Pressure Points: Video in the Public Sphere

By Martha Gever

The Medium

The medium, of course, is television. But not *television.* Titles of two events that christened video as an art—WGBH's *The Medium Is the Medium* and the exhibition *TV as a Creative Medium,* both in 1969[1]—cryptically announce the distinction between video art/television and mass communications/television. Thus divorced, "the medium" of video art becomes identified as material—electronic circuitry, cathode rays, photons, phosphors, and the like—not "the media," understood as the entire complex of television and film industries as well as commercial publications. For some prominent makers and promoters of video art, this split is absolute, but their defense of truly separate spheres for art and commercial culture, sharing only a technological bond, is rarely explained, just flatly asserted.

To take a recent example: three curators writing three consecutive essays in the catalogue for a major touring show, *The Second Link,*[2] begin on this note:

> The medium of video/television, coupled with the computer, will come to play a paramount role in our world, but video art will be able to win no bigger place than that which art has always held up to now: a refuge in which sensibility and genius take on their aesthetic form.
>
> Dorine Mignot[3]

> Like printmaking, photography, and film, video has artistic and commercial applications. Both applications utilize the same telecommunications technology, but reach audiences of different magnitude.
>
> —Barbara London[4]

> Video art is fundamentally different from broadcast television and has been since its inception. Where broadcast television addresses a mass audience, video art is intensely personal—a reflection of individual passions and consciousness.
>
> —Kathy Huffman[5]

The object of each of these statements is to distance video art and mass media in order to privilege the former.

In the same catalogue, Gene Youngblood, known for his championing of electronic experimentation in the late sixties and early seventies, takes a more extreme position:

> It is apparent that video art is not television art. . . . Art is a process of exploration and inquiry. Its subject is human potential for aesthetic perception. . . . Art is always non-communicative; its aim is to produce non-standard observers.

For Youngblood, the idea that video art "belongs on television" is contradictory, not an uncommon notion perhaps, but soon to be disproved: "Personal vision is not public vision; art is not the stuff of mass communications." This statement may be empirically accurate, but, nevertheless, Youngblood refuses to grapple with the various kinds of video work produced, simply dismissing these as immature art. Ignoring prevailing economic and political conditions, he prescribes "counter definitions of reality" achieved, ideally, through a marriage of video and computer technology. Heralding once again the "Communications Revolution" on the horizon, he predicts "an inversion of existing social relations," a society peacefully reformed into "reality communities, defined not by geography but by consciousness, ideology, and desire."[6]

Conversant with the latest hard- and software, Youngblood subscribes to a type of determinism that treats technology as natural, thus evolving according to natural laws. Certainly, a number of videomakers and early supporters of video as countertelevision were similarly attracted to optimistic projections for democratic culture resulting from the proliferation of electronic communications technologies, but their prophecies of improved social conditions, foretold by Marshall McLuhan and others,[7] have failed to materialize. Indeed, a very different scenario from McLuhan's "global village" or Youngblood's "reality communities" has been elaborated and analyzed by those who study the ever-expanding global communications networks and the uses of advanced electronics, designed to serve the needs of military and corporate powers.[8] One critic of theories that posit technology-as-cause, Raymond Williams, correctly identifies McLuhan's work as "a particular culmination of an aesthetic theory, which became, negatively, a social theory: a development and elaboration of formalism."[9] And formulas for social amelioration emanating from advanced technology have become increasingly difficult to sustain; as of the mid eighties, we live with sophisticated surveillance techniques, data bases shared by police departments and the FBI, the concentration of communications capital in the hands of transnational corporations, budgets for "Star Wars" weaponry, and so forth. Recognizing the dead end of electronic salvation, video-art

advocates have transferred their fascination with new technologies to another formalist project: the retrospective construction of a video academy. In effect, science fiction has been replaced by history writing.

The Museum

Four significant attempts to establish a legitimate lineage for video art have been displayed during the past two years; the sponsoring institutions are the Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City, the Long Beach Museum of Art in California, and the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston. On the video-art stage, MOMA, the Whitney, and Long Beach play leading roles. Long Beach introduced video into its exhibition schedule in 1974, when David Ross was employed there as assistant director. He is now director of the ICA, and the recent debut of the ICA as a showcase for video art is not incidental. (Before his residency at Long Beach, Ross was video curator at the Everson Museum in Syracuse, New York, which, during his tenure, gained a reputation for its video exhibits and videotape collection.) The video department at MOMA dates from 1974; given that museum's prestige as an arbiter of modern art, video programs there necessarily carry weight. Located, like MOMA, in the world's central art marketplace, the Whitney maintains a high profile as a video-art venue. Unlike MOMA and Long Beach, however, the Whitney does not collect videotapes, but since 1973 video art has been included in its influential Biennial Exhibitions, and in 1982 its film and video department was able to mount the most ambitious video show ever—the Nam June Paik retrospective. This exhibition achieved unprecedented notice in the art press and the mass media,[10] and the 420-monitor extravaganza is now cited by video cognoscenti as a landmark event. Indeed, it was. Video art was admitted to full status in the ranks of modern art, a master was acclaimed, and a masterpiece—Paik's *V-ramid* installation—was added to the Whitney's collection.[11]

Once again, the assertion of valid aesthetic credentials for a form that might be seen as tainted by mass media pervades the curatorial statements that describe the museum versions of video history:

> As video art emerged in the wake of conceptual art, it clearly reflected many of the social and aesthetic issues of the period as well as specific issues relative to this new art form.
>
> —David Ross[12]

> [T]he tapes selected are those that gave shape to new ideas and spawned new traditions for creative artists' television.
>
> —Bob Riley[13]

> It is the personal point of view, made possible by the portable camera, that has distinguished artists' video from commercial material.... Today ... the strongest works in single format and video installation formats are recognized as having cohesiveness and integrity. At this point there are mature artists who understand the potentials of the video medium.
>
> —Barbara London[14]

> In an attempt to challenge the television industry's hegemony, many activists worked—often as collectives—to use video as a tool for social change. At the same time, video artists began producing tapes and installations designed to explore the medium's potential for new aesthetic discourses.
>
> —John Hanhardt[15]

Common to these verifications of the artistic merits of the work screened is an ambivalence concerning the social component of some video. The most explicit acknowledgment is Hanhardt's, but the survey he compiled omits primary examples of the political video practices mentioned in his text. The "social change" and "social issues" noted in these introductory sentences cannot be overlooked by the curator-historians, but the curatorial writing and tape selections quickly leave extra-aesthetic contingencies aside.[16] The only exception can be found in the MOMA program, which included four social documentaries of a total of fifty-three tapes. (Andy Mann's *One-Eyed Bum,* described as a "personal documentary," was exhibited at the Whitney and at the ICA; Long Beach and MOMA put Antonio Muntadas's documentary media critique, *Between the Lines,* in their programs.)

The near invisibility of documentary forms and topical political content in these shows may not seem particularly shocking, considering the social position represented by art museums, but the neglect of the considerable contribution of documentary videomakers during the period encompassed creates severe historical distortions. Excised from these official accounts is that significant portion of video work which tells of specific (and continuing) social struggles, and thus the varied work of many Black, Latino, Asian American, Indian, and women videomakers who chose documentary forms and techniques. Presumably, work based on the experience of particular communities, using realist devices in order to challenge prevailing "reality," does not represent "new ideas," nor are these videomakers "mature artists," nor do they "explore the medium's potential for a new aesthetic discourse"—with an emphasis on *aesthetic.*

The limited resources available to curators turned historians should be factored into an assessment of the gaps in these partial accounts, but even so, a formalist imperative clearly rules. One obvious symptom can be isolated: the naming of genres. The MOMA program awkwardly groups tapes under headings like "Perception," "Narrative," "Image Process-Computer."[17] Likewise, at the Whitney, tapes were classified as "perceptual studies," "narratives, texts, and actions," "personal documentaries," "performance-based," and "image processing." Curiously, the ICA show excluded image-processed work because, in the curator's words, "In many ways the electronically produced videographics belong more to kinetic art and sculptural experimentation in the preceding decade—the 60s." This disclaimer, however, recognizes the category as such, and the ICA catalogue texts describing each tape repeat the "narrative," "perception," "performance" catchwords.[18]

Formal cubbyholes like these become functional labels, establishing video's modern-art pedigree. Although Western avant-garde cultural traditions can provide insights into many of the video projects exhibited as historical signposts,[19] several branches of the family tree had to be pruned so that they could be proclaimed the *only* tradition. But even these limited, often redundant, selections of tapes consistently beg the question of formal primacy. Many artists use this form for its mass communications connotations or possibilities. Television, the foremost producer of contemporary cultural consciousness, the leveler of social experience and information, can, in theory, also carry the products of alternative or oppositional cultures that exist beyond the art world. Or television's ideological structures, conventions, and strategies can be revealed through references to or frustrations of mass-media idioms. Granted, the most abstract video art and many video installations seem best suited to the rarefied, supposedly neutral environment of art museums[20] and formalist interpretations. But this work, too, is historically entangled with overtly critical, political video, as any slice of video history in the early seventies will indicate; during the early part of the decade, many videomakers made street tapes, fiddled with electronics, built installations, recorded artists' performances,

and so forth. In other words, artists who chose video/television take on the social function of the medium as well as its machinery. No matter how often the litanies of "properties of the medium" or "new art forms" are recited, no matter how consistently the specter of mass media is disavowed, much of what's included in the museum histories of video—as well as what's left out —proves the inadequacy of video history conceived as art history.

The Audience

Antitelevision, countertelevision, nontelevision, alternative television—the negation proves the link between art-video and television-video.[21] After all, the medium is television—not a bunch of wires and silicon chips but a social structure, a cultural condition. Therefore, the *circulation* of video work, neglected in discussions about artists' self-expression, sensibility, and vanguard consciousness, constitutes a necessary term in any conceptualization of video production and reception. Even in the formalist camp, the audience figures.

To return to the three condensed credos quoted at the beginning of this essay, the contrast between mass-media popularity and the small, select, specialized audience for video art is repeatedly identified as a major distinguishing characteristic. Youngblood's idealized, "non-standard observers" also come to mind. In an ostensibly democratic society, where public cultural resources could, in theory, be allocated on the basis of statistics—to benefit the largest number of people—these statements might be read as arguments to support nonpopulist (antipopulist, to Douglas Davis[22]) culture. But talk about video audiences usually sounds a bit defensive; echoes of Nielsen ratings can be heard when video viewers are discussed. In the museum economy, some kind of audience for this work must be identified in order to satisfy exhibition funders, but consistent references to audiences by video programmers confirm that even the most esoteric video presupposes communication. Just as audience constitutes one of the principal terms of television (not that the audience decides what's on, but the audience must be captured, captivated), video entails reception as much as individual creativity and program design.

Rudimentary knowledge about television economics has permeated our social vocabulary. The term "Nielsen ratings" can be invoked as metaphor without further explanation. For television, the operative formula was neatly summarized in the title of Richard Serra and Carlota Schoolman's 1973 videotape *Television Delivers People*—to advertisers.[23] Certain exceptions exist, such as Home Box Office and other cable subscription services, which, as the HBO name indicates, replicate a box-office income structure. Public television, of course, must scramble for government appropriations, corporate underwriting (a variant of commercial advertising), and individual donations to stay on the air. To make a persuasive case to patrons, public TV, too, must claim a respectable audience share.

Despite prophecies of increased diversity of program formats and contents accompanying the advent of each new distribution technology and marketing scheme—cable, satellites, discs, home VCRs—the commercial networks still rule the television world. The enormously lucrative broadcast industry dominated by the big three networks commands the big numbers while other television systems compete for a few slices of the profit pie. In this risky business, fueled by sales—to advertisers targeting demographically defined groups of people—program choices rarely exceed predictable boundaries, and permissible forms necessarily buttress a social order that generates more sales. Videomakers interested in distribution outside the art world must persistently search for aberrations in the industry.

Since the television premiere of video art—the WGBH experiment in 1969—public television has provided the meager broadcast opportunities granted to independently produced video. As a result of collective lobbying, independent documentaries receive regular, if limited, time and some funding from the Public Broadcasting Service and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Opportunities ebb and flow depending on the political climate, which affects the welfare of the public system and the interests of its administrators. Predictably, during the Reagan years the situation has worsened.[24] Nevertheless, the influence of public television on documentary video can still be detected in prevalent styles, and even in the length of tapes; most documentaries run exactly twenty-seven or fifty-eight minutes, most are finely crafted, and most avoid partisan politics. In other words, most are tailored for national PBS broadcast. Interventions of this kind are always negotiated and mediated, expensive to make, constrained by standards and conventions designed to replicate the status quo. In a country where the social-documentary tradition includes the work of left-wing groups like the Workers' Film and Photo League and Frontier Films as well as the numerous radical films and videotapes made during the sixties and early seventies, the pattern of conformity to PBS formats becomes significant. The deciding factor here is audience.

One major source for documentary production money was stabilized when the Ford Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts jointly established the Independent Documentary Fund at WNET's TV Lab in 1977. This fund supplemented the artist-in-residence program already in place at that station for videomakers working in all styles. Established in 1972 with grants from the New York State Council on the Arts and the Rockefeller Foundation, the TV Lab provided the primary broadcast outlet for video art through the series *VTR: Video Tape Review,* which aired from 1975 through 1977. Earlier in 1977, the Rockefeller Foundation had set up other experimental television centers at KQED in San Francisco and WGBH in Boston.[25] All these facilities offered artists access to sophisticated equipment not available elsewhere (and that few individuals could afford to own) and the hope of reaching a large public. The subsequent demise of these labs can be attributed to the Rockefeller Foundation's withdrawal and the indifference of station executives.[26] (Although WNET continued to receive NYSCA dollars for several years after the Rockefeller's defunding, the station refused to supply the necessary matching funds, and the TV lab folded in late 1983.) Without government and foundation support, few public television stations have demonstrated willingness to finance or show nondocumentary video. Indeed, what corporate underwriter wants to display its logo on programs watched by a sparse, hardly upscale audience?

So far, the easiest route for getting video on television without interference from program executives or protection from some quirky station-employed producer has been paved by activists who relentlessly pressure city governments to guarantee public access to cable television. Although the makers of what are now proclaimed video classics in the museum versions of video history were often people already working in other art forms, their Portapak comrades—some practicing artists, some not—took their decks and cameras to the streets. There developed collectives, workshops, equipment loan programs, and socially engaged projects concerned with the use, distribution, and ownership of television, invoking and experimenting with ideas about democratic media. Remnants of the public-service concept of mass media—as contrasted with the commodity-consumer construct now firmly established in the U.S.—are pre-

served in provisions for access channels on cable television. (However, recent federal legislation and Federal Communications Commission rulings have weakened communities' power to demand access channels and production facilities from their local cable companies.[27]) Riding piggyback on the wires of cable industry, some public-access producers consciously contradict the ideology of their profit-seeking hosts.

On public access cable time is free, if limited. Likewise, no one gets paid for his or her work. A few grants are awarded to artists producing for cable outlets, but the sums are modest. Furthermore, public-access shows, rarely listed in program guides or newspaper TV schedules, attract relatively scant, always geographically restricted audiences. That's the idea of public access—community-based, noncommercial TV—but many videomakers have grander ambitions. Many would also like to be paid at least enough to finance the next production.

As commodities, videotapes can't be treated like tangible artwork,[28] but theoretically they can be sold like other electronic media products: audio cassettes, records, and programming for established entertainment media. Videomakers' partial and always provisional inroads into public territory have already been described; to this add the list of commercial-based distribution forms that optimistic videomakers hope to use as vehicles to reach the public: music videos, leased cable acess (allowing advertising), subscription cable services, videodiscs (last year's hot prospect), and the big time—broadcast TV. It is not only video entrepreneurs who want to break into the business, where the best equipment and biggest audiences money can buy await: artists who clothe their social critiques in popular forms also want to make music videos, sell their cassettes in home-video stores, and get their tapes on late-night TV. Advocates of this sort of infiltration propose subversion via wide circulation. This seems somewhat naïve considering that the hegemonic mass media can easily tolerate a few minor disturbances without surrendering any authority. Cultural intervention that rests on the expansion of the communications industry—on its global reach and ever-multiplying gadgets and markets—remains ambivalent, or desperate.

Whether media guerrillas or media hustlers, videomakers who disdain the label "artist," discuss their work as "product," and accept the jargon of "marketing" and "packaging"—a growing number to be sure—demonstrate the centrality of audience to this hybrid with roots in two distinct cultural forms. Although included in museum and gallery shows, these would-be infiltrators refute claims for video as an elite art. At the same time, there are risks in abandoning entirely the critical province of art for the greener pastures of mass media.

Institutions

Conceived and nurtured in the public sphere, video would not survive without public patronage, public TV, or other public institutions. As semipublic institutions, museums cannot completely ignore or thoroughly co-opt the social discourse of media artists.[29] Similarly, public TV, which represents privileged interests parallel to those traditionally served by museums, has been somewhat vulnerable to demands for public accountability. This relatively young institution generally exhibits all the instincts of more venerable, highbrow cultural establishments, but it also depends on congressional funding as well as on some degree of community support. Public-access channels, too, exist because of social pressure for some service to communities in exchange for commercial exploitation of the public domain. And educational institutions, which provide the few jobs available for artists, often rely on public sources for funding.

The various conduits for public patronage of video—the National Endowments for the Arts and Humanities, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, state arts and humanities councils, nonprofit media centers, museum video programs, public-access centers, university visiting-artist programs, and so forth—expand and contract depending on economic trends and political shifts. Currently, the constriction of public patronage, due to the ascendancy of political conservatism, corresponds to the consolidation of private capitalism in the communications industry, enabled by advanced information technologies: computers, satellites, digital systems, and so on. In this environment, public cultural institutions either diminish or court private sponsors.[30] And video becomes doubly implicated in this movement.

Official histories of the "art form" lend video respectability while redefining its development in terms suitable to the tastes of a small number of connoisseurs—distinct from those of the "rabble." Combining depoliticized rhetoric and selections of exemplary masterworks, video can be rendered palatable to wealthy art patrons. Alternatively, video can be cast as a new brand of media merchandise. Here, too, the lure of success is proffered—big audiences and big bucks, accompanied by quasi-political rhetoric about independence from patronage. In both cases, video is touted as a vanguard, while being enlisted as an ideological agent.

Video that adopts mass-media criteria for success quickly becomes a cottage industry, akin to small business ventures developing new software for the culture industry, complete with the attendant mythologies of freedom. High-art video, too, can assist the advance cultural hegemony. In his introduction to *Video: State of the Art,* a 1976 survey published by the Rockefeller Foundation, the foundation's director for arts and a notable videophile, Howard Klein, describes this process:

> The struggle for world domination has been a common theme in our time. One form of domination is cultural, and in that it embodies a world of ideas and concepts that can be influential and threatening to a status quo, it may be the most important form. Such domination of world culture has fallen to the United States. . . . Just as popular aspects of culture have spread American values and concepts abroad, so the arts, and especially those forms which are uniquely American, infiltrate foreign lands and minds and produce a spread—for better or worse—of Americanization. This has begun to happen already within the narrow field of video art.[31]

Given his position, no one would expect Klein to describe the mechanisms of cultural domination or the interests it serves: concentration of wealth and power along with destruction of indigenous cultures and social institutions. Klein takes cultural imperialism for granted, and his uncritical advocacy echoes the arrogance of U.S. political and economic imperialism. Video easily becomes complicit with imperialist programs if the audience is presumed irrelevant (art-for-art's-sake, video-as-refuge). A more active collusion is embraced if the institution of art is renounced in favor of creating new consumers for video products. But historically, practically, much video has proposed audiences that are by no means homogeneous, harmonious, or necessarily complacent. Klein doesn't mention that cultural domination meets resistance, at home and abroad. But it does. In relation to television and other mass media, resistance has produced critiques of the uses of communications technology, the economic relations that determine and are determined by these uses, and the functions of culture reinforced by these forms of communications.[32] Video that doesn't accede to the

television industry or to regressive aestheticism indicates resistance. Video practice that attends to audiences and acknowledges public functions joins this resistance. Indeed, opposition to the private control of communications technology and the cultural hegemony such control produces implies, depends on, and contributes to the viability of the public sphere. But a broadened definition of video that admits a relationship to mass media without paying heed to ideological functions of art institutions ends up in another formal cul-de-sac, with art severed from its connections to the ideological work performed by institutions.

A short essay by Bertolt Brecht has been a staple in curatorial commentaries on video as political, critical art. In "The Radio as an Apparatus for Communication," Brecht writes:

> As for the radio's object, I don't think it can consist merely in prettifying public life. Nor is radio in my view an adequate means of bringing back cosiness to the home and making family life bearable again. But quite apart from the dubiousness of its functions, radio is one-sided when it should be two-. So here is a positive suggestion: change this apparatus over from distribution to communication.[33]

Attempts to apply a translation of Brecht's words to video practice in 1986 ignore the vastly different social conditions that prevailed in 1926 when he wrote the essay. Too often references to Brecht are summoned forth to establish the radicalism of this or that style of video, disregarding correlations of his strategy with his active participation in revolutionary communist politics. Instead, his remarks about two-way communications are misread in formal terms. Again, manipulations of "the medium" are deemed inherently radical.[34]

That Brecht still speaks to those who think about the meaning and purpose of video activity indicates, however, the possible social project of art that assumes television as a method and as a subject. In his theoretical study of the historical avant-garde in modern art, Peter Bürger situates Brecht:

> Brecht never shared the intention of the representatives of the avant-garde movements to destroy art as an institution. . . . [W]hereas the avant-gardistes believe they can directly attack and destroy that institution, Brecht develops a concept that entails a change of function and sticks to what is concretely achievable.[35]

If video presumes public institutions, its production, circulation, and reception can be conceived in terms of public function instead of formal innovation. Otherwise, art that turns its back on the social institutions that surround and support it won't change much. And video practice blind to the social functions of the communications industry cannot be critical. Following Brecht's lead, however, video can be undertaken and understood as part of a resistance to cultural domination and as a means to change cultural institutions.

Notes

1 *The Medium Is the Medium,* a 30-minute composite videotape of work by six artists, was produced at the New Television Workshop in Boston. *TV as a Creative Medium,* at the Howard Wise Gallery in New York City, was the first major gallery exhibition devoted exclusively to video.

2 *The Second Link: Viewpoints on Video in the Eighties,* Banff, Alberta, Canada, Walter Phillips Gallery, 1983. In his introduction, the exhibition organizer, Lorne Falk, finds precedents for contemporary video art in the activity of the aestheticist, elitist Linked Ring Society, formed in Great Britain in 1892 to champion art photography over the popular uses of photographic technology.

3 Dorine Mignot (curator of painting, sculpture, video, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam), "Video: An Art Form," ibid., p. 25.

4 Barbara London (director of the video program, Museum of Modern Art, New York), "Striking a Responsive Chord," ibid., p. 28.

5 Kathy Huffman (former director, Long Beach Museum of Art, Long Beach, Calif.), "Video Art: A Personal Medium," ibid., p. 30.

6 All quotations from Gene Youngblood, "A Medium Matures: Video and the Cinematic Enterprise," ibid., pp. 9–13.

7 The central text of technological determinism in Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media,* New York, 1964.

8 For example, see: Herbert I. Schiller, *Who Knows? Information in the Age of the Fortune 500,* Norwood, N.J., 1981; and idem, *Information and the Crisis Economy,* Norwood, N.J., 1984.

9 Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form,* New York, 1975, p. 126.

10 The numerous reviews and features on the Paik retrospective included Robert Hughes, *Time* (May 17, 1982), pp. 75, 77; and D.C. Denison, "Video Art's Guru," *New York Times Magazine* (April 25, 1982), pp. 54–58, 63, as well as those in art publications; Paul Gardner's "Tuning in to Nam June Paik," *Art News* (May 1982), pp. 64–73, was the cover story.

11 I discussed the significance of the Paik retrospective in "Pomp and Circumstances: The Coronation of Nam June Paik," *Afterimage,* Vol. 10, No. 3 (October 1982), pp. 12–16.

12 *Ten Years of Video: The Greatest Hits of the 70s,* exh. cat., Boston, The Institute of Contemporary Art, 1984, n.p.

13 Ibid.

14 Wall text for *Video Art: A History, Part 1,* New York, The Museum of Modern Art, 1984.

15 Program notes for *New American Video Art: A Historical Survey, 1967–1980,* New York, Whitney Museum of American Art, 1984.

16 A history of video art in the U.S. that ignores the work of groups like the Videofreex/Media Bus, Raindance, Video Free America, Optic Nerve, or Global Village consciously skews history towards formal aesthetics, away from all social factors. Also rendered invisible is the important work of community media activists during this period, most notably that of George Stoney and those who worked at the Alternative Media Center at New York University, which Stoney founded.

17 In "Raster Masters," *Afterimage,* Vol. 11, No. 8 (March 1984), Lucinda Furlong details the inaccuracies that London's taxonomy perpetrated.

18 Kathy Huffman's and David Ross's essays in LBMA's catalogue, *Video: A Retrospective, 1974–1984,* chronicle institutional development rather than propose rationales for the work exhibited. The other text in the catalogue, Bill Viola's "History, 10 Years and the Dreamtime," is a mystical treatise that denies criticism altogether and questions the usefulness of any history.

19 In addition, avant-garde art traditions are generally cited only to certify video's art status; critical historical analysis is rare. Martha Rosler's lecture, "Shedding the Utopian Moment," delivered on October 4, 1984, at the Video 84 conference in Montreal, counts as an exception. In her paper, Rosler considers "how modern artists have tried to find a place in new ideologies and new technologies or have tried to oppose them, and marketplace values as well."

20 An inquiry into video displays in museum spaces lies beyond the scope of this article. Nevertheless, such an investigation would extend the critique of formalist interpretations of video.

21 David Antin makes this point in his essay, "Television: Video's Frightful Parent," *Artforum,* Vol. 14, No. 4. (December 1975), pp. 36–45, where he describes how "the television experience dominates the phenomenology of viewing and haunts video exhibitions. . . . [I]f anything has defined the formal and technical properties of the video medium, it is the television industry" (p. 36). Although Antin makes a convincing argument for the influence of television on video, I take exception to the conclusion he draws: "To a great extent the significance of all types of art derives from its stance with respect to some aspect of television, which is profoundly related to the present state of our culture. In this way video art embarks on a curiously mediated but *serious critique* of the culture" [emphasis added] (p. 44). A serious critique must be consciously undertaken and

cannot be inferred solely from video's alternative status.

22 Douglas Davis, "Video in the Mid-'70's: Prelude to an End/Future," *Video Art: An Anthology,* Ira Schneider and Beryl Korot, eds., New York, 1976, p. 197. In his essay, Davis states, "[T]he Video Art that interests me the most . . . is antitelevision, antipopulist. Most of it is very far as yet from high art, from realizing the perfect achievement that occurs when thought and medium come together."

23 *Television Delivers People* is based on the discussion of the economics of television in Les Brown, *The Business Behind the Box,* New York, 1971. Brown, in turn, repeats the analysis given in Erik Barnouw, *The Image Empire: A History of Broadcasting in the United States,* New York, 1970, and Barnouw incorporates theories put forward by Dallas Smythe, in *The Structure and Policy of Electronic Communications,* Urbana, Ill., 1957.

24 1984 saw the demise of the CPB-sponsored Independent Documentary Fund at WNET-TV. Two CPB-funded, PBS documentary series, "Matters of Life and Death" and "Crisis to Crisis," likewise expired during the first Reagan term.

25 A list of Rockefeller outlays for video up to 1974 can be found in Howard Klein, "The Rise of the Televisualists," *The New Television: A Public/Private Art,* Cambridge, Mass., 1977, pp. 168–69.

26 Although the public-TV experimental labs brought income to the stations (since artists were required to spend grant money allocated through these programs at the stations) and despite favorable critical response to many of the projects accomplished at these centers, the stations never integrated these programs into their operations. One plausible explanation for this is that PBS stations have resisted supporting truly independent projects that don't conform to established formats, even when these are reasonably successful.

27 In October 1984 Congress enacted HR. 4103, a compromise version of Senate cable legislation (S. 66) passed during the previous session. Cable operators are now able to obtain relief from requirements for access channels and rate regulations for leased channels. Also, the role of for the public in the franchising process has been curtailed.

28 Attempts to market limited editions of videotapes through galleries or art auctions have been uniformly disastrous, and tape rentals and sales by art dealers have proved unprofitable.

29 In contrast with painting and sculpture, or even photography, video attracts few private patrons; video programs within museums are primarily creatures of public patronage.

30 At the 1983 conference of the National Alliance of Media Arts Centers, Brian O'Doherty, the NEA Media Program director, told assembled media center administrators, "Every board of a media center needs to have the leading banker in the community, the leading lawyer, the leading real estate broker, influential politicians. . . . You need to love your funders for what they can do for you. . . . Get through their doors, and when you do, dress like you're a funder." Quoted in Carrie Rickey, "Get It While You Can: The Vanguard, the Bucks, and the System," *Village Voice* (July 5, 1983), pp. 37–38.

31 Howard Klein, "Introduction," in Johanna Gill, *Video: State of the Art,* New York, 1976, pp. v–vi.

32 E.g., see the report of UNESCO's International Commission for the Study of Communications Problems, *Many Voices, One World,* New York, 1980; Anthony Smith, *The Geopolitics of Information: How Western Culture Dominates the World,* New York, 1980; Herbert I. Schiller, *Communications and Cultural Domination,* White Plains, N.Y., 1976; and Armand Mattleart and Seth Siegelaub, eds., *Communications and Class Struggle: 1. Capitalism, Imperialism,* New York, 1979.

33 John Willett, ed. and trans., *Brecht on Theatre,* New York, 1964, p. 52.

34 E.g., in "Nam June Paik's Videotapes," in John Hanhardt, ed., *Nam June Paik,* New York, Whitney Museum of American Art, 1982, David Ross links Paik with Brecht in order to claim Paik as a radical artist.

35 Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant Garde,* Minneapolis, 1984, pp. 88–89. On the following page, Bürger makes a pertinent point: "[T]he social effect of a work of art cannot simply be gauged by considering the work itself but that its effect is decisively determined by the institution within which the work 'functions.' "

***Martha Gever** edits* The Independent Film and Video Monthly, *published by the Association of Independent Video and Filmmakers.*