Swiss Art Videolobby
Simon Lamunière

For the past ten years Swiss artists, and especially those working in video, are among the most dynamic, singular and original. Their increasingly ambitious and complex productions are shown both nationally and internationally, confirming the strength of the Swiss scene and the importance of video in current practice. In view of their number and excellent standard, the decision to incorporate these works in a special consultation space for video is an option of particular consequence for the 10th Biennale of Moving Images.

By deliberately omitting previous generations of artists from the 1970s and 1980s, such as René Bauermeister, Muriel Olesen, Urs Lüthi, Sylvie and Cherif Defraoui or Roman Signer, the emphasis is placed on the 'younger generation' of the 1990s and 2000s. If they are no longer 'pioneers' or 'musketeers' of video, they have succeeded in finding their own language and developing original themes that make them true authors. The criteria informing the selection of artists and works for the Videolobby is primarily based on these criteria.

Out of its initial phases – the discovery of the medium and the self-imaging – video comes across as having a broader field of expression at the beginning of the 1990s. The artists represented in this selection are the very artists who have contributed to this expansion. Some work exclusively with the medium, others have only made one or two videos. In all cases, the medium has been developed in very personal ways.

These artists create installations, films, projections or single channel videos. Sometimes they determine the modes of display of the work, sometimes not, leaving a large margin of manoeuver to the curators and programmers. A video recording or a DVD is merely a support that permits multiple possibilities of presentation, including television and the internet. For most of these works, the only important constraints concerning their presentation are how they should be installed in a space, whether they should be looped and the question of how they should begin and end. For each artist, for every work, the margin of manoeuver alters.

The subject-matter tackled by the artists varies greatly, and this is constitutive of their originality. All subjects and forms are explored; in particular, relationships to cinema, to fiction, to documentary or to the video-clip. Style, subject and the personal preoccupations of the author determine the specificities of each of the works. This diversity is extremely important, and it also explains the choice of so many videos for the Videolobby.

The intention is not to represent an artistic tendency, but rather to offer the public a sample of current practice and trajectories. To make this possible it is necessary to find a general and generous context of presentation that enables the viewer to be autonomous and to come across the unexpected. An open video library therefore seemed a pertinent point of departure.

If there are a large number of spaces specially dedicated to presenting videos, internet sites and multimedia projects, they are more often than not conceived as a dark side-room with a few monitors and chairs, or alternatively a space installed with high-tech design furniture. Thankfully, there are also a few rare media or video libraries that are conceived as real installations or group exhibitions, by artists and/or curators. Since the end of the 1980s, the structures put in place by Dan Graham, and later those by Johann Grimonprez, Fabrice Gygi, Stéphanie Moisdon Trembley or Costa Vece, materialise this approach. They seek confrontations between the whole and the parts, architecture and furniture, video and its perception.

The questions that these modes of presentation raise are just as important to the artists and the curators as they are to the institutions and spectators. A video library can dissimulate more than a hundred works for consideration. The environment, context, configuration, the programme's concept and access to the projects, all have an influence on the perception, and thus the interpretation, of the works. Modes of presentation are often conceived by several people; their choices can be both practical and conceptual. This can lead to some confusion, but it is also, nevertheless, unavoidable and the fiction of neutrality is thereby escaped.

To create a space in which to consult for several different videos is to create a bridge between the individual and the collective and also between the immediate and the deferred. The same space gives the opportunity to see several things at the same time or consecutively. We can be watching one thing while thinking of others.

A space with several monitors in the same room enables the spectators to exchange glances and share opinions. They are not necessarily looking in the same direction as with cinema or television: they are engaging in the same space, among the objects they are watching. The disturbances this situation can provoke link back to reality and to its public spaces; they can provoke a fruitful exchange of ideas and free thought. In fact, they are the very opposite of totalitarian space.

For the Swiss Art Videolobby, I wanted a space that was simultaneously constraining and open: constraining because the furniture is stationary and organised, open because the public can sit as they choose. The formal meets the friendly and informal.

In the space of the Videolobby, twelve rows of seats are placed in parallel, alternatively back to back and face to face. A dozen chairs are placed by a monitor set on a small table. A hostess responds to the public's questions and hands them the DVDs. Two other monitors show looped videos; they are positioned at a certain height, one over the counter, the other discreetly in corner near a high table. There is also a vending machine dispensing drinks, a basket of fruit and daily newspapers available for the viewers. The general display suggests a waiting room or an airport lounge.

The reference to this sort of standardised space is, of course, not completely innocent. With the fear of attacks and the crisis in air travel, people's presence is constantly

controlled, their movements watched, their luggage searched. If they are there in the first place it is with the intention of going somewhere for leisure or business. These spaces are transitional, and when passing through them everything becomes a source of interest. Because one has to wait, the smallest activity and detail catches one's attention. Thoughts circulate freely, by association, a little like at an exhibition. Reality is perceived differently.