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**Curatorial Mediation and the Institutionalization
of Canadian Video**

Cathy J. Busby

A Thesis
in
The Department
of
Communication Studies

Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Masters of Arts (Media Studies) at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

November, 1992

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ABSTRACT

Curatorial Mediation and the Institutionalization of Canadian Video

Cathy Busby

Curatorial mediation results in a specific representation of artwork through a complex process of negotiation among interests both inside and outside art exhibiting institutions. The introduction of video as an art medium has challenged the assumptions of curatorial mediation and accepted definitions of art. Numerous independent video production sites flourish, as producers choose to work with a medium that is a televisual technology. Yet the exhibiting institution continues to define art video in terms of conventional art historical practices, tending to reinforce a false dichotomy between high art and popular culture. Much video questions the existing social order, and this creates further tension in the institutionalization of video as an art medium. Exhibition catalogues are a valuable source of documentation of these processes. This thesis analyzes social tensions within cultural production and their negotiation in the specific instances of four video exhibition catalogues. The selection of catalogues was made to mark instances in the development of institutional practices since video emerged as an art medium in the early 1970s. The process of institutionalization distorts the representation of the cultural producer, whereby the artist's identity is either submerged or constructed in the over-invested identity of art star.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Little attention has been paid to contemporary art exhibition catalogues, yet catalogues are often the only remaining evidence of an art event. As such, they are powerful agents in the construction of art history. This thesis contends that there is much to be learned from an in-depth analysis of catalogues because they occupy a site of intersection of interests in the network within art worlds.¹

The tensions relating to the catalogues as representations of video art and the institutional networks in which they are produced are the point of departure for this study. There are many players to be considered in the institutional network of interests that relates to the production of catalogues. Specific to the site of video exhibition catalogues are video's many locations outside the art exhibiting institution informing institutional practices of documentation. There are also tensions around institutionalizing a "new" medium, particularly one that has been a favorite of artists concerned with progressive political intervention by means of their video.

Catalogues are a particularly revealing source of information because of the written and visual statements they contain, a densely constructed statement of a particular cultural moment in the life of the network of interests. The corpus of this thesis consists of four catalogues, however a broader spectrum of contemporary art exhibition catalogues is implicated.

¹ Howard Becker, "Art Worlds and Collective Activity," *Art Worlds*, (Berkeley University of California, 1982), p 34-39

Networks of interests in catalogue production include the organizations and individuals who have stakes in these publications. They include state funders, artists, administrators of art exhibiting institutions, curators, designers, and audiences. The catalogue is the product of their interventions. State funders are the agencies, federal, provincial, and municipal who are responsible for the distribution of funding allocated by their respective levels of government. This thesis is concerned with the federal art funding agency, the Canada Council. Outstanding features of state funding in Canada are that it is unstable, competitive, and depended on by most public exhibiting institutions. These features inform the uncertainty of cultural production in Canada. To the Canada Council, the catalogue is proof of production by its clients. It is mandated to fund the production and circulation of artwork. Central among their complex and varied interests is the need to remain financially stable themselves. The allocation of funds to art institutions and individuals is carried out through a peer jury process of assessment. Potential jury members are recommended to and composed by officers of the Canada Council to review applications for funding. The decisions of the peer jury determine what projects are funded. Many institutions depend on the Canada Council for funding of their catalogues.

The term "art exhibiting institution" or "exhibiting institution," for the purposes of this thesis refers to public art galleries and museums who exhibit contemporary art, both federal (the National Gallery),

provincial, municipal, university, and artist-run. Their interests include exhibiting, collecting, documenting, and promoting artwork as well as building a reputation and maintaining visibility and credibility. Their power lies in determining the kind of work displayed, number, and scale of exhibitions. The art exhibiting institution's mandate and policy will describe its commitment to publications. An art institution may employ a full-time curator(s) or a director/curator. Curators may also be sub-contractors to the institution. The curator's work is to contextualize artwork through research, presentation, and writing. Contextualizing requires interpreting or processing the work for a perceived audience. As well as representing the artwork, curatorial interests may include professional advancement, a desire to increase their curatorial visibility, the visibility of the art exhibiting institution, and the visibility of the artist(s).

The artist is the primary producer, without whom there is no art for exhibition. Artists are sub-contractors of the exhibiting institution. For the artist attempting to maintain financial security through state funding, exhibition of work in public exhibiting institutions is important in managing a career.

Maintaining financial stability is an issue that each of the institutions and positions described have in common. Audiences, the receivers, are implicated, but play a different part. Their interests are multiple and may include the desire to acquire knowledge, and the desire to

be entertained. Their power within the network is as consumers and specifically to this thesis, their consumption of the catalogue.

In Canada, there are four main kinds of exhibiting institutions. Artist-run centres, university galleries, provincial and municipal galleries, and the National Gallery. Each is characterized by a different kind of funding structure. In the artist-run centre, there are often varied proportions of provincial, federal, and municipal funding. Occasionally other forms of sponsorship assist in overall funding. These sources may include membership dues and corporate sponsorship of specific projects. Consistently, and since their inception, artist-run centres have been dependent on the Canada Council.² University galleries receive an operating budget from their university, and may apply to the Canada Council through Exhibition Assistance funding in order to produce exhibitions that include catalogues. Provincial and municipal galleries are similarly funded with an operating budget from their respective province or municipality. They are dependent on multiple sources, including the Canada Council, for the production of exhibition catalogues. The National Gallery does not receive funding from the Canada Council. Rather it is funded by the Department of Communications.

Howard Becker in his book *Art Worlds*, claims that the interest of the state in visual art is in "the preservation of public order, promotion

² Clive Robertson, "The Story Behind Organized Art: The New Museums, Part 2," *FLUSE*, Nov 1980, p 318-325

of national unity, and representation among other nations." ³ Just as state funding institutions maintain power over cultural production by controlling financial aid, visual artists have the power of being 'primary producers.' They make the art work. However, artists receive no financial security in return for their role as producer. Video art is not profitable and so its producers are dependent on state funding promised to them. The state is patron to the artist through the granting system. Grants are not a stable form of funding, and, in most cases, cover costs for a maximum duration of one year, or a single production. The artist is terminally a temporary employee of the state with no benefits or security (eg. seniority) as enjoyed by other state employees involved in this network.⁴ This situation informs art production, and documentation, including the catalogue. Though a semblance of fairness is maintained by the arms-length relationship of the state to the artist, and the peer jury system, the state-funded artist lives in a precarious and oppressive financial predicament.

During the 20th century much work has been done to reconstruct the identity of the artist as cultural worker, shedding the uniquely-talented-genius role. Birmingham School members have argued for the artist to be called 'cultural producer.'⁵ The term takes into account the collective production of art, and its social construction. Terry Eagleton and T. J. Clark have also worked to demystify the

³ Op Cit Becker, p 180

⁴ Op Cit Robertson, p 318

⁵ Janet Wolff, "The Social Production of Art", *The Social Production of Art*, (London MacMillan), 1981, p. 29

'divine creature of inspiration' through their work in defining 'art-as-ideology.'⁶ The practicing artist, specifically video producer is informed by these histories. However, over the past two decades, video artists, determined to survive in a climate of austerity, have moved towards professionalization. To the professional artist, documentation of their work is all-important. When the documentation is compiled in an exhibition catalogue, it provides optimum validation.

Janet Wolff discusses three main categories of influence in the social production of art: technology, social institutions, and economic factors. She claims that these overlapping categories each inform the product in different ways.⁷ The technology has to be available for the catalogue to be made. She discusses at length the impact of the invention of print. Further to this and directly relating to the exhibition catalogue is the invention of offset printing and more recently desk-top publishing. The relationship of technology, as well as the social institutions and economic factors, will be considered as this analysis unfolds.

Contemporary art exhibition catalogues are an awkward category and defy easy categorization. They are not exactly books, journals, nor magazines. They often do not fit conveniently on the bookshelf. Although catalogues have increasingly high production values, their distribution remains limited. They are pleasing objects whose place

⁶ Op Cit Wolff, p 26

⁷ Op Cit Wolff, p 34

within art criticism is ill-defined. Catalogues are cultural artefacts that on one level contain straight-forward information and documentation of a specific art event, and simultaneously provide clues to the apparatuses of cultural production. They have come to embody complex functions and their pages are one site where the tensions within the network of interests involved in their production and consumption are played out. The overt function of catalogues is to document and promote the circulation of the work represented. Several critical essays are often included, along with the curatorial statement. Images do not necessarily only document the work exhibited, but may stand on their own as artworks, extending what the text and documentary images offer, as in the case of the Colin Campbell: Media Works catalogue. These developments speak to an enlarged function for exhibition catalogues.

II Method

With the experience of a "participant observer," I will articulate the functions of the exhibition catalogue and the curator's role in it. Since the mid-80's when I was curator/director of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design Art Gallery, I have had questions about the role of the exhibition catalogue. When received from other institutions, I would thumb through them, paying most attention to the images, and skimming the curatorial essay. They filled my shelves. I became concerned with their function relative to the time and money required to produce them.

I intend for this research to show the abundance of information that catalogues provide, how they are politically charged, and have much to say about institutional interests, the networks and structures that support these interests, and the distribution of power among various players involved.

The catalogue is made up of multiple layers of information and is open to different readings. My comments will range from general observations to very specific investigations of details and clues found in individual texts, or throughout the corpus. I will look for regularities that give evidence to institutional practices within the domain of contemporary art, video, curatorial, and other mediating discourses related to the corpus. Discursive regularities will be sought within and across the corpus. I will look for traces of the politics of curatorial practices that mark the circulation of that power in art exhibiting institutions. What follows is an example of the process described. A more full description of the method is found in chapter two, "Corpus and Method."

I will compare the Foreword of the Colin Campbell: Media Works 1972-1990 exhibition catalogue, written by director Carol A. Phillips of the Winnipeg Art Gallery, and the Foreword of the Sara Diamond catalogue, written by director Dr. Shirley Thomson of the National Gallery. I looked for common points of reference in how artists and their works are located, how the medium is discussed, and how the medium is situated in relation to contemporary visual art and in relation to its audiences.

Carol A. Phillips says Colin Campbell's work "both in Canada and internationally, is of serious consequence and influence." The exhibition is called a "retrospective", a "thorough consideration of the work." Through the essays the reader is "assured access" to Colin Campbell's "major critical themes." The writers have provided "analytical interpretation." Carol Phillips says he is "provocative and challenging" and of the "postmodern generation." She calls Colin Campbell's work a "parodic enterprise." The reader is told that his subjects of "sexuality and identity" provide ways of "resisting traditional expectations within the viewing of art and in relation to television's genres." His work is referred to as "videotapes" and "video works." Bruce Ferguson is the Adjunct Curator who organized the exhibition and wrote the overview essay in the catalogue. The Winnipeg Art Gallery is "grateful" to the Canada Council, "honored" to present this exhibition, acknowledges V-tape (an artist-run distribution outlet in Toronto), as a "valued partner", and is thankful to the writers.⁸

Dr. Shirley Thomson of the National Gallery, says the exhibition is a "retrospective devoted to the video artist Sara Diamond." In the "context of contemporary visual art... catalogues and booklets will help situate the media arts in general and film and video in particular..." The National Gallery acknowledges "the importance and

⁸ Bruce Ferguson, *Colin Campbell. Media Works 1972-1990*, (Winnipeg: Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1990), p.2

impact of the media arts - film, video, and the new electronic and digital media - on the world of contemporary art." She calls the media arts, "these new art forms," and says they are "sometimes difficult to comprehend." Through exhibitions she claims the National Gallery has "made the public aware of this current art form." Though she does not make any specific references to the work or artist represented in the catalogue, Dr. Thomson says: 'And through exhibitions, the voices of our media artists will be heard. What they have to say - in forms freed from the tyranny of the mass media - will enlighten us, sometimes disturb us, and always renew the life of the imagination.' Dr. Thomson claims that the National Gallery, with a media art collection of four hundred works, "ranks among the leading collections in North America." Associate Curator Jean Gagnon holds the "recently created position." His task is to "showcase a non-traditional art form" and to "make it accessible to our visitors." ⁹

These Forewords are institutional position statements and they locate the exhibitions within their frame. In relation to the artist, they speak of "the retrospective," in relation to the medium, they assert that it is "new," in relation to contemporary visual art, that it is "important and significant," in relation to audience, that it is "accessible." In each of these relations, the catalogue asserts institutional authority, giving voice to our artists, in the case of the National Gallery.

⁹ Gagnon, Jean and Knights, Karen, Sara Diamond, Memories Revisited, History Retold, (Ottawa National Gallery of Canada), 1992, p 7

The "retrospective" is a traditional institutional means of elevating a single producer. Extensive institutional resources are used to establish such a figurehead. The retrospective bolsters the institution who claims the artist as their discovery or territory.

Video was first used by artists in the mid-sixties. Prior to that time equipment was limited to television studios. Over the past twenty years, video has become a popular medium of artists. It is a medium visual art students can study; it has an office within the Visual Arts Section of the Canada Council; and a number of artist-run centres are devoted to its production and distribution. It is an institutionalized medium. It is not a "new" art form. By calling it "new", the National Gallery indicates the pace at which it moves to accept art forms.

The opinions expressed by institutions such as the Winnipeg Art Gallery and the National Gallery are relied upon to write the dominant art history. They produce many lengthy publications, and because large institutions have a public relations officer or team, their activities often receive national mainstream coverage by art magazines and newspapers. The fact of the exhibition is frequently more widely disseminated when it takes place in a larger exhibiting institution, than in a smaller institution, such as an artist-run centre. The catalogue is a location where the art institution's authority is consolidated and controlled.

III Corpus - Video Exhibition Catalogues

For the purposes of this study I have selected catalogues of exhibitions that include the issue of addressing representation of the self, noting its changing representations, a consistent preoccupation in Canadian independent video. A number of curated exhibitions have sought to address this tendency. I have chosen to look in detail at the following catalogues: *Videoscape* (1974) curated by Martie Dunn and Peggy Gale, *Western Front Video* (1984) curated by René Blouin, *Colin Campbell: Media Works* (1990) curated by Bruce Ferguson, and *Sara Diamond* (1992) curated by Jean Gagnon and Karen Knights. This corpus charts the presence of the video medium from its beginnings in the Canadian art context, spanning the period from 1974 to the present. *Videoscape* is the catalogue from an exhibition that attempted a survey of Canadian video of the early seventies. Within it, an interest in autobiography, introspection, and self in relation to the technology are themes represented in the selection of video inclusions. *Western Front Video* places its theoretical theme in a secondary position to its first function, which is representing Western Front, an artist-run institution. In the *Colin Campbell: Media Works* exhibition catalogue, the artist represents himself as a way of talking about identity politics. This catalogue demonstrates an alignment with this artmaking agenda and his particular approach to making videos. In the *Sara Diamond* catalogue, the artist is represented primarily for her concern with memory and its construction. Two of her videos are specifically concerned with herself in relation to her mother (*Influences of My Mother*, 1982) and the other with her father (*Patternity* [sic], 1991). In the essay "Imagining the Feminine," Karen Knights discusses the

larger project of Diamond to make space for women's stories. The theme of representation of self is central to how the video and the artist are represented. None of the catalogues are exclusively concerned with representation of self, but each addresses it, and these representations will be sought through the thesis.

I want to know what theoretical discourses are relied on by curators, and what this means in terms of institutional voice, and the framing of the exhibition. I am also concerned with the political intention of these videos and how political intention is represented by curators through this process of mediation in the catalogues. Aspects of various feminisms have politicized the self as a strategy for describing political concerns related to various kinds of oppressions. These representations often take the confessional or testimonial form. The thesis will look at how the discourses in corpus have changed from 1974 to the present, and within the various institutional sites of the exhibition catalogue. The thesis will look at how the kinds of curatorial presentations in the corpus vary.

Videoscape

The Videoscape catalogue is ring bound, and printed in black and white. It is seventy-two pages in length, containing the work of twenty-five artists. The inside cover is two layers of clear acetate covering an abstracted black and white image in a television monitor shape. Printed on one layer of the acetate is a pair of eyes. On another layer of acetate are the words, "This is real." The relative formality of the double-page spread on the next page comes as a

contrast. Black, with white dropped-out type on the left-hand page; white, with black on the right-hand page. On the left page the type reads "Art Gallery of Ontario", on the right, "Videoscape presented by Education and Extension Services." Looking through the pages, I notice there are photographic images and text on nearly every page. For the Art Gallery of Ontario, the producer of this catalogue, it is an inexpensive project. There are no colour reproductions, and the binding is inexpensive. The presence of the artists and their work is foregrounded in this catalogue. Much of the writing is in the artists' words, and many of the images include representations of the artists themselves.

Western Front Video

The Western Front Video catalogue is smooth to the touch, perfect-bound, with a thick, glossy cover. Two references to video are made on the cover; the title, with blue horizontal lines on a black background suggests an electronically generated video image, and the illustration of leopard-skin clad woman framed within a television monitor provides a decorative motif. At the bottom of the cover appearing in simple typewriter font are the names of the two sponsoring institutions; the Musée d'art contemporain de Montreal and the Art Gallery of Hamilton. On the back, as a sort of casual postscript, filmically lit, are the words "A Western Front Video Production." Turning to the table of contents, the seamlessness that was communicated by the first impression is interrupted. Varied interests are expressed, and a hierarchy is immediately evident. The names of the curators, René Blouin and Peggy Gale, and the titles of

their articles are up front. Immediately following the Introduction is an article entitled "Le Western Front: centre alternatif" by René Blouin, followed by: "The Use of the Self to Structure Narratives" by Peggy Gale. Although the following two entries, "List of works" and "Videography of the artists" appear half-way down the page, the names of the artists themselves and their work go unmentioned. In his article Blouin writes enthusiastically about alternative centres, purporting to give a social history of the Western Front. Accompanying his article is a carefully composed black and white photograph of the building that houses the Western Front. The facade resembles a set piece from a western film and alludes to the mythical frontier of the "wild west." The building seems to stand as a rough-and-tumble yet resilient monument to the pioneering efforts of the video producer. Significantly there are no people in the picture. The combined effect of these factors is that the alternative centre functions in a social and historical vacuum. Blouin privileges the institution itself over the artists and their production. He champions the alternative status of this artist-run centre, while clearly contributing to securing its institutional position within the Canadian cultural community. The corporate identity of the Western Front is bolstered and the artist's position is subordinated to its line of products; the artists and the videos.

Colin Campbell. Media Works 1972-1990

The satin finish of the primarily dark blue and turquoise cover is common to recent cultural studies and 'upscale' art publications. An image of a 1970's car approaching a bridge is printed in a lighter

blue in a texture that suggests a video screen. "Colin Campbell, Media Works" are the only words on the front cover. His name is in yellow print, separated from "Media Works" in white. In this ninety-five page catalogue, Campbell is honored as a pioneer video artist. The first written text, "Noise," is written by Campbell. Short written texts by many artists are found in the Videoscape catalogue, however, this is the only instance in the corpus where the artist positions her or himself before being framed by the curator. In the middle of the book, a twenty-five page interview with Campbell is presented. The final piece, "Skin," is an excerpt from a script he has written. Curator Bruce Ferguson's name first appears in the cataloguing data, and next in the body of the Foreword. In the Table of Contents Ferguson is presented as another of the writers. This relative downplaying of the curatorial role and inclusion of three additional written texts makes this catalogue more book-like than the others in this study.

The Sara Diamond catalogue has a different kind of gloss. The cover looks like craft paper, like a cheap brown paper bag. However, this list price of the slim catalogue is \$20. On the front cover, in the shape of an extended diamond, narrowly outlined in pink, is the name "Sara Diamond." It resembles a designer label, like "Armani." Towards the top of the cover is a cut-out monitor shape. Pictured in this window is a pair of pinkish hands. The gesture is active and invitational. On the back of the catalogue is a bar code and the words "Musée des Beaux-Arts du Canada," and under it, "National Gallery of Canada." Dropped out lettering on the spine, a pink strip, reads from

the top: "Jean Gagnon [space] Karen Knights [large space] Sara Diamond" At the bottom of the spine, is the symbol of the National Gallery. The front cover has a hole in the shape of a video monitor cut out of it. The pair of hands from the page behind are 'on' the monitor. The still image of the hands has been inset into one of the hanging monitors in the photograph of the "Patternity" installation that fills the facing pages inside the cover. Except for the hands that are in colour, this inside image is printed in a warm-gray ink. It looks pale, like a fading black and white photograph. On this ground the colour hand image stand out. It is very clever. On the next page is the Sara Diamond name-mark as it appeared on the front cover, repeated in black. The next two pages provide one new piece of information - the title of the exhibition: Mémoires Ravivées. Histoire Narrée. Memories Revisited. History Retold. On the next page are the credits and table of contents. There are two essays: "Imaging the Feminine: The Video Art of Sara Diamond" by Karen Knights, and "The Installations of Sara Diamond" by Jean Gagnon. The title of this page, "Sommaire Contents," interrupts the listing of contents half-way down the page. A short, thin line follows these words, and just below it, on every page that follows, is the page number. Using this unconventional system inserts the designer's signature into the text. The catalogue is bilingual, French preceding English. Karen Knights' fifteen-page essay is followed by full-time curator Jean Gagnon's much shorter contribution. Like the Colin Campbell catalogue and exhibition, this presentation of Sara Diamond is a tribute by the art institution to the artist's pioneering work and contribution. However,

unlike Colin Campbell, Media Works, Sara Diamond does not speak for herself, nor are any of her written texts reproduced.

The marketing of Sara Diamond, community activist, writer, and videomaker involves shaping her strategies and politics to conform to the mandate of the National Gallery - specifically the four year-old Media Arts Section. Having a retrospective of someone whose political agenda includes issues of representation related to gender, sexual orientation, race, and class is a feather in the cap of the Section and the Gallery, giving the institution a progressive "look."

Description of the corpus is a step in the process of marking sites towards finding regularities. The project begins by drawing a map that looks at the institutional structures of the art world and moves from there into the texts. The process will continue to be one of moving inside and outside the corpus, working to construct a body of meaning through the process. The choices of points of focus are subjective and I will acknowledge my interests through the process.

IV. Thesis Chapters

1. Networks of Interest

This chapter implicates the broadest scope of art institutions, including art schools and funding agencies and specifies the institutional stakes involved in video exhibition catalogues using Howard Becker and Janet Wolff as theoretical reference points. The different kinds of exhibiting institutions, the process of

institutionalization, and the varied practices of curators and artists will be mapped out.

2. Corpus and Method

This chapter discusses the bracketing of the corpus, and considers its limitations. Each catalogue is considered for its texts: introductions, images, essays, biographies, tables of contents. The method will cut through the political seamlessness, siting institutional interests. The task will be to look at how the art work is represented in the catalogue by considering interests and interventions by funders, directors, curators, and designers of video artists work, through regularities in the texts.

3. Curatorial Practice as a Mediation: The Disappearing Artist and the Making of the Canadian Video Art Star

Catalogues are an important accessory to 'art star' design. This chapter examines the tendency the corpus reveals of excessive production values and the focus on the individual artist, often in the "retrospective" exhibition. The curator mediates, fitting the artist into the exhibiting institution for a perceived public. Simultaneously, the increasing population of artists is less represented. Secondly, this chapter explores the trend towards professionalization of artists and curatorial positions. Specifically, it looks at how catalogues are an investment by the art exhibiting institution in the artist through the power invested in the curator.

4. Video Inside and Outside the Art Exhibiting Institution

This chapter explores the relationship between art video and broadcast television. It goes on to map the changed social context of independent and art video over the past twenty years, and finally outlines consumer video culture that includes home video recording.

5. Concluding Remarks: The Corpus, Publications, and Curatorial Practice

The catalogue is determined by a network of interests, central among them, those of the curator. As a cultural theorist and producer, my concern is both with critiquing the systems that control the representation of artwork, and imagining the process and form of other forms of documentation. The term "interest", as used throughout the thesis, cannot be reduced to a narrow economic reading. Rather it is a broader concept which involves professional or institutional power within an on-going process of curatorial practice. In the case of an artist exhibiting work in an institution, questions of professional status and institutional prestige are of key concern. Catalogues are one site where the tensions between interests are in evidence.

Curatorial practice is considered in this thesis both as a process of mediation involving networks of interest, and as instances of production providing material evidence in the form of the exhibition catalogue. Curatorial practice is not the work of an individual curator, but rather implies decisions reached through the network which includes interests ranging from funding to those of graphic design.

Chapter 2: Networks of Interest

Introduction

Janet Wolff and Howard Becker have both investigated the social context in which art is produced. Exhibition catalogues document and represent this context and the various, often conflicting interests, at work at a given moment in cultural history. Situating these catalogues within a social context is therefore essential to understanding their meanings. Working from different perspectives, both Wolff and Becker emphasize the collective means by which art is produced, and demystify the notion of artist as individual creator, operating outside historical, political, and economic forces.

The work of Becker and Wolff has specific implications for the production of video exhibition catalogues. Video is almost always produced collectively, whether by an individual producer supported by a number of contributors, or by a self-named collective. However, the mechanisms of representation, as found in the catalogues, are hesitant to acknowledge these collective processes. Secondly, the notions of cultural production and networks have hopeful repercussions, contributing to the theoretical redefinition of the boundaries between video as art, activism, and information.

Wolff emerges from the Marxist context of the Birmingham School, committed to such notions as the artist as "cultural producer,"¹⁰ a worker with economic interests. This analysis is useful in

¹⁰ Janet Wolff, "The Social Production of Art", *The Social Production of Art*, (London: MacMillan), 1981, p. 138

considering the evolving position of artist-as-worker as represented in my corpus. Her text, The Social Production of Art, serves as a reminder that the catalogues are constructed within social and ideological processes. Woolf argues that art production is not innocent of historical factors, but is conditioned by a range of social and political relationships. The production of exhibition catalogues is likewise determined.

Howard Becker, author of Art Worlds, is neither a cultural producer nor an art historian. As an American sociologist, he is primarily concerned with understanding art production as a collective activity which occurs within an extended network of varied interests. He insists that the state is inevitably a key player in this network. His network model and notion of ever-present state agendas provide tools for analysis of the corpus.

The purpose of this mapping is to make visible the cultural landscape and to delineate the "cultural ecology,"¹¹ the balance between various interests that participate in the production of contemporary art. This mapping will form a network through which I will plot a course. Each site of interest will be described in terms of the history, structure, and distinguishing features. Characteristics of the relationship between the artist, video art, the catalogue, and the institution may be discussed. Connections to other parts of the

¹¹ Bruce, Harry, ed., You've got ten minutes to get that flag down... Halifax Conference, a National Forum on Canadian Cultural Policy, (Halifax Nova Scotia College of Art and Design), 1986, p. 98

network will be considered. This institutional map is drawn on the surface of Canadian cultural production. It is conceptualized as a process of constructing a number of layers that can be read separately (e.g. funding institutions); or together, in which case they reveal the interconnection of the network of interests involved in the circulation of power in the production of contemporary art. This chapter examines the conditions within which cultural production takes place.

The following institutions, organizations, and individuals will be described in order to account for them historically and to situate the criticism of video exhibition catalogues:

1. art funding institutions, specifically the Canada Council
2. art training institutions
3. video art and artists
4. artist-run production and distribution institutions
5. art exhibiting institutions - curatorial practice and video
6. visual art periodicals
7. art organizations
8. art video viewers and the exhibition catalogue

Art Funding Institutions

The initial stated purpose of the Canada Council was "to foster and promote the study and enjoyment of, and the production of works in, the arts."¹² State funding of the arts in Canada has been hard-won.

¹² Grants to Artists, 1991-92 ed, (Ottawa: Canada Council, 1991), p 1

In 1951, the allocation of funds to "voluntary organizations in the arts" totalled \$21,000.¹³ The wave of activism that brought about current funding levels to \$105 million¹⁴ began in 1941 with the meeting in Kingston of a few dozen artists who formed The Federation of Canadian Artists (FCA). According to Arthur Gelber, founder and former chairman of the Ontario Arts Council, there would likely not have been enough artists around to constitute such a body, were it not for the formation of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) in 1936. The CBC provided employment, at marginal rates of pay, to musicians and writers of fiction, drama, and criticism, among others.¹⁵ According to Gelber, the next significant push for federal government support of the arts came in 1944 when the FCA joined the "March on Ottawa." They presented a brief to the Special Committee on Reconstruction and Re-establishment that called for "a non-political body, supported by government which would evolve and administer a comprehensive program of aid for both performing and creative arts."¹⁶ In 1949, the Massey Commission (the Royal Committee on National Development in the Arts, Letters, and Sciences) was formed and its report two years later took up the recommendation of the brief. In 1957, thirteen years after the presentation of the brief, the Canada Council was formed. Gelber speculates that this was largely because of the bequests of Sir James Dunn and Izaak Walton Killam, whose \$50. million estate

¹³ Bruce, 22

¹⁴ 1992-93 budget is \$105 million according to Lise Rochon, Service des communications at the Canada Council. Telephone interview September 30, 1992

¹⁵ Bruce, 22-23

¹⁶ *ibid* 23

earned \$2.5 million annually, the sole operating budget of the Canada Council from 1957-67. This funded the arts, social sciences and humanities, and Canada's role in UNESCO. Through the lobbying of the then Secretary of State, Maurice Lamontagne, the Canada Council received its first funding from Parliament in 1967, \$10 million over a two year period. The Canada Council is now primarily dependent on grants received annually from Parliament.¹⁷ State funding of the arts in Canada is the result of determined lobbying by cultural workers over an extended period of time.

Canada maintains distinguishing features that inform state funding. Some are obvious, yet fundamental: we are a young country, and the U.S. overshadows our geographic, political, and economic life. Our population is small and spread over a vast area, concentrated in a band close to the southern border and clustered in a few urban centres. We are the inheritors of a tradition of communication over our distances. These facts have contributed to the political reluctance to support art and culture.

Contemporary artists, including video artists/producers, depend on art funding institutions. The client/state relationship has been characterized by the tension of heightened instability since the mid-eighties when conservative forces began to dominate Canadian politics. Public funding of the arts, which had become entrenched as

¹⁷ Grants to Artists, p 1

a right in the minds of cultural producers, was thrown into question in the climate of conservatism.

In the view of the state funding institutions, art is not seen as a commodity, nor is the artist valued as a provider of services. The availability of funds controls what is made. Funds are vulnerable to political wills, and the arts and culture are not considered by most governments to be neither valuable production nor valuable services. The video artist is dependent on unreliable state funding, and has no security in this relationship.

The clever client of the Canada Council, who hopes to have a career as an artist (full-time employment over more than several years as an artist is almost impossible) has to learn how to use its system. The artist must understand the mechanics of presentation: be able to write about proposed work, and provide documentation of completed work in order to be competitive. This requires specialization and ingenuity that does not necessarily have anything to do with the artwork. In order to gain this knowledge, it is expedient to be connected with either a training institution, an exhibiting institution, or an arts organization.

The main national English-language contemporary arts organizations that maintain a profile with the Canada Council are the Canadian Conference on the Arts (CCA), the Association of National Non-Profit Artist-run Centres (ANNPAC), and Canadian Artists Representation (CAR). Affiliation with these organizations is through exhibiting

institutions, or individual membership. Joining these organizations improves the possibility of having a voice to, and an ear from the Canada Council. These organizations also provide research for the funding institution, making recommendations, re-stating principles, and reacting to government decisions. Over the years of state funding to the arts, these largely volunteer organizations have been putting out fires of government resistance to arts funding. This tradition harkens back to the first efforts that were made to establish the Canada Council by the CFA in Kingston, 1941.

The structure and practices of the Canada Council contribute to the construction of an official art.

The Arts Awards Service of the Canada Council offers grants to artists, including native artists and artists from all cultural traditions, who have completed their basic training and who are recognized as professionals. The grants of the Arts Awards Service are designed to give individual artists an opportunity to pursue their own personal and creative development. (The Canada Council, Grants to Artists, 1991 p.1)

The Canada Council is composed of a Board of nineteen government appointed members, plus a chair and vice-chair. The Board decides on "policy, programs, grants, and other matters."¹⁸ These decisions are carried out by staff under a government appointed director and associate director in consultation with advisory committees made up of members from across the country, representing various client groups. This organizational structure causes instability for artists

¹⁸ *ibid*

and producers of exhibitions because government appointees guide this process. Aside from the advisory committee system that may have power at various levels of the institution, the organizational structure is a conventional hierarchy, closely controlled by government appointees.

Grants are awarded through a peer jury system, in an attempt to democratize funding decisions. It is generally acknowledged as the best way of implementing arms-length funding. This is an important principle, however, it tends to affirm institutional bias, which is usually the bias of the large urban based training and exhibiting institutions. Jurors are selected through informal networks of recommendations by past jurors to the awards officer. The five jurors must work very quickly, reading through hundreds of pages of documentation. Presentation becomes very important.

Interests and the Circulation of Power

The introduction to the Grants to Artists publication spells out the mandate, organizational structure, and activities of the Canada Council. I will address the three areas that are the most urgent and relevant with regards to funding of artists. The first is the power of appointment of representatives in the organizational structure. Second are the interests represented in the mandate. Third is the designation of artists as "professionals," along with other arts "professionals." Midway through the introduction, the organizational structure is outlined. Decisions made by this body are described as "policies, programs, grants and other matters."

The mandate of the Canada Council, is "to foster and promote the study and enjoyment of, and the production of works in, the arts."¹⁹ This statement reveals the basic ideological conflict between what artists are motivated to do, and what the funding institution is willing to endorse. Contemporary art, including most video is not produced to be "enjoyed." Rather, it questions dominant values and critically probes dominant culture. Video in particular, abounds with criticism of dominant cultural values. Artists and other art "professionals" are placed in an ideological conflict that is played out in the representation of artwork in exhibition catalogues. It means in the intensified conservative environment of the 80's and 90's, liasons with corporate sponsors can be considered, liasons which corner the artist in the unstable position of having to bite the hand that feeds.

The document states that eligible artists must be "recognized as professional," as well as having completed "basic training." One has to believe oneself to be a "professional." Once over this hurdle, artists are granted "an opportunity to pursue their own personal and creative development." Artists, curators, and critics are named as professionals, a label that places them in the category of white-collar workers. This naming protects the interests at stake in the construction of the Canada Council client. This professional

¹⁹ *ibid*

designation constructs a worker and an artist community that can be managed by the mechanisms of the Canada Council.

Art Training Institutions

During the late 1960's, there was a rapid growth in post-secondary institutions in Canada, and an expansion of both funding and vision that influenced many art training institutions. In the course of this expansion, many new faculty were hired, and at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (NSCAD), the majority were American, or American trained. I will use NSCAD as an example of an art training institution, since it had video production facilities as early as 1969, and since many of its students and faculty are featured in the earliest catalogue of the corpus, *Videoscape*. Where the College had formerly focused on traditional art practices, in 1967 with a change in administration, young white male, conceptual artists were hired as faculty. These hirings had a profound effect on the kind of art training students received. The new NSCAD introduced its students to international art stars including Dennis Oppenheim, Sol Lewitt, and Claes Oldenburg. A strong connection with the New York art world was established by bringing many New York-based artists to the College, and maintaining a loft in SoHo. Rubbing shoulders with big names in the contemporary art world became part of the training process; important in establishing new ideas about career building and in circulating new ideas about art.

The art training institution defines the successful artist in terms of exhibition record. The artist is known and sought after through this

practice of having exhibitions and documentation of exhibitions. The exhibition catalogue provides an additional boost to circulating the artist's name. The process begins by requiring the student to express the individual creative self, and becoming familiar with the hierarchy of ideas related to contemporary art. The informal process of initiation and selection is carried out through lifestyle codes as expressed in attitudes, ideas, and taste.

For practicing contemporary artists, the training institution is one of the few places where related salaried employment is available. Degrees of financial security vary widely, however all employees may enjoy the benefits of association with that institution, access to institutional resources, including students, libraries, infrastructure, institutional research funding. Since many of the peer jury are likewise employed by art training institutions, these collegial allegiances, as well as improved resources to produce more thorough grant applications, mean that funding from the Canada Council is more likely. Faculty positions are the most advantageous for the artist, bringing legitimacy and credibility. These positions are increasingly sought and in many institutions are being reduced from full-time to part-time. Recent unionizing, at institutions like NSCAD has made existing full-time positions more desirable but less accessible. The gap between artists who can comfortably afford to make their work, and those who struggle on intermittent funding is increasing. As it becomes more difficult to produce independently, and opportunities for secure employment diminish, a catalogue takes

on greater importance in validating the artist's activities, thus building a career and opening up employment options.

Video Art and Artists

Video of the late 60's was characterized by the stationary camera recording an event and producing an unedited tape in black and white. The formal devices of pacing, narrative, and subject matter revealed the narrow strictures within which television operated.

Video proposed alternate representations to those of television. It was also used to document artists' performances, and produce sculptural works. Since the early 70's the medium has expanded in use within art worlds, and I propose four major overlapping kinds of expression that currently motivate the artist to use video as a medium:

1. Narrative potential. Video is used to tell stories, including stories about the self (e.g. autobiography, such as Influences of My Mother).
2. Political interventionist potential. Video is used to communicate information that will re-write histories or bring about social change. Video is seen as a radical and powerful tool (e.g. in the work of Colin Campbell and Sara Diamond).
3. Conceptual potential. Video is used to talk about the medium (e.g. surveillance).
4. Technical potential. Video is used to explore technical possibilities (e.g. the work of Martie Dunn).

The most significant change since the introduction of video as a medium accessible to artists, was the camcorder, an advance that will

be expanded upon in chapter four. Access has changed from exclusive to readily available. Despite this fact, art video remains relatively exclusive. Increased emphasis on high production values requires more expensive specialized equipment, keeping the potential of greater access at bay.

Though early video was the domain of men, a concerted effort by women producers to claim video technology and distribution has resulted in a large number of women producing and having their videos circulated. Distributors include Women In Focus (Vancouver) and Groupe Intervention Vidéo (Montreal). Various women's screening festivals have been established and include: Insight - Edmonton Women's Film and Video Festival, the Festival de films et vidéos de femmes, Montréal, and Lifesize: Women and Film, Halifax.

The professional artist in Canada is a contradiction in terms. "Professional" assumes that one's products or services are valued and marketable in the private or public sectors. This is not the case for the artist. Institutional undervaluing of the artist, specifically the video artist is confirmed through policy, mandates and the systems that these give rise to. The artist has little influence over the conditions controlling their ability to produce, except through the peer jury system, and when called upon by advisory committees. There is no job security and few producers are able to work full-time as professional artists.

Production / Distribution

The production and distribution of independent video, including artist's video, has been possible because of the network of state-funded distribution and production centres that artists have created to support their own work, and the work of others. Most production, for the independent, takes place through the artist-run network of centres, commercial production houses, cable television stations, or a combination of the aforementioned.²⁰ Several of the artist-run production centres also distribute artist's work including Satellite Video Exchange Society in Vancouver, Videographe in Montreal, Centre for Art Tapes in Halifax, and Trinity Square Video in Toronto. Distributors include V-tape in Toronto, the largest independent video distribution centre in Canada, Atlantic Independent Media in Halifax, and Art Metropole in Toronto, who were the first distributors of artist's video. These are institutions representing various impulses that compose the commitment to this production. Both production and distribution centres have established themselves over the past 10-15 years largely in urban centres, and have attained relative institutional security in that they receive regular annual operating funding. Access to production facilities is made through membership and basic familiarity with equipment, usually through workshops which allow the user access to equipment, with additional fees for rental of equipment. Rental of video, is available to anyone, however prices tend to restrict its distribution to training institutions, public schools, and interest groups.

²⁰ In addition, the Banff Centre contributes a singularly unique production opportunity in that it assists artists with projects. In 1992 it merged its media art and television sections, formerly strictly separated in order to share resources and create space for new kinds of productions to be undertaken.

The explicit primary interest of artist-run production centres is to facilitate the production of video. The interests for centres primarily concerned with distribution is in the circulation and sale of videos and in acting as agents for artists. Artist-run production and distribution centres, often have good relationships with larger institutions, but see themselves as apart and distinct from them.

Art Exhibiting Institutions

One way of categorizing the kinds of institutions that select, display, and document video is based on organizational structure and in relation to their financial affiliation to state funders. They are artist-run centres, university art galleries/museums, provincial/municipal art galleries/museums, and the National Gallery. Of the corpus, Videoscape was produced by a provincial exhibiting institution (The Art Gallery of Ontario); Western Front Video was jointly sponsored by an artist-run centre, a provincial exhibiting institution and a municipal exhibiting institution, (the Western Front in collaboration with the Hamilton Art Gallery and the Musée d'art contemporain); Colin Campbell: Media Works was from a municipal art gallery (the Winnipeg Art Gallery); and Sara Diamond was published by the National Gallery.

Curatorial Practice and Video

The appointment of curators is uncommon to artist-run centres, where boards of directors, usually through a committee structure, make curatorial decisions. Other art exhibiting institutions do

appoint individuals to positions of director/curator or curator. Their training and experience may be in the fine arts, art history, writing of criticism, and freelance curating. There is no standard training, and much credibility rests on reputation and accomplishments. Curators may work within institutions and also commonly do curatorial work on a freelance basis. These two kinds of relationships to institutions are very different. The employee has other institutional obligations, a salary, and the security of an institution, whereas the contractor has a single exhibition to organize, a fee for this service, and no security from the institution. Art exhibiting institutions, through curators or collective processes of decision-making, mediate the collection, circulation, and reception of art.

Video has a non-exclusive relationship to these institutions, a questionable belonging. Some video is designed to work exclusively within the art exhibiting space. It requires surrounding props to have meaning. Video may not be a central component to the overall work. There is video that is designed to work within or outside the art exhibiting space. Additional components provide an enlarged context, but are not essential. Finally, there is video that may be screened interchangeably in curated exhibitions, or festivals. The above categories of narrative, political intervention, conceptual, and technical potentials may be found in each of the categories of exhibiting institutions.

Video that simply requires screening has two features which art exhibiting institutions have generally failed to recognize. First, it is by far the most easily transported of contemporary art mediums. Secondly, it can be broadcast. Usually art exhibiting institutions use the exhibiting space they occupy for the exhibition; however, some have used the institution for its infrastructure and made use of the broadcast potential of video. Examples are Prime Time Video, (1984) the Mendel Art Gallery in Saskatoon and Video Refractions, (1984) the London Regional Gallery. The failure to extend these features is evidence of the hesitation with which video has been understood by these institutions. Others create semi-permanent video viewing spaces, for example the Musée d'art contemporain and the National Gallery. This has several results. Video has a constant presence in the gallery indicating a commitment to screening. However, its physical location is static; it may only be found in this place.

Artist-run centres have more consistently exhibited video, but the documentation is most likely to be available in periodicals, not in artist-run centre-initiated publications. Catalogues are costly and time-consuming to produce and are therefore more likely to be published by larger institutions. Therefore, the history of video, as it is written in video exhibition catalogues, has mainly been written by larger institutions.

The artist-run centre approach to video promotion and documentation has been quite different than that of the larger exhibiting institutions. As well as creating physical viewing spaces,

Art Metropole, an artist-run centre in Toronto, has produced two books about video art entitled *Video Art One* (1974) and *Video Art Two* (1984). Another artist-run centre, A Space in Toronto recently held an archival exhibition of original video event documentation from 1972 to the present entitled *Why Video?* (1992). I do not want to suggest that artist-run centres are not contributing to the writing of the history of video, but that the stakes in creating that documentation are different. One of the interests of art exhibiting institutions is in legitimizing themselves. All art exhibiting institutions are dependent on state funding. Depending on the institution, this may extend to an interest in developing a national or international profile. The institution uses its relationship with the art organization (ANNPAC, Canadian Museums Association, [CMA]) to strengthen its collective position in relation to funding and other lobbying.

Curators within art exhibiting institutions negotiate through the entire network. If there is to be an exhibition catalogue, they must apply for funding. They must be familiar with artists and their productions. They solicit or are solicited by periodicals. The degree to which these multiple concerns must be directly addressed has to do with the size of the institution, the number of staff, and the degree of specialization of the curator. Except for rare positions, such as adjunct curators, there are few positions that allow the curator time to research and write extensively.

Visual Art Periodicals

The power of art periodicals is in their documentation, circulation of exhibition information, and extending that information more broadly than the exhibition itself. This function makes the periodical extremely valuable as documentation to artists. Articles and reviews are used by writers and artists to document their activity towards further state support and other professional activities, such as teaching positions and further exhibitions.

There are currently about ten nationally circulated Canadian art periodicals. They have varied mandates and represent diverse interests. *Parallelogramme* is the quarterly publication of the ANNPAC, produced in Toronto and available free or for a minimal price at artist-run centres across Canada. It provides the most comprehensive guide to activities in artist-run centres, as well as critical feature articles on recent productions, cultural policy, and the position of the artist in the Canadian political and economic system. The magazine argues that art is a social practice.

Parachute is a bi-monthly Montreal publication under the direction of a single editor, available in major cities in Canada and in Europe. It contains both articles and reviews. They function to circulate artists' names, as well as information and ideas about their work, positioning it within theoretical frames. Writers may propose or be offered a particular article or review assignment. Their backgrounds are as artists, curators, journalists, art historians, or academics.

Fuse magazine, formerly Centrefold, has been producing critical and progressive arts journalism since 1980. Its editorial position asserts that artists are workers and active members of a larger social and political network. This basic orientation has remained intact, despite changing editorial membership over the years. It has been particularly active in anti-racist and feminist struggles. From the outset, Fuse has provided extensive coverage of video, and on occasion has featured supplements dedicated exclusively to video.²² The letters page in Fuse provides a forum for lively debate on issues that producers confront in relation to art and politics. In contrast, the magazine Canadian Art, aimed at the connoisseur, talks about art, but provides no forum for artist-lead debate.²³ Canadian Art makes little room for video, which is not readily collectable. Video Guide provides the trade-magazine look, appearing in tabloid form and listing production and distribution resources for video producers. An editorial statement reads:

Video Guide is committed to the continued awareness, appreciation, and development of the Video and Media Arts, and we encourage those of you out there who see this as important to contribute." (Video Guide, 1986, p. 2)

Visual art periodicals are wide-ranging in their mandates, but consistently provide validation, positioning the artwork in a larger context. In addition, these writings are often the only published documentation of the work.

²² For example, "A Twenty-Six Page Catalogue, The Second Independent Video Open, 1979," Fuse, vol 4, no 2, supplement (Jan 1980)

²³ from a talk with Clive Robertson, August 1992

Arts Organizations

National arts organizations and associations represent concerns and rights of artists, artist-run centres, and larger institutions, and advocate on their behalf. These organizations are dominated by white, middle class urban representatives. They function to assist in networking across the country, even though their offices are located in Toronto, Montreal, or Ottawa. There are some links between organizations, especially between those representing artists, and those representing artist-run centres.

In order to exist as a non-profit organization, eligible for state funding, they must have bylaws and an elected board of directors. This required form contributes to a leveling of their differences, in that each follows the same processes of decision-making.

The practices of these organizations are removed from art production and curatorial practices that their members are engaged in.

However, the AGM annual conference structure brings together institutional representatives and some individual members from across the country where information sharing takes place formally and informally. Efforts have been made on the part of artists and artist-run centre organizations to hold their conferences in the same place and time, thus allowing a greater sharing of information. However, little exchange has taken place between the organizations representing larger institutions, and the artists and artist-run organization.

A further structural feature is the election of executive members for a one to two year period. There is a short-term investment by a particular board in the organization in specific capacities. In ANNPAC, the strategy is often used to deal with pressing issues and problems.

Art Video Viewers and the Exhibition Catalogue

An audience is composed of a number of different interests that may include formal concern in art work, interest in the subject matter, a relationship with the institution that necessitates attendance, or the perception that the work is important and should be seen.

Exhibition catalogues may serve a different function depending on the audience. In some instances they contribute to an accumulation of knowledge and research that builds with experiences of seeing work and in the gathering these documents. Exhibition catalogues may be of interest because of a particular aspect of an exhibition that stimulated interest. They may also serve an record-keeping function, a reminder of having attended an event, and as a souvenir.

Unlike other contemporary art, video is currently programmed by two institutions: the art exhibiting institution and the festival. This study intentionally remains within the bounds of the former, but festivals must be mentioned because of their prominent role in exhibiting the work of independent producers, including artists. Video is also circulated outside these institutions, through

courses offered at training institutions and in situations in which it fits thematically. ²⁴ In each of the two primary institutions, video circulates differently. The audience at the art exhibiting institution understands the video to be video art. Video is the adjective describing the art. In the festival context the same video is understood to be video, or art video, in a context that understands video to be the noun.

Artist-run centres and larger institutions serve their audiences differently. Artist-run centres are not well-known to the uninitiated audience. They work with smaller budgets and a smaller staff, and are often not prominently located. Larger institutions work with much larger budgets, have staff who work to promote the institution and the work it represents. The larger institution, is better able to inform an audience and promote itself through catalogues for specific exhibitions. The artist-run centre with its more limited budget, may not have more than a press release for the specific exhibition.

I will comment on generalized features of the video viewing audience by categorizing the four major institutional sites that are available regularly for video viewing. Other sites exist, such as collections owned by university libraries, but these are further buried and would require analysis of other variables in order to adequately consider. The following are the most permanent and available audience sites.

²⁴ For example, the use by unions of Sara Diamond's *Ten Dollars or Nothing*, about women in the British Columbia fishery in the 1930's, as told by Josephine Charlie, a native cannery worker

1. The artist-run art exhibiting institution.
2. The artist-run production and/or distribution centre, with permanent viewing facility.
3. The larger art exhibiting institution.
4. The festival.

The first category is mainly frequented by initiated audiences, and depending on the exhibition, specific interest groups. The viewing structure varies. The video may be playing continuously, so that the viewer may begin viewing at any moment in the tape. The video may be started by the viewer, thus giving the control to the viewer through the interaction. The video may be programmed and shown at particular times, or a single time that is publicized beforehand.

The second site invites a smaller group of initiated viewers, mainly producers and curators to view work. Facilities are usually available to anyone who reserves them. One has to become familiar with this opportunity through knowledge of the institution.

The third category provides the audience with the most highly mediated experience of video viewing. The audience is composed of both initiated and the uninitiated. Screenings of work are usually pre-scheduled or played continuously. It is unlikely that audience members will be able to touch the equipment. Audience experience of viewing video in this setting is different from that of home video and more closely resembles attending a programmed event.

Like that of the larger art exhibiting institution, both the initiated and the uninitiated are found in the festival audience. This audience

more closely associates video with film than with art. Video is more likely to be projected at such events, seldom shown on monitors.

Audiences as markets are implicated in two main kinds of power relations. They are counted on by many art exhibiting institutions to justify practices and programming to funders. Secondly, as a perceived body of interest, they are important to curators in conceiving exhibitions. In large institutions, where an educational component is built into the program, they are considered as this form of mediation is conceived and developed. Institutional perceptions of their audiences inform the decisions of funding institutions, the policy of art exhibiting institutions, curatorial decisions, decisions of the video producer, and the content of periodicals.

Conclusions

Sketching this network of interests provides an "art world" context, a basis to see the corpus within. This foundation extends the reader's sense of the moment in which the video exhibition catalogue was realized and the interests it is connected to. The network also suggests the range of immediate influences informing art production. Chapter two discusses the bracketing of the corpus. Each catalogue is considered for its texts. The method returns to siting institutional interests.

Chapter 3: Corpus and Method

As a curator, I have constructed curatorial mediation and witnessed some of the meanings generated. As an artist, I have had my video curated, and have experienced how curatorial mediation constructs meanings. I investigate the corpus in light of these positions in art worlds, and through the theoretical frames of Michel Foucault's critiques of histories and institutions, and Roland Barthes' tools of textual analysis. This approach allows me to engage with the material, drawing upon past experience as a participant observer immersed in the tensions of an exhibiting institution. Analytical tools serve to pry open the texts in order to reveal institutional relationships and assumptions about video.

1 Corpus - Video Exhibition Catalogues

I find these catalogues compelling and disconcerting, representing ambitious projects and entangled interests. I work through the corpus and the thesis, drawing on my experience as an art student, artist, curator, and white woman in these "art worlds," from the 1980's to the present. I am concerned with the layer of meaning created through the work of the curator. Video fits awkwardly in the art exhibiting institution where it is both new, and disrupts some former orders and assumptions. Video is not, however, wholly dependent on these institutions and their audiences since it can be exhibited elsewhere. The ill-defined placement of video within the institution, combined with its flexibility as a medium has contributed

to the blurring lines of definition; 'art video', 'video art', 'independent video', 'media works', etc. ²⁵

The corpus is made up of four catalogues each representative of a specific moment in the production of video documentation. The catalogues from 1974 and 1984 provide historical reference. However, my main concern is the Canadian political and social context in the 1990's as the focus of the "Networks of Interest" chapter makes clear. Each of the catalogues met the criteria discussed in the introduction: concern with the catalogue as a production of the art exhibiting institution, the representation of Canadian independent video, the theme of representation of self, and the practices carried out by curators. *Videoscape* (1974) represents one of the first attempts in Canada to bring artist's video together in the survey form of exhibition. Curator Peggy Gale discusses representation of self as an on-going interest to makers of independent video in Canada. The *Western Front Video* catalogue (1984) marks a mid-point in time between the earliest show and the present. A smaller selection would have reduced the potential for comparative analysis, while a larger selection would have limited the possible depth of specific instances. Initial research was done at *V-tape* in Toronto and *Artex* in Montreal. Materials included all available video exhibition catalogues and related forms of documentation: book-like catalogues, posters with texts on the back,

²⁵ Catherine Lord contends that it is not possible to get rid of the idea of art as "a socially transcendent activity by further refining its subcategories" see Catherine Lord, "Video, Technology, and the Educated Artist," *The Independent*, vol. 8, no. 5, (June, 1985), p. 14

brochure-like documents, and supplements found in periodicals. At V-Tape I viewed a number of videos that were represented in catalogues, comparing my impression of the actual video with the documentation. Through this process of comparison, I selected four catalogues as the corpus of this thesis. The process of viewing confirmed that the documentation and the video text itself exist as distinct productions. These four were chosen because they reveal how the medium of the video exhibition catalogue has changed over the eighteen years bracketed by the corpus. The catalogues represent both large and artist-run art exhibiting institutions, as well as curators and writers holding different relationships to these institutions. They were produced in different geographical locations: Toronto, Vancouver, Montreal, Winnipeg, and Ottawa. The two earlier catalogues include larger numbers of artists and videos, while the two recent examples represent single artists.

II Method

The methodologies I use to investigate the corpus follow the Foucauldian vision that locates power in capillaries of the social body and textual analysis that emerges from Barthes' multiple readings of texts. While both Foucault and Barthes question traditions in Western rational thought, they go about constructing alternatives differently. There are three concepts from the work of Foucault that I have used to frame this project, and that I will use actively as tools in this process. They are the concept of regularities, statements, and genealogies. Regularities are occurrences found across a range of texts. They occur at the level of statements and are indicative of

institutional processes. Regularities must also be considered in terms of regulation. "Discourses not only exhibit immanent principles of regularity, they are also bound by regulations enforced through social practices of appropriation, control and 'policing.'"²⁷

The production of video exhibition catalogues is indicative of many aspects of art world practices, revealing geographical and institutional locations that have funding and motivation to produce catalogues, and indicating what is deemed worth documenting in catalogue form. The social practices within "art worlds," specifically where video is concerned, are regulated by the networks of interest relating to every publication. They are the product of negotiations within the network. Foucault speaks of genealogies as an anti-science, concerned with reconstructing the order of power, divesting "globalizing discourses" ²⁸ in favor of local, intimate views of power. Each catalogue production is unique, representing a different grouping of work curated within a different institution. Further to this, the entire construction is specific to these points of origin; this curator representing this institution, at this time, to these funders, in order to represent this grouping of video, in this location. There are so many decisions that construct the video exhibition catalogue as an object or artefact.

Power must be analysed as something which circulates, or something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localized here or there, never in anybody's hands, never

²⁷ Michel Foucault, *Power: Knowledge*. (New York: Vintage), 1972, p. 236

²⁸ *ibid.* p. 83

appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization. And not only to individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation. In other words, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its point of application." (Foucault, 1972, p. 98)

The video exhibition catalogue, in addition to documenting a video exhibition, bears witness to the complex institutional relations of power within specific sites in art worlds.

In a different way, Roland Barthes describes his method as a growing interest in a subject: "As a *Spectator* I was interested in Photography only for 'sentimental' reasons; I wanted to explore it not as a question (a theme) but as a wound: I see, I feel, hence I notice, I observe, and I think."²⁹ This method assists in defining a method that looks at texts as open to multiple readings and resistant to easy classification. The reading that I make is motivated by a biographical impulse as curator and video artist. I have worked closely in the construction of catalogues and the dissemination of video. My relationship to catalogues as material objects is informed by this experience within the networks of interest. Barthes' use of multiple readings allowed me to read the texts in different ways. I examined and responded to the written text, this text in relation to images, image texts on their own, and the structuring of information within the catalogue. Barthes' multiple

²⁹ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*. (New York: Noonday Press), 1981 p.21.

reading process framed a structural analysis which permitted the identification of regularities and traces within the corpus.

I like to have exhibition catalogues as reference objects. Most often I would skim through them, only rarely actually reading the written texts. They remind me of my history with art institutions. Over the past 15 years, catalogues have changed for me from foreign to familiar objects. Now that I can locate myself within the network that includes artists, curators, and institutions, this location punctuates the texts. I add to this a commitment to considering social contexts.

I am aware of the distinct roles of artist and curator/administrator, having occupied both positions. In the role of artist, I was trained to be suspicious of rules and conventions. As an artist I learned to consider myself engaged in a marginal activity from a critical position. This critical awareness extended mainly from second-hand readings of theory, picked up from colleagues and professors. During the period of my formation in the mid-eighties, some feminist theories, specifically Marxist-Feminist analyses were considered important to read and work with. There was support for lateral thinking, that allows for leaps of logic. This permission and encouragement from within art training institutions is a hold-over from the artist-as-genius belief in which it is the role of the artist to have original insights or visions. It is a belief that the role of the artist is to act on her/his imagination. As participant observer, I also rely on my knowledge and experience as curator/administrator. The

training for this was on-the-job, and the expectation of the curator was to be generally knowledgeable of art and artists, and to run a successful, well-documented gallery. This was framed within the limitations of administrative structure and funding. In this position I became acquainted with how bureaucracies influence the production and distribution of artwork. The idea of the "professional" was touted and the development of "professional practices" and the guarding of "professional knowledges" was valued.

As with any research, this project is delimited by its research methods. Within the theoretical frame I have drawn, and the network of interests I have constituted as a contextual layer, the process is also an intuitive one.

III Catalogue Introductions

The catalogue introduction is an organizing device, and frames the exhibition for the reader by presenting an overview of what the catalogue contains. In both Colin Campbell: Media Works and Sara Diamond, there are no sections entitled "Introduction." In the first the essay, "Otherwise Worldly," by the exhibition curator, Bruce Ferguson, is called "an overview" by the gallery director in the foreword. It serves as an introduction. It is located after a short script entitled "Noise," written by the artist. In Sara Diamond there is no substitute for an introduction. To find a framing of the work, the reader must move to the curatorial essays. In Colin Campbell: Media Works, the space traditionally occupied by the introduction is replaced by the presence of the artist's voice. In Sara Diamond, two

essays composing the body of the catalogue follow the foreword. These absences contrast each other. In *Colin Campbell: Media Works* the replacement of the introduction is a refreshing alternative to the standard format. The function of framing the work is achieved. In the second, the absence leaves a gap, distancing the artwork from the audience.

Martie Dunn, guest curator to the Art Gallery of Ontario for *Videoscape*, writes the introduction as a means of orienting the audience to something unfamiliar. He provides an analogy and guide to this end, by likening the journey of viewing video to Columbus or Cortez "charging through a land of 'savages' without ever experiencing the civilization...many [viewers] are so busy looking for China they never find anything else, or are disappointed in what they do find."³¹ The guide consists of a list of categories into which video can be organized: "Conceptual, Synaesthetic, Performance, and Experiential."³² The curator imagines the gallery-goer and catalogue reader as a naive explorer who is likely to misunderstand or get lost. This is in competition with the unruly content of the work. The curator anticipates an uneasy reception. In this imagined tricky situation, he takes on a harnessing role, rationalizing the work. He suggests the gallery-goer needs "coordinates" (the categories) in order to experience the work. The gatekeeping role of the curator, to be discussed further in chapter 3, is revealing here, prescribing a route through the work, and imposing ways of seeing. The curator

³¹ op. cit. Dunn, Gale, p. 4

³² *ibid.*, p. 4

anticipates panic. The gallery-goer is predetermined as white and "cultured," someone who will not be offended by the "discoverer" image. The use of the racist explorer analogy also suggests that art-goers are colonizers. The writer assumes his audience will identify with the analogy, or he would realize he was insulting them. "Civilization" is contemporary art, specifically in this case, video.

Bruce Ferguson, who is adjunct curator to the Winnipeg Art Gallery writes about his fondness and fascination with the artist Colin Campbell and his work. In the opening sentence of the essay, he says that the retrospective is an "institutional category." Then he works within that system of organization, the retrospective, to describe features of the twenty years of work produced by Colin Campbell. He discusses "Sackville, I'm Yours", a video Campbell made in 1972, and draws from that, the character Art Star in all his ambiguity.

This introduction is theoretically contextualized within post-modernism, which allows Ferguson room to discuss the fictional constructedness of Campbell's characters. The irony of the identity of Campbell's Art Star, is in fact a fictional one that the artist can now wear, given the association of the retrospective with art star status. The identity fiction has moved to non-fiction. The curator attempts in this introduction to act as a collaborator with the artist. He says:

I will instead 'co-author' this text by respecting a certain incoherency and a lack of control which parallels the split motivations between intuition and social comment in

Campbell's own texts. Here, I favor a Campbellesque flirtation with loss of power and a confusion of desires. (Ferguson, 1990, p.8)

Ferguson breaks with the institutionally determined distance between artist and curator. "Noise", by Campbell, is written script-like in the location where one would normally find the introduction. Its three pages read as a manifesto of his current work..."Time to make some noise, Colin."³³ Together, the essays introduce the work. In the catalogue, there is not the physical distance and hierarchy in presentation, present in Sara Diamond. The artist speaks first. However, this irregularity in order and voice occurs in the context of a retrospective, a privileged opportunity offered to few artists.

The missing introduction in Sara Diamond prevents the reader from gaining a quick grasp of the approach to the exhibition. It is a surprising absence in the context of the National Gallery, where available documentation is plentiful, and educational assistance to gallery-goers abounds. The accompanying pamphlet neglects to provide introductory remarks to the work, simply listing the contents of the show. It is particularly ironic following a foreword where the director states the role of the curator is "to showcase a non-traditional art form [video] which is sometimes difficult to comprehend and to make it accessible to our visitors."³⁴ It is inconsistent, then, to not have a frame provided, like a tour-guide, to propose a direction to the reader. This absence represents the

³³ op cit. Ferguson, p. 8

³⁴ op cit Gagnon, Knights, p 8

tension which is played out between politically challenging artwork, such as Sara Diamond's, and an institution. In this catalogue the National Gallery is celebrating artwork that challenges its order.

The introduction to *Western Front_Video*, written by curator René Blouin, is authoritative and instructive in tone. It promotes the Western Front, noting in the opening sentence that it has been operating for more than ten years. Anniversaries are often used to connote credibility in institutions, and Blouin seizes the opportunity.

In the text he unnecessarily uses the term "studium," without reference:

In the works in this exhibition video serves as the support, but it also constitutes a *studium*: (sic) a terrain of cultural connotations in which we have collectively participated since the advent of televisual media. (Blouin, Gale, 1984, p.3)

The purpose of this exhibition was to make visible and credible the Western Front artist-run centre. None of the artists are mentioned in the introduction, except Kate Craig, a co-founder and long-time director of its video programme. Craig has institutional power within the Western Front, and this is apparently the reason for her centrality in terms of curatorial theme. Works were selected that reflected the themes of her work. The artwork itself takes second place to the celebration of the institution and its agents.

In Western Front Video, the introduction focuses on the history of the institution. Video is secondary to the institution. Videoscape orients the viewer to the medium as art, not television. Colin Campbell: Media Works, substitutes an introduction with "Noise," an activist manifesto, which precedes the account of his eighteen years of video production. The absence of an introduction in Sara Diamond represents a gap in the orientation of the reader to the considerable body of her work. These introductions serve different purposes, but they do not consistently orient the reader to the work in the exhibition.

The Videoscape introduction begins to define video by specifying how it is not television. Broadcast television is described as large and looming, devoid of life, contained in "packaged product" form. For the curators of Videoscape, video is the antithesis of broadcast television; a radical new technology, process oriented, communicative, risk-taking.

Bruce Ferguson specifies video in relation to television with one particular image. He pulls the image of the tie-less, shirt-less Campbell playing Art Star in "Sackville I'm Yours" and comparing it to the tie-clad newscaster. Ferguson describes the tie as a referent to "Law (sic) and masculine jurisdiction"³⁵ of television. Throughout the essay Ferguson makes this tape his point of reference. According to Ferguson, Campbell's work can be seen as an appropriation of devices

³⁵ op cit. Ferguson, p 10

familiar to TV programming, including its anti-academic, anti-linguistic tendencies. The work, according to Ferguson, embraces television for its illusiveness. Just like TV, we don't know if the person on the screen is telling the truth or not.

The curator of Videoscape writes an introduction to guide the reader into a nebulous open-mindedness of the new medium. Dunn works within the frame of dominant culture; for example, his use of the aforementioned colonizing metaphor. Sixteen years later, Ferguson's knowledge of cultural theory safe-guards his writing against the naive views expressed by Dunn. In 1974, Dunn was a practising artist and worked at Trinity Square Video, a fledgling artist-run centre. Ferguson works as an adjunct curator to the Winnipeg Art Gallery. Ferguson uses theory to expand his position. The alignment of theory with contemporary art serves a useful purpose here in situating Colin Campbell's work. Ferguson skillfully discusses Rosalind Krauss' critical position of the late 1970's³⁶ in which she theorizes video as a narcissistic, repressive cultural production. Further, he discusses lying and its relationship to semiotics. The meaning of the video is enriched by this multi-layered context. The curator in this catalogue provides a layer of meaning, an adjunct work next to the video itself. This enlargement of the work by the curator is particularly functional in relation to the retrospective form of this exhibition and catalogue. It lends the authority of other disciplines to the work. It locates this practice, not as a "tiny light" in

³⁶ op cit Ferguson, p 19

relation to broadcast television, but as valid art production that demands attention. Theory works to dress up video, to authorize it, to legitimate it. Artists once believed they spoke in a different world than newscasters. Ferguson, in this retrospective, locates Art Star as an active critical text, and challenges the notion of the separation of the art world and the rest of the world. Twenty years later, television is being looked at critically, not rejected.

In contrast to the Videoscape and Colin Campbell: Media Works approaches to introduction, Western Front Video does not include as part of its frame, a relationship to broadcast television. The context for video in this exhibition catalogue is the Western Front, where video is produced. The curator locates video simply in the terrain of "televisual media."

The introductions serve as a place of negotiation between curator, art work, and reader within the institution. In their presence and absence specificities are revealed. In Videoscape, a guide of categories are provided for the reader, while the work of specific artists is only presented as examples that fit these categories. In Western Front Video, the introduction is guide-like again, advocating the reading of clues in the work, but without mention of the viewing location where this takes place. The absence of a traditional introduction in Colin Campbell: Media Works is replaced by "Noise," Campbell's manifesto as a three-page script. It is not a guide in the literal sense of either of the previous introductions. Sara Diamond has no introduction in spite of the institutional context of the

National Gallery, where it would be expected. The regularity of the introduction can occupy the space of the catalogue in many ways, as this survey demonstrates.

IV. Images

Looking quickly through a catalogue it is the images that provide the first impression not the content of the written text. As one of the earliest video exhibition catalogues to be produced in Canada, Videoscape showed optimism. An established regime related to representing video photographic images was not in place. This lack of system informs the photographs and their placement within the catalogue. The photographs often make reference to the video monitor, framed in the monitor itself. This would become a convention in the representation of video. Other images refer to the aesthetic of television by high contrast and simulation of the lines across the television screen. There are sequences of images that present the changing picture on the screen. There are extreme close-ups, abstract images, and photos of artists unrelated to the video camera. A code for the representation of videos is not established, and the playfulness speaks to the absence of more rigid rules that have not taken hold. Video by artists had not yet been widely represented in exhibition catalogues. Within this unestablished set of codes there are some general trends to be noted before making a close analysis of several images. The stills make reference to television by the presence of the video monitor frame and the lines of the television screen, however the images are constantly asserting their distinctiveness from television. The close-ups may be too

extreme for broadcast television, there are out-of-focus stills, or characters sinking out of the frame. Though there is reference to broadcast television, particularly in the framing of head and shoulder shots, there is an active defiance to those representations. Lisa Steele performs with an egg in her mouth, head and shoulders framed just a little closer than the typical newscaster would be.

There are two distinct image groups in *Western Front Video*: images at the beginning of the Blouin and Gale articles, describing the physical space of the Western Front, and images in "Videography of the Artists." I will discuss each body of photos separately. The two images that are at the beginning of the essays represent the exterior, and the interior of the Western Front building. They are large, each filling more than half the page. The first photo is located above the article title "Le Western Front: Centre Alternatif,"³⁷ which lends a caption to the photo. The former Knights of Pythias building was purchased in 1972 by a group of eight artists motivated by the increasing cost of rentals in downtown Vancouver and the burgeoning artist-run centre movement in Canada. In the spirit of cooperative living and working possibilities, the group divided the building so that each member had a studio and living space. The photograph speaks of a frozen vision of an alternative lifestyle. Its clapboard exterior is weathered and some windows are boarded, the rest are dark. Parked just outside is a motorcycle and a Mercedes-

³⁷ René Blouin, *Western Front Video*, (Montreal, Vancouver Musée d'Art Contemporain and Western Front Society), 1984, p. 4

Benz. The contrasts seem organized in such a way that the photo could currently be used in lifestyle clothing advertising. The photograph resonates with the opening shots of Down By Law, a Jim Jarmusch film, establishing an accomplished look; casual, cool, laid back, street smart. The grass is shaggy around the building and one can see a road going around the corner where the building stands. There is a no parking sign and the back of a stop sign, but no sign indicating the function of the building. I have seen other images of monumental buildings shot at this angle to show-off some architectural splendor. This photo communicates the anti-hero. Located as the first image in Western Front Video, I am struck by this image of a counter-institution.

Since their beginnings in the early Seventies, artist-run centres have been financially insecure, receiving grants first through "Opportunities for Youth" and the "Local Initiative Project" federal funding programs, and later through the Canada Council. Funding of artist-run centres in Canada resulted from the government's desire to placate the rowdy youth of the Seventies.

Once artists' organizations switch to government funding and are allowed and encouraged to grow and depend upon such an economy, pulling the plug, or even cutting back can, and usually will eliminate all such risk that work will be made that doesn't agree with government views. (Clive Robertson, Fuse, Nov. 1980, p. 321)

Clive Robertson, writing in 1980, says the subsistence level funding of "parallel"³⁹ centres keeps them marginal and ineffective. Once their dependence on the Canada Council funding was accomplished, their political independence was undermined. This is especially true of artist-run centres which require on-going funding. However, artists failed to come up with effective strategies to permanently alter the exhibition and distribution of visual arts in Canada, and allowed artist-run centres to be co-opted into an on-going submissive relationship with federal funding agencies.

Ten pages further along in the catalogue, there is a second image, of the same size and location on the page. This marks the beginning of the essay entitled "The Use of Self to Structure Narrative."⁴⁰

Similarly to "Le Western Front: Centre Alternative," this title acts as a caption under the photo. In the photo, standing against a white backdrop, a white man in a suit and a white woman wearing a dress and high heeled shoes stand close to each other. His chest is close to her back, sideways to the camera. The man's arm that faces the camera is bent and his fist is clenched. She holds a cigarette. A crew of three are looking at them. A video monitor and deck face the crew who are viewing what has been recorded. The studio space is improvised. The walls vary in colour and architectural details remain. However, there is nothing in the image that suggest the subjects of the camera's eye may be doing something for this video

³⁹ The term "parallel gallery" was instituted by the Canada Council in 1976, not by artists themselves. See Glenn Lewis, *Parallelogramme*, vol. 3, no. 2, (Feb 1978)

⁴⁰ op. cit., Blouin, p. 14

that would not be recorded for conventional television. What is different is the above described context. The text of the photo mimics dominant values. The pose of the subjects, and their physical relationship to the crew reveals the familiar relationship of privilege between camera-person and subject. The photo is unrelated to the written text, since there is no indication in the photo that the subjects being recorded are making this work themselves, using self as source. What is not ambiguous is that the Western Front, which is housing this action is a place where things happen. Action takes place inside the building, pictured in the first image.

The pages of the videography of the artists have identical format through its sixteen pages. Each of the facing pages is laid out identically with a photo image above a brief biography of the artist beside a list of their videos. There is no information about the photo, which occupies about half of each page. One would expect the name of the video that the still is from. The two images on each of the facing pages are paired by their placement side by side. Though each page is devoted to a different artist, or group of artists, the order of the videography seems to have been chosen by the relationship the pairs of images have to each other on each facing page: two animation images, two talking head images, two men-in-uniform images. For example, on facing pages is an image from a video Susan Britton, and one by Robert Morin and Lorraine Dufor. They seem to have been formally paired because both are head and shoulder shots. In the left still a Chinese politician looks out, but not at the camera. He is middle-aged and has oriental features. In the

facing image, a woman raises a sandwich to her mouth, obscuring part of her lower face with her raised hand. Both images are framed similarly. The association appears to have been made for formal purposes, to provide a visual coherency to the selection of videos. This coherency, provided by the paired images is an attempt to bring visual consistency to the video selections of the exhibition as they are documented in the catalogue. However, the selected images, without contextual information, and falsely associated in pairs, do not provide additional access or understanding of the work.

The written texts and image texts in *Colin Campbell: Media Works* enhance one another to enlarging the meanings that either would hold separately. The majority of stills are cropped vertically, creating an image at once part of (eg. the lines of the monitor screen reproduced in the images), and apart from (vertical cropping), the video monitor referent. The first image in the document is a black and white still of a gloved hand, open palm pressing against the steering wheel, the hand of a confident driver. On the facing page is the Foreword. The image in this textual relationship suggests that if the catalogue is a road trip through the work, then someone has to be driving. In this image, we cannot identify the driver. The image is captioned "Black and Light 1987." Frequently the caption adds another level of textual play. The written and image texts tell the story about the work that is sympathetic to Campbell's suggestive, open-ended way of working. I make this association from having viewed his videos. There is also play with the conventions of the catalogue or book. For example, on the inside flap there is a head

and shoulder image of Campbell, ambiguously attired to construct an transvestite-like image. The usual accompanying biography that we expect to follow a picture of the author placed in this location is absent. Is Campbell the author? The question remains unanswered. Unlike *Western Front Video*, where play between the format of the document and the video being presented is absent, the use of images in this catalogue leaves room for the reader's imagination.

Campbell frequently acted in his videos through the 70's and 80's. Stills from these videos are used in representing his body in the catalogue: in drag on the cover flap; an extreme close-up as a man, bearing the caption "The Woman from Malibu;" as a man having his hair combed by a woman; as a man looking in the mirror, perhaps in the midst of transforming to a woman; in a set of six images, two of Campbell applying make-up, above two of his manicured and jewelled hands from "The Woman from Malibu," and two of him in wig and sunglasses. Usually the monitor screen texture mediates the image, softening the focus. S/he is still in the images, posing, close-ups and extreme close-ups, drawing the reader close. In all but one, Campbell appears alone. There is drama and intensity in these images that could not be conveyed in writing. Representations of himself are found throughout the catalogue, except in the final chapter "Skin." This is an excerpt from the script for a film about HIV positive women and their experiences. All the colour reproductions are contained in this thirteen-page section, and their subject matter, including close-ups of skin, and a miniature skeleton speaking into a microphone, sharply contrast the rest of the

catalogue, creating a distinct section. There is a strategy and breadth to how the images are used in Colin Campbell: Media Works: a grid-like grouping of stills describes several videos, an enlarged section of a still expands the possible meanings of a written text, full-colour is used only in the "Skin" chapter. These varied uses create a broadened vocabulary for the image-texts.

Most of the images found in the catalogues are from the videos represented in the exhibitions. Some production stills are found in Videoscape. In most videos many different images are created because of the variety of scenes and shots making up a video, hence the pool of possible stills is vast. The selection, its cropping, the scale of reproduction, the use or non-use of colour, and the placement in the catalogue are all variables. This selection and presentation can re-write the meaning of the video in the catalogue.

In Sara Diamond, most of the images are grouped together in the videography. They are presented in a highly structured way; each consecutive page containing a pair, the uppermost large, bleeding off the page at the top and sides, with a small image of a close-up below, framed in a video monitor. The final pair of the "Paternity" installation is the sole exception. The first of these sets documents "The Influences of My Mother." In that video, Diamond reconstructs a range of emotions in coming to terms with her relationship with her long-deceased mother. In the images, the physical likenesses of mother and daughter are in the fore, highlighting two beautiful young women who look astonishingly similar. These images and

their presentation are indicative of stills throughout the catalogue. They are used in an illustrative and decorative sense, downplaying the political clout inherent to the videos. It is ironic that the voice of Sara Diamond's work is reduced to a polite murmur, since she is so outspoken on behalf of women's histories, frequently featuring interviews and oral histories in her videos, and fictional re-writings of history (e.g. "The Lull Before the Storm").

The absence of Diamond's voice is apparent in the exhibition catalogue, especially in comparison with Colin Campbell: Media Works. The images in the Campbell catalogue substantiates what he says in the extensive interview (twenty-three of the catalogue's ninety-three pages) and two scripts included. Images are used non-literally. The blurring of gender, truth and fiction that he achieves in his scripts is likewise blurred in the images.

It is not surprising that the National Gallery did not allow the rabble-rousing voice of Sara Diamond in its catalogue. And yet it is to Diamond's professional advantage to accept representation, whether it takes the form she originally intended for her work or not. She gains national status and credibility as an artist, assets that are particularly valuable in securing funds for future work. This, after all, is the first exhibition presented by the new Associate Curator, Media Arts, Jean Gagnon. Gagnon had not been a curator until taking up this post. He received a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Cinema Studies from Concordia University, and then became involved in the local

artist-run network in Montreal.⁴¹ Perhaps he and the team of catalogue producers wished to avoid public scrutiny, even if that meant compromising the artist's work.

Campbell has already gained international credibility as something of a video art star, and he is also a "homeboy" from Reston, Manitoba. Bruce Ferguson, adjunct curator to the Winnipeg Art Gallery, has been involved with curating video since at least 1977.⁴² With fifteen years of experience, he may have authority that permits greater freedom in representing politically engaged video work for what it is. As well, he was working for a smaller, less powerful institution that is responsible to a smaller constituency than the National Gallery.

The kind of images used, their placement, and their relationship to the written text varies between the four catalogues that make up the corpus. While *Videoscape* demonstrates the greatest variety in use of images, they are used less prescriptively. The relationship between video and the institution in 1974 did not have blue-chip status, and institutional investment in reproduced images was small as evidenced in this video exhibition catalogue. Technology and theory were not as developed as they are eighteen years later. Art exhibiting institutions were not aware of the potential impact of images. Cultural consumption was less competitive and sophisticated marketing strategies were not entrenched in art exhibiting institutions.

⁴¹ telephone interview with Jean Gagon, Aug 1992

⁴² Bruce Ferguson, *In_Video*, (Halifax Dalhousie Art Gallery, 1977)

The images in Western Front Video speak to projecting the rational, counter-institution: competent, sophisticated, and professional. All the stills in the Videography were photographed by one photographer for the catalogue. Selection of the images was likewise not in the hands of the artist in Sara Diamond, that credits two "picture editors." The photographs for the Colin Campbell Media Works catalogue are also taken by two photographers. The ordering of the presentation of images attests to the institutional investment. The question of the degree to which the images are representing the interests of the photographer, the designer, artist, the curator, cannot be fully answered, but the tension between these interests in the network are engaged around images in the catalogues.

V. Conclusions

This initial stage of investigation indicates that catalogues are a site where the tensions within the network at a given moment are made visible. Choices regarding text and images are contingent on the art world of that particular moment. The text and images in Western Front Video, for example, seem to have been constructed with a view to promoting the institution itself, at a moment when artist-run centres were consolidating their position to ensure their permanance.

Curatorial practice is central in the decision-making process involved in producing a catalogue. It is this practice, specifically as it relates to the construction of the artist in the exhibiting institution, that will be the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Curatorial Practice as a Mediation - The Disappearing Artist and the Making of the Canadian Video Art Star

Introduction

There are many entangled issues within the culture of art exhibiting institutions. The decreasing access for the growing population of trained artists, along with the increasing investment in single artists, is one among them. Examining the disappearing artist and the making of the art star model is a way of looking at changing artist identities and the curatorial mediating practices within exhibiting institutions. I will look at this tendency as it is found in video art and the curatorial practices of the exhibiting institution. This chapter will be considered in three sub-sections. The first, curatorial practice as a mediation, considers how artwork is located in the institution through curatorial practice. The second section, concerned with the disappearing artist, considers the process of access to exhibiting institutions, and the institutional control of representation through processes of mediation. The third section examines the mediation of Colin Campbell and Sara Diamond and their representations in retrospective exhibitions that defines them as video art stars.

There are currently increasing numbers of artists graduating from recognized art training institutions. However, there are fewer opportunities to show work in these institutions, which are not increasing in number and size. Video artists depend on other forms of circulation besides the exhibiting institution, including the festival circuit and independent distribution. Festivals are a one-time opportunity to see a video. Most often film is part of the festival as

well, and tends to overshadow video. The festival always includes a catalogue listing and describing work. Independent distributors rent videos to organizations, issue oriented interest groups, and educational institutions, making them available at any time to varied audiences. These videos are not distributed to individuals, but to groups and organizations. Rental fees are intended to recoup expenses for the producer, hence fees are much higher than commercial video outlets.

Despite public funding of the arts in Canada, art stars are constructed through curatorial practices in a process that has been influenced by the proliferation of American art stars. Internationally renowned New York-based Nam June Paik, repeatedly represented as the first artist to use a port-a-pak, is the first image to appear in Videoscape. His image and his ambitious video projects construct the first American video art star. His identity as free agent and maverick inhabits Canadian video art culture. In the American context private investment and the market play a key role in creating art stars. However, its highly competitive commodification, and the pre-eminence of private collectors, philanthropists and their foundations are relatively foreign to Canadian context.

Another reason for the institutional tendency to single out an artist and their work harkens back to models of art history that require names to occupy categories of greatness and create chronologies, systems that have been incorporated into museological practices. Names of individual artists are more easily accommodated than themes

or issues, which lead to the writing of cultural histories around the identities of great individual artists.

The catalogue is the public documentation of the institutional investment in the artist and artwork. It is the only lasting site of curatorial mediation, the gathering and resolution of tensions around how representation is made. The artist, the artwork itself, the curator, and the designer all bring particular interests into the process of curatorial mediation where they are played out. What one finds in the catalogue is documentation of the curatorial mediation and traces of institutional investment in the artist and artwork. This model provides a means of accounting for the construction of the art star found in Canadian art, which culminates at the point of the retrospective exhibition.

Curatorial Practice as a Mediation

Curatorial practice mediates the selection of topics for research and exhibition, the location of the exhibition, the installation of the artwork, the production and distribution of the catalogue and other print documentation, and the organization of other events in conjunction with the exhibition. The catalogue is the most significant remaining document of the exhibition itself and the process of its negotiation.

Curatorial mediation may be performed by an individual or collective, such as the exhibitions committee of an artist-run centre. Decisions are made which tailor the art work to the form or the

mandate of the institution.⁴⁵ The institution is also informed by the ever-shifting network of interests in art worlds, and the artist and artwork itself. In the exhibition and publication, artwork is selected and adjusted to fit institutional requirements through a series of decisions which constitute the curatorial mediation.

The degree of curatorial intervention varies. There are many instances where there is a collaboration between curator and artist, and the curator works as an advocate, insisting on the primacy of the work and the artist's intentions. In other situations, particularly in artist-run centres, the curatorial mediation appears to be minimal, due to the absence of one person in the position of curator. Yet a series of decisions is always made which determine the representation of the artwork. Even when intervention is minimal, the history of previous decisions compose a structure and process of curatorial mediation.

Though they operate under different conditions and tensions, all exhibiting institutions have an investment in the work they choose to exhibit. Curatorial practice is performed differently in each exhibiting institution: the artist-run centre, the university art exhibiting institution, the provincial and municipal art exhibiting institution, and the National Gallery.

⁴⁵ Sue Ditta was the curator responsible for video at the National Gallery who invited Sara Diamond to exhibit her work. The exhibition was mounted after Ditta left the Gallery. Although the exhibition was her idea, she received no recognition in the publication from any of the representatives of the institution. This, perhaps, is the price paid for working at the margins of the institution. There is little room for resistance.

To summarize, curatorial mediation is an active process of negotiation that extends beyond representing the artist and artwork. Whether in a smaller or larger institution its traces are found in the exhibition catalogue.

The artist-run centre is a parallel institution, with institutional patterns that are similar to other art exhibiting institutions, but extending from an initial desire to create an alternate, more accessible venue. The on-site exhibition has become the primary work of these institutions. Often the record of activities is in press releases, artists statements, and in-house documentation, including photographs. Artist-run centres rarely produce publications, even though, along with periodicals, they are key to circulating ideas and information about art production, and in writing art histories. In general, boards of directors experience a high turnover, and are a mix of experienced and less experienced members. Parallel institutions are often unable to keep up with the demands they make of themselves, and have frequently been unable to re-assess and re-determine their political orientation without major upheaval.⁴⁷ Board members and/or membership may have conflicting agendas - some advocating community access, others advocating the exhibition of work that is more concerned with formal and theoretical issues not necessarily widely accessible. The boards of artist-run centres create infrastructure that requires large amounts of overhead,

⁴⁷ The instability I am suggesting is based on my experience as a committee worker of The Centre for Art Tapes, a more peripheral relationship to Eye Level Gallery in Halifax 1985-90, and as Atlantic Regional representative for ANNPAC 1988-9

without the security of on-going operating funding. Another contradiction sewn into the fabric of the artist-run centre is reliance on volunteer labour, while abhorring the poverty income levels of artists. Artist-run centres tend to build bureaucracy, often in noble attempts to be representative and democratic, while developing procedures that deter innovation. Despite internal tensions and contradictions, artist-run centres have made a significant contribution to cultural production in Canada, and these practices have been too-little documented.

Artist-run centres invite applications for exhibitions from artists. Individual or groups of artists submit a written statement describing and justifying the proposed exhibition, accompanied by photo-documentation, usually in slide form. A video artist will usually propose a video installation, thus making a claim to require the physical space for the duration of an exhibition period. The one-month exhibiting period lends a professional profile to the work and contributes to a professional profile. In order to secure grants the artist must be selected for exhibition regularly. In fact, the form of application and competition procedure for exhibitions in artist-run centres resembles that of the Canada Council Aid to Artists' review process.

Procedures in submission, selection, presentation, and documentation contribute to constructing curatorial mediation. In the current socio-economic climate, many exhibiting artist-run centres have failed to maintain the critical edge in programming that brought artist-run centres into existence. Innovation has been slow and maintaining

stability has been a priority of the artist-run centre. One way of asserting viability has been for the parallel institution to produce exhibitions.

The university art exhibiting institution may or may not have an active board of directors who advise the curator and/or director. Operating funds are secured through the educational institution, and capital expenses are covered by the university. Additional funds are usually sought through the Canada Council or provincial funding agencies by the director. Exhibitions are usually four to six weeks in length. Unlike the artist-run centres, university art exhibiting institutions are included in the CMA. Most university art exhibiting institutions have a staff of two to four people and often the positions of director and curator are held by the same person. Professional identity is interpreted differently by employees of artist-run centres and university art institutions. Job security is more certain in university art institutions, and salaries are usually larger than in artist-run centres. Artist-run centres maintain an open-door and peer-jury policy in considering artists for exhibition, while the larger institutions give the authority for selecting artwork to a curator. Curators in the university exhibiting institutions are invested with greater mediation authority than coordinators in artist-run centres. University galleries produce catalogues. It has long been recognized within the university art exhibiting institutions that catalogues are a means of documenting artwork, validating the institution, and propelling careers. Many more exhibition catalogues are produced by university exhibiting institutions than by artist-run centres.

However, video is rarely an medium represented by university exhibiting institutions.

Provincial and municipal art exhibiting institutions are relatively secure and established. Represented in the corpus are the Winnipeg Art Gallery, the Musée d'art contemporain, the Art Gallery of Ontario, and the Art Gallery of Hamilton. There are many others that are concerned with the exhibition of contemporary art across the country, including, the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, the London Regional Art Gallery, the Mendel Art Gallery in Saskatoon, the Glenbow Museum in Calgary, and the Vancouver Art Gallery. Generally, these are institutions with more physical space, staff, and larger budgets than either the artist-run centre or the university art gallery. In terms of curatorial mediation, they are large enough to have at least one curator of contemporary art. Catalogue production is important as larger institutions are concerned with national visibility. Exhibitions are installed for periods of six to eight weeks. These exhibition contexts, with fewer exhibitions and more staff, leave time for research and development of exhibitions and catalogues. The professionalization of the employee, which is increasingly developed in the larger institution, informs the curatorial mediation, and is reflected in catalogues. These tend to be larger and more expensive than those produced in smaller institutions. Their production values are increased, along with their purchase price. These institutions have shown much less interest in video over the years, and frequently imagine it as new and foreign. However, some interesting and risky experiments have been

undertaken. In 1984, the Mendel Gallery Art Gallery in Saskatoon collaborated with the CBC to broadcast Prime Time Video,⁴⁸ a series of independent video productions. Video Refractions,⁴⁹ at the London Regional Art Gallery, documents the efforts of artists and other independent producers to move into broadcast and cablecast production. In the catalogue the contributions are named initially by the groups represented: "Television By Artists," "The Gina Show," "Amelia Productions," "Tele-Video," "Art Montreal," "TBA-TV" (an acronym for "Television By Artists" or "To Be Announced"), "The Howard Show," and "IBC" (Inuit Broadcasting Corporation). This alignment of video art and broadcast in the context of the larger institution is atypical. The tendency is to draw solid boundaries between high art and popular culture, and in the case of video, between video art and television. Both these exhibitions expand the definitions of video art representation within the gallery context.

One of the curatorial frames of reference is the museum and its history of curatorial practice in conservation and classification. This history informs the curatorial mediation of contemporary art.

Collections are considered an important dimension to the overall mandate of most non-artist-run exhibiting institutions.

Contemporary art is collected by university, municipal and provincial galleries, and the National Gallery. Collections are considered in the process of determining a program of exhibitions. Some exhibitions

⁴⁸ Allan MacKay, Director-Curator, Prime Time Video, Saskatoon Mendel Art Gallery, 1984

⁴⁹ Renee Baert, Video Refractions, London, Canada. London Regional Art Gallery, 1984

are built around existing work in the collection, others are supplemented with work from the collection. In some cases the work is purchased following its exhibition. A collection, like the catalogue, is tangible evidence of the history of the institution's activities. It can also act as an investment for the institution.

Video is not extensively collected by art exhibiting institutions.⁵⁰ For instance, the National Gallery has only 400 films and videos in its Media Art Collection - "an odd assortment," in the words of Associate Curator of Media Jean Gagnon.⁵¹

I propose several reasons for the lack of interest in collecting video. Video does not conform to the criteria that have been established in collection practices. Video does not increase in value, since it can be endlessly reproduced, and has no tradition of limited editions or of other means of becoming valuable through scarcity. The artist's name doesn't work to increase the value of the work, as with other media. In addition, the medium does not carry the prestige of other art mediums. It is too much like television. As a medium closely aligned with television, video challenges acquisition systems designed for more commodifiable visual art forms.

The exhibition of video is relatively new as a consistent practice at the National Gallery. The first exhibition, *Two Audio-Video*

⁵⁰ In university collections, video is purchased for the non-print collections of their libraries. Provincial and municipal art exhibiting institutions [find out]

⁵¹ Jean Gagnon, interview by author, telephone, 24 July 1992

Constructs works by Noel Harding and Eric Cameron, was shown in 1978. A media arts collection was started in 1977, and a full-time position for Associate Curator, Media Arts was established in 1988.⁵² This position was established under the curatorial umbrella of contemporary art. When the National Gallery, moved to a new building in 1988, a space was allocated for the exhibition of video.

The stakes at the National Gallery are heightened. Comparing two versions of the Sara Diamond "Heroics" installation provides an illustration of how curatorial mediation is constructed in light of the institutional investment in the exhibition. Tensions in the two exhibition sites show how curatorial mediations pull the work into different representations.

Earlier this year "Heroics" was exhibited at the National Gallery for a twelve week period as part of a retrospective of Sara Diamond's work. There were many institutional needs to be satisfied in organizing this retrospective. The institution required a pay-off in return for its large financial investment. The curatorial mediation was informed by the needs to showcase, to entertain, and to educate. At the National Gallery, artwork becomes a resource for marketing national identity by profiling artists as art stars.

In 1985, while director of the NSCAD Gallery, I collaborated with the Centre for Art Tapes in Halifax to invite Sara Diamond to exhibit

⁵² Gagnon, 7

"Heroics". The set-like installation was composed of a number of areas that suggested rooms in a home, including a kitchen with table and chairs, and a livingroom with a large carpet and couch. The installation was mainly pink and gray, making a tongue-in-cheek comment on the corporate decorating and general popularity of these colours at the time. In each room was a video-monitor, positioned for easy viewing. In the kitchen, the monitor was perched on the table. In the livingroom, it was on a stand that made viewing from the couch comfortable. The videos were composed of women's heroic stories collected by Diamond. In each, the women sat comfortably, one at a time, in a gray and pink set, similar to that of the exhibition. The installation was designed to use video as a vehicle for the communication of the stories to the viewers.

When Sara Diamond was exhibited at the National Gallery seven years later, the same installation was reduced to a kitchen-like set, and was installed to be observed from the outside, not to be entered. Cluttered with the decorations that were used at the NSCAD Gallery to make the space comfortable and homey, they now became rarified in the cramped space. The viewer was not invited to sit down, get comfortable and engage with the work. The NSCAD Gallery installation successfully appropriated prettiness to construct an environment in which to contextualize the stories, while in the National Gallery context, the installation became merely pretty, devoid of the its original subversive re-construction of the kitchen. In the monumental space of National Gallery, the politics of the artwork were dwarfed while the politics of the institution

dominated. The gendering of the space that was achieved in the NSCAD Gallery was reduced to its decorative elements in the National Gallery. The exhibition of "Heroics" in a small, unenterable space, constructs the work as a surface. It also points out that the physical space itself acts as a mediating frame.

Through analysis of categories of art exhibiting institutions, I set out to identify some of the tensions that characterize curatorial mediation under these different networks of varied contexts. There is an additional current trend common to the exhibiting institution that influences curatorial mediation. Corporate funding and related sponsorship is increasingly being solicited by art exhibiting institutions. The trend of cutbacks and the sense of insecurity in government funding is escalating, and a reliance on private sources is becoming instituted.

Corporate sponsorship shakes the foundations upon which art exhibiting institutions in Canada have come to depend on, namely public funding, and brings about new tensions in curatorial mediation. They are new authorities, creating a new base of power, upsetting established networks. Corporate sponsors support larger, better-known artists. Traces of this kind of support is often found in the form of the high-gloss catalogue. Corporate sponsorship and other foundation funding is not arms-length like that of the Canada Council. Private funders demand a greater return on their investment. This relationship throws curatorial mediation into a more uncertain position and may limit exploration. The sponsor has

to be pleased with the product, or their generosity may not continue. Market standards and marketing principals become an added interest in the network. The jury system of the Canada Council is, by comparison, impartial. Client institutions of the Canada Council count on the peer jury system of selection which is both documented and accountable.

One result of corporate or foundation sponsorship is a dominant profile of the corporate interest in the exhibition catalogue. The catalogue *4 Hours and 38 Minutes: videotapes* by Lisa Steele and Kim Tomczak, curated by Philip Monk and Dot Tuer for the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO), was an expensive production. The cover is thick and uses several colours of ink, the inside cover is shiny lavender and repeats the words "4 Hours and 38 Minutes," identifying it as a name-mark. The following page says "A Fraser Elliott Foundation Canadian Contemporary Exhibition." In the acknowledgements, Fraser and Betty Ann Elliot are thanked for their support. Two pages later, library cataloguing information reconfigures the funding credits: "The Art Gallery is generously funded by the Ontario Ministry of Culture and Communications. Additional financial support is received from the Municipality of Metro Toronto - Cultural Affairs Division, Communications Canada, the Canada Council."⁵³ The final paragraph of the acknowledgements reads: "The exhibition and catalogue has also been supported by the generous assistance of the

⁵³Phillip Monk and Dot Tuer, *4 Hours and 38 Minutes, Videotapes* by Lisa Steele and Kim Tomczak, Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1989, p 4

Canada Council."⁵⁴ This juxtaposition of credits leaves the reader to wonder the size of the financial contributions from the Foundation and state funders. Once a private investor is present in the curatorial process, the funding matrix is altered and in this case the private funder is clearly privileged over the Canada Council and other funders within the catalogue. The foundation becomes another interest in the network. When this model of foundation funding is grafted into the Canadian context, the result is to construct a funding new funding matrix. The presence of foundation funding indicates a shift in interests. This shift will inform the practice of curatorial mediation because it implicates the network of interests.

Curatorial mediation can describe the work of an individual charged with the task of curating; however, it always implicates the network of interests. Curatorial mediation constructs exhibitions and publications. This process of selecting, presenting, and documenting has its roots in museum practices of the 19th century, practices adapted to the context of contemporary art, including video. Video as a medium is an irregularity in the curatorial practice of contemporary art. The art exhibiting institution continually makes efforts to normalize it into its frames of reference. The burgeoning of the video installation, a project specific to the art exhibiting institution, is an example. The so-called installation makes video more like contemporary art than the medium itself. This accommodation to the preferences of the exhibiting institution is one

⁵⁴ *ibid*

reason for the development of the video installation as a form of production.

The Disappearing Artist

This section will distinguish between two meanings of disappearing artist; disappearing in terms of control of representation and disappearing in terms of longevity of an artists' career.

Many Canadian artists were drawn to video in the early 70's as an extension of sculptural or performance concerns, while others worked with its potential for social comment and political intervention. Production in art training institutions and artist-run centres provided artists with the means of production. As discussed in the introduction, Clive Robertson suggests that the motivation behind the Trudeau government's provision of funds to the artist-run centres was largely to dissipate the radical behavior of young people in the early 70's. Perhaps because of the radical context, early exhibitions, such as Videoscape, avoided fixed systems of representation. The catalogue demonstrates a mushrooming of ideas, and a certain measure of self-representation. The artist statements, for example, were written by the artists themselves, and vary in length and style. On the other hand, in Western Front Video, the artists are represented by a standard form biographical statement, and their videography. No room is made for self-representation.

The representation of the work of Sara Diamond at the National Gallery is another example of disappearance, where the artists comes under pressure to allow the institution to construct the exhibition. Through the appropriation of the work into an exhibition and catalogue, the artist is re-constructed into the terms of the National Gallery. The Sara Diamond exhibition fits into the machinery of career which is what the National Gallery inscribes. In this context, the artist's role has shifted from one of individual genius, worker, or professional, to that of a consumable cultural product.

In art training institutions, the artist is invested with the identity of uniquely creative and talented worker. The artist is trained to work independently, and to develop a career that relies on individual creativity and talent. The professional career is not clearly articulated until the artist seeks to survive making art full-time, in which case the choices are federal or provincial arts funding, social assistance, or double employment. The myth that creativity requires poverty conveniently fits the agendas of the funding and exhibiting institutions. Artmaking is considered more a personal indulgence than a valuable contribution to Canadian culture. Living in the identity of the professional careerist, the artist is hard-pressed to be highly critical, just as the artist-run parallel system becomes completely occupied with its professional position, and leaves behind its function as social critic. With the adoption of professional career identity and action, the artist may be able to be a full-time artist, a year at a time. This identity requires documentation of work and making work that will read well in slide form, or in the first five

minutes of a video. Grant-writing and strategizing also has to become part of the activities of the professional artist. It is a system of self-representation in information, a network that the artist, specifically the video artist, must be familiar with. This level of administrative skills must be learned. As documented in the Canada Council introductory statement in Aid to Artists, eligibility for these grants requires recognition by other professionals in the field. There is no such thing as a full-time video artist. The most successful video artists hold institutional teaching positions. Others move into arts administration, the video industry, or elsewhere to a salary and some measure of security. Institutional tension is located between career advancement and presentation of the work; the artist is in the position of having to relinquish a degree of control over the representation of their work.

Video artists do not depend entirely on the exhibiting institution. Festivals, broadcasting/cablecasting, and independent distribution also contribute to the circulation and dissemination of artists' video.

The institution of the festival has grown over the past fifteen years in Canada. In the festival, the artist is represented within a category that includes a number of films and/or videos. The five year-old "Images" festival in Toronto is one of the few that programmes video and film under the same thematic categories. In the 1992 Festival, these categories included "Historical Divisions/Family connections,"

and "Rants, Freefalls and Impertinent Questions." Curatorial mediation is constructed within a separate, but similar network of interests, and some characteristics are found in both systems of representation. Frequently, for example, the festival includes a retrospective of one film or videomaker within its programming.

Cablecasting is an exhibition option that has been available to artists, and was utilized, for example by artists in Vancouver. Cablecasting by community organizations including artists, was half-heartedly supported by the federal government in the early 70's. The licensing of community access cable stations was similar to the initial funding of artist-run centres, in that both provided minimum support to these potentially disruptive cultural initiatives. As Sara Diamond describes: "Such programs were symptomatic of the liberal struggle to institutionalize marginal sources of dissent."⁵⁶ Media and community organizations lobbied the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) for access to a local broadcast channel that would be of a high quality and financed by the cable system, following the model of Channel Four in Britain.⁵⁷ Vancouver Metro Media, a grassroots organization of video activists, lead the struggle for sufficient funding for quality local cablecasting. Even though they lost their fight with the CRTC for a license, Vancouver Metro Media produced over 200 hours of

⁵⁶ Sara Diamond, "Daring Documents: The Practical Aesthetics of Early Vancouver Video" in *Vancouver Anthology: The Institutional Politics of Art*, Stan Douglas, ed., Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1991 p 63

⁵⁷ Douglas, 63

programming.⁵⁸ The existing cable station, Cable Ten still profitted from this programming, while Metro Media remained a marginal and resource-starved organization.

As in the case of artist-run centres, little support means that much of the work must be done on a volunteer basis. This working premise was likewise instituted in the artist-run centres where funding has almost always been inadequate and doing things on a shoe-string budget has been institutionalized. The meagre support handed out piecemeal to artist-run centres, and the obstacles placed in the way of access to the cable system are both indicative of the federal government's fundamental suspicion and distain towards artists and cultural production. This context constructs tendencies for the artist on one hand as art star, and on the other as impoverished and invisible. These circumstances make a mockery of the idea of the professional artist as described by the Canada Council.

1.4 The Making of the Canadian Video Art Star

A retrospective is an institutional category which organizes a complex of artistic productions. Its ruling premise is to eliminate paradoxes, ellipses, ambiguities, contradictions, latencies, and deformations to produce a smooth narrative of individual progress and aesthetic development. A retrospective overview surveys the meanings of an artist's work, making the meanings even more meaningful by historicizing art which in turn serves the re-viewer's own authority as much as it does that of the artist's. A retrospective necessarily makes claims for cogency and comprehensiveness. (Ferguson, Colin Campbell: Media Works, 1990, p. 8)

⁵⁸ Douglas, 63

The retrospective is a significant way in which the status of the artist is established. Bruce Ferguson argues that both the curator ("reviewer") and the artist stand to gain through the process of "historicizing art." Even though Ferguson does account for the advantages of such an exhibition on the artist and curator, he fails to implicate the interests of the art exhibiting institution in historicizing the work. The process of historicization happens in a larger network than either the artist and curator. However, this is the only time the veneer of institutional objectivity is punctured in the four catalogues of this study.

Ferguson argues that retrospectives are constructed as seamless, but fails to note that the valuing of the retrospective has further implications for the construction of art history. The retrospective is a form that privileges the institution, and traditional representations of art. By promoting the institution's narrative of the artist's smooth ascendancy to stardom, the identity of artist as worker/producer is eroded in favour of the artist/genius. This is not an "employee of the month" strategy, giving credit to one particularly good worker to encourage the others, under the premise that there's room for everyone. Very few artists working in any medium will have a retrospective exhibition, or be art stars.

The retrospective is a popular and familiar form in large institutions. It is an opportunity offered to artists who have developed an identity that can fit the institutional criteria. The phenomenon of retrospectives of video artists is relatively new, since video has only

recently been an accessible medium. The structure of the retrospective undermines the content and subversive character of much video production. While building professional status, the retrospective also commodifies the artist in the interests of the exhibiting institution. The retrospective works well as a marketing strategy, identifying a particular personality with the institution. It has been an important genre in institutionalizing video, lending it high-art status and easing its difficult fit into large art exhibiting institutions. The video art star bolsters the video art category within the art exhibiting institution.

The star treatment imposed on Colin Campbell was immediately evident at the *Colin Campbell: Media Works 1972-1990* exhibition. Entering the hallway of the National Gallery, the huge banner announcing the show imposed itself, reproducing a coy and androgenous image of Campbell, in shirt and tie, long hair in a loosely gathered pony-tail. This same image is found on the inside flap of the catalogue cover and on the cover of the National Gallery exhibition programme. The image has been made into an icon for the purposes of the exhibition. The retrospective enlarges the image of the artist.

The image-mark for the *Sara Diamond* exhibition was a still from the video "Paternity" (sic) of Diamond's hands. It is a close-up, framing a pair of hands, one gesturing outward, the other turned in. The image is reproduced with the break-up from the monitor screen, reds and yellows in the image merging to pinks and peach colours. It

is used repeatedly to represent the show: on the cover of the program, on the cover of the catalogue, and on the large poster advertising the show. The extreme close-up of the hands identifies the image outside the boundaries of television. However, the selected image, does not assert a political position as, for example, a still from a political demonstration would suggest. Rather, the hands of the artist extend an ambiguous invitation to the viewer. These image-marks are a regularity within the curatorial mediation. The designer works for the institution and visually presents the publicity and documentation for an exhibition, thus determining its visual identity. A designer is always involved in the process of catalogue production for a larger exhibiting institution. The interests of the designer are in using the conventions of the trade to assert a specific design presence. There is a tension between the art work and design work implicit in the visual presentation of the catalogue. Design reconstructs Sara Diamond, for example, from feminist activist to well-behaved, consumer-friendly, professional artist.

In his video, "Sackville, I'm Yours" (1972), Campbell writes and acts the character Art Star, who has an uncertain gender and unclear credentials. Is this Campbell or Art Star? Is he lying or not? Both Campbell and Art Star are unreliable narrators. Art Star's identity construction, its fiction, is created in such a way as to mimic what might be necessary for media to make an art star. This play with the notion of stardom is found elsewhere in the corpus. In the Videoscape catalogue, Les Levine locates the audience as the central influence on the artist: "What the audience expects from the artist is

that you be some heroic figure, which they can look up to. They want you to say, "I'm the greatest."⁵⁹ Throughout his statement, the artist inscribes audience authority. The video he presents is "The Greatest Hits of Les Levine," a tongue-in-cheek joke about presenting art, and standing in as an art star.

Both videos were made in the early '70's at a time when video artists were far from being perceived as art stars in Canada. However, for Sara Diamond, a retrospective at the National Gallery is but one of many roles: the video activist, television co-producer, and art school teacher. Her multiple roles connote an unfixed identity...art star for a day, perhaps. The video artist cannot afford to be a full-time art star, unless their work is sold in large quantities. One may be very well-known in the context of viewers, but this does not amount to the same financial security such a show would promise an artist who sells work to collectors. In terms of video, celebrity does not ensure an income.

There are other ways of benefitting from this form of exhibition. Colin Campbell used the catalogue as a forum for his video activism. Unlike Diamond, Campbell's concerns for social change survived the trip to the National Gallery. Where Diamond's activist voice was muted, Campbell's representation allow him to speak in the first-person, and to address contentious issues. Where both stood to gain professionally from a National Gallery retrospective, the process of

⁵⁹ Dunn and Gale, 38

curatorial mediation delivered a more accurate representation of the activism and disruptive force of Campbell's work.

The advantages of the retrospective to the artist are having a glossy catalogue and a large exhibition, constituting historicization and professional advancement. This institutional acknowledgement and validation is likely to make the artist a more attractive candidate for secure employment in an art training institution. It also helps in securing art production grants, and promoting the sale of the artist's videos. The decision of Diamond and Campbell to accept the invitation of the retrospective may stem not only from exhibiting their work in this context, but also an awareness that it is politically strategic to do so.

The Diamond and Campbell retrospectives are part of a trend in large exhibiting institutions toward embracing video as significant medium. Video has made it. But on whose terms? In this location its grassroots origins disappear. The gatekeepers are reluctant to admit work that disrupts their mediating power in determining high art. The advent of video as an art medium upset standard curatorial practice, and so it was initially ignored by the large exhibiting institutions. Retrospectives indicate that video is now allowed in, but only through the conventional practices of curatorial mediation. Video art promised to function as a catalyst in the reconfiguration of institutional practices. Yet despite glimmers of hope, no significant structural shifts have occurred in this context.

This entrenchment of the large exhibiting institutions occurs against a backdrop of a larger cultural terrain where video is being seized upon by a range of cultural producers. This explosion in diverse video practices points to the need for curatorial mediation to draw upon a broader vocabulary than that provided by art history and museological practices.

Chapter 5: Video Inside and Outside the Art Exhibiting Institution

Introduction

During the past twenty years, video has become a dominant communications medium in Canada, yet most art exhibiting institutions do not reflect this fact in their practices related to video art. Their research, presentation and documentation of video has not changed significantly during this period. Although catalogues and related forms of documentation have reached new levels of graphic sophistication, they construct art video as a phenomenon largely unrelated to video culture. There is a tendency for the institutions to lodge their vision in a limited and isolated position, away from the many developments in video culture outside the institution. This is a means of reinforcing an entrenched privilege high culture has over popular culture. As seen in the last chapter, video exhibition catalogues of large exhibiting institutions are becoming increasingly glossy in presentation, and expensive to produce and purchase. More and more they focus on single artists, streamlined to traditional expectations and forms of art exhibiting institutions. Video art is co-opted by the institution, losing its subversive and disruptive intent.

In this chapter, I will sketch the discourse of the relationship between art video and broadcast television through the corpus. My interest is in mapping the terrain of video culture and situating art video within this larger evolving context. There are two sections of this chapter. The first traces the discussion of broadcast tv and its relationship to video through each of the catalogues of the corpus.

The second section sketches sites of development since 1970, of video art culture, followed by consumer video culture.

I Art Video and Broadcast TV in the Corpus

In the early '70s, TV was called mindless, banal; a passive activity. This perception is asserted in the curator's essay in *Videoscape*. Meanwhile, outside the art context, video moved from being an expensive, inaccessible, specialized medium to a relatively affordable and accessible one. Cable and community access to cablecasting developed in the '70s. Then in the early '80s, video became widely available to the home market with the introduction of camcorders, VCRs, and video rental outlets. While conditions have changed rapidly in video and broadcast, the positioning of TV within curatorial mediation has changed little. This discussion looks at the written texts of the catalogues as its source for assumptions about video in the art exhibiting institution.

Videoscape opens with an expression of optimism for the new medium to counter "tv-land".⁶⁰ The catalogue is concerned with establishing a distance between TV as an "extension of our eyes and ears"⁶¹ and video, an "extension of our minds."⁶² Each of the writers draws attention to the positive features of video and negative features of TV. According to the catalogue, television exploits its consumers, while video is involved in a process of conveying an

⁶⁰ Dunn and Gale, 10

⁶¹ Dunn and Gale, 10

⁶² Dunn and Gale, 10

experience. Video, it is asserted, poses a challenge to TV.⁶³ An adversarial relationship is described and TV is the enemy. Video is claimed as an art medium. Initially video was used to document ephemeral performance events and as a new medium of sculptors. The videos from these contexts were different from one another, but could easily be contained within the art exhibiting institution.

The distinction between tv-land and videoscape takes a different form in Western Front Video. The definition of video continues to be determined in relation to television. The videos of Elizabeth Chitty and Kate Craig are "a clear assault on the conventions of commercial TV,"⁶⁴ at the same time as they make use of TV formats, for instance in re-writing the melodrama. In this catalogue there is a tension in asserting the political intervention of the work that engages with the TV format. Video production by artists begins to take a deconstructive approach, relying on TV formats as a source from which to make different kinds of interventions. This tradition was notably influenced by the work of Dara Birnbaum with her "Wonder Woman" series.⁶⁵ This example of video appropriating TV breaks down the dichotomy between TV and video established in discourse on early art video.

⁶³ This position is affirmed by John Handhardt in his article "Notes on Video/Television. Prime Time Video," Prime Time Video, and Lorne Falk in his article "The Second Link and the Habit of TV," in The Second Link: Viewpoints on Video in the Eighties

⁶⁴ Blouin, 16

⁶⁵ Dara Birnbaum is the first artist documented to appropriate television footage and use it as video. She used this footage to construct ironic new meanings, having the heroine alternate roles from secretary to Wonder Woman and back. This is documented in her book Rough Edits. Popular Image Video, Halifax, Nova Scotia: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1987.

Emphasis is placed on the distinction between broadcast television and independent video. In Western Front Video, Gale claims that TV is the "most basic and pervasive cultural frame."⁶⁶ She maintains that broadcast TV and video are the same medium, distinguishing independent video as "non-commercial, non-institutional, personal works."⁶⁷ She assumes that independent production operates outside an institutional framework. In the same catalogue, Blouin locates art video in relation to the multi-disciplinary debates around technology. "The cultural repercussions of mass television consumption by post-industrial society have pre-occupied art for the past 20 years."⁶⁸ He de-emphasizes the adversarial relationship, strongly in evidence in Videoscape, but acknowledges a tension between broadcast television and art video.

Video is TV that is not allowed on the airwaves, according to curator Bruce Ferguson in Colin Campbell: Media Works. He describes video as the "poor cousin"⁶⁹ of TV and art, the "black sheep" sent away to "Art, Education, or Local Concerns."⁷⁰ In Colin Campbell: Media Works, TV and video are discussed as allies. Ferguson states the similarities; they are both anti-academic, both operate in televisual space; neither are deconstructive. He is discussing the similarities of

⁶⁶ Blouin, 18

⁶⁷ Blouin, 18

⁶⁸ Blouin, 48

⁶⁹ Ferguson, 16

⁷⁰ Ferguson, 16

TV specifically, to the videos of Colin Campbell. Ferguson considers TV within the context of art and cultural theory, making use of its language and frameworks. TV as text, he says, produces something "transient and inaccurate, almost like memory."⁷¹ much like Campbell's work. TV "erases history over and over."⁷² His position is informed by theories of popular culture and cultural studies, establishing a shared ground between television and video within a more broadly defined televisual space. His theoretical position indicates a regularity of aligning forms, as in the borrowing of melodrama form for video production. His curatorial approach to Campbell's work is informed by cultural studies as much as by art historical traditions. Campbell's work is not placed in discrete categories, chronological or otherwise. Rather he self-consciously engages in a critical dialogue with the work, acknowledging its incoherency, and relating to the videos as texts in themselves. Ferguson adds to this his borrowing from television and video discourses, to construct a hybrid space in which to situate Campbell's work.

The relationship of TV to video is not explicitly discussed in Karen Knights' essay, "Imagining the Feminine" in Sara Diamond. Rather, she emphasizes local narratives including personal testimony and oral histories as a means of challenging master narratives. Knights celebrates Diamond's ability to subvert the "constructed mythology of Woman, as represented in history, art, popular and commercial

⁷¹ Ferguson, 18

⁷² Ferguson, 19

culture."⁷³ Yet there is an irony in Knights neglecting to examine, or even mention, Diamond's subversive strategies of dissemination. Neither Diamond's critical writings, nor her ground-breaking use of cable and community access TV are mentioned. For the purposes of the National Gallery catalogue, Knights chooses to ignore the potentially disruptive links forged by Diamond between independent video and "tv-land".

In the same catalogue, Jean Gagnon reasserts the dichotomy of television as fake and video as authentic. He claims TV is characterized by "mock dialogue,"⁷⁴ while video is "participatory."⁷⁵ In order to assert the high art status of video at the National Gallery, Gagnon frames video at a distance from television, echoing the terminology used in *Videoscape* eighteen years earlier.

Furthermore, Gagnon discusses Diamond's work as "reformulating"⁷⁶ the TV viewer within a recreated domestic space, with no acknowledgment of the larger exhibiting institution which predetermines the overall experience of the viewer.

The relationship of video to television in the corpus is an ever-present concern. It makes sense that this relationship be a contentious one. Video challenges the boundaries of high art and popular culture, and a series of institutional assumptions on what

⁷³ Gagnon, 15

⁷⁴ Gagnon, 55

⁷⁵ Gagnon, 55

⁷⁶ Gagnon, 55

constitutes art and cultural production. Video as a medium has forced a shift in curatorial mediation towards constructing a new vocabulary which addresses art practices within a broader cultural context.

One of the limitations of conventional curatorial mediation is its emphasis on the individual producer. Institutions have been reluctant to look at collective production and individual achievement is valued over collective practice. The collectively produced work featured in the National Gallery exhibition *Rebel Girls* was an unusual choice, an exception to the rule. The up-coming Antonio Muntadas exhibition that features an international art star as an exceptional individual, rather than one cultural producer among others, is more in line with the institutionally determined curatorial practice of the National Gallery.

Curator Bruce Ferguson brings the valuable perspective of cultural studies to the discourse on the relationship of broadcast television to video. Unlike art history, cultural studies is not concerned with identifying and historicizing art objects. A cultural studies perspective sees art and mass culture as part of a larger cultural practice. Cultural studies have developed theories that consider art and other aspects of cultural production along-side and in relationship to one another. This theoretical framework opens the discourse to allow Ferguson to consider video, art, and television as members of one extended family. The curatorial mediation in Colin

Campbell: Media Works points to the likenesses of video and broadcast TV.

Sara Diamond presents work that has been broadcast. However, this unusual negotiation Diamond has managed with broadcast television is mentioned only in passing. The Lull Before the Storm was co-produced with Knowledge Network, and demonstrates tensions between broadcast texts and the artist's approach to the video text. The focus of the Karen Knights' article remains with the narratives, and not with the medium within which the narratives are produced. However, the Gagnon article does conflate video with TV viewing, and Diamond's work is contextualized within a domestic space, thus likening video to TV.

The discourse on the relationship of TV to video has changed in the curatorial mediation found in the written texts of the four catalogues. Reference to television has been made in each case; however, the approach to the televisual world has generally failed to track the changes in video culture, including "tv-land," viewing it as monolithic. Reference to video culture gives little idea of the vastness of independent video interventions that have taken place outside the art exhibiting institution. The discourse of this curatorial mediation locates art video and art exhibiting institutions in a central position. Art histories are constructed around this centrality.

II. Notes on Video Culture 1970-92

It is treacherous to set about suggesting any one frame through which to account for the diverse activity that is video culture. The context of video culture has vastly expanded over the last twenty years. This section sketches histories of activities, locating the requirements of independent video production, and art video in particular. They are organized in an order that begins with those institutions most important to supporting independent producers, moving through this inventory to a discussion of consumer video culture.

Independent Distribution

As artist-run independent distribution centres are involved in the selection, categorization, and representation of video. It follows that they are implicated in a process of curatorial mediation. These centres are just one means of distribution, but their establishment has become central to the circulation of video.

Distribution of independent video has been critical to artists and other independents. Without a system of distribution, the impetus of production would be curtailed because its dissemination would be so much more limited. There are eight organizations in Canada devoted entirely or in part to the distribution of independent video: Atlantic Independent Media, Halifax; Videographe, Montreal; Groupe Intervention Vidéo, Montreal; V-tape, Toronto; Art Metropole, Toronto; Video Pool, Winnipeg; Video Out, Vancouver; Women in

Focus, Vancouver. Established in 1974, Art Metropole was the first organization to distribute independent video.⁷⁷

One of the largest distributors is Video Out, a division of Satellite Video Exchange Society. It has been involved in distribution since 1980 and represents work of independent, non-commercial producers. The videos distributed by Video Out fit loosely into the established categories of documentary or video art. Video Out serves a diverse market, ranging from galleries, broadcast and pay TV, to unions and other special interest groups. Video Out is typical of the artist-run distributor in that it maintains a diverse collection of independent work.

V-tape, established in 1982, claims an important role in offering over 1,800 videos for distribution. V-tape facilities are used by researchers, programmers, curators, and students. Although the establishment of video distribution was initially for artists, V-tape represents a mixed community of producers; and as their client list indicates, their videos are being distributed to various communities outside the art world.

The Canadian distribution model differs from the American model that preceded it. In the U.S., early independent distributors were leaning towards a no-fee system of distribution, while in Canada, the notion of paying artists for their work was well-established by the

⁷⁷ Clive Robertson, "Video Structures: Back to Basic Memory," *Parallelogramme*, vol. 12, no. 5, (Summer 1987), 40

early 70's. Art Metropole established the first sales and rentals system and long-time video producer Lisa Steele believes that if the American model of free exchange had been established, the prospects for long-term production by video artists would have been decreased. Steele supported Art Metropole and Canadian Artists' Representation, a relentless advocate of artists' fees, in their insistence on paying artists for their work. "You want a living culture? Then you pay for it."⁷⁸

Distribution - Video Packages

Independent distributors and producers have enthusiastically explored new possibilities outside of the established distribution of the rental or sale of a single video. The initiative to compile videos into groupings often springs from the need to address specific issues.

"Infermental: The First International Magazine on Videocassettes" is a curatorial project which assembles and circulates video on specific themes. Established in Budapest by Gábor Bódy in 1980, it has been based in a different city and country with each edition, and makes an open call for submissions. Each issue has a new editorial/curatorial team. In 1987, the Western Front hosted *Infermental .VI*, the first produced outside Europe. Called "The New World Edition," it was supported by the Canada Council and the Goethe Institute.

⁷⁸ Robertson, *Parallelogramme*, 40

A recent development in curatorial mediation has been to assemble thematic video compilations or anthologies. "Video Against AIDS," made up of a selection of mostly American videos, was collaboratively organized by V-tape in Toronto and the Video Data Bank in Chicago. The videos are contained on three cassettes. An accompanying publication provides a compact listing and description of the work. Both are available through sales or rental on an on-going basis from the distributors. This coordination between curatorial mediation and distribution suggests an economical means of extending distribution to libraries and commercial video outlets, reaching particular communities of interest.

The packaging of "Video Against AIDS" is a hybrid of commercial and grassroots practices, increasing accessibility to the videos themselves. The jacket clearly informs the reader of what is contained within the compilation, thus providing control over selective viewing. V-tape is now producing "Race and Representation," another three-tape package accompanied by a study guide. In these kinds of compilation video packages, there is no dependence on the exhibition institution or the festival circuit. This change of control to the independent distributor also makes for an overlap of art and activist video around specific issues or sites of intervention. The network of interests is different as reflected in the printed text accompanying the compilation. They are not catalogues; rather they are conceptualized as user manuals. They function at a distance from the network of interests and the practice of curatorial mediation which determine exhibition catalogues. They are economically produced,

available to the viewer as part of the rental fee. "Life Like It: Some Halifax Video," a selection of five videos and an accompanying brochure, is an example of a compilation not based on a clearly defined political issue. Organized by independent producer Cathy Quinn in 1986, "Life Like It" is a selection of Halifax independent video production, and was exhibited at a number of artist-run centres.

Video in Books

There are two kinds of books that contribute to the writing of video histories. The anthology Work in Progress: Building Feminist Culture and The Vancouver Anthology: The Institutional Politics of Art are both examples of publications addressing video within the contemporary visual art context. The first includes a chapter by Lisa Steele, "Committed to Memory: Women's Video Art Production in Canada and Quebec" which describes the lineage of women's video production and acts as an inclusive history. The Vancouver Anthology includes an article by Sara Diamond, "Daring Documents: The Practical Aesthetics of Early Vancouver Video", which traces the link between production and activism in exhibiting institutions, cablecasting, and other sites.

The publication Video the Changing World, addresses production in a broad socio-historic context and brings together a series of essays on the use of video in forming alternative communication networks. It was developed from an international symposium "Alternative Communication and Development Alternatives on the Democratic Use

of Video and Television" organized by Vidéo Terre-monde in Montreal. These discussions recognize institutional control of information and communication systems, while asserting a role for video in community development and social change.

Recent writings on AIDS activism, such as A Leap in the Dark, speak to the on-going interest in using video as a tool for social change. The book contains an essay entitled "Still Searching," in which John Greyson situates his own video productions within the vibrant tradition of artist/activist work specifically related to AIDS activism. There is an energetic urgency to this focus. "Any cynical commentator who has lost faith in the efficacy of video as an agent of social change should plug into the AIDS video subculture."⁷⁹ Amongst the accomplishments documented in this essay is "Living With AIDS." The producers, Micheal Balser and John Greyson, took the innovative step of commissioning videos to be cablecast as part of the series. Until recently critical theory has tended to neglect independent video as valuable textual contribution. A Leap in the Dark is an example of the potential for video to function effectively within a thematic published anthology.

Video Festivals

Festivals are an important form of distribution and representation for video. The festival is another site where curatorial mediation is played out. In most cases, festivals program video in a secondary

⁷⁹ John Greyson, "Still Searching," A Leap in the Dark, 95

position to film. As a form of mediation and as an institution, the independent festival is strongly influenced by the commercial model (e.g. Cannes, The Festival of Festivals in Toronto, The World Film Festival in Montreal). Likewise, many of the codes in festival catalogues have been adopted by smaller festivals. Video programming for example is too often relegated to the back pages of the catalogue, rather than being thematically integrated into the overall programming. "Images: Festival of Independent Film and Video" is an exception in that its catalogues over the past five years have integrated video and film into sections organized by theme not medium.

Independent Production Centres

Independent production centres began at the same time as artist-run centres, when funding through the federal programs of Local Initiative Project and Opportunities For Youth made new grassroots organizations possible. Over the years, efforts have been made to provide access to both artists and community-based activists. Training workshops have been an on-going feature of these production centres. They are non-profit production centres, working with a Board of Directors and employees, including a Coordinator or Director. However, tensions have emerged as meagre resources are over-extended by idealistic and ambitious intentions. These centres have tried to keep production costs low, while maintaining a relatively open-door policy. The Centre For Art Tapes, for instance, offers a scholarship program in which it selects five new producers per year and gives them free access to facilities as well as a stipend

to produce a video. On one hand, this ambitious program represents valuable production and community building. On the other it perpetuates the pattern of unrealistic expectations vis a vis chronic underfunding. Independent production centres located in the lesser-funded provinces are particularly susceptible to this pattern.

The administrative structure can become rigid and highly bureaucratized, due to the demands of organizational assumptions and the funding system. These production centres have been formed out of a need to resist dominant culture, while caught in a position of permanent imbalance. Manoeuvring through the ever-changing technology and the perceived need to keep up with it, adds another tension. A counter-institutional position is difficult to maintain in such circumstances, and independent production centres are hard-pressed to resist the perceived stability of institutionalization.

Artists' Organizations

Artists' organizations provide a degree of stability and longevity to artist-run centres. There are two main national organizations representing artist-run centres: ANNPAC, and the Independent Film and Video Alliance. There is no single organization dedicated exclusively to video, and video producers and production centres tend to belong to one or both of the above. These organizations support the interests of artists by acting as clearing-houses, and connecting centres across the country. They also serve as lobbyists for government policy that represents the interests of their memberships. Staff and boards often operate in an atmosphere of

insecurity, funding and policy often being constant concerns. These organizations support independent distribution and production centres, specifically with the ANNPAC publication Parallelogramme, a valuable quarterly available in every artist-run centre.

Outside the artist-run network of resources, consumer video has recently developed rapidly and must be taken into account as influential to independent video production and dissemination. Home-video recording and viewing has become accessible to an extent unimaginable twenty years ago. The parallel development of the video rental outlets and related artist-run distributors have contributed to a rapidly expanding video culture, which goes far beyond "tv-land." The Rodney King episode illustrates the powerful subversive potential of home-video. In fact, consumer video culture is both subversive and innovative in ways which video artists have been slow to recognize. Given the expanding consumer developments, why is there not a proliferation of home videos by artists? The Videoscape catalogue provides a clue in that independent art video is discussed in opposition to broadcast television. In that catalogue, a dichotomy is stated whereby art video is situated in opposition to television. The narrow and obsolete view of a videoscape, informed by modernist theory, continues to inform the production and distribution of independent video.

Home Video Recording

On the front page of Montreal's The Gazette, July 13, 1992, Jack Moore, a Pima Indian, is pictured wearing traditional dress at the

Kahnawake powwow, holding a video camera as he records other performers. The portable video camera has made video recording accessible to a much larger sector of the population than ever before. During the last ten years, prices have decreased while quality has increased. The former "broadcast quality" barrier is no longer rigid. Student revolts in Tiananman Square, videotaped by non-professionals, made it to prime-time TV. The Rodney King episode, that ultimately resulted in the L.A. riots of April 1992, now stands as an icon. In a 1991 *Newsweek*⁸⁰ article, video surveillance by camcorders is argued to be influencing the judicial system by changing the nature of evidence. The same article refers to a case of video entrapment. A man is harassed by a teenage neighbour apparently because the teen believes the man is gay. The man installs a camcorder in order to record an example of this harassment. After reporting the incident to police, the man gives the tape to KPIX-TV, which broadcasts it widely in the Bay Area. The *Newsweek* article notes that 14 million camcorders are in circulation in the U.S. DIVA-TV (Damned Interfering Video Activists) in New York record how police respond to AIDS activists at demonstrations. They are met by police who carry their own cameras to record events. This instance provides an image of the camcorder as weapon. The impact of camcorders is not so much in the camera itself, but with the strategies of dissemination. At a point when access to the technology is no longer a barrier, the question of devising effective strategies of dissemination becomes key.

⁸⁰ Melinda Beck, "Video Vigilantes," *Newsweek*, 22 July, 1991, 42.

These are among the multitude of practices spawned by the introduction of the camcorder, blurring the lines between amateur and professional production. Surprisingly, artists have remained outside these developments, sticking to the practices associated with professional video production. The introduction of the camcorder on a grand scale and the resulting production has challenged the assumptions of professional video production. For traditional cultural producers, artists and independent producers, this raises the question of what exactly constitutes cultural production.

VCR /Video Rental Outlets

The recurring tension between the art institution and the larger culture reoccurs in the relationship between art video culture and the rapid technological changes in home video technology. The proliferation of television stations, the availability of video recording technology, and the explosion of the video rental market, compose a series of new sites, as yet largely unexplored by artists and other independents working with video.

Now, at any given moment, viewers are not only watching network television. They may be watching a pre-recorded PBS documentary, or a rented movie. They may be watching an NFB film borrowed from the library, their cousin's wedding, or their kids playing at the beach. But chances are that they are not watching an independent artist's video.

VCR technology has developed rapidly and become a common household fixture. Although independent producers, artists and related organizations have made use of the technology, little attention has been given to the impact of the VCR as a site on video production. As is the case with the camcorder, the VCR has not been fully considered in terms of the distribution of independent video. Independents have often celebrated their marginal status, yet this can limit movement to other sites and possibilities for production and dissemination. Strategic interventions are possible without compromise. Indeed, unless independents seize upon these new sites and redefine marginal status they risk slipping unnecessarily into obscurity.

Interventions in Broadcasting/Cablecasting

In the article, "Daring Documents: The Practical Aesthetics of Early Vancouver Video,"⁸¹ Sara Diamond outlines the history of video production in Vancouver, specifically the struggle of community groups and artists to gain access to cablecasting. Hard lobbying to gain cooperative licensing in the early 70's was unsuccessful in Vancouver, and artists and community activists were thereby excluded from cable distribution.

In other instances, some artists were able to make use of this site. Early programming includes "W.O.R.K.S. (We Ourselves Roughly Know Something)" in Calgary and "The Gina Show" in Vancouver. There

⁸¹ Douglas, 47

were no resources to sustain these initiatives. More recently the public access cable series "Toronto - Living with AIDS," broadcast in 1990-91, received federal and provincial support. The independent video distributor V-tape provided an important base of support to this project.

There are other recent examples of independent video producers making use of cable access. During the Gulf War, Paper Tiger television in New York, and its associate Deep Dish TV, produced "The Gulf Crisis TV Project," a series of ten half-hour programmes. The programmes were assembled from 130 independently produced videos, and were broadcast in 25 American cities, and in several other countries internationally. Anti-war groups lobbied local cable stations, 300 hundred of whom picked the programmes up via satellite. The collaboration between professional and non-professional producers, and between producers and activist groups, resulted in the effective distribution of this oppositional video, and suggests openings for future interventionist practices.⁸²

Another attempt to incorporate video productions from outside the broadcasting institution of the CBC took place with Prime Time Video, a 1984 collaboration with the Mendel Gallery Art Gallery in Saskatoon. Five videos were produced using CBC facilities and were aired on five consecutive nights after the early-evening news. They were also screened at the Toronto Festival of Festivals, and at art

⁸² Philip Lewis, "Video as Counter-Information," (Research Project, Journalism 500, Concordia University, 1991)

galleries across the country. The substantial catalogue includes five essays that differ in their forecasts for the relationship between video and television. John Hanhardt, curator of film and video at the Whitney Museum of Art in New York, asserts that "the intervention of video in all of its variety of forms of expression into television can reshape the broadcast landscape."⁸³ Bruce Ferguson unabashedly declares the project a failure, claiming that the artists come across as oddballs making wierd, inaccessible work. He does not agree that parachuting video artists into the TV format can be done successfully and prefaces his criticism with the assertion that TV is a medium dominated by centralized and authoritarian telecommunications systems: "Video, which could have been an 'appropriate technology,' a means of interactive communication, instead occupies a limited area as a means of production for marginal groups."⁸⁴

While these examples illustrate some of the difficulties inherent in broadcasting independent video, they also point to possibilites for locating the medium outside the exhibiting institution.

Conclusions - Prying Open Institutional Assumptions

The corpus indicates that exhibiting institutions have generally failed to account for the developments in the larger culture. This is not surprising given the history of museological practices which have their root in 19th century conventions. These practices leave little room for accounting for developments outside the institution.

⁸³ MacKay, 5

⁸⁴ MacKay, 16

The position adopted in *Videoscape* is one that distances art video from the institution of broadcast TV, at a time when that medium dominated video culture in a particularly monolithic fashion. In the later *Colin Campbell: Media Works*, Ferguson draws upon cultural studies to position video and television within the same televisual terrain, de-emphasizing delineations separating art video from and above the complex and rapidly developing framework of video culture.

Conventions in curatorial practice have enforced the isolation of video dissemination. In order to appropriate video as an art medium, exhibiting institutions have severed art video from the larger body of video culture.

In the early 70's it made sense to claim a marginal space for art video in relation to broadcast television. However, the changes in video culture raise questions about the usefulness of this marginal identity as a subversive strategy. Independent producers must devise strategies which allow them to occupy, rather than stand apart from sites within the video culture viewed as a whole. Maintaining marginality as defined in the early '70s has required creating institutions whose stability is virtually impossible.

Maintaining these institutions has become a primary focus for so-called marginal cultural production. What is required is a renewed sense of interventionism providing a more fluid approach to the changing production and distribution sites.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

The catalogue is the single most important publication documenting curatorial practice. At the same time it reveals the institutional interests and processes at work at the moment of its production. On one level, curatorial mediation is guided by the conception of a particular exhibition. However, this mediation process is informed by a network of institutional interests which regulates the systems of representation. Curatorial mediation is a negotiation process and the catalogue is evidence of the power relationships and tensions as they are played out through traces in written and image texts.

The site of video exhibition catalogues represents an intersection of two forms of cultural production, independent video and art publications. Both are important for intervention by cultural producers. I have therefore situated my analysis within a broader search for strategies to challenge institutional authority and control over cultural production.

I conclude with some comments on the position of independent video within the network of institutional interests, the catalogue in relation to other art publications, and suggested strategies in distribution practices which challenge exhibiting institution's systems of regulation and reconfigure networks of interest to better serve cultural producers.

I Video and the Exhibiting Institution

From its introduction in the early 70's, video posed a challenge to exhibiting institutions' structures and practices. As a new art medium, there was no established system for its representation. It was not easily or quietly accommodated into existing exhibition practices, which tend to suppress and silence contentious artist-activist video. The tendency of the catalogue is to co-opt video through representation, in order to bolster the interests of the institution. From the beginning, video was a loud-mouthed medium demanding audio as well as visual space, and initially often documenting or otherwise involved in performance, another troublesome contemporary art medium for the exhibiting institution. Since the early 70's, in large measure due to feminist practices, video has been concerned with political intervention and this has been practiced by artists and community activists, upsetting the notion of the artist as defined by exhibiting institutions.

More recently video has been going through rapid technological changes and expanding into a video culture including the development of home video technology. These changes have altered the conception of video as an exclusive medium open only to professionals. Art video discourse in exhibition catalogues has generally lagged behind the political developments in the use of the medium by artists, and the technological transformations it has undergone. These changes have generally not informed curatorial practice in relation to video. For example, video exhibitions are not being packaged and made available on loan for home viewing from galleries, and artists are not presenting video sketches made with home video equipment in exhibitions.

Cultural studies has the potential to locate art video outside exhibiting institutions and within a broader field of cultural production. Bruce Ferguson in *Colin Campbell: Media Works* successfully applies the investigative tools of cultural studies to open up a new vocabulary for locating art video. Ferguson sees the binary division of art video and broadcast television, documented in *Videoscape*, reinforced through institutional practices, as a hindrance to video's development, helping to keep it in the position of poor cousin to TV. These developments have revealed the limitations of traditional art history and a curatorial practice concerned primarily with locating the art object within the context of art worlds.

The notion of professionalism has been put to use by exhibiting institutions to co-opt disruptive or contentious art work. In the mid-seventies the representation of video was less heavily regulated. Institutional interests are by no means absent in *Videoscape*, but the negotiation itself is more transparent. However, *Videoscape* is not presented by the contemporary curators of the Art Gallery of Ontario, but by Education and Extension, a less central department. In the catalogue, the tension between the exhibiting institution and the artist are expressed in the artists' self-representations. The artists and their work are inconsistent and boistrous, unlike the later professional packaging of Sara Diamond. Eighteen years later there is greater institutional investment in video, which is no longer considered a marginal art medium. It is curatorial mediation that negotiates the network of interests and is responsible for the representation

of video in catalogues. Professionalization works to reconfigure cultural production within the exhibiting institution.

II Publications

As seen through the discussions of Sara Diamond and Colin Campbell: Media Works, it is possible to produce catalogues that are more critical and extend the form of the catalogue, even when the production takes place through a large exhibiting institution. Colin Campbell: Media Works presents a number of different writers using a variety of forms including the script, the interview, and the critical essay, and the artist speaking in the first person. In it artwork is interpreted for the catalogue as a particular form, different from the video itself.

In summary, what do video exhibition catalogues achieve? They provide documentation long after the exhibition has been dismantled. They tangibly measure production and are a means of having work documented and circulated for the art exhibiting institution and the artist, legitimizing both. They document the discourse in practices of curatorial mediation. For the viewer, they provide a framework to contextualize the work, and a souvenir. To fellow cultural producers catalogues provide a source of information and documentation. Exhibition catalogues are limited by the particular network of interests that regulate their form and content. They tend to represent the artwork narrowly, often revealing more of the institution than the work itself. A final limitation of the catalogue is its relative economy within the overall budget of an exhibition. Compared to the artist fee or other costs of an exhibition, the price of catalogue production is immense.

Though resources for exhibition production are limited, catalogues are still frequently the favored form of documentation of an exhibition. I suggest a shift in emphasis to the production of books when they are co-productions of artists and curators, and at the other end of the production scale, inexpensively produced ephemeral publications.

Few catalogues sell well or are well distributed. An exception was *Vidéo*, published by Artexite in 1986 which was a bestseller in the art-publication context. Book-like at over 260 pages in length, it was made in conjunction with an international video conference and includes forty-nine contributions. While documenting exhibitions taking place in conjunction with the conference, it offered a variety of perspectives and an abundance of information. Another more recent and notable publication is the Vancouver Anthology: the Institutional Politics of Art, a co-production of Or Gallery and Talonbooks, which critically frames the project of documentation. Written by artists, critics, and curators from the artist-run network, it gives an social-historical account and context to art production in Vancouver. Although there is more social history to be written of independent video production in Canada, the critical framing of this kind of an intervention needs to be considered.

I also suggest the production of publications with exhibiting institutions contributing at the periphery, rather than centrally, as in co-publications between these institutions and other publishers. A function of this form of institutional production is the change in meaning of art from objects to be interpreted to texts to be read. Publications that realize this shift include

Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures (1990) and Blasted Allegories: An Anthology of Writings by Contemporary Artists (1987), both co-productions by the New Museum of Contemporary Art and MIT Press. The recently-defunct NSCAD Press serves as another model for book production. This educational-institution base of production was much more stable than, for instance Artex, who produce and co-produce books, but depend on the grant system in order to do so. Cultural producers would be well-served by University-based presses, preferably aligned with a department or school teaching cultural production. The NSCAD Press was the college's primary means of national and international publicity during the '70s, thus further legitimizing its production of books.

Publications that are intended as ephemera should be produced at minimum expense, while maintaining distribution. This form can later be compiled into more long-lasting forms of documentation. Publication downscaling, includes the possibility of liner notes in video packages, as produced for Video Against Aids. There is a rich past of economical projects initiated by artists and artist-run centres in the representation of video art. For example, a supplement to the artists' periodical could be a venue for a catalogue. In 1979, a twenty-six page catalogue, "The Second Independent Open," was included in the January 1980 issue of Euse.

III Distribution Practices

In concluding, I would also suggest strategies for distribution of video. Distribution needs to be conceptualized with an understanding of the networks of interests within the exhibiting institution, and how these can be reconfigured to realize improved distribution. For example, the co-production of a series of video exhibitions compiled to 1/2 inch video for distribution through sale to libraries and video distribution outlets.

Cablecasting can be reconsidered with awareness of artists' experiences of the '70s and '80s. A way to acknowledge and learn from work, already done in this area is to interview artists who have been involved. It could be productive to interview John Greyson and Micheal Balsar, who originated the Living with AIDS project.

The festival is the other mainstay for distribution of independently produced video. Its networks of interest inform both programming and publications. Image and Nation, in Montreal, and Images, in Toronto, have moved away from distinguishing film and video in their programming; however, this is unusual. This intervention into the privileging of film over video, thus re-inventing the festival institution, could go further.

IV Thesis as Intervention.

I intended that this thesis would bring me closer to understanding the complex power relationships involved in the production of video exhibition catalogues. Now I want to come closer to the artists and to the politics of production and distribution not only as they are documented in catalogues. I want to contribute to validating video art production, and to seeing and

accounting for it within video culture. Furthering this project would involve an ethnographic study of video artists and curators, piecing together stories and memories of artists and curators, of moments that include communities of production, as well as further work with publications.

Curatorial practice and the exhibiting institution need to be reconfigured, and video as a medium has served to point out the construction of institutional practices as they currently exist.

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