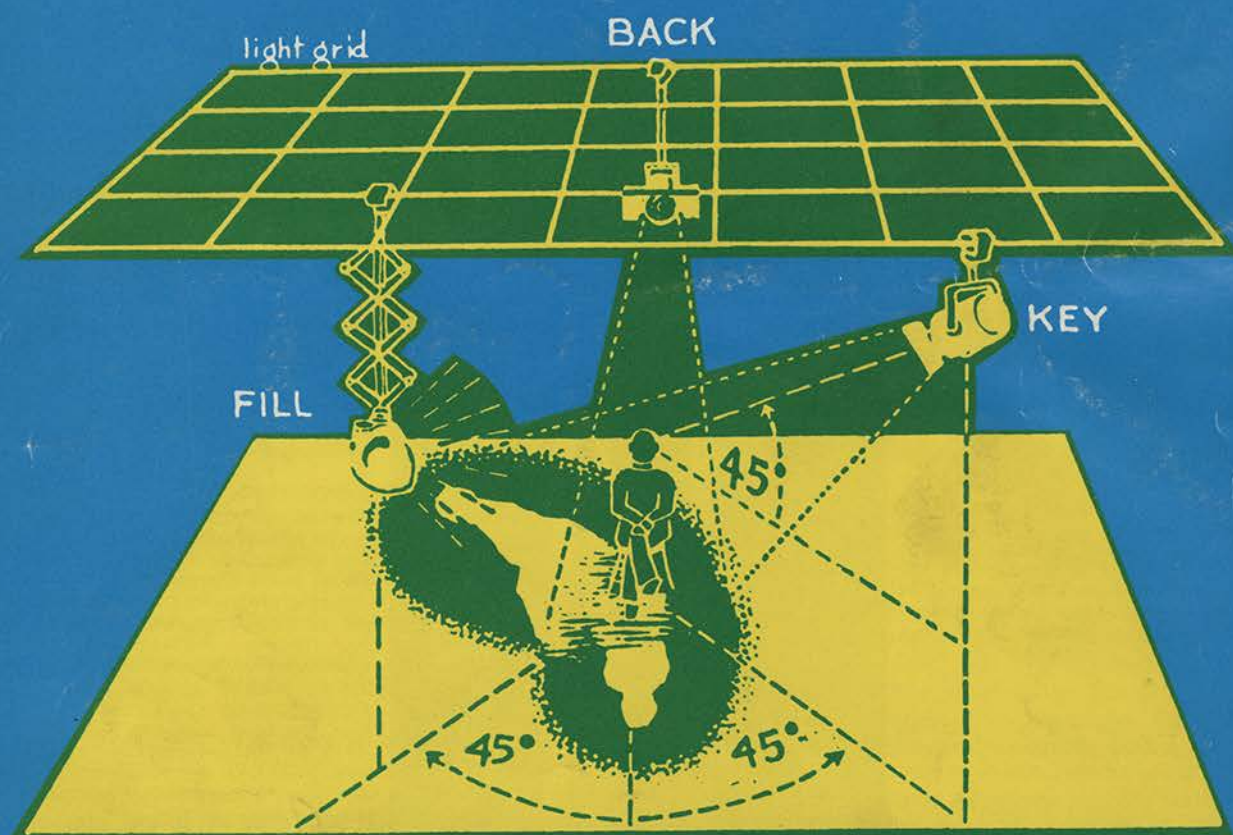


DECEMBER, 1978

\$2.00

CENTERFOLD

Television and Video
Reports



TELE-PERFORMANCE

THE 1979 CANADIAN VIDEO OPEN

CONSIDERATIONS:

Following last year's Open in Calgary, we have attempted to correct and improve certain aspects of the competition and its follow-through. The purpose of the Open is still clear and simple — we want the vehicle of socially creative video to be recognized as an important and consequential product.

ELIGIBILITY:

The competition is open to all Canadian residents.

ENTRIES:

A maximum of two tapes may be entered. Tapes eligible must have been produced between February 1978 and January 1979.

SELECTION:

Of the tapes that are entered 30 will be selected to be shown. 25 of these tapes will receive a single showing fee of \$50. Five tapes will be selected by a jury to receive purchase awards of \$1000.

JURY:

(To be announced.)

SITE:

The 1979 Canadian Video Open will be held in Kingston, Ontario with acting host St. Lawrence College. The Open has been planned to coincide with the Video Symposium at the Agnes-Etherington Centre.

DATE:

5th, 6th and 7th March 1979. Deadline for entries: February 10th 1979.

EXHIBITION:

All tapes selected will be shown through Kingston Cable TV. Negotiations are being made for the five award tapes to be shown in Vancouver and Europe immediately following their presentation in Kingston. (In total 3 selective showings.)

OCCASION:

An award reception will take place on Monday, March 6th 1979 at St. Lawrence College. The wire services will be ceremoniously telexed.

CATALOGUE:

An illustrated catalogue of 30 video artists works will be produced and published by Arton's Publishing Inc.

INFORMATION:

Updated information can be directly obtained by writing to Tobey Anderson, St. Lawrence College, Creative Arts Dept., Portsmouth Avenue, Kingston, Ontario, K7L 5A6.

THE 1979 CANADIAN VIDEO OPEN

OMNIUM CANADIEN DE LA VIDEO 1979

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CONSIDERATIONS:

Suite à la tenue de l'Omni à Calgary, l'an dernier, nous avons tenté d'en corriger et d'en améliorer certains aspects ainsi que ses suites. Essentiellement, le but de l'Omni est encore simple et clair: — nous voulons que le véhicule qu'est la vidéo telle qu'utilisée par les créateurs indépendants soit reconnue comme produit important et valable.

ADMISSIBILITE:

Le concours est ouvert à tous les producteurs résidant au Canada.

SOUSSIONS:

On peut soumettre un maximum de deux vidéogrammes. Les programmes admissibles doivent avoir été produits entre février 1978 et janvier 1979.

SELECTION:

De l'ensemble des vidéogrammes inscrits au concours, 30 seront choisis pour visionnement public. 25 d'entre eux recevront un cachet de \$50 pour un visionnement. Cinq autres choisis par un jury se verront attribuer une bourse de \$1000 et deviendront la propriété de l'Omni.

JURY:

Les noms seront annoncés plus tard.

ENDROIT:

L'Omni canadien de la vidéo 1979 aura lieu cette année à Kingston, Ontario, sous les auspices du St. Lawrence College. Les dates de l'événement coïncident avec la tenue du Symposium-Vidéo organisé par le Centre Agnes-Etherington.

DATES:

Les 5, 6 et 7 mars 1979. Date limite pour les inscriptions: 10 février 1979.

EXPOSITION:

Tous les vidéogrammes choisis par le jury seront télédiffusés par Kingston Cable TV. Des négociations ont présentement lieu afin de pouvoir permettre le visionnement des cinq programmes gagnants à Vancouver et en Europe, immédiatement après leur exposition à Kingston (en tous, trois visionnements au maximum).

OCCASION:

Une réception aura lieu lundi 6 mars 1979 au St. Lawrence College. On y remettra les prix aux vainqueurs et le téléscripteur transmettra cérémonieusement ses dépêches.

CATALOGUE:

Arton's Publishing Inc. produira et publiera un catalogue illustré à propos des 30 vidéogrammes choisis.

RENSEIGNEMENTS:

On peut se procurer de plus amples renseignements en écrivant directement à: Tobey Anderson, St. Lawrence College, Creative Arts Department, Portsmouth Avenue, Kingston, Ontario, K7L 5A6.

Letters

Mail correspondence to be published to: LETTERS, Centerfold, 2nd. Floor 217 Richmond St. W., Toronto, Canada M5V 1W2.

Please be both brief and concise to prevent the need for future editing. Feedback and comments of a longer length should be submitted as possible texts.



We wanted to thank you for your principled review of *Main Trend*. While we obviously have disagreements with some of C.R.'s points, he is to be commended for focusing on major issues instead of on the obvious problems of our first number.

Yours in struggle,

Loren Shumway
for the editorial committee
Main Trend, N.Y.C.

...As for censorship, it can only duck

Artists in Canada have been hit by a massive cutback in federal spending on the arts. Aside from the barely audible grumbings of various individual artists, the only organized response has taken the form of a 'day of protest' under the banner of *The 1812 Committee*. This misnamed group of arts organizations — from The Canadian Book Publishers Association to C.A.R. — puts forward as its main demand a public inquiry into the state of the arts, a demand that has been easily met by Ottawa mandarins since no qualifications were attached. CAR/Toronto, for its part, has sponsored a postcard contest and an evening of entertainment and 'protest', which received a mod-

erate attendance and a few postcards.

The cutbacks are serious as they affect all areas of the arts and especially when viewed in the general context of government cutbacks in public sector jobs, U.I.C. benefits, education, health and its moves to discredit or bust public sector unions. It is in this climate that the recent 'Censorship' issues, a topic in recent issues of *Centerfold*, should be seen. The two issues are inter-related and, unfortunately, the response to both, with a few exceptions, has been the same. The general mood among artists seems to be that things are simply returning to 'normal' after a period of 'enlightened liberation'. The CAR response, for example, reflects more than a simple political conservatism. This conservatism itself is based on a set of assumptions about the very nature of artists' social practice. What most artists fail to understand is that this social practice, and thus the creation of C.A.R. itself was made in response to the development of the Canada Council. That is; the organizations and practice of artists historically corresponded to the centralization and monopolization of cultural funding by the State. The organization and socialization of artists is a progressive development, but progressive only to the degree that artists are conscious of its social and political implications.

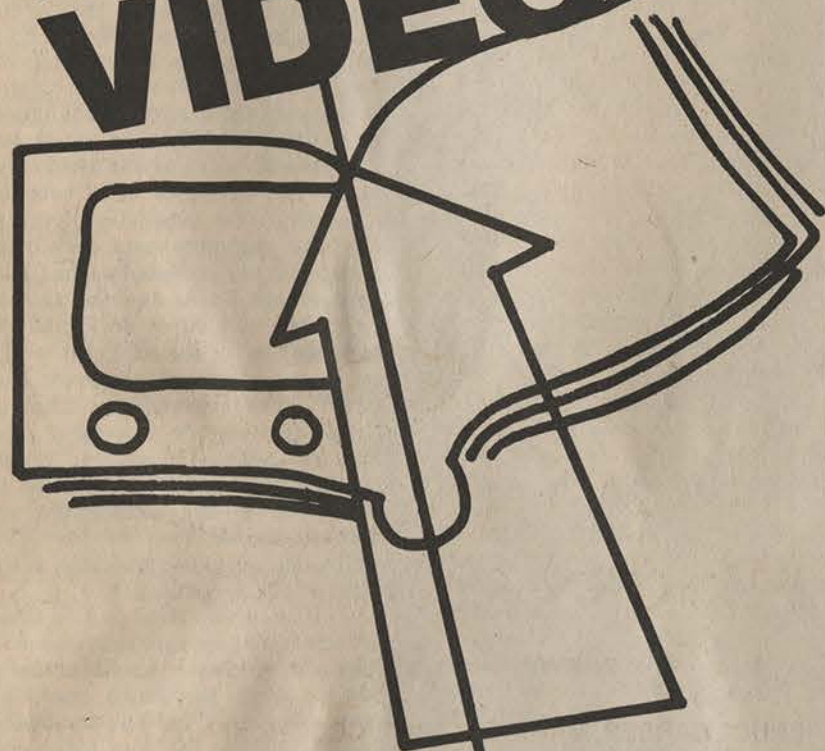
The relation of institutions such as the Canada Council to the social practice of art (including the actual forms of production) has never been adequately analyzed. Around the turn of the century the production of culture was split. 'Mass' culture, like industry, was monopolized; whereas 'high' culture was left operating under the principles of the earlier and already superceded forms of competitive capitalism, hence its increasing inability to express any relation to the real world, a function left to the manipulations of the mass media. High artists, thus denied any social access, turned their own subjectivity into 'reality' and aesthetics into metaphysics. This contradiction between the artists social practice and the social reality in which they worked had to be rationalized. To achieve this a number of social institutions (galleries, museums, magazines, etc.) were developed. But this in turn has given rise to another contradiction. As these institutions consolidated their mutual interests, even-

tually to be centred in the state, artists themselves were being socialized, mainly seen in terms of their common economic interests. But a bureaucracy such as the Council does not simply control cultural economics, but by virtue of controlling economics as well as rationalizing the social practice of artists it in fact determines what constitutes meaningful production. By making aesthetic criteria absolute, which in turn reinforces the sanctity of individualized competitive production and the 'freedom of expression', that is, the freedom to do nothing but to do it well, the bureaucracy can maintain effective control. By eliminating any social political content it eliminates any criticism of itself or the system it represents right at the productive base. The 'apolitical' artist becomes increasingly the 'aesthetic' victim of arbitrary corporate/state decisions. Censorship, as exercised against Pulp Press, Talon Books and CEAC, etc., is not an isolated or accidental occurrence, but is the explicitly political aspect of general economic control.¹ (The particular politics of CEAC, for example, is another issue. This isn't political liberalism. The infantile politics of CEAC should be dealt with in the community, not through the agencies of the state, which only enhances the state, at the expense of the community.)

At best an organization such as CAR, in maintaining an apolitical stance (if such a thing exists — apolitical means not upsetting the status quo), can only ask (beg?) for fair treatment, and this only in terms of token economic distribution. As far as federal government cutbacks are concerned it can only make noise;² as for censorship, it can only duck. Without recognizing its own social-political basis, without recognizing who in fact supports the production of culture — which is not the Council, but the mass of Canadians who create the necessary surplus value and who more obviously pay the taxes, without recognizing that these same people are also struggling against the state for decent living and working conditions, CAR can only end up becoming a reactionary lobbying group representing the most backward of artists.

CAR, or any other artists' organization can only be effective to the degree that they develop a political face, and to the degree that their politics are part of the broader political movements that can not only

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Letters

challenge but eventually change our present exploitative social economic system.

Karl Beveridge, Toronto

1. The fact that it emanated from the Federal House of Commons makes little difference, the Council had to act on it.
2. To think as CAR/FAC does that the Council was ever autonomous, when the majority of its funds come from federal tax revenues, is a joke.

A Space's Many Spaces

Since the last issue of *Centerfold* appeared, complete with summaries of A Space's past and possible futures, a new board of directors and a new staff have laid the preliminary groundwork for a new future, not only for A Space, but for Toronto: the establishment of a 'Museum without a Collection'. The museum is, of course, A Space itself.

Elsewhere in this issue we are advertising for a new A Space Executive Director who will research and implement this project. We hope to have the new Director chosen and working by the middle of January.

In the meantime we are using A Space primarily as an organizing office through which artists' projects can be executed, publicized and disseminated into the city at large, whether this be through radio or television broadcast, use of public spaces, use of other institutions, or use of the streets and urban environment. We are hoping, with this new emphasis, to reach a broader public, who we feel are now ready to experience the work that A Space has always supported in the past. This also allows us to cut overhead expenses and put a greater proportion of our budget into artists' fees.

With this in mind the following projects are now underway:

1. Ben Holzberg's *Rolling Landscape* project will once again bring an extensive photography exhibit into the subway system. This year the project will be much more visible, occupying billboard panels in the stations. The TTC has promised us high traffic locations and we are asking them to rotate the show several times.

2. Susan Harrison's series of writers' readings and workshops began with William Burroughs at Cinema Lumiere last month. The two additional workshops were sold out. Other writers will be coming to Toronto in 1979.

Centerfold, December 1978

Letters

3. Al Mattes is organizing a festival of electronic music and another of solo piano. Both will be held in cooperation with the Music Gallery at the Music Gallery. A Toronto radio station is also interested in broadcasting the series.

4. Elizabeth Chitty is planning her dance series *Recent Pasts*, which will focus attention on recent Toronto choreographers who have received all too little attention to date. The location of the series is not finalized, but we are looking for a high profile location with a large audience potential.

5. Ian Murray is planning a series of audioworks, to be commissioned by A Space and broadcast on radio. If the series is successful it will be distributed to other radio stations in other cities.

6. Tom Dean is commissioning a series of art-works in poster format for A Space. These will be distributed monthly, decentralizing the work around the city. Artists will be working with printer/artist Gary Schilling on the A Space printing press for this project. In addition Tom will be curating several shows for the remaining four months we have the gallery space. After March 31, 1979, exhibitions will be held in satellite spaces.

7. Meanwhile, back in the office, our new administrative assistant Jane Perdue is carrying on an admirable job without anyone to assist. Jane is co-ordinating the various projects while managing our finances and untangling our complicated legal history in preparation for our upcoming 'Museum with a Collection' project.

By the way, A Space fully intends to continue its participation in ANNPAC. Despite our decision to hire professional administrative staff, our Board of Directors is a majority of artists and all our curators are artists. Our first priority is to offer competent administrative services and a charitable number for artists' projects. Our long-range goal is to establish a 'Museum without a Collection' for the exhibition, promotion and ratification of new art, new music, new dance, new writing, performance and all the many hybrids artists are cultivating today. In other words, we continue to be an artist-directed organization.

AA Bronson
for the Board of Directors,
A Space

Centerfold, December 1978

COMING SOON



PERFORMANCE BY ARTISTS

A MAJOR SURVEY with essays by GERMANO CELANT

BRUCE BARBER, MARIA GLORIA BICOCHI, KENNETH COUTTS

SMITH, ROSELEE GOLDBERG, ARDELE LISTER, FRANCE

MORIN, GISLAND NABAKOWSKI and others ... texts and docu-

mentation by VITO ACCONCI, MARINA ABRAMOVIC, LAURIE

ANDERSON, DANIEL BUREN, COUM, GATHIE FALK, GENERAL

IDEA, REINDEERWERK, CLIVE ROBERTSON, ULRIKE ROSEN-

BACH, ULAY and more...

Release date: February, 1979.

Edited by Peggy Gale and AA Bronson

Published by Art Metropole

AM

ART METROPOLE, 217 Richmond Street West, Toronto, Canada M5V 1W2

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Publisher's Note:

Whilst most of the artists that assisted with this issue are included in the masthead we wish to underline our thanks to all the writers and re-writers and artist-photographers who made essential last minute contributions. The Tele-Performance* Series not only generated the following performance texts but also video documents (which have been cable-cast) for the artists who presented performance works. As publishers of *Centerfold* who also organized the Tele-Performance Series we would like to thank the artist-administrators of The Fifth Network/Cinquième Réseau and the artists who acted both as support technicians and video documentary crew: Lawrence Adams, Scott Didlake, Jim Plaxton, Kevin O'Leary, Terry Crack, Bob Croll, Nancy Nicol.

* ("Tele-Performance" was coined by Clive Robertson, a disposable phrase, please don't litter!)

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Guest Editorial

Kenneth Coutts-Smith

Performance art, like many of the previous forms in recent visual culture, is amenable to an extremely wide range of focus, from the intimate, personal and introspective to the public, collective and theatrical, from the lyrical to the expressionist, from the formalist to the social. But it does differ in one significant way from other modes in that it sets about to replace the static and privileged art-object with an experiential process.

Inevitably, performance art must to some extent, both understand itself and be defined in terms of the idea of *spectacle*. Despite clear deviation from the classic norms of theater (the distinction between stage and auditorium, for instance, or the uni-directional flow from an active performer to a passive audience) the element of an *observed event* would seem to be absolutely central. This does not necessarily require that performance art takes place only within a defined cultural space such as a gallery; many pieces have been presented before random "audiences" in the purely social space of the street.

Indeed the very existence of an audience itself is not mandatory, since frequent events have taken place in which only the performers have been physically present, combining at the same time in themselves the dual roles of actors and observers. It is clear that a special relationship between participant (which term must be understood as comprising either actor or observer) and event is defined in which the objective world normally beyond the participant's immediate control is ritualised and thus rendered to some degree malleable. Spectacle has been, historically, the structure within which this type of process has operated.

From the circus (using the word in its widest sense) to sacred rite, military parade and the formalised combat of sports and athletics, spectacle has, through the centuries, fulfilled two distinct functions: that of providing an arena and focus for collective social identity, and that of setting up a consensus structure of

social control. This has been true from the point somewhere in the bronze age or earlier when developing social structures began to rely on sacred theater, ritualised combat and athletic olympiads right up to the present day when the factor of spectacle has expanded, as a result of the dominance of electronic media, to become what is now possibly the primary fact of our total social experience.

The fundamental commodity fetishism of liberal-capitalist society has long since extended its domain past the simple physical objects of exchange, property and consumption, it has now appropriated the whole dimension of social experience. Not only the ideological parameters of bourgeois value and conduct, but even the objective events of historical occurrence have been all but totally subsumed into the arena of spectacle. The ritualised event has surpassed the fields of admiss and the media commercial; it has gone even beyond consensus-control sublimation in setting out consciously to revise social truth T.V. sit-coms and cop-shows. It is a decade now, at least, since the very act of reporting "objective" news began to be totally de-historicised into a media-event.

The older form of spectacle which regarded it as a mechanism for objectifying collective social identity has now been completely supplanted by its obverse function of socio-political control and indoctrination. Little Alex, the ur-punk, observed that the only real things are those that you "viddy on a screen", and the combination of media-fetishism and nihilism would seem to be far from fortuitous.

The recent independant Video Conference-Festival "Fifth Network/Cinquième Réseau", held in Toronto between September 7th and 10th based its fundamental rationale on proposing alternatives to the monolithic cultural-political control and the hierarchical bureaucratic structure of "conventional" electronic media. The very existence of the conference itself was a demonstration of the achievement of a considerable degree of maturity and cohesion throughout the general alternate-video movement that comprises vari-

ous forms of community access and social action.

Nevertheless, it still remains problematical how genuinely effective, given the present realities of liberal-capitalist society, this diffused force can become in actual social and political terms. As long as it remains a "marginal" phenomenon, as long as it remains dependant on various forms of public funding, as long as there is no major reassessment concerning the very nature of cultural activity in terms of the changing social relations of an increasing corporatization of society in general, then it will inevitably be relegated to a position where it discovers itself at best to be merely *tolerated*, and thus be finally manipulated by the established commercial structure of communication networks.

One remarkably dominant aspect of the conference in general was the evidence of a significant gap of mutual incomprehension between the two broad factions present who can be said to have represented the poles of "social" video and "art" video. In the view of this present commentator, this fragmentation of purpose and understanding may, of course, have revealed a weakness in the general concept of an alternate network. But is also proposes the most crucial area of debate and analysis that appears to demand resolution if any sort of future grass-roots input is to have any effect whatsoever on the developing monolithic structure of cultural and social control through the electronic media.

The activists on the one side and the artists on the other demonstrate a frequent tendency to downgrade the importance of the other's activity. Some artists shout: "mere politics!" Some social-video producers accuse: "self-indulgent irrelevance!" Both, however, fail to understand that each represents the obverse of the other engaged in the pursuit of a common programme devoted to socio-cultural change. Unquestionably, we have all been exposed to examples of social-video that are sectarian and dogmatic. Equally unquestionably, we have all suffered through a considerable body of ego-tripping art-video that is narcissistic and self-indulgent. But, this dual

phenomenon represents respectively bad politics and bad art, and cannot be seen as evidence of an essential duality of purpose and intent.

This erosion of mutual comprehension which was occasionally evident in a dramatic manner during the debates and formal sessions of the conference seems to have been one of the reasons that the Fifth Network remained unable to constitute itself as a formal organisation. It seems regrettable that an element of factionalism appears to have precluded (so far, at least) the establishment of a democratic institution geared for collective action and controlled by the producers themselves.

It is, of course, quite understandable, in terms of the very nature of today's corporate society, that many individuals would reject institutions in general and the notion of developing "our own bureaucracies" in particular. Nevertheless, it would appear that the denial of any projected activity based on structured and collective forms constitutes little more than an individualised and romantic anarchism. In terms of any proposed action towards attaining a measure of democratic control over the means of distribution, it is obviously self-defeating to reject the very idea of structured institutional bodies. In the absence of there being any probability of alternate-video seizing a significant measure of control over existing institutions, then it is evident the only possibility is to attempt to develop "our own" ones.

Those individuals who assessed the conference from a dualistic and factionalist perspective (and it seems necessary to remark that these persons appeared to be more numerous in the "art" camp) clearly misunderstand the essential nature of the series of performances which took place at the Masonic Temple during the four evenings of the conference itself. The "Tele-Performance" programme provided, without question, a broad spectrum of artistic responses to the whole shifting social and political relationship between the individual and the state as it is presently mediated by the ideological superstructure of television in particular and the communications media in general.

Eleven separate performances were mounted during the programme, and each dealt in one way or another, to a greater or a lesser degree of socio-political focus, with the pervasive and dominant presence of television as a mechanism of social control and indoctrination.

On the first evening, Elizabeth Chitty's piece *Demo Model* explored the essential distancing and reifying effect of television; and it dealt with, amongst other aspects, the opacity "of codes and combinations" and the alienation that the individual experiences from the socio-political process as a result of the fact that newscasting (and particularly the reportage of disasters and war events) becomes transformed into a media-event no more or less significant than a commercial break.

This performance was followed by *Artist's Support System* in which General Idea satirised the props and mannerisms of the T.V. studio in, once more, elevating the audience to celebrity status. Using the provocative concept of confronting the real audience with another "mirror" audience of instant art-stars, they presented yet another episode in the eternal rehearsal for the future which is planned to finalise itself some day in 1984 when a sort of millennial age of spurious glamour is expected to achieve a media apotheosis.

On the evening of September 8th, three pieces were presented. The first by Tom Sherman, *See The Text Comes to Read You*, defined an intellectually dense and poetically lyrical inquiry into the "relationship between the artist and his tape-recorder". Sherman's dialogue was one essentially between man and his technology, between the "machine" and an individual's self expression. The electronic communications device was understood as being both the objectification and the mechanism for existentially integral communication. The paradox presented one, in which limitation was also liberty, the prison of technological control also the channel of human dialogue.

Clive Robertson, in *Explaining Pictures to Dead Air*, explored aspects of the broad phenomenon of the artificial elevation to celebrity status of specific individuals. His examination of the fugitive dimension of cultural "heroism" was presented as being the result of a manipulation of subtle media clichés. The incorporation of a personal telephone dialogue with Joseph Beuys was particularly effective in commenting on the ambiguities of celebrity status in the enclosed marginal society of the cultural avant-garde. In essence this piece comprised a socio-political docu-drama concerning the manner in which artists relate to the various forms of television fiction.

The second evening ended with David Buchan's stylishly mounted presentation *Lamonte Del Monte's Fruit Cocktails* in which he commented wittily on the whole artificial world of show-biz and entertainment that has become such an ubiquitous and tranquilizing dream that the pseudo-reality of the variety-tee-vee-spectacular and the talk-show has long since supplanted religion or other ideological facets of the superstructure to qualify as the opium of the masses.

The third evening of Tele-Performance comprised a further three presentations. The first, by Dennis Tourbin was based on the very simple but remarkably effective concept of the performer shuttling back and forth between dual roles as interviewer and interviewee, between the talking head and the transfixed and sedated spectator. *Conversations With a Diplomat* revealed a further aspect of the essential synthetic quality of our electronically-dominated political experience in which bland and interchangeable statesmen mouthing vacuous platitudes are presented as being viable alternatives and figureheads in the fraud of participatory democracy.

Jean-Francois Cantin in his *Propos Type* proposed a very different and much more formalised approach in which the element of physical hardware was represented by a monitor which mirrored and echoed the events that took place in real-space/real-time. His more conceptual use of the video elements, however, brought the audience into a direct manipulation of the hardware. *Another State of Marsharelore* followed this with a powerful statement in which Marsharelore, booted and spurred, delivered an ironic history of the social development of television.

The final evening, that of September 10th, was focused on Randy and Berneche's piece, *Centre of a Tension*, in which perhaps the most direct political comments of the series were made. Juxtaposing texts

from the *Diary* of Che Guevara and statements by Mata Hari, the audience was exposed to a broad mediascape of total fiction in which the twin parameters defined, on the one hand, the fact that Mata Hari was a complete media invention and, on the other, the media process in which the revolutionary becomes transformed, and thus politically defused, into the fashion model.

One further event, not scheduled on the programme, was the spontaneous appearance of Daniel Dion and Daniel Guimond in their manifestation *Extra Rule Value*. Defining itself as a punk-performance, a violent assault on the sensibilities of the spectators was less a nihilistic act than one of instant feedback, providing a genuinely critical response to both the events of the conference as a whole and the particular cultural alienation experienced by Quebec artists in the face of a dominantly "english" programme.

Further to these, there was, in a sort of Off-Off-Yonge Street situation, several significant performances at the Factory Lab Theatre, in which Marien Lewis and the Hummer Sisters as well as the Government presented further examples of the politically-oriented cabaret-type performances they have been developing during the recent years. The Hummer piece, *Nympho Warriors* especially developed a bite and socio-political edge that seems to have significantly matured and achieved force since the days of *The Bible as Told to Karen Anne Quinlan*. Both groups have developed a particular use of video as a stage dimension as well as a method of action and reaction in developing the thrust of their material.

The texts that follow in this special edition of *Centerfold* devoted to the Tele-Performances are, without question, the most remarkable collection of texts on performance art yet to be published in Canada, and there would seem little question that they will provide the basis for wide discussion, even for reassessment of the very nature of performance art at the present time. They question the function of performance as both a creative and reflexive force in re-defining the shifting relationship between the domain of visual culture and the social and political realities of the present stage of society. ■

It is *The Body Politic* which immediately faces the prospect of being in fact outlawed under the terms of the Criminal Code.

Their case is of particular importance to us all: in it we can see the transmogrification of pseudo-issues like "misuse of public funds," "accountability," etc., into the essential political issue of censorship and the suppression of distinct minority groups.

The media attack on *The Body Politic* began in the pages of the *Toronto Sun*, whose editors first "exposed" the fact that the magazine had received a grant from the Ontario Arts Council. That certain politicians smelled an issue in the pre-election wind we can presume from the ensuing police raid on *The Body Politic* offices and the subsequent laying of charges.

Their case is now pending; its outcome in the next month or so will determine whether in this country censorship has moved to its final tertiary phase, or is to remain dormant a while longer, a contagious rash spread by contact with media hacks and politicians.

Stephen Osborne, *Pulp Press*, Vancouver, in *Centerfold*, September 1978.

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Demo Model



Rodney Warden

An interview by Peggy Gale

You've been using video as part of your performances for some time.

I've used it ever since I graduated from school (at the York University Dance Department) in 1975. My first show in May 1975 included video and one piece called *Polyfil*. I've used it fairly consistently since then, in fact the show I did last December was the first one I'd done with no video. In earlier works such as *Lap* I was never really satisfied with my use of video; I felt that I hadn't really explored it quite enough. And obviously it remains important for me.

One of the things I find significant about video generally is that it manipulates time, and it permits overlaps and juxtapositions that wouldn't be possible without some sort of recording mechanism. In fact video offers a double manipulation of time, because although it is a recording, it has an aura of real-time. I think that is particularly interesting in a dance context, which is very much about movement through time.

Actually that was my beginning point in using video. That was the

content, in terms of the video performance, of *Polyfil*, and in *Lap* also. The very word 'lap' came from the idea of overlap in time, or trying to change a sense of time progression.

When you're choreographing, are you conscious of this element of time displacement or shifting?

In *Demo Model* the video had a kind of narrative quality to it, which the movement didn't, and while I was making the piece I remember being conscious and careful about how defined I wanted the narrative to be. The tapes had very specific scenes, the briefing, the interrogation etc. (there weren't actually titles in it, but they were implied), and I wanted to introduce a sense of narrative, but I didn't want the piece to be taken on only that level. That's a very basic concept to everything I've done; my priority is to create something not following just one direction or too closely tied to the content or meaning. I come from a dance background, which has always been a more traditional or conservative art form than others, where the basic structure of the theme is the whole content of the piece and I see that as being very limiting. It leads the audience's perceptions along one path. And I try to make a structure that will allow a more creative response.

It seems to me that the content of your piece is much more by implication than by explanation; you give a lot of facts or objects, and the rest is to be done by association by the audience.

It's also because the pure structural level of the dance is very important to me.

Can you explain to me what you mean by "structure"?

Let me give you a specific example, of *Demo Model*. The pure movement parts of it came directly from a perception of dance in semiotic terms. Even before I was familiar with the academic terminology of semiotics, I was aware that I was

looking at dance from the point of view of what the movements expressed, and looking at traditional dance vocabulary as a clichéd method of language. This is specifically in modern dance; gestures represent emotions. In this piece, and in the earlier work *Extreme Skin*, I reduced the movement to blatant sign systems, such as the deaf mute, and semaphore, and the poses also representing simplified but particular feelings.

What influenced me when I first began dancing/choreographing was precisely what happened in dance in the 60's, the Judson Dance Theatre kind of thing, Yvonne Rainer's "task" idea, but I didn't stay with that very long. *Extreme Skin* was the first piece with large numbers of people; it had the task sense but I wasn't totally satisfied with it.

In *Demo Model* there is a more elaborate sense of theme. I started out at the beginning knowing that the piece would be about information, and how information is relayed. Information is very different as image or movement or words, and information is relayed differently by moving images as opposed to still images. I would say that *Demo Model* is the most content-oriented work that I've done.

It's full of messages for me; it's practically a catalogue of languages. There's the video language, both live and pre-recorded. Then there were the polaroids (on-the-spot recording) and the pre-recorded photographs that were also looked at by the video camera. There was semaphore, xerox, sign language, the maps...

Actually that backdrop was a xeroxed collection of various things, again on a theme of language. There were a few sheets of playing cards, because of the way pattern relates to language, and diagrams from dance technique manuals. There were also some newspaper stories, including one about NBC being sued by a girl who felt she had been raped as a direct consequence of a tv programme about such things. There was also the newspaper story there about the MPs being sued for libel. The political sense was very much there, and comes from a perception of the kind of right-wing politics that's coming forward now.

In the sense of watching and be-

ing watched, and being coded and systematised and all of that?

Yes, and the person in the videotapes had that 'spy' feel, or police detective.

Was this to warn the rest of the world? Or was it just another format?

I guess I look at it from the point of view of content, comment; it's true that I do like to have a reality basis for my work and certainly this is what's happening in politics right now. The whole thing with CEAC last spring was the reason for including that news story about the MPs and libel, and referred to the whole censorship issue. I didn't want to make it too explicit, but I did feel that it related to the political overtone of the piece. In general language is obviously important to the whole piece.

Well, it's very inventive, with the semaphore and sign language. Were you spelling out something specific?

I didn't actually. When I used semaphore the first time, in *Extreme Skin*, I did spell out 'extreme skin', but this time language as a concept was important rather than any specific information.

It's all about language, but it also is language, you were speaking many languages. And as an audience, you not only listen to the language, but you listen to the theory that these are languages. That's already three levels: the specific content of the language, the fact that these are languages, and the fact that you are observing language as a system.

Right. I think when I mentioned the word 'structural' before in reference to *Demo Model*, the theory of language as such, those things are very important.

I also spoke. Those gun-moll phrases were intended to contrast with the photographs, which were fairly nondescript, empty spaces or images with no elaborate story to tell. The gun-moll texts were so emotionally loaded. They were sort of humorous as well, things like "I've got your number and it starts with zero", "I suppose it was business when I caught you with that redhead in Frisco", something about lefty and stoolies... they were very clichéd phrases.

Those are all a kind of lingo, and functioned as another sort of lan-

guage, although they fit comfortably into the rest of the piece. You were sort of done up in the punk look.

I first thought of erotic dancing as a good example of manipulative, blatant language. But I wasn't really comfortable with doing that so I decided to do just a rock dance as it also operates on a kind of sign level. I don't think the piece was a 'punk' piece, though Sol Littman kept referring to that, and to me as a punk. I thought that was rather facile of him, although my own performance sense does have a certain amount of aggression which can easily be related to a punk sensibility.

How do you go about beginning a piece?

It usually starts with a very vague feeling about something, and then gets elaborated from that point. In *Demo Model*, that feeling was information and image, and the first thing I did was write a few pages in a pseudo-scientific way: information, reception of information, mode of reception of information, information topics, information assembly. That was what I started with. And I added a couple of hypotheses: reception of information from an image is more simple, direct and mimetic, than our reception of informa-



Rodney Warden

tion from an actual person, object or action, because there are fewer and more distant active interfaces. So that differentiates image from performance, right from the beginning. And since mode of reception is a determining factor in the information, we are referred to a sort of manipulation.

Since an image is fixed, surely you can find out everything that's there simply by looking, which might take you more time or less depending on the complexity of the image. Whereas a performance is ongoing, and even if it's complex you can't use any more time for looking than the duration of the piece.

Well, that contrast is one of the real reasons why I've always been interested in the juxtaposition of live performance and videotape. But after I got this far with the planning, some of the other ideas just lost interest for me. I had thought of the 'rebel' as an example of social information. I guess that relates to the punk thing. I was going to have a whole section on 'political rebel', and information on terrorist activities.

That part at the end where you were reading from a book, and the monitor showed your hand...

Lobotomy. I introduced lobotomy as a means of removing information. It's an extreme, rather macabre example, and it certainly wasn't there as a comment on the morality of lobotomies.

There was an implied threat,

though, because of all this sort of interrogation, and 'we'll get you' and all that, and so although the notion of lobotomy was just dropped in as another fact, there was a residual effect that went beyond that.

On a theatrical level it certainly added to the whole ominous overtone.

The kind of police-detective issue, and the kinds of theories that were considered by this, seem to lead directly into a consideration of television and the mass media.

For sure. For instance, the 'briefing' tape, "assemble data, define the policy" — about two-thirds of the phrases were lifted out of newscasts, with the content removed. There is a whole language in television news and newspaper news. The story about the massacres in Africa was taken right out of the paper with no changes at all. It's all so manipulative, words like "bludgeoned with rifles", words with such a strong emotional reaction. And yet there's the irony of the removal into print at the same time, we are brought close to the information but kept away from the true reality. But it was also happening on a pure emotional level as well. While this was being read, I was doing endurance poses, which was the most metaphorical the movements ever got. Listening to this horrible story, which if you bring yourself emotionally close to it... And the voice-over was saying "stop", "no, don't go on", and of course the voice continued on.

That's very much a comment on what communication is, and how dangerous it can be. Overload of information in fact leads away from action. You become kind of blunted by it and you don't perceive it, you just sort of catalogue it. To me the whole sense of catalogue in Demo Model give that sense of here there's more information than ever before, we have more languages now, but the result is that we pay much less attention to any of it.

That's part of the political concern of the piece too, the sense of helplessness and frustration I have felt that wasn't in the piece directly, but it was there in an underlying way. I'm very concerned with politics; as an artist I'm concerned about the world we're living in and yet my art, or art, is the most important thing to me. I don't just go out and work for the NDP and knock on doors, but I really feel that art is as legitimate a political tool as doing something which is more active, more direct. I have no doubt that art is always political; I mean if you're getting up on pointe shoes and doing a dance that comes from the time of Imperial Russia, then of course it assumes a political context from that time. It's impossible to separate what you're doing from its context and history, it's there all the time in the work of artists who are involved in changing art. The whole stance of change or exploration can't be separated from its political implications.

And yet it's relatively unusual to make that connection explicit in art today.

It was definitely a decision on my part to specify that political awareness. I really felt I had to do this now.

There weren't any real assessments of the performance series by the newspaper, but Littman did write about your piece. Do you think that these messages hit him on some subconscious level?

Well, it's peculiar, because he spoke to me after the performance, he came up to me and said do you think you could throw a little light on what you've just done? And I spoke to him for a few minutes in very clear terms about the image, information, etc., and he seemed to be a very intelligent man who was asking questions and taking in what I said. And he said at the end, well



I like you am somewhat concerned with the political sensibility right now, and don't you think you could be more explicit? He meant "improve your work" by being more clear. And I said no, because the expression of this political stance is not my only priority, and I made reference here to what I've said today, that I didn't want to create a work which led only to one specific message for the audience. I didn't just want to write a sign that said "down with the liberal party"...

It's much more evocative to be dealing with issues of control and manipulation and subversion and eventual political lobotomy. It seems to me that the points you discuss are made quite clear, saying that information is an issue, and communication is an issue, and recording devices and tools and languages are issues. That's pretty specific. Do you feel that you're one of several people with similar thoughts?

I have no doubt at all that there are people with similar thoughts; it's all that people have been talking about — censorship, and the cut-backs. Most people look at that not just from the point of view of oh dear we're not going to have enough money, but from the fact that it implies a perception of art and culture as frills for our society. And I have no doubt that any artist with integrity about his work knows that that is just not the case. That awareness is all around.

I don't have any presumption that what I do is totally accessible to everybody in the street. And I'm familiar with the whole accusation of elitism and you-don't-care-about-your-audience, and I totally reject those ideas. Of course I care about my audience; if I didn't, I certainly wouldn't go to the trouble of making something different from that formula we're all familiar with. I'm concerned with art and with evolving art forms, but I still consider my work dance because it's evolved from dance. And of course it's tied to its roots.

It all comes down to the role art is seen as having in our society; it's still seen as a luxury for the upper classes, a decoration to cover up some of the hard parts of life.

But your work is not about decoration or pleasure, but about some of the realities themselves. And you're not alone in that.

I was even more stringent about that in my earlier work; I think that now I'm showing some awareness of theatricality and visual sense again. I am concerned with performance quality, and I definitely don't want to be so involved in my concerns that the work becomes academic.

I had the sense in watching it that it was pared right down; by way of criticism I could only say that all of those things could have been elaborated on. There wasn't time for an audience to muse over those issues very much, because they were being confronted with the next one right away.

I think that comes because I work very specifically. I like to have the conceptual framework of what I'm doing totally together before I do anything, and perhaps that leads me to stick to a conceptual framework more than people would like to see me do. But the issues are all inter-related, and that led to a mingling of the ideas.

I just think the audience would have been more satisfied if they had more extra stuff.

Yeah, I tend to fulfill what I intend to do, and that's it. I guess I look at extra things as extraneous. I certainly started choreographing from the point of view that I wasn't going to fulfill the audience's expectations, and I suppose I'm uncompromising in that sense.

You said earlier that you've been interested in semiotics and a study of and definition of the terms of language ever since school. Is this piece then part of a continuum of work, and ongoing intention?

Actually I can say something about my plans for the immediate future. Even before I performed *Demo Model* I'd made the decision to stop choreographing for awhile, a year or so. The main thing I want to do in that time is to do a conscientious study of language and to apply that to what I do. After all, communication is a very basic priority for me. I've been concerned most in the past with communication from the point of view of making something which allows perception in a multi-dimensional way, but I feel now that I want to get a handle on other aspects of communication. I want to do a lot of reading.

But in longer-range terms, the next thing that I do will be BIG, and

I'd like to do it in a theatre space. But my notions about it are all very vague still.

And are you pleased with Demo Model?

I think it's the best work I've done so far. ■

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Centerfold, December 1978

General Idea Towards an Audience Vocabulary



Rodney Warden

A pre-cast 32 member group of extras occupied 32 numbered seats on stage directly facing the audience. The seats were arranged in a ziggurat shape that was an extraction from the overall seating plan designed for the 1984 Miss General Idea Pavillion (32 seats x 62 sections = 1,984 extras). The sequence of events the extras responded to followed the format of a Miss General Idea Pageant. The raising of the curtain scene with appropriate audience reaction started the performance, which proceeded in sequence to the finale. A narrator fleshed-out or set the scenes, the director indicated what reactions were desired and conducted the enactment. General Idea played the parts of narrator, director and still photographer. The decision to present this taping in performance rather than in the studio arose out of a hoped-for mirror-image effect between the two very different audiences. The role of the audiences were equally but differently isolated from the usual stimuli. The "real" audience enacted a traditional audience vocabulary in response to the extras' performance of the "real" vocabulary once removed. Mirrors mirroring mirrors. It was hoped that the gap between the audience and stage would blur into endless reflections.

Edited by Jo-Anne Birnie Danzker and rewritten by General Idea

Jo-Anne Birnie Danzker interviews AA Bronson, Felix Partz, and Jorge Zontal of General Idea:

JBD: I'm sure you noticed that the "real" audience was pretty restless during the performance.

AA: Well, we realized restlessness would be a possibility because the piece wasn't directed to that audience, it was directed to the stage. There were two audiences necessary for the piece to work, but all our attention was directed to one and not the other. It was a perverse situation. On the other hand, if the physical setup of the space had been different, if it had been a normal theatre situation where the "real" audience was right up next to the stage, then the whole relationship of the two audiences would have been much clearer. The space was a problem.

JBD: What relationship between the two audiences were you trying to explore?

FP: The relationship between audiences and the stage or focal point in performance situations. . .

JZ: . . . and the relationship between a forcibly de-activated audi-

"A good artist doesn't have to be loved. There are so many lovable, ineffectual artists. . . . This is not to suggest that art should be grating or irritating or hated to be effective. . . . We are quite aware of the fact that the main objective of one's work is not to win friends, not to win praise and attention, but to get the public to act on the basis of your work. In the process you may not endear yourself to some people but you have become an effective generator of cultural information that warrants consumer attention."

Excerpt from General Idea's Press Conference (videotape/performance), The Western Front, Vancouver, 1976.

ence and a forcibly activated one. Between active and passive as well as active and re-active.

FP: We did this by attempting to set up a mirror-image situation. Our performers, our stage audience, were called up to the stage from the "real" audience. In fact they sat through the previous performance as part of the "real" audience. They were called up over the p.a. Their names and seat numbers were announced. This was the initial "act" of our performance. It was an intended blunt gesture. We wanted to underline the separating of the audiences. We wanted to set up two distinct yet similar behavioural situations in the same room.

JZ: Once they assembled on stage the show began. The "extra" audience reacted to a hypothetical narrative intended to provide a context for the reactions we required. These reactions are what we consider a basic audience vocabulary. Again, the "real" audience's vocabulary was bluntly, and quite literally up-staged. All they could do was lip-sync. They were once removed and their role was called into crisis.

JBD: So in other words you

were exploring the dialectics of a "real" audience that would have nothing to do and a stage audience that would be entering into the traditional vocabulary of the audience.

AA: Yes, our focus wasn't on the "real" audience. The "real" audience were left to their own devices. Although we attempted to appear to be excluding them we had indeed considered their role. We were also exploring what "real" audiences do indeed do, what expectations they have, what involvement they require and of course what they do when their scenes are stolen.

FP: The dialectic was left to find its own level. Any addressing of the "real" audience, any introductions, any acknowledgement would have weakened the situation we were attempting to set up. We contrived the alienation.

JBD: And you had your backs turned to them?

JZ: Yes, of course we did. Another blunt decision. But also for practical purposes. We were working, directing. The cameramen also had their backs to the audience. So do band leaders, or choir-masters, which is sort of the part G.I. was

playing on stage. Someone mentioned that the "turned-back-stance" broke the first rule of theatre. Was the "real" audience anticipating theatre? But there were 32 people on stage, directly facing the "real" audience and performing for them.

JBD: You said you anticipated a negative reaction.

AA: No, I never said a negative reaction. We really didn't know what to expect. It was exciting, titillating... a certain tension. We were definitely interested in what would happen. It was something new for G.I. to allow the unexpected to happen in a performance situation. But, yes, a negative reaction was a possibility.

JZ: There were other reactions. During the "movie" section the stage audience was requested to act out the viewing of an engrossing film. The lighting crew provided effects to simulate the appearance of audience faces in a darkened theatre with a flickering light motif. The "real" audience vocally provided a sound track for that situation. Their hooting, applauding and stomping of feet became quite articulated and ended right on cue when the lights

went up. This was an attempt to create a role for themselves since their usual role had been removed.

JBD: Would you wish for audiences in general to have more control, or a more direct relationship to what is being performed? Is that not an issue for you?

AA: Well, it is a definite issue for us. As you know we have been working with audiences, concentrating on them and involving them in our productions for some time now. Their desires as audiences in performance situations and how they go about fulfilling those desires are issues for us. We find it desirable to involve audiences in a manner in which their role, their involvement, their expectations, their vulnerability becomes topical. We want audiences to sit on the edge of their seats, becoming both extras and viewers, active and passive at once.

JBD: If you are concerned with the way in which people are manipulated and are forced to be passive viewers, why would you subject them to it?

AA: For us it is a form of investigation of these issues. We want

to know more about how manipulation operates. We presume others are interested as well. We operate in a controlled situation. Like a laboratory. We assume we are working with sophisticated patients with patience. We attempt to articulate the issues. They were the subject matter of our performance.

FP: It is not our style to take the podium and deliver manifestos about the heartbreak of exploitation, manipulation and alienation. This is an entry into the topics but not ours. We don't deal with these situations with a ten foot pole. Turning off the TV creates a short-lived relief from TV manipulation. We're not into abstinence. We're into the thick of it. It's dangerous and we try to maintain a borderline stance. It's really a tension point in all our work and a lot of people express their concern.

JBD: And yet you yourself pointed out that virtually the same audience, an equivalent audience, a few days later was asked to engage in cliché reactions which they thoroughly enjoyed.

AA: Yes, at David Buchan's *Fruit Cocktails*. In fact I thoroughly

enjoyed it as well. But we were all very conscious of the situation. It made you conscious of what the cliché was, and how you were reacting to it. You did it, enjoyed it, but you were never sucked into it. You were maybe manipulated by it, but by agreement between you and it.

JBD: Was it the consent element that was missing from your dialectic between the "real" audience and the stage audience?

AA: Yes, that's what was missing. That's what we decided to eliminate. It was simply a different type of performance than David's *Fruit Cocktails*. We didn't ask or cater for consent. It was left up in the air. Again, if the audiences had been in direct physical confrontation this issue may have developed more extremely.

FP: Yes, if that had been the case, the visual contact could have in a sense provided the traditional entertainment quotient that perhaps some people found lacking. On the most banal level it would have been interesting to see what so-and-so was wearing or how so-and-so in particular was reacting. This was probably difficult from 60 feet away.

JBD: One member of the audience remarked that they saw the performance as essentially a videotape production and the indifference to the "real" audience as something of an insult.

FP: Obviously that is one way to deal with it. Perhaps the most basic. Perhaps the least interesting. It would have been quite simple to shoot the tape in a studio situation. It would have been simpler for us, the crew and probably the performers. But it was conceived as a performance before a live audience and the interest we expected to generate was not that of watching a TV show being shot. I felt the taping and the performance before the "real" audience was totally integrated, but in this performance the taping was only a device, a found format.

JBD: So then comes the question: for which audience were you performing?

AA: We didn't perform. We worked. The stage audience performed.

JBD: For what audience was the stage audience performing?

JZ: They were performing for



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three audiences essentially: for the "real" in-house audience; for whoever is going to see the tape; and of course for us. Also let's not forget the other performance that was coinciding with this activity. I mean the "real" audience's performance.

JBD: Another element particular to your "real" audience was the large number of people from the social-political video community whose response was pretty negative.

FP: Perhaps you also noted the art community's reactions to some of the social-political video community's tapes. Pretty negative. Obviously there is a certain split between these two groups. The conference was an interface situation for these two groups in particular. In some cases there are common objectives involved, but the methodology is usually extremely different. But the possibilities of overlap are increasingly seductive.

JBD: One comment that was made was that the stage audience was made up of an in-group.

AA: It was for sure.

JBD: This is a criticism that has been leveled at G.I. for as long as I can remember.

JZ: Yes, it does sound familiar.

AA: We could have requested 32 volunteers from the "real" audience but we specifically wanted what we have begun to call our Art Support System. People who have supported us in the past and continue to support us and who we presume are forming the audience for 1984.

FP: Also we definitely wanted to get a tape out of it. We weren't into just trying it out. We had objectives. We chose people who we felt would do it, do it well, who we would feel comfortable working with, and of course people who can deal with being on camera and come across. As you said, this in-group thing is often leveled at G.I. It's a rather confusing issue for us. It's obviously a projection. We're not sure exactly where the problem comes in. We selected an extremely diverse group. Does the in-group paranoia imply they have been chosen simply because they look good, are easy to manipulate, we're hustling them, they're gold-digger exhibitionists? Are they simply in-groupies? Jo-Anne, you've participated in one of our videotapes. You've written about our work on numerous occasions. You've in-

cluded us in your exhibitions. We've been seen together socially. Would you accept the label of being one of the in-group? I would hope so. Remove the negative connotations and it's simply working and being with interesting people. If this really is a problem for anyone then they should examine the individual members of the group and discover why we find them interesting. Actually I find it a total insult to the people we work with, to the 32 people on stage, to reduce them to in-groupies, objectified with no identities outside of the group. A lot of this type of criticism is rooted in personal insecurity and jealousy and I think it's a dead issue.

JBD: One of the obvious elements of the performance was its discontinuity as a functional element of the filming-taping process. The resultant videotape is a discontinuous experience which through editing becomes "reality" or "continuity".

AA: Unless we chose to present it as a discontinuity. We swing both ways, depending on the context.

JBD: I was wondering in this particular case, if continuity was a central issue.

JZ: I think the performance was

what is normally thought of as a discontinuous experience presented in a manner that in fact was quite sequential and continuous. The performance did have five distinct scenes. We started from scene one and went right through. There were almost no technical interruptions. It had a strong narrative that developed. We never shot out of sequence. It had a climax. Actually, in performance I think it was quite traditionally structured.

JBD: Perhaps, but it was still discontinuous and I did wonder if the audience's reaction was as much against this discontinuity of experience as it was against their personal lack of involvement.

AA: In all our performances we play with discontinuity. You're here now, but you're also in 1984. You're watching a performance, but it's actually a videotaping. You really are the audience, but you're also extras. This performance was an extension of these concerns. An extreme extension.

FP: I doubt that the resultant videotape you refer to will misrepresent the "reality" of the initial performance situation. The discontinuity angle will probably be heighten-

ed.

JZ: There were several things we wanted from this project. The performance, the still photos — which incidentally were of a high priority for another project — and then of course the tape. The tape was conceived as "stock footage". This could have been the title of the performance. We realized the possibility of a beginning-to-end real time documentary of the performance. The tape could also be cut up and paced faster but still be a factual document. We fantasized about editing right down to the various audience reactions and arranging them chorally like a choir performing a scored piece. Sort of like the Hartz Mountain Canaries. We will also definitely be incorporating sections into our *Hot Property* tape which we're now editing. As in most of G.I.'s work, I'm sure this material will continue to spin off and resurface for years.

JBD: An interesting point for me in seeing the performances during the conference was the apparent impact of your particular relationship to the media, style and glamour — the influences of G.I. on some of the other performances. I don't

know if you felt it.

FP: Of course, in some cases quite strongly. In other cases they were dealing with similar issues in different manners. I just think that artists' relationships to the media, style and glamour are topical issues at this moment.

JBD: The irony was seeing G.I.-style performances, and there was G.I.'s audience pouring out the doors.

AA: Well, I guess it was fortunate for us that we secured a very attentive, receptive, attractive and entertaining 32 member audience that we could count on to endure the show.

FP: Really, Jo-Anne! We hardly emptied the hall. Most people did manage to resist the lure of the bar and chit chat.

JBD: What relationship do you see between your gallery exhibitions, media productions and performances? Are you exploring the same issues, or are you exploring different issues in different media?

AA: There is a whole vocabulary of issues that are interrelated. I think in performance situations we tend to focus on concerns that come



Centerfold, December 1978

Jorge Zontal



Centerfold, December 1978

out of performance. Thus the audience was subject matter in this performance. We get very involved with the media we are using. File for example is a prototype magazine. It's a found format.

JZ: Obviously we have a very formalized central theme: 1984. Everything revolves around that as subject matter. Whatever media situation we create or find ourselves in, we attempt to co-opt its effective qualities.

JBD: You mentioned File. Do you feel that the Punk issue crossed the very delicate line between commenting on glamour/star/style and participating? I'm saying that less from the point of view of how popular it was as an issue (which it obviously was — you couldn't even fill the orders you had for it) than how the material was presented. Many of the other issues of File involved highly satirical articles on glamour and some promotion, but it seemed

to me that this particular issue was much more involved in participating in the process of evolving a style rather than commenting on it.

AA: I think we always try to participate in it.

FP: If you mean did it just cross over and become R 'n' R hype, the answer is no. The content of that issue was the Punk/New Wave music scene which at that time was surfacing. Most people's exposure to it was through the popular media which of course dealt with it expectedly as a new marketable product. A lot of the music was dealing with issues that touched-a-soft-spot-in-our-hearts, issues such as glamour/star/style/promo-hype/relationships audiences/cults/selling-out and of course the BIZ. We found it compatible with our work and extremely energizing to be in contact with it and still do.

JZ: There is also the group situation as well. I mean R 'n' R is strongly group oriented. We're interested in groups. As work units. G.I. is a group — not a band yet, but, well... hold your breath.

JBD: To what extent is G.I. image-bound and to what degree is it glamour-struck?

AA: How do you measure that?

Rodney Warden



Tele□Performance

Tom Sherman

See the Text Comes to Read You

An analysis by René Blouin

10:45 P.M. Friday, September 8, 1978. The auditorium of the Masonic Temple is almost in total darkness and the audience of a few hundred people is about to see a performance of/by Tom Sherman.

Slowly the front of the stage is revealed. Two people, a male and a female, stand on either side of stage front, each holding a white card approximately 1 meter by 1.5 meters. A text is written on the top half of the left hand card. The right hand card also shows a text, but written on the bottom half. At the extreme right, a tape recorder on a small

table faces the audience. A technician enters and puts on a pair of headphones; he proceeds to install a tape on the machine but in a gauche manner drops one of the reels. He manages to catch the total attention of the people in the audience who are wondering what is going to happen. Meanwhile, a blond girl walks towards a microphone, at the other end of the stage, and with a very soft voice introduces the piece. "It is going to be a quiet piece. It is going to last about ten minutes. *See the Text Comes to Read You* is a performance about relationships between people and machines and their performance as they relate to each

other. The story of the artist and his tape recorder. . . " The main performer, Tom Sherman has been standing in the darkness, behind and as the machine is put in forward position he walks towards the front of the stage. He stands just near the white card on the left of the stage. He is holding two small speakers turned towards his chest. He turns these speakers, directing them towards the audience. One is blue, the other green. As the voice on the tape recorder starts to deliver a text, the performer engages in a series of movements, stopping in precise positions. The speakers move very slowly, from one position to another. There are fifteen positions, delivered in three sets. When the voice on the tape pauses for a few seconds, he moves a few meters to the middle of the stage. There, he proceeds through the same series of signs again. A second pause of the voice and the performer moves to his left.

Centerfold, December 1978

Rodney Warden

He now stands near the white card on the right side. The third series of signs ends at the same time that the machine finishes reading its text. A few seconds of silence and the technician comes back to stop the tape recorder. The performance is over.

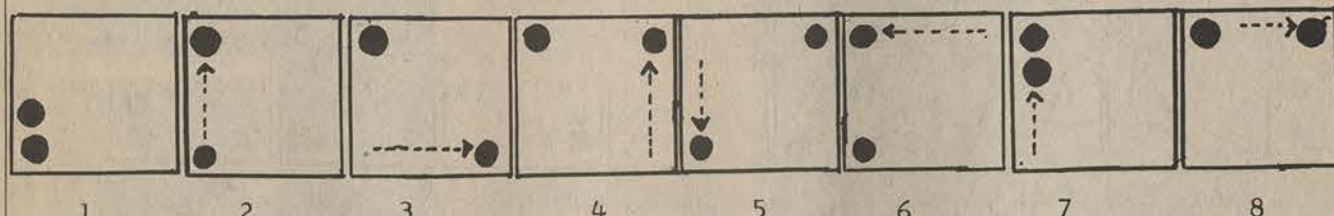
During the action, the performer obviously attempted to not use dramatic expressions. He performed his movements in a totally technical manner, with no apparent emotion. In fact, the human warmth of the piece is transmitted through the voice delivered by the tape recorder/the machine. This conforms with the theme of the piece and although the piece uses some theatrical elements it

creation and extension. Through this particular performance, the artist demonstrates a very intimate relationship between himself and his tape recorder. However, the work cannot limit itself to such a simplistic demonstration. It has many levels of reading and we will try here to explicate some of them.

At first, let's look at the actual gesture: is there a correspondence between the series of signs/movements performed with the speakers and the text delivered by the tape recorder? I would say that there are abstract, non-narrative, correspondences. In fact, the series of fifteen signs are repeated three times, and in time-space, they correspond to a part

space between the two cards. They are a means to make the text alive.

The text itself contains a very high density of information on communication between people, on interaction of machines in the communication process. It is written very poetically, enlightening us about the workings and emotions of human beings in their attempt to communicate with each other. It is critical of our potential for digesting information. By extrapolation we can say that it is critical of the impact of television on us. Indeed, through the monitor, we receive every day doses of light information. The dose is so strong that it does not affect our behavior anymore. That phenomenon



SERIES OF FIFTEEN POSITIONS OF THE SPEAKERS

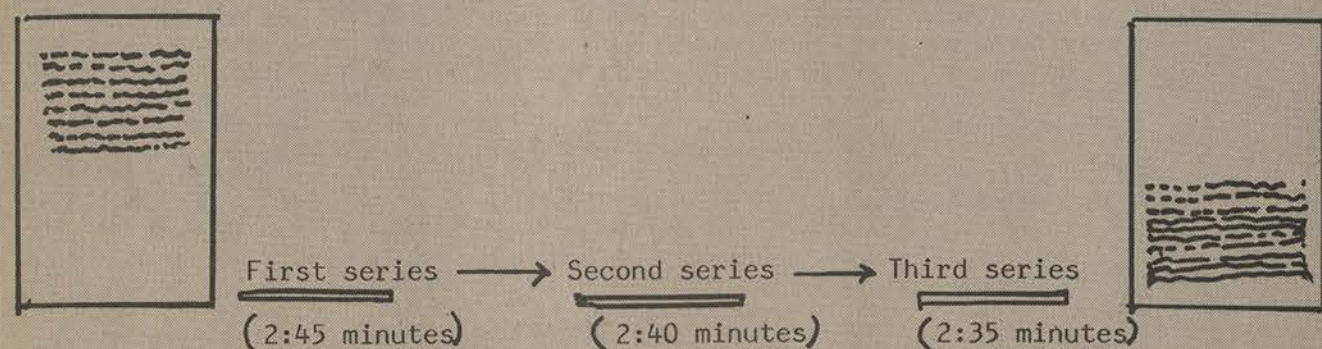
drawing: René Blouin

does not work as theatre. Performances never work like theatre in the sense that the relationships established between the performer and the spectator are from individuality to individuality. In theatre, these relationships are much more of social (community) relationships. In performance, the performer does not attempt to conquer the audience, he only tries to demonstrate his proposition. The element of "theatralite" in performance only exists in a rapport with the purpose of the action. It does not exist as a separate entity. It is a tool and not a finality in itself.

A performance then is a demonstration of a very specific proposal and in this case the proposition pertains to (as the title suggests) our relationship with machines: our own

of the text. They constitute rather a visualisation of a coding operation. They also conform with the title of the piece: usually we read the text. This time, it is the text that literally comes to read the audience. What confirms this "visualisation concept" is the position of the elements before us. The card on the left hand side of the stage presents us with the beginning of the text read on the tape recorder. After the audience/spectator has read the few sentences written on the card, Tom takes over with the performance of his abstract signs. After a pause he moves towards his own left. We always read from left to right (at least in our culture where the coding and decoding operation that is writing and reading has been built as such). The signs fill in the

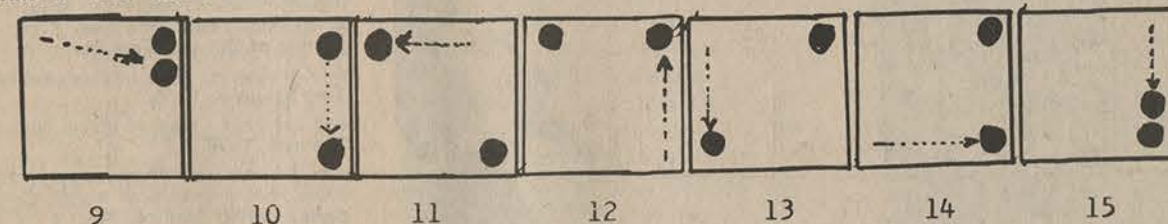
brings Tom Sherman to tell us in this text: "the injection of information has not the power to destroy the universe of uniform or marshalled thought. . .".² These doses have rather the effect of keeping the masses of viewers at a passive level, in a state of inaction. This text is very difficult to follow. The effect of the text is that we become aware of the very light density of information processed by television/machine. It also demonstrates that television (as we are used to it) plays almost exclusively on the emotion of the form and therefore can afford a very light density of information. Here, we confront a text that is so dense that it takes us by surprise. It is a kind of disorienting experiment in the sense that the workings are reversed. The



THE THREE POSITIONS OCCUPIED BY PERFORMER DURING THE ACTION

form is almost totally neutral, non-emotional, non-narrative; the text contains some very stressing information on our communication patterns and processes. It also comments on the power of images created, on our power in helping others to develop. But does the machine really have this control over us? The message of the text is then the second level of reading of the performance.

See the Text Comes to Read You is the demonstration of Tom Sherman's understanding of information processing. It presents us with some elements of his own analysis, it confronts us with an actual experimentation of a coding and decoding operation. The theme is one of the



main concerns of the artist. All of the pieces that I read of his recent years of production deal formally with that issue. They deal with it in terms of form, in terms of content; they are experimentations in the working of the process. The very high density of information and emotion is ever present. He masters the coding operation in a very sophisticated way. The performance presented at the Fifth Network follows exactly the very specific and efficient pattern that enables him to summarize a very complex situation in a few lines. How does he arrive to that result? First, by giving us some very precise parameters. Precise, however, does not mean lack of flexibility. Then by forcing the reader/spectator to focus on the most important elements of the situation he depicts. Unimportant details are supplied by the reader/viewer. He tells us: "... your vision is the limit." The selection of information fragments given through his work is so well done that it becomes almost impossible to digress from the images and emotions he is trying to transmit. The elements are entities in themselves; entities which once put together in a specific manner bring us to reconstruct easily the very specific situation the artist has confronted. These works incarnate the struggle, the very intimate tensions of the artist. In a piece produced last spring, Tom

Sherman quotes fellow artist Jay Yager, "The slide-device for miniaturizing information and storing it to be recalled by means of the projector to something near its normal scale in this case is 'crypt' for a miniature life form which when projected becomes mythic."³ Somehow, his pieces also work that way. He gives the reader/viewer selected elements of information. It is the reduction operation. When being in contact with the work, when experiencing it, the reader reenlarges the situation, to the scale of his imagination. Following the experience of this kind of work, an analysis of the workings of the piece is almost inevitable. This is regardless of the content.

the "freak out" when facing the problems of communication of the intimate state of the being. The abstract signs with the speakers provoked deep in myself the same stress as the fears of not being understood. The exact same fears are underlined by the text. I strongly believe that it is a very legitimate fear.

"The relationship between people and machines and their performance as they relate to each other" poses, in a very rigorous manner, the global problem of communication, of shaping messages to be understood, of reading signs within the conventional systems of codes we had to adopt in order to attain a certain (although arbitrary) level of pre-

See the Text Comes to Read You works also along this process. The elements given to the audience are minimal. They're concrete facts and do not need romantic interpretation. The series of signs with the speakers are in themselves a complete system of coding, abstract in the sense that they form a concrete entity in themselves. The text delivered on the tape is non-linear. Like the short pieces Tom wrote on "car accidents"⁴, it transmits a bulk of apparently loose information. However, when looking at them closely, one realizes the carefulness of their selection. Like his other pieces, this performance provokes a very emotional impact on the "receiver" of the work. "There you are without anyone else to break response. . ." "To look inside deeper to find you the you of questionable presence and the foolish sense of self importance kidding no one because you do not have to demand understanding. . ." "I was building the machines you were living with. . ." "I construct with you your position of being able to pull the plug on my development."⁵ These are some arbitrary sentences chosen from the text of the performance. I find that they illustrate well the lucidity of the artist, his awareness of the confinement of man, the never complete communication, the paranoia that lies deep inside every human being. It also expresses

cision. It addresses itself to the issues of the knowledge of the universe. Art constitutes an organized system of knowledge which, combined with precise sciences, enables man to have a better knowledge and understanding of the universe, of some parts of the universe. The approach is intuitive and must be: precise sciences cannot afford it. This performance by Tom Sherman is a typical example of the utility of art for us. It demonstrates not only craftsmanship but is also concerned with real issues confronted every day. It questions many levels of behaviour including our relationship with the machine. The occasion of the Fifth Network, a video conference, was more than appropriate for such a demonstration.

See the Text Comes to Read You circumscribes many of the problems of working with video. It is to be hoped that its impact will help video-creators to think of how the use of the tool can become even more efficient. Far from wanting to make an idealized version of Tom Sherman, I just happened to really enjoy his piece, as much as I have enjoyed reading his written works and video. It is very tempting to repeat the analysis presented in each of his published pieces. But they talk for themselves. Some of his pieces have been published in *Criteria*,⁶ in *Parachute*⁷; you can al-

so find a catalogue, *1 Traditional Methodology for Processing Information*, published by the Art Gallery of Ontario last spring at the occasion of the show in Toronto. In order to understand better the concerns expressed by this particular performance, I strongly recommend the reading of this catalogue. I must also mention that Art Metropole has published some of his written works.⁸

Let these texts come to read you too. . .

¹ *Introduction of the Performance*, A.S.A. Harrison, 1978.

² *See the Text Comes to Read You*, Tom Sherman, 1978.

³ *1 Traditional Methodology for Processing Information*, under the influence of Brian Molyneux and Jay Yager, Art Gallery of Ontario, Tom Sherman, 1978.

⁴ *50 Car Crashes with Fires*, unpublished, Tom Sherman, 1978.

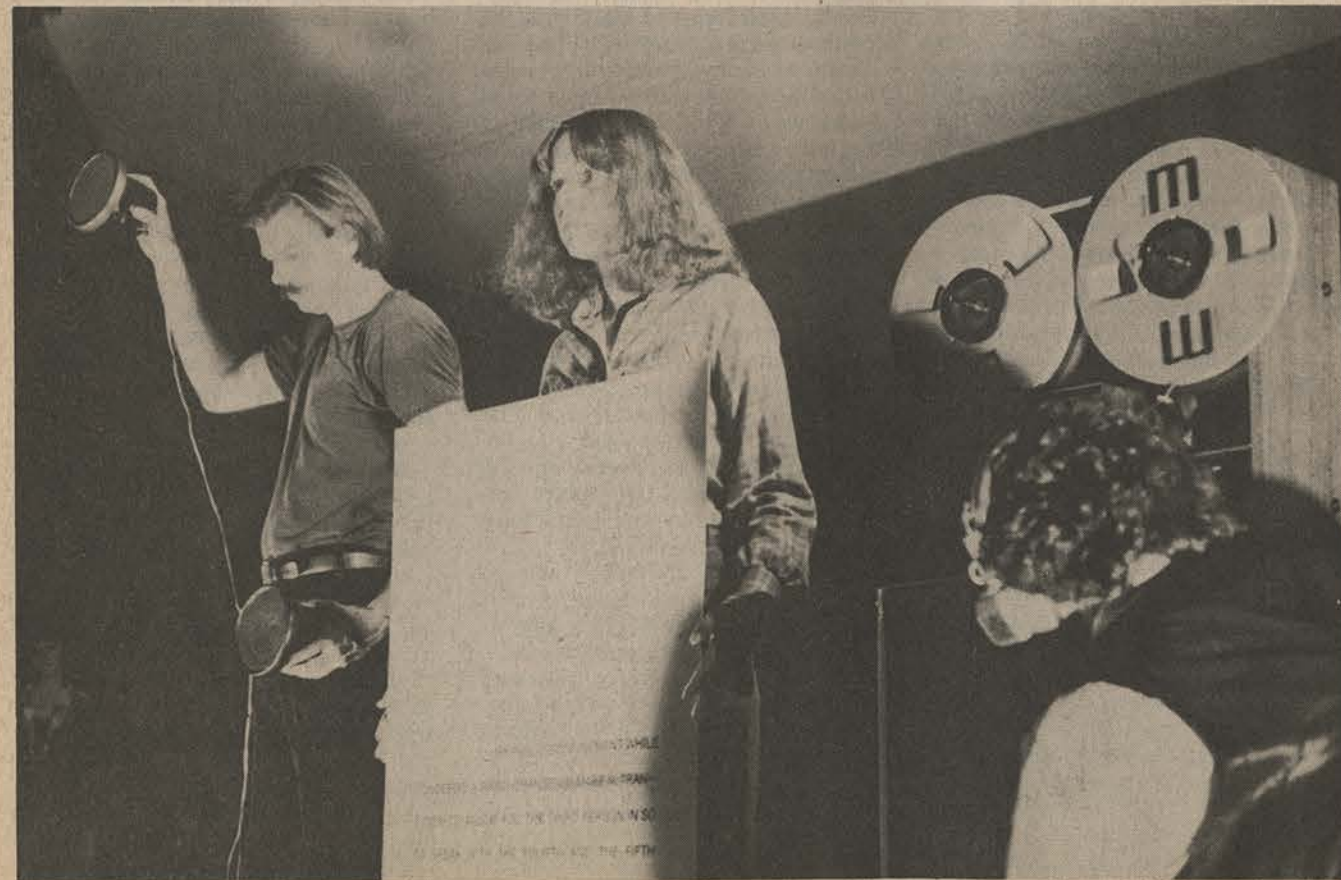
⁵ *See the Text Comes to Read You*, Tom Sherman, 1978.

⁶ *The Trouble with Psychosurgery*, Advertising Photographs with Words, Criteria, Spring 1978, Vol. 4, No. 1, Tom Sherman, 1978.

⁷ *On the Page (1975) and Writing from a Photograph by Rodney Werden (1977)*, Parachute, No. 9 Hiver 1977-78, Tom Sherman, 1978.

⁸ *Death Stories*, Art Metropole, Tom Sherman, 1978.

Performers: Tom Sherman, ASA Harrison, Cyne Cobb, John Watt, Ian Murray.



Clive Robertson *A Beuys-Shaped Frame*

A discussion with Clive Robertson by Vera Frenkel

The conversation that follows took place early in November, 1978, on either side of a tape recorder at Clive Robertson's desk at Arton's in Toronto.

The conversation was longer than it appears here, covering in more detail questions concerning the design of performance works for particular contexts; the inherently political nature of interdisciplinary art; common diseases of the communications media; cultural anachronisms; the grip of decade-consciousness (i.e., "the sixties", "the seventies"), and

so on, matters relating generally to Robertson's piece. However, given limited space, included here are the exchanges which deal more directly with the piece itself, its sources and intentions, with some focus on the process of choosing a "frame", in making and presenting art, and on the moral implications of such choices. This central question, especially in relation to the use and control of the communications media, is a theme in Robertson's work. In its various formulations this has always been a central question for artists, although confused sometimes, especially in this century, with the search for the new, one of its more

frantic expressions. It is a particularly crucial question today, when options for the choice and location of frames (formats, contexts, scales, durations) are so numerous, and determine so critically the impact of a work. Explaining Pictures to Dead Air seemed to me to raise precisely these issues, (issues Robertson has stated more polemically in his writing). Yet, unlike rhetoric, the work hovers alive and kicking in its self-generated mesh of paradoxes, as art must.

There are, in fact, two versions of Explaining Pictures to Dead Air, since it exists also as a videotape of the tele-performance, directed by Tom Sherman. The tape turns out to be a different version of the work rather than simply an event documented, and deserves separate discussion. Sherman's direction is unusually sensitive to shifts of emphasis during the performance, and finds throughout the right visual equivalents for these changes. It is the performance, however, that we are discussing in this conversation; the particular tensions of live presentation, the time/space/media relationships of all its component parts, and the things memory does afterwards.





VF: To set this in context, perhaps you could describe the component parts of the performance; — what was live, what was on tape, so that the things we're saying will connect.

CR: It consisted of a pre-recorded videotape which paced the performance, and was used to reveal certain immediate conclusions I was drawing while making the tape and preparing the performance. The tape consisted of me making telephone calls (which meant you could hear only half the conversation), which in turn were interrupted by two voice-overs, one of which was requested by me, — so you had the sense of watching something in production. As the tape proceeds it suggests that there is going to be a telephone conversation placed with Joseph Beuys. You are never too sure, as I wasn't sure, whether it was going to take place. Even in the performance itself, the audience doesn't really know whether it's Beuys' voice or an actor's voice.

The character of Beuys played the role of the evening news reader. Beuys was given air time on television's own terms — he is accepted as a legendary figure like Walter Cronkite. Beuys has his back to the audience, but by using closed circuit TV with two cameras, the audience sees Beuys' image being switched on two monitors on either side of where he is sitting. Beuys sits behind a structure made of saplings over

which is stretched a blanket which was made just strong enough to hold a few sheets of paper from which he reads, lip-synching the soundtrack of the evening news. He enters carrying this unrecognizable 'news desk' over his head. He stands still. The whole implication of this is that if Beuys had entered with such an object, he might have held it over his head for hours rather than for a few minutes, which is what I did. The stillness is a direct Beuys reference.

VF: So the audience sees you as Beuys, indirectly, on two black and white monitors once he's seated. And his face is gilded. Were both voice-overs your voice?

CR: Yes. *Explaining Pictures to Dead Air* is a pun on a Beuys piece, *Explaining Pictures to a Dead Hare*, which I had also performed in 1975, that consists of Beuys holding a dead hare cradled in his arms, looking at art works on a wall. In that piece, depending on what source you believe, his face was coated either with honey or fat, then covered with metallic dust. It's not gilded as a James Bond image, but related to his choice of materials, the insulating and energy-storing substances. The gold face and the title are from the same piece.

VF: I think the work succeeded so well because it derived so much of its energy from various kinds of transformation, and because it was set up as an interdisciplinary work in

which one could not help being introduced into the several playings of reality, manipulations of reality that were its subject. Revelation of that kind, in that it reveals underlying mechanisms which shape consciousness, is always more political than anything didactic, or martyred, or self-indulgent, or preachy which is typical of much that professes to be political art. I don't know if your work was always a successful vehicle for this experience, but this piece certainly worked for me. I'd like you to talk a bit, if you feel like it, about your choice of the figure of Joseph Beuys — what he represents to you, what he evokes in the people you addressed this piece to that was important, and also your use of other elements, such as the advertisements that involved meat and eating. The "mainly because of the meat" commercial, and the cat-food one. Then there were the modes of address. Was it coincidental that the stretch of news in one part referred to the provincial government in several different ways, 'Queen's Park', for example, which is what you described to us in the videotape as typical newscasting technique?

CR: I think the importance of Beuys being used in that context, apart from some immediate recognition for anyone who has even just heard about him, is the way, the form, that he has structured as a personality, to talk about issues. The most important or appealing effect is the transformation not only of a character and that character's totemic relationships, but that it is also a transformation of a strong specific European mentality transposed into a North American location. It includes an historical archaeological mentality that Beuys delivers: The way his actions function within an art context as opposed to the way in which Performance functions in North America, (with some exceptions, notably Terry Fox). The difference between 'Action' and 'Performance' is so great that it immediately sets up this mysterious situation which has all this indexing which we know something about.

VF: Indexing?

CR: Indexing of behaviour. Why is this man wearing this costume? That costume is not the product of a recent culture — not just the hat, the vest, but the fat, the bronze or gold powder is a product of an ancient culture.

The commercials were coincidental. They just happened to pre-

cede the news I was taping. It does show, however, that I am not speaking generally but that any TV news taped would provide similar juxtapositions, content structure, etc. Whilst I had used the institution naming as an example in the text, its placement in the tape of the news was again coincidental.

The soundtrack of the news in fact drops out about half-way through the tape so Beuys is left in the position of not even lip-synching the news, but talking without any hearable speech component. The performance was my contribution to the conference, not only because I didn't really attend (because of the performance series which I worked on), but because in my mind the relevance of such a statement had potentially a greater dynamic than getting up at the conference and making purely mono-statements. (Which, in fact, in the end I did as well.)

The performance structures a statement. It can contain rage instead of being contained by rage, which is what usually happens to me. It's one characteristic of Beuys that I don't have: I can't stand listening to a large group of people in conversation who continually are not listening to what the others are individually saying.

Some of the lines in the tape are now embarrassing in their flippancy such as wishing that Alvin Lucier would re-design the inside of my mouth so that I could articulate my speech pattern with a more interesting tonal range. That sort of processual response — I was listening to my own voice played back — was perhaps my way of sincerely depicting what I was thinking about, including banal details, whilst I made the presentation. So those elements are timely whilst some are timeless like the usage of Beuys whose 'role' is to make political statements, and the ways in which he is prevented from having a greater platform. He says in the telephone conversation it is very rare that he can appear on television even for a few moments. The horror which you mentioned earlier was for me projecting him into that Barbara Walters scenario, saying to him this would be the way that they would want you to do it. That came up in the text when I say, "I'm a Joseph Beuys fan, I've never missed a newscast yet."

VF: That's a chilling line.

CR: One would think that Beuys would change the news, but the mechanism of access overrides literally anybody, including Begin, Sadat, Carter, or anyone who thinks they know how to play the media.

VF: Your effecting this transformation of an already stylized character reveals something about both sets of assumptions; about the Beuys figure and about North America, and its media. The abrasion, or stretch effect set up by a shift in context is critical to your piece. I certainly felt that while watching it. But it seems to me that there were other levels of transformation as well. In fact, you transform him; you use the transformed persona of Joseph Beuys as a vehicle for your own transformed persona. So both you and Beuys meet in this hollow man that is mouthing received words.

CR: There are other pertinent facts that come together within that action because I, in a performance, do not like to project my own personality, and never have, so my involvement with performance has been a method of working, not of personality projection. So by inhabiting Joseph Beuys I don't have to focus on myself in that construct.

VF: What would be wrong with projecting yourself? What seems to you unnecessary about doing that?

CR: In a sense, while I consider *Explaining Pictures to Dead Air* as a performance work, it wasn't work in the sense that I wasn't working; — it was a presentation of pre-recorded information, the videotape, the text, the figure of Beuys lip-synching the news, were all pre-planned.

VF: Where were you during this presentation? Where was Clive Robertson?

CR: I was just animating this character. My projection was pre-recorded through the tape of me having these fictional phone conversations. They were there to reveal the way in which the piece was being made, and how it related to my own analysis of television, artists and television, the performance mode, the video conference, my previous relationships with the work of Beuys, and the art politics of these compound phenomena. The Beuys character is not central to the piece, though it was the most highly visible component. Beuys was not used, as has been suggested, with intentional cynicism. I have a great admiration



for the man and his work. I don't think it's a literal comparison between Europe and North America, but I am interested that Beuys' emergence, (popular), in the sixties happened at a time when a folk culture of that intensity, that degree of actuality, rather than idealism, was not popular. The popular culture at that time was urban base. His archetypes were so different from, for instance, the pose of the Californian mystic. I see his action based upon direct experience with survival mechanisms rather than intellectually prescribed hysteria on, for example, at that time, such issues as Ecology.

At the time of this performance I was also considering the phenomenon of political deception, and I think more upsetting for artists; cultural deception. Artists often feel that they are above being culturally deceived, at least on a popular level,

that they often use it but do not feel used by it. I believe that that is a total fallacy. We do not switch off mechanisms of that emotional specificity, even when we know their impetus is totally constructed and synthetic. If rock and roll makes you move, you cannot intellectually stand still because it happens to be disco music.

I have been looking recently at what I considered in the early seventies were projects of mine that really were not conceptualizations, but were supposed to evoke and transmit more than that, but now, looking back, I see they were in fact heroic conceptualizations, and while that 'heroicism' felt good, — what Beuys calls an 'evolutionary warmth' — it actually doesn't change the situation that much. What happens is that you unintentionally set up a closed circuit, even if you don't have anything to do with the art world. The content of working becomes repetitive or cul-de-sac'd, not that you are always dealing with the same things but that you socially reach the same point of solution: the artist 'solves' a social issue through an art work.

I think our immediate task is continuity. It's the same for people of Beuys' or Filliou's age group, or our own age group. We have to continue. Our lives didn't end in 1969 and so we have not only to find fresh optimism but to find a way of dealing with things which is not developed from a paranoia but which actual-

ly still contains rage, emotional intensity, because the loss of emotional intensity is to me the most frightening thing.

VF: *The figure of Beuys you enacted embodies that intensity. It becomes particularly forceful when we finally hear the real voice of Beuys in the tape, after all that preparation — not because it has been disembodied, not because it is distant, not because it's European with a different speech cadence, — it's precisely because the figure of Beuys you presented, with his face covered in gold paint, sweating hard and mouthing the news is a hollow sack. He's a Beuys-shaped sack. He's a manifestation of helplessness. The initiatives are elsewhere; either with the voice over, or with the telephone company or with the folks that are writing the commercials. At the same time, in the presence of that cipher reading the news, the voice has a startling vigour, because it issues from a context quite other than the bankrupt situation we are confronted with. We know that the figure we love or the folk hero or whatever that Beuys uniform in front of us may mean by now, we know that he's dead.*

CR: There was a very deliberate mechanism in the tape when it reaches our phone conversation — me talking to Beuys about artists and television, any individual and television: the mechanism was a split

screen with a photo of Beuys on one side and a video image of me standing still apparently listening to him through headsets on the other. In the photo of him his hand is cut off by the division of the screen down the middle. My hand is also cut off in the same place so that it appears we are holding hands. We are symbolically touching each other as we talk over the phone. For me it's a pivotal gesture. We are not telephone answering machines dumping information on each other. It's not the Americanization of Joseph Beuys as Davy Crockett. It is for me the antidote against the digestion of art history. Beuys is not a Duchamp that is dead. He is not a plastic figurine produced by mould injection, and yet that is what we are led to believe. That is what we are supposed to believe. Legends are dead people who are castrated by admiration, people who are intensified so that they can be defused politically. We are encouraged to be culturally deceptive and culturally deceived. That is the use of Beuys in this piece; if we consider him to be an anti-hero, dead news, then we can act. If we consider him a hero and imitate what we consider was his game plan for success, we will gain nothing.

VF: *You've written recently about art galleries and their validating function; that as forms of validation art galleries have now given up their last remaining role as cleansing agents. It seems to me that the validating function of an art gallery is a two-edged sword, or rather, like any framing device, a combination of camouflage and vehicle. The validating function, whatever form it takes, is also a permission, a support for the strange and difficult as well as for the accepted. At some level it is still possible for people to go to galleries, or read magazines, and be refreshed, enabled, with new insights made available to them. And this brings me the long way round, again to your use of Beuys.*

I think you use of Beuys is a very interesting sort of validation. I think it's only a somewhat wiser validation than art galleries can be. That is to say, you have chosen a figure, a very affecting figure, — whether it's someone who doesn't know his work, just the persona as it is visually manifest, or when one knows what he has come to represent in the art world — he is the frame. One of several, but a certain kind of frame for your work. He is therefore a form of validation. You enter him

the way he reportedly entered the carcass of the animal that kept him alive. And like any agency of validation, Beuys here is simply a reference point. It is clear, despite your long-standing interest in these reenactments, that you are free to choose others.

CR: I agree with you and can only further say that I am aware how delicate Beuys as a vehicle is. As a framing device it is as dangerous as is the gallery. The difference is that you or I have a possibility of using that framing device constructively whereas with the gallery I don't think we do. We are being affected by such subliminal minute differences of illusion commercially that identity transfer has become a very common part of our language. For artists that cultural language decoding is often central which I have already said in this case is decoding their own use of cultural deception.

VF: *This issue is an extremely interesting one. These aspects of framing and letting go are central to what art does. Choosing Beuys is your way of doing this, or one of your ways; as you say, the most visible. I think your use of Beuys in this piece was completely valid, certainly not cynical or exploitative, because it made possible what good framing does, and that is it allows you to embrace a phenomenon and then discard it. The problem with art galleries is that that whole process of taking in and giving out doesn't happen, or not very well. Your use of that figure, whoever it might be, "X", allowed people a vehicle to enter a work and then released them. All the while a lot of other things were happening as well. The only distinction I can make between Beuys as framing device, versus the news as a framing device, versus the monitor, the performance, the arena in which this all took place — all the nests of frames that interrelate — is that he is an iconic figure and by pointing that out you are again grappling with that two-edged sword, in fact raising the issue of framing as a moral question. There's no doubt that you will be criticized in just the way you have been. I think that's a risk you take, and I think it's useful. What I'm saying is that implicit in your use of the Beuys figure or persona is a level of moral responsibility that most art galleries can't address themselves to. In one's choice of what to validate and by what means lies the distinction between whether*

VOICE 1

What you have just watched was a docudrama of how artists relate to the forms of television. A docudrama is the deliberate manipulation of fiction to create the illusion of reality, it is not as you might assume the manipulation of reality into a fiction.

If you like, the relationship between artist video and television shows how the intent of our work becomes carefully and violently misrepresented.

To dramatize this it was necessary to show how we become forces opposed to ourselves. The process of this performance was parodied to provide you with entertainment. The theatrical characterisation of Joseph Beuys in this instance was used to simulate the artist lip-syncing television's cultural propaganda. To give it documentary credibility Beuys was also co-opted to give his views. This is exactly how the media in general and television in particular manipulates what it doesn't own.

You can only sacrifice your own specific gifts of working as an artist when you choose to adapt your work to the up-tempo demands of what television calls "digestion without chewing".

Unless the video artist wishes to cross the boundaries and become a media-expert puppet, there is no present role for the artist in television. As this piece attempted to illustrate — we are exploited at the same time we are forced into exploitative relations with others.

Television unlike video is never a fun tool, it gets you when you're young, it gets you when you're ill, when you're tired and when you're down. The art market may want your body and your individualism but the TV market only wants your fingerprints.

VOICE 2

THIS HAS BEEN A FREE POLITICAL BROADCAST PROVIDED BY THIS STATION. NEXT WEEK WE WILL HEAR GAS STATION ATTENDANTS TALKING ABOUT TELEVISION FOLLOWED BY COMPUTER OPERATORS, AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS, BANK CLERKS, LAUDEROMAT OWNERS, SECURITY (voice fades out).

c 1978 Clive Robertson, *Explaining Pictures to Dead Air.*

one's work is life-enhancing or not. No matter how painful the revelation. The frames I see artists choosing on the whole are, (to give them the benefit of the doubt), naive, or self-serving, or, as you know, represent pockets of the culture that don't have valence. The choices you made raise these issues, and make it important to discuss framing and the location of the frame in the culture. We talk about Beuys because he's easy to talk about, but then you chose him for that reason. It's dangerous, but then paradox is dangerous. To

re-enact the work of that kind of figure in the art world is to place yourself in a very difficult position. To me it has some kind of primordial meaning, not only because of what you're re-enacting, or the shifts in context you engineer, but because the act of re-enactment itself implies that whole totemic thing you were referring to.

CR: Beuys as a framing device is for me using an anachronism as a framing device. Not that he is "slipping from the market" but that he exemplifies more than Cage, more



Lisa Steele

than Warhol, our recognition of "active time" versus "infinite time". Attempting to draw some metaphysical quality from the mythology of Beuys is made difficult because there's no factual information about him. . . it's not only iconographic, it's also a mythology which at an earlier period of time he was responsible for manipulating himself, as Warhol was responsible for manipulating his mythology. It wasn't that Beuys was manipulating in a self-serving way. I think he has always been suspicious about the growth of the science of sociology. He is against those protective mechanisms. Basically the impetus for his work is not so much a mystery, but getting the individual to click into some response that they just about know, which is archetypal, which is somewhere back in your memory that this person is eliciting a very early response in you, and yet you're not too sure what it is, but it's very, very important.

So, he is for me an anachronism in the sense that he exemplifies "active time" versus "infinite time". We as humans are not hockey players or baseball players that have a definite shelf-life.

VF: In general, consciousness of the decades and their passage, location in the century and what are the mandates and the urgencies of the sixties versus the seventies. . . the

so-called shelf-life of a work of art; I hear artists talk in those terms relatively often. It always startles me. It's not that it doesn't have its truth; it has, and I suppose you could call Joseph Beuys an anachronism in that temporal sense too, but to calculate . . . well, I don't think anybody that's any good really calculates, "what do the seventies need, or the eighties". I think that's quite unimportant. That people are attentive to that sort of thing and design their working lives accordingly is at some level very self-destructive and ultimately destructive of the art that is shared. Where the uses of time become important are at the archetypal level that you're talking about, when someone can, looking back and using his or her work, bring together forces that reveal, that enable people to connect with that thing that's at the back of the head that they don't quite know is there. Certainly that happens differently in every decade, but the guys who claim to know where it's gonna happen next are the ones to move away from. At this point I would like to ask you again, with reference to this piece, what you feel was expressly political about its interdisciplinary nature — as distinct from what was political in its content.

CR: I think the artist makes available to him; or herself, the formats of communication. We all

know that there isn't a mono format any longer. We're dealing with publications, television, performance — whether of local politicians or T.V. personalities or radio talk shows — there's a whole range of live and packaged communication forms which the artist has often chosen to neglect. I would suggest that this is a very unusual state of affairs. In previous times the artist was cognizant of, and reasonably articulate in, the major forms of communication of their time, as formats they used for their own work. The semi-mythology that was created in the 50's, that artists could not talk and could not write, and could only throw something at a material surface, has really stuck and the glue was pretty effective. Since that period of time we're dealing with a technological, socially-influencing development which is now out of the artist's hands. (Fourteen-year old children operate computers when artists struggle with outdated video equipment.) I'm not suggesting that all artists should be involved, but for any artist to take it so lightly when they're so totally illiterate in present forms of social communication — I mean totally illiterate — to me is well. . . a strange phenomenon. Artists may still be 'going on a date' with the rest of society, but there is an increasing possibility that the artist will be 'stood-up'. Now, is not the time for the artist to act as a dumb terminal. ■



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David Buchan

Lamonte Del Monte and The Fruit Cocktails



A report by Colin Campbell

The Dress Rehearsal

Lamonte Del Monte's "No More Bread and Butter" could well become the Canadian artists' (and landed immigrants') anthem in these days of cut-back, cut-off and cut-out. Never mind the toast and jam. We're getting down to basics. Take Lamonte's sets, for instance.

The recycled-one-more-time Dr. Brute Screen; the sets decorated in musical notes, stars and circles; the last three all painted in Day Glo. An involuntary shudder. Carefully painted in Day Glo. To look nice.

"Jeez, how much longer do we have to wait?"

A young Lauren Bacall look-alike husks the question.

Lamonte, looking up from blocking out the show with the camera crew:

"Soon. Please try to be patient."

"But I've been patient for three hours", she threatens, shifting her machine gun (plastic) to the other shoulder and walking off. Unruffled, Lamonte continues explaining the next shot.

The emcee looks up and tells Lamonte not to worry, that he's writing his intro speech for him

now.

"What am I saying?" queries Lamonte.

"Don't worry. I'll make you sound great," soothes Red Sublime.

"What are you wearing for your number?" (Downtown by Petula Clark. . . we remember her being moved to tears in the middle of singing *Fool on the Hill* on the *Ed Sullivan Show*).

"A pink polka-dot dress (chroma-keyed to the Day Glo sets). It has a big full skirt," replies Florida Sands. "Only, I haven't made it yet."

It is six hours before the performance.

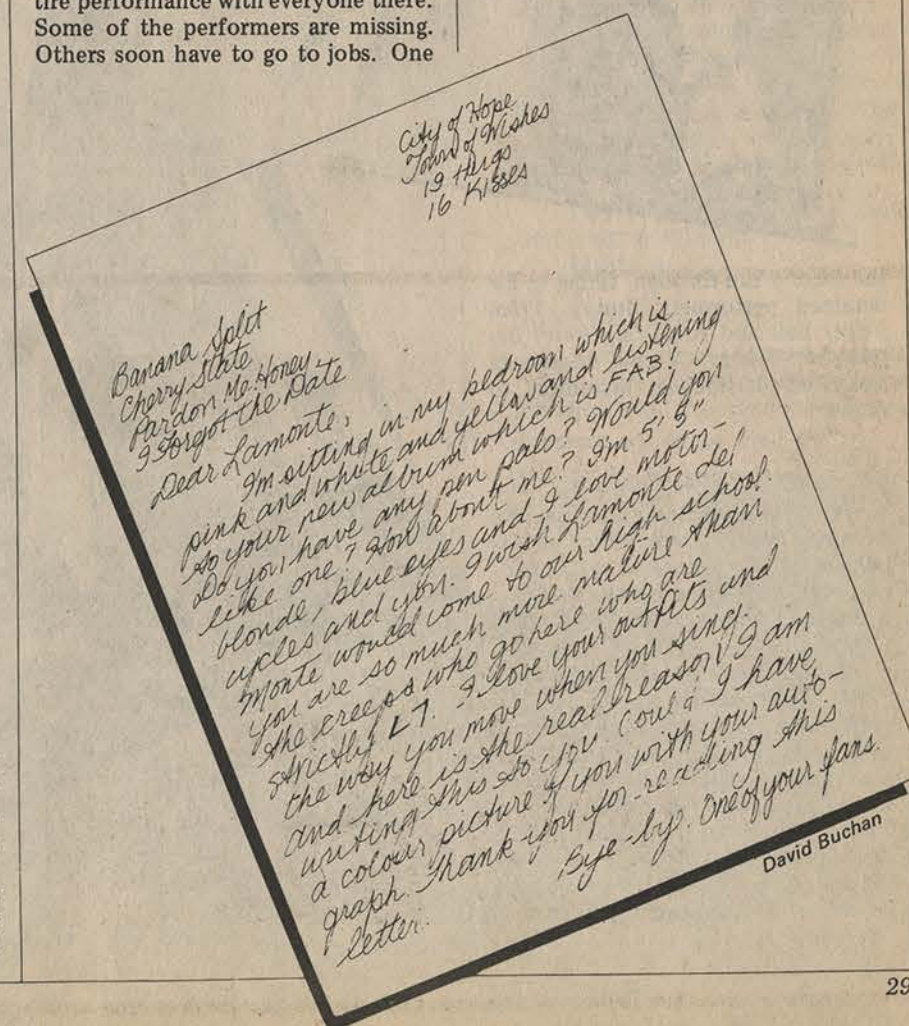
There are twenty-six people in the production (not counting the technicians), and Lamonte has not had a chance to run through the entire performance with everyone there. Some of the performers are missing. Others soon have to go to jobs. One

of the chorus girls has forgotten her machine gun in the washroom. Well, no, she can't get it because *The Clichettes* are rehearsing there. Admittedly, it could be a formidable errand to interrupt Elizabeth (*You Don't Own Me*) Chitty rehearsing in the washroom. The machine gun is retrieved by a braver soul.

"Just what kind of a show is this. . . like I mean, what could we use as a visual tie-in theme (a "bumper" in T.V. lingo)?" the T.V. producer asks Lamonte.

"How about this?" offers Lamonte, holding up a little ceramic crock shaped like a man, and, crazily, looking like Lamonte. The head pops out. It is a cork.

Joanna Householder, the camera lights flashing off her 50's sun glasses,



comes out, does the splits, and tells Lamonte that the Clichettes have to do their rehearsal now because they have to leave in a moment, and would like to get the feel of the stage at least once. They do their number and leave.

Finally, the rehearsal begins. Emcee Red Sublime, an unnervingly accurate combination of *The Price Is Right* and Las Vegas' Circus Circus, warms up the as yet imaginary audience.

Three and one-half hours before the performance, Lamonte finishes

day," replies Peggy Gale drily, in response to why she wasn't on the other side of the door watching the video tapes playing before the performances. A.S.A. Harrison sends someone into the men's washroom to retrieve John. "He must have fainted or something." "Gee, I wonder how much longer those tapes are going to be playing?" inquires someone anxiously, peering through a crack in the door. "Don't worry, they'll just cut them off if they run overtime."

achieved by Clive Robertson and Tom Sherman's two performances. The audience is buzzing while the lights are up and the Day Glo sets are being positioned.

"I thought Clive's was just fabulous," says Ron Gabe.

"Tom has such a Lovely voice," says A.A. Bronson.

"Who is Lamonte, and what are the Fruit Cocktails?" asks Monique Belanger.

The Performance

Lights down.

Red Sublime, cheeks rouged, hair slicked back, and tongue greased, starts the show. He introduces Lamonte, who enters with an ease and charisma that speak of STARDOM. The gold lame vest and boots glisten, the peroxide hair shines. He's naughty.

"And these are my fruit cocktails." He drinks out of the look-alike crock. He's a tease.

"Just kidding folks, it's really fruit juice."

He's sexy.

"I'd like to change into something more uncomfortable," he says, indicating the black nylon pants that have cords gathering the material suggestively tight at the crotch, ass and ankle.

Red introduces Florida Sands. She appears in her very freshly made



the second run-through, filling in for detained performers Murray (*Privilege*) Ball and Anya (*My Heart Belongs to Daddy*) Varda. Lamonte and Red decline an invitation to dinner:

"We have to do the cue cards."

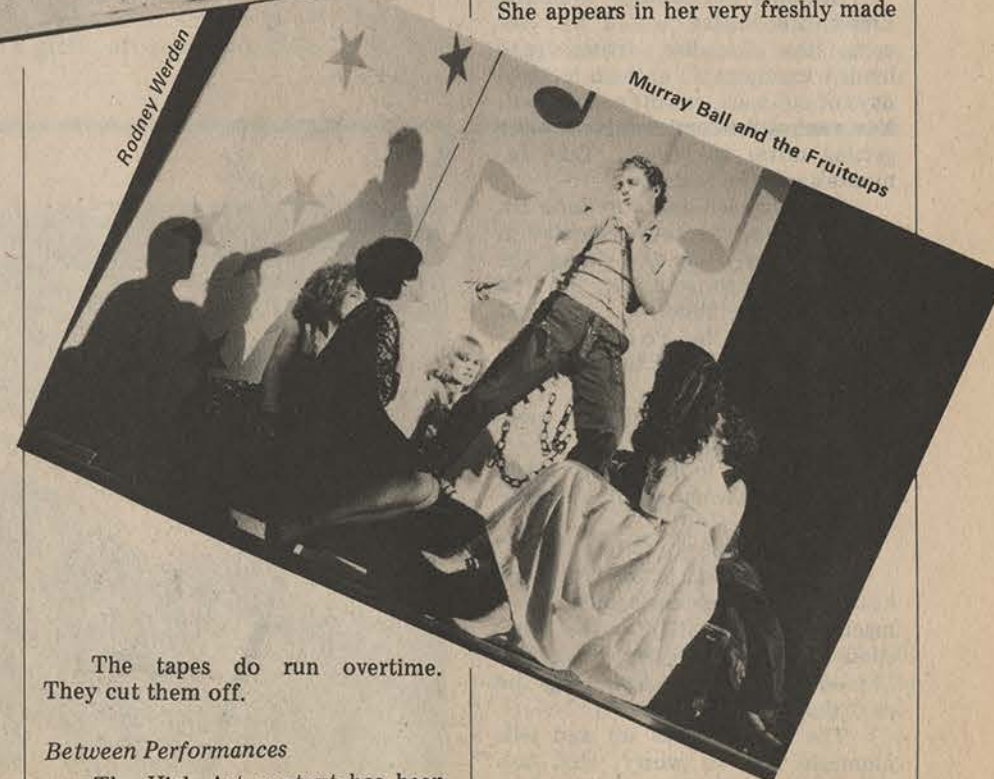
Before the Performance

The lobby is filling up. Suzette Couture missed *Geek Chic*, and is excited at the chance to see David's new work. "I hope it's the first performance," she says hopefully. Lori Ental (one of the chorus girls) asks where the stage door is. "Can't see a THING without my glasses," she assures everyone. Suzy Lake, sporting new curls, offers a cheek (kiss), the other cheek (kiss), tells how she is showing Chantal Pontbriand and a friend around her new city. "And I don't even know where I am most of the time myself!" exudes Suzy, newly moved here from Montreal. "I've had my fill of video for to-

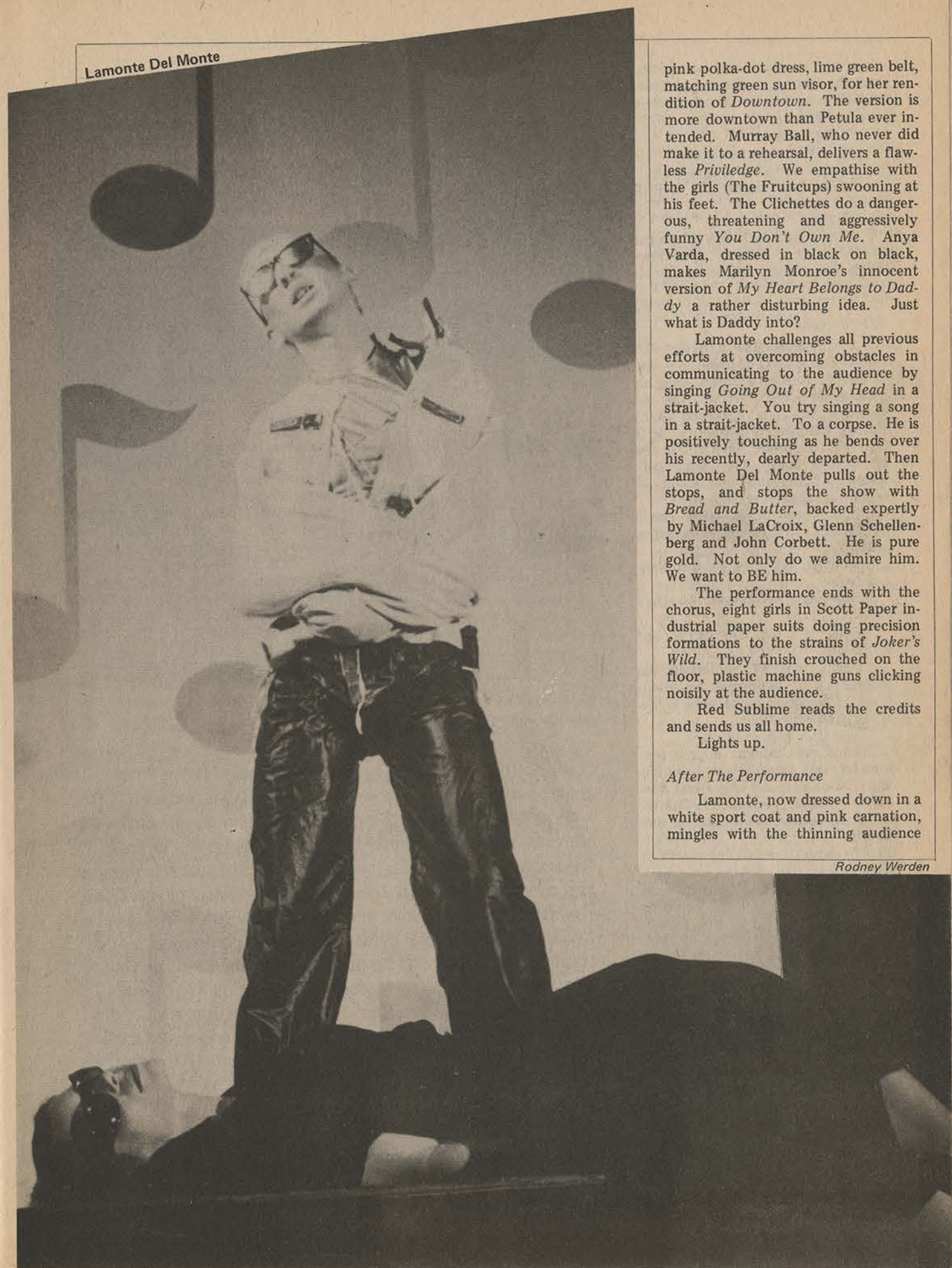
The tapes do run overtime. They cut them off.

Between Performances

The High Art context has been



Lamonte Del Monte



pink polka-dot dress, lime green belt, matching green sun visor, for her rendition of *Downtown*. The version is more downtown than Petula ever intended. Murray Ball, who never did make it to a rehearsal, delivers a flawless *Privilege*. We empathise with the girls (The Fruitcups) swooning at his feet. The Clichettes do a dangerous, threatening and aggressively funny *You Don't Own Me*. Anya Varda, dressed in black on black, makes Marilyn Monroe's innocent version of *My Heart Belongs to Daddy* a rather disturbing idea. Just what is Daddy into?

Lamonte challenges all previous efforts at overcoming obstacles in communicating to the audience by singing *Going Out of My Head* in a strait-jacket. You try singing a song in a strait-jacket. To a corpse. He is positively touching as he bends over his recently, dearly departed. Then Lamonte Del Monte pulls out the stops, and stops the show with *Bread and Butter*, backed expertly by Michael LaCroix, Glenn Schellenberg and John Corbett. He is pure gold. Not only do we admire him. We want to BE him.

The performance ends with the chorus, eight girls in Scott Paper industrial paper suits doing precision formations to the strains of *Joker's Wild*. They finish crouched on the floor, plastic machine guns clicking noisily at the audience.

Red Sublime reads the credits and sends us all home.

Lights up.

After The Performance

Lamonte, now dressed down in a white sport coat and pink carnation, mingles with the thinning audience

Rodney Werden

accepting compliments, but there is not the adoring response that occurred when he was on the other side of the footlights.

Young woman:
"I loved the performance."
Companion nods in agreement.
("But you know, I'm a little put out by it.")
"Why?"

"Well, because I wish he'd asked me to perform. You see, deep down inside me, I know I'm really Connie Francis."

Afterthoughts

"You dress like a queerball," someone from out-of-town once said to David. And he wasn't wearing his gold lame boots. (It was the red sneakers that so inflamed her.) David's wardrobe is distinctive. So is his style. Surprised, then threatened by David's image, the young lady tossed off the intended insult to voice what she felt set him apart.

Some may be as taken aback by David's style as a performance artist.

Oddball Art as opposed to Serious Art.

Low Art as opposed to High Art.

I like it, I like it, I like it, but is it Art?

David dares to entertain his audiences. He announces his intentions. "We hope to be both entertaining and educational."

And then follows through.

As a rule, almost a law, performance art doesn't have to entertain. For fear of appearing low-brow, perhaps. Performance art requires an audience, one that is well behaved and silent. The performance artists, framed by the High Art context, like pictures on a wall, allow the audience to participate at the end. Simple applause would be most appropriate; no foot stomping, whistles or, heaven forbid, Standing Ovarations. The new Chamber Art.

David, on the other hand, invites us to "Come on DOWN". His attention to detail, the layer upon layer of collage, the total transformation of the familiar to the new, attest to David's skill as an artist. Lamonte Del Monte and his Fruit Cocktails was produced on a two hundred dollar budget. Talk about bread and butter. A few more bucks, and ALL the chorus girls could have had gold lame boots ■

image nation

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In February 1978 Ben Holzberg and friends, with help from the Nightingale Arts Council, Ontario Arts Council, Wintario, the Canada Council, National Museums and the Toronto Transit Company presented a unique photo exhibition entitled The Rolling Landscape. All overhead advertising was removed from a single subway car. 11 x 15-inch Ciba transparencies were made from fifty-two slides representing thirty-four photographers. The images represented a broad spectrum of sensibility from the absurd to the spectacular. The importance of this exhibition, however, is its token triumph of art over consumerism. The audience was a random selection of 50,000 surprised commuters, while countless art enthusiasts simply missed the train. Image Nation announces that it will publish as a double issue a complete catalogue of this exhibition in dazzling colour. The price of this issue after January 1, 1979 will be \$8.00. Order now and receive this collector's edition at a special pre-publication price of \$6.00.

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Dennis Tourbin In Conversation with a Diplomat

A conversation between
Dennis Tourbin & Glenn Lewis

Edited by Tom Sherman

GL: I want to explore your interest in the diplomat — what was it called again?

DT: In Conversation with a Diplomat...

GL: Where did that come from?

DT: I met a diplomat and I asked him questions and he always answered my questions with a question and then when I would approach certain subjects that were... oh, what is the word?... sensitive — touchy or sensitive, he would say... "I am sorry I am not allowed to discuss that" So each part — there are eight parts in it, each part ends with "I am sorry I am not allowed to discuss that" or "sorry, I am not allowed to discuss the matter"... and then it ends with a "Sorry, I am not allowed to discuss the T.V."... I think it's very literal... patterned after a typical T.V. show...

GL: You got that idea of putting it together with the performance... like a news broadcast... like an interviewer... except that you are in the place of the audience in a sense... as the questioner... It's like a mythical audience... to be questioning this person on the T.V.... How literal is that relationship? I'm curious.

DT: Well, the audience is important as a viewer... in the T.V. experience of sitting back and watching... but quite frankly, I've looked at the whole experience as an interview with myself...

GL: I want to know more about this diplomat. Where did you meet him? In a bar... some hidden away bar in Ottawa?

DT: As I say, you know, if you really want to see spies and diplomats go to the Lord Alex Hotel...

GL: What kind of a diplomat was he?



Rodney Werden

DT: A nice diplomat...

GL: What country? Did you ever find out?

DT: Canadian.

GL: Oh, he was Canadian.

DT: He, in fact, was a friend of mine and I think he's posted in the Far East right now... and the sequence... "talk about golf"... a lot of it was very much real and a lot of it kind of fabricated... to inject humour — to inject drama... like the humour that came in... the drama in respect to Pierre Laporte.

GL: When you wrote it did you visualize the performance at the same time or was that something that came about... afterwards?

DT: It came afterwards...

GL: It seems so perfect for the actual way you performed it...

DT: Well, actually it came from the prop itself. The T.V. prop initiated everything. I am a compulsive writer.

GL: Do you write every day?

DT: Yes. Right now I am working on a book called *The Complete Sea Anglers*... I'm documenting the fishing experience...

GL: Your fishing experience?

DT: Yes, every time I go fishing I get back and I write all about it and I draw the pictures and I take pictures of the fish that I catch so...

GL: I never catch them.

DT: I catch them... I make my own flies... and I make my own lures and I watch it... fishing is like watching T.V.... in physical form... you see a pool of vast water and you see logs... and everything like that... you're fishing for trout and you cast this spinner out and you reel it in and you watch it come through the water and you watch the fish come through the water and you watch the fish come out and take it and so you can see it all — so it's very much like watching T.V....

GL: ... you're also interested in television?

DT: I like watching T.V.

GL: Do you have favorite programmes — the news?

DT: I like *The Edge of Night* and in fact in my first play, *The Writing of the Painting of Martha*, there is a whole section about *The Edge of Night* and I find that very interesting — although there is a new programme — a Canadian programme called *High Hopes* which is becoming a very... one of my favorites.

GL: ... I love your imagery — and how you relate to it.

DT: I am interested in the area between painting and literature. I think because of T.V., language, and poetry in that respect, has had to become more visual to survive, so what I have attempted to do is to make poetry visual, so I paint poems and I painted a book called *The T.V. is the Poet* which is a series of canvases. After painting that — the colour that was involved in the words with the images of a written newspaper indicated to me that there was something really theatrical about words; so then I decided to paint a play and the props that I used in *Conversation with a Diplomat* were the props I used in a painted play and it was that large cut out T.V. screen — it's made of wood and painted with acrylics...

GL: I must tell you — actually, that when I saw you up there — performing — with that prop, a cut out T.V. screen... I saw it as a T.V. screen — but also I thought of a kid's *Punch and Judy* show — that kind of thing...

DT: Yeh, yeh...

GL: . . . you know how children will sometimes create a little theatre . . . it reminded me of that a little bit. There was a childlike quality. . . I found it quite touching in some ways. . . its simplicity and the directness that was presented. . . in that sense. . . childlike. . . Are you conscious of that element?

DT: Yes. . . I know. . . there is a certain element with children that when given a prop or. . . toy . . . there is a certain amount of absolute fun.

GL: I think joyfulness. . . I think your performance was wonderful that way — nice bright colour and the lights . . . up.

DT: The other thing is the actual . . . the pages drifting in air. . . very important. . .

GL: Radio announcers do that sort of thing too. . . drop the page. . . I liked that alot. Hummm. . . Reminds me of a sort of news thing. . . the news according to Dennis Tourbin. . . something like that. . .

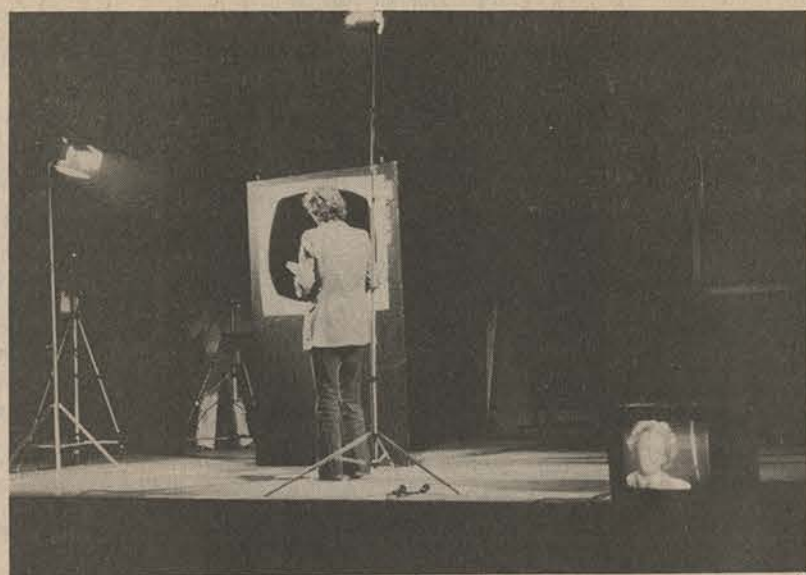
DT: I approach poetry as news. . .

GL: I am sure you do. . . (Discussion here about news.) I want to talk a little about the video tape. . . I haven't actually seen the results on tape. Have you seen it?

DT: No, I haven't. I was in the truck. I saw a couple of feet of what went on. . . Very good job of directing. . .

GL: Do you see the use of video as a document of your performance. . . or do you see the subsequent use of that format in some other way. . .

DT: I think that there are so many ways of docu-



Rodney Werden

menting things altogether. . . it would be easy to see video as a form of documentation. I want to involve it more in my work. Right now I'm working on one called *Under Interrogation*, which is exactly what it implies, but it deals with the stark image of Pierre Laporte in the trunk of a car. That is, the video image will be presented and then there's a performance between three people, where one person is under interrogation, blindfolded.

GL: Now, are you speaking of the video image as a video tape. . . as . . . I mean . . . as coming on the screen.

DT: On the screen. . . still and a movable with it as well. . .

GL: So it will be a prop in



the performance.

DT: Absolutely, there will be another person. . .

GL: Do you see — I see another little interesting point about this perhaps — that format you were using with the cutout video screen and so on, I see you maybe using or creating a video tape which has segments of that idea plus other things — like the way you were interviewed — you could build up, in a sense, like a T.V. programme.

DT: I want to do a ballet. I want to use about 25 or 30 of those T.V. screens with the cutout at various different levels so that if ever a person moves within a gallery one part of that person is always on T.V. and that no matter where you look — like, you always see someone on T.V. But you know what I think is interesting . . . is the colour — it's painted and the paint in the experience is a very important experience to me as well . . . most of the performance. . . most of the development in performance emanates from an electric experience and I am trying to develop mine — or move mine from not only that electric experience but from a painterly experience as well. . .

GL: I am interested in how you wrote the performance. We talked a little about your writing — that you write every day and so on and you actually got the sort of cue from having the cutouts originally. . . you probably wrote without thinking of that immediately but it probably came together afterwards.

DT: That's right.

GL: How did you go about writing it. I guess I am interested in knowing about your actual writing process. Did

you write it all in one sitting?

DT: It is completely unedited.

GL: Really.

DT: It came straight out. Most of my writing does.

GL: Really?

DT: Yeh, that's why I publish a lot of my journal papers straight. . . you know, with all the scratches and everything. . . editing is a tedious thing. . .

GL: Of course it is, yeh.

DT: . . . and although I haven't experienced. . .

GL: You've managed to self-edit somewhere?

DT: I haven't experienced editing on video or film the way some have. . .

GL: Do you have notes on the conversations you had with this diplomat? Or was it all just totally remembered. . . I mean, it's in 8 parts,

Rodney Werden

for instance. Did you know beforehand it was going to be 8 parts? Or did this happen?

DT: The parts descended. . . like I said, every time I asked that diplomat a question he would answer me with a question. When I came to a sensitive subject, like: "Could we talk about Quebec" — "I'm sorry, I'm not allowed to talk about Quebec," and so that — that was the end of one part. "Now I want to talk about sex" . . . the length of it to me depicted the epitome of a half hour T.V. programme. Perhaps I should have had a commercial.

GL: Not in the performance. . . maybe. . . in the video. Perhaps. . . that's something you can always insert. I am sort of curious about how you started using the videotape — or how to use videotape other than as a document. . . possibly in a format like a public programme. . . or interview programme. . . or whatever. I mean you are the only person. . . you are both the interviewer and the person being interviewed.

DT: I developed a whole series of interviews with myself.

GL: You have some other ones, too?

DT: Yeh, one called *Under Interrogation* and one called *In Conversation with a Young Canadian Couple Vacationing in Florida*.

GL: Where did that one come from?

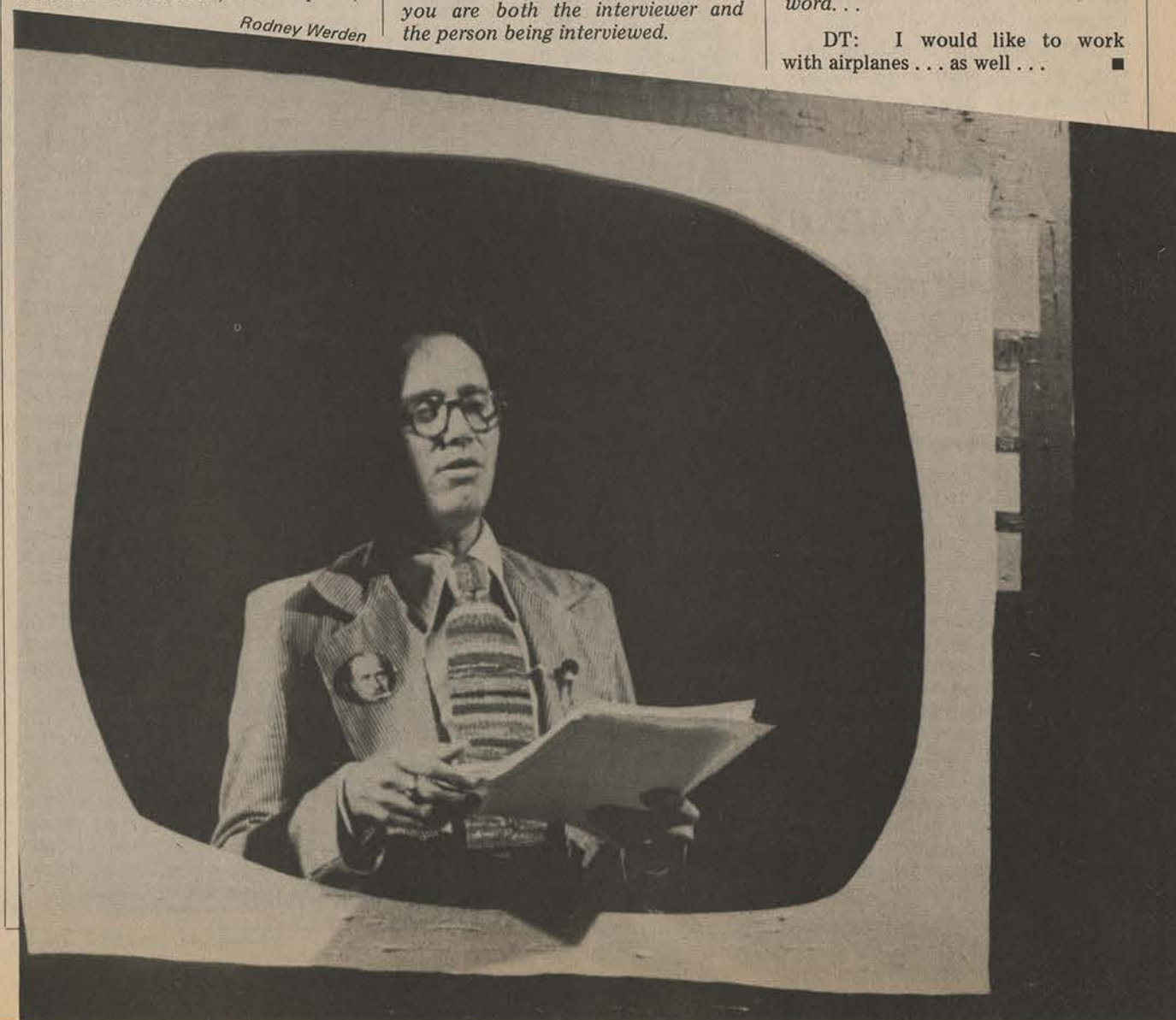
DT: I was in Florida. I interviewed my brother-in-law and sister-in-law on the beach on the Gulf of Mexico and I want to do that as a performance and set it. . .

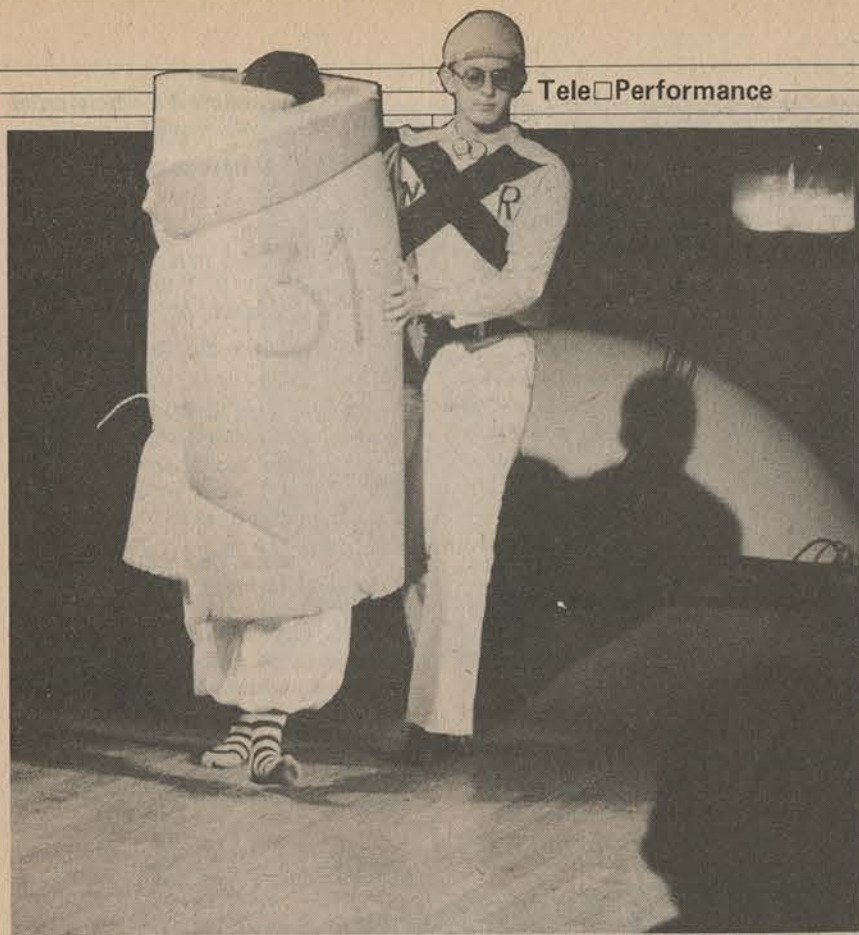
GL: Does that have anything to do with fishing?

DT: No fishing at all. Although while we were doing it we looked up in the air and an airplane spelled out the word "Pepsi" . . . over the Gulf of Mexico. . .

GL: Well, that's a very visual word. . .

DT: I would like to work with airplanes. . . as well. . .





TelePerformance

Marshallore and Tom Lux

Marshallore Another State of Marshallore

An interview by Nancy Nicol

N: Could you begin by talking about the relationship between the video and the performance itself.

M: Why video in that context?

N: Well, because to me the video in that show was quite lovely and in some places even more compelling than the actual performance. That must be quite a rare occurrence.

M: There were at least two things happening at once and the textual graphic of the video image was there. I love using images, so whether I did anything or not there was that happening as well. I think there was more than one thing happening. It could have been one of those silent artistic little video images. I do stuff like that if I have the equipment. The same with the performance. It could have happened without video. It's like people in social animation will say. . . "Well we couldn't use

film, we couldn't use tape recorders, video was there, it was expedient, we used it."

N: Who was John Logie Baird?

M: OK, the piece starts out when I went to camera one and then to camera two. What in fact I was doing was reciting a narrative which opened the whole thing and it was describing the problems which John Logie Baird, who was the man who put television into the state that we see it today. He was the one who actually devised the true nature of television from which it developed.

N: Were you trying to correlate these events with events now?

M: Sure, yeah.

N: Well ok, I follow what you say as far as the competition in television and the media and the oblivion of upper classes, and I suppose a contrast between our technological culture and a 3rd world situation but...

M: Oh, the correlation was very

definitely there and what I think it was all along saying. . . we sit here, we know so much, we can relate to stuff 40 years ago because we know so much now, but we don't push our political awareness, and not just political in the sense of social events, but the politics of art itself. We talk about how the establishment is a certain place, and therefore we don't like this stuff from 300 years ago, we do not like the theatre with its proscenium arch. But what are we actually doing about it? Are we pushing ourselves? In the performance I ended up rolling around the floor, which to me was a behavioral expression of the state of politics, the "roll" of the artist in politics.

N: I wrote down some notes after the performance and about that part I think I said something like I was being buffeted about by forces beyond my control. Is that the intention?

M: Well, not necessarily, no. You could read it like that. I mean it was not universally explicit. But I mean I myself was rolling. Thomas was simply steering me because I couldn't see where I was going but it was me who was actually doing all the rolling. It was a very strenuous physical thing. I was the horse. I went from rider to horse; I changed classes so to speak, but I went further, I changed species. There's the whole thing about what is the Feminist thing about, but it's further than that. I didn't go from male to female, or from the domination of the riding crop to being ridden... I did all of that, but I went past that: I just changed into another thing. I changed my whole context, the whole contextual arrangement, from what you normally see as a human being, standing up and doing these theatrical things, to being wrapped in this saddle, this form, and changing my whole species. But I was in control of my movements although I was being directed not to crash. I was trying to roll myself further and further and to this absurd popularised Cagean music. . . (you know Spike Jones can almost be called the tin pan alley of Cage, because of the way he assembles sounds to form a particularly tin pan alley sound). . . so the whole statement is: do we push ourselves farther, can we roll ourselves farther, can we roll ourselves into something different?



N: What comes after that part?

*M: The race ends and Thomas and I stand up as the winners, in sync, with the announcer saying "and the winner da da da da;" the song from 1931 comes on, *As Time Goes By*, a sort of mood music that is played after that to get the people back from that era and bring them back to the night reality.*

*I'm doing another behavioural thing now, where I have quite a few of those songs on tape, and dissecting them. I'm suffered by the whole enticement of the lyrics and the music. But when you think about the lyrics, the conditioning is just so absurd. . . "He beats me too, what shall I do, my man is mine, I'm his". . . So I'm taking bits of that and dissecting them and reacting to them as role playing. I might take the lyrics from *My Man* and react to them as an old woman, as a child, as an adult, as an artist. I guess behaviour comes into a lot of things.*

N: Is that like "acting out"?

M: Well, it goes a bit further. It's very hard to do, because it can get too self indulgent. But maybe that's what acting is, or is supposed to be.

N: When it's that intense, when there is that self transformation. . .

M: But I'm not doing someone else's script, so I'm saying to myself, "I'm a child, I'm a child."

N: This relates to what you said earlier about schizophrenia.

M: Oh, this is another piece entirely. The schizophrenia relates to the split/screen in the performance, (split/screen, split image, split personality). As in the fact that we in this time and in that time as well are schizophrenic; at least there is a duality, and maybe that duality becomes schizophrenia; and it can break into more than one duality, so that neurosis, and psychosis, maladjustment manifests itself. I see us as schizophrenic in our role as intelligent, aware people.

N: Vis-a-vis technology?

M: Vis-a-vis technology, vis-a-vis social awareness, vis-a-vis developing art. So I mean it's great to make these poetic visual images (and I like to do that as well. . . I get some aesthetic rush which is akin to sensualism); but, there's more. We have to push ourselves to do it. Sometimes,

it just doesn't seem right to say "the artist" or "the arts" because the meaning has been realigned, or its just been kept in this cabinet, this very beautiful old Louis XVI cabinet.

N: How do you feel about collaborative work?

M: Well I have trouble dealing with the rest of the human race, but I like to work with people that turn me on.

N: Why I asked is because... well it relates to what you were saying about the hermetic capsuling of "the art", "the artist". Collaboration is something which allows one to get an extension of oneself, which is very important, and which perhaps opens out of that "dualism" or that schizophrenic situation, because the extensions are more "real".

M: Yeah, in that you are not just working with abstractions but recognizing the real needs of other people. I'm going to try that next winter; I'm going to be working with a woman in Amsterdam.

N: Where are you from?

M: I live in Montreal.

N: Are you French?

M: No, but I'm an expatriate of an English culture. I love it there [Montreal]; I love the passion there.

N: It's interesting that you call yourself an expatriate from the English culture because when I saw your performance I thought that you were from Montreal, without knowing anything about your background.

M: Just maybe because it had that political social leaning to it.

N: Well, more than a social political leaning, something about no surface analysis, in other words the piece wasn't feeding back on itself, it was very open ended, it had almost a cabaret feeling to it.

M: Do you know the difference between actions and performances? Not that I'm going to make any definition of them, per se, but, in Europe something will be called an action, and it has the same definite feeling of an action painting or a gesture drawing, except that it takes the form of the human body or the human mind making this gesture. I don't know if working with other people alleviates schizophrenia. Not confronting oneself does. Any statement that an artist is going to make has to be some sort of self-confronta-

tion, right down to funding. I'm really involved in all these aspects.

N: Funding?

M: Yes, how the artist can live, which is basically off a funding system.

N: I would like to see it as a business system.

M: Well, I'm not sure what I want to see it as, but I don't like the idea of it going into the top ten sort of strata and it does.

N: No, it disturbs me a great deal. Where did the idea 5th Network come from?

M: Well some newspaper said it was called the 5th Network, so we would get confused with the 5th estate on T.V. But what we're saying, the "official story" is the national network, the C.B.C., is the first network; the commercial national network, the CTV, is the second network; the OECA, Radio Quebec, is the 3rd network; the cable systems is the 4th network; and independent video is the 5th network. So here we are creating a myth from our nostalgia by calling ourselves the 5th network, and we've subliminally, if not overtly, introduced a history of 4 networks into the whole sensibility. It's sorta like propaganda.

N: Well, yes, I found a lot of the layout for the conference propaganda. I mean to me the most interesting thing of the whole conference was the propaganda behind it...

M: Oh great! Well what did you get from it? You mean from the brochures and the press releases?

N: Yes, but even more so in the

way it was established; the way the concept was infiltrated into the public mind...

M: Oh good, we tried very hard to do that.

N: There was also some remark in your article that when you went to the Ontario Arts council for funding...

M: That was my article. That was the opening statement called Ballroom Dancing in Ottawa.

N: Right...

M: Oh I know, when they found out we were real.

N: Right.

M: And all our friends had given us money.

N: Exactly... I was thinking in terms of an article in general on the conference itself and I wrote these notes... "an article on the 5th Network conference should include... fabrication of the event..." and in that statement I was including what we were talking about, in terms of advertising or how you placed the idea in the public mind, and which also includes the phrase from the guy from Nova Scotia... the "hidden agenda".

M: Oh, what does that mean?

N: I think what he was saying is that you were giving the conference as an exchange forum in which to present works. The "hidden agenda" was the idea of a 5th network or, in other words, a national association of independent video producers.

M: Well maybe there was a hidden agenda — subliminal agenda.

N: I believe he saw it in that way, in that sensibility.



M: But I don't think anyone knew what it was. I think that everyone came with their own ideas.

N: How do you see what you do in relationship to events like this, as related to your work?

M: To my work? Well which part of my work? To community access work? I see it as being very relevant; as someone who spends her time in the social action milieu, giving equipment out, working on productions, raising money so that they can have a centre accessible.

N: What do you do about criticism such as: you can't do both: one or the other suffers, either the work or the organizational aspect; you can't organize a conference such as this...?

M: And go to it.

N: And go to it... that you fall short of both goals.

M: Well you can say that, but here we are. I'm the woman in Montreal who needed equipment, so I formed an access group. You have to be able to do all that. I wanted to make a tape and I didn't want it to stop there; I wanted to show it. So I had to start an exhibition program.

N: I wanted to ask you a few more questions on your performance during the Fifth Network Conference. You called the work Another State of Marshalore. Ok, if you were living in a 3rd World Country and a State of Marshal Law is declared... I'm presuming that you intended this pun.

M: The reason I've called myself Marshalore... about twelve years ago it came onto me, learning about marshal law declared in Cyprus, marshal law in Turkey, and my name being Marsha, I thought of this penal system of imposed military rule and then I thought of folklore — the whole tradition of intelligence and knowledge and ritual being handed down. I thought of that in contrast to "law", so I called myself Marshalore. It's a pun on that reality.

N: I see, yes, now the thing I was thinking about, in terms of the performance, is when you have a situation in a country where marshal law is declared, it involves a great amount of pain and suffering for those people involved.

M: And it's not as removed as the third world. When Thomas was

reading, marshal law declared in Idaho, marshal law declared in Austria, marshal law declared in Germany...

N: Yes, well marshal law declared in Canada, in Quebec...

M: Yes in Quebec, so it's not a remote reality...

N: Well yes, even our reality here. The point that I'm trying to make is it involves political suffering or tension, or aggression, or upheaval... and yet I found the performance light.

M: There are different ways of presenting information. There is a light aspect to it. But then when I was going up to the people in the audience saying "you're jaded, decadent, and blasé," and then Thomas read the headlines; I intended there to be a follow of logic from decadence to fascism because fascism is a product of decadence.

You're blasé (Oh Hamilton)
You're deep just like a chasm,
You've no enthusiasm
You're tired and uninspired,
You're blasé
While reaching for the moon
and the stars up in the sky,
The simple things of normal
life are slowly passing by.
You sleep, the sun is shining,
You wake, it's time for dining,
There's nothing new for you
to do,
You're blasé.

N: Is there any vulnerability in the performance; and I am thinking of that in relationship to the statement: Another State of Marshalore. In a situation where you have a political upheaval, there is also a tremendous degree of vulnerability, because those people are on the blocks... I want to get to the question of vulnerability in the work.

M: You mean does it hurt?

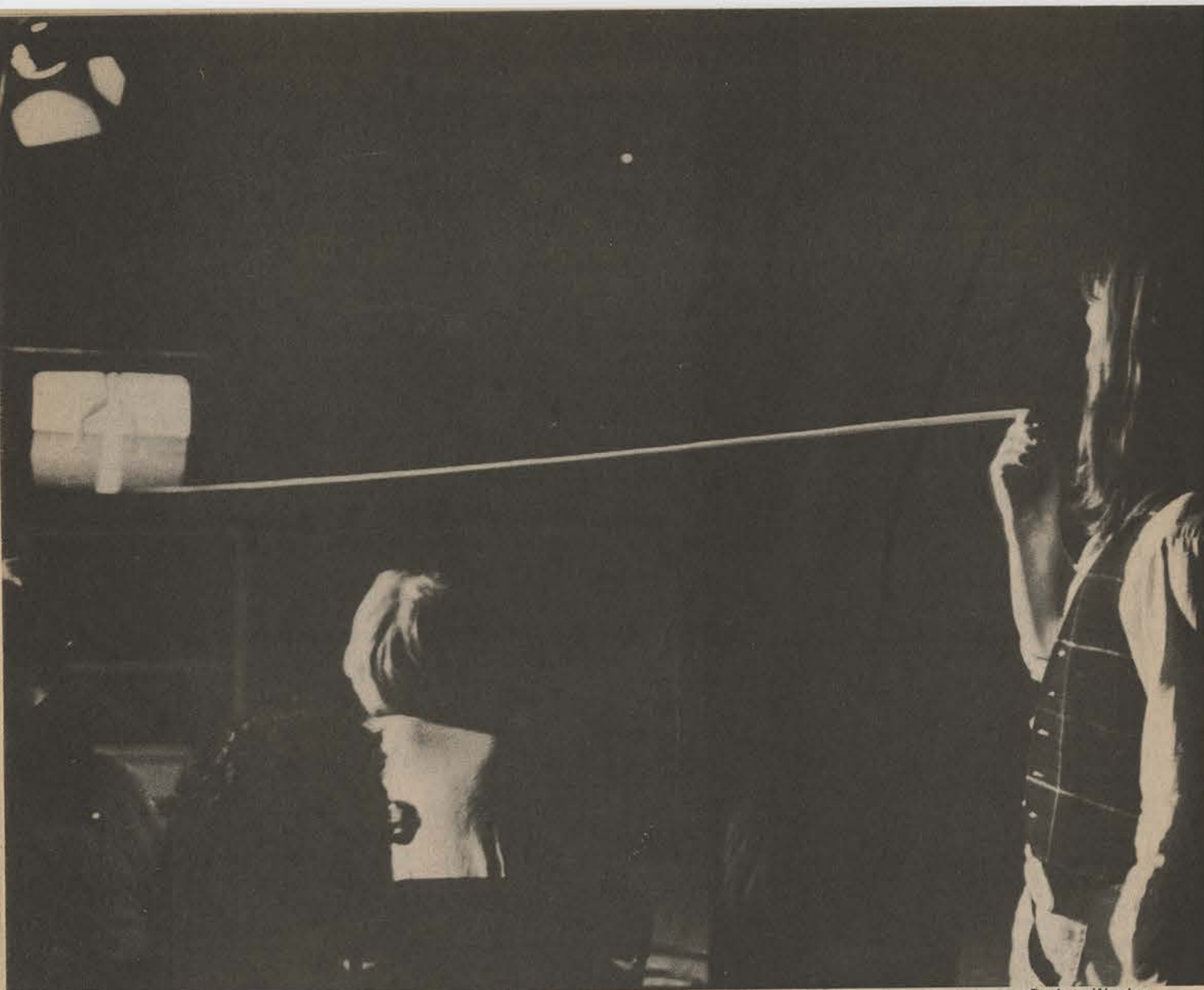
N: I guess that I was disturbed by the fact that you are dealing with some very loaded questions and images and, well, this is not entirely critical because I enjoyed the costuming, the play, as images in themselves, but where's the connection between the entertainment and the

content? I mean, I guess I'm saying you expose your vulnerability in the respect that you assume certain aspects such as entertainment, costuming, and the musical comedy routine but...

M: And I stripped them down, I took my outer shell off and so did Thomas. Mind you, Thomas had another shell on underneath. Ok, well, right. On the one hand I'm depicting all that injustice and all that violence, and misunderstanding, and yet, why am I being so light and cheeky? Right! Because that's what I was then. I was being light and cheeky. If it got past the light and cheeky, well good, because it was meant to. But that's another state of me, I'm also light and cheeky. But one can't help but say something and you get hurt through all of that. It was meant for people to take it all in. If they understood the different levels of it, fine. If they didn't, they got entertained. But that certainly wasn't the only thing I was doing up there.

Footnote to Marshalore Interview

A number of questions and thoughts emerge as a result of my encounter with the Fifth Network Conference and general anguish with the state of the art in Toronto today, from a political point of view. These questions, being involved principally around the connection between the "production resources", i.e. money, and the "creative resources" of work. The feeling being that the general dependency upon funding leads to a lack of integrity vis-a-vis the "production and presentation" of work. Why? The system presumes a stable of actions of "supporting material" which in many instances is simply fabricated to meet the requirements. We are learning the tools of co-opting the system, but in fact we are in the process co-opting ourselves. The irony of the situation is akin to the irony of the gallery, the white-walled system which becomes in effect, more interesting, more complex, than the art that it shows. We are now faced with the situation that the production resources, i.e. funding, have surpassed on the surface at least, the creative endeavour, be it "short term project", category A or B, or "explorations"; the terminologies to which we apply our endeavour. Survival is the essence of the game.



Rodney Werden

Tele□Performance

Jean-François Cantin

Propos Type

Une analyse par Rober Racine

Au centre de la salle du Masonic Temple, le montréalais Jean-François Cantin avait disposé une installation audio-visuelle simple et séduisante à la fois. Constituée d'un écran-vidéo muni d'une bande élastique blanche; d'une toile de projection ainsi qu'un projecteur de film, cette formation technique jouait le rôle d'une sculpture. La projection vidéo montrait Cantin nu mouant avec une bande élastique qui se prolongeait 'concrètement' à l'extérieur de l'écran. De l'autre côté de la salle,

la projection d'un film nous montrant un écran-télé s'effectuait sur une toile-écran.

En face de l'écran-vidéo, J.F. Cantin tendait la bande élastique accrochée à l'appareil et répondait, en se déplaçant de gauche à droite, à ses propres gestes présentés sur le vidéo. Il s'y passait des transferts de dimensions: Cantin dans la salle répondant à Cantin sur l'écran-vidéo à l'aide de cette bande blanche qui faisait le pont entre la bidimensionnalité et la tridimensionnalité. Toute cette action prenait vie pen-



Centerfold, December 1978

dant la projection d'un film nous montrant un autre écran-télé. Donc, écran filmé face à écran diffusant sous des jeux de miroirs et des parallèles optiques ambiants. Après un certain moment, Cantin posa la bande élastique par terre et commença à entourer l'écran-vidéo de ruban adhésif. Un spectateur prit la bande élastique et se mit à son tour à répondre aux *gestes-vidéo* de Cantin sur l'écran. Puis un autre spectateur se plaça autour de l'appareil et Cantin, continuant d'entourer de ruban adhésif l'écran-vidéo, intégra ce spectateur à l'appareil. Peu à peu d'autres spectateurs se "collèrent" à l'écran si bien qu'à la fin, quatre ou cinq personnes étaient littéralement 'prises' à la diffusion du vidéo.

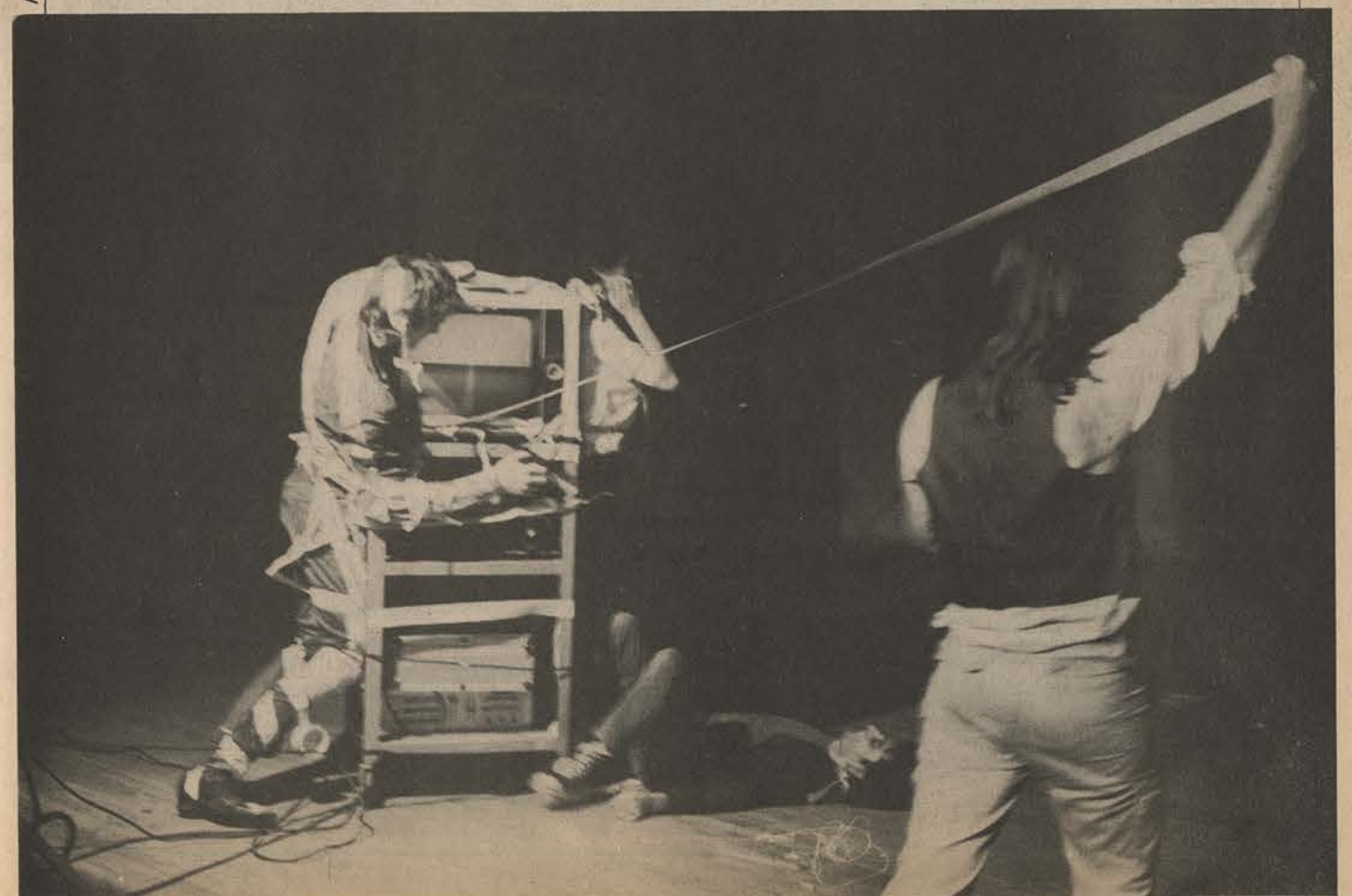
Ce qui est intéressant dans ce *Propos Type* c'est la part de recherche accordée à la 'bande'. Bande adhésive, bande vidéo, bande élastique servant de trait d'union entre le contenu de l'appareil vidéo et la réalité de la salle du Masonic Temple, et bande plastique de la pellicule du film projeté. Un matériau-ligne porteur à divers degrés de connotations et ayant son propre rôle à l'intérieur de la bande vidéo et en ressortait matériellement hors de l'appareil-télé. Jeu de matérialité/tridimensionnalité mentionné plus haut. Des rap-

ports complexes pourraient donc s'établir ici et qui seraient d'ordre sémantique. Mais l'action-performance de Cantin ne vise nullement ces rapports; ils sont beaucoup plus simples et surtout fortement marqués d'intentions dramatiques au sens de 'jeu théâtral'. L'intervention du spectateur à l'intérieur de cette sculpture est un second point qu'il faut aborder. Et encore là, l'intervention de la 'bande' est très remarquable. La première fois que le spectateur s'est 'inter-posé' à *Propos Type* fut en prenant la bande élastique pendant que Cantin entourait de ruban adhésif l'appareil. Le deuxième spectateur à entrer en jeu alla directement se coller sur l'appareil pour se faire attacher par la bande adhésive que Cantin mettait en action. Donc déjà deux niveaux différents où le spectateur est très bien identifié à chacun d'eux. Deux autres degrés peuvent être nommés. Un troisième est celui où les spectateurs de la salle sont attentifs au contenu de la bande vidéo proposés par Cantin. Cette bande vidéo (nous l'avons vu plus haut) nous présentait Cantin jouant avec une bande élastique. L'attention des spectateurs devient alors une nouvelle intervention face au rôle de la 'bande'. Un quatrième niveau s'in-

stalle avec la chorégraphie réalisée par la bande élastique mue sous Cantin soin du vidéo proprement dit. Tous ces degrés d'utilisation d'un matériau somme toute très simple, n'en évoque pas moins une démarche où l'idée de la 'ligne' transformable ne cesse de proliférer en sens multiple.

Autre aspect spécifique à *Propos Type* est le parallélisme pictural qui gère une organisation interne du 'prolongement'. Par prologement j'entends sujet présenté et sujet qui présente quelque chose à partir de ce sujet présenté.

Par exemple: voir Cantin sur place jouer avec Cantin sur le vidéo propose cette façon de dédoubler le sujet par voie/voix de prolongement. Ce prolongement peut s'effectuer sur le plan physique, psychologique et symbolique. Au plan physique, l'action de Cantin d'"englober" son sujet à l'aide d'un matériau tangible (ruban adhésif) autour d'un second matériau (appareil télé) fait s'accentuer le rapport étroit qui existe entre le sujet présenté et ce second sujet qui présente quelque chose. Dans l'éthique de l'action-performance, une des priorités, il me semble, est d'établir un rapport nouveau entre celui qui propose et celui qui dispose. Or dans *Propos Type*, celui



qui dispose se trouve à proposer une manière de vivre qui est celle d'entrer en contact avec la matière pour ne pas dire matériau(x). Le spectateur ou les spectateurs de la fin qui sont collés à l'appareil devenant la sculpture vivante qui au départ n'était que technologique. A ce moment, peut se prolonger le plan psychologique qui modifie le contenu du discours émis. Lorsque le spectateur prend la bande élastique et évolue avec elle au moment où Cantin tourne autour de l'appareil puis attache un second, un troisième et un quatrième spectateur, il est évident qu'est teintée l'image première qui fut diffusée par le vidéo. Cette fois le rapport entre les deux sujets est beaucoup subtile puisqu'il se réalise par l'emploi de deux dimensions différentes (bi et tridimensionnalité). Sans trop développer le plan symbolique qui ne fait que renforcer certaines données du plan psychologique, il faut parler de cet aspect que sont le parallélisme et jeu de miroir.

Plus haut j'ai parlé d'écran diffusant une image d'écran; il est sûr que cette façon de présenter le message et de lui faire véhiculer sa propre image hors de tous sens étranger n'est plus très riche de nos jours. Cependant la manière dont Cantin use de ce miroir technique est très séduisante car elle n'intervient absolument pas dans l'action proprement dite de *Propos Type*. Cette image continue (réalisée par une projection de film) n'est là en fait que pour alimenter le regard et à la limite pour 'jouer' avec les idées du spectateur. C'est-à-dire que ces idées à fonctions connotatives ne renvoient à rien puisque cette image de l'écran est vide picturalement. On n'y voit qu'un cadre d'appareillage. Le but premier de Cantin est de faire participer le spectateur à une sculpture technologique qui est faite pour évoluer toute seule sans que l'artiste n'y soit réellement. Cantin était sur place un peu comme un animateur qui indique une façon d'agir en face d'un environnement précis. Il y a un peu de cela dans le parallélisme qui unit les diffuseurs et les diffusés (rejoignant ici les sujets expliqués plus haut). Cantin/Spectateur peuvent se transmuter en *Propos/Type* et vice versa. Car il s'agit bien ici d'un propos où la matière divulguée et celle qui ne l'est pas s'affrontent. En nous montrant ce que l'on doit voir on nous indique du même fait ce qui ne doit pas être vu. Cantin et sa bande élastique jouant avec lui-même

indiquent un moyen de pouvoir le substituer par quiconque voudra bien en assumer la prise de position. Or pour le spectateur normal, il est souvent difficile d'assumer justement cette prise de position. Cantin nous dicte que l'on peut aussi dicter; exactement de la même manière que l'écran-vidéo dicte à Cantin qu'il peut céder sa place à quelqu'un d'autre qui à son tour sera dicté. Et à voir évoluer Cantin avec cette bande élastique à la façon d'un 'joueur de point de fuite', l'impression d'être comme un chien en laisse ne peut s'effacer de notre tête. Cette dernière observation qui peut sembler complètement hors sujet est au contraire très importante. Cantin n'a pas que des préoccupations formelles et structurales; et surtout, ce serait une erreur de porter une réflexion uniquement fondée sur des critères structuralistes. Cantin joue avec le thème de l'absurde et de manière personnelle. En usant de matériaux qui ne se veulent vraiment absurdes. Au contraire; employer la vidéo (déjà pour bien des gens c'est toute une démarche!), le film et la participation éventuelle du spectateur effront pour l'ensemble des concepteurs des moyens sérieux. Cette notion de l'absurdité se manifeste par la façon dont le spectateur peut s'intégrer à l'action et surtout au rôle qu'il joue dès ce moment précis. Le caractère 'théâtral' (mentionné encore une fois plus haut) est très stimulant. Ici

avec *Propos/Type* il n'y a pas de text; ce qui est déjà quelque chose quand on songe que de nos jours, presque chaque performance est munie d'un texte. Donc ce caractère de 'jeu' s'établit sous le signe de l'improvisation. Un canevas est proposé (*Propos/Type*) et ceux qui veulent y vivre une expérience qui ne se fera qu'à ce moment-là peuvent intervenir comme bon leur semble. Au Masonic Temple, ce samedi 9 septembre 1978, les spectateurs collés à l'appareil-vidéo criaient, hurlaient et manifestaient leur délire face une technologie plus qu'abrutissante. A un certain moment, les spectateurs attachés se mirent à se déplacer avec l'appareil un peu partout sur le plancher de la salle. L'impression de voir une sorte de sculpture vivante et quasi cybernétique était frappante. Cette sculpture se déplaçait en fonction des réactions des 'déplaceurs'; ceux-ci étant conditionnés par le propos de la bande vidéo et bien sûr par le rapport/contact qu'ils vivaient sous l'accumulation de ruban adhésif qu'articulait sur eux Cantin.

Propos/Type se termina premièrement par la fin temporelle du déroulement de la bande vidéo puis par la fin du déroulement du film projeté, mais se poursuivit tout aussi longtemps que les quatre ou cinq spectateurs se furent libérés de tout ce ruban adhésif. Mais au fond c'est peut-être à ce moment-là que tout commença. ... ■

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

A SPACE, a division of the Nightingale Arts Council, is Canada's oldest and largest artist-run gallery.

We are currently re-organizing our administrative structure with the purpose of establishing a professional contemporary 'museum without a collection' in Toronto.

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85 St. Nicholas Street
Toronto, Canada.



Rodney Warden

Daniel Dion and Daniel Guimond *Valeur Extra Regle / Extra Rule*

An analysis by Paul Wong

Valeur Extra Regle/Extra Rule Value was the last of the numerous Tele-Performances presented during the 5th Network/Cinquieme Réseau Conference & Festival. It's been well over a month and for some reason or another the performance by Daniel Dion and Daniel Guimond was one of the more memorable perform-

ances of the festival. The piece *Extra Rule Value* assisted by Jhon Zinx and Razor X of Studio Z perhaps stands out because of its very nature — that of being cliché in its stylizations of "punk", being extremist, violent and short. Perhaps after an exhausting week, it seemed refreshing, perhaps in my almost nitely intoxicated state it was an easy performance to absorb, it was direct.

The performance corresponded to the content and running time of the 7 minute B/W tape of the same title of which was played back over the video projection system and relayed to 4 monitors situated throughout the performance area. The tape was strong in imagery, the style reminded me of the looseness of the kind of video verite camera exploration/exploitation of late sixties/early

seventies video. It showed confidence in the handling of the medium, the content up to date, refined and polished in editing. The performance appeared raw, with 4 performers. . . a row of chairs set up facing towards the stage, several cases of beer, . . . 3 performers simultaneously read an incomprehensible text through a microphone, the 4th performer played with a follow spot. . . on the audience, on the technicians, on the performers. . . from there the performance degenerates. . . Dion with lipstick scrawls words across the video monitors, Razor X starts a fire on the floor, various artzines are burnt including *Only Paper Today* and *File*, the burning ritual corresponds with the flushing of flames down a toilet on the tape. . . Guimond is smashing beer bottles, clothing is being torn and torn off, a sort of animated contact improvisational wrestling occurs with all performers, Jhon's pants are at his ankles with him walking about yanking on his dick. . . the smashing of glass continues and performers are rolling and bleeding in the glass, shaving cream is sprayed, rubbed into the wounds and over the bodies. . . the lights go down. . . the performers armed with knives and sharred glass rush towards the audience. . . the performance is over. Although the fouled lighting cue caused some confusion amongst the performers, members of the audience did express their fear at that moment.

This type of performance is not isolated and is certainly nothing new. We've observed it in "body art" say that of Chris Burden's and in the "behavioural activities" say some of Willoughby Sharp's performances and in the tapes and performances of Coum Video. The works are brutish if not primitive, self indulgent and often enough self-destructive. The works quite often reflect certain behavioural codes often acceptable or unacceptable to aspects of society. Specifically Studio Z's performance is of the "punk vein".

The punk phenomenon is usually associated with the music scene "punk rock", "new wave", it is an acceptable and accessible vehicle to amplify the message, the posturing of the blank generation, perhaps a reaction towards some kind of social/political awareness or cultural change. Defiance that parodies violence bordering on destruction. By reflecting certain human condition-



ings, it questions the basic rights of survival and to survive differently from how we know it. It's concerns and statements are broad, broader than the visual paraphrenalia, much broader than many of the pseudo punk-ettes and fashion rag hags associated with it. It is anti-establishment, it's forceful and should be recognized for what it is.

The performance of Guimond and Dion cannot be easily labelled as being good or bad or as high or low art or even simply liking it. Being observers to self-inflicted pains, it is not easy to digest, it is even a harder exercise to inflict physical

pain on oneself. I don't accept this piece easily but I can't accept the responses to it as just merely being a piece of reactionary sensationalism, nor can I accept that it is a naive cheap shot as expressed by many of my colleagues.

Upon further correspondence with Daniel Guimond and Daniel Dion these thoughts concerning *Extra Rule Value* were expressed to me. . . Guimond, *Valeur Extra Regle* is an abuse form of control over signification (sense), the signs are compiled out of everyday life gestures / transformed / toyed with / to obtain greater possibili-

Centerfold, December 1978



Rodney Werden

ties of "interpretation" (sense) on a "radical use level" . . . he further states: "I don't believe in communications . . . informations exist (in our idea of a reality), I try to manifest them as they appeal to me, pleasurably, hysterically. Dion goes on to say *Extra Rule Value* / operated version to sickness / senile immunization against intelligence stuff/ against art hang-ups / against white secretary performer's secretions. . . necessary semiotic aggressions measured normative / tolerable acts, probably unacceptable by the very "middle-aged minds" of the cultural community. . . briefly, my friends like to bleed and I need to be there to watch them. They further state the research grounds; sex, violence, text, body codes, modernity, chic, ideological terrorism, signs. . . without the realistic effects. The production of a new plural explosive unholdable languages that correspond (or not) to existing systems (codes).

I look forward to seeing further writings, videotapes and performances of Dion/Guimond and the works of Studio Z. Studio Z is located in Montreal.

Centerfold, December 1978

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TORONTO LIFE

Other voices, other
brooms: rating the
art publications

Only Paper Today (964-3627). This is A Space's sought-after monthly tabloid—a provocative mélange of photos, reviews, interviews and comment. Edited by poet Victor Coleman, it is a must for pursuers of modernity.

Randy and Berneche

Centre of a Tension

A document by
Randy and Berneche and
Clive Robertson

The colour wheels:

I watched *Centre of a Tension*
from the balcony, I wanted to see



Rodney Werden

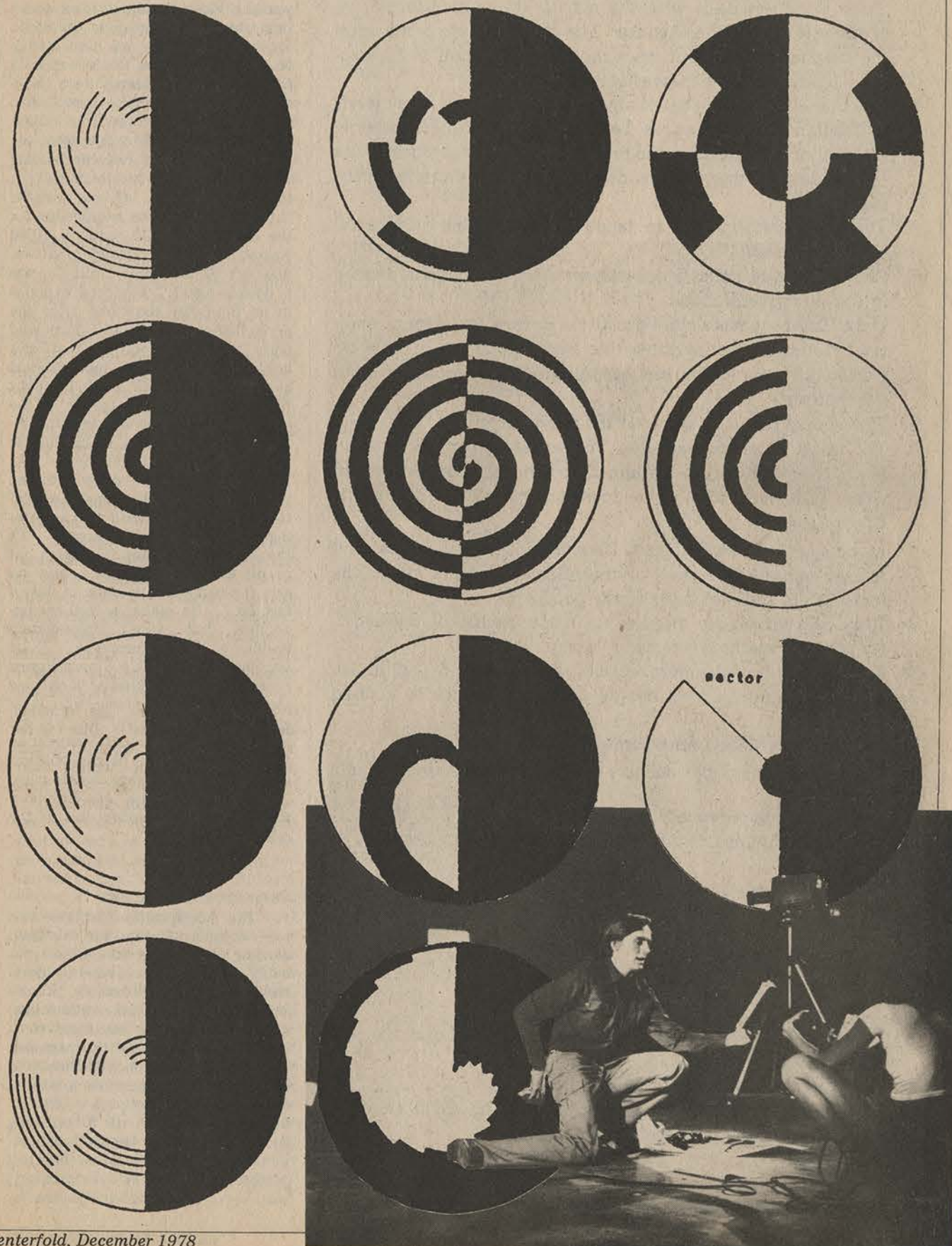
the colour appear from those black and white monitors produced from a tape of spinning black and white subjective colour experiments. *Centre of a Tension* was in many ways hidden as a performance, partially because Randy and Berneche were placed (placed themselves) in the middle of what for their purposes was too large a space. The analogy was subtle. These spinning disks that appeared on the monitors behind their performance simulate a frequency that presents colour. It works, like television, on retinal fatigue. As performance is 'povera' those 21" monitors should have been at least 10' square screens (the wheels could have been shot on film — but for the money) and then the audience would have experienced the fatigue that was intended.

The disco music:

The disco music occurred for 40 sec. bursts during which time either Randy or Berneche passed to one another a closed-circuit video camera whilst they both danced in sleep-like frenzy, her with her Mickey Mouse T-shirt — holding a bottle of beer in one hand, often a cigarette in the other — looking somewhat like the younger sister of the woman from *As the World Burns* (the R&B performance that the 'performance audience' knows best). Disco is the assimilation of revolution into fashion says Randy, commenting about a recent film festival and in some ways inspiration for *Centre of a Tension* — whose two main characters are Che Guevara and Mata Hari, or at least their voices reading from their (Guevara's and Hari's) diaries. He goes on to say that the film world sees the revolutionary as a marketable character who can have the celluloid shit kicked out of him/her for profit. The Mexican wet-back, the Reggae singer, the Aborigine from Australia, the North American Indian are real characters turned into fantasy land. Turned by the corporations from a martyr into a fad.

Che Guevara and Mata Hari:

Randy and Berneche take turns sitting on a stack of beer cases lip-synching excerpts from Mata Hari's



Centerfold, December 1978

- R: Disco Blindness deals with the diaries, the purported diaries, of Mata Hari and Che Guevara. The characters are based upon the original martyrs but are a modern translation of how society today perceives these characters.
- B: The diaries have been percolated down through so many levels of fashion that the words become mere mouthed rhetoric.
- R: By stealing and cleaning the revolutionary's image, society has consumed and therefore rendered artificial the original message.
- B: The characters lip-sync to taped readings, their mouths fill the video screen.
- R: Che Guevara becomes a department store mannequin, dressed in the latest guerilla look.
- B: Mata Hari becomes a child prostitute in torn and skimpy, skin-tight clothing; a victim rather than a manipulator.
- R: During the monologues, one becomes the voyeur, one mouths the rhetoric.
- B: The camera points its finger at the glaring error.
- R: The target poses suggestively. The voices scream sex and violence, love and war, to a stunned society that doesn't want to hear — just wants to mouthe, doesn't want to feel — just wants to emulate.
- In between the monologues, they play out all of the cat and mouse games. The arms of the frenzied dancers mimic the fascist salute and the power to the people fist.
- B: They pass off on one another the responsibility of the knowledge that something is terribly wrong.
- R: The desire for glamour replaces the desire for emotions.
- B: Evened out into a grey middle zone, they dance to a disco beat.
- R: Superficiality takes over where paranoia left off.
- B: Discs spin behind the dancers to destroy this sense of equilibrium.
- R: Retinal fatigue produces slight nausea.
- B: Minds programmed to tune into the subliminal believe only in illusion.
- R: The illusions are pre-manipulated to control the unsuspecting.
- B: An illusion of colour masks the truth. Reality is blocked from memory.
- R: Only sensationalist triggers remain. We perceive much more than we want to.
- B: The voices never stop.
- R: Freedom of choice is allowed but the choices that are presented are all identical.
- B: The Joker transmits the orders.
- R: The Commentator is the bored tool of the myth creators.
- B: They die laughing but never know the joke.

© 1978 Randy and Berneche.

and Che Guevara's diaries. Whilst one sits synching, the other points a portable video camera at the reader's lips which is enlarged on the video screen. The diaries are played back from an audio tape, Che's read by a Columbian voice, Mata's by a Canadian voice with a fake East Indian accent. "Nobody knew where Mata Hari came from, she was a complete fraud appearing in Paris pretending she was an Indian temple dancer. . . she made a lot of connections through sex and was responsible for the death of 50,000 soliders, Allied troops; she was executed as a German spy by the French, but she was a double agent," Berneche explains in an interview sometime after the performance. Mata Hari's purported diary is grade bee porno — that has a continuous level of metaphorical exaggeration. Che's diary is about the present with his troops in the jungle — an emotional account relating all the horrors of his suicide mission and jungle survival. As Randy connects the diary with the performance: "the jungle revolutionary image is turned into a clothing style that hit the disco's. It's the only visible thing that came out of his life and even that is now on sale for half price because its out of fashion." He makes a further connection that wasn't immediately visible in the performance: "Che becomes a manikin, perma-press creases on your khakis, mouthing the rhetoric of someone who is in great discomfort whilst you are hustling in the disco. It's similar to what is believed to be the political content in art, it's very middle class, just mouthing the revolutionary rhetoric without having any of the inherent danger."

Between the buttons:

The juxtaposition of the two texts is indeed strange and the disco dancing interludes somehow probably confused the audience completely but not intentionally. Randy and Berneche both talked about this, about not pushing theatrical 'buttons' — which makes the performance for the audience difficult to comprehend, the disco seems like an up-tempo device to "push a button" in the performance, it's a confusing though admirable theory. It certainly is understandable as their last performance (*As the World Burns*) was very 'appealing' in its use of

theatrics — both characters were used by other artists in a number of tapes and performances with Randy and Berneche playing their *Burn* roles. They both say that *As the World Burns* was not a satire of *Soap*, but that the characters were "parts of ourselves that we pulled out of the closet". They say the buttons can be replaced with a presence, with an honesty, with an assault and it is in this light that *Centre of a Tension* should be seen.

Subliminutes:

Between the disco/diary section and the manifesto, the spinning colour wheels changed to reveal newspaper texts spinning, an early filmic image except the variable speed of this newsprint was more in contact with the speed of an electronic age. As the wheels slowed the newsprint was visible as the soundtrack changed to voices overdubbed over overdubbed voices.

Manifesto:

(see box)

This part of the performance was without doubt the most effective in terms of active enactment. Berneche shouted the orders beginning with the line "Be a mercenary" while Randy, further from the audience, quietly delivered the random (though alphabetical) commentary. Throughout this 'dialogue' there is humour, anguish, hatred, frustration which says a lot for random emotions. At the end of this section both broke out into hysterical laughter — "dying laughter".

The political/social/aesthetic level of this performance can be brought into question, that is it can be questioned as the resolution was far from clear. Like many performances it contained a code under development, presenting a new work is not always for the ultimate benefit of the audience, though that can occur at some later date. This is not to outwardly criticize *Centre of a Tension*. It did become or attain a rationale for me once it could be discussed, which hopefully is what this collected document may do for this and other performances. Often, superficially, performances seem to have a lot in common — hence the tele-performance 'key'. *Centre of a Tension* I saw as being separately purposeful and an interesting and relevant departure. ■

BE A MERCENARY
BLIND AN ARTIST
BORE AN AUDIENCE
BURN BOOKS
BUST A PROSTITUTE
CAGE AN ANIMAL
CASTRATE A HOMOSEXUAL
CLOSE A HOSPITAL
COLLECT A BOUNTY
COVER UP THE TRUTH
CRANK CALL A WIDOW
CRIPPLE AN ATHLETE
DECEIVE A LOVER
DEFACE A BEAUTY
DEFOLIATE NATURE
DEPORT A REFUGEE
DESECRATE A GRAVE
DESTROY A FAMILY
EXECUTE A REVOLUTIONARY
FLOOD A CITY
FORGE A SIGNATURE
FREE A CRIMINAL
GENOCIDE A RACE
HAVE NO CONSCIENCE
HIT AND RUN
HIJACK A SCHOOL BUS
HORD MONEY
INQUISITION A SAINT
JAIL AN INNOCENT
KILL A COP
KILL A KID
KNEECAP AN EXECUTIVE
MAIME A PET
PERVERT AN INNOCENT
PLANT A BOMB
POISON FOOD
PULL APART A TEDDY BEAR
RAPE A CHILD
REINSTATE CAPITOL PUNISHMENT
ROB A BLIND MAN
SELL OUT TO FORTUNE
SCANDALIZE A POLITICIAN
SLANDER AN IMMIGRANT
SLASH A PAINTING
SMASH A CROSS
START A COUNTER REVOLUTION
STARVE AN ORPHAN
STEAL AN HEIRLOOM
TELL A LIE
TURN IN A FRIEND

From *Centre of a Tension*, Randy & Berneche.

myth adventure
myth advise
myth anthropology
myth apply
myth apprehend
myth appropriate
myth behave
myth become
myth beget
myth believe
myth calculate
myth call
myth carriage
myth chance
myth chief
myth conceive
myth conduct
myth construe
myth count
myth creant
myth deal
myth deed
myth demean
myth doubt
myth employ
myth fire
myth fit
myth fortune
myth give
myth govern
myth handle
myth illusion
myth inform
myth interpret
myth judge
myth lead
myth like
myth manage
myth ogeny
myth perceive
myth prison
myth quote
myth rule
myth shapen
myth state
myth take
myth trial
myth trust
myth understand
myth use

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How You Can Look
And Feel Younger

LARGEST CIRCULATION OF ANY PAPER IN AMERICA

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Simple Technique Can Bring Relief to 67 Million...

#1 NO-DRUG PLAN TO STOP PAIN

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30 Minutes a Day
Will Add Zing
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How to Improve
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Michael Learned
To Quit 'Waltons'
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How You Can
Make a Good
First Impression
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Kotter's TV Wife:
My 3 Eerie
ESP Experiences
page 31

How to Tell If
Your Spouse Is
Having an Affair
centerfold



David Hynsky

EXCLUSIVE— THE HUMMER SISTERS

How do stars like Kate Jackson, Cindy Williams and Suzanne Somers stay so trim? Through simple slimming tricks that include everything from fasting to lasagna

meals to ballet — and their stay-slim ideas should work for you, too! To find out how eight of Hollywood's top actresses keep their fantastic figures, turn to page 37



Bobbe Besold

How I Lost My Video Virginity to the Hummer Sisters

By Willoughby Sharp

"Yes, it's TRUE. The Hummer Sisters All-Guy Revue Band are hitchhiking to a gig in New York with 400 TV sets and their HOPES held firmly around the middle..."

How did it come together? How did they meet? How do they collaborate?

DO THEY STILL SPEAK? ("Proceeds will be used to buy platform shoes and garter belts...")

I collected the individuals that make up the continuing collaboration called the HUMMER SISTERS & Video Cabaret & the Government & whatever INDIVIDUALLY. 1 by 1.

(Vancouver 1973, Western Front Society, M.L. & D.T. there for the organization of a woman's film festival sponsored by MEMO FROM TURNER with a half million Canadian Dollars \$ from the Gov't via L.I.P.).

But what are the issues? What makes the HUMMERS important to contemporary culture?

THIS:

Music: WHAT IS THE MATTER
what is the matter
what is the matter
what is the matter
what is the ma ma ma ma maw...

Did you ever put your (artistic) life ON THE LINE (as they do)? Day after day. Hour by hour. Did you ever try to TRUST another to be YOURSELF? Throw your lot into the pot? Submerge your EGO into the flow. Just GO w/ it? It's not easy. "WHAT IS THE MATTER (?)"

Here are my notes from that historic evening after the 5th NETWORK... "ML & DT stage rt. sound check: "DO YOU WANT TO

DANCE?". Chris on camera: "Art is where the heart is" etc. 7th Heaven. Double DRAG on swings. Pre-recorded Raymond Chandler-type narrative... "Trouble is my business..." (Male/Female role reversal) Rev up. The Government: ("Where's that two bucks you owe Me?"). "HELLO! We're the HUMMER SISTERS." (High energy).

"Who do you think you are
What do you think this is
Where were we...who's next...
how come
Where did you find that..."

But back to the issues: what makes all of this creative chaos significant? The concept, the creation, the process, the pain, the play, the fun, the collaboration, the performance, the life-style, the image, the ecstasy...

The reviews: "... HUMMER cohorts and VIDEOCAB chums are heralding the future..." David McCaughna, *Scene Changes*.

"... the peerless HUMMER SISTERS media manifest — as devastatingly funny as it is deva-

stating... ", *Toronto Star*.

"... a shameless video-rock broadcast on morality... ", *New York Times*.

BOOGA BOOGA BOOGA BOOGA.

Consider what you're writing Willoughby. Try to get to the core. What gives them the energy? How do you convey the power. VIDEO? The closed-circuitness of 400 simultaneous TV monitors with something different on each CRT. The scan in REAL time. The pure pleasure of just being in the midst of all THAT energy. The free flowing grace. The satisfaction of self derived from the work of others. The sense of togetherness. COMMUNITY. (What does it all have to do w/ TORONTO. And Canada?).

MUSIC: EDEN

Snakeoil: Good morning, Eva.

Eva: Are you speaking to me, Snakeoil?

Snake: Yes, you Pearl of Paradise. The others neither mark nor remark. Do you want to eat me?

Eva: I do not eat snake. I am chaste and immortal. Fierce as fire, patient as ice.

Snake: The simile is a dead donut.

Eva: How about a backrub?

Come on, Sharp. This is BULLSHIT. You're just pulling from the script. Don't you have anything ORIGINAL to say. Confront the issues. Get it ON.

"Well, within the contemporary stream of avant-garde work, the HUMMER SISTERS and their collaborators represent the first and historic rupture with traditional theatre in the sphere of..."

TRY AGAIN.

"I like (and respect) them PERSONALLY..."

Eva: I am advised that to eat the snake is to know the Worm. I am advised that to know the Worm is to know Nothing. I am advised that to eat Snake is to visit the hell from which all return and none advance. I am waiting for further instructions.

Snake: Nice girls finish last.

That's just more PADDING. That's

their vision. You're "dry and frivolous". Say SOMETHING.

"Well, maybe I should say something about the agony of writing it. after all, I lived in the HUMMER house (Sussex & Robert) during Aug., saw it all go down on the



David Hlynsky

typing-machine, saw the TEARS, the shredded sheets, the discussion, the re-visions, the dismembered lives..."

Come on, come on. Nobody could understand that. It's just words. The old eight and a half by eleven, if you know what I mean?

"No. Wait. That's where it's AT. It has to be on paper before it could go up in front of the eyes



(cameras).

You mean it isn't improvised?

"Just the timing, the audience interaction, the subtle exchange between the performers, the movement of the image flow on the TVs..."

Then why does it seem so RAW?

"Because it's real, every evening. They bring their TOTAL selves to it each time. All their loves & hates. Their fears. And fanaticisms.

That's hard for me to understand. Perhaps you could quote some more from the text. "Sure."

Spy: All witchcraft comes from carnal lust which in woman is insatiable.

Inq: Stay tuned.

Spy: Another ideological S&M affair, another 70's romance. Inq: Close-up.

Spy: From the Hairy neck of the Phalangium spider are extracted two worms. According to Pliny, these are wrapped in deer skin and attached to a woman's body before sunrise to prevent conception. If her loins are rubbed with blood from the ticks on a black bull, she will be averse to copulation. Aristotle recommends cedar oil applied to the cervix. Hemlock applied to the testes at puberty. Mouse dung checks abominable thoughts in men. Women have been known to use their fingers to direct urine to flush out the vagina..."

But what about the individual performances, the center staginess of it all?

"... it slips and slides, comes into focus and then dissolves, sort of like the sea, waves there and there, but mostly just flow. And depth."

Ok, I'll buy that. But then what do you come away with?

"That's hard to describe. It's not like a Broadway musical. You don't leave with a tune in your head. It's more TOTAL. More WHOLE. When it works, the parts come together in ways unique to performance now. The music is powerful, the musicians keyed, in & out, back & forth, supportive not overwhelming. Robert and Andy up FRONT, backed by sensitive drums. Randy & Berneche adding range & style. And the FOUR sisters out there, lined up, belting it out, Janet, Bobbie, Marien & D. Anne."

"... ONCE A LUNAR MONTH THE EGG TRAVELS BOOGA BOOGA BOOGA BOOGA... As all of you who are engaged in this work are aware... ONCE A LUNAR

Centerfold, December 1978

MONTH... BOOGA BOOGA BOOGA WOOGA... The Big Picture keeps bleeding off the frame... A shard of plastic, a mood ring... An encounter with fossilized mating rituals... A skirmish with OHIP... A hang-over here... A torture case there... And of course the daily dinosaur / dinosaur du jour... The magnificent stomping and snuffing ceremonies... Devised by a pea brain in the body of a monolithic beast..."

Alright, enough. I get the picture.

"But you couldn't possibly. You HAVE to see it. I could not describe their performance to you. Words are not sufficient. It's the experience that counts. And each one is different. I must have seen them up before an audience, maybe, ten, fifteen times, Toronto, the Horseshoe, New York, and elsewhere. What's most memorable is the ENERGY. The POWER. The FORCE of them all working to-

gether to bring it OFF. That's extraordinary!"

So it's hard to be critical? "I identify too much. I feel I know them too well to take that distant stance. Anyway, I never saw myself as a critic."

Well, then why are you writing about them in *Centerfold*?

"Pure ambition. I want to establish myself as a writer."

But, I thought you already had?

"That was a long while ago. Nobody remembers. Even I can't."

Well, frankly, Willoughby, I don't think that you've said very much. I don't think that you've caught that special something that the HUMMERS have. That fire, that warmth, that infectiousness. I haven't seen them often, but when I have, they were HOT.

"You're right. But my talent is limited. It's hard for me to put into WORDS what I really feel. I'm no Tom Wolfe."

Too bad.

"I guess I could have brought out the dedication, the devotion, the sense of destiny that is the HUMMERS. That unqualified "throw caution to the winds" quality. That walking the edge, the thin edge. The Risk. Perhaps some personal quotes, some anecdotes would have helped. But they are so elusive, so mercurial. In and out of focus..."

Excuses, excuses.

"Perhaps with more time, more effort, more intimacy. But Clive called; he had to have the copy; Tanya was ready to set it. I couldn't put it off any longer..."

But what if people want to know more, aren't satisfied with what you've given them?

"Well, they could go see the show. Tomorrow they are off to Vancouver, and then Ottawa, Montreal, and New York again..."

The beat goes on.

"Yes. And don't you forget it."

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S.A.W. VEHICLE VIDEO INN
THE WESTERN FRONT A SPACE

The Government Electric Eye

An interview by Tom Sherman
and Clive Robertson

THE GOVERNMENT

Ed Boyd, drums
Robert Stewart, bass, vocals, writing
Andy Paterson, guitar, vocals, writing

Originally, some 18 months ago Andy Paterson put a band together for Michael Hollingsworth's play ("which he had the audacity to call:") PUNC/ROK (with a German spelling). The Government became adept at playing "Television incidental music" except that Paterson was using both prerecorded and live Video instead of Television as his main writing source. The Government provided more than half of Michael Hollingsworth's *Electric Eye*, as well as adaptations for his *Strawberry Fields*, they have also provided major contributions to *The Hummer Sisters*, Karen Ann Quinlan, Patty Rehears Story, and *Nympho Warrior*, and

Randy and Berneche's *As The World Burns*. The Government is also a band in its own write, extending a parallel performance aesthetic which

relates directly to post-surveillance artist tapes. With the Government black and white video never looked so mean. Their music is bureaucratic, their voices sound like so many filing cabinets closing, they are investigators, they know when not to act — just like the Government.



Lorne Fromer

Bobbe Besold



Centerfold, December 1978

AP: At that time (Nov. 1977), I took the liberty of getting sick and turning into David Berkowitz writing down everything that came into my head for awhile and at the same time feeding in to *Electric Eye*. There are three videotapes for *Electric Eye*, two have been put together. The first one shot has the five Visits, the reading of the newspaper and the blowing up of the guitarist in the night club. At first that was the only tape. When it was shown the music related to it casually. There were no specific cues. For New York two more tapes were made. The Emmanuel Jacques Reversal, you could call it, the one with: "I am going to bite his cock off" tape, and she actually does it. Rodney Werden shot the first one, Susan Britton shot the second one and then we put in the incidental tape of myself playing chess with myself. The chess game was bizarre — I can't play chess so Hollingsworth and Chris Clifford are calling out these moves. The reason I look in such angst as to what I am going to do next is that I can't understand what they're talking about.

Hollingsworth and I would change *Electric Eye* so we would extend the song four bars and then stopped the music, what is going to come out on tape. So we would change the songs until we could stop and the pre-recorded tape would immediately take over.

RS: That took a long time, it was very complicated. There are some great performers on the videotape: Maury Chaykin, Jackie Burroughs, I'm good myself — the lines you don't want to lose. The video is there but without the lines! I still think we are losing too many but...

AP: No. We've gone through it and decided which ones we want brought out.

CR: When you did *Electric Eye* at the Beverley, I didn't understand

at first why you showed the tape first and then performed with the tape, overriding some of the soundtrack, then I realised why and apart from the songs, Andy's extra narrative, his commentary on the content of the tape's narrative, it's also a unique use of the video installation.

AP: When the tape was shown in the bar, which allowed the band to have a break, we were surprised how many people related to the tape as if it were a French movie. The beer

is too contrived and loses spontaneity.

CR: As a use of the video cabaret format that for instance, *The Hummers*, use — I liked *Electric Eye* because there is no delay between the narrative on the tape and the band, either singing or ad libbing. The theatre, for the most part, is on the tape and so the audience doesn't have to wait for the actors to become the band, which at times is unnecessarily aggravating.

AP: It's changing with the Hummers as we produce more murk music as we get closer to the question of what can be the definition of a song.

RS: I like watching the audience, it's like watching tennis as their eyes move constantly between the video monitors and the band.

TS: What's that? Incidental murk music?

AP: I could be very crude and say I tune my guitar to a chord and do a lot of volume twitching in and out. Fluid sound. Narcoleptic. For a strictly rock and roll audience is *Electric Eye* immediate enough? There's obvious bits — mood, posture, tableau that are there when something is on the tape that demands focus but not audio focus. Or is the appeal that maybe there are at least two focuses and the audience can be its own editor?

CR: The music holds it together. You don't have to watch the band to hear the music

and then you can choose to look at any of many banks of monitors carrying the pre-recorded tapes and live synthesised video of the band and tapes.

AP: Theoretically if you don't give a flying shit about the tape, with those kind of people in the pauses they wonder what the fuck is going on. It's very tightly scripted as far as allowing accidents, there's a difference between mistakes and an accident. A mistake is when the tape is



Bobbe Besold



sales went down. The waiters were saying to us, What kind of a movie's this? Hermann Neutics once asked me how scripted *Electric Eye* and the Government was, he said that it seemed as if the music would stop before two very specific pieces of mundane conversation. The whole point of the conversation in the visits is that the conversation is mundane. There are two segments when the lead singer in the band is the voices on the tape. If anything the scripting

Centerfold, December 1978

I AM ON THE PROWL

Hey everybody in the street driving cars
I've got just one thing to say to you
And that is
I can get where I want to go on my feet
faster than you can get where you want to go
in your cars
Do you know why?
It's because your cars are all stuck at some intersection
It's irrelevant which one because
All the intersections of the world are IDENTICAL
But me, well, I get around
I've got mail to deliver
Fires to extinguish
Missions to perform
that the voices of dogs have been telling me to perform
for thousands of years
I AM ON THE PROWL
I AM ON THE PROWL
I'm the King of the Sidewalk, I never step on cracks
I break through the arms
of old lovers who've forgotten that they're still holding hands
I step on dogs who get in the way
I'm fast and efficient
I AM ON THE PROWL
I AM ON THE PROWL.

© 1978 Mirrochismo Music Ltd. Words and music by Andrew James Paterson.

not held at a certain point, it means I have to cut the song and those are just sloppies...

RS: To us. I don't think the audience picks up on that too much...

EB: Even if we do a song at a slightly faster or slower tempo we can miss a cue...

AP: That's when positive accidents can happen...

CR: (to Ed) I heard you made a comment that the music would be cleaner if you didn't use video?

EB: I like playing with video in the context of a band. What we've been doing recently to avoid that is to turn the video sound down, so the band is cleaner. We have to bring the video sound up when the band is not playing to get the dialogue across.

AP: But again, some of the pieces in that show, the way they work, is for the band to be a back-

drop. In the second visit: trivial information: explosion from band. We therefore then put the focus on to the live performance, the camera's role is taken away from the tape.

RS: I can see what Ed means because sometimes as people who make video know, the sound track can be shitty, when you bring it up through that large a sound system you really notice the distortion, the crackle, the tape noise.

EB: It's not that that noise is often unbearable. You see Andy is doing a number of things: he's acting, singing and Robert's doing the same. All I am doing is playing the drums, right? So to me it's just my ears, I watch my cues of course but their acting with the video.

RS: (In a takeoff voice). He's just the drummer!

AP: My guitar playing deals with an irrational alter ego thing. All these rationalisations and avoiding the issues in these 'visits'. I'll give a blitz or a nod, a twirl of the knob, a nod of the head. I write songs on that basis largely any-ways. If you actually want to do something you don't talk. Without range, which I didn't have the other night, the dichotomy between the density and inaudibility, is lost.

CR: So how can the Government transform itself onto disc as its major known presentation is so rich visually?

EB: Very easily. When I first joined this band we weren't doing much video, like we were just playing The Horseshoe, The Bev, and The Turning Point, so it was just a trio on stage with no video. Occasionally we would do the Eye. We cut it in a bar very easily.

AP: It depends what you call a bar. There's a difference between The Beverley and The Yonge Station. I wouldn't want to be caught in the latter circuit.

CR: What I meant is that your visual presentation is very sophisticated and quite close to what other artists are doing just with video, particularly Susan Britton, Randy and Berneche. It's not a re-make of the Velvet Underground with Andy Warhol's 8mm films and slide shows.

EB: We're sophisticated visually but we are also more sophisticated musically than most New Wave or Punk Bands in this city.

CR: I'm not denying your music...

AP: You're wondering what the excuse is to make a record and Gee it's about time this band made one.

EB: The songs stand by themselves.

AP: I think what you're saying is...

TS: Here's the thing. If your music has essentially for the last year been generated from visual phenomena...

RS: But it hasn't though. Electric Eye is just one of the pieces.

TS: So is the video adapted to the pieces, or the pieces (songs?) come from the video. Or do they come from the live performances with the video?

RS: Electric Eye is the only think I consider is the band's piece. For the Hummers, that's our job. So we don't have to work some

shitty job to play. It takes care of it.

AP: No. It's not that simple...

RS: Besides, we like doing it.

AP: I've already made a tape called *Skillful Evasions*. I like using a pre-tape as a strategy or a stimulator, how long a scene should run before a prop, a change of mood. I like the idea of video cassettes accompanying a record. Where the video gives a fresh dimension to the song. It's stimulus.

TS: Let me rephrase it. I've seen the Government behind the Hummers, but I've never seen Electric Eye. What I'm interested in is the problems of the Government, as a group, working in the collaboration with The Hummer Sisters, is that you both have to fill time, you also have to build their excitement, right? You have to be the rock band. You have to be the key in that way. Then you have to deal with the video/live performance and their interchanging parts. What I'm saying is that when you generate your own material in terms of your writing, another performance - Electric Eye or something else, you have all this experience, you know how to build, know how to use the video, etc. How do you approach the writing, is it visual from video, from performance?

AP: I do four minutes of murk, one minute of fluid or dramatic situation which I suppose is the thing with *Electric Eye*. With characters we work it out, what kind of rhythms do they move in, when do they run out of things to say and become irrational, what kind of break.

RS: I work in an opposite way, tend to have ideas and look for where to use them.

AP: I tend to write music frequently first and say what does this mean? What do I see here? before I write words. Sometimes it's a cut-up, you have a background and construct a minor event.

CR: Who wrote the songs for Electric Eye?

AP: *Gunshot Wound* is a collaboration between Robert and the original drummer, Pat Desbiens. It's myself and Michael Hollingsworth. The Toronto songs: *I Used To Hang Around The Downtown*, that's Michael Hollingsworth.

EB: Andy has written 80% of the music and lyrics.

CR: I've heard different music and songs for Electric Eye during its various performances.

EB: We have changed some of the incidental music. Like one song, *I'm Somebody*, we have changed the music completely. Most of the songs that we do in a band set come from the various video shows that have happened. So when we played at CBGB's in New York we played the video songs without video and they went well, we were asked back so...

AP: I haven't played with many other bands.

RS: What about the Poles?

AP: I did play with the Poleites for two weeks. They could have used some video as a guide. They could have used taking their dynamics visual rather than verbal. I could say that about the Hummers too. Music is visual rather than verbal.

TS: Performance contains rhythm, do you ever look into a television and drum?

EB: At certain points in *Electric Eye* I do.

TS: As I see you talking I see that video is one component, it's not the thing that The Government comes out of. Everything is not generated from a videotape.

AP: Although I do want to do a lot more of that, more tapes. I think the most disciplined guitar I've ever played was for Episode 6 of *As the World Burns*. It was supposed to be an air conditioner, the discipline is suspending all artistic splendour.

RS: The Hummers are always saying, I want you to sound like a blender. What did they want you to sound like, a serilizer in a hospital?

EB: They wanted me to sound like 500 birds flying in the air.

AP: That's great. Those are the kind of dictums I like. I write like this guitar should sound like you're robbing a parking meter, this is what happens here. The issue that arises is that is this a prime focus or is this incidental?

TS: When you get someone who asks for birds taking off that demands a certain literal musical interpretation by the band. Do you feel that during the course of these performances that you've manipulated the people who've been directing you by changing.

EB: Yes. That happened in the play we've been doing *Strawberry Fields* (Michael Hollingsworth). We had so much freedom to add special effects to what the three actors were doing. We had an outline when we started but by the end we could almost kick off the actors into doing other things, encourage the actors.

RS: Especially in timing, you can determine how long their pause is going to be.

AP: There's a fine line between shoving them into a corner and encouraging them, that's the fine line, a sensitivity you need. It's an audio background - the air conditioner, the bathtub, MacDonald's counter. What I'd like to get more into, almost in a sense of Eno whatever, he uses his parables-Peter Schmidt-oblique strategies. I like to use dramatic situations like that in my writing and my playing where the pre-recorded video is like an audio reference, and an alter ego to what I'm doing myself live.

CR: Are you scoring the new Susan Britton tape by yourself or with The Government?

AP: She just wants me to do a few mutations in it.

TS: A few mutations, what does that mean?

AP: She wants some mutated Motown things, so maybe it'll be *I Heard It Thru The Grapevine* a la Kraftwerk. You saw *Interference*. I told her, look Susan, this is three hours work. An hour to learn the lines, an hour to figure out how to get a hard-on whilst reciting that crap, an hour for the take. She said, "You idiot, we'll fake it". The lines were on the wall. That Marxist dialectic is just a bunch of words, I wanted more than words. Those words were close to Newspeak, which is interesting because Michael Hollingsworth and I are working on *Modern Living*: 1984, which we'll do in the new year.

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"The once naive children of the nineteen-sixties, those trained and retrained in the wild fields of their own humiliating exploitation..."

The New Triumvirate Tom Sherman

Surely, we are living in an era when the ability to be everywhere at the same time is, as it always has been, an ability greatly increasing the possibilities one has of attaining respect, wealth and power. Recently, in the late nineteen-seventies, there seems to be a weak, though dangerously resonant signal of dissent gaining power in the popular press. This signal conveys the awakening of the mass audience from the indisputably drowsy domain of the consumer identity. It is an awareness by survivors for survivors. It is simply the thought, 'I think, they control my mind.'

"Do you read me?"

In a state of healthy paranoia, this signal of dissent has found its way into print, for the older, more experienced, more practical, print-biased members of the society we live in. Those no longer *where it is at*, first hand... so to speak, out-loud. We who take our visuals for granted, we see the photograph feeding the printed text. The commonplace abstraction of the written language is still holding firm for so many of us. Do you read me? Okay, let me continue to focus on this curious spot of noise, this glowing signal of dissent, most clearly manifesting its presence in the great proliferation of electronic multiples, the recordings that feedback into the resurgence of an undeniably *human* counterculture, artificially fabricated or not, the likes of which were 'not exactly' experienced in the late nineteen-sixties. By 'not exactly' like the nineteen-sixties, I mean the media *was* manipulated in the nineteen-sixties, but remember, the stock material of today's entertainment industry was *then* the source of the news and *now* those 'real-life' street performers of yesterday are the invisible controllers behind today's scene. Today's manipulators have learned the ropes the

hard way, as have all the best manipulators of the near past, and I would hold with that logic as far back as I can imagine drawing conclusions. Before they were able to switch roles, these new 'top dogs' had to become aware of their submissive positions through methodical techniques of notation and the painful mental recreation of their own personal experiences of being used, badly, over and over again. And subsequently, they have spent years 'entertaining' themselves in depressions of gloomy analytical

"... having been given the network by the sheer weight of their ideologically cohesive mass."

thought. Those now emerging from this dark period of thinking find their deep reconstruction of events, however fictionalized by the distorting inadequacies of their mind's bioelectrical process of recollection, they find these stories, true or false, lead them back to the front lines. Behaving as humans will, they have become the manipulators in turn, having been given the network by the sheer weight of their ideologically cohesive mass. The new counterculture is the general dissent of the youth of the nineteen-seventies, engineered into cultural form by the present ruling class of manipulators, the once naive children of the nineteen-sixties, those trained and retrained in the wild fields of their own humiliating exploitation. Those attractive ex-revolutionaries remain idealistic, though disillusioned, having been out of their minds for nearly a decade, having been brought down to earth by their degenerating bodies, they are now ready to assume the positions of control. It is important, now that some of us actually have some control, that we take on the responsibility of moving information to the best of our abilities, thereby losing our self-consciousness in the consuming difficulties of our work, in order to catch sight of one of the highest of human goals, total communication through the

principle of equivalent enlightenment.¹

"The principle of equivalent enlightenment should not be confused with the dissemination of a signal of perfect knowledge."

In order to reach a state of equivalent enlightenment, it is necessary to eliminate *all* ignorance through the unrestricted sharing of information. This unimpeded flow of information is principled historically as the basis of democratic theory. Unfortunately, it is the forgotten ethical code of the mass communications sect. The principle of equivalent enlightenment should not be confused with the dissemination of a signal of perfect knowledge. I am not suggesting that one ideology be transmitted to a mass audience, but that the transmitter be governed by an ideology permitting all information to reach the air. The principle of equivalent enlightenment is based on the belief that there is an equivalence of information possible between the expert, the leader and the layman. And that such an equivalence of information creates an environment where the formation of rational public opinion is possible. As in a healthy society, the rank and file shall provide the experts, who become the leaders, who in turn define the reality of the mass, until the mass reality defines them and they return to the relative anonymity of the rank and file in order to permit the entrance of the unexposed young or old, now that they, in turn, are in demand for their expertise. In Canada, for example, to say nothing of Russia, the radio and television is for all intents and purposes, owned, controlled and operated by government.⁴ Does government presently adhere to the principle of equivalent enlightenment? If it does not, what are the values shaped and distributed by the institutions of the government in power? Is there a legitimate need for intelligent criticism of the policies of those in rigid control? Must we become government in order to lead? Must we disappear to adhere to our principles?

If I may take a step or two backwards, I would like to continue my thought on the nineteen-sixties-based hidden

manipulators and the game they are playing with the entertainment industry at this late date. The power of radio and television can be compared only with the power of the atomic bomb.³ And all you can say is the media have taken on the task of rendering mass publics conformative to the social and economic status quo? What about the dangerous force of reaction you will surely set into motion if you manipulate but miss control? What about the possibility that a continued assault of these professionally-honed packages of dissent may induce the unconditional surrender of the critical faculties of the wrong aspect of the public at large and bang! , we have backfire misdirecting the participants into a massive psychotic state of unthinking conformism. The love child disco dances the police socialists into shape for some skull smashing. This time around, the new manipulators watch while the members of their audience take the rap for them. This is the way they plan to expose the fascists for who they really are, and then they will know with certainty, who they can't afford to say no to.

"... public expectations have been defined by the intelligence jointly compiled by the RCMP, the artists and the broadcasters..."

With the media so obviously in the back pocket of government, here is a question the RCMP, the artists, and the broadcasters all might ask themselves. Who says what, on which channel to whom, with what effect?² Is not the RCMP hired to perform surveillance on the political environment of the state as a whole for the information of government? Does not the artist correlate the internal response of the state as a whole and then publicly exhibit this response for the information of government? Will not the broadcaster, in his slightly different, more lucrative informant's role, make a fast buck transmitting the social inheritance of the nation through the electromagnetic translation of certain patterns of response from the middle young to the young and on down to the younger, within the parameters of government censorship? The show *must* go on, even

though the schools have become the street! Notice the influential role the pattern of the people's expectations have in the decision making process of government. These public expectations have been defined by the intelligence jointly compiled by the RCMP, the artists and the broadcasters, strange bedfellows flirting with an exchange of information outside the national broadcast studio, as they pool their resources to place their bets on the *soon-to-be-absolutely-predictable behaviour* of the unknown talent. Meanwhile, this trio of informants all have an excellent chance of making the big score on remarkably tiny initial investments, if they can begin to communicate directly, out of range of government ears. Of course, they may wish to continue a limited exchange of their advice and critical faculties for cash, as they need money to survive. In fact, even though they take work from the same government, they have all made sure their self-negotiated percentages are correctly spelled

out in the small print of their completely separate contracts. Their paper is a different colour. Their money is the same. ■

¹ Lasswell, Harold D., "The Structure and Function of Communication in Society," originally published in *The Communication of Ideas*, The Institute for Religious and Social Studies, New York, New York, 1948.

² Ibid., Lasswell does not lay these ideas out in one sentence, as I have done, but his descriptive outline of media analysis (control, content, media, audience, and effect analysis) is a classic exercise in post World War II, pre-cybernetic communications research.

³ Lazarsfeld, Paul F. and Robert K. Merton, "Mass Communication, Popular Taste and Organized Social Action", also originally published in *The Communication of Ideas*, 1948.

⁴ Ibid., Lazarsfeld and Merton were discussing the media of England, *not* Canada, but for the sake of my figurative argument, I have taken the liberty of substituting Canada for England, thereby calling into question the accessibility of the Canadian Media State.

Literature

First Experiments in Writing and Reading Video

bone, stone, clay, papyrus, parchment, paper, tape, disc...

Scott Didlake

Considerations: When I was growing up, I used to do all my reading sitting in front of the television; in this way, I could alternate between mediums and not be confined to one at a time. Being left handed, I hated handwriting — which amounted to chiseling rather than stroking. Typing was preferable; it was an ambidextrous approach. Truman Capote, a fan of handcrafted script, once said that Jack Kerouac's prose wasn't written but was typewritten. Mark Twain was the first writer to use a typewriter for literature instead of business. Marshal McLuhan said that composing on a typewriter was like flying a kite. Robert Mueller described, in 1967, almost exactly what we came to do with the videowriter.

Rationale: In the fall of '77 I first got my fingers onto the seven thousand dollar videowriting machine which typed electronic lan-

guage onto videotape or, with the flipping of the proper switch, onto the screens of 200,000 television receivers. Here, it seemed, was the final solution to all the problems



Selected Reading, a tape by Ian Murray, associated with trying to make pictorial video with less than the logistical capability of network television: video could be symbolic rather than representational. There would be no more problems of definition, color, time base error, or

whatever. Expensive, temperamental pictorial video technology would not be necessary. And if video was to be written, there could also be an escape from the high fevers of image influenza and — to bend one of Susan Sontag's comments on photos — the contradictions inherent in the shady commerce between art and reality and commerce. Too much TV with too many pictures was making the populace illiterate, anyway. The videowriter seemed to be an electronic press capable of publishing, very efficiently compared to any other method, all the information that's fit to image.

Although it was preferable to compose directly on the videowriter, it wasn't essential. Writing could first be worked out on paper and composed as a kind of literary score, with the videowriter being used only at the final moment of playing the score onto tape.

Machines: I like to call these electronic writing machines videowriters, but they usually go by the names of alphanumeric generators, character generators, and broadcast titlers. You can find them in most broadcast and cable television stations. They can cost as little as about \$1,000 or as much as over \$50,000. A machine of about \$7,000 will do for the techniques of structuring language described here.



Evidence, a tape by Alan Sondheim.

True videowriters are a different kind of machine than the keyboard operated CRT terminals found attached to computers. Videowriters write on videotape, and many of the functions of the machine are similar to the methods of working with pictorial imagery and sound on videotape. CRT keyboards are usually not capable of being interfaced with standard video equipment and tend to be fluent in languages other than human.

As simply a typing device, the videowriter is a superior invention. Manipulations of language imagery with the machine are instant and effortless compared to the tedious mechanical operations necessary when working with ink on paper. You can write, erase, edit, and rearrange writing faster than you can usually think of what it is you are going to communicate. This is why modern typesetting uses video keyboards to set what is then produced as print. But the videowriter images on tape — and in that are to be found peculiar capabilities for structuring language unlike any other aural or visual method.

During this time the potatoes were active. Their growth rate was phenomenal. She would like to measure their rate but is unable to set up her apparatus. Long vines curl around the kitchen windows and across the cupboard doors. The footprints of North American wildlife are to be seen on her freshly waxed kitchen floor. She has to pull the vines off the dish cupboard door to reach the bowl for her vegetables.

The Central Character, a film by Patricia Gruben.

Photoelectric Writing: There are two kinds of language imagery in video. Written language was of course used extensively in motion pictures up until the introduction of sound and is still used by less conventional filmmakers. But writing in motion pictures is always only a photographic representation of imagery already existing in another static medium; film is just used as a method of transfer and animation. So writing in film is almost always limited to being an inferior reproduction of forms of writing found in print — with the most common techniques being a sequential display of stationary, minimal "pages" of writing or a scroll-like vertical roll up of successive lines. Unless exceedingly complex methods of mechanically animating language imagery are undertaken, it is impossible to execute in film many techniques which are instantly available with the videowriter. For, in the same sense that print does, the videowriter both creates and displays writing imagery in one medium. Even more directly than most print techniques, which require a succession of independent stages of refinement of the language imagery, videowriting makes use of the same visual context for composition, re-working, and final presenta-

tion.

In searching for examples of how videowriters have been used so far, I found it curious that each example of videowriting I was able to observe used the techniques of writing manipulation common to motion picture film. This was true of all instances from the great quantities of language displayed in cable "print-out" of news, to minimal broadcast titles and credits, to the tapes of video artists. Even though the writing may have been written with video, the structuring of language was still as though it were a photographic representation of print on stationary paper or a scroll in motion.

Videowriting Techniques: Language written with video does not at all have to be confined to being a transposition into electronic display of the language structures of print-writing. Videowriting is as pure a function of the video medium and as subject to many of the same considerations as is pictorial video; it is written with and as video, not "on" video. This provides writing techniques which are unlike any other method of structuring language.

THE MESSAGE SOURCE IS THE COMMERCIAL TELEVISION BROADCAST. THE MESSAGE IS LIMITED TO DISPLAY ON THE FLAT SURFACE OF THE VIDEO SCREEN. AN ANALOG IS FORMED BETWEEN PROCESSING THE VIDEO MESSAGE AND THE ACT OF PAINTING. THIS PROCESSING SYSTEM PROVIDES PERSONAL CHOICE OF HOW THE MESSAGE SOURCE IS VIEWED IN THE SAME WAY THE PAINTER CHOOSES TO VIEW THE

Theoretical Television, a tape by Tom Sherman.

In printwriting, language is expressed in static space with the creation of an animated flow of information and experience of time in perception being formed by the reader in the act of scanning; grammar and the spatial arrangement of words act as a time symbology. Video-writing can of course be used to replicate this kind of structure, and "pages" can be composed to be sequenced one after the other as they are recorded on tape. In this case, it is the writer of video who is "turning the pages," and not the reader. This is the most basic approach to dealing with the fact that language written with video is composed in time as well as space. Linear print-like structures of language can also be animat-

Centerfold, December 1978

You are the product of t.v.

Television Delivers People, a tape by Richard Serra.

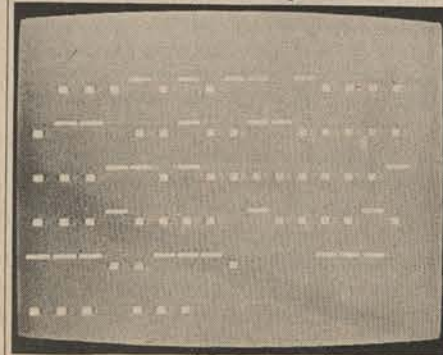
ed to move in horizontal or vertical patterns. But a more radical approach to composing language with video involves a realization that print-like linearity can be by-passed entirely — for the capacity to write video in time is a total function which applies to each element of the symbology independently and offers a completely elastic method of forming language patterns in time and space.

Videowriting can be patterned into temporarily evolving gestalts where decisions of rhythm and varying spatial relationships in the constantly changing structure of the symbology contribute as much to intent as does the selection of symbology. As well as being capable of linear print expression techniques, videowriting can be a holistic method of expressing language which acts primarily in a temporal rather than spatial framework and is completely elastic. This makes possible structures of language unlike those found in either print or speech but which combine characteristics of both these mediums. Such structures bear a similarity to the temporally dynamic, multi-layered forms of rhythm, harmony, and counterpoint of the notation system which has made possible polyphonic western music — except that with videowriting we are dealing with a symbolic system where meaning is achieved in the act of reading alone without the need to translate symbology into physical response.

Reading Television: Reading videowriting is of course an experience not much like reading print. A reorientation of expectations concerning time and, if the writing is patterned in gestalts, space is necessary. Though people have come to accept impositions of time in the perception of pictorial imagery and audio in film and tape, the tradition of freedom of time in print reading is firmly em-

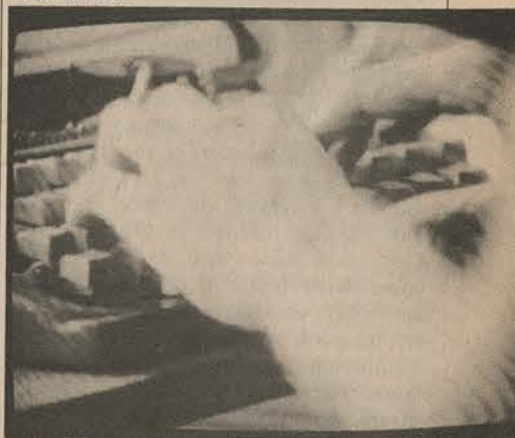
bedded in peoples' perception of words as a peculiar form of imagery. On first reading video, people can react with hostility to having time dictated through written language. It becomes as necessary, when reading video, to accept the writer's structuring of time as it is, when reading print, to accept the spatial arrangements of symbology. In videowriting the legitimate concern should be the articulation of time within the total language cluster; in itself, it is not an error to write with time.

If videowriting patterned in gestalts is being read, a reorientation of spatial perception of writing is also needed. Reading print requires a most unusual contortion of visual perception, tunnel vision. The eyes must isolate specific clusters of symbology from the surrounding mass and sequence from one to another in linear progression. This technique is not used at all in watching pictorial video — or hardly any other form of imagery, for that matter. And it seems that the monitor screen is more suitable to language patterns which are to be read through the same visual approach as is pictorial video — because sequencing is going to be primarily temporal rather than spatial. This is why most writing written as print and then transferred to video isn't very satisfying to read. Holistically structured writing seems to me a much more rewarding method of forming symbolic language for video, but reading this kind of writing requires an open reception of all elements on the screen simultaneously — an approach just the opposite of tunnel vision. It is necessary to read, as an evolving whole, clusters of symbology whose meaning is always being formed and re-formed through continuously transforming spatial and temporal structures. Reading, or for that matter writing, such structures may not come readily to print-conditioned perceptions, and may not exhibit



Romeo and Juliet, a tape by Opal Nations.

the linear-logical characteristics of traditional language patterns. But similar reading techniques are applied to musical notation, especially where more than one staff is being read simultaneously; and it is this holistic method of dealing with symbolic language in space and time which is the most unique and fascinating aspect of writing with video in an attempt to create an electronic form of literature.

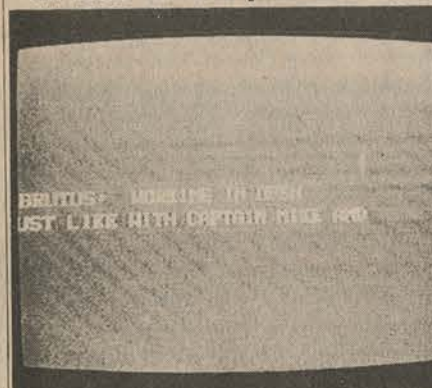


The Biography of Tom Sherman, a tape by Lisa Steele.

Tapes: I was first able to work with a videowriter at Keeble Cable in Toronto. We were using the machine there for titles and credits in a series of community television tapes for an Ontario Housing Project. The people at Keeble were generous enough to let me satisfy my curiosity and practice with the videowriter for some time. At first, I had thought to use it in combination with pictorial imagery in a manner which would be an expansion of the techniques of using written language in filmmaking. But after I realized the machine's capability for structuring language in the most peculiar patterns, I temporarily dropped my interest in using the videowriter for anything but pure language formations. Combining videowriting with pictorial imagery and audio would have to come after the writing possibilities alone were understood. And it was soon obvious that videowriting pieces could not be worked out on paper without a very experienced feel for what the machine could do.

At Keeble, I was able to practice writing with the machine until I learned to score video writing pieces on paper. With this newly acquired skill, I began work at Rogers Cable, the system near my home. Where these cable stations were generous with their time, I must thank the On-

tario Arts Council for their financial support of these video writing projects. At Rogers, I had support from programmer Valerie Marlatt, who provided fine working conditions and acted as editor in both the video and literary senses. Working at Rogers, we produced two half hour video-writing "shows" ("shortshows?") which consisted entirely of electronic writing without either pictorial imagery or audio. The first was called *Reading Television*, and was written by Opal Nations, Tom Sherman and myself. The show opened with my segment, *I, a TV*. In this, I developed an idea of Tom's which he had had once while working for a broadcast station but had not been allowed to use. I played, in words only of course, the role of a disembodied talk show host with a personality somewhere between Johnny Carson and an authoritarian computer. At the end of my Carson-like opening monologue, I introduced Opal Nations, our first "guest". Opal then presented a most unusual treatment of the balcony scene from *Romeo and Juliet*. Though the piece is visually interesting because of its unusual non-writing imagery, its cleverness is in the way the balcony speech is delivered visually in Morse code. It did seem to me a perfect concept/



Captain Mike and the *Television Sensibility*, a tape by Scott Didlake.

comment on the relationship of literature to electronic information and to what we were doing with the videowriter. Tom Sherman followed, as the second "guest", with his piece, *Individual Times*. To hazard an interpretive comment on this writing, I would say that for me the piece deals with the homogenization of individuality in the society through the influence of image/audio reproduction technologies. The unusual prose style of the writing is potentiated by the form in which it is presented as videowriting, and the

resulting impact on the perception of the reader is intense. All three of the pieces of writing in *Reading Television* are quite different in intent, composition, and visual structure, and demonstrate some of the elastic possibilities of the medium.

I produced another tape *Essays on Television*, which I wrote alone. This tape begins with *Democratic TV*, a kind of comment on the notion of decentralization of video production into the community — which is a video genre I have worked a great deal in and am now highly sceptical of. The "narrator" of this piece is the type of person who calls radio phone-in shows, and the narrative describes what would happen if — and there is absolutely no technical reason why this could not be done — television stations simply took whatever anyone sent them on paper, wrote it in video, and transmitted it. Next there is *TV Time*, or, *I Used To Read Horizontally*, a piece which deals with some of the ideas of McLuhan about television and literacy. In structuring the writing for this piece, I was seeking a video-writing style which would incorporate the ideas being presented through language into the way the language was presented and would approximate the effect of broadcast pictorial television on perception. The last two pieces on the tape, *Construction of the Set*, and *Captain Mike and the Television Sensibility*, are investigations into the possibility of using video to write in semi-linear gestalts. Each of these make use of narratives of more than one thing at a time which are meant to be read holistically and integrated into a total narrative. The pieces make use of layerings of language which carry narratives through spatial succession, sequencing in time, and graphic mutation; through integrated relationships in space and time, the layered narratives form the composite narrative. These last two pieces are meant to be read as gestalts, with the same approach to visual scanning as is used when watching pictorial video. *Construction of the Set* describes a story of television fabrication of things inside and outside the medium. *Captain Mike and the Television Sensibility* is a somewhat true depiction of my relationship with Captain Mike, Popeye, Wimpy, Olive Oyl, and Bluto of cartoon fame.

All of the writing in *Essays on Television* deals with the fruits of

television and is a shade polemical; that is why I have called the pieces essays. But they are not traditional essays, really; they are electronic fictions, videowriting shortstories. They are my first experiments in reading and writing video. ■

FOOTNOTE

Among films and tapes which either contain or deal with writing and which were in a sense my "sources" in this project: the films of Godard: *The Central Character*, a film by Patricia Gruben; *The Biography of Tom Sherman*, a tape by Lisa Steele, *Theoretical Television*, a tape by Tom Sherman; *Evidence*, a tape by Alan Sondheim; *Television Delivers People*, a tape by Richard Serra; *The Typist*, a tape by Rodney Werden; *Selected Reading*, a tape by Ian Murray; and there is my own *Rush Hour on Easy Street*, a film.

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Back Up, Kate Craig and Margaret Dragu

Video in Vancouver: PUMPS on Cable 10

Russell Keziere

There are very few outlets for contemporary artists' video in Vancouver. Although it may appear that with the Western Front, Pumps, Video Inn and the Videospace of the Vancouver Art Gallery, there are sufficient arenas, it must be remembered that the first two have found it necessary to emphasize production and the third must maintain its archival resources. The necessary outlet at this point in the maturation of video in general, and its level of development in Vancouver, is public exposure. The prima facie response of a relatively untutored viewing audience (tutoring being more of a liability than an asset) will prove to be the necessary stimulus for a continuously developing media.

One of the most positive steps in video exposure of this sort in Vancouver was the premiere of a new half-hour video anthology of recent productions in Vancouver, broadcast on Cable 10 on Tuesday, November 14th. Produced by Pumps and edited by Ken Kuramoto and Mike Macdonald, this anthology is to be a continuing series, featuring production by local and visiting artists.

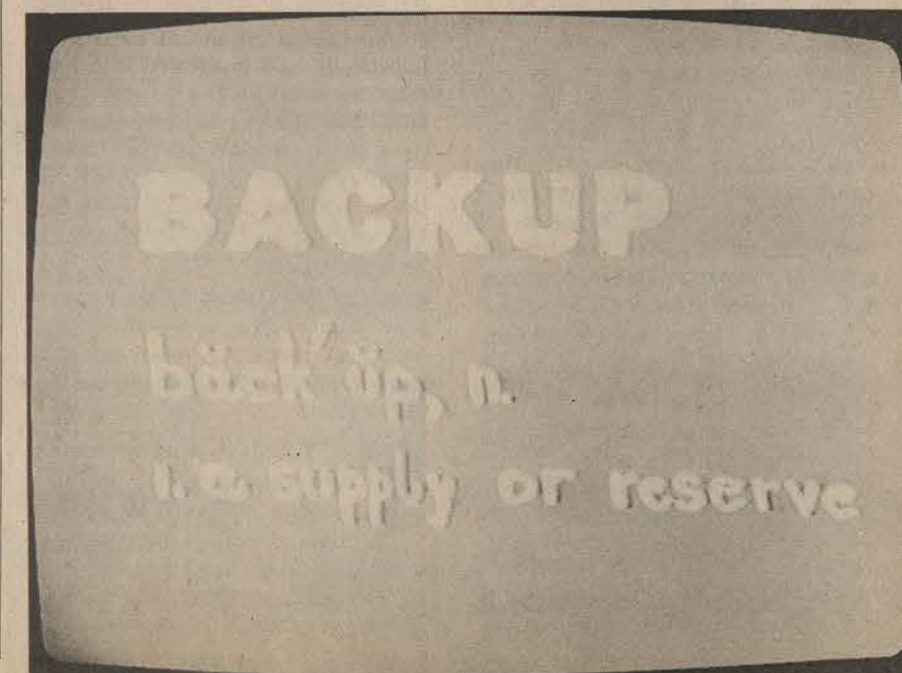
One of the inherent dangers in video is the inadvertent destruction of its contextual basis; a basis which

is behavioural and political rather than, as with traditional art forms, material and historical. The video artist must necessarily "act out" against and within a media consciousness which is as prevalent and ensconced as any carefully nurtured cultural milieu. For that reason alone the exhibition of contemporary video art on television has a great many contingent problems, but an equal amount of potential for growth. The continuous and everpresent

Video

model of broadcast television might be short circuited and grounded in an interpersonal atmosphere and architectural context (artists in private spaces or an ideological sanctuary) but when video art is broadcast at prime time and in direct juxtaposition with 13 licensed and 7 mid-band channels, then the context is altered, if not reversed. The issues and concerns of video art, because they are so integrally imbedded in context, become refocussed and challenged; the danger is not one of rejection by an audience (that response in itself might prove positive) but of an unconscious redefinition of artistic intention.

The first installment of the Pumps video show demonstrates these issues clearly. The presence of an editing profile is, at first glance, minimal. The policy is to let the tapes speak for themselves; there are no commentaries, apologies, definitions or intellectual discussions between or after the tapes. Necessary information is contained in the artists' tapes; what they have not chosen to include is omitted. The tapes are shown in direct succession with a small tag at the end promoting a punk/art event at the Viking Hall; this is the only section which is directed toward the concept of broadcast time. It is in fact a direct acknowledgement of, or concession



to, broadcast reality. Pete Lipski's tape of DOA (Dead on Arrival, headed by Joey Shithead) is overlaid with the editorial presence lending the entire half-hour a comprehensible persona. The nature of this important segment, which is also a banal parody of a K-Tel ad, is clearly defined by its once only impact. It could not be used after the event occurs. This is a major concession to the temporal ambience of broadcast television.

This first half hour included tapes by Fabio Mauri, Sanja Ivekovic, Kate Craig and Margaret Dragu, Liza Bear and Pete Lipskis. The selection was excellent. Fabio Mauri, Sanja Ivekovic and Liza Bear are from Rome, Yugoslavia and New York respectively. Their visits to Vancouver are documented by tapes produced while in residence; and broadcasting them to a Vancouver public audience is an appropriate and respectful way of acknowledging their presence. The Mauri tape is a tight and demonstratively playful statement of the artist's philosophy (gravity and vegetables become equivalents) which is similar in its combination of seriousness and accessibility to the tapes of Robert Filliou. (The Vancouver video community has a penchant for introducing visiting artists, such as Filliou, Nitsch, and Mauri, to video potentials; this work will ultimately prove of international significance.) Sanja Ivekovic is a Yugoslav video artist who, together with Dalibor Martinis, visited Vancouver on invitation by Video Inn. They both produced tapes in Vancouver, involving a fundamental communication by working with Vancouver people on production; this is a much more estimable means of conveying information than merely exhibiting works produced elsewhere. Ivekovic's tape showed the artist pacing away from and toward the camera announcing "I want you to understand me" in English when in front of the camera and the Yugoslav equivalent when away from it. It was a brief, strident statement of what that artist must have felt during her visit. It was in many ways similar to the directness and frontal use of language by Vito Acconci.

In one of the other screenings,

however, the basic problem of the collusion of video art and broadcast television was evident. Kate Craig and Margaret Dragu's *Back Up* is over three-quarters of an hour long; it consists of several layers of narrative working against and within one another. The whole tape is broken down into segments (Get Up, etc) and is loosely aligned. There are dramatic scenes and, at one level, something of a plot: incidents in a girls' school (The Western Front) culminating in a murder by a jealous student and a graduation ceremony dinner. There are also flat, out of sync discussions about the "urban wilderness" and visual essays of Dragu and Craig in everyday situations such as playing pool, vacuuming, ironing, walking, etc. The tension between a documentary reality and a dramatic reality is apparent.

In the Pumps production for Cable 10, however, the tape was reduced to about 8 minutes, using only a few of the segments. This is an obvious concession to the necessity of a broadcast package; it is not obviated by permission from the artists since it calls into question the entire structure of the tape. If it were sufficient to see only one fifth of a work, then the *raison d'être* of the remaining four-fifths is obviously called into question. As it stood, it worked quite well with the other tapes. But it hits a matter of principle squarely in the face. Is the persona of the producer and editor to control the final mode of broadcasting video art on television? Doubtless some arrangement will have to be worked out; in this instance there is no question but that the artists had maximum input into the manner in which they were brought together. These are, however, the very issues which we must now face if the acceptance of a broadcast mode for video art is to prove a positive factor in its maturation.

The Pumps produced television show is welcomed. It gives a chance for current production to reach a larger and critically necessary audience, provides an incentive for production and offers a challenging context for emerg-

ing ideas. It is hoped that the experiment will be followed through with as much critical circumspection as possible. ■

Television

TV Guy

Steven Davey

The enclosed report is an accounting of a selected monitoring of a Saturday's scheduling. The annotated programming represents an afternoon's viewing and response.

Channel 29, 3:00 p.m.: *Jukebox*, starring Twiggy. A half hour syndicated British production along the lines of *Midnight Special*, *Jukebox* is a music show with fashion-model-turned-country-and-western-singer Leslie Hornsby (that's Twiggy). *Jukebox* features lotsa top-of-the-popsters: Gary Glitter, New Seekers, Pilot. Balloons and dry ice fall from the studio ceiling. Everyone lip synchs in fine TV tradition. There's even a scream track! Twiggy co-hosts with a sheep dog. The show is sponsored by the U.S. Army and uses lifestyle ads: Drive tanks, go to discos in third world locales, shoot guns. Great stuff. (Commercial: video games by Coleco called Quiz Whiz. "Kids, outsmart your parents. Over ten thousand permutations.") Next, Alex Harvey Band singing *Runaway*. Lead guitarist in mime make-up, dance steps. Barry Ryan sings a tribute to Judy Garland accompanied by dry ice. "Why was the wizard so uncool?", Barry ponders. (Commercial: "Hi, I'm Lester Wilson and I taught John Travolta how to dance." Disco dance, dance, dance, foot diagrams.) Gary Glitter pops out of a cardboard spaceship singing *I Belong To You*. The Glitterband bump into each other. Bass player wears a sombrero. Promotional consideration from Shakey's pizza. (Commercial: "Hi, I wrote many hit songs! Now you can too, in 7 days with my learn-to-play-the-piano course. Maybe you remember my big novelty hit of 1961?" Bozo plays *Itsy Bitsy Teenie Weenie Yellow Polka Dot Bikini*. "All you need are these three easy chords and you can be writing hits today.")

Channel 22, 3:30 p.m.: *Circle Square*. This is a kid's version of *100 Huntley Street*, a Toronto evangelical program. A cast of interracial robots lip synch to disco hymns. Host of the show is a ventriloquist's dummy with an afro named Leroy. Cartoon parables double-talk dogma. . . . Scary. Switch over to channel 2 for a *Gilligan's Island* rerun. A satellite headed for Mars lands . . . well, that's why they call them sit coms 'cause they only have one situation. Tina Louise is ultra-sexy, but the rest of the cast should have been eaten by cannibals, Japs, Nazis or whoever Vito Scotti is playing this episode. Good theme song, though.

Checking the Guide to see what we missed this morning: *Hilarious House of Frightenstein*, stars Billy Van and was produced in Toronto; this hour-long ghoularama is quite funny, aimed way over the heads of the kids. Only problem is: it's scheduled at 6:00 a.m. A good one to watch if you're still up from the night before. At 8:00 we have a show from Buffalo called *Carrascollendas* which stars a Puerto Rican cockroach. 8:30 *Willie and Floyd*. W and F run a delapidated vaudeville theatre where only the cameraman laughs at their jokes. Good puns. Godzilla has his own Saturday morning series on NBC at 9:00. A crummy Canadian cartoon *Rocket Robin Hood* runs non-stop on a variety of channels. At 12:30 we have a toss-up between the *Bay City Rollers* new show, the sultry Jan Tennant hosting *Reach For The Top*, or Carolyn Jones and *The Addams Family*. I go for Gomez (now married to Patty Duke). At

1:00 channel 29 has a Clayton Moore/Jay Silverheels movie (that's the Lone Ranger and Tonto to you) and channel 79 is showing old *Laurel and Hardy* silents with piano tinklings by Horace Lapp.

Channel 22, 4:00 p.m.: *Little Rascals*. Spanky and Our Gang. These are the old serials that perennially run and run. Alfalfa died in a dope bust and Darla is Nanette Fabray (aunt of Donna Reed and *Johnny Angel's* Shelley Fabares). Sometimes Spanky is three years old and he gradually ages over the span of the Forties. Alfalfa sings and a bird flies out of his mouth. Alternate channel watch: the CBC's *Celebrity Tennis* (Paul Soles vs. Eddie Shack) and the tedious *Star Trek*. Can't stand William Shatner; the plots to this sci-fi saga are identical: they always seem to find a planet that's just like earth only in the 17th century.

Channel 29, 4:30 p.m.: *Leave It To Beaver*. Ward and June, the fabulous Tony Dow as Wally, Eddie Haskell, Gilbert, and of course Jerry Mathers as the Beaver. (Jerry didn't die in Vietnam and he's not Alice Cooper either). The archetypal American family (*Ozzie and Harriet* came close), Ward and June are always muddling something. In today's episode the Beav has been invited to a party by a girl who has a crush on him. Much to his horror, Beav finds out it is an all-girl party and Wally tells Theodore that they'll probably make him play kissing games (yeesh). Beav tries to get out of going to the party by feigning illness but Ward and June will have nothing to do with it and force Beaver to go. There's a great scene

when Ward drags Beaver out of the car to the front porch where all the little girls are waiting for Beaver's arrival. Naturally Beaver wins the door prize — a doll that cries "Mama" when he picks it up. How mortifying! Continuing along this Freudian vein, Beaver wanders into the little girl's father's den where the old man lets Beav fondle his guns. Back at the Cleaver's, Wally has told June about the all-girl party. June tells Ward, who gets all upset because he didn't understand. When Beaver comes home from the party, Ward and June apologize for forcing him to go, but Beav says he had a great time. Ward and June exchange puzzled looks. Cue the trumpets going "wha wha wha".

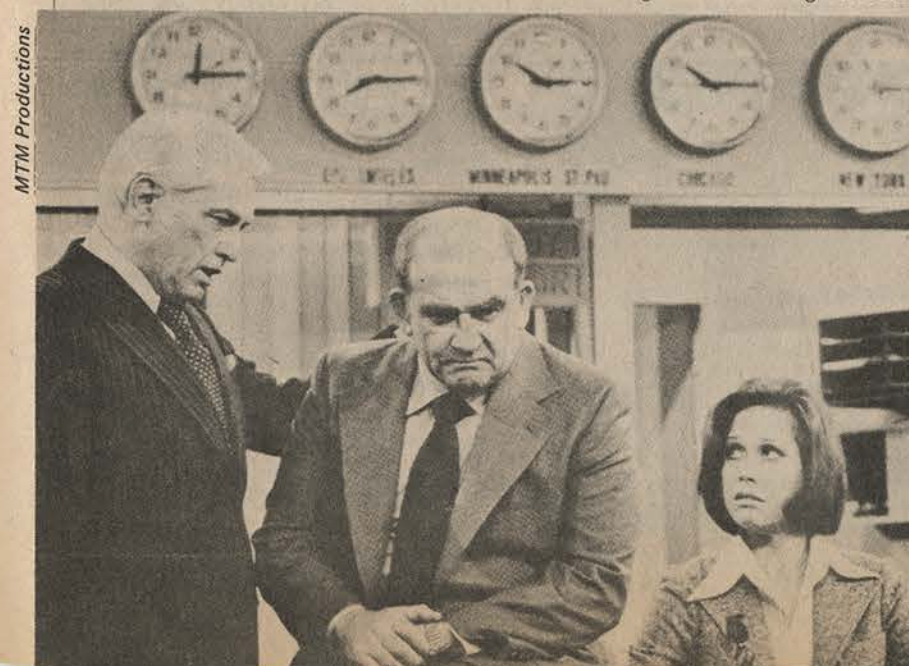
Over on channel 22 we have *Hammy Hamster*, an animal show that features heavily sedated guinea pigs.

Channel 5, 5:00 p.m.: *Bonkers*, the Hudson Brothers new show, is produced in England by Jack Burns (Burns was partners with comedian Avery Shriber). A half hour whiz bang burlesque *Laugh-In*-style music show, the Hudsons try for a Marx Brothers brand of comedy. They sing disco songs à la Bee Gees (they used to sound like the Beatles on their old series filmed at CFTO in Scarboro). Guest stars include Petula Clark, Sandy Duncan, and Karen Valentine. Fun, fast paced.

(Commercial: Elvis Presley's Christmas collection.)

Channel 5, 5:30 p.m.: *Mork and Mindy*, starring Robin Williams. Mork is from the planet Ork and has dropped into this spin-off from *Laverne and Shirley* (which itself was a spin-off of *Happy Days*). Produced by Gary Marshall (*Odd Couple* and Penny's pop), this is the hot show of the season. Robin Williams, a stand-up comic who looks like he just walked out of *Godspell*, is already a teen idol along the lines of the Fonzie (i.e. the kids all go crazy when he walks on the set): very reminiscent of *My Favourite Martian*, Williams supposedly ad libs. The situation is fairly straight forward: Ork jokes, no sex, water drinking through the fingers, don't sit on my face. First time Mork is amazing, but it fades real quick. The C.B.C. in its incalculable logic has *Mork and Mindy* scheduled at suppertime.

Channel 29, 6:00 p.m.: *I Love Lucy*. The classic sit com and the first TV show to use three cameras with a live audience,



Lucy still holds-up. Every episode is the same: Desi sings *Babaloo*, Lucy wants to be in the show but there's only parts for Fred and Ethel, Mrs. Trumble and Little Ricky. . . Suddenly, the sub-plot thickens. The later *Lucy Show* doesn't make it. Ms. Ball controlled everything then (She received Desilu in the divorce settlement) and hams wildly through not-so-funny scripts.

Channel 29, 6:30 p.m.: *Mary Tyler Moore*. I could never stomach the old *Dick Van Dyke Show*. Dick was never funny and always fell over (oops!); Rose Marie overplayed every line thrown at her; Morey Amsterdam had been selling that same shtick since the Catskills and radio; Jerry Paris (the dentist next door) directs *Happy Days*; Millie was OK; Carl Reiner: no way, Jose (besides he was the producer of the real show, as well as the star of the show within the show). Remember Mary and Dick singing *Mountain Greenery*? Chad and Jeremy as the Redcoats? Mary's own show is near classic in the *I Love Lucy* format: it's not the plot, but the characters: Mur, Mar, Lou, Ted, Rhoda, etc. Sometimes sappily sentimental, *MTM* always spotlights top writing. Mary's new show bombed. The TV audience wanted Mary Richards, not the real Mary T.M. Mary was unbearable: another show within a show. Mary explodes as the all around show biz entertainer. No guest stars and surrounded by has-beens like Dick

Shawn, it's no wonder *Mary* got cancelled after three shows. Up against the space-age *Bonanza*, *Battlestar Galactica*, *Mary* got embarrassingly axed. The new *Mary* show is the same as the old, only now the star is Mary Richards, not M.T.M.

Channel 9, 7 p.m.: *Lucy Goes to Nashville*, starring Lucille Ball. Normally, *Carter Country* (police sit-com in Plains, Ga.) is scheduled in this slot, but its been pre-empted by Lucy's special. Lucy looks like she's pickled in formaldehyde (the greatest gams in show business). She mugs along to cue cards with M-M-Mel Tillis, Lynn Anderson (singing an Eagles song), Barbara Mandrell (who sleeps single in a double bed and drinks doubles alone, apparently) and the audience of The Grand Old Opry. Lucy drags out her saxophone and attempts *Glow Worm* and she still can't sing. Stars never know when to stop. It spoils the illusion of their timeless re-runs. Where is Vivan Vance when we need her?

Stand by: the following afternoon unravelled the greatest media event since Lee Harvey gathered a load in the gut, destroyed context: the mass media suicide splattered brains on the portapak Live from Guyana holy roller coaster. Instant myth.

Business

Art Publishing: Financial Structures and Freedom

Isaac Applebaum



Lorne Fromer

An art publication contains only the work of artists that are in contact with its editors. The publication presents the work that the editors have access to at any particular time. At the same time the publication itself attracts contributors. The organic nature of art publishing must be maintained and enlarged.

In its pure state an art publication would not become a tastemaker but would chronicle the best work (activities) that it is presented with. This task requires a great many different types of publications in order to fulfill its potential. Canadian art publishing, because of its financial structure (The Canada Council) is in a good position to accomplish this.

This chronologicalizing of activities conceptually presents a problem for editors. The art publisher could be in danger of becoming an administrator, a government hack who is given money to present Canadian material to Canadians. For example, questions such as why publish foreign work in a publicly funded magazine are sometimes asked. The advantage of having government support is that the publisher is not forced into creating a purely commercial publication. In Canada it is probably suicidal to publish an original art magazine with your own money. Public money allows us to be free and not to pander to popular taste. As long as the editor has energy and commitment, and the government does not interfere, the system can continue.

One of the more obvious problems in Canadian art publishing is that it does not have an effective and diversified distribution system. There are only two companies, outside of Québec, that distribute art books/magazines on any scale; Coach House Press and Art Metropole. Both these companies are really only capable of and interested in distributing their own publications and those art books and magazines from foreign countries that they feel are worthwhile.

At the present time, Canadian art publishers are attempting to co-operate with each other in order to penetrate foreign markets. By accomplishing this, art publishing will gain credibility and circulation at home. Provincialism, vitality and a credible interface with art publishing on a world wide scale is not a problem for us. Our future, being tied to government priorities, vis-à-vis cutbacks, freezes and elections, is.

General Idea's

HIGH PROFILE

A report by Tim Guest

Oh to be the eye of the social whirl

Last Friday the 13th we all got to play Cinderella at General Idea's *High Profile*. It was, in the minds of ticket-holders, a glamorous bash, a beaux-arts ball, a tenth anniversary party for their favourite popular artists. For General Idea it was free publicity and a chance to expand their audience and their mythology.

It's difficult to say much in review about General Idea themselves, since at the actual event they kept (ironically) a low profile. Rather it was the party-goers who played the starring role, with General Idea setting the stage — elaborately. High above Toronto inside the sky-pod of the immeasurably reputable CN Tower, you knew it was really the perfect site. The highest free-standing structure in the world, home to a vast network of modern communications, it symbolizes a dream of the exotic kitsch metropolis. A profile already immortalized in a million tourist purses, it was a smart move to hold a popular occasion on its premises. By using the CN Tower not only are you going to get lots of publicity, you appropriate a piece of its mythology. Now whenever you see the CN Tower you subliminally associate it with General Idea.

Then of course there's the view, which turns a familiar skyline into a landscape; by night it's a glittering necklace (or any other tired metaphor you choose to describe the spectacle). And with the full moon beaming down on Friday the 13th, it plants an image which is macabre yet seductive.

People



Jorge Zontal

Arton's 1978 Industrial Award to General Idea (1968-1978) for achievements in measuring success.

So with the time and the place set the audience poured out of the elevators and 'the show' began. Carole Pope and Kevan Staples wooed them with a colourful cabaret act. Then the lip-synch show started with that fruit Lamonte Del Monte, and the Pineapples, followed by the desirable Anya Varda, followed by The Clichettes, who looked like poisonous desserts. Then came the fashion show, ten years of personalized outfits led by Mimi Paige in a bear costume, and although the timing was a bit rough the talented models more than made up for it.

But the real show was the audience. In a true party scene the audience is forced to transcend their role, passive becomes active, so they did, and they revelled in it. They came dressed in every kind of apparel, from the grotesque to the risqué. And there were lots of items

you knew were the products of impulse buying. "It's so fabulous. . . but I'll never get a chance to wear it." Well they got their chance and they used it. Generally they were young-ish, sort of arty, lots of familiar faces and not that many people you know. They were people who were looking to fulfill their fantasies of a glamorous party scene and most of them got what they wanted.

Naturally the entire evening was a 'rehearsal' for the party scene at the 1984 Miss General Idea Pageant. It functioned both as a good time and a demonstration/experiment in the social amenities of party life. And the results proved at least that the participants were already very well rehearsed.

Reviews

Film



photo: Parallelogramme

Some Women Filmmakers — Quelques Femmes Cinéastes

POWERHOUSE GALLERY
Oct. 10 — 14, Cinéma Parallèle
Montréal, Québec
by Nancy Nicol

It requires some leap of the imagination to step from the reality of social action groups born in the rhetoric of the "service organization" to the vision and power of a feminist perspective as a creative source. It is perhaps a particularly difficult transition for those women who have used the support group structure as a self-realisation and educative source. I feel strongly that it is no longer enough to simply rediscover what women are capable of, but that it is necessary to move through the trajectory of self-realisation to action.

This may seem an unusual way to review the women's film festival in Montréal, a review which could basically be a reporting act; but it seems to me that this festival reflects, both in the context of the represented works and in the organizational attitudes of Powerhouse, a transition in awareness or at least a potential transition in awareness vis-à-vis the women's context in the arts.

Linda Covit, the coordinator of Powerhouse, principally saw the festival as an extension to existing programming in Powerhouse which "provides a centre which reflects the trends of women artists." Women filmmakers from across the country were invited to submit films to a jury consisting of the festival organizers from Powerhouse and members of Femmedia, a group of

Montréal-based women filmmakers. 17 films of 45 submissions were selected to comprise the festival. One of the factors in limiting the festival was the inability to obtain funding, despite months of preparation, a fact which points up a contentious issue; i.e. support or recognition of women's projects in the arts. The Canada Council's reaction to Powerhouse's proposal was that the sponsoring of women's events in the arts is prejudicial to men. The absurdity of this statement is comparable with refusing to support video as being prejudicial to film or painting as being prejudicial to drawing. . . In other words, the reaction is not one of confronting and exposing prejudicial pitfalls, but rather exposes the funding bodies' attitudes vis-à-vis women in the arts as a sexual definition, rather than considering its political and/or aesthetic dimensions. To pursue this argument any further is to be self-defeating.

The problem is emblematic of Powerhouse's unique position as a self-supporting contemporary arts centre in almost all aspects of its development and growth since its conception. Linda Covit: "I think that there was a time when women had to be separated, but for me that period is past, in that what we are working for is integration." (See *Centerfold*, June 1978, page 52). What is meant by Feminism as a creative source is the genesis of the whole person, emotionally, intellectually, spiritually, as applied to the unique position of women, both from historical and psychological perspectives. Given this perspective, the question of integration or separation becomes an issue of formulating alternative actions within a politically aware climate. Frustration in the face of the establishment is not simply because it is male dominated, in fact, but because it is male dominated in principle. Structure, which includes presentation, review and public orientation, plays an important part in the art. This issue speaks to what I term as a transition in awareness leading to action, an emergence from the naiveté of support group isolation. In Canada, to term oneself as a feminist artist usually results in misinterpretation or ridicule. In the United States, at least there is the women's movement, which provides a broad based intellectual fabric.

The key issues emerging from the film conference itself, as linked with the key issues of a women's arts space or non-space, are immediately entwined with the core issues of action and structure, these issues being: a growing need for conscious and informed feminist criticism on the ideological concerns in women's film, a demystification of production and distribution procedures for the independent filmmaker, and a need for more women in all areas of professional film, including the technical. ■

Performance



photo: National Geographic

Piranha Farms

Eric Metcalfe, Jane Ellison,
Hank Bull — The Music Gallery
November 12th
by Clive Robertson

This trio of artist-performers on a cross-country tour from Vancouver were warmly received with a full house on Saturday and a good turnout on Sunday afternoon (12th). Eric Metcalfe (a.k.a. Dr. Brute) opened (after a punderful introduction by Hank Bull) with nostalgia presenting a new version of Leopard Realty, followed by a reformation of the legendary Brute Saxs. Not for jaded ears, Dr. Brute, Vic d'Or and Hank Bull played those kazoo/piano hits that are for Canada almost what Ben Vautier's Fluxus pieces are for France.

The new work — *Piranha Farms*,

is both romantic and complex. Romantic in the form of fun fair — Bull with his clam costume, Metcalfe with his Piranha costume and Jane Ellison part mermaid, part Botticelli. The set-three opaque screens were used for shadow dancing, rear slide projection, and from the front as a wall for primary coloured lights. The complexity came from two colour monitors on either side of the set playing excerpted TV clips from movies about sea monsters, battleships, science fictions edited together with a melodrama of sexual fantasy — most of it male — apart from all that water!

The interplay between the two was always bizarre but often logical as in a sequence of slides with Hank Bull fully clothed chasing Jane Ellison underwater, only to be attacked himself with a resin model of a piranha fish that 'bit' him in the neck producing thin strips of red paper that emerged from his ringless collar. Hank later re-enacted the slide sequence in shadow form which certainly was the most effective shadow manipulation I have ever seen. The TV's meanwhile were, had been, or were about to show clips of frightened women jumping into male arms as they escaped the clutches of the deep. There were many times when the piece might have been called *Piranha Freuds*.

'Farms' was loaded with humour, Metcalfe frantically playing 'improvisational' music at The Music Gallery — his love of jazz fused with his love of movie as persona. Hank Bull singing a duet with a native movie star singing in a canoe, Metcalfe in shorts scanning the audience through binoculars whilst every nation's seamen imitated him from bridges of their submarines, battleships and destroyers, all via TV clips.

The dancing sequences by Ellison gave the live components their waveform and yet as Hank Bull said at the beginning, "There is no porpoise" and the purpose of this piece was certainly evasive. Not that clarity is a necessity, but the cycle of content from the film clips became repetitive and made one a little un-shore. The ever-present angst of the content never quite made it to the audience, whilst it was certainly three-dimensional, in technicolour, you never quite felt sea-sick. The shoreline may be elusive but the differences between land and water could have used a little more edge. ■



photo: Art Gallery of Ontario

Performance

Laurie Anderson

AGO Autobiographical Performance — November 9th
by Clive Robertson

Laurie Anderson is a manipulative performer in both positive and negative senses. As was shown in *Like a Stream Continued* she has access to almost too much talent with the end experience being both impressive and contrived. Her content is presented in a brief way, a sandwich of technology and literalness — the brevity effective in its capability for instant recognition, its aftertaste odorful but lacking body. I say this after being greatly impressed with her work included on the AIRWAVES anthology of artist's music, she is a fine musician, songwriter, narrative teller and producer.

Her performance is many things that most performances are not. It is fluent, engaging, comfortable in a not distasteful way. Her stories are almost Cagney in their warmth though again they are not quite remarkable enough for repeated tellings. Her inventions, including the audiotape violin bow stroked over a playbackhead fixed to her white violin, are meaningful in themselves. She knows how to sensitively activate them. With a locally formed ensemble of musicians the longest piece in the performance was the most successful, proving that it is not the content but the structure which jars the intellect.

Her use of film, overlaid with slide captions is where the literal pun seems most pointless — considering

the effort that it takes to construct such sequences. She says she likes the sound of the Swedish language and we see her posing in front of the camera and in the background we see two men with a screw cultivator digging post holes. Such conceptual language is hackneyed if not frayed. One telling segment of the performance stood out which referred to an interrogation which is told in two microphones adjacent to her head — she speaks into one and then the other. It is the story of someone being interrogated by two people on either side of him. when he realises that by answering each in quick succession he is with his head turning from side to side saying no to all questions.

It might be unfair to go further and say that Laurie Anderson projects her understanding of herself as *Hot Property* through her performance. Dressed like Diane Keaton, she seems to want to play everything for advantage. In Performance that is often a disadvantage. Moments, though brief, when she played Jews Harp or sang were enough to satisfy. The most enlightening aspect of this performance was that it graphically showed what happens when talent is overplayed and genius is underplayed. What happens when Performance Art stretches out to become that plexiglass kinetic sculpture: — as soon as the assembly is complete — the scratches begin to show up immediately. ■

Discs

Potentially Dangerous

Dangerous Diane and the Dinettes with Duh Detroit Band
D.A.M. Records, 15720 Southfield,
Detroit, MI 48223. A Side: *Poten-
tially Dangerous*; B Side: *It's So Easy*
(to make art)

Diane Spodarek does her audio art "Detroit style". For the uninitiated, her work is always tough, straight forward, and sometimes brutal. She has built up quite a reputation exposing the midwest to her controversial videotapes and performance. This is her first record.

Potentially Dangerous is a 'talk-through' cut reminiscent of the early 60's music of the Shangri-La's. Only instead of the strings, Spodarek employs the somewhat lean backup vocals of the Dinettes to keep things moving while she delivers a set of ice cold confessions representing a mother admitting to herself her recurrent fantasies of murdering her infant child. "No one knows that once, just once, I had the urge to plunge the knife I was using to chop onions into my baby's stomach." All of the mother's imaginary acts of violence perversely invert her instinctual concern for the child's safety. "No one knows that once, just once, I had the urge to keep the pillow over my baby's face when we were playing peek-a-boo." Here we have on disc, one murder city mother's twisted thoughts released on a brand new motor city label. We have a recording that is honestly interesting, painfully true to life, though musically awkward and amateurish. An example of the contemporary artist playing the pop music star, not to be confused with the pop music star playing the contemporary artist.

It's So Easy (to make art) is Spodarek's remake of Linda Ronstadt's remake of Buddy Holly's *It's So Easy (to fall in love)*. "People tell me art is for fools, here I go breaking all the rules." While she may have a very good point in the context of her hometown, that making art is easy when compared to doing shiftwork on the assembly line, she does find herself deep in the hot water of her limited vocal range. As this B side does not carry the edge apparent in *Potentially Dangerous*, that convincing inner city authenticity, her lack of musical talent may throw a wrench into her po-

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tentially popular 45rpm art. By saying it simple, she does stand to become much more accessible. But by inadequately packaging a decent set of ideas, she may fail to reach the wider audience she desires. Unlike her region's undistinguished art history, Spodarek's particular urban environment has generated more than its share of influential pop music. Perhaps this new audience will be even more difficult to impress.

Whatever the artists think of this record, the public will ultimately pass judgement on this audio art. They are voting right now, two plays for a quarter, as they find her on the jukeboxes of selected bars in Detroit and vicinity. Whether they play her songs or not, no one can say that Dangerous Diane is afraid to take chances.

Tom Sherman

Books

The Plug-In Drug

Television, Children and the Family

by Marie Winn

Bantam Books, 666 Fifth Ave.,
New York, N.Y. 10019
paperback \$2.25

In the midst of a late-seventies' backlash against the commercial television industry, this popular thought-provoking volume has to be carefully looked at for the information it provides, if not somewhat inadvertently, in its curious but generally inflated argument for the curtailment of the prevailing indiscriminate consumption of broadcast television.

This is not a brand new book. Viking Press originally published this manuscript in April of 1977. This Bantam edition (May 1978) is the sixth printing of Winn's popular thesis. If there is a "media section" that includes television in your favourite bookstore, there will be a pile of *The Plug-In Drug*. My purpose in this review will be to isolate the logic of a number of Winn's reactionary views through a more or less linear display of what I consider to be the more attractive ideas of Winn's anti-television argument. As these ideas are interesting, I will not restrict myself from developing opposite viewpoints. I will list my specific interests under

her original *Chapter Headings*, thereby assuring a reasonable reconstruction of the patterns of thinking employed in these selected sections of the original text.

Let us start at the beginning of the book, in the *Preface*, where Winn asks herself, "Why have I limited my investigations to middle-class families, it might be asked. Partly because these are the very people whose behaviour, as Philip Slater writes, 'has the greatest impact on society and who have the power and resources to improve it' . . ." As a point of honesty, Winn admits this book is not an investigation into the effects of television on the upper or lower class. That she has limited her analysis by not surveying the television viewing habits of the upper-class does not bother me, for it is my experience that the upper-class has its viewing process set into mind as nothing but a kitsch experience anyway. The upper-class more often spends its leisure time experiencing the depths of classical music, legitimate theatre, repertory cinema, great literature, and modern art, while feeling as though it is slumming with "low-life" (an expression commonly used by the upper-class to define persons of the lower-class) often represented in the regular programming of broadcast television. It does seem inappropriate to bypass commercial television's effect on ghetto families locked into a rigorous viewing schedule mandatorily imposed by the cultural restrictions of poverty. This is not to imply that *The Plug-In Drug* is not a political book, as all media books are political by nature, but that it is a political book designed for the consciousness raising of a single class. It is a book describing the self-destruction of the middle-class through the unintelligent use of television technology.

It's not what you watch, but how much you watch. This leads us to that all important relationship between actual viewing time and critical level of association one must have with the world. Winn stresses, we must encourage "prosocial behaviour" in our children. And, of course, she states in no uncertain terms, that too much television does little to encourage "prosocial behaviour". In fact, heavy television viewing encourages anti-social behaviour. And such anti-social behaviour is cultivated in the home with the imple-

mentation of television as a baby-sitting machine. To back up her point she quotes a pseudonymous Sedulus writing in *The New Republic* in 1970 as having stated, "The present generation of preschoolers watches an average of 54 hours of television a week." That's just under 7 hours a day. An extreme estimate by an unaccountable source. In a state of concern for the minds of innocent children, she continues, "There is, indeed, no other experience in a child's life that permits quite so much intake while demanding so little outflow." Or, she asks, "What are the effects upon the vulnerable and developing human organism of spending such a significant proportion of each day engaging in this particular experience?" Or "The young child's need for fantasy is gratified far better by his own make-believe activities than by the adult-made fantasies he is offered on television." And "The young child's need for intellectual stimulation is met infinitely better when he can learn by manipulating, touching, doing, than by merely watching passively." As Winn pounds her way through this series of redundant statements, all suggesting the evaporation of the imagination of the victimized television child, she never once examines the other side of the coin. What about the possibility that the child who grows up without television in this day and age will in the long run suffer an irreversible incompatibility when attempting comprehension of a culture produced by individuals of the mass who have developed a conventional perception while cybernetically involved with a home television receivers? Will not a certain minority of television children take to the air as brilliant programmers based on their natural affinity towards the medium? I hold up as example the remarkable abilities of those young musicians who seem totally at ease in their inventively eclectic representation of the rock and roll music they were literally born into. As for babies and television, these kids will grow up to be good at something!

Winn makes sense in answering the next question. Is the prolonged viewing of television more harmful for children than it is for adults? Yes, it is more harmful for the younger viewer, because children watch television as a primary experience, whereas adults watch television

with a backlay of "real" experiences to go with the electronic metaphor.

Winn continues her discussion of children being destroyed by television with the introduction of the "television savant", who like the idiot savant, a "retarded" child exhibiting strange abilities or talents — such as being able to multiply 5 digit numbers in his or her head, is capable of similarly useless feats. "The young television savant has no more ability to use his television acquired material for his own human purposes than the defective pseudo-genius has of using his amazing mathematical manipulations." While I will admit to being 'shocked' upon hearing children 'talk commercials', I must continue to maintain some semblance of an anti-thesis by suggesting this savant syndrome may be the germ of a phase of creative evolution we have little understanding of at this time. Just as the anti-intellectuals have always had the 'eggheads' to make fun of, the anti-television faction must make example of the "television savants", depicting these sensitive, exceptional individuals as unnaturally introverted members of an otherwise 'normal' society, their televised minds horribly misshapen by the limitations of a fantastically evil machine.

In *Verbal and Nonverbal Thought*, Winn discusses the physiological development of the human brain and does very well in her treatment of the popular left and right hemisphere model, which suddenly, in the past few years, has become the favourite metaphor of the self-conscious, the astrology of the seventies. "What's your dominant lobe?" I call this two brain model a metaphor because so many of the people using the two brain hypothesis have never had a chance to read the instruments the clinical psychologists have been watching for decades. As the patterns have emerged from the recordings of data based on the readings of the instruments, and this information has been substantially published, the abstract form of the data being roughly distinguished, it then finds its way into the more or less 'common' language of the popularizer and we find a very useful model being used in many different kinds of people, all having found the conceptual division of the brain an advantageous procedure in any number

of theoretically practical applications. In *The Plug-In Drug*, Marie Winn uses the left-right brain hypothesis beautifully to back her claim that television and children do not mix very well. In her book, the brain divides like so: the left lobe is verbal and logical and therefore, in most of us it is dominant; the right lobe is non-verbal, spatial, visual, and perhaps "affective" or emotional. Intelligence and memory can be seen in light of this verbal-spatial (visual) dichotomy. Any attempt to measure the intelligence of an individual may be biased towards verbal or spatial recognition. The young child does not exhibit discrete left and right hemisphere functioning, as is outlined above. That is, there is no clear hemisphere specialization until approximately the 12th or 13th year. Without hemisphere specialization, and particularly left hemisphere dominance, verbal-logical thought exists only intermittently in a sea of nonverbal thought. The eidetic image is cited as a manifestation of this state of cognition. Eidetic images are images that last visually in the mind, but as they are verbalized, they instantly disappear. As the child develops, and his or her brain specializes in terms of discrete left-right functioning, "Verbal thought is used whenever words, symbols, logic, or focal organization is required. Non-verbal functioning may be seen when the mind shifts into a qualitatively different state, as in those moments when one seems to be washed over by sensations unaccompanied by the usual mental manipulations or ratiocinations. Staring into a flickering fireplace is an example of a non-verbal form of mental operation: the mind perceives the changing movements of the flames—the visual stimuli are obviously received by the brain's sense receptors — and yet no verbal manipulations occur. A mode of mental functioning that requires nothing but intake and acceptance is in operation."

And Winn adds, "If during the child's formative years when the brain is in transition from its original, unspecialized state to one in which each hemisphere takes on a specific function the child engages in a repeated and time-consuming non-verbal, primarily visual activity — if, in effect, he receives excessive stimulation for the right-hemisphere forms of mental functioning —

might this not have a discernible effect on his neurological development?" In other words, Winn feels the television generation's inadequate verbal-logical skills are the result of young unformed minds thinking through too much television. And "It is not the child's actual acquisition of language but his commitment to language as a means of expression and to the verbal mode as the ultimate source of fulfillment that is at stake, a commitment that may have a physiological basis in the balance of right and left hemisphere development" . . . "as he or she (the viewer) relaxes year after year, a pattern emphasizing nonverbal cognition becomes established."

As Winn continues with the strong argument that television holds back the verbal-logical skills one must develop to become functionally literate in a print sense, I can only choose to amplify a statement she makes further on in the *Television and Reading* section of her extremely linear text. "Because reading demands complex mental manipulations, a reader is required to concentrate more than a television viewer. An audio expert (Tony Schwartz, *The Responsive Chord*) notes that 'with the electronic media it is openness (that counts). Openness permits auditory and visual stimuli more direct access to the brain . . . someone who is taught to concentrate will fail to receive many patterns of information conveyed by the electronic stimuli'."

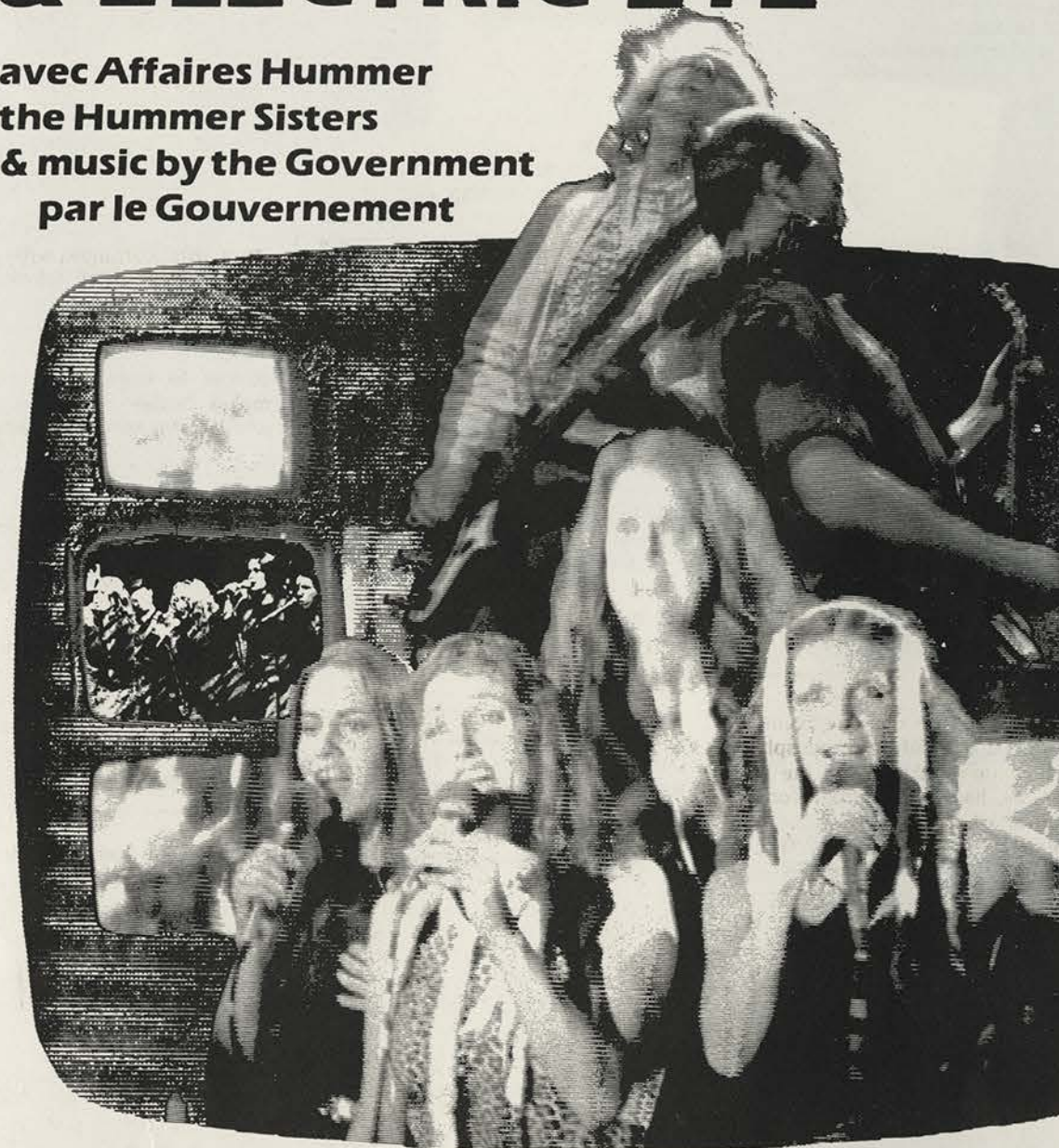
It seems very odd to me that Winn has missed a very important set of considerations. She has failed to take into account the overwhelming evidence that the television image is most consistently activated by its companion audio, and that this audio is most commonly a narrative structure demanding the skillful verbal-logical processing activities of the viewer-listener in order for the story told to be comprehended, however simply in the aural tradition of the culture, thus allowing the video to be seen with 'open' eyes. And there is one more question I have to ask. If you can't 'hear' the language, how can you expect to read or write? ■

Tom Sherman

Centerfold, December 1978

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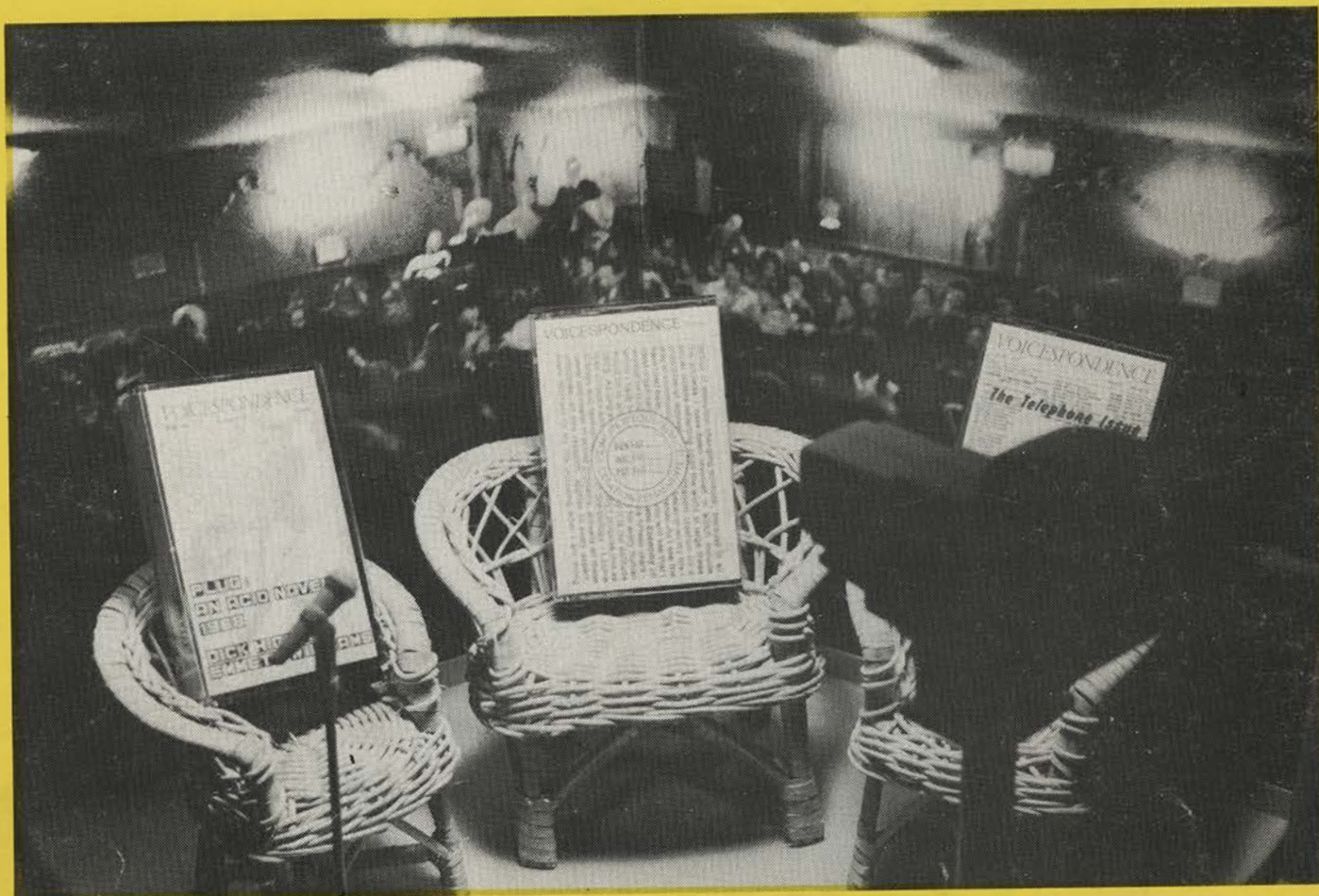
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- VSP 3. 60 min.** *PLUG — An Acid Novel' (1963). Dick Higgins and Emmett Williams.* \$6.50 (1976).
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(The following will be available in 1979.)

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|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| VSP 5 The Government | VSP 9 A.S.A. Harrison | VSP 13 Diane Spodark |
| VSP 6 Tom Sherman | VSP 10 Rodney Werden | VSP 14 (No publicity) |
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