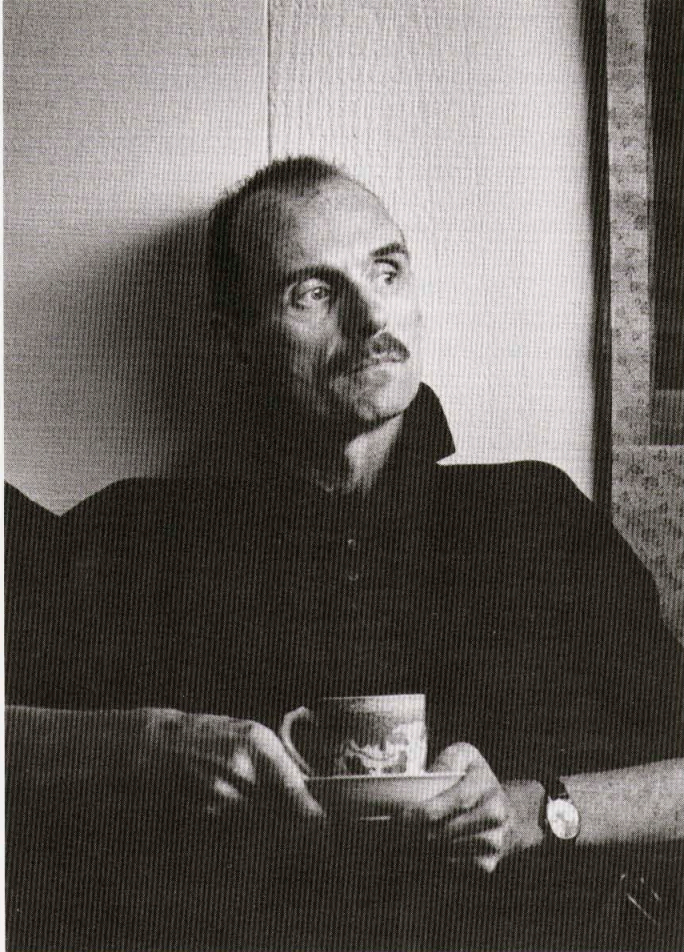


Wadsworth Atheneum
HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT

Paul Wynne/MATRIX 112
Paul Wynne's Journal
September 30 - November 18, 1990



Paul Wynne, 1990
Photo: Fran Ortiz/San Francisco Examiner

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Paul Wynne / MATRIX 111
Paul Wynne's Journal

Paul Wynne was an Emmy award-winning television broadcaster, once a highly visible figure on the San Francisco entertainment beat. In 1981, Wynne learned he was HIV positive. When, in the spring of 1989, he was diagnosed with AIDS, he retreated to his studio apartment for many months, reluctant to face acquaintances in his physically deteriorating condition. It was there that he conceived the idea of his **Journal**. After several years of unemployment, he was invited to return to his former station, KGO-TV, the local American Broadcasting Company affiliate, where he taped these weekly Thursday evening segments for the six o'clock regional news. This series, **Paul Wynne's Journal**, marked a rebirth of his professional career and became the occasion of his finest work.

The candor, wisdom, and courage of his television broadcasts stunned and moved the San Francisco viewing public. He made a total of twenty segments between January 11, 1990 and his final taping on June 20, 1990. The final segment from a hospital bed is not, strictly speaking, a segment of his **Journal**. It is a 50-second "Welcome" addressed to the participants at the Sixth International Conference on AIDS meeting in San Francisco at that time. Paul Wynne died on July 5, 1990 at the Fort Miley Veteran's Medical Center in San Francisco. He was 47 years old.

Some of Wynne's segments are primarily educational. They inform the viewer of what life with AIDS is like. One piece is presented in a graphically bold question and answer format, with Wynne offering sometimes a quick, humorous answer followed next by a more precisely serious answer. He also shares letters received, revealing the general public's ability to move swiftly beyond stereotypical reactions of fear and harsh judgment to concern and compassion. Many of the segments are specifically personal. They recount how he informed his parents that he had AIDS, the reluctance with which he prepares a will, and his detailed scenario for a spirited, unconventional memorial service.

There are also occasional moments of transcendence in these tapes, when the full force of his private agony and brave spirit are felt unequivocally by the viewer. On May 17, 1990, he announces his intention to quit the **Journal**,

"I came here to say good-bye." He then speaks as directly and clearly as any AIDS patient ever has: *"I'm very sick and I'm very weak. My life is very joyless and I'm very scared."* He suddenly decides--during the broadcast--to continue the **Journal**, momentarily reinvigorated and promising not to *"insult you by giving you second-rate material...just to fill up 90 seconds."* On June 14, 1990 he tells the viewer, after a two week absence from the airwaves, *"Well, I've missed you. I really have...I'm doing better...I promise you that I'm going to get better...the **Journal** lives and so do I."*

Television can be a confusing medium for the viewer to comprehend. It is deeply imbedded with contradictions. Often heralded as the one mass medium that can transmit events in real time, it is able to be spontaneous (but rarely is), and it has the capacity to offer actual events in a fairly straightforward manner (but rarely does). For these abilities, it is associated with the delivery of facts and information. Yet most television viewers are savvy about the extent to which commercial television chops time and events into little bits and manipulates nearly all of the images it presents to us.

It is interesting to consider **Paul Wynne's Journal** in the context of commercial television, the context in which it was produced. David Antin, critic and poet, has referred to how the commercial orientation of television affects "every aspect of the medium, determining the tempo of its representations and the style of the performances, as well as the visual syntax of its editing."¹ When these aspects are considered, **Paul Wynne's Journal** fits snugly within the established conventions of commercial television. These are short pieces, on average about two minutes each, and, even in his most moving moments of candor, Paul Wynne remains a television reporter on special assignment. His professional pride is as evident in the final segments from his hospital bed, as it is in earlier, more theatrical pieces, staged with props from *Gumps* and "on location" at various photogenic sites around San Francisco. Paul Wynne is forthcoming but always in character. His consistency in this regard is a mark of his courage.

There are ways, though, in which **Paul Wynne's Journal** liberates the hidden potential of the medium. Often, for some of the reasons noted above, we think of television as a cool and remote medium, hijacked long ago for corporate gain. Certain critics and artists, however, have maintained that it remains a largely untapped resource for more humane, interpersonal communication. Indeed,

television can be an intimate medium. It comes to us in our moments of leisure, into our livingrooms, kitchens, and bedrooms.

Paul Wynne's **Journal** willingly abides by the established conventions of commercial television. This was Wynne's medium of expression. Yet the **Journal** also managed to intervene in audience (and, no doubt, producer) expectations of existing limits. Instead of *representing* a person with AIDS, Wynne appears on the screen *being* a person with AIDS. The authenticity of his work was quickly recognized by San Francisco audiences as a rare viewing experience. Wynne reaches each viewer personally, on a one-to-one basis. Consequently, these segments soared above the ads for diapers and detergents, above the anxieties of insecure anchorpersons, and above the war games of competing networks. As a noble exception, they re-open discussion on what television might be.

These twenty segments are presented for the first time as a total work here at the Wadsworth Atheneum. We believe they are an important artistic statement, an important document in the history of AIDS, and a noteworthy moment in the history of American television.

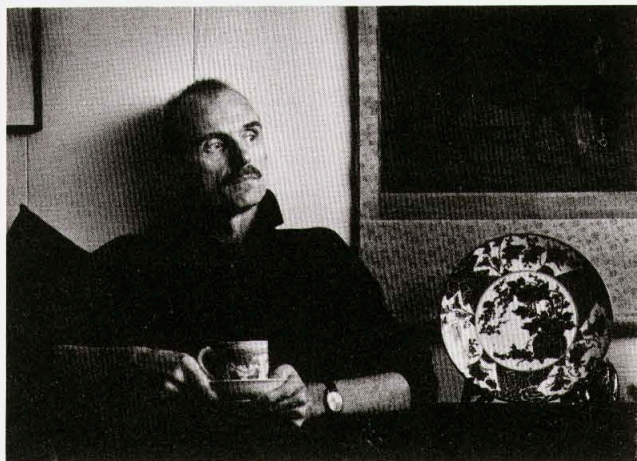
Andrea Miller-Keller
Curator of Contemporary Art

¹ David Antin, "Video: The Distinctive Features of the Medium" in *Video Art*, Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia 1975, p. 60. (This landmark survey exhibition was presented at the Wadsworth Atheneum in 1975.)

Paul Wynne's Journal

Entries (KGO-TV, San Francisco)

Show No.	Title	Running Time	Air Date
1.	Introduction	4:03	1/11/90
2.	The Dinner Party	1:53	1/18/90
3.	The V. A.	2:15	1/25/90
4.	Canes, Walkers & Wheelchairs	3:43	2/01/90
5.	Paul Wynne, Media Star	2:11	2/08/90
6.	The Big Fall	1:34	2/15/90
7.	How I Told My Parents	2:24	2/22/90
8.	Hit by a Bus	1:00	3/01/90
9.	Megace	2:58	3/08/90
10.	Letters	3:28	3/15/90
11.	Medicine Cabinet	3:16	3/22/90
12.	Memorial	2:40	3/29/90
13.	The Will	2:31	4/05/90
14.	Questions & Answers	1:26	4/12/90
15.	Hospitality	2:43	4/19/90
16.	Baseball	:56	5/10/90
17.	Quitter	2:21	5/17/90
18.	The Last Walk	2:03	5/31/90
19.	Scared	1:15	6/14/90
20.	Welcome	:50	6/20/90



Paul Wynne, 1990

Photo: Fran Ortiz/San Francisco Examiner

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