

RECENT BRITISH VIDEO



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John Adams

Neil Armstrong

Ian Bourn

Catherine Elwes

David Finch

Sera Furneaux

Mick Hartney

Steve Hawley

Tina Keane

Richard Layzell

Antonia Sherman & Mark Lucas

Elsa Stansfield & Madelon Hooykaas

Caroline Stone

Margaret Warwick

Jeremy Welsh

Sponsored by the British Council

RECEIVED
BRITISH
VIDEO

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INSTITUTIONS/CONJUNCTURES/PRACTICES

Very little independent/avant-garde British video has been seen in the USA in general or in New York in particular. One suspects that this first major show for several years will be subjected to that close scrutiny which is reserved for the cultural "other"; that curious gaze which detects the threat of difference while seeking out the reassurance of similarity. I feel, therefore, a great responsibility for the selection and contextualisation of the works to which this catalogue serves as an introduction.

My intention is to make the works approachable – and to some extent consumable – while allowing their difference to emerge and insist. This ambivalent project which involves both an invitation and an exclusion necessitates the writing of a history (the socio-aesthetic context) and the elaboration of an aesthetic (that which constitutes the similarity of the works but does not collapse their difference).

Shows such as this are usually attempts to survey and therefore "represent" a much larger number of works. Such a strategy usually involves either the employment of a theme or the notion of a representative selection. The strength of each approach is precisely the weakness of the other. In the first case similarity is stressed over and above difference. In the second case difference is stressed over and above similarity. I am approaching, albeit cautiously, the very issues with which this **selection** is concerned. The key terms are **difference** and means and modes of **representation** – the very terms upon which an **oppositional practice** is predicated.

This selection of works is unashamedly partial. It does not attempt to "represent" the breadth and richness of independent video practice in Britain. Nor does it attempt to provide a linear, chronological historical overview. Instead it focuses upon the very issues which make such a representation impossible to select and such a history impossible to write.

All that these works have in common is their difference from something else. They are all "difficult" (in the sense that a child is said to be difficult) in that they seek to resist or stand apart from dominant ideological practices. It is precisely these issues which fascinate me as both writer and independent video producer and it is for these reasons that I have chosen to bring together these works and write this particular history under the title of this show.

Modernism

It is possible to identify a modernist and a post-modernist phase in avant-garde British video. Each phase has practices, institutions and critical discourses appropriate to it. The conjunctural determinations of these phases can be located in a variety of practices and institutions.

The video portapak became available in Britain in the early seventies at a time of national financial optimism and economic expansion. The sixties had seen the emergence of an exuberant youth culture which had generated its own economic units and cultural forms as a new market was created for a new and much younger generation of consumers. The revolutionary politics of '68 tended, in Britain, to focus upon confrontation with the educational practices, power structures and ideologies of the education institutions. Significantly it was in the art schools that the voices of dissent were heard the loudest. The alternative radical press flourished as new and specific cultural groups sought representation, self-recognition and affirmation. Pirate radio stations challenged the BBC's broadcasting monopoly of the radio frequencies. The late sixties and early seventies saw a progressive liberalisation of the legislation which maintained social inequalities based upon race, gender and sexual orientation. At the same time that the students of Guildford and Hornsey Colleges of Art were occupying their colleges and restructuring art education in favour of a network or non-specialist system, the arts themselves were entering a new phase of experimentation and cross-fertilization.

Artists had begun to work with forms such as installation, performance and mixed media which tended to cut across categories and definitions. Many younger artists felt the need to construct new institutions for the production and exhibition of work as an alternative to the commercial galleries and forms of patronage. These usually took the form of artist co-operative exhibition spaces which sprang up throughout the country and created new and different opportunities for production and consumption. In painting and sculpture modernism had reached its zenith. The semiotic shift begun by Cubism's rupture of sign and referent had eventually culminated in the play of pure signifiers free of any signifieds beyond the realm of aesthetics itself. Painting had achieved almost total reflexivity; it spoke only the conditions of its own existence. This far the history is not dissimilar to that of North America itself. But what was to determine the specificity of avant-garde British video was the form of modernism which it took up and developed to its own conclusions.

This entanglement of early avant-garde British video with late modernism requires further elaboration. There was, of course, nothing inevitable about it. One aspect of video practice was already establishing its difference from contemporary art ideology by moving towards the conventions (and dominant televisual ideologies) of agit-prop. In Britain, avant-garde video never fully identified itself with, or was accepted by, the traditional institutions and structures of the commercial art world. Its first practitioners were the very artists who had instigated the development of alternative exhibition spaces. Video technology became available, and a practice was developed for it, at the moment when traditional categories and definitions were being most forcefully challenged. As a consequence the technology was taken up in a number of hybrid practices such as "video/performance" in which its role was more of an adjunct to or expansion of other media and practices.

Several British artists were, however, devoting themselves almost exclusively to the video medium and they recognized the need for a specific video practice to be developed. It is important to note the extent to which avant-garde film suggested models of organisation for this early attempt to establish video as an autonomous practice. Artist filmmakers had been struggling for several years to develop their own practice as an identifiable, autonomous and, most importantly, fundable aesthetic.

In the late sixties, as many younger artists began to work outside the commercial gallery structure, the State – in the form of the Arts Council of Great Britain – took on increasing importance in the funding and exhibition of alternative aesthetic practices. The two most significant new committees were the short-lived Special Projects Committee, and the Artist's film Committee which was set up in response to increasing pressure from artists working in film for a specialist body apart from that of the visual arts. Avant-garde filmmakers set up the London Filmmakers Co-op to handle the production and distribution of their films.

Artist video producers formed a pressure group: **London Video Arts**, which was to become a distribution, exhibition and production center supported almost exclusively by the newly formed Artists' Film and Video Committee. An aspect of the early membership of LVA which was specific to video was that almost all of the first steering committee members were, or were to become, in some way related to colleges and schools of art. Many artists in Britain rely upon part-time teaching in art colleges to scrape together a living. Equally, undergraduate art education in Britain tends to be organized around an atelier system, in which teaching by example is practiced by an artist rather than an educationalist. At this time many art colleges were setting up media departments and investing in video technology. This came as a response to both the new developments in cross-fertilisation in the arts (art colleges in Britain have always maintained a close contact with the professional art world) and the increasing fascination with new information technology, which was making its presence felt in educational institutions in the form of audio-visual aids in media-dependent teaching practices. Early British video therefore became inextricably linked with undergraduate and post-graduate art education, both in terms of its means of production and the development of its aesthetic. A consequence of this institutional conjuncture was that avant-garde video found itself face to face with the traditional arts of painting and sculpture. Video not only had to establish its own practices but also had to argue for the aesthetic validity of these practices. By developing a modernist practice, video would stand on an equal footing with other traditional art practices. At the same time, however, it would have the advantage of being recognized in its difference as a result of the modernist foregrounding of the inherent properties of the medium. Only such a project would guarantee the survival of the current means of production and the future support of the state funding bodies. It was these factors which constituted the conjunctural determination of the specific forms of modernist video.

Late modernism in painting took the form of a reflexivity which extruded all representation or meaning other than that which resulted from the purely formal play of signifiers. Avant-garde film practice had become "about" acetate, optical reprinting, movement, repetition and duration with an equal stress being placed upon the pro-filmic event, the process of image production and the projection event itself.

In modernist video there was also a constant attention paid to the possibilities of the technology and its means of image production. In some sense one can compare such work to modernist work in film in that there is a concentration upon the processes of image production. Yet there is a significant difference between the media which concerns the method of image registration. In video the image only appears at the moment of "projection". Videotape does not offer itself as a material surface to be worked upon. Hence the modernist attitude becomes directed away from the materials of the medium itself towards systems and signifying procedures. Separate units of image production – camera, recorder, mixer, monitor – can be brought into differing and complex relations but the producer is always kept at a distance from the actual electronic processes of image coding and registration. Many works focused attention upon the video monitor object either by retaping images from monitors in order to emphasize edge and frame or by perceptual plays between the screen as an image surface and the transparent front of a box.

The impossible contradiction which arose as a result of this attempt by video to take up the procedures of modernism was that there was an inevitable and constant confrontation with illusionism and representation – the very antitheses of the modernist object. Although film is also inextricably caught up with the photo-graphic representation of the world, film acetate can be marked, coloured, manipulated, re-filmed and reprocessed. Video technology simply refuses to be tampered with in the same way. The very drive to establish the ontological autonomy of video brought the artist up against the issues which constantly displaced the terms of his/her project. By attempting modernism, video practice in fact became embroiled within practices of signification. Unlike the media and practices of painting and sculpture, video technology and dominant televisual practices do not "belong" to the artist. The technology was not developed with him/her in mind and televisual "literacy" was established and is controlled by the television industry. Video's attempt at modernism produced a second unexpected dimension which was the establishment of a critical relation to dominant technology and its representational practices.

The curious result of this set of factors was that much early avant-garde British video turned the medium away from the world and in upon itself in order to achieve a high level of reflexivity. But, it then made deeply political claims for its subversion of dominant modes of representation. At the heart of this contradiction lay the seeds of a truly oppositional practice.

Post-Modernism

The terminology of critical and theoretical discourse rapidly palls and loses specificity. Sometimes redefinitions are necessary to pull terminology back into a theoretically precise space. I do not use the term **post-modernism** in the sense of a discarding of the modernist project or its "inevitable" supercession by the most recent form of avant-garde practice (a notion which is in some senses the very principle of modernism itself). The connotations which I intend to deploy are those of development and redefinition. Post-modernism does not transcend modernism but rather learns from it and develops its potentials. Essential to post-modernism is the notion of an oppositional practice. It is evident that as far as video is concerned, the engagement with modernism set the stage for the development of such a practice.

By the late seventies LVA had established an international library of over two hundred videotapes, developed a small scale production center in the heart of London's film sector and had a history of several years of exhibitions on a weekly basis in the Acme and later the AIR galleries in London. Avant-garde video was now fully recognized as a fundable practice by the Arts Council of Great Britain which instigated several video fellowships for periods of up to one year at a number of major polytechnic media centers and/or fine art departments. This policy was an attempt to promote video practice without having to invest large amounts of capital funding in a single production center at a time of State cuts in the Arts Council budget. This funding policy further entangled video practice with art college media departments which were, by this time, more secure – at least as far as their proven aesthetic status was concerned.

In the mid-seventies many of these departments had begun to make use of radical semiotic theory in their daily teaching. The attempt to establish a "science of signifying practices" represented by semiotic theory was taken up as a theoretical practice to accompany, inform and displace avant-garde film and video practice. By involving itself with modernist principles to the extent that it had, video practice had inevitably found itself asking deeply political and theoretical questions about the means and modes of televisual production of meaning. Radical semiotics was set on a similar course. The debate that ensued at every level of avant-garde film and video culture was to result in the rejection of the keystone of modernism – the denial of representation – and the development of modernism's progressive and radical potentials. Two of these radical aspects of modernism deserve special mention. They are **reflexivity** (or in post-modernist terminology **deconstruction**) and the **denial of the author**.

Semiotic theory began to provide the analysis of ideologically dominant televisual and semiotic practices of representation which would allow video makers to re-evaluate these two aspects of modernism and combine them with a new perspective on cultural politics to form the basis of a post-modernist oppositional practice. The Women's Movement provided a major political context for such an oppositional practice. The questions that women had been asking for several years tended to concentrate upon issues of representation and the ideological effects upon women's consciousness of dominant media representations of femininity. Feminist analysis suggested that power structures and practices of representation were inextricably linked and that the ideological had a specific effectivity which helped to mask contradictions in the social formation and maintain the dominance of the status quo. These observations led to the notion of a cultural politics which would involve the making of **interventions** at the ideological level in order to deconstruct and de-realize the fictional worlds constructed by dominant modes of representation. Interventionist strategies involved the setting up of organisations such as CIRCLES which places women's work in distribution.

CIRCLES was started in 1980 by women to promote and distribute women's works in a variety of media: films, tapes, slides, video, performance and other related activities. By presenting women's work in this way they aim to show its richness and diversity and the threads which run through and link it together and to also encourage discussion and support for other women to make and show their own work on their own terms.*

The Post-Modernist Work

Post-modernist video has not given up the deconstructive and reflexive separation of signifier and signified in order to reinstate the regimes of Realism and Representationalism. Modernism extruded the signified. Post-modernism re-introduced it, but displaced it in its relationship to the signifier in order to better understand the ideological effects of dominant televisual forms. This relationship of signifier to signified is reconstructed cautiously and problematically to demonstrate that no meaning is given or natural but is, instead, the product of a signifying practice. The world is not reflected in the practice of representation but rather is seen to be a product of it. It is precisely a fiction.

In its most radical instances, late modernism sought to deny the notion of the author as the transcendental source of a work's meaning. It consequently detached itself from conventional art historical models of heightened creativity and the ultimate expression of this creativity in the form of the masterpiece. Marks of authorship were expelled with the signified. This radical suppression of the author had as its concomitant a foregrounding of those aspects of a work which constituted it as a cultural text. Julia Kristeva has used the term "intertextuality" to describe this cross-referencing of aesthetic texts which tends to challenge the uniqueness of the individual art object. In post-modernist video this quality of intertextuality allows the work to be read in terms of its cultural and ideological resonances rather than in its capacity to "represent" the consciousness of its author. It becomes evident that the meaning of a work is precisely a social construction.

If the works in this show have anything in common it is their relation to this post-modernist context. Many of the works demonstrate a concern with narrativity – the dominant fictional mode. There is a strong tendency towards the discursive with an overt use of televisual devices. Frequently writing and speech accompany a devaluation of the purely "visual" as an overriding aesthetic. Many of the works conduct a critical analysis of the forms and themes of dominant television. Unlike earlier work, they do not construct dominant television as an irredeemably "bad object", but rather attempt to rework modes of representation such as soap opera to their own advantage.

All the works have been produced since 1980. They indicate a few of the possibilities open to an adventurous oppositional practice.

*Quoted from CIRCLES Catalogue No. 2.

Stuart Marshall 1983

I would like to thank Steve Rogers and Jennifer Williams of the British American Arts Association for their advice and assistance in the organisation of this exhibition.

John Adams

SENSIBLE SHOES 1983 color 10 minutes

John Adams was born in 1953. He studied at Jacob Kramer College and Newcastle upon Tyne Fine Art Department where he currently lectures in video. He has been a member of The Basement Group in Newcastle since 1979 and has a commercial video company **Playback Video**. He has received four awards from the Arts Council of Great Britain between 1980 and 1982.

1978: Video '78, Coventry. **Newcastle Festival**, Newcastle. **1979: Video '79**, Coventry. **1980: Artists' Video**, Washington, Co. Durham. **The Basement**, Newcastle. **1982: Expanded Media Show**, Sheffield Polytechnic. **London Video Arts**, London. **Video '82**, Coventry. **Midland Group**, Nottingham. **Paris Biennale**, Paris, France. **Orchard Gallery**, Dublin, Eire.

He has shown work with The Basement Group at **1981: Cairn**, Paris, France. **Events Week**, Coventry. **Centro Lavoro Arte**, Milan, Italy. **A La Limite**, Dijon, **Etage 3**, Besacon, **Lieux Des Relations**, Lyon, **Maison Des Jeunesse**, Lyons, France. **1982: Internationalist Festival**, San Francisco. **Galerie Diagonale**, Paris, **Nouveaux Mixage**, Caen, **Cairn**, Paris, France. **1983: Arnolfini Gallery**, Bristol. **London Filmmakers Co-op**, **London Video Arts**, London.



I love editing, I really do. But I can't talk about my work unless I'm drunk. I was in a bar the other night with a woman. I was drunk then. We both were. I was trying to persuade her to do the voice-over for **Sensible Shoes**. This is what I said.

"Well it's about this woman in a room on her own. She's watching the TV and reading the newspaper. But not really watching. And not really reading. Day-dreaming mostly. Reminiscing about a one-time lover and fantasizing about a new acquaintance. He's fantasizing too. In another room. But not about her. He looks a lot like me. In fact he is me. I play the man. He's watching TV also. A different program, at a different time maybe. Time is important. Manipulated. And words will come up on the screen. They are important too but in a different way. They will coincide with the voice-over. There are lots of other images too, but a lot of the time the screen will be blank. No, we don't see the woman and sometimes the visuals don't match the voice. And someone else is in another room at the same time. That's me too. But this time it **is** me. I'll be deciding what happens to the woman and the man. It's going to be great. Sound effects and low key lighting. And a 'phone call. That's important. What else? Romance and violence. No sex though. It's not that sort of tape. That's it. But there's a surprise ending. And you see it differently the second time around OK. Will you do it? She said, "Do you know what the difference is between alcoholics and drunks?"

I said 'No, what?'

She said, "we don't have to go to those silly meetings"

I'd heard it before but I'm really generous. I give my friends all the best lines.

John Adams 1983

Neil Armstrong

WHEN WAS NOW? 1982 color 11 minutes

Neil Armstrong was born in 1955 in Leeds, England. He studied at Harrogate College of Art and Newcastle Polytechnic Fine Art Department. He worked as an art therapist in a psychiatric hospital, left to pursue his work – which was mainly performance, multi-media based – and then gradually moved towards video as a means of exercising greater control. In 1982 he held the Arts Council of Great Britain Video Bursary at Brighton Polytechnic. Apart from Britain he has shown in Holland and has toured Canada with the financial assistance of the British Council.



American TV was a quizzical toy at first. We'd sit around anytown New Jersey laughing at the ads from our 'informed' position. In fact most of the time the ads were more interesting than the formula programs in between. Then, inevitably, the novelty wore off. You could visualize them doing it. OK the suckers have nothing better to do, let's break them in gently. The TV spider politely tap dancing for the great fly populace. Come into my fish bowl said the friendly piranha. The spider waited – don't want the victim buzzing anxiously around the room, perhaps directing his attention to more succulent morsels. Give him time to get interested. Then – clunk – Hi, I'm Crazy Eddie – clunk – Hi, I'm the new Crazy Dog Food – clunk – Hi, I'm the new Crazy American Dream and – zip – back to the film. Not too bad, most victims with us still. Twenty five per cent have moved closer to the screen. Try as they may to escape, the ads come with ever increasing frequency, pulverizing the flies into submission. Soon there's more ads than film – enough retina stimulus to make a blind man deaf. Sod fact and fiction – Hi, I'm the new Crazy Dog Food – but who murdered Mary the middle-class housewife? I must know. And they tell me. One hundred and twenty seven ads later they tell me. It was Jim, her second husband from Denver, who stood to make some money on their big house if he killed her. It was in her name you see. Oh really. How interesting.

"Didn't see you down the bar last night, Neil, where were you?"

"Oh, I was glued to the set". The spider burped. I started thinking when was NOW?

Some time later we were playing a game of Monopoly. By two in the morning three of the competitors had gone home, casualties of more cunning capitalist manoeuvres. Well somebody's got to lose. Two of us battled further into the early hours. I was determined not to give in easily. I was under no illusions. I hadn't a hope in hell of winning, but I could probably prolong the game for another hour if I was lucky. She wanted to know if I'd submit. I proposed we called it a draw. No chance. When the end inevitably came we packed the game up and went to bed. No trumpets blew, there was no great celebration, we just went to bed. I started thinking, when was NOW?

And then in the pub, with nothing to say. Somebody tells a joke. We smile and laugh at the telling and groan at the punchline. He tells another one. We groan in unison. And again, only this time I know the joke. I feel very powerful. I stand in silence, smirking. I start thinking, when was NOW?

It has always seemed an irony to me that when you needed and could enjoy the privileges of money – when you were young – you never could get it. But as you got older it seemed to accumulate at an ever increasing and redundant rate. Time is money. It was then that it came to me. 'Young' equates with speed – of movement and of mind – any ad man knows that you can stretch or shrink the appearance of time by how fast you put your message across. The older I got the quicker time passed, but I seemed to get less done. I couldn't keep up. It was a perfect idea – to commit a crime in order to experience time – to stop time and live in that moment – knowing that the penalty for failure would be a surfeit of time imposed by a jealous society in all its interminable slowness.

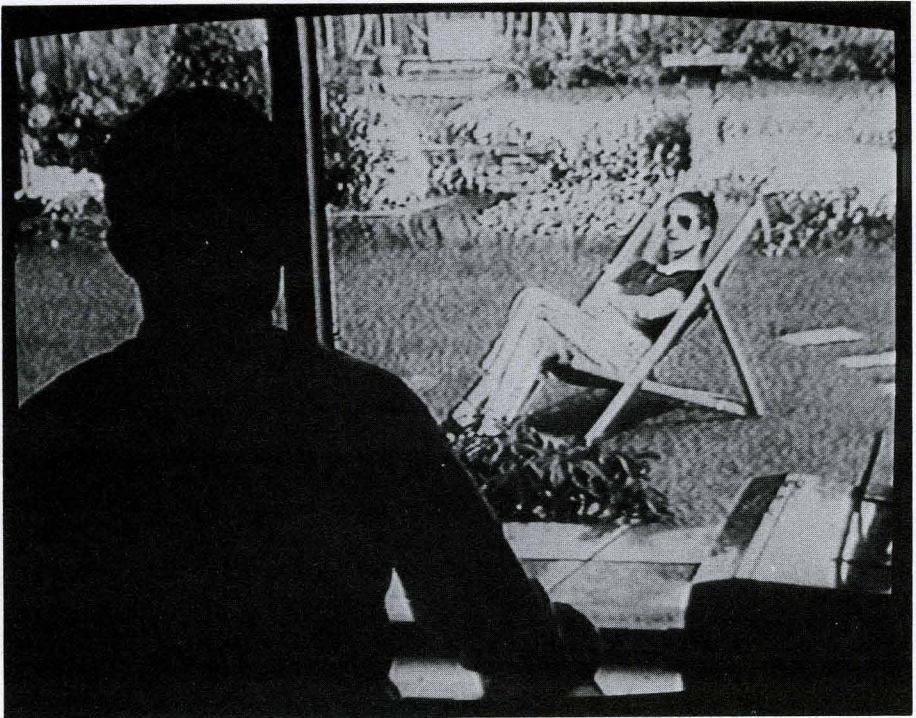
Neil R. Armstrong 1983

Ian Bourn

THE END OF THE WORLD (Don't You Just Know It?) 1982 color 10 minutes

Ian Bourn was born in London England in 1953. He studied at Ealing School of Art and at The Royal College of Art. He is currently the Arts Council of Great Britain Video Fellow at Sheffield Polytechnic.

1979: Acme Gallery, London. **Hayward Gallery**, London. **Royal Institute of British Architects**, London. **1980: London Filmmakers Co-op**, London. **The Basement**, Newcastle. **Open Studios**, Brighton. **A Suitcase for Rottweil**, West Germany. **33**, Luton. **1981: Institute of Contemporary Arts**, London. **Air Gallery**, London. **Tate Gallery**, London. **Video Festival**, Bracknell. **1982: Arnolfini Gallery**, Bristol. **Brighton Film and Video Workshops**, Brighton.



A tea set piece in peaceful Wanstead – the garden of England. News of the world, this lazy Sunday, it's Happy Ever After for Mr. and Mrs. . . . Tea for two. Set and match. Adam and Eve, through a glass darkless, in the wars of the roses. This side of the drainpipe all in love is fair. The buzzing of the bees in the . . .

In keeping up with the Jones', the grass is always greener when it comes to DIY . . . So why was I born to idleness?

Yes, there are three steps to heaven and every battle of the sexes has its Siegfried Lines. And a lot of hot air. Storms in tea cups. Chinese wrist-burns. Zen flesh. Home sweet home.

"You're the cream in my coffee", thinks Jack (the tray), quite contrary in house and garden. Is this the last of the summer wine? Bugger the neighbours. With or without. One lump or two. No. Nothing but blue skies from here to eternity. In our compendium of games.

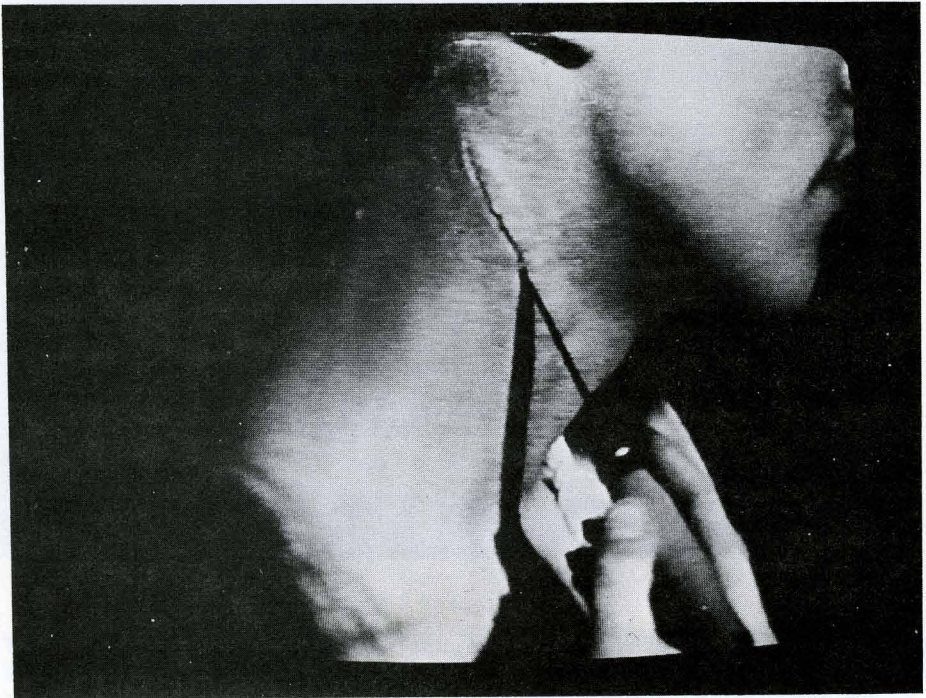
Ian Bourn 1983

Catherine Elwes

KENSINGTON GORE 1981 color 15 minutes

Catherine Elwes studied at The Slade School of Art and the Department of Environmental Media at The Royal College of Art. She worked for three years in the make-up department of the BBC. She has been a member of the Women Artists Collective, was a co-curator of **Women's Images of Men** and **About Time** at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London 1980. She makes regular contributions to Time Out, Undercut, Art Monthly, Feminist Art News, Aspects, PS, and Performance magazine. She is currently a visiting lecturer at North East London Polytechnic.

1977: The Women's Arts Alliance, The Women's Festival, Action Space, London. **Kvindegalleriet**, Copenhagen, Denmark. **1978: Acme Gallery**, London. **1979: Institute of Contemporary Arts**, London. **1980: London Filmmakers Co-op, About Time**, The Institute of Contemporary Arts, London/Arnolfini Gallery, Bristol/Third Eye, Glasgow, Scotland. **1981: The Basement**, Newcastle. **National Video Festival**, Bracknell. **1982: Women Live**, Newcastle and London. **Institute of Contemporary Arts, Air Gallery**, London. **Midland Group**, Nottingham. **1983: Video Roma**, Rome, Italy. **Institute of Contemporary Arts**, London.



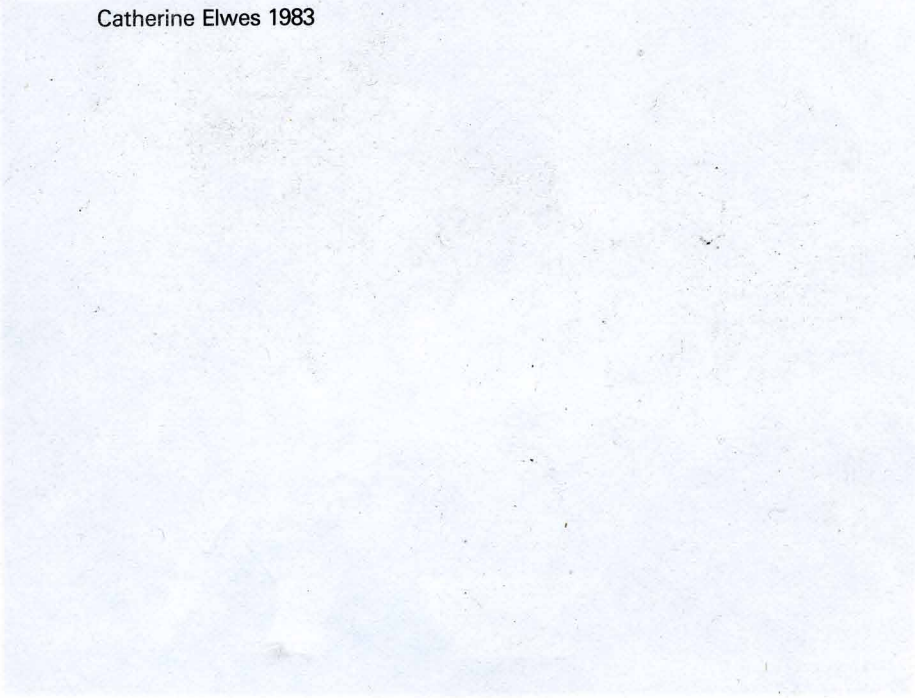
Thinking back on Kensington Gore

After lengthy cosmetic preparations on a man's neck, I take a knife and slowly slice through a built-up area of wax leaving a clean, bloodless cut. A scarcely suppressed "Yuk" invariably escapes from the audience. Is this a conscious choice to ignore at a distance, the possibility of mutilation? Should we, rather, see the viewer's reactions as deeply ingrained credulity – years of subtle indoctrination passing off the hidden ideologies of TV and high culture as irrefutable truth? Either way, watching a painstaking but painless simulation of a slit throat is apparently uncomfortable and most people (in Britain at least) are relieved to laugh at the slapstick that punctuates the spectacle and happily shift into structuralist interpretations of the distancing devices I use: fragmented narrative, alternative modes of storytelling etc. The actual violence, both self-inflicted and as perpetrated on an extremely phallic male neck (not to mention the violence of the editing) – much of this has gone undiscussed and my personal motives remain unquestioned.

After years of insistently pointing to my subjective experience as the personal in 'The Personal is Political', I came to seriously consider issues of spectatorship – possibly to give me me me a rest, but equally through a sense that a feminist/journalistic account of my trials and tribulations was becoming peculiarly impersonal. Some more indirect approach might inadvertently reveal deeper mysteries, greater complexities and unexpected insights. A tape dealing with illusionism and spectatorship is an extremely indirect way of cutting someone's throat, and where the personal was previously discussed only in terms of the political, it now disappears under the interest generated by a semi-structuralist sub-plot. Am I disappointed? I'm not sure.

Political/personal, public/private, intellect/instinct, head/heart, these eternal oppositions infiltrate every aspect of human endeavour – social, psychic and cultural. Where the artist attempts some form of synthesis, the viewer or critic can be relied upon to redraw demarcation lines generally by cutting out anything that doesn't fit the category to which the work is being consigned. But the artist her/himself is equally susceptible to the charms of familiar patterns and in **Kensington Gore** among others, I attempt to break old habits and reconcile some of those opposites which alternately produce mechanistic art – predictable, rational and accountable, or a spew of chaotic subjectivity. Around this objective revolve a constellation of formal and political concerns, many private needs, a host of anecdotal, sensory and visual preoccupations and a simple delight in the magic of video which makes my dreams come true, if only for a moment – or two.

Catherine Elwes 1983



David Finch

THE FOG 1982 color 13 minutes

David Finch studied Social and Political Sciences at St. Catherine's College Cambridge, Film Studies at the Polytechnic of Central London and Visual Communication at Goldsmiths' College. He works at the London Filmmakers Co-op and teaches cinematography at the Fulham and South Kensington Institute. He has received two awards from the Arts Council of Great Britain.

Film and Videography: **1979: Tunnel Vision**, 58mm 9 minutes. **The Mysterious Case of Joey Hutchinson**, ½ inch video (with Fish Theatre). **1981: The Fall Of The House Of Usher**, 16mm 30 minutes. **1982: Troilus and Cressida**, S8mm 11 minutes. **The Fog**, ¾ inch video 13 minutes.



The Fog is a skeletal version of a short story by Arthur Conan Doyle, **The Bruce-Partington Plans**, in which the mislaying of a state secret is 'solved' as a crime. The fog is the enigma at the edge of all stories, but here it is especially the smokescreen of (British) TV journalism. The TV news story is especially oppressive because it covers up even the knowledge of our own ignorance; but still somehow we know that we don't know.

For me **The Fog** is a change of direction away from my previous work in film in which specific literary texts (Poe's **The Fall Of The House Of Usher** and Shakespeare's **Troilus And Cressida**) are drastically retold and used as examples for implied general criticisms of literary/cinematic narrative. The relation of **The Fog** to its literary text is more tenuous. Using video for almost the first time opened up for me a new point of reference: television and its representations of the contemporary and the overtly political.

The film that I am working on at present feels for relations between the 'stories' of TV news, newspapers and advertising and the way in which we think of our lives in terms of stories, 'life stories' which also draw on the cliches and genres of cinematic and literary fiction.

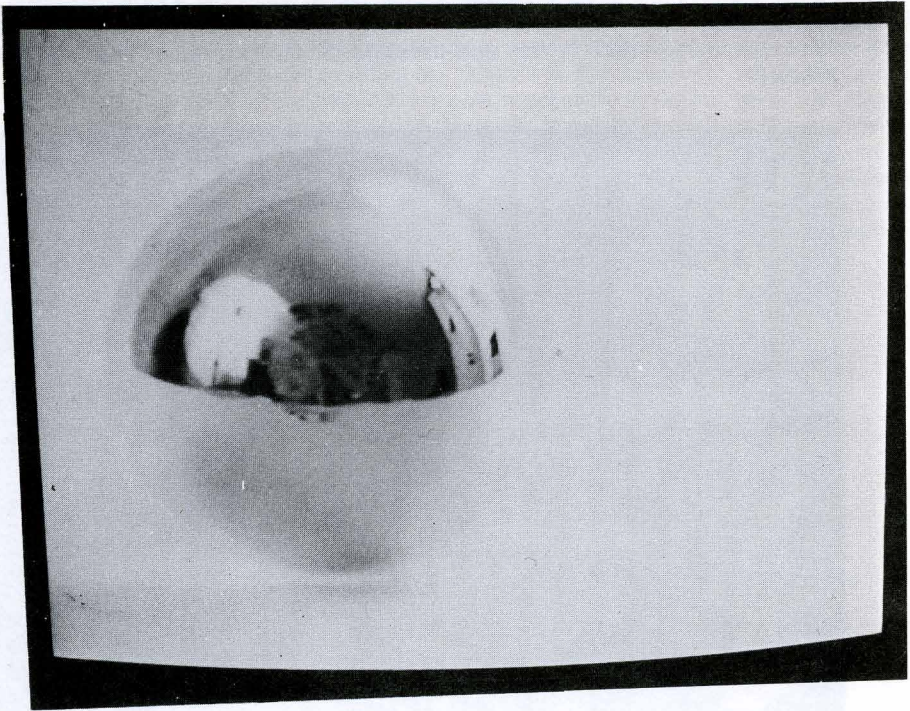
The personal and the political meet, among other places, in the 'fictional', where it seems to me that the male hero is still very much in control; I think that it's worth challenging that control and contesting the forms of pleasure in fiction.

David Finch 1983

Sera Furneaux

14 MINUTES 1982 color 14 minutes

Sera Furneaux studied at St Martin's School of Art, Maidstone College of Art and at the Department of Environmental Media at The Royal College of Art. She has received two awards from the Arts Council of Great Britain. **1978: Acme Gallery, London. 1980: Acme Gallery, London. 1982: Air Gallery, Institute of Contemporary Arts, Tate Gallery, London.**



Thing presented to sense material thing person or thing of pitiable or ridiculous aspect that to which action or feeling is directed thing aimed at end purpose thing external to the thinking mind or subject to conditionally upon the assumption of with submission to metaphysics the conscious self as opp. its attributes theme of discussion or representation matter treated of or dealt with any possible object of thought including persons material objects events qualities circumstances utterances & acts a person or animal regarded in contempt or pity or affection as impersonal or inanimate the course of events one's belongings or luggage or clothes or implements a sixtieth of an hour a short time exact point in time very small precise going into detail pocket oxford dictionary definitions.

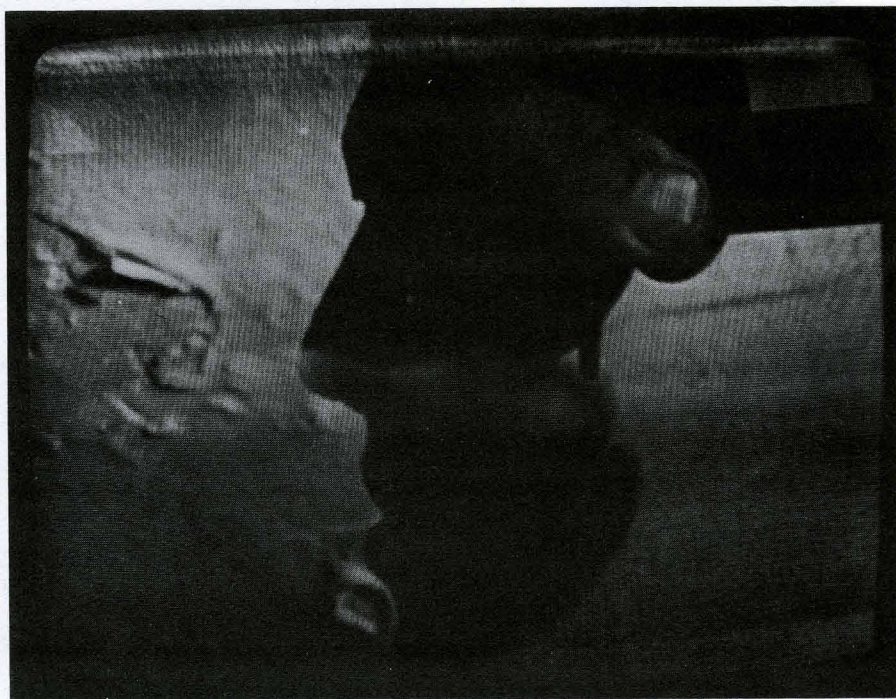
Sera Furneaux 1983

Mick Hartney

DICKLER'S WHAMMY 1982 color 17 minutes

Mick Hartney was born in London in 1946. He studied at the University of Sussex and is currently Head of the Audio Visual Unit in the Faculty of Art and Design at Brighton Polytechnic. He began working with video in 1972.

1979: Acme Gallery, London. **Studiogalerie**, Warsaw, Poland. **Kunstlerhaus**, Dusseldorf, West Germany. **The Kitchen**, New York. **1980: National Video Festival**, Bracknell. **Artists' Video**, Washington, Tyne and Wear. **Air Gallery**, London. **1981: Acme Gallery, London Filmmakers Co-op, Institute of Contemporary Arts**, London. **The Bank**, Amsterdam. **Videomaart**, Maastricht, Holland. **The Tate Gallery**, London. **1982: Institute of Contemporary Arts, Tate Gallery**, London. **British Council Touring Show**, Japan. **1983: Video Installation Show**, Air Gallery, London. **Montevideo Art Gallery**, Amsterdam, Holland.



Even though I have long been concerned with maintaining a tension between the illusory aspects of video depiction – the possibility of treating images in a plastic manner, folding cutting, collaging etc. – and the stubborn way in which those depictions maintain a psychological link with the originating subject (particularly in the case of portraiture), this is the first time I have dealt directly with narrative form. There is a story line to **Dickler's Whammy**, but it remains ambivalent, fuelled by fragments of sound and image which hint at an extension of events, outwards, forwards and backwards in (fictional) time, yet ultimately thwarted by the enforced stasis of the protagonists. He and she remain trapped, on or off screen, by the impossible *mise en scène*, through which an identical space – and a congruent delineation of that space – serves in the case of each as the setting for what purport to be separate and simultaneous contributions to a network of relationships. From the web of sexual and manipulative interplay emerges, unseen, a third personage, who can only be located behind the camera – or, in your case, in front of the screen.

Mick Hartney 1983

Steve Hawley

BAD REASONS 1981-2 color 20 minutes

Steve Hawley was born in 1952 in Wakefield, England. He studied at Bradford College and Brighton Polytechnic Fine Art Department. He is currently the Arts Council of Great Britain Video Fellow at the North East London Polytechnic where he also teaches.

1982: Art for Boxes, Tate Gallery, London. **Video Art and Technology**, Serpentine Gallery, London. **1983: Institute of Contemporary Arts**, London. **Video Installation Show**, Air Gallery, London.



BAD REASONS is an attempt to come to grips with the power of language and the inadequacies of reason. The piece is in three parts.

In the first part, **The Undistributed Middle And Other Fallacies In The Home**, a man walks around his room obsessively constructing syllogisms but keeps getting them wrong. In his confusion of logic and emotion he resembles Star Trek's Mr. Spock, in whom either the Venusian half predominates ("Logically speaking Captain, your fear of death is completely irrational."), or the human ("Mr. Scott, I am in love."). The fallacious arguments are preceded by titles couched in the forbidding, yet poetic, language of formal logic – 'The Fallacy of Illicit Process Of The Major Term' – and lead to conclusions which are not susceptible to reasoned proof in any case.

The second part, **We Have Fun Drawing Conclusions**, takes as its source material a series of images from children's learn-to-read books. The stereotypes and idealized attitudes are the premises, if you like, on the basis of which the conclusions of our adult lives are reached. And bad premises make for bad conclusions. But in another sense the images project a view of childhood which looks plausible (looks, on the face of it, very similar to my own) but which is separated from actuality by a huge gulf, on the other side of which all farmers are kind, all good girls help their mummies, all skies are sunny and we all have fun.

In the final section, **Divers, Divers, Can I Have Your Attention Please**, two images – one of a man constructing logical arguments and one of a swimming pool – are restructured and finally combined by editing. The rigid order of the formal language is chopped up and re-formed, firstly into a rhyming sequence, then into a rhythmical conclusion in which all intellectual meaning is drained out of the words and is replaced by a different kind of understanding. In a similar way the chaos of the swimming pool has order imposed upon it.

Steve Hawley 1983

Tina Keane

DEMOLITION / ESCAPE 1983 color 15 minutes

Tina Keane is a member of **Circles Women's Work** in Distribution. She teaches at St Martin's School of Art, The Slade School and the Byam Shaw School. She has received several awards from the Arts Council of Great Britain.

1977: Acme Gallery Women's Festival, Action Space, **Air Gallery**, London. **National Eisteddfod of Wales**. **1978: Institute of Contemporary Arts, Serpentine Gallery, Hayward Gallery**, London. **Peterloo Gallery**, Manchester. **Arts Lab**, Birmingham. **Cavallino Gallery**, Venice, Italy. **1979: 9th International Painting Exhibition Video Section**, Knokke-Heist, Belgium. **Riverside Studios, Battersea Arts Centre**, London. **1980: International Women Artists Festival**, Copenhagen. **Edinburgh Film Festival**, Scotland. **Women's Own**, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London. **About Time**, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London / **Arnolfini Gallery**, Bristol. **1981: Tate Gallery, Four Corners, Battersea Arts Centre, London Filmmakers Co-op**, London. **Franklin Furnace, Collective for Living Cinema**, New York. **Midland Group**, Nottingham. **1982: Third Eye Centre**, Glasgow, Scotland. **Women Live at London Filmmakers Co-op**, London / **Arnolfini Gallery**, Bristol. **Tate Gallery**, London. **Edinburgh Film Festival**, Scotland. **Tyneside Film Festival**, Newcastle. **Women's Film Festival**, Norwich. **Slow Dance Film Collective**, Liverpool. **Midland Group**, Nottingham. **1983: Video Installation Show**, Air Gallery, London. **St Paul's Gallery**, Leeds.



The idea for **Demolition / Escape** came from my daughter Emily singing

"My girl's a cor-or-ker,
She's a New Yo-or-ker,
I'd buy her anything to keep her in style.
She's got a pair of legs
Just like two whiskey kegs
Hot Dog! That's where my money goes!"

a street song she heard from a teacher at her junior school. The rhythm is quite different from the usual chant of street songs in that it stems from the music hall tradition. I liked the rhythm and humour and decided to weave the song into a sound piece, so that I could question and shift the content without losing the form. I then decided to make a video/performance installation to indicate the shifting of levels visually.

Using the rope ladder as a metaphor for escape. A column of video monitors every other one placed upside down. A performance of me climbing a rope ladder, giving the impression of moving from level to level, upwards and downwards and bringing into play patterns, space and light. The camera movement is an integral part of the piece; a visual interpretation and juxtaposition of the song, a meeting of street and fine art.

Tina Keane 1983

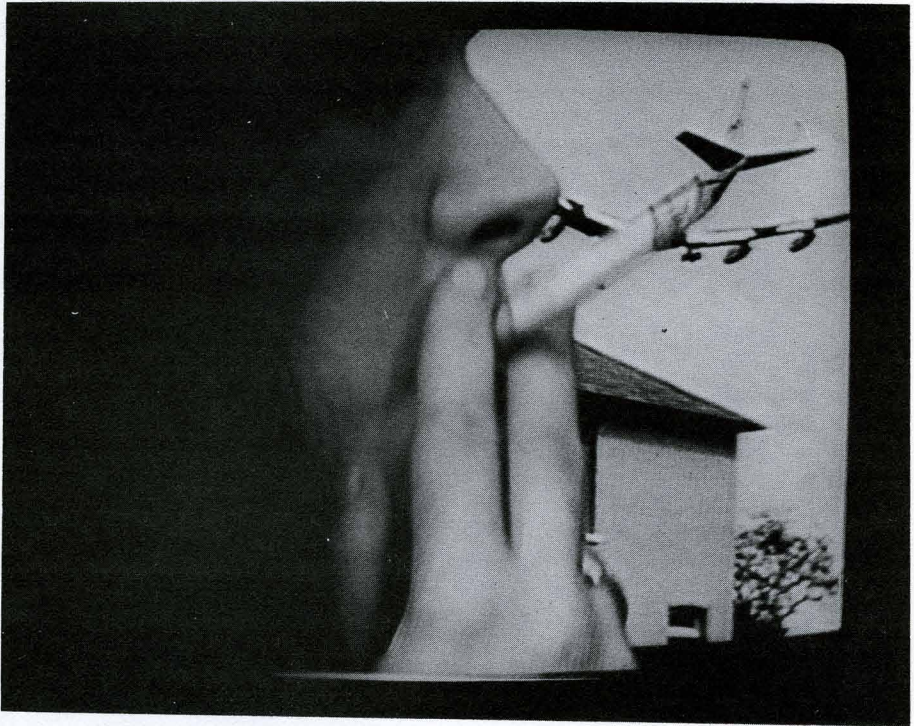
"Keane's version of the song, however, is sung somewhat ironically by the innocent voice of a girl. One of Keane's recurrent motifs is the childrens' chanting song which accompanies street games. It is among its strengths that, through subtle juxtapositions, the work provokes without sentimentality the memory of our own childhood in unison with issues of adulthood. The ropeladder, for instance, evokes the fun of the adventure playground as well as the anxiety of escape from imprisonment. Childrens' games possess an almost tribal exclusion of the adult world, nevertheless they may also mirror and unconsciously establish the behaviour patterns and attitudes of adult life. "My girl's a corker" is not the only song Keane has found that denigrates the feminine, but at the same time, **Demolition / Escape** admits that the song is nevertheless humorous and entertaining. We are reminded, therefore, that the ambivalent inscription of the feminine within language is something women learn to accept with good grace. Keane focuses on language still at the stage of play, unpicks its codes, and plays it back through her own wry humour to subvert the meanings behind its innocent facade. What is important about Keane's work is its acknowledgement that there is no language other than that given by patriarchy, and that, rather than attempt to reject it, women must seek to re-use it or risk never gaining a voice within culture."

Jean Fisher 1983

Richard Layzell

SO THIS IS HOW YOU SPEND YOUR TIME 1982 color 8 minutes

Richard Layzell was born in London in 1949. He studied at the Slade School of Fine Art and currently teaches at Newport College of Art, Wimbledon School of Art and the Open University. He works in installation, performance, film, photography and video and has received four awards from the Arts Council of Great Britain. He has shown extensively throughout Europe and the USA. His video work has been shown at: **1980: Acme Gallery, Air Gallery**, London. **1981: Filmmakers Co-op, Institute of Contemporary Arts, Tate Gallery**, London. **National Video Festival**, Bracknell. **Midland Group** Nottingham. **Arts Centre**, Luton. **Open Eye**, Liverpool. **Arnolfini Gallery**, Bristol. **Open University Summer School**, Norwich. **1982: Air Gallery, Institute of Contemporary Arts, Serpentine Gallery, First International Video Festival**, London. **Arts Centre**, Luton. **Teatro Materno**, Locarno, Switzerland. **Franklin Furnace, Westbeth**, New York. **Trinity Video**, Toronto. **Western Front**, Vancouver, **Above the Rainbow**, Victoria, British Columbia. **SITE Inc., CLUB FOOT**, San Francisco.



Day to day, my time is divided between working in video and performance, looking after my three-year-old child and teaching in Art Schools. The house that I live in has become a centre for the Women's Peace Movement. These aspects have inevitably combined and interrelated and I've become something of a receptor – making collaborative performances with students, making my relationship with my son the subject of videotapes and trying to experience creativity as he does, attempting to work for peace through art. There has been little choice, or rather a kind of 'acceptance'. The boundaries between life and art have become blurred, the work almost determines itself. My ideal is to be a vehicle for creativity to filter through, with the ego playing a small part in the process.

I have produced several video/performances, because the live element can break through the 'television' preconceptions of an audience watching video. It's not often that the character you're looking at on TV shows up in person, to argue the point more forcefully, or change his mind.

I trained, originally, as a painter and sculptor, which led to installations, then to performances (when art became fun again, or didn't have to be taken **too** seriously), then to video, which has been the ideal medium to combine experience in the other media.

So This Is How You Spend Your Time is a fragmented narrative containing separate short sequences and a linking episode of foliage. The underlying theme is of shifts in the commonplace, through sound, speech, image and time. Sit down, relax, I'd like to tell you a story, just give me your full attention and watch the screen, it's all so natural . . .

Antonia Sherman & Mark Lucas

HER PASSION WAS COLLECTING BLUE—PAINTED DRIFTWOOD 1981 color 20 minutes

Antonia Sherman was born in 1958. She studied at West Surrey College of Art and Newcastle upon Tyne Polytechnic Fine Art Department. Mark Lucas was born in 1960. He studied at Mansfield College of Art and Newcastle upon Tyne Polytechnic Fine Art Department. They have made several joint works in video, film and tape/slide which have been shown at; **1981: The Side Cinema**, Newcastle upon Tyne. **The London Filmmakers Co-op**. **The York Film Festival**. **Tyneside Film Festival**. **Air Gallery**, London. **1982: The Expanded Media Show**, Sheffield Polytechnic. **Video Art and Technology**, Serpentine Gallery, London. **British Film Institute Show**, Midland Group Gallery, Nottingham.



Designed as an experimental work in color dynamics, the 'tape' is structured according to primary blue, red and yellow with a final reference to Godard's **Pierrot Le Fou**.

Using images of ourselves in public and private ritual, we sought to explore the struggle for sexual identity, the Nietzschean aspects of sport and the 'body beautiful', testing popular gender representation against taboo activity.

The tape was shot in and around Newcastle upon Tyne where the pursuit of sport and health is considered to be a part of daily life.

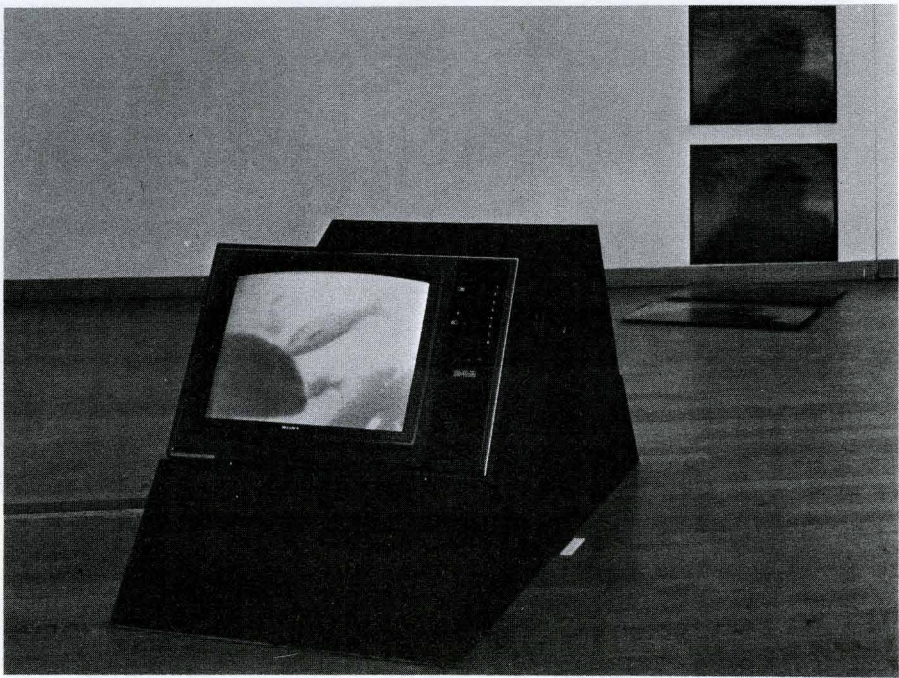
Antonia Sherman and Mark Lucas 1983

Elsa Stansfield & Madelon Hooykaas

FLYING TIME 1982 color 8 minutes

Elsa Stansfield was born in 1945 in Glasgow, Scotland. She studied at Glasgow School of Art, Ealing School of Art and the Slade School in London. Since 1980 she has been the head of video and sound department at the Jan van Eijck Academy, Maastricht, The Netherlands. Madelon Hooykaas was born in 1942 in Maartensdijk, The Netherlands. She currently lives in Amsterdam. They have worked together since 1972, moving between Britain and The Netherlands.

1979: 't Hoogt, Utrecht, **Mickery Theater**, Amsterdam, **Schiedams Museum**, Schiedam, The Netherlands. **Battersea Arts Centre**, **Wapping Open Studios**, **Acme Gallery**, London. **Franklin Furnace**, New York. **Video '79**, Rome, Italy. 1980: **The Stempleplaats**, Amsterdam, **Enschede Verplaatst**, Enschede, **Kultureel centrum**, Tilburg, **Oogwenk**, 't Hoogt, Utrecht, **Bickerseiland**, **The Bank**, Amsterdam, **Mixage**, Rotterdam, The Netherlands. **Franklin Furnace**, New York. **Center for Art Tapes**, Halifax, Nova Scotia. **AIR Gallery**, London. **The Kitchen**, New York. **Artist's Video**, Washington, Tyne and Wear, England. 1981: **Stedelijk Museum**, **NKS Tour**, The Netherlands. **Kunst & Austach**, Berling, **E43**, Berlin, West Germany. **Kapee**, **Murole**, **Hostens**, Finland.



Time and tide: as a shadow of a woman on the sand is washed by the incoming tide, a voice begins relating the international time zones one flies through on a journey from Amsterdam to Sydney, Australia and back.

The motion of the waves is counterpointed by fish swimming lethargically in Pacific blue waters.

Caroline Stone

OUR SEX LIVES 1982 color 10 minutes

Caroline Stone was born in 1959. She studied at South Glamorgan Institute of Higher Education and Wolverhampton Polytechnic Department of Fine Art. She currently works as the Joint Film Co-ordinator at Open Eye Film and Video Workshop in Liverpool.

1981: **Coventry Events Week. AIR Gallery**, London. **Norwich Women's Film Festival. Northern Young Contemporaries**, Manchester. 1982: **Women Live, AIR Gallery**, London **Filmmakers Co-op**, London. **Birmingham Arts Lab. Midland Group**, Nottingham. 1983: **London Filmmakers Co-op**, London. **WITCH open night. Community-Communications Conference**, Liverpool.



The piece was made as a response to a bizarre visit to the family planning clinic I was attending. Although strange and rather disturbing for me, it was just another session at the F.P. on a Wednesday night in Wolverhampton. The point that was made obvious to me was the separation of men and women by sex. The F.P. clinic is a place where **women** go. It can be unpleasant and is always a chore. Men have sex easy – we have been conned into believing contraception to be one of our greatest liberators. Of course it can be, BUT to the drug companies it's big business. If you can't or don't want to use existing forms of contraception, then it's tough. You're a minority and therefore you don't count.

Putting together the clinic scenes was easy; I was referring to personal experience. Juxtaposing this with the male viewpoint was more difficult. The quotes selected are contentious. However, if they serve to make us question . . . and if they jar against the mundanity of the women's conversation, then it's beginning to get through. . . .

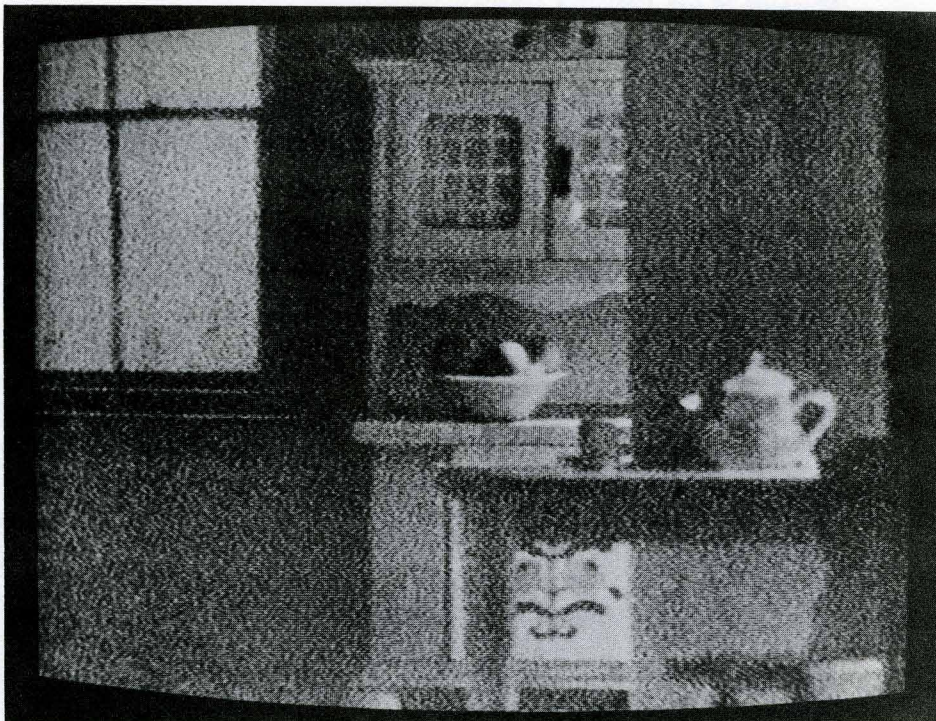
After all, look how sex is sold to us.

Caroline Stone 1983

Margaret Warwick

STILL LIVES (a drama in three acts) 1982 color 18 minutes

Margaret Warwick was born in Manchester in 1953. She studied at Sunderland College of Art and The Department of Environmental Media at The Royal College of Art. Her work primarily takes the form of video or tape/slide and has been shown at; **The Air Gallery, The Institute of Contemporary Arts, The London Filmmakers Co-op**, London. **The Basement**, Newcastle. **Studio Access Project**, Sydney, Australia. **Cairn**, Paris France and at video festivals in Amsterdam. The Hague, Canada and California.



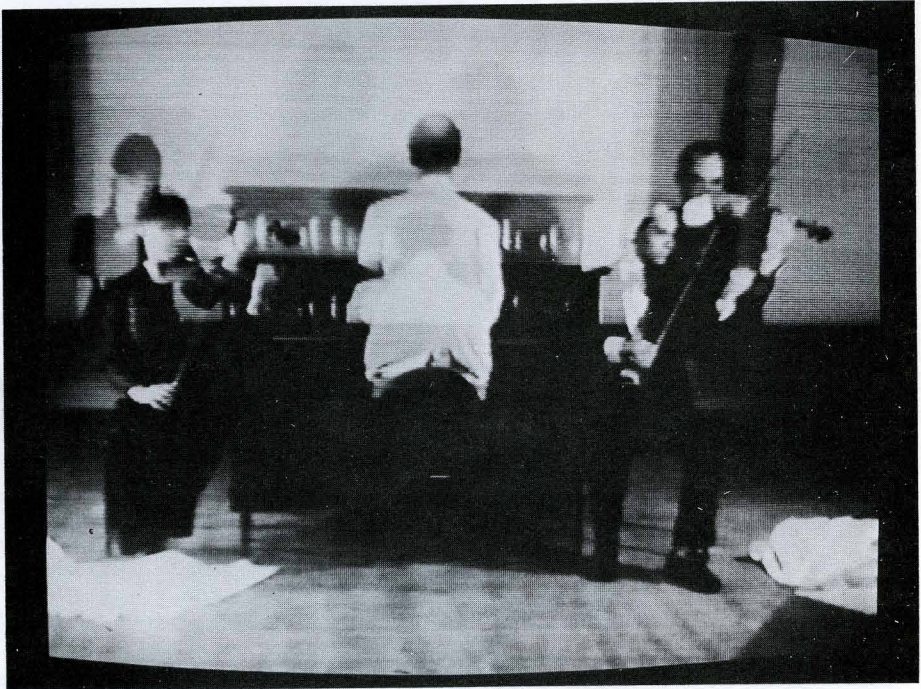
"It was a rainy Monday morning in New York City. At the Kitchen Center down on Wooster, Margaret Warwick's videotape was being shown. Meanwhile back home in Bow, Margaret went about her daily routine – washing, cooking, cleaning, taking her kid to school, making art etc. etc. . . . New York seemed, and in fact might as well have been, a million miles away . . . a mere figment of her imagination supplemented by things read and seen in books, stories told by friends . . ."

When asked to write something for this catalogue about **Still Lives** what struck me most was just how closely the narrative of the tape parodied my own feelings about New York and how much both the tape and I embody a 'typical English sensibility' . . . and so, I suppose, it is particularly fitting that this tape should be shown as part of a festival of British art.

Jeremy Welsh

IN RE DON GIOVANNI 1982 color 3 minutes

Jeremy Welsh was born in 1954 in Gateshead on Tyne, England. He studied at Jacob Kramer College, Trent Polytechnic Fine Art Department and at Goldsmiths College. He was a member of the performance group **Aerschot** and the rock group **The Distributors** and is currently the show organiser for London Video Arts. He has received two awards from the Arts Council of Great Britain. **1980-1983: The Basement**, Newcastle. **Ikon Gallery**, Birmingham, **Cotes Mill Gallery**, Loughborough. **AIR Gallery**, **B2 Gallery**, **W8 Gallery**, London. **Midland Group**, Nottingham. **Spectro Gallery**, Newcastle. **Institute Contemporary Arts**, London. **Bracknell Video Festival**, Bracknell. **Angelo Mazzuro Media**, Bologna, Italy. **Long Beach Museum of Art**, California, USA.



In Re Don Giovanni is a collaboration between myself and Michael Nyman using the music of the same title from his album **Michael Nyman**. The visual content of the tape springs from our mutual interest in the works of Fluxus artists such as George Brecht, Dick Higgins, Yoko Ono, Tomas Schmidt and others and from the research we were involved with at Trent Polytechnic from 1975 to 1977 into the influences of Fluxus upon experimental music and performance. Michael Nyman sometimes describes his work as 'Imaginary Pop Music' in which context this tape would be 'Imaginary Pop Video'.

Jeremy Welsh 1983