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Lumiere

Lindsay Kemp  
: 60's Exile  
Returns

and Son's Senseless  
Sculpture  
Festival Supplement

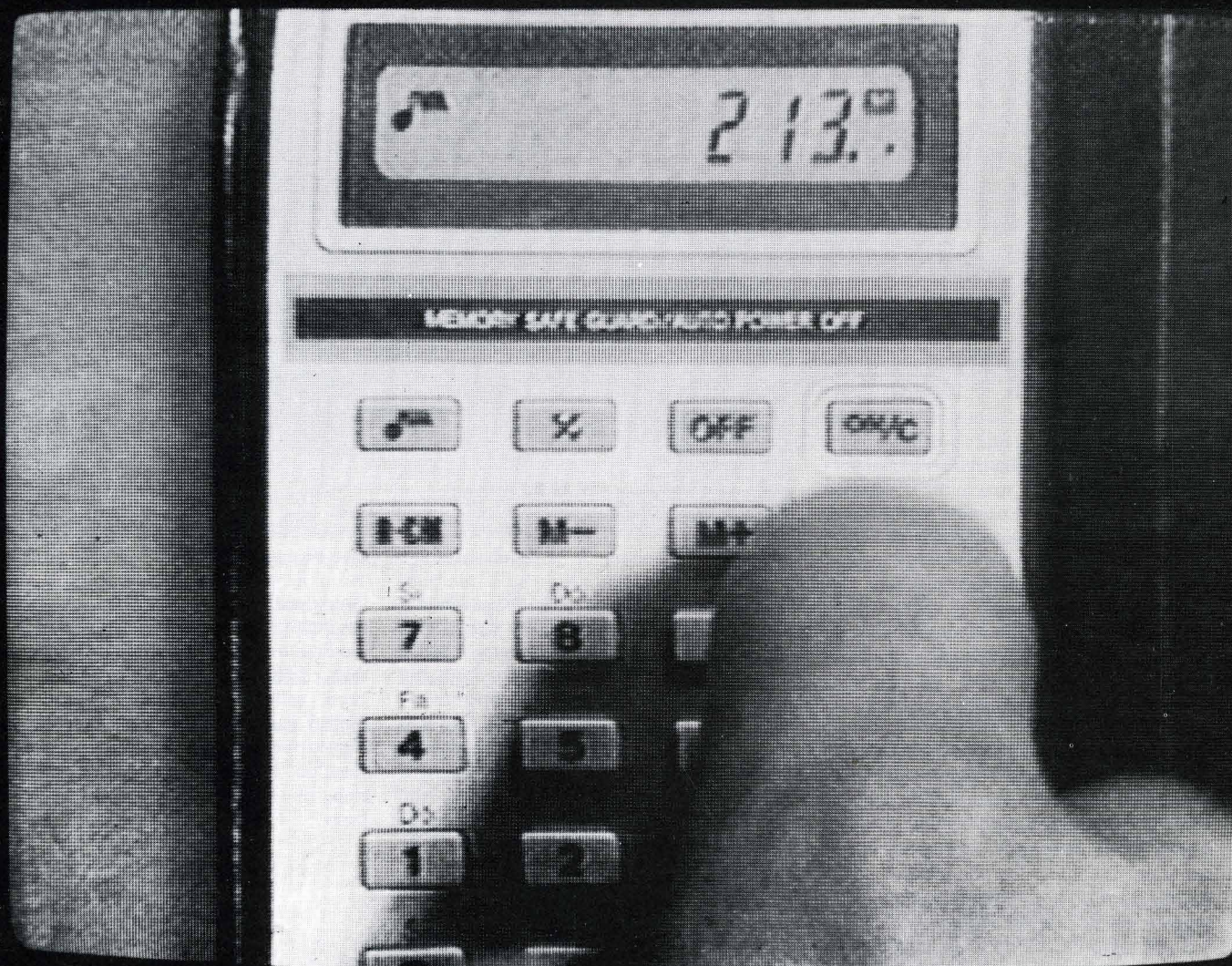
Performance Journeys, 'MOUS





# I Wish They'd Get Rid of That Phoney Sky

Video takes on high technology



Steve Hawley The Extent of Three Bells

IT WASN'T QUITE what they had in mind when they declared 1982 'Information Technology Year'. And it wasn't quite what the bombastic publicity would have us believe. But for all that, London Video Arts screening about the 'relationships between leisure, technology and culture' (and the future of the world as we know it?) deserved a close look.

The theory was: video tackles the subject of high technology. And why not?

There have to be several new perspectives on what is constantly described as 'the revolution that is going to change the way we live' (translation: 'is going to put a hell of a lot of people out of work and change nothing'). There is a spectrum of critical intelligence missing from the discussion of this emotive area, a spectrum in which video can, and will, make a contribution.

Video's narrative defies the verbal domination of television (a fact which

makes any television comment on an important issue rather than two-dimensional)—in taking on the subject of high-tech it operates at its best in its unique visual and aural world of loose associations, and interjections, woven together to present the viewer with a *sensation* of meaning, as opposed to television's wretched analytical monologue. Of course, that makes it inaccessible to some, but it does allow it to be stimulating to the open-minded.

The big nut that video has to crack in approaching this subject is that video is high technology. So, in investigating the self-same phenomenon it runs the risk contemplating its own navel—a smear too frequently spread (and just once in a while with justification) across much of video art.

So, the whole concept has its possibilities and problems—how did it fare?

Of the five tapes two had a strong video

bias, two were created with sound in the forefront, and one attempted to bend television-style naturalism to its own ends. The latter was doomed to failure—not because of the quality of the performances or camerawork, which were perfectly good—but because the imitation of television is a massively retrogressive path for video to follow. Video is about video, and television about television, and if ever the two are to meet it should be on video's terms, not television's.

Of the others only *Audio Mutant* by Auto Awac chose to spurn the glossiness of technology. A fact I found surprising—after all, if there is to be a challenge to high-tech surely one line of approach must be in the decomposition of the perfect image? Unfortunately, in this instance, the low-tech approach to high-tech was a less deliberate choice, and more a matter of necessity. There's nothing wrong with a person spending a few



Steve Hawley's *The Extent of Three Bells* also chose to edit by sound, and was also, as a piece of edited composition, precise accurate and effective. But apart from its basis in sound had little in common with *Audio Mutant*. Very neat in its equivalence of sound and image as candles described streaked across on the camera-tube, and with a beautifully uncluttered opening of a hand generating synthetic permutations of sound on a musical calculator. Well done—so what?

Of the two image based pieces Judith Barry's *Space Invaders* was a very clever piece of paranoid fantasy of someone 'trapped in dreams' pursued by Space nights in a garret/apartment recording themselves doing what they do, and spending a week over the editing decks making sense of it (how many video artists haven't done the same?), but the work was a very acceptable piece of sound concrete/electronics with the image as an unnecessary incursion. With the one exception of the maker coming rather too close to a TV with a blow torch the image contributed little. OK, there were calculators, digital watches, B & W reversed insets and the rest, but when he is forced to show himself drumming on boxes and tin cans it's difficult to escape a couple of conclusions: he's meddling with images without using them, and much worse, he seems to be totally unaware of everything that happened real-time in 1968.

Invader players, contained a great one-liner voice-over on a shamefully poor 1940's Hollywood shot of distant planets: 'I wish they'd get rid of that phoney sky', whilst Dalibor Martinis *Image is Virus* was the only direct hit on the bull's eye.

Martinis exploited his medium fully, yet remorselessly. It is worth mentioning that he is a video performer, and, preferences of PERFORMANCE aside, unquestionably showed the sophistication that a performer brings to confront his audience. The only problem was one of scale - the opening sequence in ever-moving lifts, with a delayed inset, normally moving against the main image, cried out for twenty-seven monitors scattered around the viewer, as you were transported to a limbo of all visual possibilities. Nonetheless, twenty-six monitors down on this video environment, the sensation was still electric. Captions extracted from William Burroughs *Nova Express* rolled through the screen as the tape progressed—each one neat, curt and precise to the image chosen. *Space Invaders*, to Martinis, is a symptom of aggression: the nude, the nuke, the alien electronic image awaiting your destruction at the push of a game's button—'Suppose there was no enemy, that would be unfortunate'. We have been unwittingly drawn into a world where want to push the button—we feel embarrassed—he's pulled the carpet from under our feet and left us standing on our nose.

Judith Barry *Space Invaders*

He's drawn the parallel that exists in reality: the people that make the high-tech of warfare are the same that make the high-tech of entertainment - they've told you what you should expect, so don't complain when it happens.

LVA is bringing Martinis to London this Autumn. On the basis of this tape I suggest you do everything in your power to try to see him.

If it seems that only a couple of the tapes screened on this occasion made any real impact upon the advertised subject, let me suggest that this is a problem of marketing rather than an innate problem with the producers of tapes. Many of them would stand up well in their own right, had they not been, erroneously, presented under a cover-all concept title. Is this a mistake by LVA? I don't think so. This is their showcase for their growing video library—and all video libraries need any showcase they can get.

Video libraries are one of the few ways of allowing producers to have their tapes made accessible for viewing, and as a relatively new phenomenon they deserve better attention than they are receiving. In future issues we will be looking at these libraries, and other means of distribution, and looking at what is on offer.

Is there a growing awareness of both the art and technology of video that lies waiting to be discovered?

Pete Shelton

