WORLD WIDE VIDEO FESTIVAL 1986

KIJKHUIS

The primal Code

● SIMON BIGGS chose at the Den Haag and Bonn video festivals (both held during September 1986) a number of tapes and one performance, which lend themselves admirably to a theoretical textual approach.

The work of the video makers JOHN ADAMS (UK), JEAN CLAUDE RIGA (Belgium), BILL SEAMAN (USA), NIGEL ROLFE (Ireland), STEVE FAGIN (US) and GAD HOLLANDER (London) all reflected sources and motivations outside the usual conventions of video historicity. The diversity of these forms - these previous artistic incarnations - suggested that their videos were substantially different, both collectively and individually. In these authors works can be seen to be evolving a language better suited to its context, cognizant of a medium that is not painting, sculpture, performance or film but is nevertheless not exclusive of them. Watching their videos one is aware of modes of signification that, in one way or another, delineate a network of codes suggestive of a pre-historical textuality - the reference to some half-hidden process that could be conceived of as primitive. That is not to say that their work appears to be primitivistic (as early modernism) but rather that their work refers, at least obliquely, to some function of language more fundamental than the higher level codes that we are used to dealing with in normal communication. [1]

These factors are managed to great effect by JOHN ADAMS in his work *Intellectual Properties* where his stated intent is to explore power: political power, economic power, the mass media and the temptation to create multiple fictions that nevertheless tally. ADAMS' world is one that is predicated on ambiguity and where that ambiguity can be exploited to give everyone a little of what they think they want whilst actually only giving them what you want to. That this function in art is constantly rewarded links the work to its own context and status whilst allowing it to look out on a world (of money, power and advertising) that is not really that different from its own. Through using the same elements in varying sequences ADAMS creates a multiplicity of readings that reinforces the idea that society takes its forms from the dominant language structures that have informed the human intelligence since its origin.

In ADAMS' work it is the processes of power found in desire and gratification, fear and rejection, possession and dispossession, and the ensuing paranoia/acceptance the subject must deal with that motivated his character. This in turn reflected on the viewer's relationship with the video maker and the medium of video within this dynamic.

This film transferred to video is constructed of six sections which, as far as the material of the images is concerned, all draw on the shots in the last section. They are, however manipulated in a variety of ways: Adams cuts up, isolates or amplifies the images. He changes their sequence to achieve a constantly changing emphasis. Voice-overs tell stories and anecdotes which unite to form a labyrinthine whole. The subject is always power: political power, economic power; the power of the mass media, and the power of money; the power of advertising and the temptation to tell stories that tally. A link between the different segments is provided by a lecture on copyright, delivered by a man who looks like the young John Wayne. This star appears as a running gag in most of the stories. Adams starts from the hypothesis that images derive their quality from sound. This is also why he makes use of the same basic images. The consequences are unpredictable.

Intellectual Properties	GB, 1985
	56:00 min, color
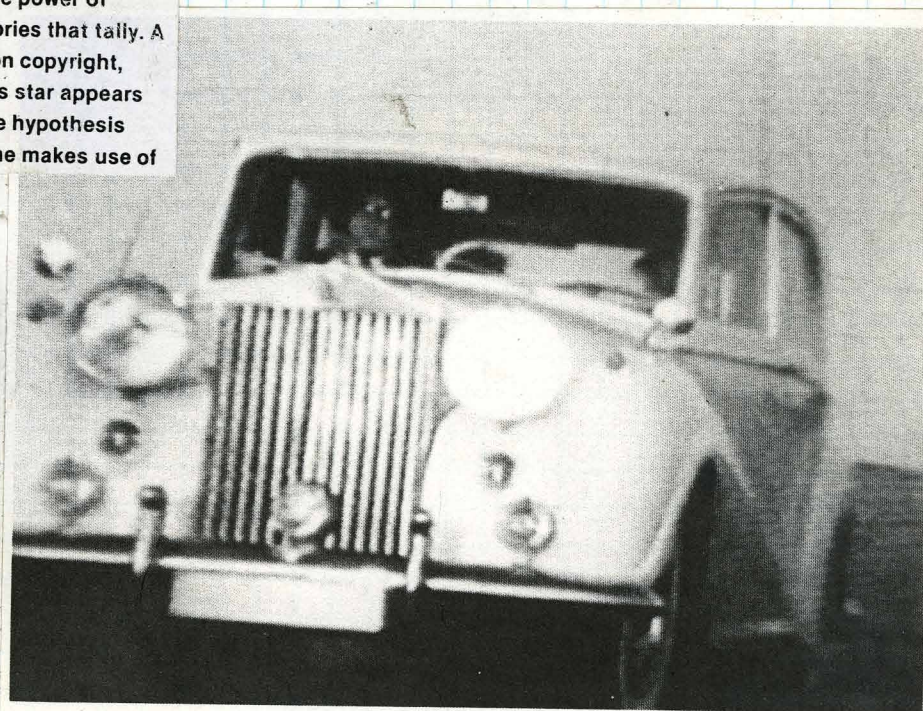
JOHN ADAMS *Intellectual Properties* 1985

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