

attendant polemical issues with some emphasis on the practical business of independent video-making. To my knowledge there is no similar coverage elsewhere in Britain, and, as was apparent from the fast developing situation at our one and only comprehensive Video Show at the Serpentine Gallery last May, it is certainly overdue.

Ever since realistically priced TV recording equipment became available in the mid-sixties, there has been a proliferation of independent work with a wide application. That break in the frustrating spell of the Mass Wonder Drug was partly heralded with the statement 'Television has been attacking us all our lives, now we can attack it back' by the acclaimed father-figure of video art, Nam June Paik.

Unlike avant-garde/experimental/underground film, which has a history (albeit spasmodic) as far back as Méliès' turn of the century innovations, independent video had no precedents a decade ago when suddenly a few strings were severed from the broadcasters' very own electronic Monster-Puppet. This instant reversal of roles produced a great deal of C grade stuff by freaks simply amazed that they could conjure facsimiles of the Telly-hero programmes they had worshipped for so long; or that here was the idyllic way to OD on narcissistic pursuits (with a little help from the Chemical Revolution). Others with more outgoing intentions rightly saw, and still see, its use and development in community work, this being the most organized facet so far. Still others see it as a direct political tool and produce programmes about people and events either not covered, or unfairly treated, by the mass media.

In each of the last two the work is necessary and beyond dispute, but in many cases the method/structure/treatment (not content) is handled in a way which is directly analogous to that traditionally employed by the very establishments they so often deplore. I believe that demystification and reappraisal do not come simply with alternative content; they can only occur when simultaneously uprooting, questioning and redefining the form. Many feel that this implied disruption would take it into obscurity, and beyond the apprehension of their audience. I consider this to be as patronising an assumption as the classic give-the-public-what-they-want cry that excuses Telly's soporific output.

Those comments also often obliquely apply to a large portion of what is known as video art. Whereas the plastic arts (hotly pursued by film) have undergone a critical scrutiny of their roles as 'media' – emphasis being on (re)defining the *actual* properties as an inherent condition of the work – the surprise is that so few video-makers have emerged with this as a criterion. Acceptance of it as a secondary medium, as a traditionally convenient recording mechanism (for ideas otherwise realised), still predominates. (So too does the argument that much VT recording is done as a substitute for film. This I have attempted to discuss at length elsewhere*). Consequently, I find it difficult to accept this (or any) form of documentation as art, however convenient it may be to the Art Market. Many of the widely exposed tapes from North America are no more than this, albeit well disguised, and in my experience a similar state of affairs prevails in Europe, though in fairness there is obviously a great deal yet to be seen.

Experimental work in Britain

Virtually no exposure occurred in Britain before that one occasion at the Serpentine Gallery last May. Little was known of the more interesting British video-makers until that time, principally because there has never been any sufficiently interested gallery or institution here handling such work. The very rare exceptions have invariably been one-off gallery showings of American pieces, and the Gerry Schum (artist documents) show at the Hayward Gallery, in '73. This must surely be the only principal European country in the western world without at least one

VIDEO

Report by David Hall

This is the first of a regular column which will be primarily devoted to independent video work. I shall use the space not only to comment on current shows and work in progress, but as a platform for airing

progressive venue (public or private) equipped or at least prepared to hold regular tape and installation shows. Equally, the broadcast networks are probably the most conservative in the world, using among other things their claim to being the leaders in 'technical excellence' to bar anything progressive made outside on what they would consider 'inferior' gear (more on their paranoia at a later date).

One of the crucial differences between community work and experimental tapemaking seems to be that the former is essentially self-sufficient from the need for separate viewing and distribution. Here video is integrated into a cycle of events, the recordings not usually being considered the ultimate goal. They are part of a *process* of collective involvement where tapes rarely have any significance outside their 'domestic' context. For the rest, it is becoming apparent that an independent distribution organization should be established in this country. This could be centred in a venue for regular tape, performance and installation shows together with an appropriately equipped workshop. I would be pleased to correlate responses to this with a view to making some initial approaches to the relevant funding bodies.

Meanwhile, the recently-formed Association of Video Workers (London Region), which at present appears to consist mainly of community people, is pressing the BFI Production Board to apply for, and set aside, an additional budget of £75,000 solely for video productions. (More information on AVW's other activities from the Secretary, tel 01-359 2516). Peter Sainsbury, new Head of the BFIPB, seems to have a particular empathy for video work, but has reservations as to whether the Board should commit its funds to aspects (*ie* community groups) which, he says, are in a position to apply for direct aid from the Department of the Environment, local councils, etc. For the experimental video-makers, however, he made it quite clear that the Board will consider applications on an equal par with film-makers, which in some cases could also include living expenses – a welcome and long overdue consideration. This is obviously an important step for an essentially film-oriented institution and video-makers should take full advantage. I tend only to be a little chary on the question of actual selection since to my knowledge the committee consists entirely of film people. Surely now is the time for this to be reconstituted?

The case is much the same at the Arts Council's Film Dept. headed by Rodney Wilson. But an added discrepancy there is that the separate Art Finance Committee have recently handed out a number of working bursaries of up to £2,500 to artists in other fields (painters, sculptors, etc), yet the maximum the Film Committee have offered (aside from specified product-oriented projects) is £1,000 a head. Ongoing costs in film and video work are unequivocally greater than those of say, a painter, and it is certainly a case for the Arts Council to get its economics sorted out.

Incidentally, I see no reason why both the BFI and the Arts Council should not include tape distribution alongside their films. Incompatible formats still present a slight problem with some work, but if private companies can organise it for educational material, so can they. The new European standard tape speed and electronics are now a fairly long term bet, and the machinery is fast becoming widespread. In any case there is little problem in transferring from one format to another.

Colleges

Aside from one or two heavily-used half-inch black and white VTRs (video tape recorders) and cameras available from the Arts Council and the BFI, most of the more experimental work originates on the scattering of half-inch equipment in a few sympathetic art colleges and other educational establishments. There are many more schools and colleges with such hardware, often more sophisticated, but it seems their attitude towards any true exploration is very limited.

Essentially they are geared to either considering it as an 'Audio Visual Teaching Aid', or feeding the broadcast industry with its traditional needs. However, for those who do not, and who tend to be linked to 'Fine Art' activities, it would be useful to inaugurate some system of interchange, both of pre-made tapes and even where possible of students, staff and facilities.

Of the more encouraging and progressive situations that I am aware, there is the video studio in Chelsea Art School's Painting Department, contacts Clive Richardson and Brian Young; Associated Studies in the Department of Fine Art at Newcastle Polytechnic, contact Stuart Marshall; a hopefully developing situation in Fine Art at Trent Polytechnic, contact the Head, Derek Carruthers; the RCA's School of Environmental Media, and School of Film and TV; Exeter College of Art, contacts Mike Bartlett and Mike Leggatt; and my own now well-established Film, Video and Sound Workshop at Maidstone Art College.

An invaluable guide to equipment dealers and *all* known users (whatever their concerns) is the *UK Video Index* available from John Hopkins at CATS, 42 Theobald's Road, London WC1.

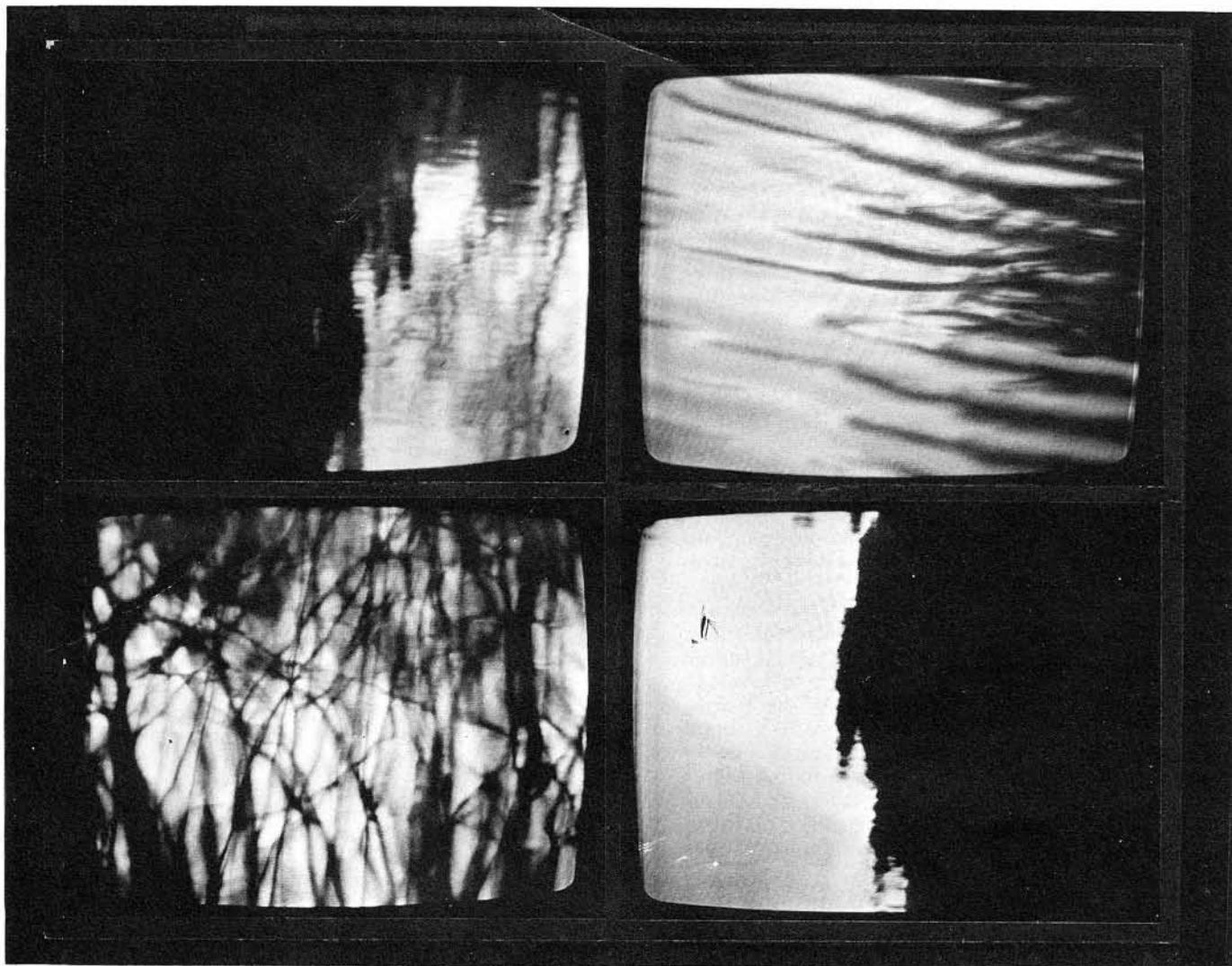
Scotland

I have for some time had a particular interest in Scotland and specifically the efforts of the Scottish Arts Council to encourage progressive activities. For me it started in 1971 when Alistair Mackintosh (then employed by them) arranged his *Locations Edinburgh* event during Festival time. This involved a number of artists who were asked to produce work as an integral part of the environment (rather than show in the convention of a gallery). My idea was to extend my work through as wide a context as possible, this by using local broadcast TV. With amazingly few problems we managed to arrange regular air space over ten days with STV, and with a little financial help from them and most from the SAC, I produced ten short 'interruptions' which were inserted between 'normal' programmes with no apology or even an announcement.

In 1973 SAC's Rob Breen and Leslie Greene organized the *Open Circuit* show at the Charlotte Square Gallery in Edinburgh. Apart from including pre-made films and video tapes, it was a 'live' event with a large gallery space turned over as a flexible feedback situation, where tapes were made and played in situ.

It was at this time that Tamara Krikorian became actively involved both as a video-maker herself (she produced a remarkably subtle four VTR/monitor piece called *Breeze* shown at the Serpentine), and in putting a great deal of energy into increasing the SAC's interest in video work in general. The past two or three years have shown a rapid escalation of video use in Scotland as elsewhere, and through Tamara and her colleagues' efforts the SAC, in collaboration with the Scottish Film Council, are holding a symposium on 'The Future of Video in Scotland', which is to be held at the Glasgow Film Theatre, 12 Rose Street, Glasgow G3 on Saturday 13 March. At the time of writing I have no confirmed information on speakers or exact format, but I am told it will attempt to cover the full range of independent work. Although it is directed at Scottish activity it should involve issues pertinent to Britain as a whole.

The same people have also arranged that the SAC supports a video art show from 16-21 March inclusive. This will include a selection of mostly British video-makers' tapes, performances and installations, and will be held at the Third Eye Centre, 350 Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow. As yet I have no details of participants, but hope to review both this and the symposium at a later date. Certainly both will be well worth a visit, and further information can be obtained from Tamara Krikorian/Leslie Greene at the Scottish Arts Council, 19 Charlotte Square,



Tamara Krikorian *Breeze* (4 monitor piece) 1975

Edinburgh EH2 4DF, or phone enquiries on the symposium to John Adams, Regional Film Officer, Scottish Film Council, tel 041-332 9988.

Exploded Eye Events

Still in Scotland, the SAC were to my knowledge the only body to organize an immediate follow-up for a participant out of the Serpentine show. This took the form of a six-day tour in December by Rolande Thomas's 'Exploded Eye' group. Aside from Rolande the group consists of John Dunn, Pete Mitchelson and Paul Cheetham. They were joined on the tour by one of the founder video wizards in the business, Cliff Evans. They presented their *Set Piece for One Performer* at the Third Eye in Glasgow, Aberdeen Art Gallery, and the Fifty Seven Gallery in Edinburgh.

This essentially 'fringe' theatre group had never used video before the Serpentine occasion when they first performed the piece. Usually I would be most sceptical of video being used extraneously in theatre performances and the like. But in this case it was the most integrated idea I have seen. Rolande, as a forlorn Chaplinesque character, interacts with pre-recorded images of his mother, his girlfriend, his cat, his domestic paraphernalia and even himself in a perfectly-timed half-hour sequence. Multimonitor images take the place of actual people and things to the point where his own sense of identity comes into question. It is fundamentally a surrealistic interplay on concepts of time, beautifully executed and incidentally full of humour. Anyone interested in contacting the group should ring Rolande Thomas on 01-790 8618.

British shows in Italy

In mid-December I went to Italy to discuss initial arrangements for a proposed show of British video work later this year. The show, with financial help from the British Council, is likely to be included as part of the Venice Biennale and will hopefully go on to various locations throughout Italy. The organization Art/Tapes 22, which is run by the energetic Maria-Gloria Bicocchi in Florence, initiated the idea last year, and I was invited to select the participants. I hope to include works by Brian Hoey, Clive Richardson, Steve Partridge, Mike Leggatt, Stuart Marshall, Tamara Krikorian, myself and others. More details later.

Incidentally, that reconnaissance trip also included my taking a programme of films (by Tony Hill, Rob Gawthrop, Ron Haselden, Bill Lundberg, Lisa Ridley, Chris Welsby, Tony Sinden and myself) to a well-received screening at the Cavallino Gallery in Venice.

Finally two brief questions: The major show of British work to be held in Milan in February includes painting, sculpture, film, etc – why no video? The Independent Cinema West Festival at the Arnolfini last year made an attempt at including video (half-hearted as it was). This coming one in April categorically rules it out. Why?

*'The Video Show' by David Hall, *Art and Artists*, May 1975.