1; Artists' Television Tamara Krikorian

In Britain,

The interpretive arts have always been more revered ~~in~~ than the original creative statement. While a Beethoven score or a play by Samuel Beckett are unrounded covered in mystique, the virtuoso performance by a singer or instrumentalist, dancer or actor, receives popular adulation. Stardom is the prize with which the entertainment industry honours its money-spinners. Television cultivates the star system of performers and presenters, cult figures who re-inforce the information while continuing within the interpretive tradition. Borges can only speak to us through a mediator like Frank Delaney; Melvyn Bragg translates for Hamilton-Finlay. Only rarely is the writer, composer or visual artist permitted to make a direct and unmediated statement, for the mediator's position must not be transgressed if the viewing figures are to be maintained. Documentaries on the arts encapsulate the visual statement and are brought to us through literary representation. It is ~~[illegible]~~ not surprising, therefore, that the contemporary visual arts have been poorly represented on television, as artists only become David Tom television material if they are rich and famous like Hockney, or devious like Keating. A subject that is more intellectually demanding is immediately rejected, nepts diluted as ideas count for nothing and, if anything, get lampooned by the press and media. The burning of David Mach's submarine (on the South Bank during the 1983 Hayward Sculpture Show) and the infamous case of the bricks at the Tate Gallery are typical examples of the press seeking sensationalism in the service of entertainment, while refusing to explore the possibilities that these works carried significant messages.

? Television has developed out of the theatre, ~~and of~~ film and radio ~~on the one hand (radio on the other)~~ and is run by mandarins with English degrees who have been brought

up in a predominantly non-visual tradition. This explains the apparent need for continuous narration, endless costume drama, the awkwardness of most of the set design and the irrelevance of much news footage. While dramatists have been employed in television since its inception, visual artists have only played a support role - albeit an important one, contributing to the design and art direction of programmes, providing graphics, titling, set design and props. These have become more elaborate with the introduction of new technology and a range of computer hardware which is capable of the most sophisticated electronic wizardry. The title sequences of programmes like 'Newsnight' (BBC2) and 'The South Bank Show' (LWT) owe much to the invention of these designers and their ability to work within the constraints of an extremely tight economic system, (governed by speed and money.) Producers of programmes have turned to designers and engineers for visual effects but have shied off experimental ideas, often rejecting material for not being literal or explicit enough, revealing a deep suspicion for formal innovation which is perhaps seen as being mildly subversive. In the early 1970's there was a suggestion that one of the BBC studios normally used for programmes like 'Late Night Line Up', cookery programmes and the Weather Forcast (Bakewell, bake fish a fish? sorry, don't fu... Hum in · CC) might, in between times, become a centre for experiment within television. This, however, was seen as an extravagant and perhaps dangerous precedent and never given any credence.

It has been mainly through programmes like 'Top of the Pops' (BBC) and of course, commercials, that any continuing formal experiment has been carried out and the growing inventiveness of pop promos, which have wide distribution, has provided an outlet for artists and designers frustrated by the conservatism of many TV producers. The curious aspect of most of these promos, is that credit is never given to the art directors and producers, so that promos. of bands like Godly and Creme, Bad Manners or Dire Straits will have been made

by directors and artists with reputations made elsewhere. This area of creativity can no longer be looked at as purely commercial and seperate to the main production of art. However, the development of a truly televisual language in Britai has for the most part taken place outside broadcast television, and this pioneering work is only now being recognised by the TV companies.

In an introduction to the television exhibition, 'Land Art', which was broadcast by Sender Freies in Berlin in April 1969, Gerry Schum wrote:
"More and more artists today are exploring the possibilities of the relatively new medium of film, television and photography. These artists are not primarily concerned with exploiting the possibilities offered by the mass media. A more important consideration, I think, is that the greater patt of our visual experience is induced by way of reproduction, with cinematic and photographic representations." This observation echoes Walter Benjamin's prediction that "the reproduced work of art is bound to become, in an ever increased degree, a reproduction of a work of art that is intended to be reproducable."*2.

Artists in the late sixties were turning to concepts and the actual process of making art. Time and space were used to visualise ideas as an alternative to object making. Photography, film and video were perfect media for the expression of these ideas and were not merely used to document the work of art but to transform an idea using the process relevant to the chosen medium. In Land Art, it was no longer the painted view of the landscape which was important, but the landscape itself, marked by the artist. Schum, who had been working in feature films for several years as well as making a couple of art documentaries, was aware of these ideas and believed that television was the perfect outlet for artists' work recognising at the same time the inadequacy of simply reproducing a work of art on television. His idea for a Fernseh-Galerie, a television gallery, was developed after he realised that television would give a much wider audience access to contemporary art than the galleries, and he conceived of art works specially made for television. 'Land Art', the first of these projects, included work by Dennis Oppenheim, Walter de Maria, Richard Long,

Jan Dibbets, Barry Flannagan and Robert Smithson. The project ran into considerable problems with Sender Freies, who broadcast it, failing to understand the underlying philosophy of the scheme and who tried to insist that a commentary be added to the programme, which had already been carefully constructed to allow each work or idea to stand on its own, so that the audience could view the work without mediation, as they might while looking at a work in an art gallery. A studio at the TV station was converted into a gallery, with monitors along the walls, and people were invited to a preview of the work before it was transmitted. A recording of the preview was included in the transmission, effecting the transition between the reality of the art gallery and television. Schum, writing in 1969, said: "Television would seem, thanks to the medium of film, and even more the communication system, to be eminently suited to serve visual art in the same way as the press and publishing serve literature and the gramaphone industry serves music..." [3] His own experience fell far short of such an optimistic view.

'Identifications', funded largely by the Kunstverein in Hannover, included work by twenty international artists and concentrated on concepts. The title of the show pointed "to the correlation between the work of art and the artist in this process," [4] Schum, in his introduction to the broadcast, said, "Film and television offer the artist the possibility of avoiding the materialization of his ideas to some extent. Television broadcasting and video recording make direct contact between the artist and the public possible..." [5] In this respect, Schum was suggesting that the artist could circumvent the gallery system, which uses the work of art as a commodity, and takes the work directly to the audience.

Two further broadcast projects initiated by Schum took place, including Keith Arnatt's 'Self Burial' and Jan Dibbet's 'TV as a Fireplace'. Finding continual problems with the broadcasting institutions, Schum opened a video gallery in Dusseldorf in 1971, but quickly recognised that this was going against all his original ideals, including that of making art available to a wide audience.

In the United States, public ~~broadcasting institutions~~ " " TV channels like WGBH in Boston and WNET in New York have been commissioning work from artisits since the late sixties. See parcian plage, Artists like Nam June Paik and Ed ~~xxx~~ Emshwiller matured with the coincident rise of television and therefore their work became very technologically orientated. Paik had worked with Vostell and Stockhausen in Cologne, at West Deutsche Rundfunk, and his association with WGBH in Boston led to the development of his first video synthesiser. WNET TV in New York founded a TV laboratory in 1972 with grants from the Rockerfeller Foundation and the New York State Council for the Arts. The idea of the TV lab was to provide facilities and sponsorship for '~~independents~~', ~~film-makers as well as~~ artists in order to draw them into a dialogue providing the framework for a new experimental phase in television. Other North American stations have followed these examples. In 1975 WNET Channel 13 broadcast a series ~~in 1975~~ called VTR - Video & Television Review. emanating from the video lab, including work by Peter Campus, William Wegman and his dog, Man Ray, and Nam June Paik. ~~Thexxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ Soho TV in New York, acting as producers, will book a slot every week on public access television for artists, ~~xxxxxx~~ However, public access in this case means that the artists get free access to sophisticated technology and technical support, but no fees. Younger American artists like John Sandbourn (whose recent collaboration with Robert Ashley, 'Perfect Lives', has been purchased by Channel 4), Kit Fitzgerald, Mary Lucier and Bill Viola have all profited from periods as artists in residence at WNET and many of them consider themselves to be TV artists, collaborating with writers and musicians to produce work which is closer in its production techniques (though not in its formal appearance) to TV.

Yugoslavian Television, whose budgetary allocation allows for the purchase of only 14% of foreign material, appears to have a more open attitude to the broadcasting of artists' work. Jez Welsh, who recently visited Lluibliana for a video conference, was invited , ~~on the spot~~, to collaborate with the local TV company~~, and he made a programme during his xxxx~~ stay. In Italy, where there are a large number of local TV stations, it is also fairly easy for artists to ~~gain access.~~ broadcast material.
~~The late Wies Smalls and Del Appel~~

In the United States 'public' TV channels as opposed to the commercial channels have concentrated their attentions on education and the arts. We should make the distinction here between these channels, which only reach a small local audience & broadcasting over the network, nationwide as with the BBC & the IBA. The latter always brings with it, its problems inherent in attempting to address a mass audience. Public TV channels like WGBH in Boston and WNET in New York have been commissioning work from artists since the mid-seventies.

The late Wies Smalls and De Appel Gallery in Amsterdam had ~~forged links~~ collaborated with Dutch TV and sponsored a number of projects, including one most recently with Kevin Atherton.

In Britain, where access is rare, for the reasons discussed above, there have been (odd sorties by artists into the realms of broadcasting.) a few occasions when artists have broadcast their work on TV During the Edinburgh Festival of 1971, Alistair Macintosh, who was working as an exhibition organiser for the Scottish Arts Council, organised a series of events which took place outside the normal gallery context. "Locations Edinburgh" brought together a number of artists including Stuart Brisley, who faked a car crash in a car showroom, & David Hall, who was able to contact an enlightened producer at Scottish Television and persuade the company to transmit his 7 TV pieces. Made with the assistance of Tony Sinden, '7 TVs' was shown ~~between~~ during commercial breaks with no introduction by the company. These short works were shot on film — (the technology was not then available for originating the work on video) and rapidly processed before being sent to Glasgow for transmission. Artist Peter Donnebauer, who has worked with the electronic ~~effects of video~~, manipulating images and colour, has worked on several collaborative projects with the BBC, having spent time at the Royal College of Art developing ~~new~~ synthesised techniques.

In 1975 ~~came the~~ The Video Show took place at the Serpentine Gallery, and brought together various when important threads ~~of~~ aspects of video activity ~~were brought together~~, including screenings of ~~American work~~ work made by American artists ~~made~~ for the cable network. The following year saw two important British video ~~installations~~ Video festivals defining an aesthetic at the Third Eye Centre Glasgow Gallery installation shows, one in Glasgow and one at the Tate. Mark Kidel, a producer working on Arena at that time, and Anna Ridley, designer of ~~many~~ programmes ~~like~~ such as 'Man Alive', 'Top of the Pops' and 'Arena', persuaded the ~~BBC~~ BBC that the time was ripe for a programme on video art. This programme, exceptional in both form and content, was transmitted ~~in May 1976~~ on 'Arena: Art & Design.' in March 1976. David Hall had already made a name for himself as a sculptor in the sixties and had turned to film and video, recognising that sculpture had reached an impasse in its most minimal stage and also, perhaps more importantly, had embraced video as a more flexible and democratic means of communication. He started making video in the early seventies,

paralleling structuralism in film and concentrating on defining the precise qualities of the medium. He was commissioned by Arena to make a work specifically for the programme and produced a new version of a tape made in 1974, 'This Is A Video Monitor', The title of the new work was 'This Is A Television Receiver'. Hall persuaded Richard Baker to perform his role as newsreader; while reading the text, Baker described the essential paradoxes of the real and imagined functions of the TV set on which he appeared. The second shot was taken optically off the monitor, the third copied from the second, and so on, until there was a complete degeneration of both sound and image, removing the newsreader from his position of authority to a quivering indefinable mess of electronic signals.

Stuart Marshall, in a fscinating essay, 'The Image of Authority', published in 1979 described the image of the newsreader as one of the most codified of all televisual images. Newsreaders are, in fact, the 20th Century equivalent of icon figures. Cosmetically packaged, they deliver horrifying information with impassive faces, controlling emotion and response. In our living rooms, they take the place of family portraits and photographs. This preoccupation with newsreaders and news information has remained with British video artists since the mid-seventies, offering a rich source of inspiration and analysis and a precise pictorial representation to deconstruct. In fact, the majority of work produced by until quite recently artists working with video in Britain was concerned with offering an alternative language to that of the broadcasters through careful deconstruction of the language and genres of conventional television Much interesting work has been produced but has, until fairly recently, been conspicuously ignored by the 'professionals'. The author's own tape and video installations,'Vanitas', has been mainly concerned with these questions, as have Steve Partridge's 'Interlace', Stuart Marshall's 'The Love Show', Catherine Elwes' 'A Critic's Informed Viewing' and Ian Breakwell's 'The News'. Other work has been concerned less with the content of TV than with bringing to attention the essential formal qualities of the medium. Much of this work was

carried out at a stage when the technology was less sophisticated than it is now and was therefore difficult to view, but all of it stands as essential in its questioning of dominant culture. ~~This~~ etc Following this important phase of artists' video, there appeared new opportunities for independent work. With the opening of Channel 4, and more enlightened policies in some of the commercial TV companies presented a fresh challenge for artists, not all of whom are familiar with video as a medium. Jane Thorburn's enterprising production unit, 'After Image', anxious about the limitations in distributing work, ~~were~~ planned an arts magazine on videocassette, which might be funded through advertising, for circulation through various outlets. After Image were approached by Channel 4 to produce a series of alternative arts programmes covering a broad range of media. They produced ten programmes each made up of five x 5-minute sections, and included work by John Scarlett Davis, Stephen Taylor Woodrow, Zandra Rhodes, Biff Kardz, David Cunningham, William Burroughs and Genesis P.Orridge. Cabaret artists, animators and jewellery designers were included in the series to provide a mixture of very different types of work in an effort to appeal to a wide audience. There was a concentration on visual ideas, no voice-overs, narration or mediation, thus avoiding language problems and making the series eminently suitable for ~~export~~. Reservations over the project seem to have been reflected in the relationship of artist to the producers in which the producers in several cases insisted on re-structuring the artists' work.

Jonathan Harvey, who ran the Acme Gallery in London, was closely involved with the formation of a new company, TSW - Television South West, which ~~successfully~~ won the independent television franchise from Westward TV in 1981. With Jonathan Harvey as Arts Consultant to the company, TSW has developed an active role in the arts of the region, through arts sponsorship, programme-making and a unique system of advisory boards made up of local viewers. They have developed a close collaborative relationship with the regional arts association, South West Arts, out of which has come an Open Play Competition, a Film and Video Award, guaranteeing the transmission of a new work commissioned from an independent film-maker or artist working with video and won last year by Mike Leggett), and TSWA - the National Open Art Exhibition. Like other television companies, TSW have recognised that there are, very occasionally, short periods of time when studio and post-production

facilities are unused and could be made available for special projects. They decided to commission ten programmes of up to 20 minutes in length, which would be broadcast after 'normal' viewing hours, i.e. after midnight. They considered that it was important to involve local artists as well as people from outside the region, and turned to performers from different practices, including musicians, dance and theatre. Each performer was offered three hours in the studio and a limited amount of time for preparation, and therefore had to have the work fairly closely scripted before shooting began. Sylvia Zmiranek and the Flying Pickets were among those invited to contribute to the programmes as well as Stuart Brisley and Rose Garrard. The series was called 'A Private View' (Director, Kevin Crooks; Associate Producer, Jonathan Harvey) ~~(no doubt implying a relinquishing of editorial control)~~, and Garrard and Brisley both responded in interesting ways to ~~very difficult~~ eight schedules, adapting their own preoccupations to the rigorous studio lay-out. Neither programme had a spoken introduction, though captions ~~subtitles~~ which went up before each work offered brief information about the artist. Garrard called her work 'Pandora's Box'; using casts of herself as model, she performed alongside them, acting out the role of Pandora, bringer of gifts. The text, sometimes spoken by Garrard in performance, and sometimes in voice-over, narrated the story which often referred the viewer back to the role of woman as artist, and as model. One was never allowed to rest in the fiction, being constantly drawn back from the illusion...."open it at the story of Pandora. Try to create an identical image. Try to adjust your position, remember the model in the book..." Garrard's performance was meticulously planned and executed but still bore marks of television production through which the artist's work has been mediated. The studio layout, tracking of the camera and inevitable fades were fundamental to conventional televisual language and occasionally uncomplementary to the artists intentions. Brisley appeared to have overcome some of these problems by working very closely with the director, Kevin Crooks, but he still did not succeed in eliminating the clichés of conventional television production. Perhaps it is not entirely fair to make these observations in relation to this project, since neither Brisley nor Garrard ~~artist~~ had any substantial experience with the medium. Brisley's performance was

in many ways more theatrical ~~than~~ and more verbal than his previous performance work. There was the exceptional circumstance, for example, of seeing Brisley and hearing him at the same time. The work seemed very influenced by Samuel Beckett consisting of a long interior monologue relating the artist's thoughts on first waking up in the morning. Through a series of shifts of performer and camera one was drawn further and further into the artist's mind. He accomplished the very things that television usually fails to do - inducing a proximity and a sense of embarrassment , from which one is normally protected by the quasi-prosceni um arch of the monitor frame. The text revealed the full nightmare of his waking dreams.. .."Dustbins are filled with the imaginary ~~slaughter~~ slaughter of today's pictures." ~~and~~ Comments like .."the eye that is myself looks into the image of myself which returns the gaze of myself.."gave one a feeling of extreme discomfort.

A project which is still at the development stage , involving one of the major facilities houses and Channel 4, is being produced by Anna Ridley. Recognising the continuing problem of presenting artists' work in magazine format while working at the BBC, Ridley proposed a project to Channel 4 which would give the artist maximum freedom with the best production facilities available, ~~in the hope that~~ By familiarising themselves thoroughly with the technology at an early stage in the project, ~~they would~~ the artists would be able to manipulate the material in such a way as to establish their own mark on the work rather than have it mediated by a TV director. By going to a facilities house, expensive though it might be, Ridley has insured that each artist is given a much greater degree of access to equipment and techniques than would normally be possible in a TV studio. Artists like David Hall and Steve Partridge, whose work is relevant to the context and who are both experienced Video practitioners will obviously use this opportunity to maximum advantage. Others will be given guidance but will not be directed.
Ian Breakwell has been working on an adaptation of "Extracts from the Diary" for this series. It has been shot on location, mainly in London, and uses an interesting mix of straight commentary and poetic narration, moving ~~freely~~ freely between both

An important aspect of this project which is worth considering comes, partly from the philosophy behind the original proposal, but also from the substantial funding which the producers hope to obtain, for overcoming many of the problems inherent in earlier collaborations between visual artists and television directors. The aim is to ensure that the artist will have complete control over all aspects of production: the artist is the director. This personal control over all aspects of production through crafting is essential to the fine art ethic. This may appear as a precious comment, more related to late 19th Century thinking than to the world of new technology, but the application is not purely technical and has far wider implications.

A step not yet taken in Britain would be to follow the WNET experience and set up an artists in residence scheme at a TV centre, such as Channel 4 or some of the independent companies. There is also the possibility that a TV company might consider funding a TV laboratory. This has already been suggested in various discussions which took place in a seminar at the National Film Theatre in 1980, involving Channel 4 and the British Film Institute. The present funding of film and video workshops by Channel 4 goes a long way towards forging a link between the independent sector and the TV institutions. Organisations like London Video Arts are rapidly becoming mini TV labs and , given that the technology is becoming more and more sophisticated and that the technical discrepancy between broadcast and non-broadcast standards of reproduction is becoming less problematic, there will shortly be a time when what Mick Hartney described as 'a collision between early video art and broadcast institutions will be turned into a fusion. Negotiations with the union, ACTT, which displays some justifiable reservations about allowing independently produced work by independent artists to produce work for broadcast television, are also taking place.

But how desirable is this relationship; can artists have a lasting effect via the ephemeral medium of television? Television is concerned with immediacy.

It is generated by an efficient technology and reflects the world now. There is a lack of ~~permanency~~ permenency about the medium itself and no TV programme rests in one's memory in the way that a film or a play might. Making something which lasts is not in fact central to the philosophy of most TV directors, who are concerned only with the present. TV is all about the expression of the moment rather than some lasting intellectual or creative statement. Art, on the other hand, has always been associated with the precious, the preservable and of course, the unique. The comparison with the Renaissance bears some attention in considering patronage and the use of painting for prestigious purposes and propoganda: one might contemplate the idea that television has replaced the traditionally respected art forms and that advertisers have replaced the Florentine merchants as patrons. The title of Richard Serra's videotape "Television Delivers the People" suggests that the aim of the broadcasting industry (and this would apply to the independent companies here) is to deliver the customers to the industry. The moving mural on our television sets might well be seen by some as a replacement for other forms of artistic expression.

In 1979, an interesting debate emerged following the ~~Artists' Video~~ exhibition, "Artists' Video - an Alternative Use of the Medium", held at Biddick Farm, Washington Co. Durham. In an introduction to the exhibition catalogue, Richard Cork had suggested that artists working with video should consider it as potentially giving them access to a wider audience, particularly through television. In a reply published in "Aspects" later that year, I argued that much important work was being carried out in the anti-illusionist debate, including the deconstruction of televisual codes, but that this would not have entertainment value for a mass audience. Such work can only ever be carried out successfully outside the institution of television, as the work is, by its very nature, oppositional to the dominant practice and often coded in a language that is only accessible to the practitioners. Entertainment for a mass audience has restrictive elements built into it in terms of language and form. Formal innovation in television is only

adopted through slow absorption, for fear of disturbing the passive perception of the viewers. Yet it is through formal analysis that a real engagement with the institution must occur. Simply transmitting material transferred from one context to another is not sufficient.

Another question which one might ask is whether broadcast television needs artists. The more enlightened policy towards artists already discussed in this essay suggests that it does. Artists, once tamed, bring prestige to an institution but the danger in this relationship is that the work inevitably becomes less radical. If the purpose of the work is to question and offer radical alternatives, then is television the best place to carry this out? In his editorial to the 1976 video edition of Studio International, Richard Cork wrote,'Somehow,(and the difficulties should never be underestimated), a synthesis of medium awareness and social democratisation ought to arise, so that a mature grasp of technical and contextual issues can go hand in hand with a determination to exploit the unique potential availability of video to the hilt. Only then, and depending on when,if ever, television accepts its clear responsibilities both as providers and broadcasters in this field, will video art be able to move from its fragmented niche on the border of culture to the central position it could well prove worthy of occupying.'

It is not enough to simply offer artists 'broadcast time', for they can only be effective if they have a proper understanding of their material and of the intricacies of the most conservative of institutions.

Tamara Krikorian.