

Introduction

Under some pressure from those in London who were much excited by the advent of the portapack, the BFI Production Board began to consider its own role in video funding during 1976. Some portapacks (Sony-Matic Portable Videocorders) were acquired and made available for free loan to users in order that the Institute might learn from observing the processes of 'video work'; some formal research was commissioned; consultative seminars were held and some examples of 'community video' and 'video-art' were financed. A formal policy decision was reached: the Production Board declared itself open to applications for projects using video tape rather than, or as well as film, with the rider that it would not consider itself responsible for financing video work in which local politics or community action appeared to be a stronger motivation than any other. Such work seems far better conducted with support from the Arts Council's Community Arts Panel.

Peter Donebauer's video tapes were the first examples of what is generally referred to as video-art financed by the BFI; to date they are also the last. On the one hand Donebauer's work was instrumental in opening up a new source of finance for video art — albeit a modest one — and on the other posed new problems. These have partly to do with that work itself, which ought perhaps to be regarded as a performance art, but more largely to do with the fact that there is an even greater problem concerning access to equipment for video artists than there is for video workers, so that the work is likely to be very limited technically, or very expensive.

Of the 160-200 projects submitted to the Production Board annually, no more than five or six are video projects. The majority of these move away from Donebauer's concerns with kinetic and abstract forms towards a less intuitive interest in problems of perception, representational time, image manipulation, and have mainly been concerned to simply demonstrate that these problems exist, rather than investigating them or using them as material to work on, as avant-garde film-makers have done.

Peter Sainsbury

Video Work

Despite historical confusions caused by the broadcasting of moving images and sounds, video and film are totally distinct media. The apparent product of each medium looks similar only because both media are used to carry a similarly produced and structured content, which is most usually literary or theatrical in nature. Neither medium in nature, neither medium in fact intrinsically lends itself to such adaptations of other forms, as can be seen for example in the banal attempts by television to cover serious music concerts. No musical gain can possibly result from close-ups of one section of the orchestra after another. The only gains are in the egos of the musicians or, more usually, the conductor. The music loses.

This is a very great shame, for it has been said that all art aspires to the condition of music.

The condition of music is that it is the live production of organised sounds that extend in time and affect our inner selves without the necessity of mediation

through verbal or conceptual structures.

The condition of video is that it is the live production of organised images that extend in time and affect our inner selves without the necessity of mediation through verbal or conceptual structures.

As one plays a musical instrument the result is an immediate feedback through the ear of what the body and mind has created.

As one plays a video instrument the result is an immediate feedback through the eye of what the body and mind has created.

Video is the visual equivalent of music.

My own concern with video has been the search for and discovery of a coloured visual expression of equivalent potency to that of music. Music needs no external references other than itself. It just is. There is now no reason why a visual event should need external references. Let it be.

Video as a medium is unparalleled by any other in its ability to allow immediate visual and aural experience extend in time and be recorded. It extends our possibilities for expression.

At present there are desperate and paranoid attempts in certain quarters to limit by definition what is 'video' or what is 'video art' either in terms of the equipment used eg the portapack video tape recorder, or in terms of the content eg alignment with mainstream modern art or film movements.

Video however is young and alive and undefined. As electronic technology pushes back frontier after frontier in terms of size and processing techniques so does video expand its possibilities. In a contemporary world where many aspects of our external environment are appearing to be finite, the interaction of human consciousness with electronic possibilities seems to be without limit.

In many ways the three videotapes produced for the Production Board in the period 1976/77 represent a different approach to the production of video to that practised by the media and most independent users.

The areas explored included 1. the validity of the naturalistically reproduced image, 2. the relationship between the image and the sound, 3. the value of non-edited ie 'live' television, 4. the value of improvisation within this context and 5. the production of television by only two or three people working in a studio situation.

Working in collaboration with a composer the method of production that we have developed can be described as follows.

Starting with pre-recorded or live music the sound is shaped and structured by a live mix of all the available sources and treatments that have been set up. Similarly, events occur in front of television cameras and the visuals are shaped and structured by a live mix of all the available imagery and treatments. This concept of the 'live mix' is central to this way of working and refers back historically to the earliest days of broadcast television. In contemporary broadcast the introduction of videotape, and now sophisticated videotape editing, has seen a rapid decline in live television in favour of the pre-packaged product tailored to meet a time slot. Our productions find their own form and their own duration by performance. Both the musician and the video artist have immediate live feedback of one another's produc-

tions. Sometimes a transducer allows sound elements to affect directly some of the visual elements. Random factors play a considerable role in the detail of the visuals at any one moment, but very little to the shape of the overall production. Form and colour are always under the direct control of the video artist, and can be manipulated as sound is by an instrumentalist.

All these three tapes were thus generated by the interaction of a musician and a video artist in a controlled improvisation performance. The tapes are un-edited, being real time recordings of an event in a television studio. This event is not perceived by the viewer as occurring in such a space. The space recorded is the inner world of the two performers' exteriorised into a meaningful form which is recordable in terms of image and sound. This final form is thus a unified expression of the mutual interaction of two human consciousnesses. These consciousnesses are formed by the cultural conditions of our day, and the external form is relevant to this point in time more than any other.

The external form is a reflection of internal forms that we each carry within us. Some of these are very fundamental indeed and can be seen in all cultures of all times. Others are more relevant to our internal condition today, where our mythological perception is governed by the ideas and expressions of science and technology. Our meaning, the way we perceive and interpret the world, is strongly influenced by these ideas. Perhaps as a culture we have not yet unified these areas with our internal lives. Perhaps we are doing so at this moment now.

In common with all other images, all television pictures are abstract images, ie they abstract out elements from our external and internal perceptions and re-present them. These representations are chosen by an artist on the basis of their internal necessity to him.

If an artist chooses forms that are non-representational there is a deliberate meaning in this choice. Ours is the only culture ever to have become obsessed with the need for realistic and now mechanically produced representations of our externally perceived world. It is as if we need constant reassurance that this world is real and meaningful. We are becoming so swamped by such images, which lack any serious degree of human expression, that we are becoming unaware of what is happening to us internally. The images that swamp us are those of the mass media, with television at the forefront. Somehow this amazing and powerful medium must be humanised rather than abandoned to the cheap pressures of journalism, sales promotions and audience ratings.

There is a great deal of rubbish talked in art magazines about what video is or what video art is. People seem to seek the safety of definitions (ie verbalisations) rather than the essence, which is an intuition. Video imagery is very non-corporeal compared to other visual art forms.

Looking at classical forms, paintings manifest themselves through paint on a carrier, sculptures through solid materials of many kinds situated in space. Video is manifested as a controlled flow of electrons exciting light-emitting phosphors on a television screen, or the beams of a projector on to a wall screen.

The key with video (and other electronic media) is the electrical signal which controls the flow of electrons.

To control the signal is to control the medium.

The situation of the broadcast media is at present totally schizoid. Engineers produce and control the form of the television picture, which is the signal. Producers and directors produce and control the content carried by the signal, which is the programme.

Neither is complete.

Neither has control.

And they are so separated from one another that no humanly unified result is possible. The problem is that everyone accepts it as normal when it is very abnormal. Most viewers of sensibility complain, yet do not know quite what is wrong because they do not know the technology that is involved, nor the social structure of the television production companies. What people intuitively sense is that there is an innate but unconscious conflict between the content and the form.

Only when there is a unification of content and form can a medium transcend itself.

Only when a medium transcends itself are we looking at art.

The Three Videotapes

All three videotapes were produced at the Royal College of Art studio, with thanks to Professor Stuart Hood and the engineer Reg Clough. The music for the tapes was produced by Simon Desorgher. All were monitored on 1" tape IVC recorder.

Circling (12 minutes) was inspired by the cyclical processes that occur in all natural events. The endless circling visual motif used was paralleled in the music. Eight pre-recorded and non-synchronous loops of sound were mixed live as the visuals were produced.

Teeming (15 minutes) was inspired by the process of internal meditation. External imagery only appears at the beginning and end of the tape; all other imagery was generated by feedback ie the electronics looking in upon itself. Most of the sound was pre-recorded.

Dawn Creation (11 minutes) was inspired by perceptions and intuitions of the interpenetration of order and chaos in our experience of the universe on scales ranging from micro to macro-cosmic. It was a synthesis of ideas and feelings about the medium of video itself (sound, rhythm, light, colour, electricity), and externally about the process of manifestation of all perceived forms.

Peter Donebauer