

the village

VOICE

DECEMBER 31, 1979

Videosyncrasies

By J. Hoberman

IMAGE PROCESSING. Videotapes by Barbara Latham, John Manning, and Edward Rankus; Barbara Buckner; Shalom Gorewitz; Pier Marton; Joann Gillerman; Nam June Paik and Gregory Battcock; Woody and Steina Vasulka; Peer Bode; Gary Hill; and Dan Sandin. At the Kitchen, through December 29.

SPYING and CONFIDENTIAL REPORT. Two films by Joe Gibbons. At the Collective. (Closed)

THE LAST TIME I SAW PARIS. Films by Yannick Bellon, Agnes Varda, Shirley Clarke, Harold Becker, and Pierre Chenal. At the Film Forum, December 27-30 and January 3-6.

The video-synthesizer was invented by Nam June Paik only a decade ago, and its not surprising that much of the electronically manipulated video that followed smacked of gimmickry. There's a residue of such gadgetry glitter to the dozen tapes of the Kitchen's current "Image Processing" show, but what's more apparent in this state-of-the-art survey is the sense of a media staking out its own videosyncratic content.

Paik is represented by the 30-minute *You Can't Lick Stamps In China*, synthesized from tapes shot by critic Gregory Battcock during a tour of the People's Republic. The raw material isn't as promising as that used by Paik in his related *Media Shuttle: New York-Moscow* (China being more of a cliché now than the Soviet Union), but processed through the master's console, the images emerge as a welter of funny, scattershot sensations. Casting himself as the last McLuhanite—mind agog in the teleconnected Global Village—Paik is a poker-faced parodist: When Battcock defends the concept of Chinese personal freedom ("What do you think they want to do? Fly to New York?"), Paik takes the cue to portray the West in an incomprehensible split-screen mosaic of frenetic tapdancers superimposed over garishly solarized Blimpies.

A less sanguine vision than Paik's is the half-hour *Alien Nation*, produced by three instructors, from the Chicago Art Institute, Barbara Latham, John Manning, and Edward Rankus. *Alien Nation* employs the standard colorizations, superimpositions, and computer graphics of synthesized video, but it's a hipster's *Star Trek* that puts its barrage of oh-wow effects into a tawdry, Burroughs-like context. With a soundtrack culled from a dozen sci-fi programmers and its recurring lightning bolt motif, the tape sizzles like a short circuit in Mr. Spock's brain. *Alien Nation* is a mite too zappy to be the ultimate send-up of that tacky new world it evokes—audio-suggestion tapes, urban sludge, smile buttons, disco—but it's the prize tape of the show, if not the year.

The rest of "Image Processing" is not so epic, but still impressive. Woody and Steina Vasulka's use of digitalized imagery, *Recent Explorations*, and Peer Bode's hypnotic assembly-line still-life, *Apple(s)*, are particularly compelling. Barbara Buckner's mystical abstractions,

Pictures of the Lost, range from innocuous *Lumia* prettiness to the remarkably subtle. Shalom Gorewitz (who curated the show) and Dan Sandin contribute uneven but promising tapes, both characterized by flamboyant fauve color distortions. I had more problems with Joann Gillerman's strained punk scopitone, *Jeromes Tape*, and Gary Hill's conceptually solid but stridently executed sound/image conundrum, *Soundings*.

L.A.-based Pier Marton is the only artist on the program to combine video dazzle with the equally popular auto-performance mode. Marton's *Tapes* swarms with sinister pranks and contradictory harangues; his effects are cruder and more forceful than those of his colleagues. For starters, he integrates visual static and bar-rolls into a garishly abstract screen; while a voice-over warns of the baleful effect that color TV emissions have on one's retina, chromosomes, and bone marrow. Having established his medium's danger, Marton attacks its ontology. Fragments of his face float through the void, petulently screaming, "So you think I'm still here!" *Tapes* winds up with an unforgettable image of Marton talking suicide while red paint streams up his face: He's hanging by his heels and the camera's inverted too. It's an old Ernie Kovacs gag, one of the simplest and most powerful special effects of all.