

any of the improvisational spontaneity characteristic of independently produced video.

Sweeney's unflagging honesty prevents *My Mother Married Wilbur Stump* from being a sentimentalized family portrait. Rather than whitewashing conflicts, he brings them out into the open, presenting an honest view of family relationships. The Oedipal subtext of Sweeney's jealousy of Stump, and the sibling rivalry apparent in the conversation between Skip and his brother and sisters, give the videotape an uncomfortable edge, augmenting its impact. By challenging the taboos against revealing intimate material publicly, Sweeney transcends the merely personal; he succeeds in broaching subjects of universal significance.

**Christine Tambllyn**

## STEINA VASULKA

### "THE WEST"

2 channel video installation

Modern Visual Communication, Los Angeles

May - August 1986

*Do not attempt to adjust the controls of your television*

*We control the vertical*

*We control the horizontal*

*We can make the picture fuzzy, or give it crystal clarity*

*... We now return control of your television*

—The Outer Limits (Sci-Fi TV Program)

*You are not in charge of the space;*

*It is not your choice—it is somebody else's.*

Steina Vasulka, Allvision

When the ten monitors of *The West* black out at the exact same moment that the audio stops on a dime, (all aided by a synchronizer), an exchange occurs. The power to see selectively is returned to the viewers, but not without a sense that there is more to seeing than meets the eye.

Two channels of videotape are checkerboarded within a ten monitor matrix—five monitors per channel stacked horizontally in two rows on the floor with a mirror placed underneath them. Viewing is either theater

style, or one can stand closer and look down into the wall of monitors reflected in the mirror. The sets of images move away from each other, toward each other, into each other, and become the same image moving in perfect alignment. Natural forms become abstract patterns of changing colors and textures in a stunning video kaleidoscope. The interaction of images completely reorders the act of perceiving and processing visual stimuli. A logic unique to the installation emerges, a language that, once introduced, becomes both trance-like and highly precise.

Extending her efforts to divorce photography from the human tendency to selectively edit visual information, Steina uses motor-powered video cameras that survey the environment in even, multidirectional sweeps. The beauty of the Southwestern landscape—specifically New Mexico, the Anasazi ruin in Chaco Canyon and a radio telescope (the Very Large Array)—is presented as seen by the mechanical "eyes" of these cameras. The imagery binds time together under the leveling stare of an artificial intelligence.

The structural basis is the circle and the rotating 360-degree panorama, flattened by the video monitor. The cameras are either panning or, if stationary, focused on the radio telescope which scans the sky in a circular motion. The landscape itself swirls across the surface of a mirrored, rotating globe placed in front of the camera. As the landscape bends around the turning sphere—a fisheye view floating within the square monitor—the camera remains central in the image. Elements of simultaneous feedback pervade the work on every level, often insidiously as with the audio environment created by Woody using video-activated audio. Together, video and audio transform the image gathering process of the cameras into an eerie, unpopulated environment, running like clockwork.

Manipulations of the video footage by custom-built electronic processors complete the nonhuman point of view, the "gaze" of the machine. A horizontal-drift variable clock causes the image to drift continuously. A multi-keyer allows foreground and background shifts. The Rutt/Etre scan processor organized an image according to its brightest

parts, making a topography, and the digital image articulator combines images, allowing programmed switching between digital and analog inputs. The result is a symphonic array of machine-generated activity: layering and abstracting information, colorizing, extended panning by equipment specifically designed to let the electromagnetic nature of video express itself. Thus the landscape is not intended to be represented as we see it, but exactly as we do not see it, cannot see it. Stein's visual effects suggest the entire spectra of the invisible: light, lifeforms, electromagnetic activity, while the audio track suggests omnipresent frequencies that we do not hear.

In *The West*, surveillance of space is a profound vision of an alternate reality.

**Kathy Tanney**

## STUART BENDER

### "FOR THE RECORD, 1985"

Modern Visual Communications, Los Angeles

June 1986

The center screen of the three-monitor installation, *For the Record*, reads "RELAX," which is a comically sarcastic order to the audience crowded into the enclosed, narrow viewing room. A pair of glossy red lips keyed over white appear on the screens to the right and left. A surly female voice repeats, "You'll never get a job" on the one side while the other pair of lips lists various generalized shortcomings, all directed at "you" ("You're a loser"). On the center screen a generic man-in-suit sits before a keyed grid with hands folded and begins asking questions. The format is that of a job interview.

The interview delivery is like the children's game "Simon Says," in which players are tricked into losing by a series of commands always worded the same way. If the wording changes suddenly, the players comply even when compliance means losing the game. So it goes in Bender's quick-witted interview. Seemingly harmless questions asked in rapid succession quickly cross over the mundane to the personal. "Was your mother married?" "Do you masturbate?" "You do believe religion is important, don't you?" "What's 21 x 375?" Throughout, the red lips continue to berate.

The possibility of being screened in such a manner is ominously relevant. Common-place equivalents include lie detector tests, fingerprints, drug tests, private investigators and credit checks—avenues of control open to employers looking to discriminate on the bases of race, morality, sex, religion, philosophy or political belief.

Since I had not come to the gallery for a job, nor was the installation illusionistic enough to simulate the psychological or physical atmosphere of a real encounter, the comedic value of the work precluded what might have developed into a stronger statement with regard to invasion of privacy. Where perhaps a pause between questions might have afforded more time to read between the lines, Bender's game of Simon Says habitualized my



*The West*