

EITF

Edinburgh
International
Television
Festival

DOC & ROLL

SCRATCHING

EDINBURGH INTERNATIONAL TELEVISION FESTIVAL '88

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WHOSE IMAGE IS IT ANYWAY?

The phenomenon of 'scratch video' has caused a stir recently in the video-art community, and lent its style to some pop-videos, notably, Frankie Goes to Hollywood's Two Tribes and Paul Hardcastle's 19. A fugitive from the disco world of clubs like The Fridge in Brixton, it involves the pilfering of images and sounds from broadcast television (usually soap-operas, late-night films and newsreels), which are then cut to the rhythms of disco-funk music, using repeat edits, slow motion, superimposition and montage. The effect is often humorous, sometimes analytic and nearly always aggressive.

The musical form of 'scratch' from which this video practice takes its name, originated in the disco clubs of the Bronx New York where disc-jockeys 'mixed' different records together, and more characteristically, 'stroked' the record so that phrases were repeated, the needle scratching the record surface with a distinctive sound. The result was a unique kind of music based on the fixed form of the record. This activity was understood by some as a subversion of a cultural mass-commodity, as a creative interaction with what is usually consumed passively. The same claims are made for 'scratch video'.

Scratch video confronts the two faces of television - a medium of communication of information, and of pleasure. The stream of images not only constructs the world of politics and world events, but also one of sublime pleasure in its advertising in particular. Reconstructing television from the endless stream of images is pleasurable itself, as well as being a means of asserting a more active relationship towards television. There are obvious similarities here between scratch and Pop art for instance, which also re-appropriated the images of mass-commodities in Western society, both in an ironic and witty way and in a more critical and serious one.

A pertinent issue in all of this, is the one of copyright, which with the spread of recording technology (audio-tapes and videos) has become more and more acute. To many, the individual use of images and sound which bombard our lives is an issue with a political and moral edge, and in the nature of the television medium, adds an urgency to the issue of copyright not met with in the other arts.

Finally, scratch points the way to resolving or practicing ideas which until the advent of the video, had been largely a matter of theory and debate. Suddenly, the problems of communication in mass-media are no longer simply academic but exciting real ones where David seems to have stumbled upon his sling before the Goliath of broadcast television.

-Michael O'Pray

The 'SCRATCH VIDEO' session will take place on Saturday at 11.30am in the Adam Room, George Hotel. Several examples of Scratch will be shown, and will be discussed by MICHAEL O'PRAY, GEORGE BARBER, SEAN CUBITT, ANDY LIPMAN and TIM MORRISON.