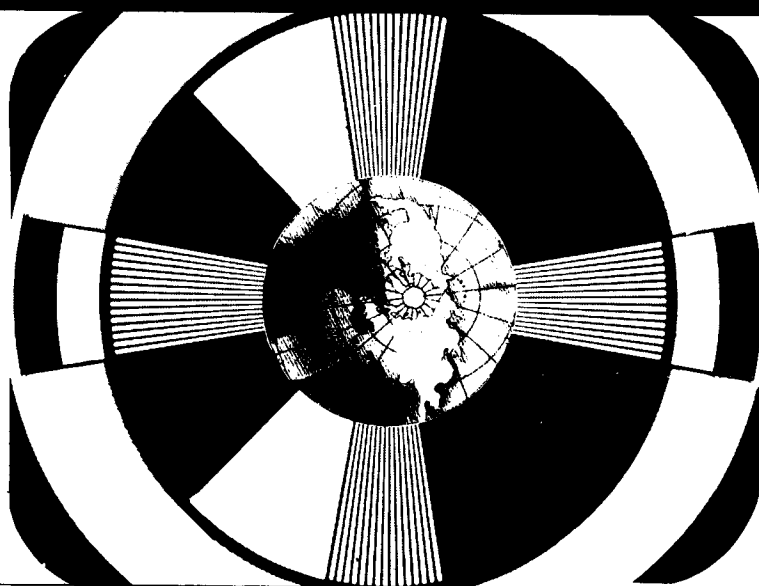




GLOBAL VILLAGE'S THIRD ANNUAL DOCUMENTARY FESTIVAL:

Introduction and Review



BY
JOHN REILLY

NOTE: The following is excerpted from the Program to the Festival.

Global Village was pleased, once again, to present our Annual Documentary Video Festival. This year's festival marked the third year we have honored the video documentary in a special program. Despite its early emergence in the video spectrum, the documentary has only recently achieved widespread attention as an art form. This year's festival includes documentaries of national prominence and we believe the works presented here are among the finest video documentaries we have ever seen.

Video has, in the few short years of its existence been applied in a number of well-noted directions. Early on, video was recognized for its "street" tapes, attempts at finding out how the people out there felt about life, and "process" tapes, works that displayed long, unedited segments of a subject's life. Later developments led to the more abstract and electronically aware forms, resulting in feedback and synthesized tapes. Environmental video artists created daring gallery and studio installations. Clearly, what was developing freed us momentarily from the cyclops in our living room.

All of this was given clear mark and distinction as video art. What was not recognized as such was the video documentary. With as many forms and styles as the works that were called video art, the video documentary explored areas of social and personal reality in a manner quite distinct from the film documentary. In 1977 the video documentary has taken an important place in video consciousness. A greater appreciation of the content of documentary as well as great strides in video technology have combined to bring the video documentary to national prominence.

Several of the works in this year's festival have already received national attention. Three of them were produced in association with The Television Laboratory at WNET/13. *Giving Birth: Four Portraits* by Julie Gustafson and John Reilly, and *Chinatown: Immigrants in America* by Downtown Community Television, were broadcast nationally on PBS' new Documentary Showcase. *The Police Tapes*, by Alan and Susan Raymond, premiered in New York and is expected to receive a national broadcast.



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All three works received above-average New York Neilsen ratings, with *The Police Tapes* and *Giving Birth* out-drawing the station's prime time average by a factor of more than three to one. *Chinatown* generated excellent ratings and extraordinary viewer response as well as a follow-up program.

Two other works in the festival have also received national broadcast and critical acclaim. *A Day Without Sunshine* by Robert and Nancy Thurber and Robert Stolberg, and *A Matter of Size* by Joan Lapp and Michael Marton, were both produced in cooperation with a public television station.

In the past year, much has happened to broaden the support for and awareness of the documentary. The Corporation for Public Broadcasting and the Public Broadcasting Service has joined together and formed the \$1,000,000 Documentary Fund which is open to both film and video documentary makers. The Ford Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts

tried but failed to launch their own documentary fund. We hope in the near future that this worthy project will reemerge.

This year, Global Village conducted ten workshops across the country at public television stations with independent producers and artists in attendance. The emphasis of the seminar/workshops was the role of the independent producer in the public television. The workshops centered around the latest videocassette and time base correction technology. We observed an enthusiasm and purposefulness about the interaction of public television, independents, and video.

Our experiences and travels have confirmed what we suspected when we started—the video documentary is increasingly a major factor in public television and that many more independents as well as stations across the country, are working with tape and successfully putting it on the air.

This year's festival represents a wide range of documentary types. In addition to the nationally broadcast

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BY
INGRID WIEGAND

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Who hasn't dreamt at one time or another of making an entire film or television feature from end to end? Maybe not everyone, but for those who have, and especially for those who have not stashed the idea permanently (along with visions of unaided flight, perfect love, and eternal sang froid), the possibility is infinitely more real now than it has ever been, at least in the medium of television. A vision that once was available only to those who could raise dollars by the 100 thousands (at least) is gradually becoming possible to those who can raise (at best) substantially less. Obviously we are talking about a potential revolution in the sources of our fiction and documentary programs. It is a revolution that will be a while in coming, and will never be total, but the first unmistakable signs that individuals can reach a larger public with their private visions were in evidence in May at Global Village's Third Annual Documentary Video Festival.

What the Festival demonstrated, in terms of the docu-

mentary form at least, is that programs made on small-format videotape (3/4-inch and 1/2-inch) by individuals with minimal financing are gaining a foothold in television land, at least on public TV. Of the 30-odd tapes in the Festival, 15 have been telecast (one on cable) and two are under consideration for broadcast. Many will find their way onto cable. Two years ago, when the first Video Documentary Festival was held, only two of the tapes shown had been seen on television, and only a couple more were cablecast. Yet, like the first Festival, all (but two) of this Festival's tapes were independently produced on small-format videotape. Of the two that were made by individuals working for public TV stations, one (*Trident*) was made in small-format videotape, a situation unlikely even a year ago. The other, included because it used small-format video style and techniques to create a fierce indictment of the conditions of migrant farm workers (*A Day Without Sunshine*, by Bob and Nancy Thurber and Robert Stolberg for Miami's WPBT),



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documentary there are a number of stylistically more personal works such as *My Father* by Shigeko Kubota, and more abstract documentations of reality such as *Guadalcanal Requiem* by Nam June Paik and *Jglgn* by Skip Blumberg. A delightful work in the style of the early street interview tape, *She Has A Beard* by Norma Bahia Pontes and Rita Moreira, is included.

A great number of tapes produced by or through video groups is included. Among them are *Dead Action* by Optic Nerve, *The Trouble I've Seen* by Phil and Gunilla Jones of Ithaca Video Project, *Women/Ministers* by Nancy Rosin of Portable Channel, *The Denise Hawkins Incident* by Carvin Eisen of Visual Studies Workshop, *San Quentin* by Richard Harkness, David Lent, Jack Burris, Clint Weyrauch, with Marin Community Video, *So Far, So Good: At The People's Inaugural* by Videopolis, and *Body Builders* by Greg Pratt and Jeff Strate, and *Project Elan* by Cara DeVito both from University Community Video in Minneapolis.

Several other works were produced with the cooperation of a public television station such as *Trident* produced by Jean Walkinshaw and *Reel West* by Suzanne Tedesco, both for KCTS in Seattle, and *In The Grand Manner* by Paul Edwards, Richard Ward, and Edgar Woodward for UNC/TV Network in North Carolina.

Included also this year is the early documentative work of Steina and Woody Vasulka, prepared especially for this festival and entitled *Participation*, as well as the now classic *Carel and Ferd* by Art Ginsberg. These are just some among the many fine works by other known and lesser known artists.

Much has happened in one year in the development of the new documentary—many more people are making video documentaries, more people have a chance to see them, and more support of all types seems to be emerging for the form. We hope that our festivals have contributed in some small measure to this improving situation. ■ ■ ■

Public TV at Global Village

was made the usual way, with 16mm film and 2-inch videotape.

Today, 50 years from its beginnings, the independently-made, widely-distributed film is still an isolated incident. But it was only ten years ago that the early videomakers saw beyond their grainy, bouncing images to a future where the independent videomaker would be king. A number of the early videomakers who hung in there are now here, in the Festival, not the least of whom is John Reilly himself. Reilly co-produced the first-rate *Giving Birth: Four Portraits* with Julie Gustafson for WNET. It was shown on PBS and got a strong and positive response despite its explicit head-on view of birth and other non-erotic real-life intimacies, from which the television audience is generally protected by the prevailing TV documentary approach. Like about a third of the tapes in the Festival, it was shot entirely on 3/4-inch video-cassette equipment, at a fraction of the cost that would have been incurred with film.

Other early videomakers who are moving the medium into the big time include Jon Alpert of Downtown Community Television, whose beautifully shot and edited *Chinatown* (shown on PBS) is only marred by his failure to keep his overvoice mouth shut. Another is Nam June Paik, whose *Guadalcanal Requiem* is a dream-like personal memori of the artist's recent journey to the island, mingled with memories of Guadalcanal's World War II past. Suzanne Tedesco, who has worked with such video groups as TVTV in the past, produced *Reel West*, one of the most entertaining tapes in the Festival. Made for Seattle's public TV station, KCTS, *Reel West* weaves film clips of the old and new westerns into 3/4-inch video footage of the *real* west and footage of a conference on "The Western Movie" held in Sun Valley, Idaho. The last includes vignettes of Clint Eastwood in person that are as psychotic as his film role.

The Festival represented a fair if incomplete cross-section of the independent documentary video work being



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produced today. It was gathered from several parts of the country in the course of Global Village's Ten Cities Project. As part of this project, Reilly and Gustafson brought 3/4-inch portable videocassette equipment to 10

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public TV stations around the country and held workshops at the stations, focusing on the use of the equipment for the independent production of broadcast television programs. “There’s a lot of interest and a lot of resistance to small-format equipment,” Reilly said. “People are unfamiliar with it and confuse it with earlier, less capable equipment, but once they’re shown what can be done with it, people at the stations become willing to try it. At KCTS in Seattle, where Jean Walkinshaw produced *Trident*, a documentary on the new nuclear sub, there was a lot of controversy about the use of small-format tape. Walkinshaw had to use rented equipment which broke down and was defective and caused a lot of problems that were attributed to the medium itself. But it’s not the medium that’s the problem. It’s misuse and unfamiliarity. I swear by the new equipment and am using it with no problems in our current production. But the emphasis of the Festival and of the Ten Cities Project was on independent production, and the significance of small-format videotape is that it is an economical means to that end. There is also a big shift in the receptivity of public television to independent documentary productions. In the past year, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and the Public Broadcasting Service have joined together and formed the \$1,000,000 Documentary Fund for both film and video documentary makers. The Ford Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts have considered creating similar funds. So the possibilities are not only better for getting the \$25,000 to \$50,000 you need for a program, but there are better odds that a station will be willing to air a program once it is made.”

Obviously we are talking about a potential revolution in the sources of our fiction and documentary programs.

The Festival also included *The Police Tapes*, a cop’s eye view of the South Bronx, shown several times on PBS. The material was shot with low-light 1/2-inch black-and-white video equipment by Alan and Susan Raymond, who filmed *The American Family*. Joan Lapp and Michael Marton produced *A Matter of Size*, about big government, big business, and individual control. Although produced for WMHT, in Schenectady, the producers raised the money and executed it independently. A tape that has not been aired but probably will be if it can get some really good editing, is the beautifully shot *San Quentin*. Made by four men in cooperation with Marin Community Video, a San Francisco organization, the tape is now an assembly of 100 minutes of first-rate footage with no visible organization, but great potential.

The accessibility of videotape also makes it suitable for group productions, and in fact the independent production group is almost unique to video. University Community Video of Minneapolis produced *Body-builders*, a professionally-made color tape, broadcast on KCTA there; the group Optic Nerve produced *Dead Action*, on life in the San Francisco County jail; and a number of groups produced works on the Bicentennial, the election, the inaugural, and on combinations thereof. Most of the last reflected styles, attitudes, and ideas in their tapes that were developed during the early days of video. The group works were not as good as the best works in the Festival, all of which were made with no more than two or three people in control. This has not always been true. Some of the best early video works were made by groups. But it is true for the group works in the Festival.

Most of the tapes in the Festival were made to make a point, but a few were made, at least apparently, for purely expressive reasons. These include Shigeo Kubota’s *My Father*, an intimate memoir made when she received the news of her father’s death; Bob Wiegand’s lyrical, dreamlike record of a North Carolina fox hunt, *Sedgefield Hunt*; and Steina and Woody Vasulka’s *Participation*, a life-with-video piece specially put together for the Festival.

One of the gems of early video, *The Continuing Story of Carel and Ferd*, a documentary soap opera of a San Francisco couple of the Sixties, was included as a retrospective view of the earliest style and subject matter for which the video camera was used.

All of the works in this year’s Festival were shown on a brand new smaller format Advent video projector that uses a three foot by four foot screen that really suits the viewing space at Global Village. ■ ■ ■