

“Managing Miracles”: Governmentality, avant-garde art, and ‘the TV problem’

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how workshops for artistic experiments in television production during the late 1960s in the United States opened a space for experimental art practices. This space was contoured by, on the one hand, established avant-garde aesthetic preoccupations with medium specificity, and on the other, governmental concerns with directing television programming toward, as President Johnson put it, “the great and not the trivial purposes”—that is, for the general intellectual uplift of the national population. Two of Michel Foucault’s notions—themselves interrelated—will shape my analysis: governmentality and problematisation. The incitement to experiment that these workshops affected, I argue, was forged by a complex of the medium-specificity orientation of avant-garde art; discursive movements towards problematising television that characterised it as an intellectual and cultural vacuum; and governmental concerns aiming to act on the latter diagnosis by a general project of mass edification through television. An analysis of three artists’ contributions to WGBH’s 1969 broadcast *The Medium is the Medium* will highlight the aesthetic and political tensions played out in this process: rather than being complicit elaborations of a governmental ideology taken to be hegemonic, that ideology will be taken as one discursive force among others in the artists’ negotiation of television as a technology to be experimented with.

KEYWORDS

Governmentality, television, avant-garde, art, experimentation, technology

INTRODUCTION

Over the course of the decade spanning 1967-77, the Rockefeller Foundation donated \$3.4 million for the funding of new projects, facilities and workshops across the US for young, innovative artists to experiment with the technical apparatus of the state-of-the-art television studio (Sturken 1987). The professed intention behind this was to open the expressive capacities of the medium by means of artistic experimentation—capacities that had been foreclosed by the commercial imperatives that held sway in the American television industry, largely resulting from the interests of the broadcasting oligopoly known as the “big three” (ABC, CBS, NBC). The Rockefeller Foundation’s then-Director of the Arts, Howard Klein, explains: “The rationale is simple: television is a medium of communication natural to artistic expression, but which, because of the vast expenses of programming, effectively limits artists’ access to its studios” (quoted in Bouman 2008, 43).

In this paper, I will examine how these workshops opened a space for experimental art practices contoured by, on the one hand, established avant-garde aesthetic preoccupations with medium specificity, and on the other, governmental concerns with directing television programming (in then-President Lyndon Johnson's words) "toward the great and not the trivial purposes"—that is, for the general intellectual uplift of the national population (1967)). Two of Michel Foucault's notions—themselves interrelated—will shape my analysis: governmentality and problematisation. The latter term designates "the totality of discursive or non-discursive practices that introduces something into the play of true and false, and constitutes it as an object for thought (whether in the form of moral reflection, scientific knowledge, political analysis, etc.)" (Foucault 1990, 257). As such, problematisation is the governmental operation of defining a field of knowledge production as a means of managing the dynamics of a population. "[I]mprov[ing] the condition of the population" became the "final end" of government—but the population also acted as the primary "instrument" of government, developed as an "object of knowledge" at the hands of so many "technologies of government" (Foucault 2007, 141).

Drawing on Foucault, media scholar Markus Stauff has expounded on the way in which television's technical and cultural lability is an effect of the heterogeneous operations of governmentality. Stauff reformulates Foucault's definition of governmentality as "the ensemble of reflections, strategies and technologies that are aimed at control and the processing of a subject area" (2010, 264). Media participates in this in a twofold way. Firstly, they can engender new subject areas (television, for example, affects a series of audiences for its various programmes and programme types, calculated through rating techniques). This is the means by which given media forms become "productive [...] especially by remaining unproblematic themselves" (Foucault 2010, 264). Secondly, a given media form can itself function as a 'subject area' with its own phenomena to be measured, assessed and regulated. A "governmentality of media" expresses the intersection of these two forms of knowledge production. As technologies of government, media themselves are subject to governmental regulation: "The regulation of media—the measures that are aimed at the knowledge and the change of media—constitute media (their contents, their technologies, etc.) as a problematic complex that becomes strategically productive precisely because it is constantly being developed." (Foucault 2010, 267)

Such theoretical orientations will direct my analysis of the role played by artistic experiments in television production in the late 1960s, and to the complex of discursive forces in which they were embedded. First I will suggest that an effect of this moment, when artists' access to a still relatively new medium depended on the provision of significant funding and ideological endorsement, was an attempt to shift the aesthetic and epistemological terms of engagement artists had with their media from the earlier avant-garde's 'aesthetic' or 'spiritual' motivations

towards quasi-scientific experimental dispositions. This incitement to experiment, I will then argue, was forged by a complex of the medium-specificity orientation of avant-garde art; discursive movements towards problematising television that characterised it as an intellectual and cultural vacuum; and governmental concerns aiming to act on the latter diagnosis by a general project of mass edification through television. Finally, an analysis of three artists' contributions to WGBH's 1969 broadcast *The Medium is the Medium*—the offerings of Otto Piene, Nam June Paik, and Allan Kaprow—will highlight the aesthetic and political tensions played out in this process: rather than being complicit elaborations of a governmental ideology taken to be hegemonic, that ideology will be taken as one discursive force among others in the artists' negotiation of television as a technology to be experimented with. The historical vantage offered in such an analysis may help us think through the relation between artistic practices and new media technologies today; in particular, how the incitement to experiment that the latter seem to constantly pose to the former ineluctably pertains as much to governmental as aesthetic problematisations—especially as the increasing pace of change in media ecologies continues to problematise the dynamics of contemporary social and political life.

MEDIUM SPECIFICITY AND TELEVISION ART: A POLITICAL GENEALOGY

Before proceeding to this analysis, it will first be necessary to establish the experimental television workshops and their relation to a broader political rationality in a genealogy of the artistic avant-garde's political status. In a political genealogy of avant-garde aesthetics in his well-known 1939 essay "Avant-garde and Kitsch," Clement Greenberg describes the avant-garde's development in the intellectual crucible of the "superior consciousness of history" that emerged around the middle of the nineteenth-century (a thinly-veiled allusion to the Marxist philosophy Greenberg adhered to at the time he was writing) (Greenberg 1989b, 4).¹ At that time, such intellectual dispositions, Greenberg speculates, were soon adopted by artists and poets, "even if unconsciously for the most part"; (Greenberg 1989b, 4). Yet avant-garde artists were to retain an extremely ambivalent relationship to the revolutionary politics that precipitated their emergence. At one level, this "superior consciousness" allowed the avant-garde to define itself in negative terms (as "what they were not") in relation to its theoretical formulations of the bourgeoisie's prevailing social standards (Greenberg 1989b, 5). And yet the "emigration from the markets of capitalism" also predicated here had the result of tying the avant-garde to the ruling classes by an "umbilical cord of gold" (Greenberg 1989b, 2); without the financial support of social élites, avant-garde artistic activity could not have been sustained. (Greenberg does not spell out the motivations of these élites for sustaining an artistic avant-garde, however.) According to

¹ For Greenberg's association with Marxism, see Kramer 2016.

Greenberg, an additional aspect of the avant-garde's ambiguous relation to politics was its retirement from an active engagement with political efforts in favour of the search for an aesthetic "absolute" in which "all [ideological] relativities and contradictions would be either resolved or beside the point" (Greenberg 1989b, 6). As such, art reneged its figurative capacities (its capacities for creating 'illusions') in favour of thematising its "obedience to some worthy constraint or original," namely the unique properties of the medium in which the artist works (Greenberg 1989b, 6).

Greenberg set out this cultural diagnosis of the avant-garde at the onset of the Second World War in Europe. But in spite of the ways in which the war resulted in widespread redefinitions of the US's identity as a global military, economic and political superpower, much of the logic of his argument is still apparent in discourses surrounding the postwar search (in the US) for a specifically American modern art. According to Lynn Spigel, the chief imperative behind this search was the sense that without a distinctive set of aesthetics characteristic of its own (what Spigel calls a "vernacular"), the US would not be able to distance itself from its sense of inferiority at being a "cultural colony of Europe" (Spigel 2008, 23). In other words, the position of relative strength that the US had gained as a first-order global power (this as a result of the Second World War) would be significantly inhibited by its dependence on rehashing second-hand aesthetics. It became a matter of international impression management at the governmental level: the Department of Cultural Affairs was inaugurated in the late 1930s in part "to counteract the prevailing image of Americans as militaristic vulgar brutes" (Spigel 2008, 24).

New York School abstract expressionist painting was seen by some critics as a strong candidate for the first eruption of the new American art, both through the "freedom of individual expression" and the "sense of eccentric psychology" that it appeared to embody (Spigel 2008, 25). These traits were seen by some as especially valuable political weapons for an American art in the context of the Cold War. Greenberg himself celebrated the work of these artists, for instance in his 1955 essay "'American-type' painting" (explicitly defining them by their geographical and geopolitical context above and beyond any particular artistic qualities of their work) (Greenberg 1989a).² Conversely, some "more conservative" government officials and cultural critics (the "dismayed populists of the Right and the Left," in Martha Rosler's terms (Rosler 1990, 41)) associated these painters with the subversion of American values, and some artists' earlier connections with the Communist party were dug up in support of such arguments (Spigel 2008, 25). Not only (as in Greenberg's analysis) was the figure of the avant-garde artist forged through an ambivalent relationship to politics (be it those of the revolutionaries or of the ruling élites,

² Greenberg appropriated the term 'American-type painting' from British artist Patrick Heron in favour of 'abstract expressionism' and other competing labels (see footnote 209). As an aside: Greenberg's evocative description of the work of Clyfford Still, Mark Rothko, and Barnett Newman in that essay as "[a] new kind of flatness, one that breathes and pulsates" may be even more appropriate to the electronic images generated by experimental television artists a decade later.

insurgency or aloofness); in the US during the cold war, the figure of the avant-garde artist also became a site of political contestation for institutional powers that wanted to invest various political agendas in America's own emergent brand of high modernism.

This complex discourse still appears to have been largely in circulation during the 1960s, when television came to be seen by a diverse section of cultural actors (ranging from artists, to public-service focussed television producers, to government policy makers) as a frontier to be fought for in the struggle for the hearts and (predominantly) minds of mass audiences. Now, however, the effort was to turn the artistic endeavours that contributed to the US's international impression management toward the governmental project of raising the cultural and intellectual profile of its own population. This struggle was elaborated in a discourse that became known as 'the TV problem'. Broadly speaking, critics of the state of television programming through the 1950s and 1960s formulated 'the TV problem' as a squandering of television's potential as a medium for educating and enlightening the national population. This, they held, resulted from the nature of the commercial television industry that, impelled to attract the biggest audience share (in order, in turn, to attract advertisers) produced content designed to appeal to the 'lowest common denominator'. In a 1959 article for the *New York Herald Tribune* (entitled "The TV Problem") Walter Lippmann noted that although television was a "superb scientific achievement," there was a pressing need for representatives of the academic elite to figure out how to produce programming that concerned itself with "not what was popular but what was good," in spite of the risk of drawing comparatively small audiences (quoted in Ouellette 2003, 117). Such programming, he wrote, "might well attract an audience that made up in influence what it lacked in numbers" (ibid.).

A federal government response to the 'TV problem' came in November 1967, when President Johnson signed into law the Public Broadcasting Act. President Johnson remarked at the Act's signing-in ceremony that although "today, miracles in communication are our daily routine," the problem to be addressed is more of a governmental than a scientific or technical nature: the problem is "not making miracles—but managing miracles" (Johnson 1967). The most significant result of the Public Broadcasting Act was its inauguration of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), an institution charged with "direct[ing] that power [of television to change our lives] toward the great and not the trivial purposes." (Johnson 1967) It would aim to do this by providing funds for television programming suitable for public service broadcasting that could not draw the large audiences demanded by commercial stations. One such project was the Rockefeller-initiated workshops for experimental television art.

TELEVISION ART AND THE ROCKEFELLER FOUNDATION

Howard Klein's initial task at the Rockefeller Foundation was to find a solution to the Foundation's need to forge a place for themselves in relation to the educational television programming that existed at the time, the funding structure of which was dominated by another private philanthropic body, the Ford Foundation.³ These workshops would be conceived as "research and development departments" that could facilitate the kind of open-ended experimentation with television's technical apparatus that had been associated with avant-garde art practices in other media (Sturken 1987). Moreover, Klein saw the role of the Foundation as one that could shake up the status quo by using its money to open avenues for creative work, stating that the only way in which the Foundation could remain "pertinent" was by using its money to "take risks" (Sturken 1987).

Klein also implicitly positioned his work in the Foundation's arts programme in the context of the Foundation's earlier history as an offshoot of the Rockefeller Institute of Medical Research (now Rockefeller University), under whose auspices intensive research was undertaken into producing cures for (for instance) malaria, as well as developing new forms of high-yield agriculture to help assuage food shortage in parts of the world where this was a problem, known as "the green revolution" (Bouman 2008, 36). A similarly broad philanthropic mission was carried over to the Foundation's art programme, but the focus on supporting experimental practices now rested on an ideology of risk-taking, a shaking-up of the status quo (Klein states: "You don't need a private foundation to support the status quo. It has money that should be used to take risks") (Sturken 1987). But in this case the status quo was not conceived only as the result of top-down governmental regulation or the censoring of dissident voices; rather, the aesthetic frigidity of television was identified as a result of its programming being driven exclusively by profit and ratings motives. Funding from the Rockefeller Foundation made possible the circumnavigation of these motives that had up to that point significantly foreclosed the possibility of genuine efforts to experiment with television technology's potential to generate new forms of 'high' art practice. Rather than the beneficiaries of the Foundation-funded experiments continuing to be the sick or malnourished, these new experiments would serve the greater good by extending the technical domain of artistic invention into the culturally dark continent of television.

The Rockefeller Foundation's intervention into television production represents a change in the relationship between avant-garde artists and their benefactors. The "umbilical cord of gold" that, for Greenberg, simply functioned to maintain high-art production financially, now connected

³ In an interview with Marita Sturken, Klein stated: "[...] the Ford Foundation made the public television system, for all its weaknesses and strengths. I looked at it and, knowing Norman Lloyd's [director of the Rockefeller Foundation] take on support, said, 'Well, we can never do that. If we are going to work in television, we really should support artists' research in television.' So that is what we started doing in 1967 [...]" (Sturken 1987).

avant-garde artists explicitly to the governmental imperative of edifying the population through television. Through the conscription of avant-garde artists for this purpose, the Rockefeller Foundation's intervention into television production had the effect of aligning the aesthetics and politics of the earlier avant-garde with an approach to working with television that sought to parallel that of earlier avant-garde painting (as per Paik's wish for an "electronic painting studio," and KQED director Brice Howard's Greenberg-style ontological reduction of television to the monitor's electronic surface) (Youngblood 1970, 294-299). But the relatively large financial and technical resources that needed to be mobilised in order to bring about this alignment may have contributed to another characteristic of the experimental television workshops: that they would be used as "research and development branches" for innovative television production.⁴ This formulation makes explicit a preoccupation with television as a technology—as a new technology that required facilities for experimentation in order to discover the expressive properties foreclosed up to that point by commercial imperatives. This figure of the artist as experimenter with new technologies forecasted what Martha Rosler has called an "avant-garde of technical expertise" (a point corroborated by many of the artists' track records as researchers and instructors in institutes of advanced learning) (Rosler 1990, 40). Unlike the aesthetic or spiritual claims to "the absolute" of the earlier avant-garde, technical experimentation became the value-form that inscribed these artist's activities in the governmental imperative to edify mass audiences: artists were charged with producing 'new knowledge' in the space of problematisation opened by the Rockefeller Foundation's and central government's support in television technology through their 'risky' experimental endeavours.

THE MEDIUM IS THE MEDIUM: THREE CASE STUDIES

In what remains of this essay I will briefly study three of the artworks that comprise Boston-based station WGBH's inaugural, and best-known, experimental television broadcast, *The Medium is the Medium*: Otto Piene's "Electronic Light Ballet," Nam June Paik's "Electric Opera No.1," and Allan Kaprow's "Hello." I will focus on how these works exceed the designated "research and development" function of the experimental workshops that facilitated them, in so doing betraying varying degrees of support and resistance to the broader political rationality of public service television. The governmentality-oriented analytics that I have been elaborating, by examining ways in which objects of knowledge are conceived as problems, will allow those objects to exist as intersections of a complex of discursive and non-discursive forces with multiple points of correlation with and resistance to institutionally-specific political rationalities.

⁴ Bouman suggests that this model had a direct precedent in the Rockefeller Foundation's previous activities in experimental medicine and agriculture (Bouman 2008, 43). Klein alludes to this in his description of the development of the Foundation's arts programme: "What I did was come to the organization, get the feeling of it, the spirit and the history, and say, 'Okay, how do you think that way in the arts?'" (Sturken 1987).

Otto Piene: “Electronic Light Ballet”

While the title of Piene’s work itself indexes a transposition of a classical art form to television, the work itself bears little resemblance to ballet. Instead, the piece makes use of two image sources: an electronically-generated and manipulated abstract grid of coloured dots, and a videotape made of one of Piene’s sculptural works (named “Manned Helium Sculpture”), a helium-inflated form created as “one of a series of experiments with lift and equilibrium” (Youngblood 1970, 299) during Piene’s tenure as first artist-in-residence at M.I.T.’s Centre for Advanced Visual Studies in 1968 (Nadeau 2006, 46). A porosity between the experimental and the abstract (both of these in terms of aesthetics and in the form of physical concepts: “lift and equilibrium”), educational value (confirmed in Piene’s being sponsored by authoritative academic institutions), and allusions to established forms of ‘high art’ (sculpture and ballet) subtends Piene’s artistic offering. This has the effect of testifying to the political rationality that would bind these elements together, as well as positioning the artist as a mediator, communicating the activities of his advanced artistic research to a mass audience through television.

Nam June Paik: “Electric Opera No.1”

Like Piene, Paik had also spent time in academic institutions developing his practice. During 1967-68 he undertook a residency at the Institute for Experimentation in the Arts (an affiliate of the State University of New York, where his colleague Allan Kaprow was a professor), with funds provided by the Rockefeller Foundation (Sturken 1987). There, under the job title ‘Consultant for Experimental Art’, Paik penned a first written report to the Foundation, entitled “Expanded Education for a Paperless Society.” In this text Paik fantasises about ways in which television could deliver an immense and high-quality (if remarkably conservative) body of knowledge to people around the world: recordings of philosophers like Karl Jaspers and Martin Heidegger could be broadcast to a global audience, spreading their respective wisdoms worldwide (Paik 1970a, 7). In “Utopian Laser TV Station” (another paper written during his residency), Paik proposes for his dream station a fairly rigorous educational programme à la avant-garde: a 7am chess lesson with Marcel Duchamp; at 8pm a segment called “Meet the Press” with John Cage as special guest; this followed by morning gymnastics at 9am with Merce Cunningham (Paik 1970b, 14).

Perhaps these proposals themselves are spiked with Paik’s sardonic sense of humour. But as reports to the Rockefeller Foundation, they presumably would have had to have carried a degree of interpretive latitude sufficient to convince those concerned that his work corresponded to some form of philanthropic imperative. Especially difficult to resolve to any professed pedagogical intent, however, is Paik’s affirmation of an aesthetics of boredom. This had been an important aesthetic device in his work since (at least) his 1963 show *Exhibition of Music—Electronic*

Television at Galerie Parnass in Wuppertal. His self-reflective text for the exhibition's catalogue begins: "My experimental TV is / not always interesting / but / not always uninteresting / like nature, / which is beautiful, / not because it changes beautifully, / but simply because it changes" (Paik 1974). In "Electric Opera," a speaker complains (rather more prosaically), "I don't know...I'm getting awfully bored," to which his respondent replies "Thank God it's the last one", referring to the position of "Electric Opera" as the final segment of the transmission.

While Paik's attitude to art as a positive educational paradigm is clearly ambivalent at best, both the articles on education through television and the aesthetics he propagates in "Electric Opera" betray an unswerving faith in the cultural significance of the avant-garde itself, and in art more broadly. This is what informs his references to other media in his television art practice: "electronic painting" and "electron-drawing" using the cathode ray tube, for example; but also his "prepared televisions," conceptual descendants of John Cage and David Tudor's prepared pianos (Youngblood 1970, 304). These were first used by Paik in his 1963 exhibition at Galerie Parnass; in spite of the comparatively much more sophisticated technical equipment offered to him at the WGBH studios six years later, Paik nonetheless carted a dozen of the sets there, mixing their images with others made in the studio (nude dancers, tape delays, etc.). Paik has described his work with television as "attack[ing] it back" by means of its own technical apparatus. This is a more radical, and certainly more militaristic expression of a desire to crack open the status quo than that expressed by representatives of philanthropic foundations and central government directives; yet, broadly speaking, both Paik and those supporting his artistic activities appear to be in general accord as to the means of doing so: through other art forms, traditional and sometimes less traditional (Youngblood 1970, 302).

Allan Kaprow: "Hello"

In spite of Paik's close professional relations with Kaprow (in fact, Kaprow's idea for "Hello" stemmed from a conversation between the two artists), Paik's attitudes towards the cultural and educational importance of art (often ambiguous as they are) appear to be in diametric opposition to Kaprow's cynical view of art's ability to offer edification to any kind of public not already 'initiated' (Kaprow 1974, 17). In his essay "The Education of the Un-artist, Part I," Kaprow writes: "The arts, at least up to the present, have been poor lessons, except possibly to artists and their tiny publics. Only these vested interests have ever made any high claims for the arts. The rest of the world couldn't care less" (Kaprow 1993, 99). Moreover, Kaprow's low opinion of the contemporary arts vis-à-vis popular and industrial visual culture was not proffered as an occasion for artists to 'attack back'; rather, he calls for a practice of "nonart"; that which "has not yet been accepted as art but has caught an artist's attention with that possibility in mind" (Kaprow 1993, 98).

Kaprow was in many ways an anomaly in *The Medium is the Medium's* artist roster, as his distancing himself from both pedagogical and artistic prerogatives shows. He was the only artist of *The Medium is the Medium's* roster not to have experimented with electronic technologies in a significant way in his prior work. Furthermore, he was also the only one not to have exhibited at New York's Howard Wise Gallery, an important institution for the development of television art and video art, due in part to its 1969 exhibition *TV as a Creative Medium* (which included works by Paik, Tadlock and Tambellini). "Hello" also testifies to a fundamental divergence in his approach to television as a technical apparatus.

The work employed five television cameras and twenty-seven monitors to connect four sites in Boston "like an open conference call on the telephone" (Kaprow 1974, 17). The group of participants at each site was required only to acknowledge whoever they saw on the monitor in front of them. Kaprow's task was to "randomly" order which channels would be open and closed. At one point this activity is interrupted by the appearance of the word 'HELLO' on the screen, the 'O' being superimposed over an image of the Earth as seen from Apollo 8 (Nadeau 2006, 80). "Hello" was the only work of the set to undergo editing: the actual Happening lasted for an hour, and was subsequently cut down to a six-minute videotape version by the production's director, Fred Barzyk. Kaprow called this process a "video-tape digest" and distanced the edited version from the piece, calling it "an insight into what really happened among a small group of people" (Kaprow 1974, 18).

Kaprow explicitly distances "Hello" from the informational forms of the "newscast" or "lecture," stating instead that the information transmitted was "the most important message of all: oneself in connection with someone else" (quoted in Margolies 1969, 48). And it was through the attempt to communicate by this means that a phenomenology of television as an electronic communication medium was discovered: "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" (ibid.). In short, the singularity of Kaprow's work is in his unravelling of the discursive thread tying together technology, pedagogy, and art—the thread that, to varying degrees, constituted the other works in *The Medium is the Medium*, as well as the political rationality that defined artists' experimental television as a governmental technology.

CONCLUSION

President Johnson's remarks at the signing-in of the Public Broadcasting Act include the following passage:

In 1844, when Henry Thoreau heard about Mr. Morse's telegraph, he made his sour comment about the race for faster communication. "Perchance," he warned, "the first news which will leak through into the broad, flapping American ear will be that Princess Adelaide has the whooping cough."

We do have skeptic comments on occasions. But I don't want you to be that skeptic. I do believe that we have important things to say to one another—and we have the wisdom to match our technical genius. (Johnson 1967)

This desire for a harmony between “wisdom” and technique contra the trivial and inconsequential is a reasonable schematic definition of the ‘TV problem’ for those that took it upon themselves to expound it at the time. Artists working in television at the experimental workshops occupied a unique point of intersection with the ‘TV problem’. Their approach to art making—applying themselves primarily to the medium’s technical apparatus, and defining its characteristics with the support of earlier avant-garde art discourses—was brought about through the notion that such practices could realise the “risks” needed to wrest the medium from the trivial and inconsequential programming carrying content akin to that of Thoreau’s comment quoted by President Johnson above. This discursive constellation gains its consistency through an appeal to a governmental logic: that using television to disseminate such programming would lead viewers to tune in for their own edification, resulting in a more culturally aware, more ‘enlightened’ population. In this way, a “technological constellation” was formed through the connection of artists’ experiments with television’s technical apparatus and the governmental operations that this was associated with.

I have tried to show how the various approaches to artistic and technical experimentation followed in the workshops were conditioned by several discursive forces. These forces are not simply the context in which these experiments took place; neither—as a reductive version of hegemony theory might have it—can the political valences of these practices be enumerated solely on the basis of the conditions they elaborate, complicity, resistance, or withdrawal all being beside the point. The governmentality-oriented analysis of these experiments in television art that I have ventured instead indexes the historically-specific discursive horizons of these practices, establishing experimental television art as one among other domains of television’s productive problematisation.

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