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# WULF HERZOGENRATH

## VIDEO ART AND INSTITUTIONS: THE FIRST FIFTEEN YEARS

Institutions are never the beginning, rather things always start with the artists! That said, unlike the creators of drawings, paintings, sculptures, or photographs, the video artist is much more dependent on the support of institutions such as galleries, colleges, and television stations; traditional art institutions such as art societies, public galleries, and museums, or publishing houses and cultural institutions, such as the German Goethe Institutes and Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen (Institute for Foreign Relations), a mediator of German foreign cultural policy. Here, I shall use the term 'video art' to include the very early activities and productions, which were created on 16mm film while video was just becoming available to artists in Germany, and which were aimed at television, at TV images, at a new, artistic approach to the medium of television.

The beginning can probably be located within the Cologne art scene around Mary Bauermeister's studio and her actions featuring the avant-garde music of John Cage and Nam June Paik, and more specifically Karlheinz Stockhausen's *Originale* performed at the Theater am Dom from September 26–October 6, 1961. Stockhausen's detailed score was interspersed with improvised actions by the performers, including Paik, experimental films by Wolfgang Ramsbott (we see the film with Paik's eyes, hands, and legs), and Harry Kramer's film *Räderwerk* from his *Mechanisches Theater*.<sup>1</sup>

New experiences of time, particularly of duration, of music, sounds, and their manipulation; changes to

texts, words, and structure; new dance and the inclusion of the synthetic possibilities of electronics in music: all these elements together, including film projections as well as painting and blurring actions, were the terrain on which Nam June Paik discovered the electronic medium of video and Wolf Vostell created his works. Paik's experience with the radar experiments by K.O. Goetz, his collaboration with the WDR's electronic studio in Cologne, and particularly his engagement with John Cage's music after their meeting in Darmstadt in 1958 led Paik to create his first electronic works—the manipulation of and interaction with television sets—in the Cologne environment. Vostell's encounters with the Nouveaux Réalistes in Paris, who—like Christo—exhibited in Cologne in the Galerie Harro Lauhus, Mary Bauermeister's companion at the time, then led to the exhibitions of manipulated TV sets in the Smolin Gallery in New York in May 1963. Also present at these performances in the Bauermeister Studio were Wolfgang Hahn, future collector of Fluxus artworks who owned several TV objects (today his collection is kept in the Vienna Museum of Modern Art), the DuMont publisher Ernst Brücher, and the architect Rolf Jährling.

Credit is due to Rolf Jährling and his wife for enabling the first public performance of video art. Since 1949, the Jährlings had regularly invited artists to their

1 Cf. *intermedial, kontrovers, experimentell—Das Atelier Mary Bauermeisters in Köln 1960–62*, ed. Historisches Archiv der Stadt Köln (Cologne, 1993), p. 74.