

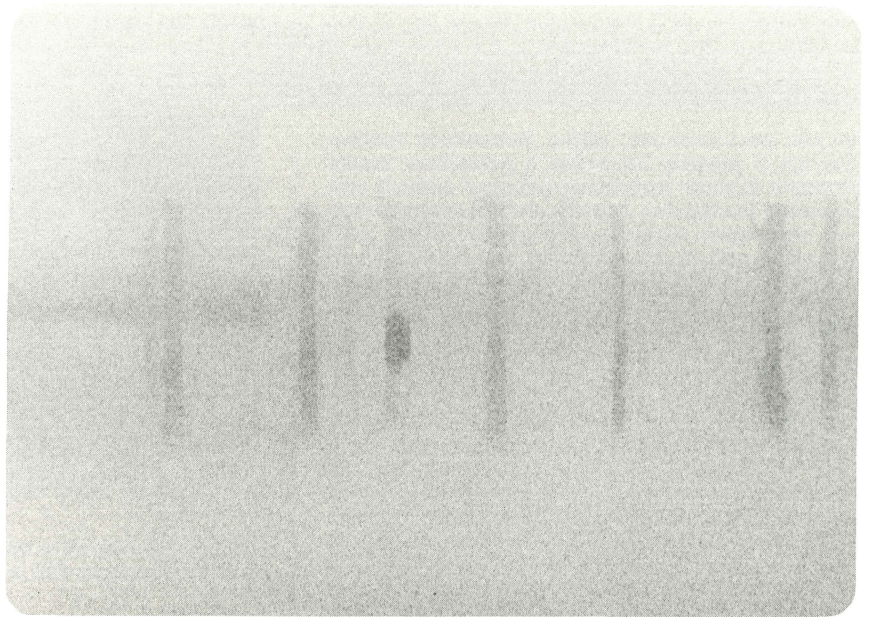
David Rimmer, *Al Neil/A Portrait*, 1979, filmDavid Rimmer, *Narrows Inlet*, 1980, film

photo: Robert Keziere

gave writing a new vigour and sense of itself. Each of the films above, as well as the later *Fracture* (1973), *Watching for the Queen* (1973), and *Canadian Pacific* (1974), owe a great deal to Stein's methodical inquiries, and, like Stein, each works by exploring and demonstrating rather than proving its point. Rimmer's use of open and closed loops of archival and found footage in most of the above films is the cinematic equivalent of Stein's fascination with repetition.

As should be evident by now, Rimmer's early films do not suffer greatly by being ten years old; they stand up very well. *Variations*, *Surfacing*, and *Real Italian Pizza* are like old friends who still have a lot to say. *Watching for the Queen* is another experiment with an anonymous loop and a long precise unravelling, and is actually a very dramatic film about waiting and watching for something to happen. At some points it was even exciting, although the movement is minimal. *Fracture* is also an investigation into the nature of cinematic drama, i.e., parallel montage. Two incidents from a home movie shot on 8mm film and blown up to 16mm so that the result looks like nothing so much as famous Washington State sasquatch footage, are juxtaposed against each other to suggest relation, which is then broken down and finally restored, to the point where we put our own doubt into question. The best moments in Rimmer's films consistently provoke us to question our own perceptions and pre-established assumptions, an important gesture in a medium entirely dependent upon illusion.

*Al Neil/A Portrait* I found to be a completely marvelous film, absolutely compelling, and it should be shown to everyone in the National Film Board. In some ways it appears to be a very conventional film, but it is also very personal, and it gets in very close to its subject, an almost impish west coast jazz musician, writer, and sculptor known for his huge heart and his huge appetite. And it's precisely because of its quiet personal style, its slow fades to black under which voices or music continue, its insistence on the integrity of the musical pieces, and its refusal to artificially blast everything with light, that it succeeds so well in giving us a portrait of a man whose legend threatens to obscure his humanity. Few shots are not close-ups; we are from the beginning among friends. There is no history, no attempt to fill in a life, to tell of a man by showing the things around him. Al Neil speaks for himself. By being fully present without the whim to manipulate, Rimmer succeeds in becoming almost invisible, in other words, totally integrated. And when Neil tells an anecdote about his mother's funeral, two segments of the story are marked on the screen by fades to black, taking us away from the storyteller's face and leaving us to imagine what we wish to

imagine. Donald Brittain might presume to illustrate someone's story with "appropriate" or parallel images, but we have the feeling that Rimmer's respect for the story and the subject of the story would never permit him to go for a false but personally aggrandizing shot with which to hammer us over the head.

Rimmer's most recent film, *Narrows Inlet*, marks a concern to formal concerns. It consists of a repeated series of jerky, dissimilar pans back and forth across a beach in front of which, in shallow water, a large number of dark, creosoted pilings stand. No doubt they once held up a cannery or a wharf, but today they make one think of house poles in deserted Indian villages. To begin with the pilings are barely visible through the fog, and it is difficult to orient oneself. Horizontal pans, vertical stripes, and at first few jerks. Rimmer was anchored in a boat which, as the fog begins to clear, begins to bob up and down increasingly. Trees, pilings, beach, and sky take on their expected colours, and at the end a herd of seals splashes in the water in front of the boat. The horizontal panning continues, and, with the jerking, eventually evolves into an unpleasant visual experience. I felt that the film was a little long, that its point was quickly made. Even so, I found the beginning enchanting. In all of Rimmer's films, something hidden is revealed. Usually the revelation comes as a result of manipulating an image through looping, cutting, optical printing, repetition, etc. In this case, Rimmer lets the fog act as a curtain, prefacing the dance of the waves. The same faith he placed in Al Neil he invests in the elements.

Rimmer is seeking new areas to explore. The seemingly conventional approach of *Al Neil/A Portrait* would not have been possible without the earlier films (*Al Neil* contains some pretty remarkable double-exposure *camera stylo* work). But Rimmer, it occurs to me, may have developed his film technique to the point where he will have to interrogate his comfortable facility; he may have to start making films that are open to mistakes he cannot program. *Narrows Inlet* insists on the chance element of fog and waves. It also seems to mark a new visual awareness in Rimmer; the opening images have an almost painterly quality. And they feel very close to home.

#### COLIN BROWNE

## GERMAN VIDEO AND PERFORMANCE

### A Space, Toronto

4 - 25 JANUARY 1981

The presentations by Ulrike Rosenbach, Marcel Odenbach, Klaus vom Bruch and Jochen Gerz at A Space were video-performances rather than German video and performance. All the artists used video in their performances; and many of the tapes documented video-performances.

This integration in performance and documentation indicates a particular concern with video. (Jochen Gerz is aside of many of these generalizations. Gerz lives in Paris; the other three share a studio and video equipment in Cologne. Rosenbach curated the exhibition.) For the Cologne artists, video is a medium — a means of recording and transmitting — and an object (a monitor) in their performances, not specifically a substitute for commercial media. It serves to transmit cultural values (which are ideological all the same), not to impose social roles as defined by commercial media. In this, the video-performances differ from much North American work which inhabits the more theatricalized forms of media, and which effects a more direct relation between performer and viewer.

Even though we are part of the space, we observe these performances as if they were apart from us — as if they were sculptures we looked at from the side with no eye contact (excluding Gerz again). The performers confront the video monitors almost as objects first and transmitters second, rather than confront the audience. As a consequence, the cool detachment and working through of the performances both determine a relation to the audience and establish an intention: the work is to be understood. While the work may be didactic, or pointedly symbolic in Rosenbach, these artists, including Gerz, are concerned that the audience or individual make a decision or choose to act. Odenbach the performer makes a choice in his performance; Rosenbach exemplarily enacts a role; Vom Bruch intervenes within his performance; and Gerz is "antagonistic" to his audience.

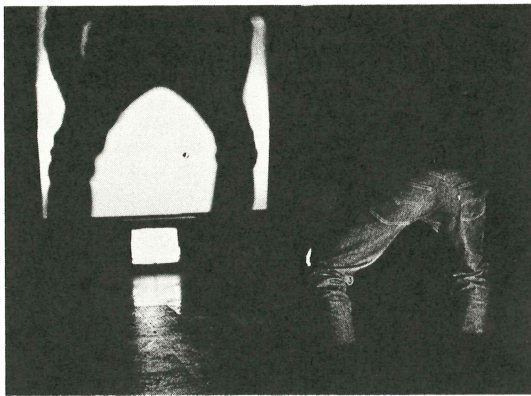
While we share a Western culture and the international context of contemporary art with these artists, differences invariably arise from a Central European and specifically German culture. Yet, we know this work — its forms, structure, ideological intentions and strategies: we can read it. A primary concern of the work, in

fact, is that it be structured so that we can read it, understand and act.

#### ULRIKE ROSENBACH

In her performances, Ulrike Rosenbach follows through a physical act within a prescribed spatial structure in which mythical or historical patterns and personae (concerning women) and video technology are telescoped together. The space of the performance conflates a symbolic figure, such as a spiral, a mythical personified figure, and the physical forms of the technology. At the same time a persona is enacted (while symbolized) through the body of the performer who acts through the video technology while registering its projections.

The initial set-up for *Psyche aber... She wandered about, 30'* was a maze of hanging paper which Rosenbach tore down with a walking stave to clear the space, and to reveal a monitor that she then carried on her shoulder along a spiral trail of video cable. Carrying of the monitor is that acting out of Psyche's task at the same time that it is a difficulty: the monitor has a physical and cultural weight (with its image). Rosenbach's assumption of this mythic task as a contemporary act has exemplary symbolic value. Yet even though it is actualized and acted through, it maintains that value as symbol; and the performance's complex, layered formal unity serves for didactic comprehension. The performer does all the labour and leaves little for the viewer to cathect.



Marcel Odenbach, *The Goalie's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick*, video performance; photo: Ric Amis

#### MARCEL ODENBACH

In his video installation/performance "The Goalie's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick," Marcel Odenbach faced the video monitors as if he were a goalie deciding where the penalty kicker will kick the ball. Three monitors defined the space of a soccer field — two serving as goalposts, the third facing the "goalie"/performer as the action of the game. On top of this "literal" structure, video served as cultural transmission: one monitor alternated the red image of political speeches and American westerns accompanied by a repetitive musical scale, the other a blue meditative and illusory image accompanied by softer music such as Stevie Wonder. Once again, Odenbach did not confront the video monitors specifically as commercial media, but rather as objects of cultural weight. He occupied a more generalized existential position — acted upon as a goalie, acted upon culturally and socially. His seemed the most personal of the performances. At first, the performer attentively responded to the penalty kicks, throwing himself on the ground, and then was a helpless victim of its assaults, as if the kicks were to his body. Rather than subject himself to media imposition or simply react to the penalty kick, the performer must make a choice. Within the physical space of the performance, this became a symbolic and object choice of the blue monitor by Odenbach as he ended the performance by moving his slumped body in front of it. But, as in Odenbach's *To fall between two*

*chairs*, the choice is what has to be faced, not necessarily escaped.



Ulrike Rosenbach, *Psyche aber... She wandered about, 30'*, video performance.

#### KLAUS VOM BRUCH

Klaus vom Bruch searches for the rhythms and forms of the imagery of the heroic male. His is the other side of Rosenbach's feminist work on patriarchal codes as he poses the images of the male in the intersecting and supportive worlds of technology, labour and the military. (He used part of Rosenbach's *The culture of women/an attempt to establish contact* on one monitor in his performance. His own work reproduces, in its tight technical control and application of new electronic devices, what one of his tapes names: *The reason we males adore technique so much*.)

In *La grande propagande*, Klaus vom Bruch worked with two monitors, using the strategy of repetition of a single image of a male in action, here a single repeated motion of a fireman, coupled with live projection of his own face into that image by means of a device that edited an image in response to a sound. The other monitor mainly showed a repeated clip of a WW II bomber pilot. (One complaint of the performance series was the inappropriate location at A Space which made viewing difficult, for instance, seeing at the same moment these two monitors.) By repetition, he imposed an image on us, but he also used it as a means of analysis. Repetition forms an image from a continuous motion, forms a socialized image from a presumed natural continuum; it hypostatizes an image that is always registered by the viewing subject. At the same time that repetition heroicized the image, it reduced it to a repetition compulsion on the part of the subject of the image — the fireman on one monitor, the pilot on the other.

As performer and subject to the image and technology, vom Bruch kept his eye on the monitor, inserted himself by ringing a bell, which edited him into the image (the bell was almost pathetic next to the fireman's hose), and slapped himself to achieve the same insertion. To be subject to, but also to pay attention, was the desire of his action.

#### JOCHEN GERZ

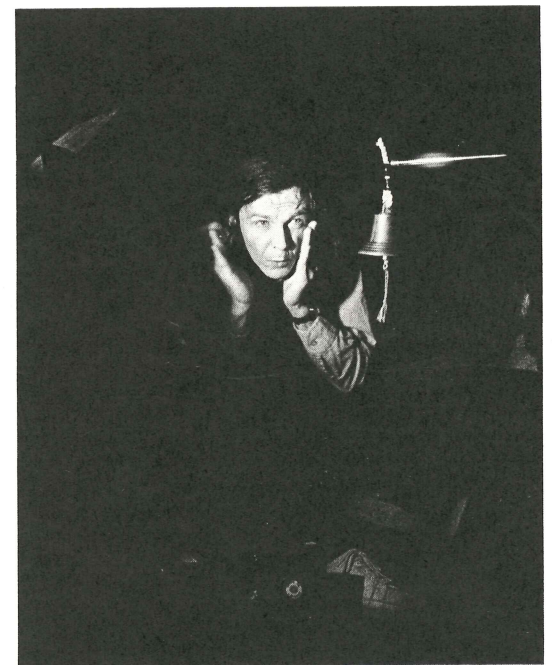
Coming at the end, and from outside this group, Jochen Gerz put the performances into a perspective, or a least put the audience's role in performance into question. *We are coming* questioned the audience's acceptance of convention and consumption of performance — not an audience that could be easily antagonized, but the audience that knew its cues and responses; "We are not afraid", spoke the audiotape that accompanied the performance from the point of view of the audience.

Gerz placed himself in the space as a presence and provocation. Half-naked, he played a flashlight over himself, around the "structure" of the room, and then on the audience's faces. From bemused self-con-

sciousness in response to the audiotape, one individual after another became the focus of the audience, first as subject of the artist's flashlight, and then his touch. What Gerz seeks in his love-hate relationship with the audience is for the audience to break the frame, to act beyond conventional response, in effect, to leave performance/this performance.

At what point are we in performance that we need this reminder? What frames or conventions are necessary for an effect, or even in order for a convention to subvert itself? Gerz has to insinuate himself into a situation he is trying to act beyond. But conventions are built as much as they are broken in performance; and the promise of convention — and performance — is that something can be effected within it. While he may oppose the theoretical origin of the other performances presented at A Space, Gerz's performance still has a didactic value as he continues to re-present in art his notion of life beyond art.

#### PHILIP MONK



Klaus Von Bruch, *La Grande Propagande*, video performance; Photo: Ric Amis