

But is it art?

# Video tunes in on our lives

by Susan Schachter  
Spectrum Staff Writer

The enthusiastic reception of video as an experimental medium during the 1960's was typical of the period's general outpouring of creativity. All forms of self-expression were tattooed "art," from body movement to rock 'n roll; thus video was aesthetically inbred into drugs, meditation, dungarees, and the general sense of freedom that unfolded itself in every sound and image.

Video was seized by individuals who saw it as a political tool capable of rupturing "establishment" control of the media. Woody Vasulka, former innovator and currently a resident video artist at this University, said, "The notion of these elements became the basis of what is now called 'video art'."

With the advent of the video synthesizer by Nam June Paik, Shuya Abe, and Eric Seigel, video took a giant step forward. The synthesizer enabled signals to mix in non-ordinary ways, assigning an array of colors to the image and imposing one image on top of another.

## A video happening

Artists from other mediums, including painting, dance and film — flocked to the new, captivating consciousness elevating and integrating electronic device. Energy generated from those enlightened by the possibilities of a culturally undefined medium, was absorbed by the video equipment and released in a rare display of sounds, colors and images.

In 1970 an alternative media conference was held at Goddard College. Video and other media enthusiasts gathered together, spouted theories, altered their states of consciousness, held seminars, and screened hours of tape. This event provided the impetus for a movement which in the past five years has crystallized into a "video happening."

Soon after the conference, video declared its independence from conventional television, as it spoke defiantly from monitors in public galleries. David Silver said eloquently in his article, "Transforming TV," "It was a visceral thrill to see the TV (television) set heretofore reserved for Carson, Cronkite, and Rice Krispees, issuing forth completely chaotic

form — wild juxtapositions and distortions sardonically contrasting with the strict predictabilities of broadcast TV."

## Densities, colors and outlines

Although video was reflexive screen from which a continuous stream of new ideas floated, the art world, when suddenly faced with a new form called video, needed to define it, and thus categorized it in three ways.

The first was a category *image processing* and involved the artistic manipulation of the densities, colors and outlines of an image, maintaining the boundary of its transformation as originated through a light space code, regardless of external realities.

Secondly, video was classified as a *conceptual tool* where an image was staged for the camera, a style better known as documentation. This differed from image processing because it focused on the presentation of an idea rather than an image.

Lastly, video was defined as a *documentary device*, exploring events of social or individual significance by recording real occurrences.

Vasulka spoke of an early exhibition by Howard Weiss, entitled "Video as a Creative Medium." "It was a whole generic code of what was later to be proclaimed video art, contained in one exhibit," Vasulka said. "I've seen more precise definition, more socially hidden concepts but, I have not seen a significant contribution to these concepts since."

The exhibit had a number of monitors displaying different events. At first sight one was presented with an empty screen. Within a matter of seconds the viewer watched himself entering the room, a dislocation of real time and an example of a documentary. As one rounded the corner he suddenly came upon Albert Einstein, or a version of Einstein distorted by the addition of colors and feedback, an example of electronically processed image.

Ever journey into the realms of a kaleidoscope? One monitor reflected a mirror environment

in which all movements were perpetually distributed through a kaleidoscope arrangement, an example of video used conceptually.

John Burris, a local video artist, said, "Video is unique in that it tends to investigate the medium itself — using the medium to look at the medium."

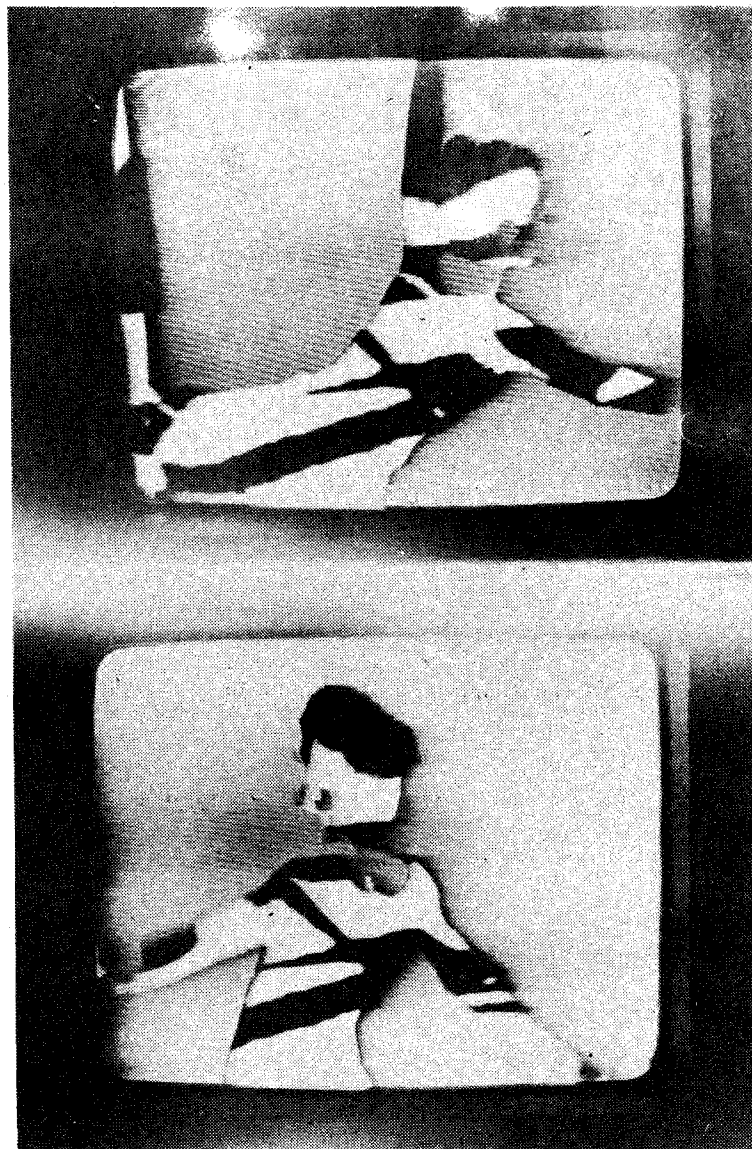
A tape done by Taka Iimura examined the relationship between different levels of the observed and the observer, encompassing the monitor and the camera (as observed and observer), and the viewer and his decoding of the multi-level of observation.

Peter Campus' tape, *Double Vision*, was an alternate mode of visualization which explored certain states of malfunctioning vision. He took an image of a door and distorted it in five distinct ways. By observing states of abnormal vision the viewer was compelled to observe his own visualization processes.

## Video slapstick

Video has its lighter moments. Portrayed on an experimental public TV show was a man sitting in a bathtub who turned on the water and was awaiting its arrival. No such luck. Frustrated, he banged on the faucet. Suddenly water splashed on his person from thin air. Flabbergasted he stood up to be confronted by water flowing upward from the faucet. Here, video effects composed a slapstick comedy routine.

An episode in the continuing drama of *The Videonauts*, created by video maniac David Silver and poet Stuart Ingber, revealed a nighttime voyage into video space which led the videonauts to a variety of electronic fields, where they encountered new states of being — chroma zone 12, feedback 2 or solarization 20. Everything was dandy until the videonatus sighted an outlaw TV wave force entering their territory. The outlaw force was a whole day of American commercial television, a concentrated piece of game shows, Nixon/Agnew news, soap operas, and



—Fliss

Visual Arts Committee and Gallery 219 present: Poeme: Dance with Intermedia a performance involving live dancers, video, film and electronic music will take place this Thursday, March 31 in the Katherine Cornell Theatre at 8, 9 and 10 p.m. Admission is free and public is invited.

commercial.

Who said dancers must have their feet firmly planted on the ground? A video tape superimposed two dancers floating gracefully along the crest of Niagara Falls. Hermine Freed took classical oil paintings and animated them, as if they were embodied by a mystical spirit. David Court created distorted body images, such as a body being swallowed by its mouth or tangled in the length of its nose.

## Few public centers

Now that the reader has

delved into the video world he may have emerged with a few questions. Where might one go to view video events and where might one find public access to video equipment? For presentation of video tapes in New York State, there exist such organizations as The

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# Video...

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Kitchen, Media Study Buffalo, Anthology Film Archives, Hallwalls, and some small galleries.

There are few public access centers for the production of video due to its growth as a highly individualistic artform and also a lack of financial backing. As Vasulka said, "Creative centers are always within the individual."

However a few such centers do exist, including National Educational Television (WNET) Synapse in Syracuse, Television Center in Binghamton, and Media Study Buffalo in Buffalo.

Media Study Buffalo was converted from an old hotel into a huge media-oriented complex, located on Delaware Avenue. Before its equipment was stolen, it was the second largest program for video exploration in New York State. Renowned video people involved with Media Study are willing to teach interested students here.

Burris, presently working with Media Study, said, "Buffalo is unique in its development of a framework for looking at electromagnetic phenomena. We gain an understanding of their principles by examining them through a video system."

His University provides ample opportunity for video study. The Center for Media Study offers a course in experimental video and the Video Committee broadcasts student run television over monitors located in Haas Lounge and the check cashing area, from 11-3, Monday through Friday.

"We want to encourage student participation in video," said Steven Keeler, a Video Committee member. They have in their possession a wide variety of tapes, ranging from the GSEU strike transactions to a collection of favorite movies. Interested students are urged to make requests.

Dramatic readings, electronically controlled images and music blended together stimulating a mind expanding experience.

Classes are offered by the Video Committee in equipment design and basic electronics. Equipment and studios are available to anyone interested in

its past because we've achieved something in video, but this is only a beginning."

## Use by C.I.A.

Replacing mad scientists will be mad videoists, pouring into their TV sets a mixture of TV ingredients — toil, toil, boil and bubble — (poof!) video discs and tele-commuting systems.

The video disc will create a situation where people can go into a store and buy the video

acquired discs which record people's faces and facts about their lives. "With around 10 discs, they can print records of everyone in the world," he said.

The video disc industry will cast at the feet of humanity its jewels in the form of a wealth of new jobs. The young people today who are up on "what's going down," will have numerous job opportunities in the future.

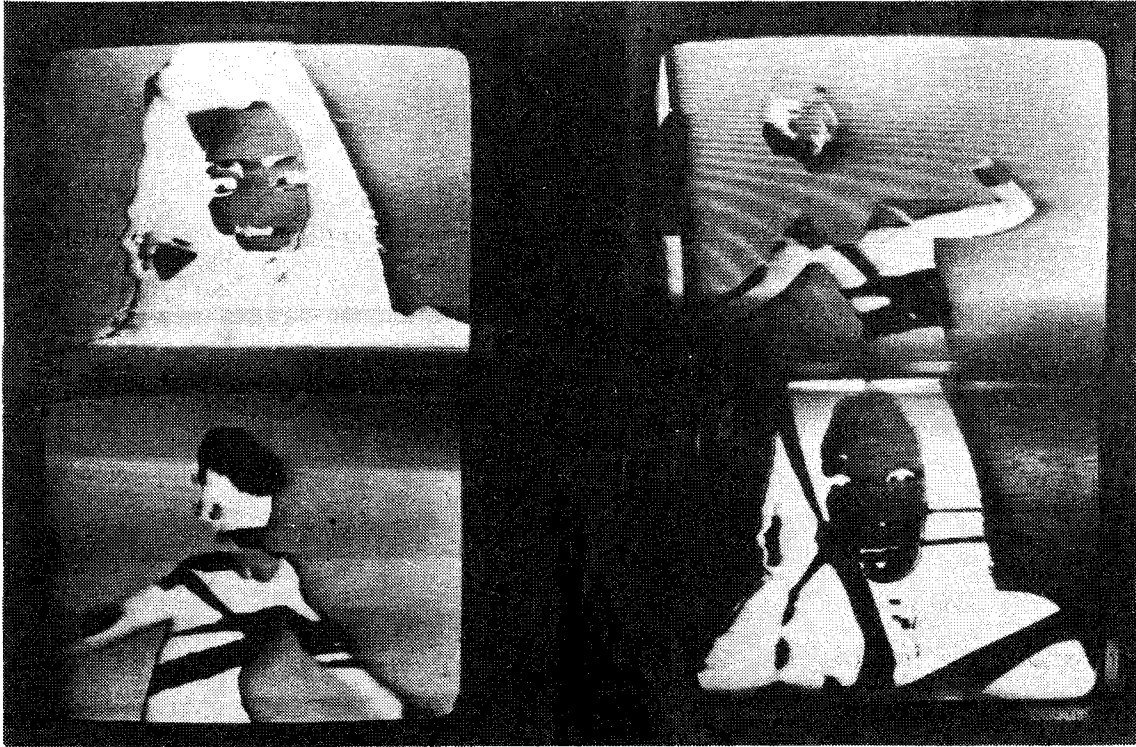
## Pictorial self-analysis

Tele-commuting, the construction of television by the computer, will enable home viewers to dial their exact video needs, be it the local weather report or business world transactions. Within ten years video technology will be as prevalent as the automobile.

Paik said, "There are two reasons to drive, for pleasure and as a means of communication. Pleasure driving is an escape from the self and seeks to analyze the self through a machine. Video provides an escape and self-analysis through pictures. To communicate to someone else one won't have to drive. They will see and hear the other person through a two-way TV system."

Paik envisions video communication as a means of liberation from the energy crisis. The car's only source of energy is gas; thus, to cut down on its use will benefit society. Video is the natural substitute technology for the automobile because it serves similar functions.

Whether or not the new generation will be "video babes" only time can tell, but can't be denied that video has tuned its way into our present life styles.



The Video Committee sponsors guest artists and video events. Their most recent show, *Held Over at the Cafe Bizarre*, was a multi-media presentation where Gallery 219, in Squire (Norton) Hall, was set up as a cafe equipped with stage, video monitors, percussion instruments and synthesizers.

working for the committee; the equipment may be rented by students and organizations inexpensively.

Video is an instrument of the imagination because of its future possibilities. Nam June Paik, an innovator in video, said at a recent interview, "I would rather talk about its future than

album of their choice, ranging from a Humphrey Bogart movie to a poetry reading. Paik and other experts believe that within the next ten years every home owner will purchase a video disc player for \$500 and one hour video discs at ten dollars a piece.

Paik continued, the CIA has

—Fliss

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