

Pretzel logic revisited

Paul Ryan explores Earthscore Notation Systems, ecochannels, and the future of Memory, all within a video context.

New uses of video and television for the green movement and its media dimension have been relatively few and far between. Where such use has occurred it has been piecemeal and has tended to apply the conventional vocabulary of TV and video to green issues. Video, after its radical countercultural birthrites, has settled into being merely another technological art genre, its promise as an instrument for perceiving in new ways significantly displaced. The hopes of TV have largely turned sour, with the galaxy of commercial stations Americanising and Disneyfying the horizon, also dissipating the expectations of what could have been realised.

Paul Ryan is an American artist, primarily a videographer, who was in at the beginning of experimental videos and their extended use by the outer counter-culture. Since the late sixties he has been involved in a unique artistic and philosophical project, at once completely practical, yet with a sophisticated theoretical basis, to develop the possible uses of video for what could be described as relational ends, and ultimately he believes, the survival of the living planet. He views video as an evolutionary tool. The range of strategies which he has developed out of this project are potentially far reaching and possibly transforming the philosophical ground on which he situates himself. In turn, this opens up significant developments both within the technologies he uses and interacts with – video, and to a lesser extent, television and computers, and also in the field of personal interactions and relationships.

Ryan, once a teenage Catholic monk, originally studied with Marshall McLuhan in 1968. Partly in place of the Vietnam draft he immersed himself in the educational possibilities of video as an alternative to print

and classroom based educational orthodoxies. In the early seventies Ryan explored the cybernetic ideas of Gregory Bateson and Warren McCulloch. Cybernetics – the science of systems of control both in living creatures and machines – in Bateson's words, "recognises that the 'self' as ordinarily understood is only a small part of a much larger trial-and-error system which does the thinking, acting and deciding". Thus the much larger, all embracing system is often referred to as Mind, and the systems in relation to Mind are considered "Units of Mind". Bateson is recognised as one of the key figures in the development of a holistic cybernetics. He has stated that he believed cybernetics was the biggest bite out of the tree of knowledge to come along for a long time. His major work, "Steps Towards an Ecology of Mind" was published in 1972 whilst McCulloch's "Embodiments of Mind" had already appeared in 1965. Since '72 Ryan began synthesizing these concepts of thinking in circuits of cybernetics, with the work of the leading American turn of the century semiotician, Charles Peirce. Where the semiotician thinks in signs Ryans thinking moved towards thinking in both circuits and signs. Although the results Ryan offers us is a synthesis, it is also an indication of the richness of imagination of Bateson's influence, and a continuing of the fragmented if quiet Post-Batesonian tradition of which Ryan is part, it could be said. Whilst much of cybernetics has become a hard technocratic science ranging from ecology to AI, there is another parallel soft cybernetic stream which continues as a source of rich if quiet influence. Ryan is involved in this stream.

Ryan has also attempted to apply his synthesis to aspects of Rene Thom's catastrophe theory, the notational systems of aesthetician Nelson Goodman, and

