

Video
towards defining
an aesthetic

"..... A brief attempt at some of the distinctions between video and film may be useful.

Initially, it might appear that the difference is no more than a choice of presentation medium. But the differences are significant and often quite subtle. It would be reasonable to argue that much video tape recording is done as a facsimile of film. This is understandable when one considers the historical pressures on such a comparatively new medium, much in the same way as film suffered in its turn from the classic theatrical influence.

Two basic functional aspects in tape-making which are analogous to film work yet differ considerably are (a) the nature of magnetic tape and (b) the camera. It is the fact that a video signal is transferred as an invisible stream along the length of the tape, compared to being a series of very apparent separate frames, which precludes the process conscious tape-maker from considering it in segmented plastic terms. It can only be regarded in total as a plastic equivalent to its duration. This essential difference is one which as yet only a few video tape-makers have recognised, many still aping the film convention and often using electronic or crude manual edits. One cannot therefore consider tape as a series of separate instants, only as flow, which also relates to the camera's function.

A video camera receives information through the lens which is focused on to a retina - the signal plate, much in the same way as it is on to the film emulsion in a cine camera. But there the similarity ends. In cine, 'snatches' of light are flashed directly on to each 'frame' of film as it is separately exposed in the gate, in video, there is a continuous flow of light on to the photoconductive signal plate which is scanned and transposed to the tape. Because of this continuous flow, the process is directly related to the real-time continuum. Concerns with real-time and temporal juxtapositions are ones which can perhaps be most effectively explored in video. The developing involvement with the medium has a historical rationality when considering recent moves from object orientated art to 'process' art where time-span becomes an intrinsic 'substance'.

Important video performance/installation work is being done by artists most interested in exploring and extending temporal, perceptual and behavioural relationships. These often involve the audience as both spectator and subject. Some of them utilise tape-recording as part of the immediate process, i.e. tapes are recorded and replayed at the time of the event. In film, similar 'expanded cinema' events often involve live performances by the film maker, and/or audience, related directly to the screened material. How-

ever I often find the validity of this questionable as the present-time action is substantially integrated with indeterminate past-time decision making (and the film has necessarily been pre-recorded, due to the technical process, usually some considerable time in the past) which confuses any implied temporal objectives. Only on the rare occasions when past and present-time relativity is inherent to the piece, and this has been carefully considered, are such events convincing. By comparison, some of the better video performance/installation artists are exploring the built-in capability of 'same-time' occurrence in their works. In video, present and immediate past-time sequences can be interrelated, even overlapped. Behaviour patterns can be replayed in seconds, and most unique of all, participants can relate to their same-time image. They are intrinsically functional to the piece and become literally part of the work; viewer is simultaneously the viewed in a process of self-referring consciousness

Extract from "The Video Show"
Art and Artists, May 1975, by
David Hall