“I See and Smile”: The Video Rideo Motif And the *Video Rideo* Artwork

Gerard

“Remember, remember, the fifth of November, / The Gunpowder Treason and Plot…”

“A penny for the old Guy”

This is a revised version of a piece that I put together a few years ago on the cover of our first cassette album, *Video Rideo* (June 1981, Con/ventional Tapes). I had seen the image in a classroom and found the design, and the rhyming phrase “Video Rideo”, which means in Latin “I see, I laugh” (though it is translated in the below images as “I see and smile”), compelling. I am not sure if I knew at the time it was to do with the famous Gunpowder Plot of 1605, when Guy Fawkes, a member of a band of Catholic conspirators, was discovered in the cellar of the House of Lords with 36 barrels of gunpowder. His intention, to blow up King James I whilst he was in attendance, and with him the Protestant nobility. A vile fate awaited Fawkes and most of his fellows, the kind of horrific execution that drew a good crowd – as I expect it would today. However, Fawkes himself – though after torture and confession – managed to escape the dreadful end intended for him by slipping on the ladder to the gallows, falling and breaking his neck. These days the judicial killing of humans by humans is done… more “humanely” – I hardly think so, but with rather less loathsome indulgence in the infliction of unimaginable agonies of the flesh. Surely it should be patently obvious to all, that the judicial killing of humans by humans is against the law. The “practicalities” of “deterrence” are a complete irrelevance.

The history is well known. Henry the VIII severed the British from Rome. Elizabeth I was excommunicated in the late 1500s. England had been Catholic for 1000 years. But after the severance with Rome, Britain had to establish its own church, Anglicanism; deliberately intended as a third way between radical Protestantism and Catholicism, and to be as broad and accommodating as possible. But for those who could not in conscience espouse the new order, repression was savage. In 1588 the Spanish Armada, a Catholic army of invasion, was successfully broken up and defeated by British battleships, with many of the surviving Spanish vessels suffering shipwreck in retreat, with heavy loss of life. Naturally it was seen by the English as an act of God, and the theme of God’s protection of England continued in the iconography and writings produced in the wake of the Gunpowder Plot. The “I see and smile” is of course the all-seeing eye of God: *England*’s “whole never slumbering EYE” (see below) – so perhaps with some admixture of God’s/England’s “agents”, the English intelligence service, and the supreme head of state and church, appointed by God, the monarch.

As it happens, one of my brothers is called Guy and there was a John Gerard involved in the plot, a Jesuit priest. I currently reside in a half-underground lower-ground-floor flat, almost a cellar. The house number is 36, the same number as Guy Fawkes’s gunpowder barrels. Guy Fawkes Night is celebrated in the United Kingdom on November the 5th each year, with bonfires and a symbolic dummy, the “Guy”, set on the top to burn. And there is gunpowder too, in the form of fireworks.

I have not seen it in recent years, but in my childhood it was still common, as November the 5th approached, for children to make a Guy with old clothes stuffed with newspaper, and a head fashioned out of a pumpkin, balloon, or a ball of some sort, and go about the streets with their dummy, often slouched in a pram, asking for “A penny for the old Guy”. On one occasion I made a self-standing guy with a shoebox tape machine installed in his chest. He was as tall as a man. We placed him in front of the garden fence abutting the street. In the fence was a hole through which I passed the tape player’s microphone lead, and which also functioned as a spyhole. With the on/off switch on the microphone I could play or pause the tape. As somebody approached on the street, I would activate the machine, on which I had recorded over and over again “A penny for the old Guy”, and my Guy would appear to speak. I was rather pleased with my ambitious ingenuity, but I have no memory of how much money we made. On another occasion, we disguised my brother Guy as our Guy Fawkes. “Stop breathing, somebody’s coming!” Those who troubled to stop often became suspicious that our Guy was no dummy. “But”, we would triumphantly exclaim, “his name is really Guy!”.

I pinched the image from the classroom and showed it to Ben, and we agreed that we had both the cover and title for our album. Ben did all the design work. Below you will find the image that featured on our cover, and details of what Ben did to it, and associated images, and a poem, regarding the foiled Spanish Armada and the Gunpowder Plot. Discrimination against Catholics went on in Britain until well into the 19th century. It was not until 1871 that Catholics were admitted to the two elite universities of Oxford and Cambridge.

My little history lesson is followed by images of the full artwork of *Video Rideo*, and an image of Ben and myself when we first began.

Keep on rockin’!

“The Double Deliverance 1588 1605”

That is from the Armada (1588) and the Gunpowder Plot (1605). The *Video Rideo* artwork made use of this image. Ben switched the position of the skull from the front of the Palace of Westminster (which houses both the House of Lords and House of Commons). In the version that follows, “The Papists’ Powder Treason”, there are skulls on both ends of the building.



The original image.



The cover of *Video Rideo*.

The complete image: “The Double Deliverance 1588 1605” (1621)



See below for the caption to this etching.

“The Double Deliverance 1588 1605” (1621)

“Anti-Catholic satire in three parts below the irradiated name of Jehovah in Hebrew: on the left, the Spanish Armada shown in a horseshoe formation; in the centre, a tent in which the destruction of England is plotted by the Pope, a cardinal, the Devil, a Spanish grandee (possibly Philip II) and a Jesuit seated at a table with three monks in attendance; to right, Guy Fawkes approaches the House of Lords where the vault is stacked with barrels of gunpowder; in the distance is a notional view of the fortifications at Tilbury. 1621 etching; the plate burnished in places to create a variety of textures.” (Image BMSat 41, the British Museum)

The etching is an Anglo-Dutch production. There was a close alliance at the time between England and the Protestant Dutch Republic, pitted against the then-supremacy of the Spanish (though the defeat of the Armada in 1588 was the beginning of England’s emergence as a major maritime power). The print is effectively an international piece of Protestant propaganda and features three languages: Latin (understood by the educated throughout Europe), Dutch and English. But there was a reason why the etching had to be produced in the Dutch Republic. The design for it was the work of Samuel Ward, a Puritan preacher from Ipswich, England, but its vituperative anti-Catholicism meant that it could not be printed in England, where press censorship was severe. The reason being that at the time (1621) James I was seeking to ease tension with Spain through the marriage of his son (the future Charles I) with a suitable Spanish bride. Ward smuggled the design out of England and took it to Amsterdam, where a collaborator could easily be found (moreover the Dutch were then at war with Spain). There the etching was made by a Jan Pietersz van de Venne, and one supposes the addition of Dutch language was his work.

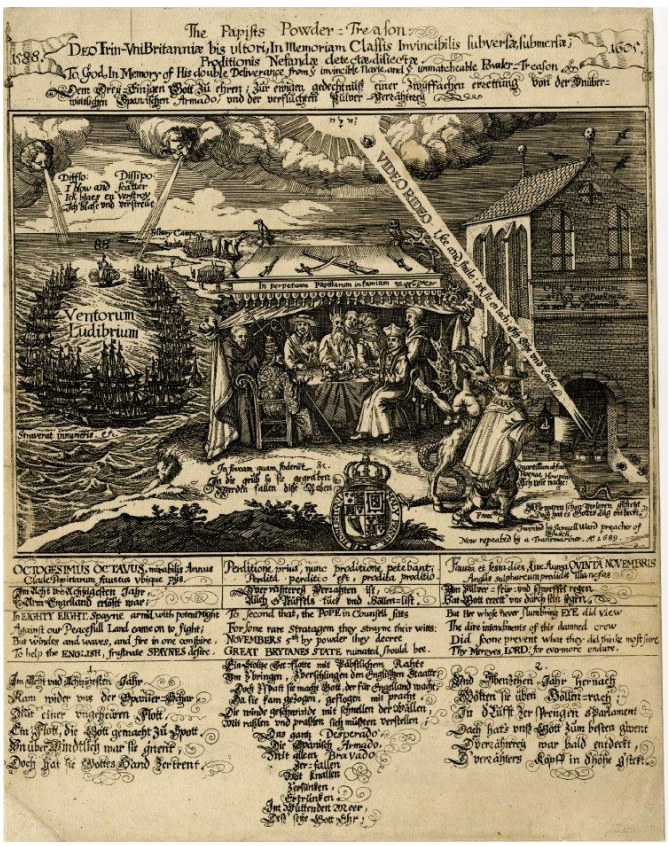
The poem beneath the illustration reads:

In EIGHTY EIGHT, Spayne armd with potent Might
Against our Peacefull Land came on to fight;
But windes and waves, and fire in one conspire,
To help the ENGLISH frustrate SPAYNES desire.

To second that, the POPE in Counsil sits
For some rare Stratagem they strayne their witts:
NOVEMBER 5th by powder they decree
GREAT BRYTANES STATE ruinated should bee.

But Her whole never slumbering EYE did view
The dire intendments of their damned crew
Did soone prevent what they did think most sure
Thy Mercyes, LORD! for evermore endure.

“The Papists’ Powder Treason” (1689)



See below for the caption to this etching.

“The Papists’ Powder Treason” (1689)

“Anti-Catholic satire copied with some variations from BMSat 41 [the “Double Deliverance” etching], in three parts below the irradiated name of Jehovah in Hebrew: on the left, the Spanish Armada shown as a horseshoe formation of ships; in the centre, a tent in which the destruction of England is plotted by the Pope, a cardinal, the Devil, a Spanish grandee and a Jesuit seated at a table with three monks in attendance; to right, Guy Fawkes, accompanied by the devil in the form of a dragon, approaches the Palace of Westminster where the cellar is stacked with barrels of gunpowder.” (the British Museum)

This version of the image has the same poem as “The Double Deliverance”.

Related Images

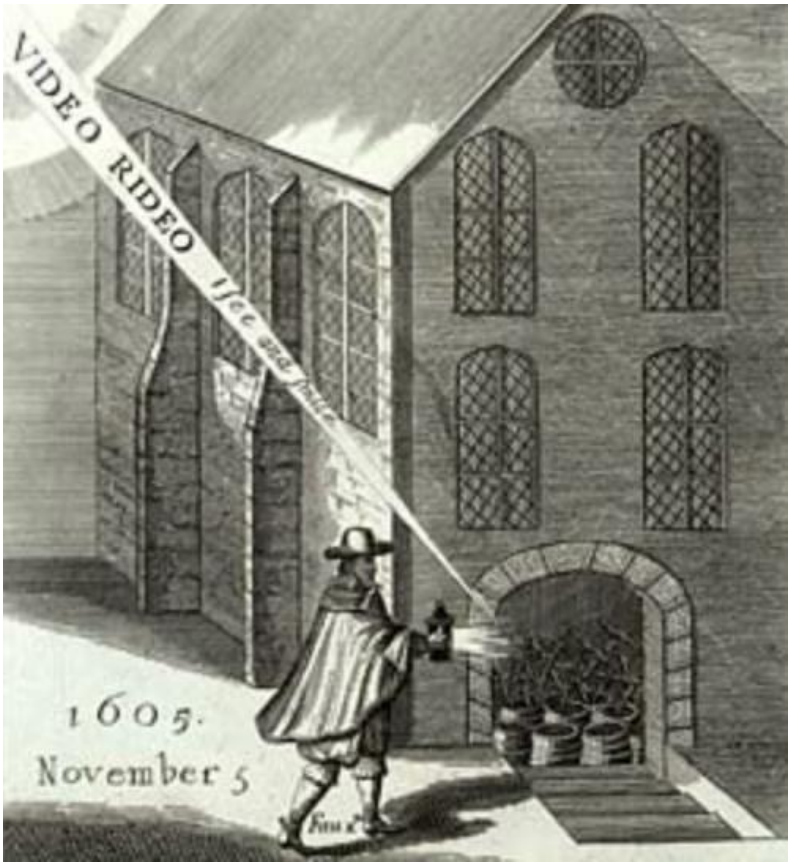
As you can see from the examples below, there were many variations of the image of the eye of God watching Guy Fawkes as he went about his treasonous business.



“A Plot with Powder”

In this image the text in the eye-beam of God is: “Digitus Dei hic” – “The finger of God is here”.

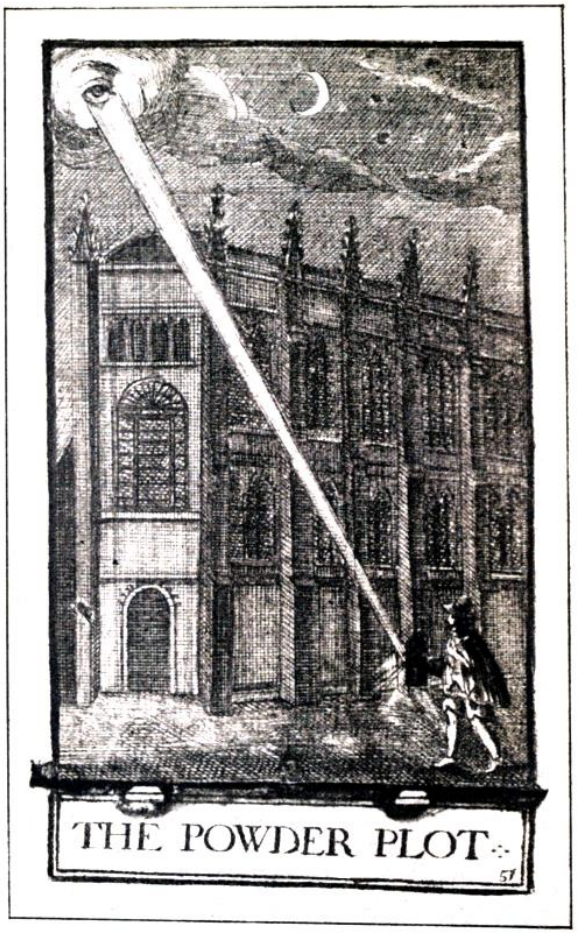
The Biblical quotation at the bottom of the image is from 2 Samuel 12:11: "*Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house*, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbour, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun." (King James Version (appropriately))



"1605 November 5"



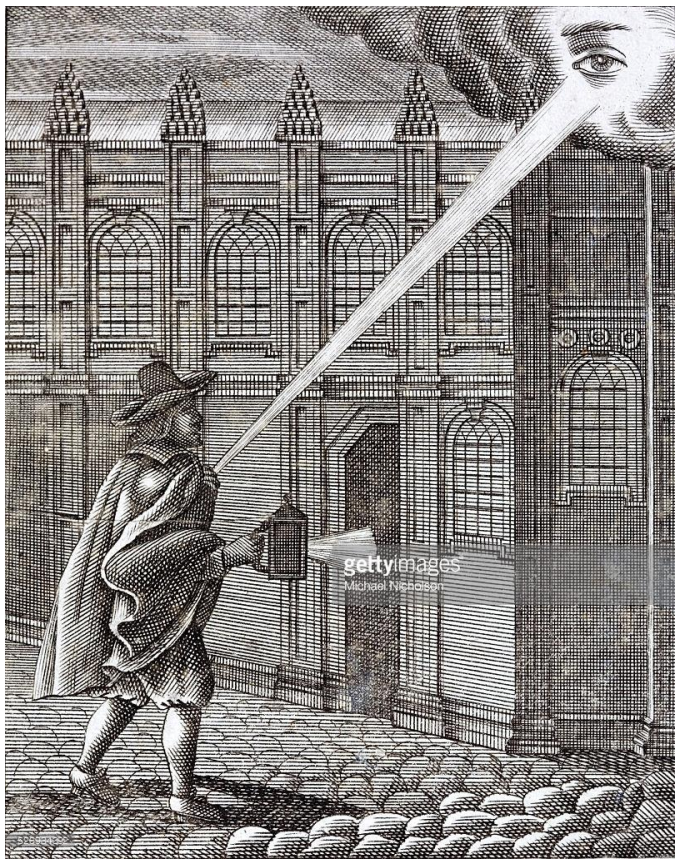
"Prodigy, Tragedy" (*The Book of Guy Fawkes Day*, Conrad Bladey)



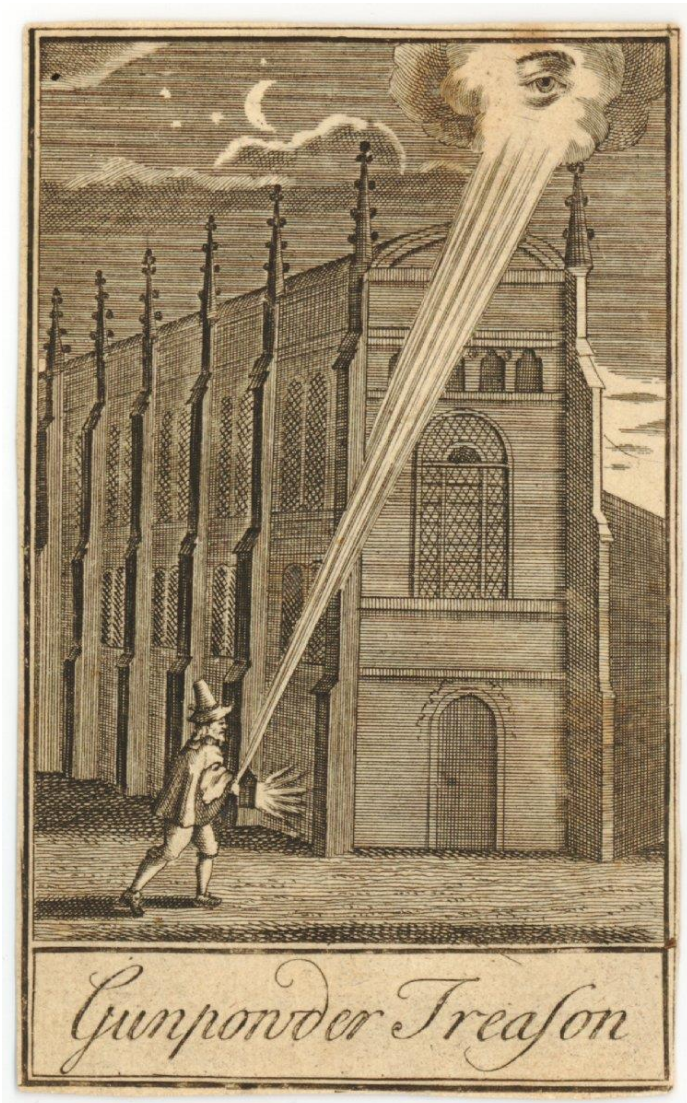
"The Powder Plot"



"Gun-Powder Treason" (Getty Images)

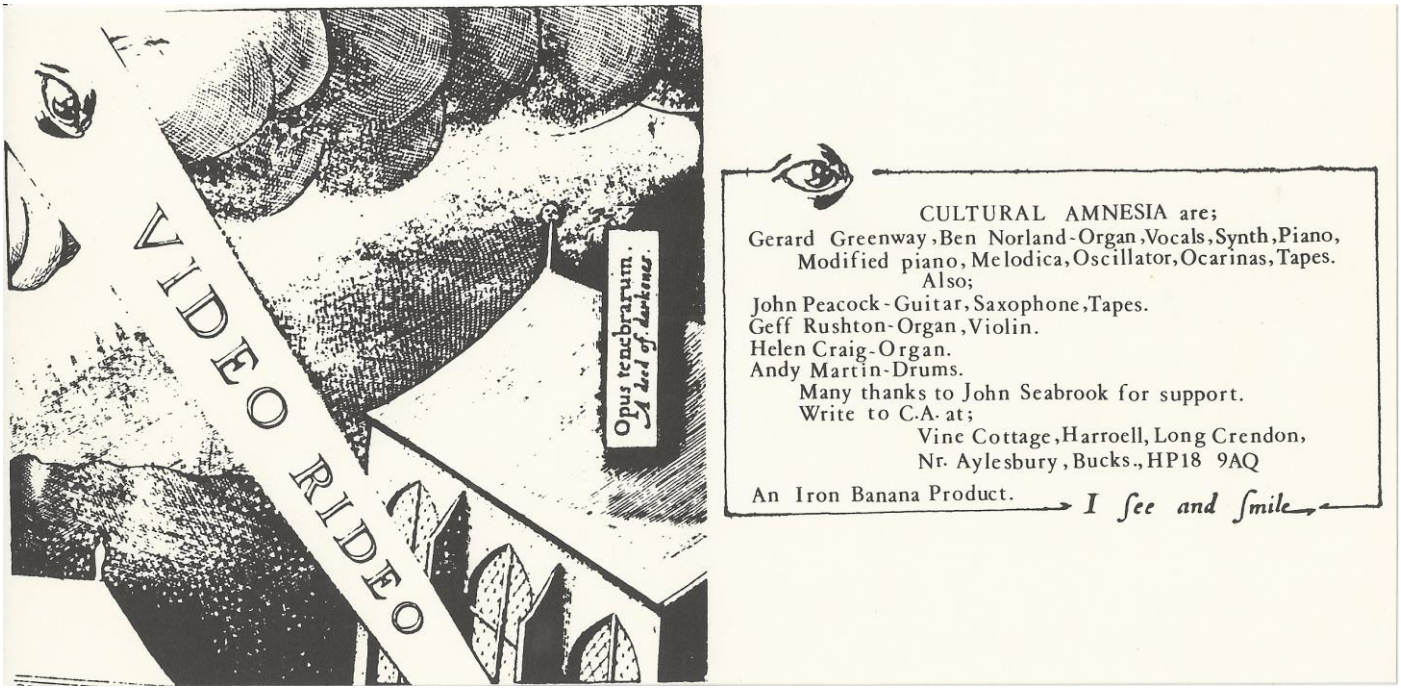


(Getty Images)

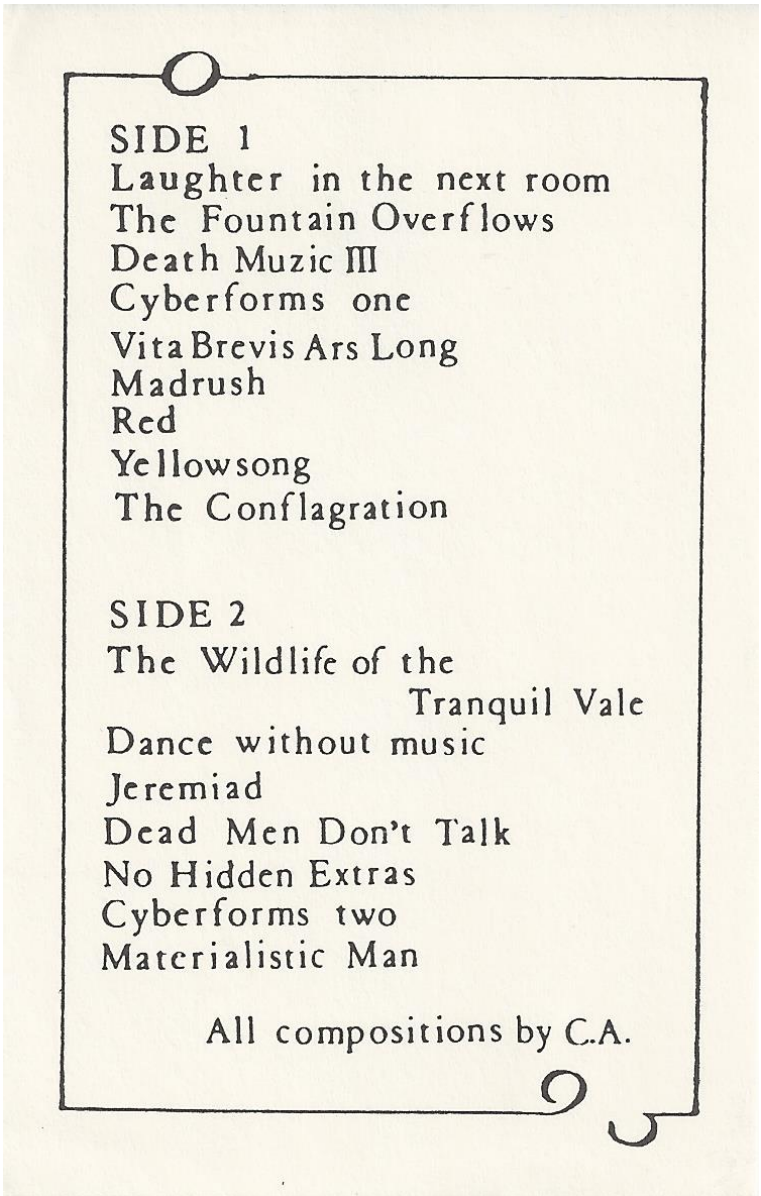


“Gunpowder Treason” (the British Museum)

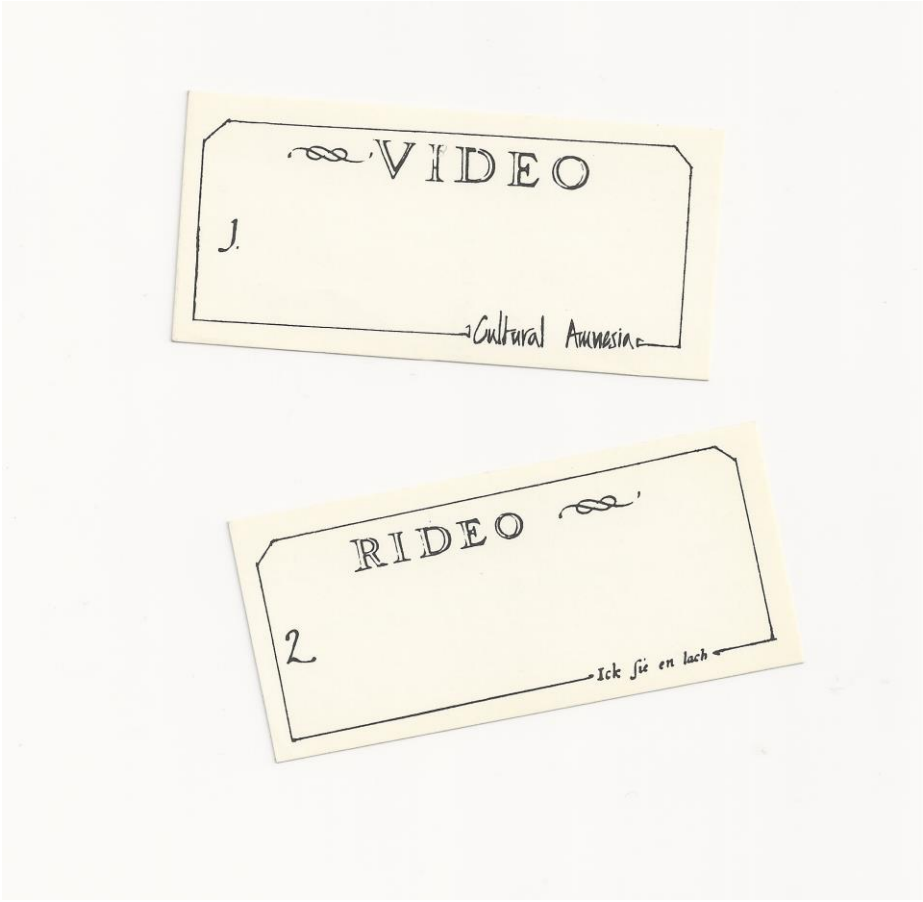
The *Video Rideo* Artwork



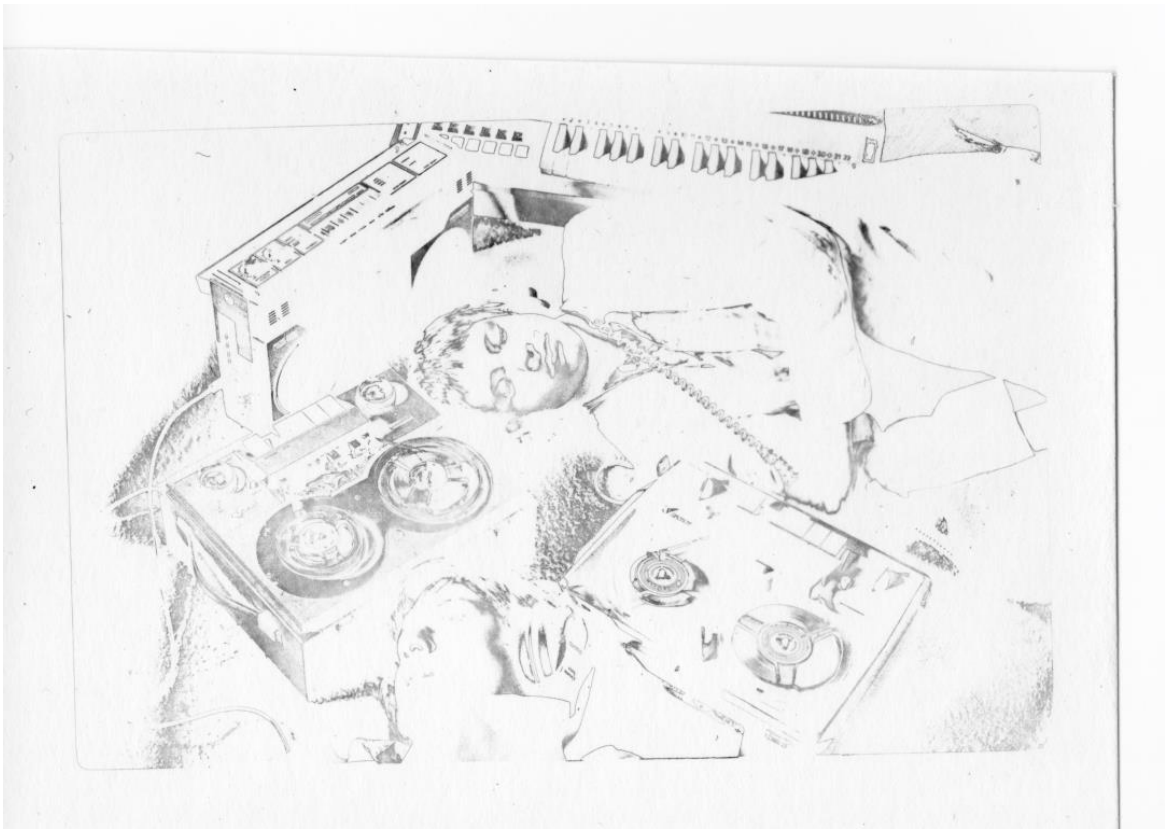
The *Video Rideo* J-card. Cover, and on the reverse the credits.



Insert with the tracklist.



The cassette labels. On side 2, Ben has used the Dutch version of “video rideo” found in the Anglo-Dutch “Double Deliverance”, the source image of the album cover: "Ick sie en lach": “I see and smile/laugh”.



Sporting our white lab coats and headphones, Ben and Gerard, “Dead in the Studio” (Vine Cottage). Solarized b/w photo from 1980, at the time that we had just begun, with John, as Cultural Amnesia (spring 1980).
In it you see two reel-to-reel tape recorders, with which we experimented and on which a little of our very earliest material was recorded, a stereo cassette player, or boombox, which machines began to appear in the second half of the 1970s, and our Bontempi “Hit Organ”. (© Helen Craig 1980)

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