

■**Press 'play'** *Guillotined battery-hens are falling into an Electrolux mixer. Riot police storm hair spray adverts, electrode-manipulated laboratory rats collide with stuttering newsreaders, the buckle of a straightjacket is refastened endlessly. The sound is a low melancholic drone of synthesised echoes and radio static. Eject. This is 'Bleeding Images' by Nocturnal Emissions.*

■**Press 'play'** *Goose-stepping soldiers in Red Square receive the salute from Thatcher and Heseltine at the Conservative Party Conference. The Saatchi Tory logo, an ice-cream cone with flames leaping out, blurs into the hammer and sickle. Lady Di glides by waving to the beat of New Order's 'How does it feel to treat me like you do?' Eject. 'Scratching for a new texture' by the Duvet Brothers.*

■**Press 'play'** *Sultry eyes blink on screens within screens. Joan Crawford slaps William Holden. Violins play a distant tango, interrupted by snatches of dialogue from Hollywood melodramas. Floating layers of images are washed away by seeping pinks and crimsons, like the jelly blobs in those novelty table lamps. Eject. 'Polka Dots and Moonbeams' by Sandra Goldbacher.*

HIP HOP Video, image break-dancing: television does a body-pop. Broadcast TV is scoured for arresting images and fed into video editing systems like shredding machines. The fusion of funk rhythms and visuals on collision course crumble original context. Reassurance and sweet reason, television's facade, disintegrate before your bombarded eyes.

Paul Maben of 'Protein Video' hands over the choice of images to a computer, attempting to simulate an organic, visual osmosis. His ambition is to mix sound and vision live. Grand Master Flash toasting live broadcasts with pre-recorded tapes. Image-rapping in a video disco.

George Barber takes the innately seductive quality of TV to mix colour, shapes and movement into hypnotic, fluid sequences. The screen becomes a crystal ball, triggering the subconscious. TV as the Dream Machine.

The Video Lounge at the Fridge in Brixton, with its 20-screen TV installation (presently moving house and re-opening on December 1st) has provided one of the few exhibition venues in London for scratch video to reach a wider audience. Now established video-makers like Derek Jarman, Cerith Wyn Evans and Richard Heslop are joined by bored TV addicts with a lot of state-paid leisure time on their hands, and a video recorder in the front room.

Scratching is so simple. Just playing with the TV remote-control con-

sole, quickly switching stations at random, is a basic scratch. What emerges isn't just a jumble of voices and images but the personality of broadcast TV itself. Its self-importance, its hectoring, its banality and plastic smile.

It's just this attitude to television which unites the diverse offerings of video-scratchers. The focus isn't narrative film genres, or individual TV programmes, but the effect of television on tap, the stream of the schedules. It was only a matter of time before television got the scratch treatment. We had to wait for the tools of TV and video to fall into the 'wrong hands'.

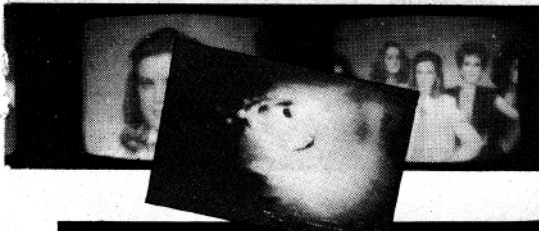
An idea of this attitude might be an all-nighter of the movies 'Koyanisquatsi', 'Atomic Cafe', and 'Videodrome' with maybe the 'Animal Film' thrown in. That's a world out of control, a victim of technology's own mindless momentum, with a humanity hopelessly alienated from nature, and, via the mass media, image-numbered into unreality. Scratch prescribes 'Close Encounters of the Subliminal Kind' as the antidote.

The latest tape from Brixton-based multi-media outfit, Nocturnal Emissions is called 'The Foetal Grave of Progress'. It leaves you feeling you've just witnessed the final death-throes of a civilisation, sadly ours. All its past traumas flash by in seconds, before the last electronic bleep and oblivion.

The soundtrack is an aimless, pathetic whine punctuated with snatches of speech, traffic and baby chuckles, as if we're on remote-control search for meaning amongst the image debris of an information-overdosed world. Tanks at portside, radar scanners, smoke and rubble vie with fish fingers and toothpaste ads for our fleeting attention. The pulse of the Ghost in the Machine.

Such preoccupations inform Nick Cope's 391 scratch, 'The View From Hear' clearly signalling that we should learn to 'listen' to television, like music, rather than watching and analysing for meaning like the way we read books. Western culture prioritises sight over hearing, scientific rationality over intuition and feeling. Conventional television reinforces such myopic awareness, and information is packaged into easily digestible stories, whether it's the news or a soap. The problem is that the bits don't add up to a whole. To understanding.

391 draws scratchers in Sheffield and Nottingham together, and developed out of local fanzines, after they got bored with just covering bands, records and gigs. Like the Nocturnals and another Sheffield group, the Anti-Group, they see video as part of a broader movement to stage multi-media events, incorporating scratch sound, multiple



Scratch and run.

film and slide projections as well as video installations.

Cope is fond of quoting Situationist writings to explain what he does. 'Work follows the random fragmented path that our mind takes every day, turning from dream to reminiscence, from nightmare to prescience, from the longings for objects to the longings for sex. As the foundations crack, our society follows this pattern, as random event piles on random event, and like a drowning man the past of all ages flies before our eyes. Instead of imposing order, this vortex is received and celebrated, then concentrated into a force of unexpected power.'

Which is probably where Genesis P. Orridge and Psychic TV come in. Armageddon cultists and William Burroughs devotees, Psychic TV give innocent entertainment a very bad name. Which is just as they intend.

Their live performances of sensory over-kill, employing extreme imagery of satanic sex rites or spoof christian ikonography are experiments in mass disorientation. 'Altered States' tests attempting to free the spirit from predictable control. Like those voodoo dances which induce trance-like states. If television's the opium of the masses, will orgiastic communal seances such as these be the bingo of the

future?

William Burroughs predicted as much in 'Wild Boys' back in 1968. Along with punk style ('the chic thing is to dress in expensive tailor-made rags and all the queens are camping about in wild-boy drag') he gives us The Penny Arcade Peep Show—moving multi-screen video boxes, enveloping us in a fusion of sound and vision. 'Fragmentary glimpses linked by immediate visual impact... a sensation of speed as if the pictures were seen from a train window.'

Frankie's 'Two Tribes' is inspired by Mad Max II, a wild boy if ever there was one, and Marc Almond is signed up to star in the movie of Burroughs' book. Doublevision in Manchester distribute scratch videos of Cabaret Voltaire and 23 Skidoo, and the IKON/Factory label have just brought out 'The Final Academy Documents', the early film scratches of Burroughs and Anthony Balch. The Rough Trade shop in Notting Hill stocks a small range of independent scratch cassettes.

Scratch has arrived. But will the media, as usual, simply detach the style from the substance to market newer bands and consumer durables? Charlotte Street becoming the new Kings Road?

Video-scratching is an inter-active response to the one-way arrogance of broadcast television. And

perhaps the growing accessibility of the medium, both for creating new messages and distributing alternative information, gives some hope. A flick through the extensive library of London Video Arts in Wardour Street, or the Videotheque at the ICA shows just how adept video-makers have been in subverting conventional expectations.

Clive Gillman's 'Warning, Attack and Recovery' demonstrates the economy of scratch, and the irrelevance of soap-opera narrative, by saying in eight intense minutes what 'The Day After' and 'Threads' took hours to say. While Graham Young's 'Ships, I See No Ships' brilliantly debunks the show-biz jingoism of a post-Falklands military tattoo, scratching the antics to a reggae steel-drum soundtrack.

Steve Hawley's 'Science Mix' is a hilarious parody of TV commercials, mixing archive '50s soap powder ads (including a genuine no-tangle wash-tub clip where radioactive clothing is rinsed static-free!) with present-day versions.

And Jez Welsh's 'IOD' (Information Overdose/Imagine Other Destinies) lays image over image in abstract, geometric designs, weaving around a soundtrack of buzzing radio frequencies, distant telephones and DJ bilge. As with much scratch video, the idea of image pollution, and our so far

unrecognised need to develop an 'ecology of information', permeates the work.

Can video wean us off our addiction to the dominant television habits so assiduously nurtured by consumer capitalism? Certainly it can claim to have established itself as a specific creative medium, no longer in hock to the codes and language of film narrative or broadcast television. And scratch brings together the fluidity of video-editing, more akin to sound-mixing than montage film techniques, with a healthy critique of the mass media.

But are we ready for it? And with the absence of social exhibition venues, will most people ever be challenged to think differently about the sort of information they receive and how they consume it? When confronted with the apparent incoherence of scratch, are we prepared to suspend our critical faculties—in order to re-discover them?

If television is our shop window on the world, scratch has just chucked a brick through it, and is busy looting 30 years of goodies, with abandon. Will the results be inflammatory or wallpaper?

See Video Listings for details of forthcoming exhibitions of scratch video at ICA Videotheque, London Video Arts and Moonshine Arts Centre.