

## **“The machinery by which we have been moved.”**

Unlike the puppets, we have the possibility of stopping in our movements, looking up and perceiving the machinery by which we have been moved. In this act lies the first step towards freedom. – Sociologist Peter Berger quoted in *The Community, Communication, and Social Change: A Discussion Paper* prepared for Teled Video Services Association by Norman Peterson, May 1974

Before the Centre for Art Tapes (CFAT) was established in 1978, Halifax artists were producing and presenting videos at Video Theatre, a community organization that provided video equipment, facilities, and services to a wide range of community service organizations, advocacy groups, and arts organizations.

Video Theatre was created in June 1974 through a partnership between the National Film Board (NFB) and Teled Video Services Association. Teled was a non-profit organization founded in 1971 to “educate members of the community generally in the uses of communications technology as a means of increasing public understanding and awareness of the issues facing the community.” Teled received equipment through the NFB’s “Challenge for Change” program, a national initiative to promote the use of film and video to draw attention to social issues. Uncertainty about funding forced the non-profit to curtail its services and essentially transition into Video Theatre.

Video Theatre was not an artist-run centre; it was incorporated as a non-profit organization that received arts funding from Canada Council but it was also controlled in part by the NFB, a federal agency. The awkward organizational structure of Video Theatre resulted in poorly defined membership policies and inequitable access to its publicly funded equipment. These challenges erupted into a public feud when documentary filmmakers Bill McKiggan and Tom Burger were inexplicably “blacklisted” by Video Theatre’s board of directors. McKiggan and Burger organized the Coalition for Community Video Access (CCAV) and launched a relentless campaign against the NFB, Canada Council, and Video Theatre.

Eventually, Canada Council cut funding to Video Theatre and began providing equipment funding to CFAT. The artist-run centre explored the possibility of collaborating with Video Theatre but decided that Video Theatre’s policies and costly access fees were incompatible with the centre’s mission.

The redirection of funds had a dramatic, lasting effect on the artist-run scene in Halifax. CFAT shifted away from its initial focus on distribution and began developing a video equipment facility for Halifax artists. Despite the shift in operations, the centre continued to accumulate video and audio tapes by artists from the Maritimes and around the world. The collection now contains over 1,300 tapes and is one of the largest of its kind in Canada.

This installation includes select archival documents that reveal the intertwined history between Teled Video Services Association, Video Theatre, and the Centre for Art Tapes. It also features a video projection of digitized administrative documents, photographs, and other material from the Eyelevel Gallery fonds and the Centre for Art Tapes fonds, presented in an intermingled chronology. The video can be viewed silently or accompanied by a selection of audio recordings in the Centre for Art Tapes tape collection. Information cards for the sound recordings are provided near the headphones.