

Andy Warhol's Outer and Inner Space (2015)

Recently a professor shared two images with me, the first was a photograph of ancient cave drawings from Lascaux and the other a plan of a city crudely drawn on a wall of an ancient building. We discussed how these images essentially show a culture talking to itself; over the past few days that idea has remained in the forefront of my mind. Perhaps all cultural production could be interpreted this way. However, I've been looking at a lot of early video art and there are intrinsic qualities of not only the medium of video but also the historical era in which video came into being that are unquestionably a continuation of this cultural conversation. Television set the stage for most early video artists: as we sat in the comfort of our homes, television newscasters, celebrities and marketers spoke to us, spoke to each other, looked out from behind the screen directly into our eyes. There was the appearance of a live one-to-one relationship. Even when video technology allowed for pre-recorded programming it was presented as *live on tape*, and our sense of being there in the moment where anything could happen became part of our consciousness. It makes sense that video artists, especially in the early days, would use television for inspiration as they made work in which they communicated with themselves, each other and the audience.

Interestingly, what is considered the earliest work of video art, Andy Warhol's *Outer and Inner Space* (1965), is emblematic of the essence of one medium talking to another and a culture talking to itself. Whether the experiment and resulting film was a predetermined format, a stroke of luck or a sudden realization of what he was dealing with, Warhol and his muse Edie Sedgwick created a work that summed up so much of what video art could be: hybrid, performative, installation. As the story goes, in the summer of 1965 the Norelco Company loaned Warhol video equipment. They likely chose Warhol because of his reputation as an artist and filmmaker.

Their expectation was that he would use the equipment and then, with his endorsement, they would be able to successfully market their goods.¹ What we see in the final work is Sedgwick being filmed in front of a monitor on which is showing a video recording of her made just prior. Video-Edie's image is in profile as film-Edie looks into the camera, thus it appears that video-Edie is speaking into the ear of film-Edie. When presented for public viewing Warhol chose to show two versions next to each other (a technique he would use with other films) so we see four different images of Sedgwick, each dislocated in time and space. Video-Edie is taped in a consistent, close up shot. She is looking up and off into the distance and her head barely moves. Even though she is responding, speaking, even at one point sneezing, her pose is static and stilted; it is as if she is sitting for a portrait. Film-Edie, although more animated and performative, sits fairly still as if sitting for a portrait and this multiplicity of her image is reminiscent of Warhol's portrait paintings. Callie Angell, authority on the films of Andy Warhol, remarks, "Portraiture is transformed into a kind of self-conscious performance, celebrity is recreated and critiqued with the result that the moving image media of film and video suddenly become as infinitely expandable and repeatable as Warhol's seemingly endless series of paintings."² Throughout most of the film the camera is zoomed in and we have no sense of the larger space. Yet, eventually, the camera pans out and we see the video equipment and Warhol's studio. We even get a glimpse of Warhol's assistant moving in behind the monitor to disrupt the video image by manipulating the distortion and vertical roll. In this moment we are acutely aware of video's connection to television and how remarkably different video is from the film in regards to both image and process.

¹ Angell, Callie. *Doubling the Screen: Andy Warhol's Outer and Inner Space*. Millennium Film Journal No. 38. Spring 2002. Web. March 10, 2015.

² Ibid.

The video glitch is pointed out to film-Edie and when she turns her head towards the monitor to see the distorted image she is clearly disturbed. Her sudden self-awareness combined with the wide shot helps clue the audience in to the event that we are witnessing. Another disruption is seen in the temporal discrepancy of video-Edie and film-Edie. Although they appear next to each other, film-Edie's discomfort, neglect, and ultimate interaction with her other self suggests that they exist in disparate times. There is a moment where video-Edie sneezes, startling film-Edie. Nonetheless, film-Edie, at this point more comfortable with her multiple selves, plays along and sneezes back. Sedgwick, acclimating to her predicament, suddenly seems adept at both engaging and performing with herself. Media theorist William Kaizen makes note of how poignant this moment is, "[Sedgwick's] past self is immediately there, collapsed onto her present. The cinematic 'that-has-been', with its vestigial connection to history and memory, had been replaced by the televisual 'this-is-going-on', with its incessant presencing. Video has given her the ability to interact with herself in a way that was overwhelming at first, triggering a mnemonic game where she could eventually accept the past as immediately present"³

Much of the dialogue in *Outer and Inner Space* is indecipherable. Except for the few instances when film-Edie reacts and responds to video-Edie, the dialogues appear unrelated. Video-Edie seems to be speaking to no one and to film-Edie all at the same time. There are too few clues for the audience to know what she is saying or responding to. And she is unwittingly submitted to the imposed glitch of the monitor. Film-Edie, on the other hand, is smoking, laughing, frowning, critiquing, performing. She is self-conscious and her gaze is directed out towards the audience. The composition of the multiple Edies and the sharp contrast of the video image and the film image is striking. Even though time is in one sense collapsed, video-Edie

³ Kaizen, William. *Live on Tape: video, Liveness and the Immediate. Art and the Moving Image: A Critical Reader*, London: Tate Publishing/Afterall, 2008.

presents more of a spectral image while film-Edie exists corporeally with us in our reality. The complexities resulting from the juxtapositions and contrasts in *Outer and Inner Space* reveal Warhol's keen intuition regarding the potential of video technology both outside of and within his existing art practice.

Video technology, accessible and mobile, allowed artists to produce works in their studios and out in the streets. Some artists chose to work specifically within the context of television – seamlessly and often subversively - infiltrating the developing medium while others would use video as a way to evolve cinematic ideas. Tanya Leighton explains, “The decade of the 1960s is the apposite place to begin as this period marks the point when artists’ film production emerged as a recognisable category of film art. It was the beginnings of an ‘intermedia’ condition; the permeation of boundaries between art and film; and the creation of hybrid filmic objects, installations, performances and events.”⁴ Amazingly, in Warhol's first encounter with video technology he was able to capture, to one degree or another, all of these conditions. *Outer and Inner Space* reveals the immediacy and directness of communication inherent in the medium and in the historical moment. It challenged our notions of the moving image and showed the potential for art to exist in new, multiple formats and locations.

⁴ Leighton, Tanya. *Art and the Moving Image: A Critical Reader*. Tate Publishing, London England. 2008. Pages 13-14.



Warhol, Andy. *Outer and Inner Space* (Film Still). 1965.⁵

⁵ Warhol, Andy. *Outer and Inner Space*. 1965. Youtube. March 14, 2015.

Sources:

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