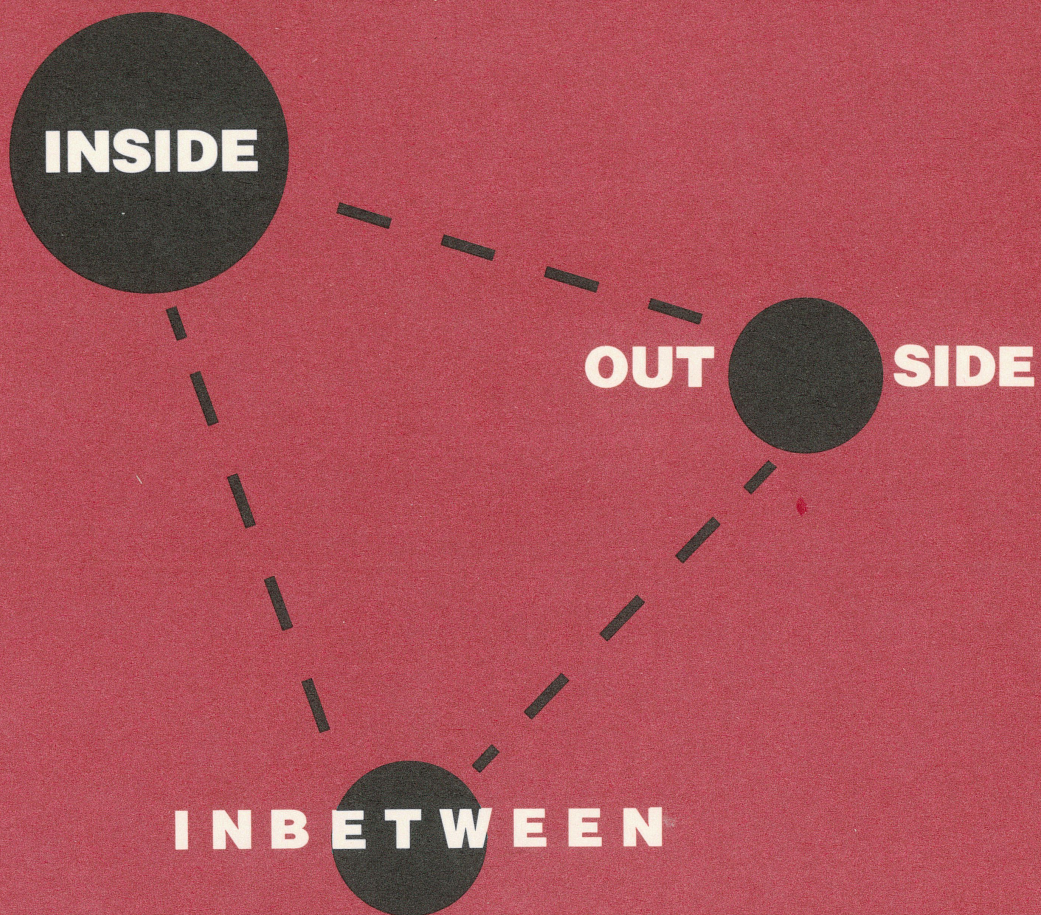


JAPAN



a three part video program
investigating the representation of Japan

JAPAN

OUTSIDE/INSIDE/INBETWEEN

a three part video program
investigating the representation of Japan

Since the end of World War II, Japan and the United States have participated in a partnership based on mutual needs, reciprocal resources and a perceived common enemy, the Soviet Union. Now, with the Soviet Union dismantled, the symbiotic relationship between the two nations has begun to shift. Policies forged to win the Cold War have left the U.S. economically vulnerable: a half century of defense-driven economic strategy has allowed the U.S. to emerge as the political victor of the Cold War, while Japan — which prospered under U.S. protection and an imposed constitutional provision that limits military expenditures — appears to be the economic winner.

Although the U.S. has become the only remaining military superpower, it has accomplished this dubious feat at a high cost, by becoming one of the world's largest debtor nations. Meanwhile, rising from the economic and political devastation of the Second World War, Japan has become an economic superpower — building the world's second largest economy — by relinquishing military power in exchange for access to global markets.

This post-Cold War reversal of fortunes has produced renewed tensions among longtime allies. As the U.S. economy staggers under the weight of government debt and burdensome trade deficits, Japan and the Japanese are becoming acceptable targets for America's economic anxieties. Our mass media images, both contrived and inadvertent, resonate with concerns about political and economic potency: Oldsmobile commercials allude to the diminutive "size" of Japanese men; President Bush is pictured prostrate at the Imperial dining table. An array of recent non-fiction publications feature alarming, even paranoid, titles such as *The Coming War with Japan*, *The Japan That Can Say "No"* and *Zaibatsu America: How the Japanese are Colonizing Vital U.S. Industries*. As American anxiety grows, Japan is represented not as an economic competitor, but as a predatory arch-rival.

The apprehensions and aspersions have not been unilateral: prominent Japanese politicians have recently begun commenting on the decline of American industry. Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa and Speaker of the Lower House of the Diet, Yoshio Sakurachi, have characterized U.S. workers as "lacking a work ethic," "lazy," and "illiterate." As tensions heighten, the formerly synergic nature of the alliance between Japan and the U.S. is obscured; the interlocking partnership which built Japanese economic

power and U.S. political dominance may give way to a less cooperative, potentially dangerous, relationship.

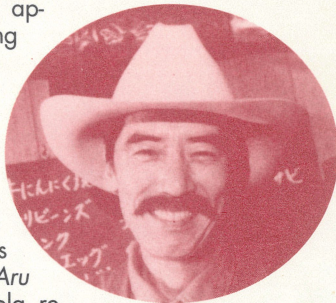
In the face of these strained relations, JAPAN: OUTSIDE/INSIDE/INBETWEEN, a program of independent media art by Westerners, Japanese, and Japanese-Americans, suggests that U.S. perceptions of this Asian nation may be flawed as Japanese characterizations of American workers.

Outside Looking In

The U.S.-Japan Cold War partnership yielded considerable cultural exchange; many of the videotapes featured in *Part 1: Outside Looking In* were produced by artists who visited Japan with the support of cultural exchange programs. Prominent video artists including Gary Hill, Edin Velez, Bill Viola, and Steina and Woody Vasulka turned their attention to representing Japan with the support of the Japan/U.S. Friendship Commission. Their video investigations consider Japan as tourists might view any exotic locale.

With this Baedeker's point of view, these artists examine the surface of the Japanese culture by picturing those sports and games, arts and rituals, landscapes and architectures that are distinctly Japanese. Sumo wrestling, pachinko betting, Butoh, Noh and Kabuki performances, Shinto rituals and festivals, bamboo forests, rice paddies and active volcanic flows, ancient wooden temples, gardens of raked pebbles, velvet-cushioned subway benches, Shinkansen Bullet trains and shimmering neon-lit urban landscapes are among the visual materials from which these artists construct their visions of Japan.

While their material appears similar, each bring their own distinct artistic concerns to the foreign subject. Hill, well-known for his investigations of language, unravels Japanese palindromes (words or phrases that read the same backwards and forwards) in *Ura-Aru* (*The Backside Exists*). Viola, renowned for his romantic renderings of light against landscape, takes light as his subject and metaphor in *Hatsu Yume* (*First Dream*): fishermen use light as bait as their nets sweep an inky black sea at night; the dazzling neon displays of the Tokyo skyline lure urban inhabitants. The Vasulkas, pioneers in the use of video synthesizers, use digital animation in *In*



Photos: this page "The Japanese Version", opposite page: top "In the Land of the Elevator Girls", bottom "The Japanese Version".

the Land of the Elevator Girls to capture the motion of a metaphorical elevator door which opens and closes to reveal glimpses of Japan's landscape, architecture and daily life. And Velez, known for his numerous anthropological video essays, overlays images of traditional ritual with popular culture to suggest the tensions in this rapidly modernized nation in *The Meaning of the Interval*.

These individual, even idiosyncratic, views of Japan maintain considerable distance from their subject. For the tourist, the culture is always just at hand, yet out of reach; for the voyeur, the object of desire is visually present, if physically and emotionally absent. Relying on visual images (or, in Hill's case, non-narrative palindromic reversals) — functioning without narrative structure or voice overs — these artists keep the history and significance of particular cultural practices at arm's length. The risk of such a position is that an artist may inadvertently exoticize, rather than illuminate, the culture depicted. For the Japanese viewer, these tapes may appear to be evocative homages to the rituals and realities of Japanese daily life, while for the Western audiences, these tapes may offer visually provocative images of an exotic "other."

Though also foreigners to Japan, videomakers Louis Alvarez and Andrew Kolker take a different approach to representing Japanese culture. Rather than attempting the risky business of relying on pictures alone to do the work of a thousand words, the two producers employ a traditional form: the narrative documentary essay. While they utilize a conventional Western narrative structure, the team avoids the usual Westerner's focus on Japanese traditional arts by investigating a popular phenomenon. The result — *The Japanese Version* — is a skillfully researched, insightful travelogue focusing on the Japanese propensity to import, assimilate and reinterpret foreign ideas, customs and objects.

The Japanese Version's focus on one aspect of popular culture allows an unusually close view of the contradictions in Japanese life. Despite the Japanese desire to maintain an ethnically homogeneous society, they are avid importers of things foreign, adapting and perfecting them for their own cultural



context. And, while the Japanese have a well-deserved reputation for elegant refinement, their love of kitsch commodities — musical toilet paper holders that play a few bars of "Für Elise" and love hotel suites decorated with Disney, Snoopy and Muppet characters — is less well-known.

Alvarez and Kolker explore these seeming incongruities with tours to a shrine where an Elvis statue is strewn with fresh flowers; to a Tokyo bar where Japanese businessmen dress up in full cowboy regalia, sing cowboy tunes and reinterpret the meaning of the Wild West; and to a wedding palace where a Shinto marriage ceremony incorporates a three-tiered sixteen-foot high Western-style wedding cake fabricated out of rubber.

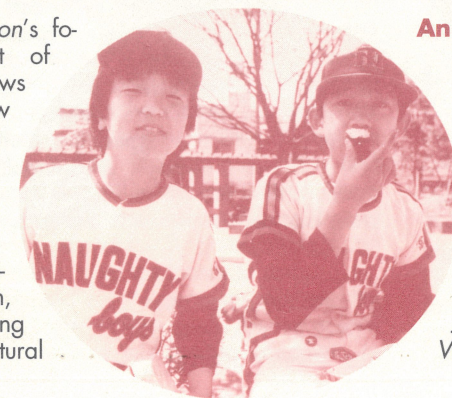
John Goss' *OUT Takes* investigates another aspect of Japanese popular culture, focusing on a popular children's television program, *Maido Osawaga Seshimasu* (*We're Always Making Trouble*). By repositioning excerpts from the show with two U.S. television programs, *Pee Wee's Playhouse* and Rex Reed's *At the Movies*, Goss reveals the homosexual subtexts in each of the shows. In so doing, sexual orientations often represented as outside both mainstream Japanese and American culture are brought inside...and out of the closet.

These varied approaches to representing Japanese traditional and popular culture share a single limitation: they are all, whether visually provocative or particularly informative, depictions of Japanese culture from an outsider's perspective. The self-representation of Japanese video makers, featured in *Part 2: An Inside View*, offers an intimate, sometimes surprising, view of Japanese culture through the eyes of independent video artists.

An Inside View

Japanese independent media productions offer an unexpectedly self-critical look at Japanese culture. In spite of a dearth of opportunities for exhibition and screening, Japanese video artists persevere with their productions, addressing an array of concerns, both serious and comical.

Visual Brains, an on-going collaboration by Sei Kazama and Hatsune Ohtsu, has taken on a five-part project that satirically interprets illogical aspects of Japanese life. To date they have completed *De-Sign: Volumes 1-3*, which are featured in this program. *Volume*



1: *Kunren*, comments on the transition from the Showa period to the Heisei era, which occurred with the death of Emperor Hirohito. In *Kunren*, which means "disciplined training," or "rehearsal," Visual Brains alludes to the widely held belief that Emperor Hirohito, who fell ill near the end of 1989, was kept alive through the end of the year so that the New Year's holiday would not be interrupted and the millions of New Year's cards mailed by Japanese people would not become instantly obsolete.



Volume 2: 5-7-5 Hi-Cook represents a common rhythmic form which infiltrates and guides Japanese culture. The basic form for the classic haiku verse, the 5-7-5 rhythm recurs throughout Japan's daily life, in the announcements of newscasters, the slogans of advertising campaigns and the messages of police officers. Anthropologist Edward T. Hall, writing in *The Dance of Life*, notes that various cultures function not only at various speeds, but also in diverse rhythmic structures. (Hall, 1983: 153-76) With *5-7-5 Hi-Cook*, Visual Brains underscores the beat Japanese culture marches to.

In their most critical commentary, *Volume 3: Stand-Drift*, Visual Brains looks at Japanese complacency in the face of the Persian Gulf War. Japan, which relies entirely on foreign oil, could have seen all its industry paralyzed within 90 days if the war interrupted oil shipments. Only after considerable pressure from the international community did Japan agree to partially finance the Gulf War. *Stand-Drift* paints a picture of a Japanese woman's daily concerns — finding an attractive mate, keeping a slim figure, perfecting her makeup — against the critical moments of the Persian Gulf War.

While *Stand-Drift* represents a stereotypical Japanese woman as preoccupied with petty vanity in the face of international conflict, Mako Idemitsu shows another side of the lives of Japanese women with *Kiyoko's Situation*. Continuing her investigations of Japanese family life, Idemitsu tells parallel stories of two women artists, Tani and Kiyoko. Using the "video-within-a-video" structure that Idemitsu has developed in previous melodramas, *Kiyoko's* situation unfolds on a television monitor within Tani's drama.



The parallel stories of thwarted female ambitions are fiercely critical of a society that asks women to realize their ambitions vicariously, through husbands and sons.

The male-female, public-private, office-home division of labor that Idemitsu critiques from the female perspective has another, similarly oppressive outcome in the sadly monotonous daily life of the overworked "salaryman," or office worker. Akihiro Higuchi's *CUE* portrays a "day in the life" of a salaryman; as Orwellian TV commercials announce that "Everybody is looking for peace and happy family life" a beleaguered businessman races from bedroom to bathroom to office, where he drifts into a nostalgic reverie for an agrarian Japanese past. *CUE*, much like *5-7-5 Hi-Cook*, decries a culture where regimentation rules and all activities occur on cue, to a unified rhythm, and with the consensus of the group.

Each of these works — from Idemitsu's eerily omniscient internal video monitor to Higuchi's televised propaganda — registers suspicions about the technological miracle of television. While television technology may bring us closer together, the heightened availability of information suggests possibilities for social control that are deeply disconcerting. In Osamu Nagata's *The Other Side*, the television set becomes a narrow tunnel through which one might crawl to reverse the flow of information and catch a glimpse of an actual family, instead of a sit-com stereotype. Yoshitaka Shimano's *TV Drama* is reminiscent of, yet distinct from, an American media event

Ant Farm's *Media Burn*, in which a souped-up Cadillac careened into a pyramid of television sets. Rather than producing a towering pyramid, Shimano takes a particularly Japanese approach: his television sets are electronically-nested sets within sets as each is sequentially demolished.

Along with these critical reflections on Japanese society, *An Inside View* also affords a lighter, more playful perspective with Hiroshi Araki's animated morality tale of good triumphing over evil in *Mechanic and Angel*; Junji Kojima's electronic graffiti session in *Trance Verge*; and Jun Ariyoshi's paint-box self-portraiture in *Self-Image*.

Photos: this page, top "Cue", bottom "De-Sign, Volume 3: Stand/Drift", opposite page: top "Intimate Stranger", bottom "History and Memory".

Individuals, In Between

Individuals, by virtue of geographical relocation, biological inheritance or intimate relationships, frequently find themselves poised between cultures. While Japanese society valorizes purity and homogeneity, privileging notions of "insider" and "outsider" — of Japanese and "gaijin" — these subject positions are not entirely fixed and immutable. Reciprocally, American culture, with its melting pot — and, more recently, mosaic — metaphors, suggests that all immigrants may be integrated into a grand heterogeneous multicultural society, but offers no certain guarantees of equality.

Third generation Japanese-American artists Rea Tajiri and Janice Tanaka reflect on one outcome of this failed heterogeneity: the internment of their family members by the U.S. War Relocation Authority. In *History and Memory*, Tajiri juxtaposes Hollywood film images and U.S. government newsreel footage of the Second World War and Japanese relocation against her mother's story of her family's detainment at Poston internment camp. Official history and unofficial memory draw widely disparate pictures of the painful event. Similarly, Tanaka tells the story of her mother's detention at Manzanar in *Memories from the Department of Amnesia*. Forced to sell her property and relocate, separated from her husband who was arrested by the FBI, her mother's life was irrevocably damaged; her story reveals the long term affects of the internment etched into a portrait of one detainee's life.

Mixed heritage videomakers Gavin Flint and Ruth Lounsbury each comment on their positions as individuals of dual ethnic backgrounds, as persons who are neither clearly Japanese nor Anglo-American. Flint, who was born to an American father and a Eurasian mother and was raised in Japan, has a curious relationship to the "Japanese-gaijin" dichotomy. In *Drift* he explores this anomalous situation by considering the displacement of a narrator who, raised on Western television programs dubbed into Japanese, always assumed that John Wayne spoke fluent Japanese. Lounsbury's *Halving the Bones* tells the story of her inheritance: a can of bones that she keeps on a shelf in her closet. The bones are half of the remains of her Japanese grandmother; the rest are located in a cemetery in Tokyo. Through a narrative and visual collage comprised of family lies and stories, home movies and documentary footage, this work-in-progress traces 100 years of her maternal family history from Japan to America as she attempts to set the bones to rest.

Intimate relationships and commitments forged between individuals can mitigate cultural differences. An example of one such relationship is a story told by Alan Berliner. In

Intimate Stranger, Berliner tells the story of his grandfather, Joseph Cassuto, a Palestinian Jew who relocated from Egypt to Brooklyn to Osaka and formed a life-long affiliation with a Japanese textile company.

The bond, which continued during and after

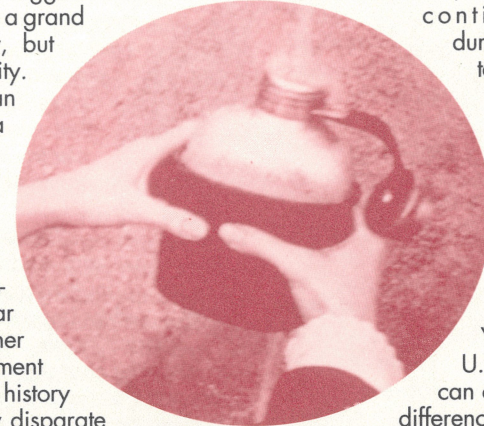
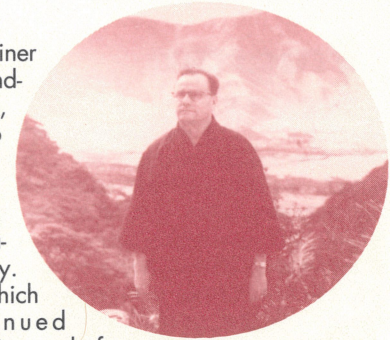
the devastation of the Second World War, brought Cassuto neither wealth nor fame, but instead afforded him a unique cultural position as an "honorable special foreigner."

Finally, longtime U.S. resident and pioneering video artist, Shigeko Kubota brings the "outsider" metaphor full circle as she juxtaposes Navajo, Tokyo and New York culture. As an immigrant to the U.S. and an outsider to Native American culture, Kubota ruminates on cultural differences in *Video Girls and Video Songs for Navajo Sky*, a video diary of her forty day stay at the

Chinle, Arizona Navaho reservation. Her electronic collage compares disparate cultural images — Navajos taking a horse-drawn cart to a public well are contrasted with erotic cabaret dancers; a Navajo woman slaughtering a sheep is juxtaposed with a performance art piece. Her diary suggests that most Americans are as much outsiders to Native American culture as they are to Japanese culture; that the "melting pot" of American ideology may be as mythical as the ethnic purity ascribed to the Japanese culture.

Taken together, the three programs that comprise JAPAN: OUTSIDE/INSIDE/INBETWEEN map out a terrain where Japanese and American culture intersect, overlap and diverge. In charting this territory, these video explorations suggest that the relationship between Japan and the U.S. — though often contentious — is just as frequently congenial and that cultural difference occurs along a continuum, rather than in stark contradiction. While a map can never completely and accurately represent a terrain, these media investigations suggest that this territory is well-worth charting and re-visiting, particularly as the landscape of global political power shifts and changes.

MM



Program Notes

Part 1: Outside Looking In February 13 - March 21

Program 1 (Running time: 57 minutes)



Kinema No Yoru (Film Night) by Peter Callas (2:15, 1986, in Japanese) collages computer-animated images from Japanese and Western films and popular culture in an electronic celebration of visual culture. Callas, who makes his home in Tokyo, Sydney and New York, produces a tape that revels in the split-second pleasures that electronic media provide. (Distributed by Electronic Arts Intermix, New York City)

The Japanese Version by Louis Alvarez and Andrew Kolker (55:00 minutes, 1990, in English) is a surprising and entertaining look at what happens to Western influences when they reach Japan. While today Japan is the world's biggest exporter of electronics and automobiles, for a thousand years the Japanese have been insatiably importing ideas, customs and objects from the rest of the world. Produced by two "outsiders," *The Japanese Version* goes beyond the usual stereotypical images of Japan to reveal Japanese reinterpretations of Western culture — from Tokyo businessmen in letter-perfect cowboy outfits, to the institution of the "love hotel," where each suite is decorated in a different Western fantasy. (Distributed by The Center for New American Media, New York City.)

Program 2 (Running time: 59 minutes)

Ura Aru (The Backside Exists) by Gary Hill (28:30, 1988, in Japanese and English) conforms palindromic word play (words or phrases reading the same backwards and forwards) to the underlying structure of the Japanese Noh drama. Noh is a drama of essential dualities — characteristically, two principles enact connections between mortal deeds and otherworldly consequences in mythic narratives that unfold in two scenes. In a series of compounded dualities mimetic of Noh, Hill composes evocative acoustic palin-

Photo: this page "Kinema No Yoru", opposite page: top "The Meaning of the Interval", bottom "Kiyoko's Situation".



dromes by reversing Japanese words: "hara/araha" binds belly to heart, "asu/usa" couples tomorrow with melancholy, and "ema/ame" makes an offering to rain. English counterparts like "live/evil" anglicize the dynamic. Hill reverses words to release their doubles, and in an evocative sequence of these mirrored pairs, *Ura Aru* envisions this process as a ritual renewal of counterpart realms. (Distributed by Electronic Arts Intermix, New York City.)

The Meaning of the Interval by Edin Velez (18:40, 1987) is an evocative essay that explores the inherent contradictions of contemporary Japan, from the rituals of Shinto religion to the nation's fascination with Western pop culture. Constructing a densely layered, nonlinear weave of the mythical and the everyday, Velez probes beneath the surface to unearth ancient, often anarchic tensions. In Velez's collage, emblems of contemporary Japan — the Bullet train, businessmen and McDonald's — collide with traditional ritual, from Kabuki and Sumo to Shinto. The "interval" of the title relates to the Japanese concept of "ma" — the space between things, a source of energy, tension and balance. (Distributed by Electronic Arts Intermix, New York City.)

OUTTakes by John Goss (13:00, 1989, in Japanese and English, with English titles) repositions excerpts from two U.S. television programs — *Pee Wee's Playhouse*, Rex Reed's *At the Movies* — and one popular children's show from Japan — *Maido Osawaga Seshimasu (We're Always Making Trouble)* — to reveal the homosexual subtexts in each. In so doing, sexual orientations often represented as outside both mainstream Japanese and American culture are brought inside... and out of the closet. (Distributed by the Video Data Bank, Chicago.)



Program 3 (Running time: 62 minutes)

Hatsu Yume (First Dream) by Bill Viola (56:00, 1981) evolves a vision of the Japanese culture and landscape in which perceptual shifts assert the relative nature of all observations. An immobile rock on a mountainside appears to change in size and scale with the shifting passage of time and light; an urban scene is illuminated by a single match; fishermen trawl on a black ocean at night, hauling in luminous squids using light as bait. Throughout, Viola creates haunting allegories of light as a metaphysical construct. ("Hatsu yume" refers to the first dream of the new year, which is thought to have portentous significance for the year that will follow.) (Distributed by Electronic Arts Intermix, New York City.)

In the Land of the Elevator Girls by Steina and Woody Vasulka (4:12, 1990) uses the elevator as a metaphorical vehicle to reveal an outsider's gaze into contemporary Japanese culture. The continual opening and closing of elevator doors serves as a succinct formal device, as the viewer is offered brief glimpses of a series of landscapes — natural, urban, cultural and domestic. Doors open onto doors to reveal layers of public and private vision, transporting the viewer from theatrical performances and street scenes to an elevator surveillance camera's recording of everyday life. (Distributed by Electronic Arts Intermix, New York City.)

Part 2: An Inside View

April 9 - 25

Program 1: (Running time: 62 minutes)

Kiyoko's Situation by Mako Idemitsu (24:19, 1989, in Japanese with English subtitles) articulates the deeply embedded cultural roles of Japanese women through the parallel stories of two female artists, Kiyoko and Tani. In Idemitsu's narrative-within-a-narrative, "Kiyoko's situation" is played out on a television monitor within Tani's drama. Tani is paralyzed in her attempts to paint by her feeling that, as a single woman, she has failed in society's eyes. Kiyoko, a young mother viciously criticized by her husband and family for her fierce determination to paint, eventually compromises her art for "maternal duty." As Kiyoko complies with the family, Tani, isolated and despairing, is driven to suicide. Idemitsu's chillingly omniscient television monitor, which acts as the psychological "other," metaphorically and literally condemns Tani to death. In the final cruel irony, she hangs herself, using the television monitor as a jumping-off point. (Distributed by Electronic Arts Intermix, New York City).

De-Sign, Volumes 1-3, by Visual Brains (Sei Kazama and Hatsune Ohtsu): **De-Sign 1: Kunren** (8:10, 1989, in Japanese with English subtitle) comments on the transition from the Showa period to the Heisei era, which occurred with the death of Emperor Hirohito. In *Kunren*, which means "disciplined training" or "rehearsal", Visual Brains alludes to the widely held belief that Hirohito, who fell ill near the end of 1989, was kept alive through the end of the year so that the New Year's holiday would not be interrupted and the millions of New Year's cards mailed by Japanese would not become instantly obsolete.

De-Sign 2: 5-7-5 Hi-Cook (9:37, 1990, in Japanese with English subtitles). Classic examples of the Japanese haiku form, which is based on a 5-7-5 rhythm, usually comment ironically on political or social situations. In *5-7-5 Hi-Cook*, Visual Brains comments on current political and social conditions and this rhythmic structure that recurs throughout Japan's daily life, in the announcements of newscasters, the slogans of advertising campaigns and the roadside messages of police officers.



De-Sign 3: Stand-Drift (20:00, 1990, in Japanese with English subtitles) looks at the Japanese dilemma in the face of the Persian Gulf War.

Japan, which relies entirely on foreign oil, could have seen all industry paralyzed within 90 days if the war had interrupted oil shipments. Although the Japanese government bowed to pressure from the international community and agreed to partially finance the war, a constitutional provision which prohibits military activity prevented more active participation. As a result of the situation, the Japanese public became avid spectators to this war, watching CNN reports as dramatic entertainment. *Stand-Drift* paints a picture of a stereotypical Japanese woman's daily concerns — finding an attractive mate, keeping a slim figure, perfecting one's makeup — against the critical televised moments of the Persian Gulf War. (Distributed by the artists.)

Program 2: (Running time: 53 minutes)

The Other Side by Osamu Nagata (9:30, 1990) offers an image of the television set as a narrow tunnel through which one might crawl to reverse the flow of information and catch a glimpse an actual family, instead of a sit-com stereotype. (Distributed by the artist.)

TV Drama by Yoshitaka Shimano (7:20, 1987) applies the concept of the nested set of boxes to a series of television

sets that are sequentially destroyed. As a craftsman might fashion a set of perfectly fitted boxes, Shimano devises a tightly knit minimalist set of television demolitions. (Distributed by the artist.)

Trance Verge by Junji Kojima (5:10, 1991, in Japanese). Writing about *Trance Verge*, Australian video artist and SCAN video festival juror, Peter Callas commented that Kojima has synthesized a new genre of "cyber-performance" to document and extend his painting events. Influenced by the video-clip imagery of MTV, Kojima combines real-time painting with electronic paint-box technology in a lively performance.

Ph by Dumb Type (30:00, 1991) documents the *Ph* performance by the Kyoto-based multimedia group Dumb Type, who combine talents in the visual arts, architecture, theatre, music, dance and computer programming to create elaborate interdisciplinary events. Their work melds traditional Japanese design concepts with technological advances to shape new systems for creative interaction. Commenting on their work, Dumb Type wrote: "Technology today has in many ways created a network covering the globe, making the world smaller, and sending accurate information tens of thousands of miles, from point A to point B, in just a few seconds. In reality, however, when we try to communicate, for example, the few words 'I love you', just these three words, we are forced to realize the vast distances that lie between us..." (Distributed by the artists.)

Program 3: (Running Time: 41 minutes)

Mechanic and Angel by Hiroshi Araki (16:30, 1990). In this animated morality tale, Tiananmen Telephone Company devils are defeated through the skillful work of our

Kewpie doll-mechanic hero and his angelic associate. These cartoon figures duke it out in a classic fight of "good" vs. "evil" that uses one of Japan's favorite Western imports — the kewpie doll — as a symbol of the good influences and happiness that have come from the Western world. (Distributed by SCAN Gallery, Tokyo.)

Cue by Akihiro Higuchi (20:00, 1990, in Japanese) portrays a "day in the life" of a salaryman: as Orwellian TV commercials announce that "Everybody is looking for peace and happy family life", an overworked businessman races from bedroom to bathroom to office, where he drifts into a nostalgic reverie for an agrarian Japanese past. Like the brooding "shishosetsu" novels of the Meiji period, *Cue* registers a profound ambivalence about modern life. (Distributed by SCAN Gallery, Tokyo.)

Self Image by Jun Ariyoshi (4:35, 1991, in Japanese-English) For Western cultures, "two faced" is a rather disparaging comment on a person's character. In Japanese culture, to have "hyakumen-so", which means, literally "to have 100 faces", is a great compliment, indicating that a person is worldly, clever and flexible. Ariyoshi's visually lush *Self Image* puts forward a variety of possible faces, from fashionable to clownish to garish and playful. (Distributed by SCAN Gallery, Tokyo.)



Photos: this page bottom "Trance Verge", top "The Other Side", opposite page: "Self Image".

Part 3: Individuals, In Between May 7-23

Program 1: (Running time: 43 minutes)

Memories from the Department of Amnesia by Janice Tanaka (1989, 12:50 min, in English) is a deeply personal reflection upon the loss of a parent — specifically, Tanaka's mother. Memory is at the core of this poignant work, in which Tanaka transforms the autobiographical into the universal. Stages of mourning — evasion, fear, grief, denial and remembrance — are rendered as a series of evocative visual metaphors. Transfigured through Tanaka's characteristically lush image processing, haunting images are complemented with a collage of photographs, voice-over and text, which together recount a personal history of her mother's life. (Distributed by Electronic Arts Intermix, New York City.)



History and Memory by Rea Tajiri (1991, 30:00, in English) Focusing on the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II, this powerful and poignant work examines the rewriting of history through media representation. In a pastiche of film images, written text, voice-over and video, Tajiri interweaves collective history and personal memory. The attack on Pearl Harbor is seen through anonymous archival footage, Hollywood's *From Here to Eternity*, a filmed re-staging and a news report. The Japanese-American internment is similarly reconstructed. "Who chose what story to tell?" asks Tajiri. Referring to things that happened in the world with cameras watching, things that we re-stage to have images of them, and things that are observed only by the spirits of the dead, Tajiri reclaims history and memory by inserting her own video footage and narrative voice, and her mother's recollections of her family's internment. (Distributed by Electronic Arts Intermix, New York City.)

Program 2: (Running Time: 60 minutes)

Intimate Stranger by Allan Berliner (60:00, 1991, in English) tells the story of Berliner's grandfather, Joseph Cassuto, a Palestinian Jew raised in Egypt who relocated to

Brooklyn and Osaka, as he formed a life long connection with a life-long affiliation with a Japanese textile company. The bond, which continued during and after the devastation of the Second World War, brought Cassuto neither wealth nor fame, but instead afforded him a unique cultural position, as an "honorable special foreigner." (Distributed by the artist.)

Program 3: (Running Time: 61 minutes)

Drift by Gavin Flint (10:00, 1991) Using footage from the American television program *Hart to Hart*, which is a favorite among Japanese audiences, Flint considers the myriad ways in which meaning is fractured by translation. Flint constructs a hypothetical situation wherein the English original for the program is lost and the show is translated back into English and once again into Japanese, rendering the dialogue non-sensical. By amplifying the "drift" of meaning which occurs in translations, Flint suggests the fragility of cross-cultural communication. (Distributed by the artist.)

Halving the Bones by Ruth Lounsbury (work-in-progress, 19:00, 1992) tells the story of the filmmaker, a half Japanese woman living in New York, who has inherited a can of bones that she keeps on a shelf in her closet. The bones are half of the remains of her Japanese grandmother; the rest are located in a cemetery in Tokyo. Through a narrative and visual collage comprised of family lies and stories, home movies and documentary footage, the film traces 100 years of her maternal family history from Japan to America as she attempts to set the bones to rest.

Video Girls and Video Song for Navaho Sky by Shigeo Kubota (31:56, 1973). Kubota writes, "This is a video fusion of synthesized image and video document. I went to the Navajo Reservation and stayed with a Navajo

family for 40 days. This is my video diary of women who I met in Arizona, Tokyo, Europe, and New York. I carried my portapak, instead of a baby." Kubota creates an ironic collage of radically disparate cultural contexts. Navajos riding a horse-drawn cart to a public well are contrasted with erotic cabaret dancers; a Navajo woman slaughtering sheep is juxtaposed with a performance art piece involving a dead goat and a naked man. Featuring Kubota's often haunting and witty electronic manipulation, this video document is an autobiographical journal of cultural identity and difference. (Distributed by Electronic Arts Intermix, New York City.)

Photo: this page "Video Girls and Video Song for Navaho Sky"