

# Video: It Spans Dimensions

*Artists Display 3-D Poetry  
Of Sounds, Images, Words*

By K.C. COMPTON  
Journal Arts Writer

The "Video As Attitude" show opening this weekend in both Santa Fe and Albuquerque is what is known in artistic circles as a Major Show. Thirteen of the world's best and brightest video artists will present an exhibition dealing exclusively with video installations — the first show of its kind in the country.

The shows, which run through June 26 at the Museum of New Mexico in Santa Fe and at the University of New Mexico Art Museum, open with a performance of "He Saw Her Burning" by Joan Jonas at 8 tonight at the Museum of New Mexico. A symposium featuring a presentation by John Hanhardt, curator of film and video at the Whitney Museum of American Art, will take place at 2 p.m. Saturday in UNM's Rodey Theatre. The show is financed primarily with funds from the National Endowment for the Arts. In the video arena, all this spells heavyweight.

It is unlikely but possible that you already know a great deal about video art. But you probably don't know what the show's curator, Patrick Clancy, wants you to know. For instance, I started to write that this is a fairly new art form because the video technology has been with us for only a couple of decades. But before my wee fingers could tap out those words on this keyboard, I felt Clancy mentally swatting my wrists.

"What I want to do with this show is to introduce a whole new discourse regarding video art, situated within a sculptural context," Clancy said determinedly, socking the back of one hand into the palm of the other like a shortstop determined to catch the next fly ball. Our conversation was accompanied by the

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Journal Photo by Jim Fisher

## 'Not a Model for Big Brother's Spy Cycle' — Dieter Froese's Cardboard Video Complex

high-pitched whine of an electric drill and punctuated with an occasional blam-blam of hammers as the exhibition began to take shape in the museum around us.

"The idea of video as attitude has to do not only with a spacial attitude, but it also has to do with a certain approach to art and to experience that emphasizes process. The Modernists would say that video art began in the early 1960s with the invention of the first portable video recording equipment."

Such an assumption is an easy mistake to make because it seems so, well, *logical*. *Au contraire, mon cher*. When you look at the situation through Clancy's glasses, you peer back over centuries instead of

decades. The technology of video may have started 20 years ago, but the *attitude*, the approach to information and experience, has been a part of our culture for ages.

For instance, in the late 1600s Johannes Zahn adapted the Arabic idea of magic lanterns, so that a weather vane on his roof moved a cogged gear that engaged a circular glass plate with engraved images on it. As the wind blew, it moved the plate in back of a flame, which projected moving images into a darkened room. Such technology was the forerunner of video installations.

The problem with art, according to Clancy, is that

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# Sounds, Images, Words Make Video 3-D Poetry

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there has been a Modernist tendency (the word Modernist seems to evoke the same emotion in these artists that communism stirs up for John Birchers) to view all art as painting. This one-dimensional approach may be OK for painting, but it is *dreadful* for sculptors and most certainly for video artists.

"For me as an artist, the problem in talking about video in that kind of modernist context was that it just wasn't the right issue," Clancy said, raising his voice above the sound of a second drill that joined the first in a high-tech duet just outside the door. "People who were using video were using it in a sculptural sense. They weren't always and only the kind of people that used video in the sense that a painter in the past only worked with paints. They make films, do performance work, make paintings—a whole variety of forms.

"Video is a very synoptic art form. It includes sound, image, words, every kind of thing you can imagine. It has had an impact on painting, sculpture, all the art forms in the sense that it has opened them up and has shattered this kind of single dimension view. Video has created a multi-layered, multi-dimensional, inclusive experience."

Often in the past, Clancy said, video art has meant a single-channel video tape functioning as a self-contained unit. In this show, the key word is video *installations*. It's part of that multi-layered approach Clancy mentioned earlier. In that same '60s upheaval that made women resist being treated as sex objects, sculptors began to complain about their work being viewed as objects, period. Sculpture was context, not form, they said. Some of them grew up to be video artists.

"One thing that began to happen in the '60s with a lot of artists was that they began to be interested in the context of the art work, that it would not be situated within a single object, but either multiple situations or an environment that would be the context for the experience; that a person would be a participant in or move through or that the 'sculpture' would activate the space; in some sense it would be greater than looking at the condensed, centralized form that was the object itself. Video became a natural kind of tool in that situation," Clancy said,

"In my recent work, I have become particularly interested in exploring and exploiting that aspect of behavior which attributes significance to gesture beyond that which is obviously true," says Bill Berne, one of the artists who will exhibit at the Santa Fe Museum of Fine Arts. "Through the use of surveillance cameras, extras move in and out of the viewers' frame of reference to form this work."

Juan Downey says that his piece "Signage," also part of the Santa Fe show, deals with perceptual phenomena in opposition to signification and cultural context. And Gary Hill, who will exhibit "Primarily Speaking" in the Albuquerque show, says his work is based on a text constructed from idiomatic expressions.

He continues, "The individual phrases become topological variations and, combined linearly, bore into the perceiver's stronghold."

For those who may not be absolutely certain they want their strongholds bored into, the show may provide alternative experiences.

"I really think this art is more accessible than other art forms that necessitate a formal, historical knowledge of let's say, painting," Clancy said, trying to find the right words to communicate his sense of excitement and adventure about the show. "You can think of it as not only like television in your home that you sit in front of and watch; it's a series of televisions that you walk through and move around. There are other objects there as well. An event will be happening in that space that you will either be a participant in or you'll be discovering and decoding. It's not a high-tech vision of the future at all.

"It's poetry."

# SPECTRUM



Steina's experimental video will be part of the *Video As Attitude* exhibition opening May 13.

## VIDEO AS ATTITUDE

Museum of Fine Arts  
Museum of New Mexico  
Santa Fe

University Art Museum  
University of New Mexico  
Albuquerque

Video as *attitude*...not *object*. That may take some time to grasp. As Patrick Clancy, curator of this six-week video installation and exhibition, explains it — "This exhibition has more to do with the redefinition of sculpture than anything else."

For the exhibit program, Clancy wrote: "To most people 'Video Art' implies a single-channel video tape which functions as a self-contained work. Although all of the artists in *Video As Attitude* use video in the works presented here, they are also known for work in performance, sound, books, drawing, sculpture, or any combination of these media. This exhibition presents video as a component which interacts with other media in a multi-layered, sculptural context."

The *Video As Attitude* show contains the installations and performances of 13 artists from New Mexico, New York and California. The show opens in Santa Fe on May 13 at 8 pm with a performance by Joan Jonas of "He Saw Her Burning," a piece that incorporates video, dance props and film. Works by Bruce Nauman, Bill Viola, Francesc Torres, Juan Downey, and Bill Bierne will be installed in Santa Fe.

The Albuquerque opening will take place on May 14 at 2 pm with a symposium on *Video As Attitude*, moderated by Patrick Clancy. Installations will be those of Steina and Woody Vasulka, Robert Gaylor, Rita Myers, Gary Hill, Dieter Froese and Michael Smith.

In an interview with N&R, Clancy expounded on the concept behind this exhibition, the first of its kind in the country.

"Many different attitudes are represented in this exhibition. Bruce Nauman was one of the first people to use video in an installation, for the Nicky Wilder Gallery in LA, in 1969 or '70. It was a corridor piece with a camera — a very, very narrow space that you moved down, and you displaced within the situation. That was an example of a whole genre of early video work which had to do with locus, of how one was located in the space. It was in contradiction to notions about sculpture as a frontal centered object.

"Nauman's work is very innovative, post-minimalist work that deals with video in a way that's different from the way a lot of artists have used it. Again, not all of these artists would be called 'video artists' — they work in other media.

When Steina Vasulka was awarded a solo exhibition in 1980 in the Museum of Fine Arts biennial she asked to be able to show her work in the context of other video artists' new work. About the same time Patrick Clancy was asked to curate a video exhibition for the University Art Museum. This enormous collaboration is the result of those two invitations. But Clancy's stated intentions aside, the many contributors to the show have their own intentions — to explore different modes of perceiving and creating art, everyday reality and the metaphysical. Experience these artists' constructions and your own attitudes about video and art will be likely to change. At the very least, you'll be amused.

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# PERFORMING ARTS

## Video: Art As Process

**V**ideo as Attitude, opening May 13 at the Museum of Fine Arts in Santa Fe and May 14 at the University of New Mexico Arts Museum in Albuquerque, is a rare and unlikely cooperative exhibition that will be happening simultaneously in both cities for six weeks. Many years in the making, this event has received little advance publicity from the main sponsoring institution, the Santa Fe Museum, and yet it promises to be a unique gathering of internationally recognized artists, critics, and curators. *Video as Attitude* features the work of 13 artists from New York, California, and New Mexico who have created sculptural installations and performance pieces specifically for this major show. Squeezed amidst this year's Santa Fe Film Festival, the third annual Festival Theatre, 11th Chamber Music Festival, and the 27th opera season, it could well be overlooked. It shouldn't be. It's important, and if current indicators are correct about the cutback in exhibitions at the Museum of Fine Arts, it may be the last really contemporary endeavor of that poverty stricken institution for many years to come.

With the emergence of Laurie Anderson into the mainstream, there is now a vague awareness of something called "performance art" among the general public. In fact, it was hoped that Anderson would participate in this exhibit, but, as one of the organizers put it, "She got really famous on us during the time it took to put the show together." And this show was a long time in coming. The notion of such a large-scale, complex project arose out of the Museum's last Biennial (which may truly have been the *last*) in 1980 which was held at the Armory for the Arts. The well-known video artist Steina Vasulka won the "Best of Show" award for her two-camera, motorized installation, which was a variation on a series called *All Vision*. The prize was to be a solo exhibition at the Armory. More interested in seeing other video artists' work, Steina encouraged a multi-artist show. It was in 1981 that artist/theoretician Patrick Clancy took up that baton and has been running with it ever since. Clancy received a sizeable grant from the National Endowment for the Arts and offers of support and encouragement from the Santa Fe and Albuquerque museums. Patrick doesn't speak about this exhibit so much as a curator as a participating artist.

In a written statement about the exhibit, Clancy gives us clues about the orientation he has had in bringing the show together:

"Video has had a great impact on us and is forcing us to reconsider how we structure information and see the world. Artists are interested in video as a tool capable of displaying many kinds of information — sound, text, color, image, language, 'real time' experience. Video is a tool which tends to open up form and create a rich multilayered experience."

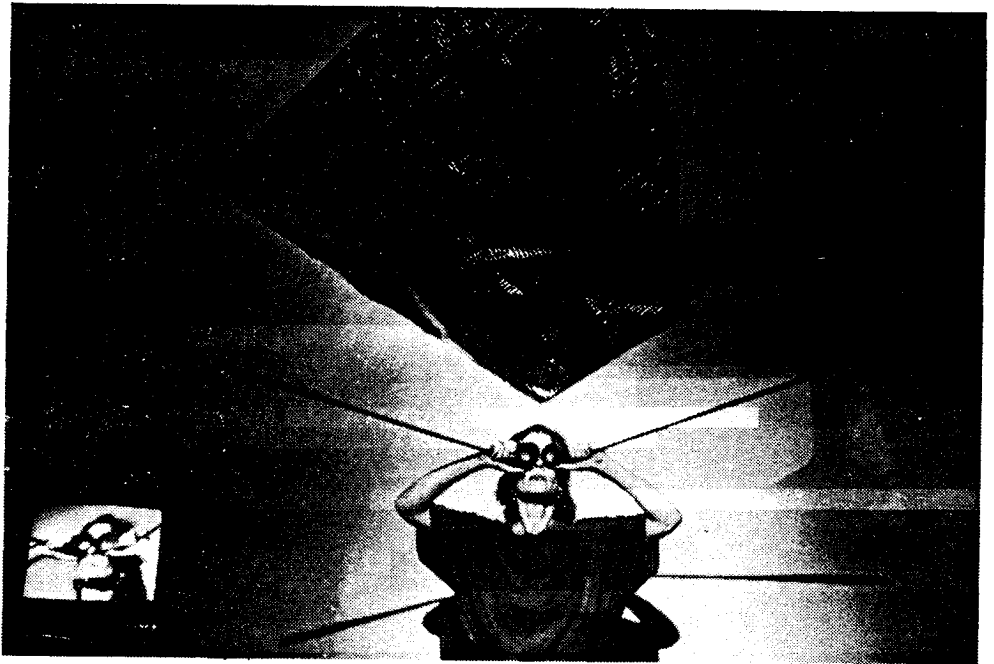
"Multilayered" is a continuously recurring word in Clancy's vocabulary when speaking about the show. On April 1 he was in Santa Fe with another of the featured artists, Allan Kaprow, who is credited (whether he likes it or not) with creating the first "happenings" in New York City in 1959. Currently a Professor at the University of California in San Diego, Kaprow has been mentor and provocateur for more than one generation of younger artists. He has the tweedy, philosophical look and considered manner of an academic, speaking slowly, pausing while he nurses his pipe. And, so, it is somewhat of a surprise when he says, "I really don't think of art as a distinctive category except as the background of all my bad habits. The consequence of my history is that art is a separate thing — like shoemaking or drinking tea or whatever it is . . . The total identity is what I'm most interested in rather than the relative difference. I'm not particularly concerned with art as a part of a history of specialization."

Indeed, most of the participating artists in the exhibition refuse to be categorized. They all seem to be working as "comprehensivists", creating artifacts that are by-products from the process of discovery. The seasoned teacher Kaprow puts it this way: "In the past we tended to think of objects or things as having a stable experience, and that what many people have been doing the last 150 years is mov-

ing away from the thing toward the process. And that does not mean products or objects are obsolete, it only means that our attitude and use of them has begun to change to a very flexible, continuous sort of way."

This emphasis on process is potentially unsettling to the average museum audience. The university population has previously been exposed to such work, as have the small, eager audiences at Santa Fe's Rising Sun Media Arts Center. It will be mostly in Santa Fe that the general public will be introduced to "the use of video in a sculptural sense and the spatial, narrative and conceptual roles of the artist and the viewer himself." For this kind of art is completely dependent for its completion, its endless possibilities for articulation, upon the individual who comes to it. Unlike so much of what is hung on the walls or placed on pedestals, this work is active and requires participation.

Because the starting points are perception, life, the big picture, what you get is what you are. There is no right way or wrong way or set way to "understand" this work. And while that may sound confusing, it is actually very simple. The exercise for those who come to the show is to



Joan Jonas, *He Saw Her Burning*, 1982, *Golf Club Dance*, installation/performance. (Photo by Francene Keery.)

relax and be prepared to enjoy it. Should you become engaged, you may spend more than the normal 2.5 seconds accorded by the viewer to the average work of art shuffled past in most museums.

In addition to five sculptural installations in Santa Fe and the six in Albuquerque, there are two performances using the greater New Mexico outdoors. Kaprow made his preliminary trip to investigate the 70 mile stretch between the state's two principal cities. As Kaprow said, he never

solidifies a piece in advance. "The reason for that is a point of view about artwork that you conceive all ready to show, (versus) creating something in a real situation with people, with the surroundings, that are unique to that situation." Kaprow, who sees himself as a doer, will perform this original work between May 16 and 21. The other artist working in the community will be Bill Biene. Curator Patrick Clancy

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says, "Biene is doing a piece that involves 'real time' performance. He has been collecting the newspapers from both cities for two years. His performance will be a collage of micro-events enacted every day in the flow of normal activity on the Santa Fe Plaza." It will occur at 12:15 p.m. from May 14 to June 26 and be transmitted into the Museum of Fine Arts in Santa Fe, hence the title *Extras: Street Performance For an Audience Enclosed*. Each day the live performance and the audience's reaction will be recorded on video tape and transmitted to Albuquerque via microwave link atop Sandia Crest.

Every one of the artists will be in Santa Fe and Albuquerque on the 13th and 14th. Everything is free to the public except the opening performance by Joan Jonas, *He Saw Her Burning*, which is at 8 p.m. on Friday, the 13th, and will be followed by a reception for all the artists. Any one of these artists would make a solid and substantial one-man show. Clancy

is trying to take full advantage of this conglomeration of provocative artists and has scheduled a symposium for the next day at the university's Rodey Theater which is in the Fine Arts complex. Clancy will moderate and John Hanhardt, curator of film and video of the Whitney Museum of American Art, will lead off the discussion. Considering the extraordinary preponderance of video pieces in this year's Whitney Biennial and the dependence on "word of mouth" and critical writing to transmit information about these art forms, the symposium and resultant papers will be important. The furious activity in the last decade in video and performance has, by and large, been confined to either major metropolises or university communities in Europe and the United States. According to Clancy, "It is a very complex show. Nothing has ever been done in this country of this scale with this kind of work before."

— MaLin Wilson

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# Fine (Video) Art

By SUZANNE DEATS

The Museum of Fine Arts in Santa Fe and the University of New Mexico Art Museum in Albuquerque are jointly fielding a major video art exhibition that will run through June 26. The show is situated in both locations—and at points in between and beyond, which is a logical yet largely unexplored fine-art application of the very nature of video: its capacity to be in more than one place at a time.

The event was curated and organized by artist/theoretician Patrick Clancy of Albuquerque and coordinated by staff members of the Museum of New Mexico in Santa Fe. Sculptural installations of video works in both locations will be complemented by showings of selected tapes, inter-city video transmissions, and the creation and performance of a work examining various communication links between the two cities by Allan Kaprow, a pioneer figure in conceptual art.

To begin the month's activities, Joan Jonas performed her latest work at St. Francis Auditorium last Friday night. "He Saw Her Burning" incorporated video, dance, props and film in a complex, multifaceted meditation on modern society.

Jonas' art form is an evolution of Kaprow's happenings of the '60s, but the content places it squarely in the present. Unlike the action-packed '60s, with its clear-cut political myths, the present is static and ambiguous, and its symbols more concerned with paralysis than revolution.

Jonas selected two news events from Berlin, the divided city where she was

residing a short time ago. In one, a soldier stole a tank and devastated parts of the city of Mannheim before driving into a river. In the other, a woman spontaneously burst into flames as a witness watched from a car. In Jonas' multimedia treatment, these two puzzling episodes became metaphors for thwarted passions in a world without substance.

She constructed these metaphors in a sculptural manner, by moving all around the events and back and forth in time, using images that are both direct and allusive. They piled one atop the other in a seemingly irrational fashion until the true irrationality of a modern existence was clearly delineated.

No one image was more significant than another, yet some were strikingly beautiful. A large red fan and a filmy red dress in motion suggested fire in a more immediate way than a filmstrip of real flames would. In a projected image, two long, horizontal wooden sticks clacked together combatively in front of a white, vertically corrugated

wall. Beneath them, Jonas stood in the dark and raised two large white flags into the projected image, waving them in the time-honored gesture of truce. It was an unforgettable visualization of the stubborn, sometimes hopeless hunger for peace.

Another multimedia work incorporating performance that can be seen during the show is "Extras: Street Performance for an Audience Enclosed" by Bill Beirne. This piece will run Monday through Friday from 12:15 to 12:33 p.m. until June 26, and can be seen in the new wing of the Museum of Fine Arts.

Other installations include an untitled piece by Bruce Naumann, consisting of a corridor and an upside-down room monitored by television cameras. Viewers interact with what Naumann describes as a "part of a dream I've tried to reconstruct." Seen at an uncrowded moment, it does function at a dreamlike remove from daily consciousness.

Additional installations by Bill Viola, Francesc Torres and Juan Downey are

shown in the Santa Fe museum, while six others have works in Albuquerque. Taken all together, the video art show comprises an exhibit of national significance, with nationally recognized artists from New York and California collaborating with local people to produce some important firsts in scale and content.

Curator Patrick Clancy describes the media in this show as "process-oriented. It begins to redefine sculpture," he says. "It is a new discourse, parallel to painting. It parallels rather than replaces the object. It is more meaningful in terms of change and modern intellectual thought."

Viewers will probably have to work a bit to absorb the ramifications of this exhibit. The video/sculpture medium is not brand new, but it is still young. Unlike cast-bronze sculpture or film, it does not lend itself to being collected or to being sold as entertainment. What it does do is provide mirrors for the present moment, which is as good a definition as any for what art has always done.



Joan Jonas in 'He Saw Her Burning': What happened to the happening in the '80s?

Photo by Kitty Leaten

Santa Fe Reporter 5-18-83



# VISUAL ARTS



## Video art show a dynamic display of work

**W**hat's on TV?" This contemporary *pater-noster* has changed our way of life. And it comes as no surprise that artists today are turning to the power of video as the raw material of their art.

*Video as Attitude*, on exhibit now through June 26 at Santa Fe's Fine Arts Museum and at the UNM Art Gallery, Albuquerque, is the largest all-video show mounted in this country. It's a realm of art with a paltry 20-year history and every work on display bursts with newness and a sense of adventure. The Albuquerque component of guest curator Patrick Clancy's exhibition is a little more lively than our own, and well worth a trip down.

The show's title describes the interface between artist and medium; but it applies equally to the viewer. How you respond to the show will probably depend on your attitude.

If you've ever let a toddler loose in a children's playground, you know his life is one of brand-new experiences. The toddler has no expectations or frame of reference to color his first encounter with a slide or teeter-totter. He simply investigates possibilities as they occur.

So it is with *Video as Attitude*. Confronted by these video-installations for the first time, with no previous experience influencing us, the process is one of exploration and discovery.

### ART & EYE



by nicole pleett

With only five works installed in Santa Fe, *Video as Attitude* may seem to offer the prospect of a quick museum visit. Nothing could be further from the truth. These five works not only occupy gargantuan amounts of space, but some present their video material sequentially which means staying with a work for 15 minutes or more, just to see it.

Like a proud Renaissance artist who has discovered the trick of simulating three-dimensional space in two dimensions, Bruce Nauman uses his TVs for spatial rather than narrative effect.

Nauman's *Untitled* installation is a stripped-down game with space that includes making his viewer "run the gauntlet" down a narrow, glaringly-lit corridor, only to find himself in a tiny room occupied by two tables, two chairs and two TVs. The TVs create gaping tunnels into space. The viewer is a participant in this piece, appearing on each monitor via surveillance cameras. Approaching a table and chair displayed on a TV hovering a foot above the table top, you join them, upside down. The question, of course, which way is up?

Francisco Torres' work, *Jean's Lost Notebook*, also demands time-consuming exploration.

It is an elegant grouping of tumbled building blocks encircling a replica of a "taula," T-shaped stone megaliths found on a Mediterranean island off the coast of Spain.

Propped this way and that among the ruins are six TVs, like discarded but well-preserved relics of the distant past. Most screens present a straightforward image; but eventually, as you explore the piece, you'll discover lurid footage documenting our century's mania for armed combat. This cautionary monument to a dead culture also includes footage of a searing punch that precipitates a hockey brawl.

A second installation with an overt message is one where viewers cluster to "watch TV." Juan Downey's *Signage* is installed in a pyramid-like structure, but the work's main thrust lies in the interplay between three video channels, broadcasting, in living color, action from Egypt, Chile, and New York.

Camels, pyramids and the serene sphinx are featured here, but it won't make you feel like visiting. Downey's tapes contrast scenic footage with a hodge-podge of symbols generated by the advertising media. Graceful hieroglyphics are intercut with a defecating dog. Footage of the artist disfiguring his own drawing puts the finishing touch to his picture of insensitivity to our world.

The most overtly dramatic work in the show is Bill Viola's *John of the Cross*, a sort of chamber of horrors with a happy ending. During the 15th century, the Spanish mystic was imprisoned by opponents to his monastic reforms. The poems he wrote while in a state of extreme sensory deprivation are some of the most transcendent in Western culture.

Here Viola masterfully simulates the calm of the poet's soul within his suffering body. The large, darkened space, filled with a roar of sound and dizzying projections of windswept mountains, assaults and disorients the viewer. Within the tiny, well-lit cell standing in the center of the larger space, St. John's poems pour forth in a litany of lyric images.

As if to prove an unhappy fact we all combat daily — that life with machines is a never-ending battle for supremacy — Bill Beirne's, *Extras: Street Performance for an Audience Enclosed*, was stalled by technical difficulties earlier this week and had not progressed beyond the scene-setting phase.

Beirne's work is a dramatic mini-series to be performed by a dozen local actors and actresses, based on information about this area gleaned from local newspapers. Wading through acres of print from three papers, Beirne distilled his information down to a handful of inscrutable events. His scenes range from the theft of a wristwatch at Fenn Gallery to the selling of atomic secrets on Castillo Bridge. Our only choice? — To stay tuned...