

TV—THE NEXT MEDIUM

"It's the new everything," says Andy Warhol

John S. Margolies



The first generation of "television babies" is now reaching maturity; the average American home has one and one-third television sets; American homes have more television sets than bathtubs, refrigerators or telephones; 95 percent of American homes have television sets; portable video-tape equipment for home use is available to the general public right now.

Television is clearly ready to be recognized as an educational device and an artistic medium of great influence. Analogous to film, which was not considered an "art" until it had been around for many years, television is finally receiving serious recognition. In March 1969 a program of video tapes by six artists—"The Medium Is the Medium"—was broadcast nationally. In May 1969 the first major show of television artists—"TV as a Creative Medium"—was mounted at the Howard Wise Gallery in New York to show eleven different experimental programs.

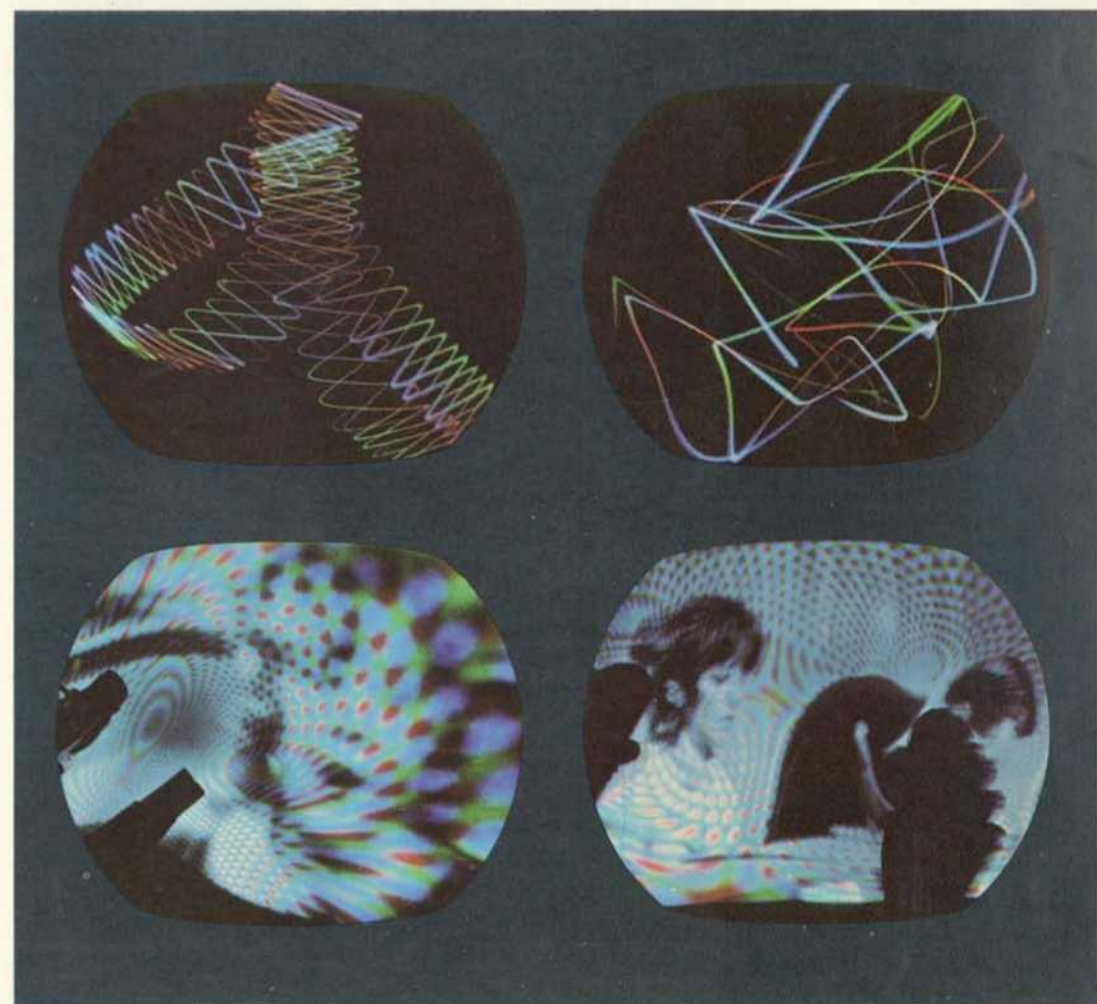
Television has already had a profound impact on world culture,

Andy Warhol was commissioned to make a television commercial for New York's formerly staid Schrafft's restaurant chain as part of a campaign to rejuvenate the Schrafft's image by F. William Free & Co., advertising agency. The result, above, made in late 1968, is *The Underground Sundae*, a 60-second color video-tape opus centering in and out of focus on a chocolate sundae. Warhol achieved a wide range of "cosmetic" colors and planned with the range of color- and image-distortion possibilities in the video-tape medium. Says Warhol, "My movies have been working towards TV. It's the new everything. No more books or movies, just TV." And Schrafft's obligingly created an "Underground Sundae" for their restaurants: "Yummy Schrafft's vanilla ice cream in two groovy heaps with three ounces of mind-blowing chocolate sauce undulating with a mountain of pure whipped cream topped with a pulsating maraschino cherry served in a bowl as big as a boat. \$1.10." He was concerned

Les Levine's *Contact: A Cybernetic Sculpture* was completed in 1969 under a commission by Gulf & Western Industries for the lobby of their new headquarters building under construction in New York. The eight-foot-high television sculpture will have identical "seeing" sides facing in two directions, each side having nine television monitors and four TV cameras equipped with different lenses and set at different angles. The screens of each monitor are covered by colored acrylic sheets. As the spectator stands before *Contact*, he sees images of himself in close-up, mid-range and long-range focus and material programmed through a slide scanner; the images jump from monitor to monitor in random sequence. The sculpture is encased in stainless steel with reflective plastic bubbles covering each "seeing" side. "Contact is a system that synthesizes man with his technology," says Levine. "In this system, the people are the 'software.'" Photo by Hans Namuth.



Nam June Paik, a pioneer television artist, turns the cathode-ray tube into a palette to create a myriad of moving abstractions. Paik rewires sets that have been discarded as junk and then attaches devices such as audio generators, electromagnets and signal interceptors to distort the transmitted image. The artist provides controls so that the spectator can change the image. "I prefer that people do it themselves," he says. In one piece, *Tango Electronique*, 1966 (top pair of images), the turn of a knob makes the screen explode in patterns of shimmering lines. In another work, *Participation TV*, 1965 (bottom pair of images), passing a magnet in front of the screen causes the transmitted image to distort and dissolve in an infinity of patterns. Mr. Paik estimates that by attaching distorting devices, he can create at least some 500 different abstract possibilities from a normal TV screen. "I am tired of TV now," says Paik. "TV is passé. Next comes the direct contact of electrodes to the brain cells, leading to electronic Zen." Photos by Paul Wilson.



and especially American culture. The generation which has grown up with television and other sophisticated media has evolved a new perception in processing information. Electric and electronic media—radio, television, film and recordings—along with the continuing growth of traditional print media, have created an information explosion.

In assimilating and processing this information, the individual is likely to shift his attention among many alternatives within any given period of time. He relies more on visual and aural sources than on printed information, which imposes longer and more concentrated demands on the attention span. This new attitude can be called "process-level" perception as contrasted with "content-level" perception common to people who grew up with print media as their primary source of information. However, these boundaries are not rigid; individual perception is a blend of the two in varying proportions.

A process-level analysis of the art experience is concerned with art as a process of perception, a way of experiencing, how one sees rather than what one sees. Therefore the concept of art becomes an inclusive one, and everything is or isn't art, according to one's experience. The process level affirms direct, sensory perception, with content determined by individual relevance, rather than by formalized, intellectual considerations. It denies the traditional "critical" function of the critic, since relevant standards cannot be established beyond one's personal experience. Art at the process level denies a fixed relationship between spectator and object or event because there is no fixed space or time, and there are no absolute distinctions such as right and wrong, good and bad, beginning and end. The process level generates such art forms as environmental art (where the art object within a space is replaced by total treatment of the space, the space itself becoming the "object"); happenings, performances and street events; multi-projection films (where the spectator has to choose from any number of simultaneous images in order to determine his own "content"); and architecture considered as broad, interdisciplinary design.

With the growth and influence of process-level perception, a new concept of the art and entertainment experience has evolved, the key to the new experience being the provision of options for the spectator's attention. The new experience affirms the concepts of participation, simultaneity, spontaneity and the accidental. Television is a prime example of this new experience, with its option of many channels to be viewed simultaneously with a number of receivers or sequentially by changing the channel. Looking at TV for fixed periods of time, as if in a theater or movie, denies its function as a continuous flow of assorted information to be processed by the individual according to his perception. Television can become part of a regular life style, a fabric of individual perception, a super-real reflection of the city, country, world. And the televised image is but one of many options—the image and sound can be changed immediately, the spectator can eat, drink, sit, lie down, read, talk.

"Television has given us a totally different idea of focus," says sculptor and conceptual artist Les Levine, "the same way as photography changed our way of looking at images in relationship to the way we paint them. Television has made multiple focus acceptable; as a result we can see many different focal planes all at once. We can go from one focus to another and refocus all at once. When you focus your eyes from one thing to another, it's necessary not to keep any one thing in focus too long, otherwise you can't immediately change to another."

The growing importance of process-level perception is related to the breakdown of the traditional spectator-to-object (or -event) relationship. The breakdown is really an evolution where the spectator's experience has become increasingly important as

the object has decreased in importance. At the process level, ownership of any object is decreasingly important because the object can provide only so much information within fixed parameters, rather than a flow of transitory information and images. And when the object is precious, ownership becomes a responsibility that is more important than the experience of the object. Art collecting turns out to be more about collecting than about art. And what does a person do when he gets sick of looking at his valuable object? He certainly can't throw it away. Selling it becomes a bother, and the owner might be able to gain something new by experiencing it again at some future time. The implication is that the owner must keep it. Les Levine's production of "disposable art" is concerned with this very concept.

Gerry Schum, producer and director of the Television Gallery in Düsseldorf (where films of "earth" artists were broadcast and displayed in a studio on about twenty TV monitors for the "opening"), echoes this attitude toward objects and ownership: "One day, I am sure, the reproduction of an art event or, better, of an art idea by the TV medium will be more important than selling art objects to a single collector. The artist will be paid by the publishing of his idea or project or event. It's not the object of art that is sold, but the communication between artist and audience by the publishing medium. What counts is the idea of the artist and not the limited result of an idea realized in an object. Objects are no more the end of an artistic development. Objects are a stage of a mental process, part of an idea in development. Important is the idea itself."

The concept of the artist's role is undergoing a transformation; the artist is emerging as a communicator. At the process level, a person who is an "artist" is one who can experience directly through his senses. His effectiveness as an artist can be judged by how well he communicates his perception. Art, therefore, becomes a two-step process—formulation or creation of an idea and communication of this idea—and the two steps are inextricably related. At the level of communication, the importance of the idea is linked to the number of people who can experience the idea. So it is quite logical for the artist to seek out the greatest audience possible, and to wind up in the field of television.

Marshall McLuhan's books and articles on the communications media, including much perceptive analysis of television, have had a great influence on many "media" artists and writers. But McLuhan notwithstanding, the medium is not the message. The medium is not an end in itself, but is rather a means. What I am proposing is a revision of the concept of "message" or content. The new content is the traditional content inextricably combined with the medium or process. It is an idea along with its means of dissemination in various proportions, the end result of which is determined by the audience. The artist's intention in his concept does not necessarily matter at this level. This end result or content, and value judgments based upon this content, can be as diverse as the individual members of the audience.

One advantage for television artists is that their audience does not look upon television as "art." Art at the content level is something set apart from life; it is something that one goes to see at a museum or theater. That insidious little box with its super-real image, on the other hand, is accepted into the home situation. It is just there, part of a person's life. It has none of the pretension associated with the art experience.

Television today is being used to present events and forms inherited from other media and art forms. It is often little more

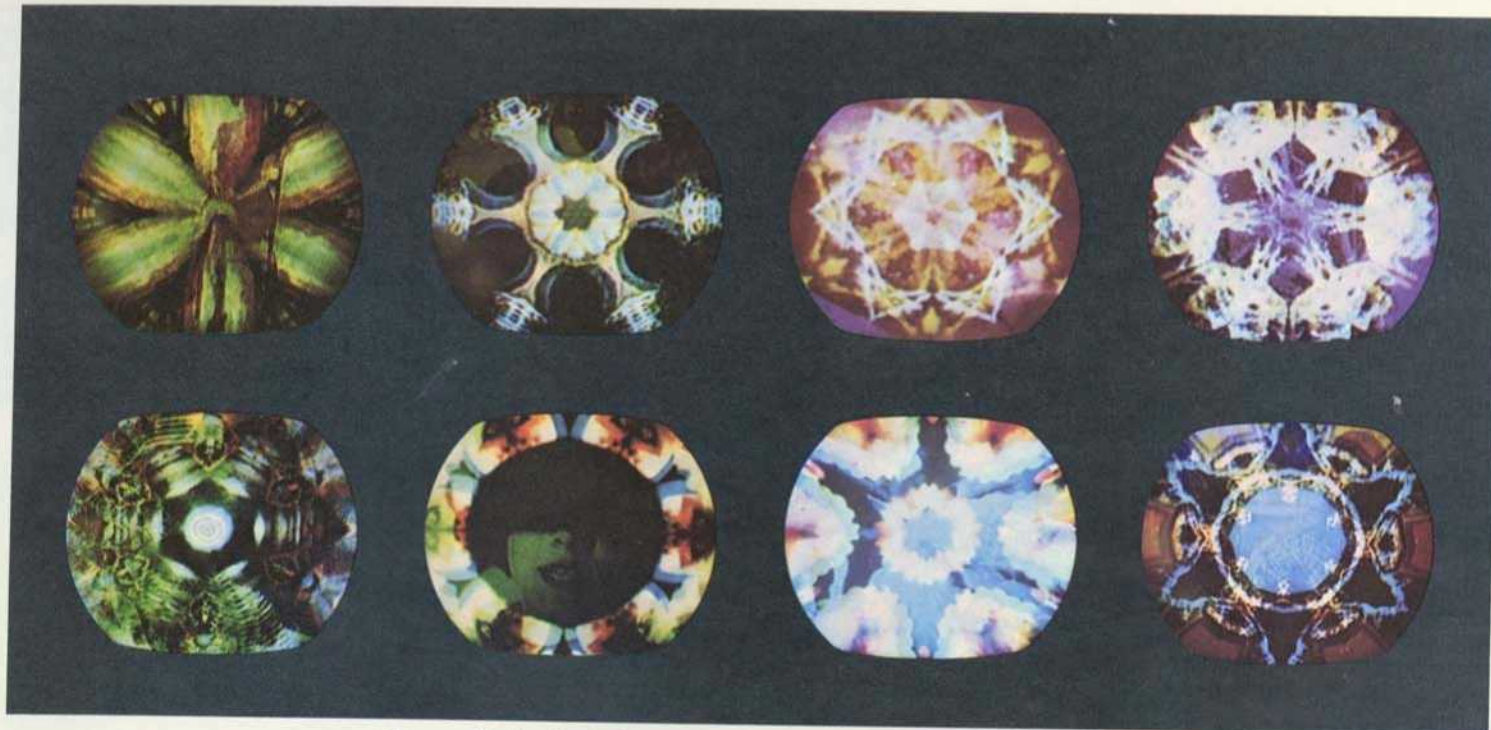
John S. Margolies has written on architecture, the arts and the mass media for several national journals. A member of the executive committee of the Architectural League of New York, he directed the League's program of events from 1966 to 1968.

Argentinian artist Marta Minujin performed the event "Simultaneity in Simultaneity" in Buenos Aires in October 1966 by combining the media of television, radio, film, photography, telephone, telegram and newspaper. A preliminary phase of the event took place when 60 well-known personalities came into a theater with 60 radios and TV sets to be filmed, photographed and recorded. Eleven days later the 60 people were invited back, and as they entered they saw their images projected and recorded from the different information sources. At this time a 10-minute video tape was broadcast publicly on one of the TV channels, as well as a 10-minute tape on the radio. Meanwhile a selected home audience of 500 people were instructed to watch and listen. As they did, all received telephone calls and 100 received telegrams.



Allan Kaprow in his Hello, a portion of "The Medium Is the Medium"—a nationally telecast program produced in January 1969 by WGBH-TV, Boston—chose four sites in the Boston area and interconnected them with five TV cameras and 27 monitors. A group of people assembled at each site, the only requirement being that they acknowledge their own image or a friend's when they saw it on a monitor by calling out "Hiya, Bob," "I see you, Paul," etc. Says Kaprow: "Everyone was a participant, creating, receiving and transmitting information all at once. That information was not a newscast or lecture, but the most important message of all: oneself in connection with someone else. . . . We had fun. We played. We became something else, transformed by audio-video images that eliminated distances and shifted us to a totally new non-place, the TV realm of electronic bits." And the artist envisions an expanded form of Hello produced as a global hookup.





Thomas Tadlock's Archetron, completed in 1969 after two years of work, is a complex device that takes live TV signals and scrambles them to make a series of constantly changing visual effects. The artist set about making the Archetron after viewing television through a teleidoscope. "It's a special way of looking at TV," says Tadlock. "It shows what you watch on the home screen in a

new way. I am concerned with the patterns, rhythms and timing cycles that make people watch TV, the same concern the advertising people have. The Archetron gives you an image without the message. You get a super-positive out of it and watch it with accompanying music." The Archetron takes a number of black-and-white signals and feeds them into a color monitor, creating teleidoscopic effects through

use of a "Specula" device. The Archetron (meaning an electronic device for production of archetypes) was commissioned by Dorothea Weitzner and is used in New Age Rituals at the Aquarian Republic, Inc., New York, as a prophecy, meditation and healing machine. It was featured in a segment of "The Medium Is the Medium" television program. Photos by Jamie Andrews.

than radio with a picture, a vaudeville show miniaturized, a newspaper with an audible voice, a proscenium stage or sports arena reduced to 140 square inches, a tiny movie projection device. It is a source of immediate, transitory information. Television is the ultimate "reproducible" image, and, says TV artist Nam June Paik, "the cathode ray screen is as important as paper."

In communicating information, television not only translates images, but transforms them into a unique and powerful super-reality which has an independent life. McLuhan has described the nature of the television image, pointing out that it is not a still photograph in any sense. The image, says McLuhan, is formed by light passing through the screen at the viewer, the viewer forming the image by accepting a few of the some three million dots per second transmitted to the receiver. The very fact that we can turn a small knob to bring television images and sound into the home gives these pervasive images incredible influence—a point that Gilbert Seldes analogously pointed out for radio as far back as 1924. That the transformed image has a life of its own can be illustrated by experiencing an event and then experiencing it on television. The television experience is more condensed, concise and powerful. The television camera—and cameras in general—is a fantastic tool for teaching people to see. The lens can be considered an extension of the eye, and can guide the eye in paths that it usually does not take.

Television is becoming a new form of documentation for traditional art forms—criticism, happenings, dance, etc. And when a

greater number of people acquire home video-tape equipment, the audience will have a means of forming their own documentation, of making the transitory images permanent. The public will have available a whole new form of collage in which random television images can be recorded and edited into any combination. Video-tape equipment has revolutionized traditional film-making techniques, and has caused traditional commercial film-making to seek new areas where its medium can do a better job than any other. Commercial films will probably evolve into dazzling multi-image, multi-screen presentations within their specially designed halls.

Rarely does the television experience involve coming to the set at a specific time for a specific program, sitting in front of the set and watching it for the length of the program, and then turning it off. This is the content-level approach, where the spectator and event are mutually restricted. At the process level the television set may be on constantly, with the program most interesting to the viewer at any particular time slot. If the content of this program is of sufficient interest to the viewer, he will certainly remain transfixed before the set. But a characteristic of the televised image is that it is but one of many options for the attention—the image can be changed or shut off. The viewer can also adjust the intensity and clarity of the image and the sound, in effect manipulating the process as well as the content. And when the number of receivers is increased, a whole new set of options is provided for the viewer. He can watch the same event as it is



James Seawright's contribution to "The Medium Is the Medium," titled Capriccio, was a collaboration with his wife, Mimi Garrard, a dancer responsible for choreographic material, and Bulent Aral, who was commissioned to compose the electronic music. In the beginning and middle sections of this "media" dance piece, two dancers—Mimi Garrard and Virginia Laidlaw—were shot in "negative" color and superimposed with a reversal image (see also front-cover illustration). In the concluding section, the camera image of the two dancers was broken down into three primary camera colors, each color being recorded on a separate video tape. Seawright then mixed the three tapes, achieving multiple images with a fixed time lag created by video-tape delay. "It is a great challenge to work with a time-dependent medium with great flexibility in control over both image and sound," says the artist.



Otto Piene's Electronic Light Ballet, another portion of "The Medium Is the Medium," combined abstract patterns of colored light with the tape of an event, "Manned Helium Sculpture." The event was performed at night in the parking lot of WGBH-TV, Boston, as a 95-pound girl made a 30-minute ascent to a height of 40 feet, attached to 800 feet of transparent polyethylene tubing filled with helium. In the studio Piene mixed colors and patterns electronically on video tape, using multiple-aperture stencils. The blending of these two sets of images created the end result. Piene is known here and in Europe for his light, sound and air environments and performances of the past decade. With Aldo Tambellini he founded the Black Gate, "the first electromedia theater" in New York, in 1967. Commenting on the significance of TV as an artistic medium, Piene says "it will give artists a challenge to get out of the 'ivory tower' of the art world and prove their relevance to and compatibility with society."

covered on two channels, gaining a greater insight into the event, since he thus has two sets of eyes experiencing for him. And "television freaks" have been known to watch as many as nine television images at once, some the same, some different, sound from some, no sound from others, or sound from none of them, and/or accompanying music from the radio or recordings.

Assuming for a moment that the artist is aiming for a large audience, he must realize the differences between traditional entertainment and process-level entertainment, which by traditional standards can mean boredom. It is extremely difficult for an uninformed and uninitiated audience to accept a relatively limited situation or number of ideas presented repeatedly over a fixed or unfixed period of time—be they works by John Cage, La Monte Young or Andy Warhol. And yet this is one of the principles upon which advertising is based, and, like it or not, it is an effective means of communicating ideas. Prolonged and repeated exposure to the same information or ideas creates a consciousness beyond the intellect—an almost subconscious internalization of the information.

The artist working in television has a vast new set of premises to consider when communicating his perception, premises which are similar to a painter's choice of canvas size, color, composition, brushwork. These premises include the choice of audience, choice of message, duration of message, definition of image and sound, and the amount of repetitiveness versus "variety."

Artists are using television in a variety of ways: the actual

making of programs and other material for on-air or theater-gallery exposure; as a self-awareness device in happenings, environments, performances and educational contexts; as a device for making distorted and abstract images; and as an actual object in assemblage sculpture or an image in painting, collage and graphic works.

Notable in the area of programming was the nationally televised program in March 1969, "The Medium Is the Medium," where six artists—Allan Kaprow, Nam June Paik, Otto Piene, James Seawright, Thomas Tadlock and Aldo Tambellini—made short tapes for the half-hour presentation. This project, conceived by Ann Gresser and Patricia Marx for the Public Broadcasting Laboratory, used the studio facilities of WGBH-TV in Boston. The results of this experiment were disappointing because too brief a period of air time was allowed each artist to demonstrate a real command of the medium, although some of the presentations showed great potential. Another significant experiment has taken place in San Francisco, where the Dilexi Foundation, in collaboration with KQED-TV, has organized a series of thirteen programs which give artists the opportunity for direct expression of their ideas on television. Artists taking part in this experiment include: Edwin Schlossberg, Philip Makanna, Robert Nelson, Ann Halprin, Julian Beek, Yvonne Rainer, Andy Warhol, Robert Frank, Ken Dewey, Walter de Maria, Frank Zappa and Terry Riley with Arlo Aeton. There are other scattered examples, such as programs on WDR-TV in Cologne, Germany,

and programs on WCBS-TV, New York, by Alwin Nikolais and Allan Kaprow. Andy Warhol's sixty-second commercial for Schrafft's restaurants opens up a whole new area for artists to explore, although there are already many "artists" of great merit working in this medium.

Many artists are involved with making video tapes which have received theater and gallery viewing. Les Levine has been making tapes since 1966, using the medium as a documentary device, and he presented a series of these in four evenings at the Architectural League of New York in April 1968. Andy Warhol made a series of tapes in 1965 when the editor of Tape Recording Magazine lent Warhol some video equipment to see what he could come up with. Sculptor and media artist Bruce Nauman has exhibited in Los Angeles and New York a series of video tapes made during the past year. The Nauman tapes show the artist performing various activities in his studio. Eric Siegel has made a series of tapes which demonstrate great virtuosity, and Channel One, a television "theater" in New York City, is now in its third production of video-taped programming.

Television has been used as an awareness device in many contexts. It has been used in performances by five of the artists in "9 Evenings—Theater and Engineering," sponsored by Experiments in Art and Technology in October 1966, in New York—TV being used by Oyvind Fahlström, Alex Hay, Robert Rauschenberg, David Tudor and Robert Whitman. Performances using TV have also been given by Paik, Piene, Tambellini, Siegel, Levine and Serge Boutourline. In the area of happenings, television was a major component in Marta Minujin's "Simultaneity in Simultaneity" in Buenos Aires in 1966. Allan Kaprow and Wolf Vostel had planned to present identical events simultaneously with

Minujin's, to occur in the United States and Germany, with interaction taking place between the three events, but the Kaprow and Vostel events did not take place. Ken Dewey used TV systems in two of his happenings in 1966 and 1968. Les Levine has produced two television sculptures, *Iris* in 1968 and *Contact* in 1969, using live images of spectators on monitors. Levine has also used television in many of his environmental works over the past four years to provide information about his environments. Other artists concerned with the documentary and education possibilities of television include Paul Ryan, David Court, Frank Gillette, Ira Schneider and Serge Boutourline.

Another major area of television involvement for artists is the disabling of the normal function of the television receiver, turning it into a "canvas" for creating abstract patterns and distortions of the transmitted image. Nam June Paik is the pioneer in this area, having had his first showing of abstract television images in Germany in 1963. Various projects in this area include: Boyd Mefford's "Arlington," exhibited in 1967; Robert Krage and Robert Lippman's "Come Unto Me," exhibited in 1968; Peter Sorensen's "Lumokinetic Paint Set," in 1968; Thomas Tadlock's "Archetron," in 1969; Joseph Weintraub's "A/C TV," in 1969; Earl Reiback's "Aurora," in 1969. Ted Kraynik's 1968 "Video-Luminar" defies classification. It is a photosensitive device which, placed in front of a TV screen, scans changing patterns and diffuses abstract patterns on patterned plastic sheets for decorative effects. The instrument translates TV images into electrical energy capable of illuminating lamps or running motors.

Artists have for some time been using the TV set or its image in assemblages, collage and graphic works. Richard Hamilton's

famous collage of 1956, *This Is Tomorrow*, which is a precursor of pop art, included an image of a TV set. Edward Kienholz in *The Big Eye*, exhibited in 1961, used a non-functioning console model television as part of an assemblage sculpture. In 1963, in a series of five painting-assemblages, Tom Wesselmann included working television sets. Wolf Vostel in *TV-Décollage*, a series of collage-assemblages exhibited in 1963, used functioning TV sets with vertical and horizontal controls out of adjustment. A group of six artists collaborated with Nam June Paik for his 1968 exhibit at Galeria Bonino in New York to produce TV assemblages. Included were Otto Piene's metallic pearl-inlaid TV set, Ray Johnson's chair-TV, Christo's "wrapped" TV, Robert Benson's photo-assemblage, Robert Breer's kinetic assemblage sculpture with toy automobiles, Ayo's cocktail-table television. Sculptor John Seery recently embedded a working TV set within a clear polyester block—as a comment on the proliferation of objects in society. The USCO group projected slides of television images in "Intermedia, Imagimotion" at New York's Whitney Museum in 1968. Les Levine has produced a series of nine television prints this year as a by-product of his multiple-television sculpture, as well as a number of posters using the television image.

But TV as subject matter now interests artists only incidentally. TV as a *medium* for artists to express their perception—that's where the excitement is. In the next few years there will be an increase in the number of channels—on UHF stations and on cable TV hookups. A growing group of artists will turn to television, seeking to have a relevant and influential role in society. The combination of these factors portends the possibility of a whole new realm of "art" experience opening up to an incredibly vast audience.



Eric Siegel is a young television artist with great technological command of the medium, having built his own camera and special-effects box. Working since early 1968, his *Psychedelevision* is a series of black-and-white tapes ranging from abstract patterns to representational images. Among his tapes are: Einstein, top (done in collaboration with Michael Kirsch), in which abstract patterns are created within the head of a photograph of Einstein; a dance piece of Jenny Nyquist, center, where positive video feedback causes the echo effect of the image; and *Symphony of the Planets*, bottom, where signals from a TV camera were fed back through the camera and distorted to create moving abstract patterns with accompanying music. Siegel, impressed with the versatility of the TV medium, says "the picture tube is an excellent light machine."

Aldo Tambellini is shown in the studio of WGBH-TV, Boston, as he was making his segment, titled *Black*, for "The Medium Is the Medium." Tambellini's event, right, took place with about 30 black children from the Roxbury section of Boston brought into the studio to interact with 1,000 of his slides and seven of his 16-millimeter films projected in the space. In the past few years Tambellini has been concerned with the color black as a concept of time and space and as a social concept. He works in black and white. His films and slides include abstract images created on video tape (from a series of "Black" tapes made since 1966) and images filmed directly from the home television screen. Tambellini's intent: "to experience TV as a medium itself, and to bring a direct relation between the audience and the characteristic elements of TV in a total involvement of the senses." One of Tambellini's short films, "Black TV," was awarded the Grand Prix of the International Oberhausen Short Film Festival, Germany, in 1969.

