

**VIDEO
FREE
AMERICA
PRESENTS**

by Joanne Kelly

A Blade of Grass: Comments on Video

"VIDEO ART IS THE BLADE OF GRASS GROWING UP BETWEEN THE CRACKS IN THE CEMENT OF THE BROADCAST TELEVISION INDUSTRY." Jerry Mander, author of "Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television".

In 1978, we presented in our weekly video showing series the videomakers included in this book. From the start, I felt that the series should reflect a broad range of video styles, including abstract video imagery, artists' videotapes, performance video and documentaries. We presented San Francisco videomakers as well as hosting several videomakers who live in other parts of the country. The depth and breadth of the showing series has remained an amazement to me. The year has been full of appointments and screenings of new works that continue to surprise me regarding all the possible uses of the medium. From seeing all this work, I have some strong feelings about the state of the art and would like to share them here.

The best place to start is examining abstract video imagery. It all began in San Francisco at the National Center for Experiments in Television at KQED-TV in the 60's. The NCET project was sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation under the direction of Brice Howard (now at a PBS station in Texas) and Paul Kaufman (now doing research at Stanford University). The idea was to give a number of people the freedom to experiment within a television context and see what could evolve out of that. The NCET broadcast a series of abstract video imagery called "Electronic Notebooks", published books such as "Videospace", held conferences/workshops and presented a huge unique installation called "Videola" at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, as well as showing tapes at other closed circuit showings, including one at Video Free America. This year, more than a decade since NCET was founded, we showed the works of Stephen Beck and Bill Roarty.

The NCET gave Beck the freedom to develop and build his direct video synthesizer. Recently, he has expanded to design and build prototype electronic toys for manufacturers. Roarty presented his collaborations with graphic artist Bernard Blake. Roarty has become interested in freezing a single abstract video image and transferring it to the print medium.

The beginnings of San Francisco video art was in the hands of NCET artists as well as Video Free America feedback artist, Skip Sweeney. These artists were drawn to understanding and exploring the possibilities of the technology and had a strong technical grasp of alternative uses of the video circuitry. If they wanted to flip or color an image; they had to design and build a tool to make that happen. This was also true of the east coast video art in the late 60's and early 70's. Nam June Paik built his synthesizer, as did Bill and Louise Etra. The Etras now live in the Bay Area. Presently, they are researching the possibilities of interfacing computer and video technology. Some of their new tools will be unveiled at the 1979 Video Expo in San Francisco. Other east coast pioneers whose work we have presented this past year include Woody and Steina Vasulka, the founders of the Kitchen in New York. They (as well as the Etras) have been researching computer-video interfacing. They have been experimenting primarily at Media Study in Buffalo, New York. At their VFA showing they explained with charts and tapes the recent direction of their experimental work. The works of these artists was the first "video art". It was identifiable to a broad audience as "art" because the shapes, designs and patterns were clearly very different from what was seen on TV.

Since these first explorations this form of video art — abstract video imagery has been the recipient of a great deal of criticism. It is referred to as video wallpaper, i.e. just designs and patterns. It is criticized for never going anywhere, for lacking content, for merely being a succession of pretty pictures. Often these criticisms were justified. Because of this, electronic video imagery has been utilized primarily to create more sophis-

licated title graphics for television series and station identification and/or by the feature film industry to expand the vocabulary of special effects. Ron Hayes is perhaps the best example of an artist who has done this kind of crossover with his work from PBS-TV art tapes to special effects for science fiction feature films.

It seems to me that electronic video imagery has yet to hit its stride and that instead of a withdrawal of interest and funding it needs a shove over the edge . . . into an identity. Electronic video imagery makers need to be given a chance to make and broadcast works that are more than graphic dazzle spots in the middle of somebody's documentary or situation comedy. Ironically, in the past year these opportunities in the Bay Area have been coming from commercial stations. KPIX-TV's Burt Arnowitz interviewed Stephen Beck on his works and aired his tapes, as did KGO-TV's Ken Ellis on Skip Sweeney's abstract video imagery. These are encouraging signs, yet we wait for a program manager willing to dare to make a larger, consistent commitment to abstract video imagery.

We also have shown tapes made by artists who don't work exclusively with video. These artists such as Charlemagne Palestine, Paul Kos, Suzanne Lacy and Howard Fried have established their original voice in music, sculpture or performance. Their videotapes are often a video treatment of concepts and vocabulary that have established them in other media. Artists' videotapes face a whole realm of new problems and possibilities. Since these artists for the most part do not have an everyday working vocabulary established with video; they have two choices. One is that they can make simple unedited black and white low resolution video works. The other choice is to collaborate with a video engineer on the shooting and editing of a more complex tape. For the most part, artists' tapes over the past few years have fallen into the first category. They have often been boringly long and full of sync and other problems that distract the viewer from the intention of the tape. Artists' videotapes have a history of a

yawning gap between intention and actualization. If we all simply didn't have broadcast television in our minds as a reference analogy the problems of duration and technical quality might not exist. But, television permeates our entire culture down to the preschooler singing commercial jingles like a nursery rhyme. Artists simply can't escape the broadcast television reference their work implies when it is shown on the same type of box that brings us "Charlie's Angels" and "The Brady Bunch". This has been an almost insurmountable problem in appreciating the intention of artists' videotapes.

Some artists who have shown at VFA, such as Suzanne Lacy, and to a certain extent Howard Fried and Paul Kos, choose the option of hiring or collaborating with a video engineer to avoid technical limitations to the appreciation of the content of their work. Suzanne Lacy is perhaps the extreme example of this. She creates events/performances that the news media tapes and edits for broadcast. This kind of collective authorship of an artist's videotape is often the most fruitful in closing the gap between the artist's intention and actualization of the work.

For some artists collective authorship is totally unacceptable. They feel a need to work privately on the actualization of a concept or impression. The most engagingly successful of these simple black & white videotapes is when they are presented in a multi-monitor installation. In an installation of several monitors, with different pre-recorded channels we can begin to escape from the ingrained expectations of broadcast television and give the video work space to reveal to us the intention of the artist. In this multi-channel genre the Video Free America showing of Max Almy's tapes was particularly evocative. Her use of the different monitors/channels to portray different people at different points in time, gave this half-inch black & white tape depth of interest, intelligence and a kind of simple elegance of design.

Another way of escaping the expectations of broadcast television is by creating video performance works.

Some people confuse documenting a performance for video performance work, that is not what I am referring to here by video performance works. The distinction is probably best explained by Darryl Sapien's Video Free America screening. Sapien performed "Within the Nucleus" at the SFMMA in which he built a tall structure while wearing a video camera harnessed to his body. The performance of "Within the Nucleus" was a video performance, but the tape he presented at VFA of the performance was not a work of art in itself. It was an archival document of the event. It is interesting to view this archival documentation if you couldn't be there to experience the video performance, but all performances lose something with this removal from the immediacy of performance. Actual video performances combine the immediacy of live interaction with the complexity and distance of pre-recorded or live video. Sharon Grace's video performance at VFA involved the use of telephone lines to send and receive a live video signal back and forth across the continent. Fiske Smith's VFA video performance included pre-recorded and live imagery in performance with more theatrical references in terms of script, dialogue and staging. Livia Blakman's video performance had strong references to dance.

Video performances often are an interesting combination of the best of television, (immediacy — the capability for instant visualization) and the best of the performing arts, be it theater, dance or music. In 1979, Video Free America will be showing more video performance works in a separate series, created especially to showcase the particularly rich possibilities of video performance. This special series will be made possible by an alternative art space grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

The largest amount of video funding dollars these days is going to documentaries. There are two reasons for that. First, groups such as TVTV (who showed an anthology of tapes at VFA) have shown that documentaries don't have to be dry, pedantic affairs that induce sleep better than Somnex. TVTV pioneered the participatory documentary, which gave the viewer the

feeling of actually being at the convention in the case of "Four More Years"; or in the White House as in "Gerald Ford's America". They dispensed with the formal distance, asserted a point of view with the editing and dropped the dry narration. Television audiences across the country woke up. Secondly, there is an increasing loss of appeal for the "variety show" format and networks are scrambling to try to replace it. The docu-drama is the likely hybrid, trying out its wings. But with the excellent ratings "60 Minutes" has been receiving, network executives are giving a second thought to more documentary programming also.

In the VFA Showing Series we presented documentaries by PBS producers such as Skip Blumberg ("For a Moment You Fly"), commercial television producers, such as Ken Ellis, ("Bay Scene"), and closed circuit producers such as Richard Weiss ("Arcology: Paulo Soleri").

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Independent documentary producers are beginning to make their presence felt a little more by television stations. Many PBS stations have always been fairly open to independent documentary programs as a source of "cheap" programs. Recently, with the WNET-TV documentary fund a few independents are getting a chance to do more than make inexpensive programs. Also, commercial stations are beginning to feel pressure from independents to include them in their scheduling. The Pennebacker/Maysle etc. suit against ABC-NBC-CBS will bring the issue to the forefront. The independent documentary community aside, the general public also has expressed an increased desire to hear about diverse topics from various points of view and the independent seems the likely supplier.

As an independent producer ("Abortion: The Divisive Issue", "Lake Tahoe: the Politics of Ecology") I am

relieved and encouraged by the funding sources and litigation which addresses the need to see more independent productions on television. At the same time, I feel the discussions and funding projects are missing the point. In many cases, there is not a lot of difference between what an in-house producer and an independent producer would choose to cover. An example is Bob Klein, producer of "People's Five" at KPIX-TV decided to do an investigative documentary on nuclear power. He shot in California and Washington D.C., uncovered some controversial facets of the issue and won a Du Pont-Columbia award for broadcast journalism. On the other hand, Don Widener, an independent, received money from the CPB documentary fund to do a documentary on nuclear power and few PBS stations are willing to air the program. Often, the difference is not in the producer's but in the program managers. The program managers decide what topics by whom get on the air. The bottom line is educating program managers to be open to taking dares with programming, to cover tough subjects, and to stand up for the producer whether they are in-house or independent. PBS program managers especially seem to have an atrophied sense of judgement in these matters. Perhaps, many have just gotten used to taking the feeds and doing "how to" shows and have forgotten how critically their values and tastes forecast what their region will be able to perceive and understand about the world at large.

As you can see, Video Free America has shown an incredibly diverse group of tapes over the past year. All the videomakers have their "special something" that they bring to this multi-faceted medium.

I hope this anthology inspires some readers to make more and better tapes and gives other readers a more detailed understanding of the uniquely diverse potentialities of the medium.

Joanne Kelly

Mark Allen

Video music is the basis for "Spring Fever" a videotape retrospective by Mark Allen. The tapes are presented in two twenty minute albums, "Past Fantasies" and "Sacred & Profane" which explore "real time" video imagery in its various aspects.

In "Past Fantasies" natural forms such as trees, water and clouds are combined with electronically generated patterns, shapes and colors and synchronized with music. The resultant study of moving imagery in space yields a heightened and abstracted interpretation of natural environments and subjective realities. In "Sacred and Profane" wave forms and feedback are featured with improvisational jazz, electronic and Indian music. The feedback provides a backdrop for the mood of the particular musical score.

Mark Allen

Max Almy

Max Almy's videotapes provide an entity comparable to a single book, with each chapter adding to and expanding the overall theme, yet each able to stand on its own as well. For Max Almy the formal structure of the series is its common denominator. The seven tapes best describe this evolution in an installation situation where single image/single monitor tapes move to double (keyed-in) images on a single monitor, and then develop into four monitor sequences. Her selection of subject matter, its timing and placement in the sequences, carefully develops the psychological impact of the series.

The scenarios describe personal and social encounters. The first tape, for example, uses ten different still photos of a woman's head in fashion poses. With these stills the narrative presents ten subjective mood questions: "If I loose ten pound will I be beautiful?" and "If I commit suicide, will you be sorry?" Repeated ten

times, the clauses are mixed and rearranged, each time adding unexpected implications to the initial questions. In this and other tapes with narration, familiar phrases used in conversation are isolated from context by repetition or the associated image, to the point where their intent to communicate seems hollow and superficial.

In "Double Image, I'm Fine", the keyed-in image of a second mouth contrasts the external conscious statement "I'm Fine" with its inner subconscious meaning "I'm not Fine". A purely abstract counterpoint of images in "Double Image, Abstract", juxtaposes moving and still shots of waves breaking, views of trees, rocks and streams.

For the four monitor pieces, the viewer is seated with a monitor in front, behind and on either side. In one sequence for this layout, "found" images and sounds, like a clock ticking, progress in a circle from one monitor to the next, varying from fast to slow, soft to loud. In another, the placement utilizes the front monitor for the narrative images, the rear monitor for the text spoken by a mouth image, and the side monitors for peripheral exposition of the story. In this format five images describe an encounter between two people; these are repeated with the same text three times. On the two side monitors, the evolution of their relationship is revealed in different interpretations of the action as each sequence is repeated. As the pieces become more structurally complex in the timing and pacing of images and narration on the four monitors, the emotional impact becomes more intense.

Max Almy has imaginatively investigated the capacity for formal structure filled with human content, both emotional and psychological. Her subject matter is engaging and easily identified with, while the statements she makes are thoughtful observations of human nature.

Suzanne Foley

Burt Arnowitz

Burt Arnowitz was invited to show tapes and speak on Video Free America's "Meet Commercial Television Producers" night. Originally, Burt was one of the founding members of Marin Community Video. He had a cable television magazine format program. He was hired on KPIX-TV's "Evening Show" as the editor. Now he has moved on to be a field producer, and the show is syndicated nationally, by Westinghouse Broadcasting Company. He greatly enjoys his job on the "Evening Show". He is allowed a great deal of freedom to cover an event. He is paid for 40 hours of work a week, but out of love for the show usually puts in many more hours shooting and editing. The "Evening Show" has an unusual arrangement where the producer can both shoot with an ENG video camera, a TK-76, and edit his own segment of the program, with no union hassles. The content of the programs are decided at staff meetings where everyone throws in their ideas, including the hosts of the program Jan Yanihero and Steve Fox. The staff is allowed great freedom on what they want to cover because they get good ratings. So, management trusts their judgement. The show began two years ago trying to compete with the game show time slot. It airs every weekday at 7:30. Arnowitz says that he likes to do entertaining features that will move people in a positive way. At Video Free America he showed a tape on the artists' soapbox derby sponsored by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and also a piece on the low rider car cult. Asked if many viewers call or write in about his pieces, Arnowitz mentions that most often he gets calls asking where they can buy the record of the music he played under the action of his "Evening" piece. The highest rating the show received was for a program with Leif Garrett on it. Sometimes they do "celebrity" interviews as a way of maintaining their ratings, but they are basically confident, what with the show going into national syndication this year, somebody out there likes what they do a lot. Their toughest competition is the

"Newlywed Game", which they have been running neck and neck with in the ratings for local programming in San Francisco. Sometimes the staff travels and does a few out of town programs on more serious subjects. They have travelled to the Panama Canal this year and are also going to Alaska.

Arnowitz said that one of the frustrations with his job is the "TV Guide" listings. At one point he even called up and talked to the person who writes the listings for "TV Guide". It frustrates him that if he does an especially good piece, like the low riders piece, he has no way of telling the audience that it's a particularly good program coming up and to watch out for it. The "TV Guide" doesn't use superlatives in its listings because they feel that they would then be open for bribes.

The "Evening Show" staff seems like one big happy family of people working hard doing what they love to do, shoot and edit video pieces without severe management or union restrictions. This situation is more unusual than one might think in the television industry. Arnowitz mentioned that there were a lot of casualties with the staff in the beginning (like going through 4 directors in 2 years). But, those problems have been worked out and now it's smooth sailing.

Arnowitz says that the best reward for the hard work is when he's shooting in the field and people just walk up to him and tell him they watch the show all the time and love it.

Kenn Beckman

Kenn Beckman with his shoulder length blond hair and grey brushed felt hat, passing out color xerox's at the opening of his Video Free America retrospective tape showing, looked like he could have stepped right out of a hipper illustration of "Alice in Wonderland". Indeed, his tapes for the evening reflected the "One pill makes you larger, one pill makes you small" philosophy. Beckman has been working with video for the past ten years and he showed an anthology of his black and white tapes with clips of him being interviewed in a

North Beach bar/strip joint, on what he thought of video and the state of the art. Beckman has taught at California College of Arts and Crafts, and has worked with the video documentary group Optic Nerve. One Optic Nerve, Starr Sutherland, was the interviewer in the bar. The interviews poked gentle fun at the commercial television "Man on the Street" interviews and managed to let the audience know a little more about who Kenn Beckman is. Beckman is presently working for the Xerox Corporation in Palo Alto.

Livia Blankman

Livia Blankman performed "Painting III" a video/performance piece, at Video Free America. The black and white video was made in New York. It was taped by John Merrill and conceived by two dancer/choreographers, Clarice Marshall and Debra Wanner.

The content of the 20 minute video was inspired by a Balthus painting of a nude woman lying on a chaise. While the video played, Livia crossed along the top edge of the wall, then climbed down the wall into and through the projected image.

As the tape ended, the video projector was slowly pulled from the space, leaving Livia to finish the piece with a live dance solo.

Livia Blankman

Skip Blumberg

Skip Blumberg is one of the founders of the Video-freeex in Lanesville, New York and has worked with documentary groups such as TVTV and Image Union. Blumberg recently moved to the Bay Area and has been working at KQED-TV. At his Video Free America showing he presented three tapes, "For a Moment You Fly: The Big Apple Circus", and "JGLNG". Following are his comments on those tapes:

Circus is hard work, and choosing to survive as a small circus in the midst of the megalopolis doesn't make it easier. But it's been a worthwhile struggle for the performers, crew and supporters of the Big Apple Circus in New York City and for the several thousand people who have been delighted and excited at the Circus shows. "For a Moment You Fly", an entertainment documentary, tells the story and performance of the first show of the Big Apple Circus in the summer of 1977. The circus put on a second season of performances in summer 1978, in a parking lot next to Madison Square Garden. Today the Big Apple Circus is operating the New York School for Circus Arts and planning the summer 1979 show for New York City in an effort to find a permanent home in the city's cultural landscape.

The videotape, "The First International Whistling Show" begins in San Francisco in Union Square and at the Press Conference and proceeds rapidly to the contest itself, which took place in Carson City, Nevada during three days in the Fall of 1977. (The second contest was planned for this year to be held in Pittsburgh. It was cancelled when the California computer company that sponsored the contest changed hands and the new owners decided not to be so wacky.) The contest gave prizes for classical, country and western, hymn, group, novelty, and enough categories so that everybody took home a prize. The winner of the Grand Prize (a Steuben Glass bowl presented by the New Yorker Magazine) was Harvey Pollack, a classical whistler and barrister from Winnepeg, Canada. He was also appointed president of the spontaneously initiated, ad hoc international whistling organization.

The tape, "JGLNG" showcases the third generation circus performer, Mario Groggett. Mario, his mother, father and brother juggle in the family act. His sister was part of the act until she married a flyer and joined the flyer's family act. This videotape (pronounced juggling) is the result of work that I did from 1974-1976, while living in Lanesville, New York. In summers I occasionally travelled with different circuses and circus

acts — recording and playing back performances and rehearsals for the benefit of the circus artists. "JGLNG" was recorded in the Drougett's backyard in Sarasota, Florida during an afternoon in January 1976 and was completed in September 1976.

Skip Blumberg

Liza Bear

Liza Bear works at the Center for New Art Activities in New York. She has become well known for her informative interviews with artists in "Avalanche" magazine. Besides, the print medium, Bear is interested in communication via video signals transmitted over satellite. She has been involved in lobbying for public access for satellite time. She came to Video Free America after attending the LAICA Alternative Arts Space conference in Los Angeles. In San Francisco at her Video Free America showing, she presented documentation of her Send/Receive satellite project and talked about the trials and tribulations of working on such a large scale satellite project as Send/Receive.

Stephen Beck

Stephen Beck is a video artist and inventor of the direct video synthesizer. Beck, whose work has been widely shown on public television as well as in museums and galleries, showed several medium length tapes and talked at Video Free America about the process of developing his synthesizer.

Beck's work is pure video, in so far as its sensibility is derived from the inherent qualities of television, rather than those of film, painting, performance, etc. His "Video Weavings" are an extension of traditional weavings, utilizing the capabilities of his synthesizer to generate a large variety of geometric configurations and over 4,000 colors. The patterns are woven on the screen and set to music. They tend to resemble Indian

or Middle Eastern rugs — but this resemblance, which Beck emphasized by reading a quotation about weaving, is more of a convenience than anything else.

Of more importance about Beck's video is that he has found a way to link his consciousness to an image-maker without history, at least not in the glaringly derivative manner found in most of the work one sees. The basic power of his tapes, especially "Cycles" (made in collaboration with Jordan Belson and utilizing some film work to circumvent the outrageously expensive video editing process) comes from a sense of unity between the artist's consciousness and the vision before us as an audience — perhaps, in fact, this linking is the very essential element which, at this time in history, gives video an edge of immediacy over other media whose roots are too deeply interwoven among the threads of past cultures.

The visual effects of the tapes include explosions of colors, anthropomorphic forms, the raw beauty of primal images growing, as if without the control of the will, from the artist's mind. The command that Beck has of the imagery on the screen, mixed with the inherently automatic quality of some of the electronic effects, creates a greater feeling of richness and spontaneity than I have seen in any art in a long time.

Another piece that Beck showed was titled "Anima" a tape of a woman dancing. He explained that the woman on the tape was in fact a kind of anima figure in his life. Upon hearing that, I thought the title might be a little gratuitous — especially since most tapes or films of dance always seemed to me more profound in the minds of those who made them than in the reaction of the audience.

But it was immediately clear that Beck had achieved something beyond the scope of most examples of the genre — a sensuous drifting image appeared, sometimes visible only through the sparkling highlights of her gown and limbs, the deep reddish colors powerfully suggestive of the feminine spirit delicately guiding, balancing, appearing and disappearing. The "Anima" tape was particularly note-

worthy for its lovely, controlled use of the medium — and rarely have I seen an electronic medium produce such a graceful and quietly humane effect.

In its larger context, Beck's work, if it is about anything, has to do with the alchemy of technology, the process whereby the base metal of circuitry and components is transformed magically into the gold of images hitherto unavailable to the eye and disclosing things about the mind and our relation to the universe that could not otherwise be revealed. Working before a monitor, watching the creation of a whole world which takes on its own life, develops its own elements spontaneously via infinitely possible configurations, is a process akin to the highest level of mysticism, the bringing of pure nonbeing into being, into at least the level of transforming perception. More than any other medium, where sheer materiality and historical weight are obstacles to extending one's vision beyond time and space, synthesized video has the elements of a spiritual form in so far as it combines an imagemaking tool with an iconography which has not yet been developed or codified, which still allows the soul to reveal itself. This is not to say that someday video will avoid being as cliché ridden as older media — in fact the potential clichés of electronic media art already exist.

Bob Keil¹

Doris Chase

Doris Chase's background is in the visual arts, rather than dance, and this shows in her dance videotapes. In all of the tapes Chase screened at Video Free America, she explained that the choreography was entirely left up to the dancer, improvised or as the result of trial and error experimentation once the taping had already begun. Consequently, the dance interest of Chase's tapes varies significantly depending on who the performer is.

Chase seems tacitly to acknowledge this by increasing the optical transformations when she is dealing with a dramatically cool performer, like Jonathan Hollander, and limiting them when a theatrically powerful presence like Kei Takei is the subject.

Parts of Chase's "Dance with Me" tape of Takei are such straightforward records of her movement that they almost look documentary, but artistically so. In this respect, Chase's tape fulfills one of the unique functions of video by showing us closeups of parts of the performer in details that we never see in live performance. And unlike film, there is real time immediacy to these close ups of Takei's dancing eyes, feet, torso and hands. They seem to have come of a piece from a single performance, rather than having the look of perfection assembled from several different takes.

In this first section of the "Dance with Me" tapes, Chase's pieces made with the dancer Jonathan Hollander, where each movement leaves either a brilliant red or yellow trace, as if his actions were keyed thermographically.

Despite my preference for the Takei tapes, Chase's pieces made with Hollander are probably more typical of her work with video, and perhaps video-dance in general. In "Jonathan and the Rocker" a royal blue, two dimensional Hollander described simple turning and swinging actions while a white ellipse in the background vibrates with EKG like oscillations. The drama, and subsequent interest in the tape is more the result of the confluence of Hollander's movements, William Bolcomb's accompanying music and the optical transformations, than any one of these elements individually. The two dimensionality of Hollander's video image is underlined through Chase's use of chromatic manipulation.

As Richard Lorber has pointed out, it's the nature of the medium that bodies in videospace lack weight and substance, but Chase's use of a beautiful yet optically jarring palette of hot pink figures on an electric orange background and rich blue and fiery yellow, make the figures even visually flatter and the pictorial depth of

the Advent video projector, even shallower. This results in a beautiful but anaesthetized design image, somewhat like a Matisse cutout, or a "moving picture", as Chase refers to her work.

Undoubtedly, part of the static nature of Chase's dancers is a result of her being forced to tape them in the limited space of a video studio, where presumably neither they, nor she, can move very much. Yet, one can't help but feel that today the marriage of advanced video technology and dance should produce a more lasting and vital image. Especially when dealing with what many consider a hypnotically passive medium like television, the art has to be all the more powerful to silence the detractors.

It would be marvelous to see Chase's video techniques applied to a dancer of consummate technical abilities like Mikhail Baryshnikov, but, then, that might just upset the balance of video-dance even more, without stretching its potentials, resulting in a product that is more dance than video.

*Janice Ross*²

Eleanor Dickinson

"A chemist told me that there's enough strychnine in this jar to kill 20 people," Eleanor Dickinson announced with delight. She had videotaped imbibing of most of the jar's contents by a group feverish with religion and with effect benign as soda pop.

Dickinson is known in this region more for her powerful contour drawings of women, and for her teaching of art and curatorship at the California College of Arts and Crafts. The list of exhibitions, awards, and publications is long. Alfred Frankenstein of the San Francisco Chronicle considers her "one of the country's most powerful figure draughtswomen". Quite apart from this theme, so apropos of the Bay Area, she has devoted her last 11 summers to researching an aspect

of her family roots in Tennessee near the Kentucky border.

Annually she has packed her car with enough supplies and equipment to draw, paint, audio and video record and photograph the spirit of revivalism. Returning in her car have been all the trimmings for a serpentine celebration — snakeskins, blowtorches (an orange soda can with rag wick), fans printed with religious scenes on one side and mortuary ads on the other, tambourines and huge tent revival signs.

“Revivalism began in the 1880’s”, she explained. “It was like Woodstock; people would come from hundreds of miles”. Today’s remnants are tucked away into places like Holder’s Grove, Tennessee, Jolo and Camp Creek, West Virginia. She added video some three years ago, mostly ½” black and white but with some color. Use of a nuvocon tube had aided her in low light environments. Rattlers and copperheads are caressed like sacred charms, devils are cast out, a woman is comforted at the mourners bench. An elderly woman confirms in an interview, “My blessing’s always been with serpents — and my Daddy’s”.

Dickinson is a welcome friend, who can trade bible verses as easily as a rural Sunday school teacher, which indeed she was, but she is not free to invite others, particularly a production crew.

The body of research now includes 320 audio tapes, 152 videotapes, 250 drawings, 3,990 negatives, 1,951 artifacts and she is currently creating a series of black velvet portraits of her friends, inspired by the Mexican black velvet “Last Suppers” to be found in every revivalist’s home.

Already she has produced two exhibitions at the Concoran Gallery in Washington, D.C. and has published “REVIVAL!” a book of interviews and drawings and “That Old Time Religion” both by Harper and Row. The Smithsonian is now touring an exhibition of the photographs around the country. After Dickinson’s show at Video Free America, her next major exhibition will be at the Oakland Museum in summer 1979.

*Paul Kleyman*³

Loni Ding

Kick ball and jump rope had competition during the lunch break at Sherman Elementary School. A television crew, almost immobilized by fascinated admirers, taped the energy exploding over the schoolyard of the kindergarten through fifth grade classes.

The crew of “Bean Sprouts” was shooting another of its series of Chinese American children and friends. “I told everybody they would be here and that they might be looking for new talent”, said one career minded nine year old. Multi-cultural television that aims for the youngsters and frequently captures the entire family audience now has two major projects originating in the Bay Area.

“Villa Allegre” (Happy Village) produced by BCTV of Oakland is in its fifth year on the air as a national show with an impact on an estimated 8 million homes. Its cast features children of all social backgrounds who use Spanish and English interchangeably.

It was joined last Sunday by “Bean Sprouts” a television series created by the Children’s Television Project of San Francisco. The local showing was on KRON with national PBS airing scheduled next year, when the six part series is completed.

“Bean Sprouts” crews will be shooting in Chinatown and throughout the city to tell the story of Weimin, an immigrant boy who makes new friends, learns to deal with school problems and helps his family adjust to a new way of life.

“We use Cantonese dialog where it is natural”, said producer-director Loni Ding. “But we focus on the adventures of children of many races, immigrant and American born, inner city and suburban. Ding, who has a fellowship from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting is on leave from KQED where she has been a producer and director since 1973 with the multicultural “Open Studio”.

Children’s Television Project is operating out of a self refurbished warehouse owned by the Redevelopment Agency at 641 Golden Gate Ave. Two organiza-

tions, the Association of Chinese Teachers and Chinese for Affirmative Action, worked on the original idea and funding for the series. The Department for Health, Education and Welfare provided \$300,000 initial funding.

The crew is primarily Asian-American and includes Myron Chan, Michael Chin, Sara Chin and Dean Wong. Parents, teachers, and community workers have provided ideas for scripts, talent and locations.

"We intend 'Bean Sprouts' for family viewing", said Ding, "and we are making it a mixture of reality and fiction, using music, animation and fantasy. Race relations and ethnic appreciation are blended into the activity. The show emphasizes building on a background, not hiding it, and enhancing friendship among children of all backgrounds."

Children's Television Project has finished the first in the series, enthusiastically received in its San Francisco airing as well as in private screenings across the country. The crew is editing the second and planning the other four.

*Mildred Hamilton*⁴

Juan Downey

Juan Downey was born in Santiago, Chile and has studied architecture at the Catholic University of Chile and printmaking at Atelier 17 in Paris. He is currently Assistant Professor of Architecture at Pratt Institute, New York. In 1972 Downey began "Video Trans America" an on going project shot in Mexico, Central and South America. He has continued this interest with his latest work, "Yanomami, Body Rhythms" which was shot on the Orinoco River in Venezuela. His works have been shown at anthropological conferences and at video art showings. Following are some of Downey's feelings about interactions with the Yanomami people:

"Among the Yanomami, cinema, photography and video are called 'noreshi towai', a term which means, literally, the taking of a person's double. For this rea-

son, the Yanomami are somewhat afraid of the white people's cameras. The noreshi is the shadow or double of a person, and is an integral part of his spirit. Not even the Yanomami themselves know for sure the reason for the term 'noreshi towai', whereby they attribute such power to the cameras. Nevertheless, they take delight in watching good documentation of their own culture and in listening to records of their shamans. On more than one occasion I have discussed with them the absurd relation between the noreshi and photography. The only reason that appears to remain for their resistance to the camera is that of not wanting in a possible future, to sadden their descendants by confronting them with the image of a dead person. So, the camera represents a danger only beyond death, and even so, at the most of causing sorrow to their relatives. But the photographed image, filmed or printed offends against no Yanomami tabu except that relating to death.

The Yanomami took great interest in all sorts of recordings of images or sound. Untiringly (far beyond the extent of my interest or patience) they watched and listened to the films and tapes that I had of them. Those who learned to handle the video equipment or the camera took pride and pleasure in doing so, and in general they devoted themselves enthusiastically to playing with the closed circuit video as if it were a mirror reflecting variable angles and distances. Since they felt that there would be no images in the future to cause sorrow to their descendants, live television afforded them a playful approach to electronic and cybernetic technology. But, furthermore, for this culture whose highest value is transition or behavior, a game so uniquely situated in the present as closed circuit video, which did not violate their ritual prohibitions, would twang the most intimate fibers of their temperament and fancy . . .

Video as process or instrument, impress the Yanomami no more than an outboard motor, a shotgun, or a flashlight. From the point of view of the Indians, television is simply yet another thing that the 'strangers'

make, as desirable as any consumer goods. (By contrast, in our culture, TV transports the viewer to a paradise of extremely desirable consumer goods!) Closed circuit or live television appeared to them no more surprising than a mirror, and the fact that the videotape requires no developing did not interest them, for the simple reason that they do not know about the cinema and its slow laboratory processing. The closed circuit and the freedom from processing then, are advantages not inherent in video, but rather a comparison with the cinema; a catalyzing process in our culture, but not in the Yanomami's."

Juan Downey

Ken Ellis

Ken Ellis is the producer of "Bay Scene" at KGO-TV, the San Francisco ABC-TV affiliate. A graduate of San Francisco State University's broadcast communications department, Ellis has worked his way up to producing "Bay Scene". At his Video Free America Showing, Ellis presented a tape explaining how "Bay Scene" is made. They work strictly with union crews, DGA, etc. and shoot on 16 mm film. Ellis also presented an excerpt from a program on teenage crime and showed a reenactment of police arresting youth offenders. He discussed how he felt that film gave the reenactment a distance from reality that video couldn't give. He spoke broadly on the film vs. video argument, and said that he personally favors film.

Ellis was very interested in Video Free America after his showing and wanted to screen tapes by San Francisco video artists. After screening works he decided to do a "Bay Scene" program on electronic video artist, Skip Sweeney. The program which will be shot in January 1979, will include an interview with Sweeney at Video Free America and also the broadcast of his original video creations on KGO-TV in prime time.

Bill & Louise Etra

Bill and Louise Etra are widely known for the co-invention of the Rutt-Etra video synthesizer with Steve Rutt. It was one of the first synthesizers built and processed a black and white video signal. The Etras moved from New York to the Bay Area in 1977. Since moving to the Bay Area they have established three companies; Etra Technology Research Associates, Digital Video Image, which offers production and post production for computer images, and Video Modular Systems which manufactures computer video hardware.

Bill Etra continues to research with genius the possibilities of interfacing computer and video technology. He has had the foresight to use Woody Vasulka, Dan Sandin and Bill Hearn as research assistants on his projects. Louise Etra presently serves on the panel for the National Endowment for the Arts.

Previous to moving to the Bay Area, the Etras have shown their works at the Kitchen in New York, Anthology Film Archives, WNET-TV, and co-curated the New York Annual Computer Arts Festival. They have received fellowships from the Rockefeller Foundation and much recognition for their synthesized tapes. At their Video Free America showing, they presented "Narcissicon", "Beneath the Bedsheets", "Heartbeat Tape" and "Video Wallpaper".

Kit Fitzgerald/John Sanborn

The sports broadcaster recognizes the value of capturing and manipulating the essential "Play at the Plate". In the time frame of baseball, not only are these moments the most important to the outcome of the game, but they also are empowered to transform the sport into something resembling poetry. The use of television technologies, then, at these explosive moments permits the viewer to transcend the incident (by passing its allotted "incident time") and dissect it vi-

sually in a manner beyond simple human sight, and absorb those fragments in suspension.

While the sportscasters must apply their technical expertise to an existing situation, and modify the parameters of the particular sport, we produce images and sound which drive forward at the force of a "continual play at the plate" and are rooted in the possibilities of the TV technologies. What results is in short an addition to the vocabulary of our new visual and aural language. We make abstract videotapes comprised of "real" images, altering the "realness" of the images along the way. All using existing hardware, but providing a different set of content elements, which are extruded in new and different forms.

The videotape recordings are a cross section of our work from the last two years, sampling the styles resulting from our investigations.

"Exchange in Three Parts" recorded in 1977 under an artists in residence grant from the New York State Council on the Arts, "Exchange" is a production of the Television Laboratory at WNET/13 and was broadcast in New York, on WNET as the first show in a four part mini VTR series in June 1978 and has subsequently been picked up by the Eastern Educational Network for National Public Broadcast throughout 1978.

Musical in its basic construction, "Exchange" is an allegory revealing a confusion between the televised and non-televised worlds where technology has flexed its omnipresence and surfaced in public and intimate environs. Subtle and sudden dissolves between concrete and fantasy settings are achieved by both simple (direct color recordings) and complex (slow motion disc work combined with multiple dissolves controlled by a CMX editing system) techniques.

"Paris a la carte" was completed in early 1978 as part of the VISA series. The brainchild of Nam June Paik, and funded by the Rockefeller Foundation, the series presents artists visions of other cultures, a mixing of "art" and "documentary" styles. Aired in New York in April and on PBS in July, VISA included works by Paik, Russell Conner, Bill Viola, and Dimitri Devyatkin.

"Paris a la carte" is a crash into the Paris of today, with attention paid to the information overload, French style. Don Foresta, serving as a field producer, gathered bits of French television programs for us to use in our editing collage. Foresta also served as a base for us when we shot and absorbed in Paris, preparing us for a three month sifting of information which was the essence of our edit.

"Entropy & Order", "Access" the first two pieces of the A and B sides of a visual "45" are the beginnings of an eight part, half hour which will be completed in early November. "Access" was commissioned by WPBT-TV, the PBS station in Miami as a segment in their pilot program "Wraparound" a magazine type program. What does music hold over a linear visual medium? Humming. What is visual humming? "Entropy & Order" are attempts to instill a sense of visual humming. "Access" is a compressed story, which evolves from implications not direct statement.

Fitzgerald-Sanborn

Terry Fox

Terry Fox is an artist who first became known for his evocative performance pieces stemming from his knowledge that he had cancer. After chemotherapy, and relative health, Fox's work took another turn. He made "Children's Tapes" which he presented at Video Free America. The simple black and white tape deals interestingly with the simple things that children find so interesting; such as twisting a fork, or balancing a spoon on a glass. Since "Children's Tapes" Fox created a sound instrument in the abandoned urban site of San Francisco's Yerba Buena, stringing the hollowed out sections under sidewalks, making them into resonant environmental stringed instruments. Most recently, Fox has decided to go live and work in New York.

Simone Forti/Peter Van Riper

Simone Forti and Peter Van Riper performed "Big Room" at Video Free America. Forti is a legend in her own time, dancing natural movement that often reflects her interest in the study of animal movements. Van Riper is a composer who plays clarinet and ethnic percussion instruments. Following is a song by Forti which she says gets her running in a large figure eight.

I look around me and I see goodwill
And I look inside me and I see goodwill
But the spots of blindness they linger still
to tilt the wheel to tilt the wheel

And did we fly to earth or will we fly away
Did we fly to earth or will we fly away
And a song of choosing where to go
Is a song of wonder
A song of wonder
Full song of wonder

And the endless summer rolls on and on
And forever clockwise its spun and spun
And forever counter its spun and spun
And the endless winter rolls on and on
And did we fly to earth or will we flyaway⁵

Howard Fried

Howard Fried teaches video at the San Francisco Art Institute and has been involved with other art forms such as sculpture and performance for a long time. For his Video Free America showing, he created a new work using Video Free America equipment and utilizing the Video Free America studio as the setting for part of his tape, "Vito's Reef". The first section of the tape involves Fried talking with his 10 year old son describing the principle of "cat and squirrel" eg. the Italian theory of light and shadow, chiaroscuro. The second section of the tape was transferred to video from film and has Fried and a female companion standing in a large sports

stadium next to a blackboard. The woman says a sentence and Fried corrects her and tells her how to say it correctly. She repeats it word for word and he corrects her again. This process goes on over and over as tension and frustration mount higher and higher.

"Vito's Reef" after its Video Free America showing has also been shown at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

Jody Gillerman

Jody Gillerman has a pet boa constrictor, Fafnir, who has been a subject of her video art and inspired the name Viperoptics. Certain to elicit audience reaction, Gillerman's snake tapes reveal a fascination with sensuality, science and the uncommon. Since her arrival in the Bay Area in October 1976, Gillerman's work has been performed at Cat's Paw Palace, the Blue Dolphin, and the Lawrence Hall of Science in Berkeley. On a more commercial level, Gillerman has created video environments for the Hooker's Ball with cuts of Fafnir included. In addition to her art, Gillerman is interested in video technology and recently invented a 4 channel vertical/integral switcher, designed by Michael Polatnick, Don Day and herself.

Jody Gillerman became interested in video synthesis and computer graphics while a graduate student in painting at the Chicago Art Institute. She acquired her technical skills and awareness at the University of Illinois, known for its sophisticated hardware programming. Gillerman grew tired of computer graphics which she now refers to as "pretty patterns" since they became ineffectual in a large space. She now works primarily with large, interactive environmental performance pieces, and likes to draw in audience reaction.

Since last year Gillerman has taught video art at the California College of Arts and Crafts. Her equipment at Viperoptics includes: an image processor, 6 cameras, 4 processing monitors, 8 mixers, a pattern generator, a colorizer, plus her newly invented 4 channel vertical/integral switcher.

Mark Gilliland

Mark Gilliland is a video artist who attended Virginia Commonwealth University until 1976 and since then has shown his works in Virginia, San Francisco, Mexico City, Los Angeles, and Canada. At Video Free America he presented three video essays: 1. "Supermarket Aesthetics" 2. "Image Topology Tape" and 3. "Coffee and Doughnuts Tape". Gilliland writes on the works, "The Video Essays are an ongoing inquiry into and a reflection upon, the cultural space of society. Because of the nature of the field of inquiry, the analysis touch upon context ranging from archeology to mysticism to hermetics, from psychology to linguistic philosophy, etc. The basic procedure involves analysis and evaluation of signs, symbols, objects, situations and the like, into interrelated grids of meaning. Each of these matrixes (or meaning grids) is presented as a logically formalized structure in which the underlying elements are specific concepts or cognitive attributes. The interrelationship of these elements yields a grouping of operationally equivalent meanings or referents."

Also shown at Video Free America was a collaborative tape between Gilliland and Jill Scott, called "Video Value". Gilliland writes, "Video Value" is a research tape which documents the opinions and problems of a number of independent producers and artists who utilize video. (Also included are short samples of artists tapes.) All decisions made during editing were based upon a set of topics which seemed to reoccur in the various interview sessions i.e. equipment access, group representation, public access. The content of this tape is a condensation of many viewpoints, serving as a record of a particular moment in the history of the Bay Area video community."

Arthur Ginsberg

At the Video Free America showing series, we presented Arthur Ginsberg's "Carel & Ferd", a multi-

channel closed circuit work. In 1975 he revised the work for broadcast television and "Carel & Ferd" was broadcast on WNET-TV locally in New York City. "Carel & Ferd" is a portrait of two people straight out of the sixties who deal with drugs and homosexuality in video verite.

Since 1975 and "Carel & Ferd" Ginsberg has moved on to other projects. This past year he made a pilot for KQED-TV called "Screening Room" which would showcase the works of independent filmmakers. The host for the show was Peter Boner (formerly the dentist on the Bob Newhart Show). The program has gone through several transitions of different host possibilities motivated by a concern to get national PBS ratings. The "Screening Room" project is in a holding pattern now.

In 1978, Ginsberg was also the broadcast director of the Bay Area Video Coalition, a new video group in the Bay Area. As broadcast director, Ginsberg (with a panel) chose six producers for documentary projects for which he is the executive producer. Hopefully, these programs will be aired on public television in 1979, packaged as a series called "Western Exposure".

Presently, Ginsberg is only serving as a consultant to the Bay Area Video Coalition as he directs his full energies towards making a pilot program called "Paperback Television". "Paperback Television" will be a magazine format late night television show. The pilot has been funded by the Rockefeller Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts. All in all, a busy year for 1978, and surely more to come in 1979.

Jean Goldberg

"Urban Self-Reliance: An Alternative" was originally made in Super 8 film and has been transferred to $\frac{3}{4}$ " videotape for wider distribution. It is about the work of the Farallones Institute's "Integral Urban House" located in Berkeley, California where various food raising and energy conservation systems are being demon-

strated particularly for people living in urban areas. These methods are being developed to encourage an understanding of how people living in cities can manage their own homes in ways that can reduce their dependency on "supermarkets and high priced utilities", as well as to contribute to an ecologically healthy environment.

When Jean Goldberg first went to the Integral House she thought that more people should know about what was going on there and that someone should make a film about it. The result was that she ended up learning how to make the film herself. She was assisted in the editing by Cora Harschel, and Steve Lawler did the sound recording. A videotape copy of the Film has been purchased by the San Francisco Library's Communication Center and has been shown publicly and on cable television.

Jean Goldberg

Sharon Grace

Sharon Grace first began working with video in Gestalt therapies recording the interactions of others so they could observe themselves in their roles. While attending California Institute of the Arts she constructed a Paik/Abe video synthesizer. Her interest was in the development of a new language, the language of the dream and precognitive impulses brought out by the real time image potential of the synthesizer. She conducted workshops in which the video synthesizer and other electronic tools were available for live image processing. Participants including dancers, musician-composers and artists working in other media were encouraged to improvise freely. In one of the most expressive tapes of the period, a dancer performed her reaction to losing a partner, based on a personal dream. Her swirling image is transformed by the synthesizer into a brilliantly colored flow of movement.

A growing interest in the coded language of commercial broadcast television led to a series of analysis pieces. A freeze frame technique allowed close examination of the images. It was discovered that non-verbal communication (eg body language) often revealed more content than other image components. In an analysis of a television commercial Grace attempted to sensitize viewers to the erosion of their critical faculties through the constant bombardment of TV commercials.

In 1977 Grace worked as artist technician in the Phase II Send Receive Satellite broadcast between artists at NASA AMES Moffett Field, CA, and other artists using a portable ground terminal which was set up on the banks of the Hudson River in NYC. Dancers and musicians interacted via the US-Canadian Technical Satellite. Information was exchanged on topics of artists access to satellites, health care, and art. The possibility of further decentralization of telecommunications terminals led to research into the Slo Scan phone line television system. The freeze framed image is sent through conventional dial up telephones. Grace's piece at Video Free America involved a conference call between six cities in the US and Canada. The content of the calls was as varied as the regional ambiances, ranging from a video tape of the Mutants (music group) performing at Napa State mental hospital, to scenarios performed by artists in each city. The system develops regional dialogues with information traveling freely across boundaries. Artists in each of the six cities had a particular time to transmit to all other locations. For part of her transmission participants were asked to lie on the floor holding small tombstones; the caption on the frame read "100% Mortality".

A recent work entitled "Intimacy at 2,000 Miles" is a visual lyrical poem in which she explores some of the limitations of the system. In black and white, still frame, a series of nudes (mainly baroque) are juxtaposed. One of the captions reads:

“Beyond this glass outside this frame
is color, warmth and touch.”

*Sharon Grace
Sharon Small*

Dan Graham

At Video Free America, Dan Graham performed “Performer Audience Mirror” which had previously been performed at de Appel in Amsterdam and PS1 in New York City. He also showed the tape “Past Future Split Attention” which was produced in London and has been shown at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Following is the artist’s description of the tape, “Past Future Split Attention”.

“Premise: Two people who know each other are in the same space; one person continuously verbally predicts the other person’s behavior at the same time as the other person recounts (by memory) the opposite’s past behavior.

Both are in the present, so knowledge of the past is needed to continuously deduce future behavior (in terms of causal relation). For one to see the other in terms of the present (attention) there is a mirror reflection or closed figure eight feedback/feed ahead loop (of past/future) cross effect. Each person’s behavior reciprocally reflects/depends upon the other’s so that each one’s information of his moves is seen in part as a reflection of the effect that their own just past behavior has had in reversed tense as perceived from the other’s view of himself. For instance, the expectation of the person predicting the other one’s behavior may be thwarted if the other person deliberately alters the course of his future behavior and establishes an alternate or negating series of actions. However, unconsciously (conscious to an outside observer in a long span of time) may perform as predicted, but in a displaced or altered sequence of responses which reflect his reaction to the reaction of the other to his predict-

ing a ‘past’ identity upon them. Or he may be projecting the behavior that the other person is anticipating from him onto the other person’s past, trying to affect that person’s future (predictions) . . . and so on. (As part of the thinking process in terms of the time continuum of cause and effect, the observer in dealing with what he sees, extrapolates from the observed’s past behavior projected in a line to the future.) For the performance to proceed, a simultaneous — but doubled attention of the first performers self in relation to the other (object) — the others impressions — must be maintained by each performer. This effects cause and effect directionality, as does the discrepancy in time between words as linear projections and the linear direction of behavior.

It ideally must be executed as a videotape. This allows the performers a solitary and more intense concentration. For the viewer, the medium of video (its reduction of information to audio and visual sequences and its unbroken flow of real time continua) make evident the relation (and disjunction) between verbal language and body language/behavior as (separate but inter-related) linear (temporal) sequences.”

Dan Graham

Candy Hershfield

Candy Hershfield is the producer and on camera talent for “In Review”, a Viacom Cable Television series. Their programs range from interviewing the littlest Osmond brother, to taping the feminist artist Judy Chicago. The program has both in studio segments and segments shot in the field on their TK-76 camera. Hershfield has also interviewed video artists on the program and aired their works.

At her Video Free America presentation, Hershfield presented an anthology of “In Review” programs and talked about the politics of cable television. Hershfield was a panelist at the cable television conference in San

Diego in the summer of 1978. She also talked about her perceptions of the future of cable television. Hershfield sees a threat in the future for local cable programming because of the expressed interest by Viacom management in programming feature films. These old movies attract viewers at a minimal cost to the cable system, so cable management programs them heavily.

But, Hershfield feels that original local programming should be at the top of management's priority list, rather than old movies. Hershfield thinks the primary value of cable television is its ability to cover timely community events. In fact, "In Review" is the only television program (cable and non-cable) that consistently covers local art exhibitions, concerts, theater and dance programs. Let's hope Hershfield is strong enough to sustain "In Review" as a showcase for the possibilities of local programming, in spite of the advent of cheap movies.

Lynn Hershman

At Video Free America, Lynn Hershman presented a documentary of an installation she created in a fashionable New York department store. She used holograms in the windows, an energy survey and even a mannequin crashing through the display window. Her tape of the event was a good color video document of the installation with interviews with the artist and people on the street.

Lynn Hershman is also known as the director of the Floating Museum, an alternative art space in San Francisco. The Floating Museum, has sponsored "Global Space Invasion" at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, (H)ERRATA, and solo exhibitions of Eleanor Antin, Paul Cotton, Terry Fox, Michael Asher, Peter D'Agostino, Helen and Newton Harrison, Robert Harris, Hilaire Duphresne, Robert Janz, Douglas Davis, and Peter Wiehl.

Hershman's "Lynn Hershman is not Roberta Breitmores" work was shown at the de Young Museum in 1978 and she also presented drawings and her videotape "Windows" at Gallery Paule Anglim in 1978.

Alan Hertzberg

Alan Hertzberg showed the "Autobiography of Miss Jane Dubois" at Video Free America. Hertzberg is on the faculty of Media Studies at the New School for Social Research.

"The Autobiography of Miss Jane Dubois" is a 12 part video portrait of a young black woman. Jane is unmarried, a teacher's aide dependent on welfare income supplements to provide for herself and her two sons. She is alive, articulate and candid about the day to day realities of her life. Each tape runs approximately 15 minutes and covers a single theme: "The Early Years", "Abortion", "The Father of My Children", "Izzy and Other Lovers", "Black is Beautiful", among others. Each chapter in this video autobiography fits together another fragment of the puzzle of Jane's life.

Jane was nine months old when her parents gave her to an aunt and uncle and five when they reclaimed her "because the more children you have, the more money you get." Lost and unhappy in her family, she left home in her teens and became pregnant and a high school dropout at 17. Although she lost this child by 20 she had delivered her first son, James. Jane recounts her painful relationship with the father of her two sons who not only refused the boys any love or child support, but raped Jane after his marriage to another woman. Jane has no pity for herself; she is far too realistic to get mired in any sentimentalizing. She recalls the illegal abortions performed on poor women and explores how her own feelings about abortion have changed in the last ten years. Her love and care for her two sons comes across in two tapes where she admits to herself that "I need them — they are really all I have". Jane's descriptions of her Kafkaesque episodes with the Department of Welfare will set your teeth on edge. Sharing intimate details, she reveals her unsuccessful search for satisfying personal relations. She communicates her feelings about work and the problems of managing on a small income, comments on how the "Black is Beautiful" movement influenced her. and

makes observations from the Northern black's perspective on life in the South. Jane is a portrait framed like an Avedon photograph, only this chiaroscuro woman speaks, reacts and exists in time. She is startlingly vital. One senses her courage and humor, a resilience borne out of a lifetime of hard lessons . . .

*Deirdre Boyle*⁶

Gary Hill

Gary Hill has been working with video since 1973. His work has gone in many different directions but gathered a conceptual approach most recently. "Field Dance" shown at Video Free America, is an example of Hill's earlier work. His concern with this piece is a purely visual one utilizing different image processing techniques. It is a live improvisation of four dancers, image processed keyed video, and interfaced sound. The result is a computerized environment of motion and sound; a visual cybernetic discovery in video.

"Field Dance" marks a turning point in Hill's progression as a video artist. His direction is moving away from video as a visual, pattern making process toward aspects of video as a conceptual process . . . video and decision making.

Fiske Smith

Kathy Huffman

Kathy Huffman, along with Nancy Drew, are the new video curators at the Long Beach Museum of Art, replacing David Ross, who moved on to the University Art Museum in Berkeley. Huffman presented a number of tapes from the Long Beach archive at her Video Free America showing. They included tapes by Charles Frazier, Hildegard Duane and Allan Kaprow.

Huffman is looking forward to curating and presenting a group of new video artists in a show at Long

Beach in the spring of 1979. In 1978, Long Beach showed tapes from their archives and also received a video program from the Kitchen in New York, titled "Made for TV" which was curated by RosaLee Goldberg, in conjunction with Carlota Schoolman and Robert Longo. "Made for TV" was shown on cable television in the Los Angeles area by the Long Beach Museum.

In addition to cable television showings and the maintenance of a video archive, the Long Beach Museum also has an artist's post production facility, which provides video artists with works-in-progress, access to video editing equipment and technical assistance.

Daile Kaplan

Daile Kaplan installed "Changing Postures: the bed" at Video Free America. Following is a review describing the work.

"At one end of the room was a real bed, red sheets, plaid blanket, two rumpled pillows. Next to each pillow was quite casually placed a video monitor, each monitor showing a tape of one rumpled pillow. The tape deck was placed on the floor beside the bed. Running across the wall behind the bed was a mirror, partially blocked by another video monitor.

Standing directly in front of the bed, one saw one's face reflected in the mirror and one's back on the monitor. The real objects and the hardware and reproductions were tied together in the black and white photograph of a nightgown, silkscreened on a fabric so delicate and placed so carefully on the bed that it could nearly be mistaken for the 'real' thing.

The casual juxtaposition of the bed, the site of dreams and of the most intimate parts of one's life with the video hardware suggests that the use of these means of reproduction and the problem of somehow relating them to private experience were of deep and ongoing concern: the tapes, with their real past time sound track gave this bed a history: and the mirror and

monitor opened this private space to the partial transgression of, if not the viewer's person, of at least his-her reflected image. The viewers grouped in a semi-circle at the foot of the bed, had a hesitant, slightly confused look of friends at a sick bed. A strongly suggestive work."

Amy Taubin⁷

Nancy Karp

Stylistic links between dance and the other arts have rarely been as clear as they were in the early 1970s when nondance or minimal dance neatly paralleled conceptual and minimal art.

Laura Dean, Lucinda Childs and Trisha Brown are the choreographers whose names are most frequently linked with this dance form in the east. In San Francisco, however, the all-too-infrequent performances of Nancy Karp and Dancers constitute our only continuing contact with this approach to movement. Although the resemblances are apparent, Karp classifies herself as neither a disciple nor imitator of these New York minimal dancers. She cites, instead, her study of South Indian Classical music and dance as a major influence on her work. But this in some ways only brings her closer to Dean, who also refers to certain Eastern elements in her dances, such as mystically repetitive harmonies and whirling dervish spins.

This blending of Eastern and contemporary Western esthetics is alternately apparent and hidden in Karp's work. Her most recent Bay Area concerts, March 4 and 11 at Video Free America, began with the performance of an original Karp score, "Music For A Small Gamelan". The almost hypnotic tranquility of the gamelan's soft gonglike tones is echoed in "Reminiscence", Karp's newest and most ambitious dance.

"Reminiscence" begins with the entrance of Rachael Reilly, a slim, darkly attractive, but intentionally cool performer. She slowly traverses the studio space in

even, measured walks, highlighted by an occasional raised arm or pivoted direction change. Something about the deliberate and calm manner in which she executes these simplest of tasks clues us in immediately to the nonvirtuoso tone of the dance. One-by-one four more performers enter the space, each redefining it with his or her own perimetrical or diametrical walks.

All five dancers (3 women and 2 men) are barefoot and wear either black or white shirts and drawstring pants of the opposite color. This casual and comfortable costuming is *de rigueur* in most minimal dances, thereby forcing attention on the large scale movements of the dancers' bodies through space rather than on individual body parts and muscles as the standard leotard and tights do.

The Karp dancers radiate a genial smiling warmth as they execute small forward and backward walking circles and two-feet-to-one hops. Sex is not underscored in any way, no one "lifts" or "partners" anyone else, and the only visible difference is in the qualities of weight and lightness that bigger or smaller bodies impart to the same movements.

Unlike the other two Karp dances on the program, "apace" (1975) and "Jumping Dance" (1977), "Reminiscence" is not performed in silence. The mini-gamelan sounds that accompany it provide easy accents for the performers syncopated hops and contrapuntal stamps. After some twenty minutes of this relaxing sound sauna of music and foot slaps, the dancers exit out the door one-by-one in the same perfect tempo that they entered. It's the kind of beginning and end that suggests that what we are seeing is only a fraction of some still ongoing dance.

In its length, complexity and title, "Reminiscence" marks a clear departure for Karp. The title is at once romantic and explicit, denoting an associative recollection of sounds mnemonically linked to actions. Neither "apace" nor "Jumping Dance" provides the same visual meditation as "Reminiscence". Devoid of sound, "apace" is a simple perambulatory duet for Karp and a

partner who walk abreast and apace. Never altering their rhythm, they cross the space, one facing forward and the other back, their heads resting on each other's shoulders.

"Jumping Dance", like "Reminiscence", has a charm that's impossible to articulate in writing. Four women and one man enter, Adidas and socks in hand, and sit down and methodically put on their footwear and striped sweaters. Once dressed, they stand, and at a nod from Karp, who is at one end, they begin jumping in place. Like a bouncing human calliope, they loudly exhale "Ha!", "Hey!" and "Ho!" in an irregular but precise rhythmic counterpoint. It would be easy for Karp to lay with the repetitive simplicity of this, but she doesn't. Like a mantra for the hurried, her dances are short, uncomplicated and strangely euphoric.

*Janice Ross*⁸

Joanne Kelly

A dance work needn't be "important" or even theatrical so long as it has the spark of individuality and holds the interest. Those were the properties of Joanne Kelly's solo video dance "Tahmar" seen at Video Free America.

Kelly is a graceful dancer in her mid-twenties who first attracted attention here as the author of the excellent "Survey of Dance in the Bay Area" published last year by the Bay Area Dance Coalition. My reasoning that a dance statement by someone that intelligent should be worthwhile, turned out correct.

"Tahmar" is several things. As dance, it is a consequential synthesizing of its own sign language. As a medium, it involves effective interaction between dancer and color video projections of outdoor scenes. As statement, it is evidently an autobiographical discourse, Kelly-Tahmar's figuring out the meaning of a life made up of ordinary activities.

Her recorded voice announces this scenario purpose

in accompaniment to one recurrent video flashback. It is a sequence shot through a culvert of a girl climbing a beach and walking towards the camera. We assume it is Kelly-Tahmar and that she will emerge so revealed and fulfilled at the final return of the video refrain.

In the episodes between, Kelly creates her sign language associations. A long overhead shot of waves on the beach are reflected by the dancer's slow wave of one arm and gentle rise on one foot. A rolling surf — a slow rolling head, water swirling around a rock, arms outstretched in embrace over head bowed forward, a distant beach strand — leg raised straight out, develop. Again and again these brief episodes are repeated in sequence.

There is no music. She is working in the time plan of the video sequence, created by the way, with Skip Sweeney's assistance.

The ideas are direct and clear. Tahmar as Kelly emerges finally through the culvert, out of her self-querying phase, with her answer. The meaning of her life is in the dance expression of her perceptions of it. It is not earth-shaking, not heavy, and thanks for that, but gracious, gentle and persuasive.

*Robert Commanday*⁹

Paul and Marlene Kos

Paul and Marlene Kos, who have displayed their works widely, showed a selection of short tapes at Video Free America. Previously, I hadn't had an opportunity to see more than a few of their works, and I was deeply impressed with the evening. The pacing and editing of the tapes was exceptional, and in no case did they decay into the auto-obsessiveness of much video. One piece, perhaps visually the most striking, was "Sirens", and began with a close up of smooth stones casually piled together, as if discovered on a beach. After a while the stones shifted and you realized that they were actually placed on the face of a woman. When the stones fell away, the woman began to laugh with a haunting shrillness — and soon the scene

shifted. Each of the several scenes was accompanied by this sirenlike laughter . . .

Another piece of similar character, featuring Marlene Kos, showed her seated at a vanity table daubing black makeup on her face while repeating, like a dirge, a sequence of words with negative associations. She continued to makeup her face, at which she gazed with a sort of fatalistic look, mingling hatred with utter detachment, until it came to resemble a death head, the dark lines of makeup like shadows delineating the bones. If unskillfully done, this piece might have easily slipped into silliness, a sort of lurid freshman play about life and death, but instead it seemed to emerge intact as something felt and lived through. In the tapes where Marlene Kos was the actress, it seemed that her exceptional dark beauty was as necessary to the success of the piece as were the other elements. The works were highly personal, some clearly emerging from the feelings between the two artists, in a sense a playing out of their own drama.

Something that struck me especially was the blending of masculine and feminine elements in the Kos' work. I recently read a piece by Judy Chicago in which she sought to show the distinction between male and female art, indulging in every possible cliché about the difference between men and women. Chicago described male artists as aggressors against the blank space of canvas, etc. and women artists as nurturing or giving birth to their ideas in an unfolding process. Paul and Marlene Kos' work was interesting in that regard because it really showed the strange bisexuality of the creative act. It was possible to sense the two artists envisioning the works through the medium of the other and creating them by a sort of dialectic process involving the aggressive and passive parts of both sexes. The tapes at Video Free America had a certain type of completion about them, and it was especially interesting that I felt this element was lacking in some of the works Paul Kos did alone. For this aspect, as well as for many other reasons, the tapes are of special interest.

*Bob Keil*¹⁰

Suzanne Lacy & Leslie Labowitz

Suzanne Lacy and Leslie Labowitz are two feminist artists who work together collaboratively pushing the boundaries of what one normally defines as "art". Lacy is a graduate of California Institute for the Arts. She has taught at various colleges and shown at the Long Beach Museum of Art, the Women's Building, LA. La Mabelle, San Francisco, etc. Labowitz graduated from the Otis Art Institute in LA and received a Fullbright Research Fellowship to go to the Art Academy in Dusseldorf, West Germany. Her work has been shown in the De Young Museum in San Francisco, Frankfurt Art Museum, etc.

At Video Free America, they showed videotape of their Memorial Media Event at the Los Angeles City Hall protesting the many rapes that were referred to in the press as the "Hillside Strangler". Their videotape was shot by a local news team and their event appeared on the Evening News. The event included talking and singing of solidarity among women and called for women to unite against violence towards women. The mother and sister of one of the dead rape victims and officials from City Hall also participated in the event.

They also showed a videotape in progress that was shot in Las Vegas of a showgirl/prostitute turned office worker. In a very simple videotape, the woman talks of growing up and going to a Catholic school, of being sexually enticed when very young and punished by nuns. Of reaching out for love in the form of prostitution, of trying to get out of it and going through analysis, of becoming a showgirl, of falling back to prostitution and drugs, of trying to attend a community college and on. It's a simple portrait of a woman struggling to come to terms with herself as a woman in our society. It was an unusually moving tape.

The most current San Francisco project by Lacy & Labowitz was a demonstration called "Take Back the Night" which was staged in North Beach in San Francisco, a neighborhood with a high percentage of strip

joints and massage parlors. The demonstration was in conjunction with the "Women Against Pornography & Violence" conference held in San Francisco. Hauntingly, their event, "Take Back the Night" occurred at the time when the Guyanese mass murders of People Temple followers became known.

Geoff Leighton

Geoff Leighton has been director of Viacom's Cable Access Channel 25 for about a year, but has worked with video since 1972. As an administrator, he handles the duties of organizing and producing community projects for little reward. Channel 25 has a "hands on" policy of cable access. Leighton is patient and optimistic about his role as director of Channel 25. At Video Free America, he talked about independent producers and the potential cable offers them. "Channel 25 is a good distribution source for independents to show their tapes to a large audience." He showed a tape of short segments of locally produced work, which reflected the beginning difficulties people have trying to polish a new medium. Right now, Channel 25 offers independent access to equipment and an audience, but Leighton projects that money, in the form of a revolving tape library is around the corner. "People misunderstand cable," he says, "broadcast and PBS programming is inaccessible to most independents, but cable can eat up all kinds of programming." He sees Viacom's "Showtime" as a huge potential programming source for independent work (to fill in the spots between features).

Fiske Smith

Richard Lowenberg

Richard Lowenberg's work includes research and development projects dealing with the information environment and human sensory abilities. He has collaborated on cultural artistic projects implemented by the resources of NASA. Following is an excerpt from

the text of his video performance at Video Free America.

The toad silently wondered. He remembered the human play he had seen years ago. It took place in a huge black room. The metal floor and walls took off at peculiar angles, shaping the gentle breeze that flowed continuously through the space. Some people sat along one wall, watching others moving very slowly. They seemed so small and far away in that enormous room. And they were quiet. They were not talking, that is. They were making music. Their every movement produced a succession of rhythmic sounds. An old woman sat in a rocking chair, remembering youthful experiences with Dinah the gorilla. She had photos to prove it. At times it became possible to see the air and hear its myriad sounds. In the dark distance, the toad could see a group of people wearing long white coats. They stood under a single bright light, working diligently among a collection of small machines. They seemed to be important, but he could not understand what they were doing. He croaked. Moments later, his voice echoed through the darkness. He slowly hopped towards the trees.

Richard Lowenberg

Jerry Mander

Jerry Mander spoke at the Video Free America series about his book, "Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television". His views are radically unique. Mildred Hamilton's interview of Mander follows:

The latest television survey is called the Jerry Mander Ratings and the entire industry scores zero.

Mander, a former advertising and publicity whiz kid, developed a social conscience as his thick unruly curls turned grey. For the past four years, he has searched his soul as well as scientific and social studies, and the result is a disturbing book, "Four Arguments for

the Elimination of Television” published by Wm. Morrow & Co. “There are, of course, hundreds of arguments for eliminating television, but overall it is damaging to people’s understanding of the world.”

Mander advocates Television Anonymous because he thinks the medium is not reformable. It can’t just be turned off — it must be turned out. “If this is a democracy and if the technology is increasingly controlled by fewer and fewer people, we ought to get rid of it and not submit to it. Giving up television is a positive act, but we must understand this act is an example of taking control over our own lives.”

The first of Mander’s four arguments is that television moves man into an artificial environment and alienates him from the real world. Second, he sees economic control being concentrated through the domination of TV by the corporate juggernaut. Third, he is alarmed by the possible physiological and psychological dangers from four hours and 15 minutes a day the average viewer spends before the set. And finally he believes that television’s highest potential is advertising. And advertising, according to one time partner of the celebrated agency of Freeman, Mander and Gossage, “exists only to purvey what people don’t need . . . and to homogenize people and culture.”

His own inner conflict over the clash between his personal philosophy and corporate policy has already taken Mander out of the three martini lunch, Tahiti for the weekend, class-client orbit and into a public service ad agency. He tried to convey ecological information and cause on TV. “I found it was not possible. I feel that information on that can’t be conveyed is lost and gone from the democratic mix. What survives is the corporate control of all of the millions of people in front of the set. It frightened me. It was 1984.

He recalled how he began to look critically at TV, to listen to people’s comments that they became zombies or were somnambulized, mesmerized, spaced out, hypnotized, brainwashed by television.” He mulled over the idea “that television had to be eliminated”. He talked about it and was encouraged to write about

it. The deeper he got into the subject, the more Mander was alarmed by television’s impact.

Today he admitted as he chain smoked, sipped coffee and tried to suppress signs of nervousness, “I worry about being interviewed about the book, about how the thing that comes out of my mouth arrives in people’s heads. I won’t go on television to discuss it. I obviously believe the print medium is the closest to the truth — but I am wary.”

He sees his value in “just articulating the stance.” I don’t want to be a one man movement, or a leader. I expect anyone with the same perception about improving things will support it. The ecology movement may be the most logical, as these people see it as the same kind of monolith as the nuclear arms, highrises, freeways, they fought.”

He also hopes his book will spur research on the biological effect of television; “It’s a scandal how little has been done.” He found a few studies on the effects of artificial light on human beings that suggest they may be harmful to cell structure and that they may be linked to hyperactivity. “One Australian study shows that the TV viewing experience actually inhibits learning as we usually think of it. Very little cognitive, recallable analyzable thought based learning takes place while watching TV.”

Mander’s own searching watch of television as a frightening fact of American life made substantial changes in his own. How did Mander, his feminist author wife, Anica Vesel and their two small sons live during those non-income expensive research years? “It wasn’t easy,” he said with a grin that eased the lines around his deepset eyes. “We had been used to the big time advertising money. When we got out of that we had to readjust to living on one third the amount, but it was basically a good life, simpler. I got an advance from the publisher and some foundation grants. I did a few one shot ecological ads. Anica teaches and writes. By the hour, writing the book works out to about ten cents an hour.”

However, the lean days may be behind him, "Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television" has been named a Book of the Month alternate and the prepublication interest suggested a brisk sale.

The Manders still have a TV set. "Aside from research use, the Mohammed Ali fight is the only thing I have watched in three or four years. My wife doesn't watch, but the kids get a maximum of five hours a week. There is a problem. I want them to see the world with their own eyes and also I want them to know the medium. They have become aware watchers and they helped me with the technical tricks test. This involves timing each alteration of events, a cut, a zoom, a super, a voice over, all the tricks intended to keep your attention from waning. Try it yourself. The luring forward never ceases for very long. If it did, you might become aware of the vacuousness of the content."

Mander fears that children — and some adults — turn into TV characters as they slowly absorb the images of the set. When TV is eliminated, "suddenly the rest of life looms larger. When the rest of life is too difficult for the individual, he must make the choice of dealing with it — or taking more drugs like television."

Mander is also upset by political campaigns that degenerate into television advertising campaigns. He cites President Carter's emphasis on style over substance and calls Jerry Brown a symbol whose substance has dropped out. "I don't see anyone with a fundamentally political stance on how to improve the world. Carter's campaign pledges are forgotten, washed out by the next TV show."

If the public can be helped to understand the relationship between mass technology and control over one's life, Mander said, social changes can be made. "Look at Gov. Brown and the space program he advocates. That is good only to a handful of corporations. It is not giving us more solar energy, for example. It is a concentration of power. The individual's interest in solar energy will be lost and Brown will be responsible."

He looks at his book, despite the vast amount of research involved as basically a personal statement,

a manifesto, a plea to other to examine the political and social consequences of the technology of television. "It deserves the same kind of serious thought as genetic engineering and nuclear power".

*Mildred Hamilton*¹¹

Deborah Mangum

"Six Phrases in Real Time" is a videotape interpretation of an actual videodance event, performed at Serramonte Shopping Mall. The nontheatrical environment of Serramonte Shopping Mall, provided an immediate audience for "Six Phrases in Real Time" that was unfamiliar with the inside workings of TV and modern dance. The audience attention was constantly changing from dancers to monitors, to technicians and cameras, to themselves viewing the dance. The interweaving of these people and objects in the space provided a part of the whole experience.

Five dancers manipulated six movement phrases. One skittered near one of the six closed circuit monitors and imitated another dancer's image on the screen. A cameraperson would leave her camera and assume the posture of a dancer. A dancer working a camera, shot two passersby sitting on a bench, while another dancer laid beside them, rhythmically flinging her arms and legs.

The audience shifted their focus from chroma-keyed storefront lights on a monitor, to a nearby dancer, to supered ensemble dancers over the center fountain moving to a dissonant sound score.

The reality of Serramonte Shopping Mall on Sunday afternoon was altered. For forty-five minutes the audience, dancers and crew members associations with television and dance were radically changed.

The ten minute edited tape, "Six Phrases in Real Time" is both another interpretation of the event and an independent visual and aural experience with its own integrity.

Deborah Mangum

Marin Community Video

Ray Rodney, the director of Marin Community Video, (who has since been replaced by Rainer Matuszewski) presented two tapes at Video Free America. The first tape he presented was a selection from their Marin Video Magazine and the second was a documentary of San Quentin produced by Richard Harkness, David Lent, Clint Weyraych, Jack Burris in conjunction with Marin Community Video, called "Inside San Quentin".

The Marin Community Views, a newsletter for the organization, describes what MCV is:

"Marin Community Video in Marin County, California is a video organization that has successfully maintained its community focus and its dedication to public access. It has remained committed to the idea of television as an information and communications tool geared towards increasing people's awareness of the area in which they live, and of the people they share that area with. New school zoning, public elections, local artists, gay discussion groups, all find their place on community television. Video education, cable regulation, support of local videomakers — all are concerns of the Marin organization. It's history and its many current activities reflect a continuing effort to strengthen the voice that independent groups and individual citizens can have in the direction and content of television programming . . . Of course, there will always be struggles for money and power. But, Marin Community Video has made enormous progress in bringing television to the people — as a tool, as entertainment, as a friend. It will be fascinating to monitor the political, sociological and cultural offshoots of MCV as Marin County becomes an increasingly wired community."

Roberta Grant¹²

Mobile Image: Sherrie Rabinowitz and Kit Galloway

Mobile Image: Satellite Arts Performance Project

is a research and development project aimed at developing and exploring the creative use and application of satellite communication systems. To this end, the objective is: To use dance to investigate the interactive potential of applying the creative process in live transcontinental satellite mediated television/video performance.

The grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, were given specifically to develop ideas for multi-point interactive satellite performances that could eventually be applied to live satellite performances for airing on PBS.

The performance experiments are simple, focusing mainly on technical problems and performance possibilities. We want the performers to work with the "television space" and specifically the characteristics inherent to satellite technology.

One of the most important and interesting characteristics of live satellite interconnection is the signal time delay. This means basically that, though we speak of 'real time' and 'live TV' there is a time delay in sending and receiving the image. This delay is a result of the signal travelling at the speed of light up to and down from space requires 1/8 of a second up and 1/8 of a second down, resulting in a 1/4 second signal travel time from east to west or a 1/2 second round trip. Though the delay is only a 1/4-1/2 second it is extremely noticeable and can be disorienting. On the other hand, it can also be quite aesthetic and has many possible implications.

When we speak of "television space" we are speaking both conceptually and literally. Literally, we are talking about a performance/dance that is designed for viewing on a television screen. In this respect, the performance is 'framed' rather than staged. The camera is not an objective eye photographing a performance conceived for stage, the dance, the camera are interactive. The performance is an integration of the graphics of dance and image. Conceptually, we are speaking of a performance in which dance/ritual is about communication, about time and space, and about our interaction with television.

The performance designs were created to enable us to test as many technical configurations as possible. This was important in order to create a base of technical information that can be applied to future, more extensive satellite performances.

The creation of the performance pieces was a collaboration between the dance performers, technical performers and ourselves. The program is a series of performance fragments in which the technical tests are designed as performance scores and conversely the performance scores are designed as technical tests. The scores have been designed so that content talks about and shows process and that the process is considered performance. This is a "Research & Development" project, by definition it is one of experimentation. A final product, in this case an hour video record of our experiments, should show potential.

To our way of thinking the spirit of the technology is one of communication, cooperation and collaboration. The process must be as much a statement of this as the product.

Rabinowitz & Galloway

Francie Oman

Francie Oman has degrees from Mills College and the University of California at Davis. She has shown her work at the Richmond Art Center, Target in Oakland, and the San Francisco Art Festival. Following is a statement by the artist on her work:

"Miracles are not contrary to nature. They are only contrary to what we think we know about nature." St. Augustine.

In my work I confront the questions of where control stops and chance starts. I explore highly coincidental, or synchronistic patterns in events and their relationship to play. I often use disc shaped playing pieces as a medium of play and interaction with forces beyond my control, leaving the result up to a mixture of my

own control and chance. A sense of magic, visual incantation, ritual and psychic effects results.

My procedure is to establish my intention, set up a game, and begin to play; then events line up in coincidental patterns showing higher than chance odds, in ways that complete a work in alignment with my original intention although I have theoretically no control over these elements. For example, while documenting a game with colored discs at the beach all were lost to the waves, at which point a rainbow appeared in the sky.

Chance caused me to pull the Tarot cards 6 and 9, whose meanings about death and birth were so in line with the theme in "Many Happy Returns". It was one of many similar coincidences in the piece.

Sometimes I assign control to the viewers and invite them to participate, as in "Color Trilogy". In this piece the viewers also get to play with chance in the form of dice. Sometimes the games set up have higher stakes, as in "Tidal Lasso", in which I could easily have lost my life climbing on the cliff; in this case the finished piece became a melodrama. Through playing and discovering patterns apparently outside my control it has become clear that art is the child of magic. The tapes I showed at Video Free America were:

"Black and White Video Color Drawing" where I draw on my side of the screen as the audience draws on their side of the screen. A playful revival of Winkie Dink merges with the artist's giving up her control of the piece to viewer participation.

"Red Moon" is an "on the spot" dance ritual which grew out of playing with discs on the full moon during the artists menstrual flow.

"Color Trilogy" is non-competitive games which invite the viewers to participate by using their eyes and psychic powers. Playing involves chance with color dice.

"Many Happy Returns" is a synchronistic birthday-deathday visual poem which was an actual documentation of a pile up of real events on the artist's birthday using more disc games.

"Tidal Lasso" is a melodrama evolving from the artist's attraction to and fear of dying by going off a cliff into the ocean; in which the artist makes a real game of it using more disc games.

Francie Oman

Charlemagne Palestine

Charlemagne Palestine is an experimental composer who also makes wall hangings and videotapes. His videotapes are distributed by Castelli-Sonnabend Gallery. He was in San Francisco to present his work in performance at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music and also agreed to present his latest video work in progress at Video Free America. The tape involved footage of Palestine in bed under covers and inter-cutting to a very dramatic taped version of an Italian cowboy western. The tape has since also been shown at Media Study in Buffalo.

Ilene Port

At Video Free America, we showed an unusually strong first tape, by artist Ilene Port, titled, "No Che Problema". "No Che Problema" is a beautifully evocative portrait of three women who live together. It portrays their everyday experiences and the mounting frustrations of everyday life, i.e. working, relating to men, and the pressures of the city. The tape is well shot with spectacular tunnel shots from darkness to light, women reflected in store windows, and whited out dreamy shots of women sleeping or brushing their hair upside down.

The editing is fast paced, but thoughtful. One cut in particular highlighted the tape. We see a woman in the shower with water dripping down her back which cuts to water dripping down the side of a teapot as it reaches its boiling point, letting off steam and tooting. It was a sensible visual analogy which strongly

reinforced for the viewer what Port was getting at in her visual poem.

Port has said that she has had some difficulty getting her tape shown at women's video festivals, which makes sense in some weird way. "No Che Problema" is not the feminist party line rhetoric, it's a moody impressionistic visual poem on contemporary female life. Although its subject is something that is increasingly dealt with in the commercial media via "Girlfriends", "Women" etc., the tape is Port's own unique take on life, and it makes a lovely first tape.

Virginia Quesada

Virginia Quesada is a composer and video documentarian whose work reflects the energies of her environment and her culture. Quesada has a MFA from the Center for Contemporary Music at Mills College in Oakland. Her recent showings were at the Exploratorium in San Francisco and at the Kitchen in New York.

At Video Free America, Quesada showed a two channel video work, "Twins". A pair of identical twins (Virginia and Victoria Quesada) were simultaneously videotaped, the twins being separated by a distance of 3,000 miles. At the appointed time they were interviewed with identical lists of questions, one question a minute, for a half hour of videotape. Neither twin had prior knowledge of the questions. In performance, the tapes are played simultaneously. It is an interesting juxtaposition, as each twin answers the same question in different ways.

Also on the program was a documentary made on the San Francisco Mime Troupe. Quesada was the producer and director of the program which was made with funds from the California Arts Council.

Quesada is an interesting videomaker, in that she is both a video artist and a documentarian.

Bill Roarty/Bernard Blake

Bill Roarty is a painter, videographic artist and

teacher. He was an artist in residence at the National Center for Experiments in Television from 1971-75. He also participated in the first National Center intern session in 1969. The National Center was affiliated with KQED-TV in San Francisco. It was the first video center established at a television station that specifically explored the uses of electronic video imagery research, broadcast and development. Roarty's major works include "Passage, See . . .", "Passage . . . a life drawing", "Untitled", and a collaboration with Willard Rosenquist called "Lostine". His works are characterized by slowly revealing shapes and forms. In particular, his work with dancer, Noel Parenti, is an exquisite example of languid colors and textures revealing the human form.

His work has been broadcast on the "Electronic Notebooks" series from KQED-TV in 1973 and 1974 and from WNET-TV on the "Video Visionaries" series in 1974 and 1977.

His showing at Video Free America included an installation of the silk screens of Bernard Blake. Blake and Roarty have been working together originating design elements that they transfer from video to silk screens and/or paintings.

Martha Rosler

Where do ideas come from? All the myths of everyday life stitched together form a seamless envelope of ideology, the false account of everything thinkable. Ideology is a readymade always ready to stand in for a closer understanding of the world and its workings. The myths of ideology cushion us, it is true, from the paranoia that is engendered by mistrust of cultural givens. But they are not nurturant. The interests served by ideology are not human interests properly defined; rather, ideology serves society in shoring up its particular form of social organization. In class society, ideology serves the interests of the dominant class. Through the channels of mass communication the bearers of both "information" and advertising, the

dominant class holds its own ideology up to our whole society as the one true way of seeing the world. The impetus is then strong for us all to adopt its views and to identify ourselves as members of the middle class — a mystified category that covers over the real outlines of the dominant class.

The dominant ideology leads us all to aspire to the condition of the petty bourgeoisie (the lower reaches of the dominant class): to be "our own boss". Thus, the legitimate desire for control over one's own life is flattened out, transmuted into a desire to own one's own business — or, failing that, to construct a "private" life in opposition to the world out there.

Looked at historically, the advance of industrial capitalism has eradicated craft skill at work and economically productive family activity as well, lessening people's chances to gain a sense of accomplishment and worth and increasing our vulnerability to the blandishments of advertising — a potent educational institution that has also developed under industrial capitalism. Thus, as the opportunities for personal power on a human level diminish for all but a few, self-confidence, trust, and pleasure conceived in straightforward terms are poisoned, and we are increasingly beguiled by an accordionlike succession of mediations between ourselves and the natural and social world, mediations in the form of commodities.

We are each promised personal power and fulfillment through consumption; we are as nothing unless clothed in a culture that is conceived of as a congeries of packages each of which presents us with a bill. In pursuit of meaning and satisfaction we are led to grant the aura of life to things and to drain it from people: we personify objects and objectify persons. We experience alienation from ourselves as well as from others. We best comprehend ourselves as social entities in looking at photos of ourselves, assuming the voyeur's role with respect to our own images; we best know ourselves from within in looking through the viewfinder at other people and things.

The culture of corporate capitalism has metaphor-

ized agriculture: each of us is the row to be howed, the field to be sowed. The upward-aspiring bourgeoisie and upper ranks of the working class are led to "cultivate" superfluous skills, such as gourmet cooking or small boat navigation, whose real significance is extravagant, well rationalized consumerism and the cultivation of the self but which, in seeking legitimation, mimic skills once necessary to life; skills which moreover, were tied to a form of social organization that we think of as less alienated and more familial than our own. In pursuit of meaning, also, we are led to see meaning where there is only emptiness and sham, strength where there is only convincing manner, status where there is only a price tag, satisfaction where there is only a cattle prod, limitless freedom where there is only a feedlot. Our entire outlook is conditioned by the love and the terror of consumption.

Commodity fetishism, the giving over of self to the thing, is not a universal trope of the human psyche; it is not even a quirk of character. It is both the inescapable companion and the serviceable pipe dream of the capitalist social organization; it is "Our Way of Life". It is built into the structure of society originating in the production process and the social relations it engenders, in which one's very ability to make or to do something is transformed into a commodity of sorts in itself, salable to the boss in exchange for "wages".

How does one address these banally profound issues of everyday life? It seems reasonable to me to use forms without simply mimicking them. A powerful medium is television, which in its most familiar form is one of the primary conduits of ideology — through both its ostensible subject matter and its overtly commercial messages. I am trying to enlist "video", a different form of television, in the attempt to make explicit the connections between ideas and institutions, connections whose existence is never alluded to by corporate TV. Nevertheless, video is not a strategy, it is merely a mode of access.

Video itself is not "innocent". It too is a form of cultural commodity that often stands for a celebration of the self and its powers of invention. Yet, video is useful in giving me the chance to construct "decoys", entities that engage in a natural dialectic with TV itself . . . A woman in a bare-bones kitchen, in black and white, demonstrating some hand tools and replacing their domesticated "meaning" with a lexicon of rage and frustration is an antipodean Julia Child. A woman in red and blue Chinese coat, demonstrating a wok in a dining room and trying to speak with the absurd voice of the corporation, is a failed Mrs. Pat Boone. An anachronistically young couple, sitting cramped and earnest in their well appointed living room, attempting to present a coherent narrative to explain their daughter's self-starvation, are any respectably middle class couple visited by misfortune and subjected to a "human interest" news-show interview. A woman and child in a studio-constructed no space, being handed can after package after can of food as Christmas charity, are a faded echo of "Queen for a Day". An operatic presentation of a woman put through an ordeal of measurement tenuously alludes to a monumentally stretched out version of "Truth or Consequences".

One of the basic forms of mass culture, including television, is the narrative, especially the first person narrative. (Melodramas, situation comedies, soap operas and so on seem to me to embody a form of first person narrative in their protagonists.) Narrative can be a homey, manageable form of address, but its very virtue, the air of subjectivity and lived experience, is also its danger. The rootedness in an I, which is (predictably) the most seductive encoding of convincingness, suggests an absolute inability to transcend the consciousness of a single individual. And consciousness is the realm of ideology, so that the logic of the first person narrative, in particular, suggests that there is no appeal from ideology, no critical view of things. Given the pervasive relativism of our society,

according to which only the personal is knowable and all opinions are equally valid, the first person narrative implies the unretrievability of objective truth. (The validity which, we grant to "public" figures of all kinds, which tends to include the scientific and medical establishment, is the opposite term of this pair of oppositions.) At most, one version, or another of the dominant ideology is implicitly reinforced, on the basis of what happens to the protagonists or the other figures with whom they interact.

Yet this inability to speak truth is the failure not so much of narrative per se as of the naturalism that is taken to be narrative's central feature. Break the bonds of that naturalism and the problem vanishes. One can provide a critical dimension and invoke matters of truth by referring explicitly to the ideological confusions that naturalism falsifies by omission. A character speaking in contradictions or failing to manage the socially right sequence of behaviors can eloquently index the unresolvable social contradictions — starvation in the midst of plenty, gourmetism as a form of cultural imperialism, the demeaning impersonality of the institutional charity, the racism, sexism, and national chauvinism of some of the basic tenets of "Scientific" testing — that are the source of ideological confusions and make them stand out clearly.

In choosing representational strategies I aim for the distancing (ostranenie or verfremdungseffekt) occasioned by a refusal of realism, by foiled expectations, by palpably flouted conventions. Tactically I tend to use a wrenched pacing and a bent space; the immovable shot or, conversely, the unexpected edit, pointing to the mediating agencies of photography and speech; long shots rather than close ups, to deny psychological intent; contradictory utterances; and in acting, flattened affect, histrionics, wit, or staginess. Although video is simply one medium among several that are effective in confronting real issues of culture, video based on TV has this special virtue; it has little difficulty in lending itself to the kind of "crude think-

ing" as Brecht used this phrase, that seems necessary to penetrate the waking daydreams that hold us in a thrall. The clarification of vision is a first step toward reasonably and humanely changing the world.

Martha Rosler

David Ross

In 1977, David Ross came to Berkeley from Southern California to assume the position of chief curator at the University Art Museum. At the museum he supervises all curatorial programs and manages the curatorial staff, as well as oversees the production of museum publications. In addition to the many areas these duties encompass, Ross is interested in video and film. Before coming to Berkeley he was deputy director of television and film at the Long Beach Museum of Art from 1974-77, and prior to that from 1971 to 1974 he held a curatorial post at the Everson Museum in Syracuse, New York, which involved video programming. Ross has also written about the medium and has produced his own work. In this interview he talks with Bob Keil about video esthetics and dissemination.

Bob Keil: To begin with, what plans do you have for video in the Bay Area?

David Ross: That sounds rather Machiavellian . . . and a bit ominous. For the last 9 months I've been chief curator for the art museum. It is a position I took with certain understandings, with certain feelings for ways I wanted to change personally. Specifically, I had certain feelings about the developing character and complexion of what is called — "video art" and the relationship of that character to something which is of primary interest to me, that is the way in which the functions of the museum are changing. Video art after ten years, for some people, is like photography forty years ago. I think it is at a stage where it's time for it to be seen as part of the normal curatorial concerns of the museum and no longer should be seen as an additional

activity which the museum adds on like a trailer to an exhibition program.

Bob Keil: I read a short piece by Nam June Paik where he remarks that people will stroll for hours through a mediocre museum collection but refuse to be imposed upon for more than a few minutes by a mediocre tape or film. That was his way of describing, in part, the unseen presence of "culture" in the museum environment.

David Ross: Well, the context is so important. Maybe the basic problem of museums will be solved and maybe not — but the idea of putting video into indiscriminate transmission demands that the issue of context be rethought. For example, is it reasonable for a video art program to be put on a public station as Carl Loeffler of La Mabelle has done or as I did in Southern California? How much value does that really have in terms of the effect on the audience? Is it like putting up a painting in a shopping center and expecting it to survive? If you put up a painting in a shopping center it's likely to be misread, but more important, it is likely not even to be seen by 99% of the people. On the same level, could a Terry Fox piece survive on television in the context between "Barretta" and "Police-woman"? Could you put on the "Children's Tapes" and expect people to sit through it? And what issues would you engage by doing that anyway?

A more concrete example is that during the "Southland Video Anthology" series some people from the Johnny Carson Show got very excited about video art. They called me up and wanted to have some video art on the show. I showed them some tapes. Of course they wound up liking only the Bill Wegman tapes and put one on with Wegman, Man Ray and another dog. A "Two-dog" piece! A wonderful Wegman "Man Ray" tape showing all the dog's well-known stoic characteristics. But the entire piece is silent, and Johnny Carson just couldn't bear the silence. After about fifteen seconds he started narrating the tape. So all of the sudden this piece, which was now in a broadcast context and reaching umpteen million people, was

completely altered. Wegman took it with a great sense of humor and was thrilled to have a Johnny Carson monologue on his piece. But that's the sort of distortion likely to occur.

Of course, that story has its limits because we couldn't expect much out of that showing, but a more reasonable thing would be to consider the timing and the rhythmic expectations that commercial TV builds in people, the five-second edit, the faster and faster pace leading up to a commercial, the volume increasing with the commercial, then back to the slower editing, etc. That kind of inbred rhythm, which David Antin called the "money metric," provides a context for some video art which can be reasonable sustaining, but for a completely unfettered use of the medium an artist has to be able to generate a context out of the idea of the work. If video art were forced to develop within the commercial TV context, it would be similar to all painting developing out of the interior decorating context.

Bob Keil: I think that earlier in the development of video art a lot of artists, almost in reaction to the confines of commercial TV editing, were just turning on their decks and leaving them on, recording images that left people wondering "why bother?" It's seductively easy to record images on tape. I still see a fair amount of video art that seems to go from point A to point A.

David Ross: That may be due partly to a reaction against commercial TV, partly to the absence of editing equipment, and also that these artists no longer felt the need to force their tapes into a filmic structure. After seeing unedited tapes for a year at the studio in Long Beach, at one point a lot of artists started making edited tapes. Sometimes they went back and made an unedited one again. The point is that unless an artist has access to the full range of the medium, not only the tools but also the sense of the end game of the medium, his or her work can be damaged severely by forcing it into the wrong context. In other words, if the piece should take three weeks to "see" but can't be

made that long because programs are only one-half hour long, then there's literally no way an artist can transmit that idea in a broadcast context. So epic works are written out of the possible uses of the form.

I just saw some wonderful tapes by an artist named Bill Viola who spent time in the South Seas and made an incredibly long and involved tape study of local music forms. When he had to edit them down for the program WNET wanted they looked like another one of those academic PBS anthropology shows. The raw material, however, had had his own musician's sense to it. The final program was much less powerful than the original material. So I see one of my roles in the museum as championing the idea of the artist having actual access to a channel that will be run solely for artist's work.

It's still a lot too early to think that society will have enough sympathy for artists working in TV to try showing these works on commercial TV. It's the responsibility of museums and the art world to try to develop networks to show artists' work.

A museum-run television station would, in many ways be closer to the ideal clean white space than the most Bauhaus-style gallery you could devise. It would be a channel purely for use by artists. I know it seems boring and ridiculous to a lot of people. That's not the issue. The issue is that the alternative of having that station exist really changes the whole picture. It is still difficult to judge video art in any larger sense, but it's especially damaging to rush to judgment about video before this kind of system becomes a reality — artists' video will only hit its stride fully in that kind of context. It seems possible to me that a forced judgment of artists' television at this point will lead to a serious setback in public apprehension of artists' working in TV in the near future.

Bob Keil: Why do you say that?

David Ross: Well, because I feel the forces out there constantly. Critics wonder, Where are the great video artists? The great works? They insist on judging the medium's esthetic suitability rather than looking and

thinking about specific work. Clearly the notion of artists working in TV is provisional, tentative, as it always has been, and it has not yet reached the level of being self-sustaining. A lot of artists are working in the medium, but there's this kind of knee-jerk reaction to the fact that video wasn't able to achieve all it might have in its first ten years. There's a turning away by some artists involved in the medium. There's a loss of confidence by some artists that TV can provide the social connection it potentially has.

Bob Keil: In closing, can you give a sense of how you define video art — that is, in contradistinction to other uses of the medium?

David Ross: Well, for one, the question of high production values is not essential to artists' video except insofar as it is one approach available to the artist. High production values are germane to those who work in commercial TV or film; are paramount. As far as I'm concerned, one of the most dangerous things that happens is that people blur all independent cinema as art, all independent video as art. This demeans it all. Some of film or video making may be sociology, politics, art or various combinations of elements, but it cannot all be labeled art just because it's not commercial. The notion that Frank Gillette introduced, the notion of quiddity, the kind of infinite difference that makes all the difference, is very important in our trying to understand what's happening out there.

Most of the understandings about video art that I encounter have to do with people blurring those distinctions or not even knowing that those distinctions exist. . . those distinctions between uses. If film were seen as the apotheosis of the architecture of movement, video is more likely to be understood as the apotheosis of the architecture of intention, where the use is determined by both the producer and the viewer — where the notion of mass audience exists more as a possibility than as a given, where the idea of interpersonal relationships using the medium becomes an actual possibility, part of the artists' range of choices.¹³

Dan Sandin

Dan Sandin is a nuclear physicist, designer and video artist. He received a Guggenheim fellowship in 1978 and has taken a leave from his teaching duties at the University of Illinois, Circle Campus, to continue his work under the Guggenheim fellowship. At Video Free America, he showed tapes he has made on his Sandin synthesizer and also showed tapes by some of his advanced students. Willard Thomas in "Video-graphy Magazine" describes the properties of Sandin's synthesizer.

"The image processor is a powerful and versatile instrument for manipulating video signals and producing effects that many experienced video directors have never seen nor even dreamed of. The device is a set of analog modules that respond in specific ways to properties of well-behaved, high speed electronic video signals. The modules separate, amplify, contour, extract edges, do separation effects, key superimpose and any and all combinations of the above. It can perform the functions of a colorizer, switcher, keyer, special effects generator and almost any other television processing instrument. However, it can combine and multiply these effects in a truly visually unique manner."

Darryl Sapien

Darryl Sapien is a sculptor and performance artist. At Video Free America he presented black and white videotapes documenting his performances "Splitting the Axis", "Within the Nucleus" and "Split Man Bissects the Pacific", and talked about future projects. Since then, he has shown his work at Gallery Paule Anglim in San Francisco.

"Splitting the Axis" involved two performers, Michael Hinton and Sapien. They both worked their way down a 32 foot tree trunk while splitting the pole with wooden wedges and hammers. A live video instal-

lation showed the performance in real time as it was happening. This performance was done at the University Art Museum.

"Within the Nucleus" was performed at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, with Hinton and Sapien as performers again. They built a 32 foot high helical ladder inside a transparent polyethylene cylinder. The structure was meant to be an analogy of DNA molecular structure. As they climbed this ladder — out through the ceiling — video images from cameras tied to their bodies were shown on a video installation below them, so the spectators could literally see what the performers were seeing.

The last documentary tape presented was Hinton and Sapien performing "Split Man Bissects the Pacific". This performance did not include live video. It took place on a foggy cliff on the Pacific Ocean in San Francisco called "Lands End". They built a large wooden wheel and rolled it over the rocks to a small island and back to the land.

Ira Schneider

At Video Free America, Ira Schneider presented the work-in-progress, "Time Zones". Schneider received a grant from the Guggenheim Foundation to videotape in each time zone around the world, and edit the footage together for a multi-channel installation. The installation would enable the viewer to walk through and experience each time zone in the world. At Video Free America, he showed a selection of the work to date.

Schneider is also known as the co-editor of the "Video Art" book, published by Harecourt, Brace and Jovanovich. The book shows photographs by many video artists and provides several essays of commentary. This book has become a guide for many people interested in the medium.

"Time Zones" is not Schneider's first multi-channel video work. He has also produced a multi-channel

portrait of the United States called, "Bits, Chunks and Pieces". This was shot in New York, Madison, Wisconsin, the Texas/Mexico border, New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, and California. Schneider explains the title of the work, "A bit is a small segment of information. A chunk is an organized series of bits. And a piece is like an art piece, an organized whole." This work has been shown at the Kitchen in New York and is distributed by Electronic Arts Intermix.

"Time Zones" is the logical development of Schneider's work; from black and white video to portable color video, from the United States to the world. He is broadening his focus and challenging himself to expand his own personal style of geographical, multi-channel video art. After taping around the world for a year, his next challenge after editing the hours and hours of material will be finding the needed showing space to present "Time Zones" in. He will need 24 cassette decks and 24 color video monitors of equal size, to present his latest work!

Jill Scott

Jill Scott is an Australian artist relocated in the Bay Area. She is also a member of the women's performance connexion, "Motion", and has also showed her work in conjunction with "MOTION" at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in 1978. At Video Free America she showed three tapes and slides, "Untitled", "Inside Out" and "Extremities" which dealt with records of body movement confined by environmental structures. She writes on her work:

I use video to flatten life. Video enables me to receive flat images just as immediately as they occur so that drawings can be created from the results. My tapes mostly deal with records of body movement confined by environmental structures. Video can mean a good rehearsal aid or simply an unusual viewpoint, but it enables me to be selective and probe around. Video serves as the triangular structure at the base of the

network of the installation or performance. In "Extremities" (1978) the audience was videotaped as they made decisions, whether to move to the left or right of a large wall etc. I recorded this information from a monitor behind the wall by drawing on large sheets of vellum and then presented it back to the audience via video. It took them a while to realize that they were effectively, my "source of inspiration".

Jill Scott

Fiske Smith

Americans are daily saturated with information from *local* sources such as sloganized, personal and overheard conversations, as well as foreign sources of information, media programming.

"In Touch, Out of Touch", my four channel video-performance piece, concentrates this dual ambiance of information using the 1976 Carter-Ford debate as a focal point to distill the notion that we can discern everything coherently and reliably. The piece consists of three parts performance and three parts tape. The performance parts, live and local, and the tape parts, recorded and foreign, integrate the two information sources, and literally structure an ambiguous half hour of American life.

The first performance part is a conversation loaded with media stereotypes. The first tape section is recorded interviews with random citizens in familiar settings, bars, streetcorners, schools, etc. The second performance part is a live newscast. The second tape part is primarily significant sections of the debates, plus prime time TV. The third performance part is a dinner conversation and a newscast done simultaneously by myself through the aid of a tape delay video beam projection. The third tape section is a mix of the first and second tape sections, plus violent keyed footage of football, hijacking drama and horror movies.

Reliable knowledge is an idealized popular culture myth, manufactured for public trust by our authorities.

TV is a convolution of true and false imagery that constantly molds our sensibilities and actions. It is a difficult, almost impossible task to arrange a standard for ourselves by sifting through an endless output of local and foreign sermonizing, fashion, violence etc.

Fiske Smith

So & So & So & So

So & So & So & So's work is composite theater — a tapestry woven of dream, journal, found text, found icon, autobiography and folklore. The group is comprised of two co-directors, Louise Steinman and Susan Banyas in collaboration with guest artists — visual artist Michael Bowley, an actress Rebecca Engle, a non-dancer Felicity March and video artist, Elaine Velazquez. Their work extends visual imagery into physical/verbal theater through collective backgrounds in dance, writing, visual arts, and personal exploration. Their work is personal, intimate and direct.

They presented "Untitled" at Video Free America. "Untitled" is a dance video collaboration between Elaine Velazquez and Susan Banyas. It deals with the artists self image and psychic states, sleeping and waking, during the course of making the piece. Banyas appears as one live image and two videotaped images simultaneously.

Tom Rhoades

Comments on "Untitled" dance video work:

... Elaine Velasquez emphasizes that her background is in painting; it was as a visual artist, rather than a documentarian, that she became interested in dance collaboration. She wanted to find out how video could be used actively (she stresses the word) not as background but as an integrated part of a live performance.

Susan Banyas' interest in the collaboration came out of her own naivete about the possibilities of video. She wanted to explore its potential for use in the dance

process as a recording device providing instant feedback, and as an abstract visual element.

Velazquez feels that the immediacy and flexibility of video kept them from feeling precious about their early experiments; during the initial month of work their method was loose, investigative, even intuitive. According to Velazquez, they did a lot of playing — passing the camera back and forth, chasing each other around. The results were sometimes self-consciously arty, sometimes jut plain silly. But in each working session they allowed themselves enough time to try something, reject it, try something else.

Although Banyas has never worked with a video artist before, the material she's using in this video piece reflects a larger involvement with what Al Wunder calls, "the theater of the ordinary".

"A day out of anybody's life is interesting," says Banyas, "and a month contains an incredible amount of material." During the first weeks of work Banyas introduced her own dream images, thoughts and daily activities into the taping sessions — and all without premeditation or conscious manipulation of a theme. It was not until she and Velazquez reviewed a month's worth of tapes that they began to define the terrain of the piece as it had evolved.

Rebecca Engle¹⁴

Henry Smith/Solaris

Henry Smith, received a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation to make a video adaptation of his performance piece "Cerberus". He came to San Francisco to make it. He created it at Video Free America, utilizing to a great extent the possibilities of Video Free America's "Video Lab" a custom built processor by Bill Hearn. The tape was presented in the August showing series with Henry Smith and the video crew of Skip Sweeney, Walt Louie, Joanne Kelly, and Amy Gissen answering questions from the audience on how it was made. Following is a review of the tape:

Henry Smith, director of Solaris Dance Theatre, has produced "Cerberus Video" shot on locations in San Francisco in May and August 1978, and given its European premiere at the American Cultural Center in Paris, France on October 11. With Smith as artistic director and choreographer, Skip Sweeney, director of Video Free America, as video director, this stunning half hour of experimental video dance theatre emerges as a surrealistic work of art.

Though the striking music by Teiji Ito and the effective Oriental based costumes by Bosh Johnson and Kris Varjan impart a Far Eastern ritualistic ambience to Cerberus and though martial arts sequences are used in it, the work is also fascinatingly reminiscent of American Indian ritual dance. Henry Smith's portrayal of Cerberus, a warrior-clown, making his pilgrim's progress through time while constantly reminded, through Nietzsche's words, that he'll have to live his life "again and again, times without number" shows a strong vulnerable, absurd figure universal in conception, lovable in execution.

The piece is subtitled, "A Journey to the Power of Self" and consists of segments with titles such as "Pursuit", "Routines", "Offerings", "The Need for Power", "Initiation", "The Test", "Death", "Judgment". It's questionable whether these titles aid the progression of, or the viewers understanding of, this innovative work. In a mysterious place such as this, Mystery (rather than explanation) is the name of the game. To me it's a work about relationships: man's relationship to his enemies, to himself and to his gods, and is successful in depicting these variants of existence. The final monologue keened by Smith asking whether one wishes to live "again and again, nothing new" becomes at times too frenzied, but that is a small flaw in a compelling and beautifully filmed half hour of philosophy and movement.

My favorite sequence is when Cerberus rolls in grass, which to me, epitomizes his desire to become grass (i.e. to be one with nature), but there are many arresting passages in this video as art so effectively

performed by Henry Smith, Jauzo Chiba, Mitsunari Kanai, Harvey Koingsberg, and the Solaris Dance Theatre. It is imperative that a work of such artistic and educational importance be aired on television so that the public can share the beauty.

*Norma McLain Stoop*¹⁵

Skip Sweeney

Skip Sweeney was one of the founders of Video Free America in 1970. At this showing he presented the tape "My Father Sold Studebakers", which was funded by the National Endowment for the Arts through the WNET-TV LAB. The tape explores his relationship with his father through the sixties and early seventies until his death from cancer. Since his showing Sweeney has been deeply involved with many projects. He created "Cerberus" a half hour video translation of the New York based theater-dance group, Solaris. The video project was funded by a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation. He has produced for KQED-TV "Ray Jason: Portrait of a Streetartist". Also for KQED-TV, he has produced and directed a thirteen week series "Gardening From the Ground Up". He has worked as a cameraman on two Bay Area Video Coalition projects. He has shot and edited a video project directed by David Ross, of Terry Allen's theater occurrence, "The Embrace . . . advance to fury". He has been the technical brains behind many artists videotapes including Howard Fried, Judith Azur, Meyer Hirsch, Nancy Karp and many others. He has taped an artists series for the San Francisco Art Institute including artists Chris Burden, Wayne Thiebault, Lucy Lippard, and others.

His abstract video works were featured this past year on San Francisco's ABC-TV affiliate in prime time on the program "Bay Scene". This week French National Television is travelling to San Francisco to shoot an interview with Sweeney about his abstract videotapes and showcase them on an upcoming video art series in France. In addition to all this, Sweeney has

frequently shot commercials (Toyota, Kotex, etc.) for Video Production Services in Berkeley.

What Sweeney has done in the last year would take most others five years to accomplish. He lives video 24 hours a day, always working on his own, or someone else's project. He is an unusually talented man, a widely respected abstract video artist, a NABET video cameraman/editor, and a television producer for KQED-TV.

TVTV

Michael Shamberg and Megan Williams were among the founders of TVTV in 1972. TVTV was formed as an experimental company to explore the possibility of creating new formats of non-fiction television through the use of portable video equipment. From 1972-1976 we produced 13 documentaries for PBS including coverage of the 1972 political conventions; "Gerald Ford's America", a series about the White House; "The Lord of the Universe" a look at the (then) 16 year old Guru Maharaj Ji and his crazed followers; "In Hiding", an underground interview with ersatz political fugitive Abbie Hoffman; "Adland" a humorous study of TV ad advertising; "Superbowl" about the annual football spectacle; "The Good Times are Killing Me" a musical portrait of Cajun musicians; "TVTV Looks at the Oscars" with Lily Tomlin; "Hard Rain" Bob Dylan's NBC special; and the "TVTV Show" a satire about the television environment and our first network pilot for NBC.

Since 1976, TVTV has moved from non-fiction programming into the development of fictional entertainment shows for commercial television. We currently have in development comedy projects with ABC, NBC and Home Box Office.

Michael is also co-producing a major motion picture based on the lives of Neal Cassidy, Jack Kerouac and Carolyn Cassidy. The film was shot on location in San Francisco in September 1978.

I am currently co-producing a documentary entitled

"Television City" a behind the scenes look at the TV industry featuring the people responsible for prime time programming.

Megan Williams

Woody and Steina Vasulka

Woody and Steina Vasulka are pioneers in the use of electronic image manipulation as means of artistic expression. They have been working with computer generated video imaging for the past few years. Their digital computing system has grown during this period into their primary tool for researching the code structures of image. The material shown at Video Free America was excerpted from the different stages of system development, so that the audience could share in the excitement of each new stage.

The earliest tape segment displayed a program that divided the video raster into 64 boxes, the color and intensity of each under program control. In time, the programmed instructions would change the various colors, creating patterns of apparent motion and implied rhythms.

Their later work involves using an ALU (Arithmetic Logic Unit). The ALU is the part of a computer which performs Boolean Logic and simple arithmetic functions. The Vasulkas input two sources to the ALU which performed these functions in a variety of combinations. The resulting images were shown to the audience along with a large chart explaining the Boolean functions. Woody was able to refer to the chart while displaying the tapes, making it easier for the audience to follow the progression of the changing logic functions, providing for a more dynamic experience than showing the tapes alone.

The next tapes shown instead of using simple binary (on/off) patterns as inputs to the ALU, black and white video signals, digitized through an analog to digital (A to D) converter, were used, resulting in a multi-level

colorized image, quite complex and beautiful. One was able to determine that the subjects were people, but the detail was so intricate and the colors so varied and bright, that it was difficult to distinguish facial expression. The image resembled a mosaic.

One tape was the actual document of the first time a live black and white camera was used as an input to the ALU.

We can expect that in the future the Vasulkas will be showing us the further developments of their LSI-11 based digital system, along with more sophisticated means of control, as they are committed to exploring digital imagemaking. To paraphrase Woody Vasulka, once one has translated an image into digital code, that code can be processed or manipulated by any other code, and the possibilities become as infinite as the number of ways code may be generated or translated from events in the real world.

Amy Gissen

Videograph

Videograph is a San Francisco based group made up of Jim Locker and Steve Faigenbaum. They met at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor and moved to the Bay Area a few years ago. At Video Free America they showed a selection of tapes from their Michigan days, and tapes they have made in San Francisco. "Restoration Rag" is a documentary about an old Victorian House being moved for relocation out of its decaying neighborhood. The tape successfully captures the mood of the neighborhood and the technology employed for such a venture. Another tape they showed was of a street musician playing in Dolores Park, which was colorized in relation to the music. Since then, Videograph has worked on a tape about San Francisco's innovative early parole program for county inmates, called "Going Straight".

Bill Viola

Bill Viola is working extensively with electronic and acoustic sound, videotape, closed circuit television, and projected images. He was a member of the Synapse group where he worked to install and operate a campus wide cable TV system and later initiated courses in video and sound media in the art school there. Recently, he served as technical director in charge of production at the Art/Tapes 22 video studio Florence, Italy and has been an artist in residence at the WNET-TV Lab in New York. His personal work has been exhibited in many galleries and museums in the United States and Europe. In addition, he has been collaborating with David Tudor and others in many concerts including the electro-acoustic environment "Rainforest". He is a member of the International Television Workshop, a group of artists exploring cultural expression and exchange through television.

Bill Viola did two showings at Video Free America. At the first showing he showed two tapes of the Solomon Islands. He presented "Palm Trees on the Moon" and "Memories of Ancestral Power". His comments on these tapes follow:

The Solomon Islands lie approximately 1000 miles northeast of Australia and 500 miles east of Papua New Guinea in the South Pacific. In 1976, I travelled there at the request of Nam June Paik to finish some shooting for Paik's WNET project "Guadalcanal Requiem". During that period I was able to visit several of the islands in the Solomon chain, of which the infamous Guadalcanal is the principle one. I filmed my travels with Super 8 sound, and learning of an upcoming festival of traditional music and dance later that same year, decided to return with portable video equipment. Receiving modest grants from the Rockefeller Foundation and Electronic Arts Intermix, with contributions from WNET-TV Lab and the International Television Workshop, I returned to record the inter-island festival which was organized by the Solomons Island Museum. Concurrently, the museum also hosted a UNESCO

workshop where participants from the Solomons, New Hebrides, New Caledonia, and Papua New Guinea were to be trained by experienced anthropologists in the use of recording equipment. It was hoped that they would go back to their home areas and continue this activity as indigenous anthropologists.

On the trip I also spent some time with a cult leader named Moro, who was leading his people in efforts to re-vitalize forgotten island traditions which existed prior to the arrival of the Europeans. As a result of these travels, the following two videotapes were made:

Palm Trees on the Moon

In December 1976, people from all around the Solomon Islands travelled to the capital Honiara to perform in a festival of traditional music and dance, all arranged by the Solomon Islands Museum. The island's rich and diverse cultural heritage became evident just watching and listening to the many varied groups, but in many respects the festival offered one of the only remaining reasons to stage the elaborate ceremonial dances that were once the vital pulse of daily island life.

The music and dance sequences are counter-pointed with cross-cultural images from my tour of several other islands, images that embody the dramatic forces of cultural collision still in reverberation since World War II. Today, traditional island ways continue to be bombarded by Western ideas and technologies. Material shot at a historic UNESCO workshop is also included, where young Melanesian men and women are instructed by professional anthropologists in the use of videotape, audiotape, super 8 and still photography, with the intention they would continue this work back in their own countries. In many instances this is the last chance for preserving records of the vanishing traditions of their fathers.

Memories of Ancestral Power: the Moro Movement in the Solomon Islands

A visit with a cult leader named Moro in the village of Makarua on the island of Guadalcanal. Twenty-five

years ago Moro died and came back to life within one 24 hour period. In his trance state, he claimed to have been contacted by the ancestors who told him that he must work to revive the old traditions which had been lost since the arrival of the first Europeans (missionaries and government workers). So Moro set out to re-educate his people. He re-vitalized the old dances, songs crafts and even re-introduced (voluntarily) the traditional mode of dress — grass skirts for the women and soft tree bark loincloths for the men. Many of the younger children at first thought this to be a totally “new” way of dressing. Their leader Moro however always emphasized there must be a choice. They were to re-establish the old custom ways, but also keep from European culture those things they deemed valuable and beneficial.

In the tape, Moro, translator and others show us around their village. We are taken inside the “House of Memories” a kind of museum Moro constructed to maintain artifacts and symbolic objects once the focus of traditional island life. Speaking English directly to the camera, Moro's translator shows us several other ‘cult’ houses, explaining in the process the old stories of creation and cosmology according to Moro. In a very moving speech to the entire village, Moro explains how we are all living in this world “to help solve each others problems” and asks how it is possible for us to develop back his custom standard ways of living” to his people. If possible, he says then we are all welcome “to be here once again in the future life to come”.

At his second Video Free America showing, Viola presented “Four Songs”, “Memory Surfaces and Mental Prayers” and “Red Tape”. His description of the tapes follows:

Most of the programs are actually collections of musical stories in allegorical form, each one potentially independent, functioning much like an LP record album. They may either be shown altogether as a program, or selected and played individually. The works test the subjective nature of our perceptions of life experience, and some of the individual themes include:

mind over matter; death and memory; self-annihilation, phototropism and blind faith; intersections between the microchasm and macrochasm; and the internal death of the individual and re-birth into the mass. The pieces are related in that the images and sounds are composed into audio and visual rhythms based on the psychosocial/emotional dynamics of the original situations, rather than their 'content' or storyline aspects. The aesthetic ideas they express are closely bound to the unique characteristics and high degree of precision offered by state of the art post production video systems. Particular attention is paid to the power and importance of sound in the final stage of the work.

Bill Viola

Willie Boy Walker

Willie Boy Walker is a humorous video artist who has shown his tapes at a number of places including the Whitney Museum in New York, and has collaborated with various video groups, including TVTV.

At Video Free America, he showed an anthology of his tapes, including "Life with Video". "Life with Video" is an enduringly funny portrayal of the possible uses of home video. The television persona in the tape talks to a young woman viewer and asks her to come close to her TV set. What ensues is a hilarious, erotic combination of impossible but believable events that has the viewer sitting on the edge of their chair.

Richard Weiss

Richard Weiss, is a young video producer who recently graduated from the broadcast department at San Francisco State University. At Video Free America he presented his first completed documentary, on Paolo Soleri, the architect of Arcosanti in Arizona, a city of the future. The color thirty minute tape, interweaves interviews with Soleri on his visions of the city of the future, with interviews with students helping build the mammoth structure, to architects at the Frank

Lloyd Wright Center and their estimation of Soleri as an architect. The tape mixes one man's dreams for the future, with the realities of making that dream come true on a day to day basis.

Clare Wren

"First Call: Videodancer" shown at Video Free America in March 1978 is an important work for me. In it I began exploring my relationship to dance as a visualist and in that sense a choreographer using camera angle, countermovement, prerecorded imagery, switching. But the most exciting thing that happened was the editing. Traditionally you aren't supposed to edit dance tapes. I found that you can create some very interesting choreography through the editorial process. After all, video is a two dimensional medium. That is part of the problem I've seen in other video-dance tapes. Video is a unique space. Rather than impose myself on it I try to be more surface conscious.

I think timing is the fundamental element: silences which need to be manipulated. It is how you score the work like a composer. With video you have two kinds of timing: audio and visual. Texture is the secret. It doesn't have to be linear. Effort/Shape theory taught me that.

I am not a dancer. I work with dancers. Because of the expense, my work is single channel. I find single channel easier to market and I often work alone.

Clare Wren

Jud Yalkut

Jud Yalkut, is the director of the Ohio Contemporary Media Study Center in Dayton, Ohio. At Video Free America he presented his color processed video abstractions. Following are his comments on the works.

Guest artist in residence at the WNET-Television Laboratory in New York permitted me vision realization with a fully interfaced color capable system. "The Astrolabe of God" utilized two color studio cameras, the ability to prepare an electronically colorized feedback tape to serve as sync source and visual input during production, and chroma key capability, exchanging foreground and background, to crystallize the spiritual base of the tape centered on the unity of within and without in the relationship of the human being to the cosmos. The production at the TV LAB occurred in real time, one take situations, a premise which continues to interest me as being unique to video systems. Intensive pre-production preparation, as contrasted to the dependency on post production (editing, opticals, sound synchronization) of film, has always seemed germane to me for proper utilization of the video medium.

Jud Yalkut

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Footnotes

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