

# Bruce Kurtz

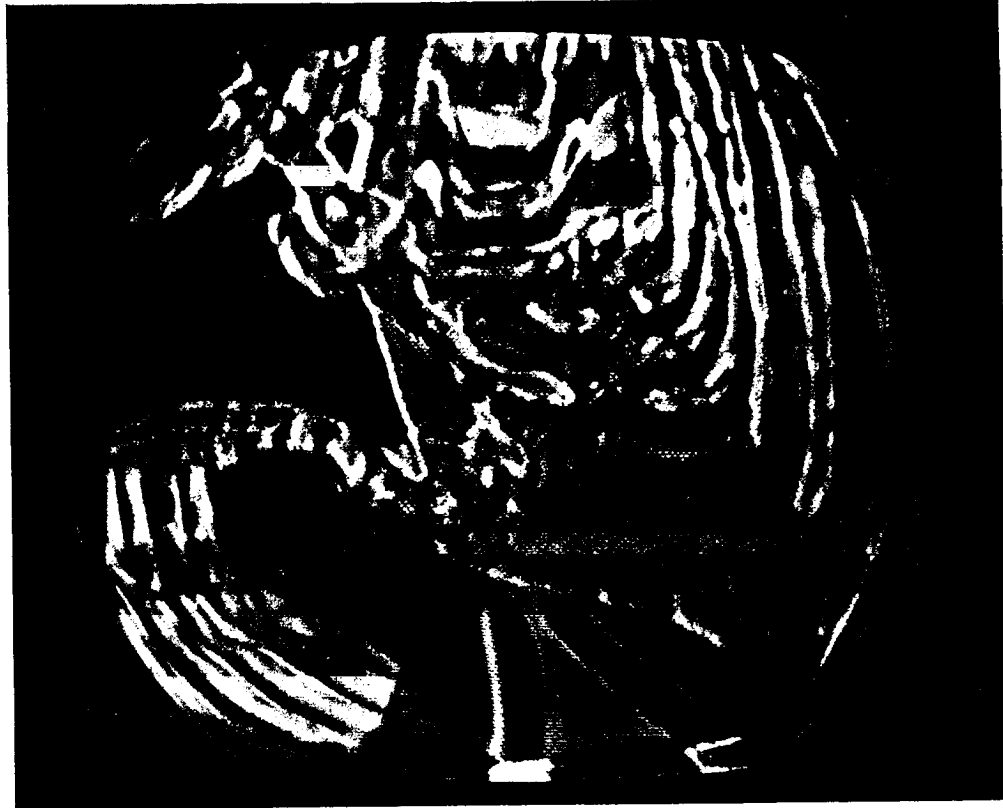
Nam June Paik has been one of the seminal forces behind the recent emergence of Video as a viable art form, both as the earliest artist to seriously work in video, and as a kind of invisible, protean energy which has produced a mental and aesthetic environment predisposed toward video as an area of important activity.

Paik, a Korean, first worked with television in Germany where he studied at the University of Cologne from 1956-58. At that time he altered a black and white television to electronically change images from live channel television, a predecessor of the Video Synthesizer which he and Shuya Abe produced in 1970. Later Paik took the television with him to Japan, where he extended the experimentation into color television, and then shipped the results to New York where he came to live and work in 1964.

The area of vanguard art activity which interested Paik at that time was energized by Jasper Johns, Rauschenberg, Kaprow, John Cage, David Tudor, and Yvonne Rainer. Paik, who is a composer, performer, and engineer as well as a visual artist, quickly assimilated the most advanced American art of the time and became their associate. He was especially close to Kaprow, Cage, and Tudor, but was also the benefactor of generous donations of TV sets from Rauschenberg, Hans Haacke, and Jasper Johns, who gave Paik a color television.

What all these artists had in common was an interest in extending the formerly fixed boundaries of art-making activity between visual art, music, dance, and theater into areas which included sound (music, happenings, dance, performance), movement (dance, theater, happenings, music), visual images (painting, dance, performance, happenings), tactile sensations (happenings, performances, painting), time, and issues of duration and sequence (happenings, performances, music, dance, painting), and active participation and involvement between the spectator and the art object or event. In many ways, the activities of Johns, Rauschenberg, Cage, Tudor, Kaprow, and Rainer made possible the extension of image making into video art, as video art combines visual, tactile, and auditory sensations, as well as movement and time. The earliest stimulation for video activity came not from film but from happenings, performances, dance, theater, music, and painting, though video was to be considerably influenced by Warhol's later "reel time" films and by the cinema of Michael Snow.

Mc Luhan writes of television being responsible for the re-integration of our senses, away from the primarily visual orientation of print technology. According to Mc Luhan, television is primarily audio-tactile, and has not only provided a new balance, hence reintegration, of our senses, but has eliminated the fixed point of view of visual thinking in favor of an all-involving, all-encompassing auditory-tactile space which surrounds us (have you ever



Nam June Paik, photographs from the Video Synthesizer (above and below.) Photographs by Peter Moore. Courtesy Bonino Gallery.

## VIDEO IS BEING INVENTED

*"Television Has Not Been Invented Yet." Robert de Havilland, Print Magazine, January/February, 1972.*

*"The nature of the environment is much much more on TV than on film or painting. In fact, TV (its random movement of tiny electrons) IS the environment of today." Nam June Paik, 1971.*



Nam June Paik, Video Synthesizer.



The Video Synthesizer, invented in 1970, seen here at the Everson Museum, 1972, courtesy the Everson Museum, photo by David Ross.

heard of a "point of hearing," or a "point of feeling"?). The presence of television as the most advanced, pervasive, and persuasive communications medium of the 'fifties was partly responsible for the emergence of art making activity directed toward the reintegration of the senses. Paik was at the center of this activity and awareness. In fact, he may have been the only artist seriously working in video at the time.

In 1964, the year Mc Luhan published *Understanding Media* and immediately became a sensation, Paik bought the first portable video tape recorder and camera in New York. The story is that he made a tape in a cab from the store to his destination, and when he arrived he declared that video would replace painting. A number of video objects and video events date from this time to the late 'sixties, such as the *T. V. Chair* (1968)<sup>1</sup>, a chair with a clear plexiglass seat under which is a globe-shaped television (a reference to Mc Luhan's global village?), and the *Television Bra* which he designed for Charlotte Moorman. The ubiquitous and indefatigable Charlotte Moorman, a consummate performer, wore the *Television Bra* while playing the cello. The *Video Chair* requires involvement and action on the part of the spectator, and involves movement, visual imagery, tactile sensations, sound, and performance. The *Television Bra*, a "liberation of TV from TV box<sup>2</sup>," makes a most intimate environ-

ment of television, both for the wearer and for the spectator, and involves all of the sensory responses of the *Video Chair*.

The Video Synthesizer which Paik and Shuya Abe invented in 1970, permits the artist to control and manipulate the entire video image.<sup>3</sup> With the Synthesizer one can add any quantity and quality of color to a number of black and white images fed into it, as well as distort and manipulate the image, turning faces inside out, etc., or abstracting images entirely. Many signal sources can be used, and audio inputs can control the visual image, thus electronically making sound visible. The color is electronically originated—produced, invented, and controlled entirely by the artist. When Cartier-Bresson saw the Synthesizer demonstrated in Colorado, he said that it created color unlike any he had ever seen before, either in art or in nature.

What distinguishes Paik's Synthesized color is its appeal to tactile sensations. It is a transparent, luminous, highly saturated, warm, smooth, caressing color. Rather than being merely visual, it is color which massages the viewer, color composed of light projected at the viewer, with the viewer's skin becoming the surface of the color. Paik's Synthesized images deal with a kind of color and surface unique to video, paralleling concurrent investigations into color and surface in the medium of painting by Olitski, Poons, and Bannard. That it is an

area of important activity is evidenced by the fact that these artists continue to work on issues of surface and color to this day.<sup>4</sup>

Video clearly involves an entirely different aesthetic than other art forms, as it has entirely unique image-making capabilities. The emergence of major video art requires a reassessment, or perhaps a recreation, of critical criteria. The place for criticism to begin is where artists have begun: with an investigation into the inherent characteristics of the medium and their image-making capabilities.

Definition of the inter-relationships of color, surface, space, and material<sup>5</sup> has characterized the art of Keith Sonnier in his latex and flocking pieces, gauze and flocking pieces, neon and glass piece, films, performances, live video pieces, and video tapes. In all of these works, surface as an integral aspect of colored material located in space is a primary consideration. This may be an obvious statement in verbal language, but in pictorial language it is an idea of impressive subtlety. Surface is not defined in Sonnier's art as an inherent characteristic of any medium. In fact, Sonnier has been able to integrate with apparent ease aspects of visual ordering characteristic of painting, sculpture, film, video, and performance in the same work. The most unique quality and the greatest strength of Sonnier's art is that it deals with an integration of color, surface, space, and material unlike any other art.



Video Bed, Ralph Hocking and Ken Dominick, with Charlotte Moorman, Everson Museum, 1972, photo courtesy the Everson Museum, photo by David Ross.

Video is an integrated image-making process. Sonnier has produced color video tapes of exceptional subtlety and beauty. That the tapes deal with painterly, sculptural, and performance issues relates them to his sculpture, which deals with sculptural and painterly issues, and identifies them with his strengths: the ability to work outside of confines and to integrate various qualities. Sonnier's inclination toward integration is well served by the medium of color video which, by its very nature, is an image-making process consisting of the integration of moving colored light with surface and simultaneous sound.

In Sonnier's video tape *TV In TV Out*, two images are superimposed, one shot-off network television and the other shot from a studio performance situation involving some of the materials and visual qualities of his sculptures. This live image is colorized by a device which adds color to a black and white image and in turn manipulates the color. Colorized color is more opaque and less three-dimensionally tactile than synthesized color, but it is tactile in its video scan-line texture.

The two images in *TV In TV Out* are, in effect, rubbed against each other, determining spatial positioning, and as the live, colorized image changes, moves, goes from opaque to transparent, flat to three dimensional, the image on which it is superimposed appears and disappears, flattens and becomes three-dimensional,

defining and altering the perception of the surface of the video image as the various surfaces with the image become visible. Though the



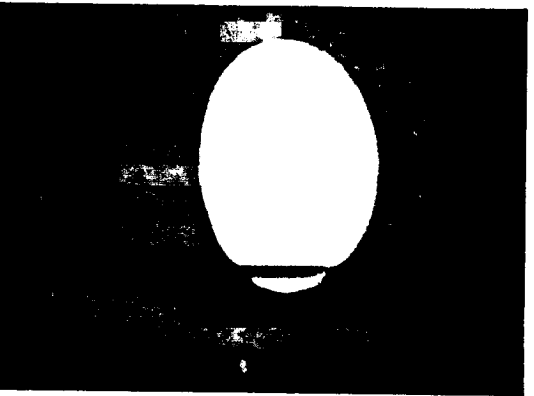
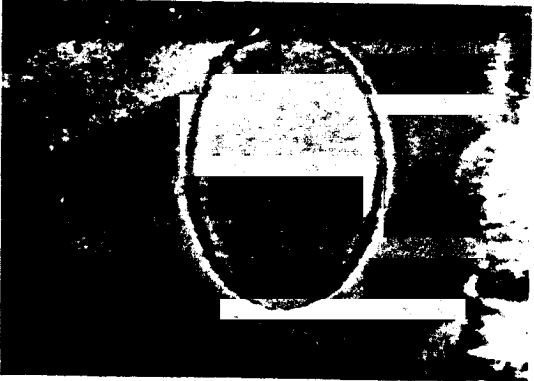
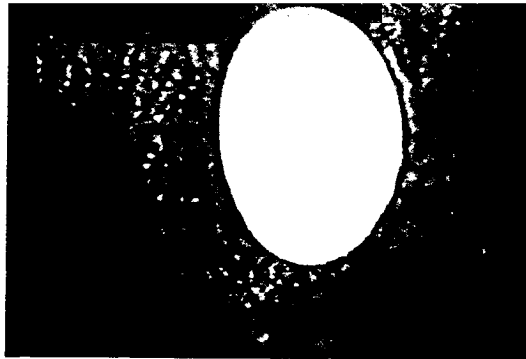
Nam June Paik, *TV Bra*, with Charlotte Moorman, photo by Peter Moore.

images move back and forth in space, the surface of the image is always on the surface of the TV screen: there is no illusion of looking into space, but the surfaces which are located in space are brought to the surface of the medium. There is no "in front of" or "behind"

except as one surface rubs against another, and this is done by a variation of the dots of colored light which comprise the video image and which are two-dimensional (some even say one-dimensional, as the video tape moves across the tape head in one way).

These changes are done almost entirely with color, and the color is completely controlled by operating the colorizer. Surface and space are determined by colored light. One is tempted to make parallels with formalist paintings, as the images frequently look like occasional color-field paintings, but this would be a mistake because the images are generated in audio-tactile-visual space, consist of light, not "luminosity," and are in motion, all characteristics which video does not share with painting. The measure of Sonnier's color video tapes is not the extent to which he extends painterly values, though there is some continuity there, but the extent to which he defines the surface, space, and color of the material of video.

Linda Benglis' tape, *Noise*, extends the work of art into an audio-tactile space which surrounds the viewer. The sound track consists of street noises amplified so much as to be physically involving. The video image is of a subject taped, then played on a monitor and retaped, and in some cases replayed again and retaped, thus removing the image enough times from the original to make use of the dots and lines, as well as static, snow, and varying density char-



Keith Sonnier, *TV In-TV Out* (1972), color videotape. Courtesy Castelli Gallery.

Keith Sonnier, *Mat Key Radio Track* (1972), color videotape. Courtesy Castelli Gallery.

acteristic of video images. The awareness of these characteristics is achieved by use of the capability of video for instant replay. The video image is a visual and tactile equivalent to the sound of amplified street noise.

The subjects are five different friends who are shown roughly from the shoulders up, but they are not important to the tape as they are only the material from which the video image is made. Altogether, the tape is an amazingly clear perception of the process of video's ordering of information and of its audio-tactile nature.

In *Home Tape*, Benglis took a portable video tape recorder with her when she visited her family in Louisiana. She saw most of the experience through the video camera, thus giving her a distance from an emotionally involving situation. The tapes were replayed and reshot off a monitor and commented about by Benglis, and these sequences were interspersed in the finished tape with sequences of the initial images and the original sound. It is a deeply personal tape about an emotionally involving situation, but it is precisely controlled. It makes use of the intimacy of video, of the one to one relationship between the viewer and the monitor

which distinguishes video so much from film, resulting in the feeling of shared experience though the experience is not in the least dramatized. In fact, the experience is presented in a very low-keyed fashion, with a monotone voice and a very factual verbal and visual description.

Besides using the intimacy of television and the instant replay capability of video in *Home Tape*, Benglis makes use of the fluidity of time possible with instant replay and the capability of carrying on a dialogue with oneself due to a combination of the characteristics of instant replay and intimacy. There is no other medium which makes these kinds of relationships possible.

Benglis' most recent tape, *On Screen*, consists of a very loud sound track of amplified street noises plus the sounds made by Linda as she grimaces and stretches her face before the video camera, between the video camera and the monitor playback of the first action, and finally between the camera and the second tape on the monitor, thus multiplying her image three fold. The sequences are punctuated by snow and other "disturbances" of the video surface which are used as definitions of surface and process

as well as for controlling the flow, similar to the punctuation used in written language, but much more emphatic. *On Screen*, like *Home Tape*, makes possible a dialogue with the artist and herself, which in *Home Tape* includes a fluid time in replay and in comparisons of memories of the past to experiences of the present. In *On Screen*, the artist carries on a visual, tactile, and auditory dialogue with herself. In addition, *On Screen* utilizes the surrounding auditory space of *Noise*, in the amplified street sounds which surround the hearer.

At least two of Joan Jonas' video tapes show evidence of her having come to video via performances. *Mirror Check* is a tape of the nude artist examining herself in a mirror with the use of a small hand mirror. As a performance I am told the work was very strong, but as a video tape it is ineffective because A.A. the video image is a non-mirror image. The images reflected in the mirror cannot be seen due to the poor resolution of video. characteristics which Linda Benglis took advantage of, and the camera never moves or registers any kind of feedback in spite of the fluid time-space nature of video.

*Left Side Right Side*, originally a performance, has been effectively transcribed into video tape



Joan Jonas, *Mirror Check*, 1972, 8 minutes, photo courtesy Leo Castelli Gallery.



Joan Jonas, *Vertical Roll*, 1972, 20 minutes, photo courtesy Leo Castelli Gallery.



Joan Jonas, *Left Side Right Side*, 1972, 7 minutes, photo courtesy Leo Castelli Gallery.



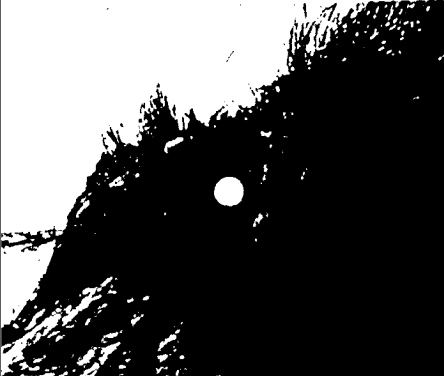
Linda Benglis, *Home Tape, Father's Office*, summer, 1972.



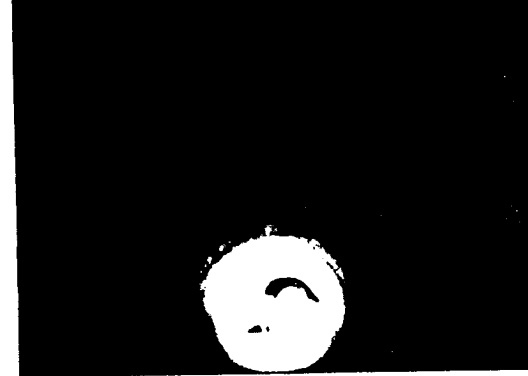
Linda Benglis, *Noise, August*, 1972, Image D.



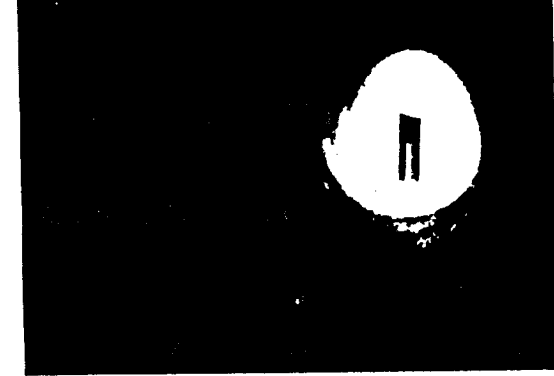
Linda Benglis, *Noise, August*, 1972, image E. Courtesy Bykert Gallery.



Nancy Holt, *Views Through A Sand Dune*, (1972) Narragansett cement-asbestos pipe 5 1/2' long.



Nancy Holt, *Locating #2*, 14 minutes, 1972.



Nancy Holt, *Locating #2*, 14 minutes, 1972.

by Joan Jonas In it we see here on a live feedback video monitor at the same time that we see her taped live, so the image which appears on our monitor is of two equal sized hands which look identical. When she points to one eye and says, "This is my right eye," the two images do not correspond, though they are both correct because one is, in effect, a mirror image. She compounds this confusion by placing a mirror in the center of her face and reflecting one side, to look like a whole face and saying, "This is my left side." The illusion is completely convincing, and we see two whole faces each of which consists entirely of one side of the face. She continues and draws on her face, first dividing it down the middle, then drawing on each cheek which is again mirrored in the video monitor alongside her.

In *Vertical Roll*, the most effective of Jonas' video tapes I have seen, she makes use of a vertically rolling video image (made by turning the vertical hold on the monitor) shot from a monitor. Within the vertical roll actions are carried out which conform in action and in sound to the rate of the roll. She begins with her face horizontally on the screen, clacking what appear to be spoons together in front of her

face at the instant that the black band of the vertical roll reaches the bottom of the monitor. This is followed by various activities such as clapping and jumping in keeping with the roll. She jumps with the roll, coming down when the black band reaches the bottom of the monitor, and against the roll, and then jumps out of the top of the monitor and doesn't come back in. Slowly her head reappears in front of the monitor from which the roll was shot, and the monitor is still rolling. The auditory and visual strength of this piece cause a kind of hypnotic attention, and when the image of her face no longer rolls, a startling discovery is made about the nature of the monitored video image.

Nancy Holt's video tape, *Locating #2*, was made by placing a tube on the end of the lens of a video camera and taping views of a scene while discussing what is seen with Jerry Clapsaddle, who is watching the view on a live-feedback monitor. Nancy and Jerry discuss what is seen, bit by bit, and at the end of the 14 minute video tape the tube is taken off the camera and the scene formerly seen bit by bit is seen in its entirety. It is discovered in the small details seen with the tube on the camera that we rely on language a great deal to iden-

tify what we are seeing: when not enough is seen to identify the sight by words it is difficult to clearly identify it. When the tube is removed, the verbal identification is so immediate as to be startling.

When the circle of vision moves toward the edges of the screen, it turns into an ellipse, partly due to the angle of vision but also to the convexity of the video screen. The tape has to do with the limits of vision, and of the camera as an extension of the eye, with memory and its reliance on verbal identification, and with live feedback establishing a communication loop which foreshadows something like this: Nancy, eye, camera, scene, monitor, Jerry, Nancy, etc.

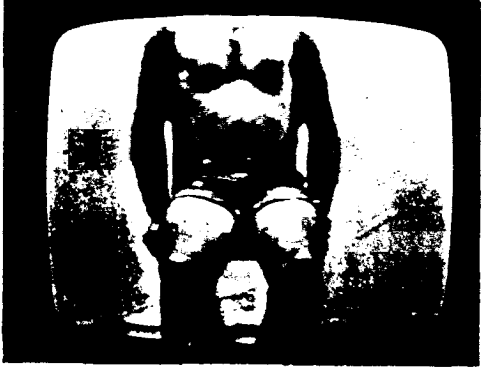
*Locating #2* is related to Holt's *Locators*, pieces of pipe fixed in specific location through which one observes a specific field of vision. A recent *Locator* is *Views Through A Sand Dune* made this fall on the coast of Rhode Island. The piece consists of a 5 1/2' piece of 8" cement and asbestos pipe set into a sand dune in such a way as to define a specific field of vision: a view of sand, water, sky, and the sun (earth, water, air, fire). This work differs from *Locating #2* in that the latter emphasizes feedback, a characteristic of video, and the changeable character



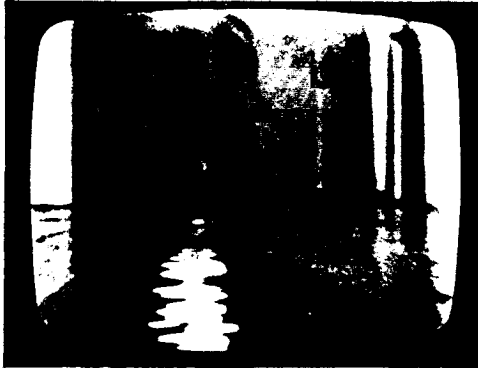
William Wegman, *Born Without A Mouth*, 1 minute, 1972, photo Jean Kender.



William Wegman, *Rage and Depression*, 1 minute, 1971, photo Jean Kender.



William Wegman, *Stomach Stone*, 1 minute, 1971, photo Jean Kender.



William Wegman, *Milk on Floor*, 1 minute, 1971, photo Jean Kender. Courtesy Sonnabend Gallery.

of the field of vision in tilting the camera as an extension of the eye (though one can change one's position in relation to *Views Through A Sand Dune*, the pipe itself cannot be moved). In addition, the title *Locating #2* accurately identifies video as a *process* (it is not called *Locator #2*), and the tape makes use in the sound track (conversation) and in the image-making process of the feedback loop character of video.

William Wegman is a California video artist, formerly a faculty member of the California

Institute of the Arts, currently living in New York. His tapes consist of series of unrelated vignettes which are dialogues between himself and the video camera, sometimes including his dog. The tapes are always humorous, often personal, and always about a set, acted situation with the camera usually fixed on a tripod. Though the situation is set, the feeling is very casual, loose, and experimental. Wegman discovers a kind of psychology of video space rather than rigidly structuring his work's with the physical properties of video. The ease and

casualness of his performances is due in part to the fact that video tape is erasable, and one can re-record on the same tape over and over. This permits a casualness and an experimentation that the costliness and permanence of film do not allow. In addition, Wegman's video space is activated by a dialogue between his various sensory responses and their inter-relatedness, qualities which we have seen are characteristic of video.

In *What's Wrong With Your Eye* (*Ventriloquism*), the tape opens with the camera in close range on Wegman's face with one eye closed. He speaks, without moving his lips, "Hey, what's wrong with your eye?" and answers himself, this time moving his lips, "I don't need it right now." "Oh yeah, what's this?" "A rose." "How did you know it's a rose?" "I could tell by the smell." "What's this?" "A potato chip." "How did you know it's a potato chip?" "I could tell by the taste." "What's this?" "A glass egg." "How did you know it's a glass egg?" "It doesn't sound like a real egg." "What's this?" "A piece of petrified wood." "How did you know it's a piece of petrified wood?" "It's heavier than real wood." "What's this?" "A Screwdriver." "How did you know it's a screwdriver?" "I guessed." Wegman deals with six senses in this tape: sight, smell, taste, hearing, feeling, and intuition, each of them with equal time and equal significance. It is characteristic of his work to deal with sensory balances in a lighthearted way, producing both entertainment and serious investigation into how we integrate our various sensory responses to form an overall response.

In *Stomach Song*, we see the artist seated, wearing shorts and with his shirt removed, from the chest to his knees. He makes humming sounds while at the same time protruding, sucking in, and convoluting his stomach, so that it appears that the sound is coming from his navel, his nipples are his eyes, and his stomach is his cheeks. The response is tactile, visual, and auditory, as well as causing a confusion between our sensory responses and our verbal identification of the "face," "eyes," "cheeks," and "song."

The limits of language in relation to sensory response is the subject of a photograph by Wegman which shows the artist holding two copies of the same book open in front of him while each of his eyes is directed toward one, an example of the incredible control he has over the parts of his body (as in *Nose Twitch*, a video tape in which he practically moves his nose all over his face). In the photograph the question is, is he reading two books at the same time or the same book twice? Wegman's use of confusing, contradictory, or absurd relationships between sensory experiences and thought may cause him to be identified with DADA, but the important difference is that somehow Wegman's art makes sense, and that sense is made not out of upsetting our clarified order but out of causing us to clarify our sensory responses which he deliberately upsets. The result is not obscurity or abstruseness, but a clear reordering, re-balance, and reintegration of sensory responses.

George Bolling's video tape, *Generations*, is a short action which is dubbed, or electronically copied, many times, each time removing it another step from the original and causing the



Michael Snow, *Three Breakfasts*, 40 minutes, 1972.

image to diminish in clarity. In a very short period of time the generations become indistinct, and are finally nothing but snow and other disturbances of the video screen. It is characteristic of video that copying a copy of a copy, etc., drastically changes the quality and character of the image, and Bolling has turned this structural characteristic into a virtue by extending it into a logic of its own.

Michael Snow's video tape, *Three Breakfasts*, makes use of the fact that the surface of the video screen is between us and the image. The tape consists of a slow zoom in on a long table covered with food for a breakfast. As the zoom slowly moves in, the objects on the table are pushed in front of the camera, until they reach the wall. When seen on a TV screen, effect is that while the table moves toward the viewer, the surface of the TV screen pushes the objects on the table against the wall. It is typical of Snow's cinema to make maximum use of a simple structural characteristics of the medium, and he has extended that sensibility here into the medium of video.

I have spoken so far about video tapes, which are seen on a monitor, but there is important video activity which uses the medium of video as an environment and as a more active process. An important work in this area is Michael Snow's *De La*, making use of the motorized, electronically controlled machine which he invented and used in the filming of *The Central Region*. The mechanism moves the camera in circular patterns at various speeds, so that the entire room is eventually surveyed and seen live on the four monitors placed in the room. The video piece is very different from the film in that the mechanism is visible and is seen as a kind of kinetic sculpture, but more importantly the viewer participates in the image-making process and sees himself on the monitors from the point of view of the camera. The camera and the eye see very differently in this piece, and the differences between them are not only informative about the environment but about video as a process. The camera is used in this case not as an extension of the eye, but as an independent surveying mechanism which logically, completely, and independently from direct human control investigates the entire surrounding space.

Bruce Nauman's *Live Taped Video Corridor* makes use, as its name implies, of both live and taped video. A live video camera is mounted 10 feet from the floor just outside the corridor. On entering the corridor, you look into the top monitor to see yourself entering the corridor, but the top monitor shows a tape of the empty corridor. You keep watching, waiting for yourself to appear as you enter, and then notice that you are appearing in the bottom monitor. The differences between live and taped video, and expectations and memories, have been utilized to bring into question the correspondences between sense experiences, thought, and image making.

Peter Campus's video work *Interface* is one of the most subtle, complex, and original video environments. It is entirely live, and the camera is not used as an extension of the eye but as an electronic information gathering mechanism. The work makes use of a sheet of glass held in a metal frame about six feet from a wall. Behind the glass and to one side is a video camera connected to a video projector in front of the



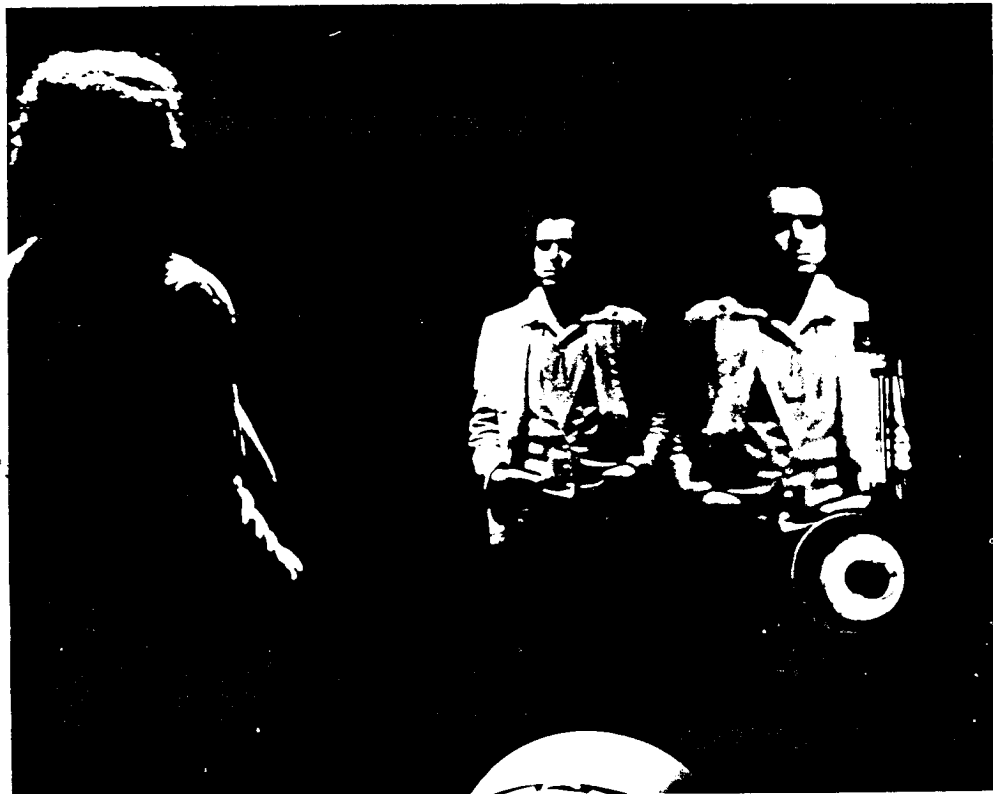
Bruce Nauman, *Live Taped Video Corridor*, 1969-70. Coll. Giuseppe Panza di Biumo, photo courtesy Leo Castelli Gallery.

glass. The camera is aimed at the left side of the glass and the projector at the right side. When the viewer stands in front of the glass, under a light, his image is reflected in the glass at the same time that it appears, the same size, in the live, projected video image on the wall behind the camera. The viewer can move about in the space encompassed by the camera and carry on an information exchange with himself multiplied by three. The glass, on which the viewer's

image is reflected, through which he is seen by the camera, and through which the video image is projected, is an intermediary between the viewer and himself. The environment is the space through which information is exchanged. The glass is a mirror and a window; a surface, a plane, and an illusion: a kind of summarized contradiction of the dichotomy between the values of formalist painting and illusionism. It might be tempting to make formal parallels between *Interface* and Duchamp's *Large Glass*, but the formal similarities of these two works are only incidental. They have a good deal more in common in that they both deal with metaphysical issues: one spectator said the *Interface* was like seeing the soul depart from the body.

Another important area of video activity is in the numbers of independent video groups<sup>7</sup> which have developed since portable video equipment became widely available in 1968. With the Sony VideoRover, a battery operated, portable video tape recorder and camera, videotapes can be made and played back anywhere at any time with almost the same degree of ease as portable tape recorders. Though two TV stations have made studio apparatus and local network air time available to artists<sup>8</sup>, most commercial television is based on promoting American, white, middle class, family oriented, male dominated, heterosexual, materialistic, and consumer-oriented values toward the end of exploitation and control. Kenneth Clark has said, "And unfortunately machines, from the Maxim gun to the computer, are for the most part means by which a minority can keep free men in subjection."<sup>9</sup> With the use of the VideoRover, or Porta-Pack, many groups have made tapes expressive of their points of view, which are impressive in their variance from the commercial TV point of view.

Video Freex, a group located in upstate New York, has made a tape called *Recycle* in which



Peter Campus, *Interface*, 1972, photo courtesy Bykert Gallery.



David Sasser, *Queer Blue Light Gay Revolution Video Project*, "Lesbian Mothers," 1972.

there appear the daily activities of the group. Their activities are very different from what one sees on television situation-comedies. The contrast makes one all the more aware of what an illusion commercial TV is, and that the most effective means of communication ever devised by man is used mostly for illusion, exploitation, and control. A sequence in *Recycle* called *Chicken Dinner* shows the members of the group killing, plucking, cleaning, cooking, and eating chickens. The last shot is of a man chewing on a bone and saying, "That's good chicken!" It may seem very simple, and it is, but when compared to the number of false, misleading, erroneous, and stereotyped messages about food and nutrition, and about eating (i.e. as sexual activity) on commercial television it takes on an honesty, truthfulness, and straightforwardness that is admirable. *Recycle* corresponds to simple things we care about and think about, things that effect our lives, unlike the frozen-chicken-TV-dinner commercial, television's illusion of experience aimed toward control and exploitation. Portable, inexpensive video production makes possible the dissemination of various points of view and could, if creatively managed, change our entire political, social, economic, moral, and aesthetic environment, just as commercial television controls our entire environment now. The important difference is: commercial television is centralized, whereas portable equipment takes video out of the studio and into the mainstream.

Fortunately, the emergence of video from the TV studio coincides with the appearance of cable TV which offers the possibility of locally generated programs and public access. So far, the accessibility of cable TV has not been very extensive, but public access to cable is required by the Federal Communications Commission,

which licenses the stations, and many groups are pushing to open cable TV to a wider variety of points of view in their hopes to have television more truly reflect the real world.

Television is politics. A recent demonstration of this fact is the effectiveness with which President Nixon used television in his re-election campaign. Beginning with the T.V. scripting of the Republican Convention by the president's staff, Mr. Nixon employed experts in the technique of commercial T.V. mind massaging. The persuasiveness of the medium is evidenced in



Frank Gillette, "Ruff Cut, an homage to R. Mutt, a work in progress so to speak," 1972, New York.



Videofreex, *Chicken Dinner*, 1971.

Nixon's ability to lie and get away with it. Television influences opinions and attitudes and controls behavior more effectively than any other medium in history.

*Queer Blue Light Gay Revolution Video Project* is a group of gay men and women who are making video tapes about the experiences of being gay in a media environment which provides no models of gay behavior, though homosexuality is the reality of millions of men and women. Homosexuals are only one of many minorities suppressed and oppressed by commercial television, including blacks, Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, women, children, the aged, etc. *Lesbian Mothers*, a 30 minute tape by the group, edited by David Sasser, is a sensitive, skillfully edited, beautifully clear and compassionate documentary treatment of the family lives, problems, and positive aspects of lesbians who live together with their children from heterosexual relationships. The approach is that of the documentary, and the tape presents interviews with people of the street who are sometimes violently against the idea of lesbian mothers, but the intimacy of the video medium and the ability of video to represent divergent points of view, plus the warmth and tenderness of the individuals involved and the skill of Sasser make a very convincing case for *Lesbian Mothers*.

These are three major areas of recent video tapes as art, practiced mostly by artists who have worked in other media as well, and seen in galleries and museums; video environments as art, again by artists; and video taped documentaries, often by individuals who have had little or no art experience, shown on cable and little or no art experience, shown on cable and seen in lofts. This article does not by any means deal with all of the artists working in these areas but is, rather, a representative selection of those who are among the best. These three areas are being developed concurrently and separately, though they sometimes overlap, as in the work of Michael Snow. We may see them merge more in the near future, and we may see video art decentralized from the gallery and museum going into the home, as David A. Ross, Video Curator of the Everson Museum plans when Syracuse has its cable installed. We may see contemporary video art become a daily experience as pervasive as commercial television, and we may discover that many people can be artists. At any rate, these areas of activity are among the most interesting and consequential image-making being done today.

1. See the catalogue, *The New York Collection for Stockholm*.
2. Catalogue, Paik-Abe Video Synthesizer with Charlotte Moorman, Galeria Bonino, Ltd., 23 November-11 December, 1971.
3. A Video Synthesizer is available for use at the Experimental-Television Center in Binghamton, New York, directed by Ralph Hocking and Ken Dominick.
4. See Walter D. Bannard, *Quality, Style, and Olitski*, Artforum, October, 1972.
5. See Robert Pincus-Witten, Keith Sonnier: *Materials and Pictorialism*, Artforum, October, 1969.
6. Robert Pincus-Witten, Keith Sonnier: *Video and Film as Color-Field*, Artforum, May, 1972.
7. The major organ of communication of these groups is *Radical Software*, begun by The Raindance Corporation. It is a kind of video Whole Earth Catalogue.
8. KQED in San Francisco and WGBH in Boston.
9. Kenneth Clark, *Civilisation*, Harper and Row, New York, 1969, p. 346.