

## Video by Jeremy Welsh Simon Biggs. 1988

The video work of Jeremy Welsh functions across a diverse topography of concerns. However, at the heart of his practice, evident in the earliest to the most recent productions, is an engagement with power.

The idea of power is an admittedly rather nebulous concept, but Welsh relates his subject to what he regards as its primary means of constitution and expression in our culture - language and technology.

Welsh sees technology in its broadest sense, incorporating within his vision technologies we tend to regard somewhat apart (t.v. and architecture, for instance). Within such an understanding, the choice of video as his primary medium is especially significant, as Welsh seeks to engage his subject partially through reflecting it in the surface of its means. Thus, subject and media are seen to be functioning from the same point of departure, engendering the work with a coherent sense of totality.

From here we can see Welsh engaging technology, not only as the means by which power is established and exercised, but in its invention as an expression of a more subtle dynamic which relates to people's fundamental need to manipulate and control their environment and one another, through their artefacture. That the artist is similarly involved in this process, just as the scientist or engineer, is encompassed within Welsh's comprehension and so we see the artist placed, admittedly in a position from which he can function, without the predetermined access to a high moral ground that is often given to artists. Thus, when we are confronted with the artist declaiming some

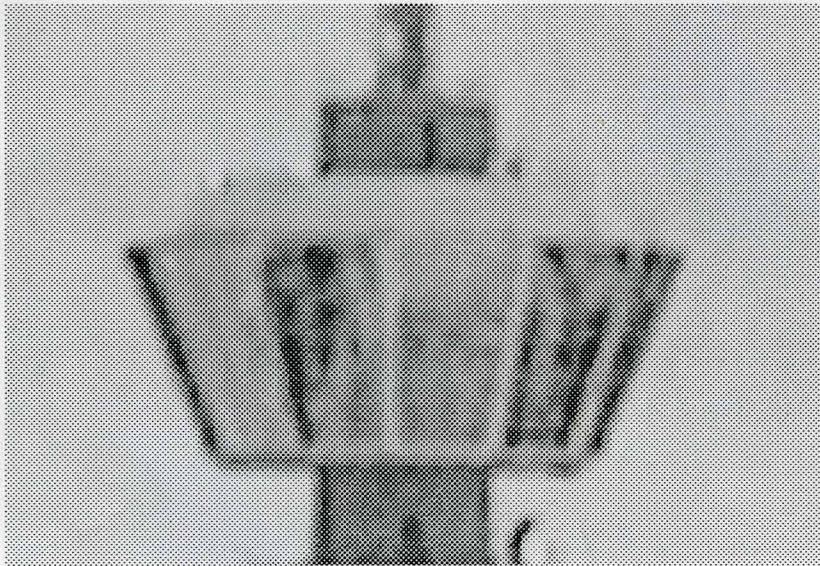
aspect of humanity's inhumanity, we are acutely aware of his own paradoxical position as another engaged in the production of meaning.

Welsh regards this process of production as one dependent upon the most pervasive of human artefactures. Here I am not speaking of television, but of a technology that is invisible, but all the same, very much there - language. Language as a form of invisible artefacture must be regarded as a technology - perhaps the primal technology - and Welsh, with an eye on the paradoxes of such a strategy, engages these characteristics as someone entirely dependent upon his subject for his means.

Thus, Welsh is able to apply a lever to what at first appears a homogeneous whole, but in the realisation of language's dual role as subject and means, its heterogeneous structure, in both its internal and external relationships, is revealed. The nature of this engagement and critique functions on numerous levels, giving any one work by Welsh

a kaleidoscopic quality, further enhanced by an approach to the video surface that is reminiscent of a jeweller's.

Through spoken and written texts, in addition to the more subtle languages involved in any system of visual signs, Welsh introduces us to what he sees as our exploding and fragmented consciousness - a consciousness responding to the same dynamics occurring beneath its sphere in the bowels of linguistic structure. In an early piece, Welsh utilised his own body by contorting it into each letter of the alphabet. In this act, he suggests the organic and primal relationship we share with language, and the operative dynamic



of control. Any one piece by Welsh carries both explicit and implicit linguistic devices in this fashion.

In the late twentieth century humanity has radically shifted its own materiality and that of its artefacts, also shifting its values in the process. Welsh's concern with this process - often referred to as an emerging late capitalist or post industrial culture - goes beyond the obvious evocations, (although he will utilise a specific and timely issue, investing it with an emotional intensity difficult to do with the abstract) to address the basic forces underlying the process.

These he sees as founded in the basic and historical character of our relationship with our environment and our significant others, as mediated by language and technology. Such territory invites a psycho analytic or perhaps Marxist reading, just as his approach to language and the production of mean-



ing begs a deconstructionist strategy - however, in the case of Welsh this would not suffice. For him these are not abstract issues, but a part of his own personal experience, coming as he does from the recently de-industrialised North of England. Thus we discover the means by which he can invest the emotional intensity that he does into a particular work.

Art does not depend upon ideas or beliefs, or techniques to be formed - though all of these can assist in its realisation - but in the involvement with and drawing upon of personal experiences - for both the artist and the reader. In the case of Welsh, by geographical or historical accident, his own experiences reflect those forces which are now shaping our culture. That he has the tools and devices to render his experience accessible and comprehensible to the viewer is evident in the works we see.

stills from PAUSE, 1993. Col video 6 min  
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