

Gislind Nabakowski: Utopia? Consequences ... Passages! Intermediate Times!

"The Television Gallery starts out with the idea of confronting the largest possible audience with the contemporary trends of international development of the arts."

Gerry Schum, 1969

In the Federal Republic of Germany, the concept of "Video in Television" has practically started with "Film in Television". At that time, international artists had already created the first video films. Thus, the concept has re-oriented itself towards video. Gerry Schum had developed the concept of a "Television Gallery" for Sender Freies Berlin/SFB in West Berlin. The fact of Berlin being an isolated town played a decisive role. Without having to travel to Western Germany, the audience should be able to enjoy works of art – on the screen. Gerry Schum's concept reads like a pamphlet obsessed with the belief and the ideal of changing the world through art. It contains all those terms that reflect the democratic and revolutionary spirit of the 1968's. "Criticism" and "consumption" were to be the mutual elements of the viewers' perception. One did not intend to show "final products" but processes of development. "Objects were brought out of the artistic aura of museums and galleries and reproduced in the everyday environment of TV viewers" The viewer was to receive insights into the development of ultra-modern avantgarde art, without any distortions, on the TV screen. This sounds like wonderful Utopia? When "Television Gallery" could not be realized in Berlin, Gerry Schum was commissioned by Wibke von Bonin to create a film "Art Consumption – Consumption of Art" for WRD III in Cologne. The topic was closely related to the Berlin concept. It described the way of a work of art from its very beginnings in the studio to the commodity on the wall of a gallery.

All persons concerned, the artist, the engineer and the proprietor of the gallery, were given equal chances of expressing their opinions. The work of art was understood as part of the social process. It was, indeed, a commodity, but it had become tangible, taken down from its pedestal. It did not take long before Schum for himself noticed an ambiguity in the fact that "objects and pictures were brought before the camera in order to reproduce them for television". Thus, the concept of a "Television Gallery" evolved more clearly, leading to the uncompromising decision not to make an "art program" but to create "works of art that were conceived and realized specially for publication in television".

At that time, he came in touch with the international land artists whose works of art were not of a durable nature but consisted of water, sand, soil, stones and air. Land artists, process and body artists were thus especially suited to follow Gerry Schum's ideas of a "Television Gallery". Schum had studied at the Television Academies in Munich and Berlin. In 1970 he switched to video. Up to 1973, when he committed suicide, video was his life and his obsession. In the city of Dusseldorf he established a video gallery and cooperated closely with video artists. It is not surprising that his "Television Gallery" which he was able to realize, does not show any differences to video. On the one hand, television determines the structure and technique of representation. And on the other hand, he cooperated with video artists in his "Television Gallery" – they all had one fundamental principle in common: to abandon documentary films.

Witike von Bonin assisted in realizing several "Television Galleries": "Land Art" was broadcast by SFB in Berlin in 1969– eight artists were involved. "Identifications" was broadcast by SÜdwest-Funk/SWF in Baden-Baden. 19 artists had created this 50 minute film together with Gerry Schum. Short, bold avantgarde projects could be broadcast with the assistance of WRD III. Keith Arnetts's "Self Burial", a series of photos included daily into the current programs, could be compared to the difference between Charly Chaplin and the

traditional genre of entertainment. Jan Dibbet's "TV as a Fireplace" ironically transformed the screen of our "good old" television set into a cosy fireplace that appeared as a "strange" object on the screen. For one week, this fire glowed in the fire place, three minutes every day, at the end of the daily program.

In the meantime, Gerry Schum had not been successful in presenting his production "Artscapes", in which Christo was to participate, to the broadcasting corporations. Even "Identifications", in 1970, had been mainly financed by funds from the "Hannoveraner Kunstverein". The pioneer era of film art on television had been a very short episode only. In it, there was the pioneering spirit, the fantasies, the drive and the curiosity of the 60's. Even wise-cracks at traditional language were allowed. But very soon Gerry Schum's concept ran into the crisis when getting in touch with television. In retrospect, Wibke von Bonin describes Schum "as a friendly, then insisting and finally very difficult partner in discussion". And also in hindsight, she is glad about the fact that the former director Karl Höfer was liberal enough to "accept those crazy ideas". In 1985, she confesses that she had "really failed" with her project. And she adds, "The anecdote that there was a note on the door to the technical director's office reading 'anyone who talks about art here will be thrown out' is, if not true, so well invented, because it sadly but correctly characterizes the relationship between technology and art. The limits are clearly drawn. The term 'technology' applies to all those who – in the service of the German television audience who pays for their accurateness – controls the perfection of the out going broadcasts. And 'art' describes the products of those loose chaotic guys who see their task in undermining this very perfection by creativity." Thus, the mediator between the two positions, the full-time editor, becomes the troublemaker. Whoever wants to bring video into television has to break through habits, expectations and broadcasting schemes.

Also with video art, the attempt to evade the dangerous ghettoization, the constant search for possibilities of presentation – all these problems are more acute than ever before. Gerry Schum has not found a "successor" who would follow and realize his ideas in a similarly uncompromising way. The following ideas are part of his concept:

- to produce original works of art for television;
- to present these works of art in the form of a television exhibition
- to find ways and means to broadcast these works of art
- to establish a television gallery to produce these works
- to establish a video gallery to produce and sell the video tapes.

What Gerry Schum was made to realize or at least to suspect: Society was becoming more restorative. Today, it seems correct to talk about a love-hate relationship between the parties concerned, as well as an insufficient exchange of information. Today, video in television almost exclusively means video in the culture magazines. This implies that ALL fields of art, such as film, literature, theatre, photography, architecture, design and visual arts are part of the broadcasts' content. Everybody knows that magazines never have enough time at their disposal. Therefore, the typical video artist of today is a terrifyingly isolated artist in our media landscape.

Obviously, Gerry Schum's video gallery, the way in which he broadcast images without mediation to a broad public, came as a shock to the broadcasters. Television needed a respite of seven years to become more massively interested in video. This took place on the occasion of "Media Documenta" in 1977 in Kassel. There, film, photography and video were represented as autonomous media. Wulf Herzogenrath, responsible for Documenta's video sector on the one hand, and Wibke von Bonin (WRD 111) and Hansgeorg Dickmann (HR) in the other hand, elaborated a unique concept. Both stations arranged for nine broadcasts of films by video artists in the late-evening programs (10:30 p.m.); the films had an average duration of 30 to 45 minutes. The series attempted to give a survey of this art form by

showing typical examples. Considering all facts, this was a relatively long time given to this fringe-medium. Those who had the patience to watch the entire series could really get an insight into video art. However, the event remained an isolated one.

Today, the situation of the video artist, working in an electronic age with an electronic medium, is an ambiguous, difficult and paradoxical one. One of the few production units, offering something of an oasis of experimentation and research, is the "Kleines Fernsehspiel" (Little TV Game) within ZDF. This program has been existing for 15 years, with varying broadcasting hours. Audience ratings are relatively constant. At present, "Kleines Fernsehspiel" is broadcast on ARD at the same time as "Dallas". This decision has proved to be positive, as one could notice that audience ratings had not changed. The production unit comprises seven full-time editors, all of them working also with video. In addition, Carl Ludwig Rettinger was included into the team as freelance video expert. The unit had 42 broadcasting dates annually, for film and video, as compared to 1,500 other programs. The unit, comprising among others Lilian Jessen, Brigitte Kramer and Andreas Schreitmoller, supports young film talents and is relatively free in televising experimental and innovative films. The budget for video production is to be raised by 100,000 DM annually. Video films have been broadcast in "Kleines Fernsehspiel" since 1976. Until 1980, they made two productions a year, 1984 there were six and the tendency is still rising; at present, there are ten video films a year. The first program ever was "Video 50" by Robert Wilson.

Very carefully one supports the attempt to make a "different television". As it is a known fact that the presentation of a scenario is very important for the decision of whether a film will be produced, one has developed the so-called "video exposés", audio-visual video scripts. Thus, it is possible to realize, without detours and verbal misunderstandings, the future film in excerpts of its visualization; individual scenes of the video/film idea can be picked out beforehand, the visualization can also be carried out in the form of comics, of short images. The video-exposé is understood as a sort of sketch not as a completed film. All of the "Kleines Fernsehspiel" productions are strongly determined by the images. Artists are given a relatively great amount of freedom. The production unit calculates the costs, the artist then receives the money and has one year to complete his production. The artist delivers the product, but he is not supposed to use the television studios. "By the way, I would never advise a video artist to work in big television studios, they are rather immobile units permitting only a fairly limited range of work. We are extremely happy to be rid of the obligation to use the studios to capacity. Maybe it will be possible to establish equipment pools and publicly financed production facilities" – says Carl Ludwig Rettinger about the problems of production in an interview with Gerd Conradt in "Medium" Magazine/1985.

All this explains why the films realized in the framework of "Kleines Fernsehspiel" are situated in a border-land. New forms of language are being tested and applied. As to their structure, some of the films have a certain similarity to "film poems", to "time sculptures" or to "music pieces". We also find mixtures of film/video, super 8/video; or a film, originally produced in mixed form that is later on transferred to video. It is wrong to believe that video productions for television cost less than films; calculations have to be made in approximately the same amount.

Gabór Bódy's "Psychotechnikum" was to have been among the films that were produced there in 1985. Gbstav HAmos' "Der Unbesiegbare" was broadcast in 1985. Among the 1986 video films are titles like "Der Fall des Elefanten" by Volker Anding, "Totes Geld von Gisa Schleelein" and "Riff" by Rolf S. Wolkenstein, "Animal Consciousness/Black & White" by Bill Viola and "Am nächsten Morgen kehrte der Minister nicht an seinen Arbeitsplatz zurück" by Monika Funke-Stern. Furthermore, they are planning a 60 to 90 minute succession of short videos by various artists, entitled informations in this longest and most complex structured video entertainment so far. "Kulturszene" is a culture magazine broadcast monthly (45

minutes duration) on WDR III. Similar to "Aspekte" (ZDF), with a weekly broadcasting time of 40 minutes, this program offers a mixture of all fields of culture. The magazine's program form is based on variety and rapidity. Dagmar Sauerstein, editor, believes that this form is rather difficult for art videos as most of them are of a meditative and slow nature because they deal with the fundamentals of viewing; therefore, more often than not the original tapes are shortened or "clipped" in "Kulturszene" that has been open to video since 1985. This raises a considerable problem for the artists because it constitutes an interference with their original tapes. The editors report that American video artists are usually more persistent and offensive in forwarding their tapes to television; they also state the fact it is extremely difficult for over-worked TV editors to be up-to-date with video as long as the artists themselves are not active enough in their capacity as sources of information. As a rule, American artists do not oppose to television shortening their works. The editing unit thinks it advantageous to find videos for programs on special occasions. So one was able to find Herbert Weritscher's "0 Tannenbaum" around Christmas time. Does "cultural television" when seeking videos like that, try to find elements of entertainment to make the broadcasts more attractive? Or does the representation of art take place in a critical form? In the past, the program has shown a rather long survey in an video spectacle in Frankfurt and continues to present short contributions by Klaus vom Bruch, by the electronic composer Holger Czukay, as well as tapes by Olga Gasteiger and Cosima Santoro as WDR-productions, and a tape by Gabór Bódy.

The nation-wide network ARD presented, in March, a video broadcast, "Formel 2", produced by WDR III (Sabine Rollberg), a very informative, beautiful and avantgardistic work illustrating the mutual influence of artistic video and musical video clip. Nine contributions were broadcast within 15 minutes. The trend is obvious: the electronic medium video does not have fixed broadcasting dates on German television, it has no regular "niches" and no longer any focal point. It merely gets broadcasts from time to time, the entirety of cultural information competing with video. The "fringe" medium video has to assert itself against feature films and entertainment programs.

A very interesting and unusual form of working with video is presently being tried out by WDR III in "Lyrics" by Joachim Dennhardt. "Lyrics" wants to establish new links between poems and other fields of art such as music, performance, dance, video and visual arts. All programs will be public events, recorded in different places. The site of the events is a huge mirror-tent. Unusually sophisticated videos are being commissioned. They will be faded into the events via large-scale projection. Here, too, the fade-ins will only last between one and four minutes. The longest and most interesting project is "Gedicht an ungewöhnlichen Orten" (Poem in exceptional places) by Daniela Hartmann. The poem-video plays with the surprise effect of a program that used to be very popular with the German audience, i. e. "Vorsicht Kamera" (Candid Camera). A Dada text by Kurt Schwitters will be read over loudspeaker to audiences in a football stadium, a discotheque, a department store and an indoor pool. The audience's reactions will be recorded and presented to a new audience. "Walzer" was the title of Gabor Body's latest video created to a poem by Novalis. Nam June Paik is represented with a reading from Allen Ginsberg with electronically alienated images. Besides, texts by Friedrich Roth, Erich Kästner, Malcolm Lowry, Walter Serner (with a photo of Man Ray) and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe were also artistically illustrated with video.

In recent years, since 1982, the culture magazine "Aspekte" (ZDF) has also broadcast several contributions on video; all of them with the usual duration of 6 to 10 minutes. Among them were Herbert Wentscher's survey of "New York Video Scene", a contribution of "Infermental" on the scene in "Hungary", a portrait of a "Video Friseurs". In the latter, the salon of the well known Munich coiffeur Wolfgang Flatz was presented, traditional mirrors being replaced by a video monitor. Furthermore, there was a long live-interview with Michael Bock about video and the problems of its distribution, containing fade-ins from American

videos of "Electronic Arts Intermix". "Aspekte" has partially financed, together with DAAD, the production costs of Richard Kriesche's tape "BER/LIN" and broadcast it. "Aspekte" also participates in the "Marler Video-Kunst-Preis" that "Adolf-Grimme-Institut" has been awarding since 1984. The prize-winning tapes are broadcast full-length and adequately remunerated. Michael Stefanowski, staff member of the program unit, is also one of the jury for the Marler-Prize. In our country, this prize is the first and probably the only step towards cooperation between television and other public institutions, such as the sculpture museum "Glaskasten" in Marl, the "Secretariat for Cultural Development" in Nordrhein-Westfalen, the German Adult Education Association. The jury underlines the importance of the award by further public activities. They compiled an exhibition of 20 tapes that was shown in eight cities during 1985. The prize winners – last year it was Marcel Odenbach – are offered visits abroad, among others by the Goethe-institutes. This highly coveted video prize is being awarded "for video work excelling in media specific translation, marked difference to simple forms of video documentary, quality of technical treatment and artistic quality".¹ Although a new generation of video artists is trying to push its way into the public and although video artists are being trained at the academies in Dusseldorf, Berlin, Braunschweig and Munich as well as in alternative workshops, the chances of getting broadcasts on television are still few. This situation has led artists, who rightly feel expelled from the media society, to resign rather than revolt. Their only chance is to be better informed on possible broadcast "niches", to make their obstacle race through the institutions and most important, to establish an alternative form of cooperation. The only thing that really helps is a whole package of strategies. Instead, video artists often try individual "strokes of genius", self-assertion without mediating ambition, forms of behaviour that seem remnants of the 18th and 19th centuries. A highly commendable exception is "Universal Input Output e.V.", an association that video artists like Astrid Heibach, Gusztáv Hámos and Marian Kiss have founded in Berlin (West). In the meantime, the artists have found out that the situation in the "open channels" of pilot cable projects does not make any difference for them; their chances there seem even less favourable. Therefore, the Group has addressed a "request to support the improvement of the video artists' situation" to the Senate of Western Berlin. This is a matter of perspectives and strategies for the of survival of an art form.⁷ But this is only one of the steps that have been taken so far. A meeting on "Video artists, video organization and video consumers" took place in Wiesbaden in March. Video artists, representatives of television, of academies, libraries, videotheques, museums, publishing houses and the press had been invited to this brain storming. The ministry of Education and Science and the Institute of the History of Art of the City of Bonn had sponsored this weekend conference. Its aims were an exchange of experiences and the elaboration of further suggestions, plans and strategies. BARbel Moser and Petra UnnOtzer from "Videonale", a video festival that had taken place twice before, compiled the results in a booklet.

FOOTNOTES:

1 All quotations on "Television Gallery" are taken from Gerry Schum's "Videokunst in Deutschland" (Dorine Mignot), ed. Wulf Herzogenrath, Verlag Hartje, Stuttgart 1982.

2 In the Federal Republic of Germany, there are two major public broadcasting networks: ZDF and ARD. While ZDF can also be received in Austria, Switzerland and the Netherlands, ARD broadcast their programs nationwide. Members of ARD are all regional stations WDR, HR, SWF, SFB, BR, Bremen and Saarland.

3 In a letter to G. 4. of March 27th, 1986.

4 In "Video. 20 Jahre später. Eine Zwischenbilanz." Ed. Gisliind Nabakowski, "Kunstform International", Vol. 77/78, January/February 1985.

5 A booklet in "Kleines Fernsehspiel" will be published in June on the occasion of a meeting at the Academy of Fine Arts, Western Berlin: "Kleines Fernsehspiel", ZDF, Postfach 4040, D-6500 Mainz – Lerchenberg, Tel. 06131-702475/76.

6 Skulpturenmuseum Glaskasten, Rathaus, D-4370 Marl, Tel. 02365-105614.

7 Universal Input Output e.V., Pestalozzistraße 81, D-1000 Berlin 12, Tel. 030-316631.

8 Bärbel Moser, Görlitzstraße 3, D-5300 Bonn 1, Tel. 0228-669421-0228-215961.