VIDEO ART

Institute of Contemporary Art
University of Pennsylvania
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

January 17 to February 28, 1975
The Contemporary Arts Center
Cincinnati, Ohio
March 22 to May 30, 1975

Museum of Contemporary Art
Chicago, Illinois
June 28 to August 31, 1975

Wadsworth Atheneum
Hartford, Connecticut
September 17 to November 2, 1975

PARTICIPANTS

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In 1973 VIDEO ART was a mere idea, it was an intention to survey the growing use of video by artists in the United States and abroad. From the very beginning Jack Boulton, director of The Contemporary Arts Center in Cincinnati, shared my enthusiasm for the undertaking, in fact, his encouragement and the Center’s early commitment to participate in this project, followed by the interest of Stephen Prokopoff, director of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, made this exhibition and publication feasible for all three institutions.

The development of the exhibition owes much to the generous assistance and advice of many. I am deeply indebted to Robert Stearns, director of The Kitchen in New York, for invaluable information, practical suggestions and inspiration during the exhibition’s early planning stages. The project’s focus was greatly clarified by discussions with Jack Boulton, Eugene Feldman, Christopher Speeth and Patricia Stewart. They generously shared their insights about video with me as did the many artists I visited during my research travels. My perspective on video art was sharpened by conversations with persons from broadcast television, notably Fred Barzyk, director of the Television Workshop at WGBH-TV in Boston and Carol Brandenburg, Peter Crown and David Silver from the Television Laboratory at WNET-TV in New York. At CBS-TV in New York, Merle Brockway, director of Camera Three, and Louis Dorfsman, Vice President of Advertising and Design, provided valuable insights and advice about the relation of video to network television.
David A. Ross, deputy director of the Long Beach Museum of Art in Long Beach, California, kindly made his research material available, for which we are most grateful. George Bolling, video curator at the de Saisset Art Gallery and Museum at the University of Santa Clara, and Jane Livingston, curator at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, were resources for video activities in California which greatly enriched my research trip to the west coast. Peggy Gayle of The Canada Council in Ottawa and Elke Hayden from A Space in Toronto were extremely helpful in expanding my knowledge of video activities in Canada. In arranging for videotapes by European artists, I was helped by Barbara London, curatorial assistant at The Museum of Modern Art in New York, and by Anna Canepa; both freely shared their knowledge of European material with me. Irene von Zahn from René Block Gallery Ltd. in New York as well as René Block in Berlin graciously assisted with the transportation of videotapes from West Germany. William Viola from Art/Tapes/22 in Florence arranged for the delivery of tapes from Italy with cheerful efficiency. Fujiko Nakaya at Video Hiroba in Tokyo coordinated communications with artists from Japan. I am deeply indebted to Antonio H. Amaral, Aracy A. Amaral, Luis Camnitzer, Regina Cornwell and Luis Villares for information about the use of video by artists in Brazil. Above all, I extend my thanks to Walter Zanini, director of the Museum of Contemporary Art at the University of São Paulo, for sending us the Brazilian tapes which are included in the exhibition. I also wish to extend special thanks to Michael Demetriades, film editor at Clio, not only for spending endless hours showing me old TV commercials, but for editing the selections made for this exhibition.

Warm thanks to Anna Canepa, The Videotape Distribution, Inc., to Joyce Nevreaux, Castelli-Sonnabend Tapes and Films, Inc., to Michael Tims at Art Metropole and to Howard Wise as well as Flora Meyer and John Trayna at Electronic Arts Intermix, Inc. All extended kindness to me during my many hours previewing materials for the exhibition.

The installation of an exhibition of video works cannot be separated from electronic technology. For the Institute’s staff, the presentation of works that is electronic, audio, visual and temporal was an uncharted challenge. The development and realization of the exhibition come from the absolute devotion and tireless efforts of the Institute’s staff. I am exceedingly grateful to Michael A. Quigley, curatorial assistant, for help with every aspect of the exhibition’s preparation. The Institute’s Advisory Board, who supported the entire endeavor from the very first, has been a constant source of encouragement. Although the original installation plan was mine—in part governed by ICA’s space, artists’ requirements, and standardized building materials—its ultimate form came from roundtable discussions with Michael A. Quigley, John Taylor and Gregory Tobias. Thankfully we received many suggestions about acoustics from Sidney Dorfman at Ace Lumber and Millworks in Philadelphia. The installation structures were skillfully built by Randall
Dalton, Thomas Nicholas, John Taylor and Gregory Tobias; they were assisted by Bill Bauman, James Juszczak, Pierre Payne and Joseph Ross. Many of our technical problems were solved during the initial planning stages thanks to advice from Peter Voetsch as well as from Tom Harding and Michael Kowalski at Smith, Kline and French. The closed-circuit system for presenting videotapes was masterfully supervised by Curt Carlson from VideoPlay Industries in Rockville, Connecticut. We are appreciative of Tim Tasker from the School of Architecture, who volunteered to help with countless last minute details.

Raymond Kullman and John Davis from the University’s Department of Buildings and Grounds good-naturedly attended to our complicated electrical needs. Les Levine’s Contact was ably installed by Peter Cuozzo, Starrship Associates, Inc., Philadelphia. Our deep appreciation goes to Allan F. Hofmann, coordinator of visual communications at the University’s School of Dental Medicine, for overseeing the maintenance of VIDEO ART’s technical system; his ready aid kept everything running with blessed smoothness. Carla Hultman, Charles Rosenberg and Cranston Walker—ICA gallery attendants—cheerfully assumed the added burden of daily equipment care.

This publication, which hopefully will serve as a useful document of the artists’ exploration of video, is the result of the contributions and devotion of many persons. I would like to extend my deepest appreciation to David Antin, Lizzie Borden, Jack Burnham and John McHale for their essays. The bibliography was assembled by Michael A. Quigley; Nancy Blum did much of the initial legwork for the bibliography. My affectionate thanks to Christine LaValley, Marcia Olives, Gayle Samuels and Debra Steffani for typing the catalogue copy and for handling the masses of correspondence the project required. We are most grateful to Sarah Williams, who served as the publication’s editorial advisor, for her unerring sense of clarity, and to Lynn Lewis for her eagle eye. I also wish to extend my particular thanks to Eugene Feldman and Falcon Press for printing this publication; his skill, calm logic and special interest in video made the entire production a pleasure. The exhibition poster was designed by Bill Sontag of The Contemporary Arts Center in Cincinnati.

A project as complicated and costly as VIDEO ART would not have been possible for ICA and the three participating institutions without a generous grant from the National Endowment for the Arts in Washington, D.C.. We gratefully acknowledge the Endowment’s support as well as grants from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Council on the Arts and The Philadelphia Foundation, which provided a substantial share of the Institute’s matching funds. Such support has allowed the Institute the particular privilege of organizing VIDEO ART for audiences in metropolitan Philadelphia. We are also honored to present this exhibition to wider audiences through the collaboration of The Contemporary Arts Center, the Museum of Contemporary Art and the Wadsworth Atheneum.

Suzanne Delehanty
Director
Institute of Contemporary Art
University of Pennsylvania

Ant Farm

Chip Lord  Born 1944 in Cleveland, Ohio.  B. Arch. 1968 Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana. Lives in San Francisco.  

Hudson Marquez  Born 1946 in New Orleans, Louisiana. Attended Newcomb School of Art, Tulane University, New Orleans. Lives in San Francisco.  


Group History  Ant Farm was founded in 1968 by Chip Lord and Doug Michels to work in architecture and allied arts. In 1970 they were joined by Hudson Marquez and Curtis Schreier. Ant Farm began using videotape in 1971 as an adjunct to architectural projects. As graphic artists, the group has contributed to Radical Software.  


Broadcast The Cadillac Ranch Show WPHI-TV Amarillo, Texas.  


Fernando França Cocchiarale  Born 1951 in Rio de Janeiro. 1972
to the present, studies at the Museum of Modern Art, Rio de Janeiro
with Anna Bella Geiger, Frederico de Moraes and Guilherme Vaz. 1974
Studied philosophy of art with Vera Terra at Catholic University, Rio
de Janeiro. Selected Exhibitions  1973 Young Contemporary Art
Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo, São
Paulo; Summer Salon Museu de Belas Artes, Rio de Janeiro. 1974
Prospective '74 Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São
Paulo, São Paulo.

Andrea Daninos  Born in Italy. Lives in Florence. Selected Exhibi-
tions  1974 Project '74 Cologne.
This is a real-time videotape. The performance you are watching has occurred is occurring in real time your time no editing.


Valie Export  Born 1942 in Linz, Austria. Studied art in Linz and design in Vienna. Founding member of Austria Filmmakers’ Cooperative. Member of Institute for Direct Art, Vienna. Lives in Vienna. **Selected Film Showings** 1969 Multi-Media I Vienna; Underground Explosion Munich, Krone Circus Zurich; Volkshaus, Cologne. 1970 First International Underground Film Festival London; Viennale ’70 Vienna. 1971 Experimeta 4 Frankfurt. 1972 Cinematheque, Liège, Belgium. 1973 Festival of Independent Avant-Garde Film National Film Theatre, London. **Selected Group Exhibitions** 1973 Austrian Exhibition Edinburgh Festival, Edinburgh; Trigon’73 Neue Galerie am Landesmuseum Joanneum, Graz, Austria; Body Language Neue Galerie am Landesmuseum Joanneum, Graz, Austria. 1974 Flash Art Kunstverein, Cologne; Project ’74 Cologne; Video/Art/Impact Galerie Impact, Lausanne, Switzerland.


Michael Geissler and Video Audio Medien


Group History  Since 1971 VAM has created non-fiction television programs on hospitals, education, immigrant workers, group therapy, and resocialized drug addicts.  

Selected Broadcasts 1971 Behind the Scenes of a Second Class Cabaret. 1972 We Have to Be the White Indians of Europe. 1973 Children and Art; Interview with John Vaccaro/Berlin’s Reaction to the New Theater of the Absurd. 1974 Berlin by the Wall; German Rock.
General Idea


Martha Haslanger  Born 1947 in Dearborn, Michigan. BA in German Literature 1969 Denison University, Granville, Ohio. MFA 1974 Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, Michigan. Awarded a grant 1974 by The Royal Film Archive of Belgium. Lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Selected Group Exhibitions 1972 Photography '72 Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, Ohio; Attitudes and Directions Sill Gallery, Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, Michigan; Mind and Sight Gallery, Toronto. 1974 Sill Gallery, Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, Michigan; University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan. Film Festivals 1973 Ann Arbor Film Festival Ann Arbor, Michigan. 1974 Women in the Reel World Ann Arbor, Michigan; Ann Arbor Film Festival Ann Arbor, Michigan [Focus prize]; Kenyon Film Festival Kenyon College, Gambier, Ohio; EXPERMNTLS Fifth International Experimental Film Competition, The Royal Film Archive of Belgium, Knokke-Heist, Belgium.


Selected Individual Exhibitions 1974 Nirenoki Gallery, Tokyo; Tenjo-Sajiki-Kan, Tokyo.  
Selected Group Exhibitions and Film Showings 1973 Woman'space, Los Angeles; Egg and Eye Film Show, Tokyo. 1974 Tokyo-New York Video Express Tenjo-Sajiki-Kan, Tokyo; 100 Feet Film Festival Sabo-Kaikan Hall, Tokyo; New Film Showcase Underground Cinematéque, Tokyo.


Selected Group Exhibitions  


Alvin Lucier  Born 1931 in Nashua, New Hampshire. Studied
music with Howard Boatwright, David Krachenbuhl and Quincy Por-
ter at Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut; Arthur Berger, Irving
Fine and Harold Shapero at Brandeis University, Waltham, Massa-
chusetts; Lukas Foss at Tanglewood, Lenox, Massachusetts. Re-
ceived a Fulbright-Hayes Fellowship to Rome to study with Boris
Porena. 1961 Met Frederic Rzewski and David Tudor. 1962 Director
of Brandeis Choral Union. 1964 Founded Sonic Arts Union with
Robert Ashley, David Behrman and Gordon Mumma. 1970 to the
present, Director of Electronic and Computer Music Facility, Wesleyan
University, Middletown, Connecticut. 1973 to the present, Musical
Director of the Viola Farber Dance Company. Lives in Middletown,
Connecticut. **Principal Compositions** 1962 Action Music for Piano;
Time Capsule; Vespers. 1968 Chambers. 1969 The Only Talking
Machine in the World. 1970 Hartford Memory Space; I Am Sitting in
a Room; Quasimodo, The Great Lover. 1971 The Duke of York;
Gentle Fire. 1972 The Queen of the South; Room Stimulation 1, The
Bird of Bremen Flies Through the Houses of the Burgers. **Composi-
tions for the Theater** 1965 John Arden's The Waters of Babylon
Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts. 1969 William Shake-
speare's King Henry V American Shakespeare Festival, Stratford, Con-
necticut.

Urs Lüthi  Born 1947 in Lucerne, Switzerland. Lives in Zürich and
Milan. **Selected Individual Exhibitions** 1966 Galerie Beat Mäder,
Bern, Switzerland. 1969 Galerie Junge Generation, Hamburg,
Kabinett für aktuelle Kunst, Bremerhaven, West Germany. 1970
Galerie Toni Gerber, Bern, Switzerland. 1972 Galleria Diagama,
Milan. 1973 Galleria Conz, Venice; Galerie Krinzinger, Innsbruck,
Austria; Galleria Rumma, Naples; Galerie Nachst St. Stephan, Vien-
na. 1974 Galerie Impact, Lausanne; Kunstmuseum, Lucerne; Neue
Galerie am Landesmuseum Joanneum, Graz, Austria. **Selected
Group Exhibitions** 1968 Neue Galerie, am Landesmuseum Joanneum,
Graz, Austria; 22 Young Swiss Stedelijk Museum, Amsterd; Plans
and Project in Art Kunsthalle, Bern, Switzerland. 1971 Swiss Avant
Garde The New York Cultural Center, New York; Biennale Paris;
Musée d'Arte Moderne, Lausanne. 1972 Young Swiss Art Rotunda
della Besana, Milan; Profile X Kunstmuseum, Bochum, West Ger-
many. 1973 Contemporanea Rome; Trigon '73 Neue Galerie am
Landesmuseum Joanneum, Graz, Austria. 1974 Ambient '74
Kunstmuseum, Winterthur, Switzerland; Project '74 Cologne; 1975
Americans in Florence: Europeans in Florence Long Beach Museum of
Art, Long Beach, California.


Selected Individual Exhibitions  

Selected Group Exhibitions  

Philip Morton  Born 1945 in Sandy Lake, Pennsylvania. BA in Art Education 1967 Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pennsylvania. MA in Art 1968 Purdue University, Lafayette, Indiana. 1969 Began developing an experimental video program and later established Video Data Bank at School of Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago. 1974 Established P-Pis, or Pied-Piper Interactioning System, a cable TV station, South Haven, Michigan. Lives in Chicago.  

Selected Exhibitions and Performances  


Telethon


Top Value Television

TVTV  is an experimental production group formed in 1972 from the alternate television collectives, Raindance and Ant Farm, to cover the Democratic and Republican Conventions. The twelve to twenty-eight TVTV members are dedicated to the development of the portable video system as a broadcast tool for non-fiction programming. Core staff is composed of Michael Couzens, Betsy Guigon, Hudson Marquez, Allen Rucker, Michael Shamberg, Tom Weinberg and Megan Williams. Headquarters in Los Angeles. Selected Broadcasts 1972 The World’s Largest Television Studio: Four More Years. 1973 The Lord of the Universe (co-produced with WNET-TV New York); Adland (co-produced in collaboration with WTTW-TV Chicago). 1975 Gerald Ford’s America (co-produced with WNET-TV New York); The Good Times Are Killin’ Me.
Steina and Woody Vasulka


Commercials  Twenty-two broadcast commercials from Germany, Japan, Spain, Sweden and the United States from 1948 to 1973. Selected by Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia with the aid of Michael Demetriades, Clio, New York.
CATALOGUE TO THE EXHIBITION
Installation Works
Dimensions are given in feet; height precedes length, width. The measurements below will change somewhat at each institution.

Peter Campus
col 1974
a video camera with a tivicon tube, tripod, rear screen projector, red light
10 x 32 x 15
courtesy of Bykert Gallery, New York

Douglas Davis
Images from the Present Tense I 1971
a 1962 black and white TV
16 x 22 x 12
lent by Finch College Museum of Art, New York

Dan Graham
Present Continuous Pasts 1974
a black and white video camera and monitor, two reel to reel tape players, a half-inch video loop, four sheets of plastic mirror, each four by eight feet, fluorescent lights, spun glass cloth
8 x 8 x 8
the artist

Paul Kos
REVOLUTION: Notes for the Invasion MAR MAR MARCH 1972-1973
redwood two-by-fours, a red box with typewriter, manuscript and one-inch TV, cassette player and videotape:
MAR MAR MARCH 1972-1973, black and white, 12 minutes, sound, camerawork by Marlene Kos, produced at University of Santa Clara Studio, Santa Clara, California
10 x 21 x 15
the artist

Les Levine
Contact: A Cybernetic Sculpture 1969
eighteen black and white TVs, nine cameras
9 x 9 x 6
lent by The New York Cultural Center in association with Fairleigh Dickinson University, New York

Nam June Paik
TV Garden 1974
fifteen color TVs, five black and white TVs, four electric fans, cassette player, splitters, amplifier, plants, videotape:
Global Grove 1973, color, 30 minutes, sound, produced at WNET-TV Lab, New York
10 x 20 x 15
courtesy of Bonino Gallery, New York

Videotapes
Length of tapes is given in minutes and seconds.

Vito Acconci
Undertone 1972 black and white 30 sound distributed by Castelli-Sonnabend Tapes and Films, Inc., New York

Sonia Andrade
Untitled 1974 black and white 10 sound technical assistance: Jom Azulay
lent by Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo

Ant Farm
The Cadillac Ranch Show 1974 color 30 sound camerawork: Antfarm, KVII-TV produced at KVII-TV, Amarillo, Texas distributed by Electronic Arts Intermix, Inc., New York

Eleanor Antin
The Ballerina and the Bun 1974 black and white 52 sound distributed by The Video Distribution, Inc., New York

David Askevold
My Recall of an Imprint from a Hypothetical Jungle 1973 black and white 6 sound It's No Use Crying 1971 black and white 3 sound Concert Cover 1972 black and white 6 sound distributed by Art Metropole, Toronto
John Baldessari  
*Inventory* 1972 black and white 30 sound  
distributed by Castelli-Sonnabend Tapes and Films, Inc., New York

Lynda Benglis  
*Collage* 1973 color 9.35 sound  
distributed by Castelli-Sonnabend Tapes and Films, Inc., New York

Jim Byrne  
*Both* 1974 black and white 5 sound  
camerawork: Tim Harding  
*Translucent* 1974 black and white 5 sound  
*Hand Held #2* 1974 black and white 5 sound  
the artist

Pierpaolo Calzolari  
*No Title* 1974 black and white 8 sound  
technical assistance: Raffaele Corazziari, Alberto Pirelli  
produced at Art/Tapes/22  
distributed by Art/Tapes/22, Florence

Colin Campbell  
*Sackville, I'm Yours* 1972 black and white  
15 sound  
distributed by Art Metropole, Toronto

Peter Campus  
*Set of Co-Incidence* 1974 color 15 sound  
produced at WGBH-TV Workshop, Boston, with support from National Endowment for the Arts and The Rockefeller Foundation  
distributed by Castelli-Sonnabend Tapes and Films, Inc., New York

Giuseppe Chiari  
*The Sound* 1974 black and white 18 sound  
technical assistance: Andrea Giorgi  
produced at Art/Tapes/22  
distributed by Art/Tapes/22, Florence

Fernando França Cocchiarale  
*You Are Time* 1974 black and white 10 sound  
technical assistance: Jon Azulay  
*Memory* 1974 black and white 10 sound  
technical assistance: Jon Azulay  
lent by Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo

Andrea Daninos  
*Show of Everybody's Death* 1974 black and white  
8 sound  
technical assistance: Raffaele Corazziari, Alberto Pirelli  
produced at Art/Tapes/22  
distributed by Art/Tapes/22, Florence

Antonio Dias  
*Illustration of Art on the Use of Multimedia (Rat Music and Banana for Two)* 1974 black and white  
14 sound  
produced at Art/Tapes/22  
distributed by Art/Tapes/22, Florence

Juan Downey  
*Chile* 1974 color 15 sound  
distributed by The Video Distribution, Inc., New York  
*Video Dances* 1974 black and white 30 sound  
dancers: Carmen Beuchat, Barbara Dilley  
produced at Electronic Arts Intermix, Inc., New York

Ed Emshwiller  
*Scape-Mates* 1972 color 29 sound  
dancers: Emery Hermans, Sarah Sheldon  
technical assistance: Walter Wright, Richard Froman, John Godfrey  
produced at Dolphin and WNET-TV Lab, New York  
distributed by Electronic Arts Intermix, Inc., New York

Valie Export  
*Space Seeing and—Hearing I, II, III, IV, V* 1974  
black and white 20 sound  
camerawork: Lijnbaancentrum Rotterdamse Kunststichting  
music: Christian Michelin, Valie Export  
produced at Kunstverein, Cologne  
the artist

Terry Fox  
*Children's Tapes* 1974 black and white  
28.30 sound  
the artist

Howard Fried  
*sequick* 1972-1975 black and white 34 sound  
camerawork: George Bolling, Tyrus Gerlach  
sound: Bruce Bangsberg  
produced at the University of Santa Clara, Santa Clara, California and San Francisco Art Institute  
the artist

Seiichi Fujii  
*Mantra* 1973 black and white 7 sound  
produced at Video Hiroba  
distributed by Video Hiroba, Tokyo

Anna Bella Geiger  
*Centerinal* 1974 black and white 7 sound  
technical assistance: Jon Azulay  
*Passages* 1974 black and white 3 sound  
technical assistance: Jon Azulay  
*Statement in Portrait* 1974 black and white 20 sound  
technical assistance: Jon Azulay  
lent by Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo

Michael Geissler & VAM  
*Ich will nicht nach Casablanca* 1974 black and white 20 sound  
distributed by Video Audio Medien, Berlin
General Idea
*Light on Double Mirror Video* 1971-1974 black and white 26 sound distributed by Art Metropole, Toronto

Frank Gillette
*Tetragramaton* 1973 black and white 26 sound distributed by Castelli-Sonnabend Tapes and Films, Inc., New York

Sakumi Hagihara
*Reprint* 1973 black and white 5 sound produced at Video Hiroba
*Twenty Years* 1974 black and white 5.35 sound produced at Video Hiroba distributed by Video Hiroba, Tokyo

Martha Haslanger
*Outlines* 1973 black and white 8.10 silent the artist

Michael Hayden
*Scan/Gaspe* 1973 black and white 15 sound produced at Sony Video Studios, Toronto the artist

K. H. Hödicke
*Tartaruga* 1968 color 3 sound
*ADI (for Duchamp)* 1971 color 3 sound
*ADI, In Advance of the Broken Leg* 1971 color 3 sound
*La Faccia del Mondo* 1971 color 3 sound
*Tivoli* 1971 color 3 sound
*Zähne* 1971 color 3 sound distributed by Galerie René Block, Berlin

Nancy Holt
*Underscan* 1974 black and white 8 sound technical assistance: Carlota Schoolman distributed by Castelli-Sonnabend Tapes and Films, Inc., New York

Rebecca Horn
*Masken* 1973 black and white 18 sound camerawork: Helmut Weitz produced at The Film Academy, Berlin the artist

Mako Idemitsu
*What a Woman Made* 1974 black and white 13.35 sound produced at Video Hiroba distributed by Video Hiroba, Tokyo

Taka Imura
*I Love You* 1974 black and white 7 sound distributed by The Videotape Distribution, Inc., New York

Joan Jonas
*Vertical Roll* 1972 black and white 20 sound
*Disturbances* 1974 black and white 14 sound distributed by Castelli-Sonnabend Tapes and Films, Inc., New York

Allan Kaprow
*The 2nd Routine* 1974 black and white 15 sound produced by The Video Distribution, Inc. distributed by The Video Distribution, Inc., New York

Nobuhiko Kawanaka
*Playback No. 7* 1974 black and white 11 sound produced at Video Hiroba distributed by Video Hiroba, Tokyo

Hakudo Kobayashi
*Earth* 1974 color 10.20 sound produced at Toyo-Gengo-Sho, Tokyo distributed by Video Hiroba, Tokyo

Masao Komura
*Object Collection* 1974 1974 color 7.40 sound distributed by Video Hiroba, Tokyo

Beryl Korot and Ira Schneider
*4th of July in Saugerties* 1972 black and white 20 sound produced at Raindance, New York distributed by Electronic Arts Intermix, Inc., New York

Ernie Kovacs
*Kovacs/ 1951-1961* black and white 60 sound distributed by Video Tape Network, Inc., New York

Shigeko Kubota
*Europe on 1/2 Inch a Day* 1971 black and white 30 sound distributed by Electronic Arts Intermix, Inc., New York

Richard Landry
*Divided Alto* 1974 color 15 sound distributed by Castelli-Sonnabend Tapes and Films, Inc., New York

Alvin Lucier
*The Queen of the South* 1974 black and white 30 sound this tape is an outgrowth of a live performance commissioned in 1972 by Gerald Shapiro, The New Music Ensemble, Providence, Rhode Island produced at Art/Tapes/22 distributed by Art/Tapes/22, Florence

Urs Lüthi
*Mori d'Amore* 1974 black and white 9 sound technical assistance: Andrea Giorgi, Germano Sangiardi, Enzo Stella performers: Urs and Elke Lüthi
*Untitled 1974 black and white 11 sound technical assistance: Andrea Giorgi, Lesley Pinnock, Enzo Stella, Germano Sangiardi produced at Art/Tapes/22 in collaboration with Galleria Diagramma, Milan distributed by Art/Tapes/22, Florence
Ivens Olinto Machado
 Slave Maker Slave 1974 black and white 10 sound
technical assistance: Jim Azulay
Dissolution 1974 black and white 10 sound
technical assistance: Jim Azulay
Versus 1974 black and white 10 sound
technical assistance: Jim Azulay
lent by Museu de Arte Contemporânea da
Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo

Andy Mann
His Noon 1973 black and white 10.30 sound
distributed by Electronic Arts Intermix, Inc., New York

Toshio Matsumoto
Expansion 1972 color 14 sound
audio assistance: Toshi Ichiyanagi
distributed by Video Hiroba, Tokyo

Kyoko Michishita
“Let’s Have a Dream”–Yoko Ono in Japan 1974
black and white 11.30 sound
produced at Video Hiroba
distributed by Video Hiroba, Tokyo

Robert Morris
Exchange 1973 black and white 32 sound
distributed by Castelli-Sonnabend Tapes and Films, Inc., New York

Philip Morton
Colorfull Colorada...Tuesday on the Way to Work
1974 color 20 sound
utilizes the Sandin Image Processor, an analog computer
the artist

Fujiko Nakaya
Statics of an Egg 1973 black and white 11 sound
produced at Video Hiroba
distributed by Video Hiroba, Tokyo

Bruce Nauman
Lip Sync 1969 black and white 60 sound
distributed by Castelli-Sonnabend Tapes and Films, Inc., New York

Dennis Oppenheim
2-Stage Transfer Drawing (Returning to a Past State) 1971 black and white 8 sound
performers: Erik and Dennis Oppenheim
2-Stage Transfer Drawing (Advancing to a Future State) 1971 black and white 13 sound
performers: Dennis and Erik Oppenheim
distributed by The Video Distribution, Inc., New York

Jean Otth
Limite E 1973 black and white 10 sound
technical assistance: Serge Menendez
produced at Galerie Impact, Lausanne
Limite B (Le Lac) 1973 black and white 12 sound
technical assistance: Serge Menendez
produced at Galerie Impact, Lausanne
distributed by Art/Tapes/22, Florence

Giulio Paolini
Unisono 1974 black and white 2 silent
produced at Art/Tapes/22
distributed by Art/Tapes/22, Florence

Ulrike Rosenbach
Der Mann sei das Haupt der Frau 1972 black and white 8 sound
Videoconcert 2, Inselmusik 1974 black and white 10 sound
distributed by Galerie Ingrid Oppenheim, Cologne

Reiner Ruthenbeck
Objekt zur teilweisen Verdeckung einer
Videozene 1972 black and white 30 sound
camerawork: Linbaanencentrum Rotterdamse Kunststichting
the artist

Daniel Sandin
Amplitude Classified Clouds, Romp and Roust through the Image Processor 1974 color 16 sound
utilizes the Sandin Image Processor, an analog computer
the artist

Ira Schneider
Bits, Chunks & Pieces 1975 black and white 45 sound
produced at Raindance and Electronic Arts
Intermix, Inc., New York
the artist

Eric Siegel
Einstein, Symphony of the Planets, Tomorrow Never Knows 1968 colorized black and white 20 sound
distributed by Electronic Arts Intermix, Inc., New York

Richard Serra
Television Delivers People 1973 color 6 sound
technical assistance: Carlota Schoolman
distributed by Castelli-Sonnabend Tapes and Films, Inc., New York

Nina Sobel
Breakdowns 1974 black and white 23.30 sound
camerawork: John Sturgeon
distributed by Newspace Gallery, Los Angeles

Keith Sonnier
Mat Key Radio Track 1972 color 10 sound
performers: Tina Girouard, Suzanne Harris
Animation II 1974 color 25 sound
produced at Computer Image, Denver, Colorado
distributed by Castelli-Sonnabend Tapes and Films, Inc., New York

Lisa Steele
Lisa and the Egg 1972 black and white 18 sound
camerawork: Tom Sherman
A Very Personal Story 1974 black and white 20 sound
distributed by Art Metropole, Toronto

53
Skip Sweeney
Moog Vidium 1972 colorized black and white
15.55 sound
camerawork: Art Baker
Moog synthesizer: Douglas McKechnie
videum: Bill Hearn
produced at Video Free America, San Francisco
the artist

Teleton
Television Highlights 1972-1974 color 30 sound
with segments from Our National Anthems,
Pillsbury Bakeoff, Bowling for Dollars with Chick
Hearn, Let's Make a Deal with Monty Hall, Brady
Bunch, Partridge Family, All in the Family, An
American Family, Mark Spitz, Howdy Doody,
George Jessel, Spiro Agnew, Dr. Pepper, Chocolate
Twins, Texaco, MacDonalds, Andy Williams
Christmas Special, Miss America 1973, Mr. World
1973, Belmont Stakes 1973, Munich Olympics
1972, Inauguration 1972 AMERICA, John W. Dean
III, Richard Nixon Resigns, Jerry Lewis

Television History 1974 black and white 60 sound
with segments from Rin Tin Tin ca. 1954, Nabisco
Honeys Commercial ca. 1954, You Asked for It
with Art Baker 1955, Howdy Doody with Bob
Smith 1958, Wonder Bread Commercial 1958,
Gene Autry 1950, Highway Patrol 1957, Sea Hunt
1960, Ozzie and Harriet 1956, I Love Lucy 1953,
Sergeant Bilko with Phil Silvers 1959, Queen of a
Day starring Jack Baily 1959, Timex Commercial
with John Cameron Swayze 1956, Liberace 1954,
Muriel Cigar Commercial with Edie Adams 1953,
Chance of a Lifetime starring Dennis James 1953,
Old Gold Cigarette Commercial from Chance of a
Lifetime starring Dennis James 1953, See It Now
with Edward R. Murrow, McCarthy sequence
1953, Perry Mason 1955, Alfred Hitchcock 1954,
The Continental 1953, Steve Allen Show with
Elvis Presley 1956, Viceroy Cigarette Commercial
1956, Untouchables 1959, Fugitive 1966, Lloyd
Thaxton Show 1965, Shebang starring Casey Cas-<br>sen 1966, Shivaree starring Gene Weeden 1967,
Okay Mother with Dennis James 1947, Chance of
distributed by Teleton, Los Angeles

Top Value Television (TVTV)
The Lord of the Universe 1974 color 60 sound
produced in conjunction with WNET-TV,
New York
distributed by Electronic Arts Intermix, Inc.,
New York

Steina and Woody Vasulka
Golden Voyage 1973 color 27 sound
produced at Synapse Cable TV, Syracuse
University, Syracuse, New York
distributed by Electronic Arts Intermix, Inc.,
New York

Bill Viola
Information 1973 color 30 sound
produced at Synapse Cable TV, Syracuse
University, Syracuse, New York
distributed by Electronic Arts Intermix, Inc.,
New York

Wolf Vostell
Desastres 1972 color 45 sound
camerawork: Helmut Wetz
produced at Neuer Berliner Kunstverein-Videothek
distributed by Neuer Berliner Kunstverein-
Videothek, Berlin

Morihiro Wada
Situation 1974 black and white 9.30 sound
distributed by Video Hiroba, Tokyo

Andy Warhol
The Underground Sundae 1968 color 1 sound
a commercial commissioned by Schrafft's
lent by Clio, New York

William Wegman
Selected Works, Reel 2 1972 black and white
14 sound
Selected Works, Reel 3 1972 black and white
17 sound
distributed by Castelli-Sonnabend Tapes and
Films, Inc., New York

Peter Weibel
VT and TV: Selected Works 1969-1973 black and
white 20 sound
camerawork: Peter Weibel, Helmut Fibich
the artist

Katsuhiro Yamaguchi
Video Portrait 1973 color 7 sound
produced at Toyko-Genzo-Sho, Tokyo
distributed by Video Hiroba, Tokyo

Keigo Yamamoto
Water 1972 black and white 9.30 sound
distributed by Video Hiroba, Tokyo

Commercials
1948-1973 black and white and color 30 sound
Texaco Sky Chief with Milton Berle 1948, Lipton
Chicken Noodle Soup with Arthur Godfrey 1954,
S.O.S. Magic Scouring Pads 1955, Chevrolet 1962,
Ipana Toothpaste 1962, Muriel Cigars with Edie
Filter 1963, Sunbeautd Mairches On! 1968, CBS
World Watchers 1968, Volkswagen 1968, Luigi's
Pizza Rolls 1968, Tonik (Sweden) ca. 1961, Great
American Soap ca. 1968, Alka-Seltzer 1972, Na-
tional Council for Drug Abuse 1972, Help Unsell
the War 1972, ABC Wide World of Sports 1972,
Trygg-Hansa (Sweden) 1972, AEG Dreyer (Ger-
many) 1972, National Hi Top Japan 1973, Ebro
Slato (Spain) 1973
selected by the Institute
with the aid of Michael Demetriades
lent by Clio, New York
VIDEO: THE DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF THE MEDIUM
David Antin

video art. The name is equivocal. A good name. It leaves open all the questions and asks them anyway. Is this an art form, a new genre? An anthology of valued activity conducted in a particular arena defined by display on a cathode ray tube? The kind of video made by a special class of people—artists—whose works are exhibited primarily in what is called “the art world”—ARTISTS’ VIDEO? An inspection of the names in the catalogue gives the easy and not quite sufficient answer that it is this last we are considering, ARTISTS’ VIDEO. But is this a class apart? Artists have been making video pieces for scarcely ten years—if we disregard one or two flimsy studio jobs and Nam June Paik’s 1963 kamikaze TV modifications—and video has been a fact of gallery life for barely five years. Yet we’ve already had group exhibitions, panels, symposia, magazine issues devoted to this phenomenon, for the very good reason that more and more artists are using video and some of the best work being done in the art world is being done with video. Which is why a discourse has already arisen to greet it. Actually two discourses: one, a kind of enthusiastic welcoming prose peppered with fragments of communication theory and McLuhanesque media talk; the other, a rather nervous attempt to locate the “unique properties of the medium.” Discourse 1 could be called “cyberscat” and Discourse 2, because it engages the issues that pass for “formalism” in the art world, could be called “the formalist rap.” Though there is no necessary relation between them, the two discourses occasionally occur together as they do in the talk of Frank Gillette, which offers a convenient sample:

D1 The emergence of relationships between the culture you’re in and the parameters that allow you expression are fed back through a technology. It’s the
state of the art technology within a particular culture that gives shape to ideas.

D2 What I'm consciously involved in is devising a way that is structurally intrinsic to television. For example, what makes it not film? Part of it is that you look into the source of light, with film you look with the source of light. In television, the source of light and the source of information are one.¹

Though it is not entirely clear what “high class” technology has to do with the rather pleasantly shabby technical state of contemporary video art, or what the significance is to human beings of the light source in two adjacent representational media, statements of this type are characteristic, and similar quotes could be multiplied endlessly. And if these concerns seem somewhat gratuitous or insufficient with respect to the work at hand, they often share a kind of aptness of detail, even though it is rarely clear what the detail explains of the larger pattern of activity in which these artists are involved. In fact what seems most typical of both types of discourse is a certain anxiety, that may be seen most clearly in a recent piece by Hollis Frampton:

Moreover it is doubly important that we try to say what video is at present because we posit for it a privileged future. Since the birth of video art from the Jovian backside [I dare not say brow] of the Other Thing called television, I for one have felt a more and more pressing need for precise definitions of what film art is, since I extend to film, as well, the hope of a privileged future.²

It would be so much more convenient to develop the refined discussion of the possible differences between film and video, if we could only forget the Other Thing—television. Yet television haunts this exhibition, as it must haunt any exhibition of video art. It is present here only in a few commercials and the “golden performances” of Ernie Kovacs [a television “artist”]. Other television “artists” and “art works” are absent—Walter Cronkite, Sam Ervin, Ron Ziegler, the Sid Caesar Show, Cal Worthington, McCann-Erickson. Television is here mainly in quotes, allusion, parody and protest, as in Telethon’s TV History, Douglas Davis’s installation piece with the TV set forced to face the wall, Richard Serra’s Television Delivers People. No doubt, in time there will be an auteur theory of television, which will do for Milton Berle and Sid Caesar what Sarris and Farber and Cahiers du Cinéma have done for John Huston and Nicholas Ray and Howard Hawks. But the politics of the art world is, for good reasons, rather hostile to Pop, and that kind of admiring discussion will have to wait, even Cahiers du Cinéma has abandoned Hitchcock and Nicholas Ray for Dziga Vertov and the European avant garde, on sociopolitical, aesthetic grounds. But it’s unwise to despise an enemy, especially a more powerful, older enemy, who happens also to be your frightful parent. So, it is with television we have to begin to consider video, because if anything has defined the formal and technical properties of the video medium it is the television industry.

The history of television in the United States is well known. Commercial television is essentially a post second World War phenomenon, and its use was, logically enough, patterned on commercial radio, since control of the new medium was in the hands of the powerful radio networks, which constitute essentially a government protected, private monopoly. This situation determined many of the fundamental communication characteristics of the new medium.
The most basic of these is the social relation between “sending” and “receiving,” which is profoundly unequal and asymmetrical. Since the main potential broadcasters, the powerful radio networks, were already deeply involved with the electronics industry through complex ownership affiliation, and since they also constituted the single largest potential customer for the electronic components of television, the components were developed entirely for their convenience and profit. While this may not seem surprising, the result was that the acts of “picture taking” and “transmission” were made enormously expensive: cameras and transmission systems were designed and priced out of the reach of anything but corporate ownership. Moreover government regulation set standards on “picture quality” and the transmission signal, which effectively ensured that “taking” and “transmission” control would remain in the hands of the industry into which the federal government had already assigned the airwaves channel by channel. The receivers alone were priced within the range of individual ownership. This fundamental ordering, establishing the relations between the taker-sender and the receiver had, of course, been worked out for commercial radio.

Only ham transmission—also hemmed in severely by government regulation—and special uses like ship-to-shore, pilot-to-control tower and police band radio deal in the otherwise merely potential equalities of wireless telephony. That this was not technically inevitable, but merely an outcome of the social situation and the marketing strategies of the industry is obvious. There is nothing necessarily more complex or expensive in the camera than there is in the receiver. It is merely that the great expense of receiver technology was defrayed by the mass production of the sets, whose multiplication multiplied the dollar exchange value of transmission time sold by the transmitter to his advertisers. So the broadcasters underwrote receiver development, because every set bought delivers its viewers as salable goods in an exchange that pays for the “expensive” technology.

For television also there is a special use domain—educational, industrial and now artistic—where the relation between the camera and receiver may be more or less equalized, but this is because transmission is not an issue and the distribution of the images is severely restricted. The economic fact remains: transmission is more expensive than reception. This ensures a power hierarchy: transmission dominates reception. And it follows from this asymmetry of power relations that the taker-transmitter dominates whatever communication takes place.

This is clearer when you consider the manners of telephony. A would-be transmitter asks for permission to transmit, rings the home of a potential receiver. It's like ringing a doorbell. Or a would-be receiver rings the home of a possible transmitter, asks him/her to transmit. This formal set of relations has become even more refined with the introduction of the Answerphone and the answering service, which mediates between the ring—an anonymous invitation to communicate—and the response, requiring the caller to identify himself and leaves the receiver with a choice of whether or not to respond. In telephony manners are everything. While in commercial
television manners are nothing. If you have a receiver you merely plug in to the possibility of a signal, which may or may not be there and which you cannot modify except in the trivial manner of switching to a nearly identical transmission or in a decisive but final manner by switching off. Choice is in the hands of the sender.

Now while this asymmetry is not inherent in the technology, it has become so normative for the medium that it forms the all pervasive and invisible background of all video. This may not be so dramatically manifested in most art work video, but that's because most art works have very equivocal relations to the notion of communication and are, like industry, producer dominated. Yet it has a formidable effect on all attempts at interactive video, which operates primarily in reaction to this norm. In this sense the social structure of the medium is a matrix that defines the formal properties of the medium—since it limits the possibilities of a video communication genre—and these limits then become the target against which any number of artists have aimed their works. What else could Ira Schneider have had in mind about the 1969 piece Wipe-Cycle he devised with Frank Gillette:

The most important thing was the notion of information presentation, and the notion of the integration of the audience into the information. One sees oneself exiting from the elevator. If one stands there for 8 seconds, one sees oneself entering the gallery from the elevator again. Now at the same time one is apt to be seeing oneself standing there watching Wipe-Cycle. You can watch yourself live watching yourself 8 seconds ago, watching yourself 16 seconds ago, eventually feeling free enough to interact with this matrix, realizing one's own potential as an actor. What is attempted is the conversion (liberation) of an audience (receiver) into an actor (transmitter), which Schneider and Gillette must have hoped to accomplish by neutralizing as much as possible the acts of "taking" and electronic transmission. If they failed to accomplish this, they were hardly alone in their failure, which seems to have been the fate of just about every interactive art work employing significantly technological means. Apparently, the social and economic distribution of technological resources in this culture has a nearly determining effect on the semiotics of technological resources. More concretely, an expensive video camera and transmission system switched-on and ready for use don't lose their peculiar prestigious properties just because an artist may make them available under special circumstances for casual use to an otherwise passive public. In fact, this kind of interactive video situation almost invariably begins by intimidating an unprepared audience, which has already been indoctrinated about the amount of preparedness (professionalism) the video camera deserves, regardless of the trivial nature of television professionalism, which is not measured by competence (as in the elegant relation of ends to means) but by the amount of money notably expended on this preparation. Yet while the most fundamental property of television is its social organization, this is manifested most clearly in its money metric, which applies to 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. The money metric has also played a determining role in neutralizing what is usually considered the most markedly distinctive feature of the medium: the capacity for instantaneous transmission.
In principle, television seemed to combine the photographic reproduction capacities of the camera, the motion capabilities of film, and the instantaneous transmission properties of the telephone. But just as the photographic reproduction capacity of the camera is essentially equivocal and mainly significant as mythology, so is the fabled instantaneousity of television essentially a rumor, that combines with photographic duplicity to produce a quasi-recording medium the main feature of which is unlikeliness in relation to any notion of reality. The history of the industry is very instructive in respect of this remarkable outcome.

In the beginning television made widespread use of live broadcasting both for transmitting instant news of events that were elapsing in real time and for more or less well-rehearsed studio performances; and some of the most interesting events recorded by media were the result of the unpredictability of instantaneous transmission. Spokesmen for the industry never failed to call attention to this feature of instantaneousity, and as late as 1968, a standard handbook for television direction and production by Stasheff and Bretz asserts:

Perhaps the most distinctive function of television is its ability to show distant events at the moment when they are taking place. The Kefauver hearings, with a close-up of the hands of gangster Frank Costello; the Army-McCarthy hearings; the complete coverage of the orbital shots; the presidential nominating conventions; the Great Debates of 1960; the live transmissions from Europe and Japan via satellite—this is television doing what no other medium can do.4

Yet the same handbook casually points out a few pages later that between 1947 and 1957, kine-recordings, films taken directly from the TV screen, were in constant and heavy use, especially for delayed broadcast of East Coast programs on the West Coast, in spite of the much poorer image quality of the kines, and that by 1961 virtually all television dramatic programs were being produced on film. There were, apparently, from the industry's standpoint great inconveniences in instantaneous transmission. The most obvious of these was that at the same instant of time the life cycles of New York and Los Angeles are separated by three full hours, and since the day for the industry is metrically divided into prime and non-prime viewing time, in accordance with whether more or less viewers may be sold to the advertisers, the money value of instantaneous transmission is inversely related in a complicated way to the temporal distance of transmission. But this was only the most obvious manner in which the money metric worked to eliminate instantaneous. A more basic conflict between the structure of the industry and the possibility of instantaneous is the inevitable relationship between instantaneous and unpredictability.

Any series of events that is unfolding for the first time, or in a new way, or with unanticipated intensity or duration threatens to overrun or elude the framing conventions of the recording artists (the cameramen and directors). This element of surprise is always in conflict with the image of smoothness, that has the semiotic function of marking the producer's competence by emphasizing his mastery and control, his grasp of events. The signs of unpredictability and surprise are discontinuities and ragged edges that mark the boundaries of that competence by puncturing or lacerating that grasp. The image of smoothness depends always upon the appearance of the unimpeded forward
course of the producer's intention, of facility, which means that there must be no doubt in the viewer's mind that what is transmitted is what the transmitter wants to transmit. And the only ways to achieve this were through a) repeated preparation of the events, b) very careful selection of highly predictable events, c) or deletion of unexpected and undesirable aspects of events, which meant editing a recorded version of these events. Video tape came in in 1956, and at the beginning Ampex was taping the Douglas Edwards newscasts and, not much later, the stage presentations of \textit{Playhouse 90}: once again according to Stasheff and Bretz:

...by 1957 a new TV revolution was under way. Undistinguishable from live TV on the home receiver, video tape quickly replaced most of the kine-recording done by the TV networks. Not only did the stations put out a better picture, but the savings were tremendous. Live production, video-tape recording of live production, kine-recording, and film began to assume complementary roles in the pattern of TV production. Video-tape recording, by 1961 became so commonplace that the true live production-reaching the home at the moment of its origination—was a rarity limited largely to sports and special events. The live production on video tape, though delayed in reaching the home by a few hours or a few days, was generally accepted as actual live television by the average viewer.\footnote{[my italics]}

Yet this did not place television in the same position as film, which from its origins appeared to be situated squarely in the domain of illusion. Film, after all, has made very few and very insubstantial claims to facticity. Amed's bathtub battle of Santiago Bay may have convinced Spanish military historians of its authenticity, but that was back in 1897 before the movie palaces together with the movie makers dispelled any illusion of potential fictivity. Flaherty looks as clearly fictional as Melies now. But a genre that is marked “fictional” doesn't raise issues of truth and falsehood, and television never ceases to raise these issues. The social uses of television continually force the issue of “truth” to the center of attention. A President goes on television to declare his “honesty,” a minister announces his “intentions,” the evening news reports “what is being done to curb the inflation.” The medium maintains a continual assertion that it can and is providing an adequate representation of reality, while everyone's experience continually denies it. Moreover the industry exhibits a persistent positive tropism toward the appearance of the spontaneous and rehearsed event in its perpetually recurring panel shows and quiz programs and in the apparently casual format of its late evening news shows. According to Stasheff and Bretz:

...the television audience will not only accept, but even enjoy, a production error or even a comedian who blows his lines and admits it or who asks his straight man to feed him a cue once again so that he can make another try at getting the gag to come out right. This leniency on the part of the audience is caused by the increased feeling of spontaneity and immediacy which minor crises create. The audience loves to admire the adroitness with which the performer "pulls himself out of a jam."\footnote{[my italics]}

The industry wishes or feels obligated to maintain the illusion of immediacy, which it defines rather precisely as "the feeling that what one sees on the TV screen is living and actual reality, at that very moment taking place." The perfection of videotape made possible the careful manipulation and selective presentation of desirable "errors" and "minor crises" as marks of spontaneity, which became as equivocal in their
implications as the drips and blots of third-generation Abstract Expressionists. It's not that you couldn't see the Los Angeles police department's tactical assault squad in real time, in full living color, in your own living room, leveling a small section of the city in search of three or four suspected criminals, but that what you would see couldn't be certainly discriminated from a carefully edited videotape screened three hours later. So what television provides video with is a tradition not of falseness, which would be a kind of guarantee of at least a certain negative reliability, but of a profoundly menacing equivocation and mannerism, determining a species of unlikelihood.

At first glance artist's video seems to be defined by the total absence of any of the features that define television. But this apparent lack of relation is in fact a very definite and predictable inverse relation. If we temporarily ignore the subfamily of installation pieces, which are actually quite diverse among themselves but nevertheless constitute a single genre, the most striking contrast between video pieces and television is in relation to time. It may not be quite hip to say so without qualification, but it is a commonplace to describe artists' videotapes as "boring" or "long," even when one feels that this in no way invalidates or dishonors the tapes in question [viz. Bruce Boice's comment that Lynda Benglis's video is "boring, interesting and funny";^8 or Richard Serra's own videotape Prisoners' Dilemma, where one character advises another that he may have to spend two hours in the basement of the Castelli Gallery, which is "twice as long as the average boring videotape."] This perceived quality of being boring or long has little to do with the actual length of the tapes. It has much more to do with the attitude of just about all the artists using video to the task at hand. John Baldessari has a tape called Some Words I Mispronounce. He turns to a blackboard and writes:

1. poor
2. cask
3. bade
4. Beelzebub
5. bough
6. sword

As soon as he completes the "d" of "sword" the tape is over. Running time is under a minute. It feels amazingly short. But it is longer than most commercials.

Robert Morris's Exchange, a series of verbal meditations on exchanges of information, collaborations and interferences with a woman, accompanied by a variety of images taped and retaped from other tapes and photographs for the most part as indefinite and suggestive as the discourse, goes on till it arrives at a single distinct and comic story of not getting to see the Gattamelata, after which the tape trails off in a more or less leisurely fashion. Running time forty-three minutes. Television has many programs that are much longer. The two artists' tapes are very different. Baldessari's is a routine, explicitly defined from the outset and carried out deadpan to its swift conclusion. Exchange is a typical member of what is by now a well-defined genre of artist narrative, essentially an extended voiceover in a carefully framed literary style that seeks its end intuitively in the exhaustion of its mild narrative energy. But they both have the same attitude toward time: the work ends whenever its intention is accomplished. The time is inherent time, the time required for the task at hand. The work is "boring," as Les Levine remarked, "if you
demand that it be something else. If you demand that it be itself then it is not boring.” Which is not to say that the videotapes may not be uninteresting. Whether they are interesting or not is largely a matter of judging the value of the task at hand, and this could hardly be the issue for people who can look with equanimity at what hangs on the wall in the most distinguished galleries. For whatever we think of the videotapes of Morris, or Sonnier, or Serra, they are certainly not inferior to whatever else they put in the gallery. Levine is right. Videotapes are boring if you demand that they be something else. But they’re not judged boring by comparison with paintings or sculpture, they’re judged boring in comparison with television, which for the last twenty years has set the standard of video time.

But the time standard of television is based firmly on the social and economic nature of the industry itself and has nothing whatever to do with the absolute technical and phenomenological possibilities of visual representation by cathode ray tube. For television, time has an absolute existence independent of any imagery that may or may not be transmitted over its well-defended airwaves and cables. It is television’s only solid, a tangible commodity that is precisely divisible into further and further subdivisible homogeneous units, the smallest quantum of which is measured by the smallest segment that could be purchased by a potential advertiser, which is itself defined by the minimum particle required to isolate a salable product from among a variable number of equivalent alternatives. The smallest salable piece turns out to be the ten-second spot, and all television is assembled from it. But the social conventions of television dictate a code of behavior according to which the transmitter must assume two apparently different roles in transmission. In one he must appear to address the viewer on the station’s behalf as entertainer; in the other on the sponsor’s behalf as salesman. The rules of the game, which are legally codified, prescribe a sharp demarcation between the roles, and the industry makes a great show of marking off the boundaries between its two types of performances—the programs and the commercials. At their extremes of hard-sell and soft-show, one might suppose that the stylistic features of the two roles would be sufficient to distinguish them, but the extremes are rare, the social function of the roles, not so distinct, and the stylistic features seldom provide sufficient separation. Since the industry’s most tangible presentation is metrically divisible time, the industry seems to mark the separation emphatically by assigning the two roles different time signatures. The commercial is built on a scale of the minute out of multiple ten-second units. It comes in four common sizes—10, 30, 60 and 120 seconds—of which the thirty-second slot is by far the commonest. The program is built on the scale of the hour out of truncated and hinged fifteen-minute units that are also commonly assembled in four sizes—15, 30, 60 and 120 minutes—of which the half-hour program is the commonest, though the hour length is usual for important programs, two hours quite frequent for Specials and feature films, and fifteen minutes not entirely a rarity for Commentary. Television inherited the split roles and the two time signatures from radio, as well as the habit of alternating them in regularly recurrent intervals, which creates the arbitrary appearing, mechanical segmentation of both media’s
presentations. But television carried this mechanical segmentation to a new extreme and presented it in such a novel way, through a special combination of its own peculiar technology and production conventions, that television time in spite of structural similarity with radio time has an entirely different appearance from it, bearing the relationship to it of an electronically driven, digital counter to a spring driven, hand-wound alarmclock.

Television achieved its extreme segmentation of transmission time mainly through the intense development of multiple sponsorship. Old radio programs, from the 1930s and 1940s tended to have a single sponsor. *The Lone Ranger* was sponsored for years by Silvercup bread, *Ma Perkins* by Oxydol, *Uncle Don* by Ovaltine, and these sponsors would reappear regularly at the beginning, middle and end of each program with pretty much the same commercial pitch. This pattern continued by and large into the early days of television, with *Hallmark Theater*, *The Kraft Playhouse* and so on. But current television practice is generally quite different. A half-hour program might have something like six minutes of commercial fitted to it in two-minute blocks at the beginning, middle and end of the program. But these six minutes of commercial time might promote the commodities of twelve different sponsors, or twelve different commodities of some smaller number of sponsoring agencies. The commodities could be nearly anything—a car, a cruise, a furniture polish, a breakfast food, a funeral service, a scent for men, a cure for smoking, an ice show, an x-rated movie, or a politician. In principle they could apply to nearly any aspect of human life and be presented in any order, with strategies of advocacy more various than the commodities themselves. In practice the range of commodity and styles of advocacy are somewhat more limited, but the fact remains that in half an hour you might see a succession of four complete, distinct and unrelated thirty-second presentations, followed by a twelve-minute half of a presentation, followed by a one-minute presentation, one thirty-second presentation and two ten-second presentations, followed by the second and concluding half presentation (twelve minutes long), followed by yet another four unrelated thirty-second presentations. But since this would lead to bunching of two two-minute commercials into a four-minute package of commercial at every hour ending, and since viewers are supposed to want mainly to look at the programs—or because program makers are rather possessive about their own commercials and want complete credit for them—the program makers have recently developed the habit of presenting a small segment of their own program as a kind of prologue before the opening commercial, to separate it from the tail end of the preceding program, while the program makers of the preceding program may attempt to tag onto the end of their own program a small epilogue at the end of their last commercial, to affix it more securely to their own program. Meanwhile the station may itself interject a small commercial promoting itself or its future presentations. All of these additional segments—prologues, epilogues, station promotions and coming attractions—usually last no more than two minutes, are scaled to commercial time and are in their functional nature promotions for either immediately succeeding or eventually succeeding transmissions. This means that you may see upward of fourteen distinct segments of presentation in any half
hour, all but two of which will be scaled to commercial time. Since commercial time is the most common signature, we could expect it to dominate the tempo of television, especially since the commercial segments constitute the only examples of integral [complete and uninterrupted] presentation in the medium. And it does, but not in the way one would generally suppose.

It is very easy to exaggerate the apparent differences between commercial time and program time by concentrating on the dramatic program. Television has many programs that share a mechanically segmented structure with the packet of commercials. The most extreme cases are the news programs, contests and the so-called talk shows. What is called “news” on television is a chain of successive, distinct and structurally unrelated narrations called “stories.” These average from thirty seconds to two minutes in length, are usually presented in successions of three or four in a row, and bracketed between packets of commercial from one to two minutes long. The “full” story is built very much like a common commercial. It will usually have a ten- to thirty-second introduction narrated by an actor seen in a chest-shot, followed by a segment of film footage about one minute in length. There are alternate forms but all of them are built on exactly the same type of segmentation. The narrating actor may merely narrate (read off) the event from the same chest-shot seen against a background of one or two slides plausibly related to the event. The only continuity for the six- or seven-minute packet of programming called “news” consists of an abstract categorial designation (e.g. National) and the recurrent shots of the newsmen, actors who project some well-defined character considered appropriate for this part of the show, such as informed concern, alert aggressiveness, world-weary moralism, or genial confidence, and so on. This tends to be more obvious in the packets designated as “sports” and “weather,” where what passes for information consists of bits so small, numerous and unrelated that they come down to mere lists. These may be held together respectively by more obvious character actors like a suave ex-jock and a soft touch comic. Similarly, contest shows consist of structurally identical, separate events joined edge to edge and connected mainly by the continuous presence of the leading actor (the host). Television has also—through selection of the events themselves and manner of representation—managed to present most of its sports programs as sequences of nearly identical unrelated events. Baseball gets reduced to a succession of pitches, hits and catches, football to a succession of runs, passes and tackles, while the ensemble of events that may be unfolding lies outside the system of representation. If we count together all the programs that are constructed out of these linearly successive, distinct segments of commercial scale, the contrast between commercial and program becomes much less sharp. Moreover a closer inspection of both will show that there are really no clear stylistic distinctions between commercials and programs, because just about every genre of program appears also as commercial. Dramas, comedies, documentaries, science talks, lists, all show up in thirty- and sixty-second forms. Even their distinctive integralness can be exaggerated, because often there is a clean partition between the programmatic parts of the commercial—its dramatic or imagistic material—and the details of the pitch that specify the name of the product and where you can get
it. This separation is so common that it is possible to watch three thirty-second commercials in succession with some pleasure and find it difficult to remember the name or even the nature of the commodity promoted. This is not a functional defect in the commercial, the main function of which is to produce a kind of praise poetry that will elevate to a mild prominence one member out of the general family of commodities that television promotes as a whole tribe all of its transmitting day. Poems in praise of particular princes are addressed to an audience already familiar with the tribe, and commercials are constructed to particularize an already existing interest. Nobody unconcerned with body odors will care which deodorant checks them best. It takes the whole television day to encode the positive images of smoothness, cleanliness or blandness upon which the massive marketing of deodorants and soaps depends.

There is no fundamental distinction between commercial and program, there is only a difference in focus and conciseness, which gives the thirty-second commercial its appearance of much greater elegance and style. Both commercials and programs are assembled out of the same syntax: the linear succession of logically independent units of nearly equal duration. But this mechanically divisible, metrical presentation has none of the percussive or disjunctive properties of radio presentation. This is because of the conventions of camerawork and editing that television has developed to soften the shock of its basically mechanical procedures.

It is probably fair to say that the entire technology from the shape of the monitor screen to the design of the camera mounts was worked out to soften the tick of its metronome. Almost every instrument of television technique and technology seems to have the effect of a shock absorber. As in film, the television presentation is assembled out of separate shots. But these shots are very limited in type and duration. Because of the poor resolution of the television image (525 bits of information presented on photosensitive phosphors) and the normal screen size, the bread and butter shots of television are almost all subforms of what film would consider a close-up. Common shot names illustrate this—knee-shot, thigh-shot, waist-shot, bust-shot, head-shot, tight head-shot. Or else they count the number of people in the frame—two-shot, four-shot, etc. Probably primarily for this reason shot durations are very limited in range—usually from two to ten seconds—and very predictable in function and type. The two- to three-second shot is almost always a reaction-shot or a transition detail in a narrative, so it will usually be a head-shot or detail of some activity. Distant shots of moving cars, or whatever, will usually run seven to ten seconds, like action in general. Shots of a second and under are very rare and only used for special occasions, but distinct shots over twenty seconds are practically nonexistent. “Distinct” because television’s camera conventions include a cameraman who is trained to act like an anti-aircraft gunner, constantly making minute adjustments of the camera loosening up a bit here, tightening up there, gently panning and trucking in a nearly imperceptible manner to keep the target on some imaginary pair of crosshairs. These endless, silken adjustments, encouraged and sometimes specifically called for by the director, and usually built into the cameraman’s training, tend to blur the edges of what the film director would normally consider a
shot. To this we can add the widespread use of fade-ins and fade-outs and dissolves to effect temporal and spatial transitions, and the directors' regular habit of cutting on movement to cushion the switch from one camera to another. This whole arsenal of techniques has a single function—to soften all shocks of transition. Naturally the different apparent functions of various genres of program or commercial will alter the degree of softening, and a news program will maintain a sense of urgency through its use of cuts, soft though they may be, while the soap opera constantly melts together its various close shots with liquid adjustment, and blends scene to scene in recurrent dissolves and fades. This ceaseless softening combines with the regular segmentation to transform the metronomic tick-tack of the transmission into the silent succession of numbers of a digital clock.

Because of the television industry's special aesthetic of time and the electronics industry's primary adaptation of the technology to the needs and desires of television, the appearance of an art-world video had to wait for the electronics industry to attempt to expand the market for its technology into special institutional and consumer domains. The basic tool kit of artists' video is the Portapak with its small, mobile camera and one-half-inch black and white videotape recorder that can accommodate nothing larger than thirty-minute tapes. Put together with a small monitor and perhaps an additional microphone, the whole operation costs something in the vicinity of $2000—a bit less than a cheap car and a bit more than a good stereo system. This is the fundamental unit, but it allows no editing whatever. The most minimal editing—edge to edge assembling of tapes into units larger than thirty minutes—requires access to at least another videotape recorder with a built-in editing facility, which means at least the investment of another $1200. This is a primitive editing capacity, but increases the unit cost by 50 percent to about $3000. Yet precision editing and smoothness are still out of the question. Unlike film, where editing is a scissors and paste job anyone can do with very little equipment, and where you can sit in a small room and shave pieces of film down to the half frame with no great difficulty, video pictures have to be edited electronically by assembling image sequences from some source or sources in the desired order on the tape of a second machine. The images are electronically marked off from each other by an electronic signal recurring (in the U.S.) thirty times a second. If you want to place one sequence of images right after another that you've already recorded onto the second tape, you have to join the front edge of the first new frame to the final edge of the other, which means that motors of both machines have to be synchronized to the thirtieth of a second and that there must be a way of reading off each frame edge to assure that the two recorded sequences are in phase with each other. Half-inch equipment is not designed to do this, and the alignment of frame edge with frame edge is a matter of accident.

Alignment of a particular frame edge with a particular frame edge is out of the question. If the frame edges don't come together the tape is marked by a characteristic momentary breakup or instability of the image. You may or may not mind this, but it's the distinctive mark of this type of editing. Since this is absolutely unlike television editing, it carries its special mark of homemade or cheap or unfinicky or
direct or honest. But the dominance of television aesthetics over anything seen on a TV screen makes this rather casual punctuation mark very emphatic and loaded with either positive or negative value. An installation with synchronized, multiple cameras, with capabilities for switching through cutting, fading and dissolving, and some few special effects like black and white reversal will cost somewhere in the $10,000 range, provided you stick to black and white and half-inch equipment. This is only a minor increase in editing control and a cost increase of one order of magnitude. If you want reliably smooth edits that will allow you to join predictably an edge to an edge, without specifying which edge, you will need access to an installation whose cost begins at around $100,000. One major art gallery has a reduced form of such a facility that permits this sort of editing, which costs about half that. Again we have an increase of control that is nearly minimal and a cost increase of another order of magnitude. Some artists have solved this problem by obtaining occasional access to institutions possessing this kind of installation, but usually this takes complete editing control out of the hands of most artists. There are also ways of adapting the one-inch system to precisionist frame-for-frame capacity, but that requires the investment of several thousand dollars more. A rule of thumb might specify that each increase in editing capacity represents an order of magnitude increase in cost. Color is still another special problem. Though it is hardly necessary, and possibly a great drawback in the sensible use of video for most artists' purposes (viz. Sonnier's pointless color work), it is by now television's common form and has certain normative marks associated with it. To use black and white is a marked move, regardless of what the mark may be construed to mean. So, many artists will seek color for mere neutrality. But it comes at a price. There are bargain basement color systems, wonderfully cheesy in appearance, but the most common system is the three-quarter-inch cassette ensemble, which together with camera, videotape recorder and monitor goes at about $10,000. If the Portapak is the Volkswagen, this is the Porsche of individual artists' video. For editing control the system of escalation in color runs parallel to black and white. The model of ultimate refinement and control is the television industry's two-inch system, and since that's what you see in action in any motel over the TV set, interesting or not, everyone takes it for the state of the art.

These conditions may not seem promising, but artists are as good at surviving as cockroaches, and they've developed three basic strategies for action. They can take the lack of technical refinements as a given and explore the theater of poverty. They can beg, borrow or steal access to technical wealth and explore the ambiguous role of the poor relation, the unwelcome guest, the court jester, the sycophant, or the spy. This isn't a common solution. The studios don't make their facilities available so readily. But it includes works done by Allan Kaprow, Peter Campus, Les Levine, Nam June Paik and numerous others. Artists can also raid the technology as a set of found objects or instruments with phenomenological implications in installation pieces. There are numerous examples from the work of Peter Campus, Dan Graham, Nam June Paik, Frank Gillette, etc. To a great extent the significance of all types of video art derives from its stance with respect to some aspect of television, which is itself profoundly
related to the present state of our culture. In this way video art embarks on a curiously mediated but serious critique of the culture. And this reference to television, and through it to the culture, is not dependent on whether or not the artist sees the work in relation to television. The relation between television and video is created by the shared technologies and conditions of viewing, in the same way the relation of movies to underground film is created by the shared conditions of cinema. Nevertheless, an artist may exploit the relation very knowingly and may choose any aspect of the relation for attack.

If Nancy Holt's *Underscan* is an innocent masterpiece that narrates in its toneless voice a terrifying, impoverished story over a sequence of simple photographic images ruined twice over by the television raster, the co-related Benglis *Collage* and Morris *Exchange* are cunning parodies that use the cheesy video image to depreciate a filmic genre that would sensuously exploit the personal glamour of stars like Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton, replaced here by the mock glamour of two pseudo-celebrities in a visual soup. Holt calls into question anything that the medium has ever represented as documentary with her sheer simplicity of means, while Morris and Benglis produce a total burlesque of the public figure through the manifest absurdity of their claims.

Acconci's *Undertone* is an even more precise example of this type of burlesque. In a visual style of address exactly equivalent to the presidential address, the face-to-face camera regards The Insignificant Man making The Outrageous Confession that is as likely as not to be an Incredible Lie. Who can escape the television image of Nixon?

In Baldessari's wonderful *Inventory*, the artist presents to the camera for thirty minutes an accumulation of indiscriminate and not easily legible objects arranged in order of increasing size and accompanied by a deadpan description—only to have the sense of their relative size destroyed by the continual readjustment of the camera's focal length that is required to keep them within the frame. Who can forget Adlai Stevenson's solemn television demonstration of the "conclusive photographic evidence" of the Cuban missile sites, discriminable over the TV screen as only grey blurs?

What the artists constantly re-evoke and engage with is television's fundamental equivocation and mannerism, which may really be the distinctive feature of the medium. But they may do this from two diametrically opposed angles, either by parodying the television system and providing some amazing bubble or by offering to demonstrate how, with virtually no resources, they can do all the worthwhile things that television should do or could do in principle and has never yet done and never will do.

Terry Fox's *Children's Tapes* exhibit nothing more nor less than the simple laws of the physical world in terms of small common objects—a spoon, a cup, an ice cube, a piece of cloth. They make use of a single camera, adjusted only enough to get the objects and events into the frame, and no edits. The hands crumple a spoon handle, place an ice cube in it over a small piece of cloth, balance it at the neck over the rim of a cup. You watch. It takes how long for you to figure out that the ice cube will melt? That the cloth will absorb the water. That the balance will be upset. But which
way? Will the water absorbed into the cloth be drawn further from the fulcrum and increase the downward moment on the ice cube side? Or will the water dripping from the spoon reduce the downward moment and send the spoon toppling into the cup? You watch as though waiting for an explosion. It takes minutes to come and you feel relieved. It has the form of drama. You’ll never see anything like it on educational television or any other television. It takes too much time, intelligence and intensity of attention to watch—except on video. There are, I believe, twenty-two of them. They have the brilliance of still-life and the intelligence of a powerful didactic art. But it is also a critique of means. Other works similar in this respect of means are Richard Serra’s *Prisoners’ Dilemma* and Eleanor Antin’s *The Ballerina and the Bum*.

The Serra piece shamelessly adapts a casual stage skit and a contest show format to illustrate hilariously and with absolute simplicity a moral-logical dilemma with grave implications for human action. The problem is apparently simple. There are two prisoners, A and B. Each is offered a chance to betray the other and go free—but here is the first catch—provided the other refuses to betray him. In the event that this happens the prisoner who refuses to betray will receive the maximum sentence—this is catch 2. The other alternatives are that both prisoners will refuse to betray each other; this will get both prisoners the second lightest penalty; or that both prisoners will attempt to betray each other, which will get each prisoner the second gravest penalty. On the face of it we have a straightforward 2 x 4 matrix with four outcomes for each player, but all the outcomes are linked pairs: you go free only if he gets life imprisonment and he goes free only if you get life imprisonment; you both get away with two years’ imprisonment if you both hold out against betrayal; you both get ten years’ imprisonment if you both try betrayal. If each player plays the game as a zero-sum game for his own advantage, he will inspect the reward columns and come to the single conclusion that the worst possible outcome is life imprisonment, which can only happen if he refuses to betray. This prevents the other player from screwing him and leaves the original player the chance of screwing his opponent. Since both players—regarded as unrelated individuals who will consider their own individual advantage—will both play to minimize their loss, they will each play to cut their losses and inevitably come out with the next to worst payoff—ten years in prison. There is no way to win and no way to play for mutual non-betrayal because failure to betray always risks total loss. But the video piece is more brilliant than that. It sets up two precise illustrations—comic, yes; casual, yes—but elegant in the way it demonstrates that any two unrelated prisoners—say a pair of suspected criminals picked up in the street—will inevitably betray each other and take the consequences. But any two prisoners who have a real community bond between them have no choice but to play for non-betrayal, because they must consider the value of the outcome in terms of its value for both players. Obviously, the differences in negative weights assigned to the penalties will work differently in deciding the outcome. Still, nothing in the world of this low-budget game could make Leo Castelli betray Bruce Boice in public. This low-budget marker calls up beautiful improvisational acting from all of the players and loose styles from all of the
collaborators in this group piece. The logical structuring of the piece owes a great deal to Robert Bell, who occupies a role somewhere between script-writer and director, and to all of the actors, whose improvisatory performances contribute markedly to the final outcome of the piece, which must be considered a community venture with Richard Serra assuming the producer’s role. This piece is also of a sort that will never appear on television and has the force of a parable.

Antin’s *Ballerina and the Bum*, another low-budget job, with single Portapak camera and two improvising actors, declares itself, from its five-minute opening shot, against television, time and money. The camera changes position only if it has to, to keep something in view, pans once along three cars of a freight train, to count them, moves inside the car. The mike has no windscreen. The sounds of the world of 1974—cars, airplanes, children and chickens—intermittently penetrate the film style illusion of the image of a Sylphides-costumed, New York-accented ballerina “from the sticks” and a twenty-five year-old grizzled old bum on the way to the big city. Nothing happens but what they say and do. She practices ballet, sets up light housekeeping in the boxcar, they daydream of success, he cooks some beans, she eats them, the train goes nowhere. Everything else is moving—cars, planes and other trains. A whole Chaplin movie for the price of a good dub.

Other successful examples of this low-budget strategy are Andy Mann’s *One-Eyed Bum* and Ira Schneider and Beryl Korot’s 4th of July in Saugerties, which bring to bear the video of limited means upon documentary as a kind of artist’s reminder of the ambiguities of “honesty” and “simplicity.” It is no accident that the best of these works have, at least in part, a didactic and moral element behind them and are “exemplary.” And even the tapes that are not specifically presented in an exemplary mode become exemplary in their fundamental disdain for television time.

But the theater of poverty isn’t the only way. Peter Campus somehow infiltrated WGBH-TV, Boston, to produce a single deadly piece precisely aimed through their expensive equipment. A man holding a photograph, seemingly of himself. You see him set fire to it and watch it burn from all four sides. Gradually you notice that the photograph is breathing, its eyes are blinking. This is the image of television.

FOOTNOTES
5. Ibid., p. 6.
6. Ibid., p. 8.
7. Ibid., p. 8.
Videotapes by artists differ from commercial television in their means of distribution and broadcasting, even though these distinctions may eventually disappear with a wider availability of public-access channels and cable TV. At present, the economic limitations on video artists strongly affect the content of their work, for the structures and characteristics of both television and video depend upon the level of technology used. These economic considerations make it impossible to ascribe to video any essential qualities that underly its use in all circumstances. Video is, rather, a polyreferential tool which is used for many different purposes and has developed from a variety of sources.

Videotapes by artists have both art and non-art histories. In their production, the traditions of music, painting, sculpture, environmental work, performance, Happenings, and Fluxus are combined with cybernetics, computer programming, and behavioral science, as well as with the broader cultural influences that have affected commercial TV: film, radio broadcasting, and theater. Many of the editing habits and narrative structures of film have been carried over into video and TV with the creation of electronic equivalents for wipes, fades, and superimpositions. The physical layout and audiometrics of the radio studio, drawn from theater design, have set precedents for the TV studio, as, for example, in the placement of the microphones and the control room. Video by artists has also been greatly influenced by TV style and genre—talk show, commercial, quiz program, news report, direct address, and documentary.

In the past decade, video by artists has developed in at least three major directions: abstraction, representation, and closed-circuit environments. The first, abstract video, might more appropriately be called reflexive or self-referential video. In reflexive video
imagery is artificially created by the manipulation of the TV frequency, and comes directly from the technological processes inherent in television and its systems. Frequently, reflexive video requires a matrix of monitors regulated by a multi-channel switching system which is sometimes programmed by a computer "brain." Another use of video is more narrative or representational. It is mimetic of the external world even when it incorporates feedback which, in video, is audiovisual interference created by the equipment itself and added, with a few micro-seconds delay, to the outgoing signals, thereby amplifying the present-time output with past-time output. Still another use of video has been in the creation of a closed-circuit environment, a space dominated by at least one video camera and monitor. Unlike reflexive video, video in a closed-circuit environment does not operate independently from its viewers, but works with their perception of real and video spaces as well as with their physical and psychological dislocations from familiar means of orientation. This aspect of video is sometimes explored in video performance, where the relation between the audience and the performer may be altered through the medium of television. Since all of these types of video involve different modes of temporality and spatial extension, the ways in which they are presented and read are vastly dissimilar.

Artists who work with the technology of video have often demonstrated a religious fervor for the intricacies of their hardware. They are the media-freaks who have romantically identified themselves with the machine. The content of their work is determined both by the process of video and the context or situation in which it is made. The image, as such, has no value apart from the matrix. This attitude, which leads the artists to metaphors for the computer brain based on the human brain, is reminiscent of the ideas of both Marshall McLuhan and the cyberneticist Norbert Weiner in the way it points up similarities between electronics and physiology. Weiner's argument centered on the similarity in the means of control and communication in the animal and the machine: "the binary code of today's computer has its origin in the 'all or nothing' character of our Neuron synapses, which are simply on or simply off."  

Nam June Paik was one of the first artists to experiment with the technological processes of video. Paik's experimental work in television grew out of his study of electronic music with Karlheinz Stockhausen in Cologne during the late fifties. His work was also influenced by his involvement with Fluxus and Happenings as well as by the ideas of Weiner, McLuhan, and the composer John Cage. Paik's work shares with Happenings their operatic impetus and constant metamorphosis, where the line between art and life was kept fluid, the sources of themes and materials were non-art situations, time was variable and discontinuous, and events occurred only once. The blurring of distinctions between art forms and life also characterized Fluxus, an iconoclastic movement organized in Germany by George Macunias in the early sixties, which included concerts, events, and performances by artists such as George Brecht, Dick Higgins, La Monte Young, and Paik. Fluxus operated in the interstices between painting, sculpture, music, dance, theater, and poetry and its products were regarded as truly "inter-media" rather than "mixed media." John Cage was a catalyst in the thinking of Fluxus artists in that their music consisted of simple events in which ordinary or chance sounds were incorporated. Paik's work drew from Cage's in the use of structuring devices such as indeterminacy which allows for improvisation.
From 1963, Paik “prepared” TVs in the way that the composer David Tudor doctored up pianos: he placed electromagnets on top of TV sets to distort the broadcast signal of commercial TV. His early interest in transforming music by TV also informed a witty work from 1969, TV Bra for Living Sculpture, in which the sound of Charlotte Moorman’s cello modulated the picture on her TV bra. Paik also played on TVs with wave-form generators, amplifiers, and tape recorders. His simultaneous use of many monitors demonstrated, even more than did the quickly changing content of commercial programs, McLuhan’s point about the “mosaic” of TV experience, namely, that many separate threads of perception are simultaneously perceived.

The prepared TVs and work on various video components beginning in 1955 led Paik to the invention of the video synthesizer in 1970 in collaboration with the engineer Shuya Abe. Video synthesizing is a way of combining two or more elements in order to project a composite picture. One of the limitations of video synthesizing for most artists is that the range of shapes which can be produced and the speed of the synthesizer in producing them are determined by the technical means available to the artist, and all too often this is, in turn, limited by the amount of money available. For example, one reason why many images look psychedelic is purely economic: it is easier, and therefore less expensive, to make different-sized images appear in series and change symmetrically than it is to create a different image at each scan. Paik himself has surmounted these limitations, however, because his frequent position as Artist in Residence at WNET-TV Laboratory in New York and at WGBH-TV in Boston has given him access to the full range of technical capabilities available in these network studios and thereby allowed him to apply his profound understanding of electronics to the creation of masterful works. Paik too has made visionary claims about the possibilities of TV synthesizers. In regard to his color synthesizer of 1970, he has written:

In the long-ranged future, such a versatile color synthesizer will become a standard equipment like today’s Hammond organ, or Moog synthesizer in the musical field.

1) TV-tranquilizer....the tranquilizing “groovy” TV will be an important function of future TV, like today’s mood music....

2) Enormous enrichment of background scenery of music programs or talkshows, combined with sharp reduction in the production cost....Traditional psychedelic light show cannot compete with electronic color synthesizer....

3) This will provide valuable experiments for EVR [Electronic Video Recording], which would be aimed for more sophisticated or educational layer of consumer.3

In a more concrete vein, Paik drew up a report dealing with the expansion of education possible in a global university. Among his suggestions was the production of video records to capture the presence of great thinkers, and videotapes of musical performances in which one instrument or voice has been omitted so that it could later be supplied by the student, thus giving him the simulated experience of playing or singing with a full orchestra.

While Paik has written about the use of video to store information, many artists have developed video works whose aesthetic organization has grown out of information theory. Frank Gillette, whose art and writing have been influenced by cybernetics, created an elaborate and highly developed video matrix in 1974. Called TrackTrace, it manipulates information by presenting it through a series of time delays.
Three television cameras record and transmit the contents of the gallery to a matrix of fifteen television monitors arranged in the face of a tetrahedron. A switcher changes images every 8 seconds. One television monitor is mounted at the apex, two televisions are mounted on the second row down, three on the third, four on the fourth, and five on the fifth.

A television camera pointed at the observer feeds a "live" real-time image into the single, apex monitor. The image is delayed three seconds and then replayed on the second row. It is then delayed an additional three seconds (a total of six seconds) and replayed on the third row. The process continues until the bottom, or fifth row, where the original image is replayed twelve seconds after it appeared on the top monitor. These images, and those from two other television monitors, are alternated on the monitors. All fifteen monitors feed back their content simultaneously.\(^4\)

In an earlier piece, Wipe Cycle, made in collaboration with Ira Schneider in 1969, Gillette also attempted, as Schneider has noted, to "integrate the audience into the information. It was a live feedback system which enabled the viewer standing within its environment to see himself not only now in time and space, but also eight seconds ago and sixteen seconds ago. In addition he saw standard broadcast images alternating with his own delayed/live image. And also collage-type programed tapes, ranging from a shot of the earth, to outer space, to cows grazing, and a 'skin flick' bathtub scene.\(^5\) As an outgrowth of a 1968 work called Iris, Les Levine constructed, in 1969, Contact, a video matrix which also engaged the spectator. The piece was an eight-foot high sculpture bank of nine TV monitors on either side, and eight TV cameras with different lenses set at different angles. Viewers saw themselves in nine different colors in close-up, medium range, and long range on monitors whose screens are each covered with a different colored acrylic gel.

Since the closed-circuit systems in these works are multi-channeled, the viewer is forced to perceive many events simultaneously. The complexity of the information presented counteracts any tendency toward a single reading. It compels the viewer to focus and refocus on a constantly changing field. It has often been suggested that this kind of perception parallels the scanning and focusing process that takes place in normal vision which operates at the "process level":

A process level analysis of the art experience is concerned with art as a process of perception, a way of experiencing, how one sees rather than what one sees... The process level affirms direct, sensory perception...\(^6\)

However, it seems that the video process they describe operates at the level of the video system's mechanism rather than at the core of the viewer's perception. Moreover, while Gillette has asserted that "the viewer becomes the information"\(^7\) and Levine that his work "synthesizes man and his technology,"\(^8\) it seems that the spectator is merely the agent for the realization of the video's program; whether it involves time delays, mixes, distortions, or wipes is immaterial. Instead of creating an interaction between the spectator and the system, these programs merely objectify and manipulate the viewer. It is not true that the viewer simultaneously experiences himself at different times or in different places, for by the time he recognizes his image, his attention has shifted from himself to the program. Consequently, these systems are sometimes illustrations of the ideas about information theory for which they are models. They are very close to traditional sculpture in that they are three-dimensional objects, but they have the added dimension of self-fulfillment as their programs play out their permutations through time. Only in more reciprocal systems where there is interaction between the viewer and his situation could there be a real investigation of perceptual intake and feedback.
In contrast to this kind of video art, which relies heavily for its conception on the equipment used and is influenced by the structuring techniques of other media [such as sound-delay in music and the mechanics of computer programming], single-monitor videotape takes its content as well as its structure from traditional art forms and cultural genre. Before coming into its own as a medium, video had been used as a means of presenting other media. For example, it documented public and private performances and extended the photographic records of Conceptual, Body, and Earth Art. Through broadcasting, video provided a way of making this art and its ideas available to a larger audience.

At the same time that artists began to use video for documentation, a series of experimental Artist-in-Residence programs, funded by The Rockefeller Foundation, was established in 1967 at WGBH-TV in Boston, WNET-TV in New York, and at KQED-TV in San Francisco. Thus broadcast television made the ideas of artists available to a wider audience. In the following year James Newman created an “open gallery” at KQED-TV, which produced a series of programs of works by sculptor Walter de Maria, choreographers Yvonne Rainer and Ann Halprin, the Living Theater, composer Terry Riley, and others. The year 1968 also marked the beginning of experimental programming at WDR in Cologne and the founding of “Fernsehgalerie Gerry Schum” in Düsseldorf. A year later Land Art, a documentation of earthworks by American and European artists, produced and directed by Gerry Schum, was transmitted over ARD in Germany. These projects were concerned with rethinking the economics of art in a move away from the saleable object toward the transmission of “free” ideas. This attitude was an outgrowth of the Conceptualist emphasis on the primacy of the idea over its execution. However, this use of television only increased the audience for already known artists, who often presented non-video works, and did not introduce its audiences to new artists or programming. The format of the program itself remained submerged within the framework of commercial TV.

The availability of the Portapak, in 1968, was a more significant step toward video’s becoming an independent art medium. Although a modest technological advance, the Portapak was important for artists because it is a self-sufficient and relatively inexpensive system. It was easy to document activities with the Portapak, which was preferable to film because it offers the possibility of instantaneous feedback.

The sculptor Bruce Nauman was one of the first artists to use video to document his activities. In 1967 he had been making and recording photographically works such as arrangements of flour on his studio floor which he altered every day. These pieces led to his works of 1968 in which he performed for his own pleasure. His interest in documenting his own activities made him more aware of ideas then current in music and dance. His earlier introduction to Meredith Monk as well as his exposure to the Judson dancers allowed him to see his own exercises as dance problems: “You can take any simple movement and make it into a dance just by presenting it as a dance.” Nauman was investigating sustained physical exertion in tasks which require great concentration, and the kinds of tensions that arise when a person tries to maintain a difficult balance or becomes fatigued. While on the East Coast in 1968, he became interested in the music of La Monte Young, Philip Glass, Terry Riley, and Steve Reich. His studio activities, sometimes dealing with rhythmic patterning, reflect the serial repetition of this music, which does
away with the sense of duration while intensifying one's awareness of the moment. Nauman's interest in activities and his work with music and dance awakened public interest in these art forms, not as music or dance, but as "performance."

At first Nauman used film to document his work, but later changed to the video camera which was lighter than a film camera and could be put into various positions:

After I had made a few films I changed to videotape, just because it was easier for me to get at the time. The camera work became a bit more important, although the camera was stationary in the first ones...the videotapes I did after those films were related, but the camera was often turned upside down, or a wide angle lens used for distortion.10

The camera was horizontal in Violin Tuned D.E.A.D., 1969, and Slow Angle Walk, 1968, and upside down in Revolving Upside Down, 1969, and Lip Sync, 1969. These camera angles are frequently very expressive. In Slow Angle Walk, Nauman walks out of and back into camera range. His image, returning from unpredictable positions, is intensified by the horizontal plane of the camera. In Revolving Upside Down, occasional close-ups evoke strong emotional reactions, which are again exaggerated by the camera position.

Nauman's videotapes are an hour long, while his early films lasted only about ten minutes. Consequently, the tapes intensify the feeling that the activities they present have no beginning and no end. In later tapes, such as Elke Allowing the Floor to Rise Up Over Her, Face Up, 1973, the camera is in motion panning and dissolving at five-minute intervals to suggest the rhythm of passing time. In all the tapes, a certain distance is maintained between Nauman and the audience because many of the activities are neutral and because the unusual camera angles tend to depersonalize the performer. Yet, as Nauman has said, some of the tapes evoke empathetic body responses on the part of the viewer:

What I discovered...was that even though you set this mechanical list of things that can be done and you do them within a narrow boundary of some kind, there would be emotional responses to some just because it is a person doing that. Some things call up strong emotional responses and some don't.11

Another sculptor, Keith Sonnier, also moved on to videotape from performance. His first tapes, in which performers play with a few props within a static situation, are unedited chunks of video time. Sonnier plays with the ambiguity of video images. This ambiguity is exaggerated by his use of special effects such as wipes, reversals from positive to negative, and split screens. For example, in Light Bulb and Fire, 1970, a black "hole" or spot appears on the screen from time to time. Only later does the viewer realize that this is caused by a trick light bulb going on and off. In all of his tapes, Sonnier uses props that are keys to the processes of video. For example, the light bulb is a metaphor for the binary nature of video technology—on-off, negative-positive. He reinforces the interplay between live and video images by presenting both actual events and their electronic parallels. In 1-200, 1972, positive-negative reversals are created actually by turning lights on and off, and technologically by means of a Special-Effects Generator, or SEG. Each of these modes of lighting can be recognized by the character of the light source: literal lighting has a precise position within the video space while electronic lighting is diffuse or varied. In the same tape, Sonnier uses panels with rectangular openings through which images can be seen, punning on the electronic creation of
quadrants through special effects. Sonnier also puns in color, as, for example, in Color Wipe, 1973, where actual color panels are seen in relation to electronic color-keying.

Sonnier's tapes also show, rather completely, the studio spaces where they are made since he combines the images from two cameras by using an SEG. While in Mat Key and Radio Track, 1972, he uses two cameras to show the same thing from different perspectives, in TV In and TV Out, 1972, he uses two cameras to pick up and transmit different information. For the performers, Suzanne Harris and Tina Girouard, the camera plays a role in the performance and acts as a control which is sometimes psychologically loaded. In TV In and TV Out, Harris could not see her own video image but had microphone contact with Girouard, who could see her own image and that of Harris. Sonnier, who was in the control room giving instructions, could see and contact both performers, Girouard directly and Harris by microphone. In Color Wipe, Harris and Girouard operated two large, rotating, studio cameras as though they were guns, sometimes crossing each other's visual path, sometimes focusing on each other's camera-eye. In these situations, the SEG allows the visual information to be viewed simultaneously in different ways through the use of split screens and quadrants. Even though there is more than one reading of the space that unfolds with this use of cameras and microphones, the limits of the space revealed are determined by the set-up of the TV studio and the off-screen control room. In a sense, these tapes illustrate places and provide a visual means of reconstructing situations not directly portrayed.

Sonnier began to move away from in-studio performances toward work with computers that generate abstract patterns, such as the graphics-display units generally used for the animation of type and cartoons. Unlike video artists who were involved with the technology itself, Sonnier was not interested in creating his own machine, synthesizer, or matrix. In Animation I, 1973, he used a simple computer, called "Scanimate." Because "Scanimate" could not store information or play more than one track at a time, the tape was made in three separate steps. Sonnier's second computer tape, Animation II, 1974, was made on a more complex machine called "Caesar." To explore the parameters of the computer set-up, Sonnier divided the computer frame into seven parts with an input, a rotating axis, and an independent track for each. Any number of these sections could be called up, eliminated, superimposed on another, or twisted. The patterns Sonnier used included textures and colored bars. "Caesar" allowed for a more complex rhythm than that of a linear continuum, because the computer could animate and store information to be recalled when desired. Viewers know that they are seeing only segments of tapes which are stored in their entirety in the computer's memory bank and they understand that much more time would be required to see all of each tape. Thus they have a sense of longer stretches of time than the one actually spent in watching Animation II.

Sonnier's computer tapes are like the video matrices of other artists in that they are limited by the capabilities of their programs, and can only illustrate the brain of the computer. However, Sonnier also feels frustrated by this one-directional nature of video output. When asked if he were interested in direct television broadcast, he replied:

That could work if everybody had a live feedback situation, but television—and radio, most radio except for the lesser forms of radio that people aren't interested in, like Citizen's band—is still all about sending out information, and not about receiving it.12
Sonniér's most recent works, such as N.Y.–L.A. Hookup, 1974, and Send-Receive-Send, 1973, are telephone pieces in which the energy of sending and receiving is at both ends of a line of communication so that the audience is made a part of the structure of the piece. This form had been first investigated by Allan Kaprow in Hello, 1968, at WGBH-TV in Boston, which according to Kaprow "approached the medium of video as if it were a picture telephone. The telephone is so common it no longer makes any claim as 'technology' and acts therefore as a personal and social medium."13

Vito Acconci's early work with video also developed out of a need to document his performance activities. At first Acconci used photographs, then in 1969 film, for direct, undirected documentation. For example, in a Super-8 film of 1971, Conversions, he used a candle to burn the hair from around his breasts, pushed the flesh to simulate female breasts, then did exercises such as walking, running, jumping, and stretching, with his penis hidden between his legs as if he were a woman. Acconci has written of his early pieces:

None of these films should stand alone... I should take them together: a form of justified behavior—concentration exercises, training positions, tactical attitudes [they can serve as a foundation for a course of development—an orientation toward mobility, flexibility, durability.14

This comment is also appropriate to Acconci's early videotapes, a medium he used interchangeably with film. In other tapes, however, he responds to his own image on the video monitor. In Body Works, 1970, for example, with the camera focused on his back and using the monitor in front of him as a mirror, he lit a match and burned tufts of hair from the nape of his neck. In Centers, 1971, he pointed at his image in the monitor, while trying to keep his finger in the center of the screen.

Acconci moved away from the performance of physical tasks by a single person toward the psychological interchange between persons and began to use video to explore the "performance areas" that exist between people. In this work, he was influenced by contemporary writings in the field of kinesics, particularly that of Kurt Lewin and Erving Goffman. Acconci's new tapes operate on three levels of performance: the portrayal of a personal relationship, the presentation of this drama to an audience, and the study of interpersonal behavior on a larger scale. While several tapes only record live performances, tapes such as Remote Control, 1971, made from a performance, use video to influence the interaction between performers.

Acconci has also used video in live performance as a way of being indirectly present to the viewer. In Claim, 1971, a three-hour performance, he sat in the basement of 93 Grand Street, New York, blindfolded, with metal pipes and a crowbar at hand. Upstairs, next to the stairway door, a TV monitor recorded his activity for the audience, who had the choice of either watching on the monitor or going downstairs to confront Acconci and dodge his lunges at them with the crowbar. Acconci gradually worked himself into a state of violence about his possession of the territory. "I'm alone down here...I want to stay alone down here...I'll stop anyone from coming down the stairs...I've got to believe this...."

Recently, however, Acconci has been ambivalent about video performance altogether:

I find it difficult to give the video part a reason for existence: it has to reveal something that the live performance doesn't reveal....In some earlier pieces it seemed that I put myself in isolation for the purpose of being revealed outside on the monitor. And it seems absurd: if I'm there, I might as well be really there.15
In his desire to change his mode of presence before the audience, Acconci began working with videotapes that create the feeling of directness and, even, exchange with the audience. The prototype of this attempt is *Undertone*, 1972, in which he is seated at the far end of a long table, facing the camera, looking down, his arms hidden under the table. He tries to convince himself that there is a girl under the table, and then that it is only himself rubbing his thighs. Then he claps his hands together on top of the table and speaks directly to the audience at the other end of the table, implicating them in his self-coercion: “I need you to keep your place there at the end of the table... I need you to screen out my lies, filter out the lies from the real point of view.” In another tape, *Command Performance*, 1973, Acconci creates a greater distance between himself and the audience. His attitude toward the audience is both seductive and antagonistic as he plays the stand-up comedian who wins people over but also makes fools of them at the same time. In these tapes, Acconci uses video as a means of presentation, while drawing from sources in popular forms of entertainment such as radio, commercial TV, and nightclub acts.

What interests me about video is its use as a kind of home companion, it's a place for close-up. I can be face-to-face with a viewer, I can be one point in a space that includes the viewer... Maybe this would be clearer if I compared it with the way I want to use film—movie is the landscape, drift, shifting scenes... I think of movies as basically silent, whereas in video sound is the kernel.16

As more and more artists began to explore the medium and use its processes as content, they had to deal with video on the low level of Portapak resolution, or clarity of image, which included visual “noise,” or feedback, static, etc. Many artists seized upon these elements fetishistically, as if carrying out an obligation to be “honest” to the medium. Their work was centered on their narcissistic interactions with their own images displayed on the monitor, exploited the ambiguity between first- and second-generation images, and used the infinite regressions of monitors seen on monitors. The content of this work became these characteristics themselves, because they overwhelmed the images. The quality of the picture on half-inch tape, compared with the two-inch tape of commercial TV, has always been problematical. The low resolution creates a lack of differentiation between images; landscapes become pattern and distances can’t be conveyed; there is a restricted range of values, and no subtleties of lighting; the shading is often unreliable, and the imagery is often interrupted by undesired static. If these characteristics (or imperfections) are disregarded by the artist, the viewer is left with a tape on this gritty level. The lack of quality in the image is further exaggerated because the monitor is only a small object in a relatively large environment. Another quality frequently exploited as “honesty” to the medium has been the use of “real” time in video. However, the originality of this approach was undercut by Andy Warhol. His films, such as Empire and Sleep, both of 1963-64, anticipated the use of uninterrupted actual time, but were perverse in using film, a medium of spatial and temporal transport through editing, as a way of relentlessly enforcing a present-time situation. In television, on the other hand, real time actually is inherent in the medium, for what the camera sees can be immediately viewed, without the delay for processing as in film. Video is instantaneous.

Another challenge to video artists has been to develop ideas about editing that do not imitate those of film. There is no literal frame in video as there is in film, but rather visual phrasing, which is a more gestural way of reading images. The equivalent of the film-shot is the bracketing of a sequence in video. The more
successful videotapes have been edited in accord with the processes of video and in such a way as to avoid overpowering any discrete images.

Joan Jonas's tape, *Vertical Roll*, 1972, uses as a structural device the vertical roll that results from the simultaneous use of two frequencies which are out of synchronization. The first is the frequency signal being sent to the set and the second is the frequency by which it is interpreted. The two are usually stabilized in TV and video and thus the image is at rest, though changing, centered on the tube. Instead of considering the roll as interference, Jonas uses the rolling picture rhythmically, creating a natural “frame” for images. This is intensified by the sound track on which she is heard banging a spoon against a mirror or clapping pieces of wood together to mark the moment when the roll strikes the bottom of the monitor, making it sound solid and material. The constancy of the banging intensifies the visual effect. Within this structure, the images seem to “roll” into view. Jonas plays with ambiguous images, odd camera angles, and technological effects such as the white traces left by the vidicon tube’s reaction to light. The images are, for the most part, horizontal lines including a black band, rolling vertically off the screen, but sometimes, as she is seen to jump up and down, Jonas creates the illusion of having jumped over the roll as her actions go out of synchronization with the rhythm. The images on the tape always appear within the framework of the roll, yet are distinguishable as discrete images. The viewer of the tape suffers a disorienting perceptual illusion as the floor of the room where the tape is played seems to rise up and the monitor seems to sink into the floor. Whether or not this effect was intentional, it is a unique experience in peripheral vision, all the more remarkable as one is watching the tape on a relatively small monitor.

Another tape that uses a structuring device possible only in video is *Underscan*, 1974, by Nancy Holt. The underscanning device on the monitor is a button that compresses the picture so that the edges can be seen precisely. Holt uses two underscanned images: one caused by the button pushed halfway in, compressing the vertical sides of the picture and thereby elongating the images, and the other by the button pushed all the way in, reducing the whole picture. Holt uses this device in displaying photographs of her Aunt Ethel’s house in New Bedford, Massachusetts, as she reads portions of her letters from her aunt. Each photograph is seen three times as it is subtly transformed through underscanning. The tape begins with a blank monitor seen rolling in the distance, centered in an empty black space. The camera zooms in on the monitor and the photographs begin to appear until they eventually take up all the monitor space as the soundtrack begins. The original audio-tape was played into the underscan monitor and the resultant sound retaped, so that the viewer is at one more remove from the original sound. The repetitious and coldly mechanical underscanning is in contrast to the intimate content of the letters which describe incidents from Aunt Ethel’s life—sicknesses, deaths, accidents, the decay of her house—read by Holt in a voice without affect.

In a different way of turning to advantage the visual peculiarities of video, Robert Morris has pushed the images to the periphery in *Exchange*, 1973. A fictitious text is read by Stephen Koch to the accompaniment of visual images which are primarily from tapes made earlier. One recurrent sequence, which shows Morris moving up out of the frame with his back to the camera, is from Lynda Benglis’s tape, *Mumble*, 1972. *Mumble* is one tape in an ongoing dialogue between Morris and Benglis in which they exchange tapes as raw material for the other’s taped response. Other
images in Morris's Exchange are of still photographs of, for example, racing cars, Carolee Schneeman as Olympia in Morris's dance Site, Morris on horseback, and a multi-faced picture of Benglis. The only live sequence in the tape is of Morris in a recording studio, with his back again to the camera and a photograph of Buster Keaton filling in as his alter-ego. The complex text winds around fictitious events, uses "asides" and other literary conceits, and creates the character of the narrator partly through an unembodied voice—not unlike radio. In Exchange, attention is focused on the soundtrack which provides more information than do the visual images. Some of the most interesting tapes by other artists have centered on a disproportioning of image and sound, which are recorded simultaneously on a single tape by video equipment. Paul Kos, for example, frequently manipulates the balance between the video image and sound; in Mar Mar March, 1972-73, the sound of a typewriter is distorted to resemble marching troops. Lynda Benglis also dislocates video image and sound in Mumble and other tapes. Certainly Ernie Kovacs mastered this technique to transform ordinary events into the art of high comedy.

Other artists have based their video presentations on models derived from commercial TV. William Wegman, for instance, borrows the straightforward, eye-to-eye, low-keyed approach of talk shows, product demonstrations, and early comedians such as Ernie Kovacs. Yet Wegman uses TV genre ironically to play with the structure of the joke in order to find out what makes something funny. He uses the format of the skit, a self-sustained unit, to put together on a single reel a series of short segments which are united by a particular strain of humor. Sometimes he personifies inanimate objects, shows his dog Man Ray's reaction to a situation, or dubs in sound to create a disparity between the soundtrack and the action. Wegman also borrows literary or visual styles from fairy tales, tall tales, and cartoons.

Some of Richard Serra's tapes also draw from commercial TV. Television Delivers People, 1974, for example, makes its ironic statements about the imperialism of commercial television in the seductive manner of advertisement. Messages such as "POPULAR ENTERTAINMENT IS BASICALLY PROPAGANDA FOR THE STATUS QUO," "Control over broadcasting is an exercise in controlling society," and "CORPORATIONS ARE NOT RESPONSIBLE" roll down a bright blue background to a zippy Muzak accompaniment. In this tape Serra criticizes the medium from within the medium itself. To have any political impact, however, the tape would need to be shown on a major TV network rather than in the art gallery or even on cable TV. Match Match Their Courage, 1974, was made in a television studio. It used a delayed audio-feedback system and a split screen which showed two performers, each of whom could see the other on a monitor only and could hear only the delayed sound of their voices as they were fed back through their earphones. Each performer's character was suggested by a color—one cool blue, the other warm orange. Prisoner's Dilemma, 1974, made with Robert Bell, was structured on a problem in game theory, a "non-zero sum game." The first half, modelled on the TV cops-and-robbers genre, used professional actors who turned the situation into TV theater by playing to the camera. The second half was like a TV quiz show, and was taped from a live performance in which contestants were goaded by an M.C. to respond extemporaneously for a reward or a punishment. The "punching," or rapid switching from one image to another, by Serra and Carla Schoolman who controlled three cameras through the SEG board, was reminiscent of early TV situation comedy.
While these and other videotapes have found ways of dealing with video processes characteristic to the medium, they are still dependent upon the continuum of linear reading and the relation between the monitor and a relatively arbitrary external situation. Although the creation of certain effects in these tapes may be achieved through technologies particular to video, the viewer's experience of these effects is no different from the experience of analogous effects in other media. For example, an SEG allows a simultaneous presentation of several points of view, but the split screen on film also permits this, although less directly. One experiences an illustration or picture of simultaneity—a way of reading more elements into a whole, bounded conventionally by a frame—rather than actually experiencing simultaneous events. Video feedback is also understood at a remove, read back into the history of the tape rather than experienced directly.

In contrast to the video matrices, other closed-circuit video environments really have been able to engage the viewer in their modes of presentation. In these pieces, video is used as a medium for creating interaction between the viewers and the space they occupy. This interaction is possible because the artist's attention is focused on the visceral response of the viewer rather than on the mechanical workings of the video. The difference between these pieces and closed-circuit video matrices is that the latter are sculptures in an environment while the former are environments. These pieces resemble theater more than sculpture, and the actors and actresses are the viewers who participate in a drama inherent in the setting itself.

Bruce Nauman was the first artist to move video into the room. His Performance Corridors of 1969 and his closed-circuit systems use mirrors, video, light, and techniques such as masking part of the camera lens to create in the viewer feelings of displacement and disorientation. The mind's memory of the body is disturbed at its most basic level, as the self is recognized in several uncharacteristic appearances simultaneously, as the recurrent images are integrated into a single moment. For example, in Video Surveillance, 1969, a television camera was placed at the outside entrance and a monitor at the other end of a corridor thirty-five feet long and twenty-five inches wide. The viewer had to walk about ten feet into the corridor before appearing on the television screen. The camera had a wide-angle lens and was placed ten feet above the floor. Viewers saw themselves on the screen from the back and from above, totally unlike their usual experience of themselves. In a piece at the Reese Palley Gallery in San Francisco, the viewer created and moved within an invisible corridor by maintaining a certain distance from the monitor as set forth in the rules of the piece:

The point of the piece is to make a visual corridor in which you must walk in order to keep yourself visible on the monitor screen. At the same time, one must keep oneself visible on the monitor in order to stay in the corridor. The problem is rendered more difficult because a) the camera does not point at the monitor so that walking toward the screen does not keep you in the picture, in fact leads you out of it; b) the cameras are rotated on their horizontal axis 90 degrees and 180 degrees so that the image on the monitor is either sideways or upside down; c) the camera which records the image on your reference screen is always at your back so that the image is always of your back.17

This dissociation in elementary body perception accounts for an apparently inexhaustible number of sensations:

It had to do with going up the stairs in the dark, when you think there is one more step and you take the step, but you are already at the top...or going down the stairs and expecting there to be another step, but you are already
at the bottom. It seems that you always have that jolt and
it really throws you off. I think that when these pieces
work they do that too. Something happens that you didn’t
expect and it happens every time. You know why and
what’s going on but you just keep doing the same thing. 18

These and other pieces by Nauman do operate at the
process level of perception, as the transaction between
viewer and environment is constantly regenerated.

Peter Campus’s closed-circuit pieces also create the
simultaneous experience of different modes of
appearance in a space by the use of live, video, mirror,
and shadow images which cause feelings of dissociation
in the viewers who must experience something other
than the familiar, integrated manifestations of
themselves. Like Nauman, Campus understood that
this experience of simultaneity could happen only in a
video environment:

In a closed circuit video situation one is no longer dealing
with images of a temporally finite nature. The duration of
the image becomes a property of the room. 19

While cybernetic parallels between human perception
and the machine have been claimed by artists working
with video matrices, their technologies may provide
metaphors for vision but they do not set up conditions
in which visual processes occur. Campus has tried to
create a dialogue between the viewer and the
environment rather than to construct perceptual maps:

If we are to avoid the problem of creating a visual system
that will reduce the capacity of the eye, it is necessary to
dissociate the video camera from the eye and make it an
extension of the room...

Instead of limiting the amount of visual information
coming to the eye-brain by replacing the natural field of
vision with an abstracted one, it is possible to include the
video information in the viewer’s field of vision,
increasing the potential of the visual system...

The video camera makes possible an exterior point of
view simultaneous to one’s own. The advance over the
film camera is due to the vidicon tube, similar to the
retina of the eye, continuously transposing light (photon)
energy to electrical energy.

The monitor is an object sitting rigidly in space. This
allows the viewer to locate the monitor in space relative
to him/her. Compare this to a movie theater where every
effort is made to erase one’s ability to locate the screen in
the viewer’s space, containing all possibilities for central
(foveal) eye movements. In a video monitor situation,
central eye movements tend to move off the surface of the
screen, locating the screen and relating the screen to the
room. 20

Campus’s pieces employ binary relationships such as
light-dark, negative-positive, projected and reflected
light, and present and past events in such a way that
the viewer mediates between the mechanism of the
video and the image it produces. As in Nauman’s
corridors, most of Campus’s pieces (except for
Kiva, 1971, a self-sustained system) require the viewer’s
presence for their realization: the viewer is the trigger
as well as the material for the work. One must
physically explore a piece to discover the coordinates of
the field in which the piece exists visually. Within this
area, the focus is on simultaneous and disconnected
modes of appearance. For example:

In Shadow Projection (1974)...a spotlight and a video
projector stand on opposing sides of a translucent screen
located 18 feet from each light source. Upon entering the
brilliant white field created by the theatrical spotlight, a
video camera located directly beneath the light picks up
the viewer’s well-lit image and transmits it by cable to
the projector. The shadow created by the viewer standing
between the light and the screen is filled in by the video
projected image of the viewer thrown from the opposite
side of the screen. As the viewer moves in the field, the
properties of the inverse square law regulate the
proportional size of the shadow to the video
projection....What Campus sets up in this piece is a field
in which the interplay and difference between the shadow
image and the projected image becomes a property of the
viewer’s motion in the light-defined field....
In *Negative Crossing* [1974] the field is split into halves. On one side of the screen, a camera mounted on top of a picture monitor establishes a split screen, positive-negative situation. The negative image is superimposed over the positive if the viewer finds the mid-point in the field. A projector, located behind the screen, repeats the monitor image creating a situation in which the viewer is caught between the monitor camera and the projection. The sum total of the forces at play tends to lead the viewer into a centralized rotation in an effort to apprehend the work, and mediate between the opposing elements.

*Stasis* [1973] refers to calm in relation to motion. The viewer, upon entering the field of light and camera angle, is confronted with two views of him- or herself. One view is a stationary full-length shot, the other is a three-quarter length view that is rotated through a motorized revolving prism. Depending upon the viewer's position within the field the two images may either float away from each other (as if in some dream-like state) or, when centrally located, the viewer's image rotates (on an axis located in the stomach) around the stationary head of the static image.  

Some of the closed-circuit environments by Nauman have been among the most abstract works in video: given properties inherent in the medium, such as simultaneity through feedback, these pieces create their own conditions of presentation, independent of externally determining frameworks such as broadcasting or the monitor within an arbitrary display situation. In these works, form emerges as a convergence of content and structure. The other schools of video are unable to achieve greater abstraction because of economic limitations. Artists' tapes aired on broadcast television (such as "Video Visionaries" on WNET-TV in New York) are not sufficiently distinct from commercial programming to be dissociated from network imperialism and are subsumed in the megalithic system. Seen out of context and transposed to a framework of more sophisticated technology, these tapes seem to appease the desire for something "avant garde" without posing any threat to the ruling corporations. Until an independent and equivalent structure for presentation is realized financially and politically, there will be no network TV by artists.

The conditions in which videotapes are shown in galleries also undercut their ability to create primary forms. Such work has the possibility of abstraction through modes of presentation—the intimacy of the close-up and of sound in a dialogue with the individual viewer—but most galleries and museums are not equipped to handle these requirements. Monitors are usually placed in spaces so large that the monitor is only a small object in a relatively large environment and the sound is diffused (or confused, if more than one tape is playing), eliminating any possibility of direct contact. Perhaps public display is antithetical to such work; it may be that only wide-scale private ownership will permit this intimacy.

These are some of the reasons why video still seems to be dependent upon forms outside of itself, whether from art or mass culture. Until it can create more independent structures of composition and presentation, video will continue to illustrate the processes it borrows.
FOOTNOTES


5. Ibid., p. 27.


11. Livingston and Tucker, Bruce Nauman, p. 34.


17. Livingston and Tucker, Bruce Nauman, p. 28.


19. Peter Campus, in Peter Campus: Essays by Peter Campus, James Harithas, and David A. Ross (Syracuse, N.Y.: Everson Museum of Art, 1974), n.p.

20. Ibid., Peter Campus.

21. Ibid., David A. Ross.
There is a small but growing clan of artists who are finding promise, if not salvation, through the medium of television. If one were to announce to a group of academic art historians that television is one of the inevitable and logical successors to a thousand years of the Western Art Tradition the statement would be greeted with incomprehension, benign amusement, or angry denial. Still, Television Art is here in galleries and in some museums. Its very presence tells us a good deal about the state of art. What is more, it gives us a glimpse of both the beginning and end of art as a cyclical phenomenon. As for the perennial problem of "quality" besetting High Art, video goes its own way and seems to be more interested in the day-to-day problems of acting effectively in various social contexts.

As a critic I am not particularly addicted to television as an art form; however, the literature of the medium really interests me. For instance in 1971 Michael Shamberg published a large paperback, *Guerrilla Television*, an outgrowth of his early support of the magazine *Radical Software*. In the last two years, Frank Gillette's *Between Paradigms: The Mood and its Purpose* appeared, as did *Cybernetics of the Sacred* by Paul Ryan. These books have in common a certain evangelical fervor concerning the possibilities of videotape as a medium of artistic and, more importantly, of communal expression and exploration. Looking back on what is disparagingly referred to as "Teck-Art"—that is, the kinetic sculpture and luminous art of the 1960s—Television Art displays enormously more sophistication in the financing of its technology, relationships with corporate structures, social ethics and application, and in the aesthetics of the work itself. Not surprisingly, there is a collective energy which has contributed a particular flavor to the writings of this group; Joycean hyperbole as used by
McLuhan is plentiful, as are the technical-verbal agglutinations so loved by Buckminster Fuller. Video prose is influenced by the writings of a handful of favorite philosophers, mystics, and poets, and interlarded with the hip language of Downtown New York. It sounds unreadable, and at times it is. Nevertheless a messianic call to a new age of communication shines through these writings.

Of the three, Shamberg's *Guerrilla Television* is the most literate and informative. He offers particularly keen insights into the morality of the individuals who control the medium. He talks about lending equipment to other users, dealing with large corporations, the abnormal self-consciousness of homemade video, and using video as a means of raising "grassroots consciousness." The theme that there is a large anonymous audience "out there" just waiting to turn TV against the exploiters of culture, makers of consumer goods, and particularly corporation-media itself is a favorite—because it is a direct extension of the essential concept of communication feedback as a form of social prophylaxis.

To my knowledge no other movement connected with the fine arts has given its literature quite such an apocalyptic tone, nor dwelled on the theme of history's obsolescence with the same enthusiasm; "The past is history and history is over!" is Gillette's encapsulation of the present. Paul Ryan, who studied several years for the priesthood, writes with similar enthusiasm in *Cybernetics of the Sacred*. For Ryan the task of the "sacred" is to perform an eternal balancing act between the natural ecology and man's attempts to deal with technology. To Ryan, ecology is akin to "God's House"—the harmonious interaction of every sphere of the Universe. Here television seems to be the binding medium which, if it has not exactly produced that cliché of the 1960s, the "Global Village," it has at least united the artists and technicians who make up the Television Movement.

As with all art before it, television is a creature of illusion and, as in the past, the goddess of illusion seems always to stand "out there," just beyond the reach of corporal contact. Paradoxically, the alternate television movement in part beguiles the art audience by its kinship with the omnipotent powers of network television, so that some of the aura of network programming, with its fame and money, descends on the mundane figures of Television Art. The taboos of network television, however, are frequently broken by Television Art which uses deliberate repetition, private candor (on occasion), sexual explicitness, and downright monotony. Its little-boy misbehavior militates against the split-second solemnity of Big Brother, the networks.

The formats of Video Art may be described fairly simply. On the one hand, arrangement of the hardware is paramount. Multiple monitors with multiple channels programmed with the same materials presented from different camera angles and with contrasts of color and image-resolution, slow motion and superimposed images, etc. are all basic elements. On the other hand, Video Art evolves from Body Art, where the artist uses improvisations or set pieces to enact bits of drama, ritual, work, or intrapersonal encounters. While there is a strong bias among a number of artists toward formal arrangements in which the monitors themselves play a part in structuring the environment, televised Body Art mainly depends upon the editing of the videotapes themselves. On occasion, both forms can be and are integrated. The point is that, for the most part, Television Art relies upon the simplest "aesthetic" means possible—it shuns and
leaves behind the formal devices and complexity of so-called High Art, and in its place desires an honest, easy give-and-take with the world around it. In ridding itself of High Art mannerism it seeks to become another communication loop with life at large.

Quite possibly it is this willingness of Television Art, not merely to imitate life but to become one with it that gives its literature an apocalyptic flavor. There is the implication that television is the instrument which will transform an age of spiritual density, with its obtuse artistic pleasures, into the coming age of sacred revelation. The title of Frank Gillette's book, *Between Paradigms*, suggests that television is the interface between the modern myth of historical causality, what he terms "Amyth," and its diametrical opposite, an era of Nothingness which paradoxically provides us with Everything. Gillette insists, "We [our cultures, myths, systems] are traumatized by this unremitting interaction of the knowable and its passage to the *bete noire*, the void." He is saying that we are what we know, and that our knowledge is about to take a quantum leap by virtue of an enormous extension of our being through television. The implication of Gillette's thesis is that art as we know it has a strange kind of built-in self-justification, while conversely, Television Art provides, through de-aestheticization, a life-model which incorporates all the mechanisms of feedback, which, in turn, constantly sustains us through humor, self-revelation, and heightened awareness — always on an "on-line," minute-to-minute basis.

Elsewhere Gillette states, "Ontological survival demands we revive our waning capacity to celebrate mystery, which remains our only experienced absolute." Here is the key to sacramental celebration: constant revitalization through the reliving of the original mystery. Art must die, both constantly and periodically, so that life may be born, so as to give birth to art again. One is no less authentic than the other but, rather, art and life seem to be complementary, and thus inevitably locked together. As Gillette says: "As art is the successful communion of a variety, life's paradox is identical with art's: Affinities for opposites changing into one. In seeking the more perfect illusion, art seeks life."4

Without too much difficulty, it is easy to envision television as a kind of human eye attached to a purposeful brain. The electron beam scanning the phosphor on the inside of a video tube has all the ephemerality that we ordinarily associate with the ever shifting light falling on the mosaic of receptors in the human eye. Nothing lasts, and the medium, with all its flexibility, can and occasionally does become an extension of our own bodies — as Paul Ryan explains: "Wow, it's like making it with yourself." Sexual excitement through self-admiration is evident not only in the prose of Television Art, but frequently in the tapes themselves. The blatant narcissism of Michelangelo's "Dying Slave" or Hans Belmer's dolls is reminiscent of a session in Gestalt therapy or an in-group joke when it is translated onto tapes. We begin to see that perhaps the original sin was self-consciousness and that our first images of God were in reality secret images of ourselves — but now it can be told, as they say, in living color. Yet if feedback through the ecologically minded use of television is a form of social therapy, are not these images on videotape just as destructive to true spontaneity and creativity as the miles and miles of masterpieces seen in museums?

In Post Formalist Art, particularly in television, the art act becomes subjective, immediate, and is constantly
renewed, while the history of Western art can be read as a steady objectification of the archetypal acts called the holy sacraments. The replication and distribution of videotapes by the commercial gallery are becoming just as much legal business matters as the sale of paintings, prints, and sculptures ever was. However it is in the nature of art forms to have a foot in both worlds—to be made viable by the very mechanisms that ultimately stultify artists and lead them to acknowledge their spiritual and aesthetic inadequacy. Thus it is the making and not the repetitious viewing which lies at the heart of art, and this is the secret truth which no one must divulge for the fear that it would destroy our covetous attitude towards paintings and videotapes, which are, after all, merely objects.

Since I have intimated that all art is sacred, it might be well to look into the etymology of the words “sacred” and “sacrament.” The word “sacrament” came into the language through Old French from the Latin word sacramentum, which meant a sworn obligation sanctioned by religious rite. Sacraments differ from the other rites of the Church in that they are channels through which supernatural grace is imparted; they are enacted outward and are the visible signs of inward grace. In Christian Latin from the third century, sacramentum was the accepted rendering for the Greek word for mystery, mysterion, meaning truths which are beyond the range of unassisted human apprehension; in essence, mystery is knowledge about the universe withheld. The word “sacrifice” also comes to mind as an extension of sacrament: sacrifice is the offering to a higher power, in basest terms the slaughter of an animal with its subsequent consumption by fire on the altar. Here we might look at sacre as being connected to the “s” sound in a derivation older than the Greek or Latin, that is, in the Chaldean or Hebrew letter shin which is the mother letter of FIRE. In a fundamental way the sacred has to do with fire as the alchemical element responsible for the inordinate repetition of images, ultimately purging these images of their newness and “life” and thus leaving us with only the ashen residue of their spiritual meaning. We may look at art too as an extension of sacrament, and at sacrament historically as a progressive debasement of the archetypal religious acts, first reduced to icon, then to pictorial image, then to formal object, and finally to recorded activity itself. In every case, materiality, and the perception of it, are transformed in some degree to spirit. And it is the lived embodiment of sacrament which ultimately obviates art, and which is eventually consigned to FIRE.

In the secularity and crudeness of most Video Art there is an appeal to one of the oldest strictures concerning religious art, namely that the least pleasing and the least beautiful images of the gods (ourselves) tend to be the most holy. They tend to be closer to the core of mystery.

One of the main formal features of the art of the 1960s was a reliance on the repetition of trivial imagery. Manifest in the silkscreens of Warhol, the stripcs of Buren, the “Disposables” of Levine, Antin’s “Boots,” and the multiple editions by many sculptors is the emotion of ennui, of weariness with “things,” a fondness for multiplicity for its own sake. Multiple images symbolize the vacuousness of modern life and parallel the infinity of images generated by television as video approximates the stimulus-seeking rapaciousness of the human eye, with no rest or respite. Mircea Eliade’s profound study of the nature of myth and symbolism in religion, The Sacred and the Profane, contains a powerful passage describing the transition from meaningful to meaningless repetition.
The perspective changes completely when the sense of the religiousness of the cosmos becomes lost. This is what occurs when, in certain more highly evolved societies, the intellectual elites progressively detach themselves from the patterns of the traditional religion. The periodical sanctification of cosmic time then proves useless and without meaning. The gods are no longer accessible through the cosmic rhythms. The religious meaning of the repetition of paradigmatic gestures is forgotten. But repetition emptied of its religious content necessarily leads to a pessimistic vision of existence. When it is no longer a vehicle for reintegrating a primordial situation, and hence for recovering the mysterious presence of the gods, that is, when it is desacralized, cyclic time becomes terrifying; it is seen as a circle forever turning on itself, repeating itself to infinity.

In a society where life itself is sacramental there would be no room for images or "others," mystery would rest in our own will to ephemeralize the sullen and resistant images of day-to-day existence. Mind would be everywhere at once, and our attempts to prove, through duplication, its absence are a way of reminding us that we too think. In a large sense I am sure that the more thoughtful artists of video realize this instinctively. We have, for example, something close to that effect in Frank Gillette's statement: "Tele-vision is an advanced technology programming a formal exhaustion into its ambience."

FOOTNOTES

2. Ibid., p. 18.
3. Ibid., p. 17.
4. Ibid., p. 100.
7. Gillette, Between Paradigms, p. 46.

Control room, installation at Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia
I would like to emphasise initially that we cannot deal meaningfully with the future of television as an isolated development. Nor is it enough to concentrate unduly on the singular possibilities of the medium itself—as technical instrument or new art form—without attention to the larger theoretical considerations. Television is severely compounded of techniques of recording, processing and transmission of information, of entertainment, news and market offerings. It is a cultural medium which overlaps with and interpenetrates the wide spectrum of other media in the society.

The future of television lies within an ongoing revolution in information and communications capabilities. The latest and most critical aspect of this revolution in both information and communications technologies—and their ancillary software—is that these create what is virtually a new information environment.

We are no longer dealing with the separate strands of evolution within these technologies but with the ways in which their convergent interaction now constitutes an unprecedented change in our overall social and cultural environment. The core of this change lies with electronic reproduction, processing and transmission systems, one of whose prime characteristics is the extremely rapid, low-cost diffusion of sound, image and other symbolic messages—and the attendant capacity to store, process and interrelate many different types of information.

The initial convergence of these systems may be located at a point in the mid-1950s with the digital transmission of information by telephone line. Since then they have become more complexly interlinked and expanded, from the level of global satellite
monitoring and communications to that of individually interactive modes. We are dealing, therefore, with a fusion of hardware and software which not only amplifies our capacities but which, by its functions as screen, channel and 'multiplexer', actually reshapes the information content and perception of society itself—in ways that our conventional wisdom may not be able to foresee, comprehend, or effectively control.

It can be said with some certainty that societies which become centrally dependent upon this new information and communications base will be as different from the industrial society which we have known for the past century or so as that society differs from all the agrarian pre-industrial societies which preceded it. The possible configurations of institutions, governance, individual and collective value systems of the emerging information society, however, are still open to conjecture. The extent to which we are already in the information society phase is exemplified by the Watergate affair, for example, in which the central dialogue was concerned with access to, and control of, information.

Though we have disavowed, somewhat, the emphasis on technical developments in television, it may be useful, at this point, to review some of these briefly for discussion. The general line of forecasted development runs through the more widespread use of picturephone with ancillary flatscreen wall TV, in the next decade, going towards holographic, three-dimensional video in the next fifteen to twenty years. Paralleling these main lines are further developments in more sophisticated, more miniaturised, personal and portable systems. These would include:

1) At the individual level, various types of interactive two-way modes for remote, plain language, graphic and aural, input and output linkages to large-scale

information 'utilities' and computer networks. Operational prototypes for these exist in the ARPA network and others.

Where 'broadcast' TV is somewhat limited by the number of signals which can be sent without interference, the implementation of this expansion to interactive TV and other communications systems depends on the shift to coaxial cable and community antenna which can dramatically increase the number of channels available for the two-way interactive mode. Predicated on this shift is the ideal, or idealized, concept of the total home information and communications center which, in addition to providing entertainment either as consumer or producer would give direct access to a variety of services. For example, 'instant' library and information storage, access and retrieval, with 'on-line' news facsimile and electronic mail service; remote medical attention and counselling; decentralised education, shopping, banking—and even 'work', where many on-the-job functions could equally well be conducted at home. The overall services and functions can be elaborated as the imagination wills!

2) At the level of the local, national, and international society, many of the individualised services above, expanded to the enhancement of other professional, business, and government requirements at these different levels. With the successive launching and interlinkage of the communications satellite capabilities into interactive networks, the 'global village' will compact further into a closer resemblance to the old face-to-face community. It will be, however, a community in which the pace and 'tempo' of events and 'informational' awareness of events is much greater and much more highly interactive in their feedback relationships than at any other period.
Film, radio, and television broadcasting, if managed in conjunction with space satellites, telegraph and telephone cables, are not far from achieving instantaneous communication on a global scale. The mass media revolution [has] accelerated the tempo and direction of world history. This stupendous flood of messages could not fail to speed up the pace of history in Western Europe, and eventually in Asia, Africa, South America and Oceania. The media of communications were employed in ways that exploited the marginal advantage of a “sign.” By definition, an instrument of communications is specialised to the use of signs, and signs mediate between the subjective events (the “symbols”) of communicators. The signs are parsimonious of physical resources, rendering it feasible to cover vast distances by means of sound, sight or electromagnetic waves. The media rapidly reach the attention of distant persons and cue them to act more quickly than they otherwise would be able to do.

3) The generalised pattern would be a considerable broadening of the spectrum of communications modalities e.g. from the one-to-one mode of the telephone, to the one-to-many mode of the book, radio and broadcast TV—towards many-to-many and many-to-one modalities of different kinds. The range of these technical possibilities suggests a strong trend towards more open, participatory, and ‘democratic’ uses of new video possibilities as they become available to larger numbers of people in a more directly interactive manner. Questioning whether this trend is implicit, or merely assumed, returns us to our more central discussion of the overall environment of the information society.

In considering the larger theoretical aspects of the information society, some of the underlying social implications may be noted as follows:

1) Changes in the central resource base. All other resources are dependent upon information and knowledge for their perception and use. As resources in themselves, information and knowledge are unique in not being lessened or reduced by wider sharing and increased use—rather they tend to gain in the process. In gaining access to, and control of, larger areas of the electromagnetic spectrum via information and communications technologies, society moves from its classically economic zero-sum position to a non-zero-sum game situation of which we know little.

2) Changes in the nature of power, e.g., from the older power base of control over physical product wealth to potential control over the process wealth of information and communications. A new ‘property’ class emerges, whose property is in their heads, i.e., those who are skilled in access to, and manipulation of the new processes. “Who knows what will become more important than who has what.”

Again, where older forms of power are converted into newer power sources:

In a highly communicative world, access to the communications broadcast resource is equivalent to partially political power... the sale of TV time for political advantage is equivalent to a conversion of economic power into political power. Similarly, TV’s insatiable appetite for visible dramatic news provides the mechanism whereby the demonstration—or staged riot—can convert political zeal and energy into political support by galvanising sympathies or inspiring fears and quiet.

Another aspect of the increasingly swift diffusion of news and comment via television is the sharp decrease in the ‘time cushion’ between the occurrence of problems and issues and their entry into public dialogue. Policy and decision makers are increasingly placed in day-to-day crisis management with regard to issues in public view.

To some extent the policy process becomes more open as more interest groups may potentially seek to
intervene, question and seek leverage to influence public affairs. The temptation here, however, is to think in terms of an increasingly homogeneous response by large, broadly informed, national and international audiences with possibilities of instant plebiscite or referendum, ‘soapbox television’, and video voting on crucial issues. The reverse may actually occur as more channels and more interactive means become available.

Though the audience for large TV events is enormous, e.g., up to 1.5 billion for some global programs, the so-called mass audience is already highly diversified. Media multiplication may indeed lead to more fragmented attitudes, more specialised interest groups and decreased concensus.

Whilst subscribing to fashionable terms such as participatory, widening of alternatives, options, choices, etc., we do need to remember that the increase of options and choices also entails increase in the repertoire of responses, increase in the range of value preferences and so on. Though initially expanding the 'sense of community', of common norms and purposes, it is equally possible that a greater variety of media alternatives etc. will also weaken individual identification with any community, as we know it, in favor of a more personally idiosyncratic, more selective and shifting range of allegiances to institutional structures.

In certain ways, this also suggests the emergence of divergent ‘information communities’ with an increasingly heterogeneous pattern of individual response. The polity, for example, may become more issue oriented but on a changing issue-to-issue basis and hence more difficult to mobilise on broad concensual patterns.

It may also be suggested that, due to economies of scale and development, information and communications could become more centrally controlled resources, especially where coupled with a political climate of high centralisation and increased surveillance. The counter influences towards this are, obviously, more diversity of accessible systems and more individuals skilled in organising and using the new media. The latter, however, may be limited in effect by their stratified class position.

3) Impacts on the individual. Many of the negatives in the information society have already been voiced—the use of communications to mold public opinion, increased surveillance and monitoring of personal data, the invasion of privacy in various forms, the dissonance and strains of over stimulation and information ‘swamping’, etc.

The positive aspects have been given less attention. The amplification of capacities could significantly enhance the power that individuals may exercise over their personal lives. This is already evident in the extension of the sensing, storage and processing range of individuals—where transportation technologies have extended physical mobility, information and communications have greatly extended individual ‘psychic’ mobility.

For example, the copying machine, allowing every writer to be his own publisher, already makes for an extraordinary flow of personalised information exchange. In combination with the telephone, terminal and other devices, such elements have already created new associational groupings which transcend conventional institutional barriers. Associated with this is the rise in ‘underground’ papers, journals, books, film, audio and video cassette exchanges which now
constitute a wide spectrum of personalised information and communications networks. As the technical devices become more available to more people at less cost, they have tended to spur a new wave in cultural forms.

The more specifically cultural impacts of television, and associated mass media, require separate attention. The general tendency is to extrapolate the 'hardware' possibilities into the future—with insufficient regard to our assumptions about, and understanding of, television's cultural and symbolic functions even in the present.

So far, we have been dealing mainly with the instrumental and cognitive aspects of television rather than the affective. In considering the latter, we are really talking more about the 'signals' which change us rather than through which we change our environment! Human society is essentially more centrally dependent on its common symbol systems and their affective role in communications than on its physically effective and instrumental technologies. The flow of symbolic messages provides both its cohesion and its 'reality'.

Communication is essentially a social process. Sharing does not mean simply passing something, some sign from one person to another, it implies also that this sign is mutually accepted, recognised and held in common ownership or use by each person.5

In the larger sense our present society, with its particular qualities of speed of change, interdependence, global diffusion of information and innovation is the latest phase of a massive and ongoing cultural evolution. World communications, particularly radio and TV, diffuse through and interpenetrate local cultural traditions, and provide more commonly shared cultural experiences in a manner which is unparalleled in human history. To a considerable extent the media are a common cultural environment sharing and transmuting human symbolic needs and their expression on a world scale. In providing a constant stream of moving, fleeting images of that world for our daily appraisal they are part of an emerging planetary culture—whose relation to, and comparison with, previous cultural forms may be somewhat uncertain.

In reiterating the commonality and 'global sharing' of sets of images and symbols, we should, however, qualify the term mass culture as applied most typically to television. Mass culture and 'mass society' are concepts which grew out of the dystopian vision of standardised cultural forms, and their widely shared sets of common values which were presumed to lead to a society of increasingly uniform life styles, aims and purposes. It was viewed as a 'low culture' society whose mass-produced products were intrinsically inferior to the 'high culture' forms which preceded it.

On the score of social uniformity and lack of variety, the more denotably standardised society was the agrarian peasant community with its limited repertoire of socio-cultural forms and possible life strategies. The mass-production phase of the industrial society actually provides a far greater variety of cultural forms and life styles. The shift to a post industrial information society portends an even greater diversity of social and cultural forms.

The high-scale societies of the Western World are becoming increasingly heterogeneous. They are becoming increasingly differentiated, comprising thousands of minority groups, each joined around common interests, common value systems and shared stylistic preferences that differ from those of other groups. As the sheer volume of information and knowledge increases, as technological developments further expand the range of
options, and as awareness of the liberty to deviate and differentiate spreads, more variations are possible. Rising affluence or, even more, growing desire for at least subcultural identity induces groups to exploit these options and to invent new ones. We might almost say that irregular cultural permutations are becoming the rule.  

We have then few critical precedents with which to evaluate our present cultural milieu—let alone to conjecture about its future. Most of the physical facilities which render it possible have not previously existed, and their transformative capacities pose more fundamental questions regarding cultural and social values then we may hint at here.

This examination of the overall position of the mass media is important in considering the future of television. The general commitment of those critically concerned with that future is to perpetuate an evaluative scale derived from the fine arts—whose application to a medium such as television may be singularly inappropriate. The traditional canons of uniqueness, endurance over time, universality of appeal etc. can give little insightful guidance to the evaluation of a form in which such qualities are rarely present. Such evaluation is also often linked to conditions of social and moral judgment whose pertinence may even be suspect in the fine arts.

The moral criticism of television has been particularly specious in dwelling upon its consumer-oriented aspects, its apparent tendencies not only to corrupt the young but to degrade the emotional experience and aesthetic taste of the older. One apt quotation may suffice here:

Going to the theater is a festive occasion, while seeing television at home becomes an everyday routine....We do not become part of an audience but remain alone even if we are a particle in an invisible mass audience. We are not especially dressed as for an opera performance but, on the contrary, most television viewing is done in a state of highly informal dress. There is an utter disrespect for the play and its author, with the exception of rare performances. Nobody bothers about wilfully interrupting the show by eating, talking, telephoning and leaving the room, and nobody seems to be bothered much by interruptions for commercials. The lack of awe is a form of indifference and alienation from one's own emotion.

The lack of formality, of awe and constraint, may seem somewhat salutary! We may note, however, the confusion between one kind of cultural experience and another and the implicit demand that they be treated as though in the same plane.

There is also a denial of the both/and quality of television (and other areas of mass media) in that one is not forced to choose between one experience or another but may flexibly shift from one to another— and read a book or talk on the telephone at the same time. A somewhat similar point has been made in relation to classical music, though with more invidious conclusions:

all music can now be heard at any hour and as domestic background. Tape, radio, the phonograph, the cassette, will emit an unending stream of music, at any moment or circumstance of the day...It explains the prodigality of the baroque and of the pre-classical chamber ensemble in the L.P. catalogue. So much of this music was, in fact, conceived as Tafelmusik and aural tapestry around the busy room.

When we turn to other critical stances within the media we may find them equally suspect as indicators of the future. One trend is the cultivation and encouragement of an avant-garde video art form whose implicit goal is to rescue the medium from 'the wasteland'. Admirable and interesting as this may be in terms of the quality of the work of individual artists who seek to use the obvious potential of television as
an expression medium, much of its output so far has been somewhat conventional.

In all too many cases, the actual products tend to be mere animated versions of what has already been prefigured in abstract painting, kinetic sculpture, light shows and film. There seems to be two main directions, one—to exploit the range of technical effects either with the camera itself, or in ‘direct video’ without the camera but using the various possibilities of direct electronic input into the receiver (a kind of video Moog synthesizer effect), or distorting the broadcast signal through various means to produce video collage effects; the other is the ‘kino-eye’, or candid camera, approach of continuous or discrete monitoring of processes or human actions and their transmission 'as given', or in combination with the former technical transformations.

The potential is certainly there for enlarging the spectrum of aural and visual image and symbol manipulation and making it available to more direct interaction. This point is well made in the following computer-oriented comment:

Could the functions of TV and the computer be integrated into some new device so as to be most useful and helpful in man's intellectual development? One may envision a device which is like a TV in that it is capable of generating visual images of rich and wondrous variety as well as displaying symbolic forms, while it is also like a computer in that it invites active participation of the viewer by enabling him to enter into the generation and control of the information being displayed. Then, for the first time, man would have the ability to create visual images easily for communicating ideas that he hitherto had little or no facility for expression.9

One may repeat again that the quality and promise of such work depends on individual talents which should in no way be denigrated. The lack of rigor in internal criticism of such work, however, partakes of the 'Emperor's clothes' syndrome. Our larger theoretical question is its relevance within the context of the future of television. There is certainly a strong tendency to overvalue such experimental modes as being on a higher plane than ordinary programming.

What is particularly apparent in such overvaluation is a denial of the larger symbolic and ritualistic functions of both the manifest and latent 'content' of television—as even extending to the commercial break. This is one area in which our critical appreciation of the mass media has, in general, been rather weak, with, of course, some notable exceptions such as McLuhan and, earlier, Parker Tyler.

The latter's stance, though referring more specifically to film criticism rather than television, is still relevant:

Devotees of both stage and novel who scorn movies as below the serious level—as standing in relation to true art somewhat as the circus does to the legitimate stage. But unfortunately these judges, unaware of the ritual importance of the screen, its baroque energy and protean symbolism, are unwarrantably summary, basically uneducated in the movie medium.10

We might argue that it is in this area that our primary concern with the future lies—with the role of television as one of the main channels which provides a rich profusion of symbolic images, usable configurations of experiential behavior, and social metaphors which enable people to adapt to and control the rapid frequency of changes in the human condition. The collective symbols of the society are to be found here rather than exclusively in the fine arts.

The constant re-creation and ritualistic repetition of such metaphoric images matches up to the requirements of a highly mobile and plastic
environment in providing a stream of replaceable and expendable ikons of human experience. Secular by definition but mythopoetic in function, the video ikons afford both the recurrent stability and ritualised predictability of the standard format series and the changing topicality (and fantasy) of the 'specials', the news, and other shows.

One may also underline the ways in which the range of ikonic heroes is adaptable to, and identifiable within, a wide range of marginal and minority audiences for whom some specifiable trait may be important. For example, the fat man, the crippled, and the aged, as exemplified by Cannon, Ironside and—the geriatric as detective—Barnaby Jones, or the blind as in Longstreet. It is not without latent significance that the nonviolent hero of Kung Fu is a half caste with the singular name of Cain. Even Paladin has crossed the frontier into the early twentieth century as the aging Hec Ramsey—trading in his travelling gun for a microscope and a Holmesian preoccupation with forensic science.

As I view it, then, one of the main problems in discussing the future of television lies with the critical viewpoint, i.e., as posing a dichotomy between TV as medium for high art or as "banal wasteland" of supposed mass culture. We have no overarching theory of aesthetics or cultural values which embraces both ends of what is essentially a fluid continuum rather than a polarised dichotomy. One need not seek for some internal consistency within such a theory—which might try, for example, to equate the intimate creative gesture of a brush drawing with the collective satellite broadcast of a Presley spectacular—on some monotone hierarchical scale. The former is part of, and expresses, the private dimension of experience, the latter of the public environment—the significantly common element is that appreciation of the one does not preclude participation in the other.

At best, such a theory or aesthetic need only be descriptive and inclusive rather than hierarchical and exclusive. Its beginning formulation may be found in the early discussions surrounding the origins of pop art which extended aesthetic meaning and significance to the everyday objects and processes of contemporary living.

In terms of the future of art or the future of television, or indeed the future of culture, we are patently moving towards the cafeteria style of a cultural smorgasbord rather than the formal stages of an eight course dinner! It is no longer a question of either/or but of both/and—as a vastly enlarged range of experience becomes available according to personal taste and desire.

To an increasing extent, the future in general is potentially more open to our individual and collective choices and options than ever before, rather than being determined by externally constraining agencies. The role which television may play in molding that future is best served by enlarging rather than restricting the potential for both individual and collective participation in its interactive use. Our task is to evaluate the policies, and preferred directions, which may aid its role in broadening the imaginative reach and behavioral repertoire of human possibilities.
FOOTNOTES


5. The 'common sharing' aspect might also be qualified. As used to define the supposed coherence of the youth culture deriving from a common identity of symbols and meanings carried in pop music, it neglects the range and diversity of such music itself and its diverse audiences. A recent study suggests, indeed, that, "Although pop has undoubtedly extended the range of expressive styles open to adolescents, we would argue that their underlying values and definitions continue to come from class-based systems, rather than from pop...rather than creating a classless society of the young, pop is reaffirming class divisions." Graham Murdock and Robin McCror, "Scoubi, Skins and Contemporary Pop," New Society Vol. 23, No. 547 [29 March 1973]: 692.


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