

Discover European Video.

For a catalogue of an exhibition.

The title is appropriate: first we invent, and then we discover what we have invented/ Who could have guessed all the virtualities inherent in (for instance) the letters of the alphabet, when linear writing was invented? And who would dare to affirm that we have already discovered everything one can do with a computer? But with video, the need to discover its latent potentialities is especially urgent. The reason why this is so is a curious one: it does not look at all like the thing it is, and this is why it ^{is} misleading. It looks like an electromagnetic film camera, and thus it misleads people to make films with it. In fact, however, it is a mirror with a memory attached to it. And people are slow to discover this.

The mirror is, of course, a relatively ancient invention, and it is used for reflexions and speculations. If you look into a mirror, your glance is thrown back at you. You may say that your glance (and therefore your thought) is turned around like a glove by the mirror. Now this inversion of vision and thought has been developed and refined in the course of history, and ever since the ancient Greeks it is called "philosophy" (at least within the Occidental tradition). But something curious has happened: as philosophical discipline became ever more refined, and as it gave birth to the sciences, the original mirror was abandoned, and the term "speculation" acquired a metaphorical meaning. People forget that they are looking into an imaginary mirror while reflecting about themselves and the world. The consequence is that philosophical and scientific reflections and speculations have become unimaginable. Something must be done about this, unless we admit that we can no longer imagine our own concepts, which is a form of alienation.

To remedy this, video has been invented. It is a new sort of mirror. If you look into its "monitor", your glance and thought is still thrown back at you, but this time the two sides "left and right" are not inverted. This is very surprising: we are so accustomed to mirror inversion, that we are disoriented by a mirror which does not do so. But the monitor is an active mirror: when you look into it, you see yourself and your surroundings from the point of view of the video camera (the Big Brother). Not only do you see in the mirror the way other people see you, but you may see yourself from your back side. And this is not all to that miraculous invention: the monitor has a memory (a tape), and you may see yourself in it as you were five minutes ago. And since the memory may be manipulated, you might even see yourself in the mirror as you never were, but as others imagined you to be.

Now what has just been said is technically very primitive, and anybody who can afford a video equipment can do it. But does he do it? To do so, you have to discover that video is a tool for philosophical speculation. This may be technically very primitive, but intellectually and esthetically it is all but simple. It is both intellectually and esthetically much easier to handle the video camera to do technically complex films with it. And this, of course, prevents people to discover what video may do in the future: render visible our most abstract concepts, and thus deliver us from alienated speculations.

But the matter is less simple. People might handle the video camera with a view to producing a film-like tape, and the very essence of the video (its being an electromagnetic mirror equipped with a memory) might impose on them the motion of philosophical speculation. They may think of themselves that they are 'artists' (whatever that term may mean), and in fact they may be philosophizing. In spite of themselves (or only half conscious of themselves) they may be discovering what video is about (and what philosophy is about). This is why exhibitions like the one introduced by this catalogue are useful: to permit viewers (receivers of video information) to see for themselves to what extent the producers have discovered what they are doing.

You might object that such is not the job of viewers, but of critics. You might believe that it is the critics who view the tapes, who judge them, and who exhibit them for the public to admire the depth of their judgement. But you will be mistaken. The critics are even less capable of discovering video (be it European or whatever) than are the artists, because they are just as much prisoners of the "film prejudice" as the artists are, and they lack the concrete experience with the video apparatus. It is the viewers of the exhibition who are in the "phenomenological" position (one that is relatively unprejudiced) to see for themselves, and to show to the video manipulators, how video may come to be the mirror of man, of society, and of the world. Not like a photograph or a film, but more like a visual philosophical treatise.

The exhibition here introduced is called "Discover European Video". Those who have chosen that title might not have intended this, but the title suggests that the exhibition is meant for those who want to discover what Europeans have found out about the hidden possibilities within the video apparatus. And it is in order to provoke precisely such an attitude in the viewers of the exhibition that this article is written.