their own video training manuals and tape distribution catalogues.

Hoppy's style of writing had altered radically since his articles in *IT*. In 1970 he could emote: 'How about this for a slogan: MAKE PEACE MAKE LOVE MAKE TELEVISION.'[21] By 1974 he was observing: 'There is a much greater variety of meaning and message produced by the independents than by network television. This distinction extends to the connotative (implicit) meanings as well as the denotative (explicit) meanings of the use of the medium.'[22] The naïve idealism of TVX had translated, through intensive readings in semiology and information theory, into a level-headed idealism which sought a professional, democratic basis of access to the exponentially expanding field of telecommunications. For CATS, from about 1975, direct involvement with specific broadcast TV programmes gave way as a priority to the marshalling of intelligence and the establishment of networks which could exert a generalised influence on the changing nature of broadcasting as a whole.

The visual appearance and ambitious purpose of *JCATS* were not unlike those of another theoretical journal of the 1970s, though the written style and the subject addressed were of a different world. *Art-Language: The Journal of Conceptual Art* made its first appearance in May 1969, just as Hoppy was getting to grips with portapak recording techniques. Its editors had established the collective art practice Art & Language a year earlier, with the intention of investigating – and changing – the fundamental nature of Fine Art.[23] As far as I can ascertain, the event was not reported by *International Times*. Indeed, it was far more suited to the pages of *Studio International*, at that time the foremost British journal of contemporary art, and its assistant editor, Charles Harrison, first encouraged and later joined them. Recently Harrison has penned a number of somewhat partial histories of the Fine Art of the period which suggest that Art & Language was a unique phenomenon on the British scene, but in fact several projects initiated in the 1960s shared both the general aspirations of Art & Language and some of their specific tactical methods.

One such project was APG – the Artists' Placement Group. From April 1970 to December 1971 several issues of *Studio International* carried a puzzling epilogue under the general heading *Inn70:* a set of pages apparently transposed from the financial pages of broadsheet daily newspapers. Closer scrutiny revealed that sections of these had been rewritten or 'subverted' by adding text and pictures with the same typeface and visual style. These supplements were for a time the most visible public aspect of APG. Founded in 1966, its main protagonists were the artists John Latham and Barbara Steveni,[24] but other early participants were Stuart Brisley, Jeffrey Shaw, Barry Flanagan, Ian Breakwell, Garth Evans and David Hall. All maintained individual art practices which became increasingly disparate through the 1970s, and the extent of their association with APG was variable.

The activities of APG were predicated on the belief that the relevance of artists to

contemporary society could be enhanced by a series of insertions or 'placements' of the artist's presence and sensibility – characterised as the 'Delta' quality – into one of the industrial, administrative and communications networks which constituted the infrastructure of society. From the outset APG rejected the naïve proposition that the artist should simply exploit the material or administrative resources of an organisation to benefit his or her individual practice. Nor was there any intention to decorate or embellish the public perception of an organisation's activities, to give it cultural credibility or to assuage its moral conscience.

The actual objectives of APG were in fact complex and sophisticated: to initiate a long-term pattern of disturbances within the power structures and information flow of the organisations involved, taking effect over perhaps a quarter of a century, in order to have a profound influence on the nature of society. A key text would be Donald Schon's *Beyond the Stable State*,[25] which announced the demise of traditional hierarchical structures in the dynamic context of information technology and the birth of a new, empowered role for the individual. The Group was also conceived in the context of a radical cosmology developed by Latham and manifest in his own art work and texts, which gave many of APG's declarations and activities an enigmatic and ironic quality. Not all the artists associated with APG subscribed to the full agenda: some initiated placements as individuals, and David Hall's intervention in the information flow of Scottish Television in 1971 was made on his own terms.

DAVID HALL: 'GESTURES AND FOILS WITHIN THE CONTEXT'

David Hall had trained as a sculptor, first at Leicester College of Art, then at the Royal College of Art in London. Afterwards he quickly achieved critical success: he was awarded the sculpture prize at the fourth Paris Biennale in 1965 and participated in the significant 1966 exhibition of 'Minimalist' sculpture, *Primary Structures*, at the Jewish Museum in New York. In the catalogue of the 1970 exhibition *British Sculpture out of the Sixties* held at London's ICA, Hall juxtaposed a photograph of a 'perimeter piece' – a flat hexagonal ring in arborite sections made in 1968 – with one of the work in the show: a corresponding area of sanded floor in the gallery entitled *Displacement 1970*. It had became apparent to Hall – as it did to several other British sculptors around this time[26] – that an extension of his sculptural concerns could be achieved through the photographic image: he had started to work with still photography, then with film. His first film, *Vertical*, had been completed that year, and from this point on his work as an artist would be invested in film, video and installation work.

During the late 1960s and early 1970s the Arts Council of Great Britain commissioned and funded a considerable number of documentary films on the

work of contemporary artists. Although funded by the ACGB, *Vertical* was something of a departure: it does not depict Hall's work, but *is* the work, depending on film time and space for its existence. Typical sections deploy a skewed camera to show an upright human figure, sloped at an improbable angle from the perpendicular, against a level horizon. The presence of 'vertical' posts in the scene make it almost impossible not to read the figure as being the skewed element, although logic dictates otherwise. In another sequence lengths of railway track are so disposed that, from the point of view of the camera and viewer, their arrangement is rectilinear in the plane of the film frame within a scene which otherwise corresponds to perspectival laws and should impose the more familiar foreshortening effect. These shots carry over Hall's interest in contradictory perspective which had been a feature of his sculpture from the mid-1960s. They also relate to an earlier APG project Hall had proposed to the Waites construction firm, in which the perspectival appearance of permanent estate roadways would be similarly manipulated. However, Waites had felt the proposal would be a threat to road safety and the work was never realised.

While some artists, like Hall, adopted film as their primary medium, others – Bruce Nauman, for instance, in America or Rebecca Horn in Germany – used it during the 1970s, not from a commitment to film *per se*, but as part of a rejection of traditional art forms and media which had been gathering momentum for several years. A conscious use of film as an extension of avant-garde painting and sculpture had begun around 1920 with the experiments of Hans Richter, Man Ray, Marcel Duchamp and Germaine Dulac. The cabaret performances of the Dadaists, the preoccupation with light and movement of the Futurists and Constructivists, and the extension of New York 'Action' painting into 'Happenings' all made the use of film both as documentation and as first-order art an inevitable development.

Closely allied to this was a shift of the location of the work of art out of the gallery into other contexts, where it vied for attention with existing features of the natural or urban environment. The notion of intervention by the artist into non-art-specific systems of communication was a natural corollary to this move. In America Joseph Kosuth and Dan Graham inserted 'advertisements' in newspapers as works of art or placed them on bill-boards. In Britain Gustave Metzger presented auto-destructive events on vacant sites, John Latham burned *SKOOB* towers of books on pavements, Richard Long made his discreet alterations to landscapes, and APG infiltrated magazines and institutions. In France Daniel Buren pasted uniformly striped panels on the Metro hoardings or employed people to parade them on sandwich-boards outside museums. And in Germany Joseph Beuys swept streets as an art action, James Lee Byars contrived momentary, spectacular apparitions in public spaces, while Gerry Schum conceived and for a short time realised his *Fernsehgalerie*.

Through Schum's bold entrepreneurial project and with his assistance as film-

maker, artists were able to present their ideas to a TV audience without mediation or interpretation.[27] Included in the roster of mainly young artists who participated in his two compilations of films broadcast by the Cologne-based TV company WDR III were some from Britain: Gilbert & George, Barry Flanagan, Hamish Fulton and Richard Long. Between the two 'exhibitions' – *Land Art* broadcast in April 1969 and *Identifications* broadcast in November 1970 – Schum also facilitated two 'TV interventions'. One of these was originated by British artist Keith Arnatt as a photographic work: *Self Burial*, a set of nine photographs depicting the 'disappearance' of the artist into a hole in the ground. Apart from Schum, who ultimately interceded with the TV company to arrange the transmission, John Latham and Charles Harrison were also involved in its evolution into an art work for television.[28]

In the summer of 1971 David Hall was one of seven artists to take part in *Locations Edinburgh*, a project curated by Alistair Mackintosh at the Scottish Arts Council for the Edinburgh Festival. The artists were invited to intervene in various ways in the city environment, and besides Hall they included Stuart Brisley, David Parsons and Jeffrey Shaw, all associated with APG, and Ed Herring, Peter Joseph and Graham Stevens. Although this event was not an APG exercise, Hall's contribution was included in an APG show at London's Hayward Gallery the following November. The central idea of the project was that the artists should deploy the various communication networks of the city to make their work or to make it visible. Each artist approached the project in terms of his own particular interests: Brisley occupied a disused car showroom to stage a slow-motion car crash; Herring used ambient sound recordings fed back into the environment; Parsons made street-mounted banners; Shaw and Stevens, inflatables; while Joseph's abstract paintings provided the most 'conventional' presentation.

Hall was interested in using the powerful communication resource of local television. The commercial broadcasting company Scottish Television (STV) was approached and, somewhat to Hall's surprise, agreed to transmit short 'art' pieces between programmes without introduction or comment, two or three times a day over ten days in August and September. He produced ten short (around three minutes each) 16mm, black and white films for transmission. At no point did any overall title, individual titles or production credits ever appear on screen or in published programme schedules. Seven of the films were later selected for distribution and given the general title *7 TV Pieces* (1971). The absence of contextual packaging was central to Hall's intentions:

> The idea of inserting them as interruptions to regular
> programmes was crucial and a major influence on their content.
> ... These transmissions were a surprise, a mystery. No
> explanations, no excuses. Reactions were various. I viewed one
> piece in an old gents' club. The TV was permanently on but the

occupants were oblivious to it, reading newspapers or dozing. When the TV began to fill with water newspapers dropped, the dozing stopped. When the piece finished, normal activity was resumed. When announcing to shop assistants and engineers in a local TV shop that another was about to appear they welcomed me in. When it finished I was obliged to leave quickly by the back door. I took these as positive reactions.[29]

The *Piece* with water is the best known of the available seven through its inclusion in tape compilations and the reproduction of stills in catalogues and articles. And visually it is the most memorable, its form comprehensible through one or two iconic moments. This *Piece* and the others are entirely consistent with Hall's concerns in his previous work in sculpture and film, though those concerns necessarily required the adoption of a specific formal approach when addressed through the medium of television. Much of his sculpture had used box-like constructions or variations on rectangles to establish, often in conjunction with the regular perspectival space in which the work was located, expectations of a similar regularity within the work: expectations which were irreconcilable either with further examination of the work itself or with the self-contained contradictory perspective which the work itself proposed.

However, with the television set – both as illusory window and as furniture – as the reference point, a different kind of tension was involved: between the three-dimensional illusion of the image, the flatness of the screen, and the different three-dimensionality of the apparatus. In the 'Tap Piece', mentioned above, a surrogate interior for the viewer's TV set is filmed and filled with water. On reception this illusory space appears congruent with the actual interior of the set. When the water drains away, however, it appears to do so at an unexpected angle, contradicting the carefully contrived illusion in a reprise of parts of the film *Vertical*. The other *TV Pieces* similarly recall elements of Hall's previous films or predict those to come later.

Three of the ten interruptions were made at a small film studio at Penicuik, outside Edinburgh. The remainder were filmed in and around the city both before and during the period of transmissions, often in a good deal of haste.[30] The films had to be sent to London for processing, collected from the airport the following day, edited at Penicuik and then sent by rail to STV's studios in Glasgow. STV was extraordinarily accommodating, as they had no idea what would be broadcast and had to trust Hall's assurances concerning potential obscenity or other legal implications. But it was not part of Hall's project to incorporate content which was controversial, other than through its very presence in the broadcast flow.

Although each *Piece* has its own specific quality and repays repeated viewing in varying degrees, Hall has insisted: 'The pieces were not intended as declarations of art in their own right, they did not assume that privilege. They were gestures and
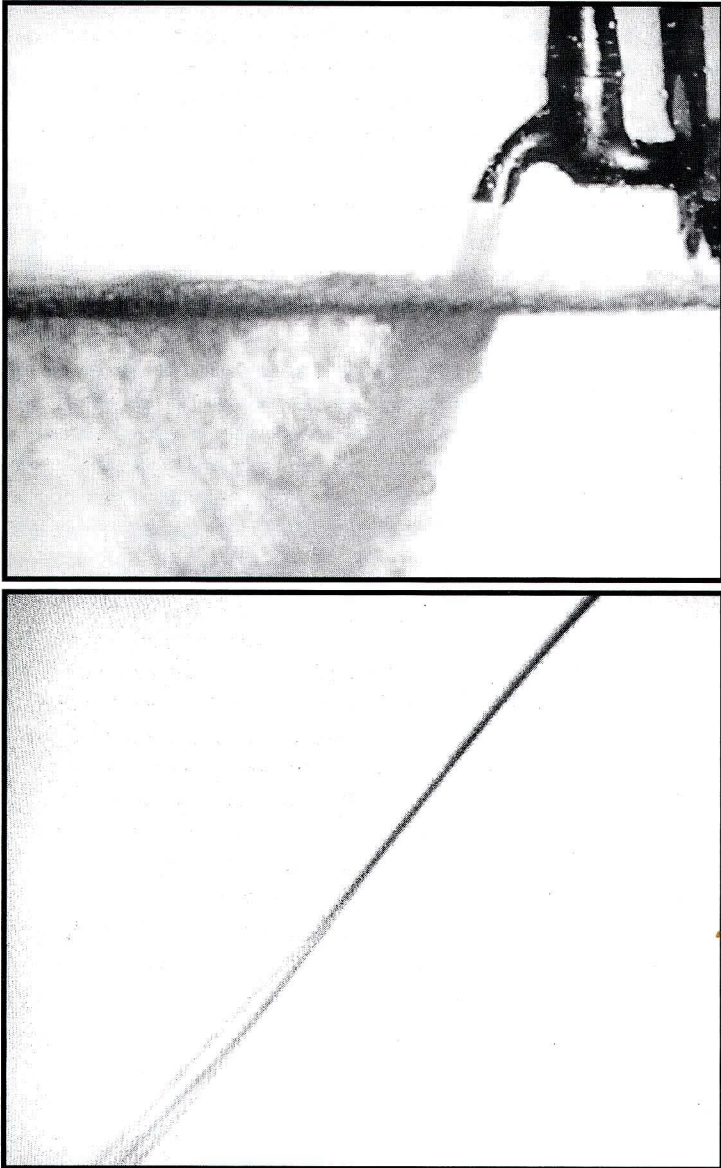
The 'Tap Piece' from David Hall's *TV Pieces* (1971)

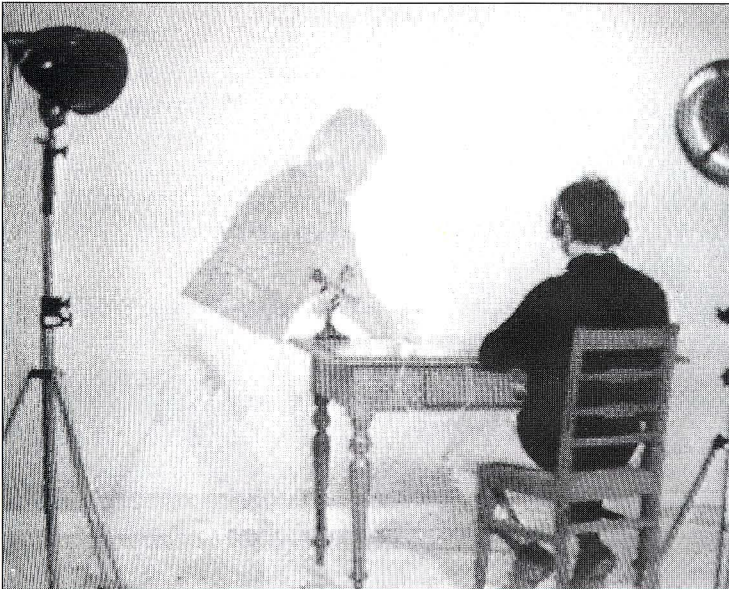[REPRODUCED WITH THE KIND PERMISSION OF THE ARTIST]

foils *within* the context of the predictable form and endless inconsequentiality of TV. They needed TV, they depended on it.'[31] Hall is critical of specialist arts programmes which 'call the few and exclude the many', and in a letter to *Studio International* the curator of the Edinburgh events echoed Hall's strictures. Mackintosh pointed out that the *Pieces* reached 'an audience of 250,000 per night. They didn't know what they were looking at and didn't expect it, so all the rubbish surrounding art was circumvented.'[32]

Nevertheless, the internal detail of the *Pieces* was hardly arbitrary, or calculated simply to alert or confuse the TV audience. In the case of one *Piece* filmed at Penicuik, the respective stillness and frenetic movement of two figures in a room depended for its perceptual effect on a complex interpretative process on the part of the viewer, whereby the 'reading' of the technical manipulation of the scene – i.e. the unnatural acceleration of the moving figure – is 'subverted' by the prolonged stationary presence of the seated figure. In this *Piece* – in my opinion the strongest – by juxtaposing within a single scene a figure whose behaviour is largely cinematically-generated with one whose appearance suggests the medium is transparent, Hall brought vividly to the fore the inherent contradictions of that medium.

The following year Hall collaborated with Tony Sinden on another television art work. This time, it was not the transmission, but the reception of images which determined the form of the work. Gallery House, a building in London's Exhibition Road sponsored by the German Cultural Institute (now the Goethe Institute), had been made available as an exhibition space. In October 1972 it was the venue for *A Survey of the Avant-garde in Britain*, curated by Rosetta Brooks. The event included performance work, 'expanded cinema' and something new to Britain: TV installation. Hall and Sinden installed 60 TV Sets. The sets were tuned into broadcast channels, but with every available variant in the functioning of the sets utilised: the controls for vertical and horizontal hold, brightness, contrast, and so on were altered on each, so that the installation displayed a chaotic profusion of different versions of the three incoming signals. The work demonstrated succinctly how vulnerable to deviation was the supposedly authoritative broadcast picture by using features built into the sets themselves.[33]

'VIDEO ART IS VIDEO *AS* THE ART WORK'

The year 1976 was a particularly propitious one for British video art. In May an issue of *Studio International* was devoted to an international survey of work in the medium, and the Tate's Education Department mounted the London gallery's first exhibition of video installations. David Hall's influence, and his work, were evident in both events. Perhaps even more significantly, a couple of months earlier, on

'Two Figures' from Hall's *TV Pieces* (1971)

[REPRODUCED WITH THE KIND PERMISSION OF THE ARTIST]
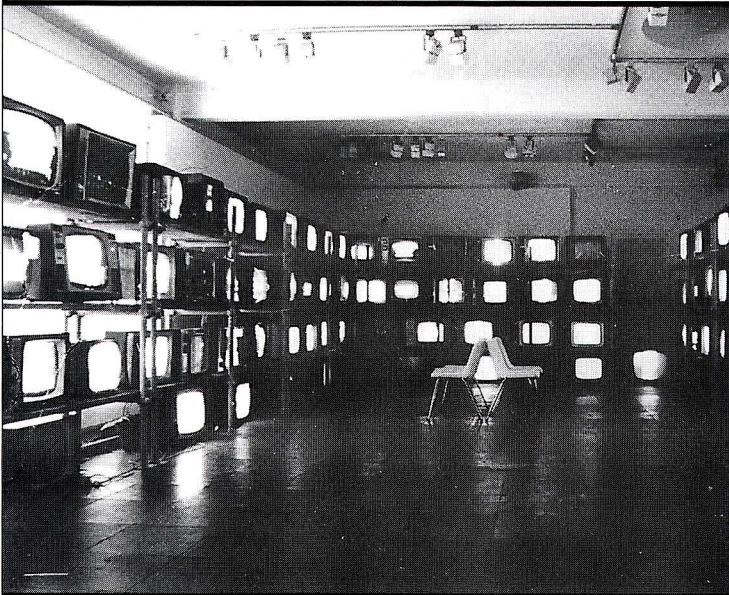
101 TV Sets (1975) by David Hall and Tony Sinden – this was an expansion of their earlier installation work, *60 TV Sets*.

[REPRODUCED WITH THE KIND PERMISSION OF DAVID HALL]

March 10, the BBC2 arts magazine *Arena: Art & Design* had also been devoted to a survey of artists' video. It was presented by Hall and produced by Mark Kidel, with much encouragement and help from Anna Ridley. The programme included video tapes by American and British artists, including one by Hall made specially for the programme and another, *Struggling*, by British artist Peter Donebauer. The programme ended with publicity for the Tate exhibition and for another in Glasgow, *Video – Towards Defining an Aesthetic.*

Arena's survey of artists' video opened before the titles with the first two phases of Hall's *This is a Television Receiver* (1976), in which Hall's script was read to camera by Richard Baker in close-up. Now more often heard on radio, Baker had been TV's first newsreader to become a 'household-face', the first to appear on camera. His participation and assured, professional delivery gave a unique authority to the spoken text, which simply described the essential features of a domestic TV receiver and the manner in which the representational process of TV constructed the viewers' illusory perception of his image and voice. For the remainder of the tape this initial sequence, shot and recorded in a 'neutral' manner, was progressively recycled: the first recording was played back as a fresh recording was made by pointing the camera and microphone at the monitor. This process was repeated several times, with the picture and sound at each stage degenerating in a kind of delayed feed-back. As with *60 TV Sets*, the solid dependable presence of the TV personality was eventually revealed to be mere glow and vibration at the receiving end.

Hall did not make another work specifically for British television until 1990. And by the time British TV at last began to give substantive programme time to video art in the mid-1980s, the austere, reflexive approach had lost favour with younger video artists and their audiences. The most coherent and visible period of the characteristically British, self-referential and didactic school of video art, which had Hall at the aesthetic and polemical centre, lasted about three years, from the Serpentine show in May 1975 to the international event *Video Art 78* held at Coventry in May 1978.

In 1975 Hall had already been concerned by the blurred edges between the kind of work made by him and his peers, on the one hand, which followed a modernist tradition of reflexivity, austerity, high-seriousness and truth to the medium, and the various strands of synaesthetic abstraction, narrative and documentary work, on the other, often grouped with it by curators and critics. The Serpentine show had been just such a melange. In the catalogue introduction to the Coventry show, Hall therefore took the opportunity to define the boundaries. After pointing out that unlike film, independent video had arrived long after TV had fallen into the hands of governments and big business, he carefully separated politically motivated work and documentation of performances (for which he preferred the term 'Artists' Video') from 'Video Art' *per se*: 'Too often enthusiastic writers have mistakenly

constructed notions of a related endeavour on the presumption that simply the use of that technology presents a common factor of some ideological, conceptual or aesthetic significance.' After providing some instances of specific aspects of video/television which Video Art addressed or manipulated, he provided what amounted to a concise manifesto for the form:

> It can be summarised then that Video Art is video *as* the art work – the parameters deriving from the characteristics of the medium itself, rather than art work using video – which adopts a device for an already defined content. By characteristics I have meant those particular attributes specific to both its technology and the reading of it as a phenomenon. Video as art largely seeks to explore perceptual and conceptual thresholds, and implicit in it is the decoding and consequent expansion of the conditioned expectations of those narrow conventions understood as television.[34]

Much of the work embraced by this prescription had many virtues: it could be intelligent, serious and often very elegant. It was capable of bearing the weight of complex theoretical exegeses, usually written by the artists themselves – it would be some time before many British critics from outside the Video Art sector would be capable of making cogent observations on the medium.[35] The installations, which used real-time content – often the viewer's own video image – also had an immediate appeal for audiences disinclined to grapple with the ontology of the medium or perceptual thresholds. Some of the single-screen tapes, on the other hand, could be excruciatingly boring, even for other video artists. Adherence to a pre-determined process in the production of a tape often meant that the viewer knew precisely what was going to happen long before it did. An ascetic suspicion of the notion of entertainment seemed to pervade the tendency and sought to deny artists use of the panoply of devices – tension, relief, surprise and sensory appeal – which elsewhere constitute time-based arts. Such an extreme aesthetic position commands respect, and the rigour of the work it generated is rare in today's much more diverse video culture, but for the scions of Hall – and for some of his contemporaries – it seemed to represent a strait-jacket from which the developing technology of video might offer an escape.

On October 12, 1978, at London Video Arts' inaugural screening at the AIR Gallery, the undoubted hit of the evening was a brace of short tapes, *Entropy and Order*, edited with the pace and precision of TV commercials by a young New York couple. ('Can we see them again?' shouted Hoppy from the back row.) Kit Fitzgerald and John Sanborn would be the first video artists commissioned to make a work for Channel 4 five years later. They parted company before the project was in production, but Sanborn and his new partner Mary Perillo invested their production of Robert Ashley's opera for television, *Perfect Lives/Private Parts* (1983-4), with

the gamut of digital effects – travelling mattes, squeezed, rotated and layered images etc. – by then available. It had become apparent to the new breed of independent video-makers that their work could entertain as well as lecture, and that by doing so it had a better chance of reaching a wide, and possibly lucrative, audience.

This populist approach to video was taken largely by the students of Hall's generation of artists, just as earlier the 'New Art' – conceptual, process-based, photographic – had been made by students of Anthony Caro's. As the Thatcher years began and another alternative society, with Punk rock as its pivot, learned the advantages of respectability or ossified into a Style, *IT* gave way to *Time Out* and *The Face*, and Arts Labs to clones of the ICA. Of course, there would continue to be video art exhibitions and screenings, but many artists were happy to provide the picture track, the moving wallpaper, for the young and rather worldly bohemians who inhabited Club Society.

'NON-OEDIPAL TELEVISION'

Early in 1986 rumours began to circulate in London of plans for a pirate TV station, transmitting independent, 'underground' films and making tapes on contemporary art, fashion and music, with an emphasis on the burgeoning – and often proudly gay – club and youth culture of the time. The London listings magazines *Time Out* and *City Limits* helpfully included tuning advice in their reports, and, thanks to an energetic publicity campaign and an enthusiastic young metropolitan community deprived of any really relevant material on mainstream broadcast television, large numbers picked up the first transmission of Network 21 at midnight on March 21. The station opened, after some minutes of its call sign, with silent footage from John Maybury's film *Big Love* (1985).

Maybury was one of a number of young British directors who looked back past the severe formalism of structuralist cinema and the British video art typical of the 1970s to the exuberant and taboo qualities of 1960s American Underground film – made by the likes of Jack Smith, Kenneth Anger, Bruce Conner and Andy Warhol around 1964 – and forward to the new audiences and distribution networks provided by Clubland and by video cassettes, cable and satellite TV. Some, with the late Derek Jarman as their mentor, used Super 8 film to make visually luxurious psychodramas of homo-erotic and polymorphous physical encounters; others, influenced by the American video artist Dara Birnbaum, by Underground film-maker Bruce Conner, or even by the veteran New Zealand-born film collagist Len Lye, produced 'Scratch' videos, in which images were culled from the vast variety now available through off-air video recording and juxtaposed in new patterns via the latest generation of precision video edit suites and digital vision-mixers.

Although the genre received scholarly plaudits in journals and at the 1985 Edinburgh Television Festival, it was in the clubs that Scratch Video, with its scruple-free pillaging of broadcast TV for the raw material of its rock music-based rapid collage, was really at home. The Danceteria and Palladium clubs in New York had installed huge banks of video monitors as part of their decor. Smaller venues like the Pyramid and Red Bar had video nights and competed to screen the latest and most sensational material. The scale was smaller in London, but The Fridge in Brixton did what it could with artful piles of old TV sets. Far from investigating the parameters of perception, or the ontology of the television presence, many video artists were having fun generating or reflecting a life style.

They disregarded their elders' puritanical sensitivity to the medium's specificity, using film or video, or both, according to need or convenience, and they scorned the pious hush of LFMC or London Video Arts (LVA) screenings, preferring the arbitrary din of a nightclub or fashion show as background to their work. And most of them were fanatically good at their work: they were ambitious to make a stir in the mid-1980s' City-driven boom of London's leisure industry, and most of them did. For a while, as with New York's incestuous So-Ho art-fashion revival a few years previously, rock musicians, writers, magazine art directors, dancers, clothes designers, artists, photographers, models and stylists seemed to be engaged in a frantic non-stop party, which the rest of the country could read about, if it chose, in the pages of *i-D* and *The Face*. Network 21 was perfectly in tune with the times and – deliciously – it was illegal, although the authorities did not seem particularly exercised with its suppression, perhaps because the perpetrators avoided essential public service frequencies and were not interested in transmitting pornography. In fact, they enjoyed a remarkable degree of co-operation, not only from the Underground – independent film and video producers – but also from the legitimate broadcasting sector, whose producers and editors handed over tape and film which would otherwise not have been transmitted, and from janitors and fire-brigade personnel around London, who provided access to the various high points from which successive transmissions were made.

The perpetrators of this guerrilla operation were mainly out to have some very public fun, part of which was the liberal tongue-in-cheek deployment both in interviews with the Press and in their manifesto – distributed mainly in hope of gaining advertising revenue – of post-modern buzzwords, references to theorists such as Deleuze and Guattari, and their description of the project as 'non-Oedipal Television', an indirect poke at 'Auntie' BBC. Nevertheless, the programming – a mixture of new work by independent producers and archive material unavailable or considered unsuitable for legitimate broadcasting – was genuinely innovatory and influential.

Network 21 lasted about six months. It resurfaced in May 1987 as a pirate radio station and was raided for the first time, but the money had run out. In a way, so
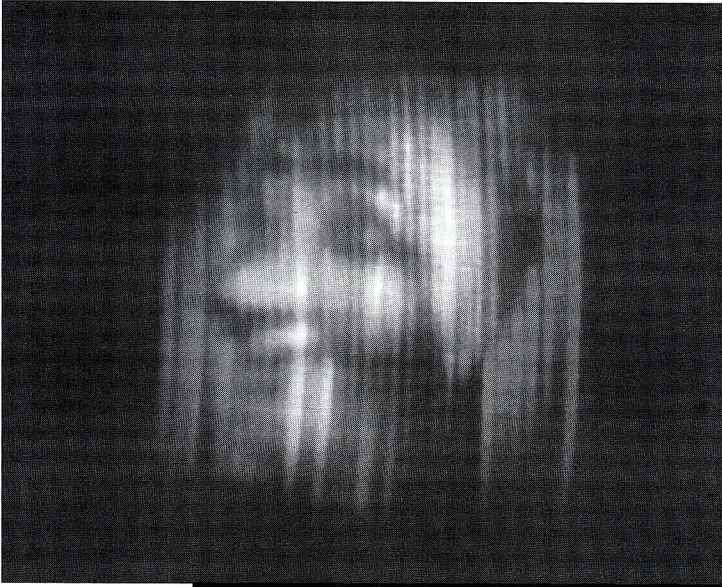
Stooky Bill TV (1990), Hall's contribution to Fields and Frames
19:4:90 Television Interventions

[REPRODUCED WITH THE KIND PERMISSION OF DAVID HALL
AND FIELDS AND FRAMES]

had its phase in the cycle. The process by which innovation starts as rebellion and is then assimilated as style had become institutionalised and accelerated. Whereas Hoppy's ambitions for wider access to television for community groups had taken a couple of years to cross the Atlantic from America and about three more to infiltrate the BBC (whose Community Programme Unit was established in 1972), the content and ironic style of Network 21 were appropriated within months. Janet Street-Porter's *Network 7* (Channel 4, 1987-88) was only the earliest in a succession of broadcast ventures in which 'subversion' was replaced by corporate planning. Similarly, Hoppy's experiments with one-person crew TV newsgathering have recently been emulated for commercial purposes by Michael Rosenblum's Channel One cable station in London.

Even David Hall's confrontational mode of intervention was not exempt. In 1990, his *TV Pieces* were commemorated with a much more ambitious project marking Glasgow's European Year of Culture: *19:4:90 Television Interventions*. The project was originated and executed by independent video artists and producers: Stephen Partridge, Jane Rigby of Fields and Frames and Anna Ridley of Annalogue, in consultation with Hall. Some of Hall's original 1971 *Pieces* were broadcast, and a total of 23 new works were commissioned (19 of which were broadcast) from a mix of established video practitioners like Hall, Robert Cahen and Steve Littman; other artists, many with Glasgow connections, including Bruce McLean, Ron Geesin, Alistair MacLennan and David Mach; and local community groups. Unfortunately, the intended surprise element of the broadcasts was to a large extent defused by Channel 4: Waldemar Januszczak introduced the *Interventions* with disarming explanations, and the interventions were repeatedly trailed and announced in programme schedules.[36]

Hall's new contribution to the project was *Stooky Bill TV*, an imaginary dialogue between the pioneer of television, John Logie Baird, and the eponymous ventriloquist's dummy used as the subject of his experimental cameras and apparatus. To make the piece Hall used a reconstructed 30-line mechanical system almost identical to Baird's original device, which he had obtained through contact with an extraordinary society of 'underground' enthusiasts for the Baird system. The dialogue hypothesises the thoughts of Baird and the dummy at the moment of the first successful transmission in Baird's workshop in October 1925. To Baird's (Hall's?) insistence that television will enable people to see themselves more than ever before, Stooky Bill ripostes that they will be led to demand the 'fantastical' illusion that he represents. Stooky Bill speaks for the phantasmagoria of entertainment; Baird (Hall) for the social applications of live television. Given the normal relationship of ventriloquist and dummy, this dialogue has numerous ironic implications. Baird's optimistic prediction that 'we can see ourselves more than ever', for example, could as a pessimistic prognosis open the way, not to high-minded documentaries, but to 24-hour camcorder jape shows.

ecstaseeTV (1993), one of Hall's TV interruptions made for MTV
[REPRODUCED WITH THE KIND PERMISSION OF THE ARTIST]

Three years after the Glasgow-based event, Hall also made a set of six TV interruptions for MTV Networks, five of which were selected by Hall for transmission. Although conceived in the spirit of the *1971 Pieces, TV Interruptions* 1993 were shot or post-produced using advanced colour video technology, electronic effects and a refinement gained over Hall's 25 years' work in time-based media. Taken together, they constitute a potted summary of Hall's preoccupations in video and television, and perhaps of the progression of video art as a 'genre'. A particular interest of Hall and his producer Anna Ridley was the differing audience responses to these interruptions in different parts of the vast geographical area and among the diverse cultures covered by MTV's transmission 'footprints'. This time, though enigmatic, the interruptions were not anonymous: each was followed by a brief credit both for Hall and for Ridley's production company, Annalogue, together with a date and copyright notice for MTV.

The very sophistication of contemporary television, however, seems to invite an internal reaction. In the early days, the TV schedules were full of gaps in which a test card accompanied by soothing music was the only object of contemplation; or interludes between programmes, in which kittens played with wool, horses patiently ploughed, or potters toiled at their wheels. Now we have something called 'information flow', in which referents have to be ceaselessly generated on the screen, even if they are only station idents. Silence is anathema: 'dead air'. Pictures are invariably accompanied by a voice or by appropriate music, directing our interpretation. Continuity announcers tell us what we are about to view, have just viewed, or can view later. A rhythm, a dynamic has been established, partly through technical developments, but also through the evolution of sophisticated broadcasting procedures and conventions, which hardly ever seems to falter or vary. It could be argued that intervention itself has been engulfed by TV's ability to absorb everything it can use, as recent adverts for First Direct Bank and Sega computer games, purporting to break into the commercial breaks themselves, demonstrate. The *One Minute Television* pieces (1990-93) commissioned for *The Late Show* (BBC2, 1989-), the short spots addressing aspects of the work of Magritte and Rembrandt, the use of 'avant-garde' film devices on MTV's *Buzz* (MTV Europe/Channel 4, 1990), even BBC2's imaginative station 'idents', reveal that the makers of British television now acknowledge and court a highly sophisticated audience. Thus the occasional real technical hitch, the awkward pause, an announcer corpsing or a calamity with the sound stage, when recognised as such, bring out the gleefully malevolent child in most viewers – the delight of *schadenfreude*. But when the nature of the interruption is intentionally obscure, the reaction is often clouded by anxiety – as the Canadian film and video artist, Stan Douglas, discovered after making interruption pieces for broadcast in Vancouver:

> People were either very curious or, more often, very confused by
> what they saw. ... I saw raw footage of what they said after they
> were told that it was art. Their attitudes were immediately

different. They said, 'Well, now we know it's art, we can relax and look at the colour, the camera angles, and the camera movement.' One of them added, 'Once we learned that it was art we stopped worrying about looking for a point because we realised that there was no point. It was only for art.'[37]

Neither Hoppy nor Hall, I suspect, have much time for the more rarified strata of postmodernist theory. Yet they would surely sympathise and identify with Jean-François Lyotard's riposte, at an ICA symposium, to a characteristic address by John Wyver. An energetic independent TV producer, Wyver has in the past – through series like *Ghosts in the Machine* (Channel 4, 1986 and 1988) and *White Noise* (BBC2, 1990) – been an important promoter of video art on British television. His enthusiasm has enabled the broadcasting of work by such formidable American talents as Gary Hill, Bill Viola, Joan Jonas and Cecilia Condit, as well as work by European artists like Klaus vom Bruch, Joëlle de la Casinière, Robert Cahen and Stefaan Decostere. He has also raised purist hackles through his preference for professionalism in video art over the wilder shores of experimentation and for a catholic taste which accords Martin Scorsese, Jean-Luc Godard and *LA Law* equal status with Viola, Malcolm Le Grice and Michael Snow. In his contribution to the symposium, Wyver bounced eagerly from Walter Benjamin to Malcolm McLaren, from Colin McCabe to Paul Hardcastle, in a manner which would reduce the work of Hopkins and Hall to mere seasoning at a banquet. Calmly, Lyotard proceeded to respond:

> The question everybody raised was that of knowing how to introduce resistance into this cultural industry. I believe that the only line to follow is to produce programmes for TV, or whatever, which produce in the viewer or the client in general an effect of uncertainty and trouble. It seems to me that the thing to aim at is a certain sort of feeling or sentiment. You can't introduce concepts, you can't produce argumentation. This type of media isn't the place for that, but you can produce a feeling of disturbance, in the hope that this disturbance will be followed by reflection. I think that that's the only thing one can say, and obviously it's up to every artist to decide by what means s/he thinks s/he can produce this disturbance.[38]

To seriously disturb: to suspend and change the nature of the television viewing process is an accomplishment achieved by only a few visionaries in any generation. It is the role of the perceptive television producer or executive to recognise them, provide the means of production or access, and then to move quietly into the background.