Bilderbuch

für

Ernst Will

Essays by Peter Callas, Barbara J. London and Erkki Huhtamo.
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Special thanks to Gary Warner.

Bilderbuch für Ernst Will
Ernst Will's Picture Book
A Euro Rebus
by
Peter Callas
1990-1993

11:00 mins, NTSC D2 videotape master.
Original music composed and performed by Felix Davies.
Additional music by Robert Moss.
Music co-produced by Felix Davies and Robert Moss.
Sound equipment supplied by Mark Comish, Sound Sync Systems, Sydney.
Laboratory liasion, Alaric McAusland, Video-8 Broadcast, Sydney.
Post-production co-ordination, Yoichi Kajima, Ring World, Tokyo.
Post-production facilities, Batsu Four Co. Ltd., Tokyo.
Quantel Harriet segments sponsored by Apocalypse, Sydney.
Additional Fairlight CVIR/+ Hybrid sponsored by Fairlight ESP, Sydney.
Quantel Harriet operator, Fairlight CVIR, CVI+ & CVI Hybrid operator, Peter Callas.
On line interpreter, Yuri Kawanabe.
On line editors, Hiroshi Higaki, Satoshi Nagao.
Special thanks, Erkki Huhtamo, Stephen Jones, Yoichi Kajima,
Yuri Kawanabe, Robert Moss, Gary Warner.
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Electronic Arts Intermix, 9th floor, 536 Broadway, New York, NY10012, USA.
Tel +1-212-966-4605 • Fax +1-212-941-6118
Heure Exquise! Le Fort, Avenue de Normandie, BP 113, 59370, Mons-en-Baroeul, France.
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Tel +44-71-284-4588 • Fax +44-71-267-6078
235 Media, Spichernstr. 61, D-5000, Köln 1, Germany.
Tel +49-221-523-828 • Fax +49-221-522-741
Video Gallery Scan, 1-21-1 Jingu-mae, Shibuya-ku, Tokyo 150, Japan.
Tel +81-3-3470-2664 • Fax +81-3-3470-2259
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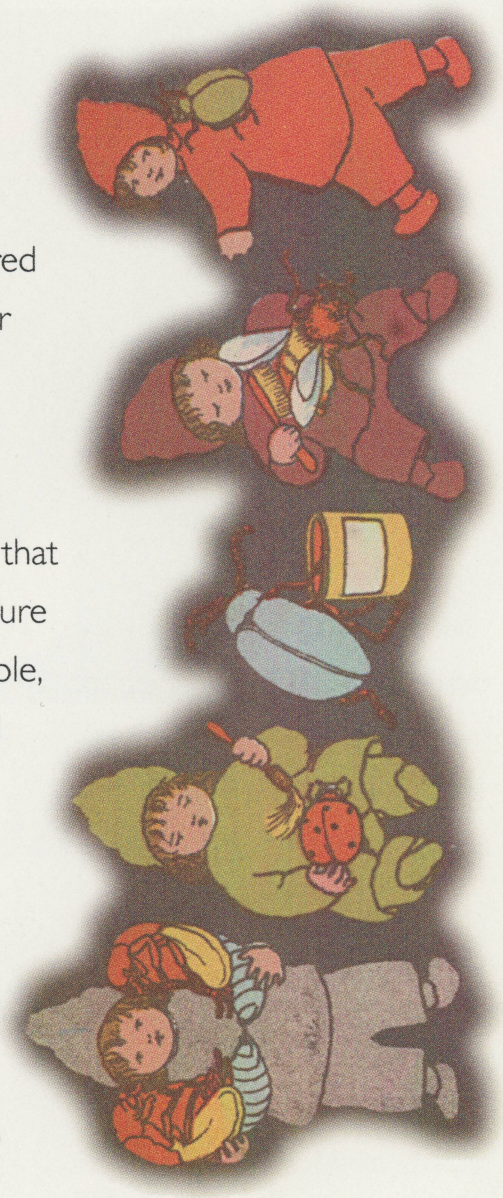
Ernst Will's Picture Book
A Euro Rebus

Essays by Peter Callas, Barbara J. London and Erkki Huhtamo



This videotape is an electronic rendering of a form of proto-televisual iconomania: the creation of haphazardly sourced private pictorial scrap books or *bilderbucher*. Often intended for the surprise, delight and edification of grandchildren by grandparents (the most famous example being Christine Stampe's picture book which was compiled by her grandfather Adolph Drewsen and the remarkable storyteller Hans Christian Andersen), these books had the anagogical potential to become flamboyant transmogrifications of the detritus and sequestered oddments of the great age of print in the latter half of the 19th century.





The activity of making picture books was so phenomenonally widespread at that time that gaudily printed, glazed and embossed picture sheets of flowers, animals and quaint people, known as *bilderbogen*, were manufactured specifically for the purpose of feeding the desire for images to fill the blank pages of these books. So-called "ephemera societies" were formed across Europe to buy and swap these printed fragments.

Whilst *bilderbucher* were not intended to make a public statement, the deliberately irrational and surprising bricolage constructed to delight the young recipient as s/he turned from page to page was often amplified

surrealistically by the logic of placement determined, for example, by the size of an image in filling out a partially completed page. Often the composition of a book might be re-entered (such books were rarely "completed") at a later date by another hand (usually that of the child-owner grown into adolescence) with the inclusion of parachronic imagery. This type of pre-literate/post-verbal, and often intrapersonal, animus could lead to the creation of visual tropes of astonishing clarity. Such tropes beg the question of intention in the creation of "meaning" and suggest the unravelling of a kind of rebus or enigmatic code which reveals the extremely private within the use of the plethora of mass-produced public images of distant scenes, events and people.







The fortuitous collocation of views of towns, voyages of exploration, catastrophes, battle scenes and royal portraits become mantic in the deft hands of an expert snipper such as Andersen or the unknown creator of Ernst Will's picture book in war-time Vienna.

Peter Callas
Tokyo, April, 1993



Virtual States of Mind

by

Barbara J. London

Peter Callas is an insightful artist with a wary sense of humour. Part media theorist, poet, painter and sage, he astutely and mischievously tackles serious global issues, such as nationalism, balance of power and mis-communication. An Australian with a compatriot's curiosity about the world and a strong compunction to travel, his video work has several underlying concerns. First, he is engaged with the information landscape that has developed around television and electronic image-making systems. He looks at the mass media's position and at how commercial users of up-to-date computer and video technologies have adapted other art forms to develop their own language, which permeates so many aspects of everyday life. Second, he is interested in how one culture (mis)understands and adapts ingredients from another. The foreign other might seem exotic, offer a distinctly different sense of time and history, or simply be raw visual fodder.

Callas began his video career exploring topics that were close to home, such as the myth of the solitary Australian drover working the land, an image which is still perpetuated in commercial advertising. But after going to and then living in Japan for several years from 1984, he became preoccupied with the notion of "appropriation" in video. In that highly charged, media-crazed metropolis of Tokyo, where fads quickly appear and disappear like tidal waves, he had access to sophisticated video equipment while working in the video studio of the Marui department store in Shibuya. He was hired to create arresting images for the large outdoor video screen on the store's facade - a challenging task in such a highly saturated image world. The works he created for Marui drew from the mass media, including television, film and "manga" (Japan's very refined comics). Fascinated with the way Japanese culture traditionally has emphasised technique and impression over content, he was struck how these outdoor, commercial video images were only meant to cover a surface, imparting little or no information.

Upon working at Marui, Callas began exploring the area between nostalgia and history, juxtaposing different kinds of iconographic and realistic images. He took a series of early 20th century images from a children's card game called "menko". He combined these cute, cartoon-style pictures with pre-War, overtly propagandistic pictures, along with other Japanese materials. The work is a cycle of one image supplanting or overpowering another. He was making an analogy between his own imperfect understanding of the materials he had appropriated and Japan's longstanding adaptation of foreign signs, symbols and words.

Mental Maps



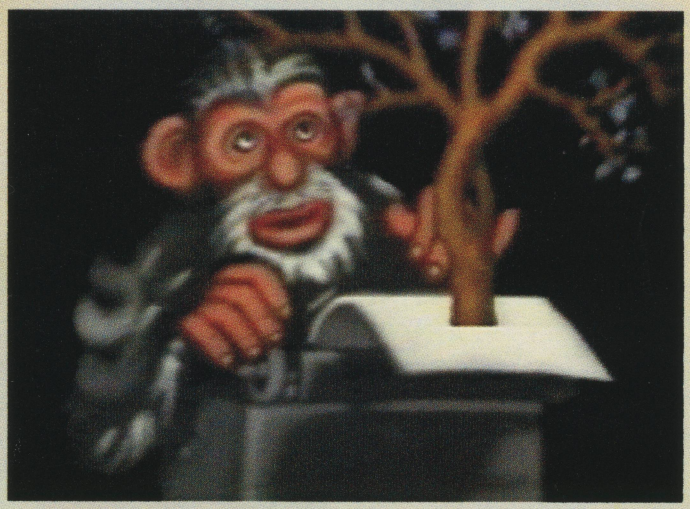
Callas' works often circle around issues of political geography, colonialism and national identity versus globilisation. However, instead of making explicit historical or political statements, Callas composes "mental maps", which trace the hidden undercurrents of these processes - those layers of culture which are not written down in official documents and chronicles, but are no less real than constitutions, diplomatic treaties or corporate documents. Media images - stereotypes, symbols, emblems - are both agents and witnesses of this "secret history". They embody and transmit collective fears, hopes and desires. They migrate, get (even cross-) married or wage wars.

After dealing with Australia, Japan and the United States in his earlier tapes and installations Callas turns to Europe in **Ernst Will's Picture Book**. Again, we encounter a dizzying array of motifs, related this time to the old continent: Christian myths, "prepared" images of great men (Marat, Lenin, Freud, Van Gogh, Gorbachev...), utopias, revolutions and dictatorships, familiar icons of "Europeanity", references to European colonialism, dates (1914-1491-1941...), visual puns. There are also scores of images, which seem only ephemerally related to the central "theme".

Following the linguistic clues given along the way, we could interpret everything as a dream - but whose dream is it? The author's or the viewer's, mankind's or Europe's? Is what we are watching another version of history as a "tale told by an idiot" (or written by a monkey with a typewriter, as the most frequently repeated image seems to suggest)? Or is it about the ceaseless bombardment of the ubiquitous global media, which represents Europe as a collective somnambulist?

It is tempting to try a traditional modernist "reading", seeing the tape as a "purification ritual", or as a mass for the fragile balance between chaos and antichaos in Europe - a battleground of ideologies, a continent of hope and progress, yet continuously overshadowed by the threat of despotism and tragedy. Making a claim for a "correct" reading would, of course, be out of place here. There are countless ways of interpreting an open work like **Ernst Will's Picture Book**, as a quick test among students at the University of Turku (Finland) proved. Several of them didn't even come to think the tape was about Europe. They wrote about "the evolution of mankind" and its representations. Most students were perplexed by the density of the work; almost every paper contained question marks, caused by the failure to put all the pieces together. But as said before, that kind of reading misses the point anyway and is doomed to fail.

Back to the Sources



It is interesting (although not obvious to most viewers) that Peter Callas has used the "picture book" (in German "Bilderbuch") as a historical reference point to his endeavour. The Bilderbuch was a favourite late 19th and early 20th century pastime, a privately collaged pictorial scrap book. A naive and haphazard compilation of images drawn from different sources, it was a reflection of the new euphoria for the culture of the mass-produced image. It was also a unique "interface" between the public and the private sphere, the auratic and the anonymous, the hand-crafted and the mass-produced.

But the Bilderbuch was was not just a harmless pastime; in retrospect it can be seen as a strategy to cope with the explosive dissemination of images in modern society by recycling them through the private. This resonates well with the fact Peter Callas has characterised his own way of working as "diaristic". He segregates pieces of information which he often encounters by chance, reworks them and re-places them in a new context. "I use

"Technology as Territory" is the general title Callas has given to the videotapes he has made since 1986. The title refers to power and meaning and his own tendency to become involved with particular geographic locations. In his video work, he regards the individual elements he appropriates as a fragment of a much larger pattern, which represents his observations of a specific urban environment, be it Tokyo, Sydney, New York or Paris. The region he is in tends to become the subject he is working on at the time.

A good example is "Neo Geo: An American Purchase", a critical videotape Callas made in 1989 whilst living in New York as an artist-in-residence at alternative gallery PS 1. In this wild and crazy, multi-layered videotape with lively music by Stephen Vitiello and John Zorn, Callas explores American codes and mores, especially around war and the economy. Juxtaposing images of the Pentagon and Smokey the Bear, a crucified Santa Claus, weather maps, soldiers and Japanese and American businessmen shaking hands, Callas is looking at global power. At one point a building sign with "Technocracy: A Scientific Answer to America's Problems" floats across the screen. His images are disjointed yet connected, in the same way that we all seem to lead fragmentary lives in a very fragmented world.

Callas bases all of his work on "found" images. Using a Fairlight computer graphics system, he reworks or "intentionalises" his chosen images in three different ways. First, he redraws each, working with a palette of cycling colours that exists in the computer's software. Here he is analysing the image as an artefact, removing it from its original environment and turning it into an emblem. Next he reconfigures each onto a two-dimensional plane, creating a pattern that relates to another form of energy suggested by the image. This is a transformation, an obsessive repetition of elements in an attempt to uncover something essential from the culture that the work is intended to address. Lastly, each image is turned into a stencil so that it can serve as a "cut out" to be superimposed over different backgrounds. All of these background and foreground images are stored so that they can be retrieved by two or more computers. Once he begins the final layering, he draws on each of the images stored in his data base. The compositing is an intuitive process, when his ideas begin to crystallise. At this point he works very quickly, developing references and associations with the images he retrieves or recombines. The result is a densely-layered crazy quilt which seems to move as rapidly as the mind.

Over the last eight years Peter Callas has quietly and consistently articulated his own unique vision, working exclusively with the layering and drawing techniques made available to him through the Fairlight and other computer graphics systems. Instead of "virtual reality", Callas creates a kind of virtual mental state. He is a provocative media artist who is able to extend computer technology at the same time as stimulating viewers.

Dreaming Europe, or Mapping the Global "Anti-Terrain"

by

Erkki Huhtamo



Ernst Will's Picture Book is the latest achievement in Peter Callas' ongoing project of electronic cartography. A new "mappa mondo" is in the making, but don't expect a series of aerial views (now almost necessarily associated with Paul Virilio's "logistics of perception", the coupling of the "war machine" and the "watching machine"), systematically fitted into a grid, "frozen" and provided with a scale.[1] That kind of map belongs to a different endeavour - that of monocular perception, the ubiquitous eye, the reduction of reality into the visible, of surveillance and repression.

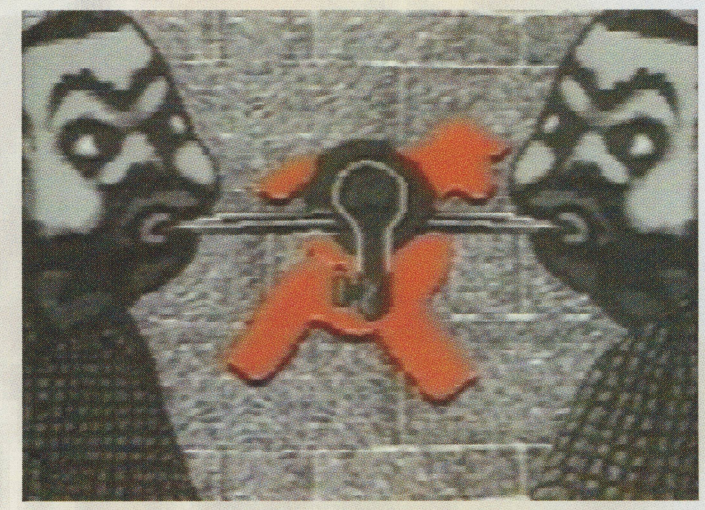
The "eye in the sky" flattens the surface of the earth; it reduces reality into patterns and shapes, which are, eventually, turned into something else - power structures, ideological formations. Simultaneous, it keeps up distance. The spectator is constituted as an outsider. His position reenacts that of the eye in the sky - absolute dominion, which is the perceptual building block of totalitarianism. Yet this perceptual empowerment is an illusion, disguising the fact that the spectator himself is being watched, constituted as the object of another invisible gaze.

(Un)fortunately this kind of spectatorial position is not sufficient for orienting ourselves in contemporary society. We are living in an "endo world", dominated and partly created by electronic technology. The central question is: how to map this world *from within*? How to account for the fact that - in Peter Weibel's words - "we are only part of the system or an inner inhabitant of the system that we observe or with which we interact"? [2] The system is "technology turned into territory", to use an expression coined by Peter Callas.[3] Technology as territory is the

virtual extension (and sometimes replacement) of physical space, a "second nature". It is also an "anti-terrain", a non-space - material and yet immaterial, constantly present and yet moving with infinite speed.

The overwhelming presence of this territory accounts for the fact that it has ceased to be purely (audio)visual - it has become mental, internalised, as well. The constant (re)cycling of images and sounds takes the form of technological-mental loops that mingle, merge and separate from each other in an endless movement. This connects the mind and the machine into a hybrid system, or an "apparatus", which is a powerful myth generator. The constant circulation of meaning-traces seems to dissolve the distinction between "fact" and "myth". That which "really took place in a certain time and place" is wrapped around a multitude of discursive formations, which turns historical facts into molds for post-fabricated meanings. The figure of Napoleon may have less to do with the historical person than with certain mythologised ideas about power and ambition, or at least about codes of dressing and body language.

Open Architecture



The videotapes and installations of Peter Callas both celebrate this electronic endo world and try to get hold of it. The questions they posit are the following: how to establish a critical art practice which will account for the very variety and instability of this world without resorting to reductionism and academic "monocularism"? How to remain inside, have fun and yet succeed in orienting oneself (and others) amidst the kaleidoscopic flow of images?

The solution Callas offers is to speak about reality with realities, about representations with representations, about signs with signs. By resorting to appropriation and the recycling of found imagery he has created a highly sophisticated strategy which seems to speak the language of mass media, but isn't content with simply producing

just another stream of seductive, empty signifiers (as many pop videos do). Yet Callas' strategy isn't really akin to the classical montage techniques of an Eisenstein or a Heartfield either. Eisenstein's films and Heartfield's photomontages juxtaposed pre-existing meaning-traces to produce "image-signs", the meanings of which were defined and ideologically fixed in advance.

Callas has developed a more open "architecture". His way of combining and manipulating images - a kind of "internal montage" - works not so much towards fixing meanings as releasing them. Even though some "language" is involved, what results is often hard to put into words. It is as if the subconscious (of the maker) were speaking to the subconscious (of the audience) on the shared domain of media(ted) culture. Astonishing "emblematic" images follow each other in rapid succession, (seemingly) without chronological or semantic logic. Cyclical repetition, layering and the multiplication of visual motifs create a dense texture, a metamorphosing audiovisual "tapestry". The spectator is faced with a "rebus", but not in the traditional sense of the word, as something which needs to be definitively solved, or which has a (hidden) closure to be discovered.

There is no "correct" way to read Callas' rebuses, yet there are certainly ways of making sense of them. Even though the internal architecture is open, the works themselves are not without semantic determinations. The situation recalls the interplay of "openness" and "closedness" in interactive computer art (although Callas' works are "non-interactive" in the technical sense of the word). The spectator has plenty of space to "navigate" in the work and construct her/his own readings; yet s/he is never abandoned. There are enough clues and even semantic signboards to fuel and orient the experience.



images which come to hand on that particular day. I have to finish working on the image in one sitting, or I can't come back to it." [4]

Of course there are also great differences between the attitudes of Callas and those of the anonymous creator/s of the original "Ernst Will's Picture Book", compiled in war-torn Vienna (and found by Callas in a second hand shop). It is however, extremely challenging to draw parallels like this. As media scholars are beginning to realise, the ways that people think about media and relate to it do not necessarily change at the same pace with technology. The logic of media culture seems cyclical, rather than simply linear. If we want to understand our present immersion into the "territory of technology", it is instructive to go "back to the sources". In addition to its other achievements, **Ernst Will's Picture Book** is thus a valuable contribution to the "archaeology of audiovisuality".

1. Paul Virilio, **War and Cinema. The Logistics of Perception**, translated by Patrick Camiller, Verso, London & New York,1989.
2. Peter Weibel, "The World from Within - Endo & Nano. Over and Beyond the Limits of Reality", in Karl Gerbel and Peter Weibel (eds), **Die Welt von Innen - Endo & Nano**, Ars Electronica catalogue, PVS Verleger, Linz, 1992, p.11.
3. Peter Callas, "Some Liminal Aspects of the Technology Trade", **Mediamatic**, Vol.5, No.3, Amsterdam, pp.107-115.
4. Erkki Huhtamo, Interview with Peter Callas, unpublished, Linz, September 14, 1989.



Peter Callas

Born May 30, 1952, Sydney, Australia.

SELECTED AWARDS

1981 Most Socially Relevant Video Art, Portopia '81, International Festival of Video Art, Kobe, Japan.
1984 Kiffy Rubbo Memorial Fellowship, Visual Arts Board, Australia Council, Sydney.
1986 Special Merit Award, 9th Tokyo Video Festival, Tokyo.
1987 Scan Video Gallery Prize, Electrovisions '87, Video & Television Festival, Tokyo.
1988 1st Prize, Australian Independent Video, 3rd Australian Video Festival, Sydney.
1988-89 PS1 Fellowship, Visual Arts/Craft Board, Australia Council and the Institute of Urban Arts & Resources, New York.
1990 New Horizons Award, for Innovation in New Media, International Society for the Arts, Sciences & Technology, Berkeley, USA.
Grand Prix de la Ville de Locarno, International Festival of Video Art, Locarno, Switzerland.
Best Computer Art, Festival Fotoptica Videobrasil, São Paulo, Brazil.
1991 Australia Council Fellowship, Visual Arts/Craft Board, Australia Council, Sydney.

SELECTED COLLECTIONS

1988-93 Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney.
Australian National Gallery, Canberra.
Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid.
Donnell Media Center, New York.
Griffith Art Works, Griffith University, Brisbane.
Kawasaki Museum, Tokyo.
Long Beach Museum of Art, Los Angeles.
Centro Internazionale de Brera, Milano, Italy.
Museum of Modern Art, New York.

SELECTED RECENT INDIVIDUAL EXHIBITIONS

1987 "Technology as Territory: Video & Desire in Japan", Artspace, Sydney; Praxis, Freemantle; Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne.
1988 "Architectronics", Berlin Film Festival, Berlin.
1989 "Speed-Images: Video Architexture", Video Viewpoints, Museum of Modern Art, New York.
1990 "Alphabyte Cities: The Videos of Peter Callas", ICA, London.
"Métropolis", Television Española, Madrid.
1991 "Video IM", Kolnischen Kunstverein, Köln.
1992 "Men of Vision", installation, The Armoury, Adelaide Festival of the Arts, Adelaide.

SELECTED RECENT GROUP EXHIBITIONS

1989 "Im Netz der Systeme", installation, Ars Electronica, Linz.
"Worldwide Video Festival", Kijkhuis, The Hague.
"Video & the Computer", Museum of Modern Art, New York.
1990 "1st Adelaide Biennial", Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide.
"1st Biennial of the Moving Image", Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid.
"Taormina Video Arte", Taormina, Sicily.
"Traversals: Instructions to the Double", installation, Long Beach Museum of Art, Los Angeles.
1991 "Australian Perspecta", installation, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney.
"Towards the Aesthetics of the Future", ICA, London
"Japan met Westerse Ogen Bekeken - 7 Videomakers", Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

"The Third Dimension and Beyond", The Third Emerging Expression Biennial, The Bronx Museum of the Arts, New York.

1992 "Installation Age: Space and Vision", installation, Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, Tokyo.
"Strangers in Paradise", National Museum of Modern Art, Seoul.
"Video: Two Decades", Museum of Modern Art, New York.

1993 "Video Positive '93", installation, Tate Gallery, Liverpool, UK.
"39th International Short Film Festival", Oberhausen, Germany.
"Fukui International Video Biennale", Fukui, Japan.
"Video Visions", New York Film Festival, Lincoln Center, New York.

SELECTED RECENT TELEVISION SCREENINGS

1989 "New Television", WGBH, Boston (also 1990).
"Media Art Museum", NHK Satellite, Tokyo.
"10 to 11", RTL, Köln (also 1990).
"Stunde der Filmemacher", SAT1, Köln.
"Art of Video", Atanor, Madrid.

1990 "Métropolis", Television Española, Madrid.
"Eat Carpet", SBS, Sydney (irregular screenings 1989-1993).
Canal + Television, Paris.
Canal + Television, Madrid.
"White Noise", BBC2, London.

1991 "Down Under", Channel 4, London.

1992 "Art Paradise: The Museum of Ecstasy", Space Shower Satellite, Tokyo.

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

George Barber, "Visual Callasthenics", **Videographic**, Vol.1, No,1, London, 1989.

Steven Bode, "Alphabyte Cities", **The Face**, No.20, London, 1990.

Gregory Burke, "Translating Video; Languages of Space in the Video-work of Peter Callas", **NOW SEE HEAR!**, catalogue, Wellington City Art Gallery, New Zealand, 1990.

Peter Callas, "Re Re-Orientation: The Image as Fantasy and Furniture in Japan", **Pleasure of the Gaze**, catalogue, Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth, 1985.
"Structure without Substance: Video as Architecture", **Artlink**, Vol.4, No.3, Adelaide, 1987.
"Some Liminal Aspects of the Technology Trade", **Mediamatic**, Vol.5, No.3, Amsterdam, 1990.
"Technology as Territory: Video & Desire in Japan", **Technology as Territory** catalogue, Praxis, Freemantle,1987.
"Traversals: Instructions to the Double", **Traversals: Instructions to the Double**, catalogue, Long Beach Museum of Art, Los Angeles, 1990.

John G. Hanhardt, "Peter Callas/Woody Vasulka; Re-imagining History", **L'Immagine Elettronica**, catalogue, Ferrara, Italy, 1990.

Ross Harley, "Alphabyte Cities; The Architectronics of Peter Callas", Art & Text, No.28, Sydney, 1988.

Christine Lombard, "Peter Callas", **Pixel, Le Magazine des Nouvelles Images**, No.6, Paris, 1989.

Victoria Lynn, "The Fujiyama Pyramid Project", **Australian Perspecta**, catalogue, Art Gallery of NSW, Sydney, 1992.

Lawrence McDonald, "Horizons of Technology: an Interview with Peter Callas", **Illusions**, No.15, Wellington, 1990.

Bernice Murphy, "Peter Callas", **Australian Perspecta**, catalogue, Art Gallery of NSW, Sydney, 1981.

McKenzie Wark, "From Roots to Aerials: Peter Callas and the Contemporary Information Landscape", **5th Australian International Video Festival**, catalogue, Sydney, 1990.
"Techno Sprawl; Japan, Postmodernism and Peter Callas", **Tension 22**, Melbourne, 1990.

Lori Zippay, "Peter Callas", Electronic Arts Intermix: Video, **Electronic Arts Intermix**, New York, 1992.

