

# THE NEW TELEVISION:

ESSAYS, STATEMENTS, AND  
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# A PUBLIC/PRIVATE ART

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*Barbara London*

Essays, Statements, and Videotapes

Based on  
"Open Circuits:  
An International Conference on the Future  
of Television"  
Organized by Fred  
Barzyk, Douglas Davis,  
Gerald O'Grady, and  
Willard Van Dyke  
For the Museum of  
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# Barbara J. London

The Museum of Modern Art's involvement with video tape began in 1968. That year, Nam June Paik's "McLuhan Caged" and "Lindsay Tape" were shown on a unique tape loop device constructed by the artist in the "Machine as Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age," an exhibition directed by Pontus Hulten. The Paik video tapes violated conventional perceptual television expectations. The video image, culled from news broadcasts, arrested the viewer by being out of synchronization with the audio tracks. Hulten wrote in the catalogue: "It is a direct frontal attack on the principal modern machine for manipulating men's minds for commercial or ideological reasons. Paik's counterterrorism is, of course, based on ridicule." Video was included in the "Information" exhibition, directed by Kynaston McShine, in 1970. A video tape recording booth was set up in the Museum by the Argentine Group Frontera. Visitors answered questions in front of a video camera, and then watched themselves on TV screens in both "real time" and "time delay." (Group Frontera explained: "The object of our work is to formulate a theory of the role of mass media in the identification of society's culture.") Video tapes by the Italian group Arte Povera, as well as six of Bruce Nauman's video works from 1969 -- "Bouncing in the Corner," "Revolving Upside Down," "Violins Tuned D-E-A-D-," "Lip Sync," "Pacing Upside Down," and "Walk with Contraposto" -- were included in the exhibition. Among the many films shown, two also existed in video format at the time: the first, Gerry Schum's "Land Art," with works by Marinus Boezen, Jan Dibbets, Barry Flanagan, Michael Heizer, Richard Long, Walter de Maria, Dennis Oppenheim, and Robert Smithson; the second, Joseph Beuys' "Eurasienstab." Kynaston McShine wrote in the catalogue: "The films and video tapes in this exhibition and listed in this book have often been described as 'minimally structured,' which means that the content is non-narrative and that the style, while being almost an extension of cinema verité is, like so much of the other work in the show, simply a method of distributing the visual information that interests the artist."

# Video in the

Aware of the design significance of some audiovisual equipment, the Museum acquired its first video hardware in 1970. Three television sets designed by Marco Zanuso and Richard Sapper entered the Design collection: the Doney 14 (circa 1958), the Algol 14 (1965), and the Black 201 (1970).

After the "Information" exhibition, the next video shown at the Museum was a work by Keith Sonnier in the Projects Series, in May 1971. Sonnier created a closed-circuit video environment in two small, adjoining galleries. In one gallery, Sonnier had part of the ceiling lowered and red lighting installed. The visitor had to crouch in order to enter the open rectangular space past the dropped ceiling, and upon standing up would be recorded by a video camera. The visitor's image was then projected in the second gallery in negative and positive through the use of a special-effects generator and two video projectors. Through the use of video, Sonnier involved the spectator as a performer, in contrast to the usual museum experience of the spectator as an observer.

Two and a half years after the Sonnier installation, video's past and future was discussed at the Open Circuits Conference held at The Museum of Modern Art in January 1974. Museum educators and curators, cable and educational television producers, artists, and art critics from the United States, Canada, Latin America, Europe, and Japan gathered to share information and cast video predictions. Artists exhibited their video tapes on the Museum's sixth floor for the conference participants.

Eight months later, in September 1974, the Museum inaugurated a series of video tape exhibitions in a gallery near the Museum's Film Auditorium. The video program is organized so that a selection is exhibited for a two (or three) month period. During that period the tapes are shown on a regular, weekly schedule. Thomas Wilfred's "Lumia Suite, Opus 154," a rear-screen light projection, has been exhibited in this same gallery since 1964.

# Museum of Modern Art

The video program is part of Projects, the continuing series of small exhibitions at the Museum which report on contemporary developments in the visual arts. The video tapes are shown as a general survey of work produced internationally. The first program, selected by Jennifer Licht and myself, was based on the video section of "Some Recent American Art," an exhibition which toured Australia and New Zealand in 1974 under the auspices of the International Council of the Museum. The second program was devoted to European conceptual artists. In these works, video not only documented an action, but was a determinant in the artists' activities. The third selection was made up of historical video, from the late sixties and early seventies. The theme of this exhibition was an investigation of the unique technical properties of video, such as unstable images, phasing, and audio tracking. The fourth selection included eight recent American and European works from Art/Tapes/22, the Florentine production center which opened in 1973 under the direction of Maria Gloria Biccocchi. The fifth consisted of documentary video. For the 1975-1976 programs, funding has been provided by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. A group of artists' videotapes, acquired in May 1975, forms the beginnings of the Museum's video study collection. A National Endowment for the Arts grant for the Projects series for 1973-1974 included funds for the video installation equipment -- a Sony 3/4-inch cassette deck with automatic repeat, and two 17-inch Sony Triniton monitors. Fifteen people can sit comfortably on benches and watch the video works being played on the two monitors installed in opposite corners of the gallery. The program is set up so that one cassette, with one or several works on it, is played daily, and automatically repeats for the scheduled time. The video public consists of individuals who happen upon the installation, as well as those seeking out the program.

The first year of video exhibition was not problem free. The major disturbance was caused by air conditioning pumps located one floor below the video gallery. Periodically the pumps emit an electrical charge, which caused extraneous color to permeate the corners of the monitor screen. A lead plate installed beneath the monitor does not appear to arrest this electrical interference. Unfortunately, the video exhibition space cannot be changed for some time.

A problem more easily solved is that of European video. As it projects a denser image than American, European video tape is incompatible with American equipment. The expensive Sony "switchable" (50 to 60 cycle) cassette deck, which plays both American and European tapes, is one solution. The Museum does not yet own a switchable deck, and has European video tapes "transferred" for exhibition. Global standardization of video hardware will be appreciated by institutions who wish to present a broad approach to video.

The future for video as an accessible medium is bright. It remains to be seen how creative sensibilities will explore its rich potential. The Museum's role in exhibiting, collecting, and encouraging video will undoubtedly expand with the growth of the medium.

PROJECTS: "VIDEO V"

August 1 - October 31, 1975

Chris Burden, "Documentation of Selected Works." 1974. Color, 30 minutes

Cara Devita, "Always Love Your Man." 1975. Black and white, 18 minutes

Darcy Lange, "Work Studies: Boning, Verson Press, Shearers." 1974. Black and white, 30 minutes

Les Levine, "We Are Still Alive." 1975. Color, 50 minutes

John Margolies and Billy Adler, "Assemblage Video Cassette." 1974. Color and black and white, 60 minutes

John Margolies, "House Tour, May 4, 1974." 1974. Black and white, 18-1/2 minutes

Nam June Paik, "Charlotte Moorman, February 1966." 1966. Black and white, 12 minutes

John Reilly and Stefan Moore, "The Irish Tapes." 1972. Black and white, 50 minutes

Ilene Segalove, "Tortillas and Tuna." 1974. Black and white, 8-1/2 minutes

TVTV, "The Good Times Are Killing Me." 1975. Color, 55 minutes

Downtown Community Television, "Cuba -- The People." 1974. Black and white, 55 minutes

Trisha Brown, "Primary Accumulation." 1974. Black and white, 18 minutes. A Fifi Corday Production.