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The Village Voice

July 8, 1971

Movie Journal

By Jonas Mekas

Video Exchange, under a grant from the New York State Council on the Arts, on June 24 opened its first Video Festival, "the first comprehensive showing of experimental and non-broadcast video tapes in New York City. Most of the major non-commercial video people will be represented in the series to be held at the Merce Cunningham Studio at Westbeth 463 West Street." So says the group's press release.

My intention is to see all the programs offered at the Video Festival and report to you. My point of view, briefly, is this: video is not a unique means of producing moving images; it's only one means of many available. Each means of producing moving images uses slightly different tools and slightly different materials which automatically affect the content and form of the image.

June 24, 10:30 a.m.: The Vasulkas (111 East 14th Street, NYC). On the program: Electronic Story No 1 (Black Sunrise, Horizontal, Landscape, Energies), Electronic Story No. 2, (Swan Lake by Larry), Electronic Story No. 3 (Shapes). Color designs. "Synthesized images," says Vasulka. The means of making some of the images (says Vasulka): oscilloscope, sound synthesizer, feedback.

A four-part video abstraction with different forms in each part (flying disk, a dark circle, flame-like forms, etc.). "Decay" series: a face slowly disintegrating; disintegration of image by means of interferences. Visible formal preoccupations. Formal questions raised, answers not always received. But the beginnings are there. A sequence with a dancer, classical ballet (Swan Lake). But it's the color and the freedom of the video camera movement that makes it compelling.

One keeps thinking about the effectiveness of some of the color. It may not be true, in one respect, that a video artist has to solve what he's doing formally, the way we understand form in cinema or in painting. Because we also have the question of video as energy. So that formal solutions must be worked out also on the level of energy. That feeling comes very strongly when I watch the Vasulkas. The question of energy. Color. Not long ago I saw the color organ that Erich Siegel invented (at Howard Wise Gallery), and I thought the day may come soon when certain color compositions will be prescribed for certain illnesses, for certain states of feeling, or even physical diseases. That is within possibility. Anyway, one can feel this color energy coming from the set, and one feels there is something about it that we don't quite know yet but that is very important. To discuss the achievement of Siegel or the Vasulkas according to the rules and criteria we know from painting and cinema is not quite right, or not enough, or not always right. That is my clear feeling. We deal with energy in cinema too. But not to the same degree.

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