

(Shirley Clarke, well-known dancer and filmmaker, started working with video about two years ago. She now operates the TePee, a Video-Theatre Workshop partially funded by the New York State Council on the Arts and located in the tower of her loft on top of Manhattan's Chelsea Hotel. She is currently developing a video troupe to take on the college circuit.

Shirley was interviewed by Antioch's Videoball. The questions and responses which follow are excerpts from that interview.)

SHIRLEY: At this point, it's been about two years since I started working with 1/2-inch video equipment, and though I have progressed nicely in basic cable, dirty recording heads and signal-to-noise ratio, somehow I have the feeling that if I had chosen to go into the business of selling 1/2-inch equipment, by now I might at least have been rich.... I guess I read the signs wrong or the wrong signs. Five years ago (the speed of Life, etc. being what it is), I figured that by now we'd have equipment that for starts didn't fall apart the minute its three-month warranty ran out - and that cable TV would be a fact in a majority of the major cities across the country - why, we might even have Videophones (a kind of mini-two-way cable)! Indeed, I thought the Great New Era of Communications would be in GO - but after a careful checkup in several encyclopedias, it looks like 1985 is the earliest date when we might expect, etc.... So what do we little people do who are not involved in sending pictures to the moon, who don't have access to industry, who are not the heads of science departments, and who don't even want to work for the networks or Educational TV? What are we supposed to do? Those of us who spend all day every day and night doing our Video thing - we think of our work with 1/2-inch video as a profession - a career - a way of life. What do we do - while we're waiting for future time to get here?

VIDEOBALL: Why should we be doing anything different than we're doing now? We are all exploring and learning at this stage.

SHIRLEY: Of course, that's true. And it is working that way, especially for the people who are interested in cinema verite video portraits - or interested in

making non-objective videotapes, electronic paintings - who use synthesizers and build or adapt their own equipment. But it's not quite the same for those of us who want to work with Video as a process art form - who want to do Video Theatre - live video mixes - and all too often one of the main reasons we fail is that we need tools and equipment that we can count on to function. And after we have managed to somehow collect a lot of expensive stuff, is it too much to expect that it holds up through one show? After enough bad experiences, you begin to think you're too stupid or too unlucky to stay in Video - or else you find yourself suffering from the Electronic Meemies.

VIDEOBALL: Are you perhaps being too ambitious for present realities?

SHIRLEY: Well, that's exactly how I came up with my six-point practical program to help you to get and keep it together - to list and limit your goals and experience. I hoped that it would slow me down a bit, help me to simplify, and not to go off in all directions at once.

First, the press. I think it is time now to try to find a way to get to the general public. During this period it would be useful to have regular reports on the different ways to use the potentials of Video from all sorts of groups and individuals that work with Video and we will have to make use of the popular press until we're able to get more exposure by cable or air waves or whatever. Besides, we could use an audience who, if they knew they could participate, would enjoy doing so. I might add here the idea of promoting Video Festivals across the county and in Europe, and even though they tend to be "in"-group events, they can help to develop standards; also, they generate publicity, with the added side effect that sometimes there are even financial rewards.

Second is equipment. Nobody questions the fact that equipment needs to be improved - and we should continue writing letters to the manufacturers and get all our friends to do so also. And by complaining to our distributors, they in turn will exert pressure - particularly Panasonic and Sony. But what has been the most helpful to me has been the information I've gotten from other Videotes, so I think we should find more ways to exchange information in print among ourselves, like in the back section of Radical Software. We could use lots more information sheets like Dumping Ground; I could use one a week. Also, when any of us succeeds in finding ways to adapt or improve any equipment, we should pass the word around. Here I'd like to mention an unusual phenomenon that rarely if ever happens on the art scene, namely a Video artist, Nam-June Paik, arranged to give us access to his synthesizer via the TV Lab at Channel 13. This is very generous and he deserves many thanks from all.

Then, third, the cassette. The cassette could be an important outlet for all of those in Video who are making Electronic Video Films, and for all the video artists who are doing personal video biographies or autobiographies. I see the cassette attracting customers in much the same way that we now buy books and records. With this in mind, I think we should start now to form a number of small video publishing companies. We should not allow the cassette hardware manufacturers to function also as our distributors as they are doing now - they're busy stockpiling for the future and not paying any money, just future rights - and they are making deals with the tapemakers one at a time and obviously ripping them off one at a time.

VIDEOBALL: In terms of the distributor, do you think some place should be centralized, not Radical Software doing a printout where each group lists its own material, but a central place where the tapes are kept?

SHIRLEY: That's fine for our internal communication needs; as a matter of fact, Image Bank in Vancouver is developing a library of tapes, and everyone is welcome to join. They offer many different kinds of services - maybe they represent the format suitable for an Alternate Media Publishing House; but if we want some kind of income return, we will need something for videotapers like the Filmmakers' Co-Op. The advantage

Shirley Clarke: an interview

of many different groups is that they can pay attention to their own interests; their first concern should be geared to their special images and needs, and then all of them could form an overall body that could protect and check up on all our deals with cassette companies and distributors - in unity there is...etc. In other words, we need some alternate media business people.

Fourth is tours and travel. The most obvious way for many of us to be able to find out what's happening around the country and to learn the "hows" from each other is face to face - so for the time being, we should find ways to tour and travel and get paid for it! I've been working on a plan for a troupe to go on tour after spending a three-month period of training together. We will travel on a three-month tour to any college community that is already into Video or has access to Video equipment. We plan to rent a station wagon - carry some special equipment, props, costumes, lights, etc. - there will be about five of us in the troupe, and for starts we'll ask the communities to pay us \$100 apiece. In each location, we plan to spend several days as guests of the community and we will invite anyone who has any interest or background in electronics or film or theatre to become temporary members of our troupe. We hope to find ways to use their input together with ours, and all of us will do a show for the community - we will have developed video games and techniques and methods to do this during our rehearsal period. Also, we hope to discover quick ways of helping others to pick up the easiest methods of working with video and when we leave, we hope we'll leave behind some new converts, who on their own will continue to work in this mode. We plan to start these tours very soon, so I hope you'll invite us down your way.

Now point five is cable access. I guess we all have our own ideas about the kinds of social-cultural-political changes that would take place if we, the people, were to

have control over what goes in or comes out of that tube in our homes; it's our job to find ways to use video to inform the public of their inalienable right guaranteed by the First Amendment - free speech. And that means free access to the communications media. We have to find a way to get them to realize what's at stake if they relinquish these rights. We should find fun and exciting ways to use whatever the present access allows us, and get the public to feel that they'll be missing something they not only have a right to, but want to be a part of themselves.

VIDEOBALL: Are you talking about lack of access on the cable? I know that you already have public access channels in New York City. And isn't it true that the FCC has established public access channels as part of the requirements for issuing licenses and franchises to all the cable companies?

SHIRLEY: Public access is an important conceptual victory, but in reality it's only been tokenism - a little like the "Letters to the Editor" in the

SHIRLEY: Well, that's exactly what I had in mind when we planned this invitation to the Space Telethon Game. The whole idea was to try and use Video to play a game with the public. But the sad fact was that the powers-that-be at the cable company saw fit just the week before it was to take place (and on my birthday, no less) to renege on all their promises - and with too little time left before cold weather arrived, we had to cancel. But let me explain very briefly what we had in mind. At the TePee, 200 artists, press, producers, and money-type people would broadcast "live" for 48 continuous hours over the cable, using either their regular channels or Public Access. Every six hours a different group would come together and rehearse and finally tape a work that they had all created. Now around the city, we had set up three or four "drops" - places where other groups could gather that had access to video equipment and the ability to feed into our mix. They were in contact with us via the telephone and bicycle. The audience at home, if they tuned to the cable channels, could hear us at

As a recognized member of the Art Community of New York, we are happy to extend to you an Invitation to play a key role in the FIRST INTER-ARTS SYNERGETIC-SPACE TELETHON. From Saturday morning, September 30th, 9 a.m. to Monday dawn, October 2nd, 9 a.m., 1972, (forty-eight continuous hours) at the T.P. atop the Chelsea Hotel, over two hundred artists (200) of different disciplines will interact creatively with each other and simultaneously over Sterling-Manhattan Cable TV, we will broadcast "Live" the process and creation of "Ten New Video Tapes."

Through the miracle of electronic tele-communication, we will have direct contact with our audience. Those at home, already connected to the cable can talk to us on the telephone and see us on their TV set. Then at specially set-up "DROPS" we will have viewing and taping facilities that will enlarge and extend our scope.

SPONSORS

NEW YORK STATE COUNCIL OF THE ARTS • STERLING-MANHATTAN CABLE TV
• THE T.P. THE TOWER PLAYPEN • THE ALTERNATE MEDIA CENTER • OPEN CHANNEL, INC. • TECHNISPHERE, INC. • WOMENS INTERNATIONAL CENTER

To confirm and clarify your participation U.S.V.P. to:
MARGOT LEWITIN (477-5416) • MIRIAM SILMAN (586-1927)
SHIRLEY CLARKE (243-3700) • BARBARA HASPIEL (586-2040)

So The Date Is Set For Our Experiment Into Future Time.

Our goal is for all of us to meet and have fun playing VIDEO together. We hope you will be able to join us.

newspapers - and so far, the quality of the tapes and the broadcast signal reinforce this resemblance. And one little channel reserved for all of the People, with 48 or more channels still in the hands of Big Business! I guess the problem is that no one else can afford to invest \$5 million a year against eventual profits of \$5 million a day except someone like Howard Hughes or Time-Life. Actually, this was why at first I was against public access, and it pretty much turned me off cable TV. Then, fortunately, last fall I met Gene Youngblood over at Shegiko's and Paik's. He has spent the last three years doing a book on this whole subject, which will, I believe, be one of the most important and influential books of the decade. By the time we parted, we all agreed that a few months after his book comes out, there should be a major conference in Washington to find support to ensure that the rights of the public are protected.

VIDEOBALL: But doesn't cable isolate people, rather than bringing them together as video theatre does?

regular intervals invite them to join in our video Scavenger Hunt: "Wake up and come and play with us. All you have to do is to call us on the phone - then, if you'll sing us a song, we'll do a dance for you!" Whenever you do something that we accept into our mix, you move up to the next drop. "So get up and out of bed - you're on your way - the first drop is Video Exchange - see you soon - right up here - live - in person - on camera!" What a great way for Video to take over the cities! Like taking theatre not only into the streets, but into our homes. The average American watches TV for 6 hours a day - and with the 3-day work week coming, we need a new way to deal with this box. Those into Video are in a good position to show and inform people just how access to the new tools, the new toys of the new technology can be used. I hope that by next fall, please God, I will have found the funds to lease a cable channel and this time round, knock on wood, the "Second Synergistic Scavenger Hunt Space Telethon" will really take place.

Now point six: Live Process Video Theatre Mix - Environmental Video - Video Play Games - Video Theatre. We need to build prototypes for the new theatre needed for the new forms. As we develop the home entertainment complex - multi-image inputs on mosaic wall-screens - we will want to go out to a place chock full of people and lots of different things for everyone with every taste. The Pleasure Palaces of the Future! Everything from dancing to live and recorded music, spaces for theatres, plays, films - sandwich bars - drinking fountains - a maze of rooms of many sizes on many levels - maybe sunken pools of water for swimming or sauna baths - swings and slides - trapezes - balls to bounce - rooms to play ping-pong - even a small room to play chess while listening to Mozart. Sounds like a great hangout, doesn't it? But anyhow, since I haven't yet been able to convince anyone to build my Pleasure Palace, I decided to take some of the grant money I got and use the empty space in the tower above where I live and construct a demonstration Video Theatre Workshop. It is possible for four places both inside the tower and out on the roof to send and receive video images, since there are junction boxes all over, and a patchboard and switches - it's a good place to use as a workshop for small groups to work out all kinds of ideas and practice the new skills we'll need, so that if one day a rich gentleman comes by and decides to invest in a Pleasure Palace - we'll be ready!

VIDEOBALL: I think it's important for the people who come to video theatre to have some expectation of the kind of environment they're going into, that they come and know they're coming for a video experience. We were doing the same thing at the Videoball Local, our video theatre. We had four different stations. You went from room to room and in each room we provided props which we thought provided a lot of choices, but we began to feel we were laying this trip on them. They didn't know what to expect and when they got there, they felt pressured to perform. We felt that they shouldn't feel any pressure, but should rather just flow with it.

SHIRLEY: We're going to have to change many habits and we've got to understand that most audiences see their role as observers. They are used to sitting back and waiting to be entertained. There's going to be a learning period for everyone and I see nothing wrong with helping them. You as a teacher should know that you don't stop creativity by helping your students learn. But it's going to be a while before people realize that they can go to the theatre where we expect them to interact with us, but they need to be given some idea of what is expected - we must give them hints - props are fine because if it really gets going, they'll take off on their own. If we see Video as a "process" art form, we can use the process of learning in life as a good guide. We need very much as adults to play. To understand that playing is art and art is playing - what is the difference? We've separated these things much too long. We've lost the tribal culture and we've lost shamans and the campfire and the group energy that's needed if the rain dance is to produce rain. We have separated the artist from the group. We've gotten to the point now where there are these freaky people called artists and then there's

everybody else - we are changing that, and Video is the tool that will let the artists connect back, by interacting with the group - that is, if we can learn how to use Video properly.

I should have a subhead - Skills and Drills. In order to accept as true that a new technology gives us a new media, we first have to describe just what the unique capacities are that distinguish it from any other previous form of human expression. We should then describe Video as a new form in terms of its uniqueness - like simultaneous feedback, instantaneous playback, interplay-interface, time delay, etc. Each new capacity demands new capabilities. If you look back into the history of Humankind, you become aware that it took a long, long time for each new media to develop as an independent art form. Slowly the human being gained the skills and dexterity necessary to use the new tools that had allowed the new forms to emerge in the first place. For instance, how long do you imagine it took for a hand, a stick, and digging with it to develop the necessary dexterity between eyes and fingers and hand to carve the graceful curves and calligraphy of images and dreams?

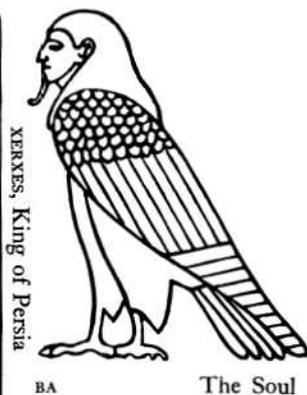
Dancers spend years training their bodies and developing the technical skills necessary to dance - and it's the same for musicians, for actors - whatever new media you choose, it's the same story. But what are the skills needed in Video that humankind never needed before? Well, one unique capability of Video is that we are able to put many different images from many different camera and playback sources into many different places (upstairs and downstairs) and into many separate spaces (monitors) and we can see what we are doing as we are doing it. We need to develop better motor connections among our eyes and our hands and bodies - we need balance and control to move our images from monitor to monitor or pass our camera to someone else. But mainly we need the skill to see our own images in our own monitors and at the same time see what everyone else is doing. We need to acquire the ability to see in much the same way that a jazz musician can hear what he is playing and at the same time hear what the other musicians are doing and together they make music. If we are lucky, for starts we'll make video games.

Perhaps one of the most successful video games I've participated in was the VID-E-ORACL. Don Snyder and I did it together. Through the aid of video electronics, it told fortunes. "The atmosphere was extremely effective in the little wheel house on the top deck of the boat where Charlotte Moorman held this year's Avant-Garde Festival. Outside it was raining, inside it was dark and cosy - decorated in Early Arabian Nights. A robed and turbaned Oracl was perched on top of the steering wheel, and at his feet, on soft cushy cushions, the Seeker sat. The Oracl gazed into his crystal ball (a TV ball that played the I Ching) while the Seeker watched the playback of our magic fortune tapes. It's hard to describe, but somehow the air was filled with the vibrations of electronics and people meditating and the overall effect, the customers agreed, was a sense of calm well-being." That's pretty OK, I think. And it's been pretty OK talking with you, too.

MAGIC COLLAGE CARDS DESIGNED BY DON SNYDER FOR THE VID-E-ORACL



MAGIC CIRCLES AND WAND OF DOCTOR FAUSTUS Solomon's Seal



XERXES, King of Persia

BA The Soul



CRIOSPHINX -The Silence



THE FIVE GREAT BLESSINGS--HAPPINESS, HEALTH, VIRTUE, PEACE AND LONG LIFE