

An Avant-Garde Video Inquiry into the Social Role of Architecture and Television

V.E.T.V, an hour-long video that explores relationships between architecture and television, premiered on October 14, 1994, on Channel 13, the local public-access station. The creation of graduate architecture students Jorge Otero-Pailos and Alfonso D'Onofrio, V.E.T.V was ten months in the making and enlisted the help of thirty other people.

"Architecture and television have many similarities," Otero-Pailos said, explaining the impetus behind their inquiry. "Both are perceived as unconscious impulses, and both are cultural objects at work in the construction of contemporary subjectivity."

"Architecture and television are our most common experiences," D'Onofrio added. "They shape our identity through the subject/object exchanges we have with them in the context of contemporary culture."

Architecture and television may be daily fare, but V.E.T.V is not. It explores such complex issues as the social implications of making architecture and visual images. How the show was filmed and edited, how scenes change and transform—the manipulation of artwork and other images—in short, the entire video was constructed "much as an architect designs a building" to make viewers question "the production of architecture and television as objects of social identification."

Looking at one visual experience through theories and techniques related to another produced for the creators and for those who participated in the video's interviews and roundtable discussions (and, no doubt, for those who watched the show) a new set of references.

But the video "is just the beginning, the first brick," as Otero-Pailos put it. Should the pair pursue this innovative method of investigation (which they might), they would "split the brick open and look more intensely at the separate parts."

Among those who helped Otero-Pailos and D'Onofrio were members of the Channel 13 camera crew, fellow art and architecture students, contemporary theorists and practitioners (including Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas, Puerto Rican architect Jorge Rigau, and University of Chicago English professor Lauren Berlant), and Cornell professors (political scientist Susan Buck Morss and architecture historian Mark Jarzombek). The two producers also had free access to the public station's production facilities.

The students undertook the video project on top of graduate study requirements. Otero-Pailos was a design T.A. working on his master's thesis (completed this December). Entitled "Rock the Casbah," the project uses the city of Casablanca and *Casablanca* the film as sites of intervention in which to weave a real/imaginary "architecture of anxiety."



D'Onofrio, who was both a student and drawing T.A. during the video's production, is now working on his master's thesis, a study of how thematic histories, as created in the media, relate to suburban design and the idea of the American dream.

To obtain a copy of V.E.T.V, or to have D'Onofrio and Otero-Pailos present the video at a seminar or conference, contact Gail Kolbe (telephone: 607 255-6808; fax: 607 255-1900).



Graduate architecture students Alfonso D'Onofrio (left) and Jorge Otero-Pailos, creators of V.E.T.V.