is exclusive. I mean, just because we are starting to incorporate these concepts into our own frames of reference doesn't make them new concepts. Exponents of

a newly-invented medium must still lodge themselves in the history of ideas.

(I am deliberately overlooking the videotapes I have seen by artists who deal with Big Time Television because they are ultimately fascinated by it and wish to become part of it. I've met many video artists who secretly or not so secretly hunger for show business careers.)

If it is incumbent on artists working in video to dish out cold leftovers of accepted intellectual theory, then it would make sense, wouldn't it, to add a little chutney to the meatloaf.

A few examples from the cinema: John Carpenter's 1988 film, *They Live*, adheres loyally to semiotic principles and yet manages to be inventive and entertaining. A vagrant finds a secret cache of special sunglasses which permit you to see the "real" (i.e.: black and white) propagandist messages behind glossy color media images.

Woody Allen's *Purple Rose of Cairo* is a lot more interesting in its through-the-looking-glass conceit than what Charles Atlas could come up with (even with Bill Irwin). Even *Poltergeist* cautions us that the television screen we're so comfortable with is a monster that sucks children into its rapacious gullet. When I see work such as *As Seen on TV* it doesn't feel like I'm in the presence of artists. It feels like I'm in the presence of lecturers. In trying to make the case for more *televisionmakers*, I'm suggesting that the theories of media domination that so consume "lecturers working in video" can be presented with more reliance on imagination and less reliance on dogma.

Gretchen Bender,
videomaker,
TV: Text & Image

No criticism. Narcotics of surrealism. Public memory. Self censorship. Homeless. Military research. Dream nation. People with AIDS. Gender technology.

Muntadas, videomaker, *Video is Television*

the fact that the video piece we are looking at is NOT TELEVISION WITH A CAPITAL T. There seem to be video libraries full of tapes that seek to demonstrate that mass commercial television is full of manipulation, lies, subversion, and distortion. I have seen more tapes than I care to count that told me that the world of corporate communications is a commerce-oriented propaganda machine that manipulates the thoughts of its message receivers.

These "hermeneutical" lecturers working in video are exemplified by Gretchen Bender's work, or by the Max Almy's tapes, *Lost in the Picture* and *Perfect Leader.* I liked Almy's work in *The Thinker*. It was distinctive and funny, albeit didactic. But in *Perfect Leader* she uses crisp, high-density visuals against laborious, backyard-cheap-sounding audials which drone endlessly the line, "We have to have the perfect leader." Believe me, you get the point. The line is later referred to in the credits as a "song" which Almy has "composed." (Such overindulgent accreditation is usually restricted to lobotomized Heavy Metal bands.)

Almy's graphic composition is a perfectly bland, Reaganesque media-friendly WASP male face, which is altered with computer and video techniques until the "perfect look" is achieved. There you have the Awful Truth, folks: the ideal political candidate is a computer image. *Perfect Leader* is a sharp-looking video, but its point, shopworn to begin with, is made in the first twenty seconds. (One of the most outstanding weaknesses of the "video artist as lecturer" cadre is the tendency to overindulge oneself. Artists who do not talk down to their audiences tend to be more restrained.)

Thirteen percent of televison sets are never on. Thirteen percent are never off.

McHugh/Hoffman and Frank Magid Associates of Marion, Iowa were notorious back in the '70s for advising local news station to add patter, banter, sensationalism and the cult of personalities to their newscasts. In trying to demographically catalogue television viewers, organizations like "news consultants" and the Nielsen Ratings Group labor diligently to find out just what TV audiences watch, how often, when, and with whom. Yes, the corporate strategies can be insidious. But to whom are they most dangerous? Certainly not to Max Almy's and Charles Atlas' target audiences who, presumably, belong to that first thirteen percent of TV viewers whose TV sets are "never on." The "never on" group consists not surprisingly, of the educated, leisure, or moneyed classes in this country. The thirteen percent whose TV sets are never off, it was determined, belong to the least educated, least moneyed class.

McHugh-Hoffman, Inc.
TV News Consultants
McLean, VA

It would be interesting if Max Almy, to name but one, made work addressing the megalomania of corporate television for distribution among the non-moneyed, non-educated Thirteen percent. But the irony is, videotapes like Almy's *Perfect Leader* are intended— and will only be seen by those, like you and me, who already share Almy's distrust about corporate media. People whose television sets are never off do not, as a rule, go to museums and galleries, subscribe to *October*, or audit lectures on Jacques Lacan.

But Almy and Atlas and Gretchen Bender are not going after those people. If I'm not mistaken, their gallery mailing lists are not crammed with addresses in the South Bronx, or Browning, Montana. But there are people in those places who might actually be intrigued by the idea that Big Brother is seeking to control their experience and that television and advertising media are unreliable narrators of our cultural history.

But you do not reach those people through "Video". You reach those people through "Television." And you only reach them, I guess, if you identify with them.

your correspondent,
The Rec Room

INTERIOR A RUNDOWN TV SHOW SET - LIVE

SKIP
Because it's lonely out there in the world! That's why we have television!

SKIP'S JAZZ COMBO
(IN UNISON)
TV, TV!

SKIP
Yes, thanks to the miracle of TV, none of us ever has to be lonely again in our own lifetime!

SKIP'S JAZZ COMBO
TV is the thing! It's the thing!

SKIP
Yes, be it ever so ho-humbly home, sweet home on the range, or in the oven, here at last, you can look for the silver-lining. (PAUSE) Or was it the union label?!

In preaching to the already converted, like-minded cadets of the art world, Almy and her fellow lecturers are helping to preserve the banality of Television with a Capital T. The insistence on keeping complex ideas as far from the public experience as possible is a way of privatizing intellectual theory. Like privatizing property, it is an exercise of privilege.

Bruce Ferguson

The underestimating of audiences continues to make television a vast wasteland. But artists are just as guilty as executives. The rightest and leftist intellectuals join with each other in a contempt for audiences.

I'm not suggesting that video lecturers move to Burbank and write episodes of *Growing Pains*. I'm suggesting that we need people with concerns like Almy's to participate more in the corporate television process. Just as badly, we need gifted teachers in public schools, as well as at Exeter. After Tim Rollins and K.O.S.—Bronx public school children in collaboration with Franz Kafka—why would anyone in the art world want to persist with the notion that the only appreciative art audiences and exponents are the cognoscenti?

I am aware that keen minds, such as critic Gene Youngblood's are adamant on this subject. "Personal vision is not public vision", he has written. "Art is not the stuff of mass communication." Yet I believe the gap between corporate television and video art is broadened unnaturally—beyond any "high" and "low" art distinctions—by untested perceptions in the art community where there is virtually no exposure to, or familiarity with, the real workings of corporate television. And so we are back to contempt prior to investigation.

The *a priori* dismissal of the artistic potential of large-audience television was a

healthy idea when there were only three networks and their commercials to watch in the '60s and '70s. But today it makes about as much sense as a blanket dismissal of the publishing industry due to the shallowness of *People*, *Time* and *Cosmopolitan*. What was politically correct has become xenophobic. There is a difference after all, between healthy suspicion and the belief in an Evil Empire.

Juan Downey,
video artist,
The Return of the Motherland

Mother was consumed by her appetite for mass media. She often quoted mass media news as ultimate truth. She diametrically opposed it as the ultimate lie. She rarely formed her own opinion. She went from the arms of one man to another, without knowing the difference, changing channels, changing sex partners, the same day, the same bed. She went as far as not washing herself between her encounters to keep together inside her the semen of both lovers.

lumpen. I was sitting with three well-known, successful painters at a fashionable downtown Manhattan restaurant. I was the only non-art world person at the table. I asked the painters, earnestly, with no conscious trace of antagonism, what it actually felt like, on an emotional level, to know that each time they picked up a paintbrush, they were making something for millionaires? I was really curious. Instantly the painters--a few of whom were millionaires themselves--pounced on me vigorously. I was excoriated, and I mean *excoriated*, as a fool and a savage, unworthy, even to sit at their table because I did not understand the fundamental truth that art has always been, and is intended to be, for the leisure class. Do you

Leo Wyoming (Stanley Marsh), Ant Farm (Chip Lord, Hudson Marquez, Douglas Michaels), video artists, *Cadillac Ranch*

They say they're artists. I say they're Cadillac lovers.

As a commercial selling tool, I think the American art gallery is one of the most successful ever invented, and certainly more lucrative than advertising on a local tv station. You can buy *Batman*, the movie, which cost over fifty million dollars to produce, for $19.95 at your local video store. Or if you prefer, you can buy a work of video art by Mary Lucier, *Wilderness*, which features slow or non-moving pictures of attractive scenery on seven TV monitors, for about $75,000. My personal preference would be to purchase seven television monitors at Crazy Eddie's, buy seven copies of *Lawrence of Arabia*, and program that epic film at various intervals on each monitor. Of course, if this were done at an art gallery, I might claim the whole installation as *my* work and really clean up. But I think I'd rather lend it out, like a book, than sell it. So sue me

Todd Gitlin, sociology professor, University of California, Berkeley, and editor, *Watching Television*

Postmodernist art echoes the fact that the arts have become auxiliary to sales.

ime. In seeking to ally themselves exclusively with the museum world, dominated for centuries by painting and sculpture, video artists are trying to adapt to a tradition which is non-specific to, and in some cases, intolerant of, their chosen means of communication. The increasing flagrance with which the "Art World" addresses it capital gain-crazed subtext does not invite art which cannot be commodified. Even video installation—that aspect of video art which is, to me and to many others, the most powerful expression of

this embryonic medium to date-- takes up an awful lot of space in a collector's living room. And even in hip, "happening" biennials, video art may be boisterously sub-categorized into a lesser status than painting and sculpture. Trustees

Steven Fagin, video artist

Being a video artist in the art world is like being at the kids' table at a bar mitzvah. The adults' table is Painting and Sculpture. And they're usually liberal enough to throw us some food.

Given the paltry screening opportunities for "serious" television work, is it in the interest of artists to isolate themselves from TV due to a presumed, but barely tested, belief in the enforced limitations of commercial media? Instead of contraction into xenophobic resolve to avoid The Vast Wasteland, how about expansion into a pioneering spirit? Commercial television needs more people who think and read like artists, to save it from itself. I wish that artists drawn to the medium of television would form a sort of "Peace Corps" of the imagination: Donate their ideas to the savagely underdeveloped nation known as The Television Industry. Leave the halls of ivy and pick a little lettuce. Organize, and

Martha Gever, editor and media critic

Art that turns its back on the social institutions that surround and support it won't change much. And video practice blind to the social functions of the communications industry cannot be critical.

In my view artists who have never been to the bowels of commercial television can be as naive as L.A. showbiz types who degrade an abstract painting because, "any two-year old can fingerpaint that." I wish artists interested in cautionary video about corporate television would a) see what it is really like to work in the salt mines before declaring how hazardous they are to our general health, or b) see what it is like to work in the salt mines to discover whether or not their own enlightenment can reduce the hazard to our general health.

One of the many reasons television can sink as low as it does is because there aren't enough people who care about ideas who are willing to dirty

This was the challenge. How was I going to make a piece that was enjoyable for a sophisticated audience that was also for people who don't sit around and think conceptual things all day long. They don't get heavy about stuff, they just want to go out and have a good time. ...I found a way to do it. I start the show dark, become funnier toward the middle, and end up dark again. Keep them at a distance, then bring them in with something they enjoy. Three quarters of the way through the audience is laughing and they think it's all just a big joke.

Eric Bogosian, performance artist

rubber fetishists of the world unite.

Cynthia Schneider and Todd Haynes pulled a fast one over on A&M Records a couple of years ago with their *The Karen Carpenter Story*. It is their version of the prime time television movie about our most famous anorexic. It doesn't tell you much about

Karen Carpenter, but it speaks volumes about television, and about ourselves as television watchers. There is a full-blown "Carpenters" music track, and a very prime time movie-of-the-week script to go with the pathetically-on-purpose minimalism of their cast, all of whom are Barbie (or Ken) dolls. In one, deft, deconstructivist punchline, Schneider and Haynes lift scenes from the actual, syrupy TV movie about this hideously wraith-like mainstream song bird, and "enact" it with dolls. Like Chip Lords' *Easy Living*, the use of non-humans says everything about our humanity. And as long as you are listening to a standardized soundtrack of a recognizeable television genre, your experience is that of a full fledged commercial television event. It would make very little difference to our experience if real actors suddenly took the place of dolls. TV actors, are after all, Barbie dolls. And watching TV is not, after all, watching real life, etc.

For Haynes and Schneider to depersonalize so vividly the television theatrical moment is to re-focus our consciousness as media consumers to the point where we can observe where, and how, we are being manipulated. Haynes and Schneider accomplish this, not incidentally, while being both riveting and ravingly funny. It can be done. Even on the cheap.

Stuart Schneiderman, psychoanalyst and author, *Freud and The Rat Man*

I watch TV every night. My favorite show is *Cheers*.

syndication. If I attempt to goad "artists" into making their presence known in the arena of corporate communications, it is not the same thing as asking them to contribute the body of their work to television companies. It's their attitude and talent that's needed. Even the work of those artists best suited for commercial TV—such as Michael Smith—is not

always "professional" enough for the airwaves. And by that I mean professional both in content and in production value.

Americans are spoiled visually. I speak not only as someone from the velvet-lined entertainment world, but also as part of a generation (and generations to come) of the media-smart. One of the most off-putting things about a great deal of video art is how amateurish it can look. This *can* be a very positive element. "Cheapness" as Haynes and Schneider display in their *Karen Carpenter Story* can be a virtue. I would never condemn work simply because it is not abundantly funded. But it may be time for certain videoists to hang up their portapaks. It's just as hard to watch bad-looking video as it is to read a handwritten book. There's absolutely nothing wrong with a handwritten book, as long as you aren't trying to pass it off as a laser-printed best seller.

Steve Fagin

You have to turn cheapness into charm. A work shouldn't be bad simply because it's not good video.

When a "downtown" videoist reaches for "uptown" theatricality such as long form drama—the format of the original prime time *Karen Carpenter Story*—he or she had either be technically equipped to compete with big bucks TV and films, or imaginative enough to fake it. In such tapes as *Volcano Saga* by Joan Jonas or *The Bad Sister* by Peter Wollen, dramatic flair and ambitious storylines are trashed by the poverty of the production design. The obviously limited editing choices of these "on a wing and a prayer" productions severely compromises the effectiveness of their stories, in my opinion. The videomakers' desire to tell a story exceeds their ability to tell it. You can't play chess with a checkers set. If you want to be taken seriously get serious about production technique.

Allen Rucker

I was more of a fraud when I was with TVTV than I am now as a so-called "mainstream" TV producer. What we were doing at TVTV was slapdash video. Trying to organize chunks of reality, but actually just vamping.

take offense. "Broadcast quality" has plagued some videoists, while it has made others defiant. Today despite improvement in technology and its availibility to the independent producer, it is still next to impossible to make something shot from $20,000 look anything like something shot for $2 million, which is about what the first *Karen Carpenter Story* cost. The Haynes-Schneider version—with those non-union, non-temperamental Barbie dolls—aims so far in the other direction that production value's importance to overall artistic quality is rendered completely moot.

Douglas Davis
Artculture: Essays on the Post-Modern
Video Culture

It is absurd for video artists not to be willing to be accountable for the effect upon audiences of whatever their production limitations happen to be.

Nam June Paik once told me that he always discovers more in his work when he sees it broadcast than he put into it.

Real TV has a kind of energy that can't be duplicated in an art gallery or a museum.

Chris Burden, media and performance artist on paying for ad time
from *Famous For Ten Minutes*
by Carole Ann Klonarides

and real TV is, by the way, a bitch. Learning to live with its terms even a little, has taken me at least a decade of pain and anguish. Most of my artist friends probably have too much self-love to put

up with the conditions I work with, and I respect that. They wouldn't stand for their paintings being touched up by the various dealers and collectors who appreciate the works on their way to a museum. That is essentially what happens to a show business writer's work on its way to the screen.

And yet it has been my experience, as someone who has worked in both the art and entertainment worlds, that the constraints of working in a capitalist society are not limited to only one portion of that society. There is no free lunch, even in a museum. Today thanks mostly to longevity I get to write pretty much what I want to write. But I may still need a hack job to pay the rent sometimes. As this article goes to press, I'm writing (and associate producing) a very weird, very fringe movie with a big star and a tight Hollywood package. It might actually get made. The money comes from executives who've been associated with funding a few of the most ground-breaking small budget films of the last five years. But if I run out of money I'll try writing a sitcom before I go back to waitressing. Fundamentally, I feel a whole lot less censored now than I ever did, and less censored than many of the endangered species now trying to secure public funding within the context of the art world.

Writing in commercial television and films is like being a surrogate mother. You give birth, but you can't raise the child. Everything you write is "Baby M". What you retain, however—and this is an important historical first for the labor force—is guaranteed equity in the profits and *resale*, and ownership of your own work. I am labor. And I belong to a union. And, unlike your average art dealer—who takes fifty or sixty percent of an artist's revenues—my agent can take no more than ten percent of what I earn, in exchange for contractually and legally protecting me at all times.

INT. TAYLOR'S OFFICE

your correspondent, *Entwined*, first run pay TV film, Lifetime Entertainment

In a gleaming high rise with a dazzling Manhattan view, Taylor-dressed, as always, to kill—carries on many phone and in-person conversations at once. People rush in and out. Phones buzz. Pandemonium equals business-as-usual. The walls are crammed with awards, press clippings and photos revealing that this is Command Central for *The Marc Davenport Show*, daytime TV's number one and most exciting talk show. Behind Taylor is a huge, framed photo of the man himself— Davenport— a handsome, thick-haired, trustworthy grinner of 52.

Taylor faces a floor-to-ceiling bulletin board. At its top are large cards labeled with days of the work week. Under the days are cards with the names of celebrities or hot topics, e.g.: Divorce Lawyers. Reincarnation. Cholesterol. Brooke Shields. Kitty Dukakis. Chris Evert. Taylor's very young assistants, SONYA and LARS, tack new names onto the board and field calls. A manicurist starts work on Taylor's nails.

TAYLOR
(on phone)
I know the rain forest thing is important, but who cares what Morgan Fairchild thinks about it? Call me back.
(on second phone)

Linda, listen. I said it's okay to do a show on embryos, but I don't want to *see* the embryos. Let's stick to the custody issues. ..They look like seahorses, for God's sake!

(to Lars)

Find me an articulate, clean, sane, gregarious homeless person by Thursday.

Lars nods curtly and exists, bumping into MARC DAVENPORT, Mr. Charisma, who signals his need for Taylor's attention. She signals back, "Be Right There!" Sonya holds up a card that reads GLORIA ESTEFAN. Taylor nods and points to the bulletin board, under BACK INJURY WEEK. Sonya holds up another card reading BLIND GOLFERS. Taylor points to the bulletin board, under COURAGE WEEK. Marc peruses a row of vibrators on Taylor's desk.

SONYA

They're for "Orgasm Week."

A gorgeous hunk in shorts enters to give Taylor a massage as she gets off the phone and smiles at Marc.

MARC

You booked a ballet dancer.

TAYLOR

You asked me to.

MARC

I didn't say "ballet." I said "belly." A belly dancer! I don't know anything about ballet! I'll look stupid!

TAYLOR

She doesn't want to talk about dancing. She's here to talk about bulemia.

MARC

Oh. Well. That's fine. I'm excellent on bulemia.

...Lars rushes in, gasping for breath.

LARS

Barbara Bush just cancelled!

MARC

What?!! God, no!!

Others rush into the office. Everyone but Taylor is in a tizzy.

TAYLOR

Lars, get the elevator guy from Poland up here. Sonya, get the guy in the deli who makes the pepper beef. He's from Roumania. Frank, scoot across the street and bring over that cute Russian couple that runs the dry cleaners.

Everyone stares at Taylor in panicked confusion. She smiles.

TAYLOR

The Fall of the Iron Curtain: An Immigrant's Perspective!"
Run! We've only got twenty-five minutes.
Everyone madly dashes out.

MARC

Barbara Bush owes us a big one.

TAYLOR

I know. We'll collect.

Iraqis.

I don't discount the self-limiting economics of corporate media, but neither would I discount the self-limiting economics of the patronage/federal funding/non-profit route to media funding.

I sold the first TV script I ever wrote to Columbia Pictures in 1977. That is, I

showed them the script, but what they bought was the idea. I didn't yet know that you don't sell scripts to TV executives. TV executives hate to be caught reading. You could hand them the original manuscript of *The Brothers Karamazov* and what they would buy would be "a story about four Russian brothers and their drunken father." Then they'd try to relocate the story in Arizona, make the father the mother, and call it *Those Crazy Carter Boys.*

That first TV script of mine, *Yonder*, was never made into the series I dreamed it should become, i.e., a revolutionary populist serial in the tradition of Mark Twain. A few years later, though, I applied for and received a small grant to re-do *Yonder* as a radio production at ZBS Media in Fort Edward, New York. *Yonder* became *The Insiders' Lounge*, an NEA/NYSCA funded radio musical, which has a loyal cadre of cult followers today, thanks to its recurring presence over Canadian airwaves and over non-profit public stations. A few years later I reworked *Insider's Lounge* into a live stage musical complete with live, satellite radio hookups for Dance Theater Workshop in New York City. I then received a fellowship—from the American Film Institute—to turn *The Insiders' Lounge* into an independent television comedy via the AFI's McMurray Award in Television Comedy.

Meanwhile I was supporting myself writing a TV pilot for CBS and a mini-series comedy for HBO. I applied for the AFI fellowship to do something weird. Something I couldn't do on network TV. I turned *The Insiders' Lounge* into *The Rec Room*, which I dubbed a "postmodern TV comedy" and proceeded to develop it in residence at AFI's Los Angeles headquarters.

Halfway through my writing process AFI negotiated with NBC Television to broadcast a one-hour prime time TV special featuring excerpts from material written by

students from an AFI sitcom workshop . The sketches selected for NBC from that workshop were conventional sitcom fare. AFI adminstrators—in an attempt to make their institution look a little more interesting than a sitcom mill—decided to include an excerpt from my rather weird piece-in-progress. This would show everyone how daring AFI could be. This despite the fact that my piece was never meant to be something for prime time. I spent four months softening and altering *The Rec Room* to fit The NBC Special. In addition to accessorizing their public image with my work, AFI got the benefit of my show business contacts—actors and executives—who had offered their services to my piece and thereby, by implication at least, to the entire AFI Comedy Special.

And yet AFI went to enormous lengths to diguise the real nature of my participation in the TV special. Although I had nothing to do with the sitcom writing workshop AFI described me in all press material as just another workshop member who had written something a little strange, but what the heck. Even though I was an Emmy-winning TV writer, they refused to describe me in their publicity as anything but an up and coming writer. The McMurray Award, given in recognition of prior achievements in television and comedy, was never mentioned.

AFI's motivation in all this had to do with their eagerness to draw favorable attention to the AFI beginner's writing workshops which existed in collaboration with well-heeled industry heavyweights and the television networks. AFI, a non-profit institution, used me to further their own press and financial interests, at the expense of my own hard won professional reputation.

After the NBC Special aired I planned to go back to producing the original version of *The Rec Room*, as I had always intended it to be done. However, AFI informed me that my entire production grant and all fellowship privileges had vanished into thin air.

Without telling me or anyone associated with The McMurray Award trustees, AFI had magically absorbed my entire grant and its budget into their NBC sitcom special. Not only did they use me, they used my grant money. When I tried to protest I was given an IBM typewriter and told what an ingrate I was having had "the privilege" of network TV exposure.

Today I am trying to produce *The Rec Room* on my own, with much difficulty, and at the same time trying to re-launch its antecedent, *Yonder* in commercial television. It has come full circle, with time out for bad behavior from a non-profit arts institution.

These things happen. *So, nu.* But they happen just as easily at arts organizations as at the networks. I can usually play "heads up ball" with show business moguls. But the capriciousness of an arts administrator can sometimes be too subtle a form of abuse to redress. Besides—and I'm not entirely alone in this—I tend to feel so damn grateful to people who give me grants that I always wind up leaving myself wide open for exploitation and over-exertion.

The barons of industry, who ultimately pull the strings for both arts and commercial organizations, would find the distinctions we attempt to make between them a very good joke, indeed. Is *your* money cleaner than *my* money? Does it show more integrity to take orders from an employee at NBC, or to sell your art to the Chairman of the Board of General Electric, NBC's parent company? Do we simply worship the influence of the richest and most powerful after all?

What we fear in the nature of censorship and propaganda can become a reality within the grant and patronage-sponsored bureaucracy just as easily as within the advertising bureaucracy. When Oliver North decides to take a job at Disney instead of joining forces with Senator Helms, maybe I'll change my tune. But at a time when

politicians of the acknowledged far right are attempting to persuade the population to withdraw support for artists based upon the most hideously mercurial of reasons, it may be interesting to rediscover the freedoms inherent in the madness of the marketplace.

What makes an empire evil? Its religious fanatics or its bankers?

Andy Warhol and entourage, media artists, in a guest appearance on *The Love Boat*, a popular TV series

Q: How do you know if a work of art is a success?
A: When the check clears.

I was so enchanted to get a breather from the closed-mindedness of Hollywood that I ignored the close-mindedness of the art world, at first. But in the last several years I've come to understand that some of my perceptions of the art world were highly romanticized, and I'm fond of saying, today, that the art world makes show business look like a zendo. I can now see the commodification and investment/marketing rituals, where all I wanted to see before was purity of intention. I meet artists whose lifestyles are utterly indistinguishable from those of Beverly Hills tax lawyers. I notice that some artists will puff up their work with trendy intellectual theory in order to be accepted by the critics, whether they grasp the theory or not. And the inflationary feeding frenzy of art sales recalls the same commercial hype and manipulation that Hollywood accepts as routine. To embrace this aspect of the "art world" and still try to present oneself as free from crass commercial restraints or unblemished by the bacteria of pop seems worthy of a major acting award. Take

Peter Kirby, video producer, Whither Video Art?

Video Art remains a stepchild of the art world, still called into question by the public. Even the boards of many of the institutions which present video art have a hard time accepting the exhibition of video as "high art.

nstraints. What do you think the court painters were doing in the Renaissance and Middle Ages? Sneaking rotten fruit into the still life. Adding a smirking dwarf in the background of the duchess' portrait. Or a peeing terrier under the Virgin's throne. Or, the artist him/herself leering at us from behind a plush Vatican curtain. How do you think the artists got their vision past the Royals? J.S. Bach had a noble patron who was an insomniac. He asked Bach to write him some music that would help him go to sleep at night. Bach accepted the assignment. It was called *The Goldberg Variations*.

Ernie Kovacs. *The Honeymooners*. David Letterman's monkeycam. Stupid Pet Tricks and POV DOG home movies. William Wegman's guest appearance on the *Letterman Show* in which Man Ray did the original Stupid Pet Tricks. Andy Kaufman's regular appearance on *Taxi*, *Saturday Night Live* most of the time. Tracey Ullman. Gary Shandling talking to the camera a la George Burns. George Burns. Nam June Paik's set for CBS *Sunday Morning*. Robert Longo directing music videos. William Wegman working for *Sesame Street*. *Roe vs. Wade* on network TV. *Brothers*, Showtime's long-running series about homosexuals. Eddie Murphy using the "F" word 312 times in a single HBO special. *Max Headroom* shot by Paul Goldsmith formerly of TVTV. *The History of White People in America* produced by Allen Rucker formerly of TVTV. John Sayles' *Shannon's Deal*. David Lynch's *Twin Peaks*. David Sanborn's Sunday night avant garde jazz show.

...a few of the things that have appeared on Big Time commercial TV (Not PBS. Not Bravo. Not A&E.) Oases in the Vast Wasteland? Flukes? I wrote for *Charles in Charge*. I read *October*. What to make of it all?

I was asked to present my work to students at The Art Institute of Chicago. I was supposed to present them as theoretical, historical, and aesthetic. But when I did, the kids weren't interested. Then I changed my tactics. I presented them as showbiz, and even presented myself as a showbiz hack. The kids loved it—and they watched the stuff.

Allen Rucker

face the music. Where does one go, though, with ideas that are too abstract or too personal--too anything--for big time commercial TV? Is the *soi-disant* art world the only alternative? Is this a global village or a two-horse town? In every other medium we could think of there is ample acceptance for both "high" and "low" forms of expression, and the two usually cross-pollinate at some eventual level. But "high" art has still to define its distribution mechanisms in the medium of television. Most "high" television art is profoundly unavailable and unknown to most of the population. At least you know where to go to find "high" art in painting, music, dance, etc., even if you have no interest in finding it. But almost no one outside the museum world even knows that there *is* a rarified form of television and that it can be seen, pretty much exclusively, in modern museums and art galleries, or on esoterically-programmed slots on local public TV stations (which dimly promote the work, if at all). I can count on the thumb of one hand the number of

video rental stores in greater Los Angeles which stock "high art" along with commercial film releases, while the three such outlets in Manhattan went out of business quicker than you can wink your eye. Why is video so hard to see?

Douglas Davis

We have not seen video yet.

sure. I don't consider video art to be as Peter Kirby said, "the stepchild" of the art world. I think it's the child of divorce in an unresolved custody battle between "high" and "low" forms of artistic expression in the still-dysfunctional medium of television. We don't need high-resolution giant screens. We need therapy.

In 1987 I began producing *Viewpoints on Video* for the Long Beach Museum of Art. This was a one-hour program of video art works shown on fourteen cable systems through the state on a regularly scheduled basis. Often the works were the same ones on exhibit at the museum. One of the volunteers who had been with the museum for years, and who never went upstairs because that was where the "video" was (and she knew from past experience that she didn't like it) saw the first program at home. The next day she said that she never really understood video art before, and had actually liked some of the program. Perhaps she even understood that "video art" is a term with almost no meaning beyond the obvious one, and that there is good work and not so good work, as in any other aspect of human creativity.

Peter Kirby,
Whither Video Art?

Stay tuned. Stay very tuned. Whoever is feeding you information is a dummy. With no mouth.

Jerry Saltz, visual arts curator, from Illinois, to Gretchen Ferguson, student from Saskatchewan, daughter of Bruce Ferguson, media arts critic/writer, from Montreal, at a Vietnamese restaurant, in Chinatown, in Manhattan, at a party for Nancy Bowen, a cultptor, from Rode Island, on her way to Rome, sitting next to your correspondent, a screenwriter, from Chicago, living in the Tribeca loft of David Diao, painter from China introduced to her by Marilyn Minter, conceptual painter, from Florida, and former collaborator with Christof Kohlhofer, from Germany, a place I have never been to.

Q: What is postmodernism?
A: It's artists talking to other artists.

Aren't there places you have never been to? China? Germany? Television City? Everywhere walls are coming down.

Dear Gummo,

Last night I had dinner with my celebrated pen pal, T.S. Eliot. It was a memorable evening. Your correspondent arrived at the Eliot's fully prepared for a literary evening. During the week I had read *Murder in the Cathedral* twice; *The Waste Land* three times; and just in case of a conversational bottleneck, I brushed up on *King Lear*. Well sir, as cocktails were served, there was a momentary lull—the kind that is more or less inevitable when strangers meet for the first time. So I tossed in a quotation from *The Waste Land*. That, I thought will show him I've read a

Groucho Marx, from *The Best of Modern Humor* edited by Mordecai Richler

thing or two besides my press notices from vaudeville. Eliot smiled faintly—as though to say he was thoroughly familiar with his poems and didn't need me to recite them. So I took a whack at *King Lear*. ...That, too, failed to bowl over the poet. He seemed more interested in discussing *Animal Crackers* and *A Night At The Opera*. He quoted a joke—one of mine—that I had long since forgotten. Now it was my turn to smile faintly. [Eliot] asked if I remembered the courtroom scene in *Duck Soup*. Fortunately I'd forgotten every word. It was obviously the end of the Literary Evening but very pleasant nonetheless.

Yours, Groucho Marx

anyway,

Itam, Hakim Hopiit is not a straight documentary.

We often do a disservice to

social conditions by imposing

the traditional documentary format.

It's too familiar.

It doesn't make you think.

People see it and have a tendency to forget it.

Victor Masayesva

POLITICAL VIDEO IN THE UNITED STATES: A STATEMENT FOR THE 1990s

JOHN DOWNING

What is politics?

It is no longer, so easy to say. In the USA the word has been degraded to the point that conversationally it signifies the vicious throat-cutting of bureaucratic intrigue, and so has come to dignify the small everyday maneuvers of base cunning. "I loved that job, nobody was in the least political."/ "I hated that job, everyone was so political."

For "politics" to shrink to the lust for power in the micro-environment of stagnant office ponds represents a sorry decline, a lurch downhill even from its redefinition as the hoopla of quadrennial presidential media circuses. In these an echo of national political debate survives, a sense that space might be open for a candidate such as Jesse Jackson to

raise genuine issues however much the media punditry, in its infinite, infinite perspicacity, might seek to drown them in a torrent of icy scorn. In the lilliputian cosmos of bureaucratic departments, however, the more intense and engaging the "politics" the less likely will the issues transcend personal spites and ascendancies—whatever the rhetoric.

In this essay I 'am using "politics" in its archaic, now almost arcane sense, to denote the clash of opinion, analysis and actions between social forces set in fundamental opposition to each other: feminists against patriarchy, Native Americans against colonization, environmentalists against energy corporations, African-Americans against institutionalized racism, workers against pay-cuts, lay-offs, medical benefit cuts, increasing debt-bondage... The list needs to be continued at length, the interconnections recognized, and the problematic deepened to questions of capital and the state (though doing so need *not—must* not—lure us either into the pop-eyed messianism of some grouplets on the left, or the kneejerk pro-sovietism of others). So by "politics" I particularly mean the demands, the consciousness, the activity of political *movements,* ebbing and flowing in strength, based in everyday struggles and confrontations.

Usually in' the United States these movements have had a very specific focus, such as peace or civil rights, sometimes termed "single-issue" politics. In reality, many of these "single" issues, properly understood, raised profound questions about the national political economy and culture, and are only defined as detached issues at the risk of seriously misconceiving them. However, since the Socialist Party's collapse after World War I, numerous experiences right up to the problems of the "rainbow" coalitions of the 1980s testify to how difficult it is to sustain politically integrated opposition across this very large and diverse country.

To this sociological obstacle must be added the seemingly indelible legacy of ".anticommunism" as a national political religion which, to this very day, can be mobilized to discountenance—in a flash—almost every radical analysis or movement. Newsreel footage of young U.S. soldiers walking *forward into* nuclear blast test-zones in the 1950s engraves as perhaps no other image can, the absolutism of U.S. anticommunism. Integrally with this anticommunism, the summons to compete with the other superpower or go under has worked almost unfailingly in favor of astronomical, sloppily evaluated military budgets, but against education, affordable health care and a healthy environment. Had it not been for the anticommunist impulse, could the state-by-state pork-barrel politics of Federal funding not have embraced constructive needs as easily as destructive ones?

The bold political moves of the Gorbachev team in the late 1980s and the sudden changes in Central Europe in 1989 began for the first time to erode the appeal of this summons, so dramatically indeed that much of the American power structure took considerable fright (1). As Soviet political analyst Georgi Arbatov once observed, a demonic USSR is as essential to business as usual in the USA as is the devil to a fundamentalist'preacher...

(1) **In fact the Cold War propaganda machine's definition of the world has rarely been** believed all that strongly by senior **tforeign-policy** makers themselves. The cynicism of **the U.S. government's** *realpolitik* was particularly in evidence in 1989 for **anyone with eyes. People's judgments** as to **the most sickening examples will vary** but.the tolerance of extreme violence by **good" communists went hand in glove with the almost totalitarian exclusion ol• "bad" communists, and the aversion to**

oppression by 'bad" dictators ncstledcosily with a blind eye to the atrocities of "good" ones.

..'bad"

massacre around Tiananmen Square was met with embarrassment rather than fin and brimstone, and the Chinese **government-supported Khmer Rouges** victims were **reduced** to "about &.million" from the oft-cited three million and up **earlier in the decade. Yet' Salvadorean guerrillas and Sandinistas were demonized; to the point where a terrified couple who had witnessed the Salvadorean Army's slaukhter of six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper and her daughter were threatened by the** FBI **with the nigghtmare of deportation bacfi to El Salvador in the course of their interrogation, and here murderous U.S.-armed Contra stuclta an Nicaraguan civilians went without comment by Bush Administration parrot. General Noriega's misdeeds** were **suddenly blazoned everywhere, no doubt because of U.S. government anxieties about the Panama Canal; sustained repression by** rulers, military or otherwise, in Guatemala, Zaire, **Turkey,** Saudi Arabia, Indonesia and many other nations closely allied to the USA, continued unremarked.

Without "communism" can these ***realpolitik*** categories continue to be **masked? What** will be the next panic-buaon?

In the USA politics most times involves the international context as well as national realities. Beyond superpower relations and their bearing' on domestic life, the United States' activity in policing the Americas since 1898 and the globe since 1945, has been no minor incidental in our political life (Korea, Cuba, Vietnam', Falasta-Israel, Iran, Nicaragua, El Salvador, etc.), ignorant of the rest of the planet as many U.S. citizens.are, and convinced as are so many of them that their country is a kind of hallowed island. That "island" was created by colonization, from the first wars against Native Americans through the annexation of northern Mexico in 1848 to the seizure of Hawaii and the Philippines in the 1890s. It is sustained today by a vast international network of banks and military bases, mining corporations and agribusinesses, media megaliths and space hardware.

It follows that political communication in the USA is intensely important both for its citizens and for the planet as a whole. A politically unlettered and globally uninformed U.S. electorate is dangerously exposed, and a danger to others. If we do not exploit as intensively as possible the scope that the state and the culture provide for alternative political communication, we can the more easily be suckered into supporting aggressive foreign policies. In the nuclear and chemical weapons era these policies could quite quickly lead to the extinction of all human life, or negative domestic policies of many kinds, damaging the environment, threatening the rights of immigrants, the health care of the elderly. (An irony of living in the USA is the gigantic volume of free or cheap information lying around unexploited, such as data on transnational corporations, which could be used fruitfully by political movements in many "Third World" nations where it is virtually unavailable.)

To come to the immediate question of political video for the nineties, I would argue that there are certain issues, each one with international dimensions, which video-makers with a conscious political commitment should take as priorities—which, indeed, any video-maker today should seriously consider. In turn, my judgment will govern the selection of the videos for comment in this essay. The issues are class, racism, patriarchy and ecological ruin.

Properly defining each here and justifying its priority is beyond the scope of a short essay: I would only say that these issues are deeply interconnected, as many of the videos selected make plain.

I am defining social class not on the level of the relative trivia of status differences, but as economic power relations together with their countless ramifications. "Class" is not a living concept in our political vocabulary in the USA, but the reality it signifies most certainly expresses itself in all directions, often transmuted into spatial terms such as "Wall Street", or "Beverly Hills" or "The Loop". Racism is a term in the political vocabulary, yet continues nonetheless to be the solar plexus of the culture, the nettle of choice for White people to refuse to grasp; denials of full humanity to non-White people take endless forms and saturate the social system. Patriarchy has much of the same sinewy strength but is not so peculiarly Anglo-American, and along with ecological ruin is today given somewhat more intelligent consideration in the official public sphere than social class or racism. Together, however, these four forces confront us, and only numbed fools would set up a competition for which is most dangerous.

But they do not only confront us. They are also part of us. They are not Martian culture. *Our* culture. Us.

What is video?

Of the numerous dimensions to political communication, the task here is to review just one, namely video. But video also needs defining.

We might as well begin by asking what if anything is the difference between video and television? As a visceral reaction. against the banality of most television programming in the USA, the term "video" has been reserved by some to denote television programs with artistic qualities.

> The direct reaction ¸by film and video artists to the consuming and omniscient worlds of commercial. television and cinema is, in one sense, at the basis of all films and videotapes that reject the product which fills the cinema screen or television monitor (Hanhardt 1989: 97).

Indeed, commentator after commentator, critic after critic, talks about "television" when what they essentially mean is U.S. television (e.g. Miller 1988; Fiske 1988). Even a British writer (Armes 1988)—curiously, given that British television has historically been of a higher calibre than most—wrote a book entitled On *Video* and spent many pages of it exploring in cumbersome detail how video is to be distinguished from both film and television.

Is it really a meaningful exercise to concentrate as he does on differences in audience, and differences in patronage and contracts for the original production, as though all these created a generic difference between video and TV? All these are important elements in the situation, but in Armes' text they make up a line of argument which reproduces the seemingly interminable nausea of the "high art/low art" debate, which has been dealt some weighty critical blows by a number of video critics (e.g. Antin 1976; Gever 1985; James 1986).

James, for example, points out how many of the techniques of so-called "video art" have been borrowed by mainstream television producers, and one might also note the way many video-makers reproduce rather than critique current televisual cliches. Or as this quotation from the British magazine ZG puts it:

> ...certain self-consciously borderline activities have grown up which aim to work *between* "styles" and their worlds... Hybrid styles abound... these new tendencies...challenge our most deep-rooted orientations to the world whether they are in terms of art/culture, elite/popular, or male/female... (cited in Walker 1983: 87)

Despite a number of insightful remarks scattered through his text (especially on the question of sound), Armes tends to produce statements such as this:

> ...the video camera...is openly, transparently, both an instrument for celebrating what *is,* rather than what could be achieved by social change, and, at the same time, a machine for making life seem more pleasurable than it is. (197)

He endeavors, then, to develop an intricate essentialist specificity for TV,, comparing it with photography *a la* Barthes (1977) in its tendency to "naturalize'.', drawing the now familiar contrast with the big screen/darkened space/specially assembled audience of cinema, noting the effect of current computerized averaging of light on foreground and background composition. In the process, however, the fluid boundaries between film, television and video are curiously posited as fixed, at least for the discerning eye and ear. This is despite the onset of advanced compatible television and high definition television—the latter now at the doors-as much for its military and remote sensing applications as for its attractiveness to the television audience which look set to explode some premature aesthetic theorizing.

As or more important than critics' definitions of *the* medium—I am now junking the video/TV distinction, and will use the terms interchangeably-is how the *audience* constitutes it. During the 1980s a younger generation of media analysts who had cut their critical teeth on trashing conventional audience researeh suddenly and avidly rediscovered the importance of the media audience. Their own methodology was largely qualitative and anthropological, sometimes even resembling a diary (e.g. Morley 1986), so this volte-face

did not represent a total capitulation to Nielsen.

A prolific exponent of this school is Fiske (1988), for whom the television audience is lionized as the "producer of meanings" from the television text. He writes as doughty champion of the unjustly despised mass audience:

> Television is a "producerly" medium: the work of the institutional producers of its programs requires the producerly work of the viewers and has only *limited control* over that work. The reading relations of a producerly text are essentially democratic, not autocratic ones. (239 my emphasis)
>
> The recovery of soap .operas and their audiences into cultural and political respectability, is almost complete and thoroughly welcome... (280)

Fiske never defines "limited control", and indeed one is often led by his text to think he sees the audience as hyperactive rather than as merely active, taking the televisual text by the scruff of its neck and wrenching its head off in a determination to find its own pleasures rather than the bourgeois ideologies insinuated—a kind of no-holds-barred mental wrestling from which the original "institutional" producers can only retreat in disarray, shaken and hurt by the ferocity of the encounter. The "cultural and political

respectability" in which these couch-potatoes-turned-titans are now basking is of course academic, in the sense of the academic "community"; one hopes it is sufficient reward for the obloquy under which they have so often groaned in the past, and which has held back many a guilty hand from switching on the set.

Marc Crispin Miller (1988) has argued exactly the opposite position in his essay "Big Brother Is You, Watching". Counterpointing. his analysis of U.S. television-he simply says "television"—with a reading of *1984*, and drawing upon Horkheimer and Adorno's critique (1944/1987) of the destructive cultural impact of capitalist rationality, he claims that the audience is stimulated into homogeneity, into a 1984-like fear of individuality, by the codes and rituals of American TV. These he defines as typically contrasting the smooth, all-knowing, "in control", *normal* TV personality with deviants—often conservative deviants, who are however trashed for their individuality rather than their repressive postures. Longstanding U.S. examples would be Johnny Carson in relation to Archie Bunker in *All In The Family*. He writes:

> TV seems to flatter the inert skepticism.of its own audience, assuring them that they can do no better than stay right where they are, rolling their eyes in feeble disbelief. 'And yet such apparent flattery of our viewpoint is in fact a recurrent warning not to rise above this slack, derisive gaping... All televisual smirking is based on, and reinforces, the assumption that we who. smirk together are enlightened past the point of nullity, having evolved far beyond whatever datedness we might be jeering, whether the fanatic's ardor, the prude's inhibitions, the

> hick's unfashionable pants, or the snob's obsession with prestige. (326)

In other words, a quasi-critical, quasi-active audience is posited by the TV industry-but an audience whose criticism is molded and channeled, rather than impulsive and anarchic. The phenomenon is one of "integrated spontaneity", in the memorable phrase of Dieter Prokop (1973). A banalized, thuggish irony and coarse, know-everything skepticism—communicative styles intensively deployed both by O'Brien and the Oceanic elite of 1984 and by the Stalinist machine which was one of Orwell's targets—have been adopted by U.S. television, Miller argues, to the point where they have become the U.S. audience's internalized censors which inure us against further critical reaction to the world around us, largely mediated via television. In the end, as the title of Miller's piece proposes, Big Brother becomes Us watching TV.

Miller's analysis begins to vault in an interesting way right over the sterile 1980s debate about liberal bias in U.S. media. Beyond this, however, the importance of the clash of perceptions between him and Fiske—all of it on the left, which is still where most of the interesting debate is to be found—is that we cannot begin to make useful judgments about the politics of video in the USA without developing our own views of the audience and its definitions of television. Does U.S. television drain us of our non-consumer selves, as Miller argues, or do we make of it, as Fiske proposes, practically what we will?

The nearer we stand to Miller, the more politically urgent become alternative and radical video-making, distribution, and media education. The nearer to Fiske, perhaps only media education is politically relevant, and even that might be questioned as dotting already visible i's'and crossing out already obliterated t's. In fact, for Fiske it would seem

that politically radical video is doubtfully worth the effort, given the new readings which its audiences will insistently produce of it.

Craven and dull as it may seem to hew to a center course, neither Miller's nor Fiske's absolutisms appear to capture the many-stranded realities of televisual politics and audiences. From the latter's emphasis on the audience, we may usefully avoid the TV critic's standard vice of self-projection on to the public, of arguing simply from text to effect, of dismissing the audience as moronic. From the former's dissection of the pseudo-democracy of American television, we may maintain our watchfulness against its powerful depoliticizing trend. Neither however offers us too many clues to the two key issues: what counts as politics? and what can be said about a political televisual aesthetic? The first has been commented on above; the second will occupy us now.

A political televisual aesthetic for the 1990s USA

Miller is essentially concerned with the television audience in its capacity as an audience, invited to conspire in its own emasculation. The pseudo-democracy of which he speaks exists in many other realms of the land of the free: women are denied rights over their own bodies, people of color face institutional racism, gays have to fear "faggot-

bashing", toxic agents silently invade our bodies so that corporate balances will look healthy, people with AIDS are segregated and spurned, many "illegal" migrant workers live in fear on subsistence wages.,As I have indicated above, "politics" for me is what happens in the movements of struggle against these forces.

It is much harder to define a constructive political televisual aesthetic. For political aesthetics cannot float in a political vacuum, valid for every place and time. Indeed one of the problems of radical political writing about aesthetics is its tendency to try to establish absolute criteria, whether of production or reception.

I emphatically do *not* share the understanding that

> ...video's formal project [is] the critique of the codes of broadcast tv as an intervention in the latter's ideological function (James: 88):

For one thing, even though tv critiques are fine and necessary, we should not risk having our ground defined for us by broadcast tv. Our media politics should strive to be autonomous, influenced more by political movements than by the hegemony of dominant ideology. It should be creating alternative public spheres and be organized in self-managed structures (Downing 1984; 1987; 1988; 1989).

This is why I feel obliged to attack the media theory which argues that representation constitutes us, and therefore that media art which directly confronts the canons of mass media is the key to media politics:

> …the recognition that there can be no reality outside representation, since we can only know about things through the forms that articulate them... As image-makers, artists...have come to terms with the mass media's increasing authority and dominance through a variety of responses—from_ celebration to critique, analysis to activism, commentary to intervention (Phillips 1989: 67,57).

Such an approach goes beyond the mediatic and becomes media-centric, inflating the perfectly valid and politically informative analysis of codes and signs in mainstream media into an all-encompassing explanation of hegemony. One can see why video artists and media studies specialists might be drawn to its exaggerated claims, since these in turn seem to bolster the significance of their professional undertakings, in contrast to more traditional studies in literature and political science. The Whitney Museum exhibit volume *Image World: Art and Media Culture* in which are to be found both Phillips' essay and Hanhardt's referred to earlier, presents a brilliant visual survey of modern artistic responses to mass media. Nonetheless, media-supremacism lends itself to such speculative excess as the argument that narrative is inherently patriarchal, which may be delicious to contemplate in the airy redoubts of some Midwestern graduate school but offers little that is very chewable elsewhere. It is urgent that media politics, video politics, should not confine itself to a discourse internal to media or TV.

Furthermore, "television" is capable of critiquing itself, as witness the classic *Monty Python's Flying Circus.* Yet again, many attempts by video artists to break through the "codes" are so labored and indigestible except to a dedicated "video art" clique that it is doubtful the codes can be said to have been significantly ruptured (e.g. Tony Conrad's *Beholden To Victory* and Lee Warren's and Remo Balcells' *The Grooming Tool).* Buchloh's (1985) comments on uncomprehending audience reactions to some of the videos he reviews, serve to make a similar point.

I will begin instead from an impermissible posture: in the 1990s, in the USA, political aesthetics should primarily aim to be energized from the *movements* against class, racism, sexism and ecological ruin, and most particularly to enable the *voices* of those struggling to be heard.

My crime is obvious. Not only am I confusing message with form, but I am in danger of at best populism, at worst copying a Zhdanov or Jiang Qing, with who knows what terrible implications? (I can only say that neither of the latter culture czars was remotely interested in letting people speak for themselves.) In 1968 Raymond Williams put my point rather succinctly about the scarcity of voices:in British television, whose vice in this respect is sadly not unique:

> ...we see too few faces, hear too few voices, and...these faces and voices are offered as television dealing with life... Last week's programme about farming steep land was a model of interest and intelligence, with the, regular interviewers, farmers

> themselves, talking to other farmers and letting the camera see the ground... The point would then be-that, serious and pleasant as these men are, we would not want them over the next seven days, looking over their cues at Vietnam, the universities, an air-crash, a strike, Rhodesia, car-sales, a prison escape, cheese imports, a philosopher, Czechoslovakia, suicides (in O'Connor 1989: 42-44).

To put it differently, in the 1990s in the United States we have the practical opportunity, not least because of the considerable underemployed reserve of talent and experience in television production, to utilize "the age of mechanical reproducibility" to communicate the ***public's*** expertise on political matters (in the sense of "political" defined above). Benjamin's essay (1936/1970) never specified how reproducibility could be actualized by the workers' movement, aside from pointing to Soviet film experiments which though he did not then know it were in the process of being strangled to death as he wrote. Today, outside the televisual mainstream and also in its many interstices, alternative production and reception are becoming gradually more viable.

Let me illustrate my movement aesthetics of the voice—or as Brecht put it, how "interests [have been made] interesting" (1930/1983: 171)-from a series of recent political videos.

Illustrations

Slaying The Dragon (Deborah Gee and Asian Women United, 1987) attacks media portrayal of Asian women, from *Thief of Baghdad, Flash Gordon* and *Fu Manchu* to the present day. It is a powerful work. Not only does it do some excellent archival work illustrating the continuity of the problem from *Sayonara* and *World of Suzie Wong* to Michael Cimino's *Year of the Dragon.* Not only does it disentangle the gender strand in racist ideology, which has typically defined women of color as frolicsome havens for puritanically repressed white male lust, and men of color as unmanly (with the partial, distorted exception of Black men): Not only does it chronicle the switch from evil Chinese to evil Japanese (1937) to evil Chinese again (1949) and then to evil Vietnamese, thus illustrating the way in which current events are exploited to keep racist myths seeming fresh off the shelf. But on top of all these elements, the video constantly injects the views and experiences of Asian-American women, whether actresses, a TV newscaster or more regular folk. The video is not simply *about* but *by:* the objects of scrutiny are active as producers and speakers.

This provides important insights. Asian-American women recount quite casual conversations with Anglo males which centered around the women's presumed sexual voracity. The links with the media images are underpinned: no longer are the images abstract history. Emerald Yeh, a newscaster, describes her crunching interview with CNN:

> (disappointed) "You've cut your hair [from your photo]." "I could grow it again."

"How long would it take?"
(silence)
"We're going to send you to a make-up artist to make you look more exotic."

Professor Vincent Chin emphasizes the positive impact of the African-American upsurge of the 60s on Asian-American self-awareness, underlining the key linkages between such struggles. Yet they are not glibly linked, at another point in the video an African-American film executive is cited as having been sent off to tell the producers of a film on the Japanese-American internment camps of World War 2, that the audience would need an Anglo character to identify with.

Furthermore, Asian-American voices are not presented as homogeneous, as shown by the disagreement between the speakers toward the end of the video about racially conceived humor. The "unified ethnic voice" myth—be it 'a pleasingly radical. voice or an embarrassingly quiescent one, or neither—has such a grip on white thinking. It is important to counteract it.

Slaying The Dragon skillfully used the documentary style to speak against racist mythology. *Thailand—Not Taiwan* (Nicky Tamrong and Robert Winingham, 1987) went about the same objective by editing together a series of *vox pop's* to see how many street passers-by could locate or differentiate these two nations. The results were extremely amusing, with only one former seaman able to do both. The U.S. educational and media systems were woundingly exposed in full frontal.

Through Strength And Struggle (Asian-American Resource Workshop and Helen Liu, 1988) is a low-budget video documenting a 1985 Boston strike by Chinese women, many middle-aged, against the closing of their factory. So far from being reserved, submissive worker ants in accordance with their conventional image, these older women showed tremendous toughness as they fought tenaciously and successfully to obtain their retraining rights. The visual record of these women's self-assertion is—once again—a record of the voice raised, all the more vivid because of the prevailing image of docility.

Till The Last Stroke (Joy Shannon, 1987) works in a different way to undermine racist myths, as well as those of gender and age. Shannon's documentary gives a voice to elderly African-American artists in Washington DC, and allows them to talk about themselves and to show or perform their poetry, painting and singing. The camera dwells with dignity on their experienced, finely lined faces, conveying not only their wealth of insight but also—by implication, never stated—the destructive and self-destructive profligacy of a culture which neurotically holds the bearers of its vital African component at bay, century after century.

Attacking racist myths does not have to be carried out by hitting the loudest drum or breaking the biggest crystal vase. Shannon's reflective portrayal is more celebration than social critique, a celebration of achievement and personal dignity wrought despite the enormous obstacles faced by the artists' generation. (Comparing those obstacles with the current hazards faced-by the present generation, is beyond my competence.)

One of the hardest sets of racist myths to rupture are those surrounding Native Americans. Alternately pushed out of sight, quite simply loathed, or romanticized as—to

the last member of the last nation—ecological seers, their cultural expressions seen as vestiges of a disputed past which it is more delicate not.to dwell upon, their future as one of disappearance in order to become truly American (ex-president Reagan's view as expressed to Moscow State University students in 1988): how Mightvideo begin to fight its way out of these straitjackets?

An observation by Emelia Seubert of the Film and Media Center of the Museum of the American Indian is important to bear in mind as we consider the answer:

> ...for Native Americans, cultural survival is a deeply political issue. The long history of invasions against Native culture has been' instrumental through government policy—generations attended boarding schools where speaking the Native languages was punished; policies of the 1950s and 1960s known as Relocation and Training served to disrupt family life and erode Indian territory by relocating large numbers from the reservations to urban centers and broke up a number of reservations. Repairing the effects of. a culture thus damaged brings to culture-based media production a political dimension which does not exist for the dominant society. (Seubert 1987: 305)

Three examples will-help to illustrate the points at issue. They are *Itam Hakim, Ilopiit* (Victor Masayesva Jr, 1984), *Red Dawn* (Luke Duncan, 1987) and *Kapu Ka'u/Na*

Maka 0 Ka Aina (Joan Lauder and Puhipau, in association with Ka `Ghana 0 Ka Lae, 1988). In all three, moreover, the question of the "video" aesthetics of time as contrasted with the fast-paced "tv" aesthetics of time, is posed quite strongly. All three videos slow the pace of viewing, of living, right down. They prompt viewers to ask if this is just boring, or reflective of a considered mode of being.

ltam Hakim, Hopiit presents one of the last members of the Hopi Indians' story-telling clan reviewing his own life as well as key moments in Hopi time from the myth of origins through the 1680 Pueblo revolt and down to the present. The visual imagery is stunning, enormously evocative even for a cultural outsider. The living bond between Indian cultures and their physical surroundings breathes throughout the video. Ross Macaya, the storyteller, calmly, devastatingly attacks Christianity's pretensions, stripping away in a moment the religious cant that passes for belief in the USA. Small boys giggle and chatter and accidentally knock over a hurricane lamp while he is speaking of death (the Hopi god of death is an unpredictable being). Birds skim the surface of a still lake. Wolves howl in the snowy forest. The golden fiery ball of the sun rising. Step-editing of a blizzard. A sacred eagle flies long and steady ("I caught this morning morning's minion...").

These and numerous other moments make the video deeply meditative and offer to detach Anglo viewers from our culture's frantic, driven, cocaine-computer compulsions. Is the gulf unbridgeable? Masayesva's work makes it appear much less daunting to seek to bridge it.

Luke Duncan's *Red Dawn* explores the two worlds of an Indian telephone technician who has actively maintained his Native culture. We see him splicing cable,

working high up on the pole with multi-colored strands, so many they look like capellini. We also see this same telecommunications technician, his lips wide. apart, his mouth wide open, singing lustily at the head of a Native American singing group of which he has been an active member for fifteen years. He is quite explicit that his half-hour drive to and from work each day gives him time

> to switch from one way of life to another... I use this half hour to cross over to the other side, the modem side... I don't ever make the mistake of trying to choose between the two. Working is more than just making a few bucks... Working gives you a sense of pride, of self-worth. But never forget that you're an Indian—that is the most important thing.

This time the voice is that of one. person who has addressed the dilemmas of Native life in the USA in his own way. Leading two cultural lives is not so uncommon today in many countries, but here we have one person whom we can observe living both parts of his life to the full, not melting one into the other. The video does not pronounce on whether this should be the path for Native Americans. It simply explores what it means for one person and his family and friends.

Na Maka 0 Ka Aina is mainly musically expressed by ballad and song, reviewing the expansion beyond the continental United States into Hawaii, and its consequences for the Native population. The lyrics, which tell of the Queen of Hawaii at the time of the U.S. takeover, of the concreting over of Waikiki, of the racism of the Anglo settlers, of police confrontations with Native residents who are being pushed off their land, are

intercut with video shots of bulldozers gouging huge wounds out of the land, old newspaper photographs of the Queen, a paintbox depiction of the skyscrapers which makes them look like Hiroshima after nuclear annihilation, and extensive footage of Native singers. At one point an exquisite musical trio lament over the history since the US invasion is set against the hideously ugly concrete backdrop of Waikiki. At another, demonstrators speak before setting off in a boat to protest the Canadian Navy's use of an outlying island for gun and bomb practice. The notion of Hawaii as pure bliss if you can once afford to get there, or live there, is demolished piece by piece, with hardly a voice raised except in song. There are no snarling bass guitars, no strutting lead singers, simply the plain, delicate musical expression of loss, defeat and struggle.

Another dimension of the United States' racist present, as well as past, is found in its immigration and settlement policies. Whereas Europeans were officially declared to be almost automatically welcome under the Bush Administration in 1989, refugees from Central America and from Haiti have largely been unwelcome (except for a brief period when Nicaraguans were defined as equivalent to boat people). "Illegal" migrants often live in clandestine conditions, fearing a midnight or dawn swoop by La Migra. By definition they do not get to speak in public very much, for fear of being identified—or of having their relatives identified and repressed in their countries of origin. (Of course if the repression were that of a Communist regime, it would then become real and a matter for serious moral concern.)

Two videos in particular give a voice to migrants caught in this vise. *Voyage Of Dreams* (Collis Davis and 'Cajuste Raymond, 1984) and *Esperanza* (Sylvia Morales, 1985).

Voyage Of Dreams uses animation and pixelated images as well as interviews and video newsreel footage and dance to allow Haitians to speak their situation for themselves. There are images of ex-president Duvalier throwing coins from his car as it sped through the crowds, and of people scrabbling and fighting for them. There are interviews with teenagers here in the USA to pursue their education because their parents could not afford schoolbooks for them on a Haitian income. There are images of jailed Haitians in a New York prison. Speakers underline the terrible hazards of a 700 mile boat-voyage, taking twelve days, often without sufficient water, and the ten years' imprisonment which faces them if they are caught by the U.S. coastguard or police.

Esperanza departs from the documentary format to present a nearly hour-long narrative. Sylvia Morales' video leads us to grasp emotionally the terrifying social impotence experienced by many "undocumented" workers and their families. Set in California, we are introduced to a family of four where the father is absent throughout, working clandestinely in a city a hundred or more miles away. His' wife is bringing up their early teenage daughter and little boy. We see the mother kidnapped by the *migra* in the course of food-shopping, while her little son is momentarily inside an ice cream parlor. He comes out, and only her shopping bags remain on the sidewalk.

We sense the terror and desperation of the children, see them hiding in their apartment, terrified the police will pick them up. Later, we see them trying to find the one-way bus fare to travel to their father to let him know what is happening. In the end, they manage to raise the money with the help of a woman tortilla vendor; but while the sister is in the bus-station restroom, her brother is made nervous by a cop looking at him, makes a

run and is picked up. One of the film's most striking images is the final one of seeing the children being driven away in police cars, isolated, desperate, powerless. The video so builds the narrative that Anglo viewers have the opportunity to get right inside the experience of being picked up by La Migra. The issue becomes people whose lives speak to us, not a Mexican flood. In the media silence, a voice.

The voice, so prominent in *Esperanza, is* also at the center *of First Person Plural* (Lynn Hershman, 1987). Concentrating on her experience as a battered child, she correlates her experience as a battered child to her parents' silence about their experience of the Holocaust. The essence of what she utters is the agony of emerging from self-repression, from the conviction that she must never speak about her experiences, that she was to blame for not stopping them. "Don't talk!" is whispered repeatedly on the soundtrack as though inside a frightened child's mind. "I was too young to understand that I was being robbed of my voice", she tells us.

The film is intensely personal and courageously autobiographical: Hershman is very evidently concerned to lift the veil of silence, to urge other people who have been "robbed of their voice" to emerge from these guilty, terrifying shadows and speak their pain. She uses a number of experimental devices such as jump-cuts, flashing sequences of images, different colors to indicate her different selves, and dwells on: the popularity of the Dracula image as expressive of violence against women.

In *Of Snakes, Moons, and Frogs* (C.L.Monrose, 1988), another unspoken reality is explored, namely the role of goddesses in religious cultures of the past. I must confess to being somewhat unnerved'by many aspects of religion, not least its capacity to be used

to justify obscurantism and personal ascendancies, all in the name of what the god or the goddess thinks best for you (as interpreted by the all-too-actual guru). However, Monrose's visual exploration, with the exquisite music of the Bulgarian Female Vocal Choir in the background, goes a long way to undermining my secular prejudices and no doubt, therefore, lesser ones of some other people. Only her use of character-generated word-truth on the screen seems to indicate some loss of confidence in the video's fine images which serve well to voice the ongoing power of women's cultures. Here the voice is that of women's hidden history and submerged power.

The last video I propose to review is Deep Dish's collage of work on AIDS, entitled *Angry Initiatives, Defiant Strategies.* (Along with Paper Tiger Television, Deep Dish has pioneered low-cost political video throughout the USA via public access cable channels, and acts as a satellite distribution network to over three hundred such stations, collating work done all around the nation and making it nationally available.) People with AIDS have found themselves almost insulated off from the rest of humanity, and discriminated against in areas such as jobs, housing or medical treatment. They have been told AIDS was a punishment for their gay sexuality. The disease has been defined as a "gay" disease, when in fact increasingly it is poor Latino and Black people with a history of intravenous drug use, and babies of drug-abusing mothers, who are stricken with the illness.

The collage moves at a pace, cutting through a rapid spectrum of images: a Black rap group, a still of Queen Victoria, press coverage of AIDS with some very effective zooms into the details of the text of the newspapers, a montage of radio phone-in voices, a

dramatic piece about the quarantining of gays, a demonstration outside Sloan Kettering Hospital in New York City, an image of a condom being pulled over the Reverend Jerry Falwell, interviews with mothers of AIDS patients speaking their grief at being unable to arrest its progress in their children. In the process many if not all of the illusions and stereotypes listed above are dealt with forcefully and wittily. Individuals with AIDS are able to be heard—active and protesting, rather than terribly wasted and weak.

The last work, as opposed to the last video, with which I wish to illustrate my argument about the political aesthetics of the voice, is *The Four Corners: A National Sacrifice Area?* (Christopher McLeod, Glen Switkes and Randy Hayes, 1984). Available on video from Bullfrog Films, it was nonetheless originally shot in 16mm. *Four Corners* raises a voice in protest against ecological ruin.

The four-state area of Utah, Arizona, Colorado and New Mexico contains considerable natural resources deeply coveted by energy corporations, especially in shale oil and uranium. Both in terms of the physical environment and in terms of the population, these corporate desires are dangerous. Aerial pans demonstrate the impact of strip-mining, gigantic clawmarks gouged out in the earth's surface; close-ups of children born with terrible disabilities deriving from their and their own parents' proximity to uranium filings, provide chilling testimony to the demonic uncontrolled force of the nuclear pandora's box.

The documentary does not simply seek to terrify us, however. It gives voice to a whole variety of the actors involved, not least the Native Americans on whose land much of the coveted mineral wealth is located, and the Chicano miners who extract uranium ore.

It does not seek to simplify the issues, either. The divergence is heard between those Indian voices in favor of economic development through leasing parts of the reservations to the energy corporations, as well as those pointing to the ravage of nature and human beings which would predictably be entailed. The reluctance of the Chicano miners to oppose uranium mining; despite their sense of its immediate peril_to their health, is also explored in terms of the failure of the economic. system to offer them comparable but safe jobs elsewhere.

These are not the only voices in the documentary. The then-governor of Colorado and a number of other protagonists are also interviewed. The film plumbs the depth of these issues and seeks to give space to a variety of voices without presenting a ready-made pat solution to the problems it highlights. It is more than a film about ecocide, for it forcefully depicts the complex linkages between social and economic relations and the environment, between "progress" and survival. Like so much in the works reviewed in this section, it suggests that the 1989 *eclat* surrounding State Department official Francis Fukuyama's "end of history" conjecture was a diversion of our attention from more significant issues; to bend slightly Horace's famous phrase,. the mountainous parturition of an absurd mouse.

Conclusions

In brief conclusion, then, I would propose that political video in the USA at this time has enormous opportunities to allow the unheard majority to voice its understandings and perspectives out of its struggles. I have selected some outstanding and provocative examples, but there is plenty of evidence that the production talent exists in abundance. We *know* the situations do.

"Voice" need not be understood simply in its literal sense of speaking so that someone can hear, as in radio broadcasting. The voice in life and in video is embodied in visual and other aural images-of ali•kinds which can support (or detract from) its messages. The videos I have selected have very different styles, from the experimental to the conventional narrative.

Nor do I intend "voice" to- indicate any voice without further qualification: Maryknoll World Video financed the production of three video documentaries directed by Ilan Z'iv about famine in Africa. The second *(Shaping The Image, 1987)* was terrific, particularly because it allowed Africans to speak for themselves about what the famine meant; the third *(Selling The Feeling, 1987),* on the "Hands Across America" event, was inversely awful, relying heavily on boring leftist academics pontificating on camera about "the culture".

Thus the fact people in the USA now have some access to speak televisually for themselves more than ever before is not a magic potion to right all wrongs. It is, though, a new situation with considerable potential for political development'in this country. As we

celebrate the increase of democracy in the East and its costly but continuing extension in South Africa, let us be keenly aware that the video aesthetics of the voice can equally help to extend democracy's frontiers in the West: and that democracy here has in no way yet reached the fulfillment of its historical potential.

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There has never been enough discussion of the

relation between art and social change.

In 1969 we went for the money opportunistically

to implement cultural change.

Eventually we were asked to legitimate ourselves.

The artists who succeeded were the least dangerous.

The video movement had been co-opted by the state.

The video canon is so innocuous

because the field avoids questions of what art is and what it should be.

Paul Ryan

THE POWER OF THE PURSE: PUBLIC FUNDING AND THE AESTHETICS OF VIDEO

JON BURRIS

Making art without money in a field in which the medium is as much money as it is film or tape does not make for peace of mind. No field promises less to those who enter it, and no field keeps its lack of promise better. How you get money to people is almost as important as the money itself

Brian O'Dougherty
Program Director, Media Arts
The National Endowment for the Arts

In 1965, two unrelated events, working in tandem, created independent video. The introduction of the 1/2" reel-to-reel portapak held out the technological possibility for

personal, non-commercial uses of television. And the formal creation of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the New York State Council for the Arts (NYSCA) laid the foundations for the economic structures of the new medium.

This primary coincidence, the unprecedented and simultaneous availability of money and machines, played a critical role in the subsequent development of independent video. Because video did not exist prior to the inception of public patronage, and because funding commenced virtually without delay, video is the first and only art form to develop entirely within the embrace of purposeful cultural policy. The effects of this circumstance are manifold and raise important questions: How has public funding altered the evolution of the medium? How has the relationship of the artist to the medium and to the public been affected? And the core question: how does the involvement of public agencies directly or indirectly affect aesthetics and expressive modalities?

Because funding is just one element of video's cultural context, these questions are not likely to receive definitive answers. It is. impossible to separate the aesthetic impact of available production tools—the impact of technology—from the impact of the money which buys them. Similarly, the artists' natural desire to reach large audiences cannot be readily distinguished from the effects of funding imperatives which encourage broadcast. Nor can widespread government support for avant-garde activities—and the subsequent legitimation of such activities—be distinguished from the general social acceptance of the avant-garde in fashion, politics, architecture, et. al. during the late sixties and early seventies.

It should be noted that one factor in the correlation between aesthetic developments and funding practices lies in the influential role the constituent community of artists, critics and arts administrators plays in the formulation of funding policy within each discipline. Thus, funding is not something which is solely "done to" the funded without feedback and collaboration. While the staff and Council of the funding agencies are powerful, the primary structural element in the awarding of grants, a peer review panel, inherently incorporates in funding decisions the collaboration of what can somewhat disingenuously be termed "the field."* (In fact, one primary function of the peer panel is to mitigate the political onus on state employees for potentially unpopular funding decisions.) Also, the program staff—those who write guidelines and evaluate grant proposals within particular disciplines-are themselves frequently former non-profit administrators and former or currently practicing artists; many are finely attuned to the needs of artists and arts service organizations.

No art can be unaffected by the circumstances of its practice, and all the arts exist within economic structures which nurture or constrict, broaden or channel the productions

* In the case of NYSCA, all grants are **awarded** by the New York State Council on the Arts proper, composed of up to 20 individuals prominent in acts, business and academia. The councilmembers are appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the State Senate to five year terms. This Council is advised on **individual** grant requests by the staff and panel of the various disciplines (e.g. Electronic Media **and** Film, Visual Arts, Dance, Music). In practice, the recommendations of the disciplines are almost always ratified by the Council unless there is a difference in the amounts recommended by the program staff and the panel. At the NEA, the structure is **somewhat** different. There, the National Council on the Arts sets overall policy, but all grants are **awarded by the Chairman, who may choose to** accept, alter or **disregard** recommendations of the panel and staff. Prior to Frank Hodsoll's tenure (1981. 1989), the Chairmen, nearly without exception, followed the panels' recommendations.

of artists. Public funding inherently recognizes this in its core concept: that the best environment for artistic creation is one which shields the artist from the exigencies of the marketplace. Nonetheless, in most art forms the influence of the public funder is secondary to other important support structures. For instance, the aspirations of painters are generally informed by the possibility of exhibition and subsequent sales in galleries, most ofwhich do not receive public support. Similarly, most-novelists desire publication, and virtually all publishing houses are supported solely by commercial sales. While public funding certainly nourishes painting and writing, it is unlikely that changes inphilanthropic patterns, or even a cessation of public support, would substantially deflect the overall development of those media. Painting, writing, et. al, are embedded in an autonomous marketplace and are not particularly sensitive to philanthropic imperatives. There simply isn't enough money in public patronage to create the gravity necessary for real impact.

For video, however, public funding is the marketplace and provides the predominant reward structure for the medium. In essence, the ecology of the video world is dependent upon continual infusions of public money. It is not that more money is available for video than for other media (in fact there is less), but rather no other substantial source exists to counterbalance the influence of philanthropic funds. There is no open market for the works of video artists. Indeed, with only minor exceptions, all possible rewards accruing to a videomaker in the form of fellowships, production funds, eaching jobs, exhibition opportunities and published criticism derive directly or indirectly from a hefty public subsidy. Even the few grants available from private foundations are unlikely to be awarded to those unsuccessful in securing public funds. On the level that

most directly affects aesthetics, public funds subsidize a large portion of the budgets of organizations providing access to production and post-production equipment, broadcast and other exhibition opportunities, instructional workshops and artist-in-residence fellowships. Often the equipment provided to artists—and thus determining the production options available to them—derives directly from specific contractual obligations to funding agencies (e.g. an organization which receives support for operation of an image-processing facility). In many cases, these organizations would—and do--cease to exist if funds are greatly reduced or cut off. Because the most prominent artists do well within this structure—a solipsistic formulation, to be sure—and because less prominent artists often aspire to gain entry to it, the medium is extremely sensitive to shifts in funding policy and procedure.

This is the inevitable paradox of widespread public patronage: that a system founded on the core belief that the artisi should be shielded from the constraints of the marketplace is itself a marketplace with its own powerful imperatives and repercussions. The influence of the funding agencies is found not only in specific funding decisions: whether to grant a specific fellowship, to fund a particular exhibition, or to support a public access facility in a given community. More broadly influential is the effect of the funding structures on actions of the artists and administrators who receive support, or would like to receive it. So important is this support that even the aesthetic modalities of the medium are strongly influenced by these structures, and the various changes in funding and the broader economic landscape have been mirrored in aesthetic changes in the tapes and installations.

Infrastructure and Institutionalization

The most striking aspect of the medium's development is the easiest to overlook: the emergence of independent video occurred at precisely the earliest possible moment that the base condition, in the form of cheap simple equipment, made the medium possible at all.

This is an unusual state of affairs. As a general rule, the mere appearance of a new medium does not inevitably result in its use as an art form. Film lay largely dormant as an independent medium for decades after the invention of 16mm film, while holography, years after its invention, remains a secondary application of photography. Yet the number of video practitioners went from a score or so in 1965 - 1968 to hundreds or thousands only a few years later. The transition from nonexistence to the 1973 Whitney Biennial, a prominent national showcase for new art, took eight years and video had only to wait a few more months for the "Open Circuits" conference at the Museum of Modern Art.

By any standards this is an accelerated development, an acceleration fueled only partially by hardware and the eagerness of curators and critics to adopt the medium. Equally important was the unprecedented public and private investment (mostly public) in an untried, uncharted, unformed, uncertain and unproven endeavor. What's all the more remarkable is that public patronage of all the arts was equally uncharted during the decade following 1965. It was crucial to the subsequent development of video that the introduction of inexpensive hardware occurred in an era where relative prosperity

facilitated the rapid expansion of public patronage at the same time as mainstream culture was favorably disposed to the "avant-garde." In an environment devoid of precedent, with personnel who were new at the game, and in an era with some extra cash to burn, funding agencies were willing to support inherently risky undertakings without clear contexts or predictable outcomes.

Earlier, the equipment was so costly to purchase and maintain that only broad-based commercial entities were able to support it. Video could be subsidized in the late sixties because for the first time it was feasible for public agencies with modest budgets to do so. And because the costs of equipment had dropped sufficiently, a small grant could have a major impact. While the Metropolitan Opera received the better part of a million dollars each year from NYSCA, a relative drop in its bucket, grants of $10,000 - $50,000 went far in lean video organizations. Perhaps more to the point, it was possible to get away with funding this stuff precisely because the grants were small; large grants generate concerns about audience size, numbers served, institutional professionalism and the scrutiny of jaundiced eyes unlikely to look favorably on esoteric experiments.

Today, as in the past, NYSCA and the NEA are the predominant public supporters of independent video. The forty-nine other state arts agencies, with a few notable exceptions, are not substantial media funders. So preponderant is NYSCA among state arts agencies that until recently NYSCA's total budget ($54.5 million in FY90) was larger than those of the other forty-nine states combined. NYSCA's 1989-1990 Media allocation of $1.7 million is larger than that of any other public funder except the NEA. It should also be noted that several private foundations, most notably the Rockefeller Foundation, played, and continue to play, significant roles.

Apart from the Works Projects Administration, begun under different circumstances and with different aims, the discipline of public arts funding can be said to have begun in 1960 when NYSCA's precursor was founded at the behest of then-Governor Nelson Rockefeller as a temporary arts commission. Rockefeller's intention was to create a modest experiment to get tax dollars to major cultural institutions such as the Metropolitan Opera and the Museum of Modern Art. Despite his intentions, NYSCA veered off in other directions. As one observer recently noted,

> Nowhere in Rockefeller's vision was there anything like video, or marginal artists, ,marginal organizations, marginal art forms. If you look down the roster of media funded groups: PASS, the Experimental TV Center, the Kitchen, Asian Cine-Vision, Media Alliance, Film/Video Arts... Rockefeller wouldn't know what any of that was about.-He'd be turning in his grave. (Larson 1989)

But NYSCA was Rockefeller's pet project, and the Governor's powerful hold on the state created a protected environment in which the Council could operate without legislative review. Also contributing to this independence was the size of NYSCA's budget, which was miniscule in relation to the budgets of other New York State agencies.

Thus when it became apparent that a new medium was being created the NYSCA staff had the freedom to take some risks. The timing couldn't have been better. NYSCA's

budget had been growing gradually, from $450,000 in 1961-1962 when it was a temporary arts commission to about $2 million, from which a small percentage of funds were going to support video in 1969-1970. 1969 brought the ground breaking exhibition "TV as a Creative Medium" at the Howard Wise Gallery, which signaled the emergence of video as an art form. The next year NYSCA's budget increased ten-fold to $20.2 million.

Before the increase, funding was an informal arrangement, with staff and panels inventing procedures and initiatives as they went along. In those early days, Film, TV/Media and Literature were a single program under Peter Bradley. Rodger Larson, who was on the first panel, recounted recently,

> Peter Bradley wrote the guidelines for Film, TV and Literature. For film, the guidelines emphasized exhibition, but what they found was that requests were coming in from, filmmakers for production funding, and they didn't know how to handle that because there was that stricture about giving money to individuals [NYSCA's enabling legislation permits grants only to non-profit organizations and government entities]. So they were pretty open to whatever was out there ... they would listen to you and say, 'well that sounds good.' They were responsive to the field because they had no agenda.

This outlook was shared by John Hightower, NYSCA's first Executive Director:

> Video was a new instrument of artistic expression; the syntax wasn't yet clear or refined. How could one say that one person was more articulate or more effectively expressive? The fact was that a contemporary electronic palette was being used and it really wasn't up to the State Arts Council to make curatorial judgments of what was good or bad, particularly since the syntax was so undeveloped. The best thing was to make the permissive and inclusive gamble of funding a lot of experimentation by virtue of the fact that it was experimentation. That was a pretty early part of. the Council's philosophy and concern; to always be more inclusive, than exclusive, and 'accepting of experimentation and. the freedom to fail... (Stem 1977:,147-148)

The most unusual aspect of this is that for once a government entity was ahead of the populace, the politicians and its specialized constituency. It is nothing short of miraculous that the personnel of a state agency sitting on a pile of money were willing to support a medium lacking product, tradition, infrastructure, clout, audience, critical commentary and more than a handful of practitioners. But the temper of those times supported new and adventurous undertakings, particularly those which seemed to hold the

sometimes competing promises for new modes of expressive art and the revolutionary power of mass communication. In effect, an agency formulated for the support of mainstream art institutions worked to the benefit of small activist groups with a broad range of objectives.

Within a few years the NYSCA Media Program had evolved a strategy in which non-profit institutions were funded for activities in four programmatic areas—production, education, exhibition and distribution—with many organizations receiving funds for programs in several areas. Initiatives in support of video tape preservation and critical writing were added later. The intent behind this unambiguously activist approach was the creation, in the shortest possible time, of an encompassing environment for the development of the medium.

The Media Program had a profound effect on organizations throughout the state. Although committed individuals had -earlier established ad hoc organizations in more-orless informal fashion, most media organizations were incorporated in response to the possibility of funding. In some cases, existing organizations re-directed their programs accordingly. Significant New York State media organizations founded or re-directed in the early to mid-seventies include Electronic Arts Intermix, the Experimental TV Center/Owego (originally in Binghamton), Global Village, the Intermedia Arts Center (Bayville), Ithaca Video Projects, The Kitchen, Media Bus (originally the Videofreex), Media Study/Buffalo, Portable Channel, Synapse, The TV Labs at WNET and WXXI, Women's Interart Center, Woodstock Community Video, and Young Filmmakers/Video Arts (now Film/Video Arts):

In short order nearly all the organs of exhibition, equipment access, distribution and broadcast were receiving public subsidies. It was not at all unusual, then as now, to sit in a publicly funded exhibition space to view a tape underwritten by a publicly funded production grant, made with equipment obtained at a publicly funded media access center. It's possible the artist didn't have to earn a living while making the tape, because s/he had received a publicly funded fellowship. The tape, most likely, was rented from a publicly funded distribution agency with public funds. The distributor then shared these publicly funded rental fees with the artist. It is just possible that a review will appear in a publicly funded journal.

Thus, one by-product of NYSCA's and NEA's early involvement 'in video was the accelerated creation of an unusual degree of institutionalization. While video's dependence upon expensive equipment, its crew production and its history of political activism created a propensity for organizational structures, the push to create a non-profit media infrastructure was not preordained. In the early Media panels a fundamental disagreement emerged between those who favored avoiding the substantial costs of institutional overhead by emphasizing the funding of projects of individual "artists of merit" and those who favored placing the funding emphasis on the support of an infrastructure for the general development of the medium. In practical terms the issue often centered on choosing between subsidizing access to equipment at more-or-less open "media access centers" and awarding substantial grants to specific artistic projects for which production services would be purchased on the open market and at special limited-access high-tech centers. While these issues have been continually re-evaluated over the

years (with concurrent shifts in funding emphasis), the initial decision was to support—indeed to create—an encompassing non-profit media infrastructure.

While NYSCA-supported fellowship programs were and are conducted, the awards available through these programs (CAPS and its successor, the Artists Fellowship Program of the New York Foundation for the Arts) never rose above $6,000. (A few substantially larger fellowships, up to $25,000 are available from the NEA.) By using the vast bulk of its resources to support the infrastructure in the early years, the Media Program substantially limited direct support to individual projects.

The "social engineering" implicit in this_ infrastructural approach derives from the activism and optimism of the '60s, and its primary ideal is a profoundly democratic one: if there is to be a new medium—or a radical realignment of an existing one—then access is an entitlement for all citizens. But more than this, the legacy of the sixties was revealed also as an optimistic belief in progress—as earlier embodied in the New Deal, the Fair Deal, the New Frontier and the Great Society—which had the confidence to hold that profound changes in the'social environment could be achieved by government intervention: By extension, action by the state could aid in the creation of an art form which did not yet in any proper sense exist. And conjoined with this political optimism was the belief in another kind of progress, a modernist cultural progress which holds that today's avant-garde is tomorrow's canon: to ignore the nascent is to betray the future.

This populist funding model effectively decentralizes the support of individual practitioners. The infrastructural approach aims at creating a widespread indirect subsidy by enabling the funded organizations to provide services they would not otherwise be able

to provide: a subsidy of the field as a whole in preference to a subsidy of individuals. For exhibition and distribution services, the subsidy makes up the difference between the ticket/rental receipts and operating costs, thus permitting artists to be shown/distributed who could not attract sufficient business to offset the costs of providing services. Since virtually no videomakers were able to attract sufficient business to recover costs, the subsidy was essential to having much of an audience at all. By supporting these operations, public funders were able to bring video to diverse audiences and, ultimately, to further the dialogue between artist and audience necessary for the medium's continued evolution.

The case of subsidized equipment access has more direct aesthetic implications. In that case, public funds underwrote the extremely expensive operations of equipment purchase, administration and maintenance, thus enabling "equipment pools" to rent or loan equipment at very low cost. The effect of this funding strategy was to provide over the years many thousands of small subsidies in the form of free or low-cost equipment access. Moreover, individuals did not have to pass through the rigorous reviews required in formal grant situations so that beginning and experienced videomakers were given access to the apparatus of subsidy with a minimum of fuss and waiting. In most cases, access organizations concurrently conducted publicly subsidized educational programs to introduce newcomers to, the art form.

In theoretical terms, the costs of supporting administrative overhead were justified by a greater equality of access across barriers of age, gender, race, geography, class and by the diversity of formal approaches that might be fostered through such open access.

Realistically, the open access model is inherently limited to low tech tools. Because of the need to distribute limited funds broadly, the largest grants for such purposes were/are in the neighborhood of $55,000, an amount insufficient to purchase and maintain any but the most basic equipment. Thus, equipment throughout most of the seventies was confined mainly to black and white reel-to-reel portapaks, reel-to-reel manual editing systems, relatively inexpensive microphones and simple lighting. Post-production was primitive and all editing systems were cuts-only. Color, unless synthesized, was virtually unknown. Color cameras were then so costly relative to the resources of the system that at one point NYSCA directly purchased one decidedly non-broadcast quality color camera for statewide circulation.

However, in compensation for the limited sophistication of the tools was the extremely low cost of access. In 1978 the Media Equipment Resource Center (MERC), a program of Young Filmakers/Video, Arts, New York City's equipment pool, provided portable equipment and video rough editing gratis; its multi-camera studio was $10 per hour; its "Video Fine Edit" cost $4 per hour. Electronic Arts Intermix was even less expensive. Its-relatively sophisticated editing room cost.$25 per day although a project review was required. Under such circumstances, equipment costs were a small barrier to video producers comfortable with low-end technology. (Legge 1978: 11)

Another important by-product of both direct and indirect public subsidy was the immediate legitimation conferred on unconventional practices of the medium. Significantly, the demise of the term "underground film" and its subsequent replacement by "independent film" coincides with the first public funding of the medium, the

implication being that certain film practices were no longer unrecognized and unsanctioned activities. But what sets video apart from film is that it was never an "underground" activity; because of the coincidence of technology and funding, at no point in its history was video practiced without the possibility of institutional recognition and the accompanying reward systems. Despite the implications of such terms as "Radical Software" and the somewhat disingenuous "Guerrilla Television," public funding in the form of institutional and fellowship support undercut the possibility of marginality in those individuals and groups who chose to participate in the system. Independent video may be marginal in relation to commercial television and the mainstream art world, but for most artists it is neither possible nor desirable to be marginal in relation to a system set up to foster their work. In a relatively indulgent funding system an artist's self-marginality (as expressed in a refusal to "play the game" by applying for grants and gigs) is more irrelevance than independence, and no one wishes to be irrelevant. The practical effect of these sanctions was powerfully centralizing in that virtually all independent production operated or aspired to operate within the subsidized infrastructure of production grants, exhibition opportunities, distribution, etc. (It is, of course,. thoroughly impossible for an organization accepting public funds to remain marginal. Reporting obligations and objective performance requirements force organizations, if they are to receive their second grant, to shape up into some semblance of sound management.)"

What is the interplay between funding and production, between funding and aesthetics? Can it be shown that significant works would not have been made, or would have been made differently, if the infrastructure itself was different?

Simply by looking at gross figures, a relationship between funding and work produced can be seen. In a comparison of institutional funding in New York State and the nation, a 1978 survey of video access organizations listed thirty-nine open and limited-access media organizations nationwide. Nearly 50% were located in New York State. Furthermore, a brief perusal of the survey indicates that the largest and most varied media equipment equipment were then at such New York State institutions as MERC (NYC), Media Study/Baffalo, Electronic Arts Intermix (NYC) and Intermedia Arts Center (Long Island). (Legge: 49)

New York State is also the clear leader in number of prominent practitioners. An unscientific survey of the eighty. titles reviewed in Deirdre Boyle's *Video Classics* shows that more than half received NYSCA support (direct or indirect), or were made by individuals who had previously received NYSCA support or had been resident of New York State for a significant portion of their professional careers. The proportion would be considerably greater if one were to include those works'made .outside New York without NYSCA support, but distributed by NYSCA-supported agencies.

NEA production awards to New York State residents confirm this ratio: 62% of the 1984 awards (this figure includes both film and video) went to New York State residents *(Afterimage.* 1984).

Is it possible to develop a more refined and specific assessment of the aesthetic impact of public support of video? The most reliable assessments can be made by examining two approaches to the medium: documentary and image-processing. Documentary, particularly those works that focus on social problems and the need for

change have an almost inherent ambition for large audiences. The possibility of broadcast vastly redirected this ambition (which I will discuss later in this essay). Oddly enough, image-processing, usually a rather rarefied endeavor directed to a fine arts audience and blessed with relatively modest production costs, was also greatly influenced by public subsidy.

The core aspiration of image-processing is the artists' desire to work in non-mimetic modes—modes which have not, until recently, been supported by commercially available hardware. As a result, specialized equipment was invented through collaborations between electronic designers/computer programmers and artists (or by artists who were themselves electronic designers). Such devices included video synthesizers, image processors, multi-level keyers, automated switchers, frame buffers, colorizers and other equipment capable of creating and manipulating images in ways otherwise inaccessible. The development. of many of these devices was subsidized directly and indirectly by public funds. Directly, by grants for research and development (or purchase of a prototype) and indirectly by substantial purchases by subsidized institutions and by artists who had received fellowships. Because the visual texture and/or dynamic of image-processed tapes is strongly dependent upon the tools employed (an informed viewer can frequently discern the hardware), in a very real sense the designers—and by extension the funders—are collaborators in the evolution of the aesthetic.

Because these specialized devices exist only in unique versions or limited production runs, the practice of image-processed video—except in those few cases where the artists themselves own sufficient equipment—is generally confined to a few publicly

supported studios. Thus, unlike videomakers who utilize conventional tools, those working in image-processed modes are especially dependent upon subsidy because appropriate facilities are available primarily within the subsidized infrastructure.* And organizations that operate the facilities are themselves unusually dependent upon public subsidy because the possibilities for earned income (i.e. fees paid by users) are extremely limited. Work in image-processed video is unusually time-intensive: the specialized tools are so complex in their design and interaction with one another that pre-visualization of all but the simplest processes is essentially impossible. Thus video artists, who generally don't have much money, require long stays at very low cost to do effective work.

In the 1970s, image-processing facilities were supported at Media Study/Buffalo, the Experimental Television Center (Binghamton, now in Owego) and the TV Lab at WNET. Outside New York, notable facilities included the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, whose Image Processor was.designed with public funds by Dan Sandin, and the National Center for Experiments in Television, affiliated with the San Francisco public TV station KQED.

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* Nonetheless, the role of universities and art schools in the support of image-processing should not be minimized. Many educational institutions maintain **image-processing** facilities which are used not only by students, but also by instructors in the creation of their own work.

High-Tech Equipment and Broadcast Television

Although low-cost low-tech equipment was the technological and ideological foundation of independent video, videomakers were clamoring for high-tech tools from the medium's earliest days. In part, this came from frustration over. the limited flexibility and poor signal quality of most low-cost equipment. But it also came from the related matter of television, and the promise of very large audiences.

Inevitably, public funding requires visibility, and for video visibility means broadcast. The infrastructural strategy of fostering production, distribution, exhibition, education, preservation and criticism attempts, implicitly, the creation of a mature art form in the shortest possible time. This ambitious goal is faced with a dilemma due to the different time scales of cultural and political development: cultural developments, at best, require decades; political developments are assessed with each fiscal year.

While video was able to develop unhindered by the constraints of legislative oversight during the Rockefeller years, his elevation to the Vice-Presidency in 1974 put an end to all that. Rodger Larson:

> NYSCA was Rockefeller's pet thing, and it was impervious to political influence. The legislature didn't even know about it, and what they knew about it, they didn't do anything about because he was so powerful.

> After he left, the Council increasingly came under the scrutiny of the state legislature, and they were looking it over head to toe... And Peter [Bradley] said to me, "Rodger, this is the beginning of the politicization of the Council. The good old days are over and it's going to get increasingly worse." (Larson)

When after only four or five years NYSCA had to justify its funding policies, one important way to do so was to smooth the way for the creation of broadcastable works. It was probably not a complete coincidence that the TV Lab was formally constituted in 1974—the year Rockefeller left the governorship—and the Synapse affiliation with the superb broadcast facilities of Syracuse University began the year after. (A similar but more limited artist-in-residence program was established at Rochester public TV station WXXI at around that time.) Also, during those years NYSCA had funded the purchase of time base correctors for several public television stations to facilitate the broadcasting of 1/2" reel-to-reel material. (Time base correctors, which were then quite expensive, enable small format tapes to meet **broadcast** technical standards.) It should be stated that other philanthropic agencies, including the NEA, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and the Rockefeller Foundation, also made important grants to broadcast artist-in-residence programs.

These AIR programs, intended to be the delivery system for high-tech, functioned as limited access facilities. High technology imparts advantages in signal quality and **certain technical operations, such** as the mixing. of several source tapes; intricate, rapid, precise editing; digital effects; multi-generation effects and other post-production options.

High technology is inherently expensive technology and therefore exclusive. The equipment is expensive to purchase, expensive to maintain and expensive to operate. Accordingly, working time is limited, necessitating greater pre-visualization and discipline on the part of the artist and concomitantly diminishing the possibilities for discovery and improvisation. High technology generally requires large grants, with the effect that the work must justify itself on grounds other than its mere excellence, particularly when that excellence, while recognized by cognoscenti, may elude others less familiar with video's expressive modalities. While acceptance as an artist-in-residence did not carry broadcast obligations, it was implicit in the enterprise that the TV Lab was engaged in aiding works both technically and aesthetically suitable for broadcast in their appropriate contexts. Many prominent works were created or post-produced through these programs. It is fair to say that the great majority of these works would not have been created in their final form if such subsidized facilities were not available.

The role of broadcast television in the formation of the aesthetics of independent video is enormous. Television, in diverse ways, is almost always the referent there is work which unabashedly aspires to television, work which wishes to make use of the tools available to television stations, work which in a post-modem vein appropriates or is about television, and work which seeks specifically not to be television. The sheer size of the audience and the prestige of the institution serve to make television broadcast one of the two most important validators of independent video (the other being a major museum show). The political importance of broadcast lies in the funders' ability to rationalize grant activity by pointing to 1) the prestige of broadcast and 2) its ability to deliver large

audiences at comparatively low cost per head. While funding initiatives also aided exhibition opportunities in gallery and media center settings, the audiences were generally small and composed substantially, of initiates: Institutions received substantial subsidies for weekly screenings with ten to thirty persons in attendance. (I remember a few occasions where it was only me, the host and the tape.) With audiences so small, a hard-nosed analysis shows a high cost per person served with attendant difficulties in program justification. But broadcast, with its ability to reach tens of thousands, even on Sunday night, gives the appearance of an efficient use of funds. Thus, for the Media Program officers, the broadcast of subsidized tapes serves to aid in justifying the entire enterprise to those outside the immediate field, such as senior administrators, Council members and legislators. It should be noted that while the system itself has a built-in bias toward broadcast, many videomakers were themselves clamoring for broadcast opportunities.

The effects of broadcast present a paradox: while television has had great force in channeling aesthetics, the efforts of independents to break into the broadcast system have not been broadly successful. In essence, broadcast's power is so great that its slender possibility is sufficient to skew the development of the medium. Ralph Hocking, the founder and Director of the Experimental Television Center/Owego, a major center for image-processed video, acknowledged the powerful allure of broadcast to the field at large:

> We started this thing to provide alternatives to commercial television. Gradually we're being absorbed into a structure of high technology and delivery systems—broadcast. We're being

> told that the only way to exist is to become part of this. If we can no longer do what we set out to do we may as well quit. (as quoted by Trend 1981:4)

Video *art*, referring in this context to non-documentary tapes which make use of video as an art form in itself, has been broadcast only in special series conducted sporadically at unlikely and inconspicuous time slots without much in the way of promotion. Particularly for documentaries, the validation of television. has an enormous impact on fund raising from public and private sources, and thus on program structure and content. Debra Zimmerman, Director of Women Make Movies, a non-profit organization devoted to distribution of tapes by and about women, observes,.

> The documentary has been totally perverted by television: Because of the structures of PBS: programs of 58 minutes, accessibility and a narrator that takes you through the stages: First I'm going to tell you what you're going to see, then I'm going to show you what you see, then I'm going to tell you how you just saw what you saw.' This is the modus operandi of television documentary. In order for PBS to compete in its own fashion, they have to put this kind of stuff on.

> Whether the program will get on TV is hanging over the head of anyone who produces media. It is the single largest audience that anyone can find and a major legitimation. And right now I think that's a terrible problem because everyone who comes to me with a proposal going to a funder all put down "my work will be shown on PBS." Ha! I've gotten more calls than I can count from funders following up on artists' proposals asking "Will this work get on PBS?" This is very disturbing. Even though they [PBS and CPB] give very little money they still have substantial impact on what gets made. Rationally, because they fund so few projects and give so little money they should have very little impact. If you have any intention of getting the program on PBS, which is an important part of your funding proposal, it has to be designed in a certain acceptable fashion. (Zimmerman 1988)

The efforts of independents to gain access to CPB program funds through open solicitation have generally met with disappointing results. In one striking episode, the staff or the CPB-funded series *Crisis-to-Crisis* had approved for funding none of the 305 submissions it received from independents. Although outside readers for the series recommended 42 proposals, one CPB staff member remarked, "People didn't understand what we were looking for, so we decided that rather than dilute the concept we'd withhold any funding." Jennifer Lawson, the CPB Program Coordinator stated,

> Part of the problem is that the concerns of independent producers are out of sync with the intentions of *Crisis-to-Crisis* ... We get a lot of proposals to do cultural documentaries on things like the decline of the family farm, and while they might make interesting films, they're not the kind Af things our audience is interested in. Our responsibility is two sided, both to independent producers and to our audience... Public television does not exist in a vacuum. (as quoted by Trend 1981:3)

The dilemma is that television, even when specifically subsidized for independent work, is a top-down exercise in program control, likely to be out of touch with the independent producers. As one public television executive explained,

> Our biggest problem is that there is no room to fail:.. You don't have room to experiment... Unfortunately, being sophisticated in this system means knowing what can be funded, and that means you don't even bother to put forward things on the cutting edge, that might even be a little controversial. (Gever 1988: 18)

In essence, public television is too expensive to take risks, because risks entail the possibility of alienating underwriters and the upper middle-class, middle-age viewers who are the mainstay of fund drives and ratings. Public broadcasting's own marketplace has a strongly normative aesthetic role.

In the earliest days of video, there was virtually no opportunity to get on television, and certain technical issues conspired to keep independents off the airwaves. But since the late 1970s improvements in equipment have made "broadcast quality" an easily achievable goal. And while the number remains small, there are now more opportunities for broadcast than ever before and it is apparent that these opportunities are creating a centripetal force acting on the development of the documentary form. Almost without exception, the public broadcast of independent works is supported with public funds.

The aesthetic impact of working consciously for broadcast is well illustrated in two tapes by John Reilly. *The Irish Tapes*, made with Stefan Moore in 1972 is a documentary survey of conflict in Northern Ireland. It stands in sharp stylistic and ideological contrast to Giving Birth: Four Portraits, made with Julie Gustafson, and released in 1976.

Technically, *The Irish Tapes* exists at the ground zero of video. It was made with a black and white reel-to-reel portapak (although not a particularly reliable example of its breed, to judge from all the glitches, tracking errors, drop-outs and other obvious technical imperfections) without clear hope or expectation of broadcast. Due to equipment limitations all transitions are cuts only and all edits are audio and video together (i.e. there are no edited cut-aways or drop-ins). On the one hand this absence of expectation for mainstream distribution grants the videomakers some degree of expressive freedom while on the other they are severely constrained by technical limitations. It is a tribute to Reilly and Moore that they were able to overcome these technical limitations to produce a remarkable and evocative work.

In sharp contrast to conventional documentary, the hand held camera in *The Irish Tapes* is never for a moment static and constantly roves over details and telling images. This approach to camera work—in which editorial judgments are performed live—is the most striking stylistic aspect of the tape. Another hallmark is the "real-time cut-away," in which the camera wanders from the interview subject to reveal other aspects of the scene. One assumes that this maneuver developed out of the impossibility of performing cutaways in post-production. Sometimes the camera hits something interesting, sometimes it doesn't, sometimes it must refocus, reframe or rezoom several times before it lands on something significant. But it doesn't much matter because we are observing aspects of the documentary process which are, in more conventional products, concealed- in The editing. Moreover, the content of the tape is so charged, the scenes so fascinating, and the information so dense, that the tape is riveting.

These stylistic devices operate in support of an ideological stance in which the medium—in sharp distinction to the practices of broadcast television—eschews a special and privileged authority. The impromptu and wandering camera negates the authority typically accorded a deliberate and steady gaze: a camera that "knows what it sees and knows where it's going." In the interviews themselves—all person-on-the-street—the makers display no pretension to knowing more than the participants or audience. Instead, they are explorers and witnesses, presenting as evidence for their own and our understanding the images, words and sounds of a society blown apart. Moreover, the complete absence of other devices of authority, such as voice-overs and expert interviews, reinforces the immediacy and actuality of the reportage. While no ideological position is

directly stated, the inference of strong Catholic sympathy is unmistakable.

Reilly had little expectation of broadcast when he made *The Irish Tapes* in 1972. The work was edited for display in two formats: a multi-channel installation format on six to twelve monitors and a single-image version for straight playback. The tape's technical quality was so poor that when it was finally broadcast by WNET in 1975 they were unable to air the tape directly and had to resort to rescanning (shooting tape playback off a monitor) to meet government technical regulations.

Judging from appearances, *Giving Birth: Four Portraits* was planned for broadcast from the beginning. The stylistic and methodological shifts are striking in comparison with *The Irish Tapes.* Nearly all the defining characteristics of the earlier work are here substantially conventionalized.

This work examines the process of giving birth as experienced by four couples with different approaches to delivery: a standard hospital delivery with local anesthesia, a home birth on Leboyerist principles, an attempt at natural childbirth which results in a caesarean, and a nurse/mid-wife delivery according to natural practices. Each couple occupies its own self-contained section and there are no references across sections. The impressionistic and personalized documentary technique of *The Irish Tapes,* in which the editing is based more on kinetic momentum than thematic continuity, is here supplanted by "slices of life" enclosed with a traditional descriptive stance presented by an objective observer. This attempt at objectification is further enhanced by the statements of experts—interviews from which the questions were excised—which are intercut with documentary footage and parental interviews. Thus, each of the four approaches to

birthing is contextualized by an authoritative statement. In each section, it appears that the expert is unknown to the family and is not directly involved jn the delivery, thus enhancing the implication of objectified authority.

Stylistically, the tape is in sharp contrast to previous work. The "eternal present" of *The Irish Tapes* has been abandoned, supplanted by strong narrative control established by skillful use of establishing sequences, flashbacks and flashforwards, repetition of shots in flashback, and staged reaction shots within interviews. Considerably greater. attention is paid to production values in the later work. Shot in color (except a section where a low-light black and white camera was employed), artificial lighting is used fqr many locations and all interviews. In sharp contrast to *The Irish Tapes,* the interviews are shot in close-up or medium close-up without background or ambiance; the camera neither reframes nor leaves its subject; all shots except those of the actual births are deliberate, clearly focused, steady and frontal, with none of the energetic roving of the earlier tape. More advanced post-production equipment permitted Reilly and Gustafson to bypass the "dynamic cutaways" used so effectively in the earlier work. In contrast to the rather frenetic pace of *The Irish Tapes,* the editorial tempo of Giving Birth is, overall, rather measured and deliberate.

Nonetheless, *Giving Birth* is unmistakably the work of independents, not only in the circumstances of its creation and funding but also for its content. Even slipped in at 11 pm on Sunday night, the tape presents subject matter inconceivable on commercial television, and deals with its sensitive subject with candor and maturity. It is a fine and touching work.

For all this, however, *Giving Birth is* basically a detached, balanced, well-considered survey of contemporary social phenomena. The radical and personal expression of independent documentary as manifested in *The Irish Tapes* has here been tamed. The striking divergence between these two tapes underscores the irony of broadcast: access to better equipment, more generous budgets and larger audiences carries with it also the intense pressure to conventionalize modes of expression. That only three years separates the making of these two very different works serves to confirm the powerful accelerative forces operating on the development of video.

The Future of the Infrastructure

In recent years new emphasis at NYSCA has been placed on the support of projects of individual artists, chiefly through the Individual Artists Program, begun in 1984. Although applications are submitted through non-profit organizations—a process called sponsorship.—applications are judged primarily on grounds of artistic merit and awards are made without institutional review. .

Project funding tends to foster more ambitious and expensive productions than are fostered by fellowship and institutional support. In 1986-7, thirty project grants totaling $400,000 were awarded in amounts ranging from $6,300 to $25,000 *(Afterimage* 1988), which represent only partial project support, the full project budgets are usually much

higher. Fellowship awards to individual artists in the CAPS and NYFA programs, by comparison, have never risen above $6,000. The 'need for carefully considered descriptions, detailed budgets, and a willing institutional sponsor combined with the fact that for the lucky ones, the delay between the application and the check is most of a year, foster a more deliberate and pre-planned approach to production. -Also influential is the size of the grants: the availability of such amounts tends to define the size of productions, at least at the lower end. It is reasonable to suppose that when grants of $15,000 are available from a primary source, video projects costing $20,000 $40,000 will. often be proposed. Similarly, grants of $7000 are likely to engender proposals of $10,000 - $25,000.

Technological developments have tended to reduce—but by no means to eliminate—the dependence of videomakers on the infrastructure. Adjusted for inflation, the cost of equipment has fallen dramatically while signal quality has substantially improved. Moreover, several routes to relatively affordable high quality production have opened, most notably the On-Line and Standby programs, in which otherwise unbooked time at high-end commercial post-production facilities is made available to independents at substantially reduced rates. For instance, editing rooms which normally rent for $800 per hour are thus made available to independents for $125 per hour. While both On-Line and Standby receive subsidies for program coordination from NYSCA and the NEA, the post-production services themselves are not subsidized.

While public funders have maintained their basic commitment to the infrastructure they helped establish, subsidies have not substantially risen and when adjusted for

inflation, have actually declined. At the same time, operating budgets of constituent organizations have risen dramatically. The resulting gap has forced organizations to restructure themselves economically—and therefore programatically just to maintain existing services. Such restructurings often pose difficult challenges to organizations wishing to maintain their original mission.

These two developments—declining subsidies and increased emphasis on funding the projects of individuals—have changed the expressed purpose of public funding of video in recent years. What was originally proffered as continuing support of video's infrastructure has now come to be considered "seed money" to be used for partial support of programs which will generate substantial other sources of income, earned or from private contributions, private foundations and corporate donations. John Giancola, then Media Director of NYSCA, observed in 1980 that it "was generally perceived within NYSCA, principally by the fiscal people, that the TV/Media program had to be brought into line with the funding policies for other disciplines." This meant that NYSCA was attempting to lower its contribution to the operating budget of media centers, which had ranged from 20% to 80% to no more than 25% with a maximum of $50,000. Specifically exempted from this requirement were the Experimental TV Center/Owego, Film/Video Arts and Synapse (which folded in 1982) because the nature of the "core services"(equipment access) they provide "makes it more difficult to raise funds." If their funding were cut back to the 25% level, it was unlikely they would survive. (Sturken 1980:2)

For the most part, attempts to obtain funds from privatefoundations and corporate sources have not been very successful although some private foundations have responded. Commonly, institutions are depending upon greater "earned income" to fill the gap. Earned income generally refers to fees paid by users for services: for access organizations, equipment rental fees; for exhibitors, ticket sales; for distributors, tape rental fees, etc. Thus, with an ever-diminishing subsidy, organizations are asking the users to carry a greater portion of the burden. This marketplace solution forces the organizations to focus on activities which have the greatest likelihood of earned income; further discouraging enterprises out of the mainstream.

While Media Director of NYSCA, John Giancola delivered this analysis to a conference of media arts centers in 1983:

> 1. Government Funding: In. terms of government funding of the media arts movement, a distinct period is ending and another is beginning. The period ending may be distinguished in two major ways: 1) there was a lot of money loose in the economy; and 2) there was a floating up of grassroots intellectuality, creativity and ideas, however radical or discontinuous those ideas were to and with the prevalent culture. In the small, innovative and emerging field such as media arts, the funder and the applicant often found themselves in a kind of partnership. By nature, the

field was chaotic, but that never seemed to bother its major supporters; in fact, the chaos was seen as a kind of health. It was on some level an adventure—an adventurous partnership. Ever critical of each other, funder and applicant were, nevertheless, in a cultural symbiosis.

In the next period, they will be, by necessity, in an economic symbiosis. Government funders will demand more by way of formal accountability (natural in a tight money situation). The darling infant media arts of the late sixties, already perceived as a somewhat unruly teen-ager by the late seventies, is now clearly over twenty-one and on its own.

Is the media arts ready to be on its own? I daresay not. And of course it isn't—not yet anyway. Two hard facts must still be reckoned with: (A) Government funders -have less money to give (less money by far when inflation is factored); and (B) over time, the government arts agencies will act less :like cultural supporters and more like economic supporters of culture. Why? Because the funding agencies (government and non-government alike) must themselves respond to societal trends in order to survive.

> Tight money means "Back to basics!" Back to basics means "How does your media center manage? Well, or poorly?" More than ever, that will count. The adventurous partnership is over. The "new" adventure is that the practical partnership has begun. (Giancola 1983)

At the same conference, Brian O'Dougherty of the NEA was more direct: "You can't move on without courting wealth, power and connections." (as quoted *by Afterimage* 1983). The field reacted indignantly to'this sentiment. In his response, Lawrence Sapadin, Executive Director of the Association of Independent Video and Filmmakers, advocated an increased public role as a necessary guarantor of diversity:

> The challenge is not to fool bankers into thinking we are profitable or good for their image, but to fight to•expand the public sector to guarantee a thriving, independent media that speaks for diverse 'interests and unrepresented communities. To seek support among bankers and real estate brokers is to ally with those who will tolerate you as long as you are polite. To seek support among those for whom you provide a voice is to ally yourself with people who are passionately committed to your survival *(Afterimage* 1983).

Nonetheless, the public funders now provide a smaller proportion of operating budgets than at any time in the past. These funding changes force a degree of institutional caution and make difficult the establishment of new institutions.

Funding budgets have remained more or less constant, and the maintenance of the infrastructure leaves little left over for new initiatives. As one funding officer observed,

> Anyone who has had to manage a department's budget at the Council realizes how little flexibility there really is to make changes from year to year. There's very little room to budge. There's not a lot left over after you've made the basic awards... There are always things you can juggle...but unless people are willing to make radical changes, it's extremely difficult to move things. You'd have to decide certain kinds of activities were simply not going to be supported any more. You could be like the Rockefeller Foundation, "We'll only fund inter-cultural, cross-cultural and related projects." It's more difficult for a public agency and it's even more difficult for a program that bears the broad supportive role for its field. It becomes a moral issue, and that's the way it's felt... Two million dollars is enough to make a difference, but because so much is spoken for, it's difficult to make a change. (Anonymous 1989)

New York State's media infrastructure has contracted during the Reagan years. Important organizations in all regions have ceased operation, although the effect is felt most acutely in upstate areas. Media Study/Buffalo, Ithaca Video Projects, Synapse, Portable Channel (Rochester), Woodstock Community Video, the access program of ZBS Media, the video program at the Everson Museum (Syracuse) and Qthers have shut down. Although they closed for diverse reasons, the troubling reality is that, except in the case of Squeaky Wheel in Buffalo, no new groups have risen to take their place. The great majority of organizations currently delivering subsidized services.were founded in the 1970s and few new institutions have been created. Outside New.York City, the infrastructure has always been just one layer thick, so when the top layer fails, there's nothing below to take its place. The effect of this infrastructural failure is to lessen the opportunity to make and view video in large areas of the State. .

It may eventually be seen that the ambitious state enterprise of attempting to broadly distribute opportunities to make and view video was an 'act of cultural and political hubris predestined to a brief life span: a transitional phenomenon with a significant legacy. The failure of new organizations to take up the slack left by those which have failed may indicate that there is no real slack to take up. It may be that the activism of public funders simply gave the appearance of decentralization by supporting organizations which, being peripheral to their communities, fulfilled no essential needs.

However, institutions can play a central role in their communities, and government support can be of critical importance of those institutions. In one striking incident, when Media Study/Buffalo ceased delivering access and exhibition services, a grass-roots effort

of local video and film makers organized Squeaky Wheel, which successfully and immediately secured NYSCA funding for a wide variety of programs. Even the organization's name (it's the squeaky wheel which gets the oil) is evidence of the pervasive influence and a priori expectation of public funding. Similarly, when the NEA unexpectedly cut the Experimental Television Center's grant from $9,000 in 1986-7 to nothing in 1987-1988, an outpouring of support and donations from its users—and a one-time special grant from NYSCA—enabled it to keep its doors open. From these two cases, it is indisputable that the infrastructure can be of critical importance to videomakers.

Overall, the enterprise which is independent video must be judged a success. Video is regularly exhibited in museums, collected in libraries, taught at universities and art schools nationwide and, most important; practiced by more artists than at any time in its history. To balance this, independent video does not reach a wide audience, nor has it spawned vital critical dialogues, nor .has it achieved the cultural legitimacy attractive to corporate and private underwriters. And of course, video has not developed—and has no apparent prospect of developing—an independent marketplace analogous to those which exist for the other visual arts. For lack of an alternative, today, as in the past, the medium remains substantially dependent upon public subsidy.

Perhaps, in the coming era of government austerity, the medium's inherent paradox will become apparent: that independent video is independent only as long as it is supported by government funds. Video was engendered by a singular and unnatural act, the underwriting of radical aspirations with public money, and was shaped by that support and came to depend on it. And while those active in the field accept this benevolent

patronage as part of the natural order—as indeed it should be—the conflation of cultural/political radicalism with public philanthropy is patently an unstable mixture. This instability combined with altered economic and social conditions make it unlikely that the practice of the medium can long remain so thoroughly encapsulated by public funding. In the future, video will either break out of its declining public subsidy or be condemned to live within it.

It may be that we have already left the first historical period of video. This developmental stage was marked by various forms of experimentation: formal, technological and contextual. Partially because of the infrastructural subsidy, the aesthetics of the medium were relatively unconstrained by the necessity of attracting large audiences. While many videomakers may have wanted to reach a large public, general audiences were not absolutely necessary to the practice of the art and a great diversity of work was produced and exhibited. Insofar as agencies took on a large share of the economic burden, the most important audience was composed of initiates: the artists, administrators and critics who mold opinion in the video world and, as it happens, were likely to serve on funding review panels. It is hard to see how an art medium receiving government support in its early stages could have functioned otherwise.

But if we are now in video's second phase, it is impossible to get a firm handle on all the factors which will contribute to the evolution of the medium. One thing is certain, the philanthropic "market forces" which assisted the medium in its first stage will be vastly attenuated in importance relative to the medium's needs. In part, this will be caused by a relative "drying up" of public grants. In addition, needs themselves.may change as a

result of the likely expansion of video brought on by the wide availability of camcorders and home VCRs. While the aesthetic impact of these two factors is impossible to project, the medium will certainly "open up" in the same way that many "serious photographers" received their first exposure (no pun) to photography by taking snapshots with Instamatic cameras. It may be that the medium is about to make the transition from a small, relatively elite enterprise to an omnipresent and fully assimilated component of the information landscape. Therefore, some of the populist aspiration of "Guerrilla Television" may yet be realized, although we should recognize the pungent irony that the forces underlying this media dispersion will have little to do with the practices and ideology of independent video. They will instead derive from the manufacturing and marketing abilities of large Japanese companies.

While its future forms are unpredictable, video as art, as documentary, and as a tool for activism will undoubtedly continue. In the past twenty years videomakers have created a body of work so impressive and varied that the aesthetic foundations for the future development of the medium are in place. Insofar as the NEA and NYSCA were strongly influential in- the creation of this body of work, the aesthetic' influence of these two agencies will be felt for a long time to come.

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AT ARM'S LENGTH: (TAKING A GOOD HARD LOOK AT) ARTISTS' VIDEO

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