VIDEO

POETICS

V I D E O *P O E T I C S*

CONTEMPORARY SURVEY

Damnation of Faust: Charming Landscape by Dara Birnbaum, 1987
Hole by Ante Bozanich, 1990
Just Hold Still by Jem Cohen, 1989
After the Storm by Shalom Gorewitz, 1988
Site Recite (a prologue) by Gary Hill, 1989
Truisms, Living Series and *Survival Series* selected television spots
by Jenny Holzer, 1989 and 1990
This and That (Part Two) by Scott Rankin, 1987-1990
Sombra a Sombra by Daniel Reeves, 1988
Things I Forget to Tell Myself by Shelley Silver, 1988
Voice Windows by Steina, 1986

SELECTIONS FROM THE VIDEO COLLECTION

Black Celebration (excerpt) by Tony Cokes, 1988
Amida by Daniel Reeves, 1983
S.he by Bill Seaman, 1983
Duality Duplicity by Janice Tanaka, 1980

JENNY HOLZER: TELEVISED TEXTS

Selected Television Spots from *Truisms, Living Series* and *Survival Series* 1989-1990

Broadcasts May 13 - 19, 1990

KCOP (Los Angeles, Channel 13)
KTLA (Los Angeles, Channel 5)

Cablecasts May 14 - 20, 1990

KCTV-Channel 19 (Santa Barbara)
Peralta Colleges Television (Oakland, Berkeley and Alameda)
Viacom Cablevision (Marin County)

THE WATCH DETAIL

An Interactive Videodisc Installation by Bill Seaman, 1990

Webster's New Ideal Dictionary defines poetry as writing in language chosen and arranged to create a specific emotional response through meaning, sound and rhythm and it describes a poem as communicating to the reader the sense of a complete experience. The ability to evoke feelings and understandings through language is essential to poetry. Video, an art form which like poetry is composed and apprehended temporally, encompasses sound, visual and aural rhythm, tone and cadence. It furthermore, like poetry, elicits through visual and aural juxtapositions a sense of a larger human experience beyond the boundaries of the art form, itself.

Video Poetics surveys the work of thirteen media artists including Dara Birnbaum, Ante Bozanich, Jem Cohen, Tony Cokes, Shalom Gorewitz, Gary Hill, Jenny Holzer, Scott Rankin, Daniel Reeves, Bill Seaman, Shelley Silver, Steina and Janice Tanaka. These artists either use language as a formal or conceptual component of their work or they produce work which evokes a specific emotional response through visual association and metaphor. The exhibition, which includes recent videotapes, work from the LBMA's permanent collection, a special broadcast of television spots by Jenny Holzer and an installation on loan from the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, encompasses a rich diversity of approaches to the media arts.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the following individuals and organizations for their commitment to and support of this project: Apple Computer; Gregory Bell; Peralta Colleges Television; Beladee Griffiths, Caesar Video Graphics; Jenny Holzer; Kathy Rae Huffman, ICA; David Kerr, Viacom Cablevision; Laina Long, KCTV; Blaine Rominger, KTLA; Bob Stein, The Voyager Company; Lynn Taylor, KCOP; and Abby Terkuhle, MTV. At the Long Beach Museum of Art, Michael Nash has ably curated the exhibition and Kim Harlan has assisted him by selecting the work included from the permanent collection. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the good work of Rebekah Behrendt, Publications Coordinator; Martin Betz, Operations / Exhibitions Manager; and Gary Murphy, Exhibitions Assistant for video installations.

It is our hope that this selection of works will promote a fuller understanding of the resonant interrelation of words, sound and visual imagery in the contemporary media arts.

HAROLD B. NELSON, DIRECTOR

VIDEO POETICS: TEXT AND TRANSFORMATION

the rest of my days I spend
wandering: wondering
what, anyway
was that sticky infusion, that rank flavor of blood, that
    poetry, by which I lived?

Galway Kinnell ("The Bear," 1967)

WATCH WORDS

What exactly does it mean to speak of any work of art as being "poetic"?

In the lexicon of art criticism, choreography is "poetic," images have "poetry," and aesthetic theories about space and time are recast through "poetics." If we were to judge by the frequency of such usage, poems might be considered less "poetic" than many other kinds of contemporary art. Often, "poetry" is a general designation for creative expression in any medium that exceeds merely technical success.

The application of this terminology gains a somewhat more concrete basis with reference to art employing words. Partly driven by linguistics-oriented theories like post-structuralism, and partly advancing artists interests in social commentary and critical intervention, written language is popping up in traditional and non-traditional visual art forms with increasing regularity. Reflecting this tendency, the inclusion of Jenny Holzer's television spots in this exhibition acknowledges one of the most significant artists working with words in a broad range of different media and contexts. Holzer's poetry lies in her economical transformations of vernacular into double-edged aphorisms. But use of words alone doesn't make a painting or any other art work "poetic," any more than does a poem's evocation of imagery make the poem a painting.

The point of departure for *Video Poetic's* inquiry is the presence of poetry as explicit "content"—quotations of poets' verse, artists' original compositions, text presentation strategies employing poetic devices—in a large number of recent videotapes by artists, including most of those presented in this exhibition. In one case the work is wholly devoted to a specific poet: Daniel Reeves's *Sombra a Sombra* is an elegant and quite literal habitation of Cesar Vallejo's poetical terrain. In other instances compositions are integral to the works' structure, as in Gary Hill's *Site Recite,* where a brilliant narration treats semantic self-consciousness as the lens of vision. Such strategies seem sufficient, in and of themselves, to warrant the description "poetry video."

Nevertheless, "video poetics" would be a superficial notion if limited to the tendency to incorporate written and spoken poetry. It points us in the right direction, but it doesn't tell us much about how the media arts may refine or amplify traditional ideas about poetics. There is a big difference between incorporating a poem in a videotape and incorporating poetry's underlying principles, and there is the related, but less obvious, difference between a work that is *about* poetry and a work that *is* poetry.

Poetry is one of the most powerful and enduring art forms; as an aesthetic tradition, its broad influence on art and culture attests to its significance as inspiration, metaphor, model and strategy. On the other hand, "poetics" is one of the most abused terms in the critical arsenal, and its significance has been greatly
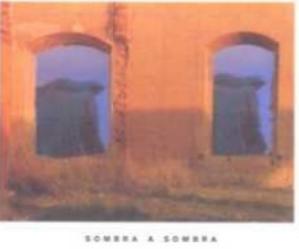
SOMBRA A SOMBRA

diluted by the careless application it routinely receives. To translate poetry's dynamics into media art without abandoning its specific precepts is the challenge, and this requires a careful inquiry into the nature and implications of poetic practice.

THE INCEPTION OF POETIC FORMS

What more is poetry than a literary composition in a historically established conventional form? Well, quite a bit more, although its reduction to the somnolent study of rhyme, meter and reference is the standard didactic introduction from which many of us never recover.

The "Open Form" movement that led to the renaissance in Post-War American poetry broke the bondage of academic convention with liberating ideas that reversed long-standing assumptions about acceptable formal strategies and the contents that could be made to fit them. Running throughout the thinking and writing of these New American Poets is the recurring expression of an emptiness or desire or vision, that will become the poem, finding the form it needs.

W.S. Merwin argues, "Obviously, it is the poem that is or is not the only possible justification for any form, however theory runs....The consideration of the evolution of forms...belongs largely to history and to method. The visitation that is going to be a poem finds the form it needs in spite of both."

Charles Simic's statement, "Poetry is the orphan of silence," listens to the absence that importunes the poem, while Denise Levertov's assessment, "Form is never more than a revelation of content," envisions the poem that follows forth.

Ron Silliman, one of the leaders among the loose confederation of mavericks and new theory devotees known as Language Poets, supports this idea in more analytic terms: "The focus of

the work to be written is felt as a blind spot in the subjective matrix, a primal lack toward which the writer is driven. This is the essential truth of the cliche that poets write only those poems which they need."

In this sense, poetry is the triumph of content over form. How does such a process manifest itself? Poems occur in time, proceed by intervals between elements and unfold inside-out. These three most important aspects of what can be understood as poetic form—temporality, association and inscape—are also the principal modes by which video art aspires to the condition of poetry.

TEMPORALITY

Temporality embodies the qualities of the poem that reflect and require time. Merwin—one of the most important poets of the last 30 years—explains how the formal patterns we think of as poems fundamentally revolve around this way of perceiving and organizing experience:

What is called its form may simply be that part of the poem that had directly to do with time: the time of the poem, the time in which it was written, and the sense of recurrence in which the unique moment of vision is set....

A poetic form: the setting down of a way of hearing how poetry happens in words. The words themselves do not make it. At the same time it is a testimony of hearing how life happens in time. But time does not make it.

In asserting these parallels and corollaries between poetic form and time, Merwin radically inverts ideas about structure. Particularly in the art world, forms are typically thought of in spatial

terms—they are things we can see, things that already physically, concretely exist. If we think of form as temporally based, then it is something that is not yet visible, that comes into being and only exists as it is experienced and expressed.

As temporal and visual arts, the experiential verities of film and video cross paths at this space / time juncture. Film is a spatial medium seeking an illusion of movement in time—it presents a series of tiny photographs that stream to life via persistence of vision. The video signal is a flux of shifting magnetic patterns seeking brief instances of spatial solidity. Works in both mediums don't really come into being until they are set to moving time, but video pushes this temporal dependence even further. With music there is the note, with performance there is the body, with film there is the frame, but with video there is no unit, no recognizable element, without time: When you pause a playback machine the still image is a constantly re-scanned pattern. In this sense, perhaps more than any other medium, the form of video is the present tense of a memory.

Shooting film and transferring to videotape for post-production, Jem Cohen connects the tradition of "poetic" experimental film with contemporary video art in *Just Hold Still*, testing the temporal qualities of this film / video fusion. Cohen pushes film grain so far that he seems to be looking through the moving image to its essence, an underlying pattern, envisioning a present that is already an abstraction, a trace. Film's illusion of time and video's illusion of space, combined, create a suspended animation, echoed in recurring clock numbers, indeterminate wanderlust and indefinite travelogues.

The activity of memory reconstructs the *Charming Landscape* that Dara Birnbaum surveys, a space that occupies the distance between experience and remembrance. This expanse makes longing inevitable, but it allows her subjects to start re-creating


WEATHER BROKEN
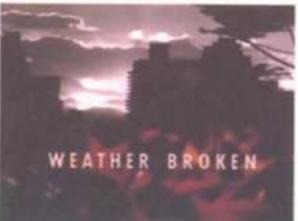
JUST HOLD STILL

their lives in terms of consciousness, rather than living out the inevitabilities of self as history.

ASSOCIATION

These ideas about temporality help us understand a poetic experience of form emerging through time, but what is it that is experienced? Another important aspect of poetic form is the concept of association. While prosody and narrative continue to concern many contemporary poets, under the influence of surrealists, particularly the great Spanish poets of the early twentieth century like Federico Garcia Lorca and Juan Ramon Jimenez and their Peruvian compatriot Cesar Vallejo, association has become a prominent strategy. Poet and translator Robert Bly refers to it as "leaping poetry," and such work is characterized by dramatic shifts in levels of experience and qualities of perception expressed within the poem. The Russian poet Andrei Voznesensky is quoted as saying, "Rhyme has become boring. In poetry the future lies with the ability to associate."

Poems proceed by mapping new relationships between feelings, images, behaviors, ideas and expressions. The interval itself is a unit of poetic form, with its various qualities of integration, resonance, irony, incongruence, simultaneity and parallelism. In *Hole*, Arte Bozanich employs enigmatic rituals to connect a sequence of disparate images, negotiating the chasms that separate social and personal realms in particularizing the exile of the self in contemporary society. Shalom Gorewitz's *After the Storm* opposes different kinds of love within their shifting personal and social contexts, as the struggle of an artist to reconcile sexuality with spiritual inquiry is pitted against the quest for cultural and mythic identity.

Association can obviously be employed in any art form, but with video's capacity to incorporate any other medium as a tributary and with television's tendency to absorb other sources of
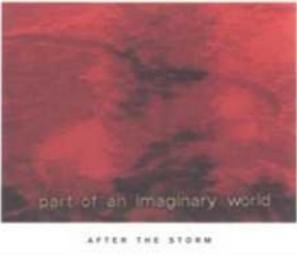
part of an imaginary world

AFTER THE STORM

history and culture, video artists have free reign to associate between a vast array of explicit contents. Moreover, video artists can explore new intervals between perceptual modes like seeing and reading, as for example in Shelly Silver's *Things I Forget to Tell Myself*, where text and image complement and disrupt each other, extending into an investigation of dynamic tensions that govern the integration and incommensurability of words and images.

INSCAPE

While such strategies are promising, it isn't necessary to pair words with images in order for vision to achieve the condition of poetry. It isn't even necessary to associate between different images. Poems rely upon vision to reveal themselves and their world-views, and this inside-out transformation is central to the experience of poetic form.

The nineteenth-century poet Gerard Manley Hopkins invented the word "inscape" to denote intrinsic form, the pattern of essential characteristics in objects and perceptions. Denise Levertov expanded upon Hopkins idea, asserting, "there is a form in all things (and in our experience) which the poet can discover and reveal." In this sense, poetry is a visionary experience, but in order to adequately explore this concept, it is necessary to think about both vision and form in different ways.

Vision is clearly more than receiving information via light. From commonplace phenomenon like mental imagery and dreams, to famous experiments where subjects fitted with image-inverting lens all righted their visual field, to instances of war wounded whose visual cortex damage who still see a complete visual field, various complexities repudiate the conventional view. Research in visual perception actually demonstrates that

we see objects and events as culturally given representations. And on an intuitive level, we know vision is more than optics and neurology. The mechanistic paradigm is haunted by "the ghost in the machine"; the imaginal psychology of self—the unitary physical identity we infer from the perception of our selves situated behind our eyes looking out at the world—is inexplicable in neutoscientific terms, but it underlies our most cherished assumptions about reality.

Apparently the notion of inscape is a literal one—there is an immanent patterning that determines what we see and the identities we perceive as a result. Michel Foucault calls it the "positive unconscious," while Francois Lyotard refers to it as the "fantasmatic matrix." Perhaps one could also call this "soul," in the sense that Romantic era poet John Keats calls the *poiesis* of identity "soul-making."

Investigating the processes whereby vision structured speech, Scott Rankin's *This and That (Part Two)* explores the manifestation of inscape in the evolution of subject / object relationships. He charts a range of perspective shifts driven by the visualization of these relationships, establishing the role of seeing in the activity of naming, and following this process to its logical and illogical conclusions in its organization of reality and the structure of language.

So far we have concentrated on the inscape of perception and consciousness. Can a literal case also be made for the inscape of forms, beyond their merely visual apperception? Biology has a very difficult time reducing forms to chemical explanations. Morphogenesis (the coming into being of forms) defeats mechanistic biology on a number of levels; there is no adequate explanation for epigenetic development (new structures in developing eggs which cannot be explained by existing structures), self-regulation and regnentation (cutting up worms, sea urchins or baby

VOICE WINDOWS

newts' eye lenses, only to have them re-create themselves), not to mention the immense complexities of how these fully formed organisms behave. Despite all the confidence in genetic programming paradigms, DNA analysis can't even explain the difference between an arm and a leg—bio-chemically they're the same. Physics can't tell the difference between a bouquet of flowers and a pile of ashes left after the flowers are incinerated—the total amount of matter and energy are the same. As Rupert Sheldrake, the source of this analysis, puts it, "forms cannot be measured on a quantitative scale...forms are recognized directly...As forms they are simply themselves; they cannot be reduced to anything else." Moreover, Sheldrake believes that the only way to explain epigenetic development, regulation, regeneration, behavior and a variety of other mysteries is "the hypothesis of formative causation," the concept that forms proceed to manifest their own morphological goals, their own inscapes.

Poetry's triumph of content over form thus reflects a deep understanding of how life unfolds in time. In this poetic sense, as Robert Kugelmann put it, "Seeing is a way of dreaming the soul of things." Photograph literally means to write with light. Vision is a transformative process that is central to the recognition and expression of poetic form, and in this way all the photographic arts can engage in writing poetry by revealing the inscapes that order our experience of the world.

POETRY AS TRANSFORMATION

If the poetic experience is essentially visionary, what explains its ancient basis as lyrical speech? Anthropologists such as Susanne Langer and Ernst Cassirer, and biologists like C.R. Carpenter theorize that language arose from singing, not as a survival maneuver, but from outbursts of ecstacy called forth by participa-

tion in cosmic rituals. These cries of ecstacy were later held as denotative of such experiences, and became verbal symbols for various visible aspects of these events. Steina Vasulka's *Voice Windows* investigates this primal connection between vision and singing that is the basis for poetic language, and the prosody that underlies the semantic systems. Steina stunningly depicts the juncture between emotive utterance and image through an audio feedback loop that enables singing to literally open up windows into the visual field.

Edmund Carpenter relates the essence of this poetic process through the philosophy of Orpingalik, the Eskimo: "Songs are thoughts, sung out with breath when people are moved by great forces and ordinary speech no longer suffices....When the words we want to use shoot up of themselves—we get a new song." The ancient basis of poetry as prosody, or singing in words, is rooted in transformation, in the morphology of creation.

The history of poetry as literature confused the mechanism for the cause, and subordinated poetry to the imitation of singing in words; but singing didn't cause poetry, poetry is manifest in the ecstatic simultaneity of experience and expression that caused singing and therefore language. This is what media theorist Gene Youngblood meant when he argued that, "Poetry is the engine of transformation"; poetry reflects change, creates the basis for change, and is the change itself. It is hardly a coincidence that this ancient connection is reclaimed through the contemporary medium of video art, which sets words, images and sounds to the rhythmic cadences of unfolding permutations of new forms. By understanding and embracing the essential dynamics of poetic transformation, a video poetics can become not only viable, but integral to creative innovation in the arts.

MICHAEL NASH, MEDIA ARTS CURATOR

The selections that constitute this survey of poetic tendencies in recent video art are not meant to merely illustrate aesthetic theory. Rather they offer an inventory of some of the best work in the field that occupies theoretical parameters identified as "video poetics," while testing the limits of these ideas in all directions. By juxtaposing poetry quotations with a discussion of each videotape, the trap of making argument by reference is risked in order to provide lenses and mirrors that demonstrate the terms of this intersection between what is traditionally regarded as poetry and media art.

MICHAEL NASH

Damnation of Faust: Charming Landscape
by Dara Birnbaum, 1987, 6:30

All the new thinking is about loss.
In this it resembles all the old thinking.
Robert Hass ("Meditation at Lagunitas," 1979)

New York artist Dara Birnbaum's *Charming Landscape*, the final tape of her *Faust* trilogy, transforms the entire project through its reach and resonance. Perhaps the leading practitioner of television deconstruction in the '70s, the development of Birnbaum's poetic realism is a prime example of the shift toward content over methodology that characterizes much of the video art of the past decade. *Charming Landscape* moves beyond the personal losses of innocence and love in *Errotation* (1983) and *Will o' the Wisp* (1985) to explore the politics of memory, particularly media history's role in the construction of self-image. *Charming Landscape* returns to *Errotation's* playground and finds it in a state of abandon. Remarks about personal dislocation and confused identity are framed to pronounce a series of deeper reflections. As preamble and counterpoint to footage of political protests—from '60s riots to recent student protests in Asia—these voices begin to locate themselves within their own political history, video offered as a way to empower individual reclamations of the past.

Hole
by Ante Bozanich, 1990, 11:00

At night
As I sit
Shuffling the cards of our silence,
I say to him:

"Though you utter
Every one of my words,
You are a stranger.
It's time you spoke."

Charles Simic ("The Inner Man," 1971)

Born in Yugoslavia and currently living in New York City, Ante Bozanich began working in video in 1974 while living in Los Angeles, and his videotapes reflect the influence of performance art on '70s Southern California video. Advancing the deeply personal and sometimes primal character of this work, Bozanich's recent videotapes continue to illuminate his interior haunts with courageous acuity. In previous tapes, Bozanich has used his apartment as a metaphor for the self. In *Hole*, Bozanich looks both further within and further without, searching for the social contexts of alienation, the loneliness that grows deeper as city populations grow denser. Anchored by the life cycle of a family of rats seen in their nest through a long tube, Bozanich maps the correspondence of inner and outer worlds in a succession of alternately intimate and remote images interrelating homeland and nationalism, country and city, pets and vermin, childhood and sexuality, currency and religion, birth and burial.

Just Hold Still
by Jem Cohen, 1989, 32:00

I have a trigger for you, a bus stop, a way out.
I have a gift for you, a list in my hand.
The weather is always accurate because the mind just moves
    that way.

Ruth Danon ("Refugee," 1986)

Working with lyrical text, filmic images and music by groups such as R.E.M. and Fugazi in a number of collaborative ventures, Brooklyn media artist Jem Cohen, an extraordinary cinematographer and editor, melds documentary modes and poetic strategies. *Just Hold Still* is a loosely interwoven collection of a dozen short works in two parts (with structural parallels to a volume of poems) that places words and images into illuminating proximations. Whether using words to address the unrequitable otherness of an addict ("Glue Man") or silently observing the routine revelations of persistent vision ("Free Shadow Movies"), Cohen's work closes distances between seeing, speaking and thinking. Time is arrested in loops of recurring numbers ("4:44"), indeterminate wanderlust ("Never Change") and indefinite travelogues ("Light Years").
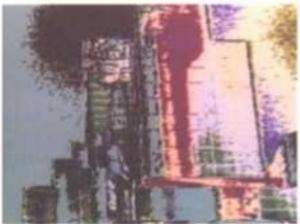
Site Recite (a prologue)*
by Gary Hill, 1989, 4:00

Silence

The way the word sinks into the deep snow of the page.

The dead deer lying in the clearing,
its head and antlers transparent.
The black seed in its brain
parachuting toward earth.

Gregory Orr ("Silence," 1973)

Seattle-based artist Gary Hill is one of the most important contemporary figures investigating the relationships between words and electronic images. His explorations of the medium's formal properties in the mid '70s gave way to thoroughly unique investigations of linguistics and consciousness, offering resonant poetical insights. With startling precision, *Site Recite* moves across and around a table-top graveyard—bones, butterfly wings, egg shells, seed pods, crumpled notes, skulls—in a series of seamless edits that present a continuous flow of focused detail closeups. This taxonomy of dispossession, "little deaths [that] pile up," is juxtaposed to a narration on the linkage between semantic self-consciousness and visual experience. Through the window of this text, the objects on the table come to model how consciousness affixes itself to material manifestations and how memory is constituted by the collection of empty vessels.

* *Site Recite* is a prologue for *Which Tree* an interactive videodisc that will present viewers with a maze of interconnected branch points, allowing them to wander through an forest of images and words and discover the "trees" of their own thinking patterns.

After the Storm
by Shalom Gorewitz, 1988, 9:55

It's in disappointment we look for words
to convince us
the spaces between stars are nothing
to worry about...
And the words we find
are always insufficient, like love,
though they are often lovely
and all we have

Stephen Dunn ("Those of Us Who Think We Know," 1976)

New York artist Shalom Gorewitz combines writerly observations with an artisan approach to image processing in richly textured, vibrant evocations of the colliding texts of contemporary life. Gorewitz embraces the Old Testament's injunction against representation (the Second Commandment) as an aesthetic premise, applying an inventive battery of "low-end" technologies—VHS images reworked with Amiga and Fairlight computer systems—in the tradition of Jewish mosaic compositions, to introduce telling absences into his imagery through colorful abstractions. In *After the Storm*, absence makes the heart grow fonder, as interpretive distance engenders and reflects a mortal longing for communion between subject and object, art and meaning, imagination and vision.

Sombra a Sombra
by Daniel Reeves, 1988, 16:09

And what if after so many words,
the word itself doesn't survive!...

They'll say that we have a lot
of grief in one eye, and a lot of grief
in the other also, and when they look
a lot of grief in both....
So then!...Naturally!...So!...Don't say a word!

Cesar Vallejo ("And What If After So Many Words..." 1938)

From impassioned indictments of America's culture of violence to soulful lamentations of spiritual loss, Daniel Reeves has refined his use of poetic texts and structure into one of the most important elaborations of such strategies in the field. He has been working in video since the mid '70s and currently lives in Argyll, Scotland. *Sombra a Sombra* is fully immersed in the ambience and attitude of Peruvian poet Cesar Vallejo, transforming its Spanish locations by adopting the vision of its source texts. Cross fades of Spanish landscapes, Catholic icons, shadow figures and abandoned buildings flow in a procession of quietude and absence with musical editing cadences. The point of view traverses the image field like a visitation, cast under the spell of Juan Downey's deeply engaged reading of Vallejo's revelatory poems.

This and That (Part Two)*
by Scott Rankin, 1987-1990, 45:15

Zyst

The last word (here, in English, in the OED): an obsolete Kentish form, the second person indicative present of the verb see. Language even ends in the eye.

Ron Silliman ("Zyst," 1987)

Chicago-based artist Scott Rankin's *This and That (Part Two)* culminates a decade of inquiry into the condition of language as it relates to referral, consciousness and vision. Untranslated narration, primarily in Welsh, but also in German, Russian, Italian, Chinese and Mayan, emphasizes the prosodic qualities of speech, underscoring how musicality conveys meanings wholly outside the bounds of semantic constructs. In one eight-minute section, a succession of quaternary image fields is paired with the oddly familiar enunciations of Welsh, orchestrating a language poetry of intriguing etymological resonances. Playful and perspicacious, Rankin's use of framing, interval and timing establishes a dense network of associations within and between image fields that elaborates upon the ancient connection between eye and I, and the relationship between self and culture that evolve from it.

* *This and That* was released in two parts. The 7:30 section referred to as *Part One* was completed in 1987 and is contained in *Part Two*, which was recently completed and receives its premiere in this exhibition.

Things I Forget to Tell Myself
by Shelley Silver, 1988, 1:52

In the new language you are awkward,
You don't agree with yourself,
these versions of what you meant to say.

Tess Gallagher ("A Poem in Translation," 1978)

In New York artist Shelley Silver's *Things I Forget to Tell Myself*, a fragmented textual statement, "We waste precious time on absurd clues and pass by the truth without suspecting it," is interspersed with imagery culled from a one-day walkabout in New York City, much of it cropped by the camera operator's outstretched hand. Buildings, windows, signs, clocks, pedestrians, cops and doors constitute a continuum of access and obstruction. The sometimes alternating, sometimes simultaneous patterns of disclosure and withholding, recognition and inadvertence, are scrutinized to reveal the imprints of psychological processes and cultural codes, while testing boundaries between seeing and reading.

A crucial aspect of the Long Beach Museum of Art's commitment to media arts production, presentation and preservation is the LBMA Video Collection, the largest public collection of video art on the West Coast and one of the most important in the country. Consisting of work dating from the advent of video art in the '60s, when video was in its technological and aesthetic infancy, to the most current work being produced by both established and emerging artists, the Collection's more than 1,000 titles offer a vast spectrum of entry points and a comprehensive survey of the development of video as an art form.

The introduction of videodisc technology to LBMA's media arts exhibition program advances this commitment with new emphasis on access to the Collection and educational support. In concert with the exhibition *Video Poetics*, four works have been chosen from the Video Collection to further develop the concept of "poetics" as reflected in the Collection's profile.

KIM HARLAN, MEDIA ARTS CURATORIAL ASSISTANT

Voice Windows
by Steina, 1986, 8:10

There is a channel between voice and presence,
a way where information flows.

Jelaluddin Rumi (Quatrain 337, thirteenth century A.D.)

Steina Vasulka, an important figure in the emergence of video art, began working with video in 1969. Her work reflects a strong musical background (she was a member of the Iceland Symphony Orchestra in her native country), as well as the environment around Santa Fe, where she moved to from New York in 1980. Both musicality and the desert Southwest are key components of *Voice Windows*, an exquisitely rendered visual music work that elaborates upon the conjunction of song, vision and ecstatic experience that is the point of intersection where poetry begot language. Joan La Barbara's vocalizations—singing, humming, chirping, chanting, trilling, crying—are visualized as a series of frequency response patterns. Vibrating lines that could be pulsing sheet music, kachina-doll cursor shapes and quilt-like composites all bring city and desert imagery together into a lyrically expressed sense of place.

Black Celebration
by Tony Cokes, 1988, 6:30 (excerpt)

In *Black Celebration*, a forceful poetic structure is established through visuals and perpetuated with text. Cokes uses the 1965 Watts riots and other urban disturbances during the '60s as a starting point for an examination of a commodity-dominated nation. *Black Celebration* recollects and venerates the street action that took place, challenging biased newsreel footage with counter-readings of the events drawn largely from the rhetoric of Situationism, an intellectual movement expounding the social consequences of capitalism. The soundtrack, consisting of compositions by Skinny Puppy, uses strong rhythmic pulse, noise and lyrics troubled by economic slavery, as further rebuttal to the ideologically myopic depiction of Blacks.

Tony Cokes is an artist working in video and multi-media installation; his work has been shown at the Whitney Museum of Art, The Kitchen and the Washington Project for the Arts. Black Celebration was acquired for the Collection in 1989 and included in the LBMA exhibition, Icono Negro: The Black Aesthetic in Video Art (June 24 - July 23, 1989).

Amida
by Daniel Reeves, 1982, 7:00

Elegantly constructed moments of graceful imagery lead to *Amida's* closing quote from Tristan, "It is difficult to hear with the ears; but when we hear it with the eyes, then we know it!" This tender study of Earth's purest elements and most humble inhabitants, and the inflicted cycles many endure, transforms such commonalities of life into an impassioned poetry fueled by the artist's repudiation of inhumanity, violence and spiritual loss.

Daniel Reeves's videotapes have been exhibited at major museums and arts institutions throughout the U.S., Europe and Japan. He has earned top awards at numerous festivals and a number of grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and the New York State Council on the Arts. Reeves currently lives and works in Scotland. Amida was acquired for the Collection in 1990.

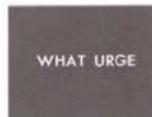*S.he*
by Bill Seaman, 1983, 11:30

In an exploration of that which is both he and she, universal and intertwined, correlative and covariant, *S.he* travels a landscape of interwoven images coalesced with music and spoken poetry that flow through it like a stream. In an intricately connected juxtaposition of industrial images and impressions from nature—both rolling by the artist's camera pointed out the window of a train—*S.he* realizes a poetic vision of omnipresent concern.

Bill Seaman is a visual artist, musician and composer. He resides in Cambridge, Massachusetts and is currently visiting artist at the Sydney College of the Arts in Australia. S.he was acquired for the Collection in 1986 and included in the LBMA exhibition Poetic License (June 22 - August 17, 1986).

Duality Duplicity
by Janice Tanaka, 1980, 5:30

In a healing exploration of self, family and place in society, *Duality Duplicity* uses poetry—both spoken and visually constructed—to express wonderment at the sometimes abusive relationships that mold our identities. The work travels a metaphorical journey through the process of reconciliation, seeking the self-knowledge that can be reclaimed from injurious experience.

Janice Tanaka is a Japanese-American media artist whose dual heritage has heavily influenced her work. She currently resides in Boulder and teaches at the University of Colorado. Duality Duplicity was acquired for the Collection in 1987.

JENNY HOLZER: TELEVISED TEXTS
Selected Television Spots from *Truisms*, *Living Series* and *Survival Series*
1989 and 1990

New York artist Jenny Holzer is among the most important contemporary figures employing words in visual art. Holzer has used written language exclusively in her art since 1977, working in a variety of media including posters, decals, electronic signboards, airport baggage counters, athletic stadium display boards, and, most recently, is the source of the voice's authority? How are the words intended? What other words are supplanted?
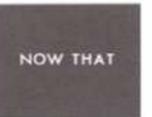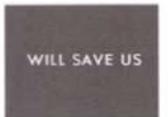
The ways in which issues of authority and identity are raised by the television spots make them an ultimate realization of this aspect of Holzer's work. Where better to present semantic mirrors for viewer

WHAT URGE   **WILL SAVE US**   **NOW THAT**   **SEX WON'T**

television spots. Like all her work, the television spots present deceptively simple sequences of text that mix provocative social commentary with resonant poetic reflection: "Abuse of power comes as no surprise," "Private property created crime," or "Bodies lie in the bright grass and some are murdered and some are picnicking."

Drawn from her *Truisms*, *Living* and *Survival* series, these television spots are presented anonymously—without any credits indicating authorship or source—to challenge assumptions about media power and point of view. These spots were created by Holzer with the assistance of Mark Pellington for the cable network MTV in 1989, part of the "Art Breaks" program under the direction of Abby Terkuhle. Newer versions were independently produced for Italian television in conjunction with the 1990 Venice Biennale.

From the standpoint of visual arts criticism, Holzer's work has been characterized as art in which words are images. From the perspective of poetry it is perhaps more interesting to think of her as an artist for whom texts are totalities. In discussing the poetic properties of proverbs and aphorisms, W.S. Merwin writes, "the urge to be self-contained, to be whole...is related to the irreversibility in time is the mark of poetry." In Holzer's deftly constructed messages, words become self-contained social systems, referents and context together, reflecting viewers in something akin to a semantic mirror. The "voice" could be that of an authority, an oracle, a criminal, a revolutionary, or any inference could be a case of mistaken identity. The poetry is in this positioning of the text in relation to audience and context, and the questions that are raised as a result: What voice is incarnated? What

reflection than that ubiquitous panoramic cultural paraphrase that is commercial television?

Two independent broadcast stations in Los Angeles, and three cable stations located in Santa Barbara and the Bay Area, will present the individual text works—from 6 to 14 seconds in length—during regular commercial and program breaks in early morning, daytime and late-night slots, potentially reaching nearly one million viewers. The 27 broadcast spots of 10 to 15 seconds in length will juxtapose Holzer's messages with such programs as the *700 Club*, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, *Bewitched*, *Brady Bunch*, *Hawaii Five-O*, *Leave it to Beaver*, *This Morning's Business* and late-night movies. Cablecasts will feature heavier rotation throughout regular access and local-origination programming. This is the first time that the 1989 "Art Breaks" works have been presented via broadcast venues, and it is the first presentation on television of the most recently completed spots.

MICHAEL NASH

Emotional architectures.
The gestures that go on ins[...]

Bill Seaman has had a varied career since 1979 when he first created performance works and multi-channel video installations in San Francisco and Rhode Island. His tapes have been shown nationally and abroad, winning many awards. He has been featured in New Music America, Awards in the Visual Art, the Museum of Modern Art and the World Wide Video Festival. He is currently a visiting artist at the Sydney College of the Arts in Australia.

The Watch Detail was funded in part by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Massachusetts Council on the Arts and Humanities, and was produced by Bill Seaman and the ICA's Contemporary Art Television (CAT) Fund, Kathy Rae Huffman, executive producer. Additional post-production support and interactive consultation was received from Videocraft, Boston, special thanks to Mark Abbate. A limited edition CAV laserdisc of The Watch Detail *has been published by The Contemporary Art Television Fund.*

The Watch Detail combines image, music and text in a poetic musing on time, interrelating these elements and investigating the visible histories of objects and locations. Seaman uses language, image and sound to produce both literal and metaphorical images related to temporal shifts—"the illusion of time, the mirage, holds pressure in the passing." *The Watch Detail* is a fugue-like network of observations that offers infinite possibilities of exploration through interactive technology.

Interactive technology is fully integrated in American consumer society. In shopping malls and airports, information kiosks are in use constantly. Automatic bank tellers and video games, as well as "talking" telephone information systems are all around us. Basic interactive processes have changed the way we use television through VHS rentals and remote channel switchers, allowing the viewer to control more aspects of the viewing experience. Artists' exploration of new technologies generally, and interactive processes specifically, are critical in that they provide aesthetic shape and content to a media that will otherwise be dominated by commercial use.

The Watch Detail is installed as an easy-to-use computer work station. It is comprised of a laserdisc player, a video monitor, audio mixer and headphones, and a MacII personal computer with a "mouse" to make selections from pre-programmed menu screens. The interactive process uses an adaptation of the Hypercard program, a Videostack program developed by The Voyager Company in Los Angeles. Using this Macintosh environment, the participant can explore the videodisc through a series of menus.

The Watch Detail is formatted into six chapters: Architecture, Wood, Stone, The Airport, Yards, Gardens and Grounds, and Clocks and Watches. Each chapter represents alternative atmospheric conditions and evidence of change. Each subject category is observed by the camera in a series of temporal shifts. The visitor is free to peruse these chapters in several different ways.

The main menu offers three basic kinds of interactions with the disc: moving around within a category; moving from one category to another; and, moving to alternative functions, which include a composite category comprised of chosen sequences from all the categories, and the still frame library. Other choices allow the viewer to access text (which can be laid over images), and to select the speed of replay, including slow motion and frame by frame.

The music score for *The Watch Detail* compliments the visual images and text in a variety of ways. The musical sense of time is non-linear and is reminiscent in one section of the sounds created by the Balinese Gamelan, a percussion orchestra. Seaman created music that is subtle, yet essential to the flowing imagery. The audio track is comprised of sound fragments, or "chunks" which form distinct themes. Each laserdisc chapter has specific sound, and suggests variable concepts of music history. Each short musical abstraction connotes a sound quality, or specific instruments. The repetitious structure relates to Eastern music. As the images relate to "time," the musical score simultaneously suggests time-related observations.

KATHY RAE HUFFMAN

CURATOR OF MEDIA AND PERFORMING ARTS, INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ART, BOSTON