Colophon

Organization
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The catalogue will be supplemented with the jury’s statement and updated lists of the works shown in the tape program.
Twenty fragmentary thoughts about video installation

Erkki Huhtamo

1. Video installation is a multi-faceted interface of late 20th century art. It brings together art and technology, private and public space, subjective vision and the opaque surface of the machine, high culture and mass culture, the seriousness of the art object in the museum and the digital orgy of satellite television, the moments when the body disappears and is found again.

2. Video installation cannot be sent in a letter or put into a VCR. It cannot be turned into a video-copy and to a copy of a copy. Every man cannot afford to buy it for the living-room corner and an artist cannot produce it with his/her pocket money. One has to travel to the video installation, just as one has to travel to see Fontana di Trevi or Michelangelo's David. As a rule an entrance fee has to be paid.

3. Video installation is a counterforce to “the aesthetics of disappearance” (Paul Virilio). It provides a tangible frame for the immaterial video image, fixes it to a time and a space. It gives video art back the aura of a unique art-object (or rather its simulation); it brings the restless media image to human proximity; it allows the breathing of the work and the breathing of the spectator to be mingled.

4. A paradox: the video cassette is small, pocket-size and distant; video installation is big, public and close.

5. Video installation has its history, conditioned by changes in the art-world and the media-world, as well as by political conjunctures. There is a connection between video surveillance and ‘closed circuit’ installations; equally between video games and interactive installations. The character of video installation—and our perception of it—changes as the position of video in the society changes.

6. Television was a new piece of furniture in the homes of the 50's. According to Vito Acconci, it was placed in the cultural position traditionally reserved for sculpture: “Compared to other furniture, the television set couldn’t be used, it could only be looked at; it had the uselessness that one associates with art.”

7. The arts rushed out from the Academy in the 50's. They claimed that the barrier separating “art” and “life” had to be removed and ended up in the transfiguration of "life". They fixed their attention on television as the totem of the new private-centered order. Fluxus-artists Nam June Paik and Wolf Vostell dragged the television set away from the living-room corner, ridiculed it and maltreated it. They conceived
it as a 'prepared ready-made' to make visible its implicit
mythical, philosophical, and political dimensions.

8. Video art was born as installation art, even before video-
taping and playback were available for artists.

9. Interaction has been a feature of video installation from
the very beginning—that between the video image and the
artist-constructed environment; that between the spectator
and the work. Nam June Paik called his early pieces 'partici-
pation TV'; they required the visitor's active participation.
The "closed circuit" installations at the end of the 60's
forced the spectator to encounter his/her own image, either
in real time or with a (slight) time-lag. Recent interactive
installations, exploiting the multi-channel video-disc tech-
nology, bring the requirement of interaction to another
level: the work of art is realized only through spectator ac-
tivity. It's for the artist to provide the framework.

10. According to Rosalind Krauss it was still possible to define
the modernist sculpture of the early 20th century in nega-
tive terms in relation to classical sculpture; it had become
"nomadic", losing its commemorative function, its fixed
place and becoming largely self-referential. In the early 60's,
sculpture had entered "a categorical no-man's land: it was
what was on or in front of a building that was not the build-
ing, or what was in the landscape that was not the land-
scape".

11. Video installation is the material, spatial and 'abiding'
dimension of video art—nevertheless, it escapes defi-
nitions. Even the presence of the television monitor or the
video image are inadequate as common denominators.
Peter Campus uses the video projector, the monitors in
Fabrizio Plessi's MATERIA PRIMA are silent and grey like
stones, like primeval graves.

12. Wulf Herzogenrath proposes to speak about "video sculp-
ture" instead of "video installation", because it 'refers to the
world of 'old art'". According to Edith Decke "video sculp-
ture" is closer to the traditional arts as has been thought. Is
the Academy making a counter-offensive, a bloodless coup
d'etat? The concept "installation" (like readymade, objet
trouvé or assemblage) was born as part of the avant-garde's
own discourse, connoting its values, remarks Davidson
Gigliotti.

13. Vittorio Fagone states that the concepts "video installation"
and "video sculpture" can alongside the ideological debate
be used to define two types of work. "Video installation" is
based on the interaction between the video image and the
artist-created environment. "Video sculpture" is a piece,
where the video image is placed within a virtual, self-suf-
ficient construction.
14. The breakthrough of image-processing on television and the over-heated state of the art market in the 80’s have plunged videoartists into an identity crisis. It has become practically impossible to make a “formal” distinction between a video art tape and the flow of commercial “neo” television. Also, how could one persuade anybody to sit and watch video tapes in the museum, while TV is overflowing with its glossier imagery?

15. The “immateraility” of the video-tape has become both a blessing and a curse for the artist; it hasn’t become an object to collect or to invest in—compared to ‘postmodern’ photography, not to mention painting and graphics.

16. Video artists have had four alternative roads in the 80’s. Some have been enlisted by the television, are on its payroll and have accepted the rules of its game. Some have retired to the margin, homeless and bitter, finding consolation in the Romantic myth of the impoverished artist. Some have gone looking for fame, status and fortune as refugees in the Academy. Some have chosen the road towards multi-media art, reducing video to one medium among the others. These roads frequently cross.

17. The impressive entry of video installation into museums, art mega-events and public collections is a sign of its coming of age. Or perhaps: of a great surrender, of early senility?

18. Video installations frame and reduce the play of the flamboyant empty signifiers of the dominant media. Even as multi-monitor installations they fragment the money-jointed electronic space and press the mental “pause”-button. They want less rather than more Images/sounds.

19. Video installation is gradually entering urban public space, being transformed into a permanent (but strangely fleeting) videomonument, a “cultivated” neighbour of the marketing videowalls. Nam June Paik and Dara Birnbaum’s rio videowall are pioneers in the West; in Japan they are much further ahead.

20. Video installation has come full circle in a quarter of a century. It was born with the arts’ great escape from the Academy. Television was one of the things they encountered. Little by little the TV-sets—prepared, multiplied, transfigured—have been carried back through the Academy gates. They have been put on pedestals. Somewhere outside even more massive pedestals are built, to make video art a new “commemorative representation” (Rosalind Krauss), the Arch of Constantine of our post-industrial and preapocalyptic era. The movement goes on, further back in history and on to the future.