

The Museum of Modern Art Department of Film

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VIDEO: EXPERIMENTS WITH SATELLITE

Since the U.S.S.R. launched Sputnik in 1957, communication has been radically changed by the television and space industries. Among the vast multitude of signals that have been bounced off satellites in the ensuing two and a half decades, a few are the work of video artists experimenting with the broad boundaries of satellite technology.

VIDEO AND SATELLITE, an exhibition in the Video Gallery of The Museum of Modern Art, documents artists' video projects that have involved satellite. The show opens September 23 and runs through October 26.

Satellites are used to relay television, radio, telephone, and computer signals over huge distances in fractions of a second. Today, there are approximately 35 commercial telecommunications satellites orbiting in the direction of the earth's rotation at an altitude of 22,300 miles over the equator.

Over the years artists have had limited access to satellites. Telecommunications satellites are manufactured, launched and operated by such companies as Hughes Aircraft, Western Union, RCA and ITT; it costs roughly \$50 million to design and build a satellite, and another \$50 million to launch one. Time on a satellite usually is acquired through an intermediary company, and costs anywhere from \$400 to \$3,000 an hour, depending on time of day and distance to be covered.

Buying satellite time is the simplest step for artists in executing their projects; the difficulty, for the independent, is to convince stations to carry their program live or even replayed later as a tape. The projects in this exhibition are varied in nature, and are documentations of the actual satellite events.

HOLE-IN-SPACE: In November, 1980, Kit Galloway and Sherrie Rabinowitz created "Hole-In-Space: A Public Communication Sculpture." Life-sized video projection systems were set up in windows in Lincoln Center, New York, and Century City, Los Angeles, facing out to the sidewalk, with microphones and speakers unobtrusively placed to provide the audio component. At 8:00 p.m. New York time, without any prior public

announcement, the two installations were connected via satellite to create an open channel, a 'picture-phone' linking the cities. Anyone who happened to be passing either window became a participant; arguments on the relative merits of the cities broke out between shivering New Yorkers and T-shirted Californians; phone numbers were exchanged; trans-continental rounds were sung; and those who stumbled upon the installation were left completely undirected by the artists to discover the nature of the electronic hookup. Separate video cassette recorders taped the installations in both cities for the three evenings "Hole-In-Space" operated. The tapes were then edited together as a document of the communication sculpture.

DOCUMENTA 6: In 1977, Documenta 6 in Kassel , West Germany presented performances by Doug Davis, Nam June Paik and Joseph Beuys, which were created for live transmission by satellite to a number of countries participating in the Documenta hookup. Nam June Paik, with his frequent collaborator Charlotte Moorman, performed a selection of his familiar TV tableaux; German artist Joseph Beuys used the directness of the satellite link to address the viewers in monologue. Since 1976 Doug Davis, an American artist, has developed a series of satellite projects, one of which was performed at Documenta. Davis concentrates on the immediacy of satellite communication, exhorting the audience to respond to his televised address by, for instance, placing their hands on the screen. Davis also attempts to bring together different locations. This documentation of the Documenta 6 project is the version WNET/Thirteen rebroadcast in New York.

DOUBLE ENTENDRE and POST-VIDEO: "Double Entendre" by Doug Davis records a satellite hookup between the Centre Pompidou in Paris and the Whitney Museum in New York, in which a man and a woman recite a Roland Barthes text on love -- the recitation, in French and English, is carried on between the two cities. "Post-Video," narrated by John Hanhardt, film and video curator at the Whitney Museum, is a documentation of several of Davis' other satellite experiments.

PHASE I & PHASE II: Liza Bear and Keith Sonnier, founders of the "Send/Receive Satellite Network" which was based in New York, created a performance project in 1977 between Battery City Landfill in New York and the Ames NASA Station in Mountain View, California. With the

VIDEO & SATELLITE

aid of NASA technicians and a NASA satellite, they created a satellite link between two groups of artists and colleagues in each location. Phase I is an assemblage of information on satellite technology and accessibility which they accumulated in the course of their project; Phase II is the actual transmission.

SATELLITE TV: BIRTH OF AN INDUSTRY: Liza Bear and Michael McClard, with Willoughby Sharp, assembled this compilation of information on satellite resources from their coverage of a satellite conference held in Miami in 1980.

Some Facts About Satellites:

The telecommunications satellites orbiting the equator are geostationary -- they orbit at nearly the same rate as the earth's rotation, and therefore appear to remain over fixed points. They can operate twenty-four hours a day. Satellites remain airborne and in alignment through the use of solar energy and hydrazine fuel. Their 8-10 year lifespan is determined by how much fuel they can carry.

Satellites function as sophisticated reflective instruments. First, audio-visual signals, which are encoded in short microwaves, are sent from a dish-shaped transmitter in one ground location directly to a satellite. The receiver/transmitter in the satellite then unscrambles, amplifies, and reprocesses the signals before sending them back down to a ground receiver thousands of miles from the original source. Satellites provide a communications link between any two points within a range of approximately 5,000 miles.

INTELSAT (International Telecommunications Satellite Organization, formed in 1964) is a 150-member organization that internationally regulates satellites. COMSAT (Communications Satellite Corporation), a publicly-held private corporation, was formed in 1963 in response to the provisions of the Communications Satellite Act of 1962, which called for the establishment of a cooperative, global, commercial satellite system.

MoMA's Video Program is directed by Barbara London, Assistant Curator in The Department of Film. The program is made possible by grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and the New York State Council on the Arts.

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For information the public may call: (212) 708-9500.

Schedule

PROGRAM I, Mondays

Liza Bear and Keith Sonnier, Phase I and Phase II, Send/Receive Satellite Network. 1977. 55 minutes

PROGRAM II, Tuesdays

Liza Bear and Michael McClard with Willoughby Sharp, Satellite TV: Birth of an Industry. Part 2. 1980. 30 minutes

PROGRAM III, Thursdays

Douglas Davis, Double Entendre. 1981. 30 minutes. Post-Video. 1981.
30 minutes

PROGRAM IV, Fridays

Liza Bear and Michael McClard with Willoughby Sharp, Satellite TV: Birth of an Industry. Part 2. 1980. 30 minutes

PROGRAM V, Saturdays

Kit Galloway and Sherrie Rabinowitz, Hole in Space. 1980. 30 minutes

PROGRAM VI, Sundays

Joseph Beuys, Douglas Davis, and Nam June Paik, Documenta 6. 1977.
30 minutes