

JOHN STURGEON & AYSHA QUINN

"CHARIOT CHAMBER"

Collaborative video installation

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Aysha Quinn and John Sturgeon are well-known in the context of Southern California video art. Their important multi-media video installations, *No Earth/No Earth Station*, performed in 1983 at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, had a profound effect on many who saw it. As a work of daring and insightful involvement with innovative video

technology, combined with interactive live performance, *No Earth/No Earth Station* was an attempt to clarify issues of metaphor and spirituality as they relate to our current mega-techno state-of-affairs.

Realizing that video technology is clearly in its infancy as far as adaptability to the real-life behavioral patterns of human beings is concerned, Quinn and Sturgeon's recent video collaboration, *Chariot Chamber*, continues the search for a more viable and expanded view of the inner-self. This apocalyptic view of the self makes use of technology as a metaphor, but *Chariot Chamber* clearly focuses its meaning upon the archetypal reality of the individual person rather than distancing the person from the technocratic authoritarian propensities of the medium itself. As a visual artwork existing in real time and space, *Chariot Chamber* may be cited as spectacular without falling into the stereotypical condition of spectacle. Rare for most video-installations of this magnitude, *Chariot Chamber* possesses a kind of solemn beauty and openness.

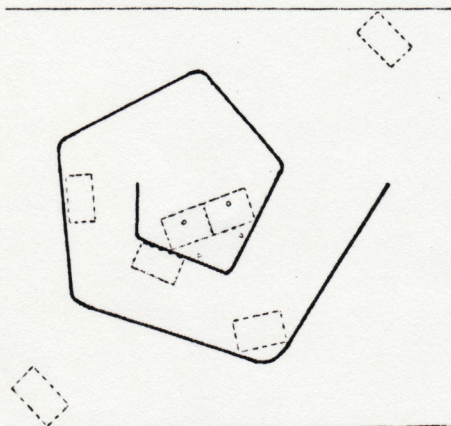
Matching one's intentions with complex techniques is never an easy task. The temptation is to move away from the focus of the statement and to allow elaboration to diffuse the originality from which the work's conception evolves. In *Chariot Chamber*, the experience of walking through the spiral assembly of bridal illusion, passing five monitors along the way in which we hear and see Aysha's breathing and heartbeat, is, in itself, an allure-ment that cannot remove the spectator from the role of participant.

This spiral progression with visual/audio accompaniment literally pulls us into the metaphor. The metaphor exists at the core of the piece, the center: two monitors side-by-side reveal a desert landscape with wheels, reminiscent of Elijah, circling above it. Each monitor projects the desert landscape as a horizontal pan; each sequence of images, including interior views of kivas—earth dwellings built by the Anasazi natives—gives the impression of flight, of moving across the landscape not at the speed of a supersonic jet, but moving at astral speed, the soul in flight, examining the place of the spirit. With all the hoopla over expressionism (that is, until the East Village rediscovered conceptual art and started appropriating images that could sell), it is both a challenge and a relief to find artists working from the inside out again, rather than simply observing surface appearances.

One of the very moving sculptural aspects of *Chariot Chamber* was the neon, fishnet and clay form which was suspended above the two monitors. This construction gave the installation a tactile sense of meaning, something existing as a fetish object among the plethora of high-tech video.

In spite of the essential openness with which one might experience this apocalyptic fiction, there is the subtle danger that Aysha Quinn and John Sturgeon might lose their grip on what the spectator feels about the rigor of their intentions. One lesson I learned from John Cage is that intentions are only a means, not an end. How one experiences a work of art—even a high-tech work of art—is still within the prerogative of individual experience. Everyone will bring something different to *Chariot Chamber* and take something different from it. Intentions cannot control the everyday circumstances which encompass the art-viewing event.

Robert C. Morgan



Chariot Chamber, diagram of installation

Robert C. Morgan is an artist, critic, filmmaker and art historian. He has shown work at the Whitney Museum of American Art, Artists Space (New York), Franklin Furnace and the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, and was recently included in a group show, "Beyond Words," at the Memorial Art Gallery, Rochester, New York. He has authored catalogs on Allan Kaprow, Komar and Melamid, Muntadas and others, and recently collaborated with Sam Hunter and other critics on *An American Renaissance: 40 Years of Painting and Sculpture* (New York: Abbeyville, 1986). This March his book on Robert Barry is being released in a bilingual England-German edition from the Kunsthalle, Bielefeld. He is an associate professor of art history at the Rochester Institute of Technology in Rochester, New York. His articles and reviews appear regularly in *Arts* and other journals in both the United States and Europe. His films were recently shown at the Millennium in New York City. He holds a PhD from New York University and has written extensively on conceptual art. His article "Chris Burden's Beam Drop" appeared in *High Performance* #27.