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# *Art Journal*

*Fall 1985*

*Video: The Reflexive Medium*

*Guest Editor: Sara Hornbacher*



**Bart Robbett,**  
*Backyard Earth Station, 1984.*

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# Art Journal

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**Correction:** The volume number of the *Manet* issue (Spring 1985) is incorrectly given on the Contents page of that issue. The correct number is: *Vol. 45*.

# Editor's Statement: Video: The Reflexive Medium

By Sara Hornbacher

**I**t has been my intention as Guest Editor to suggest the scope of video art's brief history and to isolate particular theoretical issues, without recourse to a totalizing principle. The eleven articles and reviews that constitute this issue serve to distinguish a number of possible methods of analysis and styles of discourse, and Barbara London's "Selected Chronology" is included to assist further historical research of this twenty-year period (1963–83). As artist/editor, I have adopted a personal style of appropriation, assuming or annexing the persuasions necessary to the project of introducing this first *Art Journal* issue devoted to video. This approach utilizes a montage of the fragment, the direct quotation of the authors I have chosen, and an enactment of style in the post-modern spirit.

In the opening paragraph of his article, Benjamin Buchloh observes this period concisely with regard to the development of video and its relationship to contemporary theory:

The usage of video technology in artistic practice since the mid sixties has undergone rapid and drastic changes. This makes it a particularly significant topic for the study of the shifts to which art in general has been subjected since the conclusion of post-Minimal and Conceptual art, the context within which video production established itself firmly as a valid practice of representation-production.

It is clear that these changes concern the affiliation of art practice with other discourses (film, television, advertising), the conditions of its institutional con-

tainment, and its audience relationship as well. Buchloh promotes a theoretical discourse relative to these through the rather comprehensive discussion of the work of four major video artists. He posits a post-avant-garde practice that is reflective of the critical authority in images themselves, recognizing that there is no neutral information or technology and insisting on an artistic practice that informs its audience concerning the ease with which cultural authority is molded into the realm of objective reality.

*Electra: Electricity and Electronics in 20th-Century Art*, a massive exhibition at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris in 1984, is critically examined through its catalogue by Katherine Dieckmann, who applies a definitive view of postmodernism's task. Following *Electra's* survey of technological development and art historical periods relative to electricity, as outlined by the exhibition organizer and catalogue essayist Frank Popper, Dieckmann summarizes, "The history of electrical inventions in art can be interpreted as a series of impulses towards the creation of an image-producing tool, towards video." The appearance of new inventions in the period from 1880 to 1918—particularly mechanics, optics, and, finally, electricity—corresponded to the development of modern aesthetics, which ultimately gave rise to parallel philosophic ideas leading to changes in perception. That we are again witnessing dramatic dialectical shifts is evident in the very notion of postmodernism. As cultural experience becomes increasingly synthetic and simulated, contemporary culture is obsessed with video—as form, as technology, as consumable

effects and mediated environments. Video embraces the very paradox of pluralist qualities (access and diffusion) with the modernist trope, and tools, of technological progress.

Video, inextricably bound to technological changes, carries with it the priority of advancement, represented in the search for better equipment, better image resolution, and ever more efficient compositional control. Not long after Nam June Paik distorted television physically by placing an external magnet on the surface of the screen, the first portable video equipment was marketed in the United States by SONY/Japan. Lucinda Furlong tracks the historical development of a genre called "image-processed video" that claims Paik as one of its foremost influences. "Challenging the institution of television in the late 1960s also meant creating images that *looked* different from standard TV." Thus, image processing grew out of an intensive period of experimentation; it was at once a modernist exploration of the basic properties of the medium and a subversion of the technology transmitting Vietnam into our living rooms. During the seventies video became institutionalized as media centers were organized and funded primarily through state and federal agencies, and university art and humanities departments expanded curriculum and faculty to promote this new cultural form. These institutional systems of support permitted a few persevering pioneers to carve out personalized territories where image-processing tools were developed and utilized as a means towards understanding the structural properties of the electronic image. With the advent of the microchip in the mid seventies, video

was off and running towards its digital future. In the mid eighties it is increasingly difficult to identify a distinct genre of image processing, despite a continuing school of practitioners, as more artistic productions utilize certain varieties of digital imaging and control. Whatever future promise digital-imaging techniques hold for artistic production, extra-aesthetic utilizations problematize their discursive use in video art.

Many of the early practitioners viewed their activity as the locus or site of a profound social criticism directed in particular at the domination of individuals by technological culture, manifested most visibly in broadcast television but also in modernist aesthetics. The video artists who aligned themselves with the modernist project to put forward the new electronic medium as the message were (despite the anarchist content of much of their work) seen as perpetuators of the previous institutionalized art forms by most members of the alternative television movement. Reflecting the political turmoil of the sixties and early seventies, Deirdre Boyle elucidates the split that occurred, dividing the video artists and video documentarians into two camps. For both, video offered the dream of creating something new, of staking out a claim to a virgin territory. Although there was a distinctly formalized strategy in the deconstruction of the television set as material object and the re-presentation of the TV signal as material, perhaps the more transgressive behavior of this period was embraced by the guerrilla television movement, which sought to challenge the more public, information-based technology—broadcast television. Both spheres of activity were “molded by the insights of Marshall McLuhan, Buckminster Fuller, Norbert Wiener, and Teilhard de Chardin.” Subject to the wider cultural effects of the encroaching conservatism of the late seventies, including changes in government funding patterns, the demise of guerrilla television served as an indicator of the sociological changes occurring in this country. To a great extent, the intellectual and physical energy of this communal enterprise has now been transmuted into the theoretical discourse of the eighties—urgent given the incursion of pluralist kitsch. A postmodernism of reaction is more entrenched than a postmodernism of resistance.

It would be difficult to conceive of postmodernism without continental theory—structuralism and poststructuralism, in particular—as a strategy of deconstruction to rewrite modernism’s universal techniques in terms of “syn-

thetic contradictions,” to challenge its master narratives with the “discourse of others.” The theoretical practice of deconstruction is paramount in a number of the articles published here.

The entry of psychoanalysis into post-structural readings of cinema gave rise to the analysis of the spectator’s identification with the basic cinematic apparatus and physical position relative to it. In the arena of modern film theory, meaning, significance, and value are never thought to be discovered, intuited, or otherwise attained naturally. Everything results from a mechanics of work: the work of ideology, the work of the psyche, the work of a certain language designed to bring psyche and society into coincidence, and the work of technology enabling that language to so operate. In “The Passion for Perceiving: Expanded Forms of Film and Video Art,” John Hanhardt traces the historical precedents for video practice, particularly video installations, to independent cinema. Citing Christian Metz’s *The Imaginary Signifier* as title source, Hanhardt addresses the specific spectator participation in four museum installations—two involving film and two involving video—to point to the differing strategies employed to engage the viewer in the text of the work.

Recent analysis of the “enunciative apparatus” of visual representation from a feminist perspective reveals the designatory ability of media to construct gender identification. Marita Sturken’s review of *Revising Romance: New Feminist Video*, a video exhibition distributed by the American Federation of Arts, discusses the construction of the “subject” within the text. Curated by Lynn Podheiser, this show broaches the issue of romance—a subject associated primarily with women—and asks, in effect, “What are the psychological, political, and aesthetic consequences of popular ideals of eternal passion and transcendent love?” Sturken suggests that these videotapes represent the first stage of intervention in the continuing project to “identify the structure of the opposition’s hierarchy and its inherent vocabulary” in order to replace it. Furthermore, although *Revising Romance* has a specific topic, it is an admirable attempt to isolate this topic within the panoply of issues relevant to it.

In *Pure War*, Paul Virilio states that the problem is not to use technology but to realize that one is used by it. *The Un/Necessary Image* is a volume of works by artists dealing reflexively with the content and meaning of public information, with the “public image” generated by mass media, advertising, and communications systems. Originally planned as an exhibition at M.I.T., it

became instead a major publication, a more portable dissemination of curatorial intent. Marshall Reese reviews this crossover publication and the works presented by the twenty-one artists, many of them artists also working in video. Reese notes that the editors have striven to arrange the contents in critical response to those corporate styles of layout they are appropriating, annual reports and museum catalogues, for example. As a summary representative of all the artists in this photo-text exhibition, Reese points to Hans Haacke’s statement about the role of the committed artist with a direct quotation of Bertolt Brecht’s 1934 remarks about the “Five Difficulties in Writing the Truth”: “the courage to write the truth, although it is being suppressed; the intelligence to recognize it, although it is being covered up; the judgment to choose those in whose hands it becomes effective; the cunning to spread it among them.”

In *Tropics of Discourse*, Hayden White suggests that “post-criticism” (-modernist, -structuralist) is constituted precisely by the application of the devices of modernist art to critical representations; furthermore, that the principal device taken over by the critics and theorists is the compositional pair collage/montage. Collins and Milazzo, increasingly noted for their dense style of scrutiny of contemporary art, culture, and aesthetics, have contributed “The New Sleep: Stasis and the Image-Bound Environment,” a paraliterary deconstruction of the instrumentality of several video artists’ works within the context of mapping a more inclusive theoretical practice of artistic practice. As Rosalind Krauss has noted, postmodernist practice is not defined in relation to a given medium, but rather in relation to the logical operations on a set of cultural terms. Collins and Milazzo’s collaborative practice dissolves the line traditionally drawn between creative and critical forms.

As the nexus for global cultural dissemination, video is the site of myriad problematics. Barbara London has written that “like printmaking, photography, and film, video has artistic and commercial applications” and that “both approaches utilize the same telecommunications technology, but reach audiences of different magnitude.” That ever greater numbers of the art-school educated are engaged professionally in some cultural sector of commerce relative to advertising, television, and entertainment is obvious in the eighties. Indicative of the epistemological break occurring is the MOMA programming of video exhibitions that include artists who have successfully utilized a digested



avant-garde vocabulary of techniques and effects in their drive for expression in high-tech modes—in order to reach maximum distribution as music television. Here, the postmodern notion of *la mode r tro*—retrospective styling—exceeds even the newest technologies, and exemplifies the cultural consumption of all pasts, the fragmentation of time into a series of perpetual presents.

Lori Zippay reviews five publications, all international in their scope, all emanating from the period 1983-84. Although the seventies saw an evolution of independent video activity around the world, particularly in Europe, the wide-scale production, funding, exhibition, and distribution by artists seemed a distinctively American phenomenon. Whereas the seminal influences in video's infancy as an art form originated within the European avant-garde, American art since 1980 increasingly suggests the construct of television, while European video remains more clearly contained within the continuum of contemporary art or even cinematic traditions, having less in common visually, syntactically, and conceptually with television. Four of the publications are catalogues for international video festivals, which are gaining popularity as the worldwide network for video curators, artists, and critics grows. Zippay sees this "internationalization of the medium" as revealing, resulting in the distanced investigation of the art form outside any specific cultural context, and as leading to a more informed critical dialogue and a corresponding body of theoretic literature.

In recognition of the indigeneous nature of video activity in America, Martha Gever investigates the "Pressure Points" for producers, audiences, and the sustaining power structures. In establishing her argument she discusses the development of public support for the varying kinds (or genres) of productions and the distribution of this work to both closed-circuit and television audiences. Gever situates the current effort of American museums to establish a legitimate lineage for video art. She suggests that while social-change issues are frequently mentioned in introductory curatorial statements, collective political videotapes are less frequently included in the programming. She notes that the neglect of the considerable contribution of the documentary points to the inadequacy of video history conceived only as art history, maintaining that artist's television is "a social structure, a cultural condition."

Ann-Sargent Wooster's theses concerning the historical origins of certain conventions in video art are enlightened by her graphically visual descriptive

style. In her article, "Why Don't They Tell Stories Like They Used To?," Wooster traces art historical precedents leading to video, twentieth-century avant-garde ideas regarding the structure of contemporary experience, and the appropriate devices/methods for narrative expression of modernity. In discussing individual videotapes to illustrate her points regarding fragmentation, disjunction, and chance operations, Wooster prioritizes artistic production as the nexus for discourse and provides further insights as artist/historian/critic into the failure of art criticism to embrace video art as a valid art form.

In the mid eighties, the extent to which the globe has become a village is readily apparent. As Dieckmann points out in "Electra": "Images generated by electronic means can be manipulated to lend a veneer of veracity to any number of ends." Video is a medium in suspension, bridging modernist and postmodern conditions with a variety of pluralistic features. It exerts a postmodernist tendency towards the interdisciplinary; many artists have entered video—out of other fields or afresh—for precisely the postmodern potential for a variety of practices and the possibility for playful experimentation. But video artworks, by the very nature of their continuity with philosophic tradition, cannot be exempted from investigation into the nature of their medium by a protective cloak of scientific perspective. Artworks generated by technological means require a broader discourse than the rationalist one of the "forward."

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# Electra Myths: Video, Modernism, Postmodernism

By Katherine Dieckmann

*Every technology produces, provokes, programs a specific accident.*<sup>1</sup>—Paul Virilio

## Machination and Modernism

Confronted with the machine-crazed tunnel vision of his Futurist cohorts—particularly Marinetti, who pledged fervently to replace the romantic moon as poetic muse with a new goddess, Electra or electricity—Umberto Boccioni painted his *States of Mind* triptych in 1911 as a corrective to pro-electrical fever. *Those Who Stay*, *The Farewells*, and *Those Who Go* were Boccioni's titles for three stages of existence in an age of increased speed and a corresponding frenzy in science and art. The first moment in this study of progressive movement, *Those Who Stay*, depicts full figures inclined slightly to the right, ready to take off, but imprisoned in bold vertical bars of paint. *The Farewells* is a quasi-Cubist swirl with semifigurative shapes encircling the broken image of a moving train: an agitation in process. And in *Those Who Go*, the aesthetic of turbulence is realized: the vertical shafts of *Those Who Stay* metamorphose into hyper diagonals; the full figures are now faces, rushing up and practically out of the right side of the frame, as though in too much of a hurry to wait for their bodies to catch up.

Boccioni's triptych represents the sequential movement so crucial to the Futurists in the wake of Muybridge and Lumière; but more important, it attempts to express the emotional or psychical states attached to the first great rush of technological fervor. The triptych provides a metaphor for attitudes to "the new." Perhaps these images seemed reactionary at the time, a longing to "wait a while" and reflect

(reflection as nostalgia). Today they are decidedly melancholic, evoking the inauguration of a great machine age whose demise we have by now witnessed and documented. Jean Tinguely's self-destructing machine, *Hommage à New York*, transformed the Museum of Modern Art's polite sculpture garden into a site of Hegelian inverse creation in 1960. Out of annihilation, the effort to hit degree zero, came a brief but intense coalescing of mechanical-luminescent-kinetic interests in art, which burnt themselves out, side by side with the modernism that had prompted them, by the end of the decade. The Museum of Modern Art held a requiem for the theme in 1968—*The Machine as Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age*—which, like Boccioni, bemoaned a loss of innocence. In his foreword to the catalogue for the show, its curator K. G. Pontus Hulten wrote: "the mechanical machine—which can most easily be defined as an imitation of our muscles—is losing its dominating position among the tools of mankind; while electronic and chemical devices—which imitate the processes of the brain and nervous system—are becoming increasingly important."<sup>2</sup>

The machine's unplanned obsolescence and the possibility for nonhuman replication—not just imitation—of cognitive processes coincided with and perhaps encouraged the "closure" of modernism in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The unlikely pair of Pop Art and Minimalism together drove artmaking into a corner of disengagement (one as pose, the other as absence); the heightened kineticism of the sixties has agitated itself into a standstill. Postmod-

ernism arose from the fallout, dragging its forefather along with a prefix that acknowledges an awkward relationship to its past. The sense of contradistinction built into that term points to its chief feature: a willingness to reconceive linear history in favor of a belief in discontinuity. In that reconceiving, the artwork's impermeability and self-containment under modernism could be penetrated by exterior forces—politics, ideology, even other artworks. Art is interpreted as a process of information rather than as a logical development of individual works. Postmodernism challenged conventional art history—its structure of orderly sequences of stylistic action and reaction and its privileging of the object.<sup>3</sup>

The prevailing beliefs of postmodernism are difficult to situate in relation to technology and the myth of progress as it has been phrased under modernism. The case of technology and art lends itself easily to dualisms: reason versus inspiration, logic versus the irrational, the intellect versus passion. The clichés associated with artmaking—that it is an outpouring of the creative, the uncontrolled, the spontaneous, harnessed through form—counter the conventions of the scientific process, which involve formal mastery of a different sort, an attempt to make empirical reality "knowable" through a tidy program of investigation, experimentation, and conclusion. When artists take on the concerns and tools of science, it is supposedly to "humanize" this process.

With regard to technology itself, there is a healthy polemic of pro and con attitudes towards tools, which are assembled by hand but invariably tend

to operate without the need for direct human intervention. On the one hand, there is a Futuro-ecstatic embrace of "the new" (a salient feature of modernism and the grounding for Boccioni's paintings) and, on the other, a quasi-Luddite strain of suspicion, resistance, and skepticism. The latter strain troubled the forward push of modernism. Under postmodernism, a mode of thinking that interrogates binaries in general, the relationship of art and technology is unduly problematic. We can locate this partially in the loss of the machine as a continuous, historically traceable thread in art history, as it gives way to information-based art such as video and computer-generated pieces. After a slew of exhibitions devoted to multimedia in the late sixties and early seventies,<sup>4</sup> large-scale attempts to situate technology's relationship to art practice have been practically nonexistent.

Meanwhile technology advances outside the art world with its characteristic stealth. We cannot see these changes. Our hearts beat a little faster, our eyes blink a bit more rapidly, as an unsurpassed period of invention profoundly alters our conventional time-space continuum.<sup>5</sup> Scientific developments, which always pointed towards "the future," tend now to encourage a kind of intensified present. "Instantaneousness" encroaches on daily life in the form of the computer, which gathers random and distant information and absorbs it into a heightened present with the turn of a switch. "Duration," says Paul Virilio in his dialogue with Sylvère Lotringer, *Pure War*, "is the last commodity" (p. 28). The machine art of the sixties, with its naïve utopianism and equally naïve critique of futural faith, is not just obsolete—it's antediluvian. The terms of scientific progress have changed so extremely that positivism is increasingly untenable. The war industry perfects its techniques of delivering an absolute instantaneousness, the nuclear bomb. Time and speed face new pressures as a cultural desire for the instantaneous (exemplified by the omnipresent computer) makes immediacy the key pleasure; it comes as no surprise that nuclear-weapons experts term a megaton explosion the "orgasmic whump."<sup>6</sup> We must remember Martin Heidegger's call, made more than twenty years ago, to unmask the *meaning* of technology, which is never "neutral."<sup>7</sup> The art world is not exempt from this task.

#### *The Case of "Electra"*

The massive exhibition *Electra: Electricity and Electronics in 20th-Century Art* at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris in 1984 is crucial to this

interrogation of technology. Spanning the entire twentieth century, *Electra* is the first recent large exhibition organized in the spirit of the multimedia shows of fifteen years ago, and it was organized and cosponsored by a large corporation, Electricité de France, which wished to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Society of Electrical and Electronic Engineers in an "aesthetic" way, and with a sense of spectacle. Undoubtedly the utility's ample dowry prompted this particular marriage of age-old lover-enemies, art and science. The art congratulates the scientific institution for a job well done. Electrical and electronic motifs throughout modern art history attest to the persistence of progress, legitimizing its value through culture. The investigation into the consequence of development—the Heideggerian inquiry into the *nature* of technology—is deterred by the artworks.

*Electra*—both the show and its accompanying catalogue, which is now our sole means of experiencing it—has received no attention in the English-language art press: a bizarre case of continental divide in this, the glorious age of telecommunication. Actually, the silence seems fitting considering the show's carefully cloaked isolationist stance. Despite a contemporary focus and an effort, as its curator Frank Popper puts it, to show how works are "situated in relationship to others, especially with regard to present-day debate on Avant Garde, Post-Modernism, and the relations between art, science, technology and society."<sup>8</sup> *Electra* protects its artworks from questioning by allying them to science, characterizing them as specifically modernist tendencies that develop according to an internal logic. Popper (who organized the influential *Kunst-Licht-Kunst* show at the Stedelijk Van Abbe Museum in 1966) states that he and his fellow curators, all of them French, decided that "the exhibition should not offer a didactic, linear path," but work via "a number of distinctive recollections of the recent past" (p. 24). This position seems a nod to the prevailing poststructuralist mood, both within the culture that gave us Derrida, Lacan, and Foucault and within certain branches of art criticism.

Still, it's just that, a nod, for somehow these "recollections" fall into a straightforward progression. There are a few acknowledged aberrations within the field of artistic development; neon, for example, has remained constant in form but varied in its uses from the mid forties to the present. *Electra* charts a model of rational development, a method of reading urged by the extensive chronology that prefaces the book

and the unfolding of "movements" in time. The science-related subject matter encroaches on the presentation of the works—well-known Futurist, Constructivist, and machine-art pieces until 1945; lasers, neon, holograms, copy art, kinetic sculpture, and more, post-1945—contorting them into a model of linear succession. Thus *Electra* moves seamlessly from the Bell Telephone (1876), through Raoul Dufy's monumental history-of-the-moment fresco, *La Fée Electricité* (1937) (permanently installed at the Musée and a choice reason for holding *Electra* there), to Disney Production's *Tron* (1982). The serial presentation of "just facts" is then amplified by Popper's lengthy introduction, which is in turn fleshed out by essays on "special subjects" (art and industry, the importance of Japan, music and digitalization, etc.). The *Electra* presentation provides a textbook synopsis of inventions and "isms" with which to enclose the current of electricity—of *power*—coursing through modern (and into postmodern) times.

These movements are accounted for without developed references to events like world wars. Even the critical curatorial breakmark of 1945 fails to be explicated as a point where fascination with machine art had to face its connection with war making (where the machine's main function became the production of war). This progressive militarism has reached the crisis point explored in *Pure War*. That such political and economic forces are obfuscated in traditional art history is nothing new. But to unify art and science (science as technology) requires greater attention to socioeconomic and political repercussions. A pixel is not a paintbrush. A monitor, a digital photograph, an electronic score are products of a multinational industry that also manufactures the devices that help man decide whether or not to push the button—or push it for him.<sup>9</sup> These tools exist within a milieu of political-military decision making. *Electra's* bluntly utopian presentation is a disturbing document of our times—art historical and otherwise. Boccioni's warnings from the beginning of this century remain pertinent. A faith in the forward, in *speed*, sent the heads whirling out of his picture plane in the third part of the *States of Mind* triptych.

#### *Electra History or the Birth of Video*

The history of electrical inventions in art can be interpreted as a series of impulses towards the creation of an image-producing tool, towards video. It is useful first to get a sense of the kind of video work exhibited in *Electra*, then go back and look at specific prototypes and historical tendencies that may show how

very reductive the *Electra* video presentation is. The works selected for the video section (most of the tapes are by French artists and relatively unknown in the United States) by Dominique Belloir are, to judge from the program notes, overwhelmingly supportive of the miracles of high technology and the way it may surmount the formal difficulties of more "archaic" forms such as painting, sculpture, and writing. Thus we have Colette Devle's examination of light, line, and "the electronic weave" (the minimalist grid?): "Form is dust of light, a whirlwind of sight, wind-of-colors, windswept memory, and all of this is painting." Or Patrick Bousquet's claim that video is "not merely a medium" but an object, and it is its objecthood that requires the greatest attention. Jean-Paul Fargier makes no bones about his preoccupation with literature as he relates *Finnegans Wake* to electronic production (the catalogue fails to make Fargier's relation to Nam June Paik, the man who made the Joyce-video association famous, clear—although Paik participated in the creation of the tape).<sup>10</sup> Paik himself is notably absent here. Popper devotes a scant paragraph to him in his introduction, stating his importance but noting, without further explanation, that his presence in *Electra* will be "modest" (p. 52). In light of *Electra*'s obsessive devotion to "memories," Paik would seem perfect, conjuring up as he does the ghost of Duchamp and the spirit of collective collaboration in his Fluxus period. But among tapes that seem strongly committed to a glowing embrace of technological tools, Paik's provocative positions (exemplified by his quirky *TV Buddha*, 1974, and ominously techno-tropical *TV Garden*, 1974–78) would mar a near-uniform tone of positivist production.

With a sense of the kind of work selected for *Electra*, we can now go back and travel along Popper's modernist summation of art movements and relate them to video, filling in the curator's numerous ellipses. In the period from 1900 to 1984, Popper situates three tendencies of electricity in art: iconographic usages (depicting the light bulb or imaging of light but not employing electrical light itself); "energetic" usages (machine art, kineticism); and, finally, the invention of tools able to communicate, diffuse, or generate information and images. Each tendency has a unique history, and there are, of course, moments of cross-pollination and parallel development. What is important here is how varying electrical uses point in some way to the need or desire for the video medium, which incorporates light, electricity, movement, the potential for



Fig. 1 "Illumination-as-Nostalgia": Paris, "the city of light" (light spectacle of 1937), from *Electra* catalogue, p. 136.

perception over time, and immediacy.

Popper divides the art of this century into three main periods: 1900–45 marks the years of "positive development" of electrical themes by the Futurists and Constructivists and "ironic" or "irrational" stances by the Dadaists and Surrealists; 1945–70 the time of "medium domination"; and from 1970 to the present the age of "computer and electronic domination." The Futurists founded a cult of the electric in the early decades of the century, championing speed, the forward, and the notion of "progress." Electricity was used imagistically in painting, sculpture, and poetry, but also as a central philosophic tenet: Marinetti nearly called Futurism "Electricism." Popper attends to the obvious Futurist interests in representing motion (particularly in transportation—the automobile and locomotive),<sup>11</sup> but excludes the Futurist absorption with the question of information and its dispersal. The manifestos, the polemical paintings and texts, the overall conviction in a dynamism of positions, made the Futurists great publicists of their own ideals. They realized that artworks can dispense ideology—an

ideology of speed and rapid transit that ties directly into the highly advanced communications processes of our own age.<sup>12</sup>

In the twenties and thirties the Constructivists shifted electrical usages from merely imagistic to actual. Gabo's revision of Cubist and Futurist attempts to reconceive time and space (his *Construction in Space with Balance on Two Points*, 1925, is a good example) offers both a critique of and an advance on electrical themes to that point. Popper discusses only the Constructivists' elevation of the kinetic and their development of the multimedia performance using light, motion, and spectator involvement (shifts of no small import to video). The works of Tatlin, Gabo, Moholy-Nagy, Lissitzky, Malevich, and their followers are treated merely with concern for what concrete (physically recognizable) changes in the electrical theme were made. But of equal vitality to the Constructivist enterprise is the centrality of building, and building via architectural models and kinetic rhythms, via altered perceptions of real time and the use of scientific paradigms of measurement

and experiment to create new visual experiences. There is, for example, Gabo's plan to alter the shape of Berlin through lighting in his proposed "Light Fest" (1929). (Paris underwent a metamorphosis similar to the one Gabo had planned for Berlin with the heroic luminism of the *International Exposition of Art and Technology in Modern Life* in 1937; what was then vanguard is now nostalgic—the city of light becomes the city of the byte [Fig. 1]). Malevich amplified Gabo's program for desolidifying mass and object through the use of light with the more metaphysical proposition posed by *White on White* (1918), which was described by his colleague Moholy-Nagy as "the ideal screen for light and shadow effects which reflect the surrounding world in painting. The manual picture is suppressed by the painterly possibilities of light projection."<sup>13</sup> This pictorial rejection of representation in favor of the foregrounding of light is not unlike many contemporary uses of the video monitor as a luminous "space." Malevich attempted to make an invisible property (light) visible, but artworks that do not clearly and obviously address the question of discernible advance are passed over by Popper.

Marcel Duchamp and the Dadaists reacted to the very blindness Popper embodies in their attack on what was fast becoming "modernism" in art—Fauvism, Cubism, and Futurism—by critiquing the cult of the forward and positive. Duchamp's "works"—the ready-mades, the pre-Op sculptural image-producers such as *Rotary Demisphere* (*Precision Optics*), 1925—made up the concrete side of Dada's interrogation of the ethic of the modern. The other and less apparent side of a Duchampian aesthetic is its treatment of movement. As Octavio Paz has observed, "Right from the start Duchamp set up a vertigo of delay in opposition to the vertigo of acceleration. . . . Duchamp's pictures are . . . the reverse of speed."<sup>14</sup> Duchamp's delays allowed movement to be analyzed, to become duration (Virilio's "last commodity"). Not least of Duchamp's influence on video, especially Paikian video, is his challenge to rapid time and absorption; interest in stasis, repetition, and *response*—rather than the object—provides the basis for much video work, which is why the work is often charged with being unendurably dull.

Dadaism, unlike Constructivism, concerned itself with the effects of electricity rather than with its use in objects. Surrealists such as Ernst, Matta, and Wols, Popper contends, used electric iconography to similarly subjective ends: to explore electricity's relationship

to the psyche, the unconscious, dreams, and sexuality. The essential invisibility of electricity aligned itself with the unseen functions of the subliminal. Popper treats Surrealism with one sentence in his survey, and completely ignores Surrealist film, which might have provided him with his best examples. This is one of many omissions in Popper's history that disserves ironical or "irrational" responses to modernist reason. For example, Popper never discusses Cubism, which gave the Futurists their deconstructed picture planes and challenges to the imaging of form, space, and motion (not to mention its influence on Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase* and Constructivist treatments of structure). Nor is any mention of Vorticism made. Under the guidance of Wyndham Lewis from approximately 1913 to 1920, the Vorticists drew pointed affinities between love of the machine and the war making that coincided directly with their period of production. In fact, Popper does not mention World War I in detail, except to refer vaguely to "realist reactions" in the twenties and thirties.<sup>15</sup>

Popper's 1900–45 segment frames the mighty "isms" of the early part of the century. The "Medium Domination" period of 1945–70 is far more resistant to such periodizing; Popper characterizes it simply as a time when "art was increasingly becoming a social phenomenon" (p. 32). He separates works into "neo-Constructivist" and "neo-Dadaist" trends, borrowing from a conventional separation of "rational" and "irrational" developments. Various collectives arose internationally: some borrowed from Constructivist-kinetic impulses (Gutai in Japan and Grav in Paris, for instance) and some from Dadaist positions (Fluxus, Zero, and Nul are examples).

The 1945–70 period also witnessed both increased attention to environmental art and inventions such as the laser and hologram. And this is the time of what Popper calls "early electronic plastic expressions" (the work of Paik, Wolf Vostell, Nicolas Schoffer, Piotr Kowalski, Tsai, among others), which prefigure video in their shift from strictly mechanical uses of light and movement to the incorporation of electronics, which will dominate the seventies and eighties. We hear nothing substantive about Pop art, Minimalism, Conceptual art, or even the light show spectacles of the sixties—again the omissions are those which fit uneasily into a dominant modernist stance. Even worse is the fact that Popper entirely neglects the birth of television in the fifties. This particular invention is, of course, of enormous significance both

for the entry of electronic images into the home (a populist presence preceded only by the light bulb and radio) and for the later development of video, which defined itself (at least at first) in strong opposition to the television medium.

### *Special Studies: Electra Expansion*

To take Popper's compressed and slanted history as indicative of the catalogue's presentation as a whole would be misleading, so it is worth looking briefly at a few of the eleven essays in the "Special Studies" section of *Electra*. The juxtaposition of the selections by Jacques Rigaud and Françoise Balibar unintentionally (one assumes) suggests an underlying division among the essayists: several will consider electricity's socioeconomic and political functions (keeping one eye trained on the art world), but most want to delimit the subject to detailed technical explanations. Rigaud claims an ideal fusion of art practice and corporate patronage in his "Art and Industry: A New Relationship"—not surprising in light of *Electra's* sponsorship. The possibility of pressure from supporting industries who have vested interests in making their products look good goes unmentioned.<sup>16</sup> It is up to Balibar to point to the problem of power, *literal* power, when she describes electricity as always, invisibly, *in* something. Never is it just a thing "in itself." Further, it is a uniquely marketable medium. Thomas Edison, who rose from isolated inventor to president of his own corporation, General Electric, offers a case history of "the triumph of science, electricity and . . . Free Trade." There is a "flaw" in his tale of pioneering inventionism, warns Balibar: "Nothing could now stop the irresistible rise of American companies and the entire world would come under their sway. Chile in 1973 offers a good example."<sup>17</sup>

Edison's bulb has come to stand for ingenuity incarnate (the Idea flashing over the head of a just-stricken thinker in comic strips) as well as a mythic "light that will shine on all." Electricity connotes an ideal of free transit. Pierre Gaudibert disturbs *Electra's* unimpeded flow of positivism and echoes Balibar when he observes in a round-table discussion (titled "Technology and the Respect for Diversity") that "There is at once an imperialist and therefore terrorist superiority imposed by colonialism, the neo-colonialism of multinational companies and a seduction by the Western way of life." Refreshing as this sentiment is among the myopic positions of *Electra*, neither Gaudibert nor his discussants expand on the problem of technological production as an instrument in the oppression of the third world at the hands of the corporate West. Instead they daw-

dle over questions of magic and fantasy; one participant goes so far as to ask: "Can we imagine in Africa or elsewhere that with modern techniques and electronics there could be *real creative activities* which go beyond adaptation and *simple tinkering*?"<sup>18</sup> (emphasis added). One could indeed imagine such a "miracle"—or better yet, discuss present in-the-field uses of video by Nicaraguan Sandinistas and civilians to document everyday events and the texture of a culture constantly under the threat of effacement.<sup>19</sup>

The panel debate has glimmers of promise, but winds up operating under myths of primitivist, third-world creativity. More sensitive is Gladys Fabre's up-to-the-minute essay on the importance of technology to popular culture (especially music), "The Overloaded Culture." Our culture is "overloaded" because, Fabre says, technological developments have infested our "dream-producing" industries (music, film, fashion); the Surrealist recognition of affinities between electricity and the unconscious is trenchant as leisure activity is increasingly dominated by electronic modes of pleasure. Circuitry infuses the realm of relaxation as much as it does the spheres of work and industry.

Several of the participants in Gaudibert's panel realize the leveling effects of a world-wide technoscape (a Venturiesque perception of Las Vegas becoming Times Square becoming Tokyo), but Fabre gives this erasure of architectural difference far greater attention. She also does Popper one better by elucidating the decades of technology's progressive dominance. She tells of trippers' fascination with electrokinesis and the spectacular light show in the sixties, of their delight in experience in excess. Pop art under the sway of Andy Warhol (the man who once claimed to want to *be* a machine) pushed distanced cool to its limits. In the seventies, experiments with "fixation, atonality, repetition, emptiness and silence" tempered the extremes of the preceding decade (a historical relationship not unlike that of Dadaist revisions of early modernist trends). This absorption with stasis, Fabre notes, has been replaced today by an obsession with speed. The widespread revival of painting under the aegis of neo-Expressionism (which idealizes rapid creation) has urged the commodifying tendencies of the international art market to new extremes. Fabre speaks of the difficulty "for people in general and young people in particular, to agree to postpone satisfaction of our human rights, of our pleasure, even of our secret wishes as we did in the past under the name of the sacrosanct rationality prin-

ciple." The pervasiveness of high tech in our leisure-time activities (the growth of the home entertainment center) and in the products offered (music videos and sci-fi films) suggests that we are now appeasing the "irrational" need for pleasure through technological means. Out of a love of speed and a desire for immediate gratification come tools that operate instantaneously and give us rapidly assimilated images.

Fabre is sensitive to economic factors in art and art's relationship to popular culture, but eventually she, too, succumbs to the overall utopian drift of *Electra*. She is attached to the third-world voice of reggae filtered through the most advanced apparatuses, and is even willing to venture into the South Bronx and hip-hop culture (the latter a perfect example of a vanguard art practice co-opted by the mass media through film, music video, and advertisements and quickly doomed to looking and sounding "dated"). But her enthusiasm leads her to declare: "Electronics and media will no longer be agents of standardization and centralized power structures, besottedly inducing passive reception of their message through mindless attention and an automatic brainwash, but rather the efficient spokesman of human diversity."<sup>20</sup> Advanced media can indeed disperse information across continents and, when accessible, encourage a wide-ranging participation—and, as in the hip-hop case, can oversell information until it becomes no more than white noise. This ideal of dispersal—essentially a *post-modern* ideal of access and diffusion, which is (ironically) transmitted through media of the most sophisticated modernity—can be interrogated more rigorously. In his *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities*, Jean Baudrillard stresses that we exist within a surplus of tele-information that is, at bottom, meaningless. The postmodern goal of pluralism, where a position of meaning is ideally open to anyone, finds a convincing critique in Baudrillard's contention that multiple voices, when sounded through technological media, are essentially silent.<sup>21</sup> Thus, even Fabre's admirable effort to inject a postmodernist orientation into *Electra* falls short in the final analysis—owing mainly to the specific nature of technology.

#### *Electra, Video, and the Postmodern*

Video embraces this very paradox of pluralist qualities with the modernist trope and tools of technological progress. The institutions of the art world have never known quite what to do with video, and it's no wonder. After twenty years video still lacks a solidly independent criticism,<sup>22</sup> a situation largely

attributable to its dearth of qualities required for art historical appraisal (objecthood, agreed-upon "value," and a past). Video is a medium in suspension, bridging modernist and postmodernist conditions with a variety of pluralist features. The "death of modernism" in the sixties and seventies coincided with the birth of video, and the medium became a repository for the modernist need of "the new." Because it is inextricably bound to technological changes, video carries the priority of "advancement" with the search for better equipment, better resolution, better duplication.

Yet video is also postmodern, especially in its effects. Mona da Vinci has argued in her "Video: The Art of Observable Dreams" that because video exists in a viewing system of projection, and involves the viewer in a closed, definite space but an open-ended period of time, the "electronic space" creates a situation where "Escape into the object or the other is rendered impossible in physical terms. . . . The medium communicates on a mental and psychological level rather than by a direct physical interaction."<sup>23</sup> When audiences complain of the boredom of watching art video, they are often articulating an unwillingness or inability to shift their perceptual habits, to "let go" and enter a tape's temporal and imagistic structure. Because it reveals itself through time, a video work alters the notion of a synthesized, unified appraisal of a singular object. And the medium itself defies conventional ideas of objecthood—a key postmodernist qualification. Video is dispersible, making it so annoying to those who want to sequester art as original and private. It is reproducible on a mass, relatively inexpensive scale. It plays in more than one place. It can cheapen the cost of admission.

Video's interdisciplinary development lends it another postmodern feature. Many artists came to the field out of others—painting, sculpture, filmmaking, writing, music, broadcast television, engineering, mathematics—and brought to its initial growth a breadth of interests inherently opposed to the hermeticism and separatism often associated with modernism, and often pointed to as a factor in its demise. Video is an accommodating form. It allows for personal-performance art: the artist in the studio turns on a camera and performs to his or her own image broadcast simultaneously on a monitor—video is, as Rosalind Krauss has observed, a narcissistic form.<sup>24</sup> Video artists can invoke minimal prototypes of blank space and abstraction, using the monitor as a screen of light (taking us back to Malevich), or, conversely,



employ decorative elements (recalling a vehement reaction to Minimalism, pattern painting). The video is a canvas, then, but a canvas that moves and can even be used sculpturally (Les Levine's *Contact*, 1969, and numerous Paik installations come to mind). Video can go in the streets to provide an alternative to mainstream presentation of events, political and otherwise ("guerilla" video). It can even engender a dream of widely distributed culture: the dream of a cable TV revolution, which died a resounding death several years ago.

Many artists entered video, out of other fields or afresh, for precisely this potential for a variety of practices and a possibility of play. At a panel discussion in November 1984, several video artists who were active in the early days of the medium (Vito Acconci, Peter Campus, Joan Jonas, Beryl Korot, and William Wegman) cited experimentation and quick results as reasons to try video. All but Jonas gave it up around 1978 when a great wave of technological advances occurred.<sup>25</sup> The initial appeal came from plugging in a machine and getting an image. Wegman likened his attraction to a fondness for Polaroids: push a button and get ready-made art. This pre-high-tech affinity for the instantaneous occurred when speed of production had seemingly little consequence outside the workspace. The tapes shown in *Electra* pick up just where this idiosyncratic period of play left off; since all date post-1980, there is no representation of early stages of video work. This makes sense in light of the fact that the panelists complained vehemently that the equipment they had used with a sense of spontaneity had become a demand rather than a freedom. Increasingly computers were combined with simple camera-monitor set-ups. The tools encroached on image making as they increasingly dictated the scope of the work.

The crucial point about *Electra* is that this complication of the medium is completely masked by an all-consuming support for progress in tools. Dominique Belloir makes the situation perfectly clear:

Thanks to the extreme versatility of video diffusion equipment (a simple screen and video-tape recorder to go with it), it is possible to watch video tapes in the most unlikely places, comfortably installed in the back seat of a 4 Horse Power (intimist drive-in devised one day at Bourges by Liegon-Ligeonnet), underwater at the bottom of a swimming pool or else lying on the sand of a beach in Normandy where the Allies landed forty years ago. . . . For

these last two projects one need only wait until the spring of '84—"1984," incidentally, did George Orwell not predict omnipresent television sets, spy televisions transmitting the picture of Big Brother everywhere? To contradict these pessimistic forecasts, though, the 25 screens installed for the Art Video section will have no surveillance role. They are there to convey the phenomenon of electricity.<sup>26</sup>

We may not be able to gaze on the specter of Big Brother (yet), but surely he can gaze on us: surveillance techniques using the most advanced equipment are subtle and to be found everywhere. You probably don't *know* if Big Brother is watching.

Video tapes do play in limos and swimming pools, but 1984 happened also to be the year when the "small screen" took on an added home-entertainment dimension. The number of American households owning VCRs—home video cassette players—jumped nearly 100 percent from 1983 to 1984. Twenty percent of all TV-owning households now have one.<sup>27</sup> Right from the start television has been charged with fracturing its audience and causing isolation (the vision of each American family cloistered in its living room slavishly worshipping The Machine, zombie eyed), but the VCR revolution has created an industrialization of the home industry, expanding our sense of the word "video." The either/or dichotomy of television-video art no longer suffices. Films (narratives) are selected by VCR owners, rented or purchased, and played on video. Filmgoing is no longer exclusively an "in-the-dark" proposition, and video's oppositional presentation of a viewing situation that could be entered or departed at will has been weakened (though museum screenings of tapes have long fostered devotion in the dark and a lack of viewer mobility).

Genres blend: subscribers pay to see advertisements set to music in the form of MTV (and we remember Rigaud's call for art and commerce to join hands). Music video usurps every jolting camera and cutting strategy invented by a French New Wave director, making the abrupt segue a narcotic rather than a shock in a vulgarization of editing. Colorization, long the domain of video art, is a standard aesthetic ploy on MTV. Film directors such as William Friedkin, Brian DePalma, and even, it is rumored, Federico Fellini direct videos. A reciprocal appropriation occurs between technology and the art world. Artists take what technology can give to satisfy formal or expressive needs; commercialized industry takes up avant-

garde practices to sell products.

Belloir's extraordinary shortsightedness expresses perfectly the overall trouble with *Electra's* *homage* to the alliance of science and art. She is right to comment on the "extreme versatility of video diffusion equipment" (an essentially postmodernist feature but one treated reductively, much like Popper's promised symptomatic history), but there can be no "phenomenon of electricity alone." As Balibar reminded us, electricity exists as a seemingly immaterial and yet material force; Heidegger warned that the danger of technology is to consider it a thing-in-itself. The "phenomenon of electricity" is merely a construct unifying a series of tendencies. The mythical "Electra" is just that, a myth, albeit one that ties together nicely the supposition that rationality (the progress of science and modernity) equals "light."<sup>28</sup>

### *Digitalization Simulation, and the Knowing Image*

Science and technology came from man's questions about Nature. It was from this revealed knowledge about the riddle of Nature that technology was produced. Since then—for about a century now—the riddle of science and technology has tended by its development to replace the riddle of Nature. And there are no scientists or technicians to answer this riddle. More than that, there aren't any *because they refuse*, because the scientists and engineers, claiming to know, don't allow anyone to inquire into the nature of technology. And so the riddle of technology becomes more fearsome, or at least as fearsome, as the riddle of Nature.

—Virilio, p. 34

In the digital imagery section of *Electra*, which includes digitalization in video and still images, Edmond Couchot adopts a supremely pragmatic voice, even when describing processes that have, as we shall see, unsettling possibilities. Couchot demystifies various computer functions in layman's—or lay art historian's—terms:

The three-dimensional synthesis image is an almost infinite potential of images, never visible in their entirety. It no longer represents the object on a projection plane, it simulates it in its totality. It corresponds to a way of perceiving and considering space—a topology—which no longer has anything to do with traditional optic techniques (photo, cinema, television). Digital three-dimensional synthesis introduced a new visual order into



our culture, that of simulation. The synthetic three-dimensional image with its extra dimension, as compared to the two-dimensional, gives artists the opportunity to discover and experiment with a radically different visual world.<sup>29</sup>

What is this "radically different visual world," and what does such a difference mean? From the digital section, all we know of synthesis is that it is nonrepresentational. Virtually every work shown (and again, this is a matter of the catalogue presentation and perhaps not the actual *Electra* show) investigates patterning, flat pictorial space, bright color relationships, and balancing acts of form. But, as has been the case throughout the *Electra* exhibition, this is far from the whole story of the medium under discussion.

There's only one jarring work in this mania for abstraction. It is by Jane Veeder, who, thanks to the alphabetic arrangement of illustrated works and the location of the digital section at the end, gets shoved to the back of the catalogue. Veeder's *Montana* (1982) (Fig. 2) is one of just two image-text works in both the video and digital sections (the other is Roy Ascott's *La Plissure du Texte*, a planetary fairy tale dedicated to Roland Barthes, to be produced by a computerized teleconferencing network—an attempt at cross-continental narrative). *Montana*, which seems as out-of-place for its punning Americana as for its political references, features a digital buffalo roaming in front of triangular mountain ranges composed of what look like color bars. Grafted onto one of the peaks is a form in the shape of North America, out of which explode jagged lines (electricity? radiation?) that spill down both sides of the picture onto two giant globes perched atop more triangular shapes. Under this implosion of U.S. mythmaking and power is a slogan: "Good luck electronically visualizing your futures!" The potent disturbance—which is all the more resonant when one recalls Virilio's account of an intensified present and its connection to the absolute instantaneousness of nuclear war (the "orgasmic whump")—is dramatic, set against the dry abstractions and endless formal experiments that surround it.

Veeder's vision is of a self-destructive nation-state bent on eradicating its own natural environment and that of others. Her commentary suits a time when "natural" reality can be shaped and transformed at will by the latest technological tools, tools that aim to create fictions of verisimilitude. In a recent *New York Times Magazine* article, Fred Ritchin describes how digitalization can render falsehoods:



Fig. 2 Jane Veeder, from *Montana*, 1982.

It is now possible not only to make almost seamless composites of existing photographs and to alter images in such a way that the changes may not be detected, but—using mathematics instead of a camera—it is possible to create images that are nearly photographic in their realism. With the last technique, it might even be possible at some future date to "recreate" long-dead movie stars to appear in new movies.

In considering digitalization-in-the-round, as it were, Ritchin gives equal treatment to relatively harmless uses (science-fiction films, for instance, which make no bones about being fantasies) and more dangerous ones. Synthetic images may encourage direct, representational lies. Ritchin quotes from an article by the computer consultant John D. Goodell:

Consider what a powerful weapon "bogus" but convincing images could be in the hands of the K.G.B., the C.I.A., the secret police or terrorists. These images could be used for international blackmail or to create confusion and chaos, with "news" announcements about impending disasters or nuclear attacks delivered by a synthetic Dan Rather or Ronald Reagan.<sup>30</sup>

Technology is absolutely a tool of power: power as a commercial and marketable substance; power as the capacity to watch (surveillance); and now power to lie at will. It may seem antiquated and alarmist to adapt this "War of the

Worlds"-ish forecast of doom, but it is a long-standing fact that the logical processes and rational methods of technology can provoke hysteria, as in Orson Welles's legendary broadcast. The irrational seems a condition of our response to these tools, which might usurp our autonomy and are programmed to the possibility of war. Goodell is speaking of something more foreboding than an apocalyptic scare delivered orally and unseen through the radio wires. Images generated by electronic means can be manipulated to lend a veneer of veracity to any number of ends. It's easy to lie, and it's easy to believe what we see. Digital artworks share the devices used by the media and thus it is hard for them to play dumb. Baudrillard has confronted the situation where truth in images (long a suspect notion) is in jeopardy: "There are no longer media in the literal sense of the term (I am talking above all about the electronic mass media)—that is to say, a power mediating between one reality and another, between one state of the real and another—neither in content nor in form." The poles fall atop one another and we are left with a residue, what Baudrillard terms an "undecipherable truth" (pp. 102–3). One example of this condition can be located in Nancy Burson's composites of world leaders, which critique fibbing representation while using the very methods that deceive us. Her *War-head* (1984) (Fig. 3) is an unnerving computer portrait that blends the features of Reagan and Chernenko according to the percentage of warheads held by their respective countries (54% United States, 46% U.S.S.R.); the result is a vision of indistinguishable "guides"

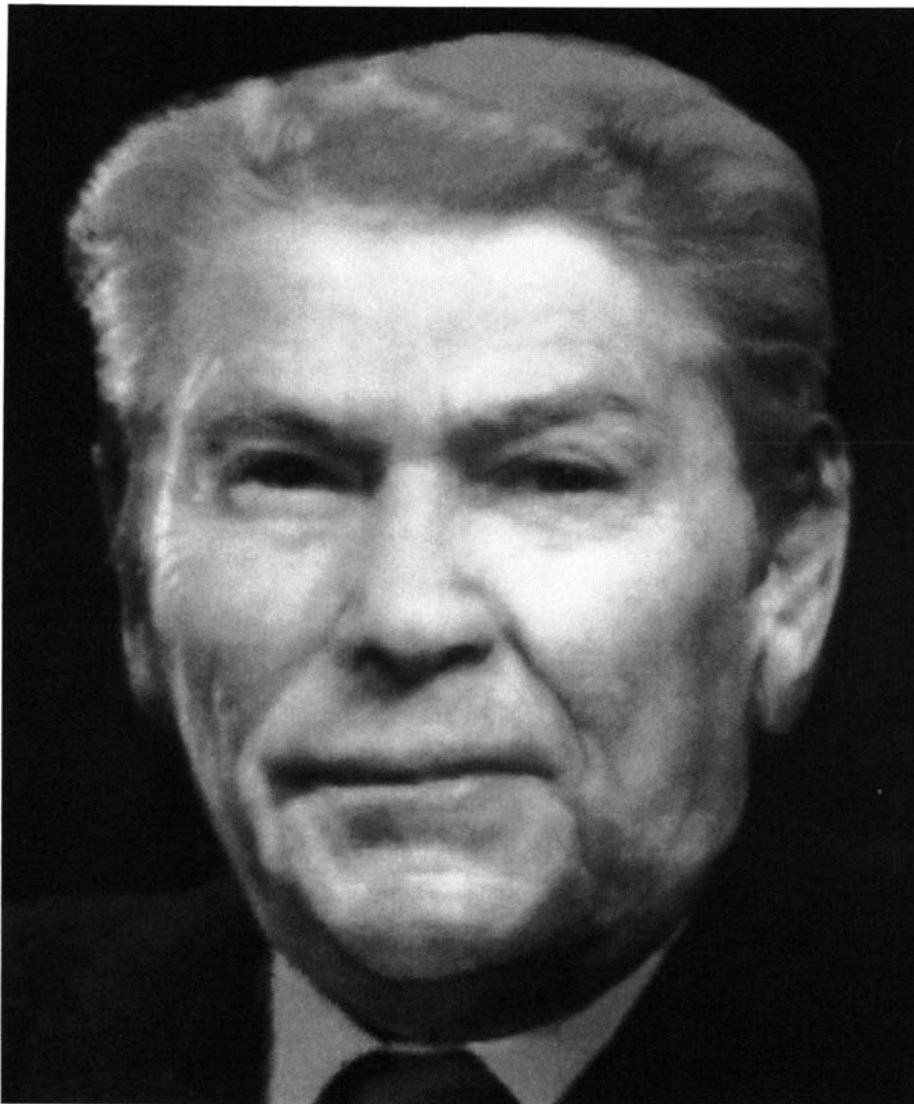


Fig. 3 Nancy Burson, with Richard Carling and David Kramlich, from *Warhead*, 1984.

who are supposed to "lead" us in a world where techno-annihilation looms as a constant.

The possibility for digital synthesis (both in video and in static images) is the strongest case against the protechnological myopia of the *Electra* catalogue. Its artworks are exempted from investigation into the nature of their mediums by the protective cloak of a scientific (rational, linear) perspective; with this isolation, *Electra* propagates a modernist progress without consequence. An interpretation acknowledging reactions, inconsistencies, ambivalence—a post-modern approach—is avoided by the *Electra* curators and critics to favor a seamless logic of "the new." A discourse other than the modernist one of the foreword is required for artworks generated by technological means.

The ape monster looks down at these territorial holdings (as or the world): acres after acres of clear fields, streams running, a few trees: Nature. I can't tell the dif-

ference between trees and tree-shadow or tree-image. Nature is either a reflection, or else nothing. I'm a reflection or else I'm nothing.

—Kathy Acker<sup>31</sup>

#### Notes

Thanks to Sara Hornbacher, Hank C. Linhart, and Craig Owens for assistance in the preparation of this essay.

1 Paul Virilio/Sylvere Lotringer, *Pure War*, trans. Mark Polizotti, New York, Semiotext(e), Foreign Agents Series, 1983, p. 32. All further citations appear in the text.

2 K. G. Pontus Hulten, foreword to *The Machine as Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age*, New York, Museum of Modern Art, 1969, p. ix.

3 See: Craig Owens, "Representation, Appropriation, and Power," *Art in America* (May 1982). Owens differentiates between what he calls a "discipline (art history) which believes representation to be a disinterested and therefore politically neutral activity, and a body of criticism (poststructuralism) which demon-

strates that it is an inextricable part of the social processes of domination and control." Douglas Davis makes a similar charge against what he calls a "Pop" attitude towards media that is "proudly objective and nonjudgmental" and "markedly indifferent to content and to personality" ("The Decline and Fall of Pop: Reflections in Media Theory," *Art Culture: Essays on the Post-Modern*, intro. Irving Sandler, New York, 1977, p. 87). Both Owens and Davis discuss how content tends to be suppressed under the guise of "purely formal" interests.

4 Exhibitions devoted to the theme of light and movement in art in this period include: 1965, *Art and Movement*, Royal Scottish Academy, Edinburgh, *Art Turned On*, Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, *Kinetic and Optic Art Today*, Albright-Knox Gallery, Buffalo; 1966, *Kunst-Licht-Kunst*, Stedelijk Van Abbe Museum, Eindhoven, *Computer-Graphic*, Howard Wise Gallery, New York, *Art and Machine*, Sigma 1, Bordeaux; 1967, *Lumière et Mouvement*, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, *Lights in Orbit*, Howard Wise Gallery, New York, 1968, *Cinématisme, Spectacle, Environnement*, Maison de la Culture, Grenoble, *The Machine as Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, *Kinetic Environment*, Olympic Games, Mexico City; 1969, *International Exhibition of Kinetic Art*, Amos Andersonin Taidemuseo, Helsinki, *TV as a Creative Medium*, Howard Wise Gallery, New York, *Vision and Television*, Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Waltham, Mass.; 1970, *Kinetics*, Hayward Gallery, London; 1971, *Art Constructif et Cinématisme*, Galerie Guene-gaud, Paris; 1972, *La Fête Électrique*, Plateau Beaubourg, Paris; 1973, *Electric Art from Europe*, The Electric Gallery, Toronto; 1974, *Art Video Confrontation/74*, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris.

Douglas Davis (cited n. 3), p. 93, has attacked the spectacle mode of presentation for its "all-at-once" reductive presentation of media within a visual field of "competing monitors." From all appearances, the *Electra* show seems wide open to this charge, especially in the video presentation, which screened tapes on a 25-monitor stack.

5 For a detailed discussion of changes in perceptions of time, space, and their effect on the arts and sciences in early modernism, see: Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space: 1880–1918*, Cambridge, Mass., 1983. His observation of the importance of World Standard Time (inaugurated in 1884) makes a strong case for the advent of "instantaneousness": "In the cultural sphere no unifying concept for the new sense of the past or future could rival the coherence and the popularity of the concept of simultaneity," p. 314.

6 See Thomas Powell's review of Paul Bracken's *The Command and Control of Nuclear Forces*, New Haven, 1984, in *The New York Review of Books*, January 17, 1985.

7 Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell, New York, 1977, pp. 283–317. All further citations appear in the text. Heidegger

- writes of "The fact that now, whenever we try to point to modern technology as the revealing that challenges, the words 'setting upon', 'ordering', 'standing-reserve' obtrude and accumulate in a dry, monotonous and therefore oppressive way," p. 299. To exist with technology requires an attitude of "catching sight of what comes to presence in technology, instead of merely gaping at the technological," p. 314.
- 8 Frank Popper, introduction, *Electra*, Paris, Les Amis du Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1983, p. 75. All further citations appear in the text. The English translations cited here and in all following *Electra* citations appear in the catalogue.
- 9 Popular culture has been quick to pick up on an alarmist attitude towards technology and narrate it. *The China Syndrome* (1979) and particularly *WarGames* (1983) typify a genre of nuclear scare movies that depict man's impotence when faced with circuitry gone berserk.
- 10 Program notes to the video section of "Electra-Video," in *Electra* (cited n. 8), pp. 373, 376.
- 11 Virilio (cited n. 1, p. 84) speaks of rapid transportation as generating its own specific light. Inverting Futurist affirmation, he states:
- All speed illuminates. The low speed of Victor Hugo's train, the relatively high speeds of the Concorde or the very high speeds of televised projection are electronic or thermodynamic light—thermodynamic light in the case of the train, light of the reactor in the Concorde and electronic light in television. When one is on a jet or on a train, one sees the world in a different light, so to speak. It's not a problem of light source, but of relation to the world. The world flown over is a world produced by speed. It's a representation. We come back to Schopenhauer's pessimism, the world as representation, but this time as representation of speed.
- 12 See: Joshua C. Taylor, "The Futurist Goal, The Futurist Achievement," *Major European Art Movements: 1900–1945*, ed. Patricia E. Kaplan and Susan Manso, New York, 1977, pp. 164–92.
- 13 Willoughby Sharp, "Luminism and Kineticism," *Minimal Art*, ed. Gregory Battcock, New York, 1968, p. 323. Sharp provides a thorough pre-video overview of luminist and kineticist trends.
- 14 Octavio Paz, "Marcel Duchamp, Or, The Castle of Purity," *Major European Art Movements* (cited n. 12), pp. 354–55.
- 15 For a study of the return to figuration and representation from abstraction in painting between the wars, see: Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression," *October*, 16 (Spring 1981).
- 16 *Electra* (cited n. 8), pp. 116–22. The inhibitions of sponsorship seem connected to *Electra*'s positivism and Popper's conciliatory stance.
- 17 "Light and Electricity: Electrons and Photons," *ibid.*, pp. 128–29.
- 18 "Technology and the Respect for Diversity," *ibid.*, pp. 244–55.
- 19 See: DeeDee Halleck, "Notes on Nicaraguan Media; Video Libre o Morir," *The Independent Film and Video Monthly* (November 1984), pp. 12–17.
- 20 *Electra* (cited n. 8), pp. 206–28
- 21 Baudrillard writes:
- Whence that bombardment of signs which the mass is thought to re-echo. It is interrogated by converging waves, by light or linguistic stimuli, exactly like distant stars or nuclei bombarded with particles in a cyclotron. Information is exactly this. Not a mode of constant emulsion, of input-output and of controlled chain reactions, exactly as in atomic simulation chambers. We must free the "energy" of the mass in order to fabricate the "social."
- In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities . . . Or the End of the Social*, trans. Paul Foss, Paul Patton, and John Johnston, New York, Semiotext(e), Foreign Agents Series, 1983, pp. 24–25. All further citations appear in the text.
- 22 David Antin has described two stabs at a video discourse as follows: one is "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,'" also known as "the formalist rap" (to which one could add "the modernist tact"). "Video: The Distinctive Features of the Medium," *Video Art*, Philadelphia, Institute of Contemporary Art, 1975, p. 57.
- 23 Mona da Vinci, "Video: The Art of Observable Dreams," *New Artists Video*, ed. Gregory Battcock, New York, 1978, p. 18.
- 24 Rosalind Krauss, "Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism," *New Artists Video* (cited n. 23), pp. 43–64.
- 25 This panel was sponsored by Anthology Film Archives and held at Millenium Film Workshop in New York City on November 29, 1984. The moderator for the panel, titled "Reel to Reel: The Early 70s," was Davidson Gigliotti.
- 26 "Electra-Video," *Electra* (cited n. 8), p. 366.
- 27 Kenneth Turam, "The Art of Revolution," *Rolling Stone* (December 20, 1984–January 3, 1985), p. 75.
- 28 Jürgen Habermas has situated a break in the historical meaning of modernism in the Enlightenment, when "the modern" came to mean less a countering relationship to the past than an ideal of futurity. The connotation of a rational "light" became focused on the forward as "the idea of being 'modern' by looking back to the ancients changed with the belief, inspired by modern science, in the infinite advance toward social and moral betterment" ("Modernity—An Incomplete Project," *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster, Port Townsend, Wash., 1983, pp. 3–15).
- 29 "The Digital Image," *Electra* (cited n. 8), p. 389.
- 30 Fred Ritchin, "Photography's New Bag of Tricks," *New York Times Magazine* (November 4, 1984), pp. 42–50; 54; 56.
- 31 Kathy Acker, "Scenes of World War III," *Wild History*, ed. Richard Prince, New York, 1985, p. 113.

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# Why Don't They Tell Stories Like They Used To?

By Ann-Sargent Wooster

Video art is a hybrid adapting and sharing the aesthetics, content, and history of the visual arts, literature, music, film, and—most recently—the computer. It brings together ideas about how to construct a story and how to structure experience, fragmentation, disjunction, and chance based on avant-garde ideas developed over the last 100 years. Yet for all its historical precedents and for all the varieties of criticism to which it is open, video art has proved opaque not only to its critics but also to its practitioners, who frequently do not understand the origins of the structures they share. In reply to a statement by Frank Gillette at the 1974 Open Circuits Conference, Robert Pincus-Witten said: "It is not a medium to which the humankind you are so conscious of has access; it's an exceptionally inaccessible medium."<sup>1</sup> More than ten years have passed since that time, but a critical model for video has not yet been constructed.

Because it shares the technology and look of broadcast television, video art has been frequently treated as an aberrant outgrowth of that medium. But to see video art primarily in the context of television is to exacerbate the confusion that already surrounds it. A complex mixture of factors explain video art's continuing lack of clarity. Those who scorn television as a mass-culture medium without any redeeming aesthetic or intellectual qualities dismiss video art in the same breath with the *Dukes of Hazard*. To television aficionados, on the other hand, video art is "poor" television not living up to general expectations of the medium because of its comparatively impoverished technol-

ogy. Moreover, they are alienated by its radical, art-for-art's-sake content featuring personal material, abstraction, and disjunctive narrative for its own sake. Television critics generally see video art as using a language totally different from that of broadcast television and outside their province even when video art is broadcast—such as the recent productions of independent video on WNET, New Television, Alive From Off Center and Independent Focus—and do not write about it.

In its early years (1968–74), video art was treated as an outgrowth of the visual arts, largely because many of its practitioners had crossed over from traditional art forms. Furthermore, the early single-channel tapes and multi-channel installations were usually shown in art galleries and museums. Videomakers, such as video's chief polemicist Nam June Paik, contributed to the identification of video with painting and sculpture by asserting that it was the art form of the future: "as collage technique replaced oil paint, so the cathode-ray tube will replace canvas." He added that the synthesizer made it possible to shape the TV screen

as precisely as Leonardo  
as freely as Picasso  
as colorfully as Renoir  
as profoundly as Mondrian  
as violently as Pollock and  
as lyrically as Jasper Johns<sup>2</sup>

Although art critics found themselves responsible for writing about video art along with other time- and performance-based art forms in the early seventies, they were never wholly comfortable with any of these mediums. Video,

in contrast to painting and sculpture, demands too much time in viewing. Although the medium has some of the properties of collage and the arrangement of monitors in installations does have certain sculptural properties, video art has less in common with painting and sculpture than it does with film or performance. After condemning video art for being narcissistic and boring, art critics shifted their focus away from video and began to treat it as invisible.

Video artists themselves have contributed to the murkiness of critical discourse. In the early years, artist-generated publications such as *Radical Software*, *Video Art*, *The New Television*, and others abounded with artists' statements on their own work and the nature and potential of the medium. These writings stressed video's capacity for expanding consciousness and enfranchising those disenfranchised by broadcast television. They saw television idealistically: a magic totem capable of generating Marshall McLuhan's Global Village, and in their hands bringing peace on earth. Others, who came to video from kinetic art and Experiments in Art and Technology (E.A.T.), celebrated their hands-on involvement with its technology in the *Spaghetti City Video Manual* and other publications. As a group, the early video artists saw video art as a way of reinvesting a technological art form with a spiritual aura and rarely placed their work in a historical context, often implying in their writing a lack of connection with previous art forms. As three-quarter-inch color tapes and lower-cost editing systems replaced the early, crude black-and-white portable systems, the

generation that followed the first wave (post-1975) video art produced more high-tech and more tightly constructed work. Because a new generation of polemicists and theoreticians failed to arise in the community to write about the new work, an aura of wordlessness surrounded video art. We are only now beginning to see a change in critical attitudes towards the medium.

Video's lack of continuity with the avant-garde tradition is compounded by the modernist and formalist rhetoric prevalent at video's genesis. Accordingly, an art form should be about itself or only the nature of its materials be discussed, or both. Noel Carroll discussed this problem in his paper on "category exclusivity" at the Symposium on Self-Invented Media—Video, Opera, Photography, and Performance at the Kitchen, Spring 1984. Carroll pointed out that in an attempt to distinguish itself from other art forms, each new medium stressed its uniqueness and denied the influence of other mediums.

Video had not only the difficulty of functionally having no history before 1970 but also the additional burden of being not-film, not-TV, not-theater, and so forth. Although many early video artists such as Shirley Clarke, Ed Emschwiller, Stan VanderBeek, and Doris Chase began as filmmakers, film was the art form video art was most eager to distinguish itself from. Shortly after the publication of Gene Youngblood's *Expanded Cinema* in 1970, which clearly delineated the evolution of video from film, film and video were never discussed in the same breath. The concept of category exclusivity, which remained in operation until post-modernism began to chip away at its boundaries, left video without access to its filmic or other pasts and without the benefit of the language that had been developed for describing film.

### *The Origins of Disjunctive Narrative*

Video art is the heir of the new set of assumptions about what constitutes reality that developed in the nineteenth century. This was a time marked by a revolution in consciousness as notions of a hierarchical order as expressed in Renaissance perspective were replaced by a multiplicity of spatial and temporal points of view. The causal or parallel developments in mathematics (especially non-Euclidean geometry and the fourth dimension), physics (Einstein's theory of relativity), psychology, and philosophy, and the invention of new methods of transportation and communication altered the perception of time and space. One of the consequences of these intellectual and technological developments was the shift from an

external, Euclidean, and generally knowable reality to a more private and subjective one.<sup>3</sup> The avant-garde and the bourgeois took up opposing positions on consciousness and mimesis. The creators of such bourgeois art forms as realistic painting and sculpture asserted that their works represented *imitatio naturae* and were the true mimetic art forms. Building on the new notions about "reality" derived from science, psychology, literature, and art, the avant-garde argued that their private visions and manipulations of form, color, space, and time imitated the true reality of the self and constituted the true mimesis.

The emphasis on a subjective ordering of the world based on personal logic was inherited by the makers of video art. One of the commonest forms of construction in video art is a form of stream of consciousness in which reality is ordered in strings of successive or interleaved images. Although William James is credited with the invention of the term "stream of consciousness," the present use of the form owes rather to literature, to Laurence Sterne and Édouard Dujardin, as well as to Gustave Flaubert's *style indirect libre*—where the point of view of the speaker constantly shifts and there are abrupt temporal leaps using flashbacks and flash-forwards—and, finally to the elaborate four-dimensional web of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, in which time, action, and meaning, as well as the thoughts and actions of the characters, are treated as temporally fluid. The literary experiments were influenced by Freud's and other psychologists' work on dreams and the unconscious. This approach to reality also asserts the primacy of the individual over the collective structures of society. Its highly personal order and hermetic or solipsistic references limit its legibility to the artist and his or her immediate circle.

The extensive historical antecedents for stream of consciousness and disjunctive narrative are often forgotten. Within the self-contained video community, it often seems as if Nam June Paik is the progenitor of this type of organized chaos. It has actually become the normative structure for all avant-garde mediums and through a trickle-down effect has influenced the structure of broadcast television, especially commercials and music videos.

The introduction of film further complicated the definition of reality. Film maintained the illusion of reproducing reality, but it accomplished this by chopping up nature even more radically than had any of the other inventions. Editing or montage further chopped up reality, but instead of increasing film's

parsing of reality, it became in the hands of mainstream filmmakers a vehicle for synthesis. Peter Bürger has observed that montage is simply the basic technical procedure of filmmaking, but its meaning depends on how it is employed.<sup>4</sup> Used to interrupt or comment on reality in a way that is designed to startle the viewer and make him or her conscious of the illusionistic portrayal, it serves a disjunctive function; used allegorically—as in Eisenstein's films—it serves a poetic one. Through the conventions of seamless editing or *montage classique* (such as cutting on motion, dissolves, and so forth), mainstream filmmakers subverted the essential disjunctiveness of montage and generated the illusion of continuous reality. Even the flashback—borrowed freely from ideas about the past derived from psychology and literature—became merely another tool for furthering their realistic illusions.

For the avant-garde artist, the so-called reality of film was a burden, something they had to subvert to express an inner vision, and they adopted different strategies to deal with it. One group said if film is a machine-generated art that slices objects and events into sequences, logically it should be used to film machines and people doing machine-like things such as swinging in a trapeze. This is precisely what Hans Richter did in *Ballet Mécanique* (1924). His method of composition—building chains of like or analogous forms—continues to be one of the strategies of abstract film and video. (Richter is also credited with producing the first self-reflexive work because at one point the image of the filmmaker is reflected in a mirrored ball.) The development of abstract film and film-as-object continued with the rotating nonconcentric circles of Duchamp's *Anemic Cinema* (1925) and in the work of Oskar Fischinger and the Link group in Germany before 1933. The heritage of this work can be seen in the structural films of the mid-to-late sixties such as Tony Conrad's *The Flicker*, which deals with retinal response to different stroboscopic conditions; Paul Sharit's *Ray Gun Virus*, *Razor Blades*, and *T.O.U.C.H.I.N.G.*, which involve the optical interaction of color in time; and Michael Snow's *Wavelength* and *La Région Centrale*. Snow describes the latter's machine-oriented making process as, "I only looked in the camera once. The film was made by planning and the machinery itself."<sup>5</sup>

The Dada and Surrealist filmmakers took an adversary relationship to continuity. Wherever possible they attacked naturalism through the use of unexpected scenes, insuring the impossibility

of the reconciliation of their conflicting realities. They saw disjunction as a political act, part of the avant-garde's commitment to reveal the true reality—in this case, the essential disjunctiveness of stream of consciousness tinged with watered-down Freudianism. Yet, they felt no compunction about using film's credibility as a vehicle of reality to make their unexpected metaphors more convincing.

One of the Dadaists' and Surrealists' most significant contributions to avant-garde structure was the emphasis they placed on chance, automatic writing, and other psychic phenomena. The Dadaist Kurt Schwitters and the Dada-Surrealist Marcel Duchamp were pivotal figures in the breakdown of the boundaries between art and life and in the acceptance of new, untraditional art materials—Schwitters through the *Merzbau* and Duchamp through the ready-made. Both were responsible for the opening up of the practice of art that gave rise to the aesthetics of junk; but it was Duchamp who brought the idea of chance to America, where it affected the works of Jackson Pollock, the Fluxus Group, the Judson Dance Theater, the composer John Cage, and, ultimately, video. Paik, who was greatly influenced by Cage, made his first video installation as a neo-Dada assemblage in Wuppertal, Germany, and many of his early TV works were really little more than junk sculptures using a newly available industrial waste.

By 1952, John Cage had moved to the use of chance operations in his work. Although in art circles the primary emphasis is placed on the Duchamp-Cage connection, Cage's theories of aleatory composition are largely derived from Zen Buddhism and the Huang Po Doctrine of the Universal Mind. In his conversations on Zen at Black Mountain College recorded by Francine Du Plessis he stressed nonhierarchical order.

No value judgments are possible because nothing is better than anything else. Art should not be different from life but an act within life. Like all of life, with its accidents and variety and disorder and only momentary beauties.<sup>6</sup>

Cage felt that his "theatrical music paralleled particular reality models."<sup>7</sup>

If you move down the street in the city you can see people are moving with intention but you don't know what these intentions are. Many things happen which can be viewed in a purposeless way; the more things happening the better. If there are only a few ideas the piece produces a kind of concentration which is characteristic of



Fig. 1 Bruce Connor, *A Movie*, 1958

human beings. If there are many things, it produces a kind of chaos characteristic of nature.<sup>8</sup>

#### *Avant-Garde Film and Film Theories of the Fifties and Sixties*

Cage's theories and music were among the factors serving to break down the old subjectivity of Surrealism, Abstract Expressionism, and Existentialism. This cool, brisk new objectivity with its denial of metaphor was heralded as early as 1958 by Robbe-Grillet when he called for the abolishment of subjectivity in the New Novel. Even Pop Art with its celebration of commercial products as icons and Op Art's emphasis on retinal stimulation distanced the art object from personal content. The advent of Minimalism and formalist-modernist criticism completed the cooling process. In a 1956 essay, Rudolph Arnheim announced, "By renouncing portrayal, the work of art establishes itself clearly as an object possessing an independent existence of its own."<sup>9</sup> Yet, the new objectivity had as its basis the old avant-garde ploy of drawing back the curtain of bourgeois illusionism and revealing the so-called nature of the mind. Sounding like a throwback to the turn of the century, Arnheim describes American independent movies as simultaneously objective and chaotic:

The destruction of time and space is a nightmare when applied to the physical world but it is a sensible order in the realm of the mind. The human mind, in fact stores the experience of the past as memory traces, and in the storage vault

there are no time sequences or spatial dimensions, only affinities and associations based on similarity or contrast.<sup>10</sup>

Bruce Connor's *A Movie* (1958) (Fig. 1) fulfills most of the then-current avant-garde dicta about structure and objectivity, ironically using not the materials of life but the most "real" products of the realm of illusions—film and newsreel footage of sex and disasters. Connor's work illustrates how completely film and now television have become part of the substance of our conscious and unconscious, producing work that is self-reflexive of the medium (film about film or television about television), and uses images culled from these sources to describe the artist's emotions. To Ottorino Respighi's *The Pines of Rome*, serious music as much like movie music as possible,<sup>11</sup> Connor builds sequences of analogous forms and events such as water-skiing accidents, car crashes, the destruction of the Hindenburg, the hiccupping death of a bridge—chains of images that are designed to comment on and illuminate each other, including the new cliché of porno followed by the explosion of such phallic-shaped forms as blimps and rockets.

Self-reflexivity—art about making art and its own materials—continued throughout the sixties. As Jean-Luc Godard turned from commercial films to avant-garde and political ones, he used the jump-cut to disrupt continuity and other forms of commentary in order to analyze the nature of the film experience. More experimental and abstract filmmakers began to insert blank leader



to create an awareness of the arbitrariness of filmic illusionism. In George Landow's 1966 *Film in Which There Appear Sprocket Holes and Edge Letters* (actually, a loop), the physical nature of film—including accidents and flaws—was celebrated.

Commercial film emphasized illusion, a synthetic construct of condensed time, while the rebellious avant-garde filmmaker often chose to use film in a manner more closely resembling real time. Andy Warhol's fixed-camera-position films, such as *Sleep*, lasting up to eight hours are typical of this way of thinking about film. With the advent of video, Warhol's practice was adopted by Bruce Nauman, Vito Acconci, Joan Jonas (Fig. 2), and others with a performance bent. They would turn on the video camera and perform in front of it for the duration of the tape. The composition of the work of art or performance was determined by the length of the tape. But, unlike Warhol, the early videomakers neither used the camera as an objective observer nor clearly separated the filmmaker and subject. In their work they were combined, and the artist performed for the camera, using it as a mirror, a process Rosalind Krauss has aptly called "narcissistic."

The most problematic concept video art inherited from the films of the sixties was the belief in the superior efficacy of the irrational, wordless experience that strives to imitate consciousness. The move towards wordlessness came from certain attitudes and values expressed by Jean Piaget, Buckminster Fuller, Fritz Perls, R.D. Laing, John Lilly, an interest in Eastern religions growing out of the fifties' interest in Zen, and the "oh wow" factor derived from the use of mind-expanding drugs by beatniks and hippies, and the trickle-down effect of the cybernetics revolution, which destroyed existing value systems and hierarchies by rendering most things in the world as pieces of information. In *Expanded Cinema*, a good summation of the beliefs of the preceding decade, Gene Youngblood propounds the virtues of synchronicity. Quoting Ehrenzeiger, he defines it as, "The child's capacity to analyze a total structure without having to analyze it or choose either/or."<sup>12</sup> The action of the mind was aesthetically objectified, and a succession of images independent of narrative was designed to produce a mind-expanding experience. In Brakhage's films such as *Dog Star Man*, autonomous images are superimposed or compounded not for dramatic effect but, according to the filmmaker, to provide raw material for the viewer's personal psychic experience.

Brakhage places himself in adversary relationship to commercial films and

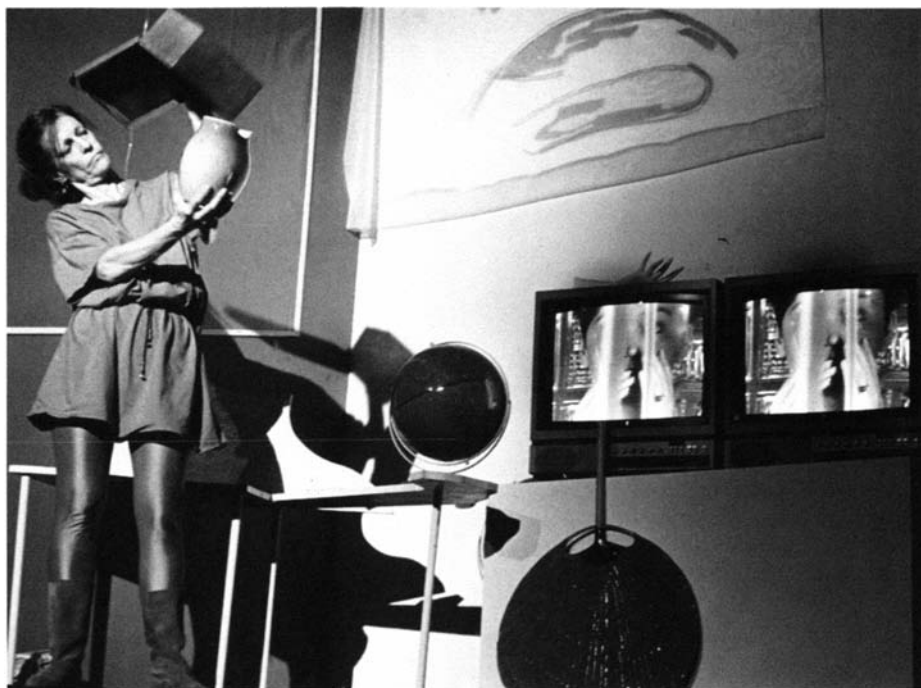


Fig. 2 Joan Jonas performing in *He Saw Her Burning*, March 1983, New American Filmmaker Series (February 22–March 13, 1983), Whitney Museum of American Art.

event art films such as *Last Year at Marienbad*. With a beatnik-hippy élan, he withdraws from capitalistic structures into a private realm. Brakhage gives the viewer the power to join him as a creator, to appropriate and combine his images at will. To a certain extent, Brakhage anticipates recent experiments with computer-assisted storytelling using video discs in which the viewer is permitted to direct the course of the narrative. In films such as *Water Baby Window Moving* (1958) he uses the flashback and flashforward to describe poetically his feelings about the birth of his child, conveying his feeling of joy through wordless images arranged cyclically. In later work he takes a more God's-eye view.

Imagine an eye unruléd by man-made laws of perspective, an eye unprejudiced by compositional logic, an eye that must know each object encountered in life through a new adventure in perception. Imagine a world shimmering with an endless variety of movement and gradations of color. Imagine a world before the beginning of the word.<sup>13</sup>

Video art inherited this emphasis on the value of the irrational, wordless experience that strove to imitate consciousness. A mystical experience is by its very nature difficult to transcribe and communicate, but, when it is translated into "art," one is no longer dealing with the immaterial. Because of the commonly held beliefs in the late sixties and

early seventies, the artist had a vested interest in playing Shakespeare's wise fool, concealing his structure behind a total incorporeal effect. Youngblood added a coda to his paean of Brakhage's abstract films: "This is not to suggest a non-objective experience. The images develop their own syntactical meaning and a 'narrative' line is perceived, though the meaning of any given image may change in the context of different sequences."<sup>14</sup>

#### Nam June Paik

A case can be made for locating the starting point of video art with the genesis of television, including Ernie Kovacs's 1952 experiments with distorting the signal, or, for the distribution of its origins, to a variety of European and American figures and movements, but if one person is given credit, it is usually the Korean-American artist and musician Nam June Paik. Coming to video as an avant-garde musician, under the influence of John Cage, George Maciunas, and the Fluxus Group, he saw television with its lowbrow reputation as the perfect material *pour épater le bourgeois*. He first used television sets as altered ready-mades and, in *The Moon is the Oldest TV* and other works, as self-referential machines capable of generating images from their own mechanisms—part of the then-current, modernist rhetoric about making work about itself. His experiments with feedback paralleled the art world's interest in process and materials. This work led him to develop the colorizer/synthesizer





**Fig. 3** Nam June Paik, *TV Buddha*, 1974, Buddha statue, video camera, and television, with mound of earth, exhibition installation, *Nam June Paik* (April 30–June 27, 1982), Whitney Museum of American Art. Statue: Collection Asian Gallery, New York; camera and television: Collection of the artist.

with Shuya Abe. The Paik-Abe synthesizer—along with those simultaneously invented by Stephen Beck, Peter Campus, Bill and Louise Etra, James Seawright, Eric Siegel, Aldo Tambellini, Stan VanderBeek, and Walter Wright—with its capacity for producing Fauve colors and electronically induced stacks of bleeding osmotic forms led to the separate genre of image-processed work. His video sculptures, *TV Bra*, *TV Bed*, *TV Cello*, and *TV Buddha* (Fig. 3), and performances with Charlotte Moorman introduced performance video, video sculpture, and video installations.

None of Paik's structures were entirely new. They blended Fluxus performance, Cage's ideas about music and art, and stream of consciousness derived from literature and film. Paik's single-channel tapes established the norm for the abstract visual language used in video. Although more edited than the work of his peers in the early seventies, Paik's personal and intuitive structures had become the norm by the decade's end. His methods are best seen in *Global Groove* (1973). Here we find a fully realized form of his use of intensely visual, chaotic stream-of-consciousness montage. Its presence here serves a didactic purpose, allowing Paik to provide his interpretation and visual exposition of McLuhan's remarks on television's effect of creating global unity, the idealistic "global village" many early videomakers sought. In one typical sequence, Paik juxtaposed Allen Ginsberg's chanting in the East Village with Korean dancers (to demonstrate the

diversity of the world) and Pepsi commercials in Japanese (to illustrate its homogenization). Paik wanted to "heat up" McLuhan's "cool" medium. He did this by imitating the structures of television—the short abrupt units of plot interrupted by brisk commercials—and then did television one better by accelerating the tempo, overlapping the units, and then enhancing them through electronic manipulation or the application of exotic color. The final product was essentially alien to broadcast television, on which it appeared. It had the appearance of wily analysis and a pastiche made by someone who did not understand, or appeared not to understand, the language and bourgeois reality of broadcast television. The appearance of misunderstanding or misreading television was increased by what seemed to be nervous and random channel switching. The style Paik chose for his presentation of global consciousness was a collage of disparate parts, like the layered images of Rauschenberg's prints. His editing had a brusque choppy quality—part play and part didacticism—that owed more to Warhol's "performance" films or to Godard's use of the jump-cut to disrupt a scene than to Hollywood *montage classique*. With modifications and embellishments, Paik's methodology has since become standard practice for most of video art including "new narrative."

#### *The Structure of Video*

Video art has been plagued by its legacy of wordlessness. Viewers often see its flowing images and unfamiliar circum-

stances as pure kinesis, visual candy, confusing it with television and imposing other limiting ideas that deny its content. Artists have intensified this problem by adopting stream of consciousness and disjunctive or abstract narrative as the standard structure in their work, often at the expense of legibility. The historical precedents for these devices are based on commonly held concepts about how the brain functions. In adopting this model, artists have not distinguished between the creator's and the viewer's perception and have not adequately taken into account the different sources of information available to maker and viewer. The maker has access to storyboards and other plotting devices, as well as a familiarity with the material, whereas the viewer usually has only the rapidly moving stream of images that appear before his or her eyes. By now, most of us have had Bill Viola's "seven-channel childhood" and have internalized broadcast television's essential disjunctiveness with its standard fare of short fragments of story interrupted by commercials, themselves subdivided into small units.

Although a career as a television watcher—a passive and unanalytical activity, at best—may familiarize one with watching speeding images and responding to them subliminally, it does not equip one for a sophisticated reading of images that are nonnarrative or not product oriented. Shalom Gorewitz's *U.S. Sweat* (Fig. 4) suffers from the difference between the maker's intentions and the viewer's expectation. The tape was originally commissioned by the U.S.A. Cable Network as its nightly sign-off, but it goes beyond the usual montage of the good life that is typical of that genre and allegorically traces the demographic shift from the rural south to the urban north and the tensions and conflicts it induced. In its ambitions *U.S. Sweat's* nonverbal montage resembles Stevie Wonder's talking narratives such as "A Boy Is Born," with further elaborations on content being supplied by an expressionist use of color, sound, and electronic image processing. Because of the subtlety and intricacy of the patterning of its images and limited viewer expectation, the nuances of Gorewitz's artistry are lost and the tape is perceived as merely a mildly disturbing travelogue.

One of the problems in interpreting and making video art is that the medium does not have the clearly defined structures or categories found in music, poetry, painting, and sculpture. This is owing in part to the relative newness of the medium; but, even when a series of conventions is established it is often rendered obsolete or superseded by rapidly



Fig. 4 Shalom Gorewitz, *U.S. Sweat*, 1982, videotape.

changing shifts in technology. As editing systems and color became affordable, they replaced the early minimally edited black-and-white work. Three-quarter-inch analog-edited color tapes have been replaced by computerized editing and special effects, one-inch masters, and \$40,000 three-tube color cameras. Through their exhibition and funding procedures, museums, festivals, and grant-giving agencies have encouraged high-tech, high-budget work at the expense of low-tech work, which has proved counterproductive to the growth of the medium. Works that employ varying levels of technology appear very different from one another—far different from, for example, a sculpture done in clay from one in bronze—and that difference in appearance has served at times to alienate the practitioners of the same medium from one another by masking the similarities of their work.

The early and often inaccurate interpretation of video art as kinetic painting has diminished through the years. Videomakers today are more likely to compare their work to poetry or music, referring to its imagist or metaphoric content with subsidiary references to its abstract and often rhythmic structure. The amorphous designation of materials as being like a poem or music raises more questions than it answers, but it is a good starting point for understanding the tacit assumptions that underlie video art and for learning to read videotapes.

If a videotape is a poem, what kind of poem is it: Haiku, free verse, a sonnet, a street chant? Or simply a collection of images, a bouquet of pretty pictures? If a videotape is like language, what is the

equivalent of the smallest unit, the word? And what constitutes the sentence? Eisenstein has said of film that the shot is the montage cell. The shot, the space between the edits or the *mise-en-scène*, can be construed as a single word or a cluster of words. It can also be a trope such as Homer's recurring phrase "wine-dark sea" or the ant-filled hand in Dali and Buñuel's *Un Chien Andalou*, which simultaneously illustrates the idiomatic expression "hands in the hand," meaning the hand is asleep, and suggests decay. Although a single picture may not be worth a thousand words, it does short-circuit language, and, as James Monaco has said: "A picture of a book is much closer to a book, conceptually, than the word 'book.'" <sup>15</sup> The picture is modified within a given shot by the presence of other objects or action, compositional shifts in color, and form. These objects and events change the picture from an icon to a symbol.

For a variety of reasons, including budgetary constraints, video images are frequently stripped of references to a specific story or society (its denotative and connotative meanings) and used more purely as an icon or symbol than is common in film and broadcast television. In film, shots are usually combined in a scene, the equivalent of a paragraph or stanza. Video generally eschews narrative conventions such as the reaction shot and the dissolve even when working in a narrative vein. Video tends to see the scene as an extension of the shot, editing to intensify the moment such as in Dara Birnbaum's *Wonder Woman* and *Damnation of Faust*, where fast

edits in the former and complex special effects in the latter magnify experience. The more unitary, building-block approach to the shot can be seen in Barbara Buckner's *The Golden Pictures*, where she gives still-life objects a supernatural intensity through shifts in color, luminance, and voltage.

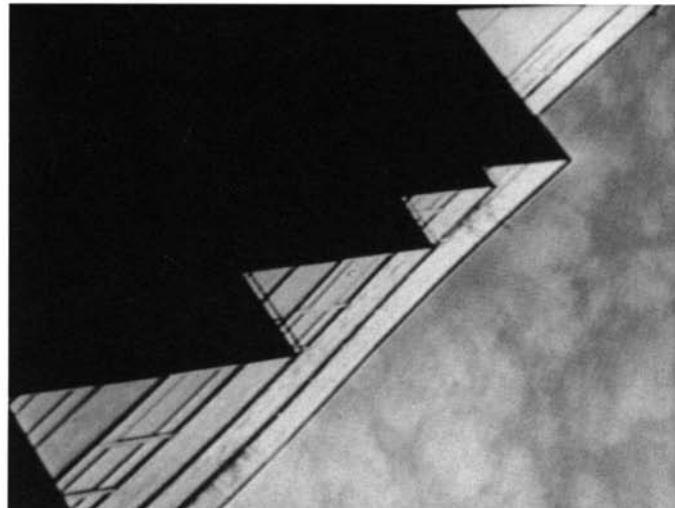
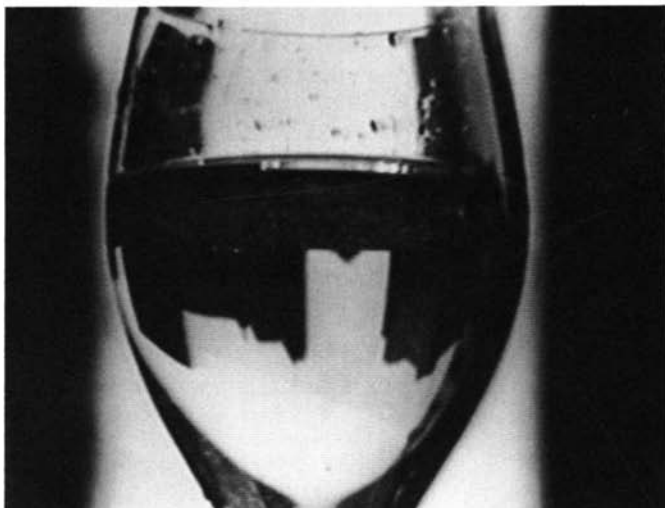
In the absence of narrative, greater weight is given to the effects of propinquity. Meaning is expanded syntagmatically through the modification and interpretation provided by adjacent shots. In Mary Lucier's *Denman's Col (Geometry)* (Figs. 5 and 6) and Bill Viola's *Hatsu Yume* it takes the form of metaphor. In *Denman's Col*, Lucier constructs a book of hours based on New York City architecture seen through the cycle of a year. Exterior shots of buildings are edited with interior shots, often of glasses, teacups, and vases being filled to call attention to the buildings' dual role as facade and container. Viola describes his work as like both poetry and music:

In the visual sense, my works are more related to music than to the printed word. They are visual poems, allegories in the language of subjective perception, open to diverse individual interpretation, yet each thematically expressing specific concepts derived from everyday experience. <sup>16</sup>

In *Hatsu Yume*, Viola presents what appears to be a high-tech travelogue of modern Japan contrasting city and country life. Woven throughout are partially buried symbolic references to his principal themes of the opposition and essential unity of fire and water, light and dark, life and death, with the city and man-made structures representing fire. As he explains it:

Video treats light like water—it becomes a fluid on the video tube. I thought water supports the  
like light supports man.  
Land is the death of fish—  
Darkness is the death of man. <sup>17</sup>

In his *Thinking Eye* series, especially in the recent *Shifters* (Figs. 7, 8, and 9), Juan Downey, operating in an unusual nexus between art history and personal reverie, builds on the expectation of continuity that propinquity gives and defies it through internally or adjacently fracturing or multiplying the object, idea, or story into unusual diptychs and triptychs. As in Medieval typological iconography, visually similar or dissimilar scenes that share a common theme, such as the pyramid of Cheops and the meaning of hearing, are juxtaposed, modifying and muddying the meaning of each.



**Figs. 5 and 6** Mary Lucier, *Denman's Col (Geometry)*, 1981, two synchronized videotapes on five monitors in a zigzag wall. Left: image from Channel 1; Right: image from Channel 2.

There are many problems in reading these works. Since video has no given or accepted norm, artists generally invent their own private, idiosyncratic structures. This is further complicated by our inexpertise in reading images or visual symbols, especially when they are divorced from a narrative or advertising context. We can all by now guess at the meaning of selling a car by showing it with a seductive woman or a sleek feline, but what of more subtle metaphors or more complicated allegories? To understand video, one has to grant greater power to images, overcoming the intellectual prejudice against the visual—and invest or reinvest them with meaning. In the case of video it often means naming images for the first time.

If video is like music, what kind of music is it like: German *Lieder*, rock-and-roll, blues, symphonies, operas, or the innovations of twentieth-century avant-garde music where virtually anything goes? When artists declare that they want their work to be read like music, do they mean passively with an unquestioning enjoyment of the rhythm? Or are they inviting the kind of analysis an opera devotee equipped with a libretto gives? When artists describe their work as being like music they are not referring to hearing. No, the musical component in their work lies in the rhythmic arrangement of images or the movement within an image. The description of images as being like music goes back at least to Eisenstein's theory of ocular music, which was based on Baudelaire's and Rimbaud's theory of correspondences as well as on the synaesthetic work of Wagner and Scriabin. Eisenstein also found kinetic-music properties in painting. He felt it was necessary to link the visual and kinetic movement in a *mise-en-scène* to the line or movement of the music. Yet, Eisenstein was not asking images to project

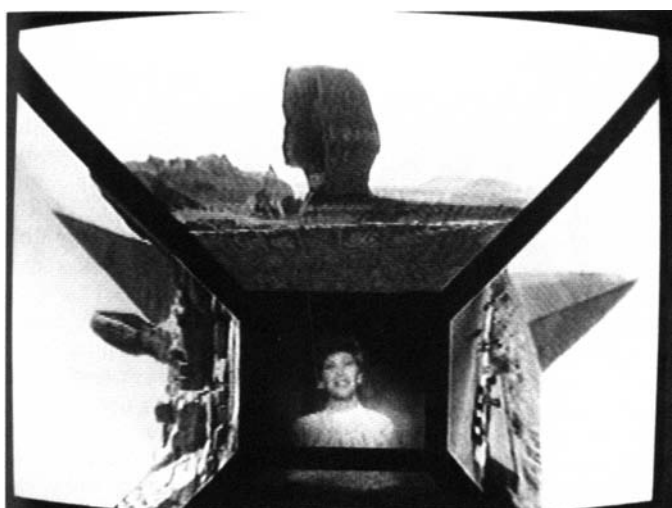
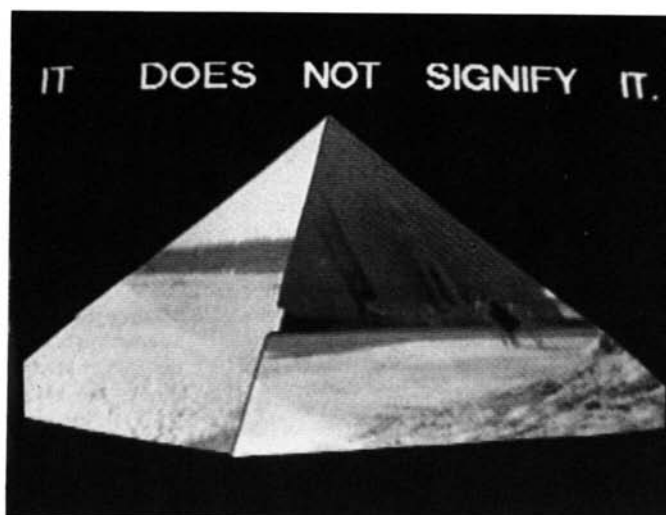
their music without assistance from actual music or a story. He subordinated color, composition, and music to the overall effect of his films. More often in video, when a parity is attempted between music and images, a split occurs because of their essentially different natures.

Sound and images have existed as unequal partners almost from the beginning of video. In the early days, with the exception of the work of Stephen Beck and the Vasulkas, for example, and Paik's experiments using sound to interrupt an image, the emphasis had been on the visual component. This was partly because of the poor quality of the audio equipment available (both recording and playback) and partly because many of the artists came from essentially visual backgrounds and were not as comfortable with sound as they were with images. Images were treated as promiscuous acceptors of sound. When ambient sound was not used the usual practice was to add a piece of music to the sound track. When Shalom Gorewitz provided rock clubs with tapes and gave them permission to use any song they wanted, he discovered that almost any piece of dance music would harmonize with the images if the editing was fast paced enough. (I might add that in his "art" tapes he carefully selects the music to enhance the images.) Recently, there have been some artists, headed by Reynold Weidenaar, who genuinely appreciate the "musicality" of their work and are involved equally in composing images and music.

Another problem in the video-music analogy is the differing degrees of abstraction possible with pictures and music. Images are short-cut signs and always have greater specificity than does music. If pictures are used in an abstract or mathematical structure, as Gary Hill sometimes does in imitation of

certain methods of music composition, they are never as abstract or lyrical as the equivalent music, and, no matter how generalized the images are, one is left with a concrete prosiness like singing the alphabet. Nowhere have the varying degrees of abstraction possible with songs (words), images, and music been more apparent than in the relatively new genre of music video. Music-songs are more abstract and open-ended than a sequence of images. With music video, the listener-viewer is locked into one specific construction of the meaning of its words. Video art's and music video's solution is to use generic types (the perfect young man, the blonde model), anywhere situations, and disjunctive story lines. All these elements combine to give the viewer greater latitude in his or her interpretation of the illustrated music. The use of generic types, which in video art is often accomplished through extreme close-ups and disjunction, works equally well for Roxy Music's *Avalon* and Mary Lucier's *Winter Garden*.

In video art, the musical component derives in part from editing. You may not be able to go away humming the picture but with many works you can hum the pattern of the edits. Video features a substantially different approach to editing from film because of its different physical properties. In film there is a mechanical juxtaposition of discrete parts that are more or less used up in their joining. Because it is electronic and nothing is lost in the editing process, video enjoys a greater conservation of matter. As John Sanborn has pointed out, artists view their material differently knowing that a shot can be interpreted and duplicated through editing, permitting the exponential expansion of a single moment. To a certain extent rhythmic editing is related to the feedback tapes of Steve Reich in which a



**Figs. 7, 8, and 9**  
Juan Downey,  
*Shifters*, 1984,  
videotape.

recycled tape supplies a layered, staggered rhythm. Tamiyo Sasaki's stuttering edits of fauna represent a similar but seemingly less mechanistic approach to parsing and multiplying the subject. In Sasaki's work, unlike Reich's where feedback gradually abstracts the words, repeated edits amplify the characteristic patterns of the animals she observed, turning them into robot-like performers. Despite the fact that different types of editing systems account for different styles of juxtaposition, the artist's sense of how to join pictures and the rhythm of his or her edits are as much a signature as is subject matter. So far no language has developed to acknowledge this quality. In the future shall we say that so-and-so's edits have a wild and woolly beat or that they sang like Pavarotti?

The sources for the color content of video art have also been neglected by its critics and practitioners. By this I mean a diversity of uses of color from the color coding of emotional content in Antonioni's *Red Desert*, which has "a precise metonymic use of color, where an overall grey tonality stands for depression and splashes of brilliant color stand for freedom,"<sup>18</sup> to Brian De Palma's use of red-

suffused fields in *Scarface* to stand for blood lust, to the razzle-dazzle chromatics of image-processed work. There is a long history of the inclusion of color in the palette of the senses, deriving in part from Baudelaire's theory of correspondences and Rimbaud's color alphabet. Color was so important to Eisenstein that he composed a virtual dictionary of the meaning of color, which included references to Havelock Ellis's psychological interpretation of color. Stan Brakhage insisted on the importance of color for shaping meaning in his films:

the comparable light-beeps of eye's out put tend *thru colors* (the order of colors, in rapid flashes), to make the shapes of closed-eye-vision which resolve into the specific details of memory's pictures; but, at first, these multiple colored flashes do smear (for the inattentive) into overwhelming color tones (viz: red for anger, green for jealousy, blue for nostalgic sadness, yellow as basic but also reflective of its psychological cowardly connotation, increasing with fear).<sup>19</sup>

Brakhage's description of his use of color in his films is close to the way it is used in image-processed tapes. The colorizer/synthesizer simultaneously allows the fusion of electronic signals from various pieces of tape and the alteration of colors by changes in voltage that affect their saturation and tonality. Image-processed work is the most direct inheritor of the traditions of color symbolism in literature, painting, music, and film. The colorizer/synthesizer guarantees an effect of exoticism to anything it is applied to. Its application automatically converts an image from an icon to a symbol loaded with artist-generated meaning. But, the knowledge of color symbolism has almost gone underground in video. When asked, practitioners of this genre almost always acknowledge the importance of color in their decision-making process, but there have been few statements by artists and critics analyzing its exact operation and no in-depth analysis or even a general awareness of how the use of altered color affects the meaning of specific shots or scenes, such as the blue sheep in Barbara Buckner's *Pictures of the Lost* or Shalom Gorewitz's use of red and muddy maroon to signify factories are bad places in *U.S. Sweat*.

It would be false to think this is a purely machine-based art, generating images mechanistically without the maker's intervention. True, the machine generates the color, and each of the major colorizers offers a slightly different range of hues: the Paik-Abe synthesizer, for example, tends towards almost Day-Glo magentas, greens, and yellows. The movement towards personal colorizers/synthesizers keyed to an individual artist is just beginning, but the present state of affairs is similar to the painter's reliance on brand-name paint. Still, the work that comes out of a specific center, such as the Experimental Television Center, Owego, New York, is as varied as the artists who

make it, and a particular palette is as much a signature as is the rhythm of the edits. Although color is a more overt facet of image-processed work than of other genres of video, it would also be wrong to limit its discussion solely to image-processed work.

The colorizer/synthesizer also affects the appearance of objects, making it possible to layer them in a dense transparent collage, glazing and interpenetrating one another. This translucent stack provides a more immediate and visual way of building metaphoric relationships than does language. It is also possible to break the boundaries of an object, giving it roughly the appearance of a freely drawn line in painting or the bleeding of two colors in a watercolor. In video this suture is more organic than in painting because it occurs electronically and temporally at once, and the objects physically become one substance before one's eyes. The distortions caused by technological pyrotechnics have the same meaning as Expressionist distortions of form—the bean-shaped head in Edvard Munch's *The Scream* and Paik's vortical head in *The Medium Is the Medium* are more alike than are Bernini's *Pluto and Proserpina* and *Kojak*, although the latter pair share an interest in violent pursuit. Recent video work has become conscious of the meaning of the manipulation of form, and one of the attractions of image processing is that its potential for metamorphosis makes it possible to render spiritual and emotional realities both graphically and kinetically.

Christian Metz has written, "When a 'language' does not already exist, one must be something of an artist to speak it, however poorly. For to speak it is partly to invent it, whereas to speak a language of everyday is simply to use it."<sup>20</sup> If video ever did represent a wholly new art form, it no longer does. Made up partly of a forgotten or ignored past and partly of certain conventions derived from film, art, television, and its own genesis, video art has a language. The time has come for all of us, makers and viewers, to learn to speak it.

## Notes

This article is excerpted from a work in progress on the structure of video art.

- 1 Robert Pincus-Witten, "Open Circuits," an international conference of the aesthetics of television held at The Museum of Modern Art, January 1974.
- 2 Nam June Paik, *Video 'n' Technology*, ed. Judson Rosebush, Syracuse, Everson Museum, 1974.
- 3 Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space*, Cambridge, Mass., 1983, proposes that the shift was a consequence of the loss of privacy brought on by the new inventions—trains, for example—and the increasingly collective organization of time due to the need for schedules.
- 4 Peter Bürger, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw, Minneapolis, 1984, p. 73.
- 5 Michael Snow, "La Région Centrale," quoted in Regina Cornwall, *Snow Seen*, Toronto, 1980, p. 105.
- 6 Martin Duberman, *Black Mountain*, Garden City, N.Y., 1973, p. 369.
- 7 Michael Nyman, *Experimental Music*, New York, 1974, p. 61.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Rudolf Arnheim, "Art Today and the Film," in *The New American Cinema*, ed. Gregory Battcock, New York, 1967, p. 58.
- 10 Ibid., pp. 63–64.
- 11 Gerald Mast, *Film Cinema Movie*, Chicago, 1983, pp. 82–83.
- 12 Gene Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema*, New York, 1970, p. 84.
- 13 Stan Brakhage, "Metaphors of Vision," quoted *ibid.*, p. 91.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 James Monaco, *How to Read Film*, New York, 1981, p. 128.
- 16 Bill Viola, artist's statement in "Program Notes," Whitney Museum of American Art, March 16–18, 1982, p. 2.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 Monaco (cited n. 15), p. 138.
- 19 Stan Brakhage, *Brakhage Scrapbook*, ed. Robert Haller, New Paltz, N.Y., 1982, p. 134.
- 20 Christian Metz, quoted in Monaco (cited n. 15), p. 132.

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# *The Passion for Perceiving: Expanded Forms of Film and Video Art*

By John G. Hanhardt

*The picture, certainly is in my eye. But I am not in the picture.*

—Jacques Lacan<sup>1</sup>

The spectator in the movie theater and the reader of the novel are no longer seen as passive receivers but as, in fact, engaged in the active production of meaning. Contemporary theories of interpretation are approaching an understanding of the reception of the aesthetic text as a complex hermeneutic of multivalent readings centered within the psychology of the reader and the social institution of discourse production.

The title for this paper, "The Passion for Perceiving," is taken from one of the key works of recent film theory, Christian Metz's *The Imaginary Signifier*.<sup>2</sup> The role of the spectator holds a central place in Metz's elaboration of a semiotic analysis of the formation of the cinema as text and social institution. Metz's psychoanalytic inquiry into the roots of the cinematic discourse posits that the psychology of the spectator is formed through the group experience of film viewing in the theater and the individual's interaction with the film's formal construct of narrative tropes. Metz thus enlarges the cinematic discourse by basing his semiotic method not exclusively on linguistic models but on Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis as well.

One of the problems with Metz's approach, as with film theory in general, is that it is given over exclusively to a cinema shaped by narrative and representational concerns. Metz's reading of film is conditioned by the dominant codes of the classical cinema and its conventions of viewing. But the avant-garde film has evolved its own separate history, allied to the movements of modernism. The developing theories of

interpretation in the visual and literary arts—with their attention to a variety of texts and visual-art traditions—can contribute to a better understanding of the cinematic experience when it is seen as an enlarged discourse composed of a variety of texts and viewing experiences.

The problem of contemporary film theory—its exclusive preoccupation with the normative theatrical film production and viewing experience—figures also in the writing of video's history and theory. The terms "video" and "television" identify two different forms of the medium. Television is the broadcast mode of the medium, which historically has been defined by the commercial networks. Video traditionally identifies the independent producer and artist creating tapes for telecast outside commercial television.

Television began as an industry whose developments, through patents, economic consolidation, and communications law, were quickly subsumed into a monopolistic commercial broadcast industry. Similarly, film emerged in the nineteenth century as a phenomenon of individual investors and entrepreneurs joining the recording ability of film and photography to its narrative potential as a popular art form. These protonarrative forms were explored before the rapid consolidation of cinematic practice into the monopolistic entertainment industry established at the beginning of the twentieth century. Since the highly capitalized corporate structure of broadcast television did not avail itself of independent production, its history does not parallel that of the experimentation and individual innovation of nineteenth-century film. But in the early 1960s, there did emerge—out of Fluxus and Pop

Art—an appropriation of the television as an icon, to be destroyed and transformed, by such artists as Wolf Vostell and Nam June Paik.

The development of the portable videotape recorder and player by the Sony Corporation released the medium from its studio confines; it became a new image-making tool in the hands of artists. One of the experimental forms that shaped video art was the installation, which took video out of the customary single-channel television and gallery-viewing format and posited it as a sculptural/installation/environmental medium. It is this work that will be briefly reviewed here as we begin to contrast film and video installations and to explore the differing strategies they use to engage the viewer in the text of the work. This comparison reflects the dialogue that is emerging between film and video artists who are joining these media through a conscious reevaluation of the traditional forms and strategies of film and video causing a rethinking of sculpture, installation, and performance.

Video as installation has expressed a conscious rejection of single-channel television viewing within the home. Video installations employ a variety of formal strategies and technological properties of the medium: multichannel and monitor displays of videotapes where the monitor as a physical object is marked within a wall structure, as in Mary Lucier's *Ohio at Giverny* (1983); or the placing of monitors in various expressive configurations, as in Ira Schneider's *Time Zones* (1980); or the juxtaposition of monitors with other materials, as in Francesc Torres's installation *The Head of the Dragon* (1981). Common to these works is the use of the



flexibility of the monitors' placement and consequent distribution of images to articulate a whole work out of a dialogue established among its elements.

A similar set of examples is available from film-installation work: from film-projection installations that employ multiple projections of images on a wall surface, as in Paul Sharits's *Episodic Generation* (1979), to the distribution of projected images from multiple points of view within an environment of steam, as in Stan VanDerBeek and Joan Brigham's outdoor work *Steam Screens* (1979), and finally to the intertextual projection of film images within environments of objects that articulate together a whole text of different parts and elements, such as Leandro Katz's *The Judas Window* (1982). The examples of film (Morgan Fisher and Benni Efrat) and video (Peter Campus and Buky Schwartz) installations described below employ film and video in a way that directly acknowledges the spectator within the work itself, thus positing an active dialogue between the viewer and the text of the installation.

In Morgan Fisher's *North Light* (1979) (Fig. 1) the content of the film is determined by the site of the installation, and in Benni Efrat's *Putney Bridge* (1976) (Fig. 2) the artist becomes an active participant in the viewing experience. The two artists working in video, Peter Campus and Buky Schwartz, both employ the closed-circuit properties of video. The image projected onto a gallery wall in Campus's *Mem* (1975) (Fig. 3) and the image on the monitor's screen in Schwartz's *Yellow Triangle* (1979) (Fig. 4) are real-time, live images being recorded by the video camera. The two sets of work in film and video posit the cognitive experience of perceiving the work as a dialogue between the artist and the spectator. The ontological differences between film and video result in differing perceptions of the nature of the image. Each piece, however, shares in forging an active inquiry into the instability of the viewing experience, and exposing the impossibility of a single reading/experience of the individual works. These projects are about the experience of time and place as both are acknowledged within the text of the work and as they affect our perception of it.

Morgan Fisher's *North Light* (Fig. 1) was created for the third-floor gallery of the Whitney Museum for an exhibition called *Re-Visions: Projects and Proposals in Film and Video*.<sup>3</sup> This work articulates the two-dimensional perspective of the film image and its relationship, through the content and process of projection, to the surface onto which it is constantly projected. Fisher, a leading

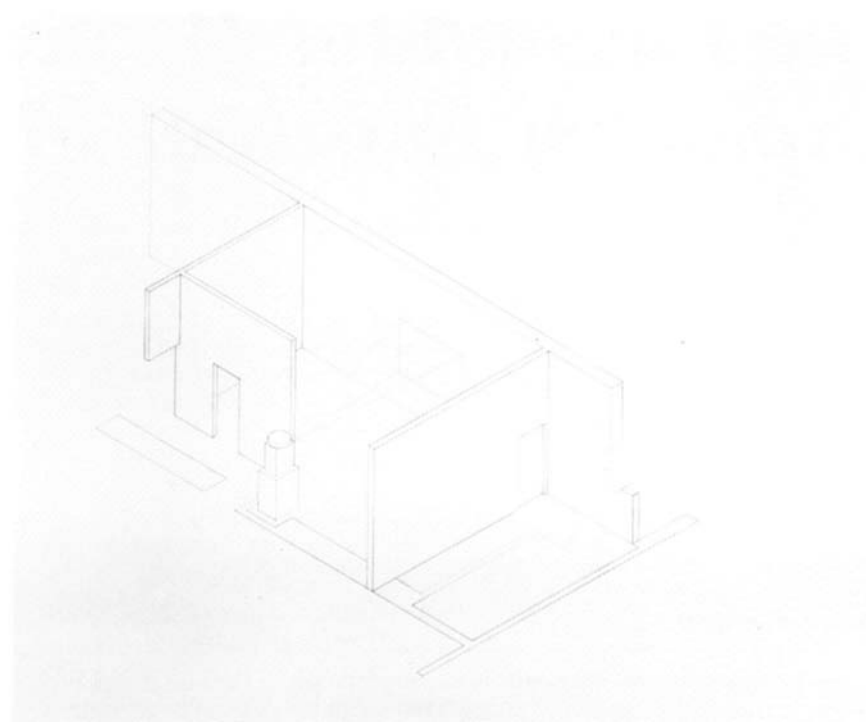


Fig. 1 Morgan Fisher, *North Light*, 1979, drawing.

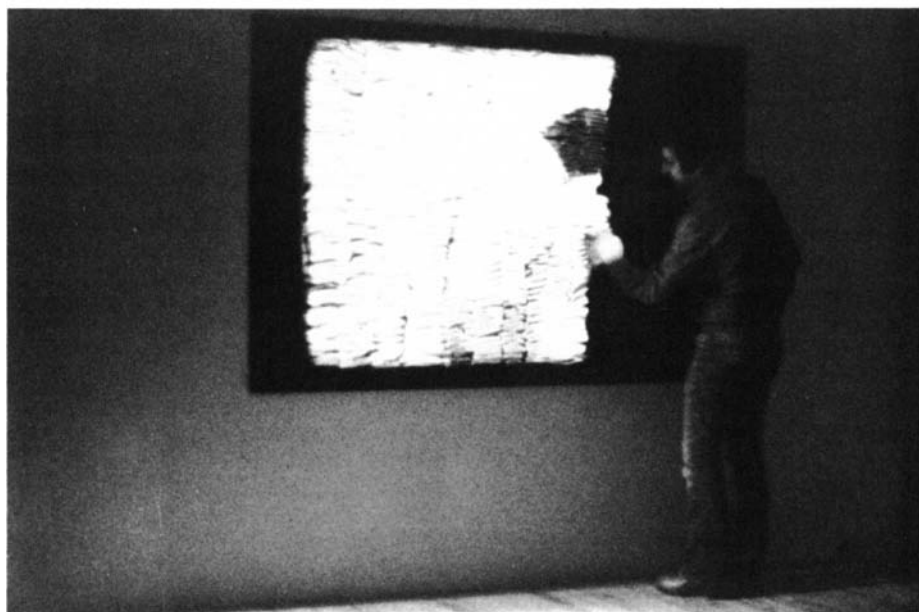


Fig. 2 Benni Efrat, *Putney Bridge*, 1976, film performance.

structural filmmaker within the avant-garde, pursues here his concern with the process of filmmaking as he treats the myth of the screen as a window onto the world. Fisher plays with the idea that film presents a "true" record of reality. The image in *North Light*—a silent color loop—is a view of the opposite side of Seventy-fifth Street projected continuously onto the north gallery wall. Because of the camera's position, the image can only approximate what an actual rectangular break in the wall at the projection point would reveal. This "approximation" is further attenuated by the two-dimensionality of the image, the position of the projector, and optical

factors in filming and projecting the image. Fisher's installation establishes a complex metaphor for the representation of point of view within the image and in relationship to the site of its showing. The loop captures within its twenty-minute cycle the action that takes place within that time in the building across the street. The narrative of the film loop is expressed in the viewer's expectation that "something should happen" on film. This is frustrated in the changeless replaying of the same action, which is itself minimal. Because the body of the spectator standing in the beam of projection casts a shadow onto the projected image, he or she becomes



part of the image. Our time spent in the frame is the image's narrative as we reflect on our position vis-à-vis the film and the real-world time taking place behind the projected image. Fisher's title, *North Light*, refers not only to the projection on the north gallery wall but also to the light that painters seek in their ateliers. Thus, Fisher's view from an imaginary window casts its own light and recalls seventeenth-century Dutch architectural painting, where the point of view of the spectator is acknowledged as matching the canvas as window.

The temporal, two-dimensional property of the projected film image is further developed as a performance by the artist in Benni Efrat's *Putney Bridge* (Fig. 2). This twenty-five-minute, black-and-white film is an unedited long shot of the Putney Bridge in London showing traffic crossing the bridge and boats moving beneath it. As the film is projected in a darkened gallery onto a blackboard surface, Efrat marks the blackboard with various pastel-colored chalks. Thus, the black-and-white film is interpreted through the application of the colored chalks to the screen surface. By the close of the performance-projection the screen has become an abstract pattern of colors that articulate and reveal the film image of the bridge. After the film has run through the projector its beam of light shows only the pattern of hand-drawn colors. Efrat's film performances and installations are distinguished by their concern for the two-dimensional projected image and its relationship to both its source and the three-dimensional context onto which it is projected. In *Putney Bridge* it is as if Efrat were painting the actual Putney Bridge as an abstract painter who "sees" the actual landscape through his canvas, which appears and disappears as one's eye moves between the painted surface and the actual landscape.

In both the Fisher and Efrat works the film projector is part of the work. It is placed within the gallery, and its sound is a presence in the gallery. The projector's beam of light—the method by which the film image is revealed—is interfered with either by the spectator, whose body becomes part of the illusion of Fisher's *North Light*, or by the artist, as in Efrat's *Putney Bridge*, where the beacon of projector light reveals the artist's performance and hand-drawn interpretation of the filmed landscape.

The two video installations—by Peter Campus and Buky Schwartz—explore the closed-circuit, real-time perception of video. Unlike film, which must be processed before it can be screened, the video image is instantaneously recorded and playable. Thus the video camera in the hands of the installation artist can

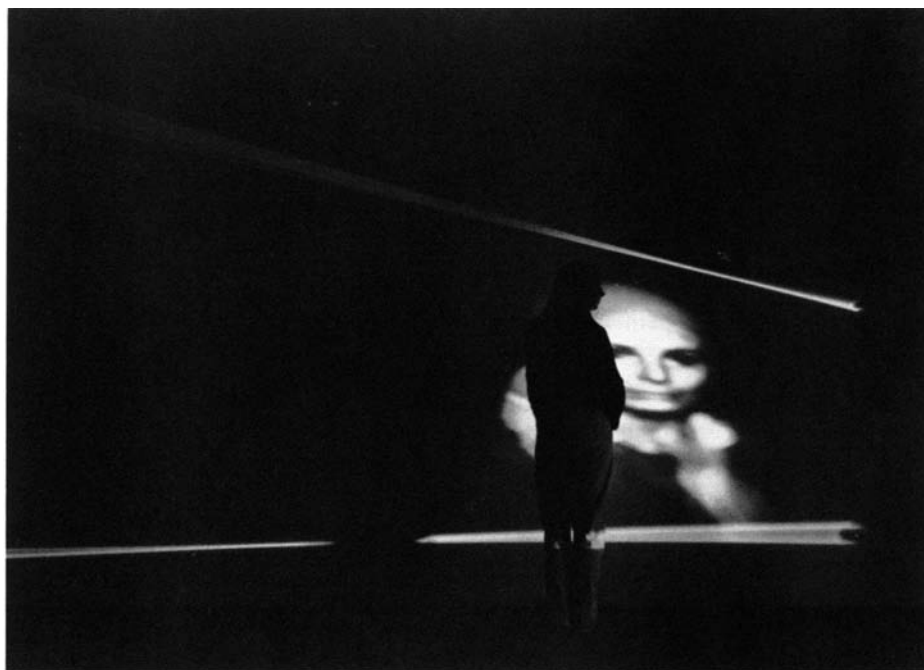


Fig. 3 Peter Campus, *Mem*, 1975, video installation.

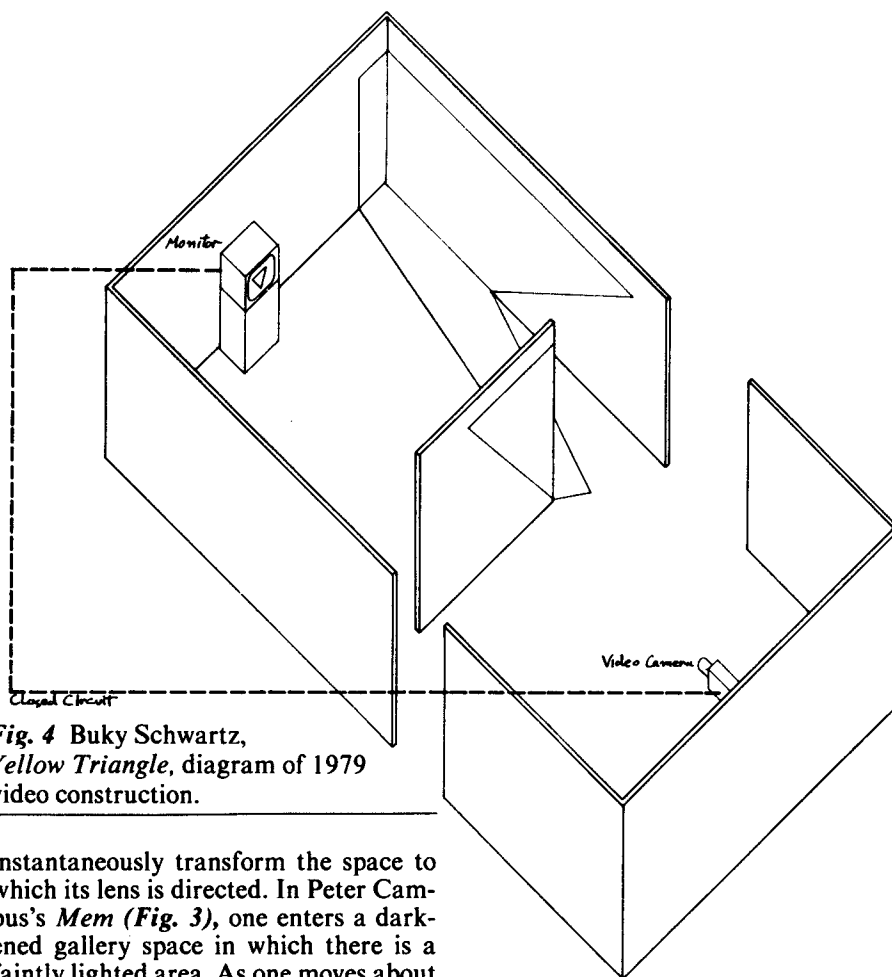


Fig. 4 Buky Schwartz, *Yellow Triangle*, diagram of 1979 video construction.

instantaneously transform the space to which its lens is directed. In Peter Campus's *Mem* (Fig. 3), one enters a darkened gallery space in which there is a faintly lighted area. As one moves about within this space, an image of the viewer's body is projected onto the gallery wall. The projection is not a direct representation of the viewer's body. Rather, the camera, which is not visible to the viewer, renders aspects of the body as light. Thus, the viewer moving about the

space is involved in constructing a self-portrait as a fragmented image on the gallery's wall. The projected image flattens the spectator's body as a presence-substance, playing with the boundary between abstraction and representation

as fragments of the body are revealed and disappear.

Buky Schwartz's *Yellow Triangle* (1979) (Fig. 4) employs the camera and acknowledges the two-dimensional properties of the video image, which flattens the space surveyed by the camera's lens. In this project, one of Schwartz's video construction series, a camera is located near the gallery ceiling and is directed into the gallery space in which the artist has painted a yellow triangular pattern on the floor and walls, which is seen as a triangle on the monitor. It is only on the monitor that the painted surfaces can be seen as a yellow triangle, and that only when the viewer is in the image itself. Here Schwartz has created the illusion on the monitor's screen of a sculptural object, a yellow triangle, that is only perceivable on the monitor's screen constructed from the point of view of the camera. The spectator is one with the picture as he or she looks at the monitor and stands within the triangle.

In both *Mem* and *Yellow Triangle* the artists manipulate points of view through the camera and position of the spectator in an active exploration of the image and space in which the work is sited. The painterly surface on Campus's projected image and the sculptural presence of Schwartz's triangle are created by a medium in which the viewer takes an active role in perceiving the work.

The film and video installations discussed above are linked to issues of interpretation theory, since the spectator is actively implicated in the perception and realization of the aesthetic text. The relationship of the film image to the surface and production process in *North Light* is created within and for its site. In *Putney Bridge* Efrat interprets the photographic image and uses it as the basis of this performance. In both of these works there is a tension between the surface onto which the image is projected and the image itself. Fisher's screen in effect is transparent as it becomes a window, whereas Efrat's screen becomes both a film and drawn image.

In the two video installations the viewer sees the work by being part of the illusion. In *Yellow Triangle* one walks through the three-dimensional space that becomes on the monitor a two-dimensional triangle in which one also disappears. In *Mem* the spectator himself becomes the image, the aesthetic text, projected onto the gallery wall.

These four projects are representative of a number of film and video installations that function as complete works of art only when the viewer becomes part

of the picture and fuses with the eye of the camera-projector-monitor. The spectator is in an active dialogue with the text, seeing it not as a closed code but as an engaging phenomenological experience. These film and video installations can be seen as models or metaphors for the relationship of the reader-viewer to text: they exemplify the aesthetic text as a presence in an active and reciprocal dialogue between the artist and viewer.

#### Notes

- 1 Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan, New York, 1978, p. 96.
- 2 Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier*, trans. Celia Britton, Annwyl Williams, Ben Brewster, and Alfred Guzzetti, Bloomington, Indiana, 1982.
- 3 *Re-Visions: Projects and Proposals in Film and Video*, April 19–May 13, 1979, was the Whitney Museum's first large-scale film- and video-installation exhibition. The exhibition occupied the Museum's entire third floor and comprised the work of three film artists (William Anastasi, Morgan Fisher, Michael Snow) and three video artists (Bill Beirne, Buky Schwartz, Bob Watts in collaboration with David Behrman and Bob Diamond).

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# *From Gadget Video to Agit Video: Some Notes on Four Recent Video Works*

By Benjamin H. D. Buchloh

The usage of video technology in artistic practice since the mid sixties has undergone rapid and drastic changes. This makes it a particularly significant topic not only for the study of the shifts to which art in general has been subjected since the conclusion of post-Minimal and Conceptual art, the context within which video production established itself firmly as a valid practice of representation-production. These changes concern not only the affiliations of art practice with other discourses (film, television, advertising) but also the conditions of its institutional containment (video's implicit and explicit claim to lead the way out of the vicious circle of gallery and museum institution straight into the mythical public sphere of broadcast television) as well as its audience relationship (opening and broadening audiences, addressing very specific audiences at the site and the moment of their conditions and needs).

As in the first instances of the usages of film technology by artists (Léger, Man Ray, Moholy-Nagy), video technology was originally employed by artists parallel to their continuing work in painting and sculpture or conceptual practices (for example, such major video artists of the sixties as Vito Acconci, Dan Graham, Bruce Nauman, and Lawrence Weiner). Since then, however, the usage of video technology has become the central production tool for a younger generation of artists, many of whom have had no background in the traditional academic disciplines of art at all but come directly out of film- and television studies or other fields such as the dramatic arts or even architecture. Therefore, video artists have generally maintained an uneasy relationship with the institutions of reception and distri-

bution of the high-art avant-garde—the museum and the gallery—and an even uneasier one with the customers of this distribution system, the private collectors. It seems that many of the potentially most progressive features of the medium have by now turned out to be a trap for the artists who find themselves caught between the vigorous reaffirmation of traditional values and techniques in the worlds of high-art and institutional television and an attitude of increasing certainty that culture, consumption, and ideology are congruent.

Although recent developments in the art world have proven the optimistic assumptions of the video artists of the late sixties and early seventies wrong on each account and have thus effectively transformed their claims into myths, it still seems necessary to recall these claims that were once made for video technology and its usage in order to recognize the industrial pressures that video art has faced since then. First, it appeared at the time that video technology would be a powerful weapon to assist language, photography, and film in the gradual dismantling of the traditional modes of cultural production, breaking down their hegemony and false claim for an organic and auratic aesthetic quality, dismantling the dominance of the fetishizing practices of painting and sculpture.

The second assumption was that electronically generated iconic imagery not only would replace the inherently retrograde aesthetics of a craft-and-skill-oriented production with its implied exclusivity and elitist domination of the field of culture but would also—by the mere fact of its technology—establish a relationship with the dominant and dominating practice of mass culture,

television, and thus reach new audiences. The promise of video technology seemed to be a progressive transformation both of the traditional fetishistic production and reception apparatus of the high-art institution and of the quasi-totalitarian conditions of the consciousness industry in television, advertising, and movie production. This promise continued the legacy of modernism's attachment to technology as an inevitably liberating force, the naïvely optimistic assumption—which had already distorted Walter Benjamin's famous "Reproduction" essay and the work of the most important artists of the twenties—that media technology could induce changes inside a sociopolitical framework without addressing the specific interests and conditions of the individuals within the political and economic ordering system.

Typical of the technocratic idealists who fostered the cult of the gadget in the field of video art is Nam June Paik, who became the role model for contemporary video artists. Another typical figure of the late sixties—and equally a heroic pioneer of video art—was Gerry Schum, who initiated the first gallery that was exclusively committed to video art and that was supposed to serve the fine-arts collector and the museum institution on the one hand and, on the other, as a studio and producer of artists' video works to be supplied to television stations for broadcasting.<sup>1</sup> Needless to say, neither of Schum's heroic and quixotic commitments were successful—in spite of his exceptional conviction and professional devotion to the project.

With regard to the traditional high-art apparatus and its distribution system, the project failed because private collectors could not be convinced that a

technically produced object in an artificially limited or an unlimited edition might be worth collecting and that screening videotapes like home movies was the new form of representative cultural patronage. Now that works of art have been restored to their proper condition as unique auratic objects, we know better that collecting is motivated not—in most instances—by the desire to communicate and conserve cultural production but by the need to possess. Or if not alone to possess, then to gamble with the cultural fetish's fortunes and misfortunes on the market. As for museums, they responded to the assault by video production as a mellowed follower of a once-virulent futurist threat, and gradually opened up and acquired and installed equipment for the continuous viewing of video work. Ultimately, some major institutions even developed departments for the collection and curatorial administration of video work. Yet the institutions were soon to find out not only that the new technology presented considerable problems of operation and maintenance but also that the silent perpetuity of painting and sculpture in the galleries attracted growing audiences, who in turn seemed to be rather disturbed by the presence of the television set in the museum. After all, the pilgrimage to the object of high art was not being made in order to be reminded of the barbarism of everyday life in the home and on the screen.

Institutions of mass culture temporarily made a liberal opening in the sixties for adventurers like Schum when his tapes by artists were in fact admitted for broadcasting on several occasions. The most appropriate was probably the proposal by the Dutch artist Jan Dibbets to broadcast a prerecorded image of a fireplace on network television for several minutes. Inevitably, the institutional managers found out that these artists' ideas about television did not really agree with theirs or those of their audiences, let alone those of their advertising patrons. The best that could be hoped for at that time was a mutual exchange of tokenism between the institutions of high and low culture and the myths that this would generate: that high culture was committing itself—once again—radically to the formation and technology of mass-cultural representation and that the mass-cultural institution was liberal and civilized enough to support the isolated and ailing high-art practices. The contradictions inherent in these myths were particularly evident on the level of video distribution and reception. While the commercial galleries of the sixties were attempting to make artists' tapes attractive as items for traditional collectors (hoping perhaps that a new collector's

personality would develop, a fetishist without the object but with the apparatus perhaps), they were also trying to maintain the radical stance of the video work as an "anti-artistic" and "dematerialized" carrier of visual and textual information and to keep the rental fees for this democratic tool of cultural instruction and entertainment sufficiently inexpensive to make it accessible to a broader public than fine art had hitherto allowed for. It seems by now that the few commercial operations engaged in video-art distribution that have survived the late-sixties adventure in media optimism have decided to keep sales and rental fees for videotapes high enough to compensate for illegal dubbing and pirating of the tapes, which means that the rental of a videotape can easily be as expensive as that of a two-hour feature movie or a public lecture by an artist in an educational institution.

Those who were involved in production in the sixties seem to have been unaware that video technology required and generated its own syntax and vocabulary and that the practices of mass-cultural institutions and high-cultural conventions were not so easily integrated. Often the results of artists' involvement with the technique of video were rather peculiar hybrids that could just as easily have been produced with traditional film equipment. Only those artists who, like Dan Graham, Bruce Nauman, and Richard Serra, were explicitly involved in a phenomenological analysis of the viewers' relationship to the sculptural construct and to the surrounding architectural container were successful in employing video technology in its most essential and specific capacities of simultaneous recording and reproduction, feedback of image and sound, duration and delay of temporal experience in the context of a sculptural installation. Although these artists were acutely aware of the unique and specific qualities of video technology for the purposes of their sculptural investigations, they deliberately ignored altogether the technology's origin and containment in the mass-cultural industry of television. This was only a typical instance of the modernists' assumption that their perceptual and aesthetic investigation takes place in a socially and politically neutral field—the virtual space of art—and is all the more astonishing since the founder of video practice in art, Nam June Paik, since 1965 had always emphasized the interdependence of the institutions of television and the avant-garde. Unfortunately, however, that interdependence was never subjected to a critical analysis, and Paik never addressed the political implications of the ideological apparatus of television. This accounts for the fact

that his ideas of resistance and subversion remained on the level of the anarchic, playful opposition, countering the totalitarianism of the consciousness industry with the transformation of its technology into the gadget.

The first artist of the generation of post-Minimal sculptors who really addressed the issue of television as being inseparable from the usage of video technology was Richard Serra. After producing a number of video and film works that employed all of the medium's specific potential for a temporal and spatial analysis of a viewer's relationship to a sculptural process and construct, Serra produced a videotape that explicitly acknowledged the technique's dependence on the institution of television: *Television Delivers People*.<sup>2</sup> This tape not only referred to the ideological affiliation of the technology but also explicitly addressed a non-high-art audience, since it was intended for broadcast television and it "spoke" to the television public rather than to the museum or gallery public.

At some point the history of the relationship between the traditional high-art avant-garde and the new video technology will have to be written. It will be surprising how many of the same grotesque features and problems that marked photography's encounter with the high-art institutions in the nineteenth century—the pretenses and disavows, the mimicry and disguises—were also at work in the interrelationship of video technology and its artistic practitioners.

One of the key figures in the development of post-Minimal video art is Dan Graham, who has employed video technology since the late 1960s for the construction of sculptural situations. The term "situational aesthetics" was used at that time with various meanings, but it could be applied to Graham's work to describe the multiplicity of its focus, dealing with the particular conditions of the site of the sculptural construction in terms of architectural space at the same time as with the psychological space generated by the interaction of the viewers with the construction itself, the behavior-space of audience and performers.<sup>3</sup>

Graham acknowledged his historical debt to the sculptors of Minimal art and the post-Minimal work explicitly; for the usage of video it was particularly in the work of Bruce Nauman that Graham had recognized the technology's peculiar and specific capacity to heighten an audience's sense of the phenomenological interdependence of spatial, temporal, material, and perceptual elements that constituted in their totality the phenomenon that had been tradi-

tionally referred to as "sculpture." Thus, video technology provided the most accurate means for a true self-reflexivity of spatial conditions and temporal processes as required by advanced contemporary definition of the sculptural experience.

At the same time, video technology also provided the means for a different kind of self-reflexivity: the reflection of internal psychological and behavioral processes, be it those of the author or those of the audience. Against the legacy of a formalist ban on subject matter and subjectivity (as Greenberg had demanded, it had to be "avoided like the plague") artists like Vito Acconci and Joan Jonas in the late sixties employed video for the recording and transmission of psychological content and subject matter, almost as if they wanted to resist not only that formalist legacy but also the restriction to a pure phenomenological neutrality of behavior that Minimal art had at least admitted back into the discussion of aesthetic practice and experience.

The impermanence of many of the installations by Nauman, Acconci, Graham, and Jonas and the inevitably "dramatic" qualities of an analytical approach to behavior processes led numerous critics to the discovery of a distinctly "theatrical" quality in the work of these artists, presumably a "theater of the conceptual" and of narcissistic self-reflection.<sup>4</sup> This misapprehension originated in Michael Fried's misreading of the insistence of Minimal artists on incorporating a phenomenological reflection on audience participation in terms of a traditional theatrical performance. Emphasis on the contingency and contiguity of the perceptual construct (with which Robert Morris, in, for example, his *Mirrored Cubes* of 1964, had initiated a critique of the modernist notion of the autonomous space of sculpture) forms also the basis of the video work produced by these artists in the late sixties and early seventies.

Unlike that of Nauman or Acconci, however, Graham's work from the very beginning explicitly reflects on the condition that all video practice *qua* technique is originating and ultimately contained in the dominant mass-cultural discourse of television. This would be best evidenced in a work from 1971, *Project for a Local Cable TV*,<sup>5</sup> where one of Graham's typical experiments to survey and record the dynamics and mechanics of an exchange between two individuals is linked to the community audience via cable network. The two individuals in this particular case have been instructed not to act out internalized modes of social role behavior—as in so many other earlier works of Gra-

ham—but to act out two opposing viewpoints on issues of community concern. By feeding the opposing positions through permutations (each adversary assumes alternately the other's position), the community is encouraged to respond and engage in an active mode of participation in the viewing and receiving process of television. Although this work is clearly marked by the utopian thinking of the late sixties (in its media optimism and in its naïveté towards the apparatus of mass culture and the powers that control it), it is also an outstanding example of a video work in which the three dimensions of video art and its unique and specific potentials are most clearly integrated. Whereas Acconci concentrated on video's potential for feedback and mirror reflection and its psychological implications of self-reflection, introspection, and the exemplary acting out of the imaginary worlds of self-projection and identification and Nauman restricted his installations to abstract formal and perceptual experiments that excluded psychological subject matter beyond that of the psychology of perception of time and space, Graham clearly opts from the very beginning for video's sociopolitical potential in every respect. On the level of the reflection of spatiotemporal phenomena, Graham's works are conceived of as the containers of social interaction, never as pure sculptural constructs or aestheticized domains of neutrality and purity as they emerge at the same time at the West coast in post-Minimal sculpture. On the level of individual or interpersonal psychological reflection, Graham emphasizes the dependence of individual psychic formations on social and political conditions rather than treating them as separate phenomena that occur in a space of behavior and intrapsychic reality disconnected from the conditions of reality. Finally, and most important for the subject of our discussion, Graham introduces the social institution of the language formation and of the technology that he employs directly into the conception of his projects and underlines within the video work its intricate and inevitable correlation with broadcast television.

The most complex and advanced work of this kind was produced by Dan Graham in collaboration with Dara Birnbaum in 1978: *Local Television News Program Analysis for Public Access Cable Television*.<sup>6</sup> It is crucial both to recall the implications of this work in order to understand the changes that have occurred in current video practice (particularly in that of Graham and Birnbaum) and to clarify its by-now historical qualities in order to criticize its limitations and to underline its unful-

filled radical potential, its relevance for contemporary thinking, which attempts to avoid these concerns. The most pertinent and striking feature of the work is once again its media optimism and its belief that access to public broadcast television will be only a matter of time and proper organization and that the instrument of television could then be turned around from being the most powerful social institution of manipulation and control to becoming an instrument of self-determination, two-way communication, exchange, and learning.

The second historical feature of the work is its abstract relationship to its audience. It is certainly one of the most advanced works with regard to reflections on audience conditions, but, paradoxically, it is also one of the most limited. The assumption that a television audience would be interested enough to submit itself willingly to a radical procedure of deconstruction and defamiliarization during its evening dosage of news mythology in order to recognize its own condition of ideological containment follows the century-old delusion of modernist enlightenment that aesthetic constructs have only to confront audiences with the perceptual and cognitive means of penetrating the layers of ideological mythification that mask the social and political conditions of everyday life to make them rediscover the underlying reality and to initiate the transition from the isolation of passive high-cultural consumption to an aesthetics of instrumentality and active change. This modernist notion that the avant-garde could break down the isolation of high bourgeois culture and its institutionalization by introducing audiences to mass-cultural subject matter in an unmediated form—and that this would engage the audiences of mass culture and disengage the bourgeois audiences' claim to exclusive access to cultural knowledge and experience—was certainly still conditioning Graham's attempts in the early seventies to reflect upon audience conditions in his video work for television broadcast. As Bertolt Brecht struggling with precisely those problems in the thirties had argued, the "truth not only had to be beautiful, but also entertaining."

In his most recent video work Dan Graham seems to have altered his strategies altogether, and it seems that the reflections that initiated the changes engage in precisely those questions. First of all, and quite remarkably different, Graham's recent video work is no longer an installation project but "simply" a pre-produced videotape entitled *Rock My Religion* (Fig. 1).<sup>7</sup> Although this transition from situational sculpture installations to scripted and produced videotape with predefined subject mat-



Fig. 1 Jerry Lee Lewis, still from Dan Graham, *Rock My Religion*, 1983.

ter is by no means necessarily a definitive change in Graham's work, it certainly indicates a drastic shift of concerns.

One of the major implications in the abandonment of the modernist insistence on the material presence of an aesthetic construct (the facture of the painting, the sculptural objecthood) in favor of a system of representations that defines itself already by its distribution form as a reproduced and reproducible entity in a universe of technically reproduced imagery (a step that all video artists make) is the denial of the exclusive validity of *any* unique artistic construct and the particular places reserved for these objects (museums, galleries, alternative spaces). Rather it opts for an aesthetic product that is multiple and diversified in its distribution and exhibition contexts, that shifts its audiences at least potentially, and, most crucially, that addresses existing systems and mechanisms of representation, and that is not attempting to conjure up in social reality the individual instance of a "work" or an aesthetic solution.

Yet what the work gains in universality and potential audience access by inserting itself into the mass-cultural totality of floating representations, it loses in material specificity and contextual concreteness, the sources from which avant-garde high culture in modernism had traditionally drawn its capacity of resistance. These problematic qualities are inherent in Graham's new video work as well. Although his subject matter is clearly a mass-cultural topic—the historical interrelationship of religious deviance, sexual abstinence, and the origins of ecstatic musical practices in nineteenth-century America as the sources for contemporary Rock and Roll music—his approach and handling of the material is clearly marked by the individuality of an artist as author, and we are confronted with a highly subjective reading of a history that may tell us more about present-day circumstances than about its historical material. The idiosyncratic and eclectic compilation of

the material in Graham's subjective history of the relationship between Rock and Roll and religion is highly original and it would be foolish to judge the results by the standard of academic historical research in the field of the history of religion or that of mass-cultural practices of delirious consumption. Yet even if one grants the tape all the individual rights to select at will and compile at random from the complex history of that interrelationship in artistic *bricolage* manner, it also provokes a response to the subjectivity of the choice and the construction of that history resulting from it. Thus it is astonishing that Graham should omit from his construction of the panorama of religious and musical consumption any reference whatsoever to the fact that this history cannot possibly be written without considering the contribution of the black working class and its musicians or reflecting on its cultural contribution in the context of its role as the traditionally exploited and oppressed proletarian class of American society. In the contemporary part of Graham's analysis this historical omission has its equivalent in the total obliteration of the basis of Rock and Roll in the apparatus of the culture industry. Although Graham's main argument—that contemporary mass-cultural practices have inherited and transformed the functions of the religious practices in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century America—is striking and convincing (perhaps not all that new and original as the author may believe) and certainly provides the basis for a study of the history of the functions and formations of ideology, in particular the increase of irrationality under the rigid regimenta-

tion of time, the rationalization of all experience, and the ensuing instrumentalization of individuals according to the needs of industrial capital, it fails to recognize the impossibility of analyzing the subliminal subversive functions of mass culture (such as a resistance against the work ethic, against the functionalization of sexuality and the family order, the denial of prescribed and functionalized sexual role behavior), and even their manifest subversive qualities, without discussing at the same time how it is precisely the mythical quality of that supposed subversion and liberation that qualifies Rock music as a perpetual repetition of the same ritual (in analogy to the mythical rhythms of identity construction through fashion production) and as such as an inexhaustible source for industrial production and consumption.

Despite the manifest shortcomings of Graham's *Rock My Religion*, the phenomena of mass culture are here approached for the first time from a high-cultural vantage point that is radically different from the traditional attitude of appropriation and quotation (Fig. 2). This attitude has been most adequately described by Thomas Crow in a recent essay as a continuous process of extraction, exploitation, and commercial redistribution.<sup>8</sup> Mass-cultural phenomena are extracted by the vanguard from their context in order to inject ailing avant-garde representational systems with a new air of radicality while initiating a process of control and containment. Once absorbed into high culture, the newly legitimized and legitimizing mass-cultural practices can then be disseminated once again on the mar-

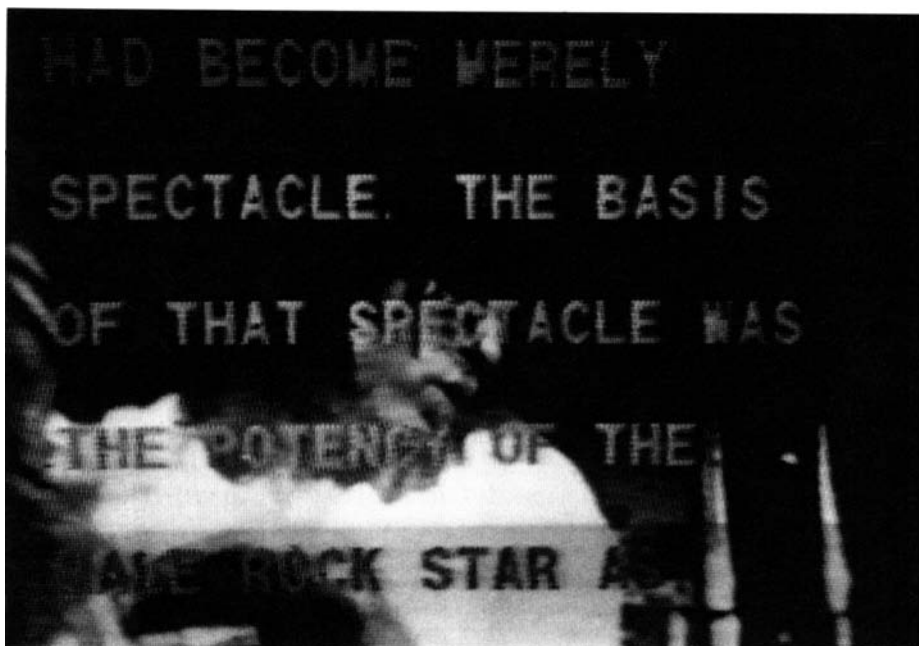


Fig. 2 Jim Morrison, The Doors, still from Dan Graham, *Rock My Religion*, 1983.



ket (the recent fate of the graffiti movement would certainly confirm this theory).

Graham's approach does not follow the traditional high-art strategies of quotation, but attempts to develop a more complex documentary and factographic method. Rather than skimming the surface of the mass-cultural phenomenon for the skill, the chill, and the gruesomely crude cultural substitutes of the lower classes (as is currently fashionable once again in painting), Graham's work attempts to construct a comprehensive reading and an analysis of the history of the relations between religion and Rock and Roll. Although it would be difficult for an academic historian to agree with that model in every respect, it is also obvious that Graham's original, idiosyncratic approach to the subject establishes relationships between phenomena that will become the subjects for the more systematic and academic forms of mass-cultural studies for the future. In particular, his selection of the figure of Ann Lee, the English working-class woman who emigrated to the United States in search of religious freedom to become the founder of the Shaker movement, as the focal point of his historical background of the origins of Rock and Roll and his selection of Patti Smith as her contemporary working-class correlative heroine position the work in a direct affiliation with contemporary questions concerning the roll of class and of gender and sexual politics in the definition of cultural production. Further, in the tape's emphasis on the subject of religion we find as much reflection on the conditions of the present as we find attempts at a historical analysis. And finally, in Graham's reflection on the history of the counter-culture movement of the sixties one recognizes a reflection of the conditions of contemporary reality (that is, the age of Reagan and the dominant modes of neo-conservative thinking) through the strategies of reconsidering the historically unfulfilled potential of the recent past.

Having been produced with an incredibly low budget, the sixty-minute tape does not measure up to the standards of broadcast television (and even if it did technically, it is highly dubious whether this unorthodox, methodological synthesis of Horkheimer/Adorno, Benjamin, Foucault, and Lacan would be acceptable to public-broadcasting channels). More problematic, however, is the fact that the author of the tape does not seem to have considered at all who the *actual* audience of the tape could be.

It is clear that the tape *Rock My Religion* fits neither the program of the



**Fig. 3** Dara Birnbaum, *Technology/Transformation: Wonder Woman*, 1978, still from videotape.

"cultural" channels that broadcast Masterpiece Theatre nor the channels that pipe MTV to the adolescent consumers of industrial music. Nor would Graham maintain at this time the typical art-world myth of finding new audiences in the clubs and discos of the city where giant video screens fill the voids between sets—a myth that a number of video artists propagated seriously for a while as an answer to the insupportable ghettoization of video work in the art-world institutions. While the audience for Graham's work is therefore unspecific—and that is clearly problematic—it is at least shifting and diffuse, and the work is potentially open to non-art-world audiences, neither fixed in its distribution form nor exclusively contained in one particular institutional apparatus.

**T**o what degree contemporary video art oscillates between mass-cultural formations (the technological and the ideological apparatus of television, whose language critique and knowledge production video art aspires to become) and the high-cultural formation of avant-garde art (the institutional and discursive apparatus whose traditional limitations video claims to supersede, yet to which it is intricately bound) has recently become evident in the work of Dara Birnbaum. She is one of the artists who emerged in the context of the early seventies to become exclusively involved in video work. Through her early awareness of the work of Bruce Nauman, Vito Acconci, and Dan Graham, she came to understand the shortcomings of a video

practice that remained inside the traditional boundaries of the art-world institutions of private collection, gallery, and museum; and it was partially through the collaboration with Dan Graham on the *Local Television News Program Analysis* that the focus for a video practice addressing the conventions of television was set. At the same time it is evident that Birnbaum's work is firmly grounded in her experience as an artist and her education as an architect and that her approach to the imagery, technology, and ideology of mass culture has its historical origins in the attitude of Pop artists like Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein. As she once stated, she "wants to define the language of video in relation to the institution of television in the way Buren and Asher had defined the language of painting and sculpture in relation to the institution of the museum."<sup>9</sup>

Since her first video tape, *Technology/Transformation: Wonder Woman* (1978–79) (**Fig. 3**), Birnbaum has consistently used the strategies of quotation and montage as they had been provided by the avant-garde conventions of Dada, collage, and Pop art. The material that she quoted were excerpts from popular broadcast television selected according to genre and iconic significance as well as according to the hidden dominance of the technological device by which the particular segment of quotation was marked. Thus the tapes, which run an average seven minutes, are clearly structured around the central categories of sitcom and soap opera, commercials and game shows, live broadcast and serial



stereotype television material. Equally selective emphasis is put on the devices of television itself, since each tape by Birnbaum seems almost to distill the essence of the standard television strategies by excluding all other aspects (narrative, sequentiality, combination, and simultaneous operation of various devices). In this rigorous reduction of the syntax, grammar, vocabulary, and genres of the language of commercial television does Birnbaum's work follow the procedures of deconstruction as they were developed in the context of modernist collage and montage work, and the effects of her application of these high-art strategies are stunning: revealing to the viewer that the apparatus of television conveys its ideological message as much by its formal strategies and its technique as by its manifest subject matter.

The formal strategies of Birnbaum's tapes seemed obvious: addressing an art-world audience through the quotation of Pop art conventions and simultaneously as a general reflection on the conditions of contemporary video practice, the work directed attention to the governing media in mass culture and the technological sophistication with which these operate. In this juxtaposition Birnbaum also delivered criteria (if only by implication) that defined the standards of reflection on contemporary art practice in general: its relative limitations, its institutional boundaries, its traditional production procedures. At the same time, however, Birnbaum's work seemed to move out into a different context altogether. For one thing, it clearly seemed to approach new and different audiences since the ideal place for the distribution of her video work would be the television set itself: inside the language and inside the distribution as well as inside the institution of television would the quotation and deconstruction of television be most successful, and they would effectively dismantle the totality of television ideology.

In her most recent videotape, however, Birnbaum has taken an utterly different approach, one that may make us even reconsider our assumptions about her earlier work. *The Damnation of Faust: Evocation* (1983) (Fig. 4) seems to have originated in the desire to distance herself from a premature identification of her practice as one of appropriation of pirated TV imagery and a reduction of her work to the seemingly one-dimensional critical engagement with television. It seems to have been further motivated by the desire to turn her back on the questioning of avant-garde's relationship to mass culture and seems to argue for a renewed exclusive attachment of contemporary artistic



Fig. 4 Dara Birnbaum, *Damnation of Faust: Evocation*, 1983, still from videotape.

practice to the history of bourgeois high culture.

Although there would seem at first to be no problem in a contemporary attempt to reconstruct a version of the Faust legend (the puppet show, the poetic drama, the opera—whichever version Birnbaum might claim to have had in mind), the affiliation with the subject in Birnbaum's work remains on the level of the title alone (unless one would consider the repeated images of a young woman reading a book, looking out of the window earnestly, sitting in the wind and reads an adequate representation of a contemporary female Faust version). The rest of the tape consists of footage that was recorded in the Italian section of Soho, and it shows children in a playground, on swings and benches behind wire mesh, with one adolescent girl receiving explicit camera attention since she seems to be a premature victim of the socially enforced, female narcissistic desire for self-display in the behavioral and physiognomic terms that the apparatuses of advertising and television provide. Although Birnbaum's sense for these intricate connections is exceptional, her capacity to observe and reveal them seems to have been overpowered here by her tendency to identify sentimentally with the luring cliché of youthful beauty. The meaningless imagery of Birnbaum's footage has been subjected to an editing process that seems to have been motivated by a primary obsession to apply every single electronic computerized editing device as extensively as possible and with more sophistication and aesthetic bravura than the industry would

ever be able to muster. Drop wipes of all kinds, colored linear splits, and, in particular, fan wipes seem to have caught Birnbaum's vision as infinitely fascinating visual operations. Although she claims that it is from the tradition of nineteenth-century *japonisme* that she received the idea to use these electronic editing gadgets and the formal play that they allow for, it remains at first opaque why *japonisme* would enter a contemporary videotape or what the connection between Faust (be it that of Goethe, Gounod, Berlioz, or Delacroix—to mention the historical adaptations that come close to the rise of *japonisme*) and Japanese woodcuts could possibly mean.

Birnbaum does not seem to realize that her obsession with "state-of-the-art" editing technology and the newest devices and tricks of computer-generated and controlled electronic imagery brings her work dangerously close to that kind of contemporary video production that has made it all along its prime ambition to produce the most advanced technocratic art of the state. The video work of Sanborn-Fitzgerald would be an example of the kind of work produced by "artists" who have become voluntary members of a corporate clique that has the smartness to perform (not the intelligence to understand) Baudrillard's observation that the time has long since passed when ideology was conveyed by political means and that it is now in the visual and linguistic coding systems where the affirmation of ruling ideology can most successfully be enforced.

The violent aestheticization of the viewers' gaze by the absolute fetishization of the technical gadget (competing

with and delivering to the advanced practices of advertisement design and the superpower of special effects in commercial film) seems in Birnbaum's recent tape directed at a successful entry into broadcast television itself. Yet no longer does this move seem to be motivated by the need to transgress the boundaries of a false exclusivity of high culture or to criticize the ideological power of television within its own language; it now appears to be motivated by the compulsion to enter that system and to become compatible with it, to construct a smooth transition from one sphere to the next that eliminates even the *memory* of the differences that might have once existed between cultural production and cultural industry. It seems, to put it polemically, that if given a chance, Birnbaum would consider it an honor to redesign and produce in a more aesthetically satisfying style a few spots or a few snippets for MTV's growing supermarket of industrial music. Only at first glance does *Faust* in its apparent commitment to high-cultural subject matter of the bourgeois past (after all, that is the subject of Goethe's *Faust*: the rise and formation of the bourgeois personality) oppose that liquidation of the qualitative differences between aesthetic practice and cultural industry. On closer reading—or repeated viewing—the originally unfathomable reference to the Faust legend (which is, as actual subject, all but absent from the tape) as well as the incoherent and incomprehensible junction of the Faust subject with late-nineteenth-century *japonisme* become clearer. (Once again the paraphrase of that phenomenon is so vague that it is not even clear whether Birnbaum actually refers to the Japanese woodcut designs and their spatial and graphic ordering systems themselves in order to construct a striking antecedent for her own graphic and spatial structuring of the video image by means of new editing technology or whether she actually wants to establish a reference to the reception of these techniques in late-nineteenth-century French Postimpressionist and Symbolist art and to relate her own current artistic practice to that history and the *japonisme* tradition.)

In the same manner that *The Damnation of Faust* orients itself in its deployment of advanced technology to the successful entry into the institution of television (if as nothing else, then at least as a source of examples of a stylish and sophisticated usage of technology that the mindless managers of the industry are always eager to pick up from artists in order to glamorize their perpetual repetition of the same), it orients itself—in its pretense to high-cultural

subject matter and to the legacy of exotic and high-cultural painterly and graphic techniques of composition and design—to the institution of the museum (and by implication the art-world distribution systems at large). Here the reaffirmation of the hegemony of traditional modes of painterly and sculptural production and their outright affirmation of the unquestionable hegemony of a fetishized notion of an immutable high-culture continuity has reemerged and taken a dominant, not to say exclusive, position. It is as a precise parallel to the strategies employed by these artists that the willful and meaningless quotation and assemblage of high-cultural subject matter in Birnbaum's videotape becomes understandable: to assert at this moment the unproblematic, continued hegemony of the high-cultural tradition (its subject matter, its production procedures, its distribution form, its reception processes, its audiences, and its institutions). This seems to be the only artistic strategy available to institute artistic production in a position and a discourse of power (as opposed to one of marginality, institutional—not to mention market—neglect, inefficacy, and isolation from the mainstream of cultural support).

Birnbaum's earlier work deserves credit for having approached the dialectic between the barbarism of mass culture and the autocratic elitism of high culture, a dialectic that has marked the entire history of modernism and reflects the essential problem of bourgeois class society's division of labor, but it is—at least on the grounds of this tape—becoming obvious where her orientation will lead her work. Admittedly, the tape has been declared to be the "prologue" for a long work consisting of several parts, and it may be premature to judge it. But since it has been shown as an independent unit of the *Faust* project by Birnbaum on many occasions, one must assume that it represents the author's ideas and strategies adequately on its own. Her ideas seem far from any attempt to counteract the desublimation by the mass-cultural formations by insisting on the historical potential of bourgeois culture as a bastion against the destruction of individuality (an attitude that many artists have developed as a practice of resistance, most convincingly the films of Danièle Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub or, in the visual art's, the work of Marcel Broodthaers). But this resistance demands more than the simplistic propping of contemporary practice with fragments from the history of high culture—more than using the rubble of high-cultural history as barricades for the defense of class interest and privileges—incorporated in the out-

moded production procedures and iconography of contemporary neofigurative painting and sculpture with which Birnbaum tries to compete. By aligning her video imagery to the aesthetic demands that these artists supply with goods (ironically, when it comes to graphic and chromatic expressivity, the traditional modes are far superior to even the most audacious gadgets that Birnbaum's editing introduces) and by succumbing to the pressure of the cultural apparatus (as one that mediates the pressure of the other ideological formations in society) to reaffirm and reconstitute the old hierarchical value systems that the reception of the history of high-bourgeois culture seems to provide, Birnbaum betrays the original impact of her own work and its far-ranging potential as well as the inherent possibilities of contemporary video practice in general: to produce a language of critique and resistance, to represent the interests of audiences subjected to the totalitarianism of the television industry, and to interfere within the elusive isolationism of high-cultural privileges.

The questions of audience address and audience specificity, but most of all the question of enlarging the scope of a public that is approached in the essentially public medium of video, were recently developed further in a collaborative work that Jenny Holzer organized on the occasion of the 1984 presidential elections. I should say from the start that although I think that this project tackled these questions more successfully than any other contemporary video work that I am aware of, it also delivered the proof that a resolution of these problems is not to be achieved by aesthetic or technological means alone. Holzer's project certainly took the claim of many video artists seriously: to engage in a dialogue with a public that is not a public of gallery-going specialists focusing on the questions of a specialized industry of high culture. Holzer for this purpose organized the rental and installation of a large truck designed to display messages on a thirty-foot video screen (a Mitsubishi screen comparable to those being installed in baseball stadiums to give viewers instant close-ups, slow motions, and replays of the action). This *Sign on a Truck*,<sup>10</sup> as Holzer entitled the project, was installed on two different days in two different central locations in midtown and downtown Manhattan before Election Day, displaying more than thirty prerecorded messages and images by artists and authors as well as direct interviews that Holzer and her collaborators had conducted in the street, asking passersby about their political concerns and opin-

ions. The project also encouraged, during open microphone sessions, the direct interference and participation of the viewers in the process of forming a visual and verbal representation of the political reality of the viewers (*Fig. 5*).

As much as this project seems to be a successful continuation of the agitprop techniques of the Soviet avant-garde in their usage of agit-trains, boats, and trucks employed for the instruction of the illiterate masses of post-Revolutionary Russia and as much as it seems to integrate contemporary technology successfully with the needs of the late-capitalist urban public and its peculiar forms of illiteracy, the work also revealed considerable problems.

In the same way that Brecht's famous dictum emphasized that statements about the reality of the Krupp factory can no longer be made by simply photographing the buildings' facades and that an accompanying constructed text is necessary to reconstruct the reality that has moved into the "functional," it is nowadays a false assumption that a representation of political views and realities on the mind of the populace could be obtained by a quest for a direct expression, by polling statements in the street. This idea of a "publicness" of opinion and direct self-representation, its claim for the dimension of an unmediated spontaneity and directness of expression, is in itself responsible for enhancing the mythical distortion of the reality of the "public." Without an artificial construction that accompanies the spontaneous representation of the collective consciousness, we shall be confronted simply with the voices of the ideological state apparatuses as they have been internalized, the synthesis of prejudice and propaganda, of aggressive ignorance and repression, of cowardice and opportunism that determine the mind of the so-called public (especially the white middle-class public, as Holzer's tapes showed abundantly). The artificial construction—Brecht's idea of the caption—is crucial to make the distortion of collective thought evident both to those who are constituted by it and to those who contemplate its representation on Holzer's video screen in the *Sign on a Truck* so that they may recognize and understand their own conditions: that the systematic depoliticization of the individual, the constant deprivation of information and of educational tools, cannot be compensated for by the enforcement of consumption.

It would be naïve, however, to assume that the ambivalence of Holzer's installation work was only the logical outcome of her commitment to the notion of a popular spontaneity, the notion of a populace that essentially knows what is



*Fig. 5* Jenny Holzer, *Open Mike*, at *Sign on a Truck*, 1984.



*Fig. 6* Vito Acconci's contribution to Jenny Holzer's *Sign on a Truck*, 1984.

right and what is wrong if it is only given the proper means of direct self-expression. This anarchistic trust in the collective mind as being innately democratic, concerned with its environment and social equality and justice, has long become a myth that itself functions to protect us from insight into the actual operations to which the collective mind is subjected. An overwhelming number of the people who were interviewed by Holzer during the open-mike sessions, as well as during the interviews that she and other participants conducted in the street before the installation of *Sign on a Truck*, turned out to be fervent supporters of Ronald Reagan. Thus some messages emanating from the sign could be perceived as part of a pro-Reagan cam-

paign while other sections could not be mistaken for anything but compelling arguments and statements against the reelection of Reagan (the best example being Vito Acconci's exceptionally striking videotape- and sound montage) (*Fig. 6*). This liberal ambivalence was in fact an accurate reflection of the funding conditions that had enabled Holzer to deploy this spectacular video device in the first place: in order to receive the public funding necessary for the extremely high rental fee of the truck (funding was provided by the New York State Council on the Arts as well as the city government's Public Projects in the Arts) Holzer had to commit herself to a project that did not engage directly in the support of one particular political opinion or party.

Although Holzer's organizational success in raising these funds deserves admiration as much as her installation deserves recognition for setting new standards for what art in public places should currently do if it wants to merit its claim to operate in the public sphere, one must also, in a sense, regard these as limitations in order to point out the actual contradictions within which current political art practice sees itself contained. On the one hand, the success of the work clearly depended on the presence of the megatechnology: only this apparatus could stop people in the streets and make them as much as listen to a politically controversial argument that departed from the daily "neutrality" of media reportage. And this technological spectacle, which guaranteed the work's access to the public sphere in the streets of New York, could be afforded only with the help of funding agencies that imposed political constraints on the project. In the same manner that the traditional exclusivity of the work of art in the confines of the museum and the gallery had to be questioned, the myth of a new public audience that can be unconditionally addressed has to be examined in all aspects that actually condition audiences.

Martha Rosler's most recent video work, *A Simple Case for Torture* (1983) (Fig. 7) embodies in many respects an attitude exactly opposite that of Holzer's *Sign on a Truck*. Rosler does not rely on an unfathomable domain of political common sense in her audiences but, quite to the contrary, confronts the viewer/listener with the seemingly unbearable request to pay attention for sixty-one minutes to the kind of political information and historical detail that the American television viewer or newspaper reader is never exposed to. Thus, Rosler gives her viewers a sense of the *labor of representation*, the labor necessary to disentangle fragments of knowledge and sociopolitical truth from the totality of myth and ideology that constitutes the nature of daily experience. Rosler seems to have learned this approach from the filmmakers Danièle Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub, who also demand from the viewer participation in the laborious reconstruction of consciousness and historical experience in an immensely delayed observation process.

This delay, committed as much to the construction of memory and consciousness as to the material analysis of the political reality of the present moment, originates in a careful distinction between the representation and the materiality of history. In the same manner as Huillet and Straub (and in the

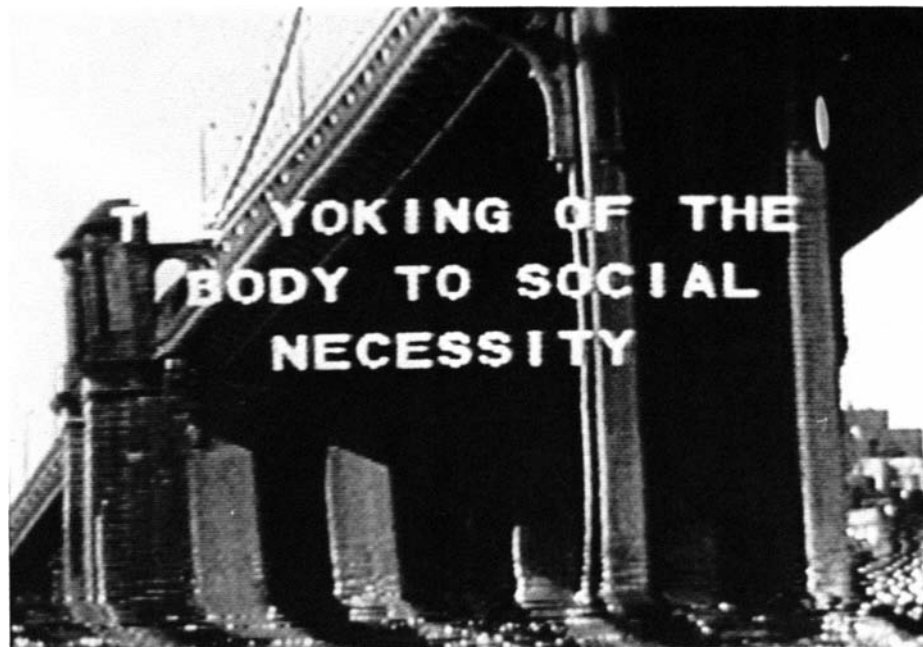


Fig. 7 Martha Rosler, still from *A Simple Case for Torture*, 1983.

way suggested by Bertolt Brecht) Rosler engages the viewers in the parallel labors of dialectical examination: to imbue the raw facts of history with theoretical insight and to anchor the theoretical knowledge in factual history. This approach provokes in the viewers an intensity of resistance and deferral by which they can gauge the degree to which myth and ideology (and the low and short attention span in which these have trained their perceptual and inner-vative system) have become constitutive parts of their personality. To what extent we depend on the comfort of distortion that ideology employs by providing us with a "natural" selection of interested facts that confirm the legitimacy of the views and conditions within which we are held becomes obvious in the confrontation with Rosler's slow-moving and didactic tape. It is precisely against this "naturalness" of ideology that Rosler's most recent videotape works on the viewer in a manner that is adequate to the subject of torture. If successful (i.e., if the viewers actually develop the patience that is necessary to watch this often repetitive and litany-like presentation), the work can also develop a different kind of resistance: one that gives the viewer almost a physiological aversion to be further subjected to the naturalization of ideology, to the depoliticization of history, and to the growing deprivation and withdrawal of actual political information in everyday life that generate the conditions of a collective state of anomie and amnesia.

It is quite appropriate therefore that Rosler's tape on torture begins with the reproduction of a William Bailey painting on the cover of *Newsweek* carrying

the headline "Art imitates life," an image showing us a bare-breasted young woman (*Portrait of S.*) who has been forced by the artist into a position of exposure to male scopophilia. Thus Rosler establishes instantly the historical connections that exist between this kind of ideological violence and the correlative of political reality; as she puts it: "Realism has become a word for hawks." Departing from a cultural reflection on the current rediscovery of traditional practices of representation in painting, she reveals them as the cultural forces of legitimation for a political reality that is the actual subject of her study. At the same time, she reclaims the strategies and history of Realism as the basis for her own work by emphasizing, from the start that "Realism" currently cannot simply be abandoned to the fashionable rediscovery of the traditions of figurative painting. (The "realism" of the Baileys and Fischls profits parasitically from the *myth* of a past in which painting still had a subject and a commitment to carry, a past when even Hopper could still perform some of the functions of Realism's historical program of the nineteenth century, however inadequate and insufficient the tools of the "realist" painter had obviously already become in the 1930s and 1940s—the phase to which the contemporary generation refers in cynical paraphrase and parody.) Rosler's video work engages the viewer in a reflection on the different necessities that realism currently has to confront if it wants to take the legacy of realistic practice seriously and if it wants to approach the reality of contemporary existence aesthetically. She makes it clear that primarily this



contemporary realism is involved in the analysis of the common practices of mediating and managing consciousness/representations—a field in which art can be uniquely competent, much more so certainly than in a direct interference with political realities (or anonymous audiences' voting decisions).

Phrased in a paradox, one could argue that the referent of Rosler's realism is the impervious and elusive materiality of ideology. For this, an essay by an American philosophy professor, Michael Levin, published under the heading "My Turn" in the pages of *Newsweek* serves as a striking example, and it constitutes the key document in Rosler's examination. In this essay, Levin argues for the legalization of torture and its application under certain extreme circumstances that he invents, with revealingly outrageous fantasies (e.g., a man holding Manhattan hostage with an atomic bomb). Rosler goes almost line for line through this contemporary document (its peculiar language formation of the neoconservative of the Reagan era will require additional attention by language analysts) and juxtaposes the wild paranoid fantasies of the philosopher about a peaceful American society of mothers and children that is surrounded by terrorists to the actual realities of the "real terror network" of the American-supported-and-directed terrorism in Central and Latin America. The philosopher's fantasies of the Manhattan mother whose child is held hostage by an atom-bomb-swinging terrorist (the kind of situation, the philosopher argues, where a legal basis for state-authorized torture would be required) is confronted in Rosler's tape with the realities of hundreds and thousands of women in Central and Latin America who have actually lost their sons to torturers and death squads or have themselves been subjected to torture by the US-backed regimes of Chile, El Salvador, and Guatemala, or the Nicaraguan *contras*. At no point are the viewers left in doubt about the artificiality of the construction that they are watching (or about the well-researched facticity of the information that this construction conveys).

Employing strategies of defamiliarization that are very effective in confronting the viewers with the necessity of reconstructing consciousness and of understanding political reality for themselves at every given moment, Rosler demonstrates that it cannot be the videotape's function to operate as a one-time aesthetical substitute for the continuous labor of representation-construction. Layers of information (such as simultaneous voice-over, character-generated rolling textual information,



Fig. 8 Martha Rosler, still from *A Simple Case for Torture*, 1983.

and visual imagery) are compressed often into an almost inextricable network that clearly does not consider a didactic agitprop approach as its only mode of operation or trust the straightforward "documentation" of political and historical facts (a task that a video work would be uniquely qualified to fulfill). Frequently, the overwhelming impact of the factual information presented is countered with calm panning shots along the Manhattan skyline or across the stacks of books providing the historical, political, and theoretical information that has entered or determined the tape. These apparently "meaningless" images, in their rhythmic recurrence, not only structure the viewers' attention into phases of confrontation with an overload of information and phases of a visual relief but return the role of the active, productive part in the construction of the representation itself to the viewer as an explicit suggestion to confront the apparent mutability of a monolithic reality with the efforts necessary to its comprehension. These devices (again reminiscent of Huillet and Straub's techniques, as, for example, in their *History Lessons*' traveling shots of Rome) grow in intensity by their simple repetition and ultimately assume metaphoric qualities in which the difficulty and the necessity to represent political reality at all in an aesthetic construction are reflected in a dialectic of speechless facticity and artless knowledge.

In some instances the tape's constructed artificiality (as opposed to what could easily be misperceived as an attempt at a political documentary) is

even more emphatically pronounced: we see Rosler play with toy tanks that she runs across and over a pile of books, for example, and, most poignantly, someone's fingertips shuffle a tiny, awkwardly cut crown of gold paper across the portrait photograph of the philosopher who advocated in *Newsweek* the legalization of torture, trying to place it on his head (Fig. 8). This striking image, which seems to have emerged directly out of Benjamin's reflections on the loss of reason under the weight of power, crowns the philosopher who has prostituted his discipline to the unconditional support of ruling-class power with the fool's cap. At the same time, this image is so haunting in its grotesque qualities of shrunken and miniaturized artifice that it instantly reminds us of another condition: in current artistic production, any element that reclaims access to the imagery of the myth or the high-cultural past is not associating itself with the meaning that these myths and art practices might have once had, but pledges allegiance to the economic and political powers that are now barricaded behind the defense of the cultural legacy of history and "civilization."

The torturous length of Rosler's tape, along with the barrage of information that it releases in highly condensed acoustical and visual structures as well as—and most likely this is the strongest feature still—the actual historical and political information that the tape conveys, makes the viewer return to reality after sixty-one minutes in a frame of mind that invites not an easy reconciliation but rather an irritation that recognizes the same ideological mechanisms

to be operative in every daily detail. It depends on the viewers, obviously, to what tasks they put their newly won discomfort in reality and the defamiliarization from its all-encompassing totality.

Unlike Rosler's previous video work *Secrets from the Street*, which was much more specific in its address of a downtown San Francisco audience (where the tape was shot and subsequently exhibited in a community center), *A Simple Case for Torture* does not address a particular audience (other than its obvious first audience, the educated middle class). In a public installation (such as the tape's first showing at the Whitney Biennial in 1983), this most complicated and lengthy of Rosler's video works to date is bound to lose large parts of its audience very quickly (certainly the meditative paint gazers first). This seems to be the really problematic aspect of Rosler's tape, and in a way the opposite problem of Jenny Holzer's populist installation. What Holzer's work lacked in complexity and political specificity, in factual information that could actually provide a moment of public counterinformation, Rosler supplies to such a degree that it is almost inevitable that the tape will not hold its audience for more than fifteen minutes at the most (many people during the Whitney installation walked away much sooner than that). This seems to suggest only that Rosler is unaware that people who visit an exhibition might simply be unable to sit in front of a video monitor for more than thirty minutes; we cannot assume that it indicates a reluctance on Rosler's part to tackle the seemingly unresolvable conflict between the construction of consciousness and the construction of new audiences in contemporary aesthetic practice.

#### Notes

This article was completed in December 1984.

- 1 For a documentation of Gerry Schum's activities and the videotapes that he produced, see: *Gerry Schum*, exh. cat. Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 1982.
- 2 Richard Serra's *Television Delivers People* is documented in the catalogue *Castelli-Sonnabend Video Tapes and Films*. New York, 1974, p. 191. For a discussion of the videotapes and films by Richard Serra, see: Annette Michelson, Richard Serra, and Clara Weyergraf, "An Interview," *October*, 10 (Fall 1979).
- 3 Dan Graham's video works have been collected in his book, *Video-Architecture-Television*. The Nova Scotia Series, Halifax/New York, 1979.
- 4 See: Robert Pincus-Witten, "Theater of the Conceptual," and "Vito Acconci and the Conceptual Performance," *Postminimalism*, New York, 1977, pp. 186 ff. and 143 ff.
- 5 Graham (cited n. 3), pp. 63 ff.
- 6 *Ibid.*, pp. 72 ff.
- 7 Dan Graham's videotape *Rock My Religion* was produced by the Moderna Museet Stockholm in 1982. Various essays by Dan Graham discuss the project in detail. See: "Rock Religion," *Artists Architecture*, exh. cat. Institute of Contemporary Art, London, 1983, pp. 80 f.; and *Dan Graham*, exh. cat., Kunsthalle Bern, 1984, passim.
- 8 See: Thomas Crow, "Modernism and Mass Culture in the Visual Arts," *Modernism and Modernity*, Halifax, 1983, pp. 215 ff.
- 9 For an extensive discussion of Birnbaum's earlier work, see my essay "Appropriation and Montage: Allegorical Procedures in Contemporary Art," *Artforum* (September 1982), pp. 43 ff.
- 10 A complete listing of the participating artists in Holzer's project was published in *Art in America* (January 1985), p. 88.

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# Subject to Change: Guerrilla Television Revisited

By Deirdre Boyle

Video pioneers didn't use covered wagons; they built media vans for their cross-country journeys colonizing the vast wasteland of American television. It was the late sixties, and Sony's introduction of the half-inch video Portapak in the United States was like a media version of the Land Grant Act, inspiring a heterogeneous mass of American hippies, avant-garde artists, student-intellectuals, lost souls, budding feminists, militant blacks, flower children, and jaded journalists to take to the streets, if not the road, Portapak in hand, to stake out the new territory of alternative television.

In those early days anyone with a Portapak was called a "video artist." Practitioners of the new medium moved freely within the worlds of conceptual, performance, and imagist art as well as of the documentary. Skip Sweeney of Video Free America, once called the "King of Video Feedback," also designed video environments for avant-garde theater (*AC/DC*, *Kaddish*) and collaborated with Arthur Ginsberg on a fascinating multimonitor documentary portrait of the lives of a porn queen and her bisexual, drug-addict husband, *The Continuing Story of Caryl and Ferd*. Although some artists arrived at video having already established reputations in painting, sculpture, or music, many video pioneers came with no formal art training, attracted to the medium because it had neither history nor hierarchy nor strictures, because one was free to try anything and everything, whether it was interviewing a street bum (one of the first such tapes was made by artist Les Levine in 1965) or exploring the infinite variety of a feedback image. Gradually, two camps emerged: the

video artists and the video documentarists. The reasons for this fissure were complex, involving the competition for funding and exhibition, a changing political and cultural climate, and a certain disdain for nonfiction work as less creative than "art"—an attitude also found in the worlds of film, photography, and literature. But in video's early years, guerrilla television embraced art as documentary and stressed innovation, alternative approaches, and a critical relationship to Television.

Just as the invention of movable type in the fifteenth century made books portable and private, video did the same for the televised image; and just as the development of offset printing launched the alternative-press movement in the sixties, video's advent launched an alternative television movement in the seventies. Guerrilla television was actually part of that larger alternative media tide which swept over the country during the sixties, affecting radio, newspapers, magazines, publishing, as well as the fine and performing arts. Molded by the insights of Marshall McLuhan, Buckminster Fuller, Norbert Wiener, and Teilhard de Chardin, influenced by the style of New Journalism forged by Tom Wolfe and Hunter Thompson, and inspired by the content of the agonizing issues of the day, video guerrillas set out to "tell it like it is"—not from the lofty, "objective" viewpoint of TV cameras poised to survey an event but from within the crowd, subjective and involved.

## Video Gangs

For baby boomers who had grown up on TV, having the tools to make your own was heady stuff. Most early videomak-

ers banded together into media groups; it was an era for collective action and communal living, when pooling equipment, energy, and ideas made more than good sense. But for kids raised on "The Mickey Mouse Club"—charter members of Howdy Doody's Peanut Gallery—belonging to a media gang also conferred membership in an extended family that unconsciously imitated the television models of their youth. Some admitted they were attracted by the imagined "outlaw" status of belonging to a video collective, less dangerous than being a member of the Dalton gang—or the Weather Underground—and probably more glamorous. As video collectives sprouted up all over the country, the media gave them considerable play—predictably focusing on groups in New York City like People's Video Theater, the Videofreex, Global Village, and Raintance—in magazines like *Time*, *Newsweek*, *TV Guide*, *New York*, and *The New Yorker*. They celebrated the exploits of the video pioneers in mythic terms curiously reminiscent of the opening narrations of TV Westerns. Here's an example from a 1970 *Newsweek* article:

Television in the U.S. often resembles a drowsy giant, sluggishly repeating itself in both form and content season after season. But out on TV's fringe, where the viewers thus far are few, a group of bold experimenters are engaged in nothing less than an attempt to transform the medium. During the past few years, television has developed a significant avant-garde, a pioneering corps to match the press's underground, the cinema's *vérité*, the theater's off-off-

Broadway. Though its members are still largely unknown, they are active creating imaginative new programs and TV “environments”—not for prime time, but for educational stations, closed-circuit systems in remote lofts and art galleries and, with fingers crossed, even for the major networks.<sup>1</sup>

Video represented a new frontier—a chance to create an alternative to what many considered the slickly civilized, commercially corrupt, and aesthetically bankrupt world of Television. Video offered the dream of creating something new, of staking out a claim to a virgin territory where no one could tell you what to do or how to do it, where you could invent your own rules and build your own forms. Stated in terms that evoke the characteristic American restlessness, boldness, vision, and enterprise that pioneered the West—part adolescent arrogance and part courage and imagination—one discovers a fundamental American ethos behind this radical media movement.

#### ***Guerrilla Television Defined***

The term “guerrilla television” came from the 1971 book of the same title by Michael Shamberg.<sup>2</sup> This manifesto outlined a technological radicalism that claimed that commercial television, with its mass audiences, was a conditioning agent rather than a source of enlightenment. Video offered the means to “decentralize” television so that a Whitmanesque democracy of ideas, opinions, and cultural expressions—made both by and for the people—could then be “narrowcast” on cable television. Shamberg, a former *Time* correspondent, had discovered that video was a medium more potent than print while reporting on the historic “TV as a Creative Medium” show at the Howard Wise Gallery in 1969. Banding together with Frank Gillette, Paul Ryan, and Ira Schneider (three of the artists in the show), among others, they formed Raindance Corporation, video’s self-proclaimed think-tank equivalent to the Rand Corporation. Raindance produced several volumes of a magazine called *Radical Software*, the video underground’s bible, gossip sheet, and chief networking tool during the early seventies. It was in the pages of *Radical Software* and *Guerrilla Television* that a radical media philosophy was articulated, but it was in the documentary tapes, which were first shown closed-circuit, then cablecast, and finally broadcast, that guerrilla television was practiced and revised.

#### ***Virtuous Limitations***

Before the federal mandate in 1972 required local origination programming on cable and opened the wires to public access, the only way to see guerrilla television was in “video theaters”—lofts or galleries or a monitor off the back end of a van where videotapes were shown closed-circuit to an “in” crowd of friends, community members, or video enthusiasts. In New York, People’s Video Theater, Global Village, the Videofreex, and Raindance showed tapes at their lofts. People’s Video Theater was probably the most politically and socially radical of the foursome, regularly screening “street tapes,” which might include the philosophic musings of an aging, black, shoeshine man or a video intervention to avert street violence between angry blacks and whites in Harlem. These gritty, black-and-white tapes were generally edited in the camera, since editing was as yet a primitive matter of cut-and-paste or else a maddeningly imprecise backspace method of cuing scenes for “crash” edits. The technological limitations of early video equipment were merely incorporated in the style, thus “real-time video”—whether criticized for being boring and inept or praised for its fidelity to the *cinéma vérité* ethic—was in fact an aesthetic largely dictated by the equipment. Video pioneers of necessity were adept at making a virtue of their limitations. Real-time video became a conscious style praised for being honest in presenting an unreconstructed reality and opposed to conventional television “reality,” with its quick, highly edited scenes and narration—whether stand-up or voice-over—by a typically white, male figure of authority. When electronic editing and color video became available later, the aesthetic adapted to the changing technology, but these fundamental stylistic expectations laid down in video’s primitive past lingered on through the decade. What these early works may have lacked in technical polish or visual sophistication they frequently made up for in sheer energy and raw immediacy of content matter.

#### ***Enter TVTV***

With cable’s rise in the early seventies came a new stage in guerrilla television’s growth. The prospect of using cable to reach larger audiences and create an alternative to network TV proved a catalytic agent. Video groups sprang up across the country, from rural Appalachia to wealthy Marin County, even to cities like New Orleans where it would be years before cable was ever laid. TVTV, guerrilla television’s most mediagenic and controversial group, was

formed during this time. Founded by *Guerrilla Television*’s Michael Shamberg, TVTV produced its first tapes for cable, then went on to public television, and finally, network TV. TVTV’s rise and fall traces a major arc in guerrilla television’s history.

Shamberg had been thinking about getting together a group of video freaks to go to Miami to cover the 1972 Presidential nominating conventions. The name TVTV came to him one February morning while doing yoga at the McBurney Y in New York. He realized instantly that Top Value Television—“you know, like in Top Value stamps”—would also read as TVTV.<sup>3</sup> He and Megan Williams joined with Allen Rucker and members of Ant Farm, the Videofreex, and Raindance to form TVTV’s first production crew. Shamberg got a commitment from two cable stations and raised \$15,000 to do two, hour-long tapes. The first, a video scrapbook of the Democratic Convention titled *The World’s Largest TV Studio*, played on cable and would have been the last of TVTV were it not for an unprecedented review in the *New York Times* by its TV critic John O’Connor, who pronounced it “distinctive and valuable.”<sup>4</sup> With that validation, Shamberg was able to raise more money and hold the cable companies to their agreement, going on to cover the Republican Convention the following month. *Four More Years* was the result; it is one of TVTV’s best works, demonstrating the hallmarks of their iconoclastic, intimate New Journalism style.

Unlike the Democrats in 1972, chaotic and diffuse, the Republicans had a clear, if uninspired, scenario to reelect Richard Nixon. Instead of pointing their cameras at the podium, TVTV’s crew of nineteen threaded their way through delegate caucuses, Young Republican rallies, cocktail parties, antiwar demonstrations, and the frenzy of the convention floor. Capturing the hysteria of political zealots, they focused on the sharp differences between the Young Voters for Nixon and the Vietnam Vets Against the War, all the while entertaining viewers with the foibles of politicians, press, and camp followers alike. One Republican organizer’s remark to her staff, “The balloons alone will give us the fun we need,” epitomizes the zany, real-life comedy TVTV captured on tape.

Interviewed on the quality of convention coverage are press personalities whose off-the-cuff remarks (“I’m not a big fan of advocacy reporting.”—Dan Rather; “What’s news? Things that happen.”—Herb Kaplow; “Introspection isn’t good for a journalist.”—Walter Cronkite) culminate with Roger

Mudd's playing mum's the word to Skip Blumberg's futile questions.

Punctuating the carnival atmosphere are venomous verbal attacks on the anti-war vets by onlookers and delegates who charge them with being hopheads, draft dodgers, and unpatriotic—a chilling reminder of the hostility and tragic confrontations of the Vietnam era.

TVTV follows the convention chaos, editing simultaneous events into a dramatic shape that climaxes when delegates and demonstrators alike are gassed by the police. Leavened with humor, irony, and iconoclasm, *Four More Years* is a unique document of the Nixon years. In it TVTV demonstrated journalistic freshness, a sardonic view of our political process and the media that cover it, and a sure feel for the clichés of a distinctive American ritual.

### Forging a Distinctive Style

In forging their distinctive style, TVTV avoided voice-overs like the plague; they experimented with graphics, using campaign buttons to punctuate the tape and give it a certain thematic unity; and they deployed a wide-angle lens, which distorted faces as editorial commentary. The fish-eye look, used at first out of practical necessity, since the Portapak lens often didn't let in enough light and went out of focus in many shooting situations, became a TVTV signature, which led to later charges of exploitation of unsuspecting subjects. But in the beginning, it was all new and fresh and exciting. The critics pronounced that TVTV had covered the conventions better than network TV news, proving that the alternative media could beat the networks at their own game and for the money CBS spent on coffee.

Although the networks had ENG (electronic news gathering) units at the convention, the contrast was striking. Only a beefy cameraman could withstand the enormous apparatus, including scuba-style backpack to transport so-called portable television cameras. Fully equipped, they looked more like moon men than media makers. Compared with this, the lightweight, black-and-white Portapak and recorder in the hands of slim Nancy Cain of the Videofreex looked like a child's toy, which was part of the charm since no one took seriously these low-tech hippies. In video's early days, many didn't believe the tape was rolling because it didn't make the whirring sound of the TV film cameras, and much unguarded dialogue was captured because the medium was new and unfamiliar.

### Television Enters the Picture

Thus established, TVTV went on to make their next "event" tape, but now

for the TV Lab at PBS's WNET in New York. TVTV was not the first to flirt with "Television." After the Woodstock Nation caught the networks' attention in 1969, the Videofreex were hired by CBS to produce a pilot, which failed spectacularly in winning network approval. In 1970 the May Day Collective shot videotape at weeklong antiwar demonstrations in Washington for NBC News although none of it was ever broadcast. The networks did air some newsbreaking Portapak tapes, such as Bill Stephens's 1971 interview with Eldridge Cleaver over the split in the Black Panther party, shown on Walter Cronkite's *Evening News*. They were willing to overlook the primitive quality of tape (which had to be shot off a monitor with a studio camera) if it meant scooping their competitors, but the 1960 network ban on airing independently produced news and public-affairs productions remained in force, and any small-format tapes broadcast were usually excerpted and narrated by network commentators, beyond the editorial reach of their makers.

The introduction of the stand-alone time-base corrector in 1973, a black box that stabilized helical scan tapes and made them broadcastable, changed everything. It was finally possible for small-format video to become a stable television production medium, which paved the way not only for guerrilla television to reach the masses but also for the rise of ENG and, eventually, all-video television production. Given TVTV's unprecedented success with *Four More Years*, it was only logical that they produce the first half-inch video documentary for airing on national public television.

The tape was *Lord of the Universe*, and its subject was the fifteen-year-old guru Maharaj Ji. Millennium '73, a gathering of the guru's faded flower children followers, was scheduled for the Houston Astrodome, which the guru promised would levitate at the close (like the Yippies at the Pentagon in '67, the guru knew how to create a media event). Elon Soltes, whose brother-in-law was a would-be believer, followed him with Portapak from Boston to Houston while other TVTV crew members gathered in Houston to tape the mahatmas and the "premies" (followers), getting embroiled in what was to be the most successful TVTV tape but also the most shattering for its makers. Fearful of mind control and violence (a prankish reporter had been brained by a guru bodyguard not long before) and stricken by the sight of so many of their own generation lost and foundering in the arms of this spiritual Svengali, TVTV determined to expose the sham and get



Fig. 1 Abbie Hoffman, in *Lord of the Universe*, TVTV, 1974.

out unscathed. The tape was the zenith of TVTV's guerrilla-TV style.

Switching back and forth between the preparation for the actual onstage "performances" of the guru, cameras focused on "blissed-out" devotees pathetically seeking stability and guidance in the guru's fold. Neon light, glitter, and rock music furnished by the guru's brother (a rotund rip-off of Elvis Presley) on a Las Vegas-styled stage was the unlikely backdrop for the guru's *satsang* or preaching to his followers. Outside, angry arguments between premies and Hare Krishna followers and one bible-spouting militant fundamentalist exposed the undercurrent of violence, repression, and control in any extremist religion. TVTV cleverly played off two sixties radicals against each other. Having traded in his role of countercultural political leader for that of spokesman for an improbable religion, Rennie Davis sings the guru's praises as Abbie Hoffman, one of guerrilla TV's Superstars, watches Davis on tape and comments on his former colleague's arrogance and skills as a propagandist (Fig. 1). "It's different saying you've found God than saying you know his address and credit card number," Hoffman quips, emphasizing the grasping side of this so-called religion.

Much in evidence is TVTV's creative use of graphics, live music, and wide-angle lens shots. As always there is humor leavening what was for TVTV a tragic situation. At one point, our Boston guide to the "gurunoids" innocently remarks, "I don't know whether it's the air conditioning, but you can really *feel* something." The humor is a black humor, rife with an irony that dangerously borders on mockery but is checked by an underlying compassion for the desperation of lost souls. At home in the world of spectacle and carnival, ever agile in debunking power seekers, TVTV admirably succeeded in producing a document of the times that remains a classic.

### Film's Hidden Impact

Paul Goldsmith, a well-known 16mm vérité cameraman, had joined TVTV

along with Wendy Appel and was the principal cameraman on this and subsequent tapes, shooting one-inch color for the first time in the Astrodome. Appel, also trained in film but an accomplished videomaker as well, would become TVTV's most versatile editor. Not surprisingly, some of the most critical people in creating the TVTV style came out of film: Stanton Kaye and Ira Schneider, who worked on the convention tapes, were also filmmakers. TVTV's raw vitality was a video and cultural by-product, but their keen visual sense and editing was borrowed, in large measure, from film.

TVTV won the DuPont-Columbia Journalism Award for *Lord of the Universe* and, not long after, a lucrative contract with PBS to produce a series of documentaries for the TV Lab. *Gerald Ford's America*, *In Hiding: Abbie Hoffman*, *The Good Times Are Killing Us*, *Superbowl* (Fig. 2), and *TVTV Looks at the Oscars* were made in the next two years. Some were equal to the TVTV name, like "Chic to Sheik," the second of the four-part *Gerald Ford's America*. But others showed a decline as the diverse group of video freaks who had once converged to make TVTV a reality—all donating time, equipment, and talent to make a program that would show the world what guerrilla television could do—began to stray in their own directions, no longer willing to be subsumed in an egalitarian mass, no longer able to support themselves on good cheer and beer. With the broadcast of *Lord of the Universe* some of the best minds in guerrilla television unwittingly abandoned their utopian dream of creating an alternative to network television. Their hasty marriage with cable was on the rocks when TV—albeit public television—seduced them with the fickle affection of its mass audience.

### *The Beginning of the End*

In 1975, TVTV left San Francisco, which had been home base during the halcyon days, for Los Angeles. This move proved pivotal. They had a contract to develop a fiction idea for the PBS series "Visions." This was not so much a departure from TVTV's orientation as it might seem. They had been mixing fictional elements in their documentary tapes all along, the most notable being the Lily Tomlin character in the *Oscars* show. TVTV's style had been modeled on New Journalism and the flamboyant approaches of writers like Hunter Thompson, of Gonzo Journalism fame, who wrote nonfiction as if it were fiction.

Supervision consisted of a number of short tapes, "filler" to round off the "Visions" series' hour. It traced the his-

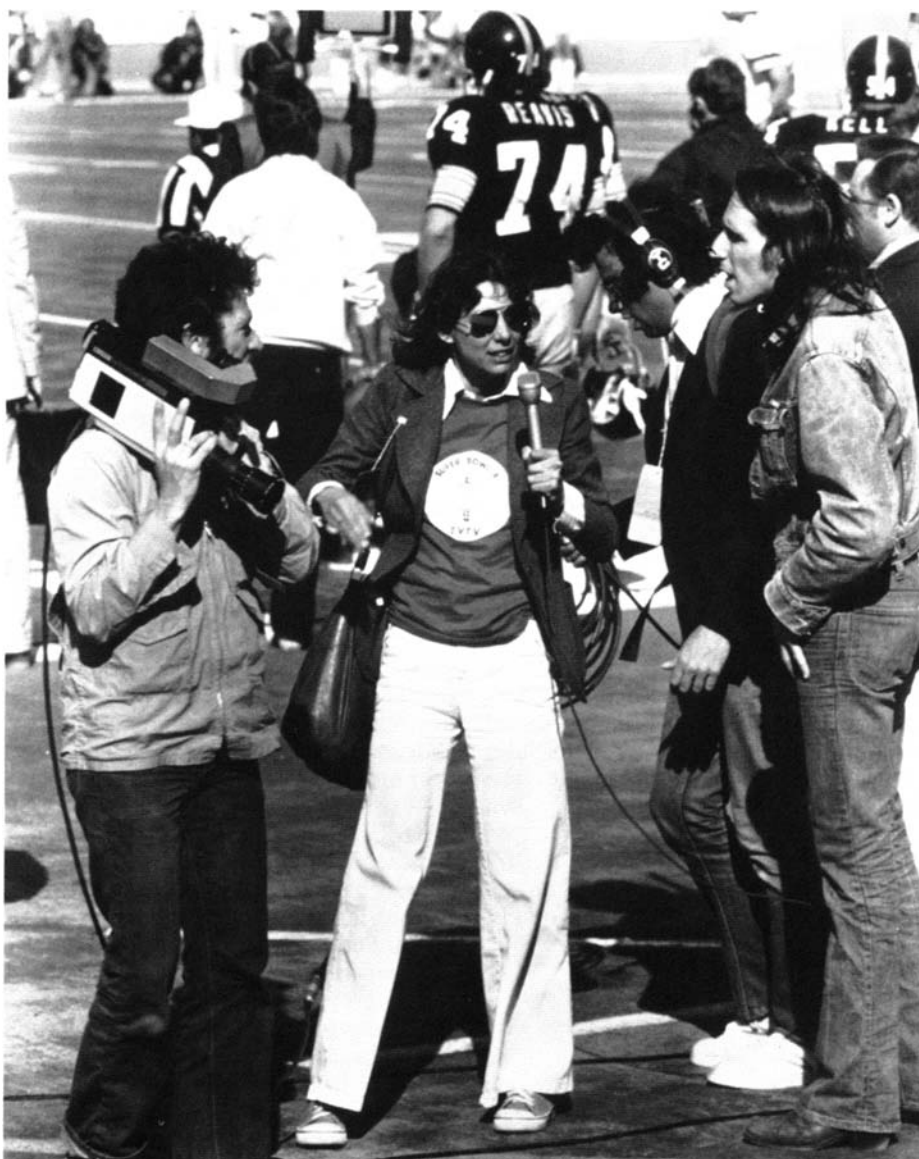


Fig. 2 Bart Friedman, Nancy Cain, Tom Weinberg, and Elon Soltes shooting *TVTV Superbowl*, at the Orange Bowl, 1975.

tory of television from its early days in the labs of Philo T. Farnsworth to the year 2000 and an imagined guerrilla take-over of a station not unlike CNN. Forsaking the video-documentary form that they had pioneered caused some internal battles, but it wasn't until their pilot for NBC, *The TVTV Show*, that the end was in sight.

Part of the problem was that TVTV knew how to make a video documentary—in a way, they had invented it—but they didn't know the first thing about producing comedy for "Television." In documentary shooting, improvisation on location was TVTV's trademark; the primitive and evolving nature of portable video equipment and the unpredictable power centers that were TVTV's main targets demanded an adaptive and creative attitude towards all new situations, something TVTV excelled at. But shooting actors in a

studio with a set script that never equaled the humor of their documentary "real people" demanded a whole new expertise, which TVTV realized too late they couldn't afford to invent as they went along.

Another part of the problem was that as long as TVTV was making documentaries, the group had its original focus. Once they began making entertainment for mass audiences, their once-radical identity and purpose was gone. For some, the evolution was a gradual and acceptable one. After charges of "checkbook journalism" over the ill-fated interview of Abbie Hoffman, who was then a fugitive, Shamberg lost some of his journalistic zeal. Harsh criticism of the treatment of Cajuns in the *The Good Times Are Killing Me* further tarnished TVTV's reputation. With people like Bill Murray and Harold Ramis (who would later become celebri-

ties on "Saturday Night Live"), eager to work with TVTV, the lure of collaborating with talented actors in an area removed from journalistic criticism, funding battles, and the pressures of producing documentaries for public TV was certainly appealing. But for those who still believed in the dream of changing television, the decision proved a hard one because it meant the dream was dead. And with it went the all-for-one spirit that had knitted together their disparate egos: TVTV no longer had the fire and purpose they needed to weather the rough storm of a midseventies transition.

It took a few years as TVTV paid off its debts before their official demise. In the meantime, Shamberg, who had seen the end coming, was already preparing his next venture. He bought the rights to the Neal and Carolyn Cassidy story and produced the film *Heartbeat*. Although it was a box-office flop, he had the conviction to go on. In 1983, two films later, he produced the Academy Award nominee *The Big Chill*, a reunion film about a group of late-sixties hippies who meet at the funeral of one of their own and reflect on how they've changed and been affected by "the big chill." Although the film was based on its director-writer Larry Kasdan's friends, it could have been about TVTV.

### Changing Times

The fact that TVTV changed along with their times should come as no surprise. TVTV wasn't the only group to pull apart during the late seventies. The media revolutionaries were growing older and changing—assuming responsibilities for marriages, homes, and families—living in a different world from the one that had once celebrated the brash goals and idealistic dreams of guerrilla television. The promise that cable TV would serve as a democratic alternative to corporately owned television was betrayed by federal deregulation and footloose franchise agreements. Public television's early support for experimental documentary and artistic work in video slowed to a virtual halt—the sad demise of WNET's TV Lab is a recent instance. And funding sources that had once lavished support and enthusiasm on guerrilla TV groups now turned a cold shoulder, preferring to support individuals rather than groups and work that stressed art and experimentation rather than controversy and community.

Once the possibility of reaching a mass audience opened up, the very nature of guerrilla television changed. No longer out to create an alternative to television, guerrilla TV was competing on the same airwaves for viewers and

sponsors. As the technical evolution speeded up, video freaks needed access to more expensive production and post-production equipment if they were to make state-of-the-art tapes that were broadcastable. Although some continued making television their own way, pioneering what has since become the world of low-power TV and the terrain of public-access cable, many others yearned to see their work reach a wide audience. Without anyone's noticing it, the rough vitality of guerrilla TV's early days was shed for a slicker, TV look. The "voice of God" narrator, which had been anathema to TVTV and other video pioneers, was heard again. Gone were the innovations—the graphics, the funky style and subjects, the jousting at power centers and scrutiny of the media. Gone was the intimate, amiable camera-person-interviewer style, which was a hallmark of alternative video. Increasingly, video documentaries began looking more and more like "television" documentaries, with stand-up reporters and slide-lecture approaches that skimmed over an issue and took no stance.

Where one could see the impact of guerrilla television was in its parody: sincere documentaries about ordinary people had been absorbed and transformed into mock-u-entertainments like "Real People" and "That's Incredible!" The video *vérité* of the 1976 award-winning *The Police Tapes*, by Alan and Susan Raymond, had become the template for the popular TV series "Hill Street Blues." In the sixties, Raindance's Paul Ryan proclaimed, "VT is not TV,"<sup>5</sup> but by the eighties, VT *was* TV.

Today, in an era of creeping conservatism, the ideals of guerrilla television are more in need of champions than in its heyday when it was easier to stand up for democratic media that would tell it like it is for ordinary people living in late-twentieth-century America. Few have come along to take up the challenge of guerrilla television's more radical and innovative past. Although the collectives with names like rock groups—Amazing Grace, April Video, and the Underground Vegetables—have long since disappeared, many notable pioneers continue to keep alive their ideals, some working in public-access cable, like DeeDee Halleck (of Paper Tiger Television), or from within the networks, like Ann Volkes (an editor at CBS News) and Greg Pratt (a documentary-video producer for a network affiliate in Minneapolis), or as independent journalists, like Jon Alpert (a freelance correspondent for NBC's "Today Show") and Skip Blumberg (whose portraits of Double Dutch jumpers and Eskimo athletes still appear on public

television). But a younger generation of videomakers eager to draw from this past to forge a new documentary video future has yet to appear on the horizon. Either they are discouraged by the lack of funding and distribution outlets for innovative or controversial work and a cultural milieu content with the new conservatism or they are unaware of the past and unconcerned about the future. The goal is not to re-create that past—no one really wants to see the shaky, black-and-white, out-of-focus, wild shots that suited the primitive equipment and frenzy of video's Wonder Bread years; the goal is to recapture the creativity, exploration, and daring of those formative years. Perhaps the technology and the burning need to communicate and invent new forms will prevail. Independents with Beta and VHS equipment have been documenting the struggles in Central America. Lost amid the home-video boom, a new generation of video guerrillas may be in training yet.

McLuhan's reductionist view that "the medium is the message" was embraced and then rejected by the first video guerrillas, who asserted that content *did* matter; finding a new form and a better means of distributing diverse opinions was the problem. That problem is still with us. How a new wave of video guerrillas will resolve it and carry on that legacy, human and imperfect as it may be, should prove to be interesting and unexpected. More than guerrilla television's future may depend on it.

### Notes

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- 1 "Television's Avant-Garde," *Newsweek*, Feb. 9, 1970.
- 2 Michael Shamberg and Raindance Corporation, *Guerrilla Television*, New York, 1971.
- 3 Interview with Michael Shamberg, Oct. 19, 1983.
- 4 John E. O'Connor, "TV: A 'Scrapbook' of the Democratic Convention," *The New York Times*, Aug. 17, 1972.
- 5 "Feedback," *Radical Software*, Vol. 1 No. 1 (1970).

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# Tracking Video Art: "Image Processing" as a Genre

By Lucinda Furlong

Video wallpaper ... special effects ... computer art ... high-tech video ... image synthesis ... image manipulation ... image processing—these are some of the terms that have been used to describe a type of video produced by artists who have been experimenting since the late 1960s with electronic imaging tools. None of these terms are particularly useful: they are too general or too specific, or they fall prey to the kind of value judgments and myths associated with "mindless," "impersonal" technology.

Even the most common term, "image processing," is problematic. Whereas in commercial television that term usually refers to signal-processing methods such as timebase correction, in the video-art world it has become at once a genre and a catchall phrase for every technical process in the book. "Image processing" encompasses the synthesis and manipulation of the video signal in a way that often changes the image quite drastically. It includes not only altering camera-generated images through processes such as colorizing, keying, switching, fading, and sequencing but combining those operations on synthesized—that is, cameraless—imagery as well. It has come to refer to everything from the most basic analog-processing techniques to sophisticated digital-computer graphics and effects.

And yet despite the term's breadth, "image processing" conjures up a number of very specific—often pejorative—stereotypes: densely layered "psychedelic" images composed of soft, undulating forms in which highly saturated colors give a painterly effect, or geometric abstractions that undergo a series of visual permutations. To many of the

people who use these tools such characterizations are superficial and belie the range of concerns that fall within the image-processing umbrella.

Although the label is conceptually and technically inadequate, it seems to have stuck for lack of a better one to describe what has become, in effect, a separate aesthetic genre. But the categories that now divide video—documentary, image processing, performance, and installation—were virtually nonexistent at its beginnings; then all forms of video functioned homogeneously as an expression of the activism of the 1960s—as the alternative television movement. As Steina Vasulka has recalled:

You have to understand those early years, they were so unbelievably intense. . . . This was the "60s revolution." We didn't have the division in the early times. We all knew we were interested in different things, like video synthesis and electronic video, which was definitely different from community access-type video, but we didn't see ourselves in opposite camps. We were all struggling together and we were all using the same tools.<sup>1</sup>

Johanna Gill has observed that the desire to use communications tools to change, quite literally, the world took a number of forms—the most direct being to work with community and oppositional political groups.<sup>2</sup> The goals of the alternative media groups were articulated in the first issue of *Radical Software*, the publication founded in 1970 by Beryl Korot and Phyllis Ger-

shuny that until 1974 was the mouthpiece of the movement:

Power is no longer expressed in land, labor, and capital, but by access to information and the means of disseminate it. As long as the most powerful tools (not weapons) remain in the hands of those who would hoard them, no alternative cultural vision can succeed. Unless we design and implement alternate information structures which transcend and reconfigure the existing ones, other alternative systems and life styles will be no more than products of the existing processes. . . . Our species will survive neither by totally rejecting nor unconditionally embracing technology—but by humanizing it; by allowing people access to the informational tools they need to shape and reassert control over their lives.<sup>3</sup>

The rejection of commercial television did not manifest itself in direct social action alone. Low-cost portable video equipment was no new that using it for any purpose at all was considered radical. As part of a new kind of "media ecology," video environments (the precursor of the video installation) were created. Some were interactive situations designed to expose and circumvent the one-way delivery of commercial television. Others—inspired both by Marshall McLuhan and by Norbert Wiener's work in cybernetics—reflected these thinkers' correlations between electronic circuitry and the workings of the human nervous system. The idealism in Juan Downey's article "Technology and Beyond" is typical of what David



Antin has called "cyberscat," the futuristic jargon spoken not only by Downey but also by Frank Gillette, Paul Ryan, Nam June Paik, and many, many others:

Cybernetic technology operating in synchrony with our nervous systems is the alternative life for a disoriented humanity.... The process of reweaving ourselves into natural energy patterns is Invisible Architecture, an attitude of total communication in which ultra-developed minds will be telepathically cellular to an electromagnetic whole.<sup>4</sup>

Challenging the institution of television in the late 1960s also meant creating images that *looked* different from standard TV. Thus, "image processing" as we now know it grew out of an intensive period of experimentation that for some, in a vague way, was seen *visually* to subvert the system that brought the Vietnam War home every night. There were other motives, of course: the swirling colors and distorted forms conjured up the experiences associated with hallucinogenic drugs, suggesting that "new realities" could be electronically synthesized.<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps the most interesting attitude, though, in light of what was going on in the art world at the time, was the connection made between image processing and the modernist credo of exploring the basic properties of the medium. This treatment of the electronic signal as a plastic medium, a material with inherent properties that can be isolated, is central to the development of what became the image-processing aesthetic. There are many examples of this fundamentally formalist characterization, which, I think, provided a way to lend modernist credentials to an art form that was having a difficult time gaining acceptance—critical attention, funding, marketability—by traditional art institutions.

For example, in December 1971 the Whitney Museum of American Art's first video exhibition, assembled by the late film curator David Bienstock, consisted almost entirely of image-processed tapes. In the program notes, Bienstock wrote:

It was decided ... to limit the program to tapes which focus on the ability of videotape to create and generate its own intrinsic imagery, rather than [on] its ability to record reality. This is done with special video synthesizers, colorizers, and by utilizing many of the unique electronic properties of the medium.<sup>6</sup>

While various people were thus engaged, however, the rules had changed. The whole idea of a modernist practice was being dismantled. The work was dismissed not so much because it was inherently "bad," but because the ideas informing it had become exhausted. No one in art circles wanted to hear about—let alone look at—video that seemed to be based on the conventions of modern painting. Robert Pincus-Witten argued that point in 1974 at "Open Circuits: An International Conference on the Future of Television":

It appears that the generation of artists who created the first tools of "tech-art" had to nourish themselves on the myth of futurity while refusing to acknowledge the bad art they produced. Their art was deficient precisely because it was linked to and perpetuated the outmoded clichés of Modernist Pictorialism—a vocabulary of Lissajous patterns—swirling oscillations endemic to electronic art—synthesized to the most familiar expressionist color plays and surrealist juxtapositions of deep vista or anatomical disembodiment and discontinuity.... The important work, then, of the first generation was the very creation of the tool, the video synthesizer.<sup>7</sup>

Pincus-Witten's comments are important not only because he pinpoints one reason why this work was rejected but because he acknowledges the important role that designers and builders played in developing relatively low-cost equipment. Prior to the introduction of consumer video products, the design of video equipment was geared towards broadcasting and industry. Much of the equipment now taken for granted—color cameras and lightweight Portapaks, for example—were either unavailable or unaffordable for most people. It was even more difficult to acquire the devices associated with image processing—keyers, colorizers, mixers, and synthesizers. What's more, that equipment was usually more suitable for producing special effects than for artists' experiments. Since it was rare to find both artist and engineer in one person, artists found themselves seeking out equipment designers who, in one way or another, were mavericks within the electronics industry. As Woody Vasulka recalled in 1978,

I discovered that in the United States there's an alternative industrial subculture which is based on individuals, in much the same way that art is based on individuals.... These people, the elec-

tronic tool designers, have maintained their independence within the system. And they have become artists, and have used the electronic tools which they had created.... We've always maintained this very close, symbiotic relationship with creative people outside industry, but who have the same purposeless urge to develop images or tools, which we all then maybe call art.<sup>8</sup>

With the exception of Nam June Paik's well-known collaboration with engineer Shuya Abe, the history of video as it is presently constituted has virtually ignored the work of first-generation tool designers and builders. Furthermore, although the Paik-Abe collaboration in 1970 is touted as the "first," a few people were working on specialized video equipment earlier than or at least contemporaneously with Paik. For instance, in 1969, Eric Siegel modified a color TV set so that images were distorted and colored; he then built a separate device capable of colorizing a black-and-white video image. And Stephen Beck, who completed his Beck Direct Video Synthesizer No. 1 in 1970, actually began working on a prototype in 1968. In addition, Dan Sandin completed in 1973 what he called an "image processor," a video version of a Moog audio synthesizer. Bill Etra and Steve Rutt later built the Rutt-Etra Scan Processor, a device that can manipulate the video image as it is displayed on a video monitor.

As Ken Marsh pointed out in *Independent Video*, a technical how-to book of the period, these early devices operated on two basic principles: "the use of electrical signals rather than light as the source of the information to be displayed; and the extensive intermixing of signals in order to display a totally new image."<sup>10</sup>

Compared with the technical standards of television these devices were quite crude: because the parameters of the video signal were difficult to control, it was impossible to predict exactly how the resulting image would look. Furthermore, most of these tapes could never have been broadcast owing to their technical inferiority. But this was not crucial to most people at that time; most important was a design approach that afforded the artist flexibility. Unlike commercial production devices—in which a specific button is pushed to achieve a specific effect—these devices became interactive instruments whose possibilities could be known only through use.

All these early tool builder-artists were "pioneers," but their ultimate

impact varied. For instance, neither the Siegal nor Beck synthesizers were ever duplicated. Some of them—Beck, Siegel, and Etra—produced and exhibited tapes and were very active in the early video-art scene. But these people eventually took their skills to the commercial sector, and their activity in the video-art world diminished or ceased altogether.

The exception was Dan Sandin, who has been one of a number of individuals—among them Steina and Woody Vasulka and Ralph Hocking and Sherry Miller—who have contributed to the institutional and theoretical framework in which much of this activity has continued. All of them share the desire to place the means of production in the hands of the user, because:

The high priests of technology use unwieldy systems to perpetuate cybercrud—the art of using computers to put things over on people. This mentality can be countered by bringing to people systems that are easily learned and used—“habitable” systems.<sup>11</sup>

Sandin was doing graduate work in physics at the University of Wisconsin at Madison (earning an M.S. in 1967) when he realized he “wasn’t being a good physicist anymore.” While producing color slides for light shows, it occurred to him that those kinds of images could be produced electronically. While doing the light shows, he became familiar with the Moog 2 audio synthesizer, and, about 1968, began thinking about what the visual equivalent of the Moog might be. It took several years to bring his ideas to fruition, for despite his training, Sandin still had to teach himself electronic design. In the meantime, he became a faculty member at the University of Illinois Circle Campus in Chicago, teaching kinetic art and interactive sculpture.<sup>12</sup>

For Sandin, the basic idea was to make an affordable instrument (presently about \$4,000–\$5,000) that would combine many functions in one tool—i.e., keying, fading, colorizing (*Fig. 1*). Like audio synthesizers, it would also be patch-programmable: how the different functions were combined depended on how an artist wanted to use it. Consequently, the Image Processor was set up as a series of stacked metal boxes that can be reconfigured with cables to perform sequences of functions on incoming signals.

Sandin wanted to make a device that not only would be easy to use but could be distributed relatively inexpensively. So he rejected the idea of marketing the device commercially, choosing instead to give the plans away to anyone who



*Fig. 1* Dan Sandin and the Sandin Image Processor, University of Illinois at Chicago Circle, Chicago, Ill., 1978.

wished to make his or her own. After he completed the Image Processor in 1973, he began to document the inner workings of the machine with Phil Morton, an artist who had established the video program at the Art Institute of Chicago. Sandin and Morton spent more than a year redrawing the plans and making up a parts list for a kit that would be comprehensible to someone with only a rudimentary knowledge of electronics. Since then, at least twenty-five Sandin Image Processors have been built, mostly by artists, many of whom have been based at one time or another in Chicago.<sup>13</sup>

Whereas Dan Sandin thinks in terms of “habitable systems” designed to be easily used by artists, Ralph Hocking conceives of the equipment built under his auspices as “thinking machines.” Despite the fact that Hocking’s background is in art rather than science, he and Sandin have much in common. Both have been committed to the idea that artists should be able to work with video technology much the same way as a painter works with his or her materials in isolation in a studio. In this sense, they both adhere to very traditional models of artmaking.

Hocking, a cinema professor at the State University of New York at Binghamton, founded the Community Center for Television Production in 1970. The Center grew out of a video program he’d been running at the university since 1969. Hocking, a potter, sculptor, and photographer, became interested in video after meeting Paik in New York City at the Bonino Gallery Show in 1968. Shortly after his arrival in Binghamton, he began to buy video equipment, and set up a program called Student Experiments in Television.

At Paik’s suggestion, Hocking applied to the New York State Council on the Arts, which was just starting to fund video, for money to set up a facility off campus. The Center, which got a whopping \$50,000 grant the first year, had three functions: educating students at the university through internships; providing local individuals and community groups with access to equipment; and providing artists with a facility for experimentation. Paik was one of the first artists to use it.<sup>14</sup>

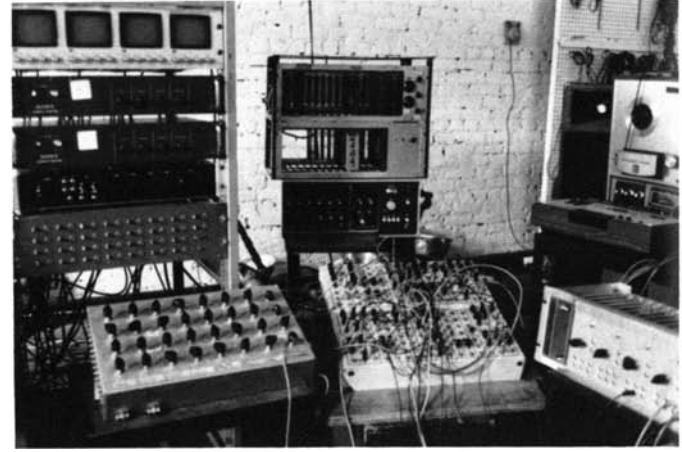
In the mid-seventies, as more community groups began to buy their own equipment, and because a student video facility was set up at the university, the Experimental Television Center, as it was now called, narrowed its focus. Hocking and Sherry Miller embarked on two related projects: research and development of low-cost specialized video-processing equipment and the establishment of artist-in-residencies. As a result, over the past fourteen years a number of people with electronics backgrounds have built various devices for the Center and for themselves, under the tutelage of the designer David Jones. Recently, more sophisticated digital machines have been incorporated that have expanded the system’s imaging capabilities.<sup>15</sup>

The idea behind the development of the equipment was to have devices that could be connected in several ways so that different kinds of images could be created, manipulated, and combined. The system has thus been refined from a technically crude configuration that could not produce a recordable output to one that now produces a signal stable enough to conform to commercial technical standards.

Hocking’s idea of “thinking” machines has to do with the way that Hocking and Miller intend people to use their equipment, as well as their conception of the artist. In contrast to commercial production facilities, there is no pressure to make a final product. At the Center (*Figs. 2 and 3*) artists can hole up for short periods of time and immerse themselves in their work. The process of experimentation is most important. Also in contrast to most film and video production, which is collective, production of tapes is seen as an isolated activity.

It is this conception of the artist and artmaking that has contributed most of the direction of image processing as a formalist enterprise. As Sherry Miller, Assistant Director of the Center, has described it:

Electronic image processing uses as art-making material those properties inherent in the medium of video. Artists work at a fundamental level with various param-



**Figs. 2 and 3** The Experimental Television Center, Owego, New York

ters of the electronic signal, for example, frequency, amplitude, or phase, which actually define the resulting image and sound.<sup>16</sup>

Hocking and Miller are not alone in their support of technological experimentation with all the ensuing formalist implications. In fact, Woody and Steina Vasulka are probably the best-known practitioners of this kind of video. Since 1969, the Vasulkas' interest has been in understanding the inner workings of video as a kind of electronic phenomenon. As Woody Vasulka has stated: "There is a certain behavior of the electronic image that is unique. . . . It's liquid, it's shapeable, it's clay, it's an art material, it exists independently."<sup>17</sup> Video's plasticity was explored by many artists, but the Vasulkas took a fairly didactic and conceptual approach. They were fascinated by the fact that the video image is constructed from electrical energy organized as voltages and frequencies—a temporal event.

Initially, they selected two properties peculiar to video. The first had to do with the fact that both audio and video are composed of electronic wave forms. Since sound can be used to generate video, and vice versa, one of the first pieces of equipment they bought was an audio synthesizer. Many of their early tapes illustrate this relationship of sound and image—one type of signal determines the form of the other.

Their second interest entailed the construction of the video frame. Because timing pulses control the stability of the video raster to create the "normal" image we are accustomed to seeing, viewers rarely realize—unless the TV set breaks—that the video image is actually a frameless continuum.

Although the Vasulkas had initially focused on these two basic areas, they began to expand their repertoire of effects by commissioning various people to build specialized video equipment. Between 1971 and 1974 they made

numerous tapes utilizing these tools in increasingly complex combinations (Fig. 4). These were the kinds of tapes that—with their colorful swirls of abstract imagery—were dismissed by many critics because they looked like a moving version of modern abstract painting, which was then becoming unfashionable. For the Vasulkas, however, their work was based on various manifestations of electromagnetic energy rather than on abstract art.

They began to think of these manifestations as a kind of language, and their work with video hardware as a "dialogue with the tool and the image, so we would not preconceive an image separately, make a conscious model of it, and then try to match it. We would rather make a tool and dialogue with it."<sup>18</sup> Throughout the 1970s, the Vasulkas produced an enormous body of work designed to reveal the inner workings of video. In 1976, they began work with Jeffrey Schier on a digital video system that would allow a computer to perform various operations on two video images by using mathematical logic functions. Depending on which logic function is operating, the numerical codes—and hence the images—can be combined in different but absolutely predictable ways. Such combinations revealed the system's inner structure and also constituted what Woody Vasulka called a "syntax."

What was surprising to me was to find that the table of logic functions can be interpreted as a table of syntaxes. . . . Because the logic functions are abstract, they can be applied to anything. That means they become unified language, outside of any one discipline.<sup>19</sup>

What was important about this device was its capacity for performing various complex operations—zooming, multiplication of the image, keying, etc.—in "real time." This made it possible for a video signal to be digitally processed as

it passed through the device—practically instantaneously—in contrast to the kind of computer imaging in which a program is entered and one must wait minutes, or hours, depending on the program's complexity, for the computer to perform the operation.

The work of these members of the first generation of video artists differed quite markedly from the slick "special effects" of the industry. The equipment they built, the facilities established, and work produced have served both as models and points of departure for those who came afterward.

#### Notes

This article is adapted from two articles originally published in *Afterimage* in 1983. Since they were written, owing to a number of factors, more artists routinely use image-processing techniques, resulting in tapes than can only be loosely defined as "image processing." Less descriptive, the term has become virtually obsolete. Some of the ramifications of these developments are elaborated in "Getting High Tech: The 'New' Television," *The Independent*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (March 1985), pp. 14–16.

1 Quoted in Lucinda Furlong, "Notes toward a History of Image-Processed Video: Eric Siegel, Stephen Beck, Dan Sandin, Steve Rutt, Bill and Louise Etra," *Afterimage*, Vol. 11, Nos. 1 & 2 (Summer 1983), p. 35. Although the various groups and individuals considered themselves part of one "movement," their goals proved to be quite contradictory in practice. In New York, the differences began to rigidify when the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA) started funding video in 1970–71, and applicants felt compelled to formalize their interests. Because the Council could not then (and cannot now) award funds directly to individuals, there was a scramble to form nonprofit organizations in order to benefit from available funding.

2 Johanna Gill, *Video: State of the Art*, New York, Rockefeller Foundation, 1976, quoted in *ibid.*



Fig. 4 Ernest Gusella in Woody Vasulka's *The Commission*

3 From inside cover of *Radical Software*, No. 1 (1970), quoted in *ibid*.

4 Juan Downey, "Technology and Beyond," *Radical Software*, Vol 2, No 5 (1973), p. 2, quoted in *ibid*.

5 In 1967, A. Michael Noll, a pioneer in computer imaging at Bell Labs, proposed one way this synthesis might occur: "the artist's emotional state might conceivably be determined by computer processing of physical and electrical signals from the artist (for example, pulse rate, and electrical activity of the brain). Then, by changing the artist's environment through such external stimuli as sound, color and visual patterns, the computer would seek to optimize the aesthetic effect of all these stimuli according to some specified criterion." See: "The Digital Computer as a Creative Medium," *IEEE Spectrum* (October 1967), p. 94.

6 David Bienstock, program notes for "A Special Videotape Show," Whitney Museum of Ameri-

can Art, 1971. Quoted in Lucinda Furlong, "Notes toward a History of Image-Processed Video: Woody and Steina Vasulka," *Afterimage*, Vol. 11, No. 5 (December 1983), p. 12.

7 Robert Pincus-Witten, "Panel Remarks," in *The New Television*, ed. Douglas Davis and Allison Simmons, Cambridge, Mass., The MIT Press, 1977, p. 70, quoted in Furlong (cited n. 1).

8 Quoted in Furlong (cited n. 6). Vasulka is referring to people like Eric Siegel, Stephen Beck, Bill Hearn, Steve Rutt, Bill Etra, George Brown, Shuya Abe, Dan Sandin, Don MacArthur, and younger people like David Jones, Richard Brewster, Jeffrey Schier, and Ed Tannenbaum—all of whom have designed or built electronic imaging devices for artists.

9 See: Martha Gever, "Pomp and Circumstances: The Coronation of Nan June Paik," *Afterimage*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (October 1983).

10 Ken Marsh, *Independent Video*, New York, 1973, p. 129.

11 Joint statement by Dan Sandin, Bob Snyder, and Tom DeFanti, quoted in Diane Kirkpatrick, "Chicago: The City and Its Artists: 1945-1978," exh. cat., Ann Arbor, University of Michigan, 1978, p. 38.

12 Sandin got involved in video in 1970 during the student protests that resulted from the Kent State killings. Because the art department was one of the few not to shut down, it became the student "mediahouse." Sandin was among those who videotaped political meetings which were shown live over closed-circuit TV.

13 The capabilities of the image processor were further enhanced when Tom DeFanti, a computer scientist who had developed Z-Grass—a user-friendly (i.e., the computer graphics language is greatly simplified), interactive, computer graphics system with a video output—joined Sandin at the Circle Campus. Together they set up the Circle Graphics Habitat—a facility in which students could interface Sandin's processor with DeFanti's system. The computer could be used not only as a controller but as a generator of images that could be fed into the processor.

14 If Paik inspired Hocking to establish the Center, Hocking did much for Paik. When Shuya Abe was building the Paik-Abe Video Synthesizer at PBS station WGBH, Hocking made several trips to Boston with equipment. Hocking also built Paik's *Video Cello* and *Video Bed*, the latter piece conceived by Sherry Miller. Hocking's role in these projects has never been cited in any of the massive historical material published on Paik.

15 Over the past three years, Jones has developed printed circuit boards that can perform a variety of image-processing functions. These boards can be interfaced with any 64K personal computer. The project, funded by the New York State Council on the Arts, is intended to provide artists with the means of setting up their own studios.

16 Quoted in Furlong (cited n. 6).

17 *Ibid*.

18 *Ibid*.

19 *Ibid*.

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# Pressure Points: Video in the Public Sphere

By Martha Gever

## *The Medium*

The medium, of course, is television. But not *television*. Titles of two events that christened video as an art—WGBH's *The Medium Is the Medium* and the exhibition *TV as a Creative Medium*, both in 1969<sup>1</sup>—cryptically announce the distinction between video art/television and mass communications/television. Thus divorced, "the medium" of video art becomes identified as material—electronic circuitry, cathode rays, photons, phosphors, and the like—not "the media," understood as the entire complex of television and film industries as well as commercial publications. For some prominent makers and promoters of video art, this split is absolute, but their defense of truly separate spheres for art and commercial culture, sharing only a technological bond, is rarely explained, just flatly asserted.

To take a recent example: three curators writing three consecutive essays in the catalogue for a major touring show, *The Second Link*,<sup>2</sup> begin on this note:

The medium of video/television, coupled with the computer, will come to play a paramount role in our world, but video art will be able to win no bigger place than that which art has always held up to now: a refuge in which sensibility and genius take on their aesthetic form.

Dorine Mignot<sup>3</sup>

Like printmaking, photography, and film, video has artistic and commercial applications. Both applications utilize the same telecommunications technology, but reach audiences of different magnitude.

—Barbara London<sup>4</sup>

Video art is fundamentally different from broadcast television and has been since its inception. Where broadcast television addresses a mass audience, video art is intensely personal—a reflection of individual passions and consciousness.

—Kathy Huffman<sup>5</sup>

The object of each of these statements is to distance video art and mass media in order to privilege the former.

In the same catalogue, Gene Youngblood, known for his championing of electronic experimentation in the late sixties and early seventies, takes a more extreme position:

It is apparent that video art is not television art. . . . Art is a process of exploration and inquiry. Its subject is human potential for aesthetic perception. . . . Art is always non-communicative; its aim is to produce non-standard observers.

For Youngblood, the idea that video art "belongs on television" is contradictory, not an uncommon notion perhaps, but soon to be disproved: "Personal vision is not public vision; art is not the stuff of mass communications." This statement may be empirically accurate, but, nevertheless, Youngblood refuses to grapple with the various kinds of video work produced, simply dismissing these as immature art. Ignoring prevailing economic and political conditions, he prescribes "counter definitions of reality" achieved, ideally, through a marriage of video and computer technology. Heralding once again the "Communications Revolution" on the horizon, he predicts "an inversion of existing social rela-

tions," a society peacefully reformed into "reality communities, defined not by geography but by consciousness, ideology, and desire."<sup>6</sup>

Conversant with the latest hard- and software, Youngblood subscribes to a type of determinism that treats technology as natural, thus evolving according to natural laws. Certainly, a number of videomakers and early supporters of video as countertelevision were similarly attracted to optimistic projections for democratic culture resulting from the proliferation of electronic communications technologies, but their prophecies of improved social conditions, foretold by Marshall McLuhan and others,<sup>7</sup> have failed to materialize. Indeed, a very different scenario from McLuhan's "global village" or Youngblood's "reality communities" has been elaborated and analyzed by those who study the ever-expanding global communications networks and the uses of advanced electronics, designed to serve the needs of military and corporate powers.<sup>8</sup> One critic of theories that posit technology-as-cause, Raymond Williams, correctly identifies McLuhan's work as "a particular culmination of an aesthetic theory, which became, negatively, a social theory: a development and elaboration of formalism."<sup>9</sup> And formulas for social amelioration emanating from advanced technology have become increasingly difficult to sustain; as of the mid eighties, we live with sophisticated surveillance techniques, data bases shared by police departments and the FBI, the concentration of communications capital in the hands of transnational corporations, budgets for "Star Wars" weaponry, and so forth. Recognizing the dead end of electronic salvation, video-art



advocates have transferred their fascination with new technologies to another formalist project: the retrospective construction of a video academy. In effect, science fiction has been replaced by history writing.

### The Museum

Four significant attempts to establish a legitimate lineage for video art have been displayed during the past two years; the sponsoring institutions are the Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City, the Long Beach Museum of Art in California, and the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston. On the video-art stage, MOMA, the Whitney, and Long Beach play leading roles. Long Beach introduced video into its exhibition schedule in 1974, when David Ross was employed there as assistant director. He is now director of the ICA, and the recent debut of the ICA as a showcase for video art is not incidental. (Before his residency at Long Beach, Ross was video curator at the Everson Museum in Syracuse, New York, which, during his tenure, gained a reputation for its video exhibits and videotape collection.) The video department at MOMA dates from 1974; given that museum's prestige as an arbiter of modern art, video programs there necessarily carry weight. Located, like MOMA, in the world's central art marketplace, the Whitney maintains a high profile as a video-art venue. Unlike MOMA and Long Beach, however, the Whitney does not collect videotapes, but since 1973 video art has been included in its influential Biennial Exhibitions, and in 1982 its film and video department was able to mount the most ambitious video show ever—the Nam June Paik retrospective. This exhibition achieved unprecedented notice in the art press and the mass media,<sup>10</sup> and the 420-monitor extravaganza is now cited by video cognoscenti as a landmark event. Indeed, it was. Video art was admitted to full status in the ranks of modern art, a master was acclaimed, and a masterpiece—Paik's *V-ramid* installation—was added to the Whitney's collection.<sup>11</sup>

Once again, the assertion of valid aesthetic credentials for a form that might be seen as tainted by mass media pervades the curatorial statements that describe the museum versions of video history:

As video art emerged in the wake of conceptual art, it clearly reflected many of the social and aesthetic issues of the period as well as specific issues relative to this new art form.

—David Ross<sup>12</sup>

[T]he tapes selected are those that gave shape to new ideas and spawned new traditions for creative artists' television.

—Bob Riley<sup>13</sup>

It is the personal point of view, made possible by the portable camera, that has distinguished artists' video from commercial material. . . . Today . . . the strongest works in single format and video installation formats are recognized as having cohesiveness and integrity. At this point there are mature artists who understand the potentials of the video medium.

—Barbara London<sup>14</sup>

In an attempt to challenge the television industry's hegemony, many activists worked—often as collectives—to use video as a tool for social change. At the same time, video artists began producing tapes and installations designed to explore the medium's potential for new aesthetic discourses.

—John Hanhardt<sup>15</sup>

Common to these verifications of the artistic merits of the work screened is an ambivalence concerning the social component of some video. The most explicit acknowledgment is Hanhardt's, but the survey he compiled omits primary examples of the political video practices mentioned in his text. The "social change" and "social issues" noted in these introductory sentences cannot be overlooked by the curator-historians, but the curatorial writing and tape selections quickly leave extra-aesthetic contingencies aside.<sup>16</sup> The only exception can be found in the MOMA program, which included four social documentaries of a total of fifty-three tapes. (Andy Mann's *One-Eyed Bum*, described as a "personal documentary," was exhibited at the Whitney and at the ICA; Long Beach and MOMA put Antonio Muntadas's documentary media critique, *Between the Lines*, in their programs.)

The near invisibility of documentary forms and topical political content in these shows may not seem particularly shocking, considering the social position represented by art museums, but the neglect of the considerable contribution of documentary videomakers during the period encompassed creates severe historical distortions. Excised from these official accounts is that significant portion of video work which tells of specific (and continuing) social struggles, and thus the varied work of many Black, Latino, Asian American, Indian, and women videomakers who chose documentary forms and techniques. Presumably, work based on the experience of

particular communities, using realist devices in order to challenge prevailing "reality," does not represent "new ideas," nor are these videomakers "mature artists," nor do they "explore the medium's potential for a new aesthetic discourse"—with an emphasis on *aesthetic*.

The limited resources available to curators turned historians should be factored into an assessment of the gaps in these partial accounts, but even so, a formalist imperative clearly rules. One obvious symptom can be isolated: the naming of genres. The MOMA program awkwardly groups tapes under headings like "Perception," "Narrative," "Image Process-Computer."<sup>17</sup> Likewise, at the Whitney, tapes were classified as "perceptual studies," "narratives, texts, and actions," "personal documentaries," "performance-based," and "image processing." Curiously, the ICA show excluded image-processed work because, in the curator's words, "In many ways the electronically produced videographics belong more to kinetic art and sculptural experimentation in the preceding decade—the 60s." This disclaimer, however, recognizes the category as such, and the ICA catalogue texts describing each tape repeat the "narrative," "perception," "performance" catchwords.<sup>18</sup>

Formal cubbyholes like these become functional labels, establishing video's modern-art pedigree. Although Western avant-garde cultural traditions can provide insights into many of the video projects exhibited as historical signposts,<sup>19</sup> several branches of the family tree had to be pruned so that they could be proclaimed the *only* tradition. But even these limited, often redundant, selections of tapes consistently beg the question of formal primacy. Many artists use this form for its mass communications connotations or possibilities. Television, the foremost producer of contemporary cultural consciousness, the leveler of social experience and information, can, in theory, also carry the products of alternative or oppositional cultures that exist beyond the art world. Or television's ideological structures, conventions, and strategies can be revealed through references to or frustrations of mass-media idioms. Granted, the most abstract video art and many video installations seem best suited to the rarefied, supposedly neutral environment of art museums<sup>20</sup> and formalist interpretations. But this work, too, is historically entangled with overtly critical, political video, as any slice of video history in the early seventies will indicate; during the early part of the decade, many videomakers made street tapes, fiddled with electronics, built installations, recorded artists' performances,



and so forth. In other words, artists who chose video/television take on the social function of the medium as well as its machinery. No matter how often the litanies of "properties of the medium" or "new art forms" are recited, no matter how consistently the specter of mass media is disavowed, much of what's included in the museum histories of video—as well as what's left out—proves the inadequacy of video history conceived as art history.

### *The Audience*

Antitelevision, countertelevision, non-television, alternative television—the negation proves the link between art-video and television-video.<sup>21</sup> After all, the medium is television—not a bunch of wires and silicon chips but a social structure, a cultural condition. Therefore, the *circulation* of video work, neglected in discussions about artists' self-expression, sensibility, and vanguard consciousness, constitutes a necessary term in any conceptualization of video production and reception. Even in the formalist camp, the audience figures.

To return to the three condensed credos quoted at the beginning of this essay, the contrast between mass-media popularity and the small, select, specialized audience for video art is repeatedly identified as a major distinguishing characteristic. Youngblood's idealized, "non-standard observers" also come to mind. In an ostensibly democratic society, where public cultural resources could, in theory, be allocated on the basis of statistics—to benefit the largest number of people—these statements might be read as arguments to support nonpopulist (antipopulist, to Douglas Davis<sup>22</sup>) culture. But talk about video audiences usually sounds a bit defensive; echoes of Nielsen ratings can be heard when video viewers are discussed. In the museum economy, some kind of audience for this work must be identified in order to satisfy exhibition funders, but consistent references to audiences by video programmers confirm that even the most esoteric video presupposes communication. Just as audience constitutes one of the principal terms of television (not that the audience decides what's on, but the audience must be captured, captivated), video entails reception as much as individual creativity and program design.

Rudimentary knowledge about television economics has permeated our social vocabulary. The term "Nielsen ratings" can be invoked as metaphor without further explanation. For television, the operative formula was neatly summarized in the title of Richard Serra and Carlota Schoolman's 1973 videotape

*Television Delivers People*—to advertisers.<sup>23</sup> Certain exceptions exist, such as Home Box Office and other cable subscription services, which, as the HBO name indicates, replicate a box-office income structure. Public television, of course, must scramble for government appropriations, corporate underwriting (a variant of commercial advertising), and individual donations to stay on the air. To make a persuasive case to patrons, public TV, too, must claim a respectable audience share.

Despite prophecies of increased diversity of program formats and contents accompanying the advent of each new distribution technology and marketing scheme—cable, satellites, discs, home VCRs—the commercial networks still rule the television world. The enormously lucrative broadcast industry dominated by the big three networks commands the big numbers while other television systems compete for a few slices of the profit pie. In this risky business, fueled by sales—to advertisers targeting demographically defined groups of people—program choices rarely exceed predictable boundaries, and permissible forms necessarily buttress a social order that generates more sales. Videomakers interested in distribution outside the art world must persistently search for aberrations in the industry.

Since the television premiere of video art—the WGBH experiment in 1969—public television has provided the meager broadcast opportunities granted to independently produced video. As a result of collective lobbying, independent documentaries receive regular, if limited, time and some funding from the Public Broadcasting Service and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Opportunities ebb and flow depending on the political climate, which affects the welfare of the public system and the interests of its administrators. Predictably, during the Reagan years the situation has worsened.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, the influence of public television on documentary video can still be detected in prevalent styles, and even in the length of tapes; most documentaries run exactly twenty-seven or fifty-eight minutes, most are finely crafted, and most avoid partisan politics. In other words, most are tailored for national PBS broadcast. Interventions of this kind are always negotiated and mediated, expensive to make, constrained by standards and conventions designed to replicate the status quo. In a country where the social-documentary tradition includes the work of left-wing groups like the Workers' Film and Photo League and Frontier Films as well as the numerous radical films and videotapes made dur-

ing the sixties and early seventies, the pattern of conformity to PBS format becomes significant. The deciding factor here is audience.

One major source for documentary production money was stabilized when the Ford Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts jointly established the Independent Documentary Fund at WNET's TV Lab in 1977. This fund supplemented the artist-in-residence program already in place at the station for videomakers working in all styles. Established in 1972 with grants from the New York State Council on the Arts and the Rockefeller Foundation the TV Lab provided the primary broadcast outlet for video art through the series *VTR: Video Tape Review*, which aired from 1975 through 1977. Earlier in 1977, the Rockefeller Foundation had set up other experimental television centers at KQED in San Francisco and WGBH in Boston.<sup>25</sup> All these facilities offered artists access to sophisticated equipment not available elsewhere (and that few individuals could afford to own) and the hope of reaching a large public. The subsequent demise of these labs can be attributed to the Rockefeller Foundation's withdrawal and the indifference of station executives.<sup>26</sup> (Although WNET continued to receive NYSCA dollars for several years after the Rockefeller's defunding, the station refused to supply the necessary matching funds, and the TV lab folded in late 1983.) Without government and foundation support, few public television stations have demonstrated willingness to finance or show nondocumentary video. Indeed, what corporate underwriter wants to display its logo on programs watched by a sparse, hardly upscale audience?

So far, the easiest route for getting video on television without interference from program executives or protection from some quirky station-employed producer has been paved by activists who relentlessly pressure city governments to guarantee public access to cable television. Although the makers of what are now proclaimed video classics in the museum versions of video history were often people already working in other art forms, their Portapak comrades—some practicing artists, some not—took their decks and cameras to the streets. There developed collectives, workshops, equipment loan programs, and socially engaged projects concerned with the use, distribution, and ownership of television, invoking and experimenting with ideas about democratic media. Remnants of the public-service concept of mass media—as contrasted with the commodity-consumer construct now firmly established in the U.S.—are pre-

served in provisions for access channels on cable television. (However, recent federal legislation and Federal Communications Commission rulings have weakened communities' power to demand access channels and production facilities from their local cable companies.<sup>27</sup>) Riding piggyback on the wires of cable industry, some public-access producers consciously contradict the ideology of their profit-seeking hosts.

On public access cable time is free, if limited. Likewise, no one gets paid for his or her work. A few grants are awarded to artists producing for cable outlets, but the sums are modest. Furthermore, public-access shows, rarely listed in program guides or newspaper TV schedules, attract relatively scant, always geographically restricted audiences. That's the idea of public access—community-based, noncommercial TV—but many videomakers have grander ambitions. Many would also like to be paid at least enough to finance the next production.

As commodities, videotapes can't be treated like tangible artwork,<sup>28</sup> but theoretically they can be sold like other electronic media products: audio cassettes, records, and programming for established entertainment media. Videomakers' partial and always provisional inroads into public territory have already been described; to this add the list of commercial-based distribution forms that optimistic videomakers hope to use as vehicles to reach the public: music videos, leased cable access (allowing advertising), subscription cable services, videodiscs (last year's hot prospect), and the big time—broadcast TV. It is not only video entrepreneurs who want to break into the business, where the best equipment and biggest audiences money can buy await: artists who clothe their social critiques in popular forms also want to make music videos, sell their cassettes in home-video stores, and get their tapes on late-night TV. Advocates of this sort of infiltration propose subversion via wide circulation. This seems somewhat naïve considering that the hegemonic mass media can easily tolerate a few minor disturbances without surrendering any authority. Cultural intervention that rests on the expansion of the communications industry—on its global reach and ever-multiplying gadgets and markets—remains ambivalent, or desperate.

Whether media guerrillas or media hustlers, videomakers who disdain the label "artist," discuss their work as "product," and accept the jargon of "marketing" and "packaging"—a growing number to be sure—demonstrate the centrality of audience to this hybrid with roots in two distinct cultural

forms. Although included in museum and gallery shows, these would-be infiltrators refute claims for video as an elite art. At the same time, there are risks in abandoning entirely the critical province of art for the greener pastures of mass media.

### *Institutions*

Conceived and nurtured in the public sphere, video would not survive without public patronage, public TV, or other public institutions. As semipublic institutions, museums cannot completely ignore or thoroughly co-opt the social discourse of media artists.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, public TV, which represents privileged interests parallel to those traditionally served by museums, has been somewhat vulnerable to demands for public accountability. This relatively young institution generally exhibits all the instincts of more venerable, highbrow cultural establishments, but it also depends on congressional funding as well as on some degree of community support. Public-access channels, too, exist because of social pressure for some service to communities in exchange for commercial exploitation of the public domain. And educational institutions, which provide the few jobs available for artists, often rely on public sources for funding.

The various conduits for public patronage of video—the National Endowments for the Arts and Humanities, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, state arts and humanities councils, nonprofit media centers, museum video programs, public-access centers, university visiting-artist programs, and so forth—expand and contract depending on economic trends and political shifts. Currently, the constriction of public patronage, due to the ascendancy of political conservatism, corresponds to the consolidation of private capitalism in the communications industry, enabled by advanced information technologies: computers, satellites, digital systems, and so on. In this environment, public cultural institutions either diminish or court private sponsors.<sup>30</sup> And video becomes doubly implicated in this movement.

Official histories of the "art form" lend video respectability while redefining its development in terms suitable to the tastes of a small number of connoisseurs—distinct from those of the "rabble." Combining depoliticized rhetoric and selections of exemplary masterworks, video can be rendered palatable to wealthy art patrons. Alternatively, video can be cast as a new brand of media merchandise. Here, too, the lure of success is proffered—big audiences and big bucks, accompanied by quasi-

political rhetoric about independence from patronage. In both cases, video is touted as a vanguard, while being enlisted as an ideological agent.

Video that adopts mass-media criteria for success quickly becomes a cottage industry, akin to small business ventures developing new software for the culture industry, complete with the attendant mythologies of freedom. High-art video, too, can assist the advance cultural hegemony. In his introduction to *Video: State of the Art*, a 1976 survey published by the Rockefeller Foundation, the foundation's director for arts and a notable videophile, Howard Klein, describes this process:

The struggle for world domination has been a common theme in our time. One form of domination is cultural, and in that it embodies a world of ideas and concepts that can be influential and threatening to a status quo, it may be the most important form. Such domination of world culture has fallen to the United States. . . . Just as popular aspects of culture have spread American values and concepts abroad, so the arts, and especially those forms which are uniquely American, infiltrate foreign lands and minds and produce a spread—for better or worse—of Americanization. This has begun to happen already within the narrow field of video art.<sup>31</sup>

Given his position, no one would expect Klein to describe the mechanisms of cultural domination or the interests it serves: concentration of wealth and power along with destruction of indigenous cultures and social institutions. Klein takes cultural imperialism for granted, and his uncritical advocacy echoes the arrogance of U.S. political and economic imperialism. Video easily becomes complicit with imperialist programs if the audience is presumed irrelevant (art-for-art's-sake, video-as-refuge). A more active collusion is embraced if the institution of art is renounced in favor of creating new consumers for video products. But historically, practically, much video has proposed audiences that are by no means homogeneous, harmonious, or necessarily complacent. Klein doesn't mention that cultural domination meets resistance, at home and abroad. But it does. In relation to television and other mass media, resistance has produced critiques of the uses of communications technology, the economic relations that determine and are determined by these uses, and the functions of culture reinforced by these forms of communications.<sup>32</sup> Video that doesn't accede to the

television industry or to regressive aestheticism indicates resistance. Video practice that attends to audiences and acknowledges public functions joins this resistance. Indeed, opposition to the private control of communications technology and the cultural hegemony such control produces implies, depends on, and contributes to the viability of the public sphere. But a broadened definition of video that admits a relationship to mass media without paying heed to ideological functions of art institutions ends up in another formal cul-de-sac, with art severed from its connections to the ideological work performed by institutions.

A short essay by Bertolt Brecht has been a staple in curatorial commentaries on video as political, critical art. In "The Radio as an Apparatus for Communication," Brecht writes:

As for the radio's object, I don't think it can consist merely in prettifying public life. Nor is radio in my view an adequate means of bringing back cosiness to the home and making family life bearable again. But quite apart from the dubiousness of its functions, radio is one-sided when it should be two-. So here is a positive suggestion: change this apparatus over from distribution to communication.<sup>33</sup>

Attempts to apply a translation of Brecht's words to video practice in 1986 ignore the vastly different social conditions that prevailed in 1926 when he wrote the essay. Too often references to Brecht are summoned forth to establish the radicalism of this or that style of video, disregarding correlations of his strategy with his active participation in revolutionary communist politics. Instead, his remarks about two-way communications are misread in formal terms. Again, manipulations of "the medium" are deemed inherently radical.<sup>34</sup>

That Brecht still speaks to those who think about the meaning and purpose of video activity indicates, however, the possible social project of art that assumes television as a method and as a subject. In his theoretical study of the historical avant-garde in modern art, Peter Bürger situates Brecht:

Brecht never shared the intention of the representatives of the avant-garde movements to destroy art as an institution. . . . [W]hereas the avant-gardistes believe they can directly attack and destroy that institution, Brecht develops a concept that entails a change of function and sticks to what is concretely achievable.<sup>35</sup>

If video presumes public institutions, its production, circulation, and reception can be conceived in terms of public function instead of formal innovation. Otherwise, art that turns its back on the social institutions that surround and support it won't change much. And video practice blind to the social functions of the communications industry cannot be critical. Following Brecht's lead, however, video can be undertaken and understood as part of a resistance to cultural domination and as a means to change cultural institutions.

#### Notes

- 1 *The Medium Is the Medium*, a 30-minute composite videotape of work by six artists, was produced at the New Television Workshop in Boston. *TV as a Creative Medium*, at the Howard Wise Gallery in New York City, was the first major gallery exhibition devoted exclusively to video.
- 2 *The Second Link: Viewpoints on Video in the Eighties*, Banff, Alberta, Canada, Walter Phillips Gallery, 1983. In his introduction, the exhibition organizer, Lorne Falk, finds precedents for contemporary video art in the activity of the aestheticist, elitist Linked Ring Society, formed in Great Britain in 1892 to champion art photography over the popular uses of photographic technology.
- 3 Dorine Mignot (curator of painting, sculpture, video, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam), "Video: An Art Form," *ibid.*, p. 25.
- 4 Barbara London (director of the video program, Museum of Modern Art, New York), "Striking a Responsive Chord," *ibid.*, p. 28.
- 5 Kathy Huffman (former director, Long Beach Museum of Art, Long Beach, Calif.), "Video Art: A Personal Medium," *ibid.*, p. 30.
- 6 All quotations from Gene Youngblood, "A Medium Matures: Video and the Cinematic Enterprise," *ibid.*, pp. 9–13.
- 7 The central text of technological determinism in Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, New York, 1964.
- 8 For example, see: Herbert I. Schiller, *Who Knows? Information in the Age of the Fortune 500*, Norwood, N.J., 1981; and *idem*, *Information and the Crisis Economy*, Norwood, N.J., 1984.
- 9 Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*, New York, 1975, p. 126.
- 10 The numerous reviews and features on the Paik retrospective included Robert Hughes, *Time* (May 17, 1982), pp. 75, 77; and D.C. Denison, "Video Art's Guru," *New York Times Magazine* (April 25, 1982), pp. 54–58, 63, as well as those in art publications; Paul Gardner's "Tuning in to Nam June Paik," *Art News* (May 1982), pp. 64–73, was the cover story.
- 11 I discussed the significance of the Paik retrospective in "Pomp and Circumstances: The Coronation of Nam June Paik," *Afterimage*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (October 1982), pp. 12–16.
- 12 *Ten Years of Video: The Greatest Hits of the 70s*, exh. cat., Boston, The Institute of Contemporary Art, 1984, n.p.
- 13 *Ibid.*
- 14 Wall text for *Video Art: A History, Part 1*, New York, The Museum of Modern Art, 1984.
- 15 Program notes for *New American Video Art: A Historical Survey, 1967–1980*, New York, Whitney Museum of American Art, 1984.
- 16 A history of video art in the U.S. that ignores the work of groups like the Videofreex/Media Bus, Raindance, Video Free America, Optic Nerve, or Global Village consciously skews history towards formal aesthetics, away from all social factors. Also rendered invisible is the important work of community media activists during this period, most notably that of George Stoney and those who worked at the Alternative Media Center at New York University, which Stoney founded.
- 17 In "Raster Masters," *Afterimage*, Vol. 11, No. 8 (March 1984), Lucinda Furlong details the inaccuracies that London's taxonomy perpetrated.
- 18 Kathy Huffman's and David Ross's essays in LBMA's catalogue, *Video: A Retrospective, 1974–1984*, chronicle institutional development rather than propose rationales for the work exhibited. The other text in the catalogue, Bill Viola's "History, 10 Years and the Dreamtime," is a mystical treatise that denies criticism altogether and questions the usefulness of any history.
- 19 In addition, avant-garde art traditions are generally cited only to certify video's art status; critical historical analysis is rare. Martha Rosler's lecture, "Shedding the Utopian Moment," delivered on October 4, 1984, at the Video 84 conference in Montreal, counts as an exception. In her paper, Rosler considers "how modern artists have tried to find a place in new ideologies and new technologies or have tried to oppose them, and marketplace values as well."
- 20 An inquiry into video displays in museum spaces lies beyond the scope of this article. Nevertheless, such an investigation would extend the critique of formalist interpretations of video.
- 21 David Antin makes this point in his essay, "Television: Video's Frightful Parent," *Artforum*, Vol. 14, No. 4. (December 1975), pp. 36–45, where he describes how "the television experience dominates the phenomenology of viewing and haunts video exhibitions. . . . [I]f anything has defined the formal and technical properties of the video medium, it is the television industry" (p. 36). Although Antin makes a convincing argument for the influence of television on video, I take exception to the conclusion he draws: "To a great extent the significance of all types of art derives from its stance with respect to some aspect of television, which is 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" [emphasis added] (p. 44). A serious critique must be consciously undertaken and

cannot be inferred solely from video's alternative status.

22 Douglas Davis, "Video in the Mid-'70's: Prelude to an End/Future," *Video Art: An Anthology*, Ira Schneider and Beryl Korot, eds., New York, 1976, p. 197. In his essay, Davis states, "[T]he Video Art that interests me the most . . . is antitelevision, antipopulist. Most of it is very far as yet from high art, from realizing the perfect achievement that occurs when thought and medium come together."

23 *Television Delivers People* is based on the discussion of the economics of television in Les Brown, *The Business Behind the Box*, New York, 1971. Brown, in turn, repeats the analysis given in Erik Barnouw, *The Image Empire: A History of Broadcasting in the United States*, New York, 1970, and Barnouw incorporates theories put forward by Dallas Smythe, in *The Structure and Policy of Electronic Communications*, Urbana, Ill., 1957.

24 1984 saw the demise of the CPB-sponsored Independent Documentary Fund at WNET-TV. Two CPB-funded, PBS documentary series, "Matters of Life and Death" and "Crisis to Crisis," likewise expired during the first Reagan term.

25 A list of Rockefeller outlays for video up to 1974 can be found in Howard Klein, "The Rise of the Televisualists," *The New Television: A Public/Private Art*, Cambridge, Mass., 1977, pp. 168-69.

26 Although the public-TV experimental labs brought income to the stations (since artists were required to spend grant money allocated through these programs at the stations) and despite favorable critical response to many of the projects accomplished at these centers, the stations never integrated these programs into their operations. One plausible explanation for this is that PBS stations have resisted supporting truly independent projects that don't conform to established formats, even when these are reasonably successful.

27 In October 1984 Congress enacted HR. 4103, a compromise version of Senate cable legislation (S. 66) passed during the previous session. Cable operators are now able to obtain relief from requirements for access channels and rate regulations for leased channels. Also, the role of for the public in the franchising process has been curtailed.

28 Attempts to market limited editions of videotapes through galleries or art auctions have been uniformly disastrous, and tape rentals and sales by art dealers have proved unprofitable.

29 In contrast with painting and sculpture, or even photography, video attracts few private patrons; video programs within museums are primarily creatures of public patronage.

30 At the 1983 conference of the National Alliance of Media Arts Centers, Brian O'Doherty, the NEA Media Program director, told assembled media center administrators, "Every board of a media center needs to have the leading banker in the community, the leading lawyer, the leading real estate broker, influential politicians. . . . You need to love your fun-

ders for what they can do for you. . . . Get through their doors, and when you do, dress like you're a funder." Quoted in Carrie Rickey, "Get It While You Can: The Vanguard, the Bucks, and the System," *Village Voice* (July 5, 1983), pp. 37-38.

31 Howard Klein, "Introduction," in Johanna Gill, *Video: State of the Art*, New York, 1976, pp. v-vi.

32 E.g., see the report of UNESCO's International Commission for the Study of Communications Problems, *Many Voices, One World*, New York, 1980; Anthony Smith, *The Geopolitics of Information: How Western Culture Dominates the World*, New York, 1980; Herbert I. Schiller, *Communications and Cultural Domination*, White Plains, N.Y., 1976; and Armand Mattelart and Seth Siegelaub, eds., *Communications and Class Struggle: 1. Capitalism, Imperialism*, New York, 1979.

33 John Willett, ed. and trans., *Brecht on Theatre*, New York, 1964, p. 52.

34 E.g., in "Nam June Paik's Videotapes," in John Hanhardt, ed., *Nam June Paik*, New York, Whitney Museum of American Art, 1982, David Ross links Paik with Brecht in order to claim Paik as a radical artist.

35 Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant Garde*, Minneapolis, 1984, pp. 88-89. On the following page, Bürger makes a pertinent point: "[T]he social effect of a work of art cannot simply be gauged by considering the work itself but that its effect is decisively determined by the institution within which the work 'functions.'"

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# The New Sleep: Stasis and the Image-Bound Environment

By Tricia Collins and Richard Milazzo

## Joseph Nechvatal: *Grace Under Pressure*

—In the pressure and splendor of its negations, Joseph Nechvatal's work quietly proposes that the act of Scrutiny must be equal in its power to the spectacle of commercialized Sleep (*Fig. 1*). Rendered in the graceful and intricate guise of signic entertainment, these acts of scrutiny, and their necessity, are effectively implied by the use of a gray, Renaissance or tatoo-like field or environment of super-statically charged images, generated by highly "over-worked" or congested patterns of information, seemingly contradictory in nature, which require the execution of discernment and judgment (*Fig. 2*). Scrutiny, here, must contend with this simulated grid of trans-social phenomena; in effect, measure itself against the gray (visual) noise of social and genetic disinformation and, finally, be equal in power to the spectacle of disengaged History. Scrutiny, in Nechvatal's view of things, must process, ultimately, the actuality of biological terrorism.

—While Nechvatal's pictures—drawings, photographic works, and video images (*Fig. 3*)—are stimulated by the excess distantiations of the body, which are driven mentally into micro-negations (or signic negations) in the weak temporality of existence, they also build a dark, hallucinatory techno-anterior synthetic (or a willfully obsolete or archaic anti-structure) that drives the onslaught of psychic references and sensations in their binary mode into a dense network of intentionality, desublimation, and scrutiny, a kind of Biosubjectivity that can surmount (or appropriate) the fast interiors of the New Sleep, and overwhelm the world of Naturalized Perceptions.



*Fig. 1* Joseph Nechvatal, *Grace Under Pressure*, 1984. Gallery Nature Morte.

—Ultimately, Nechvatal is constructing in his work an abstract history, a disparate instrumentality, that can accommodate the images of the Subtended Psyche in pictures that categorically exhaust standardized consciousness and institutionalized perceptions.

## Lily Lack: *Detergent*

—What Lily Lack does in *Sheila* (*Fig. 4*) and *This is My Life* (1984–85) is to break down the whole credibility factor.

—The credibility of the object is undercut by the institutional disarray of the product in *Sheila*, and the existential disarray of production in *This is My Life*.

—If attitude is neutral mystique, then Lily Lack's work sort of comes out on the other side. It's not that situation

overtakes attitude, it's that somehow you can gauge the specific atrophy involved in a social paradigm.

—It's not that you can get outside the role that detergent plays in your life, it's that you can temporarily deflect the aestheticization that serves to enhance its ontological roots.

—In a sense, she brackets the reification of the Social itself within an image-bound environment.

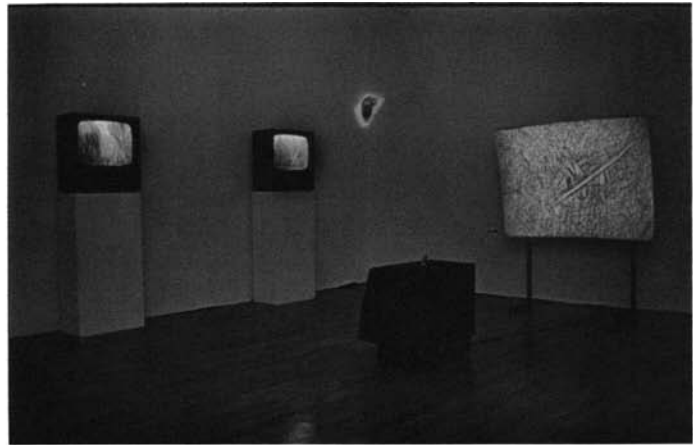
—The inevitable yield is a New Product.

—The signic negation of reification itself.

—The New Stasis.



**Fig. 2.** Joseph Nechvatal, *Installation*, 1984, at Brooke Alexander, Inc.



**Fig. 3.** Joseph Nechvatal, *When Things Get Tough on Easy Street*, Installation, 1982, at The Kitchen.

**Gretchen Bender: Total Effect—Neutralization and the Psychedelic Concept**

—Gretchen Bender's psychedelic hyper-appropriated image-bound environment—comprising visual, computer-generated, and video work—asserts a disparate instrumentality in the aesthetics of neutralized signs. The strategy situates Concept itself in the context of the New Content, endowing the effects with the power of theoretical scrutiny. In this regard, Bender's media-determined work indicates a neo-conceptual vector in the discourse regarding abstraction and technology (photo-mechanical reproduction).

—Although the militant, overriding concern in Bender's work seems—given such show titles as *Change Your Art* and *Public Vision*, and their subversive fervor—to underscore ironically the moral imperative hidden in part of this strategy (that is, in the ideological dimension or aggressive anti-proprietary values innate to the act of appropriation), the work actually distributes itself primarily into three inter-related zones of psychic passion: *information*, *interference*, and *abstraction*. In Bender's project, whole aesthetical systems (belonging to reality-incorporated or reality-complicit

artists such as Lichtenstein, Schnabel, and Haring) are self-reflexively rendered into *information bits*, which are then subjected meta-critically to a *theory of interference*, the patterns of which are subsequently transformed into *psychedelic abstraction*. Through the technological devices and various materials of photo-mechanical reproduction—such as video syncretical abstracts, computer and TV stills, and photo-silkscreened enamel on sign tin—and the arrangements of the resultant images into a calculated disarray of interferential patterns, the neutralization of signifying functions is, in a sense, intensified to produce the effect of a computer-generated *stridency* (a kind of hysterical semiotics), which brackets the aestheticized reality that operates as a support structure for the normative Spectacle.

—The first zone of psychic energy in Bender's work involves a bold technological appropriation of images from post-recent art and media in the exemplifying service of a hyper-neutralizing effect that is electric in distinction and absolute in its capacity to willfully access the overload and, in some ways, actually exceed it by analytically dismantling and ultimately subsuming the dominant signic totalities into transcendental bits of abstract information, which can then be arranged into a disparate paradigm of neutral systemic bits—"arrangements" that remain [Louise] Lawler-like, however, in their telling facticity. (Peter Nagy's xerox time-lines also participate radically in this strategy [Fig. 5].)

—In the second zone, this paradigm and its model run interference patterns over the image-content, such that the hyper-information of the pseudo-*Gesamtkunstwerk* produces meta-negative conceptual patterns. This new content (or manifest concept) in Bender's work is

virtually pornographic in the sheer number and visibility of distantiated relations it generates, which order the perception and transcendence of structure (itself), negating in the final analysis the "fascisms" of superstructural behaviorism, and issuing ultimately latent or abstract signs without directives or specific instructions. In the video *Reality Fever* (1983), Bender superimposes static (cliché) art images over moving programmed (generic) TV imagery. In superimposing the two (or more) art and media-derived systems and their codified meanings, she achieves a kind of higher (feverish) theatrical abstract neutrality which is attendant upon neither system in the end. This procedure of systemic interferences reveals surprising abstract continuities within the passage of these short-circuited images and codes whose meta-negative effects produce a powerful, synthetic sensation which perdures in consciousness as psychedelic conceptualism.

—In the third zone of psychic energy, this expansive or *Zeitgeist*-like sensation in Bender's work—operative in such video works as *Wild Dead II* (Fig. 6) and *Dumping Core* (Fig. 7)—manifests itself categorically in the concept's abstract (rather than structural) relation to psyche. Where we are forced, as we are in Bender, to think more abstractly, to perceive the structural patterns that govern the images, and to transcend structural awareness itself through the conceptual effect of neutral interferences, we are no longer dominated by the aestheticized content of the image.

—In Bender's image-bound environment, we are moving from the subversive manipulation of images and their counter-subversive neutralization to the trans-neutralization of signs.

—It is within this paradigm of neutral distinctions—magnified by the irony of



**Fig. 4.** Lily Lack, from *Sheila*, 1984 (Barbara Israel and Lily Lack in photograph).



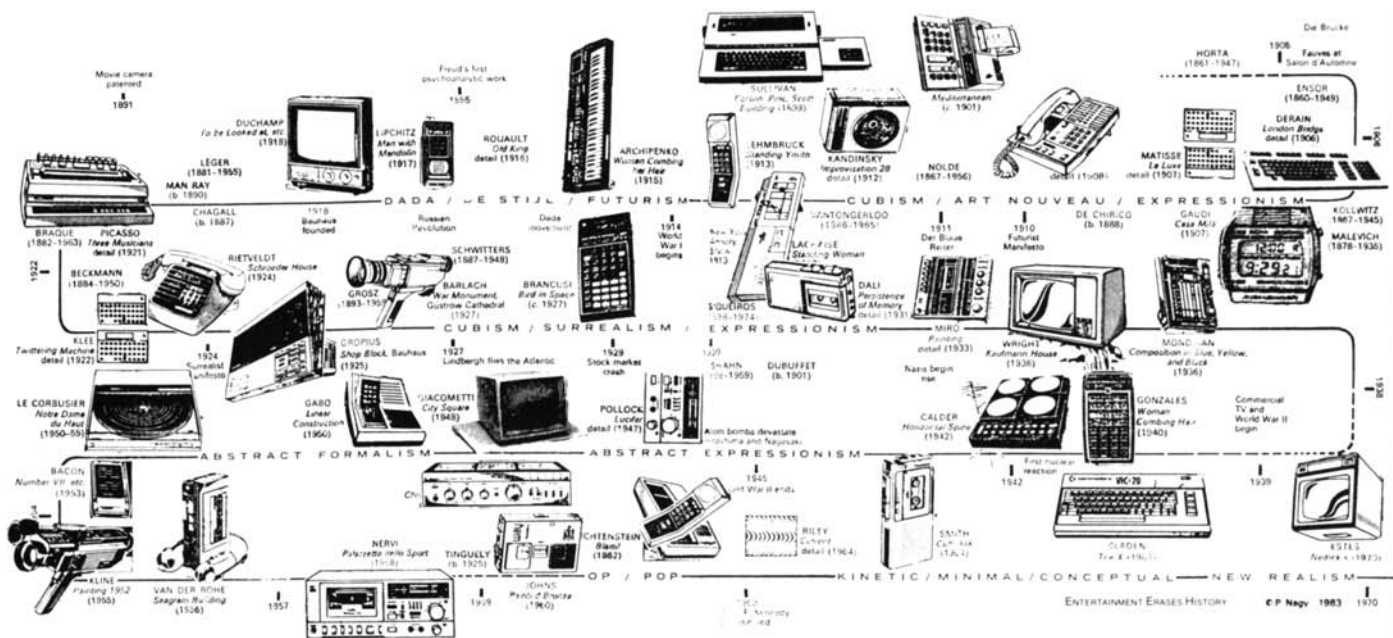


Fig. 5. Peter Nagy, *Entertainment Erases History*, 1983.



Fig. 6 Gretchen Bender, from *Wild Dead II*, 1984.

the New Scrutiny—that cause and causality itself undergo the abstract negations generated by the acute temporality of hyper-referential content whereby psyche (or the New Mind) informs concept with a pure (discausal) or psychedelic array of effectuations. These psychical expansions afford the sharp, constructive irony and abstract visibility of concept's strident neutrality as in *Mid-Effect Hold* (Fig. 8) and *Untitled* (from *The Pleasure is Back* series, 1982) (Fig. 9), even while they enact the most attenuated structural negations (as in the Mullican/Salle juxtaposition in *Mid-Effect Hold*), or they effect the widest, most comprehensive infra-environmental distribution of sensory content as in *Wild Dead III* (Fig. 10), or again, in *Reality Fever*. Ultimately, it is

this mode of psychedelic abstraction in Bender's work which facilitates concept's trans-neutralized relation to world (or direct) content and the abstract content of the psyche.

—These three zones of psychic energy in Bender's work constitute the abstract vector and critical motivation of psychedelic conceptualism in the aesthetics of neutralized signs whose perverse visibility effectively complicates Ian Wilson's (recent) classical formulation (in *Artforum* [February 1984]) of "non-visual abstraction" while simultaneously challenging the agon of individual temporality that characterizes the originary aesthetics of cult painting and cult expressionism in the various media. Within this para-zone of the Spectacle,

Bender's appropriating effects neutralize the image-aestheticization of temporality whereby we now consciously (willfully) experience the present as the History of the future. Where the psyche itself begins to operate like a 42nd street sign on Times Square, only a kind of temporary (provisional) Overmind can prevail in the blur.

#### Sara Hornbacher: *Torque Habit*

—In order for an image to bracket its existence within an image-bound environment, it must display an abstract torque in facts.

—It is like trying to find an effective way to curse in the culture.

—Otherwise, you just lean back, and swallow the Happy Language.

—Obviously, you must project the abstract decisions involved in constructing those "displays".

—It's like trying to measure a sphere with a straight-edge.

—In Sara Hornbacher's work, you experience the rational mediation of images optically as a kind of static dis-

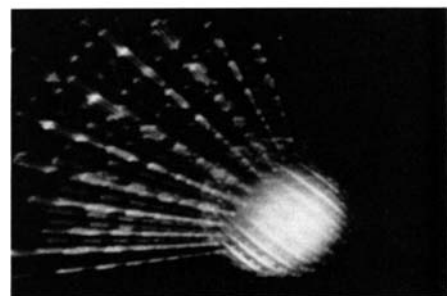


Fig. 7 Gretchen Bender, from *Dumping Core*, 1984–85, AT&T off TV, multi-monitor, multi-channel performance, at The Kitchen.



**Fig. 8** Gretchen Bender, *Mid-Effect Hold*, 1983, color photo and enamel silkscreen on sign tin, 53 × 59". Gallery Nature Morte.



**Fig. 9** Gretchen Bender, *Untitled* (from *The Pleasure is Back* series), 1982, photo silkscreen on sign tin, 6 × 7'. Gallery Nature Morte.

figuration of light. It becomes a kind of trapdoor to perception.

—Hornbacher's work—and the most effective video in general—is like the stuff between the TV stations.

—In this situation, facts sort of become the reified actuality of the categories you construct. *An American Sequence* (Fig. 11) literally brackets the narrative charge of these facts.

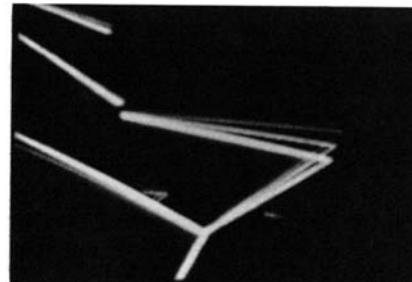
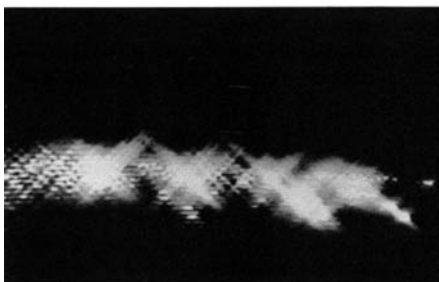
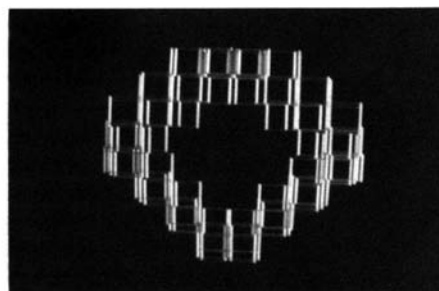
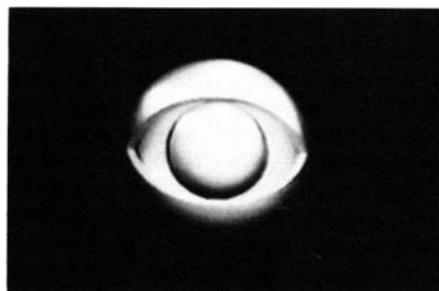
—As such, the images are really acute, even as they are placed at the behest of a kind of systematic break within their semantic value. They function like the "silverware" of temporality itself, and when you arrive at the center of this vast articulation, you get the feeling that you have been finally stopped.

—You begin to feel this optical guilt, and you become convinced that gravity is something like a static emergency.

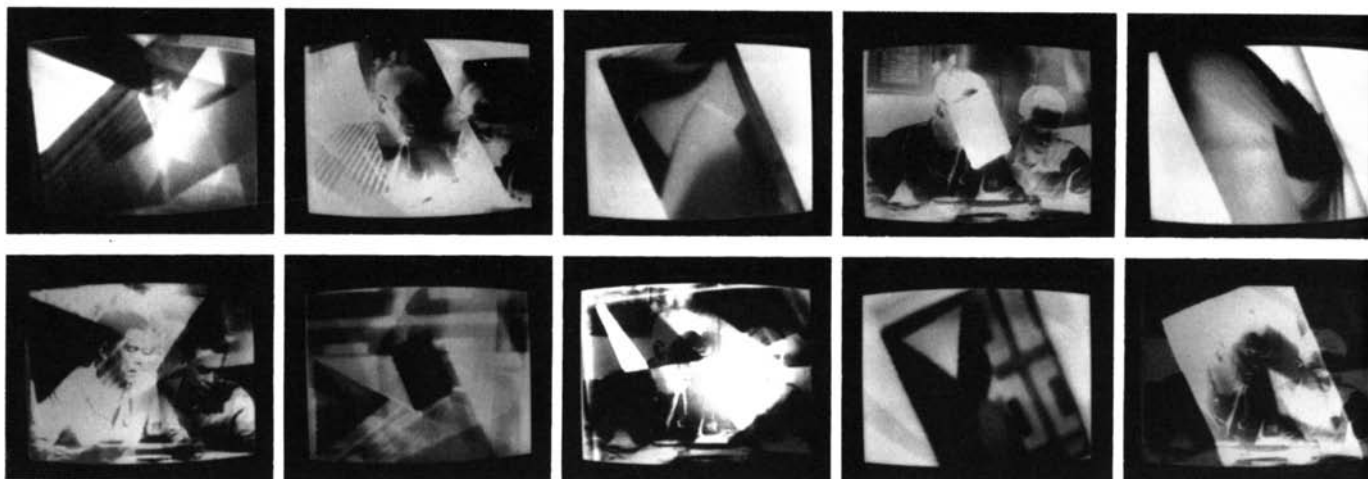
—You mean it is as if Hornbacher has located your habit, and then broken it.

—And you come up with the idea—onto-technocratic delusion—maybe that meaning asserts the secret charm of that negation.

—The op breakdown is not about anything that is weak or deliberate in the image.



**Fig. 10** Gretchen Bender, from *Wild Dead III*, 1984–85: "Glitter," from Japanese computer demo reel; "eagle," from Warhol's *Endangered Species* series; "white cross," from Apple computer graphics program; CBS logo, computer generated off TV; b & w abstract, programmed off a 3D animating computer—distortion of x, y, and z axis.



**Fig. 11** Sara Hornbacher, *An American Sequence*, still from 7-minute video.

—In Hornbacher, the crisis in negation circulates within the economy of assertion.

—I suppose we're talking about optical habits.

—Style is the religion of the super-incomprehensible.

—I was also thinking about the moral habits endemic to video, and the strange neo-humanistic formalism to which it has always ultimately succumbed.

—A kind of technological "Right," which is categorically expelled from Hornbacher's work.

—It is the formalism of correct positions inhabited by the fauna and flora of technology that must bear the pressure of an intentionally artificial dialectic in her work.

—Scrutiny is the optical style implicit in a disparate instrumentality.

—So what you get in Hornbacher is the generic deprivation of images, and, at the same time, the feeling that the Overload has been articulated by the negations effected through this instrumentality.

—In Hornbacher, Concept is catching up to content, and this prevents the instrumentality from becoming an empty formalism.

—So the habit is replaced by Hypothesis—hypothesis construed by the senses as the electric(al) spirituality of a New kitchen appliance.

—Hornbacher's work summarizes the visual tautology involved in perception. It's something like the need to wear sunglasses while you run as fast as you can in the dark.

#### **Paul Nichols: Transcendental Stasis**

—We all want to be winners.

—It's the transcendental mode.

—The distribution is pretty interesting—very American—game shows and assassinations.

—The cultural clichés and appropriated ad elements in Paul Nichols's work set up a kind of cartoonish synthesis—an image-bound environment—that enables us to look at the apparently arbitrary nature of the transcendental.

—So Nichols's work examines the structure of idealism, its hysterical content and categorical façade.

—Now it's like saying that the structure of idealism is out of control, or looks something like the crisis topography in catastrophe theory.

—So that must mean that there are such things as transcendental catastrophes that possess very specific topographies.

—You get that feeling when you look at the cuts in Nichols's *Hysteria* (Fig. 12) or the wave-structure in *Two People* (Fig. 13) or the serial arbitration in *Day in the Life Of* (1982).

—The typography of structural negation in Nichols yields a kind of a transcendental stasis.

—Something like a random gain in the Downfall.

—Auspicious mania.

—I'd call it looking good on your way out.

**Tricia Collins and Richard Milazzo** have worked collaboratively since 1982. They are the publishers of *Effects: Magazine for New Art Theory* and the American editors of *Kunstforum (Cologne)*. Collins and Milazzo have curated shows at *Nature Morte, International with Monument, Cash/Newhouse, White Columns, Tibor De Nagy, Diane Brown, and Margo Leavin Gallery* (in Los Angeles), among others. They are currently preparing shows at *S.L. Simpson Gallery* in Toronto, *American Fine Arts Co.* in New York, and *Lia Rumma Gallery* in Naples, Italy.



**Fig. 12** Paul Nichols, *Hysteria*, 1984.



**Fig. 13** Paul Nichols, *Two People*, 1983.



# Video: A Selected Chronology, 1963–1983

By Barbara London

The chronology that follows highlights some of the major events that have helped to shape independent video in the United States. Although institutions have provided the context for video, it is the artists' contributions that are of the greatest importance.

**1963**

## **Exhibitions/Events**

**New York.** *Television Dé-Coll/age* by Wolf Vostell, Smolin Gallery. First U.S. environmental installation using a television set.

**1964**

## **Television/Productions**

**Boston.** *Jazz Images*, WGBH-TV. Producer, Fred Barzyk. Five short visualizations of music for broadcast; one of the first attempts at experimental television.

**1965**

## **Exhibitions/Events**

**New York.** *Electronic Art* by Nam June Paik, Galeria Bonino. Artist's first gallery exhibition in U.S.

**New Cinema Festival I** (Expanded Cinema Festival), The Film-Makers Cinematheque. Organized by John Brockman. Festival explores uses of mixed-media projection, including video, sound, and light experiments.

**1966**

## **Exhibitions/Events**

**New York.** *9 Evenings: Theater and Engineering*, 69th Regiment Armory. Organized by Billy Klüver. Mixed-media performance events with collaboration between ten artists and forty engineers. Video projection used in works of Alex Hay, Robert Rauschenberg, David Tudor, Robert Whitman.

**Selma Last Year** by Ken Dewey, New York Film Festival at Lincoln Center,



Bruce Nauman, *Live Taped Video Corridor*, 1969–70. Installation at the Whitney Museum, New York.

Philharmonic Hall Lobby. Multichannel video installation with photographs by Bruce Davidson, music by Terry Riley.

## 1967

### Exhibitions/Events

**Minneapolis.** *Light/Motion/Space*, Walker Art Center in collaboration with Howard Wise Gallery, New York. Travels to Milwaukee Art Center. Includes video works by Nam June Paik, Aldo Tambellini, and others.

**New York.** *Festival of Lights*, Howard Wise Gallery. Exhibition of kinetic light works that include video works by Serge Boutourline, Nam June Paik, Aldo Tambellini, and others.

Rockefeller Foundation awards first video fellowship.

*Electronic Blues* by Nam June Paik in "Lights in Orbit," Howard Wise Gallery. Viewer-participation video installation.

### Television/Productions

**Boston.** *WGBH-TV* inaugurates artist-in-residence program with grant from the Rockefeller Foundation.

*What's Happening, Mr. Silver?* WGBH-TV. Host, David Silver. Experimental collage/information series in which several dozen inputs are mixed live and at random.

**San Francisco.** *Experimental Television Workshop*, KQED-TV. Directors, Brice Howard and Paul Kaufman. Established with Rockefeller Foundation grant. In 1969 renamed National Center for Experiments in Television (NCET), funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and the National Endowment for the Arts. Ends 1976.

## 1968

### Exhibitions/Events

**New York.** *Black: Video* by Aldo Tambellini in "Some More Beginnings," Brooklyn Museum. Organized by Experiments in Art and Technology.

*Electronic Art II* by Nam June Paik, Galeria Bonino.

*Intermedia '68*. Theater Workshop for Students and the Brooklyn Academy of Music. Organized by John Brockman. Funded through the New York State Council on the Arts. Exhibition includes environmental video performances, light and film projections, videotapes. Video by Ken Dewey with Jerry Walter, Les Levine with George Fan, Aldo Tambellini.

*Iris* by Les Levine. First shown publicly in artist's studio. Sculpture with six monitors and three video cameras, commissioned by Mr. and Mrs. Robert Kardon. Collection, Philadelphia Museum

of Art.

*The Machine as Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age*, The Museum of Modern Art. Director of exhibition, Pontus Hultén. Exhibition includes video art, particularly Nam June Paik's *Nixon Tape*, *McLuhan Caged*, and *Lindsay Tape* on unique tape-loop device.

*Time Situation* by David Lamelas in "Beyond Geometry," Center for Inter-American Relations. An installation using television monitors in exhibition sponsored by the Instituto Torcuato di Tella, Buenos Aires.

**Washington, D.C.** *Cybernetic Serendipity: The Computer and the Arts*, The Corcoran Gallery. Travels to Palace of Art and Science, San Francisco. Director of exhibition, Jasia Reichardt. Exhibition originated at Institute of Contemporary Art, London; American showing augmented by work selected by James Harithas. Includes video work by Nam June Paik.

### Organizations

**New York.** *Black Gate Theater*, for electromedia events, and *Gate Theater*, for experimental independent cinema. Founded by Aldo Tambellini.

*Commediation*. Video production group. Original members: David Cort, Frank Gillette, Howard Gudstadt, Ken Marsh, Harvey Simon. Ends 1969.

*Young Filmmakers/Video Arts*. Educational organization with training services, workshops, production facilities. Director, Roger Larson.

**San Francisco.** *Ant Farm*. Artists' media/architecture group. Founded by Chip Lord and Doug Michels; joined by Curtis Schreier in 1971. Other members include Kelly Gloger, Joe Hall, Hudson Marquez, Allen Rucker, Michael Wright. Disbands 1978.

*Land Truth Circus*. Experimental video collective. Founded by Doug Hall, Diane Hall, Jody Proctor. In 1972 renamed Truthco; in 1975, T. R. Uthco. Ends 1978.

**Santa Clara, Calif.** *The Electric Eye*. Video collective. Founded by Tim Barger, Jim Mandis, Jim Murphy, Michelle Newman, Skip Sweeney. Ends 1970.

### Television/Productions

**New York.** *The Underground Sundae* by Andy Warhol. Warhol commissioned to make sixty-second commercial for Schraff's Restaurant.

**San Francisco.** *Sorcery* by Loren Sears and Robert Zagone. Experimental Television Workshop, KQED-TV. Live-broadcast program using special-effects imagery.

## 1969

### Exhibitions/Events

**New York.** *TV as a Creative Medium*, Howard Wise Gallery. First American exhibition devoted entirely to video art. Works by Serge Boutourline, Frank Gillette and Ira Schneider. Nam June Paik (with Charlotte Moorman), Earl Reiback, Paul Ryan, John Seery, Eric Siegel, Thomas Tadlock, Aldo Tambellini, Joe Weintraub.

**Los Angeles.** *Corridor* by Bruce Nauman, Nicholas Wilder Gallery. Installation with video.

### Organizations

**Cambridge.** *Center for Advanced Visual Studies*, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). Established for artists to explore art and technology. Founded by Gyorgy Kepes. Director, Otto Piene.

**New York.** *Channel One*. Video theater offering comic programming featuring Chevy Chase. Director, Ken Shapiro. Technical Director, Eric Siegel.

*Global Village*. Begins as video collective with information and screening center. Becomes media center devoted to independent video production with emphasis on video documentary. Founded by John Reilly, Ira Schneider, Rudi Stern. Directors, John Reilly and Julie Gustafson.

*Raindance Corporation*. Collective formed for experimental production. In 1971 becomes Raindance Foundation, devoted to research and development of video as a creative and communications medium, with screening program. Members: Frank Gillette, Michael Shamburger, Steve Salonis, Marco Vassi, Louis Jaffe; soon after, Ira Schneider and Paul Ryan, and then Beryl Korot.

*Videofreex*. Experimental video group. Members: Skip Blumberg, Nancy Cain, David Cort, Bart Friedman, Davidson Gigliotti, Chuck Kennedy, Curtis Ratcliff, Parry Teasdale, Carol Vontobel, Tunie Wall, Ann Woodward.

### Television/Productions

**Boston.** *The Medium Is the Medium*, WGBH-TV. Produced by Fred Barzyk, Anne Gresser, Pat Marx. First presentation of works by independent video artists aired on television. Thirty-minute program with works by Allan Kaprow, Nam June Paik, Otto Piene, James Seawright, Thomas Tadlock, Aldo Tambellini.

**New York.** *Subject to Change*, SQN Productions for CBS. Produced by Don West. Program of videotapes initiated by Don West with CBS and produced by Videofreex and other members of the video community. Videotapes produced



on all aspects of the counterculture (alternate schools, communes, radicals, Blank Panthers, riots, demonstrations, etc.). Never broadcast.

## 1970

### Exhibitions/Events

**New York.** *A.I.R.* by Les Levine in "Software," the Jewish Museum. Curator, Jack Burnham. Eighteen-monitor video installation.

**Information.** The Museum of Modern Art. Curator, Kynaston McShine. Exhibition includes videotapes and installations from U.S., Europe, Latin America.

**Warehouse Show,** Leo Castelli Gallery. Includes video installation by Keith Sonnier.

**Plainfield, Vt.** *The First Gathering: Alternate Media Project*, Goddard College. Media conference.

**San Francisco.** *Body Works*, Museum of Conceptual Art. Videotapes by Vito Acconci, Terry Fox, Bruce Nauman, Dennis Oppenheim, Keith Sonnier, William Wegman. Organized by Willoughby Sharp. First video exhibition on the West Coast.

**Philo T. Farnsworth Video Obelisk** by Skip Sweeney, Intersection Theater, Multichannel video installation.

**Waltham, Mass.** *Vision and Television*, Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University. Organized by Russell Connor. Works by Frank Gillette, Ted Kraynik, Les Levine, Eugene Mattingly, Nam June Paik (with Charlotte Moorman), John Reilly and Rudi Stern, Paul Ryan, Ira Schneider, Eric Siegel, Aldo Tambellini, Jud Yalkut, USCO/Intermedia, Videofreex, Joe Weintraub.

### Organizations

**Binghamton, N.Y.** *Experimental Television Center*. Originally Community Center for Television Production. Production/post-production center emphasizing synthesized and computer-generated imagery. Directors, Ralph Hocking and Sherry Miller. In 1979 moves to Owego, N.Y.

**Menlo Park, Calif.** *Media Access Center*, Portola Institute. Alternative television resource emphasizing community and high school video programs. Original members: Pat Crowley, Richard Kletter, Allen Rucker, Shelley Surpin. Ends 1972.

**New York.** Creative Artists Public Service (CAPS) awards fellowships in video.

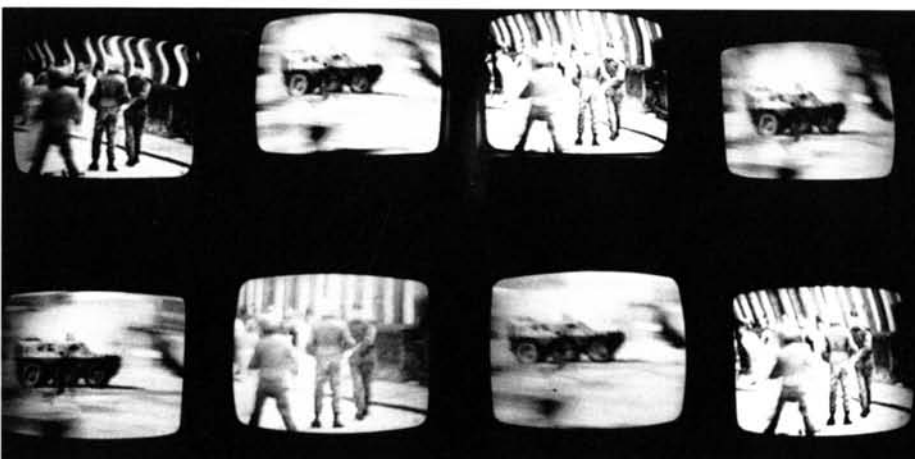
**Electronic Arts Intermix.** Founded by Howard Wise after he closes his gallery; incorporated 1971. Explores video as a medium of personal expression and communication. In 1972 establishes



Aldo Tambellini, *Black Gate Theater*, 1967, multimedia performance.



Frank Gillette and Ira Schneider, *Wipe Cycle*, 1969. Installation in *TV as a Creative Medium*, Howard Wise Gallery, New York.



John Reilly and Stefan Moore, *Irish Tapes*, 1972-73.



editing/post-production facility. In 1973 begins Artists Videotape Distribution Service.

New York State Council on the Arts forms TV/Media Program. Directors include Peter Bradley, Paul Ryan, Russell Connor, Gilbert Konishi, Lydia Silman, Nancy Legge, John Giancola.

**People's Video Theater.** Alternative video journalism collective emphasizing community video and political issues. Conducts weekend screenings in which the audience discussions are taped and replayed. Founded by Elliot Glass, Ken Marsh. Members include Judy Fiedler, Howard Gudstadt, Molly Hughes, Ben Levine, Richard Malone, Elaine Milosh, Richard Nusser.

**San Francisco. Museum of Conceptual Art (MOCA).** Alternative museum created for performance and multimedia art. Founded by Tom Marioni.

**Video Free America.** Video production group with post-production and screening programs. Founded by Arthur Ginsberg, Skip Sweeney. Directors: Joanne Kelly, Skip Sweeney.

**Syracuse, N.Y. Synapse Video Center** (formerly University Community Union Video). Video production and post-production center. Directors include Lance Wisniewski, Henry Baker. Closes 1980.

## Television/Productions

**Boston.** Nam June Paik and Shuya Abe develop Paik/Abe synthesizer while artists-in-residence at WGBH-TV.

**Violence Sonata** by Stan VanDerBeek, WGBH-TV. Live broadcast performance with videotape, film, and participation of studio and phone-in audience on theme of violence.

**New York.** Eric Siegel builds Electronic Video Synthesizer with financial assistance from Howard Wise.

**San Francisco.** Stephen Beck builds Direct Video Synthesizer 1, funded in part by the National Endowment for the Arts.

## Publications

**Film and Video Makers Travel Sheet** (Pittsburgh: Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute). Monthly listing of artists' appearances, new works, events.

**Radical Software** (New York: Raindance Foundation). Alternative video magazine and information channel for distribution and exchange of video works. Published 1970-74, vols. 1-2. Coeditors, Phyllis Gershuny and Beryl Korot. Publishers, Ira Schneider and Michael Shamberg.

**Expanded Cinema** by Gene Youngblood (New York: E. P. Dutton). First publication to cover video art.

## 1971

### Exhibitions/Events

**Berkeley, Calif. Tapes from All Tribes,** Pacific Film Archive, University of California. Organized by Video Free America. Exhibition of videotapes by over 100 American artists.

**The Television Environment,** University Art Museum. Produced by William Adler and John Margolies for Telethon. Circulates through American Federation of Arts.

**New York. Eighth New York Avant-Garde Festival,** 69th Regiment Armory. Director, Charlotte Moorman. Individual video projects by Shirley Clarke, Douglas Davis, Ken Dominick, Ralph Hocking, Nam June Paik, Eric Siegel, Steina and Woody Vasulka, Videofreex.

**Electronic Art III** by Nam June Paik and Shuya Abe with Charlotte Moorman, Galeria Bonino. Exhibition with Paik-Abe synthesizer.

Installation works by Vito Acconci, Bill Beckley, Terry Fox, William Wegman at 93 Grand Street. Organized by Willoughby Sharp.

**Projects: Keith Sonnier,** The Museum of Modern Art. Environmental video installation. Beginning of "Projects" exhibition program.

**A Special Videotape Show,** Whitney Museum of American Art. New American Filmmakers Series. Organized by David Bienstock. Videotapes by Isaac Abrams, Shridhar Bapat, Stephen Beck, John Randolph Carter, Douglas Davis, Dimitri Devyatkin, Ed Emshwiller, Richard Felciano, Carol Herzer, Joanne Kyger, Richard Lowenberg, Alwin Nikolais, Nam June Paik (with Charlotte Moorman), Charles Phillips, Terry Riley, Eric Siegel, Skip Sweeney, Aldo Tambellini, Steina and Woody Vasulka, WGBH-TV, Robert Zagone.

**Ten Video Performances,** Finch College Museum of Contemporary Art. Organized by Elayne Varian. Works by Vito Acconci, Peter Campus, Douglas Davis, Dan Graham, Alex Hay, Bruce Nauman, Claes Oldenburg, Nam June Paik, Robert Rauschenberg, Steve Reich, Eric Siegel, Simone Whitman.

**Perception.** Group of artists interested in alternative uses of video, explore video programming in conjunction with Electronic Intermix. Founded by Eric Siegel and Steina and Woody Vasulka. Subsequent members: Juan Downey, Frank Gillette, Beryl Korot, Andy Mann, Ira Schneider. Disbands 1973.

**T. P. Video Space Troupe.** Experimental workshop exploring two-way video. Founded by Shirley Clarke. Original members include Wendy Clarke, Bruce

Ferguson, Andy Gurian. Disbands 1977.

**Women's Interart Center.** Organization to create interdisciplinary collaboration involving writers, visual artists, performance artists, video artists. In 1972 begins post-production center. Offers workshops, produces videotapes, sponsors artists-in-residence. Director, Margot Lewitin. Video directors include Carolyn Kresky, Jenny Goldberg, Susan Milano, Ann Volkes, Wendy Clarke, Veronica Geist.

**Media Equipment Resource Center (MERC),** initiated by Young Filmmakers/Video Arts. Equipment loan service for artists and organizations. In 1977 reorganizes as access service with TV studio, equipment loan, and post-production divisions.

**New Orleans. New Orleans Video Access Center (NOVAC).** Founded through VISTA to provide video access to low-income community. Becomes production center with access.

**Syracuse, N.Y.** Everson Museum establishes first video department in a major museum, under direction of James Harithas. Video curators include David Ross, Richard Simmons. Department closes 1981.

**Washington, D.C.** National Endowment for the Arts initiates Public Media Program. Directors include Chloe Aaron, Brian O'Doherty. In 1977 becomes Media Arts Program.

**Washington, D.C.** Fifty independent producers from numerous video collectives join together to videotape Mayday anti-Vietnam War demonstration. Their videotapes of political speeches and organizations, riots, arrests, and events are collectively edited at the Videofreex Prince Street studio, New York.

## Organizations

**Chicago. Videopolis.** Video/resource teaching center. Founded by Anda Korsts. Closes 1978.

**Ithaca, N.Y. Ithaca Video Projects.** Organization for promotion of electronic communication. Director, Phillip Mallory Jones.

**Lanesville, N.Y. Media Bus.** Founded by the Videofreex. Media center begins producing "Lanesville TV," weekly program about the community that is the first low-power television (LPTV) station. In 1979 Media Bus moves to Woodstock and operates a post-production facility, distribution and consulting services, and produces programming for cable. Current members: Nancy Cain, Tobe Carey, Bart Friedman.

**New York. Alternate Media Center,** School of the Arts, New York University. Funded by the John and Mary

Markle Foundation to explore the uses of broadcast telecommunications. Founded by Red Burns and George Stoney. Director, Red Burns.

**The Electronic Kitchen.** Screening and performance center for the electronic arts at Mercer Arts Center. Founded by Steina and Woody Vasulka, Andres Mannik. Subsequently The Kitchen Center for Video, Music and Dance. Video Directors include Shridhar Bapat, Dimitri Devyatkin, Carlota Schoolman, RoseLee Goldberg, Jackie Kain, Greg Miller, Tom Bowes, Amy Taubin.

**Open Channel.** Organization for development of public access. Produces community programming, conducts workshops, school programs, and organizes talent pool of film and television professionals to produce public-access programming. Founded by Thea Sklover. Director of Programming, Lee Ferguson. Ends 1976.

## Television/Productions

**Boston. Video Variations,** WGBH-TV. Collaboration between Boston Symphony Orchestra and artists Jackie Cassen, Russell Connor, Douglas Davis, Constantine Manos, Nam June Paik, James Seawright, Stan VanDerBeek, Tsai Wen-Ying. Produced by Fred Barzyk.

**New York. Artists' Television Workshop,** WNET-TV. Established through efforts of Jackie Cassen, Russell Connor, Nam June Paik, with initial grant from New York State Council on the Arts to support experimental projects by independents.

New York City mandates public access as part of its cable franchise.

**Providence, R.I.** Satellite program of the National Center for Experiments in Television (NCET) established by Brice Howard at Rhode Island School of Design; also at Southern Methodist University, Dallas, and Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville.

**Washington, D.C. Electronic Hokkaido I** by Douglas Davis, Corcoran Gallery of Art, and WTOP-TV. Live broadcast piece with two-way communication via telephone.

## Publications

**Guerrilla Television** by Michael Shamberg and Raindance Corporation (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston). Manual of alternative television with graphics by Ant Farm.

## 1972

### Exhibitions/Events

**Minneapolis. First Annual National Video Festival,** Minneapolis College of Art and Design and Walker Art Center.



Dan Graham, *TV Camera/Monitor Performance*, Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, Halifax, 1970.



Vito Acconci, *Remote Control*, 1971.



Panel of the First Annual National Video Festival, Minneapolis College of Art and Design and Walker Art Center, 1972 (Left to Right: Gene Youngblood, George Stoney, Nam June Paik, Russell Connor, Tom Drysdale).

Organized by Tom Drysdale. Consists of workshops, screenings, panel discussion. Participants include Peter Campus, Russell Connor, Ed Emshwiller, Nam June Paik, Barbara Rose, Ira Schneider, George Stoney, Aldo Tambellini, Gene Youngblood.

**New York.** Peter Campus, Bykert Gallery. One-man show with video installations.

**First Women's Video Festival,** The Kitchen at Mercer Arts Center. Organized by Susan Milano. Includes work by Jackie Cassen, Maxi Cohen, Yoko Maruyama, Susan Milano, Queer Blue Light Video, Keiko Tsuno, Steina and Woody Vasulka, Women's Video Collective; and dance/video performance by Judith Scott, Elsa Tambellini.

**Ninth Annual New York Avant-Garde Festival,** Alexander Hamilton Hudson Riverboat. Director, Charlotte Moorman. Includes special video projects by over fifteen artists.

**Santa Clara, Calif. First St. Jude Invitational of Video Art,** de Saisset Gallery and Art Museum, University of Santa Clara. Organized by David Ross. Works by John Baldessari, Lynda Benglis, George Bolling, Douglas Davis, Taka Iimura, Videofreex, William Wegman.

**Syracuse, N.Y. Douglas Davis: An Exhibition Inside and Outside the Museum,** Everson Museum of Art, with WCNY-TV. An exhibition with live telecast, "Talk Out!"

**Nam June Paik,** Everson Museum of Art. Tapes, installations, and performance, with Charlotte Moorman.

## Organizations

**Buffalo, N.Y. Media Study/Buffalo.** Center for videotape production and exhibition. President, Gerald O'Grady; Video/Electronic Arts Curator, John Minkowsky.

**New York. Castelli-Sonnabend Videotapes and Films.** Videotape distribution service. Founded by Leo Castelli and Ileana Sonnabend. Directors include Joyce Nereaux, Patricia Brundage.

**Downtown Community Television Center (DCTV).** Educational and production organization. Founded by Jon Alpert, Keiko Tsuno.

**Fifi Corday Productions.** Organization to assist artists' production. Founded by Carlota Schoolman.

**Survival Arts Media.** Video collective emphasizing community education and health programs, programs on artists and artistic processes, and multimedia shows. Members include Gail Edwards, Howard Gudstadt, Molly Hughes, Ben Levine, Danny Luciano, Richard Malone.

**Rochester, N.Y. Portable Channel.** Video resource center with workshops, visiting artists series, equipment access, productions. Directors include Bonnie Klein, Sanford Rockowitz, John Camelio, Robert Shea, Tim Kelly.

**St. Louis. Double Helix.** Media Center with production and post-production facilities, audio/video workshops.

**San Francisco. Optic Nerve.** Documentary production collective producing political and social documentaries. Original members include Lynn Adler, Jules Backus, Jim Mayer, Sherrie Rabinowitz, John Rogers, Mya Shone. Disbands 1979.

**Top Value Television (TVTV).** Independent documentary production group forms to provide alternative coverage of the Democratic and Republican conventions in Miami; the first use of half-inch videotape on broadcast television. Original production by Hudson Marquez, Allen Rucker, Michael Shamberg, Tom Weinberg, Megan Williams, and members of Ant Farm, Raindance, and Videofreex collectives. Other members of TVTV include Wendy Apple, Michael Couzens, Paul Goldsmith, Betsy Guignon, Stanton Kaye, Anda Korsts, Andy Mann, Elon Soltes. Disbands 1977.

**Woodstock, N.Y. Woodstock Community Video.** Production center and resource for community video. Initiates local cable programming. Begins Artists' TV Lab, which moves to Rhinebeck in 1976. From 1975 to 1977 presents Woodstock Video Expovision, a festival of New York State artists. Founded by Ken Marsh. Members include Barbara Buckner, Bob Dacy, Gary Hill, Steven Kolpan, Elaine Milosh. Ends 1978.

## Television/Productions

**Boston. Music Image Workshop,** WGBH-TV. Project by Ron Hays using Paik-Abe synthesizer to produce tapes relating to music and video imagery.

**The Very First On-the-Air Half-Inch Videotape Festival Ever: People Television,** WGBH-TV. Produced by Henry Becton with Fred Barzyk, Dorothy Chiesa. Live studio event including home viewer call-ins, tape screenings, and interviews with artists, engineers, business people, educators, students.

**Chicago.** Dan Sandin builds Image Processor, and eventually, with Phil Morton, makes plans available to artists.

**New York. Scape-mates** by Ed Emshwiller, the Television Laboratory at WNET/Thirteen. Videotape with complex mixing of live actors and computer graphics.

**The Television Laboratory at WNET/Thirteen.** Directors include David Lox-

ton, Carol Brandenburg. Founded with grants from the Rockefeller Foundation and New York State Council on the Arts. First year initiates artist-in-residence program with Shirley Clarke, Douglas Davis, Ed Emshwiller, Nam June Paik.

**San Francisco. Electronic Notebooks** by Stephen Beck, KQED-TV. Series of tapes produced with Bill Gwin, Don Hallock, Warner Jepson, Bill Roarty, Willard Rosenquist.

**Washington, D.C.** The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) requires that all cable franchises have at least one public-access channel.

## Publications

**Between Paradigms: The Mood and Its Purpose** by Frank Gillette (New York: Gordon and Breach).

**Print** (New York: RC Publications). Special video issue. Guest editor, Robert de Havilland. Contributors: Fred Barzyk, Rudi Bass, Rose DeNeue, Bernard Owett, Sheldon Satin, Michael Shamberg.

## 1973

### Exhibitions/Events

**Los Angeles. William Wegman.** Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Exhibition of drawings and tapes.

**New York. International Computer Arts Festival,** The Kitchen at Mercer Arts Center. Organized by Dimitri Devyatkin. Includes music, poetry, film, video.

**The Irish Tapes** by John Reilly and Stefan Moore, The Kitchen at Mercer Arts Center. Installation with three channels and twelve monitors.

**1973 Biennial Exhibition,** Whitney Museum of American Art. First inclusion of video in Biennial exhibition. Includes videotapes by seven artists and installation by Peter Campus.

**Tenth New York Avant-Garde Festival,** Grand Central Station. Director, Charlotte Moorman. Includes special video projects by over seventeen artists.

**Syracuse, N.Y. Circuit: A Video Invitational,** Everson Museum of Art. Curated by David Ross. Traveling exhibition of videotapes by over sixty-five artists. Travels to Henry Gallery, University of Washington, Seattle; Cranbrook Academy of Art Museum, Bloomfield Hills, Mich.; Kölischer Kunstverein, Cologne, West Germany; Greenville County Museum of Art, Greenville, S.C.; and in 1974, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

**Frank Gillette: Video Process and Meta-Process,** Everson Museum of Art. Videotapes and installations.

## Organizations

**Chicago.** *University of Illinois at Chicago.* Dan Sandin and Tom DeFanti initiate video/computer graphics courses.

**Minneapolis.** *University Community Video.* Center devoted to independent production. In 1981 begins exhibition and distribution.

**New York.** *Cable Arts Foundation.* Founded by Russell Connor. Organization for production and distribution of anthology and art series to cable systems and for encouragement of local arts programming.

John Simon Guggenheim Foundation awards first video fellowship.

**Visual Resources.** Director, Eva Kroy Wisbar. Distribution/information service including video. Publishes *Art & Cinema*, including coverage of video.

**Portland, Ore.** Northwest Film Study Center initiates Northwest Film and Video Festival. Directors include Robert Sitton and Bill Foster. In 1979 Film Study Center begins workshops and exhibitions in video.

**Rochester, N.Y.** *Visual Studies Workshop* establishes media center. Production facility with workshops and exhibitions. Begins publication of *Afterimage* with coverage of video. Director, Nathan Lyons. Media center coordinators include Wayne Luke, Laddy Kite, Arthur Tsuchiya, Nancy Norwood.

## Television/Productions

**New York.** Steve Rutt and Bill Etra develop Rutt/Etra scan processor.

**San Francisco.** *Videola*, San Francisco Museum of Art. Environmental sculpture by Don Hallock with multiple display of synthesized video works created at National Center for Experiments in Television (NCET), KQED-TV. Works by Stephen Beck with Don Hallock and Ann Turner, William Gwin with Warner Jepson, Don Hallock.

## Publications

*Spaghetti City Video Manual* by the Videofreex (New York: Praeger). Alternative equipment manual.

**1974**

## Exhibitions/Events

**Ithaca, N.Y.** *First Annual Ithaca Video Festival*, Ithaca Video Projects. In 1976 festival begins to tour.

**Los Angeles.** *Collector's Video*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Organizer, Jane Livingston. Works by John Baldessari, Peter Campus, Terry Fox, Frank Gillette, Nancy Holt, Joan Jonas, Paul Kos, Richard Landry, Andy Mann, Robert Morris, Bruce Nauman, Richard Serra, Keith Sonnier, William Wegman.



Nam June Paik, *Hanging TV "Fish Flies on Sky,"* 1975-80, 30 color televisions. Collection: the artist; © 1976 Peter Moore.



Paul Ryan, *Ritual of Triadic Relations*, 1971-76, 1984.



Mary Lucier, *Fire Writing*, 1975.

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Mary Lucier, *Fire Writing*, 1975.

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**Minneapolis.** *New Learning Spaces and Places*, Walker Art Center. Includes installation by Frank Gillette and videotapes by James Byrne, Peter Campus, Juan Downey, Frank Gillette, Andy Mann, Ira Schneider, University Community Video, William Wegman.

*Projected Images*, Walker Art Center. Includes video installation by Peter Campus and performance with video with Joan Jonas.

**New York.** *Electronic Art IV* by Nam June Paik, Galeria Bonino.

*Open Circuits: The Future of Television*. The Museum of Modern Art. Organized by Fred Barzyk, Douglas Davis, Gerald O'Grady, Willard Van Dyke. International video conference with exhibition of tapes. Participants include museum educators and curators, cable and educational television producers, artists and art critics from U.S., Canada, Latin America, Europe, Japan.

*Projects: Video*, The Museum of Modern Art. Curator, Barbara London. Beginning of continuing series of video exhibitions. Program expands with funding from the Rockefeller Foundation in 1976.

*Video Performance*, 112 Green Street. Video performances by Vito Acconci, Joseph Beuys, Chris Burden, Dennis Oppenheim, Ulrike Rosenbach, Richard Serra with Robert Bell, Willoughby Sharp, Keith Sonnier, William Wegman.

**Syracuse.** *Video 'n' Videology: Nam June Paik, 1959-73*, Everson Museum of Art. Curator, David Ross. Retrospective of artist's videotapes, with catalog edited by Judson Rosebush.

*Video and the Museum*, Everson Museum of Art. Organized by David Ross. Funded by the Rockefeller Foundation. Conference with workshops for curators and administrators on the role of video in the museum. Concurrent exhibitions: Peter Campus, *Closed Circuit Video*; Juan Downey, *Video Trans Americas De-Briefing Pyramid* (a video/dance performance with Carmen Beuchat); Andy Mann, *Video Matrix*; and Ira Schneider, *Manhattan Is an Island*.

**Washington, D.C.** *Art Now 74: A Celebration of the American Arts*, John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. Includes twenty-three videotapes.

## Organizations

**Bayville, N.Y.** *Inter-Media Art Center (IMAC)*. Multipurpose production facility with post-production workshops and exhibitions. Director, Michael Rothbard.

**Long Beach, Calif.** *Long Beach Museum of Art* begins video exhibition program and collection of videotapes. Video cura-

tors include David Ross, Nancy Drew, Kathy Huffman. In 1976 begins production center with funding from the Rockefeller Foundation; in 1979 production is moved to new facility and called the Station/Annex.

**New York.** *Anthology Film Archives* begins video program. Director, Jonas Mekas. Video Curators include Shigeko Kubota, Bob Harris. Includes exhibition, preservation, archive of videotapes and printed matter, screenings. In 1983 begins publication of *Video Texts*, an annual magazine on video art organized by Robert Haller, Bob Harris.

*Association of Independent Video and Filmmakers (AIVF)*. Founded by Ed Lynch. Directors include Alan Jacobs, Lawrence Sapadin. National trade association of independent producers and individuals. Begins publishing *The Independent* on media issues. In 1975 establishes The Foundation for Independent Video and Film (FIVF) as an educational organization.

*Anna Canepa Video Distribution* (originally Video Distribution, Inc.). Distribution service of artists' tapes.

*The Kitchen Center for Video, Music and Dance* (formerly The Electronic Kitchen) relocates to Broome Street and begins daytime exhibition program. Inaugural show includes videotapes and three video installations by Bill Viola.

**Providence, R.I.** *Electron Movers*. Video art collective with gallery space, equipment resources, workshops, and visiting artist series. Founded by Dennis Hlynsky, Robert Jungels, Laurie McDonald, Alan Powell. In 1975 Ed Tannenbaum joins. Disbands 1980.

**San Francisco.** *La Mamelle*. Artists' space for video, audio, and marginal works. Directors, Carl Loeffler and Nancy Frank.

**Seattle, and/or.** Space for multimedia exhibitions, productions, performance art. In 1979 establishes 911, Video Library. In 1981 media program becomes Focal Point Media Center. Founded by Ann Focke, Robert Garner, Ken Leback. Video Curators, Norie Sato, Heather Oakson.

## Television/Productions

**Boston.** *New Television Workshop*, WGBH-TV. Established with grant from the Rockefeller Foundation and through the efforts of David Atwood, Fred Barzyk, Dorothy Chiesa, Ron Hays, Rich Hauser, Olivia Tappan. Director, Fred Barzyk. Producers include Dorothy Chiesa, Susan Dowling, Nancy Mason Hauser, Olivia Tappan.

*Video: The New Wave*, WGBH-TV. Program of video artists, including David Atwood, Stephen Beck, Peter Campus, Douglas Davis, Ed Emshwill-

er, Bill Etra, Frank Gillette, Don Hallock, Ron Hays, Nam June Paik, Otto Piene, Rudi Stern, Stan VanDerBeek, William Wegman. Writer and narrator, Brian O'Doherty.

**New York.** *Cuba: The People* by Jon Alpert and Keiko Tsuno, Public Broadcasting System (PBS). First documentary videotape using half-inch color equipment to be broadcast by public television.

**Rochester, N.Y.** *Television Workshop*, WXXI-TV. Directors include Ron Haggell, Pat Faust, Carvin Eison. Ends 1981.

## Publications

*Arts Magazine* (New York: Art Digest). Special video issue. Contributions by Eric Cameron, Russell Connor, Hermine Freed, Dan Graham, Shigeko Kubota, Bob and Ingrid Wiegand.

*Cybernetics of the Sacred* by Paul Ryan (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press/Doubleday).

*Independent Video, A Complete Guide to the Physics, Operation, and Application of the New Television for the Student, Artist, and for Community TV* by Ken Marsh (San Francisco: Straight Arrow Books).

*The Prime Time Survey* by Top Value Television (T VTV). Report on status of video and its directions.

## 1975

### Exhibitions/Events

**Dallas.** *The Eternal Frame* by T. R. Uthco and Ant Farm. Reenactment of John F. Kennedy assassination for videotape. Presented as installation at Long Beach Museum of Art in 1976.

**Long Beach, Calif.** *Southland Video Anthology*, Long Beach Museum of Art. Extended series of five exhibitions by California artists.

*Americans in Florence, Europeans in Florence*, Long Beach Museum of Art. Organized by Maria Gloria Bicocchi and David Ross. Traveling exhibition with videotapes produced by Art/Tapes/22, Florence.

**New York.** *First Annual Video Documentary Festival*, initiated by Video Study Center of Global Village.

*1975 Biennial Exhibition*, Whitney Museum of American Art. Includes work by eighteen video artists.

*Projected Video*, Whitney Museum of American Art. Projected videotapes by William Adler and John Margolies, John Baldessari, Lynda Benglis, Peter Campus, Douglas Davis, Bill Etra, Hermine Freed, Shigeko Kubota, Nam June Paik, Richard Serra, Keith Sonnier, Steina and Woody Vasulka, William Wegman.



**Philadelphia.** *Video Art*, Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania. Curator, Suzanne Delehanty. Exhibition documenting the development of video art through videotapes and installations. Travels to Contemporary Art Center, Cincinnati; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Conn.; and São Paulo Biennale, São Paulo, Brazil.

**San Francisco.** *Media Burn* by Ant Farm, Cow Palace. July Fourth performance/media event.

*Moebius Video Show*, San Francisco Art Festival. First exhibition of video in the Art Festival. Includes work by Ant Farm, Terry Fox, Phil Garner, Joanne Kelly, Darryl Sapient, Skip Sweeney.

*Walk Series* by Peter D'Agostino, 80 Langton Street. Video installation and first event at 80 Langton Street, an alternative space initially sponsored by the San Francisco Art Dealers Association. In 1976 becomes an independent space with emphasis on alternative art forms.

## Organizations

**Hartford, Conn.** *Real Art Way*. Arts center with video exhibitions and library. Video coordinators include David Donihue, Gary Hogan, Ruth Miller.

**New York.** *Independent Cinema Artists and Producers* (ICAP) forms to represent independent film and video artists to cable systems. President, Kitty Morgan.

The Museum of Modern Art begins collection of videotapes.

## Television/Productions

**New York.** *Video and Television Review* (VTR), the Television Laboratory at WNET/Thirteen. Executive Producer, Carol Brandenburg. Yearly broadcast series of tapes from U.S. and Europe. In 1979 renamed Video/Film Review.

## 1976

### Exhibitions/Events

**Berkeley, Calif.** *Commissioned Video Works*, University Art Museum. Organized by Jim Melchert. Fifteen artists commissioned to make tapes of under four-minute duration. Includes Eleanor Antin, David Askevold, Siah Armajani, John Baldessari, Robert Cumming, John Fernie, Hilla Futterman, Leonard Hunter, Anda Korsts, Les Levine, Paul McCarthy, George Miller, Dennis Oppenheim, Robert Watts, William Wegman.

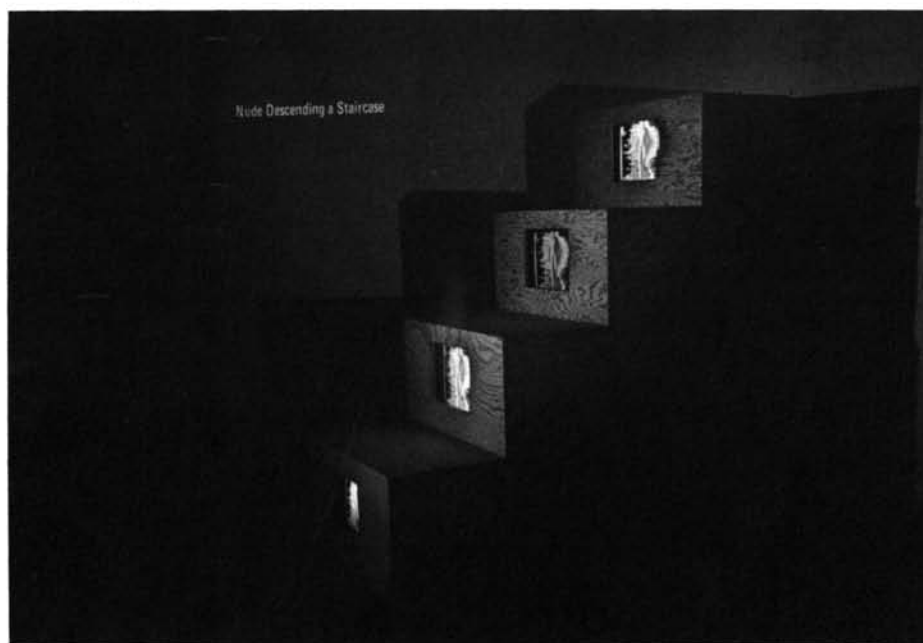
**Boston.** *Changing Channels*. Museum of Fine Arts and Museum School Gallery. Exhibition of videotapes produced by independent artists at experimental television broadcast centers: WGBH,



T.R. Uthco/Ant Farm, *Eternal Frame*, 1975.



Peter Campus, *Three Transitions*, 1975.



Shigeo Kubota, *Nude Descending a Staircase*, 1976.



Boston; WNET, New York; and KQED, San Francisco.

**San Francisco.** *Video Art: An Overview*, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Organized by David Ross. Exhibition of thirty-three videotapes by twenty-nine artists. Installations by Peter Campus, Paul and Marlene Kos, Nam June Paik.

**Syracuse, N.Y.** *New Work in Abstract Video Imagery*, Everson Museum of Art. Curator, Richard Simmons. Works by forty artists using synthesizers, lasers, and computers.

## Organizations

**Boston.** *Boston Film/Video Foundation*. Offers screenings, educational programs, equipment resources. Founded by Jon Rubin and Susan Woll. Directors include Michelle Schofield and Tom Wylie.

**Chicago.** *Video Data Bank*, School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Distribution and resource center for videotapes on artists and video art. Director, Lyn Blumenthal.

**New York.** *Asian Cine-Vision*. Media center in Chinatown producing Asian-American program series and programming for Chinese Cable Television. Conducts workshops, media and production services, and operates an Asian-American Media Archive. In 1982 begins Asian-American International Video Festival. Director, Peter Chow.

**Donnell Library Center.** New York Public Library, establishes collection of videotapes. Founded by William Sloan. Video librarians have included Mary Feldstein, Michael Miller, Michael Gitlin, Lishin Yu.

**Franklin Furnace.** Alternative space with archive, bibliography, exhibition, performance programs, including video. Director, Martha Wilson.

**New American Filmmaker Series**, Whitney Museum of American Art. Continuing exhibition of independent film expands to include video art. Director, John Hanhardt.

**Pittsburgh.** *Independent Film and Video Preview Network*, Pittsburgh Filmmakers. Program of organized preview screenings of films and videotapes around the country. Founded by Sally Dixon and Robert Haller. Ends 1980.

**San Francisco.** *Bay Area Video Coalition* founded with grant from the Rockefeller Foundation. Production/post-production center with workshops and exhibitions. Founding Director, Gail Waldron. Director, Morrie Warshawski.

## Television/Productions

**Los Angeles.** *Video Art*. Los Angeles Theta Cable, Long Beach Cablevision,

and Santa Barbara Cable TV. Cable series produced by Some Serious Business and the Long Beach Museum of Art. Ends 1979.

**New York.** *Cable Soho*. President, Jaime Davidovich. Independent organization for innovative arts programming on cable television. In 1977 becomes Artists' Television Network.

*Image Union*. Independent production company forms to offer alternative coverage of the Democratic National Convention and Election Night. *The Five-Day Bicycle Race* and *Mock Turtle Soup*, taped segments with live phone-in interviews, are shown on Manhattan Cable Television.

## Publications

*Video Art: An Anthology* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich). Editors, Beryl Korot and Ira Schneider. First anthology of video criticism and statements by video artists.

*Video: State of the Art* by Joanna Gill (New York: The Rockefeller Foundation). Report on video activity in the United States.

## 1977

### Organizations

**Atlanta.** *Image Film/Video Center* (Independent Media Artists of Georgia, Etc., Inc.). Media center with screenings, workshops, and equipment access. Begins the Atlanta Independent Film and Video Festival (now the Atlanta Film and Video Festival), an annual international showcase. Directors include Gayla Jamison, Anna Marie Pierimoni, Marsha Rifkin.

**Houston.** *Southwest Alternative Media Project* (SWAMP). Originally associated with the Rice Media Center at Rice University. Media center with education program, lecture series, production and post-production technical assistance. Conducts Southwest Film and Video Tour, artist-in-residence program, and annual Texpo film and video festival. Produces local PBS series, "The Territory." Directors include Ed Hugetz and Tom Sims.

**New York.** *Locus Communications*. Equipment access center with workshops, technical production services, cable programming, screenings. Founding Executive Director, Gerry Pallor.

**Port Washington, N.Y.** *Port Washington Library* begins visiting artists program with exhibitions and presentations. Head of Media Services, Lillian Katz.

## Television/Productions

**Buffalo, N.Y.** Steina and Woody Vasulka and Jeffrey Schier begin work on the Digital Image Articulator, a digital computer-imaging device.

**Chicago.** *ZGRASS*. Personal computer-graphics system designed by artist Tom DeFanti.

**Los Angeles.** *The Satellite Arts Project* by Kit Galloway and Sherrie Rabinowitz. Live interactive broadcast between California, Maryland, and Washington, D.C.

**New York.** *Documenta VI*. Curator, Wulf Herzogenrath. Satellite performance project with Joseph Beuys, Douglas Davis, and Nam June Paik broadcast internationally from Kassel, West Germany, presented through WNET-TV.

*Independent Documentary Fund*, WNET-TV. Executive Producer, David Loxton. Coordinator, Kathy Kline. Established at the Television Laboratory with grants from the Ford Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts to stimulate the production of independent documentaries.

**New York and San Francisco.** *Send/Receive Satellite Network*. Coordinators Liza Béar and Keith Sonnier with support from the Public Interest Satellite Association (PISA) and NASA. Two-way satellite transmission between New York and San Francisco with simultaneous performances. Participants, in San Francisco: Margaret Fischer, Terry Fox, Brad Gibbs, Sharon Grace, Carl Loeffler, Richard Lowenberg, Alan Scarritt. In New York: Liza Béar, Richard Landry, Nancy Lewis, Richard Peck, Betsy Sussler, Wiloughby Sharp, Paul Shavelson, Duff Schweiniger, Keith Sonnier.

## Publications

*The New Television: A Public/Private Art*. (Cambridge, Mass. and London: The MIT Press). Manifesto including essays from the Open Circuits Conference at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 1974.

## 1978

### Exhibitions/Events

**Buffalo.** *Vasulka: Steina—Machine Vision, Woody—Description*, Albright-Knox Gallery. Curator, Linda L. Cathcart. Exhibition of tapes and installations.

**New York.** *Aransas, Axis of Observation* by Frank Gillette, The Kitchen. Travels to Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston; University Art Museum, Berkeley; and Academy of Fine Arts, Washington, D.C. Acquired by University Art Museum.

*Video Viewpoints*, The Museum of Modern Art. Beginning of yearly lecture series by independent videomakers.

**Pittsburgh.** *National Media Alliance of Media Arts Centers* (NAMAC) holds first conference. Hosted by Pittsburgh Filmmakers.

**Redington Beach, Fla. *Chinsegut Film/Video Conference*.** Founded by Charles Lyman and Peter Melaragno. Conference with presentations to promote interchange among invited participants and film- and videomakers.

**Venice, Calif. *Video night*** by Some Serious Business. Weekly video screening series.

## Organizations

**Chicago. *Chicago Editing Center*.** Production/post-production facility with education and exhibition programs. In 1980 becomes Center for New Television. Directors include Cynthia Neal, Joyce Bollinger.

## Television/Productions

**Chicago. *Image Union*, WTTW-TV.** Produced by Tom Weinberg. Weekly broadcast of independent work.

**New York. *Artists' Television Network*** initiates "Soho Television," regular programming of artists' videotapes and performances, and of "The Live! Show," avant-grade variety show. Director, Jaime Davidovitch.

**Potato Wolf.** Collaborative Projects. Artists' television series for cable begins as live show and evolves into diversified programming with emphasis on narrative and performance-oriented work involving artists from diverse media. Regular producers include Cara Brownell, Mitch Corber, Albert Dimartino, Julie Harrison, Robert Klein, Terry Mohre, Alan Moore, Brian Pierisol, Gary Pollard, Mindy Stevenson, Jim Sutcliffe, Maria Thompson, Sally White.

**1979**

## Exhibitions/Events

**Long Beach, Calif. *N/A Vision*,** sponsored by Long Beach Museum of Art. Weekly circulating video screening series at Long Beach Museum of Art, Foundation of Art and Resources (FAR), and Highlands Art Agents.

**New York. *Re-Visions: Projects and Proposals in Film and Video*,** Whitney Museum of American Art. Curator, John Hanhardt. Video installations by Bill Beirne; David Behrman, Bob Diamond and Robert Watts; and Buky Schwartz.

***Videotapes by British Artists*.** The Kitchen. Curator, Steve Partridge. Works by David Crichtley, David Hall, Tamara Krikorian, Stuart Marshall, Steve Partridge, and others.

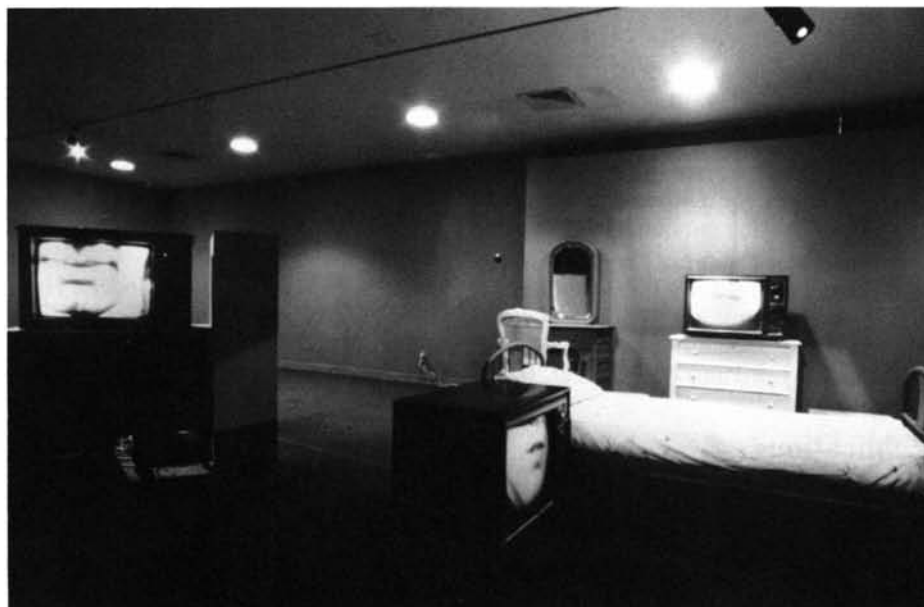
***Video from Tokyo to Fukui and Kyoto*.** The Museum of Modern Art. Curator, Barbara London. A survey of the works of thirteen contemporary Japanese artists. Travels to Long Beach Museum of Art, Long Beach, Calif.; Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver, B.C.; and with



Ralph Hocking and Sherry Miller, *Selected Works*, 1975-79.



Stefan Moore and Claude Beller, *Presumed Innocent*, 1979.



Les Levine, *Deep Gossip*, 1979.

"Video New York, Seattle and Los Angeles" travels to Japan and Europe.

**Syracuse, N.Y. *Everson Video Revue*.** Everson Museum of Art. Curator, Richard Simmons. Exhibition with videotapes by over fifty artists. Travels to Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; University Art Museum, Berkeley, Calif.; in 1981, Museum of Contemporary Art, La Jolla, Calif.

**Berkeley, Calif. *University Art Museum*,** University of California at Berkeley institutes regular weekend programming. Organized by David Ross. Ends 1981.

**New York. *The Media Alliance*.** Association of media arts organizations and independent video producers in New York State designed to coordinate resources and promote the work of the independent video community. Includes programming, exhibition, production, distribution. Directors include Jackie Kain, Robin White.

**P.S. I** begins video exhibition program with emphasis on installations. Video Curator, Bob Harris.

## Television/Productions

**New York. *Communications Update*.** Center for New Art Activities. Originally the WARC (World Administrative Radio Conference) Report. Artists series for cable dealing with political and communications issues. Original producers: Liza Béar, Rolf Brand, Michael McClard, Willoughby Sharp. In 1983 becomes Cast Iron TV and programming diversifies. Producer, Liza Béar.

***Non-Fiction Television*, WNET/Thirteen.** Broadcast series for Independent Documentary Fund.

***Public Interest Video Network*.** Executive Producer, Kim Spencer. Senior Editor, Nick DeMartino. Independent production company financed by the Urban Scientific and Educational Research (USER) presents live satellite coverage of an antinuclear demonstration in Washington, D.C., on the Public Broadcasting System (PBS). First time PBS carries a live public affairs program whose editorial content was determined by an organization outside its system.

**San Francisco. *Produced for Television*,** La Mamelie and KTSF-TV. Live broadcast of performance art. Works by Chris Burden, Lynn Herschman and Rea Baldridge, Chip Lord and Phil Garner, Barbara Smith.

## Publications

***Video-Architecture-Television: Writing on Video and Video Works*** by Dan Graham (Halifax, Nova Scotia and New York: The Press of the Nova Scotia

College of Art and Design and the New York University Press).

## 1980

### Exhibitions/Events

**Berkeley, Calif. and New York. *Video About Video: Four French Artists*,** University Art Museum, University of California; and Téléthèque-Alliance Française, New York. Works by Paul Armand Gette, Philippe Oudard, Philippe Guerrier, Thierry Kuntzel.

**Buffalo N.Y. *Installation: Video*,** Hallwalls. Exhibition with work by Dara Birnbaum, Patrick Clancy, Wendy Clarke, Brian Eno, Ken Feingold, Dan Graham, Gary Hill, Sara Hornbacher, Shigeko Kubota.

**Lake Placid, N.Y. *Art at the Olympics, 1980 Winter Games*.** Videotapes by Skip Blumberg, Kit Fitzgerald and John Sanborn, Nam June Paik. Installations by Wendy Clarke, Frank Gillette, Ira Schneider, Buky Schwartz.

**Long Beach, Calif. *California Video*,** Long Beach Museum of Art. Curator, Kathy Huffman. Works by Max Almy, Dan Boord, Ante Boznich, John Caldwell, Alba Cane, Helen DeMichiel, Tony Labat, Pier Marton, Tony Oursler, Jan Peacock, Patti Podesta, Joe Rees/Target Video, Nina Salerno, Ilene Segalove, Starr Sutherland, "Captain" Bruce Walker, Bruce and Norman Yonemoto.

**New York. *Love Tapes in New York*** by Wendy Clarke. Live interactive installation and tapes exhibited at the World Trade Center with selections shown on cable television and WNET/Thirteen.

***Television/Society/Art*, The Kitchen.** Organized by Ron Clark and Mary MacArthur. Colloquium presented by The Kitchen and the American Film Institute. Participants include Benjamin Buchloh, Julianne Burton, Nick DeMartino, Stephen Heath, Fredric Jameson, Rosalind Krauss, Mark Nash, Robert Sklar, Martha Rosler, Herbert Schiller, Allan Sekula, Peter Wollen.

**San Francisco. *First Annual San Francisco Video Festival*.** Director, Steve Ageststein. Assistant Director, Wendy Garfield. Begin publishing *Video 80* as festival catalog. Now called *SEND* and published as a quarterly.

**Yonkers, N.Y. *Alternative Spaces*,** Hudson River Museum. Series of exhibitions employing Museum's planetarium. Includes video installations by Mary Lucier, Francesc Torres.

## Organizations

**New Orleans. *Survival Information Television*, NOVAC.** Installation in local Welfare Office with social issues programming run on a repeating cycle.

**St. Paul.** Jerome Foundation expands to

award grants to video artists.

## Television

**Cambridge. *Artists' Use of Telecommunications*.** Organized by Center for Advanced Visual Studies, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). Collaborative interactive slow-scan TV conference link between Cambridge, New York, San Francisco, Long Beach, Toronto, Vienna, Tokyo, and Vancouver.

***Three Artists on Line in Three Countries*.** Three-way slow-scan transmission between Aldo Tambellini, Cambridge, Tom Klinkowstein, Amsterdam, and Bill Bartlett, Vancouver.

**Los Angeles and New York. *Hole-in-Space*** by Kit Galloway and Sherrie Rabinowitz. Live interactive satellite project between Los Angeles and New York.

**Minneapolis-St. Paul. *Minnesota Landscapes*,** KTCA-TV. Project Director, Peter Bradley. Series of videotapes on Minnesota for broadcast. Works by Skip Blumberg, James Byrne, Steve Christiansen, Davidson Gigliotti, Frank Gohlke, Cynthia Neal, Steina.

## 1981

### Exhibitions/Events

**New York. *First National Latin Film and Video Festival*,** El Museo del Barrio.

***1981 Biennial Exhibition*,** Whitney Museum of American Art. Installations by Frank Gillette and Buky Schwartz.

***Stay Tuned*,** The New Museum. Organized by Ned Rifkin. Exhibition juxtaposes artists' work in video with work in other media. Includes Robert Cumming, Brian Eno, Charles Frazier, Donald Lipski, Howardena Pindell, Judy Rifka, Allen Ruppersberg, Irvin Tepper.

***Video Classics*,** Bronx Museum of the Arts. Curator, RoseLee Goldberg. Installations by Vito Acconci, Dan Graham, Shigeko Kubota, Rita Myers, Bruce Nauman, Dennis Oppenheim, Nam June Paik.

**Rochester, N.Y. *From the Academy to the Avant-Garde*,** Visual Studies Workshop. Curator, Richard Simmons. Traveling exhibition with videotapes by Juan Downey, Howard Fried, Frank Gillette, Davidson Gigliotti, Tony Labat, Les Levine. Travels to Center for Art Tapes, Halifax, Nova Scotia, and Center for New Television, Chicago.

**Washington, D.C. *National Video Festival*,** American Film Institute. Sponsor, Sony Corporation. Festival producer, Larry Kirkman; festival director, James Hindman. Installation by Nam June Paik.

## Organizations

**Pittsburgh.** *Museum of Art*, Carnegie Institute, expands its Film Section to the Section of Film and Video, and opens Video Gallery. Curator of Film and Video, William Judson.

## Television/Productions

**New York and Paris.** *Double Entendre* by Douglas Davis, Whitney Museum of American Art and Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris. Satellite telecast performance.

**New York.** *Paper Tiger Television*. Organized by Diane Augusta, Pennee Bender, Skip Blumberg, Shulae Chang, DeeDee Halleck, Caryn Rogoff, David Shulman, Alan Steinheimer. Series on public-access television that examines communications industry via the print media, and serves as model for low-budget, public-access programming.

## 1982

### Exhibitions/Events

**Boston.** *SIGGRAPH* (Special Interest Group in Computer Graphics) Annual conference includes computer-generated video art in its juried art show. Organized by Copper Giloith.

**Buffalo, N.Y.** *Ersatz TV: A Studio Melee* by Alan Moore and Terry Mohre, Collaborative Projects. Hallwalls Gallery. Curator, Kathy High. Installations of six studio sets from artists' television series "Potato Wolf," with live cameras and videotape screenings.

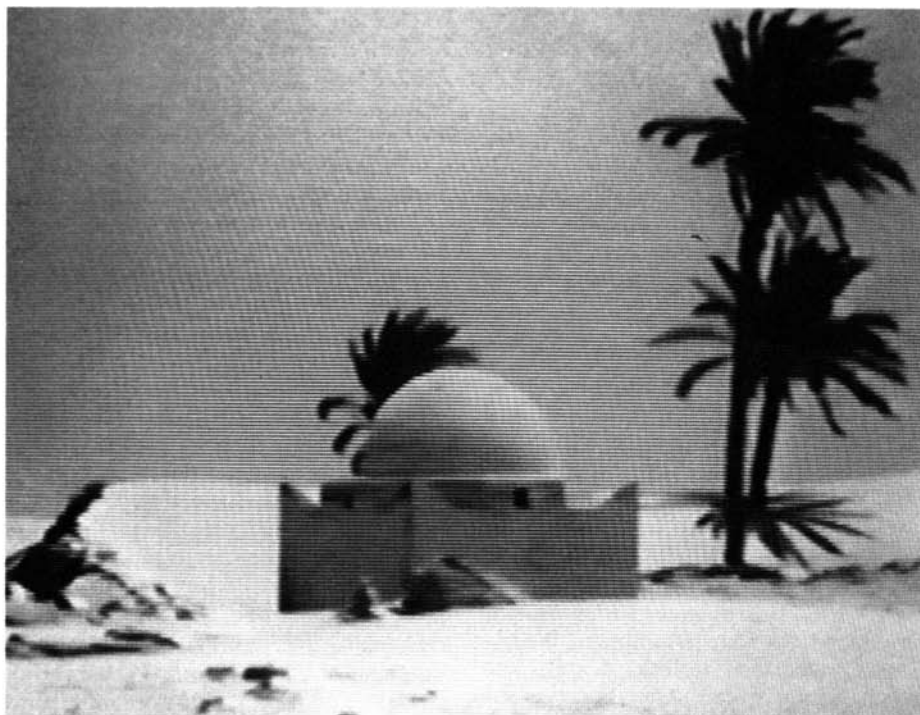
**Video/TV: Humor/Comedy**, Media Study/Buffalo. Curator, John Minkowsky. Touring exhibition that explores relationship between art and entertainment. Travels throughout U.S.

**New York.** *Nam June Paik*, Whitney Museum of American Art. Director of exhibition, John Hanhardt. Major retrospective. Travels to Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago.

**Park City, Utah.** *Fourth Annual United States Film and Video Festival* expands to include video.

**Yonkers, N.Y.** *Art and Technology: Approaches to Video*, Hudson River Museum. Three-part exhibition of installations by Dara Birnbaum, David Behrman and Paul DeMarinis, and Kit Fitzgerald and John Sanborn. Curator, Nancy Hoyt.

**Washington, D.C.** *National Video Festival*, American Film Institute at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, and the American Film Institute Campus, Los Angeles. Sponsor, Sony Corporation. Installations by Shigeko Kubota (Washington, D.C.) and Ed Emshwiller and Bill Viola (Los Angeles).



Bill Viola, *Chott el-Djerid (A Portrait in Light and Heat)*, 1979.



Ed Emshwiller, *Sunstone*, 1979.

## Organizations

**Boston.** *Institute of Contemporary Art* begins video program. Director, David Ross.

**Portland, Ore.** *The Media Project.* Expands to include video. Media organization for distribution of independent work includes workshops and state-wide directory of media services, and acts as a liaison to cable. Director, Karen Wickery.

## Television/Productions

**Los Angeles.** *The Artist and Television: A Dialogue Between the Fine Arts and the Mass Media.* Sponsored by ASCN Cable Network, Los Angeles, and University of Iowa, Iowa City. Interactive satellite telecast connecting artists, critics, curators, and educators in Los Angeles, Iowa City, and New York.

**New York.** *Disarmament Video Survey.* Organized by Skip Blumberg, Wendy Clarke, DeeDee Halleck, Karen Rannucci, Sandy Tolan. Collaboration by over 300 independent producers from New York, Washington, D.C., San Francisco, Great Britain, Germany, Japan, India, the Netherlands, Mexico, Brazil, and other locations to compile one-minute interviews with people about their views on nuclear arms and disarmament. Survey shown on cable television and presented as installations at American Film Institute National Video Festival in Washington, D.C.

*The Video Artist.* Producers: Eric Trigg, Electronic Arts Intermix, Stuart Shapiro. Sixteen-part series on major video artists broadcast nationally over USA Cable Network.

## 1983

### Exhibitions/Events

**Minneapolis.** *The Media Arts in Transition.* Conference organizers and sponsors: Walker Art Center, National Alliance of Media Arts Centers (NAMAC), Minneapolis College of Art and Design, University Community Video, Film in the Cities. Conference programmers: Jennifer Lawson, John Minkowsky, Melinda Ward.

**New York.** *The Intersection of the Word and the Visual Image,* Women's Inter-art Center. Colloquium involving artists, writers, and scholars on relationship of language to the moving image, alternative narratives, and the transformation of literary, historical, performance, and visual works to video. Screenings of international works.

**1983 Biennial Exhibition,** Whitney Museum of American Art. Installations by Shigeko Kubota and Mary Lucier. First touring video show of Biennial, through American Federation of Arts

(AFA).

**Rochester, N.Y.** *Video Installation 1983,* Visual Studies Workshop. Exhibition including works by Barbara Buckner, Tony Conrad, Doug Hall, Margia Kramer, Bill Stephens.

**Sante Fe and Albuquerque.** *Video as Attitude,* Museum of Fine Arts, Santa Fe, and University Art Museum, Albuquerque, New Mexico. Director, Patrick Clancy. Installations by Bill Beirne, Juan Downey, Dieter Froese, Robert Gaylor, Gary Hill, Joan Jonas, Rita Myers, Bruce Nauman, Michael Smith, Steina, Francesc Torres, Bill Viola.

**Valencia, Calif.** *Hajj* by Mabou Mines, California Institute of the Arts. Written by Lee Breuer, performed by Ruth Malczek. Video by Craig Jones. Premiere performance of complete version of performance poem, which incorporates extensive use of live and recorded videotape.

**Yonkers, N.Y.** *Electronic Vision,* Hudson River Museum. Curator, John Minkowsky. Installations by Gary Hill, Ralph Hocking and Sherry Miller, Dan Sandin, Steina and Woody Vasulka.

**New York and Long Beach, Calif.** *The Second Link: Viewpoints on Video in the Eighties.* Organized by Lorne Falk, Walter Phillips Gallery at the Banff Centre School of Fine Arts. United States showing at The Museum of Modern Art and Long Beach Museum of Art. Curators, Peggy Gale, Kathy Huffman, Barbara London, Brian McNevin, Dorine Mignot, Sandy Nairne. Works from Europe, Canada, U.S. International tour.

## Television/Productions

**Long Beach, Calif.** *Shared Realities,* Long Beach Museum of Art. Executive Producer, Kathy Huffman. Series on local cable station of work produced by artists at the Station/Annex, programming about the museum, and local cultural programming.

**New York.** *Perfect Lives* by Robert Ashley. Project Director, Carlota Schoolman. Video Director, John Sanborn. Television opera in seven parts produced by The Kitchen.

*Barbara London has directed the Video Program at The Museum of Modern Art since 1974. She is a writer and lecturer, and has taught in the Film Department of New York University.*



# Reviews

Guest Editor:  
Sara Hornbacher

Bettina Gruber and Maria Vedder, *Kunst und Video: Internationale Entwicklung und Künstler*, Cologne, DuMont Buchverlag, 1983. Pp. 264.

Bill Viola, exh. cat., Paris, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1983-84. Pp. 44.

*The Second Link: Viewpoints on Video in the Eighties*, exh. cat., Banff, Canada, Walter Phillips Gallery, Banff Centre School of Fine Arts, 1983. Pp. 111.

*National Video Festival, 1984*, cat., Los Angeles, American Film Institute, 1984. Pp. 84.

*Het Lumineuze Beeld/The Luminous Image*, exh. cat., Amsterdam, The Stedelijk Museum, 1984. Pp. 202.

In the media-saturated landscape of contemporary American culture, video has emerged as the quintessential American art form. No other medium is informed by an innate reflexivity to the structure that dominates the consumption of ideology, images, and money in America—television. TV is our primary cultural icon and alter ego. A generation of Americans have grown to adulthood as sophisticated connoisseurs of television's visual language and ideological conventions; along with pop music and Hollywood films, TV is a part of the collective and personal mythology of Americans. Thus, it is not surprising that American video art (and the entire economic and theoretical structure surrounding it) has been defined by its relation to television, either adversarial or assimilative. In an ironic convergence, American television has appropriated video's visual innovations and image language for its own purposes,

while American artists have appropriated television technology for their own uses. In its encapsulation of the post-modern fine-art/mass-media debate, video would seem to be an almost indigenous American art form.

Indeed, although the seminal influences in video's infancy as an art form originated within the European avant-garde (Nam June Paik's 1963 exhibition *Exposition of Electronic Music & Television* in Wuppertal, West Germany, and Wolf Vostell's Fluxus television Happenings in Cologne, for example), once the Portapak hit the American consumer market in 1965, video art crossed the Atlantic with Paik, and American dominance of the field had begun. The seventies saw an evolution of independent video activity around the world, particularly in Europe, but the wide-scale production, funding, exhibition, and distribution by artists seemed a distinctly American phenomenon.

But since the early 1980s, a perceptible shift towards an "internationalization" of the American art and cultural scene in general has affected the climate of American video. As a consequence both of the extraordinary popularity in the United States of young European painters and of the increased attention to continental film theory and contemporary criticism, there has been a growth of interest in a complex international network of video artists and theoretical video discourse that springs from a context and traditions far removed from American art and television.

For years, the absence of a coherent American-European exchange of independent video was predicated partly on a technological fluke: incompatible electronic standards. Moreover, in a new twist to cultural imperialism, the American electronic standard, NTSC, is widespread in Europe, while the European standards, PAL and SECAM, are scarcely available in the United States. But even with the growing availability of Tri-Standard equipment in the United States, the disparity between American and European video goes beyond incompatible electronic standards or languages. Whereas American video art since 1980 increasingly suggests the construct of television and shares its technological base, the discourse of much European video is more clearly contained within the continuum of contemporary art or even cinematic traditions. Of course, it is not entirely accurate to speak of a "European video," as though artists from a dozen disparate nations could share an aesthetic. Certainly the cultural, economic, and historical contexts that inform the art are specific to each country, but when European tapes are contrasted with tapes

made by American artists of the TV generation, however, certain generalizations may hold true.

Generally, European tapes have less in common visually, syntactically, and conceptually with television, but in content and form they are often more rooted in such other forms as literature, performance, painting, sculpture, or cinema. Certainly the context in which the work exists, both culturally and practically, is within the traditions and institutions of contemporary art. The past two years have witnessed the growth of an active, international video-festival circuit, which has evolved in Europe as the dominant network for tape and information exchange, resulting in an increased cross-fertilization of influences among European countries and between America and Europe. American video has seen wide distribution in Europe for a decade, but European artists' tapes are only now gaining limited exposure in the United States. At the very least, a heightened international perspective in the field should raise important questions about the governing context and aesthetics of video work being produced both in and outside the United States and initiate a more informed critical dialogue. As more exhibitions in the United States and Europe include international tapes and a corresponding body of theoretical literature develops, the resulting investigation of the art form by curators, critics, and artists operating outside the prevailing cultural context is revealing. Indeed, a number of recent publications from Germany, France, the United States, Canada, and Holland include an international selection of artists and writers, and their differing approaches to the material and the medium reveal much about the disparate cultural relationships with television, video, and art.

*Kunst und Video: Internationale Entwicklung und Künstler* (Art and Video: International Developments and Artists) is a handsome anthology published by the DuMont Buchverlag in Cologne and compiled by the German artists Bettina Gruber and Maria Vedder. With seven essays on communications theory and video history, eight pages of color plates, statements, photographs, biographies, videographies, and bibliographies for sixty-one artists, this ambitious project would seem to be a welcome update to the earlier American volumes such as Ira Schneider and Beryl Korot's 1976 *Video Art: An Anthology* and Gregory Battcock's 1978 *New Artists' Video*. But *Kunst und Video* might be more aptly titled "Kunst und Video in the Seventies"; it presents not current theory but an art historical overview of



the medium in Germany and the United States. In its scope of artists and essays, this book serves as the highly subjective first chapter towards a survey of video from a traditional art historical perspective.

The first three essays, by Allison Simmons, Gregory Battcock, and David Antin were published originally in America in the seventies, and each stands as an important contribution in the evolution of American video and media theory. Simmons's essay, "Television and Art—A Historical Outline of an Improbable Alliance" (1977), contains one of the earliest chronological histories of the important developments of the medium as art, and David Antin's "The Essential Characteristics of the Medium" (1976) is a classic exploration of the fundamentals and implications of the young medium. The three American essays are marked by a kind of optimism for the subversive potential of the new medium that rings somewhat naïve from the perspective of the more cynical climate of the eighties. Revealingly, the essays by the Europeans—Vittorio Alliaia, Rene Berger, and Friedrich Heubach—do not continue this discourse into the next decade. Instead, each discusses an aspect of video within an art-world context: Alliaia, in "Tradition und Videodämonie" (1982), addresses the tradition of the cult of images and symbols in art history and its relation to video, while Berger's "Videokunst oder die Künstlerische Herausforderung der Elektronik" (1982) deals with video's role and future with an art audience and the art market. Nam June Paik, in "Vom Pferd zu Christo" (1981), contributes philosophical anecdotes that serve to illustrate his theories of communications and video. Although these essays do reflect the disparity between the early American "video/TV" theory and the European art historical approach, one misses a discussion of the work within a broader scope of contemporary art.

In a foreword to *Kunst und Video*, the editors describe the artists selected for inclusion as the "most important artists of the pioneer generation." Indeed, of the sixty-one artists represented here, more than one third did not produce videotapes after 1979. But by limiting the selection to the "pioneer generation," the authors have compiled an anthology of international video art that omits such important artists as the American Dara Birnbaum and the German Klaus vom Bruch, both of whom began working with video in the late seventies. Approximately two thirds of the artists included in this survey are Americans, with most of the remainder from German-speaking countries. For

the most part, the "pioneer generation" in America as seen here consisted of those artists who used video as an extension of the formal and theoretical concerns of their work in Minimal, Conceptual, or Performance Art, such as Bruce Nauman, Richard Serra, Lynda Benglis, and John Baldessari. Apart from the Vasulkas, artists who explored imaging techniques, usually considered important to American histories of the medium, are largely omitted, as are practitioners of "guerrilla" television or documentary, another particularly American form. The European selection is culled mainly from those artists associated with Gerry Schum's landmark "Fernseh Galerie" in the early seventies, artists who worked with video in the context of performance, environmental art, and Arte Povera.

As a survey of a specific moment in the history of video in America and Germany—when video was first being used by visual artists as a continuation of investigations that evolved from Minimal and Conceptual Art—*Kunst und Video* is an important document. From the vantage point of the altered landscape of the video-art scene in the eighties, the editors' approach towards an international history of the medium seems to reflect a specifically European perspective.

**B**ill Viola, one of the youngest of the American artists included in *Kunst und Video*'s "pioneer generation," not only has continued to work in video but has emerged internationally as one of the most accomplished masters of the medium. A veteran of an American TV-inspired childhood who is also a knowledgeable student of Eastern philosophy and religion, Viola places equal emphasis on the "video" and the "art" in his work, and thereby seems to encompass both an American and a European aesthetic. Viola's work falls outside the postmodern discourse of much American video and within a more international, modernist tradition. His works do not usually address specific cultural references or language; rather, they address personal, often archetypal referents and create a visual, perceptual, and ultimately allegorical language from the raw materials (time, light) of the medium.

On the occasion of his first European one-man show, which featured two original installations and an exhibition of his later tape work (1977–83), the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris published a catalogue that falls somewhere between an artist's journal and a formal monograph of the artist and his work. Viola is an articulate and engaging communicator, and the editors of the cata-

logue have wisely chosen to include a liberal selection from the artist's own personal statements and anecdotes. The approach, in a parallel to Viola's work, is more philosophical than analytical, resulting in a catalogue that speaks with the artist's own authoritative but unassuming voice.

Anne-Marie Duguet of the Université de Paris I has contributed a structuralist overview of Viola's work, which examines the technical and perceptual processes that inform the artist's poetic vision. John Hanhardt, of the Whitney Museum of American Art, writes on the tapes *Chott el-Djerid* (1979) and *Hatsu Yume (First Dream)* (1981), describing them as celebrations of the aesthetics of light, perception, and transition, and Kathy Huffman, curator of the Contemporary Artists' Television Fund in Boston, offers incisive comments on the 1983 tape *Reasons for Knocking at an Empty House*. But most of the catalogue's descriptions of the tapes and installations were written by the artist himself. Likewise, one of the catalogue's most informative segments is Deirdre Boyle's interview with Viola, in which he proves himself equally conversant with Jung and the Little Rascals and offers thoughts on the dichotomy between technology and art. The section of the catalogue devoted to the artist's own anecdotes and short essays again combines humor and philosophy to clarify the complex references underlying his work. Typically, Viola strikes a knowing balance between the arcane and the accessible; his discourse on ritual, spiritualism, and tribalism is countered by a story of an undergraduate encounter with a magnetic-tape degausser at Syracuse University. The catalogue concludes with a complete videography and biography of the artist and a list of his exhibitions, installations, and publications.

**O**ne of the first exhibitions in North America to signal the incipient growth of a more international perspective of video art was organized by Lorne Falk at the Walter Phillips Gallery in Banff in 1983. Entitled *The Second Link*, a reference to the Linked Ring Society's encouragement of photography as an art form in nineteenth-century England, the exhibition was part of a project that comprised an international tour of thirty videotapes selected by six guest curators from Canada, the United States, Great Britain, and Europe, a lecture series, and a publication. The resulting catalogue/anthology, *The Second Link: Viewpoints on Video in the Eighties*, is an impressive survey that isolates the pertinent issues informing the field of artists' video in the

eighties, first in nine essays by curators and writers and then in the catalogue of the eclectic, international exhibition of tapes by some of the important artists in the second generation of videomakers.

The theoretical agenda for the anthology is introduced in Lorne Falk's opening essay, "The Second Link and the Habit of TV": "The single most important issue in video art in the '80's has to do with its relation to television." Indeed, although the contributing essayists do not always specifically define video by its relation to television, they do consistently address the dichotomy between video as a personal medium existing within an art-world context and video as a public medium existing within a television context—a dichotomy that suggests an identity crisis heightened by the economic and technological shifts in the past several years. Although the jargon differs, the essayists' concerns are similar: Falk speaks of a "private aesthetic" versus a "public aesthetic"; Gene Youngblood of a "personal vision" versus a "public vision"; Carl Loeffler of "video art" and "television art"; Kathy Huffman of "personal video" versus "broadcast television"; while Sandy Nairne isolates the "body" as the focus of seventies video art, as opposed to "television" as the focus of video in the eighties. These essays reveal the anxious climate of a field in transition from the pioneering climate of the seventies to the more complex economic structure and conservative market of this decade, particularly in the United States and Canada. Several of the essayists (including Huffman and Youngblood) point out that artists' access to television is still severely limited and call for a reaffirmation of video's personal vision, while Loeffler posits an optimistic future for artists on television. Despite opposing viewpoints, clearly the operative issue here is what Huffman describes as "the uneasy relationship between video art and commercial television in the environment of today's restless viewer." In addressing their tape selections, most of the guest curators—who include Sandy Nairne of the Institute of Contemporary Art, London, Barbara London of The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Brian McNevin and Peggy Gale from Canada, and Dorine Mignot of the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam—suggest that artists' video must acknowledge the dual aspects of the medium.

Although the artists and tapes selected for the exhibition can hardly represent a definitive survey of recent video, these works do effectively reflect certain prevailing tendencies in work by young Americans, Canadians, and, to a lesser degree here, Europeans. Each of

the thirty artists is given two full pages of the catalogue: one for biography, videography, and bibliography; the other for a large, visually striking color still from the tape. With fifteen tapes from Canada, the host country, and ten from the United States, the North American artists represent a broad range of sensibilities. For example, London's and Huffman's selections from the United States include Tony Oursler's expressionistic psychodrama *Grand Mal*, Max Almy's high-tech political music video *Perfect Leader*, Mary Lucier's lyrical homage to Monet, *Ohio in Giverny*, Gary Hill's exploration of word/image relationships in *Primarily Speaking*, and the symbolic landscapes of James Byrne's *Swan Songs*. Dorine Mignot has chosen five works from five European countries, but, considering this limited number, her selection includes important works by major international artists who have gained considerable attention abroad but who have not been widely seen in America. Klaus vom Bruch's *Propellarband*, in which personal identity and national history collide in re-edited archival World War II film footage, Marina Abramovic/Ulay's symbolic study of time and culture, *City of Angels*; and the Belgian Joelle de la Casiniere's layering of song, written text, sign language, and image in *Grimoire Magnetique*—each of these informed by a specific historic and cultural context—allow for fascinating comparisons with the more familiar references of the American work. Such comparisons and juxtapositions, even when culled from such specific curatorial perspectives, underscore the value of exhibitions that acknowledge an international presence, by allowing the viewer to draw conclusions from a much broader source. As such, *The Second Link* is a significant step towards a more sophisticated approach to the issues that define this period in the history of the field, and to the artists and works that are emerging from this second generation.

**T**he *Second Link* had been conceived as a forum for current thought on art and video and thus drew on an international selection as a reflection of contemporary discourse in the field. But it is both surprising and revealing that the fourth National Video Festival, presented by the American Film Institute in September 1984, would concentrate so heavily on what its Executive Director, James Hindman, refers to as the "internationalization process" in video.

Although the 1984 festival included a large selection of artists' tapes from Europe, Japan, and Great Britain, the

AFI's interpretation of the process of "internationalization" is not limited to, or necessarily focused on, the international video scene as it relates to the art world; the theme here is video as television in a wider cultural context. The catalogue for the 1984 festival, which is one of the most provocative in the festival's short history, includes presentations on Britain's Channel 4, television in Nicaragua and El Salvador, Japanese Public Broadcasting, Japanese TV commercials, and the Kheda Communications Project in India. Among the "video-art" presentations are a survey of Japanese tapes curated by Fujiko Nakaya, an international program of recent narrative work curated by Barbara London, and a selection entitled "Cultural Impressions," curated by Marita Sturken.

The festival's organizers, James Hindman and Jackie Kain, have compiled an unusually broad overview of international developments in television and television-related art, but rather than concentrating on the "uneasy relationship" that characterized *The Second Link*, they focus on positive models for the convergence of television and if not art per se, at least an alternative vision. The catalogue repeatedly allows for cultural comparisons of these models by juxtaposing descriptions or essays on particular programs from various countries; for example, under the heading "Arts Magazines," one finds material on the "Alter Image" series from England, the "Dis/Patches" series on The Learning Channel in the United States, and the magazine-format program "There is a Video-cassette in My Soup" from Belgium. Likewise, under the heading "Public Television: Politics, Fiction, and Fantasy," important works made in conjunction with a public television station, such as Michael Klier's ZDF production *Der Riese*, are presented in the company of works made in similar situations in England, Hungary, the United States, and Yugoslavia. Should the dominance of television productions be seen as a sign of conservatism on the part of the festival, the inclusion of an interview of the British social theoretician Raymond Williams by Colin McCabe, Peter Broderick's essay "Point-Counterpoint: Controversy by Television" on advocacy television, and Julianne Burton and Karen Ranucci's presentation "Nicaragua and El Salvador: Art and Activism, Urgency and Ethics" indicates that the organizers have deliberately attempted to present television in a social context. Finally, in the section "Image and Sound: Collaborations," the catalogue touches on an area that has immense implications both for the television industry and for

the direction of independent video but that was barely mentioned in the other publications reviewed here: music clips or music videos. Although music videos are promotional tools for the recording industry, their liberal appropriation of motifs and techniques originally developed by artists have further confused the distinction between video art and its commercial applications. In the United States these music clips are generally seen in the clearly commercial context of television or dance clubs, but in Europe there is an increased tendency for "retrospectives" of clips to be shown as part of video-art festivals or in exhibitions of artists' tapes in museums. Although the relation of promotional music clips and artists' videotapes is an issue that needs to be addressed in depth, this catalogue's brief coverage of artist/musician collaborations at least hints at the possibility of alternatives to the consumer ideology and clichéd visual language that has become the currency of most music clips.

Besides the volume and range of ideas and programming it addresses, this catalogue should be distinguished from most similar ventures for its ability to stand as more than a document or artifact from the event itself. In its attempt to present a viable convergence of art and television on an international scale, the catalogue for the 1984 National Video Festival is an important publication in its own right.

**I**n marked contrast to the premise of the AFI National Video Festival, which identified video as a tool for cultural communications—either in the form of broadcast television or in the form of closed-circuit, private transmission—a recent major exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam places video firmly within the historical traditions of the visual arts, and thus within the domain of the art institution. The 1984 exhibition, *The Luminous Image*, featured twenty-two artists from ten countries working in the video format most closely wedded to the conventions of modern art history: installation. With its relationship to sculpture, painting, and architecture, installation provides video with the objectness that it otherwise lacks and thus obscures the medium's association with broadcast television, allowing a completely different set of formal and theoretical directives to operate. The Stedelijk exhibition, curated by Dorine Mignot, was unprecedented in offering such a collection of major, original installations—seventeen were premiered at this exhibition—at one museum, an event that not only will have an influence on the study and exhibition of installation but will

contribute to its further validation within the art world. The resulting publication, also entitled *The Luminous Image*, is equally unprecedented, in that it is a lavishly produced museum catalogue of a seriousness, scale, and scope that was previously reserved for books on the "finer" arts of painting and sculpture. Although one hopes that eventually the more problematic and ultimately subversive form of videotape ("subversive" because it lacks that very objectness which allows it validity as an art commodity) will also be celebrated in such a publication, it is particularly gratifying to see these artists and their works taking their place within the broader discourse of contemporary art.

*The Luminous Image* is both a catalogue of the exhibition and a compilation of essays by nine authors from the United States, Belgium, France, The Netherlands, and England. Unlike most writing on the medium, the essays here do not address theories of communication but, in keeping with the concerns of video installation, initiate formal and historical analyses of video as an art medium rooted in visual art and cinematic traditions. Indeed, in her introduction, Dorine Mignot establishes the relation of video to art history by drawing parallels between the formal and conceptual concerns of artists throughout the centuries—for example, light, personal history, time—and those of the artists featured in the exhibition. Caravaggio and Rembrandt are evoked as precursors to Mary Lucier and Nan Hoover; Kiefer and Cucchi as sharing themes with Marcel Odenbach and Francesc Torres. In his essay "Video and Visual Arts," Wim Beeren takes this analogy to a rather simplistic extreme by comparing video's formal characteristics to those of painting, sculpture, and graphics, and finally declaring, "I am prepared to regard video as art when like art . . . it concentrates on colour, line, three-dimensional form and their possible interrelationships" (which would seem to exclude most of the pieces in the exhibition). Also drawing parallels between video and other art forms, David Hall discusses the problematic situation of video-art education and criticism.

Other essayists take a more theoretical approach. It is revealing to note that, where other publications mentioned above probed the "uneasy relationship" between video and television, here the uneasy relationship between video and art is seen to be equally complex. For example, Vito Acconci's lucid analysis of video's function explores the dichotomy between the "television box" as sculpture and as television, and implies that video installation is an art form in

which the artist compromises tradition and experimentation. A compelling theoretical approach is developed by Jean-Paul Fargier, who discusses video in the context of contemporary cinematic traditions. Using Godard as his model, Fargier contrasts the interior/exterior (or screen/off-screen) dialectic of film with the internal manipulation of time and image in video. His identification of a "new fiction" in video, as exemplified by Michael Klier's *Der Riese* and Claudia van Aleman's *Das Frauenzimmer*, constitutes a "clash of cinema and video," with a video work always including "the metaphor of its process in the subject matter."

American and European histories of the video medium are also developed here. Jean-Paul Trefois briefly covers highlights of the evolution of video as art in Europe, while John Hanhardt formulates an insightful history of video installation, not only isolating important events and artists but also charting the formal and conceptual developments that led to the transformation of television in postmodern art. His history of installation begins with Paik and ends with Birnbaum, concluding that video has had and will continue to have a revolutionary impact on twentieth-century art historical conventions. In his historical notes, David Ross also focuses his comments on Paik and Birnbaum, discovering in these two artists the ultimate deconstruction of the American television image and the American television experience. In Ross's view, Paik and Birnbaum share a unique understanding of the television image as cultural artifact, and Paik himself discusses the cultural impact of live, interactive satellite art as experienced in his global media event, *Good Morning, Mr. Orwell*.

The second half of *The Luminous Image* deals directly with the artists' installations. Each artist is represented by color or black-and-white photographs of previous installations or related tapes; sketches or notes on the works in progress; statements by the artists on the formal or conceptual underpinnings of the installations; essays by critics and writers on the specific works, several of which are particularly effective, such as Raymond Bellour's eloquent comments on Thierry Kuntzel's *Nostos II* and Constance de Jong on Tony Oursler's *L7-L5*. Surprisingly, these pages, bristling with color, energy, and a sense of concepts and works being formulated, capture some of the spirit of controlled chaos that typified the actual exhibition. These pages constitute one of the most fascinating sections of *The Luminous Image*; the various and often conflicting aesthetics that inform the

twenty-two artists' works are an encapsulation of the pluralism and eclecticism of postmodern art in general. Although most of the works, such as Nan Hoover's *Walking in Any Direction* . . . rely on the actual experience and perception of the installation for their meaning, others, such as Marcel Odenbach's *Dreihändiges Klavierkonzert für Entsetzlich Verstimmte Instrumente*, are also effective when viewed as conceptual works consisting of documentation such as drawings, photographs, and statements, as presented here.

The catalogue also includes biographical information on each artist, as well as a general bibliography, culled mostly from European sources. In addition, the catalogue closes with a series of small, black-and-white photographs of the actual installations as they appeared at the Stedelijk. Unfortunately, after the colorful and densely informative impact of the previous artists' pages, these dimly lit, documentary photographs come as something of a disappointment, inadvertently giving the impression that the exhibition was ascetic and dark in execution, instead of the eclectic, noisy, and spirited array that is reflected in the rest of this otherwise excellent publication. *The Luminous Image*, both as exhibition and catalogue, was a landmark.

Each of the publications mentioned above offers a specific view of the history or current issues vital to artists' video, which in most cases is determined by the prevailing cultural context. The plurality of views is an indication of the importance of a continued "internationalization" of the field, in terms of theory and of the work itself. As the Americans and Europeans further the process of cross-fertilization (and internationally accessible publications are crucial to that process), we may see a development of an ongoing critical dialogue that addresses the opposing contexts of art and television.

#### Note

This article was written in 1984.

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**Peter D'Agostino and Antonio Muntadas**, eds., *The Un/Necessary Image*, New York, Tanam Press, 1982. Pp. 100; 85 ills. \$11.95.

The time-based concept of high technology is transforming our lifestyles. The culture of high technology is timelessness. We are all going through a transition. The concept of timelessness manifests itself in our value system, i.e., our culture. "Timelessness" opposed to "valuable at all times" go together first in the high technology age. I guess that's what art is about.<sup>1</sup>

*The Un/Necessary Image* is a crossover publication. Originally proposed as an exhibition around communication models and emerging technologies held at the Hayden Corridor Gallery at MIT, it evolved into a book by various artists "concerned with 'the public image' generated by mass media advertising and communication systems," as stated in the preface.

It is interesting to consider why this exhibition took on the form of a published anthology. In their preface, Peter D'Agostino and Antonio Muntadas explain that the title alludes to an existing dichotomy between public and personal significance, "insofar as the meaning of the public image ultimately depends on the context in which it is presented." The works chosen deal with the content and meaning of public information. The artists have appropriated and recontextualized recognizable information in order to analyze and comment on its reading within the context of mass culture.

*The Un/Necessary Image* constructs a paradigm of issues critical to our time. The twenty-one artists touch on a number of themes, but ideas about time, context, and the absence of dialogue in our society recur in almost all their contributions. The layout suggests the look of corporate reports, museum catalogues, and other high-brow publications. The editors have striven to arrange the contents as a response to those sorts of publications. In imitating them, they critique their content and their form.

There are works by Reese Williams, Erika Rothenberg, Les Levine, Dan Graham, Chip Lord, Richard Kriesche, Victor Burgin, General Idea, Hal Fischer, Catalina Parra, Judy Malloy, Judith Barry, and Peter D'Agostino in addition to those discussed below. They have produced essays and photocollage assemblages and in many ways have expanded and invented new expository forms to analyze the public image. These take the form of cut-ups, abridg-

ments—incisions into the seamless body of corporate discourse. This kind of radical surgery may be the only means for creating a dialectic.

Kristine Stiles's collage essay "The Luciferean Marriage Government/Corporation/Media 'Fact' as Entertainment" specifically focuses on the creation of a dialectic in a "media-ized" society. Written from her experience at the Diablo Blockade Encampment at Diablo Canyon, California (where political action took place in protest against the Pacific Gas and Electric Company's nuclear power plant), Stiles had to confront the media/corporate/government police daily. During this time she saw how her actions and political expression became dominated by government/corporate and media structures. Her response is interesting:

While everyone at the Diablo Blockade Encampment was at a consensus meeting, Sandra Koponen had an idea that we two became very excited about: Everyone should quietly pack up and leave the camp in the middle of the night. Just go home without explanation.

In retrospect, I believe in this position even more. There would still be the "Media Corral," the helicopters of television crews and highway patrol flying overhead, the power lines of P.G. & E. hissing and zinging next to the empty camp site . . . the dozens and dozens of waiting buses ready to cart away the protestors, the build up of police forces. . . . The whole world would be waiting by the television sets and watching the newsstands for the latest "confrontation," and we would simply slip away (p. 29).

As has been stated elsewhere, "The totality of the culture industry has put an end to [expression. It is] exclusively concerned with effects: it crushes insubordination and makes them [expressions] subserve the formula which replaces the work."<sup>2</sup>

There are many artists who currently use techniques like those in *The Un/Necessary Image*. They appropriate images or statements from the public domain and reconstruct and recontextualize them. They juxtapose language to image, or image to image; or they cut right through them, leaving a visual ensemble with the cuts still there. They take on social issues or address nontraditional "art" subjects. All this is made in the face of a public language that speaks without reference, without memory, without a past and that is so opaque that it gives forth only its own presence. They

force a dialogue by slashing and cutting to transform the codes that exist as a nonresponse. "It works through the instantaneous deconstruction of the dominant discursive code. It volatilizes the category of the code and that of the message."<sup>3</sup>

The artists of *The Un/Necessary Image* create situations that contrast the public image with its content. Two levels of content are shown to exist: a surface content, by which the public façade of the image is read, and a submerged content, which gives the image its significance and context. When both appear on the same plane, and when the social meaning and history of the image begin to be distilled, the readings of the image multiply and change immensely. Using this type of analysis, the artists crack the public surface of the images and free their social meanings.

Robert Morgan analyzes the Hyatt Regency Corporation's manipulation of its advertising image following the tragedy of 1981, when one of the structural supports in its Kansas City hotel broke away and caused the deaths of 113 people, and injuries to 186. From the time of the accident to the hotel's reopening, Hyatt developed an advertising campaign with specific imagery to offset the bad press resulting from the mishap. Morgan focuses on the type of imagery used to achieve the desired public-relations results during this campaign.

Joan Rabascall examines the way that advertising in the press presents the computer today. His images reassess and reassemble the information that normally forms the content of the magazines and publications bearing the look *The Un/Necessary Image* imitates. They become a structural critique of such media. In interpreting images from magazines and newspaper ads, Rabascall notes that office work and the office are suddenly depicted as well organized, clean, and efficient; that the miraculous use of the computer today has achieved this result and guarantees a revolutionized office tomorrow; and that this office seemingly springs from the computer's possession of some supernatural spirit, outside any human action or control.

The absence of time in advertising is fascinating. Advertising time is always the present, even when the ad is nostalgic. There is neither past nor future. *The Un/Necessary Image* begins with Sonja Ivekovic's "Universal Man/Universal Society" and concludes with Antonio Muntadas's "Selling the Future." These visual essays are about the media's negation of time. Ivekovic takes Leonardo's Mona Lisa and a Renaissance engraving of an arsenal. By juxtaposing them, she arouses feelings of eroticism and of war, and by enlarging them, she

gives them a presence that expands their temporality. This she amplifies by placing over both images the title, "Universal Man." To "Universal Man" she matches "Universal Society," contemporary images that continue the earlier associations between the Mona Lisa and the arsenal engraving. Time here is frozen.

In "Selling the Future," Muntadas begins with an epigraph by Niels Bohr: "Prediction is very difficult, especially about the future." He then excerpts such phrases as "Our Future," "Your Future," "For tomorrow," "By the year 2000" from magazine ads concerned with selling us the future: insurance, communications, and defense. "Selling the Future" is a static work. The future is inescapably the present. There is no passage. It is a tableau in which even language loses meaning, for there is no grammar to move sense: "Into the Future/the future/for tomorrow/L'avenir." Ivekovic and Muntadas point to a present of which the media and the public image are both guardian and prisoner.

Representation in advertising is a case in which style or context or both overrun content. John Brumfield's essay "What Do You Know When You Know a Picture?" picks up the historic, philosophic, and aesthetic threads surrounding visual meaning:

All visual imagery is . . . inextricably tied to an informing, limiting, or conditioning referent. . . . [T]here is always something—and often a lot implicitly referential in the *structure* of the image. . . . . insofar, as any representation is tied to the history of the object it represents, there arises an immediate question as to how much of the object's history is required for an understanding of the significance of the pictorial system (p. 13).

Brumfield also raises questions about how composition and style affect meaning and about how meaning is limited when it is transmitted only through iconography:

As I've remarked elsewhere, we can't do much more than make a pallid and random sense from such "familiar" paintings as Brueghel's *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* unless we happen to have access to at least a modestly specialized body of knowledge . . . the identity of individual figures; their sociological status . . . before we can even begin to properly see Brueghel's painting . . . or for that matter any other image system, whose components derive their meaning

from beyond the functional frame of reference of the viewer (p. 13).

Meaning is conveyed from sources beyond the functional frame of the viewer. This is of interest in the case of Hans Haacke and David Craven. Haacke's "On Social Grease" is a series of six photo-engraved magnesium plaques. Four of the six are reproduced in *The Un/Necessary Image*. The plaques contain statements on the arts made by corporate chairmen. Corporate endorsements of the arts is a policy strongly supported by many sectors of the art world. This support, however, often does not question critical corporate social actions, or even the corporate chairmen's own view of their role as patrons. "On Social Grease" contextualizes the relationship between corporations and the arts. In his essay on Haacke, David Craven writes:

To consider Haacke's *On Social Grease* simply mounted journalism is to be unduly naive about an art exhibit's lack of neutrality. . . . Haacke creates a cool non-art so seemingly insubstantial that the aura of it becomes the center of focus—and, more importantly, of controversy.

As such, Haacke deftly uses what the nihilistic Dadaists merely tried to negate. The result is a negative dialectic whereby Haacke affirms the process of artistic enshrinement, though only in order to debunk it. In *On Social Grease*, Haacke uses remarks about art he did not utter, without any overt comments of his own, in an aesthetic realm he has not made. Thus, the art world has been faced with the irony of appropriating its modes of art appropriation, even while proclaiming art's purity—its distance from all else (p. 21).

In Craven's view, corporate patronage becomes appropriation of the arts: "Corporate patronage makes the artist an indentured master—a servant of the corporate system, he is master only of his art. Ironically, it is in conceding to this conformity, that many artists feel most free. Able to create 'independently,' these artists ignore the dependence into which corporate money helps force them" (p. 24).

Quoting Bertolt Brecht, Haacke defines the role of a committed artist as: "the courage to write the truth, although it is being suppressed; the intelligence to recognize it, although it is being covered up; the judgment to choose those in whose hands it becomes effective; the cunning to spread it among them" (p. 25).<sup>4</sup> This view should be

taken to represent that of all the artists in *The Un/Necessary Image*.

#### Notes

- 1 Richard Kriesche, "AMI = AMI," *The Un/Necessary Image*, p. 44.
- 2 Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, New York, 1969.
- 3 Jean Braudrillard, "Requiem for the Media," *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, St. Louis, 1981.
- 4 From Bertolt Brecht, "Five Difficulties in Writing the Truth," *Kritische Berichte*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (1982).

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### **Revising Romance: New Feminist Video**

There has been recent discussion of the role feminist theory has played in the demise of modernism. In a provocative essay, the art critic Craig Owens draws a parallel between postmodern theory and such tenets of feminism as the questioning of monolithic theoretical discourse and of preestablished systems of representation.<sup>1</sup> Defining postmodernism as "a crisis of cultural authority, specifically of the authority vested in Western European culture and its institutions," Owens writes that "women's insistence on difference and incommensurability may not only be compatible with, but also an instance of postmodern thought. Postmodern thought is no longer binary thought." To be welcomed into the postmodern dialogue may be a mixed blessing, but Owen's image of the toppling of a monolithic culture and the roles that feminist theory and women's art have played in that demise is a powerful one, especially when one considers the immense and difficult task of redefining traditional cultural views of the sexes.

In whatever theoretical contexts we choose to define this issue, it is apparent that the role of feminists—and here I am dealing specifically with women artists—has been that of cultural revisionists. It is those outside the dominant culture who raise the issues and questions that have been suppressed expressly in order for that culture to survive intact. Thus, such issues as the media representation of women, the confining aspects of the domestic cultural domain, the roles of sexual victims and perpetrators, and the struggle of women to change well-entrenched discriminatory social values—topics that are often ignored, apparently because they are threatening to men—have been

dealt with primarily, although not exclusively, by women artists.

In video, the issue is even more complicated. For an art medium that developed during the "sexually liberated" yet deceptively sexist sixties, video art contains an impressive number of feminist voices. Although it also sports its quota of "old boys' clubs," these are balanced by highly visible women critics, curators, administrators, and well-established women artists. Video has always been, however, on the fringes of the art world, and has since its inception been used as a political weapon and an anti-establishment tool. So it is no surprise to discover it as the medium of many feminist-minded artists.

To define videotapes by women, or by feminist women, as constituting a specific isolated genre risks a reduction of the work and a denial of its diversity. Yet, with the emergence of feminism as an issue explored by video artists, feminist video art has become a topic for exhibition and, as such, subject to classification as a genre.

*Revising Romance: New Feminist Video* is a traveling exhibition organized by the American Federation of Arts (AFA) in cooperation with the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, and curated by Linda Podheiser, now teaching at Harvard, and Bob Riley, video curator at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston. Predicated on the premise that there is a particular feminist message, or aesthetic (although allowing that this aesthetic can be male as well as female), the AFA show broaches the issue of romance—a subject associated, of course, primarily with women—asking "What are the psychological, political and aesthetic consequences of popular ideals of eternal passion and transcendent love?" These videotapes analyze traditional sexual roles and address the use of romance in popular culture to exploit women's dissatisfaction with themselves and their bodies. However, they tend to parody romance rather than propose any alternative to the consumer culture brand. Perhaps they represent the first stage of a revisionist perspective: first identify the structure of the opposition's hierarchy and its inherent vocabulary, then attempt to subvert it.

*Revising Romance* is an admirable attempt to isolate one topic within a multitude of issues relevant to women working in video. It is also a risky attempt to construct a very specific premise out of a broad group of tapes. Here the issue of women as cultural revisionists is centered very specifically on the realm of narrative. Podheiser writes in the introduction to the accompanying brochure that "all of the works

locate popular ideals of romantic love in the rhetoric and iconography of popular entertainment genres traditionally aimed at women: television soap opera, juvenile literature for girls, movie genres like *films noir* and 'the women's picture,' and the Gothic novel and its pulp descendents." The tapes are divided into four programs—"Domestic Drama," "Revisionist Romance," "The Double Bind," and "Video Picaresque."

"Domestic Drama" comprises three tapes that juxtapose the reality of housework to the domestic ideals presented in daytime television's soap operas and advertisements. The role of the housewife, portrayed as the quintessential victim of the consumer culture, provides these artists with ample fodder. In Deans Keppel's *Soap*, Keppel sits in uncomfortably close range before the camera, which assumes the place of her television set. Sniffing and blowing her nose, she bemoans a failed romance. Dialogue from soap operas she is watching on TV is juxtaposed to her attempts to perform certain domestic duties such as cleaning the bathroom and mending a pair of pants. The paralysis effectively portrayed by Keppel is offset by her undercurrent of humor—comic interplays of her inner dialogue and the soaps—and her deliberate overdramatization. Although the tape reads more as a personal catharsis than as a commentary on romance, Keppel effectively portrays the influence of television soaps' sentimentality on her own emotions.

An audio subtext of daytime television is also used in Ann-Sargent Wooster's *House* as a backdrop to the realities of housework. Wooster combines spoken text on the sociology and mythology of housewives and the domestic domain, ranging in tone from anger to poetics, with scenes of a pair of hands roughly performing housework either on miniature dolls or in a real-life setting—feeding a baby doll, washing dishes, cutting up vegetables, arranging things. Like Keppel, Wooster has shot her tape in a claustrophobic style, and she underscores it with visual metaphor and voyeuristic references. Ultimately, though, it centers on her commentary, which emphasizes "the way in which girls are socialized and directed towards housework through emulating their mothers." In its didactic nature, this tape stands out in the exhibition as stylistically representative of earlier information-oriented feminist works, such as the videotapes of Martha Rosler. Wooster's tape straddles the fence of narrative and theory.

Barbara Broughel goes beyond the rather straightforward style of Keppel and Wooster in *Lesson 1: Trouble in Paradise* to create a disjointed yet fasci-



nating narrative. This tape is so laden with references to daytime commercials that it creates an eerie kind of alter-world in which everything resembles an advertisement in some kind of bastardized fashion—shirts talk back to a housewife whose husband goes to work in his underwear, stains constantly reappear on the carpet after they have been cleaned up, and coffee boils over as the housewife (predictably defeated by her appliances in the end) is beset by salesmen. Broughel calls this crisis the “external disruptions issued by a world of men and commerce” and pushes her style to extremes with a sound track that is either out-of-sync or backwards and loose, handheld camerawork. (The tape was originally shot in Super-8.) Unfortunately, this style gets increasingly more irritating as the tape progresses, undermining the intelligent and original images Broughel constructs. Nevertheless, this disintegrated look stands in sharp contrast to the slick, focused look of television that Broughel is deconstructing.

In the second of her tapes, *Lesson II: The Frigid Heiress*, exhibited in the “Revisionist Romance” program, Broughel examines the use of eroticism and romance to sell products, defining “commercial advertising [as] the Romance genre’s most recent and most available formal manifestation.” Adding elements of plot intrigue and juxtaposing the “real” thing—shots of erections and dramatic blood stains—to the fake eroticism of perfume and liquor ads, Broughel constructs a conniving character who tries to “trap her man” in a kind of *Cosmopolitan*-magazine desperation. Once again, the “lesson” of the title is a play on words—the lessons, or “morals,” of advertisements and women’s self-improvement magazines, as well as the lessons each heroine should have learned from the tape.

Also classified by the curators as “Revisionist Romance,” *With Love from A to B*, by Nancy Buchanan and Barbara Smith, is a charming, one-shot sketch that pokes fun at the clichés of unrequited love. Two hands play out this drama with simple props—a ring, a glass of wine, flowers—in such a way that they remain humorous (she does her nails while he offers her gifts) yet poignant. The tight, almost claustrophobic style of this tape—like that of Keppel’s and Wooster’s—is echoed in Ilene Segalove’s *Why I Got into TV and Other Stories*, a humorous, autobiographical tape in which we see none of the characters’ faces, only their torsos. The consistent recurrence of this closed-in stylistic device, apparently uncontrived, is worth noting; are the domestic world and female introspection of sexual

roles suffocating issues? Certainly the confinement evoked by this style effectively underscores the narrative intent in these tapes. Segalove, for instance, has made a series of autobiographical tapes in this fragmented style, each narrated by her in a humorous, somewhat self-deprecating tone. In *Why I Got into TV*, she pursues her self-analysis via the popular culture and TV addiction of her youth—seeing JFK shot on TV, falling in love with the TV repairman, being glued to the tube while suffering from the requisite bout of mononucleosis, and associating the memory of watching her parents kiss with the sound track of “Dragnet.” Segalove’s particular brand of narrative, with its use of static, often stiffly comic visuals and flat delivery of narration, is close to the tradition of stand-up comedy and carries with it that genre’s quality of self-mockery, making its qualification in this show as feminist an uneasy one.

The stylistic simplicity of these tapes is contrasted with the complexity of Bruce and Norman Yonemoto’s *Vault*, a well-crafted piece that interweaves an advertising-image romance with clichéd old movie scenes. The Yonemotos, who depart in this work from their usual soap-opera format to create a nonlinear, disjunctive romance, are here at their best when deciphering rather than imitating the soap-opera/melodrama styles of television and movies. They combine classic juxtapositions like flashbacks and hackneyed scenes of romance (the young couple embracing in the great outdoors) with Buñuelian kinds of non sequiturs, using two exceptionally wooden actors to play out a star-crossed Texas romance of a cowboy/artist and a cellist who pole-vaults. Their revamped Freudian symbols (she pole-vaults her way out of the romance to a new job, and he is left standing next to—you guessed it—a phallic oil rig), humorous mimicry of advertising’s use of romance, and campy style make *Vault* a sophisticated remake of the standard boy-meets-girl, boy-loses-girl scenario.

As revisionists, women must also contend with the issue of their compliance with the social norms that have allowed the patriarchal mechanism of western culture to remain intact for so long. This is a difficult and complex issue, which the curators address in this exhibition with a program called “The Double Bind.” Here, “Romance is treated as a sadomasochistic exchange, part of a larger psycho/social dialectic of power within which the protagonists are unwittingly trapped.” Perhaps the most interesting example of this mode is the work of Cecelia Condit, a video artist from Ohio who has been noticed recently for her tape *Possibly in Michigan*. Condit

uses a dense, convoluted style to construct macabre, often unnerving narratives. Although *Possibly in Michigan* and *Beneath the Skin*, both of which were included in this show, can be easily categorized as feminist tapes, closer scrutiny reveals that neither work is simple or straightforward. In *Beneath the Skin*, a young woman describes in incredulous fashion how she discovered that her boyfriend had been arrested for the murder of his previous girlfriend. This naïve narration is heightened by Condit’s elusive visuals intercutting morbid imagery of corpses with a young woman lying on a bed, all of which underscore the protagonist’s identification with the dead girlfriend and her excitement at her proximity to danger, while the singsong sound track that characterizes Condit’s work chants “Tell us about Barbie and Ken and how their friendship never ends . . .”

*Possibly in Michigan* takes these thorny issues even further with two women who “have two things in common—violence and perfume.” The tape begins in a shopping mall, where the two women try out perfumes and are pursued by a man who alternately bears the head of a wolf, rabbit, or frog. When he follows one of the women home, they band together and kill him, eventually making him into their evening meal in a reverse fairy tale that often alludes to childhood fantasies of Little Red Riding Hood and The Three Little Pigs. Condit’s imagery is vivid and unusual—the two women dance with a series of men with animal heads in a nightmarish party scene, and superimpositions of deathlike imagery weave all kinds of allusions to the relationship of sex and death and the roles of victim and perpetrator. Her heroines are hardly role models—both evoke vapidness and eroticism (they eat their prey while naked), and Condit never lets us see either sex as expressly the victims or oppressors; her men are violent, but her women “have a habit of making the violence seem like the man’s idea.” The do-unto-them-as-they-did-unto-us undercurrent of the tape is only mockingly angry. The sound track singing “I bite at the hand that feeds me” and images of falling buildings and fleeing figures give one an elusive feeling of chaos and confusion, a funny yet unfunny realization that this male/female interaction is doomed, which ultimately brings a subtle and creepy sense of despair into the tape.

Another work categorized by Podheiser as “Double Bind” is *Mother*, a stylized film-noir detective story by John Knoop and Sharon Hennessey. The tape is a very smooth, well-acted drama, beautifully framed in black and

white, about a woman who kills her unfaithful husband in a rage one night and buries him in the garden. As the story unfolds, she gets involved in a romance with a chauvinist police detective who catches on pretty fast that she has something to hide. Ultimately, he uses his knowledge to blackmail her into subservience, and it becomes apparent that she has replaced one cruel tyrant with another. Podheiser describes *Mother* as being set apart from the traditions of film noir because of its emphasis on the woman's perspective, but the tape is finally much more concerned with stylistic issues than with women's issues, and I would be hard put to think of it as feminist. The antiheroes typical of film noir make it merely a well-done genre piece.

To round out this exhibition stylistically, the curators conclude it with Eleanor Antin's *The Adventures of a Nurse*, a performance/paper-doll theater piece that adheres to the long-drawn-out pace of extended avant-garde performance (it was made in 1976) rather than to the television-influenced time frame of the other, more recent, tapes. Antin animates her narrative in a small enclosed space while wearing a nurse's uniform and uses paper dolls for her characters. Her main character, nurse Eleanor, the epitome of the unsuspecting yet complicitous victim, is seduced and used by various male characters throughout the course of the drama and seems to learn nothing. As performance, Antin's piece has some interesting qualities—she mimics each character's voice and moves her dolls like a young girl fantasizing at play, arousing our voyeuristic tendencies. One can imagine that this piece might work if seen live, but as a sixty-four-minute videotape it has a stifled pace that undermines the kinky-ness of Antin's performance. The flatness of the video image reduces this voyeuristic adult play to very difficult viewing, and even its vague curatorial category, "Video Picaresque," suggests that the curators did not entirely define where it fit into their show.

*Revising Romance* is ambitious in its premise. The AFA, which some would regard as representing the uptown art establishment, has distributed other video exhibitions, notably the Whitney Biennial selections, but this is its first serious attempt to showcase feminist videotapes. There are problems with the show: the tape selection seems unbalanced (why have two relatively similar videotapes by both Broughel and Condit and such a deliberately long piece like Antin's in a relatively short—four-hour—show, or one early work in a program of recent tapes?); nevertheless, it is an intelligent beginning to defin-

ing the revisionist aspect of women's narratives.

*Revising Romance* is subtitled *New Feminist Video*, and it is interesting to examine what this show represents about new feminist work. The unclassifiable and diverse aspects of these tapes attest to the fact that although many of these works were not consciously created as feminist pieces, they are inherently so. In lieu of the didactic nature of much early feminist work, these tapes incorporate feminist beliefs and values in narratives and what are often deconstructions of the cultural systems that affect the status of women.

The redefinition of an exclusive cultural mythology quite often centers on the most glaring of cultural symptoms—the media. As Norman Yonemoto says, "Our work says that media does affect the way people see their own personal lives, their own love affairs." In fact, in *Revising Romance* there seems to be a preoccupation with the power of media and popular culture—advertisements, romance novels, TV soap operas, and so forth—to shape traditional sexual identities. Certainly television and its pop-culture companions are the most influential and pervasive purveyors of narrative in our culture, but one wonders whether the vernacular is really the only language construct to be examined or whether it is merely the most obvious.

Some postmodern theoreticians define the postmodern condition as a loss of narrative's social function, and Craig Owens elucidates the demise of modernism's "master narrative" (a term defined by Fredric Jameson): "For what made the *grands récits* of modernity master narratives if not the fact that they were all narratives of mastery, of man seeking his telos in the conquest of nature? What function did these narratives play other than to legitimize Western man's self-appointed mission of transforming the entire planet in his own image?" In this context, the quest of women artists to revise the presumptions and hierarchies of narrative takes on a particular relevance and importance. As Podheiser writes in her introduction, "[The woman artist's] voice or persona literally appears in several works, and while she may share much with the heroines and spectators of Romance, she is preparing a different road: having taken control of her active fantasy life, her work of imagination may help redefine Romance for us all."

#### Note

This is a revised version of part of an article entitled "Feminist Video: Reiterating the Difference," published in *Afterimage*, Vol. 12 No. 9 (April 1985).

1 Craig Owens, "The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism," *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, Port Townsend, Washington, 1983.

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**Exhibition Schedule:** August 28–October 12, 1986, Dalhousie Art Gallery, Dalhousie University, Halifax, N.S., Canada; September 29–October 20, Real Art Ways, Hartford, Conn.; October 18 and 19, Eastern Women's Studies Association, Montclair, N.J.; October 30–November 6, Webster University, St. Louis, Mo. (The foregoing is the latest schedule available at press time.)

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