

THREE PIECES: SOME EXPLICATION[©]

1. EGO ME ABSOLVO
2. GUNS, KNIVES OR VIDEOTAPE
3. COLLEGE IS A HIGH CHAIR

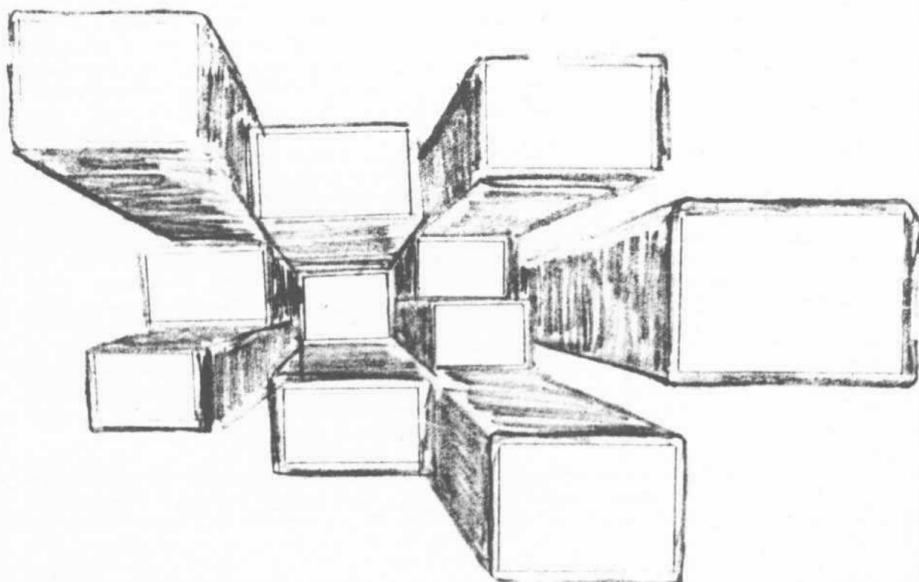
EGO ME ABSOLVO* is an ordinary single penitent confessional set up against the wall. The penitent (participant) goes into the confessional and kneels. He flips on an audio track which guides him through an appropriate confession. While he confesses, his face is videotaped. When finished making his confession, he goes round where the priest sits and watches the replay of his own confession. Then the tape is erased by the next penitent. Appropriate audio tracks could be gotten by bringing a tape recorder with you to confession. Different tracks could be developed for different kinds of people, young girls, teenage boys, married women, etc... All audio tracks would be the authentic voices of real priests in an actual confessional situation.
*Unexecuted

GUNS, KNIVES OR VIDEOTAPE* works this way. Two people, each with a portable pack and camera, face off fifteen feet apart. At a given signal they start "shooting" each other. Both roll tape *continuously* for five minutes. Then both tapes are played back simultaneously on two monitors set up side by side. The area should be large enough so that participants can move around. Variations are possible. Doubling up in teams of two, doing it in a mirrored room, setting up a third camera on a stationary tripod to catch the whole duel for playback with the participant's tapes.
*Executed in Pontiac, Michigan

COLLEGE IS A HIGH CHAIR* requires a prepared tape of a 9-12 month old baby eating in a high chair. This tape is shot from a tripod facing the baby in real time. An appropriate ten minutes are run through slow motion at half speed to create a new tape twenty minutes long. No sound. This tape is then played back on a video projector screen in front of a classroom. The participants are seated in the standard college classroom desks with the desk top coming around from the side of the chair. Participants are then asked to imitate the baby's movements for the entire twenty minutes in silence.
*Unexecuted

by PAUL RYAN April 11, 1970

ENVIRONMENT



Drawings by Davidson Gigliotti.

These pieces juxtapose video with three existing cultural cliches: confession, the shoot out, and the college classroom. By deliberately putting a new media in old winebags the interface between the existing culture and the new information technologies can be profitably explored. Generally the introduction of new technologies has taken little account of the way in which the existing culture is already programmed. For example, talk about the upcoming home communications centers pays little heed to the fact that the kinship system is already a highly complex and formidably designed data processing system. The mindless mutation in family structure wrought by the third parent, broadcast TV, will seem minor compared to the effect of home communication centers designed by hardware heads with no realization that culture is software.

As an alternative to merely talking about the information contours of existing cultural cliches and their relation to VTR, these pieces are designed to provide some experience of the interface for those that are interested. The cultural cliches are approached as information structures. The expected experience is transformed by video design. Electric is elastic. These pieces are structured to help provide a sense of the possibility of cultural design through electric information technologies.

Confession is structured in such a way that the priest has authority over the experience of the penitent. His authority is based on his knowledge of the "revealed dogma" kept by the Church. Out of that body of information he provides feedback for the conscience of the penitent. The priest guides according to the norms of the Church. Videotape undercuts the authority of the priest by providing the "penitent" with a closed loop information system: intake (camera) processing (deck) output (monitor).

This complete information system enlarges a person's ability to self-cybernate. He can take in his own outside. Of course, a person needs more data related to himself than the replay of himself going through the confessional routine. He needs much tape of himself in many situations, with different friends, and alone. The point is that with video it is possible to build up such a self-cybernating data base that undercuts the authority of the priest and his body of information. These considerations also hold true for many forms of private therapy.

GUNS, KNIVES OR VIDEOTAPE seems useful for the questions it suggest rather than for any clear comment it provides. Essentially it is a mutation from the hardware form of a six gun shoot-out to the software form of a videotape information duel. Is winning possible in a videotape shoot-out? What would winning mean? What modes of behavior are appropriate for someone who is simultaneously recorder and performer? What areas of interpersonal relations are explorable in this videotape encounter not explorable in ordinary encounter groups? Is not the metaphor of "shooting" tape misleading?

COLLEGE IS A HIGH CHAIR is based on one of the video experiments done in the fall of '69 at Victor Gioscia's Center for the Study of Social Change using Roosevelt Hospital facilities. The choice of a baby to imitate comes from my own experience imitating the movements of babies. This piece seems to stand by itself as an electric equivalent to the metaphor of spoonfed education. All I want to do here is provide a description of the experiment that generated the piece.

Vic and I recorded a conversation between us using full body shoots on a split screen. We were seated facing each other. A week later we played the tape back using slow motion and no sound. We both sat facing the screen imitating the kinesics of the other on the screen and verbalizing how we felt from going through those motions. It was extraordinary. Holding my head and rocking back and forth in imitation of Vic. "Yeah, I'm listening to what you're saying, Ryan, but I'm really getting ready to strike back." Following a diminutive hand gesture "Let me make it nice and small, Ryan, so that you can understand it." Vic was scoring on me in a similar way and we were laughing our heads off. What was even more extraordinary was when I woke up the next morning. I felt like I was wearing his body. That I had it on. I called up Vic and started telling him how I felt about the relation between his/my stomach and shoulders, stomach and head, torso and legs, etc., etc. Each time Vic confirmed I was right on. For the next few weeks I found I could recall this sense of his body when I wanted.

Let me conclude by saying something to those who feel that these pieces are too contrived. Confession, the college classroom, even a six gun shoot out are extremely contrived forms. What's important is that electrical information systems such as videotape introduce an elasticity into the creation of new cultural forms that may free us significantly from the perimeters of contrivance we've had to date.

Paul Ryan is working now at the New York State Council on the Arts.

VIDEOTAPE PIECE:

THANK YOU FOR PRESENTING ME WITH A DIFFICULT PROBLEM[©]

by MARCO VASSI

1. Build a room fifteen by ten feet in area, eight feet high. Equip it with all the necessary apparatus and supplies for eating, sleeping, eliminating. Provide props for living: stereo, radio, typewriter, books, favorite fetishes, etc.

Have one wall be a solid field of television monitors. Have eight cameras continuously shooting into the room from variously placed slots in the walls so that every inch of space is covered.

Let one person live in the room for seventy-two hours.

2. The television wall will hold twenty-eight 23" monitors. The screens will show the following:
 - a) Eight are live feed, playing back the activity in the room from eight different angles;
 - b) Twelve are delayed feed, playing back the activity in the room in time lapses from fifteen seconds to twenty-four hours;
 - c) Eight are random tapes either shot separately or taken off the air.
3. The piece is viewed on a large screen placed outside the room, shot with a ninth camera facing the television wall and having a wide-angle lens.
4. The purpose of the piece is to give the person in the room the experience of himself or herself as process. It is to destroy the notion of art-as-product. It is to destroy the notion of self-as-object.

Through continual feedback in a shifting matrix of time and space, time and space attenuate and come to the end of their tether. All that remains is awareness-without-context.

In the room, it soon becomes unimportant what the person does. Everything is recorded and played back with total impassivity. Thus *every* thing is as meaningful as *any* thing. A unity of multiplicity is achieved. Intensity comes to inhabit attention while concentration is relaxed. Reality and illusion do sixty-nine. The mind achieves clarity in the state of insanity.

5. The piece has uses in psychotherapy, in education, in entertainment, in experiments on the sensorium, as an environment for getting stoned in, and can be used by couples and small groups who want to work things out. Used with hypnosis and with specially chosen programs on the monitors receiving outside tapes, it should prove an excellent tool for propaganda by those who are inclined to the behavioristic or totalitarian mode.

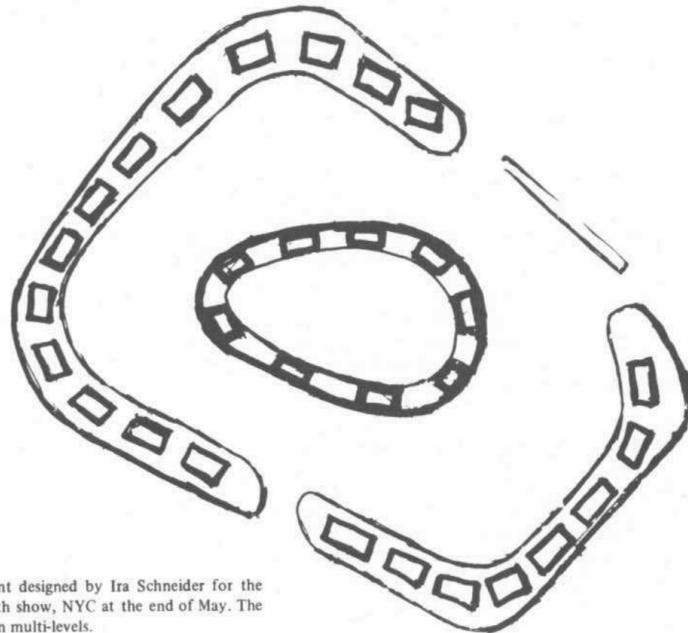


Diagram of environment designed by Ira Schneider for the opening of the Westbeth show, NYC at the end of May. The monitors are situated on multi-levels.