

VIDEO/TV: HUMOR/COMEDY

Introduction to the Catalogue for the Exhibition

By John Minkowsky, curator

The touring exhibition VIDEO/TV: HUMOR/COMEDY was conceived in early 1980 as a means of exploring the recent renaissance of experimental comedy in the visual and performing arts *and* in the entertainment industry. It was to consider the ways in which this renewed interest in innovative approaches to humor had begun to blur traditional distinctions between the otherwise exclusive domains of Art and Entertainment; which distinctions might still be maintained as useful critical tools and which could be discarded as surplus baggage; some of the circumstances that helped to foster this new breed of crossovers afforded by the employment of comedy; and what all of this might portend for the futures of Art and Entertainment alike.

The introduction in the late 1960s of portable, low-cost television equipment engendered the rise of video as a new art medium. And the birth of video art more or less coincided with that of other modes of artistic expression – such as Performance – which were themselves part of a vaster and more profound upheaval within and redefinition of contemporary art. A number of younger artists, for reasons which ranged from mere curiosity and the desire to extend their ideas into temporal forms, to strong convictions about the relationship of art to commerce and the role of the artist in society, embraced these new modes of expression and media, and the new approaches, techniques and conceptual strategies toward the act of art making they seemed both to suggest and demand. For many early video experimentalists, working in a medium with which they had grown up and about which they were ambivalent at best, the means were now within their grasp to create TV that would critique the omnipresent – and even omnipotent – monster of broadcast television in one fashion or another; a few also understood that, despite their often didactic intentions, their video creations could also be entertaining and thus combine the most engaging qualities of TV with the depth and purpose of art. Nam June Paik realized this as an almost fundamental strategy in his witty tape collages and video sculptures, as did William Wegman in his brief video sketches, drawings and photographs. The first works by this pair of artists were made more than a decade ago and, in the intervening time, both Paik's and Wegman's prescience in these matters has been applauded and the modes they established emulated. Moreover, their work still maintains a freshness of vision and clarity of purpose long after tapes made by some of their more "serious" contemporaries have come to seem intolerably poky and pretentious.

Over the past three decades, commercial television has issued extraordinarily little acceptable – not to mention memorable – product. There are, however, exceptions to the rule, and TV comedy has offered its TV audience a fair share of remarkable experiences, like the work of Ernie Kovacs. Some of TV's greatest moments have, in fact, been known to set off unexpected social repercussions on a massive scale. Erik Barnouw, in *Tube of Plenty*, cites one such example:

Restaurants and nightclubs felt the impact. A variety series starring Sid Caesar and Imogene Coca, launched in 1949 – later titled *Your Show of Shows* – became a Saturday terror to restaurateurs. It made people rush home early. Television had briefly drawn people to taverns, but now home sets kept them home. Cities saw a drop in taxicab receipts. Jukebox receipts were down. Public libraries, including the New York Public Library, reported a drop in book circulation, and many bookstores reported sales down.¹

A quarter of a century after the reign of Caesar, *Saturday Night Live* became the much-heralded salvation of TV comedy, and members of the *SNL* ensemble would express their surprise at similar changes they had caused in the social habits of young urban audiences, and a degree of ambivalence toward the unexpected degree of power they wielded.

Your Show of Shows and *Saturday Night Live*, blessed with gifted and, at times, brilliant writers and performers, came as close to great comic art as any network commodity, in spite of the odds against such a level of achievement within the entertainment industry. And these programs might not have been, in retrospect, a totally inappropriate model and inspiration for a handful of visual artists working with electronic media and experimental forms, and desirous of escaping the ghetto of the gallery and developing a broader, more diverse audience for their works.

In the beginning, *Saturday Night Live* experimented with traditional concepts, and attempted to expand the vocabulary of conventional broadcast humor. Many of the performers it introduced and featured, such as Andy Kaufman, Michael O'Donoghue, and Steve Martin seemed, at their very best, more aligned – in concept and execution – with the comic practitioner of Performance Art than the traditional standup comedian. Moreover, the *SNL* company, and those of imitations that followed, began to flirt with subjects formerly considered taboo by the networks, and reinstated, in a variety show format, the live broadcast – one of the medium's unique and long-neglected sources of immediacy and power.

Whether or not the parallel developments in humorous art and comedy entertainment were directly related, their concurrence was nonetheless fortuitous. And for a time, at least, a new merger of sensibilities appeared to be emerging, with Wegman and Paik presenting their work on Johnny Carson and Tom Snyder, and Mitchell Kriegman a staff writer/producer/performer for the second incarnation of *SNL*. The adoption and adaptation of popular forms by artists and the increasing sophistication of provocative entertainment created, in their interminglement, a healthy stock of hybrids which seemed to suggest a new vitality for both.

VIDEO/TV: HUMOR/COMEDY, as originally conceived, was to incorporate not only works by video and performance artists but also examples of network of broadcast comedy by likes of Ernie Kovacs, Spike Jones, and several of the other abovementioned electronic auteurs and oddballs. While the spectre of Television is everpresent, for better or worse, throughout the many videotapes that comprise this exhibition, very few examples of broadcast TV have, in fact, been included. There are several reasons for this, and not all of them are intentional or, for that matter, desirable.

A number of sought-after works, and especially those of Ernie Kovacs, were unavailable pending their releases on pay cable. Symbolic of the meager value placed by the industry upon television programming since the inauguration of the airwaves in the late 1930s, much other material – and virtually the complete works of Spike Jones and Steve Allen, to name two – has been lost as a result of initial carelessness, subsequent neglect or corporate avarice (e.g., the expense of producing, storing and preserving videotapes and kinescopes, the filmed records of live shows made prior to the introduction of videotape in 1957). Still other programs, such as *Laugh-In*, which might have exemplified certain innovations in style and content, are locked away in network vaults and thus exorbitantly expensive to procure. And, finally, the widespread syndication of *Saturday Night Live* and *Second City TV* reruns made the inclusion of even brief selections from their halcyon days seem superfluous at best.

The decision not to include even those examples of television comedy that were available was further prompted by the discovery, in the process of selecting tapes for this exhibition, of a far more extensive and compelling body of humorous work by video and performance artists than even I had imagined. There were so many exciting tapes, in fact, that the length of this already protracted eight-hour program could easily have been doubled (although I am aware that there are those who feel that it should, to the contrary, have been halved). And as producers of comedy for network television have had little difficulty in gaining exposure for their work – an understatement if there ever was one – and the sometimes rude and jagged but always enlightening work of the best video artists still remains unknown to the public at large, a concentration on the latter seemed ideologically as well as aesthetically correct. And perhaps most importantly, the presence of commercial TV, it was reasonable to assume, would still be felt – would, in fact, be inescapable – not only through commentary included in the catalogue and both overt and indirect references within the tapes themselves, but also, and quite simply, by the fact that our contemporary information environment, seen as a set of common cultural references, has been immeasurably shaped and influenced by all aspects of broadcast image and sound. And this fact is, without question, a mixed blessing: We may rest assured that one Cleaver, a Theodore better known as The Beaver, holds a more prominent place in the consciousness of most of our contemporaries than his distant relative Eldridge, and that a Holiday, rather than Soul, on Ice will attract a larger cut of meat in any ratings count, even as it serves to define the stupefying realm of the marketplace itself. In a Marxian context, the secret words are profit and sponsors, rather than the common good.

VIDEO/TV: HUMOR/COMEDY is, thus, a selection of nearly 100 works by some four dozen artists totaling approximately eight hours in length. The included works themselves span more than a decade and represent a sampling of sorts from virtually the entire history of video as an art form; furthermore, they range from the technologically primitive, if conceptually elegant work of pioneers like Wegman and Willie Walker to more recent pieces which may have been produced with broadcast TV in mind and which play upon the conventional forms of the omnipresent parent medium. All of the works in this exhibition have been organized into hour-long programs, each with a theme that attempts to focus on particular aspects of the individual tapes of which it is comprised, to unify them into a cohesive entity for the purpose of presentation and, hopefully, to

enlighten viewers as to their singular merits, the reasons for their inclusion, and some of the more pressing and significant issues as regards contemporary Art Comedy.

The title of this exhibition distinguishes between Video and Television and between Humor and Comedy. The distinctions between Video and Television are, to some extent, obvious, as is the fact of the fading line of demarcation between the two upon which this entire exhibition is premised. Distinctions between Humor and Comedy are harder to come by, and the search for them may ultimately prove fruitless. However, Steve Allen, another of TV's early comic innovators (as paraphrased by Leonard Feather) has pointed out:

... the word *comedy* suggests the idea of performance, while the word *humor* suggests creative thinking and the written word, but there is a considerable area of overlap.²

This exhibition is concerned, in a general sense, with areas of overlap. And while it does not attempt a definitive statement, but, rather, acknowledges the unsettling yet joyous nature of any period of transition in the ebb and flow of art fashion, it nevertheless has a few points to make. One is that Comedy as Art, whether gallery-bound or broadcast-oriented, is recognizable as a manifestation of pointed, and often iconoclastic, intention of the maker – a statement, on the one hand, about central human issues such as the vagaries of and weaknesses within the social fabric, or, on the other hand, a testing or redefinition of limits of what does or may constitute humor, evidenced by unique innovations in style and content. In the process of viewing this exhibit and thinking about it, the double-edged prejudices which seem rampant – that commercial TV *cannot* be art, and that art that is popular *cannot* be great or serious – may in fact be made duller than the dull wits who are wedded to such beliefs. And there may also be made available, in part as an imaginative act and in part as a document, an image of the ideal cultural environment wherein mixes of art and entertainment may not only occur, but flourish spectacularly.

I am a poor man from a poor country, so I have to be entertaining all the time. –
Nam June Paik

Rumors of a reunion between Art and Entertainment, not unlike those spurious notices of Mark Twain's demise, may be greatly exaggerated – even as have earlier reports of the partnership's dissolution. Our intuitive assumption of the somewhat clearcut, if nonetheless shifting distinctions between Art and Entertainment might well be a peculiar and perilous conceit of the last two centuries, and a byproduct of, among other things, the reigning sensibilities that created the assembly line, the tenets of democracy, and the glut of useless information for an information-based society. Or it may simply be that the passage of time winnows away distinctions between "High Art" and "Pop Culture" and that works which survive from the latter category are open to interpretation and evaluation exclusive of delimiting cultural contexts within which they were originally framed. (Jim Pomeroy's reflections on Spike Jones, as characterized in the *Musical Comedy* intro. are relevant here.) Invariably, however, any period in the history of

Art/Culture will demonstrate some intersection among the various spheres of man's technical achievements, and especially between the exotic/sacred creations molded by a tradition of High Art, and the mundane/profane folk arts and popular forms of the time.

Skeptics of the current phenomenon of artists' humor are often heard to grouse that its practitioners are little more than failed entertainers and second-rate comedians – or, in short, that they are incompetent high-wire acts reliant upon the safety net of the relative indulgence, and low visibility, the art community provides. The unstated implication is, of course, that artists for whom comedy is a central means of communication would be summarily dismissed within the highly competitive arena of the entertainment industry.

There is, in some cases at least, a modicum of truth, in what these disbelievers have to say. But ultimately distinctions of this sort have less to do with a particular individual's talent and commercial marketability than they do with his or her sense of self-definition and expressive intent, and with a conscious choice of the social environment, the appropriate audience, and the modes of discourse proper to the work at hand – both because of and despite the opportunities and limitations these alternative strategies may offer.

Upon this abbreviated but still hazy morass of issues regarding the relationship between Art and Entertainment (and in spite of my belief that there are many great artists, including some of those already mentioned, who have managed to infiltrate the ranks of the broadcast industry), allow me to adopt a less than radical position ... That there are represented with the body of works of which VIDEO/TV: HUMOR/COMEDY is comprised, certain characteristics, emphases, aesthetic directions, ideological points of view and what have you that distinguish these works from the vast slagheap of that which generally passes, courtesy of the moguls of Mass Media, for humor. There are (at least) three obvious areas within which these distinctions may be drawn. Each of the trio is broad in scope, together they are all-encompassing, and I think they go something like this...

Technics/Technology – In his groundbreaking video art exhibition of altered TV sets held in Wuppertal, Germany in 1963, Nam June Paik adopted a subversive, yet playful attitude toward the content, style and technology of commercial television that would come to serve as an inspirational model for future “generations” of video artists. SONY's introduction of the portable VTR in 1965 made possible the development of a community of practitioners of video as a medium for personal expression, as well as a manner of television production distinct from that of the monolithic broadcast structure from which it was derived.

Denied access to the sophisticated tools of Television proper, and disdainful of its principles, purposes and methods, video artists invented approaches to the medium that were diametrically opposed to “standards” promulgated by commercial TV. These artists' sloppy, spontaneous, self-indulgent, brilliantly conceived, provocatively inelegant and extraordinarily beautiful tapes were as cost effective as they were rich in ideas. They represented, to paraphrase David Antin, one of the most significant statements possible

among this class of poor novice producers – their ability to create, with extremely limited resources, lasting works of conceptual complexity unimaginable within the conservative and profit-based milieu of the entertainment industry. This is borne out by the works of William Wegman, Willie Walker, and countless others.

The thought occurs that, his brilliance as a writer, director, and performer notwithstanding, the most attractive feature of Ernie Kovacs among the video art community has been the fact that he too was grappling with primitive technology in an attempt to realize the full potential of TV as a uniquely electronic medium. The recent development of quality video tools available to artists and of new commercial markets ravenous for unusual and innovative approaches to TV production (one manifestation of which is the rampant appropriation of artist-originated styles and techniques by Pay TV producers), have caused video art and television entertainment to *appear* to be less distinct, *at least* on superficial levels of technical quality. But then again, there are always formal concerns and questions of content to consider...

Formal Experimentation – The programmatic forms of television were derived from broadcast radio, with the cinema and vaudeville stage significant influences. The formulae upon which most of TV's trifling dramas, whether toothpaste commercials or serious teleplays, have been based are determined by the previous season's commercial successes, and each heralded breakthrough in network programming generally turns out, once the sounding of the trumpets and cash registers has died down, to be little more than a rehash with a vaguely familiar new twist.

By distinction, video artists constantly probe and fashion anew various aspects of the medium, and seek to shatter the molds of derivative programming. As a result, their exemplary manipulations of the form of television narrative have, at times, produced startling results. Tony Oursler's *The Weak Bullet*, looking and sounding like Kukla, Fran and Ollie meet Krafft-Ebbing, is an out-and-out shaggy story; Mitchell Kriegman and Michael Smith display their own inclinations toward the absurd and fashion their tales accordingly; Dan Boord and Ed Tannenbaum are adept at fragmentation and other types of transformation of the joke form; and General Idea, Tom Adair/Kenneth Robins, Alan Lande, Howard Fried, Paik, and many others reconceive and reshape recognizable genres of TV programming in unusual and revealing ways.

Topics for Discussion – Members of the art community are often accused of a tendency toward the abstruse, of speaking among themselves in arcane languages, telling in-jokes, and applauding their own refined brand of professional tunnelvision. To the extent that this is true, it is not always a choice, nor is it necessarily a bad thing. Among the most natural and obvious subjects about which video artists may speak to their colleagues and peers is contemporary art itself. And if their bent is humor, these selfsame members of the art community may choose to spoof its clichés and preciousness (McDonald/Sims), attempt to recast it within popular contexts (General Idea), or consider, with a sense of irony and indignation, its relationship to commerce and to other social institutions (Doug Hall, Bob & Bob, Ilene Segalove, and many others). Despite the evident differences among them, all of those makers cited above share a fundamental commitment to the

artist and his or her ideas and visions being integrated into, and not subsumed by, the mass culture. They also recognize that the talent for innovation and unique perspective that the artist can offer has traditionally been overlooked by the star-makers of popular culture – the communications media and entertainment industries.

Mass Culture itself – with a special emphasis on The Media – is another prime target for satirical treatment by video artists, and the perspicacity and relish with which they level and take sight is attested to by numerous works included in this exhibition. But self-parody is also one of the mainstays of commercial television, even as the affectations and pretensions of the art world, whether real or imagined, are topics for popular jest. In what ways, then, do parodies by artists and entertainers of themselves and each other, and what can be gleaned from these differences?

The answers to this question seem neither overly simple nor complex. They may have something to do with the fact that mass entertainment and the formulaic structures by which it operates are by definition and intent as widely accessible (or, speaking less euphemistically, superficial) as possible. This quality, which makes such programming popular because it assures the fulfillment of our expectations as consumers with some degree of consistency, also makes TV a ready target for parody. What we have come to identify as art, by distinction, is that which represents innovation, the unique expressions of an individual consciousness, and quirkier visions – efforts which seem, for the most part, less readily adaptable to satire.

The answers to the above question may also have something to do with such qualities as attitude and belief on the part of the makers, and also with the contexts within which their work is presented.

Before he left (*Saturday Night Live*) Kriegman produced three short segments including one about a man (himself) who was literally unconscious of the woman with whom he lived, and consequently was oblivious to her needs. The reaction to this segment among his friends who watched the show at home on television was negative, because the tape seemed to project a sexist attitude toward women in general. According to Kriegman, neither the producer of “Saturday Night Live” nor NBC program executives thought of his tapes as sexist. And when the same tapes were seen months later at the Kitchen – without the weight of cultural authority provided by network television – the issue of sexism no longer seemed threatening.

In retrospect, Kriegman says, “About the sexist nature of those tapes – as far as I’m concerned, they were personal pieces. That’s the way I saw myself acting in that situation. In the context of television everything becomes a corporate statement: you can’t communicate a personal attitude to something. So the character in these tapes was not considered a role model whose behavior had the tacit approval of the all-powerful ... I wasn’t cautious enough,” Kriegman continues. “I forgot how the television context would redefine my personal statement. I’m not saying that all men treat women this way, or that they should; only that I have. In TV the corporate entity comes between the viewer and creator and puts its own message on top of yours ... The vanishing point comes when you try to make an uncompromising statement for an audience. You lose track of yourself and your ideas; you can get wiped out.”³

The true comic artist (whether with the most elite audience or network TV in mind) is ultimately attracted to and believes in the freedom of expression of complex and

challenging ideas that art has traditionally afforded its practitioners. And while the artist's freedom is restricted at any given point in history by the standard-bearers of society in general and of high culture in particular, his or her limitations are not nearly so severe as those of the broadcast producer who must believe, as a means of selling the sponsor's goods, in cultural homogeneity and the mass dissemination of normative ideology which serves to reinforce the status quo that broadcast creates, represents, and is supported by. And the broadcast artist (and here Michael O'Donoghue particularly comes to mind) who attempts to challenge these restraints, either by reflecting a more extreme of the world/philosophical position/set of personal obsessions, etc. or by questioning the very notion of taste as he viciously attacks the mores of the dominant culture below the belt, may in fact be engaged in the most heroic, if quixotic, endeavor or all.

Sans censorship restrictions and audience quotas to fill, the video artist can explore intimate themes, speak to specialized groups, adopt unpopular positions on issues of current importance and, ultimately, transgress the boundaries of broadcast civility with a vengeance. And as most commercial TV panders to recent mass opinion polls (many of which it has played no small part in generating), it follows that this more heady and visionary stuff must fall, by default, within the purview of the contemporary court jester – the media/comedian/artist.

“Comedy is a baby seal hunt.” - Michael O'Donoghue

“When the going gets weird, the weird turns pro.” – Dr. Hunter S. Thompson

The original working title of this introduction was MANS/LAUGHTER, and it was to consider Black Comedy as the characteristic, if not preeminent form of late 20th Century humor and the calling card of the contemporary comic artist. But that must remain another essay for another time.

Black comedy is often thought to be about death – including “other kinds of death than just the one you can smell,” to quote the members of Ant Farm and T.R. Uthco – and certainly mortality and lesser frailties of the body loom large in any consideration of the genre. When the literary Marquis deSade, that much misunderstood and vastly underrated sire of salacious sociopolitical black comedy attempted to redefine the human body not as a holy temple but, rather, a sentient and perversely inventive slab of carrion, he was persecuted to the full extent of that most heinous of crimes, Bad Taste ... or (to put it more accurately, perhaps) for transgressing the aforementioned bounds of propriety and for challenging the accepted codes of moral behavior upon which society was/is founded. This is no mean feat: for even in these days of relatively lax standards of censorship, it is not especially easy to get away with similar offenses. And while deSade cashed his check in 1814, oppression of social satirists remains a palpable fact. Cases within recent memory include the obscenity trials against William Burroughs's *Naked Lunch*, the terminal pummeling received by that quintessential comic martyr Lenny Bruce ... and the beatings go on. But because of the vision and courage of these and other artists, there has been a great acceptance of dissenting points of view and comedy that exploits very real

and immediate tensions within our society, whether the subject is massive nuclear destruction, the assassination of public figures, changing sexual politics, or fateful death by Extra Strength Tylenol, has found its solid, if still peripheral niche within the cultural mainstream.

In his introduction to an anthology of Black Humor in 1965, Bruce Jay Friedman offered the following commentary:

...and what it really comes down to is *The New York Times*, which is the source and fountain and bible of black humor. The Secretary of State, solemnly reviewing the Vietnam crisis, suddenly begins to strangle on a wild gastronomical metaphor. Hanoi's support of the rebels, that's the "meat and potatoes issue." When we get to that, then we can consider the salt and pepper issues. The bombing raids? Secondary stuff, just a lot of garlic and oregano talk, really, just a bunch of diversionary sweet basil and East Indian nutmeg baloney.

A ninety-year-old Negro sharecropper lady watches Ladybird Johnson – on a poverty inspection tour – sweep up to her shack in a Presidential limousine and says, "Ain't it wonderful?" Fun loving Tennessee students pelt each other with snowballs and suddenly scores are dead of heart attacks and gunshot wounds. A mid-flight heart-attack victim is removed from an airliner, suddenly slides from the stretcher, and cracks her head on the runway. We bomb North Vietnam and anxiously await the reaction of Red China, scourge of the Free World. Red China breaks her silence. The imperialist dogs have behaved like vermin and Communist China is not going to sit idly by. With all the fury and power of a frenzied 900-million populace behind her, Red China speaks.

"We are going," says Radio China, "to return you tit for tat."

You guess that it has always been this way, that Tolstoi must have had this unreal sensation when Napoleon came east. And then the police Urinary squad sweeps down and spears a high government official at the Y.M.C.A. trough; five hundred captured Congo rebels are ushered into a stadium before their Free World captors. The ones who are booed have their heads blown off. Those with good acts who draw applause go free. Nehru sends troops rushing up to the India-China border with orders to shout if necessary.

"How does it feel?" the TV boys ask Mts. Malcolm X when her husband is assassinated. We send our planes off for nice, easy going, not-too-tough bombing raids on North Vietnam. Sixteen U.S. officers in Germany fly through the night in Klansmen robes burning fiery crosses and are hauled before their commanding officer to be reprimanded for "poor judgment." It confirms your belief that a new, Jack Rubyesque chord of absurdity has been struck in the land, that there is a mutative style of behavior afoot, one that can only be dealt with by a new one-foot-in-the-asylum style of fiction.

If you are fond of pinning labels on generations, I wonder whether this one could not be called the surprise-proof generation. What might possibly surprise America? Another presidential assassination? Kidstuff. A thousand Red Chinese landing on the Lever Brothers building and marching toward Times Square. Hardly worth a yawn. Mike Todd suddenly showing up on the Johnny Carson show, not dead after all, involved in Broadway's greatest hoax. It's sort of expected.

What has happened is that the satirist has had his ground usurped by the newspaper reporter. The journalist, who, in 1964, must cover the ecumenical debate on whether Jews, on the one hand, are still to be known as Christ-killers, or, on the other hand, are to be let off the hook, is certainly today's satirist. The novelist-satirist, with no real territory of his own to roam, has had to discover

new land, invent a new currency, a new set of filters, has had to sail into darker waters somewhere out beyond satire and I think this is what is meant by black humor.

...It may be said that the Black Humorist is a kind of literary Paul Revere, a fellow who unfreezes his mind, if only for a moment and says, "For Christ's sake, what in hell is going on here? What do you mean 35,000 Vietnam advisers?" ...⁴

The facts of our contemporary life do constitute a "bible" of black comedy, with socially committed artists serving as the interpreters and preachers of the text. No mere wags or merry Andrews, they act as rare and mischievous guardians of our collective sanity, allowing us the emotional release of a guffaw in the face of death while perched upon the fragile teeter-totter of a mortal coil which modern times has wrought. Tendentious humor, as defined by Freud, may at times offend those of Higher or Deeper Faith, but what better ideals in which to believe in these uncertain times than psychic survival pure and simple, and what better means of this survival than the disarmament of your greatest enemies and worst fears with laughter. Certain elements of stark, raving, boneblack humor may be an affront to a large segment of the public as yet, which explains the general caution among the titans of entertainment toward messages of this sort. But as times get weirder, as they seem irrevocably inclined to do, there may, in fact, be measurable shifts in our attitudes on a massive scale regarding the propriety of controversial subject matter for comedy. And this, I would venture to guess, may already be a primary reason for the shrinking gap between our current definitions of art-comedy and entertainment.

This last barrage of unseemly prose leaves much to be desired and answered for. Certainly many of the pieces included in VIDEO/TV: HUMOR/COMEDY have little to do with our cultural day-and-nightmares, for there are also all manner of innocent parodies, light pastiches, droll cultural documents, and warmed-over cabbages. My advice is to be kind to them and to let them sink slowly and tenderly into the softer spots of your cerebrum, for they too are valuable and have their purpose and season.

I hope all of the stuff included in this exhibition (with apologies to the artists for this crude characterization of their work) offers more pleasure in the form of laughter, sardonic or otherwise, than a slow and exquisite crawl through a sunlit field mined with thistles, tetanus, and despair (my definition of the blackest comedy). In fact, I hope the immediate tickles, and later the scars, that it produces are far more joyful and lasting than most of our unintended, and oftentimes self-inflicted wounds.

¹ Barnouw, Erik, *Tube of Plenty*, p. 114, Oxford University Press, 1977.

² Feather, Leonard, "Comedy, Humor And Allen," *Bigger Than A Breadbox* by Steve Allen, p. 12, Paperback Library Edition, New York, 1968.

³ White, Robin, "Great Expectations: Artists' TV Guide," *Artforum*, Vol. XX, No. 10, June 1982, p. 46.

⁴ Friedman, Bruce Jay, "Foreword," *Black Humor* (Bruce Jay Friedman, editor), pp. viii-x, Bantam Modern Classics, New York, 1969.

Schedule of VIDEO/TV: HUMOR COMEDY

Musical Comedy

Guitar Piece – Pier Marton

Ear to the Ground – Kit Fitzgerald/John Sanborn

Songs for Swinging Larvae – Graeme Whifler/Renaldo and the Loaf

Instant This, Instant That – Twinart

One Minute Movies – Graeme Whifler/The Residents

Intimate Parade – Julia Heyward

Art Punks – Ernest Gusella

Song of the Street of the Singing Chicken – Kenn Beckmann/“Blue” Gene Tyranny

Language is a Virus – Laurie Anderson

Scale Flop – Ernest Gusella

Til Ye Know Me – Tony Oursler

Giddi Up Travel Agent – Michael Smith/Davidson Gigliotti

Dancing Death Monsters – Dale Hoyt

Eight Days a Week – The Kipper Kids

Video Pioneers

The Selling of New York – Nam June Paik

The Best of William Wegman – William Wegman

The Eternal Frame – Ant Farm/T.R. Uthco

Parody: Cultural TV Station

PART 1

Selections from *13 Changes* and *Your Radiation* – Alan Lande (interspersed throughout the program)

Snuff – Tony Mascatello/Davidson Gigliotti

Live From Lunds – Tom Adair/Kenneth Robins

The Longest Poem in the World – Peter Brownscombe

Test Tube – General Idea

The Dying Swan – Laurie McDonald

Godzilla Ballet – Jeff Strate

PART 2

Selections from *13 Changes* and *Your Radiation* – Alan Lande (interspersed throughout the program)

Generic Video Art – Laurie McDonald/Tom Sims

Man Ray, Man Ray – William Wegman
Making a Paid Political Announcement – Howard Fried
The First International Whistling Show – Jules Backus/Skip Blumberg
Leather Weather – Ferris Butler
Mental Illness – Ferris Butler
Don't Ask – Kit Fitzgerald/John Sanborn

Likely Stories

Likely Stories – Mitchell Kriegman
The Weak Bullet – Tony Oursler
Lure Detour – Willie Walker

The Magic Box

From Your Radiation – Alan Lande
Life With Video – Willie Walker
Secret Horror – Michael Smith/Mark Fischer
Turkey Dinner – Mitchell Kriegman
Video Rover – Brad Stensberg
Prov. Video Dating Service – Ed Tannenbaum
Captured Tool – James Hartel
The Real Long Ranger – Willie Walker/T.R. Uthco

Short Takes, One-Liners and Talking Heads

Soho – Tim Maul/Davidson Gigliotti
Secrets I'll Never Tell – Teddy Dibble
The Cough – Teddy Dibble/Peter Keenan
The Deviant – Teddy Dibble/Peter Keenan
Admiration – Teddy Dibble
The Role Model – Teddy Dibble
Pass Debris – Louie Grenier
Caught – Louie Grenier
I Play Real Well – Louie Grenier
Winners/Losers – Louie Grenier
Risk – Louie Grenier/Davidson Gigliotti
Squark Hooks – Louie Grenier/Davidson Gigliotti
Driving – Michael Smith/Mark Fischer
Empire State – Tim Maul/Davidson Gigliotti
Wit and Its Relationship to the Unconscious – Dan Boord

Docucomedy

Who Shot M.M.? – Dale Hoyt

The Big Apple – Alan Lande

Tuesday Morning Bobs – Bob & Bob

Game of the Week – Doug Hall

What is Business? – Ilene Segalove

Epilogue/Bonus: A Couple of Kippers – The Kipper Kids in Performance

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