

Stephen Partridge

20 March - 15 May 1999 Cooper Gallery, Crawford Building, Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design and Centrespace, Visual Research Centre, Dundee Contemporary Arts.

As an artist and producer, Stephen Partridge's work of the past three decades has consistently concerned itself with investigating the creative potential of video and new media. During the eighties he also became interested in works for broadcast television and now works principally in digital media.

This exhibition marks Stephen Partridge's inauguration to the Chair of Media Art at the University of Dundee - the first of its kind in the UK.

The following interpretative texts have been written to accompany the exhibition by John Calcutt, writer and lecturer at Glasgow School of Art. A publication has also been produced and features essays by John Calcutt; Al Rees, Reader at Royal College of Art, London; Anna Ridley, producer, Analogue Productions, and a transcript of an interview between Stephen Partridge and Hugh Stoddart, screenwriter and art critic.

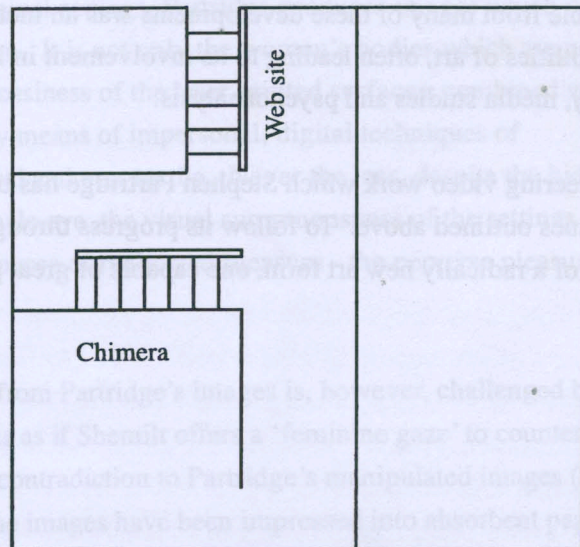
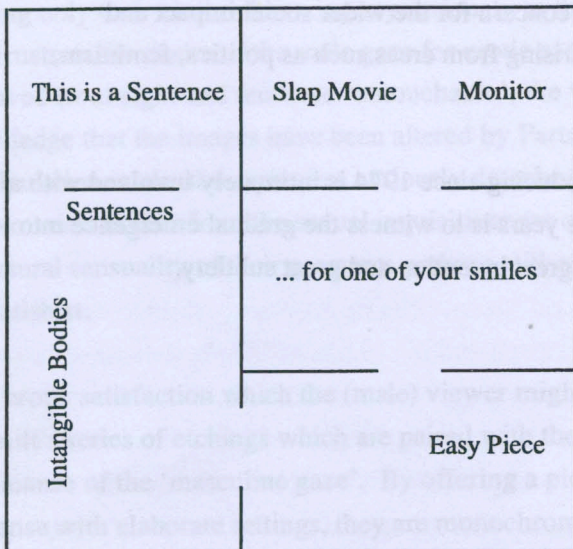
The publication is available for sale from the University of Dundee Exhibitions Office in Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design, and Dundee Contemporary Arts' shop One Five Two, in the Nethergate, Dundee.

COOPER GALLERY

Centrespace, and VRC

Level 1: *Centrespace*; Chimera

Level 2: Web site



THE EMERGENCE OF VIDEO

Originally developed within the American television industry as a means of storing rather than producing programmes, and later developed for military purposes, video equipment did not become readily available to artists until the later 1960s. Once it did become more generally accessible, however, the artists who chose to work with the new medium were faced with a choice of possible directions: either video could be seen as an aspect of the already established medium of television (albeit it as a form of critical reflection upon the 'language' and values of television); or it could be developed as a new and independent art form (one which would, nevertheless, take its lead from innovations emerging from the work of artists and independent film makers). Alternatively, some argued that video's greatest asset lay in the fact that it has *no* single, definable characteristic, and that it is in fact more accurate to speak of video media in the plural. Whatever the case, the later 1960's and early 1970's witnessed a series of significant developments in modern art which could not fail to have some impact upon the emerging medium.

Pop art, for example, had introduced the imagery and techniques of the mass media and popular culture into the rarefied atmosphere of fine art. At the same time, Minimalist artists began producing artworks which hovered between the traditional categories of painting and sculpture, and which simplified compositional complexities in order to arrive at simple, clear, geometric forms (often basing the structure of these works on the simple repetition of such basic forms).

Conceptual artists, meanwhile, were claiming that the purpose of art was not to produce conventional art objects but to engage in a theoretical investigation (often carried out in the medium of language) into the very nature - or definition - of art itself. Their frequent refusal to produce objects was also part of a rejection of the increasingly commercial values of the art market and the gallery system - a rejection shared by performance artists, installation artists and the so-called land artists.

Throughout this period, an increasing number of artists also abandoned painting and sculpture, turning instead to photography, film and video, in order to find more appropriate means for art to engage with the conditions of life in an age increasingly dominated by mass media imagery.

Inseparable from many of these developments was an increasing concern for the wider social impact and responsibilities of art, often leading to its involvement in issues arising from areas such as politics, feminism, sociology, media studies and psychoanalysis.

The pioneering video work which Stephen Partridge has been producing since 1974 is intimately involved with all of the issues outlined above. To follow its progress through these years is to witness the gradual emergence into maturity of a radically new art form, one capable of great power, great invention and great subtlety.

Stephen Partridge shares the interests of many of those artists who, since the 1960s, have become interested in the influence of culture and technology upon the act of looking. In ... **for one of your smiles**, for instance, his exploration of computer manipulated imagery is part of his wider concern with such questions. In an age when a vast amount of our knowledge of the world takes the form of mass media images of that world (film, television, press photographs, etc.) it is not surprising that artists should take a keen interest in them. We are so used to seeing these images that it is easy for us to forget that initially we had to *learn* how to read them. It may come as a shock when we find that people living in societies where films have never been seen before find them bewildering; because they have never learnt the filmic conventions of editing, jump cuts, flashbacks, and so on, they are confused. We may feel a similar sense of dismay when faced for the first time with images based upon cultural references which are unfamiliar to us, such as Wild Style graffiti art, Australian aboriginal dream paintings, or abstract painting, for example. All of this suggests that looking (at art, certainly) is something which we have to learn, and that seeing images has something in common with reading a language.

There are further implications here, however. If looking is a cultural skill which we must learn, then it cannot be free of cultural influences. When we start to think about our own culture and the values and assumptions which are embedded in it, it doesn't take long to realise that men occupy it differently than women. Another way of putting this would be to claim that the 'masculine' is generally valued above the 'feminine' in this culture. The masculine is associated with power, prestige, action, intellectualism, culture, etc., whereas the feminine is associated with weakness, secondariness, passivity, emotionalism, nature, etc. (This is certainly not to claim that all women are weak, secondary, passive, etc. On the contrary. It is merely to point to the kind of associations which overwhelmingly accompany the idea of the 'feminine' in our culture.) It is therefore difficult to resist the conclusion that there is a 'masculine' way of viewing the world, and a 'feminine.'

In **Intangible Bodies**, Partridge and Shemilt explore this highly charged question of gendered looking. Partridge's contribution is a series of digitally manipulated laser prints. These images derive from Japanese soft pornography magazines, featuring partially undressed young women in stylish surroundings. By removing the women's bodies, leaving only their clothes hovering mysteriously in their original settings, Partridge produces images which disturb and frustrate the desire of the male gaze for erotic satisfaction. It is not only the women's bodies which are now removed from sight and rendered 'untouchable'; the very glossiness of the laser printed surfaces, combined with our knowledge that the images have been altered by Partridge by means of impersonal, digital techniques of manipulation, make these pictures curiously detached, clinical and non-tactile. Never the less, despite the hiding of the women's bodies from the sexual inquisitiveness of the male eye, the visual sumptuousness of the settings and the sculptural sensuality of their garments perhaps still offer a source of redirected pleasure - the perverse pleasure of the fetishist.

Any erotic satisfaction which the (male) viewer might gain from Partridge's images is, however, challenged by Shemilt's series of etchings which are paired with them. It is as if Shemilt offers a 'feminine gaze' to counteract the dominance of the 'masculine gaze'. By offering a pictorial contradiction to Partridge's manipulated images (they dispense with elaborate settings, they are monochromatic, the images have been impressed into absorbent paper, the process of image generation is additive rather than subtractive, they retain evidence of the artist's hand, etc.) they draw our attention to the inadequacy and sheer relativity of the male view of the world - and its view of female sexuality in particular.

EASY PIECE

Installation 1974 - 1996

"My first videotapes", Partridge wrote in 1979, "are 'structuralist' in nature, echoing some of the notions prevalent in artists' films over the past decade, and work of a conceptual nature of the early seventies. They are largely concerned with an exploration of the video process, and attempt to define the medium and establish a language, or syntax, both universal and personal."

"**Easy Piece** is a very minimal work which confronts the spectators' expectations of visual information. The screen is blank for most of the time but is interrupted at precise intervals by the image of the word 'easy', which is heard spoken in a rather sensuous tone. After a few minutes the word is expected and awaited even though its ambiguity becomes irritating and meaningless, contrary to its definition."

The 'structuralist' aspect which Partridge mentions above is a reference to **Easy Piece**'s self-referentiality - the fact that it takes the medium of video itself as its primary subject matter, rather than trying to capture nature, tell a story, or illustrate an emotion. Partridge achieves this by a variety of means. The static camera, for instance, draws attention to itself by the artificiality of its unblinking immobility, so unlike the familiar operations of television and film cameras - or the human eye, for that matter. The same effect is further emphasised by the apparently random zoom action of the lens - which, at the same time, is the only visual 'incident' throughout the whole tape. The fact that the entire sequence has been captured in one uninterrupted shot - along with the simultaneous recording of the soundtrack - is another way of drawing our attention to the technical and 'material' aspect of the piece. This takes on an added significance once we realise that the early reel-to-reel machines with which Partridge had to work made editing a near impossibility. (It is also, incidentally, typical of many of Andy Warhol's films of the 1960s, such as **Empire** (1964) and **Sleep** (1963), indicating Partridge's relation to wider artistic developments.)

The initial simplicity of **Easy Piece** (its "minimal" appearance), thus subtly disguises a great deal of complexity. This complexity even extends to its relation to other visual art forms. Its emphasis upon rectangularity, for example (the rectangularity of the monitor screen, repeated by the sheet upon which the word 'easy' is written), combined with its flat, two-dimensional appearance, make the experience of looking at the work closer to the experience of looking at a painting (especially a 'minimalist' painting) than looking at a film or a television programme. This is not to say that looking at **Easy Piece** is the *same* as looking at a painting - far from it - but it is to suggest that some of the impact of the video is generated by the tension which arises from our recognition of its similarities to *and* its differences from painting. It is as if such a video can share some of the qualities of painting but also add new dimensions - such as duration and language, both written and spoken.

Similar things might be said of its relation to sculpture. When we confront **Easy Piece** in the gallery, we are not simply looking at an image made of flickering light, but at a very specific physical (i.e. sculptural) presence, comprising a plinth supporting a video monitor of specific style and dimensions. In fact, these physical aspects are so integral to the work that Partridge insists that the monitor is a 1970s Sony model, the one for which the video was originally intended. (The actual tape in this exhibition is a 1990 remake of the 1974 original. Partridge's interest in 'faking' the look of the original is typical of his interest in playing with time. The replacement also reminds us that video tape doesn't only represent time in an artistic sense, it also suffers the ravages of real time, rapidly decaying unless carefully treated.) The placement of the work within the gallery space further accentuates its sculptural character, making us realise that **Easy Piece** isn't to be mistaken for a TV programme, but is to be approached as a new kind of artistic experience, one which lies somewhere between film, television, painting and sculpture.

... for one of your smiles

Installation for two projectors, with sound by David Cunningham, 1999

One of the fascinating aspects of video is that it is hard to categorise. It shares many technical features with television, but it refuses to fit in to television's rigid formats and styles (the chat show, the sit-com, the soap, the documentary, etc.). It is related to film, but it involves different materials (magnetic tape rather than celluloid film), different image-capturing processes (electronic scanning, rather than exposure to light), different editing techniques (electronic on-screen manipulation of information, rather than 'hands on', physical cutting of the film), and different viewing conditions (electronic scanning of a screen with the viewer facing the television, rather than the projection of light in a darkened auditorium with the viewer's back to the projector). It is connected to art, but it isn't an object - like a painting or a sculpture - which can easily be bought and permanently displayed. It is also often noisy and, unlike conventional works of art, it usually has a specific duration; its 'running time'. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that artists like Partridge should want to explore as many of video's many paths as possible. **...for one of your smiles** offers a prime example of a response to such an open field: the video installation.

In paying particular attention to the physical components of **Easy Piece** (1974/1996) - its plinth, its monitor, its precise placement within the gallery space - Partridge demonstrates the importance of the relationship between the sculptural aspect of the work, its exact location, and the physical presence of the viewer. In later works, such as **8x8x8** (1976) and **Display-Displaced** (1981), he develops the complexities of these relationships by his use of several monitors. **...for one of your smiles** takes this even further.

The first thing we might notice is that Partridge has dispensed with monitors altogether, taking advantage of more recent technical innovations to project his images directly on to two facing gallery walls. Whilst this may remind us of film, video, as we have seen, differs significantly from film (more on this in a moment). Our relationship to this work is also very different from our relationship to works screened on a monitor. Here, we can walk between the two projected images, and we have to involve our bodies more directly in the experience of the work, turning our heads from one image to the other, or even turning our whole bodies 180 degrees. The space *between* the images (the space which we occupy) now becomes part of the work, and this space is also 'filled' in a different way by David Cunningham's soundtrack. Rather than simply looking *at* something, **...for one of your smiles** invites us to locate ourselves at the *centre* of an experience which involves space, images and sound.

As for the images themselves, these lips which slowly break into smiles are not simply mesmerising; they also provide yet another demonstration of Partridge's investigation of video's special language. The techniques which video uses to produce slow-motion effects are very different from those of film. Whereas film captures a single fragment of motion on each of its separate frames, video's process of electronic scanning is flowing and continuous. This means that the 'units' of information which film and video work with when they want to manipulate the illusion of speed and movement are different (video does not have film's discrete frames). Because the 'units' are different, the techniques of manipulation and the resulting optical effects are also different.

To achieve the slow-motion effect in **...for one of your smiles** Partridge exploits recent computer technology. All the information relating to the video image's colour, brightness, movement, etc. is stored digitally by the computer in the form of pixels which are organised as maps. In this form, the information can be manipulated by redistributing the pixels into new maps, thus producing altered images. The slow transformation of the images in **...for one of your smiles** is the result of Partridge's re-mapping of the pixels which, because they do not 'belong' to any particular moment of the image can be shifted from time frame to time frame, (a pixel is simply an anonymous bit of digitalised information about luminosity and hue). Thus we see yet another manifestation of Partridge's recurrent interest in the play of time.

MONITOR

Videotape, 1975

Monitor is another important early work by Partridge which demonstrates his interest in structuralism. Structuralist analysis was of great interest to many artists at this time because it provided new and rigorous ways of thinking about art as a form of language. Its basic claim is that all signs (such as words, images, clothes, gestures, and so on) operate within systems (or structures) which are governed by rules. Thus it is not only words which function within the structure of a language, but all signs - there is a language of clothes, a language of the body, a language of painting, a language of sculpture, a language of film. Partridge's quest in **Monitor** (as in **Easy Piece**) is to find a language of video.

In a sense, these structured language systems are like games which have their own laws and rules of conduct. Just like the moves within a game (football, chess, cricket, snooker, for example), the meaning of any sign only makes sense when seen in relation to the rules which govern its use. From the structuralist point of view, the sign (the move in a game) means nothing by itself; it has to be understood in relation to all the other possible signs (or moves) within its rule bound system (or game). There are two major consequences to this claim: first, it means that all signs derive their meaning from their relation to - or, to put it more precisely, their difference from - all other signs within the system they occupy; second, it means that these signs refer inwardly to themselves before they refer outwardly to the external world. Another way of putting this would be to say that all languages are primarily "self-reflexive" structures.

In **Monitor** Partridge is looking to find those structures which characterise the language of video. In order to do this, he has to make video turn in on itself: he has to make the medium of video "self-reflexive". His most obvious way of doing this in **Monitor** (apart from its title!) is to turn the camera onto the monitor itself, so that the subject of the video becomes itself. This alone, however, would not be enough to establish the unique properties of video; there is no reason why a film camera could not do the same thing. What makes video so special, however - what distinguishes its language from other kinds of filmic language - is that it can record and transmit *simultaneously*. There is no time delay. This can lead to the special phenomenon of feedback. When the video apparatus is turned on itself, it can produce an infinite series of repeated images, each nestled within the other like Chinese boxes. This effect thus mirrors that very same condition of self-reflexivity which forms the basis of language according to structuralist analysis.

Look more closely at **Monitor**, however, and you will see that the effect of feedback has actually been 'faked'. Partridge has not simply presented a novel and quirky technical effect of the video medium. Like a mechanic he has dismantled it to provide a thorough examination, and then, like a poet, reassembled it in unexpected ways. The slightly different speeds at which the monitors are rotated in each of the images introduce an element of variation and syncopation which contradict the standardised effect of simultaneity which occurs within ordinary feedback. In other words, Partridge has incorporated the crucial element of *difference* into video's self-reflexive feedback system. This element of difference - without which systems of language would fail to function - is further enhanced by the differently angled position of the monitors in each image. The interlaced patterns of time and space which result from these subtle modifications give **Monitor** a visual fascination which perfectly matches its intellectual clarity.

SLAP MOVIE

Miniature interactive installation for mini projector, 1999

It's probably fair to say that we don't usually give much thought to seeing. We tend to take it for granted, a bit like breathing or walking. It seems such a natural process that we might easily resist the idea that it is in fact a highly sophisticated activity. Seeing isn't simply a question of light hitting our eyes and then being transmitted to our brain; this is only part of the story. It's how our brain filters and interprets the information which comes to it from the eye which really counts. Eye witness accounts of events are frequently taken to be more accurate than other forms of evidence, but, as judges and juries sometimes learn, such accounts can be notoriously untrustworthy. More often than not it seems as if we see what we want to see, or see what we expect to see.

The act of seeing is informed by all sorts of factors and influences, such as habit, prejudice, anticipation, cultural conditioning, and so on. It is also, as Partridge and Shemilt suggest in **Intangible Bodies** and **Chimera**, related to sexuality. In fact, Freud claimed that looking is a form of eroticism and is filled with sexual curiosity. We gain sexual pleasure from looking at other people as objects. If taken to an extreme, this leads to the disturbing voyeurism of Peeping-Toms. It comes as no surprise, then, to learn that many artists, including Partridge, have shown a keen interest in these matters.

The investigations of these artists have led to further revelations. Most important amongst these is the suggestion that looking isn't a one-way activity. We look at the world, but we are also looked at. We are all caught in a circuit of looking in which, disconcertingly, the world looks back at us. According to this view, it is not just other people who look at us, but objects as well. This may seem unbelievable, but it is perhaps not so difficult to think of works of art as objects which look back at us metaphorically. In a conventional portrait painting we have the recognisable image of another human who appears to return our gaze, but even in the case of abstract paintings and sculptures we might be tempted to think of them as 'standing in' for another human. This is especially so of paintings and sculptures with a pronounced vertical axis; objects, in other words, whose general proportions echo those of the standing human body. This sensation of being in the presence of another human, and thus of being located within an exchange of looks, is also particularly evident in installations, such as **Chimera** and ... **for one of your smiles**.

If it is true that the work of art somehow 'looks back', then it is only logical to conclude that the kind of look which it offers will be as charged as the one it receives from the viewer. Thus the work becomes a site where two (perhaps conflicting) agendas meet: the particular priorities, preferences, expectations and knowledge of the viewer (e.g. a male viewer, a female viewer, a black viewer, a Buddhist viewer, a teenage viewer, a non-European viewer), and the work's capacity to satisfy these demands and expectations. (In **Intangible Bodies** and **Chimera** we see instances where the work of art fails to satisfy the demands usually associated with the gaze of the male viewer.)

The simplest and most effective way to demonstrate some of these issues is to engage with **Slap Movie**. The fact that we have to bend over to align our eye with the screen immediately puts us into a direct bodily relation with the work - we are extremely conscious of the physical effort involved in the meeting of our eye and its 'eye'. We trust it, submit to it, and yet it has made us vulnerable and perhaps slightly ridiculous. Our intimate relation with the work is accentuated by the rubber bulb which we are invited to squeeze. Not only are we actually touching the work (an experience so unlike our usual act of simply looking from a distance), but the rubber bulb itself has a kind of unexpected sensuality (imagine if it had been a metal button or switch instead). Nobody forces us to squeeze the bulb, but we do it anyway. This is probably because looking is also, among its many traits, inquisitive. We *want* to see. Now that our whole body - not just our eye - is in position, we squeeze the bulb. In a startling flash, the work looks back at us, and we may feel that it has caught us in the act of looking at it. If we feel slightly guilty, excited or shocked at what we have seen, then **Slap Movie** has done its job.

THIS IS A SENTENCE

Interactive CD-ROM in collaboration with David Cunningham, 1998

From his earliest days as a student at Maidstone College of Art (1972-75), Partridge showed a great interest in language, some of his first works being artists books. This fascination with language was a feature of Conceptual art which emerged in the second half of the 1960s, and it marked a distinct break from the dominant concerns of art throughout most of the modern period. In rebelling against academic art in the nineteenth century, the pioneers of modern art were rejecting its literary and narrative elements. The purpose of visual art, they claimed, was not to tell stories or to recount historical episodes - that was the job of literature. The mission of art, they argued, was to focus on aesthetic issues. Anything which smacked of literature or writing in general was to be banished from the visual arts. Increasingly, therefore, the subject of art became art itself ("art for art's sake"). For the viewer of such modern works, the experience should be purely visual and not require any outside knowledge of history, literature, religion or the life and times of the artist. Because visual art ruthlessly expelled language from its domain, it also required that the work of art should have an immediate and instantaneous effect upon the viewer. The reasoning behind this lay in the fact that language unfolds in the dimension of time, and thus the experience of time is inappropriate to the purely visual, anti-literary content offered by painting and sculpture.

By the mid-1960s these ideas had become so entrenched within the art world that they had almost become a set of academic rules to be obeyed by any artist wishing to have their work taken seriously. Unsurprisingly, many younger artists started to resist and to question these assumptions. They pointed to the early 20th century example of Marcel Duchamp's readymades, such as **Fountain** (1917), in which the artist merely selected a mass produced object (a urinal, in this case) and exhibited it as art. These objects didn't attain the status of art by virtue of their visual or aesthetic qualities, but as a result of the debate which surrounded them. The readymades became art partly because people *argued* that they were art, and these arguments and debates took/take place in the medium of language. Increasingly, then, the conclusion emerging during the period since Conceptual art is that language and art are impossible to cleanly separate; each informs the other.

The manifold presence of language (written and spoken, seen and heard) is unashamedly at the heart of **This Is A Sentence**, and yet this is as much a work of visual art as any of Partridge's other pieces in this exhibition. It is possible, in fact, to think of this CD-ROM as summarising much of his output to date. Spread throughout its labyrinthine web of electronic paths and connections are fragments and versions of many of his earlier works, including some of his collaborations with David Cunningham, such as **Sentences** (1988-93) and **The Sound of These Words** (1990). Its invitation to the user to click on the image of words on the computer screen in order to open up new networks of connections is built on the same kind of self-reflexive structure which formed the foundation of early works such as **Easy Piece** (1974) and **Monitor** (1975). The use of the mouse as a form of physical connector between the work and its 'operator' is also similar to the use of the rubber squeeze bulb in **Slap Movie** (1999). The non-linear patterns of combination and juxtaposition which the user of **This Is A Sentence** sets in motion are reminiscent of the open-ended process of 'reading' offered by **Chimera** (1998). The strangely disembodied finger of the cursor as it darts around behind the glass screen of the computer recalls the ambivalent sensation of physical detachment mixed with imaginary involvement which occurs in the laser printed images of **Intangible Bodies** (1999).

There is, none the less, a sting in the tail. Just as Partridge dismantles the phenomenon of video feedback in **Monitor**, and just as he throws the authority of the male gaze into doubt in works such as **Intangible Bodies**, **Chimera** and **Slap Movie**, so the utopian freedom promised by interactive computer technology is questioned in **This Is A Sentence**. The illusion of freedom of choice promised by this technology is no more than an illusion. Freedom of choice is undoubtedly involved, but it is a freedom to choose between a limited number of alternatives which have been predetermined. It is the restricted freedom of the consumer.

CHIMERA A collaboration with Elaine Shemilt

A four channel installation for four video projectors onto suspended latex screens, 1998

Chimera is a richly textured installation comprising video images projected onto four latex screens, each of which is split down the centre. The location of these screens is such that the viewer is partially surrounded by the work and invited to make their own connections between its various components. The scale of the screens, as well as their angled setting, also tend to make the viewer conscious of their own physical presence (their own bodies) in relation to the work. And it is the theme of the human body - especially in relation to female sexuality - which occupies centre stage in **Chimera**.

What is immediately striking about this work is its fragmentary quality. Not only are the screens spatially separated from each other, but the fact that they have been cut in half vertically repeats the overall theme of fragmentation and disjointedness within the context of each individual element (rather like the screens within a screen of **Monitor**, 1975). The images which are projected onto these split screens also tend to be fragmentary, often truncated details of the human form, some of which are difficult even to recognise. The effect of this 'cropping' is to hamper our ability to grasp the work as a unified field, a single image. We are forced to enter the work and fill its gaps with our imagination.

As so often in Partridge's work, **Chimera's** structure tempts us to compare it with language. In **Easy Piece** (1974) and **Monitor** (1975) Partridge had looked to structuralism for a model of language, and had given visual form to its insistence that the units of any language (its signs) exist in a structured system of difference. The meaning of a sign arises only through its *difference* from all other signs, not by virtue of any inherent meaning or value that it might possess. If difference is the crucial factor, then difference itself can only arise through separation and gaps, through distancing and spacing, through ruptures and splits - such as those apparent in the overall structure of **Chimera**.

Another essential characteristic of language is that its units are organised sequentially. The various parts of a sentence must follow each other in the proper order. Thus time is as much a feature of language as spacing; and time, too, is a recurrent theme in **Chimera**. On one level, for example, the work incorporates imagery from Shemilt's earlier work, and its 'recycling' thus introduces an element of historical time. There is also, of course, the running time of the tapes themselves, but within this 'real' time, there is also a 'fictional' time - the time of the actions which are captured on film. Here we are confronted by one of Partridge's typical paradoxes, for the events which are represented seem circular and repetitive (waves breaking on a pebbly shore, for instance). Unlike our usual experience of time, time in these videos seems to lead nowhere. It defies linearity and, consequently, any sense of narrative closure. Any conclusions to this work have to be provided by the viewer.

The spectre of language doesn't only appear by analogy in the visual structure of **Chimera**, it is also manifestly present in the form of the continuous soundtrack - softly spoken by a female voice - which accompanies the images. Once again, however, this is language which evades normal conventions. Rather than explaining the images, the spoken word is itself a montage of fragments derived from a variety of different sources - sociology, poetry, psychoanalysis, feminist theory, etc. One sentence repeats, however: "The body of a woman is colonised, appropriated, mystified, defined by male fantasy."

The overall effect of **Chimera** is to block this male fantasy, to escape its control (and, in this sense, it belongs beside another of Partridge and Shemilt's recent collaborations, **Intangible Bodies**). Images of the female body are recurrent throughout the installation but, because they are dispersed throughout its fragmented structure, because they offer widely differing images of womanhood (naked, pregnant, erotically clothed), and because they fail to cohere as a fixed image within a clear narrative, they remain constantly open to a wide range of interpretations and imaginary reconstructions. "For an audience of women," say Partridge and Shemilt, "the same body can represent fertility, childbearing, or sexuality."