

Woody & Steina

Well, here it is... ...you'll notice fragments from that shorter article- well I hope ~~thx~~ they are clearer now- though when typing it up from billions of little fragments I can no longer tell if it makes any kind of sense or not- and so please excuse change of tone and the bad typing on La Monte Young's typewriter which is very old and rickety, so anyway I can only see it as a joke in a way--and oh yes the footnotes are totally unaccurate but must do for now so if you ever do anything with it let me know first-- I guess it will have to be cleaned up a bit anyway---

and so will I

so have spent day after day at LaMontes since I got back and today start work at Doubleday's Bookstore on 5 th Ave for 3 dollars an hour the 4 to 12 shift- it was the best I could do since i need a job real fast,

send grant papers to
La Monte Young
P.O. Box 190
Canal Street Station
New York, N.Y. 10013
212/966-4089

Please ask Gerry if he got my degree forms if he hasnt let me know as fast as you can.

Also can i be included in tape show program at MSI if there is one?

I cant find the form (final) for you to sign but I'll send it up when i do.

I cant think of anything else so letters are ridiculous so bye for now I'll call in a week or two.

Oh yes

Arnold Dreyblatt
75-30 113th ST.
Forest Hills, N.Y. 11375
212/263-1282

THE ELECTRONIC IMAGE:

MEDIUM OF THE FUTURE
OR
AN EARLY FUNERAL?

ARNOLD DREYBLATT
75-30 113ST.
Forest Hills, N.Y. 11375
212-263-1282

The Video Image can be understood in terms of an electronic signal --a waveform occurring periodically which is utilized somewhat ambiguously to simultaneously represent and control time and energy. The different components of this complex waveform indicate the luminance or brightness information, colour and the timing of the image within certain display parameters (frame). Immediately upon detection by a scanning electron tube the reality - light information is metamorphosed into a wave-form in which it is "represented" and it is here that the signal enters into a very profound and "suseptible" state. By altering parts of this waveform we can effect the corresponding attributes of the displayed image. Likewise by electronically working with this signal (including change of timing signals which will change the image shape in display) we may construct an image that is independent of optically reproduced reality; that is synthesized.

A waveform, -literally, energy displacing matter in time represents a holistic and often convenient model in accomadating such concepts as space, energy, time etc. This model is the basic principle in analogue transmission, detection, and display of information utilized in both "natural" and "artificial" communication systems in both micro and macro-cosmic dimensions, and is found as both organizing abstract assumptions and on the practical level. The concept of "the periodically occurring waveform" has inspired and been utilized both practically and as a metaphor by many visual and audio artists observing form and time interacting.

Paul Klee¹ in his famous notebooks prophetically writes, "I should

like therefore to establish this wave structure as the symbol of minutely divided animation... ..early adaptive union of idea and matter yield matter animate. At this momentum the originally straight line of attack changes into a slightly oscillating vibrating wave line. The attendant friction is overcome by a first flickering rhythmization."

La Monte Young, a musician who with his wife Marion Zazeela have produced continuous periodic waveform environments with light installations in writing on Indian Music refers to the "abstraction of the Vedic idea that the universe began with vibration which is itself very clear, and related to concepts of modern physics..."² The formal and temporal aspects of the waveform create a metaphor for the temporal characteristics of all matter and experience - perpetually changing, etc. Such a metaphor can easily be found upon examination of Asian philosophy and in the mythology of so-called primitive peoples. Hans Jenny, in his book on the structure of vibrations³ writes, "There are always figurative and patterned elements in a vibrational process and a vibrational effect; the whole is of a periodic nature and it is this periodicity which generates and sustains everything. The three fields - the periodic as the fundamental field with the two poles of figure and dynamics - invariably appear as one. They are inconceivable without each other. It might be argued and discussed that this is not really a true morphology but only a vibrational form, not an inherent dynamics but a vibrational dynamics etc. If, however, we restrict ourselves to experience and speak its language, we shall find that that we speak of every metamorphosis and variation in terms of the basic triadic phenomenon."

It is true that these metaphors operate in the subjective realm but we can find in a mode such as the generation and control of videofeedback just such a personal activity.⁴

While mechanical movement⁵ and the cultural and artistic contexts it initiated implied a temporal sense with beginning and end, dramatic pathos and anthropomorphic redemption etc., we find that the age of electronic periodic movement yields only endlessness, continuous change, and a kind of silence except for the statement of its own existence (which may be sound). One may dream of the timing/vibration that sets all other timing/vibration in motion in seeking to experience another time frame. Yet, paradoxically, in order to have full control of all points on a continuous waveform source it is necessary to convert the analogue information to digital information. In these artificial intelligence systems the importance of the synchronization/timing differentiates it from the biological: where the decisions affecting the pathways of information implies the organization. Another important difference between a system designed by man and a biological system is that the information carried in a biological system is never completely definable - "it contains a memory of unknown extent."⁶ William S. Burroughs writes, "The only thing not prerecorded in a prerecorded universe is the prerecording itself- that is to say any recording which contains a random factor."⁷ Woody Vasulka, a video artist living and working with his wife Steina in Buffalo, New York,⁸ has become interested in the use of these electronic technological tools to "re-structure reality". Acknowledging our visually oriented culture, he sees the task of electronic image forming as no less than "constructing" a new

reality through the reorganization of kinetic materials that these modes of electronic synthesis allow us.⁸

The semi-conductor revolution accelerated the development of self-responsive technological systems that began with the post war military complex. The trend which enabled greater information processing with smaller and less ~~expensive~~ hardware has facilitated systems which in addition to metaphorically resembling the modes of brainlike processes proceed in a time sense foreign to the realms of human experience. Even though my technical knowledge of electronic circuitry is somewhat limited, I cannot help but fantasize about the internal events in such a system. Here in this microcosmic world, simple decisions can be made by energy being modulated or decoded according to a pattern no doubt referent to the desires of a biological brain containing similar but more mysterious circuitry operating in a more complex physical environment of which the technological system is ^{also} a part of.

Somehow, the material and logical structures man has devised to detect and direct this electromagnetic energy echo our own mental awareness of space and time. It is not only the use of such technology which seems to mirror and parody the philosophies of our perceptions but also the "setting into motion" or programming of a series of electromagnetic events for which we may or may not find observable corollaries in our experiential world.

We can return to the "susceptible" state in which the image is indicated between pickup and display. When the energy and time relationships are altered the image becomes relatively malleable and in a form readily altered by various electronic hardware. Luminance priorities assign colour, image layering etc. When the image is being displayed on the Cathode-Ray Tube the image coordinates can be changed by electromagnetic means (modulating the incoming waveform that the electron gun is slave to). The basic tool in this image modulation is the audio oscillator, an electronic device capable of producing a fluctuating signal variable as to amplitude, frequency and waveshape. Modular "scan conversion" systems are now available which include a CRT display adapted for waveform modulation inputs, and banks of voltage controllable signal generators. Here we can see that both complex sound and image construction is based largely upon modulation by audio oscillators. In video an audio signal can modulate the components of the video waveform referring to horizontal and vertical deflection of the electron beam thereby restructuring the spatial characteristics of the image.

It cannot be forgotten that the Cathode Ray Tube displays images on a two dimensional plane, and, that regardless of whatever familiarity one might have for the electronic process involved in a sense the image must be judged on its compositional merits. But as the process of image forming becomes more and more complex and suitable to various types of interface with other media it does become harder and harder to hold aesthetic judgement to the final product. Yet at times it does seem to me that when video tapes are played back as product, they can only be judged as product as opposed to the presentation of a larger context.

For, sure, video is unique in being able to detect, transmit, and display images in real time. All electronic manipulation of the image can also be accomplished within this immediate temporal sense. This implies an interesting relationship one can nurture in the creative mode.

More so than film, Video in its short history has itself served as much as anything else as its own subject. The organic-seeming unpredictability of video feedback and the electromagnetic distortion of the raster/frame and its subsequent recanning have both quickly become a trademark, and, inevitably a cliché. It may be that the immediate accessibility of subject matter has led to a romantic affair with feedback and its various mandala incarnations which has resulted in a kind of "electronic jazz romanticism" on one extreme and a "electronic scare in the dark" on the other. A San Francisco group of video artists, some of whom were formally painters, have expounded a painterly aesthetic, William Gwin writes, "Naturalism is the context within which I work; it describes the basic attitude from which all my work comes. Naturalism describes a synthesis of memories from the visual world and feelings produced by confrontation between nature within the artist and nature outside the artist... ..Naturalism, surface, motion and a respect for the properties of the material are the four cornerstones upon which my art is built."⁹ The keyed colorized images as utilized by these San Francisco artists neither does justice to their dogma nor to the limits of electronically treated resolution. Like many others working in

Video, they seem to have misconstrued the art material entirely.

So what can we do but look to the medium's own internal catalogue of electronic images, letting optical reality play only a referential role as we plunge. Yet the visual vocabulary of the state of the art technology (Scan converter, voltage control, image processing equipt.) while offering an undeniable collection of kinetic possibilities are trapped by awkward animation, clumsy control, and images of stylistic sameness that unintentionally can add up to kitch. One can only hope that digital technology can surpass mere digital control of analog functions and be able to process the video signal fast enough to assume a major role in future creative work.

The problem of sound and image has been dealt exhaustively in film criticism but Video raises some interesting questions in this regard. I am referring to the electronic relationship¹⁰ between sound and image. This is an area that has been exploited in most of the Vasulkas tapes (They have insisted on maintaining this structural element since their earliest tapes) and in some of the work of other video artists. Sound/voltages are used to either form or switch an image (whether with audio frequencies directly interacting with the video waveform or with some more sophisticated scan conversion device). The original audio may or may not be recorded and/or routed through audio analogue processing components. Other than being synchronized the sounds may not necessarily reflect the quality of the images ~~of the tape.~~ ~~Since the visual~~ information and its

timing are indicated by periodic waveforms one could say that in some respects there could be an inherent structural connection between electronic audio and video creative applications. Whether such a technological relation enabling flexibility of interface between two mediums can be adopted as a visual aesthetic above that of traditional accompaniment techniques is open to question.

Video represents a paradox of being defined by the limits of a technology which is at the same time ^{most} ~~the~~ unique characteristics.

During my own personal encounter with the medium I have experienced a kind of disassociation or alienation in my relationship with the visual image as a means of personal expression. The only comparable experience in my own life was an inability at one point to frame (enclose) reality. But now the problem is inverted - it is no longer an elusive object/essence we seek to capture/contain. In an immense disparity between surface and depth, conception and realization, object and subject, we are faced with a multitude of contradictions. With others I had once thought that the electronic image stands in accord with the development of surrealistic juxtaposition (assemblages) ^{, but} I have found the image itself to be a mere indicator; a surface glow monitoring the unpredictable behavior within the mysterious spaces and pathways ~~of the~~ electronic circuitry. As videofeedback exists only in relation to the actions of its maker, the electronic image exists only in relation to its source. And it cannot hide the limitations of its own design - the limitations of waveshapes as a basis in image construction. And so until some new machines arrive, we can sit and observe our present system (the only one that God hath given us), and maybe switch a few wires around and see what happens.

FOOTNOTES

1. The Notebooks of Paul Klee Vol. 1, Dover Publications, NY 1943
2. Sound is God, La Monte Young The Village Voice April 1978
3. Cymatics, Hans Jenny, George Brazillier 1968
4. Videofeedback is the visual result of a loop created when a video camera is pointed into its own monitor; an output is directed into an input.
5. "The principle of synchronization has been the basis of even the mechanical devices of the new century - the synchromesh gear is a means by which varying speeds and parts are brought into adjustment. Gertrude Stein suspected that the cinema is the primary art of the 20th century because it synchronizes (1920). "If," she says, "the artist is to be contemporary he must have the time sense of his Bay..." Whyte Syper, Art & Literature
6. Information, Computers, Machines and Man, Edited by A.E. Karbowiak & R.M. Huey, John Wiley & Sons, Sidney 1971
7. The Ticket That Exploded, William S. Burroughs, Corgi, London 1962
8. (c) THE VASULKAS
9. (~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~)
99. Reflections on Two Media, William Gwin
10. This is not to be confused with an electromagnetic relation, which may or may not be the case.
- 11.

PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A YOUNG MAN
BEFORE AND AFTER WATCHING HIS OWN VIDEO TAPE



BEFORE



AFTER