



MADE IN SCOTLAND II

## VIDEO THAT KNOWS ITSELF Notes on 'Made in Scotland II'

JEREMY WELSH

*"There was a taste for wayward and compulsive hobbies, like the marking of obsessive words in a novel, the construction of pointless mathematical puzzles on a pocket calculator, the collecting of fragments of t.v. programmes on a video recorder and the hours spent playing back particular facial grimaces or shots of staircases."*

J G Ballard, *Myths of The Near Future*, 1982

*"Video, everywhere, serves only this end: it is a screen of ecstatic refraction. As such it has nothing of the traditional image or scene, or of traditional theatricality, and its purpose is not to present action or allow self contemplation: its goal is to be hooked up to itself. Without this circular hook up, without this brief instantaneous network that a brain, an object, an event or a discourse create by being hooked up to themselves, without this perpetual video, nothing has any meaning today. The mirror phase has given way to the video phase."*

Jean Baudrillard, *America* (Chapter 3; *Astral America*) 1986.

OBSESSION and the circulatory self reflexive logic of the hook-up, themes observed and reported by Ballard in his psycho apocalyptic fiction and by Baudrillard in the crypto fiction of his theoretical discourse on America. Themes with broad social and psychological implications, themes that aptly illuminate a discussion of the works in this collection of video tapes. Themes that describe the major cultural shifts of the eighties, and an anthology of short video pieces that display the primary characteristics that have been embodied in the twenty year development of video as art practise.

Dispense with the term Video Art, we have outgrown it, but we have not yet grown into the alternative term, Television Art, and perhaps we never will; it is too fragile, too portentous. Media Art has become a fashionable alternative, suggesting a broadness, an encompassing of the technologies and informational/cultural forms that shape electronic culture. However, increasingly, the site of 'Media' is the screen, since most newspapers are produced on computers, most pop music is produced on computers, most forms of communication are becoming network based and dependent upon the phenomenon of Video to materialise. Video, in Baudrillard's conception above, is more than a technology for the storage, retrieval, reconstitution and display of images - it is a condition, an envelope, a given, almost, whose pervasiveness is unparalleled even in comparison with the print revolution of an earlier phase. So, Video is what we are addressing, Video is what is on the Video Cassette that this catalogue accompanies, Video is the technology whereby the images were produced, Video is the condition that shapes the thinking of the artists represented in this package.

Man and machine, the interface between us and our environment, the means by which we know the universe. An obsession with the man-machine interface, with the technologies of communication, is a common and understandable obsession for those working with video. LEI COX's 'TORSO', reminiscent of the works of influential German artist Klaus Von Bruch, typifies this obsession. The jerky, spasmodic movements of the male torso superimposed upon images of telecommunications equipment, suggest an interdependence of the two forms with the sinister implication that the body becomes an extension of the technology - the prophylactic function of technological form as remote sensor of the body replaced by a new configuration, a networking of hardwired technology with the 'soft' bionetwork of bodies, of consciousnesses.

An obsessive re-rendering of particular images is the keynote of a series of recent tapes by PICTORIAL HEROES, who address the political power of media representations through a combination of deconstruction, appropriation and adaptation, while at the same time referencing the aesthetic development of Video and their own historical position within that development. Throughout the eighties, Video internationally has often been characterised by use of key images, usually derived from television, that are crystallisations of major social, psychological and cultural themes. In the early to mid-eighties, imagery of war, nuclear power, and American political/economic hegemony were common themes in a host of video tapes. In Britain, the Miners' strike, the inner city riots of the early eighties, the potent image of Britain as Police State, became key images, key themes. And internationally, the destruction of the American space shuttle became a potent symbol of the fragility of the American Dream, signalling, perhaps, a realisation that our future is terrestrial and that interplanetary travel - a modern Dream of Icarus - is not a viable option. Indeed, far from being a route to the stars, a perspective on new and infinite horizons, the space programme is now seen exclusively and unavoidably as the expansion zone of the Industrial Military Complex.

In "Sniper", PICTORIAL HEROES are asking who is being watched and who is doing the watching, with the suggestion that Surveillance and Voyeurism are closely linked. Indeed, the popularity in the past of television programmes like 'Candid Camera' could be read as preparation for that ultimate voyeurism which would interlink television networks with surveillance systems to make us all complicit in the exercise of social control by media. The sniper is not the one holding the gun, but the eye behind the camera, the eye watching the screen. In his highly influential 1973 video tape, the American artist Richard Serra postulated that 'Television Delivers People To An Advertiser': the implication of PICTORIAL HEROES work is that 'Television Delivers People To A Network' and that having been delivered, they are subsumed, they become functioning units within a molecular structure of symbolic exchanges that add up to a meta-collectivism predicated upon the myth of the self determined individual (consumer/owner occupier/shareholder). This can be seen in operation with American cable t.v. home shopping networks, where the entire content of the programme, an orgy of non stop consumerism, a consumerism of religious dimensions, is derived from the complicity of its viewers. Neither the programme itself nor the objects it offers for sale have any meaning other than the illusion of community created by the symbolic act of participation in the communion of consumption.

Sniper's key image of the gunsight superimposed on the scene sites the tape very neatly within separate but perhaps parallel discourses. The metaphorical coincidence of gunsight/surveillance camera links it to a broad discussion of media and society, while at the same time it has an almost sly subtext addressed to informed viewers and historians of Video - a self-conscious quotation of David Hall's 1977 tape "TV Fighter" in which the gunsight/bombsite/camera connection is applied to images of second world war aerial combat. Of course, the quotation of past Art has been something of a keynote of eighties culture, but in Video it is virtually a structural principle of the form, and it seems that Pictorial Heroes' use of quotation is an ironic recognition of this.



'SNIPER' Pictorial Heroes, 1988.

If the exploding space shuttle is a highly charged image that marks the end of a dream - a Performance of ritualistic intensity, a Media Event like the Kennedy Assassination - then the option to dream of flight through space must once again be internalised. LIZ POWER's "A Cruise To The Universe" is a different kind of journey. Paper dragons chasing their tails around nebulae of digital imagery, mandala like images that combine fairytale narratives with pan-cultural mythologies. Liz Power's vision of space owes nothing to the quantal, simulated perspectives of mainstream computer graphics with their hyper real solid objects suspended in a deep linear space of Renaissance objectivity. Her space is mottled, textured, constantly shifting; a space in which light is warped and

refracted, taking on a liquidity rather than a linearity. It is an emotional and imaginative space, a space of mysterious possibilities in which the unlikely is likely to occur. The only nod in the direction of conventional science fiction (or astronomical theory) is in the final image of explosion/implosion - the Big Bang and its mirror, the beginning and the end of time.

MALCOLM DICKSON's "Arrival/Departure" is a journey of a different kind, though one whose form is familiar in eighties culture. The inter-relationship of travel, landscape and memory are the basis, the vehicle and the starting point for a speculative narrative grounded both in shared experiences - the particular qualities of landscape seen from a train window, for instance - and in theoretical discourse - Paul Virilio's assertion of the 'Aesthetics of Disappearance' (Pur War, Semiotext(e) 1983) as the perceptual mode induced by the mediating experiences of watching the world from a train or a car or on a television screen. The narrative form of the tape is a digital form - fragments of observation like bytes of computer memory, thoughts about memory itself that indicate its centrality in a culture obsessed with its own past and striving for a future in which memory as the storehouse of past experience forms the basis for an artificial intelligence that will perform the mechanical functions of production and environmental management. But memory deceives, and the corporate memories of Great Britain Inc. as archived in the databank of National Heritage, are as flimsy and transient as Data on a RAM chip, as insubstantial as the blurred images of slowed down film that function for us as the Sign of Travel.

The memory of Heritage, of fake historicism, is like a computer virus that has already invaded our national thought process, our culture, and threatens to lock us into self replicating Feedback. An escape from this is to invent forms that challenge both the tyranny of memory as repository of assumed 'Truths' and the pervasiveness of Media as the only means by which we know the world - forms that expose these constructs for what they are - even if this proves to be exposing the fact that  $0 = 0$  - such that by knowing them, we know their power.

Throughout "Arrival/Departure" the phrase is regularly repeated "Amnesia and Memory constantly interfere with one another". Here are two concepts at the heart of our conceptual models of a digital universe; the tension between Memory/Amnesia and that of Interference. Interference is the phenomenon that occurs when two beams of coherent light (laser light) meet, and is the phenomenon that makes holography possible, that fuels the drive toward the ultimate image, the image that is totally indistinguishable from "the real", the image that finally abolishes "the real" as a concept rooted in rationalist thought and enshrined as an absolute. The interference between Memory and Amnesia may thus provoke a conceptual holography that occurs, that asserts itself as an undeniable phenomenon, but whose implication is the abolition of the "reality" of memory. In the dimensionless, factual landscape of the virtual realm, the digital universe of "pure" information, amnesia is the constant threat of annihilation; loss of memory is the collapse of meaning. The hacker who infects computer systems with virus programmes - the information terrorist whose target is Memory - is the mythological creator of monsters, the Frankenstein of the information world.

The creation of 'monsters' in the sense of the production of simulations, the self-conscious manipulation of artifice, is a theme running through many of the works in this collection. CLIO BARNARD's tape 'Dirt and Science', though drawing upon a common stock of imagery in womens' art - the domestic environment, housework, cooking and cleaning - breaks with the realism or naturalism of seventies and early eighties feminist art and quite consciously utilises and exposes the illusionism and artifice of television studio production. CAVAN CONVERY and RICHARD COUZINS both flirt with illusion, play with the expectations of the viewer, while LEI COX in 'The Parallel' dismantles the illusion of reflection to illustrate that at the digital level, the old rules no longer apply.

Many of the tapes in this programme are characterised by their brevity, and none more so than the pieces by STEPHEN PARTRIDGE and CHRISTOPHER ROWLAND both of whom produce interstices that punctuate the programme as a whole. Describing each of his three 'Sentences' as a 'Work for Television' STEPHEN PARTRIDGE indicates an interventionist approach that recognizes the fact that if there is any subversive potential in Video's invasion of mainstream television, it is in a form of contextual disruption rather than in an attempt to force a segment of 'unmediated' 'true' 'representation' into the flow of overdetermined media constructs. The utopian ideal of an accountable 'community' television looks less realisable than ever at this moment when multinational conglomerates are poised to saturate the television landscape with their unaccountable messages. However, the appropriation of small segments of television's space (or time) may force open a small window through which other points of view may be accessed. STEPHEN PARTRIDGE's 'Sentences' have a peculiar quality, like the works of Jenny Holzer, in that they take the formal structures of seventies Conceptual Art and represent them in a late eighties media framework; they are Post-Modernist in a very literal sense. They refer back directly to some of PARTRIDGE's earliest work in video, yet nevertheless they are both quoting and appropriating an earlier historical moment.

Conceptual Art at the end of the eighties is just another Style to be borrowed, even if the borrower can lay some claim to authenticity. The self reflexivity of these pieces is significant not just in terms of its relevance to the whole cultural frame that encompasses 'Made in Scotland', but also in terms of the underlying structures of production and development in Scottish Video. For under the influence and tutelage of Partridge, the output of the Television Workshop in Dundee is making a substantial contribution to British Video as a whole, in terms of the quality and strength of the work, and in terms of its self identification. That is to say, its recognition of what video is and how it functions as technological form, as cultural environment, as conceptual model. The Television Workshop produces not only Video as object - the product of individual projects - but also Video as a meta structure that now clearly differentiates itself from traditional theatrical, cinematic, literary and Aesthetic conventions. Video that knows itself.

**JEREMY WELSH**

## VIDEO AS REARMAMENT

### MALCOLM DICKSON

To place 'Made in Scotland' in context and to assess its relevance and its limitations, interrelated issues come under scrutiny. Firstly, its relation to the area of experimental/time-based art in Scotland (and its potential contribution to it). Secondly, the assertion of the medium of video and its growing fashionability in the 'art world'. Thirdly, its relation to the technology of mass communications as a whole and the implications of that.

Previous partisan writing has reported the existence of artists work and activities in the areas of performance, installation and video (1). In the early 80's this was an invisible area in terms of institutional art as represented and perpetuated by galleries and art schools. More recently, certain departments within Glasgow and Dundee art schools have shed such indifference and are supportive of students' work which aims to broaden out in its forms and concerns. Imported events, such as the National Review of Live Art (now based in Glasgow) are now incorporating Scottish based work (by choice and by necessity?). The 'Audio-Visual Experimental' Festival in 87 and 88 has included Scottish artists or Scottish based work (as distinct from 'Great Britain') to a markedly visible extent (2). Through a number of traceable events there can be identified a body of artists at work who are committed to drawing attention to the practice. Video is the problem child for the repressed parent of the Scottish art world that it no longer can be satisfied with just being visible, but through its present stage of development and in the foreseeable future aims to be incandescent.

A counterpoint to new practices is represented by Variant magazine (originally self-published it now receives a small grant from the Scottish Arts Council to assist its printing costs, though still retaining a 'samizdat' approach). This explicitly supports new endeavours which might contribute to a 'multi-disciplinary' approach to art practice and to apply a critical perspective to cultural strategies. As editor, there is an underlying concern to articulate new developments within a context of creative self-determination, on the one hand against the prescriptions of culture by functionaries outwith Scotland and from those who negatively hold key cultural positions within the country, and on the other hand in contradistinction to the insularity of other practices, such as painting, sculpture and printmaking. This is not from a position of parochialism or nationalism (imagine the cultural situation in Scotland reversed), but in the recognition that an indigenous culture has to assert itself in its own terms, not exclusive of, but alongside those elements which contribute to an active infrastructure for particular practices - in this instance 'art'. This outlining of a position is not snobbery for all that which is 'extended media', but to declare that art is multi-faceted and this goes beyond the concern with the art object itself. This is not just contemplative, it is theoretical and it is operable, as several other journals through their convergence of ideas will indicate (since categorisation brings accommodation, autonomy will be upheld).

The multi-categorical finds its parallel in the need for criticism, debate, organisation and collaboration. Any change in the perception of art practice in Scotland (as anywhere else) must involve all the arts and nothing short of a complete dismantling of the establishment that currently holds sway. Despite the fact that there has never been a large forum for the relatively low number of artists in Scotland (or any artists union), change occurs often antagonistic to 'given' attitudes and the marketplace mentality - new forms and ideas create new and changing structures for their expression and dissemination, even if transient and spasmodic.

Video does not have objective priority within such a scene. It does, however, highlight the problematics as far as this article is concerned. In video, the manner of working is obviously different from that of studio-based practices such as painting or sculpture. Video, by applying up-to-date technology, does not make it more pertinent when it comes to individual artists' work, but it does generally provide a fertile area for crossover between mediums through the plurality it embraces. Furthermore, video as a distinct practice has its own specific discourse and that this too offers diverse vocabularies and interpretations.

Video for the artist is not an accessible medium. The forms that the practice take are largely governed by finance which in turn governs access. Usage is facilitated by the Workshop sector, but has drawbacks in that it is underfunded and not in possession of the post-production facilities that enable fairly simple effects such as dissolves and mixes. Specialist institutions which do have such equipment often seem impenetrable. The problems encountered by artists have been outlined in a report Steve Partridge wrote for the Scottish Arts Council in 1987 when that body were looking at possible ways of supporting the medium. Itemising the problems in relation to 'Training', 'Access to Facilities', 'Distribution', 'Exhibition and Production of Work', Partridge made several practical recommendations which could be applied to alleviate some of the problems thereby facilitating a more exciting and widespread practice. In terms of a reasonable support structure for video little has changed that is appropriate to its development in those two years. (The Scottish Arts Council has established the New Projects Scheme which aims to support time-based work in its exhibition and distribution. It is from this fund that 'Made in Scotland' is supported).

'Made in Scotland' comes in a line of several attempts to engage a 'public' with the medium. Given its marginalisation and the small number of practitioners, it is no surprise that we find the same artists involved in the organisation of screenings and events. Through specialist facilities at such a place as the video department at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art in Dundee, 'centres' of production will be apparent. 'Made in Scotland' is not meant to be representative of a widespread practice throughout Scotland, nor is it claiming to contain something which we might identify as Scottish work, as if work was of virtue simply by the country it was produced in. The title then is more for convenience, an uncomfortable one as it is given the repackaging of Scotland as a tourists paradise and the gentrification of the country's cities (with the business incentive to 'make a killing in Scotland').

The work on 'Made in Scotland' displays the range to which that tool can be applied. As a review, it illustrates the sophistication to which digital technology

can be put. The department at DJCA combines 'experimental' approaches, graphics work, animation, computer applied images and pop promos and while it is characterised by an eclecticism, this is not arbitrary, and most of the work and productions which emerge are highly individualistic.

Digital technology, in video and in television, has affected all the arts and is the bearer of the majority of codes in our image culture. Today, artists have at their disposal a means of engagement (or assimilation into) Television, and beyond that a means of critical intervention into the wider issues of the mass media (for example see the work of the Artangel Trust, Jenny Holzer and Krzysztof Wodiczko). Today many videomakers are aware of the marketplace and how video can operate in and through the media. This too is a pragmatic move - one practice may financially support the other. Perhaps this marks a maturity in artists' perceptions of their roles in contemporary society as 'image-makers' and/or 'cultural producers'. The prerequisite to this, however, is the ability to differentiate each area constructively and to know what each application is doing, why you are doing it, and how it relates to the wider ideology ('*Ideology can be seen as a 'complex of social practices and systems of representation which have political consequences'*') (3). Such an awareness is rarely voiced and even more rarely practised today.

With the possible accommodation of video within the system which needs a constant proliferation of new styles to camouflage its superficial transparency, it is more important that we always go for content and contextualise the work. Art today too easily sings the praises of present aberrations of public society; the city as theme park, and through its acquiescence fails to contest human experience as a telegenic commodity. Approaches to video, because the means for commercial and creative work are the same, are often too easily interchangeable with one another. A commitment to video within the 'art context' then, should not only be aesthetic, but philosophical and rigorously critical.

Mike Dunford in an article from Undercut criticises the video medium and offers a reassessment of the radical self-reflexivity of 'structuralist film'. An informed critique, though largely negative, it does serve to keep debate on the agenda in its polarisation:

*\* ... an experimental and critical practice will always be marginalised in this culture, in favour of an experimental practice that is either politically reactionary, or pretends to some kind of impossible neutrality (look at the art scene in painting). The present flirtation of many video-artists with some kind of notion of a commercially acceptable critical stance is no more the political posturing of many pop-groups, and becomes, similarly, a betrayal of ideals, and an accommodation of dissent and resistance". (4).*

The 80's are marked by entrenchment and fear with endeavours not so experimental and not so aggressive as conditions require. The Thatcherite ethic spreads the illusion that it is better to play the game (the game of silence and compliance) than be marginalised against the might of that mass of public opinion the Media apologists claim it is serving. The Media (in this country at least) repeats the lies of those in power in order to confuse, frighten, persuade and to disseminate a mediocrity with the excuse that it is 'freedom of choice'

(what does 'freedom of choice' mean in a country with minimal civil rights and little regard for its 'citizens?'). Satellite Television heralds the 'chewing gum for the eyes' gross of seamless TV - more choice, yes, but less reason to choose anything.

Baudrillard has stated the pointlessness of trying to infiltrate the media as a socialist strategy; *"... it is not as vehicles of content but in their form and very operating that media induce a social relation"* (5). That social relation is mediated by images and is a one-way communication, where we become an audience for fictional events and disasters on TV that largely pass us by. Furthermore as TV *"carries with it the paradigm of this culture - incessant consumption"*(6) it is becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish reality from illusion. With Pepsi-Cola going global into Russia, and Fun Lands and pleasure consortiums blighting modern cities with banality and the commodity, the world of the Spectacle is well upon us.

*"There is no longer any transcendence or depth, but only the imminent surface of operations unfolding, the smooth and functional surface of communication, the image of television, the most beautiful prototypical object of this new era, the surrounding universe and our very bodies are becoming monitoring screens".* Jean Baudrillard (7).

It is seemingly paradoxical to suggest that the battle to maintain control over some credible ideas in the modern world should begin as much in the Media as it is in theoretical violence and oppositional positions. It is an area whose discourse at once repudiates the all-encompassing values of consumerism and at the same time accommodates the unorthodox. Despite - or should we say because of - Baudrillard's panic theories and insight into our present malaise, he can at the same time appear on the front feature of the Guardian, on Channel 4 Television's 'Signals' arts programme and chair our demise as public beings in seminars at the Institute of Contemporary Arts.

Can one ascribe to art the ability to transcend the reductivism of today's exchange value mentality? Can the 'artist' do more than be self-conscious about the contradictions of their position, or is it time to abandon art and talk of values? 'Style culture' and its forced turnover of new ideas as novelties with a time span no longer than their television transmission makes the power of images prosaic. Once they have sold the product, those flickering images, tumbling logos, 3D images and scratch house-visuals have served their purpose, they no longer have 'time' in the world. With such a 'post-modern' dilemma, where do we begin to assess the drives to produce creative concepts and forms, as opposed to the commercial ones? Peter Suchin has provided a possible clue:

*"Advertisements have to be slick and simple in their implications because with the intensification of commodification the aim is to index (very) young people to dedicated consumption ... The task of art then ... is to emphasise the permanence and relative coherence over time of concerns which cannot be edited into mere financial profit, 'equivalence'"* (8).

Suchin goes on to suggest that artists should 'disturb - in many different ways - the complacency of ready-made meanings. Art should become once again something not entertaining but suspect'. Such a challenge places the creative

over the more insipid aspects of video production by applying a theoretical dimension which tackles the surrounding system. Here then, new aesthetic and critical criteria are proposed - not in evasion but in engagement with technological advances (from major productions to low-quality media based art). Video can remould our perceptions and offer new modes of thought, given the commitment and the time-span to do it. Video being the interface between art and the space of mass communications, can tumble us out of frame and offer - for better or for worse - a glimpse at our tomorrow.

## MALCOLM DICKSON

### Notes

- (1) See Performance Magazine No. 41 (1986) "EventSpace One" and Performance Magazine No. 54 (1988) "All the Rage" by Malcolm Dickson Variant Magazine No. 3 "101 Things to do with Time" by Alan Robertson Alba Magazine No. 4 "Artists Television" by Steve Partridge File Magazine No. 1 (1987) on EventSpace 3 (Video from DJCA).
- (2) This has included video work from DJCA, lectures/presentation on Transmission Gallery and their ongoing commitment to experimental work, performances/installations by The Puberty Institution, Euan Sutherland, Elsie Mitchell and Evelyn Jardine, and other screenings including film by Malcolm Dickson and Pete Horobin from a pilot issue of Variant Video. Also at the 1988 festival a well-received screening was given by Chris Rowland (co-ordinator with Steve Partridge) of the work included on 'Made in Scotland'.
- (3) Quoted by Judith Barry in an article "Women, representation, and Performance: North California" in the book 'Performance in San Francisco'.
- (4) Mike Dunford, "Video Art: the Dark Ages", in UnderCut, the magazine of the London Filmmakers Co-operative, No. 16, 1986.
- (5) Quoted by Alex Richards "Baudrillard and Hyper-Reality" in Here and Now No. 4.
- (6) E B Maple "Turn if Off" in Fifth Estate Vol. 19, No 1, Spring 1984.
- (7) Jean Baudrillard "The Ecstasy of Communication", Foreign Agent Series pocketbooks, also reprinted in Mediamatics Magazine Vol. 3 No. 2, December 1988.
- (8) Peter Suchin "Art and Fashion in the Age of Exchange", Here and Now No. 5, Autumn 1987.

## MADE IN SCOTLAND II

ANNA RIDLEY

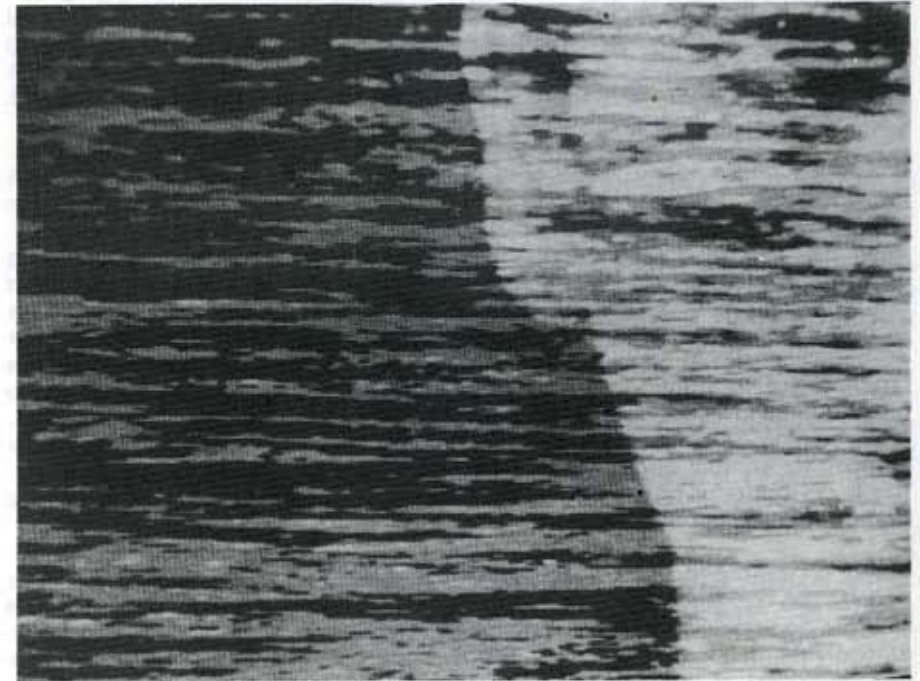
The United Kingdom is on the brink of being less so with the introduction of several satellite TV systems designed to offer an unprecedented freedom of choice thereby dissolving or, at least, diminishing the idea of a shared experience through television. Many television executives in charge of steering the terrestrial networks through this time of change take a gloomy view of this weakening of their power base. However, satellite programming appears only to offer more of the same and, as one way observed, it seems ironic that the viewer requires state of the art equipment to receive re-runs of "I LOVE LUCY" in black and white. Works by artists have only recently been found on our TV screens in any substantial way and it is not at all clear if this will continue. Advertisers, on the other hand, have blatantly borrowed ideas from artists which, if only in a backhand way, illustrates the potential that their work has in reaching an audience.

Over recent years, a number of artists have endeavoured to find ways of communicating directly with the public and this compilation "MADE IN SCOTLAND" demonstrates the determination to bypass those systems and markets which serve only to limit or place restrictions on how the work is seen. The proliferation of video festivals around the world indicates public interest in and support for original and technologically innovative work. A number of works in this collection demonstrate a high degree of technical skill and, more importantly, illustrate the almost infinite variety that video offers in the translation of ideas into visual form. The potential for the author/creator to closely direct the process of realisation can result in a very personalised expression where concerns and obsessions are clearly communicated. This is perceptible in the emergence of a female sensibility as manifested in the work of Clio Barnard, Sandra Christie and Liz Power.

"DIRT AND SCIENCE" by Clio Barnard takes as the beginning the peeling of the humble potato which leads to a cycle of enquiry. Domestic chores are isolated within a limbo divorced from their usual mundane context so that they emerge as the basis of scientific/philosophical questioning. The subtle layering of Liz Power's "A CRUISE TO THE UNIVERSE" creates an evocative and spiritual space on the screen. The simple elements of Sandra Christie's "FLY IN YOUR EYE" are combined with delicacy giving the images a resonance in parallel with the narrative. The reflective nature of the work being embodied in the treatment. The disquieting implications of "A MERE SIMULATION" by Cavan Convery produce echoes of a very different nature. The image of the distorted face at the beginning whose pleasure in pronouncing the word "BOOM", performed so as to confront the viewer, makes the idea of the transition from boys games to a man's way of holding power only too palpable. "SNIPER" by Pictorial Heroes is in the spirit of video works in the early seventies which sought to alert viewers to the selective and manipulative nature of broadcast television. Set firmly in the eighties, however, this work reflects the fragmentary and repressive state of affairs today where people are seen as targets: a target audience for advertising strategies being the more innocuous of current trends.

It is quite difficult to make a successful compilation of short works. Too often, the effect of one is overshadowed by whatever follows. In this case several of the works contrast with each other, not in conflict, but rather as a presentation of equally valid points of view so that they may be seen both individually and in combination. TV scheduling rarely offers this kind of comparison: more often it is by way of chance: mostly each programme employs various devices to fix our attention. Despite ever increasing claims on our viewing time, it is to be hoped that this kind of work will find a satisfactory distribution system that will bring it before audiences around the world. Then perhaps we may really begin to have freedom of choice.

ANNA RIDLEY



"VIDE VOCE" Partridge, Phillips, Cunningham 1986.

## VIDEO ART: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF AN EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

DAVID HALL

After more than twenty years of practice, the view that video art is an established artform is still difficult to accept - on one hand by the art world, and on the other by broadcasters. Conventional, reactionary, and certainly monetarist ideals have generally stood as a barrier to both its exposure in the commodity art market, or as a challenge to the formal conventions of TV (there have of course been a few notable exceptions). Such an identity, or lack of it, has been a problem for many younger practitioners. Partly despairing of external indifference, and partly tempted by possibilities of commercial success, some are happier with the compromise of making conventionally attractive products rather than pursuing the difficult path of personal innovation.

Video as a fine art practice has nevertheless survived; despite cynical rebuffs at one time that it was merely a passing *movement* when it was and is a new art *medium*, despite its intangible form as an object-obsessive art market; and despite commercial temptations that harass the conscience of many a young artist who can operate a camera and edit suite. It has survived, and is perpetuated through the support of a handful of flexible funding bodies and, more importantly, through art colleges.

The art education scene, certainly in Britain, is inextricably linked with artists and the art world; in the rest of Europe attitudes vary tremendously; and in North America many 'professionals' will not be seen dead near an art department - other than on an occasional *prima donna* visit - for fear of being dubbed a dreaded 'academic'. Yet without doubt ninety-nine per cent of all artists started out as art students. It may be that in North America insufficient emphasis is placed on contemporary issues and debate, or maybe too much time is spent collecting credits in subjects either barely relating or totally unrelated to the practice. But here, the importance of the introductory period working alongside artists cannot be underestimated. Most artists do some teaching at some level, often not only for financial support, but because the art college circuit provides a platform for contact and debate - debate that rarely occurs in the gallery world. This is an opportunity to discuss work openly, in progress, with few hang-ups about social etiquette.

Video art emerged out of, and has been sustained by, art colleges in this country not only because of an empathetic and progressive context (though this is lately becoming limited by reactionary changes in the name of economic rationalisation) but also out of necessity, since colleges of art have been the main providers of the essential and expensive hardware. Many artists in Britain have been dependent on their connections with these facilities in one way or another since the early seventies. Occasional excursions into the use of commercial equipment are attractive but economically prohibitive especially if considerable time is required for experimentation - and grants from funding bodies are extremely limited. Opportunities in broadcast TV are so rare as to be discounted in terms of day-to-day production. And workshops, cooperatives and

other publicly funded facilities, whilst cheaper than their commercial counterparts, are still too few and undernourished. A video artist, unlike a painter, cannot function without considerable support.

Hence the college department that actively encourages video work is invaluable as a cultural and production context for students and artists alike. In this case, *education* is not only intended as a brief initiation period preliminary to *coming out into the real world*, but is more an ongoing interface of introductory courses; professional artists' activity; common facilities; research and debate. There are some critics who might argue that this situation is both insular and cyclic, yet until an appropriate provision has been developed where artists are adequately facilitated in their production as well as in the exposure of their products, it still remains one of the most prolific workplaces.

More specifically, developing technology has undoubtedly influenced the nature of the product at all levels and wherever it is made. These developments have inevitably effected aesthetic criteria as well as making life easier. In the early days of basic black and white portapaks, extremely limited editing facilities, and no special effects, the tendency was towards fairly minimal but nevertheless profound pioneering work. This was necessary and appropriate at a time when concerns were generated in part by reductive and 'cerebral' preoccupations. If it can be said that now, this so called *post-modernist* phase, an inclination has developed towards more visually complex, even baroque artwork, then the timely expansion of technical possibilities in video allows for greater image manipulation. The dangers though are that as the gap has gradually closed between the technology available to the artist and that used by for instance TV companies, temptations inevitably arise to indulge in what is often only slick and superficial electronic wizardry. The medium here indeed becomes the message. Conversely, the current availability of complex studio mixers, time base correctors, multi-machine editing, 'paint boxes' and other dedicated computers can provide (with due caution for their many seductions) a very sophisticated palette inconceivable twenty years ago.

But perhaps more important than differences of how the work is made, where it takes place, whether it is linked to institutions, and whether one method is more appropriate than another, is the question - what is to be gained by any educational context? And this is meant to imply any gainful situation which promotes an artist's development, whether in a college studio or in a pub. Clearly one cannot *teach* art practice yet one can *learn* a great deal, and this is never-ending, not only by viewing others' work but by discourse in an informed and conducive climate. The romantic notion of the artist self-propagating in isolation is a fanciful but merely mythical concept. Exposure and critical reception are essential to a progressive artist.

While this is true for all artists in my view, it is nevertheless problematic for the student or artist working in video. Problematic in that it is still by far the youngest medium to emerge, with a very short history and very little critical back-up. All but a very few critical writings on video art to date have provided little substantial material to which one can seriously relate. And historical overviews, so far, are rarely more than national propaganda promoting work from wherever the writer happens to live. This lack of both specific insight and in-depth general



perspective in critical literature doubly demands greater regard for meaningful verbal discourse in whatever social and working environment is available.



'A Force to be Reckoned With' David Kelly 1988.

It is interesting to note that despite setbacks the number of aspiring artists working with the medium is rapidly increasing. Quantity is encouraging, but quality may be an issue particularly in this broad 'educational' context. Assessment of quality is a difficult and dangerous ground - criteria shifting constantly. And whilst I do not necessarily advocate perpetuating earlier concerns which had their roots in conceptualism and structuralism (both out of minimalism) with an essential seeking for a video 'vocabulary' - an identity specific to its form, I believe there is still a necessity for a similar search for a personal aesthetic, the same philosophic approach expected of any other fine artist. As has already been suggested it is often easier to slip into an easier route well established by TV conventions (and this may be convenient to post-modernist objectives). In traditional art media there are arguably no equivalent dominant parallels. Good or bad, a painting is a painting, uniquely created. By contrast video is capable of similar individual use, but is likely to be manipulated by public or private interests who absorb creative idiosyncrasy into a faceless melting pot and often regenerate it as tired convention.

*Video art*, as distinct from the broader framework of other independent video

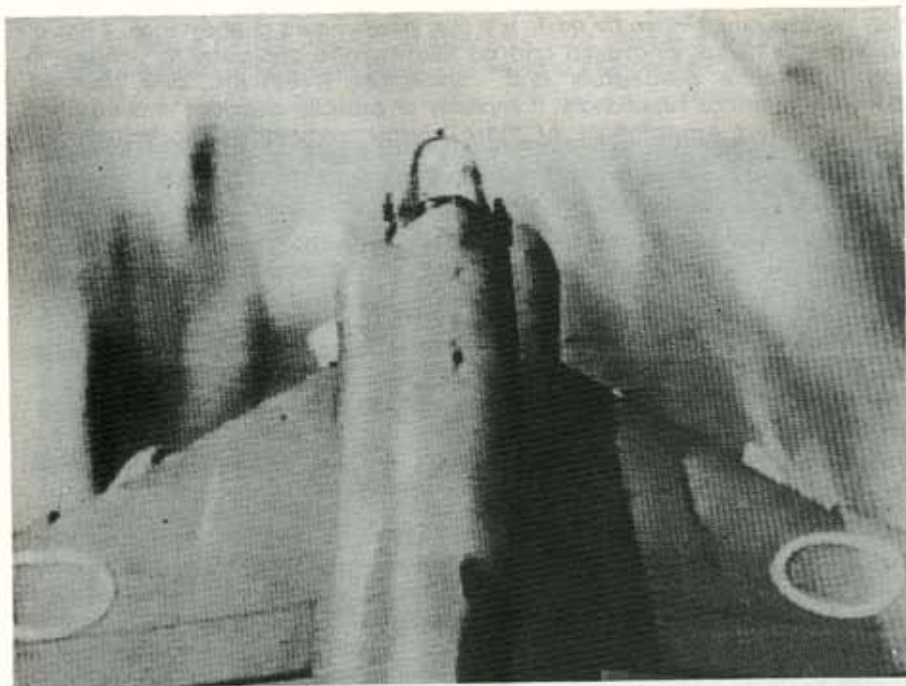
which includes much *video by artists*, is a truly independent phenomenon. It has a uniqueness in formal innovation and an idiosyncratic approach to content. *It seeks to explore perceptual and conceptual thresholds, and perhaps incidentally, perhaps intentionally, it implicitly or explicitly decodes and expands the conditioned expectations of those narrow conventions understood as television.*

Attitudes towards video art in colleges are in some ways no less problematic than in the artworld itself. Usually video activity exists side-by-side with traditional media and usually there has been a struggle to establish it as a viable artform. Justifications are difficult to accept by those who know little about it. And this is complicated by its intangibility, ephemerality and inevitable identity with non-art practice. By comparison painting and sculpture have their history and critical support, where video is immediately confused with television and all that is considered untenable in a hitherto classically established context. Also, art departments are traditionally underfunded, and to suddenly present a new medium which demands resources equivalent to those in advanced science or engineering courses creates something of a dilemma.

However, it must be said that after twenty years a positive view might be that while countless difficulties prevail there is, ironically, a determined and healthy regime. The very problems encountered in pursuing an extremely demanding art activity are not the deterrents one might expect when, for a serious artist, there is little opportunity to slip into comfortable complacency; when there are no short cuts to easy financial turnover; and when there are comparatively less channels for exposure and critical acclaim. It is the continuing enthusiasm for experimentation and discovery in a new and socially relevant medium which stimulates the necessary determination among an increasing number of artists. This is the motivation of the true artist, who will always insist on personal ideals despite obstacles and the expectations of the status quo.

*Adapted from an article first published in The Luminous Image exhibition catalogue, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam 1984.*

## DAVID HALL




---

## CAVAN CONVERY

**Cavan Convery** experiments with images, themes and languages derived from television convention, especially the more ideologically ambiguous products of the 'mass appeal' Media. Humour has always played an important part in his work, often through the use of visual puns and absurd juxtapositions creating associations which may in their usual context be obvious or even credible.

Recent work comments on the relationship between the male artist/media personality and mass destruction and death, as exemplified in modern technological warfare.

### "A MERE SIMULATION"

1987 Duration 3:09

**Malcolm Dickson's "Arrival/Departure"** uses a past journey and previous encounter to speculate on the notion of memory and experience. This journey may be real, imaginary or metaphorical. In the video, the monitor itself becomes a dream screen onto which images are built. These take the recurring form of a passing landscape and a close up of a woman's face. The video is constructed on superimposition, dissolves, the repetition of images and the interplay between positive and negative imagery. The text uses two voices, one a personal narrative and the other which describes certain psychoanalytical ideas touched upon in the first narrative.

The reawakening of images is not purely for reflection - the past is something we may never experience again - but to suggest that as balance is lost it is continually recovered. Memory, or the renewal of images

from the past to be used in the present, can be used to counteract the economisation of time within our culture as a whole.

This video was made at the TV Workshop at DJCA and made possible by a bursary from The Scottish Arts Council. It was originally devised as a video triptych which has been exhibited as an installation at the AVE 87 Festival in Arnhem, Holland and at the Third Eye Centre, Glasgow.

### "ARRIVAL/DEPARTURE"

1988 Duration 11:30

---

## MALCOLM DICKSON



---

**David Kelly's** "A Force to be Reckoned With" is one part of "The Golden Boy Comic Strip".

"Lifes a Bastard" - One of the lines from a cynical aggressive diatribe that makes the framework of the piece. The aggressive, defensive 'front' quite suddenly breaks down into the relating of a strange and vivid dream. The piece uses strong graphic images and attempts to speak of the extremities of feeling locked inside a sedate, repressive and mannerly English upbringing.

Dave Kelly studied at Lancashire Polytechnic and Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art in Dundee.

**"A FORCE TO BE RECKONED WITH"**  
1988 Duration 3:12

---

**DAVID KELLY**



---

**CLIO BARNARD**

**Clio Barnard's** "Dirt & Science" is inspired by a novel by Robert Irwin "The Limits of Vision". This is the second short story by Barnard (the first was "Still Life") that deals with a woman who is obsessed with cleaning and household chores. She meets Vermeer in her living room and Leonardo da Vinci in her bath tub full of dirty potatoes which she is trying to clean. The conversation drifts from the implications of water formations in the bath to the efficiency of cleaning oneself in a bath of dirty water.

These meetings bring into question the very nature of obsession - whether it takes the form of madness or genius.

Clio Barnard was born in California, brought up in Yorkshire and educated at Leeds, Newcastle Polytechnic and Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art in Dundee.

**"DIRT & SCIENCE"**  
1988 Duration 6:24

Other works include animations "Fish" and "Walk" 1985/6, installations "Postcards & Filmstills", "An Extreme Solitude" 1986 and "Billboard Girls" 1987.



## LIZ POWER

Liz Power's "A Cruise to the Universe" is a special adventure story. Imagine yourself on a space ship that can take you anywhere! We see what lies at the other side of the black hole and find ourselves in a very different universe where imagination is all that you need.

Liz uses animation techniques ranging from the sophisticated Quantel Paintbox to simple but effective rostrum and optical tricks.

The images are surprising and charming with chinese butterflies, fish and decorated dragons traversing the void with ease equal to the space ships that accompany them. The world turns into a ball of wind that gently blows earthly preconceptions and logic into the distance.

**"A CRUISE TO THE UNIVERSE"**  
1988 Duration 4:00

Liz Power studied at Sheffield Polytechnic then Dundee. Other works include "Funny Robot" and "Little Allen" 1987, "Choo Choo" and "Sidney the Spider" 1988.

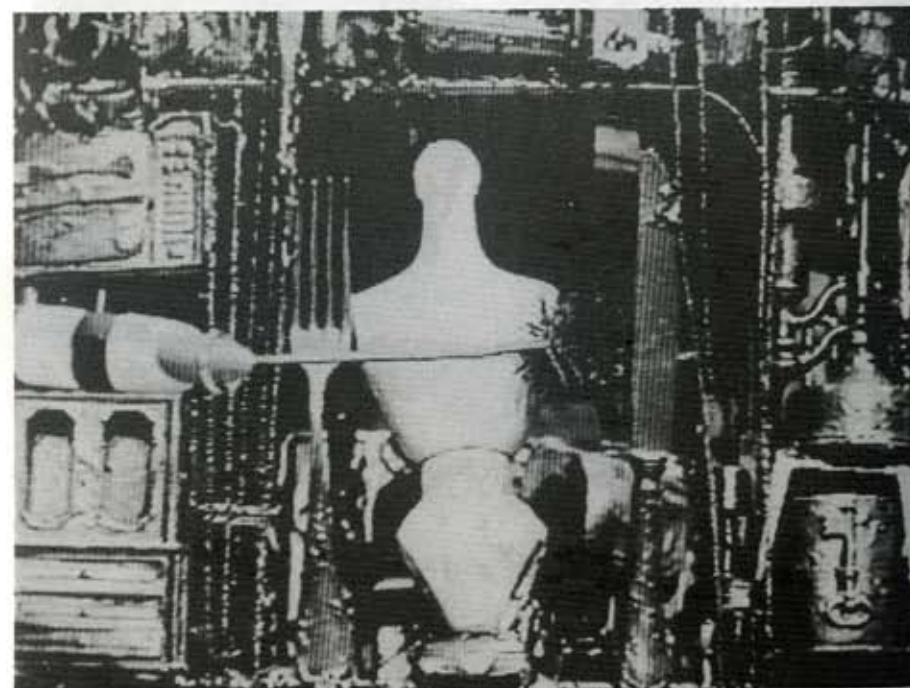
Isabella Emslie uses a rhythmic soundtrack to drive her animation "Love and the Domestic Appliance". The piece starts with two children frozen at play in a tranquil walled garden; the images of the real world are suspended as this strange journey through domesticity begins. A tower of discarded household objects waits in a red lined room, as though at the centre of a maze, from which escape is impossible. Images are repeated, but altered by the changing context. The box objects exist in their own right then become masks for semi-human figures that collide with the environment as they dance.

Events seem topsy-turvy in this day dream world, yet none the less related to everyday life.

This work was made with an award from the Scottish Arts Council and the facilities at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art.

**"LOVE AND THE DOMESTIC APPLIANCE"**  
1988 Duration 7:00

ISABELLA EMSLIE



Richard Couzins employs relatively few technological 'tricks' in his work. The general feel is that of seeing the thread pattern revealed when a carpet has been well worn. The construction of ironic juxtapositions has the effect of leaving the audience in the position of not knowing whether to laugh or wince. Essentially Couzins is dealing directly with language, both visually and audibly. His puns are often decidedly corny but the general feel is that the work sits precariously on a tightrope from which at any time it could fall into deconstruction.

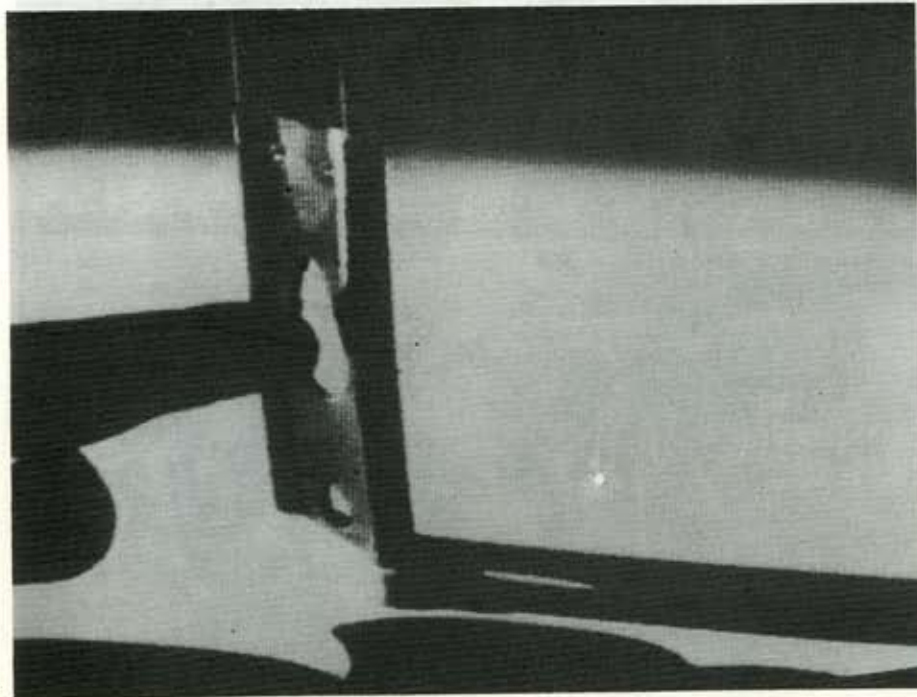
Nursery rhymes are intercut with proverbs and limericks to create a strange and enthralling narrative.

Previous exhibitions include "Death" at Kettles Yard in 1988 and "The National Review of Live Art" at the Third Eye Centre, Glasgow 1988.

**"NICELY EXECUTED"**  
1988 Duration 4:00

---

## RICHARD COUZINS




---

## SANDRA CHRISTIE

**"VENUS"**  
1988 Duration 4:30

Sandra Christie's "Venus" attempts to manipulate the parallels between event and memory in order to build a picture of a woman who wants to believe in herself as an individual person but cannot.

Venus (after all, this is who she wants to be!) places over importance on the way other people see her. She fears changing her life in any way, she cannot see herself in any other role other than the one she already portrays. She knows the score, but her choice is the illusion of magazines, television, history - her dreams are of finding beauty, love and fulfilment through these sources.

Sandra Christie studied at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and is now living and working in Edinburgh. Her four channel video installation "Waking Dream" was shown at "The National Review of Live Art 1986" at The Midland Group, Nottingham. Other works include "Fly in Your Eye" 1987, and "The Last Dance" 1987.

Venus's self destruction manifests itself through the contrasts created between the images used to present her to us, and her own perception of herself - in the form of the narrative she uses. Venus is waiting for life to happen - for the hero to arrive.



## STEPHEN PARTRIDGE

Stephen Partridge, David Cunningham, & Mary Phillips collaborated on "Vide Voce". The idea for this work is founded in the experience of the Scottish landscape which is often threatening but always powerful. The threat to this seemingly unchangeable presence was tragically underlined by the Chernobyl disaster. Partridge felt that the best way to realise this work would be through interaction, so he invited Cunningham, composer and producer, together with Phillips, singer & performer, to develop his idea. The sound was created solely from the voice of Phillips, where the acoustic perspective mirrors that of the landscape. The composition of the images parallels the sound structure weaving the parts together to complete the marriage.

### "SENTENCES 1, 2 & 3"

1988 *Various Durations*

### "VIDE VOCE"

#### (THE THREES IN THE FOUR)

1986 *Duration 10:30*

"Sentences 1,2 & 3" Three new works for television. Sound by David Cunningham. Wry comments on our sentence here, or interruptions in normal programming?

Steve Partridge has been working in video since 1974. His video tapes and installations have been exhibited throughout the world and has curated a number of shows. In 1984 "Dialogue For Two Players" was commissioned by Channel 4 Television. He is presently in charge of video at D.J.C.A.

Leigh Cox's work embodies a sort of manic-humour that often puts the viewer in an uncomfortable position, wondering whether the he/she is observing the work or vice verse.

"Torso" was originally intended to be screened in a gallery situation amongst paintings and sculptures, the tape would run continually.

"The Paralell" is intended as an illustration of a confused and frustrated man who cannot decide if he has made the right descision on which direction to take, his counterthought is mirrored in a paralell universe.

"Lei Can Fly" illustrates one of Cox's pre-occupations, the mystery of flight tinged with a deadly pun.

Work has been exhibited in Scotland, England, the Netherlands, U.S.A., and Japan.

### 'LEI CAN FLY'

1988 *Duration 1:10*

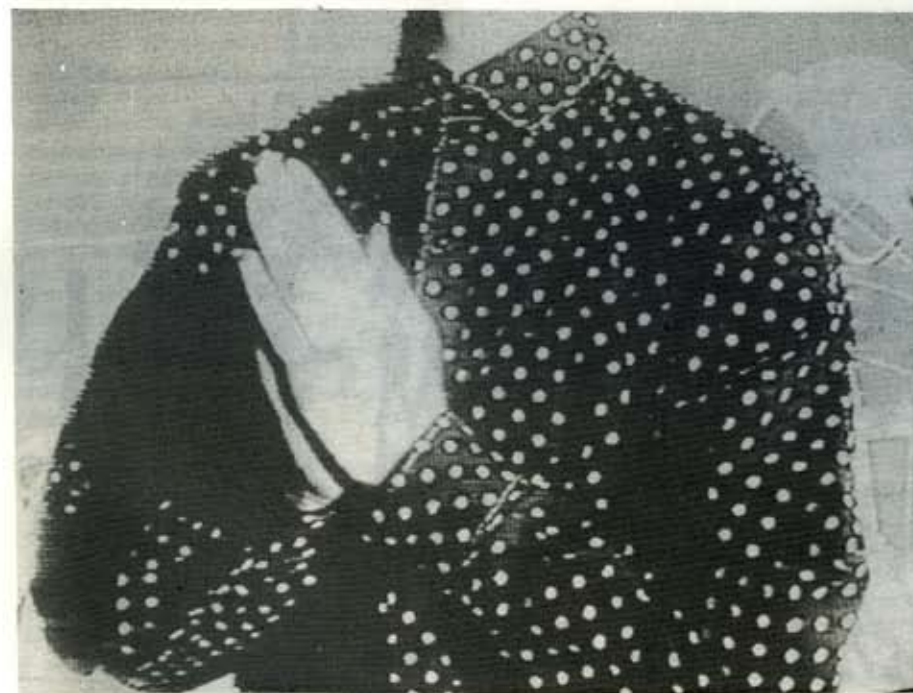
### 'THE PARALELL'

1988 *Duration 2:18*

### 'TORSO'

1988 *Duration 1:10*

## LEIGH COX



**Pictorial Heroes** are Alan Robertson and Douglas Aubrey. "Sniper" re-explores in a series of short episodes, actions, gestures and images, a number of themes of a broad cultural and political nature; in particular the notions of a media of surveillance and a jigsaw interpretation of events and experiences that were established in the original "Sniper" tape (this is version 2). The tape adopts an episodic structure, forming short bursts of energy - rather than the more methodic narrative form. This creates the sensation of several storylines happening at once, with the subjects, locations and the technology eventually converging, conflicting and revealing.

The original "Sniper" won the second prize at the "Smith Biennial Exhibition

1987". The second version tightens and reinforces what was originally subliminal imagery to enhance the piece and hopefully to clarify the issues dealt with.

Other works include "Reflections on the Art of the State" 1988, "The Cover Up" 1987 and "The Last Man in Europe" 1987.

### "SNIPER"

1988 Duration 14:45

---

## PICTORIAL HEROES




---

## CHRISTOPHER ROWLAND

Christopher Rowland's pieces included on the compilation were originally made for BBC Scotland's "F.S.D." programme. They are short 'stings' that were used as punctuation marks to separate longer sections of programming, much the same as they are used here.

In their brevity they tell parts of a continuing story that will eventually have seven episodes. The story deals with the infamous deadly sins as experienced by a tomato.

Other works (on a more serious note!) have included "Rutwork" 1986, "Swipe" 1986, "Wakey Wakey" 1987, and installations such as "Hothouse" 1988/9 shown at "The National Review of Live Art" 1988 in Glasgow, and at "Video Positive '89" at Liverpool's Bluecoat Gallery.

"TOMATO MARTYR"  
1988 Duration 0.17

"SPLAT"  
1988 Duration 0.10