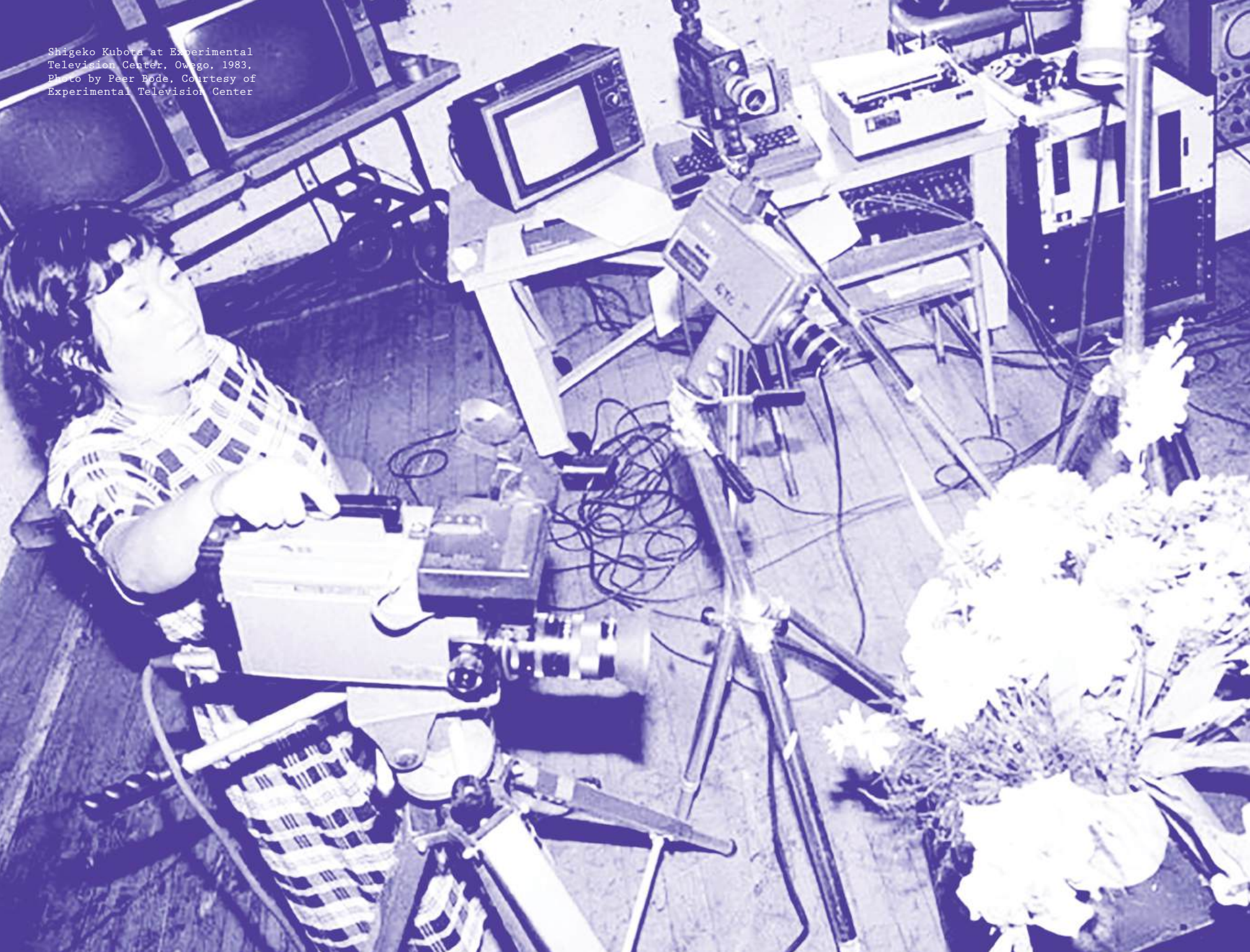


"CURATOR DIARY":

The Curatorial Work
of Shigeko Kubota

Shigeko Kubota at Experimental
Television Center, Owego, 1983.
Photo by Peer Bode, Courtesy of
Experimental Television Center



“CURATOR DIARY”

The Curatorial Work of Shigeko Kubota

by Gladys Lou

In 1974, Shigeko Kubota appeared on broadcast television. She introduced herself as a video artist and declared, “But tonight—watch out! I am the video curator of Anthology Film Archives Video Program.”¹ Her insistence spoke to the way her curatorial work stemmed from a deep passion for her own practice as a video artist.

The Japanese American artist-curator Shigeko Kubota (久保田成子, 1937–2015) dedicated her life to advocating for women video artists and facilitating international exchange between the United States, Japan and beyond. This exhibition highlights Kubota’s role as a cultural mediator and community organizer. As an early video and Fluxus artist, Kubota not only created her own works, but also used video as a bridge for community building and as a platform to champion other artists through the programs she curated. She was also an active participant in art collectives and published writings.

Kubota played an important role in shaping video as a global artistic language through her support of other artists as video curator at Anthology Film Archives in New York from 1974 to 1983. She organized *Tokyo-New York Video Express* (1974), a three-day screening and live performance event in Tokyo spotlighting both Japanese and American artists. She was also a member of the artist collectives Video Hiroba in Japan and Red, White, Yellow, and Black in New York, through which she amplified the voices of racialized women artists. Her extensive writing on video in its nascent years, and her community initiatives, such as the Video Talk Shows she produced between 1976 and 1983, created forums for artists, curators, and scholars to discuss timely topics related to video art.

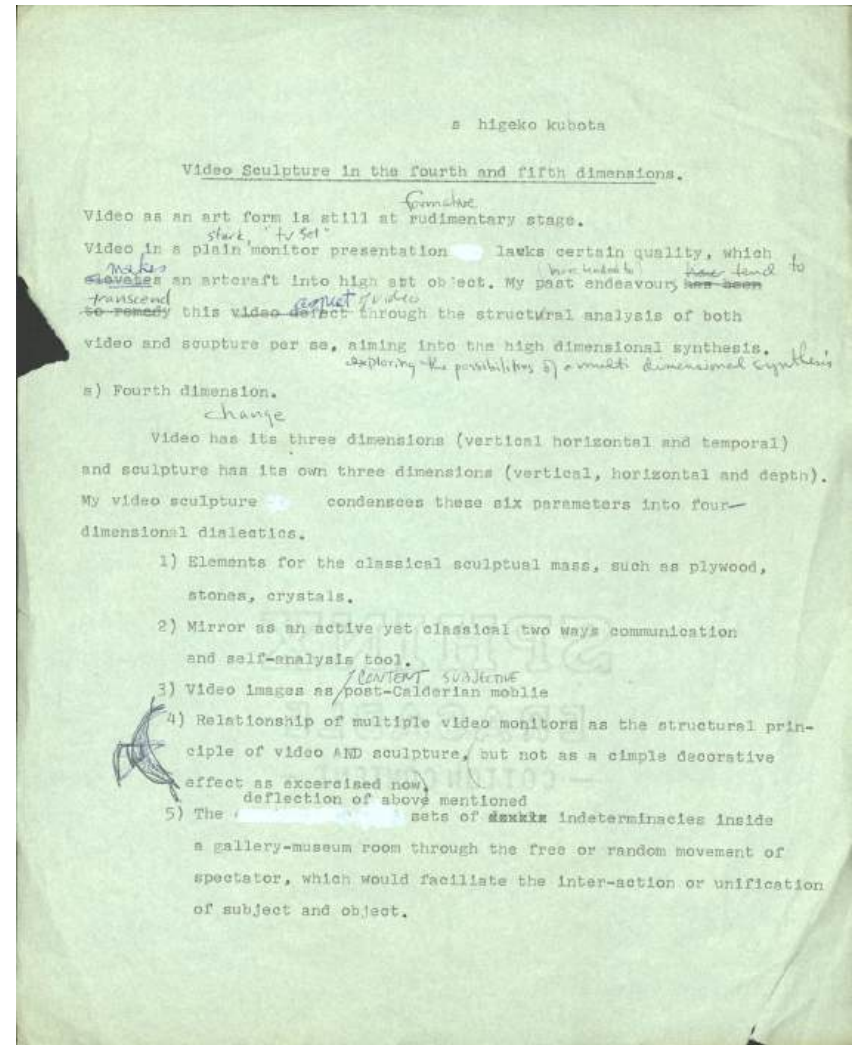
The exhibition title draws from a video that Kubota made, *Curator Diary* (1974), which documents her appearance on a cable-TV video art telethon for Anthology Film Archives. Featuring materials from the Shigeko Kubota Video Art Foundation and the John G. Hanhardt Archives at the CCS Bard Archives, the exhibition situates Kubota’s curatorial initiatives within the social and cultural context of the New York avant-garde of the 1970s and ’80s, rooted in collaborations among Fluxus artists and the underground film and video communities. Her work embodied the era’s collective and experimental spirit, fostering dialogue within second-wave feminism and advancing video as an international medium of exchange.

1 Shigeko Kubota, *Curator Diary*, video, 1974, courtesy of Shigeko Kubota Video Art Foundation.

Kubota's curatorial approach and writing reflect her broader practice of bridging feminist discourse and technological experimentation in the United States with parallel movements emerging in Japan. From 1969 to 1971, she contributed articles to *Bijutsu Techo* (Art Notebook), a Japanese contemporary art magazine. She reported from New York on the realities of American culture and the art scene to Japanese readers, with topics ranging from art and ecology to sexuality and countercultural life, acting as a cultural intermediary between the two contexts.²

As Kubota writes in "Video-Open Circuits," reprinted in this publication (p. 30): "While the hardware of video art was highly developed in Japan, the software of video art was highly developed in New York."³ As a cultural mediator working between these two contexts, Kubota nurtured a reciprocal relationship between their parallel developments, facilitating two-way communication across artistic and technological communities.

The exhibition and this accompanying publication are both organized into five sections: Video Poem; Love, Shigeiko; Red, White, Yellow, and Black; From Film to Video; and Tokyo-New York Video Express.



Shigeiko Kubota, "Video Sculpture in the fourth and fifth dimensions". Transcript, Courtesy of Shigeiko Kubota Video Art Foundation, © Estate of Shigeiko Kubota

[2] Mayumi Hamada, "Video Is the Window of Her Life: The Art and Life of Shigeiko Kubota," in *Viva Video: The Art and Life of Shigeiko Kubota*, ed. Mayumi Hamada (Tokyo: Kawade Shobo Shinsha, 2021), 193-200.

[3] Shigeiko Kubota, "Video—Open Circuits," *Geijutsu Kurabu*, no. 9 (1974): 173-87.

VIDEO POEM

Upon entering the gallery, visitors encounter *Video Poem* (1970-75), Kubota's first video sculpture. The work bridges her foundations in conceptual art, sculpture, and performance with video, then a new medium, and provides an entry to understanding her curatorial approach and philosophy.⁴ Kubota sets herself apart by integrating her works into their surrounding environment. She covered the monitors' casings to conceal them as electrical appliances, leaving only the screens visible, thus inviting viewers to experience her works spatially.⁵ While the exhibition primarily focuses on Kubota's curatorial work, she was and continues to be best known for her artistic practice. This section first introduces visitors to the Kubota they may already know—the artist—and the rest of the exhibition unfolds to reveal her significant roles as a curator and writer.

In *Video Poem*, an embedded square cathode-ray tube monitor plays Kubota's altered self-portrait: her face appears behind sunglasses, with distorted expressions, inside a pink canvas bag that evokes a vulva. Through humor and absurdity, Kubota deploys her own face as a feminist strategy to reclaim agency over women's bodies. The work comprises three components: *Chamber Music*, a canvas bag gifted by her former partner, composer Toshi Ichihyanagi, originally activated in a striptease-like performance in which he entered the bag through multiple zipper openings; embedded within the canvas bag is *Self-Portrait* (previously titled *One Day in California*), a video Kubota made using the Paik/Abe Video Synthesizer, a device that enabled users to receive external sources, such as live camera input, and manipulate video in real time; and Kubota's writings on 35mm film are projected on the wall behind the bag, featuring an excerpt of the original "Video Poem":

Video is Vengeance of Vagina.
Video is Victory of Vagina.
Video is Venereal Disease of Intellectuals.
Video is Vacant Apartment.
Video is Vacation of art.
Viva Video...⁶

Video Poem is accompanied by selections of archival materials from Kubota's personal journals and manuscripts, as well as her Portapak camera. In a typewritten note about the project, titled *Video Autography: Narrative Video "Broken Diary,"* Kubota describes her lifelong relationship with video as one of intimacy and intensity. She explains that she has spent over a decade of her "Video life" "eating, screaming, sleeping with, menstruating, and excreting Video." She further notes: "As a Video artist, curator and woman, my life has vacillated between ecstasy and despair; my Portapak has been a faithful chronicler to this rugged landscape."⁷



Shigeko Kubota holding a Portapak at her Westbeth studio, New York. Photo by Tom Haar, Courtesy of Tom Haar and Shigeko Kubota Video Art Foundation. © Estate of Shigeko Kubota

4 The term "video sculpture," first used by gallerist René Block for Kubota's 1976 *Duchampiana* series, generally refers to free-standing, three-dimensional structures that incorporate video monitors.

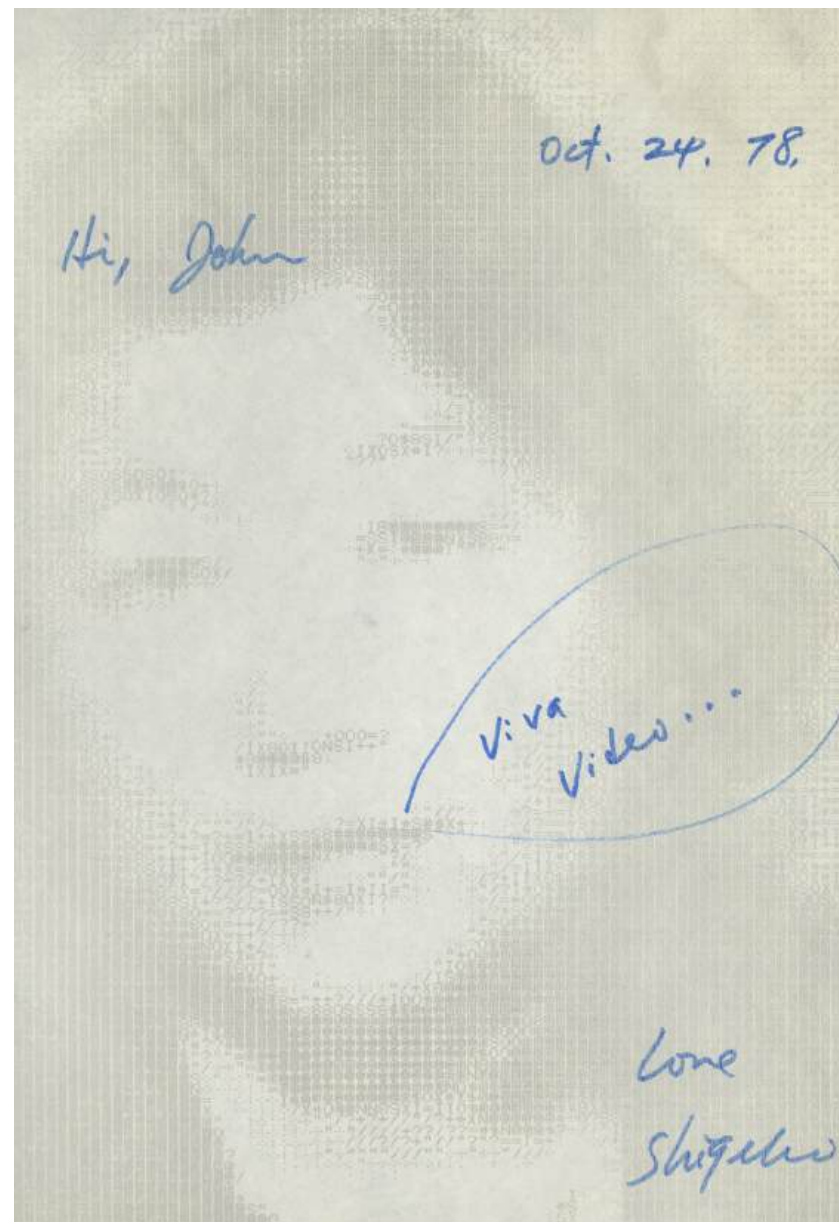
5 Nihoko Nishikawa, "The Video Sculpture of Shigeko Kubota: Transmissions from the Past," in *Viva Video: The Art and Life of Shigeko Kubota*, 220-226.

6 Shigeko Kubota, "Video Poem," *Arts Magazine*, December 1974, 48.

7 Shigeko Kubota, "Video Autography: Narrative Video 'Broken Diary,'" courtesy of the Shigeko Kubota Video Art Foundation.

LOVE, SHIGEKO

This section presents letters, postcards, and handwritten notes documenting Kubota's correspondence with John Hanhardt, curator of film and video at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York from 1974 to 1996. Hanhardt participated in Kubota's Video Talk Shows (1977) and was a guest curator in her Curator's Choice program at Anthology Film Archives (1976). Among others, Hanhardt organized the 1979 exhibition *Shigeko Kubota/Taka Iimura: New Video*; organized *Gazing Back: Shigeko Kubota and Mary Lucier* in 1995; and curated Kubota's 1996 self-titled solo exhibition. Spanning from 1977 to 2010, these materials illustrate the depth of their collaboration and enduring personal connection, showing how Kubota worked closely with other artists and curators to build networks of global exchange. Postcards tracing Kubota's travels across Asia, Latin America, and Europe further reveal the international scope of her practice in promoting video across cultural contexts. These correspondences highlight how personal networks were instrumental in shaping the early circulation of video art.



Stationery made by Shigeko Kubota with a coded portrait of Kubota made with Bell Labs, including a speech bubble saying "Viva video!" 1978. John G. Hanhardt Archives, Center for Curatorial Studies Library & Archives, Bard College



RED, WHITE, YELLOW, AND BLACK

The artist collective Red, White, Yellow, and Black (1972-73), formed by Kubota, Cecilia Sandoval, Mary Lucier, and Charlotte Warren-Huey, brought together Japanese, Navajo, American, and African diasporic perspectives. According to Sandoval, in a 2023 panel discussion at The Kitchen in New York, the group's name also refers to the colors of the four cardinal points referenced by many Indigenous communities in the United States. Archival posters and correspondence presented in this section highlight Kubota's leadership in creating spaces of visibility, solidarity, and community for women artists in the early 1970s.

In contrast to the white male artist groups dominant in the artistic and music communities—such as those associated with the Sonic Arts Union, a collective of sound artists active between 1966 and 1976—Red, White, Yellow, and Black challenged the exclusiveness and individualism of the New York underground art scene by emphasizing interdisciplinary and cross-cultural collaboration. Between 1972 and 1973, the collective organized three multimedia concerts that presented a range of performance, photography, text, and video installation works at The Kitchen, then located in Mercer Arts Center, which played a key role in launching the individual careers of its members. These archival materials document the members' roles in organizing the events and advocating for diversity within the New York avant-garde.



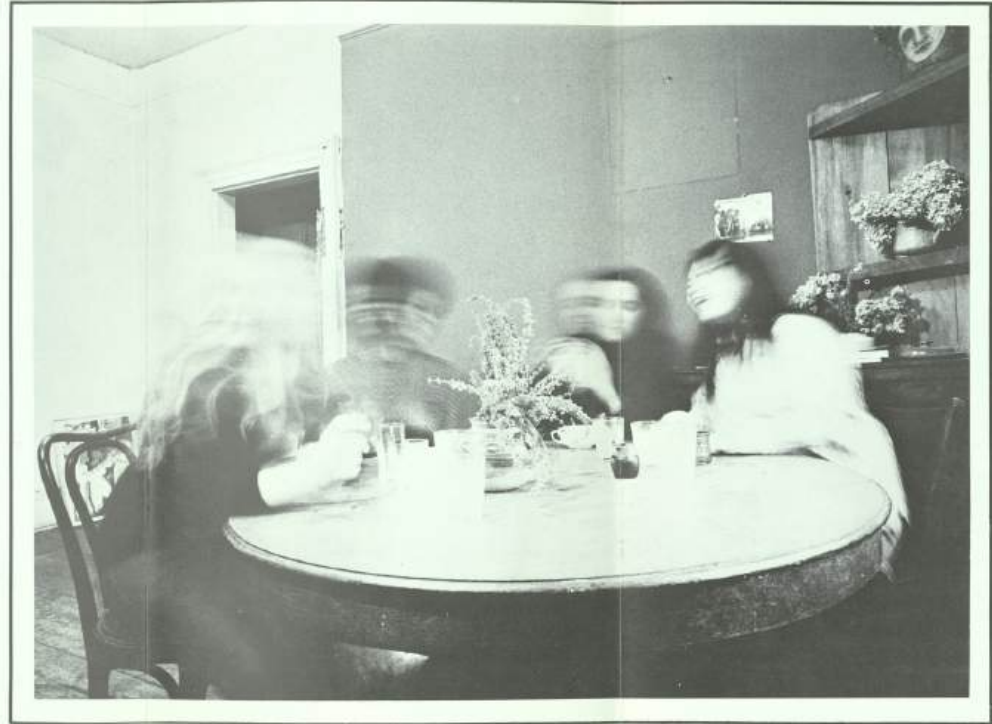
Postcard sent by Shigeko Kubota from Japan (Tokyo), addressed to John G. Hanhardt, April 8, 1995, John G. Hanhardt Archives, Center for Curatorial Studies Library & Archives, Bard College

RED WHITE YELLOW & BLACK

MULTIMEDIA CONCERT

CECILIA SANDOVAL
MARY LUCIER
SHIGEKO KUBOTA
CHARLOTTE WARREN

April 20 & 21, 1973,
8:30 P.M. At the Kitchen,
The Mercer Arts Center,
240 Mercer St., New York.
Tel. 475-9865



VIDEO TALK DANCING FASHION STORY PALMS

The Kitchen is supported by a grant from the N.Y. State Council on the Arts.

Advertisement poster for Red White Yellow and Black at The Kitchen, New York, 1973. John G. Hanhardt Archives, Center for Curatorial Studies Library & Archives, Bard College

Shigeo Kubota's sketches of the team at Anthology Film Archives (in journal), 1977, Courtesy of Shigeo Kubota Video Art Foundation. © Estate of Shigeo Kubota



FROM FILM TO VIDEO

Anthology Film Archives in New York was founded in 1970 to present independent and avant-garde cinema. Kubota was appointed the first video curator at Anthology in 1974, coinciding with its relocation to 80 Wooster Street in SoHo, the former home of Fluxus artist George Maciunas. Here, she initiated From Film to Video, the institution's first video series, introducing video into a space historically dedicated to film. In Anthology's 1974 bulletin, Kubota articulates a curatorial vision in which "Film and Video are not mutually competing media, but mutually complementing media."⁸ Kubota worked closely with Anthology's team, including founding director and filmmaker Jonas Mekas, as well as Bob Harris, Al Robbins, and Shridhar Bapat—key figures in New York City's video art scene. This section features programming schedules, correspondence, handwritten notes, newsletters, press releases, and posters that document the breadth of Kubota's video programming at Anthology Film Archives, revealing her diverse and community-based curatorial approach.

Kubota presented a wide range of initiatives at Anthology that expanded the possibilities of video art, including Video Talk Shows, Open Screenings, and Curator's Choice. She curated works such as Joan Jonas's *Twilight* (1975), a performance with film and live-feed and prerecorded video, as well as a weekly series on video art on Manhattan Cable Television that showed work from the Independent Filmmakers Program.⁹ Other projects included installations like the storefront window screening of the video archive of Videofreex, a pioneering artist-run video collective known for its early experiments in portable video, alternative television, and countercultural media practices.

Curator Diary (1974), a video presented here on a cathode-ray tube monitor, illustrates how Kubota created a public platform for dialogue around video art on broadcast television. Together with video artist Maxi Cohen, she hosted this fundraising event for Anthology, presenting an evening of tapes and engaging in conversations with video artists Ed Emshwiller, Skip Blumberg, Joan Logue, and Ethel, Iana, and Edin Velez.

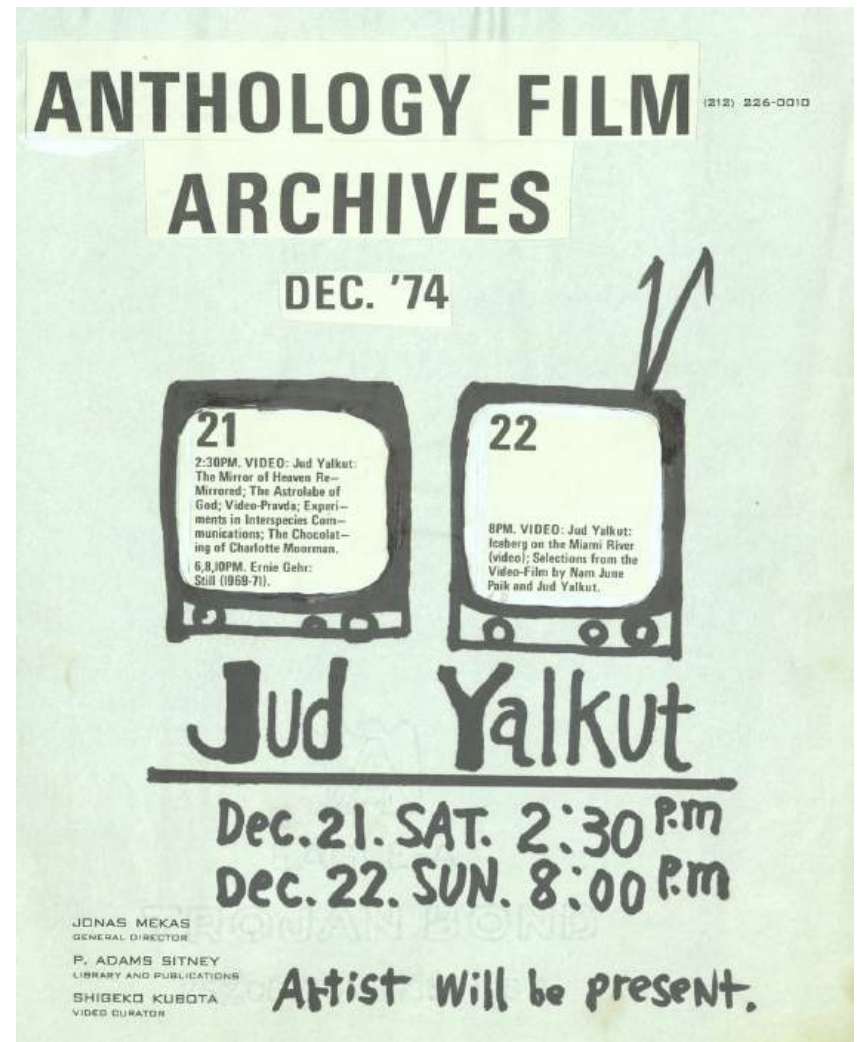
8 "Video Programming," *Bulletin for Film and Video Information*, Anthology Film Archives, June 1974.

9 Letter to Brian O'Doherty (Public Media, National Endowment for the Arts) from Anthology Film Archives on September 5, 1978.

At Anthology, Kubota regularly featured works by video artists such as Dara Birnbaum, Barbara Buckner, Wendy Clarke, Amy Greenfield, Joan Jonas, Joan Logue, Susan Milano, Martha Rosler, and Susan Russell, as well as other figures active in video art including Vito Acconci, Douglas Davis, Juan Downey, Les Levine, Ira Schneider, Stan VanDerBeek, and Woody and Steina Vasulka. Simultaneously, Kubota focused on bringing international practices to New York. She frequently presented works by Asian American artists such as Takahiko Iimura and Nam June Paik, and also featured Latin American artists like Pola Weiss.¹⁰

As her collaborator Bob Harris recounts in his 1992 essay "Video at Anthology," Kubota invited guest curators to present screenings featuring works "from Zagreb, Barcelona, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Great Britain, and Canada, as well as works reflecting feminist, Afro-American, Asian, Latin American, and Native American sensibilities"—perspectives largely excluded from traditional film venues at the time.¹¹ Kubota's commitment to Indigenous video is evidenced by a 1976 letter from artist and musician Dudley Evenson, which documents an evening of Native American video presented by T.I.M.E. (Turtle Island Media Environments).

Following the closure of the Wooster Street building in 1978, Kubota and her team continued their video program at the Holly Solomon Gallery in Manhattan and P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center in Queens. Her curatorial legacy at Anthology is documented in *Video Text: 1983*, a publication dedicated to Shigeko Kubota that was produced at the end of her time at the institution. The publication includes a complete listing of video programs she curated between 1974 and 1983.



Anthology Film Archives, Jud Yalkut video program poster, 1974, Courtesy of Shigeko Kubota Video Art Foundation, © Estate of Shigeko Kubota

10 Anthology Film Archives, "Video Program at P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center, Queens," press release, 1978.

11 Bob Harris, "Video at Anthology," in *Free the Cinema*, ed. David E. James (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 288.

TOKYO-NEW YORK VIDEO EXPRESS

VIDEO PROGRAM

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
80 Wooster St., New York, N.Y. 10012
(212) 226-0010

FEBRUARY SCREENINGS

Friday February 1, 11 PM NIGHTCLUBBING "Real Rockers" - Heartbreakers + Cherie Chrome and the Cousins / "Dead Boys Reunion" Dead Boys

Friday February 8, 11 PM NIGHTCLUBBING "Modern Music" - Lounge Lizards + Futons / "Rock from CBGB's, Part 1" Egg, Cuban Heels + Stardem

Saturday February 9, 2 PM VIDEO FROM CHICAGO: 5 New Tapes. Guest curator: John Mabey.

Saturday February 16, 2 PM NAN HOOVER - Light As a Source of Illusion

Saturday February 23, 2 PM RALPH HOCKING & SHERRY MILLER - The Electronic Image. A Live Image Synthesis Demonstration.

MARCH SCREENINGS

Saturday March 1, 2 PM YOUNG ARTISTS' TAPES - Tapes produced by high school students from 15-19 years old, in the Summer Program at Media Study Center in Buffalo, NY, under the direction of Philip and Quinla Mabey Jones. Guest curator: Quinla Mabey Jones.

Saturday March 8, 2 PM NEW NARRATIVE FORM - MERRILL ALDIGHERI / JOE TRIPICIAN "Love Among the Mutants" / EDCORNELL "Late for Trinity"

Saturday March 15, 2 PM PEER BODE - Image-Processed Tapes

Saturday March 22, 2 PM BENJAMIN BERGERY "Young August" and new works

Saturday March 29, 2 PM OPEN SCREENING! BRING YOUR TAPES!

SCREENINGS AT P.S.-1

46-01 21 St., Long Island City, Queens, N.Y. (212) 784-2084

Sunday February 17, 2 PM AMY GREENFIELD "The Wave" Video/Film/Holography Installation

Sunday March 2, 2 PM VITO ACCONCI "The Real Tapes"

Sunday March 16, 2 PM DAVIDSON GIGLIOTTI "The Falls of Saint Anthony"
3-channel video installation

Sunday March 30, 2 PM ROBERT POLIDORI - New Works

Friday Night Screenings: \$3 donation
Saturday Afternoon Screenings: \$2 donation
Sunday Afternoon Screenings: FREE

Program supported by National Endowment for the Arts
and New York State Council on the Arts

Curators: Ann Eugenia Volkes and Bob Harris
Video Program Director: Shigeo Kubota

Library by Miguel Herrera

DIRECTIONS BY SUBWAY TO P.S.-1:
7 Flushing line from Times Sq. or Grand Central
to Hunters Point
OR:
E or F train to 23 St / Ely Ave.
(2 stops from 5th Ave./MANA)

Tokyo-New York Video Express (1974) was a three-day event combining video screenings, immersive environments, and live music performances held at Tenjō Sajiki Theater in Tokyo. The event was curated by Kubota, who brought the tapes from New York to Tokyo, and organized in collaboration with Video Hiroba, a Japanese video art collective active in the 1970s that approached video as a social practice and communication tool.

Bringing together fourteen Tokyo-based artists—including Mako Idemitsu, Takahiko Iimura, Toshio Matsumoto, Kyoko Michishita, and Fujiko Nakaya—alongside sixteen artists from New York, such as Shirley Clarke, Joan Jonas, Susan Milano, Nam June Paik, Woody and Steina Vasulka, and Kubota herself, the program shows Kubota's dedication to fostering international exchange within the then emerging field of video art.

As Kyoko Michishita explains in an article she wrote after participating in the event, *Tokyo-New York Video Express* shed light on women's lives, domesticity, and gender roles across Japanese and American contexts, revealing both shared feminist concerns and culturally specific perspectives.¹² Through this cross-cultural dialogue, Kubota's event demonstrated how feminist strategies developed in both parallel and distinct ways, contributing to the formation of an international video art network based on collaboration.

This section also presents two videos screened as part of *Tokyo-New York Video Express*. They demonstrate video's capacity to document everyday life and express personal narratives through its portability, extended duration, and ability to record intimate moments, as compared to film. Michishita's 1974 video, *Being Women in Japan: Liberation Within My Family*, documents the artist's sister's return from the hospital upon recovery from an injury. Through dialogues with family members, the work reflects on the traditional domestic roles of women in Japan and advocates for women's freedom to pursue their chosen aspirations.

Video program at Anthology Film Archives schedule, with Shigeo Kubota listed as Video Program Director, 1980, John G. Hanhardt Archives, Center for Curatorial Studies Library & Archives, Bard College

12 Kyoko Michishita, "Tokyo-NY Video Express," *Women and Film* 1, nos. 5-6 (1974): 86-87.

TOKYO-NEW YORK

VIDEO EXPRESS

● 1974年
1月7(月)・8(火)・9日(水)
● 茶=渋谷・天井楼数館
● 6 P.M.—11 P.M.
当日=600円・前売=500円
シネマテーク会員=400円

●主催
アンダーグラウンド・
センター 203-6317
ビデオひろば 501-0322

**UNDERGROUND CINEMATHEQUE
SPECIAL PROGRAM**
東京とニューヨークを結ぶ初のビデオルート ●●●
●●●●● 新作テープ30本とライブ・ビデオの3夜

● 7日
**LIVE VIDEO
COMMUNICATION
& VIDEOTAPES**
ライブ・ビデオ・コミュニケーション
とビデオ

シャリー・クラーク
SHIRLEY CLARKE
ウエンディ・クラーク
WENDY CLARKE
白南雄
NAM JUNE PAIK
ジャッド・ヤルクット
JUD YALKUT
スーザン・ミラノ
SUSAN MILANO
ジュリダール・バット
SHRIDHAR BAPAT
デイビッド・サッサー
DAVID SASSER
ステイファン・ベック
STEPHEN BECK
ピーター・キャンパス
PETER CAMPUS
ジョン・ゴッドフリー
JOHN GODFREY
デイビッド・ロクストン
DAVID LOXTON
フレッド・バルジック
FRAD BARZYK
オリビア・タッパン
OLIVIA TAPPAN
中谷美子
FUJIKO NAKAYA
吉川修太郎
SHUNTARO TANIGAWA
萩原明美
SAKUMI HAGIWARA
進下麻子
KYOKO MICHISHITA
山光穂子
M.SAKO IDEMITSU

● 8日
**VIDEO ENVIRONMENT
&
VIDEOTAPES**
ビデオ環境とビデオ

久保田成子
SHIGEKO KUBOTA
ググラス・デイビス
DOUGLAS DAVIS
ウディ・ステナ・バズルカ
WOODY & STEINA VASULKA
エバーソン ミュージアム
EVERSON MUSEUM;
デイビッド・ロス
DAVID ROSS
フランク・ジレット
FRANK GILLETTE
マイケル・スノウ
MICHAEL SNOW
ウィロビー・シャープ
WILLOUGHBY SHARP
飯村隆彦
TAKAHIKO IINURA
デニス・オッペンハイム
DENNIS OPPEENHEIM
アルド・タンボリーニ
ALDO TAMBELLINI
ブルース・ノウマン
BRUCE NAUMAN
ウィリアム・ウェグマン
WILLIAM WEGMAN
ロバート・モリス
ROBERT MORRIS
KATSUHIRO YAMAGUCHI
山口勝弘
小塚はくどう
HAKUDOU KOBAYASHI
ふじいせいいち
SHICHI FUJII
松下麻子
SYOKO MATSUSHITA

● 9日
**LIVE VIDEO
& LIVE MUSIC
PERFORMANCE**
ライブ・ビデオと
ライブ・ミュージックパフォーマンス

シャルロット・モーマン
CHARLOTTE MOORMAN
小杉武久(出演)
TAKEHISA KOGUGI
アラン・ギンズバーグ
ALLEN GINSBERG
ジョセフ・ボイス
JOSEPH BEUYS
エド・エムシュウイラー
ED EMSWILLER
ジム・マックウイリアムス
JIM MCWILLIAMS
リズ・フィリップス ステーブ・ロウエンス
LIZ PHILLIPS
& STEVE LAWRENCE
エルザ & タンボリーニ
ELSA TAMBELLINI
& STANLEY ELDRIDGE
リチャード・タイトルバウム
RICHARD TITELBAUM
ステイファン・パレウスキー
STEPHANIE PALEWSKI
根本徳夫
TOSHIO MATSUMOTO
がわながのぶひろ
NOBUHIRO KAWANAKA
阿部修也
SHUYA ABE
山本圭吉
KEIGO Y. MAMOTO
細田守弘
MORIHIRO WADA

久保田成子さんが平荷物便で持って来たニューヨークのビデオ・エンバライメントの紹介と ビデオひろばの新作の発表です アンダーグラウンド・シネマテークの スペシャル・プログラムへ 是非参加して下さい

Opposite it, Susan Milano's *Transsexuals* (1971) follows the lives of transgender women in the United States, presenting their daily experiences, relationships, and journeys to self-understanding. Both works adopt a light, playful tone and use interviews to create space for personal testimony across domestic and public settings. Similar to the theory of "neo-documentarism" proposed by Toshio Matsumoto, another *Tokyo-New York Video Express* artist, these works fuse avant-garde aesthetics with documentary realism to highlight subjective experiences and the psychological dimensions of lived reality.

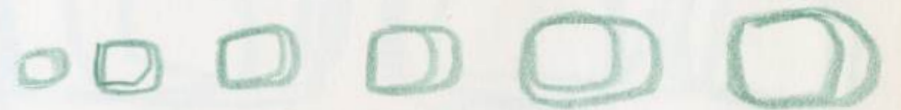
Juxtaposed in the gallery space, *Being Women in Japan and Transsexuals* reveal both shared and distinct challenges faced by women in Japan and the United States.

Kubota's curatorial practice played an important role in shaping the global understanding and circulation of video. "*Curator Diary: The Curatorial Work of Shigeko Kubota* traces her curatorial work as an extension of her own bold and whimsical character, reflecting her feminist thinking and lifelong dedication to advancing video art. By asserting that video was neither superior nor inferior to film but should coexist alongside it, Kubota affirmed its legitimacy as an emerging medium, created institutional space for marginalized voices, and promoted video's power in creative experimentation, individual expression, and cross-cultural solidarity.

Poster for *Tokyo-New York Video Express*, Produced by Video Hiroba, 1974, Courtesy of Shigeko Kubota Video Art Foundation, © Estate of Shigeko Kubota

my

Love to





Shigeko Kubota in her Mercer Street loft, New York, Courtesy of Shigeko Kubota Video Art Foundation, © Estate of Shigeko Kubota

VIDEO

Open
Circuits

by Shigeo Kubota

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN *GELJUTSU KURABU* (TOKYO), NO. 9, 1974, 173-87.

EXCERPTED FROM THE VERSION PUBLISHED IN *VIVA VIDEO! THE ART AND LIFE OF SHIGEKO KUBOTA*, ED. MAYUMI HAMADA ET AL. (TOKYO: KAWADE SHOBOA SHINSHA, 2021). A CATALOGUE FOR THE EXHIBITION OF THE SAME NAME, WHICH TOURED JAPAN IN 2021-22.

TRANSLATED BY MIDORI YOSHIMOTO WITH EDITORIAL ASSISTANCE BY GUS TSEKENIS.

THE TEXT HAS BEEN LIGHTLY EDITED FOR REPUBLICATION HERE.

A large part of video culture is based on community and an anti-institutional philosophy, like the drug and hippy cultures were.

It is a fusion of youth energy, symbolizing contemporary reality and reflecting the social phenomenon.

Video art is part of media communication in which art communicates itself and turns into everyday life.

Video art electrifies minute aspects of your life and subconscious which are deeply asleep. It is media communication which connects the consciousness of individuals by revealing their insecurities.◻

Humans crave more information in times of wars and economic instability. This need accelerates the feeling of societal crises upon individuals and the speed and permeability of information follow suit. Media communication becomes a necessary feedback in your life.

I was always interested in the concept and process of art becoming communication and communication becoming art. Video art realizes this.

Video art is the art of "two-way communication." It is not art which is given from the top, but global communication which connects one horizon to another, side to side. It is an art of feedback which confirms the presence of humans aesthetically through the sociological exchange of information.

As the feeling of lovers' intimacy in bed is the experience of fresh skinship, to experience video art is to expand on your life philosophy and special dimensions, and to depart for a fairy tale of media communication; your new lifestyle. The Watergate scandal is a contemporary fairy tale which even dogs wouldn't want to consume, while soap operas in the afternoon are your (and mine) experience of video life.

My body is a cocktail of video life experience and information. I don't necessarily prefer carrying this Portapak (SONY video tape recording system) on my back. As traditional Japanese women carried a baby on their back, what can a contemporary woman carry on her back when she can't even have a baby?

I am a levitating car which runs on an electronic highway called video art. It can be as slow as an [Alexander] Calder mobile, and as intimate a traveling space as a Taj Mahal Travellers' performance, moving about as on a hot tin roof.*

Video art is Victory of Vagina, and Vengeance of Vagina.

Video art is anti-Venereal Disease of Intellectuals in terms of its proliferation and corrosion.

Video art releases the media's monopolized information from institutions. Very delicate contemporary problems such as politics, philosophy, sex, and avant-garde movements are at the heart of video art, and they are never dealt with fairly in today's media.

Videofreex is an illegal, pirate television station from the village of Woodstock which airs and produces programs which are like video versions of the Whole Earth Catalog.# Several members of Videofreex cultivate the land, make a video commune, and document the natural births of their babies, just as they document the growth of the vegetables in their field.

People running the Experimental TV Center in Binghamton immersed themselves in the ghettos of New York and witnessed an armed robbery in a supermarket, and recorded kids who are selling heroin on the street. This content is far from the typical TV programs which invade your living room. The author of *Guerrilla Television*, Michael Shamberg, who used to be a journalist for *Time*, went to the Republican National Convention in Miami (covered by the CBS News team) to directly ask the audience about the reliability of the reporting.

These are examples of social activities which are carried out as part of the street guerrilla tactics of video art.

Video art is a revolution of the new lifestyle. Its concept, and the political revolution of the ordinary, reframes art itself as a radical act, through the medium of media communication.

Portapaks enable one to carry a camera by oneself, take the risk of immersing yourself anywhere, collect information from various angles, expand the information landscape, and provide the

audience a chance to select information.

In the revolutionary definition of the non-traditional lifestyle, to pervert is to subvert.

Sexual freedom was not possible without the freedom of the third sex. Similarly, the restructure of society is not possible without the restructure of media.

Isn't it quite radical for an artist to become a street guerrilla!

At present, the population of video art is most concentrated in New York City and San Francisco. It has spread to Düsseldorf, Amsterdam, and Paris.

While the hardware of video art was highly developed in Japan, the software of video art was highly developed in New York. As the land where Pop art crazily flourished, New York consequently germinated the seed of video art within the compost of the collapsed movements of Pop art, Action music, and Street Happenings.

Happenings, Earth art, Elemental art, Conceptual art, Process art, and Body art enfold the relationship between nature and self within concepts and on white sheets of space; ephemeral arts requiring documentation.

The pioneer of Earth art, Robert Smithson, who died in an airplane accident, knew that his work was accidental art, like his own accidental death.

When an artist isolates himself in a remote natural environment, where the audience cannot participate, the contact between the isolated environment and isolated concept is not possible without tools which use information as a medium—photography, film, a video recorder, and a witness. Conceptual art and avant-garde art could not exist without media.

Truly, video art derives its methods of expression from the temporal concept of continuous recording, where the present continues forever, such as in Michael Snow's films and Andy Warhol's "reel-time" films. But it is recycled in video expression as a feedback, as La Monte Young's performance for an endless journey—*Dream Music (The Tortoise: His Dream and Journeys)* (1964) influenced by the concept of early "reel-time" films by Warhol, such as *Empire, Sleep, Eat*, and *Chelsea Girls* (1964-66).

The concept of "reel-time" is the breathing rhythm of contemporary artists who live in the extra-ordinary by forgetting

Shigeo Kubota, "I wonder what video is actually." (in journal),
1988. Drawing, Courtesy of Shigeo Kubota Video Art Foundation,
© Estate of Shigeo Kubota

I wonder
what video is
actually.



the fact that a day consists of twenty-four hours, living in New York lofts.

Gerry Schum, who lived in Düsseldorf and had a video gallery as his only expressive outlet, turned his Volkswagen bus into a video studio, crossed Venetian canals, and brought the possibility of conceptual video art into the infertile land. [...]

Contemporary art stepped out of frames and is developing toward a direction not dependent on galleries and museums. Those stars whom galleries and museums made into virtual images continue to live as legends in society, while art, which hasn't produced a star since Pop art, becomes part of daily life by turning itself into no-subject and no-object.

Shirley Clarke, the former woman filmmaker who produced such films as *Connection*, *Cool World*, and *Portrait of Jason*, suddenly gave up on film and "fucked in" video.

She proclaimed that "video is my new penis." Then, in her own way, she learned and mastered the function, mechanism, and usage of video, which was her new penis. That was artistic expression in the "X"-field [unknown dimension], which she could never obtain in the filmmaking process.

The penthouse of the Chelsea Hotel [in Manhattan] where Shirley lives has turned into a cybernetic toy or junk box. Its three rooms and garden space are wired like a Watergate surveillance operation, which connects eccentric residents of the Chelsea Hotel through electric lines and dots. Group psychotherapy sessions unfolded against the backdrop of New York—the Empire State Building and Hudson River—in shocking, picture-postcard colors.

Video environments are offered in everyday life as a new "high life" instead of "high art." This suggests a vision for art and life in the future, to be sought in our post-industrial era not only by artists but also by architects, environmental designers, psychoanalysts, socialists, and doctors.

Humans, as a species, belong to a creative category which constantly looks toward a future vision.

[...]

As a summary of the "Open Circuits" conference [held at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, January 27-29, 1974], let me isolate the most interesting issues and directions in video art.

1) Experimental television as an experimental art. Various networks, especially public educational television stations such as WNET, WGBH, KQED, are actually broadcasting experimental artistic activities and works by video artists, filmmakers, dancers, and musicians. "(The) Medium is (the) Medium," produced by Boston's educational television [station], WGBH, in 1969, has become a classic in video art. At present, WNET, New York's educational television [station], is broadcasting Nam June Paik's *Global Groove* (1973), Ed Elmshwiller's computer video *Scrap-mates* (1972), Michael Shambert's new work *TVTV* (c. 1972), and receiving good responses from an audience who are tired of the existing TV programs.

2) Conceptual video art represented by Castelli Gallery and Sonnabend Gallery [both New York] exists as another approach to video art. For example, the videotape by William Wegman repeats a few-minutes segment depicting an ordinary action with his beloved dog, but in an intellectual composition filled with surrealist wit. While his loving dog is sleeping with a blanket in a human bed, as in Andy Warhol's film *Sleep* (1964), an alarm clock rings loudly. The dog jumps up and starts running, like his surrogate. A conceptual videotape by Vito Acconci shows him lying on the floor for one hour. He confesses in front of a video camera his experience of sex and the internal process of him turning into the third sex from the difficulty of having a sex.

3) The most popular method of expression in video art, "do it yourself," is video documentary. Carrying a Portapak, an artist becomes a street guerrilla and becomes part of a group, producing a new, radical counterculture through cable TV and guerrilla TV. But video art is never limited to videotapes.

4) In video art, one cannot forget about video environment and the live performances which create video theater. If the screening of a videotape becomes a concert of electronic tape music, a live video performance is a performance where chance operation and audience-participation Happenings can occur.

At "Open Circuits," videotapes were screened in short excerpts. The focus was placed, rather, on video discussions.

In New York, videotapes have proliferated to the point where we have to make a selection from the excess information. The audience is growing tired of one-way communication.

At the time of *Tokyo-New York Video Express*, I was surprised by the Japanese audience, who watched loads of videotapes while

sitting on the dusty cold floor of the Tenjō Sajiki Theater
from 6 p.m. to 11 p.m. It was due to their curiosity and thirst
for information.

Media complicates art and distributes it everywhere.

Media elevates concepts to the level of physical substance.

Media disseminates the power inherent in public or
private economic structure.

Media's exposure involves low energy compared to the
high-energy exposure of museums and galleries. But its channels
are broad and essentially fair.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTES:

∞—Kubota used "minority complex" in Japanese here, but it seems to refer
to inferiority complex or insecurities.

*—The Taj Mahal Travellers were an experimental music group out of Tokyo,
which performed improvisational drone music using Eastern and Western
instruments, electronics, and vocal chants. The founder was the composer
Takehisa Kosugi, Kubota's former boyfriend and a member of Fluxus.

#—The *Whole Earth Catalog* was an American counterculture magazine and product
catalogue published by Stewart Brand several times a year between 1968 and 1972.

Screenshot from
Self-Portrait, 1970-71,
by Shigeko Kubota.
Image courtesy of
Museum of Modern Art,
New York



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The Curatorial Work of Shigeo Kubota**

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