

Al Wong at Pittsburgh Film-Makers
Victor Grauer at Pittsburgh Film-Makers
Frank Gillette at the Kitchen

About twenty years ago Hans Richter declared that "the main aesthetic problem in the movies, which were invented for reproduction (of movement) is, paradoxically, the overcoming of reproduction." In other words, Richter was in favor of discouraging that suspension of disbelief we have all been taught to acquire as we enter film screenings. Each of these exhibitions contribute to that discouragement—with an equal thrust towards expanding the range of the spectator's vision.

Al Wong's January program at PFMI included his first east coast showing of a "corner" film, as yet untitled, which involved (in the making) two cameras perpendicular to each other, and (in the showing) two projectors and two screens, similarly perpendicular, forming a corner. As the cameras pan to the right, in what we soon guess will be a 360 degree movement, we not only "see" with a wide-screen vision, and watch furniture, ropes, and other things passed back and forth "between" the two screens, but we also discover at the pan's end that the corner we thought we saw was not the "actual" corner we end with. Wong completely unhinges our sense of space with this film, beginning with what seems a mechanistic reproduction, concluding with a simulacra, a pretense especially appropriate to cinema.

Victor Grauer's April PFMI showing consisted of video and film "Chords," "verses," and "Cantilevers"—from one second to two minutes long, works that can be better measured by frames than by conventional time units. These films are a demonstration of how much can be seen within the confines of one brief second (corroborated recently by Douglas Trumbull's 64 frame per second "Super 70" process). Grauer is seeking rhythms (he prefers to call them "time proportions") on just this side of the subliminal. The playful light that pulses on his projection screen unexpectedly illuminates, in stark contrast to the analytic thoroughness of his "Theory of Pure Film" [1], the quality of wit that also is implicit in Grauer's cinema.

In his "Aransas" Frank Gillette set up six video monitors in a second floor gallery of the Kitchen Center (in New York, in April-May), creating what he called a "video glade." Each monitor had a different set of images, all recorded in Texas with a color portapak. Mainly coastal images—the shore washed by waves, plants in sand, closeups of leaves, shots of rolling clouds, birds and animals moving through the underbrush—the pictures were marked by an intense fidelity to reality. In the Kitchen gallery, however, these six glowing "windows" on a natural environment become an unsettling artificial environment. "Unsettling" because the viewer, once between the six monitors—arranged on all sides of a rectangle—can never see all at once, but is continuously tempted to try to scan all, not to miss the intense images that appear in each direction, all united by the unceasing roar of the wind, and four or five different, dominant, natural colors, that migrate with change of scene to each of the monitors.

—R.A.Haller

Reference

1. Victor Grauer, "Theory of Pure Film," Field of Vision, 1977, 3.

Shigeko Kubota at the Museum of Modern Art

Shigeko Kubota is one of the strongest voices in video today, both in her untiring support of video art and artists as the video curator of Anthology Film Archives, and in her own work as an independent artist. Her structural video piece, "Nude Descending a Staircase," made in 1976, and recently (April 1978) on display at the Museum of Modern Art, is one in a series of her works which define a unique territory—video sculpture. The piece is directly inspired by Marcel Duchamp's 1912 painting, but emerges as a video piece independent of its source.

The sculptural format is simple—four color video monitors are embedded vertically into four, free-standing wood stairs (constructed by Al Robbins). The image on each of the monitors is identical: a very beautiful nude woman descending a set of wooden stairs, over and over. To break up space and time (as in the Duchamp original), Shigeko has composed an hour-long tape of complex video manipulations all based on this single image. The whole piece is placed on the diagonal of the small gallery room, and the woman-descending-stairs is set on the same diagonal within the video screen. This bold format is deceptively simple. Neither the tape alone nor the structure alone would have the impact they do together. In literally building the video monitors into this well defined solid structure Shigeko creates fascinating and challenging relationships—contrasts and conceptual paradoxes—between video imagery and sculptural space.