What now reads like nonsense further attests to the unthinking abandon with which this 'event' was obviously conceived. Consider, for example the claim: "TV and video talk to the body, while film and books talk to the mind and the emotions." While the spectator watches the movie, and the reader reads the book, it is the video of the television program which proof the viewer. (What, no more 'pleasure of the text'?"

That is, the organizer's naivete (bordering on mouthpiece), attitude towards technology approaches that of McLuhan's. The main point the fact was that it did not, could not, envision the complex overlap of technology and the corporate vortex.

I do not wish to engage that sterile and worn debate (a debate which is often fused with resentment for the Other's imagined esteem within the art world) propagated by film and video producers alike that each medium has its individual properties and should be considered with different criteria.

Agreed. Nor do I wish to impose one medium's set of issues onto another, albeit, younger one. But certain constants apply to both and should remain immediate. That is, a select number of the 15 New Toronto tapes exhibit what Arthur Kroeker has called the "ethics gap," the gap between ethics and technology.

In the '60s we developed a language to talk about ethics and film which now perhaps reads as an outdated liberal concern for the subject's authenticity. This concern has recently evolved into the challenge of coming up with formal strategies around how to represent 'marginals' without using the language of co-optation, without collapsing the representation of 'others' back into outdated and prescriptive positions that we have come to 'naturally' place them in.

Unfortunately very few "Recent Toronto Videos" rose to this challenge. In particular, Rodney Werden's Money Talks Bulsuit Walks and Aboo, suggest that this New Age digital technology has delegated such worn issues to the same garbage heap as blackness carries over into his next tape, Abbo, where an African salesman is duped by tourists to vacation in the original site of the Garden of Eden. The simplicity of its images matches its conception. This often fuses with resentment for the Other's imagined esteem within the art world) propagated by film and video producers alike that each medium has its individual properties and should be considered with different criteria. Agreed. Nor do I wish to impose one medium's set of issues onto another, albeit, younger one. But certain constants apply to both and should remain immediate. That is, a select number of the 15 New Toronto tapes exhibit what Arthur Kroeker has called the "ethics gap," the gap between ethics and technology.

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they are additionally integral to each tape’s particular interpretation of the social.

Recent Toronto Video - where different conceptions of the social meet. Where media social work meets nihilism meets wank voyeurism meets self-expression. Video - where the engineer and the artist should meet - but rarely do.

As a final note I must mention that I watched most of these tapes at three o’clock in the afternoon in the back room of a Queen Street eatery - alone. I ask: who is this for? Is this just bad marketing or just plain lack of interest?

They screened the relatively bright, crisp films immediately afterwards. Some local producers insisted on having their tapes shown on monitors, but as soon as no one was looking, the image always slipped and the monitor failed to light properly, and some tapes, like Bill Viola’s I Do Not Know What It Is were quiet, meditative pieces, which demand a direct, personal kind of viewing situation - a situation which aesthetically defies the festival context and for which the intimacy of the video monitor is ideal.

I don’t think these curatorial gaffs can explain the incredibly dismal turnout for most of the screenings. If the nature and size of the audience is the final measure of the effectiveness of the work and the validity of the content, then both video art and this festival are dead in the water. The most successful video events are those which appeal to a general audience as well as to the cognoscenti. This festival did neither. But advertising may have been part of the problem, but I imagine there exists a public perception of video art as exceedingly esoteric and practically arrogant - and this may have had more to do with the lack of general interest in this event (and, truth be known, in most Toronto video screening events). And what else but arrogance could explain the absence of practically the entire film/video-producing community from this opportunity to view a selection of international tapes?

The differences, similarities and hybridizing between film and video may continue to hold interest in festival trade forums, but it is a poor excuse for a principal festival theme. A comparison of video art to painting, or of film to literature, could prove more meaningful, even if it lacks the intimate producer/resident relationship of the video-art-producing community from this opportunity to view a selection of international tapes.

The festival program. The posters read: Featuring: Peter Wollen, Peter Greenaway; Jean-Luc Godard, Atom Egoyan, Bill Viola and special guests. The special guests were: Atom Egoyan, David Cronenberg (a last-minute cancellation), Kathy Huffman (curator), and Juan Downey (video/television producer).

Egoyan (and presumably Cronenberg) was invited to stimulate discussion about the possible contexts in which film and video can operate. But it was difficult for Egoyan and the audience to get beyond the success of Family Viewing, his recent film, and there was not much room for fruitful comparisons between his work and the rest of the festival program.

Tapes like Godard’s Soft and Hard and Greenaway’s A TV Dante were screened to demonstrate what accomplished filmmakers can do when they decide to dabble in video (well, television actually). Meanwhile, Jean Gagnon’s Puzzle and Dara Birnbaum’s The Damnation of Faust: Charming Landscape were included because there were no better video tapes and had a little bit of film footage in them. Tapes like Gary Gibbons’ Canadian Diamonds and the Yonemotos’ Kappa were included in this film/video component for no apparent reason.

A desperate attempt to show films and tapes on the same screen, as though to prove that video has finally grown up, failed pathetically for technical and aesthetic reasons. The organizers seemed unable to face the fact that the projected video image was simply far too dark. This shortcoming was aggravated when they switched to the relatively bright, crisp films immediately afterwards. Some local producers insisted on having their tapes shown on monitors, but as soon as no one was looking, the image always slipped and the monitor failed to light properly, and some tapes, like Bill Viola’s I Do Not Know What It Is were quiet, meditative pieces, which demand a direct, personal kind of viewing situation - a situation which aesthetically defies the festival context and for which the intimacy of the video monitor is ideal.

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Dance on Tape

by Maggie Helwig

There is an inherent contradiction in the idea of a dance video. The language of dance is bodily, direct, immediate; the language of video is based on the mediation of the image. Even a good dance video, then, ultimately speaks in the language of video, and perhaps cannot have a lot to do with dance. It is like trying to speak Italian in German. The best you can manage is a translation, and it's just not the same.

The “Dance in Video” section of Videoculture International, therefore, was really a study of video techniques in which dance is, at most, the raw material. And it is material which presents special problems for a video artist—how can something so intensely physical, so much a matter of communication between the bodies of the dancer and the spectator, be captured in this almost ‘dematerialized’ medium?

The least effective approach is the attempt to evoke some sort of mood through blurry shots, dissolves, close-ups and intercutting, a sort of woozy impressiveness that is, it seems, all too popular—Ko Nakajima’s Dolmen, Jean-Louis Letacq’s Waterproof, and Mary Lucier’s In the Blink of an Eye... were particularly excessive examples.

Those video artists who chose something much closer to ‘straight’ filming produced, in the end, more powerful results. All three Canadian videos shown fell into that category. I especially enjoyed Bernard Hebert’s six-minute video of a duet by two members of La La Human Steps though this has a lot to do with the excellence of the company—the video itself was nothing unusual. Yves Langlois’ OMO succeeds where Waterproof failed in making an effective video of underwater choreography, a dance form that is viable only through video on film. I did not greatly like François Girard’s Montréal Danse—again, though, this is a comment mainly on the company being filmed. Girard’s rather stark production is, in fact, quite impressive.

The two ‘fictional documentaries’ by British director Charles Atlas, for all their innovations in storytelling strategy, also used relatively untouched dance footage; and I think that Atlas’ decision to do this was right. Essentially, dance transfers to video best with the least interference.

And, having said that, I will immediately contradict myself. The best videos shown were unquestionably those by John Sanborn and Mary Perillo, a New York-based team who blasted through their work deploying the full range of effects—computer animation, ultimate, image overlays, paintbox animation, slow-motion, digital editing. The difference is that Sanborn and Perillo use these techniques to emphasize the physical punch of the dance—they also favour harsh, swift, percussive scores, as opposed to the stringy synths most of the other directors chose. It is worth noting that Perillo began her career as a sports programmer.

This attention to the body of dance is most interestingly used in Metabolism. The score for this piece was created by David Van Tieghem on a Macintosh home computer, using the sounds of the dancers’ breathing, footfalls and collisions with each other.

Van Tieghem himself is the subject of two Sanborn/Perillo videos, Ear-Responsibility and Galaxy. These are not really dance videos at all, but they are perfectly delightful; especially Galaxy, which is what rock videos would be like if rock videos were brilliant (incidentally, do the visual echoes of Stop Making Sense owe anything to one Dot Demme, listed in the credits as “snow sweetener?”)

The Sanborn/Perillo collaborations with choreographer Charles Moulton—Visual Shuffle and Fractured Variations—have the same fine, mad intensity. In the hands of the right people, people with a strong enough intuition of what dance is all about, video can evoke very closely the medium that is most nearly its opposite; the impossible language barrier can almost be broken.

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...ASTONISHINGLY MOVING
—J. Scott, The Globe and Mail

...LIFE CLASSES IS A SLEEPING BEAUTY
—Playback

...DISARMING, MOVING AND FUNNY
—Variety

...STRANGE, HILARIOUS
—D. Edelstein, The Village Voice

...UNFORGETTABLE
—G. Peere, The Toronto Star

THE OFFICIAL CANADIAN ENTRY IN COMPETITION AT THE BERLIN INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

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Bill MacGillivray