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VIDEO ART AND TELEVISION

London 1986

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INTRODUCTION

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"I believe it is the responsibility of artists, writers and critics to fight over the new means of communication because they are not neutral, they dominate our lives now and they will dominate our lives even more in the future (1)".

The realization that we are all influenced by the power of the mass media is not new. An awareness of the difficulties in contending this influence is however more recent. From this awareness must come the realization that art despite its 'creative' posture is not necessarily the perfect means for enacting this contention. As Conrad Atkinson illustrated in a talk entitled 'Art and politics', the "Medicis of the present day in the west are the multi national corporations, they control the means of communication as never before"(2). They control not just the mass media, they also have a hugh stake in the control of the 'fine arts'. To try and intervene with one against the other is like trying to play the two sides of one coin against each other.

Herbert Read traces this monopolisation to the Renaissance where with the transition from religious control of society to the 'productive' systems economic control of society the artist switched from portraying the glory of God on chapel roofs to asserting the glory of man for anyone who could afford such luxery. In the process the arts became part of the productive system, produced by it and valued by it, despite continual and deceptive claims that art is produced in a creative vacuum. This position remains unchanged today except the patron is now a governmant or a corporation and portraiture is no longer necessary - we have also incidentally become obsessed with the glory of the artist.

Lr.,

WE ARE INTERESTED IN TELEVISION

"- public property -"

"- this is a television reciever -"

"- more interesting than television -"

"- cheaper and more available -"

"We repudiate so called easel painting and every kind of art favoured by ultra-intellectual circles, because it is aristrocratic, and we praise monumental art in all its forms, because it is public property (1)".

So wrote David A. Siqueros in support of what he called 'integral' art. He well understood the difficulties, in a world where canvas painting holds such a dominant position, of presenting any kind of visual art as truly public property. Painting has, at least in the current century, been considered fine art in its purest form much to the expense of other forms. This has nothing to do with some innate superiority in canvas painting , instead it a market consideration. Painting is the most easily acquired, transported and displayed of art forms and this is its attraction. In an attempt to counter this there has been a growth of unmarketable art works - the interest in performance, land art and time based work is directly connected to this. These actions although succeeding in re-siting the art work out side the gallery or collection has not succeeded in making them public property or re-siting them outside the gallery 'mentality'.

At the time that David Siqueros was praising public sculpture and mural, painting it is worth remembering, that films were still without sound, radio was in its infancy and television was unheard of. Today they are the most powerful purveyors of messages and they are in the viewing and listening sense public property.

"The idea that we have any choice whatsoever, in a completly technological enviorment, is pretty ridiculous, we only assume we make a choice (2)".

Lr.,

In the sixties, with the arrival of portable video equipment, the true democratisation of television was proclaimed. At last anyone could control their viewing, fast forwarding, cutting and repeating broadcast material while more importantly they could produce their own programmes. "Television has been attacking us all our lives, now we can attack it back" said Nam June Paik (3). Nearly twenty years later this all sounds like Andy Lipman's manifesto for scratch which, despite having a hugh resource of privately owned video equipment, has been no more successful in putting this idea into practice. In the words of Stuart Marshall, "video seemed little more than a 'hiccup' in the vast corporate and military development of electronic information technology (4)". Despite these past failures there is a current optimism in the British video arts that the time is now ripe for furthur involvement in television and attempting to, at some level, diversify its repetitive and routine content. Anyone jumping at such an opportunity should bear in mind however a statement by Conrad Atkinson - "artists have for some time been under the illusion that they produce art. Now with a little examination it seems that a more accurate description could be that societies or political systems dictate what kind of patronage is needed for the kinds of art which are the most useful and least dangerous to the stability of, and the promotion of the aims and aspirations, of that system (5)". Artists may go into television,believing that they are going to provide some alternative to the orthodox television,only to find themselves induced into and becoming part of that system. It is a case of the kind of advertising against advertising which was advocated by Les Levine when he said that "companies do have the possibility to control you, if you are hooked into them you have the possibility to control back (6)". Except within the context of television, financial dependance is not

going to give video artist autonomy to advertise against their financiers advertisments.

Televisions interest in video art is as a means of perpetuating its own business interests. It may do this by selling advertising space around the material or more likely the presence of art programmes and the like will widen the viewing possibilities of that station and through association give it some 'cultural' credibility. Within these limitations of contrary aims, between artist and company, it should be possible for artists to inject a little of there dissatisfaction. Indeed one of the most enjoyed intellectual persuits is self criticism and television companies will revel in a little of it - it may well strengthen their position. Nonetheless, it is a campaign which must be attempted.

Independant producion and distribution must also be mentioned here, for its objectives are much the same but without relying on the accepted channels. This kind of independance from major companies has existed in pirate radio and independant record and video production for a number of years, and it is perhaps the closest that electronic media has come to being used as 'folk art'.

"Cassettes are used for their immediacy, availability and low cost. Production and editing are kept to a minimum. Such strategies are seen as politically and economically progressive in that control of the means of production and the final product are maintained by each group. Anti music is industrial folk music" (7). This theme will be looked at more closely in the section on scratch video.

"The fact is we are interested in television. Either in changing it,

adapting it, incorporating it, selling it,free basing it or just plain getting our work onto it (8)" - John Sanborn.

The following sections consider how successful or unsuccessful, in the mid eighties, British video is being in achieving some of these objectives. The four tapes refered to at lenght address at least four of the six objectives noted obove.

"This is a television reciever which is a box. The shell is of wood, metal or plastic. On one side, most likely the side you are looking at, there is a large rectangular opening, this opening is filled with a curved glass surface which is emitting light. The light passing through the curved glass surface varies in intensity over that surface - from dark to light in a variety of hues. These form shapes which often appear as images, in this case the image of a man. But it is not a man (9)".

The tape 'this is a television reciever', like the three other tapes discussed in this section, appeared as part of an Arts Council sponsored compilation called 'deconstruction'. "All these tapes", says selector for this section Mark Wilcox, "in one way or another attack the beliefs and conventions which govern the way our world is represented on television and in the cinema (10)". In this tape it is the electronic illusion of the television screen which is attacked and also the presentation of 'factual' information on television.

The piece was concieved by David Hall and made with the assistance of BBC 2, with the knowlege that it would appear on broadcast television. Something which is unusual with the usual hit and miss relationship between video arts and television.

In the tape farmiliar newsreader Richard Baker, dressed in the standard newsreading costume of sombre suit and tie, delivers a monologue that exposes the illusion that in a television newsbroadcast somebody is actually talking to us. For this the camera angle, eye contact and assured voice all mimic the real news broadcast. Having created this strong visual illusion that Richard Baker is talking directly to us the monologue destroys it by telling us that the voice is emitted not

from his lips but from a loudspeaker and that although it looks like a man it is not infact a man.

This address is repeated three times and each time the sound and picture are re recorded - causing the face and voice to degenerate and become grotesquely distorted.

Then this figure of authority is reduced to what it really is - a series of pulsating patterns of light on a glass screen coupled with electronically produced 'sound' vibration. The illusion of authority and information is shattered. The paramiters in which the news and other authoritive information programmes exist on television are very narrow. Dress, speech, age, even sex are tightly regimented, and it is by slipping neatly into the confines of this role and then exploding it that Hall has managed to make such an impression. The ingenuity of this tape is startling, by repeating and re-recording the piece not only is the media newsreader destroyed but also the alternative meaning that Hall has supplied. We learn at the beginning that the voice is electronic and comes not from the mouth but from an apperture at the front of the set. We accept that, it seems to confirm ideas we already have although they may be unexpressed, so we believe it - partly I suspect because we have been informed of it by none other that soberly dressed, well spoken Richard Baker who is in his late thirties. So illusion has been attacked to the extent that we are told it exists, but then we have been told of its existance by the illusion itself. It is not until the entire piece self destructs beyond recognition that we can be sure we have been told the truth. Then we can be quite sure that television is illusion and should be treated with scepticism. The thin line between recogisable sound and

light patterns and arbritrary ones should make us realise the thin line between electronic literacy and illiteracy.

"The challenge of video artists is to make things that are more interesting than television (11)".

'Nil by mouth' and 'Calling the shots' are both British tapes made within a year of each other. Both, in the forms appearing here, are thirteen minutes long and both were selected as tapes involved in deconstruction for an Arts Council package called 'Subverting Television'. Both are also based on what could be described as American forms - 'Nil by mouth' is derivative of American structuralist video making while 'Calling the shots' is emulative of popular American film making.

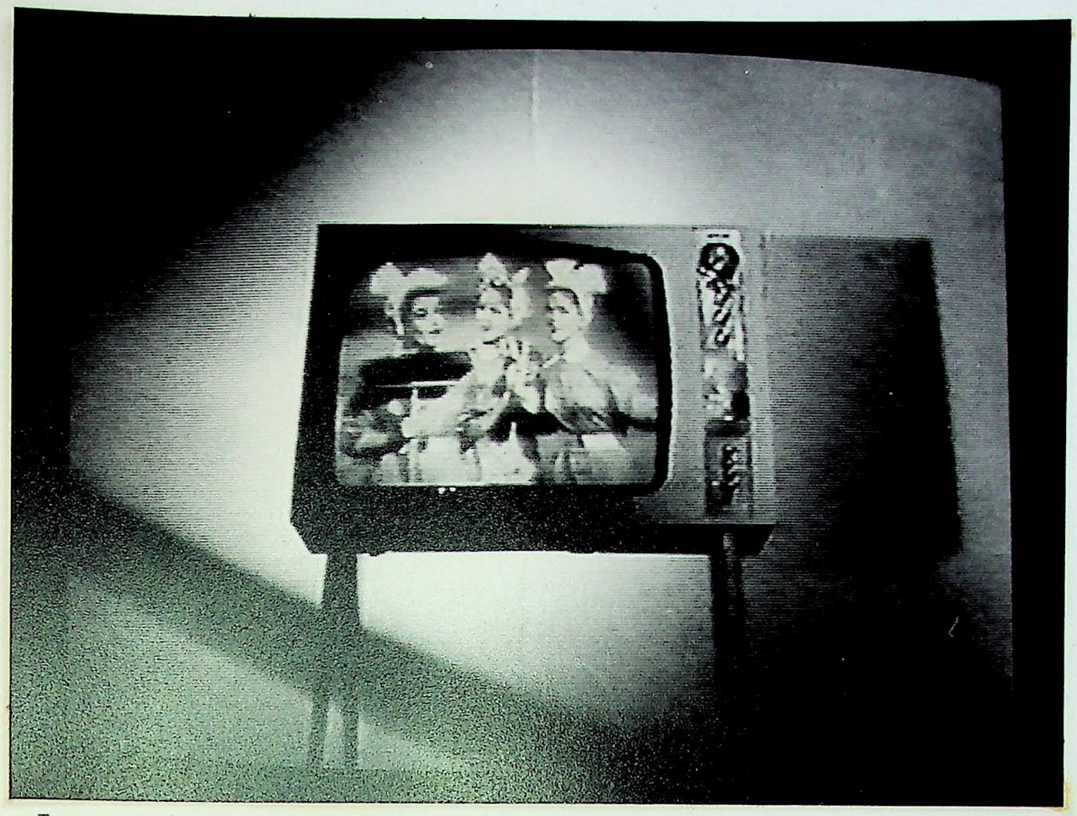
'Nil by mouth' involves the physical deconstruction of the viewers viewing enviroment during a simultaneous radio and television broadcast of a Beethoven symphony. The artist meticulously removes all the fittings from his living room, starting with the books, book shelves and carpet and finishing with the disconnection of his radio and television equipment - leaving the set in bleak silence.

Richard Baker, as the presenter of the concert, is again heard, again the voice of authority, in this cas authority on 'culture'. The tape through a number of visual puns and surprises assaults the cohesion of sound and image; something upon which television is totally dependant. The piece is however, symbolic deconstruction only, it does not take apart our means of viewing this spectacle, which is the static video camera and monitor through which we see this scene. To do this, author Graham Young would have to have interfered with the internal circuits

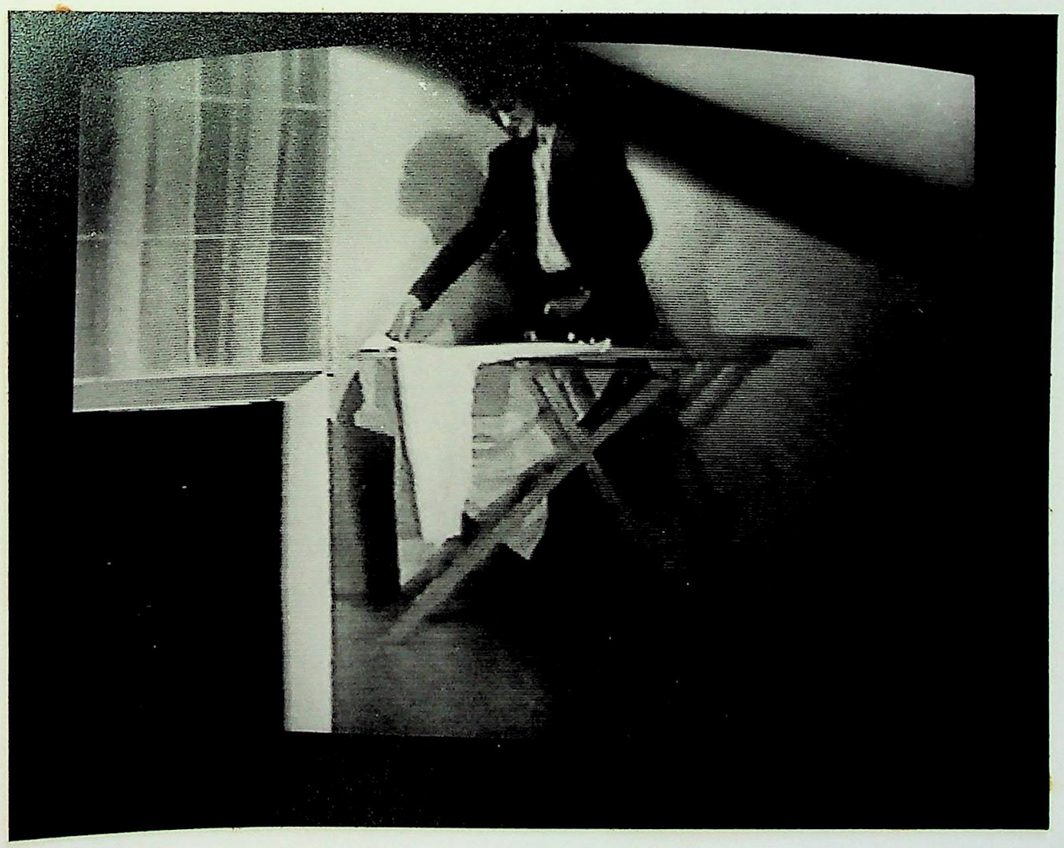
and tubes of the equipment. This is something Nam June Paik came close to doing in the late sixties with his distortions of television images. These were produced by moving powerful magnets around the screen, thus causing distortions rather like fairground 'crazy mirrors'. They demonsrated televisions dependance on electrical and magnetic information. A process not to dissimilar from that which occurs in Hall's "this is a television reciever".

'Nil by mouth' seems to have strong connections with the kind of 'action' performance so common in the sixties where commonplace actions and movements were transformed into artworks. If viewed from this perspective 'Nil by mouth' slips even furthur from successful or even intended deconstruction, is it simply a man moving house, presented and documented as such. Action performance did not have as its objective deconstruction of anything except preconceptions about what is and what is not high art. It was not analysing the actions but attacking what was and was not thought to be art. Unfortunatly in packages such as this 'Subverting television' compilation there is seldom space given for statements by the actual artists, thus the tapes are subjugated to the ideas of the compiler. Graham Young's objectives may have been quite different. No such difficulty exists with 'Calling the shots' for it was made by programme selector Mark Wilcox.

'Calling the shots' is a pointed and determined attack on media stereotyping. It reconstructs, not once but three times, a scene from a re-run Hollywood movie of the fifties. The first reconstruction is loyal to the original, the male character is cool and relaxed in a square suit, slickly making advances towards the passive female. His ambition is to get his photographs into the museum of modern art while



Irons, shoes and television sets - "Calling the shots", Mark Wilcox.



she dreams of being an actrss - and presumably of him. Shots of irons, ironing boards and high heel shoes all push the implied female role furthur towards the decorative and domestic. While the garish pink walls of the room are openly sexual. In the second reconstruction the female plays her role with the same assertiveness that had previously been reserved for the male, usurping his authority and much to the tapes credit placing the audience in a state of some discomfort. As the woman ignors the man, the cinemas view of male charisma is shattered, the males cool stylization is then uncomfortable and absurd. Yet despite our knowlege that these stereotypes are stylized to the extreme if not entirely fictitious, and shown as being unlike any real situations, we still cling to them. The fact that numerous contempory productions reiterate these same stereotypes amply demonstrates this. This reconstruction then manages to cause discomfort and embarrassment where it should not exist except if you conclude that despite ourselves we aspire to the code of behaviour portrayed in films and on the television.

In the last reconstruction the male character plays to the cameras alone, moving uncomfortably through the props and script as if in rehersal. We see the cameras, lights and technicians putting the scene together, the falseness and frailty of the production is in evidence everywhere.

'Calling the shots' is a funny and disturbing tape and for these reasons compulsive. Its references lie firmly within the popular forms, they provide a basis for working against and for expanding from. 'Nil by mouth' on the other hand works in a reverse way - its references are in art practice, even in its choice of a symphony, and it retreats furthur

"I am an actress" - Roxy Spencer in "Calling the shots", Mark Wilcox.

Lr.,

and furthur into these practices as the tape continues. Perhaps it is a question of interpreting Young's objectives incorrectly but artists approaching the broadcast format must consider the potential audience. Mass audiences are unlikely to view these tapes in the same way as those trained in the art world. That is not due to any lack of sophistication - on the contrary, television is more sophisticated than art video is likely to be - but it is a different dicipline and requires different approaches. If video art is to be successful on television it must minimize the discrepancy of expectation between itself and television. That is the real distinction between 'Calling the shots' and 'Nil by mouth': 'Nil by mouth' provokes a fairly immediate change of channel for everybody except the initiated and even quite a few of them would rather watch something else.

"The art world should be seen as a social system rather than producing objects for use by that social system (12)".

While'Calling the shots' while obviously comming from the art world deals with more universal issues. Through its use of our preconceptions of the media it manages to entertain and seduce us into watching it. It will never compete with the soap opera,with which it deals,in terms of viewing figures,but it is sufficiently unpredictable and captivating that its content will be made available to many people.

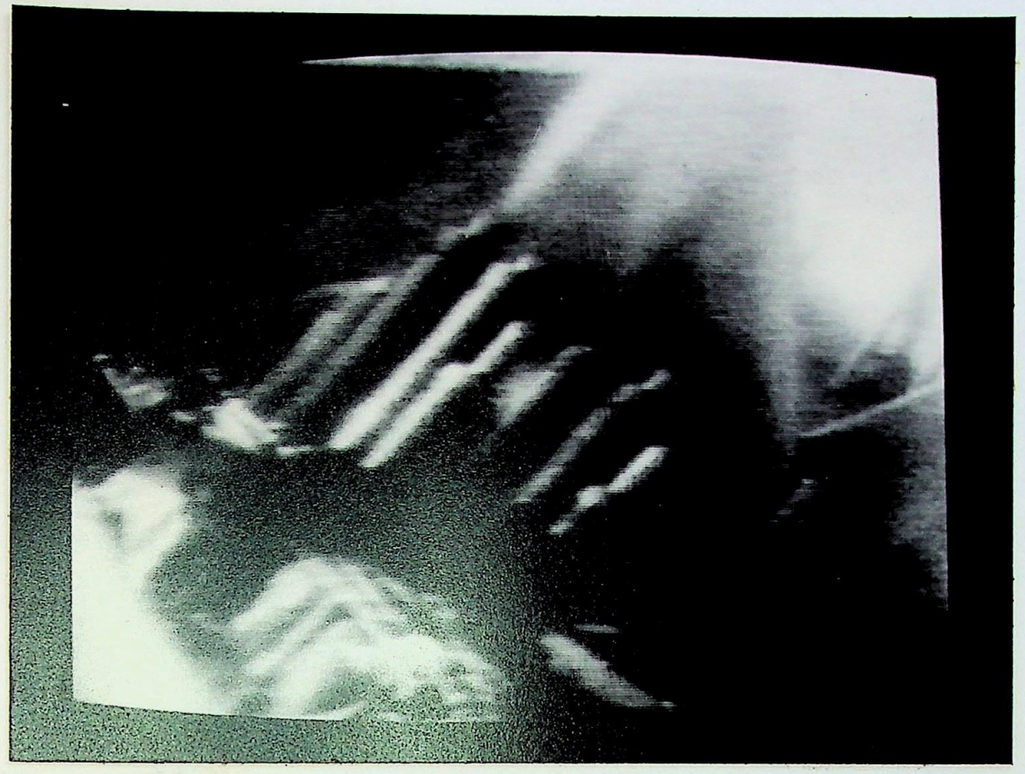
Lr.,

"TV and video are hugh mountains that have hardly been chipped at.
Now they're becoming cheaper and more available, they should be used (13)".

Scratch video, when it appeared on the scene, was heralded by some as the true democratising of video. Anyone with a video recorder, and there are some six million of them in the United Kingdom - or in nearly forty per cent of homes, can produce, simply by flicking between the channels, scratch video. If you can borrow another machine the possibilities are endless, cutting up material culled from TV and re-editing it to produce 'new meanings'. These tapes could then be duplicated and distributed through a grapevine of friends and friends of friends, re-recording each time, until you have national distribution.

This kind of thinking was certainly at the backs of the minds of the early champions of scratch, with Andy Lipman at their fore. The reality was quite different - the scratch tapes were not produced at home on VHS machines, but instead by editors and technicians in major video and television companies using very sophisticated equipment. These people having completed their quote of broadcast or advertising material simply played around with some of the imagery.

War machine and blue monday.
This Duvet Brothers tape typifies the style and structure of scratch, fast editing and repeated shots - the use of current 'serious' news and advertising material mixed with archieve film footage. All then tied together with the 'electro pop' music which is a legacy from scratches early appearances in London clubs. Indeed the name scratch



"War machine", The Duvet Brothers.

originated in New York clubs, where similar 'cut up' techniques were applied to disco records.

War machine opens with the aggressive male posturing of a police thriller and quickly turns to extracts from an advertisment for magazine 'War machine'. Second world war newsreel is mixed with footage of helicopters and napalm in Vietnam, then culminating with a long and colourful sequence of decimated casualties - again from Vietnam. The second half of the tape, called 'Blue monday', takes shots of public school boys, Ascot, the Royal family, references to private medicine and inserts 'rich get richer, poor get poorer' in text. It then superimposes shots of the British police struggling with marching miners with footage of marching Russian soldiers. A Conservative party conference is mixed with cruise and polaris missiles, and throughout appears the recurring image of a fat business man lighting his cigar with a burning five pound note - like a character from a Grosz cartoon.

Powerful stuff one would have thought, but it never quite is. The advertisment for the magazine 'War machine' is so similar to the Duvet tape that they are almost interchangable. The Duvet Brothers tape lacks the narrative telling you about the contents of the magazine, while in the advertisment the sequence of shots of casualties is considerably shorter, but otherwise they are almost identical. Infact the Duvet Brothers tape contains longer edits of identical shots to those appearing in the advertisment. This suggests that both the advertisment and the 'art work' came from the same source tapes, as I doubt the Duvet Brothers went through the film archives to find the same shot, I think we can

Lr.,

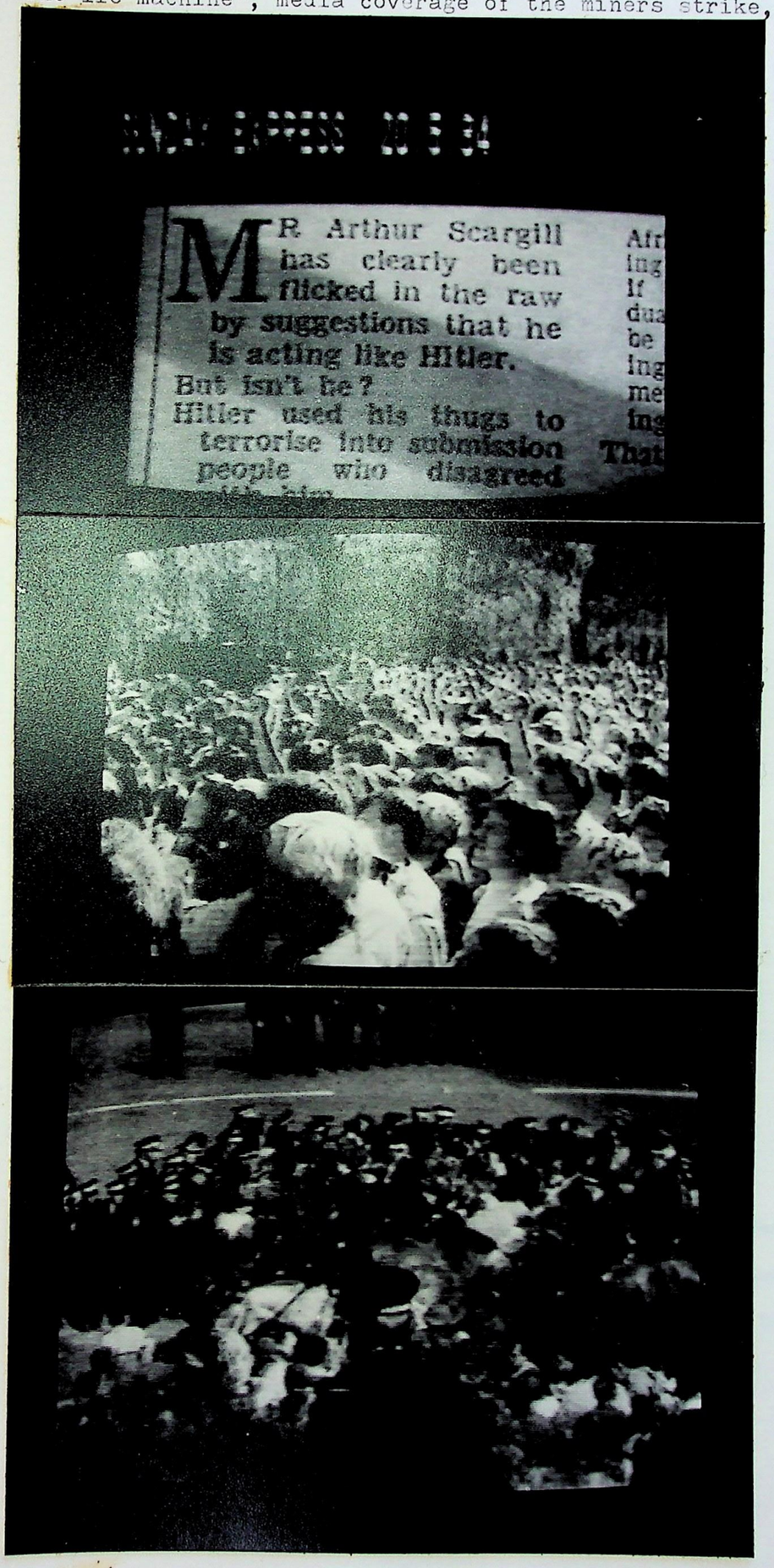
be fairly certain that both the advertisment and the 'art work' came from the same studio if not the same people.

The tape is, at its most obvious reading, intended to comment upon some connection between macho behaviour, technology and violence. The opening shot, from an American detective movie of the early seventies, is both sexual and mock violent. I suspect the sexual theme is reinforced throughout the tape with the use of subliminal images.

The tape infact when compared with the 'War machine' advertisment makes no real comment, imagining that this advertisment is a sort of nineteen eighties 'ready made' is nieve. The male audience, with an interest in military technology, would be equally satisfied and impressed by what is really just a slightly longer 'party mix' version of the advertisment. It is just as likely to prompt people to buy the magazine. There is nothing to change anybodies mind in this piece and then 'War machine' the video becomes just another aspects of the media it proports to be attacking. Certainly in a country which plays host to a weekend 'Vietnam re-creation society' there is more to be done.

'Blue monday' is a much more defined piece aimed at the British class system and divisions between rich and poor, and a projection that totalitarian police control is upholding this inequality. Again its shortcommings are multifarious - firstly in the depth of understanding of the subject and the way it is dealt with. Certainly in a country with such a long and involved labour movement as Britian, no great revealation is going to be found here. Anyone farmiliar with quite conventional and popular broabcast material like ITV's 'Spitting image'

"The lie machine", media coverage of the miners strike, NUM.



will see nothing new in 'Blue monday', so it cannot claim to be in any way diversifying our television experiences. Indeed during the miners strike, which was the source of much of this material, the miners themselves made a number of videos to counter the medias unfair presentation of their case. These should be far more interesting viewing. In restricting itself to the use of plagarised broadcast material scratch may have chained itself not to attacking television but, on the contrary, to paying a strange kind of homage to it.

It has even been rumoured that some scratch 'artists' working with major production companies have a policy of alternating, on a weekly basis, between left and right wing videos. It may or may not be true but it demonstrates the ambivalence of some of the working processes behind the work. Certainly the rather shallow left of centre ideals of 'Blue monday' correspond rather closely with current criticism of Margaret Thatchers policies by the media itself.

On the other hand this kind of scepticism for scratch overlooks a number of important considerations. Scratch may not be moving into much new territory but it has achieved a high level of popularity and awareness for its small achievements. The appearance of scratch with its political references, albeit on a low level, on youth orientated programmes is quite an achievement if they manage to displace their decadent cousins the 'pop videos'. Pop video has managed to reach depths of banality that nobody could have foreseen. It has also in it formal experimentation, produced by the continual demand for something new and different, adopted some aspects of scratch. Perhaps scratch is now in a position in expand upon this initial

popularity,into wider areas, bring its audience with it. George Barber, one of scratches central figures, as a graduate in fine art must be aware of the discussion for television intervention. Unfortunately, in the fickle world of fashion, and scratch is extremely fashionable, loyalty to one style is unlikely. So scratches audience may disappear as quickly as it appeared.

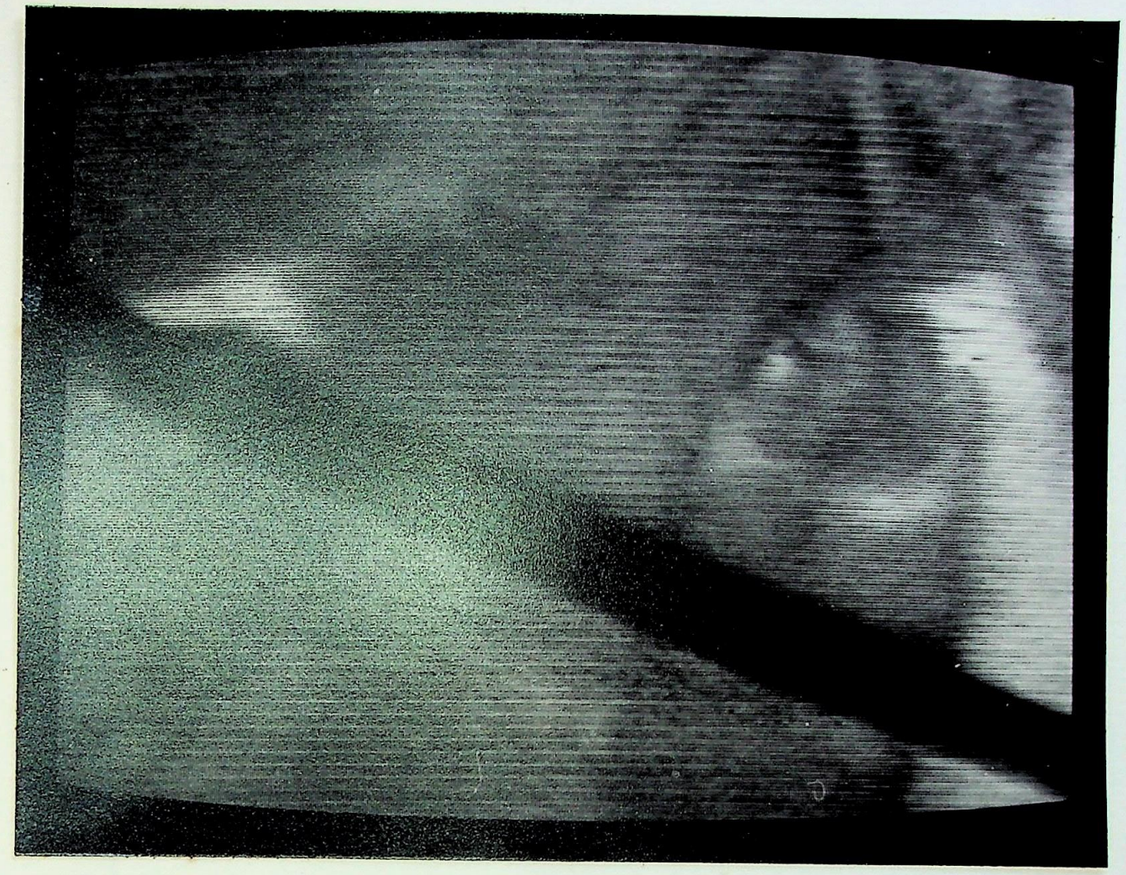
"Basically everything that we do is just aimed at trying to find out how peoples minds are manipulated, and then short circuiting that (14)".

-Throbbing Gristle.

In discussing scratch it is necessary to mention Psychic TV and Genesis P. Orridge. Not because they are central to it as a movement, infact Psychic TV preceeded scratch by a number of years, but they come closest to providing a practical manifestation of the ideals presented with scratch. This comming not just from Psychic TV's video material but also from Orridges, Coum's and Throbbing Gristle's independant, 'anyone can do it', approach to production and distribution of records and video material.

Interviewer: "Why are you doing music ?"
G. P. Orridge: "Well one reason, it's a platfrom for propaganda (15)".

This is an answer which can presumably be equally applied to Orridges involvement in video. An answer,which incidentally,Lord Beaverbrook returned when asked why he was involved in newspapers, but one which I cannot visualize any television company controller giving, publically



"Night of a thousand eyes", Kim Flitcroft and Sandra Goldbacher. Television advertising is frequently the source for scratch video.

at least, they always emphasize public information and impartiality.

In 1976 Genesis P. Orridge and his colleagues from Throbbing Gristle and the preceeding Coum project set up Industrial records. Its aim was not , as with many other independant record companies springing up at this time, simply to record and market music and video which had been overlooked or rejected by the major labels. Instead it set out to control the entire process of production and distribution of their material and to reveal the mechanics of the industry - to demonstrate that it is possible for anyone to record and distribute music without the high technology and finance usually associated with the industry.

They were concerned not with the orthodox presentation of pop music with its repeated nostalgia for its black roots, rebellious lifestyle or chic sixties appeal nor with pop videos pouting and pastiches of Hollywood glamour, instead they were concerned with "mass production and technology without any science fiction cosmic sentiment (16)". To face the viewer with violence, facism, aworld where home video is seen in its true light as a by product of surveillance technology and where pop music has been a "powerful weapon of imperialism (17)". Such things Orridge believes are far more appropriate to most peoples everyday experiences of the consumer lifestyle in which we are all involved.

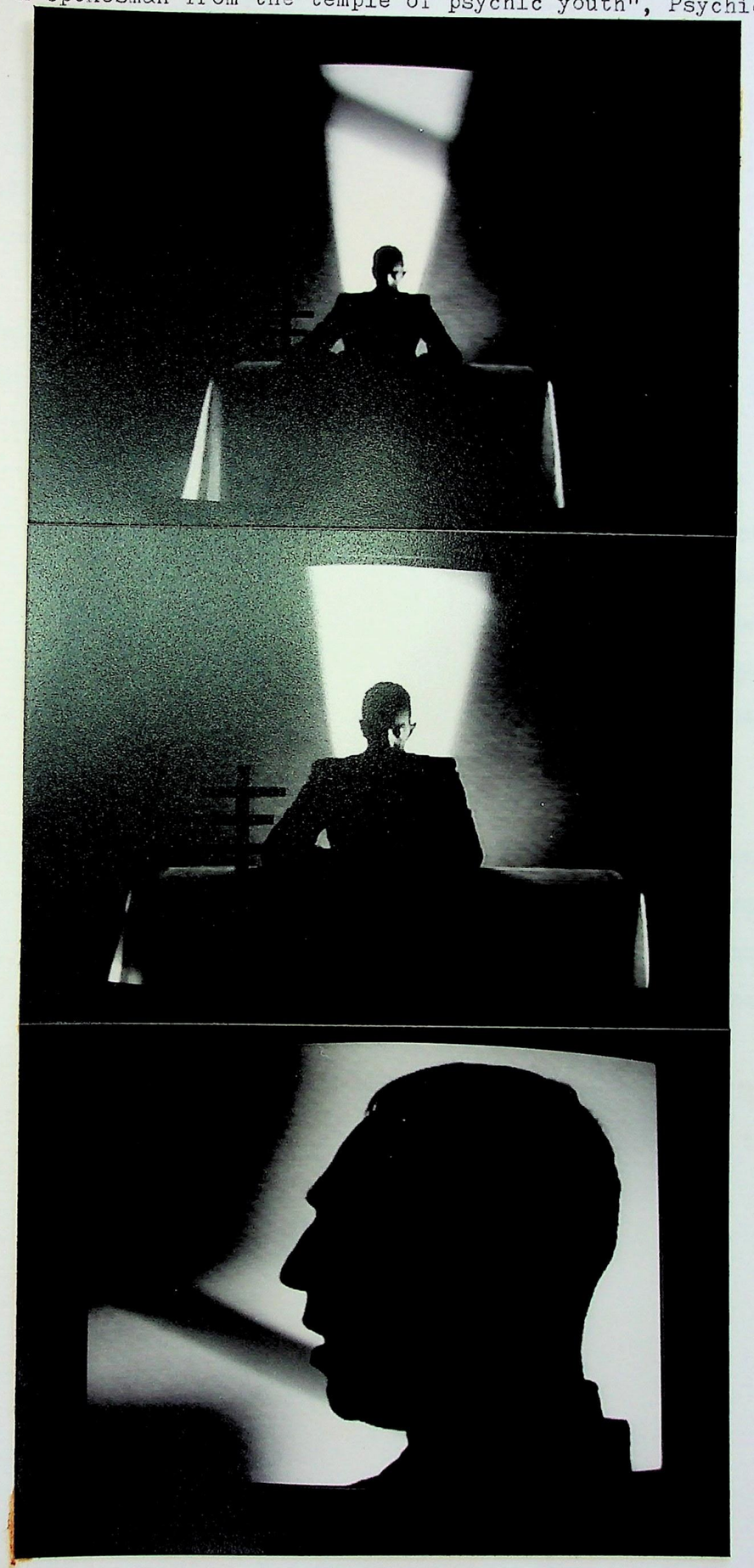
Orridge, despite frequent excesses in his Burroughesque horrors, and flirtations with skin deep alternatine lifestyle punk, has managed to make some inroads in a reevaluation of the control effects of the media. There is throughout his work a continual challenge to the behavioural

conditioning to which we have all been subjected. A Coum manifesto elaborates on how this might be achieved: "my interest is in putting myself into unpleasant or risk situations"-"I use it as a means of deconditioning myself psychologically" - "anything I found myself thinking about which I was not sure I could do in public or private, without feelings of embarassment or selfconciousness, I put into action to test myself (18)".

"A spokesman from the temple of psychic youth", a video tape by Psychic TV, well exemplifies this subject area. This tape is not scratch, indeed it is closer in appearance to David Hall's 'this is a television reciever', nor is it Pyschic TV at their most virulent. It copies the form of a cable television religious broadcast where a gentle voiced young minister, backed by light music, explains the merits of his beliefs. In this case it is a minister of the 'temple of psychic youth' and the address is on the social repression of sexual activity.

Society tries to replace the feelings of power and freedom experienced at orgasm with feelings of guilt, anxiety, fear of failure and fear of disease. Individuals are denied the chance to "explore the potential for pleasure" in sex because, the tape suggests, society is not prepared to let individuals get any ideas about the merits of freedom. On a more practical level time and energy spent in sexual exploration will be time and energy withdrawn from its own production and consumption needs. Indeed if orgasm remains, uniquely, unquantifyable as a product it becomes a threat to the 'productive' society. Thus the tape informs us why sex has been the target of so much 'moral' control. These morals have themselves obviously been subjugated to the needs of capitalism.

"A spokesman from the temple of psychic youth", Psychic TV.



The only flaw in this tape is that in adopting the style of a cable television presentation, it may marginalize itself in this part of the world where this kind of religious presentation is sceptically treated.

As far as establishing alternative systems of production, Industrial records have been quite successful. Over one hundred and fifty thousand records have been sold without the assistance of large publicity campaigns or the support of the music press. Infact Orridge says in reference to that bastion ot the British music industry, the 'New Musical Express': - "they decided that young people should not be encouraged to listen to us, that was their policy and I have proof of that. They pretend we don't exist (19)". Meanwhile, as a final gesture of disrespect to the music industry, Orridge encouraged his listeners to pirate his records where ever possible.

Psychic TV's video material has been slower to appear, and certainly loses out from the lack of a visual equivalent to pirate and independant radio. But as the technology becomes cheaper and with cable television on the horizon, the possibility of video as 'folk art' is increasing.

Lr.,

IS TELEVISION INTERESTED IN VIDEO ARTS ?

"- video art is not television -"

"Video art as we kno it is not television. But for most people video does mean television, and thats why they don't like video art. They see it as bad TV (1)" -Lorne Falk.

Channel 4 has a statutory duty to encourage innovation on television, something the company plans to expand upon in the comming years as it becomes better established. But this is not going to provide any quick or easy access to broadcast television for artists working with video or film. There are too many oppositional views between the artists and the companies.

John Wyver, the producer of the recent 'Ghosts in the machine' series, which despite unfavourable viewing times attracted considerable interest, outlines his brief as, "to find work,that at a simple level, worked on television" - he continues, "I have not yet succeeded in defining the criteria any more precisely than that, simply an intuative sense of what I felt would go down on television (2)". This approach, and the final selection, angered many people for the series was not presented as a selection of Mr Wyver's favorite videos but instead under banner headlines proclaiming that it was the 'state of the art'. Something that was wilfully untrue.

This, I think illustrates the crossed purposes of the two parties - video artists see television as the enemy which must have its values rebalanced, while television sees video in strictly formal terms, as something which looks and sounds unlike anything else and thus has potential to fuel its own need for innovation. An innovation demanded

by commercial considerations. They have little interest in exploring the content of video art. Indeed why should they, if its aim is to subvert the system that they themselves have created, no television company is that suicidal. We see this manifest itself in the 'Ghosts' series for there is no easier why of depoliticising and formalizing material than to show it decontextualized in a different country, material which incidentally in this case was formally orientated in its native America. Protestations by the series producer that British material of similar quality is not available are simply unfounded, as are claims that the earlier 'Eleventh hour' series, again on Channel 4, cleaned out the archieve of British video. John Wyver infact believes that "six hours of TV has used up the video catalogue" and "another comparable six hours does not exist"(3). From the selection which appeared many people would not be displeased that a 'comparible' six hours does not exist, but many other things do. 'Ghosts in the machine' was undoubtably an extremly humourless and formal collection relying far too much upon tricks of the medium and indulging in esoteric art practices for a semblance of depth. On the member of the audience, at a recent seminar on the series, had to be reassured by the series producer that the artists involved had had any experience of television and had not simply been pushing buttons at random to see the ensuing effect.

For serious'political'content'Ghosts'relied on tapes such as Max Almy's 'Perfect leader' and 'Smoothering dreams' by Dan Reeves - scratch would incidentally have been included but copyright laws stepped in and prevented this inclusion. 'Perfect leader' is a pop video influenced demonstration of the media qualities necessary for an aspiring politician,

and not ineffective as such.'Smoothering dreams' is a protest at the Vietnam war and a decade to late to have any effect. It should also have learnt that often what is unseen and hinted at can be more effective than what is actually seem. 'Smoothering dreams' is colourful, slow motion violence that would not displease the makers of 'Rambo'.

Perhaps I am being excessivly hard on the series, hidden in the six hours were a number of gems, like Laurie Anderson's 'O Superman' and 'Probably in Michigan' a spoof musical by Cecilia Condit. There can nonetheless be no doubt that video art when it appears in this manner on television is quite a disappointing experience.

If broadcast television seems unwilling to compromise it is nothing compared to the video artists who imagine that television should fling open its doors and hand over the entire broadcast facility, for the gratification of the artists. Comming from the uncompromising background of fine art some seem bemused at the idea of anything less. There is on both sides an unwillingness to forfeit any of the control that they currently have. There is also, I believe, a genuine fear among artists of appearing on television. That this would leave them open once and for all to the criticism that video really could be bad television. It is much easier to remain in galleries and on art college circuits,using 'art' as a shield, than to actually become involved in the problems of television. Some of this fear in understandable, unleashing video on television is unleashing it on an audience who has grown up with excitement, glamour, humour and all the other expectations of television. Television would be quite likely to swallow video arts, make it

fashionable, formularize it and finally regurgitate it as a pastiche of its former self. Perhaps this is a nesessary and inevitable test of videos strength and credibility. Perhaps the conclusion of such a meeting is already known, and we are seeing the beginnings of it in 'Ghosts' and 'The Eleventh Hour'. The material which appeared in 'Ghosts' has been disowned by the British video art 'establishment as being formal and out of date, with the 'Eleventh Hour' it was because scratch, which made up some of the package, had dubious production origins and commitment to content. Is this not the critical art world disowning its links with anything which does not appear to have been entirely successful. Then can this process not continue until any other overlaps between fine art and other activities have been dismantled. If the art world is not to be accountable when video art proves to be bad television what then when performance is seen as bad theatre and so on. In other words any kind of expansion of the context in which art appears is not to be encouraged in case it fails and discredits the whole.

John Kustow, the commisioning editor for arts with Channel 4, cites one of the reasons why there has been so little video art material shown on television, as being that nobody has ever made any firm proposals to him. Independent television in Britian regularily gives large amounts of money, through charity funds, to the arts. There is no reason why this money should not be spent on supporting video though the commisioning of work. What seems to be lacking is the determination by artists.

In the U.S.A. the 'Contempory Art Television' (C.A.T.) fund which

links the WGBH television workshop with the Institute of Contempory Arts in Boston, provides an example of the collaborative possibilites between art and television.

Among the multifarious independent production companies,established to provide material for Channel 4, there is ample scope for such an establishment. Here it would be hoped, artists would not just supply creative technical assistance but do something to contribute to a far reaching diversification of broadcast television.

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