

video, and architecture beyond the screen

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Introduction

New forms of electronic architecture beyond what is visible on the screen continually evolve, define intelligent space, and are a medium for today's media artist. This architecture is communication, primarily composed of radio, telephone and television technologies, and their manifest forms: art created for electronic networks, multimedia and interactive art. These contemporary forms comprise an electronic transparency that requires video and computer technology. This transparency, which as Virilio notes "has long supplanted appearances,"¹ takes on physical dimensions of a new order when the representation of overlapping physical and electronic realities are constructed.

Equally important in a discussion of electronic architecture is the consideration of the critical and theoretical discourse that connects video, "informatics"² and the geography of space. The concerns, which have evolved during the three decades of practical experience, research and observation of artists using video, are the direct consequence of the exploration of the altered, electronic image. Media information networks underscore a completely new phenomenon: the grid that exists in electronic space. A new understanding of this volume in media space is a result of what seemed to be an impossibility to represent depth in the electronic frame. But, according to Deleuze — ideas from one medium often translate to another, because "A creator who is not seized at the throat by a set of impossibilities is no creator. A creator is someone who creates his own impossibilities, and thereby creates possibilities."³

Consequently, the art in video and multimedia technologies incorporates not only seeing, but it also reveals the act of viewing and of perceiving. It is an on-line exercise in the simultaneous transmission of ideas, and a metaphor for the numerous communication energies and impulses crowding earth's airwaves, outer space, and the universe. In our real-world environment, networks of intense frequencies intrude into — and upon — the rhythm of the human body, and both tangible and intangible effects are physically evidenced. This otherwise invisible phenomenon is media information, and is portrayed in video by way of digital and analogue processes. The video exhibition *Intelligente Ambiente / Intelligent Environments* is an attempt to create a new understanding of the artists' interpretation of the mysteries of communication, media and a new epistemological space: a real space that combines video and computer technology with theoretical and practical issues of architecture and appearances.⁴

Architecture and communication

The intrusion of media in today's urban environment is obvious. The next generation of new communication technologies will require an even more advanced, abstract ability to receive and perceive abbreviated language, including the complete physical immersion into the electronics of advertising. The necessity to expand an expression of architectural space is a growing concern among multimedia and video artists, and has become a new focus. Previously known (and visually translated) only in cinematic language, the genre of "architecture on film" dates back to the beginning of experimental filmmaking, and by tradition is interpretive.

The early films made by architects and designers (sometimes with filmmakers) primarily analyze architectural forms. As documents, these films preserve valuable images of

architecture threatened by loss, through time, war and renovation. As conceptual statements and observational practices, filmed subjects include cities, housing projects, highway systems, landscapes and workplaces. The effect of film on contemporary architecture has been strong, and the relationship between the two is a powerful precedent for today's new media concerns. In fact, an interaction between film and architecture has been noted, that "Architecture does not merely put forward prospects for viewing, rather it creates energy spaces with which the cinematic interfere, so as to gain its own topology 'in loco.' The cinema will grow so enormously that the architectural itself will begin to charge itself with cinematic forces ..."⁵

Electronic memories

Since the consumer video boom of the 1980's, even ordinary users have discovered how to see and experience space differently. Home video recording has also made it possible to accumulate an entirely different set of memories — memories that are experienced differently than preceding generations — because of the ability to instantaneously replay recordings of personal events. With the many opportunities to document, individuals have also observed familiar space and time — in electronic form infused with new meanings and opportunities to understand "the self" and "others." Video, which portrays these memories, reflects them as moments in a continuously moving, and thoroughly integrated picture created from an electronic light source that overlaps and juxtaposes the familiar images in new combinations, unnatural in physical life but familiar in the illusionary state of video.

The relatively new interactive digital-TV environments and electronic networks feature direct access to communication, and the mass consumption of volumes of information by everyone and for everyone. This is the art of being everywhere, while really being nowhere. A witness and transmutation of representations, "The emergence of forms as volumes destined to persist as long as their materials would allow has given way to images whose duration is purely retinal."⁶

Video, installation, and psychological space

Videotape provided a breakthrough in the understanding of the relationship between image making and the individual's perception of oneself. In the early 1970's, when video first began to be used widely by the first generation of "video pioneers,"⁷ artists explored new ways to analyze and observe their personal space. Video was also a rejection of the frozen moments in time familiar to artists, to whom temporal space was a painted atmosphere or a mood "captured" in a photograph. Video was used in the same way as surveillance devices, to keep watch over and observe reality. Much of this video research material remains unedited and unwatched. It was, however, a valuable exercise that helped artists to understand space, memory, and video's ability to document experience.

Early in video art's development, many artists created sophisticated "settings" in which the environment was integral to the phenomenon of being in a space. This act of creating new electronic territory and involving the viewer is the predecessor to contemporary, interactive multimedia installation art. Early installation artists⁸ introduced strong concepts of both psychological and physiological territory, and advanced an awareness of video's ability to define space, time and energy.

Live television experiments — being in electronic space

Television has extended the territory of the home, and the sensibilities of its inhabitants. Like radio and the telephone, its direct-indirect capabilities were, on the one hand, all pervasive into private/public space. Television, referred to as "a window on the world", is now understood more clearly for its political-commercial context and as a control mechanism for the public. Information, cultural standards, and trend setting are big business, not to mention the subject of endless research into its effects on culture.

The explorations of television space by artists included live and "interactive" experimental events that alluded to a real space, but actually created an alternative television space between sites. Artists first attempted live television and satellite performances, designed to combine two (or more) places (spaces) as early as the late 1960's. Using the concept of EVENT and SPECTACLE, "interactive" and live broadcasts were — however — usually closed circuit, or broadcast to a limited number of homes. The early TV experiments were possible only because they were not considered to be important, because broadcasters considered art to be a neutral subject, and artists held a special position, much like a researcher.⁹

"For telecommunications, coming together in time means, inversely, distancing oneself in space."¹⁰ Many of the early TV projects were called "interactive" but were actually performances by artists to demonstrate connections between spaces, with theoretical sub-texts on mass communication and the control of information by broadcaster. Even now, in the context of advanced computer technology, some of the early live historic television transmissions stand up as seminal works, integral to the communication industry's acceptance of art and technology. As the archeology of artists broadcast work on radio, television, telephone, and various communication networks is compiled and assessed, the key to an interrelated history of the cultural and individual vitality of "seeing" electronic images and sounds will be revealed.

The crisis of physical dimensions in the mediated world

There are collapsing boundaries and new case histories for representation: 'Boundary, or limiting surface' has turned into an osmotic membrane, like a blotting pad. Even though this last definition is more rigorous than earlier ones, it still signals a change in the notion of limitation.¹¹ These ideas are urgent challenges for architects and communication experts, who together with the designers of new formats for information systems should collectively be recognized as media artists in the 1990's. Their practical and theoretical interests, and the information technology, have shifted towards multimedia, virtual reality and cyberconnected networks - new territories to explore and to understand. The growing public interest in electronic data space, interactive television and virtual experience is largely due to the news media, and its excitement over the large financial investments being made by computer companies, entertainment, television, and telephone systems. The capabilities exist for multimedia exploration of the television and information networks, the specific architectural forms and realities created by electronics. As physical places, some contemporary television references include: "Piazza Virtuale," the Ponton European Media Art Lab's interactive computer environment for live television (broadcast for 100 continuous days from the Documenta IX), which featured Picturephone and ISDN connections, telephone keypad controlled games and activities, and chat programs using modems, FAX, telephone and a live entryptpoint. The mythical TV space "My Neighborhood", an interactive community television program developed by New York University, in which a little world can be explored by viewers using the telephone keypads; and the "Electronic Cafe" a real place that connects various participants around the world in conversations, poetry and communication art. In these examples it is important to recognize that place is still a necessary space!

Architecture can no longer be bound by the static conditions of space and place, here and there. In a mediated world, there are no longer places in the sense that we once knew them. Architecture must now address the problem of the event. Today, rock concerts may be considered the archetypal form of architectural event.¹²

If the new architecture is a rock concert, as Eisenman states, then the ultimate skyscraper of the recent past is U2's "ZOO TV" - a mobile live satellite spectacle, connecting their concert with the broadcast of regular TV programs — and the TV viewers — to the concert, by satellite dish and by telephone. And, as a finale (and sign-off) at the end of each concert, a call is placed to The White House, asking the President for PEACE, to the background roar of applause and agreement from the thousands of spectators in the audience.

Checking out data space — with no conclusions

The new electronic territory is an invisible architecture, facing new challenges in the public domain. It is not a fictional virtual environment. Artists, for expressive and theoretical intent, have discovered important lessons about the image and its relationship to this created space. They are beginning to recognize the vast worldwide "NET" of unlimited information as another potential shared art place. Electronic networking demands an entirely new use of language, space and time. And, if we believe Wittgenstein — that language, which is also a fundamental technology, is not merely a vehicle for expressing thought, but the driver of thought — then we had better take the new information technologies seriously. We must know and judge how they affect our culture — our lives, space, and most of all, art.

1. Paul Virilio, "The Overexposed City" in *The Lost Dimension*, translated by Daniel Moshenberg, Semiotext(e), 1991, p. 25

2. informatics: networks, memory banks and terminals

3. Gilles Deleuze "Mediators", p. 292 in *INCORPORATIONS* (originally *L'Autre Journal*, 8 — October 1985)

4. Woody Vasulka "The New Epistemic Space," in *Illuminating Video*, edited by Doug Hall and Sally Jo Fifer, Aperture, 1989, pps. 465—470

5. Marc Ries, film+arch festival catalogue, Graz, p. 13

6. Virilio, op cit.

7. Some artists who were important to early video experiments were Peter Campus, Nam June Paik, Terry Fox, Vito Acconci, Bill Viola, Joan Jonas, & Bill Wegman

8. Important early installations using video technology were by Bruce Nauman, Dan Graham, Gary Hill, the Vasulkas, and Nam June Paik

9. Early TV experimenters: Douglas Davis, Allan Kaprow, Nam June Paik, Kit Galloway & Sherrie Rabinowitz, Jaime Davidovich, Richard Kriesche, Bob Adrian, David Hall and Roy Ascott

10. Virilio, op cit, p. 74

11. Ibid, p. 17

12. Peter Eisenman "Unfolding Events" in *Incorporations*, edited by Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter (Zone) 1992, p. 423

