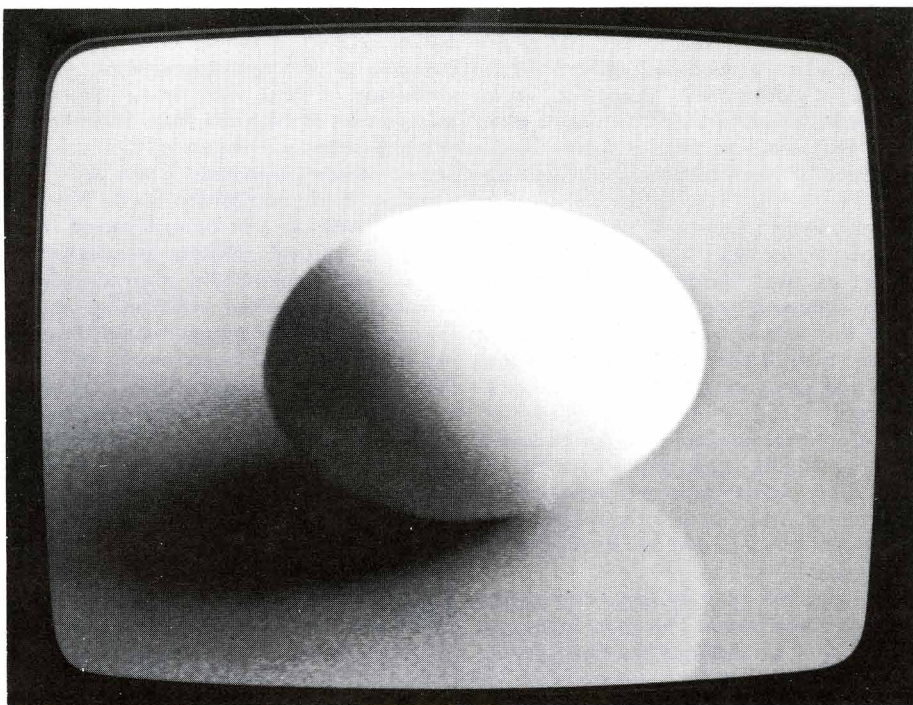


frame instability, for example — and also of the actual presence of presentation equipment as more than 'transparent' aids to viewing. If the capacity for instant image feed-back is utilised for the production of 'abstractions' which are then edited and coloured in sophisticated synthesisers, awareness must be maintained that the mystique of the hardware is only being increased. Works in which the participant is confronted with a live monitor image of himself as he stands before a camera must not fail to take into account the fact that the video process is as an indigenous a condition of the work as is the self-examination which usually makes up the content of the work. This also applies to works which are determining or re-evaluating the semiological functions and familiar narrative devices of television experience.

Insistence on the integration of content and form may seem critically conservative when dealing with a medium as new as video, especially considering its early avant-garde associations. But it may be a necessary step in sorting out the increasingly disparate uses of the technology and in preserving the admittedly delimiting usage of the term art. Clearer distinctions may assist the users of video themselves, giving them a sense of place in the development of video, providing a means of calculating their work's relationship to the larger body of video use, and enabling them to more astutely broaden their practice into unexplored areas. At the same time, increased exposure of the public to video is required — this to stimulate open-minded yet unintimidated critical appraisal of quality, craftsmanship, originality and significance of statement. Otherwise video will be doomed to its status as 'just another movement'.

PROGRESS in the use and appreciation of video will be tied, as it has been in the past, to the availability of production resources and to the viewing of exhibited work. Institutions with a record for supporting film ventures have especially been the target of subsidy requests by independent video practitioners. Traditional exhibitors of art have been expected to open their galleries to the new medium to make it accessible to the public they serve. The openness with which funding and exhibiting organisations have embraced video has varied, reflecting their caution and uncertainty, while their frequent slowness to act has sometimes been a catalyst to the emergence of new video-oriented organisations.

A natural target of funding requests is the British Film Institute. However, the BFI is not a body which responds quickly to new needs. If something appears on the edges of its concerns — which is mainstream cinema — it prefers to provide encouragement and to fund indirectly, thus, for instance, supporting independent film-making through an indirect grant to the London Film-makers Cooperative. Concerning video, the BFI has no specific position. Indeed, when the policy group recently met to discuss video access libraries like the Arnolfini's and the ICA's, the topic was of interest but



Video Elegy (1980): Huw Parsons; gallery installation — an exploration "into our own ambiguous perception of TV and cinema images..."



Continuum: Chr. Andrews.

unfamiliar. This reaction seems to support what some within its doors say — that the BFI as a body does not seem particularly aware of an independent video constituency and that it draws little distinction between either video and broadcast television or video as an independent medium and as a useful tool for film-makers.

Strictly speaking, video is not unknown to the BFI. It has been used in BFI funded projects for transfers of film and for instant playback uses on film projects. And funds have recently been awarded Mark Nash, editor of *Screen Magazine*, for the development on video of a project idea; to review his ideas for a documentary on the various skills and traditions of acting, it was agreed that a convincing way to suggest them was on video. (After their production, it became

obvious that video would be more appropriate than film for the entire project, especially as a teaching aid.) Also, the distribution library is now known as the Film and Video Library, and the BFI has bought all of Godard's video work, two video series made for French television (only one of which was shown), work by the ex-Chilean Raoul Ruiz, and part of a video magazine made for the Beaubourg Centre in Paris. Plans are being made to bring independent foreign film-makers to tour and talk in Britain; one possibility is the French video artist Thierry Kunzel who works in the creative development branch of French television — a reflexive, interrogative and theoretically sophisticated video artist.

Besides these peripheral contacts with video, more concrete attempts to support

the investigation of the medium have been made. It was clear to the BFI four or five years ago that a good case existed for the funding of video projects. Some Sony portapak were bought and lent to people interested in community politics and to people interested in performance and video art; these were the two apparent pressure groups. Peter Sainsbury, head of BFI Production, explains the outcome of the project as this: 'Research and a written report followed; we did not decide that video was outside our area of interest but rather, in 1975 and 1976 we did not find what was going on all that interesting. In retrospect it was evident that video users with a political message were not interested in the medium itself, and so we let the community politics projects be subsumed by community arts councils without closing out the possibility of further applications from video users.'

No categories in video exist; the review panel is a film panel. This must be in part responsible for the extraordinarily low number of applications from video-makers received by the BFI. In some years none have been received; in others there have been four or five from among two-hundred. Of recent applications none have been funded. They were found to be no more interesting than what was being done in 1976: as Sainsbury explains, 'We have left alone projects concerned with analogues to kinetic art or projects which were actually pilot TV programmes. These will be left alone in the future as well.'

If eventual broadcast of a work is a concern of the video-maker a potential conflict of interests is presumed. One thing the BFI does not want to fund is a bad copy of broadcast television or video magazine projects which depend upon conventional content. Video art which is abstract in a superficial way will also not be funded. The real issue in any consideration, Sainsbury says, is whether it is 'a good project', and yet at the same time 'it is too glib to say that the low quality of applications in video has resulted in so little funding in the area. There are very few applicants, and there must be something in the structure of the BFI which suggests we are not interested. There should be discussions with video organisations, and there should be open encouragement to video artists to apply.'

Whether there will be anything to apply for is another question. Already over-taxed budgets appear especially alarming in light of this year's £400,000 deficit and severe cuts for next year. Money must now be raised as special funds and not through the government — thus BFI Director Anthony Smith's active and successful participation in fund raising for the video library at the ICA.

Disregarding the inevitable bias towards film, the attitudes of the BFI reveal a few important implications. Awareness of video as an independent medium has not thoroughly permeated even the strongholds of support for more established visual media, and where it has, present financial restrictions negate the promise of substantial support. Alleviation of these restrictions

may depend on the private sector and not public agencies — though one hopes not at the cost of lessened appreciation of the autonomy of some video work from commercial uses of the technology. Where independent video is recognized, it is a fringe activity where individual works are measured by their contribution to the development of video as a medium divorced from one-sided political concerns, broadcast television, and superficially abstract works. Finally, a constructive relationship in the future demands present open-minded reaching out by both the institutions and the body of video users. Significantly, in relation to film, that future may be influenced by the increasingly important role video resources will play as most of the major regional theatres disappear and as video loan and reference centres spread.

FRUITFUL relationships have already been realised at the grass-roots level of the Regional Arts Associations, which are perhaps better able to respond to the needs of video-makers. For example, in Carlyle, Northern Arts is supporting Aidinvision which, with its studio production facilities, represents an advance on the portapak schools. In London, the Greater London Arts Association has twice funded the Independent Video Association's conferences. GLAA also provides practical training with professional courses and makes production and editing facilities available for London users. Generally, GLAA sees itself as providing a boost upwards for the trained non-professional, but they also act as a granting body to film and video-makers by providing funds for production costs. This year £17,850 is available in production grants. Completed works are promoted, sometimes in international festivals, and they are distributed through outside organisations such as London Video Artists and the British Council. As with the BFI, there are far fewer applications in video than in film, and these tend to be from community video tape-makers and local documentarists rather than artists. Projects funded have ranged from a programme on the political philosophy of William Morris to one on pot-holing in Yorkshire to another on stereotypes of women in media. Audiences are generally community groups and schools.

While these regional resources assist the spread of independent video production and viewing, creative initiatives have generally depended more heavily on the Arts Council of Great Britain, the major funder of GLAA. The implications derived from the experience of the BFI are largely transferrable to this other conspicuous target of funding requests. The arts department has not been particularly sympathetic to the idea of independent video work. The touring-artists tape program was, outsiders say, the result of two years of convincing the Council that it might fund something other than painting, sculpture and film; also, its 'art' bias left disgruntled some experimentors in documentary video whose work was left out.

Unlike the BFI, the Arts Council has concentrated its resources on funding insti-

tutions and individual initiative. Recent purchase of video equipment by London Video Artists was thus made possible, as was the position there of a six-month administrative post. Individual grants to artists include a £3000 bursary for costs and travel for Richard Lazell to spend a year at Brighton teaching with the aid of the sophisticated video equipment there. Perhaps the project providing the most impact has been the 'Video-Artists on Tour', an outgrowth of the Artist's Film and Video Committee's 'Film-makers on Tour'. About twenty-five participants receive £32.50 plus expenses to travel in Britain to introduce a programme of their work and then to discuss it or answer questions about it after its presentation.

David Curtis of the Arts Council's Film Office hopes that the touring project might provide the initiative needed to tackle what he sees as the single largest obstruction to the development of creative video programming — the lack of any real context in which video can be exhibited. For if one generalisation can be added to those implied by the experience of the BFI, it is that reaching audiences with the finished work has been immensely difficult. Also, comprehension does not necessarily follow accessibility. Artist-organised shows have been criticised for not being structured so to make sense to a lay audience. However, successful shows, at the Tate, the Serpentine, and the Herbert in Coventry, for instance, have been organised. And recent Tate and ICA programmes are welcomed as part of their coverage of twentieth-century art forms. Nevertheless, grumblings were heard in the artist's community that the coordinator of the Tate's recent show did not have a firm grounding in the field and that the programmes' having been slotted in between larger exhibitions gave them an air of acting simply as space-fillers. Like other potential exhibitors, the National Film Theatre has been lax. And while David Hall appeared on BBC 2 in the early days of British video, there is now not even magazine format patronage. Channel 4 remains a mystery for the moment.

IN light of this situation, initiative has been taken by the video community itself. In 1976 ten people gathered to create an organisation which would look after the interests of video artists. Their immediate concerns were for the distribution and exhibition of members' video tapes. Today about 150 members have deposited some 200 tapes that make up the rental library of London Video Artists — a limited company with charitable status. While the tapes must be possible to watch, the only stipulation for deposit in what is basically an open access system is that the work originate on video and be of experimental or innovative nature (recently changed from 'painterly or sculptural'). With the tape on hand — a U-matic video cassette — LVA then works as a clearing house, hiring the tapes to any interested parties. A week's rental runs from between £36 and £63 depending on the length of the tape. The member collects 66 per cent of the rental