SURVEYING THE FIRST DECADE: VIDEO ART AND ALTERNATIVE
MEDIA IN THE U.S. (1968-80)
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1. EXPLORATIONS OF PRESENCE, PERFORMANCE, AUDIENCE

Video, with its capacity to immediately record and play back recorded moving images, was not only relatively inexpensive to buy and easy to operate, but was also easily adaptable as a new perceptual instrument, an extension of the human body. The appropriation of video into artmaking followed enormous changes in the art world in the late 1950s and early 1960s; the emergence of Minimalism, Happenings, Performance, and Fluxus demonstrated a new interest in the gestures and materials of everyday life as well as a desire to explore multimedia and intertextual forms of artmaking. (John G. Hanhardt, "Beyond Illusion: American Film and Video Art, 1965-75," *The New Sculpture, 1965-75,*1990)

(From the introduction of an issue of *Avalanche Newspaper* devoted to a January, 1974, evening of video and performance at 112 Greene Street, a New York City gallery) The works implied a very close and multilevelled rapport with audience consciousness; in fact, in many cases, part of their content was an articulation of that consciousness itself—of the audience's knowledge, beliefs, [and] expectations of the artist in question. This made the performances very far removed from a self-referential display situation. And it was a consciousness of the audience as people who've come to see a particular artist's work, as people who know or work within the art context, and also, in some cases, a consciousness of the limitations of that context. (Liza Bear, editor's introduction, *Avalanche Newspaper,* May,1974)

Artists included in *Explorations of Presence, Performance, Audience,* who moved into video from performance, sculpture, photography, writing, and dance, used the video camera and monitor as time-based tools to investigate perceptual processes or for performative

strategies within the paradoxically intimate and distanced theater of the video monitor.

The video equipment's unique ability to monitor presence and deliver informational feedback through recording and editing structured situations for the artist to venture personal exchanges with collaborators and/or audiences (Morris, Kubota, Acconci), and formal paradigms about the phenomenology of perception (Graham). In conjunction with this early performance-based work, the video monitor often functioned as a mirror, a diary, a theater, and an ironic reference to television's "perceptual imperialism" (Paul Ryan, "Cable Television: The Raw and the Overcooked," *Radical Software,* 1970). Videotape, a reusable and relatively inexpensive recording medium, was an ideal tool for performing artists to integrate into their meditations on presence and to foreground perceptual process over commodifiable art product.

In most of these tapes the performer constructs an active relationship with the audience, one in which the viewers' awareness is specifically acknowledged under both live and remote viewing conditions. Such an aesthetic focus reflects, in part, the period's cultural agenda to radically rethink personal and institutional relationships of all types. A variety of strategies for engaging viewers' attention, some of them confrontative and transgressive, are played out in these tapes. Provocations of viewers' erotic projections (Acconci, Jonas), social histories bearing the baggage of television viewing (Wegman), expectations around high and low art (Baldessari), and comfort with art as a discrete object of contemplation rather than experiential process (Kubota, Morris) challenged assumptions brought to a video tape screening or art performance using video.

1. EXPLORATIONS OF PRESENCE, PERFORMANCE, AUDIENCE

Performer/Audience/Mirror
Dan Graham   1975   23:00

Selected Works [Two Dogs and Ball (silent), Used Car Salesman, Dog
        Biscuit in Glass Jar]
William Wegman   1972   90:00 ex. 8:00

Baldessari Sings LeWitt

John Baldessari	1972	12:35 ex. 4:00

Undertone
Vito Acconci	1972	30:00 ex.10:00

Vertical Roll
Joan Jonas	1972	19:30

My Father
Shigeko Kubota	1975	15:00

Exchange
Robert Morris and Lynda Benglis	1974	36:00

2. INVESTIGATIONS OF THE PHENOMENAL WORLD--SPACE, SOUND AND LIGHT

[T]o show that light is a constant moving force, an ever-changing form...And when creative people begin to get involved with this idea of energy rather than the idea of making pictures then we will come to some creative aspect not belonging to one particular class but toward a new exploration which is for all. (Aldo Tambellini, "Simultaneous Video Statements," *Radical Software*, 1970)

[In *Boomerang*:]...a delayed audio feedback system (two tape recorders, earphones) was set up in a television studio...This system established a distance between the apprehension and the comprehension of language as words split, delayed, mirrored, and returned. Thoughts were partially being formulated, comprehended, and vocalized. The reiteration presented a revolving, involuting experience, because parts of the words coming back in on themselves stimulated a new direction for thoughts...This unit of discourse examines and reveals the structural framework of the system. (Richard Serra,*Video Art*, 1976)

Throughout the late1960s and1970s, artists intrigued with both the physical and experiential dimensions of a time-based medium engaged video to extend process-oriented, phenomenological investigations of space, sound, and light.

Some tapes in this program were made by artists who had already developed a distinguished body of work in sculpture, performance, painting, music, or film. In extending aesthetic preoccupations beyond mid-1960s strategies with objecthood and materials specific to traditional painting or sculpture, many of the these projects featured the body of the artist and its capacity to articulate its own perceptions, its stamina, and its own generation of sound. In those works the body of the artist functioned as one kind of instrument in the presence of, or complicated by, the video and audio recording instruments (McCarthy, Nauman, Serra and Holt, Palestine, Hill). Issues of attention such as boredom and exhaustion, of the artist and the audience, were embraced as part of the potential dynamic range of the work (Nauman). Related to this introduction of the body as idiosyncratic recording or expressive device are other video projects which proposed structural relationships between natural or biological and electronic systems (Campus, Kos).

Reflecting their roots in1960s minimalism, many artists represented in this program produced videotapes which generate their own descriptive systems for physical operations and materials, whether inventorying synthetic spaces constructed by interfacing two cameras and a mixer (Campus), reporting on the experience of audio delay of one's voice (Serra and Holt), or testing the capacity of audio speakers' vibrating cones to move sand and water as well as air (Hill). A related concern for grounding these physical explorations in the routines and materials of the everyday revealed the artist tracing habitual movements in his studio (Nauman), harmonizing with a revving motorcycle engine (Palestine), and demonstrating fundamental musical harmonies on a simple calculator (Conrad).

Working out of the 1960s, a decade that valorized the marriage of art and technology, some of these materials-based operations introduced the controlled methodology of a science experiment (Fox, Kos, Campus), while others specifically registered transcendent or mythic metaphors for fundamental physical and electronic processes involving light, sound, and space (Viola).

2. INVESTIGATIONS OF THE PHENOMENAL WORLD—SPACE, SOUND, AND LIGHT

The Black and White Tapes

Paul McCarthy	1970-75	33:00 ex. 7:00

Stamping in the Studio
Bruce Nauman	1968	60:00 ex. 5:00

Double Vision
Peter Campus	1971	15:00

Boomerang
Richard Serra and Nancy Holt	1974	11:00

Island Song
Charlemagne Palestine	1976	16:00

Cycles of 3s and 7s
Tony Conrad	1976	30:00 ex. 3:00

The Children's Tapes
Terry Fox	1974	30:00

Soundings
Gary Hill	1979	18:00

Lightning
Paul & Marlene Kos	1976	1:17

Sweet Light
Bill Viola	1977	10:00

3. APPROACHING NARRATIVE—"THERE ARE PROBLEMS TO BE SOLVED"

The necessity for digressing from and undermining a coherent narrative line driven by characters, or simply refusing to comply with its demands for spatio-temporal homogeneity,

uninterrupted flow of events, closure, etc., has always been a basic assumption in my scheme of things. The necessity for *inducing* identification has only recently become worrisome, because once it is hooked, how do you unhook this audience that dreams with all its eyes open? (Yvonne Rainier, "More Kicking and Screaming from the Narrative Front/Backwater," *Wide Angle*, 1983)

I am personally happiest when I am forced to solve a problem. The aggression on stage has to do with that. I want the performer and the performance to give the audience the feeling that there are problems to be solved. And I've made the solution available, somehow. (Richard Foreman, in Eric Bogosian, "Interview with Richard Foreman," *Bomb*, 1994)

The works in *Approaching Narrative* establish inventive formal armatures for staging epic story-telling. Like much video and film work from the early and mid-1970s, these projects reveal little interest in seducing an audience into accepting a seamless narrative illusion of reality. Rather, more attention is directed to problematizing an audience's understanding of the "real" construction of their own attentional apparatus based on the material fundamentals of video and film production. "...[F]ilm and video by artists working within the art world and avant-garde cinema...sought to subvert the tradition of narrative illusion as the sole means of constructing meaning in filmmaking and television. To achieve this, they employed various formal and aesthetic strategies, including directly addressing the technologies and properties of film and video, turning the camera upon themselves...and exploring the conceptural basis of the processes of production" (John Hanhardt, "Beyond Illusion: American Film and Video Art, 1965-75," *The New Sculpture, 1965-75*, 1990).

Audiences may have to work to construct meaning for these curious communications which sought to rupture expectations of narrative closure and illusions of an authorized point of view. They may be unsettled often—by buzzers which repeatedly interrupt a meticulously staged theater in a box (Foreman), the speaker's emphatic "cut it out! cut it out!" (Acconci's stage directions or part of the confrontative dialogue he performs?), or Carel and Ferd's intimate disclosures to videographer Ginsburg.

These three remarkable epics are structured around the collection and presentation of physical "evidence"—for example, a series of scenes and diary entries that may or may not share a common place or time (Acconci); tableaux that fill up with furniture, books about Western civilization, and dancers (Foreman); and hours of videotaped countercultural living (Ginsburg). The various performers—the banished revolutionary, the young feminist, the countercultural couple and their videographers—are committed to interrogating their collected cultural material. Notably, there is little effort by the videomakers to provide a neatly packaged answer to their questions or to moralize through them.

The "problems to be solved" through these fragmented narratives were each housed by their makers in radically revisioned theaters. They included the intimate theater of video through which the cultural revolutionary addresses a condition where "[the masses] associate power with obsolete buildings" (Acconci); the formally restrained tableaux paradoxically coupled with its female protagonist's alliances with a revolution-in-progress (Foreman); and the endless countercultural lifestyle assertions played out through the multi-monitor, multi-channel installations featured in new video spaces on east and west coasts (Ginsburg). These experimental video epics present fragments of cultural evidence from a decade which challenged public storytelling and sought to decentralize cultural mythmaking by inventing new forms of theatrical space.

3. APPROACHING NARRATIVE—"THERE ARE PROBLEMS TO BE SOLVED"

The Red Tapes, Tape 2
Vito Acconci   1976   58:00

Out of Body Travel
Richard Foreman   1976   42:00   ex. 24:00

The Continuing Story of Carel and Ferd
Arthur Ginsberg and Video Free America (edited with interviews for
"Video and Television Review" ("VTR")   1972-75   60:00   ex. 33:00

4. GENDERED CONFRONTATIONS

> ART HERSTORY: The alteration of the past through
> reinterpretation in the present. Superimposition of the present
> over the past. Role playing. The discrepancy between the image
> and the event. History and actuality. The individual in time and
> place. The still frame vs. the moving frame. Time in history.
> (Hermine Freed, *Video Art*, 1976)

> Large tracts of the common ground currently occupied by
> feminism and art were delineated in two essays that
> circulated widely in the 1970's. In keeping with feminist
> investigations into the implications of gender for all
> cultural forms, the titles of both articles were framed
> as questions: 'Why Are There No Great Women Artists?'
> [by art historian Linda Nochlin, 1971] and 'Is There a Feminine
> Aesthetic?' [by Sylvia Bovenschen, 1977]... (Martha Gever,
> "The Feminism Factor: Video and its Relation to Feminism,"
> *Illuminating Video*, 1990)

The growing influence of feminism politicized cultural territory in
the late 1960s and 1970s—women reassessed and asserted
themselves as performers, artists, producers, and viewers. The
observation that the "the personal is political," central to the period's
widespread consciousness-raising (CR) groups, became an important
impetus for using video to examine one's own life and the
experiences of female friends and family, and to question one's own
relationship to what was coming to be understood as "her"/history.
As histories of women in the arts and in society as well as strategies
of empowerment were explored, critical attention was also focused
onto speculations around the existence of an essential female
aesthetic, and the question of women as objects of the theoretical
(male) gaze.

Studies of mass culture's relationship to women led to explorations of
gendered relationships evident in Americans' complicated
parafamilial relationship with television and pararomantic
relationship with film, representations of lesbian experience, and the
fractured and fetishized depictions of women by commercial
advertising. While some artists sought an overtly oppositional media
practice formally grounded in performance (Rosler, Benglis), cinema

verite documentary (DeVito), and one's own or appropriated home movies (Montano) that eschewed the representational codes of commercial television and film, others strategically repositioned familiar images from art history (Freed), and mass media (Angelo and Compton, Segalove).

The videotapes included in this program provide a reference point from which to examine the powerful feminist investigations that challenged the reigning but waning modernist and materials-based discourse of the 1970s, revisited psychoanalytic theory and critical examination of the construction of the subject, and continue to inform the cultural theory of the 1980s and1990s.

4. GENDERED CONFRONTATIONS

Art Herstory Hermine Freed	1974	22:00 ex. 15:00
Female Sensibility Lynda Benglis	1973	14:00
Always Love Your Man Cara DeVito	1975	19:00
The Mom Tapes Ilene Segalove	1974-1978	28:00 ex. 4:00
Primal Scenes Linda Montano	1980	11:00
Nun and Deviant Nancy Angelo and Candace Compton	1976	20:00 ex. 13:00
Vital Statistics of a Citizen, Simply Obtained Martha Rosler	1977	38:00

5. PERFORMANCE OF VIDEO IMAGING TOOLS

I started with light, light and shadow, a typical filmic
agenda; I started working with stroboscopic lights. Then
I encountered video, whose principles essentially negate
film. I gave up film instantly. Video was undefined, free
territory, no competition, a very free medium. The community
was naive, young, strong, cooperative, a welcoming tribe.
There was instantly a movement mediated by two influences.
One, the portapak made an international movement possible,
and two, the generation of images through alternative
means--the camera no longer carried the codes. (Woody
Vasulka, in Chris Hill, "Interview with Woody Vasulka," *The
Squealer*, June, 1995)

DISTRIBUTION RELIGION: The image processor may be copied
by individuals and not-for-profit institutions without
charge. For-profit institutions will have to negotiate
for permission to copy. I think culture has to learn to
use high-tek [sic] machines for personal, aesthetic, religious,
intuitive, comprehensive, exploratory growth. The
development of machines like the Image Processor is part of
this evolution. I am paid by the state, at least in part,
to do and diseminate [sic] this information; so I do. (Dan
Sandin, in Lucinda Furlong, "Notes Toward a History
of Image Processed Video," *Afterimage*, Summer,1983)

Artists who explored video as an electronic "material" were
interested in the process of translating energy and time into
waveforms, frequencies, voltages and finally into video and audio
images. Some artists stated their intentions to develop a new formal
"vocabulary" for this electronic medium, which they pursued further,
collaborating with independent engineers, through the development
of new analog and eventually digital imaging tools. Tapes were often
documents of "dialogues with tools" (Vasulkas), or real time
performances of the tools where a video signal would be routed
through an interface of modifiable electronic instruments.

An elementary vocabulary for what the second generation video
artists in the 1980s came to regard as video's "special effects" was
developed in the late 1960s and early 1970s by artists who had been
inspired by, among other phenomena, the production of light shows
and the possible adaptation of audio synthesizer design to video.

Eventually, the video and electronics industry marketed standardized instuments for producing a range of video special effects. The first generation of video artists, however, were introduced to the image making potential and formal vocabulary of the medium through hand-built analog instruments like Bill Hearn's Vidium (1969), the [Nam June] Paik/[Shuya] Abe Synthesizer and Scan Modulator (1970), Eric Siegel's Electronic Video Synthesizer (1970), Dan Sandin's Image Processor (1972), George Brown's Video Sequencer and Multikeyer (1973), the [Steve] Rutt/[Bill] Etra Scan Processor (1973), and Stephen Beck's Direct Video Synthesizer (1974). Working outside of the television industry during most of the 1970s, these artists and independent engineers established opportunities for others to work directly with their custom-built tools through access programs in media art centers, artist-run residency projects, university media programs, and experimental labs at public television stations.

"Video synthesizer" is a term that refers to machines designed to produce a video image without using a camera as well as instruments that alter or "process" the camera image. In the production of a video image, the video signal can be generated by the electron scan of a video camera, but also can be produced by a wave form generator, or even by an audio signal. Video signal mixing, colorizing, and luminance and chroma keying are a few of the fundamental video effects that could be produced using basic image processing tools. The self-generating, pulsing vortex effect of video feedback, simply achieved by pointing a video camera at the monitor to which it's cabled, is another elementary artifact of the video tools which fascinated many early producers. The video images included in this program produced by this first generation of video tools in the early 70s were produced on analog tools, although digital tools were developed for video by independent engineers and industry in the late 70s.

In addition to artists' efforts to produce new kinds of synthetic or processed images using the range of video and audio instruments available, tapes included in this program foreground aesthetic issues such as the relationship between electronic sound and image synthesis (Bode), and the possibility of radically reconceptualizing the unit of the frame, a structural element common to both video and film, but produced by entirely different electronic and chemical processes (Vasulkas). These tapes sample a range of sensibilities— psychedelic play (Gusella, Emshwiller), formal abstraction (Hocking),

spirituality (Buckner), rock music (Sweeney), tech bravado (Morton)—and testify to formal, visual, and musical ambitions of the artists.

5. PERFORMANCE OF VIDEO IMAGING TOOLS

Calligrams
Woody and Steina Vasulka   1970   4:00

Illuminatin' Sweeney
Skip Sweeney   1975   29:00 ex. 5:00

Video Weavings
Stephen Beck   1976   28:00 ex. 4:00

5 Minute Romp Through the IP
Dan Sandin   1973   6:30

Triangle in Front of Square in Front of Circle
Dan Sandin   1973   2:00

Video-Taping
Ernest Gusella   1974   3:00   silent

Exquisite Corpse
Ernest Gusella   1978   8:00   silent

Einstine
Eric Siegel   1968   5:00

General Motors
Phil Morton   1976   60:00 ex. 10:00

Merce by Merce by Paik
Nam June Paik   1978   28:00

Crossings and Meetings Ed Emshwiller	1974	27:33 ex. 4:00
Oval Series Sine Wave Ralph Hocking	1977	4:00
Pictures of the Lost Barbara Buckner silent	1978	23:00 ex. 8:00
Video Locomotion Peer Bode	1978	5:00 silent
Music on Triggering Surfaces Peer Bode	1978	3:00
C-Trend Woody Vasulka	1974	9:00 ex. 7:00
Switch! Monitor! Drift! Steina	1976	10:00 ex. 4:00

6. DECENTRALIZED COMMUNICATIONS PROJECTS

Video was inexpensive, easy to use, anybody could do it, everybody should do it. That was the mandate, like the power of the vote. Vote. Take responsibility. Make it and see it. (Ken Marsh, interview with Chris Hill, July,1992)

The experiments with public access on cable television continue to be among the more significant in contemporary communications. On specific channels set aside by a cable company, groups or individuals are afforded, without charge, an opportunity to present themselves directly undiluted by the direction or inhibitions of media professionals. The only

restrictions on content at present relate to laws on libel and profanity...The over-all concept, however, carries in its highly decentralized structure staggering ramifications for the electronic media...Eventually, it seems, television's monologues may have to make room for cable-vision's dialogue. (John J. O'Connor, *New York Times,* June 6,1972)

Generated by artists, public access cable producers, and video collectives, these tapes mark the efforts of cultural activists to redefine the asymmetrical relationship between transmission and reception, the production and consumption of American television. The introduction of the portapak in the politically-charged late 60s inspired proposals for a radically decentralized information system. "Culture needs new information structures, not just improved content pumped through existing ones" (*Radical Software,* 1970). Community activists and artists were further supported by a 1972 Federal Communications Commission (FCC) ruling requiring public access provisions in cable systems with over 3500 subscribers, and by dramatically increased media arts funding from government agencies and private foundations. By mid-decade, there existed a burgeoning alternative media network of public access cable channels, media art centers, public television stations, and a range of independent venues that included pirate TV, media laboratories, and library video programs, which would continue to expand through the end of the decade.

Many of these communications projects were intended to appeal to specific communities and audiences, proclaiming themselves "local, vocal, and non-commercial." Citizens could be trained to make tapes and video could become integrated with local social and cultural agendas. In the mountains and hollers of Appalachia independent videomakers trained citizens who recorded and distributed on cable a local culture that previously had been transmitted through a rich oral tradition (Broadside TV). Videomakers' documentation of the public speech and demonstrations of citizens in urban areas led to their participation in significant cultural and political events that might be screened for further discussion or as part of a community mediation process (David Cort and Curtis Ratcliff, People's Video Theater).

Citizen producers used this growing network of alternative venues to foreground voices and opinions that were unrepresented or

misrepresented in the market-driven mass media (ACTV, Gustafson, Portable Channel, others). Notions of cultural community were also expanded as producers undertook explorations of their ethnic heritage, building bridges across otherwise distanced cultural territories through historical and/or spiritual re-examination of their roots (People's Communications Network, Downey). Because many cable TV projects were produced around local issues for local audiences and never intended for a national audience, many of these tapes remain virtually forgotten in community centers, schools, and museums across the country.

6. DECENTRALIZED COMMUNICATIONS PROJECTS

Mayday Realtime
David Cort and Curtis Ratcliff   1971   60:00 ex. 10:00

Selected Tapes 1971: Women's Liberation March NYC, Gay Pride
March NYC, Young Lords Occupy Manhattan Church, Native American
Action at Plymouth Rock
People's Video Theater (Ken Marsh and Elliot Glass)
                                             1971-1972   28:00
Participation
Woody and Steina Vasulka   1969-1971   30:00   ex 6:00

First Transmission of ACTV
ACTV and George Stoney   1972   4:00

Jonesboro Storytelling Festival: Kathryn Windham Telling Ghost
Stories (The Jumbo Light)
Broadside TV   1974   6:00

The Politics of Intimacy
Julie Gustafson   1974   52:20 ex. 10:00

Attica Interviews
Portable Channel   1971   30:00 ex. 8:00

Queen Mother Moore Speech at Greenhaven Prison
Anonymous NYC Cable Producers   1973   17:00

The Laughing Alligator
Juan Downey   1979   27:00

7. CRITIQUES OF ART AND MEDIA AS COMMODITY AND SPECTACLE

> The spectacle is not a collection of images, but a social
> relation among people, mediated by images. (Guy
> Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, 1970)

> John Baldessari: Ingres and Other Parables, Konrad Fischer,
> Dusseldorf, October 8 22, 1971...
> The Best Way to do Art.
> A young artist in art school used to worship the paintings
> of Cezanne. He looked at and studied all the books he could
> find on Cezanne and copied all of the reproductions of
> Cezanne's work he found in the books. He visited a museum
> and for the first time saw a real Cezanne painting. He hated
> it. It was nothing like the Cezannes he had studied in the
> books. From that time on, he made all of his paintings the
> sizes of paintings reproduced in books and he painted them
> in black and white. He also printed captions and
> explanations on the paintings as in books. Often he just
> used words. And one day he realized that very few people
> went to art galleries and museums but many people looked at
> books and magazines as he did and they got them through the
> mail as he did. Moral: It's difficult to put a painting in a
> mailbox. (Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the
> Art Object*, 1973)

For a brief period in the late 60s and early 70s, making art as a
commodity for investment was broadly criticized by artists.
Performance art and video had no established markets; both
presented archival problems and unknowns for collectors. In early
70s publications, community producers and video artists from all
over the country declared the necessity of creating a media culture

opposed to corporate-owned television, dubbed "video's frightful parent" by critic David Antin. Global Village, an early New York City collective, referred to broadcast TV as a "comic book medium" and invoked video's structural potential for "instantaneous feedback...as the visual counterpart to the underground newspapers." Artists' and audiences' ambivalence around the spectacle on and of television became a subject for critical examination.

Through projects that were oppositional to both the economic and attentional structures of television, artists targeted the nature of its spectacle (Ant Farm and T.R.Uthco), spelled out critical manifestoes (Serra), undermined its selection of newsworthy events and public storytelling (Ramos, University Community Video), and challenged consumers' investments in its cast of heroes and occasional heroines (Optic Nerve, Raindance). These artists showed their work in public spaces, on public television, in some museums, and in alternative cultural settings such as artist-run spaces.

Although most artists and community producers resisted corporate television's authority, new critical strategies such as appropriation emerged toward the end of the 70s to analyze and comment upon a media world still dominated by commercial interests. Artists re-presented or quoted corporate television and film images in an effort to reframe them and deconstruct the ideological context that constructs meaning for viewers (Birnbaum).

7. CRITIQUES OF ART & MEDIA AS COMMODITY & SPECTACLE

Eternal Frame
Ant Farm & T.R. Uthco   1976   24:00

Television Delivers People
Richard Serra   1973   6:00

The Business of Local News
University Community Video   1974   25:00   ex. 15:00

Proto Media Primer
Paul Ryan and Raindance   1970   16:00

About Media
Tony Ramos   1977   26:00 ex. 17:00

Fifty Wonderful Years
Optic Nerve   1973   28:00

Wonder Woman
Dara Birnbaum   1978-1979   7:00

8. INDEPENDENTS ADDRESS TV AUDIENCES

With the new technology of verite, documentary could rise to the revolutionary potential which its pioneers always sensed in it, offering us an unprecedented range of experience against which, by endowing it with significance, to structure our consciousness and our values. But television as an institution, by its impoverishment of documentary's reference to the world, proffers us in effect an impoverished world to which it invites us, by construing it as *the* world, to render assent. The only experience offered by most television is the experience of watching television; and the inertia of the system operates to keep things that way. (Dai Vaughan, *Television Documentary Usage*, 1976).

Independents have developed self identity and effective organization and are now a constituency with allies as diverse as the public interest and minority groups and the Hollywood studios. As a result they cannot be ignored in policy constructs of the future...The central focus must become the determination of what proportion of the national schedule and how many hours per year should be devoted to non-station productions and who will administer such funds under what guidelines and procedures. (Nick DeMartino, "Independent Production in the Future of Public Television," *Televisions*, 1979)

Throughout the 70s many documentary producers worked to establish relationships with broadcast television that would deliver their independently conceived and produced programming to

large broadcast audiences. In the early 70s portable 1/2 inch open reel equipment guaranteed greater mobility than the 16mm film equipment used by professional news crews, but the electronic signal produced by the portapak was usually rejected by broadcast engineers. Some of the first tapes broadcast on public television were rescanned by studio television cameras off a monitor cabled to a 1/2 inch open reel deck. In 1972, TVTV's *Four More Years* was the first portapak-produced documentary "electronically broadcast" by KQED, San Francisco's public television station. In 1973, stand-alone time base correctors (TBCs) were introduced that could compensate for the portapak's signal idiosyncracies.

By mid-decade independent documentaries by local producers had been shown on public television stations all over the country—KUHT, Houston; WTTW, Chicago; WXXI, Rochester; WETA, Washington; KQED, San Francisco; KCTA, Minneapolis; WNET, New York; and more. Independent productions by TVTV and Downtown Community TV challenged the structure of broadcast television documentaries and news reporting. Public access cable television and video art centers remained an important outlet for work that challenged assumptions about healthcare, education, and the police and for projects by minority producers and women under-represented in the industry and in the arts. Nevertheless, many independent producers continued to lobby for the development of new funding sources and access to larger and more mainstream television audiences primarily targeting appropriations by Congress for independent programs on public television.

Video pioneers saw their challenging projects co-opted by broadcasters, who appropriated certain signifiers of independent eye-witnessing as stylistic inventions for their own television news and dramatic programs. Despite this, many continued to believe broadcast TV did offer important opportunities that the alternative networks could not deliver. In a society that receives so much of its culture and information from television, public television with its potential for reaching mass audiences continued to be a gamble for independents, who organized themselves to argue for better funding. Whether video documentarians could maintain independence in content and production values while working within broadcast television, was hotly debated throuout the decade.

8. INDEPENDENTS ADDRESS TELEVISION

Healthcare Your Money or Your Life
Downtown Community Television   1978   60:00

The Ruling Classroom
Peter Bull and Alex Gibney   1979-80   58:00

Four More Years
Top Value Television (TVTV)   1972   60:00