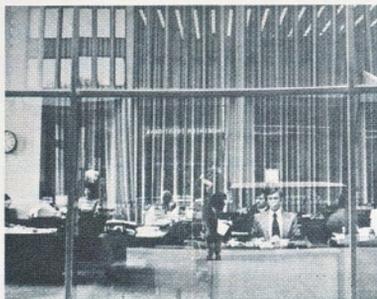


VIDEO SALON



DIA CENTER FOR THE ARTS

## *Rooftop Urban Park Project*

### *Video Salon*

A significant element of Dia's Rooftop Urban Park Project, as outlined by Dan Graham, is the ongoing development of a video library for public use. Of primary consideration was the site for viewing videos on the roof at Dia: the inclusion of a video monitor in the café area is intended to stress the function of television's situation within a social space—an idea that has been a central focus of Graham's work since the 1960s. The video library was also formed to provide a much-needed resource: a video repository that includes both scheduled programming and free public access to the collected titles.

Graham's performances have often incorporated the use of video to contrast video realities in relation to actual physical time and space, deliberately engaging the TV audience as active participants in the televisual process. When characterizing the act of watching video, Graham insists on the narrative constructions inherent in the medium: "video feeds back indigenous data in the immediate, present-time environment." By comparison, "Film is contemplative and 'distanced'; it detaches the viewer from present reality and makes him a spectator."<sup>1</sup> Through his or her involvement in the architectural placement of the video monitor or the video camera, the TV viewer, then, is not a passive consumer. These architectural codes of narrative determined the construction of the video salon at Dia as an active social space, where the intimate experience of TV viewing takes place in a public setting.

In various essays and video works, including *Picture Window Piece* (1974), Graham has correlated the picture window of the suburban home with the glass of the television screen, in their mediation of public and private, inside and outside space. Lynn Spiegel has examined the position of television in postwar America as "caught in the contradictory movement between private and public worlds." As such, television became an alternative space coalescing with the suburban picture window—"the central design element used to create an illusion of the outside world."<sup>2</sup> The windows and open doors of the video salon, and Graham's sculptural pavilion *Two-Way Mirror Cylinder Inside Cube*, operate similarly within the urban setting, but remind the visitor of his or her own subjectivity by means of shifting and reflected images of the individual and of the surrounding city.

The framework from which to begin building a collection of videos for the library consisted of four broad categories: performance, narrative, animation, and architecture. The initial program was formed by drawing on the advice and suggestions of five consultants: Bruce Ferguson, John Hanhardt, Michael Nash, Michael Shamberg, and Sheena Wagstaff. This will be an ongoing project, with new videos added to the collection each year.

The category of "performance" illustrates how the medium has been used by artists in performance, investigating what the video camera and monitor signify and represent in relationship to the positioning of "audience" and "stage," as in Vito Acconci's voyeuristic video confrontations. It also includes deconstructive studies of performance, as in Charles Atlas's music and dance docu-extravaganzas and Michelle Parkerson's historical portrait of the activist music and performance collaborative Sweet Honey & the Rock. The "architectural" category is expanded through the incorporation of videos that investigate the construction of physical and psychological space. In documentary tapes, such as those by Michael Blackwood Productions or Kamal Kozah, contemporary architects critically discuss their practice. The "narrative" category stretches the boundaries of the art of story-telling. Feminist narratives, such as those by Cecilia Condit and Judith Barry, use familiar tropes—the fairy tale and the love story—to render allegories of irony, desire, and horror in suburbia. Of course, what charges these categorizations is how they fuse and blur. For example, some of the most iconoclastic contemporary "animation" works are those not bound to classic narrative convention, thus providing an open call to the elusive possibilities of computer-generated editing and imagery. Critiques of dominant media ideologies might also be considered through their narrative dimensions. Examinations of cultural mythologies through media images expose mechanisms formulating collective history. Subverting video's initial history as an instrument of corporate control, videomakers have found creative methods of reinvesting in subjectivity.

The collection is being assembled within the framework of these four areas with an intent to represent broad conceptual patterns in videomaking. Among the works are low-budget independently made artists' videos, music videos, activist video, and film distributed on video. The program is intended to provide an environment for diverse genres to be viewed in critical exchange. However, the library has not necessarily been compiled

to provide historical structures for viewing video. In fact, as Doug Hall and Sally Jo Fifer have observed, the medium actually “defies the art historical practice of ordering the field into a depoliticized hierarchy of stylistic categories.” They attribute this institutional challenge to “video’s multiple origins and explicitly anti-Establishment beginnings.”<sup>3</sup> The power of media imaging is steadily reinforced by fluid and rapid changes in the technology of information flow systems. With interactive video looming as shopping mall, workplace, and playground of bourgeois culture, alternative venues for video continue to support a persistent referendum on dominant televisual vocabularies.

K.K.

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<sup>1</sup>Dan Graham, “Essay on Video, Architecture and Television,” in *Video—Architecture—Television: Writings on Video and Video Works 1970–1978*. (Halifax, NS: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art & Design, 1979), 62.

<sup>2</sup>Lynn Spigel, “The Suburban Home Companion: Television and the

Neighborhood Ideal in Postwar America,” in Beatrice Colomina, editor, *Sexuality and Space*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992), 189.

<sup>3</sup>Doug Hall and Sally Jo Fifer, “Introduction.” *Illuminating Video: An Essential Guide to Video Art*. (New York: Aperture, 1991), 14.

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### Acknowledgments

The formation of the Video Salon could not have been possible without generous support and assistance from many people. In particular, we would like to thank Dan Graham and the consultants on the project, Bruce Ferguson, John Hanhardt, Michael Nash, Michael Shamberg, and Sheena Wagstaff. Their invaluable opinions and advice shaped the organization of the library. We would also like to extend our gratitude to Stephen Vitiello for his significant suggestions.

The establishment of the Video Salon at Dia has been made possible by a generous grant from The Bohen Foundation.

Dan Graham's Rooftop Urban Park Project has been made possible in part by funds from the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency, Washington D.C.; The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc.; The Cowles Charitable Trust; the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts; and the individual members of the Dia Art Council and the Dia Art Circle.

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Top right: Still from *Rock My Religion* by Dan Graham. Courtesy Electronic Arts Intermix.

Bottom left: Still from *Possibly in Michigan* by Cecilia Condit. Courtesy Electronic Arts Intermix.

Bottom right: Still from Tex Avery's *TV of Tomorrow*. ©Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Inc.