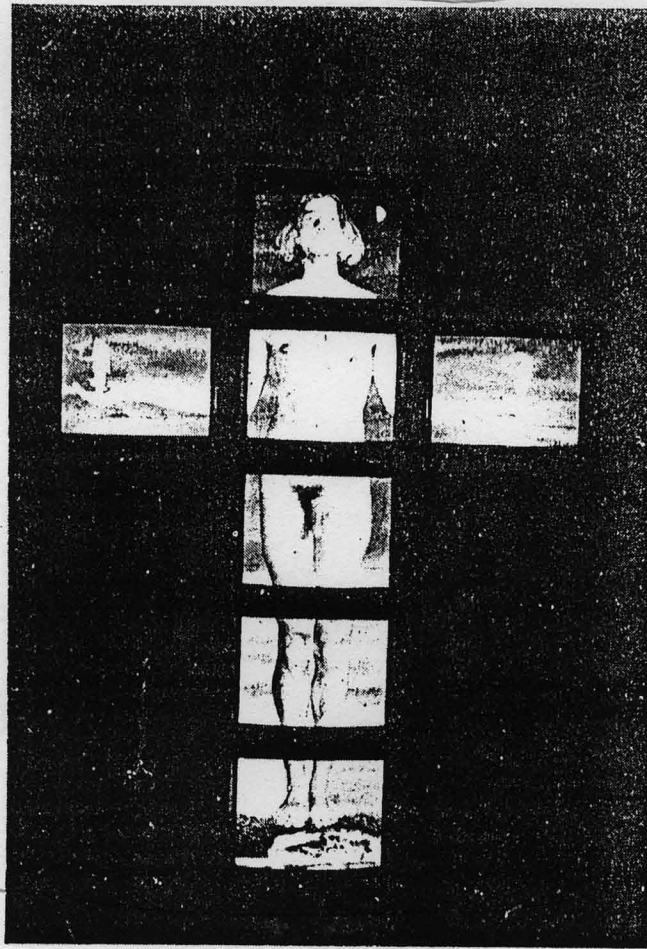


to the space when the coast was clear - perhaps also was suffering from 'Slade-fatigue'. Robertshaw tells us that he works within psychiatric and special care issues, in order to understand the complex histories of such institutions and the views represented by the hierarchy of medicine. He has been inspired by Jeremy Bentham who in 1775 devised an architectural mechanism named the Panopticon. This was a circular building with cells at the periphery and a central viewing tower from which the building was kept under surveillance. He refers to the reductionist view evident in Eugenics and the philosophy of DNA; that we are composed of small elements making up the larger picture; that such a belief negates any intrusion by consciousness, environment, culture or even history; and that it is split between nature and nurture remains predominant in biology and science. On the other hand, it really lent itself to creating your own small interactive performance piece - as was I want.

One piece in the whole festival which made me actually want to inhabit its world in a Virtual City was City of Angels by Catherine Ikam. Interactive computer-generated faces, or rather, masks floated, twitched, turned in metallic blue, magenta and silvery light across eight monitors lined up across the floor. Like a governor overseeing their movements, a large video-projected version floated above them on the wall behind. Again, the clever trick with the luminosity of the monitors. In this case blinding you to the fact that there is a wall at all, giving the projected face imposing and eerie solidity. 'Today', Ikam creates, 'intermediate' or synthesised beings and virtual environments interfere more and more with reality. City of Angels is a creative metaphor for these new sensory spaces - described by SF writers like Phillip K Dick and William Gibson. It goes back to the ancient belief in the existence of a City of Angels (a society organised by messengers mediating between gods and men), which is present in religions throughout the world'.

The Open Eye Gallery presented two pieces. Richard Wright's Corpus offers us the opportunity to perform 'video-surgery' on the integrity of a computer simulated figure which 'swings' across four monitors. I was childishly disappointed to find that this wasn't anything to do with the technology of touch-sensitive screens but more about heaving huge boxes on castors containing up-ended monitors across a large circular space. A kind of four piece jigsaw.

Lightless by Jonathan Swain is an amazing choreography between two robots (the kind that move cars) each holding a video projector. Ever so slowly, they twist and turn on their pedestals, projecting images onto the floor, ceiling and walls.



The images are heavy with substance and yet free from the restraints of gravitational pull. As you follow them like a hypnotised snake you begin to lose your own sense of gravity and connect with the title of the piece. When the robots simultaneously accelerate then come to an abrupt stop, pinning you to the wall in a blue or orange haze, you can't help but take it personally. But you can always concentrate on the matching image opposite and pretend you haven't noticed.

At the Bluecoat Gallery Lei Cox presents 'The Sufferance'. A striking seven monitor, seven tape piece in the form of a cross. In this modern crucifixion the figure flickers between genders at high speed. Instead of being nailed to a cross, however, his/her palms are turned upwards. On the right hand, a female figure, and on the left hand, a male version, each rotating, each with an outstretched hand holding a figure of the opposite gender, which is rotating... ad infinitum. Using paintbox montage techniques and two live models Cox says his work is like 'vacuuming'. 'You pick up hundreds of frames of the model, empty the bag and chose the exact picture sequence'. He likens his work to painting or photomontage, and refers to classical painters such as Rembrandt, Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci and Poussin.

The Suffering. Lei Cox.
(Bluecoat Gallery)

Video Positive: Britain's International Festival of Creative Video and Electronic Media Art