sion, the company of its talk and its events, to overcome the anxiety of the intuition the medium embodies. But if I am right, this is the order it more or less already fulfills, proving again the power of familiarity, for good and ill, in human affairs; call it our adaptability. And who knows but that if the monitor picked up on better talk, monitored habitually the talk of people who actually had something to say, and if it probed for intelligible connections and for beauty among its events—who knows but that it would alleviate our paralysis, our pride in adaptation, our addiction to a solemn destiny, sufficiently to help us allow ourselves to do something intelligent about its cause.

NOTES
A set of comments William Rothman prepared on the basis of a reading of the first version of these remarks caused changes on every other page as I prepared a second version. This was then read by Norton Batkin, Gus Blaisdell, Jay Cantor, and Arnold Davidson, whose comments I used as I prepared the present version. I am, as before, grateful to these friends.
1. In *The Immediate Experience* (New York: Anchor Paperback, 1964).
2. Enlarged edition, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1979.
3. Cambridge, Harvard University, 1981.
4. New York, Columbia University Press, 1965.
5. Translated by Richard Howard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975).
6. I spell this out in "North by Northwest," *Critical Inquiry*, (Summer 1981).
7. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1976.
8. New York, Viking, 1971.
9. *Morphologie du conte*, translated by Marguerite Derrida (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1970).
10. P. 72; this is taken further and modified to characterize cartoons in "More of The World Viewed," pp. 167ff.
11. *What Is Cinema?* translated by Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), p. 97.
12. See, for example, the essays collected in Fernand Braudel, *On History*, translated by Sarah Matthews (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).
13. New York, Morrow Quill Paperbacks, 1978, pp. 348, 394.
14. An English translation of Tausk's paper, "On the Origin of the 'Influencing Machine' in Schizophrenia," originally published in 1919, is included in *The Psychoanalytic Reader*, edited by Robert Fliess (New York: International Universities Press, 1948), pp. 31-64.

La Vie, Satellites, One Meeting—One Life

Nam June Paik

IT IS SAID that all the sciences can trace their roots to Aristotle; but the science of cosmic aesthetics started with SARUTOBI Sasuke, a famous *ninja* (a samurai who mastered many fantastic arts, including that of making himself invisible, chiefly to spy upon an enemy). The first step for a *ninja* is learning how to shorten distances by shrinking the earth, that is, how to transcend the law of gravity. For the satellite, this is a piece of cake. So, just as Mozart mastered the newly-invented clarinet, the satellite artist must compose his art from the beginning suitable to physical conditions and grammar. The satellite art in the superior sense does not merely transmit existing symphonies and operas to other lands. It must consider how to achieve a two-way connection between opposite sides of the earth; how to give a conversational structure to the art; how to master the differences in time; how to play with improvisation, in determinism, echoes, feedbacks, and empty spaces in the Cagean sense; and how to instantaneously manage the differences in culture, preconceptions, and common sense that exist between various nations. Satellite art must make the most of these elements (for they can become strengths or weaknesses) creating a multi-temporal, multispatial symphony.

These factors complicated matters immensely for the broadcast of "Good Morning, Mr. Orwell," which was transmitted simultaneously on two channels from New York, San Francisco, and Paris, and received simultaneously in the U.S.A., France, West Germany, parts of Canada, and Korea.

First of all, there was the difference in time. There is a six-hour time difference between New York and Paris. It was impossible for it to be prime time in both countries, so I chose a cold winter Sunday. Noon in

New York (Sunday, January 1, 1984) would be freezing cold, so most people would still be at home (with a hangover). Twelve noon in New York is 6:00 p.m. in Paris. I figured that even the worst philanderer would take his dinner at home on New Year's Day. In Korea, this unfortunately turned out to be 2:00 a.m. on January 2.

A second difficulty was the difference in general knowledge and language. Orwell's *1984* has become so well known in English-speaking countries as to be almost stale. Obviously, it needs no explanation. In French-speaking countries, however, it has been out of print since the '50s, and, what is more, there is only one critical work dealing with it. Therefore, French TV required a long, long, fifteen-minute commentary both prior to and in the middle of the broadcast. These differences made this difficult avant-garde art even more difficult.

There is no rewind button on the BETAMAX of life. An important event takes place only once. The free deaths (of Socrates, Christ, Bo Yi and Shu Qi) that became the foundations for the morality of three civilizations occurred only once. The meeting of person and person, of person and specific era are often said to take place "one meeting-one life," but the bundle of segments of this existence (if segments can come in bundles) has grown much thicker because of the satellite. The thinking process is the jumping of electrical sparks across the synapses between brain cells arranged in multilayered matrices. Inspiration is a spark shooting off in an unexpected direction and landing on a point in some corner of the matrix. The satellite will accidentally and inevitably produce unexpected meetings of person and person and will enrich the synapses between the brain cells of mankind. Thoreau, the author of *Walden, Life in the Woods*, and a nineteenth-century forerunner of the hippies, wrote, "The telephone company is trying to connect Maine and Tennessee by telephone. Even if it were to succeed, though, what would the people say to each other? What could they possibly find to talk about?" Of course, history eventually answered Thoreau's questions (silly ones, at that). There developed a feedback (or, to use an older term, dialectic) of new contacts breeding new contents and new contents breeding new contacts.

"Good Morning, Mr. Orwell" of New Year's Day 1984 produced all kinds of feedback. Cage and Beuys are friends, but they have never performed together. Beuys and Ginsberg are two artists who have many things in common (active political involvement, heated performance, complete anti-nuclear naturalism, similar age, romanticism), but have never met. The heavenly stars (Mars, Saturn, Altair, Vega, etc.) meet periodically, but the earthly ones do so very rarely. When I ponder what mysteries the encounter with other people holds for our insubstantial lives, I feel it is a terrible shame that great geniuses may pass

their prime without ever meeting. And even when such encounters have actually taken place (for example, Cage and McLuhan; Cage and Buckminster Fuller), no camera has recorded the event. What a loss for the history of human civilization! In 1963, French television recorded a meeting between Edgar Varèse and Marcel Duchamp. Now that both of these giants have passed away, I find it a stirring moment no matter how many times I watch it. The satellite will no doubt amplify these mysteries of encounters by geometric progression. If I may relate a personal experience, I was surprised to find a photograph of myself and my respected friend Beuys at our first encounter (at the "Zero" exhibition held at the Galerie Schmela, Düsseldorf, 1961) in the catalogue *Zero International Antwerpen*. Indeed, I had not even known that such a picture existed.

Thanks to the satellite, the mysteries of encounters with others (chance meetings) will accumulate in geometric progression and should become the main nonmaterial product of post-industrial society. God created love to propagate the human race, but, unawares, man began to love simply to love. By the same logic, although man talks to accomplish something, unawares, he soon begins to talk simply to talk.

It is a small step from *love* to *freedom*. To predefine freedom is a paradox in itself. Therefore, we must retrace the development of freedom historically in order to understand it. The progressive American journalist Theodore White once wrote how impossible it was to explain the difference between *liberty* and *greed* to the leaders of the Chinese Communist Party at Yánān during the Second World War. There are 2,500,000,000 two-character permutations and combinations of the 50,000 Chinese characters. *Ziyóu*, the two-character word for *freedom*, however, did not come into being until the nineteenth century. Just as it is harder to translate *rén* (benevolence, humanity) and *li* (ceremony, etiquette) into English than *dào* (the way [of life, etc.]), it is extremely difficult to translate *liberty* and *freedom* into Chinese. It seems that *gòngchǎn*, the word *communist* as in the Chinese Communist Party, is a loanword from Japan; perhaps *ziyóu* originated in a similar fashion. Even in bright and free ancient Greece, there was the term *free man*, referring to a social class, but there was no philosophical concept of freedom. The passionate idea of freedom is said to have been born under the most unfree, dark domination, of medieval Christianity. Moreover, it was amidst the rise of fascism and the decadence of the Russian Revolution and after the loss of bourgeois freedom before and after the Second World War that man was most strongly and keenly aware of this passionate idea. The existentialism of Camus, Sartre, and Berdyaev was once again forgotten by West European society from the 1960s on, when it experienced a return of freedom and prosperity. In any case,

freedom is not a concept inherent in man (it is found neither in the *Koran* nor in the *Analects* of Confucius) but is an artificial creation like chocolate or chewing gum.

The "increase in freedom" brought about by the satellite (from a purely existential point of view, an "increase in freedom" is paradoxical; freedom is a qualitative idea, not a quantitative one) may, contrary to expectation, lead to the "winning of the strong." (Although the imported concepts of freedom and equality may appear to be close brothers, they are in fact antagonistic strangers.)

Recently, an Eskimo village in the Arctic region of Canada started establishing contact with civilization. So far they only have four stores. The first is a general store. The second is a candy shop. (They had not even tasted sugar until quite recently.) The third is, of all things, a video cassette rental shop!!!

Video has immeasurable magical powers. This means that the Eskimos' ancient traditional culture is in danger of being rapidly crushed by the bulldozers of Hollywood. The satellite's amplification of the freedom of the strong must be accompanied by the protection of the culture of the weak or by the creation of a diverse software skillfully bringing to life the qualitative differences in various cultures. As the poets of the beat generation learned from Zen, Phillip Glass obtained hints from the music of India, and Steve Reich looked to the music of Ghana in their creation of original forms of late twentieth-century high art, it is not an impossible task.

As long as the absorption of a different culture makes up the greater part of the pleasure of tourism, the satellite may be able to make every day a sight-seeing trip. So, SARUTOBI Sasuke not only embodies the origins of cosmic aesthetics but also the ethnic romanticism that must always be the companion of satellite art.

P.S. I dedicate this exhibition to my esteemed, one meeting-one life friend Shuya Abe.

From *Nam June Paik—Mostly Video* (exhibition catalogue). Translated by Yumiko Yamazaki. Tokyo: The Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, 1984, pp. 12-14.

FILM AND VIDEO: DIFFERENCES AND FUTURES

infiltrated WGBH-TV, Boston, to produce a single deadly piece precisely aimed through their expensive equipment. A man holds a photograph, seemingly of himself. You see him set fire to it and watch it burn from all four sides. Gradually you notice that the photograph is breathing, its eyes are blinking. This is the image of television.

From *Video Art*. Edited by Ira Schneider and Beryl Korot. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976, pp. 174-83. Reprinted with permission of the Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania from the catalogue to the exhibition "Video Art," 1975.

NOTES
1. Frank Gillette, *Frank Gillette Video: Process and Metaprocess*. Jodson Rosenbush, ed. (Syracuse, N.Y.: Everson Museum of Art, 1973), p. 21.
2. Hollis Frampton, "The Withering Away of the State of Art," *Artforum* (Dec. 1974): p. 50.
3. Jud Yalkut, "TV As a Creative Medium at the Howard Wise Gallery," *Arts Magazine* (Sept. 1969): p. 18.
4. Edward Stasheff and Rudy Bretz, *The Television Program: Its Writing, Direction, and Production* (New York: A.A. Wyn, 1951), p. 3.
5. Ibid., p. 6.
6. Ibid., p. 8.
7. Ibid.
8. Bruce Boice, "Lynda Benglis at Paula Cooper Gallery,„ *Artforum* (May 1973): p.83.
9. Les Levine, "Exerpts from a Tape: 'Artistic'," *Art-Rite* (Autumn 1974): p. 27.

Truth or Consequences: American Television and Video Art

David Ross

We have an inconsequential literature, which not only takes pains to have no consequences itself, but goes to a great deal of trouble to neutralize its readers by picturing all objects and situations without their consequences.
Bertolt Brecht, 1927[1]

THERE WAS ALWAYS something particularly disturbing about "Truth or Consequences," a prototypical 1950s American game show hosted by a smarmy announcer named Bob Barker in which members of the studio audience were made to look foolish as a consequence of answering a trivial question incorrectly. Perhaps it was the fact that one developed the idea that consequences were always undesirable and that if one could always tell the "truth" one might avoid them. Consequences were for suckers, the kind of people who actually went to sit in the audience of TV game shows to entertain those of us smart enough to keep our distance. Perhaps what was really feared was exposing the shallow mystery that was TV in its early period. This mystery was a great comfort to children of all ages, as the saying goes, for it effectively neutralized us all in precisely the manner in which Brecht had predicted it might.

The ways in which our neutralized status was reinforced by television over the years are in themselves quite fascinating. First there was the unstoppable character of television itself, which rated right up there with the earth's rotation in terms of natural phenomena. Television's

velocity was constant—it kept its pace whether you were watching or not, whether you were eating, sleeping, studying, playing, or paying attention. It was oblivious of you, and you (in return) were offered the opportunity to become oblivious of it and (by extension) anything else you chose to ignore. Equally as important was the TV-bred illusion of endless choice. Change channels whenever you like. Never be bored. Live free or die. Bill Viola's "seven-channel childhood" has expanded to 105, and it's still growing! This illusion of choice was so well developed that it actually promoted the notion that there was significant difference between the essentially identical offerings "competing" with each other for the lucrative privilege of capturing an audience. Of course, once captured, you (the audience of free individuals) were delivered to the same prisons—one in which your consumer desires would be rehabilitated en masse and your sense of self either perverted or retarded. Finally there was the seamless representation of a world populated by essentially good, middle-class, white people in which powerless women and other victims were intimidated, threatened, and often harmed by essentially evil, non-white or ethnic types. In other words, the problem of pernicious content. As America and its television "greened" in the '70s, these representations were modified and reformed, providing perhaps *the* critical illusion of the medium: that TV is reformable on the basis of its content alone.

As a result, well-meaning activist organizations like the highly visible and powerful Action for Children's Television (ACT) carefully monitored television violence aimed at youth markets and observed with equal concern the content and methods of TV advertising directed towards children. They have lobbied for and brought about significant content reform. Numerous women's groups monitored and lobbied against the sexist representation of women on television, and nearly every ethnic minority and religious community continually monitors its basic media portrayal. The result has been a rapid TV industry sophistication in regard to program development, script editing, and most of all pre-testing of viewer response. Little, if anything, is left to chance. In fact, the programming of commercial broadcasting reflects the same market-tested methods that government itself does. At this point in time, the linkage between TV program development and political power development is direct: the attendant processes are identical. Selling based on illusion reigns supreme in America.

In the context of such finely crafted illusion—one developed and maintained by America's most sophisticated media minds and technologies—video art has been slowly developing for the past twenty years. Its development has been steady, marked by the work of some important artists whose aesthetic orientation has ranged widely (from Vito Acconci and Bruce Nauman to Nam June Paik and Stephen Beck, from Eleanor Antin and Howard Fried to Mary Lucier and Bill Viola), and by many artists whose work in video resulted from a specific need generated by previous work in painting, sculpture, photography, ceramics, dance, performance, and of course film. It would be untrue to state that television, or to be precise, broadcast television—what David Antin termed video's "frightful parent"—was the sole or even the primary referent in the body of work that has emerged from the past two decades. But it would be completely misleading and actually untrue to attempt to describe the activity of American video art outside of the clear and—in some instances—critical relationship that video art has had with broadcast commercial television. But this relationship has had less to do with a critique of television content, and its inconsequentiality, than with the manner in which television creates and reinforces the neutralizing effect of a consequence-free universe.

Recently, broadcast television, in its increasing sophistication, has managed to re-use its own rich (or at least dense) history of characters, plot formulae, and trivia to create what seems a parody of its own past. In fact, using the collective memory of a generation thoroughly schooled in television, TV has created a veneer constituting a meta-critical strategy rather than the indication of a willingness or a fundamental ability to change. In this same climate, opportunistic Luddites like ex-advertising executive Jerry Mander publish tracts calling for the "elimination" of television, ridiculing the idea of a meaningful critique of television. Ironically, it has been the avant-garde artists working in video whose work has constituted the only meaningful critique of television's form and practice. Rather than simple parody, artists like Nam June Paik and Dara Birnbaum have used what the literary critic Fredric Jameson terms pastiche to explore and develop a grammar appropriate to a television of consequence.

To make this assertion, one must begin by assuming that the content-based critique of commercial television is, by the very nature of its intention, a modernist enterprise, linked to the rejection of "that whole landscape of advertising, motels, Hollywood B movies," and other aspects of culture that Jameson describes as "*Reader's Digest* culture." According to Jameson, pastiche, as opposed to parody, is blank, humorless, and based wholly on the primary post-modernist assumption that "stylistic innovation is no longer possible, all that is left is to . . . speak through the masks and with the voices of the styles in the imaginary museum."[2] The results of this kind of thinking, whether they be the *film noir* appropriations of Betty Gordon or Vivian Dick, the stylistic appropriations of David Salle or Robert Longo's painting, the wholesale appropriation of photographic images by Sherrie Levine,

or the video works of Birnbaum and Paik and others, is work which functions both directly as art and indirectly as a critique of the style, manner, and nature of the forms on which it is based.

When in 1965 Nam June Paik took a magnet to the face of a television image and physically twisted the flow of electrons that had previously formed recognizable imagery on the screen so that the resulting image had the tortured look of comic-book surrealist imagery, we finally recognized a gesture that seemed to do justice to the face of a Richard Nixon or Marshall McLuhan. The simple gesture, though demonstrably after the fact in relation to the production of those images (and by extension their power sources), robbed these images of more than their propriety. The distortion of these images constituted a primary and, in a way, profoundly liberating appropriation of the notion of media-image power.

Paik's subsequent attack on the notion of "real-time" in his earliest videotape manipulation pieces can also be seen as an extension of this emerging post-Pop sensibility. In *Variations on George Ball on Meet the Press* (1967), an off-screen recording of Johnson-era, Under-Secretary of State George Ball (who had recently resigned his post in ostensibly moral opposition to the Vietnam War), the image of Ball speaking moves first at the pace of real-time, and then in intervals determined by Paik's manual manipulations of the recording reels. The resulting tape work serves as a clear example of the kind of pastiche that Jameson later defined—in this case not in relation to speech itself, but to the representation of speech that constitutes such an integral part of the television grammar—TV time itself.

The overt satirical device of taking the powerful and making them look foolish is not in itself novel, nor in this case the really significant operating level of this work and others like it from the same period. Rather it is the double assertion of the value of the insertion of the hand of the artist into the process of media—which at this point in time was indeed novel and significant—and the relative nature of truth as communicated through this medium.

An earlier piece, *Variations on Johnny Carson vs. Charlotte Moorman* (1966), provides a link between the magnetic distortions, and the Ball piece. In this work, a simple offscreen tape of Paik's collaborator, Charlotte Moorman, conversing with and later performing a John Cage piece for Johnny Carson, is the subject of the work. This is to say, the tape itself is the subject, rather than the content of the re-recorded discussion and performance. Paik placed a live wire across the tape erasing a thin line of material directly below the wire itself. The resulting tape features the Carson-Moorman interaction periodically interrupted by a momentary erasure. The regular period of the interruption becomes

shorter as the reel plays towards its core, ending in pure uninterrupted static. Again, the comic effect is there, but it's not as funny as it is disturbing. The sense of some intervening random event interfering with our vision of this representation gives way to a recognition of the pattern of the interruption which in turn shifts the work's significance to the implied critique of the reality represented rather than the content itself. Ironically—for pastiche of this sort need not be empty on this level—the tape features Carson doing his patented eyes-rolled-up double takes as Moorman first explains avant-garde music, and later as she performs the Cage piece. The use of the Cage work as a matrix, and the Carson "critique" implied by his gestures and patronizing attitude towards Moorman, only fortifies the power of Paik's meta-critique.

Like other artists of this era (late sixties, early seventies), Paik sought to build a strategy through which aspects of culture as well as understanding of culture itself might be transformed by the act of appropriation and by the will to reconstruct commonly accepted phenomena as works of art. As an early goal of Pop Art, this objective seemed unattainable before the liberating effect of the politicization of the art world during this time. Though Paik's works were seemingly dealing directly with television, they dealt more directly with the ideology of television, the structure of its controlling components, and in true Fluxus spirit, with intellectualized violence and applied chaos. As Paik's work has developed, his concentration on the broader cultural and ideological critique has become more focused as well.

For a brief though influential period, Paik focused on the invention of hardware, an essentially sculptural activity linking the lessons of electronic music composition and his guerrilla robotics in a focused attempt to re-invent the grammar of television from within the TV apparatus. If the early manipulated tapes demonstrated a resigned awareness of the artists' post-facto position in relation to television as both a technology and a universal model of society, the invention of video image-manipulating devices constituted a metaphorical and practical attempt to position the artist within. From the crudely manipulated or "prepared" television sets in his ground-breaking 1963 Wuppertal exhibition, Paik developed the idea of moving his point of entry further "upstream," into the source of the electronic flow itself. His well-known (but widely misunderstood) sculptural collaboration with the engineer Shuya Abe, known as the Paik-Abe Video Synthesizer, was a device that allowed the artist to re-scan, distort, colorize, and in other ways (that seems positively tame by 1984 technical standards) process the video image produced by a live or tape source. The visually distinctive imagery that the synthesizer produced provided the artist with a signature style, and allowed him to occupy a novel position relative to straight

television imagery. Paik's images were, in the McLuhanesque terms of the time, cool, less resolved, less representational of the normal television language of recognizable signs. In short, they indicated an attempt to generate pastiche rather than parody, to reinvest emptied, well-understood forms, and refill them for distinctly different purposes.

Underlying the invention of the synthesizer was something besides the simple desire to create a video equivalent of the psychedelic "posterized" photography of the late sixties. Though his 1967 four-hour broadcast of Beatles' music and randomly generated synthesizer imagery produced by anyone who happened by the WGBH Boston studios that evening did constitute a landmark of stoned television, it was not the point of the exercise. A more subtle critique of the development of television as *the* invention of late 20th-century capitalism was also implied. The direction and progress of television's invention was brought into relief by Paik's comic intervention in that process.

The playwright Bertolt Brecht noted that "these people who have a high opinion of radio have it because they see in it something for which 'something' can be invented. They would see themselves justified," he continued, "at the moment when 'something' was discovered for the sake of which radio would have to be invented if it did not already exist."[3] Leaping over the predictions of cultural enrichment for the masses predicted by television's early defenders, Paik offers his television-art produced as a response to the clear fact that the television product and indeed the television grammar itself developed with no significant artist's participation. This is stated by Paik's invention as well as the work of the Vasulkas and others in clear counterdistinction to the development of film's grammar which *was* forged by artistic genius.

But perhaps more important than Paik's response to Brecht's analysis of the rationale supporting radio's suspect invention is Paik's overriding concern for the other thrust of Brecht's essay. Brecht asserts that "by continuous, unceasing proposals for better employment of the apparatus in the interest of the community we must destroy the social basis of that apparatus and question their use in the interest of the few."[4] Brecht questions the implicit order of one-way broadcast as model of societal control. In whose interest, one implies from Brecht's statement, does the one-way nature of broadcast (television) exist, and for what reasons did the invention take that form? Paik questions this nature of television the invention, as surely as he explores the nature of television the cultural form.

Like Brecht, Paik's work aspires towards consequence embodied metaphorically as participation. "Participation TV" was the subtitle of the exhibition of Paik's 1965 synthesizer exhibition in the Bonino Gallery. Not only positioning the artist inside the production process (or

more correctly the distortion of deconstruction process), the synthesizer opened the production process to public manipulation. Compared to most kinetic sculpture Paik's went further than any of the essentially inconsequential playthings offered up by the makers of mechanical art purporting to hail or eulogize the end of the mechanical age. Paik's art, to paraphrase the artist, was not "cybernetic art, but art for cybernetic times;" it was kitsch in the true meaning of the word. Another of Paik's early participation pieces featured a device that transformed the viewer's voice into a burst of video color on the screen. In this work, talking back to your television set was transformed from an act of alienation or slight craziness to a real metaphorical act. Giving the functionally mute, passive viewer/receiver a voice was not merely playful, it was the creation of an act of consequence, in which the ephemeral nature of the act reinforced the real condition of the viewer and framed his or her awareness of that condition as a work of art.

Paik's broadcast works, and live broadcast performance pieces, represent the extent of his development in this direction. Starting with *The Selling of New York* and *Waiting for Commercial* (both 1972), Paik began to create broadcast tapes, fully aware of the context for the works. That is to say, Paik was fully aware of the general broadcast condition and the viewer's relation to television viewing as a physical phenomenon and sociological situation. Though these tapes were produced to be aired on noncommercial, public television (ostensibly differing in style and intention from their commercial cousins), it was immediately clear that Paik projected no differentiation between the broadcast types in his approach to the form. In *Selling*, Paik created spots to be inserted into the late-night programming schedule of New York's WNET-TV. The core of the work, operating below the rather flat parody of New York's ongoing effort to sell itself as the major media market in the U.S., is the view of "normal" people, going about their everyday lives oblivious to the constant droning of the television sets in their midst. Inserted as punctuation into these black-out skits, with origins in broadcast's own penchant for defusing self-parody, are off-the-air commercials for American products (i.e. Pepsi) produced and aired on Japanese TV for the major industrial market in Asia. Like Brecht's Marxist monologues, delivered in the middle of the dramatic entertainment, these commercials are used not so much to sell a product or ideological shift as to warn the viewer and wake the sleeper. What Paik refuses to do is idealize the conceptual process of viewing or assign a passive role to the spectator. In these early broadcast works Paik asserts, through the use of ironic juxtaposition, the necessity of an active, non-neutral position for the viewer and the artist.

In 1975, in a remote "live-on-tape" broadcast emanating from Paik's

studio, the artist had the rare opportunity to produce a work in the context of a highly rated, late-night network "talk" program, the now defunct Tom Snyder "Tomorrow" show. In many ways, this program allowed Paik to create his most successful two-way piece. Speaking with the host in a mock video-phone set-up, Paik led Snyder on a short tour of his studio, a tour which constituted a small retrospective of his career. Selling all the while, Paik ended the tour at his interactive video sculpture known as the *TV Chair*. On the monitor located below the transparent seat of the chair was a silent tape of Snyder, recorded off the air on the previous evening. Maintaining his polite banter all the while, Paik then sat himself atop of Snyder's silent/talking face. Like the simple gesture of erasing the Carson tape, this action confirmed the emergence of a new role for artists relative to mass media, a role characterized by the willingness and capability to appropriate and transform media power. Needless to say, Snyder was not amused.

In his New Year's Day 1984 broadcast work *Good Morning, Mr. Orwell*, Paik produced and aired a work that earlier tapes like the 1973 *Global Groove* served as studies for. This "entertainment" also took as its form the broadcast variety-talk show. This program, a live simulcast between WNET in New York and the Pompidou Center in Paris, featured real-time intercontinental interactive performance works, not-so-successful parodies of video telephony, some new music, and some talk. Though flawed by technical problems, the work demonstrated a strong sense of consequence and a profound understanding of the nature of its two-way TV context.

Dara Birnbaum's work has developed in a wholly different, though completely sympathetic, manner. Unlike Paik who emerged from an essentially musical context into the visual arts, Birnbaum came to video from a background in architecture and painting. Her video work represents the generation of artists whose exposure to Paik and the other early seventies videomakers and theorists (in her case, Dan Graham was an important influence) allowed for the creation of quite powerful and original video works based on assumptions about television that did not exist in 1963.

This is not to intimate that Birnbaum's work is academic or second-hand. Indeed, Birnbaum has wrestled with the complexities of contemporary psychoanalytic film and television theory, with Lacan and Freud on the one hand and Mulvey and Heath on the other, and has emerged from the struggle with a work that is both theoretically sound while joyous and accessible at the same time. Like Paik's, Birnbaum's video is both about consequence, truth, and the spiritual values that link them. Also like Paik, Birnbaum makes use of clearly understood cultural artifacts and popular forms to communicate with an audience she posi-

tions and charges in a manner that denies them a passive or neutral point of view.

Prior to the Faust series, which I will not discuss here as it is still in progress, Birnbaum's work divides essentially into single-channel tapes and multi-channel installation works. This division, which mirrors the exhibition opportunities developed by video artists during the seventies, allows for several things to take place. First, within the conventions of the single-channel tapes, the literal appropriation of the television program is given prominence. Within this context, Birnbaum chose to combine an exploration of the codes and grammar of commercial television with the production of a new cultural form, the music video. Also addressed, as a subtext in effect, are issues relating to concerns regarding the representation of women. But, at the risk of unintentionally denigrating Birnbaum's feminist politics, these concerns seem subsumed by primary concerns for the operation of the medium within a broader cultural situation.

Secondarily, Birnbaum has expanded her investigation by re-editing her material to conform with sculpturally-based site-specific installation environments. In these works she has been able to create spatial extensions of the concepts that were introduced in the single-channel tapes.

The first works were, in her own words, "an attempt to deal with some of the basic dichotomies intrinsic to the medium."[5] In the work *Technology/Transformation* (1978), Birnbaum focuses on the dual nature of Wonder Woman's transformation from regular (powerless) woman to Wonder (superpower) Woman in a pyrotechnic display straight out of the vocabulary of the vaudeville magician. This action, repeated dozens of times, is depleted of its magical impact and made as banal and commonplace as the concept of magically empowering the "regular-woman." Beyond the repeated pyrotechnic transformation itself, Wonder Woman confronts her image in a hall of mirrors, and again in repeated action, finds it only possible to break through her image by cutting her mirror image's throat, symbolically sacrificing her intelligence and voice in the process. This text, created entirely through the use of video quotations, is then inserted into an alien sound track; one composed of off-air synch sound and a syntho-pop disco song, which derives its energy from a rhythmic repetition of the wondrous secret desires that the idea of a "wonder" woman might generate in a "regular" man. This seemingly perverse notion of the moral wonders of which our specially empowered heroine is visibly capable should establish a sort of running self-parody but in fact it does not. The lyrics "This is your Wonder Woman talkin' to you/Said I want to take you down/Show you all the powers I possess/and o-o-u-u-u-u/(Shake thy wonder maker)/Make sweet music to you" are sung/spoken in a

breathless stage seduction manner as a kind of footnote to the previous disco video transformation sequences. The implied footnote reads: there is no transformation, there is only one possible "power" you might possess, and it has nothing to do with change of your passive condition.

To reduce this to a simplified formula, Birnbaum presents an action (transformation from powerless to empowered, helpless to savior) and suggests its consequence (intensified object of desire, no change in status, voice, or sensibility.) Compared to the standard TV formula based on the illusion of empowerment in which the action (transformation) transpires without consequence, Birnbam's Wonder Woman, though comic as a result of the repetition of her video-edited actions and disco ridicule, seems far more plausible—almost realistic. The effect is reminiscent of the repetition of the Kennedy assassination in the Ant Farm/T.R. Uthco co-production *The Eternal Frame* (1975) in which a series of re-stagings of the Zapruder film at first seemed to parody the grim document, but finally reveal the nature of media-mythology as a function of enforced redundancy. Numbing, desensitizing, trivializing the use of repetition in video edition, as in Klaus vom Bruch's *propellertape* (1979) or earlier (and perhaps in its best utilization) in Paik's *Guadalcanal Requiem* (1977), underscores the way in which far more subtle repetition works to neutralize the viewer and render him passive, even as he perceives his "liberation." Birnbaum's next tape, *Kiss the Girls: Make Them Cry* (1979), is a far more sophisticated examination of television grammar. The work focuses almost exclusively on the body gestures of a Hollywood celebrity whose feminine giggle and throw of the head is set against a fast zoom, and the hint of seductive private communication to the home viewer is cut into a syntho-pop disco number. In this work, the repeated body gesture and unspoken language, which work into the rhythmic nature of the song, giving it (the music) the leading role, also allow us to focus on the exquisite qualities of the gesture, emptying it of its original intent (a standard silly hello on a daily game show) and allowing it to be filled with the intent gleaned from the song's lyrics. This is not, as some have suggested, an extension of the notion of found art, in which the artist's will, invested in a common artifact, object, or situation, critically alters the meaning of the original. In this case, appropriated material is consciously stripped of its references to its original setting, so that it can be reinvested with meaning which draws specific attention to the nature of the original surrounding context. That reinvestment results in more than a representation of the original in a new context; it results in new understanding of the original from within a novel critical framework.

In an important and relatively early essay on the relationship be-

tween video art and broadcast television ("Video: The Distinctive Features of the Medium",1975),[6] the poet and critic David Antin discussed what he termed television's "money metric," or the way in which the TV hour was methodically and unwaveringly divided up into segments based on the primary need to accommodate commercials, but as importantly, to provide a structure to the velocity of television time which must function irrespective of the dramatic value of the material being aired in order to maintain a captive audience for the selling process. Birnbaum explores just those linguistic subtleties created by the "money metric," re-applying the close-up, the fast-cut, and other devices that both propel television while supplying virtually hypnotic illusions of novelty and significance to pacify a marginally attentive mass audience. In the installation work *P.M. Magazine* (1982), arguably her most finely tuned completed work to date, the referent is the most prominent broadcast format of the seventies, the feature magazine show. These shows are essentially "life-style" digests, and like their print magazine counterparts, they deliver continual reports on the condition of upper-middle-class leisure life and hints at how to get there or appear to be there. In Jameson's world view, this is the stuff that pastiche thrives on, the meat and potatoes of postmodernism, America at its high-tech kitsch zenith.

Using an electronically altered sound track centered on the Doors' classic *L.A. Woman*, Birnbaum constructs a fast paced, image-text-music montage which runs slightly out of sync within a three-part billboard framework. The images, taken from the *P.M. Magazine* introduction montage (which ironically is itself an unconscious homage to the kind of editing Paik pioneered in the early seventies) as well as from an out-of-date (but essentially timeless) commercial for Wang office automation hardware, combine with the driving sound track, a German translation of the Doors' lyrics (the piece was originally commissioned for Documenta 7), to produce a far more disquieting work than any of Birnbaum's single-channel works seem capable of. Its effectiveness quite clearly results from the radical reconstruction of a novel environment built with utterly familiar elements. In contrast to *Kojak/Wang* (1980), one of Birnbaum's Pop-Pop videotapes in which the same office miracle (the emanation of a rainbow from the keyboard of an office machine following the gentle touch of an ethereal office worker) is intercut with a cycle of violence and recrimination from a seventies detective show (*Kojak*) and a set of color bars with a tuning tone, *P.M. Magazine* places the Wang woman in a context in which there are no visual contradictions. All is upbeat, modern, pleasant, and leisure-bound. At least, it appears that way. The Doors track consists of an edit of *L.A. Woman* which emphasizes the loneliness and alienation of the

postmodern condition. "Never saw a woman so all alone/So all alone/ Alone alone alone" emanates from three sets of speakers, which, as stated above, play slightly out of sync to underscore the singularity (aloneness) of each of the three channels playing in apparent concert. All of the elements of this work support the confrontation of appearance and effect. The video and sound are displayed on monitors set into billboard-size blowups of stills from the tapes mounted on metal strut frames reminiscent of trade show displays. This display condition emphasizes the uncomfortable nature of the exhibition environment (the art gallery), adding yet another level of dissonance to the work. It is finally this active dissonance which activates the viewer of the work, and charges the viewer in a manner that rules out passive response— without resorting to overt melodramatic manipulation of the audience.

In effect, what Birnbaum creates, based in part on her own sensibilities and in part on understandings of the American television culture that she shares with many artists of her generation, is the model for a new game show, one in which truth and consequence are not mutually exclusive concepts.

From *The Luminous Image (Het Lumineuze Beeld)*. (Exhibition catalogue). Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1984, pp.72-84

1. Bertolt Brecht, "Radio as a Means of Communication," *Screen*, Vol. 20, no. 3/4 (Winter 1979/80). London: Society for Education in Film and Television, p. 25.
2. Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press, 1983), p. 115.
3. Brecht, "Radio as a Means of Communication," p. 27.
4. Ibid.
5. Dara Birnbaum, *'60-'80 Attitudes/Concepts/Images* (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum (catalogue supplement), 1982), p. 35.
6. Reprinted in this volume, pp. 147-66.

Video:
The Aesthetics of Narcissism

Rosalind Krauss

IT WAS A commonplace of criticism in the 1960s that a strict application of symmetry allowed a painter "to point to the center of the canvas" and, in so doing, to invoke the internal structure of the picture-object. Thus "pointing to the center" was made to serve as one of the many blocks in that intricately constructed arch by which the criticism of the last decade sought to connect art to ethics through the "aesthetics of acknowledgment." But what does it mean to point to the center of a TV screen?

In a way that is surely conditioned by the attitudes of pop art, artists' video is largely involved in parodying the critical terms of abstraction. Thus when Vito Acconci makes a videotape called *Centers* (1971), what he does is literalize the critical notion of "pointing" by filming himself pointing to the center of a television monitor, a gesture he sustains for the twenty-minute running time of the work. The parodistic quality of Acconci's gesture, with its obvious debt to Duchampian irony, is clearly intended to disrupt and dispense with an entire critical tradition. It is meant to render nonsensical a critical engagement with the formal properties of a work or, indeed, a genre of works—such as "video." The kind of criticism *Centers* attacks is obviously one that takes seriously the formal qualities of a work or tries to assay the particular logic of a given medium. And yet, by its very mise-en-scène, *Centers* typifies the structural characteristics of the video medium. For *Centers* was made by Acconci's using the video monitor as a mirror. As we look at the artist sighting along his outstretched arm and forefinger toward the center of the screen we are watching, what we see is a sustained tautology: a line of sight that begins at Acconci's plane of vision and ends at the eyes of his projected double. In that image of self-regard is con-