

(Shirley Clarke, well-known dancer and filmmaker, started working with video about two years ago. She now operates the TePee, a Video-Theatre Workshop partially funded by the New York State Council on the Arts and located in the tower of her loft on top of Manhattan's Chelsea Hotel. She is currently developing a video troupe to take on the college circuit.

Shirley was interviewed by Antioch's Videoball. The questions and responses which follow are excerpts from that interview.)

SHIRLEY: At this point, it's been about two years since I started working with 1/2-inch video equipment, and though I have progressed nicely in basic cable, dirty recording heads and signal-to-noise ratio, somehow I have the feeling that if I had chosen to go into the business of selling 1/2-inch equipment, by now I might at least have been rich.... I guess I read the signs wrong or the wrong signs. Five years ago (the speed of Life, etc. being what it is), I figured that by now we'd have equipment that for starts didn't fall apart the minute its three-month warranty ran out - and that cable TV would be a fact in a majority of the major cities across the country - why, we might even have Videophones (a kind of mini-two-way cable)! Indeed, I thought the Great New Era of Communications would be in GO - but after a careful checkup in several encyclopedias, it looks like 1985 is the earliest date when we might expect, etc.... So what do we little people do who are not involved in sending pictures to the moon, who don't have access to industry, who are not the heads of science departments, and who don't even want to work for the networks or Educational TV? What are we supposed to do? Those of us who spend all day every day and night doing our Video thing - we think of our work with 1/2-inch video as a profession - a career - a way of life. What do we do - while we're waiting for future time to get here?

VIDEOBALL: Why should we be doing anything different then we're doing now? We are all exploring and learning at this stage.

SHIRLEY: Of course, that's true. And it is working that way, especially for the people who are interested in cinema verite video portraits - or interested in

Second is equipment. Nobody questions the fact that equipment needs to be improved - and we should continue writing letters to the manufacturers and get all our friends to do so also. And by complaining to our distributors, they in turn will exert pressure - particularly Panasonic and Sony. But what has been the most helpful to me has been the information I've gotten from other Videotites, so I think we should find more ways to exchange information in print among ourselves, like in the back section of Radical Software. We could use lots more information sheets like Dumping Ground; I could use one a week. Also, when any of us succeeds in finding ways to adapt or improve any equipment, we should pass the word around. Here I'd like to mention an unusual phenomenon that rarely if ever happens on the art scene, namely a Video artist, Nam-June Paik, arranged to give us access to his synthesizer via the TV Lab at Channel 13. This is very generous and he deserves many thanks from all.

Then, third, the cassette. The cassette could be an important outlet for all of those in Video who are making Electronic Video Films, and for all the video artists who are doing personal video biographies or autobiographies. I see the cassette attracting customers in much the same way that we now buy books and records. With this in mind, I think we should start now to form a number of small video publishing companies. We should not allow the cassette hardware manufacturers to function also as our distributors as they are doing now - they're busy stockpiling for the future and not paying any money, just future rights - and they are making deals with the tapemakers one at a time and obviously ripping them off one at a time.

VIDEOBALL: In terms of the distributor, do you think some place should be centralized, not Radical Software doing a printout where each group lists its own material, but a central place where the tapes are kept?

SHIRLEY: That's fine for our internal communication needs; as a matter of fact, Image Bank in Vancouver is developing a library of tapes, and everyone is welcome to join. They offer many different kinds of services - maybe they represent the format suitable for an Alternate Media Publishing House; but if we want some kind of income return, we will need something for videotapers like the Filmmakers' Co-Op. The advantage

Shirley Clarke: an interview

making non-objective videotapes, electronic paintings - who use synthesizers and build or adapt their own equipment. But it's not quite the same for those of us who want to work with Video as a process art form - who want to do Video Theatre - live video mixes - and all too often one of the main reasons we fail is that we need tools and equipment that we can count on to function. And after we have managed to somehow collect a lot of expensive stuff, is it too much to expect that it holds up through one show? After enough bad experiences, you begin to think you're too stupid or too unlucky to stay in Video - or else you find yourself suffering from the Electronic Meemles.

VIDEOBALL: Are you perhaps being too ambitious for present realities?

SHIRLEY: Well, that's exactly how I came up with my six-point practical program to help you to get and keep it together - to list and limit your goals and experience. I hoped that it would slow me down a bit, help me to simplify, and not to go off in all directions at once.

First, the press. I think it is time now to try to find a way to get to the general public. During this period it would be useful to have regular reports on the different ways to use the potentials of Video from all sorts of groups and individuals that work with Video and we will have to make use of the popular press until we're able to get more exposure by cable or air waves or whatever. Besides, we could use an audience who, if they knew they could participate, would enjoy doing so. I might add here the idea of promoting Video Festivals across the county and in Europe, and even though they tend to be "in"-group events, they can help to develop standards; also, they generate publicity, with the added side effect that sometimes there are even financial rewards.

of many different groups is that they can pay attention to their own interests; their first concern should be geared to their special images and needs, and then all of them could form an overall body that could protect and check up on all our deals with cassette companies and distributors - in unity there is...etc. In other words, we need some alternate media business people.

Fourth is tours and travel. The most obvious way for many of us to be able to find out what's happening around the country and to learn the "hows" from each other is face to face - so for the time being, we should find ways to tour and travel and get paid for it! I've been working on a plan for a troupe to go on tour after spending a three-month period of training together. We will travel on a three-month tour to any college community that is already into Video or has access to Video equipment. We plan to rent a station wagon - carry some special equipment, props, costumes, lights, etc. - there will be about five of us in the troupe, and for starts we'll ask the communities to pay us \$100 apiece. In each location, we plan to spend several days as guests of the community and we will invite anyone who has any interest or background in electronics or film or theatre to become temporary members of our troupe. We hope to find ways to use their input together with ours, and all of us will do a show for the community - we will have developed video games and techniques and methods to do this during our rehearsal period. Also, we hope to discover quick ways of helping others to pick up the easiest methods of working with video and when we leave, we hope we'll leave behind some new converts, who on their own will continue to work in this mode. We plan to start these tours very soon, so I hope you'll invite us down your way.

Now point five is cable access. I guess we all have our own ideas about the kinds of social-cultural-political changes that would take place if we, the people, were to