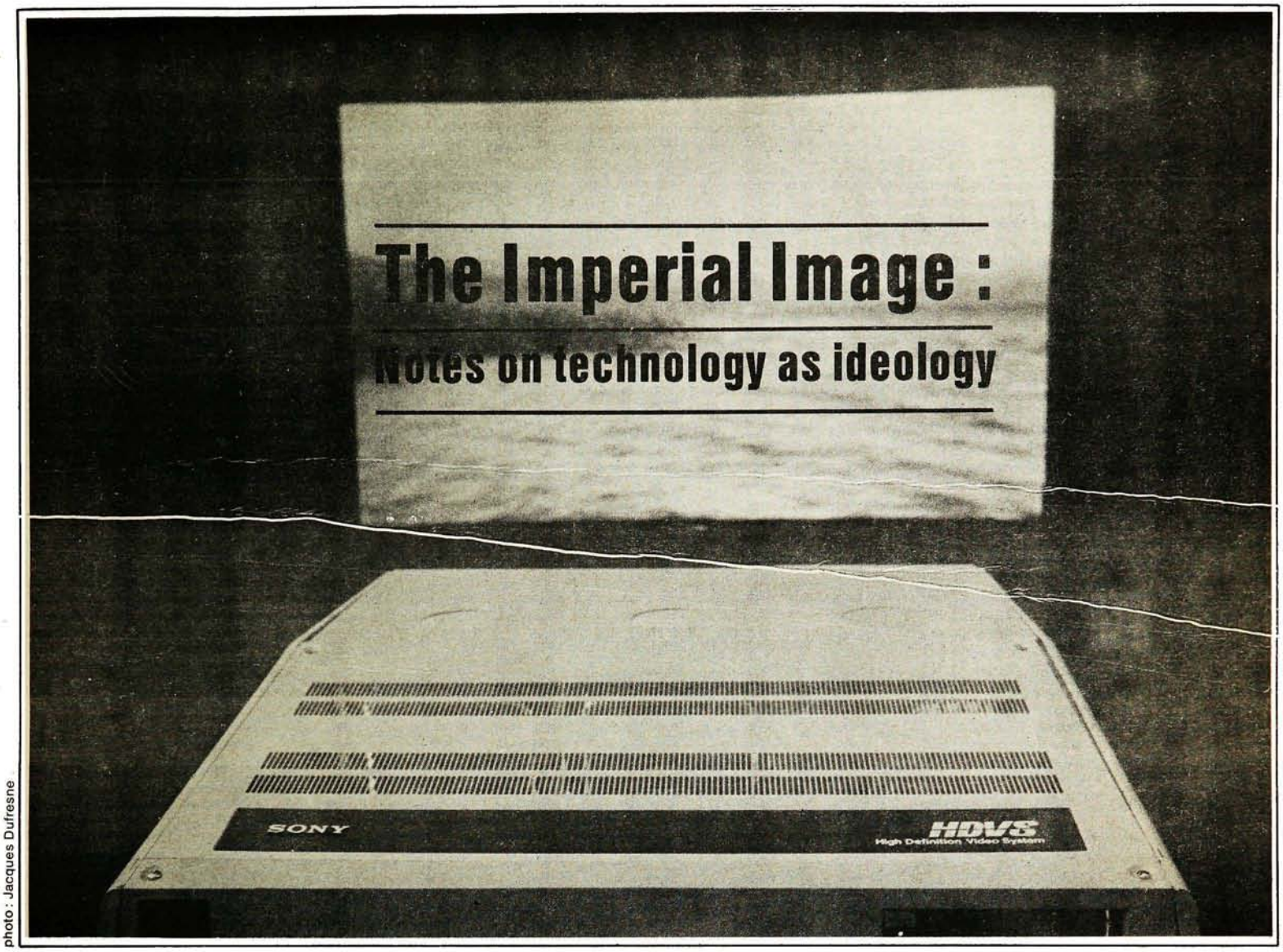

photo : Jacques Dufresne

The Imperial Image :

Notes on technology as ideology

by Michael Dorland

"Technology is the metaphysics of the 20th century" – **Ernst Jünger**

"No mention is made of the fact that the basis on which technology acquires power over society is the power of those whose economic hold over society is greatest. A technological rationale is the rationale of domination itself. It is the coercive nature of society alienated from itself. Automobiles, bombs and movies keep the whole thing together until their leveling element shows its strength in the very wrong which it furthered. It has made the technology of the culture industry no more than the achievement of standardization..."

– Max Horkheimer & T.W. Adorno

The *pièce de résistance* in the exhibits room at the recent (Nov. 27-Dec. 2) Convergence forum on the new video/film technology in Montreal was the Sony/NHK-developed High Definition Television System (HDTV). Before this array of prototype cameras, VTRs, switchers and display devices, crowds of curious onlookers gathered in awed silence, gaping at the imperial image of the future front-projected onto a 120" curved screen. If the more venturesome on-lookers were subsequently eager to ask the Man from Sony such sensible consumer-questions as "How much does it cost?", "Where can I get one?" and "When will it be available?", the fact that this is a system still-in-development – and so such questions as yet do not have answers, other than at present the HDTV costs in the vicinity of $1 million – offered a unique perspective on the entire development process of imaging systems, and the cultural implications.

On one level, the HDTV appears simply like a more technically advanced type of television, employing 1125 scanning lines instead of the current North American broadcast standard of 525 lines. But such a definition is misleading. Writing in "The SMPTE Journal," February 1984, Richard Green and Dwight Morss III offer a definition of HDTV that is far more suggestive.

"HDTV is a new medium. It is not exactly television or film. It is much better than conventional television and as (20th Century Fox TV producer) Glen Larson says, 'It is, for the first time, a quality alternative to 35mm film.' The entertainment impact and feeling of realism which results from large, sharp, wide-screen pictures accompanied by high-quality sound is a new experience. The challenge today for those in the technical and production communities is to bring to the public this new innovative technology."

The key elements in this definition are worth repeating :

- better than conventional TV
- a first-time quality alternative to 35mm film
- that offers a new experience in terms of entertainment impact and greater realism
- and which it is the task of the technical and production communities to bring to the public.

What makes these statements so revealing is that they uncover the inner workings of an ideological complex : they state a defining set of beliefs about the relationships between media and experience, between technology and entertainment, and ultimately between types of human communities (producers and consumers), all of which can be described as varieties of contents. For what such an ideological complex does not state, and what precisely makes it ideological, is its own formal assumption ; namely, the underlying determinant of corporate organization whose evolution can be grasped in one compelling word : standardization. To quote Charles Darwin's grim technological credo, as the Convergence program did in its single yet telling literary reference, "Technology evolves, language adapts."

And so what was most interesting about the HDTV was less the thing itself than the mammoth corporate battle going on behind-the-scenes over the production and distribution standards that have to be agreed upon before HDTV can be produced, marketed, and only then, within those parameters, used. At issue in this global battle between the Eastern empire of the image and the Western, largely American, equivalent is the development of universal or worldwide production standards, particularly in studio production, that would permit increased international exchange of programs and commonality of production equipment ; that is, ever-greater standardization.

Developed 12 years ago by NHK (the public-sector Japan Broadcasting Corp.) the HDTV system now closely involves such Japanese corporate giants as Sony, Matsushita (Panasonic) and Ikegami, and some observers fear that these conglomorates will within the next year attempt to impose their production standards without waiting to come to agreement with their U.S. manufacturing rivals. NHK director of programming Mikio Suzuki politely steered away from this question when it was raised towards the end of the conference.

Once the standard is agreed upon by the manufacturers involved, says Sony's Jacques Proulx, suggesting that this was

nobody's business but the manufacturers themselves, "production and marketing of HDTV will happen very rapidly, within a year."

The nature of media – not to use a more apt metaphysical word like essence – is to conform, not converge.

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If the history of modern media can be taken as an upward spiral of conforming disparities (light and dark in the photograph, motion and sound in the film, solitude and mass in the radio, and commodities and individuals in television), the central question faced in the introduction of a new medium becomes that of making it conform to what already exists. In the perspective of a theorist like McLuhan, the formula for conformation was deceptively simple : the new form took the old as its content. From the perspective of a conference like Convergence as one for working professionals – that is, within a technical-ideological complex – it would seem to follow that the new medium, HDTV, successfully represents the formal digestion of the old form, 35mm film, by the broadcasting system. The virtue of Convergence, however, was to underline that the digestive process of advancing media-development is not without biliousness, cramps, and attacks of gas. If McLuhan's ghost, like Banquo's, planed over the conference as a whole, it was one of the rare dissenting voices, that of American video artist Bill Viola, who dared invoke – and even so apologetically – the late Canadian thinker. Evoking McLuhan, Viola described the process of media development as a Darwinian "survival of the least imaginative" :

"We are moving forwards to a vast homogenization, and the key player is the digital computer. Computers are just codes, a means to translate two disparate things once they are 'conformed' into the same underlying code. The difference is not between film and video, but between video and toast. Computers can make anything look like anything else, can make video look like film. And in an age when copies look better than originals, things are going to get even more confusing."

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Plunging into the confusion, one entered Convergence by way of Harry Addicott's Primer In Electronic Imaging Systems on the afternoon of day one. A compressed version of a week-long course Addicott gives to Canadian Broadcasting Corp. technicians, the primer focussed less on electronic imaging than, as Addicott put it, "describing the present colour TV system, the NTSC system, for laymen."

The difficulty with any technical language (or for that matter, technical system) is that it is closed : you can only approach it on its own terms, that is, technically. And despite Addicott's heroic efforts to be as non-technical as possible, his largely filmmaking audience was rapidly so awash in the jargon of another production process as to be thoroughly confused.

And yet Addicott's primer was utterly essential as an approach to media development precisely because it grappled with the issue of making a new technical system (here colour-TV) compatible with the one already existing (black & white TV). In other words, the uniformization of standards acts as the conduit for the formal development from one medium to another. Given the present ubiquity of colour television, the technical deployment required to make the colour signal receivable through single-wire to black-and-white receivers becomes an ironic confirmation of McLuhan's formula on the relationship between media form and content. And what is true in the transition from black-and-white to colour was already true for the earlier technical absorption of film by black and white TV. Addicott noted, for example, that black-and-white TV's aspect ratio of 4:3 was opted for, solely "because films were going to be shown."

If conceptually the development process from one medium to the next passes through standardization, a similar conforming process recurs internally. Addicott termed it "normalization" or the more or less arbitrary creation of systemic sub-sets that are infinitessimally quantifiable or fragmentable according to a dominant code. For instance, the colour on a colour television is not a property of anything shown : it is a conformed quantity of information articulated by an information system. Driven by the technical imperatives of standardization, normalization and averaging, television can be grasped as a light-based information system of phenomenally reductive power, particularly adept at outwitting the human eye. In this sense the Italian semiologist Gianfranco Bettitini is absolutely dead-on in defining television as "more a complex and extraordinary information machine, geared to cultural and scientific vulgarization, than it is an instrument for autonomous expression and artistic communication."

As Addicott put it, "If you're used to film you'll find the TV system just doesn't have the same range. If you're shooting for TV, bear in mind the limitations of the system, which is actually not so limiting any more."

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The rock video, at least on the level of content, would appear to be one formal construct that transcends the limitations of mainstream TV programming. But, at the panel on Music Video : Where Do We Go From Here ?, on the morning of day two, Warner Bros. Records vice-president/video Jo Bergman traced a brief history of the music video since the corporately "dangerous and undesirable but popular" rock'n'roll explosion of the mid-'50s to today's prevalence "of the music video style in advertising, movies, and TV series." Observing that "the rock video has plundered the history of movies and commercials," Bergman noted the rise of rock-video consumerism, largely through the vehicle of MTV whose recent buy-out of Ted Turner's music video channel and upcoming launch of a second channel she found worrisome. Bergman also noted a close correlation between commercials and rock videos whose producers and directors "are often the same," pointing to the ZZ Top video for "Legs" by commercial director Tim Newman, and how it was subsequently conformed with mainstream TV as an episode of *St. Elsewhere*. She also showed the Randy Newman video for "I Love LA" and how it was recut and recast to become an advert for the Los Angeles TV station KABC. (It would turn up in a third version as a 1984 Clio-winning commercial in the apparel category for Nike.) Bergman's conclusion : "Anything can be made to sell anything."

A less pessimistic view of music video was articulated by Canadian specialty channel MuchMusic's director of music programming John Martin who termed the "very successful" pay-service "the world's best-kept secret in rock video."

"It's been a long, slow process bringing video to Canada," Martin said, adding. "It's a wide-open area and we can do anything," because it was unlikely that the Canadian government would license another service : "We can turn into a genuine Canadian music service." However, Martin too admitted that "MTV's imperialism scares me : they are the arbiters of morals and taste in the U.S." But like most of the Canadians on the often American-dominated panels at Convergence, Martin's concerns seemed dwarfed in the larger international context.

Juno-winning Canadian rock video producer director Robert Quartly described rock video as "a huge industry that's getting more and more competitive." Of himself he said : "I am hired. I don't have complete control. I'm restricted to the music I'm given. But the primary thing is that I'm trying to sell an artist. Video is the strongest promotional thing in the industry," Quartly said, stressing the predominance of selling over entertainment. "I'm selling an artist, but I put in entertainment."

The driving impetus in RV, according to Quartly is that you "always have to be new and different. There's this urgency not to be the same. We don't want to do a clip that was done two years ago : it needs to be new."

Quartly screened a number of RV's he's directed, the most striking of which was for the Canadian group Platinum Blonde's song "It Doesn't Really Matter", which is an extraordinarily bleak visualization of the effacement of human beings by meaningless images.

British rock video writer Keith Williams reiterated Quartly's point about being new and different, terming the formula as "the least obvious way to do the obvious." For Williams the approach to rock video was contrapuntal, "to create the maximum contrasts," and have the visuals "almost contradict the song", which he illustrated with a video he wrote for the Supertramp song "It's Raining Again" where it doesn't rain until the very end. This video, Williams noted, in which the heart-broken young principal gets beaten up in a Los Angeles alley, was "censored by the BBC", the scene being deemed too violent. Concluding with a final video for Teddy Prendergast's "So Sad The Song", which was shot in Mexico, Williams felt that "what we were doing there was shooting a silent movie. With the rock video we've come full-circle."

Los Angeles-based "image doctor", editor Larry Bridges chose two videos to illustrate the capabilities of electronic doctoring to advance the editing idiom, which only raised unexpected problems. In the first, a rock video for Rod

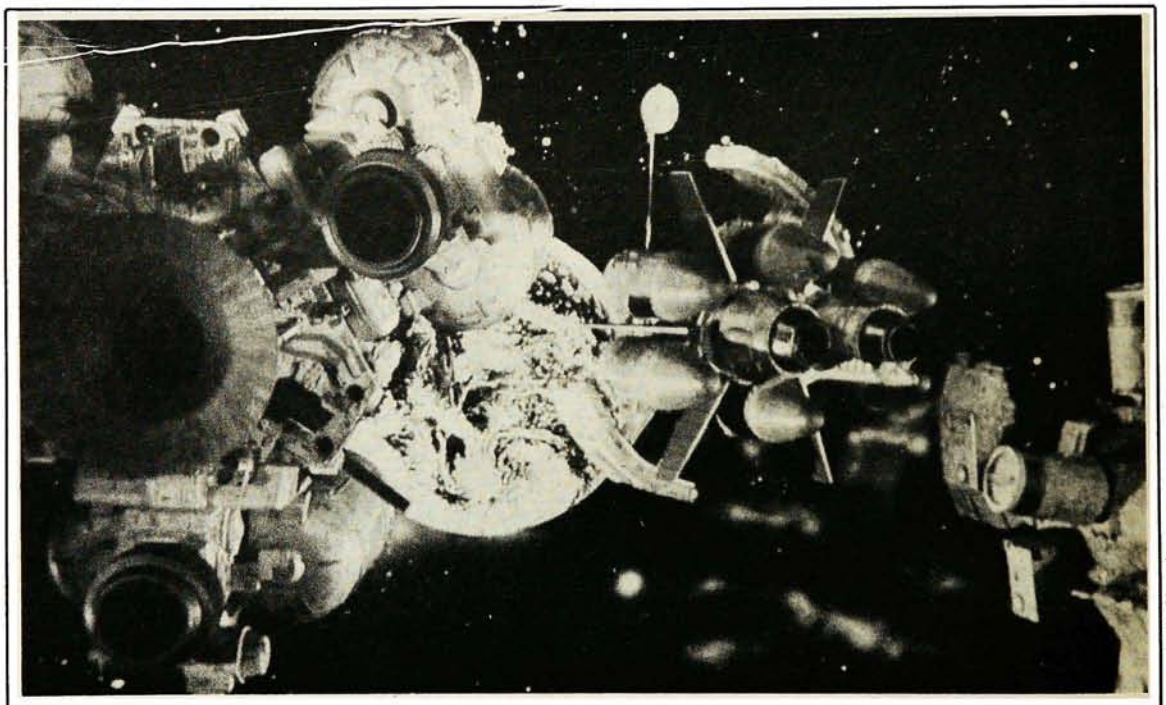


photo : Lois Siegel

● The high definition television image : technology as the ultimate invasion of the body-snatchers

Stewart's song "The Baby Jane Case," director Steve Barron made extensive use of posterization in shooting the video, a process of image-fragmentation that just seemed to disintegrate both singer and song. Could Bridges bring the thing back to life with electronic magic? The result is probably debatable; certainly the electronic editing gave an otherwise fairly empty tape a tighter context, but the demonstration was far from conclusive.

Bridges' second piece of work for The Gap Band's song "Stop The Mother" was a stunning illustration of what Jo Bergman meant by rock video's ability to plunder film. If on one level Bridges did transform a dull piece of concert footage into a surreal extravanganza, his unackowledged and acute indebtedness to Godfrey Riggio's film masterpiece on technology, ***Koyanisqaatsi,*** raises yet again the serious issue of the relationship between an impoverished content left light-years behind by quantum advances in technical formality.

The business complement to that position was sternly put by RCA Video Productions vice-president, program production, Chuck Mitchell who observed categorically that "the short-form video clip is created to advertise and sell records. That is its sole ***raison d'être :*** to advertise and promote audio records. Economically promo clips are red ink: we're still talking about an expanding cost-center, not a profit center."

For Mitchell, music video "is not a business; it doesn't pay for itself. You have to live and die by the rules and those rules are rising market costs and product glut."

In a scathing attack on "the limited on-camera talent" of performing groups, "the slam-bang attitude to craft and filmmaking from the timeframe exigencies of record manufacturing," to the "insatiable appetite of music services for whom virtually anything goes because they get the stuff for free," Mitchell argued for music video's serious commercialization – "for the health of the form."

While he mentioned issuing video clips for sale as singles, as well as longer 30-minute versions, priced at $14.98, the chief thrust of Mitchell's interest focussed on the 60-90-minute music video feature which would provide "a conjunction of narration and technique that could be widely marketed for recoupement and profitability."

For Mitchell, the music video feature "with its high impact and immediate visceral aspects," "its dreamlike convergence of music and images with narrative to synthesize the information presented, "that such a powerful compound is being wasted is galling.

"We have to move beyond the endless barrage of surrealistic gruel to the next systematic advance that cinema has to offer. The music video is not yet fully experiencing our age."

●

"This whole complex, this whole history of technology provides a history of the transformation of images, through formalist, surrealist, cubist and abstract forms. If technology is the expression of the end of modernism, are we then witnessing the end of modernism as film comes up against electronics?

"All this technology, and our captivation with image-control and image-making, is not enough. The new technologies and sciences have let artists rethink the relationships between ourselves and technology in an active dialogue of inquiry and discussion. All this hardware is to be transformed and rethought."

The speaker was John Hanhardt, curator of film and video at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York and moderator of the video artists' panel At The Avant-Garde: Expanding The Visual Language, on the afternoon of day two. Present too was Toronto videomaker Ian Murray, whom Hanhardt described as "our Canadian on the panel."

The American artists – Chilean-born but New York-based Juan Downey, Mitchell Kriegman, Bill Viola, Mary Lucier, and Dan Reeves – all seemed to be suffering from varying degrees of what one could term technological trauma. In some instances its origins were clear enough: the Vietnam War for Dan Reeves; a great anger at the cultural establishment's sellout of the imagination in the case of Viola; a saddened resignation before her epoch from Mary Lucier; with Downey and Kriegman, the source was more obscure. The lone Canadian, on the other hand, was much more technologically positive, at least in terms of video's emancipatory potential among community groups and women-artists.

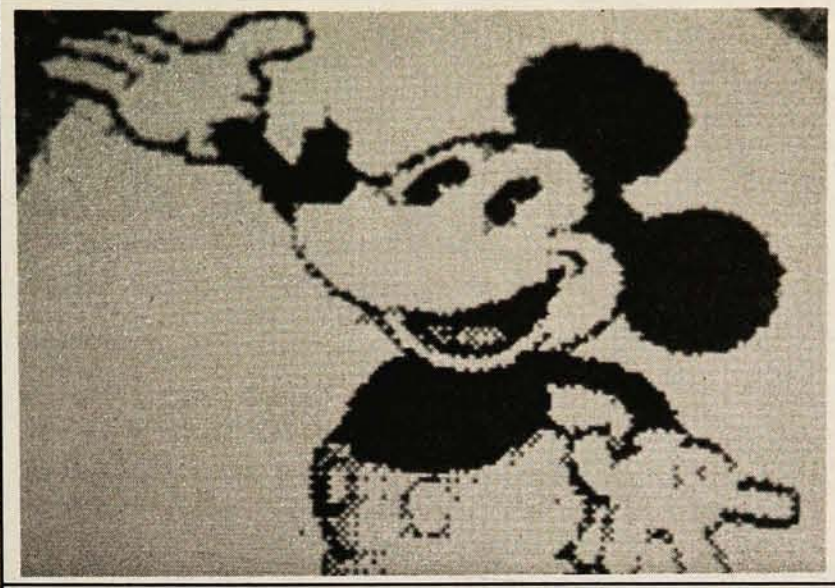
Downey presented a tape, striking by its use of computer animation, entitled ***Shifters,*** a work-in-progress that is part of a series called The Thinking Eye. "It explores space as an instrument of cultural thought," he explained, "the space of cultural context. The tape explores videodisc aesthetics, not technology, and it is structured in modular units according to my own stream of consciousness. My intention is to produce a clash of interpretation, an opposition of content and image so strong that it should contain a spark that is open to interpretation."

For Mary Lucier, who showed two tapes ***Ohio to Giverney: Memories of Light*** and ***Winter Garden,*** both of which contrasted natural and technological environments, the question was: "Is there any way the technology can rescue itself?" In her video work since the mid-'70s she found she had moved from destructive attempts ("burning out vidicon tubes") at pushing the technology of image-making beyond its limits to meditations on "the two levels of technological environment – where it had brought us to, and where it was going." More and more, she said, she was finding a profound affinity in her videowork with the problematics of late 19th-century American painting particularly as it attempted to come to terms with the new industrial-technological context.

That new environment, particularly in its redefinition of the nature of the human as an extension of the machine, was the subject of Bill Viola's ***Anthem,*** a despairing celebration of the image as the invasion of the body-snatchers. In an empassioned denunciation of technological alienation, Viola came down firmly on the side of the artistic project, reaffirming a vital commitment to art despite the growing number of "detached and disenfranchised artist," despite the stifling cultural bureaucraties, despite the collective blockage of the imagination.

For Dan Reeves, who showed four stunning exerpts from tapes entitled ***Arches, Smothering Dreams*** and ***Sabdha*** and several seconds from a shattering untitled work-in-progress, his video work is an exploration of poetic language, "a search for the sacred." But perhaps what gives Reeves' work such extraordinary eloquence was his sense, as he put it, "of living in what Hindu cosmology calls Kalayuga, the final age," – and even so seeking for the Rilkean "hand that holds up all this falling."

Nova Scotia-raised but now Toronto-based video artist Ian Murray, who showed a tape entitled ***Come On Touch It*** which attempts to satirize an American-developed personality test, found



● Computer animation: incredible, but expensive photo: Lois Siegel

Animation and the computer

It is becoming more and more evident that film is being overrun by video. The products are developing so fast that you'll even have trouble these days buying Super 8 film cameras in some photo stores in Montreal which used to specialize in supplying this equipment.

It seems that supply and demand has created a market centering on home video units, and this demand is pushing some film equipment into extinction.

The overall process was examined in detail at Convergence, the recent international conference on film and video held in Montreal, featuring 85 guest-speakers from all over the world, and especially from the States.

There were sessions on production techniques in electronic cinematography, computer-assisted editing, music-video, and computer-generated imagery, to name only a few categories.

The section on animation and computer-generated imagery showed a wide range of possibilities. I saw a series of very short videos created by individual students at an animation workshop at UCLA which were rather rough because they were made on Apple II or Atari computers that had been donated to the school.

But then the "big guys" from Los Angeles showed their stuff. If you work with expensive Cray computers like they do, it's incredible what you can do with the images. They give the computer a three-dimension description of a scene, and then program the computer, specifying the motion required. The computer can do the in-between drawings.

They can do texture-mapping, which adds any texture you want to an object or bump-mapping to give the appearance of detail and depth.

Ray-tracing simulates the reflection of light rays, and they can attenuate the contrast to create a fog effect.

A cartoon-type character can even be given motion blur to make it seem more real as it runs out of frame.

John Lasseter was there from Lucasfilm, a company created by George Lucas of ***Star Wars. The Empire Strikes Back*** and ***Return of the Jedi*** fame.

Lasseter, who previously worked with Walt Disney Studios, showed scenes with computer-generated cartoon characters. He showed the step-by-step process of making these figures come to life, including how the computer adds shadows and motion blur to give the drawing more spirit.

Yet it quickly became clear that if you wanted to do any type of sophisticated computer animation, you'd need at least $125,000.

One of the more exciting presentations, from a technical point-of-view, was the Editdroid, a creation by Lucasfilms to facilitate the arduous process of editing films.

The layout of the machine looks like something out of ***2001: A Space Odyssey.*** The console is a type of wrap-around, large desk featuring three screens. On the left is a preview screen, then a main screen in the middle, and on the right is a screen to log information, complete with key pad to punch in data.

The Editdroid doesn't wear down the film as you edit. All the film information is transferred to video discs. The editor can locate any frame within 30 minutes of material in less than two seconds.

Several versions of a sequence can be made and then saved on the disc, giving the editor time to think about which version he prefers. He can also preview such effects as dissolves.

Although the discs can't be re-used like tape, they are said to make good wall-plaques or serving trays after they have fulfilled their original purpose.

Lois Siegel ●

the composition of the panel "a little disturbing. I find it disturbing that there's only one Canadian and only one woman." Murray pointed to different Canadian traditions in video art, particularly in the work of women video-artists and community-based use of video. Implicit in Murray's criticism was a political critique of the American artists' discourse, but as the lone Canadian on the panel he was perhaps too civil to actually make it explicit.

Finally New Yorker Mitchell Kriegman showed a humourous tape entitled ***My Neighborhood*** that wasn't particularly funny, and described himself as "kind of a connoisseur of technology : I like the different technologies for their limitations, and what I do with them is tell a story that is human and anti-technological."

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1984 is a one-minute commercial for Apple Computers directed by filmmaker Ridley Scott ***(Alien, Bladerunner)*** that would win a 1984 Clio for cinema and direction in the U.S. selection. It was aired at the 1984 Superbowl last January and screened at Convergence along with other Clio-winning ads.

In a ***Metropolis***-like setting, hordes of haggard, shaven-headed male zombies shuffle into a huge room whose far wall is a giant screen on which a bespectacled intellectual intones about "one will, one mind, one resolve in the garden of pure ideology." As the zombies stream into the room, a blonde woman dressed in a tight white T-shirt and red running shorts dashes by, chased by black-clad and faceless security guards. She races across the room, carrying a sledgehammer that, discus-like, she hurls into the screen which exploded in a great burst of light that causes all the zombies to stir slightly from their torpor.

Now a female arm upholds an Apple II personal computer while voice-over and graphics explain that, as of January 1, 1984, with the introduction of the Apple II, "1984 won't be anything like ***1984***."

A second commercial, Canadian this time, that also screened at Convergence was produced for Bell Canada by Montreal ad-agency Cossette Communications.

In a jungle setting, the foreground shows a Greek temple ; behind the temple stands a modern aluminium skyscraper. Among the temple pillars, a dinosaur is about to topple the entire structure. Temple and skyscraper come crashing down as the voice-over reminds one that the business world has scarcely evolved since the beginning of time. The image indicates what kind of world that is : a jungle of savage beasts.

Cut to a gigantic telephone against computer-animated background signifying the pulsations of instant communications. But now, says the voice-over, with Telemarketing the possibilities of realizing profits on a scale never before imaginable is here at last.

Both commercials are gems of "pure ideology" : self-definitions of the ideology of the technological age.

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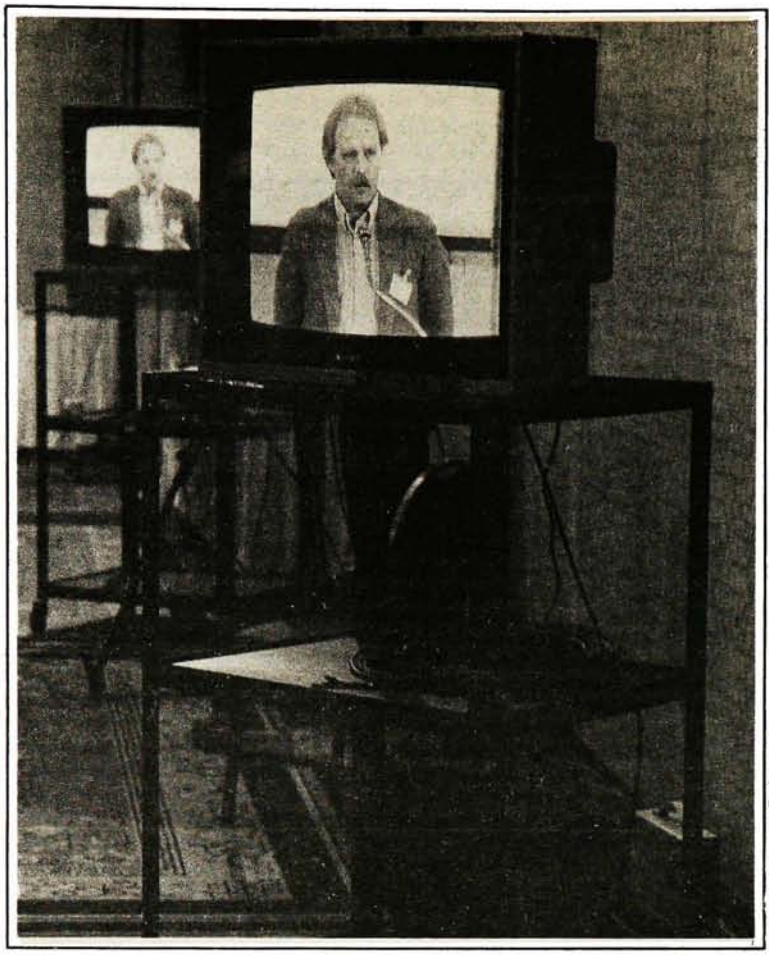
"We are living on the edge of precipice whose bottom we cannot see." Speaking was Peter Sainsbury, head of production for the British Film Institute who, as a non-commercial film producer, was acting as a self-described "outsider looking in."



photos : Jacques Dufresne

● Cinematographer Harry Mathias conducts workshop in electronic production

● Harry Addicott on the intricacies of the colour TV signal

Day four and the five-man international panel on distribution and exhibition in the new age was grappling with the implications of current media systems in development on traditional delivery mechanisms. Australian David Field, head of marketing for the private sector entertainment group PBL Productions, had rapidly sketched the structure of the Australia-New Zealand markets, noting that, to everyone's surprise, Australia's 40% VCR penetration was the highest in the world. If throughout Oceania, VCR penetration reaches 80% levels, the numbers are still small, Field noted, quickly covering other Southeast Asian markets like Singapore and Hong Kong. Because of pricing difficulties, there are problems selling into Asia, Field said and "the major market is still Australia."

For Mikio Suzuki, head of programming for Japan's public sector NHK, both the financial situation of the public sector and changing attitudes of viewers, particularly among the young "fed up with conventional media," are a cause for concern as Japanese television – which recently launched the world's first direct broadcast satellite – expands throughout Asia. As increasing numbers of Asian territories, like Korea, Hong Kong and Singapore, develop their own software-making capability, Suzuki envisages a growing "Oriental market", especially in the areas of cartoons and drama. Whether programming would remain Oriental or turn into another showcase for the West, Suzuki did not know : "No matter how much programming there is, it's not enough."

Turning to Europe, Peter Sainsbury found "the British in a peculiar position in terms of media, very involved in the EEC on one hand, but also dominated by the fact of a common language with the U.S." With the distribution of British-made theatrical features "more or less dead as a market," the British film industry had turned into "a great service industry to U.S. finance."

In broadcasting, with the BBC also deep in the midst of the crisis of public broadcasting, the brightest spot was the two-year-old Channel Four "which has livened up the situation no end and changed television in the UK for the first time since World War Two."

Like Australia, Britain too has "a collossal VCR penetration at close to 40% of households." Viewers for the most part "want to see commercial product that's cheaper than the cinema."

A debate over the introduction of cable rages on. "The government refuses to place a quota on the quantity of British production, and in all likelihood programming is expected to be a duplication of broadcasting's most specious programs."

The BBC and independent television companies are developing DBS in the expectation of a powerful programming explosion. "Within the next five years, we'll see a whole range of different technologies come into place."

Canadian Broadcasting Corp.'s CBC Enterprises general manager Paul Cadieux described the evolution of CBCE's international sales, particularly in the the narrower speciality programming on U.S. cable and in Europe. Both in the U.S. and in the U.K., Cadieux said, CBCE was finding more and more of "a sell-through market. People are acquiring videocassettes, not just renting them like features. Ballets, operas are treated

much like recordings: they're something people want to keep to watch over and over."

From that brief overview of five international markets, the panellists attempted to examine what it all meant.

David Field began with the Australian difference. In a series of repeated digs at Canadian television production – Field lived in Canada from 1971-73 – he attributed Australia's television boom (PBL productions alone had made $22 million worth of TV production in the last 12 months) to: a) the Australian quota system in broadcasting and broadcast commercial production which as of the mid-'50s created a television industry that only later turned to feature filmmaking; b) an early ability to translate the national literature onto national screens; c) learning from the Canadian example of how not to make films solely on a tax-shelter basis and; d) profiting from the range of Australian accents, colloquialisms and diction for export-oriented sales.

photo: Jacques Dufresne

● John Rook instructing at the Convergence workshop on video lighting

"The future for Australia is making product for indigenous TV," Field said. "Unless you have something successful in the home market, it won't succeed overseas," and he used the analogy of the difference between a gold nugget and "dogshit sprayed with gold paint."

In terms of the future, Field said Australia would be looking hard at its options. "There will be no cable because of the costs," and the converter-available radiated subscriber service has a quota for Australian production – "Thank God, for the government." In terms of foreign sales, possibilities would vary from territory to territory: "There are no strict rules. Each production has its own rules built in."

In terms of coproductions, Australia would keep thinking about it. "In coproduction, who is the raper or rapee? Can you control what happens in coproduction? Any government organization that can't control what's going on, can't decide what's going to go on either."

The real technological revolution

Bill Viola was born in New York in 1951. He studied at Syracuse University, became an artist in residence at WNET in New York in 1976, was a founding member of the International Television Workshop, was an artist in Residence at Sony Corp. in Japan on a Japan/U.S. Creative Artist Fellowship and is now living near the Pacific Ocean in Long Beach, California. He constantly travels the world – from the Solomon Islands to Saskatchewan – teaching others about video ways of seeing and capturing images which he transposes into brilliant video mediatations. Influenced by experimental filmmakers, his work concerns investigation into the materiality of the medium, motion, sound, crosscultural archetypes, myth, pre-linguistic form, perception, awareness, death, and consciousness. When asked if he felt isolated from the art world, he pointed to his heart and said, "No, here lies the art world." He is not enamoured with high technology; instead he would rather talk about imaginative perspectives, acoustic holograms, compound vision, Zen, virtual volume, Gestalt, ground/figure reversal and life. His work has received many international awards. His latest, Anthem (1983) *won the First Prize at this year's New Media Festival.*

Other works include:

"Instant Replay", "Wild Horses", "Tape I" (1972), "Composition 'D'", "Vidicon Burns", "Information", "Polaroid Video Stills", "Level", "Cycles", "In Version" (1973), "Eclipse", "August 74" (1974), "Gravitational Pull", "A million Other Things", "Red Tape" (1975), "Migration", "Four songs" (1976), "Memory Surfaces and Mental Prayers" (1977), "Memories of Ancestral Power (The Moro Movement in the Solomon islands)", "Palm Trees in the Moon" (1977-78), "Chott-el-Djerid (A portrait in Light and Heat) (1979), "The Reflecting Pool (1977-80), "Hatsu-Yume" (First Dream) (1981), and "Reasons for Knocking at an Empty House" (1983).

The following is an exerpt from his presentation at Convergence:

It has been my experience with this technology over the past 15 years that the higher up you go on the technological ladder, moving up into the professional or 'broadcast' domain, the less and less you get to actually touch stuff. Working with the old 1/2 inch reel-to-reel machines over 10 years ago, you "touched" it plenty, that was the point – grease pencil edit marks and fingerprints were always clogging up the heads. When I finally got into the WNET TV lab artist program in New York to work with broadcast stuff – it felt like when I was a kid and my parents got this big new blue couch – they kept it covered in plastic so you couldn't sit on it and, from that point on, my brother and I weren't allowed to play in the living-room anymore.

Thinking about how technology affects ideas, the best example I can think of is an old story about Andy Warhol. His place, The Factory, was in full swing in the early '60s he was making lots of movies. His so-called "still camera technique" was his trademark. Films like *Empire*, the fixed shot of 7 hours of the Empire State Building, his portraits and *Sleep*, a man sleeping, were being discussed and analyzed by film critics and scholars. Finally, much later, someone asked him why he never moved the camera so much in those early films. Warhol said: "Well, we had just gotten this new 16mm-movie camera and it was real expensive and no one knew that much about it, so we were afraid to move it too much."

At the American Film Institute's National Video Festival a few years ago, I saw a demonstration by a guy who developed a sophisticated computer-image processor to make material shot on videotape and shown on television look like it was shot on film and shown on television. He was very proud of this. It reprocessed the video signal so the contrast ratio, cold response, grain structure, etc. emulated film transfered to video. His market, he explained, was to pacify dissatisfied and nervous art directors and their clients who didn't like the fact that their new commercials didn't "look" the way commercials are supposed to look.

The art world is slowly responding to a lot of these changes, but there are even bigger problems. As artists working in the late 20th century, not only do we find ourselves detached and disenfranchised from a society that doesn't seem to think it has a place or a use for a true art experience, that thinks that art is painting some guys called 'artists' did 100 years ago in Paris and Italy before that, but particularly we, as contemporary *video* artists, have found ourselves in a deeper "Twilight Zone."

Now, things are changing. After having been ignored by the institutions, industry, and therefore the general population, we find we are now receiving new attention and new interest because we do Video, capital "V", and we get invited to conferences like this.

At a conference on technological change, I get a little unsettled to talk about technology in isolation of its use and application. It makes me think of the Pentagon press-releases when they describe the capabilities of various missiles, tanks, and bombs without any acknowledgement of what it's like to be burned, maimed, or irradiated.

For me, the larger question that must be asked at a gathering like this is to what purpose and ends are we channelling all the creative efforts behind the design, production, and use of these tools?

As we watch the film industry frantically trying to "filmify" video so they will be more comfortable using it and don't "waste" any time converting over to it, when we watch the day approaching when electronic cinema will arrive and we can see John Travolta and Olivia Newton-John cavorting on a wide screen that "looks like it's supposed to look", that is, like "reality" – I see a huge blockage growing greater and greater.

As long as there are artists who insist on speaking some undecipherable personal code or dwelling on some formal property in isolation from daily life, then will be little progress made.

More importantly, however, as long as there are people who are exercising rigid control over the sphere of human communication through the culturally institutionalized media, who continually underestimate and disregard/disrespect individual intelligence, who have been so programmed both by the education system (from grade school to film and/or TV/Radio school) and by their own institutions that they cannot see outside of one narrow definition of the many forms that communication may take, who view the act of communicating as some giant commercial money-making business like a big, dark dumb factory churning out images for sale with profit as audience-attendance the motivating force, who disregard and look past the talent and creativity of even those they have hired, then progress will be slow.

Abraham Maslow, the psychologist, wrote: "If the only tool you have is a hammer, you tend to treat everything as if it were a nail."

Jalal-al Din Rumi, the Persian poet of the 13th century, and one of my personal heroes, wrote, "New organs of perception come into being as a result of necessity, therefore, increase your necessity so that you may increase your perception."

I believe that this is the real technological revolution.

Bill Viola ●

For Mikio Suzuki, the split between mass-media and mini-media had created a feeling of detachment from mass-media that, as a member of a large public-sector organization, he found particularly alarming.

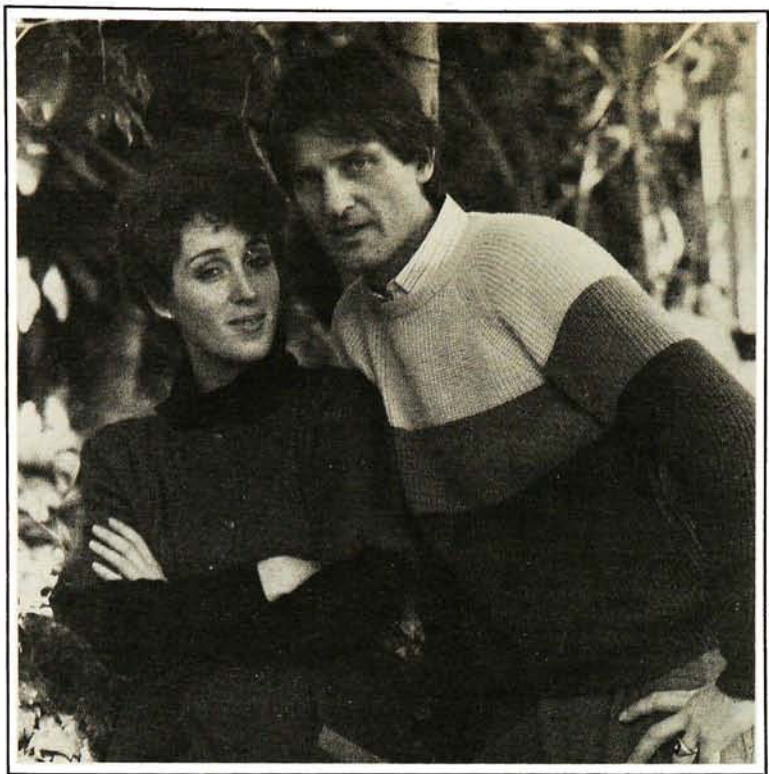
"But nobody knows the future of exhibition and distribution. In 1985 the production standard for HDTV will be settled between Japan and the U.S. and once production standards are set-up, the next step will be very quick and accelerated.

"The point of the new technology is that it's not only for TV. Off-station distribution will be much easier, and a new era of distribution will be on-hand in three years time. NKH, for example, has started on the future distribution of HDTV using small theatre chains." HDTV too, by connecting the airwaves with printing, could have "a revolutionary impact" on print-forms that "within a decade could create a wholly new phase."

Suzuki also felt that changes in quality and software had created "a new faith. Background video is something completely different. Perhaps the new generation, fed up with conventional software, is slowly trying out new phases of perception."

For Sainsbury the "technological future appears to be inscrutable." Despite the collapse of the British cinema market, he could see three levels of continuing film production : the studio-based, location-based, U.S.-financed commercial feature ; a vulnerable low-budget level of independent film production, and television-supported independent cinema or TV, essentially a form of highly-developed TV drama in the traditional U.K. mentality.

With the British government phasing itself out of supporting the small amount of indigenous filmmaking, the three levels would likely drop to two : commercial U.S. or U.K. filmmaking and a subsidized cinematheque that would include BFI-type production and more modest, low-budget films made through disguised subsidies like Channel Four (funded by a tax on the independent networks). In the case of the BFI, funding comes from the cultural sector as opposed to the business sector, and if it is a type of filmmaking that presents strong aesthetic arguments for the continued use of film, it is also very artistic and very vulnerable. Present uses of video, he said, are mainly in electronic news gathering, advertising and music.



photos : Jacques Dufresne

● Convergence co-directors Barbara Samuels and Larry Lynn

Overall, Sainsbury was "not too happy about the ways the new technology is developing : the government and vested-interest views are very crude and simplistic."

Among apparent changes, the BBC "is more and more of a dinosaur, there are serious imbalances in independent production, and no sympathy from the government.

"It's a very uneven, drastic situation : and for the foreseable future, continued uncertainty, continued setbacks, especially financial, and continued U.S. domination."

For Cadieux the new technology had in the past decade completely changed marketing. Transfer to tape allowed selling to broadcast markets around the world and an increase in "more specialized product for cheaper dollars."

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"What we're looking for is how to universalize certain ideational standards. We want Canada to open up to other markets. We have to produce and we have to defend our ability to produce, and we have to fight to convince advertisers to raise their standards.

"So I would encourage people to go further, to let themselves be educated, to learn what's new – because when it comes to the new, the advertising agencies are the first to be interested.

"And I would conclude that there is a convergence happening – between ideators, producers and technicians.

"Because the war is going to be fought on television, and in the name of the power to inform."

– Jean-Jacques Strelisky, vice-president and creative director, Cossette Communications, Montreal.

"To me new technology is not the starting point. To me the starting point is the creative concept. The technologies are used to be develop the creative concepts.

"We creative people have two minds : how to put video technology into film to express the creative concept better ; the other mind is more conservative : it has a deep attachment and affinity to film, to the warmth and visual depth of film." – Koh Okada, vice-president, First Creative Group, Tokyo. Both men were speaking on the panel on Advertising and the New Technology, day four.

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On the morning of day five, the final day, a seven-member panel met around the ambitious topic of the Global Overview on the film/video convergence. Some highlights :

Moderator and U.S. cinematographer Harry Mathias :

"World broadcasting groups, the CCIR, the world-regulating congress, the SMPTE, the EBU, have called for one world, high-definition production standard, to originate either on the basis of one universal standard or from national standards. A world-wide production standard makes a lot of sense ; it was such a standard that led to 35mm film, for example. Many observers feel the NHK high-definition standard will be adopted, though other standards are possible."

Clark Higgins, U.S. electronic production designer :

"What is being achieved is better, more efficient ways to create production out of sound and images (Francis Ford) Coppola's electronic cinema is more efficient, more work-effective."

Mikio Suzuki, NHK, Japan :

"I recall the days when EFP was first introduced in 1975 : for the first time it was possible to make a 50-min., documentary with a Sony cassette prototype that then cost Y1 million. My boss couldn't understand what a small portable camera and tape could do."

Peter Sainsbury, BFI, London :

"Broadcasting developed the construction of advertising messages. Through this mechanism broadcasting created an institutional and consensual language. Filmmaking in England today is seen as a rear-guard action against the broadcast institutions' non-contradictory language. There is little point in discussing convergence unless we take on the political problem that the technology is totally controlled by these same institutions."

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Conclusions ?

"There's nothing to summarize," says the BFI's Sainsbury. "We've opened up a lot of questions and I can only hope they stay open for a long time."

"We live in a very challenging time," says NHK's Suzuki. ●

● Music video panelists, from left : Muchmusic's John Martin, director Rob Quartly, writer Keith Williams, Warner Bros.' Jo Bergman, video editor Larry Bridges, and RCA's Chuck Mitchell