

Minutes of 1st meeting of the Video Committee  
held at the Serpentine Gallery on 29 April 1974

Present: Mr Stuart Hood (in the chair)  
Mr Peter Bloch (outside consultant)  
Mr William Feaver (Serpentine Committee representative)  
Mr David Hall  
Mr Clive Scollay (latter part of meeting only)

Mr Norbert Lynton - Director of Exhibitions  
Mr Rodney Wilson - Arts Council Film Officer  
Miss Sue Grayson - Serpentine Gallery Organiser  
Mr Keith Griffiths - GLAA Film Officer

1. Structure and range

i) Exhibition versus Festival: Peter Bloch, in a brief introduction, stressed the need for the committee to arrive at a definition and brief for the Video month at the Serpentine Gallery. The main choice lay between a limited programme repeated perhaps daily and a wide, continually changing programme, with a minimum of repeats. The latter would obviously prove more expensive, but be much wider ranging and resemble a film festival. After discussion it was proposed that a combination might be possible, whereby a shorter (perhaps 2 hour) programme made up of the best tapes in all areas could be offered visitors with limited time, alongside the more comprehensive programme.

ii) National versus International: David Hall was strongly in favour of concentrating on British video in order to strengthen and encourage work in this area. Since this would severely limit the material available it was suggested that a carefully chosen foreign section should accompany the British material. The question of funds available for the show was broached, and the committee asked the gallery organiser if the £8,000 overall budget could be increased by a contingency of up to £6,000. William Feaver and Norbert Lynton emphasised that if the exhibition was to be international it must be comprehensively so, and at the same time selected by the committee on behalf of the Arts Council. Peter Bloch put the case for a large international section (possibly half of the material) hoping that a demonstration of what can be achieved with the support of advanced technology and the tv companies, would reverse the lack of interest in experimental video in Britain on the part of manufacturers and the media. William Feaver hoped that the international section would be kept for the "all-time greats", and was supported in this by the Chairman, who felt that everything possible should be done to encourage national work, which he felt had now reached the "blossoming stage". Rodney Wilson felt that British video had so far suffered from lack of support, money and equipment, and if the larger part of the funds now available for the exhibition went into showing foreign work, this might again undermine British activities. Peter Bloch suggested a breakdown of something like 100-150 hours of tape from British sources and up to 350 video hours from other sources. The Chairman summed up by proposing that the exhibition should provide the best possible programme by combining British work, chosen from a wide, open submission, with work, both invited and carefully selected, from the international scene.

iii) Extent of Studio and Live Participation: The committee stressed the importance of extending the exhibition's effect beyond the gallery-viewing. David Hall hoped for daily coverage (say, 15 minutes a day throughout the month) on peak-hour tv, rather than on specialist arts programmes. While it was recognized that it was optimistic to expect this degree of co-operation,

it was agreed that the Chairman of the Arts Council should be asked to make a firm approach to the BBC. Rodney Wilson reminded the committee that people used video in many different ways: socio-political, educational, as much as artistically, and that all these should be covered in a video exhibition. It was felt that the exhibition, being the first large one of its kind in Britain, presented a challenge, and as many forms as possible should be covered, but within a structured framework.

Sue Grayson reported that allowance had been made within the budget for one room to be kept as a studio, where artists or groups could work. Peter Bloch suggested that numerically the largest share of the show would go to community groups, national and international, but pointed out that this would not provide the most interesting programme. Rodney Wilson suggested giving different community groups a time limit, perhaps a room for a day to show existing tapes, or in which to work with an audience, while the more structured programmes would continue in the other rooms. Participation would be important because demystification could only be achieved when people used video equipment themselves. While David Hall worried that community projects tended to use equipment conventionally, Rodney Wilson maintained that anti-aesthetics was an important part of the video movement. Peter Bloch stressed that the committee should look for work which was indigenously video i.e. would not be better done with film. Peter Bloch was anxious to bring over 30-40 video makers from abroad who could offer live events and video installations. It was generally agreed that Peter Bloch would draw up a short list of international groups and individuals, with the emphasis on work not covered in England at the moment i.e. videographic and political tapes etc (this would be circulated as soon as possible). This could include such people as Stephen Beck and the National Centre for Experiments in TV, San Francisco, who had access to the most revolutionary equipment, and David Ross, video curator in Syracuse.

iv) Selection versus Open Submission: It was agreed that the first step in planning the programme should be extensive circulation of art colleges, tv and film courses, art magazines and Regional arts association bulletins etc. The first announcement should be general, inviting people working with video, in whatever area, to write giving information of work already completed, under way or planned. No categorisation would be attempted at this first stage, since it was agreed that the prime purpose of the exhibition was to break down barriers rather than create them. It was hoped that information received would be as wide as possible, with no area swamping another. A short list of known video users would also be invited to submit proposals, but it was understood that the committee (and ultimately the Arts Council) must have the final veto. Peter Bloch mentioned that his forthcoming visit to Australia, Japan and North America would provide an ideal opportunity to research new video work, and gather material. It was essential therefore that the committee should agree on a brief for the exhibition and instruct the outside consultant accordingly at their next meeting.

2. Availability of equipment and desirability of approaching retail and rental firms for loan of equipment during the four-week period

Peter Bloch pointed out that the exhibition was likely to require 8 or 9 different video formats. He had already held preliminary discussions with Sony, who manufacture almost all the equipment likely to be required, and found their reactions encouraging. However, since the Arts Council was reluctant to link itself with a single commercial enterprise on the level of

co-sponsorship, it was agreed to approach other manufacturers, such as EMI, Rank etc. The Chairman volunteered to approach BREMA. It was hoped that the attraction of using the exhibition as an experimental testing ground would encourage firms to lend their equipment to the exhibition free of charge. Similarly it might be possible to borrow colour video for an exhibition on this scale. Susan Grayson stressed that the budget was based on the assumption that all the necessary equipment could be obtained in this way, since the actual cost of hiring equipment of this kind would be in the region of £6,000. The Chairman also emphasised the importance of budgeting for two skilled engineers to service the hardware (at £450 for the month), unless a firm was willing to provide such services free.

3. Format of Catalogue etc

The committee felt that the catalogue should be kept to a minimum. Rodney Wilson suggested that a large sheet giving time-tables and sold at 5 or 10p would be sufficient. Keith Griffiths volunteered to put the timetable into Video Extra at the appropriate time. It was possible that a record in catalogue form could be made of the exhibition as it took place.

4. Possibility of related events

Sue Grayson hoped to invite participation from ILEA, and it was agreed that a strong tie-up with the audio visual officer at London University and the ILEA Battersea studios, as well as the National Film School, would benefit all. The question of reserving funds for a commissioning of work and installations was also raised. With a ceiling budget of £15,000 it would be necessary to strike a balance between simplicity and feasibility without pennypinching where there was a real need for funds to produce more ambitious work. Allocations would have to be worked out carefully on an assessment basis. Before the next meeting Rodney Wilson and Peter Bloch would discuss any help that the Arts Council's film committee might be able to extend to events related to the video month.

5. Co-ordination of programme with the Royal College of Art

The Chairman suggested that the Royal College's participation would be most useful in arranging seminars, discussion groups and lectures, and possibly providing outdoor space for media events difficult to accommodate within the DOE strictures on the use of the gallery grounds. David Hall wondered whether the Royal College tv studios might be available during the Easter vacation for the preparation of tapes to be included in the exhibition. In order to benefit from these facilities and the likelihood of increased audiences during term-time, it was agreed that the exhibition should be held in May 1975.

6. Any other business

The committee was asked to consider appropriate titles for the exhibition and bring their suggestions to the next meeting.

7. The date of the next meeting was arranged for Monday, 10 June.