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Changing Museum Environments: Global Articulations of the 'Video Text' (1968-1990)

Abstract

This article addresses how and why video art shaped the museum environment for the 21st century. The argument tracks a period of museological innovation between 1968 and 1990. Beginning with the Museum of Modern Art, New York, changes in architectural display and curatorial focus are then examined with respect to the Centre George Pompidou, Paris, the Tate Gallery, London and the Art Gallery of New South Wales in Sydney. This research reveals how video art's "problematic" time-based presence and redefinition of normative spectator positions assisted in the development of modern museum environments suitable for constant modification.

From the mid-to-late 1970s, various large scale art institutions such as the Centre Georges Pompidou, the Tate Gallery and the Art Gallery of New South Wales began to embrace new technologies such as video art. Video art brought with it a new set of interpretative and spectatorial challenges for these museums. Attempts to successfully interpret the specific properties and 'problematics' of the 'video text' by institutions would gradually come to alter their internal spatial arrangements. This paradigm was initiated by the Museum of Modern Art, New York in 1929, in a shift away from the hierarchical spaces of the white cube 'modernist' museum model to non-hierarchical darkened and interactive immersive environments more in keeping with theatre and stage presentation. In later years, with the increase of new communication media in the art world, not only the architectural format but the curatorial imperatives of mainstream museums were radically altered. As Josep Montaner and Jordi Oliveras point out, 'a whole new series of spaces and equipment became essential: cinema, video rooms, audio-visual rooms'.[1] This article interrogates how and why video art shaped the museum environment during the period 1968 to 1990. These changes are tracked across four national museums: the Museum of Modern Art, New York, the Centre George Pompidou, Paris, the Tate Gallery, London and the Art Gallery of New South Wales in Sydney. This research reveals how video art's "problematic" time-based presence and redefinition of normative spectator positions assisted in the development of contemporary museum environments suitable for constant modification.

The Influence of the Museum of Modern Art

The Museum of Modern Art in New York (MoMA) was one of the first mainstream institutions to devise exhibition programs that invited viewers to interact more directly with their displays of video art. The 1968 group exhibition, *Machine Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age* (curated by K. G. Pontus Hulten) referenced Walter Benjamin's *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1935-6) through its title and much of its

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[1] Montaner and Oliveras, 1986, pp. 9-10.

spirit. It was an early initiative in this regard.[2] Here, the museum's promotion of video art pioneers such as Nam June Paik and Dan Graham and others established a precedent for other art institutions to encourage video artists to use video as a means of ''humanising'' gallery spaces. Both Graham and Paik were inspired by the Canadian media theorist Marshall McLuhan's belief and axiom that electronic technology communication should not just be passive but active and participatory. As art historian Marga Bijvoet argues:

> [McLuhan] deserves merit for being the first author who created a conceptual framework for understanding the new electronic media. He was also among the first who recognised the impact that these media might have on our perceptual senses, as well as the implications this could have for the education system at large. Paik's visions were congruent with McLuhan's arguments in that the electric or electronic technology (McLuhan used both terms indiscriminately) and its consecutive automation techniques and computerization would bring about a major change in the concept of learning and knowing.[3]

Although *Machine Seen At the End of the Mechanical Age* was aligned with this perspective, its premise was expanded two years later in a second survey exhibition titled *Information Show* (1970), curated by Kynaston McShine.[4] Many of the artists were invited by McShine to determine their own viewing environments in the gallery. Group Frontera, for example, for their work *Especta* (1969) constructed a set of interactive video installations which were built as an "environment" within the gallery walls.[5] The invitation was extended from the artists to visitors to 'complete the work' through their active participation. Hence visitors were asked a set of questions (relating to power, sexuality and every day actions) whilst being videotaped within a recording booth. This was later played back on a set of video monitors in a section of the gallery nearby. Works such as this were significant in establishing museum protocol toward video display because they set an example for art museums to transform their exhibition spaces towards more flexible environments. These environments were often intended to be experienced as "total artworks" in themselves.

In 1974, curator Barbara London established *Projects Video*, MoMA's ongoing video exhibition program. A new gallery space was constructed for the exhibits, designed to highlight the specific properties of new media.[6] London positioned the initiative as a continuation of MoMA's commitment to exhibit "art of our time":

> Since its founding in 1929, The Museum of Modern Art has dedicated itself to the exhibition, collection, and preservation of the 'art of our time.' The Museum first recognized video as an art form with the 1968 exhibition 'The Machine as Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age.' This was only three years after manufacturers introduced the first consumer video camera which gave artists access to the medium.[7]

The program was complemented by a shift in collection policy. From the 1970s onwards, the Museum of Modern Art began to amass a significant amount of video art, some of

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[2] In *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* Benjamin reflects on the positive aspects of new technology for society and culture. The Museum of Modern Art's *Machine Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age* had been its first to contain video art.
[3] Bijvoet, 1997, p. 14.
[4] Manovich, 2002, p. 567.
[5] Alonso, 2005, unpaginated.
[6] Storr, 1997, unpaginated.
[7] London, 1996, unpaginated.

which was documented and highlighted in its annual reports, and much of which was rigorously promoted in specific exhibitions devoted to the medium.[8] MoMA was a pioneer in this regard, and would serve as an example for other national art institutions which would gradually realise the need to build into their gallery spaces areas suitable for constant modification. This would eventually lead to separate areas being set aside and constructed specifically for video art presentation.

The Centre Pompidou

In 1977 the Museum of Modern Art's innovations for presenting video art were extended by the Centre Pompidou's new exhibition framework. The Pompidou's first director K. G. Pontus Hulten had previously been the curator of the *Machine Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age*. Part of Hulten's mission at the Pompidou was to provide the public with 'all levels' of art, culture and information which would be directed towards the running of a public information centre that could, as he had stated, 'give people access to tools that are sophisticated – that people cannot have at home, like video, film, communications.'[9] From the outset, video art was positioned at the centre of the Pompidou's agenda and propagated on behalf of the French nation.[10] Every year since the Pompidou's inauguration, video art exhibitions have been numerous and prominent. As a predominantly government funded institution, the Pompidou's purchase of fifty video tapes between 1976 and 1978 revealed the French government's initiative to propagate and market this art form as a powerful commodity and attraction.[11] From this period, the amount of video art put on display by the Pompidou had escalated on a yearly basis, as it had also at the Museum of Modern Art.[12]

These new directions in collection policy and curatorial foci impacted on the built space of the museum. While France's National Museum of Modern Art was installed on the Pompidou's top floors with the permanent collection on other floors, in other parts of the Centre wide open and immersive spaces with moveable panels were created to highlight what was seen as the "latest" in contemporary art. It was hoped 'that visitors headed for one facility would wander naturally into others'.[13] This was one of the Pompidou's primary

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[8] For details of MOMA's video art exhibitions, acquisitions and its Circulating Video Library, see the Museum of Modern Art's annual and biennial reports for the period.

[9] See Pontus Hulten's interview in Baker, 1977, p. 102.

[10] This concept of propagating art on "behalf of the nation" emanates from a PhD I am currently working on in which I argue that mainstream national museums through their curatorial practices since the time of the Louvre's initiation in 1793 have used art to reflect their nation's cultural supremacy. (For a discussion of the museum as "national and cultural monument" see Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach, 1980, pp. 448-469.) Following this line of reasoning, I am suggesting here that the Pompidou from 1977 attempted to promote France's cultural supremacy through its representation of video which had been necessary since MoMA had been presenting video since 1968.

[11] Reperes, http://www.newmedia-art.org/english/reperes-h/70.htm. Accessed April 22, 2007. In 1982, for example, the Pompidou's prominent video art exhibitions featured included Marie Jo Lafontaine's *Round around the Ring* (1981) and Piotr Kowalski's *Performance par satellite avec le Canada* (1982). See "Centre national d'art et de culture Georges Pompidou Rapport d'Activite 1982", 1982, p. 28.

[12] My discovery of the rise in the number of video art exhibitions at these art institutions is derived from tracing details of video art exhibitions held at the Pompidou through the Pompidou's annual reports as well as the Museum of Modern Art's annual and biennial reports, which details their respective acquisitioning and exhibitioning of video art for the period. The accumulation of this data is re-enforced through web sites such as Storr, http://www.moma.org/exhibitions/2002/projects/storr.html, and
Reperes, http://www.newmedia-art.org/english/reperes-h/70.htm for example.

[13] Newhouse, 1998, p. 193. This had included all areas of the Centre such as its CCI, IRCAM, MNAM and Forum. In relation to this having occurred at the Pompidou, Robert Lumley argues that: 'Among the various sources of the 'wandering' that results from more or less heterogeneous activities being lumped together in

contributions to the development of the modern art museum. It was achieved via the construction of separate "non-hierarchical" spaces[14] and rooms specifically devoted to 'video spectacles' such as its *Salle Garance*.[15] Here, video art was placed outside a strict classification and taxonomy (as embedded in museums from the Louvre to the Museum of Modern Art) in a manner designed to escape the pretence of the Museum of Modern Art's white cube classificatory programme.[16]

For example, in 1982 Nam June Paik's monumental *Tricolour Video* (1982) consisting of a series of video tapes with selections from: *Global Groove* (1973), *Suite 212* (1977), *Guadalcanal Requiem* (1977-79) and *Lake Placid 80* was presented in the Centre's main Forum near the entrance.[17] As Bijvoet states in relation to the Pompidou's innovative display of video:

> The multi-monitor installations of the eighties became gigantic by comparison. Among the majestic pieces was 'Tricolour Video' (1982), conceived for the Centre Pompidou in Paris: 384 monitors were laid out in a square on the floor, in twelve rows of eight. These rows were divided in three, one colour from the French flag dominating in each section of four rows; blue, white and red respectively.[18]

Works such as *Tricolour Video* engendered the necessity for the redefinition of exhibition space. Through this, the theatrical and live quality of video as a particularised form of installation in a sense actively emulated the proscenium arch of theatre or cinema environments within the gallery. The inclusion of video art and screen-based practice in spaces such as these assisted in broadening and reshaping the definition of the museum exhibit.[19]

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the building, there are then topographical ambiguities (risk of getting lost) and semantic ambiguities (lack of reference points)'. Lumley, 1988, p. 207.

[14] Outside a strict classification and taxonomy programme which had been embedded in museums from the Louvre to the Museum of Modern Art video art was placed in an environment at the Pompidou which did not fit a strict discipline employed to popularise a narrative in Western culture which had been designed to propagate the idea of high art. As Ursula Frohne points out in relation to how new media such as video art shaped a new environment for museums: 'Taking the form of theatrical scenes and kaleidoscopic, large format projections, these projects added the parameter of time to the space-defined visual parameter of the classic museum; indeed the mechanical means of representation increasingly shifted the focus of visual perception from the experience of space to the experience of time'. Ursula Frohne, 2007, unpaginated.

[15] "Centre national d'art et de culture Georges Pompidou Rapport d' Activite 1985", 1985, pp. 12-13.

[16] I am arguing here that the ideology behind the Museum of Modern Art's white cube to act as a 'neutral' paradigm fails, since the very basis for its inception had stemmed from modernist conceptions of classification and didacticism. For more discussion of the Museum of Modern Art's original intentions and objectives see Barr, 1986, p. 72.

[17] "Centre national d'art et de culture Georges Pompidou Rapport d'Activite 1982", 1982, p. 28.

[18] Bijvoet, 1997, p. 14.

[19] The Pompidou's model later influenced the construction of museums such as the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, whose existence as a "container for art" for Jed Perl relates to the 'death of the concept of the museum as mausoleum', which had been formed by an intellectual tradition of criticism of the concept of the museum from Quatremere de Quincy to Theodore Adorno. In fact, many artists through their works had for some time attempted to 'refashion' and deconstruct traditional museum space. For example, the environmental artist Robert Smithson had been one of many who had viewed the museum as a tomb that exists to 'congeal' our past memories as a basis for reality. Smithson for example, created works from as early 1967 such as the 'non-site' series that challenged the notion of the gallery's fixed framework. For a discussion of de Quincy's views on the traditional art museum see Deotte, 2004, pp. 51-65. For a discussion of the 'museum as mausoleum' see Adorno, 1990, pp. 175-185.

As a result of its overall exhibition planning, the Pompidou's innovations orchestrated and propounded a shift in museum frameworks toward considerations of the museum as a funhouse and "supermarket of culture".[20] By marketing video art in such a way, the Pompidou had extended the Museum of Modern Art's understanding of video art's specific properties and set a morphological standard for contemporary art museums, based upon a new museum paradigm of interactivity. Historically, for modern and contemporary art museums, this resulted in a global transformation of the fixed structure and doctrinaire focus of the 'white cube' toward environments that would problematise the concept and definition of the museum as mausoleum.

The Tate Gallery and the Art Gallery of New South Wales

In contrast with the Centre Pompidou, the Tate Gallery and Art Gallery of New South Wales did not immediately grasp the significance of new media for museological frameworks. Unlike the Museum of Modern Art and the Centre Pompidou (whose exhibitions of the medium had from 1974 and 1977 indicated a shift in their understanding of video art respectively) the Tate Gallery in England had not, as yet, opted to modify its galleries for video art presentation. Neither had it demonstrated a clear commitment to the medium in its exhibition programming. It was only with the extension of the Tate in 1979 that the gallery began restructuring its viewing environments in a manner conducive to contemporary art exhibitions in general, some of which included video.[21] The Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW) was similarly slow to pick up on international trends in the exhibition of video. The gallery's radical disjunction and dislocation stemmed primarily from its geographical position, which limited its relation to contemporary international art during much of the 1960s. However, in1975 the AGNSW's *Projects* series initiated its promulgation of video art.[22] Although the Gallery had darkened an area of the main entrance for its presentation of Nam June Paik's video works in 1976, it had not been until the Sydney Biennale in 1988 that video art was presented in separate non-hierarchical spaces.[23]

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[20] Through its blockbuster exhibitions of video art the Pompidou's marketing strategy can be seen as a symptom of the institution's new museological policies. This helped to shape a new museum framework. As the Pompidou's first director stated in relation to the public's response to the Centre: 'The people have learned to think of this place as a city. They come to walk around, to look, to window-shop without always having a specific exhibit in mind. They're open to suggestion. Achieving this attitude is one of our biggest accomplishments so far'. Pontus Hulten in Paul, 1979, p. 48.

[21] As a new contemporary art form, a great many of these exhibitions such as *Performance, Video, Installation* (1981), *Tate-Pompidou (co-relation) Anglo-French Video Exchange* (1984), *The New Pluralism: British Film and Video 1980-85* (1985), *The Elusive Sign* (1987), *The Arts for Television, and Revision and Video Positive* (1989) took place in the new extension from 1979. For an outline of the Tate Gallery's major video art exhibitions see Knight, 1996, pp. 324-333.

[22] The 1975 *Project* exhibition series was mainly funded by the government and greatly assisted by corporate sponsorship. The exhibition series was initiated by Francis McCarthy, an assistant curator of Australian Art, after her studies at the Museum of Modern Art in 1974. See "Report of the Trustees of the Art Gallery of New South Wales 1975", 1975, p. 8. See also "The Museum of Modern Art Biennial Report 1974-76", 1976, p. 26. In fact, with video art by Nam June Paik being presented at the Art Gallery of New South Wales-(a "national" institution) in 1976 the recognition that video art was the 'art of its time' saw the Gallery's attempts to keep up with events in the contemporary art world. For example, the Sydney Biennales from 1976 onwards attempted this.

[23] Interestingly although temporarily, the AGNSW had, as early as 1976 installed in its gallery entrance Nam June 'Paik's 'Video Garden' in a blacked-out room, his 'TV Bed', 'TV Cello', 'TV Buddha' and other works'. See "Report of the Trustees of the Art Gallery of New South Wales 1976", 1976, p. 10. Sydney Intermedia Network (now dlLUX media arts) also used the AGNSW as a screening venue via the Gallery's Education Department for regular screenings during the late 1980s. Screenings of video art had also taken

Video Art's Problematics

Prior to the physical changes introduced by the accommodation of video art in museums, a set of specific problems concerning the imbrication of this new electronic media had arisen. These were often related to the viewer's experiences of watching video art, and arose both from the medium's problematisation of the artwork's "aura" and its potential capacity to "rupture" the temporal logic of the museum. This section demonstrates how both of these factors impacted upon video art's assimilation into museological frameworks. In early exhibitions of video art, the medium was frequently "subordinated" in traditional museum spaces. For example, logistical compromises from curators and gallery staff led to the display of video art in awkward positions such as behind stairs and in basements and corridors. Further, the lack of wall labels explaining the works forced video's moving image to play a subordinate role in the gallery.

These logistical problems emerged from a tension between traditional museological practice and the specific qualities of the video medium. In 1931, Walter Benjamin wrote that, 'we define the aura … as the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be'.[24] In early video works, this "phenomenon of distance" was addressed both within specific art works, in artist's investigations of the division between public and private space, and also by the installation of these works in the gallery. For example, many early video experiments had been performative, that is, relating to the artist performing some action documented in the works themselves. These experiments had created a sense of immediacy and intimacy in works that paradoxically invited yet rejected the viewer's spectatorial presence.

They also epitomised a trend in the early stages of video art (circa 1965 to 1970), in which video was employed as means of documentation. The picture quality of the recordings was usually poor, the camera was frequently positioned too far away from the action, and much of the "live" feeling of the performance was lost. Catherine Elwes, a British pioneer of video art, has noted that, 'These early performance tapes would rarely be seen in public and were regarded as documents, residues of the live events, though they were briefly collected by galleries along with other photographic and material by-products of live work'.[25] As a means around these problems, many artists began to re-create live events, actions and performances in order to capture them 'specifically for the video camera and monitor'.[26] For example, "performative" video works of this kind included Bruce Nauman's *Going Around the Corner Piece* (1970), Vito Acconci's *Remote Control* (1971), Peter Campus's *Interface* (1972), Valie Export's *Space Seeing, Space Hearing* (1973-74) and Dan Graham's *Present Continuous Past* (1974). For Elwes, 'these live video-performances combined the role of video as a recording device with its participation as an essential component of the work itself'.[27] In this respect, many artists employing video attempted to 'humanise' museum environments. They did this by encouraging active audience

place in the Gallery's new extension on the lower ground floor as part of the 1988 Sydney Biennale. For details of this Biennale see http://www.biennaleofsydney.com.au/history/1988artisticdirectorsreport.pdf. Accessed April 15, 2007. See also "Report of the Trustees of the Art Gallery of New South Wales 1988", 1988.
[24] Benjamin, 1931, unpaginated.
[25] Elwes, 2005, p. 10.
[26] Elwes, 2005, p. 10.
[27] Elwes, 2005, p. 10.

participation within the gallery's fixed environments in order to pose a challenge to institutional stability of the art museum. Video was then a problematic art form for the museum.[28]

One institutional strategy designed to counter this difficulty was the presentation of video as a 'new form of sculpture' (usually installed on TV monitors until around the 1980s). Screens were encircled by viewers but observed still only from a certain critical distance. The sculptural installation of video raised a new set of problems, particularly as the static, structured installations frequently clashed with the stylistic and aesthetic "flux" of video art works. In works such as those by Nam June Paik, for example, the flow of imagery emitted constant fleeting signs, perceived instantaneously before being haphazardly replaced. For the American critical theorist Frederic Jameson, the 'video text' was comprised of images that indexed signs from an earlier period of modernism. To Jameson, these signs within the 'video text' were seen to exist side by side with other signs that were freely exchangeable for any other signs and were thus subsumed by each other's 'sameness'.[29] The video art work referenced not the 'real', or 'reality' as such, but bits already depicted or represented in the culture of the past: 'as a topic of the operation … it is subject to change without notice … our two signs occupy each other's positions in a bewildering and well-nigh permanent exchange'.[30] The constantly shifting meanings prevented a singular engagement with the text and demanded a new kind of spectatorship from viewers.

It also introduced a new mode of narrative time. The medium's capacity to create its own temporal agenda or 'temporality' ruptured the temporality of the space in galleries. Hence, for many encountering video art in a gallery space, the 'open-ended video text' often engendered a frenetic and futile pursuit to "find meaning" within the work. This was exacerbated by the viewer's perceived psychological and physical separation from not only the aesthetic but the conceptual bases of the texts. However, this 'phenomenon of distance' also made it difficult for viewers to engage with these works as 'sculpture' in art institutions whose structures were based on nineteenth-century as well as modernist conceptions of interior planning, structuring and hierarchy.

In the United States from the 1970s onwards, many American artists employed video as an anti-institutional tool.[31] For example, Vito Acconci, Eleanor Antin, John Baldessari, Lynda Benglis, Nancy Holt, Joan Jonas, Bruce Nauman, Richard Serra, Keith Sonnier and others used video to question the existing codes or expressions both in the world of art and the broader culture industry. In this, they followed in the footsteps of political and social activist art movements such as Fluxus, whose main criteria had been to pose challenges to prevailing institutional structures, conventional boundaries and cultural conservatisms. As American media theorist Marita Sturken points out:

> For many, video represented a tool with which to 'revolt' against the establishment of commercial television. For others, it was an art medium with which to wage 'war' on the establishment of the commercial art world.[32]

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[28] For further discussion of the critique of art institutions see Buchloh, 1997, pp. 117-155.

[29] Jameson, 1992, p. 87.

[30] Jameson, 1992, p. 87.

[31] As cultural theorist Frank Popper states: 'Video Art began in the U.S.A., then spread to Europe along with the motifs of the '70s: anti-militarism, love and peace, the road to India and the pop and drug cultures'. Popper, 1993, p. 75.

[32] Sturken, 1990, pp. 106-7.

Hence, a great many video artworks (although not all) were designed to subvert the normative expectations of "viewing" within institutional structures. Examples of such video works include Nam June Paik's *Moon is the Oldest TV* (1965-1976), Frank Gillette's *Wipe Cycle* (1969), Valie Export's *Autohypnosis* (1969-1973), Vito Acconci's *Body Building in the Great Northwest* (1975-93), Muntadus's *Between the Lines* (1979), Thierry Kuntzel's *Nostos II* (1985), Bill Viola's *Reasons for Knocking at an Empty House* (1983) and *Passage* (1987) and Dieter Froese's *Not a Model for Big Brother's Spy-Cycle* (1987). The specific spatio-temporal qualities of the medium were of great significance in these works, and were used to critique normative viewing positions or institutional expectations of spectatorship.

The Problem of Video Art in the Gallery: the Tate's 1976 *Video Show*

Many of the difficulties that video posed for institutions were highlighted by the Tate Gallery's *Video Show* of 1976, staged three years prior to the modification of some of its internal spatial arrangements. The exhibition was curated by David Hall in the Exhibition Department of the Tate Gallery, and included several works that used video to signpost a 'crisis of representation.'[33] One exemplar was David Hall's video installation *Vidicon Inscriptions* (1974-75). Consisting of a single TV monitor, video camera and mirror, Hall's work attempted to trace the passage of time in a gallery space. Positioned on a table in the Tate's lecture room with both monitor and camera lens facing the viewer (the camera lens placed immediately behind and above the monitor), Hall's installation focused on registering the pristine objectivity of the 'real-time' movement of the viewer. This was achieved by employing a clear polaroid shutter to capture at intervals the viewer's movements, which were then transformed as images 'onto the camera's vidicon signal plate' then emitted via the TV monitor moments after the recorded movement.[34] Hall's installation allowed the viewer to watch 'the progressive recession of his own tracks through space.'[35] In addition to Hall's work, Stephen Partridge's video installations also attempted to confront and control viewers via their involuntary associations with the camera. For his work *8X8X8* (1976), Patridge installed a live camera feed in the lecture room space in the Education Department (located in the basement). The camera recorded the activities of viewers who could see themselves pictured on a series of television screens. However, each time a viewer looked into the monitors, only the side of their head was visible.[36] In this ecstasy of denial, viewers were obliged to vertiginously redouble their efforts in order to catch a proper glimpse of themselves. In this way, each viewer would perhaps be meant to see something of the representational ruptures concomitant with video technology. The aesthetic value of these works was metonymic of the commitment of all the video artists involved in the show to expose and analyse the viewer's position and relationship to institutionalised space.

Yet for many who attended this exhibition, the Tate's engagement with video's specific properties was seen as a failure. Some reviewers argued that the art works had served as mere kinetic decoration and had achieved the effect of only a 'side-show'. As Richard Cork stated in the London Art Review for the Evening Standard, 'The upshot is that a show which cries out for – and fully deserves – a maximum amount of public participation has

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[33] Fine Art Forum, http://fineart.ac.uk/artists/90/. Partridge, 1976, unpaginated.
[34] Cork, 1976, unpaginated.
[35] Cork, 1976, unpaginated.
[36] Partridge, 1976, unpaginated.

been tucked away downstairs in the Lecture Room'.[37] However, although the Tate's registration of video art in 1976 revealed an inability to cater for the specific properties of the medium, by the late-1980s, the museum's understanding the 'video text' was much more comprehensive, largely due to the examples set by institutions such as the Centre Pompidou. This evolution was mirrored by the Art Gallery of New South Wales's gradual restructuring of their viewing environments, which by the late 1980s accommodated the viewer's physical need to interact directly with the video work in a specifically created environment. The importance of experiencing what is perceived by the mind through the body is central to the writings of French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty.[38] Merleau-Ponty's existential enquiry into human perception encompassed an analysis of space, viewing conditions, states of mind and bodily perception in an attempt to elucidate the relationship between the object, subject and self. These ideas are also central when considering the production and reception of video texts. For Merleau-Ponty, human perception is an amalgamation of the "totalising experience" of mind and body. It is through the body, as Jack Reynolds states, that we have access to the world: 'the practical modes of action of the body-subject are inseparable from the perceiving body-subject or at least mutually informed, since it is precisely through the body that we have access to the world.'[39] The establishment of specifically designed environments to show-case video works explicitly recognised these different tiers of perception.

The move away from "sculptural display" toward "immersive" environments in mainstream art institutions may have been realised via changes to architectural and curatorial foci, but it was instigated by the unique qualities of video itself. Video art's "problematic" time-based presence (temporal rupture, flux, phenomenon of distance) and redefinition of normative spectator positions assisted in the development of contemporary museum environments. These new spaces were not only suitable for constant modification but were also designed to highlight the physical and mental experiences of the viewer as primary components of the art work. This led to a questioning of traditional museological values and precipitated the development of "in situ" installations, non-hierarchical viewing platforms and a shift in the presentation and understanding of technology as an artistic medium. Although the initial attempts to enunciate the specific properties of video art in the 1970s and '80s facilitated the absorption of video art into the culture industry, they also disrupted the modernist definition of the museum as a mausoleum of 'alienated art.' The propagation of video art by institutions such as the Museum of Modern Art, the Centre Pompidou, the Tate Gallery and the Art Gallery of New South Wales was central in the redefinition of this paradigm.

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[37] Cork, 1976, unpaginated.
[38] Merleau-Ponty, 2005.
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