state of electro, rap, hip hop, Latin hip hop) throughout the nation (Chicago house and acid, Detroit techno, Miami bass) and over to the West Coast (LA hard core rap and jack-beat swing). And on it will go. Remember: bass can rock your whole body; treble just gives you a pain in the temples. While the history of film sound privileged the tinny, scratchy timbres of the spoken word, Spectral Recording is *made* for bass – that subsonic dark continent which Sly & Robbie (on their song *Boops*, 1988) stake and title thus 'Bass . . . the final frontier'.

10   MIDI stands for Musical Instrument Digital Interface. It became the dominant means of studio-recording for pop music in the mid Eighties, replacing 'multi-tracking' which in the late Sixties became the norm for assembling temporally dislocated sounds into a finished, pseudo-real time composition. MIDI effects a very different compositional process. Through storing all required sounds digitally (sampling) and composing/orchestrating them in temporal relation to each other (sequencing), the 'performance' of a digital mix happens in real time and with perfect (inhuman) timing. Also see Alan Durant 'A New Day for Music' in this volume.

11   If this analysis seems too alien in its rhetoric (by favouring aural and audio metaphor) there is not much I can provide as compensation. To articulate sound involves realising it. Experiencing *Colors* involves listening to it as much as watching it – a mandate which acknowledges the legacy of sound-image fusion in the cinema. While it is probably unlikely that one could now take in *Colors* in the form of its original presentation (70mm, THX Sound, Spectral Recording), the stereo Hi-Fi VHS video release (Warner Bros. Home Video) will more than ably demonstrate all the points I have made about the film's soundtrack above – but *only* if one watches the tape wearing headphones to fully experience the shift in spatial dimensions in the mix.

12   The sound in *Colors* is industrially warranted by its aim to hit its target market. *Colors* attempted to be the Eighties' *Rock Around The Clock* by incorporating a stream of youth music into the film's narrative. The point is that since youth music has become so technologically oriented (*especially* contemporary urban black subgenres based on bass) the film has had to follow suit in order to communicate to its projected audience. The commercial failure of *Colors* is too great an issue to ponder here (liberal-minded critics whingeing about drug-related gang violence; postmodernists disappointed with Hopper's telemovie-style direction and Penn's tempered performance; the larger audience demographic being more interested in John Cougar than Ice-T; hardcore rap crossing over into the recording industry but failing to do so in the film industry; etc) but it is safe to suppose that the bottom line of Warner Brothers' gamble in the new JD-gang movie stakes was the soundtrack – the site of commercial exploitation at the nexus of cultural importation (record sales generating film grosses) and industrial exportation (film grosses generating record sales).

SCRATCH AND AFTER
Edit Suite Technology and the Determination of Style in Video Art

GEORGE BARBER

As a rule, in video art, technology is often characterised as self evident or passed over as a 'given'. Usually this is simply because artists are too egotistical to want to share the credit with machines and, not unrelatedly, artefacts seem to be devalued once it is known 'how' they were made. 'Oh you mean you just fiddled with button X to get that . . .?'

Hopefully, from the point of view of the audience, the ideas in video art should be more interesting anyway. Video art is primarily a technological form and thus one is easily able to date and make links between the visual solutions chosen by artists in particular periods. If artists rarely used dissolves in the early Seventies, one is aware that the 'look' of their tape is not so much to do with their 'vision' but frequently, merely a byproduct of what they had access to. Specifically, in Scratch, a mid-Eighties genre of video art, technology played a huge part, not just in a 'making' sense but also as a delimiter of an emerging visual language. However, before elaborating the role of the edit suite in this, I would like to outline a historical context for the genre.

In the Eighties, as far as the fading corpse of British avant garde film and video art was concerned, strung out on the operating table, mouth agape, body limp, there were two blips on the screen where something stirred – the New Romantics and Scratch. The first, pioneered by John Maybury and Cerith Wyn Evans, centred around Super 8 film's image characteristics and mostly involved attitude and a novel no-holds-barred policy on narcissism. The second, Scratch, was more impersonal, throwaway even; it mostly used television companies' product, taped on the newly rentable VHS format, to be re-cut and re-presented with zap-happy glee. Neither of these oscilloscope 'highs' had much political or ideological task to which 'weight' might have been attached. And, as it transpired, neither had much chance of living longer than that *certain moment* – except in the world of commercials, there to be hooked up neatly into the visual vocabulary of hip

advertising directors, and 'Youth' television programmes. But like all the best Eighties products, the New Romantics and Scratch *felt* good – the independent scene's equivalent of jogging and Walkman culture.

For Merleau Ponty,[1] a fundamental of vision is that, with open eyes, one doesn't *choose* whether to see or not. Vision is an enjoyment in itself, there are no set premises to be fulfilled, even in boredom one cannot help registering 'sights'. Ultimately, seeing has a fascination within itself. Part of the holding power of moving images – film and video – is this flow, technology creating a meta-fascination, one like life itself. Both the New Romantics and Scratch concentrated energy at this mesmeric level, they never really offered anything that would draw one in – other than this eye contact – or go past it. They stayed on the surface. Indeed, frequently the images engendered a feverish passivity that was quite different from the more earnest expectations of what had gone on before in the independent scene. At the time, this kind of approach seemed fresh, weirdly unpretentious in some ways, enragingly so in others. Part and parcel of the Eighties high points was that they ignored the independent 'establishment'. They made their own context, pitching themselves successfully at pop magazines and papers who, in typically English style, were actually sick of pop – their very *raison d'être* and only too pleased to write about something else. Yet the rupture with the past, conceived in these terms, has been most misleading for criticism.

In fact it now seems that the New Romantics and Scratch inherited and drew in quite a logical way from the past, even if the makers never troubled themselves to find out much about it. The New Romantics explored the myriad permutations of how 'beautiful' one could make a film image – lace, snow, reflections, over- and under-exposure, wind machines, flowers etc; while Scratch, with its customary light-fingered approach, spent more time hustling the rules of how pictures go together, searching for aesthetic moments that had gone underrated and unappreciated when the stuff was first broadcast on TV. Furthermore, both movements concentrated almost exclusively on shots containing people. But in retrospect, it appears that the New Romantics especially only ever had formal concerns. In this sense, it could be claimed that these were the *same* ones as those of the previous generation of film makers, say of Peter Gidal or Nicky Hamlyn. Whereas one group searched the smallest matrices of their chairs or bathrooms, the next generation did much the same with the faces of their best friends. Plugholes in virtual silence gave way to pretty pouts to Maria Callas.

In terms of artistic methodology and ideology, both the

New Romantics and Scratch felt very European, very French in fact. Baudrillard would perhaps be pleased but probably he'd be more so with the go-ahead entrepreneurs of television that have now perhaps inadvertently taken over the mantle of the avant-garde. They alone have realised the full power of fragmentation, the full force of Modernism – just pictures from all over the world, all the time, all day, all year. And as far as any television or video goes, never mind the avant-garde or otherwise, it's all about pictures referring back to other pictures.[2] Specifically about Scratch, he'd probably see it as the condensed version of an evening's entertainment, the collapsed version, and he would be right. Seeing things faster than they go on in real life *was* Scratch – the same old impatience as that shared by Fillipo Marinetti, James Dean or, more contemporarily in Britain, the country based BMW-driving lager lout.

Nevertheless, both the New Romantics and Scratch have often been seen as just a reaction – as much in their profile and swanky confidence as anything else – to the stodginess of the British late Seventies independent scene. If anybody can agree about anything, it would be this characterisation. For example, from Mick Hartney, an amusing anecdote epitomising the scene then: Hartney once had his work rejected by David Hall – the Iman of British Video and co-founder of London Video Arts[3] – because he committed the cardinal sin of using music 'and it was Brian Eno as well, who was pretty cool then by any standards, music was just "out", you see. . . .'[4]

The Early Eighties

Britain is famed for its artists a) not knowing much about each other, and b) not knowing much about the artists of other countries. We have no cafe society and seem to dislike, even ridicule, those who attempt to 'manufacture' dialogue. Video magazines like the British *Independent Media* or the Dutch *Mediamatic* have not only poor readerships but seem to generate wilful disinterest. I mentioned earlier that the New Romantics and Scratch seemed more European. I would place this too with another point, the importance of night clubs in both scenes. Having social centres is rare in British art. Neither movement would have gelled so fast or indeed become a recognisable cultural 'blip' had it not been for the way in which everyone knew everyone and their work on the circuit. Not unnaturally, upon seeing other people hitting similar visual conclusions, enjoying the same image tricks, one inevitably grows in confidence and becomes caught in an

exciting creative pull. Namely, being part of something, having an identity, a 'job to do', so to speak. For the previous generation, and I assure the reader I write with no malice – surely one wouldn't really think of making a film of a chair or bathroom unless one was in a lot?

Night clubs, then, helped ground an aesthetic for both the New Romantics and Scratch – one of 'visual pleasure'. For the New Romantics, it was held in the long unedited stares of beautiful people out into the audience, poses, set lovingly and dressed with rich fabrics. In Scratch, the idea arose, as in Bowie's *The Man Who Fell To Earth* (Nicholas Roeg, 1976), of a consciousness where images and images, pumped in on banks of screens, could be fed to people with no effort to explain them or make them 'mean' anything – a new line in televisual surfaces. More fundamental too, Scratch looked its best in nightclubs rather than screenings, clubs were its spiritual home. But be that as it may, it wasn't until 1985, upstairs at the Fridge in Brixton in South London – 'the Freezer' – where a club run by Bruno De Florence fully set down the potential of Scratch. At its best for about seven months, various makers would turn up with their latest work and sit around while a sizeable crowd – who'd probably never even heard of independent videos – watched their handiwork on banks of old DER monitors, some upside down, some even, artistically of course (what else?), on the blink.

At the same time, in the late Seventies and early Eighties, art colleges and community resource centres started to unpack the first 'decent' video edit suites – the Sony Series V. And as far as Scratch goes, this was probably as important as any of the cultural contexts outlined above.

The Sony Series V

In the Seventies, the sort of edit suites used in colleges, such as the Sony Series IV and others, were so bad that it's difficult to believe that anybody would have bought one. To use one today, one would need beta-blockers. They had no instantly variable visual search – offering instead a totally laborious process: stop, unlace, fast forward, stop, relace, see picture, wrong one, stop, unlace, fast forward, stop, unlace, see picture, too far, stop, go back, stop etc etc. And you hadn't even found the bit you wanted, never mind tried to edit it – that comes much later in the running order. Hours would go by and very little would be apparent to show for it.

However, if one thought this was bad, the original Sony Portapak was worse. Nancy Holt's *Underscan*, an early American classic of video art, was just about right. That work was a cinch for a Portapak, roll bars were its bread and butter

shot. (In 1978, I actually felt physically sick from watching footage I'd shot on one.) In short, it suffices to say that, prior to the Eighties, using grant aided sector equipment in Britain was not for the impatient but only for the very determined.

Editing was central to Scratch – and *being able* to edit – precisely what it appeared the first 'edit' suites weren't very capable of. So, in this prosaic way, the first wave of 'decent' technology did indeed help delineate an aesthetic and make achievable the first truly edit based video form; in much the same way as the invention of Acrylic paint allowed the possibility of Hard Edge painting. But obviously, like a dialogue, the way people were thinking concentrated the fixation, amalgamated aspects of both into an attainable visual approach. Further, the Sony Series V had one trick, and still does, that sets it apart from all the others. One can edit *live* – even the latest U-matic SP (Superior Performance) suites, and certainly not machines of higher professional standards, can do this. This facility more than any other shaped a lot of the work, especially mine.[5]

Take a fast edited tape, full of choice moments, with no dreary shots. Movement is everything, cut pans to pans every time, Copy it. Now you've got two tapes. Keep the copy in the recorder and press play. Press play on the player also, making sure one tape is slightly ahead or behind of the other (it doesn't matter which). Next, with the edit button, located top right, bang out shots as you go (with the right hand), pressing END when you've had enough (with the left hand). There's no stopping involved. It is possible to perform, depending on how fast you want to go, forty or more edits in *one* minute like this – use the music as a guide, if you need one. (Obviously, a few of them will contain 'flash frames' which will need to be patched up but generally it's a precocious way to edit.) Moreover, because one tape is slightly ahead, one gets strange tapestry-like patterns developing, repetitive repeat edits that start to renew, remind, recapture moments that have only just been on the screen. This effect is the definitive 'look', the 'cutting edge' of Scratch, the technical ability to reawaken memories of a shot just gone, a process so fast that you enter oblivion or, paradoxically, a *fast stasis* – life between edits, video that keeps referring back and back to itself.

For me, this facility on the machines seemed to be tailor made to the kind of visual sequences I wanted to work on at the time. It also introduced 'chance' and many conjunctions of the images that Scratchers achieved would just never occur to anyone sitting down with a log of the tapes. This is much the same way in which graphic computers can be asked to randomise the colours of an image, often producing striking

combinations that no artist with a palette would be likely to think of. But the point is, to make forty edits or so on anything prior to the Series V would just be a long day's work, suddenly with the Series V, it took half an hour. At this stage, shock alone primed a genre, one of the 'edit-happy'.

Soon, other technological developments fell into the hands of Scratch video makers. First, 'Mixing'. In London in the early Eighties,[6] mixing, ie being able to mix two tapes onto one, became more available. One could make up, say two hours of chance edited material on two separate cassettes, then, at the mixing stage, introduce treated colours, 'posterisation' and other distortions. Afterwards, back on the Series V, one could cut down the best moments of these composite tapes. The final cut would look very complicated – alive and fresh.

Thirdly, the invention of the music computer/sampler had a role. By 1982, Hop Hop music was well established (incidentally the late Pat Sweeney coined the term 'Scratch Video' in 1984, comparing it to New York's Hip Hop scene) and by 1986, Greengate music computer/samplers and equivalents seemed quite commonplace, bought by the same fame hungry people who perhaps only a few years previously would have been buying synthesisers. (Prior to this, these devices existed but were only for the privileged few – the Fairlight is probably the most famous, but only rock stars had them.)

In parallel, as these new technologies were percolating through to various kinds of creative people, significant and similar changes were underway in the world of ideas. Quoting across cultures and cultural forms became a sunrise industry. In forms such as Pop, Fashion, Sculpture, Architecture and Cultural Studies, themes and emphases cross fertilised and video embraced these developments. Again a convergence of technology appeared perfect for this task. Machines such as the Greengate matched the aspirations and helped consolidate an avant-garde video style.

In practice, it became possible to musically repeat stolen voices and small phrases of dialogue, quoting in an exciting and rhythmical way (see for example my tape *Yes Frank No Smoke*[7]). Sound *bytes* or noises could be stored on disk and a music track (see for example the door slamming/helicopter sequence in my *Absence of Satan* tape[8]). Thus, after the sound was perfected, the pictures could be synched in place. Of course, you could have done something similar on an edit suite but it would have taken much longer and could never be quite the same – although Gavin Hodges, John Dovey and Tim Morrison (aka Gorilla Tapes) amazingly produced all the sound inserts and mixes on their *Death Valley Days* tape on


low band U-matic. The then current technological sophistication made dynamic a simple idea, which probably wouldn't have surfaced without it. Indeed, this narrowing of video and audio technologies continues apace today and it is quite likely that eventually a world timecode standard will be established for all machines, both video and audio, expensive and cheap. With this, one could freely edit, adjusting either picture or sound and make videos with the advantage of as many as eight, sixteen or even forty-eight sound tracks.

In relation to Scratch, the improved standard of edit suites also gave respite to the long standing intimidation of video artists by technology itself. Often it wasn't that artists had different aims to dominant TV culture but that, in fact, they couldn't realise these as 'properly' as they wanted to anyway since they were not given the chance. Video artists felt that they could never do anything they really wanted to because they just never got on the right equipment, all the new devices were always that bit out of reach.

Suddenly, with Scratch, a group of people made most of one part of the process – editing – and appeared to hit solutions and gain familiarity with a few tricks that the dominant scene had never thought of and, in many ways, could never think of.[9] The business itself always saw Scratch as 'post-production' and, as such, assumed it cost the earth. The movement highlighted the fact that, up to then, the business never 'played' or in any way endeavoured to really see what their equipment could do. For them Scratch became something of

Video montage in Gorilla Tapes' Til Death to Apartheid (1986)
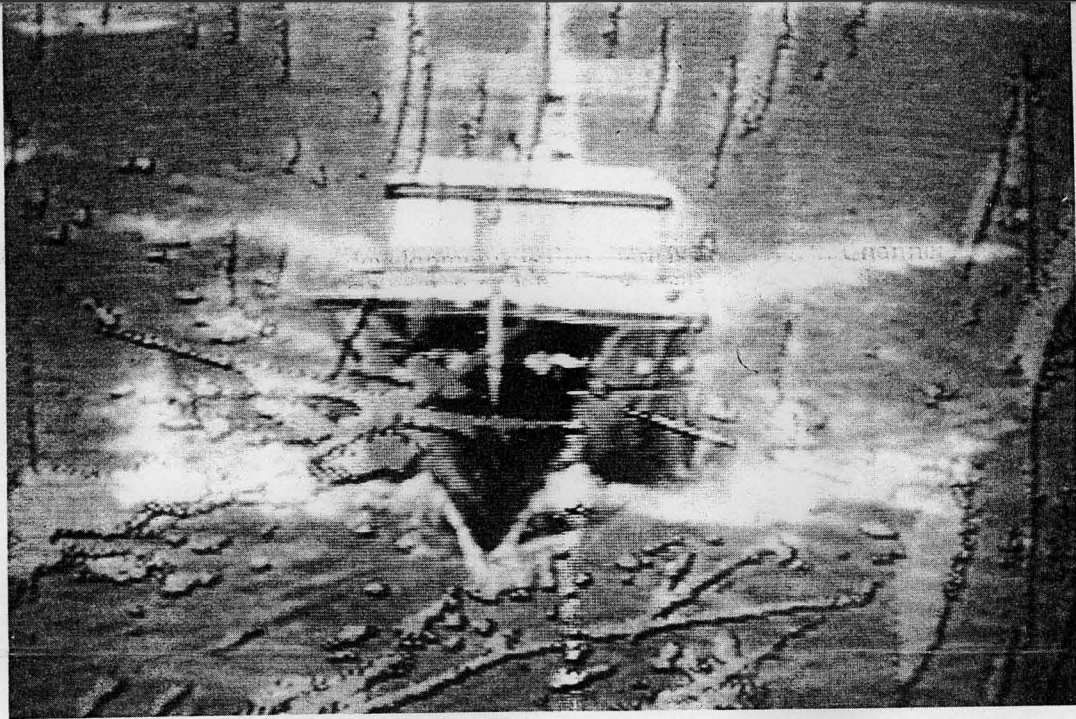
George Barber's
Absence of Satan
(1986)

an early indicator of a new zone, later to emerge as a whole new electronic *sector*, satisfying the ever-expanding 'image treatment' needs of current British television. Soon, 'image processors' were all facilities houses talked about, whether they had them or not – Da Vincis, Paintbox, Harry, Ava, Space Ward, Pluto, Abekas, etc. For today's TV you simply can't make anything look contemporary without them.

After Scratch

I would now like to look at the effect of technology on the British independent video scene – post-Scratch – and raise a few technology issues, and their implications, within the history of video art. In the early days of video art, because of technological limitations, a large body of work came into being that had a doubly distinct difference to television. Obviously, it had completely contrary aims and, frequently, more abstract themes – Illusion, Reality, Space, Time, Texture etc but then again, with the benefit of hindsight, one can see links across such widely differing artists as Brian Hoey and Tamara Krikorian, or Vito Acconci and David Critchley. Compared to television, their work looked quite different, it looked 'wrong' from the very first frame. Often, because of the stronger Performance connection in earlier video art, it had a much more playful and ingenious approach to just 'what is possible with video'. A lot of contemporary video art, including my

own, has a much more contrived and predetermined feel; as if it's trying to hit similar rhythms of interest, pace and development that broadcast TV has, only differently.

Recently in Britain, one of the most encouraging developments is that there is now regular Channel Four, Arts Council, British Screen and British Film Institute money being provided for the making of short, eleven minute or so independent film and video art tapes. It would be irrelevant for me to become involved in too lengthy an analysis of what this all means for the video tradition in Britain, for only a part can be explained by technology alone. I would like to choose one of these tapes – Sera Furneaux's *Canvas* (1988) – to make one points concerning technology's impact but they could be illustrated with reference to many other tapes.

Canvas consists of six sections where women stand frozen, for a couple of seconds, in poses reminiscent of Greek statues. The piece deals with the themes of Time, Perception, Illusion, Reality, Space and Light, key themes from Video Art's tradition, and handles them well and skilfully. One enjoys watching. Yet, it could almost be a perfume ad – specifically the *Simple* ads (a brand of soap and hair care product). In these ads, classical music plays languidly while a group of women barely move against a clutch of wonderfully composed sets – in fact, the same script. In itself, this shared plot, or *mise en scène*, shouldn't really matter, it is after all just the way the two 'look' – there *are* different imperatives at work – but this problem never seems to get resolved or stops corrupting a viewer's response. The problem is that, although it is no greater than what is happening in other cultural areas, video art, as a tradition, seems to be suffering from the depletion of all its previous definitions and areas.

One takes it for granted today that mainstream incorporates the best devices of the avant-garde but this process itself fractures all the time since the avant-garde itself now, by virtue of Channel Four initiatives etc, often finds itself with access to the same equipment as the commercial sector. Today, at a point of technological equivalence, an apparent commonality of access, artists flounder in a dilemma, perhaps created inadvertently by the machines. As the 'look' of everybody's material inescapably becomes more homogenous – technically fine, in spec, no drop-out, all broadcast quality, all sharp, the same sense of pace – it becomes even more likely that any astute commercial eye is going to be able to seize on solutions or novel aspects spotted in any video artist's work. Secondly, coming from the other direction, making anything in an 'amateur', 'wild' or 'unprofessional' fashion becomes just a choice – jerkiness and graininess are now merely a cute aesthetic, a retro excursion. Furthermore, once

upon a time, the business wouldn't have had the open-mindedness to wade through the 'amateurishness' or graininess to get to the idea. Now it does. I would contend, therefore, that the basic fixed process of incorporation has rapidly accelerated in the Eighties, so much so that I think it is beginning to enforce a kind of stagnation or, at least, a lack of confidence on the part of video artists as to what it is their work might be aimed at or based on. In the worst possible scenario, it is as if they have no possible role (and, in this case, the future for video art will perhaps be dominated by a return to the gallery, coupled with a retreat from television and screenings).

Scratch's famed burn-out and burn-up can also be seen as related to the technological equivalence and understanding it held in common with the TV establishment. Style, ways of doing things, the agitation of video grammar, suddenly, and not unrelatedly, became an issue and occupation for the commercial sector – a zone to colonise for broadcast TV's own sense of renewal. Today's video artists were never going to be satisfied being the unpaid R&D department of big business. But when that business, in true Baudrillardian fashion, led by the Pop Video/Youth programming division, became more used to experimenting, playing, trying out new technology – ultimately, in effect, taking the mantle of visual playfulness over from artists to itself, this just about put video art on an endangered species list. The Pop Video/Youth sector, and the opening titles and station idents on TV, are now where people find delight and recourse to the kind of visual enjoyment that they might have once found elicited by video art. The need for a purely formalist experimental video art seems gone. (I might cite here the explosion of 'New Narrative' work in Europe funded by innovative TV channels such as the French Canal Plus, including Monika Funke-Stern's *Mit Fremden Augen*, Bruce Romy's *La Ciancee*, Alain Jomier and J. Le Tacon's *Extrait De Naissance* [all made in 1989].) Many of these tapes have admittedly ingenious production values, indeed one rarely sees video looking better but, given the nature of their writing and its combination with its visuals, little else remains but the production values themselves. One just assumes it is how *Play for Today* will seem in four years time. Certainly, no sense of radicality, Video Art or *difference* to TV is engendered. Indeed, worse than that, often the stories' character models: aggressive thugs, tarts, maids, mad scientists, transvestites, the blind, the 'mixed up' (usually woven together in a semi-Surrealist mode with minimum dialogue), are virtually indistinguishable from narratives long felt outmoded by television itself.[10]

In many ways the *absence* of technology probably influences

video artists today as much as its presence. Going back earlier in this chapter, the reader might have had the impression that anyone today can zoom into video studios and make things, that perhaps money doesn't come in to it. Clearly, for most video artists, most of the time, work stops when the grants do. But be that as it may, even with grants, artists are not going to get hours playing with the *most* sophisticated hardware and yet often, as a video artist, these are precisely the ones one would love to work with. One of the few who has had such access is Cerith Wyn Evans, who received £60,000 from the British Film Institute to make *Degrees of Blindness* (1988). It is a surprising tape and a fine argument for the creative use of hi-tech machines but this level of financial support is rare, to say the least.

As I mentioned before, there now exists a commercial sector that daily 'experiments' with image treatment and novel ways of putting images together.[11] In an inversion of the accepted flow, artists are not immune from taking from this industry either, watching innovative TV also creates ideas, different aims, different pursuits, maybe, but requiring the same hardware. Even though artists have easier access to better basic equipment today, and more of it, the traditional sense of exclusion goes on. Working within a technological form, one cannot restrain a natural curiosity to experience the latest forms but unless one has big grants, the situation remains essentially as it always has been, with most video makers feeling that they never gain access to the equipment they would really like to. To be precise, perhaps one's sense of what is possible with basic set-ups is hampered anyhow by a feeling, however misguided it may be, that the opportunities available with these machines have been well covered in earlier video art. (For example imagine if the first generation of video artists had had the easy access to VHS that the contemporary one does – the widespread existence of VHS has virtually done nothing – there are no samizdat networks of tape makers, no folk-type developments and no explosion of Neo-Neo-Realism).

In sum, as technology gets more and more elaborate, and the grant aided sector slimmer and slimmer, the kinds of things artists would like to do, itself to some extent fed by what is happening on television and in the work of more fortunate artists, grow further and further away from what is possible in their position. It is in this way that the absence of technology results in the numbing of the contemporary video art scene and, ironically, the situation is probably no different to that which existed in the days when artists had to struggle to get hold of any equipment.

However, it is not all gloom, ideas are what must always

count in the end, not budgets or hardware – however much one knows the situation is more complicated than that. Secondly, it may be simply that present video technology is somewhat out of step with the video artist. If one looks to the world of music a very different history exists vis a vis technology, the simple reason being that the market for DIY music technology is gargantuan compared to the market for people who want to make their own videos.

In the mid Sixties, all you needed to make a hit record was three people with guitars and a drummer with drums. By the mid Seventies, the Pink Floyds of this world needed five articulated lorries just to 'fulfil a fixture'.[12] In the Eighties the situation continued, essentially the same, but with different focuses. When bands like Frankie Goes to Hollywood wanted to make a record – we're told it was too expensive to even think of playing live – they apparently needed budgets of a quarter of a million just to cut five minutes of record time. Thus, compared to the golden era of the Beatles, the technology of the following decades became preposterously out of step with the bedroom hopefuls. But the pendulum is swinging back – manufacturing breakthroughs have not only reduced machine prices, they have collapsed them. Digital drum machines currently sell at around £300, as little as eight years ago they cost thousands. It is the same for practically everything else. Nowadays, it is inspiring to hear the amount of 'home made' music that is in the charts. Bands such as 808 State, 49ers and Black Box have had great success with records such as *Pacific State*, *Touch Me* and *Ride On Time* (all 1989). They work on easily available machines but still come up with good tunes. They really don't need anything super-tech, they know exactly what they can get out of their own equipment and play to its strengths. The older bands, still staggering under the weight of the usual yen hardware fiestas – David Bowie, Phil Collins etc – don't really sound better, just different.

Maybe by the end of the Nineties, video edit suites will not only be affordable but so too will much of the *rest* of the standard video-making environment. Perhaps it's just that no one gets the chance to practise making video art day in, day out, that leads so much of the present stuff to be so awkward and not quite 'there'. Anyway, however one defines them or sees the future, it remains that there have been certain tendencies at work in the Eighties that have led to the slow contracting of space in which to work. At the point where you'd think that there would never be an easier time to make one's own stuff, curiously few want to.

In conclusion, one would think technology should make it easier and easier to do what one really wants but it seems to

hide, to do little more than take people further and further away from themselves – at any rate, that is how the argument usually issues from a particularly nostalgic English intellectual position. In Video Art specifically, this usually gets expressed as, 'people just get carried away with effects'. I would never agree – though there will always be bad artists – and would cite Scratch as a prime example of where available technology *was* made the most of, where people just got on the machines and 'did things'. They jammed, winged it and made it up as they went along. It would take a philistine to say it was 'just effects' pure and simple. One only has to look at broadcast television to see its legacy, of how Scratch and the arrival of the first decent edit suites combined to instigate a more edit based video form. In parts of television, the grammar of editing and visual language have irredeemably changed, copying over the excitement of the Scratch scene.

In this way, it is perhaps only when the latest wave of image processing technology filters down to being affordable, that artists will again be unconstrained, unintimidated and original. The Australian artist Peter Callas is a good case in point. In *If Pigs Could Fly* (1987), he ingeniously hitched up three 'low-tech' Fairlights in a way that allowed him to do the bulk of his artwork at home. With everything stored on disk, it could simply be loaded over on to one inch tape and smartened up at the final edit. In general, I think it is to his working methods and to others like him, combined with a renaissance of the video art installation scene, that one would look for the energy of the video art of the Nineties. However, the days of just switching on a video camera and doing things 'live', with no editing, or urge to be succinct, might make a comeback but only as a 'quote' within a larger historical succession – like pitched roofs or a dome on new buildings – the form can never re-find its original purchase. The inexorable trend, as paralleled in other creative forms, outwardly demands more and more technical expertise to revitalise tradition. In the general escalation of technological dependence, video art plays its assigned role quietly, just the odd person still beavering away amidst the indiscriminate landscape of Postmodern Corporate Culture. The artist peers out, swamped by a vast TV industry.

Notes

1 See M Merleau Ponty 'Eye and Mind' in Harold Osbourne (ed) *Aesthetics* Oxford, Oxford University Press 1972.

2 This has been taken even further with video art referring back to video art – Mike Jones and Simon Robertshaw's *Towards A New History of the Origins of Video Art* (1981) for example. Here, the opening water footage of the *Hawaii 5-O* TV series is amusingly cut to refer to the universal video art cliche of videoing water.

3 Now London Video Access.

4 Related at an ICA talk as part of the 1989 Piccadilly Film and Video Festival chaired by Jeremy Welsh.

5 See my contributions to *The Greatest Hits of Scratch Video Volumes One* (1984) and *Two* (1985).

6 The American Video Art scene had all these things earlier and, of course, so did British broadcast stations.

7 *The Greatest Hits of Scratch Video Volume Two* track four.

8 *ibid*, track two.

9 However, it must be acknowledged that Dara Birnbaum in *Kojak Wang* (1983) or, really, any of John Sanbourn's early work, arrived at a metronomic editing style before any of the British Scratch makers. At the time though, it didn't connect up with clubs or magazines and in general hung onto its independent 'Art' status. The British, coming later, took it in a much more low brow direction, frequently using disco music and consciously striving to make a name with superficiality.

10 Obviously, some of my own works such as *Taxi Driver 2* and *The Venetian Ghost* may be felt to fall into precisely this kind of area. Yet I would argue that via humour, 'in' references, and especially the writing itself, breaks with dominant modes of television are clear. Further, when *Taxi Driver 2* was broadcast on Channel Four in December 1987, a member of the public came into the Channel Four Video Box to say that it was the worst video he had ever seen and that his uncle made better ones. I must be getting something wrong.

11 For example, the astonishing work of the TV design company, English Markell Pockett, which does numerous links and opening titles on British television.

12 Punk is obviously an exception here, but being anti-technology was part of its thrust.