"VIDEO LETS ME SEE WHAT I MEAN":
THE SOCIAL WORLD OF VIDEO ARTISTS

By

DONALD ROBERT RICHARDSON, B.A., M.A.

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AUTHOR: Donald Robert Richardson,

B.A. (University of Guelph)
M.A. (University of Guelph)

SUPERVISOR: Professor Graham Knight

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines practices of cultural resistance and subversion among marginalized cultural producers within the context of theories of hegemony (Gramsci, 1988; Hall, 1986) and theories of discourse (Barthes, 1975; de Certeau, 1984; Fiske, 1989). It is a study of the struggle to produce and circulate meanings in the shadow of dominant discourses which may tend to contain alternative cultural production practices. It is also a study of a unique art world that poses a threat to the larger art world and the social, political and economic foundations upon which that larger art world rests.

The empirical focus is the social world of Canadian cultural producers who call themselves video artists. A methodology of participant observation in combination with archival research and textual analysis is used. This project is also an attempt to clarify the methodological directions appropriate for studies of discourse and hegemony.

I argue that video art practices are a form of subversive deviance that threatens the institutions which produce dominant discourses such as the institution of television. I attempt to demonstrate that these threats are
met with containment strategies which range from selective appropriation of aesthetic and technical innovations, to encirclement into the agendas of power which support dominant discourses. I conclude that these containment strategies are effective, but incomplete and have left video artists with relatively minor, but nonetheless significant, victories in the arena of cultural production.

This study also has important theoretical implications regarding theories of television production and consumption. Video artists are shown to use the medium of video in ways which point out the contradictions inherent within the institution of television, an institution which uses the same medium. The cultural context of production and consumption is shown to be the decisive variable in constructing the differences between video art and television.
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Howard Becker (1982), an author whose name appears frequently in this dissertation, writes that,

All artistic work, like all human activity, involves the joint activity of a number, often a large number, of people. Through their cooperation, the art work we eventually see or hear comes to be and continues to be. The work always shows signs of that cooperation.

(Ibid: 1)

Dissertation work, like artistic work is by no means a solitary activity and I would be contradicting the substance of the arguments contained within these pages if I were to take full credit for the work that appears on these pages. I can not list everyone who played an integral role in helping me to construct this weighty manuscript, such as the electronic engineers who designed my computer or the Columbians who provided the beans for my coffee, however I can attempt to thank those with whom I have been in close association.

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CHAPTER I

THE SOCIAL WORLD OF VIDEO ARTISTS

INTRODUCTION

...the debate over post-modernism can also be read as the symptom of the disruptive ingression of popular culture, its aesthetics and intimate possibilities, into a previously privileged domain. Theory and academic discourses are confronted by the wider, unsystematized, popular networks of cultural production and knowledge... The world has moved on. It is no longer necessarily tied to traditional discourses, institutions and voices for information about its meaning. (Chambers, 1986: 216-7)

Video artists have been creating alternative media products in Canada for twenty years, yet outside of the Canadian art world little has been written about these people and their work. The research that was undertaken for this project is an attempt to explore the social world of video artists and to identify the relationships between video art and more dominant social institutions and the ideologies and discourses which support them. Video art is a unique phenomenon because it is not produced by large corporations or the state, and its production is not given access to the supports that privilege the productions of the mainstream media. Despite this, video art continues to be produced by a rather large number of individuals and collectives, almost in direct defiance of the mainstream media. This study suggests
that to produce video art is to engage in a representational struggle over the means of signification, the means of legitimation and the means of communication.

This study is primarily motivated by a sense that there is a need for democratic media structures within Canadian culture and society. We live in an era which is dominated by information and communication, whose systems saturate our lives: "There is no longer any transcendence or depth, but only the immanent surface of operations unfolding, the smooth functional surface of communication" (Baudrillard, 1988: 12). We are given access to a wealth of technological devices that allow us to partake in systems of communication, to listen, to watch, to network and to interface, yet we have little or no control over the systems into which we patch our cables. We have been given a false sense of access and a false sense of control because we cannot own, we cannot transform, and thus we do not have true access to the systems of communication.

Alienation has been understood as a state in which we have a false consciousness which prevents us from seeing reality as it is. Today, however, we have access to a plethora of information about reality, from multiple perspectives ranging from the radical to the conservative. Our information systems do not prevent us from entertaining alternative perspectives, and thus alienation has lost its affinity for describing our feelings of powerlessness. Our powerlessness
is no longer strictly in the realm of ideological mystification, but has moved to the realm of the structures and discourses which process our communications. We have access to all the information we could ever desire, but we do not have access to the means, the systems, of creating and exchanging information:

We no longer partake in the drama of alienation, but are in the ecstasy of communication. And this ecstasy is obscene... Obscenity is not confined to sexuality, because today there is a pornography of information and communication, a pornography of circuits and networks, of functions and objects in their legibility, availability, regulation, forced signification, capacity to perform, connection, polyvalence, their free expression...

(Baudrillard, 1988: 22)

Understanding the need for access to structures of communication is not a question of the quantitative availability of networks, screens and terminals, but is a qualitative question. Do communication structures promote, catalyze or celebrate creative and thoughtful expression and understanding among members of a society? Or, do they instead contain, process, pasteurize, neuter and dampen such expression and understanding? Do we have access to the power to change communication structures so that they no longer contain us, but liberate us? Is a democratic media structure one that provides us with access to input and output "ports" but denies us access to control of, or creation of, the hardware that processes our software?
Alternative Media Practices and Media Criticism

Raymond Williams (1973), among others, has drawn our attention to the emergence of "alternative" and "oppositional" cultural practices that are appearing at the cracks and margins of dominant cultural forms. De Certeau (1984) writes of "popular" tactics or diversionary practices that people utilized to create their own lives within the dominant order:

The actual order of things is precisely what "popular" tactics turn to their own ends, without any illusion that it will change any time soon. Though elsewhere it is exploited by a dominant power or simply denied by an ideological discourse, here order is tricked by an art. Into the institution to be served are thus insinuated styles of social exchange, technical innovation, and moral resistance, that is, an economy of the "gift" (generosities for which one expects a return), an esthetics of "tricks" (artist's operations) and an ethics of tenacity (countless ways of refusing to accord the established order the status of law, a meaning, or a fatality). "Popular" culture is precisely that; it is not a corpus considered as foreign, fragmented in order to be displayed, studied and "quoted" by a system which does to objects what it does to living beings.
(Ibid: 26)

In other words, alternative communication tactics do exist within the walls of the dominant communication system. While the forces of cultural hegemony continually adjust their strategies to limit the parameters of discourse and to limit participation in the production of discourse, there are pressures from below and from the margins which continually disrupt those strategies (Williams, 1981).

For too long we (academics and others) have criticized
the media and its products and called for democratic forms of communication, without specifying what these would actually look like. We talk of access, we talk of control over product, we talk of decentralization and we talk and we talk, and we write and we write. Meanwhile, there is work being done in the cracks and the margins that we have tended not to notice. Even when it is noticed, it often occupies little more than a footnote which diminishes the work's tremendous importance. It is work that is seldom talked about or written about: the only evidence we have is in its practice. The fact that we have such resistant or subversive practices should call our attention to the fact that the system does have cracks and margins, and that those cracks and margins can be and are being exploited.

Our criticisms of the media are valid and are justly contributed to our society, however, criticisms do not change or subvert the system, practices do. We must now go beyond criticism to investigate alternative, oppositional and subversive practices, and we must not simply study them and report back to other academics. If we are indeed serious about democratic media, we must seek to strengthen and empower those who are engaged in these practices, and we must begin to learn all that they can teach us about subversion, resistance, tricks and tenacity. Our theory exists in the privileged realm of rational ideas and discourse, their theory exists in the gritty realm of everyday praxis. Our theory is
privileged, their theory is subordinated.

For too long we have had a parasitic relationship to the media that we critique. Our joy in exposing its contradictions, its limitations and its alienating powers is a joy that feeds off the power invested in media systems. If they were ever to become the democratic structures that we say that we would like to see, we would lose that joy. We remain attached to the very systems we claim to despise, and our constant attention to them may only serve to flatter and, ironically, re-affirm their powers, rather than subvert those powers. And, meanwhile real tactics of resistance and subversion take place all around us and we collude with the dominant media systems in ignoring them, marginalizing them and trivializing them.

For example, community access cable television has been a Canadian reality for over twenty years. Each week 7,000 hours of community programming (all Canadian content) is produced, in Canada, by volunteers with little or no funding who wish to give substance to their views, their concerns, their pleasures, and their identities (Goldberg, 1990). Despite the relevance of this fact for the democratic media cause, not one academic scholar has published a book addressing the extreme relevance and importance of community access cable television (Ibid). To ask why this is so, is to begin to examine the biases, the vested interests and the paternalistic interests of academic media critics. Perhaps we
are afraid that what we are preaching is already being practiced and thus our legitimacy as critics is in jeopardy? Are we in unconscious (or conscious?) collusion with the mainstream media organizations in our efforts to disregard existing, and thriving alternative media tactics?

Brief Outline of the Study

The study presented here is an attempt to redress some of the above criticisms. Video art production will be shown to have the characteristics of a subversive or resistive practice, and it will be shown that the production of video art is an important site of struggle over the means of representation and signification within Canadian society. The struggle to produce video art is not a uniformly subversive or resistive practice, however: hegemonic struggles rarely are. Video artists have been pressured to engage in practices which often subvert or deny the resistive or subversive potential that their works have come to connote. Despite this, video art continues to retain its power to empower those who produce it and exchange it. By its very nature it remains tied to the grassroots initiatives which inspired its popularity and growth throughout Canada. It continues to be one of the only means of popular expression for marginalized communities and individuals.

In the pages that follow, the theoretical contexts for this examination are outlined, with special attention to the
concepts of resistance and subversive deviance within the framework of theories of hegemony. The methodological tactics of participant observation that best fit the nature of this study are outlined and discussed, and the procedures chosen are presented and evaluated. Finally, the findings of the study are presented and their relation to the aforementioned theoretical contexts is developed.

As this is the first sociological study of video art in Canada, it is only the first step towards an understanding of the social world of video artists and the nature of their products. It is hoped that the research presented here will be taken up by others, who may challenge my findings and interpretations. My analyses are critical of the existing social situation of video art, but are ultimately supportive of the democratic spirit that underlies much of the video art world. Others may not share my biases and may be capable of producing studies which uncover aspects that remained hidden from my rose coloured lenses, or which interpret the phenomenon from theoretical perspectives which may be more appropriate. I encourage others to explore the video art world and to hopefully celebrate its mixed bag of achievements because it is a part of Canadian society that has been ignored for far too long.
CHAPTER II
TOWARDS A THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL FRAMEWORK
FOR THE STUDY OF THE SOCIAL WORLD OF
VIDEO ART AND VIDEO ARTISTS

SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS STUDY

Initial Orientation to the Social World of Video Artists

My original intention for my dissertation fieldwork was to study the socialization processes through which students of television production pass on their way to becoming professionals. Despite the tremendous number of studies available on television production personnel, there are no studies which have focused on training, education and socialization processes. We know a great deal about what television production personnel do, and why what they do tends to support dominant social institutions and ideologies, yet we know very little about how the techniques and knowledge bases of the profession are maintained and transferred to students of television production. My original intention to study these processes was not realized. By studying the social world of video artists however, I was able to approach the underlying issues from an oblique angle.

It would seem that the process of professionalization would have significant ramifications for the continuing support of production techniques and processes which contribute to the support of the social system at large.
Professionalization processes are well known to be powerful experiences in which subjects alter identities (Geer, 1972), adopt new symbolic systems (Haas & Shaffir, 1987) and learn new skills of impression management in order to assert authority and mastery (Ibid). The fact that television producers are responsible for constructing products that manipulate and communicate symbolic systems, are responsible for attempting to manage audience impressions and expectations and have roles that are imputed to have the authority to represent reality 'objectively' and 'truthfully', means that the omnipotence that is often bestowed on professionals (Woods & Natterson, 1967) can become a powerful factor in the maintenance of ideological hegemony. As such they are a fascinating example of Bourdieu’s concepts of cultural reproduction and social reproduction (Bourdieu, 1973).

The need for a study of television production professionalization processes is dictated by the Gramscian approach to superstructures, political economy, ideology and human practice. Gramsci’s rejection of structural determinism in favour of a philosophy of practice which affirms "that the social world is constituted by human practice" (Carroll, 1990: 392), requires that studies of television and television production move beyond deterministic models to develop an understanding of television practices and the ideas which underpin and maintain those practices. A great deal of work has been done on the former aspect of television production,
but very little has been done on the latter aspect. If Gitlin is correct in stating that within the media, "hegemony operates effectively... yet outside consciousness; it is exercised by self-conceived professionals working with a great deal of autonomy within institutions that proclaim the neutral goal of informing the public" (Gitlin, 1980: 257), then we need to begin to move away from strict documentation of overt practices and move toward the study of the conscious or unconscious assimilation and accommodation of dominant ideological goals.

My original fieldwork intentions were quickly changed upon my receipt of a letter which rejected my application to conduct fieldwork at a major post-secondary school of television production that I had applied to in order to conduct my fieldwork. Through informal discussions with people familiar with the school, I learned that the most likely reason for this rejection was an internal changing of the guard due to an unfavourable institutional review process which had found fault with the television production program. This review process was further complicated by strong union/management (instructors/school administration) conflict creating a general atmosphere of threat and suspicion. Heads were rolling and necks were sensitive, thus my research was subsequently viewed as yet another potentially dangerous external review.

As Hoffman (1980) has indicated, when dealing with
social elites and people in powerful positions, it may be wise to expect that the researchers' intentions will be mistrusted and suspected. In light of this it is important to note that the instructors at the school were also, no doubt, familiar with the wide ranging critical literature on television production and hegemony and were probably uncomfortable with themselves being implicated in "maintaining the dominant ideology". Thus there may have been a conflict of interest between my desire to unravel the professionalization process and their desire to maintain a professional ideology, a conflict complicated by their familiarity with the literature.¹

Finding myself with an interesting research topic, but nowhere to research, I began to re-evaluate my orientation. I discussed my problem with several friends and acquaintances, and one, a practising video artist, mentioned that I might want to take a look at video art. Realizing that personal crises sometimes create both problems and opportunities (Richardson, 1989a), I decided to take the opportunity that was being offered to me and follow it where it would lead me. Unconsciously I was utilizing West's (1980) strategy of letting topics emerge through maintaining the flexibility that

¹ If this is indeed the case, then Hall's idea that hegemony operates unconsciously is problematic. As well, as my research will hopefully demonstrate, hegemony does not strictly operate in the unconscious, particularly for theorists who write about it, and for video artists who utilize it as a foil.
allows for unanticipated discovery: "Not infrequently, projects formulated around one topic will generate information relevant to others" (Ibid: 33).

After a short, preliminary research investigation of the potential of a study of video art, I quickly realized that video art was a prime topic, primarily on the basis of its exclusion and marginalization relative to mainstream television production. As Derrida (1976) might put it, "the margins are at the centre". The very processes of socialization and knowledge maintenance that I was seeking to unravel in the world of mainstream television production could be approached obliquely from the study of video art. Video art has emerged both within and against the dominant field of television production and is representative of the kind of struggles over meaning, content and form that call attention to attempts at ideological and social closure by dominant social agencies (Polan, 1986).

Video Art and its Relation to Television

Video art discourse (in art catalogues, art journals, art texts) continually characterizes video art as something that is not television. The prevalence of these characterizations tends to place video art in the shadow of television: video artists tend to claim that video art is all that television could be, but is not. Of equal importance in understanding video art's emergence within and against
mainstream television production is the institutional framework of mainstream television which tends to prevent video art from being broadcast, and the extensive marketing and distribution networks that allow mainstream products to be disseminated and consumed but which condemn alternative products to obscurity.

Video art production utilizes many of the same technological tools as mainstream television production. Video art utilizes the same screens as mainstream television to extend productions to audiences. Video art utilizes the same recording form, videotape, to process, store and replay video productions. Video artists possess much of the same technical knowledge that television production personnel possess. The people who consume video art productions also consume television productions. With so much the same, why are the two products and social environments so different, and why is video art marginalized in relation to mainstream television? This is perhaps the most important question that a study such as this might answer.

If we imagine that the television screen (or "monitor" in video discourse) is like a blank canvas, we can imagine an infinite variety of image forms that might appear on this canvas. When we watch television, however, tend to see only a small portion of the possible image forms. It is analogous to having all of the world's canvases only containing eighteenth century portraits of the aristocracy. What
determines the image form on the television screen are the social formations that finance, create, and distribute those image forms. There is no intrinsic, technologically determined reason for television to appear as it does in our homes. In order to discover why the image forms of television and video art are different, we must look to the social, cultural, political and economic factors that lie behind the images we see.

Traditional television form and content have become so pervasive and institutionalized that it is very difficult to see them as representing a form of language (Silverstone, 1986). Within North America there is a tendency to view the language of television as a natural system which somehow grew out of the constraints and applications of the technological tools of television. To a certain extent this is true. For example the existence of editing devices allows editing to actually take place.\(^1\) However, the style of editing used is only partially determined by the editing devices themselves. Editors make use of a language of codes which allow them to process images rapidly and efficiently with the expectation that these codes are common to other editors and to the

\(^1\) Several veteran video artists told me that editing devices were actually introduced into mainstream television production after being conceived of and invented by video artists in Montreal (at Videographe). These inventors were attempting to overcome the limitations of standard switching devices and tape players which were designed to facilitate "live" on-line switching for broadcast, but which were not specifically designed to construct permanent edits onto master tapes.
viewers themselves.

Stuart Hall provides an excellent explanation for the way in which television language or codes seem to be a taken for granted, invisible language system for most viewers within a specific culture. He theorizes that certain codes or language structures may be so widely distributed within a specific community or culture and learned at such a very early age, that "they appear not to be constructed... but naturally given" (Hall, 1980: 132). Elaborating on this he writes:

The operation of naturalized codes reveals not the transparency and 'naturalness' of language but the depth, the habituation and the near-universality of the codes in use. They produce apparently 'natural' recognitions. This has the effect of concealing the practices of coding which are present. But we must not be fooled by appearances. Actually, what naturalized codes demonstrate is the degree of habituation produced when there is a fundamental alignment and reciprocity between the encoding and decoding sides in an exchange of meanings.

(Ibid: 132)

Television producers have constructed a set of formal television codes which serve to expedite the process of making television. Hartley (1984) believes that it is these codes that characterize the very nature of television, for television continuously engages in the process of trying to eliminate the possibility for alternative meanings to be attached to television content:

Television [is] characterized by a will to limit its own excess [of meanings], to settle its significations into established, taken for granted, common senses, which viewers can
be disciplined to identify and to identify with.
(Ibid: 134)

Video art, on the other hand seems to be a phenomenon that seeks to liberate that excess of meanings and disrupt the taken for granted, common sense identification with codes. Through its disruptions and liberations it can provide us with a much clearer view of mainstream television's "will to limit its own excess." The existence of video art tells us that television and video can take other forms, and can be utilized in ways which are presently excluded or marginalized by corporately dominated television institutions.

Video art practices also draw attention to the relatively arbitrary, but seemingly reified, split between encoding and decoding. The separation of encoding and decoding processes is to some extent integral to the production/consumption split which works to maintain the ideological closure required by the television industry to situate viewers for the "proper" reading of its products (personal communication with Dr. Graham Knight). Many academic media critics, particularly those who engage in "decoding" the hidden ideological messages of television, likewise neglect to bring their attention to the relationship between encoding and decoding. In both cases there is an implicit assumption that meanings are latent within television texts and can either be unproblematically read by unsuspecting audiences or critically read by more discerning academics.

Video artists, particularly due to the limited
distribution avenues open to them, are in the practice of bringing encoding and decoding processes together. Video art audiences are encouraged to create their own readings, and agreements on meanings which may or may not be latent in a text. These meanings are reached through interactions between producers and audiences or through audience interaction and discussion. The difference between the "decoding only" limitation of broadcast television and the encoding/decoding synthesis of video art would appear to lie in socialization processes. Broadcast television prefers to socialize its audiences to become passive consumers of its products. Video artists prefer to socialize their audiences to become critical viewers who will be actively engaged with their products. In both cases, however, the nature of the encoding/decoding relationship is arbitrary until it is contained or released within the context of specific social practices.

Other Important Aspects of Video Art

Aside from the important relationship between video art and mainstream television in terms of signifying practices and their containment or release within hegemonic structures and processes, there are a variety of other equally important reasons for conducting a study of video art. For example, the sheer number of participants in video art production in Canada, which I estimate at over 2,000, who practice at over twenty different co-operatively styled production facilities,
virtually demands thorough academic study. As well, Canada has a strong international reputation, within artistic sub-cultures, as being a leader in video art production and innovation. Video art has a twenty year history in Canada and proved to be an interesting source of innovative ideas within Canadian television’s regulatory history as well as within Canadian art history. When one considers the relative quietness of all of this production activity and the overall lack of public awareness of video art, its study is made even more compelling.¹

When one considers the Canadian content regulations of the CRTC, another example of the importance of the study of video art comes to light. One of the central tasks of the CRTC is the implementation of cultural objectives designed to assert Canadian cultural identity and to promote indigenous cultural production, yet it has a consistent history of neglecting to take this task seriously (Raboy, 1990). We look to the CBC or the Canadian private broadcasters and find

¹ When I tell people that I am studying video art and independent video producers, I inevitably get responses which associate video art with music video, and while there is a relationship between the two, it is as wide as the relationship between video art and other television productions. Very few people seem to be aware of video art, outside of artistic sub-cultures. Attempting to present a paper on my research at an academic conference in front of academics familiar with television research, I found myself fielding questions about music videos and spending a great deal more time than I felt necessary differentiating video art from television. This experience has become a crucial piece of data because it made me aware of just how pervasive the dominant view of television is, and how it can cloud even a critical researcher’s view of alternatives.
little Canadian content, and few real initiatives in indigenous cultural production. However, if we look past the traditional sources of television production we can see a tremendous wealth of indigenous production. Canadian video art is 100% Canadian, in its content, in its innovative forms, in its regionalized production and in its diverse cultural origins. That it continues to be ignored by policy makers, broadcasters, media analysts, and the communications infrastructure in general is reason enough for it to be worthy of study.

The existence of video art also serves to demonstrate that members of the television watching public are not completely taken in by what they see. A great deal of video art productions are either overtly or subtly critical of the mass media and the meanings presented by the mass media. As both members of the mainstream television audience and producers of video, video artists represent one end of a continuum of possible audience roles that range from positions of uncritical, non-response, through positions of passive consumption, to positions of cynicism, through to positions of critical re-structuring. This is not to say that all video artists and their works demonstrate the existence of the latter end of the continuum, however if it can be shown that a significant number do, then this is of great importance for theories of consumption and theories of audience interaction with television. The importance lies in the conclusion that
the media are not completely external and separate from the audiences that they try to influence.

Video art may also reveal the extent to which subjects in the post-modern world are willing to convert their resources of time, energy and capital into signification practices. In a sense video artists, like many other marginalized cultural producers, are saying, "I signify, therefore I am," and in doing so they are resisting or subverting the forces which might compel them to remain passive signifieds. Video art may thus be representative of both resistance to hegemony and resistance to all-encompassing codification processes. Video art may help to point out the radical, subversive deviance involved in transgressing and rupturing established sign systems and powerful processes of codification.

The study of video art is also significant because it can shed light on the processes that emerging art worlds pass through. Technological innovations have passed into and had effects on cultural production many times in the past, but the latter part of the 20th century seems to have seen more than its fair share of such innovations. Emerging art forms include, video art, computer art, holography, database and network art, electronic art, robotic sculpture, xerox art, fax art and satellite art (due to the emerging nature of some of these art forms, some names may be disputed or changed over time). What has become very clear is that artists can work in
media that have never existed in the past, and these media are often also media of communication and thus part of our postmodern environment. Art work in these media can serve to recontextualize the relationships between culture/society/economy/technology and act as critical theoretical projects in their own right. These emerging art worlds are surfacing within the larger, more modernist-based art world where final referents, established meanings, artistic subjectivities and reputations, commodification processes, and professionalization patterns are well established. The emergence of post-modern art worlds seems to be evoking a variety of interesting containment strategies on behalf of the modernist-based art world and the dominant cultural discourses that it helps to support. Again, video art can help us to understand both hegemonic processes, resistance, containment and potential subversive gains.

Video Art as Theory

Video art may also suggest some important changes to the academic media/cultural studies agenda. Within studies of television production, for instance, there is a distinct tendency to assume that the products of broadcast television are assimilated or absorbed by television consumers without so much as a burp (de Certeau, 1984, Fiske, 1987, 1989). While this tendency seems to be changing with the emergence of audience studies (Fiske, 1987) the legacy that this tendency
has left carries tremendous ideological weight, and far too many works on television production continue to contain the explicit or implicit assumption that the television audience are little more than dupes who absorb with little or no resistance (Hackett, 1988).

As de Certeau (1984) has asserted, positing a passive, processed public is dangerously elitist. It positions the academic writer as the only kind of cultural producer who is capable of escaping the passive, processed role. We who study the media are able to see what others are unable to see. We who study the media operate at an intellectual level which transcends that of the typical media consumer. We who study the media are somehow immune to the very same processes that apparently turn a media consuming public into receptacle-like zombies who absorb the media's products and act according to the media's agenda (Richardson, 1990).

The danger with this position is that it privileges academic theorists and authors who produce theoretical discourse, and places us in the same position as the media producers whom we critique. We forget that we are as much a part of the audience as anyone else, and that we do not occupy a privileged vantage point, only a socially privileged position. In many ways we see ourselves as media producers must see themselves. While our products may differ, we tend to share the (mistaken) assumption that our job is to produce "real" meaning while remaining above the lowly consumer of
cultural products. We privilege our production of theoretical discourse because we believe that it is a creative and critical activity that has little or nothing in common with public practices of consumption. We can see through the haze clearly while non-theorists gaze through a fog.

Michel de Certeau (1984) has presented some very good evidence to support a view which sees the audience as unrecognized producers who employ a variety of tactics to guilefully assert their interests and desires. According to de Certeau (Ibid: 34), the audience members, "circulate, come and go, overflow and drift over imposed terrain, like the snowy waves of the sea slipping in among the rocks and defiles of an established order." The entire post-modern theoretical project has subverted the modernist agendas of sociology and humanist social sciences and is asking us to re-evaluate our position of being unproblematically outside of the complex representational practices and institutions that operate around us and inside us.

We now have to consider ourselves as de Certeau's audience members, and perhaps we have to de-privilege academic theoretical discourse. If we claim to possess the cognitive capabilities which allow us to tactically avoid passive consumption, then we must assume that the public possesses the same cognitive capabilities. We are therefore not the only audience members capable of viewing and critically producing theory. Video artists, as fellow audience members, may be
showing us that what we know as theory can come in forms other than the printed word, forms developed from within systems of cultural discourse that are not as socially privileged as academic discourse.

Finally, video art deserves to be studied because it represents a real, functioning alternative (or perhaps oppositional form) to mainstream communication institutions and products. Far too many media studies articles and books end with a call to devise and establish alternative communication structures (the list of such conclusions is lengthy, c.f. Gitlin, 1980; Kellner, 1979; Hackett, 1988; Raboy, 1990; Richeri, 1986; UNESCO, 1980) yet they fail miserably at identifying existing, radically different communication structures or forms. The existence of video art challenges media studies to account for this existence and perhaps utilize it as a model for change in communications locally and globally.

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1 Raymond Williams (1977) differentiates between two types of non-hegemonic forms: alternative forms which can be contained and muted within hegemonic processes, and oppositional forms which, while much rarer, signify an authentically different social order, are difficult to contain and which are thus capable of subvert hegemonic processes.
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY OF VIDEO ARTISTS

Introduction

Analyzing the social world of video artists requires both a focus on micro-level interaction (what they do) and a focus on macro-level processes and structures such as political economy and popular culture (the milieu in which they work). The latter focus is made more important by the degree to which aspects of political economy and popular culture play in the videos actually produced by video artists. Unfortunately, sociology is not yet very rich in theory which allows for such a dual analysis. Inroads have been made within the tradition of symbolic interaction and within post-structuralist theories, and it is to these two theoretical areas that we must turn in order to construct the theoretical framework for understanding the social world of video artists. As well, integration of theoretical ideas from specialized areas of study such as cultural studies and the sociology of the arts can add to that theoretical framework.

Key Theories

While this is primarily an ethnographic study, I devote significant attention to key theoretical perspectives which help to contextualize my ethnographic work. My contention is that the social world of video artists is a site where the insights of these key perspectives can applied and yield significant interpretations. Throughout this study I
make use of the terms postmodernism and post-structuralism to indicate the ideas represented by these key theoretical perspectives. In this section I attempt to clarify my understanding of these perspectives.

Post-structuralism is a term that is normally applied to a relatively wide range of theoretical positions, a fact which frustrates attempts at simple definition. Like the theoretical orientation the word represents, post-structuralism resists fixed meanings. It is commonly associated with the work of such theorists as Barthes (1974, 1975, 1977), Baudrillard (1981, 1982, 1983a, 1983b, 1987, 1988, 1990), Derrida (1976), Foucault (1980a, 1980b), and Kristeva (1976, 1980). Each of these authors depicts a different form of post-structuralism and these differences are important. My interest in post-structuralism lies with the specific theoretical forms of post-structuralism which I believe best address questions of how social power is exercised and how social relations might be transformed.

Post-structuralism, as the term implies, takes its lead from structuralism, particularly the structuralism of Ferdinand de Saussure (Weedon, 1987). Saussure examined language as a structure which produces meaning rather than as something which reflects meaning. In other words, our understanding of reality is bracketed by the structure of the language system we use to give meaning to our social reality. Saussure believed that language is a system of chains of signs
which consist of arbitrary relations of signifiers (sounds or written images) and signifieds (meanings) (Ibid). Signifiers, by themselves have no intrinsic meanings, but gain meaning from their relationships (differences) to other signifiers. For example, as I argue in this thesis, there is nothing intrinsic to the signifier "television" that gives it its meaning. The difference between "television" and other signifiers of communication mediums such as "video" or "radio" gives television its specific meaning.

The problem with Saussure's perspective, and the problem that is addressed by post-structuralism, is that Saussure saw the links between signifiers and signifieds as virtually fixed and final. This perspective does not account for changes in meanings, it does not account for plural meanings and most importantly it does not account for the relationship between competing meanings and associations between (usually dominant) meanings and power. Post-structuralism deals with this problem by examining the social and historical relationships that may appear to make meaning fixed within signs, but which also reveal the way in which relationships between signifiers and signifieds are socially constructed. Meaning is thus never fixed or final: it depends upon the social discourses within which signs are located.

Social discourses, according to post-structuralists such as Foucault (1980a, 1980b), are intimately connected to relations of power. To grossly over-simplify Foucault's
perspective, individual discourses are tied to specific political interests which compete and clash in struggles to maintain, resist or subvert power. These struggles are played out within the subjectivities of individuals through the discourses in which people are immersed. The rational self-knowing individual of humanism is displaced by a concept of subjectivity which sees consciousness as socially produced by language and competing discourses. This consciousness is not fixed, but is a site of struggle and (potentially) change.

It thus becomes important to focus on the ways in which discourses, both powerful and non-powerful, are asserted within society. This necessitates the examination of the material conditions and relations that permit or exclude subjects from participating in discourses or asserting alternative discourses. Participation in discourse provides subjects with a means for claiming subjectivities. If participation is limited by a dominant discourse and poor access to various means of signification then subjects may only claim the menu of subjectivities with which they are provided by that discourse.

Subjectivity is thus produced within discursive practices and the meanings which discursive practices attempt to organize are a constant site of struggle over power. As a result, subjectivity, like meaning is never fixed and final: it is the place where discursive struggles are ultimately played out. According to Foucault, discourses may carry
different weights according to their association with dominant or subordinate institutions. Some discourses will legitimate existing power relations while others, which I call alternative discourses, will contest those power relations. The latter discourses are likely to be marginal to established discursive practices and may be ignored or contained by the established hegemonic system or discursive practices. Dominant discourses, on the other hand, can never establish a total grip on power: they are under constant challenge.

This idea that dominant discourses are under constant challenge is crucially important when we link it to ideas connected with postmodernism. Postmodernists such as Lyotard (1984) believe that at our current point in history, there is an excess of, and a free play of, signifiers with little or no relation to signifieds. If we accept this premise, then dominant discourses are not only under the constant challenge of alternative discourse, but also under the pervasive and system-wide challenge of pluralistic and chaotic meanings. Postmodern subjectivity is prodded by dominant discourses, but is ultimately unstable and disoriented due to the continuous flux of meaning in the discursive environment.

In order to understand postmodernism we must briefly look at the historical period characterized modernism and the realist period which preceded modernism. Realism is associated with the rise industrialism and the ascendancy of the bourgeoisie. Realism was essentially constituted by a
mechanistic world-view and a fundamental belief in the positive and evolutionary progress of society (Lash, 1990). A realist perspective reinforced the identity and dominance of the bourgeoisie as the social group, a social group which was held to be leading society further along the linear path of progress. Realism and the bourgeoisie were subsequently destabilized by the emergence of an organized, urbanized and literate working class and simultaneously, destabilized by the emergence of organized capitalism as a replacement for liberal capitalism. These emerging social forms challenged bourgeois individualism and asserted a competing discourses based on the interests of monopoly capitalism or an organized left. These discourses asserted interests which were in conflict with the interests of the bourgeoisie (Ibid). These modernist discourses had the effect of de-stabilizing fixed and final meanings and replacing them with meanings related to social factors or social interests.

In the postmodern world, as discussed by Lyotard (1984) for example, meaning itself (and thus reality) has been problematized by the virtual free play of signifiers that were first released from their fixed forms under modernism. Postmodernism is thus the logical outcome of modernism, yet it does not seek to replace modernism. It simply makes the discourses of modernism that much more difficult to reify in the struggle for discursive dominance. Subjects are free to take part in this free play of signifiers in constructing and
continually reconstructing their identities. Attempts to 
limit the menu of discursive choices ultimately fail, but can 
still have effects on subjectivity. Subjects are consciously 
and unconsciously capable of tactical subversion within and 
around dominant discourses, simply through participating in 
the free play of signifiers. Alternative discourses may 
appear in a virus-like fashion, frustrating the attempts of 
dominant discourses to establish supremacy.

Modernist interests have one key weapon against these 
frustrating discursive games and that is their ability to 
limit access to the material resources required to widely 
participate in the free play of signifiers. However, this 
weapon is not absolute. In order for monopoly capitalism to 
continue to assert its hegemony it requires a vast 
communication system, and the components of this communication 
system have been produced in such quantities that many are now 
accessible to consumers. All kinds of electronic 
communication devices are now available for subjects to 
participate in the free play of signifiers and the assertion 
of alternative discourses. This thesis is about one group of 
communication devices and the role that they have played in 
allowing subjects to open new discursive spaces which 
challenge and subvert dominant discourses.
Symbolic Interaction & Post-structuralism: Compatibility

In this section I will attempt to show that symbolic interaction and post-structuralist theories are compatible and may perhaps be amenable to synthesis on some levels. The thesis for this argument is that the concept of praxis informs both theoretical perspectives and provides each with its crux. Compatibility or synthesis does not mean that either theoretical perspective is without its problems. Symbolic interaction is flawed by adherence to a largely unquestioned ideal of individualism (the self) and an idealistic view of human agency: ideology, hegemony and postmodern "realities" do not play large enough roles. Post-structuralist theories are flawed by a neglect to empirically examine the real lived relationships between subjects, and by a virtual negation of human agency combined with an idealistic view of theoretically-based agency: ideology and hegemony play roles that are perhaps too large, and the self has been virtually eradicated.

Prior to 1975, symbolic interaction displayed a clear neglect for dealing with macro-level processes such as ideology, yet it had established a great deal of depth of understanding for micro-level practices and processes. The period prior to 1975 can be seen as a developmental period for symbolic interaction. As a unique methodological and theoretical position in relation to the more dominant American tradition of structural functionalism, symbolic interaction
had to clearly differentiate itself from Parsonian theoretical positions which highlighted the macro at the expense of the micro. Proponents such as Herbert Blumer (1962) took great pains to lay a path which would place symbolic interaction as the theory best suited for avoiding structural determinism in understanding social life. This enthusiasm for the role of acting "selves", however, left symbolic interaction with a long legacy of superstructural neglect that has not gone unnoticed by its critics (c.f. Ashley and Orenstein, 1985; Boskoff, 1969, Collins, 1985, Lichtman, 1970; Mullins, 1973; Perdue, 1986; Ritzer, 1981; and Smart, 1976).

Blumer strongly emphasized the role of acting people who have selves and who align their individual actions to create social groups and society itself (Blumer, 1962). His writing is quite critical of what he saw as the opposite path taken by most sociologists and his wording points directly at the macro-oriented theories of Parsons:

Sociological thought rarely recognizes or treats human societies as composed of individuals who have selves. Instead they assume human beings to be merely organisms with some kind of organization, responding to forces which play upon them... these forces are lodged in the make-up of society as in the case of 'social system', 'social structure', culture...
(Blumer, 1962: 184-5)

Blumer and other early symbolic interactionists held that the core components of the tradition were the self, interaction and roles. In doing so they succeeded in differentiating their ideas from Parsons and the dominant structural-
functionalist school, yet hindered their theoretical capacity by marginalizing superstructural relationships.

Maines (1977), however, argues that symbolic interaction's contributions to the area of social structure are many and have been neglected by its critics. While the evidence he presents clearly indicates that, at least in theoretical writing, symbolic interaction views "social structure, interaction, form and process [as] tightly interwoven," a host of authors writing from within the symbolic interaction tradition have recognized that the critics' arguments have some validity, particularly when one considers the lack of empirical investigation or verification of social structural influence (c.f. Meltzer, Petras and Reynolds, 1975 and Stryker, 1980). During the last twenty years, symbolic interactionists have responded to criticisms of superstructural neglect with enthusiasm, perhaps realizing through these criticisms that the tradition has achieved its long sought after legitimacy with the demise of structural functionalism. Proponents such as Stryker (1987) have called for the "vitalization" of symbolic interaction, a call that requires extensive research into neglected areas such as superstructural relationships.

Research work is still lacking an integrative and consensual approach to the issue of social structure, however the foundation stones for a cohesive and specifically symbolic interactionist analysis of social structure have been erected
during the last two decades (Hall, P., 1987). For example, Maines (1980), in a brief overview of recent developments in symbolic interaction, discusses the value of symbolic interaction's past record of neglecting superstructural relationships. He argues that by stressing that society was necessarily a process rather than a static structure, symbolic interactionists enriched social theory. He states that, "to their credit, they failed brilliantly to freeze society" (Ibid: 471) and thus they were able to develop a theoretical position that allowed for "soft" (Matza as cited in Maines, ibid) social structural determinism rather than a hard determinism favoured by structural functionalists, among others.

Maines' approach to studying "negotiated order" (c.f. Maines, 1977, 1980, 1982) necessitates that researchers study both interaction and the context in which interactions such as negotiations take place. Contexts are seen as helping to shape and direct negotiations, and each context is usually enmeshed in a loose hierarchy of larger contexts. Maines (1982) introduced the concept of mesostructure in order to capture the relationships between contexts and interactions. He states that mesostructures "are realms of human conduct through which social structures are processed and social processes become structured" (Ibid: 277). This approach provides a view of superstructural processes that meets the processual demands of symbolic interaction, while still
leaving room for social structure to set limits and constraints on social interaction. Maines (1977: 255) argues that these theoretical innovations show that "there is nothing in symbolic interaction that precludes the analysis of social organization and social structure."

Stryker's work (1980, 1987) in identity theory exemplifies symbolic interaction's trend toward examining social structure. Identity theory follows traditional symbolic interaction theory by stating that the self is responsible for enacting behaviour and that the self is developed largely through interaction with others. However, it also specifies that social structures such as positions and roles help to shape self-definitions and definitions of others, while larger social structures such as political and economic organization constrain the possibilities for role-making by setting criteria for who, when, why and where people come together to interact. Stryker clearly sees many beneficial possibilities inherent in the trend to incorporate social structure within the scope of symbolic interaction's research program, for:

if sociologists doing social psychology do not locate social psychological processes in their structural contexts and examine the ways in which the structural contexts impact those processes, no one will; and if no one does, much will be lost.
(Stryker, 1987: 92)

In another vein, McCall and Simmons (1978), in their work on role and identity, have drawn attention to the impact
of Western dualism in originally setting up the distinction between self and society. They imply that this distinction is not necessarily empirically evident, but is simply an analytical tool that is useful in understanding the processual nature of social interaction/society and one that social scientists have helped to reify. In other words, Western dualism is a social creation which has taken on powerful influence and meaning within social scientific and scientific discourse, becoming akin to a social structure in and of itself.¹

Lindesmith and Strauss (1968) draw attention to the impact that social structure has on the symbolic side of symbolic interaction. They argue that societal structures emerge from human interaction at the symbolic level, while human interaction itself is also impacted upon by social structures which utilize symbolic systems such as language to reproduce culture and society and to provide rules of action. Similarly, Bush and Simmons (1981) focus on the contradiction between socialization processes which both serve to perpetuate existing social structures and which contain the seeds for change. They emphasize that the socialization process is not

¹ Smart (1976: 163) argues that dualistic thought characterizes sociology as a whole: "...the creation of distinctions between supposed 'macro' and 'micro' levels of reality [reflects] the failure to recognize man's nature as a conscious and active being, and the corresponding neglect of his ability as an objective natural being with living needs, constantly engaged in the dialectical construction of social reality, [which] has characterized sociological thought from Comte to the present."
unidirectional in that the individual, through the self, may elect to redefine social roles and obligations, thus creating social change.

Many other substantive areas of study have recently benefitted from concerted efforts to analyze social structure and its relation to social interaction (Hall, 1987). Howard Becker’s work on Art Worlds (1982) is an excellent example of this trend. Becker is one of the first symbolic interactionists to examine the role that political economy and relations of power play in shaping collective action among interacting people. Issues of control, resource allocation, and economic structure are seen as impinging upon individual actors (though not directly determining) in their efforts to co-ordinate their activities (Ibid).

The domains of political economy and ideology are perhaps the areas in which symbolic interaction requires a great deal more research and theoretical analysis. Lichtman (1970) and Smart (1976) are justifiably critical of symbolic interaction’s history of neglecting these areas of study. Symbolic interaction is one of the few viewpoints that can provide us with a real understanding of how the largely intangible structures of political economy have manifested themselves within social interaction and within the selves of individuals in everyday life.

Symbolic interaction offers the possibility of addressing this neglect, and is theoretically well suited for
the task. Both Marx and Mead realized that society could only be properly understood as a "form of co-operative activity", a phrase they both use (Goff, 1980). Incorporating aspects of political economy into symbolic interaction might also enable the tradition to dispense with much of its liberal heritage so that it will not only be able to study human society, but will also be able to work for human "enlightenment and emancipation" (Smart: 185). As Stryker (1987: 86) notes:

...no respectable sociology can avoid dealing in a very explicit way with the contexts of class relations, power, age structure, sex structure etc., that taken together comprise the social environment of interpersonal relations, structures whose interrelationships among themselves constitute the heart of sociology, historically considered.

One of the most recent moves toward revising the symbolic interactionist agenda has been made by Denzin (1986, 1987, 1988, 1989a and 1989b). Denzin (1989a) argues that symbolic interaction must move into the postmodern situation and abandon the "grand narrative myths" of ideologically based science. Looking at current trends in symbolic interactionist research he claims that the tradition is moving beyond its traditions:

in several directions, both vertically and horizontally, at the same time. This means that the interactionist tradition will confront, absorb, debate and be in conflict with the new terrains of theory which continue to appear in the postmodern period (i.e., hermeneutics, phenomenology, structuralism, post-structuralism, psychoanalysis, semiotics, Marxism, cultural studies, feminist theory, and film theory).
(Ibid: 7)
In the postmodern situation images have come to refer only to images, and notions of any final reality are collapsing. Invoking the ideas of theorists such as Baudrillard, Denzin (1986) asks that symbolic interaction attempt to deal theoretically and methodologically with the postmodern cultural crisis, the loss of ideology, and the collapse of meaning.

Rethinking the Concept of Deviance in the Postmodern World

Krug and Graham (1989) in a provocative essay on symbolic interaction and postmodernism demonstrate that symbolic interaction is well suited to studying the postmodern subject and the processes through which subjects struggle for definition of situations and self. Pointing to the symbolic interactionist penchant for turning to "the aberrant, to the fringes of cultures" Krug and Graham (Ibid: 67-68) argue that symbolic interaction has demonstrated a unique ability to examine situations in which,

people seize the language and the symbols of their culture and invert them or distort them, challenging the meaning they find and so drawing battle lines between themselves and the relations of power.

The deviants which symbolic interaction has studied so closely are precisely the subjects which best illuminate the outlines of the cultural and social schemes of legitimation and fabricated structures of meaning which contain human
activities. Deviants work the margins and fringes of containment and actively disrupt and subvert containment strategies. Thus, deviants can act as our guides in both showing us the outer edges of containment and in demonstrating well tested tactics for resisting and subverting containment.

Distinctions between resistance and subversion become important. Deviance works through resistance when it is practiced in opposition to system integration. In this sense, resistance has Newtonian characteristics in that it acts as the "equal and opposite" reaction to formations of power. In doing so, however, resistance provides the other side of the equation that keeps power in place. The existence of resistance is the alibi or excuse that power requires to remain a force. Resistance manifests itself within strategies of opposition which speak to formations of power.

Deviance works through subversion when it refuses to confront power with easily containable strategies, when it works through tactics which defy efforts to integrate it within dominant social systems and dominant social discourse. Subversive tactics have "quantum" characteristics in that they are activities of movement, evasion, elasticity and which are difficult to codify or define. The existence of subversive deviance side-steps and eludes power, but nonetheless, involves power when and if forces of power become aware of subversion. Such awareness invokes strategies which seek to re-integrate deviance into the systems of discourse which
support the rationale for power. What was once subversive deviance is re-labelled as opposition, resistance, insanity, foolishness or even "socially beneficial" so that it can be coded and necessary containment strategies (incarceration, institutionalization, fines, public humiliation, or state adoption, funding, monitoring and licensing). In such cases subversive deviance scores limited gains through the need for formations of power to engage their, often limited, resources and perhaps withdraw resources from one area to support containment strategies in another.

In sociology, the literature on deviance tends to approach the topic from a system integration perspective, seeing deviance as "essential to the very organization of society...[functioning] to establish and maintain behavioural boundaries and to affirm the value of conformity" (Farrell and Swigert, 1982: 27). The alternative to this perspective is one which sees deviance in terms of social or cultural integration rather than system or institutional integration. In this sense many activities that might be labelled as deviant from the system integration perspective (in order for containment strategies to be legitimated) become activities to be celebrated and cherished for their positions as lubricants and catalysts to social integration.

The postmodern version of symbolic interaction that Krug and Graham (1989) discuss is one which "requires theories of ideology and of myth as well as theories of how people de-
construct ideology and myth and reconstruct them in their daily lives" (Ibid: 68). This necessarily requires a rethinking of the narratives of traditional symbolic interactionist texts, theories and methods, because the traditions themselves must be amenable to deconstruction and reconstruction. If we are to study the tactics through which subjects challenge, subvert and reconstruct received meanings we must also be ready to utilize similar tactics for received theoretical canons. Indeed, the deconstruction and reconstruction of theoretical canons may be synonymous with the deconstruction and reconstruction of received meanings in general. Perhaps as theorists we too are subversive deviants and likewise, the subversive deviants who illuminate our way are the theorists par excellence!

This perspective on subversive deviance\(^1\) is given tacit legitimacy through the writings of one of the most quoted post-structuralists, Jean Baudrillard. Outlining a theory which proclaims that all ideologies are themselves subservient to the tyranny of a code of signs that absorbs and codifies all of 'reality', leaving us without any final referents, only simulations and signs, Baudrillard is critical of any and all attempts to oppose the code. He does however offer a path of resistance in elusive, seductive, trickster-like expressions of subversive deviance:

\(^1\) I have coined the term subversive deviance to characterize tactics of subversion which take place in the realm of discourse utilizing signs and discursive practises.
Strategy of absence, evasion, of metamorphosis. An unlimited possibility of substitution, a concatenation without reference. To divert, to set up decoys, which disperse evidence, which disperse the order of things... to slightly displace appearances in order to hit the empty and strategic heart of things... The evil forces which [seduction] has raised against God, against morality, the forces of artifice and the Evil Demon of dissimulation and absence, of challenge and reversion, which it has always embodied and for which it has been damned: seduction can today reinvent these forces, and raise them against the terrorist seizing of truth and verification, of identification and programming which engulf us. Seduction remains the enchanted form of the devil’s share.

(Baudrillard, 1987: 68 & 75)

Although Baudrillard’s writing is as slippery and evasive ("to move faster than conceptual interconnection, such is... the secret of writing" (Baudrillard, 1982: 290)) as the tactics of subversion he appears to espouse, he does seem to be suggesting that subversive deviance is desirable. The deviance he appears to admire is that which is guerrilla like. Direct and open opposition invites absorption by the code, while tactics of seduction, frustration, taunting and evasion offer the possibility of living and communicating within a world which seeks to annihilate real life and real communication. Guerrilla-like forms of subversive deviance are thus to be celebrated and relished.

Hebdige’s work (1979) stands out as one of the few thorough attempts to theorize the compatibility of postmodern and post-structuralist theories with symbolic interaction and the study of deviance in particular. Acknowledging his debt
to Howard Becker and his classic *The Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance* (Becker, 1963), Hebdige builds on Becker's understanding that "a major element in every aspect of the drama of deviance is the imposition of definitions - of situations, acts, and people - by those powerful enough or legitimated to be able to do so" (Becker, 1974: 62). For Hebdige, the process of the imposition of definitions is directly related to the process of the maintenance of hegemony, while the deviant process of subverting the imposition of those definitions is equivalent to the deconstruction and reconstruction of meanings and signs.

Becker notes that deviants, who create their own subcultural definitions, are in a complementary relationship with the rest of society: "One cannot exist without the other" (Becker, 1964: 3). Deviant definitions require the existence of normative definitions. Hebdige takes this relationship another step further to illustrate that deviance draws attention to "the struggle between different discourses, different definitions and meanings within ideology... a struggle with signification: a struggle for the possession of the sign which extends to even the most mundane areas of everyday life" (Hebdige, 1979: 17). Thus, deviance also draws attention to hegemony and the social order's terror, not of deviance itself, but of the acknowledging the tenuous grasp that it holds over dominant processes of signification.

The study of deviance or subcultures, the study of
"immorality" allows us a view of the underbelly of the social. It allows us to see that the real immorality or vice is the immorality of the social itself which imposes rational systems of morality and value and attempts to usurp the processes of signification from acting subjects (Baudrillard, 1990). To Hebdige, the failure of the symbolic interactionist school has been a failure to view a subculture as anything other than "an independent organism functioning outside the larger social, political and economic contexts" (Hebdige, 1979: 76). Placed within a perspective which acknowledges hegemony however, the studies of symbolic interactionists such as Becker (1962) and Whyte (1955) illustrate that,

subcultures represent 'noise' (as opposed to sound): interference in the orderly sequence which leads from real events and phenomena to their representation in the media... Any elision, truncation or convergence of prevailing linguistic and ideological categories can have profoundly disorienting effects. These deviations briefly expose the arbitrary nature of the codes which underlie and shape all forms of discourse.
(Hebdige, 1979: 90-91)

The Cultural Studies Agenda and its Roots in Symbolic Interaction

Researchers in cultural studies, an emerging cross-disciplinary field that is infused with post-structuralist thinking, have realized that popular culture is, more often than not, an area of "contested terrain" upon which struggles for definitions and meanings are waged between subjects and
received signification systems (Donnelly, 1988). The tactical agenda of cultural studies is "to achieve an understanding of the ways in which popular culture is made, not simply imposed from above" (Ibid: 80, emphasis in original). As Fiske (1987: 37) asserts, "challenging meanings and the social group with the right to make them is a crucial part of asserting subcultural identities and the social differences they maintain."

Cultural studies actually began with a clear recognition of the rich vein of ethnographic work supplied by symbolic interactionists and a recognition of the ways in which such work could be de-constructed and re-constructed in the context of struggles over signification in postmodern society. Indeed, in the introduction to Resistance through Rituals (Hall, S. & Jefferson, T., 1976), one of the more significant texts of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham, the authors pay homage to Howard Becker:

Our starting point, as for so many others, was Howard Becker's Outsiders - the text which, at least for us, best signalled the 'break' in mainstream Sociology and the subsequent adoption, by many sociologists working in the fields of deviance, sub-cultural theory or criminology... of what came to be known as an interactionist, and later a 'transactional' or 'labelling' perspective. Our reading of this text - and subsequent British work in this rapidly emerging tradition [cultural studies] - and our engagement with the perspective in general was always, however, double-edged: both a sense of exhilaration about the importance of some of the ideas generated by
this 'sceptical revolution'... and a sense of unease: a feeling that these accounts, whilst containing many important, new insights, were not comprehensive enough: a feeling, particularly, that deviant behaviour had other origins besides public labelling.

(Hall, S. & Jefferson, T., 1976: 5)

In recent years however, cultural studies' symbolic interactionist legacy seems to have been either forgotten or laid aside within cultural studies, and is only now being resurrected by symbolic interactionists such as Cagle (1989) who are seeing cultural studies as a fertile resource. Researchers in the symbolic interactionist tradition may be awakening to a perspective which provides the "vitalization" that Stryker (1987) asks for, and which allows for the revitalization of previous studies and classic texts.

Becker's (1953) study of marijuana users, for example, clearly illustrates the depth of analysis that symbolic interaction brings to the study of the construction, and assertion of alternative practices of signification within the context of a dominant anti-drug ideology. Marijuana users are shown to construct definitions of drug effects which allow them to experience pleasure from drug use rather than succumb to the self-fulfilling prophecy implied in the anti-drug ideology which holds that only negative definitions of drug effects are legitimate. Marijuana users thus construct an alternative set of signification practices that provides them with relative immunity from the negative effects stressed by doctors, psychiatrists, the state, the media and the general
public. Only in terms of levels of analysis are there differences between symbolic interactionist accounts of such subversive deviance and subculture and the struggles for definitions and meanings studied through post-structuralist perspectives (Cagle, 1989).

Rethinking the Concept of the Self

Suggesting that post-structuralist theories and symbolic interaction are compatible also necessitates a thorough rethinking of the concept of the self. Traditional symbolic interaction theorizing regarding the self is deeply rooted in liberal pragmatism, with Mead's (1934) privileging of the "I" and the "me" predominating. The individualist ideology that permeates liberal pragmatism is largely incompatible with subjectivity as it is conceived by post-structuralists. As Habermas (1987: 111) correctly summarizes, "the constraints of reproducing the social system, which reach right through the action orientations of sociated individuals, remain closed off to an analysis restricted to structures of interaction."

Kortoba (1989: 118) remarks that traditional symbolic interaction views the self as "a variable dependent largely on variable audience input, constraint and definition", however this is only the side of the self that Mead would label the "me". The traditional view of the self also posits that the self is the ultimate foundation of society as a result of the
"I". Mead, for example, was fascinated with the potential for social actors to role-take and adjust and readjust their responses, and this lead him to believe that society is a constructed phenomenon that is maintained and changed through symbolic interaction and ultimately through the processes of mind and self (Turner, 1978). The "I" is the source of social change as well as emancipatory institutions. He states that:

...the institutions of society are organized forms of group or social activity - forms so organized that the individual members of society can act adequately and socially by taking the attitudes of others towards these activities. Oppressive, stereotyped, and ultra-conservative social institutions... are undesirable but not necessary outcomes of the general social process of experience and behaviour. There is no necessary or inevitable reason why social institutions should be oppressive or rigidly conservative, or why they should not rather be, as many are, flexible and progressive, fostering individuality rather than discouraging it (Mead, 1934: 261-262)

Post-structuralist versions of the self transcend the liberal pragmatist faith in individuality, yet still retain some semblances of the "I" and the "me". The postmodern "me" would consist of a "generalized other" "anchored neither in core social values, social class, nor reference group..." but as "a field of mass-mediated images, a Disneyland-like fantasy world without clearly demarcated social structural elements" (Kortoba, 1989: 116). A postmodern "I" is found not in any biological or metaphysical given, but instead, would arise only through an engagement in the process of meaning deconstruction and reconstruction. The postmodern "I" emerges
through a process of signifying practice, for if the postmodern "me" rides on the tides of the symbolic order (Kristiva, 1975), the postmodern "I" exists for the subject at moments in which the symbolic order is ruptured and the subject recognizes the social institutions and signs which support the postmodern "me". The postmodern self is not a single unified self, but is a self in process (Kristiva's phrase is 'subject in process'), and the "I" emerges through signifying practice which Kristiva defines as "the setting in place and cutting through or traversing of a system of signs" (Kristiva as cited in Hebdige, 1979: 120).

The postmodern "I" is not a characteristic of individuals which simply allows them to break out of the normative constraints of previously acceptable combinations of signifiers. Instead, this "I" is productive in that it extends the boundaries of what is acceptable as systems of combinations of signifiers. The postmodern "I" is an entity that lives within space that has been opened or liberated in between dominant discourses.

Subversive deviance is thus a phenomenon to be celebrated and promoted rather than marginalized and condemned. Once again we are forced to realize that deviants who engage in processes of meaning deconstruction and reconstruction are theorists par excellence and may have theoretical privilege beyond that of the academic theorist. As Barthes notes (discussing a dilemma faced by theorists), in
producing analyses of culture,

...we constantly drift between the object and its demystification, powerless to render its wholeness. For if we penetrate the object, we liberate it but destroy it; and if we acknowledge its full weight, we respect it, but restore it to a state which is still mystified.

(Barthes, 1972 as cited in Hebdige, 1979: 140)

The same may not be true of the subversive deviant who not only reflects on the self and its position in the social order, but actively participates in the rupture of the social order, creates opening discursive space and lives precisely through the discursive space that is thus liberated. As academic theorists however, our signifying practices are relegated to the text and the conventions that it embodies. We are trapped by the functional necessity of intelligibility and seldom attempt to disrupt the flow of the text, lest we decide to forgo the social sanctioning that our work traditionally supplies.\(^1\) The theme of theoretical legitimacy and power will be returned to in subsequent chapters.

\(^1\) Exceptions to this practice do exist, most notably, the post-For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign (1981) work of Jean Baudrillard such as The Ecstasy of Communication (1988) or Simulations (1983), work which was written after Baudrillard had achieved the academic stature through which such risks can sometimes be taken. Journals such as Borderlines (c.f. Majzels, 1989) offer some possibilities as well, however Borderlines appears to be running the risk of creating a style of writing that is just as formally and socially restricted as traditional academic discourse.
Methodological Implications of the Postmodern Self

Methodologically, the postmodern self provides the ethnographer with several interesting, although unconventional, tactics. The old standards of objectivity and validity no longer have any referential foundation, since the ethnographer is necessarily implicated in the same process of signifying practices as the subjects being studied. A postmodern subjectivity acts to encourage the ethnographer to release his or her subjectivity to the subjects, whose signifying practices deconstruct and reconstruct that subjectivity.

"Going native", once the traditional taboo of ethnography, becomes almost a necessary methodological tool because we can no longer understand signifying practices without allowing our selves to take part in those signifying practices. As Fabian (1971) notes, the task of the ethnographer is to transform observation from "the mere recording of givens" to "participation in the process of their production." Further analysis of the methodological implications of a postmodern subjectivity will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

Symbolic interaction is compatible with poststructuralist theory "precisely at the points at which its concepts are undertheorized" (Balsmo, 1989), that is at the points where the self, the "I" and the "me" contact and interrupt received systems of signification. Symbolic
interaction's strong tradition of studying deviance and subculture is a tradition which provides post-structuralists with rich ethnographic accounts of the practice of signification as it is actively undertaken through postmodern selves. Indeed, the data gathered by symbolic interactionists and their resultant texts represent rich ethnographic resources to post-structuralists who lack an empirical orientation. This material can be re-read and re-worked from a post-structuralist framework to construct alternative readings that illustrate relations of power and discourse.

Harkening back to Weber's notion of the power of charisma, the postmodern "I" represents the capacity of the subject to create social and cultural discursive spaces within the constraints of the dominant social order: "...in its most charismatic forms it has inverted all value hierarchies and overthrown custom, law and tradition" (Weber, 1978: 1119). The postmodern "I" engenders the capacity to transcend the ideological individualism of Mead's pragmatism as well as to escape the "iron cage" of rationality that Weber feared from the spread of rationalism. Subversive deviance and subculture become, not aberrations of the social, but the ultimate tactical spheres for living through the social. Theoretically and methodologically the two, seemingly opposed theoretical positions of symbolic interactionism and post-structuralism, are compatible where their weaknesses meet.
The Development of Cultural Studies

Cultural studies is an emerging theoretical strategy for investigating everyday, lived, cultural forms and practices together with their relationships to power and practices of signification (Gruneau, 1988). Such a theoretical strategy is particularly relevant to the study of the production of video art because: its production necessarily implicates practices of signification; its production is marginalized in relation to the mass media and dominant cultural forms and; it is produced by contemporary, historically situated, creative and acting subjects. In this section, the theoretical strategy(ies) of cultural studies will be discussed in order to clarify the direction taken by this particular study.

The examination of the practices and organization of cultural production has been, until the last two decades, seriously neglected in all areas of culture including video, television and art (Becker, 1982; Chambers, 1986; Elliott, 1972; Gruneau, 1988; Williams, 1981; Zolberg, 1990). Chambers marks the emergence of cultural studies with the publication of Richard Hoggart’s (1958) *The Uses of Literacy* and Raymond William’s (1958) *Culture and Society 1780-1950*. These books not only allowed the study of culture to be released from strictly aesthetic and moral criteria but also brought the study of culture into the world of everyday lived experience with an understanding that culture "could not be divorced from
the wider dynamic of culture as a sphere of economic, social and symbolic activity" (Chambers, 1986: 203).

The institutionalization of cultural studies is normally marked by the creation of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham in 1975, lead by Stuart Hall and his colleagues such as Chambers, Hebdige and Willis (Cagle, 1989). The subsequent publication of Hall and Jefferson’s (1976) Resistance Through Rituals announced the Centre’s determination to introduce the work of Italian theorist Antonio Gramsci and other European marxist discourses into the understanding of the lived culture of groups traditionally thought to be emersed in either “base” cultures or to be largely contained within the dominant ideology of the bourgeoisie. Gruneau’s (1988) theoretical history of the Centre highlights its concern for the historical specificity of culture and the diversity of cultures in combination with a concern for understanding the ways in which dominant social relations are resisted and reproduced, particularly through practices of signification.

Gruneau (Ibid) notes that the history of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies has not been unproblematic. Citing Johnson’s (1983a and 1983b) analysis of the culturalist-structuralist debate at the Centre, he describes how the Althusserian notions of the over-determination of the social totality through ideological imperatives to reproduce capitalist social relations competed with culturalist
perspectives which focused on resistance to a dominant ideology. Ultimately the tensions between these two perspectives was lessened with a return to Gramsci’s work on hegemony. The Gramscian perspective meant that:

Popular cultural forms and practices could be viewed neither as an unambiguous site for class-based ways of life nor as the ideological supports of capitalist relations of production. Rather, such forms and practices could be analyzed as a force field of historical relations shaped by a complex and often contradictory set of limits and pressures.

(Grunneau, 1988: 21)

The Gramscian perspective entails an acknowledgement that, while dominant power blocs may appear to have culture and ideology function in their interests, dominant power blocs must continually struggle to maintain this relationship in the face of a diversity of resistances and unstable alliances. Ideology is thus continually worked and reworked as compromises are forced, alliances changed and resistances co-opted or muted. Ideology’s most powerful defence (or offense) is its ability to play in and through the daily lived experiences of subjects in establishing “common sense” understandings of reality which ultimately serve the interests of the state and power blocs, rather than the interests of the non-powerful.

The continual movement of hegemonic relationships forces us to consider the specificity of cultural practices of resistance or domination within historic sets of relationships and circumstances. For example, the peace sign worn on a
denim jacket in the 60’s may have once represented a fundamental icon of resistance, while today it may represent a simple element of style worn by an upper middle class university student to signify difference or nostalgia and very little else. Hegemony allows practices of cultural resistance to exhibit their resistance and to effect changes, however those practices can be continually absorbed or muted within the dominant social system.

The concepts of dominance, resistance and subversion can be clarified by examining Raymond Williams' (1981) distinctions between dominant cultural forms and residual and emergent cultural forms. Dominant cultural forms are produced through dominant institutions. While these forms may not appear to be directly attached to dominant institutions, they are deeply integrated into the practices and discourses of culture which in turn uphold dominant institutions. According to Williams (Ibid: 204)

Those dominated by such forms usually see them as natural and necessary, rather than as specific forms, while those dominating, in the area of cultural production may be quite unevenly aware of these practical connections, over a range from conscious control (as of the press and broadcasting), through various kinds of displacement, to a presumed (and then dominant) autonomy of professional and aesthetic values.

On the other hand, residual cultural forms are left over practices and related aesthetic values from other cultures or other times and emergent cultural forms are practices and related aesthetic values that try "to move (and at times
succeeds in moving) beyond the dominant forms and their socio-
formal relations" (Ibid). Residual and emergent forms exist
as alternatives to dominant forms and can either be absorbed
by dominant forms to support ongoing cultural reproduction or
they can be abrasive to cultural reproduction.

Cultural reproduction is a constant process which
necessarily involves constant adjustment within the dominant,
"but there is usually tension and struggle in this area. Some
innovations - kinds of art and thought which emerge and
persist as disturbing - would tend to destroy the dominant in
any of its forms, just as some new social forces would tend to
destroy the social order rather than reproduce or modify it"
(Ibid: 205). These disturbing forms can be categorized as
resistant when they are engaged in overt struggle with
dominant forms (and thus attract forces of containment) or as
subversive when they are engaged in covert struggles which
dominant forms do not immediately recognize (and thus do not
automatically deploy strategies of containment).

Hegemony and Resistance

Hegemony also allows for oppositional or alternative
readings of texts which appear to legitimize dominant cultural
forms and contents. Fiske (1987: 41) notes that texts are
ultimately unable to impose their meanings, in total, upon the
subjects who read and decode them:

Hegemony is a constant struggle against a
multitude of resistances to ideological
domination, and any balance of forces that it achieves is always precarious, always in need of re-achievement. Hegemony's "victories" are never final, and any society will evidence numerous points where subordinate groups have resisted the total domination that is hegemony's aim, and have withheld their consent to the system.

Fiske's (Ibid) work on audiences demonstrates that the contradictions imbedded in television texts can be breached by resistant readings which open up the alternative structures within those texts. He argues that, "alternative and resistant readings are possible within and against any dominant textual structure," (Ibid: 140).

Fiske's perspective is supported by several empirical studies of audiences. Morley (1986), for example, argues that subjects, who are situated within a diversity of historically specific contexts, can produce contradictory readings of the same Nationwide television program. Hodge and Tripp (1986), likewise argue that primary social relationships and the discourses generated through social interaction can work to disrupt or negate television's representations of reality. Katz and Liebes (1984) have demonstrated how ethnic identity and local culture are related to selective interpretation and perception of the meanings of Dallas.

Fiske's position on resistance is problematic, however, because it permits the cultural analyst to see resistance in virtually all consumer practices. Appropriating Michel de Certeau's (1984) ideas from his book, The Practice of Everyday Life, Fiske (1989) sees the technocratically
constructed and functionalized space in which consumers move as being a large and potentially malleable menu of signs from which consumers construct and reconstruct their own terrain and their own alternative significations. Fiske sees the "guerrilla raids of the weak" (Ibid: 193) everywhere, and one cannot help but ask, why, if resistance is so prevalent, the dominant ideological system does not simply collapse due to its own unsupported weight?

Fiske's overwhelming optimism concerning resistance brings one of cultural studies' central problematics into relief: if resistance exists, what are the catalysts that bring it into existence and how are individual subjects implicated in its existence. Fiske's point of view would almost have us believing that resistance is a phenomenon that is rooted in structural relations and which passes through historically specific subjects with little or no assistance on their part. Subjects are always resisting in one way or another, and thus there is no need to theorize about praxis or any other potentials which subjects might themselves bring to their structural relations as catalysts for resistance.

The concept of subversive deviance may provide an antidote to Fiske's optimism. Subversive deviance operates at a micro, local level and produces combinations of signifiers that overlap the domains of dominant discourses and local discourses. Dominant discourses do not determine local discourses, but instead provide subjects with an excess of
ready-made signifiers (Hartley, 1984) in addition to rich sets of signifiers which are latent within local (or sub-) cultures. Subjects are thus placed within the paths of a variety of discourses and signifiers that converge upon them "in ways that clash, cancel, augment, repress, and free-up [meaning] without any necessary guarantees about forgone conclusions or outcomes" (Personal communication with Dr. Graham Knight). Dominant discourses may impress the subject with strong claims of legitimacy and "truth", however they may also provoke the subject to produce meanings and discourses which do not reproduce dominant discourses, and which may effectively subvert those discourses.

Rethinking the Concept of Agency Via Piaget

The cultural studies agenda would seem to require the development of some conceptualization of agency. Subjects are historically situated and act according to structural constraints and pressures, yet the notion of hegemony also requires that at least some subjects engage in practices which subvert those constraints and pressures. These constraints and pressures are potentially contradictory and thus when they intersect they open new spaces for practices which may subvert the structures which produce them. Subjects may be situated at the intersections of such constraints and pressures and are the media through which subversive practices manifest themselves. Such situations require subjects to act, and we
must therefore attempt to uncover not only the catalyst for this action, but the forces within subjects which permit it to surface.

One theoretical avenue that would appear to be promising in this regard is the Piagetian (Piaget, 1971) position that cognition is rooted in human activity, or praxis. If we regard cognition as equivalent to systems of representation and modes of utilizing discourse or systems of signification, then the Piagetian position would appear to offer a theory that allows for dominant discourses to work through subjects' thoughts and behaviours, but which also allows for subjects to critique and transcend structural limitations and pressures on thought and behaviour.

Piaget (1972) clearly takes a social constructivist view of knowledge acquisition. Knowledge of the world can only be acquired by acting upon the world and receiving feedback from objects acted upon. Intelligence, however is generated through active coordination of the actions performed on objects. Piaget (1971) makes a distinction between two styles of thinking, figurative and operative. Figurative thinking is characterized by perception, imitation and mental imagery (which Piaget notes is itself internalized imitation). Operative thinking by contrast is the essential characteristic of intelligence, and deals with transformations from one state to another. Operative thinking requires a process that Piaget (1971: 18) labels reflective abstraction, a mental process of
reflection through which subjects develop strategies for coordinated actions between themselves and objects or other individuals.

Parallel to the two styles of thinking, are two major types of social interaction. The first, Piaget (1965) describes as the relationship of constraint and it is characterized by conformity to invariant rules that define 'appropriate' behaviour. This kind of relationship is wholly unilateral in nature and is normally based on social relationships characterized by authority. The second type of social interaction is cooperation, a relationship characterized by reciprocity and mutual respect for the rules governing behaviour. Key to this respect is subjects' understanding that the social rules of behaviour are constructed by people and that change is negotiable.

It is not difficult to abstract from the Piagetian position, an argument that would see the reproduction (within subject's lives) of a dominant discourse as being related to figurative styles of thinking and relationships of constraint. Resistance or subversive deviance to figurative thinking and relationships of constraint (dominant discourse) would be related to operative thinking and relationships characterized by cooperation. While a direct, one-to-one correspondence between a society's dominant discourses and characteristic styles of thinking and relationships is not likely to be all encompassing, we can look to a society's provision of multiple
discourses and excesses of signifiers and envision the
enerative possibilities for thinking styles and relationship
styles. Individual subjects act upon their environment,
however their environments provide a menu of possibilities for
those interactions.

In postmodern society, we can relate the relative
plurality of social forms and discursive systems to the
emergence of varieties of operative thinking and cooperative
interactions which generate new forms of social interaction
and new ideas which may transcend or transform the initial
possibilities offered to subjects. Resistance or subversive
deviance then become wider social phenomenon, given a
pluralistic environment; an environment characterized by an
excess of meaning. Forms of social constraint, may however,
retard any progress toward resistance or subversive deviance:

Social constraint - and by this we mean any
social relation into which there enters an
element of authority and which is not, like
coopration, the result of an interchange
between equal individuals - has on the
individual results that are analogous to
those exercised by adult constraint on the
mind of the child. The two phenomena,
moreover, are really one and the same thing,
and the adult who is under the dominion of
unilateral respect for the "elders" and for
tradition is really behaving like a child.
(Piaget, 1932: 67)

This theoretical position adapts well to the Gramscian
notion of hegemony, for it provides further depth to the idea
that the dominant or controlling social blocs must constantly
struggle to maintain the ideological and material basis for
their dominance. Social actors, within a pluralistic society, engender the possibility for resistance or subversive deviance and the dominant or controlling social bloc must continually dampen, mute or absorb that possibility. As well, resistance or subversive deviance can never be seen as a given, since it can only arise through interactions with the environment, interactions which open discursive space and thus seek to transform the subject’s relations to that environment.

The crucial element in the Piagetian position is the need for the presence of conflict or contradiction within the subject’s interactions upon the environment. If conflict or contradiction are not present, the subject has little need to re-organize thought structures or social relations. Conflict or contradiction require subjects to either retreat from interaction or to engage in an effort to assimilate and transcend conflict or contradiction. The outcome of such a situation can never be predicted in each case, however external social factors such as cooperative relations with other subjects who have made similar transformations (or who have not) may direct the interaction one way or the other.

Like Piaget, Gramsci also sees the existence of conflict as central to intellectual and social progress: "The abolition of class struggle does not mean the abolition of the need to struggle as a principle of development" (Gramsci, 1988: 71). As well, Gramsci clearly sees social and intellectual development as being tied to subjects’ critical
understanding of their position within their historically specific social order prior to the negotiation of a new order:

The starting-point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is 'knowing thyself' as a product of the historical process to date which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory. Such an inventory must therefore be made at the outset... Critical understanding of self takes place... through a struggle of political 'hegemonies', from opposing directions, first in the ethical field and then in that of politics, in order to arrive at the working out at a higher level of one's own conception of reality. Consciousness of being part of a particular hegemonic force is the first stage towards a further progressive self-consciousness in which theory and practice will finally be one.

(Gramsci, A., 1988: 326 & 333–4)

The concept of praxis, in terms of the unity of theory and practice or in terms of intellectual processes and social interaction remains central to both Piagetian and Gramscian ideas of social development.

Piagetian ideas are also compatible with those of Jean Baudrillard, particularly with regard to the notion of cooperative relationships. Much of Baudrillard's critique of postmodern society stems from his belief that relations of reciprocity have been vanquished by a code that seeks to annihilate all processes of response on the part of subjects. Baudrillard remains fixated, however, by the possibilities for reciprocity offered by the "anthropological dream... the dream of sacrificial logic, of gift, expenditure, potlach, "devil's share" consumption, symbolic exchange" (1988: 11). Similarly,
although perhaps less romantically, cooperation for Piaget (1965) remains an ideal type characterized by a desire for mutual understanding, pleasure in anticipating all possible innovations, pleasure in reciprocally negotiating rules, and relationships involving non-hierarchical interaction.

In essence, Piagetian ideas can help to fill in the gap left in cultural studies' usage of the concepts of hegemony and praxis. Resistance and subversive deviance can be seen to not only to be related to super-structural relationships, but also, via Piaget, to micro-level interactions. Both the micro-level and the super-structural level are necessarily inter-dependent and inter-related and processes of resistance or deviance, in their historically specific situations, can be understood in terms of relations among elements at both the micro and macro levels. Micro-level interactions do not take place within autonomous, atomistic groupings, and likewise, super-structural relations do not magically transfer their qualities to individual subjects. Adopting the relational perspective advocated by Piaget (1971) we can fruitfully investigate individual processes of knowledge creation or hegemonic resistance and subversion while relating those processes to super-structural processes such as dominance or the excessive production of meaning.

The Sociology of Art
Another theoretical area which is implicated in the study of video art is the sociology of art. As Pierre Bourdieu (1980: 207 as cited in Zolberg, 1990) notes, "sociology and art make an odd couple" because (according to Bourdieu) artists tend to see their creative works as embodying the personal gifts or the uniqueness of the original creator, while sociologists disrupt and corrupt this belief through analyses aimed at understanding and explaining. The sociology of art contextualizes art and artistic practices (Zolberg, 1990) and thus runs counter to the 'common-sense' notion that artists are autonomous creators.

The most extreme form of contextualization is outlined by Clifford Geertz (1983) who argues that the particular sector of the general symbolic system of a culture that we call art is inseparable from that symbolic system. Geertz maintains that, "a theory of art is thus at the same time a theory of culture, not an autonomous enterprise." While Geertz' point contains a great deal of truth, it makes the study of art particularly difficult because art works, artists and art worlds are social categories that have achieved a degree of sanctioned autonomy and sacredness over other categories of cultural production. Geertz' argument is based on an audience centred perspective in which artists are held to rely on the perceptual and interpretive capacities of their audiences in order to construct the symbolic qualities of their works, and these capacities are drawn from the symbolic
system of the broader culture. What Geertz ignores is the creation and maintenance of the specialized cultural institution of art: artists also rely on the socially constructed interpretive framework of "art" and the mutual identification between artists and audience of the interpretive and perceptual requirements of specific frameworks. As well, Geertz neglects to consider the extent to which artists utilize cultural material as their raw material which is then processed through practices that make sense within the cultural institution of art (Brain, 1989).

Sociological studies of art worlds have tended to either focus on specific social practices or focus on external structural constraints. The latter focus tends to reduce artistic practices to the level of reflections of material conditions or dominant ideologies. The former focus tends to view art worlds as institutionalized bodies of practices which provide interpretational contexts, career paths, materials and audiences for art and artists. Work in cultural studies appears to be bridging the gap between the two orientations, by demonstrating the relationship between historically specific cultural systems and ideologies, and specific institutional contexts, however this has not been the predominant practice amongst sociologists.

Howard Becker’s (1982) Art Worlds forms a major part of the framework that will be utilized in contextualizing the institutional practices of video artists in this study.
Becker's work starts with the symbolic interactionist assumption that, like other social fields, art worlds consist of the regularized interactions among producers and the social actors who support production or consume that production. Art is viewed as "collective action" and is studied through the way in which people within art worlds create and utilize conventions to communicate with each other and their audiences and to organize cooperation within art communities. Essential to Becker's analysis is the negation of aesthetic values as having any intrinsic truth or transcendental meaning. Aesthetic values are tied to elements of status and to institutionalized systems of value creation. As well, artists are seen to engage in a great deal of boundary work in their signification to each other and to members of the public that their work has significance and that their institutions are valid.

Becker defines art worlds as follows:

Art worlds consist of all the people whose activities are necessary to the production of the characteristic works which that world, and perhaps others as well, define as art. Members of art worlds coordinate the activities by which work is produced by referring to a body of conventional understandings embodied in common practice and in frequently used art facts. The same people often cooperate repeatedly, even routinely, in similar ways to produce similar works, so that we can think of an art world as an established network of cooperative links among participants... Works of art, from this point of view, are not products of individual makers, "artists" who possess a rare and special gift. They are, rather, joint products of all the people who
cooperate via an art world's characteristic conventions to bring works like that into existence.

(Becker, 1982: 34-35)

Art Worlds provides an excellent framework for understanding and contextualizing the wide variety of practices in which artists and their communities may be engaged. Becker's shortcoming, however is, like that of many other symbolic interactionists, a lack of analysis of super-structural relationships, ideologies and their relationships to art worlds and artists. External structures of opportunity and constraint are dealt with only on a superficial level as in discussions of how the production of certain photographic papers constrains photographic art practices, or as in discussions of the state's ability to support artistic creation or to impose sanctions such as imprisonment or death upon artists who produce undesirable work.

A Critique of Bourdieu and His Sociology of Art

Another sociologist whose work is implicated in the study of video art and video artists is Pierre Bourdieu (1984). Where Becker is content to examine art worlds outside of considerations such as political economy or ideology, Bourdieu makes such considerations paramount to his theoretical work. He writes:

The sociology of cultural works must take as its object the totality of relations (objective ones and also those effectuated in the form of interactions) between the artist and other artists, and beyond them, the
totality of actors engaged in the production of the work or, at least, of the social value of the work (critics, gallery directors, patrons, etc.). What people call 'creation' is the conjunction of socially constituted habitus and a certain position (status), either already constituted or possible in the division of labour of cultural production (and, moreover, at a second degree), in the division of labour of domination.

(Bourdieu, 1980a: 208-12, as cited in Zolberg, 1990)

Bourdieu's intent is to demonstrate that art is used as a form of symbolic capital both for the status creation, maintenance and continuance of certain socially located actors (according to class origin), and also in the Gramscian sense as a tool for the maintenance of hegemony through the reproduction of the 'common-sense' privileging of dominant social classes, based on assumed innate qualities of taste. Only the few are endowed with the capacity to understand the sacred value of art and to consume art as an end in itself, (supposedly) outside of the trappings of modern capitalism, and beyond the pathetic and overly personalized tastes of the dominated classes.

The cultural institution that Bourdieu sees as helping to drive this hegemonic system is that of aesthetics. "What is at value in aesthetic discourse... is nothing less than the monopoly of humanity" (Bourdieu, 1984: 491). Aesthetics serves to maintain the sacred nature of art by providing control of textual meanings and cultural economies through complex, abstract codings that are ultimately only open to decoding by those imbued with the cultural capital needed to
unlock their sacred meanings. Aestheticians are thus the modern equivalents of witch doctors. Knowledge of aesthetic matters serves to differentiate and privilege the dominant classes who are rich in cultural capital resources while distancing the dominated classes who have great difficulty in acquiring cultural capital.

There is little doubt that Bourdieu's analysis has powerful explanatory value with regard to the maintenance of hegemony and many aspects of art worlds. However, Bourdieu's characterization of artists is problematic because artists are seen as unproblematically assuming the ideology that the hegemonic system requires of them. Artists, according to Bourdieu (1984), adopt an elitist ideology of artistic greatness, artistic sacredness and artistic autonomy. As such they are either of the dominant class, or they are the privileged pawns of the dominant class. Bourdieu is correct in pointing out the prevalence of this elitist ideology among artists, however he does not account for the processes through which artists might acquire this ideology (Zolberg, 1990), and equally importantly, he neglects to take accurate account of the economically marginalized position that most artists occupy.1

1 According to 1981 Statistics Canada Census Data (Canada Council, 1984, as cited in Donegan 1986), the average self-employed artist's per annum income was $6,9391.00. "Between 1971 and 1981 there was a 244% increase in the number of painters, sculptors and related artists in Canada (which does not include photographers, video producers, etc.) It is definitely a growth labour force - not a growth economy"
Bourdieu also fails to allow for the possibility that economically marginalized artists might be interesting models of the reformed educational program that he advocates as a tool for eradicating hegemonic cultural reproduction. His proposed program for teaching critical thinking and in-depth 'socioanalysis' (Zolberg, 1990) as a replacement for passive education which transmits authority and reinforces hegemony is laudable, however, he neglects to take into account vast changes in contemporary art which have propelled certain art forms into the realm of critical thinking and socio-cultural analysis. Thus, he also neglects the role that artists may play in criticizing, questioning, subverting, disturbing, poking fun at, and challenging dominant ideologies, aesthetic systems which support dominant classes and political and economic relations.¹

(Donegan, 1986: 19-20).

¹ Among the many artists who have created such works, Duchamp is clearly among the most interesting. His works include Fountain, which for all intents and purposes can objectively be described as a porcelain urinal, and L H O O Q, a reproduction of the Mona Lisa on which he painted a mustache and whose title when read slowly in the accent of the French alphabet says, "Elle a chaud au cul," or loosely translated "She's got the hots." Hans Haacke's work is more openly critical of capitalist corporate values and ideologies and includes photographic/sculptural installations which expose the racist allegiances of Alcan and British Leyland, two transnational corporations with significant South African investments. One piece, A breed apart, consists of a quote from a British Leyland press release: "No other vehicle ever produced can claim the international admiration and fame that surround the Land-Rover; overseas military authorities, in particular, continue to rely on this famous cross-country vehicle despite ever-increasing competition from motor manufacturers worldwide (Haacke, 1985: 225)." This quote is
Bourdieu's understanding of art and artists is thus essentially constructed within modernist ideology of art. In essence he is reacting against the writing of American art critic Clement Greenberg and the British Bloomsbury tradition. Greenberg is the quintessential modernist, whose assumptions can be outlined as follows:

Art is an activity characteristic of humanity since the dawn of civilization. In any epoch the Artist by virtue of special gifts, expresses that which is finest in humanity. The visual artist achieves this through modes of understanding and expression which are 'purely visual' - radically distinct from, for example, verbalization. This special characteristic of art makes it an autonomous sphere of activity, completely separate from the everyday world of social and political life.

(Burgin, 1986: 30)

The Bloomsbury Group, in a similar tradition, held that certain things are 'good in themselves' and that these things are part of a devine language of forms which give rise to aesthetic emotions (Burgin, 1986). Both traditions are

placed below a photograph depicting very heavily armed, South African soldiers preparing to lift the prone body of a black South African onto the prisoner compartment of a Land Rover.

Of course the Situationist International whose objective was to "jolt: to interrupt the continuum of everyday experience and expectation in such a way that people are forced to confront the familiar from an altered perspective" (Ward, 1985: 150), deserve mention as well, especially since their work is implicated in many post-modern theoretical analyses.

Canada also has its share of critical artists, many of whom are video artists. Perhaps the most well known example is the group known as General Idea who produced a video entitled Shut the Fuck Up! which is directed at aestheticians and elitist art connoisseurs who are seen as continuing to reinforce the marginalization of artists.
informed by a humanist, individualist, modernist set of assumptions. Bourdieu is correct to see the maintenance of these assumptions as supportive of dominant classes and dominant ideologies, however art which is not informed by these taken for granted assumptions is either left out of his analysis or is quickly dismissed.

Bourdieu’s dismissal of subversive art forms is far too simplistic. In discussing Manzoni’s tins of ‘artist’s shit’ he claims that:

Paradoxically, nothing more clearly reveals the logic of the functioning of the artistic field than the fate of these apparently radical attempts at subversion. Because they expose the art of artistic creation to a mockery already annexed to the artistic tradition by Duchamp, they are immediately converted into artistic ‘acts’, recorded as such and thus consecrated and celebrated by the makers of taste. Art cannot reveal the truth about art without snatching it away again by turning the revelation into an artistic event.

(Bourdieu, 1980b: 266)

By denying the potential of subversive art forms, Bourdieu places himself in the same camp as structuralists such as Althusser (1969), who claim the ability to interpret and resist the dominant ideological systems that condemn the rest of us to repression. Bourdieu’s dilemma, like the structuralists’ (Harland, 1987), is that the all-encompassing, dominant ideological system that he exposes must also control Bourdieu. It is, “a classic case of a deterministic theory that reflexively determines itself out of existence” (Ibid: 123). Subversive theories become just as problematic as
subversive art forms, and Bourdieu's theory falls into the same trap as the art forms he dismisses.

Yet, we cannot as easily dismiss Bourdieu. Clearly, he is outlining a pattern which is all too common in virtually any discourse. Attempts to oppose, to assert contrary ideologies, to resist, are more often than not absorbed and muted by the dominant ideological system. According to Baudrillard (1981: 172), such acts of "transgression and subversion never get 'on the air' without being subtly negated as they are: transformed into models, neutralized into signs... eviscerated of their meaning." What potential lies in subversive art (or theoretical) forms cannot be determined by examining material form or aesthetic qualities, but in situating the art form within a context. Of course, the subversiveness of Manzoni's 'tins of artist's shit' is muted or negated through discussion in art texts and discourses, however there exists a moment in the historical process of the reception of 'tins of artist's shit' where the discourse of art is forced to react and contain the disruption that this work creates. As well, the act of contemplating such an art work involves a moment in which a viewer must realize the initial disruption in order to understand the processes of discursive containment, thus the work serves to signify the very existence of processes of containment.¹

¹ The controversy over the National Gallery of Canada's purchase of Voice of Fire is a fascinating example of discursive containment. Voice of Fire is an art work that
Complicating Bourdieu's analysis even further is the fact that many contemporary artists are either cognizant of, or are emersed in, the very theories which might see them contained. It is becoming exceedingly common for artists and art critics to make reference to theorists such as Bourdieu, Barthes, Delueze, Lyotard, Derrida, Kristeva, Althusser, Lacan, Habermas, Gramsci, Baudrillard, Williams, Fiske, Gitlin, Eagleton and Hall. This phenomenon could represent several theoretical directions: a) contemporary art works are simply taking their impetus from contemporary theory. In other words, the art work is theory driven, and artists, aware of current intellectual fads are "jumping on the bandwagon", and knowledge of theory indicates membership in or aspiration cannot be separated from the theoretical discourse in which it was created and for which it represents, if one is to understand the work according to accepted critical notions. The controversy over the work brought the arbitrary nature of such theoretical discourse to light. The duplication of the work by a farmer who lacked artistic credentials, and who therefore did not qualify even for processes of containment to be brought into action, served to further indicate the arbitrariness of artistic discourse. Regardless of the farmer's intentions, this was true subversion, and will continue to be true subversion until his painting is purchased by a gallery, or becomes labelled as art within art discourse. The irony that the farmer's painting suggests is made even more apparent when we look at works by artists such as Duchamp, the Situationists or Warhol. Duchamp's works were adopted by the art world because he was given artistic credentials, even though his urinal piece was simply a urinal, and his appropriation of the Mona Lisa is very similar to the farmer's action.

In order to contain the subversion that the farmer's painting suggested, the National Gallery should have placed it within the great legitimating narrative (Lyotard) of art by purchasing the work and placing it on display next to the original in order call attention to the brilliance of the subversive act!
to the status community of the cultivated (Bourdieu, 1984); b) contemporary postmodern and post-structuralist theory is being contained and absorbed by the "Ideological State Apparatus" (Althusser, 1971) of the culture industry according to Bourdieu's claim that artistic aesthetic discourses monopolize humanity, and thus these theories have lost any subversive potential; c) theory is trying to contain and absorb artistic objects and practices on behalf of some dominant organizing code, and thus it is theory that is the repressive force rather than the 'liberating' force (this is what Baudrillard seems to be implying); d) art is a theoretical practice (Burgin, 1986), perhaps more so than theory itself. As to which of these directions theory/art is taking, I would answer "all of the above."

Conclusion

The study of video art and video artists is a complex endeavour because the video art world's marginality to other art forms, its emerging institutionalization, its use of electronic media, its referencing to ideological communication systems, and a variety of other factors make it theoretically challenging. Video art is virtually excluded from broadcast television institutions and it is marginalized in the context of other art forms such as painting or sculpture. Video art is thus a phenomenon which is particularly well suited to an understanding of the "logics of exclusion" (Derrida, 1976)
that create the discourses and institutions of art and of television. Video art and other art practices are also excluded from theoretical practices, and thus they may allow some deconstruction of the discourse and institution of theory.
STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM TO BE INVESTIGATED

The social world of video art has not been subject to sociological study. An account of the lived world of video artists will fill a distinct void in the literature on television production. An analysis of the work produced through video artists' practices will similarly fill a void in the literature dealing with television content and form. This study views television screens as blank canvases which can be filled with an infinite variety of images. The study asks why the content and form of mainstream television looks as it does, while other video products are different in form and content. Secondly, this study is directed at examining organizational processes, sub-cultural interactions, and larger social phenomena to see what role they play in shaping the images that appear on screens and in shaping our ways of understanding those images.

Essentially, this study looks at the social history of video art combined with a current ethnographic picture of the world occupied by video artists. This examination is tied to theories of political economy and theories of representation in order to connect a micro-sociological phenomenon with macro-sociological processes. Questions about what video artists do and why they do it will be integrally related to wider social processes, and to representational patterns and processes within dominant communication forms.
RESEARCH THEMES

Investigating the world of video artists and video art requires the identification of a variety of thematic research questions. Many of these questions are related directly to aspects of organizational processes and organizational contexts, including relationships to external bodies and organizations such as the state or private sector sponsors. The internal world of video artists can best be understood utilizing the organizational context method provided by Becker (1982) in his book, Art Worlds. External relationships are more problematic and require a more theoretically involved approach linking aspects of political economy/ideology theories (e.g. Gramsci, A. 1988; Hall et. al., 1978; Golding and Murdock, 1979) with discourse theory, post-structuralist theories and post-modernist theories (e.g. Barthes, R., 1975; Baudrillard J., 1981; de Certeau, 1984; Derrida, 1975; Fiske, 1987; Foucault, 1980a, 1980b; Kristeva, J. 1980), however, internal and external aspects of the world of video artists and video art are necessarily intertwined.

Video Art as an Art World

In order to contextualize video artists and their practices the first question that must be addressed is whether or not video artists comprise an art world according to the model suggested by Becker (1982). I hope to show that video artists will map unto this model rather unproblematically. I
also hope to show that video art and video artists are involved in what Becker would describe as an "artistic revolution" (Ibid: 305), specifically a resistance to and a subversion of the modernist aesthetic beliefs and institutions within the established art world utilizing post-modernist discourse as a primary resistance tool. I will attempt to demonstrate that this resistance and subversion of modernist aesthetic beliefs is also an attack (or guerrilla raid) on the existing institutional systems of art worlds.

According to Becker (Ibid: 305):

An attack on aesthetic beliefs as embodied in particular conventions is, finally, an attack on an existing system of stratification. Hughes argues, following William G. Sumner, that folkways and mores create status. Sects - religious, political, or artistic - are at war with the mores. An attack on the mores is thus an attack on social structure, and sects or innovators in art worlds are at war with the systems of rank current in the worlds whose conventions they attack and attempt to replace.

Thus, not only does video art represent an "attack" (here viewed as resistance and subversion) on the existing institutional systems of art worlds, but it also (a fourth hypothesis) represents an attack on the social, political and economic structures which support that system. In this case, video art may also represent an attack on traditional systems of discourse and communication processes.

Following Gramsci (1988) another research question is implicated in the argument that video art represents a revolutionary "attack": opposition and resistance typically
invoke strategies of social or cultural containment in response, on the part of dominant institutions, the state or dominant power blocs. By examining evidence of containment in the social world of video artists I hope to demonstrate that such a revolutionary "attack" is present.

Finally, evidence of this "attack" of resistance and subversion will be shown to be found specifically in the realm of discourse, communication and the sign. Discourse, communication and signification practices are elements of the popular social change model that Fiske (1989) distinguishes from a radical social change model. According to Fiske, radical social change movements "neither originate nor operate at the level of representations or of symbolic systems," (Ibid: 188) rather, radical social change movements strategize for major redistributions of power and restructuring of social systems. Popular social change tactics work utilizing systems of representation and processes of communication and discourse at the micro-political level.

Fiske is cautious about imputing any macro-political power to popular social change tactics, however he notes that such tactics may provide subjects with the empowerment and experience that leads to social change: "The micro politics that maintains resistances in the minutiae of everyday life maintains a fertile soil for the seeds of macropolitics without which they will inevitably fail to flourish" (Ibid: 913). I would add that tactics such as disruption, or irony
within the realm of systems of representation and processes of discourse and communication pester dominant social structures and processes to the extent that forces within those structures have to expend far more energy in coping with these taxing disturbances than the agents of popular change expend in utilizing their subversive tactics. Such guerrilla warfare tactics within culture wear down and frustrate dominant ideologies and discourse patterns because they call into question the very tenuous representational foundations on which they have been erected.

Video Art and Mainstream Television

Video art cannot be isolated from its relationship to mainstream television. In order to demonstrate this the social history of video art will be outlined according to how practicing video artists experience their history. I hope to show that there is a binary opposition inherent within video art between mainstream television and video art, and yet it is a binary opposition that seeks its own erasure through the deconstructive operations (Derrida, 1976) that it evokes. Mainstream television explicitly avoids evidencing the conditions which might lead to its deconstruction by seeking to establish the absolutism of facticity, and the rich literature of television production studies will be utilized to demonstrate this characteristic. In addition, video art's relationship to community access cable systems will be used to
illustrate the difficulty of evoking deconstructive operations within the confines of broadcast television structures.

In essence, then, combining the research themes above, I hope to show that video artists create video which is radically differentiated from mainstream television in form and content.

I will also argue that video art represents a possible revolutionary strategy according to Baudrillard's notion that "the only revolution [in the domain of the media]... lies in restoring [the] possibility of response" (Baudrillard, 1981: 170). In order to demonstrate this, evidence of speech which "must be able to exchange, give and repay itself" and evidence of something like symbolic exchange will have to be shown to be an important aspect of video art practices. It must be shown that despite the commonality of technology, materials and procedures, video art actually represents a different medium than the medium of television, and that this difference is maintained through practices (or praxis). In other words, video art is radically differentiated from mainstream television in terms of the audience processes that it creates and maintains.

A research theme in this regard is that video art is not capable of total resistance, and tends toward commodification and the logic of signification. In other words, video art is not immune to the seduction of simulation and cybernetic social designs. At the level of everyday lived
practice there should be evidence of resistance and subversion, however at the level of artistic representational practices such as aesthetic writing, or relations to the larger (deeply modernist) art world commodification and simulation take hold. Evidence for this tension will be linked to de Certeau’s (1984) work on the *Practice of Everyday Life*.

Relationship Between Video Art Practices and Theoretical Practices

One final, rather radical, research question will be discussed. Video art practices may constitute a form of discourse that provides more "explanatory" power than the textual, meaning producing discourses of academic theoretical production. If some of the above statements can be demonstrated to be "true" then: video art represents a discourse which evokes practices which empower through the provision of response; video art is a product and a set of practices which resist commodification; video art resists rote consumption; video art is a practice which provides a mode of theoretical discourse to those who do not possess academic cultural capital. In short it embodies practices which accomplish most, if not all, of the items on the wish lists of academic media theorists.

Video art may thus be a form of discourse that does what a critical theory is supposed to do, yet is unable to do
largely as a result of a reliance on text and the relationship to the reader that text requires (Barthes, 1974). More importantly, if Baudrillard is correct in nominating the mass media and specifically television as the most desocializing simulacra which elicit maximal production of meaning to create the simulation of the social and the simulation of subjectivity (Baudrillard, 1983b), video art may exhibit characteristics which resist even this all-encompassing theory. Social theory and sociology are only further simulations according to Baudrillard, and neither will bring us closer to any final referent or fundamental reality. If this is the case, then theory may operate best through the very medium (the mass media, television and simulation) that it seeks to subvert. Producing theory through video and the manipulation and transformation of video signs may be far more provocative and powerful than theory which sits like words on a page.
DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

My original plan for this research study was to create a cross-Canada overview of the world of video artists. While I now smile at the naivete of that original plan, I do hope that some of the data and analysis contained herein is generalizable to video artists practicing across the country, however, I am very much aware of the tenuous nature of such generalizations. A variety of factors conspired to limit my geographic mobility, yet these same factors also conspired to allow me to conduct an in-depth study of one particular video art production centre and the lives of some of its members.

Resources

Although we read about the difficulties involved in conducting participant observation fieldwork (c.f. Schatzman and Strauss, 1973; Shaffir et. al, 1980), we seldom read about the very real problems which may be related to the researcher’s financial situation. These problems are an integral part of the entire research process and play a very important role in shaping that process. In the case of this research study, financial resources, or lack thereof, played a major role in limiting the geographical scope of the research plan in three ways.

First, since video art is produced at centres across the width and breadth of Canada, from Inuvik to Windsor and from Vancouver to St. John’s, a thorough study of producers
and their practices across Canada would be incredibly costly in terms of travel, as well as costly in terms of research time. My funds as a graduate student, even with a generous scholarship, were limited (my wife was also a graduate student), so the high costs of air and rail travel did not permit the cross-Canada research plan I had in mind. I was thus limited to examining mainly the production centre in my home city. Luckily, however, I lived within easy traveling range of two other production centres, two video art distribution centres, several galleries which occasionally show video art and many video artists. I was able to include two more production centres in my study thanks to travel funding for the presentation of a paper at a learned conference. Finally, various university libraries house collections of catalogues from artistic exhibitions, including video exhibitions and screening events, and these catalogues proved to be a valuable source of textual data.

Locating Video Artists

Another very important limitation to this study is the fact that many individuals and groups who might be labeled as video artists work outside the established networks of artist-run centres, galleries and distributors, and are thus marginal to the video art world. Utilizing their own equipment or, more frequently, equipment borrowed from other organizations, they involve themselves in producing videos which are
circulated and shown among friends or individuals who might share their particular representational interest. A prevalent example of this might be university students who use camcorders to produce material for class presentations. Because these producers do not label themselves as video artists does not mean that they do not produce video art, only that what they produce is not recognized (or even seen) by those who legitimize such a label. This study will be limited to an examination of video artists whose work is connected to artist-run centres and to the supporting organizations which legitimize and fund video art productions. As Becker (1982: 36) notes:

To the Sociologist studying art worlds, it is as clear as, but no clearer than, it is to the participants in them whether particular objects or events are "really art" or whether they are craft or commercial work, or perhaps the expression of folk culture, or maybe just embodied symptoms of a lunatic. Sociologists, however, can solve this problem more easily that art world participants. One important facet of a sociological analysis of any social world is to see when, where, and how participants draw lines that distinguish what they want to be taken as characteristic from what is not to be so taken. Art worlds typically devote considerable attention to trying to decide what is and isn’t art, what is and isn’t their kind of art, and who is and isn’t an artist; by observing how an art world makes those distinctions rather than trying to make them ourselves we can understand much of what goes on in that world.

The designation of the labels video art and video artist are thus important delimiters for the scope of this study. For example, with camcorders becoming a standard
household object among the middle and upper middle class, the lines between what is video art and what is not become blurred. Surely, many individuals are producing videos which could evoke the same representational dynamic as video art, even if they are focused on the special occasions and birthday parties within a single family\(^1\). Indeed, some productions which have been officially designated as video art within the mainstream art world, and have been awarded important recognition, contain 8mm film footage from old family home movies. What appears to differentiate video art from home videos is the context of both production and viewing. It is this same context which clearly differentiates video art from mainstream television. As will be argued later, this context serves to expand the variety of formal visual techniques and effects within video art, and thus preserves the visual differences between home videos, mainstream television and video art. The context also determines that what video artists do is produce art, and like other artists, "if they act under the definition of 'art', their interaction convinces them that what they produce are valid works of art" (Ibid: 39).

One important dimension of this study is the need to compare and contrast community access cable television and

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\(^1\) Benjamin (1969) observed in the 1930's that the process of photographing family events represents the attempt to keep art embedded in its ritual origins and thus defeat the process that was transforming art into a mass commodity.
video art. Both sectors provide low cost access to facilities and equipment, both sectors provide training to neophytes, and both sectors produce works which are neither mainstream television productions, nor home videos. The social and economic organizations of community access cable television and video art worlds are vastly different, even though at first glance their production processes would appear to be similar. The relationship between the two sectors will be discussed in some detail because their differentiation illustrates many of the important features of video art. Again, as Becker (Ibid: 38) notes, analyzing two or more similar activities, one which is defined as art, and others which are not, allows the process of definition to come into focus as a "major problem".

Isolating Video Art in Relation to Other Art Forms

A further limitation of the study concerns the use of video in a variety of artistic practices which are found under the heading of "time-base art". Video has been used within sculptural installations, within performance art, within films, in connection to computer based art, as well as in documentation for more familiar artistic practices such as dance. Again, it is the context within which video art is produced and viewed which sets the parameters for this study. Works of a sculptural, filmic, performance, or computerized nature are included only if the world of video art has adopted
them or placed them as important elements within video art discourse.
DEFINITION OF VIDEO ART

The most important term utilized in this study is "video art". It is also the most difficult term to define. Within the world of video art, a vast quantity of critical discourse has been dedicated to precisely answering the question of "what is video art?" To assert that any objective definition of video art would be possible to arrive at outside of the internal discourse of video art would be ridiculous because video art is essentially the products that people who designate themselves as video artists, label as video art. Their definitions of their art, and their definitions of the meaning of that art are what makes video art "video art".

We can however, go beyond the circularity implied by a strict reliance on insular definitions by examining practices. The combination of insular definitions and analysis of practices can provide a clearer definition of what is entailed in the variety of processes connected to the construction of video art. Rather than attempt to settle on a strict definition of video art at this point, the definition will be left to evolve out of the data and its analysis. In a sense, this entire study is dedicated to answering the question: "what is video art?" and the problem of its definition is itself a crucial for understanding not only video art, but other phenomena linked to the mass media, television and communication within a post-industrial world.

We can however, work toward a definition of video in
relation to television if we eliminate the descriptive noun "art" for a moment. Commercial television, industrial video, instructional video, home video, music video and video art all share the common medium of video. This medium, in its rawest form consists of images created by electronic devices, images which are essentially combinations of electronic wave forms that are decoded and displayed on monitors, often with an audio component, for humans to view and hear. It is the impact and manipulation of this medium by various social formations that creates its differing manifestations, and it is these social formations that dictate its content and uses. Television, of course, is the predominant form, and it is easy for us to view television as the most "natural" form of video. It must be stressed that television is only one of the theoretically infinite forms through which the medium of video could manifest itself. Video art is a form, or perhaps a series of forms, that highlights and examines the boundaries and "taken for granted" forms, such as television, to which we have become (too?) accustomed.
CHAPTER III
RESEARCH DESIGN

GENERAL METHOD

This study attempts to examine localized cultural practices, and specifically, representational practices within the context of a study of the power relationships and struggles over signification within a postmodern multinational global economy. It is a study of hegemonic processes which privilege and or delegitimize meanings and practices in order to achieve unity in a cultural world view. It is a study of processes of marginalization, containment, and the control of oppositional voices and alternative understandings. It is also a study of collective and individual practices which attempt to subvert hegemonic processes through the creation and maintenance of discourses which challenge the masternarratives (Foster, 1983) of the postmodern multinational global economy.

Such a study necessitates that the traditionally separate methodologies of interpretive sociology and political economy be understood as complementary methodologies. Within a world in which images produced by corporately dominated media institutions attempt to shape our consciousness and our
perceptions of reality, culture becomes very much a political matter and politics becomes very much a cultural matter. Both politics and culture are played out within everyday cultural practices, and it is at this level that hegemony realizes its capacity to actively assert itself, and it is also at this level that subjects realize their capacity to resist, subvert and transform.

Such a study also necessitates a reconceptualization of the position of the researcher who utilizes a theoretical apparatus that denies the existence of a modernist, or enlightenment centered subjectivity. The postmodern subject exists as an intersection of discourses, and also as an agent that actively paves the way for the flow of discourse, or disrupts or diverts that flow. Postmodern subjects are subjects who are continuously in flux, in whom discourses both reside and are transformed. This implies that the researcher must conduct research by releasing his or her subjectivity into the discourses in which his or her subjects are immersed. The researcher's subjectivity must be allowed to be shaped by the localized flow of discourse that intersects in his or her subjectivity. As well, the researcher must understand that his or her subjectivity will necessarily disrupt or divert the flow of discourse present before entry into the field, and must understand that his or her subjectivity will be mutated as a result.
Subjectivity

Like the novice marijuana user in Becker’s (1953) famous study, the researcher’s subjectivity must be understood to go through the same transformative processes that his or her subjects are seen to go through as they enter into a new sub-culture. Only through allowing his or her subjectivity to be transformed, to enter into the flow of discourse and be shaped by it, can the researcher obtain data that are true to the complex identities of his or her subjects. Just as the novice marijuana user must allow "a transformation of meanings" to occur through allowing others to "point out new aspects of his experience to him, present him with new interpretations of events, and help him achieve a new conceptual organization of his world" (Becker, 1953: 509), so must the researcher release his subjectivity onto the researched and allow such transformations to take place.

This methodological practice extends the revisionism that has taken place within the methodological discourse on participant observation. The classical view of participant observation was imbued with a positivist view of objectivity (Johnson, J., 1976). Personal, subjective involvement in the field was seen to produce bias, and researchers endeavoured to avoid getting too close to their subjects. The less involved one was with the people being studied, the more objective the observations. In order to stay within the positivist view of objectivity, a pragmatic compromise was reached in which "the
researcher should become as involved as necessary to establish the trusting relations required to get members to tell him what was going on and to be able to observe some things directly; but he should not go beyond this and should never become a member" (Ibid: 110).

Objectivity requires that the researcher's self become categorically separated from the world that (apparently) lies outside the self. This does not mean, however that the self is completely ignored, instead, objectivity has been refined within methodological discourse as consisting of "so fully realizing the countless intrusions of the self in everyday thought and the countless illusions which result -- illusions of sense, language, point of view, value, etc. -- that the preliminary step to every judgement is the effort to exclude the intrusive self" (Piaget, Jean as cited in Keller, 1982: 594). The self, within the confines of objectivity, becomes something that contaminates experience, distorts experience and jeopardizes the collection of truthful data about reality.

Objectivity conceived in this way, is a dialectical process and requires a process of critical self-reflection. To engage in research that requires objectivity we must attempt to reflect on the socially structured and interactive relationships that helped "to shape our conception of the world and our characteristic orientations to it" (Keller, 1982: 595), including the socialization processes involved in
data collection. However, once we have reflected on how they have shaped our selves, and once we have become conscious of the self's ability to contaminate data collection, we must seek to eradicate the self's influence.

The process described above is directly at odds with post-structuralist understandings of reality. Subjectivity is conceived to be the place where discourses intersect and interact, the place where culture, politics, economics and the social are inscribed and lived, the place where discourses are deconstructed and reconstructed. Any attempt to eradicate the self, to deny the significance of subjectivity as the site where hegemonic forces play out their strategies and are resisted and subverted is to lose out on the most crucial source of data available to the researcher: his or her own self. Post-structuralist research necessitates that the researcher's self or subjectivity become the most valuable tool in the researcher's methodological arsenal.

Practitioners of participant observation have been moving in this direction for at least a decade. Many have realized that field research is not a one way process. For example, Kleinman (1980) points out that to some extent the people researched help to determine the methodology of the researcher, while the researcher often influences those who are observed. "Fieldworkers not only observe and question informants, but they are studied and queried themselves in a continual reversal of roles" (Georges and Jones, 1980: 21).
Much of the discourse surrounding the role of the researcher's self in research has been contained within debates about the issue of stranger/friend roles in participant observation.

Stranger/Friend Debates

One of the more revealing stranger/friend debates took place between anthropologists I.C. Jarvie (1969; 1971) and Johannes Fabian (1971).\(^1\) Briefly, Jarvie (1969) in an article on ethical integrity in participant observation, argued that the prevalent technique in participant observation is to be "both a stranger and a friend" (Ibid: 505) among the people being studied. However, he views these roles as being mutually exclusive, and resolves the issue by stating that only in the stranger role can the participant observer avoid a crisis of integrity. Furthermore, he insists that the stranger role contributes to the scientific understanding of the people being studied because it is a role which exploits the "situations created by the role clashes insider/outside, stranger/friend, pupil/teacher" (Ibid).

\(^1\) While this debate took place within the bounds of anthropology, the role of the participant observer in sociology is virtually identical to that of the ethnographer's role in anthropology, especially given anthropology's trend toward the study of industrial society (c.f. Marcus, 1986; Martin, 1987; Rosaldo, 1989) and sociology's attention to subcultures which share most of the characteristics of the exotic and foreign cultures studied by anthropologists. According to Goody (1969: 10), "a sociological 'theory' which is distinct from a 'theory' of anthropology is conceivable only to the extent that zoological theory differs for sheep and goats: the base must be common to both."
Although Jarvie's article was written over twenty years ago, his perspective is still prevalent, despite its paternalistic overtones. For example, Corsino (1987: 283) states:

In practical terms, fieldworkers should live like participants by endorsing community rules for living, thinking and acting but at the same time reject societal membership that entails identification with the participants... [this allows the fieldworker to] gain an empathetic understanding of participants but still retain a detached, analytic perspective... [and thus] escape... the most distorting feature of fieldwork relations -- the problem of overinvolvement.

Likewise, Stebbins (1987) argues that the participant observer must remain "sufficiently removed from the setting to be able to analyze it objectively. The fieldworker who successfully fits in succeeds in maintaining his or her marginality throughout the project" (Ibid: 103). What these researchers are saying, following Jarvie, is that the researcher's self must never become overly emersed in or contaminated by the discourses among interactants that he or she wishes to study. Essentially, the self has no role in the research process except to maintain the researcher's will not to be tempted by the "other" being examined.

Fabian (1971) criticizes this position (and Jarvie in particular) for taking an overly positivist view of social science, and asserts that the separation between the observer and the data within positivistic social science is a social creation, partially designed to give the researcher a clear
conscience. Fabian then suggests an alternative route: bridging the horns of the stranger/friend and subject/object dichotomy. Citing Schutz, Habermas and Radnitzky, he argues that the social scientist does not study "things" as Jarvie would have us believe. Instead, we study production and process, and thus we transform observation from "the mere recording of givens" to "participation in the process of their production" (Fabian, 1971: 230). From this perspective, the researcher is totally integrated within the social world, and indeed must be, in order to conduct social research, and as a result, the stranger/friend dichotomy has no basis.

Fabian's (1971) position signals the changes in observational methodology strategies that have become more accepted within interpretive frameworks. Rather than simply record and assimilate information offered in a cultural context, the researcher is compelled to participate in the very process of producing that cultural context. Fabian concludes that the researcher interested in understanding the structures and meanings of various cultures should proceed with his or her work "as a common enterprise of researcher and researched" (Ibid: 231).

The relationship of dominance, characterized by the stranger role and the objectification of the researched, is criticized elsewhere in social science and participant observation literature. Some feminist writers, for example, view the detached observer (stranger) role as an androcentric
bias in Western science, a bias that permits scientific knowledge to exercise power and control over its subject matter, be it nature or society (Keller, 1982). The alternative conception of science is one of a union between the scientist and the subject matter (Ibid). This feminist version of science echoes some familiar calls within the symbolic interactionist and participant observation literature (c.f. Becker and Geer, 1957; Glasser and Strauss, 1967; Johnson, 1976):

> For an especially striking contrast, consider a contemporary scientist who insists on the importance of "letting the material speak to you," of allowing it to "tell you what to do next" -- one who chastises other scientists for attempting to "impose and answer" on what they see. For this scientist, discovery is facilitated by becoming "part of the system," rather than remaining outside; one must have a "feeling for the organism."
> (Keller, 1982: 599)

The Fear of "Going Native"

The union between the social scientist and his or her subjects, as characterized in the literature on participant observation, tends to alternate between pure "objectivity" and the biggest taboo of fieldwork and "going native" (Shaffir, Stebbins and Turowetz, 1980: 13 and 19). Complete identification with the people being studied, is usually impossible in practice because the researcher usually has some characteristics which differentiate him or her from the people
being studied (Cicourel, 1964). The key to this union is the dimension of power, just as the key to understanding the postmodern world is in acknowledging the dimension of power. The researcher should endeavour to assure him or herself and the people being studied that their relationship is one of symbiosis, not dominance, a relationship that involves a mutual dialectic of process and transformation.

Adler and Adler's (1987) analysis of the Chicago School describes the traditional fieldwork strategy as one which has a distinct aversion to "going native" and a fear of over-involvement in fieldwork settings. Echoing Fabian, they claim that this bias against "going native" seriously distorts the analysis of the worlds of living, interacting subjects. They argue that researchers should be intensely personally involved in the field setting and have no desire to be objective or scientific. Instead, researchers are asked to "adopt membership roles in the settings they study", and write their accounts not for other academics, but for the people they study, with special attention to the value of their own experiences as data (Ibid: 35).

Adopting membership roles requires a significant, long term effort on the part of the researcher. To become a competent member of the culture being studied the researcher must invest a great deal of time and energy and be prepared to spend a long and often intense period in the field (Emerson, 1987). The data gathered from such a study is of a different
nature than the data gathered from a study in which the researcher attempts to merely observe and record "objectively". Adopting membership roles requires the researcher to actively create the reality in which he or she is involved, a process through which the researcher learns the ropes by imersing his or her subjectivity in the specified culture. By engaging in self-monitoring exercises the researcher is permitted to report not only what was observed, but what was experienced in the widest sense of the word.

Questions of Validity

But what of the validity of this style of participant observation? Shaffir, Stebbins and Turowetz (1980: 11) state that "the problem of validity in field research concerns the difficulty of gaining an accurate or true impression of the phenomenon under study." Within a frame of objectivity the researcher must constantly be self-reflexive and conscious of illusions created by his or her subjectivity. Only by erasing the existence of the researcher's subjectivity can a true impression of the phenomenon under study be said to exist. Unfortunately, it is an impression that is based on a dominant power relationship between researcher and subject matter.

The flipside of the validity problem, when we are concerned with research relationships based on symbiosis, is that we are again faced with an impression that is based on a power relationship. Because the relationship is not
characterized by one side dominating the other, however, there is a greater chance that the research project will, at the very least, document the perspectives and value systems of the researched with their interests and desires in mind. Power relationships inevitably determine the nature of the "true impression" that the research yields. Precisely because the symbiotic relationship is the least common within the social and natural sciences, and has suffered neglect and ridicule among the scientific community (Keller, 1982) it is a research relationship which affords great merit in terms of validity. This does not make it any more valid than the other research relationships, but it does increase its value because it offers views of the world of social interaction and culture that have been marginalized.

Thus, the "reactive effects of the observer's presence or activities," and the "distorting effects of selective perception and interpretation" (Shaffir, Stebbins and Turowetz: 12) that are normally seen as decreasing validity, need not apply as rigorously to symbiotic relationships. Reactive effects are a necessary part of the symbiotic relationship, and selective perception becomes recognized as an inevitable component of field research and a useful source of data as well (Adler and Adler, 1987). In other words, the researcher's acknowledgment of his or her historically situated subjectivity is given acknowledged incorporation into the interpretive process, whereas, in classic fieldwork
characterized by objectivity, the researcher's historically situated subjectivity was always a hidden subtext in the research process.

Brenkman (1988) argues that another problem with the classic research paradigm is that cultures and sub-cultures are seen as embodying completely unified systems of meaning. Culture is a fixed quantity that appears as an already constructed monolith of structural rules and relations that subjects pass in and through and whose interpretations are open only to the dominant, legitimated analysis of the researcher. The social, political and economic processes through which culture is constructed and reconstructed are ignored or considered aberrant. The subjects who construct and reconstruct culture are not considered in terms of their interests, agendas, biases or power situations, and cultural differences or social conflicts within communities are neglected (Ibid).

Learning From Feminist Research

The clearest demonstration of the value of a research perspective which views culture as something in the process of being constructed and reconstructed by subjects is that provided by feminist researchers. Feminist researchers have demonstrated that many taken-for-granted "objective" and "scientific" interpretations of culture have been established through the exclusion of the cultural meanings that women and
other marginalized and subordinated groups give to their own experiences (Jaggar, 1983). Indeed, the modernist penchant for constructing systems of difference that enables the creation of and the exclusion of "others" and their interests is specifically targeted by feminist researchers. Hartsock (1983), for example, argues that the subjectivities of women are averse to any dualistic constructions of difference that privilege the self over the "other". Chodorow (1978: 133) sees the construction of this duality as based in separate gender-specific spheres of experience, dominated by the masculine sphere:

Masculinity must be attained by means of opposition to the concrete world of daily life, by escaping from contact with the female world of the household into the masculine world of public life. This experience of two worlds, one valuable, if abstract and deeply unattainable, the other useless and demeaning, if concrete and necessary, lies at the heart of a series of dualisms -- abstract/concrete, mind/body, culture/nature, ideal/real, stasis/change. And these dualisms are overlaid by gender: only the first of each pair is associated with the male.

Postmodern Ethnography

There is some evidence that both anthropology and sociology are moving toward an ethnographic style that eschews the masternarrative styles produced through classic fieldwork techniques (c.f. Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Denzin, 1986, 1987, 1988, 1989a, 1989b; Emerson, 1987, Rosaldo, 1989). Denzin lists four assumptions that characterize what he calls
"postmodern ethnography" (Denzin, 1989b) each of which are seen as challenging the traditional views of fieldwork and ethnography. First, he argues that postmodern ethnography "works from the premise that all cultures are conflictual, processual and always in motion. There is no attempt to grasp meanings of structures or cultures as totalities; static, oppositional, holistic, structuralist, cognitive pictures of society and culture are rejected" (Ibid: 90) in favour of a vision that sees human beings as actively constructing their worlds and their meanings.

Secondly, postmodern ethnography views the observer as a problematic category and rejects claims to the effect that observers can objectively record and code experience. "There is an effort to write subject-centered texts that express the lived experiences of those studied" (Ibid: 91), which leads to the third assumption that postmodern ethnography challenges central assumptions about the production of texts:

Traditional social anthropologists attempted to write objective, realistic, descriptive texts that gave an observer's interpretations of a culture and its social structure... an authorial authority... that conveyed the sense that the writer-as-anthropologist had accurately and objectively penetrated the world he or she had studied. These were monologic, single-voiced texts. They often suppressed, or repressed, the "native's" voice. This meant that these texts were to be "read" as documents that told the "truth" about the culture studied. (Ibid: 91)

Denzin opposes the traditional textual style to a style that does not even try to be objective, but instead attempts to
create texts that represent the variety of voices within the subjects’ world, as well as the dialogues and interactions between the researcher and the researched. The researcher is placed on the same plane as the subjects, and is no longer afforded the privileges assumed to be the right of individuals emersed in the hierarchicai, status-oriented, scientific-and-therefore-right world of academia.

Denzin argues that the fourth assumption of postmodern ethnography is that:

all cultural experience is problematic...
Cultural experience is studied in terms of its symbolic expressions, which range from dramas of experience, to narratives, myths, stories, performances, rituals, and ceremonies. These performed texts are then read in terms of the meanings they construct and display for their participants. Meaning is contained in experience, in the preformance and in its representations, not in the text per se. The symbolic, interactional performances of meaning do not release per-established understandings; rather the performance is constitutive of meaning.
(Ibid: 91-92)

It then follows (Denzin’s fifth assumption) that social moments that tend to evoke such interactional performances of meaning become the most important foci for postmodern ethnographers. According to Denzin, who cites Turner (1986), social moments which "display the liminal phase of experience, where the mundane, ordinary world of experience is exploded," where, "the threshold between the past and the future is illuminated, often in frightening detail, with existential consequence for the person and his or her fellows" (Ibid: 91)
are moments which show us where the social subject's constructed life and the constructing subject's experienced life intersect, with the latter in transcendence.

Why do we engage in such fieldwork? The postmodern ethnography project that Denzin supports has little respect for the modernist scientific project that sees the accumulation of objective knowledge as the primary motivation for scientific or sociological inquiry. The primary goal of the postmodern ethnographic project should be to provide stories and interpretations which aid the people we study, especially in terms of their empowerment or in terms of reinforcing or promoting their tactics of resistance, subversion and transformation. This goal becomes a theoretical, methodological and ethical imperative for all research. Difficult as it may seem, research, from this perspective, must focus on the needs of the researched, as they see those needs, and on the problems that they see as in need of action or intervention (Schein, 1987). Theories and methods utilized must be reactive to the initiatives and directions desired by or taken by the researched.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the methodological perspective taken in this study is non-traditional and follows the theoretical pathways cleared by post-structuralist, post-modernist and feminist inquiry. In taking this route, I am very much aware
that I am treading on ground that many may find problematic, largely because I am challenging many of the theoretical and methodological assumptions of conventional sociology. I am also aware that because this route has only recently been blazed, I am in danger of straying beyond it or falling back to more comfortable pathways. I hope that readers will acknowledge that despite the problematic nature of this inquiry and despite the dangers involved, that it is nonetheless a route that must be tested and explored, even by modernist, scientific standards.
SPECIFIC RESEARCH PROCEDURES

Entry Considerations: Converging Paths

As mentioned previously, my entry into the world of video artists was the result of some interesting convergences. Prior to beginning the research I had been made familiar with Video Place [a pseudonym], the artist-run video production centre in which I would be conducting the bulk of my research, from an earlier research project involving the community access cable television station in the same community. Members of this station made infrequent reference to Video Place, and one of the people on staff was a member of Video Place. The staff persons had referred to Video Place as a place where artists worked and made it clear that there was a strong distinction to be made between the "reality-based" work that they did in comparison to the "artsie" work of video artists.

At this point in time my research concern was directed toward community access cable television productions that were explicitly from a left-wing social activist perspective in terms of content and form, and I had no desire to extend my research beyond this. I was curious about video art, however, because one of the conclusions of my study of community access cable television was that while the content of a production might be quite radical in nature, unless the form of representation is as radical and deviated from established television language, that the use of such language will
necessarily mute the radical nature of what is represented (Richardson, 1988a, 1989c). I theorized that the established codes of television production work as independent referents to notions of objectivity, integrity and status quo maintenance (Richardson, 1989b).

Working in the realm of community access television re-affirmed my belief in the potential inherent in democratically organized media structures, even though the ideals of such structures were not truly present in the reality of community access television (Ibid). This experience taught me that television and video production is easily technically accessible to lay people even if production facilities themselves are not accessible. It was an experience that did much to destroy any mystique that television production might have had for me, and it was also an experience that made me want to further investigate ways in which television production might become more accessible to the public. The experience also left me with some acquired skills in videotape editing, camera work, effects generation, lighting and other skills of the trade, skills that would I would eventually re-learn (literally) in my study of video art and video artists.

I was also familiar with some of the members of Video Place prior to my entry into their world. The city in which Video Place is based, and in which I lived, was a community of about 80,000 with a socio-cultural life that revolved mainly
around a major university. Having completed my B.A. and M.A. at this university and continuing to live within the community while completing my PhD., I had become an established and active member of the community.

Crossing paths with members of Video Place was inevitable, and I came to know two members through academic associations and a third member through research for an undergraduate paper involving children and television. This third member, Chuck, was one of the founders of Video Place and he had helped to create the organization with the help of a Leadership Initiatives Program (LIP) Grant from the Canadian federal (Liberal) government in 1976. This grant allowed Video Place to purchase video equipment to run a series of what would now be called "media literacy" workshops with public school children. The undergraduate paper I was researching argued that children are not passive conduits who were becoming totally indoctrinated by television (the argument held by most effects studies), but that children have the cognitive resources to overcome many of the effects imputed to be the result of television viewing. Our discussions at this time were quite animated and we established an informal friendship that lasts until today.

I came into much closer contact with other members of Video Place when I volunteered to produce a promotional videotape for the local food co-operative. Knowing that I would be able to buy editing time at Video Place I borrowed a
camera from the university and gathered footage for this videotape over a six month period. In discussing this videotape with Chuck at a chance meeting, he volunteered to assist me and other people working on the tape so that he could learn more about the food co-op. We spent a day with Chuck during which he showed us a variety of fascinating camera techniques and I learned a little bit more about the techniques used by video artists. While editing this production I became more familiar with the facilities and support personnel at Video Place.

Again, prior to beginning this research project I was offered a chance to work on a CBC co-production with a local folk band whose manager was a very close friend and who knew of my research interest in television production. Chuck had accepted the position of director and I took on the role of production assistant during the most intensive two weeks of the shooting schedule. Originally I saw this as both a way to earn some extra money and as an extension of my research on the socialization of television production personnel. As this was an early CBC experiment in co-production arrangements I saw it as giving me a chance to view the interactions between broadcast professionals and independent production teams with an eye toward understanding the world of the broadcast technicians and their production techniques.

The outcome of this co-production project was to build my relationship with Chuck, with whom I spent many hours in
close contact working on the production. We spent a great deal of our "off" time discussing the world of television production, the evolution of various television techniques, and his view of television/video production as an artistic endeavour. Through these conversations I began to become more familiar with the perspective of a video artist and I became quite interested in learning more about video art.

In essence, unbeknowst to me, there were a series of paths converging together to connect me to the study of video art. Friendships, my community's socio-cultural environment, past research activities, the development of a theoretical and substantive interest and my own video production activities converged together. As mentioned earlier, the final path was laid when I received notice that I would be unable to conduct the research at the school of television production that I had planned to make the central component of my dissertation. Meeting with Chuck after receiving this information was highly probable, as was discussing other potential fieldwork opportunities. Looking back, it was almost inevitable that I would eventually end up studying video art and video artists, however, it is only in hindsight that I can see the convergence of these paths.

Procedures within Video Place

My research work on community access television was conducted within the framework of participant observation research. I had found this methodology to be rewarding in a
variety of different ways, particularly in terms of the way in which it allowed me to immerse myself in the world of the subjects and gain insight into the dynamics of production processes. I had, however, limited myself to the role of a non-participant in accordance with the traditional interactionist view which holds that the researcher should not interfere with interactions of the subjects, that he or she should become a "watcher" who "certainly does not want to distort the very processes he wishes to capture conceptually" (Schatzman & Strauss, 1973: 58).

The passive observer role was not entirely to my liking because I inevitably found myself in situations in which my resources were called upon by the subjects who had difficulty, particularly in location shooting, with not using everyone available to assist in doing their work. My intentions to be a passive observer were overlooked by the subjects who saw any extra body as a body that should be engaged in production work. I invariably found myself feeling as though I was hindering their work, unless I provided limited assistance in terms of carrying equipment or providing transportation. I also learned through these experiences that I was unable to get at data and information that might provide me with further depth of analysis. In particular, not taking part in camera work or editing work created knowledge boundaries around my understanding of the decisions which producers make in processing images and sound. Upon finishing
this particular community access television research project
I began to become involved in my own video productions and
learned a great deal more about the codified strategies and
tactics employed by camera people and editors.

Consequently, I found myself in disagreement with the
proponents of the passive observer role. Schatzman and
Strauss (1973: 61) for instance caution strongly against the
"observer as participant" role, saying that:

The researcher is more easily able "to go
native," adopting one or another position
prevalent among his associates; because he
may not be able to balance what he sees,
experiences and "feels" by hearing the whole
range of views of others involved in the
organization or social movement; because his
experiences are so overwhelming that he gets
"overinvolved" and so falls victim to that
intense engagement; and because, being
trained or experience in his participatory
activity has so unwittingly absorbed certain
viewpoints that his participatory activities
tend to reinforce those taken for granted to
such an extent that he never thinks to
challenge them, to regard them as having the
status only of hypotheses.

I began to see the "going native" taboo as one of the myths of
fieldwork, a myth that allows the researcher to retain a
relationship of power over those being researched, and a myth
that has very little substantive research to support it. As
Schatzman and Strauss do note however, the observer as
participant role may, "under certain circumstances" allow the
researcher to be privilege to confidential information and to
gain insights into how it feels to do the work of the
subjects, and what it is like to experience their failures and

In my preparations for conducting my doctoral research I began to investigate alternative strategies for conducting fieldwork, most of which have been addressed in the above Methodology section. In essence, I have come to agree with Denzin (1989c: 157-8) in his statement that:

To comprehend the worlds of interacting individuals, sociologists must adopt the perspective of those studied - thereby avoiding the fallacy of objectivism. Adopting the perspective of those studied means that the evolution and unfolding of social action through time and across situations must be followed as completely as possible... For present purposes, participant observation will be defined as a field strategy that simultaneously combines document analysis, interviewing of respondents and informants, direct participation and observation, and introspection.

The research conducted for this study, was from the outset, conducted with the above definition in mind and involved all of the above strategies.

"Casing the Joint"

I gave myself the mandate, in the early stages of the research, to discuss my research strategies with several video artists to discover whether or not such research would be problematic as well as to convince myself that the research would be possible and worthwhile, what Schatzman and Strauss (1973: 19) refer to as "casing the joint". My first discussion was with Chuck who expressed his belief that video
art had never been examined "from the outside" and that video artists, including himself, would probably benefit a great deal from such an examination. He viewed my research strategies not as a threat to video art and video artists, but as very similar to the tools of the trade of artists in general and video artists in particular. He stated that in conceptualizing and creating videos he often found himself actively learning more about his subject matter by becoming actively involved with it. He would conduct research to learn more about theories related to his subject matter and he would spend time talking about his work with other artists and thinking about his relationship to his work.

This preliminary discussion provided me with one of my first insights regarding video art, an insight that would prove to be integral to my understanding of video art and video artists: video art and sociology share methodological and theoretical strategies. This rather simple insight was, for me, reason enough to continue with the study. Chuck's belief that such a study would benefit video artists in general and the people at Video Place convinced me that this would indeed be a worthwhile project to pursue.

Official Entry Procedures

In conjunction with Chuck, Julie (Video Place's administrative staff person) and Steven (Video Place's technical staff person) I formulated a strategy for obtaining
informed consent from the board of directors for this organization. I provided interested video artists and all board members with copies of a brief essay which introduced me to the membership, described the research project and my role as a researcher, discussed issues of confidentiality (all participants were assured of anonymity), and asked for their approval of my presence within their organization as a researcher. At the next meeting of the board of directors I was given time to introduce myself and describe the project in person in order to receive board approval.

The meeting with the board of directors resulted in several concerns being raised, but with several other positive comments and a decision for overall approval of the project. The issue of confidentiality was discussed, not in terms of a concern to ensure anonymity, but rather in terms of the problems inherent in discussing a particular work of video art without making specific reference to the artist. As I was later to realize, some members saw me as taking on a role related to that of an art critic, a role which interacts with the artist in establishing identity and promoting work within the larger art world. I maintained that anonymity was a priority for me (and for the university’s ethics committee) and that blanket anonymity would be best for all concerned, particularly for information that might possibly harm Video Place’s or its members’ reputations. The strength of the artist’s requirement for recognition took me by surprise,
however, and we ended this discussion with my agreement to maintain anonymity with respect to everyday activities and interviews, and to only make names public in specific relation to a video art production in the context of discussing individual productions as entities outside of the contexts of social interaction.

Video art is produced by people who wish their productions to become public artifacts. As well, video artists, in their efforts to establish their art form have produced a formidable supply of publications and make their work available to as large an audience as possible for critical consumption. In all of these aspects the specific work of video art or the published article are integrally tied to the names of their producers or authors. With this in mind I felt quite comfortable with the ethical choice for disregarding anonymity (unless requested) when discussing individual works removed from their social context of production.

A second concern on the part of some board members was the amount of time that I would be spending with staff members and whether this time would take away from the staff members' abilities to perform their work properly. I acknowledged that to some degree I would be taking some of their time by necessity, but that I would endeavour to ensure that I did not come into conflict with their work. I explained that I would mainly be "hanging out", going through files, working with
members on productions, going to meetings and simply being around. I noted that I would often be around to help answer the phone and receive visitors when staff members were busy. It was agreed that I should do my best to "not interfere too much" in Julie and Steven's work. Chuck, who was also a board member, vouched for my integrity and ability to work with people from his experiences with me during the CBC co-production we worked on together.

In summary, entering into the research process was considerably less problematic than my earlier experiences with community access cable television producers (Richardson, 1988), and was a decidedly less problematic experience than some of the experiences related in the literature of participant observation and ethnography (c.f. Hoffmann, 1980).

Does Previous Experience Taint Observations?

It could be argued however, that studying a group with which I had some previous experience could potentially taint or distort my findings because to some extent I would have pre-analyzed the group (Spradley, 1979). This argument is based on the fallacy of objectivism (Denzin, 1989c: 8)\(^1\) in

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\(^1\) According to Denzin (1989c), the fallacy of objectivism occurs when researchers substitute their own perspectives for those of the people they study. This occurs because the researcher may be unconsciously or consciously tied to an ideological preconception regarding the group being studied. He states that the best way to overcome this situation is to allow those being studied to "tell it like
that it assumes the possibility of an untainted, objectively situated observer. It also ignores the ideological, linguistic, cognitive, biological and cultural background that the researcher may share with the subjects of his or her study. In the latter sense, there can never be untainted fieldwork, even within exotic and distant cultures. It could be justifiably argued that some previous experience with subjects and their world (including the shared fact of being human) is absolutely necessary in order to establish relative grounds for communication, interpretation and analysis. Indeed, to "take the view of the acting other" (Denzin, 1989c: 8) requires a depth of knowledge that can only be assisted through previous experience with the group under study.

What strengthens the validity of such an approach is the recording of changes within the observer’s self (Denzin, 1989c). A sensitivity to introspective questioning, awareness of shifts in the observer’s attitudes and attempts at conscious self-monitoring in terms of attendance to personal feelings, ideological anchors and taken for granted points of view aid the researcher in avoiding the fallacy of objectivism. Non-familiarity with the subjects is no guarantee that the fallacy of objectivism will be avoided, however the employment of the methods just outlined provides some protection. I recognized, quite early in the study that such methods would be an integral part of the research process they see it" (Ibid: 8).
and I began to take auxiliary field notes which focused on my reactions and shifts in perception (c.f. Johnson, 1975). Indeed these methods and notes were responsible for one of the major insights I gained regarding video art.

Learning to "Hangout"

In organizing the parameters of the study I engaged in what Schatzman and Strauss (1973: 34) label a mapping process. For me, this began with visits to Video Place to acclimatize myself to the social environment and to acclimatize that environment to me. Discovering an initially comfortable role was problematic in that on many occasions the only people present were the two staff members, Steven and Julie, and perhaps one person using the editing suite. People might come into Video Place throughout the day to conduct business, to use the computer, to sign up for equipment usage, or simply to "hangout". Shadowing Steven and Julie throughout the day would have been uncomfortable for both them and myself and would have interfered with their work.

I felt a good deal of discomfort during the first few days of fieldwork because I was having difficulty establishing a role within the setting. To deal with this discomfort I began to make use of Video Place's significant collection of print material dealing with video and video art. Several sections of the physical space of Video Place were devoted to either displaying recent video art publications, newsletters,
artist catalogues, grant information, video art festival announcements and copyright/artistic rights information or for archiving older material from the centre's past. My early fieldnotes were often almost completely dedicated to my experiences with this material. For example, I wrote:

I don't think I can ever get through all of the printed material, but I feel that I should before I get my observations started in full swing. I should try to get to know more about the history of Video Place by looking through their archival stuff, old grant applications, and their taped interviews with previous members. Then there are all those back issues of Video Guide, The Independent, Parallelogramme etc. I think that I won't really be able to conduct interviews until I can feel really comfortable discussing video art with an artist until I learn some of the big names, the big tapes, the big points in history etc.

Ironically I began to use the print material as a way of fitting-in, and while my readings were quite important sources of data, the time I spent at Video Place looking through their collections was also time I spent getting to know members, learning daily routines, establishing an identity, conducting very informal interviews, listening to conversations between members, and establishing very close relationships with Steven and Julie. I was in effect, killing two birds with one stone. Many of the people who came into Video Place to "hangout" would sit at the large meeting table in the centre of the member's room and read through the printed material and engage in conversation with each other and/or with me. It took me a while to realize that I was
"hanging-out" too in the eyes of most of the members and staff, and that it was through my own ability to "hangout" and read that I had found a very useful role that was both comfortable for me and comfortable for the staff and members.

"Hanging-out" and reading in the member's room also allowed me to take my fieldnotes in the midst of interactions and conversations. My notebook was always open for me to take notes on my readings of video art related material, and it was a simple matter to switch from text based notes to interaction based notes while I was sitting with printed material in front of me. I was thus able to almost instantly record significant snippets of conversation, or record what I saw to be significant interactions. The fact that the member's room had to be traveled through to reach any of the other facilities and offices also meant that I could keep track of who came in and what they did. The centre's main phone was also placed in the member's room, so I could overhear one side of staff and member phone conversations. My centrality within the physical layout of the centre also meant, however, that from time to time I took on the role of message taker/secretary, fielding questions about who was around, answering the phone, taking messages and later on, giving interested newcomers tours of the centre and its equipment.

Fieldwork Procedures

As my site visits continued, I began to keep track of
members who would be valuable people to conduct interviews with. I also spent two visits going through the membership list with Steven identifying each member according to his or her activities at Video Place, the degree of involvement each had with video art productions and the video art world, and obtaining Steven's comments on the essential nature of their productions. From this categorizing exercise I was able to create a typology of members and generate a representative sample of potential interview subjects based on this typology.

Within a short period of time I found that members were beginning to include me in a variety of other activities, including visits to local bars for in-depth theoretical discussions, very late night viewing sessions of raw footage and "rough-cut" edits, informal discussions over lunch, jam sessions (Video Place also provides members with access to an 8 track audio studio, and thus attracts its share of members who have cross interests between video and audio art), and field trips to video equipment trade shows. All of these activities proved to be very important sources of information about video art and video artists (although some of my notes are barely decipherable).

Video Place also ran a series of artistic "programs" to provide the local community with access to local video art, visiting artists, and touring exhibitions. Normally offered at night, these events typically drew crowds of about fifty or more people, both members and non-members. Each event was
unique, and the variety of programs gave me some insight into the artistic "vision" held by video artists and artistic groups. I began to see that many other artistic groups could be easily associated with video art in terms of practices, funding relationships, problematic issues, organizational contexts and artistic beliefs. These events thus served to initiate me into the workings of the provincial and inter-provincial art worlds of Canada.

In order to gain more insight into the production processes involved in creating video art, I spent many hours sitting in the editing suite with members as they went through the often time consuming process of editing their work. These experiences gave me the chance to engage in informal discussions, while also attending to editing practices, contexts of editing choices, and artistic decision making processes. While often very tiring episodes of fieldwork (on several occasions these became almost all-night vigils), where I would become bored by the constant cueing and recueing, rewinding and fast-forwarding of tapes, these sessions provided me with a good experience of the incredibly time consuming work that goes into editing.

Not satisfied to remain strictly a passive observer at Video Place, I took it upon myself to learn more about using camera equipment and editing. Steven gave me a very thorough introduction to the editing equipment and both Steven and Chuck took me through the ropes of using the camera equipment.
Over a period of about a month I concentrated on producing a work of video art with technical, theoretical and artistic assistance from the members and staff. Of all of my fieldwork experiences, this was definitely the most rewarding source of data. It gave me a great deal of depth of understanding regarding the socialization processes for video artists, and it allowed me to experience the feelings that artists feel in showing their works. It also gave me a slightly different role in the eyes of the members of Video Place who began to see me more as a "serious" artist than as a researcher or someone who just "hungout".

Following this experience I participated in a two week workshop at Video Place with a famous (within video art circles) and highly successful (financially and critically) video artist from New York who had trained under the founder of video art, Nam June Paik. The workshop was designed to introduce new members and potential new members to all of the aspects of video art production, from scripting and budgeting to promotion, as well as to provide seasoned members with a chance to work with "one of the best" and learn and exchange techniques and ideas. I participated fully in this workshop, contributing to script development, doing "sound", and discussing camera and editing strategies.

I used the opportunity of this workshop to conduct an in-depth interview with this visiting artist to get a glimpse of the artistic realities south of the Canadian border. The
members of Video Place were very pleased that I was conducting this interview and offered to pay me a significant amount of money to write it up in a more formal fashion and submit it for publication in a Canadian video art magazine (Richardson & Hallas, 1990). Participating in this publishing venture served to give me access to a variety of data on the world of video art critics, attitudes towards critical perspectives in art, and the social milieu of the artistic publishing sector.

Another data gathering technique that I used was to follow a member video artist through the stages of one of his more involved productions. We spent several weeks together shooting on location, I followed his efforts to obtain financing, and I accompanied him in the editing suite late into the night. Throughout these activities we engaged in numerous conversations about the social and economic aspects of video production and with him I was able to substantiate many of my early observations regarding the video art world. Again, this portion of my fieldwork gave me further insight into the day to day processes involved in the production of video art.

Throughout the entire fieldwork project I engaged in informal interviews, from time to time, with members I had selected to interview from the list I had compiled with Steven's help. A total of twenty-two members were interviewed, (as well as the two staff members) comprising of a cross-section of highly active, moderately active and less
active members, with some emphasis also given to representation according to gender, age, and race\textsuperscript{1}. During these interviews I would either take notes or, on occasion, tape record the sessions. As the interviews progressed I was able to shorten the length required for the interviews and create a more structured and precise set of interview questions.

Grant Writing Experiences

One of my last data gathering exercises at Video Place was to assist in the creation of a project grant application to the provincial art council responsible for providing partial funding for the centre. In a sense I was both using this application to learn more about the grant writing process and the granting body's organization and decision making structure. I had determined, by this point in time, that one of the pieces to the puzzle that I was missing the most was the representational, "presentation of self" (Goffman, 1959) type of activities that members engaged in order to receive grants for individual projects or for centre based operational funding or special projects. In assisting in the creation of the grant application I was given access to a series of previous successful and unsuccessful grant applications and I was made privy to confidential, insider information about the

\textsuperscript{1} Of the twenty-two, four were representative of minority ethnic groups and ten were women. The oldest was 62 and the youngest was 17. The majority of the interviewees were between the ages of 22 and 45.
granting systems and award winners. I became aware that the granting systems were the sites for significant inter-organizational and inter-personal funding. As Schatzman and Strauss (1973) point out, in cases of intra-organizational funding, "providing the researcher can maintain apparent neutrality and confidences... participant colleagues will "spill" their actions and intentions to him, not merely because he is a group member, but because his position as an educated researcher will assure understanding for actions that require it."

Indeed, members and staff perceived (correctly) that, by helping to construct and author the grant application, I was contributing time to the organization and thus paying the organization back for the assistance that it had offered to me. This fact increased their trust in me to the point where highly confidential and potentially damaging information was discussed with me. The excercise yielded some of the most valuable data I was to encounter, while also serving to provide me with a method of giving a gift of time and work to the organization prior to leaving the field.

Since the project grant in question was designed to honour the centre's fifteenth anniversary, I regarded their trust in my capabilities as significant recognition of the depth to which I had come to understand the world of video art and video artists. To place such a project in my hands was to award me the ascribed status of "video artist". Ironically,
the grant application was not approved by the provincial arts funding body, and I learned that one of the possible reasons for its rejection was that it was authored by myself. In my travels to other video art centres I had presented myself to many video artists in the role of a learner, not realizing that some of these artists might one day be sitting on a jury which would evaluate a grant with my name on it. The jury's decision in this particular case was based on my non-video artist, researcher role, a role that they believed could not possibly allow the project to have artistic credibility. Thus, in one centre I had achieved the ascribed role of "video artist", while in others I had not been so knighted. Obviously, this also proved to be a very important source of data.

Procedures External to Video Place

In order to contextualize the world of the video artists at Video Place, to learn more about video art in general and the issues that confront video artists, and to add some external validity to the research project, I extended my fieldwork into other settings in which video art and video artists could be found. Again, I utilized a mapping (Schatzman and Strauss, 1973) process, but one tailored to make maximum use of my financial resources, time and geographical mobility.
External Mapping Processes

The first stage of the mapping process involved locating and categorizing the various artist-run centres (organizations similar to Video Place), parallel galleries (a Canada-wide association of artist-managed galleries which frequently exhibit video art), art galleries which exhibit video art, associations to which video artists belong, publications which include discussions of video art, funding bodies, and video art distributors. The map that resulted from this effort was intimidating, yet served to show me just how pervasive video art is within the Canadian and international art scene. It was clear to me, however, that I had to drastically tailor this list in order to accommodate my resources.

My first priority was to find out when members of the external organizations might be coming to Video Place as guests, workshop organizers or exhibitors. I quickly became aware of a rather well connected community of Canadian video artists who frequently traveled from centre to centre, and it became quite easy for me to meet and interview many of these people, from across the country, simply by staying at Video Place. I was also lucky enough to be conducting my research during the year in which Video Place hosted the annual regional meeting for the Association of National Non-Profit Artists' Centres (ANNPAC), a coincidence that allowed me to observe their meeting and discuss particular issues with
representatives from six other artist-run centres.

The rest of the mapping process made use of Steven, Julie, Chuck and other member's suggestions and connections to other centres and individuals. As well, some of the visitors to Video Place invited me to visit them, and when possible I did so to take advantage of an established rapport. I found that I had much more successful visits and received much more trust and confidence when I had either met an external individual within the context of Video Place, or when I had been introduced to that individual by a member of Video Place.

Distribution and Exhibition Fieldwork

One of my first priorities for external fieldwork was to investigate organizations which act as distributors for video art. Early on in my study I had isolated distribution as a problematic and important issue for video artists, and I felt it was important to discover more about distribution processes and interview distribution proponents. A second, and equally important reason to visit distributors was to actually view works of video art that I did not have access to at Video Place (normally only the tapes of Video Place members). Distributors proved to be important sources of archival videotapes and print material.

In terms of video art exhibitions at parallel galleries and art galleries, I based my fieldwork visits on
exhibition schedules. I was able to see several "installations" of video art at a variety of galleries and make observations regarding the context of video art displays, curatorial critiques and audience interactions. I was also able to attend a five day annual festival of video art which was shown at an innovative theatre that had been explicitly designed for both film and video projection.

In total I was able to visit six artist-run centres, five of which specialized in video art production and exhibition. There are at least twenty-two centres in Canada which have video art production as a central component. My resources did not permit me to visit all of these centres and collectives, despite my desire to do so. While at these centres I would conduct informal interviews with members, tour facilities, screen videos and spend a great deal of time doing the same "hanging-out" routine that I had mastered at Video Place. Each centre had very substantial print archives and it was very easy for me to find interesting material to take notes on while I continued to make observations of the interactions within my surroundings.

One centre had a massive collection of archival print material dating back to 1968. One of the centre's members had made it her hobby to collect virtually everything that had ever been written or received by the centre. When I met her she was in the process of applying for a federal grant to catalogue and organize this material, which filled a large
room. Her intention was to make this material accessible to researchers and curators, and as I was the first researcher who had ever expressed a keen interest in her collection she went far out of her way to accommodate my needs. Only having four days to spend at this centre, which was across the country from my home base, I worked twelve hour days, pouring through their materials and taking notes. Throughout this period she guided me through the print material, suggesting items that might be of interest while reminiscing about her twenty year experience with the world of video art.

In my tours of other centres I got to meet a diversity of producers, many of whose names I had become familiar with and whose works I had screened. Establishing rapport became easier as time went on, because I had learned that knowing the names of artists and tapes was a key to my acceptance among video artists. In one of my first visits to another centre I had been closely questioned about my knowledge of artists and tapes and this had resulted in a rather "closed" interview on the part of one video artist. These experiences also taught me about the cross country networks that established video artists utilize to maintain and support their artistic status.

During one visit to an artist-run centre I was the house guest of one of the staff people who was also the editor of a major video art magazine and who was a highly respected curator of video art among artists, curators and galleries. As the visit progressed we were able to have some very candid
discussions about critical issues regarding funding, careerism, art theory, and the social milieu of video art.

Annual Meeting Fieldwork

Finally, my research was rounded out by my attendance at an annual meeting for Canadian independent film makers and video producers. This meeting allowed me to meet and talk with members of artist-run video centres from across Canada. It also served as a good test of the external validity of many of my hypotheses that I had generated from within the context of Video Place. Representatives at this meeting discussed a variety of issues common to centres, outlined the issues specific to each of film making, broadcast/educational video production and video art creation, and debated the directions that video and film producers should take in the coming years. The meeting also ran in conjunction with a large display of recent works of video art from across the country that could be accessed through individual video monitor/videotape recorder stations.

Procedures Related to Textual Content Analysis

The sheer quantity of printed material that is generated by video artists, curators, critics and distributors never ceased to amaze me. In fact, the quantity of material pointed to one of my most fascinating observations regarding video art, when it is placed in the context of other arts.
Despite the visual and audio components of video art which serve to present imagery and sound to audiences, critical, artistic understanding of works named as video art can only be achieved through reading textual material which attempts to describe, analyze or critique the work. In a sense, the textual material is often inseparable from the video as a named artistic artifact, and may even be more important than the video in terms of a legitimizing agent. The irony of this situation is highlighted by the stress that many writers (curators and critics) place on video's usurpation of text as a representational medium.

When I had begun to enter the field, I had, as mentioned earlier, viewed published material as both a source of information and a medium through which I could observe my surroundings relatively unobtrusively. As time went on I began to see that this material also had a strong legitimating and socialization function. It served to allow video artists across the world to communicate, as well as establish artistic norms and conventions, establish theoretical fads and strategies and convey sense of common unity among marginalized artists. Many publications would serve as platforms for controversial works, and works deemed too subversive to enter into the mainstream artistic discourse. An article entitled: "Lesbian Video Art Subverts Dominant Culture" might be seen as helping to establish a sub-cultural artistic identity, as breaking the rules of mainstream art, as being politically
correct (or incorrect), or as providing legitimation for minority voice points of view.

Categorization of Print Material

As I continued to collect print material I began to categorize it according to five basic categories: (a) archival, first person (largely historical documents associated with a particular centre); (b) social activism (c) artistic promotion; (d) theoretical, and; (e) organizational. These categories were, of course, ideal types in the Weberian sense and served to help me organize my readings and notes. Many items might map over two or more of these categories, however, I found that the categories were, on the whole quite representative of the material available.

Locating Print Material

The bulk of the printed material was garnered from catalogues published to accompany video art exhibitions or from various art journals. The latter sources were available through Video Place, distributors, other artist-run centres, galleries and university libraries. The former sources were often only available from veteran video artists, artist-run centres with extensive archival collections, or university libraries which housed collections of art exhibition catalogues. Chuck, a veteran video artist, made his extensive collection of books and art exhibition catalogues available to
me at my convenience.

At one centre, daily journals had been kept for most of its twenty year history, along with reports of various activities and events. This material provided me with some excellent data on the historical development of video art as an art form and as a tool for social action and social interpretation. At Video Place, a collection of cassette tape interviews with founding members allowed me to gain a sense of the developmental path that Video Place had followed, as well as to gain an understanding of the early moods and conceptions of the promise of video art.

Content Analysis of Print Material

My content analyses of printed material were based on attempts to isolate salient patterns within the texts. For example, the themes of postmodernism saturate contemporary artistic writing. Rather than simply clump together all texts that talked of post-modernism, I looked for typical cases and discovered that there were many texts that talked with postmodernist jargon, a smaller number that critically discussed postmodernist theory and its relation to video art or art in general, and many that were written in what was described or implied as a post-modernist artistic style. The predominance of the first type of case spoke a great deal about the fadish nature of artistic discourse and the need that artists and art writers have to maintain their legitimacy
in the eyes of peers and controlling agencies in light of the latest fads. The second case, however revealed the degree of theoretical sophistication that many artists have acquired outside of the boundaries of academia. Thus, at least two different analyses could be generated from material that might have been coded identically.

Another example would be the salient patterns developed around the category of social activism including issues of representation, including gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, self, or community. Also included in this category were materials promoting social action or critiquing status quo relationships, which might relate to socio-economic policies, artistic issues such as censorship, AIDS activism, women's issues, cultural issues, political parties, imperialism, third world issues, or capitalism. As should be evident, the printed material within the video art world is very diverse, an interesting observation in and of itself.

Procedures Related to Video Art Content Analysis

Perhaps the most difficult research task that I faced was deciding how to analyze the works of video art that I screened. I resolved from the beginning to try to avoid aesthetic interpretations, advice garnered from Becker's (1982) *Art Worlds*, and concentrate on developing a precise categorization scheme which could outline codings for content, technical aspects, camera and editing techniques, length and
overall production values. This categorization scheme was useful, but often revealed next to nothing about my perceptions of a video, the feelings it might evoke, the ideas that it might generate, the metaphors that might be present and the basic feeling of whether I liked the work or not.

Becker argues that an aesthetic acts as something that is akin to both a social lubricant and a social glue in that it allows people "to evaluate things in a reliable and dependable way [making] regular patterns of cooperation possible" (Becker, 1982: 134), while also providing the playing field upon which schools of thought can conflict to evoke changes within an art world (Ibid). Attention to the social practices which construct aesthetic systems is thus far more important than the substance of the aesthetic systems themselves.

Learning How to Watch Video Art

Video art is at one level, fundamentally represented by its practitioners, critics, fans and distributors as an anti-television aesthetic in and of itself. As will be discussed in further detail later, the act of watching video art is very different from the act of watching television. Indeed, the watching process is inseparable from the work on the screen, and video artists have gone to great length to train viewers, or perhaps to re-train viewers to watch video art rather than watch television. I found that the
construction of this appreciation or viewing process formed the basis of what might be called the essence of the video art aesthetic.

As mentioned earlier, many of the people outside the world of video art that I discussed my research with would typically immediately identify my topic as music video, rather than video art. During the presentation of a paper describing my research, members of the audience debated with me about the aesthetic similarities between music videos, David Lynch's "Twin Peaks" and various television commercials, indicating that the formal aesthetics of television were relatively wide open to alternatives. My argument, then and now is that what essentially defines the video art aesthetic, is not what is on the tape or on the screen, but the process of watching. The aesthetic system of video art is at base, a processual aesthetic rather than a strictly formal aesthetic.

This observation was brought home to me in a conversation with a veteran sculptor who had been in the Canadian art scene for twenty-five years. We were discussing some of my ideas on the institutions of the Canadian art world, and he mentioned that he believed that the reason why video art had not progressed very far within the traditional art world was because, "watching it is so boring... I mean

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1 In fact, outside of my supervisory team and people emerged in the world of video art or similar art worlds, I had met only one person who knew about Canadian video art and who was not an artist.
it's hard not to yawn!" In his opinion, video was not art because it did not engage the viewer. He had watched a few tapes and been so turned off that he had dismissed the art form. Indeed, I had found many of the first works of video art that I screened to be as boring as he had found them to be, however, because I was working in the world of video art and not in the world of sculpture, I had to spend more time and energy with the works. After learning how to watch video art tapes with guidance from video artists I had come to watch them very attentively.

The Link Between Marijuana Smoking and Video Art Viewing

Like Becker's (1962) marijuana smokers, video artists learn how to watch video art, how to describe what they see, and how to experience what they see from interactions with other video artists, from reading publications and from watching other video art. The practice of watching video art is very often a collective activity, and it is through such collective activities that the processual character of video art aesthetics is developed.

As my time in the field progressed, I came to realize that many of my thoughts and feelings about a particular video had actually been learned during the fieldwork experience. In a sense, I had been socialized by my subjects, and I had learned how to watch a video, what to feel and how to feel, and how to understand. Works that I had not had very much
feeling for at the beginning of the project seemed to have totally different meanings for me toward the end of the research. The objective criteria that I had generated remained exactly the same, however I had learned to watch video art in an entirely new way, based not on technical aspects, but on my understandings of the motivations, representational issues, social contexts and cultural histories of individual artists and video artists in general. I had learned a new way to watch TV.

I realized that a novice’s first approach to video art, as my first approach was, would be similar to that of watching mainstream television. Mainstream television situates us into rather passive roles and the metaphor of television viewers as “couch potatoes” (Adams & Goldbard, 1989) who participate in a “vast wasteland”, called a "boob tube", "idiot box" or "cultural barbituate" (Elgin, 1990) is probably very close to the truth. Mainstream television denies us an opportunity to respond, and thus does little to engage our cognitive capacities to critique its presentations. Video artists, however, demand active viewers who will be challenged, provoked or moved by what they see. The video on the screen cannot do this without the viewer’s consent to participate in this process. Obtaining this consent and teaching new, more active processes of attending to video screens is one of the most important tasks of video artists.
Categorizing Video Art Productions

At this point I began to re-assess my coding strategies and resolved to try to make more sense out of the viewing socialization process, and the context of watching video art. This meant that I could categorize videos according to my likes and dislikes based not on any prescribed aesthetic system, but upon the effects that particular videos would generate for other video artists who had gone through the same sort of socialization processes as I. Their aesthetic systems had become my aesthetic systems, and it became a matter of understanding the representational patterns within these systems. My categorization system thus changed to adapt to the categorization systems of the subjects of the research. Indeed, I feel that it would be irresponsible for me to pass any aesthetic judgements outside of the collectively defined aesthetic systems of video artists. I have no greater perceptive or interpretive abilities than they.
RESEARCH POPULATION

Locating Video Artists

The majority of my fieldwork was concentrated at Video Place and thus its formal membership roster and various friends of the organization made up the largest segment of my research population. Of these members and friends I was in actual close contact with approximately thirty or so active members and a handful of less active members. Artist’s organizations and collectives have been an historically strong part of the Canadian art scene (Donegan, R., 1986), a situation that makes the sociological study of art worlds in Canada an easier task than it would be in the United States. The problems that McCall (1980) in finding where the art scene in St. Louis was and who was in it, had only limited bearing on my fieldwork tasks.

Snowballing

As my fieldwork moved me beyond the setting of Video Place I found that my key informants were very helpful in pointing me to other video artists and organizations. In a sense, the snowball sampling method that McCall (1980) and others (Hoffman, 1980; Plant, 1975; West, 1980) have suggested as a means for allowing key informants to introduce researchers to other members of their groups, did play an important role in my decisions to interview or make contact with other video artists. The staff members at Video Place as
well as key individuals such as Chuck suggested many video artists who would be worth interviewing, and a staff member of a video art distribution centre not only suggested potential interviewees, but made his organization's files containing hundreds of video artists' biographies and c.v.'s available to me. Video artists do, however participate in rather clearly defined organizations, a factor which made locating them relatively easy. Suggestions by key informants helped me to structure my sampling to include women, gay, lesbian and minority video artists. Unconscious selection of people to whom I could relate or feel comfortable with, a standard bias in fieldwork (Honigmann, 1973; Spindler, 1955), was to some extent eradicated by sometimes strong insistence, on the part of informants that I include societally marginalized groups and individuals within my fieldwork, in keeping with a major theme in contemporary video art practices. For example, AIDS activism plays an important role within the Canadian art world in general and within the video art world in particular, and I had to confront my enculturated biases in interacting with potentially HIV positive individuals.

The Importance of Video Artist Collectives

All of the individuals I met, observed or interviewed were in some way connected with a video artist organization. Unlike other artists, who can collect their materials and resources independently, video artists are dependent upon
access to extremely expensive equipment, often in the range of $200,000 to $500,000 dollars (1990 dollars). The majority of video artists are not electronic technical wizards and are thus also dependent upon the resources of expensive technicians to install, maintain and repair video equipment. These basic facts make the collective or co-operatively styled organization a natural locus for activity because only by sharing their resources and working together to build their equipment pools can they individually set out to create their works.

This does not mean that people cannot create video art outside of such a collective. Chances are, there are large numbers of people who are producing independent videos that might be defined as video art, however because they do not access to the resources of these collectives, they have little chance of being recognized as video artists. The label video artist is an ascribed label, and as such can only be connected to a person who takes part in the activities of the video art world. As will be discussed later, the term video art was not always connected with all of the independent video productions that we now know as video art, but was a term that evolved in relation to institutional, economic and social factors. In fact, many early works of video art have been (or are in the process of being) resurrected and retroactively labeled as video art.
Limitations to Research Population Parameters

While finding video artists external to Video Place was not difficult, I did find it necessary to limit my contacts to currently practicing video artists. These people were the easiest to find because they would be working within the context of an artist-run centre, a parallel gallery or a distributor. Also, many video artists may only work in the medium of video for a year or two at which point they may move to another medium, leave the art world altogether, obtain artistic administration jobs which do not allow them the time to produce, or in some cases, obtain jobs within the mainstream commercial video sector. There are also a substantial number of producers who may come from a community that is attempting to re-represent its public image, or to communicate images to itself. These producers may only produce one, issue oriented tape, and then return to the folds of their community. I was able to meet with all of the above categories of individuals if they were currently practicing, however, my resources did not enable me to interview "retired" video producers who had moved away from the video art world.

Artist-run Centres and Parallel Galleries

In addition to video artists, I also had the opportunity to interact with members of artist-run centres and parallel galleries which might program video art, but whose members were not primarily video artists. Again, membership
within an artist-run centre or parallel gallery was sufficient indication of artistic status and familiarity with video art. These centres and galleries tend to specialize in supporting experimental and non-traditional art mediums such as arts which are time-based (including video art, performance art, audio art etc.) or which utilize "mixed media" to produce paintings or sculptures that incorporate a variety of non-traditional materials or juxtapose materials which are traditionally kept separate.

Video Art Audiences

Additionally my research population included the audiences for video art, which while often including a large portion of video artists, also tended to include friends, acquaintances, and interested community members. The perceptions and actions of these latter groups were particularly interesting, especially during their first introductions to video art. To a lesser extent the research population included people who might play various supporting roles such as a centre’s landlord, staff at local restaurants, bars and cafes (who interacted with individuals or groups from Video Place for example), and other people who were tangently related to a centre’s operation.

State Agencies

Finally, at the other end of the spectrum, the
research population included several individuals who were representatives of provincial or federal granting agencies. These people would occasionally visit centres, meet with boards, conduct workshops on how to write grant proposals and discuss centre concerns with the granting agency and its procedures. They were crucial sources of information on state policy, dominant artistic discourses, and granting processes. In some cases these would be individuals who were or had been practicing video artists who had taken a limited term appointment, and in other cases these individuals were professional arts administrators.
DATA COLLECTION

Fieldnotes

Data for this research project took a variety of forms, and in some cases the data collected were unique to the population being studied. Fieldnotes, however made up the bulk of the data. Other sources included tape recorded interviews, printed material produced by video artists and related organizations, actual works of video art, tape recorded interviews of video artists produced by other video artists, archival material from artist-run centres, still photographs of video art works, and as is befitting, videotapes of video artists' meetings and workshops.

Keeping fieldnotes was a strenuous exercise and I must admit that there are probably many gaps in my data as a result of late night editing sessions or serious discussions in bars. My periods in the field would often last for full days, which made note taking after the fieldwork all the more difficult, because the last thing that anyone would want to do after spending twelve hours following a video artist on a location shoot would be to write fieldnotes. In order to facilitate the process I developed a two step method for making notes which, while not infallible, allowed me to retain a great deal of data that might have been lost.

The two step process consisted of taking down very short key words, phrases or concepts while in the field, on very small note pad, and then outside the field, using those
notes to generate fuller descriptions via a computer, and thus onto computer disks. In other cases, such as while sitting in the member's room at Video Place, I kept a larger journal size notebook in which I would record both my notes from printed and archival materials as well as my notes from following the interactions around me.

In conjunction with these two techniques, I kept another journal strictly for methodological notes about my experiences and feelings while in the field. Burgess (1982) provides a good explanation of the value of such a practice for generating data that often proves to be especially relevant. While not a daily log of my activities, I would use this journal to record salient experiences that I felt might be important for latter analysis, or more importantly for my psychological health, I would use it to record my feelings toward the entire fieldwork and dissertation process. These feelings could only be described as manic as I would go from stages of euphoria to general depression all in the course of several days. They were my guide to understanding when I was ready to return to the field and when it was time to leave for a break.

I kept another journal which I made use of primarily during days in which I was away from the field. This journal was similar to what Burgess (1982: 193) refers to as "analytical field notes". In these pages I would write memos about more theoretically oriented ideas pertaining to my
fieldwork. Becker's (1982) *Art Worlds* became a strong focus for this journal as I went through each of his chapters, systematically, to structure a comprehensive picture of the video art world. I also utilized texts such as de Certeau's (1984) *The Practice of Everyday Life* and Wolff's (1981) *The Social Production of Art* in a similar manner. These texts helped me to define concepts, to orient my observations and to move my fieldwork into new directions. This journal eventually provided the backbone for my analysis of the data I collected.

Finally, I kept a separate journal to make notes on works of video art that I was able to screen. I organized this according to artist's names and attempted, as best as was possible, to chronologically order their works so that I might keep track of trends in video techniques and form over time. Distributor catalogues and screening services, served as my essential references to many works, however artist-run centre video archives and specific screening events were another important source of videotapes.

**Interviews**

Many of my interviews with key video artists were tape recorded and then transcribed onto computer disk. As supplemenal information to my fieldnotes, these interviews did not result in the problem that Epstein (1967) describes where details and experiences within a setting are lost. Indeed,
during the transcription process, I normally included many marginal notes to record details of the interviewees mannerisms, the contexts of interruptions during the interview and my feelings toward the interviewee's information and demeanor. Because I would normally undertake other observational fieldwork while at the interview site, I would also utilize my fieldnotes to record substantial details about the setting and the interactions within it.

It is also worth noting that while tape recorded interviews have been cited as possible sources of distortion of data due to a tendency for interviewees to talk "for the record" (Whyte, 1960: 368), I found that this was not a typical problem with video artists. I was initially surprised at the candidness and relaxed demeanor that most of my interviewees seemed to express. I suspect that this is due to their relative familiarity and comfort with the recording devices that they work with, and the various videotaped workshops in which that they often take part.

Tape recorded interviews and videotape recordings made by video artists to capture significant events or personalities within the video art world were transcribed as efficiently as possible. Normally I would watch or listen to the tapes once, and then go through them a second time to make note of key quotes or important aspects of the scenes I was viewing. The staff at Video Place allowed me to borrow some of this material for several days at a time, which gave me
further work to do while I was not in the field.

Archival and Print Materials

Archival and print materials were either photocopied, purchased, or included in my fieldnotes. All of the artist-run centres I visited had access to photocopiers, however I reserved making photocopies for material that I believed to be crucial. Photocopying was expensive and I also found that I was sometimes interfering in daily administrative activities when I would make extensive use of a photocopier, thus the need to limit this as a means of data collection.

Materials that could not be photocopied were either recorded into my fieldnotes at the site, or sometimes borrowed from their owners for use at home. As mentioned earlier, several video artists made it a practice to lend me articles and books. The administrator at Video Place even arranged for me to have a mail slot (normally reserved for board members) so that I could receive submissions from members. Toward the end of my fieldwork I was provided with a key to the doors of Video Place so that I could gain access to archival material during evenings and on weekends. Printed materials made up a significant aspect of the social world of video artists, and therefore became an essential portion of my data.
TREATMENT OF THE DATA

Burgess (1982: 191) maintains that "note-taking is a personal activity that depends upon the research context, the objectives of the research and relationships with informants." I would argue that data treatment processes are equally personal activities which depend upon the same contexts, objectives and relationships. In other words, how the data is coded is dependent upon what data is made available by the subjects, how the interaction between subjects and researcher has structured the research objectives and how the researcher perceives his or her data.

Coding the Data

For this study I undertook a systematic coding procedure for organizing and interpreting the data. The first step in this process was a thorough review of all of my fieldnotes and collected printed material, prior to initial coding. Following this I made some initial categorizations in order to group the data into analytical and theoretical subcategories. I then reviewed the fieldnotes and printed material marking codings in the margins for later analysis. The coding process further enabled me to gain insight into my analytical and theoretical strategies.

Again, Becker's (1982) *Art Worlds* proved useful in allowing me to create a skeletal framework for the data analysis. While I may have had some theoretical differences
with his general approach, I found his analytical categories matched my observations extremely well. His essential premise is that art is a collective activity, and as such can be best understood by focusing on the nature of those activities, the individuals, organizations and state interests that interact with artists during those activities, the resources and technologies that must be utilized. The categories he thus provides are simplistic, yet elegant in the depth of analysis that they provoke.

Moving Beyond Becker’s Categories Within Art Worlds

Despite the strength of Becker’s categories, I found that many of my observations, analyses and theoretical conclusions went beyond his strictly symbolic interactionist viewpoint. Thus my ideas about video art’s relation to hegemonic processes, my ideas about video art as a form of praxis which promotes de-construction and re-construction of discourses, my hypotheses about audience development and the distinctions between video viewing and television viewing, and my observations regarding the strength of modernist ideologies of art and artists go beyond the framework Becker provides. Regardless, Becker’s analysis provided me with much of the stimulus I needed to generate analyses and theory to expand upon his general approach to art. In the end, I found the compatibility between Becker’s symbolic interactionist standpoint and the work of hegemony theorists, cultural
studies theorists, and discourse theorists to be confirmed. I remain strong in my belief that the later theoretical perspectives have much to learn by returning to methodological strategies which focus on what de Certeau (1984) calls "the practice of everyday life".
CHAPTER IV
HISTORICAL CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING VIDEO ART IN CANADA

INTRODUCTION

All That Flickers is Not Television

The history of the practice of video art in Canada is intertwined with the history of the institution of television and its regulatory environment, with the history of video technologies, with the history of art, with the history of social activism and with history in general. Any historical analysis of video must, however, begin with a demarcation of video against the institution of television, an institution whose technology has been utilized in ways specific to the currents of the social, economic and political environments that surround it. The apparent similarities between video and television are minor compared to their differences and become particularly evident when the medium of video is separated from its absorption into the institution of television.\(^1\)

Video production is an activity that takes place within the dominant shadow of the social reality of commercial television. This is of primary importance to recognize, and we must guard against accepting the norms and practices of

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\(^1\) The term "institution of television" is a conceptual phrase first coined by Heath and Skirrow (1977).
commercial television as being synonymous with those of video. Indeed, the existence of alternative video practices serves to further illustrate the socially and politically constructed nature of commercial television. An analogy can be drawn to the relationship between the NFL Super Bowl and a backyard pick-up game of football. The techniques may be similar, however the social and political environments and impacts are worlds apart. Likewise, video and television are not one and the same medium.

Television, according to the brilliantly concise definition provide by Ulmer (1989: x), is "the name for the institution that has arisen to manage and distribute the medium of video (just as cinema is said to be the institutionalization of film)." Conceiving of video as a medium distinct from its socially constructed manifestations such as television allows us to delve deeper into the historical processes which have created television on the one hand and video art on the other. The technology is the common lineage to both forms, however the technology has not determined those forms, they have been determined by specific social practices.

In order to make this point explicit, we need only examine some of the early, pre-commercial television, usages of the medium of video. For example, video and war have always been closely connected, and video was given much of its research and development attention prior to and during the
second World War, particularly by German engineers. The 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin witnessed the first major appearance of video cameras and monitors for what is now seen as an early propaganda victory for the Nazi Party. Hermann Göring, the German Minister of Aviation introduced the video camera to the military and propaganda wings of the Third Reich and the video camera saw its development as a monitoring and surveillance device as well as an observational tool for armament testing (Von Bruch, 1986). By the end of the second World War, the video camera had been refined so that it yielded a picture of 411 lines, roughly equivalent to the top end Hi-8 consumer video cameras available today. One of the most interesting uses for these high quality cameras was as a television guidance head for the V-2 rocket (Ibid).^1

Gatekeeper of the Technology

As the above examples and other histories of television make clear, early research and development in television took place in the realms of transmission and reception, but not in the realm of production (Armes, 1988). Like radio, television did not easily adapt to the economic model of spectatorship common to theatre and film because of the difficulties in instituting any kind of pay-per-view

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^1 This is an interesting piece of historical information when one considers the fascination that television has had with similar devices as used during the 1991 war in the Persian Gulf in which some of the most 'spectacular' images were transmitted from the noses of U.S. missiles.
system for a product that was broadcast on airwaves. Thus, there was little impetus, in television's early history, to develop innovative, popular programming. Television was created by corporations such as RCA and Philco to sell television sets, not television programs (Ibid). These corporations were already heavily committed to the emerging electronics industry through their connections to radio, and thus realized the enormous profits to be made through marketing a new and innovative receiving device utilizing the same technical infrastructure.

The corporations which manufactured television sets were also among the first broadcasters and thus the first television program producers. Aided by corporate advertisers and governments they molded the medium of video into the one-way, mass communication phenomenon that we are so familiar with. As Antin (1976: 174) puts it, "the social relation between 'sending' and 'receiving'... is profoundly unequal and asymmetrical." States implicitly supported this arrangement by assigning control over the right to transmit television signals over airwaves directly to the industry that controlled the radio airwaves. As well, states created regulations to standardize "picture quality" and signal strength, thus ensuring that only highly capitalized organizations could take on the elite broadcasting role (Ibid).

The standards of "picture quality" and signal strength established in the early days of television could arguably be
the central factors in preventing television from becoming a more democratically functioning institution. Today, picture quality standards in Canada and the U.S. are set at a level of "400 lines" of television signal, while in Europe the standard is "640 lines" making European television pictures of a "higher quality". The differences in standards also points to the arbitrary nature of "quality" standards. The popular VHS and 8mm. camcorders which have proliferated in the North American consumer market produce an image of about 200 to 300 lines. Only the so-called "Hi-8", 8mm. camcorders, have broken through the broadcast "quality" standards at a resolution of 400 lines while retaining their consumer accessibility. The picture quality barriers have prevented anything but highly capitalized, professional productions appearing on the TV screen, with the interesting exception of some amateur news footage and the popular television program "America's Funniest Home Videos". Transmission strength standards tend to bottom out at 10,000 watts, making it next to impossible for someone to create a Ham radio type television station in their own home.

Television: The Curse of Video

Antin (Ibid: 175) argues that all airwave transmission and reception systems maintain the "potential equalities" of what he terms "wireless telephony". In other words, if we view the telephone as a prototype of a communication system
which provides a level playing ground upon which we can be both senders and receivers, all airwave transmission and reception systems have the potential to replicate the equality provided by the telephone. It is "not technically inevitable," argues Antin (Ibid), that television should be a system in which transmission dominates reception, it is:

merely an outcome of the social situation and the marketing strategies of the industry... There is nothing necessarily more complex or expensive in the camera than there is in the receiver. It is merely that the great expense of receiver technology was defrayed by the mass production of the sets, whose multiplication multiplied the dollar exchange value of transmission time sold by the transmitter to his advertisers. So the broadcasters underwrote receiver development, because every set bought delivers its viewers as saleable goods in an exchange that pays for the "expensive" technology.

Together, manufacturers, advertisers and states colluded to create a process whereby audiences of television viewers became valuable commodities. The medium of video was not seen as a medium of expression: it was seen as a medium that allowed products and ideas to be targeted directly to the inside of the homes of consumers and citizens. Programming was considered to be valuable not based on its content, but based on its ability to "pull" an audience. The idea that television could be used for expressive purposes that might not involve pulling audiences or pushing products was rather alien.

The fact that the medium of video was utilized as a one-way communication device and not as a two way medium of
expression is an extremely important consideration. Essentially video was used to disseminate the images and ideas of a favoured few to mass audiences who could not participate in the communication process in any way other than choosing to view or not to view. Television’s use of video was to mark the medium of video as a non-communication medium that inhibited or prohibited the exchange processes that are, according to Baudrillard (1981) for example, essential for real communication to take place. As a result, television has been responsible for labelling the medium of video as something akin to a set of practices that is only valuable as a type of propaganda tool. As will be discussed later, video art has been fundamentally marked by its use of the same medium that the institution of television uses as a non-communication medium. Many of the early efforts of video artists in the late 1960’s and early 1970’s, and continuing to today, have been adversely effected by the viewing practices that television conditioned audiences almost automatically utilize to view video art.

Television might have developed in innumerable ways, many of which we can, at present, only discuss as fantasies. For example, television might have become a tool for communities with an infrastructure owned and managed by community members based on a cooperative model. Television might also have not become as professionalised as we now see it, calling for less capitalization and thus allowing greater
access to production and dissemination. Television might have
developed as a companion to the film theatre with large
audiences gathering to watch large screen monitors. Each of
these applications of video technology currently exists,
however we do not normally recognize them as "television" in
its institutional form.

Many media critics dismiss video as having no
redeeming qualities as a medium, precisely because it is seen
through the thick fog of television. Neil Postman, for
example, criticizes video imagery for its perceived ability to
decrease public literacy levels, essentially claiming that a
public that increasingly thinks through images rather than
words is a public that is incapable of dealing with complex
ideas. While it would be difficult to argue that a process of
this type is not operating through the institution of
television, one cannot extend the argument to blame the
messenger or, in this case, blame the medium of video. It is
the socially constructed and maintained institution of
television that is responsible for the way in which the medium
is used. To blame the medium of video itself is to support
the concept of technological determinism.

A Brief Genealogy of the Social Uses of Video Technology

The full range of uses for video as a medium during
the early years of television during the late 1940's and
1950's was largely comprised of live broadcast television
programming and video surveillance systems. Video's range was to increase dramatically with the introduction of video tape in 1956 (Antin, 1976) and its subsequent industry adoption by 1958 (Armes, 1988). The industry probably saw little incentive for developing videotape and videotape recorders prior to this point because the primary use for recording and later playback was to overcome the obstacles to prime time broadcast presented by North American time zones. As Antin (1976: 176) notes, "between 1947 and 1957, kine-recordings, films taken directly from the TV screen, were in constant and heavy use, especially for delayed broadcast of East Coast programs on the West Coast, in spite of the much poorer image quality of the kines."

Prior to the introduction of videotape, video was condemned to operating in "real" time. Television broadcasts operated out of studios which might contain two or three cameras and a switching control centre to change the image from camera to camera, and all the events were shot and broadcast instantaneously. This system is still very much in use today, and has reached tremendous levels of sophistication with the live broadcast of sporting events and wars. It is however a very limiting system in that there is little or no latitude for mixing and layering images, or recalling images without the use of a recording and playback device such as a video tape recorder. In addition, it is a system which requires events to occur in a predictable fashion if the
television production is to appear smooth and project the signs of television's mastery and control (Antin, 1976). Reality does not always provide reliable and predictable events, which is no doubt the reason for television's fetish for broadcasting "live" sporting events, or "live" award shows which have precisely predictable flows due to standard rules or precise planning and rehearsal.

While it is difficult to conduct experiments with history to discover the paths that social practices might have taken under varying circumstances, it is possible to imagine various trajectories that video might have taken based on early practices that were discontinued because of their inability to work profitably within the institution of television. The brief existence of the "teleplay" is a good example. As Armes (1988: 127) perceptively states, television is a phenomenon that "strives to become an event," largely because it is an institution that has been built on a foundation of real time transmission. Unlike film which could aspire to become an art form because of its essential existence in a material form, television spent the first decades of its life as an ethereal form that was broadcast onto airwaves that could not concretize that form. While many productions were shot and edited on film prior to broadcast, or were captured during live broadcast on poor quality kinescopes, video did not become a medium with its own material form until the introduction of videotape and
videotape recorders.

The Lost "Art" of the Teleplay

Prior to the introduction of these tools, complex television productions were only made possible within large television studios that could comfortably house two or more large cameras and dollies, numerous sets of hot lights, could allow for the connection of a control centre to switch shots from cameras, and could provide the electrical power to service all of the equipment including its broadcasting hardware. While in the early stages such productions were often limited to two camera sequences between a stage performance and a commercial segment, two interesting technical and aesthetic aberrations did emerge during television's early history as an institution: Ernie Kovac's comically televised experiments with distorting the signal in 1952 (Wooster, 1985) and; what might be considered as the highly artistic and complex teleplays, a form that Kellner (1979: 408) refers to as the "critical realist drama".

The teleplay form is virtually extinct today since it insists upon a switching control centre and three cameras rather than upon the almost absolutely standardized production strategy today: the single camera and editing suite combination. Teleplays signified some of video's essential differences from film. Shot and broadcast in real time they required extensive and exhaustive pre-planning which was
manifested in the teleplay script: an organizational tool upon which every shot, every focal length, every vertical or horizontal camera movement, every zoom, every dolly, every lighting combination, every microphone position, every talent position, every musical addition, and every scene sequence must be recorded in chronological order. While to some extent this form is represented within the common soap opera, the soap opera is a very poor cousin to the teleplay in terms of complexity.

One cannot help but admire the sophistication and precision coordination required to produce a teleplay. Like a live stage play, the teleplay required extensive rehearsals, not just for the actors but for the camera crews, lighting technicians, sound crews, stage crews, musicians and directors. Indeed, the director of a teleplay production required the cognitive capacity of a symphony orchestra leader, who would not only call out production changes, but would also alert crew members and technicians for changes for which to immediately prepare. In many cases the director both made the calls and physically manipulated the switching device, a device which normally included a variety of "wipes" which would allow for various effects and dissolves to enhance the switching process. The closest equivalent practice that we have to this today is the broadcast of an NFL football

1 Talent is cinema and television jargon for the actors, actresses, news readers, announcers and other professionals who appear in productions.
game, with the exception that with the teleplay, the director is mainly proactive rather than mainly reactive. Kerbel (1982: 57) relates that one teleplay, A Night to Remember, produced in 1956, recreated the sinking of the Titanic "in a live telecast with 107 actors and thirty-one sets!"

While the only teleplays I have had the opportunity to see are some of Rod Serling's resurrected teleplays and Samuel Beckett's teleplay productions, I have been able to read several teleplay scripts by other writers such as Paddy Chayefsky, Gore Vidal and Reginald Rose (nicknamed 'the video boys' (Rutherford, 1990)). In reading these scripts one can fully appreciate the artistry required to produce a teleplay for live broadcast. Cameras are constantly changing angles, changing focal length, panning or doing dollies, while lighting technicians make changes to lighting, shadowing and

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1 This of course could be open to debate. The televised NFL football game is a somewhat scripted event and the form that has been institutionalized for television involves many recurrent production practices such as the instant replay, the bench shot, the coach shot and the wide snap shot (pardon the pun). Recently, Monday Night Football games have been officially delayed to accommodate commercial segments which might otherwise have been cut to provide live coverage.

2 Teleplays are difficult to find because, the vast majority that are available for viewing are only available on kinescope reproductions at the Museum of Broadcasting in New York. Many teleplays have been lost forever for, as Kerbel (1982: 49) notes, preserving them is "like preserving a few grains of sand at a time while so many others remain buried, or worse, washed out to sea." A substantial number of teleplays were not kinescoped, and a large number of kinescopes have been destroyed (Ibid). Kerbel's article provides some excellent descriptions of the intricacies involved in producing a live teleplay.
tone (original teleplays were black and white, of course). The technology available was utilized to the physical limits of its form to create a vast variety of effects, atmospheres and images. The technology became as important as an actor or actress in the production’s performance.

Kellner (1979) maintains that the teleplay became extinct due to its tendency toward critical social realism, bordering on political radicalism, characteristics antithetical to television’s corporate sponsors. Kellner’s new left argument only partly explains the demise of the teleplay because it does not take account of the simple costliness of their production in comparison to other productions, nor does it take account of the development of new technologies such as the videotape recorder. As well, the genre of the teleplay in the U.S. lasted for fourteen years, from 1947 with the Kraft Theatre to 1961 with Playhouse 90 (Kerbel, 1979), and from 1953 with CBC Television Theatre and GM Theatre to 1964 with Playdate (Rutherford, 1990) hardly something irritable sponsors would tolerate.

The teleplay probably became extinct simply due to both the time and the money that must be contributed towards a production. The teleplay required a significant quantity of labour and planning, perhaps several weeks of writing, organization and rehearsal, and the financial capability to pay for many non-broadcast hours of studio space and labour resources. On the other hand, the less sophisticated live
broadcast stage production with minimal camera and lighting changes could be produced at a small fraction of the cost, could utilize non-broadcast studio space for rehearsal (thus freeing up facilities for other productions), and required a much less intensive labour effort. We can see the evidence of this in the persistence of the "videotaped before a live audience" situation comedy. These productions do not provide us with the spontaneity of a live broadcast, as their producers maintain, but provide the producers with a very low cost production technique while providing us with the illusion that we are watching something that is somehow more real than a production not videotaped before a live audience.

The live broadcast stage production was thus both financially less taxing and physically less taxing than the teleplay production. Obviously, production companies more interested in selling televisions than attracting anything like a fickle, ticket purchasing audience, opted for the live broadcast stage production. As the necessity to compete with other broadcasters for audience attention became important with the advent of commercials, it was natural for television to follow its path of least resistance option and continue to produce less sophisticated productions. Rather than attract audiences through complex video artistry, producers began to attract them through the provision of nightly spectacles. Game shows, stage comedies and sporting events were not only cheaper to produce, but also attracted audiences bent on quick
entertainment fixes rather than intense, absorbing dramas. In Canada where the teleplay had a much longer run than in the U.S., the audience choice was overwhelmingly in favour of the lighter entertainment offered by U.S. stations (Rutherford, 1990).

The teleplay was not the first and last attempt at developing the medium of video within the institution of television, but is no doubt the most significant attempt. It showed that video was an infinitely flexible medium that offered opportunities for expression that other media such as live theatre, film, and radio could not approach. Its existence documents the fact that television does not have to look like it does today.
A HISTORY OF CRITICAL TECHNOLOGIES AND ASSOCIATED PRACTICES

The Development of the Video Toolbox

As stated earlier, the medium of video was limited to the construction of real time images until the introduction of videotape. The material represented by videotape and its imaging tool, the videotape recorder, could capture and reproduce images almost identical to the images transmitted for live broadcast. They also combined to allow 100% television productions (not film productions broadcast on television) to be constructed prior to broadcast. They allowed for the possibility of editing which would then permit practices of combining images similar to those patterns common to the institution of cinema. During the late 1950's and the 1960's, however, videotape editing remained a rather rudimentary and time consuming process due to the need to accurately coordinate and synchronize both tape speeds and edit points. During this period film remained the primary material for constructing edits. Edited film segments would either be directly broadcast or, more commonly, they would be transferred to videotape for playback during broadcast.

While the introduction of videotape and videotape recorders was to have complex effects on the medium of video, three other innovations combining video practices and technologies probably had a greater effect than any others. Each of these innovations and the mainstream practices and technologies they later gave birth to owe a great deal to the
unacknowledged or forgotten technical and aesthetic efforts of video artists. The first of these to arrive on the scene was the so-called "porta-pak" video camera and videotape recording unit in 1965 (Easterbrook, 1975). The other two innovations, the edit controller and the various versions of the image synthesizer, arrived during the late 1960's. Each of these technologies has changed the institution of television significantly and each has a lineage that is rooted in video art practices.

The Porta-pak

As a case in point, the first person to purchase and use a porta-pak video camera was not a member of the television industry or a corporate image maker, but a video artist by the name of Nam June Paik (Cameron, 1974). With these portable video production kits it became possible to effectively leave the studio and its supporting technical and labour provisions behind. Video could be produced in an infinite number of locations, thanks to relatively compact equipment. The portability of the hand-held video camera was

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1 This acknowledgement has become a part of video art fokelore. I have no independent evidence to substantiate the claim, however it seems clear to me that Paik was at the very least one of the first people in North America to utilize a porta-pak.

2 The term porta-pak is somewhat of a misnomer according to most video artists. The early apparatus, and some of the equipment still used today is bulky, heavy, delicate and cumbersome. The early equipment required a crew of two persons and access to a vehicle for transportation over
made possible by the use 1/2 inch magnetic tape rather than the 2 inch tape standardized within broadcast television studios. Porta-pak video kits were also relatively inexpensive, ranging between $1,000 and $3,000 (U.S.) between 1965 and 1970 (about the price of a car) (Simmons, 1977) which helped to ensure their dissemination to non-professionals. Electronic news-gathering (ENG) is one of the video practices that can be considered to be an offspring of these early equipment packages.

As will be dealt with in a more extensive discussion on portable video cameras later, video artists had a strong influence on the development of ENG and other television industry practices. We cannot attribute the technological development of the so-called portapak video camera and recording units to video artists. That distinction remains tied to SONY. There is evidence, however, to support the position that many of the television industry practices related to portable cameras and recorders that we are now so familiar with are rooted in the innovative practices of early video artists.

The Edit Controller

The second technological innovation was the introduction of an editing synchronization unit known as the significant distances. The equipment did however allow producers to move out of studios.
edit controller. The edit controller was, according to several of the people I interviewed, developed in the early 1970's in Canada by video artists and video activists collaborating between two organizations, Montreal's Videographe, an early video collective and a program that was to have a major impact on video art, the National Film Board of Canada's Challenge for Change Program. Concerned with developing new techniques for processing video imagery, these artists and activists desired a system which would speed up and clean up the editing process.

In its rudimentary form, the edit controller is a device which coordinates the recording and playback sequences of two videotape recorders. When editing videotape it is necessary to have both the playback unit and the recording unit reach the same tape speed at the same time in order to have an edit point accurately constructed. Without this coordination the edited image often appears with a half-second 'glitch' of distorted signal. It is possible to construct edits by hand, so to speak, by methodically playing and rewinding a playback deck and a recording deck until the desired edit points and corresponding start points are reached. Both decks are started and when they reach the proper speed the video signal from the playback deck is manually switched to the record deck. This is a cheap and rather interesting editing method, however, it is highly inaccurate and "it is also nerve-racking... and requires
rhythm" (vom Bruch, 1986).

The edit controller is essentially a timing unit which marks the entry points for an edit in a analog or impulse form (digital units are now rapidly replacing analog editing devices) and then rewinds both the player and recorder to a point which will allow both to reach the entered edit point in unison, and at the same tape speed. Edits are normally carried out automatically by a control program in the edit controller. Many edit controllers also allow the editor to preview edits through a simulation function which switches video signals at the edit point, without actually transferring those signals to the videotape in the recording unit. The preview function is important because, unlike film editing, videotape editing is a sequential process and each edit becomes a more or less permanent feature of the finished video production.¹

According to the information I gathered, the technology for the first edit controller was acquired from its

¹ Computer technology has radically transformed the nature of the preview function. An entire production can now be "off-line" edited using specific video software packages and all edits can be stored on a single floppy disk. With the source tapes inserted into playback decks, an editor can preview a completely edited production without making a recording of the production. This technology has vastly enlarged the malleability of video edits. Digital editing, while not yet standard video technology, promises to replace analog editing and add further flexibility to editing processes. Equipment manufacturers such as SONY have commissioned several renowned American video artists to experiment with their new digital equipment in order to demonstrate the almost infinite flexibility that digital technology provides.
video artist developers by SONY Corporation, resulting in the marketing of commercial units in the mid-1970's. By the early 1980's the edit controller had virtually replaced all other forms of videotape editing and had become the indispensable workhorse of the television industry. Edits that might have taken tens of minutes to coordinate could, with an edit controller, be completed in seconds with virtually no recognizable distortion to the videotape signal. The edit controller effectively revolutionized the use of videotape. Instead of simply being a material which permitted the steady recording of real time images, videotape became a malleable form that could be shaped outside of the parameters of real time recording.

Editing practices which were once reserved only for film now became available for video. Ironically, the rapidity with which editing can take place using an edit controller has recently resulted in the industry-wide use of videotape editing for film productions. While the images are still originally shot on film, these images are time-coded and transferred to videotape for computer editing. An entire film is edited on videotape and a computer prints out a list of all edits for the film editor. The film cutter simply reads time codes from a computer sheet and assembles the respective film

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1 Anyone who has tried to edit a videotape on his or her home videotape recorder will realize the advantages of a time-base corrector. The flashes of snow and jiggled images that result from "crash" or "scratch" editing are eliminated with an edit controller.
segments according to the videotape editor's desires. In this fashion a film can be edited and re-edited many times before a piece of celluloid is even cut.

The Foundations of Video Synthesizers

The edit controller was one of many technical innovations to be developed from within the video art world and then exploited by the world of commercial television or corporate video production. Beginning in 1967 and continuing through the 1970's a series of experimental (both technically and aesthetically) video projects were created through the auspices of the Rockefeller Foundation, the Markle Foundation, the J.D. Rockefeller 3rd Fund, Fordham University (Marshall McLuhan's Media Center), state arts councils in the U.S., the American Crafts Council (Stern, 1977) and the Canada Council and the National Film Board in Canada. Collectives of video artists were commissioned to produce video works for exhibition or broadcast on television by such stations as the Public Broadcasting System's WGBH which in 1968 produced a show called "The Medium is the Medium". In 1967 the Rockefeller Foundation initiated an experimental TV project at KQED in San Francisco which later lead to the foundation of the National Center for Experiments in Television (NCET) (Haberi, 1976). The Rockefeller Foundation was also responsible for funding the WNET/Channel 13 Television Laboratory (originally the Artist's Television Workshop) in
New York, an organization dedicated to exploring "the uncharted territories of the television medium" (Ibid: 58), and had a hand in directing state arts council money and National Endowment for the Arts money towards video art. In New York in particular, video art was given an exceptionally large portion of state arts funding, primarily as a result of the Rockefeller Foundation’s influence on the New York State Council on the Arts (Stern, 1977). For example, in 1969, out of a total budget of 20 million dollars, the New York State Council on the Arts allocated 500,000 dollars to video art activities (Haberi, 1976).

New York became a hotbed of video activity during the early 1970’s, giving rise to various activist video groups and artistic/experimental groups with names such as Videofreex, Top Value Television, the Global Village Video Resource Centre, Raindance, Survival Arts Media, People’s Video Theatre and an organization that was to have a lasting impact on television and video art, The Kitchen (Video-In Archival Material; Haberi, 1976; Ryan, 1988; Shamberg, 1971). The New York State Council on the Arts was able to foster all of this activity based on its relatively large overall budget and its open attitude toward new art forms. Its philosophy regarding video funding was based on experimentation. According to its executive director at the time, John Hightower (as cited in Stern, 1977: 147-8):

We had been concerned with the artistic uses of television and had very little interest in
the approach of televising concerts or artists at work. Video was a new instrument of artistic expression; the syntax wasn’t yet clear or refined. How could one say that one person was more articulate or more effectively expressive? The fact was that a contemporary electronic palette was being used and it really wasn’t up to the State Arts Council to make curatorial judgements of what was good or bad, particularly since the syntax was so undeveloped. The best thing was to make the permissive and inclusive gamble of funding a lot of experimentation by virtue of the fact that it was experimentation. That was a pretty early part of the Council’s philosophy and concern: to always be more inclusive, than exclusive, and accepting of experimentation and the freedom to fail...

Many early video artists were commissioned, through the public broadcasters which also received generous state arts council and foundation grants, to dedicate the majority of their efforts to electronically processing the image that would appear on screens (Ryan, 1988). These early video artists were not satisfied with the limited performance of ‘realistic’ images provided by the cameras, videotape recorders and edit controllers of the time. They were quite serious about investigating the aesthetic possibilities of video imagery. In order to continue to advance their work it was necessary to construct electronic image processing devices or synthesizers that would enable them to move past the limits of the traditional television image. Writing in 1976, video artist Stephen Beck (1976) clarified the uses for which video artists employed electronic imaging techniques by video artists:
These techniques, as applied to television, utilize the inherent plasticity of the medium to expand it beyond a strictly photographic/realistic, representational aspect which characterizes the history of television in general. A wide variety of electronic instruments have been constructed by engineers, artists, and engineer-artist collaborations in the past several years which operate specifically with TV sets as primary display or "canvas". Each imaging system that has been developed reflects the artistic and technical capabilities of its originators and tends to be utilized according to distinctly different aesthetic theories. In some cases the resultant image is largely due to the inherent circuit designs of a given instrument. In other cases, the instrument is utilized to produce an image with specific visual or psychological effect, the electronic aspect being more of a means than an end to the realization.

Unbeknownst to these artists and their technical collaborators, they were to create the seeds for many of the special effects devices that have now become commonplace on the nightly news, MTV and countless other television programs.

Nam June Paik's Video Synthesizer

The video artist who is given the most credit for creating video imaging tools is also given the credit of being the founder of video art, Nam June Paik. References to Paik in the literature of video art are often quite reverential and I did not have to read very much material before it became apparent to me that Paik is the charismatic leader of the video art world. The legends of his first experimental art works involving video and his connections to the masters of
avant-garde music and art have been told and retold many times, and probably deserve to be briefly retold here.

Nam June Paik is a Korean-American artist and musician who trained under avant-garde musicians such as John Cage, George Maciunas, the Fluxus Group (Wooster, 1985) and Karlheinz Stockhausen in West Germany (Haberi, 1976). Paik's multi-cultural ethnic and artistic influences are representative of the postmodern, inter-cultural flavour of much video art. His musical training took place at the University of Munich, the Freiburg Conservatory and the University of Cologne. From 1958 to 1961 he was a resident at the Studio for Electronic Music of Radio Cologne (Ibid). The influence of Stockhausen and his ground-breaking avant-garde works which combine music and electronic machines seems to have had an important impact on Paik's video work.

Nam June Paik first began to experiment with video as a medium by placing various objects with strong magnetic fields near the screen of a television which was tuned to broadcast television. Using electrical appliances and magnets he was able to distort the electronic image on the television screen and this "fluxus-action" was displayed in 1963 at an art exhibition in West Germany under the title "Exposition of Music - Electronic Television" (Herzogenrath, 1976). Moving to New York, Paik continued his video manipulations and was the first North American to purchase a porta-pak video camera and recorder with the help of a grant
from the J. D. Rockefeller 3rd Fund. In 1965 he repeated the
magnetic distortion technique utilizing videotaped images
rather than broadcast images. The images he chose to
manipulate were off-screen recordings of Richard Nixon and
Marshal McLuhan (Ross, 1986). Paik was fascinated with the
infinite possibilities for image production inherent in the
very circuitry of television sets. A single quote from 1963
reveals much of Paik's (1977: 39) early philosophy and its
connection to Stockhausen and the Fluxus group:

There are as many sorts of TV circuits as
French cheeses. For instance, some old
models of 1952 are capable of certain kinds
of variation which new models with automatic
frequency control cannot do... Maybe one
needs ten years to be able to perceive the
delicate differences between thirteen
different "distortions" (?), as was needed to
perceive the delicate differences between
many of the kinds of 'noises' (?) in
electronic music.

In 1966 he produced a piece entitled "Variations on
Johnny Carson vs. Charlotte Moorman". In this production an
off-screen recording of a Johnny Carson segment in which
Carson interviews Charlotte Moorman, who then proceeds to
perform a John Cage musical piece, is manipulated using a live
wire rhythmically placed directly on the videotape. The
result is a recording which is interrupted by sequentially
spaced distortions which eventually replace the television
image (Ibid). According to video art critic David Ross (1986:
171) this tape implies a critique of the reality supposedly
represented by television because, "the use of the Cage work
as a matrix, and the Carson "critique" implied by his gestures and patronizing attitude towards Moorman [and her explanation of avant-garde music], only fortifies the power of Paik's meta-critique."

Manipulation of the physical apparatus of video in the form of the screen and the tape became Paik's signature. In 1976 he produced a work called "Variations on George Ball on Meet the Press" again using an off-screen recording of a "Meet the Press" program which featured Under-Secretary of State George Ball who had recently resigned from the U.S. administration based on his opposition to the Vietnam War. Paik physically manipulated the recording reels of the video recorder by hand to speed up and slow down the real time recording, thus playing with the concept of television time while making an indirect anti-war statement (Ibid).

None of the technical innovations mentioned thus far had much of an impact on the institution of television. During the late 1960's and early 1970's however, Paik, commissioned by the public broadcasting station WGBH in Boston (Haberi, 1976), collaborated with Shuya Abe an electronics engineer to create the Paik-Abe Video Synthesizer, "a device that allowed the artist to re-scan, distort, colourize, and in other ways process the video image produced by a live or tape source" (Ross, 1986: 171). Paik consistently expressed a love-hate relationship with the technology he worked with, and the institution of television, saying, "ironically a huge
Machine (WGBH, Boston) helped me to create my anti-machine machine" (Paik, 1977: 44).

One of the first experimental uses of this synthesizer technology was to take place on broadcast television rather than within a gallery situation. In 1967 at the broadcast studios of WGBH he and other video enthusiasts broadcast four hours of Beatles' music together with "randomly generated synthesizer imagery produced by anyone who happened by the WGBH Boston studios that evening... [constituting] a landmark of stoned television", while also criticizing the piousness of the institution of television (Ross, 1986: 172). The Paik-Abe Synthesizer was among the first devices designed specifically to process video images, and it set the stage for the introduction of video effects into the world of mainstream television. In 1969, Paik (1977: 44) was to state:

In the long range future, such a versatile colour synthesizer will become standard equipment like today's Hammond organ or Moog synthesizer in the musical field, but even in the immediate future it will find wide application... The video synthesizer is the accumulation of my nine years' TV shit (if this unholy allusion is allowed), turned into a real-time video piano by the Golden Finger of Shuya Abe, my great mentor.

The irony of the situation is that Paik was correct, and the Paik-Abe Synthesizer, his "anti-machine" that allowed him to "use technology in order to hate it more properly" (Ibid) ultimately became the basis for some of the standard effects components used in the television industry.
Other Synthesizer Technology

Other video artists working during the same time period were also developing synthesizing devices. For example, one video artist working with synthesizer technology was Erich Siegal who developed the Processing Chrominance Synthesizer in 1968, a device similar to that of the Paik-Abe Synthesizer. Both of these devices were capable of colourizing, or adding chrominance signal to black and white (monochrome); placing other images over an original image to create a matte effect; imposing a polarity inversion which creates an image similar to that of a photographic negative, and; mixing which allows for the superimposition of several image sources (Beck, 1976). Today the effects that can be created by these video artists’ inventions invite feelings of nostalgia for those of us who recall early attempts at music video in the early 1970’s or, quintessentially, the video aesthetics of the Dr. Who series.

The Paik-Abe Synthesizer and the Processing Chrominance Synthesizer have limited applications because they require the use of a video camera to process images via a video monitor. These devices are unable to create their own images without the aid of a video camera. Ever the visionaries, the video artists who were experimenting with synthesizers were groping for a pure form of video imagery based on video waveforms, not on representations of images in the environment. For example, according to video artist
Stephen Beck 1976: 184-185), some video artists were seeking a device which is:

in principle conceived to operate without the use of any camera image... One can conceive of a synthesizer as a generative device which forms the resultant picture by a process of assemblage of electronic pulsation... When visual literacy has advanced sufficiently, many will no longer consider the synthesized image as a by-product of television technology, but as a visual reality of its own, distinct from the terms of a representational, photographic image, an image which is more glyphic than literal.

In 1969, Beck, with the assistance of a U.S. National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) grant, designed the Direct Video Synthesizer one of the first "video-computers" which could produce abstract images without the aid of a video camera (Haberi, 1976). In 1970 Beck was designated as "artist in residence" at the National Center for Experiments in Television in San Francisco where he was able to fine tune his image synthesizer (Beck, 1977). The great distances which separate the aesthetic spirit and intentions of video artists from those of the television industry are neatly highlighted by Beck (1977: 50):

The whole idea of the synthesizer as I conceive it is that of an electronic sculpting device. The circuit cards are the "works" the inside where it's all happening, hand-crafted. There are between thirty and forty soldered connections which are structured on these circuit cards. These don't make the image per se, but they give me a means of shaping and sculpting and forming the electronic current flow, which, when translated into the video picture, takes on quality and shape and texture and form, movement and colour -- the basic ingredients
I work with. It's an architecture of its own at this level, and if you were able to stick your head in back here, it might give you some sense of just what the connection is between the technology and the graphics. You see, there are thousands and thousands of individuals responsible for the parts and components which go into making up the synthesizer. So in no way can you think of any one of us synthesist artists as being separated from this tremendous base within the culture itself. I don't really see the problem of a separation between art and technology; you can't have one without the other.

Similar devices to Beck's Direct Video Synthesizer began to rapidly appear during the early 1970's from video artists such as Erich Siegel (the Electronic Video Synthesizer), Gianni Colombo (the electronic "Wobbler") (Ibid), Bill Etra (Computer/Video Synthesizer) (Vanderbeek, 1977). All of the technological innovations brought forth by video artists would, in some form or another, make their way into the institution of television, a technological flow that continues to this day. The generous grants provided by the Rockefeller Foundation and other sponsors not only stimulated the development of video art, but provided the television industry with some relatively inexpensive and trouble free research and development.

Current Video Technology and Video Artists

Current technology permits an editor to construct a complex, edit-rich production entirely on a computer screen. Videotapes are electronically marked with digital codes which
are read by computers for the purpose of selecting and constructing edit points. An editor can view tapes at home on a videotape recorder and select image sequences and their corresponding digital codes. In the editing suite, he or she needs only to type in the correct sequence of digital codes that were selected at home and place the right tapes in the right machines. With everything in place, a start button is touched and an entire one hour production can be edited automatically. Computerized sequencers advance and rewind tapes automatically and also provide a fantastic variety of editing and visual effects to be added to the cut-edit capacity simpler edit controller units.

The television industry has been the industry which has been at the forefront in exploiting the technology represented by the edit controller and the various synthesized, digital and computer assisted siblings. During the late 1970's, the edit controller was quickly wed to a device known as a time-base corrector (TBC). Again, this is a device which owes a great deal to the experiments conducted by video artists. The time-base corrector is essentially a unit connected in line with recording and playback decks, a unit which among other things, harmonizes wave forms between source tapes and recording tapes. The harmonization of wave forms allows the editor to create edits which appear to come from different tapes with exactly the same luminance and chrominance characteristics. In many respects it is a hybrid
of Beck's Direct Video Synthesizer and other computer assisted synthesizers developed within the video art community.

All of these technologies represent a means for fast, low-cost and efficient production. In an industry driven by profit, these considerations are paramount. It is thus ironic that the edit controller, the TBC and a great many of the other effects devices that are now so common on television were originally conceived and developed by the creative labour of video artists working, seemingly, with relative independence from the industry they were to provide with its tools. Indeed the debt owed by the television industry to the world of video art is enormous, but will probably remain unacknowledged.

Today, video artists continue to experiment with video technologies. Experimentation comes in two basic forms: either the video artist will utilize an existing or new technology to make it perform in unconventional or non-design practices or; the video artist will create new technologies to generate the images required for the work's completion. As an example of the first form, video artists such as Nam June Paik have been commissioned by video technology manufacturers such as SONY and Samsung to create works that illustrate the capacity for a given device to create imaginative imagery. New York video artist John Sanborn, for instance, was recently commissioned by SONY to create a work which highlighted the versatility of its latest computer-video graphics technology.
In Japan, video "walls", interactive video displays and large screen video presentations are commonplace in stores and in the streets and employ many video artists to produce works which mix the distinctions between advertisement and video art (Richardson and Hallas, 1990). Other more recent technologies that are experimented with include "super slo-mo", "blue-screen", "laser graphics" and holography.

That video artists continue to invent new technologies was illustrated by an interesting interview I had with a female video artist who was attempting to represent the changes that were taking place with encroaching development in rural areas of Ontario in the wake of the spread of suburban development from Toronto. This artist wanted to take her audience on a tour of a small rural Ontario town. Not satisfied to simply record the town's development with the linear style of record afforded by videotape, she desired to allow her audience to choose its own direction and its own pace on its tour. In order to do this she constructed a device that would be controlled by a stationary bicycle which the viewer could pedal and steer at will. Connected to the bicycle was a laser videodisc player and a computer that could interpret the signals generated from the bicycle. As the viewer pedalled, a monitor in front of the viewer would play a pre-recorded scene from the tour of the town. The viewer could speed up or slow down and the scene would do likewise. If the viewer decided to turn a corner, the scene on the
monitor would automatically change scenes to follow the viewer's decision. Seemingly unaware of the lucrative profits that such computer software and mechanics could produce in the video-game industry, she believed that she was simply expanding the realm of possibilities available to video artists.
THE DEVELOPMENT OF VIDEO PRACTICES

Uncovering the Lineages of Current Video Practices

Technologies alone do not determine the practices with which they become associated. Social practices develop in and through cultures, economies, political systems, histories, and localized interactions. The practices common to video artists are no different, and in fact, they highlight the complexity of determining the lineages of social practices in general. There are two central lineages to current video art practices that I have identified, largely through an analysis of the debates and discussions among video artists themselves. These debates and discussions illustrate the vast spectrum of production that is video art while helping to specify the motivations, rationales, and sub-cultural genres within the social world of video art.

The sources of information which I have utilized in outlining the historical development of video art practices are primarily print material published and distributed by video artists themselves. This information is supplemented by interviews with "veteran" video artists (all Canadian, with one exception), videotape archival records of early video art productions, audiotaped recordings of interviews with video artists and archival documentation from various artist-run video art centres. I am also grateful to a United Church minister who was active in initiating the United Church’s North American promotion of community video and community
access cable television, and who spent the greater part of a
day providing me with an incredibly thorough history of the
struggles to establish and maintain community access cable
television channels in Canada.

Despite the efforts of my informants to guide me
through the research process, I can make no claim that the
history I present is authoritatively accurate, as it is a
history filtered through my sociologically selective and
imperfect eyes and ears. I am aware that there may be many
gaps in these accounts and probably some factual errors and
errors in interpretation, and I apologize to video artists who
may feel that they and their works have been mis-represented
or not represented at all. The tremendous quantity of early
video organizations and activities prevents me from including
all and everything. My interest is in attempting to represent
my interpretation of the overall pattern of the historical
development of video art.

Much of the history of video art remains an oral
history with all of the methodological problems that such
empirical data presents. The early print material that is
available is also steeped in rhetoric espousing the
revolutionary potential of video art practices, although there
are several valuable publications such as Davis and Simmons’
(eds.) (1977) *The New Television: A Public/Private Art*, and
Shamberg’s (1971) *Guerrilla Television* that maintain a healthy
degree of self-criticism and self-reflection. I found several
fascinating Canadian publications on video activities in the late 1960's and early 1970's, including: the National Film Board's Challenge for Change Newsletter, published between 1968 and 1973; The Video Exchange Directory (later the International Video Exchange Directory) published several times during the 1970's by Intermedia (later the Satellite Video Exchange Society, a.k.a Video In) in Vancouver; Video Guide, a Canadian serial publication with an international readership which began publishing in the late 1970's but which includes many retrospective pieces on video art in the early 1970's; Video Circuits, a yearly publication from the University of Guelph's Department Fine Art Department published between 1973 and 1975, and; Video Architecture - Television, written by Dan Graham (1979), a book which documents the video art activities at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design.

While the majority of the above publications are available through university libraries, other sources of print archival material included artist-run centres and art gallery holdings. Very extensive archival holdings can be found at V-Tape, a video art distributor in Toronto, Art Metropole, another distributor and artist-run centre in Toronto and at the Mills Library of McMaster University which houses a very good collection of Canadian art catalogues. The most thorough collection of print material related to video art that I became acquainted with is held at Video In - Satellite Video
Exchange Society in Vancouver.¹

The extent to which video artists have documented their work and their ideas was beneficial to my research, yet it also provided me with an interesting observation. Despite the rhetoric surrounding the power of video to communicate, video artists rely on the printed word to create a discursive context through which to interpret their work, legitimize their work, and convince themselves and funding bodies that their work is deserving of critical consideration. Ironically a diverse collection of people who consider their practices to be at the leading edge of post-modernist activities, resort to Gutenberg's technology and the modernist heritage of the printed word to insert their work within public discourse. I have since discovered that this observation was echoed as early as 1974 when Gerd Stern (1977: 149) of the New York State Council on the Arts noted, in reference to a video newsletter published by the Raindance group entitled Radical Software, that "it is ironic that probably the single most influential element in spreading the video word was not a tape but a printed periodical."

¹ I remain indebted to Kim Tomczak at V-Tape in Toronto, Charlie Fox at Ed Video in Guelph and especially to Crista Haukedal at Video In in Vancouver for their efforts in guiding me through their archival material. The collection at Video In was initiated during the early 1970's thanks to Crista's foresight in believing that almost everything related to video art should be documented and collected. As a result of my all too brief visit to the Video In archive I have become an avid supporter of their efforts to develop and maintain an accessible and efficient video art (tape and print) archive for research purposes.
Two Lineages

Creating a pattern for understanding the diversity and complexity of video art is difficult and bound to be limiting, however, I believe that despite the limitations of categorizations, non-video artists can gain a better understanding of video art practices if they are presented with a schematic of some sort, no matter how limited. There are at least two lineages for contemporary video art practices that I believe can be related to the majority of current video art productions. As with all attempts at constructing ideal types, my attempt at categorization is not meant to show that each type is inherently distinct and autonomous. Indeed, video art practices continually overlap and some video artists explicitly try to combine a variety of practices in their works.

The two lineages that I have identified are: social action or community development videos and sculptural works. These two lineages are identified according to specific historical practices and each practice continues to be developed today in diverse ways. I conclude by relating these two lineages to a dominant hybrid of current video art practices which I have labelled "representational" video art. In the following sections I will attempt to outline the generic characteristics of each of the tenuous categories I have identified. To some extent I have relied on various categorizations by video artists and video art critics to
legitimize my ideal types. Prior to outlining these categories, however, it is necessary to look further into the central tool of video art, the portable video camera and recording unit since this piece of technology has made its mark on both of the categories I distinguish, and it is the one piece of technology which has been essentially responsible for the proliferation of video art practices.
THE IMPACT OF THE PORTABLE VIDEO CAMERA ON VIDEO PRACTICES

The Early Impact

The impact that the introduction of low cost, portable video cameras and 1/2 inch video recorders had on video art practices is of paramount importance. Prior to the availability of this technology video artists such as Nam June Paik could only work with video monitors\(^1\) which received broadcast television signals. Thus, the images available for use were either totally provided by broadcast sources, or were totally dependent on the electronic gadgetry available within video monitors. Prior to 1965 I can find no instances of video artists gaining access to the 2 inch videotape recorders and the video studios maintained by television broadcasters. After 1965 there was a veritable explosion of video art activities which made extensive use of the so-called porta-pak video camera and its companion recorder. This activity took place throughout the world, wherever such equipment could be purchased or borrowed.

In the early history of video art, video art practices which utilized the porta-pak seemed to spontaneously arise, in

\(^1\) I will use the term video monitor rather than the more common term "television set" to help to distinguish between the medium of video and the institution of television. The latter term connotes a household appliance that has a socially prescribed role as a device for receiving and reproducing broadcast signals from the television industry. The former term connotes a more flexible device which has a diversity of roles in presenting video images from a variety of sources, both broadcast and non-broadcast (i.e. images created by video synthesizers or images reproduced from videotape).
hundreds of locations, and with relatively little contact between user groups. The 1972 *Video Exchange Directory* (Video In, 1972) lists no less than 320 individuals and organizations participating in video practices throughout the world including over 100 in Canada alone. In 1976 the *International Video Exchange Directory* (Video In, 1976) lists almost 400 individuals and organizations worldwide.

Scanning through the various documents produced by user groups it is fascinating to see the degree to which the porta-pak engendered similarly motivated uses. We must remember that the late 1960's and early 1970's were years of unprecedented activity related to social change. These were the years in which the views of McLuhan with his stimulating concept of the global village took hold of the minds of a generation. These were the years in which the baby boom generation flexed its muscles and asserted its "right" to affect change. It is not surprising then that a piece of technology that provided access to the means of media representation and to the means with which to distribute representations would be greeted with tremendous enthusiasm by so many young people in so many locations around the world.

By 1970 video art practices had become commonplace throughout Europe, in South America, in Latin America, in Japan, in Australia and New Zealand and, of course, in the United States and Canada. Video activities were no doubt taking place in other geographic locations, however there is
little documented evidence to provide support for this assertion. One interesting video project took place in Algeria and in China in 1971 under the guidance of the self-exiled Black Panther leader Eldridge Cleaver and deserves some further comment due to its wider historical significance. The flavour of social change conveyed by this project is at the extreme end of the general relationship between video art and social change that was to characterize so much of the work produced with porta-paks.

A letter from Cleaver while in self-exile in Algeria (reprinted in Shamberg, 1971: 34) states that the Black Panthers used video "for communication and information purposes [and] have discovered the fantastic effectiveness of this medium as a political weapon." The letter implies that porta-pak equipment was used to document a visit to China, as well as to communicate Cleaver's views from Algeria to the Party's followers in the United States and elsewhere. Cleaver desired to put together "the Revolutionary People's Communication Network throughout Babylon for distributing and reproducing video" (Ibid). The 1972 Video Exchange Directory (Video In, 1972) has an entry under "The Black Panther Party", with an address in Algeria. The entry notes that the organization had two porta-pak units, one for the North American NTSC format and one for the European SECAM format, and records an activity entry which states: "used as a media tool in our Revolutionary Peoples' Communication Network;
shooting here [Algeria] in the 3rd world & shown in American & European cities; recording of social & political events, interviews, discussions, documentary of travels in socialist countries, environment study & feedback, information communication & educational uses."

In 1970, universities throughout North America were offering courses in non-broadcast video practices, and the introduction of cable television was bringing community access video production to most major U.S. and Canadian cities. The scope of these activities, only five years after the introduction of the technology and only three years after it had become a mass produced commodity is intriguing. The 1972 Video Exchange Directory (Video In, 1972) provides a good source of data on the various video practices of the time, as described by the users themselves. The uses fall into various groupings including, in order of frequency: social action/community development oriented video, medium-centred and sculptural video art activities, educational and media literacy workshops, therapeutic and psychiatric applications, sociological and anthropological uses, computer animation and music video.

The Diversity of Early Uses for the Porta-pak

By far the most common declared video usage in 1972, comprising approximately 3/4 of all the recorded listings was that of social action/community development oriented video.
It is illuminating to reflect on the descriptions that various users, both individuals and groups, gave to this type of video art practice: "social animation", "community organizing", "agitation culturelle et politique", "intercommunal video", "community documentation", "programs by, for and of the people", "global village direct democracy", "black community based workshop - special interests include programs produced by residents which address themselves to dealing with day to day survival in an oppressive environment", "exploring by community usage the possibilities of political, social, aesthetic concerns of groups left out by regular media", "community oriented free video theatre", "training low income, self-help community groups to produce programmes", "street video", "community development", "inner city community projects" and, "training in social change".

Video art activities directed toward the aesthetics of the video medium, either as medium-centred or sculptural, comprise a good 1/3 of the listings in the 1972 Video Exchange Directory (Video In, 1972). A few user descriptions will suffice to illustrate the variety of such practices: "feedback, tape delay, mylar reflections & numerous other distortion techniques", "experimental video", "sculpture events, image vortex, recycled tv", "video image synthesis", "exploration of video as an art form" and, "illuminating landscapes, recording mythologies, mirroring possibilities". At this point in video art's history, a large number of these
users also indicated that these activities were also combined with interests in community oriented video and educational and media literacy workshops.

The educational and media literacy usages tended to be organized by educational institutions such as universities, community colleges, high schools and public schools. One of the more interesting activities in this category, that several groups noted, was the provision of video equipment to young children with the expressed purpose of facilitating their understanding of media techniques in order to "vaccinate" them against mass media manipulation. As well, these groups claimed that children's creative and expressive abilities would be enhanced.

Approximately 20 individuals and groups expressed an interest in utilizing video for therapeutic and psychiatric purposes. Primarily this activity was said to be dedicated toward refining therapeutic techniques and providing feedback to therapists regarding the strategies used to aid their clients. As a professional development technique, video recording has strong merits in terms of its ability to provide users with instantaneous and comprehensive feedback. Today the therapeutic community continues to use video in its training programs. For instance, the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapists requires that all of its member practitioners have a minimum of 500 hours of videotaped practical training to facilitate evaluation by supervisory
instructors (personal communication).

Uses for Sociology and Anthropology

I was impressed to find that at least twelve individuals and groups noted that they utilized video for sociological or anthropological reasons. In my, rather biased, view I can see some tremendous benefits in using video as a data gathering technique and as a way of exploring representations of reality. I have not, however, come across any indications in the literature of sociology that such uses are in any way common practices among sociologists, even amongst members of the Visual Sociology Association, and perhaps this is a significant area of neglect in sociology. I consider it valuable to include some of the applications considered important in 1972 in the hope that such uses might be resurrected and further developed today. As I have already indicated, video artists have been very active in developing sophisticated sociological uses for video, and I believe that we have much to gain from studying their contributions to our discipline.

The sociological and anthropological users quoted in the Video Exchange Directory describe their activities in the following ways (I apologize for the length of this list, however I believe that it is very instructive and deserves documentation): Universite Lausanne, Switzerland: "videologie; sociologie; explorations, recherches, sciences sociales";
School of Architecture, Carleton University: "recording/observation of behaviors"; Institut de Sociologie des Comm. de Masse, Lausanne, Switzerland: "recherche sociologique, anthropologique; media-freaks; counter-culture technology"; International Visual Communication Associates, Tokyo, Japan: "folk culture (festivals, social customs etc.)";

UCLA Video Systems Laboratory, University of California, Los Angeles: "alternate education, urban sociology, anthropology"; Resolution, San Francisco, California: "have 20 hours with Guatemalan Indian Family, festival, markets; problems & life of highland indian struggle"; Evergreen State College, Olympia Washington: "community organization, anthropology field tool";

Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research: "social research & distribution"; Urban Communications Teaching & Research Center, Livingston College, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, N.J.: "teaching video as part of 'urban communications' major; working in community communications, environmental documentation, communications planning"; Antioch College, Baltimore Campus, Baltimore Maryland: "institutional analysis - consultation & intervention vtr models, working with social research and action faculty; making the information available so that a community can organize itself to affect the policies that effect them (eg. alternatives to methadone); community video- inner city blacks, youth group; neighbourhood groups video exchange... urban survival, women's production unit... video
conferences..."; Social Psychiatry Research Institute, New York: "video seminars in psychiatry; taped lecture demonstrations on social & psychiatric problems using material from clinical & community settings... subjects include depression, suicide, drug abuse, stresses of modern life, strategies for daily living"; Faculty of Environmental Studies, York University: "pedagogical tool; use by students/instructors to record, analyze & present materials; social animation, particularly with reference to environmental concerns".

The Seeds of Music Video

The early development of music video can also be detected within the listings in the 1972 Video Exchange Directory which includes at least four references to individuals and groups interested in combining music with video. They describe their activities as: "rock via closed circuit & cassette distribution of music & special use marketing techniques which are generally employed by the LP business"; "working with musicians who make music as images generated" and; "rock music/pop culture video productions". By 1976, music video had become an established, yet relatively minor genre of video art, with the most significant production group situated at "The Kitchen" in New York. This artist-run centre specialized in "new wave music" and was the breeding ground for music video producers such as John Sanborn (The
Residents, Sammy Hagar) and David Byrne of the Talking Heads. While these individuals were primarily concerned with exploring the potential for combining video and sound within New York's rather bizarre new wave music subculture they played a pivotal role in introducing the music industry to the potential of video images linked to popular music (interview data). In Canada, music video appears to have its roots in a late night TV Ontario production called Night Music which introduced musicians such as Nash the Slash through a combination of creative imagery and music.

Strange Uses

In compiling my categories from the 1972 Video Exchange Directory, I was left with one final residual category that is worthy of mention, if only as comic relief. I've labelled it as "other", and it serves to illustrate the often strange uses for which the medium of video is a perfect tool. For example, there is a group known as Magus Vidacon who claim to be, "a group of students of theater & the occult; we are poets, magicians, psychics, alchemists & warlocks; video is our common form of expression in search towards cosmic consciousness through the gate of the 28th dimension." Another interesting entry is from Fat Toad Productions who express a highly specific interest in, "mostly tape truck rodeos", but who are serious about, "expanding our field of interest: does anyone have any ideas about what to tape
besides truck rodeos?" My favourite, however, is a group based on Reunion Island in the Indian Ocean, known as the Centre Reunionnais de la Communication Audiovisuelle who write:

full tilt video on a far out island in the Indian Ocean; send us your tapes, & we will send you back one of ours of equal length, full of exotic flavor, freaks canadiens, on est francophones et on aimerait recevoir vos bandes.
SOCIAL ACTION OR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT VIDEO PRACTICES

Video as a Social Animator

It should be clear by this point that video art has a lineage that is strongly connected to movements for social action and change or community development. The rapid spread of the porta-pak camera and recorder unit was not connected with a counter-cultural desire to produce art in the modernist sense of that term, but was connected to the accessibility of video as a medium which could document and communicate change strategies and change tactics within many levels of the society. Early users also discovered that the process of creating video productions was an empowering process, and indeed that the process of production was often more important than the finished product.

Challenge for Change

One of the video projects that was to become a model for social change and community development video projects throughout the world was the National Film Board of Canada's Challenge For Change Program which operated from 1968 to 1974. Initially started as a film project, its coordinators quickly realized the advantages of porta-pak video units over the more cumbersome and technically sophisticated procedures of film. The mandate of the Program stated that it was designed to "improve communications, create greater understanding, promote new ideas and provoke social change" (Henaut, 1972: 3).
The first Challenge for Change project was a film entitled *Things I Cannot Change*, a film that was produced with the best intentions on the part of its director, but which reportedly had disastrous results for the people it depicted (Ibid). The film focused on the lives of a poor Montreal family and their experiences with poverty, a noble concept, however one that was to result in the public mockery of the family once the film was broadcast on television in Montreal. The coordinators of Challenge for Change realized that the traditional organization of film production, with its emphasis on control of the product being in the hands of professional film makers, was largely to blame for the problems experienced by the family:

What should have happened: the film should have been screened for the family in their apartment, with just a few of the crew around. All the response would be sympathetic and understanding. Then, with the family itself doing the inviting and deciding who should come, it could have been screened at the church or any group where the family had connections and where people could start from a friendly base to see that the family was doing something, was involved in something important... All this could have been done before the film was actually finished; then if they wanted changes you could make them. I don’t think you would have had to change a single frame, but you would have made it possible for the message to get out without embarrassing or hurting the family...

(Stoney, George as cited in Henaut, 1972: 3)

The next, more ambitious Challenge for Change project was known as the Fogo Experiment and involved a long term pilot project in "community film" on Fogo Island off the coast
of Newfoundland. The Fogo Experiment was conducted with close association with community development workers and with the people of Fogo Island who had control over some of the editing choices and who were encouraged to help decide on topics and locations. The end result was a series of films that was to aid the Islanders in understanding their resources and capabilities and which stimulated them to engage in communication with each other about common problems and tactics for change. Among other things, the films provided the catalyst that the Islanders needed to work for the establishment of a cooperative fish plant and a boat building cooperative. For the film makers the experience lead to the realization that the products represented by the films were the least relevant aspects of the Fogo Experiment: it was the community's involvement in the film making process that stimulated cooperative work for change (Ibid).

The next development in the Challenge for Change Program was the introduction of video. The film production process had some serious drawbacks that were eliminated with video, and the realization that the process was more important than the product negated the drawbacks represented by the poorer "quality" of video in comparison to 16mm film. Film required professionally trained cameramen, sound men, directors and other crew, along with bulky and expensive equipment. There was the cost of salaries, location and travel expenses and hefty lab costs for developing and synchronizing 16mm film. There was the time lapse between filming and screening on a large and heavy double-system projector.
Then another time lapse before the finished film.
(Ibid: 5)

The coordinators experimented with automated slide and sound systems, but finally settled on video as the medium of choice due to its simplicity, low cost and characteristic immediate feedback (Ibid).

The final tactic developed by the Challenge for Change Program was to eventually be adopted as one of the central tactics of the emerging counter-cultural use of porta-pak video cameras and recorders. Essentially it consisted of eliminating the "middle-man" represented by the professional film or video crew and the democratization of the production process. Video equipment was placed directly into the hands of people who would both be represented on the finished product and who would be totally responsible for creating that finished product (Ibid). Brilliant in its simplicity, but radical in its subversion of mass media professional norms and agendas, the concept of indigenously controlled community video projects was to rapidly spread throughout the world.

The prototype project for Challenge for Change’s use of video was to take place in the community of Rosedale in the Drumheller Valley in Alberta. Rosedale was a "disaffected" former mining community which had residents who lived without water, sewers or gas and who had no form of local government. Many of the residents were retired miners who lived like squatters on small pensions. During the winter of 1970 a
community development worker affiliated with Challenge for Change in a neighbouring community was approached by a small Rosedale citizen's committee which had heard about the community development worker's work with video. They asked for his support in initiating a video project and were given a porta-pak unit to take back to Rosedale.

The results were fruitful and demonstrated the value of video as a community development tool which could help to catalyze process of social change:

The first step a small group of people has to take is to reach other people in the community. So the group went out into the community with the video equipment - to customers in stores, to people in the pub and in the street - and asked them what they thought of the situation in their village: did they like having their outhouse right next to their well, did they like hauling water, did they think it was right that, in a gas-rich region, they had no gas? Answering questions for the camera got people thinking. Then the committee edited all the tapes down to a one-hour show and announced an evening of television called "Rosedale: A White Mans' Reservation?" in a local community hall. Over half the population showed up to see itself. The discussion afterward was heated and relevant. By the end of the meeting sub-committees were formed for gas, water, sewers, industrial development, recreation and community improvement. As one man said to me, "I've been playing cards with these guys for years and we didn't know what the other guy was really thinking about the place until we had to speak out for the camera."
(Henaut, 1972: 6)

Soon after the community had a weekend community cleaning bee, removing rubbish and abandoned cars, and then created a public park complete with outhouses, handmade picnic tables and
picnic stoves. The committees established at the first video meeting persisted in lobbying the provincial government until gas and water lines were installed. Small industry was thus encouraged to come into the community, the citizens obtained a fire engine and organized a building bee to construct a fire hall. By the summer of 1971, little more than a year and a half since the video project was initiated, the community had seen the opening of an upholstery shop, a small supermarket and a beer garden that was to become the social centre for the whole valley (Ibid).

The Spread of the Challenge for Change Model

The amazing success of a project with such simple beginnings lead the Challenge for Change people to promote the concept of community access video production at seminars and conferences throughout North America. It also lead to a new theoretical outlook on communication which is currently echoed by academic theorists such as Jean Baudrillard (1981) who call for media that will engage people in response rather than the one-way reception model favoured by the institution of television. In the words of Challenge for Change advocate Colin Low (cited in Henuat, 1972: 7):

What is two-way communication?
It is the dialogue essential to problem solving. It requires that the speaker and listener reverse roles... It is the opposite to power confrontation and attack because it locates and emphasizes common concerns and aspirations. By fostering self-awareness in people it promotes group awareness. The
communications media - film, videotape, community television - can accelerate and reinforce this awareness and creativity.

People must become convinced of their problem-solving capacity on a scale that is meaningful to them. This conviction arises as the result of actual experience and participation in a creative social process. For this reason the means of communication - real two-way communication - must be made accessible to ordinary people for dialogue in meaningful local debate. In this way we would generate a much more vigorous problem-solving capacity based upon local initiative and creativity.

Rediffusion on a broad scale of original and creative solutions coupled with free information accessible to all could alter positively the social and environmental situation.

In the fall of 1971, Raindance, a New York State Council for the Arts funded video organization dedicated to spreading the word about video’s uses as an agent for social change, published what would become the acknowledged bible of porta-pak users, *Guerrilla Television* (Shamberg, 1971). A tactical manual for community development and social change, the author acknowledges the leading role that Canadian programs, and especially Challenge for Change, had on like-minded groups in the U.S.: "In fact, Canada is way ahead of the United States in decentralized media, much of which is government-sponsored" (Ibid: 60). In Canada, the *Challenge for Change Newsletter*, distributed across the country to libraries as well as to organizations and individuals interested in video and film was to help spread the word about the uses of porta-paks for community development and social change.
The Ambivalence of the Manufacturers

Returning to the discussion of early video practices, it is interesting to examine the reaction of the porta-pak equipment manufacturers to the explosion of video art activities during the 1970's. Ironically, SONY, Panasonic, and Akai, the main manufacturers and distributors of the technology, remained relatively aloof from populist video practices. Only Ampex (Toshiba) apparently marketed their porta-pak units as machines for non-professional use, but were rather late in breaking into the porta-pak market.\(^1\) SONY remained the leading company in porta-pak technology and set the equipment standards for others to follow. Their advertising is indicative of the market they were seeking to service. Ads for their product depicted the porta-pak as an industrial and corporate educational tool and as a surveillance device for police and security forces (copies of ads from 1970 can be found in Shamberg, 1971). Not surprisingly, video artists with counter-culture philosophies experienced a great deal of delight in appropriating a technology designed for the "reactionary establishment" and turning that technology back on its manufacturers and establishment users.

\(^1\) "The only machine we've seen represents three prototypes travelling in North America... there simply are no production models available... they wouldn't even let us touch the thing at a demonstration which consisted of one vacuous model shooting another ratting her hair. They were too paranoid to let us shoot the scene with our SONY, which they made us keep in a closet" (Shamberg, 1971: 101)
The United Church Jumps on Neighbourhood Video Bandwagon

The porta-pak movement in Canada gained an important ally in the early 1970's in the United Church of Canada. The impetus for the United Church's involvement is unclear, however, it was one of the founding members of the Interchurch Broadcasting Group and was active in media politics through a Church committee called Mediatink which had a mandate to provide information on citizen's rights in media and cable television (Watson, 1975). Some of my informants related that the United Church may have been positively influenced by the activities a group of Toronto video artists who were loaned the basement of Toronto's "somewhat radical black sheep" (Wong, 1975: 1) Trinity Anglican Church (now virtually engulfed by the Eaton Centre) to initiate a community development video project which would eventually evolve into the artist-run centre known today as Trinity Square Video. In 1967, however, the United Church became involved in what was initially a radio and assembly based program called Town Talk in Fort William, Ontario. Town Talk was designed to assist the community in defining its needs, resources and avenues for change, and engaging the community in making change happen (Wilson, 1969).

Town Talk was very successful in creating community dialogue where little or none had previously existed, and much of the credit for this belongs to the program's efforts to train community discussion leaders in group process techniques
Town Talk was able to secure time on a local television station to broadcast some of the discussions that took place, and these broadcasts served as an important feedback mechanism that the program's directors identified as a key factor in the social animation of the community. "We saw ourselves and the problem in new perspective... it became increasingly clear how powerful a tool for social change television can be" (Wilson, 1969: 9). The United Church used Town Talk as a model and spearheaded an inter-church coalition called "Project People" to address poverty issues in Canadian communities. Integral to the model's success, in the eyes of its proponents, was the utilization of community television to provide community integration, feedback on change processes and citizen control over locally identified problems. Tapes of community television programs were seen as important community networking tools that could allow citizens in Vancouver, for instance to benefit from the experiences of citizens in Fort William or Montreal (Williams, 1969 and interview data).

One of the United Church's more successful endeavours was the funding of the Greater Montreal Anti-Poverty Coordinating Committee's (GMAPCC) Challenge for Change video project (Prinn, 1972). This organization was involved in social animation around welfare rights and what it considered to be an unjust welfare system. According to it's organizers:

video helps to equalize the bargaining power of poor people when they confront welfare and
government officials and, for once, the people have a means of controlling records of their own experiences. Tapes are also shown to people who are not yet involved in citizen's groups. They do get excited when they see other people taking on the welfare office, and discover that they don't have to be afraid of the police coming in and beating them up.

(Prinn, 1972: 15)

GMAPCC was obviously aware that Montreal's emerging cable television system was out of reach of the urban poor, and thus they invented a rather imaginative piece of appropriate technology called the Neighbourhood Television Wagon (Ibid: 14):

We just went out on the streets and started showing tapes we'd made with groups fighting for citizen's rights. Then we'd talk with people. On one street there was so much noise from the Union Carbide trucks that we couldn't hear each other. We asked if this went on all the time. "It's not just this street that has the problem," they said. We went back to talk to them another night. We went also to talk with the workers. Shortly afterward, we visited the second street. "We're showing a tape tonight that we made on the next street. Some of the people from that street are coming too." We showed our tape, and people were turned on. They wanted to have a meeting another evening, so we got together in a public meeting hall. The result was the formation of the Committee for a Safer Environment.

Upon evaluating the GMAPCC's work, the United Church became committed to the use of video in its anti-poverty campaigns and funded the GMAPCC's development of training films for grass roots organization with topics including power, politics, indigenous leadership, effective negotiating, and change tactics. A distribution mechanism other than the
Neighbourhood Television Wagon was needed to bring these tapes, and other tapes that would allow people to share community development information, to Canadians in other cities (interview data).

The Church and the Community Access Cable Channel Lobby

The United Church became one of Canada's most outspoken, and surely the most respectable, advocates of community access video and cable. The United Church quickly became the most strategic lobbyist in the affiliation of interest groups which were busy trying to influence the CRTC to mandate cable companies to provide free community access channels on their cable systems (Forbes et al, 1972). The Church's publication (in conjunction with Interchurch Broadcasting), *Opening the Closed Circuits* (Ibid), became perhaps the most important tool in the struggle to gain the community access channel mandate. They were also able to attract heavyweight media personalities such as Stanley Burke to testify on their behalf (interview data). Not only could the Church's communities benefit from the provision of access channels and related community development activities, but the Church itself could gain "television congregations" (Watson, 1975: 11) through broadcasts on community channels.

The Vancouver Experience and Community Access Channels

The introduction of community access cable television
channels was, at first, seen as a breakthrough for the video art community. In Vancouver, for instance, an organization called Intermedia, founded in 1969 (Wong, 1983), which was later to become the artist-run centre, Video In, had been set up to support the work of experimental artists. Intermedia was a thriving co-op funded by the Canada Council and in part through small grants from the Federal Liberal Government’s Manpower Local Initiatives Program (LIP), a funding source that was to have a dramatic impact on the development of video art in Canada. Video artist Paul Wong, a founding member of Vancouver’s Intermedia and Video In (1983: 8) characterizes the importance of LIP grants beautifully:

In the early seventies, a variety of funding structures and programs were set up by various levels of government and agencies to alleviate the tension of the "baby boomers" bursting into a saturated employment market. These programs, including O.F.Y (Opportunities For Youth) and L.I.P. (Local Initiatives Program) funded student employment, senior-citizen projects, community newspapers, tree-in’s, paint-in’s, research papers, day care centres, known and unknown subversive entities. The programs created a false market and a boom for social programs and cultural services; at the same time they provided important bases for development of non-static production and exhibition of art and art processes.¹

¹ The Local Initiatives Program (LIP) was also to have important influences on a variety of other art programs throughout the country, as well as sports programs, community development organizations, youth groups, and environmental groups. As I progressed through this research project and discussed my work with people outside the video art scene, I became aware that a very large number of people from the baby
By 1971, Intermedia’s work in the Vancouver area had become well known through its close affiliation with the Vancouver counter-culture. Its video work was largely oriented toward audiences interested in experimental art activities. Work from its 1970 to 1974 period consisted of documentation of performance pieces (eg., Randy Reality, 1974, Gerry Gilbert: Video In Archive), documentation of art gurus (eg. William Boroughs Reading, 1974, Paul Wong, Glen Lewis: Video In Archive), video graphics (eg. Videographics - Selected Works, 1972-1974, 1974, A. Razutis: Video In Archive), ‘pure’ video art work such as early work by General Idea, and video pieces directly related to counter-cultural activities (eg. Extraction, 1972, Mark Keniziorick and Doug Chadwick: Video In Archive, a video which is essentially a laboratory style lecture on how to set up a THC or hash oil producing extractor).

Intermedia members had found that their equipment and boom generation were in some way touched by LIP during the 1970’s, and that many organizations that are in operation today have roots that were initially nourished with LIP funding. I am not aware of any sociological research which has dealt with this important program, and it is clear to me that such research would be fascinating and rewarding. LIP grants, I believe, rarely surpassed the $1500 level, yet they probably had more impact on the lives of Canadians than the vast majority of job creation schemes designed by any Federal Government. At the same time LIP was probably instrumental in channelling counter-culture energy that might have proved disruptive to the Federal Government. LIP would thus make an interesting case study of hegemonic struggle. LIP was designed, in part, by Jacques Hebert, the Liberal M.P. and later Senator who was also responsible for such creative youth oriented projects as Katimavik.
experience was in demand by groups and individuals ready to adopt the Challenge for Change model of video and community development, so in 1971 they applied for and received funding to create a separate organization called the Metro Media Association of Greater Vancouver. "We needed an organization that could act as a community service agency. Intermedia could not fulfill this role and still maintain its focus of activity in artist experimentation with video" (Nemtin, 1972: 12). This separation of activities foreshadowed the continuing debates within the video art community around the issue of what constitutes "art". At the time, however, the availability of a foundation grant to support a separate organization, and the limited money available to support Intermedia which was funded through the Canada Council as an arts organization, were probably more important factors in Metro Media's establishment as a separate entity (interview data). As will be seen later, such funding tactics continue to play a large role in video artists' choices of video art practices today.

Metro Media used video both to create video productions and to engage in the animation processes that had worked so well for Challenge for Change. Their work involved networking with "groups involved in welfare rights, housing and tenants' rights, pre-school and day care, labour issues, consumerism, youth, women, mental health, education, community medicine, native rights, art, ethnic groups and immigrants,
senior citizens, ecology, transportation, and recreation" (Nemtin, 1972: 12). One of the goals of Metro Media was to set up neighbourhood media facilities in order to decentralize its services and make media tools more accessible to the communities it served.

Both Metro Media and Intermedia were initially attracted to the provision of community channel facilities to air their work and to provide further equipment resources. The match between these two groups and the philosophy of a community access channel would seem to be closely matched, however it soon became apparent that the Premier Cable Company in Vancouver felt differently. The cable company retained control and administration of its equipment and studio and saw its community role not on the basis of the Challenge for Change model, but on the network television model.

"Quality" as a Gatekeeper

Essentially, the cable company wanted "quality", professionally styled programming and was ready to provide this programming through a small staff of professionally trained television technicians and the assistance of community volunteers who would host talk show style programs or who would "pull cable". They were aided in this paternalistic stance by the CRTC's insistence on a 400 line television image, which could only be obtained with 1 inch or 2 inch videotape, which was largely non-portable equipment, not the
1/2 porta-pak equipment available to Metro Media (this regulation existed despite the fact that a handful of community access channels located in smaller communities were in fact successfully broadcasting 1/2 inch tape which had been transferred to and edited on 1 inch equipment (Hannah and Henaut, 1972)). Metro Media's style of production, which normally included videos produced by non-professionals complete with all the "glitches" that entailed, combined with equipment choices that were not "broadcast quality", and a populist, social change stance, was not strictly compatible with the profit hungry cable companies. The cable companies had realized, along with CRTC Chairman, Pierre Juneau, that cable was "a licence to print money", and their only interest in community access channels was as a way to disguise their profit motivation with a community service veneer (Richardson, 1988).

Cable Company Paternalism

This pattern of cable company paternalism toward community video would be, and still is, repeated over and over again in communities across Canada, North America and Europe. Initially, community based social change organizations and churches such as the United Church were instrumental in aiding Canadian cable companies in their early efforts to obtain licensing status against the arguments of Canadian broadcasters who (rightly) feared the influx of American
programming. The ability of the cable companies to provide citizens with cheap access to media structures was appealing to the CRTC’s rhetoricians who saw community access channels as a way to show the Canadian public that their best interests were at heart. If the Canadian broadcasters and Canadian communities feared a loss of Canadian content programming with the introduction of cable, the community access channel was supposed to assuage those fears. The community organizations which had supported the cable companies soon found, however, that the promise of democratic community media was very low on the agenda of cable companies (Richardson, 1988).

One early community channel activist described his experiences with community access channels during the first years of the 1970’s as follows:

You went over to the cable company, say you wanted to do a program and you lived in that area... so you went across to the community channel and there would be a sign on the door and it would say so and so cable company or whoever owned the licence at that point, and there would be a little note: ‘Hours... if you would like to do a program, contact the following telephone number.’ You’d phone the phone number and it would be a student at Ryerson who was being paid a residual on every program they produced on behalf of the company. So you phoned the student at Ryerson and he’d say, ‘O.k., I’ll be right down to the office. Wait there or I’ll see you there tomorrow morning and we’ll make your program.’ So he’d open the door, there was no receptionist there, there was no nothing... he’d open the door and it’d be a clothes cupboard... and in that clothes cupboard was porta-pak equipment and that was called community access... You made your program, you then took it to the cable end and they would play it on a channel for you.
That was called community programming."

Indicative of the problems of having a democratic access system established at a corporately owned cable company, even the first community access channel experiment ran into conflict with the owning company (Hannah and Henaut, 1972). In this case, the locally owned cable company in Thunder Bay, Ontario had actively encouraged the establishment of a community board which would oversee the activities of the community channel, with the cable company simply supplying equipment and air time. The initial model had encouraging results until the cable operator was approached to sell his operation to McLean Hunter Ltd. The community board opposed the sale at a CRTC hearing on the basis that ownership would be more responsible to the community if ownership was based in the community. The CRTC ruled in favour of McLean Hunter Ltd., which then set out to systematically remove the power of the democratically structured community board, eventually denying the board access to broadcast its flagship program (Ibid).

The only community access channels that have managed to maintain and develop the democratic community board model to oversee the community access channel within English Canada have been co-operatively owned and operated cable companies such as the Campbell River TV Association in British Columbia (Goldberg, 1990). In Quebec, the Regroupement des Organismes Communautaires de Communication du Quebec (ROCCQ), an
organization of democratically structured community access
television associations has successfully established community
ing control over corporately owned and financed cable channels and
is seen as a model for putting video technology into the hands
of citizens (Ibid). In the rest of Canada final control and
authority over community access channel rests with the owning
cable company. "Decisions on station content, policy,
philosophy and practice are almost always made by cable
company staff hired to run the channel. In some cases these
decisions are made by company management, which may be located
in corporate head offices, hundreds of miles away" (Ibid: 30).

Kim Goldberg (1990) in her thorough analysis of
community access channels in Canada, The Barefoot Channel:
Community Television as a Tool for Social Change, notes that
community access channels experienced much greater community
participation during the early 1970's than they do today. In
1972, she claims that 75% of programming was "produced
primarily or totally by community members with little or no
technical assistance from cable staff", but that by 1978 this
had dropped to 44% (Ibid: 18). A study conducted by the
Canadian Council on Social Development from 1977 (Chapin and
Stirling, 1977: 46) stated:

While cablevision's potential as a community
media [sic] may be vast, the reality is that
most cable stations operate under commercial
auspices and provide only limited access to
the community... Local groups and
organizations wishing to use cable facilities
have found that they have little control over
program direction and almost no opportunity
to participate in the technical aspects of video production. Many are questioning whether the effort is worthwhile... As a result of this experience, the initial enthusiasm with cablevision has waned considerably.

Some, such as the cable company managers, programming staff and even the CRTC considered the move away from citizen control over community channels to be beneficial to community channels because of the "improvement" in the products aired. Goldberg (1990: 31-32) quotes CRTC Chairman John Meisal, comparing early community programming to more recent programming:

It... looked as if it (early programming) had been shot through a piece of gauze, fixed across the lens of an 8mm camera held unsteadily by someone in the throes of a hangover. Most characters appearing on the screens were awkward and gawky, both embarrassed and embarrassing. Now most community programs are so good one can't tell them apart from "regular" broadcasts.

Of course, Meisal was correct, however the reason for this change in "quality" was the fact that control over programming had moved from the hands of non-professional citizens into the hands of professionally trained programmers with their volunteer staffs of "teenagers hoping to use the community channel to get jobs at real television stations" (interviewee). Meisal was conveniently ignoring the quote which appeared on Dorothy Forbes' (a member of the Interchurch Broadcasting Group) 1972 manifesto on community access television, Community Television: An Opportunity (Forbes, 1972: i) which stated:
The worst thing that could happen to community television is that it would become indistinguishable from conventional television.

Video Artists' Disenchantment with Cable Channels

Over the twenty year period from 1970 to 1990, and continuing today, groups such as Metro Media and Video In would continually lobby the federal government for "real" community access to community channels. During those years, however, the impetus, the resources and the desire to establish a participatory style of community access would slowly wane, and be all but forgotten (to the relief of cable companies which pretend that it never happened). The vast majority of video artists have either completely given up on the possibility of working with community channels, or are not even aware that such a possibility could exist for a video artist. Two issues are the cause for this situation: paternalistic, non-democratic control and the fact that:

Community Television does not assist in the creation of a viable industry that would generate revenue for independent producers. It pays no fees for programs.
(Wong, 1983: 9)

Veteran video artists that I discussed the cable situation with tended to feel that they had been poorly treated by cable companies especially in the area of funding for productions. Video artists had to develop sources of funding within the art world, even though much of their work involved content that dealt with the local communities that community access channels were supposed to support with access
to production.

The Canada Council had a rule that it wouldn’t directly fund cable productions... the cable companies never provide any money for this stuff [video art], and you are really lucky if you can just get the equipment out of them... The other thing which they don’t really encourage, and this is the big surprise for me, is community action video. I can understand not providing support for video art, particularly because the funding agencies had started to develop funding for it, and in the mid-70’s people were starting to get video grants, but they did not provide any support for more community action kind of work that would have been the stuff that, theoretically would have been the resting place for this kind of stuff... It is such a put through to work through cable. It doesn’t keep producers, it doesn’t build and develop skills, there is no sort of spirit of say video investigative reporting... That is a tremendous loss of energy and a waste of all those talents because a lot of people are really interested in that kind of thing, but we really haven’t had the opportunity to develop that. That is the missing link, and it was missing early on.

(Interviewee)

The struggle to obtain community control over community channels is well and bitterly documented in Herschel Hardin’s (1985) Closed Circuits: The Sellout of Canadian Television. This book which focuses particularly on the efforts of the Vancouver Community Television Association (an umbrella organization of 300 individuals and 70 community groups (Synth, 1980)) to obtain community control of the community channel both through lobbying efforts and through a well organized attempt to purchase the Premier Cable Company’s CRTC licence through a cooperative venture that would have
given the community control over the community channel and ownership of the cable company itself.

The Problem of "Buying Into" Cable Company Agendas

With the failure of the community channel avenue, video artists interested in using video for community development or social change purposes had little choice but to look for other avenues for equipment and funding. The alternative was to "buy into" the cable company agenda and produce "boring talking heads videos" (interviewee). There are some exceptions to this point, however. In Toronto, video artist Michael Balsar is producing a series of programs for Rogers Cable dealing with AIDS. These programs mix interviews and studio segments with video art produced by veteran video artists such as Balser himself, John Greyson and Richard Fung. Rogers Cable, in an unusual move for a cablecaster, has provided funding, in the range of $10,000 per artist, through which video artists have been commissioned to produce work (interview data). A video artist involved in this program admitted to me that he had to "adapt to the constraints of mainstream television... because we want to keep [the program manager] on our side". In the past, video artists have created some very explicit pieces dealing with homosexual life styles, and have run into reactionary problems with censor boards and most notoriously, Canada Customs inspectors (interview data). The person quoted above explained that the
artists involved in the AIDS program had to "tone down" their work because to do otherwise would be to risk the cancellation of a program that many felt was an extremely important program in terms of social awareness as well as dialogue within the populations most severely affected by AIDS.

Another exception occurred in 1981. There was a short-lived video art program which circulated tapes for broadcast in Halifax, Montreal, Guelph, Calgary, Vancouver and Victoria, however a combination of problems with cable company staff, a complete disregard for artist remuneration on the part of the cable companies involved, and disputes over copyright caused the program's demise (interview data). The copyright issue is an interesting example of cable company policy working against community production, because all productions produced using a cable companies equipment remain the sole property of the cable company, not the individual community producers. Community producers are legally not permitted to distribute or present a production without the explicit permission of the cable company.

Cable Companies' Preferences for Broadcast Television Form

Both video artists and community channel volunteers do not naturally subscribe to the visual languages of broadcast television which the cable companies consider to be the only "normal" forms for broadcast. In the case of community channel volunteers, they can be trained by cable company staff
to mimic the forms of mainstream television (Richardson, 1989b). In the case of video artists, they tend to react against formulaic television languages. From my discussions with cable television programmers, I learned that there seems to be a complete lack of understanding on their part as to why someone would want to disrupt or change the television languages they take for granted. Thus, video artists also have to face the gulf that separates unconventional video practices from the conventional practices of mainstream television, a gulf that most deem extremely difficult to cross (interview data).

I am reminded here of a quote from Karl Marx which would seem to characterize the difference between the television forms favoured by cable companies and the more experimental forms favoured by video artists:

*The style is the man.* And how! The law allows me to write, but on the condition that I write in a style other than my own... I am a humorist, but the law orders me to write seriously. I am bold, but the law orders my style to be modest. Grey and more grey, that is the only authorized colour of freedom.

(Marx, Karl as cited in Ward, 1985: 151)

By and large, collaborations between video artists and community channels have remained the exception rather than the rule.

On other fronts, there have been efforts by groups interested in receiving state funding for community development or social change video projects, groups which have not labeled themselves as video artists. Unfortunately they
have not found success in their endeavours because the reaction from funding sources has been to look with scepticism on proposals to set up new video projects which would be community development oriented, because, "after all, that's what the community channels were supposed to be for, and they couldn't understand the need to fund what they saw as a duplicate community channel" (interviewee). The Challenge for Change Project has also mysteriously disappeared from the video scene leaving a gap that has never been adequately filled.¹

Where There is Funding, There is Video Art

People interested in using video for social action or community development found themselves looking toward the video art community which had managed to find a unique and sustainable niche within the Canadian art world. By the 1980's, the video artists who were interested in "pure" video art had secured relatively stable funding from the Canada Council and Provincial arts councils because they were considered to be making "art", not video for community

¹ I have not succeeded in discovering the reasons for this disappearance, despite repeated requests, over four years, for information from the National Film Board of Canada, the Federal organization of which Challenge for Change was a part. I have been added to their subscription list to their newsletter for libraries and media resource centres, The NFB Community Network: A Newsletter About Film and Video, three separate times, and look forward to receiving my three newsletters twice each year. I am still waiting for someone to read and reply to one of my letters. Perhaps this is a clue to Challenge for Change's demise?
development or social change. These video artists had also, in conjunction with other artist organizations, lobbied for and received recognition of the fact that their works deserved showing fees when exhibited by galleries, and equitable purchase prices when bought by galleries. They had also succeeded in establishing a critical discourse on video art that gave video art the air of legitimacy it needed to enter into the gallery sphere.

Anyone interested in creating video around community development or social change and receiving funding and obtaining a distribution mechanism and gaining access to appropriate production facilities had no choice but to either make their work conform to the emerging norms of "pure" video art, or to join with the video art community and work to change the definitions of what was considered as video art. Until the 1980's the term video art remained a term that was only bestowed upon work with a sculptural basis or work with a clear medium-centred basis. During the 1980's however, a trend toward applying the label "video art" to work with a distinct flavour of social activism or community development began to emerge.

"Pure" Forms of Video Art and Issue Oriented Video Art

Women, more than any other demographic group were responsible for this shift in the video art scene, however gays, lesbians, native Canadians and ethnic and visible
minorities also participated. In 1973, for instance, a typical description of a work of video art was similar to this description of Eric Cameron's piece, Insertion, 1973 (Baert, 1986: 6):

Holding the camera in his hands, Cameron swings back and forth into the lens, in a direct interaction with the technology. In the continuous series of movements, his opening mouth seeks to literally swallow, embody, the lens. The camera imprints his action through the simultaneous recording of the actin, but Cameron too leaves an imprint on the camera, through the spittle which accumulates on the lens and distorts the camera's view.

In 1980, there were substantially more video art works which were dealing explicitly with issues of gender, sexuality, racism, ethnic identity, the environment, social change, native issues and international issues to name a few. To illustrate, by comparison, here is a description of Teri Chmilar's work, Nellies, 1980 (Reinhardt, 1990: 3^):

Nellies is a hostel in Toronto that always has room for someone in need of temporary shelter. This tape documents a few days in the lives of a variety of women, from teenagers to pensioners, who are running away from their homes or husbands, avoiding alcohol or drugs, and who find brief security within the communal surroundings of the shelter.

Video art continues to have a distinct lineage rooted in experiments such as the Challenge for Change Project, yet the "realist" nature of early social action or community development videos has, over time, been developed into various hybrids of aesthetic forms. One of the reasons that I believe
that such hybrids have developed is because of video arts' continual opposition to and deconstruction of the languages of mainstream television. Subversion of mainstream television is certainly a dominant theme within the social world of video artists. There are, as well, other reasons for the development of aesthetic changes in videos which have content surrounding issues of social action or community development, and these will be dealt with in greater detail in the sections to follow.

Video Art and McLuhan

There is one final aspect of video's uses for social action and community development that is necessary to address, and that is the use of video to create an idealistic form of information exchange. During the early 1970's, video artists were very much under the influence of Marshall McLuhan's work, particularly in Canada. Video artists envisioned themselves as being at the forefront of "the Global Village" (McLuhan, 1962) through the innovative use of a "cool medium" (McLuhan, 1964): video. Video artists were extremely attracted to McLuhan's thesis that video, in being a "cool medium", is a "spectacular electric extension of our central nervous system" (Ibid: 275); a medium through which "the viewer is involved and participant" (Ibid: 277) and a medium which aids in the integration of world communications (McLuhan, 1962).

The emergence of Intermedia's International Video
Exchange Directory (Video In, 1971) is directly related to McLuhanesque ideals. Michael Goldberg, one of the founders of Intermedia and the International Video Exchange Directory coined the term "matrix" to describe the goals of Intermedia's work involving the global exchange of video tapes (Goldberg, 1973):

...the title, "Matrix". Without looking it up in the dictionary, the sense I get is that of a mesh, a variety of scattered points that inter-related dynamically, in a spheroid rather than pyramidal pattern. It implies flexibility or randomness, like a telephone exchange, W.W. II searchlights over London, Ham Radio, or Geodesic Domes; if some of the lines are cut, the system can still function as a whole.

The function of a matrix system, as distinct from other networks, lies in its essential diffusion. It would be very easy, and to a lesser extent it is inevitable, for certain groups to assume major responsibilities in the growth of new communications patterns. If, however, they get caught up in the power that this offers, then small-format video will become an extension of the worst values of the present structure of television and the society it reflects. We can contribute to changing the social consciousness only if we are susceptible to change ourselves. If we establish certain groups or individuals around the world as mailing addresses, centres of contact, tape accumulation and dissemination, etc., then we are merely setting up a new information elite, easily rendered ineffective in a crisis.

This statement, very much influenced by McLuhan's ideas about information exchange and human interaction is representative of a strong theme in early video discourse. It is, of course, also representative of ideological expressions of the counterculture of the period and the place that video held as the
counter-culture's favoured medium:

My recollections of early, early days? Lots of exchange... people just coming through town because they knew about A Space [an artist-run centre in Toronto] and it was just kind of an interesting place to be, and they would say, "Oh yah, I have these video tapes from Poland," and I saw some really interesting work from Eastern Europe in the early seventies that was amazing! And stuff from the States... and you know, it was the end of the whole hippie era, and there was a lot of driving around in vans and documentation of stuff, so it was fantastic to see.
(Interviewee)

Ironically, despite McLuhan's rhetorical style, and despite the romanticism for the late 1960's and early 1970's, I have found that there are some interesting grains of truth in respect to the concept of video being a participatory medium as well as being a vehicle for the exchange of information within and across communities, however my observations have lead me to believe that it is the processes of producing and the processes of creating audiences rather than the content of video art productions that results in these characteristics. This will be covered in more detail in later sections.

Free Exchange and its Problems

The idea of free exchange of videotapes was not one that held sway for very long. The problem that video artists faced was that video production required time and money, and free exchange was not seen as a sustainable way to remain a viable producer. The capitalist socio-economic milieu favours
the use of video for slick productions which benefit the institution of television rather than for grassroots productions which might benefit community based activities. It is thus understandable that video artists have experienced difficulty in adapting an equitable form of exchange to an environment that thrives on inequitable exchange:

One of the important conceptual things which happened in the early days, which I still think is important to remember, even though the attitude has changed, had to do with the potential for information exchange... that was outside of an ordinary kind of commodity exchange. The problem with it in its long term was that... the system couldn’t support the activity. You know, if there were lots of places where people could make the work for free or really cheap, or if the work remained at a really simple level, if the technology had remained really simple like it was to start with, I think this idea would have been very hard to pry out because it agreed so much with a lot of what we were thinking about then. But, it couldn’t go on because people couldn’t afford to do the work, and they couldn’t get a possible return on it.

(Interviewee)

Despite this, the idea of free exchange and the idea of a participatory process surrounding video production, distribution and viewing remains an important ideological legacy in understanding the development of current video art work.

Community Development Video and the Developing World

Before closing this section, it should be noted that the video models represented by experiments such as Challenge
for Change and other early video artist activists have found very fertile soil outside of the North American or European context. By 1980, non-broadcast video production dedicated to social change through community development had spread throughout the developing world, with the assistance of the Village Video Network, an organization which spread small format video equipment to rural communities and facilitated the exchange of video tapes between rural villagers in countries such as China, Egypt, Mali, Antigua, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Indonesia, India, Jamaica and Guyana (Hobson, 1986). The purpose of this activity, called "self-documentary video" by its proponents is to provide villagers with a tool which focuses community energy toward understanding local problems, local resources and local strategies for change:

Most development communication is intended to tell people what to do. It represents the effort of people in power to instruct, direct or otherwise control the activities of the people who are the "targets" of development... Self-documentary video is a tool which can encourage choice rather than impose remedies from outside. It captures the process that leads to decisions as well as the decisions themselves. It invites others to consider themselves as potential collaborators. There is much greater equality between producers and the consumers of the information than when communication is an official act. The strength of this approach is in allowing a multi-directional sharing of experiences that can be expected to produce different outcomes in different settings.
(Stuart, 1987: 1)

The experiences and analyses of organizations such as the Village Video Network are extremely articulate regarding
the interactive processes which non-commercial video productions facilitate. I have found that the publications and papers from such groups have provided me with several hypotheses with which to analyze video artists practising within the developed world. In particular, my focus on the importance of the social experiences of video artists, rather than on a limited analysis of the content of video art productions, owes a great deal to the ideas propagated by authors such as Sara Stuart (1987; 1989) from Martha Stuart Communications the organization responsible for developing the Village Video Network.

It is also interesting to note that video productions from producers within developing countries have circled back, so to speak, and that video art festivals such as the Images festival, held yearly in Toronto, feature many works from video artists in developing countries. Many of these video artists produce works that are provocative and have strong statements concerning social action and community development. For example, in Brazil, a vibrant video art community produces videos which combine interesting visual techniques with content that speaks to issues of racism, gender, and poverty. AXE by Maria-Angelica Lemos, 1988, is a case in point:

Axe: Peace, Energy, Light; a greeting used by Black people in Brazil. Through interviews, stories, poetic texts and reportage, AXE offers an in-depth look at the position of Blacks in Brazilian society. Revealing the scars of slavery and rampant racism, this film is also a celebration of African roots and Black culture.
(Northern Visions, 1990: 40)

Video work such as this has had an impact in reminding members of the Canadian video art community of its roots in movements for social action and community development.
SCULPTURAL VIDEO ART PRACTICES

Playing With Time and Space

The second video art lineage that I have identified is that of sculptural productions. Essentially these works are designed to explore, play with and push the boundaries of the medium of video, not so much in the relatively concrete form of a work on tape, but within the spatial and temporal contexts involved in producing and viewing images. This is a difficult concept to explain on a printed page, however with sufficient excerpts of artists' descriptions of their own works, I hope to be able to convey my impressions of this work while still doing justice to the intentions of the artists who create such work. Categorizing video art is a notoriously difficult and often disdained task among video artists. The category that I have titled sculptural includes two sometimes distinct and sometimes intertwined forms of video art: what is now referred to as video installation, and the use of video equipment and video images in performance art.

The difficulty in categorizing this type of video art can be seen from this attempt by video artist David Ross in 1976 (Ross, 1976: 84-86):

The notions of a dematerialized art that united a highly diverse group of sculptors, dancers, poets, painters, and documentarians in eclectic multi-media investigations into the nature of art, seem to have jelled into a set of activities called (fairly ineffectively) video art. Within this set, the creation of videotapes accounts for a great deal of the activity, although it is important to note that many important video
works involve the sculptural manipulation of complete television systems from production to broadcasting... these seemingly clear-cut distinctions are, unfortunately, significantly blurred by the fact that many works contain elements of more than one category, with economic and other contingencies determining the nature of any particular presentation.

An interviewee discussed his concept of sculptural work in this way:

[Sculptural work] moves from simple installations like mounting the televisions on the ceiling and having the chairs on the floor and you know, looking up... just things to change people's orientations towards space, towards objects, towards television, towards themselves... I mean one very early video piece that I saw was a pile of sand and a video tape showing a person making a pyramid out of a pile of sand, you know, sort of a process piece... which is real sculptural...

The Institution of Television as Background Noise

Again, in looking back to the origins of what I have termed sculptural work, we start with the work of Nam June Paik. Paik's early work involving the physical manipulations of television images by placing various objects such as magnets on a television set was not only an attempt at image synthesis but was also a way of integrating a concrete household appliance/video technology into an artistic context. Accordingly, these early pieces called attention to the presence of television within culture and cultural conditions of production and consumption or viewing. Indeed, this is the most common theme, whether intended or unintended of much of
the work that could be considered sculptural, primarily because the institution of television has had such a limiting effect on the cultural parameters of the use of video technology. Many video artists wish to deny this factor and insist that their work in video simply involves yet another technology not unlike canvas, but with different properties. Others make the issue of the institution of television a primary consideration in their work. Regardless of either intention, both uses of video inevitably and almost inescapably involve discussions of the institution of television, whether denial or celebration, in critical discourse on the work:

...it is important to remember that the physiological phenomena of television viewing plays a significant role in determining the relationship between the viewer and the work. The sociological implications of a medium designed and developed for casual home-oriented serendipitous access are in a way perverted when videotapes are shown in a public gallery space. While these sociological and psychological factors are only rarely the subject of artistic inquiry into the medium, they often bear heavily upon the artist's primary intention. This nearly inescapable distortion of intention must be acknowledged and suffered, as the ideal situation for viewing artists' videotapes is yet to come.

(Ross, 1976: 87)

One of the more infamous works that can be placed in the sculptural category is Media Burn, performed in 1971, by Chip Lord, Doug Michels, Curtis Schreier all members of a video collective known as Ant Farm (Lord et al., 1976). A 1959 Cadillac convertible was modified into a futuristic
prototype car called the Phantom Dream Car. In front of 500
person outdoor audience, on July the 4th, 1971, the artists
had a look-alike John Kennedy arrive to the performance via
limousine and read the following speech:

Mass-media monopolies control people by their
control of information... Who can deny that
we are a nation addicted to television and
the constant flow of media? Now I ask you,
your fellow Americans, haven't you ever wanted
to put your foot through your television
screen?
(Ibid: 18)

This was followed by a twelve minute check-list and countdown
before the Phantom Dream Car sped up to 55 miles per hour and
crashed through a pyramid of forty-two TV sets that had been
soaked in kerosene and set on fire. The entire event was
recorded with a porta-pak camera and recording deck mounted
inside the car (Lord, et al., 1976). In the video art world
this would be called a performance piece.

Representative of video works which encouraged the
interaction of the audience with the technology is Susan
Milano's The Video Swing (Milano, 1976). This piece consisted
of a rope swing, which when used, would pass parallel to three
video cameras. Each camera was connected to one of three
sequential monitors mounted in the direction of the swinger's
legs. The swinger would be able to swing while watching his
or her form pass through the three monitors. In the video art
world this would be called an installation piece.
The Lineage of Canadian Sculptural Video Art

Canadian video artists have a rich history of sculptural video work. In the early 1970’s two creative centres for sculptural video art practice were developed: one at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (NSCAD) and one at the University of Guelph’s Fine Art Department (Easterbrook, 1975)¹. In both centres the impetus for the development of a video curriculum came from a core group of young artist-instructors who were able to attract a cadre of student disciples (interview data). These student disciples had an important role in legitimizing video art within the larger Canadian art world, as several went on to become very visible within both the established social world of art and within the social world of video art.

At both centres, the influence of aesthetic theories of art and previous artistic movements seems to have had a greater impact on the artists’ uses of video technology than the influence of the institution of television or any concern with using video as a tool for social action or community development. Here we can see the role that larger art discourses have had on the social development of video art practices. Within a school of art it is no doubt important to

¹ This is not to say that video art was not proliferating at other art schools in Canada. Sir Sanford Fleming, York University, the Ontario College of Art and other schools were also integrating video art into the curriculum, however at Guelph and NSCAD video art appears to have become something of a movement during the early 1970’s.
legitimize artistic practices by placing them on a foundation of previous practices and theoretical or critical discourses, or at least making reference to past discourses in the effort to establish the fact that a new discourse represents an artistic improvement or even an artistic revolution. Failure to adhere to established discourses is not in itself a dangerous practice, however in breaking from artistic traditions it is important to incorporate a critique of those traditions within a legitimizing discourse. This discourse may be created by the artist or it may be created from within an artistic community. The failure of a development of such a discourse may result in marginalization, loss of status, slow movement toward tenure, being passed over by granting bodies or even ridicule.

Whereas at Intermedia in Vancouver, there was an explicit avoidance of traditional artistic discourse (interview data), at Guelph and NSCAD there was an emphasis on developing a "critical" discourse which was explicitly connected to the larger art world, and rigorously documenting artistic productions to aid in the maintenance of such discourse. At Intermedia (later Video In), video artists were attempting to develop a discourse that would be created from within the video community rather than from without by art critics or previous discourses: "without any 'artspeak'" (interviewee). At Intermedia, this permitted a great deal of flexibility in terms of content, production style,
distribution, performance and display. "Political" videos were said to be as valid as "artistic" videos.

The Development of "Artspeak"

At Guelph and NSCAD it was common to have exhibitions and course rationales backed up by strongly rationalized theoretical discourse: "artspeak". For example, the following is an interesting piece of prose written by video artist and Guelph instructor (at the time of the piece's writing), Eric Cameron (1974: 4-6) in which the author examines a video art work that references a previous work by another video artist, and then weaves an argument in artspeak that points to theoretical developments that logically claim the disappearance of a necessity for art objects. The irony in the piece is that it unintentionally implies the necessity for art criticism and theory to thrive over and above art objects in order for art to be seen as art:

The history of twentieth century art -- which is to say, the entire history of art as "art", is one of spiralling regression into the infrastructure of pre-supposition of previous art. At each stage the shift appears to reveal a necessary base beneath the formality of evidently arbitrary content, but the move as it is accomplished serves only to expose the arbitrariness of infrastructure when divorced from the superstructure it sustained... Art is only saved from disappearing altogether by the fact that criteria of "less" are as relative as criteria of "more"... Art in the twentieth century has behaved as if in quest of its own essential nature, and has come into line with twentieth century thought in general only through the recurring relativity of its own
success and the discrediting by example of the doctrine of essentialism itself.

Space and Time

The sculptural usage of video is said to be based on the use of space and the use of time. Because the video camera and monitor have the ability to be placed at a distance from one another, even in separate rooms or separate countries, video is a tool that can be used to play with spatial concepts that might be common to sculpture or architecture. As well, video is, in the terminology of video artists, a "time-based art". A painting can be placed on a wall and will always present the same image to the audience, while a video on a monitor unfolds over time. Thus the "work" of video art cannot be appreciated without viewing it over the full duration of its planned length. Video technology is also capable of shaping the time durations of images recorded in "real-time". The possible variations of space and time relationships using video is infinite, and this fact has provided video artists with an endless source of innovation.

Dan Graham's work at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design is indicative of the style of video art that can be generated through variations on space and time relationships (Graham, 1979). Graham was interested in audience responses to various spatial arrangements of video cameras, and monitor situations as well as responses to video feedback which often incorporated time delays. The following description of his
The audience sees itself live on monitor 1. Simultaneously it could be seeing a replay on monitor 2 of its behaviour from 8 seconds earlier. The performer's verbalization is heard by the audience to coincide with its delayed monitor view. As the performer verbally projects the audience's future, he is actually predicting a line of development beginning from a point 8 seconds before the present...

The Sculptural Form as a Trojan Horse

During my period data collection I learned that sculptural video art is not as predominant as video art made on videotape for playback on monitors in front of an audience. In the museums and galleries which represent the traditional art world (and the source of much of the legitimation attached to art works), however, there is a pronounced use of sculptural video art over tape-based video art. According to several of the people interviewed, this was related to the difficulties that museums and galleries expressed in dealing with an art form that did not have a concrete existence as an object. My informants related that sculptural pieces had much better chances of breaking into the larger art world that is normally inhabited by tangible objects such as paintings or

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1 Graham's description is accompanied by diagrams which help to illustrate his words, however, I was unable to establish copyright clearance in order to reprint the diagrams. The description does, however, fulfill the purpose of capturing the nature of his work.
sculptures. Many sculptural pieces might contain monitors which play-back works of video art that could also be played-back with a monitor alone. As one interviewee candidly confided, the sculptural piece that he was working on for a gallery installation was "a Trojan Horse" that would allow him to break into the gallery context and establish his name as a video artist. Thus, the sculptural work embodies potential status and economic factors that might evade tape-based video art.

At the gallery located in the city where Video Place (my primary research site) was situated, the curators had seldom included tape-based works in their exhibitions, and had never purchased any tape-based works for their collections. However, this gallery had participated in installation projects by video artists who put their work in a sculptural form. This was a constant "bone of contention" with the video artists at Video Place who understandably felt undermined by the "art establishment" represented by the gallery. Only toward the end of my research with Video Place did this gallery attempt a series of lectures and showings which were designed to contextualize video art, and even at this point, there was a recognition of some of the stars of the video art world, but little recognition of the practising video artists within the city occupied by the gallery. The legitimacy that such a gallery can bestow upon artistic traditions or individual artists is enormous, and the power invested in
gallery curators can open and close careers.

Mixed Media, Mixed Discourses

Sculptural video art was also a style that developed with a great deal of influence from artists who had traditionally worked in other media and who saw video as a new medium with which to experiment. As a sculptor might work with marble and then switch to fibreglass as a medium, many artists whose work was associated other media moved to video. In doing so, they brought with them bodies of artistic discourse associated with their previous media, and often used the discourse of a medium such as paint to interpret their works in video:

A lot of the early video artists were coming out of other media too... you know, they were grappling... painters working with painting and other media, and they were thinking, "I want to take it further", and moving into video as a result... Now, people who are growing up now, or coming into video now, often don't realize that video was an unusual offshoot of other media, [one] that was providing other possibilities that you couldn't get anywhere else... a lot of people who are working in video art now are working as though it were a standard medium, as normal as painting and sculpture... and they are not... you know, there is this sort of irony...

(interviewee)

Thus, sculptural video art has helped to transfer and maintain discourses associated with the larger art world, while also transferring some of the traditional social contexts of art production, distribution, exchange and viewing.
REPRESENTATIONAL VIDEO ART

Introduction

Current video art practices can be understood to be a hybrid of the lineages of social action or community development practices and sculptural practices. The former lineage has left a legacy of interest in struggles against dominant interests, while the latter lineage has left a legacy of interest in aesthetic theory and art discourses. Together these lineages have helped to form a hybrid of video art practices that I term "representational" video art, a hybrid that I believe successfully characterizes much of current practice.

Philip Monk (1988: 19) has coined the phrase "struggles with the image" to characterize some current art practices, and I believe that the phrase aptly describes the factors at work among contemporary video artists. Many video artists have discovered that, as members of different subcultures or ethnic groups or as people who experience gender in non-male, non-heterosexual manners, their voices are not heard and their eyes do not come into contact with images that represent their experiences and identities. Their struggles with the image incorporate both struggles against domination through cultural hegemony and struggles with the signification systems which infuse cultural forms with hegemonic characteristics. They are struggles to not only open spaces to assert their voices, but to assert their voices on their
own terms using their own signification systems or generating new recombinations of available signifiers to subvert dominant signification systems.

Video Art and the Expression of Identity

The following description of a work of video art from a video art catalogue is typical of a great deal of the video art that is currently being produced in Canada and elsewhere:

_Rape Stories_: I have tried to make a poetic analysis of a rape, not a theoretical one. When I first began telling the story seven years ago, I was shocked to discover that many of my friends and women in my extended family had also been raped. Some had kept it a secret until the act of my telling allowed them to tell me. Telling makes it real; forcing the experience out of the shadows, out of the dream shape, into the mainstream of articulate experience where it can be shared, released.

(Strosser, 1990: 20-21)

For a large number of video artists video is a primary tool for expressing themselves. Uncomfortable with language and text, excited about the ease with which video can record and provide feedback or simply unconvinced of the efficacy of other media, they use video to represent themselves to themselves, to their community, to networks of associates and to other video artists. Every video artist I met had something that they believed was important to place in the flow of discourse, and for many, video art represented a novel, accessible and highly flexible way for entering into discursive space with their thoughts, ideas and feelings.
They wished to articulate their identities and the issues that moved them, and they wished to do so by making representations that could be exchanged and shared with others. Here is how one video artist I interviewed explained her desire to work with video art:

I can't express myself as easily as other people. Sometimes I feel scared when I see how easily they can say what they mean... Video gives me another way to say things and to get things out that stay inside me... When I use video I feel more stable, like I know what I want to say and how to say it, and I don't have to worry about anyone telling me I'm slow or hard to understand...
(Interviewee)

Some video artists, such as the one quoted above, are motivated by gaps in the discourses they see around them. Their identities and their ideas are not given a voice despite the endless flow of discourse they move through in their lives. Others see their voice being falsely represented in the discourses of others and they wish to insert alternative representations into those discourses. Video artists who work with gender, sexuality, ethnicity and race commonly use video art in this way:

**Distant Voices:** The artist links contemporary experiences as an immigrant with the historic influx of immigrants arriving at pier 21 in Halifax between 1928 and 1971. Two points of view are woven in counterpoint: the silent, emphatic gaze of the camera is periodically reframed by a black and white surveillance monitor. The collective voice of the immigrants appears as text while the resonant sounds of boats, trains, wind... measure the present 'ongoingness' of the site just as they marked the past.
(Badessi, 1990: 14)
As one interviewee explained her motivations to me,

With video I can take my ideas and put them on tape. Then I can rewind and look at them. I can see my ideas... who I am, as a woman, as a Black Canadian woman, who has ideas about who she is in a mostly white, mostly male and mostly closed world... Mostly they're [ideas] just floating around in my head and I can't see them. With video they are right there in front of me... Video lets me see what I mean.

(Interviewee)

Some video artists wish to express their thoughts on representational issues in general, or on the politics of meaning. Sometimes their work takes the form of stripping "art" of its sacredness. Sometimes their work opens new avenues within discursive space to create new forms of representations. An interesting example of the latter would be Stan Douglas' Television Spots, a series of television commercial-length videos which were designed to be inserted among the commercials of a broadcaster's schedule (Nichols, 1988). Screening Douglas' Spots was one of the highlights of my fieldwork experience. Each of Douglas' Spots is a video record of a rather simple moment from everyday life, a moment which has no overt meaning or significance. Seen sandwiched in between television commercials which are rich in meaning and persuasion, Douglas' Spots undermine the intentions of television commercials by creating a tension around a lack of meaning. The mundane detail of everyday life is given the same prominence as a new car, a candy-bar or a toothpaste. Douglas' work is striking in its simplicity and lack of
meaning, but that very lack motivates the viewer to try to fill the void he has left, a void that cannot be filled with any degree of closure.

Douglas' spots, like many other works of video art, also reveal a great deal of detail about the people and places we see every day, yet remain completely anonymous. Television and other mass media rarely provide us with images of the grittiness, relative slowness and imperfection of everyday life. The detail that Douglas presents us with subverts all of the idealized forms of pre-packaged, ready-made meaning with which we have been made to feel comfortable. Douglas shows us the texture of the pavement in a street, or thirty-seconds of a car lot attendant's life at midnight, and he refuses to provide us with a slogan or a message which will help us to contextualize what we see (unlike a similar visual technique used by City TV in Toronto, which interrupts our gaze with the narrator's comment, "City TV, everywhere"). Thus, he interrupts the flow of discourse that television bathes us in and gives us thirty seconds during which we have little else to do but to try to understand and search for meaning where little is provided. This is a powerfully subversive tactic that undermines all that the institution of television represents without resorting to theoretical analysis or sloganeering.

Video art that plays with representational issues is a subversion of modernist premises for representation. Video
art seldom approaches anything like a final meaning or referent and it is produced by a multiplicity of voices from many (often marginalized) spheres of society, rather than by privileged voices of authority and "truth". The meanings of particular video art works are elusive and slippery and are not easily codified and contained by more dominant discourses. Video art can be a populist form of expression that occurs outside of the forces which organize and control other forms of expression.

Video art thus embodies a form of social discourse that can be called postmodern. It opens up discursive space, allows for the combination and recombination of signifiers and meaning, and does so on behalf of marginalized voices. It is subversive in that it refuses to be commodified and exchanged as a product. It is exchanged and shared as a social process which is piggy-backed upon common technological materials that have been released from the confines of professional institutions and placed into the hands of people.

The irony of video art practices lies in their relationship to modernist discourses such as those embodied in the larger art world. In order to receive funding, video artists must connect themselves to institutions which have been formed to support incongruent ideals. The larger art world supports a hierarchical status system which awards chosen art "stars" with impressive financial rewards, and maintains a vast productive ghetto of artists who compete for
smaller rewards and for art "star" status. This larger art world also supports the construction and maintenance of theoretical and aesthetic discourses which label and legitimate artistic practices and art objects for the purposes of commodification and exchange within a capitalist framework. Video artists participate in the organization of this art world to varying degrees, however, for the most part they do so for tactical reasons rather than because they completely identify with the practices and ideals of this art world.

By and large, video artists believe that the larger art world should be providing more support for their practices, support which is free of any and all ties which might hinder an artists' ability to create even the most seemingly bizarre representations. Video artists believe that all work should be "artist-driven", meaning that the artist has complete control over all aspects of a production. Many video artists believe that their work can be compromised by a variety of external constraints and pressures which are dictated by the practices of the larger art world. For example, censorship of video art which contains explicit sexual imagery or sexual connotations is a continuing area of conflict:

The [Large Gallery] cancelled the show [of video art related to sexual representation] because they were afraid of the controversy that might erupt in the community. They felt that some of the videos might be labelled as pornographic. They made it quite clear that artists are not allowed to criticize dominant images of sexuality, are not allowed to talk
about gay, lesbian or assertive female sexuality, and are not allowed to produce anything that might be seen as sexually explicit... The end result of the controversy was a tremendous amount of solidarity among artists and a strong condemnation of the [Large Gallery's] policies and its curator's support of the status quo version of art.

(Interviewee)

A public gallery has a responsibility to engage in critical debates about contemporary culture, as well as housing work by historically recognized artists. The fact that a gallery has such an extensive funding base and centralized technical, curatorial, and public-access resources should make it more open to taking risks, to offering a wide variety of cultural experience to the community it which it resides... Somehow, policies which cut funding to birth control information centres, women's health services, counselling for children, women and families in crisis, support for incest victims, cut thousands of jobs, curtailed workers' rights, and eliminated human rights... seem to fit hand and glove with a decision to suppress [the show].

(Diamond, 1984: 7)

This outrageous action has instituted an explosion of controversy like this city has never seen... the specific incident has only been the tip of the iceberg or rather icepick that has driven in the wedge, factionized the arts community, and has brought to a boil the traditional arts versus the media arts, the activist versus the complacent artist, the politicized, the non art for art's sake avant-garde... The active and the politicized wasted no time jumping onto the bandwagon and turning it into a bulldozer further driving through the wimps in the middle... the public flogging of [the gallery director] in front of his board wore through the gallons of deodorant put on for the evening performance - gallery dregs, patrons, and donors were quivering to the point of rattling their diamonds...

(Wong, 1984: 2)

Making such potentially subversive art is thus both
ailed and hindered by the larger art world. The art world’s refusal to open discursive space for alternative representations creates a pressure for this space to be opened elsewhere. Its more explicit refusals also provide an opportunity for collective organization bent on exposing the arbitrary foundations upon which artistic judgements are made. The result, as indicated above can be the support of artistic solidarity and the support of the value of subversive tactics.

The larger art world’s less publicized, more institutionally based (and more common), gatekeeping efforts do not build the same degree of solidarity and support of subversive tactics because artists are not focused on tangible and overtly controversial issues. The "star" system is one such institutionally based gatekeeping strategies that marginalizes a great deal of video art that is based on representational issues. Video artists subvert this gatekeeping through ambivalence rather than through confrontation. Tapes are produced and circulated to audiences outside of the larger art world and specifically to audiences which are, to some degree, familiar with the representational issues which might be addressed. A tape which addresses the representational issues common to the gay community may never be adopted by the larger art world, but it may be informally circulated among members of this community and may act as a catalyst for recognition and discussion of the issues.
Video Art as Sociology?

One of the things that attracted me to video art during the early stages of my fieldwork was the clear affiliation that I began to see between video artists' areas of interest and the areas of interest that make up sociology. At first I noticed that many video artists had an interest in contemporary cultural theory, but as my time in the field wore on I discovered that they also have interests in almost every subject area that might fill a progressive introductory sociology text. Video art which highlights representational issues and reveals the boundaries of dominant discourses is fulfilling a sociological function. Several of the video art works that I have screened would make excellent audio-visual resources for sociology courses.

During the first few weeks of my fieldwork I spent a great deal of time with video artists such as Chuck, Steven, Julie, Jane and Michael as they went about their lives. They were quite inquisitive about my research direction and my point of view, and as a result, we had many long conversations about issues relevant to cultural theory. I discovered that they were quite well read in the area, particularly around authors whose work overlaps cultural studies and art theory and of course, postmodern theorists. Such theoretical work was deemed important as source material for artistic ideas,
and, as Michael explained to me,

People like Goffman and Baudrillard and Barthes are great for giving you ideas to video... These are guys who write in images, so their books belong on video... Look at Goffman’s *Asylums*. Amazing book, with lots of great ideas about behaviour, not just in asylums but everywhere... If I can get some of his ideas on video, wow... but it’s actually pretty easy because Goffman’s talking about people, and people look great on video because it shows you everything... Video is the most irreverent medium because it’s so cool and precise and captures all the details... That’s what Goffman was on about, the details that we don’t like to see, but are always there...

In the case of the work of video artists such as the group General Idea, as I watched their videotapes it became abundantly clear to me that their work was heavily influenced by theoretical work associated with cultural studies. One video artist coined the term "theory-driven" to describe a great deal of video art work that did not appear to be based on a foundation of realism. As mentioned previously, work which is related to the social action/community development lineage of video art has taken on artistic characteristics, and this work has been heavily influenced by cultural theorists who can provide these artists with directions and themes for their work.

Looking at a catalogue of video art works is like looking at a list of possible topics for a sociology essay. The following is a representative selection from Video In’s *Video Out 1990 Distribution* Catalogue (Reinhardt, 1990: 13-17): Aboriginal; Biographies; Business/Industry; Community
Politics; Disability; Drugs; Economics; Environment/Ecology; Feminist Politics; Gay/Lesbian; Health; Human Rights; Humour; International Politics; Interpersonal Relationships; Labour; Law; Literature; Media; Men; National Politics; Personal Identity; Race; Recreation/Sports; Sexuality/Gender; Shelter; Spirituality/Mythology; Technology; Women; Youth.

These video art works can often be considered to be comments by people who are quite literate regarding the representational issues which sociology addresses, yet who have little or no training in sociology. They are made by people who have some very interesting things to say about the world in which they live; statements which are based on their own specific situations and understandings of that world. They are made by people who typically have no authoritative voice which can serve to legitimate their viewpoints and comments within the context of mass media institutions. Their video art works serve as their own private or community affirmations of identity, and understanding. At the same time, they serve as texts which, by their simple existence, subvert the encompassing strategies of mass media institutions:

I made the tape for us because we don’t have anything we can point to and say, this is who we are... People like the tape, but other people [outside the group being discussed] look at it and say its hokey, or amateur... That’s their problem... We don’t have lots of money to make a big TV show... We aren’t on TV, and when we are, we don’t recognize ourselves because that’s somebody else’s cartoon-like version of who we are... TV
shows us in two-dimensions, but we can show ourselves in three or four dimensions...
(Interviewee)

Summary

The production of video art which focuses on identities and the representational issues surrounding identities provides video artists with alternative discursive avenues. When combined with viewing contexts which support engaged discussion and interpretation of video art images, video art can serve as a catalyst for subjects to construct and elaborate identities which may not be available within dominant discourses. The interactive engagements which such production and viewing processes catalyze allow subjects to escape the containment which mass media, pre-constructed identities connote. The institution of television does not evoke such engagements between viewers and texts because viewers are conditioned to be separated from texts. A video artist can state that "video lets me see what I mean", while a television viewer can only say that "television lets me see what I am supposed to mean." In the chapters that follow, I will elaborate upon the representational practices of video artists with more ethnographic detail from my fieldwork.
CHAPTER V

THE SOCIAL WORLD OF VIDEO ARTISTS AT VIDEO PLACE

INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses primarily upon data gathered through fieldwork experience at Video Place (pseudonym), the artist-run video centre which became the base for my research activities. As well, I make use of fieldwork experiences at other artist-run centres and other video art related facilities and events. In the pages that follow I attempt to give a voice to the people with whom I interacted.

The following sections cover aspects of the social world of video artists. Becker (1982) outlines a variety of art world activities that can be isolated for the purposes of empirical analysis. I have adopted some of Becker's analytical distinctions in order to provide a framework for an ethnographic understanding of the social world of video artists. Included in this chapter are discussions of: general activities; producing ideas; video production (roughly equivalent to Becker's distinctions of selecting the means of execution and executing ideas) and aspects of socialization. The following chapter will include discussions of distribution; support work and; aesthetic activities. As will become clear, there is often a great deal of empirical overlap
between these analytical distinctions, and they are not meant to describe characteristic divisions of labour. They are simply the activities that are necessarily present within art worlds in order to facilitate the production and consumption of artistic products.

I have also included a discussion of the processes involved in becoming a video artist and in particular the processes involved in learning how to watch and interpret video art. I have found that the production of video art (and perhaps all art) cannot be separated from the processes of producing interpretive contexts. The context in which a work of video art is viewed is a large part of what makes video art, "video art" and not television or home video. Video artists consciously work to create contexts which insure that their work will be received and interpreted as video art, and there is an underlying socialization process through which video artists move in learning to immerse themselves within these contexts.

ACTIVITIES AT VIDEO PLACE

Video Place: A Brief Description

Video Place is essentially a support centre for media artists, and specifically for video artists. It houses all of the equipment and resources needed to produce videos as well as audio recordings and photographic prints, while also providing space for performances and screenings, and space for
informal discussions and meetings. Normally there is a staff of two full time employees, Julie and Steven, who respectively coordinate centre activities and equipment maintenance (including training, trouble-shooting and booking). Occasionally a third, part-time staff person is hired through government job-training or school co-operative education programs to perform administrative tasks. The premise behind the creation of centres such as Video Place is to provide low cost access to equipment and facilities and to maintain and support an artistic community. Usage of equipment and facilities is directed primarily toward "artist-driven" work, which is work which is totally controlled, directed and administered by an artist, and normally not for commercial profit:

Basically, we support independent production... It's called a media arts centre because we have equipment for artists who want to work in audio-visual media... Everyone who works here is producing work that is artist-driven, in other words the artist is the person who calls all the shots... we've had people want to come in to produce industrial videos, so we had to fine tune our policies and so we define an artist as someone who is producing something for himself and not because he is getting paid by some corporation... The artists are responsible for everything from the idea to the credits and there are no rules about what they can and can not do. The work has to be not for profit, though... artist-driven work gets the first choice of editing times and we will let members do commercial work, but that can only be approved by the board and normally its done for members who have done a lot of artistic work in the past and who we know have good intentions... People like Chuck and Sam who have been around for years
and who do other things to help pay the rent, but who are first and foremost, artists. They have to pay commercial rates which are pretty high, which discourages that kind of work. We're funded by the Canada Council and the Ontario Arts Council... we could let them [commercial producers] come in and we could make lots of money, but things would really change around here, and I don't think we'd be Video Place any longer... it would kind of defeat the purpose of being an artist-run centre that is supposed to provide artists with cheap access to good equipment... Making things work for artists keeps our direction right on target.
(Interviewee)

The centre contains editing facilities, video (as well as some photography and film) equipment, darkroom facilities, a word processor, a photocopier, office space, a journal and publication rack, shelves of video and print archival materials, meeting space, a large viewing room, a sound studio, video studio space, storage facilities, a washroom and a freight elevator for moving equipment from floor to floor. Video Place itself is located on two floors above an older downtown store. Entry is via a door from the street and then up a long staircase to a second door. The first floor contains a large meeting room, office space, an equipment room, a small "cut-edit or dubbing" editing suite and a large viewing and performance room. The second floor contains a more complex "A/B Roll" editing suite, the video studio, an audio studio and a darkroom. Intercoms connect both floors and the entry to the main door, and phones are available on both floors.

Membership is available to anyone, regardless of age,
gender, technical background, race or education. Each member pays a yearly fee of fifty dollars which provides them with full access to the centre’s equipment, reduced rates on workshops, a monthly newsletter and access to the centre’s print and video archives. Equipment is made available through an advanced booking system and members usually phone Video Place several days before they require equipment and book their use times. Fees for using the equipment are nominal provided that the production work is artist-driven. The artist rate, or "A-rate" for one hour’s use of the A/B roll editing suite is $8.00, which can be compared to commercial rates which normally start at about $100.00. Artists who receive funding from the Canada Council or a provincial arts council specifically for a video art production are expected to pay the higher "B-rate" ($16.00 per hour for the A/B roll editing suite) which allows the centre to "spread the wealth from the golden goose" (interviewee). Equipment fees for work on behalf of non-profit organizations are calculated at a slightly higher rate, the "C-rate" ($24.00 per hour for the A/B roll editing suite). This allows community service groups or schools which normally have outside funding to have access to equipment at reasonable prices provided they are not doing commercial work. Finally, commercial work is assessed at a "D-rate" ($50.00 per hour) and such work can only be done with the approval of the centre’s board of directors, who only support such work if it will directly benefit the centre, its
members and its commitment to artistic production.

On any given day, a person entering Video Place for the first time would probably discover very few people at work. Normally one will find that the two staff persons might be present and one person will be using the top floor editing suite and perhaps one person will be using the word processor. In the main meeting room one will usually find that members will occasionally arrive to book equipment for future dates, read magazines or journals, check the mail or simply just to chat. In the background, a stereo plays the local, "progressive" campus radio station. The phone rings fairly often with members who want to discuss equipment problems or artists from other centres who want to discuss upcoming video shows. Occasionally someone will phone to ask, "Do you guys have Raiders of the Lost Ark?" to the amusement of everyone present.

This is how, Steven, the staff member at Video Place who manages the equipment, describes the centre and its activities (from a taped interview):

Well, you heard all those extra noises shuffling around, and that's exactly what [Video Place] is all about [laughs]... this person and that person going here, going there, coming and going... that's exactly what [Video Place] is all about... questions and answers: "where's the on button?"... it's like a place where things are happening for the present, on an informal basis...

One of the centre's main roles is to act as a meeting place, a place where video artists can cross paths and talk to one
another in a relaxed and collegial atmosphere. Since many members produce their works independently and have limited chances to interact with each other on their productions (geographical distances sometimes play a role), the centre and its main meeting provides the locus for personal contact.

Members who have been with the centre for over a year are normally provided with a key to the building so that they can come in during off hours to use or borrow equipment, or screen their videos to friends. Members are expected to sign in and out for their off hour visits, and the centre has had a remarkable record of member honesty and lack of theft. Members are encouraged to see the centre as their own space, and because the centre works along co-operative lines, the members do in fact have ultimate ownership of the centre and its equipment.

Throughout each month Video Place sponsors special events. Often, these events will feature visiting video artists who come to show their work and discuss their work with other artists and interested members of the public. Sometimes the centre will sponsor media artists from other fields, such as musicians who design their own instruments. Other events include discussions with officers from granting agencies, video performances, and various technical and artistic workshops. As well, each month, Video Place holds a board meeting for members who are elected from the membership at an annual general meeting to make administrative decisions
regarding centre activities and future directions.

The Video Artists at Video Place

There are approximately 130 members of Video Place who range in age from 16 to over 70 and who have diverse interests and backgrounds. The majority of the membership are aged between 20 to 40 and approximately two-thirds of the membership are male and one-third are female. Approximately one-half of the membership share a background that includes an education in art. Other common backgrounds include experience in drama, experience in film and work with organizations concerned with social or environmental activism.

Many of the members who have a background in art have come to Video Place directly from their studies in the Fine Art program at the local university. This university has included video art in its curriculum on and off over a twenty year period and has cultivated an interest in media art in general. There is little active co-operation between Video Place and the Fine Art Department at the university, however the faculty within this Department recognize the existence of Video Place and sometimes encourage their students to investigate its work. For its part, Video Place offers two "equipment" scholarships worth $500 of equipment time to undergraduate art students each year. Students apply for the scholarships with statements about their intentions for utilizing the scholarship, and each year about a dozen
students apply. This serves to increase awareness about the resources available at Video Place, and many of the applicants find themselves attracted to video as a medium.

Many of the core members of Video Place are graduates from the Fine Art program at the local university, and have remained in the city because Video Place offers them a connection to other artists and a reasonably affordable place in which to do their work. Steven’s background is representative of other video artists who have come to Video Place from the Fine Art program:

[Veteran video artist and sessional lecturer at the university] brought in even [three other veteran video artists], performance artists, and so though my main interest then was painting and print making, my attitude was that if I don’t know about something then I should take that course... and video was like that... it was these strange people with different sort of glasses, always... they always had different ways of ‘dressing’ themselves which was, were different than the rest of the fine art people... And I thought, why don’t I give it a try... I’ve never done it before, I should give it a try. And that’s how I got lead into it, and even still being interested in painting, etc. It is always good to see an alternative way to the system... that’s what I felt even then was when [sessional lecturer] would bring in guests... Even doing work like that, I knew that the history of it was very short and that’s exciting to me to be involved in something that almost doesn’t have a history to it, as opposed to going to a Renaissance history class... I mean what’s all this time spent looking backwards... why bother... just to know where the present is I guess, right? But there seemed to be a lot of emphasis on the past, and some people’s art work does sort of emphasize the past, and that’s how they relate to their own work.

So, I thought it was really exciting that
there were people mainly living in the present, because without a history, you only have the present to deal with, and that's exciting because you're creating this new... because of the inventions of these things... scientists invent these new toys or items and then it filters into the hands of the artists and creative people do other things with them in different ways than these scientists ever imagined or expected...

But, getting back to Video Place, it's like a place where things are happening for the present, on an informal basis. Yah, I think that's a very important thing to talk about, is that other art centres, or the world of buying and selling art usually has a lot to do with a lot of money, and I never felt comfortable in that... infra-structure... people want to work and be a part of something where they have something in common with other people, right? And, me not ever having experience with the buying and selling art... that involves a whole 'nother lifestyle that I never really have had... I mean making paintings... there are people who live a lifestyle of selling a $15,000 painting and then travelling to Spain and Paris to do more research for their painting, and they'll fly back... there are people who live that lifestyle, and I've found that Video Place and that group of people for the most part dealt with a very different situation of being very resourceful. People who didn't have very much money, people who were next to being broke all the time, and the people as an organization were comfortable with each other because of that. And there wasn't any... forces like intimidation forces, like nobody had a Porsche who would be in charge of Video Place... I mean that would set the tone now wouldn't it?

Other members come to Video Place for a wide variety of reasons. James, for example is retired and was active as a nature film maker during the 1960's. He comes to Video Place:

because I like all these young energetic lads
and lasses... I can give them a hand by volunteering to fix things and build things and it lets me think that I'm helping them to do their visual experiments... I may not always understand what they do, but I try to get out to all the events and what have you because I like to see what they can do... I've got my own cameras and editing equipment at home and I do a lot of nature stuff, but I just putter around and have fun... Video Place is another place for me to putter around and have fun...

Tim comes to Video Place because he wants to make videos about local environmental issues:

We tried to work with the cable station but they were just too uptight... we can use something we make on a VHS camcorder and we can make copies of it and circulate it around town and get people aware of the issues...

Sarah is interested in developing "community-based" video because:

There are many issues that affect people in the community that do not get discussed or brought out into the open... The Vietnamese video is a good example because here is a group of people that are living around us and who have been through horrible and frightening experiences to get here and yet once they're here, we sweep them under the rug. It is difficult for them to adjust to our culture, particularly when we don't try to understand who they are... The video will be put to good use by congregations who have helped to sponsor them, but who don't know who these people are and why their efforts are still needed ten years later...

Together, the video artists at Video Place are an eclectic mix of people who are not brought together by any particular social cause or artistic mandate, but are brought together because they share a common desire to have access to video production equipment, access which provides them with
full control over all aspects of their intended productions.

Production Activities

Video art production activities are, once one gets over the initial "equipment buzz" (interviewee), rather mundane tasks that often require repetitive operations, long hours and a great deal of waiting time. Video art production is not normally glamorous or sexy, and it can in fact be quite dull. In essence it is not unlike most other kinds of work activities.

In a first draft of this chapter I made a conscious decision to exclude a great deal of the mundane details of video art production because I believed that those details were not particularly relevant and would detract from my analysis. In retrospect, this was a serious error of judgement. As the members of my committee were to point out to me, the pervasiveness of the "gritty" details of everyday life combined with their obvious invisibility is precisely the reason they should be subject to discussion. As well, the very commonality, yet invisibility of the "gritty" details across cultures points to their importance as signifiers of the continuance of practical social life and the ways in which people tactically use and make do with the systems around them (de Certeau, 1984).

"Gritty" details also illustrate that social practices do not always fit well into the linear narrative formats that
sociologists like to create to package and present them. "Gritty" details do not provide readers with the sense of back-stage voyeurism that many ethnographies attempt to convey. We have many ethnographies such as Laud Humphrey's "Tearoom Trade" (1970) which do a great deal to illustrate that the assumed gaze of the reader of sociological material is that of a straight, middle-class, heterosexual male who gains some voyeuristic pleasure from examining the lives of "others". We have far fewer ethnographies which specifically examine the mundane and tedious details of daily life which hold no fascination for the voyeur.

I was also wary of presenting the details of video art production because such production is incredibly diverse. No two video art productions seem to follow the same production pattern. Video artists at Video Place might produce a work using only images taken "off-screen" from television or they might employ full crews which would include personnel such as lighting technicians, sound technicians and actors. Not being able to find a standardized pattern of production, presenting data on video art production activities became problematic.

Ironically, the difficulty I faced was actually an important piece of data in itself. I was looking too closely at my fieldnotes, trying to find a stable pattern, or an identifiable procedural chain. In this case such a pattern was not clearly present in the data, however, after distancing myself from my fieldnotes I was able to realize that the lack
of a pattern was important. Broadcast television production is ultimately highly routinized, has a well defined division of labour, is done according to strict time frames and can almost be regarded as an assembly-line production process. Video art production is a diverse and eclectic set of practices that are characterized by poorly defined division of labour, non-systematized routines and fuzzy time frames. The contrast between the two production styles parallels and is indicative of the vast differences that exist in terms of their products and audience relationships.

The Primary Role of an Artist-Run Production Centre

Broadcast television personnel work with materials that are owned and managed by the corporations which employ those personnel. Video artists work with materials which are co-operatively owned and managed by artist collectives. To understand how important a centre such as Video Place is in supporting the work of video artists, we can imagine the difficulty an artist would face in creating a video production without access to the centre’s services. Obviously, obtaining equipment would be the biggest hardship, unless the artist were independently wealthy. Video Place houses over $200,000 worth of relatively high quality video and audio equipment, thus its role as an equipment co-op is a primary one. Without Video Place a video artist would have fewer chances of interacting with other video artists and thus would not benefit from the exchanges of ideas and information that
take place at Video Place, and nor would he or she benefit from the availability of a friendly supply of low-cost (often volunteer) skilled labour to assist with production activities:

I like to come in and see what’s going on and who’s doing what and what needs to be done... Like today... I usually come in to pick up a copy of Parallelogramme [a publication of the Association of National Non-profit Artists’ Centres (ANNPAC)], talk to Steven or Julie, find out about things that might be happening... Sometimes I’ll go up to the editing suite and bug whoever’s working up there... I like to know what’s going on, and the only way to do that is to come in and talk and look around...

(Interviewee)

Labour, equipment and information are the three most obvious benefits of a centre such as Video Place, however an equally important benefit that would not exist without the centre is the link that it provides to the larger social world of video artists. Announcements of festivals, grant opportunities, equipment sales, and video art events all pass through Video Place. As well, the centre acts as a clearing house for publications of interest to video artists and publications from the video art world.

One of the centre’s less visible roles is as a lobbyist for the rights of video artists, media artists and artists in general. For example, Video Place is a member of the Association of National Non-Profit Artists’ Centres (ANNPAC), an organization which represents the artist-run centres in Canada and engages in lobbying provincial and
national levels of government on behalf of its member centres. Each member is a non-profit collective of artists engaged in creating, displaying, screening and/or distributing art work (there are currently 69 member centres and 38 associate member centres (Gagnon, 1990). ANNPAC also publishes a quarterly periodical, Parallelogramme, for its members and for the general public. This journal contains a complete listing of all member centres, their current artistic activities and their public showings and screenings of artist's work, as well as articles articulating issues of relevance to contemporary artists. This journal is the TV Guide of the "artist-run centre movement" in Canada, and it was one of the most important field research tools I had in locating video art centres and screenings.

Video Place also holds membership in Canadian Artists Representation/Le Front des Artistes Canadiens (CARFAC), the closest thing to a union representing visual artists in Canada. CARFAC spearheaded a national lobbying drive to establish a comprehensive and nationwide minimum fee schedule for the exhibition of artists' work. National and provincial public galleries had been reluctant to pay artist fees to artists who might not have "star" status in the art world, believing that exhibiting a relatively unknown artist's work was payment enough. CARFAC established a fee schedule and was successful in retaining artist fees from publicly funded institutions and organizations.
This fee schedule was a frequent topic of conversation among veteran video artists because video art has traditionally received poor screening fees and until very recently had received purchase prices of at most one-tenth of the average for more mainstream art work. For example, in 1990, the members of Video Place pushed for a boycott of the local publicly funded art gallery because it was refusing to pay artist fees for a juried art show.¹:

They're simply ignorant of video art, Video Place and most working artists in general... they forget that we're the ones who keep them supplied with artists who they can "discover" and get recognition from their stuffy high art friends... we're just fodder as far as they're concerned... of course they can't see why we would want to get a fee for working our asses off and starving so that people like them can get big salaries by deciding what art is... It's not like we're asking for a lot, we're just asking for token recognition that what we do is work and that we should be recognized as professionals, not as contestants in some local flower painting contest...

(Interviewee)

By 1991 the gallery was paying artist fees, however these were still below the fees recommended by CARFAC. CARFAC has also been involved in lobbying for fairer income tax treatment for artists, revision of copyright legislation to protect artists and for the health and safety of artists in the workplace.

¹ This is an artistic exhibition which begins with an open invitation to all artists in a particular area (sometimes with restrictions on the media utilized) to submit work which will then be judged by a panel of established artists. A portion of the works will be selected for exhibition, and some of these will be awarded prizes.
Creating a Work of Video Art at Video Place

Producing a work of video art can be a very simple, straight-forward exercise or, alternatively, it can be a complex and highly technical endeavour. A video could consist of a single shot on a consumer camcorder or it could be a multi-edit piece shot on "Betacam" (the camera favoured by the television industry for location work, which rents at a corporate rate of $400.00 per day) which could include computer graphics, various effects, actors, composed music, special lighting and 'sweetened' (processed to eliminate extraneous noise and to improve overall quality) sound. Budgets can range from the price of a VHS videotape using a camcorder borrowed from a friend, to over $20,000 using the assistance of a Canada Council grant.

Steven describes the typical Video Place producer as someone who is driven to create, despite the material and financial hardships that might be involved. I have yet to find a wealthy video artist, although there are probably a few in existence, but for the most part, video artists are not wealthy, and yet they continue to put money aside to produce their works regardless of whether or not they receive grant money. Even when they do receive grant money, they often tend to go over budget on their productions and must pay for all cost over-runs from their own pockets. I asked Steven why video artists behaved in this way and why he was attracted to
such a life style. He replied:

People want to work and be a part of something where they have something in common with other people, right? At [Video Place] you are associated with people who have similar financial needs. People pouring any amount of money that they ever had into making more art, which is really an unusual thing compared to the rest of society... people save to buy this and buy that, and if they have any money left over, maybe they'll make some creative decisions, but the [Video Place] group of people mainly live to make more art, at the risk of being broke all the time... that's really, that's really interesting, that's where the risk taking is involved... I always felt that being creative was being resourceful, making something from nothing, and even historically, its proven that you can do a lot with nothing, and I felt that having a few monitors and cameras was like having nothing. All you need is some extra money for some video tape, and then its up to your own brain power to come up with something... I thought that was interesting, and these people socialize in that realm, I mean the social aspect is really an important thing because people talk, bounce off ideas from one another, and it becomes, not separate brain activity, it becomes an attitude of a group of people creating the work too.

When an artist receives a grant, there is an implicit expectation on the part of other artists at Video Place (this may not be generalizable to other centres) that the wealth will be shared to a limited degree:

I've been thinking about this for a while. What we are doing is creating an artist-economy. An artist-economy where we work together to get money for the centre or we help an artist write up a grant proposal and we help people to produce and to make being a video artist something that can be financially positive... what goes around, comes around... we have to nurture each other... if Chuck gets a grant then Chuck
pays the B-rate and Video Place benefits, and he'll probably hire someone to do sound or to be a production assistant... we help to organize a screening which might give us revenue... Chuck's piece gets picked up by a couple of festivals and then the centre looks good, and we get the equipment grant that we've put into the Canada Council... what goes around, comes around, and we end up creating our own little economy... (Interviewee)

An interesting case in point was the centre's work in helping an installation artist and sculptor obtain a Canada Council Explorations grant worth $20,000. This artist decided to use the grant to generate as much work as possible for members of Video Place:

Explorations Grant... let me tell you, exploring on your own is boring... all the great explorers travelled with teams... so I can give $600 bucks to eleven [Video Place] members to produce three minute tapes for the installation and I can give $500 bucks to four or five musicians and sound people to produce the audio portion... I use the rest for my own video work and for my materials and I still end up with some money to eat with... I can't imagine a more exciting way to use the money... I get to work with eager young artists and we get to make something that is all of us, not just one guy, you know?

Obviously, it is difficult to describe a "typical" video creation process, and each artist approaches the task in idiosyncratic ways. In order to gain a better understanding of producers' activities, I have outlined the work involved in the production of two pieces of video art, one by Jane and one by Michael. Jane has produced a video which examines child abuse, while Michael is in the planning stages for a "feature
length" (at least an hour and a half) video which is an experimental piece dealing with experience, life and death.

Jane's Video Art Production

Jane began to work on her video, not out of a strict desire to become a video artist, but to create some images that "would help people to understand what it feels like to wait for this person who abuses you to come home... [and] to show that abuse is something that is with you forever" (interviewee). The idea for Jane's video has not come from a traditional art discourse, as Jane does not have an arts background. Jane is a woman who has a young child and is in transition from full-time motherhood, who has some intimate experiences with abuse, who holds a master's degree from a social science program, and who is working to create new strategies for communication among mothers in her neighbourhood who stay home with their children. Jane believes that video art can be a tool that "breaks the ice... [and] gets women talking about what really goes on in their lives" (interviewee).

It is interesting to note that despite Jane's non-artistic background, and the activist orientation she shares with many other video artists, she is still labelled, and labels herself, as a video artist. As a member of the board of directors at Video Place, Jane is responsible for helping
to define the practices which are grouped into the category of video art. I asked her specifically about how she understood the term video art:

Being on the board gives me a better picture of what video art is all about... I guess you could say that some video art is more political than it is artistic, but by calling things video art, it lets you play with video a lot more than you might do if you didn’t call it that. If you call something a documentary it means you’ve got to stick to a set pattern. If you call it video art, you can have more fun...

In a sense, Jane helps to demonstrate that the term video art can be employed in a very flexible manner to encompass video practices which involve playing with, and having fun with, images and signification systems.

Jane’s idea is to create a video in which the camera is the eyes of a woman who sees her past in dreams. In this woman’s dream she is a child who peers out of a second story window to the street upon which the person who abuses her is about to walk upon on the way to the child’s house. "I wanted to make you feel the way that child would feel... you are so frightened you can hardly move. You don’t know whether you’ll be hugged or hit. You peek out the window. You look to a closet door for a place to hide. Your whole body is tense with fear..."

The video is shot on a VHS camcorder and the 1/2 inch VHS tape is then re-recorded on a 3/4 inch source tape for editing. In editing, the images are made greyer and an effect which stops the image for a fraction of a second at a time is
added. Jane plays with a variety of effects before deciding on the combination which provides her with the dream-like atmosphere she is looking for. The editing takes place over two days, titles are added and some friends help her to make a sound-track (pre-recorded music is seldom used for video-art due to copyright restrictions).

The audience that Jane is hoping to influence with this video is made up of her friends and neighbours:

I don’t really care if I show this to other video artists... I want to have video parties like other women have "tupperware" parties. You know, you invite people over, you show them your stuff and then everyone talks about what’s going on in their lives, how their kids are... Why not, I mean they may not understand all the effects, but I can use it to start them talking about abuse, or even just their day-to-day fears. We talk, we listen and maybe we can change some little thing in someone’s life.

In discussing this idea with Jane, I learn that she has a community development background, and feels that she is only now starting to put her education to work, after being a single mother for four years. She wants to encourage other women to create videotapes, either at Video Place, or at home using their own or a borrowed camcorder. She also wants to further develop the "tupperware party" concept to generate a new outlet for video artists (especially women) to screen their work.

Michael’s Video Art Production

Michael, on the other hand, is a graduate from a
nearby University's fine arts program and has been working as a video artist since graduation, four years ago. He has a job at a store that sells prints and posters (very little original art), where he is a framer. Like many fine arts graduates he has gravitated toward employment in an art related business, but is frustrated by the wages, and the working conditions he must put up with to stay within an arts related field and still maintain his more interesting career (and what he maintains is his real career) as an artist. Michael's art work covers a variety of mediums, but when I meet him he is in the process of committing the next two years of his artistic career toward video art. His previous video art works have been fairly well received, although they have not received the wide national and international exposure that some veteran video artists' works garner.

Michael is in the process of creating a feature length video, much of which remains in the planning stage. He has been working on this particular piece on and off for over a year, and while I was conducting my fieldwork he was writing a grant proposal to submit to the provincial arts council to receive a $10,000 production grant. He did not receive this production grant and has had to put his plans for the video on hold. He has also been faced with the prospect of paying bills for equipment rental and editing time that he had accumulated while working on early footage for the video.

The concept that Michael is developing for his video
is intriguing, and involves travelling to England to videotape a specific church and cemetery, as well as other English sites. Michael has already spent a substantial amount of time in England gathering preliminary footage for the video and is currently saving to finance another trip. The video centres on English landscapes, architecture, churches and cemeteries because these are the things that fascinate Michael:

It's about death, really... my death, or at least me when I'm eighty years old and I'm about to die. I had this idea: what would happen if, when I'm eighty, I'm near death and my spirit develops the power to travel back in time and possess me as I am now, here, today? What would I, the eighty year old want me, the twenty-eight year old to do? I would want me to travel to places that really meant something to me as an eighty year old looking back on my life. The trouble is, most of my memories are faded, and the best memories I have are from videotapes I made when I was young. So I possess myself and make myself go to England and make the videotapes that I remember so well... I've spent a lot of time in England - I love churches and cemeteries for their architecture and stone carvings...

In order to signify segments of the video which would indicate "video memories" for the eighty year old Michael, Michael has developed an innovative, yet risky technique for degenerating the video image. One of the taboos in the world of broadcast television is the loss of more than three "generations" of video signal. A "generation" is lost each time a source tape is copied onto another tape. Most master tapes contain second generation images that have been edited from original source tapes. Occasionally in the world of
broadcast television and more commonly in the video art world, master tapes may contain third generation images. Each generation contains "drop-outs", and other "noise" caused by the transfer process, defects on tapes and a loss of signal caused by the movement of the electronic current through several feet of wire. Michael has worked with third generation tapes in the past and is familiar with the signal losses which accompanied them. Rather than seeing these signal losses as problematic, Michael has developed an aesthetic philosophy which holds that these losses are an interesting aspect of the medium of video which can and should be exploited for aesthetic purposes.

Michael created a "work in progress" tape to show other video artists at Video Place the project on which he has been working, as well as to document his ideas for his grant application. The tape he created consisted of "video memory" footage from his last trip to England. The images were of cemeteries, church architecture and English landscape as seen through train windows. The majority of the images were tenth or twelfth generation video signals that inevitably contained a great deal of video distortion. The image quality was further undermined by the fact that the original footage was shot on a VHS camcorder which produces approximately 200 lines of video signal compared to the 400 or more available on higher quality equipment. In a sense, Michael was making up for the poor quality of image available to him, through an
aesthetic tactic of purposefully degrading that image.

Michael is certainly not alone in his tactical development of aesthetic techniques to address the problem of poor quality source images. A great many video art pieces are "sourced" on VHS camcorders, and even 8mm camcorders. In fact, one of the videos I saw which was made using a low-end 8mm camcorder was Paul Wong's *Ordinary Shadows/Chinese Shade*, a video which thoroughly impressed me. Most of this feature-length video was shot in China where the benefits of a small, light-weight and unobtrusive camera allowed the producer to capture sides of China that are unavailable to broadcast television producers. This tape has in fact been broadcast in Canada on an educational channel, despite the fact that it does not meet CRTC broadcast standards. While some video artists such as Wong, unashamedly use low-end equipment, many other video artists make use of a variety of electronic effects and camera techniques to compensate for and disguise the image quality provided by accessible and cheap camcorders. Techniques include posterization, various still frame intervals, colourization, and chromakey. Michael's use of multi-generation images was the only conscious use of this specific technique that I have seen, but it was representative of a tactical, "making-do" practice that allows low-end equipment to be used for productions which do not, as Michael states it, "automatically say 'home video' trash to the people watching" them.
PRODUCTION PROCESSES

Diversity

Video art production processes are as diverse as the products that emerge from those processes. They can range from productions that employ many of the features of major film and television productions to productions which are completed entirely with just a camcorder in under one hour. Productions at these two extremes are rather rare, but they are ideal types that help to contextualize the bulk of productions that lie somewhere in between. Table 1 illustrates the variety of possible combinations of techniques, equipment and personnel that might be employed or not employed on a given video art production (given the flexibility of video art production many other items might have been included in the table, however the items presented are fairly common).

There are also a variety of stages through which a video art production may go through on its way to completion. Again, these stages may or may not be present in a given production, but they do indicate the range of production techniques that may be utilized. For example, every video art production begins as an idea or concept, yet that idea or concept may be developed within a script or a story-board (a set of production sketches), it may simply be an idea in an artist's head, it may be elaborated through discussions, it may be suggested by video footage already available to the
producer or it may be developed through audio material to which visuals will be added. Table 2 illustrates some of the stages common to some, but not all video art production.

Two more examples will help to clarify these production processes and possible combinations of techniques and equipment. Chuck is producing a documentary style production on an elaborate and politically charged community play produced in a nearby rural town, and Chris is producing several "vignettes" on the topic of AIDS.

Chuck and the Community Play Video

The concept for Chuck's video production on the community play was suggested by the play's writer/producer and her brother (a video producer who works with Inuit production groups) who are also friends of Chuck's. The concept was developed in cooperation with the community volunteers who worked together to develop the play. Chuck held discussions with these people to help him understand the context of the play and its parameters and he had access to a script of the play to help in its documentation on video. The concept for the video production developed over time from a strict videotape of the play to a more elaborate documentary style production that would include interviews with production personnel, actors and members of the community as well as footage of the organizational activities leading up to the play.
The play itself was modeled after community development plays in Great Britain and was designed to increase community interaction and focus community participation on local issues such as land development, the loss of agricultural land and the changes that were happening within the community. A private foundation provided money to bring a British director, who had worked on many similar plays in Great Britain, to the community to direct the final stages and performances of the play. The underlying theme for the production was community empowerment and participation in local and provincial decision making. Over 1,000 people from the community participated in producing the play over a period of a year. The play ran in amongst the ruins of an old mill during a two week period during the month of August. The play’s writer and producer has been active within the New Democratic Party, and following the run of the play she ran for the provincial legislature on an NDP ticket, which should help to explain the grassroots, democratic spirit of the play.

When I began to work with Chuck in the field, he had already obtained a significant amount of tape consisting of interviews, set construction and play meetings. Chuck was limited in organizing his production by the activities of the play’s participants. Chuck’s vision of the organization of the production was that he wanted to:

try to capture the essence of what the play is about for the community and the people in it... Nothing like this has ever happened in Canada before, so its important to do it...
I've got all kinds of ideas about what I'd like to videotape, but I have to work with what's happening when it happens. It's hard to work within everyone's schedules because everyone is a volunteer, so I have to simply be there when something is happening... Yesterday they told me that I should have been there to see the council meeting and the other day they said I should have been there to tape the kids rehearsing, but I don't know these things until they tell me they're going to happen... I can only get what I'm around for... maybe today they'll rehearse the barn raising scene and we might also be able to get an interview with [the writer/producer]... if that doesn't happen we can probably get some shots of the set building at the mill and interview some of the crew down there...

Chuck wanted to be able to produce a videotape that could be utilized for educational purposes and distributed to schools, as well as be utilized as an artistic production, so he felt that it was necessary to employ high-quality production equipment and tape. This also meant that the production would cost a significant amount of money which Chuck estimated to be in the range of $20,000. Obtaining production money was perhaps the most difficult task that Chuck faced.

Early into his work he discovered that, in the eyes of provincial and federal granting agencies, his production fell through the cracks in the distribution of funds. These funding agencies normally fund productions beginning in the development stage, but rarely fund productions once production has been initiated. Writing grant proposals is also a time consuming process that requires the creation of a budget and
the solicitation of letters of support from possible distributors and potential users. Distributors are familiar with the grant writing process and are thus quick to provide the necessary supporting material, however potential users typically do not realize the importance of letters of support and the need to provide them quickly. As Chuck stated, "the last thing in somebody's 'out' box is a letter of support for some video production that only exists on paper... most people have plenty of other things to do then to read my proposal and give me a long letter praising the idea." Grant proposal deadlines are normally very strict, and Chuck, like most of the other video artists I observed spent the last twenty-four hours before a deadline scrambling to pull a proposal together and trying to "pull" letters of support from people who had not yet provided them. Since Chuck's production had to follow the schedule of the play's activities, he was also in a situation in which any money he applied for and received would not be forthcoming until several months after the play had finished:

I've got to ask them for development money for a production that has already gone past the development stage, and then I've got to wait six or seven months for them to decide. By then the play would be over! They said they'd make an exception in this case... Getting letters from distributors isn't too bad because they know the business and they can give you good letters if they know who you are. Getting letters from people who will actually use the video and from people who support the idea is a different story... these people have other things to do, and the least important thing for them is to sit down
and read your proposal and take the time to write you a letter. It can take weeks to get them too and you've got to keep phoning to remind them and running up more long distance bills... The deadline is coming up and I don't have all the support material I need, so I have to call them [the provincial organization] and see if they can wait for the letters... I've also got to find the time to sit down and make up a proposed budget when I've already spent a lot of money!

As the production unfolded, Chuck was informed that much of the production money he had applied for would not be forthcoming. The board that was overseeing the play decided to advance him a portion of their grant money which helped him to pay some of the bills he had accumulated, and together with limited funding from a variety of sources and the credit extended to him by Video Place for equipment usage, he was able to complete the production. He also benefitted from the generosity of his landlord who allowed him to "slide" with his monthly apartment rent. Once the play was over, many members of the community approached him to "get a copy of the play on video", and an arrangement was worked out whereby Chuck would produce a separate video production which would be a scene by scene compilation of the play, without the other footage that he had gathered. These videotapes would be sold at a profit which would help to provide funding for the production of the documentary. This also provided Chuck with a type of 'economy of scale' in that producing two video productions from the same source tapes only necessitated previewing and coding his source tapes once, using the money pledged for the scene by
Each day that I followed Chuck on his production followed a similar opening routine. I would arrive at his apartment and we would assemble all of the equipment and materials necessary for that day's shooting. This meant packing video tapes, lighting equipment, sound equipment and cameras into their appropriate bags and carrying cases. Normally we carried: a large duffel bag which held lighting equipment, sound equipment, various equipment cords and extension cords; a small shoulder bag containing videotapes, batteries, notebooks and miscellaneous supplies; and a video camera and its accompanying video recorder. Chuck kept his equipment in an orderly fashion which I found slightly obsessive at first, but came to appreciate when we were in the field. Everything had its proper place and when Chuck needed something quickly such as a flashlight or an external microphone, it was always readily at hand.

Once we had packed the equipment into the car, we drove around the block to Video Place where we picked up fresh supplies of recharged batteries for the camera and video recorder and any other necessary equipment such as extra lights or specific equipment cords. On many days we also picked up the camera because it had been in use by someone else on a previous day. Often, this morning routine of packing and obtaining equipment would last an hour and we would stop along the way for a cup of coffee and a muffin.
which we would finish during the twenty minute drive to the community where the play was being produced.

During these drives we would generally talk about the material that had been gathered thus far, future shooting ideas, and the production’s financial situation. Often we would discuss topics important to video artists and I was able to garner a great deal of information on these morning drives. One morning Chuck cautioned me that he did not conceptualize the documentary about the play as a work of video art:

> If you’re working with me because you want to see what producing video art is all about then you’re probably not going to find out. This really isn’t video art.

This comment was disturbing for me as a fieldworker because I had invested considerable time in working with Chuck and I had assumed that Chuck’s production work was video art work. I questioned him further and he related that because he was directing the video production to an educational market and this meant that he had to make the production conform to the aesthetic expectations of an educational audience. I felt confused by Chuck’s explanation because from my experiences with other video artists, I had come to equate Chuck’s work on the play production as equivalent to the work of many other video artists. I later questioned Julie, one of the staff members at Video Place, and she agreed with my assessment of Chuck’s work, and suggested that the reason that the play production was video art was because it was being created almost solely by one person and that person was using
techniques that went:

against the grain of industry productions. You don’t see the CBC out there becoming part of a community. They go in, do their thing and leave. Chuck is involved with the people, he’s closer than anyone else could get, and he’s doing work that shows that... he cares about what’s happening out there and that care comes through on tape...

The British director of the play echoed Julie’s comments:

In Minnesota we had a television crew who wanted to make a show about our community play, and we said fine, and they came in with their cameras and lights and they were quite distant from what we were doing. If we had just done something that they liked, but hadn’t been shooting, they would ask us to do it again. This is real life that we’re living, and they’re asking us to do it again for the camera! Chuck is completely different. There’s only one of him he really is part of the community that is making this happen. He has a very good rapport with people and he has a way of always being there at the right moment, and never getting in the way. People don’t seem aware of the camera much of the time, you see, because Chuck is intimately a part of this whole process. He’s getting things with his camera that the television crew in Minnesota never came close to getting. They were making something that talked about the play, you see, and Chuck is making something that works with the play. There isn’t the same distance with Chuck...

Ironically, my perception that Chuck was doing something that could be labelled as video art within the video art world was eventually corroborated by Chuck several weeks later:

I was reluctant to call it video art because I thought I was going to go in and make a pretty straight documentary, but as I got deeper and deeper into the thing it really became a part of who I am... Instead of doing things the way they are supposed to be done,
I started to take some chances, and the more chances I took, the more fun I had and the better the production got. Sure, it's got some standard editing sequences, but there's an awful lot of me in there and I've been able to do a lot of pretty creative camera work if I do say so myself... The play has a way of growing on you, and all that creativity by all those people had to rub off on me eventually, and I had to make something that was approached that level of creativity...

The evidence of Chuck's strong rapport with the play's participants was demonstrated to me each morning as we arrived at the play project's office in the community. The participants greeted Chuck warmly and were very enthusiastic about pointing out aspects of the play's organizational activities that they believed should be videotaped. We would often stay in the office to casually chat with people for up to an hour before we headed out to different sites in the community and surrounding township.

Each day we would normally shoot one to two hours of videotape for about eight to ten hours of work. Much of the work involved driving around to locations and looking for the people involved, setting up and packing up equipment at locations, and talking with participants to find out more about their activities and roles within the play. This latter aspect of the production was informal and friendly but was crucial to the overall development of the production and Chuck's ability to establish rapport with the community members involved in the play.

A typical day would find us going from the play office
to "Heaven", the costume workshop which had been nicknamed by the participants in the play. "Heaven" was actually the second floor of a rural veterinary clinic that had been donated to the play by a cast member. Upon arriving we would leave our equipment in the car and go upstairs to talk to the costume designers to find out what they were doing that day and whether or not they thought that their activities would be worth getting on videotape. "Heaven" was normally filled with a buzz of activity, with people trying on costumes and women from the community using sewing machines to create elaborate costumes.

After talking with the participants and deciding what we would shoot and where we would shoot within the building, Chuck would make a mental list of the equipment we would need from the car. We would carry this equipment up the stairs and then spend about fifteen minutes setting it up. Setting up would not normally be required with a small camcorder, but with the 3/4" camera or the Betacam, the higher quality cameras that Chuck was using for this production, there are a wider variety of considerations. The camera is a very heavy item which provides a steadier image when it is placed on a tripod, so a good, sturdy (and heavy) tripod is a necessary piece of equipment. In "Heaven" we had to work with fluorescent lighting which causes colours to appear "toward the blue side of the spectrum", and in order to compensate, Chuck would often set up extra electric lights on their own
stands.

Lighting equipment must be handled with extreme care in order to protect the high intensity bulbs used for video lighting. Chuck’s lighting equipment was fairly compact and portable and could be set up in about five minutes. Each bulb is housed in a box with small radiator fins to dissipate excess heat. The front of the box is open and various coloured gels and filters can be placed in a slot on the box to change the colour of the light. Reds and yellows, warmer colours, could be used to balance the spectrum to offset the impact of the fluorescent lights in "Heaven". Each box is then mounted on a light "standard" which is a light-weight aluminum stand with tripod legs that extends to about two metres in height. Care must be taken in placing the standards so that they are out of traffic areas and are close to outlets. If more than one was used Chuck would try to make sure that different electrical circuits were employed for each light.

The camera is set up by setting the iris for the correct light level and then "doing a white balance". Chuck kept a 4" x 6" white card which he would have me hold about four feet from the lens of the camera while he would press an adjustment button on the camera for several seconds. This adjustment was crucial for obtaining colours that are balanced according to the perceptual abilities of the human eye. Each time we would move to a different location, Chuck would have
to do a white balance, inside or outside. Any white surface under the same lighting conditions would do, and often when I was wearing a white t-shirt I would become the focus for his white balance.

Charged and discharged batteries were placed in a small shoulder bag that was normally kept with the camera. The 3/4" camera used one battery pack while the videotape recorder used two battery packs. Each time we would set up the camera and recording deck we would check the battery levels to make sure that we would not have to change them during a shot. Discharged batteries were placed on one side of the shoulder bag and charged batteries on another. Batteries would normally last for about thirty to forty minutes of recording time.

Chuck used twenty and thirty minute tapes for shooting and a supply of these were also placed in the shoulder bag. Once a tape was finished Chuck would remove a small red button from the bottom of the tape cassette to insure that it could not be recorded over by accident. Before placing the tape in its plastic case, the manufacturer's label, which was fitted into a clear plastic sleeve, was taken out and turned upside-down to indicate that the tape was used. Chuck carried a marking pen to write the tape's number on the label so that he could keep track of its contents. In a small notebook he would later write down information about the tape's contents and its corresponding number.
Setting up the camera and recording deck required attaching a thick cord between the camera and the deck. When Chuck used a rented Betacam, the recording deck was part of the camera, so the need to have two separate pieces of equipment and a connecting cord was eliminated. The recording deck operated exactly like an audio cassette recorder with play, record, fast-forward, rewind and stop buttons. The cord from the camera was capable of carrying on and off messages to the recording deck when it was put in the pause and play mode. Simply pressing the trigger on the camera would operate the deck.

After the camera and deck were set up a tape was placed in the deck for recording and we went through the standard ritual of putting "bars" on the first twenty seconds of the tape. "Bars" are the colour bars that we sometimes see after television stations go off the air. The colour bars enable editors to calibrate a standard colour mix between different tapes so that colours from one tape will match the colours on another tape, despite differences in lighting conditions. Unfortunately, this is a ritual that often interrupts shooting, as do the times when tapes run out and batteries lose their power.

While Chuck operated the camera, I would "do sound". Chuck used a boom microphone from Video Place combined with a 3/4 metre long plastic and cloth cover that was shaped like a big drug capsule with a wooden handle grip. The microphone
was placed inside this apparatus so that wind noises and other extraneous noises would be dampened. The microphone could be switched from uni-directional to omni-directional sound pick-up. This meant that it could pick up sounds from mainly the direction in which it was pointed or from every direction, respectively. Normally Chuck kept the microphone on the uni-directional setting for capturing dialogue. The microphone had a long cord which I would hold in the hand that held the wooden grip of the microphone apparatus, and the end of the cord was plugged into the recording deck. With the other hand I could play-out the cord if we moved and adjust the sound levels on the recording deck. I would also wear a set of headphones to monitor the sound levels and these were also plugged into the recording deck. If Chuck was walking with the camera, I would be following close behind him with the VTR over one shoulder, the small shoulder bag containing the batteries and tapes over another shoulder, the microphone apparatus pointed toward the scenes he was shooting and the headphones on my head to monitor the sound. My job was relatively simple, but I had to be quick on my feet and very aware of the activity around me and Chuck's movements so that the lengths of cords that tied us together would not be stretched and no one would walk in between us.

Working sound with Chuck was always an interesting experience for my senses. Having headphones on and hearing only what the microphone was pointed toward gave me a feeling
of being somewhat distanced from the events around me. Being tied to Chuck with cords like a Siamese twin made me become very aware of Chuck's movements and intentions. In order to do the job correctly I had to learn how to anticipate Chuck's movements and the movements of the people he was shooting. If I was distracted for a moment, Chuck would tug on my arm and the two of us would move in stereo to follow the action. Enclosed in a world of uni-directional sound, my experiences were often a little dream-like. I also discovered that my role put me in an excellent position as a participant observer: my job as a sound person was to acutely observe and listen.

These experiences gave me an exceptionally close look at Chuck's choices of shoots and his videotaping techniques. As Steven once remarked, Chuck had "a very good eye... he's not afraid to try to do things that other people would not even think about doing with a camera". Doing sound for Chuck was not unlike doing the reflex exercises that football players go through to learn to react and anticipate the movement of other players. When I asked Chuck about why he was so active with the camera he explained:

You can use the camera like a still camera and just shoot what is in front of you. That's what you normally see on TV. You can also use the camera as part of the making of the image... it doesn't have to be a stationary image, you can move with it and you can make it look at scenes from all kinds of angles and points of view... you can be reactive. You know, you can simply record what you see in front of the lens, or you can
be proactive and move the lens to build on what is in front of you and create new perspectives and different feelings about what is happening there... you've got to be ready to do some crazy things once in awhile, and some of them work and some of them don't, but when it works it's great and you can get some really neat shots...

"Heaven" was a setting that, due to the restrictions of space and the number of people present, would normally require a "reactive" stance, however, Chuck would typically deviate from conventional, "straight-on" shots and move the camera into different positions. During a series of shots which were designed to capture the processes involved in creating masks for the performers, Chuck used close-ups of the mask-maker's hands, a long-shot of the activities around the mask-maker, a medium shot of the mask-maker working at her bench, and then a shot where he stood on a chair and shot the mask-maker over her shoulder as she worked on a mask.

During a sequence of shots such as the one just described, Chuck would ask the participants questions about their work and their thoughts about the play and its progress. Instead of using the interviewer technique that we are familiar with from television, Chuck would ask questions from behind the camera and their responses would be recorded from the microphone that I held outside of the camera's field of view. Chuck explained that he was trying to create a documentary in which the play's participants told their own story without the need for an "omniscient narrator" to interpret everything for them:
This way we get to hear their point of view, and I can ask all sorts of questions and I don't have to worry about whether their answers fit in with everything else when I edit... When you set up to interview someone with the idea of keeping all of the images of them talking and you asking questions, you are kind of limited by what happens on tape. This way, I can record their voices on tape, but I can separate their voices from the images and I can put cut-aways in to illustrate some of the things they are talking about. They become the narrators of what is going on, not me or some booming CBC type of voice...

Chuck was constantly looking for "cut-aways" that he could insert over-top of the participant's dialogue. "Cut-aways" are simply shots of action or shots of objects that relate to the topics discussed by the participants and which serve to visually augment their words. In "Heaven" there were many opportunities to create cut-aways of seamstresses creating clothing, actors trying on costumes, artist sketches of costume designs, and simply the general level of activity in the building.

As our shooting progressed, Chuck began to develop an over-all framework for organizing all of the footage he was collecting. His intention was to create a document of the activities which lead up to the play and to combine this with participants' observations about their activities and the play itself according to a time-line which would lead from the early stages of the play to the actual performance. For example, the shots in "Heaven" and interviews at various stages of the play's production would be juxtaposed with shots
of the actors in costume during a performance. Likewise shots of the activities that went on behind the scenes to create a barn-raising scene would be juxtaposed with the barn-raising scene during an actual performance. Chuck hoped that this type of sequencing would help to provide viewers with an awareness of the complexity of the play and the tremendous amount of volunteer labour and cooperation that came together to create the play.

This meant that Chuck had to capture a wide range of pre-play activities from various points in time leading up to the play. Participants had to be interviewed at various points along the play's progression to performance. Chuck explained,

We can get a sense of the process of this thing... that's what the play is all about really, the process of its production and the cooperation, and the frustration, and the fun, and the excitement that is going on within the whole community... The interview we did with Gale [the play's producer and writer] the other day was great because here we are a week before the play and this developer is trying to get an injunction to stop the play because he is afraid that he'll be slandered, and Gale was so angry and that anger was real, and she was talking from her heart about how this is really what the play is all about, you know, people taking charge of their lives against powerful interests... She's drawing up that sign to make a disclaimer about not depicting any real people and she's just about drilling holes through the paper with her marker... If we had just gone and interviewed her on one day and left it at that we would have missed the chance to get her really talking from the heart and feeling the anger that she had about working on this thing for two years and having someone try to snatch that away...
when you see her talk, you know that no one
will be able to stop this thing...1

Our shooting activities took us to various locations
in the surrounding township. For example, we spent many hours
at an old barn that had become the centre for the construction
and storage of props, such as a huge mannequin and the pre-
assembled and cut lumber for a barn-building scene. We
visited the homes of people who were collecting materials for
props and we accompanied the stage crew on their rounds of
collecting these materials. We visited the local bakery to
interview its staff and customers about their perceptions
about the play prior to its performance. We spent some time
in the local tavern talking to the regulars. We also spent a
significant amount of time at the ruins of the old mill that
would be the site for the plays performances and which, for
the two weeks leading to the performances, was the site of set
construction and lighting and sound arrangements.

During the performances of the play I was able to
accompany Chuck on four separate nights. The play was
designed as a "theatre in the round" production where the play

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1 There were times during my fieldwork with Chuck on the
play that I considered changing my dissertation topic to the
phenomenon of this particular community play. It was a
quintessential struggle against the hegemony of larger
political forces and land developers, and it illustrated that
people could cooperate to subvert the impending forces of
capitalism that were about to change the very landscape of
their community. The play has since left a legacy of
community activity and spirit that has changed the political
landscape of the entire township and lead to the development
of land use planning that takes social, agricultural, heritage
and environmental factors into account.
takes place surrounding the audience and often within the audience itself. Each night Chuck would have an agenda of various shots that he wanted to capture, with the overall plan of being able to recreate specific scenes and perhaps the whole play on videotape by piecing together seven or eight different angles and points of view taken from different nights of the play. The idea was to be able to capture one entire performance from eight individual performances.

We would follow characters as they prepared off-stage and then move with them into the audience as they played their roles. The next night we would shoot the same scene from a scaffold, and then the following night we would shoot the scene from somewhere else in the audience. Not only would this technique provide Chuck with a variety of angles and shots, but it would also provide him with enough overlap between shots to insure that any gaps in one night's shooting could be filled in by shots from another night. It was also a useful technique for capturing the audio portion of the play. Sound is a very important part of the images that appear on video monitors, and poor sound can destroy the artist's intent. By capturing the sound and dialogue of the same scene from different points Chuck was relatively sure to be able to have enough usable sound to accompany the visuals.

Chuck was essentially a one-man crew for much of the production. I assisted him with sound for a good part of his work, and the producer/writer's brother assisted him with the
camera work on several performance nights. When Chuck was unable to have an assistant he opted to use the camera without an external microphone. Essentially, Chuck was the producer, director, camera person, gaffer, lighting technician, transport driver, caterer and production manager of the production, a phenomenon that would probably never occur for broadcast television productions. Indeed, in my work with Chuck as a production assistant on a CBC production the previous summer, the CBC provided a crew of four to do the production work that Chuck was doing by himself.

Throughout the entire shooting process both Chuck and I felt invigorated by the activities that surrounded us. One participant in the play described our feelings as "a collective rush that you can only get when people realize their own power and they extend themselves in ways they've never done before." After several weeks of shooting Chuck and I had become part of the play project and were able to share in the pleasures that are generated from such collective work. The "collective rush" that we were immersed within became the motivation to complete the work, even though Chuck was faced with heavy debts to finance the work.

Once the play had finished its run, Chuck and I went out to do some more interviews to document the participant's reactions to the play and their thoughts on its success. Each and every person we talked with wanted Chuck to not only produce a documentary on the play, but to also produce a
record of the entire performance itself on videotape so that they could have a copy of the fruits of their labours. At first Chuck was hesitant about this due to financial constraints, but these same constraints eventually compelled him to produce the tape they desired because he was unable to secure the financing he needed to edit the documentary. The play's participants were willing to pay for copies of the entire performance, and Chuck was able to use the promise of this money to log all of his acquired footage and to make preliminary preparations for editing the documentary.

Several weeks following the play's performances, one of the central cast members and organizers died in a fishing accident in the Arctic and members of the play approached Chuck to produce a videotape focusing on this person's activities for a memorial service. Again working without pay, Chuck edited together a variety of footage to create a 23 minute videotape for the memorial. Another tape was generated from his footage when several supporters of his work asked him to create a "promo" tape that they could use to lobby people from the local university to help Chuck pay for the cost of editing the documentary.

I was able to work with Chuck while he edited the "promo" tape and was able to observe the time consuming and meticulous nature of videotape editing. The editing process started at about 9 o'clock in the evening with a half-hour break while we waited for a "master" tape to be "black-
striped". A master tape is the tape upon which final edits are placed and the master serves as the "cleanest" tape from which to make further copies or "dubs" of the finished production. Black-striping is a procedure that uses a blank master tape and places a solid black image over the entire tape. The procedure takes the same time that it would take to play an entire tape, thus a 30 minute tape takes 30 minutes to black-stripe, and a 60 minute tape takes 60 minutes to black-stripe. Black-striping insures that edits onto the master tape will have no "glitches" caused by a previous background of "snow" which might sneak into the brief spaces between edit points.

At some of the video art production centres that I visited, members were able to purchase blank master tapes or they could pay an extra price to purchase a tape which had already been black-striped. Within the television industry black-striping is a duty performed by production assistants in the late hours of the evening, or black-striped tapes are purchased from wholesalers who perform the task for them. At Video Place this service was not offered since members were not willing to pay the extra cost that this entailed. Thus, prior to every editing session for the creation of a new production, the producer switches on the editing system, and puts a new tape into the recording deck, switches the proper buttons to the black-strip mode and then waits for the tape to play itself through.
At Video Place, black-striping is an excuse to go out for a cup of coffee, or to sit in the main meeting room and chat or glance through various publications. It is a procedure which generates a necessary amount of dead time. For Chuck and I our black-striping took us down the street to the local pool hall which served coffee late into the evening. The owner of the pool hall greeted Chuck with a familiar hello, indicating that Chuck was a regular customer during the evenings. We walked back to Video Place and sat in the main meeting room to talk about what we would be doing that evening.

Chuck indicated that the promo video needed to capture the spirit of the play as well as the style that he was going to use to edit the footage he had. We brainstormed about various elements of the play and its production that were on tape and tried to imagine what a good ten minute promo tape would look like for someone from a granting agency or someone from the university who might be able to "kick-in some money" to help complete the production. We decided that we wanted something that would be fast-paced and would show the social and political angles of the play, show the cooperative spirit that the play generated and show a single scene from the play that would give potential funders a glimpse of the play itself.

The scene chosen was one in which the central historical character of the play, William Lyon MacKenzie,
appeals to the "citizens of Canada" to rebel against the "tyranny and oppression" of the land management strategies of the government and the family compact and join him in a march for freedom. His speech is followed by a vibrant dance scene in which he is carried on the shoulders of cast members through the audience, accompanied by a song which implores his ghost to rise up and help the current residents of the community with their struggle to fight similar oppressive forces in the current guise of "mindless" land developers.

Editing can be done according to "cut-edit" procedures or can be done using "A/B roll" techniques. Cut-edit procedures are relatively easy to understand. Source tapes are placed in a player deck and a master tape, upon which the finished production will be stored, is placed in a record deck. The editor manually turns a set of wheels or knobs that can move the source tape and the recording tape back and forth at the will of the editor. Once the edit points on the source tape are matched with the entry point on the master tape, the specific video frames are located and they are programmed for insertion by pressing a couple of buttons. The editor then previews the edit prior to "assembling" the edit on the master tape. Previewing allows the editor to see what the edit will look like before it is actually made. If the editor likes what he or she sees, the assemble button is pressed and the machines take over to complete the edit. As Steven said, "it's something a kid can learn in a few minutes and an adult
in about an hour."

The A/B roll editing system is more versatile than a cut-edit system, however it takes a longer time to master its capabilities. The advantage to the A/B roll system is that it provides the editor with the capability to blend images together rather than simply cutting from one image to the next. The recording deck can be synchronized to begin moving slightly before the end of its last image to allow a new image to "fade" into it. The computer software package included in the A/B roll system also allows the editor to program entire sequences of many edits and preview those edits without having to place them permanently on a master tape. Instead of a simple editing board with wheels or knobs, the A/B roll system also employs a computer keyboard with a variety of special function keys to facilitate the editing process. Steven explains the system in a clearer fashion than I:

To have 3/4 inch SP [superior performance] A/B roll equipment to be locked with a modern computer edit list controller: that does a lot more functions than our normal cut editing controller... It's more of a multi-function process... for instance, the controller, you have a potential to work with the controller and type in all types of functions that are possible in the edit list, for instance if you knew where all your edit points were, that's by time code edit lists, you could type in all those points, tell the keyboard and the computer to dissolve and fade and then the switcher to do wipes, and if you program all that information in and if all your edit lists were on those two tapes, then you could watch your whole video be edited at once.

So you could take your tape, watch it at home and mark down all your edit points...
that’s called logging-in... and then come in here for an hour and have it edited... that’s called off-line when you do it in another edit suite. It’s called on-line when you are actually working with an edit list controller, and type in your edits. It can be quite fast and efficient, but normally what I find is that people want to be very careful with their edits and they work slower than what’s potential in the editing, because they want to carefully analyze all those points and make a lot of decisions based on a few edits, but it allows the person the potential to do a lot if they get more efficient at what their edits are like, what their footage is like. Each producer works their own way, so it’s good to have the potential to do a lot... if the producer really needs to.

Since neither of us had mastered the system, Chuck chose to work with the system without using its capacity to program many sequences of edits. This was also necessitated by the fact that we were going to be using dozens of different source tapes, and the A/B roll system can only adapt to one or two source tapes at a time for constructing sequential edits. Chuck did however use the system’s ability to construct fades between tapes.

Chuck related that in his experience as an editor, one can usually rely on a ratio of 1 minute of master tape to one hour of editing time. Editing is a tedious and meticulous process, particularly for the task we had at hand. In order to re-construct the MacKenzie scene Chuck had to make use of eight different source tapes from eight nights of shooting the play’s performance. Each source tape showed the actions in the scene from different angles, and each tape contained
images that were slightly out of sequence with the rest. This represented a logistical problem in maintaining the overall "continuity" of the scene.

For example, as MacKenzie is carried on the shoulders of the cast members he is transported around the grounds on which the audience is standing and he is turned around by the cast members three or four times. On each tape MacKenzie is rotated at different spots along his route through the audience, and the stages in the background provide a reference to the viewer on his location. Without proper editing, the viewer might be disconcerted to see MacKenzie turning during one edit and not turning in the following shot. The scene was also complicated by the fact that MacKenzie was singing along with the music. Chuck had one good audio track of the music to work with, and in order to make the scene appear as if it had been shot by several different cameras on one night, he had to make sure that MacKenzie's mouth was either not visible during the shots he would use, or would be shown to be moving in concert with the lyrics.

Our editing process proceeded rather smoothly, despite the problems with the borrowed playback deck, until we reached the scene mentioned above. The potential frustrations and tedium of the editing process began to wear on both of us. While the entire scene lasted for probably less than three minutes, it had taken us well over an hour just to locate the source material that we were going to use, and we had not even
begun to meticulously construct the several dozen edits that
would be required to complete the scene on the master tape.
It was also about 4 in the morning, so we took another break
to get back into shape.

Editing is hard on the body and hard on the eyes, even
though you are sitting down in a comfortable chair. When
watching a playback monitor there is a tendency to stop
blinking because one does not want to miss a single frame in
case that frame would make a good edit point or, as in the
case of the MacKenzie scene, there is a problem in the
"continuity" of the scene. Eye strain is an inevitable job
hazard and breaks are needed to help to re-moisturize the
eyes, as well as to stretch the muscles from long periods of
sitting. According to Chuck there are other occupational
diseases:

If I ever have another child it'll probably
have two heads because of the radiation from
the monitors and the equipment... we should
all be wearing lead aprons, and by the time
I'm 50 I'll probably have eye cancer.

I can not accurately describe the degree of tedium and
monotony involved in such long editing periods. You may watch
the same four second clip five or six times before the
appropriate edit points are found, and even then the edit that
was just finished might have to be re-edited because there may
be a lack of continuity that might have been missed in the
overall edit sequence. The tape players and recorders are
quite fast in their operations, however you begin to perceive
them operating at a slower and slower pace as the process continues. The visual image that you have in your head as to how the edit will look may often take an hour or so to realize itself on the master tape and on the playback monitor in front of you.

After finishing our break we went right back to the MacKenzie scene and the frustration of the tedium began to really impact upon me. Despite the collective nature of the Video Place organization, the job of editing is typically a one person job. Chuck might ask me for my opinions on particular shots or edits, but for the most part, Chuck was in charge of the controls for the editing apparatus and he had the dexterity to manipulate the controls faster than he could possibly discuss his intentions with me. As the night wore on I found that I was spending most of my time simply watching Chuck re-construct the MacKenzie scene because my input was not needed. The edits were largely dictated by the available footage, the time-frame of the scene, and the necessity of continuity, and thus there was little need for conferences to discuss particular edits.

I discovered that the tedium was also augmented by the need to colour balance each source tape that was used in re-constructing the scene. Each source tape was taken under different lighting conditions and Chuck explained that "even though they're all white balanced, there are minor deviations between each tape that will show up on the master tape unless
they're synchronized." Thus, Chuck would put a source tape into the playback deck so that he could get a four second clip from it, but first he would have to rewind to the beginning of the tape on which the colour bars had been placed and he would visually calibrate the bars using an oscilloscope that had a standard colour bar pattern with which to match the source tape's pattern. At eight o'clock in the morning as you are approaching the last few edits, this process can seem to be exasperatingly time consuming.

Once all the edits were complete, Chuck still had to insert some titles using a device called a "character generator". This required rewinding the master tape to the beginning and roughly calculating the time required to read the titles, and then typing the titles into the character generator which would overlay them onto the master tape. Chuck used the "switcher" board to manually fade the titles in and out of a space at the beginning of the master tape that he had intentionally left blank for this purpose.

After Chuck was satisfied that the master was complete, or "at least its the best we can do tonight", all was not over. The next step was to make dubs of the master tape so that they could be given to possible funding sources. This meant using VHS tapes in yet another recording deck which had to be wired into the existing editing suite. Once this apparatus had been set up, the dubbing process was a simple matter of playing the master tape on a playback deck and
routing the signal to the VHS deck and putting it into record mode. This meant more dead time and a good excuse to go out for breakfast and call it a night.

Eight months after the completion of the performances of the community play, as I write these words, Chuck has not yet finished completing the documentary style production that he had first intended to produce. His central problem is a lack of funding and he has had only limited success in acquiring the funds he needs to pay back his debts for the equipment he used and the editing time he accumulated. He has however produced three individual productions from the play footage which include the promo piece discussed above, the memorial tape for the play member who passed away and the tape of the entire play for the members of the community who participated in its production. The amount of time that Chuck spent in the editing suite at Video Place was enormous, particularly for creating the tape of the entire play which ran for over two hours in duration. If one considers the length of time that we spent creating a ten minute promo tape, one can realize the time that a similar two hour tape would take to complete. Chuck was assisted in his work by the brother of the producer/writer of the play who has substantial experience in community video production and this collaborative editing work will, according to Chuck, continue until the documentary is eventually completed almost a year after the last performance of the play.
Chuck will probably never realize any returns on the enormous amount of time that he has invested in the project, however, he is able to pay his bills and make a decent living by taking on free-lance video production work from a variety of sources. This means that his video art work, which is the work that he really wants to do, will continue to be relegated to the off hours of late evenings and he will always be short on sleep.

Chris' AIDS Vignettes

I was not able to spend time with Chris while he gathered the footage he used for his series of AIDS vignettes, however I was able to spend some time with him while he edited these pieces. Ironically, Chris was also motivated to produce these vignettes by the performances of a play. In this case it was the performances of a university theatre troupe that had produced a series of one-act plays dealing with AIDS. Their performances had become popular at conferences of health professionals and within the educational system, and Chris was interested in putting them on videotape.

Part of the impetus for his production came from a screening event at Video Place at which a video artist from Toronto had introduced a collection of video artist's works dealing with AIDS that had been co-produced by himself and a collaborator in the U.S. The screening attracted a variety of people from the local community who were interested in the
topic of AIDS and the media. Several of the people at the screening were involved in the AIDS plays and their interactions with Chris led to his interest in videotaping their work. Chris is also gay which is another factor in his interest in AIDS:

AIDS is a reality, and it's pretty scary, but we've got to deal with it and the best way is to make it fun instead of all gloom and doom and death... If you think about it, HIV is a wild concept that runs through your body screwing things up in a major way, but people don't want to see it as something that is fascinating and dreadful at the same time, they want to see it as simply evil and bad like cancer... if we're fascinated by it then I think we can come a little closer to understanding it, or at least figuring out how to cope with it through safe sex and all that. If we're just scared of it then all we do is run away and hide...

Chris went to a performance of the AIDS plays at a local church and brought with him a compact Hi-8 camcorder and two VHS camcorders that he had managed to borrow. Each of the cameras was placed at different locations in the Church and were operated by Chris, Jane and a friend of Chris'. The footage that Chris gathered was essentially dictated by the performances of the actors on stage and the performances of vocalists who sang solo between acts. Chris explained that:

Having three cameras lets me edit back and forth between tapes... Jane's a little shaky with her camera, but I kind of like the shakiness because it gives you a neat feeling. I can put in a shot every now and again to shake things up... With the other tapes I can keep the audio from one and then do some cutaways to the other...

While Chris felt that he had an obligation to the AIDS
play people to provide them with a document of their work, he also felt that he could "pretty well do whatever I want with the tapes". I was able to observe him editing two different segments of the total performance: one segment in which he was doing cut-edits from tape to tape in order to simply document a particular act, and another which utilized the audio track of a soloist performing an operatic piece about AIDS, over which Chris was "laying free association images from some other footage I've got because simply watching this woman sing doesn't do much for me."

The "free association" aspect of Chris's production work was an interesting example of bricolage. Chris did not work with a script or a story-board, but relied on his own memories of segments of footage from other videotapes that he had collected. He would run through these tapes, find images that he thought would be "symbolic of someone thinking about AIDS" and then place them overtop of the audio track. He also distorted the images:

to create a different feeling, of thinking, of feeling... I need just the right amount of freeze frame and maybe a little posterization, like that, and then I'll replay it a couple of times to give it more impact... what do you think of that? You kind of let the images tell you what to do with them instead of you ordering them around or boxing them up... This music is wild and airy and the images have to be wild and airy too...

Chris' editing style reminded me of free jazz, because he did not seem to have any particular symbolic meaning in mind, but
was letting the images emerge from the editing process and from his available footage. As Fiske (1989: 50-51) comments on "productive pleasure", escaping the control of meanings involves an escape from elements of social control which struggle to reproduce social forces in the subject. Refusing to construct or define meaning is thus a subversive tactic which allows the video artist to evade the containing strategies of larger social discourses.

Several of Chris' friends came by while he was editing this piece and their suggestions and ideas about how to distort an image or which image to use became quickly incorporated into the piece. For example, as Chris was fast-forwarding a tape to scan for interesting images, an image of a woman turning to glance down at the floor appeared and someone suggested that he "do something with that". Chris then proceeded to play the image again and again, each time incorporating different effects that would distort or degrade the image in some way. When everyone was in agreement on the "best" combination of effects, Chris placed the image on the master tape and then repeated the image two more times. Everyone thought that it "worked" well. There did not seem to be any implicit coding system at work, or any organizational framework for this process, only a sharing of ideas and feelings about the images. No one said that any image had a specific meaning attached to it because the images were judged according to collective feelings of whether they "worked" or
did not "work". The process echoed Attali's (1985: 137-141) vision of the economic rupture represented by free jazz through which music is "produced by each individual for himself, for pleasure outside of meaning, usage and exchange... is no longer made to be represented or stockpiled, but for participation in collective play, in an ongoing quest for new, immediate communication, without ritual and always unstable."

Chuck's video production had little division of labour because Chuck was responsible for most of the video work which itself emerged from the collective processes converging to create the play. Likewise, Chris' video production alternated from being a single-person production which emerged from the collective efforts of the AIDS play actors, to being a collective production in which his friends had equal influence on the finished operatic piece. For both video artists there is pleasure generated from their efforts at working with others and this pleasure is arguably more important than their finished video art works. In both cases a fuzzy division of labour is present which provides the space required for collective work and collective pleasure to emerge.

Chris finances his video work through part-time jobs and thus must make do with whatever equipment he is able to put together on a limited budget. The use of borrowed VHS camcorders helps him to gather footage inexpensively, however in order to edit this footage he must first "dump" it on to
3/4" tapes so that it can be edited using one of Video Place's two editing suites. This is a common tactic among video artists because VHS camcorders are a popular consumer item that can be borrowed from friends, relatives and businesses, and they are easy and inexpensive to operate.

The loss of a "generation" in the video image, caused by the "dumping" procedure, is considered to be more than compensated for by the gain of being able to work with little money:

Who cares if the images are a little runny and the colour bleeds a bit... If that's what the images look like, then that's what they look like... I can't afford to use the M3 [3/4" camera at Video Place] so the images are true to my own cash flow situation in life. If I used the M3 and got really sparkley images, then I'd be lying about who I am and what I'm doing running around with this mega-expensive camera. Besides, with a [VHS] camcorder I can go places and get things that the M3 is too big to get. I mean people get uptight when they see a big camera... I shot one of my favourite videos on a plane of the guy sitting across the aisle who was uptight about being on the plane. I couldn't have done that with the M3 because its too fucking obvious - "Hey look at me, I've got a big expensive camera and I'm doing something legitimate with it!" Fuck that, a camcorder is the ticket...
(Micheal)

"Dumping" would not be tolerated by broadcast television (with the exception of America's Funniest Home Videos and the use of home video footage for news items as noted earlier) because broadcast television employs "quality" standards that necessitate the use of first generation images shot on high quality tape. Unlike their television counterparts, video
artists are willing and able to make-do with the technology and the images at hand.

"Dumping", like black-striping, is a procedure that generates dead time for the video artist as he or she must wait for tapes to be recorded. Chris uses this dead time to talk with his friends and to generate new ideas for further video art works. During my fieldwork at Video Place I found that this was a common practice. Hundreds of ideas are thought of and brought forward for discussion:

What if we took a camera into a busy elevator and pointed it at the floor so that people couldn’t see that it was on, but we could get their conversations in bits and pieces as they get in and out of the elevator... every new set of people would have different conversations, some serious, some about the weather and we could kind of eavesdrop on these little points in people’s lives while we look at their feet going in and out of the elevator...

I’d like to do something on the people who hang out at the [downtown] hotel and cash their welfare cheques at the Money Mart... sort of a cinema verite thing where I’d just follow them on the day the welfare cheques come in, and maybe on the day before their next welfare cheque...

I’ve often wondered what it would be like to videotape the death of a video camera by dropping one out of a plane or from the roof of a high building while it is recording... you know, the ground getting closer and closer and then just lots of snow...

The vast majority of these ideas are never realized on videotape, however these discussions probably help video artists to reinforce the idea that video is a very flexible medium. As well, these discussions probably serve to
stimulate and motivate video artists to explore aspects of the medium that have yet to be explored. Finally, they probably serve to help define the type of the activities with which video artists can involve themselves. The dead time produced by dumping and black striping is thus socially productive rather than materially productive.

When Chris had finished the operatic piece he was working on he mentioned that he had a second audio track of the same soloist doing another operatic song. Musical audio tracks that are not subject to copyright are hard to come by and most video artists must create their own music if they wish to use music in their videos (and provided they wish to distribute the tape outside of Video Place or their own circle of friends). Chris decided that he would:

give it away to someone because I don’t need to have two opera things... let someone else play with it and see what they can come up with. It’s a clean recording and they said I could do whatever I wanted with it, so I might as well let someone else use it rather than let it go to waste.

This statement is representative of the general co-operative outlook that the video artists and Video Place tend to have in relation to each other’s work.

Summary

Video art production processes are diverse, yet they tend to share certain characteristics that the above examples make clear. Production activities do not invoke a refined and
specialized division of labour such as one would find in broadcast television production. Instead the division of labour is characterized by a fuzziness that is often increased through collective labour processes. One person usually predominates over a production, however non-specific collaboration is common. The work of producing video art is not a glamorous activity, and it is filled with the kind of mundane tasks and fractionated time with which any other work process is filled. Throughout these tasks video artists develop tactics for making-do with the materials at hand and the resources (financial and material) available to complete their work. In other words, video art production is what de Certeau (1984) would call a practice of everyday life. Finally, video art production can also be a very pleasurable task for its producers, particularly in cases where collective activities are engaged in to create a production. In these cases the pleasure generated by the production processes probably exceeds the pleasure that can be produced with the product by itself. It is this pleasure that appears to be a primary element in the motivation of video artists to do the work that they do, rather than the promise of a reward (financial or popular acclaim) for the complete production.

Finally, while television production could be seen as focusing on the creation and social diffusion of meanings, video art production is focused more on the pleasure of images and the construction of image sequences that "work" at a level
of experience that evades clear and precise definitions. Video art plays with signifiers but tends to refuse to attempt to permanently attach specific signifieds to those signifiers. Video art texts tend to be inherently texts of potentials which can evoke a multitude of readings on the part of the viewer.
GRANT APPLICATIONS, PROFILE BUILDING AND THE ART MAFIA

Grant Applications

Grant applications are the bane of video artists. For example, Michael's use unconventional techniques of degrading images may have been one of the reasons for the failure of his grant application, and Chuck's catch-22 situation of having to apply for initial development money mid-way through a production ultimately resulted in his lack of success in obtaining major funding. The juries and organizations which evaluate grant applications are notoriously mysterious bodies in the video art world, bodies which, in the eyes of video artists, often make arbitrary decisions that have little to do with the merits of individual projects.

In looking at applications and accompanying videotapes, the granting bodies have little time to fully investigate an artist's visual philosophy. According to a former juror I spoke with, many of the videotapes which accompany grant applications are viewed for less than 20 or 30 seconds. In Michael's case, the degenerated images which he submitted may have been understood simply as poor images, rather than as the "video memories" which Michael intended. Indeed, given the complexity of Michael's stated project and the obtuse link between his concept and the degenerated images, it is possible that a granting body might not make the conceptual effort needed to understand Michael's motives. In Chuck's case, his inability (due to the realities of
production) to follow the procedural rules of the granting bureaucracy probably had more bearing on his proposals' acceptance or rejection than the actual ideas and production arrangements outlined in his proposals.

Michael's grant application specifies all of the details necessary for creating his video, the most important of which is a budget, not the conceptual elements. The budget contains estimates for every aspect of a production which is still essentially a set of ideas in Michael's head. He worries about whether or not his estimates are too high or too low, whether he is asking for too much money overall, or whether he is asking for too little. He is also concerned about the fact that he is not a very well known video artist. He has not spent a great deal of time trying to distribute his previous video works to video festivals, and he has not screened his works widely:

They don't know me like they know [big name video artist] or [big name video artist] and I don't hang out in the fucking pretentious little artsie bars that the _______ Street [in a larger metropolitan city] types buzz around... My name certainly isn't on the lips of the incestuous little jury system...

Like others at Video Place, he realizes that Video Place is at the margins of the larger metropolitan city an hour's drive away, and that the artists at Video Place have expressed concern as to whether or not their marginality has been detrimental in terms of funding. In the larger metropolitan city, artists have formed a distinct, and
according to Michael and several other artists I interviewed an "incestuous" sub-culture. This sub-culture not only has its requisite jargon ("artspeak"), clothing styles and hangouts, but has also erected a formidable network of artistic venues, artist-run centres, distributors, publishing houses, journals, newspapers, and fashionable theatres, book stores, restaurants and bars. Building a profile as an artist is a difficult process, but when one compares an artist's progress in the metropolitan city to an artist's progress in a more marginal community it is easy to see the benefits of being able to integrate into such an all encompassing network. In particular, the relative abundance of print media dedicated to artists, virtually ensures that a determined artist can achieve some notoriety.

Exposure, both of an artist's work and of an artist's name and persona, is crucial to an artist's success in obtaining the approval of funding agencies. The video artists that I met during the course of my fieldwork often believed that aesthetic considerations, while nonetheless important, are secondary to reputation in judging the value of an artist's work. This may or may not be true, but this belief has very real effects, especially with regard to video artists' critiques of granting bodies and their efforts to change granting systems. Artists in Canada have fought long and hard (through organizations such as ANNPAC and CARFAC) to establish criteria for fair and equitable granting systems
which are reputed to consider aesthetics and artistic commitment over and above reputations. In these systems, which have been adopted by various arts councils, decisions regarding grants are made by "peer juries" of artists working with similar media rather than by critics or curators who are not practising artists. Practising artists are asked to submit names of potential jurors to the granting agencies, who then chose a panel for each grant competition.

As fair as this system may seem, video artists from Video Place and other regional centres complained to me that the demographic weight of artists from a dominant metropolitan art community, together with the exposure available to artists from that community, results in a high proportion of grant money straying within that community. In essence, they believe that a type of demographic and geographic hegemony is at work. In the eyes of regionalized video artists, this hegemony is further compounded by the fact that established artists are chosen to sit on juries and that they are assumed to bring with them many years of artistic preconceptions which influence their choices and tend to lead them toward awarding grants to equally established artists who share similar formative influences. Here is how one established artist from the larger metropolitan city discusses the jury system and grants:

Me: Is there a lot of competition for grant money?
A: More and more, but that is to be expected. I don't think that that is a bad thing. I
mean when I started getting grants 6, 7, 8 years ago, they were really easy to get... I was surprised how easy they were to get. I mean here's me having made like a couple of tapes, no formal training, relatively young, applying for grants and getting them. I thought that was astounding. Now the same thing doesn't happen to people in a similar situation... Being on juries, I know that there is a real tendency to want to support younger artists... people who haven't yet been tainted by the system basically, that's what it boils down to. Everybody always wants to discover an artist... critics and curators dreams, to find someone who is doing great work that no one has heard about, so that they can be part of it.

But the other thing with the arts councils is that they started funding artists, and in particular video artists, only about 12 or 15 years ago, so that the people who were doing it then, got in and started getting grants and then started being on juries and then started getting more grants and getting on more juries... because the grant structure was set up at a specific stage in our contemporary history, people who were active at that stage are the people who will continue to benefit the most from that structure until the end of their lives. It is just the way structures work... and then people coming in 15 or 20 years later have to deal with criteria that were set up by and for those people... so if you want to come in... so if you were to go in and say, "the way we conceive of video art is something completely different", they would say, "oh well, we're not set up to fund that sort of thing..." They won't say, "that's no good", but they will say, "that's beyond our scope." Now to a certain extent, people try to combat that... I know that if someone is doing something unusual on a jury, or the juries will try to be responsive... but the structure itself... the fact that the application form is designed the way it is and things like that influences who applies... also the history of who typically gets grants influences who applies... you won't apply if you're not somewhat like the people who get them already... if you're doing something that is completely different
you wouldn't even think of applying.

Michael’s grant application is thus faced with many obstacles. Not being a part of the metropolitan art community also distances him from contacts within the larger art community who have served on juries and who can provide some assistance in crafting the grant proposal. The craft of proposal writing is very similar to the efforts that Haas and Shaffir (1987) observed with regard to the craftsmanship that goes into writing biographies for medical school admissions committees. Grant applicants actively search out artists who have received grants in order to discover "the tricks" needed to win a grant. Artists such as Michael are at a distance from the current form of "artspeak" that might be in vogue within the larger art community, and they may not be able to achieve the correct formula of budgetary magic that indicates inside knowledge of the granting organization's funding priorities and funding taboos.

During the course of my fieldwork I had the opportunity to accompany Chuck on a visit to the large metropolitan city’s provincial film and video funding source. Chuck had submitted a grant application in a competition for research and development funding to a maximum of $6,000. Chuck’s grant application was turned down and Chuck felt it necessary to travel to the city to discuss the reasons with the person in charge of the research and development money. According to this person, most applicants were aware that
$6,000 was a maximum award that was seldom, if ever awarded. Applicants who requested amounts of approximately $2,000 were routinely funded, providing their proposals were in good order:

Most of the proposals that we received were in the neighbourhood of $2,000... if you had talked to anyone who got a grant from the last few competitions you might have understood our funding better, but since you live in _________ I can understand the difficulty finding these things out...

Not being privy to this information Chuck had applied for the maximum and had been summarily turned down. The person in charge of the program suggested that a subsequent application asking for $2,000 would stand a much better chance of being funded. Unfortunately for Chuck, this crucial piece of information was not printed on the grant application instructions: it could only be learned by someone close to the central grapevine of video art in the larger metropolitan city.

In Michael's case, he clearly expressed a belief (a belief echoed by others at Video Place) that his grant was turned down primarily as a result of the variety of factors implicated in a position marginal to the dominant artistic community of the large metropolitan city. Michael and others who have had mixed success with granting systems expressed a number of problems that they faced in constructing grants. For example, they might lack: the requisite jargon and ability to write in "artspeak"; knowledge about grant craftsmanship;
knowledge about funding patterns; an extended network of video art colleagues, and; a developed persona within the metropolitan art community. Another common belief was that jurors may not extend the effort necessary to understand their proposal because they might be relatively unknown artists. Some of the video artists at Video Place made a point of checking the lists of winners of each grant competition. They often claimed that these lists verified their belief that a high proportion of "art stars" from the large metropolitan city would be consistently chosen to receive major grants.

Building a Profile from Scratch

Michael's strategy for dealing with his failed grant application is to work on refining his "story-board" (a series of sketches illustrating key production sequences) for the proposed video as well as seeking alternative sources of funding and equipment. He realizes that his marginal position is a probable factor in the failure of his proposal, however he is unable and unwilling to migrate to the larger metropolitan city in order to integrate into the influential artistic sub-culture. Michael resigns himself to creating the video over a long period of time:

I've been saving for another trip to England... I'll take a VHS camcorder with me [instead of a more expensive 3/4 inch camera] and I think I can do the possession scenes without the lighting I wanted... It may not be as long as I wanted it to be, but I think I can get something on tape... I don't know when it'll be finished, you know, I still owe
[Video Place] for the last trip to England... I'll have to put in more volunteer time to pay for that and to build up some more equipment time...

Michael also realizes that he must attempt to improve his profile in the video art world. The most common tactic for doing this is to make "dubs" (copies) of finished video productions and send them to any of the numerous video festivals that take place throughout the world. Each month at Video Place, cardboard boxes are placed on the floor with information sheets about upcoming festivals. Members who would like to submit tapes can place their tapes in the boxes and they will be sent (Video Place pays the shipping charges) to the festivals. Members must also include a current c.v. or biography, detailed information about the tape's production personnel and its mastering format (i.e., the type of tape used for editing and its international playback mode\(^1\)), and still photographs of a representative image from a monitor, or photographs taken during the production of the tape. In the

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\(^1\) There are three types of international standards for tapes and playback equipment: NTSC (the North American mode, humorously referred to as "Never The Same Colour" due to its poor performance in comparison to other standards); PAL (common in Europe), and; SECAM (also common in Europe and Asia). An NTSC tape cannot be played on PAL equipment. It must be converted to the PAL standard. International standards have caused problems for video artists over the years, and they have been on the forefront of pushing for the manufacture of machines which playback in all three modes, and for inexpensive conversion processes. One Canadian video art distributor, for example, has published a world map poster with countries coloured according to their tape standards to aid artists and other video professionals who circulate tapes internationally.
artist’s biography or c.v., the artist mentions tapes that have been screened at other festivals or at notable screening events, and indicates any awards or grants that may have been won. Many festivals also ask the producer to provide a brief description of the content of the tape and may also ask the producer to select appropriate categories (narrative, experimental, etc.) for the tape’s assessment. Sending tapes to festivals is a time consuming process, a process in which many of the video artists at Video Place do not wish to take part.

Each year, several members of Video Place do have tapes accepted for screening at various festivals. Such screenings provide the video artist with material to include in their c.v.’s in a manner similar to the way publications are used within academia. Occasionally an artist might win an award from a festival, which then becomes a valuable asset in obtaining grant money or in having a tape selected for screening at another festival. Artists who become “known quantities” (interviewee) have a much better chance of breaking into the festival circuit and winning grant competitions. In Michael’s case, he believes that his c.v. lacks the necessary accolades and awards to help him win the award he needs to make his feature length tape:

Look at who gets the grants. They’ve got c.v.’s the length of my arm and I can do that, but I’ve got to either put in a lot of bullshit or I have to get into more festivals... but that takes a lot of time and money and energy too... I’m competing with
people who know how the system works and
they've got lots of grants before, so of
course they're going to keep getting grants
because the juries don't have to take any
risks on some unknown guy... it's not the work
that gets you the grants, it's how well you
know the system and how well the system knows
you... look at ______'s work - a lot
of it is shit and he gets huge grants and
commissions because he knows how to kiss ass,
behave like an "artist" and he's like a big
snowball that keeps rolling up the grants and
getting bigger and bigger...

Within the metropolitan art community, it is somewhat
less difficult to acquire citations for a c.v. The larger
number of video artists means that they can pool their
resources and develop their own screening events and thus
create a new avenue for developing their c.v.'s. Again, this
is analogous to the academic tactic of creating a new journal
to publish the writings of a group of academics who are having
a difficult time getting their work published elsewhere.
Video artists have successfully established "parallel"
galleries which are galleries run by boards of artists, many
of whom are video artists, and which routinely screen video
art from members of the metropolitan art community.

Artists at Video Place such as Michael have recently
began to attempt to develop their own screening opportunities
by holding a yearly member's tape screening. In order to add
legitimacy to any such event, it is important that it be a
curated event, curated by either an established video artist
or by an established video art critic. Members realize that
this tactic of increasing artist profiles and building c.v.'s
is important for securing grants for individuals and for the
centre as a whole:

We’ve got to nurture the membership... most of our members don’t know anything about festivals, writing grant proposals or promoting themselves... we’re too far away from _______ Street [the artistic area of the larger metropolitan city]. But we’ve got to start somewhere. We’ve got to get the membership to screen their tapes here... We’ve got to try to develop a critical discourse about our member’s tapes... Our members won’t start getting the big grant money until we stop looking like this back water artist-run centre, even though that’s what we are, and that is why our tapes are worth looking at... It’s a big game, and we aren’t making the rules, but if we don’t play the game, the centre doesn’t get good funding and the members get overlooked by the [grant] juries.

(Interviewee)

The importance of this type of video art activity is indicated by the proportion of time that Video Place’s two full time staff dedicate to "nurturing" the membership. Workshops on grant writing and distributing tapes are common; information on screening venues and video festivals is constantly being posted or highlighted in the centre’s newsletter; member’s are encouraged to participate in "visiting artist" series where established video artists act as mentors and role models for less-established video artists; the centre regularly provides dubs of members’ tapes for screenings at conferences for video artists, and; the staff members try to maintain contact with key curators and critics to ensure that the centre’s tapes are not overlooked for curated screening events or gallery displays.
A video artist who is serious about establishing a strong profile could easily spend more time entering festivals and getting his or her work screened than he or she might actually spend producing video art. Veteran members of Video Place often made reference to a former member who had become an "art star" primarily through self promotion. They asserted that his work was no better than the work of other members, but that his continuous efforts to build a profile led to his "art star" status. In the case of many of the less-established video artists at Video Place, very little self-promotional work is done because these members are not normally aware of the larger realm of video art activities geared to promotion and distribution. Video art is prodigiously produced, however, much of what is produced remains seen by a relatively small group of local video artists, and the artist's own community of friends. The "art stars" of the video art world are a proportionately small group whose works are seen by relatively larger numbers of people. Video artists interested in establishing their credentials as video artists, and receiving production money obviously view this situation as a problem. Remarkably, however, many video artists, such as Jane are content with the relatively small number of people who are exposed to their work.

There is an implicit contradiction in the co-operative organization of video art production centres such as Video
Place and beliefs about of jury systems and the art mafia. At Video Place, I saw little or no evidence of rivalry between member video artists. On the contrary, artists who received grants were typically seen as helping to improve the profile of the centre and the collective of artists as a whole. I do not have evidence to generalize this phenomenon to other centres, however I believe that it may be a common characteristic of centres in the "regions". Many video artists did however, express a belief that there is an intense rivalry between artists in the regions and artists in metropolitan centres. This rivalry appears to be maintained and intensified by granting agencies which uphold the standards of the larger art world and which distribute limited production funds to only a few video artists within the entire population of video artists. The fact that these granting agencies continue to distribute large grants to individual artists rather than small grants to all video artists (or alternatively provide production grants to centres which can then distribute them equitably among their member artists) only serves to propagate these rivalries. The existence of these rivalries may prevent the establishment of a wider collective orientation. The granting systems may thus be partially responsible creating divisions among video artists.

In this section I have attempted to contextualize the general activities of video artists at Video Place. While the centre is primarily a video production facility, it has many
other functions for its membership, and members do not confine their activities strictly to the production of video art. In the sections which follow, these activities will be investigated in greater depth.
BECOMING A VIDEO ARTIST AND LEARNING HOW TO WATCH VIDEO ART

The Marijuana Smoker Analogy: Becoming a Video User

I have already indicated that I have made extensive use of Howard Becker's *Art Worlds* (1982) in creating a framework for the analysis of video artists, however it was Becker's (1953) analysis of marijuana smokers that provided me with a key analogy to unlock some of the mysteries of the social world of video artists. In *Art Worlds*, Becker goes to great lengths to demonstrate that aesthetic decisions about what is or is not a work of art are not based on intrinsic qualities of a work or special gifts that an artist supposedly possesses. Instead, he argues that a complex set of social processes and negotiations determines whether something is a work of art or is a mundane object. I have accepted this argument and I am fairly sure that most sociologists who would study an art world would agree with Becker, however the approach, as it stands, neglects to account for aesthetic experiences.

Becker calls his approach an "institutional theory of aesthetics" (Ibid: 145), and he has derived it, in part, from art theorists who have attempted to explain the importance of works by artists who have turned ordinary objects into art objects. For example, it is difficult to claim that a snow shovel has any intrinsic qualities that would make it a valuable work of art, yet Marcel Duchamp's signed snow shovel sits in the Yale University Art Gallery (Ibid), a presence
that mocks modernist beliefs in the intrinsic aesthetic value of objects. For Becker and the art theorists who parallel his perspective, to understand an art object it is necessary to examine the relationship between an object and "an entity called and art world" (Ibid: 162). Stated succinctly,

To see something as art requires something the eye cannot descry - an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art: an artworld.

The institutional theory provides a method for determining the artistic "nature" of an object by discerning who is permitted to confer the label "art" to an object and what standards of judgement they choose to apply. In essence, the institutional apparatus of an art world such as its system of galleries, curators, critics and distributors is more important in determining an object's status as "art" than the object itself. As Becker points out, the fact that aesthetic decisions are constantly in dispute from the margins of art worlds serves to magnify the extent to which the institutional apparatus is an almost arbitrary, legitimating force.

What the institutional perspective is unable to explain, however, is the aesthetic experience that often accompanies our attention to objects that have been labelled "art". Regardless of whether or not such experience is embodied in some sort of fundamental human essence, we can not ignore the fact that subjects do experience something (or at least are capable of labelling their experience), in relation
to certain cultural objects. In *Art Worlds*, Becker refrains from even mentioning the possibility that art works can produce pleasures for the viewer, a curious gap in his otherwise fairly comprehensive work. This gap probably exists because Becker is overly cautious about entering into any aesthetic arguments that might lead the reader to believe that art works may have any metaphysical qualities that can be experienced by the viewer. This gap leaves the reader with a very good understanding of the institutions of art worlds, but with very little understanding of the kinds of pleasures that can be gained from creating or interpreting art works. The institutional theory does not have to evade questions about aesthetic experience, provided it contextualizes the reality of aesthetic experiences within the social processes of art worlds.

The analogy that I found most useful for understanding aesthetic experiences comes from Becker’s (1953) other work on the processes through which a marijuana smoker learns to experience, label and interpret a "high" through interpretation and internalization of social signals. Once I had fitted the analogy into the context of video art I found it to be a useful explanatory tool for understanding aesthetic experiences. It is curious that I was able to make use of two instances of Becker’s sociological writing that he did not combine in creating *Art Worlds*. I found that the marijuana smoker analogy helped to fill in the gap I had become aware of
within Becker's (1982) sociology of art. It is also an analogy that allows the institutional theory of art to make contact with post-structural theorists such as Barthes (1975; 1977) or Foucault (1980a; 1980b) because it helps to account for social processes which invoke what Fiske terms "productive pleasures" or what Barthes labels "jouissance... the pleasure of the body at the moment of the breakdown of culture into nature" (Fiske, 1989: 50).

Being There: Learning to Watch

Through my fieldwork I came to realize that the social process of watching video art involved a meditative, patient, openness to the work on the screen. Video artists encourage a style of viewing through which you, as a viewer, experience a production rather than observe and analyze a production. According to Fiske (1989: 51), the experience of jouissance (which he regards as the key to escaping from social control and the fixation of meanings) is:

context-specific. The same text and the same reader in a different context or time might have no such experience. Jouissance is not a quality of the text, it cannot be identified by analysis; it occurs in the body of the reader at the moment of reading when text and reader erotically lose their separate identities and become a new, momentarily produced body that is theirs and theirs alone, that defies meaning and discipline.

I was often reminded that in watching video art I should remember that as a viewer I am an integral part of the entire creative process and that to view a video is to participate in
creating art since as a viewer I am helping to realize the artist's intentions which would otherwise lay dormant on the tape. Experiencing a video is something you do with both your body and your mind: "just let it wash over you, bathe in the light of the screen" (interviewee). One video artist told me that to watch, it is important not to get stuck on individual elements within a video and to not be too analytical, but to be "more visually, or intuitively or poetically, sort of tuned up."

The parallels between this learned style of experiential watching and Barthes' (1975) concept of "reading with the body" are uncanny. Fiske (1981: 51) interprets Barthes to mean a process of reading in which:

the body of the reader responds physically to the body of the text, its physical signifiers, not its conceptual/ideological/connotative signifieds...

This is precisely the kind of experience that I felt I was encouraged to develop as I learned to watch video art. "When I see a good video I know it because I can feel the artist's passion... That's what video has to have for me. I have to experience passion" (interviewee).

Raymond Williams (1981) suggests that some type of aesthetic experience is a cultural universal. He states that:

there is indeed an observable general tendency (however deeply complicated by historical and cultural diversity) to distinguish and to value kinds of work which meet no immediate and manifest need, of an everyday practical kind... Indeed, this is so clear that I sometimes wonder why so much
effort usually goes into attempting to prove it. Such work can serve societal purposes, of the deepest kind: not as food, or as shelter, or as tools, but as 'recognitions' (both new and confirming marks) of people and kinds of people in places and kinds of place... So deep a human interest - in the renewed and the renewable means of recognition, self-recognition and identity - can be practiced over a very wide range, from the most collective to the most individual forms.

(Williams, 1981: 128-129)

The social lubricant that maintains and develops our aesthetic realm of experience is, according to Williams, the social perception of art which is made possible not simply by signifiers, but by the development of "systems of social signals" which alert an individual to modes of perception (Ibid: 130). Becker's analysis of marijuana smokers becomes useful in the elaboration of how such social signals can produce, or aid an individual in producing, pleasurable experiences.

In Becker's (1953; 1962; 1967) studies of marijuana users, the nature of the effect that marijuana has on a person depends on the way the user interprets, defines or labels the effects, rather than on the drug's actual bio-chemical reactions on the user's body. The user learns to interpret the effects of marijuana from the cultural context in which he or she is immersed. Within a culture marked by severe anti-drug rhetoric the user might interpret experiences with marijuana as negative or frightening: "going crazy," "flipping out," or "freaking out" (Becker, 1967). Within the sub-
culture of marijuana users, however, there is an absence of negative interpretations in favour of positive and pleasurable experiences, often described as mind-expanding experiences. Veteran marijuana smokers help new users to define the drug’s effects as pleasurable and show new users practices which aid in achieving pleasurable effects. These practices might include advising the new user on the quantity to be smoked, methods for inhaling and retaining the smoke, typical patterns common for marijuana’s effects and methods for interpreting those effects (Ibid). Fiske might speculate that the marijuana smoking sub-culture encourages new users to learn how to allow their bodies to experience jouissance with their bodies.

My own progress as a neophyte video artist paralleled the course that new marijuana smokers take in learning how to experience marijuana. I had to learn how to experience video art. The first few works of video art that I watched I experienced as boring, overly, or far too personally symbolic of the artist’s own world, and relatively crude in comparison to broadcast television. I have since seen these same works of video art, over a year and dozens of video art screenings later, and have discovered in them what I now recognize (in my role as a video art user) as sophisticated nuances, interesting symbolic combinations and subversive political commentary. I would argue that part of video art’s position as a subversive practice in relation to hegemony lies in its
requirement that viewers become trained in how to watch, interpret and experience. This process makes video art more difficult to distribute and sell, however it also makes video less accessible to appropriation by dominant forces such as the institution of television. Learning how to watch video art involves communal screenings and discursive interaction with video artists. The pleasures of watching are not latent within video texts: they must be evoked by social processes.

For example, Michael hosted a "member's screening night" at Video Place in order to show other members his "work in progress" (discussed earlier). Audience members entered the darkened meeting room of Video Place to find a series of chairs facing an open space on the floor which was filled with lit candles, various occult-like objects, a single chair and a video monitor on a stand. At the rear of the room, a table was set with generous quantities of wine for audience members.

The screening, or perhaps performance, began when Michael entered the room dressed completely in black, including a black skull cap, poured himself a glass of wine from a bottle near the monitor and sat down in the chair at the front of the room. For about ten minutes he sat in the chair and faced the audience, finishing his glass of wine and maintaining a stone face. Abruptly he got up from his chair and announced that he would perform a piece of music which he had written for his "work in progress". Picking up a
microphone, a flashlight and a cassette tape, he went to a stereo system, placed the cassette in the tape player, pressed play and sat down in his chair with the flashlight directed at his face. Immediately a loud and haunting music filled the room. At random points within the music Michael would pronounce the words "I hear voices... I see faces" in a loud and anguished voice.

Following the performance of this song, Michael told the audience that he would like to show them footage from his "work in progress" and described his production concept about being "haunted" by his own spirit just before it dies and being compelled to videotape the scenes which this spirit remembers. He then proceeded to play "rough" footage of scenes from cemeteries in England, various shots of religious architecture and shots taken from the windows of British Rail passenger cars. These images were accompanied by further music that he had created for his "work in progress". Some of these images had been purposefully degraded through several generations of recording, and some, as Michael later explained, had been shot from videotapes that had been played back on the screen of a black and white "bubble-screened" 1950's television.

Several days following this performance and screening I had the opportunity to talk with Michael about his ideas about the previous night's event. The setting of the room and the performance of the haunting music had been calculated to
seduce the audience to become open to experiencing the images that Michael provided:

Some people thought I was into the occult or something, which is not what I was on about there. I’m into the occult, but not into all the metaphysical stuff, I’m into the fact that people are fascinated by objects, sounds and images that convey occult-like things. The other night I was trying to jar some of the feelings that people have about the occult to give them a sense of the feelings that I want to come across in the video... The candles and all that was just a way to bring things into perspective, kind of like the way the smell of food makes you salivate and think about eating, all that occult stuff makes you connect with some pretty heavy stuff about death and the after-life.

Michael’s work may not convey any revolutionary social ideas, yet it demonstrates that the process of watching is context specific and that video art practices may evade the containment strategies of discourses which seek social control. Watching Michael’s images minus the communal environment he had established for the audience would yield much different viewing experiences. Thus, the signifiers that Michael works with can not be tied to specific signifieds, and for viewers to experience the connotative play of those signifiers they must place themselves within a type of viewing ritual.

Steven, one of the staff members of Video Place provides an interesting perspective on the roles of the audience and video artists in the creation and reception of video art:

Well, for the most part it is not what we see
on television... we can choose to stay home and watch television, or we can say, "there's got to be something else," and go look for that something else and watch it... so when we go and find that something else, perhaps its in the basement of somebody's home in somebody's subversive collection of stuff that they've made on their own: companies and the conglomerates have had nothing to do with the making of that. And so then the viewer gets to experience something that hasn't been controled for the mass media... for the mass audiences... So it takes an effort to say "no" again, and go out and look for something else. The same goes for painting, film, performance art, dance... it takes and added extra amount of energy to be a good audience.

You can say no to television and go out and make your own television which is like video art, or you can say no to television and go out and watch somebody else's video art...

Learning to Articulate Experiences with Video Art

When I began to conduct my fieldwork I felt it necessary to have a comprehensive overview of video art productions. Such an overview would, I believed, aid me in directing my future interviews so that I could discuss particular works or specific techniques in video art production. I therefore began a three day video art screening marathon at a video art distributor's viewing room. My notes from these viewing sessions can only be described as pathetic. I lacked an ability to contextualize and describe what I was seeing and hearing, an ability that I could only acquire with the help of more experienced "users". One video artist I interviewed accurately described my difficulties when she
related the problems she faced in teaching video art in a post-secondary media art class:

The overall basic goal of the seminar class is certainly to acquaint them with a range of work, which I try to do... but more than that, to provide them with a vocabulary for description, I mean just so we can start from some basic places, and then start to develop some analytical things... Of course, one of the things they most want to talk about is whether they like something or not. I always start off by saying, in fact I don't care if they like it or don't like it... if they can describe the tape itself... and from that description start to develop and to reconstruct then, if you didn't like something you can say why and analyze exactly why... But that is where they want to start from and they'll hang all kinds of things on that term ["don't like"] and [at first they'll say], "it's too long and its boring", and at first their analyses are superficial and as they get more sophisticated they get more sophisticated in their ability to defend this like or dislike.

As someone new to the world of video art I lacked descriptive terms and vocabulary, or put more simply, I lacked a knowledge of video art jargon. I also suffered from a problem that the video artist quoted above noted was common to her art students: I lacked "tolerance for complex material or material which might go on a bit (in their eyes) for too long." I experienced what this video artist described as a "tension" around trying to understand what a video artist is trying to do with a tape or what they are trying to get me to see. Each time I saw a new tape I felt that I had to discover the hidden meaning in the tape. I felt a feeling of annoyance with what I presumed were the pretensions of the artists
producing the tapes.

My experience is probably similar to the experience of an introductory sociology student trying to find the hidden meanings in a professor's lecture. After several years as a student of sociology those meanings are (much of the time anyway) clear to me because I am familiar with the context and languages for discussing and analyzing sociological ideas. As a newcomer to the social world of video artists I found myself trying to interpret work which had deeply contextualized significations, without having the benefit of an understanding of the history and meaning of those significations. Today however I can view a work of video art and place that work within a framework of previous works and video art discourses.

I was able to learn how to watch video art by participating in screening events with members of video art communities, by simply being with and talking to video artists about their work, by reading descriptions and discussions of video art works, and by actually using video equipment under the guidance of veteran video artists to create a product that was labelled as video art. It was also important for me to try to disregard the viewing habits that I had acquired from years of watching broadcast television. This was probably the most difficult experiential task to accomplish, however, once accomplished it opened my eyes to the infinite plasticity of the medium of video.
Developing a "Gestalt Switch" for Watching Video Art

In watching video art I found myself employing what might be called a "gestalt switch" in order to move from a broadcast television frame of reference to a video art frame of reference. Essentially I had to learn to watch video art with an attitude of patience and openness and with very few predetermined expectations. For someone who was weaned on fast-paced, predictable sitcoms, this was a difficult attitude to instantly assume. One of my first experiences with this "gestalt switch" manoeuvre came with the coaching of one of my key informants, Chuck. I had travelled with Chuck to a public art gallery in another city where he had lectured on his participation in the history of video art in Canada. During this lecture he had shown one of his first video art productions which consisted of a single shot of a man (himself) walking away from the camera in an open snow covered field. The man walks for some distance for perhaps two minutes, then he stops and falls to the ground.

Watching this video I felt a certain degree of discomfort due to the fact that I became very aware of the time displaced by the piece. With no cuts or edits, and no foreknowledge of what will happen in the video, the piece builds tension. The tension within the audience at the art gallery was evident from the sounds of shifting feet and nervous stretching as the video progressed. Chuck explained to the audience that regardless of the aesthetic value of the
video, it served to illustrate video art's position as a "time-based" art form, and further served to clearly distinguish video art from television. On our drive home from the gallery we talked for some length about this particular video and Chuck told me that in order to understand video art it was important to realize that watching involves:

a combination of concentration and meditation, two things that are anti-thetical to television... There is some video that is intentionally cryptic. The artist is probably insecure about what he wants to get across, but mostly we're trying to communicate ideas that are best communicated visually. We don't come out and bang you over the head with them... we want you to put some effort into the process, otherwise you just kind of graze and move on.

On the next occasion at which I watched a work of video art, I attempted to clear my mind of preconceptions and expectations and simply watch patiently. The result was a certain degree of pleasure in subverting my ingrained television watching strategies, and the acquisition of an understanding of the importance of video art as a practice which, unlike television, attempts to make full use of its medium. In a later interview Steven echoed some of my observations about watching video art:

I 'feel that I've got so many psychological barriers to overcome in order to try to achieve something that sits outside of television... I don't think that I've really done much towards that, I'm just kind or working hard to try to sort through that... it's like you said, maybe we're just fooling ourselves... but we've got to make these attempts when we make things and watch them... so its these attempts to get outside
of television... how to measure success rates on all these attempts, that would be really phenomenal research, right?

Watching Video Art is an Intimate Experience

Another video artist was helpful in describing the importance of the viewing context for me. She explained that for her, video watching was an extremely intimate process between the artist and the viewer in part because of the social fact that our experience with television screens is normally a private and personal viewing activity within the home and in part because of the size of most television screens which are designed for small audiences. According to this video artist,

there is a constructed smallness or intimacy to many video experiences... when an artist produces a video there is a certain degree of awareness that the tape will most often be shown to small groups of people or individuals and in the context of that viewing relationship the artist can establish a high degree of contact and intimacy between herself, her images and her audience. In a sense you're speaking one to one with people... Many people very, very much do not want their work put on a [video] projector because of the scale. They are in favour of the scale present in the video monitor... the projection screen changes that scale and makes things larger than life.

In conjunction with this important understanding of socially constructed and valued intimacy of viewing contexts, there is a tendency for many works of video art to be produced primarily (though seldom totally) for audiences known to the producer. This production aspect often yields a video which
dispenses with slick production values in favour of communicating content to audiences who are normally familiar with the background for the material presented. Video art works created for gay and lesbian audiences or audiences of specific ethnic origins or in many cases audiences of women familiar with feminist issues often focus heavily on creating an atmosphere of intimacy, an atmosphere that is somehow reinforced by less slick, content oriented production values. It would seem as if poor (by broadcast television standards) production values automatically signify notions of resistance or subversion to dominant discourses, and thus enable producers to establish a horizontal level of solidarity with their audience, rather than the vertical relationship generated by broadcast television.

It is thus important to realize that in the context of viewing video art, a sympathetic and empathetic audience is an important part of the total video art package, just as a marijuana smoker's relationship with peers must be based on trust and mutual regard in order for pleasurable experiences to result. Video art producers assume that their audiences will be critical, yet ultimately understanding, especially given the fact that many audiences are comprised of other video artists or friends and acquaintances. One of the tasks of artists in the social world of video art necessarily involves training new comers to watch and understand video art.
The Development of Video Art Viewing Contexts

Indeed, during the early history of video art, the viewing context and the relationship between the production and its audience was a central issue (and still is to some degree). Artists who desired to establish themselves within the larger art world of galleries and museums often began by encouraging such institutions to display their tapes alongside paintings and sculptures. Chuck related that this tactic did not last very long because gallery goers tended to only spend about five seconds looking at individual paintings. The act of spending several minutes intensively watching a work of video art was a distinctly alien act for gallery patrons. Artists experimented with various sculptural installation pieces and still found that gallery patrons watched for several seconds and then continued on. Over time, video art tapes came to be displayed in separate rooms within galleries, rooms fitted with chairs or benches to make the viewing process more comfortable, but this development took a long time to come, and probably would not have come, without the integration of video artists into gallery and museum staff positions.

Producing Video Art: Another Way to Learn How to Watch

Producing a piece of video art under the guidance of veteran video artists was also an important way for me to learn how to watch video art. Gaining knowledge about camera
techniques, editing practices, lighting practices, and video effects allowed me to understand the vast menu of aesthetic choices available to video artists. Such knowledge permitted me to watch a work of video art and make some determinations about its overall budgetary constraints, the amount of time spent producing it, and the artist's familiarity with or access to video technology.

The experience of actually producing something that would be labelled as video art by video artists was also an acknowledgement of the degree to which I had become integrated into the social world of video artists and familiar with their practices. One day while I was editing some found footage, and integrating a variety of effects to play with this footage, Steven offered to show me some of the effects I might want to use. I began to play with knobs and switches, creating all kinds of strange effects, and finally decided on a combination of several effects that "worked" for me. When Julie came up to the editing suite to talk to Steven, Steven commented: "This guy's got all the makings of a video artist. When he's finished this tape we should put some titles on it and put it in the next member's screening night." His words made me feel a pleasure because Steven was complimenting my work and offering me the label of a video artist. This episode had the effect of making me feel like I was a certified video artist and helped me to understand that I had managed to integrate myself so thoroughly into the social
world of video art that I was beginning to "go native." Far from attempting to distance myself to avoid this process, I determined to use the experience to help me document the changes that my subjectivity was being moved through.

In terms of my understanding of video art production values, creating my own work of video art was eye opening. My most important observation was that choices of production strategies and techniques can be a very arbitrary and playful process that involves little or no attention to combinations of signifiers and signifieds, but a great deal of attention to signifiers with elusive connotations. I chose, and was encouraged to choose effects and edit points which, for lack of a better term, "worked". If something appeared to provide some interesting visual qualities or could be interpreted as signifying a plurality of ideas I would use it. Sam, one of video artists at video place, provided a musical analogy to bring home this quality:

When things are too obviously pointed out for you, you kind of draw back from them... like Bruce Cockburn's stuff on Nicaragua or the rainforests. There's no subtlety at all, he just comes out and hits you over the head with dreary slogans and hip causes. On the other hand, there's David Byrne's stuff which kind of sneak's up on you and plays on your mind, you know. You hear a song and you're walking along with your walkman and you look at the world around you and it all gets integrated into the song and all the weird shit you see around you starts to jell with the song and you get a sense of what Byrne is up to. You listen to Bruce Cockburn and you look around and the only thing that it relates to are the bus-shelter advertisements and billboards that are trying to sell you
simplistic, one dimensional ideas just like Bruce is trying to do... Video art should be more like David Byrne's stuff - he's actually done some video art, not music videos, but separate video art. It shouldn't be like bus-shelter advertisements.

The creative process was also long, tiring and paid for by the hour as well, factors which often led me to make choices among techniques for reasons of expediency rather than for strict aesthetic planning. Simply playing with various equipment and image processes led me to adopt some interesting visual effects that I could not have consciously planned to use. For veteran video artists the repertoire of video effects available is substantially larger, however I was assured that the element of "play" combined with the expectation of eventually finding ways of processing images that "worked" according to the artist's fancies was both common and expected: "A lot of work is called experimental because that is exactly what it is, artists doing creative experiments, and some of them work and some of them don't" (interviewee). Haphazard configurations of equipment and buttons often lead to artistic innovations. Even for video artists who construct detailed scripts and storyboards, a certain amount of "play" is very common.

Learning how to use cameras and editing equipment gave me access to the basic sounds and phrases of the languages of video art. With this knowledge I could watch videos and often understand conventional patterns as well as
unconventional disruptions of, or diversions from, such patterns. Within the social world of video artists, knowledge of these basic sounds and phrases is commonplace and my familiarity with them gave me further tools with which to understand aesthetic constraints and possibilities, and tools with which I could discuss these aspects with video artists. Like the veteran marijuana smoker, I had gained a language for interpreting the effects presented to me in the videos I watched, and could experience, and share, a degree of pleasure in recognizing creative uses of the medium's capabilities. I had come to internalize the social signals required to fully participate in the process of watching video art within the social world of video artists and I had thus learned how to experience a form of jouissance.
CHAPTER VI

CONVENTIONS, AESTHETICS AND DISTRIBUTION

CONVENTIONS WITHIN THE SOCIAL WORLD OF VIDEO ARTISTS

The Conventions of an Unconventional Art

Becker includes a chapter on conventions within Art Worlds because "every art world uses, to organize some of the cooperation between its participants, conventions known to all or almost all well-socialized members of the society in which it exists" (Becker, 1982: 42). Conventions permit societal members to participate as audience members for an art form, or to participate as collaborators in the creation of art. Conventions also permit the production of unconventional art simply by their existence as lines across which unconventional works must be seen to cross (Ibid).

There are numerous conventions within the social world of video artists. These conventions are normally "taken for granted" practices that are socially learned. In my estimation the most important convention is the convention that holds that other conventions should be subverted, those other conventions being the conventions of broadcast television. If we examine the work that academic media theorists have done to uncover and lay bare the conventions of broadcast television and compare their work to the work of
video artists who subvert and transgress those conventions it becomes clear that there is very little, aside from the chosen media of exposition - print for academics and video for video artists - which separates the deconstructions of media critics from those of video artists. In the case of video artists, however, they not only deconstruct, but actively reconstruct the languages of the medium of video to avoid the ideological traps of television conventions.

Video artists clearly recognize that the formalistic elements of television have become almost second nature cognitive elements in our daily television viewing habits. Many video artists seem to have realized that there is no separation between encoding and decoding within the television production and consumption strategies of mainstream television, and the rupture of this pervasive pattern is one of the most popular production tactics within video art. The socialization processes for video art viewers ensures that this tactic is followed through the entire production and consumption process.

Stuart Hall's (1980: 132) contention that television languages or codes seem to have become a taken for granted, "naturalized" language system for most viewers is in fact one of the foundations for video art practices. Video artists' works tend to rupture what Hall (Ibid) refers to as "the habituation produced when there is a fundamental alignment and reciprocity between the encoding and decoding sides in an
exchange of meanings." The words of American video artist and video art critic David Ross (1986: 169) echo Hall's comments and lend support to my contention that one of video art's central conventions (both in its textual discourse and its visual discourse) is to transgress or subvert broadcast television conventions:

It would be untrue to state that television, or to be precise, broadcast television - what David Antin termed video's "frightful parent" - was the sole or even the primary referent in the body of work that has emerged from the past two decades. But it would be completely misleading and actually untrue to attempt to describe the activity of American video art outside of the clear and - in some instances - critical relationship that video art has had with broadcast commercial television. But this relationship has less to do with a critique of television content, and its inconsequentiality, than with the manner in which television creates and reinforces the neutralizing effect of a consequence-free universe.

The issue of video art's subversion of broadcast television is a problematic one for some video artists because they are wary of the temptation present for both insiders and outsiders to reduce the motivation for their practices to one single issue. I do not deny that video art consists of tremendously diverse practices and motivations, however, the fact that some video artists, such as the veteran video artist and critic Gene Youngblood, ("[It is a] myth that video has anything to do with television as we know it today" (Youngblood, 1983: 9)) believe that for video to become a real "art" it must deny its relationship to television speaks, with
some irony, to the importance of this relationship.

Television, regardless of the particular aesthetics of the images that it presents to us, is a social institution that has been built upon conventions and standardized patterns. Television attempts to construct seamless, flawless and fluid visions of realism, visions that are imbedded within professionalized practices. Video art is a social phenomenon which thrives on practices of "bricolage" (Fiske, 1989; Chambers, 1986), the process of combining images and meanings to produce texts which subvert forces of cultural homogeneity (Fiske, 1989). Video art practices thus serve to break the seamless, flawless and fluid vision of realism characteristic of television. The majority of the video artists I spoke with believed that video art practices had helped themselves and others to see through the veils of television conventions. Video artists who are strong proponents of developing new distribution avenues for their work have recently discovered that the media literacy educational curriculums adopted by the government in Ontario are quickly becoming important markets for video art work which takes a critical stance in relation to television and mass media (interviewee).

Television Conventions: A Flawless Repertoire

The conventions of television exist primarily for economic and political reasons related to its existence as a site of power within popular culture. Television creates a
discourse that struggles to establish closure over competing discourses. In doing so it asserts that its discourse is the only fair, objective, truthful and reliable discourse in town. Andrew Ross (1989: 13) states that "the struggle to win popular respect and consent for authority is endlessly being waged, and most of it takes place in the realm of what we recognize as popular culture." Video artists, enter into this struggle by asserting alternative discourses from the margins: margins which institutions such as television deny or ignore. This places video artists within what Ross defines as "the first generation to use their involvement with popular culture as a site of contestation itself, rather than view [popular culture] as an objective tool with which to raise or improve political consciousness" (Ibid). Video art curator and critic, Bruce Ferguson, also sees video art as playing a subversive role, but again, not a role that is directly confrontational or directly offensive to the institution of television and its conventions. Instead, simply through its struggles to exist as "a socially invested practice by socially engaged practitioners" in the face of a "collective amnesia or phobia with regard to video" on the part of the television industry, video art is successful in "contaminating" the discourses of television (Ferguson, 1987: 55-56).

Television analysts have frequently documented the everyday practices and external constraints which lead to the
standardization of television production techniques. Organizational demands for efficiency and systematization tend to prevent the creation of television products which differ from standardized production norms (Masterman, 1985). Stuart Hood (1980: 35) goes further by suggesting that television personnel "have as little real influence on the end product as they would have on an assembly line... a situation in which the worker is divorced from the products of his or her own skill."

The central goal of commercial television is, as Hardin (1985: 12) bluntly states, "to make as much money as possible." This goal necessitates an organization based on capitalist economic efficiency. This basis for the organization of television production inevitably encourages production personnel to cut corners, and to produce material as quickly and efficiently as possible. As Gitlin (1980: 264) notes in relation to television news work, creating television news is hard work, but conventions and organizational strategies "make the effort less burdensome to news processors."

One of the most common television conventions is the convention of 'objectivity'. Particularly evident within television news programming, news journalists are said to have an "addiction" to the notion of objectivity which emphasizes "clean separation of 'fact' and 'opinion'" and includes a "taboo against editorializing" (Hall, 1986: 8). Utilizing the
convention of 'objectivity' often requires that news personnel ensure that every contentious viewpoint is matched by an opposite viewpoint (Elliott, 1972) (thus marginalizing non-extremes). Many news organizations have explicit rules regarding notions of 'impartiality', 'balance', and 'objectivity', and these rules are reinforced by a professional, informal code of ethics (Hall et al., 1978: 58). In the view of many media analysts, these rules do little to maintain the news media's impartiality, and actually support status quo interests. For example, balancing viewpoints on a given topic usually requires obtaining statements from people who are known to be 'accredited sources', people who have a legitimate status in the eyes of the news people (Fishman, 1980; Hall et al., 1978) Accredited sources are normally found within the established institutions of society, while more radical and critical viewpoints are in marginalized or non-legitimated positions and are thus not given access to the media (Hall, et al., 1978).

In terms of the particular forms and specific narrative structures of television, there is evidence which suggests that these conventions are wholly social creations with little or no cognitive, perceptual or biological basis. As Worth and Adair (1972) have successfully demonstrated, the visual forms that we often assume are natural extensions of the technology used to obtain them, are actually highly culturally specific. Further studies have shown that within
North American culture these 'natural' forms are at least partially learned through constant social interaction with the symbolic images and formal structures of television (Griffin, 1985). Hall et al. (1978: 55) maintain that the conventions of television are part of our common stock of cultural knowledge, and television personnel make use of them in order to "make the world they report on intelligible" to viewers.

One of the more important narrative conventions that television producers make use of is the plot structure common to fictional texts. This form includes a beginning, middle and end, and often includes protagonists, antagonists and a potential resolution to a conflict (Altheide, 1974). While this form may be a common television convention, it may not (and argueably does not) reflect the actual way in which events occur, and therefore, represents reality as a seamless flow in contradiction to our experiences of everyday life. Tuchman (1978) provides an extensive overview of narrative conventions and concludes that these forms aid in the ideological labour of news workers by enabling them to reduce the quantity of visual images needed to convey a message. Skill in manipulating narrative forms also assures the news worker of a certain degree of professional autonomy. In terms of the news worker's constant struggle to maintain 'objectivity' these forms, "cast an aura of representation by [an] explicit refusal to give the appearance of manipulating time and space..." (Ibid: 109).
Tuchman (Ibid) also reveals that certain narrative conventions play an integral role in the smooth organizational flow of a news organization. Camera people and reporters work within the context of these conventions and pass their raw material on to videotape editors who must assume that these conventions have been followed in order to conduct their work efficiently. Tuchman notes that if this were not the case, editors would constantly misrepresent the stories and ideas that reporters and camera people were trying to represent. In essence, then, these narrative conventions work like a shared language within the context of television (and particularly television news) organizations, allowing everyone to proceed smoothly with their work. Other common narrative conventions include the timing and rhythm of visual representations, edits and sound (Masterman, 1985) which aids in achieving continuity, and camera positions and angles (Tuchman, 1978).

Varying camera angles are used both for organizational continuity and to elicit particular reactions from viewers (Elliott, 1972; Masterman, 1985). For example, Hood (1980: 4) maintains that camera angles which allow people to address the camera directly, give the impression that the "man or woman on the screen has power and authority." In providing a comprehensive analysis of camera angles, Tuchman (1978) reveals that they can work to increase the representation of objectivity and neutrality by stressing the "non-involvement" of reporters who are filmed at the scene of a story. The
social construction of these camera angles and positions is underlined by the Glasgow Media Group's determination that there are approximately only fifty types of shots commonly used in television and film (as cited in Tuchman, 1978: 121).

Hall et al. (1978) view the use of the narrative styles and conventions listed above as not only enabling television news workers to achieve a measure of continuity and efficiency in relation to the assembly line nature of their work (Dunn, 1986; Barker, 1985), but more importantly, as enabling the media in general to situate viewers within the confines of the ideological limits of those styles and conventions. The media work to ensure that the styles and conventions they make use of are part of the "public idiom" which then allows the "translation of official viewpoints into a public idiom [making those viewpoints] more 'available' to the uninitiated: it invests them with popular force and resonance, naturalising them within the horizon of understandings of the various publics," (Ibid: 61) and thus aids in the legitimation of the status quo.

Video Art Conventions: A Comparison

Within the social world of video artists, the strongest formalistic convention is the one which implores video artists to mock, parody, deconstruct, rupture, play with and avoid the conventions of broadcast television. Even where broadcast television forms are not intentionally referenced,
they remain almost as a background noise upon which alternative narrative styles of inventive formalistic strategies are overlaid. "Video is... an acerbic but playful scrambler of media domination," as one video art commentator poetically states (Waugh, 1989).

Sara Diamond, a high profile video artist from Vancouver, who's video art tends to focus on women's histories and women's labour history in particular, serves as a good example of video artists' engagements with television and general media conventions while concurrently attempting to claim discursive ground for marginalized discourses. "Her work creates a discourse that resists the public discourse of the mass media imagery - those image constructions which imagine, shape and interpret the world, which selectively present the past, which embed messages suggesting we propagate ourselves in its image" (Sujir, 1990). Diamond's own words in describing her 1984 video, Heroics, clarify her intentions and help to illustrate the depth of media and representational analysis common to video artists:

Although affected by the Amelia Productions practice [a collective which produced 14 video art works described as "social realist women's representations"], this video [Heroics] is a direct critique of that practice, in a sense turning feminist testimonials on their head while trying to validate the stories of the women and the texture of those testimonies. It's so much about media, so much about certain spaces of memory and history and voice, whereas the Amelia Productions were invested in revealing the truth about actual events... That kind of documentary work is valuable, but it didn't
go far enough for my purposes. *Heroics* is a semiotic discourse in negation of the dominant notion of masculine heroism which the media perpetuates.

(Diamond, as cited in Sujir, 1990)

One of Canada’s first video art critics, Peggy Gale (1983: 33) argues that video art was born out of attempts to subvert television discourse:

Artists’ video in Canada began as a negation of television, a refusal to cooperate... the television habit is both common and mesmerizing; once the set is turned on it often stays on, a constant to which other activities are simply appended or juxtaposed... We find what we "want" on television, we use it to "relax", because there are so few surprises in either content or form. Television is made for everybody.

Artists’ video is less accommodating... the information is packed to a different density and common vocabularies cannot be assumed for artists’ works... Video’s voices are poetic, demanding, generous; they may sing, speak or perform. They are seldom simply comfortable... [Video] remains unusual in terms of television expectations, or the experiences of a truly general public, but in both entertainment and socially aware terms the narrative at its core speaks to a common consciousness.

Another video artist describes video’s relationship to television conventions in this way:

Video art is fundamentally different from broadcast television and has been since its inception. Where broadcast addresses a mass audience, video art is intensely personal - a reflection of individual passion and consciousness. Whereas broadcast seeks the lowest common viewer denominator in its quest for mass viewership, video art demands the highest level of attention and intellectual participation on the part of the viewer. And, unlike the predictable, passive formula of commercial programming, video art, like all successful artwork, evokes a
psychological response that remains in our thoughts long after viewing.

Video art's common attention to television conventions within the largely internal, print discourse of video art acts as a tool for sensitizing newcomers to the social world of video art to the viewing and production practices necessary to watch and create video art within a society in which the television screen has itself become a powerful sign of discourse closure. My experience in learning how to watch video art is evidence which demonstrates that the television screen is a social artifact which, through its endless flow of standardized visual forms, tends to embody a distinct set of socially learned viewing practices. These viewing practices differ according to the socialization context and thus video art can be experienced as different than television because enculturated video art viewers have different frames of reference. Much of the print discourse of video art is designed to aid newcomers in recognizing and un-learning those viewing practices and alerting them to the possibility of deconstructing and reconstructing visual forms. In doing so, video art is able to clear a discursive space through which the pressures which strengthen conformity, power and authority can be temporarily weakened to allow for productive play in the realm of signifiers and signifieds.

Direct Indictments of Television Conventions

In many cases video artists make direct reference to
television conventions within their video productions. This practice is common, however, it should not be taken as a representative practice for all video art. Some of the videos that make such direct references actually appropriate television images "off-air" and then manipulate them and recontextualize their meanings. In a published essay by two Canadian video artists, Lisa Steele and Kim Tomczak, the artists provide a detailed description of their construction of one such video and their rationale for their production choices:

We constructed Working the Double Shift to look like TV - sort of... Much of the imagery is appropriated-off-air footage from broadcast networks, readily-recognized commercials and a section of off-air recording from the House of Commons. Our commentary or point of view is introduced through both titles and voice-over dialogue. In the beginning we "name" gender and power relations in relation to banal TV images... then cut to a House of Commons broadcast. The dialogue, however is a "Phantasy Projection" (it is titled as such) wherein mock on-air newscasters announce a move towards a fully socialist government in Canada, a change assisted by artists' involvement and critique [viewers are shown members of parliament standing up, one by one, in a recorded vote to dissolve parliamentary government and return decision making processes to people and communities]...

We constructed this tape in this way in order to present both a critique of the then-current systems of representation and to offer the potential of empowerment to our viewers. Empowerment is possible in two ways: first, through the validation of a shared critique of television. We understood that the point of view we were presenting was commonly held amongst many (if not most) TV viewers. Second, by showing a variety of
interventions into the television image-making system, we illustrated that "anybody can do it" - that even in the present state, television can be undermined...

Empowerment is the opposite of cynicism. It is one thing to acknowledge that there is a broadly-based distrust of the mass media; it is another to suggest very simple ways of making interventions. This is where pleasure comes into the viewing experience of our art.

(Steele and Tomczak, 1987: 78. Underlining mine.)

The following distribution catalogue descriptions (Reinhardt, 1990) illustrate some of variety tactics and orientations that video artists have in relation to television and mass media:

**Trial by Media**, Cornelia Wyngaarden, 1983: This tape has been produced as a political action. It has been taken off-air broadcast news stories surrounding the arrest of 5 people connected to direct action known as the Squamish 5 and subsequently the Vancouver 5. By re-editing the newscasts, it shows how damaging police manipulation of the media can be to obtaining a fair trial in Canada. It attempts to show how the press co-operates with the police in protection of their privileged status, especially when the establishment is threatened by politically motivated illegal acts.

**Prime Cuts**, Paul Wong, 1981: About style, technology and sexuality. Delivered in an unpolitical and distance view, not unlike a commercial, we see life as an endless stream of sensuality. Complete with state-of-the-art accessories, beautiful young adults work out, make out, frolic in the sun, and dance until dawn.

"Out" Takes, John C. Gross, 1989: Gay sensibility, homophobia and gender roles on broadcast television are outlined by juxtaposing scenes from two children's shows: "Pee Wee's Playhouse" and "Maido Osawaga Seshimasu" (We're Always Making Trouble), a prime-time sitcom from Japan. Rex Reed's
outrageous critique of Pee Wee (Paul Reubens), [Reed believes that Pee Wee's apparent "bisexual" behaviour is a poor role model for children] highlights the self-perpetuating closet of Hollywood and the perceived subversive threat of the show's gay subtexts. Reeds opposition to Pee Wee, and Reuben's technique of innuendo, double-entendre and gender switching, both appear equally repressed compared to the explicit frankness of the Japanese series.

Longshot, Lyn Hershman, 1989: A troubled young girl, Lian, lives on the streets, singing to escape from her "reality". She meets a videomaker, Dennis, who chronicles her urbanely wild adventures. As Lian confesses her fears and dreams to the camera, Dennis becomes obsessed with capturing and manipulating her "image". Shot in a verite style this "Faux documentary" explores perspectives of illusion and truth, emphasized by a "real" therapist's ongoing analysis of the "fictional character". Though Longshot allegedly constructs a portrait of alienation, it becomes gradually clear that the piece is really about artifice and illusions of authenticity in the electronic world: the dangers and potential loss of identity inherent in simulating artificial media images.

Excerpts and Euphoria, Ed Mowbray, 1983: A unique analysis of the manner in which media events are delivered and perceived. Combining slow motion, real time, and split screen techniques with a heavily manipulated sound track, Mowbray creates a haunting documentation of the attempted assassination of U.S. President Ronald Reagan.

Chuck, a video artist with whom I spent a great deal of time, produced an interesting video entitled: Television Tells Me What To Do. The video depicts a person who's everyday, simple tasks such as eating and drinking are dictated by a face on television screens that are placed in strategic locations throughout this person's home. It is a video which pushes the
concept of media manipulation to its absurd extreme, yet holds a disconcerting grain of truth. Chuck explained that there was a period in his life where he watched a lot of television and that he began to feel as if it was dominating his life, and thus he created this tape. Chuck, one of the more prolific video artists that I have met, no longer owns a television set.

Sculptural Work and Television Conventions

Sculpturally oriented video art has also had its fair share of play with television conventions. One notable and interesting example is West German video artist, Klaus vom Bruch’s installation piece, Up on the Rooftop, at the Winnipeg Art Gallery in 1988 (Ferguson, 1990). Klaus vom Bruch is praised by the piece’s curator as a video artist whose:

methods duplicate the violence of war and the blitz of televisions ongoing attack on the body to offer recovery of the private and subjective under duress from both spheres of power... a method [which] takes advantage of the shorter history of the medium of television to subvert it to the possibility of individual response...
(Ferguson, 1990: 55)

The work itself consisted of a mini-television station which broadcast to an adjacent receiver, both placed on the roof of the gallery. The curator’s description and interpretation of the work is instructive, and to some extent parallels much of the thrust of my own perspective on video art in general:

Using the techniques of a media bricoleur, Vom Bruch actually demonstrates how
television, usually considered as a centralized power and determining cultural force, can be personally embraced and used as a one-to-one system of communication. Defying its institutional role and its commercial allegiances, Vom Bruch literally sets up a television station... Complete with transmitter and receiver, a self-enclosed or closed circuit system is established that, although dependent upon technology, subverts it to subjective and aesthetic play. This displacement, which is actual and not just metaphorical, acknowledges the possibility of individual power and selection and overcomes traditional forms of television's expansionary capacities. A transmission becomes a mission of transference - the artist to the public as a potential against the suppressive qualities of overauthorized communications.

(Ibid)

An installation piece I was able to view during the course of my fieldwork serves as another example of video art's play with television. Entitled TV Blong Vanuatu, the artist, John Watt, erected an authentic South Pacific islander's grass hut (the entire hut was actually transported by ship from the South Pacific island of Vanuatu with significant delays at customs due to confused Canada Customs officials) within a gallery space and placed a large, modern colour television set within the hut. Viewers entered the hut and sat on grass mats to watch "television" programming from the island of Vanuatu, which was actually a series of videotapes made by the artist while on the island. These videotapes were said to represent the kind of television programming that would be available on an island where there is no television broadcast, an intentional contradiction that
cut through the pretensions of North American broadcast television. The videotapes utilized television conventions such as an omniscient narrator to process images of everyday life in a tiny island community, images that fundamentally resisted those conventions due to their local and mundane depictions of routine, daily activities.

Other Video Art Conventions

While video art's convention of subverting the conventions of broadcast television is ubiquitous and helps to contextualize video art practices, there are other conventions within video art that deserve mention. As Becker (1982) points out, conventions serve to allow people with diverse backgrounds and various skills to collaborate in the development and maintenance of art worlds. Video art's conventions are in some ways mundane, but do nonetheless point to significant tactical manoeuvres that video artists have employed in order to establish a place within the larger art world, an art world that requires the maintenance of a "critical art discourse" in order to validate and legitimate art practices. Video art, since its beginnings, has had a tenuous relationship with this larger art world, and as a result, video artists have had to pander to its requirements in order to insure stable bases of funding and institutional support.
Credits and Dates

Virtually all of the videos that I saw shared one formalistic convention: they contained credits. This may seem like an obvious aspect to point out, however it sheds some light on the role that names and status play in art worlds. Although producing video art requires the participation and assistance of a great many people only those who actually participate in "hands-on" production are listed. The engineers who designed the editing equipment, the manufacturers of the tape, the person who assembled and connected the editing suite, the person who made the coffee that kept the production people awake, and the people who processed the grant that helped to finance the production are not normally mentioned.

Credits normally include the artist's or artists' names who were responsible for directing the video, and many of the more elaborate videos contain the names of a variety of other production personnel such as camera people, editors, sound people, musicians and lighting technicians. Video credits essentially mimic the credits we see on television programs and films, and serve to demarcate the personnel involved in a production. As in television and film, the director's name is usually highlighted. If a grant was involved, the Canada Council or some other funding body is thanked. All of these credits help people within the video art world and the larger art world to establish artist's
bodies of works. In doing so they allow art world participants to keep track of who is who, who has done what and who’s money they did it with. Credits are the textual basis for careers. Credits are the video equivalent of an artist’s signature on a painting.

In many early videos, credit sections did not contain reference to copyright, and often did not even contain a date of production. All of the videos I screened that had been produced since the 1980’s contained copyright symbols or statements and dates of production. In the case of the later, dates signify the emergence of video artists’ ability to establish careers marked by chronologically specified activities. During the 1970's the idea that video artists could establish careers was in its infancy, but by the early 1980’s many video artists had produced substantial bodies of works that identified them as "video artists", and video art could be considered to be a legitimate medium in which to base one’s career as an artist.

In the case of the former, copyright symbols signify the problems that video artists have faced in utilizing a medium which inherently possesses characteristics that make copying inevitable. Unlike paintings or sculptures which can only be reproduced (with any degree of apparent authenticity) with great difficulty, video art resists the instant and recognizable commodification that most other art forms are granted on the basis of original authenticity. Copyright laws
provide video artists with a legalized form of authenticity. Only the artist or designated agents are permitted to copy tapes, thus ensuring that video art can maintain the scarcity that is required for art collections to have any value within the art world. Early video artists sometimes found that museums and galleries treated their work without the sacred status accorded other original art works, and their tapes were routinely copied and circulated without the artist’s permission (interviewee). In Canada, the Independent Film and Video Alliance (IFVA), an organization to which many individual video artists and most artist-run video centres belong, has devoted much of its energy to establishing copyright conventions among video artists, museums, galleries and video art festivals. Copyright also provides video artists with limited assurance (within the law) that they will be paid fees for public screenings of their tapes. Some publicly funded galleries have, in the past, been threatened with legal action, by IFVA on behalf of individual video artists, for disregarding copyright provisions (interviewee).

Simple conventions such as including dates of production and copyright symbols on tapes have aided video artists in achieving legitimate status both for individual artists’ careers and for the use of video as a medium of artistic expression. They highlight the struggles in which video artists have engaged in attempting to break through the conventions of the larger art world, a set of institutions
which has erected a number of artificial and subtle barriers to distinguish what is and what is not "art". These barriers provide these institutions with rationales for the distribution of financial rewards, status distinctions, and institutional assistance.

Copyright conventions also indicate the contradiction between co-operative and collective video art production practices and the imperatives of the larger social world which economically pressure video artists to produce work which has scarcity and value. The impact of video art which might take a social activist slant is thus muted by processes of distribution and artistic conventions which make "free exchange" problematic. The following conversation helps to clarify the economic pressures faced by video artists:

Me: It can't be a good commodity though because it can be so easily duplicated?

A: Well, you see that's the hook... it can be so easily duplicated, then why don't we give it out for free? The cost of a VHS tape, just send 'em out...

Me: So we're back to Abbie Hoffman, "Tape this tape?"

A: Yeah... I kind of like the idea in a way. So, like this video magazine that we do for instance, we sell it for $29 to individuals... I mean in theory the price for renting a video tape within the community is somewhere around $50, $75 to a $100 bucks to rent a tape for one evening to show to a group... here we've set it up so we can buy five tapes for that price... on the other hand I do think that the other structure is useable to. I do think that should have his works bought for more than $500 a piece or $1000 a piece which is what a
collecting institution like the National Gallery will pay for them. They should be worth 5, 8, or 10,000...

Me: But the difficulty is how do they come up with a mechanism to pay... do they pay per showing, to buy the copy of the tape, and someone else down the road can pay the cost of a blank tape to buy a copy of it... they work in a capitalist commodity market.

A: You know, they'll buy an Andy Warhol print for $50,000 and then they'll sell posters of it in their gift shop for $3 bucks, so you can buy a copy for $3 bucks that in many ways is as good... it conveys the same content... so, I don't see why you can't do the same thing with a video tape.

Me: So if you divorce the art from its material and sort of draw the essence out of the art, that's the commodity, that's what you can work with?

A: That's where the value lies... the funny thing is that you can get that without paying a cent too. You can go look at someone's work or hear about it or see it reproduced and get the full impact of it for free. However, somebody's got to pay for it somewhere... and I think that's what museums are for, to... I mean they could have said, 500 years ago or whenever they started making museums... yah, yah, we should have museums where people, the general public can come and look at art, but we're not going to pay for it... the artists can come and leave their work here and we'll exhibit it, "great"... and there could have been a whole art structure set up where artists never got paid by museums... all museums would have stuff that is all donated... could have, but... and then if you said, if you were an artist or a painter or sculpture and you said, "I think you should buy mine for $10,000", people would look at you the way people look at video artists now, who say they think you should buy their work for $10,000. They say your nuts, its not the convention. But its only a matter of convention.
Documentation

Video art that consists of installations in galleries or public spaces as well as sculpturally oriented work and video performances have similar legitimating conventions to those of videotape based art works. Such work is always documented utilizing visual media such as photography, video and sometimes film. In the case of installations and video performances, documentation is considered to be extremely important due to the transient and temporal nature of these works: one day they exist in a gallery and the next they may be dismantled. In conjunction with visual documentation, textual documentation in the form of programs, catalogues or flyers help to provide descriptions and interpretations that can remain after the work has disappeared. Again, this documentation serves to establish video art as a legitimate art form and as a legitimate artistic medium in which to make a career.

Playing with and Subverting Artistic Conventions

Video artists, true to their convention of playing with conventions, have however had some among their ranks who have sought to disrupt and subvert conventions which add legitimation and pay homage to the larger art world. Indeed, there is an undercurrent in the video art world that adopts a very cynical attitude toward the pretensions of the larger art world, an art world that for many years resisted the works of
video artists. The convention which is most amenable to such play is the documentation convention.

Some video artists, more true to the tenets of the Situationists than the Situationists themselves, have simply neglected to or have consciously not documented their work and also erased their tapes either to use the tapes to make new videos or to make an artistic statement about commodifiable art forms. The following poem is by one such video artist:

Confessions of an Erasist (Stoned on Sony)

I erase tapes
Some of my best tapes are gone forever.
Demagnetized into the world of anti-matter.
No wonder I never get a grant....

Erase your tapes.
Fight art-pollution

Best not to love video.

Best not to hate video.

(Tardos, 1976)

Ironically, however, the poem still serves as a documentation of the acts described, much like the Situationists’ boxes serve as documentation for their Situations (Becker, 1982).

One group of video artists discovered that they could make the art world’s convention of documentation into an art form in and of itself. This Canadian group, General Idea (A.A. Bronson, Felix Partz, Jorge Zontal), created a series of art works which progressed over several years and created its own documentation, some of which was entirely fictitious and much of which was calculated self-referencing hype (Gale, 1983). General Idea began developing something called the
1984 Pavilion in 1968, a construction which was written about in a magazine they produced called File, and was referenced in a number of their works over many years, a construction which was never actually constructed but was only seen in ruins during a post-1984 archaeological investigation videotaped in 1983 (Ibid).

Much of General Idea's video work seems bent on subverting what McArthur (1978: 29) called the "authority of the real". Within traditional television discourses narrators are often placed at the scenes of historical events as if this is sufficient to signify a guarantee that their descriptions of those events are truthful. Within both academic and art discourses printed texts are made to signify the truth of the events which they describe, simply through the authority of the printed word. General Idea have created a discourse (in both print and video form) about an event, the 1984 Pavilion, that never existed, yet we see them combing through the archeological remains of the Pavilion and we read about their efforts to design and build the Pavilion. We even have textual and video evidence from the "Miss General Idea Pageant" which was held to select a beauty queen to represent the Pavilion. We have all of the evidence, but there is no real Pavilion.

It would seem that one of General Idea's key tactics was also to drape themselves in the exaggerated textual trappings of "real" artists, enter into the larger art world
and achieve success based on their subversive (yet strangely and ironically legitimate) art practices. Their ruse worked with significant success. The members of General Idea are some of the few video artists who have gained some significant notoriety outside of the smaller confines of video art world, primarily, I believe due to their extensive documentation efforts. As was mentioned earlier, such documentation is crucial to the development of an artist’s persona and an artist’s eventual "success".

I realized the effectiveness of General Idea’s play with documentational conventions first-hand. For several months during my early fieldwork I kept coming across references to them and finding artifacts (a set of television colour bar laminated table placemats and copies of their unapologetically self-serving File magazine for instance) of their work in various locations, and I thought that much of what they described in print and on video had actually taken place. Only later in my discussions with veteran video artists did I discover that I, like the larger art world, had been seduced by their tactics.

Descriptions do not do General Idea’s work justice because their video art is richly complex in word play and visual play. Their trademark triad of "pissing poodles" (representative of their own position as "bad" but "cute" artists within the art world?), their use of authoritative voices whose words spill over with slippery meanings and their
apparent disdain for the art world that (now) supports them
(best represented in their videos Shut the Fuck Up! and Colour
Bar), have to be experienced. Indeed, using words to describe
any of the videos that I have screened is difficult and in
light of the role that textual documentation plays within the
video art world, it would perhaps be inappropriate.

Video art works such as General Idea's make it clear
that video art is a process and not a product. It cannot be
simply decoded and interpreted. It tends to purposefully
avoid utilizing one-dimensional signifiers in favour of
playful signifiers that avoid direct and final connections to
signifieds. Video art is a discourse that takes place between
an artist and an audience, a discourse which is shaped by both
participants. General Idea's work involves a strange critique
of the larger art world that believes that art contains
discernable messages regardless of the viewer or the viewing
context. It is a critique that pokes serious fun at the art
world's reliance on documentation and final referents by
ensuring that General Idea's documentation is purposefully
slippery and evasive. Despite this, its documentation has
been accepted by this larger art world as "art" and this art
world has created further "meta-documentation" in an attempt
to capture it. General Idea's reply is to create the video
Shut the Fuck Up!

The following are some illustrative words from a
transcript of General Idea's video, Test Tube (General Idea,
1986: 63), which help to convey the group's orientation to the larger art world, to television and to the postmodern world:

Felix: We're supposed to be out there on the fringes of society, dabbling in chaos, dishing up raw sensibilities. We're supposed to be romantic, untamed... while our artworks are slid back into the marketplace, blue-chip investments for level-headed fetishists. That's the way capitalism always operates. It has to constantly open new markets. It cultures chaos with the understanding that there will probably be a new mutation to harvest, and refine, and re-inject back into the mainstream... at a healthy profit of course.

AA: And the problem is... how to work outside that system?

Jorge: No the problem is, how to work inside the system, because there is no outside anymore. Unless you're very romantic...

Felix: How Sixties!

Jorge: That's why we're working in media formats. We don't want to destroy television as we know it. We want to add to it, stretch it until it starts to lose shape, stretch that social fabric! Imagine all those new sensibilities taking up more and more room. Those chaotic situations on the fringe of society flooding the mainstream and doing it so quickly that it's impossible to have an overview anymore.

Felix: Do you mean replace the profit motive with the change motive?

Jorge: Sure. Think of capitalism as another found format that we can occupy and fill with our own content...
Conventions: A Summary

To summarize, video artists and conventions have an interesting relationship. Conventions are depended upon for creating continuity, they are crucial in establishing career paths, they are sometimes evoked by economic pressure, and they provide content ideas for subversive video art productions. The artistic conventions of the larger art world are both adhered to and evaded, used when necessary for the economic and institutional benefits they provide and abused when they can be shown to work at odds with video artists' conceptions of art. In the sections that follow on distribution and aesthetics, the role that outside conventions have had on video as an emerging art world and social practice will be further developed.
DISTRIBUTION AND AESTHETICS

Distribution: An Introduction

Becker (1982) treats distribution as one among a variety of activities in which artists engage, and distribution does play several functional roles within an art world. As Becker (Ibid: 93) notes, "artists, having made a work, need to distribute it, to find a mechanism which will give people with the taste to appreciate it access to it and simultaneously will repay the investment of time, money, and materials in the work so that more time, money and materials will be available with which to make more works." The functional side of distribution activities is only one aspect of the role that these activities have in the process of creating art.

Video artists have always found distribution activities to be highly problematic, a factor which led me to spend considerable time investigating the realities video art distribution. The result of this work was a realization that distribution not only fulfils certain key functional roles, but is also very much a part of the process which is "art". Thus, the activities that video artists find problematic are also activities that reveal the weak spots in the framework of the larger art world and its discourses. As well, video artist's distribution tactics reveal a great deal about the hegemony that television holds over the medium of video.
The Role of Aesthetics and Aestheticians

Objects, by themselves, are not "art" until they are labelled as such and placed within specific contexts. The act of labelling, the contexts and the act of placement (distribution) all work to establish a discourse surrounding an object which conveys meaning to audiences who understand the meanings and conventions of the art world. These processes function well for art objects such as paintings which are the staple objects of the art world and which have hundreds of years of discourse (mostly mythical, yet real in its effects) to support the legitimacy and sacredness attached to them. In viewing a painting one participates in the creation of the "art" (despite the modernist contention that the "art" somehow exists within paint or canvas and would continue to exist if society disappeared) by acknowledging the legitimacy of its context, placement and label and participating in its discourse (which might include everything from the architectural construction of the gallery to images of art in popular movies and news reports about the high prices obtained at auction sales).

Some video artists have attempted to build their own textual discourse to establish the legitimacy of video art, however this is a double-edged sword. On the one articles in art journals and video art publications helps to increase the status of video art in general and thus helps to insure that it has a legitimacy that attracts funding from the larger art
world. On the other hand, such writing inevitably falls into the trap of the art world's "star" system. Some of the video artists I met were displeased with the role that such writing played because they saw it supporting only a limited number of video "stars". The incestuous nature of the larger metropolitan art world works to limit the discussion of individual artists to those who are immersed in that art world. Thus there are accusations that video artists who have established themselves as the spokes-people for video art are an "art mafia":

I think its funny, I think those magazines are trying to name more stuff art than really should be named art... and I think that part of the reason they're doing that is because of art's funding... If they can define it as art, then it becomes eligible for funding, and what they are trying to do is to set up a social mechanism, or a community of people who are doing a certain kind of work that they think is relevant, and that they would like to see supported through funding, and since the only funding that's available that they can have any influence over is arts funding, then they start calling it art... and eventually people come around and agree that it is art. But I think that that is the motive there...

The other problem with this constructed community is that a lot of times people are writing about things for ulterior motives... They are writing about it in glowing terms because it is similar to what they do and they want the whole genre to be well received... or they are writing about it in glowing terms because they are on an editorial board somewhere with the person who did the piece... or they are doing it for some sort of political reasons, like they are trying to change the funding system, or they are trying to create some other kind of influence.

Sometimes I can't always say what it is...
no, maybe I've just become jaded but I look at a lot of that kind of thing and I think, why is this person writing this, and you have to ask yourself that kind of question. Why is the person doing this in general. They are not getting paid well... art writers are notoriously badly paid so, they are probably doing it either for pleasure or from some deep seated commitment to the work itself, or for some other reason, and I think most often it is for some other reason... and then it becomes suspicious... you're suspicious of every writer... often the other reason is to have a little bit of power too... to be able to be a taste maker...

These feelings about the video art "mafia" reveal the contradiction that video artists are continually faced with. In order to fund their work it must be labelled as art, but in order to do so they must participate in the discourse of the larger art world which valorizes individual artists and contains both the subversive elements in their works and their collectivist orientations. The larger art world engages itself in such containment strategies because, ultimately, video art threatens the arbitrary discourse which supports that art world.

Video as a Threat to the Larger Art World

Video does not fit smoothly into the discourse of the larger art world and thus reveals its seams and social construction. Videotapes do not hang well on the virgin white walls\(^1\) of galleries and museums; videotapes don't fit smoothly

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\(^1\) One video artist I spoke with described his fascination with the fact that art gallery walls are always "clean, white, smooth and perfect" (interviewee) and that in
onto the pages of glossy coffee table books; videotapes cannot be easily made into posters; all videotapes come in cheap plastic packages that all look pretty much the same; videotapes are played on television sets (monitors in video jargon) and television sets are normally considered to be household appliances, not items one finds in galleries; videotapes degrade relatively quickly over time (normally a maximum life of twenty years) in comparison to paintings or sculptures and must be duplicated in order to be preserved (a practice which is alien to curators who help to support the economic value of "original" art through maintaining scarcity and valorizing age), and; videotapes take a great deal of time to view and appreciate (they must be located, played back on video equipment and watched for anywhere from 30 seconds to several hours) in comparison to paintings and sculptures which are often viewed for no more than a few seconds at galleries and whose images can be readily accessed through slide libraries around the world, or through photographs in texts. Curating video art requires the art establishment to change some of the practices and conventions that it holds onto dearly in order to legitimate its cultural power. In short,
video represents a threat.

Video art represents a threat because it is so difficult to place it next to art objects:

I’ve heard lots of people say... video art is very hard to pigeon-hole and it drives people like curators and people who are studying it crazy because its not television, its not collectable, its not... it has no commodity value, and yet people do it... more and more people do it, year after year... and people who’s job it is to quantify and measure go nuts... they can’t figure it out... so I’ve starting thinking that it’s folk art... Its an art form that people do just for the pleasure of doing it and that they share with their community, whomever they define that to be... [That community might be] other people who do it, or just friends who don’t do it but are friends anyway, and they do it for the same reason that people make mailbox sculptures out of old hardware parts.
(Interviewee)

The slippery nature of the status of video art and the refusal of many video artists to become a part of the larger art world represent threats to the larger art world that are potentially damaging for their capacity to reveal the contradictions of that art world, its relationship to systems of value and capital, its elitism and its ultimately arbitrary status-granting system.

In order to deal with this threat, the larger art world has established some effective strategies of containment, and video artists have been pressured into either submissive or subversive roles. Submissiveness meant either giving up video art as an artistic medium or placing the rationales for their work in the cloaks of the formalist
aesthetics of painting and sculpture:

"If you didn't call video art 'art', you just called it 'video', like amateur video or something like that, it would probably look a lot different. I think because its lumped into art, its decided to reference itself to existing art structures in some obtuse way" (Interviewee).

For example, I would place much of the early work that came out of "fine" art departments such as the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design and the University of Guelph in the submissive vein. Realizing that video art posed a threat, but desiring the economic and institutional support of the art system, many video artists referenced their work back to the post-impressionists, neo-impressionists, or more commonly "abstract expressionists", artists such as Jackson Pollock and (now infamous in Canada) Barnett Newman who, in the 1950's, belonged to a wave of artistic expression that was an earlier threat to established art discourses.

The threat posed by artists such as Pollock was due to the understanding that they were "able to create an image resonant with meaning and rich with emotional association without resorting to the conventions of representational art... [a] synthesis of painting and drawing, and a new conception of figuration that freed the image from its roots in representational art" (Rose, 1985: 71). As Tom Wolfe (1975) bluntly points out in his irreverent book on modern art, The Painted Word, abstract expressionism did not long remain a threat to the established art world, because it was
quickly adopted by maverick art theorists such as Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg who pushed this art style forward in printed words until it became an integral part of chic New York culture. "Good" theory became the ticket for a threatening art form to lose its threat and become saleable, desirable, curatable, and fashionable. Theory became primary and the theorists of abstract expressionism "with nothing going for them except brain power and stupendous rectitude and the peculiar make-up of the art world... projected this style, this unloved brat of theirs, until it filled up the screen of art history" (Ibid: 69).^1

Economically the larger art world can easily contain video art practices and pressure them to conform to standards of art practice. The appeal of large commissions for incorporating video art into installation pieces is difficult for video artists to deny:

Installation pieces become "collectible real estate" to quote ________ ________. I think that's kind of tacky because I think it's a really legitimate way to work... I mean if you call it real estate, then you are really kind of denigrating it, but I think artists have to make a living, and it's a better way to make a living then renting tapes at $50 bucks a crack. And it is no more of a sham than any other artist working with materials

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^1 Wolfe's point is valid, however his specific distaste for the art theorists and artists of modern art, abstract expressionism and pop art leaves the reader believing that theoretical discourse had no role in the more clearly representational painting which was common prior to 1900. A legitimating discourse of some sort is probably common to all art forms throughout history including folk art (Becker, 1982).
because, like a sculpture with bricks, and they're just bricks that he bought on Yonge St. for a buck each. Or if you work with clay or with oil painting, you spend $800 bucks for the oil, on an oil painting that sells for $10,000... you're not being paid for your labour, you're not being paid for the materials, you're being paid for something else, you're being paid for your ideas.

Despite this interviewee's contention, however, video art in the form of videotapes is a difficult for art galleries and museums to accept:

Me: How does video fit into the whole "art as commodity" picture?

K: It fits very poorly, unfortunately... because there's some concern that it can be duplicated. The notion that original artwork can go up in value... It also exists in a world where people used to art "objects"... It's an uphill battle. You know, museums want work to accrue value and video deteriorates in value.

Theoretical Discourse as Containment and Legitimation

By establishing a theoretical discourse which linked video art to the discourse formulated by the theorists of abstract impressionism, some video artists were able to extinguish the threat that their work posed in the eyes of museum and gallery curators. Surely, if video art had a rich, wordy and high-art-sounding theoretical base, it must be o.k. to display it within the public galleries of the larger art world. Unfortunately, video was still tied to television sets, the presence of which in art galleries was rather unsettling. The answer was simply to disguise the television
sets as something else: put them in things, on things, around things, and make them not look like simple television sets. Sculptural theories served as a good discursive tool with which to legitimate these practices. And so, riding on the coat-tails of theories which had legitimated formerly threatening art forms, video artists hoped to break into the larger art world.

To some extent this tactic worked, but it seems to have worked best for video artists who were directly taken under the wing of strong or up-and-coming art critics and curators. An artist such as Michael Snow who had been clearly adopted by the Canadian art establishment by 1972, could use video as a medium and have instant gallery success. His works could generate an endless supply of theoretical wanderings for influential art critics and fit in well with fashionable theoretical verbiage about space and time (time-based art):

Everything surrounding the machine, including the intensity of ambient light, is the subject of its visual scrutiny, the result of which appears as fleeting images within the rectangular frames of the four television screens... De La incorporates a series of images into one composition in time; yet in this case, they are themselves ephemeral and disappear as quickly as they appeared. (Theberge, 1976: 119)

The problem posed by submission to the dominant art world is that only a select few are permitted to enter its rationed regard, and many video artists, especially those who did not, or were unable to, make use of deep theoretical rhetoric found themselves (and continue to find themselves) marginalized by
an art world that required a star system and notions of artistic (and theoretical) genius to fulfil its power function within culture.

**Video Art Distribution Tactics**

With the limited distribution avenues opened within the established art world, video artists along with other marginalized artists, began to establish their own distribution channels: thus began the subversive tactics for distribution. The early 1970’s witnessed the birth of the artist-run centre, a style of artistic organization that spread rapidly throughout Canada and which provided artists with (among other things) new venues for their works. The demographic swelling of young baby boomers combined with poor economic conditions during this period led to the creation of many publicly funded job training programs and initiatives to create new types of career opportunities for young people. Young baby boomer artists had swelled the ranks of the arts community and the artist-run centres were a phenomenon that helped to relieve the pressure and also helped to contain and redirect the energies of creative young people who might otherwise have posed a serious threat to power (remember that these were the years following the riots and marches of the late 1960’s and the baby boomer fuelled October Crisis in Quebec).

For many video artists, the possibility of
distributing video art (which at that time was referred to under a variety of different names including guerrilla video and community video) within the established art world was a remote consideration. Video was seen as the medium that would decentralize communication processes and empower people throughout the world, and thus a variety of "underground" distribution networks evolved among video artists who shared this viewpoint. One of the tools that helped to foster the growth of these global networks was the Canadian publication mentioned earlier, the International Video Exchange Directory (Video In, 1971). Distribution and sharing videotapes became a central focus for video artists.

The concept of free exchange is considered by contemporary video artists as a relatively short lived ideal among veteran video artists, many of whom assumed that eventually videotapes would be informally circulated on a massive scale and that dubbing tapes would be seen as normal practice, rather than one that is protected by copyright laws (and offensive F.B.I. and Interpol warnings on corner store video rentals). A society saturated by free exchange would "contribute to a new kind of information environment" (Goldberg, 1973: 5) in which all "software" would be considered to have arisen from culture and society and thus ultimately belong to culture and society rather than to individuals - "no-one can rip it off if everyone has it" (Ibid: 5). In essence, free exchange was not only a way to
distribute videotapes, but was also an attempt to subvert the exchange relations of capitalism which insist that information be commodified and the exchange relations represented by television's one-way communication strategy.

Internal Economy and Internal Distribution

During the 1970's video artists established a strong internal artistic economy which continues today. Within this economy video artists make use of publicly funded artist-run centres to produce their tapes at low cost, and sometimes with the aid of grant money. Finished tapes can then be deposited at any one of five distribution outlets (depending on content, orientation and language) for distribution to art schools, community centres, galleries, or other artist-run centres. They can also be submitted to a wide variety of video festivals world wide. Sometimes curators will screen videotapes at distribution centres and select tapes for incorporation in thematic exhibitions or festivals (themes such as "Desire", or "Women of Colour") or for exhibitions which will travel to various centres or galleries.

Much of the video art created today stays within the video art world and circulates through an internal network within an economy that is largely publicly funded. An artist receives a grant for a production which is produced at a centre which is also funded by public grants. This videotape is then deposited at a publicly funded distribution centre
which may eventually provide the artist with a small royalty cheque (one high profile video artist told me that he is lucky to make $400 per year in distribution royalties). A curator may decide to use the videotape at an exhibition at her publicly funded gallery utilizing a special exhibition grant for the purpose, from which the artist receives a token exhibition fee. A video festival, largely supported by public funding may decide to use the videotape in its program for which the artist may receive another token fee. A critic may decide to write about the artist’s work based on the artist’s reputation or some other factor and with the aid of a writer’s grant, produce an essay which is published in a publicly funded arts magazine. The production of video art thus generates a substantial amount of work for other members of the video art community which has established a well-oiled internal economy.

The reason for this largely internal economy is that there is little or no commercial market for video art. In order to establish such a market, video art would have to compete with other cultural products which have substantial promotional campaigns and a well-developed public distribution infrastructure. A video art distributor commissioned a study to discover whether or not an external distribution project might be feasible, but the study concluded that this was a highly unlikely venture (interviewee). Only the educational market, and specifically the market opened up by media
literacy projects seems to hold significant promise for external distribution.

Subsidized "Free Exchange"

The irony of this scenario is that the old free exchange ideal is actually working in a manner much better than any early video artist could have expected. For video artists who have not tapped into the grant system, their work can be produced at relatively low cost (but admittedly expensive for those with low personal incomes from other sources) at a publicly funded artist-run centre. Once produced their videotape might be screened to audiences of friends, fellow video artists or members of their interest group and in some cases, particularly for issue oriented pieces, the videotape might be circulated within a larger network of acquaintances with no money exchanging hands.

Video artists who have become established members of the video art community have opportunities to circulate their tapes to wider audiences of art students at universities, of video art aficionados at festivals, or to art gallery patrons in the museum and gallery venues. Audiences remain extremely small compared to the audiences for broadcast television or Hollywood film or Hollywood video rentals, and the audiences pay little or nothing to see the work. Given the heavily subsidized nature of the entire video art community, exchange of videotapes is taking place for next to nothing: what we
find at all levels is a publicly subsidized free exchange system.

Many video artists seem unaware of this subsidized internal economy, or if they are aware they are frightened to let the word out that video is publicly funded from production through to distribution and screening. Some realize that without the funding the economy would quickly collapse and I could sense a wariness on the part of some of the video artists with whom I talked: an uneasiness about talking about a cultural production system that is probably 80% publicly funded within a social and cultural climate that is hostile to government funding of many social and cultural programs. The Robert Mapplethorpe exhibition problem in the U.S. wherein the curator of the exhibit was charged with promoting "indecency" and the fundamentalist right-wing element began a crusade against non-heterosexual art (or any art that it did not want to understand) which substantially inhibited public funding has been a major cause of concern among video artists (Graham, 1991). Canadian video artists have already faced several public events involving state confiscation and censorship of their work, and there is a concern that the small gains they have made in avoiding censorship may be quickly washed away if right wing elements decide that videotapes with gay and lesbian content should not be publicly funded and are able to garner public support for their agenda (interviewee).
Insuring Funding: The Invocation of Professional Status

In order to insure that funding mechanisms remain active, video artists, over a period of two decades, have come to see themselves as "professional artists" and have been successful in creating strong (some might say militant) lobby groups and individual lobby efforts to advance their "rights as professional artists". Within the larger art world, the money directed toward video art and other artist-run centre originated arts is relatively small. By far the most money is given to public galleries to increase their collections of art work and to commission "important" exhibitions of art from the "high" art world. Money directed toward indigenously based cultural production and cultural production communities is minuscule in comparison. As one video artist reflected, commenting on the controversy over the National Gallery's purchase of Barnett Newman's *Voice of Fire*:

> It’s not *Voice of Fire* itself that’s the problem here. It’s an important work that deserves recognition. The problem is whether that recognition is more valuable than the stimulation of cultural production among working Canadian artists. One Barnett Newman could easily fund an artist-run centre like [Video Place] for thirty years, or for that matter it could fund thirty artist-run centres for a year. Imagine how much art we could produce with that kind of extra funding... thousands of artists across the country would be able to get access to better equipment... would be able to show their work and get a reasonable fee...

(Interviewee)
The Importance of Limited Distribution & Small Screenings

Video art can often pose a threat to conservative discourses supported by cultural power brokers. Video art essentially supports the raising of marginalized voices who desire to insert their identities within public spaces that are normally closed to their participation. For example, video art allows the gay community to have its own cultural resources for expression and legitimation of their lifestyles and unique cultural characteristics. Video art from the gay community has little chance of gaining access to the airwaves, yet it provides members of this community with a powerful sense of affirmation, and a sense that they have succeeded in momentarily interrupting the heterosexual discourses which would ignore their existence. Such video art is empowering to marginalized communities and its rather limited distribution is a non-issue. Its creation and existence is far more important than its distribution to mass audiences.

In a similar fashion, communities of women, ethnic communities and native communities have been able to gain important discursive space through video art. Likewise, issue oriented groups such as environmental action groups or social welfare lobbyists have used video art to create cultural products that serve to re-affirm their commitments and beliefs. Countless individuals have made use of video art to reflect upon and represent their own problematic subjectivities, thus opening discursive space that is highly
subversive within dominant discourses which tend to limit such reflections in favour of predetermined and prescribed subjectivities. Almost all of this video art is distributed to relatively small numbers of people.

One of the video artists I interviewed described the nature and benefits of small screenings exceptionally well:

Working in video art allows us to address a number of inter-related artistic and political concerns. Personally I'm interested in issues of sexuality, race and representation... I don't like to use authoritative voice-overs who come from the sky to tell us what the truth is... A voice should come from the community whose issues it is addressing... I'm not interested in making [video art] for art's sake alone... popularity among people in [my ethnic community] is important for me because I'm doing this stuff more for them and myself than for the Canada Council! The voices I am familiar with from my culture are never represented in film or on TV... [My last video] documented my own history of growing up in three different cultures... I showed it in the basement of a church for the [community ethnic association] and people kept saying that their histories were very similar... They felt that they couldn't talk about those histories, but with the video it made it c.k., especially for some of the older people who have always been concerned about fitting in to Canadian society, whatever that is... I like to think of my work as anti-ethnographic work - it's my voice, telling my history and representing a different kind of "knowing", and representing that "knowing" to people who understand where I'm coming from.

Participating in a small screening is an interesting process. The video art acts as a catalyst to stimulate discussion and generate interaction. People want to talk about what the video meant to them, how it made them feel, why
they thought it was good or bad. I found that such experiences helped to remind me that the video art with all of its professional pretensions, funding strategies, aesthetic discourses, and distribution arrangements is not a product, but is a process. The idea that video art should and can be marketed as a cultural commodity is a red herring of sorts. What video artists are really marketing is a cultural process wrapped in a fancy package. It is a cultural process that fosters, encourages and maintains discourses in spaces where none might exist for people who, like all of us, have experiences that are discounted, ignored and marginalized within the dominant discourses of popular culture. Video art allows those marginalized discourses to rise to the surface, obtain some affirmation as to their legitimacy and to invade the spaces reserved for dominant discourses.

Video artists have successfully created large scale screening events and have successfully entered prestigious galleries such as the National Gallery which now has a full time video curator and a space dedicated to video art. I might alternatively say that the dominant art world has succeeded in containing some of video art's subversiveness within its discursive strategies. Large scale video art screenings remove the intimacy that video art requires to engage people in interactions and discussion processes. The low-key, informality of the television monitor is replaced by the video projector and the video projection screen, and
audience members become elements within crowds. The videos may be visually interesting, however the empowering process is lost. Likewise, the video space opened at the National Gallery is equally alienating. One walks into a dimly lit, glass enclosed room and sits down among rows of benches and faces a monitor which endlessly screens video after video of a preset program. There is no attempt to establish a dialogue among viewers: instead viewers feel a pressure to stay quiet and not discuss what they see. As I left this particular room I felt a keen sense of loss, a loss of community and interaction that seems to have been removed in order to push video art along a route to becoming a "high" art form.

Ultimately, distribution and the creation aesthetic discourses for video art reveal much about its status as a contradictory art form. The contradictions arise not out of the work itself, but out of the pressures posed by the larger art world and simple economic necessity on the part of video artists. Their work threatens to reveal the contradictions of the larger art world and thus it maintains a subversive potential that the larger art world must constantly struggle to contain.
CHAPTER VII
CONCLUSION

INTRODUCTION

The social world of video art is a complex one. It involves everything from the mundane activities of everyday life to the politics of power and representation. Yet it is this complexity that makes this social world a fascinating case study of contemporary social life in what has been termed the postmodern world. Video artists and their practices provide interesting insights into sub-cultural representational issues, into the institution of television, into art worlds, into contemporary patterns of commodification and into struggles for democratic media organizations. As well video artists and their practices provide a glimpse of the interplay of strategies that can be developed to contain or re-direct emerging discourses which may be subversive to dominant discourses. Finally, video artists and their practices can alert us to the presence of, and pressure to create, a variety of subversive tactics in the realm of discourse.

It should be clear to the reader that I have enjoyed this research experience. Much of my enjoyment has been generated from a realization that video artists are not simply
"subjects" and "informants" for this study, but are, in many senses, colleagues. Their work is very similar to the work that I have been trained to do as a sociologist and their efforts are equally, or more, dedicated. Video artists work with images and sounds rather than printed words in order to share and exchange their thoughts and feelings. Once I had immersed myself in their world and had learned how to watch their productions I discovered that video artists can be remarkably articulate, within their chosen medium, when they express ideas, concepts and relationships that sociologists interested in culture have been grappling with for years. Given the fact that the medium of video is becoming the most pervasive medium in our society, it is heartening to note that some are using it as an alternative to text, and are using it in ways not possible within the institution of television.

Despite the efforts of analysts such as Jerzy Kosinski (Sohn and Kosinski, 1982), and Neil Postman (1985), the medium of video is not disappearing. These authors, who argue that television is the scourge of the planet because it supposedly leads to declining literacy and the erosion of some sort of common ethical and moral fabric, refuse to entertain the idea that people (and especially the weak and innocent children they so wish to protect) can acquire "literacy" in forms other than words. Having an alternative to text-based literacy that provides equal opportunities for the articulation of ideas, and feelings can not be so extremely harmful. Of course,
television has its problems, but the problems inherent in the institution of television should not be so easily transferred to the medium of video. The social context within which the medium is used is the primary factor in determining its benefit or evil, if indeed we choose to search for such effects.

The medium of video has been utilized by the institution of television in ways which remove any potential it might have as an interactive (in the sensual, not computer-like meaning of the word), dynamic social catalyst. The institution of television has specialized and standardized video practices and has separated audience practices from production practices. It has sold the medium of video as a medium of spectacle rather than a medium of process and participation. Today, video, through the institution of television, and the very presence of screens in our homes, connotes a loss of the social. At the same time, however, on different screens, under different social circumstances, the medium of video connotes a subversive and liberating potential.

Balancing Between Modernism and Postmodernism

My observations on the social world of video artists left me confused about the position of video art in relation to either modernist or postmodernist discourse. In many respects video art seems to dance with both discourses, a
characteristic that probably places it in the latter category. In some ways video art behaves like a modernist art form, while in other ways video art behaves like an elusive postmodernist discourse. The key to understanding this balancing act is, I believe, funding.

Without funding, there would be no video art, no video art production co-operatives, no video art screening events, no video art festivals, no video art catalogues and no video artists. Funding comes from the state. The state, being the state, has a variety of pre-requisites that recipients must meet in order to be granted funding. One of the most important pre-requisites is the requirement of professionalism which signifies legitimacy.

Video art grew up in an era in which funding was not strictly tied to professionalism, a funding scenario best captured by the LIP grants discussed earlier. As economic conditions changed and phenomena such as Reaganomics and Thatcherism came to the forefront of state bureaucracies, funding became more and more restricted. The criteria for legitimacy increased, and the need to build credentials and profiles increased. Such economic and bureaucratic realities require subjects to engage in competition for scarce funding, which further increases the criteria for legitimacy. Within the video art world, this led to the use of the larger art world's "star" system model for the ascription of status and the labelling of art.
Despite the use of this "star" system, however, video artists have retained an allegiance to the populist, democratic and social action oriented ideals which gave birth to one of video arts most important lineages. The star system is used rather pragmatically as a method for obtaining funding and legitimacy. Artist-run video production centres can point to the names of "stars" on their membership rosters and claim the presence of such names as a criterion for further funding and further recognition by the larger art world. The "stars" themselves are able to utilize their status to produce boundary stretching work which will almost automatically be labelled as art, thus opening new avenues for other artists to claim the art label. "Stars" who turn their backs on the video art community to celebrate their individualistic "genius", and who do not give something back to that community are labelled as "sell-outs" and are not encouraged to take part in collectively oriented video art activities.

The art label is a central problematic for video artists. The label is legitimated and designated by the modernist-based larger art world, an art world that video artists do not seek to emulate and an art world that has marginalized video artists. On a tactical level video artists have dealt with this problematic by utilizing the documentation strategies which the larger art world supports and is supported by. A host of video art critics, curators, writers and administrators perform the function of filling
pages with discourse which legitimizes video art activities and labels them as artistic activities. In the face of an overwhelming body of textual evidence in favour of the art label for video art, the larger art world has no choice but to acquiesce and accept video art into its folds. This is dangerous to the subversive potential of video art, however this allows video artists are able to fund their work and to some extent the non-commodifiable nature of video art protects it from total containment within the larger art world.

Video art’s subversiveness is thus aided by the difficulty of commodifying video art. Capitalist processes of exchange work by reducing the exchange of objects and even signs to equivalences of value (Baudrillard, 1981). By living in a society in which virtually everything is assigned a value we have little chance of engaging in free exchange without any requirement that the exchange be monitored (by ourselves or others) for value equivalences. Video art resists the assignation of value both within the larger art world and within the video art world. The larger art world has great difficulty in providing video art the status it provides to paintings because video art is not a specifiable object that can be unproblematically assigned value based on its scarcity as an original item. Video art can be easily copied with little or no trace of "forgery". It is thus holds no value to collectors because, having no objectifiable value it cannot increase in value.
Video art represents a challenge to the aesthetic beliefs and conventions of the larger art world. The larger art world's dual strategy of both marginalizing video art and containing it within modernist aesthetic practices indicates that video art is viewed as a threat to the social structures and discourses which support the larger art world. If we follow Becker's analysis of artistic innovators (Becker, 1982), video artists can be seen to represent an artistic sect which is at odds with the status systems and conventions of the larger art world. While most artistic innovators seek to replace one set of aesthetic beliefs with another, video artists also seek to change aesthetic practices by usurping the role of the aesthetician as the final arbiter of the label "art", and placing that role in the collective hands of artists and audiences. In doing so they are also subverting the social, political and economic systems which invest certain status roles with the privilege of legitimating meanings.

Video Art in Society

Most sectors of society are largely ignorant of the existence of video art. Its non-commodifiable nature and the need for viewers to acquire watching skills has prevented the larger public from accessing video artists' works. Video artists have tried a variety of different distribution models to address this issue, but have achieved little success. As
one distribution centre staff person told me, "audiences have to have the tools" with which to watch and engage with the images on the screen, and without those tools, video art is perceived as boring or incomprehensible. In a world where images come to the viewer packed with invested meanings and based in standardized narrative forms, viewers seldom have to invest an effort in participating in the decoding process. That process is a largely learned and passive process because media institutions have much to gain from audiences which do not engage their cognitive resources in the decoding process.

Video artists are, however, part of the audience for media institutions such as television. As such the represent one end of the spectrum of audience members, a part of the spectrum which seeks to actively participate in both the decoding and encoding processes of creating meanings for images. They are representative of the kinds of gaps in discourse closure from which new meanings and potentially subversive meanings can arise and circulate. They are subversive deviants to the extent that they operate within the realm of signifiers and meanings, and do so according to agendas which are not congruous with those of dominant discourses. Their efforts are very effective at a micro-level in enabling themselves and their audiences to assert alternative discursive spaces. For sub-cultural groups which do not have a voice in the creation of their own identities,
video artists help to provide that voice. The work of video artists is not revolutionary in the confrontational sense. Their practices do, however, suggest communication models which, if placed next to those of media institutions, lay bare the contradictions imbedded in the communication models that we have come to take for granted as being effective communication strategies. Video artists offer their audiences the opportunity to participate in the construction of the meanings contained in their products. Our media institutions fail to alert us to this perspective and they fail to encourage us to adopt this perspective. As audience members we are guilty of complicity in this strategy of meaning containment if we fail to adopt alternative viewing relationships. Video artists, if their work is to receive any reception at all, have no choice but to ask (or demand) their audiences to actively engage with their work. All of this points to the fact that viewing is a socially constructed process, a process which probably has more impact upon the meaning of the images we see than the images themselves.

All of the above remarks must be conditioned upon the fact that when I speak of video art and video artists I speak in general terms. There are some video artists who would like to see their work commodified and placed on mainstream television. There are some video artists who would like to break into mass media institutions in order to build more lucrative careers. There are some video artists who would
like to see their work become a part of the larger art worlds' conservative discourses. There are video artists who have no qualms about participating in the art "star" system. What is important to note is that despite the intentions of these video artists, their practices make it difficult for them to participate in these other, more "legitimate" endeavours. Their desires combined with their frequent disappointments (and occasional whining) are evidence of the marginalized and relatively subversive role that video art has found for itself. Video art practices have been successfully hidden by dominant discourses, a factor which frustrates some video artists who wish to enter into the dominant discourses. It is that hidden quality, however, and the efforts at discursive containment that provide video art with its subversive potential because video art practices are forced to operate within a cultural underground which is spilling over with repressed cultural expression.

Dominant institutions, despite the protests of some video artists do not understand the practices of video artists because those practices are fundamentally at odds with the strategies which support those institutions. Dominant institutions choose to ignore the existence of video art, as they choose to ignore the vast majority of cultural production which appears at the grassroots level. They choose to ignore cultural production such as video art because to make it available to the masses in a way that is true to its form,
would require massive structural changes to the one-way communication strategies through which the mass media work. The institution of television is much more comfortable in playing the role of appropriator, taking an aesthetic technique here and there in order to create some synthetic difference on the screen, or seizing a technological innovation that makes production more efficient. Television can not show video art in an appropriate context because television can not provide its viewers with the "tools" that they need to watch and decode. To provide the audience with such tools would be analogous to a comedian asking his audience to heckle all of his jokes.

Video art utilizes the medium of video to build and celebrate culture and community and to celebrate meanings and subjectivities constructed at the local level. It is able to do so by creating a social context in which the artificial separation between encoding and decoding is dissolved and the audience is placed in the role of both producer and consumer. Video artists tend to produce video art for themselves and for audiences with which they share an intimate familiarity, and the social activity involved in the process of sharing imagery becomes an end in itself, over and above the product on the tape.

Grunenau (1988: 26), cautions us to be wary of postmodern theory which claims that subjects who open up new discursive space for the repossessing and recombination of
signifiers and signifieds because we may be left with "an inflated sense of the autonomy and political power of play in culture." Gruneau (Ibid) asks us to examine the potential for any "long-term counter hegemonic consequences" to actually occur. Within the social world of video art there are two processes which indicate that such counter hegemonic consequences might be occurring over the long-term. The first process is that which provides marginalized and forgotten communities and individuals a voice. This voice may not be heard outside of a local community or interest group, however, it is a voice which is often newly found, freshly experienced and not likely to disappear. The examples of gay activists using video art to construct representations of themselves and their issues, or women using video art to examine their experiences within patriarchal society are illustrative of this process. The second process involves the building of video art networks and the development of video art production facilities. Subordinated social groups normally lack access to the material means with which to resist or subvert hegemonic forces. While video art's relationship to "high" art discourses represents a potential containment of access provisions, artist-run centres have an entrenched twenty year legacy of access philosophy which calls for subordinated groups and individuals to have access to the material means of video production. Over the long-term, thousands of individuals and groups gain access to video equipment and thus
acquire the potential to create new discursive space. There may not be any immediately tangible hegemonic victories through such usage, but we cannot discount the possibility for such victories. For example, events in Eastern Europe and the Baltic States of the Soviet Union provide evidence of the counter-hegemonic uses for video. During periods of extreme crisis, where the state is in danger of losing its legitimacy and where the state engages in mass media strategies to contain dissent, video provides a material means for alternative discourses to be created and circulated.

Czechoslovakia's recent revolution is an interesting case study. Czechoslovakia, like Canada, has had a twenty-year history of video art practice (interviewee). As events and demonstrations in Prague gained momentum, there was an information vacuum that needed to be filled. Prior to the repossession of the state run broadcasting service, video artists began to use their access to equipment to videotape demonstrations, speakers and other significant events (interviewee). These tapes were then freely circulated and played back over monitors placed in streets and shops controlled by democratic forces. People who were not able to participate in previous events or who were not familiar with the events of preceding days were able to view those events from the perspectives of those involved. Large crowds often gathered to watch the latest videotaped records of the previous day's events, and the popular democratic movement was
able to maintain its momentum in the face of mass media propaganda campaigns.

Czechoslovakia's video artists, who had built an infrastructure of video art facilities and practices over the years, were able to effectively mobilize those resources during this moment of crisis (interviewee). Events of similar magnitude are unlikely to take place in Canada during the immediate future, however, the Czechoslovakian experience points to the advantage of maintaining an infrastructure of alternative media materials and practices which can act as a wedge within discursive space during times of intense hegemonic crisis. Similar uses of video have been witnessed in Lithuania, China, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Chile, Argentina and Brazil, and there is probably a great deal more such video activity that goes unrecognized.

Video Art as Theoretical Practice

Throughout this study I have indicated that I believe that video art practices represent a possible alternative to text-based theoretical practices. Post-structuralist theory, a theory of discourses, signs and meanings, recognizes that words can no longer be thought of as certain, precise signifiers of thought. Words are ambiguous, vague and slippery:

Today, no theorizing accomplished through language or mathematics can suffice any longer; it is incapable of accounting for what is essential in time - the qualitative
and the fluid, threats and violence. In the face of the growing ambiguity of the signs being used and exchanged, the most well-established concepts are crumbling and every theory is wavering... It is thus necessary to imagine radically new theoretical forms, in order to speak new realities...
(Attali, 1985: 4)

The evidence that I have gathered which demonstrates that video artists (many, but not necessarily all) produce work which addresses theoretical issues in form, content and practice indicates that social theorists are not alone in the theory producing world. Cloaked and hooded in the privileged world of academia, the theory that we as social theorists produce is legitimated and valorized through a variety of institutional means, the most important of which is our reliance on text as a medium. But who is to say that in other social spheres, theory is not being produced by subjects who engage in everyday life just as we do?

When we consider that video has become such a pervasive cultural entity and when we reflect on the degree of (visual) literacy that is required to address and interpret visual imagery, we must conclude that text-based literacy is only one form of literacy and may not deserve the privileges that we accord to it. If this is the case, then other media may be equally capable of achieving the social functions which we believe that text can achieve. It follows that video, being such a pervasive medium, and one which is particularly relevant to young people, could be an especially efficacious medium for the development and communication of theory.
I would argue that video art is already a theoretical enterprise, and an enterprise that holds considerable promise because the viewer not only reads the text, but actively participates in its creation. Because video art is also based within the realm of signifiers and meanings it is also an appropriate theoretical form for addressing the issues presented by post-structuralism, while not falling into the modernist traps of facticity and concrete meanings. Finally, video art is produced from within culture, rather than at a distance removed from culture: it is in fact part of the process that is culture and it references itself as such.

The issues addressed by video art are also the issues that are addressed by social theory, particularly more progressive forms of social theory. Led by video artists and groups most commonly associated with oppressed social conditions such as women, gays and lesbians, members of ethnic and visible minorities and natives, video art brings to those issues an inside perspective, an understanding of lived conditions and understandings. Questions of authorship, authority, and representation are primary questions which are addressed by these producers. There is a primary awareness that thinking, theorizing and constructing discursive representations are processes that are irreducibly embedded in material circumstances and the situations of everyday life. Video artists celebrate this aspect of their cultural production. Academic theorists often attempt to distance
themselves from this aspect of their cultural production.

As academic theorists, we have much to learn from theorists who operate within media other than text and who operate in and through the practice of everyday life. The social practices of video artists could be useful in helping us to revitalize our practices of using theoretical texts, and the products of video artists could be useful in helping us to utilize other media to convey understandings of theoretical issues which are problematically explained with the written word and conventional academic forms. Video art practices are not a replacement for textual theoretical practices, however they represent a different form of theoretical practice, a form that could positively augment the use of text in academia.

Theoretical Suggestions

This study was partially motivated by a desire to attempt to fit together aspects of symbolic interaction with post-structuralist theory in order provide post-structuralism with a sounder empirical research orientation. I have demonstrated that the texts of symbolic interaction contain useful metaphors and rich conceptualizations of interaction processes that can augment post-structuralist theory. Symbolic interaction's fetish for deviance can provide post-structuralists with a rich vein of empirical data with which to examine processes of subversive deviance and resistance.
This is prefaced upon: symbolic interactionist conceptions of the self and agency being revised according to developments in discourse theory; post-structuralist conceptions of self and agency being revised to accept evidence of the cognitive operations which subjects are able to perform in utilizing and appropriating discourses (this does not imply a retreat to humanism, but a recognition of empirically evident cognitive processes), and; the eradication of post-structuralist elitism within the realm of theoretical agency. I am not arguing that a direct synthesis of symbolic interaction and post-structuralist theory is either desirable or possible. I am asserting that they both share an interest in very similar empirical phenomena and that as a result they can benefit from the exchange of theoretical and methodological tactics. In particular, post-structuralism is currently very weak in terms of the empirical investigation of everyday life activities that might provide evidence of resistance and subversion, while symbolic interaction is filled with empirical investigations which can be effectively re-read from a post-structuralist framework.

Methodological Suggestions

Post-structuralist theory is an approach to cultural phenomena that brings a critical viewpoint to analyses of cultural production practices. It is a theoretical approach that integrates the study of culture with the study of power
through a focus on the practices of everyday life, in local and global contexts, which manifest relations of struggle. It is also a theoretical approach which requires concerted attention to discourses, be they dominant discourses which contain, pressure and marginalize, or alternative discourses which give voice to resistive or subversive understandings. Cultural phenomena need to be seen in the light of struggles and conflicts over relations of cultural production.

This theoretical program is an important one, however it currently lacks ethnographic research to support and clarify its advances. The worlds of free-playing, spinning signifiers, meaningless meaning and commodified subjects that post-structuralist theories describe (c.f. Baudrillard, 1988; Foster, 1985) do not easily map onto the lived experiences of ourselves and the other subjects around us. There is a serious need for post-structuralist theory to adopt qualitative methodological approaches to understanding the practices of everyday life. Exactly how do people use and appropriate discourses and how do they assert their own discursive space? Which practices of everyday life are practices of resistance or subversion, which are practices of ambivalence or mechanical obedience? These are questions which deserve to be addressed through ethnographic research as well as through theoretical discourse.

As this study indicates, there is a great deal to be gained from immersion in the social worlds of subjects. My
observations of the processes of learning to watch video art are observations that could only have been made through empirical fieldwork. Those processes proved to be a central issue in the overall study, and were important for my ability to understand the complexity of the discursive practices in which video artists engage. Actively engaging with subjects causes us to understand discursive practices as active appropriation and manipulation of discourse rather than passive absorption of dominant systems of signification. Such active engagement also allows us to understand that cultural signifiers are multi-valent and can take on an infinite variety of meanings depending on the social context and social practices which surround signifiers: perhaps this is the most important subversive practice in relation to dominant discourses.

In our ethnographic research we also need to pay special attention to the discursive lineages and historical practices which preceded our entry into the field. The legacies of discourses from the past may bring a variety of pressures, constraints and liberating ideals to bear upon the everyday practices which we observe as researchers. In this study, the lineages of television practices and discourses, artistic practices and discourses and community development and social action movements each played a role in my understanding of current video art practices. Ethnographic research cannot begin and end within the time constraints of
the present because past legacies continue to manifest themselves within current practices.

Limitations of the Research

One of my former professors once remarked to me that I was an "optimistic idealist" because I believed in people's ability to overcome dominant discourses and construct alternative readings of cultural texts. Long before concepts of resistance and subversion to hegemony had entered sociological discourse in a major way, I was busy attempting to prove that children are not the manipulated dupes that television effects researchers so often claimed them to be. I was arguing that children have the cognitive capacity to construct meanings that run counter to the expectations of researchers, television producers and parents.

In the face of so much research that tells us that the mass-media culture we live in has evolved into a society based on dependency and that the symbols of hegemony have saturated our consciousness and our everyday practices, it is important to maintain some optimistic idealism. My idealism is based on my observation that a vast number of researchers, many of whom support dependency theories, have been capable of constructing aberrant readings of cultural texts. I believe that if researchers are capable of such deconstruction and reconstruction then everyone else must also retain this capacity, and that perhaps it is practised far more than we
are normally led to believe.

My research is thus open to critiques of my belief that subjects retain certain cognitive capacities that are shared by all of us, and which may manifest themselves within appropriate cultural contexts to allow us to construct meanings which resist or subvert the dominant meanings which surround us. Some might say that I am resorting to humanist "essences" in order to justify this belief, however, I instead resort to empirical observations of the problem solving tactics that Piaget (1932; 1965) has documented in children's interactions with their peers and their social and physical environments. These tactics, for me, represent the same tactics that post-structuralists attribute to the practices of bricolage: tactics of assimilation, accommodation and transformation of the flow of discourses which surround subjects. My theoretical explorations in this area are, however, tentative and perhaps too idealistic, and are thus highly amenable to critique.

I am also aware that I have not delved very deeply into contemporary aesthetic theory. I have decided to pass over lengthy discussions of the implications of the thoughts of members of the Frankfurt School, in order to simplify my conceptual task. I have thus consciously subverted what some might see as a need to construct a deep articulation of the relationships between modernist aesthetics, critical theory and the essence of art. I hope that by demonstrating that the
aesthetic understandings of audiences are rooted in specific contexts and material conditions, I can avoid slipping into the muddy waters of aesthetic theory.

Concluding Statement

This study has made me aware of the limitations faced by researchers who confront an infinite variety of interesting avenues of investigation during their fieldwork processes. I would like to conclude by briefly mentioning some areas that I believe are interesting sites where struggles over meaning and power are clearly manifested.

As mentioned in an earlier footnote, the Federal Liberal Government's introduction of the Leadership Initiative Program (LIP) during the early 1970's appears to have had an incredible impact on cultural production and cultural activities in Canada. The impact of this program in relation to the dollars spent is probably an impressive and seldom seen ratio. The Government's strategies in offering this program during the particular historical events which were causing a crisis in the Government's legitimacy need to be studied, as do the demographic and economic patterns that led to the large number of potential recipients for grants such as LIP grants. This could be a very fruitful area of investigation.

Studying video artists made me aware of a variety of other cultural producers who remain marginalized and forgotten and who may be significant actors in struggles of resistance
and subversion. For example, every city has collections of professional and amateur musicians who "jam". "Jamming" is an elusive and evasive form of cultural production that seems to subvert containment strategies and commodification, while opening discursive space for musicians. An ethnographic study of "jamming" communities would be another interesting research avenue. Other cultural producers who are deserving of study include buskers, audio artists, holographers, computer hackers, craftspeople of every form, and performance artists.¹

Another research avenue that I find interesting is the use of video as a social animation tool for community development activities in developing countries. These activities could provide us with valuable insights into the role that culture plays in both the construction of and the interpretation of video texts across cultures. They might also provide us with information on the value of such practices for subverting dependency on the international flow

¹ For an interesting introduction to the potential subversiveness of performance art, see Heyd's (1991) article on performance art which includes a discussion of Canadian performance artist Rick Gibson's 'rat piece' which was to include "the annihilation, compliments of a 25 kg. concrete block of Sniffy [the rat]" (Ibid: 68). Gibson's piece inserted itself into national discourse (radio, television news and newspaper front pages) for several days prior to its scheduled performance and succeeded in taking a common, everyday practice (killing rats) and creating a panic over the scheduled death of one named rat. In doing so he also challenged the social conventions which support the conventions of the larger art world and forced that art world (for a few days at least) to acknowledge that the question, "what is art?", is a question that is too often camouflaged with heaps of legitimating, supportive aesthetic discourse.
of mass media products.

Finally, I believe that video art practices and products can be effectively utilized within academia as pedagogical tactics and tools. There is ample room for collaboration between sociologists and video artists in devising curricula which utilizes video art to communicate sociological concepts which are muted by more common audiovisual texts which contain over-riding "master-narratives". There is also room for collaborations which would assist students and teachers in the construction of their own video art texts for the purposes of media literacy and for the study of culture production in general. Video is a medium which arouses a great deal of enthusiasm among its users, and could be a pedagogical tool which generates far more interest on the part of students than other traditional learning tasks such as paper writing. It may also open students' eyes to the possibility of actively participating in learning initiatives and contributing their own input into those initiatives.

This potential deserves to be investigated and its successes and failures need to be documented and circulated. The students we face in today's classrooms are students who have a tremendous amount of experience with the medium of video, far more experience than they have with the medium of text. Rather than simply complaining about the loss of textual literacy in our classrooms we should be asking ourselves if our single-minded reliance on the medium of text
is too conservative a teaching and learning foundation in a world which is saturated with images and sounds. We should learn more about the efficacy of other forms of "literacy" before we rest on the laurels of text.
### TABLE 1
Possible Combinations of Techniques, Equipment and Personnel in Video Art Production

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Technology</th>
<th>Personnel</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Video Images</td>
<td>VHS Camcorder</td>
<td>Artist</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Hi-8 Camcorder</td>
<td>Expert</td>
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<td>Friend</td>
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<td>8mm, 16mm, 35mm film</td>
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<td>Synthesizer generation</td>
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<td>VTR (Off-screen recording)</td>
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<td>Existing videotapes</td>
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<td>Set</td>
<td>Existing environment</td>
<td>Artist</td>
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<td>Artist's or friends space</td>
<td>Expert</td>
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<td>Video Place space</td>
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<td>Rented or purchased objects</td>
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<td>Existing light</td>
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<td>Expert</td>
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<td>Video Place lighting kit</td>
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<td>Video Place gels</td>
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<td>Vaseline, gauze, other found materials</td>
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<td>Camera microphone</td>
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<td>External microphone</td>
<td>Expert</td>
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<td>Boom microphone &amp; headphones</td>
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<td>Pre-recorded music</td>
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<td>Sound studio</td>
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<td>&quot;In-camera&quot; edits</td>
<td>Artist</td>
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<td>&quot;Crash&quot; edits on 2 VTR's</td>
<td>Expert</td>
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<td>Off-line edits w/time codes</td>
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<td>Cut edits on 3/4&quot; suite</td>
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<td>A/B Roll edits on 3/4&quot; suite</td>
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<td>A/B Roll edits on Betacam suite</td>
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<td>Stage</td>
<td>Generation &amp; Development Processes</td>
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<td>Concept or Idea</td>
<td>Artist's imagination</td>
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<td>Discussion</td>
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<td>Suggested by existing footage</td>
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<td>Suggested by audio material</td>
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<td>Organization</td>
<td>Production design</td>
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<td>&quot;On the fly&quot;</td>
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<td>Obtaining Equipment</td>
<td>Artist's own equipment</td>
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<td>Rented from Video Place</td>
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<td>Chance occurrences</td>
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<td>&quot;Off-air&quot; recordings</td>
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<td>Available film footage</td>
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<td>Computer generation of images</td>
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<td>According to events' timetables</td>
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<td>Editing</td>
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<td>According to artist's whims</td>
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<td>Dictated by available footage</td>
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<td>According to time &amp; budget constraints</td>
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BIBLIOGRAPHY


culture of marijuana users, however, there is an absence of negative interpretations in favour of positive and pleasurable experiences, often described as mind-expanding experiences. Veteran marijuana smokers help new users to define the drug’s effects as pleasurable and show new users practices which aid in achieving pleasurable effects. These practices might include advising the new user on the quantity to be smoked, methods for inhaling and retaining the smoke, typical patterns common for marijuana’s effects and methods for interpreting those effects (Ibid). Fiske might speculate that the marijuana smoking sub-culture encourages new users to learn how to allow their bodies to experience jouissance with their bodies.

My own progress as a neophyte video artist paralleled the course that new marijuana smokers take in learning how to experience marijuana. I had to learn how to experience video art. The first few works of video art that I watched I experienced as boring, overly, or far too personally symbolic of the artist’s own world, and relatively crude in comparison to broadcast television. I have since seen these same works of video art, over a year and dozens of video art screenings later, and have discovered in them what I now recognize (in my role as a video art user) as sophisticated nuances, interesting symbolic combinations and subversive political commentary. I would argue that part of video art’s position as a subversive practice in relation to hegemony lies in its
requirement that viewers become trained in how to watch, interpret and experience. This process makes video art more difficult to distribute and sell, however it also makes video less accessible to appropriation by dominant forces such as the institution of television. Learning how to watch video art involves communal screenings and discursive interaction with video artists. The pleasures of watching are not latent within video texts; they must be evoked by social processes.

For example, Michael hosted a "member's screening night" at Video Place in order to show other members his "work in progress" (discussed earlier). Audience members entered the darkened meeting room of Video Place to find a series of chairs facing an open space on the floor which was filled with lit candles, various occult-like objects, a single chair and a video monitor on a stand. At the rear of the room, a table was set with generous quantities of wine for audience members.

The screening, or perhaps performance, began when Michael entered the room dressed completely in black, including a black skull cap, poured himself a glass of wine from a bottle near the monitor and sat down in the chair at the front of the room. For about ten minutes he sat in the chair and faced the audience, finishing his glass of wine and maintaining a stone face. Abruptly he got up from his chair and announced that he would perform a piece of music which he had written for his "work in progress". Picking up a
microphone, a flashlight and a cassette tape, he went to a stereo system, placed the cassette in the tape player, pressed play and sat down in his chair with the flashlight directed at his face. Immediately a loud and haunting music filled the room. At random points within the music Michael would pronounce the words "I hear voices... I see faces" in a loud and anguished voice.

Following the performance of this song, Michael told the audience that he would like to show them footage from his "work in progress" and described his production concept about being "haunted" by his own spirit just before it dies and being compelled to videotape the scenes which this spirit remembers. He then proceeded to play "rough" footage of scenes from cemeteries in England, various shots of religious architecture and shots taken from the windows of British Rail passenger cars. These images were accompanied by further music that he had created for his "work in progress". Some of these images had been purposefully degraded through several generations of recording, and some, as Michael later explained, had been shot from videotapes that had been played back on the screen of a black and white "bubble-screened" 1950's television.

Several days following this performance and screening I had the opportunity to talk with Michael about his ideas about the previous night's event. The setting of the room and the performance of the haunting music had been calculated to
seduce the audience to become open to experiencing the images that Michael provided:

Some people thought I was into the occult or something, which is not what I was on about there. I’m into the occult, but not into all the metaphysical stuff, I’m into the fact that people are fascinated by objects, sounds and images that convey occult-like things. The other night I was trying to jar some of the feelings that people have about the occult to give them a sense of the feelings that I want to come across in the video... The candles and all that was just a way to bring things into perspective, kind of like the way the smell of food makes you salivate and think about eating, all that occult stuff makes you connect with some pretty heavy stuff about death and the after-life.

Michael’s work may not convey any revolutionary social ideas, yet it demonstrates that the process of watching is context specific and that video art practices may evade the containment strategies of discourses which seek social control. Watching Michael’s images minus the communal environment he had established for the audience would yield much different viewing experiences. Thus, the signifiers that Michael works with can not be tied to specific signifieds, and for viewers to experience the connotative play of those signifiers they must place themselves within a type of viewing ritual.

Steven, one of the staff members of Video Place provides an interesting perspective on the roles of the audience and video artists in the creation and reception of video art:

Well, for the most part it is not what we see
on television... we can choose to stay home and watch television, or we can say, "there's got to be something else," and go look for that something else and watch it... so when we go and find that something else, perhaps its in the basement of somebody's home in somebody's subversive collection of stuff that they've made on their own: companies and the conglomerates have had nothing to do with the making of that. And so then the viewer gets to experience something that hasn't been controlled for the mass media... for the mass audiences... So it takes an effort to say "no" again, and go out and look for something else. The same goes for painting, film, performance art, dance... it takes and added extra amount of energy to be a good audience.

You can say no to television and go out and make your own television which is like video art, or you can say no to television and go out and watch somebody else's video art...

Learning to Articulate Experiences with Video Art

When I began to conduct my fieldwork I felt it necessary to have a comprehensive overview of video art productions. Such an overview would, I believed, aid me in directing my future interviews so that I could discuss particular works or specific techniques in video art production. I therefore began a three day video art screening marathon at a video art distributor's viewing room. My notes from these viewing sessions can only be described as pathetic. I lacked an ability to contextualize and describe what I was seeing and hearing, an ability that I could only acquire with the help of more experienced "users". One video artist I interviewed accurately described my difficulties when she
related the problems she faced in teaching video art in a post-secondary media art class:

The overall basic goal of the seminar class is certainly to acquaint them with a range of work, which I try to do... but more than that, to provide them with a vocabulary for description, I mean just so we can start from some basic places, and then start to develop some analytical things... Of course, one of the things they most want to talk about is whether they like something or not. I always start off by saying, in fact I don't care if they like it or don't like it... if they can describe the tape itself... and from that description start to develop and to reconstruct then, if you didn't like something you can say why and analyze exactly why... But that is where they want to start from and they'll hang all kinds of things on that term ["don't like"] and [at first they'll say], "it's too long and its boring", and at first their analyses are superficial and as they get more sophisticated they get more sophisticated in their ability to defend this like or dislike.

As someone new to the world of video art I lacked descriptive terms and vocabulary, or put more simply, I lacked a knowledge of video art jargon. I also suffered from a problem that the video artist quoted above noted was common to her art students: I lacked "tolerance for complex material or material which might go on a bit (in their eyes) for too long." I experienced what this video artist described as a "tension" around trying to understand what a video artist is trying to do with a tape or what they are trying to get me to see. Each time I saw a new tape I felt that I had to discover the hidden meaning in the tape. I felt a feeling of annoyance with what I presumed were the pretensions of the artists
producing the tapes.

My experience is probably similar to the experience of an introductory sociology student trying to find the hidden meanings in a professor's lecture. After several years as a student of sociology those meanings are (much of the time anyway) clear to me because I am familiar with the context and languages for discussing and analyzing sociological ideas. As a newcomer to the social world of video artists I found myself trying to interpret work which had deeply contextualized significations, without having the benefit of an understanding of the history and meaning of those significations. Today however I can view a work of video art and place that work within a framework of previous works and video art discourses.

I was able to learn how to watch video art by participating in screening events with members of video art communities, by simply being with and talking to video artists about their work, by reading descriptions and discussions of video art works, and by actually using video equipment under the guidance of veteran video artists to create a product that was labelled as video art. It was also important for me to try to disregard the viewing habits that I had acquired from years of watching broadcast television. This was probably the most difficult experiential task to accomplish, however, once accomplished it opened my eyes to the infinite plasticity of the medium of video.
Developing a "Gestalt Switch" for Watching Video Art

In watching video art I found myself employing what might be called a "gestalt switch" in order to move from a broadcast television frame of reference to a video art frame of reference. Essentially I had to learn to watch video art with an attitude of patience and openness and with very few predetermined expectations. For someone who was weaned on fast-paced, predictable sitcoms, this was a difficult attitude to instantly assume. One of my first experiences with this "gestalt switch" manoeuvre came with the coaching of one of my key informants, Chuck. I had travelled with Chuck to a public art gallery in another city where he had lectured on his participation in the history of video art in Canada. During this lecture he had shown one of his first video art productions which consisted of a single shot of a man (himself) walking away from the camera in an open snow covered field. The man walks for some distance for perhaps two minutes, then he stops and falls to the ground.

Watching this video I felt a certain degree of discomfort due to the fact that I became very aware of the time displaced by the piece. With no cuts or edits, and no foreknowledge of what will happen in the video, the piece builds tension. The tension within the audience at the art gallery was evident from the sounds of shifting feet and nervous stretching as the video progressed. Chuck explained to the audience that regardless of the aesthetic value of the
video, it served to illustrate video art's position as a "time-based" art form, and further served to clearly distinguish video art from television. On our drive home from the gallery we talked for some length about this particular video and Chuck told me that in order to understand video art it was important to realize that watching involves:

a combination of concentration and meditation, two things that are anti-theetical to television... There is some video that is intentionally cryptic. The artist is probably insecure about what he wants to get across, but mostly we're trying to communicate ideas that are best communicated visually. We don't come out and bang you over the head with them... we want you to put some effort into the process, otherwise you just kind of graze and move on.

On the next occasion at which I watched a work of video art, I attempted to clear my mind of preconceptions and expectations and simply watch patiently. The result was a certain degree of pleasure in subverting my ingrained television watching strategies, and the acquisition of an understanding of the importance of video art as a practice which, unlike television, attempts to make full use of its medium. In a later interview Steven echoed some of my observations about watching video art:

I feel that I've got so many psychological barriers to overcome in order to try to achieve something that sits outside of television... I don't think that I've really done much towards that, I'm just kind of working hard to try to sort through that... it's like you said, maybe we're just fooling ourselves... but we've got to make these attempts when we make things and watch them... so its these attempts to get outside
of television... how to measure success rates on all these attempts, that would be really phenomenal research, right?

Watching Video Art is an Intimate Experience

Another video artist was helpful in describing the importance of the viewing context for me. She explained that for her, video watching was an extremely intimate process between the artist and the viewer in part because of the social fact that our experience with television screens is normally a private and personal viewing activity within the home and in part because of the size of most television screens which are designed for small audiences. According to this video artist,

there is a constructed smallness or intimacy to many video experiences... when an artist produces a video there is a certain degree of awareness that the tape will most often be shown to small groups of people or individuals and in the context of that viewing relationship the artist can establish a high degree of contact and intimacy between herself, her images and her audience. In a sense you’re speaking one to one with people... Many people very, very much do not want their work put on a [video] projector because of the scale. They are in favour of the scale present in the video monitor... the projection screen changes that scale and makes things larger than life.

In conjunction with this important understanding of socially constructed and valued intimacy of viewing contexts, there is a tendency for many works of video art to be produced primarily (though seldom totally) for audiences known to the producer. This production aspect often yields a video which
dispenses with slick production values in favour of communicating content to audiences who are normally familiar with the background for the material presented. Video art works created for gay and lesbian audiences or audiences of specific ethnic origins or in many cases audiences of women familiar with feminist issues often focus heavily on creating an atmosphere of intimacy, an atmosphere that is somehow reinforced by less slick, content oriented production values. It would seem as if poor (by broadcast television standards) production values automatically signify notions of resistance or subversion to dominant discourses, and thus enable producers to establish a horizontal level of solidarity with their audience, rather than the vertical relationship generated by broadcast television.

It is thus important to realize that in the context of viewing video art, a sympathetic and empathetic audience is an important part of the total video art package, just as a marijuana smoker's relationship with peers must be based on trust and mutual regard in order for pleasurable experiences to result. Video art producers assume that their audiences will be critical, yet ultimately understanding, especially given the fact that many audiences are comprised of other video artists or friends and acquaintances. One of the tasks of artists in the social world of video art necessarily involves training new comers to watch and understand video art.
The Development of Video Art Viewing Contexts

Indeed, during the early history of video art, the viewing context and the relationship between the production and its audience was a central issue (and still is to some degree). Artists who desired to establish themselves within the larger art world of galleries and museums often began by encouraging such institutions to display their tapes alongside paintings and sculptures. Chuck related that this tactic did not last very long because gallery goers tended to only spend about five seconds looking at individual paintings. The act of spending several minutes intensively watching a work of video art was a distinctly alien act for gallery patrons. Artists experimented with various sculptural installation pieces and still found that gallery patrons watched for several seconds and then continued on. Over time, video art tapes came to be displayed in separate rooms within galleries, rooms fitted with chairs or benches to make the viewing process more comfortable, but this development took a long time to come, and probably would not have come, without the integration of video artists into gallery and museum staff positions.

Producing Video Art: Another Way to Learn How to Watch

Producing a piece of video art under the guidance of veteran video artists was also an important way for me to learn how to watch video art. Gaining knowledge about camera
techniques, editing practices, lighting practices, and video effects allowed me to understand the vast menu of aesthetic choices available to video artists. Such knowledge permitted me to watch a work of video art and make some determinations about its overall budgetary constraints, the amount of time spent producing it, and the artist's familiarity with or access to video technology.

The experience of actually producing something that would be labelled as video art by video artists was also an acknowledgement of the degree to which I had become integrated into the social world of video artists and familiar with their practices. One day while I was editing some found footage, and integrating a variety of effects to play with this footage, Steven offered to show me some of the effects I might want to use. I began to play with knobs and switches, creating all kinds of strange effects, and finally decided on a combination of several effects that "worked" for me. When Julie came up to the editing suite to talk to Steven, Steven commented: "This guy's got all the makings of a video artist. When he's finished this tape we should put some titles on it and put it in the next member's screening night." His words made me feel a pleasure because Steven was complimenting my work and offering me the label of a video artist. This episode had the effect of making me feel like I was a certified video artist and helped me to understand that I had managed to integrate myself so thoroughly into the social
world of video art that I was beginning to "go native." Far from attempting to distance myself to avoid this process, I determined to use the experience to help me document the changes that my subjectivity was being moved through.

In terms of my understanding of video art production values, creating my own work of video art was eye opening. My most important observation was that choices of production strategies and techniques can be a very arbitrary and playful process that involves little or no attention to combinations of signifiers and signifieds, but a great deal of attention to signifiers with elusive connotations. I chose, and was encouraged to choose effects and edit points which, for lack of a better term, "worked". If something appeared to provide some interesting visual qualities or could be interpreted as signifying a plurality of ideas I would use it. Sam, one of video artists at video place, provided a musical analogy to bring home this quality:

When things are too obviously pointed out for you, you kind of draw back from them... like Bruce Cockburn's stuff on Nicaragua or the rainforests. There's no subtlety at all, he just comes out and hits you over the head with dreary slogans and hip causes. On the other hand, there's David Byrne's stuff which kind of sneaks up on you and plays on your mind, you know. You hear a song and you're walking along with your walkman and you look at the world around you and it all gets integrated into the song and all the weird shit you see around you starts to jell with the song and you get a sense of what Byrne is up to. You listen to Bruce Cockburn and you look around and the only thing that it relates to are the bus-shelter advertisements and billboards that are trying to sell you
simplistic, one dimensional ideas just like Bruce is trying to do... Video art should be more like David Byrne's stuff - he's actually done some video art, not music videos, but separate video art. It shouldn't be like bus-shelter advertisements.

The creative process was also long, tiring and paid for by the hour as well, factors which often led me to make choices among techniques for reasons of expediency rather than for strict aesthetic planning. Simply playing with various equipment and image processes led me to adopt some interesting visual effects that I could not have consciously planned to use. For veteran video artists the repertoire of video effects available is substantially larger, however I was assured that the element of "play" combined with the expectation of eventually finding ways of processing images that "worked" according to the artist's fancies was both common and expected: "A lot of work is called experimental because that is exactly what it is, artists doing creative experiments, and some of them work and some of them don't" (interviewee). Haphazard configurations of equipment and buttons often lead to artistic innovations. Even for video artists who construct detailed scripts and storyboards, a certain amount of "play" is very common.

Learning how to use cameras and editing equipment gave me access to the basic sounds and phrases of the languages of video art. With this knowledge I could watch videos and often understand conventional patterns as well as
unconventional disruptions of, or diversions from, such patterns. Within the social world of video artists, knowledge of these basic sounds and phrases is commonplace and my familiarity with them gave me further tools with which to understand aesthetic constraints and possibilities, and tools with which I could discuss these aspects with video artists. Like the veteran marijuana smoker, I had gained a language for interpreting the effects presented to me in the videos I watched, and could experience, and share, a degree of pleasure in recognizing creative uses of the medium's capabilities. I had come to internalize the social signals required to fully participate in the process of watching video art within the social world of video artists and I had thus learned how to experience a form of jouissance.
CHAPTER VI
CONVENTIONS, AESTHETICS AND DISTRIBUTION

CONVENTIONS WITHIN THE SOCIAL WORLD OF VIDEO ARTISTS

The Conventions of an Unconventional Art

Becker includes a chapter on conventions within Art Worlds because "every art world uses, to organize some of the cooperation between its participants, conventions known to all or almost all well-socialized members of the society in which it exists" (Becker, 1982: 42). Conventions permit societal members to participate as audience members for an art form, or to participate as collaborators in the creation of art. Conventions also permit the production of unconventional art simply by their existence as lines across which unconventional works must be seen to cross (Ibid).

There are numerous conventions within the social world of video artists. These conventions are normally "taken for granted" practices that are socially learned. In my estimation the most important convention is the convention that holds that other conventions should be subverted, those other conventions being the conventions of broadcast television. If we examine the work that academic media theorists have done to uncover and lay bare the conventions of broadcast television and compare their work to the work of
video artists who subvert and transgress those conventions it becomes clear that there is very little, aside from the chosen media of exposition—print for academics and video for video artists—which separates the deconstructions of media critics from those of video artists. In the case of video artists, however, they not only deconstruct, but actively reconstruct the languages of the medium of video to avoid the ideological traps of television conventions.

Video artists clearly recognize that the formalistic elements of television have become almost second nature cognitive elements in our daily television viewing habits. Many video artists seem to have realized that there is no separation between encoding and decoding within the television production and consumption strategies of mainstream television, and the rupture of this pervasive pattern is one of the most popular production tactics within video art. The socialization processes for video art viewers ensures that this tactic is followed through the entire production and consumption process.

Stuart Hall's (1980: 132) contention that television languages or codes seem to have become a taken for granted, "naturalized" language system for most viewers is in fact one of the foundations for video art practices. Video artists' works tend to rupture what Hall (Ibid) refers to as "the habituation produced when there is a fundamental alignment and reciprocity between the encoding and decoding sides in an
exchange of meanings." The words of American video artist and video art critic David Ross (1986: 169) echo Hall's comments and lend support to my contention that one of video art's central conventions (both in its textual discourse and its visual discourse) is to transgress or subvert broadcast television conventions:

It would be untrue to state that television, or to be precise, broadcast television - what David Antin termed video's "frightful parent" - was the sole or even the primary referent in the body of work that has emerged from the past two decades. But it would be completely misleading and actually untrue to attempt to describe the activity of American video art outside of the clear and - in some instances - critical relationship that video art has had with broadcast commercial television. But this relationship has less to do with a critique of television content, and its inconsequentiality, than with the manner in which television creates and reinforces the neutralizing effect of a consequence-free universe.

The issue of video art's subversion of broadcast television is a problematic one for some video artists because they are wary of the temptation present for both insiders and outsiders to reduce the motivation for their practices to one single issue. I do not deny that video art consists of tremendously diverse practices and motivations, however, the fact that some video artists, such as the veteran video artist and critic Gene Youngblood, ("[It is a] myth that video has anything to do with television as we know it today" (Youngblood, 1983: 9)) believe that for video to become a real "art" it must deny its relationship to television speaks, with
some irony, to the importance of this relationship.

Television, regardless of the particular aesthetics of the images that it presents to us, is a social institution that has been built upon conventions and standardized patterns. Television attempts to construct seamless, flawless and fluid visions of realism, visions that are imbedded within professionalized practices. Video art is a social phenomenon which thrives on practices of "bricolage" (Fiske, 1989; Chambers, 1986), the process of combining images and meanings to produce texts which subvert forces of cultural homogeneity (Fiske, 1989). Video art practices thus serve to break the seamless, flawless and fluid vision of realism characteristic of television. The majority of the video artists I spoke with believed that video art practices had helped themselves and others to see through the veils of television conventions. Video artists who are strong proponents of developing new distribution avenues for their work have recently discovered that the media literacy educational curriculums adopted by the government in Ontario are quickly becoming important markets for video art work which takes a critical stance in relation to television and mass media (interviewee).

Television Conventions: A Flawless Repertoire

The conventions of television exist primarily for economic and political reasons related to its existence as a site of power within popular culture. Television creates a
discourse that struggles to establish closure over competing discourses. In doing so it asserts that its discourse is the only fair, objective, truthful and reliable discourse in town. Andrew Ross (1989: 13) states that "the struggle to win popular respect and consent for authority is endlessly being waged, and most of it takes place in the realm of what we recognize as popular culture." Video artists, enter into this struggle by asserting alternative discourses from the margins: margins which institutions such as television deny or ignore. This places video artists within what Ross defines as "the first generation to use their involvement with popular culture as a site of contestation itself, rather than view [popular culture] as an objective tool with which to raise or improve political consciousness" (Ibid). Video art curator and critic, Bruce Ferguson, also sees video art as playing a subversive role, but again, not a role that is directly confrontational or directly offensive to the institution of television and its conventions. Instead, simply through its struggles to exist as "a socially invested practice by socially engaged practitioners" in the face of a "collective amnesia or phobia with regard to video" on the part of the television industry, video art is successful in "contaminating" the discourses of television (Ferguson, 1987: 55-56).

Television analysts have frequently documented the everyday practices and external constraints which lead to the
standardization of television production techniques. Organizational demands for efficiency and systematization tend to prevent the creation of television products which differ from standardized production norms (Masterman, 1985). Stuart Hood (1980: 35) goes further by suggesting that television personnel "have as little real influence on the end product as they would have on an assembly line... a situation in which the worker is divorced from the products of his or her own skill."

The central goal of commercial television is, as Hardin (1985: 12) bluntly states, "to make as much money as possible." This goal necessitates an organization based on capitalist economic efficiency. This basis for the organization of television production inevitably encourages production personnel to cut corners, and to produce material as quickly and efficiently as possible. As Gitlin (1980: 264) notes in relation to television news work, creating television news is hard work, but conventions and organizational strategies "make the effort less burdensome to news processors."

One of the most common television conventions is the convention of 'objectivity'. Particularly evident within television news programming, news journalists are said to have an "addiction" to the notion of objectivity which emphasizes "clean separation of 'fact' and 'opinion'" and includes a "taboo against editorializing" (Hall, 1986: 8). Utilizing the
convention of 'objectivity' often requires that news personnel ensure that every contentious viewpoint is matched by an opposite viewpoint (Elliott, 1972) (thus marginalizing non-extremes). Many news organizations have explicit rules regarding notions of 'impartiality', 'balance', and 'objectivity', and these rules are reinforced by a professional, informal code of ethics (Hall et al., 1978: 58). In the view of many media analysts, these rules do little to maintain the news media's impartiality, and actually support status quo interests. For example, balancing viewpoints on a given topic usually requires obtaining statements from people who are known to be 'accredited sources', people who have a legitimate status in the eyes of the news people (Fishman, 1980; Hall et al., 1978) Accredited sources are normally found within the established institutions of society, while more radical and critical viewpoints are in marginalized or non-legitimated positions and are thus not given access to the media (Hall, et al., 1978).

In terms of the particular forms and specific narrative structures of television, there is evidence which suggests that these conventions are wholly social creations with little or no cognitive, perceptual or biological basis. As Worth and Adair (1972) have successfully demonstrated, the visual forms that we often assume are natural extensions of the technology used to obtain them, are actually highly culturally specific. Further studies have shown that within
North American culture these 'natural' forms are at least partially learned through constant social interaction with the symbolic images and formal structures of television (Griffin, 1985). Hall et al. (1978: 55) maintain that the conventions of television are part of our common stock of cultural knowledge, and television personnel make use of them in order to "make the world they report on intelligible" to viewers.

One of the more important narrative conventions that television producers make use of is the plot structure common to fictional texts. This form includes a beginning, middle and end, and often includes protagonists, antagonists and a potential resolution to a conflict (Altheide, 1974). While this form may be a common television convention, it may not (and arguably does not) reflect the actual way in which events occur, and therefore, represents reality as a seamless flow in contradiction to our experiences of everyday life. Tuchman (1978) provides an extensive overview of narrative conventions and concludes that these forms aid in the ideological labour of news workers by enabling them to reduce the quantity of visual images needed to convey a message. Skill in manipulating narrative forms also assures the news worker of a certain degree of professional autonomy. In terms of the news worker's constant struggle to maintain 'objectivity' these forms, "cast an aura of representation by [an] explicit refusal to give the appearance of manipulating time and space..." (Ibid: 109).
Tuchman (Ibid) also reveals that certain narrative conventions play an integral role in the smooth organizational flow of a news organization. Camera people and reporters work within the context of these conventions and pass their raw material on to videotape editors who must assume that these conventions have been followed in order to conduct their work efficiently. Tuchman notes that if this were not the case, editors would constantly misrepresent the stories and ideas that reporters and camera people were trying to represent. In essence, then, these narrative conventions work like a shared language within the context of television (and particularly television news) organizations, allowing everyone to proceed smoothly with their work. Other common narrative conventions include the timing and rhythm of visual representations, edits and sound (Masterman, 1985) which aids in achieving continuity, and camera positions and angles (Tuchman, 1978).

Varying camera angles are used both for organizational continuity and to elicit particular reactions from viewers (Elliott, 1972; Masterman, 1985). For example, Hood (1980: 4) maintains that camera angles which allow people to address the camera directly, give the impression that the "man or woman on the screen has power and authority." In providing a comprehensive analysis of camera angles, Tuchman (1978) reveals that they can work to increase the representation of objectivity and neutrality by stressing the "non-involvement" of reporters who are filmed at the scene of a story. The
social construction of these camera angles and positions is underlined by the Glasgow Media Groups's determination that there are approximately only fifty types of shots commonly used in television and film (as cited in Tuchman, 1978: 121).

Hall et al. (1978) view the use of the narrative styles and conventions listed above as not only enabling television news workers to achieve a measure of continuity and efficiency in relation to the assembly line nature of their work (Dunn, 1986; Barker, 1985), but more importantly, as enabling the media in general to situate viewers within the confines of the ideological limits of those styles and conventions. The media work to ensure that the styles and conventions they make use of are part of the "public idiom" which then allows the "translation of official viewpoints into a public idiom [making those viewpoints] more 'available' to the uninitiated: it invests them with popular force and resonance, naturalising them within the horizon of understandings of the various publics," (Ibid: 61) and thus aids in the legitimation of the status quo.

Video Art Conventions: A Comparison

Within the social world of video artists, the strongest formalistic convention is the one which implores video artists to mock, parody, deconstruct, rupture, play with and avoid the conventions of broadcast television. Even where broadcast television forms are not intentionally referenced,
they remain almost as a background noise upon which alternative narrative styles of inventive formalistic strategies are overlaid. "Video is... an acerbic but playful scrambler of media domination," as one video art commentator poetically states (Waugh, 1989).

Sara Diamond, a high profile video artist from Vancouver, who's video art tends to focus on women's histories and women's labour history in particular, serves as a good example of video artists' engagements with television and general media conventions while concurrently attempting to claim discursive ground for marginalized discourses. "Her work creates a discourse that resists the public discourse of the mass media imagery - those image constructions which imagine, shape and interpret the world, which selectively present the past, which embed messages suggesting we propagate ourselves in its image" (Sujir, 1990). Diamond's own words in describing her 1984 video, Heroics, clarify her intentions and help to illustrate the depth of media and representational analysis common to video artists:

Although affected by the Amelia Productions practice [a collective which produced 14 video art works described as "social realist women's representations"], this video [Heroics] is a direct critique of that practice, in a sense turning feminist testimonials on their head while trying to validate the stories of the women and the texture of those testimonies. It's so much about media, so much about certain spaces of memory and history and voice, whereas the Amelia Productions were invested in revealing the truth about actual events... That kind of documentary work is valuable, but it didn't
go far enough for my purposes. Heroics is a
semiotic discourse in negation of the
dominant notion of masculine heroism which
the media perpetuates.
(Diamond, as cited in Sujir, 1990)

One of Canada's first video art critics, Peggy Gale
(1983: 33) argues that video art was born out of attempt to
subvert television discourse:

Artists' video in Canada began as a
negation of television, a refusal to
cooperate... the television habit is both
common and mesmerizing; once the set is
turned on it often stays on, a constant to
which other activities are simply appended or
juxtaposed... We find what we "want" on
television, we use it to "relax", because
there are so few surprises in either content
or form. Television is made for everybody.

Artists' video is less accommodating... the
information is packed to a different density
and common vocabularies cannot be assumed for
artists' works... Video's voices are poetic,
demanding, generous; they may sing, speak or
perform. They are seldom simply
comfortable... [Video] remains unusual in
terms of television expectations, or the
experiences of a truly general public, but in
both entertainment and socially aware terms
the narrative at its core speaks to a common
consciousness.

Another video artist describes video's relationship to
television conventions in this way:

Video art is fundamentally different from
broadcast television and has been since its
inception. Where broadcast addresses a mass
audience, video art is intensely personal - a
reflection of individual passion and
consciousness. Whereas broadcast seeks the
lowest common viewer denominator in its quest
for mass viewership, video art demands the
highest level of attention and intellectual
participation on the part of the viewer.
And, unlike the predictable, passive formula
of commercial programming, video art, like
all successful artwork, evokes a
psychological response that remains in our thoughts long after viewing.

Video art's common attention to television conventions within the largely internal, print discourse of video art acts as a tool for sensitizing newcomers to the social world of video art to the viewing and production practices necessary to watch and create video art within a society in which the television screen has itself become a powerful sign of discourse closure. My experience in learning how to watch video art is evidence which demonstrates that the television screen is a social artifact which, through its endless flow of standardized visual forms, tends to embody a distinct set of socially learned viewing practices. These viewing practices differ according to the socialization context and thus video art can be experienced as different than television because enculturated video art viewers have different frames of reference. Much of the print discourse of video art is designed to aid newcomers in recognizing and un-learning those viewing practices and alerting them to the possibility of deconstructing and reconstructing visual forms. In doing so, video art is able to clear a discursive space through which the pressures which strengthen conformity, power and authority can be temporarily weakened to allow for productive play in the realm of signifiers and signifieds.

Direct Indictments of Television Conventions

In many cases video artists make direct reference to
television conventions within their video productions. This practice is common, however, it should not be taken as a representative practice for all video art. Some of the videos that make such direct references actually appropriate television images "off-air" and then manipulate them and recontextualize their meanings. In a published essay by two Canadian video artists, Lisa Steele and Kim Tomczak, the artists provide a detailed description of their construction of one such video and their rationale for their production choices:

We constructed *Working the Double Shift* to look like TV - sort of... Much of the imagery is appropriated-off-air footage from broadcast networks, readily-recognized commercials and a section of off-air recording from the House of Commons. Our commentary or point of view is introduced through both titles and voice-over dialogue. In the beginning we "name" gender and power relations in relation to banal TV images... then cut to a House of Commons broadcast. The dialogue, however is a "Phantasy Projection" (it is titled as such) wherein mock on-air newscasters announce a move towards a fully socialist government in Canada, a change assisted by artists' involvement and critique [viewers are shown members of parliament standing up, one by one, in a recorded vote to dissolve parliamentary government and return decision making processes to people and communities]... We constructed this tape in this way in order to present both a critique of the then-current systems of representation and to offer the potential of empowerment to our viewers. Empowerment is possible in two ways: first, through the validation of a shared critique of television. We understood that the point of view we were presenting was commonly held amongst many (if not most) TV viewers. Second, by showing a variety of
interventions into the television image-making system, we illustrated that "anybody can do it" - that even in the present state, television can be undermined... Empowerment is the opposite of cynicism. It is one thing to acknowledge that there is a broadly-based distrust of the mass media; it is another to suggest very simple ways of making interventions. This is where pleasure comes into the viewing experience of our art. (Steele and Tomczak, 1987: 78. Underlining mine.)

The following distribution catalogue descriptions (Reinhardt, 1990) illustrate some of variety tactics and orientations that video artists have in relation to television and mass media:

**Trial by Media**, Cornelia Wyngaarden, 1983: This tape has been produced as a political action. It has been taken off-air broadcast news stories surrounding the arrest of 5 people connected to direct action known as the Squamish 5 and subsequently the Vancouver 5. By re-editing the newscasts, it shows how damaging police manipulation of the media can be to obtaining a fair trial in Canada. It attempts to show how the press co-operates with the police in protection of their privileged status, especially when the establishment is threatened by politically motivated illegal acts.

**Prime Cuts**, Paul Wong, 1981: About style, technology and sexuality. Delivered in an unpolitical and distance view, not unlike a commercial, we see life as an endless stream of sensuality. Complete with state-of-the-art accessories, beautiful young adults work out, make out, frolic in the sun, and dance until dawn.

"Out" Takes, John C. Gross, 1989: Gay sensibility, homophobia and gender roles on broadcast television are outlined by juxtaposing scenes from two children’s shows: "Pee Wee’s Playhouse" and "Maido Osawaga Seshimasu" (We’re Always Making Trouble), a prime-time sitcom from Japan. Rex Reed’s
outrageous critique of Pee Wee (Paul Reubens), [Reed believes that Pee Wee's apparent "bisexual" behaviour is a poor role model for children] highlights the self-perpetuating closet of Hollywood and the perceived subversive threat of the show's gay subtexts. Reeds opposition to Pee Wee, and Reuben's technique of innuendo, double-entendre and gender switching, both appear equally repressed compared to the explicit frankness of the Japanese series.

**Longshot**, Lyn Hershman, 1989: A troubled young girl, Lian, lives on the streets, singing to escape from her "reality". She meets a videomaker, Dennis, who chronicles her urbanely wild adventures. As Lian confesses her fears and dreams to the camera, Dennis becomes obsessed with capturing and manipulating her "image". Shot in a verite style this "Faux documentary" explores perspectives of illusion and truth, emphasized by a "real" therapist's ongoing analysis of the "fictional character". Though Longshot allegedly constructs a portrait of alienation, it becomes gradually clear that the piece is really about artifice and illusions of authenticity in the electronic world; the dangers and potential loss of identity inherent in simulating artificial media images.

**Excerpts and Euphoria**, Ed Mowbray, 1983: A unique analysis of the manner in which media events are delivered and perceived. Combining slow motion, real time, and split screen techniques with a heavily manipulated sound track, Mowbray creates a haunting documentation of the attempted assassination of U.S. President Ronald Reagan.

Chuck, a video artist with whom I spent a great deal of time, produced an interesting video entitled: *Television Tells Me What To Do*. The video depicts a person who's everyday, simple tasks such as eating and drinking are dictated by a face on television screens that are placed in strategic locations throughout this person's home. It is a video which pushes the
concept of media manipulation to its absurd extreme, yet holds a disconcerting grain of truth. Chuck explained that there was a period in his life where he watched a lot of television and that he began to feel as if it was dominating his life, and thus he created this tape. Chuck, one of the more prolific video artists that I have met, no longer owns a television set.

Sculptural Work and Television Conventions

Sculpturally oriented video art has also had its fair share of play with television conventions. One notable and interesting example is West German video artist, Klaus vom Bruch’s installation piece, Up on the Rooftop, at the Winnipeg Art Gallery in 1988 (Ferguson, 1990). Klaus vom Bruch is praised by the piece’s curator as a video artist whose:

methods duplicate the violence of war and the blitz of televisions ongoing attack on the body to offer recovery of the private and subjective under duress from both spheres of power... a method [which] takes advantage of the shorter history of the medium of television to subvert it to the possibility of individual response...
(Ferguson, 1990: 55)

The work itself consisted of a mini-television station which broadcast to an adjacent receiver, both placed on the roof of the gallery. The curator’s description and interpretation of the work is instructive, and to some extent parallels much of the thrust of my own perspective on video art in general:

Using the techniques of a media bricoleur, Vom Bruch actually demonstrates how
television, usually considered as a centralized power and determining cultural force, can be personally embraced and used as a one-to-one system of communication. Defying its institutional role and its commercial allegiances, Vom Bruch literally sets up a television station... Complete with transmitter and receiver, a self-enclosed or closed circuit system is established that, although dependent upon technology, subverts it to subjective and aesthetic play. This displacement, which is actual and not just metaphorical, acknowledges the possibility of individual power and selection and overcomes traditional forms of television's expansionary capacities. A transmission becomes a mission of transference - the artist to the public as a potential against the suppressive qualities of overauthorized communications.

(Ibid)

An installation piece I was able to view during the course of my fieldwork serves as another example of video art's play with television. Entitled TV Blong Vanuatu, the artist, John Watt, erected an authentic South Pacific islander's grass hut (the entire hut was actually transported by ship from the South Pacific island of Vanuatu with significant delays at customs due to confused Canada Customs officials) within a gallery space and placed a large, modern colour television set within the hut. Viewers entered the hut and sat on grass mats to watch "television" programming from the island of Vanuatu, which was actually a series of videotapes made by the artist while on the island. These videotapes were said to represent the kind of television programming that would be available on an island where there is no television broadcast, an intentional contradiction that
cut through the pretensions of North American broadcast television. The videotapes utilized television conventions such as an omniscient narrator to process images of everyday life in a tiny island community, images that fundamentally resisted those conventions due to their local and mundane depictions of routine, daily activities.

Other Video Art Conventions

While video art's convention of subverting the conventions of broadcast television is ubiquitous and helps to contextualize video art practices, there are other conventions within video art that deserve mention. As Becker (1982) points out, conventions serve to allow people with diverse backgrounds and various skills to collaborate in the development and maintenance of art worlds. Video art's conventions are in some ways mundane, but do nonetheless point to significant tactical manoeuvres that video artists have employed in order to establish a place within the larger art world, an art world that requires the maintenance of a "critical art discourse" in order to validate and legitimate art practices. Video art, since its beginnings, has had a tenuous relationship with this larger art world, and as a result, video artists have had to pander to its requirements in order to insure stable bases of funding and institutional support.
Credits and Dates

Virtually all of the videos that I saw shared one formalistic convention: they contained credits. This may seem like an obvious aspect to point out, however it sheds some light on the role that names and status play in art worlds. Although producing video art requires the participation and assistance of a great many people only those who actually participate in "hands-on" production are listed. The engineers who designed the editing equipment, the manufacturers of the tape, the person who assembled and connected the editing suite, the person who made the coffee that kept the production people awake, and the people who processed the grant that helped to finance the production are not normally mentioned.

Credits normally include the artist's or artists' names who were responsible for directing the video, and many of the more elaborate videos contain the names of a variety of other production personnel such as camera people, editors, sound people, musicians and lighting technicians. Video credits essentially mimic the credits we see on television programs and films, and serve to demarcate the personnel involved in a production. As in television and film, the director's name is usually highlighted. If a grant was involved, the Canada Council or some other funding body is thanked. All of these credits help people within the video art world and the larger art world to establish artist's
bodies of works. In doing so they allow art world participants to keep track of who is who, who has done what and who’s money they did it with. Credits are the textual basis for careers. Credits are the video equivalent of an artist’s signature on a painting.

In many early videos, credit sections did not contain reference to copyright, and often did not even contain a date of production. All of the videos I screened that had been produced since the 1980’s contained copyright symbols or statements and dates of production. In the case of the later, dates signify the emergence of video artists’ ability to establish careers marked by chronologically specified activities. During the 1970’s the idea that video artists could establish careers was in its infancy, but by the early 1980’s many video artists had produced substantial bodies of works that identified them as “video artists”, and video art could be considered to be a legitimate medium in which to base one’s career as an artist.

In the case of the former, copyright symbols signify the problems that video artists have faced in utilizing a medium which inherently possesses characteristics that make copying inevitable. Unlike paintings or sculptures which can only be reproduced (with any degree of apparent authenticity) with great difficulty, video art resists the instant and recognizable commodification that most other art forms are granted on the basis of original authenticity. Copyright laws
provide video artists with a legalized form of authenticity. Only the artist or designated agents are permitted to copy tapes, thus ensuring that video art can maintain the scarcity that is required for art collections to have any value within the art world. Early video artists sometimes found that museums and galleries treated their work without the sacred status accorded other original art works, and their tapes were routinely copied and circulated without the artist's permission (interviewee). In Canada, the Independent Film and Video Alliance (IFVA), an organization to which many individual video artists and most artist-run video centres belong, has devoted much of its energy to establishing copyright conventions among video artists, museums, galleries and video art festivals. Copyright also provides video artists with limited assurance (within the law) that they will be paid fees for public screenings of their tapes. Some publicly funded galleries have, in the past, been threatened with legal action, by IFVA on behalf of individual video artists, for disregarding copyright provisions (interviewee).

Simple conventions such as including dates of production and copyright symbols on tapes have aided video artists in achieving legitimate status both for individual artists' careers and for the use of video as a medium of artistic expression. They highlight the struggles in which video artists have engaged in attempting to break through the conventions of the larger art world, a set of institutions
which has erected a number of artificial and subtle barriers to distinguish what is and what is not "art". These barriers provide these institutions with rationales for the distribution of financial rewards, status distinctions, and institutional assistance.

Copyright conventions also indicate the contradiction between co-operative and collective video art production practices and the imperatives of the larger social world which economically pressure video artists to produce work which has scarcity and value. The impact of video art which might take a social activist slant is thus muted by processes of distribution and artistic conventions which make "free exchange" problematic. The following conversation helps to clarify the economic pressures faced by video artists:

Me: It can’t be a good commodity though because it can be so easily duplicated?

A: Well, you see that’s the hook... it can be so easily duplicated, then why don’t we give it out for free? The cost of a VHS tape, just send em out...

Me: So we're back to Abbie Hoffman, "Tape this tape?"

A: Yeah... I kind of like the idea in a way. So, like this video magazine that we do for instance, we sell it for $29 to individuals... I mean in theory the price for renting a video tape within the community is somewhere around $50, $75 to a $100 bucks to rent a tape for one evening to show to a group... here we've set it up so we can buy five tapes for that price... on the other hand I do think that the other structure is useable to. I do think that should have his works bought for more than $500 a piece or $1000 a piece which is what a
collecting institution like the National Gallery will pay for them. They should be worth 5, 8, or 10,000...

Me: But the difficulty is how do they come up with a mechanism to pay... do they pay per showing, to buy the copy of the tape, and someone else down the road can pay the cost of a blank tape to buy a copy of it... they work in a capitalist commodity market.

A: You know, they'll buy an Andy Warhol print for $50,000 and then they'll sell posters of it in their gift shop for $3 bucks, so you can buy a copy for $3 bucks that in many ways is as good... it conveys the same content... so, I don't see why you can't do the same thing with a video tape.

Me: So if you divorce the art from its material and sort of draw the essence out of the art, that's the commodity, that's what you can work with?

A: That's where the value lies... the funny thing is that you can get that without paying a cent too. You can go look at someone's work or hear about it or see it reproduced and get the full impact of it for free. However, somebody's got to pay for it somewhere... and I think that's what museums are for, to... I mean they could have said, 500 years ago or whenever they started making museums... yah, yah, we should have museums where people, the general public can come and look at art, but we're not going to pay for it... the artists can come and leave their work here and we'll exhibit it, "great"... and there could have been a whole art structure set up where artists never got paid by museums... all museums would have stuff that is all donated... could have, but... and then if you said, if you were an artist or a painter or sculpture and you said, "I think you should buy mine for $10,000", people would look at you the way people look at video artists now, who say they think you should buy their work for $10,000. They say your nuts, its not the convention. But its only a matter of convention.
Documentation

Video art that consists of installations in galleries or public spaces as well as sculpturally oriented work and video performances have similar legitimating conventions to those of videotape based art works. Such work is always documented utilizing visual media such as photography, video and sometimes film. In the case of installations and video performances, documentation is considered to be extremely important due to the transient and temporal nature of these works: one day they exist in a gallery and the next they may be dismantled. In conjunction with visual documentation, textual documentation in the form of programs, catalogues or flyers help to provide descriptions and interpretations that can remain after the work has disappeared. Again, this documentation serves to establish video art as a legitimate art form and as a legitimate artistic medium in which to make a career.

Playing with and Subverting Artistic Conventions

Video artists, true to their convention of playing with conventions, have however had some among their ranks who have sought to disrupt and subvert conventions which add legitimation and pay homage to the larger art world. Indeed, there is an undercurrent in the video art world that adopts a very cynical attitude toward the pretensions of the larger art world, an art world that for many years resisted the works of
video artists. The convention which is most amenable to such play is the documentation convention.

Some video artists, more true to the tenets of the Situationists than the Situationists themselves, have simply neglected to or have consciously not documented their work and also erased their tapes either to use the tapes to make new videos or to make an artistic statement about commodifiable art forms. The following poem is by one such video artist:

**Confessions of an Erasist** (Stoned on Sony)

I erase tapes  
Some of my best tapes are gone forever.  
Demagnetized into the world of anti-matter.  
No wonder I never get a grant....

Erase your tapes.  
Fight art-pollution

Best not to love video.

Best not to hate video.  
(Tardos, 1976)

Ironically, however, the poem still serves as a documentation of the acts described, much like the Situationists' boxes serve as documentation for their Situations (Becker, 1982).

One group of video artists discovered that they could make the art world's convention of documentation into an art form in and of itself. This Canadian group, General Idea (A.A. Bronson, Felix Partz, Jorge Zontal), created a series of art works which progressed over several years and created its own documentation, some of which was entirely fictitious and much of which was calculated self-referencing hype (Gale, 1983). General Idea began developing something called the
1984 Pavilion in 1968, a construction which was written about in a magazine they produced called *File*, and was referenced in a number of their works over many years, a construction which was never actually constructed but was only seen in ruins during a post-1984 archaeological investigation videotaped in 1983 (Ibid).

Much of General Idea’s video work seems bent on subverting what McArthur (1978: 29) called the "authority of the real". Within traditional television discourses narrators are often placed at the scenes of historical events as if this is sufficient to signify a guarantee that their descriptions of those events are truthful. Within both academic and art discourses printed texts are made to signify the truth of the events which they describe, simply through the authority of the printed word. General Idea have created a discourse (in both print and video form) about an event, the 1984 Pavilion, that never existed, yet we see them combing through the archeological remains of the Pavilion and we read about their efforts to design and build the Pavilion. We even have textual and video evidence from the "Miss General Idea Pageant" which was held to select a beauty queen to represent the Pavilion. We have all of the evidence, but there is no real Pavilion.

It would seem that one of General Idea’s key tactics was also to drape themselves in the exaggerated textual trappings of "real" artists, enter into the larger art world
and achieve success based on their subversive (yet strangely and ironically legitimate) art practices. Their ruse worked with significant success. The members of General Idea are some of the few video artists who have gained some significant notoriety outside of the smaller confines of video art world, primarily, I believe due to their extensive documentation efforts. As was mentioned earlier, such documentation is crucial to the development of an artist's persona and an artist's eventual "success".

I realized the effectiveness of General Idea's play with documentational conventions first-hand. For several months during my early fieldwork I kept coming across references to them and finding artifacts (a set of television colour bar laminated table placemats and copies of their unapologetically self-serving File magazine for instance) of their work in various locations, and I thought that much of what they described in print and on video had actually taken place. Only later in my discussions with veteran video artists did I discover that I, like the larger art world, had been seduced by their tactics.

Descriptions do not do General Idea's work justice because their video art is richly complex in word play and visual play. Their trademark triad of "pissing poodles" (representative of their own position as "bad" but "cute" artists within the art world?), their use of authoritative voices whose words spill over with slippery meanings and their
apparent disdain for the art world that (now) supports them (best represented in their videos Shut the Fuck Up! and Colour Bar), have to be experienced. Indeed, using words to describe any of the videos that I have screened is difficult and in light of the role that textual documentation plays within the video art world, it would perhaps be inappropriate.

Video art works such as General Idea’s make it clear that video art is a process and not a product. It cannot be simply decoded and interpreted. It tends to purposefully avoid utilizing one-dimensional signifiers in favour of playful signifiers that avoid direct and final connections to signifieds. Video art is a discourse that takes place between an artist and an audience, a discourse which is shaped by both participants. General Idea’s work involves a strange critique of the larger art world that believes that art contains discernable messages regardless of the viewer or the viewing context. It is a critique that pokes serious fun at the art world’s reliance on documentation and final referents by ensuring that General Idea’s documentation is purposefully slippery and evasive. Despite this, its documentation has been accepted by this larger art world as "art" and this art world has created further "meta-documentation" in an attempt to capture it. General Idea’s reply is to create the video Shut the Fuck Up!

The following are some illustrative words from a transcript of General Idea’s video, Test Tube (General Idea,
1986: 63), which help to convey the group’s orientation to the larger art world, to television and to the postmodern world:

Felix: We’re supposed to be out there on the fringes of society, dabbling in chaos, dishing up raw sensibilities. We’re supposed to be romantic, untamed... while our artworks are slid back into the marketplace, blue-chip investments for level-headed fetishists. That’s the way capitalism always operates. It has to constantly open new markets. It cultures chaos with the understanding that there will probably be a new mutation to harvest, and refine, and re-inject back into the mainstream... at a healthy profit of course.

AA: And the problem is... how to work outside that system?

Jorge: No the problem is, how to work inside the system, because there is no outside anymore. Unless you’re very romantic...

Felix: How Sixties!

Jorge: That’s why we’re working in media formats. We don’t want to destroy television as we know it. We want to add to it, stretch it until it starts to lose shape, stretch that social fabric! Imagine all those new sensibilities taking up more and more room. Those chaotic situations on the fringe of society flooding the mainstream and doing it so quickly that it’s impossible to have an overview anymore.

Felix: Do you mean replace the profit motive with the change motive?

Jorge: Sure. Think of capitalism as another found format that we can occupy and fill with our own content...
Conventions: A Summary

To summarize, video artists and conventions have an interesting relationship. Conventions are depended upon for creating continuity, they are crucial in establishing career paths, they are sometimes evoked by economic pressure, and they provide content ideas for subversive video art productions. The artistic conventions of the larger art world are both adhered to and evaded, used when necessary for the economic and institutional benefits they provide and abused when they can be shown to work at odds with video artists' conceptions of art. In the sections that follow on distribution and aesthetics, the role that outside conventions have had on video as an emerging art world and social practice will be further developed.
DISTRIBUTION AND AESTHETICS

Distribution: An Introduction

Becker (1982) treats distribution as one among a variety of activities in which artists engage, and distribution does play several functional roles within an art world. As Becker (Ibid: 93) notes, "artists, having made a work, need to distribute it, to find a mechanism which will give people with the taste to appreciate it access to it and simultaneously will repay the investment of time, money, and materials in the work so that more time, money and materials will be available with which to make more works." The functional side of distribution activities is only one aspect of the role that these activities have in the process of creating art.

Video artists have always found distribution activities to be highly problematic, a factor which led me to spend considerable time investigating the realities video art distribution. The result of this work was a realization that distribution not only fulfils certain key functional roles, but is also very much a part of the process which is "art". Thus, the activities that video artists find problematic are also activities that reveal the weak spots in the framework of the larger art world and its discourses. As well, video artist's distribution tactics reveal a great deal about the hegemony that television holds over the medium of video.
The Role of Aesthetics and Aestheticians

Objects, by themselves, are not "art" until they are labelled as such and placed within specific contexts. The act of labelling, the contexts and the act of placement (distribution) all work to establish a discourse surrounding an object which conveys meaning to audiences who understand the meanings and conventions of the art world. These processes function well for art objects such as paintings which are the staple objects of the art world and which have hundreds of years of discourse (mostly mythical, yet real in its effects) to support the legitimacy and sacredness attached to them. In viewing a painting one participates in the creation of the "art" (despite the modernist contention that the "art" somehow exists within paint or canvas and would continue to exist if society disappeared) by acknowledging the legitimacy of its context, placement and label and participating in its discourse (which might include everything from the architectural construction of the gallery to images of art in popular movies and news reports about the high prices obtained at auction sales).

Some video artists have attempted to build their own textual discourse to establish the legitimacy of video art, however this is a double-edged sword. On the one articles in art journals and video art publications helps to increase the status of video art in general and thus helps to insure that it has a legitimacy that attracts funding from the larger art
world. On the other hand, such writing inevitably falls into the trap of the art world's "star" system. Some of the video artists I met were displeased with the role that such writing played because they saw it supporting only a limited number of video "stars". The incestuous nature of the larger metropolitan art world works to limit the discussion of individual artists to those who are immersed in that art world. Thus there are accusations that video artists who have established themselves as the spokes-people for video art are an "art mafia":

I think its funny, I think those magazines are trying to name more stuff art than really should be named art... and I think that part of the reason they're doing that is because of art's funding... If they can define it as art, then it becomes eligible for funding, and what they are trying to do is to set up a social mechanism, or a community of people who are doing a certain kind of work that they think is relevant, and that they would like to see supported through funding, and since the only funding that's available that they can have any influence over is arts funding, then they start calling it art... and eventually people come around and agree that it is art. But I think that that is the motive there...

The other problem with this constructed community is that a lot of times people are writing about things for ulterior motives... They are writing about it in glowing terms because it is similar to what they do and they want the whole genre to be well received... or they are writing about it in glowing terms because they are on an editorial board somewhere with the person who did the piece... or they are doing it for some sort of political reasons, like they are trying to change the funding system, or they are trying to create some other kind of influence.

Sometimes I can't always say what it is...
no, maybe I've just become jaded but I look at a lot of that kind of thing and I think, why is this person writing this, and you have to ask yourself that kind of question. Why is the person doing this in general. They are not getting paid well... art writers are notoriously badly paid so, they are probably doing it either for pleasure or from some deep seated commitment to the work itself, or for some other reason, and I think most often it is for some other reason... and then it becomes suspicious... you're suspicious of every writer... often the other reason is to have a little bit of power too... to be able to be a taste maker...

These feelings about the video art "mafia" reveal the contradiction that video artists are continually faced with. In order to fund their work it must be labelled as art, but in order to do so they must participate in the discourse of the larger art world which valorizes individual artists and contains both the subversive elements in their works and their collectivist orientations. The larger art world engages itself in such containment strategies because, ultimately, video art threatens the arbitrary discourse which supports that art world.

Video as a Threat to the Larger Art World

Video does not fit smoothly into the discourse of the larger art world and thus reveals its seams and social construction. Videotapes do not hang well on the virgin white walls\(^1\) of galleries and museums; videotapes don't fit smoothly

\(^1\) One video artist I spoke with described his fascination with the fact that art gallery walls are always "clean, white, smooth and perfect" (interviewee) and that in
onto the pages of glossy coffee table books; videotapes cannot be easily made into posters; all videotapes come in cheap plastic packages that all look pretty much the same; videotapes are played on television sets (monitors in video jargon) and television sets are normally considered to be household appliances, not items one finds in galleries; videotapes degrade relatively quickly over time (normally a maximum life of twenty years) in comparison to paintings or sculptures and must be duplicated in order to be preserved (a practice which is alien to curators who help to support the economic value of "original" art through maintaining scarcity and valorizing age), and; videotapes take a great deal of time to view and appreciate (they must be located, played back on video equipment and watched for anywhere from 30 seconds to several hours) in comparison to paintings and sculptures which are often viewed for no more than a few seconds at galleries and whose images can be readily accessed through slide libraries around the world, or through photographs in texts. Curating video art requires the art establishment to change some of the practices and conventions that it holds onto dearly in order to legitimate its cultural power. In short,

his view the white walls were as much a part of a painting's existence as "art" as the canvas or the artist's brush strokes. Indeed, he believed that without the white walls, paintings would lose a great deal of the sacredness with which they are invested. In order to draw attention to this fact he created a "process piece" video in which he videotaped several hours of himself painting the walls of a gallery space white to illustrate that the walls behind a painting are every bit as much "art" as the painting.
video represents a threat.

Video art represents a threat because it is so difficult to place it next to art objects:

I’ve heard lots of people say... video art is very hard to pigeon-hole and it drives people like curators and people who are studying it crazy because it's not television, it's not collectable, it's not... it has no commodity value, and yet people do it... more and more people do it, year after year... and people who’s job it is to quantify and measure go nuts... they can’t figure it out... so I’ve starting thinking that it's folk art... Its an art form that people do just for the pleasure of doing it and that they share with their community, whomever they define that to be... [That community might be] other people who do it, or just friends who don’t do it but are friends anyway, and they do it for the same reason that people make mailbox sculptures out of old hardware parts.

(Interviewee)

The slippery nature of the status of video art and the refusal of many video artists to become a part of the larger art world represent threats to the larger art world that are potentially damaging for their capacity to reveal the contradictions of that art world, its relationship to systems of value and capital, its elitism and its ultimately arbitrary status-granting system.

In order to deal with this threat, the larger art world has established some effective strategies of containment, and video artists have been pressured into either submissive or subversive roles. Submissiveness meant either giving up video art as an artistic medium or placing the rationales for their work in the cloaks of the formalist
aesthetics of painting and sculpture:

"If you didn't call video art 'art', you just called it 'video', like amateur video or something like that, it would probably look a lot different. I think because its lumped into art, its decided to reference itself to existing art structures in some obtuse way" (Interviewee).

For example, I would place much of the early work that came out of "fine" art departments such as the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design and the University of Guelph in the submissive vein. Realizing that video art posed a threat, but desiring the economic and institutional support of the art system, many video artists referenced their work back to the post-impressionists, neo-impressionists, or more commonly "abstract expressionists", artists such as Jackson Pollock and (now infamous in Canada) Barnett Newman who, in the 1950's, belonged to a wave of artistic expression that was an earlier threat to established art discourses.

The threat posed by artists such as Pollock was due to the understanding that they were "able to create an image resonant with meaning and rich with emotional association without resorting to the conventions of representational art... [a] synthesis of painting and drawing, and a new conception of figuration that freed the image from its roots in representational art" (Rose, 1985: 71). As Tom Wolfe (1975) bluntly points out in his irreverent book on modern art, The Painted Word, abstract expressionism did not long remain a threat to the established art world, because it was
quickly adopted by maverick art theorists such as Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg who pushed this art style forward in printed words until it became an integral part of chic New York culture. "Good" theory became the ticket for a threatening art form to lose its threat and become saleable, desirable, curatable, and fashionable. Theory became primary and the theorists of abstract expressionism "with nothing going for them except brain power and stupendous rectitude and the peculiar make-up of the art world... projected this style, this unloved brat of theirs, until it filled up the screen of art history" (Ibid: 69).1

Economically the larger art world can easily contain video art practices and pressure them to conform to standards of art practice. The appeal of large commissions for incorporating video art into installation pieces is difficult for video artists to deny:

Installation pieces become "collectible real estate" to quote __________. I think that's kind of tacky because I think it's a really legitimate way to work... I mean if you call it real estate, then you are really kind of denigrating it, but I think artists have to make a living, and it's a better way to make a living than renting tapes at $50 bucks a crack. And it is no more of a sham than any other artist working with materials

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1 Wolfe's point is valid, however his specific distaste for the art theorists and artists of modern art, abstract expressionism and pop art leaves the reader believing that theoretical discourse had no role in the more clearly representational painting which was common prior to 1900. A legitimating discourse of some sort is probably common to all art forms throughout history including folk art (Becker, 1982).
because, like ________ does a sculpture with bricks, and they're just bricks that he bought on Yonge St. for a buck each. Or if you work with clay or with oil painting, you spend $800 bucks for the oil, on an oil painting that sells for $10,000... you're not being paid for your labour, you're not being paid for the materials, you're being paid for something else, you're being paid for your ideas.

Despite this interviewee's contention, however, video art in the form of videotapes is a difficult for art galleries and museums to accept:

Me: How does video fit into the whole "art as commodity" picture?

K: It fits very poorly, unfortunately... because there's some concern that it can be duplicated. The notion that original artwork can go up in value... It also exists in a world where people used to art "objects"... It's an uphill battle. You know, museums want work to accrue value and video deteriorates in value.

Theoretical Discourse as Containment and Legitimation

By establishing a theoretical discourse which linked video art to the discourse formulated by the theorists of abstract impressionism, some video artists were able to extinguish the threat that their work posed in the eyes of museum and gallery curators. Surely, if video art had a rich, wordy and high-art-sounding theoretical base, it must be o.k. to display it within the public galleries of the larger art world. Unfortunately, video was still tied to television sets, the presence of which in art galleries was rather unsettling. The answer was simply to disguise the television
sets as something else: put them in things, on things, around things, and make them not look like simple television sets. Sculptural theories served as a good discursive tool with which to legitimize these practices. And so, riding on the coat-tails of theories which had legitimated formerly threatening art forms, video artists hoped to break into the larger art world.

To some extent this tactic worked, but it seems to have worked best for video artists who were directly taken under the wing of strong or up-and-coming art critics and curators. An artist such as Michael Snow who had been clearly adopted by the Canadian art establishment by 1972, could use video as a medium and have instant gallery success. His works could generate an endless supply of theoretical wanderings for influential art critics and fit in well with fashionable theoretical verbiage about space and time (time-based art):

Everything surrounding the machine, including the intensity of ambient light, is the subject of its visual scrutiny, the result of which appears as fleeting images within the rectangular frames of the four television screens... De La incorporates a series of images into one composition in time; yet in this case they are themselves ephemeral and disappear as quickly as they appeared.
(Theberge, 1976: 119)

The problem posed by submission to the dominant art world is that only a select few are permitted to enter its rationed regard, and many video artists, especially those who did not, or were unable to, make use of deep theoretical rhetoric found themselves (and continue to find themselves) marginalized by
an art world that required a star system and notions of artistic (and theoretical) genius to fulfil its power function within culture.

Video Art Distribution Tactics

With the limited distribution avenues opened within the established art world, video artists along with other marginalized artists, began to establish their own distribution channels: thus began the subversive tactics for distribution. The early 1970's witnessed the birth of the artist-run centre, a style of artistic organization that spread rapidly throughout Canada and which provided artists with (among other things) new venues for their works. The demographic swelling of young baby boomers combined with poor economic conditions during this period led to the creation of many publicly funded job training programs and initiatives to create new types of career opportunities for young people. Young baby boomer artists had swelled the ranks of the arts community and the artist-run centres were a phenomenon that helped to relieve the pressure and also helped to contain and redirect the energies of creative young people who might otherwise have posed a serious threat to power (remember that these were the years following the riots and marches of the late 1960's and the baby boomer fuelled October Crisis in Quebec).

For many video artists, the possibility of
distributing video art (which at that time was referred to under a variety of different names including guerrilla video and community video) within the established art world was a remote consideration. Video was seen as the medium that would decentralize communication processes and empower people throughout the world, and thus a variety of "underground" distribution networks evolved among video artists who shared this viewpoint. One of the tools that helped to foster the growth of these global networks was the Canadian publication mentioned earlier, the International Video Exchange Directory (Video In, 1971). Distribution and sharing videotapes became a central focus for video artists.

The concept of free exchange is considered by contemporary video artists as a relatively short lived ideal among veteran video artists, many of whom assumed that eventually videotapes would be informally circulated on a massive scale and that dubbing tapes would be seen as normal practice, rather than one that is protected by copyright laws (and offensive F.B.I. and Interpol warnings on corner store video rentals). A society saturated by free exchange would "contribute to a new kind of information environment" (Goldberg, 1973: 5) in which all "software" would be considered to have arisen from culture and society and thus ultimately belong to culture and society rather than to individuals - "no-one can rip it off if everyone has it" (Ibid: 5). In essence, free exchange was not only a way to
distribute videotapes, but was also an attempt to subvert the exchange relations of capitalism which insist that information be commodified and the exchange relations represented by television's one-way communication strategy.

Internal Economy and Internal Distribution

During the 1970's video artists established a strong internal artistic economy which continues today. Within this economy video artists make use of publicly funded artist-run centres to produce their tapes at low cost, and sometimes with the aid of grant money. Finished tapes can then be deposited at any one of five distribution outlets (depending on content, orientation and language) for distribution to art schools, community centres, galleries, or other artist-run centres. They can also be submitted to a wide variety of video festivals world wide. Sometimes curators will screen videotapes at distribution centres and select tapes for incorporation in thematic exhibitions or festivals (themes such as "Desire", or "Women of Colour") or for exhibitions which will travel to various centres or galleries.

Much of the video art created today stays within the video art world and circulates through an internal network within an economy that is largely publicly funded. An artist receives a grant for a production which is produced at a centre which is also funded by public grants. This videotape is then deposited at a publicly funded distribution centre
which may eventually provide the artist with a small royalty cheque (one high profile video artist told me that he is lucky to make $400 per year in distribution royalties). A curator may decide to use the videotape at an exhibition at her publicly funded gallery utilizing a special exhibition grant for the purpose, from which the artist receives a token exhibition fee. A video festival, largely supported by public funding may decide to use the videotape in its program for which the artist may receive another token fee. A critic may decide to write about the artist's work based on the artist's reputation or some other factor and with the aid of a writer's grant, produce an essay which is published in a publicly funded arts magazine. The production of video art thus generates a substantial amount of work for other members of the video art community which has established a well oiled internal economy.

The reason for this largely internal economy is that there is little or no commercial market for video art. In order to establish such a market, video art would have to compete with other cultural products which have substantial promotional campaigns and a well developed public distribution infrastructure. A video art distributor commissioned a study to discover whether or not an external distribution project might be feasible, but the study concluded that this was a highly unlikely venture (interviewee). Only the educational market, and specifically the market opened up by media
literacy projects seems to hold significant promise for external distribution.

Subsidized "Free Exchange"

The irony of this scenario is that the old free exchange ideal is actually working in a manner much better than any early video artist could have expected. For video artists who have not tapped into the grant system, their work can be produced at relatively low cost (but admittedly expensive for those with low personal incomes from other sources) at a publicly funded artist-run centre. Once produced their videotape might be screened to audiences of friends, fellow video artists or members of their interest group and in some cases, particularly for issue oriented pieces, the videotape might be circulated within a larger network of acquaintances with no money exchanging hands.

Video artists who have become established members of the video art community have opportunities to circulate their tapes to wider audiences of art students at universities, of video art aficionados at festivals, or to art gallery patrons in the museum and gallery venues. Audiences remain extremely small compared to the audiences for broadcast television or Hollywood film or Hollywood video rentals, and the audiences pay little or nothing to see the work. Given the heavily subsidized nature of the entire video art community, exchange of videotapes is taking place for next to nothing: what we
find at all levels is a publicly subsidized free exchange system.

Many video artists seem unaware of this subsidized internal economy, or if they are aware they are frightened to let the word out that video is publicly funded from production through to distribution and screening. Some realize that without the funding the economy would quickly collapse and I could sense a wariness on the part of some of the video artists with whom I talked: an uneasiness about talking about a cultural production system that is probably 80% publicly funded within a social and cultural climate that is hostile to government funding of many social and cultural programs. The Robert Mapplethorpe exhibition problem in the U.S. wherein the curator of the exhibit was charged with promoting "indecency" and the fundamentalist right-wing element began a crusade against non-heterosexual art (or any art that it did not want to understand) which substantially inhibited public funding has been a major cause of concern among video artists (Graham, 1991). Canadian video artists have already faced several public events involving state confiscation and censorship of their work, and there is a concern that the small gains they have made in avoiding censorship may be quickly washed away if right wing elements decide that videotapes with gay and lesbian content should not be publicly funded and are able to garner public support for their agenda (interviewee).
Insuring Funding: The Invocation of Professional Status

In order to insure that funding mechanisms remain active, video artists, over a period of two decades, have come to see themselves as "professional artists" and have been successful in creating strong (some might say militant) lobby groups and individual lobby efforts to advance their "rights as professional artists". Within the larger art world, the money directed toward video art and other artist-run centre originated arts is relatively small. By far the most money is given to public galleries to increase their collections of art work and to commission "important" exhibitions of art from the "high" art world. Money directed toward indigenously based cultural production and cultural production communities is minuscule in comparison. As one video artist reflected, commenting on the controversy over the National Gallery's purchase of Barnett Newman's Voice of Fire:

It's not Voice of Fire itself that's the problem here. It's an important work that deserves recognition. The problem is whether that recognition is more valuable than the stimulation of cultural production among working Canadian artists. One Barnett Newman could easily fund an artist-run centre like [Video Place] for thirty years, or for that matter it could fund thirty artist-run centres for a year. Imagine how much art we could produce with that kind of extra funding... thousands of artists across the country would be able to get access to better equipment... would be able to show their work and get a reasonable fee...

(Interviewee)
The Importance of Limited Distribution & Small Screenings

Video art can often pose a threat to conservative discourses supported by cultural power brokers. Video art essentially supports the raising of marginalized voices who desire to insert their identities within public spaces that are normally closed to their participation. For example, video art allows the gay community to have its own cultural resources for expression and legitimation of their lifestyles and unique cultural characteristics. Video art from the gay community has little chance of gaining access to the airwaves, yet it provides members of this community with a powerful sense of affirmation, and a sense that they have succeeded in momentarily interrupting the heterosexual discourses which would ignore their existence. Such video art is empowering to marginalized communities and its rather limited distribution is a non-issue. Its creation and existence is far more important than its distribution to mass audiences.

In a similar fashion, communities of women, ethnic communities and native communities have been able to gain important discursive space through video art. Likewise, issue oriented groups such as environmental action groups or social welfare lobbyists have used video art to create cultural products that serve to re-affirm their commitments and beliefs. Countless individuals have made use of video art to reflect upon and represent their own problematic subjectivities, thus opening discursive space that is highly
subversive within dominant discourses which tend to limit such reflections in favour of predetermined and prescribed subjectivities. Almost all of this video art is distributed to relatively small numbers of people.

One of the video artists I interviewed described the nature and benefits of small screenings exceptionally well:

Working in video art allows us to address a number of inter-related artistic and political concerns. Personally I'm interested in issues of sexuality, race and representation... I don't like to use authoritative voice-overs who come from the sky to tell us what the truth is... A voice should come from the community whose issues it is addressing... I'm not interested in making [video art] for art's sake alone... popularity among people in [my ethnic community] is important for me because I'm doing this stuff more for them and myself than for the Canada Council! The voices I am familiar with from my culture are never represented in film or on TV... [My last video] documented my own history of growing up in three different cultures... I showed it in the basement of a church for the [community ethnic association] and people kept saying that their histories were very similar... They felt that they couldn't talk about those histories, but with the video it made it o.k., especially for some of the older people who have always been concerned about fitting in to Canadian society, whatever that is... I like to think of my work as anti-ethnographic work - it's my voice, telling my history and representing a different kind of "knowing", and representing that "knowing" to people who understand where I'm coming from.

Participating in a small screening is an interesting process. The video art acts as a catalyst to stimulate discussion and generate interaction. People want to talk about what the video meant to them, how it made them feel, why
they thought it was good or bad. I found that such experiences helped to remind me that the video art with all of its professional pretensions, funding strategies, aesthetic discourses, and distribution arrangements is not a product, but is a process. The idea that video art should and can be marketed as a cultural commodity is a red herring of sorts. What video artists are really marketing is a cultural process wrapped in a fancy package. It is a cultural process that fosters, encourages and maintains discourses in spaces where none might exist for people who, like all of us, have experiences that are discounted, ignored and marginalized within the dominant discourses of popular culture. Video art allows those marginalized discourses to rise to the surface, obtain some affirmation as to their legitimacy and to invade the spaces reserved for dominant discourses.

Video artists have successfully created large scale screening events and have successfully entered prestigious galleries such as the National Gallery which now has a full time video curator and a space dedicated to video art. I might alternatively say that the dominant art world has succeeded in containing some of video art's subversiveness within its discursive strategies. Large scale video art screenings remove the intimacy that video art requires to engage people in interactions and discussion processes. The low-key, informality of the television monitor is replaced by the video projector and the video projection screen, and
audience members become elements within crowds. The videos may be visually interesting, however the empowering process is lost. Likewise, the video space opened at the National Gallery is equally alienating. One walks into a dimly lit, glass enclosed room and sits down among rows of benches and faces a monitor which endlessly screens video after video of a preset program. There is no attempt to establish a dialogue among viewers: instead viewers feel a pressure to stay quiet and not discuss what they see. As I left this particular room I felt a keen sense of loss, a loss of community and interaction that seems to have been removed in order to push video art along a route to becoming a "high" art form.

Ultimately, distribution and the creation aesthetic discourses for video art reveal much about its status as a contradictory art form. The contradictions arise not out of the work itself, but out of the pressures posed by the larger art world and simple economic necessity on the part of video artists. Their work threatens to reveal the contradictions of the larger art world and thus it maintains a subversive potential that the larger art world must constantly struggle to contain.
CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

INTRODUCTION

The social world of video art is a complex one. It involves everything from the mundane activities of everyday life to the politics of power and representation. Yet it is this complexity that makes this social world a fascinating case study of contemporary social life in what has been termed the postmodern world. Video artists and their practices provide interesting insights into sub-cultural representational issues, into the institution of television, into art worlds, into contemporary patterns of commodification and into struggles for democratic media organizations. As well video artists and their practices provide a glimpse of the interplay of strategies that can be developed to contain or re-direct emerging discourses which may be subversive to dominant discourses. Finally, video artists and their practices can alert us to the presence of, and pressure to create, a variety of subversive tactics in the realm of discourse.

It should be clear to the reader that I have enjoyed this research experience. Much of my enjoyment has been generated from a realization that video artists are not simply
"subjects" and "informants" for this study, but are, in many senses, colleagues. Their work is very similar to the work that I have been trained to do as a sociologist and their efforts are equally, or more, dedicated. Video artists work with images and sounds rather than printed words in order to share and exchange their thoughts and feelings. Once I had immersed myself in their world and had learned how to watch their productions I discovered that video artists can be remarkably articulate, within their chosen medium, when they express ideas, concepts and relationships that sociologists interested in culture have been grappling with for years. Given the fact that the medium of video is becoming the most pervasive medium in our society, it is heartening to note that some are using it as an alternative to text, and are using it in ways not possible within the institution of television.

Despite the efforts of analysts such as Jerzy Kosinski (Sohn and Kosinski, 1982), and Neil Postman (1985), the medium of video is not disappearing. These authors, who argue that television is the scourge of the planet because it supposedly leads to declining literacy and the erosion of some sort of common ethical and moral fabric, refuse to entertain the idea that people (and especially the weak and innocent children they so wish to protect) can acquire "literacy" in forms other than words. Having an alternative to text-based literacy that provides equal opportunities for the articulation of ideas, and feelings can not be so extremely harmful. Of course,
television has its problems, but the problems inherent in the institution of television should not be so easily transferred to the medium of video. The social context within which the medium is used is the primary factor in determining its benefit or evil, if indeed we choose to search for such effects.

The medium of video has been utilized by the institution of television in ways which remove any potential it might have as an interactive (in the sensual, not computer-like meaning of the word), dynamic social catalyst. The institution of television has specialized and standardized video practices and has separated audience practices from production practices. It has sold the medium of video as a medium of spectacle rather than a medium of process and participation. Today, video, through the institution of television, and the very presence of screens in our homes, connotes a loss of the social. At the same time, however, on different screens, under different social circumstances, the medium of video connotes a subversive and liberating potential.

Balancing Between Modernism and Postmodernism

My observations on the social world of video artists left me confused about the position of video art in relation to either modernist or postmodernist discourse. In many respects video art seems to dance with both discourses, a
characteristic that probably places it in the latter category. In some ways video art behaves like a modernist art form, while in other ways video art behaves like an elusive postmodernist discourse. The key to understanding this balancing act is, I believe, funding.

Without funding, there would be no video art, no video art production co-operatives, no video art screening events, no video art festivals, no video art catalogues and no video artists. Funding comes from the state. The state, being the state, has a variety of pre-requisites that recipients must meet in order to be granted funding. One of the most important pre-requisites is the requirement of professionalism which signifies legitimacy.

Video art grew up in an era in which funding was not strictly tied to professionalism, a funding scenario best captured by the LIP grants discussed earlier. As economic conditions changed and phenomena such as Reaganomics and Thatcherism came to the forefront of state bureaucracies, funding became more and more restricted. The criteria for legitimacy increased, and the need to build credentials and profiles increased. Such economic and bureaucratic realities require subjects to engage in competition for scarce funding, which further increases the criteria for legitimacy. Within the video art world, this led to the use of the larger art world's "star" system model for the ascription of status and the labelling of art.
Despite the use of this "star" system, however, video artists have retained an allegiance to the populist, democratic and social action oriented ideals which gave birth to one of video arts most important lineages. The star system is used rather pragmatically as a method for obtaining funding and legitimacy. Artist-run video production centres can point to the names of "stars" on their membership rosters and claim the presence of such names as a criterion for further funding and further recognition by the larger art world. The "stars" themselves are able to utilize their status to produce boundary stretching work which will almost automatically be labelled as art, thus opening new avenues for other artists to claim the art label. "Stars" who turn their backs on the video art community to celebrate their individualistic "genius", and who do not give something back to that community are labelled as "sell-outs" and are not encouraged to take part in collectively oriented video art activities.

The art label is a central problematic for video artists. The label is legitimated and designated by the modernist-based larger art world, an art world that video artists do not seek to emulate and an art world that has marginalized video artists. On a tactical level video artists have dealt with this problematic by utilizing the documentation strategies which the larger art world supports and is supported by. A host of video art critics, curators, writers and administrators perform the function of filling
pages with discourse which legitimizes video art activities and labels them as artistic activities. In the face of an overwhelming body of textual evidence in favour of the art label for video art, the larger art world has no choice but to acquiesce and accept video art into its folds. This is dangerous to the subversive potential of video art, however this allows video artists are able to fund their work and to some extent the non-commodifiable nature of video art protects it from total containment within the larger art world.

Video art's subversiveness is thus aided by the difficulty of commodifying video art. Capitalist processes of exchange work by reducing the exchange of objects and even signs to equivalences of value (Baudrillard, 1981). By living in a society in which virtually everything is assigned a value we have little chance of engaging in free exchange without any requirement that the exchange be monitored (by ourselves or others) for value equivalences. Video art resists the assignation of value both within the larger art world and within the video art world. The larger art world has great difficulty in providing video art the status it provides to paintings because video art is not a specifiable object that can be unproblematically assigned value based on its scarcity as an original item. Video art can be easily copied with little or no trace of "forgery". It is thus holds no value to collectors because, having no objectifiable value it cannot increase in value.
Video art represents a challenge to the aesthetic beliefs and conventions of the larger art world. The larger art world's dual strategy of both marginalizing video art and containing it within modernist aesthetic practices indicates that video art is viewed as a threat to the social structures and discourses which support the larger art world. If we follow Becker's analysis of artistic innovators (Becker, 1982), video artists can be seen to represent an artistic sect which is at odds with the status systems and conventions of the larger art world. While most artistic innovators seek to replace one set of aesthetic beliefs with another, video artists also seek to change aesthetic practices by usurping the role of the aesthetician as the final arbiter of the label "art", and placing that role in the collective hands of artists and audiences. In doing so they are also subverting the social, political and economic systems which invest certain status roles with the privilege of legitimating meanings.

Video Art in Society

Most sectors of society are largely ignorant of the existence of video art. Its non-commodifiable nature and the need for viewers to acquire watching skills has prevented the larger public from accessing video artists' works. Video artists have tried a variety of different distribution models to address this issue, but have achieved little success. As
one distribution centre staff person told me, "audiences have to have the tools" with which to watch and engage with the images on the screen, and without those tools, video art is perceived as boring or incomprehensible. In a world where images come to the viewer packed with invested meanings and based in standardized narrative forms, viewers seldom have to invest an effort in participating in the decoding process. That process is a largely learned and passive process because media institutions have much to gain from audiences which do not engage their cognitive resources in the decoding process.

Video artists are, however, part of the audience for media institutions such as television. As such the represent one end of the spectrum of audience members, a part of the spectrum which seeks to actively participate in both the decoding and encoding processes of creating meanings for images. They are representative of the kinds of gaps in discourse closure from which new meanings and potentially subversive meanings can arise and circulate. They are subversive deviants to the extent that they operate within the realm of signifiers and meanings, and do so according to agendas which are not congruous with those of dominant discourses. Their efforts are very effective at a micro-level in enabling themselves and their audiences to assert alternative discursive spaces. For sub-cultural groups which do not have a voice in the creation of their own identities,
video artists help to provide that voice. The work of video artists is not revolutionary in the confrontational sense. Their practices do, however, suggest communication models which, if placed next to those of media institutions, lay bare the contradictions imbedded in the communication models that we have come to take for granted as being effective communication strategies. Video artists offer their audiences the opportunity to participate in the construction of the meanings contained in their products. Our media institutions fail to alert us to this perspective and they fail to encourage us to adopt this perspective. As audience members we are guilty of complicity in this strategy of meaning containment if we fail to adopt alternative viewing relationships. Video artists, if their work is to receive any reception at all, have no choice but to ask (or demand) their audiences to actively engage with their work. All of this points to the fact that viewing is a socially constructed process, a process which probably has more impact upon the meaning of the images we see than the images themselves.

All of the above remarks must be conditioned upon the fact that when I speak of video art and video artists I speak in general terms. There are some video artists who would like to see their work commodified and placed on mainstream television. There are some video artists who would like to break into mass media institutions in order to build more lucrative careers. There are some video artists who would
like to see their work become a part of the larger art worlds' conservative discourses. There are video artists who have no qualms about participating in the art "star" system. What is important to note is that despite the intentions of these video artists, their practices make it difficult for them to participate in these other, more "legitimate" endeavours. Their desires combined with their frequent disappointments (and occasional whining) are evidence of the marginalized and relatively subversive role that video art has found for itself. Video art practices have been successfully hidden by dominant discourses, a factor which frustrates some video artists who wish to enter into the dominant discourses. It is that hidden quality, however, and the efforts at discursive containment that provide video art with its subversive potential because video art practices are forced to operate within a cultural underground which is spilling over with repressed cultural expression.

Dominant institutions, despite the protests of some video artists do not understand the practices of video artists because those practices are fundamentally at odds with the strategies which support those institutions. Dominant institutions choose to ignore the existence of video art, as they choose to ignore the vast majority of cultural production which appears at the grassroots level. They choose to ignore cultural production such as video art because to make it available to the masses in a way that is true to its form,
would require massive structural changes to the one-way communication strategies through which the mass media work. The institution of television is much more comfortable in playing the role of appropriator, taking an aesthetic technique here and there in order to create some synthetic difference on the screen, or seizing a technological innovation that makes production more efficient. Television can not show video art in an appropriate context because television can not provide its viewers with the "tools" that they need to watch and decode. To provide the audience with such tools would be analogous to a comedian asking his audience to heckle all of his jokes.

Video art utilizes the medium of video to build and celebrate culture and community and to celebrate meanings and subjectivities constructed at the local level. It is able to do so by creating a social context in which the artificial separation between encoding and decoding is dissolved and the audience is placed in the role of both producer and consumer. Video artists tend to produce video art for themselves and for audiences with which they share an intimate familiarity, and the social activity involved in the process of sharing imagery becomes an end in itself, over and above the product on the tape.

Grunenau (1988: 26), cautions us to be wary of postmodern theory which claims that subjects who open up new discursive space for the repossessing and recombination of
signifiers and signifieds because we may be left with "an inflated sense of the autonomy and political power of play in culture." Gruneau (Ibid) asks us to examine the potential for any "long-term counter hegemonic consequences" to actually occur. Within the social world of video art there are two processes which indicate that such counter hegemonic consequences might be occurring over the long-term. The first process is that which provides marginalized and forgotten communities and individuals a voice. This voice may not be heard outside of a local community or interest group, however, it is a voice which is often newly found, freshly experienced and not likely to disappear. The examples of gay activists using video art to construct representations of themselves and their issues, or women using video art to examine their experiences within patriarchal society are illustrative of this process. The second process involves the building of video art networks and the development of video art production facilities. Subordinated social groups normally lack access to the material means with which to resist or subvert hegemonic forces. While video art's relationship to "high" art discourses represents a potential containment of access provisions, artist-run centres have an entrenched twenty year legacy of access philosophy which calls for subordinated groups and individuals to have access to the material means of video production. Over the long-term, thousands of individuals and groups gain access to video equipment and thus
acquire the potential to create new discursive space. There may not be any immediately tangible hegemonic victories through such usage, but we cannot discount the possibility for such victories. For example, events in Eastern Europe and the Baltic States of the Soviet Union provide evidence of the counter-hegemonic uses for video. During periods of extreme crisis, where the state is in danger of losing its legitimacy and where the state engages in mass media strategies to contain dissent, video provides a material means for alternative discourses to be created and circulated.

Czechoslovakia's recent revolution is an interesting case study. Czechoslovakia, like Canada, has had a twenty-year history of video art practice (interviewee). As events and demonstrations in Prague gained momentum, there was an information vacuum that needed to be filled. Prior to the repossession of the state run broadcasting service, video artists began to use their access to equipment to videotape demonstrations, speakers and other significant events (interviewee). These tapes were then freely circulated and played back over monitors placed in streets and shops controlled by democratic forces. People who were not able to participate in previous events or who were not familiar with the events of preceding days were able to view those events from the perspectives of those involved. Large crowds often gathered to watch the latest videotaped records of the previous day's events, and the popular democratic movement was
able to maintain its momentum in the face of mass media propaganda campaigns.

Czechoslovakia's video artists, who had built an infrastructure of video art facilities and practices over the years, were able to effectively mobilize those resources during this moment of crisis (interviewee). Events of similar magnitude are unlikely to take place in Canada during the immediate future, however, the Czechoslovakian experience points to the advantage of maintaining an infrastructure of alternative media materials and practices which can act as a wedge within discursive space during times of intense hegemonic crisis. Similar uses of video have been witnessed in Lithuania, China, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Chile, Argentina and Brazil, and there is probably a great deal more such video activity that goes unrecognized.

Video Art as Theoretical Practice

Throughout this study I have indicated that I believe that video art practices represent a possible alternative to text-based theoretical practices. Post-structuralist theory, a theory of discourses, signs and meanings, recognizes that words can no longer be thought of as certain, precise signifiers of thought. Words are ambiguous, vague and slippery:

Today, no theorizing accomplished through language or mathematics can suffice any longer; it is incapable of accounting for what is essential in time - the qualitative
and the fluid, threats and violence. In the face of the growing ambiguity of the signs being used and exchanged, the most well-established concepts are crumbling and every theory is waverering... It is thus necessary to imagine radically new theoretical forms, in order to speak new realities...

(Attali, 1985: 4)

The evidence that I have gathered which demonstrates that video artists (many, but not necessarily all) produce work which addresses theoretical issues in form, content and practice indicates that social theorists are not alone in the theory producing world. Cloaked and hooded in the privileged world of academia, the theory that we as social theorists produce is legitimated and valorized through a variety of institutional means, the most important of which is our reliance on text as a medium. But who is to say that in other social spheres, theory is not being produced by subjects who engage in everyday life just as we do?

When we consider that video has become such a pervasive cultural entity and when we reflect on the degree of (visual) literacy that is required to address and interpret visual imagery, we must conclude that text-based literacy is only one form of literacy and may not deserve the privileges that we accord to it. If this is the case, then other media may be equally capable of achieving the social functions which we believe that text can achieve. It follows that video, being such a pervasive medium, and one which is particularly relevant to young people, could be an especially efficacious medium for the development and communication of theory.
I would argue that video art is already a theoretical enterprise, and an enterprise that holds considerable promise because the viewer not only reads the text, but actively participates in its creation. Because video art is also based within the realm of signifiers and meanings it is also an appropriate theoretical form for addressing the issues presented by post-structuralism, while not falling into the modernist traps of facticity and concrete meanings. Finally, video art is produced from within culture, rather than at a distance removed from culture: it is in fact part of the process that is culture and it references itself as such.

The issues addressed by video art are also the issues that are addressed by social theory, particularly more progressive forms of social theory. Led by video artists and groups most commonly associated with oppressed social conditions such as women, gays and lesbians, members of ethnic and visible minorities and natives, video art brings to those issues an inside perspective, an understanding of lived conditions and understandings. Questions of authorship, authority, and representation are primary questions which are addressed by these producers. There is a primary awareness that thinking, theorizing and constructing discursive representations are processes that are irreducibly embedded in material circumstances and the situations of everyday life. Video artists celebrate this aspect of their cultural production. Academic theorists often attempt to distance
themselves from this aspect of their cultural production.

As academic theorists, we have much to learn from theorists who operate within media other than text and who operate in and through the practice of everyday life. The social practices of video artists could be useful in helping us to revitalize our practices of using theoretical texts, and the products of video artists could be useful in helping us to utilize other media to convey understandings of theoretical issues which are problematically explained with the written word and conventional academic forms. Video art practices are not a replacement for textual theoretical practices, however they represent a different form of theoretical practice, a form that could positively augment the use of text in academia.

Theoretical Suggestions

This study was partially motivated by a desire to attempt to fit together aspects of symbolic interaction with post-structuralist theory in order provide post-structuralism with a sounder empirical research orientation. I have demonstrated that the texts of symbolic interaction contain useful metaphors and rich conceptualizations of interaction processes that can augment post-structuralist theory. Symbolic interaction's fetish for deviance can provide post-structuralists with a rich vein of empirical data with which to examine processes of subversive deviance and resistance.
This is prefaced upon: symbolic interactionist conceptions of the self and agency being revised according to developments in discourse theory; post-structuralist conceptions of self and agency being revised to accept evidence of the cognitive operations which subjects are able to perform in utilizing and appropriating discourses (this does not imply a retreat to humanism, but a recognition of empirically evident cognitive processes), and; the eradication of post-structuralist elitism within the realm of theoretical agency. I am not arguing that a direct synthesis of symbolic interaction and post-structuralist theory is either desirable or possible. I am asserting that they both share an interest in very similar empirical phenomena and that as a result they can benefit from the exchange of theoretical and methodological tactics. In particular, post-structuralism is currently very weak in terms of the empirical investigation of everyday life activities that might provide evidence of resistance and subversion, while symbolic interaction is filled with empirical investigations which can be effectively re-read from a post-structuralist framework.

Methodological Suggestions

Post-structuralist theory is an approach to cultural phenomena that brings a critical viewpoint to analyses of cultural production practices. It is a theoretical approach that integrates the study of culture with the study of power
through a focus on the practices of everyday life, in local and global contexts, which manifest relations of struggle. It is also a theoretical approach which requires concerted attention to discourses, be they dominant discourses which contain, pressure and marginalize, or alternative discourses which give voice to resistive or subversive understandings. Cultural phenomena need to be seen in the light of struggles and conflicts over relations of cultural production.

This theoretical program is an important one, however it currently lacks ethnographic research to support and clarify its advances. The worlds of free-playing, spinning signifiers, meaningless meaning and commodified subjects that post-structuralist theories describe (c.f. Baudrillard, 1988; Foster, 1985) do not easily map onto the lived experiences of ourselves and the other subjects around us. There is a serious need for post-structuralist theory to adopt qualitative methodological approaches to understanding the practices of everyday life. Exactly how do people use and appropriate discourses and how do they assert their own discursive space? Which practices of everyday life are practices of resistance or subversion, which are practices of ambivalence or mechanical obedience? These are questions which deserve to be addressed through ethnographic research as well as through theoretical discourse.

As this study indicates, there is a great deal to be gained from immersion in the social worlds of subjects. My
observations of the processes of learning to watch video art are observations that could only have been made through empirical fieldwork. Those processes proved to be a central issue in the overall study, and were important for my ability to understand the complexity of the discursive practices in which video artists engage. Actively engaging with subjects causes us to understand discursive practices as active appropriation and manipulation of discourse rather than passive absorption of dominant systems of signification. Such active engagement also allows us to understand that cultural signifiers are multi-valent and can take on an infinite variety of meanings depending on the social context and social practices which surround signifiers: perhaps this is the most important subversive practice in relation to dominant discourses.

In our ethnographic research we also need to pay special attention to the discursive lineages and historical practices which preceded our entry into the field. The legacies of discourses from the past may bring a variety of pressures, constraints and liberating ideals to bear upon the everyday practices which we observe as researchers. In this study, the lineages of television practices and discourses, artistic practices and discourses and community development and social action movements each played a role in my understanding of current video art practices. Ethnographic research cannot begin and end within the time constraints of
the present because past legacies continue to manifest themselves within current practices.

Limitations of the Research

One of my former professors once remarked to me that I was an "optimistic idealist" because I believed in people's ability to overcome dominant discourses and construct alternative readings of cultural texts. Long before concepts of resistance and subversion to hegemony had entered sociological discourse in a major way, I was busy attempting to prove that children are not the manipulated dupes that television effects researchers so often claimed them to be. I was arguing that children have the cognitive capacity to construct meanings that run counter to the expectations of researchers, television producers and parents.

In the face of so much research that tells us that the mass-mediated culture we live in has evolved into a society based on dependency and that the symbols of hegemony have saturated our consciousness and our everyday practices, it is important to maintain some optimistic idealism. My idealism is based on my observation that a vast number of researchers, many of whom support dependency theories, have been capable of constructing aberrant readings of cultural texts. I believe that if researchers are capable of such deconstruction and reconstruction then everyone else must also retain this capacity, and that perhaps it is practised far more than we
are normally led to believe.

My research is thus open to critiques of my belief that subjects retain certain cognitive capacities that are shared by all of us, and which may manifest themselves within appropriate cultural contexts to allow us to construct meanings which resist or subvert the dominant meanings which surround us. Some might say that I am resorting to humanist "essences" in order to justify this belief, however, I instead resort to empirical observations of the problem solving tactics that Piaget (1932; 1965) has documented in children's interactions with their peers and their social and physical environments. These tactics, for me, represent the same tactics that post-structuralists attribute to the practices of bricolage: tactics of assimilation, accommodation and transformation of the flow of discourses which surround subjects. My theoretical explorations in this area are, however, tentative and perhaps too idealistic, and are thus highly amenable to critique.

I am also aware that I have not delved very deeply into contemporary aesthetic theory. I have decided to pass over lengthy discussions of the implications of the thoughts of members of the Frankfurt School, in order to simplify my conceptual task. I have thus consciously subverted what some might see as a need to construct a deep articulation of the relationships between modernist aesthetics, critical theory and the essence of art. I hope that by demonstrating that the
aesthetic understandings of audiences are rooted in specific contexts and material conditions, I can avoid slipping into the muddy waters of aesthetic theory.

Concluding Statement

This study has made me aware of the limitations faced by researchers who confront an infinite variety of interesting avenues of investigation during their fieldwork processes. I would like to conclude by briefly mentioning some areas that I believe are interesting sites where struggles over meaning and power are clearly manifested.

As mentioned in an earlier footnote, the Federal Liberal Government’s introduction of the Leadership Initiative Program (LIP) during the early 1970’s appears to have had an incredible impact on cultural production and cultural activities in Canada. The impact of this program in relation to the dollars spent is probably an impressive and seldom seen ratio. The Government’s strategies in offering this program during the particular historical events which were causing a crisis in the Government’s legitimacy need to be studied, as do the demographic and economic patterns that led to the large number of potential recipients for grants such as LIP grants. This could be a very fruitful area of investigation.

Studying video artists made me aware of a variety of other cultural producers who remain marginalized and forgotten and who may be significant actors in struggles of resistance
and subversion. For example, every city has collections of professional and amateur musicians who "jam". "Jamming" is an elusive and evasive form of cultural production that seems to subvert containment strategies and commodification, while opening discursive space for musicians. An ethnographic study of "jamming" communities would be another interesting research avenue. Other cultural producers who are deserving of study include buskers, audio artists, holographers, computer hackers, craftspeople of every form, and performance artists.¹

Another research avenue that I find interesting is the use of video as a social animation tool for community development activities in developing countries. These activities could provide us with valuable insights into the role that culture plays in both the construction of and the interpretation of video texts across cultures. They might also provide us with information on the value of such practices for subverting dependency on the international flow

¹ For an interesting introduction to the potential subversiveness of performance art, see Heyd's (1991) article on performance art which includes a discussion of Canadian performance artist Rick Gibson's 'rat piece' which was to include "the annihilation, compliments of a 25 kg. concrete block of Sniffy [the rat]" (Ibid: 68). Gibson's piece inserted itself into national discourse (radio, television news and newspaper front pages) for several days prior to its scheduled performance and succeeded in taking a common, everyday practice (killing rats) and creating a panic over the scheduled death of one named rat. In doing so he also challenged the social conventions which support the conventions of the larger art world and forced that art world (for a few days at least) to acknowledge that the question, "what is art?", is a question that is too often camouflaged with heaps of legitimating, supportive aesthetic discourse.
of mass media products.

Finally, I believe that video art practices and products can be effectively utilized within academia as pedagogical tactics and tools. There is ample room for collaboration between sociologists and video artists in devising curricula which utilizes video art to communicate sociological concepts which are muted by more common audio-visual texts which contain over-riding "master-narratives". There is also room for collaborations which would assist students and teachers in the construction of their own video art texts for the purposes of media literacy and for the study of culture production in general. Video is a medium which arouses a great deal of enthusiasm among its users, and could be a pedagogical tool which generates far more interest on the part of students than other traditional learning tasks such as paper writing. It may also open students' eyes to the possibility of actively participating in learning initiatives and contributing their own input into those initiatives.

This potential deserves to be investigated and its successes and failures need to be documented and circulated. The students we face in today's classrooms are students who have a tremendous amount of experience with the medium of video, far more experience than they have with the medium of text. Rather than simply complaining about the loss of textual literacy in our classrooms we should be asking ourselves if our single-minded reliance on the medium of text
is too conservative a teaching and learning foundation in a world which is saturated with images and sounds. We should learn more about the efficacy of other forms of "literacy" before we rest on the laurels of text.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Table 1</strong></th>
<th>Possible Combinations of Techniques, Equipment and Personnel in Video Art Production</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Element</strong></td>
<td><strong>Technology</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video Images</td>
<td>VHS Camcorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hi-8 Camcorder</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3/4&quot; Camera &amp; Deck</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Betacam</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8mm, 16mm, 35mm film</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Synthesizer generation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Computer animator</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Title generator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>VTR (Off-screen recording)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Existing videotapes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set</td>
<td>Existing environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Artist's or friends space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Video Place space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rented space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Found objects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rented or purchased objects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lighting</td>
<td>Existing light</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Available lamps &amp; lights</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Video Place lighting kit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Video Place studio lights</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Video Place gels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vaseline, gauze, other found materials</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sound</td>
<td>Camera microphone</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External microphone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Boom microphone &amp; headphones</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pre-recorded music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Original music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8 or 16 track recorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sound studio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editing</td>
<td>&quot;In-camera&quot; edits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Crash&quot; edits on 2 VTR's</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Off-line edits w/time codes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cut edits on 3/4&quot; suite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A/B Roll edits on 3/4&quot; suite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A/B Roll edits on Betacam suite</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE 2
Common Stages in Video Art Production

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Generation &amp; Development Processes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Concept or Idea</td>
<td>Artist’s imagination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Script</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Story-board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Suggested by existing footage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Suggested by audio material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>Production design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;On the fly&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obtaining Equipment</td>
<td>Artist’s own equipment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rented from Video Place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rented from professional &quot;house&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Borrowed from colleagues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Borrowed from employers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shooting</td>
<td>Scheduled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>According to equipment availability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chance occurrences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Off-air&quot; recordings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Available film footage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Computer generation of images</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>According to events’ timetables</td>
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