

found. I visit flea markets. I made a drawing for the camera, tracing outlines of a sequence: an old doll, a stone, a mirror, a hammer - building layers of lines suggesting a poetic narrative. I see an object that can be used inappropriately and repeatedly in different ways. Houdini escaped from a wheel, which gave me the idea to make a six-foot metal wheel to roll around in (*Jones Beach*, 1970). Later it hung from the ceiling, spinning to reggae music. For this work, *Funnel* (1974), I began with the form of a cone. I wanted to explore the implications. I made a set out of paper that receded and filled it with paper cones of all sizes. A video monitor in the set reflected this grouping. Then for *Twilight* (1975) and *Mirage* (1976), I had six nine-foot metal cones fabricated and used them in as many ways as possible - to sing and shout through, to bang, to look through, and so on. Narrative models were early film, poetry (in terms of structure), the Noh Theater, rituals, magic shows, the circus. Later I worked with fairy tales, news stories, and sagas.

In what ways has the medium evolved? Is single channel video important today?

In terms of poetic narrative in the work of younger artists such as Eija-Liisa Ahtila the work goes beyond the one-shot/one-idea projected image as painting syndrome so prevalent in work of the last ten years, and relates to film making using possibilities of video directly relating to the content of the work. And Pipilotti Rist is also one who finds ingenious solutions to the challenges of display.

I find it very interesting that young artists are using information that has sifted down through the past 35 years involving performance art, conceptual art, and all forms of media. These and other young artists are going into the world and working with the everyday or popular culture in relation to particular, and/or personal issues, while discovering, recycling, and inventing various images. In documentary style, they record specific events as they relate to their perception of how to position themselves in relation to relatively unexplored subject matter. In this sense the work is political because it asks questions and interacts with the local context in a challenging way by mixing the familiar with the unfamiliar and by transporting different visual languages.

Also there has been a continuous high conceptual standard in the work of people like Gary Hill and Stan Douglas, for instance, who explore more complicated relationships of media structure and content. Single channel video is only important if it represents such concern with invention.

For the Love of Scan Lines

Barbara London

"Video art" began in the mid-1960s, when portable video equipment - the Portapak - became available on the 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 early version of the Portapak: it consisted of a bulky recording deck, a battery pack, and a cumbersome camera, and the tape, on open reels, often got snagged. Still, artists found the Portapak affordable, and the ability to record in ambient light made the medium attractive.

Artists accustomed to painting by themselves in a studio found they could carry on their solitary routine with the new video equipment. They pointed the camera at themselves, composed scenes, and monitored the live images as they were recorded. The artist was producer, cameraman, and performer rolled into one.

Video editing of these first productions was next to impossible. Artists accepted the limitations of the medium, and in keeping with John Cage's slogan "Go with whatever happens," they adopted "No editing" as an aesthetic. Consequently, many early works run for the full length of a thirty- or sixty-minute tape.

Bruce Nauman's videos of the 1960s feature repetitive processes performed for the camera. *Lip Sync* (1969) records a single nonstop action repeated over and over on the one-hour tape: Nauman, outfitted with earphones, tries to repeat what he hears - his just articulated phrase "Lip sync." Evidently, his aural and vocal faculties are disconcertingly out of sync. Nauman's exertion induces physical distress in the artist and in the sympathetic viewer.

William Wegman's *Selected Works: Reel #3* (1973) takes a different tack: the artist works in his painting studio, on his own with a star performer - the weimaraner dog Man Ray. The humorous sketches enacted by Wegman's canine alter ego call to mind the zany antics of Ernie Kovacs, the funnyman of the golden age of television.

Another art form that came to prominence in the 1960s was performance. Although video and performance forged individual identities, they also worked well in tandem. Video's ability to arrest and extend time and space blurred the boundaries of live performance: the form was no longer constrained to a one-time action limited in space. The enhanced palette that video and performance brought to each other stimulated painters, sculptors, musicians, and dancers to explore this cross-disciplinary form.

Early in her performance career, Joan Jonas began to use mirrors to construct illusionary spaces. She also often performed with a live video camera, which she linked to monitors on stage. The setup allowed Jonas to reveal close-up details of her performance while maintaining a theatrical distance from the viewer.

Jonas typically develops a work by presenting it several times, reshaping and enriching each performance. At the end of this evolutionary process she generates a video that encapsulates the performances yet stands alone as an original work. Jonas's performance/video *Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy* (1972) includes a continuous series of close-ups explicitly choreographed for the video camera. The details of the live action are fed to an array of monitors onstage, which the audience perceives as a nonnarrative play within a play. Clearly, a video/performance play within a play has means unavailable to its theatrical equivalent.

Richard Serra's 1973 video *Surprise Attack* operates largely outside the video frame - only Serra's arms and torso are visible onscreen. While he declaims from Thomas C. Schelling's *The Strategy of Conflict*, he vigorously slams a lead rod from one hand to another. The close-up view seems to expand beyond the box of the video monitor to include the artist's whole body in action. In painterly terms, Serra has extended the painting on the canvas beyond the frame.

The effect of context on interpretation is an abiding concern of conceptual artists. The tape *John Baldessari Sings Sol LeWitt* (1973) opens with Baldessari facing the camera. In a deadpan voice he says, "I'd like to sing for you some of

the sentences Sol LeWitt has written on conceptual art." Then, to the tune of "Tea for Two," he sings LeWitt's text, which begins, "Formal art is essentially rational." The song plods along for about twenty minutes - as long as it takes to outline LeWitt's notion of conceptual art.

Vito Acconci is faithful to the tradition of artists who refuse to acknowledge any limitations. Everyone except Acconci agrees on a fundamental distinction between video and performance - the video on a monitor is not alive, right? *Command Performance* (1972) sets out to prove otherwise. The videotape presents Acconci as a talking head available for conversation - his head is the same size as the viewer's. He cajoles, entreats, and charms passerbys, and soon enough has them talking back to him. The realization that they are chatting with a video image chagrins some viewers, but falling for Acconci's ruse is no worse than saying "Thank you" to an electronically generated telephone voice.

Bill Viola developed his ideas about actual and imagined time in a series of short works centered on a particular location, sound, or action. *Space between the Teeth* (1976) features Viola as subject/performer full-face on a monitor, staring intensely at the camera. As his anxiety rises, the tension is transferred to the camera, which slowly dollies back to long-shot as if it were pulling an elastic band taut. Finally, Viola releases an agonizing scream, freeing the camera to dolly/zoom with amazing speed right into his larynx.

Mainstream television broadcasters often look to artists for ideas, but on occasion creativity flows from the commercial world to video. Peter Campus, a professional filmmaker, devised a riveting and much copied illusion in which he appears to tear a hole in his back and walk through himself. The video, *Three Transitions* (1973), was produced by Public Television's WGBH (Boston) in an artists' lab furnished with a professional crew.

Another work to come out of WGBH was Nam June Paik's *Global Groove* (1973). The video strings together Pepsi commercials, the modern dancer Merce Cunningham, the poet Allen Ginsberg, a tra-

ditional Korean dancer, and an ingenue tap dancer from *A Chorus Line*. The arrangement of images seems haphazard, and indeed they are unconnected except for the facets they reflect of the "global village." When Paik made the video, the idea of a world culture was seen in a positive light. The mantra "We are all one" was groovy.

In retrospect, it is not surprising that video was particularly attractive to women artists: the field was new and wide open, without an established hierarchy or old-boy network to exclude women. Martha Rosler's *Semiotics of the Kitchen* (1973) is a hilarious parody of the popular TV cooking show with chef Julia Child. Instead of a recipe, Rosler presents her impression of everyday kitchenware. She begins by enunciating "A" as she dons an apron, then proceeds letter by letter: she illustrates E by beating the air every which way with an eggbeater; for K, she raises a knife, and segues into a series of vehement stabbing gestures. By the end of the alphabet the kitchen cupboard resembles a cabinet of torture instruments. Kitchenware, Rosler suggests, is a tool of repression that channels women into traditional roles.

Wonder Woman, the superhero of comic book and television fame, is commonly seen as a strong role model for women. Dara Birnbaum, however, does not consider this superhero wonderful: her image was conjured up by men, who also outfitted her with a silly superhero accessory - a metal bracelet that can deflect bullets. Birnbaum's video *Technology/Transformation: Wonder Woman* (1978-79) is a patchwork of clips from the TV show. The voice on the music track of Birnbaum's tape taunts Wonder Woman to "shake thy wonder maker." Well, what makes a woman wonderful?

The provenance of Tony Oursler's *Weak Bullet* (1980) can easily be determined: it originated as a stream of consciousness from the hallucinogenic 1960s and '70s. In those heady years, drug visions branded the memory of mind explorers. Everyday life rarely packs the wallop of such experiences. Readers of Carlos Castaneda's series of books could readily believe the teaching of their drugmeister protagonist, Don Juan, that physical existence is not the primary reality and

quotidian trials are mere interruptions of one's true life within the world of dreams. In *Weak Bullet*, Oursler inhabits a grisly underworld, as if he were on a bad acid trip and suffering seizures.

A streak of desperation marked the art world of the 1970s. Perhaps the distress caused by the Vietnam War, or by the demise of the revolutions of the 1960s, left artists rudderless. Like many of their contemporaries, Marina Abramovič and Ulay turned to nihilism, which they directed at their own person. In performance, they psyched themselves up to push themselves to the ultimate end - their death. On more than one occasion they were rescued by a viewer. In *Breathing In Breathing Out* (1977), Abramovič and Ulay breathed only each other's exhaled breath until they passed out.

Paul McCarthy used to perform before a live audience, but the privacy of video recording provides a more appropriate stage for his disquieting revelations. McCarthy trades in bad taste. Many of his personae are animated by a juvenile fascination with blood and semen (ketchup and mayonnaise). His characters also gleefully play with brown mustard.

Heidi (1992), a collaboration between McCarthy and Mike Kelley, purports to recount the children's tale of a virginal maiden. The artists' Heidi is a large doll, three feet tall, with the face of Madonna (the pop star version). Wearing masks, McCarthy and Kelley engage Heidi/Madonna and two dolls in a sadomasochistic orgy that surpasses any of the escapades attributed to Madonna herself.

Video by its nature reaches into many areas. Over the years, artists from many different disciplines have come on board, producing a wide variety of video works. Today video is mainstream, but to gain acceptance it had to overcome several hurdles. One relatively unheralded advance, for example, was the invention of the video cassette, which enabled museums to program video decks rather than hire someone to stand in the gallery and rewind reel-to-reel tape.

Many years passed before guiding principles for the acquisition of videos were clarified.

Following the tradition of the unique objects of painting and sculpture, some artists offered tapes as limited editions; others followed the unlimited-edition model of experimental filmmakers, making videotapes accessible at affordable prices to universities and libraries as well as to collectors and museums.

The Museum of Modern Art purchased its first videos twenty-five years ago through the Department of Prints and Illustrated Books. Although the acquisitions committee was accustomed to purchasing limited-edition prints and books, they opted to acquire only "unlimited" tapes. Eventually the videotape collection was merged with the Museum's film archives.

In recent years the issue of limited-edition videos has resurfaced. Artists are creating "single channel installations" with add-on props and viewing conditions that specify the gallery's dimension and the luminance and size of the projected image. The works are dealt with as editions of installations, rather than simply as videotapes for intimate TV viewing.

Collectors are undeterred. Perhaps they have been infected by the irrepressible experimental nature of video: they find the complexities of acquiring videos stimulating. Pam and Dick Kramlich have assembled a premier video collection in San Francisco, and they are building a home nearby to live in and share with their acquisitions. Unlike a painting, which requires only a patch of wall, or a sculpture, which might fit in a niche, video does not integrate passively into a personal environment.

Video is central to the architecture of the Kramlichs' home. In addition to state-of-the-art exhibition areas, considerable space is reserved for a comprehensive library of video catalogues and ephemera. A research center and a climate-controlled storage area underline a commitment to preserving a personal vision of video - a snapshot of video history from a contemporary perspective. The Kramlich Collection limns the boundaries of video's rowdy beginnings and the many crosscurrents that have made it an art of our times.

Visibility and the Electronic Mirror

Christopher Eamon

In Bruce Nauman's 1968 videotape entitled *Wall-Floor Positions*, the artist is seen contorting his body between the floor and the wall of his studio. With one leg and an arm planted on the floor and the other leg and arm pressed into the wall at the edge of the image, he begins to move his body, slowly and strenuously altering his position such that an arm replaces the position of his foot, or a leg replaces his arm outstretched across the wall. He does so until he has completely inverted himself several times and has covered, within the sixty-minute running time of the tape, the entire image area.

Throughout this continuous action Nauman rarely misses the edge of the image's frame. He concentrates intently on his movement, never looking up at the camera, but always somewhere off-screen to his right. How does he locate the edge of the frame each time? How does he know where to place himself when he is upside-down stretching outward like a spider? He must be watching something off-screen, and, if so, given how the use of video unfolds in the late 1960s, it is altogether likely that the object of his gaze was the live image of his own body on a video monitor. If the reference for Nauman's movement can be located within the feedback loop of closed-circuit video, he can be seen also to address a specific condition of his body appearing as a video image. The position of his body within the frame is contingent on its being mirrored in real time by an absent device.

Nauman's use of video in many of his fourteen performance videos points to how the medium simultaneously shows live that which is being recorded. This capacity is one of the ways that the medium transcends documentation and suggests at least two points of continuity with other art practices of the late 1960s, the emergence of performance as an artistic activity beyond the creation of objects and a fascination with the mirror as an artistic trope.

At the same time, many works of early performance-related video art suggest a break with the traditional relationship between performer and audience. While a conception of video as documentation does not adequately address this role,