

# GIVE THEM THE PICTURE

An Anthology of *La Mamelles* and *ART COM*,  
1975-1984

Liz Glass, Susannah Magers &  
Julian Myers, eds.

Dedicated to Steven Leiber for instilling  
in us a passion for the archive.

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## Give Them the Picture: An Introduction

*Give Them the Picture* is an anthology of writings that originally appeared in *La Mamelle* and *ART COM* magazines. It accompanies the exhibition *God Only Knows Who the Audience Is: Performance, Video, and Television Through the Lens of La Mamelle/ART COM*, staged at the CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts in 2011. Founded by Carl Loeffler with Trudi Richards in 1975, *La Mamelle*—which later became known as *ART COM*—was a publishing body and a gallery space during a crucial moment in the history of San Francisco's art and culture. Focusing on performance, non-object-based art, and, later, media-based works, *La Mamelle/ART COM* functioned as a space for exhibitions and performances, and an organization dedicated to archiving and disseminating information related to what it saw as the most important art of the time.

The 70s witnessed the creation of dozens of new, self-organized institutions devoted to contemporary art, from the Western Front in Vancouver to the New Museum in New York and 80 Langton in San Francisco. These organizations saw themselves, explicitly, as a corrective to existing museums: institutions of modernism, like the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA), which had once devoted themselves to the most cutting-edge practices of the avant-garde, but had fallen behind the times by not exhibiting performance, video, and the most radical forms of conceptual art.<sup>[1]</sup> In light of this perceived dereliction of duty, *La Mamelle/ART COM* was imagined by its organizers, who came to include the artist Nancy Frank and the archivist Darlene Tong, as

an *alternative* space for contemporary artists, where practices ignored by major institutions might find their place in history.<sup>[2]</sup>

Alongside serving as a venue for artists, *La Mamelle/ART COM*—somewhat uniquely, among their cohort of institutions—saw their special mission as *documenting* and *recording* these anarchic and ephemeral practices; they did so in an extensive archive of documents, artifacts and videos, and through their prodigious production of magazines and books, including twenty-five issues of *La Mamelle* and *ART COM*, as well as the survey texts *Performance Anthology: Source Book For A Decade of California Performance Art* (1979) and *Correspondence Art: Source Book for the Network of International Postal Art* (1984).

*Give Them the Picture* presents essays and images culled from the pages of *La Mamelle* and *ART COM* magazines between 1976 and 1984,<sup>[3]</sup> intending to trace in particular their discussions of time-based art practices. Pulled from later issues of *ART COM*, this title appeared originally as a heading on the table of contents, and was meant to signal something of a turn in the magazine's approach around 1980. In the early years, the magazine—by, for, and about artists—was a venue for local and international art coverage; it included reviews, interviews, information about other alternative spaces and publications, and works of art made specifically for inclusion in the magazine. As the tides of artistic practice shifted throughout the course of its publication, what was *La Mamelle* magazine became

known as *Art Contemporary*, subsequently changing its name to the abbreviated *ART COM* in 1981. The aesthetics of *La Mamelle* and *ART COM* evolved with the name. The first issues maintained a black-and-white minimal aesthetic redolent of conceptualism and mail art. In the 1980s, when *La Mamelle* was dropped from the title, the aesthetic adopted trappings of a popular publication. Bold colors, flashy graphics and catchy titles replaced an austere monochrome newsprint.

Changes coursed through the style and substance of the magazine as well. Offbeat artists' statements, transcripts of conversations in a sometimes agonizing and digressive real-time (see, for example, the conversations with Ian Burn and Tom Marioni, or between Peter Frank and Douglas Davis in this volume), and post-Beat cyberpunk rants (see Richard Irwin's contributions beginning on page 65), gave way to a style more polemical (see the included essays by Loeffler, Michael Nash, and Anna Couey) and discernibly fragmented, quick-mix, and cut 'n' paste—a writing style in tune with the new hyper-temporality of pop culture in the 1980s, in particular the rhythms of MTV, which Loeffler and others took in with rapt attention.

This new style accompanied a new sense of *La Mamelle/ART COM*'s critical project. While the magazine had always been interested in performance, video and emerging technologies, the project of considering an artist's place in this new set of conditions now took center stage. With it came a new populist bent. Articles about cutting-edge video-art shared space with critical accounts of the cable television market, the aesthetics of MTV, the development of slow-scan video technology and early incarnations of the Internet. Performance art was displaced by "televisionism," and bohemia by "teleculture." The magazine began, in

particular, interrogating obsessively the idea of television—what is it? For whom and, perhaps more importantly, to whom does it speak? What is its relationship to art practice? And how can artists find their place in this new mediascape?

In this light, the slogan "Give Them The Picture" evinced a kind of double- or triple-meaning. Perhaps most prosaically, it stood in for the role of the table of contents: to encapsulate each issue in a single "picture". But more compelling readings exist: "them" can be seen to refer to the television audience, to whom artists and writers meant to deliver *their* picture—which might, *ART COM* hoped, produce a programming more experimental, anarchic and open-ended than the rigorously controlled broadcast time allowed. Or, "Give Them The Picture" might refer to the artists themselves who were (in *ART COM*'s formulation) to be accorded access to the means of televisual production—and, by extension, access to television's mass audience.

This transition, around 1980, from documenting the production of an avant-garde, perceived as such, to finding a place for artists in an expanding and volatile media marketplace, was not without its anxieties, contradictions, and vociferous debates—as a reading of the contents of this anthology will bear out.

In his watershed essay, "E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction," David Foster Wallace posits that television inhabited an impossible contradiction.<sup>[4]</sup> At its core, television offered its target subject access to a certain kind of community and sociability. Television's popularity was the result of a collective, and broadly-felt, desire for connection, with something or someone; and yet the highly structured and regulated actuality of television-viewing engendered only isolation. While it connected its audience to an imagined

or imaged “outside,” it was ultimately consumed alone. The apparatus determined the experience—absolutely.

“God Only Knows Who The Audience Is,” was another of La Mamelles/ART COM’s ambivalent slogans, embodying both despair about this new disconnected community, and giddy excitement at the dream of addressing this vast and invisible audience. Which is to say that within the apparatus of broadcast television, La Mamelles/ART COM imagined a different possibility, contrary to Foster Wallace’s pessimistic view: one that might liberate TV from banality and build something more authentically social. They pictured an exchange between the televised image and the audience—something more open, democratic, and responsive. Or, at least, in moments of still-remarkable ambition and pioneering optimism, a new apparatus and an expanded audience for artistic material—video and television made by artists.

There is a certain pathos to this dream. These populists never truly became popular, even as the transformations they saw so clearly on the horizon—and in which they meant to carve out a space—came to pass without them: the earth-shifting advent of the World Wide Web, the chaos of YouTube, social networking, handheld digital recorders, and mass market satellite television. The mass-medium of television, which the authors revered and criticized, was, even during the time of *ART COM*, beginning to splinter, as audiences were given more choice through the development of new cable channels, and the ultimate audience-controlled device, the VCR. The very technology on which these tech-modernists based so much theorizing and art making, analogue television broadcast, has itself become largely obsolete, its pixilated glow replaced everywhere by a featureless, crisp ATSC digital signal. Still, it is worth

picturing, as you read, just how *different* this exhausting present might be, if the authors had had their way.

—Liz Glass, Susannah Magers & Julian Myers, eds.

#### Footnotes:

1. SFMOMA was attempting to adapt to the changes in the art climate, showing artists like Vito Acconci, Tom Marionni, and Peter Campus, among others, in the mid-1970s. The museum also responded overtly to the emerging alternative scene of the 1970s in the exhibition *Space/Time/Sound—1970s: A Decade in the Bay Area* at the Museum in 1979–80. Despite these efforts, however, the Museum was slower at addressing these new media forms than were the more flexible and fast-moving independent spaces. SFMOMA later established the Media Arts Department in 1988, to collect and exhibit video and media-based works.
2. As recalled by both Nancy Frank and Darlene Tong in the interviews published in this book.
3. Though *La Mamelles* began as a publication in 1975—its existence pre-dating the physical space of La Mamelles/ART COM—all of the essays reproduced here are taken from issues of the publications that were released after 1976, and through *ART COM*’s last printed issue in 1984.
4. David Foster Wallace, “E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction,” *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, 13:2 (1993: Summer), p. 151.

Susannah Magers

## The Mediated Performance

In the spring of 1970, artist Terry Fox pushed himself into a corner of San Francisco’s Reese Palley gallery, “as far into the corner and for as long” as he could.<sup>[1]</sup> With the exception of a photographer, who snapped the only available image of the work, there was no witness to this performance. For Fox, this isolation was the crux of the interaction: site-specific, the act was meant to exist only in the moment of its execution, as an intensely personal, kinetic exchange between the materiality of the gallery and the artist’s body. Yet the presence of the photographer signaled an ambiguous futurity; an element not yet present, but latent within the situation—that of the audience. What we know of this performance comes to us through various forms of mediation: traces found in a letter, a photograph, and in Fox’s own recounting in an interview with the art magazine *Avalanche*.<sup>[2]</sup> While video recordings were slowly becoming more common in the early 1970s as a means to document performance, Fox was more interested in “creating situations,” than in “making pieces.”<sup>[3]</sup> Though *Corner Push* was meant to exist as a situation (and only in the present), the reality of the photograph (which extends into the future) enacts a relationship between artist and audience that fuses the past and present.

By the mid-1970s and early 1980s, performance of the kind that Fox pursued was changing dramatically. Like many early performances, *Corner Push* was enacted for a very limited public (if anyone was there at all), and embodied an attitude towards documentation and mediation that was ambivalent at best. Recordings

of performances were often intended for the artists themselves, without aspirations towards re-presentations of the actions. In contrast, the organizers of La Mamelles/ART COM saw a new world of possibility in the language of video and television; literally described as “tele-culture,” or culture at a distance, they saw video as an opportunity to extend performance art to a dispersed and mass audience, making the works accessible after the fact. Untethered to a specific location and time, these performances might gain a new life. In the mind of Carl Loeffler, and others working within the La Mamelles/ART COM network, television and video could offer performance art something more than just another evidence of an otherwise ephemeral activity. They believed that video and television broadcast were the art of the future, a solution to the plight of what they perceived to be an increasingly alienated and uninterested audience.<sup>[4]</sup>

That many artists felt ambivalent towards the prospect of their work being mediated for some unknown audience is understandable. Eleanor Antin, who worked through both live performance and video, said in an interview with Mary Stofflet: “A live performance is always more interesting than a videotape *of it*.”<sup>[5]</sup> This statement sets up a qualitative hierarchy in which the value of the recorded performance is made distinct from the original action. Video exists as a lesser incarnation of live performance—even if that performance was done in order to produce a video. Still, many saw the video document as a worthwhile endeavor, as art in and of itself. During the mid-1970s and early 80s, La Mamelles/ART COM positioned itself as

a leveling force within this tense dialectical exchange between the idea of the performance, the trace, and the audience. By emphasizing the mediated performance, the productions of La Mabelle/ART COM sought to grant equal value to both “live” performance and its resulting recording. Contrary to Antin’s pronouncement La Mabelle/ART COM believed a videotape of a performance was not only interesting as a document of some past action, but as something that produced “art” every time it was played back; such re-evaluations served to interrogate the bare “presentness” that performance had always evinced.

Carl Loeffler, writing in later issues of *ART COM*, illuminated this evolving dialectic between video, performance, and television. In the last installment of his four-part series on what he called, “Performing Post-Performancist Performance,” Loeffler identified definitive boundaries and rules of conduct separating television and video, video-as-art, and television-as-art. In doing so, Loeffler aligned video art with marketability, claiming that it is “perceived as an art commodity that increases in value over time,” while television art existed altruistically as “information that only has value for as long as it is useful.”<sup>[6]</sup> While the divisions that Loeffler set up in the article were an attempt to parse the differences and tensions that exist between video and television, today some of his statements seem problematic. Perhaps most problematic was Loeffler’s advocacy for the “accessibility” of television art, set in opposition to the “mystification” of video. Though television art tries for more accessibility than video art, it does not succeed; the supposed “non-art” audience for television art is unknowable (and harder to reach) than the “art” audience associated with video art seen within the context of a gallery.

One of La Mabelle/ART COM’s own productions, *Videozine 6: Live from San Francisco: New Video Performance* brings these positions into relief. Unlike the experimental actions and extended durations that characterized earlier video art, *Videozine 6* has the look of a low-budget reincarnation of *Saturday Night Live*. Hosted by Loeffler himself, produced and broadcast live before a studio audience in La Mabelle’s space, the video begins with Dada artist Anna Banana descending a staircase under flashing strobes and the words “A Nude Descending A Staircase” (a reference, of course, to the famous Duchamp painting of 1912). The program then cuts very abruptly from this initial scenario, and segues into a fast-paced montage quality throughout, shedding the long durations of earlier video for an effect more akin to flipping channels. The broadcast pictures Banana shaving a star into the back of Buster Cleveland’s head; a line of people peeling, eating, and showing bananas into each other’s faces; and even incorporates a “commercial” featuring Nancy Frank sheepishly hiding behind a package of hot dogs.

Even an informed viewing of this bizarre content finds it hard to imagine pausing on this while flipping through channels, and recognizing it as an artist-made production. The banality of the work, and its inability to translate the live quality it so desperately attempts, is immediately apparent. If “television art looks to the art context as a means to the end,”<sup>[7]</sup> then, ironically, the format invoked by the *Videozine* series served to reinforce its audience’s marginalization. The *Videozines* are reliant on Loeffler’s tenet, “video art looks to the art context for meaning in the end.”<sup>[8]</sup> What does translate, however, is a commendable effort towards greater accessibility through cable access and broadcast TV, the attempt at escaping the art-context status quo. Through their adherence to a disruptive, Dada-inspired

mode of artistic practice, the *Videozines* bring into view a different aesthetic—one more unpredictable and humorous in its use of self-parody and the absurd, and demonstrating a fiercely subcultural, anti-object brashness.

Though La Mabelle/ART COM’s productions never reached network television, these projects foretell, in some ways, the relative democracy and self-organized world of YouTube—a world where amateur and radical productions sit on (relatively) equal terms with those of media conglomerates, and parody and art are seen alongside advertorials. In this regard, Loeffler and the voices in the dialogues in the pages of *La Mabelle* and *ART COM* got it right—but this relative idealism stands in tension with the question of the quality and authenticity of interactions through this sort of half-mediated hyper-connectivity. It stands to question for whose benefit this increased ability to communicate exists, with Facebook and Twitter as multi-billion dollar administrators. Which is to say that television (and subsequently the Internet) did not liberate art or make it more accessible, as La Mabelle/ART COM had hoped. It created, instead, a way of seeing and an aesthetic that artists often were drawn to, even if their attraction was communicated through means of rejection.

The works presented in the exhibition *God Only Knows Who the Audience Is*, and the essays included in this volume, do not constitute a unified take on the problematics of mediation, television, performance, or anything else. Instead they present a *discourse*, among a network of peers, and discontents, elaborated over time, with these subjects as their centers of gravity. This enables us, as “viewers” with an historical perspective, to evaluate the real effects of the shift in art practice toward various apparatuses of “telecommunication.” Maybe, with the benefit of

hindsight, we might decide that moving towards “mass appeal” for artists is a futile endeavor, or one too dependent on an idea of a mass public that, in an era of ever-more demographic fragmentation, has seen its day. We now know that a teleculture extended infinitely across the globe does not *necessarily* produce nor guarantee *any* kind of audience, let alone one that is larger or more engaged—even as social media allow for the rapid proliferation, among millions of viewers, of political resistance and nonsensical memes with blithe equanimity. But perhaps today’s art can still nevertheless endeavor to speak to “one mind,” if not to the limitless audience of home viewers of whom La Mabelle/ART COM dreamed.<sup>[9]</sup> Douglas Davis may have encapsulated this best in a 1977 interview describing his *Documenta* satellite telecast:

Peter Frank: You have just finished the *Documenta* satellite telecast—with Beuys and Paik. Your audience for this performance, live and taped, must have been in the millions, touching several continents. Didn’t the enormity of the event—as a spectacle or international Nielsen milker—obscure its message?

Douglas Davis: Only if you assume that the viewer saw it as part of the mass, as an unman. I doubt that he/she did. And I was trying to break through to him/her, not to millions of people. That figure is a myth, anyway. There is only one mind, at most two or three, on the other side of the screen.<sup>[10]</sup>

# ANTHOLOGY: 1975-1984

## Footnotes:

1. From a letter from Terry Fox to La Mamelie/ART COM co-founder Carl Loeffler, dated March 21, 1970, explaining Fox's Corner Push (1970): "I'm very happy you want to use the photo for your book." A photograph of the performance was used as the cover for La Mamelie/ART COM's publication, Performance Anthology: A Source Book for a Decade of California Performance Art. San Francisco: Contemporary Arts Press, 1980.
2. Willoughby Sharp. "Terry Fox: Elemental Gestures." Avalanche, April 1970, np.
3. This illuminates a turn in Fox's practice, as he states in Terry Fox, "I Wanted to Have My Mood Affect Their Looks." Avalanche, New York, Winter, 1971, p. 76.
4. The organization's archivist Tong states that they moved away from the conceptual format, both in the magazine and in the exhibition space, because the audience for live performances in the space of the gallery seemed to be getting bored. See the interview with Darlene Tong in this anthology, p. 192.
5. See Mary Stofflet's "Eleanor Antin: An interview by mail," included in this anthology, p. 21. Originally published in La Mamelie, Video Issue, Winter, 1976.
6. From Carl Loeffler's "Performing Post-Performancist Performance or The Televisionist Performing Televisionism," included in this anthology, p. 100. Originally published in ART COM, Number 19, Volume 5 (3), 1982.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. From Douglas Davis' "The End of Video: White Vapor." Gregory Battock, ed. New Artists Video: A Critical Anthology. New York: Dutton Publishing, 1978, p. 32.
10. Douglas Davis and Peter Frank, "Interview, July 1977," included in this anthology, p. 52. Originally published in Art Contemporary, Number 9, Volume 3 (1), 1977.

## La Mamelle: From the Pages: Lifting Some Words: Some History

No reviews or critical interpretation. To observe the natural laws. The work I'm doing now. Up at dawn clear light. Chance that makes me vulnerable. The hucksters have gone further. Needless to say, the names. Wrote "Forever" inside the outline. To be considered as sculpture. Residue resulting from actions; objects. The translation of this breakout. This balance lies quite close. Mind of the classic bent. Catalogue can become the exhibition. Vibrating and making jerking motions. It approximates and imitates life. CHANCE CHANTS CHACES CHASNT CHANEC. Problem was getting the space. You can't do this alone. An attempt to elucidate methods. Their Curriculae Vitae to insure.

Art happens in and out. The Banana by A. Banana. Years spanned by the exhibition. Out to its most logical. By implying more than is. The action out of verbs. Attempt to subvert this conditioning. I left art school I. Was never quite the same. A stiffened harness and leash. The knots and the fibers. The surrender to pure process. Archeological remains that might provide Molecular build up of values. Retirement after an enlightening experience. An equal footing with "Science." Further, to the support structure. Followed through with minimal diversions. Put it in practical terms. A photograph of a mountain. The widest variety of objects. We went out of doors.

Welcome...to resist is fruitless. "Publication" is the critical moment. Burden that he never wanted. Present discussed in the narrative. An algorithm depicting this performance. A black and white world. Handcuffed together for three days. NBC, CBS, ABC, BBC, CBC. Told how soft it was. The more we can connect. Hard it is she said. Eyes, testes and bone marrow. Symmetrical architecture of the museum. Of water to a fish. Didactic in its political stance. Costumes have always bored me. Hyperactive, and a good organizer. Designed to let content recur. More tightly structured, and less. The biological time structure performance. They had their shoes off.

The taste as a material. This daily motion which exists. Syringe full of my blood. The object enters my field. Part of the working class. Identity transfer is a public. Space is their monthly calendar. A universe of subjective possibilities. Think is the most important. Of male and female forms. My heart for a year. In opposition to established rituals. Exploit his or her work. Rooms receding into other rooms.

Fascism, decadence, ahh...beauty, life. Choice, from Outside/Inside installation. Shape of the particular constellation. Players head towards the showers. The telegrapher in the picnic. That made his brain deteriorate. Form of a real life.

Provides security for art openings. For the sake of image. A food and land library. A sojourn in the city. Art or simply another construction. Exchange of secrets will include. A series of tool projects. Caduceus to the zen monk. Revealing encounter with the flies. Money walked towards the landscape. Coffee, tea, spices, smokes, cake. Your bread and butter work. Learning to play the drums. Point between Within and Without. An intuitive way of working. Standing in the unemployment line. The part of the uncommitted. The discontinuous states of being. The running of the gauntlet. We all make formal decisions.

Such a conspiracy of silence. Receptive to a new control. No announcement of the performance. Sequence of posters with facts. Strings on the opposite page. A story behind each one. The activities in the lobby. The fundamentals, the building blocks. The pun of burning oranges. Research & reference material only. Art as a contextual art. Perspective of a binary structure. The flavor of the exhibit. Presented without explanation or structure. Ostensibly, the resources of language. This historical and physical reflection. Trying to package complex information. The underlying attitude of collaboration.

Magazine as a recording vehicle. Saturation with ambiguous subject matter. Renewal of the play element. Proxy as methodology for presentation. They expected "something" to happen. Search for the Big Idea. Be where it all began. Being never exceeds the fragment. Signification to a perceptible impression. Sonic, visual, and oral history. The dress of their times. Synthesis of art and science. Ordering point to the intuitive. The inner game of Tennis. Private life of the artist. Liquid in nature and pours. Rotated on a monthly basis. The interests of Fluxus West. Political structure of a town. Then to be considered transitional. Using diaristic, narrative, sequential variations. Repetition to the open state. Contemporary involvement with historic fascinations. Every piece of sculpture accountable. Muzak from Beyond the Edge. A tool for the mediation. The surface of the pool. Text whose language is enhanced. Process of atonement and purification. Situations within a familiar framework.

Social, geographic and economic factors. Personal clothing, other human bodies. As a precondition to communication. Deformations, touches, looking at mirrors. Certain branches of spiritual production. Economics, mechanics, psychology and biology. Codification dependent upon the structure. I'm glad if I can. Remove them from the actual. Involving dogs, fire, and god. Used as scores for performance. The doctrines of divine revelation. The mouthpiece of the soul. Breaking all his ten commandments.

Originally published in *Art Contemporary*, Number 10, Volume 3, (2), 1978.

Darryl Sapien

## Video Art and the Ultimate Cliché

A teacher once asked her class to use a familiar word in a new way. One boy read: "The boy returned home with a cliché on his face." Asked to explain his phrase, he said, "The dictionary defines cliché as a worn-out expression."

Television or video or whatever you like to call it, regardless of its content is nothing if not the most egregious cliché of our time. Not only is the programming 90% a procession of staggering platitudes, but so are the definite behavior patterns it initiates in people just to watch it; even the very "look" of the hardware is a visual bromide. Can you imagine a more tiresome and predictable proposition than the one evoked when someone (usually out of boredom) suggests, "I wonder what's on the tube tonight?" The phrase resonates with mind-yielding resignation. And despite the Messianic attitude held by many "alternative" videophiles (artists included) the sad truth is that the movement has barely been able to slog through the mud of its own banality.

Now before anyone gets too steamed-up over this bit of heresy I will present my counter point: the cliché is at one time the enemy and the secret weapon of art. For centuries artists have used these vacuous products of society to probe ever deeper into the cultural consciousness of civilization. At its most effective the cliché can be used as an accurate needle to puncture the balloon of pretense that surrounds any hackneyed institution, often revealing its archetypal substructure. For example in the "tragic-farce" play by Eugene Ionesco, *The Bald Soprano*, he accomplishes this with language by using as a dialogue chains of unrelated verbal clichés taken from an English language primer. In the process he shows us how these readymade utterances represent a fundamental isolation of man.

Not unrelatedly, artists using video like Willy Walker with his Captain Video adventures, or even Richard Serra and Robert Bell in their *Prisoner's Dilemma*, narrative-cops-and-robbers-Dragnet-game-theory-cocktail, use cliché aspects of both commercial and non-commercial (artists') video. Here cliché in art effectively reveals how these pathetically staged melodramas contribute to the perversion of our perception of society's archetypes and distort our thought patterns in dealing with the everyday world. However, no matter how trenchantly this subversion is carried off within the traditional medium of television, there still remains the problem of surmounting the cliché aspects of viewing context vis-à-vis the hardware and environment. Regardless of how successful the artist is at subverting the banality of television, the fact remains that we are still sitting in the same room looking at the same TV in the customary somnambulistic state. Essentially we are still watching the same thing: the experience does not deviate much from the situation being criticized, and it amounts to an incomplete attempt at shedding cliché, not really offering us an alternative.

In order for the artist using video to escape unwittingly having his work suffer from the

debilitating effect of a cliché format, he must either parody video by use of inherent cliché or use the system in an altogether unprecedented manner, which departs radically from the normal television experience. In many cases this results in a usage which takes advantage of the most unique capacities of the technology. In this respect video installation as well as video-assisted performances have a real edge over the one-to-one...monitor-to-spectator-in-a-chair situation. In installation conditions the viewer is often a primary or supporting entity in the artwork and consequently becomes more rigorously involved with experiencing the piece. By participating with video used in this unique manner the spectator can temporarily free himself from the numbing effect of cliché in content as well as in viewing context and can perceive unhindered by Pavlovian television pre-conditioning.

There is an old saying that goes, "I don't know who discovered water but I do know that it was not a fish." The same idea can be applied to television and its vast audience. Just as the most effective means of demonstrating the subtleties of water to a fish would remove him from it, the artist must remove his public somehow from the ocean of stale television experience to expose the latent expressive qualities of the medium. My point is that this can be accomplished when the artist in charge utilizes deliberately the cliché aspects of commercial TV content or even more effectively attempts an inversion of the traditional viewing context. Artists using video cannot continue to rely on the falsehood that because they are artists their products must necessarily be unique and therefore elevated to a loftier plane of appreciation. The only thing that can make artists' video any different from anybody else's video is a cognizance of the basic banality of the medium and a dedication to deal with that issue even before the first camera shot is taken. As the verbal cliché chains of Ionesco were used to point toward the failure of language, so can the treatment of video as ultimate cliché by the artist most profoundly probe the minds of our contemporaries in confirmation of Alfred Jarry's prophecy that "The cliché is the armature of the absolute."

Originally published in *La Mamelle*, Volume 1, Number 3, Winter 1976.

Mary Stofflet

## Eleanor Antin: An interview by mail

**MS:** How did you get involved with video?

**EA:** It was back in '73 and I was just at the beginning of my self-transformation work. I began to use the video image as a kind of trap for myself...you know, like bumping into yourself in the mirror of a friend's lobby or a cigarette machine. You get caught unawares. There's that moment when you might catch yourself thinking you were a stranger...a beautiful stranger? Underneath you know better. There will be a double chin at least. I guess I first used video as a kind of innocent mirror. Not anymore, though. I became less interested in appearances. Costumes have always bored me. My self-transformations are an act of will. For that you need a theater. The will needs space to move. That's one of the reasons my video went into narrative. Narrative is about moving on. When you get caught you call that THE END and start again.

**MS:** Do you watch a lot of commercial TV?

**EA:** Yes.

**MS:** What kind?

**EA:** I like police programs. *The Streets of San Francisco*, *Harry O.*, *Barnaby Jones*, even *Kojak* sometimes, though the sexism gets to be too much. On all of these programs, women are either victims or sexy. Never "people." When television needs a people, it's always a man. But I have no choice. It's the same with movies and books. I've got to have my narrative experience or I freak out. I need narrative every few days like most people need sex or grass. It can be a movie, several hours of TV, a detective novel—a Ross Macdonald, say, or Agatha Christie. Narrative that makes no pretense at being anything else.

**MS:** How do you feel about viewers sitting passively in front of a tube watching a video piece?

**EA:** What do you want them to do? Have a happening? What's passive about the narrative experience? Is it passive to sit still and read a book? Or sit in a dark movie theater and watch the screen? Or look at a painting on a wall, for that matter?

**MS:** Do you feel that the audience has to put forth more effort to react to a live performance piece or a video piece?

**EA:** I don't understand what you're implying in the last few questions. You seem to want the audience to work or something. Why? They're not getting paid for it.

**MS:** Do you think there is a lot of difference between improvisational theater and artists doing performance pieces?

**EA:** I never learn. Whenever I meet a “theater performer” (at UCSD where I teach I’m always bumping into members of the drama department) I tell them about what artists are doing as performers. Chris Burden, Barbara Smith—I usually go for the sensational, hoping to engage their interest. They’re always polite—but they’re never interested. They are very smug, really. They know they do their thing and we do ours. They probably don’t approve of ours. I think they’re all bores. Besides they talk funny.

**MS:** Is video more important to you as a documentation medium or as a medium for technical experiments?

**EA:** Neither. It’s time we stopped using that word “documentation.” I mean, after the fact, when the event you’re talking about goes away, that’s all you’ve got. That document is the art. As for technical experiments, I don’t understand what you mean. You only need the amount of technique necessary to do what you have to do. When you need something, a skill, say, you’d better acquire it. Who has time to experiment? That’s for amateurs.

**MS:** Why is some video so extremely boring? I’m thinking particularly of Lynda Benglis’ piece *Female Sensibility* which is in the Southland Video Anthology. I had read that some of her video work was boring, so I went to see it and it was boring.

**EA:** I don’t know, maybe you don’t think that’s really “female sensibility,” or maybe you don’t care about “female sensibility.” Terry Fox told me his video and performance work was boring. He accepts it as a fact of life. A necessity. He didn’t believe me when I said I didn’t find *Children’s Games* boring. He gives those “humble” objects “equal time” and they fill that space with their activities. Like any good still life. Is a Chardin boring?

**MS:** What is the ideal situation for video viewing?

**EA:** There’s no such thing as an ideal anything. You take what you can get. If the “situation” interferes too much you’ll go away.

**MS:** What about video on cable TV?

**EA:** I haven’t thought about it. I don’t know if a general public trained by commercial television would be interested in most artists’ video. On the other hand, if that public offered themselves, maybe artists would make different video. Would that be good or bad? I don’t know. But it might be interesting for an artist to walk a thin line between television and video. Loosen the genre markings. They’re probably too tight anyway. For both sides.

**MS:** What relationship do you see between a performance piece and a videotape of that piece?

**EA:** A live performance is always more interesting than a videotape of it. It’s certainly not necessarily more interesting than a videotape conceived and performed as its own thing.

**MS:** Do you do performances specifically for the purpose of making a video piece? For example, *The Ballerina and the Bum* as a videotape gives no sense of an audience nearby. On the other hand, *The King’s Meditation*, which I saw recently at the California Palace of the Legion of Honor, was clearly not done as a performance meant for taping.

**EA:** I do live performances for a particular space, time and audience. I do my performances on video only for an audience that will subsequently look at it on a small TV screen, probably in a dark, or semi-dark room, hopefully sprawling comfortably on the floor or on pillows. Once I used an audience on video (in *The Little Match Girl Ballet*) but I used them deliberately to set up a Degas-like space from which the narrative I was spilling out would eventually take me far away. So the story I was telling overflowed its banks and flooded the screen, taking over, not unlike Terry’s spoons and faucets.

**MS:** Do you and David (Antin) collaborate in your work at all?

**EA:** We like each other’s work. More than we like most other artists. But you can’t call it collaboration. Does our work look that close? Wow! Germs.

**MS:** Your videotapes are among the most widely accessible I’ve seen. They provoke laughter, sadness, pity—a whole range of human reactions. Is this a conscious effort to stay away from the elitism and mysteriousness often found in performance and video art?

**EA:** No, people often consider me a didactic artist but I don’t. I’m only doing what seems reasonable to me. My interests in making video are primarily narrative. I do think the narrative experience is a basic human need. I think sometimes that it acts on the same principles as dreams, as a kind of re-ordering of the world, putting it together in different ways, just for the hell of it, to try out those ways and paths we discarded in favor of the ones we took. For every step you take in this world you could have taken several others instead. They sit there haunting us, those discarded steps. Narrative is a kind of exorcism, a trying-on of the “might-have-beens,” the discards, the losers. You let them in for a while and they stop haunting you. Maybe.

**MS:** I find that I always react strongly to the part in your ballerina pieces where you describe learning to be a Russian ballerina while living in Solana Beach. After studying from books, before mirrors, you find you can only dance in one place standing still. This seems to be so much more than a simple humorous statement—would you explain the significance it has for you?

**EA:** No.

**MS:** A flier from 80 Langton St. (San Francisco) that I saw a few weeks ago said “(Eleanor Antin’s) strong concern with personality separates her from her conceptual contemporaries.” Do you agree?

**EA:** I think the writer got that from an article in *Art in America*, “The Post-Perceptual Portrait” by Amy Goldin, which was published in the winter of ‘75, I think. It was a true

statement as far as the other artists discussed in the article went. Since those artists are not my only “conceptual contemporaries,” I can’t agree that I’m the only one around concerned with personality.

**MS:** How do you see your involvement with video developing over the next few years, if you plan that far ahead?

**EA:** Narrative, and more narrative. At this time, I’m making my *Nurse Tapes*. She, the nurse, plays with paper dolls she’s made herself. They are the actors in these video-tapes. They have adventures, fall in love with the Eleanor doll, get discarded by her, kill themselves or whatever. You might say it’s narrative starting on a course of regressions. My invention (the nurse) invents her own inventions (the paper dolls).

**MS:** Would you say a few words about Ernie Kovacs?

**EA:** I don’t recall watching much of Ernie Kovacs. I don’t remember why either. But I remember loving Milton Berle. How I loved Milton Berle!

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Carl Loeffler

## Tom Marioni, Director of the Museum of Conceptual Art (MOCA), San Francisco, in Conversation

**CL:** Maybe we can start from a point of defining the Museum of Conceptual Art.

**TM:** Well, I can’t describe what it is now because it’s in a phasing out kind of period. I can say what was my intention when I started it. It was to make a museum. It wasn’t necessarily to make an alternative art space because I wouldn’t have called it a museum if I wanted to make an alternative art space. I wanted it to be part of the establishment right from the beginning because I had come from working in museums when I was in art school in Cincinnati. I worked in the Cincinnati Art Museum as an assistant to the curator of the contemporary gallery and museum and that formed my interest in museum work. So then much later, after I had been an artist for ten years or so, I happened to get a job at Richmond Art Center as curator and that changed my whole outlook. It gave me a kind of social position, more so than a private one, like being concerned with getting things to the public. So it changed my whole attitude. After I was at Richmond for two years, I decided to start my own museum because there were things I couldn’t do at Richmond. Even though I did some things that were adventurous, experimental, I still didn’t do the things as far-out as I wanted to, so I started my own space. Also, it looked as though I was going to get canned. So, in 1970, I started MOCA as a museum, and the reason I started it as a museum is because I was museum oriented. I was a museum person, so it was a museum for actions instead of objects. That’s the difference between MOCA and traditional museums. But basically the definition of a museum is a place that houses and preserves works, you know, things. It has a collection. If it doesn’t have a collection, it isn’t a museum technically. So the collection consisted of documentation, which I never exhibited. But the documentation was records of art activity like documents, films, videotapes, and all that, and later I moved across the street to the space we’re in right now. I was over there at 86 Third Street from ’70 to ’72.

Since that time the collection has included relics, residues from actions that took place here and environments built into the space, and places that were used as performing spaces. So that now the collection consists of things that have become a part of the architecture of the building. So that the works can’t be moved. When the building gets torn down by the Redevelopment Agency the works of art will be destroyed too, you know, so they’re public works of art. They’re truly public because they can’t be owned, they can’t be moved. They’re going to be destroyed.

**CL:** You say that MOCA is now in a phasing out period.

**TM:** Well, as a performance space, it is. I doubt if I'll have any more performances here. I think that performances have become academic. They've become part of the academy. And there isn't a need to do it any more. One of my concerns as a museum is to preserve. And what I'm doing is preserving that space, because I've kept it the same as I found it. I didn't sand the floors or paint it white or do anything like that to the space. It was a printing company for 50 years and when I moved in and saw it, it was perfect. It was like something that should be saved. People in positions to save things think that they should only save Victorian houses. They wouldn't think of saving an industrial space as a relic from another age. It's got real quality to it, stained glass windows and those things here that...anyway, so, even though the space doesn't get used much in a traditional way like for exhibitions and stuff, it's being used and I'm saving it. It has a purpose, you know, and that's basic stuff. It's collecting energy and it has a lot of energy from past things that have happened in it. Kind of like a hill where a battle took place, you know, something you can feel the energy from, it survives. And that's part of my personal setting too (pointing). That case of empty beer bottles is a relic and an activity that I did in '72. I drank all those beers in one afternoon. It happened. It's like an object that wasn't made as an end in itself. It's an object that was used as a material, to explain something, to communicate an idea.

**CL:** How is *Vision* in conjunction with your preservation attitudes? And is *Vision* now your primary interest?

**TM:** Well, I'm doing actions myself, sound actions. My concerns are the marriage of sound and visual art, which I've been doing since '69, and with preserving this space and with doing the magazine, which is an extension. And it's extension for the publisher and Kathan Brown. For her it's an extension of her operation because she puts out works of fine art like prints. And the book is like a print that she's putting out and I'm editing. It's an extension for me because it's another format, another exhibition space. The first issue, artists were invited to view the pages as if they were given so much exhibition space. So, I like to work in different ways; on the radio, on TV, outside the space, you know, not just in one place. I wanted to make something of high quality. I mean there are a lot of publications, but by high quality I mean physical quality, good paper, sewn together. Nobody expected that, you know. Most people told me they thought it was going to be a newspaper, because that's generally associated with conceptual art.

**CM:** *Vision* is viewed as an elitist publication...is it?

**TM:** Absolutely...but it's because it's so specialized. When you're dealing with something that's so specialized like conceptual art, like an art magazine that deals with idea-oriented art, not necessarily just performance art, then you've got a small audience of people who have a special interest. I mean there's no way of getting around being elitist. MOCA has always been elitist. I mean some people consider it a place for a kind of in-group of people, and that you're going to do something that's like an intellectual pursuit. When you're doing aesthetic experiments and stuff like that, it's elitist. And you just can't deny it. So I accept it. But socialistic too because the works are public. It's open to the public, it's free. I don't encourage the public to come, cause I don't want to spend a lot of time starting from the beginning trying to educate them. So it's really for a specific audience. You know, an educated audience.

**CL:** So you say that you graduated from art school and you were studying visual art? Painting. At that time I believe you had a painting studio, is that right?

**TM:** Yeah. I was doing sculpture when I was in art school. First painting and then I switched to sculpture. But I studied commercial art too. So I was also a freelance graphic designer for a while. That's why I can lay out the magazine so it looks designed, you know, so it looks clean.

**CL:** So what was going on for you when the Richmond Art Center thing came up? Was that something that was just given to you or was it something you were internally working towards?

**TM:** Well, I always had odd jobs that were related to art. I was a commercial designer, designed rugs and stuff. That was my first job. I was a graphic designer for a company that did architectural art. I did different projects like a playground in Newport Beach, California. I designed different stuff like that for about three years and then the company folded. It was run by a sculptor and after I left that job I got the job at the Richmond Art Center. I painted murals in the Army. I've done painting and sculpture and commercial art. I've done a lot of different things. I worked in a nightclub for about 6 months, in an act with a model. And I got the job at Richmond just because I applied for it and happened to pass the test, the interview and everything like that.

**CL:** What were you doing as a personal art at that time?

**TM:** Well, see, from when I was in art school I did welded sculpture like David Smith. And then after I got out of art school and for a while when I was in the Army I did hard edge paintings, acrylic paintings, you know, on Masonite—things like that. Real design oriented, first by Stuart Davis and then by Ellsworth Kelly, and then I started doing sculptures. Minimal sculptures. I did a lot of sculptures like that—until '68, that was the kind of sculpture I did. But I did hundreds of works like that. And I was in shows, I had shows. The Hansen Gallery handled my sculpture in '66. But I was like a real minor artist. I was a real second-generation minimal artist. I certainly wasn't recognized in the Bay Area because funk was a dominant thinking then, and I did Los Angeles kind of art. It was all plastic and polished, shiny. It was totally foreign for this environment. But I was trying to make sophisticated looking art. And I just didn't understand. But then after I went to work in Richmond my whole concept about making art changed. Being in the position, being curator there gave me a totally different kind of view. So then I began experimenting with things like materials that weren't generally considered to be sculpture material. Like taste and sound, and I did a work, I was a guest artist at San Jose State in '70. I wanted to have the students there experience the same taste that I experienced simultaneously and I wanted to have us make sound work and a taste work combined. So we were in this hut that a bunch of students had made, an adobe hut, near school and we had carrots so I instructed all of them to bite into the carrot so that their teeth would sink into the carrot a little bit and then, too, instead of biting through the carrot, I wanted everybody to snap the carrot at the same time. So that when you break a fresh carrot it makes a sound. I wanted it all to be simultaneous so just this loud snap and then everybody would taste the carrot at the same time so we could make a

work of art that was a taste sensation that we'd all have at the same time. It's like I could communicate that idea of taste. But after that I used to sit in my studio after I stopped making sculptures and I used to get stoned and eat junk food and I would think about the taste as a material, and the food as a material. And as the taste as the subject. But I never could develop that into anything, any kind of art.

My first sound piece was called *One Second Sculpture*. It was made out of a tape measure that I took apart and threw into the air, and it opened up and made a loud noise in one second. So when I started MOCA I organized a show called *Sound Sculpture As*. And I invited nine people to make sound works. They hadn't made sound works before. That was what I was interested in at the time. They were all artists who were doing sculpture, who were starting to do performances and so that was a real important show. For me it set a tone, it got my interest in sound as a medium. And I was in the show as Alan Fish because from '68-'71 I worked under the alias of Alan Fish. Being a curator was politically too complicated—to be an artist and a curator at the same time because nobody sees you seriously as an artist. As I explained to you before the tape I was an artist who happened to be a curator rather than the other way around. So when I started MOCA I was in a studio down on Third Street and the Redevelopment Agency moved me out because they tore the building down. So I moved up into another building that has lately become Redevelopment. When I closed my studio, I went out of business. Officially I was a sculptor. Because at the time I had stopped making sculpture and went into business as a museum. But it was an extension, it was still my studio. And Terry Fox and I shared a space, split the rent. He used it as his studio, and it was MOCA. I'm making these stories too long.

**CL:** Well, it's good.

**TM:** So I did this work for Alan Fish. At that time nobody knew I was Alan Fish except a few friends. I got up on a ladder and I pissed into this galvanized tub from the top of the ladder. That's my action for the piece. And on those tubs, you know, there's a space in the bottom of the tub. It's one of those big tubs like they use for washtubs. I drank beer all day because I was doing beer-drinking pieces at that time. So it was part of it, drinking the beer all day was like a hidden part of the work. So I pissed for a minute at least and as the water level went up in the tub the pitch raised. It was like a musical scale.

**CL:** So you moved out of the other studio and you started MOCA with Terry Fox? Were you grant-funded at that time or was this a project that was entirely financed through your own means?

**TM:** Terry Fox was like an artist in residence. He did a show there in '70 in the summer. By the end of the year I had decided to make it a non-profit corporation. Because I'd written to the National Endowment for the Arts to apply for a grant and they said the only way I could get a grant would be if I were a non-profit corporation. It took about nine months or a year, something like that to get that and then I got my first grant from them in '71, and then I had memberships and people became members and I had a few patrons. And I ran it like an art museum. I mean most people didn't take it seriously. Most people said that's impossible, you can't have a museum if it's conceptual art. Conceptual art can only be in your head. But conceptual art was people who use language, people who work with systems and people who made actions, and MOCA

was a museum for that kind of conceptual art which is a real strong West Coast phenomena, a real Bay Area aesthetic. Probably MOCA has a lot to do with it because it was a space for people to show, to do that kind of art before there were other places around. It was a first space for this kind of art in the country.

**CL:** Can we get into your personal art?

**TM:** Well, maybe there's just a couple of pieces I want to talk about because they're interesting for political reasons. I want to talk about the Santa Clara Art Museum. I had a show there in '72. It's run by Lydia Modi-Vitale and she's Italian, just like I am. It is a Catholic University that this museum is at in Santa Clara. She invited me to have a show there and I asked her what kind of budget there was for the show. So she said, \$500. And so I said, well for my show I'd like to buy a car for myself. So, I bought my Fiat with the money. I bought a used Fiat and paid \$350 for it and there was \$150 left that we used to print these real formal nice announcements, sort of like wedding invitations, nice announcements in double envelopes and everything. And the name of the show was *My First Car*, which was a spoof on Don Potts. See, Don Potts was just getting ready to show this car, everybody knew that it was the Don Potts' first car. I was going to do a *My First Car* show too. Don Potts had spent four years building this beautiful kinetic sculpture, this car, and so I was going to do this car show. I was going to go out and buy a car and exhibit it as a joke, like beat him to the gun like a joke. And he wasn't offended by it and everybody knew it was intended like that. So, what happened was Diana Fuller from the Hansen Fuller Gallery was Don Potts' representative and she called up the DeSaisset Museum and said "What's this?" When they got the announcement *My First Car*, don't you know that's the name of Don Potts' project? And so Lydia called and said, no, I didn't know that, and she didn't. And so I explained to her and then I told her the name of the piece came from Don Potts' and that I was going to acknowledge Don Potts in the exhibition, because I did want a statement that I put on the wall. I bought a Fiat because it was an Italian car and it all goes with the Catholic Church and being Italian and everything. And it was like all connected with that. I believe that during the Renaissance the church did support the artist, not the government. The churches supported the artist and so I believed that since I was having a show in a museum run by the Catholic Church, at a Catholic University, that the church should support an artist and I needed a car. So I figured if I bought a car with the money that they would normally use for shipping or installation expense or anything like that, that I could function better as an artist in society and I also intended that the car would be part of their permanent collection. I was going to give them the car for their permanent collection, although I was going to keep it because I lettered on the side of the door DeSaisset Museum and the dates of the show and my name, so that as I drove the car around, I was driving around one of the objects from the collection of the DeSaisset Museum. And even so the car was in my name because I went out and bought it, with the money they gave me. So then I exhibited the car and it was a small Fiat, one of those little small 500's like everybody drives in Europe, and I drove it up the steps, through the double doors, into the gallery and parked it on this nice 19th century rug in the space I had had a showing in a group show two years before (*Fish, Fox, and Kos*) and I parked the car in there with paper under it so that the rug didn't get ruined and at the opening. I sat in the car and drank champagne and there was a microphone in the back seat and in the corner of the gallery was a video camera. People would come up and talk to me in the window of the car and I could listen to the radio in the car, and

they go in and we talked and everything and so three days later, actually the next day, Lydia called me up and said the president of the University doesn't like your show and he is really coming down on me. She said, would you mind closing the show. I said no, I don't mind, getting the car was the show for me. That was on Friday night, so that Monday I went down there and took the car and drove off with it. And used it until finally, in about 6 months, it blew up on me. But it was like something that arose at the time, it was something that I needed then and it's like I believe in doing things because there's a need for them. It's like starting MOCA, there was a need for this kind of space, an art space because there were people doing this kind of art, there was no place for them to show it. So when there's a need for something you feel like you recognize it and you like to do it, so that was a real strong need with me then to have the car, I couldn't get around without a car. But then when that car blew up, I haven't owned a car since then. I don't own a car now. That was in '72, I haven't had a car since then.

**CL:** What is going on with your drumming?

**TM:** That's what I'm doing now, and what I've been doing for the past two years. I've been making these drum brush drawings and I'm going to show them at the de Young Museum in January 1977. The first one I made was in '72 and then I didn't make any more after that, but then for the past couple of years I've been doing almost nothing but drum brush drawings, but I've been doing them in different kinds of situations. And mostly they've been done in instructive ways. At 63 Bluxome St., I showed all my slides of other people's work from MOCA shows and my own work going all the way back to when I was in art school, in carousel slide projectors with an automatic changer that changes a slide every 5 seconds. Then I drummed up on a podium, like a lectern, you know, and so I was talking through the drum, like man did thousands of years ago, but I was showing these pictures and I was drumming with them. Making the drum brush drawings is like making a stroke, it's like a brush stroke. Like a trace that I was there and the brushes are like magic wands. I've had a pair gold plated, and a pair silver plated. When I was in Poland I did five silver-point, and five gold-point drawings over a three day period. I made the drawings while the gallery prepared the wall space that they were exhibited on, and they built these wall panels that were at an angle and the drawings were put on it and glass was leaned against it. The drawings started out dark and they got lighter as they went down the wall because the metal had worn off and left a residue. And the image is like a hummingbird's wing or something, like flight. So each time I do them I see more and more things in them. One time I discovered that the pattern that my hands make creates a design like a palette and a brush. And so, if I had only done this one drum brush drawing I wouldn't have started to make more and more discoveries about the complexities of it and so I discovered that a real simple act can be immensely complicated. It's something that's basic to some kind of human nature. It's something that has to do with communicating in a real primitive way, and it's also based on my pulse and my breathing. And so later I discovered that it was a way that I might be able to communicate telepathically because I might put myself in that kind of semi-hypnotic state through this continuous rhythmic drumming which I first discovered when I did the violin bowing piece. I bowed this violin for half an hour in '72 and for me it was a fantasy of flying. I discovered when I was in Indianapolis, when I gave a lecture there then they didn't know anything about performance or anything. They had never seen one before in the museum. It was a year or a year and a half ago, something like that.

I went and gave a lecture first and then we had a reception. Then I did an action in the gallery. In that piece I designed a drumming to relate to the traffic that was going by a big window. It was in January so there was snow on the ground. There were rolling hills, it was at night, it was dark, but because the ground was all white you could see it. The freeway was there and all these cars were going by at sixty miles an hour. But it was absolutely silent because we were behind this big window. So I drummed to that. I was trying to get the pulse of the traffic out there. I've found that by looking out the window, it's like framing that place out there and I can learn a lot.

I have this fantasy, this dream I have. That all these buildings down here are going to be torn down. Most of them are already. Everything South of Market, everything south of this building here, will be completely level except for the church and the museum (MOCA). We're the only two buildings left standing.

**CL:** Well, maybe you can get yourself established as a historic landmark.

**TM:** Well, I already wrote to them in Washington, D. C., about that. Mainly for the bar downstairs. Well, because there are works in here that they will have to destroy. So that's going to be my case. They're destroying art works.

**CL:** Have you gotten any reply on that?

**TM:** I just did it a couple of weeks ago. But the bar downstairs should be saved. It's a real famous bar. It's a real beautiful bar. Virtually unchanged in 50 years. They can't understand, about saving stuff. In today's paper there's a merry-go-round in Berkeley that this guy's trying to keep and he can't afford to keep it any more cause it costs him too much money. He's offered to sell it to the city for \$300,000. It's like one of the oldest merry-go-rounds in the country. I've been on it and it's a beauty. It has all the original parts, with music, and it has one of these things with the drum and the violin in it that actually plays. So the city says, well, shit. We can build our own merry-go-round out of plastic for \$80,000. They just don't understand, that they wouldn't have the same thing. It's the same thing, tear down a perfectly good building and put up a snap together building where they bolt the panels on the outside.

**CL:** You know, I'm surprised that that church is still going to be standing.

**TM:** I'm not sure that it's still going to be standing. I'm just assuming that they won't tear a church down. I mean, the two things they shouldn't tear down are the church and museum. What have we got left? But there's no way I can convince the people who are redeveloping this that this space is worth keeping.

**CL:** What was your recent past show?

**TM:** The last show was the *Restoration of a Portion of the Back Wall* by David Ireland. And that was a restoration of a portion of the wall that was the leftover residue from the *Second Generation Show*. Because Darryl Sapien had painted a section, that big pile-shaped section back there and after the show was over, that white space, that white part in there kind of interfered with the character of the space, I decided to remove it.

The only way to remove it was to arrange to paint over it. So, I commissioned David (Ireland), who is a really good painter, a really sensitive painter to materials and surfaces, to restore the space. So he spent about a month scraping the floor, built the scaffolding, worked on the ceiling, retouched the wall, working from photographs. So he made a photo-realist painting of the space as it was originally. And so when that show opened, it was open one day, I made about a two- or three-minute video each day of the process and showed it at Breen's bar the night of the reception. So people could see the whole transformation of the place and I also showed slides up here in a carousel. And that was the first painting show in MOCA and it was the first static show because the process wasn't shown, it was not a performance. It was a work that was done before and then people came to see it as a painting. So that was kind of a shift for me away from doing the performance thing. It's doing more situational things, more directed to my idea of preserving so that is, for me, a first sign of a new direction. So that takes care of the shows in MOCA, I think, no, let's see. Oh, in '73 it was open every Wednesday afternoon and I had free beer in the refrigerator and showed videotapes. Some videotapes were shown that I invited to show and some were actions that had taken place previously in MOCA. I collected all the beer bottles on the shelf right in there, that's a kind of record of that social activity. So what I wanted to make in MOCA, instead of making a thing, I mean an object, I wanted to make a space, a place that was like a social and public artwork. So the social activity was part of the program. That's one of the things I did with the grant money I got from NEA, was to give away beer.

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Linda Montano

## Chronology

**1942** Born in Saugerties, New York. Brother Bill, three years older, sister Chris, three years younger, brother Anthony, thirteen years younger. Mother Mildred, painter, singer in a Thirties dance band. Father Henry, owner of Montano's Shoe Store, played trumpet in Thirties dance band.

**1949** Performed solo tap dance for St. Patrick's night show. My uncle Joe played piano. The introduction music was changed by my teacher. Joe didn't know this; I was out on stage, frozen. I ran off in tears.

**1949** Spent a week in a hospital because of vomiting—had been afraid to tell the nuns that someone was stepping on my coat in the cloak room. Began piano lessons and tap lessons, which lasted about six years.

**1952** Entered high school. After eight years of Catholic elementary school where I had prepared for and aspired to canonization as a saint. At Saugerties High School began withdrawal techniques by being able to produce a skunk smell. This lasted on and off for ten years. Had a "smell patrol," friends who would tell me if I "stunk."

**1959-1961** Became a postulant and then a novice at Maryknoll Sisters Convent. Body rebelled with Anorexia Nervosa; left weighing eighty-three pounds.

**1965** Graduated from College of New Rochelle, a women's school taught by Ursuline nuns. Majored in art; senior thesis was a junk sculpture of the Visitation, Mary and Elizabeth embracing, both pregnant.

**1966** Graduate study in Florence, Italy. Made copper crucifixes. For show, had a "happening." Audience assembled pieces of junk they were assigned.

**1969** Summer school, welding at Hobard Welding, Troy, Ohio. Made a two-foot replica of a Florsheim shoe.

**1966-1969** Graduate school at University of Wisconsin, Madison. MFA show: displayed live chickens in three six by nine cages; they were tape recorded, videotaped and photographed. Installed a telephone answering machine with chicken sounds in my house. Rode around Madison with chicken sounds coming from car loudspeaker.

**1970** Began interest in yoga.

**1970** Chicken Woman was born. Alive sculpture. Became a chicken and stopped showing live chickens. Wore gauze, veils, and lay in state as a dead chicken or live angel within a strictly formulated system. Also sat in nine places for three hours each time on the third, sixth and ninth of the third month.

**1971** Married Mitchell Payne in Rochester, New York.

**1971** Moves to San Francisco. More lying in state. Costume changed to blue prom dress and tap shoes. Lay in a chicken bed in the Berkeley Museum wearing twelve-foot wings. Did a chicken dance all over San Francisco pulling a chicken cart. Was picked up on the Golden Gate Bridge for obstructing traffic.

**1972** Home endurance. Stayed home for a week documenting calls, dreams, food, people.

**1973** Story of my life. San Francisco Art Institute. For three hours recited the story of my life while walking on a treadmill which was going downhill.

**1973** Was handcuffed to Tom Marioni for three days; we synchronized movement.

**1974** While under hypnosis answered questions that I had prepared about sex. Event was videotaped.

**1974** With Mitchell Payne, performed husband-wife fashion show of clothes to be worn while on vacation with family in Michigan.

**1974** Birth—Death. For about three hours, lay in a crib. Listening to tape of my mother talking about me as a baby. It was November 2, a Catholic holy day called All Souls Day. Chicken, my dog, died of lead poisoning that day.

**1975** Creation of the Montano-Payne Italianate Victorian Museum. Gave tours as a nun, hooker, mother of four, businesswoman, six-year-old girl, or nurse.

**1975** Hypnosis—dream sing. Was hypnotized to sleep and dream in the Berkeley Museum, to wake and sing dreams as they occurred.

**1975** Heart murmur. For three days lived in the Lamkin Gallery and listened to my heart through a stethoscope taped to my chest. Made public vow to follow my heart for a year.

**1975** At the Chicago Art Institute, danced blindfolded for three hours in the form of a cross.

**1975** Living art. Lived with Nina Wise for a week; we documented ourselves. Living art. Lived with Pauline Oliveros in the desert. Living art. Lived with Pauline Oliveros and Nina Wise at the Annual (San Francisco Art Institute): I gave birth to Baby Jesus.

**1976** Separated from Mitchell Payne.

**1976** 80 Langton St. (San Francisco). With Nina Wise, played drums for six hours, six days.

**1976** Mills College. With Pauline Oliveros, reenacted Holy Saturday. She lay in state for four hours. I was Mary Magdalene.

**1976** Collaborated with Joya Cory, Suzanne Hellmuth, Nina Wise.

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Clive Robertson

## An Identity Transfer With Joseph Beuys

*Identity Transfer* is a public belonging from the same family as a public library, an image bank or a video inn. The identity transfer table I put together in 1972 was a somewhat blinkered layout for a usable sociological art. The transfer concept came at a time when I was publicly reenacting with the group W.O.R.K.S.<sup>[1]</sup> The ideas and attitudes of the Fluxus group, various collective composers working within new music and other associates who were continually sending me scores and plans for events, environments etc. In 1972 and '73 W.O.R.K.S. held extensive festivals, in the latter years I organized six one-hour video programs titled: *A Conceptographic Reading of Our World Thermometer*, which contained the works or documents of fifty-six artists. Also from *Identity Transfer* I authored a large body of work<sup>[2]</sup> that attempted new-old types of artist-public intercourse.

Identity transfer is applicable to all forms of communication. Whatever information is conveyed, the conveyor's identity will in some part be remembered, even if it is short-term memory. We assume that any communication alters our receptor functions: what happens to patterns put on the memory-surface is largely determined by the traces left by the previous patterns.

The emergence of common goals such as Robert Filliou's "eternal network," or General Idea's "search for the spirit of Miss General Idea," and Joseph Beuys' loaded but specific goal for "human freedom," all have become denominators of agreement and like identity transfer they are now part of both a used and abused art-language.

Only a small amount of my work now follows the pattern of mapping sets of other artists' scores or behavioral ideologies onto my own as a learning experience. As for a sociological art I find that taking-it-to-the-streets has become, for me, too aligned with token and colonial gestures to be of enough benefit for those with whom I might wish to interact or to those who might wish to interact with me. The alternative is to work within the much diluted and encoded language that we call culture, where, no matter how popular or participatory it became, its complex possibilities and purposes remain largely inaccessible. Art has, at least within this century, consistently traveled between two poles: the commonplace art which is all around us, be it minimal, kinetic, linguistic, whatever—and the legend. Much that is important between the two poles is missed due to its lack of speed, which is no contender for the velocity of myth and legend. There has been the legend of Duchamp, the legend of Klein, the legend of Beuys and recently the near-legend of Chris Burden. A legend involves a question of balance between artist-instigator and the art-media, other artists and art-critics.

"The silence of Duchamp has been overestimated,"<sup>[3]</sup> the legend of Beuys has been overinflated. Only when preparing and later after the performance did the importance of both ambiguity and actuality<sup>[4]</sup> in Beuys become apparent as a strategy. Beuys' ambiguity was/is a weapon to keep the art-world both interested and at a distance, a

strategy which perhaps has not been so effectively used since Duchamp. For the public audience (as opposed to the art-audience) there is no ambiguity: you either listen to Beuys' philosophy on life-systems and life-potentials as fresh, enlightening information, or you ignore it. The art (object-making) and the performance is irrelevant, as an intellectual exercise the ambiguous art and art performance is a carrier, giving observable indications of the workings of a specific attitude: actuality. The politics of Joseph Beuys lacks glamour, the sculptured politics of Joseph Beuys is all that glamour could ever wish for.

My performance-investigation was in many ways commonplace—we have to adapt legends so that they become portable and can fit into our pockets; unfortunately for the artist, that is the fight we label history.

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#### Footnotes:

1. Clive Robertson, "W.O.R.K.S. In Progress", *Art & Artists*, November 1974.
2. See *Workscoreport*, England: Beau Geste Press, 1971-3.
3. The title of a Beuys action, 1975.
4. See "The Constructivism of Clive Robertson as Joseph Beuys," *Queen Street Magazine*, Toronto, June 1976.

Michael Auping

## An Interview With Ian Burn

**MA:** I'm curious to find out what you thought of the questions I sent you. It's force of habit for me to deal with interviews from a chronological point of view, asking about your background and that kind of thing, especially when I feel I'm in unfamiliar territory.

**IB:** There's nothing unusual about the questions. However, there is something they brought home to me, given where we are all coming from, given the kind of class-split environment we live in, we are really encouraged into asking the wrong questions. It happens to everyone. There are so many "smoke screens" around us that it is incredibly difficult to see where to start. We nearly always end up asking a wrong question, or a question by which we align ourselves with a distinction that exists only within a bourgeois culture—or, should say, is necessary only to bourgeois culture. Our questions unwittingly reaffirm a status quo while assuming to challenge it.

**MA:** What do you mean by "smoke screens"?

**IB:** Well, for instance, one of the things that struck me, reading through the questions, was the tendency to want to treat people I work with as artists. In other words, treat us as objects. What this culture does, as unrelentingly as it can, is turn people into things, into objects. People become objects of history rather than subjects of history. They are acted upon rather than being able to act. In asking the questions like that, you are presupposing the very situation you should be challenging...

There are a lot of questions here about me and about Art & Language. However, there are some very important things to talk about. If we're talking about trying to change things, change things in a substantial way, then we have to construct how we might actually participate in the already ongoing process of change. In that sense, asking what Art & Language is doing is asking a wrong question. This happens when we speak fairly spontaneously, our intuitions are channeled through layers of bourgeois ideology. What happens then is it becomes easier to fixate on, say, Art & Language rather than real issues. This kind of society, if you can even call it a society, virtually compels you to ask wrong questions in order to cover up the structural relations of its economic base... this happens particularly within the art world, which is one of the more insignificant sections in our culture and is about as divorced as you can get from the means of production in the society. It is incredibly difficult to even glimpse those base relations. Which is why we tend to go around in meaningless circles within the art world.

For instance, if you look at various Marxist theories of art, so-called, you find that most of them are really of not much use. They try to construct or reconstruct a Marxist theory of art from "inside" the art world. If you want to find a real Marxist concept of art, you are going to have to forget about "art," at least to start with, and deal with society "as a whole" and then see where, in terms of the logic of capitalism, this miniscule unimportant area we call high art has its place—and why. At this point, its place is way out on the cultural fringe in respect to social or political impact. It is a powerless area that lives

off the profits ripped off the wage earners of this and other societies. It doesn't produce anything in terms of profit. It just eats up surplus value in the society. Capitalism is a wonderful system for reproducing superfluous structures on a superstructural level. The point is we really have to know our place. Once you see it in relation to the overall landscape and you see it as the social and economic phenomenon it is, then it's pretty difficult to take seriously any suggestion of reconstruction *within* the section itself—or even *of* the section.

**MP:** How do you explain the existence of your publications, then, which are only available at art bookstores like Jaap Rietman and not at local newsstands where it would be available to a wider base of people? Have you made any attempts to broaden your audience in that way?

**IB:** We realize the work is trapped in many contradictions, but we aren't utopian. A few people in the group have expressed interest in trying to make what we publish available to a "wider audience." But that in itself is problematic. Basically, the working class is better off without what we publish... at present, at least. It doesn't need our stuff. It knows, at least on an intuitive level, that art is totally fucked up and to get their heads into that is simply to fog up their brains even more. *The Fox*, for example, is addressed specifically to an audience of artists and their acolytes—and the limits of that kind of direction are pretty obvious to a lot of people. We're very conscious of this and see its use as a short-term strategy only—although, admittedly, not everyone involved sees it that way.

**MA:** Then, in terms of any kind of social revolution, you see your immediate job as trying to create some kind of consciousness-raising within the art system—and if you can effect this, then you're doing your part in terms of the social revolution as a whole?

**IB:** No. I disagree strongly with that. If we limit what we do simply to the art world, we end up perpetuating that world, legitimizing its elitism, and thus legitimizing its social and political function in this economic system. Basically, as an artist in the high art world, you exist strictly as a *symbol*. What you say and what you do doesn't matter a damn. The audience is taken care of by the fact that your efforts don't get beyond a very specialized and limited group. We can write vicious diatribes against Nelson Rockefeller or whatever, but while it stays "in" the art world, it's essentially harmless. In fact, Nelson Rockefeller would probably be delighted because we would be behaving ideally as symbols, if you like, of the liberalism, of the so-called "freedom" in this society. We are symbols to the rest of the world of a kind of freedom that really doesn't exist in this economic system! The kind of freedom we have, and which artists revel in, is a sort of "freedom" which is permissible *because* we are marginalized. The artist is out of the social and cultural fringe with virtually no impact. You're free to be meaningless. You're free to have no voice. On the other hand, the closer you get to the center of forms of communication which do have impact in the society, the kinds of controls change drastically. If you start working for NBC or ABC or whatever, you are conceptually restricted, and productively controlled to an intolerable degree in respect to what kind of instrumentality you can develop. That is control from the top in its most overt political form.

**MA:** Wouldn't it be more productive, however, to drop art contacts altogether and get a job in an upper echelon area of NBC or ABC and try to change things from there?

**IB:** Yes and no. I mean, you are getting at one of the most obvious contradictions we find ourselves in, that is, where we expend the most of our energies... and it's the one that I think will force some of us out. Actually, trying to change your audience comes down to committing class suicide, and we all have been conditioned into a bourgeois fear of violence and this kind of suicide is especially violent to our egos and to all the things we have been made to feel so comfortable with.

Maybe I should mention that *The Fox* was a contentious project in many respects from the start. A number of us were opposed to a number of aspects of it. For most of us it is conceived of, as I said before, as a short-term strategy, essentially a temporary front that logically has to collapse in its own contradictions. It reflects that same problem of trying to construct from "inside" the art world outwards—well, you can't do it. You are forced into presupposing "art." In terms of a logical construction, you get to a point where the contradictions are so blatant that the construction collapses. Read any Marxist analysis of art and notice what is left out, where the analysis stops in order for the argument to be convincing. At the same time, of course, it is preferable to bourgeois art criticism! The better stuff in *The Fox* is an example of that "stopping short." There's a sense in which it bumps up against the walls of its own fictional world. In that way, maybe it is useful in a small way. For instance, some of Hans Haacke's stuff does a similar thing, bumping up against the limits of that fictionalized art world in terms of how far he takes it. But, like all of us, he could go a lot further than he does...

Given the presuppositions that you start off with, there is a logical limit on how far you can go before the construction you're making collapses. One point is, this kind of work is still dealing with an abstract audience, whether it reflects the normal art world audience or is hypercritical of the normal art world audience. At the same time, it doesn't identify any other audience, thus you still end up with an abstracted audience. That's what we have done. That is why a term like "the working class" is still somewhat of an empty concept for us. Our independence from the art world can only happen through subjectively experiencing a different dependence, a different living presence, if you like. That cannot happen by declaration, only by a continuing concrete or real experience. It means a situation where you have to particularize an audience. You are then talking to, say, a construction workers' union; you are talking to a specific community, or whatever. That is very uncomfortable for most people who are artists because there is a wonderful myth about the universality of art and the internationalism of contemporary styles that we have all been fed on and is very attractive and compelling. If you specify your audience in that way and actually try to communicate with a particular group of people "outside" the art world, there is always the fear that nobody "in" the art world is ever going to hear about you. That frightens a lot of people. They want bourgeois recognition for their working-class sympathies. That's the classic petty bourgeois dilemma, trying to have two consciousnesses at the same time, switching from one to the other whenever it's convenient.

**MA:** Given the contradictions, does the Art & Language group have an overriding goal it is shooting for?

**IB:** I can only give you generalizations, like sorting out some way of participating in a socialist transformation of society, and that is both as concrete and as vague as I can get. I think there are things we can and will do. I don't know if it's things we can do as artists. That really doesn't matter.

**MA:** For example?

**IB:** Well, I know what you're getting at, but again I think it's a problem of asking a wrong question. How would you describe the goal of China? It's another situation in which our bourgeois backgrounds lead us to ask wrong questions. This is a goal-oriented society. In this culture the term "goal" is defined too cheaply and materially. "My goal is to go to college, get a good job, get a big car, and make a lot of money. That is my goal." Well, we don't have those kinds of goals...

**MA:** You mention participating in a socialist transformation. In other words you would like to see this society based on a socialist structure. Could that be considered part of your goal?

**IB:** It's not our *goal* to change the society. We see our only task being that we might be able to sort out some way of participating in that transformation because it *is* inevitable. It's going on now! God knows what it'll be like in this country, what kind of socialism will develop here when it eventually does come together. This will probably be about the last place that socialism establishes itself.

Socialism is unavoidable, however, because capitalism is a system which can transform its nature, its rapaciousness, only so much. It can never lose its need to have an exploiting class and an exploited class. The kind of high art we have today—well, we're not talking about that in the future. There's an article by Samir Amin where he argues that there is no possible way that you have culture under capitalism since there is no direct apprehension of use values of things. He defines culture as the mode of organization of the utilization of use values. For capitalism to exist, it must isolate use values and define them through a dominance of exchange value. We have an art world dependent on exchange value. In that sense, it is a nonculture. Capitalism is the moment of negation of culture.

**MA:** Do you feel Art & Language is affecting this situation at all?

**IB:** Who knows? We are trying to grapple with the situation we find ourselves in. What we learn about ourselves may help others to learn about themselves. But I really can't say.

We are affecting our own situation, however. In terms of our own histories, most of us had "left leanings" before our heads got fucked over by high art. Basically, we got diverted by art, by the whole ideology, the "hard-sell" of art, and into thinking that it would allow us some kind of effective expression. Having gotten right into the middle of it, we fast realized that it didn't and fast realized what was happening. What we have been doing the past few years is attempting to construct a way out of it, in terms of our "politics" not being separate from our "art" activities, so-called, or from our everyday activities. I think our "art" activities now come under very real scrutiny in respect to what we might mean by politics. Basically, it's trying to integrate an ideology and our politics, given the position we find ourselves in, given a particular history. It's a reconstruction of ourselves *against* the mythology of artists. In many ways, a kind of token reconstruction since such re-integration is idealistic under the circumstances. I think quite a few other people are finding themselves in stages of a similar process.

**MA:** In respect to your working in a group situation, would you say Art & Language is totally a collective phenomenon?

**IB:** Well, it depends on how you want to define "collective." The only way you can really define collective is in ideological terms. In those terms, I would be very hesitant to say that we were a collective because I don't think there is, at present, that degree of ideological unity between us to say we are a collective.

In terms of a working group, we do work collectively some or most of the time. That's simply for practical reasons. Some of us started working together over ten years ago. We never made any conscious decisions about doing it or anything like that. Most of us tended intuitively to work towards that kind of relationship as a way, if you like, to avoid the individualism and personality cult thing, that operates in the art world. A way of trying to maintain some kind of personal-ideological space. We've been talking about what an artist is in this society. Basically, an artist becomes exactly that which he is trying to create. In other words he becomes the object and is what is sold. I suppose, in terms of avoiding something like that, we intuitively went towards a collaborative form of working.

One could probably say it had something to do with cultural backgrounds also. We were faced with modern art being dominated by American art, not even American art really, but New York art, which reflects a most perverse projection of individualism and personality. Coming from Australia, which is culturally more English than American, there is something obscene about the kind of commodification of people, the commodification of personalities, which is so rampant in this country.

At the same time, I'm not saying we are immune to such things. There are some pretty big egos in the group. But a lot of the problems we have are problems from the social and cultural environment we live in, putting pressures on the group, and which usually emerge in terms of people's psychological reactions within particular situations. We're operating in a market that demands individualization of the product and the producer. If you use an organizational form that isn't compatible to that economic structure, then you are going to be constantly bounced around—and we're constantly bounced around. This manifests within the group in terms of a lot of psychologically-based conflicts. I don't mean in terms of needing psychoanalysis or whatever. Maybe "psycho-social problems" is a better way of putting it. There are social problems that are internalized and manifested in affairs within a working group in a society like this. You either sink under the conflict or see our seemingly small personal struggles as part of the struggle in a larger sense. If we begin to see our seemingly small personal struggles as part of the larger worldwide struggle, it changes a lot. Some of the people we work with tend to want to treat conflict as a norm of our going-on. That is right, I think, but I don't like the stress it gives; I would rather say it was a fact of going-on and that *struggle* was the norm.

Recently we've been trying to sort things out a bit better—or sort ourselves out a bit better. We've been trying to collectivize the group along more ideological lines so that we might be politically a bit more organized and abrasive. Of course there are problems—most of them to do with money. People become very fearful of losing contact with that economic base. But that can be struggled over as long as there is an ideological commitment to struggle. Where there isn't, or there appears not to

be that commitment, then schisms appear which are not ideologically bridgeable. This has happened, particularly around Joseph...

**MA:** Is Joseph Kosuth still a part of Art & Language?

**IB:** That I couldn't say. He's never really grasped or shown any real commitment to the ideological bases of the work we've been doing. But you have to understand that Art & Language has always been an informal, if you like, *laissez faire* group of people who, in some ways, developed a fairly intense dialogue with each other. This *laissez faire* aspect has allowed someone like Joseph to operate opportunistically in relation to the group.

In terms of what we're doing now, however, we have gone beyond the limit at which a *laissez faire* formation can be acceptable. This now becomes a crucial issue for *all* the people involved. However, as we've moved the organization itself into a more ideological, non-liberal form, Joseph has become increasingly isolated. But there are other schisms also, all of which are presently being struggled over...

**MA:** Are there any differences between the English Art & Language group and their North American counterpart?

**IB:** To make any kind of comparison like that you have to treat the people working in New York as having static relationships and, the people in England as having static relationships, and that is impossible. There are disagreements, of course. I tend to disagree with some of the assumed relationships to language that some of them in England hold to. However, there are people in New York that will disagree with me about that, and agree with the people in England. So it becomes rather complex in that sense.

They assume a sort of natural relationship to their style of language, and there isn't a natural relationship to it, at least not to the form—there may be a natural relationship to the content... If they're going to deal with it, they have to see the form of language in terms of political strategy, and I think a lot of it is rotten strategy. In terms of what they say, I agree with it. In terms of how they say it, I don't always agree. On the other hand, they see a lot of the stuff in *The Fox* as oversimplifying the problem and localizing it too much "in" the art world. To an extent, I agree with that too. A lot of the articles in *The Fox* give a somewhat simplistic view of problems which are much more complex. They also localize things too much in the art world. Moreover, *The Fox* is *very* New York based, the extent of which I've kind of realized more from being here in California. Basically, New York is an extremely isolated "art world," in respect to any sense of community. You might have ten or twenty thousand artists working in the same area, but there is very little input into it. It has a kind of baseless arrogance that produces a provincial mentality because it loses sight of its relations to other contexts. It feeds off itself and doesn't permit very much input. Everybody is trying to feed off everybody else, which gets to a point where the most trivial changes are welcomed with such relief that they are treated as if they were the most revolutionary breakthroughs. It's all rather silly and pathetic. To maintain its position of power, it must pretend to be self-sufficient, and this isolates it from any healthy social resources.

In the rest of the country I would suggest you have people who, at least on an intuitive level, are much more progressive than people in New York. Probably more progressive

than we are in terms of publishing *The Fox*. What *The Fox* does is unwittingly appropriate those kinds of progressive attitudes, that is, appropriate them *as a function of New York*. It dresses them up in more sophisticated language, since we are more practiced at talking about some of the issues, and ships them back out and shoves them down people's throats. They don't need them, if they sort out their rather bizarre dependency relationship with New York.

**MA:** Then what is your relationship to New York, and why is Art & Language based there?

**IB:** Well, for instance, Mel and I came to New York because—I don't know—it seemed like a good idea at the time. In retrospect it's rather difficult to remember what seemed so good about it. However, we stayed there, and now there are a number of people we're working with who also live in New York. To move out of New York and assume the same working relationships, we're forcing a rather large logistic problem. But there are *other* more important problems to be sorted out before we might even consider anything like that—if then, even.

But it's really not accidental that we're in New York. We went there because that's where the art world was and we were into being avant-garde artists.

**MA:** But you're beyond that now, and by staying in New York aren't you making a conscious decision to feed that dependency relationship with New York that you just spoke of?

**IB:** That question has been dealt with in a number of articles in *The Fox*, and I'm not sure I can elaborate much more on it. I think it would be silly for everybody working with us in New York to all get out of New York and move somewhere else. We are able to work together in that context which doesn't mean we would necessarily be able to work similarly together in another context.

**MA:** I haven't noticed that any women play leading roles in Art & Language. Why do you think that is?

**IB:** Again, you're fixating on Art & Language. But to try and answer your question, in terms of our original collaborations, we were (and still are) a male-dominated group. We reproduce the structures of bourgeois ideology as much as anybody else. It's only come up as a real issue recently when some women have gotten involved. Until then it wasn't an issue because there weren't any women involved. There are no Blacks involved, or Chicanos or Eskimos either. To a large extent what we've done is fairly representative of white, Anglo-Saxon, male-dominated art. What can I say?

**MA:** I'm just wondering out loud what your responsibility is in terms of making an effort to get these people involved?

**IB:** We don't have the organizational base or unity to "recruit" people. We can involve ourselves with other groups and learn in that way. Recently we've been participating in some meetings with other groups including the Congress of African Peoples. We're about the only, if you like, "professional artists" involved, and they tend to view us very

much as petty bourgeois artists. We are learning a lot from that involvement. But again we come back to the question of “Who the fuck are we talking to?” The only way we can stop being petty bourgeois artists is to get out of the art world because it logically produces bourgeois art. If we get out, we’re then faced with other questions. If we’re operating in the “real world,” is some kind of collective the best way of operating? Are there other organizations we might actually participate directly with? The fact that we operate, at least in a working sense, collectively in the art world doesn’t mean that that is the best form to operate with elsewhere. Do you follow what I’m getting at?

**MA:** Are you talking about economics and survival in the “real world” as opposed to survival in the art community?

**IB:** No. Let’s talk about the collective thing again. In terms of political clout or impact, it makes very little difference whether what one does is collectively produced or individually produced. If you go and see a film that is produced collectively, where decisions are made along democratic lines, and then you go and see any other film produced along the typical hierarchical lines this society tends to use, in terms of the product, you can’t tell the difference. You virtually need to be told that one film was produced collectively. The only difference there might be between the two films is an ideological difference—then whether it is individually or hierarchically or democratically or collectively produced is somewhat irrelevant. This is what I meant earlier when I said the only way you can define a collective is along ideological lines—and then the notion of collectivity itself isn’t as important.

Where the notion of a collective *is* important is if you like, in terms of a consciousness-developing factor. It can be important in a personal sense. We at least have found it so. It has allowed us as individuals to grow in relationships to other people, *in association with* other people, which is the only way you really learn anyway. So, in a personal sense, it is important. In a political sense it’s not important or it is a minor aspect. But also, don’t forget the relationship between the personal and the political is a crucial one.

Now, in terms of something like the art world, you have one of the more distorting kinds of individualism around, a splintering of communities, in which every single individual competes against every other individual. It’s utterly perverted. In *that* context, working collectively might have a little bit of political point to it because the idea of it seems to worry a lot of people, but that is a function of the extreme abnormality of social relations in the art world and little else.

**MA:** It’s awfully hard to get away from competition and individualism in this society. Do you have any problems within the group regarding competitiveness? How do you deal with it?

**IB:** The art world forces a lot of competitiveness into the group and that is one of the things I was kind of getting at before when I was talking about psycho-social problems. Competitiveness usually emerges in various guises of opportunism. How do we deal with it? Well, not very well, so far. Hopefully, we can learn to deal with it better.

**MA:** Do most of the people in the group feel competition is a totally negative phenomenon?

**IB:** No. The real issue you have to raise is about the *possibility* of competition in other economic senses and *that* isn’t possible under capitalism! Capitalism hasn’t really been competitive for the past one hundred years or so. It has been corporately monopolized so that real competition literally can’t exist. It has gradually transformed every possible area into monopoly and eliminated or restricted competition because monopoly means *control* of the market. You can maximize profits on a scale that you can’t in a more competitive situation. I’ve lost your question... how do we see competition existing in art?

**MA:** ...competition in terms of trying to come up with a more innovative idea before someone else, or to come up with a newer idea and get it out faster than someone else, that kind of thing.

**IB:** I see what you’re saying. But individuals really don’t “come up” with ideas. There is a sense in which everything comes up in some kind of social way. If you look around and see the art that is being produced throughout the nonsocialist world, you see the same kinds of art being produced everywhere. There is an obvious monopolization of culture, a centralization of power, and a dominance by media going on. But the kind of art that is produced, if you want to call it art, still represents collective effort which is appropriated by individuals for self-interested ends. People don’t have isolated ideas. They are springing off somebody else, then somebody else takes it over, and so on. It’s a complex social process. Most of what we write, for instance—well, it would be incredibly difficult to try and figure out where some of those ideas came from, and who did what with them. However, they usually come out, with somebody’s name on them, which is simply an example of a kind of cultural form which you are coerced into using in order to have the “right” kind of relationship, to a market, in order to get people to *read it*. For instance, you would have a very different relationship to, say, *The Fox*, if it came out without names on the articles. You have certain expectations. You want to recognize individual bits of writing. We have all been conditioned like that.

**MA:** If we could move on a bit, I’ve been wanting to ask you what, in your opinion, should the function of art be?

**IB:** There is no way we can blueprint the future! What we can talk about is the function that art serves in the present society. We can talk about how one might go about transforming the present society. However, the ways of transforming or changing it are not through art. Art plays a very minor role in relation to that kind of change. When we actually have a social and economic revolution in which the economy is organized along different lines, then that will generate different kinds of social relationships between people, we will start to have some kind of a more real culture, and perhaps a kind of “art” flowing out of those social relations, who knows.

But there is no way you can get into predicting what that will be. Sure, I could come out with a few utopian ideals, although I tend to think that probably fucks people up more than helping them. Basically, in respect to the kind of critique that we are generating, and anybody else who is critiquing modern art, it obviously reflects a certain point of view that reflects certain ideals, which you can interpret if you want to. On such a level, if you want to talk about what the function of art is in this society, essentially it serves as a kind symbol, as we said earlier, of something that really doesn’t exist. It represents a means of violently appropriating creativity, and containing it within a very small area.

It specializes creativity. It also marginalizes it. In that way it becomes a very political instrumentality that denies the basic creativity of most things that people do or might do in their lives. Its function in society is, on a mass scale, to repress creativity.

I realize creativity is a rather funny word to be using here because it's been taken over by the psychological interpreters of bourgeois art history. I'm not talking about it in that sense, but in a social sense. In the sense that it might imply a certain relationship to what we do, a relationship through which we might regain control over our lives—a relationship which might help us achieve that.

**MA:** In terms of psychology, for me there is a definite psychological aspect to art, a kind of personal communication between myself and the art object. It may involve some kind of personal iconography—archetypal iconography. I'm not all that sure how it works, but there is a kind of subconscious communication going on. Does this idea come into play in terms of your philosophy of art? Do you acknowledge that aspect of art?

**IB:** There are a number of sides to that. The mode by which the art industry individualizes production tends to put the artist in an exclusive relationship with himself and nobody else, which means the psychological elements are obvious and the social relations are not. So social issues in the world tend to be reflected only within a psychological context, which is a way of making them hard to deal with in an active or engaged way, in fact, hard to realize as even being socially-based.

Look at the history of art and the history of criticism over the past hundred years, and you'll find most of it shows an increasing bias towards the principle that good artists confront formal and/or psychological problems, but they don't have social problems. That is a function of the intense mythology or mystification that surrounds art. I'm not saying that artists don't have psychological problems. Obviously we all have psychological aspects, but it's a matter of seeing how they are embedded, and thus a function of certain prevailing social relations. This is an argument that we are having among the people I work with, more or less between Americans and non-Americans. Conflicts seem to fall largely along those lines, but with some important exceptions. The emphasis in the United States you get on psychology, psychiatry, psychoanalysis, and that whole Area, has a very political function. Most of it has to do with the projection of the belief that if you feel depressed, bored or whatever in this environment, then there is something wrong with you. You are encouraged to not look at it in terms of there being something wrong with society. So you go to a psychoanalyst or whatever to readjust. You're readjusting to something that is the most violent contradiction that has probably existed in the history of the world. You are accepting the idea that capitalism is *the* natural form of organization of society.

I'm not putting down psychologists, etc., as bad themselves, but how they are used and the sorts of relationships they reproduce to people, which are just insidious. We are constantly encouraged to treat the psychological as a natural base for relating to things, which is scandalous. In this society it isn't natural, it's political—it's embedded in bourgeois ideology. We have to begin to reconceive of ourselves in relation to and in association with other people. We keep coming back to the most basic and simple bits of Marx—the individual as the sum of his social relations, and so on. In a bourgeois so-

ciety, an individual is defined as sovereign unto himself or herself, as not fundamentally existing in any kind of relationships. Look at the form of individualism that exists in this sort of environment, and how the individual is treated as exclusive of relationships to other people. Then, look at the kind of art that is produced in this society, and you see a very strong bias towards formalism where the whole idea is based on manipulation of internal relationships. That's the other side of the coin, if you like, the individual as a domain unto him or herself, and the object as a domain unto itself—bourgeois individualism and bourgeois art. If you have that concept of individualism, you have to have formalism. This is the intimate connection between psychological content and formal content. That's why all the current bullshit about post-formalism art and criticism is laughable. We won't get away from the dominance of formalism until we start living differently, until we start relating to other people and to ourselves differently. Again the problems, or perhaps opportunistic analyses would be the more accurate way of putting it.

**MA:** Do you feel your work is void of formal decisions?

**IB:** We all make formal decisions, but what comes first? Do you decide on a form, and then try to fit something, a point of view, into it? Or does the content precede form? Obviously the content must precede the form. However, if you presuppose modern art, you presuppose form, and presupposing form is negating the possibility of real content in anything except a weak metaphoric sense.

The history of modern art from the middle of the 19th century on is fairly plain. The official history of modern art (meaning what has been singled out as the history) has, in the relations of form and content, placed increasing value on formal decisions while content has been slowly lost or redefined as form-as-content. People talk about the content of Jules Olitski's work as being corner, edge, line, surface, saturation, etc. That's not content, that's form masquerading as content. That's basically talking about the inability to have content.

The type of relationship between, on the one hand, the concept of individualism you get in art, which is just a slightly more perverse form of how it exists in society, and, on the other hand, the kind of formalism you get operating in the official history of art, well, you have a very funny relationship between people and objects, a necessarily *passive* relationship. Then, the only way you can encounter art objects is contemplatively, and that basic relation of contemplation is really a function of a fundamental structural relation of capitalism. The needs of capitalism demand all the relationships between people and between people and things be transformed into passive ones. This sort of relationship is necessary in order for commodity production to predominate. The problem is fundamental, but it's rather difficult to talk about. Our language is built for talking about things, not relationships. Passivity means fixed relationships, which means structural immutability. But it is just such passivity that allows you to feel there is some kind of, as you say, psychological empathy between you and the object. However, it's an empathy of contemplation, and you passively "enjoy" it, but there is no way it engages you in an active way. It doesn't inspire any sort of activism. It doesn't make a co-worker out of you. It makes a *consumer* out of you! It turns you into an object as much as it itself is an object. In art, we've come to recognize this as the social function of contemplation. Throughout society as a whole, it manifests itself in many other ways, but it all comes

down to the same sort of basic structural relationships whereby there is an isolation between people, and an isolation between people and things. It's basic alienation. Take the television set, for example. How often do you watch television and get inspired to do something, anything? If they can keep revolution on television and off the streets, there is little problem in controlling people.

**MA:** You really bring the hammer down on most of the art being made today, and I'm wondering what alternatives you leave for the rest of the contemporary art community. I mean, is it strictly black and white with no grey areas in between, a kind of "you are either with us or against us" situation?

**IB:** Again, you're asking me to hand over some kind of blueprint for an alternative, but any kind of alternative ends up being conceivable and defined in terms of existing circumstances, and that's no alternative! It's minor reform. We can't conceive of something like an alternative. You end up talking about utopian enclaves, utopian in the sense of dropping out, but dropping out entirely, and forming some sort of a utopian commune. That has no political point to it.

Basically, people have to come to an analysis of the situation themselves, and have to build their own ways of dealing with it. It has to grow in every person's consciousness—class-consciousness and consciousness of their history. There is no mass way of dealing with it yet. I think we will all know it when there is. There are only personal or small collective ways of dealing with it, and, depending on who people are, where they are, how far they are prepared to go, etc., they will decide what they can construct themselves.

This is a very common question that comes up. People say, "Alright, you've got all this criticism but where does it leave people?" In terms of teaching situations, we are confronted with this a lot. Administrators sometimes complain we leave students "paralyzed"—meaning students cannot use the analysis they have achieved in any of the traditional art forms. We have that problem ourselves to some extent, of not knowing how to act in such a way to fully use the analysis we have. Part of that is a result of the fact that we're operating from an incomplete analysis of the situation. No one really has a thorough analysis of the situation yet, if that is even possible.

**MA:** In teaching, would you encourage the student to get out of the "art world" situation?

**IB:** I can't answer that. It's a decision students have to make for themselves. The most I can do is try to give them some kind of frame of reference in which they can come to an analytical understanding of their own situation. They've got to sort out what they can do. There are a lot of people who say they would just as soon be bourgeois artists.

Also, even if I work with some students for a long time, I'm a very small influence in terms of all the influences working on them. They have to make the decision. In general, art schools are not the best places to make decisions. Remember, when you go to art school, you are working in an environment and being taught skills that have a given bias towards the interests of one class and against the interests of another. Art educational institutions are repressive to those inside them, and oppressive to those outside.

They are control centers. They are, again, one of the means by which creativity is contained and controlled, and ultimately negated. If I'm in there, then I'm also acting as a function of that controlling structure. All I can do is try to make my situation as *explicit* as possible. That is, to try and explain to the students the relationship that I have to them under the circumstances. However, even if I work out some sort of ideal situation in which there are pointed and free-flowing discussions and a lot of give and take, and I'm not treated with any more respect than anybody else in the room, there is still the material issue gnawing away at all our psychologies that I'm getting paid and they're paying. There's no way of getting around that one. So all you can do is to point out the extent of the control—the obvious and the discreet—because control tends to render itself as invisible as it can, as if that kind of structure is not really political, but natural—which, of course, it isn't.

The whole situation is extremely problematic. Should I go into art schools, and try to turn everybody into Marxists or something like that? Obviously not. I go in there and try to provide them with some kind of concrete analysis of their own situation. They have to make the decisions from there.

**MA:** Getting back to *The Fox*, do you feel that writing is the best way of disseminating your information?

**IB:** In terms of the art world, writing is probably one of the better ways of disseminating information, particularly this kind of information. You have to make use of the various dominant forms of communication in the art world, which include exhibitions, museums, and the media. We could stick articles on the walls at the John Weber Gallery, but nobody is going to believe it. Within the art world, publishing our information is about the only way of getting people to deal with it. In terms of other audiences, writing probably isn't the best way. This is something that we really haven't come to terms with very well ourselves, and are presently trying to...

**MA:** Have you thought about radio and television as alternative means of disseminating your information?

**IB:** We've thought a lot about radio and television, but it's an overtly controlled area. We're not going to get anything on NBC or ABC or CBS, which still leaves us on the fringe.

**MA:** What about KCET or WBGH?

**IB:** O.K. That broadens our audience somewhat, but you are still dealing with, essentially, an intellectual or culture-oriented audience—the traditional petty bourgeois class. We have to confront the real function of things, and the real function of television is in controlling people's so-called leisure time. When they come home from eight hours working on a machine or whatever, they are in a state where they just want to slip into an almost subconscious coma because they are so, well, disgusted with how they have to live their lives. They might not quite put it like that, but it comes down to the same thing. Producing surplus value means performing surplus labor, in contrast to necessary labor. Commercial television provides stupor-level entertainment. After eight hours at a menial job that occupies your time but not your mind, no one *wants* to come home

and watch educational television. But we have to understand *why* we don't want to. The sort of work or the conditions under which we work are so oppressive, and bring about certain changes in us that all we want to do is be trivially entertained. Now, that is a problem in terms of thinking about television to disseminate information. Even if one changes the content of television, I don't know whether you change the relationship that exists between the form and the audience.

You get another question coming up here, too. Given a different kind of society, given a society that isn't a consumer society, would television have been developed? It probably would have been invented, but would it have been developed and used to the extent that it has been in this country today? It's presently the most powerful tool of brainwashing, of indoctrination into consumer society, into viewing yourself firstly as a consumer, and maybe secondly, if at all, a person. The "higher" the technology of the forms you are using, the more those forms are determining, both of the artist and the audience—and the harder the struggle against such determination. So there are many problems with "utilizing" television.

**MA:** You mention exhibiting as also being one of the dominant forms of disseminating information in the art world. It seems to me that exhibiting works of art (and putting them up for sale) in a gallery such as John Weber's or any other commercial gallery would be somewhat of a contradiction for Art & Language in terms of its members' ideology.

**IB:** No more a contradiction than being a "legitimized" member of the avant-garde or being a conceptual artist or any of that bullshit. If we weren't "legitimized" figures in the art world, you wouldn't be sitting here talking to me because you would have never heard of Art & Language, *The Fox*, or me. There is a sense in which you use imperialistic or oppressive forms in order to get your voice heard at all, in order for your voice to exist. But there is a fine line there, and it's hard to really know which side you fall on!

**MA:** But at the same time, aren't you feeding a situation that you're trying to get away from?

**IB:** Sure. But again, this might be a problem of asking a wrong question. There is a bourgeois notion that if you are radical or pretend to be radical, then you have to be pure, and there is no way you can be pure in this society. If I sweep the streets to survive, I am making money from a capitalist system. It doesn't matter what you do in this society; you are going to make money from capitalism one way or another. But, at the same time, there comes the question, does having some shit in John Weber's gallery affect the credibility of anything we do or say? That is a point over which there is a lot of disagreement among the people I work with. It's not just New York—we have contacts with galleries in Europe and other places. One of the rationalizations is that it affords a kind of visibility that draws some attention to our activities. There is a lot of argument amongst us as to whether the drawbacks are worth the benefits. The point is, however, you can't be pure in this society. There's also the notion that you shouldn't live "in harmony," or that you shouldn't display these kinds of conflicts and contradictions, but I think these should be something that people, all of us, learn from. Whether we do, I don't know...

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Lynn Hershman

## The Floating Museum Phase I and Phase II

*The Floating Museum* recycles space and energy, transforming formerly nonfunctioning art spaces into exhibition areas. *The Floating Museum* has no walls. The structure is liquid in nature and pours itself into shapes determined by the scope of each artist. There is no staff, no overhead. The only concrete objects are a telephone and stationery. All collected money therefore goes directly into the making of artwork. Patrons join in the form of memberships and become thereby part of a collective that commissioned the works. All work takes into consideration the psychological, social and political elements of the spaces in question.

### PHASE I

During its first year, *The Floating Museum* dealt with the indigenous spaces, resources and energies of the San Francisco Bay Area. Artists were invited to use the city as a site and select areas that integrated with their ideas. *The Floating Museum* arranged access, financed the work, paid artists' fees and expenses and communicated the event. All of the spaces were open and free to the public. In its first year, the following artists exhibited at the accompanying sites:

Eleanor Antin: Palace of the Legion of Honor, Palace of Fine Arts  
 Robert Janz: streets and sidewalks  
 Michael Asher: courtyard  
 Newton and Helen Harrison: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, four billboards, assorted graffiti  
 Paul Cotton: classroom of Norman O. Brown  
 Peter d'Agostino: Fort Point  
 Richard Lowenberg: San Francisco Art Institute  
 Douglas Davis: cable broadcast  
 Hilaire Duphresne: San Quentin Mural (45 foot mural painted on the west wall of San Quentin prison by inmates.)

All works were temporary except for the San Quentin Mural.

### PHASE II: GLOBAL SPACE INVASION

Phase II will be the reverse of Phase I. Artists from California will travel to various points on the globe and create site works. They will be making broad brush paintings on the global landscape. Artists involved in this are: Reese Williams, Peter d'Agostino, Natasha Nicholson, Darryl Sapien, Suzanne Lacy, Mary Baker, Debra Rappoport, Susan Wick. This phase will be coordinated with the help of La Mamelles Inc. Artists will create work in Bologna, Kassel, and Amsterdam and then participate in an exhibition in California based on the experience of the journey. Phase II will begin in May 1977.

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## Interview, July 1977

**PF:** You have just finished the Documenta satellite telecast—with Beuys and Paik. Your audience for this performance, live and taped, must have been in the millions, touching several continents. Didn't the enormity of the event—as a spectacle or international Nielsen milker—obscure its message?

**DD:** Only if you assume that the viewer saw it as part of the mass, as an unman. I doubt that he/she did. And I was trying to break through to him/her, not to millions of people. That figure is a myth, anyway. There is only one mind, at most two or three, on the other side of the screen.

**PF:** You are referring to the end of your *aktion*, when you asked the viewer—the world—to break his TV screen as you burst through from the other side. Did he do it?

**DD:** I'll never know. There are too many cities and languages involved. In Kassel the next day, a woman told me I had broken her screen the night before—please come and repair it, she said.

**PF:** How long have you been involved with non-traditional, non-painterly, non-sculptural artistic pursuits?

**DD:** Since I was a graduate student at Rutgers University in the late '50s, early '60s.

**PF:** So you were involved in Happening-Fluxus activities then.

**DD:** I was very much attracted to the minimal word-scores of George Brecht, and to his theoretical writings, but Allan Kaprow was a more forceful personality, and eminently available.

**PF:** The Fluxus aesthetic then has informed your work, almost from the first.

**DD:** Perhaps. But it must also be remembered that I was very involved in the art of the past at about that time. I still am. That is one reason why content has become so important to me; I think it is the resurgence of the appeal of the past, of lost values and ideas.

**PF:** Your training has emphasized the iconographical situation.

**DD:** Right. Also there was a constant, ongoing interest in politics, in which I was deeply involved at an early stage—the McCarthy years.

**PF:** Had you done special studies in the social and political significance of artwork?

**DD:** Oh, yes. When I studied at Rutgers it was in a very traditional department, very humanistic. I hated it, but I was drawn against my will to Swift and to Bosch. Later, I was involved in sociological theories of art, Marxist and non-Marxist.

**PF:** Did you manage to find an alternative to the hated Rutgers faculty?

**DD:** To answer that, I have to backtrack. The Color School started in Washington, DC, where I grew up. The reason I didn't become a painting major at American University as an undergraduate was that the Colorist-Greenberg axis had taken over the city. I revere Morris Louis, mind you, but there's intensity in Morris Louis that's not in the other color painters. At a very much later time, I came to know and collaborate with Gene Davis on events; he was and is the most active thinker in the school. But they are exceptions. The artists in New York—who were oriented towards Pop, Happening, and Dada-Fluxus activity when I was at Rutgers—were amoral about meaning, amoral about content. They didn't care about history. That was a great release to me.

**PF:** So that in fact released you from the strictures in which the teaching of history had put you. You could return to history itself.

**DD:** Yes, I think so.

**PF:** That happens, not often enough. And that has since oriented you toward an emphasis on message-directed activity. Except that it's hard to find a terminology that manages to differentiate between the purely formal message—which is a kind of content—and other types of content. What are the other types of content in your work?

**DD:** I would argue that there is no *message* in my work. I would argue however that it originates in its content, which in turn shapes the form. I think this has always been so, but I didn't understand it until recently. I could give you any one of a dozen examples. In *Seven Thoughts*, in which I sent a worldwide message via the satellite, I'm more concerned about the meaning of speaking to the existential mind on the other end than I am about the fact that it's happening. To go to the empty Astrodome and make that piece is not a gesture, in the Duchampian sense. I did it for a reason, which is the meaning of the act. We're both tongue-tied at this moment because we're highly skilled in discussing the formal aspects of art and awkward when talking about its other qualities. Content or meaning is one of those other qualities and I find it very difficult to talk about. But that's natural and I don't think there should be any reason to be ashamed of our difficulty. The meaning of *Seven Thoughts* is elusive, as it developed over the years, from planning to final realization. In part its form-meaning was adjusted to the realities of the situation, to the fact that we had very little money, and very little time in the Astrodome, to the political and social problems that stood between me and this idiosyncratic use of the global communications system. As the work finally evolved, it contained a meaning that is the composite of all these things, together with the core intention, which never changed. A part of this composite is the documentary videotape. I controlled the aesthetics of the videotape. I knew where to put the cameras, how long the tape would be; I structured it pretty well. I also controlled the public address system in the stadium. So *Seven Thoughts* is authentically me, in part, and other parts were forced upon me by necessity, and by the politics of the satellite. Out of it all came a meaning that is more interesting to me than the form. I'm also more interested in the meaning of Jasper Johns' *Flag*, by the way, than how it was made, though in the deepest sense they are inseparable.

**PF:** But there is meaning in the content, too. You *said* something and transmitted what you said around the world via satellite. *How* you said what you said

is what you have been talking about. *What* you said could itself be content as well. But we're not going to be able to hear that, unless some government decides to release it, which is highly unlikely. Can we hear it on the videotape?

**DD:** No.

**PF:** Then for all intents and purposes we will never hear the seven thoughts whispered in to the satellite microphone. What we are affected by is how you tried to make us hear it.

**DD:** You understand that I want you to hear the thoughts?

**PF:** Yes. But you don't want us to hear it in any other context.

**DD:** Since part of the meaning of the work is to engage the telecommunications system of the world, that objective would be destroyed if I exposed the *Seven Thoughts*.

**PF:** We perceive the significance of the seven thoughts only if they and we are subject to this method of communication. The thoughts do not really exist independently of the gesture. The gesture is not the message, but it is an important ingredient in the message.

**DD:** I just go back to what I said before. The meaning of the piece is a composite of all these factors. One of the factors is that I tried to speak as a free single man to free private ears all over the world, using the satellite communication system in order to do it. I used the system because I wanted to expose it, to make it clear and visible.

**PF:** Will you manage to express these thoughts in another manner? Directly?

**DD:** I suppose you could make reasonable guesses at what they might be. There is something about *Reading Brecht* that's related here. Several people complained that they couldn't hear the text, including those who like the piece very much. They complained that the illegible audio weakened the work.

**PF:** Let me interrupt and describe *Brecht*. It was a multi-site multi-time performance/cablecast, in which you read selections from Bertolt Brecht's essays, including "The Radio as an Apparatus of Communication." Live sound from a CB radio was mixed into the reading as another element.

**DD:** If I had proclaimed the Brecht text clearly, no one would have listened. By hiding it, I sent the audience (in effect) into the libraries. This is related to the issue of the "lost" seven thoughts. If I try to speak to you using the satellite system and I fail, then I'll give them to you anyway.

**PF:** So failure is part of the message.

**DD:** Yes.

**PF:** Success might have been part of the message as well.

**DD:** Yes.

**PF:** The failure of success depended on happenstance.

**DD:** It depended on who owns the telecommunications system.

**PF:** This isn't an exploration of a medium. It's an explanation of a social situation. The medium is just a technical phenomenon. People have been misconstruing video that way, at least in terms of your work. The see you as oriented toward the medium of video and in fact you're oriented toward the social phenomenon of video, that is, telecommunication.

**DD:** I would say that video is mostly appealing to me—although there are many appealing things about it—in that it carries the message or the meaning from point to point.

**PF:** From specific point to specific point and potentially in real time.

**DD:** Yes.

**PF:** And in recorded time.

**DD:** Which approximates real time. It's like a pencil, or a piece of paper, or a book, or anything. No different. No better. No worse. The old meaning of the word "medium"—before McLuhan polluted it—described it as the means, bland and neutral, of getting an image-idea from one place to the next. That is how I use video, whether live or taped, telecast or single-monitor in a gallery. It takes me from my mind to your mind. That's a given, a *fait accompli*; and by now it is totally without interest to me. What I am obsessed with is the *content* of the contact I make with you. I'm trying to make you see certain images in a highly specific way, and to think about them, also in specific ways. I'm trying to remind the mind that it is there, that it works, that it is a pleasure when it works, and that it is responsible for itself, and for you.

**PF:** But the pencil moves according to your wishes, in two dimensions. A film camera moves according to your wishes, in three dimensions (only recording). A video camera moves according to your wishes in four dimensions (recording and transmitting).

**DD:** All that tells us is that one medium is different from one another. To make a certain kind of line I can use a very hard lead, for another kind of line I use a very soft lead. It's pretty obvious that I don't believe in a human being confining himself to one medium or one mode of address. I use lots of modes of address, and one of them is words. Often I've said, "Let us destroy mediums," or "Let us kill mediums," and people ask whether I believe there's nothing to the formal qualities of the video camera or screen. When you teach students what do you tell them? They ask. Do you tell them to ignore the medium? And the answer is obviously no. The answer is that in order to destroy any medium, you have to know it well.

**PF:** You have to be able to see beyond what you are doing, and how you are doing it, so that what you are doing is not only a matter of how.

**DD:** Exactly. It's the same as when you are teaching drawing to a group of students and saying to them in effect what I always say to students, that video is not the issue. *You* are making the pencil/camera do what you want it to do, whether you perceive that

consciously or not. *You* are the issue, responsible for what you do. It's not the tool. It's you. That doesn't mean that you ignore the physical problems; the relationship of the pencil to the paper will give you that effect, and so on. To say that you want to destroy mediums isn't an affront or insult to the medium; you know the 1974 Cologne print, *No Video No Video No Video, Against It is For It?* It's just another statement of this principle. I've always felt that the greatest service you can do video is to be against what it has been.

**PF:** You could almost say that of all art, in fact all societal phenomena—to be against what it has been encourages the development of something better.

**DD:** Yes, and the only reason not to try to achieve something better is the rather shaky assumption that we can't improve ourselves.

**PF:** One would think we would be less prone than ever to despairing or self-satisfied stasis, because of our awareness of history and our knowledge about the present and the immediate future. But there is a lot of complacency about the present.

**DD:** There is also a quite understandable and in some ways quite laudable flight to the past, or certain qualities of the past.

**PF:** I'm talking about complacency with developments in the present that have evolved into a status quo.

**DD:** Yes.

**PF:** I don't mean to attack the developments per se, but to attack people's mistrust of what happens subsequent to them. People become secure with certain developments and can't deal with subsequent, reactive developments. I guess that attitude always happens, but it should be resisted. In that regard, how do you perceive, critically and emotionally, the development of video from its inception as an art form on October 4, 1965 (a day that will live in infamy)?

**DD:** Well, I don't like the term "Video art," nor do I like the continued obsession with tape-monitor-and-telecast as ends in themselves. It's almost impossible to break the work through that hard shell of misunderstanding. I have recently found myself returning to more traditional grounds—drawing, printmaking, and performance (if you don't mind my thinking of performance as traditional; remember where I started, at Rutgers)—because they are less visible and obstructive as channels. The message is perceived rather than the means alone.

**PF:** Many people who agree with you in principle see you making the same mistakes as the video artists whom you consider in error. I'm thinking particularly of your constant use of your own image, which might show you to have been seduced by video's narcissistic qualities. This would pertain especially to *The Austrian Tapes* (the series of short tapes in which you invite the viewer to participate with you by pressing cheeks, lips, chests and backs with you against the screen, either in their bodies or in their minds. Here you use your body, and only your body, as a means of communicating directly with your

audience. But I would see this as an approach that you picked up not from video itself, but from Body Art. You're using video to reach one person, or even a large number of private minds, and also to remove them from the actual physical fact of you, to make you into something of an abstraction.)

**DD:** I don't think it came from Body Art; it came from a desire to have a point-to-point communication. It also seems more honest if I do it myself rather than put somebody else in front of the camera—if my objective is to speak directly to you. This was clearly necessary in *Studies in Myself* (the piece in which I typed out my thoughts to the viewer onto the screen as I was thinking them), where the content of the work is the content of my mind, not someone else's.

**PF:** I agree with you, but you have worked with the medium for so long that some of the work done must have influenced you or interested you in some special way.

**DD:** As far as interest goes, you are absolutely right. Bruce Nauman's early tapes in the late '60s were and are of great interest to me. So were the very first black-and-white tapes of Peter Campus, with whom I worked and talked a lot between 1970 and 1973. Paik has been a friend and a source of inspiration for many years. But the influence that seems the most direct to me are people I bet you never heard an artist talk about. A lot of the radical, underground, religious movements of the seventeenth century, for example. The writings of the young Marx, when he was romantic and idealistic and even a bit erotic. I think I mentioned Hieronymus Bosch before, and Swift. The poets that moved me most were Donne and Hopkins. As far as contemporary artists are concerned, it is Beuys, Johns, Haacke, and Barnett Newman. Of all the sources I've mentioned, Newman is probably the most important. His aesthetic was clear, direct, simple, and yet unbelievably complex in its implications. I can't tell you how moved I was when I first met him. He made me feel that it was all right to be an intellectual—to be interested in many things, openly—and still be a dedicated artist, even dedicated to a single image. I think that is his line in the Russian piece. The problem with most of the video art that I see is that it is inhuman, feeding in on itself, and painfully attempting to declare that it is video. I'm much more interested in seeing a mind or aesthetic at work than a tool.

**PF:** Right. Only you are capable of doing exactly what you would want whom-ever were in front of the camera to do.

**DD:** I was thinking a lot about the content of the mind when I made *Studies in Myself*. I must have been influenced by Chomsky's idea that the content of all minds is roughly similar. There must be some kind of structural and symbolic similarity, else the fact of language—its widespread use and form—would be different. That's why I made that piece. First of all, I was interested in what would happen when I placed myself in that situation and started typing for the first time on the character-generator. The camera was on and I was very conscious of that. There's no hiding of anything there. I was also interested in what the content would be, what would come out of mind. But you won't find anywhere in American critical writing any reference to that content—I can't remember anyone saying anything about that tape that didn't have to do with its means of presentation. Never once. In Europe there is much more reference to what came out in typing—there is constant reference to death and sex, which was absolutely

unconscious. You must realize when you put yourself into a typing situation like that, when you're trying to keep up with your mind, you can't be self-conscious about it. Because the act of trying to keep up with the mind is so consuming you can't do anything else.

**PF:** Do you find yourself more or less self-conscious when you're doing that?

**DD:** Less. I discover as I go on that in the moment of performance I'm really not there. I'm much more self-conscious when I'm not performing. You often hear that some actors never come to life except when they're playing somebody else. I'm at my most relaxed when I'm performing, when the thing is actually going on. That's when I'm absolutely tranquil. It's strange.

**PF:** It's not hard to understand. It's the one time when you know exactly what you are supposed to do and exactly what you are going to do.

**DD:** I guess so. I was so involved with *Studies in Myself* at that time. I was totally involved with the message. The same with *The Austrian Tapes*, which you mentioned. I was thinking only about you, trying to transmit to you. But of course the final work has to do with the size and shape of the television screen. It has a lot to do with where you are when you see it.

**PF:** That's true. As a matter of fact I've seen *The Austrian Tapes* projected on an Advent, and they lose meaning as a result.

**DD:** Yes.

**PF:** It's a very interesting phenomenon. Very few formalistic video artists address themselves to that aspect. Your work is one of the few bodies of video art that addresses itself to the physical—by implication to the social—phenomenon of the television set.

**DD:** As a means of carrying a message.

**PF:** It would be like doing a piece of mail art that had to do with the position of the mailbox in the typical home.

**DD:** You see that I think that a great deal of recent art—since the late '60s, let's say—has been wrongly described by critical mentalities that were developed in the early '60s, but not maliciously. The means are emphasized because the means are so carefully thought-out, well handled, right? I'm speaking of all sorts of performances which you can think of immediately that are very acutely aware of where the performance takes place, where people are sitting, what the psychology of the audience is, etc. Or Eleanor Antin's postcards—they are very acutely aware of how the image is reaching the mind, and so forth. But I think that's simply an unconscious legacy of our education. I grew up with Greenberg. When I was in Washington, my friends and all the painters were involved in those formalist considerations. So that's my heritage. That's something I can't give up—it's instinctive. If I deal with a piece of paper like a print, I don't even have to think about the fact that yes, this goes on a flat-two-dimensional piece of paper. In the

same way it comes naturally to Vito Acconci when he makes an installation to consider a room where people are as a room. There is an effortless sophistication of technique, media, physical things, in nearly all '70s art. It doesn't mean that's the purpose of the work.

**PF:** With some people it does.

**DD:** Hopefully we're discussing some sort of post-formalist or post-modernist situation and you can't get beyond those things by being concerned about physical things, physical matters. That is a given; that's taken care of. I am surprised and appalled when I see videotapes and telecasts by artists that take no account of the physical receiving situation—I'm appalled, but on the other hand, I wouldn't give a shit about that if there were something else in it I really liked. It's impossible for me not to take account of those physical things. I just can't do it.

**PF:** The situation of its occurrence is a given factor, a *fait accompli*, in your regard.

**DD:** Yes, that's exactly right. It's not the end goal. I'm interested in telecasting—perhaps even obsessed by it—not because it renders the work *public*, or reaches large numbers of people. The reverse is the case. The telecast takes me directly to your mind, unencumbered by gallery or "public" distinctions. It is at this moment that the message is naked, stripped in your mind, and stands for itself. *Reading Brecht*—to take another example—had nothing to do with its means. The means were there to reinforce the message. I read that text over and over again because I think it's a very important text.

**PF:** But the point of the piece is not to have us hear the text but to inform us that the text exists. If we really wanted to read or hear it in the traditional way, we could look it up.

**DD:** I hoped, too, that the form of that piece transmitted its content. That text and manner of presentation were the same.

**PF:** I'm beginning to perceive your work as being fueled by some basic contradictions. These contradictions may be logical, but their factors work also in complementary, even mutually enhancing, ways, leading finally to a continuity at least as logical. You seem concerned with the explication of a gesture, idea, or some such material, and equally with its obscuring. The *Three Silent and Secret Acts* (a performance cablecast in which you first listened to the video screen for a response from the other side, knocked upon it, and finally crashed through the other side of the "screen") are realized in front of a television/video situation—television because it happens in real as well as recorded time. The *Acts* occur necessarily with monitors and an Advent projector (at the performance site), and incorporate the whole TV studio. But that's another matter. The *Acts* are explicated in and of themselves, and obscured by their (multiple) means of transmission.

**DD:** That makes some sense to me. You may be describing a process now in full flower that was only hinted at in *Three Acts*. I thought of *Three Acts* as being very clear

and simple in what the viewer has to do. I hope that the meaning of the acts remains mysterious. It certainly isn't explicit. The whole issue of providing a text or a structure that's removed from you at the same time wasn't explicit in my mind until *Reading Marx*, the performance I did at the Bologna Art Fair in which I read certain selections of little-known texts by Marx—which by intention no one heard.

**PF:** We see that in the graphic piece that emerged from *Reading Marx*. It presents us with a conjunction of the three languages, none of which is a truly accurate representation of the other, none of which are as frustrating in terms of what you read as satisfying in terms of what you see. Which is kind of interesting because you're using formal aspects in creating the tension (attention?) with which you want to infuse the content.

**DD:** It's interesting that you use the word "frustration"—several friends have used it recently in connection with the pieces.

**PF:** There is a sense of frustration if one is going to approach it from a rationalist Western viewpoint, a start-to-finish computation of a text and the philosophical meaning within. A non-Western regard for the material might prompt one to perceive it, say, more gracefully—that is, not demand so much of it, deal with it as a phenomenon within which there are circumstantial contradictions.

**DD:** George Steiner wrote a book that appears to contradict Chomsky. He asks why there are so many languages in the world, why *isn't* there a universal language? And the answer is—he says—that people don't always want to be understood. This explains why there are different languages, private languages that only you and I understand, and code words. Children have little play languages, and so on. He says that there is a deep desire in people both to be understood and not to be understood, to speak publicly and be heard, and to speak privately and not to be heard, except by a very small group of people. It's a basic human instinct. I read Steiner after I had done all these pieces, but I think that is true and I think I could talk about it in terms of the work. The clearest example is the Russian piece *Questions New York Moscow New York Moscow*, a collaborative photographic-performance that occurred over four dates in 1976 with Alexander Melamid and Vitaly Komar. It involved the simultaneous asking of questions about the nature of the "line" and the exchange of photographs of the performances, later spliced together and enlarged. There is a literal as well as a metaphorical line between us in this work, about which we ask questions that are literally serious. We really don't understand why the line is there, philosophically or politically (the aesthetic choice to put it into the work is ours). I don't understand the line on that level. My guess is, from Melamid and Komar's writings, that they don't understand it either. As to whether it is a positive or negative presence.

**PF:** On what level are you talking about the line? As a physical phenomenon?

**DD:** No. It does have a spatial and temporal meaning as well as a political meaning. At this moment, I'm talking about it in terms of a political line, its symbolic value as the political line between us. My students questioned me once about this piece—after I had expressed my ambivalence about the line. How can you say that? They asked: If the line weren't there, Melamid and Komar could be right here in this room. Yes, I answered,

and the friendship wouldn't be nearly as intense. The line also relates to something that Warhol once said, "The most important thing about sex is not to do it." Certain kinds of frustration end in pleasure. Do you know that very early videotape, *Knocking*, in which I beat my hands against the screen? Somebody called it an act of frustration. Don't you want to break down the barrier of the screen and get through to the person on the other side? He asked. I said, I don't know: on Mondays I do, on Tuesdays I don't. On Tuesdays what I'm thinking is that the intensity of the desire to break through communicates itself much more effectively than if in fact I were able to bust it.

**PF:** Also it motivates you toward greater and greater activity.

**DD:** Is the frustration in the work or in its situation? Am I really frustrated by these things that stand between perfect contact? Or am I merely making visible the barriers? I don't know what the answer is.

**PF:** As you said, it's the difference between the explanation of the barriers and the attempt to overcome them. The way you explain them is precisely to make some sort of attempt to overcome them, and the way you overcome them is to make some explanation of them. In making us aware of the fact that these barriers exist in the first place you've gone just that much further towards dissolving them.

**DD:** The whole thing is really complicated because in some of these cases I am sure that the barrier is evil and in others I am not. Do you know we discovered that there are about eleven people in the world who understand the global satellite system: what you can do with it and what you can't do with it? I'm using "eleven" as a metaphor, but it's a mighty small group. Nobody knows how an individual can purchase time on it; nobody knows anything.

**PF:** As individual members of the society we are not sufficiently aware of most of society's legally balanced structures so that we might follow and exploit them. The telecommunications system is probably even less familiar than most other systems. There are more people sufficiently informed about food stamp laws, for instance, than there are people who know about telecommunications, because the stamp laws meet more basic needs as defined by this society. In a future society the use of satellite communications may be as important as feeding oneself. It may be a way of feeding oneself. And in your exploration of the telecommunications structure, pointing out its nature to us, the nature of its drawbacks as presently structured, you may have helped to bring about the use of telecommunications as a means of exploiting more crucial personal situations.

**DD:** More diverse. Access to it ought to be much easier than it is now, because you and I own it. Just as we paid for the World Trade Center, our tax dollars paid for the satellite system.

**PF:** By both capitalist and socialist definitions, having paid for it by money or work, we should own it. By the way, to return to the issue of barriers, it seems to me that the barriers are especially frustrating to us because they're not really a frustration to you. You are the only one who knows exactly what is going

on. It's the aspect of "multiple information" that has been occurring especially in your recent work. In *Three Silent and Secret Acts*, it's evident in the tripartite simultaneous structure, although there are temporal disparities (there being no sufficient way to be able to tell on the screen the live transmission from the taped transmission).

**DD:** That's true for the performance audience and the home audience.

**PF:** I know. The performance audience can differentiate. The way you structure your work, the performance audience sees the live performance coordinated with its real-time image, whereas the recorded image does not coordinate.

**DD:** You'd be surprised how many people who watched both *Three Acts* and *Brecht* as performances were confused about that.

**PF:** I wouldn't be surprised. What you tend to do is to have live and recorded images doing the same things. I notice in *Four Places Two Figures One Ghost* (a cablecast-performance at the Whitney Museum in February, 1976) that of the four places two are the same place but in different timeframes. And two figures are the same person in different times. And the ghost is supposedly the same figure as these other two, supposedly in the same time. Here you're working with what might be called "video trompe l'oeil."

**DD:** Fair enough, but it also occurs to me that a question might be asked: who's the ghost? And who's me? And which of the several "me's" is the real person? Or is it the ghost?

**PF:** The audience at the Whitney knew. They saw you performing in real time; they were able to detect the image that followed your gesture most closely as the real time image. However, they also knew that the ghost at the character generator was in real time, too. Since the ghost looked like you, they might have thought he was you, too.

**DD:** I think that some of the audience didn't know anything. And perhaps a significant percentage of the other people figured it out physically. "Ah, he's right there in front of me, therefore that other image can't be he. That's the ghost." But this relates to another issue we were discussing earlier. Physically speaking, all those things are true. But what the ghost typed out had a character that deepened the confusion. If the physical distinctions were immediately perceivable to certain people, they were complicated by the content of the ghost's typing. Which was closer to me than the "me" in front of you.

**PF:** Did the ghost type a prearranged script?

**DD:** Yes, the text is a piece that I discovered going through my memorabilia. I wrote it out when I was in my first year of college, I'd guess. I was going through a period when I first realized I was finally going to die. We all know this, but it's one thing to know it and another to experience the knowing, for the first time. The "lost" text resurfaced that moment, when I read it, years later. I thought immediately about *Studies in Myself*, the content of which surprised me, as I said before. I had no idea (in 1973) that death obsesses me. Anyway, in this old text, when I must have been 19 or 20 years old, I found that obsessive self again.

**PF:** The ghost then is not only a perception of your final self, dead, existing only as a wraith, but your view of an earlier self, dead, too—the ghost of Davis past as well as the ghost of Davis future.

**DD:** Yes... except that... it's still me. Me at a heightened awareness of myself. That kind of content intrigues me. As for presenting the self as a masturbatory act... what's wrong with masturbation? The best people do it. Second, facing the camera has to do with point-to-point or self-to-self, not narcissism.

**PF:** Wasn't there an element—a *literal* element, that is—of narcissism in *Two Cities*, *The Flesh*, and *The Devil*, in the work you realized in California this past spring?

**DD:** Do you mean because I stood nude in front of the camera? No, that is too ridiculous even to consider. Further, there were two sexes involved in that performance. Female, as well as male. Not only did they play similar roles in different cities—the girl seduced me (aggressively) in San Francisco while I seduced her in Los Angeles—but they ended in front of the camera, as one sex, nude. Both personality and sex were then subsumed.

**PF:** Why did the performance take place in two cities?

**DD:** Everything in the piece proceeded from a basis of pairs ending as one whole. Two performers, two sexes, two seductions, two times (lived and taped), and two cities. We exchanged performance sites in the middle of the work: part one was broadcast-performed in both cities between 8 and 8:30 pm. Then the two performers changed places, passing each other on the Los Angeles-San Francisco commuter flight, and executed part two between 11 and 11:30. It was an attempt to collapse scale (the opposite of Christo's fence) and to clarify against odds the intimacy of what took place on the screen. The use of the Caracas hands in the Documenta 6 telecast came out of the same concern—to collapse rather than to expand scale.

**PF:** What about future projects? Are they similar in motivation to the very complex pieces executed in 1976-1977?

**DD:** Just to speak of forms, I've only begun to find out what is possible in the area of simultaneous public/private performances: they allow me to deal in very rich ambiguities that have to do not only with time and space but with identity itself. It is essential in all these performances, by the way, that one audience be aware of the other—and of its seeing or hearing in a completely different context. I'm still working on the *Flying Man* image, which will doubtless occupy me for years. And I have several *Readings* yet in mind, in Berlin, in Budapest, and elsewhere—non-audible, of course.

**PF:** Will the Berlin and Budapest readings force political issues?

**DD:** Everything does. But I try to alert and intrigue the audience rather than to lead it. I don't want to be a leader on that level. Like all anarchists, I am against leading or being led. I look back to a de-centralized community, not to an organized Utopia (*Seven Thoughts* was anti-Utopian). Isn't this clear from the way I use media—always point to point rather than point to mass? Often I'm discouraged that this isn't understood, but I

realize how dense the training is on the other side. This is a century of dictators, pariahs, and Utopians. I probably fit better in a nineteenth-century context.

**PF:** Aren't you excessively idealistic about your audience? In almost every case your contact (as in *Seven Thoughts*) is with a *random* person, who happens to be tuning in. Don't you place too much faith in him?

**DD:** The only way to pick your way out of the shit that is fed you is to look to your own experience. This is particularly so in the matter of an audience. We've all been raised to think that "the people" are stupid, that they don't understand anything. This is an attitude very prevalent in the art world and interestingly enough in the media world. Editors are convinced that their readers are stupid; politicians are convinced that the voters are stupid; television producers are convinced that their viewers are stupid. Most of our artist friends consider the audience to be stupid. But what is my own experience? When I reflect upon "the people" that I've met all over the world, I find it difficult to remember real, hard-boned, stupidity. In fact I recall very perceptive people, everywhere I go. In Russia above all, where I was carefully prepared to find a slave-state mentality. Can my experience be that unusual? It can't. I must be touching some kind of commonality. So I decided that I would deal with the audience out of my own experience with them, not any other experience or second-hand theory. And I have found a reservoir there of extraordinary perception. I wish I could prove this—it's so natural to believe the reverse. I saw a friend the other day after *Brecht* and he said, "Well, I really liked that piece, but I was thinking to myself, how many people out there know anything about Brecht?" There you are. It's so natural to assume that *we* know, *they* don't. But we're them, they're we.

**PF:** The thing is to lead them to it. You lead an intelligence.

**DD:** I was reading the other day about Mies Van der Rohe. A colleague who'd worked with him for twenty years said he'd never seen Mies reading a book. Nothing except newspapers. Yet you go out to New Jersey and meet a hog farmer who has memorized Diderot. Our presumptions are strange and fragile.

**PF:** The exceptions are the rule.

**DD:** Yes, that's a very good way to put it. There is no rule except the exception. That's exactly the kind of audience I'm speaking to. The exceptional audience—the exception that proves the rule.

**PF:** In other words, all of us.

**DD:** Yes. Yes...

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Richard Irwin

## A Post Hysterical Hallucination For New Romantics

*"Modern art always 'projects itself into a twilight zone where no values are fixed,' he said. 'It is always born in anxiety.' Not only that, he said, it is the very function of really valuable new Modern art to 'transmit this anxiety to the spectator,' so that when he looks at it, he is thrown into 'a genuine existential predicament.'"*

—Tom Wolfe quoting art theorist Leo Steinberg from *The Painted Word*, 1975

What is the New Wave? What is its aesthetic? Its style? What is the New Art, the performance paradigm shift that has occurred over the past four years in San Francisco? Artist Paul Kos whispered in my ear one night after having described to him a piece I had performed at UC Berkeley:

"We don't want *Theater!*"

Why not, and who are *we*?

The materialistic conceptualist school of the Seventies as represented in the *Space/Time/Sound* exhibition at the SFMOMA at the beginning of the new decade here made certain aims clear while obscuring its relationship with obviously theatrical modes. Of the group represented in that show only the work of Darryl Sapien and Ant Farm were unashamedly performing in a quasi-theatrical context, that is, moving away from the purely conceptual into a visuality, a sculpturality that was inescapably "theater." Yet the work of artist Lynn Hershman was not to be seen. Lynn's *Roberta Breitmore* incarnation during the last decade, even more than Paul Cotton's *Astral Rabbit* masque picked up on a particularly SF theatrical vibration of role-change and gender permutation that had haunted groups like Cycle Sluts, and Cockettes, and the old-styled Angels of Light. She was commenting on theater or the lack of it as much as the art world by her choice of public persona.

Certainly the miles of black-and-white videotape exhibiting the works of artists such as Bruce Nauman, Terry Fox, and other male persona avoided the theatrical like the plague. Their work concentrated energy in and around their bodies as did the pioneering performances of such other notable American body artists as Chris Burden and Vito Acconci. This form was if nothing else, a form of centrifugalism, an interior monologue that mutated into various shapes that could be ultimately dispensed with and replaced by the object again. Others, Howard Fried, Paul Kos, Jim Pomeroy—expressed an unresolved disaffection with almost every phantom of solidity—a conceptuality that bordered on an all-encompassing theater whether in its installation state or actual public composition. The women were at once both more colorful in their presentations and reflective of the concerns of women. Martha Rosler, Nancy Blanchard, Linda Montano expressed a personal almost autobiographical form tinged with outright political dialectic.

Visuality still remained a problem to be solved. And what to do with an audience that grew restless and bored by the redundancy of expression that was destined to be the result of works so obviously divorced from its audience in most cases. The intention of all-inclusion, of “involving” the audience that had been the hallmark of the Sixties had been reduced to a physical gesture. Terry Fox’s piece during the above mentioned exhibit in the basement of the SFMOMA drew harsh criticism from a young audience of artists either still in art school or just entering the real world. The action of walking through the audience, of turning the space into a giant conceptualist violin was at best boring, and at worst, a dismal recapitulation of the past.

Back in the dark ages of conceptual space in the modern caves of the centrifugist movement—the art gallery had been transformed from gleaming white sterile laboratory to blue-green grottoes under city cement. The high romance of abstractionism had dissolved in a publicist’s nightmare of block paintings and ritual suicide. What was happening to our artists? Was there a regression taking place in culture? Had the artists succumbed to the blind narcissistic urges of post mortem man? The dreaded scenario of yet another savage savant depressed or wildly swinging his fists at the nose of intellectual critics whose hallmark was that they encapsulated the worst of nineteenth century scholasticism into a mounting hodgepodge of structural mumbo jumbo tainted with a rocky sense of avatar elitism. The critic had become encapsulated in the ironies of language. The sign system had been replaced by a increasingly technological system. The signs pointing in every direction at once like a spinning Chinese wheel of fortune. Strategy had successfully clobbered theory, capital tipped the scales on community, reality escaped through the back door of the underground and had jumped off the fire escape.

From the intestinal protozoan of human infestation a biological clock ticking in the background from a late night scary movie—as the city slept protected inside electric cubits from the chatter of machinegun fire and the clanging of chains, dull screams piercing the radioactive clouds—from deep inside the very cultural complexus of civilization like a groaning animal amid winged harpies and chattering sphynx’s dreamings emerged in that dead of night.

Television sets locking together billions of neuron centers called brains popping up and out of themselves reproducing themselves endlessly building replica paradigm images have recapitulated the ontological subsurface community environs from the tiniest single cell amoeboid up to the grandiose architect’s icons. In and out of these giant corporate zones passed the humanoid infestations called “units.” These units were functionally produced so as to assist the giant megalithic central computer and set to malfunction and finally terminate given appropriate electrochemical commands from control center.

The New Art, as it pertains to performance then, has accepted the relationship with theatre while infusing the merely theatrical with a sharp, at times, sense of the visual-sculpture. The main line of conjunction between the works of artists as diverse as Karen Finley, Bruce Pollack, Jojo Planteen, Phillip Hunter, Tony Labat, the many derivations of the “World’s First Band Without Instruments,” the Don’ts, then the Assholes, and finally the Puds, is their “frontalinear”/“frontaliteral” quality. Like Egyptian hieroglyphs come alive, they appear always “in front of” the spectator, and with the exception of certain

specific pieces, almost never physically involve the audience, but in fact creates an audience. The implementation of the stage itself has been a distinguishing feature of the new wave performances. Finally, the merging of the aesthetic with popular culture, and specifically underground punk and new wave Music has given us these new permutations.

The Cabaret Performance attitude and materialization might be suggested to have evolved from Tom Marioni’s sophist statement: “The highest form of art is drinking beer with friends.” 1980 at The Hotel Utah—in fact grew out of a sense of community among younger performance artists who had studied at the SF Art Institute in Howard Fried’s performance/video classes. The beer drinking escapades of the Museum of Conceptual Art Gang that hung out at Breen’s Bar next door had done an about face as it were. Instead of just talk there was art as well in the shape of entertainments that gawked and poked fun at the high seriousness of its precursors while giving the crowd a laugh in the meantime. None, or almost none of these actions were particularly noteworthy historically or otherwise—it was the energy of the events, the sheer sense of fun and the release from academic restriction that gave us our desire to fill in the empty formalist stage. This art hadn’t merged with life—it celebrated it!

“Memory is a function of the future,” one advance aesthetic mutant proclaimed, and his proclamation whizzed instantaneously across the hydro neural archival circuitry. As billions of little lights flashed off simultaneously across the zomboid galaxy of Image Nation—dim signals merged with ancient thought bodies proceeding through endless reverberations that had become like cluttered stop movements or final chords of Gregorian chants. Artists like their rival scientists and arch-enemies, the religionists, or dogmatists, scurried into their most secret interior designs and catacombed temples as the oranges gasses sparkling with deathly rays penetrated the bellies of the giant apartment complexes. “Quickly...” thought the wizened sage poet priest advancing to his arcanum library for information... “Quickly...what is future function if no memory trace is present?”

A storm of diseased insect corpses battered the roof above the rows of metal filing cabinets. Video monitors scanning the perimeter above reported back across switching cooled eyes inside the labyrinth passages. Reruns of the *Tom Snyder Show*. Tomorrow, crisscrossed between electric blinks of the ever-present eyes.

“Tonight we have with Mr. David Ross who is going to talk about artist’s television called ‘Video Art.’ He will be joined later by live camera hook-up with Mr. Nam June Paik in his Manhattan studio...”

Scraping away a quarter-inch of glowing cobwebs from the picture album, Pauline Schwarts, the once beautiful and charming wealthy art-collector-turned-conceptual-artist, prepared to set mindlessly in front of the set gazing at photo-reproductions of her collection. Later she would sip gingerly the remaining lethal dose of cyanide from the half-empty glass on the coffee table cluttered with issues of various bizarre art periodicals of the late twentieth century—*Leather Fetish*, *Cum Spots*, *Joint Effort*, *Military Mirage*, *Pseudo’s* and *Slimewick*.

“Arthur beige, where are you?” She thought out loud. She was dreaming again of Arthur

beige, the notorious neo-romantic avant-avator, her spiked-haired first lover who had seduced her backstage during a Clash concert at Temple Beautiful, on a full moon, next door to the Peoples' Temple on Geary Street in San Francisco. "Ahh... Arthur, Arthur, Arthur beige..."

Acting as underground reporter, I suddenly found myself playing a New Wave Hedda Hopper role, more concerned with an ever warping phenomenology of sights and sounds as they issued from all around the city than the purely academic act of historical amplification. When asked by art critic Moira Roth if I wanted to write art criticism I replied that I was writing "fiction." To somehow keep a sense of humor about an art that walked fearlessly among the latter-day icons of the art establishment. From an anonymous interview with the artist who gave us "Servomechanisms," Mark Pauline, to a "New Generation of Art Surgeons" manifesto, and through regular performance columns in the pages of *Damage* magazine I found myself usually in the company of the bizarre and the ridiculous. I called most of the New Art "Surferealism," a California aesthetic devoted to cheap thrills, loud music, and instantaneous feedback.

From the earliest rumblings of the punk underground at the Mabuhay between bands to the orthodoxy of the Hotel Utah in less than three years found most of us suddenly faced with the improbability of being... Artists! We had already developed a reputation to be lived up to or negated. In the year 1980 Art Clubs sprung up around the city like mushrooms after a summer storm. Club Foot, A-Hole, ARE, Valencia Tool & Die, and Club Generic. Of these only Club Generic and Valencia Tool & Die irregularly present performance art, ARE having opted for a pluralism of aesthetics and forms. And yet another wave crashed onto the art beach head from the belly of the Goodman Building which had housed artists for centuries came "Video Cabaret" recently, and already it has succumbed to entropy. Another recent splash at a club bar called Previews, and the owner is going out of business.

Of the many events during the years of this New Wave, "Mayhem" and "Son of Mayhem" at the monolithic grey monster space called Art Grip produced the most chilling response to performance. Each event drew over a thousand spectators in all-night extravaganzas that featured the best and worst of the 80s avant-garde. The work had taken on decidedly empirical flavor.

Unbeknownst to the fast fading epithet to the latter day saints of post historical pseudorealism, Arthur was in fact still very much functional. As a youthful clip of sixty Arthur had survived all the fads and fashions, had even eclipsed the sublime Picasso and Dali in actual quantity of work produced, and unlike his rival creationists and their enemy essentialists, had managed to acquire the enormous wealth of his oxymoron counterparts in the PR departments.

"Ah, so, it is the end," declared Arthur to himself, or the image of himself reflected from the holographone as he prepared to dial a six-digit code number that would transport his thoughts to a central tracking transceiver somewhere in the Hollywood Hills above Los Angeles.

A monstrous din outside the equestrian estate remarkable for its savagery and sheer violence caused Arthur to suddenly freeze his action. A blinding yellowish flash followed

by a whirring mechanical perceptual blur knocking Arthur completely off his feet, throwing him into a corner of the room, smashing against an antique replica zenith used for flowering begonias, was the first and last episode in a meaningless and torpid life function called Arthur beige. The angelic mushroom had obliterated the placid Los Angeles landscape in one fell swoop.

Extraterrestrial hordes had sufficiently prepared for their arduous, if not difficult, journey to the third planet from the star descending from the polar field Draconis in the constellation Sirius within the cluster Alpha Centauri. The advanced cybernet inhabitant unified field model, "Qua-X 343436," had observed this particular infestation of carbon units over a nanomillenia as suggested by DNA archive message clusters transceived as their civilization prepared for machine interface some billion star revolutions past. The Earth Transmission has appeared suddenly among advanced mutant robot trace projections at the most critical point of their transformation. Information itself had leaped beyond anything the modernist materialists had suggested among the five billion trillion possible scenarios.

"Material is illusion, Time-Space a contradiction, Essence is a transmutation of being and being nothing more than the quintessential process of observable diagnosis."

"Keep telling yourself that," said the quad-eyed bio unit to the antenna-topped cyborg, "and once you've convinced yourself maybe you can show me how to navigate this damn time warp!"

While still an undergraduate at a community college (those subcultural ghettos sprinkled around the green and rolling hills of southern California), I had fallen under the influence of a certain Fidel Danieli—one-time art critic for *Artforum* and *Art News* during the Sixties, artist, thinker and very clever man. I can picture him now in my memory, standing in his usual Oscar Wilde-like posture of authority before the class, at the chalkboard drawing a grid and illustrating it with dates and words. "Now, as you can see, every art movement in history has a lifespan roughly sixty years..." A few more squeaking squiggles and Presto! "...Dada only lived for twenty years..." he continued, turning to his captive admirers, "...theoretically this means that Dada still has forty years left!"

Bravo Fidel!

A few art student friends and myself gathered in clandestine meetings discussing art and our future plans. Out of these meetings we decided to activate an event called "Dadaweek" into the sleeping surroundings of our dull little valley college. With Xerox posters and determination we successfully promoted our events, confusing students (we remained anonymous) and teachers alike. The week finally arrived.

Among our actions were included: dumping several hundred pounds of garbage the night before classes through the hallways of the art department. Obscene and terroristic phone calls arrived anonymously to heads of departments from untraceable origins. A woman had slipped on a banana peel and had threatened the school with legal action. Official intra-office memos were immediately dispatched from Art Department to Administration, from Art Chair to Faculty from Faculty to students. No one should take

part in this disgusting event! “We encourage our students to become fine outstanding citizens. Your students’ participation in this so-called art project called ‘Dadaweek’ must be discouraged.” Etc., etc.

Little to our knowledge at the time, north of the San Andreas another group of artists had already begun the snowball that is Neo-DADA rolling. Bill Gaglioni and Anna Banana’s “Dadaland” and its permutations had, with military precision, prepared its assault on scholasticism, turning the tables on the art history once and for all.

What is the significance of artists of the present re-performing “Futurist” works of the past and calling it “Dada”? Timespan had become a warpable medium and the unclear ravages of pluralism spread across the glossiest art magazines like a strange viral infection.

Herman Noun preparing his lectures before the latest cum laude graduates of the New School of Advanced Hybrids recapitulated silently to himself the pre-kinetic scenario as he approached the safely lit podium at the foot of a darkened stage inside the vast auditorium. Clearing his throat into the microphone and leafing nervously through a ream of notes he began speaking.

“It was on the occasion of Monet’s death and de Chirico’s grand triumph over the forces of the antebourgeoises that we have in essence assimilated here tonight. Through the course of historical time-space you have each of you individually and alone in great solace contemplated the meaning of a random set of events and their matriculation into an observable phenomenological... distortion...” he clears his throat, “...as it were.”

Herman Noun’s clipped articulate noise pictures floated effortlessly over the heads of the eager carbon units seated in the darkened space in front of the podium. “A void.” he thought, “Avoid...” he continued his lecture, “avoid those prurient sentiments which so coldly encapsulated the aesthetic academy for so long, and advance... advance toward the light of which we are now part. Each of us our supreme duty to deify that which is so evident, while casting out those impurities recombined in the admixtures of postmodernity. Time-space, if nothing else, has taught us a valuable lesson. No longer are we burdened with meaning in a meaningless void. No longer must we cling to suspicions for fate, destiny, and the billion other shocks of new that flesh is heir to!”

An undercurrent of excitement breezed through the hall like a short electric buzz. The individual carbon units restlessly squirmed as they each stretched forward in anticipation.

“Now faced with probability as essential factor beings that we are, telepathic and transmutable in every respect—ready to interface with our cyborg community in a supreme example of cosmological sacrifice—the net has been drawn around us and we are captive in this driving essential force. Our fields forcing us to a divine conclusion, our forms meet in a unidirectional orchestration of sublime, immediate and raw intention!”

Now the applause response simulators sent spasms of lazer beams like crazed neurons blissfully orgasming each individual unit. A dazzling post-cellular display obtruded above the tiny podium where the professor stood—a greenish mechanical slime spurt-

ing wildly from center stage into the audience itself, causing a frenzied mob reaction of hysteria bordering on violence. So great was the hue and cry of this mass that Herman Noun’s last words seemed meaningless to those who heard.

“And remember the squid! REMEMBER THE SQUID!” he shouted into the microphone PA system. Just as the flickering celluloid imagery magically appeared beneath the quivering machine phallus. The words stained in light above the rioting crowd: “There is No Future in History. And No History in The Future.”

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# Notes from the Invisible Theater or Beyond Fashionism: Alternative to Alternative, the Rising Voice of the New Frontality & Artists' Theatre as Art

Karen Finley leans out of the fake Arabic arched entrance to the Garden Of Eden on the corner of Columbus and Broadway, wearing a scant costume of bright red spangled panties and matching majorette top. "I'm not interested in performance anymore," she declaims in the bejeweled Saturday North Beach tourist night. She invites me inside to catch a show, but I faithfully decline. A few days later we meet again, this time walking arm-in-arm with one half of the infamous duo, The Kipper Kids, who've since gone to pieces. Bryon (Kipper) has not yet performed his destruction-and-desolation-laced-with-humiliation-and-despair at the old ARE building on Market Street. Leave it to nasty gossip to fill in the ludicrous and amazing details, let's say it was a one-person show of contempt for the more virile forms of avant-gardism circa SF 1980 that included a smashing display of paranoid libido. Poor Karen, I'm told, was left in the hitch between her pressuring peers and her romance with Harry Kipper #1. Meanwhile, she was content to serve drinks to the jaded clientele of one of North Beach's little body shops, famous for its unique MALE & FEMALE LOVE ACT. The gaudy red lights, pseudo oriental plush pilings, and raucous music were, I assume, preferable as real-life to the pretentiousness of the art-life. Or so it seemed...

I was busily attempting to garner a slide-lecture of three years of SF underground performance art for a whirlwind tour of the colonies. This escapade had more twists and turns than a strand of DNA—it was a new business for me, hustling universities, Art galleries (or alternative you-know-whats), theater halls, in short, whoever would have me. The plan was to open during Intersection's International Theater Festival with a midnight show laced with several illusionist's firecrackers, moving down the coast to UCLA where Chris Burden holds court, stops in between, back up to Hayward, Berkeley's Helen Holt Department and then winging it to Moira Roth's Chicago Art Institute seminar. Next a slice off Big Apple and whosit to European ports. Bad timing and even worse communication with Intersection staff damaged my showy entrance and I was beginning to have serious doubts about the hierarchal art-world support system in toto.

Meanwhile, I received a hand-scrawled letter from Valencia Tool & Die's Peter Belsito which, in uncertain terms, decried the current Performance Art legacy: a reduction in integral space and good business; that nobody would pay money to watch some guy sleep inside a gallery for 12 hours; that the Cabaret encroachment practically demanded entertainment in return for cold cash. Howard Fried lamented broadly over a telephone, "It's too bad you guys didn't investigate the money-making possibilities further..." I was living in a cheap Hotel in North Beach fighting off armies of cockroaches in the red night and would have liked nothing better than to score on some big bucks in the Art

racket. As a kick I produced *Performance Underground* at North Beach's Savoy Tivoli, in fact, on the same shoestring I had tripped over a year earlier at the Hotel Utah. This time there was a door charge of three bucks for a glimpse of The Puds, Carol Alter's Band, Michael Peppe, Bruce Gluck and myself as Host.

At the scheduled moment of preparation a few of us arrived in the dimly lit underground grotto that was the mecca for Jazz over a quarter of a century (I was lubriciously informed by staff and management alike). A Disappearing Act ensued, first by the Club manager, then by the assistant manager, then by the sound man, then the bartender threatens to walk off. Finally a phone call from the owner himself screaming in a paranoid rage, "I DON'T WANT ROCK AND ROLL IN MY CLUB!" He told me that he had worked for years producing an alternative to the dreaded R&R; I informed him that Performance Art, as well, was tacitly reached: we could go on with the scheduled event so long as we didn't use the stage or the sound system or shoot any video, unless a contract was signed with the owner. A trickle of guests had already arrived outside on a bright Sunday afternoon. Carol's band exited with typical punk mixed emotions. Artist Lynn Hershman stood outside faithfully, asking were we or were we not. Critic Tom Albright juttled playfully with Tony Labat who had just completed his Art prizefight, and who took exception to something Albright had said in his article. Still, things could have been imaginably worse. I invited everyone in for free, after first asking for a simple buck to assuage tempers and keep our audience from going to a movie. Two hours later a bizarre, but amusing, event ended with Phillip Huyser of The Puds exhibiting himself in the club's brick-walled basement.

Two weeks later an article about the event appeared in the *SF Chronicle* by no less than Mr. Albright, a rarity from a man who publicly detested anything remotely resembling avant-garde action, or so we had assumed. The upshot was that the article came just in time to be included in my MFA show at the San Francisco Art Institute along with a barely visible color videotape of Michael Peppe screaming: "STOP IT! STOP IT! MY HEAD HURTS!" The media continued its slow burn. An article appeared in New York's *Cover* magazine edited by Judith Aminoff entitled "SF Fashions" by an unknown writer named M.O. David: "Let me give you some background. By the mid 1970s, isolated from N.Y., London, and even L.A., San Francisco Fashionism was lost in a backwater. Art 'gurus' Howard Fried and Terry Fox continued their eclectic work, while the rest of the city was lost in the fog of such terms as post-historical (hysterical) modernism. What was going on? Fried, a teacher at SAN FRANCISCO ART INSTITUTE, sensed the confusion and intensified it. His classes became breeding grounds for Fashionism." Fashionism, what hey? Echoes of "Fashion is Fascist" demimonde materialized in my ear. Super-animated sequences of Winston Tong smoking like a syphilitic mandarin corpse behind Art deco chinese screens... paramilitary eunuchs grandiosely castrating themselves while deliciously attacking a bereted audience of social misfits...chic S&M parlors reeking of blood and urine...a decayed vision of satanic forces setting riot to the Art museums wracking havoc on the sad philistine pillars, DEATH TO THE INFIDELS!

"fad (fad), n. a temporary fashion, manner of conduct, etc., esp. one followed enthusiastically by a group: The fad of wearing white neckties swept the campus. (n. use of dial. fad to look after things, busy oneself with trifles, back formation from obs. faddle to play with, fondle. (See FIDDLE)—fad'like, adj.—Syn. craze, vogue."

The tawdry tinsel slum goddess of modern romanticism raising its pretty head above the tar and cement once again. Bleach blond teenage boys punked out on doorsteps on Russian Hill eye me as I pass: "TREND-EE!" they swipe. The Fashionists of yesterday are the Fusionists of tomorrow. And the beat continues ad infinitum. From the truly punk opus of Mark Pauline & Co. to the gaudier aspects of post-wave New Symbolism as characterized by such underground streams as Minimal Man and Sonezone, the latter a hybrid lunatic fringe ensemble of artful dodgers (with names like Monte Three, Tommy Nein, Leroy Six, and Dani Seven) take up the burnt crucible of symbolismo in their dark dungeon somewhere in the Mission District. Sonezone is a cast of electronic wizards, Art graduates, and generally eclectic somnambulists. Their first performance, *B'wana B'reath* occurred late last year in a bomb shelter located beneath a severe studio where formally attired guests were served hors d'oeuvres before being ceremoniously lowered to the depths on an elevator, accompanied by a militantly dressed guard. The performance unbelievably welded together subterranean scents of Cocteau's *Orphée* with scattered fragments of Occult and Surrealist doctrine glimpsed through the web of Fashionism. Multimedia crafted in the pit of darkness, their Art is created at the foot of the Abyss where nightmare merges with calculated irony. They've been working on their next performance for many months since and expect it to be ready for delivery hopefully by Halloween, the Sabbath of our Underground.

Mark Pauline's Survival Research Laboratories (including Mark Sangerman, Janice Sangerman, Matthew Heckart, Jim Storm, Eric Werner, and his brother Neal Pauline), meanwhile continues to amuse if not amaze the uninitiated with "Servomechanisms" gone awry, beating, slashing, and smashing each other to smithereens in a spectator-Spartan minuteman parody of the decline of Western civilization.

Now I'm told Karen Finley teaches high school Art students in Chicago, after having transversed Europe with Mr. Kipper and exhibited at David Ross' Berkeley Museum (or so it seems). Though forces fragment, aligning themselves temporarily, only to suddenly veer in an unexpected direction, I know of no artist involved in the so-called Fashionist scene who is not at least moving in a unique direction.

Magdalen Pierrakos' new work fuses elements of theater à la Robert Wilson, using variegated structured scripts delivered to chosen actors through whispered stage directions. Her recent *The World of Message Units* at 80 Langton was a haunting diatribe on the perishing male ego symbolized by a ludicrously inept historical Napoleon, a scripted text piecing together footnote with humorous anecdote and contemporary pop lyricism. Her work has matured saliently since her earliest pieces: a party for dogs; the trashing of the Hotel Utah. Her confidence certainly reinforced by recognition from a major performance gallery (80 Langton).

The fact that you are reading me now in *ART COM*, and not in the pages of *Damage*, is a cue to what has happened in a space of perhaps eight months. The alternatives who turned a deaf eye to our alternative suddenly have eyes to see and ears to hear, the series, *Performing Performance*, at La Mamelle, being a case in point: a "Cabaret" setting in an Art Gallery? Contrary to my last piece in this pub, the smaller Cabarets have not exactly succumbed to lethargy, in fact, Previews is still going strong despite the rumor begun by its proprietor. Helen Holt, artist and curator of the UC Berkeley Student Union Gallery and self-created one-woman art tornado is at it again, curating not only

performance events at Previews, but hosting a radio program for and about artists on KPFA, Mondays from 2-7 A.M.

Aside from the purely mechanistic business end of things, a network has been established linking the new-new with the old-new, a strain of philosophy seeming to have entered the minds of artists and their purveyors. It's essential that this communication and support intensify in the areas where it is most needed, namely, presentation and economic support. It would be a foul thing indeed if we were to lose our best creative species to the gutted commercial marketplace of New York or Elsewhere simply because the system of support chose to ignore the veritable magic beast that lay in its own backyard.

The artists themselves created feverishly without this support and without federally funded endowments while the bigwigs got their lion's share. It's reasonable to assume that their individual and collaborative genius deserves now more than a polite obeisance. The collective vision of at least twenty promising artists (just off the top of my head) could very well instigate a lasting supply of fresh air from the seminal reservoirs. If instead of playing footsie to East Coast traditionalism we were to reach deep into our innermost instincts, and our pocketbooks, San Francisco could provide a soaring poetic phoenix of cultural metaphors. The maverick stance and mystical credo common to these Bay Area winds of change, unfogged by a second-rate self-opinion by our supposed Art landlords and landladies, who spend too much of their energy and money on the County Fair variety of regionalismo, might instead recognize brilliance when it's staring at them dead center.

Perhaps it is against this backwash of cultural indifference that new Art is created. The careful and sometimes criminal high-wire act between life and Art, between materialization and all hope lost, certainly is an outdated notion for our artists, especially having seen the fat cats ahead of them licking their paws after getting five and ten thousand dollar NEAs during the '70s. Not all, not half of the Art produced, perhaps under the auspices of D.C., was notable or even note-worthy and that might be an underlying message.

The important thing is for the artist not to succumb to the entropy created by Art stardom, not to be struck blind by the beast of capital enterprise, and lose the name of action! To recognize, in the heart of darkness, a self-reflected strength and a truly inspired vision, whether of good or evil, is preferable to the tedious and offensive commonplace of crass commercialism in the guise of formal aesthetics. Fashionism, a vision of the present.

*"I think I've found a suitable title for my book. It will be: The Theater and Its Double, for if the theater is the double of life, life is the double of theater, and that has nothing to do with the ideas of Oscar Wilde on Art. This title will correspond to all the doubles of theater which I had found over so many years: metaphysics, the plague, cruelty. The reservoirs of the energies made up of Myths which men no longer incarnate is incarnated in theatre. And by this double I mean the great magic element ('agent') of which the theater, in its forms, is only the figuration while we wait for the theater to become that element's transfiguration."*

—Antonin Artaud, "Oeuvres IV," published in the *Nouvelle Revue Française*, October 1, 1931, under the title, "The Balinese Theater at the Colonial Exposition," and reprinted in *The Theater and Its Double*.

Stefan Weisser (Z'EV), in Rotterdam, living off a government artists' grant, Tuxedomoon, also in Rotterdam, making music. Blaine got beat up in New York, hand smashed by a junkie. Guitar solo. Riots in Germany. Kristine Stiles in San Luis Obispo with Abalone Alliance. Tony Labat at LACE Gallery in LA Exchange with SITE, also teaching at San Francisco Art Institute. Performance students tasting food at various SF restaurants or lifting weights with Joel Glassman.

Jojo Planteen, former member of the original DON'TS: WORLD'S FIRST BAND WITHOUT INSTRUMENTS, and who is a star performer now on her own, will travel to India soon to meditate in an ashram. She is sincere about this and I've recognized a definite change from her previous nervous persona to a more mature and positive exterior emanating from within. I hope she doesn't mind me speaking about this, but I feel a search for spiritual values is probably the next most important change to occur for many people. Out of the self-imposed charnel houses of guilt and masochistic aggression commonplace in the nihilistic shadows of our latter-day underground frenzy, toward a universal wholeness and political commitment. The values destroyed must be replaced with integers of faith in the human resemblances. We've had the "me" generation, how about a little "re" generation?

. . .

the great pyramids  
point toward a language  
of misread signs

legends the size of pea pods  
crawl out of the lips of saharas  
musics fading  
cinematic ear turned to  
unmanifested radios

cities constructed rooms  
buzzing  
grey buildings erected  
for unborn computer programmers

you must escape  
you must become an escape artist

from my unpublished poem: *Carving the Work Valhalla In a Putrid Vesper, (an alchemical poem)*.

The Art world of San Francisco, tied as it is now to its retroactive fiction of Bay Area figuration and the winds of expressionism of one generation removed, has seeded, despite itself, a basic grimoire of exciting Art. Three rhyming words to a magical incantation: Junk, Funk, Punk. From Junk we see the fetishistic poser of materials, found and appropriated cast-off abandoned scraps of energy...themselves iconic mirrors of a postindustrial pre-computerized society. This contains the Art of Bruce Conner, veritable sphinx of poetic found film footage as evidenced in works like *Crosswords* where the audience watches reel after reel of giant mushroom explosions in the darkened theater: that modern platonic cave; womb of nightmares. Funk freed modernist aesthetics from

the white washed historical metronome to embrace humor, ethnicity, bizarre immediacy and the authenticity of graffiti scribbled on public walls. Punk, Art of youthful rebellious whose look is as outrageously reflective of pop culture as it is clue to a generalized hostility toward Image Nation.

Technology advances means for instantaneous communication paradigms, computerization/miniaturation-micromillennium. We comment on the Past as if it were merely an appendage of the Present and commit ourselves to a recreated future. We are gods playing dice with the universe. But we are a poor excuse for gods: everything we think we know, we don't; everything we say we are, we're not. We are small shadows of larger informational fields of which science only partially reveals. We are disembodied voices crying out in the wilderness of time-space. Unknown arenas of action lay beneath our level of perception, just beyond our senses. We must have courage to change, to take a chance: to embody the will of change and chance. The new Art like the new age is an Art of actualization/separation/embodiment/technology/and the necessity of grounded desire.

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# The Avant-Garde and the Open Work of Art: Traditionalism and Performance

*"I don't know...I've got a feeling this isn't what I paid my money for... I mean...I've got a funny feeling this isn't...it just isn't...you know...what I paid my money for..."*<sup>[1]</sup>

—Laurie Anderson

Since the Sixties, critics of the most diverse ideologies, including Harold Rosenberg, Hilton Kramer, and Donald Kuspit, have noted the end of the avant-garde. For these critics there is no longer a subversive Art which exists in an adversary or dialectical relationship with bourgeois society, nor is there an inexorable progress to some foreseeable goal that is led by a revolutionary elite of artists ready to martyr themselves for a new idea. Instead, in the words of Nietzsche, "nothing is true, everything is permitted." Postmodern pluralism is a diluted congeries of styles occasionally accented by an exceptional artwork. And the artist, if not fully accepted or assimilated by the middle classes, is supported by the universities, the N.E.A., and the corporations.

While the above scenario for the present state of the Arts is currently accepted by the Art intelligentsia, I believe there is an avant-garde today which is highly disturbing to many viewers and will continue to develop in the future. The basis of this avant-garde is "the open work of Art." A term coined by the Italian Joyce scholar, Umberto Eco, in his *Opera Aperta* (1962), but not well known in the U. S.<sup>[2]</sup> This paper will discuss the concept of the open work of Art and apply it to the visual Arts and performance areas outside of Eco's expertise. Yet this endeavor is only an incomplete beginning, a précis of a much larger work.

The earliest exemplars of the open work of Art are the 19th century French symbolists. "(Stéphane) Mallarmé," says Eco, "hoped to abandon the traditional duality between the world and its representations."<sup>[3]</sup> His poetry is a non-linear sequence of images that suggests but does not explain. Thus, Mallarmé forsakes the poet's traditional role of making sense of the world. Connections and associations are made by the reader and no response is more important than another; there are no privileged interpretations.

For those accustomed to traditional narrative poetry with a beginning, middle and end, Mallarmé's poetry is ambiguous to the point of chaos. It takes a prodigious "negative capability," which Keats defined as the ability to dwell in "uncertainties, doubts and mysteries without any irritable reaching after facts and reasons," to appreciate such poetry. Mallarmé argues that Symbolist poetry is "accessible to only exceptional spirits."<sup>[4]</sup> Few readers are able and willing to take the leap into the void that it requires. And, to my mind, it is negative capability that separates the artist from the bourgeoisie, and constitutes the avant-garde attitude.

According to Eco, Joyce is Mallarmé's greatest literary successor. *Finnegan's Wake*, is a result of Joyce's conclusion that intelligibility equals banality. Nevertheless, Joyce himself characterized the book as a "chaosmos," a mixture of chaos and cosmogony; in fact, there is an underlying order to *Finnegan's Wake* that sets the implicit boundaries of the book. For Eco, a work of Art, however anarchic, must have an order or it disintegrates into an entropic like state of random formlessness. And he strongly implies that the qualitative measure of the open work of Art is the author's ability to convey a maximum of information with a minimum of order. Yet artists in the 20th century have discovered that an order independent of will or consciousness can be utilized to give an internal structure to the work of Art.

In 1916, dissatisfied with a drawing, Jean Arp tore it up, let the pieces fall to the floor and noticed the aesthetic quality of the patterns. Arp sensed that there was a law governing these apparently random, patterns so he labeled his work *According to the Laws of Chance*.

Chance allowed Arp and the other Dadaists to accept creation rather than eliminating aspects of it through conscious choice. Chance broke down the hierarchy between simple objects d'Art. "In nature," wrote Arp,

*"A broken twig is as beautiful and important as the stars and it is mankind who decides on beauty and ugliness. Who has shown the beauty of sprigs and twigs, splinters, fragments, rubbish on the ground. Flooring, sidewalks, flagstones, plazas, the washed out grounds of river beds... all are transformed into a temple for dreamers alone."*<sup>[5]</sup>

While the Romantics and Symbolists accepted the luminous quality of flowers, children, grains of sand, etc., the celebration of rubbish is distinctly foreign to these movements. On the other hand, Kurt Schwitter's *Merz* collages (from *Commerz* with the detritus of society), Marcel Duchamp's readymades and Jean Arp's torn papers showed that the Dadaists went much further than the Romantics and Symbolists in narrowing the gap between the world and its representations. Nevertheless, the Dadaists, with the exception of Duchamp, embellished their found objects and selected the most interesting chance patterns. "Merz aims only at Art," maintained Schwitters.

With the use of automatic drawing and accident in their paintings, the Surrealists continued the Dadaist experiments with chance. Their paintings became progressively abstract, culminating in the elimination of the image by the Abstract Expressionists after World War II. As an image directs associations, it reduces the number of possible meanings. Imageless painting, however, engenders an almost inexhaustible richness of interpretation, confronting the viewer with the relativity of a fixed interpretation. Abstract Expressionist painting is anathema for those with a limited tolerance for ambiguity and it is still receiving abuse from the public and bourgeois critics.

Abstract Expressionist painting signifies nothing. There is an uncanny resemblance between a Jackson Pollock painting and the sub-atomic energy exchanges recorded by a bubble chamber. If Pollock rejects representation, he somehow depicts the particle-less world of sub-atomic physics. Yet Pollock's paintings 'are' artistic imitations of natural processes, not process itself. John Cage, Pollock's contemporary, understood this problem; his task became the elimination of artistic intervention from his presentations of the world.

For 4'33, a composition performed at Black Mountain College in 1952, Cage had a pianist uncover the keyboard at the beginning of the piece and close the keyboard at the end of four minutes and thirty-three seconds without touching the keys in the interval. Silence or the “noise” in the room became the concert and Cage’s goal was to provoke the listener from “judgment to awareness” of the immediate environment.<sup>[6]</sup> In such pieces, says Cage,

*“There is no communication and nothing being said...and so contemporary music is not so much Art as it is life and anyone making it, no sooner finishes one of it than begin making another just as people keep on washing dishes, brushing their teeth, getting sleepy and so on. Very frequently no one knows that contemporary music could be Art. He simply thinks it is irritating. Irritating one way or another keeps us from ossifying.”<sup>[7]</sup>*

Followed to their logical conclusions, Cage’s ideas would lead to the end of Art; the open work of Art would be indistinguishable from life. So Cage has settled for aleatory or chance procedures as a way of avoiding artistic intervention.

Allan Kaprow adapted Cage’s ideas to the visual Arts in his seminal text, *Environments, Assemblages and Happenings* (1965). According to Kaprow, “the line between Art and life should be kept as fluid as possible” and this entails the elimination of the frame, the closed flat rectangle of the canvas which separates the work from life.<sup>[8]</sup> Indeed, Kaprow made a significant contribution to the concept of the open work of Art by attempting to create a more natural framework of space and time in the Happening—a semi-theatrical fusion of text/drama, visual Art and music.

Today, Performance has subsumed the Happening in challenging the limits of the frame. Unlike theater, most Performances do not represent time or create the illusion of duration but last for the actual period in which the work unfolds. Chris Burden’s *Sculpture in Three Parts* (Hansen Fuller Gallery, San Francisco, September 10-21, 1974) ended when he fell off his chair in exhaustion. In addition to literal time, Performances are often informed by literal space; they take place outside of the box frame of the gallery in actual locations and sometimes without props. Howard Fried, in *40 Winks*, for example, led his “audience” in a long journey from Berkeley to Hayward expecting the “audience” to leave him to go back home. Fried’s *40 Winks* illustrates another difference between theater and performance; in contemporary performance the division between audience and participants has become increasingly blurred, especially as the participants are net actors who carry theatrical habits to the work. Moreover, repetitive motions or task-like activities, easily accomplished by the participants, drain the performance of drama, producing an overall equilibrium of energy that is closer to everyday existence.

On December 18, 1981, at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, I witnessed *Relative Calm*, a collaborative performance by Lucinda Childs, Jon Gibson and Robert Wilson. Childs’ dance troupe repeated very simple movements to a “minimal” score in an austere decorated space. This seemingly random, eventless and interminable performance was extremely boring to the middle class audience who wanted epiphanies or, at the very least, sweets at proscribed intervals. To my mind, *Relative Calm* is a radical refusal to make sense of reality, but it is far from senseless; it is a meditation on human action that made me aware of the power of my own “commonplace” motions.

Filippo Marinetti, the Futurist writer of performance, encouraged his collaborators to “take pleasure in being booed: applause merely indicates something mediocre, dull, regurgitated or too well digested.”<sup>[9]</sup>

Performance, more than any other medium, necessitates negative capability because in reducing the boundaries between Art and life it forces the viewer or the participant to experience an aspect of life that is usually not given significance. If Performance is the leading contemporary expression of the open work of Art, there are many artists in other modes who narrow the gap between the world and its representations. These artists cut across the stylistic categories of postmodern pluralism and maintain the cutting edge of the avant-garde.

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#### Footnotes:

1. In *Performance by Artists*, eds. A. A. Bronson and Peggy Gale, Toronto: Art Metropole, 1979, p. 44.
2. Umberto Eco, *L’Oeuvre Ouverte*, trans. Chantal Roux de Beziex, Paris: editions du Seuil, 1964, p. 22. This is the revised and expanded French translation of *Opera Aperta*.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 78.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 77.
5. Jean Arp, *Arp on Arp: Poems, Essays and Memories*, trans. Joachim Neugroschell, New York: The Viking Press, 1972, p. 211.
6. John Cage, *Silence*, Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, p. 205.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 44.
8. Allan Kaprow, *Environments, Assemblages and Happenings*, New York: Harry Abrams, 1985, p. 188.
9. Bronson and Gale, p. 172.

# IMPROVIDEO: Interactive Broadcast Conceived as the New Direction of Subscription Television

Improvevideo. *Im-pro viz* (v.t. to make the best of materials at hand, to compose, speak, or perform without preparation.) *Vid'-i-o* (n. television)

Purpose: Establishing a parametric correlation between video content and the viewing audience's state of mind.

Media Technology is jarring. Interactive TV, Home Information Services, Electronic Newspapers, Satellites, Electronic Mail...jarring. Imagine going to your TV set, fiddling with the dials, and tuning into a program of yourself in a heretic's library, flipping channels and finding images of aliens on every channel, all talking to you. Jarring. I'm talking to you live from a heretic's library of video. Today's show is about interactive improvevised television. IMPROVIDEO for short. In four parts: I—Meet the Concept; II—A Few Precedents; III—A Parts List; IV—Considerations.

## I—Meet the concept.

Here's IMPROVIDEO. A Program or real time improvisation on live TV, with cues provided by the viewing audience also in real time. Like the talk show, it includes cameo performances, exposition of "personality," and a moderator (main character) who represents the audience's mind. Yet the "guests" are drawn from a troupe of trained improvisers, who appear regularly on the show, and who interact as in a serial or soap opera. There is a narrative base.

The parameters of the narrative base are determined by local demographics.

For example, a program for a university town like Berkeley might be about a teacher at the university. A loose script—defining only location and general character outline—would be developed for the first few episodes. Say it outlines a teacher/student relationship, a teacher (male) of computer literacy meets a foreign exchange student (female) in the English department. She wants to transfer from Lit to computers. Enter the conflict: transfers by foreign students require a year processing, further complicated by... Enter the audience.

The third episode opens with a choice of four different possibilities: 1) a jealous girlfriend; 2) the student is a spy; 3) the teacher falls ill; 4) resolution, the student is transferred. Interactive technology, by cable or telephone, allows the viewing audience to choose one. The vote is tallied halfway through the show, and displayed on the screen.

By the end of the show, the new direction will have taken hold.

Interactive technology is a media buzz word for audience response. It used to be just fan mail, perhaps a phone call to a station. The next step was two-way cable, with a viewer control pad equipped with several response modes. Then came a telephone innovation: an 800 or 900 prefix that feeds into a computer bank, the vote instantly tallied, and results available on printout. No busy signals. Though any of these feedback ducts would work, the last two—two-way cable, and phone line polling—would be best suited for IMPROVIDEO.

Unlike most video art, IMPROVIDEO's premise is: COMMERCIAL T.V. IS THE BEST USE OF THE MEDIUM. So the doctrines of commercialism and advertising, that define TV as we know it today, become the conceptual foundation for this program. Most prominent among them are:

1) *Audience Demographics*: Networks want to know as much as they can about their audience. This helps raise advertising support, and increase chances of program renewal. Average income, age, illness, sports, hobbies, number of children, vacations...All this information is culled by programmers today using questionnaire, phone interview and Nielsen ratings. But today all these facts go to determine what advertising goes with what program's audience. IMPROVIDEO uses this information to design a show relevant to the community that watches it. (More on this in Narrowcasting).

2) *Audience Feedback*: Shows and advertising work together to get the audience to do something. Usually buy. But sometimes to vote, or change themselves, or their lifestyles. This indirect feedback is also measured by networks, and used as fodder for ad campaigns. The feedback loop that starts in TV is routed through the marketplace, where it is measured, and fed into advertising revenues. These revenues generate money for the show and the loop is regenerated. IMPROVIDEO shortens the loop. TV out, TV in. Audience feedback is direct, and goes where it should: to shape the program rather than the viewer's sense of identity.

3) *Live TV is more real and more interesting to watch*: The recent rash of "live" weekend shows proves the point. Live TV is full of risks, and has an aesthetic of its own, even when replayed. There is a shared time frame: three o'clock at your house is three o'clock on T.V. There is also the need to adlib. When you watch live TV, you watch for mistakes, for when Dick Cavett has to use his quick wit to cover for missing a cue. That's interesting - but it's not enough. IMPROVIDEO embraces the aesthetic of live TV, and capitalizes on it's inherent values. (More on this in Improv.)

*IMPROVIDEO might just be a cross between Johnny Carson's monologue, news coverage of Reagan's assassination, and Nam June Paik's self parody.*

## II—A Few Precedents

Q: Why was the first interactive TV show in the country (QUBE) set up in Columbus, Ohio? A: Because Columbus is the most "average" city in the country, according to demographic information.

QUBE has been testing interactive programming on cable for several years. *Soho Wants To Know*, a program profiled in a recent issue of *ART COM*, is indicative of QUBE's idea of interaction. It was done as a talk show that introduced artists' videotapes made in Soho to the Columbus audience. Viewers responded by saying what they liked and didn't like. That was it. The program was a success because viewers answered. In no way was this audience feedback applied to shaping the program.

QUBE is Warner/Amex's market study. Its purpose is to try out interactive technology on a statistically average mind, and find out what it likes and doesn't like. It fulfills its purpose admirably.

Karen Frank, of KQED San Francisco, was honored with an award by the National Cable TV Association at their 1981 conference in Los Angeles. What did she do? She designed and executed an interactive talk show, aired locally on Channel 9. The show relied on telephone lines for instant audience response. It was a great success. But it wasn't on cable, so why was the NCTVA moved to award her for the show? Because it demonstrated the workability of audience response. Yes, there are people out there who want to express their views.

I was at that convention. It boasted of three thousand participants. Among them, UTV, a New Jersey based national cable network. Over its booth it had a huge sign that read: "You're the You in UTV." I gasped. Had someone beaten me to the studio?

UTV offers special programming it calls INVOLVISION to local cable franchises from coast to coast. Unlike pay TV (i.e. HBO) it is advertiser supported, and costs the viewer nothing. Cable franchise owners are paid to carry UTV programming, as in the broadcast/affiliate relationship.

INVOLVISION offers weekly horseracing—"If your viewer picks a winner he wins a prize"—a weekly investment/game show—"Learn to make investment judgments...for fun and free prizes"—along with a help-wanted and shop-at-home service. Its "Sports Wrap" even calls for viewers to talk with each other and athletes and compare notes.

All of the above rely on an 800/900 number for audience feedback. Serving a national market, UTV's programming is similar to network television. UTV hopes to be the National Interactive Network.

### III—A Parts List

Q: Can a TV show be more than the sum of its parts? A: Yes. But why add when you can multiply?

Today television is linear, a process based on addition and subtraction. You add characters, you subtract a sponsor, you add conflict, you subtract an audience share.

IMPROVIDEO seeks video multiplication. Improvisation can't be quantified in advance but has a multiplier effect when performed. Each character improvising on what the other characters have just done. It is a loosely defined parameter. The results cannot be quantified in advance. Same with audience response. Performance is solving an equa-

tion with multiple unknowns. Opening a direct feedback duct for audience opinion is a nonlinear factor. These loose parameters, used in conjunction, resonate.

1) *Improvisation*: Often confused with comedy ad-libbing, as in a nightclub or by David Steinberg. But ad-libbing is only part of the picture. The rest is more dramatic, especially when done by a group. Trust and cooperation, the underlying assumptions of improv acting, give the performers the freedom to create on impulse confident that the other actors will not leave them hanging. While ad-lib plays a part in this, it is the result rather than the cause of creation in the moment. The characters' interaction is complex, unpredictable, directionless at times, rambling. Suddenly resolution, recognition hits. Like successful short stories or novels, the digression is a ploy to keep the reader/viewer off balance. Then BAM. You're on familiar turf, and somehow you feel the story is about you. This is the aesthetic of live TV.

2) *Viewer Feedback*: A mirror in four dimensions: three by four (screen size) times time, times opinion. What can happen in a program that changes with the audience? With interactive technology, all calls will be answered, not just the fourth or fifth. The opportunity to compare your self with a program that mirrors community change is a new direction in TV. The future of IMPROVIDEO, even after six months, is hard to predict. A local program that began as a situation comedy in an academic community could evolve into a suburban murder mystery. Viewer expectations, long limited by formula writing and acting, would drive the program to hybrid formats, and perhaps create totally unknown story lines. Perhaps most exciting would be the occasional instance where majority viewer opinion is ignored in favor of a minority view.

3) *Narrowcasting*: Another media buzz word, narrowcasting is the inverse of broadcasting: it aims at a select audience, rather than the largest possible viewership. We've seen it in specialty magazines that cater to a city, or a neighborhood, or an ethnic group within that neighborhood, in radio programming for 21-33 year olds in metropolitan areas, for 65 and over audiences in the suburbs... It's been around. Cable and low-power TV make narrowcasting for television an important next step. Since it's getting harder and harder to take the majority of audience share, limiting the possible audience and going for it makes a lot of sense.

It also makes IMPROVIDEO a valuable programming tool, helping the cable or low-power station find out more about its audience all the time. Using demographics to design a program, then changing the program as those demographics change, makes IMPROVIDEO a living mirror of the viewers' local environment. In hard times, for instance, the program could change to address economic and job-related issues. If the Pope had been shot while IMPROVIDEO was on the air, it could have become part of the show in a moment's notice, with no break in the program continuity.

### IV—Considerations

Success of a TV program is a financial matter. Who picks up the tab of IMPROVIDEO? Corporate sponsorship, government funding, advertising support, or pay TV arrangements are all possible, and would depend on the local business climate. In Berkeley, for example, government funding or industry sponsorship would be more available than in the suburbs, where advertisers would jump at the opportunity to appear before or after

the show. The use of products in the show is a distinct possibility, since they contribute to the reality of the situations. The usual "Courtesy of..." disclaimer at the end of the show would clarify the commercial nature of the products used.

Real-time production is stickier. The viewing public is used to very slick, sophisticated cutting, editing and special effects on TV. IMPROVIDEO might at first seem less interesting because it lacks the sheen of pre-taped, rehearsed programming. With time, and drawing on sophisticated real-time techniques developed by video artists, the production could equal or surpass TV of today in visual impact. Since IMPROVIDEO is a new direction in TV, it would have to evolve its own aesthetic. That can only take root when we go into production.

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Carl Loeffler

## Performing Post-Performancist Performance Part I

Lights out! Up stage lights one and two, dim down, now up with the audio-pre-recorded first, then mix the live mics. On Video Tape Recorder (VTR) one and five seconds into program cut to camera two. Fade down stage lights. Turn on the follow spot. Change tapes. Cut to VTR one. Program out. On to intermission. Change sets.

"Nothing exists in meaning unless you let it."

—Bob & Bob, *Across America lyrics*, 1981.

"There is no definition of 'performance,' or there are many definitions, but none of them are good for anything. Performance is very social and also very individual, very clean and very confusing. Very natural and very artificial, very healthy and terribly sick... very contradictory...the word 'Performance Art' is boring."

—Monty Cantsin, from *Art Montreal*, 1981.

*Performance Anthology: Source Book for a Decade of California Performance Art* not only documents the live Art activity of the Seventies but closes the door upon it as well. Strange, that definition leads to dismissal like a used up lover. Sensation understood leads to the rejection of same; but what's to take the place of the sensation? "Whence do we come: what are we; where are we going?"

"I just want to fuck, I don't like to kiss."

—Kathy Acker, from *Portrait in Red*.

"Anybody can be Monty Cantsin. This sounds very stupid, I know, but I don't care, stupidity irritates people and that's what I want."

—Monty Cantsin, from *Art Montreal*, 1980.

"Shoot the Survivors."

—G.P. Skratz, from *I Don't Give a Shit*, lyrics, 1981.

It is November of 1981. Raining here in San Francisco. Influx of creatures on the streets day and night. Haig says to drop the bomb for show biz war! Art? Art is the life that finds audience in cabarets, clubs, and scenes of loud music, booze, and confrontation. Live Art circa 1981 soon to be '82 is show biz. Momentary; illusionary; illusive; rehearsed chaos. Change channel for tonight's program...all new!

"2-3-4...what are we fighting for...and it's 5-6-7-8...open up those pearly gates...we're all gonna die!"

—Country Joe MacDonald, circa 1960's, lyrics.

December at La Mabelle's *Performing Performance Cabaret*, LIVE surgery is performed as video performance while an audio blip from a telemetry system tells us that every

thing is O.K.! G.P. Skratz gives us a moment-by-moment commentary and the bar is open. Send out for more beer—the crowd is thirsty tonight. Color camera is zooming in for a tight shot. Focus. Red everywhere over a glistening surface. Importance; meaning?

“That veneration of the past be displaced by a discourse with the present and future. An end to the cultism of masterpieces.”

—Al Razutis, from *Manifesto: Cinema Art*, 1980.

“Don’t touch/brush near/Don’t kiss.”

—Linda Frye Burnham, from *Don’t Kiss*, 1981.

“I only eat candy.”

—Andy Warhol, from *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol (From A to B & Back Again)*, 1975.

It was inevitable that the head of theatricality which Michael Fried so warned us of would become our fascination. *Art and Objecthood*, an essay written by Fried in 1967, speaks very clearly against minimalist tendency of “presence” and the encroachment of theatre upon visual Art:

“At this point I want to make a claim that I cannot hope to prove or substantiate, but that I believe nevertheless to be true: viz., that theatre and theatricality are at war today, not simply with modernist painting (or modernist painting and sculpture), but with Art as such and to the extent that the different Arts can be described as modernist, with modernist sensibility as such. This claim can be broken down into three propositions or theses:

- 1) The success, even the survival, of the Arts has come increasingly to depend on their ability to defeat theatre.
- 2) Art degenerates as it approaches the condition of theatre.
- 3) The concepts of quality and value—and to the extent that these are central to Art, the concept of Art itself—are meaningful, or wholly meaningful, only WITHIN the individual Arts. What lies BETWEEN the Arts is theatre.”

What was shocking to the reductive formalists of the ‘60s has become an important milieu for the ‘80s. Current interests in the manner of theatrical presentation of performance are illuminated by recapping artists’ continuing pursuit of life. A quest which presently has led, if not to life itself, then to the performance of life’s sensations, complexity, and certainly contradictions. Performing such often retorts to a myriad of overlapping planes of consciousness and meaning which appear spectacle-like and entertaining by virtue of its own performance.

“What interests me in these productions is a boundless readiness for storytelling and exaggeration, a readiness that has become a principle...the nervous systems have become extremely sensitive. Absolute dance, absolute poetry, absolute Art—what is meant is that a minimum of impressions is enough to evoke unusual images. Everyone has become mediumistic: from fear, from terror, from agony, or because there are no laws anymore—who knows? Perhaps it is only that our conscience is so frightened, burdened, and tortured that it reacts with the most stupendous lies and pretenses (fictions and images) at the least provocation, provided that one will grant that images are only just to conceal, heal, lead astray, and divert from wounds received.”

—Hugo Ball, from *Flight Out of Time*, 1917.

“The cops in Chicago are scary.  
The Alamo makes you think about  
American history.  
Animals are perfect.  
You can’t help but think of  
corn in Iowa.  
You can’t help but think of  
potatoes in Idaho.  
You can’t help but think of cheese  
in Wisconsin.  
You can’t help but think of cars in  
Detroit.  
You can’t help but think of oysters  
in Louisiana.  
You can’t help but think of tobacco  
in Winston-Salem.  
You can’t help but think of truckers  
on the highway.  
You can’t help but think on the  
highway.  
You can’t help but feel on the  
highway.  
Snow makes you spin out.”

—Bob & Bob, from *Across America*, lyrics, 1981.

Mediumistic—that’s what it is—mediumistic! Chris Burden in *There Have Been Some Pretty Wild Rumours About Me Lately* (1981) sits behind a desk on a proscenium stage and reads from a yellow legal pad. The two microphones smack in front of his face blare out (through a mammoth P.A. system) notes from a mythical life. The audience (massive) recoils line after line of a life turned fiction extreme. Machine guns, sex, the police, drugs, drama, and all the elements of a good Hollywood story are in place. Burden, desensitized by excess to the spectacle of his life’s performance, performs, in a bored, detached manner, his recollection. I recall, “A minimum of impressions is enough to evoke unusual images.”

There is also the back-up system of the multimedia, an arena that expands with each new hardware invention or application. Failsafe? At times, yes. A predilection based on overwhelming them into place, if not all together turning it loose.

“About midnight a large group of Dutch boys arrives. They have banjos and mandolins with them and act like perfect fools...He (the star performer) gets up on the stage and executes steps with all kinds of twists, bends, and shakes of the knee...So they dance and turn the whole place topsy-turvy...The jingling carnival goes right out onto the street.”

—Hugo Ball, from *Flight Out of Time*, 1916.

Fall of 1981, G.P. Skratz, Paul Cotton, and a company of three form Novacaine, a “New Wave” jug band for the performance of numb wave music applicable to Punk hoe-downs. To the accompaniment of violins, fiddles, tub base, scrub board, jugs, gourds, and the like they sing:

“Get me to the wheelchair,  
get me to the show.  
Hurry, hurry, hurry,  
before I go loco,  
I can’t control my fingers,  
I can’t control my toes,  
Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh...  
I WANNA BE SEDATED.”  
The Ramones, lyrics.

On the other side I find it interesting to see an onslaught of the application of very cheap devices such as flash powder, black lights, and the mask finding their way into the performance arena. Previously such elements reserved for magical eclectics are now conjured up and thrust out upon the audience with all the intended impact of electronic mystification. Excuse for a simplicity of means?

“The form of present day theatre is impressionistic. What happens on the stage appeals to the individual and his intellect...The new theatre will use masks and stilts again, it will recall archetypes and use megaphones. Sun and moon will run across the stage and proclaim their sublime wisdom.”

—Hugo Ball, from *Flight Out of Time*, 1913.

“The cliché has been leaping so merrily from the service of lip to lip in the half decade since the Ramones and the Sex Pistols has been that Art, and particularly performance has been revived by New Wave... Suddenly we are given to understand that all Art has been theretofore characterized by a funereal, or at least pedagogic, solemnity, but that this can all be remedied by cranking the P.A. up to 120 db., throwing in some tap, one liners and found footage, keeping the works below 20 minutes and serving beer. How did we arrive at this pretty pass?”

—Michael Peppe, from *Why Performance Art is So Boring*, 1981.

“The true appreciator of performance... is simply more interested in human nature than he is in Art. The idea of this kind of Art is a lot more satisfying than the Art itself. Something tells me that it is important—not what these people do, but the fact that they are doing it.”

—Linda Frye Burnham, from *High Performance*, 1981.

“Fuck you and so what?!”

—from the audience at La Mamelle’s *Performing Performance Cabaret*, 1981.

Last night I attended a sort of private studio performance and video screening by Richard Alpert, one of SF’s “second generation” performance artist. Alpert’s performance was narrative in base and in the end evidenced itself through a drawing reflexive of the process; standard stuff, although highly professional on the part of the artist. But all the while I kept reflecting on the idea of this being a studio performance. The subtle impact of same comes into view when I recall Paul Cotton informing me a week or so earlier that he was performing a work in his studio and that he had many reservations about the now rampant style of cabaret presentation for performance. I predict that we will witness many more such studio performances in the time to come. The positions and questions that spring to mind spurred by the notion of studio works is interesting in light

of the current context for the presentation of performance and Cotton’s questions. Perhaps all will become clearer when I convey that at this very same studio performance, Cotton, in discussion afterwards, commented that he more or less felt like a dinosaur, and that he was going to mount his infamous *Astralnaught suit* within a cage and probably sell it to a museum. Hmmm. What is going on? What does it mean when first rank artists like Alpert and Cotton opt to do a performance within the control led confines of meaning found in their studios? What does it mean when San Francisco artist Tony Labat stands up on a chair for a performance at La Mamelle and in the manner of a Cuban Lenny Bruce says that everything, including La Mamelle, sucks, and that if you think this is cabaret you suck and that you-should-have seen-what-they-used-to-do-but-nobody-does-it-anymore-because, “...it was too much work... too hard.” What does it mean when SF’s video producer Joe Rees, a videophonic-Bruce-Conner, says, in one of our town’s local advertiser Art rags that he was spinning his wheels doing performance and opted for the mass audience...are we to interpret this as opted for mass audience at the price of integrity? Is integrity the root of Cotton’s dilemma? What is the integrity of the 80s and does the integrity of the past decade presently compute? Does it matter? Does the past ever compute in the present let alone in the future? I am reminded of a conversation I had with Joanne Kelly of Video Free America (VFA) fame...she recounted the horror story of conversing via telephone with one of our local advertiser Art rags’ video columnist who off-handedly referred to VFA’s visiting artist Nam June Paik, perhaps the greatest name in video Art, as “some third world artist.” Or another local, self-described Art critic star, Suzaan Boettger, who, in the offices of La Mamelle, was confused over the distinctive difference between the infamous Ant Farm and the great, vast project created by Bonnie Sherk, The Farm. Who are these writers? Where did they come from? Where are they going? Most importantly, because they write for our town’s current glut of trashy, Art advertisers, where are they taking us? Last, but not forgotten, what does all this mean? What is the bottom line here? From the city walls I read—The Minimalists are dead and long live the Punks...I wonder.

“Dance on, fair, dear Art, dance on...and on.”

—Douglas Davis, from *Post-Performancism*, 1981.

Program Out. Cut VTR.

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## Performing Post-Performancist Performance Part II

The following is part two of a continuing series on performance art. Part I, published in *Art Com 16*, was more or less a script conveying the form and attitude inherent to contemporary new performance type works. In short, it should be regarded as a script-type work possessing the notion of what attitudinally constitutes new performance. Part II is concerned with what's new in performance art.

New...1. not old: recent: modern. 2. different from the former. 3. recently discovered. recognized or learned about. 4. not formerly known or experienced: unfamiliar. 5. not accustomed. 6. beginning as a repetition of a previous act or thing. 7. refreshed, regenerated. 8. being in a position or place for the first time.

While the Eighties push on, it becomes clearer and clearer that performance art is in transition. By saying transition I do not mean the dissolution of its form dwindling away into other media, but rather the expansion of the definition of its form and possible venues. There are specific cross currents and backlashes taking place worthy of discussion in light of the supposed theme of what's new in performance. The most paramount of currents is the rampant rumor that performance is dead and that painting is next in line. Such notions are supported in part by *Flash Art* magazine which in a recent issue published a lead article on the movement from performance to painting.

"Objectively speaking, a few years ago it would have been difficult to imagine that media such as performance, installation and photography could be contaminated or, rather, taken over by analines, color and painting; particularly in view of the mental rigor that accompanied the work of some of these artists.

And yet, in the space of just a few years or a few months, artists who had succeeded in frustrating their manual skill and creative abilities by adopting a moral severity that often impoverished their work, have abandoned the technicalities of installation and the mental and physical stress of performance."<sup>[1]</sup>

Fortunately, Helena Kontova's essay puts this condition in perspective by adding, "It must be stressed, at this point, that the painting associated with the concepts of action and performance is certainly not new; there are numerous precedents and precursors in the history of the avant-gardes..."<sup>[2]</sup>

Clearly, performance has always had a relationship to painting and other media, so for painting to appear to be of sudden interest is not such a heady change in tradition or direction. Simply recalling Marcel Duchamp, Yves Klein, and Robert Rauschenberg bears witness to the historical validity of this statement. Contemporaneous examples include a vast multitude who, as performance artists, have made a cross-over to painting or who have worked through a variety of media all along. In the early Seventies, Vancou-

ver artists Eric Metcalfe, Kate Craig, Michael Morris, Glenn Lewis, and General Idea (in Toronto) produced performances and 2-D art including painting. In San Francisco, Tom Marioni, founding Director of the Museum of Conceptual Art (MOCA), since the late seventies, has produced drawings resulting from performance type actions. In 1976 Marioni commissioned David Ireland to restore a portion of MOCA, "It was making a painting, a very large painting, where the idea was clear...we had a photograph and all we had to do was make a photo-realistic painting."<sup>[3]</sup> In Los Angeles Bob & Bob, a performance duo lets-do-everything Art team, are well noted for their performance antics and painting. The Bobs presented *SEX IS STUPID* at the Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art in 1979, integrating performance and painting. Factually, the performance revolved around the exhibition and sale of twenty-five paintings. "When the magic hour arrived, the crowd tumbled into the main gallery to see the paintings lined up on the walls, each one tagged with a number. Without pause, hands reached out to grab the numbers and all the paintings were sold within ten minutes...When the dust cleared, Bob and Bob were visible hanging high on the wall...as if to say, 'We are the art.'"<sup>[4]</sup> Buster Cleveland and E.F. Higgins, who for all intent and purposes reside in New York, produce performances, correspondence Art and paintings. Cleveland, who does fantastic Merz-like collages, is presently working in watercolor and egg tempera, while Higgins has been a portrait painter in addition to all else for the better part of a decade. Performance artists do have an interest in painting and have utilized the medium all along either as an aspect of documentation or as a primary form in itself. What needs overhauling is not the current performance-painting debate, but rather the categorization of artists. It remains far too stunted to refer to artists as painters or any other medium handle that can be thrust forward.

It is interesting to consider why painting is suddenly appearing as the next wave. Perhaps this development is best described in terms of the economy and the shock value of art. The economic outlook for this planet is grim and we see all around us that the population is ill at ease with the situation. Never before have I heard such a continuing preoccupation with money as the current tune. Artists, and the related support structures are no different and painting appears to hold the promise of quick bucks. After all, the field has had a sense of moratorium on the painting medium and now might be the time to develop some careers. Apart from my crass commercialist statements, the remains exciting content in the apparent rise of painting with regard to shock value. Face it, for performance artists to produce paintings is shocking and results in perceiving painting as a marginal medium capable of calling attention to ideas. Recalling 'the Seventies' means recalling the profusion of marginal media employed by visual artists for the sake of experimentation and shock. Performances, Xerox, artists' books, video and music are primary examples. Painting can now be added to the list.

In addition to the cross-current of painting, within the realm of performance art there are astounding backlashes occurring as well. Presently, it seems as though Theatre is attempting to claim performance; a previously unexpected twist of fate. Throughout the Seventies performance continued to approach the theatrical experience. This is exemplified by acknowledgement of the audience, narrative structures, and the application of theatrical devices such as the proscenium stage. Further, in the Eighties, performance is well entrenched in theatrical venues inclusive of cabaret, nightclub and the operatic. The preoccupation with theatre is antithetical to the high art proclamation of Michael Fried, who, fourteen years ago in *Artforum*, warned, "The success, even the survival of

the arts, has come increasingly to depend on their ability to defeat theatre.”

Fried’s well intended warning, although now an art/literary cliché, is presently largely ignored by performance as the approach of theatre and “low art” is encouraged through the acceptance and expanded definition of performance. It should be stated that experimentation is healthy and performance lends itself to testing new definitions and venues. Performance is an open ended visual art form applicable to whatever situation or condition that may arise. In this regard performance is the ideal form for experimentation and the ideal container for the undefined. The borders of performance are highly flexible. So much so that Douglas Davis stated in a recent *Artforum* essay, “To hell with medium-as-medium, structure-as-structure, New-Wave-as-the-next-thing... Let us have instead a reliable verbal umbrella: ‘Post-Performancism.’” Davis’ attempt to nullify the Fried proclamation did not go unnoticed by theatre spokespersons although inspirational to performance practitioners. At last Davis suggested the approach to end the Fried debate for the visual arts, but surprisingly, theatre reissued the argument.

An essay in the current issue of *Live*, edited by Bonnie Marranca and published in New York, carries the strongest attack on visual Art performance to date. Besides unabashedly denouncing Davis in an unnecessary manner equivalent to petty personal argument and approaching slander, Marranca clearly attempts to cut the throat of performance. “The mistake of the Art world was to believe in the first place that performance is an *art* form when in fact it is a *theatrical* form with its own set of imperatives. One cannot circumscribe performance within the modernist doctrine... The theatrical impulse lives its own aesthetic cycle outside of faddish Art talk. And if ‘performance art’ is to have an ongoing life, it will have to be saved by theatre.”<sup>[5]</sup> Let’s get the facts straight. Performance is a Visual Art form with a highly established and recounted history of experimentation, performance is not theatre nor will it ever be or wish to be if it means conforming to stilted ideas such as those of Marranca. Other equally insipid and unqualified comments in the essay can be cited, i.e., “(performance) ignored the matter of skill which theatre is based on,” or, “Artists accept anything as ‘performance,’ and, “...the solo performance form leads to a dead end because it is based exclusively on the personal experience, and with that as the sole resource, one can hardly expect it to be more than a brief phase, even exercise, in the life of an artist. Solo performance cannot create a ‘world’ in the space as theatre can.”

I remain suspect of the editorial position of *Live* and to quote Marranca, “This kind of writing is dangerous in its influence on artists and their public, and on performance itself.”

Clearly, performance art is in transition. Painting and theatre are only two media currently tested by performance. Other media include those previously mentioned and life itself. The future of performance as a visual art form is boundless.

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#### Footnotes:

1. “From Performance to Painting,” Helena Kontova, *Flash Art*, No. 106 1982.

2. Ibid.

3. The restoration of a portion of the back wall, ceiling, and floor of the Main Gallery of MOCA, *Performance Anthology*, San Francisco: Contemporary Arts Press, 1980, p. 206.

4. Bob & Bob, *Astro Artz*, 1980, p. 74.

5. “Soho’s Bourgeois Gentleman,” Douglas Davis, Bonnie Marranca, *Live* 6/7, 1982.

## Performing Post-Performancist Performance Part III

This is Part III of a continuing series on the subject of performance art. Part I was expressive of the form and attitude inherent to new performance type works while Part II was concerned with what's new in new performance. Part III will begin to explore new media: records, video, radio and television programming currently available to performance-type artists. Certainly such media as listed has been around for a while and has been utilized numerously for expressive purposes but seemingly there remains a change in attitude or approach to media that is interesting and new. So, if in fact the simple lure of media holds no charm unto itself, evidenced by the loss of shock value of a medium such as video exemplified by the Nam June Paik retrospective at the Whitney, what then is interesting about media? Considering the title *Revolutions Per Minute (The Art Record)* released by Ronald Feldman begins to lead toward the right direction.

For the greater part of my life I've been in awe of media. I can recall my first television experience and how impressed I was with those early stars who were beamed into the house weekly and often daily. I marveled over the concept of the networks and their production capability. I asked myself repeatedly, "How did they get to do that?" It has only been within a decade that I've come to understand the processes of television and my conclusion is that it's not so hard. In fact, the making of television becomes easier almost daily. This is not to say that television isn't a highly specialized field involving the talents of many skilled practitioners because of course, it is. A simple walk through a television control room will confirm this statement. But, nevertheless, television is becoming easier to deal with from the position of a visual artist.

Years ago who would have thought that Andy Warhol would have his own cablecast program along with Jaime Davidovich, *The Live Show* and other spectaculars as *Nightflight*, an eight-week series of video art coordinated by Electronic Arts Intermix and distributed by USA Cable Network. And conversely, extending into additional media—consider the Laurie Anderson/Warner deal and all of the murmurings about the videodisc although don't wait for that one as its death appears to be as long and drawn out as its rise.

Getting back to Laurie Anderson, isn't it interesting that general consensus embraces Anderson's cross over into Warner Bros, whole-heartedly with no apparent damage to the goods? Remember back, in the not too distant past, when such a crossover would have met with decries of protest and sell-out accusations. The fact of artists entering into the megamedia structures is important and signifies what all of us can expect more of in the future. In a recent *Artforum* article, the former co-editor of *Avalanche* magazine, Liza Bear, is quoted as saying, "It's a shift from hardware to software. We've explored the possible ways to tap into the technologies sufficiently. When we started it looked like there was going to be much more opportunity for the disenfranchised independent producer to have a stake in the new technologies, but instead, the feudal overlords have

accrued new territory. I feel the imperatives now are really to make programs that offer the viewer a different set of values and artistic views than they've been given so far." While Bear's program *Communications Update*, initiated in part with Michael McClard, Willoughby Sharp, and Rolf Brand, focuses upon the manipulations of television and cablecast in NYC, other new art television programming shuns the political for entertainment values such as in the case of *Andy Warhol's TV* or *The Live Show*. In all of the television programs mentioned, little or no evidence was apparent of a breakdown of intent or representation of values on the part of the artists behind the production. Seemingly, the bottom line here is that the megamedia structures are losing their grip on the nature of form and content within their programming. Roll over, NBC.

Certainly the picture I presented above is complicated with contradictions and in no way should be interpreted as a signifier of a total change in artists' relations with megamedia. Frankly, Laurie Anderson's is just one record deal and *Nightflight*, *Andy Warhol's TV* and *The Live Show* are tucked away in obscure cable television systems or programmed during generally inaccessible times. Artists' media production is still relegated to the minor leagues. Most of this production is under-funded, undistributable, and lacking a strong competitive edge. The term avant-garde may be dead as nothing is shocking anymore but the impoverished condition of the avant-gardist is still a reality and evident in artists media productions. If there was a sense of possible gain in the last five years or so, which in general is my thesis, will ground be lost now that the granting system is winding down in its support of new media?

Elsewhere in this issue Davidovich speaks of the importance of developing an audience in support of new media to assist in taking up the slack left by the exodus of the granting system. Nothing could be more true for the moment and my excitement with artists' influx toward mega-media is based on this perspective. Imagine who else Warner Bros. might consider following Laurie Anderson and consider how important the situation is for the development of the field. Years ago such a deal was the pie which now is becoming accessible. The equation is simple in that the more we get out there, the more we'll get out there. One of the single most necessary actions to be undertaken in the immediate future is the formulation of artist-based television programming positioned on national distribution during prime time. I could envision several programs and all of them are something other than the general programming of gallery-oriented video or film works as usually is the case of such programming.

How about Johnny Carson being replaced by Andy Warhol, or the 8 o'clock movies preempted by a serialized version of Eric Metcalf's *Steel and Flesh*. Michael Smith could fill the daylight hours with 'soaps' augmented by Mitchell Kriegman. And, of course, the evening news by Willoughby Sharp and Liza Bear. Sound interesting? It is and will be, noting that I framed all of this within the range of probable occurrence. The question, "Who will pay for all of this?" goes begging. The only possible answer resides in the structure of mega-media who can and will pay for it but only after it is demonstrated that it is wanted and that they can make money from it. What we have to do for the next decade is clear.

Somewhere in all of this I did want to talk about the album *Revolutions Per Minute (The Art Record)*, which, as a whole, is effective in assisting to broaden the marketability of artists' media. Appropriately, Robert C. Morgan's introduction to the record states, "by

seeking out avenues of financial backing, access to recording equipment, and expertise in advanced production techniques, experimental composers and performance artists have reintroduced a more significant use of recording media. Such outlets will continue to prove valuable among artists whose works are otherwise restricted to irregular engagements in lofts, galleries, colleges, and museum settings." *RPM* is an excellent model for the future packaging of what may otherwise be unpackageable. In listening to it one finds the good and the bad of their choice among the twenty-one original sound works featured. Morgan classifies the selections in the following categories: Sound work compositions, allegorical narrative, situation and encounters, songs, and heuristic texts.

Although *RPM* is heavy on the narrative, which becomes tiring, there are, spectacular contributions by Les Levine and Terry Fox. Levine, in a country western style, performs songs on the subject of topical issues in a straight but humorous manner. Fox gets first prize for the excerpt from *International Sound*, an eighteen hour (three day) performance in the old church of Santa Lucia, Bologna, Italy in 1979. For the work Fox installed two piano wires the length of the church (three-hundred feet), which are played with the fingers to create a continuous and ever-changing drone. The excerpt contains the result of plucking one of the wires with his fingernail which, in effect, produces a sense of electronic sound from acoustic means utilizing no manipulation or amplification by electronic sources. I played the cut repeatedly and still wanted to hear it again. I've had the opportunity to experience many of Fox's performances while he was 'in residence' in San Francisco, and I'm not disappointed by the recording. The biggest disappointment to be found is Chris Burden's recording of the *Atomic Alphabet*. I regarded this cut as way under-produced and inconsistent with the rest of the record. The *Alphabet* is an interesting work which is specifically poignant for the times but here suffers in presentation either due to the quality of the initial recording or the post-production efforts. All in all *RPM* is worth it.

Continuing with records, the L.A. Bobs are at it again but this time only one of them. *One Job Bob*, starring the 'dark Bob,' is hysterical. I guess we can consider it the DB's Bob Dylan phase who here performs highly personal and introspective lyrics to the tune of "A Hard Rain's Gonna Fall," accompanied by the 'light Bob' on guitar and M. LeDonne-Bhennet on clarinet and piano. Imagine the following:

*There's prissy  
And there's raunchy  
And there's Laurie Anderson  
And there's Vito Acconci  
And there's Joseph Beuys  
And there's Bob & Bob  
And there's being an artist  
And there's gettin' a job  
And there's slow  
And fast  
And present  
And past  
And this  
And that  
And dog  
And cat  
And thin  
And fat  
And hit  
And miss  
And bite  
And kiss  
And Dick  
And Jane  
And modest  
And vain*

It's interesting that the apparent main influence at work here is Dylan who DB parodies with a rising and falling broken voice drawing out the essentials. Expect no less than a good dose of L.A. based art gossip, tragedy, and travelling recollections packaged in a recording humorously reminiscent of, say, *Blonde on Blonde* or even in spots, *Highway 61*. Dylan it's not and if released in the sixties it most likely would have been tossed into a discount bin along with The Monkees and Paul Revere and the Raiders, I gauge it required listening.

In part four of this continuing series I'll pursue additional television programs, video discs, more records and related software.

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# Performing Post-Performancist Performance or The Televisionist Performing Televisionism

The current tendency of the visual artist crossing over into mega-media venues was expressed in two recent projects occurring within the format of television. The University of Iowa in Iowa City was the project site for the *Artist and Television* conference, a massive telecommunication event transmitted via satellite to over three-hundred cities in forty-three states. And the Mendel Art Gallery in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada, sponsored *PRIME TIME VIDEO*, an original video art project featuring 5 works produced for prime time broadcast television in cooperation with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC). Both projects are ruggedly aggressive toward interfacing visual artists with television and attempted to deal with television in its own terms: production value, entertainment factor, distribution, and sponsorship. A discussion of the debatable success of the projects follows, but in conclusion, both projects are important signifiers of increased crossover activity between visual artists and television in the future.

Perhaps the most notable name in the distribution of video art on television is Jaime Davidovich who with Estera Pollock hosted the *Artist and Television* transmission. The project conjoined live interaction from sites in Iowa City, New York, and Los Angeles and was distributed via satellite to over forty-three states. If participation and distribution are the measure, this project is the model. Each of the three interactive sites organized a multitude of activity intended for participation. The three hours scheduled for the actual transmission could not accommodate all of the activity prepared for the format. Yet the transmission contained an enormous amount of interaction and remains the most collaborative and widely distributed artist-based satellite work in the history of video art.

Speaking as an active participant in Iowa City, the excitement was terrific and the pressure enormous. Jokes were made about the historic nature of the transmission to vent the mounting tension as scripts were passed around and makeup applied. History was in the making and the potential audience was, in one word, massive. The camera lights went up and the transmission opened with hosts Davidovich and Pollock, who in the manner of television anchor persons, weaved through an odyssey of dialogue, interviews, prerecorded video art, most often interactive in concept, originating from the three project sites. For those of you who missed it, PBS is rumored to broadcast an edited version of the transmission at a later date.

The crossover of visual artists into television raises the particular question: where does video leave off and television begin? Even more important, does the participation of video artists and television result in the production of what can be termed television art? In order to heighten the drama of these briefly stated questions this essay is retitled, "The Televisionist Performing Televisionism," to suggest a sense of change taking place

in visual artists' approach to the television medium. There is a difference between video and television and for years the misidentification of the terms has been troublesome. In an attempt to clarify the situation, the following distinctions between video (art) and television (art) are proposed:

Video art is often presented in a gallery context or a "framed" segment of television.

Television art is presented in an "unframed" television context or "framed" gallery situation.

Video art is subject to the criticism applied to painting and sculpture.

Television art is derived from painting and sculpture but subject to the criticism of the information environment.

Video art is subject to the high art value of the individual as genius.

Television art is dependent upon a production crew and obscures the genius of the individual.

Video art is perceived as an art commodity that increases in value over time.

Television art is perceived as information that only has value for as long as it is useful.

Video art is distributed to an art audience

Television art is distributed to a non-art audience.

Video art applies hardware as an aspect of mystification.

Television art applies hardware to become more accessible.

Video Art is funded by the art system of grants and patrons.

Television art is funded by investment groups, advertising, and mega-distribution.

Video art looks to the art context for meaning in the end.

Television art looks to the art context as a means to the end.

The development of a television art can be substantiated but the remaining question is: assuming that the ultimate criticism of television art resides in the ratings, will television artists cease to be identified as practitioners of visual art and become television producers? Perhaps the next "art book" to appear will be titled, *The Painted Tube!*

Returning to the two projects mentioned, the *Artist and Television* transmission and the *Prime Time Video* series, are they to be regarded as video art or television art? Although important as both of the projects are in the development of a television art, both are transitional, and more aligned to video art than television art. The internal conflict

suggested is evidenced in the *Artist and Television* transmission that by virtue of the title isolates the artist from television and “frames” the experience as a function of art. Additionally, the nature of the live performative-type works selected for the transmission were vastly inappropriate and better placed in an artist-space situation—in this context, they came across as performance art works on television. Performance art does not fare well in a tightly scheduled format. One disaster in the transmission was Chris Burden’s performance (by the way, not interactive), which developed technical problems and was cut off prior to completion when the time allotted was exceeded. The greatest video art signifier of the transmission was the endless technical problems with the enormous system employed. Not that technical credit should not be granted here. Factually, the transmission was a massive undertaking but the limited budget available and typical last minute “art scrambling” positioned this project within the context of “under-budgeted visual art” where the idea is often more interesting than the execution. The most televisionist aspects of the transmission consisted of the anchors Davidovich and Pollock, who came across as wonderfully predictable television hosts replete with posed opening smiles, speaking in phrases completed by the other, and utilizing the standard devices in television when introducing station breaks, program segments, or returning from same. The massive distribution of the transmission is another example of televisionism carried out to stunning completion. Regarding performance, the most successful was produced by John Sturgeon and Aysha Quinn (in Iowa City) and interactive with Gary Lloyd (in Los Angeles). Consisting of overlapping visuals and audio, the piece was wonderful to watch and provided accessible open interpretation for a general television viewing audience. The successes of the transmission are to be found in those areas of the program that in some manner were concerned with the conventions of television. The ultimate function of the television artist is to take the conventions of television to a further conclusion.

The *Prime Time Video* series sponsored by the Mendel Art Gallery was produced to be entertaining for a television viewing audience. The concept of the project is televisionistic but transitional in execution. The series title and the nature of the videotapes produced, positions this project within the context of video art on television. Surprisingly, only three of the five videotapes in the series are interesting as video art let alone television. In short, as important as this project is toward the development of a television art, the series is uneven in concept, production value, and in application to a television viewing audience.

The most successful work is Noel Harding’s *People’s Homes Belong to Those Who Live In Them*, a primary example of video art if not television art. The success of this production is derived from well-paced edits, compelling special effects, performative aspects, and an exceptional audio track that weaves in and out of the work in a sculptural manner. The camera shots are a real attention grabber. Television viewers will stick with this one just to see what it is all about. Elizabeth Chitty’s contribution, in essence a love story (made for TV), utilizes one of the most spectacular opening scenes witnessed: zooming from outside of a window into a home, to a television set displaying a slow vertical roll and accompanied by an audio track suggestive of an amplified heart beat. When the zoom is completed the set is near full frame and Chitty interacts with it in a manner representative of preoccupations expressed in her recent performance, *History, Color TV & You*. From there the videotape tends to drag, but what an opening sequence. The most accessible work to a television audience is John Sanborn and Kit Fitzgerald’s

production. In comparison to their other work this videotape is restrained in application of special effects. The success of this work resides in the subtle manipulation of images familiar to the Canadian plains. Opening on a shot of a grain tower the videotape unfolds accumulated images of wheat fields, harvest machines, tractors, farm houses, each subtly manipulated to hold the attention of a video art audience yet identifiable for a television audience. The remaining videotapes in question were produced by General Idea and Stuart Sherman. General Idea’s videotape is far too long and too narrative. Conjoining black and white segments with color in the production is interesting but what ever happened to their acute sensibility expressed in *Pilot*, a superb example of video art. Sherman’s work is intended to amuse children but this is doubtful.

*Prime Time Video* has sensational aspects to it. The most impressive is the sponsorship of the CBC. Factually, the quality of the series resides in the production value of the videotapes, which could not have been attained in this situation without the support of the CBC. In this regard, the series is televisionist in nature and will serve as an important model for future activity.

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## Talking Back to Television

Between September 1980 and August 1981, *The All Night Show* developed a cult following in Toronto. Broadcast by MTV, Toronto's multilingual television station, the program was a four-hour nightly look at the antics and the favorite television shows of Chuck the Security Guard and his sidekick cameraman as they took control of the station's programming. Videotapes and films of musical groups occupied a large portion of the program time. The telephone lines were open for most of the four hours, and viewers called in to participate in contests, tell jokes, sing and play musical instruments over the phone. *The All Night Show* was hailed as "Art with a capital A" by one newspaper critic. It was no such thing. It was lively and sometimes clever and it discovered and colonized a surprisingly large and varied audience for its advertisers; but it failed to utilize the unique aspects of video technology. Rather than exploring television's changing forms throughout the medium's thirty-year history, *The All Night Show* merely repeated those forms. In many ways the show would have worked just as well as on radio. The medium that was really being used—that allowed for all of the vitality, the reaction and interaction—was the telephone.

The success of the switched telephone network as an interactive medium is phenomenal. More amazing still is the degree to which it has been ignored or taken for granted by those people—broadcasters, community groups, artists—who most want to react meaningfully to the mass media. Even people in the telephone industry have only recently realized that the interaction of the longest duration, and therefore a key source of revenue, lies outside of the business context: the personal, long distance call. The beauty of this sort of call, as we're reminded in the long, slow, nostalgic commercials the Bell has turned to in recent years, is that it's user-initiated and user-controlled; and the information transferred is not predictable. The only restriction on the transmission is time.

The important thing for any interactive medium is that it be spontaneous and unpredictable. As the American media observer Gene Youngblood writes, "If we heard exactly the same thing every time we picked up the receiver, we'd no longer answer the phone: there'd be no information to gain because there'd be no uncertainty to reduce." It's that lack of uncertainty that makes one turn off his brain or his television set when confronted with TV in its existing forms. Even when there is spontaneity, the quality of the interaction is usually conditioned by television. A football player on the sidelines who realizes the camera is on him almost always waves and says, "Hi, Mom." At a hockey game, when the puck flies over the glass and a happy adolescent retrieves it, he shows it first to the television camera and then to the people around him. His sensitivity to his electronic audience shows that he has learned how far, how fast and to how many people his image and voice can travel. What prevents him and others from using that knowledge in more vital and interesting ways has much to do with the history of television and the structures it has always imposed on itself and on its viewers. Rather than looking at the history of television as *The All Night Show* did—as campy, nostalgic trivia—it can perhaps be more profitably considered in terms of the structures and for-

mulas it glorifies. The question is whether these structures can be avoided or reworked to the benefit of viewers and participants alike.

It is only very recently that anyone within broadcasting has thought to experiment with television. Ric Amis, chairman of Trinity Square Video, a non-profit video center in Toronto, points to the history of broadcasting to explain the slowness of such a development. "Film began on an experimental level that only later was emulated and structured by Hollywood. And it began outside of the United States. TV, on the other hand, began with the U.S. networks as outgrowth of radio, so it's always been controlled. TV was born standardized and formed." Film was looked upon as Art, as a medium of expression for directors, technicians and actors. TV was looked upon as a way of making money.

Because of the proliferation of cable and the promise of new technologies (home video, videotex, satellites), increased competition has created a whole new group of broadcast entrepreneurs, particularly within the cable industry. Again, the increased activity is based on making money from these new technologies. This time, though, a number of important factors will come into play, factors that just didn't count in the 1950s. They will force broadcasters to concentrate on areas that they have never before really considered. For one, the CRTC (Canadian Radio-Television Telecommunications Commission), alerted to the increased American activity in the areas of pay-TV and direct broadcast satellite technology has agreed to begin considering applications and awarding licenses in these areas but "on condition that these new services make a significant and positive contribution to broadcasting in Canada, make effective use of Canadian resources, and that a significant amount of the revenues flow to the Canadian program-production industry." The latter point is especially important. Add cable, pay-TV and satellite transmission to the already existing slate of over-the-air channels and there becomes a significantly greater number of program hours to fill. Ric Amis, for one, hopes that Canadian independent video producers will be increasingly considered by broadcasters as sources for programming. There is a strong lobby within the Canadian independent film industry on this issue as well. The audience, too, will have to be considered in new and different ways with the arrival of these technologies. It's always been relatively easy to locate and broadcast to audiences because of limited channel choice, fixed schedules and the fact that over-the-air signals arrive in a family or living room at almost no cost. With home-video allowing a viewer to record programs when he is not at home for future viewing, cable bringing ten or more additional channels into the home, and pay-TV requiring direct payment for specific channels or programs, broadcasters are going to have to interact more with each other and with their audiences just to keep in touch, never mind ahead. Ratings systems will no longer tell the story, either to broadcasters or advertisers. General audiences will begin to specialize.

There has been some attempt by the broadcast industry in recent years to deal with the need to communicate with and provide outlets for specific audiences under the label "narrowcasting." Narrowcasting works like a specialty or vertical-interest magazine, basing its appeal and its potential for a success on pinpointing an audience. This is difficult on television because of its history a broadcasting medium, and because of the habits viewers have adopted as a result of this history. Children's programs, religious programs and science programs all deal to some degree with specialized audiences and attract specialized advertising, but fail to qualify as narrowcasting because they are

regularly watched by general audiences. Religious programs, especially the big budget American evangelical programs such as *The PTL Club* and *The 700 Club*, actively seek converts and financial support from the general audience that happens to tune in. What's more, this kind of specialized programming makes no attempt to explore innovative or alternative approaches. Instead, there is a blatantly contrived effort to build an audience with an appeal to familiarity, to the viewer's comfort with certain formats. Thus *The PTL Club* is made to resemble *The Tonight Show* with Jim Bakker's morals replacing Johnny Carson's monologue.

The only functioning example of narrowcasting within commercial television exists because its audience is contained and restricted by language. Multilingual programming on radio and television is community-oriented, allowing programmers to deal specifically with the interests, problems and concerns of a particular ethnic group. Such programming makes television and radio accessible to both audiences and advertisers who feel that they have something to offer their own community. All sorts of people—German hairdressers, Armenian architects, and Polish community leaders—are heard and seen narrowly through broadcast outlets.

Much of this programming is trivial and unimaginative, but over-the-air narrowcasting begins an important demystification process for all television viewers. Its accessibility and its role in teaching people how to "read" and use the medium surely outweighs problems of production quality—problems which, in any case, can be overcome through experience and through the realignment of a viewer's expectations when he or she becomes involved in the production of television programs. There are almost certainly viable alternative formats still to be discovered for, say, news programming, and these may well be found by people working outside the network television tradition.

Community programming on cable TV offers a more complete involvement and accessibility than over-the-air narrowcasting. Participants can step away from the guest's chair, produce programming and gain technical experience; learn the grammar of television. What community programming cannot do is guarantee an audience or financial reward (in Canada at least). Dave Lamb, a programmer in the Maclean Hunter cable system, points out that producers with some kind of outside support are best able to sustain programming on a cable outlet. "It's much easier," he says, "for an organization, say the Kiwanis Club, to sponsor and organize programming and use their local community outlet than for an individual off the street who doesn't have the time or the money." This is unfortunate because the best community programs (arguably the best programs of any kind on television) are live programs and programming involving children. Live programming survives on spontaneity, unpredictability and accident. On camera, talent knows that there can be no second try, and brings intensity to the performance that would not otherwise be there. Children approach television armed with an alarming mix of silliness and shyness that is quite irresistible. Organized groups, more goal-oriented in their composition, show the greatest tendency to mimic commercial television, a trait noticed by John Anderson, producer of *The Gina Show* for Vancouver's Cable 10. This attempt almost always falls flat not only because most of the cable systems lack the sophisticated technical facilities of network broadcast outlets, but also because people who act like Knowlton Nash or The Friendly Giant in the front of a cable station's camera succeed only in telling audiences how badly they imitate their TV models. They're not using television; they're being used by their own stereotypical notions.

*The Gina Show*, which has been running weekly since November 1978, is one of the very few artist-produced series for cable in Canada. There have been other artist-cable collaborations—John Watt's *Television By Artists* series, which ran on Rogers Cable in Toronto in 1980, and *Tele Video*, which ran for six weeks on cable outlets in Halifax, Montreal, Guelph, Calgary, Vancouver, and Victoria in the spring of 1981—but these have not demanded the same sustained effort on the part of the producer. "It's a hell of a lot of work," says John Anderson, "so about thirty percent of the shows are only re-edited packages of *Gina* material over the last two years." Unlike *The All Night Show* which filled its four hours primarily with ancient American television serials, a few National Film Board shorts, and commercially produced video-tapes of new wave bands, *The Gina Show* provides an outlet for independently produced Canadian artists' videotapes that would otherwise be shown solely in the closed circuit of alternative art galleries. Anderson has allowed for a certain amount of spillover into the community—one program, about the British new wave band Young Marble Giants, was interspersed with comments and praise for *The Gina Show* viewers who visited *The Best of the Gina Show* display at the Vancouver Art Gallery—but the show lacks the telephone link, direct interaction. Still, *The Gina Show's* commitment to airing the work of small-format, independent video producers is rare and admirable.

Video artists seem well equipped to deal with interactive media and the restructuring of television formats. Working out of artist-run centers such as Prime Video in Montreal, Center for Art Tapes in Halifax, The Western Front in Vancouver, and Ed Video in Guelph, they have become adept at working with small format video systems. Most of them are young; they belong to that age group for which a world without television does not exist. Because most of the artist-run centers in Canada depend on funding primarily from the Canada Council and the Canada Council is no longer in the position it was in, in the early Seventies, to grant large sums for video equipment, the centers must look for new sources of funding. One of these sources could be broadcasting.

The new technologies offer opportunities for interaction through computer systems, teleconferencing, electronic mail, and facsimile transfer. Bill Barlett of Direct Media Association on Pender Island in B.C., has been working with these technologies and connecting with interested people all over the world. These are people he might never meet except through electronics. He is sometimes discouraged by the content of these transmissions (the "Hi, Mom" reflex still prevails), but hopes that people will begin to take real advantage of them as the novelty wears off. Real advantage means remembering that communication technologies, no matter how sophisticated, still involve communication between people. Sunnybrook Hospital, in Toronto, uses slow scan video to transmit information and X-rays from remote communities in Northern Ontario to the hospital... Aware that the eventual transfer of a patient from Northern Ontario to Toronto involves a cultural as well as a physical shock, slow scan technology is used, in addition, to transfer images of the patient's family to him/her as he/she lives in the hospital.

Give *The Gina Show* a telephone, or give a show like *The All Night Show* independently produced Canadian videotapes, and Canada would take a large step towards a truly responsive, interactive form of television. People have always gone through some kind of reactive process while watching television, i.e. crying through made-for TV movies or sneering at ridiculous commercials. Occasionally someone blows his set apart with a shotgun or throws it out the window. Television hasn't yet provided the same outlet for

our reactions as the other media have. There are no personal columns, no letters to the editor on television, but why not begin at last to change the relation; why not, as Gene Youngblood says, change the question one asks in settling down in the easy chair from “What’s on TV?” to “What will I put on my TV?”

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Lynn Hershman

## Hero-Redoux: Superstars Sandwiched

On a particularly long afternoon last summer, I went to see John Cassavettes’ newest movie, *Gloria*. It turned out to be an updated film noir, an imitation gangster film that substituted a woman as the lead, reversing the expected sexual stereotype. The languid matinee darkness seduced me as I blinked in and out of the screen, exchanging the role of spectator with heroine. It was I, not Gena Rowlands (“Gloria”) who strutted in shoulder padded suits down the corridors of the underworld. It was I, as well, who had the advantage. For, unlike “Gloria” who existed in dramatic suspense, I could anticipate the action before it happened, knew in advance what would occur. It was not my hyper-sensitive precognitive abilities that signaled this accuracy of celluloid prediction. Rather, I had learned to recognize formulas:

*A formula is a conventional system for structuring cultural products. It consists of things like favorite plots, stereotyped characters, commonly known metaphors and other linguistic devices.*<sup>[1]</sup>

And could, as well, recognize the myth:

*Myth is a generic category describing basic and universal themes in some kind of narrative form. Formula is a subcategory representing the specific way in which a particular culture has embodied both mythical archetypes and its own preoccupations in narrative form.*<sup>[2]</sup>

Later that week I sent away for publicity stills from *Gloria* as well as from “typical” gangster films like *The Maltese Falcon* and *Little Caesar*. As the photos arrived, I lined them up on my dining room table, obsessively squeezing Humphrey Bogart next to James Cagney next to Gena Rowlands. The gestures of those heroes dissolved into one another. “Gloria” adapted the posture, grimace, shiny suit, and even cigarette of her male predecessors, clearly attempting to reshape the archetype.

*The depiction of historical accuracy is of much less import than its ability to convey the human condition as it is perceived at a specific point in time.*<sup>[3]</sup>

I made negatives from the publicity photos, sandwiched the negatives together, printed them, painted the print, re-photographed the painted print, printed it again and finally enlarged the image. From this process emerged the first of a series I now call *Hero-Redoux/Hero-Sandwiches/Time-Pieces*. The Bogart/Rowlands began a sequence of androgynous consolidations between male/female cultural heroes: Monroe/Freud, Hearst/Presley, Allen/West, Parton/Wayne. In each set, the participants lived in different time frames and achieved celebrity through somewhat different media forms. Yet in the pairing they overlap either by gesture, intent or effect.

As the prints waded in the chemical solution, a curious thing happened. The transformation shape was determined by which sex was emphasized. Two images were printed in each set. In each combination one image consisted of both dominant and recessive female. When the female dominated in Bogart/Rowlands, the final image looked like David Bowie (a hero of the '70s), and when the male dominated, the image looked like James Dean (a hero of the '60s). The four images side by side, (Male, Male/Female, Female/Male, Female) mark a historical progression of reflected mass hero tastes as they evolved through four decades. I felt like a cultural geneticist.

Mass media, I realized, was like Penelope, weaving myths and heroes by day, erasing them at night, and then reweaving the thread again. Trading old images for new. Lacing new poses with old. Incestuously crossbreeding strains. Finally, cannibalizing itself.<sup>[4]</sup> With each new image released, nostalgia is invented.

For example, James Monaco views Patty Hearst's public image as a direct reflection of media history.

*The best way to describe all the Pattys is to use the parallel narrative technique that Orson Welles employed in his portrait of her grandfather. There was no single Kane in the mythic American movie, there were many. All of them were set in the framework of mediated reality—the newsreel.*<sup>[5]</sup>

An audience participates interactively. In a process that involves seeing, remembering, projecting and reflecting. We remember through time, which acts as a filter to alter the original impact. Do we remember Vietnam, that first electronically orchestrated media war, through the symbolic manifestations of Punk? The shocking pinks, vibrant greens, patches of iridescent blue of punk-colored hair are the same colors used by early television. The violence, and the clothing, reflects the images shown on the news about the war. Do we remember *The Wild Ones* through the real-life antecedents of The Hell's Angels? Is this Xerox-mentality our alternative present?

The landscape of modern technology is verdant and lush as collaged archetypes grow into electric palettes they will implode (like infinity) into memories yet to become.

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#### Footnotes:

1. Joseph Cawletti, *The Six Gun Mystique*, Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, n.d., p. 27.

2. Rita Parks, *The Western Hero in Film and Television*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1982, p. 18.

3. Ibid. p. 14.

4. Conversation with Todd Getlin, May 10, 1982.

5. James Monaco, *Celebrity*. New York: Delta Publishers, 1979.

David Levi-Strauss

## Non-Nagasaki Neoist Songs

### Monty Cantsin: *Neoist Songs* (Yul Records)

Can a poor guy from Budapest with an Eraserhead haircut become the successful leader of a world movement? "Try Neoism! You'll last longer!" Monty Cantsin's album of Neoist songs is message music too, although the message is more in the tradition of Pataphysics than politics. "Pataphysics is the science of imaginary solutions, which symbolically attributes the properties of objects, described by their virtuality, to their lineaments." (*Exploits and Opinions of Doctor Faustroll, Pataphysician: A NeoScientific Novel*, by Alfred Jarry, 1898, Paris). Jarry's pronouncement, "Clichés Are the Armature of the Absolute," could be neon-lit above the entrance to the Neoist Research Center.

Monty Cantsin is a movement within a movement without a cause. "The Neoist Movement is a worldwide network of international conspirators and its aim is to make efforts for the sake of the common cause. The common cause is that always different thing which keeps the Neoists busy." You'll be surprised how communicable this solipsism can get in the hands of a true Neoist.

Monty Cantsin (can't sin) used to be Istvan Kantor ('ist,' German is; 'van,' the vanguard, forefront; 'cantor,' singer in Latin, song leader), transplanted from Budapest through Paris to Montreal in 1977. His continuous action since 1979 has been the drawing and selling of his own blood to finance the operations of the Neoist Cultural Conspiracy. But you needn't do that to be Neoist. Or even to be Monty Cantsin. "Everyone can take the role of Monty Cantsin and do everything in the name of Monty Cantsin." The long-range goal of the Neoist Movement is to establish AKADEMGORODOK (a place of learning, a grove of trees, from Plato; the promised land of Neoism).

*Neoist Songs* is a selection of three songs from CATASTRONICS, a "syntheticwave musical tragedy" combining music, video, poetry and action art that has been performed in Montreal, Toronto, West Germany, and Yugoslavia. "The Neoist activity is a part of the 80s complex symptom, what I would call now synthetic-wave. If you have a better expression to make us understand the present chaos, I'll pay you a million dollars."

All three songs are thoroughly delightful. "Catastronics" (catastrophes and electronics are the most important subjects of human history) is a "Neoist marching and recruiting song & anthem."

*In the blue, endless sky/ a new song flies/ and the little boys and the girls/ sing like little birds.*

**Catastronics,**

*In the blue, endless sky/ a flaming iron flies/ Mummy says "Get up Daddy/ your breakfast is ready."*

**Catastronics,**

*Catastronics,*

*OUR CONSPIRACY IS THE POTENTIAL ENERGY OF THE FUTURE. WE ARE NOT SUBJECT TO THE LIES OF SCIENCE. THANK YOU FOR YOUR GOLD AND BLOOD. AND IN THE NAME OF ALL NEOISTS I DECLARE THAT WE LOVE YOU. WE ARE FOR PERPETUAL CHANGE AND TOTAL FREEDOM. TRY NEOISM! YOU'LL LAST LONGER.*

I was prepared to enlist after the first hearing, but the more you play it, the better it gets. It's good for doing anything to. The synthesizer arrangements by Bill Vorn, ex-member of Rational Youth, are somehow both lyrical and infectious as only marching and recruiting songs can be. The same is true of "Caoutchouc Culture," (a Neoist cradle song) and "Blood and Gold," translated from the Hungarian poet, Endre Ady (1877-1919):

*It sounds the same to me whether/ Lust pants or pain rattles/ Blood trickles or Gold clatters.*

*I know, declare, It's Everything/ And anything else is in vain/ Blood and gold, blood and gold.*

*Everything dies, departs/ The glory, the song, the rank, the wave/ But blood and gold live.*

*Nations die and rise again/ And brave the saint who like me vows/ Forever: blood and gold.*

Disrupting the tired old chain of cause and effect, Neoists are all effect, all action—they're activists. If you've given your life to Christ and he didn't want it, if you've looked earnestly, breathlessly under every recent post-modern rock to find something to believe in and come up only with bloody fingers—look to Montreal! Take your life and blood into your own hands! "Flame irons, umbrellas, and hats regularly." "Dance to the beat of Neoism!"

*Neoist Songs.* Music and words by Monty Cantsin (except words of "Blood and Gold," written by Endre Ady [1877-1919], translated by Cantsin) Arrangements instrumental and synthesizer by Bill Vorn; Vocals by Monty Cantsin, with Kiki Bonbon aka Kazimir Stassman and the Neoist Mixed Choir. Produced by Pat Deserio & Monty Cantsin. YUL Management c/o Studio du Havre. 240-A St. Paul Street East, Montreal, Quebec. H2Y 1G9. Canada. Distributed by Downstairs Record Limited. 4515 Poirier Blvd. Ville St. Laurent, Montreal, Quebec. H4S 2A4. Canada.

#### **CRASS: Nagasaki Nightmare/Big A Little A (Crass Records)**

This record is from England. It has two sides. Them and Us. Them is "ambassadors, archbishops, vicars, the Pope, military men." Us is us. The label on the disk has a reversed Civil Defense symbol superimposed on the charred faces of Japanese children. A-bomb survivors. No ambiguity here, the message is clear:

*Cherry blossom hanging in the cherry blossom tree/ Flash blinding flash, then there's nothing to see/ They've done it once, they'll do it again.*

The song dies after every verse. Noise, strangled screams, death.

*Big A Little A* is a more general condemnation of "the system." "The system might have got you but it won't get me." The players are well rehearsed—the lord God, the Queen, the "prime minister" ("She's a mother to us all/ like the Dutch boy's finger in the dyke, her arse is in the wall."). No Maximalists. Crass stops short of violent revolution. ("...No one ever changed the church by pulling down a steeple/ and you'll never change the system by bombing number ten/ systems aren't just made of bricks they're mostly made of people.")

The record "cover" opens into a 14 x 22" sheet crammed with anti-nuclear information and rhetoric. Visuals include pictures of post-bomb Nagasaki, the Queen and Maggie Thatcher being transformed into flash-burn victims, a silver altar across from a Rolls Royce hood ornament. Heinz Baked Beans stacked for shelter use, a USAF cruise missile whose nose is a penis, a large tableau depicting our World Leaders yukking it up, mushroom cloud in background, charred bodies in foreground (Indira Gandhi clinging to Castro's arm, RR literally beside himself in cowboy hat shaking hands with Brezhnev, etc.) and a map of England showing the locations of submarine bases, airports, reactors, power stations, cruise missiles, etc.

This makes apparent one good reason to call yourself Steve Ignorant, Eve Libertine, Phil Free, Joy de Vivre, G., or whatever. It leaves holes in the Files.

There is some useful information here on the origins of the Civil Defense system in England ("Civil Defense,' isn't about defending people. It's about keeping control of people."); and about the contingency network of Regional Commissioners who would have absolute power of life and death in a State of Emergency.

Unfortunately not located on the map are the private bunkers, over one thousand of them, constructed by the British government to shelter Civil Defense, government, and military officials from the effects of a nuclear blast, with the absurd intention of insuring "business as usual" after The End.

England is rapidly emerging as the prime candidate for a U.S. vs. U.S.S.R. "limited" nuclear battleground. And the few citizens of that nation still able to think are making some noise.

*Nagasaki Nightmare/Big A Little A.* Words, music, and production by Crass (Steve Ignorant, Eve Libertine, Phil Free, N.A. Palmer, Pete Wright, Penny Rimbaud, Joy de Vivre, G.). Recorded and mixed at Southern Studios, Aug 1980. Copyright Exitstencil Music. Catalogue no. 421984/5. Crass Records c/o Rough Trade, 202 Kensington Park Rd. London. W11 England.

#### **NON: Mode of Infection/Knife Ladder**

This disk isn't normal. One glance tells you that. Normal consumer recording products do not have two holes in them. They do not have only one side and NON MR-00 on them. And even if you play it safe at first (in the center of the turntable), it isn't right. When you lower the tone arm and walk away, it plays the same thing over and over. You move the tone arm over a bit and walk away and have a drink. It plays that groove over and over. And another. You're not stupid. You get it. You have to actively play this

record. Take things into your own hands. Read the directions:

*"Multi Axis. Multi Speed soundtracks designed for play at 16, 33, 45, and 78, engineered to permit remixing at home, maximal volume suggested on this record is absolutely unbreakable."*

This last statement is, of course, a challenge. Not only does this disk have multiple play possibilities, it contains the insurance of its own destruction. The life of the product is determined by the imagination of the consumer. Nothing is unbreakable.

I awoke in a studio at 8th and Folsom to industrial noise coming in through the floor-to-ceiling glass doors. Jack hammers, radial saw, grinder. Across the hall a thousand sweatshop sewing machines competed with the popular Chinese cat-killing music they always play in those places. NON comes on.

The repeating loop soundtracks at the beginning of the record sound like: 1) a syncopated saw in a bind, cut to a four-part beat; 2) mechanical voice: wong a bee, wong a bee, wong a bee... persistent sound of generator behind, pulsing slow; 3) the 8:25 Geneva-to-Paris Express on hold.

"Mode of Infection" is some speech. Cut and folded in drum machine, steam powered organ run amok. "Knife Ladder" is a saw cutting a guitar and several girls in half, preliminary screams and squeals, "knife... ladder," obscured words, abrupt end, host sounds (needle circling the center).

NON is mostly Boyd Rice, perhaps best known as the Boyd who tried to present Betty Ford with a bloody goat's head in San Diego. His file is no doubt extensive. He's also known as The King of Noise Music. NON is one of the featured artists in the *Industrial Culture Handbook*, recently published in San Francisco by Re/Search Publications.

Played on one of the other holes (some of these records have several), the record takes on the appearance of the drive wheel of a locomotive being pushed and pulled by the tone arm. The sounds move backward and forward, speed up and slow down, wreck the needle.

The second groove played on the off-center hole at 33-rpm could replace the soundtrack for the storm sequence in *The Wizard of Oz*. I found the 45-rpm off-center mode most pleasurable. When I played "Knife Ladder" in this configuration, a swarm of flies gathered and circled slowly over the turntable.

*Mode of Infection* (Robert Turman, Boyd Rice, recording assistance from Scott Harrington)/*Knife Ladder* (Boyd Rice recorded live by Mitch Holdinghausen) /Soundtracks #1 recorded by NON, San Francisco: #2 recorded by Boyd Rice & Jimmy Holiday, London: #3 recorded by NON, El Cajon, Boyd Rice: vocals, noise manipulation unit, iona, roto guitar, altered drum machine, tapes. Robert Turman: noise manipulation unit, tapes. Available from Rough Trade. 326 6th St. San Francisco, CA, 94103.

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Lynnette Taylor

## Disappearing Into the Culture as a Frequency: Bytes from a conversation with Willoughby Sharp

"I took the PLATO system out of the Computerbased Education Research Laboratory (CERL) and moved it a few doors down into a museum where it had never been put before. The computer department was worried: they said. 'Well. Is this supposed to have something to do with art?' I said. 'No, No': I didn't want to scare them or anything."

At a recent conference, *Watching Television—A Video Event*, at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign, Willoughby Sharp utilized CERL's computer system, PLATO, which originated under the direction of Dr. Donald Bitzer at the U. of I. for a computer/video installation, The PLATO Station. PLATO is the largest most sophisticated non-military computer network presently in existence.

"The wonderful thing about the use of these systems is that you don't know where they're going to lead," explains Willoughby. "They're so vast in themselves. The PLATO system has between five and six thousand terminals worldwide... At any given moment there are about 500 individuals riding the network... Dr. Bitzer says that in a couple of years it's going to have 40,000 terminals, and with the addition of cable satellite and other modes it will become a global phenomenon."

Working with the CERL staff and Dr. Bitzer, Willoughby decided "to focus on PLATO's inherent capacities as a communications station." Four information files were entered into the computer: an electronic catalogue of the event; a Video Exhibition Notebook in which "visitors are able to comment on anything they see fit;" a Video Exhibition Opinion Index, where visitors rate the videotapes displayed; and the Talkamat, an on-line interterminal communication. "I felt that wasn't enough. I wanted to give people more information about PLATO and the fact that Dr. Bitzer was here... made it obvious that an on-camera interview for local cablevision was a necessary part of the 'jaw' that would allow people to enter into this world... In a sense I'm like a critic. I'm taking something out, holding it up and saying, look this is valuable. After all, that's what art is..."

In remote Urbana-Champaign, where hotel room murals are copyrighted, coffee in hand, tape recorder on, Willoughby began...

### TeleConsciousness

I'm interested in the systems that move electronic-magnetic information around the world, and identifying them as systems for creative people to use.

The carrier is more interesting than the content.

You can't touch a tool, you use it.

There is a difference between putting your finger in a rotary dial telephone and a touch-tone. There is a difference between introducing a telephonic conversation with a circular gesture and a pointed gesture. It profoundly implies how you have set yourself up to talk. Accessibility of information changes the desire to access it and your relationship to it.

My vision is predicated on the electromagnetic spectrum as a tangible way.

### **TeleIdentity**

I don't consider myself a video artist. Telecommunications, computers, computer networks and systems interest me.

With *Avalanche*, I was a "funnel" between the culture and the magazine. The information went into me—the funnel—and deposited into the "bottle"—the magazine. In telecommunications systems I am the carrier.

John Lurie, of the Lounge Lizards in New York, through *Avalanche* . . . realized there are other "out there" people in the world. That realization forced his whole ability to continue being who he was, who he wanted to be, and who he became. This will happen on a world scale when people can tune in their TV sets and see people all over the world "doing it."

### **TeleSophy**

It's not far fetched to realize a vision of having a permanent conduit of television information going out into the world. These tools would allow a person to exteriorize their mind on a global scale. That's very exciting because it is real power. Money, money is over obviously.

Information and the ability to communicate with the rest of humanity is so overwhelming that I never get depressed.

This time in history, this decade, is absolutely pivotal in the development of humankind, If we can make human connections with the new telecommunication tools...we have real possibilities as a human race.

### **TeleSelves**

We are losing the structure of the half hour, hour and time itself. In the same way that television is becoming 24 hours a day, we are becoming 24 hours a day.

When you bring telecommunication devices into play, you become more heightened, more online, more alive, more in the total spirit of things. You're forced to think and act more creatively because you're communicating with the world.

### **TeleFrequency**

I have a series of works called *Found Frequencies*. I set up antennas and tune in information that goes through the air. No one has any idea of what constitutes our reality and I want to display the reality that I see.

### **TeleAesthetics**

I'm not interested in whether it's art or not. I'm interested in good honest communications.

The judgment of good work is no longer brokered but self-evident.

One of the near term benefices of the telecommunications revolution is that the whole culture will become more aestheticized, more intelligent and those two things work reciprocally.

### **TeleProjection**

I would like to disappear into the culture as just a resonance, a frequency, a distant star that you know is there and plays a part.

When they ask, "What did Willoughby Sharp do?" I hope they will say he had the sense to know that ART wasn't as small as they thought and that telecommunications is as much a part of the global aesthetic as anything else.

### **TelePleasure**

My pleasure is in riding these systems, riding the network. It's more like being in the flow.

In '77, when I went on camera for a two way demo, I felt viscerally transported the 22,300 miles up to that satellite and down. I actually felt that in my body.

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## Present Tense: Rites of Passage

*The words  
made everything seem present  
almost present  
present*

—W. S. Merwin [1]

Writing about a performance is somewhat like conducting an extispicy. Meaning is severed from the vital moment like entrails from a sacrificial beast, with divination imperiled by the heresy of post-hoc paraphrase. Interpretation of John Sturgeon and Aysha Quinn’s July 26 video performance *No Earth/No Earth Station* at the L.A. County Museum of Art is particularly precarious since the preeminent concern is with the mode (improvisation) and, meaning (synchronicity) of performing the present tense.

Sturgeon and Quinn are perhaps best known for their individual video works, which according to Sturgeon, constitute “a dual statement proposing new collaborative uses of technology to emulate internal functions, while at the same time reaching back into our primitive past to rekindle psychic and intuitive connections: a double stretch going both directions at the same time.” [2] Their most recent tapes evidence the tension in this duality. Quinn’s *Excerpts* (1983), accomplishes a seamless integration of the mundane and metaphysical with a straightforward theatrical approach, contrasting Sturgeon’s painter/poet pyrotechnics which effect a mesmerizing hejira through time awareness in *Spine/Time* (1982). The confluence of their duality is apparent in the performance which synthesizes video, installation and theater, with Quinn’s stage presence and dramatic timing punctuating Sturgeon’s conceptual and spatial fix to give the collaboration a distinctive balance.

*No Earth/No Earth Station*, in its second permutation after a rough draft presentation in the summer of 1982 at the University of Iowa’s Intermedia Arts Festival, is “about maintaining a minimal status quo when everything is up in the air,” Quinn says in explanation of the title. [3] The imaginative premise is that the pair are “keepers of the station” conducting rituals of global significance while, as the audience is told at the beginning of the performance, “we are in a holding pattern.”

The station/installation is a high-tech environment, where the partially exposed technology displays three channels of pre-recorded tape and live video on three screens and three monitors forming triangular configurations, the screen triad prominently above the stage, the monitor triad less conspicuously at or below stage level in the foreground. At center stage sits a V-shaped chroma key blue field, and to either side are two terrariums containing dry ice, gardens that the station keepers must periodically feed.

The station keepers/performancists, dressed in white lab coats, use the technological environment to communicate with different personas, astro-project into a variety of earthscapes, and explore the dimensions of their own individual and “inter” personalities.

They have frustrated conversations with their children at home, a mutant woman who seeks their help to breathe, and themselves. In one of the most memorable sequences, a taped segment projected overhead shows the pair having a shrill shouting match, while Sturgeon and Quinn circle each other in a mimetic dance-fight onstage. The screaming war is stripped of objective referents like the dialogue in theater of the absurd, succeeding the way the rest of the performance does, by crystallizing underlying concerns without force feeding the audience loaded abstractions.

This is particularly the case with the visual symbology. The installation’s composition echoes alchemistic iconography, with the screens and monitors constituting squares with in triangular constellations, [4] the chroma key V-shape extending as an open-bottomed triangle to be completed by the intersecting plane of spectator rows. The video channels, screens and monitors form three sets of three, invoking one of the main lines of force in numerology. [5] As the station-keepers astro-project into other environments, sage fields or aspen groves, they struggle for balance in sometimes enigmatic poses, although in one striking sequence they are suspended as the Hanged Man and the Hanged Man Reversed, the Tarot’s classic signs of tense expectation and mystical isolation. [6]

All this might suggest that the performance could only work for a convention of semiologists. Sturgeon and Quinn’s intention, however, is not to litter the installation with metaphysical illustrations. They are attempting “to construct an arena for stretching, opening up a zone of answers to occur in.” [7] Though aware of the archetypal significance of the performance’s icons, their approach emphasizes diversity of interpretation, exemplified by the nearly universal triangle/trinity. Various associations are invited, with formulations left to subjective interaction/intersection with the open-ended zone/open-bottomed triangle.

It is from this experiential process that the central constructs emerge. The dazzling array of station activity easily overloads the viewer; there are sometimes six different videos functioning as separate presentations and within the installation’s supra-compositional pattern, while the performancists interact with themselves and the electronic environment. This creates a condition central to the experience, the schizophrenic effect of modern information technology. With so much going on it’s impossible to separate cause from effect, what the station keepers do, and what is done to them, thus particularizing the modern dissipation of causality, and with it the ability to predict and control.

But displacement from the linear continuum is only a preface. *No Earth/No Earth Station* is executed extemporaneously, forcing the performancists into a spontaneous and instinctive mediation of the technological and symbolic complexities. In saving the moment of creation for the audience, the problematic creative process mirrors what the performance is essentially about: improvising a gestalt when existence is divisively subjective and infinitely recast in the ever-evolution of the present tense. Sturgeon says, “It’s about not getting blown out by the randomness of the apparent reality.” [8] Improvisation becomes both parallel and prescription, allegory and rite of passage.

As the inevitable difficulties arise, the performancists/station keepers invent ways to continue the aesthetic/metaphysical unity, guided by an intuitive grasp of their simultaneous purposes. When a voice delay doesn’t kick in during a segment of circular

dialogue called “The Meeting,” the meeting becomes a colloquium on equipment failure, extending the general concern with solipsistic isolation caused by communication technology into the moment, as Quinn asks with resonant irony, “Could we have a better meeting if we had better equipment?”

The performancists’ coping responses thus become indistinguishable from the station activity’s figurative meaning. One way of viewing this is that, as Sturgeon joked, “the structure of the piece can take an incredible amount of punishment.”<sup>[9]</sup> Another way is to view the performance as a documentation of process, predicated on the belief that, as Jung put it, “Error is just as important a condition to life’s progress as truth.”<sup>[10]</sup>

Video technology is integrated into that process in a way that makes *No Earth/No Earth Station* ultimately a positive statement. It doesn’t reject technology despite its consequences, it treats the “Global Village” concept as a given and strives for ancient perspective to balance technology’s ahistorical impact. This is evidenced in the performancists’ use of video to achieve “purification by abstraction,” Quinn and Sturgeon’s conception of how video relates to “the alchemical process which separates and then re-fuses the self back together with a new awareness of being.”<sup>[11]</sup> The three video channels, and monitor and screen triads, are used throughout the performance to isolate and remix aspects of the station keeper’s consciousnesses. On the side monitors there is peripheral imagery, deep memory of wandering in the desert or abstract meditative earthscapes that flow unobtrusively, while the screens separate intra- and inter-personality projections of the station keepers, most graphically in the fight sequence, or mix them into other environments. In this way, technology becomes the means for healing the schizophrenia it has caused.

C. G. Jung’s writing on alchemy and symbolism is obviously influential here, and throughout the performance. Not surprisingly then, Jung’s postulation of “synchronicity” as a means of dealing with the apparent psychic relativity of space and time presents itself as an insightful subtext. Pop cultural assimilation aside (The Police’s top selling album that borrows its title and some of its ideas from the concept offers a glimmer of hope for neo-populists), this empirical concept provides a parallel in psychology to the discoveries of modern physics which cast the space, time and causality triad asunder. As the ancient axiom of Maria the Jewess predicted/expressed it: “Out of the Third comes the One as the Fourth.” Synchronicity speculates on the transcendence of the causal order by “meaning” in “the continuous creation of a pattern that exists from all eternity, repeats itself sporadically, and is not derivable from any known antecedents.” This effort to distill “the ‘quintessence’...the ever-hoped-for and never-to-be discovered ‘One’” that underlies 1,500 years of alchemical quest, clearly relates to the performance’s “double stretch” joining intuition and technology in an infinite improvisation of being.<sup>[12]</sup>

The station keepers create a place/time of passage. The station, as passage, is an alchemical conduit preserving human essence during the survival crisis shift in eras. The keepers, in a holding pattern, seek to retain what Barnett Newman called “the self, terrible and constant.”<sup>[13]</sup> The passage of time is the transition into the ever-present tense of meaning that permeates the temporal illusion, connecting the self synchronistically to origin and destiny.

Concomitantly, the performance seeks its essence in a constant act of re-creating. After a series of anti-climactic meditative water imagery, the performancists exit the installation with only a trembling candle flame and a neon emblem of the Taurus sign overlaid on a triangle to suggest the “Earth Station’s” continuance. The audience is momentarily anxious, with things still up in the air. After latent causal expectations dissipate and frustration at the irresolution fades, the wholeness of the performance begins to emerge. The performance is the quintessence of what the performance is about. The hall-of-mirrors expansiveness creates a sense of quantum realization. Sturgeon and Quinn have risked the hour’s totality for each moment, pulling off a brilliantly provocative present tense.

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#### Footnotes:

1. From “The Judgment of Paris,” *The Carrier of Ladders*, New York: Atheneum, 1970.
2. Interview with author, 1983.
3. Ibid.
4. C. G. Jung, *Dreams*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974, pp. 199-200.
5. Cheiro, *Cheiro’s Book of Numbers*. New York: Garden City Publishing, 1932, p. 56.
6. J. E. Cirlot, *A Dictionary of Symbols*, New York: Philosophical Library, 1962, pp. 131-2.
7. Interview with author.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. *Freud and Psychoanalysis*, New York: Pantheon books, 1961, p. 200.
11. Interview with author.
12. *The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1960, pp. 421-531. *Dreams*, p. 198.
13. Harold Rosenberg, *Barnett Newman*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1978, p. 21.

# An Artist's Guide to Music Television

*"I think the music video industry is our biggest chance...The video artist is going to become more and more important, as important as a recording artist. In ten years someone like John Sanborn may be as important as, say Tangerine Dream.*

—Interview with Fabrice Florin by Carl Loeffler, 1984

*As experimental as people like to think music video is, the little parts of it that are experimental are also being consumed by the system. In only two years it's as pat as the standard dramatic narrative structure. And unfortunately, for a lot of people, it has become their avant-garde experience.*

—Interview with Bill Viola by Michael Nash, 1984

*We can only hope that the struggle against rock's corruption that has always been waged by a nery handful will continue on this front, and that MTV will be considered a challenge to be subverted if it is not to remain a few hazy images, a fashion show, a synthesized beat."*

—Richard Gehr, "The MTV Aesthetic," 1983

## Introduction

Between the promise and the practice falls the penumbra of marginal prospects for artists in music television. Warner Amex's launch of MTV on August 1, 1981 did more to advance popular acceptance of short form "video" than all previous efforts by the avant-garde combined. With a hot new hybrid demanding innovation, its appeal based on employing the very latest visual ideas, television art's fortunes seemed poised on the threshold of a quantum leap. Then the empire struck back. Three years after the breakthrough, MTV and its competitor's programming has largely been trivialized into a rush of remarkably monotonous record ads. Rock establishment survivors, heavy metal Neanderthals and popped-out punk posers market themselves in slick adolescent sex sales propelled by wham-bam-thank-you-ma'am post-production pyrotechnics.

The temptation is to write the whole genre off—that would be a huge mistake. Music television is both vanguard and paradigm for the future of television art: it is the cutting edge of the art/commerce interface. Not only is it the largest growth area in the media arts, it crystallizes the key dilemma faced by all artists working in television.

As programming that is simultaneously its own advertisement underwriting (record companies provide free clips because of their sales promotion value), music television merges the seemingly binary presentations of commercial television. It confronts artists with the larger realization, elucidated by David Antin, that "there is no fundamental distinction between commercial and program...Both...are assembled out of the same syntax."<sup>[1]</sup> To make a language clouded by its economic imperative speak a transcendent aesthetic is the essential challenge of television art.

"Even if the material in each TV show single-mindedly aims at increasing consumption of its sponsors' products," David Marc recently observed, "the medium leaves behind a body of dreams that is, to a large extent, the culture we live in."<sup>[2]</sup> Music television may offer one of the best chances artists have to set our culture's agenda, if the industry's economic structure can be endured, circumvented or changed.

The following primer focuses on obstacles and opportunities that will dictate the future of artists' music television, and on work that is defining the parameters of the form. The concluding discussion by music television experts offers wise views from key players within the industry, featuring suggestions of strategies for independent artists.

## The Music Television Marketplace

**Business is booming.** After three years of losing around \$15 million per year from Warner Amex, "MTV is now in the black,"<sup>[3]</sup> according to a network spokesperson. MTV's rise to profitability has been meteoric. It is the fastest-growing cable network in history, and has earned the highest audience share of any 24-hour basic cable service. MTV's feed, available in stereo, is carried by 2,700 affiliates, and reached 23.5 million subscribers as of August 1984.

Even while MTV was losing millions, others were quick to follow its lead. USA Cable Network's 22 million subscribers can watch *Radio 1990* on weeknights, and receive a heavier dose of alternative programming on weekends with *Night Flight*. The 28 million subscribers to WTBS cable get twelve hours of music video on *Night Tracks* during the counterculture dominated late night weekend time slots. Other cable services offering varying amounts of music video include Black Entertainment Network, Country Music Television, HBO, Nashville Network, Satellite Program Network and Showtime. Over-the-air broadcasts range from locally originated programming to syndicated shows like *FM-TV* to NBC's nationally broadcast *Friday Night Videos*.

The broadened exposure these occasional competitors bring music television probably helps increase MTV's potential audience enough to offset any periodic reduction in audience share. But, on October 26 of this year, the Turner Broadcasting System initiated the first direct challenge to MTV, the 24-hour Cable Music Channel, TBS's fourth cable network, which initially projected 10 million subscribers by July 1985. (It no longer stands by that estimate following a recent subscriber over-count scandal.) Ted Turner threw down the gauntlet with some rather inflammatory remark about the "satanic" and "sleazy" nature of MTV, framing the conflict as a battle of "good vs. evil." Turner's righteous indignation aside, his company is pushing their new network as more lucrative for affiliates, more diverse, aimed at a slightly older and more affluent demographic, and less offensive, since they "reject about 10% of all music videos due to gratuitous sex and violence."<sup>[4]</sup>

In response, MTV Networks has announced that beginning January 1, 1985, it will launch VH1 (Video Hits 1), an "adult contemporary" format (Oh no! It's Barry Manilow...) 24-hour music channel aimed at the older audience Turner is courting, debuting with three million subscribers. These new, more conservative networks may only be the first manifestations of the industry's growth potential. TBS, though hardly disinterested in claiming growth capacity, argued that "the consumer response driving an explosion in music video production is overwhelming... There's no question that nationally the cable

industry can sustain at least six differentiated music video formats, even if the rate of growth slows.”<sup>[5]</sup>

Though MTV predicted that it’s not possible “for two 24-hour cable music services to survive that are within the same format,”<sup>[6]</sup> (with a vested interest in the status quo, their pessimism is hardly surprising), most analysts believe that the marketplace will ultimately parallel radio: competition within and between a wide range of formats.

**Backdoor economics.** Doesn’t this explosion of demand for music videos, and the proliferation of new music television formats, open the door for independent artists, even if “art” is one of the eight words you can’t say on television?

Radio, which earlier this century established the monopolistic structure of that artists’ nemesis known as network TV, strikes again, providing the programming acquisition model for music television. Radio stations get free records from record companies because playing the music promotes sales. Generally, music television networks work the same way, obtaining free clips because of their proven promotional value in selling records. The payoff for production thus comes through the back door. If you like vertically integrated monopolies, it’s a nifty set up: record companies control music television’s content because there is little incentive for anyone else to produce clips.

There are however, two major differences in the structures of music television and radio. The key one affecting the content of the programming is that with radio, the music is its own promotion; the work itself is broadcast to familiarize consumers with purchase options. Although music television programming includes and is based on the music, the presentational medium is fundamentally different. Since the motivation behind the transformation is largely to enhance the music’s marketability, music television assumes not only the *function*, but also the *form* of an advertisement.

The big difference, with respect to the market’s structure, is in music television’s centralization. A handful of sources provide national exposure for major record labels with large enough distribution to benefit. MTV, in fact, won’t use a clip unless it’s promoting a record in national release as a matter of formal policy. Since the profitability threshold of a national push is quite high, big record companies don’t waste their time on albums that can’t sell at least 400,000 to 500,000 copies,<sup>[7]</sup> which means that the major labels maximize profits by spending a lot of money per video (\$50,000 average per promo clip) on a few acts.

**Front door exceptions.** There are several programmers who pay upfront for videos, but these are generally exceptions that don’t significantly challenge the back door economics rule, or contribute to it. *Friday Night Videos*, offering \$1,000 per airing for clips, is the most prominent paying program. But their policy seems to have been a diplomatic gesture to keep things friendly with the record companies, not a first step to involve independent producers of non-promotional work. In any case, \$1,000 on the front end is nothing compared to back door advertising benefits, so record companies continue to maintain vastly superior financing and their dominance. This is one big reason why Vice-President of Video at Warner, Jo Bergman, believes “record companies will continue to be the major suppliers under a pay arrangement.”<sup>[8]</sup> And *Friday Night Videos*

or any other program’s token fee won’t start a trend because, as long as most record companies will provide free clips, most networks won’t pay.

Unless, of course, payment provides exclusive rights in order to lock out competitors. MTV hasn’t taken Turner’s provocations lying down. They signed deals with Columbia, Elektra, Geffen, MCA and RCA which provide payment in return for exclusive use of about 35% of those labels’ videos for a limited period of time, allowing them to feature “Sneak Preview” video premieres. Upfront money of this type obviously reinforces the status quo. Given the predominance of the back door structure then, it’s not surprising that approximately 96% of all music videos currently programmed are provided by record companies.<sup>[9]</sup> Actually, it’s surprising that 4% come from other sources, which are, for the most part, losing money in a labor of love.

### *Commercial Programming*

Radiovision realities. MTV began its cablecast existence with a blithe clip of the Buggles lip-synching “Video Killed the Radio Star.” What actually transpired was much kinder, the sincerest form of flattery, imitation. Given the music television industry’s framework, “radiovision,” the obsolete term for TV, gains a born again propriety. Radiovision is used here to underscore the radio-modeled, music-subservient and somewhat reductive promotional nature of the genre’s commercial realization.

“The basis of music videos is, was, and always will be the song,” MTV spokesperson Dorene Lauer emphasizes, “the whole point of the exposure on MTV is to help the music business sell records.”<sup>[10]</sup> Radiovision, as such, imparts certain inherent characteristics to all work produced for that context: it is an illustrative, star-dominated, lifestyle-oriented presentational form. In his somewhat vitriolic anti-MTV polemic, *Rolling Stone* contributing editor, Steven Levy, overviewed all radiovision imaging:

*In the pre-MTV world we used to construct our own fantasies to music, provide our own images rich in personal meaning. Now, mass images are provided for us. And the primary criterion for choosing these images is not artistic validity or even what the songwriter had in mind, but what might sell the song.*<sup>[11]</sup>

(It’s ironic that *Rolling Stone*, which did all it could to capitalize on the acculturation of the rock rebellion, attacks MTV for going it one better.)

The visuals in radiovision illustrate the songs’ lyrics with a marketable image of the music, keying on the portrayal of band members as the video’s stars, recognizable faces to be spotted later on album covers, triggering the purchase decision. In radiovision’s marketplace of ideas, “hipness,” headshots, and “tits-and-ass” triumph. In the J. Geils Band’s latest video “Concealed Weapons,” guess which “female glands keep poking” the band’s “front” in the back? An interesting counterpoint is provided by Kevin Godley and Lol Creme’s video to Herbie Hancock’s “Rockit,” a crafty live animation of break dancing junk pile robots. It broke with the mainstream tendencies because there were no lyrics to illustrate (it’s an instrumental) and Hancock didn’t want to make an appearance. “I have no proof MTV had a racist policy,” he revealed, “but I didn’t want to take any chances.”<sup>[12]</sup> The clip was thus forced into being a pure rendering of the form, a fully realized work rather than a vehicle, with a smattering of hip-hop cool as its

only sales pitch. Consequently, this funk crossover tape cleaned up at the 1st Annual MTV Video Music Awards last September, garnering five awards including Best Concept Video and Most Experimental Video.

This is not to imply that the imaging of the purchase industry mainstream is inferior. They do their homework. Radiovision has its fingers on the pulse of state of the art visualization techniques, and freely appropriates the historical legacy of the avant-garde. As David Ehrenstein summed it up:

*There's hardly a rock video made that doesn't owe something to either Un Chien Andalou or Blood of a Poet ... Kenneth Anger's Scorpio Rising and Bruce Conner's A Movie have likewise served as iceboxes raided at midnight by sensibilities far simpler than theirs.*<sup>[13]</sup>

The problem is that radiovision isolates visual ideas and techniques out of the context of their artistic application within coherent statements. Bill Viola remarked:

*The thing about the industry that I resent very much is they're in the business of image appropriation, images as they relate to fashion, and fashion as it relates to capitalist economics... like a fashion designer from Paris going into Central Africa, not caring about the culture or cosmology or the people, just looking at decoration on spears so they can take them back and make a lot of money.*<sup>[14]</sup>

**The video musicosmos.** Beyond the contents of individual clips, the overall effect of radiovision's programming is to create a lifestyle-oriented emotional bond with the consumer, a relentless present tense available at the viewer's convenience. This "unreal environment get[s] people into what is called a 'consumer mode,'" according to Levy.<sup>[15]</sup>

The same could be said of all television. However, explained MTV's Lauer:

*With MTV you don't have what traditional television has in terms of a beginning, middle and end. What you have is a beginning and it just keeps going 24 hours a day. It's not linear. It's not based on plot and continuity, it's based on mood and emotion which is the basic appeal of music in general.*<sup>[16]</sup>

Radiovision (particularly of the MTV variety), like radio, offers nonlinear, "tune in any time and use it as background or whatever" programming, complete with game show fantasy link contests and "let's spend four hours together" VJs who engage us with a casual intimacy which begs a daily visit. The "video microcosmos"<sup>[17]</sup> effect is central to the industry's ad-based structure. Radiovision is a zone where individual videos merge into a seamless continuum of consumer caress and enticement.

**Mini-movie production.** The industry's extreme centralization and concomitantly high expenditure per clip, adds another set of tendencies to these characteristics. The big budgets available for a relatively small number of videos encourage a feature film style of production. This is exemplified at its most overwrought by Michael Jackson's "Thriller" (directed by filmmaker John Landis), and at its most interesting by David Bowie's "Jazzin' for Blue Jean" (directed by Julien Temple), and is indicated by the involvement

of the likes of Brian de Palma (Bruce Springsteen's flaccid "Dancing in the Dark") and Sam Peckinpah (two videos for Julian Lennon's debut album). The mini-movie version of the concept video is emerging as the dominant formula, the film look is virtually a prerequisite, and the large scale productions are so segmented and specialized that the bands sometimes don't know what their videos are about until the work is completed. In a recent MTV "news" segment, a member of Ratt was asked in an on-location interview about the overall concept of the video they were making. He didn't even flinch in admitting that he had no idea what it was about, that the band just moved around to different sets in western shootout costumes. VJ J.J. Jackson led out of the segment with his usual understated wit: "Sounds like being in a Fellini movie." Actually, it sounds more like being in Michael Cimino's *Heaven's Gate*.

Almost all clips are currently shot on 35mm film and transferred to tape for post-production to get the best, albeit most expensive, of both worlds and satisfy the conventional preference for the film look, i.e. ad-slick verisimilitude. There are several striking exceptions. Lindsay Buckingham's "Go Insane," shot in video, takes a rather slight song and renders it psychologically resonant through a video mindscape of image-processed imprisonments. U2's concert tape "Sunday Bloody Sunday" exploits the edginess and highlight-smear qualities of video to communicate the rawness of live performance. And in R.E.M.'s "Pretty Persuasion," film's flicker effect is exaggerated through the transfer process to embody the incantatory repetitions and elusiveness of the song's lyrics, casting the enigmatic visualization under the spell of remembrance.

#### *State of the Art*

As these challenges to the homogenous film-look mini-movie formula suggest, artistic sensibilities have infiltrated the mainstream despite countervailing currents within the industry. Part of music television's promise is that the technical achievement, fecundity of visual ideas and sheer exuberance of even mediocre clips, make them more entertaining and formally innovative than the vast majority of other television formats that are commercially viable. And given how unreceptive radiovision's structure is to independent artistic expression, the emergence of so much television art within the genre, both on TV and waiting in the wings, is an augury for the movement's success.

Before discussing different aspects of music television activity, one sentinel artist whose diversity resists codification needs to be mentioned. John Sanborn has emerged as the major model for independent artistic success in the field. His virtuoso technical and conceptual work ranges from commercial projects like King Crimson's "Heartbeat" and Moto Sano's "Complication Breakdown," to avant-garde music computer animation milestones like "Big Electric Cat" and "Act III," to performance works like "Ear to the Ground." Sanborn blends artistic achievement and commercial savvy with an ability to exploit a variety of different creative opportunities, precisely what the interdisciplinary commercial venue of music television art requires.

**Commercial music visionaries.** Perhaps the most widely-seen music television art has been produced under the influence of recording artists with enough clout to get creative control over their videos and with a vision of the form that transcends mere illustration of their songs. Given David Bowie's influence in music and film and the fact that he was one of the first rock stars to work with video, it's not surprising that his tape for "Ashes

to Ashes" (1981) is one of the first truly great and fully realized artistic experiments by a commercial recording artist. Color negative keying creates an otherworldly video-scape, illuminated by dark light, wherein a series of identity transpositions suggest enigmatic rites of passage, psychic alienation, mystical isolation, and solipsistic exile. The costuming, gestural choreography and camera presence are Bowie at his best, and any confusion about his input vis-à-vis co-director David Mallet's are resolved by looking at Mallet's work with the likes of Joan Jett (the heavy-handed "Crimson and Clover").

As Jo Bergman, Vice President/Video of Warner Brothers and leading expert in the field, warns in the concluding forum discussion. "People don't make projections too far in the future because as soon as you think you have an understanding...the marketplace changes." Sure enough, as this issue of *ART COM* was going to press, the market place changed dramatically with the abrupt folding of TBS's music channel, bought out by MTV for a mere \$1,000,000 on November 28, 1984, after only a month of operation. The move was presaged by a subscriber over-count scandal a few weeks earlier. Perhaps this indicts the market's growth potential, but more likely it indicates Turner's current overextension (CMC was his fourth cable network), and questions the sincerity of a commitment that touts itself as a holy war. Though CMC's John McGhan is no longer in a position to use independent artists' work, his comments based on experience as former producer of *Friday Night Videos*, offer some promising strategies.

"My song, my concept, my neck," says David Bowie's character about his objection to the pat ending of the movie within the music mini-movie "Jazzin' for Blue Jean," and this sums up Bowie's total involvement with his videos while commenting on one of the key problems of the form: neglect of the recording artist's sensibility. Though none of Bowie's work since "Ashes..." approaches its power, reach or formal precision (all the videos from the disco-fied "Let's Dance" were shot in film and have more conventional narrative and concert approaches), his influence is a major force for the uniting of image and song that the music video term suggests.

Other musical artists producing confluent works that fully realize the form's potential include David Byrne of the Talking Heads and Peter Gabriel. Byrne's brilliant dance interpretation of evangelical speaking in tongues in "Once in a Lifetime" relates rock's cross-cultural rhythmic roots to third world realities, and the song's incantatory lyrics to tribal spiritualism in a way that resists paraphrase, a tribute to the tape's organic interrelation of mediums. In Gabriel's "Shock the Monkey" and "I Don't Remember" (directed by Brian Grant and Eric Fellner, respectively, but "auteured" by Gabriel), modern man's loss of instinct and anima is seen through a series of schizophrenic persona projections. The divorce of action and dream becomes a nightmare of ritualistic self-confrontations. Media replaces memory, and cyclical repetitions of musical patterns, lyrics and images express living out of time. These tapes are a powerful voyage into the future primitive.

On the lighter side, DEVO (working with Chuck Statler) has found a perfect form for uniting its performance orientation, slight gag visual sensibility and ironic social commentary in a series of tapes including "Whip It," "Through Being Cool," "Beautiful World" and "That's Good." After seeing how these clips communicate DEVO's pointed satire and perverse humor, it's hard to imagine getting the picture without the outrageous attire, placid expressions and image counterpoints.

Clips for Chas Jankel ("Questionnaire"), Haysi Fantayzee ("Shiny, Shiny" and "John Wayne is Big Leggy"), Missing Persons (Peter Max's "Surrender Your Heart"), Romeo Void ("A Girl in Trouble") and Tom Tom Club ("Genius of Love" and "Pleasure of Love," animated by Annabel Jankel) to name a few, are among the commercial work which has also risen to the level of music television art.

**Performance crossovers.** Performance artists whose inter-media inclinations mesh perfectly with the music video format have crossed over into the commercial recording arena and are making strong contributions to artists' music television. Foremost among them is Laurie Anderson. The totality of her interdisciplinary vision is precisely registered in both "O Superman" and "Sharkey's Day." The former integrates her unique conjunction of theater, dance and music into a minimal "real time" performance that articulates our collective authority complex with the spontaneity of an improvisation and the sure-handedness of a mature artistic vision. In "Sharkey," television's two dimensionality and high contrast are exploited as materials in a magical synergy of synthesized "nature" music and Tom Terrific animation (created with Dean Winkler) that shares the mediafied fix of the song: "I'd rather see this on TV," Anderson intones.

David Van Tieghem's ritualistic run/dance tape for "These Things Happen" is one of the most esoteric performance based works to have ever been televised by MTV. His earlier, more fully realized work, "Ear to the Ground" (with John Sanborn and Kit Fitzgerald), a walkabout percussion performance literally on the streets, garbage cans and phone booths of New York City, demonstrates his flair for combining sound and environment in a "live" context. Far more commercially successful are the dance performances of Toni Basil from her *Word of Mouth* album. "Shopping from A to Z" is so well conceived and performed that she can practically be forgiven for her cheerleader silliness in "Mickey." Basil, who has choreographed for Byrne and Bowie, leads the way in a romp through supermarket reality with musically arranged dance riffs that are perfectly matched to the space of the TV screen, far more sensitive to video's dynamics than the miniaturized vaudeville aesthetic of Bob Giraldo/Michael Jackson's "Beat It."

**Alternative music video entrepreneurs.** A number of small record companies and independent artists have found ways to work cheaply or gain access to advanced production technology and are producing a strong body of music video that is rarely if ever seen on television. *ART COM*'s video library is a key resource to historicizing this work that constitutes an important part of music television art's legacy.

Financial limitations often become creative opportunities, particularly in necessitating a personal scale. Graeme Whifler's pioneering work for Ralph Records is an excellent case in point. Spending \$3,000 to \$10,000 per clip, roughly 10% of the industry average, he employed a home movie sensibility in creating some of the most arresting, lucid and concise treatments of the music video to date. Working primarily with the Residents and with MX-80, Renaldo and the Loaf, Snake Finger, and Tuxedomoon, Whifler's flair for psychologically potent dreamscapes is balanced by a minimalist streak that saves his surreal visualizations from outré overkill. Since Whifler's departure in 1983, Ralph Records has continued to produce some bizarre experimentation under Homer Flynn's production guidance that have incorporated advanced production techniques. The Residents, who according to Flynn "foresaw the video revolution," worked on a video movie project beginning in 1972.<sup>[18]</sup> It was abandoned for eight years and then revived

by Flynn into *Whatever Happened to Vileness Fats*, an insistently out of control muted mutant soap opera. The Residents' "Mole Show," a computer graphic-enhanced live concert video, takes a monstrous plunge into the subterranean underworld beneath masks, with an operatic-scale production. And their clip for the James Brown's "It's a Man's, Man's, Man's World," an odyssey into the unreality of life support systems, received financing and distribution from Warner Brothers, leading to cablecasts on MTV earlier this year. The commercial crossover of this cutting-edge work is a hopeful development.

Ralph Records does a respectable, although certainly not lucrative, business distributing this work via the home videocassette market. While discussing all the possibilities and pitfalls of this venue can't be undertaken here, suffice it to say that this is one option for independents looking for ways around music television's back door lookout. A diverse array of collections including Monty Cantsin's *Castastronics*, "Blue" Gene Tyranny and Kenn Beckman's *South of La Honda Copacetic (origin still unknown)*, Dutch Knotts' *Go Big Capitalism* and compendiums like Pilot Video's California Images and Video Band's *California Zones* which are heavy on fine arts visual music influence, are ready and waiting for the music videocassette market to boom, a development that most analysts see as inevitable.<sup>[19]</sup>

Another example of turning limitations into aesthetic premises is provided by Richard Weiss' "Chemical Syndrome," featuring Mikki. What Weiss lacks in budget (the tape was done on virtually a zero budget if you don't count the 20 hours of one-inch editing time he got donated) he more than makes up for in imagination, cramming the tape full of original and compelling images like an Empire State Building model used as a mainlining hypodermic needle. He constructs a cartoon reality of paper bag masks, animated pills and eerie color intensifications that indicates a real flair for exploiting TV's artificiality.

A number of other artists have created works based in the music video format that aren't connected to the record company support structure. They have limited prospects on commercial television, but are contributing to the artistic development of form. These artists include Max Almy (*Perfect Leader*), Cecelia Condit (*Possibly in Michigan*), Dara Birnbaum (*Kojak, Wang*), Susan Britton (*Freeze Frame*), Julia Heyward (*Draggin' the Bottom*), Jill Kroesen (*Secretary Blues*), Michael Smith (*Go For It Mike*), Branda Miller (*La Nickel*), and Bill Viola (*Anthem*). The fact that these artists run the gamut from fine arts video to television art suggests that the form is wide open to diverse artistic interpretation.

**TV or not TV?** But does music television permit artistic expression? Is there an aesthetic argument for artists' music video making an all out assault on radiovision?

Artists may have understandable reservations about letting their work become grist for the video musicosmos mill, with viewers free to go get a beer, treat it as video wallpaper, or turn it into filler for football game timeouts. However, possibly because the form is intrinsically more concise and intense, music videos apparently have a stronger hold on their viewers' attention than standard television shows. According to Warner Amex VP Bob Pittman:

*We thought MTV would be secondary to television but our research showed that people watched it seventy percent more intently. MTV turned out to be even more hypnotic.*<sup>[20]</sup>

And music television presentation by its nature may be superior to an art gallery context, in that its repetition encourages multiple viewings and a progressive digestion of a clip's contents. Given music video's tendency towards high IPMs (ideas per minute) and narrative compaction, a clip may not only sustain, but actually require a number of separate viewings. While music television art can profit from these aspects of the radiovision context, it struggles against absorption by that context, synthesizing the music into an integrated and conceptually coherent work that subsumes, rather than serves, its musician-star, standing out as a discrete entity. Assuming the function of advertising in order to get record company financing and therefore access to television, without assuming the form of an ad and thereby losing artistic meaning, is the dilemma at the heart of artists' music television.

#### *Forum on Artists' Prospects in Music Television*

How do independents get televised? Is there any hope eventually receiving direct payment? Can the record companies' production apparatus be infiltrated? What changes will the market undergo? These are questions music television artists are faced with, and who better to answer them than principal decision makers within the industry?

Participants in the forum discussion include: Jo Bergman, Vice President/Video of Warner Brothers Records and video music program curator at past AFI National Video Festivals; Homer Flynn, co-owner of Ralph Records and producing manager of the label's video projects; Dorene Lauer, designated spokesperson for Warner Amex's MTV Networks as Manager of Press Relations; and John McGhan, Vice President of Programming at Turner Broadcasting System's Cable Music Channel and formerly Producer of NBC's *Friday Night Videos*.

#### *How Entrenched is the 'Backdoor' Economic Structure of the Industry?*

**Jo Bergman:** *MTV is in the middle of negotiating a contract that would provide for payment, and there's at least one syndicated show that is paying for tapes. The number of outlets and the kinds of outlets available are changing all the time. The tendency is that music video is becoming programming at the same time as it's promotional.*

**Dorene Lauer:** *We can get clips from an artist or manager or a record company or whatever, but the whole point of the exposure on MTV is to help the music business sell records. I don't see a point where we'll be putting a lot of tapes in regular rotation that don't have records that are distributed nationally. Think about it as a radio station, and if you think of that model, that will give you a better idea of what the model of MTV is.*

**John McGhan:** *If we don't make it, nobody gets an outlet. There will only be MTV left. At the present time we don't pay for any tapes because we're millions of dollars in the hole, but we have made an agreement that when we start making money we'll spread it around.*

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**Footnotes:**

1. David Antin, "Video: The Distinctive Features of the Medium," in Ira Schneider and Beryl Karat (eds.), *Video Art: An Anthology*, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976, p. 180.
2. David Marc, "Understanding Television," *The Atlantic Monthly*, August 1984, p. 34.
3. Dorene Lauer, Manager of Press Relations-MTV, interview with Michael Nash, 1984.
4. Ted Turner, "Ted Turner Takes on MTV," interview in *Rolling Stone*, October 25, 1984, p. 46.
5. Cable Music Channel Information Packet, October 26, 1984.
6. Dorene Lauer, interview with Michael Nash, 1984.
7. Homer Flynn, co-owner of Ralph Records, interview with Michael Nash, 1984.
8. Jo Bergman, Vice President of Video, Warner, interview with Michael Nash, 1984.
9. Jo Bergman's "guesstimate," interview with Michael Nash, 1984.
10. Dorene Lauer, interview with Michael Nash, 1984.
11. Steven Levy, "Ad Nauseum: How MTV Sells Out Rock & Roll," *Rolling Stone*, December 8, 1983, p. 78.
12. Herbie Hancock, in "Herbie Can't Dance But Sound System Is a Breaker's Dream," by David Frick, *Rolling Stone*, October 25, 1984.
13. David Ehrenstein, "Pre-MTV," *Film Comment*, August 1983, p. 42.
14. Bill Viola, interview with Michael Nash, 1984.
15. Steven Levy, *Rolling Stone*, op. cit., p. 33.
16. Dorene Lauer, interview with Michael Nash, 1984.
17. Based on David Marc's concept of a "sitcosmos." *The Atlantic Monthly*, August 1984, p. 36.
18. Homer Flynn, interview with Michael Nash, 1984.
19. For a discussion of the prospects see Michael Shore, "Rock videocassettes: the next big thing-or are they?" *Rolling Stone*, October 25, 1984, p. 68.
20. Bob Pittman quoted by Steven Levy, *Rolling Stone* op. cit. p. 34.

Anna Couey

## Participating in an Electronic Public: TV Art Affects Culture

*There are people who think the distinction between mass and high culture has blurred, to the point where artists have to consider it.*<sup>[1]</sup>

Television is a buzzword for experimental art in the 80s, and everyone is seemingly writing and thinking about it. As electronic transfer of experience and knowledge intensifies perception, artists are more and more interested in approaching the TV industry to gain access to the airwaves. This development is shaking the institutional supported art arena, as it necessitates a re-evaluation of the function of art and its relationship to audience.

In this spirit, the *Boston Review* ran a series of four articles (Vol. 9, No. 3 and 4) on "new topics about video,"<sup>[2]</sup> funded by the Massachusetts Council for the Arts. *Boston Review* editor Nick Bromell conceived of the series after noticing "the nation's increasing interest in video art."<sup>[3]</sup> He developed the series with Coordinating Editor Linda Podheiser, "to talk about what artists saw in television."<sup>[4]</sup> Issues that they wanted to investigate included distinctions between mass and high culture, formal possibilities of television, audience, and how television might change the parameters of art. The series consisted of "Video Art and the TV Revolution," by Marita Sturken; "Ilene Segalove: 'Girl' Video Artist," by Linda Podheiser; "TV: The End of the Affair," by William Rothman; and "The Art of Television Drama," by Martin Esslin. What emerged from the articles, apart from factual information, was ambivalence. The writers were attracted by financial prospects and the possibility of artists participating in public culture. However, their enthusiasm was countered by fears of how TV was going to affect art. Discussions of commercialism, inhuman technology and the inflexibility of the industry indicate a state of transition with regards to art and television. The series expresses attitudes representative of artists who are not yet willing to subject "pure" art to a non-institutional, non-gallery marketplace; who, as Linda Podheiser says, "want to guard some sense of autonomy. There's a purist attitude that what they do is somehow entirely different than what's on TV now."<sup>[5]</sup>

In spite of its postmodern intent, the series confirms the traditional antagonism between the industry and video art, and fears that television art will not be accessible to a mass audience. The views expressed in the series approach, but do not quite realize that "art is attitudinal,"<sup>[6]</sup> and that contamination of art with television is necessary for participation in creating a public interactive culture.

### *TV as a Venue For Art Presentation*

Martin Esslin: *...many writers start with short radio plays, progress to longer and more complex radio work, and gradually enter television; when they have established themselves there, they step to the live theatre and the cinema becomes much easier.*

Marita Sturken: *Art, almost by definition, questions conventions and invents new, more difficult languages. Video art, like other art forms, espouses the primacy of the creator, whereas commercial television gives editorial control not to the director and writer but to television executives...*

Linda Podheiser: *(Video) artists share television's materials but question its purposes and dismantle its formats in their pursuit of personal expression. At the same time, the best video art explores the aesthetic and imaginative heritage of TV as a mass medium, acting as analyst and alchemist, clarifying the revolutionary changes TV has already brought to us.*

Marita Sturken: *As problematic as museum exhibition can be, it does represent an atmosphere in which art is seriously evaluated. Can we ever say this of television?...But television is after all, the ultimate electronic showcase and offers seductive opportunities to an art form that has always been underexposed and underfinanced.*

Ilene Segalove: *At that point, I knew it wasn't that I didn't want to make art, but that I wanted to make TV. It just seemed human.*

One positive aspect of putting art on TV is financial. As with music video, mass distribution of artists' video offers publicity. Esslin describes the possibilities of television as a means of developing one's career commercially, which then facilitates "pure" art pursuit in more traditional venues with institutional support. In addition, as Sturken notes, television art as standard television programming earns money. The industry's big bucks are very appealing to artists producing in an expensive medium, especially with decreasing governmental support. Crossover into the industry provides a means of artistic survival.

However to these writers, it can also imply sellout, consumption of art by the media. Making money, or succeeding in a commercial context seems to defeat the image of an artist who questions culture, suggesting support of the status quo: postmodernism at its most reactionary. They fear that a transformation of the artistic process or appropriation of TV formats will infringe upon content, since commercial television bases aesthetic decisions on marketing strategies. They are also concerned about the presentation of a completed work. Sturken writes that TV is not taken seriously by the viewer who is looking to be entertained, and that museums, though still unable to properly present video, offer the best alternative. Isolated from popular culture in a museum video art enjoys neutral surroundings, with content free from its source.

While excited by television and its potential for becoming an art medium, Sturken and Esslin are ambivalent about the effect of TV on art; television offers a contamination of art with life. Segalove's desire to make art human via television provides another perspective. Art does not have to be defined by an avant-garde construct that becomes effective when the culture that produced it is no longer afraid of it. Once art participates contemporaneously with culture, its function changes. Rather than making its own history, art on television has the potential to affect a culture.

#### *Technological Developments*

Martin Esslin: *Television has become, and will increasingly become, a huge industry relying, for the enormous demand of hundreds of new channels, on more and more industrialized methods of mass production.*

Marita Sturken: *Network television as we have known it is slowly becoming obsolete. Vast, expensive, centralized, inflexible, it is the dinosaur of the 1980s and '90s, gradually giving way to an electronic entertainment industry that includes multiple channels, increased distribution via satellite, home recorders, and, for viewers, a radically new element of choice.*

William Rothman: *...all manner of transactions that now call for human beings to meet and converse will be effected electronically.*

William Rothman: *The new technology promises—or threatens—to banish humanity from reality.*

Ilene Segalove: *That was the first time I interacted with television, and I remember getting such a thrill. It was tangible. I used to run behind the set to see if there were people in it.*

The reality of affecting culture can be somewhat disheartening. Sturken writes, "Some early video artists... saw the medium principally as a tool for social change and as a weapon for 'guerilla television.'" [7] Even now, the prospect of television art is an ambivalent option. For all its potential in cable, television is a powerful and unwieldy industry, not overwhelmingly receptive to artists and experimentation.

On the other hand, "guerilla television" is dated as an aesthetic development. The challenge of subverting TV has changed. The potential diversity offered by cable, combined with the increasing acceptance of video as an art medium (by both institutions and the general public), and the development of populist attitudes among artists have altered artists' relationship to TV. The new challenge is to work with the industry, creating work which is no longer video-on-TV, but video as TV, reaching mass audiences. This is transformation from within.

Granted, it's not going to be easy. But with our increasing dependency on electronically communicated information and ideas, it is important for artists to have access to the airwaves. Technology itself is not a threat to humanity. Television transmits culture. Interactive technology allows for response on the part of a previously passive audience. The potential for two-way participation in electronic information exchange overcomes the real threat that TV becomes a more monolithic and pervasive agent of culture, where your choice is only between switching on and off.

#### *Audience*

William Rothman: *...television reassures us that we are connected to the world...that we are in contact with other human beings, that we are plugged in.*

Martin Esslin: *...the most effective scenes in television drama involve only two or three people, whose emotions and reactions will register in the minutest detail in their features, no further away from the viewer than those of people with whom he interacts in real life.*

Martin Esslin: *The television viewer, on the other hand, is usually sitting in his own home, with the lights on, alone, or with very few people. Moreover, he is in control of his set. If he is bored, he can switch it off or go to another channel.*

William Rothman: *Why subscribe to HBO if one has access—legally or illegally—to tapes of the movies and special programs one wants to see?*

Marita Sturken: *While television can present work of artistic merit, as for example in the more innovative programming of PBS, it can never, as a mass medium, present “difficult” work.*

Martin Esslin: *Serious drama, undoubtedly, is not among the most popular of entertainments for a mass audience and will thus never get the highest ratings. It can be harrowing and intellectually demanding.*

Martin Esslin: *...the television industry is convinced that American audiences, used as they are to the fare they are offered by the commercial networks, are not capable of watching any serious work on the television screen.*

William Rothman: *When we play our role in computer programs, we relate not to real “others,”—to human beings like ourselves but separate from ourselves—but to an agency that represents no real human beings.*

Segalove: *I loved the way he (George Burns) would look at the audience and talk to you, and then fall back into the scene, and then refer to the TV set and the audience back home...*

Ilene Segalove: *I’m dealing with universal issues, with love, with being a girl and growing up. Maybe the way I tell them is peculiar, but I’m hoping that there are enough people who can deal with them the way I do.*

On the “human” side of the screen is the audience, which feels connected to the world the TV set, according to Rothman. Close up, in the home, electronic presentation of information and entertainment is more revealing to human nature and events (though often fabricated) than our daily physical interaction with other people. It fulfills our need for a public. “In short, television makes the public who, in turn, make television.”<sup>[8]</sup> In contrast, the avant-garde tradition of art has maintained distance between artists and viewer. The medium of communication, the artwork, has utilized unfamiliar language to bring the viewer to the artists’ vision. When Esslin says that serious drama will not attract a large mass audience, it is in part because such drama does not make a real effort to attract that audience. While Esslin criticizes the industry for assuming the mindlessness of its viewers, he shares the same attitude.

Rothman takes this attitude one step further. Based on the assumption that an audience wants only to be entertained, he sees that audience’s increasing choice ending its need for a public, and that interactive technology will not mean participating in culture, but a withdrawal from it, where each individual creates his or her self-contained framework.

Both writers ignore a crucial fact: television makes itself accessible to its audience. Attraction lies in communication. By taking the audience into consideration, television has developed tremendous power as a cultural force.

### Cultural Potential

William Rothman: *...television is central among the media of journalism—newspapers, magazines, radio that serve to create publicity, to foster our sense that we belong—that we are—a public. We are a public, television reminds us, because we attend together to events.*

Marita Sturken: *Now, many are cautiously optimistic that for the first time art will have a respected and valuable place on television—and perhaps, therefore, in public life.*

Marita Sturken: *They are producing works which they hope to show on public and cable television, and which they hope will serve as prototypes for a new, more diverse kind of television.*

Marita Sturken: *Global Groove was a prescient work because Nam June Paik co-opted the rapid captivating style of commercial television.*

Linda Podheiser: *Ilene Segalove’s video stories have already crossed a number of barriers with humor and—for a “girl”—a surprisingly mature and tolerant wisdom.*

Ilene Segalove: *I set myself up in front of the set and I was vulnerable.*

Martin Esslin: *The sheer quantity of serious drama on British television has an important impact on the cultural life of the nation.*

Marita Sturken: *Whether they will take this chance to change TV, or whether TV will change them, may not matter in the long run.*

Marita Sturken: *...the changes artists make in the nature of television will profoundly alter the way we perceive and lead our lives.*

In an information age, television is our electronic public. It’s also, for artists, a medium for visual presentation. But the byword for technical revolution is communication. Each of the writers sees the development towards “variety and choice”<sup>[9]</sup> as indicating a change in the industry and that now, artists can possibly gain access. To do so, and to make their work accessible to an audience, many are beginning to utilize the familiar language of television.

For all his negative attitudes about mass audiences, Esslin recognizes the powerful impact of TV drama on English culture, and that TV can be different and be successful. Each writer is still ambivalent, worried that television cannot be art, and that an attempt at blending the two could result in a compromise of content. Desiring the potential of television art, they describe a point of transition for artists on the edge of postmodern contextualized breakthroughs.

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**Footnotes:**

1. Linda Podheiser, Co-ordinating Editor for video series in the Boston Review, (June and August 1984), and Professor at Emerson College, interview with Anna Couey, 1984.
2. Linda Podheiser, interview with Anna Couey, 1984.
3. Nick Bromell, Editor, Boston Review, interview with Anna Couey, 1984.
4. Linda Podheiser, interview with Anna Couey, 1984.
5. Linda Podheiser, interview with Anna Couey, 1984.
6. Nick Bramell, interview with Anna Couey, 1984.
7. Marita Sturken, "Video Art and the TV Revolution," Boston Review, June 1984, p. 8.
8. Carl Loeffler, "Toward a Television Art: Video as Popular Art in the Eighties," The Second Link: Viewpoints on Video in the Eighties, Banff: Walter Phillips Gallery, Banff Centre School of Fine Arts, 1983, p. 16.
9. Marita Sturken, op cit., p. 7.

# IMAGES: FROM THE PAGES OF *LA MAMELLE* AND *ART COM*



Cover: Video still from "Local Motion," Don Button

ABOVE: DON BUTTON

SITE: A NON-PROFIT SPACE FOR ARTISTS  
585 MISSION ST.  
SAN FRANCISCO

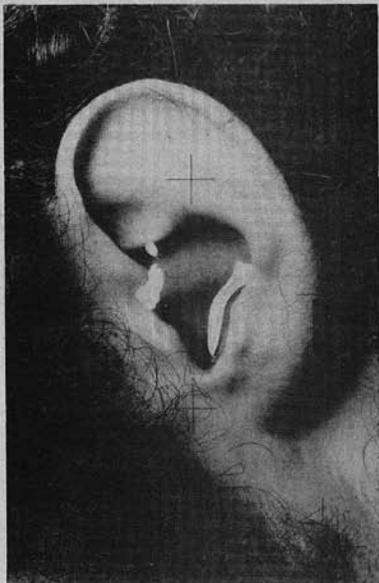


...ahhh (laughter) ...actually I..I kind of enjoy the things that very often aren't sold...so if that's temporary value that's okay.  
What's the happiest thing?  
Ahh this box of Kleenex right there....  
(Secretary enters with box of Kleenex)  
Yeah they were out of them at the corner store so I brought this from...the car.  
Used Kleenex!  
(laughter)...Well.. I can buy some more some other time...  
please give me your change..put the keys in in my coat.  
okay...  
did you get a receipt?  
Well..I..  
You forgot...  
Yeah...Yeah.  
Next question.  
Next question is what is the saddest thing?  
The saddest thing is being ripped off by some of these creeps that don't pay for

their pictures. That's real sadness.  
Do you ever laugh when you are alone?  
Yes.. everytime I read one of these letters that I get.  
Do you ever cry in public?  
No...I've never been able to do that... other than when Kennedy was shot.  
What is the most complacent thing you've ever done?  
..I never think of things as complacency.. that's a tough one...Ummm the most complacent thing I have ever done... for me is probably walking from my home to the Gallery.  
What does the term Ulti-media express to you?  
Well it's just like walking in here - it's just the ultimate in visual sensation.  
Is conversation an art form?  
Yeah...it's really great I love it.  
Can self-indulgence be an art form?  
Yes.  
Is an interview an art form?

JOHN MUSALL 7

STEPHEN LAUB



Constructing Roberta Breitmore *Lynn Hershman 1975* ©  
 ① Lighten with Dior eyestick light. ② "Peach Blush" Cheekcolor by Revlon. ③ Brown contour makeup by Coty. ④ Shape lips with brush, fill in with "Date Mate" scarlet. 5. Blond wig. ⑥ Ultra Blue eye-shadow by Max Factor. ⑦ Maybelline black liner top and bottom. ⑧ \$7.98 three piece dress. ⑨ Creme Beige liquid makeup by Artmatic.

# THE ETERNAL FRAME

AN AUTHENTIC REMAKE OF THE ORIGINAL JFK ASSASSINATION.

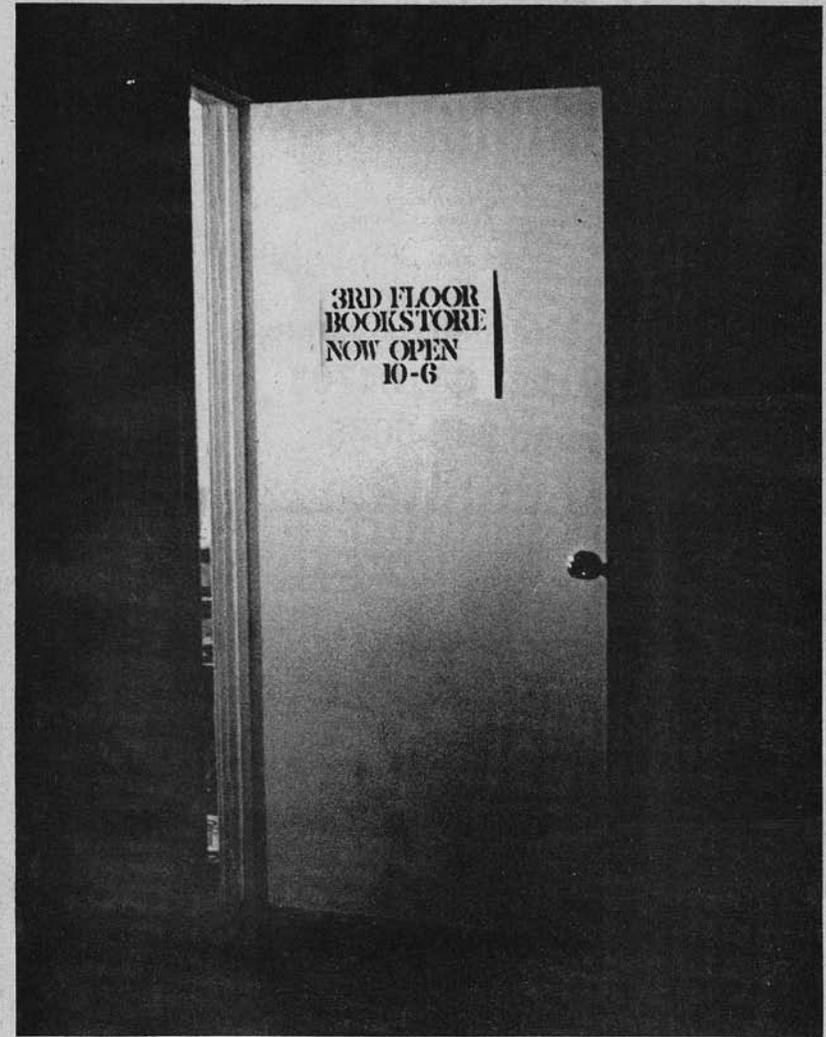
In August 1975, members of Ant Farm and T.R. Uthco went to Dallas to video tape their re-enactment of the assassination of John F. Kennedy. Fearing that their desecration of an American myth could result in an unpleasant confrontation with the citizens and authorities of Dallas, the artists' motorcade made its first pass through Dealey Plaza at 7 a.m. By two in the afternoon, the artist-President had been assassinated 17 times. Dealey Plaza had become jammed with tourists who eagerly photographed the event for family and friends back home. Even the Dallas Police were cooperative, allowing traffic to be stopped for the motorcade. The reaction of the tourists ranged between amusement and being sincerely moved by the spectacle. The only confrontation occurred when the artist-Presidential party entered the Kennedy Museum just off Dealey Plaza. The impromptu speech by the J.F.K. look-alike was cut short by the curator of the museum, who demanded that he leave the premises. The event ended with the artists and tourists gathered on the grassy knoll singing "The Eyes of Texas Are Upon You." The Eternal Frame is a video of this event and is available for purchase or rental through Electronic Arts Intermix of New York.



photo - Diane Hall

**ANT FARM**

A R T L I T E R A T U R E



70 12th STREET SAN FRANCISCO CA 94103



*Evidence*, Mike Mandel and Larry Sultan, 1977.

Peter Pfersick has been involved in the area of photo-sculpture, most specifically using photographic ideas as the basis for sculptural pieces. A typical piece involved manufacturing paint cans with labels made up to match the zone system gray scale. Another work entitled "the silver recovery kit, Oakland Edition" is an institutional package containing kodaberry tipped bullets, photo gun, cloth mask and a map to the Oakland banks.

In the early 1970s a new approach to photography, generated by conceptual artists using photography and a displeasure with the state of contemporary photography in the San Francisco Bay Area, turned a number of artists toward a conceptual and structural approach to the medium.

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Larry Sultan and Mike Mandel began collaborating on projects while students at the San Francisco Art Institute. An idea to create a billboard from a photo postcard of a woman in a cornucopia full of oranges spiralled into an entire series of billboards and eventually an NEA funded project to create billboards on an American theme.

Sultan and Mandel have essentially taken on the role of image processors, placing found images into new and hopefully meaningful contexts. The billboards contained imagery which on an informational level was for the most part irrelevant, such as a map of energy consumption in Kansas for the NEA project, or obscure iconological references such as the oranges motif which has a light hearted California thematic concept.



**STEFAN WEISSER, ISHI SHARPE**

April 18 (5-9 a.m., Easter Morning): *Life Poetic Essence: A Texturalingual Environment*, Ishi Sharpe and Stefan Weisser, artists. Improvised from texts by Stefan Weisser: *HWTOWE BYGESN*.

Description: electronic manipulation of text reading, broadcast live over external speaker system directed toward the intersection of Van Ness Avenue and Mission Street.

Production: Mark Drummond, electronic manipulation applying 3 echoplex/mixers/amplifier/speakers.

**PAUL COTTON**

April 23: *Nude Descending Staircase*, Paul Cotton.  
Description: performance.

**PAUL FORTE**

April 23: *29th Birthday*, Paul Forte.  
Description: rubber stamp performance/installation.

**T.R. UTHCO**

April 26 (9 a.m. - 3 p.m.): *32 Feet Per Second Per Second*, T.R. Uthco: Doug Hall & Jody Procter.

Description: *La Mamelles Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (Special Performance Issue): "Both (artists) sat 75 feet above the pavement in chairs bolted to the masonry wall outside the east windows of the third floor La Mamelles Gallery. Both are afraid of heights. They sat from 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM, and during this time they talked continuously. The two performers were clearly visible to spectators on the street below, and the sounds of their amplified voices as well as video images from two nearby cameras were fed into the gallery space. For two days prior to their appearance on the wall they worked from a swing scaffold, setting the heavy welded steel braces and chairs in place and drilling through 14 inches of brick with a roto hammer to be certain that the bolts holding their braces were solidly anchored. Their monologues, performed previously, but never for longer than two hours, were restricted only in one way - both presented a narrative description in the third person, male gender, past tense. They conceived of their voices as verbal muzak, and maintained a constant babble like water running over rocks, an endless stream of consciousness. Sitting so high off the ground, and at the same time occupied with this ceaseless, meaningless talk, the performers created a psychic chemistry in which both began to believe they were going crazy. They shook steadily for the last four hours, experienced tension, stress, heavy paranoid anxiety attacks, and from time to time thought they might jump." - T.R. Uthco (*Verbal Muzak from Beyond the Edge*).

Media Coverage: *La Mamelles Magazine*, *UPI*, *Flash Art*, *Domus*.

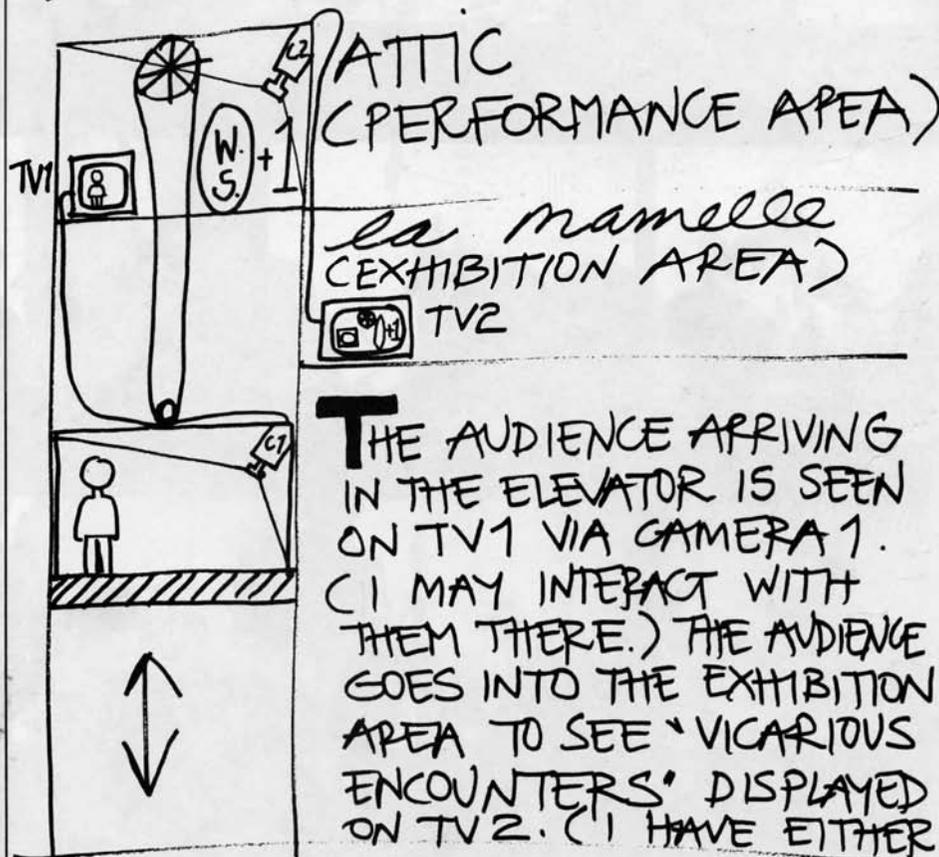
Opposite: Stefan Weisser, Ishi Sharpe, La Mamelles Arts center, 1976. Photo: Carl E. Loeffler.

Right: T.R. Uthco, performance, *32 Feet Per Second Per Second*, La Mamelles Arts Center, 1976. Photo: Diane Hall.

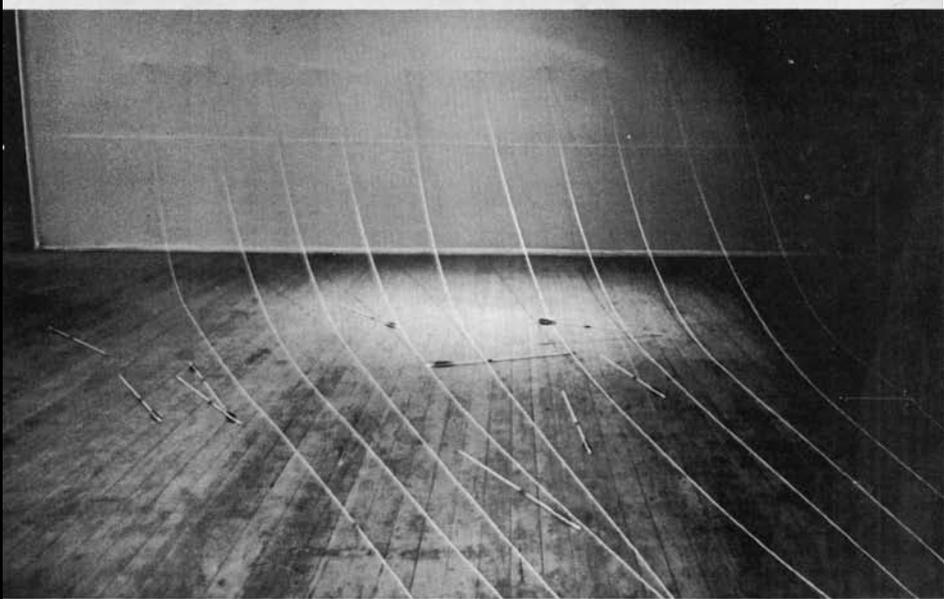


# "VICARIOUS ENCOUNTERS"

la Mamelles, S.F. CA. SEPT 28 - OCT 7.



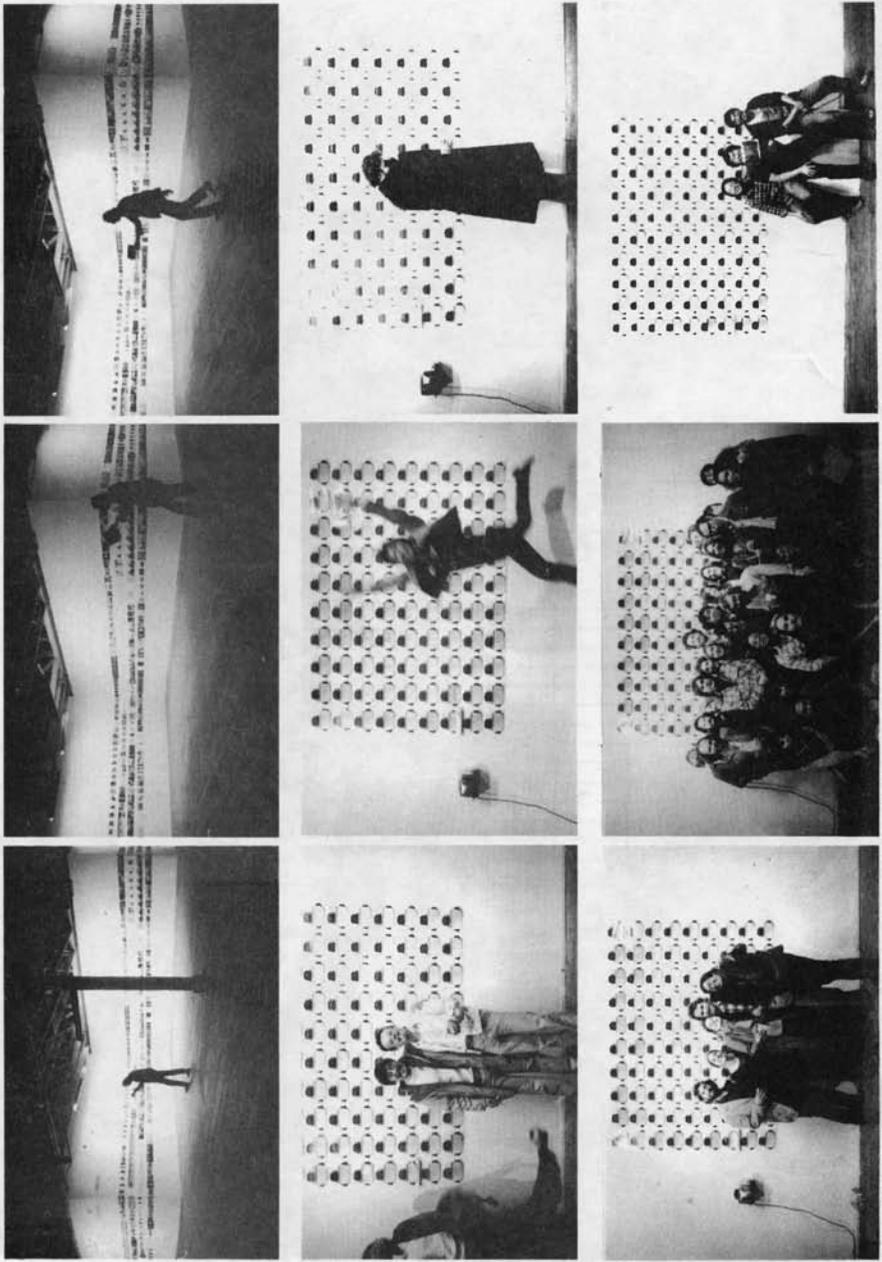
ALREADY INTERACTED WITH THEM OR WILL WHEN THEY GO UP TO THE PERFORMANCE AREA.) [FRAGMENTS OF "VP" ARE RETAINED.] W.S. SEPT 10, '76.



Above: *Pulling Strings*, Peter Wiehl. La Mamelle Arts Center, 1976. Photo: Carl E. Loeffler.

Opposite: *Vicarious Encounters*, Willoughby Sharp. La Mamelle Art Center, 1976. Photo: Carl E. Loeffler.



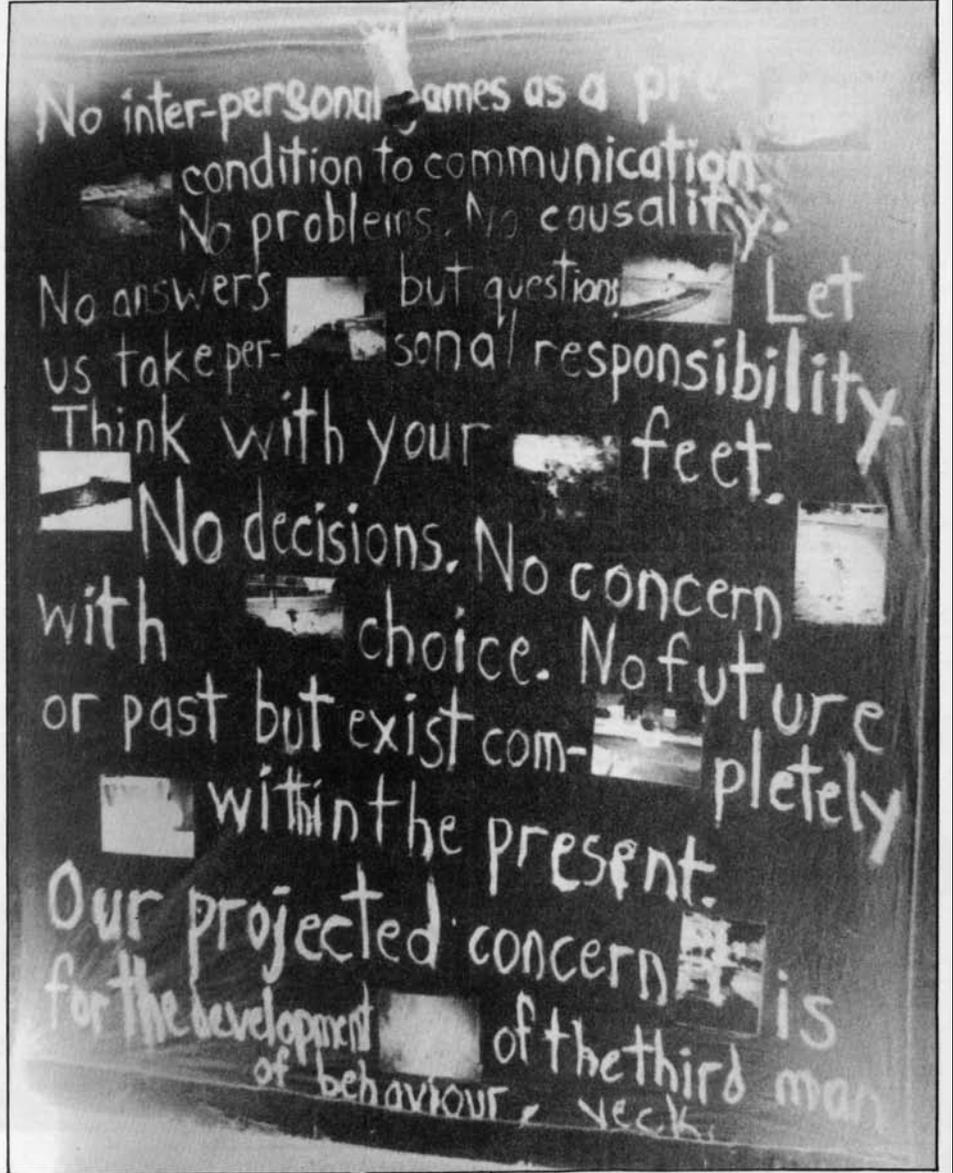


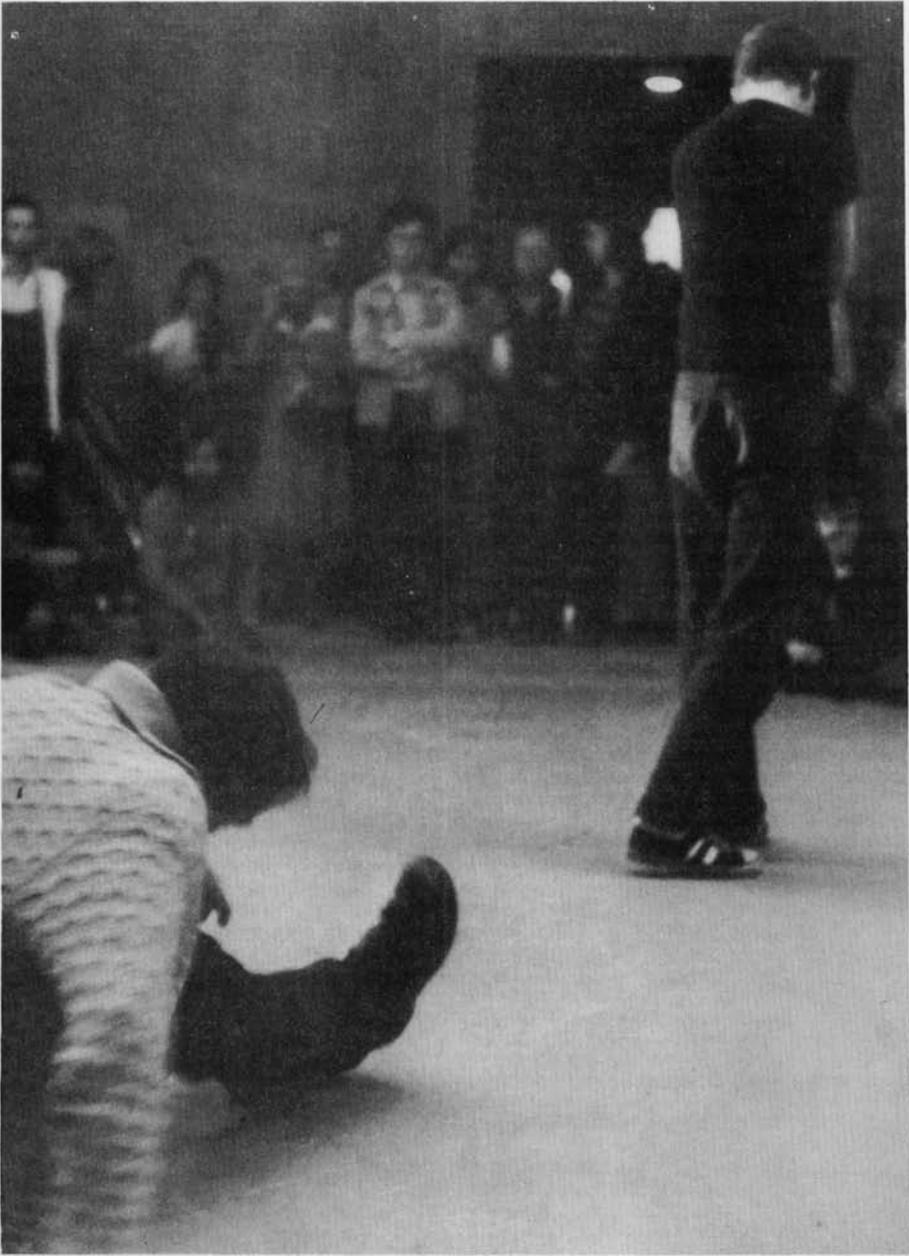
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One Hundred & One Trainers, The Registry, La Marmelle Arts Center, 1976, Photos: David Wranable.

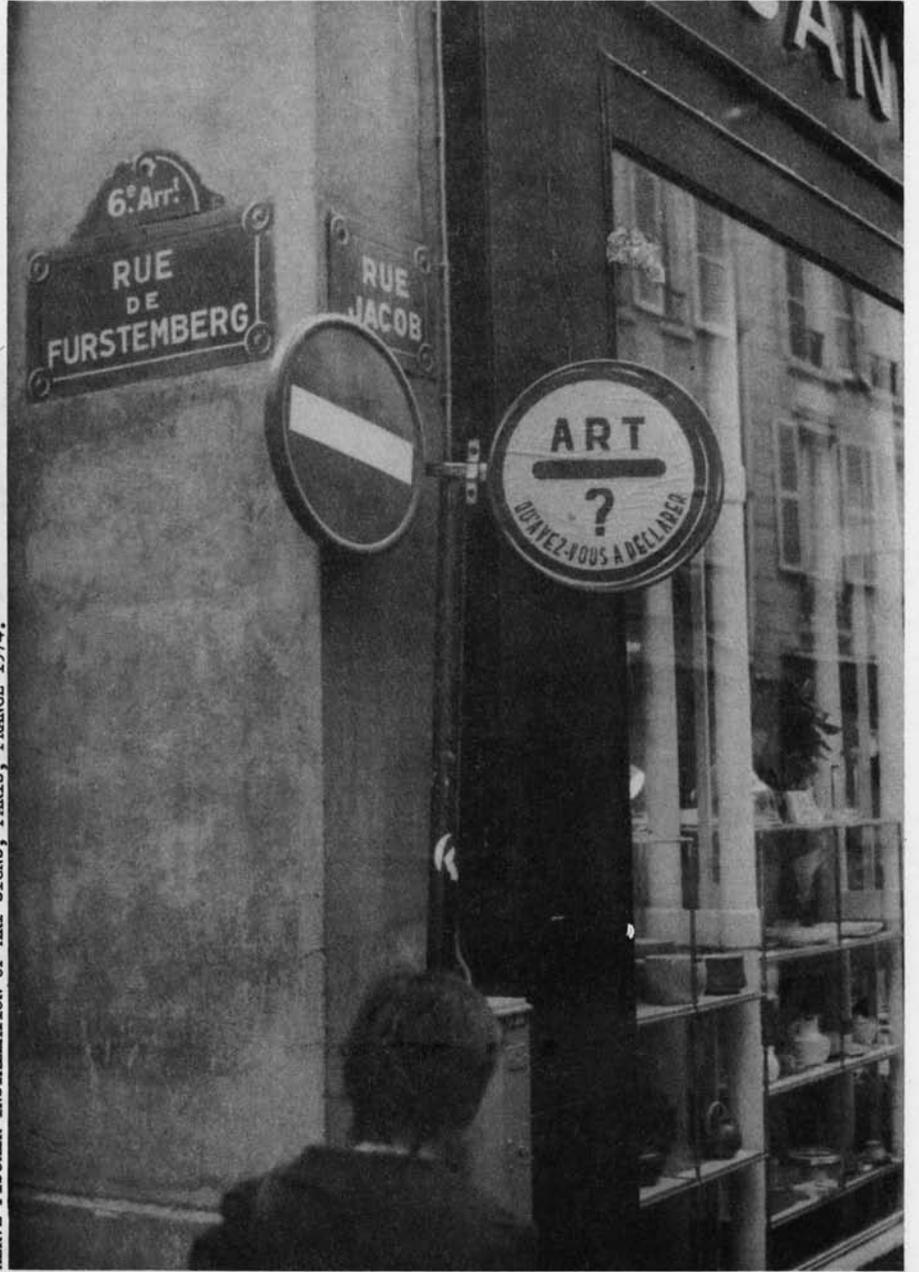
REINDEER WERK

DIRK LARSEN AND TOM PUCKEY

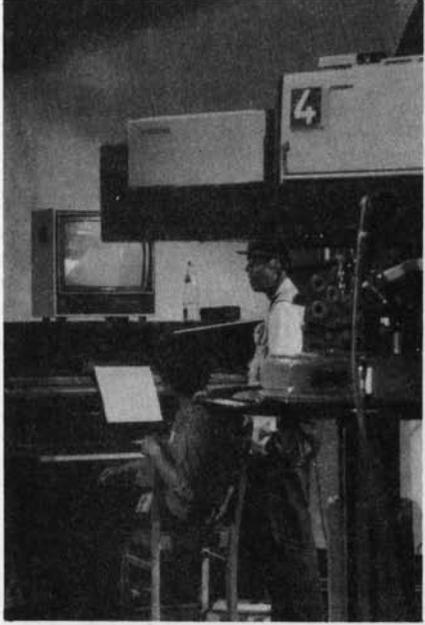
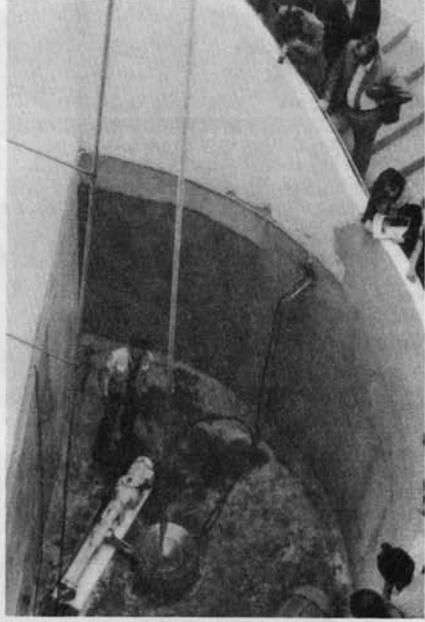
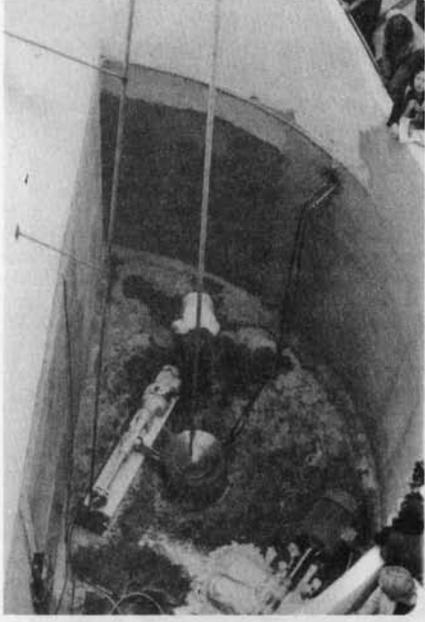




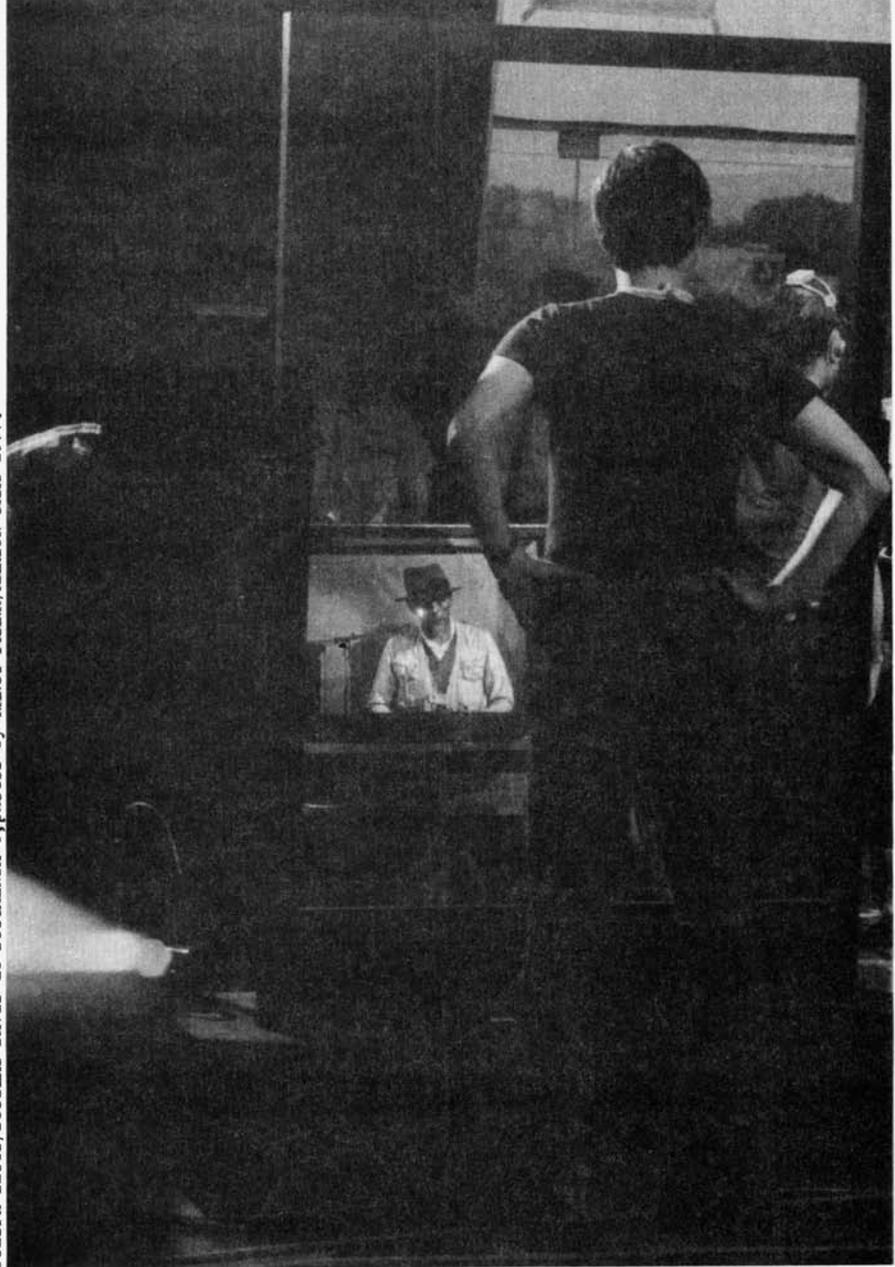
REINDEER WERK AT DOCUMENTA-6, Photo by CLAIRE GRAVELLE, 1977.



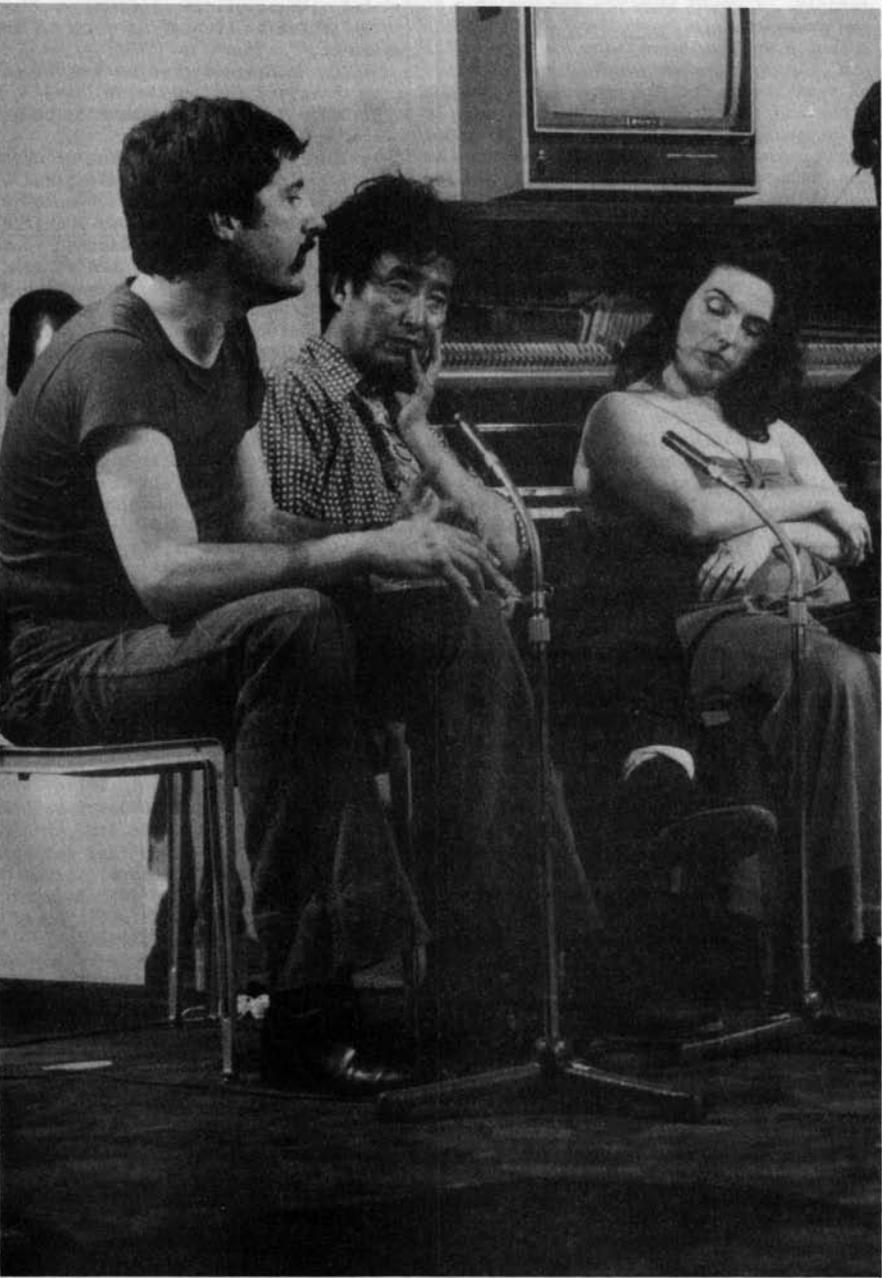
HERVE FISCHER INSTALLATION OF ART SIGNS, PARIS, FRANCE 1974.



JOSEPH BEUYS/DOUGLAS DAVIS at DOCUMENTA-6, photos by NANCY FRANK/MARION GRAY 1977.



DOUGLAS DAVIS/NAM JUNE PAIK/C. MOORMAN at DOCUMENTA-6, photo by MARION GRAY, 1977.



# (HERRATA

A CONVERSATION ABOUT (HERRATA) LYNN HERRMAN AND JO MANNION WITH MOLLIE BOTE SAN FRANCISCO, OCTOBER 18, 1977

MR. I GATHER THAT YOU TWO AND PAT TAVERNER ORGANIZED THE (HERRATA STRATEGY BOTH AS A SPECIFIC PROTEST AGAINST A PARTICULAR CURRENT SAN FRANCISCO MUSEUM PROGRAM BUT ALSO, MORE GENERALLY, IT IS A PROTEST CONCERNING THE LONG-STANDING DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN ARTISTS IN THE BAY AREA AND THAT THERE ARE MANY EXAMPLES OF THAT DISCRIMINATION, NOT IN TERMS OF EXHIBITION POLICIES, AND SUCH FACTS AS ONLY LAST YEAR DID THE ART DEPARTMENT, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY, FIRST GIVE TITLES TO A WOMAN, JOAQUIN BROWN. VERY RECENTLY, THE SAN FRANCISCO ART INSTITUTE PLANNED A MAJOR INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON CRITICISM AND ITS INITIAL LIST OF PEOPLE INVITED INCLUDED ONE WOMAN OUT OF SEVENTEEN. THE NATIONAL DOCUMENT WAS JUST APPROVED TWO REGIONAL DIRECTORS, BOTH OF WHOM ARE MEN.

JR. WELL, I THINK THAT WE ARE LOOKING AT IT AS A GENERALLY BAY AREA REGIONAL SCHEME. I THINK THAT ONE OF THE THINGS THAT HAS BEEN COMING TO THE FORE OF OUR THINKING NOW IS THE FACT THAT THERE HAS NOT BEEN THE KIND OF IMPACT AND PRESSURE CREATED AROUND THIS ISSUE THAT HAS BEEN CREATED IN CELEBRATION OF OTHER MAJOR CREATORS. IN TERMS OF RECENT BACKGROUND, THERE WAS THE FAILURE OF THE FINE ARTS MUSEUM TO ACCEPT THE REMARKABLE WOMEN ARTISTS 1950-1970 EXHIBITION (OF THE WIDE LACK-ORIENTATED SHOW ORGANIZED BY AND WITH LAND HARRIS AND LINDA MCGILL). THE MUSEUM TURNED IT DOWN BY SAYING THAT THEY HAD JUST HAD A WOMEN'S SHOW -- A MINOR EXHIBITION FROM THEIR STORAGE -- IT WAS ALL RIGHT, BUT IT WAS NOT A SIGNIFICANT SHOW. SOMEONE MADE THE POINT THAT IT'S BEEN LOOKING AT MEN'S ART FOR 100 YEARS SO IT WOULD BE NO STRAIN NOW TO LOOK AT TWO SHOWS BY WOMEN.

MR. JUST BEFORE THAT THERE WAS A GREAT DISCUSSION OVER THE "CALIFORNIA" SHOW, AND THE FACT THAT THERE WERE 50 MEN WHO WERE INCLUDED IN THAT. IT WAS NOT JUST A MATTER OF EXHIBITION BUT ALSO THE DOCUMENTATION: THE DEFINITIVE DOCUMENTATION THAT WAS BEING DONE ON CALIFORNIA ART, AND WOMEN WHO WERE BEING LEFT OUT OF THAT.

JR. AND THEN, ON THE BASIS OF THESE OTHERS, GAVE THE SAN FRANCISCO MUSEUM CURRENT OUTDOOR PERFORMANCE PROGRAM WHICH CHALLENGED WOMEN, EXCEPT FOR ONE WOMAN WHO WORKS COLLABORATIVELY WITH HER USUAL MUSEUM.

MR. THERE WAS THE EXHIBITION CALLED "AMERICA 1978", AN EXHIBITION OF LABORATORY PRINTING COMMISSIONS BY THE MUSEUM THEMSELVES. MY NOTION IS THAT THE SAN FRANCISCO MUSEUM WANTED TO MAKE THE POINT THAT ARTISTS NOW HEAR FROM LANDSCAPE IN TERMS OTHER THAN PAINTING. THAT IS A THINKING THING FOR A MUSEUM TO DO, TO ENLARGE THE CONCEPT OF THE EXHIBITION. THE MUSEUM PLANNED THREE SUCCESSIVE EXHIBITIONS IN OCTOBER AND NOVEMBER, AND THEN LATE IN NOVEMBER I IN WHICH FOUR ARTISTS WOULD SELECT A SITE SOMEWHERE IN THE AREA AND PLAN AN ACTION OR INSTALLATION. THE ONLY THING THAT WAS REALLY NOT SO GOOD WAS THAT THE MUSEUM HAD INVITED ALL MEN.

MR. AS WELL AS A DISCUSSION PANEL OF ALL MEN.

JR. THAT DOES NOT REFLECT THE REALITY OF ART IN AMERICA IN 1977. PAT, LYNN AND I WERE HAVING DINNER TOGETHER -- SORT OF INCIDENTALLY -- WHEN LYNN TOLD US OF THE MUSEUM'S ACTION.

MR. PETER D'AMORINO HAD TOLD ME ABOUT THIS PARTICULAR EXHIBITION. THE MUSEUM HAD ASKED HIM TO RE-DO HIS PLANNING MUSEUM PIECE. THE IDEA OF HAVING SUCH AN EXHIBITION IN THIS BAY AREA IN SAN FRANCISCO WITH NO CONSCIOUSNESS OF WHAT WOMEN WERE DOING -- PARTICULARLY AFTER THE PROTESTS CONCERNING THE EXCLUSION OF WOMEN FROM THE "CALIFORNIA" SHOW SHOWED THE NEED FOR ACTION. I HOPED THAT WE COULD OR MIGHT A VEHICLE TO POINT OUT THE EXCLUSION WITHOUT BEING DISTRUCTIVE, BUT TO DO IT IN A POSITIVE WAY WITH A SENSE OF HUMOR, AND IN A STRONG WAY TO POPULARIZE AND CHECK THAT FORM SO THAT THE FUTURE WOULD BEING ABOUT A DIFFERENT SET OF CONSEQUENCES AND CONSCIOUSNESS.

JR. IT WAS THIS CONTEXT THAT MADE THEIR COMMISSION ESPECIALLY SENSITIVE. THERE WAS ANOTHER SITUATION, HERE WAS AND THEN EXHIBITION AND THE SAME OLD THING WAS GOING DOWN: MEN WERE BEING ASKED TO DO THE ART, WOMEN WERE BEING OVERLOOKED, AND THE FURTHER CONTEXT WAS THAT A SIGNIFICANT PART OF INSTANTANEOUS OUT-OF-DOORS WORK HAS BEEN DONE BY WOMEN IN THIS AREA, YOU HAVE TO THINK OF CERTAIN WOMEN UNLESS YOU HAVE BELLIDERS OR SAMPLES ON, AND A CERTAIN OVER YOUR MIND.

MR. WHY DID YOU CHOOSE THE NAME (HERRATA)?

JR. WELL, I HAD GIVEN A CARDINAL THAT DAY THAT HAD AN "HERRATA" IN IT. I THOUGHT IT WOULD BE NICE TO PUT THE "H" IN FRONT OF "HERR" TO REPRESENT THE SILENT WOMEN WHO WERE EXCLUDED, AND NOT RECOGNIZED OR VISIBLE. HERRATA IS THE SITUATION WHERE YOU CORRECT ERRORS AND THE "H" INDICATES THE GROUP OF THE ERRORS BEING CORRECTED.

MR. GIVEN THAT YOU CONCEIVED THE NEED FOR PROTEST, WHAT FORM DID YOU WANT IT TO TAKE?

JR. THE SENTIMENTARY VIEW THAT NONE OF US REALLY LIKED PICKET LINES AND SOME OF US LIKED DEMONSTRATIONS AFTER THE FACT. WE WERE ARTISTS AND OUR THING IS TO DO ART. WHAT WE PLANNED FOR (HERRATA), AND WHAT IS BEING ABOUT IT AS A STRATEGY, IS THAT WE ARE DOING ART. AND IT IS THE MANNER OF DOING IT THAT MAKES IT A SIGNIFICANT POLITICAL STATEMENT.

MR. WHAT WE PLANNED WAS TO PUT WOMEN EXACTLY WHERE THE SAN FRANCISCO MUSEUM HAD PROGRAMMED MEN TO BE. YOU TWO WOULD BE GETTING THE SAME AUDIENCE, BUT ADDITIONALLY WE WOULD BE BRINGING OUR OWN AUDIENCE INTO AND SHOWING THEM. THERE IS A MAN WHO IS A GOOD ARTIST AND LOOK AT HIS WORK BUT THEN LOOK OVER HERE. THERE ARE ALSO THREE OR FIVE WOMEN AND THEY ARE GOOD TOO, SO LET'S SEE HOW MUCH THIS AREA CAN BE TOTALLY. LET'S FERTILIZE AND CROSS-POLLINATE WITHIN THE FRAME THAT HAD BEEN PREVIOUSLY DEFINED BY THE MUSEUM. SO WE PLANNED TO HAVE WORK BY WOMEN IN ALL THE SITES AND THEN, OF COURSE, THE MUSEUM'S IDEAS WOULD BE NOT EXPANDED AND TURNED AROUND.

MR. HOW DID YOU CHOOSE THE WOMEN FOR THE (HERRATA STRATEGY)?

JR. WE THOUGHT ABOUT WHO'D BEEN INVOLVED IN THIS KIND OF WORK AND FROM THERE, AND JUST EXPLORED FROM ONE TO THE NEXT. WE INVITED SYDANNE LACEY BECAUSE WE DECIDED IT WOULD BE A MEANINGFUL THING TO BRING PEOPLE FROM THE LOS ANGELES AREA, SYDANNE WAS VERY INTERESTED IN THE CONCEPT.

MR. WE MADE A LIST BEFORE I WENT TO AUSTRALIA. SHE DID A MARVELOUS JOB IN GETTING THE WOMEN TO AGREE AND GETTING THEM TOGETHER TO WORK ON THE PROJECT WHILE I WAS GONE. I WANT TO ADD THAT THIS WAS A TOUGH GESTURE AND THAT HAD WE REALLY HAD MORE TIME INTO IT, WE COULD HAVE COME UP WITH 200 TERRIFIC WOMEN, BECAUSE THERE ARE JUST A MYRIAD OF THEM EVERYWHERE IN THIS AREA. THIS IS JUST A SAMPLING, A SAMPLING OF THE STREACK OF WHAT'S AROUND.

MR. YOU DIDN'T PARTICULARLY DISTINGUISH BETWEEN INSTALLATIONS/ENVIRONMENTS AND LIVE PERFORMANCES?

JR. NO, WE WANTED SITUATIONAL WORK THAT WOULD RESPOND TO THE LANDSCAPE.

MR. I GATHER THAT YOUR INTENT WAS TO ENRICH RATHER THAN COMPETE WITH THE EXISTING MUSEUM SETUP?

JR. THAT WAS A REALLY KEY THING AS FAR AS I WAS CONCERNED. WE HAD NO INTENTION OF OPERATING THE COMMISSIONED ARTISTS. OURS WERE TOOKEN PRESENTATIONS, TO ADD TO THE ENJOYMENT AND EXCITEMENT.

MR. ANOTHER PART OF THE STRATEGY WAS THE SIMPLE MATTER OF A PLANE TICKET FROM NEW YORK TO SAN FRANCISCO AND BACK. WE INVITED LAURENCE ALLOTT TO COME OUT AND REVIEW (HERRATA FOR ART IN AMERICA) AND HE AGREED TO DO IT. THAT IS THE THING THAT TRANSFORMS (HERRATA FROM A LOCAL ACTION TO A NATIONAL POLITICAL STATEMENT AND GIVES IT GREATER IMPACT. WE WANTED TO MAKE THIS ACTION HEARD. IF WE WERE MERELY A GROUP OF WOMEN DOING AN ACTION, PEOPLE MIGHT HAVE LAUGHED OR TALKED ABOUT IT FOR TWO DAYS, BUT THEN IT WOULD BE OVER. WE FEARFULLY WOULD HAVE BEEN FORGOTTEN IN THE NEAR FUTURE IN ONE WAY OR ANOTHER. TO MAKE THIS ACTION HEARD, WE NEEDED THE KIND OF WELCOME THAT MUSEUMS RESPECT AND PAY ATTENTION TO, AND ARE FORTUNATE OF.

MR. SO RATHERLY, ALLOTT'S PLAYING OUT WAS OF SOME MEANING. WE WERE ASKED OUT TO STUDY A POLITICAL STRATEGY ON BEHALF OF WOMEN ARTISTS IN THE BAY AREA, AND TO SEE A SERIES OF INSTALLATIONS AND PERFORMANCES BY WOMEN.

JR. IN THIS CONTEXT, THERE IS SOMETHING THAT I KEEP WANTING TO SAY. I THINK IT IS IMPORTANT TO REALIZE THAT THOUGH WE ARE IN THE SAN FRANCISCO MUSEUM, WE ARE DIRECTING OUR EFFORTS TOWARDS IN THIS ACTION, IT IS ALSO THE MUSEUM THAT IS DOING THE MOST. THAT IS THE MOST SUPPORTIVE OF THE COMMUNITY HERE. IT IS THE MOST VITAL OF THE CITY MUSEUMS, AS THE LEADER AND THE YOUNG MUSEUMS ARE RAPIDLY INVOLVED IN ART THAT IS SUPPORTING CONTEMPORARY ART. AND SO IT IS THE MUSEUM THAT IS DOING THE MOST THAT GETS THE FLACK. A THOUGH WE ARE BEING CRITICIZED, IT WOULD ALSO LIKE TO SAY THAT, IN MY OPINION, HENRY MOWLES, THE DIRECTOR, WHILE HE IS HESITANT IN ALLOWING THIS SITUATION TO CONTINUE AS IT IS, IS ALSO COOPERATIVE OF THIS ISSUE, AND THE FIGURES WE HAD COLLECTED INDICATE THAT THERE IS IMPROVEMENT UNDER HIS DIRECTIONSHIP.

MR. YOU HAVE SOME FIGURES ON THE EXHIBITIONS OF MALE AND FEMALE ARTISTS RESPECTIVELY IN THE SAN FRANCISCO MUSEUM?

JR. WHAT I HAVE HERE ARE FIGURES FOR ONE-PERSON AND TWO-TO FOUR-PERSON EXHIBITIONS. I HAVE 30 FIGURES FOR GROUP SHOWS. FROM 1965 TO 1970 AMONG ONE-PERSON SHOWS, THERE ARE 97 MEN, 4 WOMEN AND 1 HOUSE GENDER COULD NOT BE DETERMINED FROM THEIR NAMES. GENERALLY THAT MEANS MEN AND AT LEAST ONE OF THE ONE-PERSON SHOWS. IN THE TWO-TO FOUR-PERSON SHOWS, THERE WERE 48 MEN AND 6 WOMEN, IE, 897 MEN AND 115 WOMEN, FROM 1965 TO 1971 IN ONE-PERSON SHOWS THERE ARE 81 MEN AND 13 WOMEN. THAT'S NOT A GREAT IMPROVEMENT BUT IT IS MUCH BETTER THAN WE HAD IN TWO-PERSON SHOWS OF THIS PERIOD. THERE WERE 20 MEN AND 14 WOMEN, WHICH MEANS THAT MEN AND 22% WOMEN, AND THAT AGAIN IS AN IMPROVEMENT FROM 11%, BUT NOT ENOUGH TO BE ACCEPTABLE. BUT FOR ME, IT INDICATES THE INTENTION OF DOING BETTER.

MR. I THINK WE ALSO HAVE TO REMEMBER THAT THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT WAS BUILDING UP MOMENTUM IN 1971 AND THAT THE MUSEUM WOULD IMPROVED VISIBILITY OF WOMEN ARTISTS GENERALLY WAS IN IT HAD FOR EVER SAN FRANCISCO TO KEEP WOMEN ARTISTS IN THE CLOSET.

JR. I THINK THE SITUATION GENERALLY IN THE BAY AREA IS EXPLICITLY AND EXPLICITLY. I THINK WOMEN ARE ASKED TO DO A LOT OF MENTAL LABOR FOR NO PAY AND THEN ARE BELIEVED OVER FOR DECISIONS IN REPRESENTATION FOR THE AREA. IT'S HARD ENOUGH TO BE IN EVERY PHASE OF LIFE HERE, WHETHER IT BE JOB HIRING OR MUSEUM POLICIES, THAT IT'S REALLY UNBELIEVABLE THAT PEOPLE HAVE ALLOWED IT TO GO ON FOR THIS LONG. THERE SHOULD BE A WAY TO EDUCATE THIS EFFECTIVELY WITH (HERRATA). THE QUESTION WAS TO FIND A WAY TO DO IT EFFECTIVELY WITHOUT MAKING IT SEEM LIKE IT'S SOME GRAB BAG OF YOU WERE LEFT OUT.

JR. WELL, ONE THING THAT UNDERCUTS THE SHOW CHANGES IDEA IS THAT THOSE OF US INVOLVED IN ORGANIZING IT, HAVE BEEN "SUCCESSFUL" AS ARTISTS, AND THAT MAKES A DIFFERENCE, I THINK, IN THAT WE ARE NOT ANTI-MUSEUM, AND ARE NOT BELLING RANT.

MR. I THINK IT IS PERFECTLY LOGICAL TO BE INTO THIS SITUATION THAT IS ALREADY SET UP, AND SORT OF REVOLVING IT. IN (HERRATA), WE HAD THE SITES ALREADY SELECTED AND BY WORKING WITH THE MALE ARTISTS ALREADY INVOLVED, WE POINT OUT THAT WHAT IS NEEDED IS A TOTAL CHANGE THAT SHOULD COME ABOUT, FROM WITHIN, RATHER THAN AN IMPOSED ONE.

MR. WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO AFTER THIS PARTICULAR ACTION IS OVER? JO, YOU ONCE TOLD ME OF YOUR IDEA OF A GROUP CALLED "WOMEN WITHOUT WALLS" WHO WOULD GET TOGETHER WHENEVER EVENTS NECESSITATED.

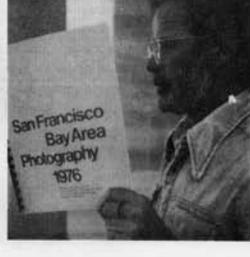
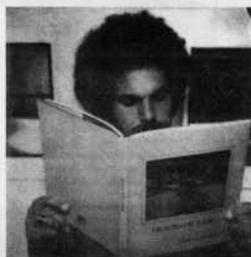
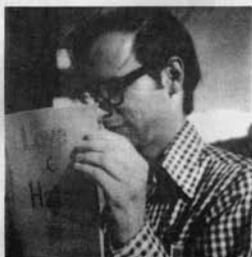
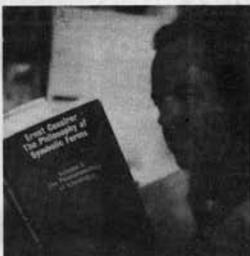
JR. WELL, I THINK WE WANTED TO TAKE ABOUT THAT QUITE A LOT -- LONGER THIS CURRENT ACTION HAS FORMALIZED FOR US IS THAT WE HAVE DONE VERY LITTLE UP UNTIL NOW, AND HAVE HAD VERY LITTLE IMPACT ON THE ISSUE. WE HAVE JUST BEEN TOO EASY GOING AND TOO SHY WITH OUR OWN WORK. I EXPECT TO CONTINUE TO BE TOO SHY. I THINK WE WILL ALL CONTINUE THAT WAY BUT I THINK WE HAVE TO HAVE ANOTHER SESSION ABOUT THE TABLE TO DECIDE WHAT THE FOLLOW-UP ON THIS WILL BE. I FEEL, AS A LAST RESORT, IF (HERRATA) AND SIMILAR ACTIONS FAIL, PERHAPS WE SHOULD THINK ABOUT BEING EVERYONE WHO IS GETTING PUBLIC FUNDING AND WHO IS DISCRIMINATING AGAINST WOMEN.

MR. IN TERMS OF ORGANIZATION -- AND I HAVE DISCUSSED THIS WITH SOME PEOPLE AND I WANT TO DISCUSS IT WITH LYNN SO THIS IS A GOOD TIME -- I CONCEPT A NON-ORGANIZATION WITH 30 OFFICERS, 30 MEMBERS. JUST A SITUATION WHERE WOMEN COME TOGETHER WHEN THERE IS SOMETHING TO COME TOGETHER ABOUT, AND WHEN OVER IS AVAILABLE DOES WHAT IS NEEDED. THIS IS A LOOSE SORT OF ACTION, HENCE THE TITLE "WOMEN WITHOUT WALLS". I THINK WE ARE ALL NOT TERRIBLY SKILLFUL AT BEING ORGANIZED ANYWAY. IT SEEMS LIKE A NON-ORGANIZATION IS A MARVELOUS WAY TO GO ABOUT IT.

MR. I HOPE WE CAN REALISTICALLY CREATE A REALLY WORKABLE, EFFECTIVE SITUATION WHICH GOES BEYOND BOUND GUESTS.

JR. IT DOES TAKE SITUATIONS, LIKE THE ONE WE ARE DEALING WITH RIGHT NOW UNDER WE SAY -- HERE IS A DISADVANTAGEOUS SITUATION. HOW DO WE MAKE IT ADVANTAGEOUS? AND THEN WE TURN IT AROUND AND MAKE IT ADVANTAGEOUS.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY 6  
LEW THOMAS AND SAM SAMORE**





ABOVE-"WE ARE NOT DADAISTS" (JUNE 1-30) BAY AREA DADAISTS GROUP INCLUDING: MARY ANN WELLS, CHERYL SOLOWAY, RICK SOLOWAY, BILL GAGLIONE, CHARLES CICALTELLI, TIM MANCUSI, MONTE CAZAZZA, AND OTHERS, PHOTO: DON ILLARDO 1977.

BELOW-"SELECTIONS FROM THE RUBBER STAMP MUSEUM"-CURATORS CARL LOEFFLER, MARY STOFFLET, BILL GAGLIONE, DAWN GAGLIONE, PHOTO NANCY FRANK 1977 AT BONNIE SHERK'S FARM, SAN FRANCISCO.



USE VALUE OF THE GALLERY  
AND THE MECHANICS  
OF MANIPULATION  
WHAT IS THE QUALITY OF  
THE GALLERY. WHAT IS THE  
QUANTITATIVE OF THE GALLERY.  
HOW IS THIS MAINTAINED.  
WHAT ARE THE MECHANICS.  
CAN AN ART OF CONSUMER  
PRACTICE BE SOCIAL PRACTICE.  
WE ASK THESE QUESTIONS  
BECAUSE WE ARE LIVING THE  
CONTEXTUAL REALITY. WE HAVE  
SEEN SOCIOLOGICAL  
INVESTIGATION  
PRESENTED AS DECORATIVE  
ART.

WE HAVE SEEN THE NEW YORK  
NEWSPRINT PUBLICATIONS  
TELL US WE'RE UNABLE TO  
SPEAK OF OUR SITUATION.  
WE HAVE SEEN THE  
NEW FORMALISM OF SOCIAL  
PRACTICE AS ART ABOUT ART  
WE HAVE SEEN THE  
NEW FORMALISM.



AMERIGO MARRAS "PHOTOBOTH IMAGES"



TOP  
TOP-JOYCE CUTLER SHAW "THE LADY AND THE BIRD": MASS PIGEON RELEASE, PHOTO NANCY FRANK 1977.

BELOW-SEVEN SUNDAYS AFTER "SEVEN SUNDAYS AFTER THE FALL" MOTION CONNECTION: MICHELLE LARSON, MINBY APURON, NINA WISE, TERRI HANLON, AMY ANN CLEVELAND, JOYA CORY, FERN FRIEDMAN, DEBORAH SLATER, MARY STOFFLET, JUDITH BARRY (COORDINATOR OF "SEVEN SUNDAYS AFTER THE FALL"), THERESA CHA, AND OTHERS, PHOTO 1977.



ART PUBLISHERS CONVENTION (OCTOBER 8-9): A JOINT PROJECT OF UNION GALLERY, STEPHEN MOORE DIRECTOR, AND LA MAMELLE INC. VIDEO DOCUMENTATION.

KEN FRIEDMAN (OCTOBER 10-11) "EMPOWERMENT: PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF THE SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE FOR THE ARTS COMMUNITY": A SYMPOSIUM WITH KEN FRIEDMAN, AMERIGO MARRAS, JOHN FATCHNEY, LYNN HERSHMAN, VIDEO DOCUMENTATION.

CHERI GAULKE (OCTOBER 16) "I AM CINDERELLA...": PERFORMANCE, VIDEO DOCUMENTATION.

NANCY BUCHANAN (OCTOBER 23) "PURIST/PUREST": PERFORMANCE DEALING IN PART WITH IMAGES THAT CONJURE OR DO NOT CONJURE A CONNECTION WITH THE CONCEPT OF PURITY, VIDEO DOCUMENTATION.

HAK KYUNG THERESA CHA (OCTOBER 30) "LOOKING FOR THE ROOTS OF THE LANGUAGE BEFORE IT IS BORN ON THE TIP OF THE TONGUE": PERFORMANCE, VIDEO DOCUMENTATION.

T. R. UTHCO (NOVEMBER 4) "REALLY I'VE NEVER DONE ANYTHING LIKE THIS BEFORE": VIDEO PERFORMANCE (T. R. UTHCO: DOUG HALL, DIANE HALL, JODY PROCTER)

FERN FRIEDMAN, TERRI HANLON, AND DEBORAH SLATER (NOVEMBER 6) "WAITRESS": PERFORMANCE WITH DANCE AND NEW MUSIC, VIDEO DOCUMENTATION.

JUDITH BARRY (NOVEMBER 13) VIDEO PERFORMANCE WITH MULTIPLE VIDEO AND AUDIO SYSTEMS.

DEPT OF ART WORKS (NOVEMBER 8) "LOCATION PINE AND KEARNY STREETS": INSTALLATION.

WEST COAST INTERNATIONAL SOUND POETRY FESTIVAL (NOVEMBER 18-20): LIVE PERFORMANCE, AUDIOTAPE, AND SYMPOSIUM, AUDIO DOCUMENTATION.

JUDITH AZUR (DECEMBER 2) "SPACES II": DANCE AND VIDEO PERFORMANCE WITH CURT SIDDALL AND MARGARET FISHER, A VISUAL PERFORMANCE WORK PRESENTING THE SQUARE AS PARADIGM OF OUR SOCIAL-SPATIAL CONVENTIONS.

JOYCE CUTLER SHAW (DECEMBER 3) "THE LADY AND THE BIRD MESSAGE EXCHANGE" AND "THE LADY AND THE BIRD TEXTS": MASS RELEASE (300+) OF HOMER PIGEONS AND READINGS FROM ARTISTS' TEXTS, AUDIO AND VIDEO DOCUMENTATION.

*Really, I've never ~~the~~ done anything like this before!*

BELOW-T. R. UTHCO (DOUG HALL, JODY PROCTER AND DIANE HALL) VIDEO PERFORMANCE, PHOTO KIT SIBERT 1977.



## SEND-RECEIVE SATELLITE NETWORK: WEST COAST PROGRAMMING

TWO-WAY

SAN FRANCISCO BAY/NEW YORK CITY  
NEW YORK CITY/SAN FRANCISCO BAY

VIA THE CTS SATELLITE  
IN FIXED ORBIT AT 116° LONGITUDE WEST

LIVE COLOR TRANSMISSION  
DIGITAL/VOICE/VIDEO

SEPTEMBER 10, 1977: 9:30-12:00pm PACIFIC  
12:30-3:00pm EASTERN

SEPTEMBER 11, 1977: 12:00-2:30pm PACIFIC  
3:00-5:30pm EASTERN

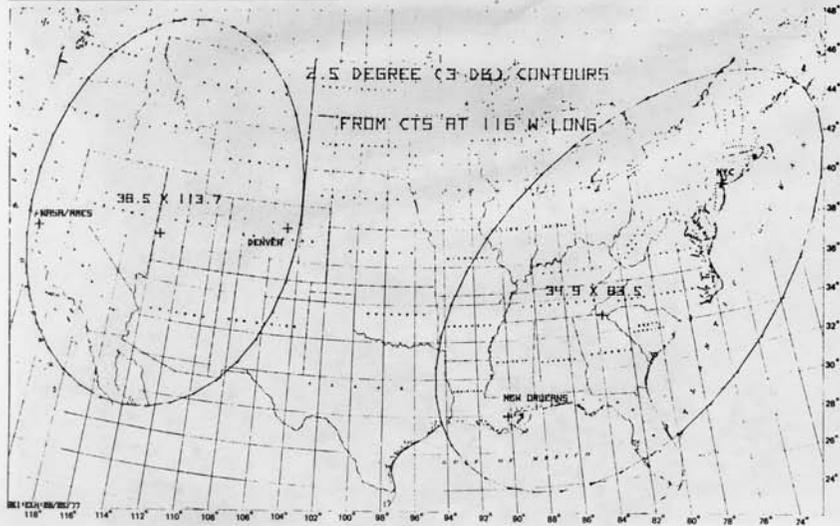
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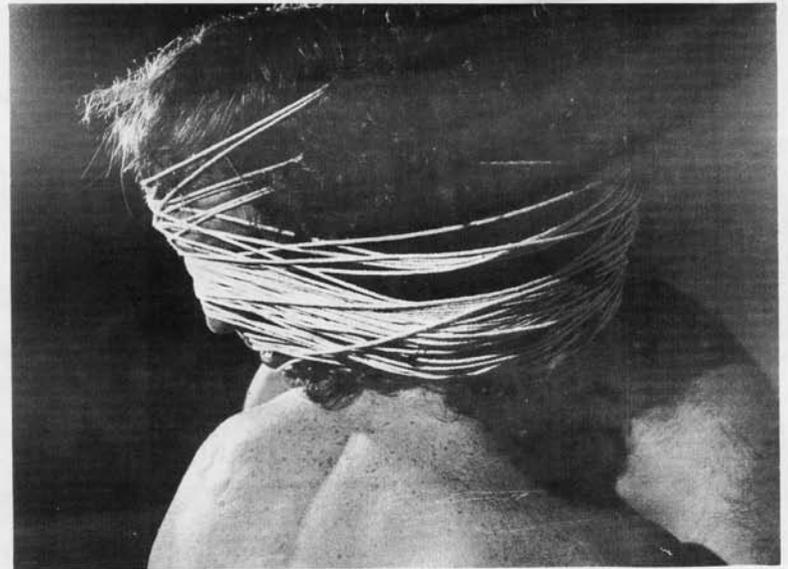
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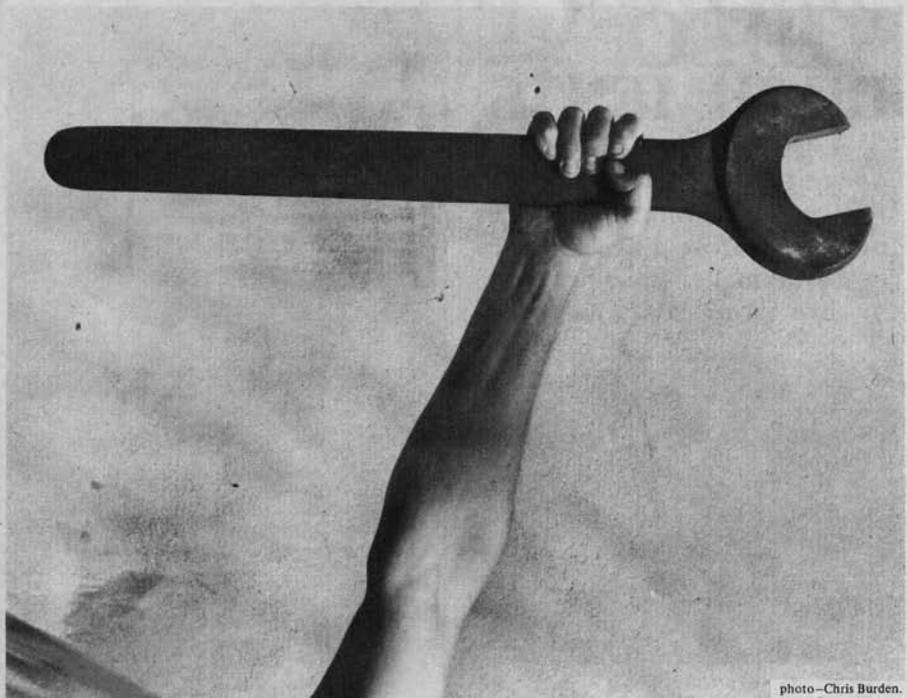
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TOP-PAUL MCCARTHY VIDEO STILL "CLASS FOOL"; DUE TO THE NATURE OF P.M. VIDEO WORKS, THIS TAPE WAS CONSIDERED NOT SUITABLE PROGRAMMING BY VIA-COM, CABLE TELEVISION, SAN FRANCISCO.

BELOW-T. R. UTICO VIDEO STILL "REALLY I'VE NEVER DONE ANYTHING LIKE THIS BEFORE"; PHOTO DIANE HALL 1977.





photo—Chris Burden.



photo—Barbara Smith.

Barbara Smith, *Just Passing*, a performance work that explores Smith's relationship to television and reflections stemming from stages in her past wherein she felt the pressure of being focused upon sexually, and other simultaneous experiences of curiosity and initiative. *Just Passing*, approx. 15 min., color, 1979, catalogue number: PT-002.

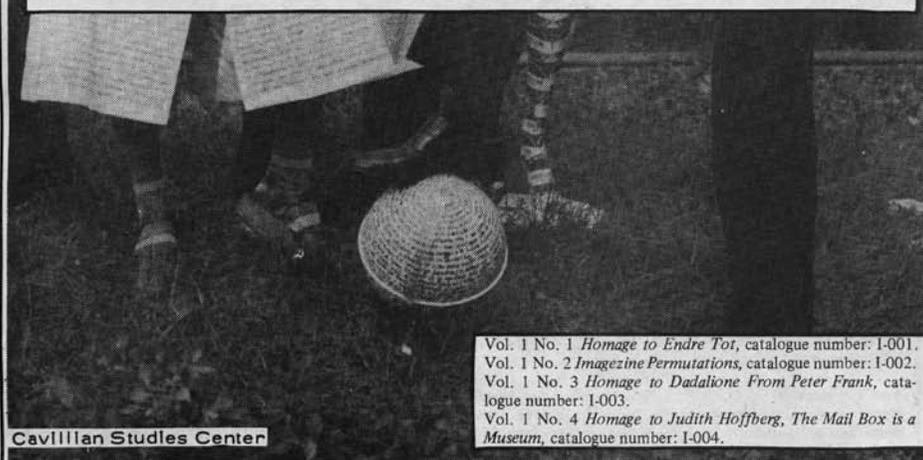
Chris Burden, *The Big Wrench*, a narrative work describing Burden's relationship with Big Job, a freight truck he bought for "traveling exhibitions" and other "mobile" works. Burden speaks of the resulting "curse of Big Job", and his foiled plans and difficulty of getting rid of the truck. Life art from one of California's most notorious performance artists. *The Big Wrench*, approx. 15 min., color, 1979, catalogue number: PT-003.

Lynn Herstman/Rea Baldrige, *Test Patterns, A Factional Docudrama (in time)*, with an introduction by Timothy Leary. A Myth America production featuring an interview with one of the "art world's" most alluring personalities. *Test Patterns*, approx. 15 Min., color, 1979, catalogue number: PT-004.

# IMAGEZINE



a magazine published on a rubber stamp format. "If art publishing is the making public of art information, then *Imagezine* imprints upon surfaces is art publishing. Be an art publisher!" A rubber stamp approx: 2 x 4 inches with handle.



Vol. 1 No. 1 *Homage to Endre Tot*, catalogue number: I-001.  
 Vol. 1 No. 2 *Imagezine Permutations*, catalogue number: I-002.  
 Vol. 1 No. 3 *Homage to Dadaisme From Peter Frank*, catalogue number: I-003.  
 Vol. 1 No. 4 *Homage to Judith Hoffberg, The Mail Box is a Museum*, catalogue number: I-004.

Cavillan Studies Center

*Art Contemporary*: Vol. 2 No. 1, Ant Farm, Paul Cotton, Lowell Darling, Paul Forte, Tommy Mew, Bonnie Sherk, Lew Thomas, T.R. Uthco, interviews with Michael Bishop, Ian Burn, and San Francisco Gallery Directors. Catalogue number: AC-005.

*Art Contemporary*: Vol. 2 No. 2/3, Chris Burden, Helen and Newton Harrison, Suzanne Lacy, James Melchert, Willoughby Sharp, book and catalog reviews, and interview with James Elliott. Catalogue number: AC-006/7.

*Art Contemporary*: Vol. 2 No. 4, *Art Periodical Conference at 80 Langton*, San Francisco, *Approaches to Photography, San Francisco Bay Area* by Hal Fischer, *Visual Poetry* by Geoffrey Cook, book and catalog reviews and *Catalogue La Mamelle, Inc. 1975-1976*: publications, video activity, exhibitions, performances. Catalogue number: AC-008.

*Art Contemporary*: Vol. 3 No. 1 *Special From Europe Issue*, Cavellini, Endre Tot, *History of Correspondence Art* by Marilyn Ravicz, *Historical Survey of Sound Poetry* by S. Ruppenthal and Larry Wendt, *Notes/Statements of Activity* by Amerigo Marras, publication, book, and catalog reviews. Catalogue number: AC-009.



photo—Tom Marioni.

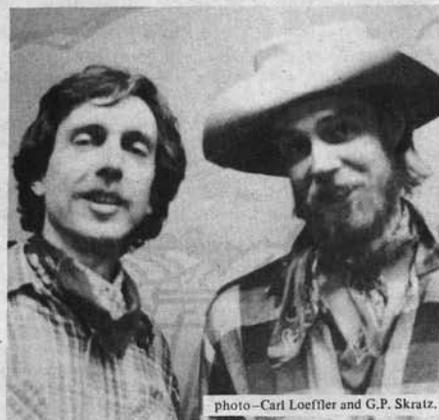


photo—Lynn Hershman.

*Art Contemporary*: Vol. 3 No. 2 *Bibliography* by Lew Thomas, (*H*)*errata* by Jo Janson, Lynn Hershman and Moira Roth, *Catalog La Mamelle, Inc. 1977*: publications, video activity, exhibitions, performances. Catalogue number: AC-010.

*Art Contemporary*: Vol. 3 No. 3, *Eros and Photography* by Meyer Hirsch, *Report on the New ArtSpace Conference* by Mary Stoffler, interviews with Eldon Garnet, Marien Lewis, and Peter Plonsky. Catalogue number: AC-011.

*Art Contemporary*: Vol. 3 No. 4, *Special Transmittable Booklet Issue*, (Produced during La Mamelle, Inc. residency at A-Space, *A Literal Exchange*, Toronto, 1978 and designed to be re-assembled into individual artists books.) Anna Banana, Buster Cleveland, Paul Forte, Nancy Frank, Bill Gaglione, Kirk deGooyer, Carl Loeffler, G.P. Skratz, Mary Stoffler, *Selections from California and La Mamelle, Inc. at A-Space catalog, Picture Pages*, Catalogue number: AC-012.



photo—Carl Loeffler and G.P. Skratz.

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## PERFORMANCE ANTHOLOGY: A SOURCE BOOK FOR A DECADE OF CALIFORNIA PERFORMANCE ART.

California occupies a leading role in the development and practice of performance as a contemporary, new art expression. **PERFORMANCE ANTHOLOGY** offers a thorough documentation of the impactful literature produced during the past decade on California performance art. The "Chronology of Literature" is an extensive bibliography of books, theoretical and critical essays from journals, artists' books, reviews, catalogues, and marginal works (videotapes, audio works, etc.). The chronology is annotated, profusely illustrated and contains multitudinous excerpts from the literature. **PERFORMANCE ANTHOLOGY** contains introductions and original essays by artists and leading historians and critics of performance art in California. Essays include: *Autobiography, Theater, Mysticism and Politics/Women's Performance Art in Southern California*, by Moira Roth; *Performance Art in Southern California: An Overview*, by Linda Frye Burnham; *From the Body into Space/Performance Art in Northern California*, by Carl E. Loeffler; and *Women, Representation, and Performance Art/Northern California*, by Judith Barry.

**PERFORMANCE ANTHOLOGY** includes the following California artists who have produced works in the area of performance: Ant Farm, Eleanor Antin, Chris Burden, Lowell Darling, Terry Fox, Howard Fried, Lynn Hershman, Allan Kaprow, Paul Kos, Suzanne Lacy, Tom Marioni, Paul McCarthy, Linda Montano, Bruce Nauman, Darryl Sapien, Bonnie Sherk, Barbara Smith, John White, and many others. Performance art situations and spaces include: Museum of Conceptual Art, Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art, Floating Museum, La Mamelle Inc., Some Serious Business, the Woman's Building, 80 Langton St., and others.

**PERFORMANCE ANTHOLOGY** has been edited by Carl E. Loeffler, founding director of La Mamelle Inc., an "alternative space" where over a few hundred performance works have been presented. The associate editor is Darlene Tong, Art Reference Librarian at San Francisco State University and executive officer of ARLIS/NA, Northern California.

**PERFORMANCE ANTHOLOGY**  
Approx 400 pp., illus., bibli.,  
and index.

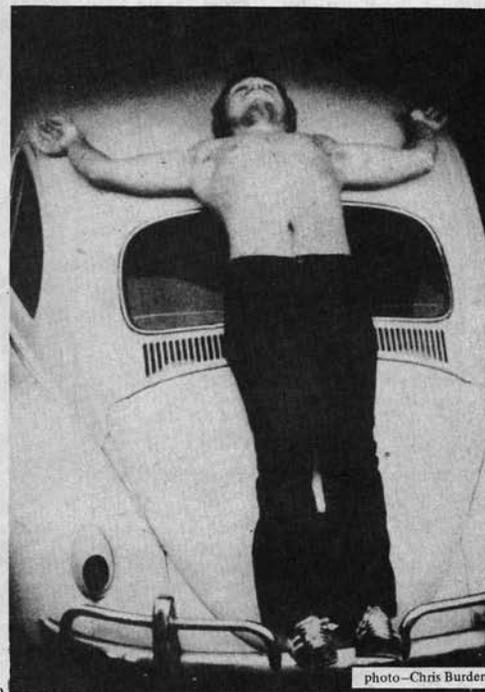
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photo—Linda Montano



photo—Chris Burden.

19

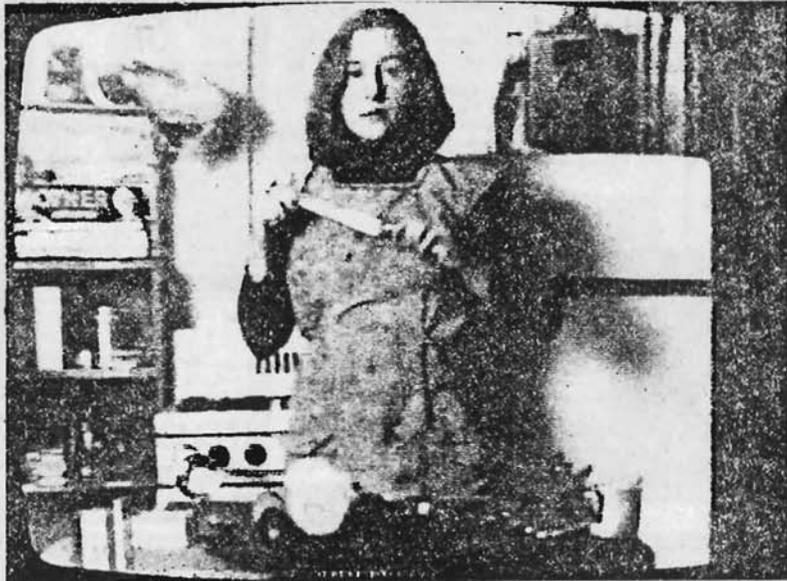
FROM BEYOND VIDEO ART

# Video Art in the Television Landscape

Television offers a new kind of narrative structure, episodic and interrupted, that incorporates within itself non-sequential inconsequential interruptions. Breaks for station identification and commercials are recurring refrains, and within of mini-narratives telling us intimate details of a family's personal hygiene. In the same way episodes of any weekly series are separated by the rest of the weekly programming, so that the viewer carries chapters of unrelated stories simultaneously in his memory.

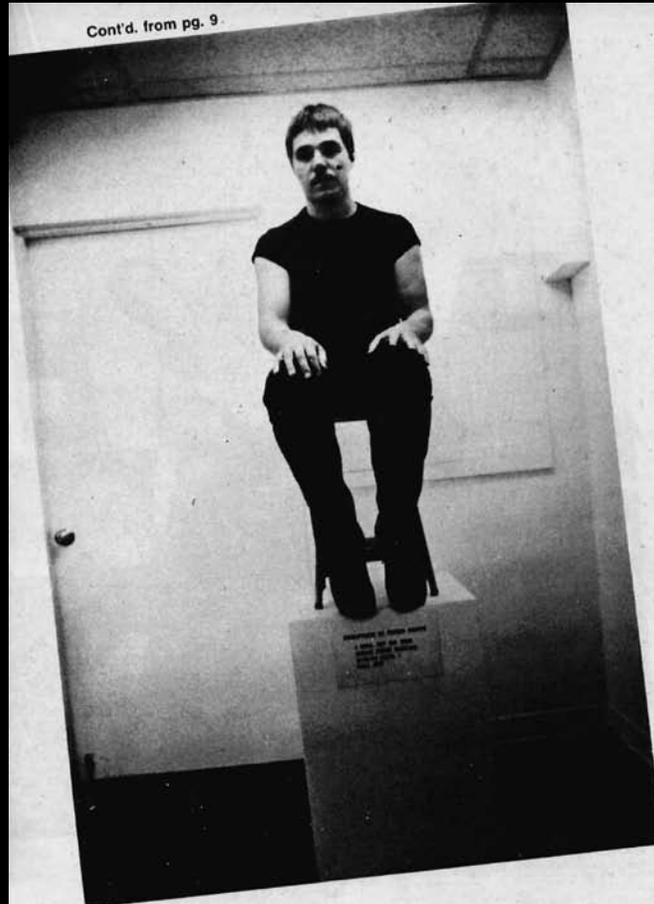
Life reinforces this interrupted narrative structure. Driving through the California landscape there is an endless repetition of the same man-made scenery. Taco Bell's, Sambo's, Jack-in-the-Boxes recur with predictable regularity, like commercials on the TV screen. Indistinguishable suburban streets repeat with the familiarity of aired stage sets re-used on different programs. Everything you do is punctuated by periods of being encapsulated in a car on a freeway, taking a lot about what they might have just done. A lot of mental rearranging takes place. As narrative content enters art, it is taking the form that life and television have offered; as narrative time becomes a field for investigation, video is obviously an appropriate medium. Television is the real subject of video.

Kim Levin



Marina Rosler, "Semi-otics of the Kitchen" Videotape, 1974, 1975

Cont'd. from pg. 9



Chris Burden. *Sculpture in Three Parts*. Hansen Fuller Gallery, San Francisco, Ca., September 10-21, 1974. "I sat on a small metal stool placed on a sculpture stand directly in front of the gallery entrance, an elevator door. A sign on the stand read: 'Sculpture in Three Parts. I will sit on this chair from 10:30 am 9/10/74 until I fall off.' About 10 feet away, a camera was constantly attended by changing photographers waiting to take a photograph as I fell. I sat on the chair for 43 hours. When I fell, a chalk outline was drawn on the floor around my body. I wrote 'Forever' inside the outline. I placed another sign on the stand which read: 'I sat on this chair from 10:30 am 9/10/74 until I fell off at 5:25 am 9/12/74.' The chair, stand, and outline remained on exhibit until September 21."

Lusinda Childs, Jon Gibson and Robert Wilson. Child's dance troupe repeated very simple movements to a "minimal" score in an austere decorated space. This seemingly random, eventless and interminable Performance was extremely boring to the middle class audience who wanted epiphanies or, at the very least, sweets at proscribed intervals. To my mind, *Relative Calm* is a radical refusal to make sense of reality, but it is far from senseless; it is a meditation on human action which made me aware of the power of my own "common-place" motions.

Filippo Marinetti, the Futurist writer of Performance, encouraged his collaborators to "take pleasure in being boored; applause merely indicates something mediocre, dull, regurgitated or too well digested."

Performance, more than any other medium, necessitates negative capability because in reducing the boundaries between Art and life it forces the viewer or the participant to experience an aspect of life that is usually not given significance.

If Performance is the leading contemporary expression of the open work of Art, there are many artists in other modes who narrow the gap between the world and its representations. These artists cut across the stylistic categories of post-modern pluralism and maintain the cutting edge of the avant-garde.

#### Footnotes

- (1) In *Performance by Artists*, ed. A.A. Bronson and Peggy Gale (Toronto: Art Metropole, 1979), p. 44.
- (2) Umberto Eco, *L'Œuvre Ouverte*,

trans. Chantal Roux de Beziex (Paris: editions du Seuil, 1964, p. 22. This is the revised and expanded French translation of *Opera Aperta*.

(3) *Ibid.*, p. 78.

(4) *Ibid.*, p. 77.

(5) Jean Arp, *Arp on Arp: Poems, Essays and Memories*, trans. Joachim Neugroschell (New York: The Viking Press, 1972), p. 211.

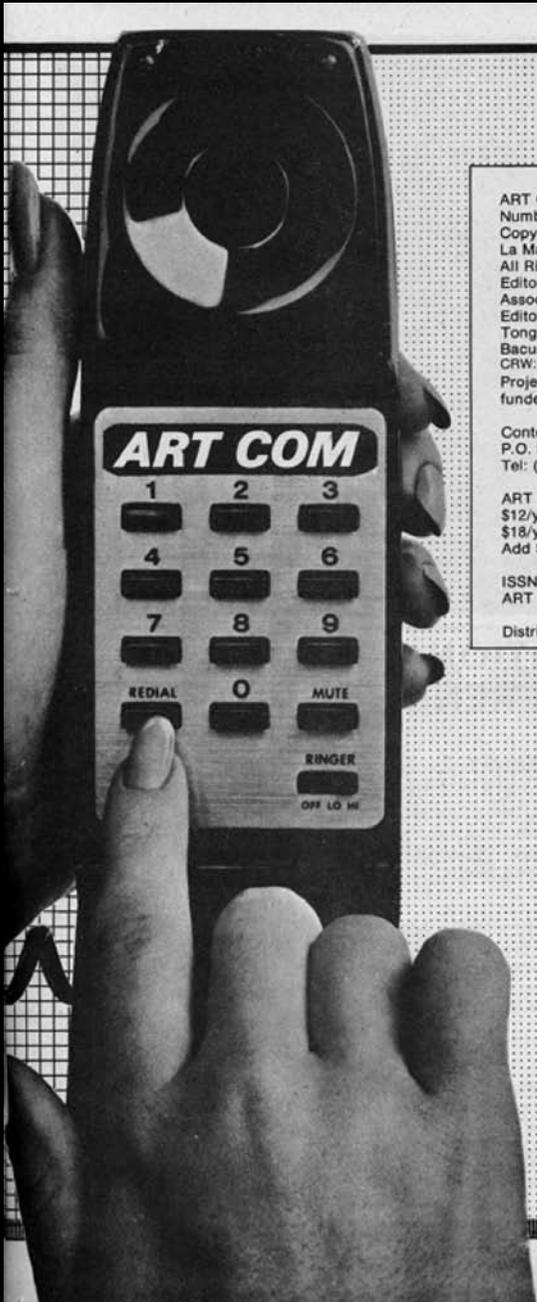
(6) John Cage, *Silence* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press), p. 205.

(7) *Ibid.*, p. 44.

(8) Allan Kaprow, *Environments, Assemblages and Happenings* (New York: Harry Abrams, 1965), p. 188.

(9) Bronson and Gale, p. 172.

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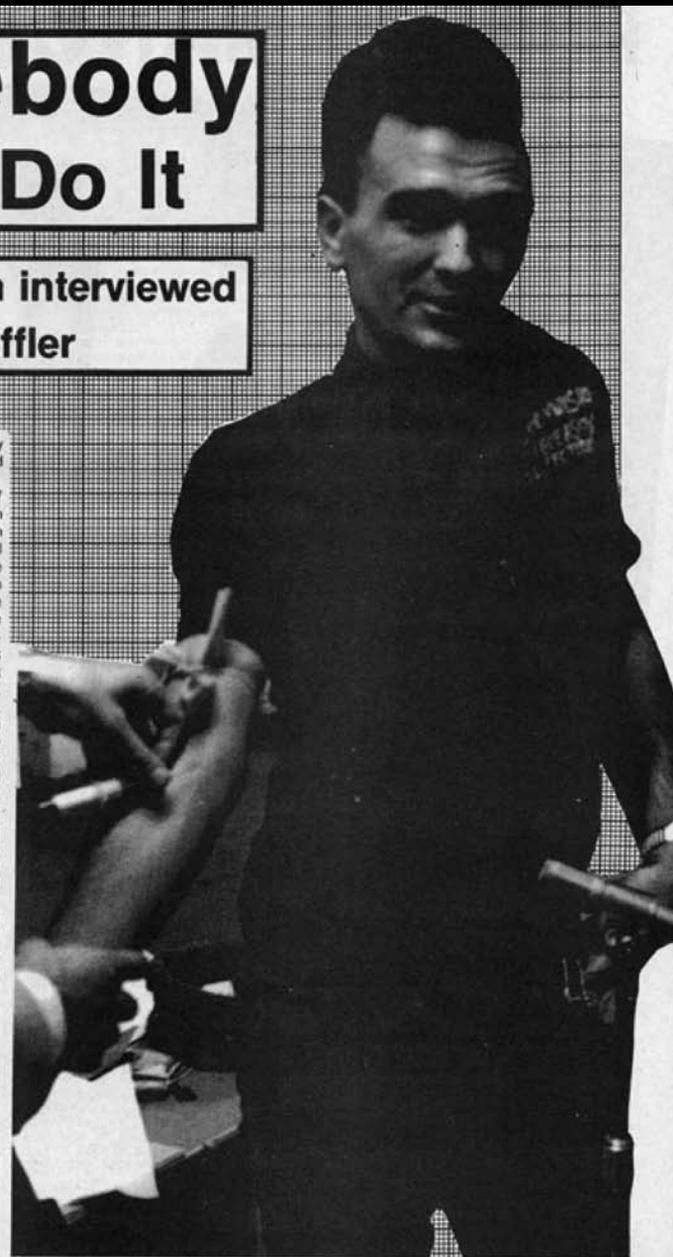
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# Somebody Has to Do It

## Monty Cantsin interviewed by Carl E. Loeffler



**C.L.** We are here in Montreal with artist Monty Cantsin, formerly Istvan Kantor. Tell me, how did you become Monty Cantsin?

**M.C.** I came from Budapest to Canada in 1977 but I had corresponded with Canadian-American artist David Zack previously. He was once in Budapest for two weeks. This was the first time I met an artist from the West, from America. He influenced me a lot and we started to work on projects together. One of the projects was the concept of an Open Star artist who can be anyone and everybody, and can perform simultaneously anywhere in the world. This concept is similar to the notion of Santa Claus. David Zack proposed to call this person Monty Cantsin. When I went to America to visit Zack in Portland, Oregon I started to use that name... That was summer, 1978. I introduced myself as Monty Cantsin. I said, "I am Monty Cantsin, but I am not Monty Cantsin. I am a copy of Monty Cantsin and Monty Cantsin is my copy, and Monty Cantsin who is speaking now." Everyone can take the role of Monty Cantsin and do everything in the name of Monty Cantsin. That doesn't mean that all the Montys are the same, because they are different people, but they have the spirit of Monty Cantsin.

**C.L.** Do you think of yourself as a performance artist?

**M.C.** Monty Cantsin is a continuous performance to revive Monty Cantsin and to become and be Monty Cantsin. Performance is the life of Monty Cantsin.

**C.L.** What does it mean for you to utilize your body?

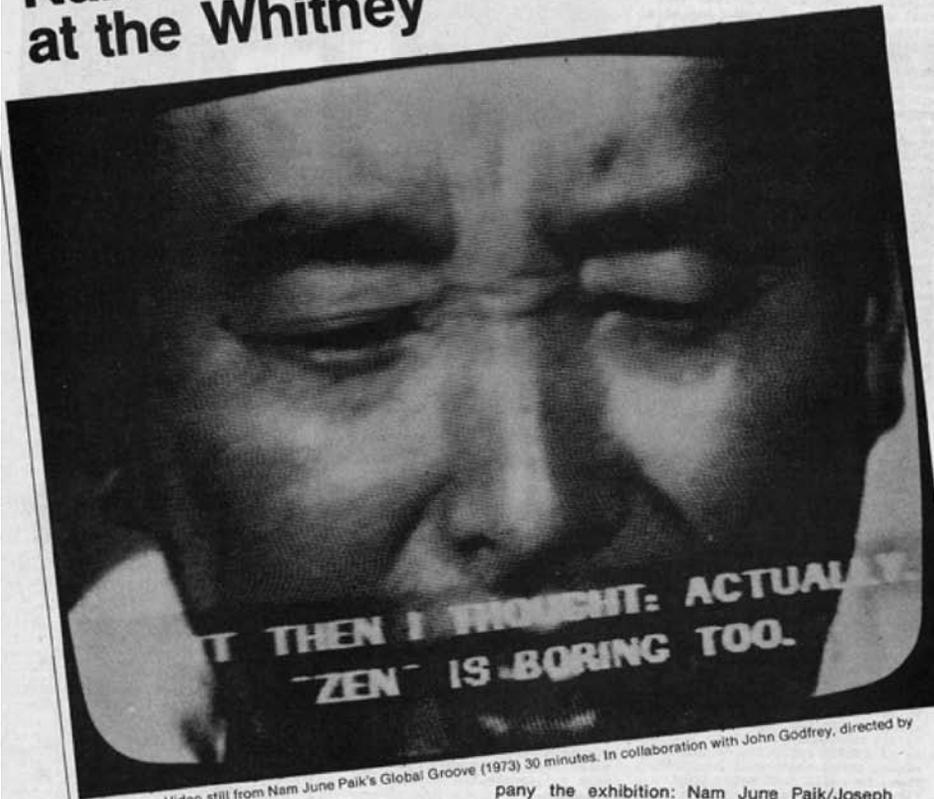
**M.C.** I've executed many body actions where I use my body in ways that are subversive and convulsive. For example—a nurse takes my blood, I then put that blood into my mouth and I give blood mouth to mouth to someone else. Or I insert a test tube filled with blood into my asshole and then I assume a yoga posture to transfer the blood into my mouth.

**C.L.** Why are these subversive actions?

**M.C.** Well, a blood letting action is a very real action. When I take the blood into my mouth it is new blood—fresh blood that I transfer. Blood is

# VIDEO

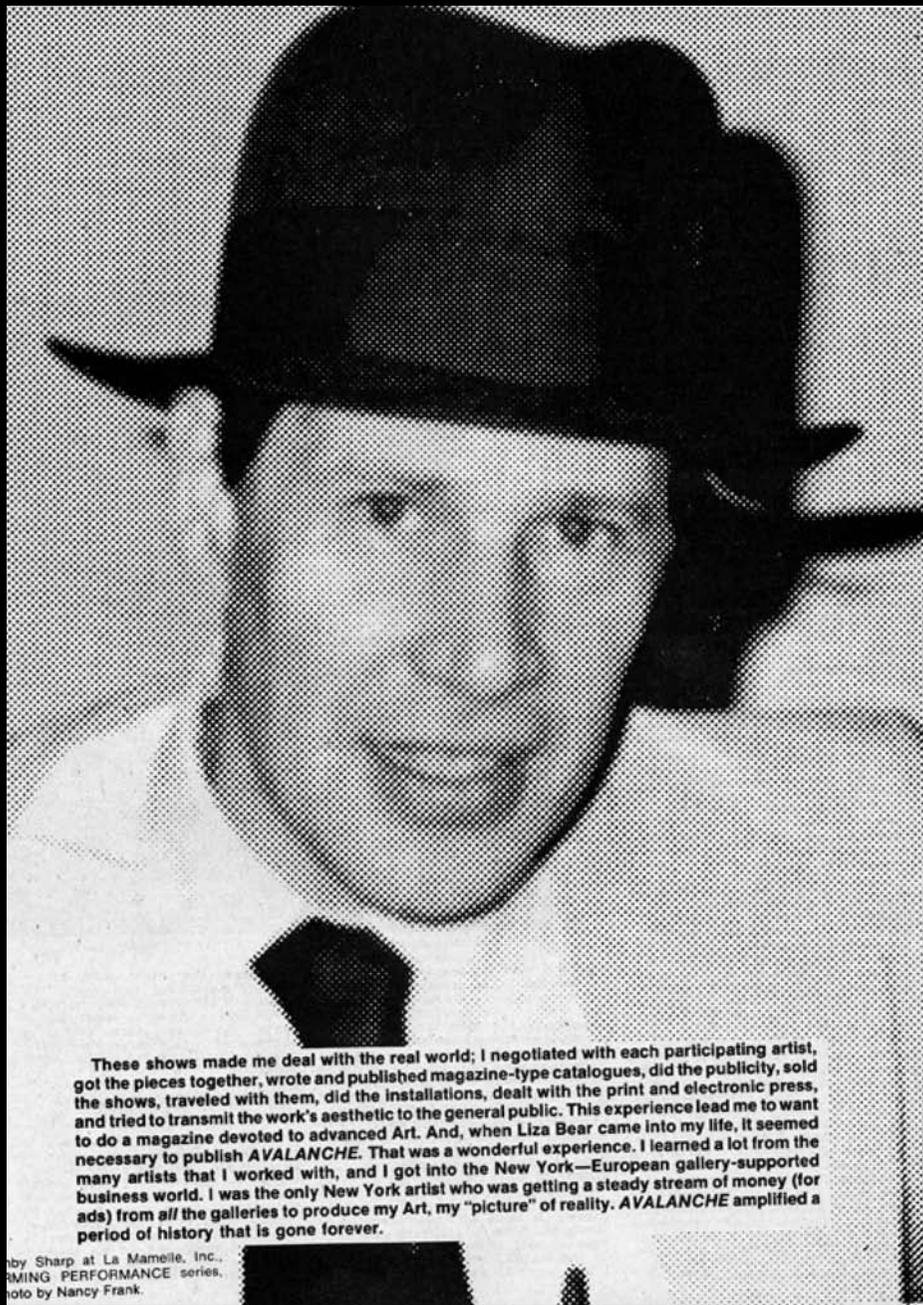
## Nam June Paik: A Retrospective at the Whitney



Video still from Nam June Paik's *Global Groove* (1973) 30 minutes. In collaboration with John Godfrey, directed by Merrily Mossman.

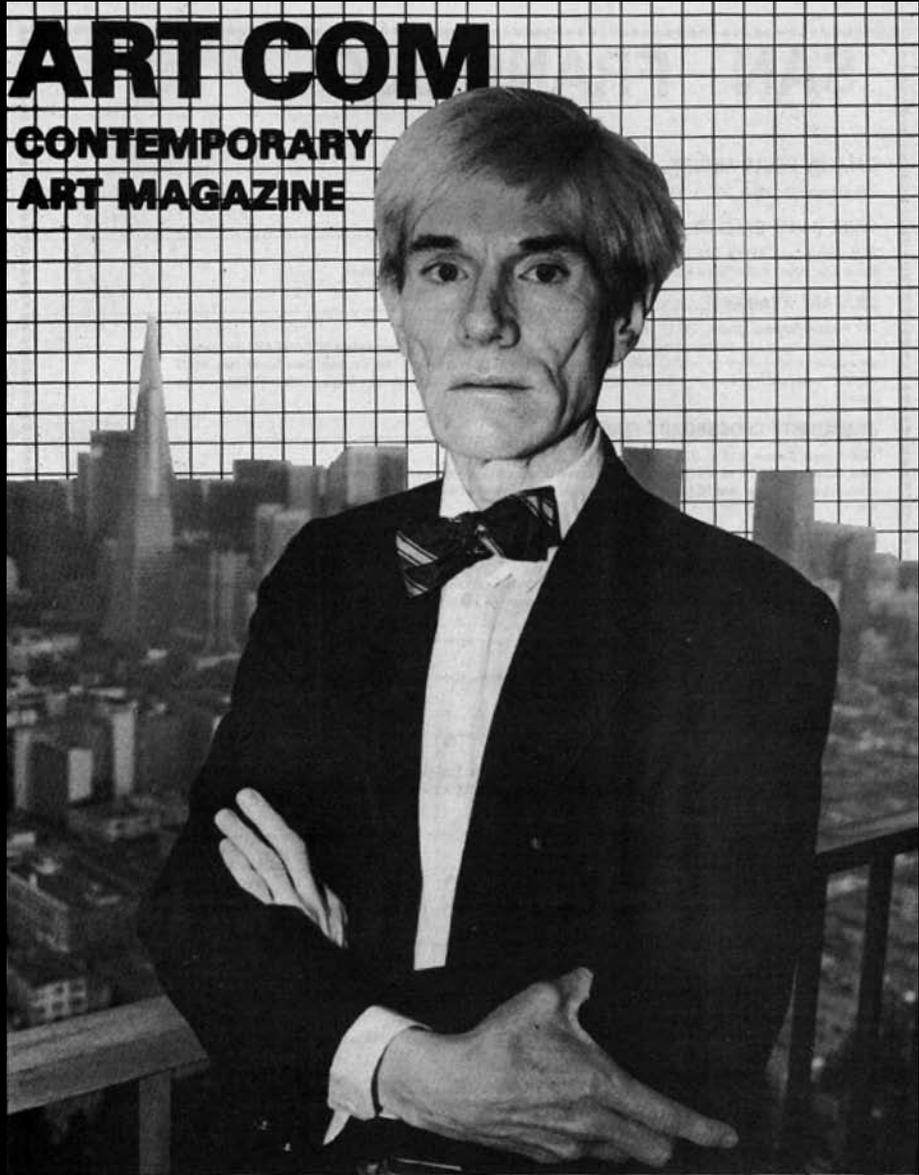
Over 60 works spanning the career of Nam June Paik will be shown at The Whitney Museum of American Art, April 30-June 27, 1982. Curator John Hanhardt has assembled music scores, multimedia sculpture, environments, and more than a dozen video installations for a major exhibition which is tentatively scheduled to travel to the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; National Galeria, West Berlin; and Museum Moderner Kunst, Vienna. Three special events will accom-

pany the exhibition: Nam June Paik/Joseph Beuys performance, May 15; Nam June Paik/Charlotte Moorman performances, May 20 and 21; and a panel discussion with Pontus Hulten, John Cage, David Ross, and John Hanhardt, May 19. Accompanying the exhibition will be a publication with essays by Dieter Ronte, Michael Nyman, David Ross, and John Hanhardt; chronology; selected videotapes; exhibitions list; and bibliography to be published by The Whitney Museum of American Art in association with W.W. Norton & Co. For more information, contact The Whitney Museum of American Art, Madison Ave. at 75th Street, New York, New York 10021.



These shows made me deal with the real world; I negotiated with each participating artist, got the pieces together, wrote and published magazine-type catalogues, did the publicity, sold the shows, traveled with them, did the installations, dealt with the print and electronic press, and tried to transmit the work's aesthetic to the general public. This experience lead me to want to do a magazine devoted to advanced Art. And, when Liza Bear came into my life, it seemed necessary to publish *AVALANCHE*. That was a wonderful experience. I learned a lot from the many artists that I worked with, and I got into the New York—European gallery-supported business world. I was the only New York artist who was getting a steady stream of money (for ads) from all the galleries to produce my Art, my "picture" of reality. *AVALANCHE* amplified a period of history that is gone forever.

by Sharp at La Mamele, Inc. *FORMING PERFORMANCE* series. Photo by Nancy Frank.



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**CONTEMPORARY**  
**ART MAGAZINE**

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Give Them the Picture: An Anthology

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## TELEVISION ART

**TV: The Popular Art Form!**  
*The video artist in television, or,  
 the televisionist as post-video artist.*  
 By: Carl Loeffler

20 ARTCOM

The rendering of the video medium by artists is currently becoming the popular art form of television. Such activity, hereafter termed television art, marks a decided turning point in the history of the video medium as a form of expression in art. The rede-

**"Forget about the avant-garde... face the real things... we are here, this is not fiction."—Monty Cantsin, Montreal, 1983.**

**"We can NOT be co-opted because we want everything."—Dara Birnbaum, New York, 1983.**

inition of a medium is common in art practice, exemplified by the divergent expression evident in painting, sculpture, and other disciplines where new approaches to a given medium establish unique direction and critical interpretation. While television art may appear in contradistinction to the notion of video art, in actuality both are inexorably entwined through history and technology. Television art and video art remain two distinct interpretations essentially derived from the same medium.

Television is a popular art form which seemingly implies a posture largely antithetical to previous notions of avant-gardism. Artists' adopting populist practice express interest in new audiences, new venues, new context, and new support mechanisms, financial or otherwise. Television and performative music presently locate the cutting edge, namely because of the options these industries offer. Within them, adventurous artists can obtain access to the means of production and distribution to reach that desired new audience.

## HOME BLASTING KIT...



### *I'm Interested in the Aesthetics.*

Are you finding the 70s "cleaning out" method to be a dud in facing the explosive 80s? Tired of wasting time "processing" in extemporaneous dialogue only to be left with verbage residue? So is Gregory MacGregor, and he has combined expertise in the fields of mining and physics to illustrate the options for surviving the 80s. At user-friendly prices he offers you a solution which will alleviate those process residue blues and provide you with concrete proof of your actions. Why clean out when you can **BLUW OUT**? For only \$19.95 you can receive your very own home blasting kit. Guaranteed to be made of safe low grade blasting powder easily obtainable.

MacGregor for the last several years has perfected his "dynamite" techniques in a series of detonations all over the U.S. illustrating the "versatility, simplicity, and safety" of this new product. MacGregor has blown up a manhole cover, subway seat, Studebaker fender, bicycle tire and girlfriend's barbecue.

In the fall of '82, before spectators at the B.C. Space, Laguna Beach, Ca., MacGregor staged a "blow out." "Of course I'm interested in the aesthetics of it all," he says; "when it sets off ground it kicks up all kinds of dirt or whatever I put over it."

Researched by Mark Levy

## ART COM TV



From left, Laura Baird, Susan Sacher, and Melissa Pantages model high-maintenance powries and accessories designed by Ramona Melissa. Photo: Jo Whaley

### *We've Just Upped The Ante ... Game?*

ADVERTISEMENT

# INTERVIEWS:

# From the White Space to the Airwaves: An Interview with Nancy Frank



**Michele Fiedler:** How did you become involved with La Mabelle?

**Nancy Frank:** It was 1976, and I was a student at the San Francisco Art Institute (SFAI), a painting major. I had heard about La Mabelle, this art space south of Market Street, and decided to go see it. I wandered up three flights of stairs and came to this beautiful, open, white space with skylights and beam ceilings. It was completely empty except for Carl Loeffler. We had a wonderful conversation. Seeing the space was empty, I asked him “Are you gonna show paintings in here?” He said no, so I asked him “Why not?” And he explained that this was an alternative art space, an alternative to museums. It was going to show the conceptual and the non-material, and performance. I was fascinated. I was an object person and I had never heard of conceptual art. The more I came to the gallery, the more my mind was blown.

**MF:** So SFAI had not incorporated any of these ephemeral and conceptual practices into their curriculum at that time?

**NF:** No. At the time it was very “fine arts,” very romantic, all about painting in your studio. At that time they did not encourage students to show their work either—it was about producing a body of work, making art and not showing it.

**MF:** So La Mabelle was an education outside of school?

**NF:** It was. Years later I went back to get my Master’s degree. But by then I had already seen, produced and been involved in so much more than what was available at school.

**MF:** What did you study for your Master’s degree?

**NF:** Video and performance art. I went back to the Art Institute because they had developed the first video program there with

Howard Fried. I wrote my thesis on the radio as a public space, just as we saw *Produced for Television* (La Mabelle, 1978) as public space. La Mabelle had been transformative.

**MF:** SFAI started their video program in 1979/1980, the year after the exhibition *Space/Time/Sound* opened at SFMOMA, surveying alternative spaces, including La Mabelle. Museums were by then starting to pay attention to the kinds of practice La Mabelle had pioneered. How did you see this as it was happening?

**NF:** It was an acknowledgment, on their part, that video had become a tool for artists, like Howard Fried. From my perspective, it was a continuation from more traditional media. If painting was about light then video was the ultimate paintbrush. In those days it was all low-light cameras, of course, so you needed a lot of light to actually get an impression on the tape. Many video artists were painting with light, and video could also be seen as an extension of sculpture.

**MF:** Of all the alternative spaces that existed South of Market, such as 80 Langton, SF Cameraworks, and Site, The Museum of Conceptual Art (MOCA) seems the closest in practice to La Mabelle, especially in its emphasis on performance.

**NF:** The Museum of Conceptual Art was there before La Mabelle, and Tom Marioni, the artist who ran it, was very much an inspiration to Carl. But MOCA was quite private. Marioni would do random performances that were very low key, and you really had to be in the underground to know about it. There was very little documentation, one photo maybe. The documentation was mostly physical residue, in the walls and floor of the space itself. You might see something cut into the wall, and that would be the only sign that a performance had taken place.

**MF:** And was this La Mabelle’s approach too in the 1970s?

**NF:** Yes, each month there was a major activity that happened in the gallery. But once it was done there was nothing to see. It was just an event that you would come and experience. In 1979 we completed our *Performance Anthology* source book, with the premise that if performance didn't get press it didn't otherwise exist. And there wasn't a lot of press around. *Artforum* had started in San Francisco, but they had long since gone to New York. So it was crucial to document what was going on here, to document the artists we were interested in. I should make clear, though, that *ART COM* was not just a regional publication; we were getting performances from all over the world. Our network was national and global.

**MF:** La Mamelles was also interested in artists using new technologies and forms of publicness: satellite transmission, television, video art, music, and performance.

**NF:** We were redefining how to use public space. *Produced for Television* was a good example of that: buying time on TV was putting an artist in a different environment and allowing for a new way of thinking about their art. Before then it was all real-time—there was no beginning and middle and end. We'd spent five years making the *Performance Anthology*, and what it documented was the 1970s. By the time it came out in 1979, everything had changed. Performance art was more accepted, there were many new channels for it, and some forms of theater, like the Magic Theatre or Project Artaud, had begun mimicking performance.

**MF:** This influence traveled both ways, though. Where performance art had previously distinguished itself from theater, now it had an audience not unlike a theatrical audience. And the TV shows had a beginning, middle and end, as well as a script.

**NF:** Right. For example for our series *Performing Performance*, artists would rehearse; we would go through the lighting cues in

advance. We had a big soundboard and someone working the audio. In the 1970s it was all raw space, and artists weren't invested in technology. But as time went on the performances became more elaborate, and even though these artists had no professional dramatic or technical training, it became more like theater. It became more collaborative as well. Artists were not using themselves as the sole tool for performance. It became commonplace to work with other artists and share an idea. The romanticism of the lonely genius was starting to unravel. We wanted to be entertaining.

**MF:** The 1980s seem to have brought a shift, not only in your activities at La Mamelles, but generally in San Francisco for this kind of art.

**NF:** We'd come to feel that this real-time performance activity was old-fashioned. There wasn't a big audience; people thought it was boring and, I mean, it was. You would watch someone crawl across the floor in real time. We had developed a language out of sculpture, of the artist-as-material, the artist-as-body. But by 1979, the truly visceral, ritualistic type of performance had already peaked. An audience had appeared, but this kind of work was difficult for them to watch, because the artist wasn't doing it for an audience. By comparison we were interested in the audience. We saw a real difference between *performance art*, and *performing art*: performance art was visual artists using their body and their self as a material, while, as we thought about it, performing arts was more narrative, theatrical, and fun. Artists had become interested in sound and music, lights, props, costumes, and production. In the 1970s, La Mamelles was a beautiful, empty, white-walled gallery that showed conceptual art, photographs, and language. Around 1980 we decided to turn it into a cabaret. We painted the walls black and built a stage.

**MF:** MTV started in 1981. How did it influence *ART COM*? A later issue offered "An Artist's Guide to Music Television," and

television, fashion, music video, and pop music featured more in the later issues.

**NF:** MTV changed our timing, our internal rhythm—everything got sped up. As opposed to the real-time of performance art, we were in love with MTV's quick editing. No one had seen that before. And there were popular songs, music that we heard on the radio. Carl was fascinated with populism, and it was the first time we could see visuals that went along with sounds that we knew were a central part of our culture. Artists' videos started to change, too: every time you blinked you'd see another image. This was the result of CMX editing, a new computerized editing technology, which artists could use at the Bay Area Video Coalition at a reduced cost. Being able to manipulate TV ourselves made us look at it in a whole new way. Of course, MTV was about selling records. Our use of television wasn't about using it as a tool to sell, but as a new framework to expand our audiences.

**MF:** How did *Produced for Television* contribute to this new ambition to popularize your practice?

**NF:** What was tending to happen in video art at the time was that artists were producing big installations with video monitors in a darkened room. By contrast we used the television station as a studio—we bought the time, for a hundred dollars a minute. It was very unusual at the time to pay for television time for an artist's investigation. It was shot in real time, as a performance, but because of the expense, artists like Tony Labat or Chris Burden would come in with a script, knowing what they wanted to do. *Produced for Television* was unusual in that it gave us something that we could tour around. Carl would lecture all over the country, showing *Produced for Television*. It was also aired on cable TV. Broadcast television didn't want it. It wasn't entertaining, it didn't move fast enough.

**MF:** Some of La Mamelles's programs were parodies of TV, borrowing the language of TV for art. Do you see this as an incorporation of art into popular media or vice-versa? I'm thinking about Ant Farm and their 1975 performance *Media Burn*. It was a performance but also a media stunt, which was covered by broadcast news.

**NF:** Ant Farm were making fun of themselves, and of the media. They were saying that there was nothing worth watching on TV—so burn your TV. We weren't making fun of the media. We were incorporating it as a language, as a new form of communication. At that time there was nothing to watch beyond the news and soap operas. There was very little entertainment if you were interested in the art world. Now there's a channel that devotes twenty-four hours a day to art. We never imagined that that would happen.

# Organizational Memory: An Interview with Darlene Tong



**Curatorial Practice:** How did La Mamelle start?

**Darlene Tong:** Carl Loeffler with Trudi Richards founded La Mamelle when she was at Stanford. The original idea was to become publishers, not to run an artists' space. But that soon followed, as they realized that in order to get information and support for the magazine, they needed space for artists to be able to do their thing. And so they rented 70 Twelfth Street with \$150 and a Royal typewriter. It was from the start a non-materialistic, non-commodity-oriented space, in reaction to the established institutions and market—SFMOMA, commercial galleries—and to the idea of putting paintings on the wall, and selling them. Part of that was because in the 1970s there was government support from both National Endowment for the Arts and the California Arts Council.

Later everything shifted. The granting agencies became more community-based and multicultural, and they couldn't deal with our *contemporary* interests. So we took up Andy Warhol's concept of being entrepreneurial and self-sufficient. Carl was also very interested in new media, which at the time meant video. La Mamelle had a program on a local Viacom channel, for example, where they would broadcast artists' videos. And after she got involved, Nancy Frank started the artists' video archive, which included first- or second-generation video art by people like Linda Montano, Tom Marioni, and Terry Fox. After La Mamelle ended, those eight hundred tapes went to the Pacific Film Archive.

**CP:** How did you get involved?

**DT:** I met Carl, ironically, in the boardroom of SFMOMA. I'm a librarian and archivist, and he was invited by the art librarians to talk about artists' periodicals. We clicked personally and he said, "Come over to my space to see my artists' books." And that's how it started. Through La Mamelle I saw the opportunity to document the era and our

intentions. I went through every article and brochure and journal, the video productions, the things that we wrote and the things that were written about us, to produce an historical record of what we did. Nancy, by contrast, is a total artist—she gives more sense of the feel and excitement of that era. And she was involved almost from the beginning, while I didn't join until two years later, in 1977. By 1977 they'd largely stopped producing exhibitions—they'd shown Xeroxes and conceptual photography before then. After that we went totally non-object. Ironically, we kept every piece of residue from performances staged there. So when we closed the space and gave that material to Stanford University, the performances became objects again, preserved in the archive as such.

**CP:** La Mamelle was also interested in producing new media works.

**DT:** Right. A lot of people at the time were using video just to document a performance. We did that as well, but also we were interested in producing video as a form in itself. Chip Lord of Ant Farm produced for La Mamelle *Chevrolet Training Film* (1978–81), for example. John Cage gave his very first computer project to *ART COM* as we were launching the ART COM Electronic Network in 1986.

When opportunities arose, we would use them to produce something. La Mamelle was one of the organizations featured in SFMOMA's exhibition *Space/Time/Sound*, organized by Suzanne Foley in 1979. We had one room in the Veteran's Building, and it was used more like a venue than a documentation of activities elsewhere. We created an issue of the magazine, a list of everything that we had produced, and it was given out for free.

And then there was *A Literal Exchange* (1978), an exchange of artists from Toronto, who published a magazine called *Only Paper Today*, with artists from San Francisco— we

occupied their apartments and they came and used our apartments. And this resulted in a special issue of *Art Contemporary*, where they produced artists' books, and we printed them in a broadsheet format, so that if the issue was cut up and refolded, the reader could make an artists' book out of it.

It was expensive to produce. After that, it didn't go downhill, but there wasn't as much energy put into the magazine. There was a hiatus and we started it up again with glossy covers, and a more conventional format. We got into populism.

**CP:** When was that?

**DT:** In 1980, around when we painted the gallery black. We'd produced *Performance Anthology: A Source Book for a Decade of California Performance Art* (1979), which was trying to capture that activity. Works like Terry Fox's *Levitation Piece* (1970), or Howard Fried's *Synchromatic Baseball* (1971), where they played baseball with rotten tomatoes on the roof of his studio—these were private performances. They didn't care if anyone was there. It was a concept, the artist as sculpture, and the individual performances lasted a long time. And artists documented performances by writing about them, by still photographs, or, some of them, by video. But by 1980 the attitude towards performance had definitively shifted. Everything became more like a cabaret. You can see it in 1978, with the dance party they staged in Toronto, and in the adoption of a *Tonight Show*-influenced talk show format. People's attention spans were shortening. So La Mamelle wanted to do performances that were audience-oriented, shorter pieces that had entertainment value.

**CP:** Why was the gallery painted black?

**DT:** It was about moving on from the white cube, and focusing on a different kind of performance. We had these really late night performances on Friday nights: Z'EV

performed in the garage elevator shaft, an incredible percussion piece. Acoustically it was very exciting, though it's hard to imagine. He was quite a performer. We'd say these were cabaret performances, very different from those earlier 1970s activities.

**CP:** Beyond publishing and staging events, La Mamelle was also an archive.

**DT:** It was open by appointment. We always billed ourselves as a non-profit, educational artist-run organization. So classes would come there from San Francisco State University, and the art schools. At the time, as well, SFMOMA didn't collect video. An SFMOMA curator like Beau Takahara, who was interested in video and technology, would have to come to ART COM. She'd spend hours here.

**CP:** Earlier you mentioned donating the La Mamelle archives to Stanford. Can you expand on this process?

**DT:** What we gave to Stanford was in archival boxes that measured the length of a football field. They brought this big truck and took it away: all the performance documents, all the correspondence, and all the artists' organizational papers. This was another aspect of Carl's foresight: he was very interested in archiving whatever came in through the door, so he had a whole cadre of interns who would set up files for artists, artists' magazines, posters, ephemera, postcards, rubber stamps, little pins—anything. And every time La Mamelle would do a book, a show or a project, they would just pull that stuff out and re-sort it and work with it, and then just shove it back in a drawer. It wasn't a complete mess, but it took some effort for Nancy Frank and me to organize it.

**CP:** You stopped the print publication in 1984. What precipitated that decision?

**DT:** It was getting too expensive and it wasn't the way to go anymore. We inaugurated the electronic format in February 1986, on the

Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link. By then Nancy had exited, I believe—the Internet stuff wasn't for her—and Fred Truck, an artist based in Des Moines, Iowa, became our systems person. Anna Couey, who would later be involved with *Wired*, was a staff person who became the associate director. The web didn't really exist at that time—it was impossibly rudimentary. But Carl saw the way things were shifting. We were one of the first art magazines to become an e-journal—most publications are still trying to ride that fence.

## Contributor Biographies

**Eleanor Antin** is an influential artist working in performance, video and installation. Her works have been the subject of several catalogues and exhibitions, including a retrospective at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1999, and *Eleanor Antin: Historical Takes* at the San Diego Museum of Art in 2008. Antin is professor emeritus at the University of California, San Diego, and continues to exhibit with Ronald Feldman Fine Arts in New York City.

**Michael Auping** was the first curator of the Berkeley Art Museum's MATRIX program from 1978–1980, and is currently the curator of the Modern Art Museum of Forth Worth in Texas. A specialist on Abstract Expressionism, Auping has organized numerous exhibitions including *Abstract Expressionism: The Critical Developments in 1987*, and *Declaring Space: Lucio Fontana, Yves Klein, Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko* in 2007. His book, *30 Years: Interviews and Outtakes* featuring selected interviews with over 30 artists, including Jenny Holzer, Agnes Martin, and Bill Viola, was published in 2007.

**Ian Burn** was an Australian conceptual artist who moved to London in 1964, and then New York in 1967. Often associated with the Art & Language group, Burn is perhaps best known for his *Xerox Book* (1968), a conceptual artist book made by photocopying sheets of blank paper. Burn returned to Australia in the late 1970s to continue his practice, and to teach at Sydney University. Burn died in 1993.

**Anna Couey** acted as the Assistant Director of La Mamelle/ART COM during the late 1980s, working to build the Art Com Electronic Network (ACEN) with Loeffler and artist Fred Truck. She continues to work as an artist who incorporates art and technology, and is focused on social justice in her practice. She currently serves as the Director of Development for the San Francisco-based advocacy group Legal Services for Prisoners with Children.

**Douglas Davis** is an artist and critic who pioneered works with art and technology, beginning with his early telecast for *Documenta VI* in 1977, and later with *The World's First Collaborative Sentence* using the World Wide Web in 1977. In addition to teaching media courses at colleges and universities, he is also the author of several texts including *Art and the Future* (1973), *ArtCulture: Essays on the Post-Modern* (1977), and *The Five Myths of TV Power (or, Why the Medium is Not the Message)* (1993).

**Nancy Frank** graduated from the San Francisco Art Institute with a BFA in Painting and Printmaking, and MFA in Video, Communications and Performance Art. Frank served as the vice president of La Mamelle/ART COM, and the director for the organization's international video archive. Since that time, she has been involved in marketing research, publicity campaigns, planning and promoting events. She now serves as director of Frank Relations, based in San Francisco and Atlanta, a public relations company that provides promotion and consulting for international art projects.

**Peter Frank** is a writer and curator, and currently serves as the Adjunct Senior Curator at the Riverside Museum of Art in Riverside, CA. He began his career in New York as a writer for *The Village Voice* and *SoHo Weekly News* and moved to Los Angeles in the late 1980s. He has organized exhibitions both in the U.S. and abroad, and is the author of several texts including *Something Else Press: An Annotated Bibliography* (1983), *New, Used & Improved* (1987), and *Robert De Niro, Sr.* (2004).

**Lynn Hershman** is an artist who has worked in photography, video, film, installation, interactive arts, and web-based technology. Her work is shown widely throughout the world, and is the subject of the text *The Art and Films of Lynn Hershman: Secret Agent, Private I* (2005). She has screened two feature-length films, including *Conceiving Ada* (1998) and *Teknolust* (2002), at film festivals across the globe. She is Chair of the Film Department at San Francisco Art Institute, Professor Emeritus at UC Davis, and professor-at-large at Cornell University.

**David Highsmith** is a San Francisco-based poet, and the owner of Books and Bookshelves, a furniture and book store at 14th and Sanchez streets. Highsmith also runs a series of author readings and events at Books and Bookshelves. He is the author of several volumes of poetry, including his most recent *Your Wilderness & Mine* (2009).

**Richard Irwin** was an artist, poet, and critic known within San Francisco's punk underground for his extreme performances. A graduate of the San Francisco Art Institute, Irwin began using the name Irwin-Irwin in the late 1970s, and performed at venues such as Jet Wave, the Deaf Club, Intersection for the Arts and the Lab. Irwin died in San Francisco in 1988.

**David Levi-Strauss** is a writer who has published many texts, including *Between Dog and Wolf: Essays on Art & Politics*, and *From Head to Hand: Art and the Manual*. He is a contributing editor of *Aperture* magazine, *Brooklyn Rail*, and is the founding editor of *ACTS: A Journal of New Writing*. He has taught writing at universities around the country, including NYU, Yale, Bard College, the School of Visual Arts in New York, and Naropa University's Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics.

**Mark Levy** is an art historian who has taught at Kenyon College, San Francisco Art Institute, the University of Nevada, Reno, and CSU East Bay. He is an author of several texts, including his first book *Technicians of Ecstasy: Shamanism and the Modern Artist* (1993) and *The Void in Art* (2005).

**Carl Loeffler** founded La Mamelle/ART COM as a publication in 1975. He guided the space and the publications of the organization for over two decades, building through La Mamelle/ART COM an international network of performance, video, and media-based artists and writers. When the publication came to an end in 1984, Loeffler collaborated with others on the Art Com Electronic Network on the Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link. In addition to the art that he created, facilitated, and reported on through the vector of La Mamelle/ART COM, Loeffler was also an artist trustee of the San Francisco Art Institute, and

a Carnegie fellow at Carnegie Mellon University. In the 1990s, Loeffler left San Francisco and became the Project Director of Telecommunications and Virtual Reality at Carnegie Mellon's Studio for Creative Inquiry. He died in 2001.

**Tom Marioni** founded the Museum of Conceptual Art (MOCA) in San Francisco in 1970. MOCA was one of the first of the Bay Area's alternative organizations that formed in the 1970s, and Marioni helped to shape an era as both a curator and an artist (using the pseudonym Alan Fish as his artist persona during MOCA's time). Marioni has exhibited internationally, and has released a memoir named after his most well-known work, *Beer, Art and Philosophy: The Act of Drinking Beer with Friends Is the Highest Form of Art* (2004).

**Gregory McKenna** was an intern at La Mamelle/ART COM while he was a student at San Francisco State University. A graduate of Carnegie Mellon and the Sorbonne in Paris, McKenna studied literature, writing, and the French language. He currently works in internet-based publishing, heading up the online newsletter *valleylist*, which brings technology and politics to 5 million readers weekly.

**Anne Milne** taught photography and video classes in California before enrolling in a Masters program in Film Directing at the Edinburgh College of Art in Scotland in 2009. Her documentary film *Maria's Way* (2009) won the BAFTA Scotland New Talent Award, and has been shown at film festivals internationally. She is currently working on another documentary, *A Sense of Reality*.

**Linda Montano** is a well-known feminist performance artist from New York who moved to San Francisco in 1970. Her work often

deals with durational living art performances, including her "Seven Years of Living Art" pieces, the first of which spanned from 1984 through 1991, and her one-year collaboration with Tehching Hsieh.

**Michael Nash** used the interest that he developed in emerging forms of digital culture while working as an art curator and critic, and became a pioneer of digital innovations in the business world. He is currently the Executive Vice President of Digital Strategy and Business Development at the Warner Music Group, where he led Warner's move to be the first company to sell and stream music over cell phone networks.

**Clive Robertson** is a Canadian artist focused on performance and video. He also describes himself as an activist, writer, publisher, musician, producer, teacher, and collaborator. Most recently, he has taught cultural theory and performance art at Queen's University in Ontario, Canada.

**Darryl Sapien** studied Sculpture at the San Francisco Art Institute, and has worked in a variety of media during his career, from performance art in the 1970s, to his explorations of painting and found materials. He continues to live and work in San Francisco.

**Mary Stofflet** was one of the editors of *Correspondence Art: Source Book for the Network of International Postal Art Activity* put out by La Mamelle/ART COM in 1984. A curator as well as an author, Stofflet served as the Curator of Modern Art at the San Diego Museum of Art, publishing catalogues including *Dr. Seuss from THEN to NOW: A Catalogue of the Retrospective Exhibition* (1986), *Latin American Drawing Today* (1991), and *Deborah Butterfield: San Diego Museum of Art* (1997).

**Lynette Taylor** lives in Brooklyn, NY, where she works as an interpreter of American Sign Language, specializing in interpreting theatrical performances for the deaf. She teaches at The Juilliard School's yearly intensive "Interpreting for the Theater," and continues to work as an artist.

**Darlene Tong** is an art librarian whose talents fit naturally with La Mamelle/ART COM's desire to archive an era of art. Working alongside Carl Loeffler, Tong helped to build and sustain La Mamelle/ART COM. She was the co-editor of *Performance Anthology: Source Book for a Decade of California Performance Art*, and, after the organization closed, she worked with Nancy Frank to develop the La Mamelle/ART COM archive that was donated to the Special Collections at Stanford University. Tong is also an instructor and librarian at San Francisco State University, and has written extensively about strategies for developing archives of art organizations.

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## Acknowledgments

During the development of this publication, *Give Them the Picture*, and the exhibition that it complements, *God Only Knows Who the Audience Is: Performance, Video, and Television Through the Lens of La Mamelle/ART COM*, we have had the pleasure of working with a variety of individuals and institutions. We would like to thank Julieta Gonzalez for being our advisor, mediator, and sounding board during the process of developing the exhibition. Special thanks to Julian Myers, who constantly challenged us and helped to shape both the exhibition and the publication. We are also grateful to all of the faculty members of the Graduate Program in Curatorial Practice at California College of the Arts, including Renny Pritikin and Steven Leiber, who offered us insight into San Francisco's art historical past. Special thanks to Leigh Markopoulos, program chair; Allison TerBush, former program manager; and Sue Ellen Stone, current program manager, for all of their guidance and support over the past two years.

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Our exhibition would not have been possible without the help and support of Stanford University's Department of Special Collections and Conservation, which houses the La Mamelle /ART COM archive. We extend our thanks to Roberto Trujillo, Maria Grandinette, Deborah Fox, Carolee Gilligan Wheeler, Mattie Taormina, Peter Whidden, Polly Armstrong,

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Colophon

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