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OCTOBER 1992

**THE NEXT FIVE MINUTES**  
A CONFERENCE, EXHIBITION AND TV PROGRAM  
ON TACTICAL TELEVISION

8, 9 & 10 JANUARY 1993  
PARADISO, AMSTERDAM, THE NETHERLANDS

EDITED BY AMSTERDAM CULTURAL STUDIES  
(JEROEN VAN BERGEIJK, GEKE VAN DIJK,  
KAREL KOCH, BAS RAIJMAKERS)

# COLOPHON

THE NEXT FIVE MINUTES (N5M)  
ZAPBOOK  
OCTOBER 1992

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## Table of contents

Preface 5

Introduction *Bas Raijmakers* 6

Histories 9

A Brief History of American Documentary Video *Deidre Boyle*  
 Occupying the New Audiovisual. Interview with Luiz Fernando Santoro *Sylvia Roy*  
*and Nancy Thede*  
 Difficult Beginnings. Alternative video and television in West Africa *Cheik Kolla*  
*Maiga*  
 New Views from Old Delhi *Rajive Jain*  
 From Small Scale Utopianism to Large Scale Pragmatism *Ole Prehn*  
 Amsterdam Open Kanaal *N5M*  
 Pirate TV in Eastern Europe *Evelyn Messinger*  
 Seeing is Believing. The arts on TV *Kathy Rae Huffman*  
 Toward TV.: Video art in the late '80s - A few thoughts *Nik Houghton*

Theories 25

Jean Baudrillard, Bertold Brecht, Michel de Certeau, John Chesterman and Andy  
 Lipman, Sean Cubitt, Umberto Eco, Hans Magnus Enzensberger, John Fiske, Dick  
 Hebdige, The Immediasts, Ted Koppel, Marshall McLuhan, Alan McLuskey, Sherry  
 Millner, Herbert Schiller, Raymond Williams

The camcorder revolution 29

Introduction *Karel Koch*  
 Finding one's own voice: releasing the "other" into the american media *Kathy High*  
 News with a view *Janet Sorensen*  
 Pamphlet *Paul Garrin*  
 Video Verité *David Montgomery*  
 Video Witness, Festival of New Journalism Catalogue *Chris Hill*  
 Shifting Communities/Forming Alliances *Alex Juhasz*  
 Camcorder craze stars the whole nation *Peter Baumont*  
 Untitled *Martha Rosler*  
 Despite TV *Malcolm Dickson*

The South 37

Introduction *Geke van Dijk*  
 Marginality or Politics? *Rafael Roncagliolo*  
 Paddington: Metro Television *Pip Parsonson*  
 Alternative Video and Television. The urgent need for action *Alain Ambrosi*



(The South, continued)

Film and Video in South Africa Today *Mokomenyana Molete*

Behind the smile *Kamron Gunatilaka*

Statement of Principles Videazimut

New Dawn Video *N5M*

South Project *Channel Four*

You are being Brainwashed! Moviemakers take on cultural colonialism *David Lush*

Tactical Television in Latin America *Raul Marroquin*

Wartime 45

Introduction *Jeroen van Bergeijk*

Interview with Paul Virillio *Thierry Chervel and Alexander Smoliczyk*

The German way of reading *Peter Glotz*

Paper Tiger Television. Smashing the mythes of the information industry *Dee Dee Halleck*

Tiger from Paper. Two short interviews with Paper Tager television *Isabella Graw*

The Rapid Demise of Sarajevo TV *Ursula Ruston*

Illusion - Simulation - Reality *Franz Kluge*

The medium is the massage *Marshall McLuhan*

Eastern Europe 53

Introduction *Geert Lovink*

Internews Network

Independent Broadcasting *Internews Network*

Kanal A *Evelyn Messinger*

About Ourselves *Black Box*

Black Box *Russel Morgan*

Black Box *Marianna Padi*

Interview with Stefana Steriade *Geert Lovink*

Esthetics of the Video document. De Romanian tele-revolution according to Farocki and Ujica *Geert Lovink*

Visual Arts 61

Introduction *David Garcia*

Van Gogh TV *Marion Borch- Madsen*

Piazza Virtuale *Ponton Media Art Lab*

Kanaal zero on Amsterdam Cable TV *David Garcia*

Video: Shedding the Utopian Moment *Martha Rosler*

The Necessity of Doing Away With Video Art *John Wyver*


Introduction of Video in the Visual Arts in the Netherlands *Ernie Tee*


List of people involved in The Next Five Minutes 70

## Preface

On the 8th, 9th and 10th of January 1993 Paradiso, Amsterdam will present in cooperation with Montevideo/Time Based Arts a conference and comprehensive survey of 'tactical' television: The Next Five Minutes. Because in principle we want to adress the entire globe, the conference language will be English. This doesn't mean that the local Amsterdam/Dutch situation won't be addressed. Although this zapbook may contain only very limited information on the local groups, they will be Thouroughly discussed at the N5M.

The zapbook was conceived as a collection of texts to be used as a set of references within the conference. As the name of the book suggests, we zap through different kinds of material on tv. This can be pamphlets, newspaper articles, interviews, mediatheories, histories, slogans and analyses. Most of the material was obtained during our research or came in as a reaction to the worldwide mailing of our conference outline. This zapbook is a presentation of the variety of ideas that exist about tactical tv, at least those that we've come across so far. The research will continue over the coming months. This zapbook gives our current impression of the field, and should be seen as a work in progress which will hopefully lead to lengthy discussions during the N5M.

All the excerpts we have put in the zapbook are labelled with a reference to make it easier to trace the original texts. Every time a piece of text is left out, it is marked with the 'zapsign': 

Some parts are translated by us, this is always indicated with: 

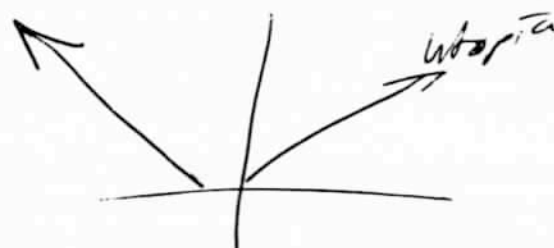
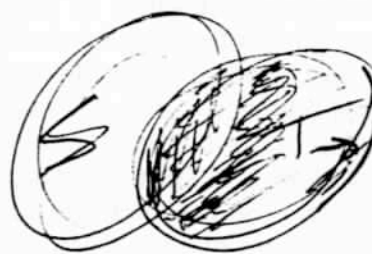
In the introduction of this zapbook, the term 'tactical television' is explained, as well as our reasons for using it as a working tool. The aims of the N5M conference are also described in this section. The first chapter gives an impression of what we feel are the histories of tactical television. The second chapter contains slogans, statements and little theoretical objects that say something about tactical tv or its opponent strategic tv. Chapters 3 to 7 will each discuss the five main topics we will adress during the conference. Each topic is introduced by the person responsible for that part of the conference program.

We would like to express our gratitude to the authors of all the different excerpts, even though not all of them will be aware yet that they receive this gratitude. Unfortunately we had to do some violence to all the texts because we could include none of them in full. Our apologies for that. We think though that in this form we can give the most room to the wide field of tactical tv. We would also like to state that these preconference papers are strictly meant for preparations of the conference. Nor will there be any commercial distribution of the zapbook.

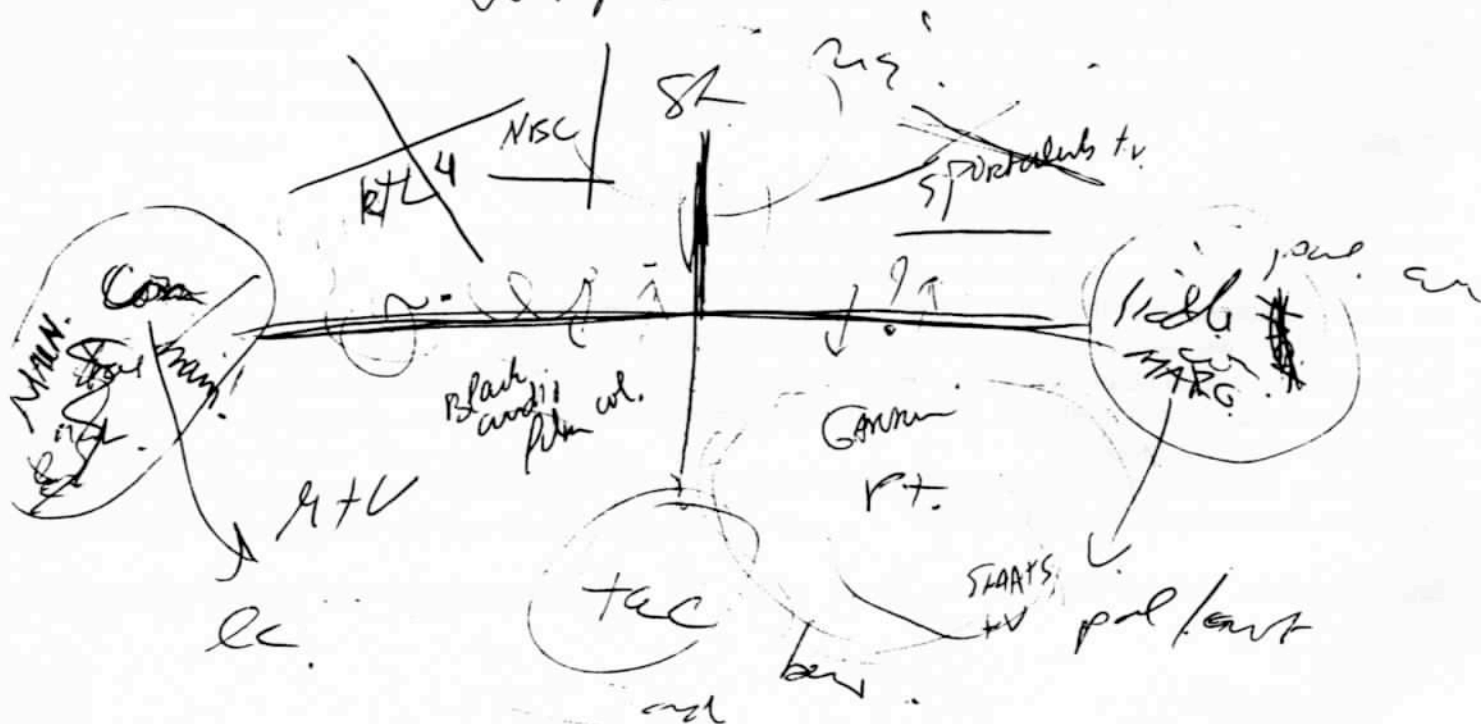
For all other information about the N5M you can contact Helen Vreedevelde at Paradiso, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

Bas Raijmakers, October 20th 1992.





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## Introduction

The Next Five Minutes is a conference, exhibition and tv program that wants to leave behind the rigid dichotomy between the mainstream, commercial and national tv on one hand and the marginal and independent tv on the other. Although these differences may still be important, N5M wants to focus on tv-makers crossing the borders of tv-making and going into the spaces that the tv-world still has to offer.

These explorers can be found on both sides of the mainstream-marginal dichotomy. N5M is about the individual media-activists trying to get their message across via public access channels but also about small production companies testing the limits of mainstream tv from the inside, about tv-art projects using television techniques to develop a new kind of poetics, community tv fighting for the right to access and people within big tv institutions developing radical new program concepts.

The richness and diversity that all these initiatives bring to the world of television is too often overlooked. This richness consists of tv-makers as different as New York's Paper Tiger Television, who made "The Gulf Crisis Project", Budapest's Black Box who is piling up tapes with recordings of Hungary's main political and cultural events in the Széchenyi Library, Amsterdam's Staats TV Rabotnik who bring to local cable interviews with independent Yugoslavian journalists working under war conditions, Bangkok's Media on Society and Culture who buys a weekly independent half-hour on commercial tv and finally all the people that are in possession of a camcorder, ready to shoot the next "amateur video".

What these tv-makers have in common is a social and cultural position. An important aspect of that position is that they have no fixed institutional or discursive relationship with the world of television. What they do have are tactics; tv-tactics depending on very specific circumstances in space and time. The positions that result from their tactical status give them the freedom to experiment with the medium and to express their own ideas and opinions. Since we feel that this use of tactics is something that cuts straight across the marginal-mainstream dichotomy, we decided to use this word to describe which part of the tv-world caught our interest.

Because tv-tacticians haven't got a fixed place inside the world of tv, their politics and/or aesthetics are shaped by different tactics used in different contexts. It is always the context in which tactical tv is made that influences the tactics deployed. Tactical tv is about "...clever tricks, knowing how to get away with things, 'the hunters cunning', manoeuvres, polymorphic situations, joyful discoveries, poetic as well as warlike." (De Certeau).

So it is important to realize that tactical tv exists in both marginal and mainstream tv. A clear example of marginal tactical tv is the Tomkinson Square Riot tape made by media-activist Paul Garrin. His tape is a very personal camcorder recording with a clear political purpose. An example of tactical tv within the mainstream is produced by the Community Program Unit of the BBC. The teenagers made with some help from the BBC a series of videodiaries.

The reasons to work tactically are multiple: You can be forced to do so, because there is no legal way to develop or maintain your tv-station. You can also have different political, aesthetic and/or economic urges. The reasons for making tactical tv are often hard to disentangle. So it may be useful to have a separate look at them separately.



The political urge is mainly concerned with giving access to dissenting opinions, analyses, information and ideas. The aesthetic urge often leads to experimenting with the medium itself, with all the possibilities that tv offers in image and sound. The economic urge is concerned with reaching certain audiences. This one is less obvious than the first two. Since audiences are nowadays quickly diversifying to a very high level, the need for a much greater diversity in programming has become clear even within mainstream tv. This development fits in with the desire of many advertisers to reach more specific targetgroups. These three urges seldom come alone. Therefore it would be oversimplifying to connect just one of them to a certain group of people. For instance artists making tactical tv do not just have aesthetic reasons to do so, they will also have political reasons and possible also economical ones.

The N5M aims to give an overview of tactical tv as it exists all over the world. This offers a chance for tv-tacticians to meet one another and exchange experiences. This is very important for the people involved in the event, and hopefully contacts will persist into the future. But we don't think this is enough. We want to extend the possibilities for tacticians in the tv-world, and by doing so giving more substantial choice to tv audiences.

Despite all the differences that do exist in the world of tv, it is still mainly seen as monolithic. It is clear that cracks are appearing in this 'monolith'. Two important developments have created these cracks. Firstly technology has brought us very cheap and easy to handle production equipment, of which the camcorder is the most obvious example. Also the possibility to put more and more channels on the same bandwidth, and the opportunities that cablenetworks and satellites offer are important. Secondly the tv-audience has rapidly diversified: our societies consist of many different cultures, not to mention all the cultural differences that exist in the potentially global audiences that are addressed by 24 hour global networks. And last but not least, advertisers ask the tv-stations for more specific tv-audiences.

So 'strategic tv', as we should name the opposite of tactical tv, is being effected by these developments and has to search for new solutions to the problem of keeping its audiences. As always, tv-tacticians are lurking, ready to move in the cracks as they appear. Ready to exploit and even enlarge these cracks. The N5M wants to give a platform to these efforts. By mapping the cracks in the tv-world, and showing the ways tv-tacticians make use of them, an important goal is served. It gives the opportunity to the tv-world to move towards more diversified programming, for smaller and more specific audiences. This means greater opportunities for political and aesthetic involvement with television.

The N5M feels that each contributor to the conference has important things to say about the growing opportunities tactical tv has to achieve this goal. That's why we dedicate the next five minutes of space to all your experiences and ideas. A more democratic tv finally comes into sight.

Bas Raijmakers, October 1992.

## A Brief History of American Documentary Video

# Histories

An impression of histories of tactical television.



### The 1960s: Underground Video



The 1960s was an auspicious time for the debut of portable video. The role of the artist as individualist and alienated hero was being eclipsed by a resurgence of interest in the artist's social responsibility, and as art became politically and socially engaged, the distinctions between art and communication blurred.<sup>2</sup> At first there were few distinctions between video artists and activists, and nearly everyone made documentary tapes.



### *Street Tapes*

Street tapes were not necessarily made on the street. With the arrival of the first truly portable video rigs—the half-inch, reel-to-reel CV Portapak—in 1968, video freaks could hang out with skid-row winos, drug-tripping hippies, sexually liberated commune dwellers, cross-country wanderers, and yippie rebels, capturing spontaneous material literally on their doorsteps.

Portable video served as a bonding agent for individuals in search of a new source of community and shared sense of purpose. They were "the progeny of the Baby Boom, a generation at home with technology—the Bomb and the cathode-ray tube, ready to make imaginative use of the communications media to convey their messages of change."<sup>4</sup> Aware of the centrality of media in modern life, of the way television shapes reality and consciousness, they tried to gain access to mass media. When frustrated, they created their own underground and alternative media, taking seriously A. J. Liebling's observation, "Freedom of the press is guaranteed only to those who own one."

Turning the limits of their technology into a virtue, underground videomakers invented a distinctive style unique to the medium. Some pioneers used surveillance cameras and became adept at "free-handing" a camera because there was no viewfinder.<sup>5</sup> Tripods—with their fixed viewpoints—were out; hand-held fluidity was in. Video's unique ability to capitalize on the moment with instant playback and real-time monitoring of events also suited the era's emphasis on "process, not product." Process art, earth art, conceptual art, and performance art all shared a deemphasis on the final work and an emphasis on how it came to be. The absence of electronic editing equipment—which discouraged shaping a tape into a finished "product"—further encouraged the development of a "process" video aesthetic.

The early video shooting styles were as much influenced by meditation techniques like *taï chi* and drug-induced epiphanies as they were by existing technology. Aspiring to the "minimal presence" of an "absorber" of information, videomakers like Paul Ryan believed in waiting for the scene to happen, trying not to shape it by directing events. The fact that videotape was relatively cheap and reusable made *laissez-faire* work as feasible as it was desirable.



Hundreds of hours of documentary tapes were shot by underground groups, tapes on New Left polemics and the drama of political confrontation as well as video erotica. Video offered an opportunity to challenge the boob





In the '80s, in Latin America, we thought we could make a revolution with video, the same as people in Canada, the U.S. and in Europe believed in the '70s. Nowadays no one thinks that video will make a revolution. We can use it to train workers; to spread information, but today we are all aware of the limitations of work with video.

Historically, there have been three distinct moments in video work: the first was the use of video to share information within the movement (video as a self-organizational tool); the second, video used as counter-information (video as a tool for constructing discourse within the movement);

and the third, present moment, where video is used to present an alternative view of the world to the collectivity at large.

As a matter of fact, these three moments coexist. In Latin America, there are many organized groups belonging to a broad social movement, that wants to express itself not only inwardly but also to reach outward, to the collectivity. With the growing number of democracies in Latin America and the new audiovisual space of the '90s, they need to reach people, especially through television. That's

tube's authority, to replace television's often negative images of youthful protest and rebellion with the counterculture's own values and televisual reality.

Observers outside the video scene found early tapes guilty of inconsistent technical quality. Critics faulted underground video for being frequently infantile, but they also praised it for carrying an immediacy rare in Establishment TV.<sup>6</sup> The underground's response to such criticism was to concede there was a loss in technical quality when compared to broadcast. Hollywood had also been fixated on glossy productions until the French "New Wave" filmmakers in the early 1960s created a demand for the grainy quality of *cinéma-vérité*, jump cuts, and hand-held camera shots. Like the *vérité* filmmakers ten years before them, video pioneers were inventing a new style, and they expected to dazzle the networks with their radical approach and insider's ability to get stories unavailable to commercial television.



Video innovators sought to extend the limits of the small video screen to embrace a larger spectacle. Since playing back a single-channel, edited tape on a small video monitor lacked the impact and spontaneity demanded of the happenings of the era, producers devised multichannel video installations as live theatrical events. This called for live mixing of a variety of inputs—including performance, video feedback of an audience, and edited video and film clips—displayed on ten or more monitors in specially designed video theaters.



The underground had discovered its freewheeling rebellious days were over. The time had come for an information revolution. Influenced by visionaries like Marshall McLuhan and Buckminster Fuller, artist/activists began to plot their utopian program to change the structure of information in America. In the pages of *Radical Software* and in the alternative movement's 1971 manifesto, *Guerrilla Television*, written by Michael Shamberg and Raindance, they outlined their plan to decentralize television so that the medium could be made by as well as for the people. Adopting a sharply critical relationship to broadcast television, they determined to use video to create an alternative to the aesthetically bankrupt and commercially corrupt broadcast medium. As the underground began to search for other ways of reaching their audiences, cable TV and video cassettes seemed to offer an answer.

### The 1970s: Alternative TV

The 1970s ushered in a new era of alternative video. The underground became an above-ground media phenomenon as magazine articles on the "alternate-media guerrillas" appeared in mainstream periodicals like *Newsweek* and *New York* magazine. When federal rules mandated local origination programming and public-access channels for most cable systems, cable seemed to promise a new, utopian era of democratic information, functioning as a decentralized alternative to the commercially driven broadcast medium.

The new AV format portapak appeared in 1970, conforming to a new international standard for half-inch videotape. For the first time, tapes made with one manufacturer's portable video equipment could be played back on competing manufacturers' equipment. Not only did this boost competition among video manufacturers and accelerate the development of portable video, it also facilitated the exchange of tapes, which would become even more widespread once the 3/4-inch U-matic cassette became available in 1972. The new



AV format, with an eyepiece that allowed instant playback in the camera, proliferated across the country as more and more people began to explore the medium.

Government funding for video was inaugurated by the New York State Council on the Arts in 1970. With it, the "all-for-one" camaraderie of early video activity, which had begun to break down in the scramble for CBS dollars the year before, soon deteriorated into an all-out funding battle as video groups competed for their share of the pie.<sup>11</sup> Within a year, sharp divisions between "video artists" and "video activists" surfaced. In time alternative videomakers subdivided into two factions: community video advocates and guerrilla television producers.

### Guerrilla Television

Although exponents of guerrilla television professed an interest in community video, they were generally far more interested in developing the video medium and getting tapes aired on television than in serving a localized constituency.



Like *cinéma-vérité* in the 1960s, guerrilla television's documentary style was opposed to the authoritarian voice-of-God narrator ordained by early sound-film documentaries and subsequently the model for most made-for-television documentaries. Practitioners eschewed narration, substituting unconventional interviewers and snappy graphics to provide context without seeming to condescend. They challenged the objectivity of television's documentary journalism, with its superficial on-the-one-hand, on-the-other-hand balancing of issues. Distinguishing themselves from network reporters who stood loftily above the crowd, video guerrillas proudly announced they were shooting from within the crowd, subjective and involved.<sup>12</sup>

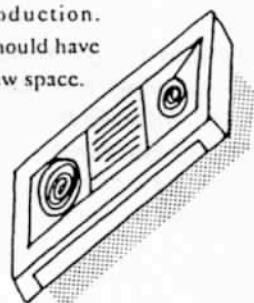
TVTV's success with its first two documentaries for cable TV attracted the interest of public television, and TVTV was the first video group commissioned to produce work for national broadcast on public television. New technology—notably color portapaks, electronic editing equipment, and the stand-alone time base corrector—made it possible to broadcast half-inch video. And so guerrilla television revised its revolutionary aims into a reform movement to improve broadcast television by example. Without the radical politics of the 1960s to inspire them, guerrilla television's producers became increasingly concerned with the politics of broadcasting.



Because guerrilla television was given national exposure on public TV, its gutsy style influenced many documentary video producers around the country. Not only were many community video groups affected, but as television news went from all-film crews to ENG (electronic news gathering) units, the style of TV's news began to reflect guerrilla television's influence. Once absorbed by television, the style and purpose of guerrilla television was transformed into something often at odds with its origins. For example, independent videomakers' preference for ordinary people rather than Establishment spokespersons began to show up in "mockumentary" entertainment shows like *Real People* and *That's Incredible!* By the end of the decade, many of the distinctions between guerrilla and network television had blurred as the networks absorbed the style and content of independent work as well as some of its practitioners.

a challenge facing all Latin American groups today. This constitutes the most important step to take and to succeed, two things are necessary: change the way we speak to people and acquire different equipment. A number of groups already possess Betacam or U-matic equipment and, others, such as ourselves, have international projects to try to change the direction of the flow of information between the North and South, within

the South and, from the South to the North. At the same time, there is a tendency to neglect basic training. The accent is on making more complete programmes in order to get them broadcast. In Brasil and Latin America, laws must be enacted to protect these groups, for example, by obliging broadcasters to carry local production. Everyone should have access to new space.



Latin America is not aware of the existence its own video production. We have not been capable of designing projects that would project our own production either on television or in the alternative community. We have no culture on Latin American production. Accordingly, the first question that has to be dealt with is in how can we make Latin America present in Latin America?

The second debate is about the change of direction that the productions have to take. How can we undertake co-productions that depart from the current North-South direction and take rather a South-South or South-North one? Governments in Brasil and Chile have begun promoting national culture. In Brasil, legislative approval has been given to support audiovisual production of a cultural nature by allowing tax deductions for





production costs. Local production is thus given

a big boost.

Events that allow people to meet regularly and permit exchanges are also very important. Witness the continental meetings of Latin American videomakers.



Training is also very important, both operational and technical training, and also training where people develop an audiovisual culture whereby they can see and get acquainted with productions from all-over, not just Latin America. Overall training must allow people to create, but to permit this people must know things. Creation is the reorganization of things you already know. People from the popular movement are very knowledgeable of political work and ideological issues. What they aren't familiar with are the different means at hand to show these realities in a more interesting and creative way. ▼

Roy, Sylvia and Thede, Nancy (1992) "Occupying the New Audiovisual. Interview with Luiz Fernando Santoro" in *Clips* 0, 3-4



African national broadcasting networks which were hastily set up after the former colonies gained independence in the 1960s (with the exception of the Cameroun, Burundi and Mali which set up theirs in the 1980s) remain mostly in government hands even now, as people are calling for greater liberalisation. Video, in which more than a glimmer of hope rests, is trying to find its way through the thick of the battle for the right to communicate.

## Community Video

Proponents of grassroots video saw the medium as a means to an end—community organizing. Their primary focus was to use portable video to effect social change, not to experiment with a new medium or dismantle the structure of broadcast television. Canada's Challenge for Change, a government-sponsored effort, pioneered the use of video as a catalyst for community change in the late 1960s and served as a model for many U.S. experiments.<sup>15</sup> Community video groups sprang up all across the United States, reflecting the regionalism of the 1970s.



Community video advocates often differed about whether they should be producing tapes for broadcast or emphasizing process over product by exhibiting unedited tapes to citizens in their homes, community centers or other closed-circuit environments. Many activists were leery of being co-opted by their involvement with television, and their fears were well grounded, as the experiences of at least three early community groups testify. In Johnson City, Broadside TV produced community video for multisystem cable operators who were mandated by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to provide local origination programming; in Minneapolis, University Community Video purchased a half hour of broadcast time weekly to air its half-hour documentary video series on local public television; and the New Orleans Video Access Center (NOVAC) relied on the public affairs interest of a local network affiliate to get its documentary productions broadcast. For various reasons each group's involvement with television—whether cable, public TV, or network TV—eventually jeopardized the organization's commitment to community-made media.



## NOVAC

learned, as did many other community access groups of the time, that once the novelty of exploring video equipment wore off, many community members had little interest in becoming video producers. Although many residents expressed interest in using this new tool for social progress, few had the time to develop the skills required to become producers of documentaries for broadcast.<sup>20</sup> And so the pressure to produce for television, with its large audiences and increased possibility for influencing social change, unwittingly seduced many community access centers away from their original purpose of facilitating people-to-people video.

## New Constituencies

Community video activists were not only dedicated to serving regional constituencies but also to serving the specialized interests of multicultural communities such as women, gays, blacks, Latinos, Asians, and Native Americans, among others.

Portable video's debut coincided with the burgeoning of the women's movement, and documentary video offered another avenue of expression for women who were redefining their history as well as their future. Since half-inch, black-and-white video was still a lightweight, low-status medium, women were free to move into the forefront as video producers, and their concerns represented a distinctive voice in early video work. Women began exchanging videoleaders; they started their own video access centers and pro-



grammed their own cable channels; and they ran their own video festivals.

In 1972, Susan Milano organized the first Women's Video Festival in New York City, defining guerrilla activity in feminist terms.



As video technology became heavier, more established, and costlier, it became increasingly difficult for women to act in central production roles. Hierarchical structures, borrowed from film and television, were applied to videotape production; and as the medium gained new professional status, video increasingly became a man's domain. Some women receded into the background as editors, while others struggled to maintain a high profile as producers and camera operators.<sup>21</sup>

Black pioneers like Bill Stephens and Philip Mallory Jones mapped out different territories for early video work.



Today, they are joined by a growing number of producers of color, many of whom—like Warrington Hudlin, St. Clair Bourne, and Michelle Parkerson—are former filmmakers who became involved with video while producing for public television.

The first Hispanic videotapes were made by the Young Lords in cooperation with People's Video Theater. Since then, Chicano, Puerto Rican, and Latin American-born producers have championed social issues and explored personal expression, developing a variety of styles reflective of their diverse heritages.



Native Americans were actively engaged in producing community video throughout the 1970s, addressing local and national issues from tribal council meetings to American Indian Movement protests.<sup>23</sup> By the 1980s, American Indian producers had penetrated mainstream media with conventional documentaries about pressing social and political issues, such as disputed land rights and the tragedy of alcoholism and unemployment, as well as experimental documentaries like those by Hopi documentarist Victor Masayesva, Jr., who focuses on spiritual concerns and vanishing traditions.

#### *Rise of Independent Documentary Producers*

By the mid-1970s, teams and individuals had replaced the collectives, a result of changing funding patterns, the end of an era of collectivism, and a creative need felt by many individuals to branch out and develop their own styles and subjects. People who had learned their craft as members of video collectives or community groups began to produce independent documentaries for public and network TV.



#### **The 1980s: Documentary Pluralism**

The 1980s arrived on a wave of conservatism that threatened to undermine the efforts of social activists and video innovators of earlier decades. As young videomakers opted to make lucrative music videos or neo-expressionist narratives hailed by the art world, the documentary seemed on the verge of becoming an anachronism. But enterprising videomakers invented new strategies so that they could continue to address controversial subjects without driving away

▶▶ Much was expected of the national broadcasters following the severing of colonial ties. They were to forge a sense of national unity (considered a building-block of development), instill in the population a sense of sharing in the economic, social and cultural life of the continent. Television, like radio, saw itself assigned the role of one unofficial engine of a much-hoped-for economic development. One Minister of Information declaring that, 'In our countries, we have neither the means nor the goal to create a television that is entertainment or sensation-oriented as is the case in Western countries. We want to create an information system relevant to the political and education needs of the people'. Thirty years later, television remains badly-equipped, and is now more than ever, a state monopoly. (1)

▶▶ As State means are very limited (2), most of the national broadcasters are highly assisted from the outside. It is estimated that some 50 to 70 per cent of programming broadcast is of foreign origin. This programming is supplied 'free-of-charge' as cultural cooperation from Western countries.

▶▶ Consequently, dependency in the national networks is a way of life. An event taking place in a neighbouring country is broadcast only if the supplier chooses to do so.

▶▶ Meanwhile, AFROVISION, a project created by the African Union of National Radios and Televisions (URTNA) in 1962 to distribute African programming throughout the continent, has never gotten off the ground. PANA, the Panafican Information Agency, is in dire straits for lack of a clear-cut political endorsement by governments.

The wind of democracy may be blowing, but in many countries the setting up of African-owned private networks is still considered suspect (4) and such plans lie dormant.



## ALTERNATIVE VIDEO

Hopes have been raised by video. Its ease of use and relative low costs make it the ideal tool for the reappropriation of freedom of speech. Thus in Africa today, important events such as weddings, christenings, ceremonies and funerals are captured on video. People discover the magic of moving pictures in their daily lives. In cities, non-professionals abound, offering a gamut of video services.

What is remarkable though, is the growing presence of communication professionals who more and more now turn to video.

▶▶ The will to use this new tool to create a space for communication free from official constraints exists and is growing. Everywhere in Africa, the thirst for images and words that have freed themselves from the official voice of the State grows steadily. Fearful and insecure authorities refuse to come to terms with these new facts. Of course, the blossoming of this freedom of speech is hindered by both lack of training and of money. But its existence, however tenuous, provides hope for a continent perpetually in search of a better way of life. ▼

(1) Africa is the continent with the smallest number of transmitters in the world. It has 160, whereas the South Pacific has 500, and 21,000 can be found in Europe. For a population of 365,000,000, Africa has 3.5 million receivers. In the South Pacific, that figure stands at about 6.7 million receivers for a population of 23,000,000. (Figures quoted from UNESCO, 1988)

(2) Ninety-five percent of funding provided national television in Burkina Faso is government money. The TNB network had a budget of 140,000 French Francs in 1986. FR3 in France, for the same period, had a budget of 140,000,000 FF.

(4) Print media and a few privately-owned radio broadcasters have been allowed to operate. In the Ivory Coast, the State has set up a second national network, TV2, where censorship thrives more than ever!

**Maiga, Cheik Kolla (1992)**  
*"Difficult Beginnings.  
 Alternative video and  
 television in West Africa"*  
 in *Clips 0*, 12-14

their increasingly conservative sources of funding and distribution. Challenged to discover new forms for their work and inspired by advances in video production and postproduction equipment, videomakers veered in two different directions, responding to the low- and high-tech options and funding available to them.

Producers like Dan Reeves, Skip Sweeney, Edin Velez, Victor Masayeva, Jr., and Juan Downey, to name a few, incorporated the aesthetic strategies of video art to produce personal essays and autobiographies that pushed the limits of the documentary genre. This overlapping of the narrower definitions of art and documentary not only served to bridge the chasm between the two, but it also reanimated the video documentary in otherwise inhospitable times.



In contrast with the special effects and symbolic language of these experimental documentaries, a new interest in stripped-down minimalist portraits and straightforward storytelling was seen.



### *From Portapak to Betacam*

Over the years documentary video evolved from the raw vitality of underground "street tapes" to the polished independent "minidoc" for prime-time TV news. Although it seems ironic that the very people who set themselves up in opposition to broadcast TV should now be making television, the irony existed from the start, with abortive efforts like the CBS "Now" project or the failure of the MayDay Video Collective in 1971 to get its tapes broadcast by NBC. Despite their utopian visions of creating an alternative to broadcast television, those video guerrillas determined to reach a mass audience had to abandon cable as an alternative and work within the broadcasting system, subject to numerous factors over which they had little or no control. And despite congressional mandates fostering independent productions on public television, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and the Public Broadcasting System have generally denied independents regular access to a mass audience. A glimmer of hope is on the horizon for the 1990s in the form of new legislation establishing an independent production service. How this service will work and what role CPB and the independent community will have in setting guidelines will determine how varied in form and content such independent media will be.<sup>25</sup>

For those with the more modest aspiration of serving local audiences using public access cable channels, revised FCC rulings during the 1970s undermined the production of local origination and public access programming and turned the cable medium over to the marketplace. Community videomakers who persevere today must produce work on shoestring budgets for embattled public access and leased access channels. But recent efforts to network independent work via satellite interconnects are hopeful signs that independent ingenuity may prevail against otherwise insurmountable odds. Curiously, the development of "trash television" programs for network TV has spawned new interest by cable program services in documentaries with controversial subjects. Whether Home Box Office and Arts & Entertainment can offer a safe—and ethical—haven for independent documentarists remains to be seen, but the courtship dance has already begun.<sup>26</sup>

Just as the channels of distribution for documentary video work have diminished, so too has its funding by private as well as government agencies. In an age of conservatism, the fostering of nonfiction work by independent pro-



ducers who historically have been linked to the Left clearly threatens the status quo. This reduction of funding is made all the more poignant by the ever-increasing cost of state-of-the-art broadcast videotape production and postproduction equipment. It is not surprising that producers of the 1980s have frequently chosen either to cast their fortunes with the lot of commercial television and hope for the best or produce a new brand of low-tech work for limited or closed-circuit distribution.



The return of guerrilla tactics and idealism has been sparked, in part, by the widespread availability of consumer video equipment and by a younger generation of videomakers caught up in the political and social issues of a newer age—from disarmament to war in Central America to the challenge of AIDS—yet tutored in the lessons of video's past. Forgoing broadcast television and mass audiences for closed-circuit distribution and public access exposure to targeted audiences, a new generation of committed video documentarists seems determined to avoid the traps that derailed video revolutionaries in the past.

Eclectic and pragmatic, these young video activists incorporate whatever works into their tapes: by mixing the slick sophistication of music video style with guerrillalike coverage of demonstrations, by juxtaposing the high-end quality of broadcast Betacam with the low-tech grit of home video camcorders, they have appropriated the full range of production tools and aesthetics and effectively rendered distinctions between low- and high-tech documentary video obsolete, further democratizing the medium and opening it up for creative and political possibilities. Thus, the gauntlet passes from one generation to the next. What new directions for documentary video the 1990s will hold remains to be seen. But for the past three decades, documentary video had been subject to change, even as it has changed our ideas about art, documentary, and television.



Edin Velez, *Meta Mayan II*. Arresting the gaze of a walking Indian woman of Guatemala, Edin Velez uses slow motion to underscore the relationship of the "other" to the outside observer. 1981.



Alternative communication supports the search for a new vision of society and an alternative development paradigm. Its spread reflects the development of communication infrastructure and specific socio-political realities.



It is being increasingly recognized that the complex process of development cannot either be centrally directed or left to the agencies of the government or market forces, but requires popular involvement at every level. A large Television in India covers the entire country through a mix of terrestrial transmitters and satellite linkages. However broadcasting is a state monopoly and programs are centrally produced. Television is largely utilized to promote official policies and present pure entertainment programs, the latter largely produced by the prolific film industry. This is leading to the homogenisation of diverse cultures and the propagation of urban consumerist values. Recently many urban areas have been cabled by private operators who relay international satellite based programs, thus providing competition to national television. There has been a continuing discussion on creating an autonomous body to operate television somewhat on the BBC model. Numerous government appointed commissions have recommended it but no political party in power has had the will to implement the proposals. Currently, in view of the competition from satellites there is talk of having a privately operated commercial channel. Though the range of choices may increase, broadcasting offers little or no opportunity for alternative film or video.

Parallel with the spread of television there has been a rapid diffusion of





videocassette recorders, and VCRs are replacing the traditional travelling cinema in rural areas. Political parties, particularly those in the opposition use video to spread their messages. Playback equipment is widely available on a rental basis. This has provided opportunities for alternative image producers for quicker dissemination of their ideas to newer audiences. Two major tendencies can be distinguished in alternative film and video, one concerned with grassroots participatory approaches and the other with sophisticated productions for wider audiences, but dealing with contemporary political and social issues from an alternative perspective. For example, films have been made on the Bhopal tragedy, on radioactive hazards, on dangerous drugs, on the rights of pavement dwellers, on the struggle of traditional fisherfolk, on the people's struggle to stop the construction of a missile range, on ethnic strife, on police brutality, on struggles to organize contract labourers, on child labour, on violence against women and so on. Recently, a number of films have been made in support of movements against large dams. Environment has emerged as a major concern for alternative filmmakers. Analysis, ideologies and issues may vary but an urgent underpinning consciousness about ecological sustainability informs many debates among alternative communications people. A few of these films have been telecast nationally, some after protracted court battles, but most of them have been circulated independently. In some cases the producers have themselves campaigned with their films, in others they have used networks of NGOs, activists, and trade unions. Some of the filmmakers have only managed to recover their costs through sales to foreign television networks, or foreign distribution tie-ups. The problem of an effective and viable system of distribution of alternative media productions has still to find a real solution. Some informal networks have emerged but

## Notes A Brief History of American Documentary Video

2. David Ross, "Television: Bringing the Museum Home," *Televisions* 3:2 (May 1975), pp. 6-7.
4. David Armstrong, *A Trumpet to Arms: Alternative Media in America* (Boston: South End Press, 1981), pp. 20-21.
5. Parry Teasdale, interview with author, April 18, 1984.
6. Chloe Aaron, "The Alternate-Media Guerrillas," *New York* (October 19, 1970), pp. 50-53; "The Video Underground," *Art in America* (May-June 1971), pp. 74-79.
11. Chloe Aaron, "The Alternate-Media Guerrillas." See also Marco Vassi, "Zen Tubes," *Radical Software* 1 (Summer 1970), p. 18.
12. Deirdre Boyle, *Return of Guerrilla Television: A TVTV Retrospective* (New York: International Center of Photography, 1986).
15. Hugo McPherson, "A Challenge for NFB," *Access Newsletter: Challenge for Change* *Societe Nouvelle* 1:1 (Spring 1968), p. 2.
20. Author's interview with Andy Kolker and Louis Alvarez (January 30, 1984).
21. Author's interviews with the following: Lynn Adler (October 3, 1983), Wendy Appel (October 17, 1983), Vicki Costello (October 14, 1983), Julie Gustafson (April 13, 1984), Joanne Kelly (October 7, 1983), Susan Milano (June 15, 1984), Kath Quinn (February 3, 1984), Keiko Tsuno, (May 8, 1984), Ann Volkes (April 25, 1984), Carol Vontobel (April 18, 1984), Megan Williams (October 18, 1983), and Ann Woodward (April 10, 1984), among others.
23. Elizabeth Weatherford, ed., *Native Americans on Film and Video* (New York: Museum of the American Indian, 1981).
25. Martha Gever, "Victory for Independents: Congress Creates an Independent Production Service," *The Independent* (December 1988), pp. 4-8.
26. Jon Alpert, telephone conversation with the author (November 16, 1988).

Boyle, Deidre (1990) "A Brief History of American Documentary Video" in D. Hall and S. J. Fifer (eds) (1990) *Illuminating Video*, New York: Aperture Foundation, 51-69



the danger of merely reaching out to a limited number of people and often the same set of people has been felt by many a producer! How alternative messaging can reach more and more people to make a dent in mainstream agendas is something that a lot of activists are trying to understand and address. This effort should help alternative media to assimilate the issues and understanding of larger numbers of people.

The other approach stresses participatory productions made from the perspective of the poor and with their direct involvement. These productions focus primarily on local issues and video is used as an emancipating tool and an organizing device giving the poor self-confidence, an opportunity to examine their context critically and cooperate to solve problems. Illiterate poor women have been successfully trained to make their own recordings, encouraging people-to-people communication. Grassroots work-



ers are video documenting their own activities and producing in-depth reports of processes of change. Video is also used to mediate between opposing groups (rich and poor, men and women, people and government).

Experiences in using video to empower the poor abound in other countries in the region as well. A group of village women in a remote area of Nepal produced video letters to further communication with development agencies and to produce instructional materials. An NGO in Bangladesh is experimenting with the use of video to promote the growth of grassroots groups. A women's group has been using video to document women's problems. In Sri Lanka too video has been used to promote self-help and as a training aid. Pakistan also has interesting experiences of trade unions and women's groups using video.

Jain, Rajive (1992) "New Views from Old Delhi" in *Clips* 0, 10-11



# From small scale utopianism to large scale pragmatism.



## CREATION OF A NEW STRUCTURE

During the past 15 years Western European countries have experienced an unparalleled explosion of new radio and television stations. In the beginning of the 1970s most stations were part of national public service institutions, with only a small number of private outlets funded commercially. Today, in contrast, there are at least 12,000 private radio stations (Loensman, 1990). The number of private television stations is much smaller, but their proliferation has clearly marked developments. The main media issues on the political agenda in Western Europe have centred on the development of nationwide television companies, transfrontier satellite television and establishment of cable television networks. In recent years, though, there has been a significant expansion of local radio and television programming distributed both by cable and Hertzian waves.



community oriented local radio and television is only one of many elements in the changing scene of electronic media in Europe. Generally speaking, the main trends in Western Europe revolve around the privatization, commercialization and internationalization of the broadcasting media, politically enforced by deregulatory initiatives. An undercurrent in this development, though, is an ongoing effort to secure a position for small scale, non-commercial community oriented media in the newly emerging electronic media landscape.



Although emerging from different legislative and organizational structures, broadcasting in Western European countries developed between the 1920s and 1970s into public service institutions for both radio and television. These institutions were regulated and administered differently for each country; a common denominator, nevertheless, was the strict limitation as to who should run the radio and television services as well as the public service obligations requiring diversity, objectivity and good taste in programming.



The concept of public service was based upon the premise that only through a politically controlled structure would it be possible to guarantee freedom of speech and diversity. As things turned out, the monopolies became increasingly difficult to defend inasmuch as technological developments became less of a hindrance for establishing additional channels without frequency congestion and interference.

Parallel to the emergence of new technological possibilities a growing crisis of legitimacy was faced by the public service institutions which were accused of approaching listeners and viewers from a high-brow, top-down attitude. Founded in the tradition of high culture and good taste, the companies were considered by large parts of the audience as paternalistic or authoritarian institutions which, embedded in an elitist approach, neglected the tastes and preferences of the general public.



Whatever the differences in background and goals, the illegal radio stations, and to a lesser extent the cablecast television initiatives, had a profound impact on the formation of media policy. In Italy and France the authorities legalized local radio; in Italy local television was also legalized. In other countries political decisions were postponed through introduction of a period of experimentation.

Country	Local TV
Austria	0
Belgium (French)	11
Belgium (Flemish)	4
Denmark	85
Finland	0
France	3*
Germany ('FRG')	17
Greece	12
Iceland	0
Ireland	0
Italy	950
Netherlands	76
Norway	160
Portugal	0
Spain	150
Sweden	18
Switzerland	8
United Kingdom	15



## Amsterdam's Open Kanaal

Amsterdam is perhaps the only European city that not only allows but actively helps groups and individuals, who are not part of the media establishment to make television. With some important differences Amsterdam's "Open Kanaal" (open channel) can be seen as an equivalent to the American public access system where cable companies are obliged to provide tv production facilities as one of the conditions of their right to transmit. The "Open Kanaal" is the channel where anyone, who is able and willing to do so, and can pay some money for it, is allowed to broadcast her/his programmes. But Amsterdam has an important advantage in that unlike most cities in the U. S. cable is something which virtually the whole viewing population of Amsterdam receives. Which means that a small scale independent producer has a potential audience of the whole city. There are regular clients/takers, such as "Staats TV Rabotnik", "Migrants's Television", and "Amsterdam-C", who present a weekly programme, but there are also takers for one programme a month or even less.

A number of Amsterdam's local cable groups (like, amongst others, Staats TV Rabotnik, Kanaal Zero, Hoeksteen and Park TV) are further testing the limits by not restricting themselves to making programs but instead are producing a whole evening of television. They are as interested in "programming" as in program making. From time to time this means making live tv. And Amsterdam is one of the few



In order to allow time for finding a new regulatory framework, several governments initiated an experimental period aimed at assessing the prospects of local radio and television. As mentioned earlier, developments in France and Italy proceeded much more quickly with legal recognition of pirate initiatives. Experiments were introduced in Britain, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Germany and in the Nordic countries.



The general aim of all these experiments, with the exception of those in Switzerland, was to assess the viability of community oriented stations operating within a limited geographical area. The stations were to function without advertising and to be open for input from residents in the area. The stations, in other words, were to be non-commercial and non-professional in nature, and to rely primarily on volunteers for programme production. The general policy was to exclude commercially oriented entrepreneurs from the experiments in order to allow opportunity for local participation to develop.

The experiments were not only media experiments, but social laboratories for testing the degree of participatory potential in the respective communities.



The experimental period is the focal point of this volume, and in general terms it can be said that the experiences demonstrated interest in the community oriented radio and television stations among local populations, both as audience members and as participants in station activities. The experiments also revealed many of the problems faced by stations operating from the concepts of community orientation and non-professionalism, particularly problems related to financing station activities, and attracting and maintaining an audience. Even during the experimental period there was a strong effort to professionalize these media and to modify the principle of maintaining an open and participation-rich station.



Following the deregulatory development in France and Italy and the experimental period in other countries in Western Europe, community radio and television became accepted elements in national media legislation by the end of the 1980s. Even though recognized as part of the media landscape, in very few countries is community oriented local radio and television treated as the only outlet for local programming. Formulation of new legislation coincided with the general trend in European media policy debates towards privatization and commercialization of both radio and television.



In a situation where the market forces primarily dictate who is to win and who is to lose, the policy of remaining non-commercial is, understandably, difficult to maintain. In the face of insufficient funding many non-commercial stations have modified their community oriented principles rather than cease activity altogether.

### *Towards a two-tiered system of local broadcasting*

The general trend in Western Europe – and since recently a trend also evident in former Eastern European countries – has been to lift the broadcasting monopolies and establish privately owned channels. Especially in political debates focus has been on transfrontier television distributed by satellite and the future of the European film and television industry (European Institute for the Media, 1987, 1988; Lange & Renaud, 1989). The development of local radio and television, on the other hand, has until recently been nearly totally neglected despite the fact that the most profound changes and experiments have taken place at the local level (Council of Europe, 1990).



Many people initially expressed high expectations regarding the possibilities of community television, especially when used in combination with portable video equipment and multiple channel cable networks. Local community oriented television, however, has remained in embryonic form partially because the medium is relatively expensive and because audiences generally prefer entertainment programming of high technical quality (Vidéotrame, 1990).



In Europe, the turbulent period of pirate radios and to a lesser extent the development of local television, with emphasis on access to the airwaves and cable channels, in many ways resembles the initiatives in North America. The development suggests further that freedom of expression, diversity and pluralism as laid down in most public service broadcasting charters had not, in fact, been realized (Shaughnessy & Cobo, 1990). Although the broadcasting structure in the United States is quite different from the European tradition of public service companies, both cases generated a call for more diversity, more access and more participation. In both cases there was a rejection of a top-down, uniformistic system of mass communication, be it moncentrically organized as in Western Europe, or polycentrically structured as in the United States (Jakubowicz, 1988).

Until the development of inexpensive lightweight video and radio equipment and until additional frequencies and channels on cable systems had been made available, the monopoly situation in Western Europe was accepted as a technical fact of life. Even such 'natural monopolies', however, were strongly felt as 'unnatural', and with the advent of new technological possibilities they came to be considered obsolete.



The promotion of the ideas of public access and participation was not meant only for determining the goals of new stations, but it also was a frontal critique against the broadcasting monopolies for not living up to their social responsibilities as public service institutions. Only by increasing broadcasting outlets, it was assumed, would it be possible to transform radio and television from mass oriented communication media into small scale media operating within a structure of polycentric pluralism (Jakubowicz, 1988).



The euphoric ambition was to demonstrate that if the overall structure of broadcasting media were changed and if the media were defined as non-commercial, non-professional and non-national institutions, then the involvement of people in radio and television production would increase along with their social and political awareness and participation in society. It is no coincidence, then, that the movement for changing the structure of broadcasting media had as its point of departure the local context. Only on the basis of everyday life, it was felt, would it be possible for non-professional programmes to function as vehicles for strengthening local identity and interest in local affairs. Producing and airing programmes offering authenticity and personal experience were only possible within a limited geographical area, it was believed, even when the issues were trans-local in nature. The concept 'community' was accordingly interpreted both as 'community area' and as 'community of interest'.



Too little research has been conducted to give a detailed evaluation of the development of the hundreds of initiatives. It is nevertheless clear that, in spite of the distinctiveness of the service provided, community stations have not been able to avoid commercialization and professionalization of programming activities. Although hundreds of stations around Western Europe still operate on a non-commercial basis, many stations initially established as non-commercial and non-professional have been forced to adopt a more pragmatic policy. Five factors account for this transformation.



locations in europe where small scale operators are able to make an evening of live television. The "Open Kanaal" is thus quite an unusual phenomenon, in its genre unique in Europe. There is for instance an 'open channel' on the Berlin cable network, but there the statutory powers of the local broadcasting board are much more limited. And the Berlin programming is much less consistent than Amsterdam's, since there are no regular takers with fixed days. At the same time, the structure in Amsterdam is still relatively open, though 'clogging' has become a definite risk in recent times. Yet, where else in the world can one watch programmes made by Turkish muslim fundamentalists, born-again christians, and agnostic gays and lesbians, all on one day and on the same channel?

The conditions that created this unique situation were initially technical. The Netherlands was the first european country to create a large scale technical infrastructure for cable. Most towns, and cities have more than ninety percent of their viewers linked to a cable network. This not only produces better picture quality, but also, through central receptor dishes, enables viewers to watch channels from neighboring countries as well as the output of the global satellite stations. Moreover the dutch willingness to speak languages, other than their own, provides a larger audience for transnational tv than might be found in other countries. However another factor was involved in the development of Amsterdam's distinctive tv environment: the question of access. From the outset the right to make tv, the right of access, has been an important issue in the story of Amsterdam's cable





development. Some of the most powerful voices for an open policy emerged in the early 80s'. It appeared in the form of lively and anarchic groups of tv and radio pirates whose popularity made it clear to policy makers that there was a need for some kind of public access service. The result has been an open channel which is administrated by a regulatory organization, SALTO.

SALTO has a statutory obligation to be a "cultural representative" foundation, i.e. that the main soci(et)al movements must be represented in some way or the other. This makes the role of board, manned (exclusively) by representatives of social organizations, paramount. Slot-management on the "Open Channel" and the screening for fascist, racist, or sexist utterances also falls under the purview of SALTO.

Sometimes SALTO does more than regulate. It offers financial and technical support to the initiatives of local groups. Once a year, SALTO bestow grants and subsidies to specific clients, after submission of a comprehensive application-sheet. Finance for these subsidies are obtained from the Amsterdam Municipal Council, which in its turn receive monies from satellite networks such as Super Channel, CNN, etc. as payment for their access to the Amsterdam cable-infrastructure. Of course no system is perfect, but as a framework of what a european public access service might be like, Amsterdam's open channel appears to be the best available european model.

First, the ideas of the pioneers – media activists, researchers and theoreticians – overestimated the need by people to take part in station activities. Many of these pioneers also seemed to have lost ability to take distance and reflect on developments (Jankowski, 1988: 9). Because of the original high expectations, many stations came to face a problem of legitimacy when it turned out that the facilities were used by far fewer people than originally anticipated. Moreover, those who did use the stations were not persons in some way neglected by the established media, but generally middle class citizens who already had easy access to the media.



Second, all stations – both the experimental stations and the free, community oriented stations with participatory objectives – found it difficult to implement organizational changes in the face of withering support. Once stations had been established it seemed as if survival became an end in itself.



Third, an inflexible logic of institutional development took its toll. The core of station staff, volunteers and paid personnel, which insured continuity in operations came to favour professionalization of programming activities and station management. The early experiments in Britain demonstrated such a tendency very early in the history of community oriented television. The need to fill available airtime increased dependence on the few paid staff, and the need for a 'station identity' tended to support production of certain types of programming. Both of these needs brought stations into conflict with the initial intention of operating differently from traditional media (Bibby et al., 1979).



The fourth factor is an extension of the above and has to do with the original position of stations in disregarding audience size. Community oriented stations were not established originally to attract the largest possible audience, but to facilitate community action and awareness. This position eventually was confronted with the quite natural interest of programme makers in securing an audience for their work. This need for an audience resulted in policy compromises between the position of open access and a more selective programming policy.



Finally, economic restraints forced many stations to make compromises regarding the non-commercial philosophy.



The need for locally oriented media to confront oligopolistic and transnational cultural industries will become more urgent in the coming years. Non-commercial and locally oriented media as social and cultural tools – and not as mass media in local disguise – can play an important role in strengthening local identity and self-respect. In the dialectic nexus of internationalization and localization, local media with a community orientation along with a trans-local perspective supported with international programme exchange networks can contribute to both local self-awareness and international understanding.



This "social dream" (Kleinstaub & Sonneberg, 1990: 105) can only become reality if community oriented media are recognized for what they are – communicative tools – as well as for what they are not – serious contenders in a Darwinistic struggle among commercially oriented media. The question is not whether European countries can afford to support such small scale media as an alternative to the commercial cacophony of other electronic media; the question is whether they can afford not to.

Prehn, Ole (1992) "From Small Scale Utopianism to Large Scale Pragmatism" in N. Jankowski, O. Prehn and J. Stappers (eds) (1992) *The People's Voice. Local radio and television in Europe*, London: John Libbey & Company Ltd, 247-268





The Jolly Roger is hoisted in Leipzig, in front of the building where video artists broadcasted East Germany's first pirate TV station.

# Pirate TV in Eastern Europe

BY EVELYN MESSINGER

*Evelyn Messinger is a television producer specializing in international news. She is a founding member of Internews, a non-profit consortium of independent video newscasters. Their most recent noteworthy projects have been Space Bridge events — live TV hookups with Moscow citizens and officials. —Kevin Kelly*

TELEVISION HAS PLAYED an increasingly significant role in the downfall of Eastern Europe's one-party states. In Poland, underground pirate video transmissions kept Solidarity alive for nearly 10 years. Last fall, East Germans judged the effects of their anti-government demonstrations by watching the coverage they received on West German news programs. In Romania, control of the television station is tantamount to control of the government.

Now another aspect of the newly flexible television medium has come into play. Independent broadcasters using jerry-rigged transmitters and home video equipment have sprung up in Poland, Hungary, Romania and East Germany, intermittently broadcasting programs ranging from rock videos to local news reports. Even in the USSR, unofficial pirate broadcasts have taken place, and are credited with aiding the election of radical candidates to government posts in a number of cities.



## PIRATE TV

To Americans, pirate TV means the guy whose face appeared illegally on a cable TV channel a few years ago. Acts like this are rare in the US, because they're not necessary. Independent producers and activists here have historically agitated for, and often won, access to the spectrum of channels. There are allowances and avenues for all types of broadcasting. The mighty Network is balanced by the lowly low-power

equipment could be carried from rooftop to rooftop in a set of suitcases. By the time these repressive governments collapsed (partly from the weight of sins that were no longer hideable), the videos of their undoing could not only be made by anybody with a home video camera, but could be transmitted to local audiences by anybody with a VHS player and a rudimentary understanding of how to do it.

So, today:

- In Lithuania, the much-suffering USSR rebel state, a daring and unusual pirate broadcast took place in autumn 1989. The Moscow city channel is rebroadcast there on UHF channel 22. After it signed off one evening, a "test transmission" was beamed from the Experimental Youth Studio of Siauliai in northern Lithuania. The transmission included a tour of the regional prison and army base, and local celebrity interviews.
- In suburban Moscow, Leningrad, and Kiev, village-sized apartment complexes are equipped with master antennas and complex-wide cable systems. They often have their own "local" channel, broadcasting exclusively to the 20,000 or so residents of the complex.
- In Romania, Free Timisoara Television (FTT) began transmitting with home-built equipment shortly after the uprising that ended Ceausescu's rule. The station is now protected by soldiers who were assigned to the task by the provisional government.
- In Hungary and Poland, a number of small-scale independent broadcasters, born during their respective revolutions, have achieved legitimization in their countries as exceptions to obsolete broadcasting rules.
- And in Leipzig, East Germany, the tiny Kanal X covers local news and rebroadcasts reports from around the world pulled off the Western satellites.

Ironically, these tentative forays into small-scale broadcasting have the potential to enhance the diversity of television all over Europe. But if the Eastern European countries simply adopt Western European patterns, they will inherit a system which is top-heavy with state-run bureaucracies and the increasingly powerful Pan-European commercial broadcasters.



Messinger, Evelyn (1990)  
"Pirate TV in Eastern Europe"  
in *Whole Earth Review*,  
fall 1990, 119-123

## Seeing is Believing: The Arts on TV



in West Berlin, a visionary named Gerry Schum considered the possibilities for television in quite a different way. In 1968, he envisioned 'Fernsehgalerie (TV Gallery) Berlin' as a 'fictitious exhibition space, that will bring together information and opinions from various places concerning a particular artistic theme.'<sup>10</sup> After several revisions in concept, Schum's first exhibition for Fernseh-Galerie was realized. **Land Art** (1969) was a series of short films commissioned and produced by Schum for Sender Freies Berlin (SFB), and broadcast on April 15, 1969, at 10:40 p.m. The program was introduced to viewers 'not as an art program, but artworks specially conceived and realized for publication by means of television.'<sup>11</sup>

10

Quoted in 'The Idea Television-Gallery', in **Gerry Schum**, ed. Dorine Mignot (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1979), 67.

11

Ibid., 68.



12

There are many examples: Sveriges Television (Sweden) commissioned a 15 minute film by Ture Sjolander and Bror Wikstrom entitled *Time* in 1966; Süddeutscher Rundfunk in Stuttgart, West Germany began producing unusual and brilliant theatre pieces by Samuel Beckett the same year; l'ORTF (the French research service that preceded INA) produced *UBU-ROI*, an experimental theatrical production by Jean-Christophe Averty in 1968; David Hall broadcast *7 TV Pieces* on Scottish Television in 1971; and ORF (Vienna) produced *Escape*, an early film project by John Lennon and Yoko Ono, in which the artists followed an unsuspecting young woman through the city, terrorizing her with the camera. RAI (Italy) and INA (France) began commissioning feature films by independent directors in the early 1970s.

Schum produced Jan Dibbets's *TV as a Fireplace* as an individual project for the Fernsehgalerie in 1969, and his second major television exhibition, *Identifications*, was produced by the city of Hannover, in 1970. Like *Land Art*, *Identifications* included work by internationally known artists. Although the pieces were originally produced on film, each artist explored the physical and temporal senses in relation to television space. Schum fought many battles with German broadcasters to protect both artistic integrity and his concept. He insisted, for example, that television stations not 'introduce' – and therefore qualify – the program beyond Schum's prepared introduction, nor could they add simultaneous commentary to the otherwise quiet images. The discourse Schum began on access to airtime and respect for content continues today. Although his early productions for television are specific and unique, his demands can be understood as examples of those made on television that appeals to, but is not structured for, the broadcast and production of artists' work. There were many early attempts around the world to produce artists' films and tapes; ranging from isolated instances to continuing projects, together they were indicative of the emergence of a 'new' television in the 1960s.<sup>12</sup>



In 1970, Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen (ZDF) began a weekly program called *Das Kleine Fernsehspiel* (Little Television Plays), which has successfully broadcast hundreds of innovative new works since then. Highly regarded for its selection and commissions of films and video by independents worldwide, the program pays close attention to new talent, and has articulated its policies for openness at conferences and festivals, maintaining that television audiences are interested in personal works and provocative subjects. Two other significant television production projects started during the decade offered state-of-the-art technology to a limited number of filmmakers, dancers, and visual and video artists. *Vidéographie*, a monthly series on Radio-Télévision belge de la Communauté française (RTBF) Liège, began in 1975 with Jean-Paul Trefois as producer. Expanded in 1978, with the commissioning of documentary and visual artists' works, the program allowed American, French, German, Flemish and French-Belgian creators access to studio equipment, technical expertise, and broadcast. One special series, *Vidéo USA*, was presented in 1978, and introduced the works of American artists to the Belgian public.



One success story in television history, the product of seven years of discussion and negotiations by artists and independents, is the United Kingdom's alternative Channel Four Television. Created by Parliament in the Broadcasting Act of 1980 the channel began in 1982, fifty years after Kenneth Clark's first BBC program on the arts, to challenge British television's traditional relationship with the arts. Operating as a commissioning entity,

Channel Four has almost single handedly revitalized the independent film industry, and has promoted the work of artists in coproductions and series such as **Dance on Four**, **The Eleventh Hour**, and **Ghosts in the Machine**. **State of the Art** (1986), a recent program on postmodern society, was released as a television series, and as a book and exhibition catalogue, in conjunction with an exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Art, London. Channel Four's mandate to support innovation and experimentation in works produced outside the station has inspired a prosperous community of independent producers. The station has become a symbol of creative television worldwide, proving that audience, artist, producer, and commissioning editor can work together toward a progressive future for television. The wide spectrum of art on Channel Four is regarded as natural. 'Art, for television, is what artists make – a comment not as tautologous as it may at first appear. For art on television is above all about people; individuals who are special, skillful, gifted, perhaps inspired. Most of them work on their own, creating, in whatever medium, for the pleasure, edification and enlightenment of us all – as long, that is, as we share a particular sense of ideas and values, which is invariably assumed and rarely made explicit.'<sup>18</sup>

18

John Wyver, **Post Modernism**, unpublished paper written in conjunction with the Museum of Broadcasting's exhibition of Channel Four's programming, 1986: 13.



Huffman, Kathy Rae (1987) "Seeing is Believing. The arts on TV" in *The Arts for Television*, Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 6-16

## TOWARDS T.V.: Video Art In The Late '80s—A Few Thoughts

If there has been a single issue in UK video art which has predominated the field in the 80's, it must surely be video art's relation to the broadcasting institutions. Through the late '60's and into the 70's the attitude of video artists, theorists, and activists was, by and large, one of outright antagonism and distrust toward a television system which was seen, somewhat simplistically, as the "enemy".

Both in its form and approach, video art offered itself as somehow outside or beyond the machinations of broadcast television, a radical new medium which often saw TV as "bad" and formal experimentation as "good". Two interconnected factors which arose in the early 80's have, however, made this equation as redundant as the open-reel video machines which first propagated video art. The first was the arrival of Channel Four in November 1982 and a "new wave" of video artists, writers and organisers.

With the stated intention of presenting television which was challenging, innovative and fresh, "The Channel", as it is now dubbed by UK media-niks, brought

two things to the video sector: firstly, Money and, secondly, broadcast opportunities. On the first count, Channel Four's initial strategy was to give often substantial support to a variety of film/video workshops in order to promote experimental, or at least "different", film and video productions which might then be bought by them for broadcast. Channel Four's broadcasting policy was marked by a remarkable openness in a field which had, for more than twenty years, been dominated by the three existing TV channels: BBC 1, BBC 2, and ITV. Arriving like a breath of tele-visual fresh air, the Channel's programme included video art in the pioneering 'Ghosts In The Machine' series, a radical new arts programme in 'Alter Image' – notable for its refusal to take on the standardised format of most TV arts programmes and the eclecticism of its coverage (everything from furnitures made of broken glass to a Brechtian big band) – and a platform for experimental film with the 'Eleventh Hour' series.

More than anything, the Channel seemed to offer at least the chance that new – and old – film/video artists



might get broadcast to a larger audience than they'd ever thought possible. As if to echo this new-found opportunity, a "new breed" of artists began to emerge. While many of them had attended art schools in the late 70's, they brought to the medium a playfulness, wit, and populist feel with which the "old school", many of them involved in structuralist debate, had never fully engaged. Furthermore they saw nothing wrong with working hand-in-hand with Channel Four which, through various production deals, could offer relatively large sums of money to artists for their work.

Certainly by the time 'scratch' video had "arrived" — heralded by a major article in the London magazine *City Limits* and subsequently mythologised in any number of follow up pieces in a wide range of magazines

— the overall shape of video-art practise had shifted considerably toward a form which attempted to break with the formalist avant-garde which had predominated.



Compounded by what some have seen as an abreaction against an avant-gardism which, by the early 1980's, was no longer outside the establishment but an integral part of arts institutional framework, this general move towards more readily accessible and direct means of expression found its realisation in an attitude where video art could encompass pop culture, new styles of storytelling, and documentary models of production. In 1985's 'Media Festival' — an annual showcase for video held outside London at the Bracknell Media Centre — it was possible, by example, to come across agit-prop scratch works, innovative documentaries and the seductive image tumbling of video graphics in the same programme.



Critics of these pioneering attempts to bring art film and video to a broader audience have argued that both projects allow little space for works which are difficult or overly experimental and that money tends to be allocated to artists who have, to some extent, already established themselves. Last year the list of 'New Director' awards included a high percentage of artists already well known in the "Independent sector". The average age of these 'New Directors' was 35. Its supporters, however, are quick to point out that without these two schemes the public profile of both art video and film would be considerably lower and that the opportunities for artists to step beyond the ghetto of piecemeal funding would simply not exist.

But if one of the effects of these initiatives has been to "professionalise" film/video practise, it is noticeable that the 'shakey-camera' syndrome which was seemingly endemic to experimental production is now, by and large, a thing of the past as higher production values establish themselves. A further bonus has been to bring the video arts more and more into the public arena.

If all this gives an impression of a video art sector which is stepping into the 1990's with vigour and confidence, then it might be well to point a finger at less positive aspects of the video scene. More and more community access video workshops have fallen by the wayside and the whole substructure of art school film and video, house and testing ground for so many of the UK's artists, is under threat. The emphasis here is now shifting toward vocational training for the TV and film industries, with fewer opportunities presenting themselves to student film and tape makers to explore experimentation and the expressive uses of the medium. As budgets are cut, art school media departments are forced toward makeshift means. At one art school, previously renowned as a source of art film and video producers, students currently have to hire their studio space for a weekly fee and are expected to pay for all the materials they use.

Despite these threats, however, the current state of UK video art remains healthy. Offering a wide range of voices and practises, the form has, despite it all, retained its eclectic feel and now sees many tape makers bringing a new assurance and self-confidence to the medium.



With events such as the recent 'Arts Into Television' screenings at the Tate Gallery (that bastion of high culture) now becoming a regular feature of the arts calendar, video art does now seem to be stepping into a territory of acceptance and new interest. Due, in part, to the interaction between television and the video art constituency, this push toward new audiences has been further informed by a mood of realism and newly emergent professionalism amongst both artists and video art organizations.



As the arts scene in general moves toward a system of mixed funding and away from a reliance on money from a single or dual source, as it looks bound to do, it seems increasingly likely that UK video art will emerge as a vital force in our culture. Looking forward to the 1990's it is not impossible to envisage a permanent video art gallery in London and a place for short experimental videos on the screens of independent cinemas. Where video art once occupied a cul-de-sac of inattention and limited horizons, the time does not seem too far distant when the medium will be as much a part of UK culture as painting or sculpture.

Things can, I believe, only get better, the work stronger and the audience larger. Now coming of age, video art will, I predict, have established a solid base for its continued expansion by the early 1990's.

*Houghton, Nik (1989) "Toward TV.: Video art in the late '80s -A few thoughts" in Video Guide, 1989, 12-13*



Slogans, statements and little theoretical objects that say something about tactical or strategical television.

# Theories



The world is in the early stages of a revolution that it has barely begun to understand. Recently, television has begun falling into the hands of the people.

Koppel, Ted (?) *Revolution in a Box*, ABC Television



Professionalism is environmental. Amateurism is anti-environmental. Professionalism merges the individual into patterns of total environment. Amateurism seeks the development of the total awareness of the individual and the critical awareness of the groundrules of society. The amateur can afford to lose. The professional tends to classify and to specialize, to accept uncritically the groundrules of the environment. The groundrules provided by the mass response of his colleagues serve as a pervasive environment of which he is contentedly and unaware. The "expert" is the man who stays put.

McLuhan, Marshall (1967) *The Medium is the Massage*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 93



"...We tend to use old solutions for the problems even when they are totally inappropriate. Finding new solutions is very exciting. It can also be very rearding. But it requires some work in directions we are not always used to. That's what lateral thinking is about. That's also what creative video is about .... Effectively, creative video has to do with developing new perceptions, new forms, new thinking about audiovisual language and getting this over to the public."

McLuskey, Alan (?) "European Video Services" quoted in *Variant*, spring 1992, 3



This, then, is the key to the problem: by trying to preserve (even as one "dialectically transcends" them) any separated instances of the structural communication grid, one obviates the possibility of fundamental change, and condemns oneself to fragile manipulatory practices that would be dangerous to adopt as a "revolutionary strategy." What is strategic in this sense is only what radically checkmates the dominant form.

Baudrillard, Jean (1981) *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, St. Louis: Telos Press, 184



Throughout the world - from videos of Middle Eastern hostages to the cassettes of nationalist folk songs distributed by the socialist underground in Chile - wherever beliefs or opinions are suppressed, the cameras and recorders are at work.

Chesterman, John and Lipman, Andy (1988) *The electronic pirates. DIY crime of the century*, London: Routledge, 164-165



The most typical approach in talking about cheap media runs something like this: "Well, I had a very limited budget, and given that, I did the best I could...I cut corners...couldn't do all the stuff I would have if I had the budget I wanted, but..." The tone is apologetic. "Forgive me, forgive my art, make allowances for it because I did the best I could under the circumstances."

Now my position is that you never apologize for being poor. You don't shuffle hat in hand, act humble. You don't talk cheap. You are cheap. The theory and practice of cheap media has its own validity, a validity that in my opinion often eclipses and/or gives the lie to expensive media.

Cheap media must necessarily ground itself in the economy of the everyday. It digs in rather than looking out. Yet the experienced cheapie does not acknowledge constraint. Instead, she regards rummaging in the bargain basement with appetite and a kind of visceral anticipation. The result is not merely a bargain but a prize, a real find. I've always shopped at discount stores (often out of necessity). In fact, I like flea markets even better, and cheap media approximates the same sensibility. so maybe bargain media is a better term than cheap media- the only place you can still get something for next to nothing. And its polar opposite, expensive media, might better be called overpriced media, because like overpriced clothing you get less than you pay for.

Millner, Sherry (1986) "Bargain Media: a Manifesto. Taking control of out images - and lives" in *Paper Tiger Television Re-Presents the Media*, 1987, 9-10



Subcultures represent 'noise' (as opposed to sound): interference in the orderly sequence which leads form real events and phenomena to their representation in the media. We should therefore not underestimate the signifying power of the spectacular subculture, not only as a metaphor for potential anarchy 'out there' but as an actual mechanism of semantic disorder: a kind of temporary blockage in the system of representation.

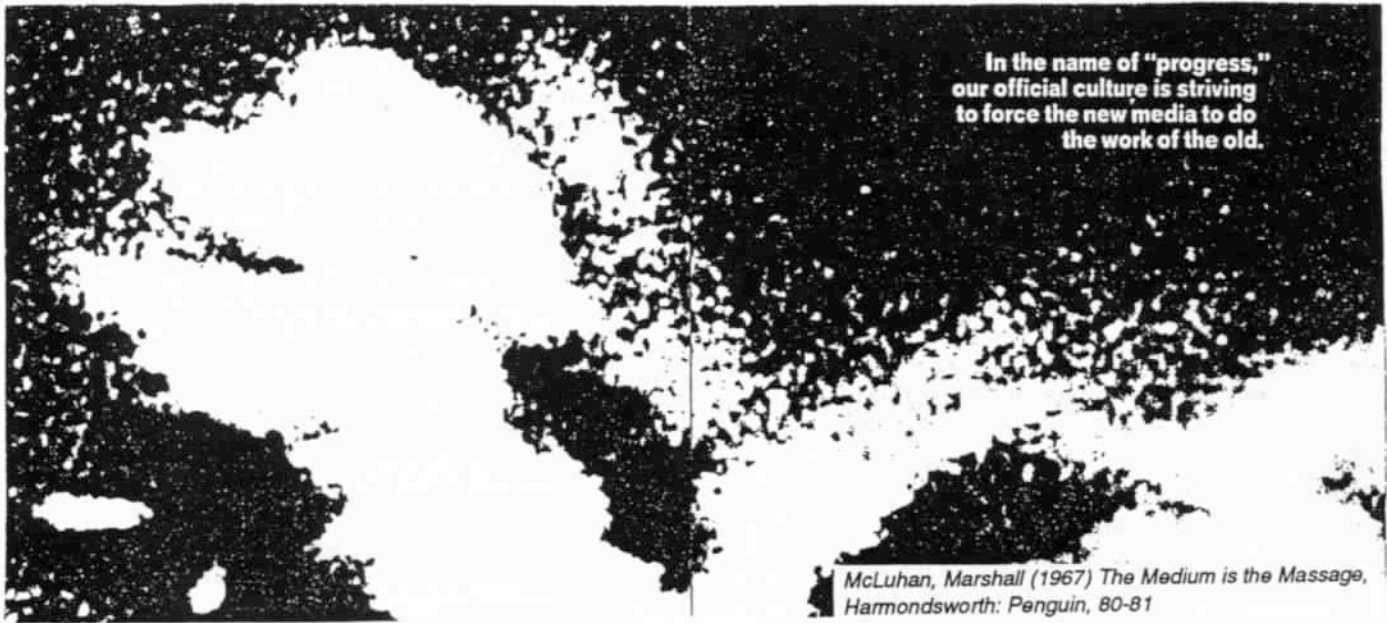
Hebdige, Dick (1979) *Subculture. The meaning of style*, London: Methuen, 156



Television, as a mass-mediated popular art must contain within it the opposing but linked forces of capital and the people if it is to circulate effectively in both financial and cultural economies. Far from being the agent of the dominant classes, it is the prime site where the dominant have to recognize the insecurity of their power, and where they have to encourage cultural difference with all the threat to their own position that this implies.

Fiske, John (1987) *Television Culture*, London: Methuen, 326





In the name of "progress,"  
our official culture is striving  
to force the new media to do  
the work of the old.

McLuhan, Marshall (1967) *The Medium is the Message*,  
Harmondsworth: Penguin, 80-81



Radio should be converted from a distribution system to a communication system. Radio could be the most wonderful public communication system imaginable, a gigantic system of channels – could be, that is, if it were capable not only of transmitting but of receiving, of making the listener not only hear but also speak, not of isolating him but of connecting him. (Brecht, 1930/1983: 169)

Brecht, Bertold (1930) "Radio as a Means of Communication: A talk of the function of radio" quoted in N. Jankowski, O. Prehn and J. Stappers (eds) (1992) *The People's Voice. Local radio and television in Europe*, London: John Libbey & Company Ltd, 257



In television, there could be a similar system. The means of production and transmission could be publicly owned but vested in several independent trusts, to include representatives of the actual providers of programmes. The facilities could then be leased, over a period, to professional companies or groups of companies, who would decide their own work. There could be liaison, here, between the professional television companies and the film and theatre companies; also with orchestras and bands, and with the existing guilds of individual contributors.

Williams, Raymond (1962) *Communications*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 158



For the first time in history, the media are making possible mass participation in a social and socialized productive process, the practical means of which are in the hands of the masses themselves. Such a use of them would bring the communications media, which up to now have not deserved the name, into their own. In its present form, equipment like television or films does not serve communication but prevents it. It allows no reciprocal action between transmitter and receiver; technically speaking it reduces feedback to the lowest point compatible with the system.

Enzensberger, Hans Magnus (1972) "Constituents of a Theory of the Media" quoted in N. Jankowski, O. Prehn and J. Stappers (eds) (1992) *The People's Voice. Local radio and television in Europe*, London: John Libbey & Company Ltd, 257-258



- (iii) Television was invented as a result of scientific and technical research. Its inherent properties as an electronic medium altered our basic perceptions of reality, and thence our relations with each other and with the world.
- (iv) Television was invented as a result of scientific and technical research. As a powerful medium of communication and entertainment it took its place with other factors – such as greatly increased physical mobility, itself the result of other newly invented technologies – in altering the scale and form of our societies.
- (v) Television was invented as a result of scientific and technical research, and developed as a medium of entertainment and news. It then had unforeseen consequences, not only on other entertainment and news media, which it reduced in viability and importance, but on some of the central processes of family, cultural and social life.

Williams, Raymond (1974) *Television. Technology and cultural form*, London: Fontana/Collins, 11-12



Thus, it is far from true that, as Enzensberger affirms, "for the first time in history, the media make possible a mass participation in a productive social process;" nor that "the practical means of this participation are in the hands of the masses themselves." As if owning a TV set or a camera inaugurated a new possibility of relationship and exchange. Strictly speaking, such cases are no more significant than the possession of a refrigerator or a toaster. There is no response to a functional object: its function is already there, an integrated speech to which it has already responded, leaving no room for play, or reciprocal *putting in play* (unless one destroys the object, or turns its function inside out).<sup>18</sup> So the functionalized object, like all messages functionalized by the media, like the operation of a referendum, controls rupture, the emergence of meaning, and censorship.

Baudrillard, Jean (1981) *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, St. Louis: Telos Press, 171





Television demands participation and involvement in depth of the whole being. It will not work as a background. It engages you. Perhaps this is why so many people feel that their identity has been threatened. This charge of the light brigade has heightened our general awareness of the shape and meaning of lives and events to a level of extreme sensitivity.

It was the funeral of President Kennedy that most strongly proved the power of television to invest an occasion with the character of corporate participation. It involves an entire population in a ritual process. (By comparison, press, movies, and radio are mere packaging devices for consumers.) In television, images are projected at you. You are the screen. The images wrap around you. You are the vanishing point. This creates a sort of inwardness, a sort of reverse perspective which has much in common with Oriental art.

McLuhan, Marshall (1967) *The Medium is the Message*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 125



America's media managers create, process, refine, and preside over the circulation of images and information which determine our beliefs and attitudes and, ultimately, our behavior. When they deliberately produce messages that do not correspond to the realities of social existence, the media managers become mind managers. Messages that intentionally create a false sense of reality and produce a consciousness that cannot comprehend or wilfully rejects the actual conditions of life, personal or social, are manipulative messages.

Schiller, Herbert (1973) *The mind managers*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1



Repressive use of media	Emancipatory use of media
Centrally controlled programme	Decentralized programme
One transmitter, many receivers	Each receiver a potential transmitter
Immobilization of isolated individuals	Mobilization of the masses
Passive consumer behaviour	Interaction of those involved, feedback
Depoliticization	A political learning process
Production by specialists	Collective production
Control by property owners or bureaucracy	Social control by self-organization

Enzensberger, Hans Magnus (1972) 'Constituents of a Theory of the Media' quoted in N. Jankowski, O. Prehn and J. Stappers (eds) (1992) *The People's Voice. Local radio and television in Europe*, London: John Libbey & Company Ltd, 257-258

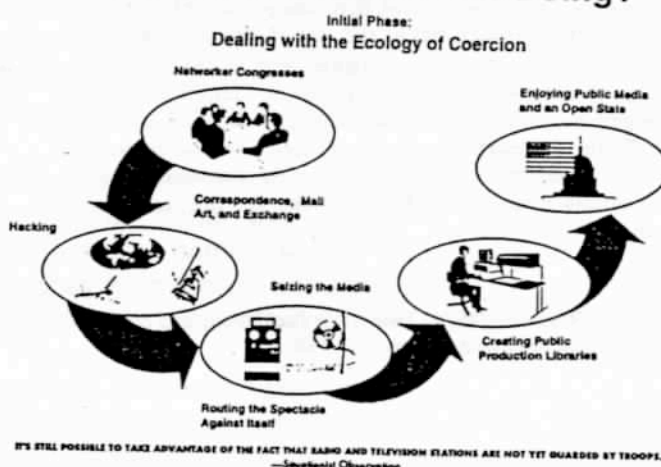


There is a basic principle that distinguishes a hot medium like radio from a cool one like the telephone, or a hot medium like the movie from a cool one like TV. A hot medium is one that extends one single sense in "high definition." High definition is the state of being well filled with data. A photograph is, visually, "high definition." A cartoon is "low definition," simply because very little visual information is provided. Telephone is a cool medium, or one of low definition, because the ear is given a meager amount of information. And speech is a cool medium of low definition, because so little is given and so much has to be filled in by the listener. On the other hand, hot media do not leave so much to be filled in or completed by the audience. Hot media are, therefore, low in participation, and cool media are high in participation or completion by the audience. Naturally, therefore, a hot medium like radio has very different effects on the user from a cool medium like the telephone.

McLuhan, Marshall (1964) *Understanding Media. The extensions of man*, New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 36



## What are the Immediats Doing?



Immediats, The (1992) *Seizing the Media*, New York: Immediat International, 12-13



The main cause for disappointment in and for criticism of television is the failure on the part of its critics to view it as a totally new technology which demands different sensory responses. These critics insist on regarding television as merely a degraded form of print technology. Critics of television have failed to realize that the motion pictures they are lionizing—such as "The Knack," "Hard Day's Night," "What's New Pussycat?"—would prove unacceptable as mass audience films if the audience had not been preconditioned by television commercials to abrupt zooms, elliptical editing, no story lines, flash cuts.

McLuhan, Marshall (1967) *The Medium is the Message*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 128





But that is precisely what is at stake: a new universal accessibility. Over a wide range from general television through commercial advertising to centralised information and data-processing systems, the technology that is now or is becoming available can be used to affect, to alter, and in some cases to control our whole social process. And it is ironic that the uses offer such extreme social choices. We could have inexpensive, locally based yet internationally extended television systems, making possible communication and information-sharing on a scale that not long ago would have seemed utopian. These are the contemporary tools of the long revolution towards an educated and participatory democracy, and of the recovery of effective communication in complex urban and industrial societies. But they are also the tools of what would be, in context, a short and successful counter-revolution, in which, under the cover of talk about choice and competition, a few para-national corporations, with their attendant states and agencies, could reach farther into our lives, at every level from news to psycho-drama, until individual and collective response to many different kinds of experience and problem became almost limited to choice between their programmed possibilities.

There is good reason to believe that many people will resist this worst of developments, but as the size of effective decision-taking communities gets so much larger, and as the scale and complexity of interlocking agencies makes identification let alone struggle more difficult, it is not enough to rely on unaided virtues. Within the next few years, decisions will be taken or will fail to be taken which will to a large extent determine which of these possible roads we are likely to take, for the remainder of this century.

Williams, Raymond (1974) *Television. Technology and cultural form*, London: Fontana/Collins, 151-152



The television generation is a grim bunch. It is much more serious than children of any other period—when they were frivolous, more whimsical. The television child is more earnest, more dedicated.

Most often the few seconds sandwiched between the hours of viewing—the “commercials”—reflect a truer understanding of the medium. There simply is no time for the narrative form, borrowed from earlier print technology. The story line must be abandoned. Up until very recently, television commercials were regarded as simply a bastard form, or vulgar folk art. They are influencing contemporary literature. Vide “In Cold Blood,” for instance.

McLuhan, Marshall (1967) *The Medium is the Massage*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 126



“It is not a question of the ‘public’, a convenient fiction at best, not ‘liking’ other cultural forms. We are all schooled to recognise the modulations of dominant culture, but only some take a route through it of rejection or renegotiation. Class, gender and race collide with the vagaries of biography to drive some people in through live with an alternative purchase on reality, something which, in the video arena, devolves upon perception (of self, of others and the relation between them) and communication (the mediated nature of perception and interpersonal relations)...”

Cubitt, Sean (1991) “Timeshift. On video culture” quoted in *Variant*, spring 1992, 3



There is no theory of the media. The “media revolution” has remained empirical and mystical, as much in the work of McLuhan as with his opponents.

Baudrillard, Jean (1981) *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, St. Louis: Telos Press, 164



Where are the mass media? In the festival, the procession, the conference organized by the Culture Commissioner on Immanuel Kant, which now finds a thousand young people seated on the floor to hear the stern philosopher who has taken as his motto the admonition of Heraclitus: “Why do you want to pull me in every direction, ye unread? Not for you did I write, but for those who can understand me.” Where are the mass media? What is more private than a telephone call? But what happens when someone hands over to an investigating magistrate the tape of a private phone call—a call made to be taped and delivered to the magistrate, and then leaked by someone in the government to the newspapers, so the newspapers will talk about it, thus compromising the investigation? Who produced the message (and its ideology)? The idiot who spoke, unawares, over the phone? Or the one who delivered it? The magistrate, the newspaper, the reader who failed to understand the game and who, in passing the message on to others, assured its success?

Once upon a time there were the mass media, and they were wicked, of course, and there was a guilty party. Then there were the virtuous voices that accused the criminals. And Art (ah, what luck!) offered alternatives, for those who were not prisoners of the mass media.

Well, it’s all over. We have to start again from the beginning, asking one another what’s going on.

Eco, Umberto (1983) *Faith in Fakes*

# The camcorder revolution

## Introduction

'The camcorder revolution' is about what happened to tactical tv since the introduction of the camcorder during the last decade. Although the Portapak, introduced in the 60s, helped tactical tv get started, it was this new electronic consumer product that accelerated tactical tv. This camera gives tv tacticians new opportunities. Because of its high technical standard, its price and its portability the whole world is being taped. As a consequence tactical tv proliferates in many ways.

For tactical media-activists like Paul Garrin, Despite TV, Staats TV/Rabotnik it is suddenly much easier to produce their own work. The small, easy to handle camcorders seem to be invented for the tactical media war that tv-guerilla's fight against the rigid concepts of the strategic tv. The camcorder made tactical literally mobile. This 90s revival of public access and media activism even developed into a Witness Festival in Buffalo, NY in the US, where artists, activists and community groups show their work.

What is important too in this camcorder revolution is the immense growth of video footage made by people who have no intention of producing tactical tv. As Peter Beaumont in his article shows, this camcorder craze resulted in an incredible increase of tape that gives us the impression that the whole world, from the most private (the birth of your first daughter) to the most public (Surveillance camera's in the streets), is being taped.

Again, tactical tv makers started using this found footage for their different purposes. Surveillance material is used by media-artist Julia Scher, the Community Program Unit of the BBC give teenagers their own camcorder to make their own diary for Teenagediaries and the Rodney King tape is used by several media-activists. These examples show that tactical tv is not always marginal but also can be mainstream.

Of course strategic tv picked up this camcorder trend with America's Funniest Home Video and sports-, news- and reality-programs. Sometimes it even seems that a whole range of tactical tv is accepted and used by strategic tv just for stylistics reasons. This may be the producers' intentions, however, strategic tv can't deny the traces of tactical substance that stick on camcorder material. But what interests us most is the way the camcorder enables tactical tv to explore both marginal and mainstream tv. The wide range of consequences this camcorder revolution has and will have for tactical tv are the focus of discussion of the N5M.

Karel Koch, October 1992.



# finding one's own voice: releasing the "other" into the american media

I read an article in the newspaper this morning about a horrible event which has been getting a lot of press lately. A black man, Mr Rodney King, was brutally beaten by over a dozen policemen on the side of a road in Los Angeles, California. The reason for the beating is still unclear although racism is obviously suspected as a cause - all of the police officers were white and the man beaten was black.

But it is not the reason why this particular case is getting so much media attention. Plenty of instances of racial discrimination occur daily in this country and those injustices are mostly ignored by the mass media. But this event has been taken up by every national TV news programme and seen by millions in the US, all because a citizen had handy his new SONY camcorder across the street from the event and recorded the majority of these heinous flagellations on videotape.

Today's article in the NY Times said: "Minority victims of past police misconduct have said the only difference between their cases and that of Mr. King was the camera (authors emphasis)." This is not just an accident or a coincidence that a camera was on the scene that night, and even less of an accident that this incident was recorded. Here the camera has been used as a weapon, even though in self-defence (the defence of recording this inhumanity), in an effort to make that which has been in the past unseen - watched. It was a political act for a citizen to be conscious enough to shoot such a videotape. It was a combination of elements: of his owning the camcorder, of his having it out at 12:45 am, of his recognising the importance of media documentation, and of his getting the tape to the media.

I mention this particular videotape recording because believe it exemplifies the way video making has been changing in the United States within the last five years or so. The handy camcorder has entered the lives of hundreds of, thousands of middle-class Americans, and they are all off to document their lives and their own particular stories.

News programmes have also been soliciting amateur videotapes of any "newsworthy" events, with hopes of truly being "first on the scene." But in this case the "amateurs" are not paid well for their news pieces. Between \$50 - \$80 per item has been offered, if any compensation at all. And the segments that are aired are always tagged "amateur video" to discredit any group or individual maker from gaining the status of "newsmaker/newscaster" or "TV journalist".

Although people probably do feel as though their lives need to be videotaped before they can be proven real, this phenomenon of documenting everything is also giving life to scores of new video makers in this country, media criticism courses offered in high schools, and many more video production departments in universities and secondary institutions. It is a bit like the explosion of literature upon the expansion of the printing press, making texts and the ability to create texts open to the masses.

Recently pressing social issues such as the AIDS crisis, censorship in the arts, abortion rights and the Persian Gulf War have all acted as a catalyst creating a new hybrid "media activists". Artists and political activists have embraced one another and combined efforts to produce a politicised aesthetic, a new video journalism. The "camcorder revolution" currently thriving in the States allows people to work with relatively inexpensive portable media equipment. Many artists believe that this revolution and the conservative political climate is reshaping the frontier of video making in this country.





# NEWS WITH A VIEW

The dark, grainy, barely visible images of a club-wielding traffic cop's repeated blows to a prone black body drove home the potential of video "witnessing" today. Shot with a low-cost video camera by a local resident, the nationally broadcast tape documenting Los Angeles police brutality highlighted the possibilities and the necessity of using accessible video equipment to shift the balance of power over representation. The tape's challenge to official media discourse was a relief after months of seeming powerlessness in the face of Operation Desert Storm's deluge of highly manipulated media images. In the recent "Video Witnesses Festival of New Journalism" Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Center screened a widely varying collection of precisely such moments of activity that resist the government-supported status quo.

The festival featured work by over 100 independent video producers and media activists from across the United States and around the world, including Brazil, Bolivia, Mexico, France, and Taiwan. The impressive geographical diversity was matched by the range of strategies that the videos undertook: exposing concealed information, offering alternative perspectives on the present and the past, playing an agitprop role in different political communities, representing collective struggles and subversive acts, self-presenting minority cultures, and examining the construction of "the truth" in the mass media.

Characterization of certain representations as "the truth" have been demonized as "old" understandings of the media. Stuart Hall elaborated such a critique in a recent talk. Hall attacks the "old" understanding of the media as one that retains the notion of an unmediated truth and believes in the possibility of distinguishing between correct and false representations of it. This model emphasizes the practice of alternative production, which could counter false representations with correct ones and give marginalized voices a chance to be heard. The "new" model Hall proposes would instead emphasize the moment of consumption, perceiving the struggle as one between differing interpretations of texts.

While all of the tapes in "Video Witnesses" actively contest dominant representations, many also point to the limitations of a theory of media such as Hall's that is confined to the sphere of consumption and to subversive readings. Witnessing does indeed take place at the point of reading, as the moment of experiencing the connotative, plural signification of any representation. But the act of witnessing also demands attention to the sphere of production. Tapes such as Maggi Carter's *Voices of Palestine* (1991) and *They Saw Their Blood Flow, Testimonies from El Salvador* (1990) by Rosemary Bodolay

and Mary Giovagnoli put the case particularly strongly. By presenting images of shocking brutality wrought by states funded by the U.S., they implicate the witness in an immediate and provocative way. The personal testimonies of Salvadoran peasants strafed by American bullets or Palestinian children beaten by U.S.-backed Israeli soldiers push the argument beyond the question of representation to one of response to the real. By implicating the viewer in the representation, the tape forces her to locate herself within the system of relationships described.

Video witnessing on this level can prove an effective means of community building. In the festival program notes Barbara Lattanzi, cocurator of video at Hallwalls, describes the impact that such tapes can have in the forum of public access TV as "strengthening a community that can act materially beyond the terrain of symbols on the home front." Many of the tapes in the festival also function as organizing tools, shown at solidarity meetings: former Black Panther Dhoruba bin Wahad takes *Framing the Panthers in Black and White* (1990), by Annie Goldson and Chris Bratton, along when he lectures. The festival itself was organized to encourage such community formation. Each night focused on a particular issue, such as "Indigenous People's Voices" or the "Gulf Crisis Program." Further, as Goldson points out, such alternative productions also encourage the possibility of resistant reading. Thus on several levels the festival spoke toward an understanding of the relationship between production and consumption.

Tapes produced by minority subjects representing themselves highlight the importance of renegotiating a relationship with the sphere of production. To argue that the political impact of such work is any less than that of engaging in critical readings of first-world-produced texts suggests a bias that would, one hopes, be problematic for anyone. Karen Ranucci's compilation *Making Waves: Popular Video in Bolivia* (1990) documents work from Bolivian communities. In it one video educator in La Paz says of his work with impoverished youth, "It is difficult to enter their world, so I give them a camera." His students collaborate on a narrative video representing a day in the life of a shoeshine boy in La Paz. When asked what the point of their video production is, one boy responds, "So we can show how we poor kids live." Another sequence focuses on an independent TV station called Tarpuy that offers programming directly related to peasant life. It is the only station that broadcasts in the native Indian language. In a scene shot in a rural home at sunrise, one woman complains about Spanish-only broadcasting, saying of the early morning exercise shows, "It's for rich

women, not for people like us." *Making Waves* ends on an optimistic note with a manifesto from a 1988 Latin American videomakers conference: "In a region marked by domination and exclusion... for the first time our people appear as the protagonists on the screen."

The need for response and action clearly motivates the videos and the festival itself. Chris Hill, the festival coordinator, described the tapes as expressing an "urgency" to move beyond upholstered armchairs to struggle with the production and distribution of their own insistent and creative voices. Lattanzi, too, described the work in Video Witnesses as having the "opportunity to assert a public role." The "Gulf Crisis TV Project" (1991), produced jointly by Paper Tiger Television and the Deep Dish TV Network, foregrounds this opportunity. The project has compiled four half-hour tapes each of which focuses on a different issue, such as domestic responses to the crisis or military resistance. Assembling footage from across the country, the well-paced, upbeat tapes present informed analyses, interviews with activists, and documentation of town meetings and spirited antiwar demonstrations. While these tapes also examine the role the media has played in the move towards war, they are agitational in style; each program contains information on upcoming demonstrations and relevant phone numbers, such as a military resistance hotline. "Gulf Crisis TV Project's" extensive range of source material from 40 states and its far-reaching satellite transmission to over 300 access stations permit it to make a national, connected response to mainstream media, which marginalized the antiwar movement as freakish and narrow in its appeal.

Equally important are festival tapes that address specific audiences about local issues. Allegany County Nonviolent Action Group's *Civil Disobedience: Protest at Cananda Site in N.Y. State* (1989-90), for instance, depicts community protest against a proposed toxic dump site. The jerky, hand-held coverage reflects the participatory status of the mediators themselves. During the festival panel discussion entitled "Making the News/Framing the News," one of the makers suggested the group made "effective uses of TV beyond TV programming" by not only witnessing the event but pushing the activity further.

Likewise Tony Conrad and Cathleen Steffan's *Studio of the Streets* (1990) records the First Amendment Network for Public Access's weekly staging of a studio on the steps of Buffalo's City Hall to protest the city's suspension of its public access operator. Featuring spontaneous interviews with "anyone who appears there each Friday lunch hour," the protest attempted to reclaim the public space increasingly privatized by corporate media and invited the general public to participate in the discourse of television. The project blends complementary objectives and blurs dis-



inctions between protest and media production. During the panel discussion, however, Conrad noted that random passersby are often reluctant actively to participate in TV creation. Instead they ask, "What do you want me to say?" Such passivity bespeaks the resistance to alternative TV modes with which any media producer must grapple.

The festival created an awareness of the spectrum of negotiations between conventional video representation, defined by attention to production values and the naturalized forms of credibility, and alternative investigations of how documentation is constructed. Some tapes, such as Barbara Trent's *Cover-up* (1988-90) and *Invasion of Panama* (1990-91), rely on familiar documentary format to reveal activities concealed by the state. *Cover-up* documents the Reagan administration's covert deals with Iran to delay release of the hostages until after the elections in exchange for a large cash settlement. *Invasion of Panama* investigates the massive—and unnecessary—slaughter that was Operation Just Cause. The tapes also offer analyses of how and why the media participated in these cover-ups. Both tapes are well-funded, professional productions which target large, general audiences. Last year's broadcast on KQED, San Francisco's public television station, elicited a dramatically favorable response. Part of their appeal to such large audiences is surely the use of accepted standards of TV and credible documentation. It's difficult to imagine that Trent's discoveries would receive such a favorable reception if presented in a format that undermined their "objectivity." Her outstanding investigative journalism registers the high-water mark of strategic responses that enlist conventional modes of establishing credibility.

The festival's range, however, suggests that no particular strategy is the correct one. Different negotiations are right for different contexts. Especially successful in enlisting varying strategies are the tapes of Annie Goldson and Chris Bratton. In a refreshingly democratic response to attacks on conventional TV representation, Goldson acknowledged during their presentation that "people anticipate the language of TV. That's the language they want to speak through. . . . People feel comfortable in reading it or feeling that they have a relationship to it." Conventional representations, then, can provide the starting point from which alternatives can be referenced. A strict dichotomy between the two need not be maintained. Bratton described how this strategy might work: "It's always a question both of playing with what are obviously recognizable forms and developing new kinds of relationships with some recognizable forms and some unconventional strategies in the body of the same tape. . . . We try to make our strategies available to the audience."

Goldson and Bratton's *Framing the Panthers in Black and White* reveals the media's tendency to dehumanize and validate the expulsion of members of society who fight back. By playing interviews that demonstrate the intelligence and humanity of the Panthers' struggles against media representations that criminalize them, the tapes force the viewer to rethink mainstream categorizations. *Framing the Panthers* examines COINTELPRO's campaign against the Panthers, and in particular against Dhoruba bin Wahad, who was imprisoned for 19 years on charges of killing a cop. The tape demonstrates how COINTELPRO effectively eroded key alliances and destroyed the movement and emphasizes the importance of exposing histories that have been erased. Throughout the tape, interviews with black high school students about the Panthers display this erasure: most seem to believe that the Panthers "just broke up." Unexpectedly, bin Wahad was released on bail during the course of production, based on evidence finally released to his defense that reveals the key witness stating, "He did not do it." The ecstatic images of the courtroom as the release is announced, punctuated by Jimi Hendrix's pounding guitar, convey the empowerment that exposure of the truth can provide.

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Barbara Lattanzi describes models of video witnessing as "self-aware of the performative nature of their discourse." Part of this awareness is reflected in many of the videos' attempts to break through conventional modes of presenting the facts. *Do Y'all Know How to Play Dixie?* (1990) by Lisa Guido, Susana Aiken, and Carlos Aparicio, for example, catalogues hate crimes perpetrated by the Ku Klux Klan by means of a rolling script appearing at the bottom of footage of white-robed Klan members and friends playing bluegrass music in a kitchen. The familiarity of the suburban domicile and the ease of the hoodless Klan leader form a dramatic, frightening contrast to the violent attacks rapidly listed on screen. (Dean Lance's *A Hard Reign's Gonna Fall* (1990) rejects the documented "real life" image altogether and instead presents a series of colorful

drawings depicting the suffering and the opposition engendered by inadequate funding for AIDS research and treatment. Similarly, Fritz Bacher's *War in Progress* (1990) treats its montage of nightly news footage, slow-motion images of hands grabbing yellow ribbons, and personal responses to and analyses of the Gulf war in an almost lyrical fashion. By superimposing images and sounds of angry anti-war demonstrations over CNN news coverage, the tape eloquently meets the desire for alternative voices in the mass media consumption experience.

*The Q.C. Girls* (1989) by MacTown Strip, aka Bill Smartt and Mark Misrock, comes close to sacrificing the image altogether. Shot at night without lighting, this underground documentation of the local hang-out strip in a small town in Tennessee discovers "Queer Corner" and records the bravery of lesbians who have staked this ground. The severe deterioration of the image lends the tape a sense of the real that is unavailable to manicured representation, as though it were a record of the inaccessible margins of society.

Also involved in widening the margins are Carol Leigh aka Scarlot Harlot's tapes, such as *Taking Back the Night* (1990) and *Die Yuppie Scum* (1989). Leigh's own interest and enthusiasm are an especially powerful focusing device. She approaches her subjects without a "correct" version of how to frame them. Her conversational interview style, occasional disrobing, and activism as a member of the sex trade community make her subjects trust her. The result is an opening up of dialogue and an honesty of representation.

Many of the tapes are highly conscious of the mediation involved in all representations, especially those of a news industry predicated on commodification. Art Jones, in his tape *Know Your Enemy* (1990), critiques the mass media treatment of the rap group Public Enemy via distorted audio and visual representations of interviews with music journalists, Public Enemy performances and music videos, newscasts, and archival footage of the Black Power movement. The degradation of the image, achieved by shooting off TV, reflects both the band's own high-noise sound and the distortion of media coverage of its subject. It struggles against a form of expression, observed by Malcolm X and quoted in the video, in which "they hold you in check through this science of imagery."

Part of the witnessing project, then, is to deconstruct the formal framework of images used to convey "objectivity." Directly engaged in this act is the 8mm News Collective's *News Diaries* (1990). Following local news camera crews, the collective playfully investigates how the news is made and exposes the construction process that is normally effaced. In one striking image the collective's and the



TV station's cameras are posed at each other in a stand-off. The moment, however, implies the limitations of mere cognition of how the news works. It generates a desire to move beyond.

Political struggles often generate questions over control of representation and an awareness of the media's bias. The Green Team Video Collective's *The Generation after Martial Law* (1986-89), from Taiwan, reflects this tendency. In one sequence youths protest biased reportage by staging a funeral for TV at a local station. The Green Team also transmitted its own television broadcasts. Its footage assembles a variety of points of view, from distanced aerial shots of waves of riot police attacking demonstrators to head-on shots at the front of the picket line, where the image is often cut off or disrupted as the crowd jostles the cameraperson. The international witnessing and documentation of Taiwan's activist movements deliver images often suppressed by our own government. The tape subtitles interviews and offers text on the background of various protests to create a historical understanding usually absent from corporate media coverage.

The Green Team's tape is remarkable for the resonance it has alongside other festival tapes produced in North America. Certain images begin to repeat in the tapes—the mass protest, the emphatic picket signs, the shield-bearing police, even the masks worn by environmental protestors in Taiwan and in Allegany County. Thus tapes in this festival serve multiple functions, from tools in localized grassroots organizing to reminders that international relations of power precipitate similar subversive responses. The opportunity for alliance building between media producers and between disparate protests becomes clear.

The problem, then, as many videomakers at the festival point out, is no longer so much gaining access to production or recording marginal witnessing as it is distribution. Festivals such as this one play a key role in that process, and plans are under way for "Video Witnesses" to travel. Especially exciting was the festival's week-long broadcast on local public access television. The appearance of these tapes alongside simultaneous cable programming made for some remarkable juxtapositions—such as documentation of life on the Gaza Strip versus local news coverage of the war. Broadcast on local TV made possible VCR recording and informal distribution among individuals. Some tapes from the festival have also been televised on local PBS stations. PBS, however, refused to distribute Trent's *Cover-up* nationally unless certain censorial stipulations were met—including the removal of George Bush's image from the tape. Trent refused; the tape has appeared on several local PBS affiliates instead.

Such demands for censorship make it clear that videomakers must engage in an ongoing contestation for distribution of oppositional news. The choice necessitated will often take place at a local level. For example, festival coordinator Hill received a "CNN Newshound" pass in response to the show. In the panel discussion Hill read this as an indication that CNN wanted her to be "part of the family."

However, as opposed to a large-scale and unified project of "alternative" news, Hill described the festival as "interested in work where people are carefully crafting their own witnessing project, thinking about who their audience is." The relationship between works and audiences is a loop that the festival intersects, calling attention to

different systems. The festival's plurality—as opposed to the illusion of plurality offered by corporate media—suggests that medi makers are traversing a number of roads in the act of witnessing. Their invocation of a larger audience betokens the possibility for alternative discursive communities. "Video Witnesses" conveyed a sense of momentum toward the building of such communities.

#### NOTES

1. Stuart Hall, "Cultural Power and the Struggle for Hegemony," at the conference "The State of Representation: Representation and the State," New York University, October 26, 1990.

*Sorensen, Janet (1991) "News with a view" in Afterimage, may 1991, 3-4*

## HOME(VIDEO) IS WHERE THE REVOLUTION IS

WHEREVER YOU ARE...

RECORD THE GENOCIDE IN THE STREETS

SHOW ACTS OF REPRESSION AND LAWLESSNESS BY THE POLICE

USE EVERY MEANS OF MEDIA AND INTELLIGENCE TO EXPOSE  
GOVERNMENT/CORPORATE MURDER AND THEFT

EDUCATE, INFORM, EMPOWER

USE YOUR CAMERA INTELLIGENTLY

## PUT THE GOVERNMENT UNDER SURVEILLANCE

*Garrin, Paul (1992)*





What's wrong with the new video revolution in Buffalo:

\* It seems primarily the work of a core - say two dozen - of white postgraduate students, and therefore, to a large extent, it reflects the concerns of that class.

Minority artists haven't flocked to pick up cameras and go to work in the Hallwalls-Squeaky Wheel universe. One exception is Colin Cumberbatch, a UB graduate student who recently screened at Squeaky Wheel part of a work-in-progress called "The Poet", a lush-looking work about a black man's conflicting internal identities.

\* And what about mainstream audiences? If public access is going to work and truly give media power to the powerless, then it has to function as a kind of mass medium. More viewers, more power. Public access video makers are subject to no controls - but they would do themselves a favor if they avoided boring, undisciplined self-indulgence, the epidemic virus on public access everywhere.

\* For all their television-bashing, video artists hitchhike on the technology and the authority of the thing many of them hate. The more successful the



Hallwalls' interest in organizing the 1990 and 1991 Video Witnesses Festivals has been to probe the range and especially the margins of video witnessing activity in conjunction with the proliferation of low-cost consumer camcorders in recent years. Award-winning tapes have been submitted by amateur videomakers documenting unanticipated and newsworthy local

Hill, Chris (1991) *Video Witness, Festival of New Journalism Catalogue*, 3

new video revolution is, the more television people will watch, the less they will read, the less they will walk in the park.

\* Video artists talk loftily about breaking the "hierarchy" of news presentation, of letting real people represent themselves, of escaping the hidden agendas of media corporations. But as the artists become more ambitious about creating effects, shaping narratives and cutting interviews short when people ramble, their work will take on some of the contrivance of local news broadcasts. Then the artist - the editor of the videotape - will occupy the top of the hierarchy, defending his own worldview and "using" his subjects for his own end.

When the 8mm News Collective interviewed the subjects who were exploited by local news stations, the video artists got great footage, even some tears. But the subjects were simply being used for the second time. It's inescapable, whatever your medium. The camera and the pen use everyone they depict, even their operators, sometimes.

Montgomery, David (1991) "Video Verité" in *The Buffalo News*, February 22

events, engaging their camcorders strategically in civic demonstrations, and delivering editorial commentary, as well as experienced producers and artists constructing independent perspectives on world affairs, documenting agit prop performances designed to reveal the "business" of corporate media, and developing innovative distribution strategies for progressive messages.



I am an advocate, practitioner, and theorist of a form of media practice - camcorder activism - that is exploding around us, even as prohibitions upon our speech and expression escalate. Camcorder activism is the low-end, low-budget, community-produced video that has been enabled through recent technological developments like camcorders, VCRs, and cable. It is a media practice that challenges the more normative uses of the medium in its remove from capital (it's cheap and it isn't made to sell commercials), in its highly personal and political nature (it is most typically made by individuals and communities who have come to video because they have something urgent to say, usually about themselves), and in its form (which often quotes, but equally often disrupts televisual conventions).



The very reason why the disempowered members of our society must speak, or make video, are the reasons that they cannot. The camcorder is allowing communities which have rarely had access to public discourse the opportunity to speak out - it is an empowering tool of expression and dissent. However, people continue to speak in a world that has not changed as quickly as has media access. •

Juhasz, Alex (1992) *Shifting Communities/Forming Alliances*, in *Felix*, spring 1992, 60/63



Beaumont, Peter (1992) "Camcorder craze stars the whole nation" in *The Observer*, august 23



## Camcorder craze stars the whole nation

THEY have descended on Britain like a biblical plague. Whirling, hard-shelled and gleaming black, with a single staring eye — the camcorder infestation is upon us.

The invasion of the image-snatchers recently hit a beach in Minehead in Somerset, where a family of six, including four young sons, was playing noisily on the sands. The father of a neighbouring family butted in and asked the children to shut up as he did not want their voices on the video he was shooting of his own children at play.

A few days later and the same family were walking along Lynmouth Gorge. Again a parent with a camcorder intervened — again to try to silence the four sons. This time the would-be cameraman was met with an unprintable reply.

Last year 500,000 hand-held video cameras were sold at prices from £400 to £3,000; this year, despite the recession, the figure could reach 700,000, bringing the total to more than two million cameras owned in Britain alone.

According to the figures released last week, the camcorder has become the accessory of the Nineties, shouldering aside the Walkman, satellite dish and rottiweiler.

They have already been banned by Rabbi Henschel Padwa, the leader of the 13,000-strong Union of Hebrew Congregations, one of the most religious Jewish sects in Britain, as 'evil' — their use being forbidden in both synagogue and home.

In many churches, museums and stately homes, they are already discouraged or barred, and they were forbidden at the recent Michael Jackson concerts.

In the space of a few years the name 'camcorder' has gone from a brand name to dictionary acceptance, at the same time spawning the advent of 'camcorder man' as a new social stereotype. He is the shock troop of Andy Warhol's self-rewritten dictum that not only will everyone be famous for 15 minutes — but that everyone will be famous in 15 minutes.

Aged 35-45 and invariably male, slung with a shoulder bag full of accessories, 'camcorder man' views the world through a blue-tinted lens, panning and zooming his way through weekends and holidays, until the moment comes to inflict his cinematic meanderings on the nearest victim.

He is the maniac muttering in the crowd as he narrates his own soundtrack into his integral microphone.

At a recent gay rights sitdown protest outside Downing Street, journalists sniggered as 'camcorder man's' antipodean cousin — *camcorder australis* — leapt among a group of chanting men dressed as nuns loudly narrating his soundtrack as he went.

His ambition — inevitably — is to see his work introduced by Jeremy Beadle on ITV's *You've Been Framed*, which begins a new series in September. For the new series, the long-suffering production staff have viewed more than 50,000 submissions, for a programme whose popularity is such that it regularly pulls audiences in excess of seven million.

There have been some bizarre submissions. According to programme executive David Liddiment, the strangest of the latest batch was several hours' footage of a naked man painting a room. Previous offerings have included similarly inspired footage, including a film of five men standing naked in a field of corn.

'The programme has the same appeal as *It will be Alright on the Night*, except that it is ordinary people involved,' said Liddiment.

'The best ones have the same quality as slapstick or an old silent movie, where you know

what is going to happen, but it is the route that gets you there that is amusing — and the timing.'

But what of the 99.9 per cent that fail to make the grade? 'They're just not funny or interesting. You get videos of people falling over on snow slopes on skiing holidays or a member of the family doing something uncharacteristic which is completely meaningless to an outsider.'

While *You've Been Framed* ensures that none of its domestic mishaps involves any injury to the participants before screening them, in the United States, NBC has taken the concept one step further with a show called *Witness Video*.

Inspired by the amateur footage of the beating of a black motorist by LA police officers, this programme has featured scenes such as a pregnant woman jumping from a burning tower block in Chicago and the shooting of a Texas policeman.





More avenues of distribution are available now than when I started making videotapes in the early 70s, thanks to the changes set in motion by the growth of cable, the popularization of home VCR's and "camcorders," and the adaptation of independent video techniques for music videos. The visibility of non-broadcast video as a public medium has been (ironically, I suppose) heightened by its being broadcast: shows like *America's Funniest Home Videos* have hyped amateur productions, and the wide play given to tapes made by ordinary people furnishing evidence of crimes (especially those committed by police) have increased the importance of nonprofessional witness. Broadcast news shows use home-camera war footage in a way that newspapers haven't used amateur photographs. The technically degraded video image has become an accepted marker of "real-life actualities," blowing the "poor technical quality" alibi that television stations used to fall back on in rejecting independent work.

All this doesn't mean that independent videomakers are now able to "editorialize" on mainstream television (see recent article in the *Columbia Journalism Review* discussing the disfavor that independent producer Jon Alpert has fallen into with network news despite his long history with them), but it does widen the crack for our work. (A negative effect is the tendency to abandon "appropriation" — the critique of television through direct quotation — or even less direct types of television critique.) Our work is also now more likely to be mentioned or reviewed in general-interest publications — admittedly those on the left — and carried by home-video distributors. At the same time, video may be shown more often in museums, but generally at the expense of political content, with the sometime exception of some works about the social marginalization of various population groups.

Rosler, Martha (1992) in *Felix*, spring 1992, 111

# **DESPITE** <sup>TV</sup>

Despite TV is a video cooperative based in London's East End. They presently run a policy of cheap access to video production and post-production facilities which is open to all members of the community. They also train their own members in all the stages of production in an attempt to demystify the machinations of the media. They have produced 13 magazine type tapes, their style pre-dating the youth magazine programmes taken up by television. The group are probably better known nationally amongst video enthusiasts and activists alike for their tapes on the Wapping dispute in 1986 (*Despite the Sun*) and their documentary around the national Anti-Poll Tax demonstration in London 1990 (*Battle of Trafalgar*). Of *Despite the Sun*, one critic wrote: '(it) equals and excels most of the broadcast material because they know the area better, and because they are in struggle, taping police attempts to stop both themselves and a BBC crew from taping, while the BBC failed to cover the story at all ... The effect of the tape itself is not to document as such ... The effect is not one of clear explanation, rational reportage, balance. It is of urgency, even desperation, of confusion and the constant threat - and frequent actuality - of violence.' (Sean Cubitt)

Dickson, Malcolm (1992) "Despite TV" in *Variant*, spring 1992, 15



# The South

## Introduction

Tactical tv in the South is hard to label. The long history of colonialization and the present state of development marked the societies as well as the developing media landscapes. Television is a relatively young medium in the South. Infrastructure is on low level in most countries. This makes tv an expensive tool, it requires both specific equipment and a basic level of education. As a consequence the production and distribution of television are tough struggles, for strategic as well as for tactical tv. Most countries do have a national channel, although it does not always reach every region of the country. These channels are often state controlled and more or less related to a specific political party. In this light it might seem logical to label oppositional videoproduction as tactical. But this logic does not get us very far. For example: Video News Services is an independent South African videogroup related to the oppositional ANC, New Dawn Video is an independent Namibian videogroup related to the governing SWAPO, they are both involved in a comparable political struggle, why should the one be tactical and the other not?

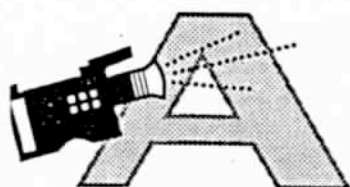
Tactical tv can exist in both mainstream and marginal tv. Independent media-activists like Media on Society and Culture from Thailand distribute some of their programmes via a weekly 30 minutes of broadcasting time that they rent from the national channel. Randy David, philippine professor of third world studies and also anchorman of a critical newsprogram, works deliberately with the commercial television in order to reach a big audience. The N5M is about tv producers that are making tactical tv, either within national channels or as tv pirates, as self-supporting videogroups or even as commercial broadcasters.

Making tactical tv in the South may be hard, but this doesn't mean that it is not happening. Wherever tv exists, tactical tv can also be found. The agendas of southern tactical tv-makers have a specific emphasis on politics, information and education. But on a general level northern and southern tactical tv-makers have a lot in common. In a way they are all familiar with the dilemmas connected to funding and distribution as described above. And certainly in a world where the strategic media are globalizing, the media context of tactical tv is becoming increasingly comparable around the world.

Unfortunately it is very difficult for most tactical tv-makers to get an impression of the activities of distant colleagues. Tactical tv is in most cases a very local thing to do, however valuable and even successful it may be. All around the world there may be thousands of tactical tv-makers but they hardly know each others work. Their programmes seldom cross the borders of the local (cable) networks. Practically no information from either strategic or tactical tv from the South is coming through to Northern or to other Southern countries. The 'South project' of Channel Four being one of the few exceptions to this. The N5M wants to give an opportunity to tactical tv-makers from the South to present their work, and it also wants to stress the need for more space for Southern voices on screens all over the world.



# Marginality or Politics?



DILEMMA IS NEEDLESSLY TEARING

apart Latin American video groups. Their own

development and multiplication is forcing them to

decide between two apparently contradictory alternatives. For some, it is a

matter of choosing, in the name of the "grass roots" doctrine of the 1960s, to

withdraw from the major communi-

cations debates, and to immerse them-

selves in popular activities that are

certainly genuine but also fragmented,

isolated and ethically self-complacent.

This attitude, inherited from the

limited and obsolete concept of "purist

activism", includes a certain desire to

be part of the tribe, the party or the

parish. In the name of the cause of

"true popular video makers", they feed

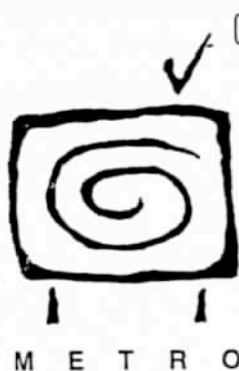
a great fear of getting one's hands dirty and getting contaminated by the reality of private enterprise, the market, an esthetic quality, technical standards and everything that is part of the outside world.

At the opposite extreme of this purism, another threat is emerging, one that belongs to times of rigorous liberalism. This is the antithetical option stating that everything put forward by the popular video movement is merely pre-historical, and that it is necessary to liberate oneself from this past (in a new and very strange way), in order to become the standard-bearer of private enterprise innovations. According to this new gospel, it is necessary to replace popular concerns with advertising, organizational questions with commercialism, social issues with profitability. Needless to say that such a proposal is an invitation to join a race in which popular and development-oriented

video groups would arrive late and badly equipped at the starting gate. That is why such a change of status and appearance only entails another kind of marginality, hardly less evident than the marginality of the first alternative.

The dilemma is consequently false. Faced with its emergence, it is necessary to once more stress the primacy of politics. That is, the primacy of creating a historical cultural project that can transform the audiovisual landscape and dynamics. Clearly not in the sense of petty politics for which being part of a party, an organization or a tribe is in itself a guarantee of excellence. Rather, the true challenge consists in ensuring public space for the production and transmission of our own images. This struggle — which is genuinely political and cultural — involves a great number of players: popular video groups, development organizations, independent professionals, creators and artists, technicians and users, teachers and politicians (of all leanings), national businesspersons as well as regional and local governments. To ignore this need for dialogue would be to condemn popular video to the marginality of the catacombs. It seems necessary to clearly define and debate this problem.

*"Marginality or Politics?" in Clips 0 Roncagliolo, Rafael (1992)*



▶▶ In Australia the mainstream media is owned and controlled by three men, men 'suckled on aristocracy or petrified by wealth'. The mainstream media in Australia paints a picture of health, wealth, happiness and a fair go for all in an anglo-saxon society. The reality is very much different. Australia is a multicultural society, where racism, poverty, disease amongst the Aboriginal population, government corruption and the widening of the class gap seems to go unnoticed by the mainstream media.

The role and challenge of public television in Australia is to redress this massive imbalance, we are the alternative, we are the rebels." ▶▶

*Parsonson, Pip, Paddington: Metro Television*



# The Urgent Need for Action



The era of the initial fascination with the potential of alternative video is over. True, new technologies did enable sectors of society to emerge as new actors in communication. True as well that the pluralism, diversity of forums,

creativity and wealth of the many alternative projects is what constitutes their strength in the face of increasing concentration of cultural industries, homogenization of messages and commodification of information. It is also true that the alternative and popular video movement can less and less be accused of marginalism as it improves production quality, figures out how to reach new audiences, and plays a role which continually expands the debates on the culture of communications and becomes one of the principal defenders of democratic life at national, regional and international levels.

And it is precisely because these new actors in alternative communication are always at the forefront of the democratic struggles that they are confronted with the urgency of responding in a strategic and political way to the major challenges of the day, and perhaps also that they can better map out the route to take.

For the world has changed very quickly in the last two years. The Gulf war and the fall of the Communist regimes both graphically illustrated the central position that communications are playing in the new world order. We all knew we were part of the so-called "global village"; everyone now knows that in this village, we villagers no longer have the right to speak, only to listen and look at what we are presented with. For this reason, the experiences related here bear witness, each from its own particular context, to the same common struggle not to

be flattened by the neo-liberal steamroller. In most African countries, these alternative communication groups, when they exist, are part of the broad social movement seeking a pluralism of voices between State monopolies and the deregulation that is paving the way (already very open) to multinational communications corporations. South Africa

is a case in point: alternative video producers which yesterday were still clandestine, are now at the avant-garde of the discussion to redefine, together with progressive forces, the new framework of national communications. And this task is even more important given that South Africa already dominates, and will probably continue to dominate, the future of communications in the whole of southern Africa.

This is also true of South America where the movement, already continental in scope, is confronted with the urgent need for concerted action — an urgency which one also finds not only in Brazil but also in India, both these subcontinents being huge producers and exporters of audiovisual programs. This is also the experience in Northern countries. Gaining access to public communications

services is everywhere an unavoidable necessity. And everywhere,

we are seeking to enlarge audiences, forge links with researchers, progressive professionals, to work on all fronts to stem the tide of large corporations. And all the fol-

lowing accounts now seem to want to pass to a heightened level of struggle, to move into areas which would have been unthinkable several years ago, and to contradict the well-known saying that one must "think globally, act locally." It now seems clear that it is necessary to think in terms of global strategies, but also to implement global actions.



**B**ecause *Reality Isn't Black and White* is the working title of a collaborative video project I am co-producing with Ivan Arocha and David Hernandez, two Cuban producers living in Havana. Although the project, a video exchange between gays and lesbians in Cuba and the United States, is in the early stage of pre-production, it provides the point of departure for my thoughts on the possibility (or impossibility) of collaboration across cultures and communities. Also in question is the strategic advantage — the point — of such border-crossing.

The working title strikes me, as I sit to write these notes, as more than slightly ironic. While the project is about sexual orientation, which the three of us presumably have in common, the very nature of a collaboration across national, racial, cultural, economic and other borders (not to mention the ever-present U.S. blockade) disrupts the premise of any sort of shared community in the traditional sense.



The collaboration developed out of a trip I took to Cuba during August of 1991. I had invested in a Hi8 camera before leaving, and had a vague sense that I should do some shooting while in Cuba. Once there, however, I felt increasingly incapable of "producing" anything "about Cuba." This unease was based in anxiety about the power dynamics of a white, middle-class Canadian representing anything about a place which inevitably was, and always will be, foreign and "other." In addition, I was in the uncomfortable position of being an *extranjero* or "foreigner" in Cuba, which meant that I had access to a slew of social and economic privileges off-limits to Cubans themselves (dollars, taxis, foreign-goods stores, etc.). Things were further complicated by my inability to feel as though I actually understood what was "going on" in Cuba, as it was a complex moment in a complex culture whose history is completely different from my own nation (if I can even dis-



cern my national identity, floating somewhere between Canadian and United States-ian).



I had come to Cuba for the first time in April, and had brought with me a number of perceptions circulating in the U.S. I had heard phrases like "Cuban lesbians and gay men are living in concentration camps," or "people with AIDS are quarantined." As the reality I perceived differed from these accounts, at least in some instances — I saw many gay men (few lesbians, however) in the streets, at the beach, living together, and willing to talk about being gay — I was concerned that the vision of Cuba that had been established by films like Nestor Almendros' *Improper Conduct*, which documents the incarceration of gay men in the UMAP re-education camps (Military Units To Aid Production) during the 1960s, was perhaps atypical, and not historically accurate. Things

have been in a process of change that is important for North Americans, especially lesbians and gay men, to understand.



In addition, the issue of repression of gays during the 60s and 70s continues to be used to mobilize anti-communist and anti-Cuban sentiment in the U.S. As a North American living in the U.S., I felt it was important to counter simplistic and false perceptions continually mobilized to justify the economic blockade and embargo against Cuba.

Ivan shared this concern, as he has travelled to the U.S. and been frustrated by people's inability to recognize him as both a gay man and a socialist living in Cuba. I think he felt this most decidedly in encounters with Cuban Americans, who often saw him as a Castro spokesperson because he has decided to stay in Cuba and live there as a gay man. He also expressed frustration with North American "leftists," who would

not allow him to say anything critical about Cuba without accusing him of being "counter-revolutionary."

Characterizations like the ones above are inevitably generalizations, but they speak to the polarized and rigidified nature of the discourse around Cuba from all sides. Ultimately, it is the goal of the tape to try to break down some of this discourse and find new ways of speaking about Cuba. The inability of Cubans in Cuba and Cubans in the U.S. to communicate has deep historical and political roots. It is my experience that there are many people looking for (and finding) new ways of communicating across the binarisms of Cuba/U.S., imperialist/communist, traitor/revolutionary, and so on. As Ricardo Acosta, one of the people interviewed in the tape, says:

We need to get out of these boring and old discourses of "I'm good, you're bad," or "You're good, I'm bad." Because reality isn't in black and white.

Anderson, Kelly (1992) in *Felix*, spring 1992, 66-69

## Film and Video in South Africa Today

**S**OUTH AFRICA IS A society in transition. Yesterday's political enemies are today rubbing elbows at the negotiating table. An interim government may soon be in place to chart a way forward for a new constitution and a new government. This scenario has a impact on all aspects of life in our society. In the past the lines of battle were clear. Strikes, stayaways, running street battles between mainly Black youth and the South African police were the order of the day. In spite of the heavy repression, videos reflecting the struggles being waged by trade unions, community organisations, students, teachers and many others continued to be produced. These videos/films were never shown on national television, but the producers developed methods of distribution, sometimes clandestine ones, through or-

ganisations active in the struggle against apartheid within the country and abroad.

The struggle has now taken a new turn and alternative video producers are faced with new challenges. The South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) and indeed the mainstream filmmakers are trying desperately to jump into bed with progressive film and videomakers. For example, in July 1991, the SABC broadcast a documentary produced by one such group on the history of the trade union federation, COSATU. But, immediately after the documentary was aired, the SABC presented a virulently anti-communist documentary. Another part of the campaign for democratic broadcasting involves the Film and Allied Workers' Organisation, FAWO, meeting with representatives of the mainstream film and video producers to discuss future legislation. So far no agreements have

been reached except that all accept the need to transform both the broadcasting and film industries. A unified industry will be able to make direct recommendations to a new government.

A transformed industry should account for the aspirations and needs of the alternative film and video movement. This hopefully will be achieved in a manner that will include those audiences and filmmakers who have historically been prohibited from participating in South Africa's film, video and television cultures. The struggle for this is far from over, with the mainstream very reluctant to change their privileged status. They however cannot refuse to include the democratic filmmakers, for their very existence, based historically on apartheid, is at stake.

Molete, Mokomenyana (1992) "Film and Video in South Africa Today" in *Clips* 0, 14



Videazimut, a coalition founded in 1990, brings together people from the world of independent and alternative video and television from every continent. Together, its members act to promote the democratisation of communication. They aim to broaden the participation by communities and movements from South and North in sound and image production. ►►

Communication is a right of peoples, of communities and of individuals. Communication is a fundamental activity of human beings, individually and in society. It is essential to democratic life at all levels, as it is to any process of development. The right to communicate is seriously undermined by the workings as well as the structures and dominant models of communications systems. Inequality of access to the means of production and dissemination exist between the North and the South but also within each country, in the North as well as in the South. ►►

The right to communicate includes the right of communities and organizations to project an expression they consider to be faithful to their own identity and ideas; it also includes the right of those who are generally excluded from the means of communication to speak and to show themselves publicly. The coalition believes that the low level of participation by the majority of the world's population is a serious hindrance to development. A plurality of voices is necessary to democracy. ►►

The coalition understands communication to be a vehicle for the expression of the social project of a collectivity, and a vehicle for developing solidarity and mutual respect between and amongst collectivities. The coalition considers itself to be part of an international movement towards the creation of a pluralist network of self-determined voices.

*Videazimut (1990) Statement of Principles*

## Behind the smile - Independent video work in Thailand

"Media on Society and Culture" (MSC) is an association of progressive media-workers, a video-art co-operative. In the Federal Republic of Germany such a group would be classified as belonging to the alternative scene. Its roots are in the Bangkok radical student movement of the seventies. Now that they are politically accepted to a large degree, the MSC people collaborate with several NGO's and they even have taken government commissions. Their goal is to initiate a process of awareness by means of video-work in rural areas and in urban slums. The downtrodden should be motivated to actively dedicate themselves for their own interests. Parallel to this basic work, members of the MSC have rented out a programme bloc on the state television, financed by advertisers, in which they weekly broadcast a 30 minutes programme of socially critical commentaries (though this is often curtailed by the censors).

In 1988 the group started the V.I.V.A. project (Village Interaction by Video Animation). They plan to open media centers and mobile screening units in the various rural regions of Thailand; one, to engage in process-oriented video-work locally; two, to help weaken the monopoly of news-flows from the center to the periphery. The idea is to have a network of local correspondents linked to these media centres, who would - among other things - provide material for a weekly reporting broadcast. ►►

*Gunatilaka, Kamron (1991) "Behind the Smile. Unabhngige videoarbeit in Thailand" in 5. Freiburger Video Forum Katalog, 1991, 35-36*

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## New Dawn Video

New Dawn Video is an independent Namibian video production group. It was founded as a section of SWAPO, the former Namibian liberation-movement and now the governing political party.

New Dawn is having great difficulty persuading the Namibian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) to air their programmes. The NBC is a remnant of the SWABC, that was created by the South African Broadcasting Corporation in the early 80's to bolster up the propaganda of the South African administration in Namibia. NBC still employs many of the original South African Security Services-seconded staff and is having a hard time coming to terms with the change of government in Namibia. As an answer to the lack of airtime, and also because of the fact that only a small part of the people have a tv-set, New Dawn has set up a travelling regional film programme. With mobile video vans they show videos to people in the rural areas of Namibia, Zimbabwe, South Africa and Mozambique.

Another activity is their engagement in the development of an indigenous film culture in Namibia, together with other groups in the region who share these aims.

N5M



SOUTH is a new global magazine programme initiated by the UK Channel 4 Television.



The primary objective of SOUTH is to bring the direct voices of the South to television screens in the North. We hope that the programmes will be transmitted in as many countries in the South as possible, increasing South to South communications. In the new era of global television, we feel that the voices of the South have a uniquely valuable contribution to make.

All of SOUTH's films were from programme makers in Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa and Asia. Avoiding a "Northern agenda", programme makers were invited to propose ideas, subjects and styles of their own choice for a world audience. This resulted in a variety of imaginatively conceived themes; social and political, music and dance, sport and everyday life.

The first series included documentaries with a wide range of styles, drama, animation and music video. Two, three or four items were linked thematically or geographically in each programme. There were also two 50' "specials", on the crucial issues of political plurality in Asia and Latin America.

SOUTH evolved from a strong relationship with Southern film makers by Channel 4's Independent Film and Video Department. Since 1982, the department has contributed to many feature films and documentaries.



*Channel Four Television (1991), press release*



MAKING MOVIES - George Shikongo at work in the struggle against cultural colonialism.

*Lush, David (1990) "You are being Brainwashed! Moviemakers take on cultural colonialism" in The Namibian, 27-1990*

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## TACTICAL TELEVISION IN LATIN AMERICA

When David Garcia invited me to join *The Next Five Minutes*, I never expected to end up writing about Tactical Television in Latin America (a subject I had no knowledge about before beginning to work for the N5M) neither that I would be advocating a careful approach by the N5M to the subject of Tactical Television outside Europe and North America. The reason why this comes as a surprise is because inspite of being born a Colombian, I have always tried to stay away from anything labeled as: Third World, Developing World, The South, etc. This is not because I'm ashamed of my roots, on the contrary, I'm probably the last one of my generation that after living in the Netherlands for more then 21 years, still retains the Colombian nationality despite of all the problems attached to a Colombian passport. But, I think that the quality of the work of a media artist like myself can only be evaluated according to universal standards. This universalist approach however can only be applied to my personal work and can not be used as a point of reference when discussing matters such as Tactical Television.

When looking at Latin America, it is obviously important to consider colonialism; first by the Spaniards 500 years ago, and its cultural, political, economical and religious influence in Central and South America. Later, the economical, cultural and political imperialist approach of The U.S.A. towards their southern neighbours throughout the Twentieth Century. These are two among several factors that play a very important role in the development of electronic communications in Latin America.

### Strategic Television

National Television in Latin America basically consists of mainstream, linear programming produced by the national networks in each country, reruns of North American and European television dubbed in Spanish and programming from transnational telecasters like CNN, HBO, MTV, etc. More than half of the television programming in Latin America is entertainment and it basically consists of nationally produced news and current affairs programs, soap operas, game shows and

all of the other formulas for popular entertainment. Foreign television films, series and documentaries come mostly from the U.S.A., Canada, Japan and some European countries. Most viewers prefer television programming that has been originally produced in Spanish (or Portuguese in the case of Brazil). This is not only because there is still wide spread illiteracy, so subtitling can not be read, but also because the great majority of the population identifies better with plots and story lines that are developed within their own cultural boundaries. The television industry has grown so much in Latin America that networks in Brazil, Colombia, Mexico and Venezuela have become influential power-brokers on an international basis. The Mexican soap opera *"Los Ricos Tambien Lloran"* (The Rich Also Cry) is nowadays number one in several nations of the former Soviet Union and the network that produces it is one of the main stock holders in a wide range of industries in Canada, the U.S.A. and Europe that range from networks like ABC, CBS and NBC in the U.S.A. to hardware manufacturers like Ampex and Grass Valley.

For several years Brazilian soap operas are being broadcasted by European networks; RTL4 in the Netherlands is presently broadcasting one of them titled *"The Surrogate Mother"*. Colombian, Mexican and Venezuelan soap operas, music shows, etc. crowd the channels catering for the Spanish speaking viewers in the U.S.A.

However, the demand for national programming in Latin America is limited to the less privileged groups, unlike them, the middle and upper classes (particularly in urban areas) generally despise anything nationally produced and are only interested in, and very much influenced by U.S.A. programming. For these groups consumerist capitalism is the basis of their life style and their goals and ambitions are well served by U. S. programming. Since some years, the influence of U.S. programming is not only limited to the reruns of shows dubbed in Spanish broadcasted by the national stations, but also to transnational, satellite telecasting directly received from the U. S. via satellite dishes. Affluent neighbourhoods in the Latinamerican capitals are



often polluted with satellite dishes placed on roof tops and gardens of houses and condominiums. Nevertheless some people think that there is a positive side to this situation and that is that these areas of the population are also exposed to issues such as: birth control and safe sex (viewpoints opposed by the Catholic Church) as well as race equalitarianism, etc. Most these subjects are not even discussed in Latin American societies.

### **Tactical Television**

Although it is not really possible to talk about Tactical Television in Latin America, alternative production and programming are beginning to surface in the shape of regional television, private television, etc. These developments are a big step towards the decentralization of production and programming and a direct challenge to the monopoly of the networks on the medium.

Another interesting development in the field of regional and private television is programming produced by ethnic minorities and special interest groups. Unfortunately the present stage can not yet be compared to similar programming taking place in other parts of the world: Aboriginal Television in Australia, Public Access in the U.S.A. and Canada, cable television produced by ethnic minorities in the Netherlands, etc.

There are also some other interesting uses given to tactical video equipment apart from television in Latin America. Visual artists and experimental film makers are producing what the media calls "Video de Alcantarilla" (Sewer Video). "Video de Alcantarilla" is presently displayed at festivals, museums and movie houses only, but it won't be long before it becomes part of the main stream regional and national television programming.

Another option that is open for the future is cable television. At this moment there is no cable television in Latin America and the term is wrongly used to describe scrambled, pay television. Nevertheless, some governments are seriously considering cable as an option and this obviously will open a whole new range of possibilities.

### **Pirate Television**

Pirate television is a phenomenon that occurs sporadically in the Latin American Television; It is

always carried out by guerrilla groups like the M.19 in Colombia, the ELN (National Liberation Army) in El Salvador, Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path) in Peru, etc. With the help of mobile transmitters, these groups interrupt regular broadcastings to send their own messages. In the early eighties, the M.19 used to dub the sound of televised presidential speeches broadcasting their own messages in what "looked like" the voice of the president. These humorous interruptions that can almost be regarded as conceptual art works were of course carried out for a very limited amount of time and within very limited areas.

### **Radio**

Although The Next 5 Minutes concentrates on television, it is impossible not to mention radio in the Latin American context.

Since its introduction, this medium has played a very important role in both urban and rural areas in Latin America. Today, radio continues to be the main source of information and entertainment and while it is difficult to talk about Tactical Television in Latin America, there is great variety of Tactical Radio. The flexibility of the medium, combined with low production costs (when compared with television), and the mobility of transmission equipment, prevents that the medium is monopolized by the governments and the mayor networks. Next to the many government and commercial (local, regional and national) radio stations, there is a wide range of clandestine radio programming in Latin America, particularly in areas where there is armed political struggle.

It is not difficult to envision the time when clandestine television stations will operate in the same way that clandestine radio stations broadcast in Latin America today.

Raul Marroquin, 1992.



# Wartime

## Introduction

How do independent, tactical television makers cope with war or warlike situations? This will be the main question addressed under the heading of "Tactical Tv in Wartime". We have chosen to focus most of the attention on the 'biggest' wars of the last years; the Gulfwar and the war in the former Yugoslavia.

One could watch the Gulfwar 'live' on television. During the first days of the war in January 1991 one lived with the idea that this was the first war in history that could be watched in real time. When the war progressed and especially during the aftermath the realization grew that one maybe was tuned in directly to some journalists on the spot, but what one saw had very little to do with what actually was going on. The voices of the Iraqi people, the devastating waste of human lives, the anti-war sentiments on the homefront in the USA etc, were hardly visible. The tactical television makers of Paper Tiger Television were one of the few who covered the anti-war movement in the US accurately.

The situation in former Yugoslavia differs from that in the USA during the Gulfwar. Nowadays many believe that the mainstream nationalist media inside the former Yugoslavia, especially the Croatian TV (HTV) and Serbian television (RTV Belgrade), have been the most influential instigators of the Balkan tragedy. Only a few independent stations exist nowadays in the republics of former Yugoslavia, for example Kanaal A, Studio B and Sarajevo TV. In Bosnia the situation is very difficult. Tactical tv-makers have to endure political threats and intimidations but are still trying to continue their difficult job, as you can read in the interview with Mr. Nenad Pejic.

Different wars presuppose different attitudes and roles from tactical television makers, but some common lessons can be learnt from all wars. In all warlike situations censorship, control over the media becomes tighter. Free gathering of information becomes harder. But especially in wars the need for free flow of information is higher than ever. Here lies a role for tactical television makers. We hope that by bringing together different groups of independent and tactical television makers from "warzones" from around the world we will come to new understandings of how one can and should work as a tv-maker in such difficult circumstances.

Jeroen van Bergeijk, October 1992.



Interview with Paul Virillio



*Should there not be a call for sabotage? For instance, to sabotage the ban on information? As American censorship prevents the broadcasting of images showing casualties, should not the communication strategy of radicals be geared toward demolishing this taboo?*

"Of course. We must demand those images that are being withheld from us. But what matters more at this juncture is analysis and commentary. That is truly subversive. Time, and that means, information, must be recaptured. Contrary to what they try to make us believe, the *live* information we are getting is no true information but deliberate manipulation - a slap in the face."

"During WWII you had hearing-at-a-distance with London Radio. De Gaulle's call did not reach us in writing but through radio waves. The Vietnam War was the first war where television played a substantial role. The American viewers did get pictures of the war, but those pictures came after the reality. Now we have a television where vision and action are merging together: tele-action. To be there when an action takes place, even if through image only, makes people into tele-actors (players-at-a-distance). They are being carried away by the images, but cannot interpret them. A slap in the face! This is a war without information - and we are all targetted."

*In your view, is it unavoidable that journalists become pawns of the authorities?*

Journalists are in the front line. They are soldiers, whether they are in favor or against the war. The media are (now) totally dependent upon the US Video Pool or CNN. There are no images that are not being provided by the Pool. The French media are simply banned from showing any other material. The soldier-journalist in this war could defect by openly condemning the use of the (mass-) communication-weapon. Put on the front page of your newspapers; "Down with the US Video Pool!"

Chervel, Thierry and Smoliczyk, Alexander (1991) "De Hele Wereldbevolking Zal Deze Oorlog Verliezen" in *De Groene Amsterdammer*, 6-2-91, 10



THE GERMAN WAY OF READING

It was hypothesized in the beginning of the seventies that the technological developments in the modern media by them selves were already an impediment to dictatorship and war. After all had not the Vietnam War proven that the daily presence of death engineered by television was severely crippling the war-resolve of the masses? Would the growing proliferation of senders, memory-banks and copying devices not greatly reduce the opportunities of governments to manipulate public opinion? It was a nice and plausible assumption. Alas, as we now know, it was also a false one.

The Gulf War has demonstrated that the liberal state too can neutralize the enlightening constituents of the modern media; The pool-journalism devised by american censorship offered the image of a sterile, casualty-free war. It proved possible to imply that 125,000 war victims, amongst which many civilians, were hardly ever represented in the media of the industrialized world, and they even succeeded without applying the conforming methods of a centralized communication-machinery.

Action under the eye of the camera

At the same time, in Romania, the reforming communist technocrats surrounding Iliescu were successfully demonstrating how one can portray a very limited change in the elite as a democratic revolution. Action under the eyes of cameras, smart insertions of "amateur footage" (as the Ceaucescu-trial), the rather brilliant use of framed stills of realistic torture-scenes made it clear that even at the end of the twentieth century it is possible to deceive the many-channeled apparatus of the "World public opinion" for weeks and even months on end.

Meanwhile the war in earstwhile Yugoslavia shows that the concept of a "World Public Sphere" is a blatant mixage, despite satellite television, globally operating newsagencies, and cross-border media. For months now in Germany, Austria and Hungary, and that in glaring contrast to what happens in the rest of the world, one sees a rather classic ethnic conflict in a zone of communal diversity being portrayed in terms of an offensive war between states. What is fascinating - but also deeply disturbing - about this state of affairs is that, with the exception of Hungary where the government of prime minister Antall is gaging the media, the implantation of this frenzied distortion of truth happens without any breach of the democratic process. Open communication channels can therefore, and this within the framework of a deregulated, globalized and privatized media-market, be closed off, "liquidated" or otherwise be brought into line.



Glötz, Peter (1992) "Die Deutsche Lesart" in *Tageszeitung*





## Paper Tiger Television

### Smashing the Myths of the Information Industry

"Paper Tiger Television" is one of the nearly 200 weekly series transmitted on access channels to subscribers of Manhattan Cable in New York City. These regularly scheduled programs range from astrology call-ins to film reviews by thirteen-year-olds. Immigrant groups, religious cults, the Boy Scouts, the League of Women Voters, and the National Organization for Women of New York have all done series. Potato Wolf, Communications Update and Artists Television Network are program series that have been produced by progressive artists using a wide variety of styles and formats.

"Paper Tiger" began as a special series on "Communications Update" with Herbert Schiller reading "The New York Times," a task he has habitually done with students as a warm-up exercise in his communications theory classes. Schiller began with an explanation of how "The Times" serves as "the steering mechanism of the ruling class" and went on for five other programs, including the Washington Talk page, the foreign correspondents in the consumer capitals and others.

The shows were very popular, especially with the group that had assembled to make them, and we realized that this was a format that could be used for other programs. Since that time we have done over 130 "readings" from "Teresa Costa Reads Biker Life Style" to "Dan Hallin Reads CBS on Contragate."



### Organization

The group that works on Paper Tiger is a loose affiliation of interested, committed and talented people. Since there is no pay for the work, most have to hold full-time jobs in the media industry. These jobs are often high-pressured and draining. That we can pull a show together after a long day of work is some kind of miracle.



### Distribution

For better or worse, after 130 shows the studio organization has remained loose and receptive to spontaneous input (and mistakes). The interest and demand for the taped shows, however, is forcing a more organized structure. We have tried to make Paper Tiger a model of cheap, imaginative, access programming. As such, it is important that the programs be distributed to other access systems and to schools and community groups. Individual shows and series have been cablecast in cities throughout the country.



Halleck, Dee Dee (1987)  
*"Paper Tiger Television.  
 Smashing the myths of the  
 information industry" in Paper  
 Tiger Television Re-Presents  
 the Media, 1987, 5*

Paper Tiger is a mostly live public access TV show.

It looks at the communication industry via the media in all its forms.

The power of mass culture rests on the trust of the public.

This legitimacy is a paper tiger.

Investigation into the corporate structures of the media and a critical analysis of their content is one way to demystify the information industry.

Developing a critical consciousness about the communications industry is a necessary first step towards democratic control of information resources.

## Two short interviews with Chris Hoover and Simone Farkondeh, members of "Paper Tiger Television" and producers of the "Gulf Crisis TV Project"

"Am I one of the americans that they speak to when they say 'the american people'? There is no one that I watch on my television screen who looks or sounds like me." Bell Hooks, "Not the America I belong to")



Isabelle Graw: Does the group "Paper Tiger" have some general idea about the kind of public they want to address? Or is every single performance directed towards some specific segment of the viewers? I at least got the impression that some videos are directed to a so-called general public, people who do not have a very fine grasp of the available information, while others seem more to be intended for people already familiar with media theories.

Chris Hoover: That's difficult to say. We do intend to make the gap between producer and the audience less blatant. The material from which the broadcast is made is intended as a reflexion upon what

is already going on all over the country. Thus, we are not reporters who are making a newsreel on what has happened. We use material that has already been filmed by other people. These people send us their videotapes from over forty different States of the U.S. Our function is that of a...

Graw: ...mirror?

Hoover: Well, rather of a blunt mirror then, since the material is being worked over by us. We take in and shape the material that has been given to us and present it to the public, that has entrusted



us with it. The main distribution channel for all "Deep Dish" (a satellite broadcasting station) productions are the cable network systems, the "Public Access People. Many of our suppliers are connected with the cable networks, you may speak of a "Public Access Community". We visualize the second layer of the audience as a kind of "broad public". We do not assume an ignorant public, but rather one that, like us, is under the influence of the mass media and so-called public opinion. This public segment, that is reached by public broadcasting, is the largest in terms of number, and the response we got from them prove that they were surprised by what they saw. Our material struck them as strange, and yet familiar. We got letters in which they expressed relief at being able to see what they always had thought was the case, but had never dared to speak out. These people were afraid they were the only ones with anti-war sentiments, and they felt unpatriotic about it.



**Graw:** But then the notion of truth (itself) is already problematic. How can one ascertain that something is true, or more true than something else? Who can say (of himself) that he has spoken the truth, or found the truth, or has commented *truly* upon something? I would rather say that your productions propose to substitute one construction of the truth for one another.

**Hoover:** I completely agree on that point. But then our programmes are not merely a critique or a deconstruction of the dominant method. They must be understood in terms of realistic political arguments. In the case of the Gulf War, we really believe that lives are at stake. And there are moments when one simply must bypass the unintelligibility of the usual terminology. At that juncture, you must believe that your programme has an immediate effect and a concrete influence on the world as it is. Theoretically, we for sure substitute one construct for the other. But in order for that second construct to be more than a passing comment on the previous one, more than a mere additional layer of argument in an already thick mass of discourse, we have to affirm that our own construct is distinguishable, that it embodies a difference, and that it is change-generating. When one is actively engaged in "counter-media", one feels the urge to achieve immediate effects.

**Graw:** How would you describe in concrete terms the goals pursued by the "Gulf Crisis TV Project"? Were you intending to

draw more people into opposition to the war, or to talk round the public opinion in order to achieve a quicker end of the war? And so to protect the lives of those people you have branded as vulnerable? When you're really after the effective prevention of something, are more radical methods not called for? Does the intercalation of "differing information" not result in "alleviating circumstances" and in reformist policies, which end up in a reaffirmation of the democratic system and its system of values?

**Hoover:** May be. You mentioned the notion of "morality", and when you had criticized the idea of "truth", I knew you would also criticize the notion of "morality" I totally agree. I hate that idea of an established morality. But we are constantly making ad hoc moral choices. We for instance made a moral choice by deciding to meet here and now. And there is (definitely) a moral standpoint underlying the "Gulf Crisis TV Project". To deny this would mean to disclaim our goal, which is to influence public opinion against the war.

Now your question was: If what really is at stake, is to influence public opinion and eventually end the war and save lives, should we then not make use of more radical means? Are our endeavours not too modest, and easy to incorporate within the system? That's a very old question. Had we produced something truly radical, then there is no way it would have been screened on public television. There are government restrictions, and all kind of limitations imposed by big corporations that are shaping what you may see. Our aim was to home into that small margin that lies between bringing up radical statements and to be allowed to voice them.

**Graw:** It may be that I am underestimating what is specifically local in your project, and especially the particular historical circumstances in which it came about. I refer here to a context in which a homogenous consensus of public opinion is being constructed - what Noam Chomsky calls "the manufacture of consent". The response to your programme shows the existence of bursts and cracks, that should be deepened further

**Hoover:** Both the reception of our work, and the fact that it could be broadcasted demonstrate that the corporate media are not monolithic. There are fractures in which you always can find a way to move in. "Public Access" is smashing up a crater in the dominant media landscape, and the Gulf war and all the debates that went with it have made quite a big hole for us,

which we do intend to fill. Of course, now the government and the big corporations are bent on closing the gap. We have only made a small step on the road to the mass media and we should not delude ourselves. We did not exert a very big influence, yet there has been a response to our work, at home but also abroad, and that means a degree of appreciation for our viewers, and for the people who have contributed to the programme by sending us material.



**Graw:** Do you feel that adopting the conventional format of *normal* television broadcasts makes you accessible to many people, whereas an alternative format always runs the risk of scaring the viewers away?

**Farkondeh:** The "Paper Tiger" videos are directed to a specific public, and we hope with them to challenge the usual television viewing habits. "Paper Tiger" strives for a situation in which, if somebody is zapping through the networks, and he lands in a "Paper Tiger" programme, he can see at once that it is something different. And indeed, "Paper Tiger" aims to attract these people (as a steady audience). Surely, the people who are watching our programmes, are sympathetic to our methods. It could well be that a viewer who is unaware of our motives is taken aback by our way of putting things.

In the beginning, we were targeting an audience of students and academics. The past two years we are increasingly focusing on the activist scene, which we collaborate with.



**Graw:** What do you think will be the outcome of your critical attitude towards the media?

**Farkondeh:** Information and education. I can get less frustrated about this Gulf War situation if I tell myself that I still can go and educate the people. If they only knew more about what's going on, they would react differently, they would be much more indignant about it. The student with whom I talk about the kind of language the media use, is learning something, and gets a piece of information which he can put to use in some other circumstances.



*Graw, Isabelle (?) "Tiger aus Papier?"*





# The rapid demise of Sarajevo TV

Nenad Pejic, editor-in-chief of Sarajevo Television and, since 4 May, a resident in Manchester, England, after being forced to leave his Bosnian home, reflects on censorship and his station's fragile independence — unique in war-torn Yugoslavia

*Sarajevo Television achieved financial autonomy and a democratically elected management in July 1989, reluctantly tolerated by a severely weakened Bosnian Communist Party. But its newly-won editorial independence came under political fire. With the fall of Communist-style censorship, the three ethnically-based nationalist parties that emerged from Bosnia's November 1990 multi-party elections to form the coalition government attempted to impose new forms of censorship which, according to Nenad Pejic, would be worse than any imposed by Yugoslavia's Communist rulers. He predicts that the slide towards a purely nationalist media means not only the destruction of independent voices in Yugoslavia but of any chance of a peaceful future for the region. He was interviewed by Ursula Ruston.*



Nenad Pejic

*Nenad Pejic (43) is a Bosnian Croat journalist and writer who began work with the Foreign Affairs department of Sarajevo Television (TVSA) in 1972, moving later to the News department, where he was editor-in-chief from 1979-81. After resigning in 1981, he worked as TVSA correspondent first in Banja Luka and then in Belgrade. He was elected by secret ballot as the first independently appointed editor-in-chief of Sarajevo Television in July 1989. He is also the author of a number of award-winning screenplays, including Trial, Masters of Darkness (about Azem Vllasi, the ethnic Albanian Communist leader of Kosovo, arrested for nationalist separatism after the Serbian government abolished Kosovo's autonomy in July 1989), and Injustice, (which won international awards).*

Since your election in July 1989 as editor-in-chief, Sarajevo Television's independent stance attracted criticism from all sides in politics.

Sarajevo Television was accused of something at every press conference given by political leaders. Each time, we said 'Give us examples of what we did or did not broadcast, and tell us what was wrong'. But they were not able to do so. This was routine, from day to day and week to week, and not only at the press conferences, but during public political meetings. We always broadcast their complaints. When the Serbian Democratic Party (SDS) said that we hated Serbs, we broadcast it. The next day, when the Croatian Democratic Party (HDZ) said that we hated Croats we broadcast that, too. And after the November 1990 elections, politicians added threatening telephone calls to journalists to public pressure. They called me, for example, and some of my colleagues, and calls were also made to my children saying that someone will kill their father, things like that. And, later on, we started to get different kinds of menaces. More direct ones. They said, 'We will kill you if you don't broadcast this particular report.' We tried to ignore these problems, but something remains in the brain, a warning. Those were hard times for us. Then, towards the end of 1991, the political pressures became greater and greater.

Most of us had sent our families out of Sarajevo and, from April 1992 onwards, were living in the TV building itself, working 24 hours a day, sleeping when we could. This is the only reason television has continued to work in Sarajevo. Then, still in April, I heard that Serbian TV had broadcast a report saying that I was on a death list held by the Croat forces; and Croatian TV broadcast a report

saying that I was on a Serbian death list. Can you imagine! My son called me from Belgrade and said, 'Daddy, just a few minutes ago, they broadcast a story about you.' Can you imagine what is going on in the minds of kids right now?

From 4 April, when the paramilitary groups came looking for me at the television station, I had to spend each night at a different friend's house, moving around Sarajevo. I know it was a paramilitary group, though I can't say which one, that rang my friends to say that a bomb would be thrown onto their balcony if it was found out that I had been staying there. Eventually, they called my office when I was there and half-an-hour later a bomb really was thrown onto the balcony! So I decided to leave. Psychologically, physically, I had reached the end. I was without any kind of motivation, without any kind of security, without money. I still have to deal with my feelings about leaving my friends. I feel guilty personally, in my heart, although in my mind I am sure that they will understand, because they know that my situation was dangerous.

## TEACHING VIEWERS TO SEE BOTH SIDES

Until September 1991, four out of five letters that arrived on my desk would accuse us of not being objective, but each came from a different national perspective. In other words, Muslims would say that we were not a good television station for Muslims, Croats for Croats, and Serbs for Serbs. After that date, four out of five letters would support us, and only one would criticise us from a nationalist perspective. My own feeling is that the reason for the change was that during those months of 1991 we tried to broadcast

news from all political sources; and only facts, no speculation and no comment. For example, when the Serbian Democratic Party established a (secessionist autonomous) Serbian parliament in Bosnia in Autumn 1991, we broadcast the event live. The SDS was very surprised, viewers were surprised. I received 26 telephone calls from viewers saying that they were not satisfied with our coverage. Months later, the Muslim-led Democratic Party of Rights (SDA) held a congress. Again, we broadcast it live, and this time there were no complaints. So, what I want to say is that we tried to teach viewers that they have to listen to the other side. In Bosnia that is particularly important, because we have three national groups, with 44% Muslims, 31% Serbs, and 18% Croats. If we have managed to teach viewers something I would regard that as my greatest success.

Every evening, viewers in Sarajevo would see three different news reports. On the first channel there was news from Sarajevo; on the second channel news from Belgrade or from Croatian TV, alternating from day to day, and a third service from Yutel (the pan-Yugoslav satellite service set up by former Federal President Ante Markovic). After Yutel was closed down by Belgrade, they started to use our studio for broadcasts from Sarajevo. But Belgrade jammed the signal after Serbian forces took control of the transmitter.

We would title our broadcasts with the place of origin of the report, whether from Sarajevo, Croatian or Serbian TV. And people liked that, because they could compare them. It was, in a way, a kind of television comedy, because to try to compare the three services was like a terrible game. If one person says that I am black, and another says that I



am white, and other people see that I am grey, for example, it is comic. Almost. Well, tragicomic! But it was important, because people learned to see the facts for themselves.

In early April, thousands of people marched to the front of the Republican Assembly, past the television building, chanting, 'Sarajevo TV, Sarajevo TV'. I was really proud. Taxi drivers organised a demonstration in support of TV Sarajevo...

There is another thing of which I am very proud. During the past couple of years, there have been a number of journalists who went over to the nationalist parties. Now there are fewer of them. Out of 11 journalists who were nationalist party supporters in mid-1991, there are certainly under 10 now, and the others are supporting our independent position. In Sarajevo now journalists of all nationalities are working together. And this is something to be proud of in such difficult conditions.

How was it possible to maintain your independent position for so long? Was it attributable to the power vacuum in the country?

That was one reason, but the main one was that support from the people was really big. Unfortunately, some of them did not pay their monthly fee for the service. This was because since January 1991 the main political parties appealed to them not to pay — to boycott the television station. At the end of 1989, 91% of our revenue was from the fee, and 9% was from advertising. By the end of 1991, 77% of our revenue was from the fee, with 23% from advertising. After that came the civil war, and now there is no revenue, no monthly fee, no advertising, no nothing. I cannot give you a figure for 1992! So, yes, the money comes directly from the people, and people in Bosnia are poor. For example, out of four million inhabitants, 1,200,000 have a TV set but only 700,000 declare that they own one. And of these, only 300,000 paid their fee. (This was before they stopped paying altogether.) A few months ago, we did get some money from the republican government. That was two months ago, and it was only for salaries. Now I am not sure whether anyone is receiving a salary.

My colleagues at the TV station are trying to remain there, but it is very hard. There is nothing. During the last 20 days, 20 cars and two cameras were stolen from us. It could have been anyone, because this is a time for criminals, anyone may stop a person and demand money, their car, anything. Since August 1991, the Serbian Democratic Party has stolen seven of our nine regional transmitters and just two days ago (on 5 May) they destroyed the main one.

## THE JUDGMENT OF SOLOMON

Between November 1991 and January 1992, the Serbian Democratic Party and the Croatian Democratic Party proposed the division of the television station into three national stations. This was a crazy suggestion. Political pressure from the Serbian party

was the greatest. They first proposed the split in November 1991. I asked Mr Karadzic, President of the SDS, how he imagined this could be done. He answered that the Serbian Assembly (in Bosnia) would choose the Serbian editor. You know what this means: exactly the same routine as under the Communists! The SDS wants the right to say who is a good Serb and who is not. It is the same elsewhere. The Croatian Democratic Party calls me a bad Croat, which is true in a sense, because my profession is not to be a Croat, it is to be a good journalist.

Over dinner once Mr Karadzic suggested that we divide only the News department, saying, 'Maybe we don't need to divide anything else in Bosnia.' So I said to him, 'Can you guarantee that if you divide only the News department you will stop the division of Bosnia? Because if you can give me that guarantee I will sign it.' He said that he could not, of course.

The Muslim party did not want the division of television. But although we and they were practically on the same side over this, there was an important difference, because they took the unity of television to symbolise a united Bosnia, while we wanted it in order to be a professional TV service, not a political symbol. To all three parties we said the same thing: 'OK, if you want to divide TV, we will accept it, but only if you can agree on the terms of the split.' Of course we knew that such agreement would be impossible. When we broadcast the 1992 demonstrations on the streets of Sarajevo live, they all said we had tried to implement a putsch. It was the first time in maybe a year that they were able to reach agreement with each other!

Privately, in conversation, members of all the political parties usually talk of their respect for television, and tell us that we are doing a good job. In public, though, they constantly criticise.

Was there ever any practical suggestion of how this idea of splitting the television station into three separate national stations might be accomplished?

The proposal of the Serbian Democratic Party was as follows: we already have three channels, two of them covering all the territory of Bosnia, and the third local to Sarajevo. The SDS suggested that one day they take the first channel and the Muslim party take the next channel and so on — that the political groups would rotate the service (in effect, ending up with a political propaganda service to rival no other!). It was absolutely crazy, and if not a technical impossibility, a logistical one. According to this system, a Serb editor would send his cameraman to record exactly what he wanted to see. Then another cameraman would go to the same event to record something else, and a third would go to find something different yet again.

So in practical terms it would mean that for each event we would need three cameramen. Nobody asks who will pay for this, nobody! They have no time for that. They want to produce conflict.

Under their suggestion for national division of television, there would be no competition, only mutually exclusive information systems. Is it a question of political power, nothing more?

Yes, of course. And people are frightened of these divisions. I tried to make a suggestion to the political parties: 'OK, if you want to keep-peace here, if you want to make an agreement, if you want to create conditions for a long discussion about our future, then let us do it. Leave the first channel free and professionally controlled: one third by government; one third by professional experts, political scientists, etc; and one third by the employees. Then, divide the second channel as you like, and leave the third channel as a commercial channel. I failed. I guess that everyone knew that in that case no one would choose to watch the second channel.'



Speaking of moves influenced by Croatia and Serbia, there seems to be a political equivalent of the national division of Sarajevo Television in the suggested cantonisation of Bosnia. Do you think the latter is as much of a logistical nightmare as the former?

The reason for the cantonisation proposal is that each camp wants to bring all kinds of life in their camp under their own political control. For example, would it be possible, after cantonisation in Bosnia, to establish elections in the republic? If not, then it means that in the next 10 to 15 years, or for the foreseeable future, it will only be possible to establish national parties. It will be practically impossible to establish local democratic parties. There is no way that anyone will be able to connect the different parts of Bosnia. In my view it is one of the main reasons for the stealing of our transmitters, by which they deprived not only viewers in Bosnia but also those in Vojvodina and Belgrade, who also watched us. Serbian people in Slavonia and Kriška Krajina were also watching Sarajevo TV. Our transmitters were stolen so as not to let people see the other side.

Is it true to say that people in Yugoslavia, possibly the majority, who want to see another side, are silenced because they are too afraid to speak out?

Yes. I guess that Sarajevo TV is now only able to broadcast to about 15% of its former territory. The transmitters which were taken are now used to broadcast Belgrade Television.

To give an idea of the difference between us and the other Yugoslavian TV stations, I usually mention two examples: during the civil war in Croatia, Croatian TV would give news about a Catholic priest who had been beaten by the Serbian forces, and the same day, absolutely the same story would be reported by Serbian TV, but about an Orthodox priest who had been beaten by the Croatian forces. The point is that both stories are true, but the important thing is that Serbian TV did not broadcast the story about the Catholic priest and Croatian TV did not



broadcast the story about the Orthodox priest. We broadcast both stories. That gives you our position. We tried to be successful as professionals. But if you try to be professional during a war you will not have success with either side. You are a traitor to both. There is no precedent for a television station which was founded by both sides trying during wartime to be professional and to broadcast the story from both sides. Maybe this has been our greatest misfortune.

The real problem in Belgrade and Zagreb is that, on both sides, the first line of journalists has been sacked from the media. Then came the second line. Now third or fourth grade professionals are working for the television stations. The governments achieved this simply enough, with massive changes in editorial staff. If a journalist didn't do as the government wanted, they were sacked and someone else brought in. It is crazy! If you give a typist a chance to become a journalist, he or she will accept any kind of order. That is normal. It is not realistic to expect typists to carry on the fight for the freedom of the press. This happened in Croatia, after Tudjman came to power. One interesting story (though not confirmed), has it that a letter was sent to 800 employees of Croatian TV telling them to stay at home because there was no room for them in the air raid shelters. After five days, they received another letter saying they were fired because they had not turned up for work! What a game! Someone is playing chess with them.

What has become of the first line of journalists in all this?

Some of the best went to Yutel; some went to the printed press, to *Vreme* for example;

some of them are still employed. They try to file real stories but the authorities won't broadcast them. None of them came to Sarajevo TV, because our salaries are very small compared with Belgrade where the salaries are excellent, or in Croatia, especially. It is better in such circumstances to shut your mouth and to earn a living ... all of them have families to think about.

Can you imagine a situation in the near future where there will be an information vacuum to replace the political power vacuum?

Not a vacuum exactly, because half of Bosnia can receive Belgrade TV. But there will be a real propaganda barrage. But I think that the most dangerous situation will come after the war.



Is this because the type of censorship which has been applied to Sarajevo TV has been an attempt to put the media to war?

I am absolutely sure that each man killed during the civil war in Yugoslavia was in a sense already killed by the news department of Belgrade and Zagreb TV. Before the war each was dead in mind if not in body.

You are talking about the way in which people were programmed by the national propaganda which was fed to them by the major TV stations?

Exactly. I heard a speaker on Croatian TV who named the pilots who were bombarding Croatian towns. He not only gave their names, but also their home addresses, their car numbers, details of where their womenfolk were working, in which school their children were studying. It was terrible — practically a call for a lynching!

So, something worse than censorship has occurred. The media instead of being a victim of oppression has taken an active role in silencing the enemies of governments.

It is the worst possible situation. Here, at the European Institute for the Media, I will try to research the role of the media in the disputes and wars which result from political and ethnic tensions. I am sure that without a media war, wars in the world would spill less blood.

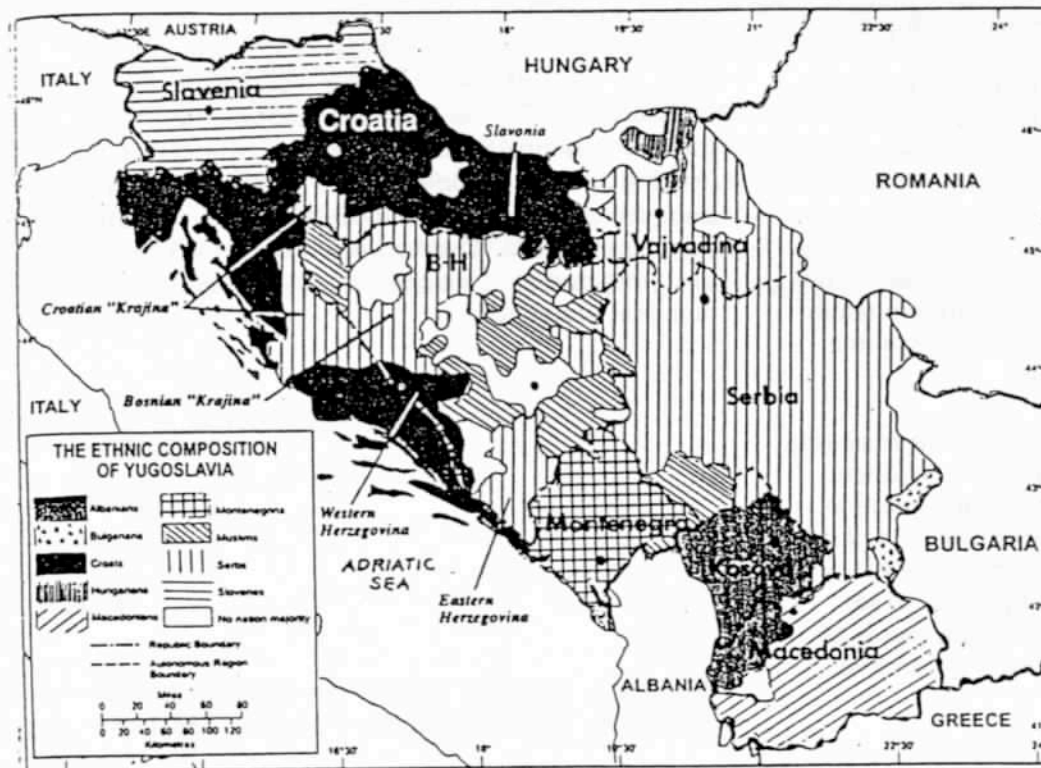
All this started in Yugoslavia many years ago under Communism. The position of viewers and readers in Croatia is worse than that of those in Serbia because, practically speaking, they have only one newspaper, the weekly *Danas*. They have no *Vreme* or *Borba* [independent papers in Belgrade], nor do they have a strong political opposition.



How are relations with other journalists in Yugoslavia?

Officially, our relations are really very bad, although Serbian and Croatian TV have said nothing publicly either way, either for or against us. Privately, in restaurants, their journalists passed on information, supported us and warned us of dangers. They wanted us to stay on the stage, although as I see it now, without a free television in Belgrade, for example, it is impossible to support a free television in Bosnia. Because Belgrade is the capital, and it has the most intellectual energy in the region, I am absolutely sure that when Belgrade begins to be free, freedom will follow in all the former Yugoslav republics. ■

Ruston, Ursula (1992) in *Index on Censorship*, 6/1992



Bosnia is marked by the complexity of its ethnic mix, comprising mainly 43.7% Slavic Muslims, 31.3% Serbs and 17.3% Croats. Significantly, no one nationality forms a majority. After multi-party elections in November 1990, the three main parties, the Muslim-led Party of Democratic Action (SDA), the Serbian Democratic Party (SDS) and the Croatian Democratic Party (HDZ) formed a coalition government under Muslim President Alija Izetbegovic, a former political prisoner. On 29 February 1992, a referendum on independence from Yugoslavia was held in the republic which saw national tensions come to a head and which severely tested the coalition's ability to work together. Until March 1992, the 'tripartite balance of power, a relatively open media, and government leaders who were willing to compromise' were credited by a CSCE report with maintaining peace and preventing civil war in Bosnia.



## Illusion - Simulation - Reality

The ability to create synthetic, quasi-photorealistic images with the help of computers is rapidly approaching perfection. Synthetic rocks look like real rocks, artificial water behaves like real water and the computer generated flora blossoms as if it were spring. Advanced computer-graphic technology views it as a kind of special challenge to emulate the history of creation, especially in making the unfolding of its visible results indistinguishable from reality. The compilation of artificial realities becomes ever more comprehensive and differentiated.

Can we still rely on images when it becomes no longer possible to decide whether we are dealing with photo-or videographic evidence of a pre-existing and materially given situation, or on the contrary, with the pure fiction and plain mise-en-scene of a naturalism, whose imaginative captation could only obtain, because there was no original in the first place. This query is a tricky one, since it suggests that we could indeed trust images that were in existence before their "liberation" through the binary code. The query is also hardly a novel one! The search for the real shooting spot of the moon-landing, was surely not the first instance of distrust of what was an authentic newsbroadcast. We now know enough about what we should think of the images that CNN delivered us on the Gulf War. And entertainment programmes such as the "really false" show (on German TV, red) also come nicely into their own, even without the massive input of the computing capacities of photorealistic simulations. To make it short: the concept of similar or simulating image(ry) contains - and this holds true for all visualisation techniques - the whole spectrum of metaphors: from authentic (documentary) evidence, via fiction and construction up to simulations, visual deception and outright lies. The ability to create illusion and disillusion, that is, the bringing about of the difference between reality and its semiotic representer, were and remain the two sides of one and the same coin.

The question whether we can still trust the images in view of the eyewashing possibilities of synthetic pictures, is thus a false one. But then the question remains open of what we do want to make out of that irritating potential the "new images" have to deceive and disorientate. I would propose to see these "new images" no longer as images, that is as something one looks through in order to perceive

something else, but to assume that they are "objects" and "constructs", data with special characteristics and qualities. The cup right next to my typewriter is such a 'datum' that neither can lie nor tell the truth. We should also value synthetic images in terms of such facts and we should research them for their factual, and not for their significative meaning.

The initial question should therefore be reformulated in a number of ways: how should we handle objects that look as if they were images, when they really are not? How do such objects preempt the constitution of our perceptive ability, as we are looking at them with the kind of expectations that derive from the traditional approach to images? Why should we mistrust objects and constructs that are playing their roles perfectly, within a given functional context, even if they do not function as sign-tokens?



Kluge, Franz W. (1991) "Können wie den Bildern noch Trauen?" in 5. Freiburger Video-Forum Katalog, 1991, 37-38



Real, total war has become information war. It is being fought by subtle electric informational media—under cold conditions, and constantly. The cold war is the real war front—a surround—involving everybody—all the time—everywhere. Whenever hot wars are necessary these days, we conduct them in the backyards of the world with the old technologies. These wars are happenings, tragic games. It is no longer convenient, or suitable, to use the latest technologies for fighting our wars, because the latest technologies have rendered war meaningless. The hydrogen bomb is history's exclamation point. It ends an age-long sentence of manifest violence!

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like  
it  
hot,

McLuhan, Marshall (1967) *The Medium is the Massage*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 138-139



# Eastern Europe

## Introduction

### *Television democracy in Eastern Europe*

Since the beginning of the nineties, tactical video and television groups from the former East bloc have been operating in a remarkable vacuum. Officially censorship has been abolished and market forces have become operative. But the media in particular is still state-controlled. As in the West, both old and new rulers prevent the privatization of radio and television. Media legislation is a tricky issue in all countries. Who will jump into the gap as soon as the broadcasting monopoly has been removed... the Western multimedia giants, the old neo-communists who want to consolidate their positions, nationalists, the Church or sects from the West, hostile political parties, everybody is ready to pounce. There is still a strong belief that anyone in charge of the media can control the public opinion. The media is not (yet) a harmless instruction and entertainment product that has to prove itself on the market. New democratic leaders prefer to hold on just a bit longer to the former rigid media rules in order to assert their political powers through the existing state channels.

The independent groups, formed during the revolution of 1989 and once played an important role, are now considered to be troublemakers that should be muzzled. But that is out of the question. Censorship or direct repression of media initiatives is an extremely delicate issue. Politicians would rather not revert to communist practises. These media often look upon themselves as a part of the democratic opposition, a 'civil movement' to which, three years later, they still attribute a symbolic (and historical) value. Usually they are on good terms with new parties and sometimes, more than in the West, they have access to the power. The social circles of journalists, artists, politicians and musicians often still blend into one another. Capital cities therefore strike as being villages where everybody knows everybody. The division of labour has not yet led to metropolitan distance.

From a Western point of view, tactical video and television groups might be considered marginal, alternative or sovereign, in fact they are not. Above all they want to be 'independent' and help developing what we West Europeans call 'civil publicity' (in which minorities take an important new position). They identify themselves with the concept 'civil society', and they'd rather not be bothered by the authorities who, as a government, have successfully blocked 'civil publicity' for years.

Geert Lovink, October 1992.



## INTERNEWS NETWORK

aims to promote international communication and understanding, primarily through the use of television. Since 1982, this 501-(c)(3) non-profit corporation has produced and contributed to news programming on international issues for US networks, PBS, CNN, the BBC, and over 20 other broadcasters worldwide.

Internews has been best known for spacebridges, or two-way satellite hookups for dialogues across international boundaries, and has developed more than a dozen such programs, including the *Capital to Capital* series on ABC News and Soviet State Television linking Members of Congress with Deputies of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR.

The organization has won two Emmy Awards and the DuPont-Columbia Award for Excellence in Broadcast Journalism. Based in Arcata, California, Internews also has offices in New York and the San Francisco Bay Area. ▶▶

*Internews Network, January 1992*

### Independent Broadcasting

East/Central Europe is now linking into the global media network. In some ways this transition is taking place seamlessly, but the contours of the region's media landscape are very plastic at this time. The greatest influences on the future of broadcasting in these new democracies will be the design of the media laws and the degree and nature of hard currency investment and donations from the West.

Western media empires have already begun to dictate the contours of the future media to some degree. This is not sinister, simply a product of media globalization. But an unfortunate byproduct is that, due to inexperience and relative poverty, crucial elements of a well-rounded broadcast environment are threatening to get squeezed out by the competition. Coverage of national and regional cultures, and even a citizen's access to public information as understood in the West, have been low priorities in decisions to allocate the broadcasting resource.

In the West the cultural and informational roles are played by local commercial stations and public broadcasting. But in this region State Broadcasters are often strapped for resources and burdened by their histories. Commercial broadcasting is increasingly taking the form of Western programming fed to entire nations at the expense of locally-produced material.

The stations described here embody the potential of a rich broadcast landscape for the region. They have a nearly unanimous desire for Western aid, but those now serving smaller communities or providing educational and cultural programming are in danger of being swept aside. State Broadcasters, rather than aiding the development of a vibrant independent sector, are succumbing to the lure of hard currency available through "selling off" a national frequency. The result could well be a broadcast landscape inundated with Western entertainment and Western-focused news programs which are not accompanied by the in-depth local, national and regional coverage that balances sophisticated broadcasting in the West.

There is clearly a role for philanthropic aid in supporting the region's developing independent broadcast sector. Non-profit funding can be very effectively applied, as it often is in the US, to strategic areas that will support native, independent media so that it can become vigorous enough to contribute to the region's future media landscape.

*Internews Network (1992) "Independent Broadcasting" in Internews Network Paper, 4*



In late March, I visited the city of Leipzig to investigate Kanal X, East Germany's first and only pirate TV station. Kanal X is a lever stuck into the ironclad media armor of Europe. The lever is slender and fragile, but with the right amount of pressure it could open a large hole, allowing independent broadcasting into the future of Europe, both East and West.

### ▶▶ "ARE YOU INTERESTED IN MAKING TV?"

If you live in Leipzig you might have had your TV antenna tuned southward, to pick up West German signals from Bavaria (East Germans are world-renowned for their expertise with TV antennas). On March 17, 1990, you would have received the first signals of Kanal X. The first show: an East German video artist's work, as rare as the East Germans with access to video gear. Then, a home-made "news" story with street interviews about the upcoming election, then a nightly news report, in English, from CNN.

Perhaps it's more accurate to say that this is what you were supposed to see. Many who watched saw lots of static, faint video signals coming as if from Mars, and that's all. The station was beaming out 8 watts in a tenuous link to the world, obstructed by insufficient power and a tall building next door.

Over the last four months, Kanal X has only been on the air a total of four nights. Although the transmitter has been improved, reception is still marginal. But the effectiveness Kanal X lacks in broadcast power is made up for in the power of its idea to set off deep legal speculation, bureaucratic opposition, heavy media coverage locally and internationally, and even debate in Berlin, where new laws are being considered.

▶▶ The signs aren't good. In May, Kanal X returned to the air for one night. By now, the station's story has been featured in East and West German newspapers, on the two West German TV networks and on East German Television's popular Youth Program. The PTT representative again appeared at the door of Kanal X, demanding that the station cease broadcasting instantly. He finally relented, allowing the program to finish, on the promise that it would be the last.

▶▶ But even if it never broadcasts again, Kanal X could change the future of German television. The fact that small independent stations already exist all over Eastern Europe gives them leverage to become institutionalized in a way that was never considered in Western Europe, and that could buck the ominous trend. Now that they have gained a foothold, these little guys are fighting to have themselves written into new broadcast laws.

*Messinger, Evelyn (1990)  
"Pirate TV in Eastern Europe"  
in Whole Earth Review, fall  
1990, 119-123*



# BLACK BOX



"The camera is the  
more powerful weapon."

## ABOUT OURSELVES

In the years of socialist censorship and deliberate manipulation, one had to live with the awareness of an unsolvable conflict that we could know only a certain part of reality. When we started our documentary work in 1987, video seemed to provide an adequate tool to break the monotonous uniformity of state mass media. To give an orientation to our work, we made up a list of various themes considered to be taboo for official communication, for example the problems of ethnic minorities, social tensions and ecological protest movements. As all of us came from the film industry, we had professional expertise but were short of money. Hence, we applied for funding from the SOROS FOUNDATION, which was the only organization at that time to support progressive initiatives. They gave us support for two years. In the beginning of 1988, the signs of the disintegration of the communist regime became increasingly evident. Discontent came out of the private flats onto the streets and organized itself into movements. Let us remember... the first recent anniversary of March 15 without police intervention; the formation of FIDESZ /Alliance of the Young Democrats/ in April; the first meeting of the HÁLÓZAT /The Network/ which paved the way for the formation of SZDSZ /Alliance of the Free Democrats/; the first mass demonstration in May against the senseless waterdam in the Danube Bend. All of this without a single official report on Hungarian Television. Hence, we were justified to presume that all of we record, even if it was not broadcasted right away, would have great historical value. So in this way the masters of lying and ignoring contributed to the formation of the BLACK BOX.

Originally, the editorial board consisted of six people: the three of us, two film directors Judit Ember and András Lányi and a sociologist Gábor Vági who has since deceased. Forgetting about our own original professions, we concentrated on being everywhere, where "something happened". At first we had to ask the permission of the participants, to make sure they did not object to our recording. As an ever growing number of people, movements and organizations began sending us regular information, our work brought us together with the newly emerging politically active society. Many of these people are now parliamentary deputies. Although the police knew about our work, they could not do anything against it and the only danger they represented was their unpredictable reaction to the demonstrations which involved some kind of street fighting. ▶▶



THERE IS A GREAT and long tradition of illegal political literature, called "samizdat," in Hungary. But visual samizdat is a more recent phenomenon, appearing all over Eastern Europe, as well as in Moscow, Leningrad, and Armenia in the U.S.S.R. at the end of the eighties. In Eastern Europe we call this Second Publicity. This unofficial news circulates side by side with the official news sources, called First Publicity. It includes gossip, what people discuss informally in the street, illegal printed materials and, finally, video documentation.

The video medium is more like the printing press than filmmaking is. Publications can be produced in any number, and circulated in the streets under the poorest conditions. ▶▶

*Russell, Morgan (1990)  
"Black Box" in Whole Earth  
Review, fall 1990, 124*

*not signed (Black Box), "About Ourselves" (1990)*



## BLACK BOX

The economic, political and social transformation in Hungary was a gradual process, the fall of the communist regime an inevitable step, not a dramatic event. It was thus not in euphoria but in consensus that people voted for the present government. This is why Hungary was able to maintain an image of relative stability for so long. It is hard to realize that what we are sitting on has somehow become a volcano.

Yet, communication in the Hungarian parliament comes close to a soap opera. Pogroms are becoming a habit. Nationalistic sentiments are manipulated to the degree that provocations might be maneuvered to induce war. The vice president of MDF, the main government party, published a "study" where he offered a quasi-fascistic party program and stated, that as far as Western control is concerned Hungary would also be able to get away with anything.

Millions who practically starve, and lack sufficient shelter, "have nothing to lose, but their chains".

The war in Hungary to gain control over the media and use them as a propaganda machine resembles the media war in Yugoslavia that preceded their race to madness.

The Black Box or Black Boxes (in 1990 they multiplied by bipartition, to Black Box Foundation and Black Box Ltd.) are incessantly recording the social and political transformation in Hungary. Since their separation they have both sought their own ways to be able to continue working.

The Black Box Foundation together with the Szechenyi Library Historical Interviews Collection won the "Documentation of the Year" award and is for the time being sufficiently subsidized by the state (this will last one year, 1992). More than 100 hours of their raw (unedited) material per month is going into the files of the Szechenyi Library where it is accessible to researchers. From the 100+ hours, Black Box Foundation makes a 3 hours long Monthly Chronicle and since August/September 1992 it is shown to the public in the Hunnia Cinema.

Black Box Ltd. has chosen to become a self-supportive enterprise. In the period of illegality or half-illegality Soros Foundation supported Black Box. Black Box Ltd. now makes "business" with Soros, as a capitalist partner. The Black Box-es hold the view that "reality bites" - and don't tamper with it anymore than is unavoidable. Apart from continuously recording (B.B.Fdt.) or recording on hot spots (B.B.Ltd.), the Black Box-es make thematic documentaries on subjects that are ignored both by the official government controlled and the commercially oriented media.

Nevertheless Magyar TV (Hungarian Television) is regularly buying and broadcasting the Black Box documentaries. Magyar TV is not a monolithic organisation, some of the people working there want to

show these films although they don't have the money to produce them. The Black box documentaries never sink into oblivion, not only because the subjects are shocking (the homeless, mental institutions, the departure of the Soviet Army and what they left behind, atrocities against gypsies, the chinese immigrants in Hungary, prostitution etc.), they are also made with discreet compassion and profound knowledge of the medium.

Magyar TV now is in a state of siege, and dealing with them is subordinate to this condition. The government coalition has been trying to gain control over the media through various methods. Most newspapers fell easy prey to takeovers, blackmail and infiltration. There is still no new media law and according to the 1974 government decrees, Hungarian Radio and Television is supervised by the government. They have been trying to remove Gombar, the president of Magyar Radio and Hankiss, the president of Magyar TV (both appointed in the first democratic frenzy of the parliament) by conceptual trials. Nevertheless, neither Gombar nor Hankiss can be suspended without the consent of Goncz Arpad, the President of Hungary, and Goncz will not bend. Failing to remove Hankiss, the parliament froze almost 70% of Magyar TV's budget. But apart from Magyar TV's chronic lack of money the "divide et impera" principle works miraculously.

Typical phenomenon to this schizophrenic situation is the existence of two different News broadcasts every day. The TV Hirado on channel 1., prime time and the Esti Egyenleg on channel 2. It is understood that TV Hirado broadcasts news from a government standpoint, while Esti Egyenleg from that of the liberal opposition. Esti Egyenleg occasionally broadcasts news items made by Black Box Ltd. Since Black Box Fdt. is totally uncommitted to any political party, there is a definite distance on both the side of Black Box Fdt. and the makers of the Magyar TV News. In the meantime both Magyar TV News teams learned from the Black Box experience to "be there and shoot" when something happens, consequently they hardly rely on independent program makers.

The force and potential danger the Black Boxes represent against power abusers in Hungary lies in the mere existence of their compiled material. The obese B.B. archives (the result of their indefatigable, constant presence virtually everywhere where the flow is likely to become an "event") form not just a collection of news-items. They constitute a fragment of the hidden conscience of the country. While apparently everybody in Hungary, from the concierge to the prime minister act as if they could get away with anything, the history of the activities of the Black Boxes prove that they can't.

One specific item of Black Box material ticks quietly in the background, ready to explode, as the extreme right, nationalistic tendencies in the present government are



coupled with their escalating fear of uncontrollable thoughts and images.

Black Box was present from the second day on the EKA (the round table conference of the main oppositional parties) and on the trilateral negotiations of the MSZMP (the communist party) with the opposition and civil institutions in 1989. It was clearly a historical event, the shift from communism to democracy. Inviting the Black Box to witness and document the negotiations was in itself a declaration of the intent that politics will be practiced openly, based on democratic principles.

The condition the parties set for the presence of Black Box was, that unless all the participants agree the recordings will not be made public. While the SZDSZ (free democrats) and FIDESZ (young dem.) insist on opening up the material for the public, the government coalition is obviously averse to revealing the historical document that could seriously damage their credibility. During the trilateral negotiations, while SZDSZ and FIDESZ demanded free elections, MDF was willing to make a deal with the communists.

MDF suggested that the interested parties should all form an editorial board and create their own version. (sic) Black Box made a 5 hour long summary, which is naturally banned. The total 150 hours raw material is in the B.B. archives, intact.

In the period of negotiations, on Christmas Eve 1989, during an ecumenical mass and demonstration for the Romanian revolution on the Hosok tere (Hero's square), a man was asking around in the crowd, looking for the representatives of the Black Box. When he found them, he identified himself as major Vegvari from the III/III (state intelligence) department. Major Vegvari told Lovas Zoltan (B.B.) that he could prove that MSZMP was abusing its power-position by tapping the conversations of the members of the opposition, while pretending to play democracy. He smuggled Lovas and a cameraman, dressed as peasant women to the central office where they recorded the documents and reports.

A few days later Black Box gave a press conference in the Graffiti cinema and Rozsa Peter showed the film in Napzarta (the predecessor of Esti Egyenleg). The minister of interior resigned. The DUNA-GATE scandal discredited the MSZMP and contributed to a great extent in the fall of the communist regime.

The Black Boxes have, from the beginning on, not only recorded political events. Their cameras have always been present at alternative rock and roll concerts, art-manifestations, festivals and exhibitions. It is a continuation of the tradition of "recording everything" which was a way of survival in the eighties, during the rock and roll revolution. Around 1980, the political opposition was coming out of the closet, writing, publishing and distributing more openly. It was apparent that total control is an illusion. Then artists, like Body Gabor (film-maker and theoretician) walked

right through the walls of the labyrinth. But samizdat literature circulated within a small circle of intellectuals, and art-movies hardly reached much further.

It was obvious that a loud and direct medium was needed. Film-makers, poets, painters, philosophers plunged into rock and roll. They joined already existing bands or asked musicians to help them make their own. "Here everybody croakes or leaves" shouted Muller Peter in 1980, kids screamed "no" and the idea was to do something about it. The lyrics these rock and roll squatters wrote broke through the frozen language and limits were washed away. The bands were mostly banned. It was difficult to organize concerts. Gradually people started recording. First only sound, later also video. Galantai Gyorgy, a member of the political opposition went to all the concerts and made tapes that others could copy. He has an immense archive. Batonyi Csaba from Black Box Fdt. is now anywhere and everywhere, if necessary for days and nights, and records. Some of this is his own private enterprise, like conversations in the "Tilos" pub that led to the birth of a pirate radio station.

Black Box Ltd. organized benefit concerts to help the homeless, and blood-donor actions for the wounded on the Yugoslavian fronts. They also take part in the anti-drug campaign of the Budapest city council.

The two Black Box units and the honourable image of their work is respected by most political parties, public and private organizations. They are admitted almost everywhere, as it has always been their policy to play the game by fair rules; no provocation, no blackmail. It is perhaps exactly this attitude that brings out the aggression of a bad conscience when B.B. cameramen are beaten up, pushed around, closed out from the feasts of extreme stupidity (demonstrations and assemblies of the extreme right, etc.).

Marianna Padi, 1992.

Note: All names are written in the Hungarian way, the surname comes first.



## INTERVIEW WITH STEFANA STERIADE.

Stefana Steriade is a Romanian sociologist. She taught at the philosophy faculty of Bucharest University, where she gradually decided to specialize in public behaviour research. In 1975 she had to resign due to conflicts with the party members running the faculty board. From then onwards she turned free-lance. Her work was published in France and Germany and she gave lectures in the USA and in Paris. Together with her companion, Pavel Campeanu, former head of the audience-research institute, she wrote a study on the perceptual behaviour of film audiences. Last year she was asked to teach at a theater and film institute. At the close of the year 1989 she accompanied Pavel Campeanu in New York and followed the events in Romania on television. Since her return to Romania in May 1990, Stefana Steriade published a number of TV reviews in the progressive intellectual weekly "22".

*Q.: Do Romanians have an ambiguous attitude towards their own Television?*

SS: No, I don't think so. Romanians do have an emotional relationship with the television. This is the country where people go on hunger strike for an independent television. I do not know in how many countries that would be the case. The same thing applies for the occupation of the TV-studios in 1989. In the seventies, when the television went through a liberal phase, there was an exceptionally strong identification with the main characters from western TV-series. At broadcast times, you would not dare to phone someone, and the streets were deserted. You could go shopping since queues had vanished. Kojak, Colombo, and Dallas were very much fancied. The craze took on such proportions that the line between reality and fiction was blurred. There was this serial where brother and sister were lovers. The television received letters from viewers requesting the script to be adapted in the next episode in such way as to make them no longer family members. Parrotting about football and the latest family-entanglements used to desorganize factory work on Monday mornings. The television was an integral part of everyday life, though nothing would be written about it in the newspapers. Romanians were gossiping even without a tabloid press.

In the beginning of the eighties, Ceaucescu had the importations of Western television series stopped in order to save

foreign exchange. Broadcasting time was meanwhile reduced to two hours a day. He never understood how harmful this measure was to his cause. Romanians stopped seeing friends or going for walks, but instead started to contrive ever bigger antennae in order to tune in to Bulgarian, Hungarian or Russian television channels. Viewing figures for the Romanian TV took such a bashing that the research institute that was monitoring them had to close since its results were unpalatable to the regime. The broadcasts disappeared into a void, and the television became a medium without audience, a fact that the programme-makers knew only too well. They were working for one single individual and not for any kind of public. It must have been a very weird experience for a mass-medium to be without audience altogether. During the spring, when I used to go out for a walk, the windows would usually be open, and one would hear only Bulgarian or Russian. Then, once, I suddenly heard the Romanian TV. Just at that moment an acquaintance came out the flat and told me that his mother always had the television turned on, but would never watch it.

*Q.: How is the "Tv-Revolution" being judged now, one year later?*

Opinion about the real nature of the 'Revolution by Television' is very much divided. There are people who now only want to see a conspiracy in the December 1989 images. But across the greatest part of the country, television provided the sole link with the revolution. I think there you'll find people who still believe in what they saw then. The previous infatuation with TV and the "revolution by television" has resulted in a section of the population thinking that the television rules the country, or rather, that the power elite rules the television and that the television impersonates that rule. The latter is incidentally true. The television is really going out of its way not to be objective. They display childish behaviour. Whenever they let a critic of the government have her or his say, they never fail to add: "you are now hearing a dissenting opinion". They very much would like to be seen as a democratic medium but I am convinced that they are against students, minorities, and opposition groups.

When it comes to foreign reporting, you can see that they are not really interested. They are absolutely unable to make it clear to the public that the crisis in the Gulf is a serious matter. They

cannot make their reporting lively enough to generate interest. In that way they help perpetuate the isolation in which the government finds itself. Yet they would love to join the rest of Europe, they are not communists of the old mould. They have entangled themselves in the system of power, at least that is the case with the TV management, and this is not without consequences. Theirs is the fear that a next government is going to get rid of all these TV-people. They expect the hold of the political system on the television to be here to stay. You cannot reason with them about that fear. This pandering to the dominant powers is not a matter of choice, it is an ingrained reflex. The television has been a submissive institution for such a long time that it cannot easily free itself from that attitude. Age-old habits thus endure as a matter of fact. You will see the camera focusing on a bunch of flowers followed by a frame of all the ten ministers who happen to be laying a wrath on that occasion. The news bulletins report in a sirupy way on president Iliescu as he politely answers questions by foreign journalists with "his customary openness". But we do not get to see either the questions or the answers. This information is being withheld from us. What we do get though are endless speeches. The opposition is covered within a separate block in the programmes, whereas of course it should be an intrinsic part of the total reporting package. We are not asking that they get a special treatment, but let them at least speak for themselves.

What should really concern us at the moment is what is going on in Hungary, Poland, all former Eastern Europe. What kind of changes take place there and what are the similarities with the situation in Romania? Yet we do not even care about what happens in (former) Big Brother Russia. The anti-soviet feelings are now running high because of Moldavia. The government will not clearly state its views, but in fact it has no policy what so ever towards the Soviet Union. The problems with Gorbachev are being glossed over and the press could not care less.

The television should bring about a political education of sorts: namely to show that the opinion of others matter. Even among intellectuals you rarely encounter much understanding of what democracy is about. That while liberty without democracy is no liberty at all. We really have to work on this, because respect for the other person does not come about all by itself.

(Bucharest, January 3, 1991)

Geert Lovink, 1991.

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## ESTHETICS OF THE VIDEO DOCUMENT

### The Romanian Tele-revolution according to Farocki & Ujica.

"Videogramme einer Revolution" (videogram of a revolution) is an exceptional filmic document about the Romanian revolution of 1989. The agitated days in December are being reconstructed by taking the changes in camera angles as starting point. The film was the result of the collaboration of the German documentary producer Harun Farocki and the Romanian/German media-theorist Andrei Ujica. Its first performance was at the 1992 Locarno Film Festival. The following interview was given by Ujica in the begin of July (1992) in his home-town Heidelberg.

Before coming to Germany, Andrei Ujica would describe himself as an "aesthete". There are people in Romania who still remember him as the song-writer of the rock-band "Phoenix". Presently a German language & literature researcher at Mannheim University, Ujica belongs to the so-called "Kassel School", the group of media-theorists around Friedrich Kittler and Norbert Bolz. Their academic work is in the realm of philosophy and history. But after the tel-revolution, there was no way Ujica would stick to the dusty bookshelves. Following Virilio and Baudrillard, he wanted to jump into the present, and thus became a videast/videoartist overnight.

In their film, Farocki and Ujica stick strictly to the chronological unfolding of events under the eye of the cameras. They never use flashbacks. "Videogramme" starts on December 21, 1989, the day Ceausescu made his final speech, and ends in the night of the 25th to the 26th, when Romanian television showed a shortened version of the Ceausescu couple's trial, without the images of the corpses at the close.



After the first screening of "Videogramme" for a Bucharest audience, beginning of June (this year), there was a lot of indignation about the way they had firmly confined their story to the first five days. This landed us straight into the debate about the real nature of the "events" - since no one wants to use the word "revolution" any longer. Nowadays all Romanians are utterly convinced that they were victims of a neo-communist plot led by Illiescu, who seized power through devious schemes. "Why don't you show the full trial and Ceausescu's execution?" "show us the missing images!" Was it that Ujica was a closet supporter of the National Salvation Front? The filmic interpretation of the "events" thus did not win them very much praise, however theoretically correct the product may have been. It is quite clear that media-theory is a Western luxury that neither provides the truth nor delivers any explicit statement against censorship and manipulation, at least not in Bucharest. Ujica agrees: "We present a reconstruction based on various kinds of sources. We only pass comment on what the images may show us, not on what might have happened elsewhere."

The film-theoretical gaze wanders around in the virtuality of the images and takes the fatality of the moment in its stride. The cameras were at work at that time and place and not somewhere else or at another time. The basic assumption of "Videogramme" is that the stock of extant images should be used as material to research the structure of the media-reality. This of course, is at variance with any attempt to speculate about the truth that may, or may not, lie behind the images.



Ujica does not believe that the news-announcers, who had been faithful servants of the Conducator, and who in the last year were allowed to broadcast for a mere one or two hours a day, have been consciously misled by the Illiescu clan right from the beginning, during the five days long live-broadcast. "But what you can see is that the cameras slowly adapt and submit themselves to a new power. Still, I tend to view this as a general process that does not hold true for Romania only. The cameras were not pressed into the service of a conspiracy. What you may say, is that they have reverted back to their normal situation after a number of days. During the first days there were hordes of people roving around inside the television buildings and the party headquarters. They were mixing with the politicians who were walking in and out. These scenes have been very nicely recorded by the new visual media."

What "Videogramme" wants to show is the power-vacuum that was prevalent at that time. It therefore implicitly rejects the question that is always being asked about how the vacuum was actually filled in. Can the video images really give no answer at all to this pressing political uncertainty? "No", says Ujica, "The filling in took place behind closed doors. What the images do show, however, is that new hierarchic power-structures were created amidst the chaos. This went together with the formulation and appropriation of a new discourse, generated through official announcements and technical linkages. The cameras then increasingly zoom in on the new rulers. As soon as they have absorbed the new political discourse, they have also appropriated the locus of power. Television studio and party headquarters may safely be cordoned off again, outsiders kicked out, and everyday work normalcy is restored. For a short while longer the cameras are still tolerated around, but then comes the moment that they too kindly buzz off only to return under marching orders of the new top-dogs. The historic moment is then a thing of the past and the need to make fresh recordings no longer arises. What was special about the Romanian tele-revolution is that the cameras faithfully rendered the dynamics and the rhythm of the events, and that for a few days they were not following any orders from above."

It is striking that the authors refrained from taking more footage. There are no witnesses or main actors in it, just



original material. Ujica: "Our starting point was the notorious television images that everyone has seen. We used them to freshen up the memory and trigger a feeling of recognition. We have lashed them with hitherto unknown scenes that are good for a surprise-effect."

Farocki and Ujica started by working their way through the 120 hours of live coverage and making a selection. After some goading around, they managed to get hold of shots made by roving camera-teams that were never broadcasted. And since the ampex tapes usually start a few minutes before the broadcast, we can also witness the chaotic stage directions given just before (the poet Mircea) Dinescu made his historic appearance that would mark the dramatic beginning of the tele-revolution (Dinescu is shown amidst the throng of revolutionaries that interrupted with him into the TV-studios).

There were also the 35mm cameras of the national documentary service, Romania's weekly newsreel programme for cinema houses. Theirs was the task to record all of Ceaucescu's speeches, so there were also present on the balcony at his last performance. They filmed on as the cohorts of party faithfuls turned unruly all at once. This was not seen on television, since the images were immediately cut off. Later on, they could not do very much, since their cameras are very heavy. So, on the following days, they only made short impressionistic takes of what was going on. Even the feature film department went on tour, but surprisingly, their material was not very exiting.

The contributions coming from videocameras is at least as interesting as the live broadcasts on television. VHS cameras are highly versatile and can as a rule go on filming indefinitely, especially if one has got a few 240 minute cassettes in one's knapsack. There were no video-amateurs around in those days as would have been the case in the West. Most of the film-makers were professionals from film and television studios who would privately own a camcorder. Since the evening broadcasts on TV had been reduced to one or two hours a day, many Romanians had purchased a VCR in the eighties. Professional camera-people were making money on the side by recording parties and marriages on video. The Culture Ministry has meanwhile set up an archive of such material. Around thirty five VHS tapes are to be found there, but Farocki and Ujica did not come across any 16mm, Super 8 or High 8 tapes. They made a selection of 22 hours of tape on the spot and went to work in Berlin with it.

In its first part "Videogramme" is a methodic disentangling on all possible camera angles. Filming in the street was extremely risky during the first two days of the revolution, and so the angle is usually from above. From behind a window a video camera records tank crews from the army choosing the side of the people and drive away Securitate troops. At the same time the regime's fixed cameras are still filming the customary scenes. Half an hour before Ceaucescu's helicopter escape from the

roof of the Central Committee building, a lone video camera dares to go on the street. A few hours later, six or eight of such cameras are on that same square. The announcement that the government has resigned is filmed from three different angles, and is even repeated because the essential television crew has not yet made its way to the place. Then, in the late afternoon, a television reporting van finally makes its appearance, and the linking-up with the television studios can start. And that is the moment that one sees the mirror-effects of the video-cameras showing the television watching going on inside, and then they rush to the balcony in a frantic search for other cameras: the revolution is televised!



The picture of revolutionaries surrounding the orators that would become the universal hallmark of the revolution, is a pre-revolutionary stage-prop. What one sees here is a nation packaged into a compact-image, where ethnic groups are being put together in a brotherly way. Everybody gets his pick here: young and old; man and woman; and not only for the Romanians, but for the whole world. This background set slowly empties to make for the New Style Central Committee. With the fading away of the stage scenery, the danger of a civil war also recedes: the scene has served its purpose, the revolution is over, and the standard television angle of filming is back again.

see also:

Ujica, Andrei & von Amelnunxen, Hubertus, Television/Revolution. Marburg: Jonas Verlag, 1990.

The film "Videogramme einer Revolution" is distributed by Harun Farocki Film Produktion, Berlin. At the N5M the film will be shown.

Lovink, Geert (1992) "Esthetica van het Videodocument. De Roemeense tele-revolutie volgens Farocki & Ujica" in *Andere Sinema* 112, nov/dec 1992





# Visual Arts

## Introduction

Visual artists were one of the first groups to seize portable video equipment when it became available and have subsequently played a significant role in creating a language for the field that we have dubbed tactical tv.

The relationship of artists to tv takes many forms from individual artists participating in interdisciplinary project groups with an ad hoc relationship to mainstream television (for example Despite TV (Britain) whose "Battle of Trafalgar" was produced on a one off basis for Channel 4). To the more traditionally individualistic "video artist" who is occasionally asked to contribute to experimental projects such as the VPRO's Het Lab (The Netherlands) which was screened in second half of the eighties.

Het lab is just one of a large number of experiments which have taken place over the years, in which the more adventurous national broadcasters have attempted to introduce television made by visual artists to a wide public. Although this kind of project has resulted in many powerful works by individual artists, most of the assembled programs have had a "fish out of water" feel to them, awkwardly floundering between the more familiar tv formats. Over the years many artists have concluded that national television is not so much a medium, more an institutionalized reality with a powerful set of protocols which are extremely difficult to negotiate successfully. Perhaps part of the problem is that television is made by teams of professional specialists. Whereas the culture of the visual arts is dominated by a paradigm of individual authorship. However things are changing both in art and in television and these changes are creating new spaces for cooperation between the artists and the institutions of television. To begin with television has become far more visually orientated. The invention of sophisticated electronic imaging and animation technologies which began with the introduction of Quantel's Paintboxes and Harries has created a visual language of quite incredible richness. The old slur of artists that television is just radio with pictures no longer sticks. But of even greater significance has been the tidal wave of regionalism and multiculturalism, which has pressed all forms of television into embracing a greater diversity of social and cultural representations than ever before. The combination of these factors has created a television in which the work of visual artists, far from looking like a fish out of water, becomes just one of the many strange and slippery fish in the pond.

Core assumptions in the visual arts are also under pressure. Although the value system and the market place of art is still based on individualism there are now examples (Gran Fury, Group Material, Tim Rollins and KOS) of artists working in long term cooperative projects which command attention, respect. Within the field of tactical tv these groups often have wider social and political aims. They have helped to create a new cultural hybrid, "media activist". Many who once would have called themselves artists have now adopted this title. As television is created by teams these interdisciplinary groups may prove in the long term to have more impact than those who insist on the more individualistic models of artist's television.



In the Next 5 Minutes we want to both celebrate and evaluate the complex and diverse contribution of visual artists to tactical television. We also want to ask whether the visual arts as a category is still a useful or even viable position from which to base ones actions as a producer of tactical television.

David Garcia, October 1992.



Van Gogh TV & Radio are always good for a surprise. At the Kassel Documenta in 1987, the sender was broadcasting from a coach - there was no license, but the German Post Office chose to turn a blind eye. At the "Ars Electronica" Forum in Linz, the group took the audience by surprise with a gameshow titled "Hotel Pompino", transmitted live on cable. 'Candidates' were dragged through the rooms of a fictional hotel and submitted to all kind of 'tests'. Art-Radio and Art-Television are the catchwords for these performances.

These concepts were gradually evolved by a group of artists in the course of a score of other activities, some international in character. They are running a laboratory called the "Ponton European Media Art Lab". Feverish work is presently going on at the Lab headquarters in the Hamburg Sankt Pauli district, as the countdown is running for the latest project of the group, an even larger and more comprehensive venture than all the previous ones: 13th of June, at the beginning of the Documenta in Kassel, will see the opening shot of "Piazza Virtuale".

*Borch-Madsen, Marion (1992) "Kunst im Kanal. Hamburger TV-Grossprojekt für die Documenta" in Prinz, Juni 1992, Hamburg*

## VAN GOGH TV *Piazza virtuale*

Television as it is going to be.

*Directly into the/your programme/broadcast by phone:*

*Van Gogh TV make it all possible.*

The mediagroup Van Gogh TV introduces at the IXth DOCUMENTA Television as a both-ended /interactive medium of communication and as a **self-generating piece of art**. The domestic screen becomes a virtual place in the public space.

**Piazza virtuale** is telepresently accessible through the interconnection of the media-networks. Visitors become active participants in the broadcasts. This enables them to help shape the process of interpretation and signification and to freely set out a course in the virtual public domain. There they will meet with their equally perplexed fellow-creatures.

People will confront each other without any guidance in the spaces in front of and behind the (television-) screens. They will call the floor, will attract attention, will engage in relationships, and will become vectors of significance. The multimedial surface, etched by the scriptural, pictorial and tonal polylog, will become the place of the transgression into the virtual world.

In company the individual is sufficient unto himself.

### How does it work?

Ponton European Media Art Lab and Kassel university have developed a new computer-directed television surface/interface, accessible by the spectator through phone, ISDN, computer, video-phone and phone-keys. What the participants takes along will be broadcasted: the flux of communication.

Access-gates are being installed at the Kassel venue. As soon as the visitor enters the exhibition she or he also directly enters the electronic medium through cameras. They become part of the image-flow being broadcast. Interaction starts.

### What can you expect?

The 24 hours of the day are divided into blocs with different themes, function, and image-landscapes. Scripts, icons, video, computer-animations, sound, and music are the elements that are welded together in Kassel into a broadcast-signal.

Ponton European Media Art Lab (1992)

## Kanaal Zero on Amsterdam Cable TV

*Information Aesthetics Propaganda*

Imagine you live in Amsterdam. It is Saturday afternoon. Mindlessly you zap through the numerous tv channels. You have cable tv. In this city every one does. Effortlessly you cross the boarders. You are the armchair pilot and you are on remote: the BBC, CNN, the twenty four hour global news service. Music Television (MTV) News is featuring the latest album from (you won't believe this, but its true) Margaret Thatcher! For once the sarcastic smirk of MTV newscaster, Steve Blame, is entirely superfluous. As you continue to accelerate through the ether, something momentarily holds your attention. You zap back searching for that image that was unlike the others in that it was not immediately self-explanatory. You find it. The screen is filled with the distinctive circle and cross hairs of the range finder that you might expect to find attached to a modern automatic weapon. An indeterminate urban skyline is being slowly scanned through this sinister lens. The image of the city has a fuzziness reminiscent of the infra-red news footage now so familiar from the Persian Gulf War and Sarajevo. But although monochrome and indistinct, it is without the familiar phosphorescent green and iridescent tracer fire. Gradually you begin to recognize familiar landmarks. It is Amsterdam, your own city, and it is being subjected to the snipers gaze. And you as the viewer have become implicated. You are that sniper. The accompanying soundtrack is made up of random transmissions of reportage from trouble spots around the world. It is "Martial Arts", the work of Michal Shabtay, an Amsterdam artist. And if you were to continue watching you would find that it is part of Kanaal Zero. A cable tv channel made by visual artists.

Kanaal Zero began in 1990, when three media artists; myself (David Garcia) together with Raul Marroquin and Claudio Goulart, developed of propositions that later became a series of monthly transmissions of a cable tv channel for the local media arts.

The project involved a number of guiding principals. The main one being that as well as creating opportunities for local artists to produce work for television the channel should also facilitate cooperation and networking between individuals and organizations involved in the media arts. And that this developing network should be visualized as part of the content of the programs. A major asset in being able to realize these aims was the fact that the channel had as much as five hours of tv time for each transmission. This created possibilities for individual artists or organizations to develop projects with timespans which would not be available to them in any other form of television. One of the best examples of these principals successfully converging came in a transmission dedicated to the work of Ulises Carrion.

Carrion was a brilliant and influential media artist who died tragically early. He left behind an extraordinary and diverse body of work. Although known and respected around the world, the challenging nature of the forms he employed prevented his work from reaching a wider public. After a long period of planning a memorial retrospective exhibition was held in Amsterdam's Fodor Museum and a Kanaal Zero transmission devoting a full five hours to the work of this one artist was timed to coincide with the exhibition. The length of transmission time available to Kanaal Zero not only meant that a significant amount of Carrion's video work could be shown but also that a number of friends and artists whom he had influenced were able to produce works in his memory. This transmission of Kanaal Zero both advertized and supplemented the retrospective in the Fodor Museum, but as television created by artists it came much closer to the spirit of the man and his work than any number of museum shows.

David Garcia, 1992.



# VIDEO: SHEDDING THE UTOPIAN MOMENT



## Part III: Myth

At the head of virtually every video history is the name Nam June Paik. Martha Gever, in her definitive article on the subject in *Afterimage* magazine upon the occasion of his unprecedented exhibition at New York's Whitney Museum of American Art, referred to Paik's 'coronation'. I prefer the word 'sanctification'; for Paik, it would appear, was born to absolve video of sin. The myths of Paik suggest that he had laid all the ground work, touched every base, in freeing video from the domination of corporate TV, and video can now go on to other things. Paik also frees video history from boring complexity but allows for a less ordered present. By putting the prophet at the front, we need not squabble over doctrine now, nor anoint another towering figure, since the video-art industry still needs lots and lots of new and different production.

The myth of Paik begins with his sudden enlightenment in Germany – the site of technical superiority – through John Cage, the archetypal modernist-avant gardist, at a meeting in 1958. Martha Gever relates that Paik later writes to Cage in 1972, 'I think that my past 14 years is nothing but an extension of one memorable evening at Darmstadt in 58.' Paik comes to America around 1960, affiliated, more or less, with the Fluxus movement. Fluxus was a typical avant-garde in its desire to deflate art institutions, its use of mixed media, urban detritus, and language, the pursuit of pretention-puncturing fun, its de-emphasis of authorship, preciousness, and domination. Paik participated in some events and, we are told, showed his first tape at a Flux event. Again showing the rest of us the way, this time to funding, Paik supposedly made this tape with some of the first portable equipment to reach US shores, equipment he bought with a grant from the John D Rockefeller the Third Fund. According to the myth, the tape was of the Pope(!).

The elements of the myth thus include an Eastern visitor from a country ravaged by war (our war) who was inoculated by the leading US avant-garde master while in technology heaven (Germany), who once in the States repeatedly violated the central shrine, TV, and then, faced the representative of God on earth, capturing his image to bring to the avant-garde, and who then went out from it to pull together the two ends of the American cultural spectrum by symbolically incorporating the consciousness industry into the methods and ideas of the cultural apparatus – always with foundation, government, museum, broadcast, and other institutional support.

And – oh yes! – he is a man. The hero stands up for

masculine mastery and bows to patriarchy, if only in representation. The thread of his work includes the fetishization of a female body as an instrument that plays itself, and the complementary thread of homage to other famous male artist-magicians or seers, (quintessentially, Cage).

The mythic figure Paik has done all the bad and disrespectful things to television that the art world's collective imaginary might wish to do. He has mutilated, defiled, and fetishized the TV set, reduplicated it, symbolically defecated on it by filling it with dirt, confronted its time boundedness and thoughtlessness by putting it in proximity with eternity in the form of the Buddha, in proximity with natural time by growing plants in it, in proximity with architecture and interior design by making it an element of furniture, and finally turned its signal into colourful and musical noise.

Paik's interference with TV's inviolability, its air of nonmateriality, overwhelmed its single-minded instrumentality with an antic 'creativity.' Paik imported TV into art-world culture, identifying it as an element of daily life susceptible to symbolic, anti-aesthetic aestheticism, what Allan Kaprow called 'anti-art art'.

Gever discusses the hypnotic effects of his museum installations – effects that formalize the TV signal and replicate viewer passivity, replacing messages of the State and the marketplace with aestheticized entertainment. In some installations the viewer is required to lie flat. He neither analyzed TV messages or effects, nor provided a counter-discourse based on rational exchange, nor made its technology available to others. He gave us an upscale symphony of the most pervasive cultural entity of everyday life, without giving us any conceptual or other means of coming to grips with it in anything other than a symbolically displaced form.

The figure of Paik in these mythic histories combines the now-familiar antinomies, magic and science, that help reinforce and perpetuate rather than effectively challenge the dominant social discourse. Why is this important? The historical avant-garde, has shown a deep ambivalence towards the social power of science and technology. Surrealism and Dada attempted to counter and destroy the institutionalization of art in machine society, to merge it with everyday life and transform both through liberation of the senses, unfreezing the power of dissent and revolt. Although this attempt certainly failed, subsequent avant-gardes, including those that begin to 'use' or address television technology, had similar aims.

Herbert Marcuse spelled this out back in 1936 in his essay 'The Affirmative Character of Culture.' Marcuse traces the use of 'culture' by dominant elites to divert people's attention from collective struggles to change human life and toward individualized effort to 'cultivate' the soul like a garden, with the reward being pie in the sky by and by – or, more contemporaneously, 'personal growth'. Succinctly



put, Marcuse showed the idea of culture in the West to be the defusing of social activity and the enforcement of passive acceptance. In the Western tradition, form was identified as the means to actually affect an audience.



Many of the early users of video had similar strategies and similar outlooks. A number (Paik among them) have referred to the use of video as being against television. It was a counterpractice, making gestures and inroads against Big Brother. They decried the idea of making art – Douglas Davis called *video art* 'that loathsome term.' The scientific modernist term, 'experimentation,' was to be understood in the context of the 60s as an angry and political response. For others, the currency of theories of information in the art world and in cultural criticism made the re-thinking of the video apparatus as a means for the multiple transmission of useful, socially empowering information rather than the individualized reception of disempowering ideology or sub-ideology a vital necessity.

Enter McLuhan. McLuhan began with a decided bias in favour of traditional literacy – reading – but shifted his approval to television. With a peremptory aphoristic style McLuhan simplified history to a succession of Technological First Causes. Many artists liked this because it was simple, and because it was formal. They loved the phrase 'The medium is the message' and loved McLuhan's identification of the artist as 'the antenna of the race.' McLuhan offered the counterculture the imaginary power of overcoming through understanding. Communarians, both countercultural and leftist, were taken with another epithet, 'the global village,' and the valorization of preliterate culture. The idea of simultaneity and a return to an Eden of sensory immediacy gave hippies and critics of the alienated and repressed one-dimensionality of industrial society, a rosy psychedelic wet dream.

John Fekete notes that McLuhan opposed mythic and analogic structures of consciousness – made attractive also through the writings of Claude Lévi-Strauss – to logic and dialectic, a move that Fekete says 'opens the door to the displacement of attention from immanent connections (whether social, political, economic or cultural) to transcendent unities formed outside human control.'<sup>11</sup> Fekete then rightly quotes Roland Barthes on myth (here slightly abbreviated):

... myth is depoliticized speech. One must naturally understand *political* in its deeper meaning, as describing the whole of human relations in their real, social structure, in their power of making the world; ... Myth does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply, it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact ... In passing from history to nature, myth acts economically: it abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them

the simplicity of essence, it does away with all dialectics, with any going back beyond what is immediately visible, it organizes a world which is without contradictions because it is without depth, a world wide open and wallowing in the evident, it establishes a blissful clarity: things appear to mean something by themselves!<sup>12</sup>

This is the modern artist's dream! McLuhan granted artists a shaman's role, with visionary, mythopoeic powers.

McLuhan writes that art's function is 'to make tangible and to subject to scrutiny the nameless psychic dimensions of new experience' and notes that, as much as science, art is 'a laboratory means of investigation.' He calls art 'an early warning system' and 'radar feedback' meant not to enable us to change but rather to maintain an even course.' Note the military talk! Art is to assist in our accommodation to the effects of a technology whose very appearance in world history creates it as a force above the humans who brought it into being.

McLuhan gave artists a mythic power in relation to form that fulfilled their impotent fantasies of conquering or neutralizing the mass media. By accepting rather than analyzing their power, by tracing their effects to physiology and biology rather than to social forces, artists could apply to an old and familiar formula in new and exciting ways. The old formula involved the relation of the formalist avant-garde to the phenomena of everyday life and culture.

I do not intend to trace the actual effects of McLuhanism on video art, for I believe that artists, like other people, take what they need from the discourse around them and make of it what they can. Many progressive and anti-accommodationist people were spurred by the catch phrases and rumours of McLuhanism to try new ways to work with media, especially outside the gallery. Clearly, though, McLuhanism, like other familiar theories, offered artists a chance to shine in the reflected glory of the prepotent media and cash in on their power over others through formalized mimetic aestheticization.

## Conclusion

Some new histories of video have taken up this formalized approach and have portrayed artists in the act of objectifying their element, as though tinkering could provide a way out of the power relations structured into the apparatus. Reinforcing the formalist approach has brought them – inadvertently – to bow, as McLuhan had done, to the power of these media over everyday life. In separating out something called 'video art' from the other ways that people, including artists, are attempting to work with video technologies, they have tacitly accepted the idea that the transformations of art are formal, cognitive, and perceptual. At the very least, this promotes a mystified relation to the question of how the means of production are structured, organized, legitimated, and controlled,



for the domestic market and the international one as well.

Video, it has been noted, is an art in which it is harder than usual to make money. Museums and granting agencies protect video from the marketplace, as I remarked earlier, but they exact a stiff price. Arts that are marginally salable have shrunken or absent critical apparatuses, and video is not an exception. Video reviewing has been sparse and lacklustre in major publications. This leaves the theorizing to people with other vested interests. In the absence of such critical supports, museumization must involve the truncation of both practice and discourse to the pattern most familiar and most palatable to those notoriously conservative museum boards and funders – even when the institutions actually show work that goes beyond such a narrow compass.

To recapitulate, these histories seem to rely on *encompassable* (pseudo-) transgressions of the institutions of both television and the museum, formalist rearrangements of what are uncritically called the 'capabilities' of the medium, as though these were God given, a technocratic scientism that replaces considerations of human use and social reception with highly abstracted discussions of 'time,' 'space,' cybernetic circuitry, and physiology: that is, a vocabulary straight out of old-fashioned discredited Formalist Modernism.

Museumization has heightened the importance of installations which make video into sculpture, painting, or still life, because installations can live only in museums – which display a modern high-tech expansiveness in their acceptance of mountains of obedient and glamorous hardware. Curatorial frameworks also like to differentiate genres, so that video has been forced into those old familiar forms: documentary, personal, travelogue, abstract-formal, image-processed – and now those horrors, dance and landscape (and music) video. And, of these, only the brave curator will show documentary regularly. Even interactive systems, a regular transgressive form of the early 70s, appear far less often now.

Perhaps the hardest consequence of museumization is the 'professionalization' of the field, with its inevitable worship of what are called 'production values.' These are nothing more than a set of stylistic changes rung on the givens of commercial broadcast television, at best the objective correlatives of the electronic universe. Nothing could better suit the consciousness industry than to have artists playing about its edges embroidering its forms and quite literally developing new strategies for ads and graphics. The trouble is, production values mean the expenditure of huge amounts of money on production and post-production. And the costs of computerized video editing, quickly becoming the standard in video-art circles, surpass those of (personal) film editing in factors of ten.

Some of the most earnest producers of art videotapes imagine that condensation of the formal

effects of this kindly technology will expose the manipulative intent of television. The history of the avant-gardes and their failure to make inroads into the power of either art institutions or the advancing technologies through these means suggests that these efforts cannot succeed.

Alvin Gouldner describes the relation between art and the media as follows:

Both the cultural apparatus and the consciousness industry parallel the schismatic character of the modern consciousness; its highly unstable mixture of cultural pessimism and technological optimism. The cultural apparatus is more likely to be the bearer of the 'bad news' concerning – for example – ecological crisis, political corruption, class bias; while the consciousness industry becomes the purveyors of hope, the professional lookers-on-the-bright-side. The very political impotence and isolation of the cadres of the cultural apparatus grounds their pessimism in their own everyday life, while the technicians of the consciousness industry are surrounded by and have use of the most powerful, advanced, and expensive communications hardware, which is the everyday grounding of their own technological optimism.<sup>13</sup>

We may infer that American video artists' current craze for super high-tech production is a matter of envy. It would be a pity if the institutionalization of 'video art' gave unwarranted impetus to artists' desires to conquer their pessimism by decking themselves out in these powerful and positivist technologies.

On the other hand, as the examination of the Paik myth suggests, it would be equally mistaken to think that the best path of 'transgression' is the destruction of the TV as a material object, the deflection of its signal, or other acts of the holy fool. The power of television relies on its ability to corner the market on messages, interesting messages, boring messages, instantly and endlessly repeating images. Surely we can offer an array of more socially invested, socially productive counter-practices, one's making a virtue of their person-centredness, origination with persons – rather from industries or institutions. These, of course, will have to live more outside museums than in them. But it would be foolish to yield the territory of the museum, the easiest place to reach other producers and to challenge the impotence imposed by art's central institutions. Obviously the issue at hand as always is who controls the means of communication in the modern world and what are to be the forms of discourse countenanced and created.

11. John Fekete *The Critical Twilight*, p.143.

12. Roland Barthes 'Myth Today' in *Mythologies*, New York: Hill & Wang 1972, p.143.

13. Alvin Gouldner op cit, (p.175).



# the necessity of doing away with 'video art'

I want in this piece to argue for the desirability of doing away with video art — or rather with the idea of video art. Or to phrase my concern in another way, to ask why we continue to have exhibitions and festivals of video art. Or perhaps just to attempt to justify my assertion that I have as much respect for and interest in an episode of "L.A. Law" (and particularly say, the first show of the 1990-1 season) as I do most works of video art that I see. I invariably enjoy "L.A. Law" more and, more to the point, I believe "L.A. Law" to be as distinctive, as intellectually provocative and as progressive as most works of video art.

Let me start with certain of the ideas in my essay Witness to the Revolution, first written for the catalogue of the Biennial of the Moving Image at the Reina Sofia Centre in Madrid, December 1990, and reprinted in the VideoPositive catalogue. In essence, the piece argues that we are witnessing a revolution in the ways in which we understand the world and the images we make of it, a revolution at least as profound as that which was brought about by the growth of photography through the 1840's.

This revolution is prompted by the change from an analogue-based culture to one in which information, including images, is created, stored, transmitted and viewed in digital form. So instead of a world in which literary works are stored and transmitted as letters on a page, of a world in which images are created from the emulsion on a photographic plate, such books and

photographs can be transformed into, or indeed created as, strings of 0s and 1s. And the purest form of these strings is as electrical impulses, which can of course be out putted as an image or as sequences of images, and stored on tape or film or floppy disc or CD — or of course kept in play as image or virtual domain to be interacted with by an observer and participant.

A digital culture offers the compelling possibility of the convergence of such previously distinct industries as telecommunications, publishing and computing, together with film, television, video and all the elements of our contemporary moving image culture. Most pertinent to this discussion is the recognition that film and photographic image-making processes are rapidly drawing closer to electronic image-making processes like video, and there are countless new possibilities for challenging combinations.



Despite these rapidly accelerating changes, we continue to treat video, and video art, as somehow special, apart, separate from the rest of our moving image culture. Creators are still seen, and indeed see themselves, as video artists; there are specialist video distributors; and there are numerous festivals of video art.

Here, as elsewhere, history has much to answer for. First, remember that video art developed out of the New York art world in the 1960's, and although the new technology was often used at first as an adjunct to performance and happenings, as well as conceptual art, and indeed for documentation of these, an important and soon dominant strand came to be work that examined and exploited the specific qualities of the medium. The video image itself became an important concern, just as the film image did in the related tradition of avant-garde film. And these "medium-specific" ideas, these fetishisations of the video image and the video process, have never lost their power — despite everything that has happened since.

As well as being defined by the medium, video became to be defined against television. Think of all those artists' statements and all those tapes which in some way attack mainstream television and offer an alternative to it.





Along with many others, I have argued elsewhere that television was never as monolithic, as homogeneous or as impoverished as the video world has invariably believed or stated it to be. And that television did not and does not only force the viewer to take the sort of passive spectator's position to which video is meant to offer a challenging alternative. That has certainly not been the case in Britain, in this television tradition, and it most certainly is not the case today, when especially with elements of Channel 4 and BBC2, television offers a remarkable range of challenging visions and understandings of the world.

Then there is a third current definition — along with definition by medium and definition against television — a definition of video by superstructure. In the development of video over the last twenty-five years, and indeed in the struggle to have it taken seriously by the rest of the art world, by television and by audiences, a connected network has emerged of distributors, festivals, critics, curators and, perhaps most important, funders. As this network has grown and become increasingly professionalised, an exclusive definition of video has taken over from the initial lobbying and arguing and proselytising for video to be taken at all seriously, for video to be shown at all, and for video to receive backing. When film festivals would not show video, and when galleries would not present installations, even when television would not show tapes, it was important to argue for video, for the specific and particular qualities of video art. But those days are passing and now this exclusive self-definition, this legitimisation by and for the festivals and distributors appears increasingly problematic.

The concentration on video as video cuts the forms of video creation off from the rest of an increasingly dynamic and richly varied moving image culture. Video as video prevents, or at least limits, cross fertilisation with other elements of that culture, from digital imaging, from film, from interactive and other technologies, from television and so forth. It also limits audiences — whether within an art context or on television. It probably also limits support from funders or commissioners — for a while it is important that the Arts Council or Channel 4 makes some monies available for video, those bodies and others make more available for other forms of moving

image culture.

Consequently, rather than perpetuating the idea of video art, we should simply dispose of it. Instead, we should nurture abroad and disparate moving image culture, with many different, overlapping and often contradictory strands within it. Specifically, it would seem to be more important now not to put together further video exhibitions but to encourage curators to include artists working with video or film or digital images within a broad range of exhibitions, whether these are national surveys, or thematic or didactic shows. And certainly this is just beginning to happen, although only with a handful of prominent international artists like Bill Viola and Gary Hill. (The reluctance of most curators to do this, and their general ignorance of video, is the direct result of the exclusive definition of video over the past decade or more.)



In this vein, it also seems important to argue not for more programmes of video art on television, but to see the innovative and challenging visions of artists and others integrated into each element of television's output. Of course, it will not happen like this, but I would be delighted to see Gary Hill tackle a programme for Bookmark, for example, or Max Almy make a Q.E.D. — neither of which seems beyond the bounds of possibility.

None of the above is meant as an argument against what has been fundamentally important in the development of video. Video has been and is a personal art, innovative in the visions it offers and the technologies it employs. At its best, it has been and still is challenging in its complexity, in its critiques of dominant ways of seeing and in the creation of alternatives to these. And it has been, and is a radical art, employed by a wide range of voices to confront the ways the world is ordered, and again to offer alternatives. All of these qualities are precious and vital, but all of them are also present in other elements of our moving image culture — even in elements that are produced within the dominant industrial structures, whether in Hollywood or Shepherds Bush.



Wyver, John (1992) *"The Necessity of Doing Away With 'Video Art'" in LVA catalogue, 1992, 45-48*





In that same year (1969, red.), Schum produced another television project by Jan Dibbets, *TV AS A FIREPLACE*, which was broadcasted in the ultimate week of the year 1969 by the West German sender WDR 3. Schum was doing the camera-work himself and the camera was focused on the fire of an open hearth. *TV AS A FIREPLACE* was transmitted for one week everyday for three minutes at a time, at late hour of the evening, and after the regular broadcasts. The pictures shown were not the same [ones] every evening. The fire was made up on the first day, fed through the week, and on the last evening the screen would merely show the last smouldering cinders. *TV AS A FIREPLACE* fell entirely within the tradition of the sixties of artists working with the new electronic tools. It took a critical stance vis à vis the effects of the mass-medium television and was constantly bent on problematising its ways of functioning. Dibbet's hearth reduces the television to its most elementary form: a cosy, central spot in the living room, where we can let our gaze wander, and from which we can feed our imagination. To achieve this we do not even need a faithful/acknowledged representation of our world: the image of mesmerizing flames achieves the same results as well.



We may also mention Wim T. Schippers, who was working with television at a relatively early juncture. This was soon recognized as a (legitimate) form of fine arts. The programme *SIGNALEMENT* was Schippers's first involvement with the television. He put it together in collaboration with Willem de Ridder, after an invitation by Henk de By, under commission of the VARA broadcasting organization. It was broadcast on December 29, 1963, and is possibly the [very] first television programme acquired by a museum. Schippers had by then already made a name for himself with his ideas on evolving "boring" art and "low profile/non-conspicuous" activities. Emptying a bottle of soft drink on the North Sea beach was one such "uninteresting" feat.

In the Netherlands, Schippers and De Ridder and their art performances are exponents of the "Fluxus" movement, elsewhere people like Paik and Vostell were inspired by the same movement. But in contrast to Paik, who would in later years exhibit his affinity with the electronic medium mainly as an individual artist, Schippers did most of his work after *SIGNALEMENT* in 1963 under contract of the Dutch broadcasting associations. After this first chance contact with the VARA, Schippers went into a long-standing relationship with the VPRO. Schippers became famous nationwide with the larger audiences thanks to programme-series such as *HOEPLA*, made in collaboration with Hans Verhagen, Wim van der Linden, Trino Flothuis en Gied Jaspars. The appearance, already in the second instalment of the programme, of the Hague model Phil Bloom totally naked, made this mixed bunch of artists, journalists, and television producers famous overnight. But what really established Wim T. Schippers's credentials as an individualistic producer was the long serie of absurdistic television spectacles he started in the end of 1971 with the *FRED HACHE SHOW*. Characters such as Fred Hache (Harry Touw), Barend Servet (Ilf Blokker), and the French fries short order cook Sjeffe van Oekel (Dolf Brouwer) who made his appearance in the second instalment of *THE FRED HACHE SHOW*, quickly became unforgettable, if slightly controversial, television celebrities to the Dutch audiences.

The nature of his work makes Wim T. Schippers a special case in the world of Dutch television art. Hardly any other artist in this country has been able to establish such a close working relationship with broadcasting organization as Schippers did with the VPRO, and hardly any of them either, has received anything like the broad based and massive response to their programme from the audience Schippers got. It may be that this popular response is due to the fact that Schippers's television work differs from what generally goes for "video-art" because it is

unashamedly about very down to-earth, day to day occurrences, and steers totally clear from exalted, abstract topics. Schippers's programmes are replete with people walking into dogshit, throwing out, singing disco tunes, or dancing topless free of any inhibition. And this all is being shown without emphasis, as if it were totally casual occurrences, and moreover in a most chaotic manner, with frequent interruptions, as if there were constantly other business on hand to be urgently dealt with.

Yet there is a definite link between this television work and Wim T. Schippers earlier activities. Programmes like *The Fred Hache Show*, "Barend Is Weer Bezig (Barend Does It Again)", Van Oekel's *Disco Corner*, "Grote Genade" (Good God Gracious), and "Het Is Weer Zo Laat" (There We Go Again) - all programmes that have been acquired by a number of museums in our country - should in fact be considered as a radical follow-up of what the artist was producing in the sixties. At that time Schippers had a vivid interest for phenomena that were studiously avoided by his colleagues in the figurative arts because of their 'totally boring normality'. The plastic pudding in the Fodor Museum, the oversized pink bucket seat in the Vondel Park in Amsterdam, the soft drink bottle being emptied in the North Sea: all this was a bit too "poky" [for] art (this in the words of the artist himself). You may compare it with a portrait of the Queen peeling potatoes, a flatulent TV announcer, the flushing of a toilet, of wrapped fish'n chips left on a chair to be flattened by a customer's buttocks. These are the same kind everyday absurdities being dished out to us on the screen, save for the fact that larger-than-life effect is not achieved by size (as with the pudding and the seat referred to earlier), but by the sheer extravagance of acting, talking, and singing.

The mass appeal of Schippers's art is in itself not so surprising: "poky" images are understandable both to the professional crew of art watchers and to the audiences at large. Beside all this display of filthy talk and shameless farts will elicit from every individual a feeling of elation at the sight of all these "poky", embarrassing occurrences being 'emancipated' in Schippers's programmes. Schippers will surely go on feeling at home in Hilversum (the Dutch TV headquarters, red.), since the television has become the embodiment of plain everyday normality. Everything he cares to show over the national airwaves comes down with a thud right in the cosy homelife of the people, and this to his full satisfaction. However deserved, it could not have been the fate of one of Schippers's projects in the sixties: a museum floor, covered with peanut butter, that was part of one of his exhibitions.





List of the people involved in the N5M (in alphabetical order)

Jeroen van Bergeijk (Amsterdam CS, conference design N5M)

Geke van Dijk (Amsterdam CS, conference design N5M)

David Garcia (Association of Media Artists, original concept N5M)

Menno Grootveld (Staats TV Rabotnik, live television N5M)

Karel Koch (Amsterdam CS, conference design N5M)

Geert Lovink (Editor Mediamatic, media theorist, conference design N5M)

Raul Marroquin (Media artist, live television N5M)

Caroline Nevejan (Paradiso, production and coordination N5M)

Lennaart van Oldenborgh (Media artist, graphic design  
and television technician N5M)

Bas Raijmakers ( Amsterdam CS, conference design N5M)

Helen Vreedevelt (Paradiso, production assistant N5M)

Valerie Wilson (pilot research N5M)