Video
Spaces:
Eight Installations
by Barbara London

The Museum of Modern Art
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Osa Brown, Director of Publications

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Introduction by Samuel R. Delany

"Video Spaces" by Barbara London

Judith Barry/Brad Miskell

Stan Douglas

Teiji Furuhashi

Gary Hill

Chris Marker

Marcel Odenbach

Tony Oursler

Bill Viola

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Bibliography
In recent years video has merged with such fields as architecture, sculpture, and performance to create a dynamic new art form: video installation. Video Spaces: Eight Installations is the first exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art to feature some of the world's most recognized innovators in this area.

The organization of this exhibition has been a stimulating and rewarding experience, enriched by the wit of the artists themselves. I would like to thank Judith Barry and Brad Minkel, Stan Douglas, Teiji Furushashi, Gary Hill, Chris Marker, Marcel Odenbach, Tony Oursler, and Bill Viola, who have been involved in every phase of the project. Not only is their work visually and conceptually insightful but they are congenial collaborators as well.

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—B.L.
Introduction
by Samuel R. Delany

I began reading science fiction well back in elementary school, toward the start of the 1950s. An experience I connect with that early reading is a visit to The Museum of Modern art in the seventh or eighth grade. The piece in the Museum that struck me most forcefully as a child (a child who had been reading science fiction stories for a year or two) was Thomas Wilfred’s Vertical Sequence, Op. 337 (1941), one of a series of works he called Lumia compositions.

Vertical Sequence stood in the middle of one of the side galleries—a small box, on one side of which was a translucent glass screen. On this surface, propelled by hidden mirrors, lenses, lights, and mechanical motors within the box, colors swirled, drifted, vanished, and reappeared in synplex, attenuated slow motion. Vertical Sequence was the piece I and my classmates talked about after we left the Museum, the piece we urged all our friends to see. It wasn’t quite a painting. It didn’t hang on a wall. Though it stood free in the center of a room, it wasn’t a sculpture: the part you paid attention to comprised images on a flat surface. For a long time Vertical Sequence had its own small, darkened gallery—like a contemporary installation. Although clearly the movement on the screen was created by mechanical means (if you put your ear against it, you could just make out the whirr of motors), rather than electronic circuitry, it seemed—at least to the child’s eye—to have something to do with television, which had only recently become widely available.

Science fiction has always come to us in two forms. The first and more significant is the written form, which ranges from the swashbuckling adventures of "Doc" Smith and the semiliberal Colonel S. P. Meek, to the sophisticated and verbally rich work of Stanley G. Weinbaum, Cordwainer Smith, Alfred Bester, Theodore Sturgeon, Joanna Russ, and Thomas M. Disch. Second is the visual form—commercial comics and films—in which any concern for clear observation of the world is lost to the overwhelming fear of placing any intellectual strain on the audience. From time to time the visual form does produce an interesting surface—for example, in comic-book illustrator Alex Raymond’s Flash Gordon series, or in filmmaker George Lucas’s Star Wars trilogy. What keeps this surface from amusing any substantial conceptual weight is its producers’ fear of the audience’s response should that surface ever display any identifiable ideas. The popular notions connected with science fiction—the special effects of "sci-fi"—come almost entirely from this second form. The worth and significance of the field come entirely from the first, even when the occasional reader, excited by ideas generated by the written form, applies them in interesting ways to some of the visual surfaces produced by the second. It is worth noting, then, that the young people who were excited by Vertical Sequence were science fiction readers, not viewers. (The real descendants of Wilfred’s Lumia compositions are the "flight shows" that accompanied rock concerts throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Though many of these are now computerized—and video has certainly made its inroads here as well—most of the effects, like those of Vertical Sequence, are still largely created using mechanical means.)

In John Varley’s fine science fiction story The Phantom Karsous (1974), weather sculptors create marvelous weather "symphonies," using computers, dry ice, and explosions to create tornadoes, lightning bolts, and cloud formations that move back and forth across the sun over the course of a few hours or
animal through the video window, we sense that we are looking out. (Put clothes on the animal, however, such as we find on William Wegman’s dogs, and once more we are looking in.) The fluidity of the image and sound, plus the mobility or absence of the frame itself, suggests shifting and mystical (aloof more gen.) an imaginary architecture through whose floating and flickering corridors, closets, and gardens the video experience moves us, as the video window changes and its image shift. But some aesthetic current of our lives always passes through conceptual houses, buildings, cities we can never see—invisible cities that can only be manifested, to whatever ghostly extent, by technology.

Beginning as an accommodation for art that erupted beyond the physical confines ordinarily associated with the picture frame and the pedestal, the video installation collapses the distinction between painting (images presented along a wall) and sculpture (images standing free of those walls and commanding space and air), between interior and exterior, present and future. Paradoxically, science fiction is rarely about time. And it is almost never about space. It takes both as given, infinitely extendable categories, pictured as almost who need not be control—and thus almost wholly unproblematic, even invisible. (It is often about what you can find in them—the specifics of history—but that is something else.) What science fiction often is about is scale, and it uses the infinite fields of time and space to reimagine the past as well as the future.

Two characteristics that video shares with much more contemporary art, especially installation art, are a lack of permanence—the “timelessness” that for so long has seemed essential to “serious” art—and movement—that motion in excess of the contained cycles and oscillations of the mobile, the sweep of movement and image that film, video, and certain large-scale mechanisms alone can provide. When such motion enters the exhibition space, it excludes a certain concept of history as a static moment to be considered, in all its elements, like a dioramic re-creation. We’re still learning what concept of history is freed into play by these mobile images. But even as we are learning how to read them, my suspicion is that underlying them is a concept of history far more complex than most of us are used to.

What is valuable about science fiction is not that it predicts new things (thus presumably giving the reader a running head start on the rest of us) but rather that it presents a range of possibilities (the vast majority of which never come about) that exercise and open up the imagination. Consequently, the new things that do appear—whether in art, technology, or in social affairs—are easier for such readers to fit into their existing world views. It gives us vivid, immediate, and luminous images of new or alternate possibilities—and invites us to describe, to assess, to judge, to reexamine, and to interrogate. So, too, in their installations, the artists of Video Spaces use a great variety of technological and aesthetic underpinnings, as well as acquired skills and knowledge, to make new images, and new experiences, and to pose new questions. Only an exploration sensitive to the discourse of the times can begin to fix their import—something that can only be suggested by criticism, something that can be experienced only by standing before, and moving about in, the works themselves.

Note

1 I tend to look at science fiction as a more linguistic phenomenon, as a way of making certain sentences make sense and decoding others that would otherwise be ambiguous. For example: “Her world exploded.” Read as ordinary fiction, it is a metaphor for a female character’s heightened emotional state. Read as science fiction, it could mean that the planet on which she lived blew up.
Video as an art form began in the mid-1960s, when portable video equipment became available in the consumer market. Until that time the medium had been restricted to well-lit television studios, with their heavy, two-inch video apparatus and teams of engineers. Not that users had an easy time with the Portapak. It consisted of a bulky recording deck, battery pack, and cumbersome camera, and the half-inch tape, stored on open reels, was awkward to operate. Still, artists found the Portapak affordable, and the ability to record in ambient light made the medium attractive. They recognized that video was wide open, with promising artistic potential. During the subsequent thirty years the field has expanded to include a variety of forms, most notably single-channel videotapes, video sculptures, and environmental installations. This introduction serves as a historical context for the artists in Video Spaces, and highlights their participation in the development of the medium.

In the early days, some artists adopted video as their primary vehicle, while others incorporated it into areas such as sculpture, dance, performance, and conceptual art. For example, in the droll videotape John Baldessari Reads Sol LeWitt (1972), Baldessari faces the camera and in a deadpan voice says, "I'd like to sing for you some of the sentences Sol LeWitt has written on Conceptual art." He begins off-key: "Conceptual artists are mystics rather than rationalists. They leap to conclusions that logic cannot reach." Then, to the tune of "The Fox Two," he continues: "Formal art is essentially rational." The barebones presentation and straightforward delivery suggest that the artist felt unconstrained by this new medium.

Richard Serra, already well known for his "process" sculpture, became involved with a group of sculptors and performance artists who were experimenting with video in the early 1970s. In Surprise Attack (1973), the sculptor's lower arms appear on the screen. He slams a lead ingot from hand to hand, declaiming a text taken from The Strategy of Conflict (1960) by sociologist Thomas C. Schelling. The rhythm of the words becomes more and more emphatic, matching the vehement thrust of Serra's hands. Video's black-and-white imagery, low resolution, and defined space are suited to examining this kind of simple action.

Dancers who worked with video developed specific forms of choreography for the "camera space"—the small area directly in front of the camera. Merce Cunningham, Tisha Brown, and Simone Forti defined the field of view of the monitor. In some cases putting tape on the floor—and in effect, the video frame became a prosenium. The fact that dancers were able to see themselves "live" on a monitor also contributed to the emergence of new kinds of productions. In Blue Studio (1975), five Merce Cunningham's perform together as a "corps" in the same space without falling over each other—a dance that can exist only as video.

One of the few artists who has moved fluidly between video and other mediums is Bruce Nauman. Throughout his exten-
Pauk was seeking a serendipitous juxtaposition of images.

Technical factors initially made it difficult for museums to exhibit video. Reel-to-reel tape decks required someone to thread up, start, and rewind each tape. Video was first presented at The Museum of Modern Art in the 1968 exhibition The Machine as Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age. The show was mainly about kinetic art, but it included Pauk and many other artists working in electronic media. Pauk turned his Lindsay Tape of 1967 into an installation by rigging an endless-loop device. He set an open-reel, half-inch playback deck on the floor several feet away from a sewing machine bobbin and spool, and ran the spliced tape between them. This loop anticipated the videocassette.

The following year, TV as a Creative Medium, the first exhibition in the United States devoted exclusively to video art, was presented at the Howard Wise Gallery in New York. The show emphasized the machinery of video rather than its images. Pauk presented several of his television sculptures, and Frank Gillette and Ira Schneider showed Wipe Cycle (1969), a work of nine monitors arranged in a grid. This early “video wall” combined both live and delayed coverage of the comings and goings in the gallery, intercut with commercial television programs. In keeping with the contemporaneous influence of Marshall McLuhan, the medium, not the content, was the message.

In the late 1960s, artists such as Woody and Steina Vasulka were seeing what they could coax out of video technology itself. The Vasulkas manipulated the video signal directly, bypassing the camera-recorded world. Their images were based on the wave form of the video signal, modulated by the sound component. Their work, cluttered with video paraphernalia and secondhand computer components, became a gathering spot where friends showed their new videotapes.

Before long, the crowds became too large, and the Vasulkas moved the screenings to the basement kitchen of the Mercer Art Center. When the building collapsed in 1973, the Electronic Kitchen moved to Soho, where it flourished as The Kitchen Center for Video, Music, and Dance. Climbing the dark stairway to this lively alternative space, visitors were never too sure what they might encounter: aggressive political activity, the first Women’s Video Festival, or the latest breakthrough in video installation or performance art—or some amalgamation of them. Still today, with the proliferation of overlapping art forms, it can be difficult to categorize these artworks.

A number of artists were intrigued by the nature of video as a light-beam medium. Like film, video uses light directly to convey the image. Mary Lucier was inspired to treat this light as a physical material. In live performances at The Kitchen, Lucier aimed her camera at stationary lasers, burning pencil-thin lines into the camera tube. The burned-in traces appeared as scars in subsequent live camera shots of the audience. Bill Viola investigated the transient nature of the light-transmitted image. In Daisy Time (1974), a strobe intermittently illuminated a dark room. Only for an instant did a camera positioned in the room have enough light to form a likeness of the viewer, which appeared as a life-size projection on the wall. An image was born, flashed before the viewer’s eyes, then died in blackness. The representation endured only in the memory of the viewer.

At the Anthology Film Archives, another alternative space in New York, the video sculptor Shigeko Kubota organized a weekly forum where artists gathered to show their works-in-progress. During this formative time, many video works resembled sketches, in that they...
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were stages of problem-solving and focused on single ideas. In one short videotape, Gary Hill gives words tangibility by showing a small speaker vibrating to his spoken text. In another study, abstract forms metamorphose into recognizable shapes as Hill recites a series of double entendres. Joan Jonas’s work at this time involved the interaction between live performance and recorded actions, shown simultaneously on several monitors on stage. Like many other artists, Jonas developed each project as three separate units—a performance, an installation, and a videotape for distribution.

The introduction of the 3½-inch video-cassette in the early 1970s made it feasible to exhibit and distribute video to a wide audience. Within a short time, a new museum position—video curator—came into being, when David Ross joined the staff of the Everson Museum of Art in Syracuse. With youthful enthusiasm, Ross promoted video as the art of today and of the future. This theme was echoed at an international exhibition in 1975, organized by the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia. Video Art surveyed videotapes and video installations from North America, South America, Japan, and Europe. Many museums in North America and Europe subsequently initiated video exhibition programs, and a literature began to form around the work. In concert with these developments, artists advanced from the production of relatively simple works to projects that were thematically sophisticated. Two classic works raised issues that have remained central to video over the last twenty years. Present Continuous Past (1974), an installation by Dan Graham, consisted of two adjacent rooms lined with mirrors. Viewers had endless opportunities to see themselves reflected "now," while simultaneously seeing on a monitor their actions of moments before. The video delay collapsed the past into the present, distorting the normal seriality of events. Space too, was rearranged, rendered discontinuous in this infinity box of mirrors. For o.m. (1974), Peter Campus used a camera and projector to confront viewers with live images of their faces projected upside-down, directly onto a wall. In the darkened room, the enlarged, high-contrast images provoked viewers to interact with their "portraits." No matter how they turned their heads or changed their facial expressions, they were startled by the blunt, relentless portraits of themselves. The expressive possibilities of interactivity engendered other imaginative installations involving viewer response. However, today, in the intersecting fields of video and computers, evolving in the form of multimedia, interactivity is at a primitive level where little work has gone beyond button-pushing. Video, like most human activities, has not escaped the embrace of politics. Participants in the women’s movement, which began its current phase at roughly the same time as video, found the medium accessible. With no established bureaucracy or history, video allowed artists to find room and jump right in. On the West Coast, Judith Barry engaged in a theoretically informed feminism, interpreting femininity and masculinity not as separate but as social constructs based on race, class, and language. In Barry's Kaleidoscope (1979), a series of vignettes about "typical" family life, characters mime feminist theory. One amusing scene depicts a couple—ostensibly a woman and a man—in bed. Before long, viewers realize that these are two women leaning against pillows tossed at a wall, behind bead sheets hung on a clothesline. In a more damning attack on how women are portrayed in the mass media, Dara Birnbaum exposed some of the propaganda techniques of advertising. In P.K. Magazine (1982), she appropriated a frame from a familiar television commercial of a pretty secretary seated at a computer and blew it up into a larger-than-life wall panel. The computer-screen image was cut out of the panel and replaced by a real monitor showing female stereotypes in clips from commercials. One sequence featured a cute little girl eating an ice-cream cone, a future woman who, it was hoped, would grow up to a more expansive professional world where good looks would not predominate over competence or other values. The widespread creative activity was coupled with rapid advances in video technology. Nam June Paik’s old "image processor" evolved into a sophisticated studio device known as the "Harpy," later refined as the "Henry." Frame-accurate video editing became available on ¼-inch tape machines. The glossier work that emerged found support from funding institutions and was frequently shown on public television. Many artists who followed this path later assumed careers in advertising, Hollywood, or with MTV. Other artists showed their work at museums and alternative galleries, and distributed their tapes through newly created, independent associations.

The division between these more-or-less distinct camps was evident in The Luminous Image, an exhibition presented at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, in 1984. The show featured "new music" composer Brian Eno’s Video: Paintings and Sculptures (1984), a relaxing installation for MTV fans seeking bliss. By contrast, Tony Oursler’s assemblage LE SIS (1984) explored the periphery of the national world. In a space ringed by cardboard cutouts of skyscrapers, clips of children playing with "say guns," drawings of aliens, and futuristic stories acted out by lurid clay figures were reflected off tinted water and through broken glass. The work demonstrated a common ground between science fiction, alien visitations, and children’s fantasies. Al Robbins, in Realities 1 to 10 in Electronic Prirmings (1984), focused on a low-tech aspect of video. Viewers had to stumble over cables and other electronic rubble to follow Robbins’s daisy-chain of images. Starting with old footage of Cape Cod on a monitor, a camera captured this image and fed it to another monitor. This image in turn was captured by another camera, and so on, until the original recording faded away and became pure light. One of the first exhibitions to open up a dialogue between still photography and the moving image of film and video was Pasages de l’image at the Musée National d’Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, in 1990. The installation by Chris Marker, although featuring videotapes, had the directness and charm of a family photo album. For years, Marker has carried a camera in order to record his own experiences and document the everyday challenges that ordinary people encounter. In Zapping Zone (1990), he filmed dozens of monitors, arranged in an island in the center of the room, with personal recordings and computer-generated drawings. In Marcel Odenbach’s installation Die Einen den Andern (One or the Other) (1987), images from German opera—which for Odenbach epitomized bourgeois culture and traditional mythologies—were framed in such a way that the viewer became a voyer, peering through a doorway into the artist’s quest for his own history. In Japan, whose craft has traditionally been emphasized over content, video artists have found support largely through commercial organizations. Spiral, a Tokyo complex that comprises a restaurant, gallery, and theater, as well as shops, is a trendy venue for contemporary art and video. In 1990 Spiral sponsored the performance pit by the group Dumb Type, p.i.f. orchestrated electronic equipment and performers in a parody of the segmentation of Japanese society. The set brought to mind the
inside of a plant photocopier, with numerous projected images and large metal frames sweeping across the stage. If performers missed a beat, the frames hit them in the shin or on the head. Teiji Funahashi, the leader of the group, represented an unfettered spirit by whizzing across the space on a skateboard. Dumb Type's work fluidly incorporates video, computers, dance, and theater. Their performances demonstrate how little remains of the boundaries between art disciplines in the late twentieth century.

The maturity that video as an art form had attained by the early 1990s was evident at the international survey exhibition Documenta IX, in Kassel, Germany, in 1992. Unlike Documenta VII (1977) or Documenta VIII (1984), the numerous video installations here were on an equal footing with painting and sculpture throughout the many pavilions. Video works by artists from Europe, North and South America, and Asia were shown, and included in the main building were installations by Stan Douglas, Gary Hill, Tony Oursler, and Bill Viola.

When the Portapak was introduced to the consumer market, it was impossible to predict to what extent video would be an effective means of artistic expression. Of the artists who explored the medium, many found it crude and did not persist. Others persevered, though they could never have foreseen the technological advances that in time would enable them to do what they wanted. The novelty appealed to their pioneer spirit, and every enhancement in the camera or tape deck was an occasion for passionate debate and further discovery. Fuelled by this energy, video exploded in many different directions. Artists searched for and found the forms most suited to the medium, often in combination with other disciplines. In the process they acquired a technical facility that allowed them to deal with content in sophisticated ways.

In recent years video installation and video sculpture have emerged as the most fertile forms of video art. By releasing the image from a single screen and embedding it in an environment, artists have extended their installations in time and space. The direct connection to another moment and an external location is unique to the video installation. Video Space: Eight Installations is an international selection of new projects by artists whose primary activity is in environmental video. Their work exhibits a distinctive visual vocabulary and style that exemplifies the current state of video.

Judith Barry/Brad Miskell

A battered wooden crate is ready for the garbage pickers. Bold black letters stencilled across its sides identify the crate as having belonged to the HasellCell Corporation. Spilled out through missing slats are abandoned computer monitors and keyboards, dusty disk drives, and other high-tech detritus. The contents are weebled together with a labyrinthine maze of assorted wires and tubing. The computer components and cards twitch and groan, and light flickers on the screens. It is like a cyborg made up of secondhand parts, or an entity from outer space that has just crash-landed in a dumpster and is crawling out, not quite having gotten all of its pieces back together.

Cyborgs are usually thought of as biological beings modified for life in a non-Earth environment, their organs and appendages replaced by mechanical parts. They are represented as high-tech, sporting shiny patina. HasellCell (1994), a rough-and-tumble assemblage antithetical to this conventional image, evokes a curious comparison with an astronaut. This "moonwalking" resembles a cyborg, in that it is a human being within a non-organic outer shell of engineered fabric and tubular ing. Generally thought of as synonymous with leading-edge technology, the astronaut is actually awkward in its movements, even clumsy. Though the astronaut and its gear may be considered advanced today, in the near future it will look as obsolete as Judith Barry and Brad Miskell's components do now.

Like the cyborg, HasellCell also has fleshly parts. A fragile apparatus—a blue plastic sack that inflates and deflates like a lung—seems to have wriggled out onto the floor. A phalus expands and contracts through a hole in the wood container. These whimsical elements suggest that this is the dawn of the do-it-yourself Heath Kit era of creating living things.

Another kind of assemblage, Dr. Frankenstein's monster, is not at all amusing. In the early nineteenth century, author Mary Shelley was inspired by the work of contemporary scientists, who were then undertaking the first experiments on the human nervous system. In Shelley's story, when the monster comes to life, Dr. Frankenstein is so repulsed by its appearance that he flees the room in terror. Although Shelley refers to fright skin and watery yellow eyes, she is unable to convey what makes the monster so horrific. Yet, at a time when science had just begun tinkering with human biology, she clearly foresaw the fear aroused by what is now known as genetic engineering.

Modern culture has different ways of diminishing the apprehension resulting from biological experimentation and its consequences. Today, television programs present a benign Dr. Frankenstein's monster. Cosmetically rendered, with bolts poking out of his head, he doesn't even frighten children. It is an image that mocks our fears, a figure appropriate to an age when people adjust their body parts as readily as they upgrade their computer software.

Embodied messages and bits of computer code stream across HasellCell's computer screens, as if crossed-life forms were communicating with one another: "Mem-shift creates discomfort." "Test indicates viral presence but no antibiotics." "I was barely twenty seconds old."

When I was raped by my father's best friend, an SGI Iridium "5 with a ferocious hard drive and ten cruel grips of RAM." At times the text reads as an assemblage of random phrases at others, as personal narratives. One interchange seems to be occurring between a group of subculture and the HasellCell Corporation, which is trying to recover stolen materials. This blurring of the mechanical and the human suggests that the computer in HasellCell have passed the " Turing test." (Initiated by the Boston Computer Museum, this test, named for mathematician Alan Turing, is held annually to determine whether a computer—a "thinking machine"—has progressed to the point where it is indistinguishable from the human brain. No machine has yet passed the Turing test as structured in Boston.)

Postwar American society, living under the threat of nuclear annihilation, was strongly ambivalent about the bounty of new technology. This attitude has changed in recent years, as the public has fallen in love with the personal computer. HasellCell's folky "creature" promotes a sense of ease with technology while cautioning against the current inclination toward an all-out embrace.

Stan Douglas

Once upon a time, watching the evening news was a ritual. The entire family sat down together and looked at television while nibbling frozen dinners. Part of the networks' mandate was to deliver information and to instruct. Having begun their careers in radio, most television newscasters did not see themselves as performers. Edward R. Murrow, for example, believed he had a duty to educate the viewer. Then things changed.

Evening (1994), by Stan Douglas, considers American television of the late 1960s, when the networks became less concerned with the editorial content of their newscasts than with enhancing the stardom of their anchors. Douglas's installation is centered around WSC, which is based on the station in Chicago that initi-
vented the concept of "happy news," and two other fictional stations in that city, WMBB and WAMO. The stations are repre-

tented by three large video images projected onto individual screens mounted side by side on a long wall. Using archival clips, Douglas follows nine developing news stories from 1969 and 1970. The contemporary footage is in color, while the archival material projected behind the anchors is in black-and-white. The sparse set design and rough edits are faithful to the production values of the time.

The news anchors, portrayed by actors, real material scripted by the artist. Beginning in union with "Good evening, this is the evening news," they proceed with their separate reports. The anchors wear uniform happy faces, no matter how horrifying or inconsequential the events they are covering. Between reports on the trial of the Chicago Seven, the Vietnam War, and the investigation into the murder of local Black Panther Party leader Fred Hampton, the stations' directors cut between human-interest stories and bantering among the newscasters. This was "indulgence" before there was a word for it.

In front of each screen, an umbrella speaker directs the sound from the corresponding track downward. Standing under the WCLL speaker dome, it is easy to keep score politically: Abby Hoffman is a buffoon, Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., is a thief, and the heart transplant surgeon Dr. Christian Barnard is a savior. The trial of Lieutenant William L. Calley, Jr., changed in the My Lai massacre, is dismissed as just one of those stories from the 1960s that won't go away.

Moving into the sound space of other "stations," viewers may compare presentations of the same news feature. WMBB's approach to the Calley story is to emphasize the philosophical and public-relations problems that the massacre raised for the American military. In another issued addressed, Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm puts the controversial Black Panthers in perspective, noting that they are not the Communist menace James E. Hoover believes them to be. For the most part, WMBB maintains a more traditional, paternalistic tone. WAMO features "happy talk," and WAMO falls somewhere between the two. However, all of them soften the coverage of disturbing news by removing the sharp edges.

When viewers stand back some distance from the screens and the speaker pods, the sound becomes indistinct. Key names and words—"J. Edgar Hoover," "radicals," "murderer"—merge in a polyphonic soundscape similar to concrete poetry. When viewed from this distance—both in time and space—the noise, a few vague memories and catchwords, is an appropriate distillation of the public that is presented as journalism on television.

Douglas's cool, analytical approach to the media is fundamental to his work. In "Horse-camouflage" (1992), several African-American musicians who reside in Europe are shown jamming. Their recorded sessions projected on both sides of a large, free-standing screen. The installation focuses on the formality and elegance of the presentation rather than on the beat of the music. By taking the music out of its established context—the smoky nightclub—Douglas suggests a new way of thinking about the soul of jazz.

This restraint also informs the way Douglas treats the medium in "Evening." He does not castigate them for their pernicious effect on the news—turning it into a ratings game—but simply denotes commercial time slots with the words "PLACE AD HERE." This minimal statement puts the burden on the viewer to develop the thought. In this understated manner, Douglas expresses the civilization's yearning for a humane and rational world.

Teiji Furuhashi

"Lover" is a common word, and lovers are a popular subject in art. As an image, a pair of lovers often suggests a castle of exclusion. With the sexual liberation of the last few decades, the word now has more to do with physical coupling than with the sublimity of "true love." AIDS has added a new dimension of wraithiness to this pairing.

The life-size dancers in Teiji Furuhashi's "Lovers (1994)" are drained of life. Projected onto the black walls of a square room, the naked figures have a spectral quality. Their movements are simple and repetitive. Back and forth, they walk and run and move with animal grace. After a while, their actions become familiar, so that it is a surprise when two of the translucent bodies come together in a virtual embrace. These ostensible lovers—more overlapping than touch-
ing—are not physically entwined.

Unlike much contemporary Japanese art, Furuhashi's work has a political edge. With fellow members of Dumb Type, a Kyoto-based performance group, he combines video, performance, music, printed matter, and installation to expand the expressive possibilities of art. Fantastical and ironic, the group presents a spirited but ultimately somber view. Their acerbic work directs attention to a society—that of Japan—overloaded with information—yet seemingly relishing its technomania.

Dumb Type's work is beholden to Anshu Butch, which is a confrontational form of avant-garde dance in Japan. Meaning the "dance of utter darkness," Butch dates back to the late 1950s, and is still quite popular. Its creator, Tatsumi Hijikata, searched for something authentic to be fashioned out of Japanese tradition. Thus, Butch exposes the dark, hidden side that Hijikata felt had been submerged in a contemporary society influenced by European and American culture. Highlighting bad taste, the banal, and the embarrassing, Butch creates images of a wasteland peopled by naked, spastic bodies whitened with rice powder. Like the grimacing ghosts found in Nob theater, Butch exists in a nightmare between reality and illusion. While today Butch has lost its relevance, Dumb Type's approach has become more pertinent in challenging the diminished humanity of the information age.

Lovers has a two-part soundscape. When the running figures stop and pause, the air is filled with whispered, indistin-
guishable phrases, as if a murmuring audience has clustered somewhere in the distance, their voices hushed in awe of the event they are witnessing. A series of metallic "ting" in the aural foreground resembles the beeps of hospital diagnos
tic machines. The overall impression is one of tentativeness—possibly hopeful, but perhaps not.

In contrast to the etiolated sounds, words of admonishment float across the black walls: "Love is everywhere," "Fear," "Don't fuck with me, fella, use your imagination," "Do not cross this line or jump over." The slowly evolving phrases strike with the power of graffiti, connecting the work to everyday life. At the same time, a gold vertical line, scaled to the human


Dumb Type. Perf. Performance at the Brooklyn Bridge Anchorsport, New York. 1992
body, moves toward a horizontal line approaching from the opposite direction. They merge briefly, to resemble the cross hairs of a weapon’s sight. From facing walls, projections of the word “limit” stream toward each other, self-consciously couple, then separate. This echoes the movements of the two lovers, who at other times briefly overlap.

A touching moment of Lovers occurs when the installation is not crowded. One of the videotaped figures—Furushashi—stops and seeks out a lone viewer. He pauses and faces this person with arms outstretched. The gesture is not a beckoning one; rather, the artist is assuming a beatific pose. He appears vulnerable and exposed. Then, as if on a precipice, he falls backward into the unknown, accepting his fate. In reaching out to a single viewer in a direct, personal manner, Furushashi believes the notion that the human spirit must necessarily be overwhelmed by the juggernaut of technology.

Gary Hill

The first time Gary Hill arrived to install Inasmuch as It Is Always Already Taking Place (1980) at a museum, he brought close-ups of a body recorded on forty different video loops. He selected sixteen to play on individual monitors—monitors stripped of their outer casings. The monitors, ranging in size from the eyepiece of a camera to the dimensions of an adult rib cage, were set on a shelf recessed five feet into the wall, slightly below eye level. Hill ran each loop on a screen that matched the size of the particular section of the body recorded on the tape. As he positioned the monitors, moving them around with the objectivity of a window dresser, it seemed he was actually handling parts of a living body: a soft belly that rose and fell with each breath, a quadrant of a face with a peering eye like that of a bird warily watching an interloper.

The components of the body displayed in Inasmuch—Hill’s own—are without any apparent distinction. Neither Adonis nor trill, neither fresh nor livened with age, the body, suits the endless loops, suggesting that it exists outside of time, without past or future.

The arrangement of the rasters does not follow the organization of a human skeleton. Representations of Hill’s ear and ached foot lie side by side; tucked modestly behind them is an image of his groin. Within this unassuming configuration, each raster invites meditation. For example, on one screen a rough thumb toys with the corner of a book page. In its repetition, the simple action of lifting and setting down the page functions like a close-up in a movie. Further, by concentrating the viewer’s attention on such a rudimentary activity, the movement, as in slow-motion replay, takes on the significance of an epic event.

On a twenty-five-size screen, smooth, taut skin stretches over the ridges of bones that shape the human back. The image fills the frame, and the monitor, given its equivalent size, is perceived as part of the body: an enclosure, a vessel, no longer something that simply displays a picture. Raster and image exist as a unified object, as representation, as a living thing.

Long, nervelike black wires attached to each raster are bound together like spinal chords. Snaked along the shelf, the bundles disappear from view at the back of the recess. Although unifying the system of monitors, this electrical network emphasizes that the body parts are presented as extremities, without a unifying torso. The hidden core to which the components of the body are attached serves as a metaphor for a human being’s invisible, existential center: the soul.

Although none of its segments are "still," the installation has the quality of a still life. Typically, the objects in still-life paintings are drawn from everyday life—food and drink, musical instruments, a pipe and tobacco. Their placement appears arbitrary, and they do not communicate with each other. Often set out on a platform or table, the elements are positioned within arm’s reach and appeal to all the senses, especially to touch and taste. Inasmuch has most in common with a vanitas, a category of still life in which the depicted objects are meant to be reminders of the transience of life. In place of the usual skull and extinguished candle, Inasmuch depicts an animate being whose vulnerability underscores the mortality of flesh.

A textured composition of ambient sounds forms an integral part of the installation. For example, the sound of skin being scratched or a tongue clicking inside the mouth, though barely recognizable as such, is orchestrated with recordings of rippling water and softly spoken phrases. Within this uniform soundscape, the looping of the sound-track combines distinctive notes in a pulse that reinforces the living quality of the installation.

In Inasmuch Hill has reduced the requisites for "living" to visceral sounds and, more importantly, physical movement that has no end. However, the ceaseless activity is an illusion, in that each component exists only as a seamless loop of five to thirty seconds in duration. Creating such a loop—one that seems to go on for eternity—involves a bit of trick: The videotaped image has to match exactly in position and in movement, at two places on the tape. The segment between these two shots is cut, and the tape spliced into a loop without a discernible beginning or end. Otherwise, for example, if the thumb were to lift the page and then "jump" back to repeat the action, or if the torso should rise slightly and then abruptly rise again, the piece would become a sort of Sinnepian depiction of endlessly repeated activities.

Inasmuch recalls an age when art was thought to be an illusion, a trick played on the senses. Here, the images are not illusory, but time itself is hidden from the viewer, in the way that segments of time are made to appear limitless. In folding time back on itself, a seemingly simple concept, Hill has fashioned a creature whose humanness poses an existential challenge.

Chris Marker

Chris Marker arrived at a meeting in Paris out of breath, weighted down by heavy canvas satchels slung over his shoulders. These, he explained, contained VHS copies of his favorite classic films, such as Howard Hawk’s Only Angels Have Wings (1939). He was sending these copies of tapes from his personal video library to cinema-starved friends in Bombay the next day. Mischieffully smiling, Marker noted that they were his own re-edited versions. Riddled with what he consider- ed to be tiresome second endings and extraneous scenes, the films are now the way he believes they should be.

This courteous gentleman seems to have creatively reworked his life the way he would edit a film. To begin with, the name of his elusive persona is an Americanized pseudonym. Chris Marker proba- bly was born in 1921 in the outskirts of Paris. He remembers seeing his first movie, a silent one, at the age of seven. He joined the French Resistance in the middle of World War II, then became a paratrooper with the United States Air Force in Germany. He has perpetuated a shadowy existence, and photographs of him are strictly taboo. Always on the go, he easily slips in and out of places inconspic- uously, and quietly observes without attracting attention.

Marker’s first artistic production dates from 1945, when he began a film on postwar Germany using André Bazin’s 16mm film camera. Returning home, he discovered that the lens was broken and out of focus; he then put his film career on hold for nearly a decade. Marker began writing regularly for L’Éspoir, a Marxist- oriented Catholic journal, and for Bazin’s Cahiers du cinéma, a vehicle for the emerging French New Wave. He tried his hand at a new journalistic form, producing a series of travelogues that combined impressionistic journalism with still pho- tography, published by Editions du Seuil.

During the 1950s Marker was part of the Left Bank Movement, an informal group that included filmmakers Alain Resnais, Agnès Varda, and Georges Franju. He made a series of polemical document-
taries with Renais: Les Statues meurent aussi (1956), for example, criticizes the
armature of African art by Western museums. Marker’s sympathies have
always been with ordinary people, whose lives he turns into history, as in his film
Le Joli Mai (1962), in which he solicits the views of Parisians in the aftermath of
the Algerian War.
Marker’s most influential film, La Jetée (1962), reveals the artist’s ambivalence
toward the past. Set in the ruins of Paris after a hypothetical World War III, the
film follows a survivor who is forced to time-travel into both the past and the
future. Granted an option by his captors, the protagonist elects to reside in the
past, only to realize that to do so is equivalent to choosing death.

The installation Silent Movie (1994–95) is a soaring tower of five oversize moni-
tors stacked on top of one another, resembling a vertical filmstrip of five
frames. The teetering structure is stabi-
lized by guy-wires. Marker associates the
overall shape with the visionary building
proposed by Victor and Alexander Vesnin
for the Moscow Bureau of the Leningrad
newspaper Pravda in 1924, and therefore
with the early spirit of the Russian Revolu-
tion. The black-and-white images on
the screens look like clips from the
silent-movie era; the subtitles appear
genuine but are also fabrications, as are
the film posters and glossy pins
attached to adjacent walls. As viewers ponder
the authenticity of the material, they are
drawn into Marker’s reverie on the past.
Marker used video and a computer to
make this work, but he restricted the
visual effects to those available to silent
film directors. These stylistic elements—which include dissolves, superimpositions,
iris, and subtitles—helped define the
nascent art of cinema. For early cine-
magographers, such effects represented
the leading edge of technology; today,
they are charmingly anachronistic.
Marker is attracted to the challenge
of working with a limited visual “palette.”
His redactivist approach is in keeping
with his miniaturized recording and edit-
ing apparatus, which his production crew
does about how the established order
Dealt with its 1968 revolutionary situations.
Footage of shouting crowds and beatings
is intersected with the famous sequence of
the Third Reich’s burning of books
deemed unsuitable for the master race. In
the center of the archival footage shown
on each screen is an inset of a hand
striking the keys of a typewriter. The
staccato cadence of the typing recalls the
sound effect that Movietone News used to
give an urgent pulse to war dispatches in
the 1940s.

A large color video projection occupies
the opposite wall. For the most part it is
a travelogue, shot with a hand-held camera,
of Odenbach’s recent journeys in Thailand.
The huge, grainy images are sensual and
current, in sharp contrast to the artist’s
composite memories of his youth, as
shown on the seven monitors. The smaller,
momochromatic images seem distant, as if
events that have become history have a
diminished reality. They are looped over
and over, like a recurring bad dream.

In the conventionally “exotic” images of
Thailand, topeix prostitutes solicit customers on busy streets, while brightly
robed monks chant their calming
rhythms. At colorful shrines, the sounds of
car horns dropped into metal wasps rever-
berate like temple bells. Within this
panorama, the “West” is present in the
person of a naked Caucasian man being
walked on, in a form of massage. Intercut
with this sunny, languorous footage is
disturbing clips of Germany: skinheads
throwing stones at foreigners, and Asians
and Africans framed in the windows of
their burning homes. The German Oden-
bach presents is somber and violent, the
parallel of warm, ostensibly har-
monious Thailand. However, the scene
of a Thai kick boxer watching CNN coverage
of skinheads on a rampage suggests that
Germany’s internal affairs may manifest
themselves globally in surprising ways.
Odenbach is ambivalent about his cul-
tural history. On the one hand, he feels
comfortable with the idealism of the
1960s, a time of dear objectives and
identifiable programs that people could
really rally around. During that period, the

Inhumanity of Hitler’s Germany seemed
to be a closed chapter in the country’s his-
tory. In light of the recent unsettling
events in Germany, however, the weight of
the past has acquired an oppressive
presence. The current revanchism has
shocked many segments of the society,
and left them uncertain how to react to
the situation. The artist expresses this
feeling in the installation’s title: “To
make a film in the pocket,” a common
German expression for thwarted anger.

On the wall at the entrance to the
installation is a quote from Ingeborg Bach-
man, an Austrian poet and activist who
was influential in the 1960s. In bold let-
ters the text reads: “I am writing with my
burnt hand about the nature of fire.” In
this context, fire becomes emblematic of
the organized violence in German history.
That history and the artist’s search for his
place in it are Odenbach’s subject matter.

Tony Oursler
At the doorway to System for Dramatic
Feedback (1994) stands a collico entity, a
stereoscopic video face projected onto its
cloth head, dver and over again the little
effy cries, “Oh, oh! Oh, no! Oh, no!”
The voice is still and anxious, as if it
were witnessing a harrowing event.
The doll’s emotional demeanor is poigtant,
and the state of alarm is archetypal.
Viewers can empathize, and thereby expe-
rience the trauma. It is an inextinguish-
situation, so powerful that it evokes
nervous laughter among some spectators.
Others simply step back and view the
character as a carnival barker, warning them before they proceed.

Inside the installation, on the wall
opposite the entrance, is a large black-
and-white video projection of an audi-
ence. Young faces stare glazily into the
room, as movie trailer music plays softly.
Munching popcorn and bathed in cinema’s
diluvial glow, these characters are
detached and neutral, waiting silently for
something to happen. They are witnesses to the routines of Oursler’s creations and
to the activity of the viewers within this
theatrical space.
Slightly off to one side is a mound of stuffed, life-size rag dolls. Stitched together out of Salvation Army hand-me-downs, each of these hobo characters is animated by a small video projection that defines one distinct action. At the top of the heap, a disembodied video hand comes down on the posterior of a best-over male figure, hitting him with a loud smack. The hand comes down again and again, as if to signify that there is no escape from the memory of the experience. The resounding slap acts like a metronome, punctuating the effigy's piercing cry, and the musculature of the surrounding figures. From behind the mound, a fat, naked female figure hesitantly lunches forward. She pauses, as if about to do something, then straightens up, only to fall down again. She is trapped in a single psychological state, a character in a nut. In the middle of the mound lies a male figure, a penis protruding from his unzipped pants. It becomes erect, then flaccid, larger and smaller, in an endless cycle without gratification.

At the bottom of Oursler's "mutation pile" lies an atrophied body with a gigantic head that looks as if it fell off a statue. Made of white cloth rather than marble, its distorted video face stares out in anguish from underneath the pile, bearing down on it. The figure is androgynous, and, as with all of Oursler's rag dolls, the video projection is indistinct. This enhances the universality of the doll's emotional states, stimulating the viewer's imagination that much more effectively. Oursler's dolls recall those psychologists give to children in order to allow them to reenact an event and play out their emotions, a therapeutic process through which a frightening experience becomes manageable.

In System for Dramatic Feedback, the dolls express their emotions as ritual acts that inanimate themselves into the viewer's fantasies. The sensation is somewhat like that of watching a popular television "cop" series. The archetypal situation shows the good policeman successfully, if violently, dealing with evil, thus assuaging the public's fears. Whereas standard-ized television programs channel viewers through a narrow range of emotions, Oursler's effigies, lifelike and nonthreatening, beckon them into an open-ended world of the imagination, where the mind is freed to assemble its personal fictions.

Bill Viola

Bill Viola is an investigator of the world of Illusion and its makeup. He feels close to the visionary William Blake, and identifies with this poet's artist's metaphysical travels. The poetry of the Sufi mystic Jalalsuddin Rumi is equally important to Viola. Rumi has the simplicity of someone who has realized his spiritual quest. He has "seen the light," to use a universal metaphor for enlightenment. Viola imparts video images, carried by light, into luminous metaphors of his own.

In the center of Slowly Turning Narrative (1992) is a twelve-foot wall panel rapidly rotating on its vertical axis. One side is mirrored, the other a film screen. Projected onto the revolving wall in black-and-white, an immense visage stares fixedly—a tired face, gazing inward. Projected onto the same revolving wall from the opposite side of the room, a series of colored images—a carnival at night, children playing with fireworks, and an empty suburban mall—are intercut with family scenes and pastoral landscapes. The rotating wall, with the face projected on one side and what might be called mind-images on the other, presents an obvious duality; the surface reality of a person, and behind it, the interiority. The overall impression is of a slowly turning mind absorbed with itself. When the projection of the man's face falls onto the matte screen, it appears in a normal, almost photographic manner. However, when the other images are projected onto the screen, they are fringed with red, green, and blue, blurred like clouded thoughts. Only at one moment, when the broad surface of the wall is exactly perpendicular to the projection, does the scene briefly come into registration. It is as if a veil has been lifted and the vision has become clear. Viola is here referring to the mystic's task, which in spiritual practice is termed "polishing the mirror."

As the wall rotates and the mind-images fall onto the mirror, they break into shards of light and splatter onto the walls of the room. The mind has exploded.

When the facial image is in turn projected onto the mirror, it also shatters and is strewn around the room. The fragments of the face and the fragments of the mind dematerialize. The distinction between outside appearance and inner reality has dissolved.

The work is like a diptych, with one of the panels—the mirror—adding an extra dimension. Viewers see themselves reflected in the glass as clear, still figures. They are frozen in a carnivalesque world of illusion, where the man's face and mind are a vortex of image fragments. His identity engulfs the viewer: their identities entwine. In this sea of ambiguity, the only certainties are that the wall will keep turning, and that the mirror will always come around again.

An important characteristic of Viola's installations is the existence of an ideal viewing location. Slowly Turning Narrative is unique in that the "best place" to stand is inaccessible. It is the pivot on which the wall rotates, at the center of the duality, the unmoving point. In the Tao, it is this point around which the universe revolves.

Notes
1. Called the Pake-Ave Video Synthesizer, the device is said to be capable of controlling an entire environment, that ascended videotape playing on neon, initially called the "video plasma.
2. This synthesizer was also the first to be used in a real-time, the Whitney Museum and The Museum of Modern Art; on the West Coast the Long Beach Museum of Art and the Vancouver Art Gallery; in Minneapolis, the Walker Art Center; in Paris, the Musee d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris and the Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou; in Amsterdam, the Stedelijk Museum; and in Cologne, the Kölnischer Kunstverein. The programs have since expanded and are now too numerous to list here. For a chronology of early video activity in the United States, see Barbara London with Louise Zipper, "A Chronology of Video Activity in the United States: 1965-1967," Artforum 9 (September 1980): 42-45; and Ornstein Video Library (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1989). pp. 41-48.
4. Bachmann died in 1973—in a fire. Odenbach finds encouragement in the recent revival of her work in German universities.

Robert Beck, courtesy Electronic Arts Intermix, New York: 51, 69 bottom
John Beininger, courtesy Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery, New York: 30-31 (background)
Das Museum, the Hudson River Museum: 37
Jean-Pierre Bonnaire, courtesy David Zwirner Gallery, New York: 41 bottom
Javier Campano, courtesy Museu Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid: 40-41
Courtesty Canon ARTLAB: 42-43
Courtesty Cinematheque Ontario, Toronto: 57 top, 58 top
Michael Dacoz, courtesy Electronic Arts Intermix, New York: 50 right, 69 top
Sevan Davies, courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery: 16
Stan Douglas, courtesy David Zwirner Gallery, New York: 20, 36-37, 40 top
Courtesty Dumb Type: 21
Charles Dyer, courtesy Bill Viola: 76 bottom
Courtesty Electronic Arts Intermix, New York: 54 bottom
Courtesty Teiji Funabashi: 44 bottom, 46, 47 bottom
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Marine Hugonnier, courtesy Donald Young Gallery, Seattle: 53 bottom
Jean-Paul Joud, courtesy Donald Young Gallery, Seattle: 52 top
Carl de Keyzer, courtesy Donald Young Gallery, Seattle: 51 top
Courtesty Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery, New York: 32, 33, 34, 35 top, 35 middle
Jeff Litchfield and Robert Beck, courtesy Electronic Arts Intermix, New York: 62 bottom
Richard K. Loesch, courtesy Wexner Center for the Visual Arts, Columbus: 54-55
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Courtesty Mary Lucas: 15 bottom right
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Courtesty Metro Pictures, New York: 70 middle
Philippe Nigest, courtesy Musée National d’Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris: 58
Courtesty The Museum of Modern Art Film Skils Archive, New York: 57 bottom, 58 bottom, 59
Courtesty Marcel Odenbach: 62 top, 65 bottom
©Tony Oursler: 70 bottom
©Kim Paterson: 13, 50 left
Kim Paterson, courtesy Bill Viola: 26, 74, 75, 76 top, 77
Georges Poncet, courtesy Donald Young Gallery, Seattle: 52 bottom
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Mike Salé, courtesy Marcel Odenbach: 65 top
Katrin Schilling, courtesy Tony Oursler: 66-67
Lothar Schwegel, courtesy Marcel Odenbach: 63 top, 64 bottom
Kazu Sekukani, courtesy Electronic Arts Intermix, New York: 63 bottom, 68 top
Shin Takahashi, courtesy Dumb Type: 44, 45, 47 top
Alexander Trowble, courtesy David Zwirner Gallery, New York: 40 middle left, 41 top
Stephan Trousselot, courtesy Tony Oursler: 70 top
James Welling, courtesy Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery, New York: 19, 30 (insert)
©Brad Wilson: 71
W. Zelik, courtesy Marcel Odenbach: 64 top
Courtesty David Zwirner Gallery, New York: 38, 39, 40, 40 top, 40 middle right

Gruber, Bettina, and Maria Wedder, Kunst und video (Cologne: DuMont, 1983).


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