

BURSARY APPLICATION FOR £ 1,500

by

STEVE PARTRIDGE

I have been working in video for the past five years and this past year has seen the time I have spent on artistic activity eroded by taking on extra commitments and responsibilities. Organising VIDEO ART 78 took up much more time than I envisaged and more seriously, constituted an interruption in the continuity of my work and its development. To fund my activities over the past three years I have had to rely more and more upon increased teaching time, which directly limits the time spent on producing new work quite apart from its taxing effect. During this time I have executed eight major installations both in the UK and abroad with very little financial support from the ACGB, (£500 awarded in Dec 1976).

I now intend to ~~resist~~ my extra commitments and concentrate on producing new work. I seek therefore, a major bursary which will enable me to confine my teaching to two days per week at Coventry and provide the funds necessary to continue my development.

Specifically I would like to conceive a number of new installations, perfect and develop the tape-loop installations (see below for details), and produce a series of colour videotape pieces. It is essential at this stage both for the new tapes and installations, for me to be able to follow a process of practical experimentation and to rely less on empirical conception and observation.

I have established a video resource facility at Lanchester Polytechnic which is now one of the best-equipped workshops in any art college, in which I could do a good percentage of the work and minimise the need to rent equipment for the production of video tapes. I would however, need sufficient funds to rent colour cameras, buy tape stock and for editing time and for the production of time-based-corrected copies for distribution.

In the case of the new tapes it would be inexpedient for me to give a 'treatment' of the proposed pieces as they are in embryo form and no shooting script exists nor is it desirable at this stage. The video-cassette which accompanies this information will give an illustration of my ideas in the past and hint at future developments. Nevertheless they only serve as a basis for experimentation. These pieces were made during the period 1974-6 since which I have concentrated on installation or multi-channel pieces. They could be termed 'structuralist' and certainly echo some of the notions prevalent in artists' film over the past decade. They are overtly formalised and are non-narrative. All are concerned with an exploration of the video process, and attempt to define the medium and establish a language or at least a personal syntax.

In INTERLACE, I have tried to assimilate and modify process-generated imagery to produce a statement and a reflection on the medium. It is an analysis of content: the classic TV situation of interviewer and interviewee; as opposed to the 'content' of video, its visual appearance, sound and structure. This TV situation and the conversation between the two participants, is obstructed by apparent 'mistakes' peculiar to video. The interview was recorded and then re-recorded optically through various stages, with the frame 'rolling over', sections frozen into still images, the video signal overmodulated, the lips of the participants out of synchronisation with the sound - which is also itself becoming progressively phased. This process was repeated a number of times in a cyclic progression of two-minute segments until the image on the screen is almost totally abstracted, and the dialogue transformed into a type of chant.

Monitor I is a play and variation upon the phenomenon of feedback in video. When a camera is pointed at a monitor displaying its own output, an interesting spatial relationship occurs, rather like the result one sees when standing in between two mirrors, space recedes repetitively to infinity. In this piece however, the repetition of the image is not actual, (not in the same time plane) but reconstructed. Each image with each other image was recorded in its own distinct time. The tape depicts the image of a revolving monitor upon which an image of another (-the same, but at a different time) monitor is seen. This is repeated and produces a disorientating illusion of this monitor 'existing' in several layers of discreet times and spaces.

I now want to go beyond the formalist obsessions of these early tapes and explore the areas of content and narrative. Video is not as plastic a medium as film but it is possible to have a feel or empathy for it - a condition which is important to harness and exploit. This is only possible by a process of experimentation both on location and in the studio with the hardware. If given sufficient financial aid this is what I intend to carry out.

Because of the transient nature of my installation pieces it is difficult to give a true picture of what they were (are) like. Because they are temporally-based and need to be experienced 'first hand' there is no form of documentation which can be said to be satisfactory. In the following information this should be remembered and explains my preference for a drawing/diagram as opposed to photographs.

I see my work as basically an extension to the traditional concerns of painting and sculpture. My installations can be loosely be defined as a work which (usually) is specially made for the environment in which it is seen and often makes reference(s) to that environment in such a way that is integral to the structure of the work. My initial pieces (eg Installation No 1 and 8x8x8) were concerned with the triangulation of space/time configurations in which the spectator interacts with the work as a participant. within a closed-circuit television system.

The most complicated piece I did of this type was 8x8x8, installed



in the Tate Gallery in 1976. This involved eight cameras and monitors, programmed switching equipment which I designed with the technical help of Howard Vie of the Royal College of Art, and sound equipment. I moved on from this type of work partly because of the narcissistic elements that they induced upon the viewer and partly because they were too simplistic and expensive to stage.

The next installations considered and manipulated the video product on the screen(s), and which recognised the dominant tangibility of the object of presentation - the TV box, which works in a paradoxical relationship to any image given out by the screen. Other elements have been incorporated into the works, particularly the tape itself in the form of a tape loop. "Delineations" was one such piece which involved two tape loops, one audio and one video, (see diagram). "Sketch for a square" was a simpler version and modification of "Delineations".

"Sketch for a square" was installed in the centre of a large space. A loop of video tape was stretched around the space in the form of a square. A recording was made onto this loop, by a camera and microphone placed in the centre of the square, of the artist describing the space I am drawing out as I walk beside the loop at  $7\frac{1}{2}$  inches per second (the same speed as the loop). This recording was played back on two video tape recorders and four monitors for the duration of the exhibition or until the recording wore out. The shot of the artist is head and torso and as the camera panned to follow the movement the images on the monitors are ambiguous with their reference to walking, an ambiguity re-enforced by the conflict of the two VTRs each giving the same image but at distinct time differences. The tape in the loop itself is analogous to the image in so far as it, like the artist never gets anywhere but merely returns again and again, as the image of the artist on the screen is always central, although apparently moving.

In the installation "A coincidence of space" (commissioned by the Biennale de Paris) I tried to produce an atmosphere of contemplation and quiet, within which gradual perceptual shifts of orientation took place. In a large dimly lit gallery were installed, along one wall, 15 colour monitors. Two pre-recorded tapes played back continuously upon each alternate monitor. One tape was made on a river boat on the Thames, and the other on a river boat on the River Seine. The view in each was of the river rushing by with just visible at the top of the screen, the banks. Every so often the orientation of the camera would shift very slowly from the horizontal to the diagonal and then back to the horizontal. Then the orientation would shift again through 90 degrees and sometimes 180 degrees. When one entered the space one was confronted by the rush of the river(s) from one monitor to the next while the orientation was horizontal. Gradually as the orientation of the camera shifts this flow of 'space' is disturbed and one tries to correct this shift by tilting one's head until this becomes uncomfortable. An adjustment in perception is then prompted and the image loses its 'narrative' or illusionist sense and becomes diagrammatic—a drawing, with the line of the bank(s) dominant. When one view of the Thames is at the horizontal and the Seine horizontal but upside-down a confrontation is set up between each alternate monitor which is disturbing

as the rivers now rush into each other. The elements of drawing are re-enforced by the variations in orientations between the two tapes from 90degrees and 180 degrees and also by the manipulation of the colour controls of each monitor along the length of the installation. The colour controls were adjusted to produce a gradation along the length from warm bias to cool. A flat two-dimensional quality was produced eroding the illusionistic properties of the medium.

I would like to perfect the tape loop installations by devising proper tape guides for the corners of the shape in which the loop is stretched. There are inherent technical problems here which could be overcome given funding.

In addition I would like to develop the use of the monitor described above, exploiting the very subtle and sensuous quality of colour and perhaps experiment with multi media installations using slides and 16mm film loops as well as audio loops. I would like to produce simpler installations with regard to the technology involved but go deeper into the imagery.

I have enclosed a review of the installation Dialogue for four players, which was produced with the financial assistance of the ACGB at the AIR Gallery. This will give some one else's idea and opinions on my work which may be useful.



## STEVE PARTRIDGE

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Environmental Media.

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Lanchester Polytechnic, Coventry; and Visiting lecturer to Newcastle  
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### *Videotapes Shown:*

1975;

*The Video Show*, Serpentine Gallery, London.

Palazzo dei Diamanti, Ferrara, Italy.

Arnolfini Gallery, Bristol.

1976

*Video: Towards defining an Aesthetic*, Third Eye Centre, Glasgow.

London Film-maker's Co-op.

*An alternative use of the medium*, Washington New Town.

1977

Galleria Cavallino, Venice, Italy.

Galleria Bonitirer, Milan, Italy.

*Video & Film Manifestatie*, Bonnefantenmuseum, Maastricht,  
Holland.

*Artists' Video*, Washington New Town.

1978

*Video Art 78*, Herbert Art Gallery, Coventry.

London Film-makers' Co-op.

### INSTALLATIONS

*Triad*, Festival of Expanded Cinema, ICA, London, 1976.

*Installation No 1*, Third Eye Centre, Glasgow, 1976.

*8X8X8*, The Tate Gallery, London 1976.

*Delineations*, Ayton Basement, Newcastle, 1977

*A spatial drawing; a condition of space*, 2b Butler's Wharf

London, 1976.

*A coincidence of space*, 10e Biennale de Paris, Palais de Tokyo,

Paris France, 1977

*Dialogue for four players*, AIR Gallery, London 1978.

*Sketch for a square*, Video Art 78, Herbert Art Gallery,

Coventry, 1978.

DAVID CUNNINGHAM's REVIEW OF *DIALOGUE FOR FOUR PLAYERS*  
-an installation by Steve Partridge, at the AIR Gallery, London, March 1978

*Dialogue For Four Players* is a video playback installation by Steve Partridge at the AIR Gallery during mid-March. Four monitors stand in a square facing the viewer in a darkened room; their own light is the only illumination. Each monitor is replaying a differing tape; each showing the lower half of (the same) woman's face, thus each speaks its own contribution to the 'dialogue'.

The four tapes are fifteen minutes long, they are played simultaneously, and quickly one becomes aware of a structure of some sort. The mouths speak one by one (at first), and the apparent structure is some (randomised?) orchestration of the times and durations of each mouth's periods of speech and silence.

The dialogue begins with a self-referring statement by one of the mouths: *'I was inhibited by the situation, by the technology, by the lack of instruction, by the lack of concept of the idea.....'*

The mouths contradict one another in these terms, one talks about the 'meat' in the piece and how to 'grab it'. Another answers; *'the meat to grab is in the process of this happening, there doesn't necessarily have to be an overt content.... to make it meaningful.'* This is a fairly crucial statement inside this piece. This 'process' referred to is obviously at work but its precise nature is unknown. What is or was the real-time relationship of the four tapes/mouths, and how is the situation generated whereby one person is arguing with herself?

It is possible to deduce a number of structures for this situation. With the clue of Partridge's illustration on his publicity mailer one can rationalise a sequence of recording of the four tapes along the lines of: record 1, then replay 1 back and record 2, then play back 2 and record 3 etc., until one re-records 1 listening to 4, creating a one way loop dialogue. There is such a diversity between the individual viewpoints that I suspect some additional elements at work here.

Much of the piece is an ongoing debate between the player(s) about the validity of what they are doing and the structure and the context in which they are doing it: *'There's going to be some kind of a media layer going on, although I don't think that we can, by merely multiplying nothing, make something.....'* *'There won't be just a simple addition of the four parts. There will be a different thing altogether - a different environment.....'* The same player, having just made this comment, continues, *'knowing that I'm not prepared to say any more.'*

The idea of a dialogue between players is interesting. One might at first assume that the installation/situation is a 'game' between the four participants. But the four are the same person. Thus the game may be between the viewer of the work and the players, the viewer's job being to detect the bluffs, uncover the facts, and deduce the rules of the game. One of the mouths speaks of the piece as therapy; *'It's of use to the person receiving the therapy and the therapist involved, but I don't know if it's all that important for people to witness that on the screen.'*

An alternative, referring to the quotation above (*I'm not really prepared to say any more.*) is that the game is between the players and the process itself. This only happens if one sees the process as alienating: here the viewer isn't given sufficient information to go on.

It is possible to interpret some shifts in the aesthetic of British video art as having less to do with the didactic structuralist presentation and more to do with peripherals that have grown out of the genre. *Dialogue* is an extension of the instant playback/real-time properties of video, but rather than re-iterate these in mirror phase structuralist fashion, the work depends on these properties and therefore assumes their existence but does not actually depict the activity relevant to what the viewer sees (which is significantly, a narrative of sorts, albeit fragmented).

One may then, see that those peripherals mentioned above are related to a form of narrative which could be called post-didactic structuralist, with a coherent fragmentary narrative.

To immediately contradict this train of thought, *Dialogue* is really four orchestrated monologues: the monologue can be seen as a half-way hybrid between the 'old' didacticism and the new narrative.

The piece works on a number of levels; the fragmentation (comparable to Partridge's previous installations with a switching device, but this time with sound) the process, the unintelligible parts of the layering (noise), and also visually, the



four images of the woman's face and mouth speaking, smiling and licking her lips. This is a sensuality most video art has so far carefully avoided. There's still an element of the old style built into the piece: *'Would one accept it if a painter laid out his palette and brushes and paints.....would one accept it as an artwork ?'*

Perhaps this work answers that question by laying out its palette but doing it in an interesting way, with a bit of style.

*(all quotations are from the video tapes in the installation)*

c 1978 D. Cunningham