

9. STEVE PARTRIDGE 'MONITOR' and 'INTER-LACE' 1975

Work which explores the ambiguities of recorded action in a feedback situation and which deconstructs broadcast material through video processes.

10. GALLERIA CAVALLINO VARIOUS ARTISTS COMPILATION TAPE

A selection from the output of this influential Italian production and distribution centre, with work by several European artists.

11. DAVID HALL 'THIS IS A TELEVISION RECEIVER'

Produced on the occasion of the 1976 Arena Survey of Video Art: a rare example of British TV allowing broadcast facilities to video artists.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

This is a very brief selection from the enormous quantity of books, catalogues and articles published on video art in the period under review. I have

concentrated on those works which indicate the wide range of contending attitudes available.

SHAMBERG, Michael: GUERRILLA TELEVISION, *Raindance Corporation: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York 1971*

LIPPARD, Lucy R.: SIX YEARS: THE DEMATERIALIZATION OF THE ART OBJECT FROM 1966 TO 1972, *Praeger Publishers, Inc., New York 1973*

WHITNEY MUSEUM: NAM JUNE PAIK, Retrospective Exhibition Catalogue, *Whitney Museum of American Art, 1982*

GERRY SCHUM: Retrospective Exhibition Catalogue, *Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 1980*

IMPACT ART VIDEO ART 74: Exhibition Catalogue, *Galerie Impact 1974*

ART GALLERY OF ONTARIO: Videoscope: an exhibition of video art 1974/75

VIDEO ART: Institute of Contemporary Art, *University of Pennsylvania 1975*

DAN GRAHAM: Video-Architecture-television, *The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design 1979*

STUDIO INTERNATIONAL: Video art, special issue May/June 1976

SOME NOTES ON VIDEO ART AND POPULISM

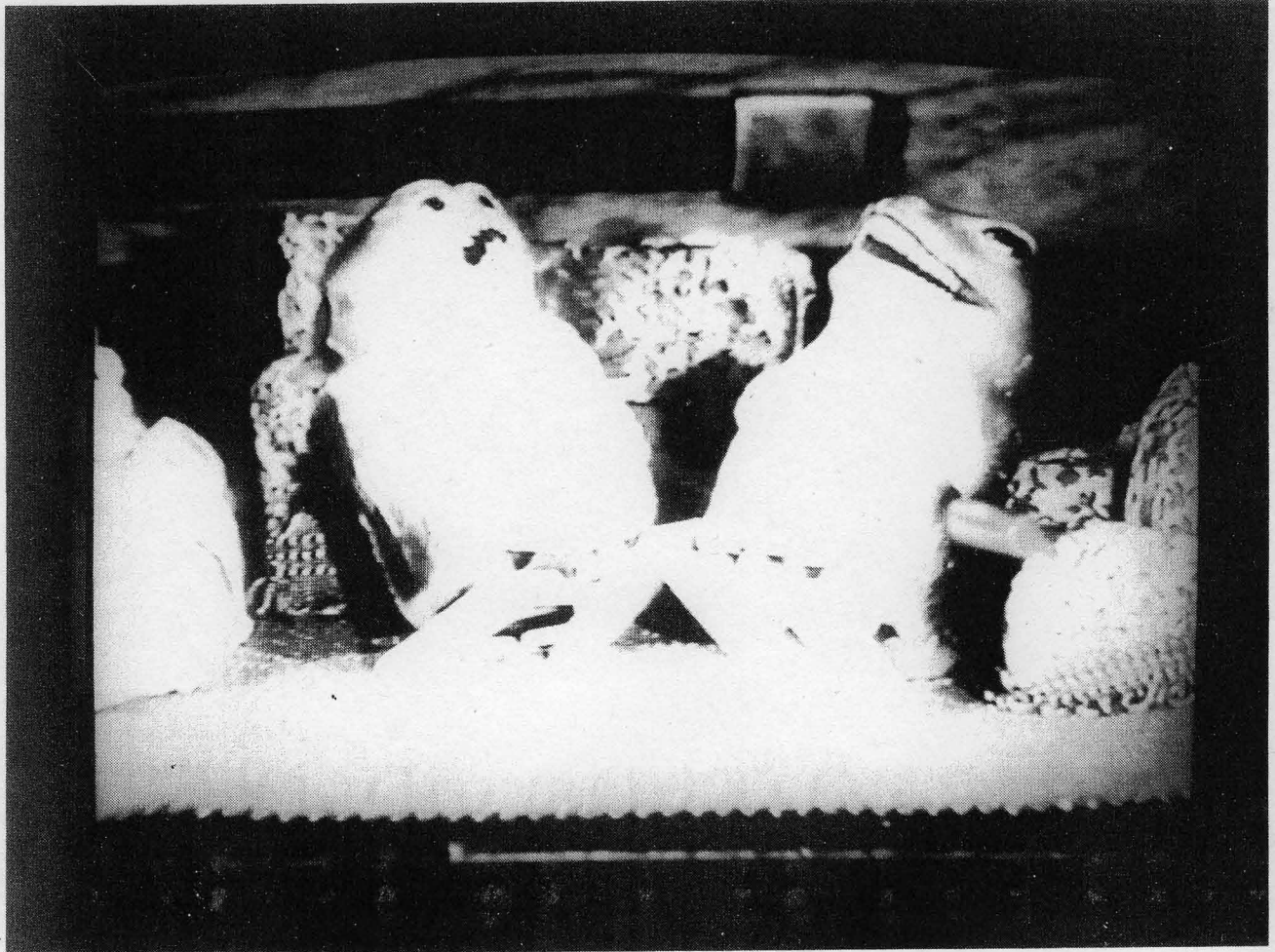
JEREMY WELSH

The works in distribution with LVA cover a broad range of formal approaches, cultural tendencies and subject matters, and given appropriate back up information, guidelines and methods of accessing the library, these works can be approached from numerous points of departure. The situation is now too complex to attempt an accurate overview of the library, or indeed of video itself in general terms, and it is therefore necessary to isolate particular aspects by means of which we can begin to approach this body of work as a whole. Within the pages of this catalogue, several such viewpoints will be explored.

Since the term 'Post Modernism' became current in the late seventies, there has been a marked shift away from the formal refinement that had contributed to contemporary art's severe insularity. This has been observed in painting, sculpture, performance, film, indeed within all the media currently employed by artists, albeit for a variety of reasons and motives. In terms of artists' and independent video, this shift can be attributed to several factors, not the least of which is the technological development that has taken place. As soon as low cost professional

(U-matic) colour equipment became available, firstly in Art Colleges, then subsequently through access workshops like LVA, it became apparent to independent producers that they could make work which actually looked very much like television - something that early black and white video did not - which could be distributed widely and comparatively cheaply, and could address a range of subjects as broad as that of television itself, while simultaneously expanding conceptions of what television could or should be, and could enable them to step out of the ghetto in which formalist tradition had incarcerated itself.

As distinctions between Art and Popular Culture become progressively eroded, it is tempting to believe that the Fluxus philosophy - everyone is, or can be, an artist - is finally coming to fruition; anyone with a home video recorder can take part in the shaping of the electronic culture. Unhappily, there is little evidence to suggest that anything more than a tiny percentage of domestic video recorders are used as anything other than passive relayers of commercial software, private porno cinemas, or a means of subverting T.V. programme schedules.



■ Japanese American Toy Theatre of London Present *Double Indemnity* Akiko Hada 1984

While domestic video has not yet passed through the first phase of technology as aid to consumption, other, slightly older technologies have been appropriated for creative intervention at the grass roots level. For example, the use of portable stereo cassette recorders by black youths to 'mix' fragments of their favourite dance records, is an authentic underground culture, a form of audio collage which occupies a central position in their cultural activity. There may also be isolated and undetected individuals who may have begun to use video recorders in the same way, re-cutting broadcast material and mixing it with their own images for their own purposes, but by and large, the bulk of 'independent video' as we know it is produced by those who have come up through the recognised channels of the educational system, and whose engagement with popular culture is an informed choice rather than an intuitive response, or a communal act. Such producers share an awareness of the historical developments in twentieth century culture, and of video's position within that.

The term 'Populism' is a broad one, and has often been used indiscriminately in describing a whole range of contemporary cultural production. When we apply the term to Video Art, (a category that is becoming increasingly difficult to define, but for which no accurate substitute has yet been found), we are

considering works which deliberately situate themselves in an intermediary position defined by Fine Art as historically perceived on the one hand, and Popular Culture on the other, and which draw on elements of both to create a synthesis. There are two dominant features that have determined developments in this area; a desire to engage with, to criticise, to mimic, subvert, re-interpret, and ultimately to produce television itself, and a strong interest in rock/pop music and its attendant peripherals; images, fashions, graphics, postures, attitudes, linguistic forms, modes of production and marketing strategies.

The former category is now well established through the re-emergence of narrative and other language based televisual forms. Indeed, the re-interpretation of broadcast material, the re-working of dominant forms such as soap opera and news/current affairs broadcasting have featured heavily in artists' video production for a number of years now, and artists' television, already a reality in the U.S. and elsewhere, is an idea that is rapidly gaining impetus in the U.K. The second category is somewhat less clearly defined, and to some extent overlaps with the art-television issue. Because of the massive upturn in the production of pop music derived video, youth culture T.V. and magazine-format video software, with an attendant annexation of the term Video

Art and its complex sub-texts, the ability to create distinctions between Art and Other in this area is being progressively eroded. Thus, it is often difficult to make qualitative differentiation between artists' video using pop and pop video using art. The main difference is budgetary, a single three minute clip for a major act costing more than the Arts Council's entire annual budget for video. There is also, of course, a difference of primary intention, though this may not necessarily be discernible from the video tape itself. The pop video is designed to sell records, the fact that it might be considered Art is a useful by-product. The Art Video is not generally intended to sell a distinct, secondary project, though it may indeed be designed to sell its maker to sponsors or funding agencies upon whose support most video artists depend to continue working. But even these basic distinctions become clouded as artists penetrate further into the mainstream and look to large communications corporations for support and promotion. A powerful corporation gives nothing unconditionally; it will support an artist for a variety of reasons from tax exemption to profit or cultural prestige. Artists entering this arena will soon know a degree of pressure never encountered in the comparatively mild climate of state sponsorship: the onus on Laurie Anderson to produce 'O Superman II' must now be considerable. Anderson is probably the best example of an artist who has crossed over and whose work is now para-

digmatic of the complex cross-definitions that come into play when Art and Popular Culture meet and merge. For example, the image of Laurie Anderson herself as the artist, but also as the subject and object of her own art. The result is close to the Marcusean notion of 'identical subject/object' achieved not through radical social practice, but through an intervention in capitalist marketing strategies.

It will be argued by some that some interventions into the channels of mass distribution constitute a radical strategy in their own right, but if this is even partially true, then it can only be so on an individual scale. It is not likely to precipitate a fundamental shift of consciousness, nor a redefinition of predominant cultural values. However, in the intermediate territory that is being opened up, there is considerable scope for the gradual establishment of cultural values attuned to the real social conditions of a post industrial society. It is in precisely this area that the work of LVA and organizations like it is of primary importance. The establishment of semi-autonomous modes of production and distribution, as alternatives to the dominant practices of conglomerate interests has been the prime objective since LVA's inception. It can now be seen that this objective has been substantially realised, although the ground we have gained can be easily lost, and the methods evolved need further development and refinement. To continue the development of independent resources is a major con-

■ Making News *Vida* 1984 *VIDA*



cern of not only LVA, but of the independent video/film sector as a whole, and this development must take place within a context of broad co-operation between the individual organisations involved despite certain basic differences of orientation or priority that will inevitably arise.

The issue of populism, not simply as an attribute of certain kinds of video work, but as a general commitment to the establishment of a broader-based video culture, will influence the further development of distribution and promotional strategies. The isolated individuals who make the transition from 'fringe' to 'mainstream' will inevitably attain a much higher level of visibility, but the espousal of populist concerns at base level will lead to a broadening and a redefinition of contexts, such that populism becomes a means of addressing significant social and cultural issues that are relevant to a wider public. This expanded audience will be engaged by the work, its concerns and its context, and may thus become engaged in the further development of an independent, accessible and alternative media-based culture.

I have avoided referring specifically to individual producers or works represented by LVA's catalogue, since there appeared to be no valid reason for foregrounding isolated examples which might thus be

regarded as seminal. However, the following suggested programmes, though by no means exhaustive, could provide useful viewpoints on the issues raised here. ■

The following programmes would illustrate some of the points made in the preceding essay:

LVA VideoMusic programme one: one hour compilation of music/video shorts.

Kit Fitzgerald and John Sanborn; Composite tape; 0284

Dara Birnbaum; Composite tape inc. Pop Pop Video; 0304

John Scarlett-Davis; Chat Rap; 0319; A-Z; 0318

Akiko Hada/Japanese American Toy-Theatre of London; Double Indemnity; 0410

Marty St. James & Anne Wilson; An American Romance; 0368

VIDA; Eurhythmics; 0396

Dalibor Martinis; Image is Virus; 0352

Twin Art; composite tape; 0293

Noel Harding; Houses Belong to those who live in them; 0292

Chris Rushton; Music compilation; 0386

Judith Barry; Space Invaders; 0316

■ An American Romance *Marty St James & Anne Wilson* 1983

