

(Photo: 1 & 2)

VIDEO/FILM some possibilities suggested by some experience by Mike Leggett

An unedited facsimile Paper version of a Poster made and delivered in June 1973 at the Experimental and Avant-Garde Film Festival, National Film Theatre, London. Reconstructed, with an Introduction, in June 2005.

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Time-based Media, the New, and Practice-based Research

The Poster, 'Video + Video/Film – Some Possibilities Suggested by Some Experience,' emerged from several converging circumstances. It followed a period between 1971 and 1972 of working quite intensively with the first generation of 'industrial' video cameras, monitors and spool-to-spool recorders. My background working with photography and 16mm film, both as a film-maker artist and as a film editor and cameraman in the television and film industries, softened my entry to working with this technology. I was a part-time lecturer at various colleges of art at the time so had access to these low bandwidth video facilities. Teaching institutions, if not individuals, could well afford to purchase low-band video at this point as it had low running costs as well as good pedagogical prospects.

In conjunction with some students and staff and in the context of contemporary art practice, I found the new apparatus encouraged a looser and more immediate response to working with a time-based medium. Essentially it shortened the action and response time inherent in the creative practice of film-making for instance, restoring immediacy, encouraging spontaneity and enabling evaluation and analysis to operate within a critical framework of the active present.

Experiments were conducted that heightened these fresh qualities, pursuing the many avenues and opportunities suggested by the varied ways in which sound, but more particularly image, could be gathered and manipulated. The simple ability to gather an image over a long time span, (the long 'take'), or the complex mixing of images from different sources were crucial differences first noticed - either activity using film would be expensive and usually require several attempts to get right. In addition, the element of feedback, control and reproducibility led to performance and installation forms – these were some of the early outcomes established from exploring the new media of the day.

For the most part, artworks on videotape or as close-circuit installations were presented in a gallery setting on video monitors – video projectors were a good decade away – and catalogue notes when available, rarely addressed the practice-base from where most of the work emerged. Quite often the 'subject' of a video piece might address the paradoxes of the video image, particularly in relation to its broadcast television form, but the 'material' or the substance of the representational apparatus was not the subject of reflection.

In the course of working with art students and collaborating with other visual artists, I began noting the processes of understanding and identifying the specificity of the video medium. The options taken during the development of a work and the interweaving of the plasticity of this time-based image with the looping decision-making processes that occured before a final sequence was committed as completed to videotape, were quite specific to the medium.

Collaborative exploration of this new practice emerged from a convergence of interest between fellow artists and the students many of them taught. The Poster records these areas of collaboration, a practice not very familiar to artists at the time, who were encouraged by the tradition and the institutions to work as individuals. Even working across a variety of media and artforms was deemed revolutionary.

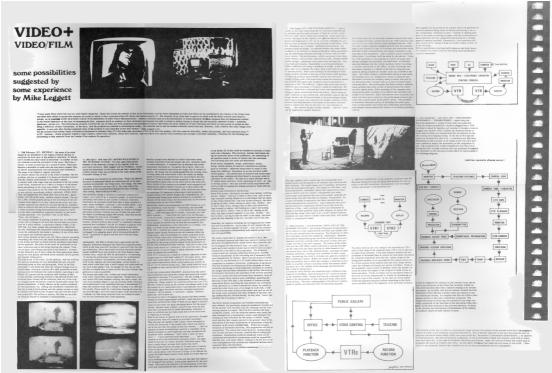
The Poster is also the only remaining evidence of many of the video projects undertaken. This was the era of the immaterial in art and the elevation of the ephemeral was echoed by the ease with which videotape could be erased – not always intentionally – and re-used: some projects were simply grist for the next. Taken together with the Achille's Heel in the area of electronics-based technology - obsolescence - and the many tapes made but not migrated promptly, gives the Poster added significance.*

The final stage of convergence for the production of the Poster in 1973 was when a lecturer in the Printing department of one of the colleges volunteered his presses for whatever large scale printing I might need. This affordance finalised the reflective practice, drawing together the various notes and diagrams that had been accumulating on paper and in mind, into the Poster form, a familiar mode of presentation at science and technology events, but unknown in the art world. It is another instance of the distinct attitudes to experience generation and knowledge management that remain separated within our Western culture.

Mike Leggett, June 2005

* Item 1, Birthday, was documented on 16mm film and became the film 'ONE' (1972). This was digitally restored in 2004 and is distributed by LUX, London.

Item 6, the 'videographic experiment; Tender Kisses' became a 16mm film in colour distributed by the London Film-makers Co-op (now Lux), before migrating to U-matic tape and more recently, DVD. Other 'single-channel' (screen) non-collaborative video pieces were completed in 1972-74 and assembled as 'Eighteen Months Outside the Grounds of.....' for The Video Show in 1975 at the Serpentine Gallery. This too migrated to Umatic and is distributed on DVD and DVCAM formats by Lux.

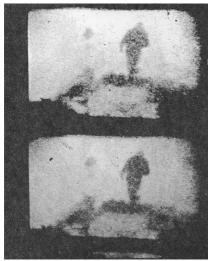


The Poster: 'Video + Video/Film – Some Possibilities Suggested by Some Experience,' (1973) 100cm x 60cm

Video + Video/Film - Some Possibilities Suggested by Some Experience

"I have made films which fall into two wide-based categories. Those that accept the medium of film as an illusionistic tool by which likenesses of sound and vision can be manifested in the cinema or the living room and those that refuse to accept this premise as a point at which to start communicating with others and instead question it. The majority of my films deal in part or in whole with the latter concern and refuse to accept, as is prevalent within the present context of the phenomena of audio-visual "communication", external elements such as actor/personality or scene/spectacle but those elements that are themselves related to the viewer/spectator at the time of witnessing the film, elements which an audience in their particular environment are able to relate to without having to accept the role normally assumed of them passivity, ignorance, naivety etc. The following six projects involving the use of Video and Film equipment and processes normally used within the strict definition of their functions and which we have grown to accept as also being a definition of their limitations. At the start, (and the projects are outlined in chronological order), the intention was to use the medias available toward this end. However, with a believe that other things were possible, it was only after having completed some of the projects it was found they in fact existed." Mike Leggett 4.73.

All the projects had certain items of hardware/equipment in common; Sony CV 2100 video tape recorders (VTR) of the 625-line cameras both dolly, studio and portable, 625-line monitors from 7" to 23", telecine – 16mm projector linked to video camera, 16mm film cameras, 35mm still cameras, tape recorders from quarter inch workshop type through to portable cassettes. Facilities for the finishing and processing of film material from the London Film-makers Co-operative.





(Photo 3)

1. 10th February 1971: BIRTHDAY - the name of an event staged by Ian Breakwell in the Angela Flowers Gallery to celebrate the first year of the gallery's operation. In Breakwell's words the event itself is described; "A number of men are situated around the perimeter of the room. Each has a shovel, in front of each man is a mound of earth. Each man shovels a shovelful of earth onto the next man's mound. They all shovel simultaneously and continuously until exhausted. The event to be filmed at regular intervals".

An insular nature was central to the event's success, but the problem was how to manifest it to those not directly involved with the Gallery particularily to the public outside.

A camera with wide-angle lens was mounted in the top corner of the room. Connected via a VTR to a monitor in the street below, everything in the room was visible. The camera remained in that position for the whole day relaying the activity or non-activity accordingly without command, without selec-

tion, as impassively as a Bank Dick 'eye in the sky'. Meanwhile, 240,000 miles away, another camera stared. The eye for 1,500, million people gazing at the cavortings of the astronauts from Appllo 14 as they 'explored the moon' and took another step that was small for one man but big for mankind. Back on earth on the face of the monitor in LisleStreet against a white moondust background pedestrians paused as Terry and the other earthshifters appeared instantly as just more looning spacemen. Two Tourists; "Das ist die Moon.."

The simple expedient of placing a monitor set in a West End street with an image on its face that had not been pre-processed by a multi-million corporation whether NASA, or the BBC had, for those people who encountered it, effectively not only challenged the monopolist situation of broadcast television but additionally had made a mockery of one of its more extravagant and nauseous spectacles.

Both events plodded on their way; the 16mm camera recording everything; the event live; the event on the monitor; the event in the street and later as these farcical parallels made themselves apparent, the event on the moon as manifested on the other television sets in the street bearing the caption "Camera on lunar rover being controlled from Houston". It seemed that Ballard's sci-fi story about the three generation space trip to the next galaxy and which never actually left the ground was already taking place.

The time scale of the event, (in the gallery), was one working day and on completion all was dismantled the only records remaining being on film and photograph. Work on the film continued; it was found that when the original footage was refilmed using a non-sync camera off a back projection screen, phasing occurred between the camera shutter operating at one fiftieth of a second and the projector bulb working at fifty cycles causing a flickering similar to the phasing flicker that occurred when filming off the monitors; thus any of the orignal footage inside the gallery could be turned quite easily into genuine moonshots. A faulty shutter on the camera produced its own moonshots too. Editing and soundtrack completed the film for a cost of £150 putting onto the cinema screen or maybe another television screen imagery that had cost the American people \$22,000 million to secure. But then we are told, the ultimate benefit to mankind is immeasurable.

2. 19th April - 16th June 1971: MOVING WALLPAPER IN THE TELEVISION LOUNGE - For this eight week period students of the Somerset College of Art together with two part-time lecturers, Mike Leggett and Ian Breakwell, investigated the phenomena of television and put their results into a thirty minute video tape produced in the video studio of the Plymouth College of Art.

A statement was issued as an initial step: "Study and observe the piece of equipment known as a television set in its most common environment the living-room, the lounge, the drawing room, whatever you may call it, the room where the members of the household find themselves after working, after eating, before they go to bed.....

The television though it remains a consumer article is no longer, as it used to be, a consumer gadget. It could be more accurately described as just another consumer ornament. Previously an ornament would have been a lamp standard, a vase, some wallpaper, a picture, a set of china ducks, a picture window, a coffee table, a bookcase, a pot plant....the television cabinet when not functioning as a source of images and sound certainly remains just one of these but even when the object is producing images and sounds, does this necessarily change its role as an ornament?

Functioning perfectly, is it not simply a 21" picture window? Another standard lamp in the corner? A constantly changing patternof new wallpaper? (In the TV industry a generic term applied to visuals which do little but occupy screen time whilst the 'message' is carried by commentary is "moving wallpaper"). An engaging guest who's staying permanently, who's impossible to ignore and who won't tolerate being turned off".

Additionally, the BBC in Bristol were approached and the Regional Television Manager told about the proposed project which at the time was still waiting for approval from the college authorities. Since the project involved television and the people involved lived and worked in the West Region transmission area, would the BBC be interested in co-operating by having the participants visit and meet the 'professional programme makers' and possibly contribute ideas and erial to the regional opt-out programme series shortly to start which could have only a small budget and would need any any local talent going? Yes, he thought all this was an idea and that we should stay in touch and let him have written suggestions as soon as possible,

The project got under way; written and visual information from every conceivable source appeared. Though there were only twelve full-time students working four days a week, the rest of the students began to use the painting studio allocated and transformed it into something between a second-hand TV shop and common room and a design workshop in an efficient film studio. There would be a television showing the news being read through a two-inch square paper mask and next to it a cathode ray tube being removed from its cabinet to make way for its conversion into a fish aquarium.

Smaller groups were detailed to collect interviews using cassette recorders from the people who sell, maintain, make or watch television. A constant flow of sketches and verbal statements continued as, throughout the project, other elements were revealed concerning the image and its control at source, the image and its counterpoint within the viewing room. A living room was constructed within the studio its design based on information gained from the researchers; the fact that the TV set is almost without exception in the corner of the household living room on the same side as the main fire. Other details of the viewing environment were compared and observations made of fellow viewers as to their behaviour whilst engrossed in a programme. Film cameras were used

as substitute TV cameras to place onto a back projection screen within a TV cabinet images that complemented the reconstructed living room instead of being an extension to it; flowers of the same colour and size were seen on the screen matching those on top of the cabinet.

Meanwhile contact was maintained with BBC Bristol by writing requesting a visit facility - "Interesting and enjoyable though it might be to assist..... I am afraid this is not possible..... staff shortages due to illness, retraining (sic) and other reasons...." came back the reply from the Manager. "I am of course, prepared to consider programme ideas from any source....." and so there was a general meeting called to try and get an overall view of what had occurred so far. Enthusiasm, sometimes a rare commodity in a college, was high. A written script outline was drawn up;

LIVE TV 1: evolves as a result of investigations and discussions about viewer/television set environment within the living room - this will manifest as a static prepared studio set of a living room with a television and a "family" of viewers. The set itself will be from a group design. Instructions compiled by the group would be issued to the performers on the set and would govern their activity. This part of the production would serve as a 'structure' into which the other things would relate; a mirror image to which reference would be made throughout the production.

LIVE TV 2: evolves as a result of a similar approach to what images seem to 'work best' within 21" of screen space. Basically this would appear as a series of non-illusion actual size visual experiments which would confine any activity to the 21" of TV cabinet screen size. They would exist for varying lengths of time and be placed within the structure of Live TV 1.

FILM AND AVAILABLE IMAGERY: derives from the watching of television and noting the variety and sources of images employed in everyday TV production - the use of film and video tape, recorded and live transmission, slides, backprojection etc. These aspects too would be slotted into Live TV1. SOUND: would be based on the various recordings made in the the course of our researches where conversations were held with people about television and have included housewives, teachers, retired people, tv salesmen, hippies, children, publicans, deaf people etc.

An important factor throughout the project has been concentrating on simple experiments and their rapid execution using materials and facilities ready to hand. So far Super 8 and still cameras have been our main recording device for the experiments. Besides these results a small living room set has been built and quantities of visual information collected. A start at collation has now been made and a more final form is beginning to emerge.

What is not known is exactly what will be removed or brought in and exactly what will remain in an actual recording". This was sent off together with a letter which attempted to clarify the intentions of the project and, which was bourne out by the fact that the outline script now existed, ".. that the outcome of these investigations would be a capability of the group to present an open-ended but entirely considered and therefore valid, statement." Back came a reply ten days later; " I have explained staff shortages..... " and no mention at all of the submitted programme ideas. He suggested in fact that we contact Harlech Television since "they have a much larger purpose built studio than ours". With the project halfway through its allotted time it seemed futile to start another six-week long negotiation and after a half a dozen phone calls Plymouth College of Art offered the group its studio based close-circuit studio for three days exclusive use.

More meetings were called, in the way that they had regularily throughout the project, to get group approval for the next stage. This was to be selection and development of all material and rationalisation into a state such that after two days

in the studio all of this could be transferred directly of indirectly onto videotape. This involved, besides individuals taking on particular parts of the production, the assembling of all possible needs in terms of objects and raw materials. The following plan was made and distributed:

Work Areas; equipment, props, performers, script. Script: should contain all material considered at anytime good or workable - deletions being easier to make at this stage than additions. Discussion as to how the final script should appear - this should then be Roneoed with double spacing and large; margins and distributed to everyone ready as reference in the studio - the idea is to make effecient use of TV studio space and time. Folio containing all work on paper during project - this may provide actual programme mat erial as well as keeping the making process in touch with the research end,

Extract from Performers Instructions;

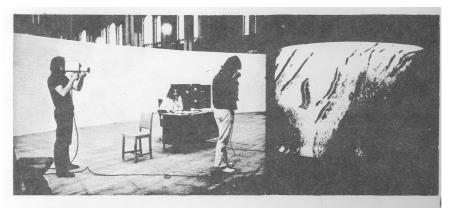
Room fills screen, the family are seen from behind, watching the set. Father - sits low in chair to left of set, feet on stool legs extended wearing slippers or in stockinged feet his shoes on the carpet beside him. One arm across stomach, the other propping up head, elbow resting on other arm. Mother - sits in chair right of set, sitting erect in chair and symetrical, legs crossed at ankles, half holding up a paper and looking over it at the tv. Sister - sits to left of set leaning on the arm, her legs crossed elegently to one side. Brother - sits low in chair, one leg across the other at the thigh. One hand grips the foot dangling in the air, the other lies at his side.

Generally the logistics including the arrangements for transport and accomadation - 'girls under 21 will require the attendance of a female member of staff' - were not too complicated and subsequent collaborations with outside groups were met with generosity.

The studio comprised of, besides the essential gear, two dolly mounted cameras with their own monitors making rapid operation straightforeward, useful extras like a telecine outfit all plugged into the standard Sony switcher, fader and matte unit which enabled simple optical effects such as superimpositions to be used in the programme. The structure worked itself out; sections rehearsed followed by revision followed immediately by the recording and if necessary followed immediately by retakes. There was the script to follow but since no one had been in a TV studio before there was no compulsion to produce a facsimile, professional programme. Thus the structure was formed out of the situation we found ourselves and having to wield unfamiliar machines to produce the images that had been visualised in the earlier discussions. Participants revolved in the operation of the various pieces of haraware; people who had previously been extremely wary of even a simple stills camera were confidently operating the functions of the VTR after a few minutes of instruction and experiment before recording the next section; the principles of the operation of a camera seemed far easier for people to assimilate when there was a live image to work with; a lady who lived in the same street as the studio took part as one of the living room occupants; full-time students of the host college enthusiastically advised having, as they said, "never had anything like this going on before..."

The thirty minute programme was finished well within the time allotted, the previously prepared soundtrack transferred off the quarter inch recorder onto the videotape and the final viewing session arranged. The first five minutes had been accidently erased, (it's not foolproof against total fools), but what emerged was a documentary using visual example concerning not only television but the issues of family, home, work and play that remain cen tral to the greater issue of the phenomena of the mass dispensation of information within the structure of the family houshold unit. Within the present structure of broadcast television, this programme will not be transmitted. The reason that would be given, besides those that already had been received, would be that by using such equipment, broadcasting technical standards would not be maintained and therefore transmission would be impossible and this will, with some others, continue to be the sort of excuse employed such that professional standards become more important than real television.

But the audience remains restless nonetheless.....,



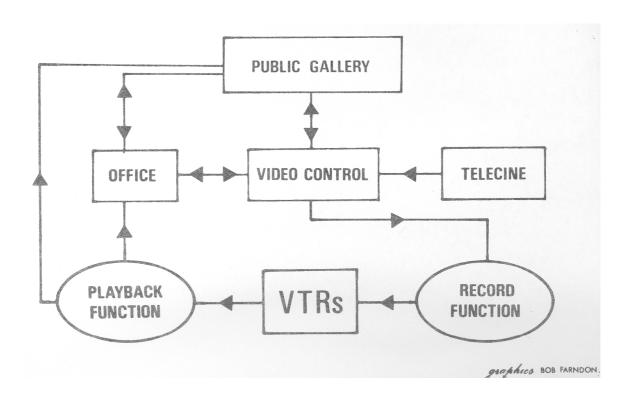
(Photo 4 & 5)

3. 14th August 1971: WHITTINGHAM HOSPITAL - was re cently in the news concerning the ill-treatment metered out to patients and the embezzlement of funds by certain members of staff. Kevin Coyne had worked for three years as a social therapist in the capacity of a general education officer. Kovne had prepared an 'act' as an exorcism of conscious protest for and on behalf of one of the patients in that place. With Ian Breakwell as a 'normal' performer/provocateur, the patient played by Koyne, re-enacted another day spent under sedation or in solitary or doing boring futile tasks, encountering the infuriating tolerant patronage of doctor and professional visitor. The performance, which was given in the Alexander Palace, had not been rehearsed as such, though considerable thought, discussion and preparation had been put into it by both participants. Essentially an ad lib performance within a defined area using a minimum of props, it was not even clear as to whether the whole thing would hold up over a 45 minute period. There was certainly no knowledge of what would actually be said or how any of the action would develop. A VTR with monitor and portable camera was borrowed ideally a Porta-Pak VTR would have suited the situation better but instead, the lightweight handheld camera attached by a long lead to the VTR sufficed. Lighter than most 8mm movie cameras and concealing a 2"monitor within its bodywork, the camera, fitted with a conventional zoom lens nonetheless was simple to guide toward and follow the action. There being no other cameras or any switch-box, the portable camera and its image became the third participant in the proceedings simply observing as Kovne was wound up into another outburst of frustration and helplessness at the hands of the doctor who was swift to assure him that he had after all, his interests at heart....the camera became another patient - ignored, mute and by appearance equally helpless.

The tape together with a sound tape and photographs have caused Koyne and Breakwell to re-examine their motives and their methods. The visual aspect was if anything, distractive from the monologue/dialogue. The context of real time, real Koyne/Breakwell, Alexander Palace that appeared on visual was in conflict with the 'patient' compressed time scale, word image conciousness that was on the sound, splitting attention away from the individual on display. Preparation for a more successful presentation has been concentrating on word communication exclusively - tape transcipts may provide the basis for a sound play which in turn may form the basis for a film - with a presise control and integration of imagery available possibly using video imagery as source for film and then using video again with a multi-channel telecine playback onto tape before transfer again onto film, will enable visual to complement sound.

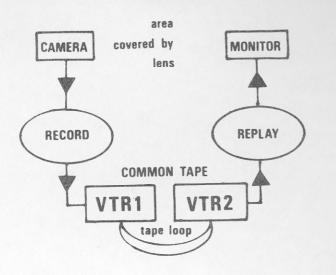
4, 30th November - 23rd December: INN70; APG AT THE HAYWARD GALLERY - the Artists Placement Group presented an abstract of the organisation's activities and results over the six year period since its inception. The broad aim of APG is to introduce artists into industrial, educational, business and medical enterprises given the brief of performing as professional activists working within the scope of their own activities and that of the host company. The centre of the exhibition was the APG Office which continued to operate throughout the event with the same function as when housed at its permanent base; day to day administration, meetings amongst company members, meetings with members of other companys, introducing the artist's attitudes into spheres outside of their traditional context. Within the scope of a public exhibition the problem was to allow the company to function as normally as possible without excluding totally the natural public curiosity as to the content of the meetings and discussions that would be taking place.

A versatile video facility was installed with a technical area close by to the Office itself, feeding five 23" monitors placed in the exhibition halls. People not directly concerned could observe the discussions as they took place from other parts of the gallery. The inter-relationships of hardware to participants to public was analysed with the following diagram;



Two fixed cameras and one dolly mounted camera with zoom lens plugged through a swtch-box into the VTR made two man operation of the whole facility quite straightforeward - with the dolly camera operator plugged directly into the sound system it was simple for him to correlate and centralise vision such that visual communication and tempo remained in step with that of the discussion - with a smaller group around the Office table, recordings could be made by one person. Using two VTR machines it was possible to record on-going discussions and feed in previously recorded ones, to playback recorded debates into the circuit monitors whilst recording a 'private' discussion in the Office, to edit recordings into shortened versions a la Match of the Day by using the nonphysical editing method of transfer from one machine to the other. The latter caused a considerable saving in tape costs but possibly led to an 'unobjective' series of extracts and shortened versions the tendency being to select that part of the discussion that 'worked' best as a piece of audio-visual communication - the participants had been invited to indicate those sections that were worthy of preservation but rarely was this option taken. When meetings of the company were taking place, public scrutiny of its affairs was shielded even though as an observer, these discussions were of greater interest and were more central to the participants sincere concerns than a great many of the public relays. The parallels to broadcast television policy of excluding the public gaze from certain people and events have disturbing similarities even though a more democratic nature of recording procedure existed.

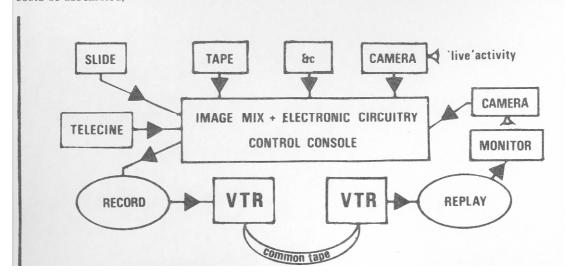
5. REPLAY FEEDBACK: in the available moments when the Hayward installation was not being used directly for the purposes of the APG exhibition, the equipment was re-plugged juickly and simply in the following way;



The delay between the real image to be recorded on VTR 1 and for that image to be replayed from VTR 2 was in this set up about three seconds. If the tape distance between the two machines is increased then of course the time delay increases by a similar preportion such that the replay image on the background monitor is re-recorded by the camera and so on in a three second cyclic pattern until the first image decays under the influence of circuit and optical variables. These in fact gradually reach a point of stability where the system returns the tones and shapes in the original to basic forms of black and white. Fresh variables can be introduced either in the form of circuit adjustments or simply by introducing an object in front of the camera. In the case of circuit adjustments the potential remains endless depending on the hardware available and/or the ingenuity of an electronic inventor.

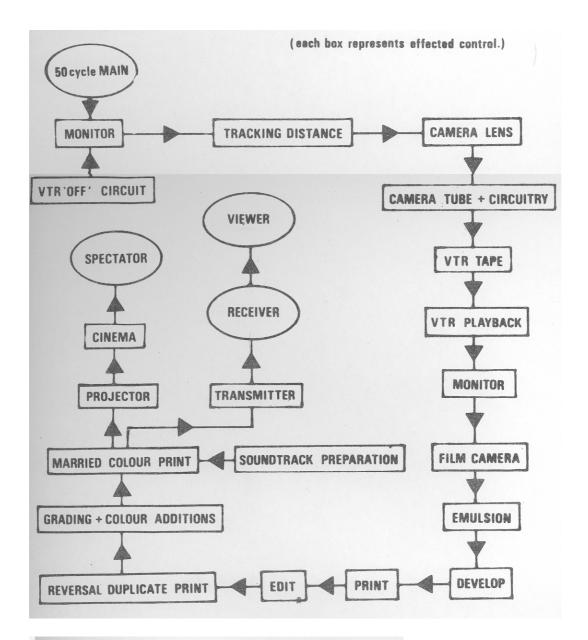
The original set-up proved to be a great source of spontaneous creative pleasure being close to theatre and having a one to one relationship, hardware to user - similar to making patterns in the sand or drawing on paper with the acceleration to the imagination that the equipments functioning as a random opposite number provided. Essentially a live television didactic event not for taping to keep as another object to pile on to the Art heap.

With an installation involving both hardware and black boxes, an orchestra as visual sister to the Moog sound synthesiser could be assembled;



6. 22nd December - 14th April 1972: VIDEOGRAPHIC EXPERIMENT - "TENDER KISSES" - again using the Hayward equipment a twenty minute tape was prepared. Using the image provided by a monitor plugged into a VTR switched to stand-by function and treating it through a camera plugged into another VTR a random but standard series of white dots on black are transformed into an abstract of rapidly moving and changing forms. At the end of the tape the source is revealed for what it is - a television set only here functioning as the provider of an image at the start of a process instead of simply the manifestor at the completion of one. The prepared tape is then transferred onto film introducing the first of many controls that are employed throughout the remainder of the ensuing process which is summarised in the following diagram;

(see next page)



A control employed for instance in the transfer from tape to film is the utilisation of the frame bar normally visible on film which has been shot with a camera running at 24 frames per second. An Arriflex with mirror shutter reveals the transformation of this bar into a flicker when the camera is run at 9 frames per second. To complete the film as a film a subsequent section is shot and a soundtrack prepared. The images and sound involved may be returned at any stage including completion of the functions of the television/video discipline as has been outlined in the previous sections. In doing so the ultimate and contrasting circumstances of the subseqent audience should be held clearly in mind.

The situation exists that in order to communicate these matters the medium of the printed word has to be employed instead of either of the mediums concerned themselves. But as became apparent at the time the projects were in progress and which makes itself visible even more each day, the means of information dissemination, (as opposed to communication), like that of economic production, is not in the hands of those who actually work with or otherwise need them but, in the case of broadcast television particularly, under the control of those who would wish to propagate the notion of Truth in Our Time. As Mrs Mary Whithouse has observed with some of this truth, "Television is not primarily fitted to be a medium for art or even entertainment but for propaganda".

Photos

- 1 & 2: from Moving Wallpaper in the Television Lounge video monitor.
- 3: Frame stills taken from the film record of the Birthday event. The film 'ONE' (1972) was digitally restored in 2004 and is distributed by LUX, London.
- 4: The Whittington Hospital performance; l r: Mike Leggett (with camera), Ian Breakwell (at desk), Kevin Coyne (with mic)
- 5: Frame stills taken from the film record of the Birthday event. The film 'ONE' (1972) was digitally restored in 2004 and is distributed by LUX, London.

The Poster as printed in 1973 is available in a limited edition of 5. legart@ozemail.com.au