



1. Laurie Anderson (American, born 1947). *O Superman*. 1983. Video (color, sound), 8 min. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Warner Bros. Records

During the late 1960s, in the spirit of counterculture and revolution, artists took up the new portable video camera, with its grainy black-and-white images and crudest of editing systems. The medium had previously been the domain of commercial television, with hefty cameras locked onto enormous tripods in broadcast studios, but now women artists flocked to this wide-open field, attracted to its clean slate and lack of old-boys network. Merging a strong sense of independence with this recently accessible medium, they experimented with time-based (and therefore intangible and difficult to collect) art, in a seat-of-the-pants style well suited to the artist-run, rough-and-ready venues sprouting up everywhere.

Viewers became participants, engaging in a more active relationship with image and sound. Video offered a more immediate form of expression, with inexpensive distribution possibilities that echoed the “spreading the word” also essential to feminism’s forward momentum. With these new tools, women artists investigated their identities, defying the romantic notions of beauty disseminated by advertising and the consort roles offered by movies and soap operas, in interdisciplinary projects, characterized by vitality and candor, that formed alternatives to and a critique of male-dominated modes of art production. As the categories of Miss and Mrs. were torn apart, so were those of traditional art practice, reception, and circulation.

The first exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art to feature the era’s new electronic mediums was *The Machine as Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age* in 1968, organized by Pontus Hultén.¹ The show opened with drawings of Leonardo da Vinci’s flying machines and included works up through the present. Hultén invited the group Experiments in Art and Technology (EAT), which had been launched the previous year by engineers Billy Klüver and

Fred Waldhauer and artists Robert Rauschenberg and Robert Whitman with the mandate of establishing better relationships among interdisciplinary artists with a scientific bent, to help select contemporary works. EAT arranged a competition, and out of two hundred submissions Hultén selected nine computer experiments, including a kinetic sculpture by Lillian Schwartz, a computer artist who also made short experimental films and videos. *Proxima Centauri* (1968), Schwartz’s collaboration with Bell Laboratories engineer Per Biorn, was a highly polished black box that opened to reveal a translucent glass dome emitting an astrophysical glow, activated by viewers standing on pressure-sensitive pads installed under a carpet.

Video gained a forum in 1971, when the Museum launched its Projects series in order to adapt to the expanding practice of site-specific installations. One of the first, Eleanor Antin’s mail-art narrative *100 Boots* (1971–73) chronicled an army of galoshes marching across the United States, storming New York, and finally invading the Projects galleries.²

My own work with video and intermedia—a concept developed in the mid-1960s by Fluxus artist Dick Higgins and Hans Breder to describe the often confusing activities that occur between genres—began in the early 1970s, when as a young curator in the Department of Prints and Illustrated Books I became absorbed in how artists stretched and manipulated time, that most elusive of materials.³ In 1971, for example, to inaugurate Ileana Sonnabend’s SoHo gallery, the living sculptures Gilbert & George—dressed in tweed suits, their skin covered with gold powder—stood for weeks on a table and sang “Underneath the Arches,” in a nonstop looped action that managed to emulate both robotic mechanization and over-the-top grandeur.

My interests settled on cutting-edge mediums, and on how artists harnessed new technology in a world where that technology was perpetually shifting. I sought out independent voices, looking for work that expanded boundaries. In nosing around makeshift venues (such as the Kitchen and 112 Greene Street) and talking with artists (such as Antin, Beryl Korot, and Hermine Freed), I discovered a dynamic counterculture, the offspring of the Beats and Woodstock, flourishing in Manhattan’s desolate SoHo neighborhood and in rural communes in upstate New York (such as Lanesville TV, in Lanesville, and Experimental Television Center, in Owego), operating on the fringes of the art world, with its prevailing modes of Conceptual and Minimal art. With other like-minded souls I climbed dank staircases and congregated in dusty lofts for impromptu screenings of black-and-white videos and for interdisciplinary performative experiments that stretched into the night. Process took precedence over saleable product, and information from the hardcore reached out-of-the-way artists through publications such as *Radical Software* (founded by Korot, Phyllis Gershuny, Ira Schneider, and Frank Gillette), a theory and grassroots how-to magazine; and *Avalanche* (founded by Liza Bear and Willoughby Sharp), an in-depth interview magazine that captured the grit of downtown New York.

At MoMA’s Open Circuits conference in 1974, I observed practitioners of expanded cinema from around the world argue about the distinctions between video and film, with the former represented by such upstarts as Nam June Paik, Shigeko Kubota, and Woody and Steina Vasulka, and the latter including the veterans Shirley Clarke and Jonas Mekas, who had bucked the Hollywood system in the 1950s, along with Maya Deren and John Cassavetes. Clarke went on to found the Filmmakers Cooperative with Mekas in 1962, joined by Stan VanDerBeek, Robert Breer, Michael Snow, and others.⁴ These moving image practitioners spoke different languages: video’s nascent critical discourse was rooted in the visual arts, with essays in *Studio International* and *Arts Magazine*, and experimental

film’s in the more established film theory exemplified by such journals as *Cahiers du cinéma*, founded in 1951. The fundamentals of expanded cinema (an expedient generic term for radical experimentation with the moving image) included intermedia techniques, participation from the audience, and the destruction and abstraction of imagery and film projection, all used toward decoding reality as it was manipulated in commercial film and toward breaking out of film’s two-dimensionality by transporting the cinematographic apparatus into an installation of time and space. This, it was thought, would lead to the opening of our usual patterns of perception and representation; otherwise we were limited in our ability to tell the difference between natural and artificial images, as well as in our conception of truth and reality.⁵

These fundamentals were manifest in the work of the audaciously spirited Clarke, a modern dancer long before she became passionate about video, which she felt shared the spontaneity of dance; her early videos explored the process of their own making, and were about instantaneous image and live, two-way communication among participants. In 1974 I visited the Video Teepee, her rooftop studio at the Hotel Chelsea, where she taught workshops, setting up multiple cameras and monitors on the roof and in stairwells, and where other Hotel Chelsea dwellers, including Viva and Agnès Varda, would drift by. I met Clarke’s lively followers, including a socially engaged collective, the Videofreeks, who explored public-access cable, using live phone-ins to create two-way, interactive cablecasting and transmit whatever was on their minds at the time.

Several months later I made my first curatorial research trip abroad. At *Projekt ’74*, an exhibition of video installations organized by the Kölnischer Kunstverein, I witnessed VALIE EXPORT, who had been the only woman to participate in the visceral events staged by the Vienna Actionists, create a new work, *Space Seeing—Space Hearing* (1973–74, no. 2), on the eve of the opening. Although she worked very much in the make-it-on-the-spot spirit that

was the norm, she carried out her project with extreme precision, standing motionless in an empty gallery, resolutely facing four video cameras set at different distances. The live images were cycled onto an adjacent monitor using carefully scripted switching and split-screen effects, all synchronized with audio composed from four synthesizer tones, so that her impassive body made a sharp contrast with her aggressively in-motion, on-screen self.

Space Seeing—Space Hearing, with its paradox of physical stasis and electronically generated motion, can be seen as part of EXPORT’s uncompromising investigation into the social position and physical being of women—like her pseudonym, adopted in 1967 in light of her refusal to cater to a “system that is defined by the

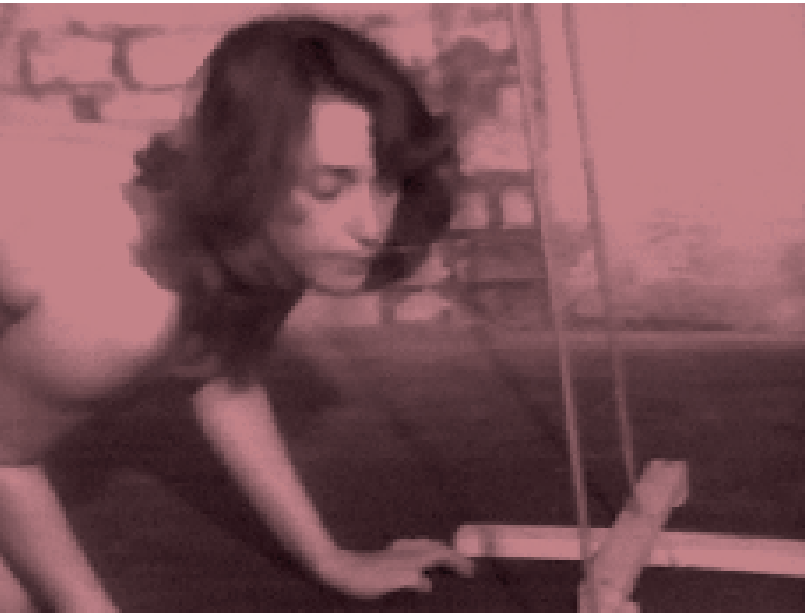
masculine”—an aesthetic, social, and political act.⁶ She began her experiments with film in 1969, mixing different colored liquids on a mirror and projecting the reflections as abstract swirls. These erratic, “live” projected shapes, rather than recorded (and thus mediated) celluloid images, formed her reality. In the early 1970s she carried out a series of hard-hitting performances that tested her physical limits and questioned physical and mental identity in a feminist critique that she called Media Aktionism, as in *Hyperbulie* (1973, no. 3), in which she navigated, nude for the most part and often crawling on her hands and knees, the narrow passage of an electrified metal fence, receiving a formidable jolt every time she inadvertently brushed against the edge. One of her goals in performance

2. VALIE EXPORT (Austrian, born 1940). *Space Seeing—Space Hearing*. 1973–74. Video (black and white, sound), 6:19 min. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Purchase



was to separate the female body from eroticism: “I felt it was important to use the female body to create art. I knew that if I did it naked, I would really change how the (mostly male) audience would look at me. There would be no pornographic or erotic/sexual desire involved—so there would be a contradiction.”⁷ EXPORT directed video documents of her early actions, which were performed live several times for an audience and then never again. The videos captured the durational aspects of her actions more accurately than photography could.

In 1974 I helped launch MoMA’s ongoing video-exhibition program under the umbrella of the Projects series, and among the first works I featured were several early black-and-white videos documenting actions by Rebecca Horn, Friederike Pezold, and Gilbert & George. These early exhibitions shared a gallery with an old technological favorite, Thomas Wilfred’s *Lumia Suite, Opus 158* (1963)—with one work showing in the morning and the other in the afternoon. Together with MoMA’s projectionists, I learned how to open playback decks and unstick jammed cassettes.



3. VALIE EXPORT (Austrian, born 1940). *Hyperbulie*. 1973. Video (black and white, sound), 6:31 min. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Purchase

By then playback equipment had become relatively simple to use; three-quarter-inch cassettes were easy to distribute; and in due course portable video cameras, although still hefty, were able to record in color. Emerging video artists, wanting their work to reach the widest possible audience, sold their tapes to universities, libraries, and museums in unlimited editions at modest prices. MoMA began acquiring artists’ videos in 1975, after seriously considering the responsibilities entailed in video preservation.⁸ Our original video advisory committee members included the innately inquisitive and supportive trustee Blanche Rockefeller; I remember her at a reception, sitting on a bench next to Bill Viola, thoughtfully asking him to please explain his video work, which he eloquently did. Video was the first new medium to be added to MoMA’s collection program in more than forty years; among the first works acquired were *Now* (1973), by Lynda Benglis, and *Vertical Roll* (1973), by Joan Jonas.

Originally associated with Minimalist artists, Jonas began by making sculpture before moving on to dance and video. What attracted her to performance was the possibility of mixing sound, movement, and image into a complex composition; she felt she wasn’t good at making a single, simple statement, like a sculpture:

I brought to performance my experience of looking at the illusionistic space of painting and of walking around sculptures and architectural spaces. I was barely *in* my early performance pieces; I was in them like a piece of material or an object

that moved very stiffly, like a puppet or a figure in a medieval painting. I didn’t exist as Joan Jonas, as an individual “I,” only as a presence, part of the picture. I moved rather mechanically. In the mirror costumes in *Wind* [her first film, of 1968] and *Oad Lau* [her first “action”], we walked very softly with our arms at our sides as in a ritual. We moved across the space, in the background, from side to side. When I was in other “Mirror Pieces” a little later, I just lay on the floor and I was carried around like a piece of glass.⁹

Jonas was greatly influenced by Jack Smith’s midnight events in his SoHo loft, at which he would mill around, pass out joints, and assemble a costume from heaps of clothes piled up on the floor, vamping in different personas. No one could quite distinguish, during those protracted evenings, between his life and art, where one ended and the other began; the time-based works by Smith, and by others, were excruciatingly long, and it was not uncommon for viewers to doze off, or go out for a short walk and then return. This elongated sense of time reinforced an impression that Noh theater had made on Jonas on a trip to Japan in 1970, and she subsequently developed for her own performances an alter ego called Organic Honey (from a label in her kitchen), whom she imagined as an electronic sorceress, a conjuror of images (no. 4).

These images began as reflections in mirrors, with Jonas studying her own face or parts of her body in a detached manner. When she added video to the performance, a live camera linked to monitors provided greater control and revealed hidden details, with a continuous series of shots explicitly choreographed for the camera and close-up details of the live action fed to monitors arrayed on stage. *Vertical Roll* was a performance that later became a single-channel videotape, but both versions take advantage of early video’s specific qualities: the granular black-and-white image; the flat, shallow depth of field; the moving bar of the vertical roll (a flaw that vanished

with digital TV sets); and video’s live, simultaneous image. In the video version, the vertically rolling close-ups of Jonas’s face and sensual satin dress move in counterpoint to the brash clang of a spoon hitting wood, creating a feeling of discontinuity that remains a key preoccupation in her work to this day.

In her next performance, *Twilight* (1975), Jonas gradually and impassively removed her clothes and, holding a small mirror, slowly scrutinized her body—a boldly transgressive act. At the work’s first performance, at the Anthology Film Archives, Jonas varied her use of the theater’s projection screen, rhythmically playing it the way percussionists play drums: as a conventional screen, depicting images of erupting volcanoes; as a scrim, with shadows cast from the action behind it; as an opaque wall, bathed in white light; as a vertical, rather than horizontal, field.

Twilight evolved into *Mirage* (1976/2003, no. 5), the last in a series of performances that deal with simultaneity, featuring multiples of the artist—the real version, on stage; the live video version, shown on one monitor; and different prerecorded actions, shown on another monitor and also projected on the screen. One prerecorded video, made as a kind of diary, showed a sleepy and disheveled Jonas facing a camera to say “good night” and “good morning” every day for a year; onstage the artist quickly drew sketches of the sun and moon, depicting a constant flow of night into morning into night. *Mirage* later became a fixed installation in MoMA’s collection; viewers walk around the gallery, discovering connections between six videos and a series of props (a Mexican mask, ten-foot-long aluminum cones), which are dramatically lit and placed to evoke the original stage.

In 1975 I met Anna Bella Geiger, who arrived from Rio de Janeiro with a series of new etchings and videos. Geiger belonged to the postwar generation that came of age as Brazil exploded with political and economic ambitions. She was barely twenty at the time of the first São Paulo Bienal, concurrent with the founding of Rio



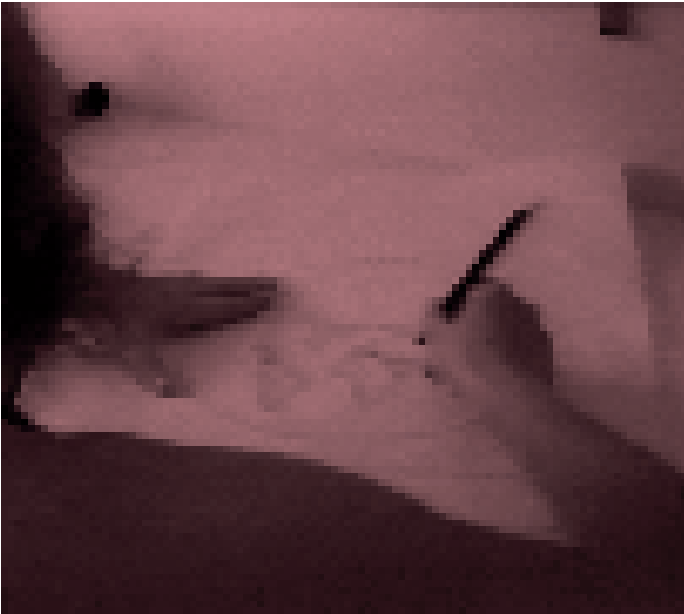
4. Joan Jonas (American, born 1936). *Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy*. 1972. Video (black and white, sound), 23 min. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of The Florsheim Foundation, Joanne Stern and Barbara Pine

5. Joan Jonas (American, born 1936). *Mirage*. 1976/2003. Six videos (black and white, sound and silent), props, stages, photographs, duration variable. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Richard J. Massey, Clarissa Alcock Bronfman, Agnes Gund, and Committee on Media Funds



de Janeiro’s Museu de Arte Moderna in 1954, and as the 1950s advanced, so did the bold enterprises of a small group of Brazilian artists and intellectuals. Critic Mário Pedrosa spotted Geiger, along with Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica, who were laying out new ideas about art.¹⁰ They all endured considerable hardship, in particular after the military coup in 1964, which sharpened their resistance to conventional forms in what Paulo Herkenhoff has called a language of “refined politicization.”¹¹ Between 1970 and 1973, together with the critic Frederico Morais, she taught a series of classes at the Museu de Arte Moderna, and it was in this environment that Cildo Meireles and other artists of his generation began their work with intermedia.

MoMA exhibited and acquired two of Geiger’s videos, *Passagens #1* (Passages #1) (1974) and *Mapas elementares 3* (Elementary maps 3) (1976, no. 6). *Passagens #1* shows a woman’s legs, with her skirt’s hem swishing above high heels, as she slowly and despondently climbs a series of staircases. She begins indoors in a three-story Art Deco–style building, gradually ascending, her tired steps moving in real time. Next she climbs a crumbling outdoor staircase on a building in Rio close to the small house where the artist’s parents lived after they arrived from Poland in the 1920s. The woman’s tense and labored moves bear the heaviness of life during the 1960s and ’70s.¹² In *Mapas elementares 3*, to the accompaniment of a version of the Argentinean bolero *La virgen negra* (The black virgin) that Geiger found in a junk shop, a woman quickly draws four maps and writes a word or phrase beneath each: *amuleto* (amulet or good luck charm), *a mulata* (mulatto or biracial woman), *a muleta* (crutch), and *America Latina*. The four maps are anamorphic impressions of the phonetically similar words, as well as allusions to Latin American stereotypes of race, class, and culture.¹³ Geiger’s warily incriminating videos parallel the suppressed ferocity in the work of Chilean artists such as Lotty Rosenfeld, the CAZA group, and Catalina Parra, all of whom made performative video work later shown at and collected by MoMA.



Art tourism around this time was flourishing, with video-art festivals springing up all over the world, in Los Angeles, Tokyo, Locarno, Montbéliard, and eventually São Paulo. I made regular stops at these lively video festivals, and looking back I realize that these were early hints of the globalization of contemporary art.

Toward the end of the 1970s early video’s revolutionary newness was petering out, and the equipment and technology were changing. Graininess gave way to clarity, and editing became more precise. At MoMA we were trying to document the medium’s early steps, and to do so we needed the direct participation of the artists. A grant from the Rockefeller Foundation facilitated the launch in 1978 of Video Viewpoints, a forum for artists to talk about and show their work. It quickly became a regular Monday-evening forum with an audience of about fifty, including artists, MoMA members, and other interested souls.

It was initially held in the Founders Room, the trustees’ cathedrallike meeting space on the Museum’s sixth floor. Working without the aesthetics of abundance, we would unplug our unwieldy three-quarter-inch cassette playback

6. Anna Bella Geiger (Brazilian, born 1933). *Mapas elementares 3* (Elementary maps 3) 1976. Video (black and white, sound), 12 min. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Purchase

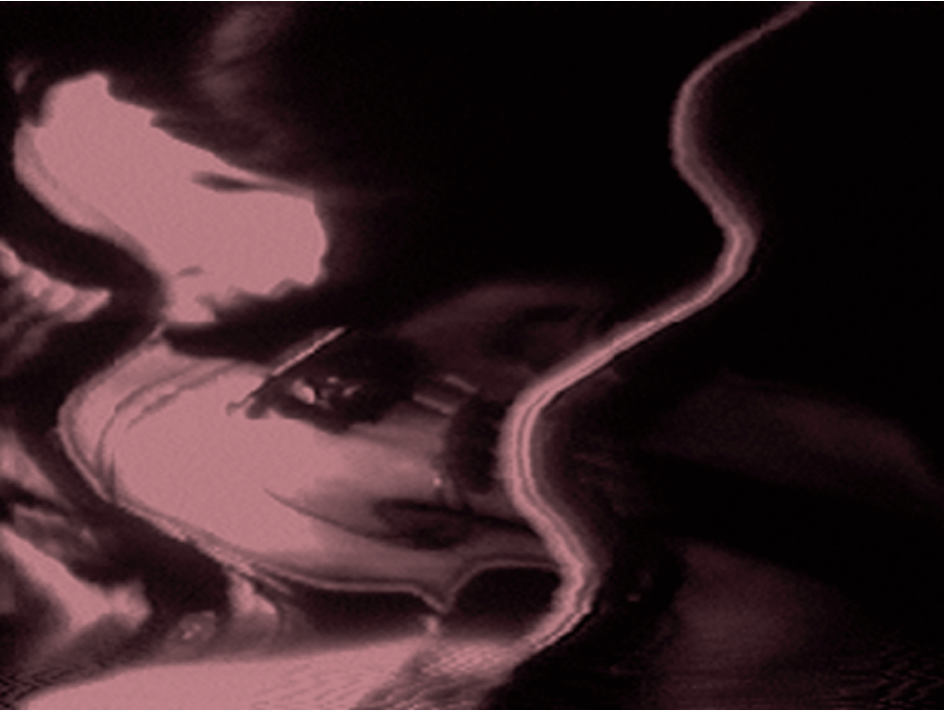
deck and two monitors in the video gallery and drag the equipment upstairs, where we would set up seats. Each artist had his or her way of arranging the room, from a basic setup for the straightforward display of tapes and slides to the re-creation of an installation. We were aware that we were inventing a new tradition, and every effort was made to be catholic in our selection of artists. Artists, for their part, were conscious of now being inside the institution, and took their presentations seriously.

Steina Vasulka—an artist, musician, programmer, and technical innovator—was our first Video Viewpoints speaker.¹⁴ For her MoMA presentation we lugged battered sculpture pedestals up to the Founders Room and set extra monitors around to re-create the anarchic spirit of the original Kitchen, the late-1960s video hub in the basement of the Mercer Art Center. The program attracted a hands-on, technical art crowd, who eagerly gathered around Vasulka and a pile of monitors showing how she experimented with the camera as an autonomous imaging instrument, layering multiple real-time images of herself bowing a violin (no. 7).

Other artists in the series discussed their different ways of using the same tools. Mary Lucier had worked with lasers, aiming her camera at the intense light, deliberately burning thin lines into her camera’s light-sensitive picture tube. At MoMA in 1979 she re-created her seven-monitor installation *Dawn Burn* (1975),

which depicts seven successive sunrises across New York’s East River. With each sunrise the light exceeded her camera’s maximum allowed intensity, and each day a new scar was added to the previous ones. In 1980 Kubota joined us at Video Viewpoints to discuss her sculptural practice. Surrounded by images of her video sculptures, including *Duchampiana: Nude Descending a Staircase* (1976), with its brash electronic color on monitor screens embedded in its plywood risers, she talked about the harmonious coexistence of the natural and the synthetic.

In 1984 Laurie Anderson came to speak about how her art practice unfolded in tandem with technology. A classically trained violinist, she developed a series of performance films in which she played the violin at the beginning and end of each screening.¹⁵ By the mid-1970s her media-enhanced performance had become more polished, incorporating slides, film, violin-playing, and prerecorded and live stories.



7. Steina Vasulka (Icelandic, born 1940). *Violin Power*. 1970–78. Video (black and white, sound), 10:04 min. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Acquired through the generosity of Barbara Sahlman



Anderson made use of readily available and modifiable technology to facilitate the process of storytelling and activate different levels of creativity. Her *Self-Playing Violin* (1974, no. 8), for example, with a tiny speaker concealed inside, makes its own autonomous sounds. In the late 1970s she used the Harmonizer, a device that lowers or raises the pitch of the voice, to create characters for her stories, including an authoritarian male and a two-hundred-pound baby. In 1978 I organized a Projects exhibition with Anderson, which contained *Handphone Table* (1978), an ordinary-looking plywood table and pair of stools accompanied by a blurred photograph of two people seated with their heads in their hands, a posture that viewers found themselves instinctively imitating. When they did so, the artist's voice—saying, “Now I in you without a body move,” a line from George Herbert, a seventeenth-century metaphysical poet—came through their hands as if entering their consciousness.¹⁶ This was accomplished by a speaker and driver, concealed in the table, that transmitted sound vibrations through solid material, in this case through bones rather than air.

As synthesizers and electronic keyboards became routine in the art and music worlds, Anderson followed her interests and made the logical next step. Armed with a Warner Records contract, she made her first music video, *O Superman* (1983, no. 1), with multimedia artist and animator Perry Hoberman as the video's artistic director. Made for the small scale of the television screen, the video concentrates on close-up shots of Anderson and exaggerated versions of her onstage activities—silhouettes of her shadow-puppet hands, her glowing face illuminated by a tiny pillow speaker placed inside her mouth and emanating a prerecorded violin solo that she modulated with her lips.

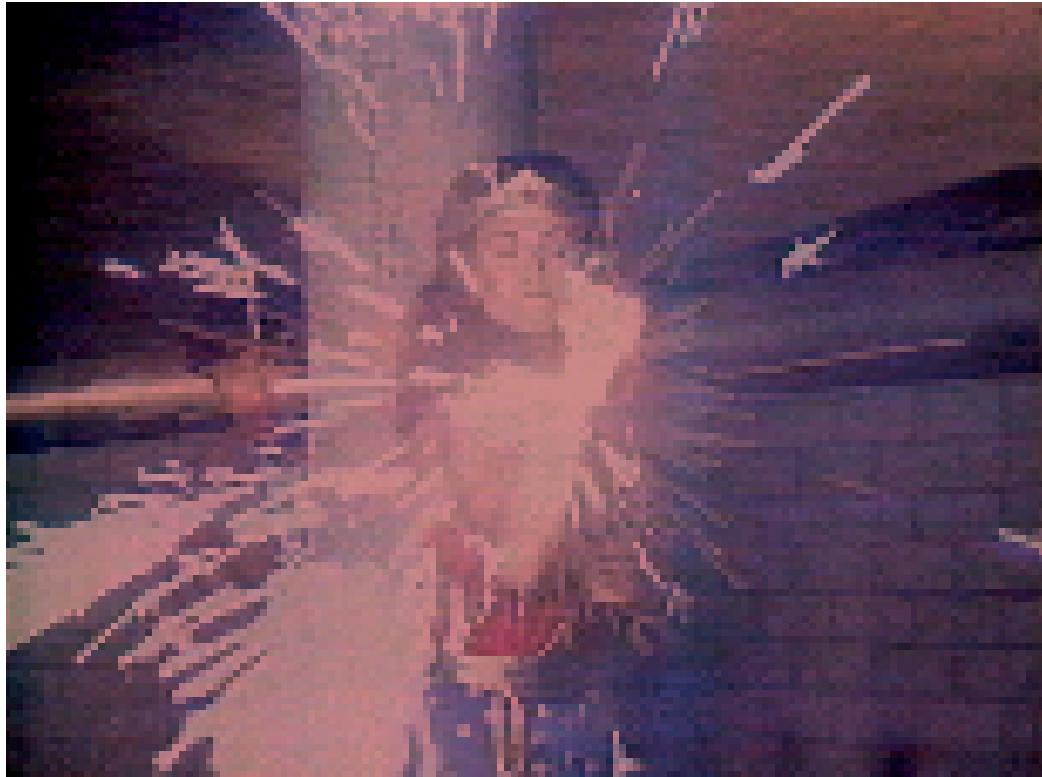
Early video artists had little to do with television—although a few, such as Emily Armstrong and Pat Ivers, took advantage of the laissez-faire

attitude of public-access television and hosted late-night programs—until the arrival of MTV in 1981. The generation of artists that came of age in that decade considered television one of the roots of video art, and some put broadcast programs under the microscope for formal analysis. In *Technology/Transformation: Wonder Woman* (1978–79, no. 9), Dara Birnbaum pointed her camera at the television and deconstructed the popular show *Wonder Woman*, revealing it as a male invention, with a businesslike heroine becoming a scantily clad superhero as a chorus sings, “Shake thy wonder maker.” Birnbaum designed her 1981 Video Viewpoints program notes with stills and pull quotes that echoed her work's critique of the power of mass media images, and the result, with its slogans and bold style, had an affinity with the work of Barbara Kruger and Jenny Holzer.

Mako Idemitsu came from Japan in 1986 to discuss her Great Mother series, which scrutinizes the emotional interactions of mothers and children, revealing the underlying volatility of seemingly placid households. The videos take place in claustrophobic rooms of ordinary urban homes, each one with a prominently placed television set; its screen, displaying close-up shots of various family members, is a window into the characters' minds. In *HIIDEO, It's Me Mama* (1983, no. 10) a son away at college is shown only on the television set on his mother's kitchen table. Both go about their daily lives: he studies, listens to music on earphones; she putters in the kitchen, makes dinner for her husband. The mother puts the son's meals in front of the television, and he consumes them on screen. Idemitsu provides troubling observations—never solutions—about family discord, exposing the constraints of social conventions and the conflicts caused by living in a hybrid of Japanese and Western cultures.

I first met Idemitsu in 1978, when, with a grant from electronics manufacturer Matsushita (now Panasonic), I went to Japan. On that trip I encountered a disparate group of lively artists who had all turned to video from other mediums—experimental film, music, sculpture,

8. Laurie Anderson (American, born 1947). *Self-Playing Violin*. 1974. Modified violin with built-in speaker and amplifier (sound), 23 x 10 x 4 1/2" (58.4 x 25.4 x 11.4 cm), 31 min. loop. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Agnes Gund & Daniel Shapiro and the Rockefeller Foundation



9. Dara Birnbaum (American, born 1946). *Technology/Transformation: Wonder Woman*. 1978–79. Video (color, sound), 5:50 min. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Acquired through the generosity of Margot and John Ernst

printmaking, and computer graphics—and were finding their own way, experimenting on the fringes of a staunchly entrenched hierarchical society. The trip turned into the exhibition *Video from Tokyo to Fukui and Kyoto* in 1979, and included one of Idemitsu’s early videos. In her Video Viewpoints talk she elaborated on the way Japanese media artists approached video, according the medium a certain respect, which gave their work a certain formality and self-consciousness. She herself was interested in observation, using video to record the daily routines of women, “to deal with the daily life of women, which also included non-routines. In this way video became a medium I used to explore women’s conscious and unconscious behavior.”¹⁷

In 1984 I went to Amsterdam to see *Het lumineuze Beeld/The Luminous Image* at Amsterdam’s Stedelijk Museum, an exhibition featuring twenty-two new installations by artists engaged with media. While there I talked extensively with Marina Abramović, and as a result she came to speak at Video Viewpoints in 1985. She spoke about her practice as a performance artist, both working

alone and in her twelve-year collaboration with Ulay; her exploration of the limits of the body, ego, and artistic identity; and the limitations of early portable video cameras:

In the early ’70s we really hated video. It was the worst thing that could happen to you. The bad image, the bad sound, everything was bad about it. It was limited to one hour and it was boring. So the video in those days we used only as a documentation record of our performance. We mostly asked the cameraman to put the camera on in one spot. . . . These videos are just like this . . . one image hardly using a zoom and never using a cut. . . . [After 1980] we didn’t make any more videotapes, any more documentation of performance. We tried to document it, if we could on film, because the quality is much better and you can project the image from the floor up and you see the life-size body in the space.¹⁸

10. Mako Idemitsu (Japanese, born 1940). *HIDEO, It’s Me Mama*. 1983. Video (color, sound), 26:49 min. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Acquired through the generosity of Margot and John Ernst



In 1983 Video Viewpoints moved into the comfortable 220-seat Titus Theater 2.¹⁹ Here, with new equipment and a regular technical crew, we were poised to evolve with the medium. Younger artists attended the lectures; the artists presenting their work got to see their tapes on a big screen, shown by a state-of-the-art video projector that enlarged the image and made it frameless, like a landscape, but did not provide the same saturated color as a monitor. The theater’s Dolby surround-sound—the best video sound system in town—mollified some of the more dubious presenters.

With the advances in home-computer technology, including advanced and readily accessible graphic and sound capabilities, the shift from analog to digital video took root. Most filmmakers still had no interest in abandoning film resolution and tactile editing processes until later in the 1990s, when video editing became more precise and portable at the same time that film-lab work became frightfully expensive. A crossover slowly took place. Leslie Thornton, in her 1990 Video Viewpoints

presentation, discussed her approach to bridging cinema and video even as she embraced their complementary attributes. In *Peggy and Fred in Hell: The Prologue* (1985) she collaborated with two children, setting her video camera on a tripod in her basement, aiming the lens at the children, and leaving the room while they devised a make-believe narrative.

By the late 1980s computerized video-editing allowed artists to edit works frame by frame, as accurately as film, taking the medium into a controlled and polished realm far removed from the old rough-and-ready, shoot-from-the-hip aesthetic of the early days. The surge of program and advertising slots available on cable television resulted in a proliferation of commercial postproduction video studios in New York, many of them accessible to artists at reduced rates when they weren’t being used by professionals. Other artists used completion funds from public television and foundation grants for postproduction, a critical and difficult-to-fund project phase. For some artists, such as Max Almy, high-end production values

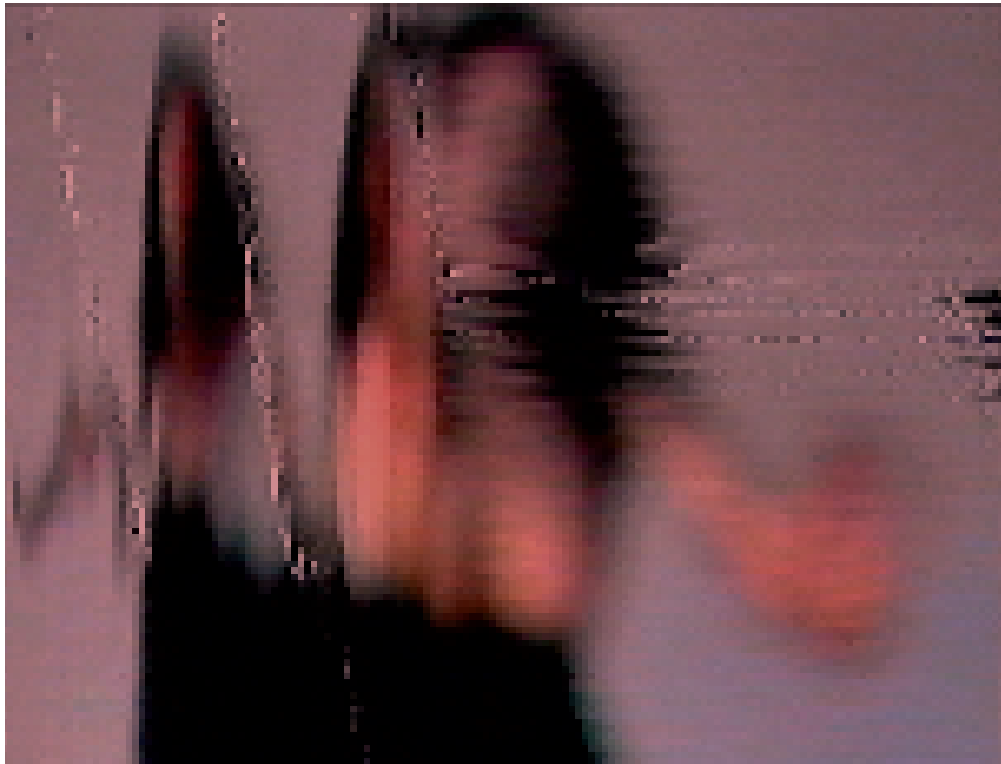
were a way of making the transition into television and Hollywood.

This new high-tech ethos produced a backlash from younger artists, who saw rawness as an act of creative resistance. Many of these younger artists upheld a performative spirit reminiscent of video's beginnings; one such artist was Sadie Benning, Video Viewpoints' youngest speaker: a persistent loner who started making videos at age fifteen, using a toy black-and-white camcorder that recorded onto an audiocassette. In her 1991 lecture, delivered when she was eighteen, she discussed her tell-all autobiographical narratives, which had a refreshing feeling of moxie and candor.

I had met Pipilotti Rist in 1986, while I was on the jury for Bonn's Videonale festival, which awarded her first prize for *I'm Not the Girl Who Misses Much* (1986, no. 11). Rist, a member of the postpunk girl band and performance group Les Reines Prochaines, was inspired by Paik's hyperkinetic aesthetic; in her work she subverts the music-video format to explore the unruly female voice and body in popular cultural representations, merging rock music, electronic manipulation, and performance. She evokes the fiction of childhood with bold, contemporary colors—the vivid

synthetic hues of photocopiers, tie-dyed T-shirts, and kitschy plastic jewelry—and distortions that play with scale to create a feeling of surprise, sensuality, and celebration. Rist is both serious and spirited, and honestly wants her work to make viewers feel good; her 1996 Video Viewpoints presentation captivated the audience with exuberant images.

Artists of Rist's generation, who came of age watching MTV, were very comfortable sampling art and popular culture and did not feel constrained by the usual categories of art and commerce. In the late 1990s this mix was visible in ad hoc screenings and installations in new galleries and spaces in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, and the Lower East Side, in work by artists such as Alix Pearlstein and Cheryl Donegan. In 1997, together with Sally Berger and Stephen Vitiello, I organized the exhibition *Young and Restless*, which gathered twenty-one witty and insightful



11. Pipilotti Rist (Swiss, born 1962). *I'm Not the Girl Who Misses Much*. 1986. Video (color, sound), 7:46 min. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Acquired through the generosity of Kathryn R. O'Donnell



12. Kristin Lucas (American, born 1968). *Host*. 1997. Video (color, sound), 7:36 min. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Margot Ernst and Susan Jacoby

what Mumbai-based artist Nalini Malani describes as a committed cross-national artists community.²¹ Born in Pakistan in 1947, Malani grew up in India, where independent media activity began with the arrival of satellite and cable television in the 1980s. Against India's complex and turbulent backdrop, and with a sense of political urgency, Malani creates her distinctive installations. These

works that took a playful look at feminine social and sexual behavior. Concurrent with the exhibition, Kristin Lucas staged an action for Video Viewpoints in which, wearing a tiny camera attached to a pith helmet, she revealed the computer processor within her (a similar action unfolds in her video *Host* [1997, no. 12]).

Around this time the dot-com industry was growing very quickly, and some artists turned to the creation of Internet hubs. In 1997 I met with the nonprofit research and development group äda'web, which paired nonmedia artists with dot-com specialists and producers to experiment with and reflect on the Web; among the results was Holzer's *please change beliefs* (1995), a work that inhabited the landscape of the Internet in the same spirit as her public art projects. I had long been meaning to put my research on the Internet, and this informal conversation turned into Stir-Fry, a Web journal about my subsequent trip to China and the thirty-five artists I met there.²⁰

Artists outside of North America and Europe had also been harnessing new technologies as they appeared, in

weave together traditional and contemporary materials and storytelling methods in a dynamically layered, immersive environment. Violence—its presence and universality—is a constant factor. *Game Pieces* (2003/2009, no. 13) features enormous, rotating, translucent Lexan drums, on the interior of which are painted angelic figures and animals, familiar creatures from ancient stories and miniatures, whose purpose is to restore harmony in an embattled world, here floating on an ironic pretext of delicacy. Through these drums Malani projects video; its light illuminates the painted images and casts their shadows on the gallery walls, but its images—projected nuclear bomb explosions in vivid reds and yellows—also obliterate the painted creatures. As a result, the past collides within an ever-shifting present.

New technologies evolve at an accelerating pace. The latest tools trigger excitement and innovative experiments, but as artists gain control they move on to a dialogue with content rather than hardware or software. The Museum of Modern Art's media collection begins with a fertile moment in the late 1960s, with video classics

by distinguished artists whose pioneering work paved the way for subsequent boundary-breaking practices. The latest generation of media artists is poised to reinvent the avant-garde. Today artists use the latest gear as readily as they sip water. Hackers, programmers, and tinkerer-revisionists draw on local culture and international sources. Women are at the forefront of this new frontier,

forging new ways of working in a setting that combines art, social causes, technology, and social networks. Breakthroughs appear out of the blue, changing everything in the uncontrollable, loosely defined field of media art, which crosses boundaries of every kind. As a custodian of this dynamic field, The Museum of Modern Art takes its stewardship seriously.

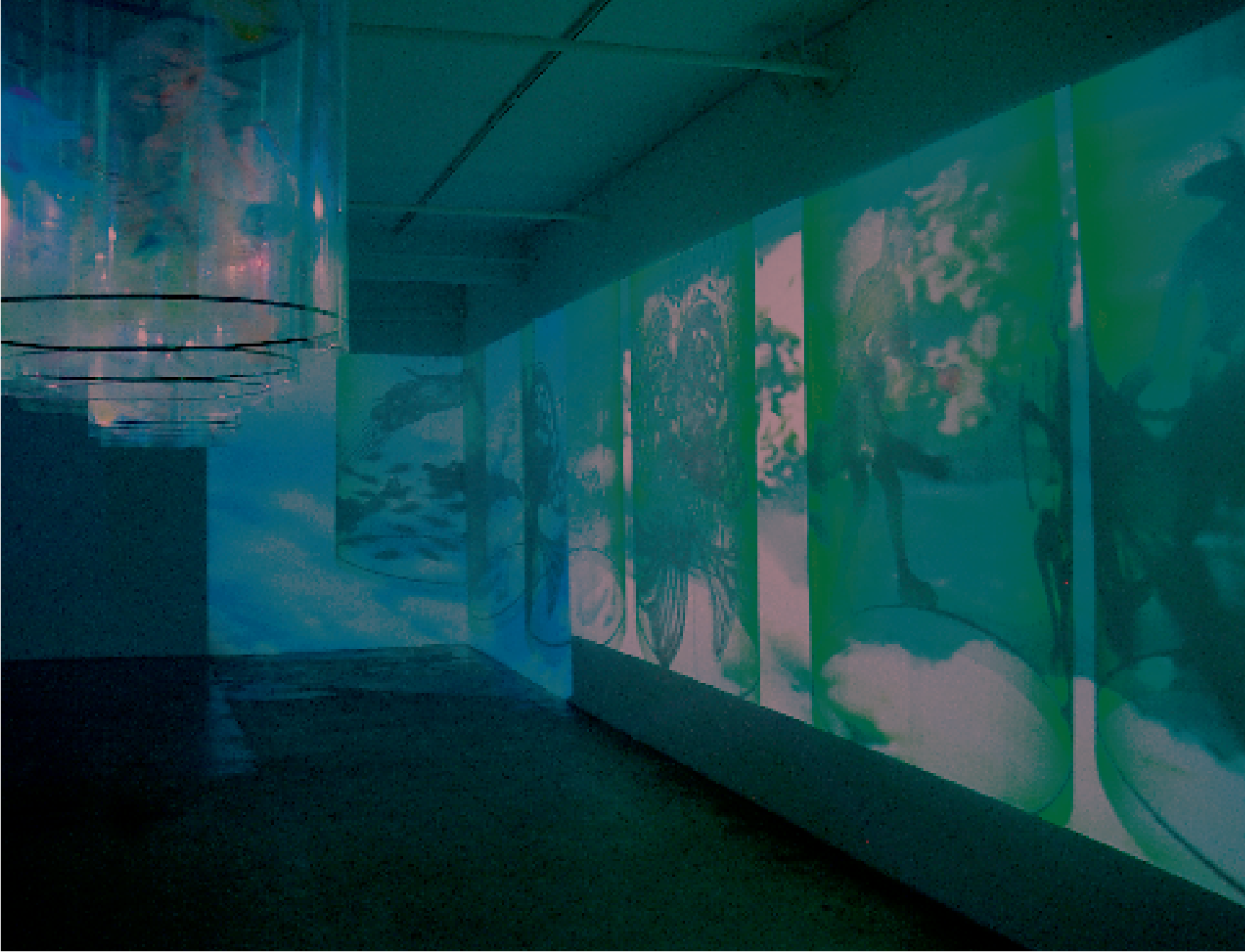
1. The exhibition had a catalogue with an embossed metal cover depicting MoMA's facade and dynamic street life. K. G. Pontus Hultén, *The Machine as Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1968). 2. Projects came about after prolonged efforts by several curators in the Department of Painting and Sculpture, namely Kynaston McShine and Jennifer Licht. In early 1970 Licht organized two exhibitions that were early models for the series: *Robert Breer: The Osaka Sculpture* and Robert Irwin's *Room Work*. Licht's exhibition *Spaces*, with installations by Michael Asher, Larry Bell, Dan Flavin, Robert Morris, Pulsa, and Franz Erhard Walther, took place in early 1970. Licht and I together selected videos to accompany the 1973 loan exhibition *Some Recent American Art*, which traveled to Australia. This video selection recurred as *Projects: Video I* in 1974. 3. Dick Higgins, "Intermedia," *Something Else Newsletter*, 1966. In 1968 Hans Breder founded the first university program in the United States to offer a Master of Fine Arts in intermedia, at the University of Iowa, Iowa City. 4. The term "expanded cinema"

was popularized by media theorist Gene Youngblood in his book *Expanded Cinema* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1970). This, the first book to consider video as an art form, was influential in establishing the field of media arts as a scholarly discipline. Youngblood argued that a new, expanded cinema is required for a new consciousness and described various types of filmmaking that utilized new technology, including special effects, computer art, video art, multimedia environments, and holography. 5. My thoughts on expanded cinema are indebted to VALIE EXPORT, "Expanded Cinema as Expanded Reality," lecture in "The Essential Frame: Austrian Independent Film, 1955–2003," London, May 31–June 1, 2003, archive.sensesofcinema.com/contents/03/28/expanded_cinema.html. 6. EXPORT, quoted in Sophie Delpoux, "VALIE EXPORT: Semper et Ubique/De-Defining Women," *Art Press*, September 2003, p. 36. On EXPORT's use of her body in video works, see Kristine Stiles, "CORPORA VILIA: VALIE EXPORT's Body," in Else Longhauser et al., *VALIE EXPORT: Ob/De+Con(struction)* (Philadelphia: Moore College of Art and Design, 2000), p. 26.

7. EXPORT, in "Interview with Andrea Juno," in Juno and V. Vale, eds., *Angry Women* (San Francisco: Re/Search Publications, 1991), p. 187. 8. Many of the earliest master tapes sat in their moldy basements or hot attics, and as a result were gumming up, corroding, and flaking. From an archival standpoint it was clear that unless cultural institutions placed the work in climate-controlled storage facilities, this part of art history would slowly disintegrate and fade away. The Museum's registrar, the official keeper of records and storage locations, gave the newly acquired video sub-masters acquisition numbers, and the tapes were placed under archival conditions. A media acquisition can be thought of as a subscription: a long-term commitment to preserve the artwork in as close to the original form as possible, with eventual upgrading from its obsolete format to the next archival standard. 9. Joan Jonas, quoted in Joan Simon, "Scenes and Variations: An Interview with Joan Jonas," *Art in America* 83, no. 7 (July 1995): 75. 10. On Anna Bella Geiger's coming of age in Brazil, see Dore Ashton, "Anna Bella

Geiger," *Review: Latin American Literature and Arts*, no. 48 (Spring 1994): 55; reprinted in *Anna Bella Geiger: Constelações* (Rio de Janeiro: Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro, 1996), p. 81. 11. Paulo Herkenhoff, quoted in Ashton, "Anna Bella Geiger," p. 81. 12. On *Passagens*, see Tadeu Chiarelli, "Fax para Anna Bella Geiger," in *O mundo talvez, olam ulay* (The world, perhaps) (Ipanema: Joel Edelstein Arte Contemporanea, 1995), pp. 6–7; excerpts reprinted in *Anna Bella Geiger: Constelações*, pp. 39–40, "Fax to Anna Bella Geiger," trans. Stephen Berg, p. 79. 13. On *Mapas elementares 3*, see Karin Stempel, "Anna Bella Geiger," in *Anna Bella Geiger: Arbeiten, 1975 bis 1995* (Herausgeber, Germany: Galerie Bernd Slutzky, 1996); excerpts reprinted in *Anna Bella Geiger: Constelações*, pp. 47–48, trans. Sylvia Frota, pp. 80–81. 14. Together with her partner, Woody Vasulka, Steina Vasulka made technological investigations into analog and digital processes; their development of electronic imaging tools place them as major architects of an expressive electronic vocabulary of image-making.

15. On the development of Laurie Anderson's style, see RoseLee Goldberg, *Laurie Anderson* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2000), p. 47. 16. For Anderson's description of *Handphone Table*, see Laurie Anderson, "Control Room and Other Stories: Confessions of a Content Provider," *Parkett*, no. 49 (May 1977): 132. 17. Mako Idemitsu, statement in Barbara London, ed., *Video from Tokyo to Fukui and Kyoto* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1979), p. 14. 18. Marina Abramović, untitled lecture, Video Viewpoints, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, January 7, 1985. 19. By this time video had become part of the Department of Film. As time-based mediums, film and video have similar storage and preservation issues. 20. "Stir-Fry: A Video Curator's Dispatches from China," adaweb.walkerart.org/context/stir-fry/. 21. Nalini Malani, quoted in London, "New Forms," in Gayarti Sinha and Paul Sternberger, *India: Public Places, Private Spaces: Contemporary Photography and Video Art* (Newark, N.J.: Newark Museum; Mumbai: Marg Publications, 2007), pp. 10–11.



13. **Nalini Malani.** (Indian, born Pakistan 1946). *Gamepieces*. 2003/2009. Four-channel video (color, sound), six rotating acrylic reverse-painted Lexan cylinders, 12 min. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of the Richard J. Massey Foundation for Arts and Sciences