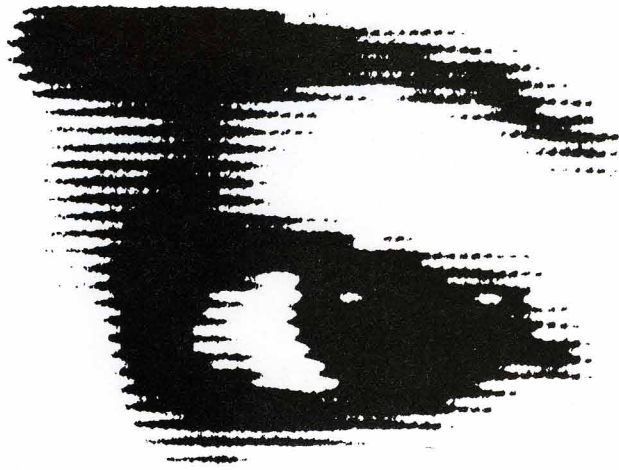


**ELECTRIC**



**EYES**



# ELECTRIC EYES

## NOTES ON THE VIDEO TAPES

### Saboten Boi:

9am 1988 45 min

Saboten Boi is a curious hybrid; part catalogue of children's myth, part celebration of the world as electronic playground, and partly a strange tale of funny rubber monsters in Tokyo. Taking as its starting point the discovery by children of a rogue satellite broadcasting multi-cultural pirate TV for the young, it deftly skips between video art and children's television, with the aid of a great many Japanese computer toys and comic capers.

### Winter / Spring:

Catherine Elwes 1987 22 min

Two parts of an ongoing trilogy by Catherine Elwes, in which familiar images of female roles are explored within a small and intimate narrative that also draws upon deeply ingrained associative readings of the seasons. The actions is all set within a suburban house, its garden, and adjacent parkland, but the imagery, atmosphere and tone of the two pieces is entirely different, from Winter's forebodings of death and destructions, to Spring's celebrations of life and energy.

### The Stream:

Chris Meigh Andrews 1987 15 min

The Stream is presented as 'A visual setting for Music for a Large Ensemble by Steve Reich', and in its fluid interweaving of imagery it functions as a coherent counterpoint to the music. The piece is also prefaced by a quote from 'Wholeness and The Implicate Order', by experimental physicist David Bohm, whose ideas on a holistic view of the universe and our place within it are reflected in Meigh Andrews' own interest in a holistic view of consciousness.

### The Flying Trunk:

David Finch 1987 14.30 min

"A video poem, shot on film, about abandonment, separation and independence. Remembering Hans Andersen's story and my boarding school trunk"

- D. Finch.

Seascapes, clouds and domestic moments, together with a spare and effective voice over (largely from the Andersen fairy tale) produce a sensitive, lyrical almost melancholic study of memory, childhood, and the transitory image. -Michael O'Pray

### E ETC:

David Larcher 1986 69 min

An encyclopedic work by one of the originators of the British avant-garde cinema. Old film footage is reprocessed through new digital technology in a dizzying journey of memories and speculations that record the maker's life and loves of two decades. Poetic alchemy and formal anarchy underscore a highly inventive fusion of the quite distinct processes of film and video production in a tape, (or film) that makes demands but rewards the attentive viewer.

### Accidents in the Home (Collection):

Graham Young 1984 - 88 20 min (total)

No.17 Gasfires

No. 8 Holiday Insurance

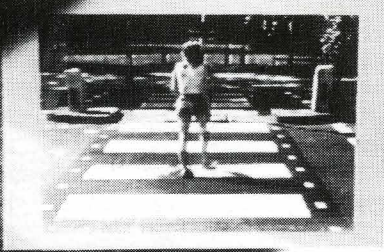
No.15 Domestiques

No. 7 To swing a cat

No. 6 Putter

Inanimate objects take action! Episodes in an expansive and definitive series of excursions into the vagaries of domestic life. The now completed series of 'Accidents' tapes which have taken the gently subversive visions of Graham Young to a position of considerable respect in the international video art world. The events that take place in these works are often so slight as to be almost subliminal, but they are always peculiarly, logically, the obvious outcome of the beautifully composed still lives and tableaux that are painstakingly arranged before the camera.





## **Factory:**

Jeremy Welsh 1988 14 min

Recorded in a disused factory in Wolverhampton, the piece is a contemplative study of the decline of traditional manufacturing industries. The tape is structured in three parts: in the first, the interior of the factory is explored through image and sound that are combined to evoke the lapsed life and energy of the place; in the second part, a group of young children speculate as to the possible nature and function of the place; in the third section, a man who had worked in the factory describes some aspects of its history.

## **Flight 1:**

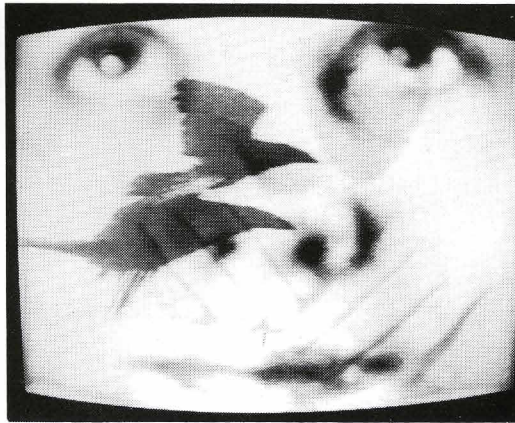
John Goff 1988 5 min

John Goff has been steadily evolving a personal and highly refined style of video post production for a number of years, and this is perhaps his most eloquent and elegant work to date. Using advanced video editing techniques he presents a vision of events and places existing simultaneously within the frame of the image. The piece undermines our fixation with dimensionality and location and takes flight - literally and metaphorically - as a motif for new ways of contemplating space and time and our perceptions of them.

## **Electron:**

Judith Goddard 1987 5 min

Electron takes Electricity - its generation, delivery and consumption - as a metaphor for the world of the urban and industrial, within which images of the natural world are framed and contextualised. Judith Goddard's video works have often taken images invested with power - either actual or implicit - and ironically deconstructed them through the use of poetic juxtaposition and a bittersweet visual sensibility. The eternal dichotomy between nature and culture, and the need to find an ecological meeting of these poles, find personal expression in Electron.



## **Medusa:**

Katherine Meynell 1988 18 min

A contemporary reworking of the Greek myth in which feminist analysis, lyrical narrative and biting humour combine to invest the story with a topical intensity.

Medusa as abused woman waits to take her revenge on the male ego that has disempowered and confined her to the role of Beauty becomes Beast. Both the intimacy and the distancing of the video medium are deployed to set up a tension between viewer and image that perhaps prompts us to ask whether the screen is a mirror through which we may safely observe, or whether it is indeed the eye of the Medusa.

## **A Cruise to the Universe:**

Liz Power 1988 4 min

With 'Little Alien' and 'Funny Robot' in 1987, Liz Power demonstrated a unique sensibility and a peculiar facility with the often awkward processes of video animation. A cruise to the Universe combines childlike charm, in its deceptively simple images and naive storyline, with an extremely sophisticated control of the medium, coaxing subtle and atmospheric tones and textures out of the computer paintbox that indicate just how limited are our normal expectations of this medium.

## **Out of the Ashes:**

Marion Urch 1987 10 min

Out of the Ashes is a powerful and evocative work that links feminism and witchcraft through images of Catholicism and pagan ritual that are steeped in blood and the mythologies of two millennia. Avoiding the theoretical, the tape used evocation and an invitation to make imaginative connections as a tool to focus awareness and to elicit questions. A haunting and melancholic soundtrack of digitally treated human voices mixed with the roar of flames and the beating of birds' wings are fused to rich and memorable images.



## **Jump Cut:**

Michael Luenig 1988 2.30 min

"I want to leave the city, the industrial landscape, the industrial food, the industrial love, but instead I trigger the camera and run up the black stairs once again."

M. Luenig.

## **Measures of Distance:**

Mona Hatoum 1988 15 min

The video is concerned with the artist's separation from her Palestinian family and in particular, her relationship with her mother whose letters from Beirut are read aloud as the soundtrack to the tape. The personal and political are inextricably bound up in a narrative that explores identity and sexuality against a backdrop of traumatic social rupture, exile and displacement.

## **Green on the Horizon:**

Philip Sanderson / Steven Ball 1988 18 min

An exploration of a bleak and mysterious marshland by a young woman on a bicycle who navigates this strange territory with the aid of a portable tape recorder whose prompts function as an audio map or guide book. Not quite a treasure hunt, the goal she seeks seems unclear, the journey is perhaps a self-fulfilling exercise. It has some of the atmosphere of a television thriller, a home movie Mission Impossible at whose outcome we can only speculate.



## Reflections on the Art of The State:

Pictorial Heroes 1988 12 min

Since 1986 Pictorial Heroes have been working on a series of video tapes dealing with the spectacle of violence and unrest in the Media's vision of a derelict urban landscape. This is the final installment in the series, and brings together elements of the preceding pieces. Setting off the formal stylistic conventions of television 'Comment' against a fractured scratch style of video editing in which single short bursts of action are repeated and reprocessed, the tape tears apart its own critical premises and leaves us with the bleak notion that the central image of a masked figure hurling a missile - a futile, mediated and frustrated act of defiance - is a metaphor for our whole post industrial culture whose history has been written in advance by the ghost writers of Media. The tape is not so much concerned with Deconstruction as with Demolition, and having torn down its own artfully erected facade, it leaves us with the bothersome notion that we will have to decide upon how to develop the site.

## Sari Red:

Pratibha Parmar 1988 13 min

Sari Red is concerned with racist violence, and in particular with the effect of the threat of violence upon the lives of Asian women. Red symbolises the spilt blood of a woman killed in a racist attack, and Red symbolises the sensuality and intimacy between Asian women. The tape explores the external world of the street and the internal world of private spaces, both of which are underlined by the threat of violence.

## Territories:

Sankofa / Isaac Julien 1986 25 min

Territories maps out the cultural territories of identity, inscribed in the streets through carnival and confrontation, inscribed in the memory and the culture of the inhabitants of this territory. Stepping aside from the constraints of documentary form, Territories suggests new ways of understanding and interpreting historical events that shape and are shaped by the lives of people engaged in struggle - a struggle to affirm a social, political and cultural space.



## Biometrika:

Simon Robertshaw 1987 11 min

An intriguing, passionate and compassionate work that redraws the borders between Documentary and Art in its exposure of attitudes towards people with mental handicaps - attitudes that have in the past made genocide possible, and in our own time enforce the involuntary curtailment of liberty and human rights. Combining archive material and contemporary news footage with his own spoken commentary, Simon Robertshaw identifies with the subjects of his tape, and forces us to examine our own preconceptions and prejudices.

## Eurotechno:

Stakker 1988 10 min

Propelled along at an alarming rate by the definitive beat of the late eighties dance track, Eurotechno is visual fragmentation at its most fragmented, bombardment at its most frenetic. Beyond the collapse of meaning there is just a kaleidoscopic wall of visions, the waking nightmares of computer age culture. The televisual equivalent of amphetamine, it exhilarates but leaves you hungry. Not for the viewer of delicate sensibilities.

## Sentinel / Needle:

Sven Harding 1986 8.30 min

An early pioneer of a video editing style that is now de rigeur for advertising and pop video, Sven Harding constructs a world of abstract symbols within which mankind is trapped in a seemingly endless and baffling conflict with its environment. Everyday objects take on menacing qualities, disparate images collaged together create extraordinary effects of displacement and alienation. Hard edged and crisply edited, Needle in particular is pop with a sting in its tail.



## Faded Wallpaper:

Tina Keane 1988 15 min

The peeling of layers of wallpaper acts as a metaphor for the unveiling or discovery of the layers of identity, and as a formal device that binds together the visual strands of this complex work. With a quality akin to woven textile, the tape combines film and video material with sound in constantly shifting and dissolving layers. Short bursts of narrative emerge from and are once again subsumed into the flux of meanings in the work. Constructions of femininity and images that evoke the domestic environment are elements within an abstract discourse that is also an art historical discussion of the production of images.

*Notes on the programme written by Jeremy Welsh  
except where otherwise credited.*

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## Introduction

by  
Steven  
Bode

## THE ART OF NOISE

Scratch was the last big buzzword to come tripping off video watchers' tongues; filling their heads with extravagant notions of what video art in the Eighties might come to achieve. With the decade now drawing to an end, and much of that hubbub died down, it's still worth stopping to remind ourselves of some of the impetus scratch provided to video in Britain at the time. It deployed a number of distinctly avant-garde devices within a genuinely popular movement; it harnessed aspects of media theory to the real-life fact of a home video boom; it attracted a number of people (this writer included) to a video genre who might otherwise have passed it by.

Not that we are about to embark on one of those habitual misty-eyed flash-backs that mander their way to the conclusion that we'll never see its like again. Things, as they say, have moved on - and it is part of the job of this touring package to show in what ways and how much. Nonetheless, reeling back through the years is instructive, if only to show the complex pattern of intervention and entanglement that scratch kicked up in its wake; one that more or less persists to the present day.

Carrying on from the ruckus of punk, scratch was about Making a Noise; grabbing a piece of media attention by scrambling, distorting and subverting the dominant signals the media sent out. Breaking down the televisual syntax by showing up its unconscious connections through crash-edited clusters of imagery was seen to be intrinsically radical; video's way of 'talking back to television'.

After a while, though, scratch attracted stinging criticism from a number of video artists themselves. Any art there was to be had in displacing or disrupting images from their familiar referents into a new combinatory language might be said to be losing its way if it was read as a simple matter of fast-paced surface effects. To a lot of people, the way TV itself had appropriated scratch as a stylistic device was proof of this process at work. For every exponent who saw scratch as opening up a radical voice within the complex babble of the media, others saw it as synonymous with an unceasing cross-talk and confusion that led the artist astray.

As a communications-theorist might put it, it gets harder and harder to separate the signal from its surrounding noise. No matter how serious or subversive the image, it still runs the risk of being superficialised, even swallowed, by the sheer weight of those around it. Maybe that old devil called entropy haunts the media, after all. The more we're given to look at, the less we actually see. The greater our choice of Different channels, so we end up with more of the Same.

All this (over)abundance of images, this patterned profusion and clashing confusion of signs; all this forms the locus, and to some extent the lot, of the video artist in the Eighties. Working in, with, around this mix-up, this diversity acts as both a qualification and a challenge to any kind of 'media art'. Sometimes, articulating, let alone arguing, a considered, authentic position from the babble of the media can seem so fraught an endeavour that only talking faster, talking louder seems to point to a way of ever being heard. Pictorial Heroes' Reflections On The Art Of The State, for instance, is, if nothing else, a bravura twelve minutes of agitational aesthetics. A strict-time survey of U.K. society in crisis, it speaks with both fire in its belly and ire in its eyes, yet also the (self-conscious) knowledge that its images have to cut through all the more sharply if it's not to come over as empty noise. Accordingly, what we get are shifting, reflexive perspectives, the undercutting of an authorial position, plus a (possibly overplayed) coda in which scattergun shots of violence and ruin are sampled and salvaged over the obligatory beat.

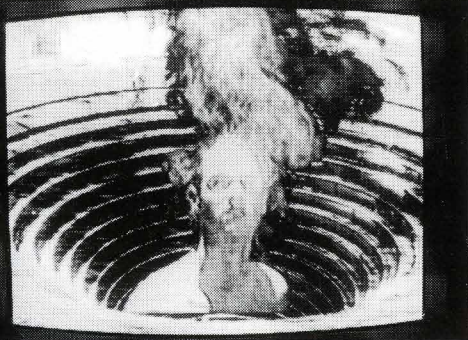
Video outfit Stakker also move in a similar direction; mirror the pace and flux of the media, then - manically - up the stakes. Eurotechno, (though it features no off-air images and is made up entirely of a computer graphic global circuit of colours and text) is scratch *in extremis*, almost *in excelsis*. Over an Acid House backdrop, images flicker and spin (every frame), appealing less to everyday sight than a 'hyper-real' dimension; an ecstasy of communication.

General  
Introduction:  
Jeremy  
Welsh

**TERRITORIES....The aesthetic, political, psychological; sexual, social and economic territories of contemporary Britain. Media pirates and garret dwellers, infiltrators and perpetrators, deconstructors and reconstructors roaming through a littered landscape of surplus images and subtle imperatives. Tapes that examine or comment upon the de-industrialised (media) landscape, tapes that celebrate electronic excess, tapes that propose new definitions of narrative, of visual communication, of political communication. Tapes that explore different ways of representing the self and the world around. Tapes that explore external social space or internal psychological space, and tapes that cross the border between the two. Tapes that are entertaining, exciting, provocative, frustrating or frustrated, vital and revitalising. Tapes that propose and map out directions for video and television art in the next decade.**

**Electric Eyes is not an exhaustive survey of video in the eighties, but aims simply to illustrate some of the major strands of development in the latter half of the decade.**





Nine Attrition Magnetic's Saboten Boi, a round-the-world 'trip' of an altogether more human dimension, also privileges this 'hyper-real' perspective, with the uncluttered view of the child, the only one to make sense of a global surfeit of images, bringing down pictures from the satellite static with the aid of Eighties computer toys.

## ECLECTIC EYES

For every artist who seeks to short-circuit the entangling mesh of the media with a high-tech 'electric' 'vision', there are others who have cut across its borders with a hybrid, eclectic eye. One of the major features of video technology in the 80's has been its patching in, and its pastiche, of disparate elements from our collective visual past; whether in the promiscuous borrowings of promos and ads, or in the -usually- more incisive re-presentations of video makers themselves. From the unashamed play-with-images of Liz Power's Cruise To The Universe, (in which paint-box graphics meet traditional Chinese animation) to the deliberate plays-on-texts of the video narratives of Mark Wilcox, George Barber, George Snow and Kate Meynell (Meynell's new Medusa included here), video artists have sketched out their own ironic, critical relation to the products of the other media that flits between homage, deconstruction and experimental hybrid form.

Simon Robertshaw's Biometrika similarly straddles genres. An almost unclassifiable visual polemic on the myths of mental illness, Robertshaw's tape mixes unswerving campaigning documentary with a multiform visual patchwork that draws out the complex issues of representation in mental health. A work in which each of the two different strands continually informs and enriches the other.

It also shouldn't pass without remark that a number of British avant-garde film-makers have also taken to (frowned-upon) video technology to extend and enhance an already existing experimental practice. Tina Keane's Faded Wallpaper, and David Larchers's E ETC, especially both use extensive video post-production in more or less freeform narratives that often combine video with Super-8 and 16mm.

## AFTER EFFECTS

Another significant trend of the last few years has been a gradual return to the (poetic) qualities of slowness, stillness, duration (though with less of the proscriptive rigour of the '70's structural approach). Often a glimmer of this lyrical use of video has come to us from abroad (the sheer shimmering beauty of tapes by Breda Beban and Hrvoje Horvatic, the clear visual focus of Bill Viola). Nonetheless, a strong tradition of work by British women artists - Kate Meynell, Catherine Elwes, Zoe Redman - also hold these qualities dear; often reflecting on the nature of 'home' - place of birth, interior landscape, local environment - without necessarily being 'home videos'. (Another feature of the last few years that ought to be mentioned is the clear, incremental improvement in 'professionalism' by tape-makers, male and female. Critics note it, commend it, though their editors tell them to come back when something more newsy is in the air.)

Mona Hatoum's Measures of Distance is a series of home thoughts from abroad, using the device of mother-daughter correspondence and stark, simple imagery to convey both a sense of personal exile and larger (political) themes of fragmentation and dispossession. Many of which recur in the work of young black/ethnic video makers like Isaac Julien and Pratibha Parmar.

Which just leaves the unique figure of Graham Young - whose Accidents in the Home series almost gives entropy its primal scene. It's hard to see Young's tapes as anything else but little parables of what occurs when we try and impose order on the world; comic tableaux of the hostility, the inscrutability of objects, upsetting the best laid plans of mice and men. And yet throughout, the artist's voice is always evident, always resonant: droll, subtle, quirky, unassuming; muddling through.

## PROGRAMMES

### Programme 1:

#### HEADS FULL OF NOISE

Younger videomakers (post scratch) & Tapes that address or reflect the babble of the media, the overloading of visual information. Visions of a Britain in decline and a global culture that threatens to swamp the world with information.

**Sentinel/Needle** Sven Harding 8.30 min

**Flight 1** John Goff 5.00 min

**Reflections on the Art of the State**

Pictorial Heroes 12.30 min

**Jump Cut** Michael Luenig 3.00 min

**Eurotechno** Stakker 10.00 min

**Saboten Boi** 9 a.m. 45.00 min

### Programme 2:

#### THE HOME FRONT

Home in two senses: the domestic environment and its contingent relationships & the domestic environment as a site of imaginative intervention; Home as the city, the country, the culture(s) of our society.

**Winter** Catherine Elwes 13.00 min

**Accidents in the Home No. 17: Gasfires**

Graham Young 2.30 min

**Measures of Distance** Mona Hatoum 15 min

**Spring** Catherine Elwes 8.30 min

**Accidents in the Home No. 8: Holiday Insurance**

Graham Young 4.30 min

**Sari Red** Pratibha Parmar 13.00 min

**Accidents in the Home No.15: Domestiques**

Graham Young 2.30 min

**Territories** Isaac Julien/Sankofa 25.00 min

**Accidents in the Home No.7: To Swing a Cat**

No.6: Putter Graham Young 11.00 min

### Programme 3:

#### REWRITING

Dissolving definitions of Art, Politics, Personal Space or Social Space; New approaches to narrative, new visions of the landscape, natural or industrial, new combinations of image and text in poetic conjunction. Merging documentary form with visual experiment and combining ancient myth with contemporary narratives.

**Out of the Ashes** Marion Urch 10.00 min

**Medusa** Katherine Meynell 18.00 min

**Electron** Judith Goddard 5.00 min

**Green on the Horizon** Sanderson/Ball 18.00 min

**The Stream** Chris Meigh Andrews 15.00 min

**Biometrika** Simon Robertshaw 12.00 min

**Factory** Jeremy Welsh 14.00 min

**A Cruise to The Universe** Liz Power 4.00 min

### Programme 4:

#### RE/SCREENING

Works by film makers who have increasingly come to use video in recent years, and whose productions are often cross fertilisations between the two media. The spirit of the experimental film tradition resurfacing through video's manipulation of the image.

**The Flying Trunk** David Finch 14.30 min

**Faded Wallpaper** Tina Keane 15.00 min

**E ETC** David Larcher 69.00 min