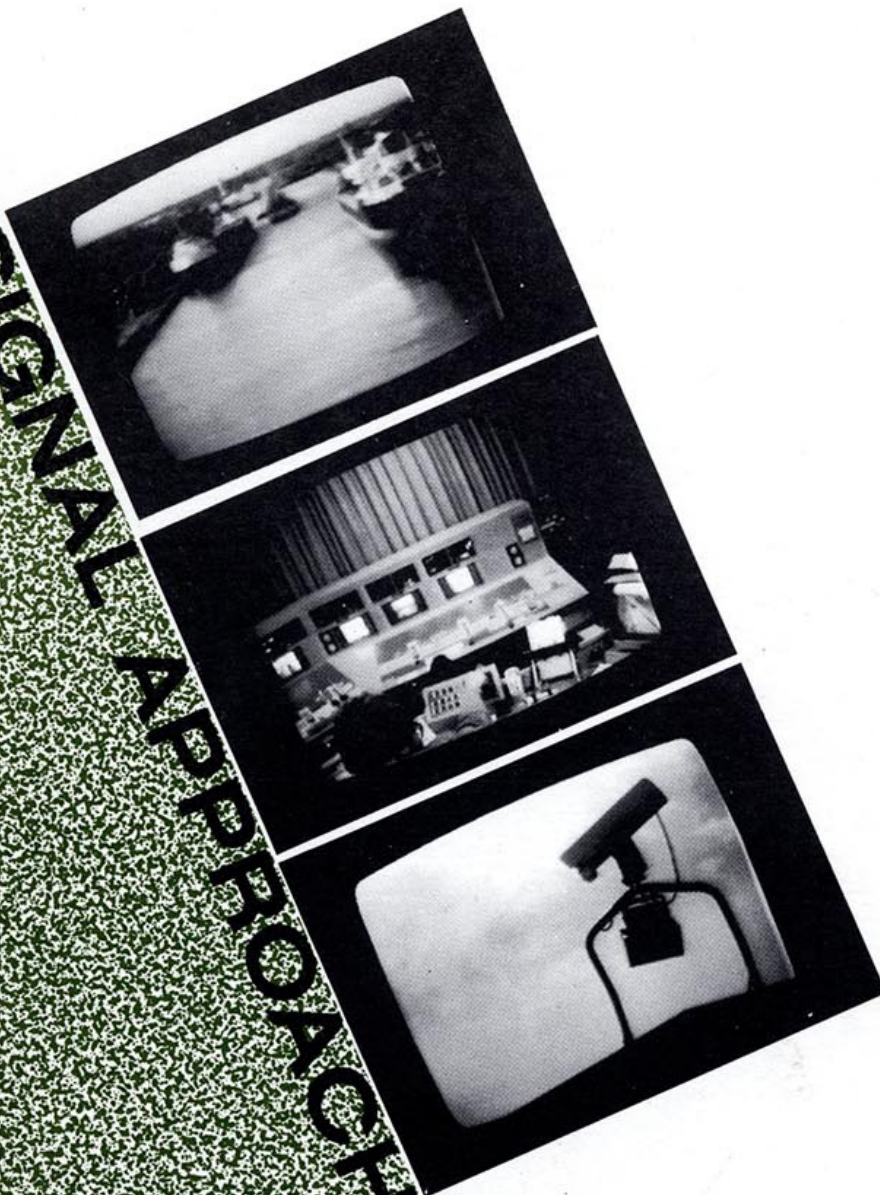


1954

SIGNAL APPROACH



THE FUNNEL

VF-3405



SIGNAL APPROACH

Schedule

- Programme 1: **Conventions of Television**
Media Ecology Ads, Antonio Muntadas
Sax Island, Eric Metcalfe/Hank Bull
Excerpts and Euphoria, Edward Mowbray
Pie Y Cafe, Jan Peacock
Soap and Water, Richard Layzell
Rhea, David Askevold
WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 9, 8 P.M. THE FUNNEL
- Programme 2: **Formal Characteristics**
No End, Dalibor Martinis/Sanja Ivekovic
Come On Touch It (Study No.4 For a Personality Inventory Channel), Ian Murray
1000 Murders, Marcel Odenbach
WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 23, 8 P.M. THE FUNNEL
- Programme 3: **Electronic Languages**
The Double, Ken Feingold
Damnation of Faust: Evocation, Dara Birnbaum
Anthem, Bill Viola
Chanoyu, Dalibor Martinis/Sanja Ivekovic
Surveillance on the Welland Canal, John Watt
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 8 P.M. THE FUNNEL
- Programme 4: **Narrative**
Grand Mal, Tony Oursler
Casual Shoppers, Judith Barry
Arcade, Lyn Blumenthal
The Woman Who Went Too Far, Colin Campbell
Starling Man, Corry Wyngaarden
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 8 P.M. THE FUNNEL
- Programme 5: **Documentary**
War Can Be Like This: Vietnam My Love, Peter Wronski
A Simple Case For Torture, or how to sleep at night, Martha Rosler
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 6, 8 P.M. THE FUNNEL
- Programme 6: **Hybrids**
And One And One And One, Helen DeMichiel
Banana Man, Mike Kelley
Is That All There Is, Chris Mullington/Ed Eagan
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 13, 8 P.M. THE FUNNEL

production still from **And One And One And One**, Helen DeMichiel ►
cover photos from **Surveillance on the Welland Canal**, John Watt





The present moment finds us in a peculiar position: for a great many, the word "video" refers, frequently, to rock videos shown on television and often produced on film, or feature films available to the home market on cassette. Distinctions between film and video have blurred in the public mind so that the terms are virtually interchangeable. It's no wonder – we see "movies" on TV, we see "videos" projected on large screens at rock concerts, and so on. But those visual artists who have defined their practices as "video art" or "experimental film" (also labelled "avant-garde", "independent" and various terms acknowledged as equally inadequate) are likely to raise strong objection to having their videotapes called films, or their films videos.

If these artists share any singular quality, it is probably first of all their insistence on their respective media being seen as video or as film. Although with a perversity that derives from the intentions of art and experiment, there are certainly those who deliberately cross the boundaries of medium in their work – both in production and exhibition. Still, I think, there is an adherence to medium among media artists. At its worst it can be seen as a refusal to acknowledge related practices, or as territorialism, or even as the advocacy of one system as superior to another. At its best, it indicates an awareness of the properties of video or cinema and a commitment to recognize and work with them.

It was in the spirit of a dialogue that could respect and elucidate both difference and sameness that this series was conceived. The setting of The Funnel suggests an audience more cognizant of film than video, and the curator, Christina Ritchie, has taken The Funnel's regular programming as one of the film references that informs this dialogue.

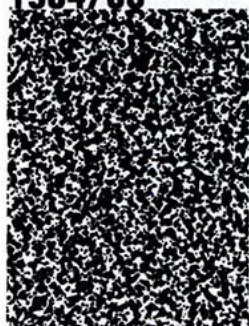
Her selection of tapes for each of the six programs, along with her catalogue essay, seek to establish a basic grammar for describing how the features of video operate to facilitate and enhance the content of the works. The other film reference for the series is the essay by Blaine Allan, which looks at video art from the perspective of the cinema. Its contribution to this effort is to bring forward the dialogue in terms of issues of significance within the lexicon of avant-garde film.

Both Ritchie and Allan steer clear of in-depth formal analysis of the videotapes' content. While their two essays acknowledge the possibility and advantages of pursuing the two autonomies of film and video art, it is more the case that they spread out the general fields which characterize these autonomies. For a dialogue to occur there must be the opportunity to compare and contrast, and this can only be done with an eye to the contexts in which both hold a place. On the simplest level the context is technological, but in a far more complex manner, cultural – implying here a great deal: mass culture, art, history, ideology and communication.

The task is no small one, and The Funnel is fortunate to have two contributors to this project who are highly respected in their individual fields. Christina Ritchie was a founder and Director of Foundation for Art Resources in Los Angeles before returning to Toronto to become Video Curator for Art Metropole. Her interest in film extends back to her years at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design where she studied with Robert Frank. Blaine Allan is an experimental filmmaker who has written extensively on film in books and articles. He is a post-doctoral Fellow at Queen's University and is currently teaching experimental film at Concordia University.

The essays they have prepared interlock in exciting ways to form a skeletal vocabulary with which to approach the aims of this series. Not only are they likely to engage the film audience with video; they also offer the audience already attuned to video art a unique perspective on the medium. But in the final analysis, the real dialogue is with the work itself. Aided by the interpretive comments in the program note descriptions, it is the viewing of the tapes that is the site of interpretation, and the opening for a dialogue between the makers and viewers of experimental film and video art.

ANNA GRONAU
PROGRAMMING COMMITTEE
1984/85





SOME NOTES ON VIDEO ART AND EXPERIMENTAL FILM

The videotapes included in this series address a number of issues that pervade the contemporary avant-garde cinema. The series itself concerns the relations and correspondences between experimental cinema and video art. In preparation to write this essay, I was shown a selection of tapes included in each of the six programs. The observations I offer from the perspective of the cinema derive mainly from those viewings and a scattered knowledge of artists' video. Slotted into the regular programming calendar of an experimental film theatre, a series of videotapes may at first seem like an intervention, or an encroachment on one art form by another. However, the programs and the writings that accompany them aim to generate a critical cross-fertilization. Each viewer may well be approaching these productions with assumptions about the autonomy of the experimental cinema or video art. As a filmmaker, teacher and writer on film, I am, to some extent writing about artists' video as a stranger. Yet the relative positions of the two art forms in culture should permit us to consider that each has something to offer the other.

In many cases, the videotapes in the series underline the marginal position of video art and experimental film in relation to broadcast television and conventional narrative or documentary film. The institutions of the commercial media can often absorb or ignore challenges from the outsiders of art. The dominance of such institutions on economic, technical and stylistic grounds amounts to a suppression of the media's artistic uses. If the artists' subordinated status means that they cannot form a real, viable alternative to dominant forms of television and cinema, their work does serve a vital, critical function.

Video and film artists use – or abuse – conventions of dominant forms to explore and question their respective media. Such tapes as *Grand Mal* and *Sax Island* criticize the opulence of film or television productions with their own cartoon-like imagery and economy of style. In literal and figurative senses, they undercut the production values that the producers of conventional films and programs place at a premium. In design and performance, these tapes deviate from the normal standards of television, although they use narrative structures to frame their ironic critiques.

Other tapes, such as *Soap and Water*, employ documentary conventions, such as direct address, the illustrative use of photographs, and voice-over commentary. This tape also inserts images of a "news event" in progress, including the reporter and television camera crew that make the event news. The documentary material, conventionally read by the viewer as unmediated access to reality, combines with an element of performance that lends the work a critical voice.

The relative newness of video art means that the form found itself, from its beginnings, inserted into a complex of moving image media. The cinema at its birth in the last years of the nineteenth century had to contend with the values of photography, theatrical performance, literature, the visual arts, and music at the turning point when they moved into the modern era. Television, and subsequently video art, have had to confront the values and conventions of those arts as they evolved, as well as the filtering process of cinema itself. The "quotation" of sound and image from film, television, and other sources in such tapes as *1000 Murders*, *Caught While Escaping*, and *The Double* releases the material from its original context and builds new critical frameworks. Most explicitly, *1000 Murders* links together a chain of graphically violent scenes from narrative films, paintings, and other sources. Marcel Odenbach imposes a new structure by recombining the images and by splitting or otherwise reorganizing the screen to alter the original pictures.

Other tapes, such as *Rhea* and *Damnation of Faust: Evocation* elliptically trace the frames of narratives, but they refuse to provide single answers to the narrative enigmas they introduce. Instead, they propose an open structure. The variations in the means by which video art uses and refuses conventions from commercial film and television suggest its importance as a reactive and subversive form.

Thus far, I have been writing mainly about video art as a companion to the experimental cinema and in their relation to commercial television and film. It would be possible to compare and contrast a selection of experimental films and artists' videotapes and tease out their correspondences and differences. That kind of specific, textual criticism would, at some point, yield useful conclusions. In a general overview, however, it would also represent a severely restricted view of the breadth of both fields. In comparing experimental film and video art as two, related artistic practices, it is useful to think of them as machines at work within culture. By calling the media "machines," I mean to suggest not only the technology they entail, but also the interrelation of their components and the relations of their parts to culture as a complex whole. The

machine metaphor has a base insofar as both are highly technological art forms, recently developed in the post-industrial era. The apparatus of each determines its boundaries and challenges artists to find ways of stretching those limits. Furthermore, elements of the apparatus possess symbolic values that help represent problems regarding the position of the medium within culture. A significant number of the videotapes I saw demonstrate a critical function fuelled by the artists' consciousness of the medium's problematic nature.

Experimental filmmakers have often isolated and used the properties of the cinema in the service of personal expression. Although the cinematic "machine" includes all the processes involved in constructing and viewing a film, the camera stands metaphorically for the cinema – both in the culture at large and in the use of film by artists. In the history of experimental cinema, filmmakers have frequently used the camera to express the personal vision of a "mind's eye," extending the identification of camera and filmmaker. Stan Brakhage, for example, has consistently tried to reproduce the qualities of a visual perception on film. The process of shooting film becomes the equivalent of vision, and the camera assumes a position as the principal instrument in the filmmaking process. Some techniques – often forms of optical printing, graphics, or animation – seem to obviate the camera. What they usually do, however, is change the object of the camera's view. Instead of making an image from the space of visual reality, the camera gazes at and records another image.

In contrast to cinema, it is not the camera that is emblematic of video/television, but the television screen itself. When we speak of the "immediacy" of video, it is perhaps, following our "machine" model, a sense of this difference in the site of exchange that informs such a statement. The television screen receives transmissions and displays them to the viewer. It is the television screen in its various forms, sizes, and settings that thus becomes the art object, as Nam June Paik has demonstrated in his installations and constructions.

There are, never-the-less, parallels in the critical intention of video and film artists, and in the fact of some form of identification between artist and viewer. But in viewing the videotapes for this series I have noted a certain troubled position of video art. The dominant institution, commercial television, so pervades our culture and society that its values seem to permeate the object itself. Distinct from the "window" that the movie screen opens the viewer (implying again the shared position of the viewer with the camera/filmmaker/projector), the small screen, enclosed in a box, contains images and sounds and releases them in measured doses. The sign of a television set or other signs of video production in an artists's videotape indicates, therefore, more than the kind of self-reflexivity often found in experimental film. It also suggests an ambivalence that sometimes comes across as the artist's hostility to the medium he or she has chosen to use. In *Caught While Escaping*, for example, Marcel Odenbach suggests the fundamentality of such a relationship with a set of images and sounds that equates confining iron bars with video's conventional test pattern, colour bars.

Ambivalence, in my view, is important to the sensibility that these videotapes demonstrate. Distinctions between the viewing situations of film and video affect the meanings of each medium. The conventional view is that both induce passivity in mass audiences. This is an over-simplification, however, that contemptuously elides social differences within the audience. Never-the-less, distinctions can be drawn: the movie theatre is the singular location where an audience gathers to see a movie. The large reflective screen, related to the proscenium stage, implies an opening into another world and the privilege of our position as viewers of that world. The radiant image of the television screen, on the other hand, is a familiar part of the furniture in many homes. The movie theatre implies the fascination of its willing audience, while the television screen suggests mesmerism and crystal-gazing. Instead of collecting viewers to itself, the television signal travels outward from a distant and unknown source, through the air, to meet people in their own homes. It speaks to individuals, rather than groups. It supplants the dialectic of privacy and collectivity that the movie spectator feels and replaces it with an alienation of the individuals who are all being spoken to simultaneously.

In images that range in source from the CBS television network logo to the stage design for the 1984 Emmy Awards to *Grand Mal*, the television screen is represented by a single, enlarged, usually unblinking eye. The segmented and multilayered image structure of *Come On Touch It* also uses the image of the eye (actually two eyes) without a face. The image connects the central character, and by implication, the viewer, with the television screen as if he and we were looking through a slot administering a personality test. While the production appears to propose a model for interactive television, it also suggests the dominance of the apparatus and the medium over the viewer. Film may imply that we can see through the filmmaker's "mind's eye," but the television screen, although in reality receiver of the video signal, is popularly conceived as

serving our eyes, and actually *improving* our vision. Unblinking, it is everywhere at once. This ubiquity appears to reinforce the illusion of power that television instills in the viewer.

A tape such as *Come On Touch It* uses the aspect of television's alienation of the individuals it addresses in this simultaneous fashion by suggesting the interaction of viewer and video program and playing with the possibility of the spectator's participation. (Significantly, George Landow's *Institutional Quality* and Robert Nelson's *Bleu Shut*, two films that involve similarly participatory elements, model themselves on instructional television and on a quiz show.) With its fragmented and layered image, the tape compels us to participate by organizing the different pieces. However the character of the person taking the test underlines the limits of our participation. The viewer's alienation replicates the artist's ambivalence toward the medium and its uses.

Even tapes that are less directly critical of the mass medium of television bear traces that demonstrate its mediation of reality. Performance based tapes, such as *Banana Man*, *Grand Mal*, and *Sax Island*, were for the most part produced in the isolation of studios. Other tapes, including *Damnation of Faust: Evocation*, *1000 Murders*, and *Caught While Escaping*, "take place" virtually within the channels of the video editing and image processing systems. In *Scapemates*, a tape not included in this series, Ed Emshwiller combines these tendencies by using the video synthesizer to place a narrative ballet in a setting that exists entirely within the video system. The artificiality or synthetic quality of these productions represent the artists' attempts to create worlds and images that possess different ordering principles than the ones we know and have naturalized. However, they also run the risk of solipsism, echoing the confinement of image and sound that the artists perceive in the conventional uses of television.

While critical of dominant cinema, experimental filmmakers have not differed from their mainstream counterparts in accepting the cinematic "machine" as a desirable object in itself. Like video, film has attracted artists in other media who import and put into practice theoretical preoccupations from the visual arts, music, poetry, architecture, and other disciplines. Yet the cinema's historical precedence in creating the illusion of motion, its exercise of space and time, its power to fascinate a collected group in the confines of a darkened room have allowed it to retain its desirability despite its mainstream uses.

The cinematic avant-garde has traditionally conceived itself as "free" or "independent." One of its strongest impulses led filmmakers out of the studios and restrictive settings and into the streets, as though the institution that is its counterpart and that dominates the popular view of cinema could be countered by a real alternative practice in terms of how images of physical reality might be put on the screen. Within the past twenty years, experimental film has concentrated on the illusionistic nature of the cinematographic image, and other properties of the filmmaking process in order to disclose the nature of the medium and the conditions that underpin and determine it. The self-critical faculty that developed in the experimental film insists on the image as image – a notion that is, in fact, susceptible to the dangers of solipsism, itself.

In many ways, one of the main projects of the filmmaker is the organization and transformation of the pro-filmic event – the segment of visible actuality in front of the camera – into the filmic. The video artist's preoccupation, I would argue, leads him or her toward the organization of the televised image and its transformation into subsequent forms and combinations of images.

Broadcast television, the dominant form of video production, lays claim to actuality. More and more, network and international television shape the world by establishing agendas for the breadth of world events. Our surrogate eye, the television screen, may not blink, but neither does it collect images and sounds indiscriminately. It organizes messages according to priorities that it does not make evident. In fact, it works to conceal such organizing principles and naturalizes them for the viewer through convention. Concentrating on the organization of televised images, video art can exercise autocriticism and turn its findings back on the realism to be found in existing forms of television.

It would be presumptuous of me to offer more than a few speculations on video art. Clearly, though, the development of video art corresponds in many ways with the evolution of experimental film. The two practices comprise significant strains in highly industrialized, commercially based, and technologically sophisticated art forms. However, they are strains that value art and innovation over commerce. Axiomatically, they achieve aesthetic success more regularly than commercial success. It would be fair to assume that, as two types of moving picture and sound media, the experimental cinema and video art share aesthetic concerns. I believe that it is more important, however, to bracket those concerns and examine the ways the two media forms relate and are understood by their viewers, the ways they organize the phenomenal and social worlds. In other words, we must see them – and watch them – as parts of our culture.

Blaine Allan

FORMS AND METHODS

At the outset, the purpose of this series was to identify the similarities and differences between video art and experimental film in order to go beyond a formal, media-specific examination and allow a way in which to talk about the social and cultural affiliations within these and/or any other media. The very large assumption within this concept is that video art and experimental film respectively are discrete and autonomous media which intersect within the sphere of artistic practice, and perhaps in other ways as well. I cannot argue the case for film – my lack of knowledge precludes any such attempt. The structure which I've imposed over the series of screenings is designed to suggest that the exploratory phase of definition of video as an artistic medium has yielded a body of conventions and properties which are specific to video art, allowing the practice to proceed on an autonomous, independent footing.

The assignment of categories to many of these tapes was difficult. Many of them could as easily be placed within several categories and lend coherence to the particular heading. That any single tape is within a given category is therefore by reason of the degree to which it satisfies one definition over another and in some cases, it's a toss-up. My point is that the categories become arbitrary and serve simply as a means of approach. The fluent variety of approaches evidenced in the tapes themselves are in fact a principal reason to keep watching.

The associations of video art to television are inescapable. Television has not only pervaded the structure and mechanisms of mass communications but has become intrinsic to a contemporary perception of the world and has an insidious effect on the quality of our experience of culture. It therefore seemed necessary to begin the series with a program of tapes which, each in its own way, operate on the conventions of television. The conventions of any form, be it painting, prose or puppet-theatre, provide the frame of reference by which we are able to apprehend its manifest content. An analysis and critique of television has characterized much artists' video from its early days and into the present. This tendency has been contiguous with an analytical bias which has pervaded all of the arts in the past decade and a half. Although often turgid with its own self-importance and pedantic to boot, this work has exposed not only what is most sinister about television, but also that which may be of value.

Whether reacting against, satirizing or appropriating the techniques of television, the videotapes in this section seek to subvert or escape the standardized expectations and denatured experiences of watching television. Among these tapes, *Media Ecology Ads*, *Excerpts and Euphoria* and *Soap and Water* confront specific orthodoxies: *Media Ecology Ads* questions the methods of television advertising and coyly deconstructs their techniques. On the other side, *Pie Y Cafe* by Jan Peacock makes a wholesale appropriation of these techniques as a metaphorical structure for U.S. power-brokering in Central America. In *Sax Island* the high-speed delivery of tv ads is added to cartoon imagery and crime-thriller motifs. *Rhea* comes closest to actually *looking like* television but what seems to have occurred is that television has been absorbed, its essence distilled and respun as pure ambiguity. These sorts of re-assembling of conventions into new configurations reflects an attitude which recognizes that a format can in itself have a particular metaphorical and ideological meaning; the format can be divested of that meaning through subtle manipulation and become a vehicle for an entirely different order of content. Art becomes the navigational principle which allows us to decipher and interpret these transformed conventions.

A taxonomy of the inherent properties of video has arisen through an exploration of the formal and technological necessities of the medium, its formal characteristics frequently giving rise to much of its content. Form and meaning are derived from the format of the screen, its luminous glow and synthetic colours; computer, colourizer and synthesizer allow the manipulation of time and sound and infinite variations on the framing, composition, juxtaposition and layering of images. In the second program I have included works which use one or a set of specific characteristics in an economic balance with the ideas or the content of the work. In *No End* the simple technique of superimposition of both image and sound informs and illuminates the concepts of routine and circularity, the concept of a seamless reality without beginning or end. A balance between the seemingly objective and distanced electronic world and the subjective, emotional and philosophical reality of the artists is achieved in both *Come On Touch It* and *1000 Murders*, in each case by engaging a reciprocity between the structure and form of images, sounds and the content of their respective perceptions. *Come On Touch It* can be seen as an elaborate pun on the fiction of mass individuation, with the artist's eyes in the center of the screen punctuating the cliché of the opacity of the medium.

By logical extension, the formal characteristics of the medium can generate a metonymic structure for a distinct method of communication. Of the tapes in the third section of the series, the most overt examples of

the implementation of this metonymic structure are *Anthem* by Bill Viola or Dara Birnbaum's *Damnation of Faust*. In each of these tapes, the sequencing and layering of images and the rhythmic stretching and compression of sound and time mirror the complexities of the text. The formal devices and technical effects act as the grammar and punctuation. In Ken Feingold's *The Double*, our fascination with the richness and variety of the images is the key to apprehending the syllogistic structure of the tape.

The omnipresence of television technology, through satellites, networks and 105 channels, allows its audience, in the bedroom, board room or corner bar, the sensation of many multiple and simultaneous presents. This sensation is inextricable from art in an electronic age. Video is ideally suited to representing this feature of our culture, but need not abandon the traditional forms and perennial themes that artists have always pursued. In the last three programs a variety of traditional schemes are retrieved from the classical order and refashioned to fit the limits of video. *Grand Mal* by Tony Oursler, by virtue of its spoofing of entrenched social values, sits squarely within the tradition of black humour. Incidents which are thematically related, rather than following any logical continuity, are the basis of his story-telling technique. In all three versions of Judith Barry's *Casual Shopper*, the central female character activates the narrative. It is her "gaze" which forms the link between the two open systems of video and shopping centre. *Arcade*, *The Woman Who Went Too Far*, and *Starling Man* all take a position on issues of representation while transforming conventional narrative and dramatic constructions. The presentation of so-called objective information in the form of news programming and documentaries is the site of the most often criticized feature of television networks. Neither Wronski's *War Can Be Like This*, nor Rosler's *A Simple Case For Torture* claim anything but a subjective voice. Wronski's tape includes information and material which has been suppressed by the television networks and the political machinery. In another context, Martha Rosler has said, "I like to point to situations in which we can see the myths of ideology contradicted by our actual experience..."

In the final program I have selected tapes which emerge out of other related temporal forms and which are realized in video in a way that weds the unique characteristics of each with the other. In *And One And One And One*, features of theatre – frontality, depthlessness, the weight of gesture – are precisely aligned with similar features of video to create a piece that carefully preserves the dramatic impact of the play, and refashions it to the form of video. *Banana Man* by Mike Kelley is clearly derived from performance art, which in this case is clearly derived from the traditions of epic poetry. The performer's juggling of reality and artifice finds a peculiar resonance with our scepticism about the medium.

The position of *Is That All There Is*, at the end of the program is by no means casual. The title, "Is That All There Is" suggests the feeling of disappointed or frustrated expectations. In so far as music videos are seen by many as the most available alternative to standard television fare, they generally offer little that is actually different in content or viewpoint – they simply alter the format and thus, if they are the alternatives, disappointment is an appropriate response.

In a less self-reflexive way, this title also alludes to the frustrated ambitions of those video art pioneers who were first attracted to the medium for its presumed radical potential. Those artists were fuelled by an optimism that permitted the vision of a total penetration, criticism and subversion of mass communications by a more personal and direct, multi-faceted and artistic content and method. The reality of the productive structure and delivery system of television did not – perhaps cannot – permit the implementation of this vision. Indeed there have been and continue to be those occasions when a little bit of air time is conceded to artists, but it is hardly substantial enough to constitute a breakthrough. By comparison to all that was hoped for, perhaps a sense of disappointment is appropriate on this count as well. However, my own answer to the question is: no, that's not all. What I have tried to show with these programs is that in the hands of some artists, video has attained the status of a tool which is substantially separate from the mass understanding of the delivery system of television, and quite outside the educational and cultural structure which provided its initial endorsement. It occupies a position that is unique and holds the vast potential to bridge these areas of concern in a manner which reflects the cultural preoccupations of the moment.

These preoccupations include themes which are perennial in art – fear, time, power, love. They also include issues of representation. Given that the form provides a portion of the meaning to any representation, and given that we are in the business of combatting stereotyped representations of ourselves and our reality, it seems pertinent to approach the content of these works *through* their forms. This is what I've tried to do to a small extent here. But this is only a crude beginning. It is, after all, on the level of content that any of these works will sustain their cultural resonance. I suggest that it is at the site of their viewing that we must meet the content, and so I extend the invitation...

Christina Ritchie



PROGRAMME NOTES

PROGRAMME ONE

CONVENTIONS OF TELEVISION

Antonio Muntadas

born 1942, Spanish, lives in New York

MEDIA ECOLOGY ADS

USA 1982, 11 minutes

In *Media Ecology Ads*, a series of three "ads" – *Fuse*, *Timer* and *Slow Down* – Muntadas explicitly solicits a critical awareness of the techniques of the mass media as a deliverer of one-sided information. The pieces are constructed on the principles of television commercials and function as critical commentaries on the speed, narration and information content and exchange used in the production and dissemination of moving images.

Eric Metcalfe

born 1940, Canadian, lives in Vancouver

Hank Bull

born 1949, Canadian, lives in Vancouver

SAX ISLAND

CAN 1984, 11:44 minutes

Sax Island is a clever combination of real figures placed against and within recorded sounds and jazz interludes – framing erotic obsessions and lustful behavior. Recurring motifs and enlarged details produce a fantasy narrative which manipulates the features of comic strips and detective thrillers and the structures of television commercials.

Edward Mowbray

born 1958, Canadian, lives in Toronto

EXCERPTS AND EUPHORIA

CAN 1983, 12 minutes

"*Excerpts and Euphoria*...reconstruct(s) the biggest American media event of 1982, the shooting of Ronald Reagan, to present a fluid and complex political critique. The medium is used with great skill, accomplishing a swift and biting attack on the current American administration and media exploitation." (K.O. Acheson *Trans FM*)



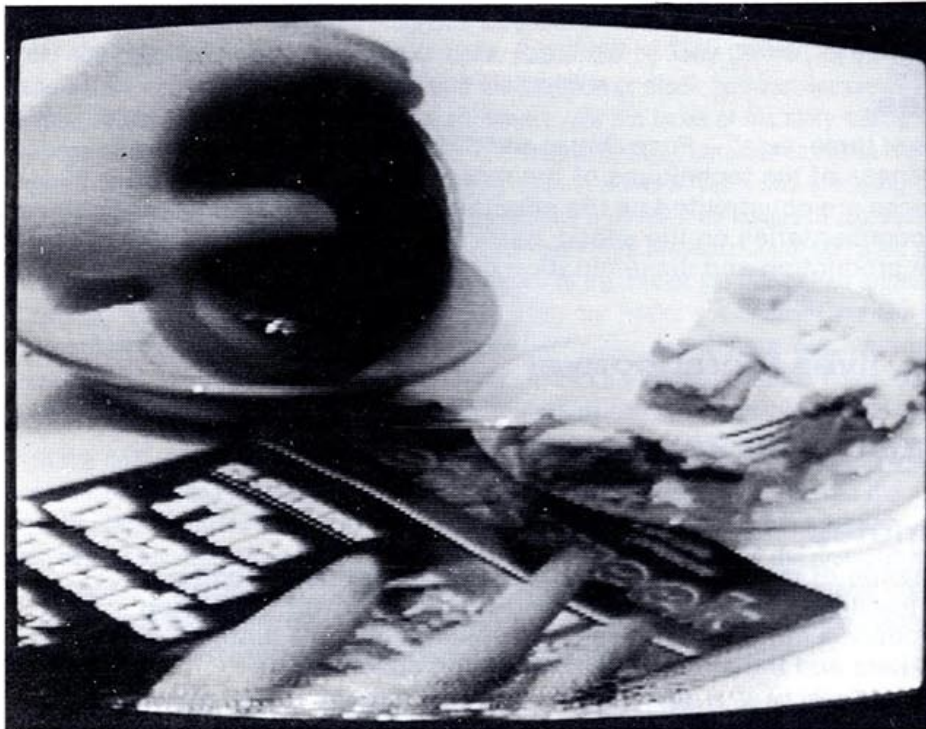
from **Excerpts and Euphoria**,
Edward Mowbray (photo: C. La Fluffy)

Jan Peacock
born 1955, Canadian, lives in Halifax

PIE Y CAFE

CAN 1984, 4 minutes

With *Pie Y Cafe*, Peacock takes possession of television advertising techniques – simple direct images, fast-clipped editing, voice-over commands – to expose the rhetorical method of American exploitation in Central America. Apple pie and coffee are emblem and symbol for economic and political imperialism.



from **Pie Y Cafe**,
Jan Peacock
(photo: Paula Fairfield)

Richard Layzell
born 1949, English, lives in London

SOAP AND WATER

CAN 1983, 17:30 minutes

A narrator, situated in an isolated landscape, informs us of the developments in a variety of television soap operas while our view is directed to images of people and wild creatures playing on an ocean beach. This is contrasted with scenes of main-street traffic, a news event, and other phenomena of the urban environment. The tape questions the extent of the damage wrought by man's domination of nature and implies that we are all complicit in its perpetuation.

David Askevold
born 1940, American, lives in Toronto

RHEA

CAN 1982, 6:50 minutes

Rhea opens and closes with a wandering spotlight, a wandering "I", in a saturnine and oblique interior. Faces appear against vague landscapes or without setting. A continuous panning movement links the faces, allowing them to combine in essence, then in form. They speak the names of others; as the visages transform, the "other" implied in the spoken name loses otherness and all names come to denote a commonality and singularity.

PROGRAMME TWO: FORMAL CHARACTERISTICS

Dalibor Martinis

born 1947, Yugoslavian, lives in Zagreb

Sanja Ivekovic

born 1949, Yugoslavian, lives in Zagreb

NO END

YUG 1983, 8 minutes

"Every day the clichés of mass media images and language radically reduce the multiplicity and richness of our perception. As a consequence, our life is turning into a daily routine. By rejecting any complexity and ambiguity we try to create our personal worlds, which are getting smaller and poorer and will finally disappear. Our memory is our only companion and our strongest enemy. The woman in *No End* claims repeatedly: "There'll be no end because I forgot the beginning." Like an obsessive patient, at the same time she wants and does not want to get dressed, she wants and does not want to remember." D.M. and S.I.

Ian Murray

born 1951, Canadian, lives in Toronto

**COME ON TOUCH IT (Study No. 4 For A Personality
Inventory Channel)**

CAN 1978-83, 34 minutes

The electronic complexity of *Come On Touch It* is achieved through the mixing of seven simultaneous layers of video imagery, some live, some off-air, and some electronically generated, and six audio tracks. The text that runs across the center of the screen is from the Minnesota Multi-Phasic Personality Inventory, the standard clinical personality study. As a proposal for an interactive television system, *Come On Touch It* dwells on the reciprocity of influence between the subjective individual and the normative power of mass-culture representations. The test subject in the tape is the artist himself.

Marcel Odenbach

born 1953, German, lives in Köln

1000 MURDERS

GER 1983, 39 minutes

With *1000 Murders*, Odenbach takes media representations of terror, violence and murder and inserts them into the frame of his own subjective emotional and psychological condition in order to question the quality of information contained in those representations, to question its relation to reality and our attitude toward it.



from *1000 Murders*, Marcel Odenbach

PROGRAMME THREE

ELECTRONIC LANGUAGES

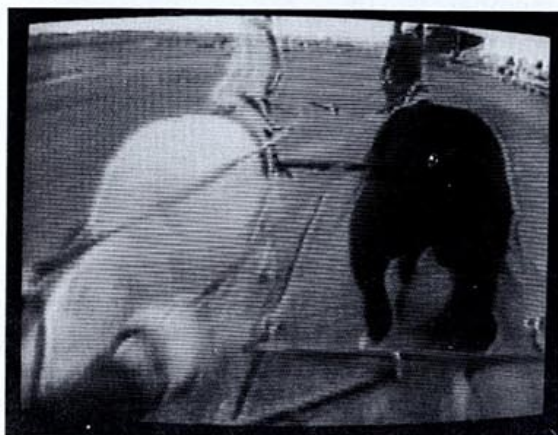
Ken Feingold

born 1952, American, lives in Minneapolis

THE DOUBLE

USA 1984, 29 minutes

On first viewing, *The Double* resembles the experience of channel-jumping at a particularly rich viewing hour. Lush and exotic, the images topple over each other in apparently frenzied abandon. Sheer fascination with each image keeps our attention, yet we know that these images have been conscientiously selected and placed in a precise order. Our fascination gives way to a search for meaning and we realize that our very fascination is the key. Feingold says: "*The Double* is about the spaces between words in a sentence, between the books in a library; the words which emerge out of these and the images which want to show us why to stay alive despite...(it all)."



from *The Double*, Ken Feingold

Dara Birnbaum

born 1946, American, lives in New York

DAMNATION OF FAUST: EVOCATION

USA 1983, 10 minutes

"Evocation" is the prologue to a five-part work based on Berlioz's *Damnation of Faust*. Shot in an inner-city playground, it takes on the formal devices of the 19th century Ukiyo-E "pictures of a floating world" and adapts them to 20th century technology. Slicing the screen into vertical pillars and fan shapes, which both reveal and conceal images simultaneously, discloses a longing for lost innocence and renewal and a desire to transcend the everyday.

Bill Viola

born 1951, American, lives in Long Beach, CA

ANTHEM

USA 1983, 11:30 minutes

In *Anthem* the form and function of the religious chant is interpreted through conventional music video practice. The piece centers on a single piercing scream emitted by a young girl standing under the rotunda of Union Railroad Station in Los Angeles. The original scream of only a few seconds in length is extended in time and shifted in frequency via 1-inch slow motion techniques. This generates a scale of seven harmonic notes which are composed through editing into the melody which makes up the soundtrack. The image consists of the girl as source of the sound, plus several image sets, centering on themes of primal fears, darkness, materialism and the detrimental separation of body and spirit.

Dalibor Martinis / Sanja Ivekovic

(See notes for NO END)

CHANOYU

YUG 1983, 11 minutes

"Simplicity, inner tranquility, harmony, achieving the highest sophistication with very natural means: these are the essential values in chanoyu, the traditional Japanese art of serving tea. Using a simple plot that involves a nervous couple, instant tea and lousy tv, the videotape represents an ironical comment on our western culture. Yet the seemingly lost harmony is still there. Under the surface of the obvious, in the minimal gestures and glances, in the movement of the objects and the sounds they produce, beauty and elegance are hidden." D.M. and S.I.

John Watt

born 1952, Canadian, lives in Toronto

"Surveillance on the Welland Canal" from

INDUSTRIAL TRACK

CAN 1984-5, 30 minutes *

Using industrial surveillance cameras installed along the length of the Welland Canal in the Saint Lawrence Seaway system (linking the Great Lakes to the Atlantic), the tape tracks a ship's passage through the locks.

* Approximate, in production at time of publication.

PROGRAMME FOUR

NARRATIVE

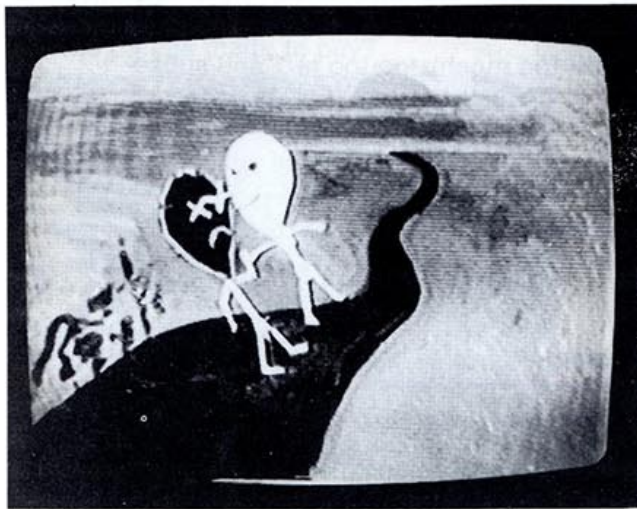
Tony Oursler

born 1957, American, lives in New York

GRAND MAL

1981, 23 minutes

Laughter, orgasm and epileptic seizure are said to share a similar psychological effect whereby many conflicting emotions are experienced simultaneously. Using descriptions of massive epileptic seizures to provide the structure, *Grand Mal* follows its finger-puppet characters in absurd and sleazy situations through a collection of opposing sensations.



from **Grand Mal**, Tony Oursler

Judith Barry
born 1949, American, lives in New York

CASUAL SHOPPERS

USA 1980-81, 6 minutes and 3 minutes

"Shopping is an activity that consists of predictable yet indeterminate activities where, like the cinema, what we go to experience over and over again is our own desire. ... (The movie spectator and the shopper) are linked in several crucial ways through the process of *looking* that must be brought to both occasions to activate desire – the spectator sits and the film does its work, the shopper moves and the store comes to life. *Casual Shopper* is about, but certainly does not exhaust, some of these relations." J.B.

Casual Shoppers was made in three "sizes". In the thirty minute version the central female character controls the narrative in that her "look" structures each shot, and it is her look that is at stake. The six minute version focuses more on the way in which the clichés of the "woman consumer" in the mall compel the character to fulfill culturally inscribed expectations of her behaviour. The three minute version focuses on the construction of "the consuming subject".

Lyn Blumenthal
born 1949, American, lives in New York and Chicago

ARCADE

with Carole Anne Klonarides

USA 1984, 11 minutes

Archiving between expression and documentation, *Arcade* pursues the contemporary dialectic between media and life. A structure of segmentation and juxtaposition attempts to discipline societal entropy while simultaneously applauding false starts to escape that containment. Images of sex roles (who is the poseur) stereotyping provide a case study of the defining power of representation. On the audio track, genderized responses to chaotic violence – "We've got to go forward; we've got to go on" (John Hinckley's mother) and "Don't worry about it man: I'll take care of it" (Robert DeNiro, *Taxi Driver*) – prove equally ineffective, collapsing futility and revolt where art slips through. Paint Box images, Ed Paschke. Music by A. Leroy.

Colin Campbell
born 1942, Canadian, lives in Toronto

THE WOMAN WHO WENT TOO FAR

CAN 1984, 10 minutes

"A modern morality story about two women who 'want too much', 'go too far', and subsequently pay too high a price." C.C.

Corry Wyngaarden
born 1949, Canadian, lives in Vancouver

STARLING MAN

CAN 1982, 8 minutes

Starling Man identifies a specific male need to dominate nature. From the distrust of natural events comes a bureaucracy that poisons food and thought. From the merest problem of starlings shitting on cars evolve continent-wide solutions such as cutting down trees and scattering contraceptive chemicals. However, faced with the frustrations of the task of conquering nature, this tape shows the core of man to be sensual and vulnerable when faced with the need for love.

PROGRAMME FIVE DOCUMENTARY

Peter Wronski
born 1956, Canadian, lives in Toronto

WAR CAN BE LIKE THIS: VIETNAM MY LOVE CAN 1984, 25 minutes

This tape evokes the pain and humiliation of the many thousands of Vietnam veterans who suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Flashbacks and hallucinations of the sights, sounds and smells of the battlefield can be triggered by the most routine activity, like having a shower or going to the supermarket. The psychological symptoms are exacerbated by the fact that the society didn't accept the war and spurned the returning veterans. The Department of Veteran's Affairs' recent response to the problem is tied, according to Wronski, to the current administration's program to re-establish the cult of heroism and to strengthen the war psychology of the nation.



from **War Can Be Like This: Vietnam, My Love**,
Peter Wronski

Martha Rosler
American, lives in New York

A SIMPLE CASE FOR TORTURE, or how to sleep at night USA 1983, 60 minutes

In 1962, a *Newsweek* guest column by a New York philosophy professor called for the judicious use of torture in the U.S. to combat future atomic terrorists. This tape asks, why now? It deploys articles and excerpts from newspapers, magazines, radio and television to unravel the truth of the "terrorist threat". It argues that the significant terror is perpetrated by States, often backed by the U.S., to protect business interests abroad. Many client States, especially in Latin America, keep order through repression, torture and murder. As the economy shrinks, our state officials remind us that "Freedom is not free". The question is, who can be made to pay?



from **A Simple Case for Torture**, Martha Rosler

PROGRAMME SIX

HYBRIDS

Helen DeMichiel
born 1953, American, lives in Boston

AND ONE AND ONE AND ONE
with Laurie VanWieren
USA 1984, 34 minutes

And One And One And One is an adaptation of three early, short plays by Gertrude Stein. Through a wide array of choreographed movements and stylized acting, translated and constructed through video, the producers' intentions were "to explore and re-evaluate the seminal power of the three plays to capture a very specific type of female language - one that is episodic, fragmentary and circular in structure. The goal is to both entertain and to show Stein's particularly exhilarating mode of viewing the world, with an inherent sense of gaiety, love and sanctity and for the possibility of an ever-surrounding desire". Choreography and dance direction are by Laurie Van Wieren. The three adapted plays are: *Identity A Poem* (1935); *A Saint In Seven* (1922); and *A Circular Play* (1920).

Mike Kelley
born 1954, American, lives in Los Angeles

BANANA MAN
USA 1983, 28 minutes

The *Banana Man* is a tight-lipped sailor who's "not responsible"; he's a stagnant pond, the well-spring of Christian gloom; he's the Banana Jesus slipping from the Madonna's hands; he's the beast of burden, the paragon of motherly love, a sailor/martyr in search of domain. The Banana Man's sea legs carry him from epigram to epic poem through word, form and movement to conclude with a big yellow question mark, a head-to-groin query.

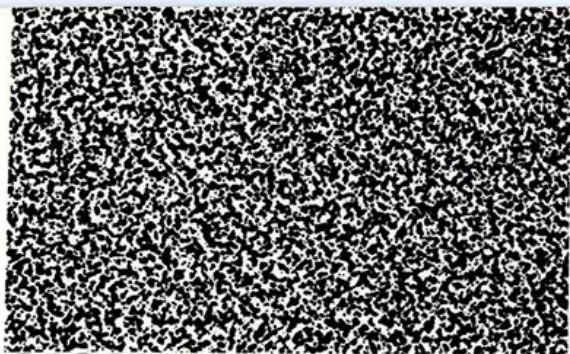
Ültimathule:

Chris Mullington
born 1957, Canadian, lives in Ottawa

Ed Eagan
born 1956, Canadian, lives in Ottawa

IS THAT ALL THERE IS
CAN 1984, 6 minutes

Arrangements and music by Ed Eagan; vocals and video by Chris Mullington. Computer animated imagery gives a fresh meaning to the Peggy Lee hit of the 50's. The makers express a resigned irony in the face of the contradictions of fate.



SIGNAL APPROACH

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