

Presented by
Griffith Artworks, Queensland College of Art, Griffith University &
The State Library of Queensland



RESONANCE

SOUND & V



Mike NICHOLLS and Tim KREGER

* *Bifurcate* 1994

feedback video FX image and music
11:30

Frank OSVATH

Homage to John Cage 1992

U-matic video

7:00

Gift of the artist

KOMNINOS

Writer & High Street Kew 1995

from *Artrage: artworks for television* 1998-99

hypertext video

3:23

Elena POPA

music by **Russell HANCORNE**

* *Texture* 1996

from *Artrage: artworks for television* 1996-97

video

3:02

Robyn WEBSTER

* *Korper* 1995

video

6:00

Justine COOPER

sound mixing by **Mazen MURAD**

Rapt 1998

video

5:06

Gift of the artist

Tina GONSALVES

sound by **Mark THOMAS**

Purge 1998

from *Artrage: artworks for television* 1998-99

video

1:40

Peter KENNEDY and John HUGHES

* *On Sacred Land* 1983

video

14:37

Stephen DUKE

guitar by **Mark Hoppe**

* *Soul Road Poem* 1993

video

9:00

Geoffrey WEARY

music by **Alfred SCHNITTKE**

piano by **Boris BERMAN**

The Eye of the Model 1993-94

video

6:40

Gift of the artist

Jon McCORMACK

* *64* 1997

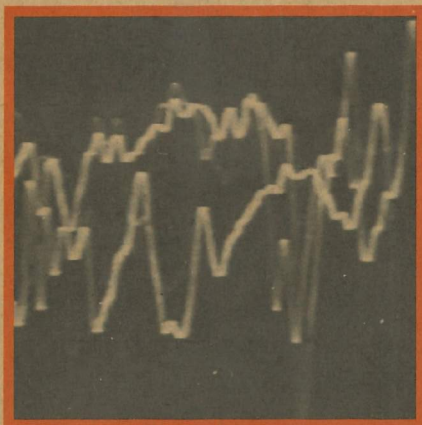
from *Artrage: artworks for television* 1996-97

video

3:11

All of the videos included in this program are held in the Griffith University Art Collection.

* *Acquired with the assistance of the Commonwealth Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body.*



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Resonance Sound & Vision in Video Art

At its most effective, sound is not simply laid on to provide a background unifying element to the flow of images or actions, but both collaborates in the production of meaning and extends the spatial dimensions of the work.¹

Critical writing about video art tends to focus on the significance of the visual image and ways of reading continuously changing moving images over soundtrack, music and aural effects. Concerns with redefining our modes of aesthetic perception to negotiate the characteristics of moving images: unfolding sequences, spatial simulations, ephemeral representations and disruptions to conventional notions of 'disinterested contemplation' (to use Arthur Schopenhauer's term), often dominate theoretical discourses for analysing video art². Aural components and the contributions sound artists, engineers, mixers, musicians and composers make to video and digital media art, remain relatively unexplored by art theorists unless they have a specific interest in multimedia arts. Conversely, sound theorists often construct an opposition between visual and auditory fields, desiring to "liberate their ideas from 'visualist' tendencies"³. This is an understandable strategy given the tendency for humans to stress the visual over other sensory elements such as hearing, smell or touch. Yet the value of emphasising sound over image or visa versa is questionable especially in regard to the interpretation and appreciation of video art or multimedia works where the fusion of these two fields actually creates the work.

Resonance is a program curated to observe and experience the poetic relationships between sound and visual imagery in video art from the Griffith University Art Collection. The works in this

screening resonate with rhythmic patterns of time, place, memory and sensation. Some works are concerned with visualising sound or subverting the technical devices used to measure sound by re-presenting them in a creative context. Others use music, voice over narratives, sound effects and soundscapes to evoke a sense of place, history, recollection and mood, taking audience members on an imaginary journey through personal, cultural and geographical territories. Video art provides us with an opportunity to appreciate the enriching capacities sound and music have to develop more experiential and multi-layered creative texts.

As suggested above, several works in this screening visualise sound or poetry, and utilise the technical mechanisms applied for representing sound frequencies, vibrations, impulses or tones. *Bifurcate* (1994), a collaborative work by Mike Nicholls and Tim Kreger, follows in the tradition of algorithmic art. Kreger produced the sound that was generated by two bifurcating algorithms. The visuals, produced by Nicholls, are an edited video feedback that has been generated by FX wipes, random noise and 'seed' animations which were inserted into the feedback loop. Aesthetically it is reminiscent of fractal images and abstract psychedelic animated films.

Frank Osvath's work, *Homage to John Cage* (1992), uses spectrographic waveforms or sine waves to represent a poem by John Cage. He recontextualises electronic impulses as animated narratives that vibrate with life and energy. The soundtrack begins as electro-garble, but as the film progresses, rhythmic waves of faster and slower frequencies reveal a brief poem. Komninos also visualises poetry in his work by incorporating multimedia and performance/reading elements in his creative practice. *Writer and High Street Kew*



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(1995), from *Artrage: artworks for television*, presents two poems as hypertexts, using English written language, symbolism and 'spoken word' narrated in synthesised voice-overs. In *Writer*, animated text and symbols flash up on the screen in different fonts, colours and sizes, working in tempo with the voice-over, to reinforce the beat and sentiment of the poem. *High Street Kew* creates an impression of space and distance between the listener and moving objects evoking an urban soundscape.

Elena Popa collaborated with sound artist, Russell Hancorne, to produce a lyrical abstract topography entitled *Texture* (1996), from the second *Artrage: artworks for television compilation*. Layers of visual textures bleed and flow into each other, transforming into different visual terrains. The electronic music soundtrack combines with computer animated effects to take the viewer on a psychedelic 'trip'. *Texture* is strongly influenced by abstraction and fractal aesthetics, indicating an interest in formalist concerns. Watching this deeply meditative video, gives the impression that the possibilities of continually morphing patterns and textures within this virtual realm are endless.

The body appears as a focus in a number of the works by women artists, exploring corporeal experience and the blurred boundaries between internal and external spaces. Permeability of the body via invasive medical and scientific technologies appears as a central theme in Robyn Webster's video, *Korper* (1995), and Justine Cooper's video, *Rapt* (1998). Robyn Webster's work confuses the perceived division between subject and object by exploring that volatile zone that separates and connects us from the outside world and other people – skin. She breaks through the illusion of a contained exterior surface, to create another site for

exploration. Similarly, Justine Cooper represents the biological interiors and exteriors of the body as scanned cross-sections, utilising a scientific technology usually used to scrutinise the body for physical variations, in alternative ways. Digital output imagery from a MRI machine scanning the artist's body is coupled with sounds derived from the interface between the body and machine during moments in the scanning process. Although Webster and Cooper have different visual aesthetics and approaches to exploring corporeality, both artists use experimental soundtracks, incorporating samples of bodily noise, to reinforce the sense of embarking on journey over and through an eerie, intimate landscape that is the body.

The title of Tina Gonsalves' work, *Purge* (1998), connotes a cleansing process by evacuating physical, emotional and spiritual burdens. It also links to the eating disorders, Anorexia and Bulimia, that are often associated with women. Gonsalves evokes a distressing psychological space and altered perception of time or reality by uniting a morphing face with a warped soundtrack produced by Mark Thomas. Mouths and hands that partially cover faces resemble feminist 'core' imagery, perhaps symbolising a feminine presence and subjectivity in the work. By distorting the visuals and sound, Gonsalves may be attempting to explore time as a subjective experience and express how notions of temporality are suspended and distorted during moments of extreme distress, sadness or purging.

The significance of the land and landscape to concepts of social, personal and cultural histories and mythologies, are explored in the work of several male artists. Peter Kennedy and John Hughes' work is indicative of some experimental film and video art from the early 1980s, as it exemplifies video as an effective media for



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expressing a political ideology. *On Sacred Land* (1983) recontextualises the process of colonisation and assimilation in Australia from an Indigenous perspective, critiquing the historical mechanisms used to construct an illusion of concern for Indigenous Australian welfare. Verbal messages about wanting to help Aboriginals are coupled with contradictory images of these people being punished, enslaved and assaulted by Anglo-European Australians. The soundtrack creates a heightened sense of tension and confusion in relation to the visuals, building up into a shrill and abrasive pitch at various times.

Themes of travelling and the personal and cultural experience of the land appear in the work of Stephen Duke. *Soul Road Poem* (1993) documents a physical journey from Sydney to Darwin undertaken by the artist in 1992, while also representing a personal journey of discovery. Interweaving animation, performance documentation, music and narration, this work explores different phases of the journey and the significance of spirituality, corporeality, family, landscape and society in creating a sense of place in the world. Duke produced all the sound for this work except the electric guitar line that was composed and played by Mark Hoppe.

Geoffrey Weary's *The Eye of the Model* (1993-94) is concerned with expressing personal and cultural memories of the dissolution of Soviet Russia and the erasure of the iconography and images of that era. Graffitied, smashed and desecrated statues and other works of art (damaged after the failed coup of 1991) are enmeshed with sequences focusing on a male and female body, architectural spaces and scenes from old black and white films about revolution. The combination of these images suggest ambiguous relationships between representational practices, spaces and concepts

of identity. The contrast between the staccato piano music, played by Boris Berman, and moments of silence, create an illusion of tension and history, while reinforcing the rhythmic pattern of the visuals.

Jon McCormack's *64* (1997) is a montage of home video footage of different locations across Australia and the United States of America, reflecting on the electronic mediation of the landscape, memories and experience of place and travel. Portable video and digital cameras have changed our experience of the world, providing an electronic eye to gaze at, and frame, various landscapes and situations. The quest to document or capture the 'essence' of a place appears to override the need to 'see' the world with our own eyes. Interestingly, McCormack intercuts idealised images of the 'natural' world, with industrial and urbanised scenery, challenging notions of the ideal landscape. McCormack composed, performed, engineered and mastered all the sound for this work, and the sense of motion and displacement evoked by the imagery is further enhanced by the music.

The corporeal receptivity of the living body – its ability to feel and experience sound, as well as hearing sound – and human tendencies to accentuate vision over the other senses, make the combination of sound and imagery a potent sensory alliance. Perhaps this is why film and video are such captivating creative media, they bring together two fields that offer their own complex languages and devices for communicating ideas. Sound and imagery have an interdependent relationship in film and video art, feeding each other to the point where they resonate with emotions, sensations, memories and illusions of time and place.

Edwina Bartleme

¹ Jean Fisher 1990, 'Reflections on Echo – sound by women artists in Britain' in "Signs of the Times", The Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, p.60

² Heinrich Klotz 1996, 'Video Art' in "Mediascape" catalogue, Guggenheim Museum, SoHo, June 14 – September 15, pp.8-9

³ Densil Cabrera,
http://autonomous.org/soundsite/csa/eis2content/essays/p54_naum.html

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List of images

cover: still from **Geoffrey Weary's** video
The Eye of the Model (1993-94)

1. still from **Tina Gonsalves'** video *Purge* (1998)
2. still from **Frank Osvath's** video
Homage to John Cage (1992)
3. still from **Robyn Webster's** video *Korper* (1995)
4. still from **Jon McCormack's** video *64* (1997)

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