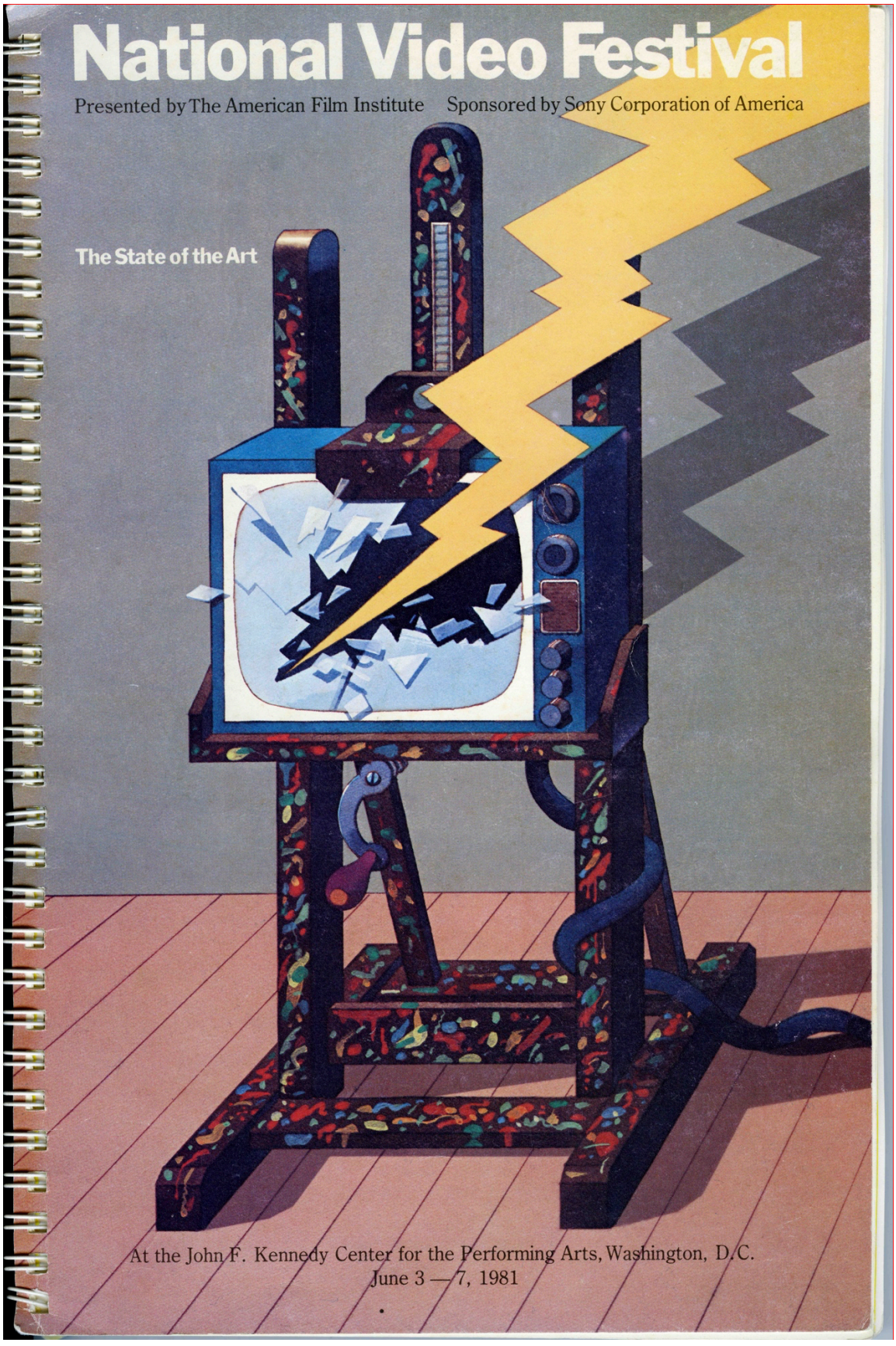
National Video Festival

Presented by The American Film Institute Sponsored by Sony Corporation of America



At the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Washington, D.C.
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AFI ENTERS THE VIDEO AGE

Remembering the National Video Festival

American Film Institute 1981-1982

By Larry Kirkman

This essay has been adapted as a chapter in the book,
Becoming AFI: 50 Years Inside the American Film Institute,
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It all started with a cold call to the American Film Institute from Sony in Fall 1979. Would AFI be interested in a student video competition and event at The Kennedy Center? When AFI director George Stevens, Jr. asked me to suggest some ideas for Sony, I proposed a National Video Festival, rooted in my experience as a producer, educator, and activist across the spectrum of video innovation.

I was a professor at American University, recruited to introduce video into the film program in 1976. I was part of a movement of independent documentary producers on public television, whose productions pushed the envelope of video technology and public affairs formats. And, I was an editor of *TeleVisions*, a journal inspired by the potential of the new media of video, cable and satellites.

Founded by Nick DeMartino at the Washinton Community Video Center, *TeleVisions* was funded by the National Endowment for the Arts and Rockefeller Foundation. The quarterly was filled with high expectations for video's impact on education, democracy, work and health. We imagined a dynamic and participatory communications environment, a vision that has become commonplace in the digital age. The watchword was access. We wanted to create new media services and reinvent professional roles.

Television historian Erik Barnouw defined the revolutionary moment in his keynote for the first National Video Festival, speaking to a full-house in The Kennedy Center's 500-seat Terrace Theatre:

"Throughout history, new media have always been an offshoot of new technology, and every such shift has brought with it shifts in society – shifts in power, values, and ideas…Now suddenly, once more, a monopoly is undermined by new technology. This is the historic fact, the possibly explosive historic fact that brings us here. Its ramifications are far from clear, but evidence of their possible reach and complexity exists in this very festival."

"Videotape, on which images and sounds of all sorts and in all manner of combinations can be readily implanted, is a medium – a canvas, palette, sheet of paper, typewriter, new wad of clay, synthesizer, what you will: it is all these and more. Those equipped to use it can feed into our television system, but also bypass it; already the medium is creating a world outside that system. It can feed into our cable systems but also bypass them. It can reach out through satellites and optical fibre channels but need not. It is itself a delivery system.
The final delivery points are television screens, already available in home, office, school, museum, library, church, community center, hotel room, party headquarters, or what have you. Each has its own needs.... The high wall that has separated a gigantic Entertainment industry, with a capital E, from individuals in their homes and communities, shows signs of crumbling. Entertainment becomes the business of many, including ourselves. I am reminded of the words of Walt Whitman: 'Henceforth I seek not good fortune. Henceforth I am myself good fortune.'"

A few months before the call from AFI, I co-produced a public television special on the Three Mile Island demonstration protesting the nuclear meltdown. The 3-hour *Nuclear Power: The Public Reaction* broadcast live from the West Face of the Capitol was distributed by the new PBS satellite service. The program exemplified the vitality of video documentary that had emerged in the '70s. We called it a "live documentary," mixing broadcast news and talk show formats with grassroots video segments edited on the National Mall, an innovation at the time.

In his review, Tom Shales, TV critic for *The Washington Post*, called our program groundbreaking: "May 6, 1979, was the first day of the '80s. We moved into a New Television -- though on tip-toe. Not everyone noticed it when it happened or knows about it even yet, but the day was a landmark for public TV, for the technological revolution in broadcasting and for America's rapidly expanding subculture of grass-roots video guerrillas."

It was Shales' review that got George Stevens to call me in as a consultant. "I don't know anything about video," he said, but he knew enough to see the potential in a relationship with the leading manufacturer and primary innovator in television and video technology.

A year later, when Jean Firstenberg succeeded George Stevens, she established a Television and Video Services program and hired me to create the National Video Festival, manage the relationship with Sony, and participate in the National Association of Media Arts Centers. In the June 1980 news release, I said: “AFI can play a very important role in helping to consolidate the advances in television and video. We want to develop new audiences for the video arts and spotlight craft innovations in every area of production. This new program will find its role in response to the needs of the institutions and membership organizations in the field.” I defined an ambitious goal for the first National Video Festival: to celebrate the pioneers of the 1970s and look forward to what was emerging in the 1980s.

AFI AND SONY: THE RIGHT TIME, THE RIGHT PLACE

In November 1980, Koichi Tsunoda, president, Sony Video Products, and vice president, Sony Corporation of America, made the commitment to sponsor the National Video Festival. Sony's $400,000 contribution included $100,000 in equipment prizes for the student competition, and $30,000 to install its new video projector in the AFI Theater.

The National Video Festival served Sony's marketing and political interests. Celebrating small-format video, a field it dominated, at The Kennedy Center in Washington in partnership with the American Film Institute asserted its contributions to our culture and economy.

After Japanese consumer electronics overwhelmed the U.S. market in the '70s, the industry agreed to voluntary export restraints on television sets from 1977 to 1980, when Japanese companies began to invest in U.S. subsidiaries.

The AFI board was elated with the Sony partnership. After a presentation on festival plans, chairman Charlton Heston said "Sony's support is important to the total Institute funding picture" and "the corporation's commitment to the institute is quite genuine."

So, why did AFI embrace the relationship with Sony? Why did their stories merge in the first National Video Festival and lead to a partnership for the next decade? You have to understand the context: technology developments, innovations in production, roles of broadcasters, growth of media arts centers and the nonprofit funding environment.

A generation was waiting for small format video

Sony launched the video era with its Portapak, introduced in the U.S. in 1967, and fueled innovation in technology and programming throughout the '70s and '80s. Consumer trends and social pressures had created an appetite for the new video tools. By 1970, television in the home was at 95%. This was the TV generation and they were ready to make it themselves.

The promise was television liberated from industry standards: a stationary video recorder cost $40,000 and it used 2-inch tape that cost $260 an hour. By comparison, the Sony Portapak Rover was relatively affordable at $1500, lightweight and easy to operate. Small format, ½-inch tape was $25 a half-hour. The Portapak worked in available light and was battery powered.

By the mid-70s, 500,000 small-format units were in use, including more than 300,000 Sony ¾-inch U-Matic, which fueled ENG, Electronic News Gathering. National broadcasters began experimenting with ¾-inch to cut costs and processing time. They could go live or microwave back to the studio for editing. Tape was reusable and provided instant replay. In 1972, the new Sony U-Matic was used to cover Nixon's trip to China. In 1975, KMOX, CBS in St. Louis, was the first to replace film with video for its news programs.

By the 1976 annual convention of the National Association of Broadcasters, video was mainstream.

Media arts centers, independent artists and public television

In 1979, AFI was still all about film. As an institution, it had not focused on the emergence of video. Though it was based in Washington with a theater and offices in The Kennedy Center, and largely funded by National Endowment for the Arts, AFI was defined by the LA presence of its Conservatory and Life Achievement Award and its Hollywood royalty board of directors.

Jean Firstenberg knew public television and the video landscape and understood NEA's commitment to media arts centers, independent video producers and public television labs. She came to AFI from Markle Foundation, founding funder of CTW, Children's Television Workshop, which brought us *Sesame Street*.

The National Endowment for the Arts, along with the Rockefeller Foundation and New York State Council on the Arts, had been funding the new video pioneers and their media centers in dozens of cities across the U.S for a decade.

Visual, conceptual and performance artists had seized the new consumer technology. As early as 1965, video arts pioneer, Nam June Paik, was using a Sony Portapak from Japan, before it was on sale in the U.S. Video art came to decode and reinvent the television experience, deploying new tools, such as synthesizers in multi-monitor installations for museums and galleries.

PBS, which began broadcasting in 1970, became a major force in bringing video to TV. Independent production organizations across the country built relationships with their local public stations, including: New York's Downtown Community Television and TVTV; Bay Area Video Coalition; Videopolis in Chicago; and, New Orleans Video Access Project. By 1976, 15 groups had formed the Coalition for New Public Affairs Programming to advocate for independent video on public TV.

The independents worked through new units at the major producing stations: National Center for Experiments in Television at KQED in San Francisco; Television Laboratory at WNET in New York; and, New Television Workshop at WGBH in Boston.

In 1974, WNET's TV Lab co-produced TVTV's *Lord of the Universe* coverage of Guru Marharaj Ji's Houston Millennium '73 event. It was PBS's first ½- inch show and won a duPont-Columbia Award. And, in 1975, WNET launched *VTR*, the "Video and Television Review" series with Downtown Community Television's *Cuba: The People*, the first color ½ inch show, which won a National Emmy.

In 1973, Museum of Modern Art and Pacific Film Archives organized a Conference on Regional Development of Film Centers and Services, funded by Rockefeller and Markle foundations and NEA. A 1977 report, "The Independent Film Community," shaped AFI's focus in the 1980s, identifying common areas of concern for advancing the field, including issues of funding, distribution and exhibition, communications, and advocacy for the programs.

In early 1979, at a National Conference of Media Arts Centers, 47 organizations and 12 government agencies called on AFI to represent the independent community and increase the visibility of media arts. NEA wanted AFI, as one of its major grantees, to broaden its mission to serve the emerging video field.

Cable television and government funding fuel the movement

At the same time, cable television was expanding into major cities. FCC regulations required the new cable franchises to provide public access, education and government channels. PEG programming began across the country in 1972 with cable company support for technology, training, and staff positions.

Community cable activists testified in municipal hearings where companies aggressively competed for citywide franchises. The companies made extravagant promises in these bidding wars to demonstrate their commitment to community service.

Government agencies funded media arts centers and PEG staff. VISTA, Office of Economic Opportunity, and CETA, the Federal Comprehensive Employment and Training Act, provided funding for thousands of public service media jobs.

Larry Kirkman welcomes a full-house to The Kennedy Center's 500-seat Terrace Theater to launch the American Film Institute's first National Video Festival in 1981.

THE FIRST NATIONAL VIDEO FESTIVAL

The first festival asserted the scope and diversity of video innovation. More than 350 video evangelists came to share their work and explore the future in presentations and panel discussions for five days, from June 3 to 7, 1981. 185 video works, more than 50 hours, were showcased during the festival's 15-hour days.

James Hindman took a sabbatical from American University to join me at AFI. I took the title of festival producer and Hindman of director, but we worked hand-in-hand to mount the conference and exhibition at The Kennedy Center.

We declared that the scale of the festival and its wide peripheral vision were necessary to define the field. It was a three-ring circus that featured independent videomakers, visual and performing artists, public and commercial broadcasters, community video and cable access centers, public information and business applications, and the national student competition winners, all congregating in The Kennedy Center's theaters and public spaces.

Was it overreaching for AFI with limited staff and resources to set such an ambitious agenda? Yes, but, as curator and convener we served the historical moment. It all came together because, as Connie Koennen wrote in the *L.A. Times,* "… the cumulative effect is that an art form is emerging."

Jean Firstenberg's program notes highlighted the mix of experience and perspectives that defined the festival: "Where else can one find, in a single symposium, ABC's president of broadcast operations and engineering (Julius Barnathan), a founder of The Kitchen (Steina Vasulka), an artist-professor from Chicago (Dan Sandin), the director of video for the New York State Council on the Arts (John Giancola), and the engineer responsible for *Live from the Met* (Mark Schubin)?"

- Responding to Jean Firstenberg, Cindy Furlong wrote in Afterimage

"True enough, and that's just the beginning of the list of unlikely combinations which occurred during the festival…one could go from a tape about an anti-nuke rally to a Department of Labor explanation of workfare, from a law firm's documentation of the price of being paraplegic to punk rock on videodisc, from CBS News to the most cerebral conceptual art, from image-processed meditations to documentations of police brutality."

Sony's vision for the market was relayed by Tsunoda: "Videotaping equipment is now a part of our daily lives, expanding from television stations to schools, industries and homes. The festival includes leaders from all sectors of technical and production areas, and the diversity is very significant."

The diversity worked, I argued, because the participants shared, "common concerns about the future of television and video" and came looking for mutual interests and potential collaborations. "Many of the hard lines drawn between these diverse areas of production have blurred. The music industry is turning to artists who have been experimenting with video and music for small audiences in galleries and clubs. The institutional/industrial sector has experience in production for specialized audiences that has become invaluable for producers in the new consumer video technologies. Community video's original program formats and its success in audience involvement contain many lessons for other information producers. Broadcasters and independent artists have found common ground in image manipulation and technical experimentation."

In her *Afterimage* article, Furlong concluded: "the festival was noteworthy not only for its attempt to represent equally broadcast and non-broadcast television, but for the diplomacy exercised in maintaining a balance between various sectors of the video field."

The festival announced AFI's commitment to TV and video. In her welcoming remarks, Firstenberg said, "…this first national event observing the achievement of our youngest and most accessible art form celebrates, in a way no other event has done, the accomplishments, the possibilities, the creative genius of the entire field. We want to welcome the world of television and video to its proper place with the American Film Institute. As an art form and a vehicle of communication in the 21st century, video is the future."

In his remarks on opening night, AFI chairman Charlton Heston embraced video as the "art of the moving image." He said: "The film of the 80's is almost certainly going to be video. It is impossible to overstate the potential of video; it has greater diversity of expression and greater access."

Staking out the territory of the video revolution

"Futurevision: A Visionary Look at Video Heads for DC," was the headline for a *Washington Post* preview, one of three articles by TV critic Tom Shales: "The notion of reinventing television isn't too grandiose to entertain… It's not too early to celebrate the death of something called "television" and the birth of something called "video" – not if you're an optimist, that is. The American Film Institute will be doing approximately that at the Kennedy Center in Washington as it stages the most extensive video festival ever."

Popular and industry press coverage amplified and validated our ambitions. In addition to *The Washington Post*, *The Washington Star* and *L.A. Times*, reviews ranged from *The Hollywood Reporter*, *Variety,* and *American Cinematographer* to *Broadcasting* and *Billboard,* to visual and performing arts publications, *Afterimage* and *TheatreCommunications*, to AIVF's *The Independent,* NAMAC's *Media Arts* newsletter*,* and *Current*, the trade newspaper for public broadcasting.

Broadcasting magazine enthusiastically mixed metaphors to describe the festival in a three-page spread in its *Programming* section, headlined *Video Celebration:* "If the great video revolution of the 1980s proves unsuccessful, it won't be for lack of ammunition. Video artists and producers have been stockpiling their wares, waiting in the wings to steal center stage from film."

The Hollywood Reporter summed up the festival:

"The American Film Institute wound up its five-day video conference on an upbeat note yesterday on the broadening horizon for those willing to explore new and innovative directions in video programming…The underlying theme of the conference was that the new technology was opening up new frontiers in video programming."

Shales saw the developments in technology as transforming for television: "The AFI festival is devoted to the programming that may be available as all the new delivery systems – cable, satellites, home video gear – take effect…It is hard to remember a time in which mass communications seemed more genuinely on a threshold – not perhaps since television made its first great national impact in the late '40s."

The festival poster and program cover by renowned graphic artist Milton Glaser captured our vision for the festival as representing a revolutionary moment in media arts and culture. He created a startling image of a lightning bolt cracking the screen of a TV set on an oversized easel covered in dabs of paint and trailing a thick cable wrapped around its legs, captioned: "The State of the Art."

Because of his prestigious career in television, academia and government, Erik Barnouw could uniquely endow the festival with a mission statement that reflected Glaser's powerful image. As Chief of the Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division of the Library of Congress, Columbia University Professor Emeritus of Dramatic Arts, author of the seminal histories of television and documentary film, and former chairman of the WGA (Writers Guild of America), Barnouw had the standing to proclaim a revolution.

Connie Koenenn, in the *L.A. Times,* wrote that Barnouw "predicted…a social revolution in the making, born of the new technology and providing new means of expression…The evidence at this festival is there is ample talent waiting to make changes."

"We must make artistic and social demands on the new technologies," I told her. The festival was both a manifesto and R&D for what we later came to call emerging media.

Larry Kirkman meets with Robert Redford and Erik Barnouw before their panel: Untold Stories: Independent Voices for the New Market.

Celebrating independent artists and media arts centers

The heart of the festival was its focus on independent documentary makers and video artists and the media organizations that enabled their work. Erik Barnouw celebrated the role of independents "who ask the unimagined question and listen to the unexpected answer." He quoted French director Louis Malle: "My role is that of a troublemaker. I want to wake people up and make them rethink their values."

Robert Redford was the star attraction for a panel on the last day of the festival, *Untold Stories: Independent Voices for the New Market*, moderated by Barnouw. Redford reached out to the participants, saying, "I hope the Oscar (for *Ordinary People)* doesn't make me an enemy." Redford quickly bridged the gap by introducing his new Sundance Institute for Film and Television, which had opened its doors one week before, with a workshop equipped by Sony.

Connie Koenenn, Daily Calendar Editor, *L.A. Times*, wrote in her article, "Video Looks Towards Rites of Passage," that "Redford was, in one sense, in alien territory: A filmmaker among videophiles, a Hollywood super star speaking to an audience of video makers who pride themselves on working outside the commercial mainstream. In another sense, he was in his element, a sponsor of film and television study and a filmmaker concerned about the future."

Barnouw summed up the discussion, which also featured David Loxton, from WNET, Tom Luddy from Zoetrope Studios, and filmmaker Peter Adair: "All these people are involved in uncovering reservoirs of talent." Redford agreed, enthusiastic about emerging production and distribution opportunities: "It's clear to me that the demands of the new technology could supersede supply. I'm interested in options – there is a lot of talent not being tapped."

Who would be part of the new marketplace and benefit from the multi-channel cable universe and who would get to go to Sundance and make the Hollywood connections were hard questions asked on the panel and by the audience.

Arlene Zeichner wrote in *Media Arts* that Peter Adair "tried to break the almost palpable tension in the audience by joking that he was Redford. And that since he was Redford, all could come to Sundance. The audience laughed. Some wished it was true."

Zeichner's review revealed the ambivalence in the hallway conversations: "The mood at the opening of the festival was optimistic. Why not? …Opportunities abound." But, she continued, "the real question of the festival," is "how can I make money in this mushrooming field? The eighties position, simply stated, is: how to succeed in business? I've got to start trying. Can I keep my principles intact?"

Those principles were showcased in 30 hours of alternative video of the Seventies, which looked back on the pioneering work in the decade before the emergence of the new cable marketplace, work supported by media arts centers, museums and public television. Subtitled "The Range of Video Alternatives," the Retrospective included productions, program notes, and presentations by ten production collectives and media centers and five museums and exhibition centers. The 15 programs ran continuously during the five-days of the festival.

I wrote in the program notes: "In some cases, the success of the tapes in this retrospective can be measured by the speed with which their approaches were absorbed into commercial television. In other cases, the success is measured in the development of an audience under adverse conditions, or in supportive critical response where the audience has been minimal."

Retrospective: The Range of Video Alternatives

- **DCTV,** Downtown Community Television Center, located in New York's Chinatown, produced national award-winning documentaries for public television and provided workshops for more than 2,000 people a year producing over 200 programs about community art, culture, local news, and documentaries in more than 15 languages.
- **TVTV** produced 15 hours for Public TV: "Using new techniques and new technology…in a way that combines the immediacy of a breaking news event with the texture of an in-depth verite documentary."
- **Videopolis** produced documentaries for public TV and provided equipment and training for Chicago artists and organizations, from community groups and schools to the Field Museum and Art Institute.*It's a Living,* a weekly series documented "a single day" of "average" workers, their "pleasures and frustrations."
- **Optic Nerve** produced *Pushed Out for Profit* as both a documentary for KQED "on the impact of speculation in rental housing in San Francisco" and "an educational tool for community groups and housing activists."
- **Ant Farm** billed *Media Burn* as the "Docu-fictional coverage of a performance event" -- their "Phantom Dream Car" driving through a wall of burning television sets and*The Eternal Frame* as a "Verite docu-drama about the assassination of President John F. Kennedy."
- **University Community Video** produced a weekly social issue series on Minneapolis public TV that gave a voice to the women's movement, Native Americans, and the handicapped.
- **Global Village** offered video workshops, a seminar series on independent producers, and a documentary festival in New York City. *Giving Birth* portrayed "the birth experience of four couples."
- **NOVAC**, The New Orleans Video Access Center, was started as a VISTA project "to use video as tool to improve communications problems within the poverty community." Its retrospective showcased both Public TV documentaries and informational videos for social service waiting rooms.

- The video collective **Media Bus** broadcast its programs on the "World's Smallest TV Station" in a Catskill Mountain village, Lanesville, NY. Community viewers phoned in to contribute their views to programs "that brought new cultural and political perspectives to television."
- Founded in 1971 in New York City, **The Kitchen** was the first exhibition center to provide "an outlet for video art." Its sampler of 15 video artists included Dara Birnbaum, Vito Acconci and Joan Logue.
- The **Long Beach Museum of Art** made a "radical commitment to video art …as a major part of its exhibition program." An equipment access and training center for video artists developed into a broadcast quality facility.
- **Whitney Museum of American Art's** Film and Video Department curated individual and group shows for its permanent Film/Video Gallery. This retrospective featured selections from its Biennial including image processing, "conceptual approaches," and autobiography.
- **The Berkeley University Art Museum's** retrospective of Northern California artists was drawn from "nearly 150 video works presented annually." *Upside Down and Backward* by Joan Jonas combined performance art, painted backdrops and video EFX.
- The most prestigious advocate for the new medium was the **Museum of Modern Art**. It first presented work by Nam June Paik in 1968. Video Curator, Barbara London selected hightlights from its exhibitions of "285 tapes and seven installations by 22 artists from 15 countries." Ed Emshwiller's digital *Sunstone* and Bill Viola's juxtaposition of the American plains and the Sahara desert in *Chott el-Djerid (A Portrait in Light and Dark)* were highlights of the festival.
- **WNET/Thirteen TV Lab** had "raised over six million dollars to support the work of independent artists and documentarians." Its national series, *Non-Fiction Television* featured recipients of the Independent Documentary Fund, supported by Ford Foundation and NEA, including *Third Avenue: Only the Strong Survive* by Jon Alpert and Keiko Tsuno.

Festival centerpiece: Jon Alpert and Downtown Community Television

I used the mission-driven **Downtown Community Television (DCTV)** as an emblem for the crosscurrents of the festival. It was a prescient choice. For more than 40 years, DCTV's founders and directors, Jon Alpert and Keiko Tsuno, have demonstrated both a profound commitment to empowering people with the tools and skills to speak for themselves and, at the same time, the highest professional standards for documentary production.

Alpert was on the cutting edge of portable video and a pioneer in investigative reporting for television in the '70s. DCTV's 1975 documentary *Cuba: The People* was the first ½" color documentary on national television, acquired by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (for $12,000), and showcased in the launch of WNET-TV's groundbreaking series *VTR: Video and Television Review*. It was the highest rated documentary on PBS up to that time.

For a decade, Alpert made documentary segments for NBC's *Today*, on a project- by-project basis, and, starting in the '90s, he began making acclaimed documentaries for HBO. DCTV documentaries have received two Academy Award Nominations, 15 National Emmy Awards, and three duPont-Columbia Awards.

Third Avenue: Only the Strong Survive, video stories from the Bronx to Manhattan and Brooklyn, won DCTV's first National Emmy Award. A review in *The Washington Post* called it "a triumph of its kind and a guidepost to a new age of television…This program is essentially about whatever it is that makes people stand up and curse and dare anybody to trample them again."

Alpert's *Health Care: Your Money or Your Life* "is rooted in a respect for its subjects and audience," I wrote. "It is rare achievement for a program to move an audience to tears and at the same time present complex information that demands an active judgment."

At the same time that Alpert and Tsuno were delivering a steady stream of documentaries, they built a vibrant community video center in New York City's Chinatown.

In 1980, 2,000 participants in DCTV workshops produced 200 video programs - community arts and culture, local news, and documentaries in more than 15 languages. More than 50,000 have participated in workshops since then.

Erik Barnouw's experience at the festival led him to give DCTV a prominent place in the second edition of *Documentary: A History of Nonfiction Film,* published in 1983. He wrote that DCTV represented "The rise of the video fever and its eventual impact on establishment media," and that Alpert had "an uncanny ability to get people to react to him as a person, not a media visitation," bringing "viewers something different from the more ritualized network staff productions."

Festival premieres in the "nation's first" theatrical video projection

Five premieres were presented to great effect on the 220-inch screen in the AFI theater. In *Media Arts*, Arlene Zeichner called "the theatrical presentation of video on the large screen…the most newsworthy aspect of the festival." In *Afterimage,* Cindy Furlong wrote that AFI "turned the film theatre into a video theatre…For most members of the audience, including this author, it was the first experience in viewing a large-screen color video projection successfully presented in a formal film theatre." She remarked on "the brilliance and glow of the projected video image…enhancing the immediacy inherent in the medium."

In *Broadcasting* magazine a photo of Tsunoda and the donated Sony projector was captioned: "Utilitarian gift….the FPH-670W overhead projector, the nation's first." *Broadcasting* described the projector as groundbreaking: "the overhead system…is the first of its kind in the U.S. All of a sudden, video in the theater…appears to be a viable option….Any video signal can be used on the projection system, which can be controlled by a single connection cable up to 200 feet away… The AFI system was mounted with 300 pounds of steel on a lattice-type affair that swings into the ceiling, out of the way for standard film projections."

In the premieres, experimenters from film, theater, and music joined pioneers in video art and documentary.

- **Brian Eno** created a piece especially for the festival: ***A videotape 1981***, a complex fusion of static images and haunting music.
- Filmmaker **Peter Adair** (*The Word Is Out)* challenged conventions in a mix of documentary and fiction, ***Some of These Stories Are True***, an exploration of sexual power and violence.
- ***Savage/Love***, directed by filmmaker **Shirely Clarke**, demonstrated the potential of the new tools for translating live dramatic performances for television. Funded by NEA and PBS, and co-authored by Joseph Chaikin and Sam Shepard, *Savage/Love* aired on public television later that year. Lindy Zesch in *TheatreCommunications* made the case that "the possibilities for collaboration between independent videomakers and theatre companies seem limitless."
- **Robert Ashley and John Sanborn's *Music Word Fire and I Would Do It Again (Coo-Coo): 'The Lessons'*** from Ashley's *PERFECT LIVES (PRIVATE PARTS)*, an opera for television, commissioned and produced for television by The Kitchen Center, was a compass point for video art.
- **Michael Marton's *I Don't Matter, I Don't Care***, an intimate portrayal of low-income teenagers in a rural town, was funded by the New York State Council on the Arts and produced with support from the public station in Schenectady. Marton, who received a Guggenheim Fellowship for video in 1980, represented the intersection of video art and documentary.

Installations: the gallery and museum experience

Artist installations brought the gallery and museum experience into the festival. Nam June Paik, described in the program as an "electronic artist and media philosopher, was the definition of video art and had to be at the center of the festival. A year later, The Whitney Museum would devote a whole floor to his work. His influence and reputation has endured.

The installation, *Kennedy Olympics*, was designed for the festival, fashioned from Paik's video, *Lake Placid '80*, commissioned by the Winter Olympics Fine Arts Committee. The video was displayed on a row of five monitors seen through aquariums filled with goldfish. Zeichner wrote: "Paik's gentle warning about the dangers and distortions of media representation, about life in a fishbowl is quite effective."

Set up for the full five days of the festival, the installation had an insistent soundtrack, a loop of Mitch Ryder's "Devil with a Blue Dress On," that filled the top floor of the Kennedy Center, next to the Retrospectives' screenings and panels. Sony's co-founder and chairman Akio Morita was delighted when he stopped a tour to look at his monitors through the swimming fish, joking, "Oh my, a whole new market for Sony."

The live interaction of audiences with the medium was an essential theme of the festival, experienced in the shock of the new theater projection, retrospective screenings, multi-monitor music video exhibitions and video dance party.

Music videos before MTV

The sense of opportunity was most palpable in music video, which had emerged in the 1970s in clubs and galleries. MTV was on the horizon and would be launched on August 1, 1981. Videos were screened on monitors in two exhibition areas on the top floor of The Kennedy Center and projected in the Theater Lab.

In the AFI Theater, *The Video Record* combined a screening of breakthrough music videos with a panel moderated by the video director of The Kitchen, Tom Bowes. Jean Callahan in *Billboard* magazine wrote: "'Video Record,' a two-hour program tracking the integration of music and video, highlighted the conference." She particularly noted the premiere of the original composition by Brian Eno and Ron Hays' *Odyssey* project.

A Video Record Party celebrated the creativity and vitality of the music video pioneers in a late night event in the Theater Lab. *Broadcasting* wrote, "at a video record party, hosted by VJ (video jockey) John Hunt, the new format was an obvious winner."

We danced to:

- *Word of Mouth from a video album by Toni Basil*
- *Ashes to Ashes by David Bowie*
- *Two Triple Cheese, Side Order of Fries by Commander Cody*
- *Emotional Rescue for the Rolling Stones by AU student Adam Friedman*
- *Girl U Want for DEVO's Freedom of Choice album*

Reality test for the new marketplace

I came into the festival with high expectations for the new marketplace because of my enthusiasm for the innovation and creativity I had observed for a decade. I was quoted in an *American Cinematographer* article previewing the festival: "Kirkman commented on the timeliness of the undertaking: 'With the tremendous growth of developing technologies…the communications environment will demand programming in greater volume, sophistication, and specialization. The festival, and other AFI activities in this area, can have, I hope, an impact on these developments.'"

The program introduction to the panel, *The Future of the Video Experience: Sound, Image and the Activated Audience*, moderated by Emmy-award winning broadcast video engineer and technology writer Mark Schubin, imagined a golden age of diversity, "serving a multiplicity of cultural and informational" needs, with technology that empowered the engaged consumer as a "home programmer," and" active viewer," as user *and* producer.

Broadcasting pursued this vision: "The key question, however, is whether video will find a place in television. Kirkman believes it may not have to. 'The audiences will change because of their control over the media,' he said." I promoted "more selection," the evolution of hardware, and the future of interactive formats.

In her report on the final panel, Koenenn found a more "sober note" in the festival's assessment of new opportunities in the emerging marketplace. Moderator Chloe Aaron, former director for the Public Media Program at NEA and senior vice president for programming for PBS, opened *Original Programming for the New Media* with a report that the new cable networks were acquiring, not funding, programs. "There is not a lot of money to be made by the performing-arts companies at this point," she said.

Koenenn summed up the panel's premise: "The discussion question: Are the emerging markets –cable, discs and cassettes – seeking material from the new video artists and journalists? The answer is: No."

Seth Willenson, v.p. for programs and business affairs at RCA Selectavision Videodiscs agreed that it would be "acquiring about 60% of its inventory from existing material," but he also said, that "it is too early to tell what will be economically feasible."

Other panelists mapped an alternative landscape for original programming. Frank Marrero, head of production for Spanish International Network, saw promise in Spanish language channels. Nick DeMartino, who had recently co-authored the Carnegie Corporation's *Keeping Pace with the New Television*, proposed strategies for public TV to counter its competition from cable.

The compilation video that framed the discussion featured clips of two plays from the nascent HBO and Showtime networks, and showcased *Lulu Smith,* an experiment for the Columbus, Ohio interactive Qube system. Co-produced by the WGBH New Television Workshop and Warner-Amex Cable, the story line of the live drama was shaped by viewer reactions in real time.

Beyond broadcast, engaging, informing, equipping new audiences

In contrast to screenings and symposia that focused on in-roads into the film and broadcast industries, *Informational Video: A Selection of Non-broadcast Tapes Made for Specialized Audiences* claimed new territory. Tom Shales wrote, "There are far more practical, functional tapes to be shown as well, and the range of these indicates how widely television, or video, has penetrated American Life."

It was surprising for many participants to find these videos asserted as models of innovation side-by-side with arts, documentary, and performance. Non-broadcast video had grown into a $1 billion-a-year industry, to some 100,000 tapes in 1980.

The Washington Star's Boris Weintraub highlighted a video to explain blood donation to young people and another for Union Carbide workers on alcoholism. He wrote, "this genre" of "informational video…has gained widespread use in the last several years, though almost unknown to the general public." *Broadcasting* was impressed by these "innovative" videos, praising the "convincing" Union Carbide tape that "showed the potential for company wide video presentations."

Shales in *The Washington Post*, Koennen in the *L.A. Times,* and Weintraub in *The Washington Star* praised *Cindy Holden Aftermath*, a 42-minute video about a young woman made quadriplegic in an amusement park accident. In his article, "Video: Medium of Tomorrow," Weintraub described *Cindy Holden* as "searing" and "emotion-wrenching…In calm, dispassionate tones, and with the strongest possible videotaped pictures, the woman, her husband, her attorneys and a forensic economist spell out the wreck that the accident has made of her life."

The festival gave a prominent platform to community video and PEG channel programming in *They Speak for Themselves: The Collaboration of Subject and Producer in Social Issue and Community Video*. The panel featured George Stoney, documentary film and video pioneer, who was an inspiration and leader for the community video movement.

Stoney made the case for cable access: "…as access develops…we'll have a different attitude towards what we put on. The people won't just be the pawns, the butt of jokes, fodder for the media." Stoney raised expectations for access to tools and channels and anticipated the new life forms of participatory media that have been realized in the digital age.

On the same panel, Atlanta councilman James Bond argued the case for diversity, explaining that cable access was the alternative to the domination of Cox Broadcasting, providing the only positive image of African-Americans in the market.

The new landscape was exemplified in *The Video Landscape of Washington, DC: A Unique Production Center,* moderated by American University professor and producer Elizabeth Daley.

The panel featured Department of Labor media director Stan Hankin whose *Employment Opportunity Pilot Program* combined direct cinema techniques with information graphics.

Washington was to become the third largest center of video and television production, after LA and New York, elevated by the Discovery and National Geographic cable channels, the growth of public television programming, and the use of video and satellite communications by nonprofit organizations, professional associations and government agencies.

In "*The Art of Information: Issues and Aesthetics in Information Programming"* moderated by Bill Moyers' producer Sherry Jones, Robert Northshield showed segments from *CBS News Sunday Morning*, including "The Science of Statistics for Political Reporting, and Jon Alpert presented DCTV work for NBC. A deep relationship to their subjects and respect for their audiences illustrated the challenges that video documentary was making to broadcast news.

The program notes posed prescient questions for the discussion:

"With the new services on cable, the introduction of the home market, and the proliferation of video in the workplace" will "our expectations that television should function as a serious informational tool" increase. "Where is the line drawn between fact and dramatic effect" between "public service, advocacy, and entertainment? What is the nature of the dialogue with the viewer? How is the effectiveness of informational programming measured?"

Student video competition promotes the next generation

The Student Competition in Videotape Production recognized the achievements of young videomakers and the programs that trained them. The five winning videos were screened during the festival and broadcast on WETA in Washington and WNET in New York.

Tom Shales, in "Kid Vid: The Intriguing Video of AFI's Winning Students," found that "they all suggest – sometimes with ingenuous and earnest amateurism, sometimes with frisky imagination – that life with television, and television with life, are just beginning."

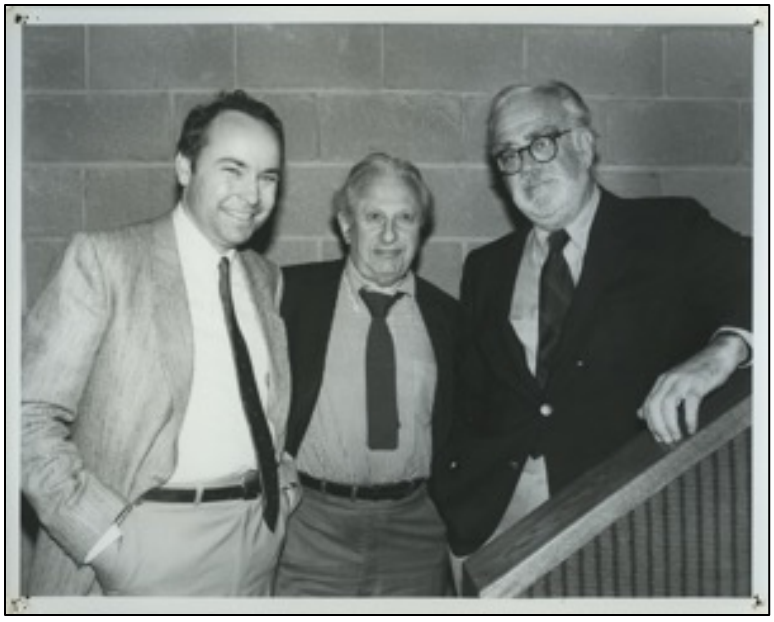
There were 330 entries from 140 colleges, universities and media centers in 39 states. Entries were judged in six geographical regions and the 23 local winners were announced in the festival program. Students took home $100,000 in Sony equipment as prizes. The educational market was a priority for Sony and reflected AFI's mission in film education.

A group of nine NY Chinatown youth, ages 8-14, won in the informational category for their neighborhood magazine series, *Second Edition,* produced in a DCTV summer employment program funded by CETA. In the spirit of Nam June Paik, Janice Tanaka, who became a pioneer in image processing, won the experimental award for her poetic *Ontogenesis*.

Alex Gibney and Peter Bull won for their 58-minute documentary *The Ruling Classroom,* made at U.C. San Diego, on a 7th grade social studies class exploring the roles of government, business and journalism. Both Gibney (*Going Clear, Taxi to the Dark Side*) and Bull (*NOW with Bill Moyers, Dirty Business)* went on to acclaimed careers in documentary. In his review, Shales praised the video as "an evocative immersion in classroom ambiance."

Tom Musca from UCLA won for a dramatic satire on a student film competition, *Highlight from the New Directors' Film Festival.* Shales praised the production as "antic, funny…and touching." Musca went on to produce and co-write the classic film, *Stand and Deliver* with Edward Olmos, and a career in fiction film.

The student winners were feted in a reception with festival artists and speakers at the Japanese Embassy. A compilation of highlights from the 1982 festival toured the country as part of PhotoShow International.



Larry Kirkman with Studs Terkel and Charlie Andrews before their screening and panel on the Chicago-school of improvisational television at the Second National Video Festival at The Kennedy Center in Washington.

THE SECOND NATIONAL VIDEO FESTIVAL IN DC AND LA

Following the success of the first festival, Sony's commitment was deep and lasting, funding annual video festivals for more than a decade, as well as a Sony Video Center on AFI's new West Coast campus.

TV and Video Services became active in the field, for example, helping to plan NAMAC's conference at Appalshop. I served on the video jury of the USA Film And Video Festival in Park City, along with Jon Alpert and Keiko Tsuno, and, spoke on a panel along with Nam June Paik and Les Brown at a Foundation for Independent Video and Film event: *TV Guides - Critics and Video Artists Meet to Discuss Role of Television in Our Culture.*

Bringing the festival to both DC and LA was driven by the move to the new campus and Sony's interest in planting the video flag in Hollywood. We produced a symposium on "Film vs. Video" at the LA campus. Festival presenters, Lincoln Center's Mark Schubin and Tom Angell of Interface Video, joined Hollywood innovators, including Jonathan Taplin, owner of Lion's Gate. And, in DC, Robert Altman presented the premiere of *Two by South,* shot and edited in video. These events set the stage for panels and screenings in the second festival that would reflect AFI's links to the industry. There was a pent up demand in L.A. for a forum on video. *Billboard* reported attendance of 600 for the festival at the new campus.

Arlene Zeichner's review in *Media Arts* posed our next challenge: "The first AFI Festival was quite successful at helping us formulate our questions about video. I hope we get some answers at the second…"

The themes of performance and storytelling were planted in the first festival's focus on theater and video music and predictions for the expansion of cable television channels enabled by satellite distribution. In her opening remarks, Jean Firstenberg said the second festival "extended the range and concept" by showcasing "new talent and experimentation that stretches our sense of the field" encouraged by "new markets being created by cable and home distribution."

Sony's Tsunoda predicted "Electronic Cinematography" will "dramatically alter conventional film techniques" and evoked a world of "multi-channel direct-to-home satellite systems, pay-TV, specialized channels…home entertainment centers, video cassette recording systems, videodiscs, and computer terminals."

Broadcasting magazine treated the second festival with the same fervor with the headline: "Video enthusiasts, artists and entrepreneurs assemble in Washington June 10 to 13 and set out to show that the video revolution is not coming, but has arrived."

Keynote speaker Francis Coppola was the lead: “New-age artists and producers, who use the television screen as their canvas and stage, along with some television pioneers, were boosted by hearing filmmaker Francis Ford Coppola tell them that old Hollywood methods of film production are bankrupt and that he now combines video and computers to help him write screenplays and make films.”

Coppola envisioned a low-cost "video studio” using “electronic systems" that would “free artistic invention.” Making video as accessible as film was the focus of the Film/Video panel, which included key executives from Zoetrope, Lucasfilm, and Sundance Productions, in addition to NBC and PBS. Predicting the future of non-linear editing, Ralph Guggenheim, editing project head for Lucasfilm, spoke about the EditDroid, a new computer managed video editor it had developed in-house. He said, “We don’t foresee the situation where it’s the video engineer who runs the equipment while the artist can’t do anything. We’re doing this for the artist.”

Choreographers Twyla Tharp and Toni Basil, broadcast pioneers Studs Terkel and Jean Shepherd, and industry executives Jo Bergman and Ethel Winant brought new perspectives to the festival. In a front page article in *Variety,* headlined “Product Plethora Forces Expansion of AFI Video Fest,” Paul Harris called the festival, “a mecca” for video producers “to showcase their works and compare notes with colleagues.” He highlighted the five-hour survey of video music curated by Jo Bergman, director of TV and video for Warner Bros. Records. Music video directors were now auteurs.

A *Documentary/Fiction* strand featured Martin Sheen and Emile de Antonio’s *In the King of Prussia,* on the Plowshares Eight anti-nuclear protest led by Daniel Berrigan, which combined documentary interviews with a dramatic reconstruction of the trial. And, with Michael Marton’s *American Trap,* whose subjects re-staged their personal relationships, it prefigured the blurring of lines between producer and subject and the practice of co-creation that are commonplace today.

BFI television officer Mairede Thomas presented *BBC Broadcast Drama: Alternatives,* from a stylized *Macbeth* with Ian McKellan and Judi Dench to Scottish playwright and director John McGrath's "sophisticated use of video technology" in *The Adventures of Frank, "*a deliberate attempt to escape the mold of conventional naturalistic drama."

The premiere of Mabou Mines' *Hajj* combined taped and live camera images with the actual presence of actress, Ruth Malaezech. Director/writer Lee Breuer said: "It's an attempt to have the best of both worlds, the immediacy of live theater and the intimacy, privacy and the *secrecy* which can be conveyed through film acting."

The inventiveness of the golden age of television provided compass points for what seemed so modern in these productions. What we appreciate as free-form today, on YouTube and some cable channels, can be traced back to the creativity and jazz-like improvisation of the Chicago-school of early television, revived at the festival by Studs Terkel and TV writer Charlie Andrews who wrote for three shows for NBC, Terkel's weekly half-hour *Studs' Place* with a regular cast of characters in a neighborhood bar performing from an outline; the variety show *Garroway at Large,* with the host wandering between set pieces talking to the crew, and, *Kukla, Fran and Ollie*, an inspiration for Jim Henson's Muppets.

Jacqueline Kain, former curator at The Kitchen, selected works by artists and independent producers under the three headings of drama, performance and music. Ranging from the "early TV parodies" of William Wegman and his dog *Man Ray* to Robert Wilson's *Video 50*, consisting of 100 30-second vignettes, the tapes defied traditional television conventions "in the exploration of new formats, narrative structure and language."

David Parker's *Dance on Television* survey ranged from Alvin Ailey recitals to abstract works by Merce Cunningham. It included "commercial and experimental modes…chosen to demonstrate innovative and divergent approaches." The 18 programs showcased the collaboration of video artists and television producers with dancers, such as the synthesized images of Ed Emshwiller's *Pilobolis and Joan* for the WNET Lab.

A program essay, *Installation Video,* by MOMA curator Barbara London chronicled 20-years of video exhibition and performance-based work. Shigeko Kubota's installation *Nude Descending a Staircase* used stair-stepped monitors to "transcend" Marcel Duchamp.

The engaged audience, with intimations of our digital future, was demonstrated by *Hole in Space: A Public Communications Sculpture,* funded by NASA and NEA. It linked giant outdoor screens in New York and LA by satellite "allowing spontaneous interaction between people on both coasts."

In the program, I reflected on the seeds of what would become reality programming and TED Talks: "In the 1980s nearly everyone will think about being on television – not only professional performers, but everyone who prints a leaflet or gives a talk." *The Role of the Subject,* moderated by Studs Terkel was framed by insistent questions inherent in the new media: who would have a voice, who would have access to the means of production and the channels of distribution? Do you matter, do you even exist, if you're not on television? Questions that anticipated the World Wide Web, YouTube and Facebook.

The festival provided a window on the geometric expansion of nonfiction television just over the horizon. In the screening series *Information/New Forms* programs for consumer education, health behavior change, and workplace safety begged the question: how do we know our audiences' needs, what information can they use? Moderator Elizabeth Daley said the *Art of Information* should not be denigrated as 'the ugly stepchild" of entertainment, but should be appreciated as "programming that has an interest beyond what 'isn't that nice to know.'"

Looking back 35 years, it's hard to imagine how exciting and fresh it was for all of us involved. How easy it was to get people to come, from giants like Sony and Warner Bros. to the independent documentary makers and video artists. How responsive they were to AFI's role as curator and convener. Our conviction about the need to collectively map the landscape was validated by who showed up and stayed around to talk.

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