



Nam June Paik, *T.V. Sea*, 1974.

The recent conference — "Open Circuits: the Future of Television," held at The Museum of Modern Art — examined the enormous number of social and esthetic issues provoked by the advent of video technology and decentralized networks in the last few years. If "Nine Evenings: Experiments in Art and Technology" in October, 1966 — riddled with countervailing currents though it may have been — represents, say, the Armory Show of video films and performance art, then "Open Circuits" carries with it, in terms of the reformulation of video consciousness, polemic and epistemic ends that parallel the foundation of Abstract American Artists.

What "Open Circuits" dramatized was that in video art the art of its founding figures resided less in esthetic or formal issues than in the creation of the actual tool — the video synthesizers and the technical studio in which these tools could be used, and the high moral purpose (virtually a revolutionary utopianism) that the first video artists attributed to the potential of the tool. But, as a medium, video is inherently no more interesting than the pencil to use — and far more cumbersome.

My position is that of the sceptic. However, "Open Circuits" did clarify that whatever else the first generation of video artists accomplished — and these accomplishments are enormous — its

esthetic efforts were virtually nil if only because its imagery was linked to and perpetuated by the most outmoded clichés of modernist pictorialism. NAM JUNE PAIK is exemplary in this respect. To the set of vocabulary of Lisagou patterns, those swirling oscillations we associate with electronic art, he synthesizes the most familiar Expressionist color plays and Surrealist juxtapositions of deep vista or anatomical disembodiment and discontinuity. June Paik's work tends to corroborate my negative feelings about the purely esthetic issues of the first-generation video artists. Surely it's very hard to beat Beethoven or the Beatles, and the sound of that music among others rendered palatable Nam June Paik's conventional imagery with which the video receivers were burdened, such as the Dali-derived image of the burning piano.

Still, in fairness, the decor of the gallery was not without interest; a darkened room about two sides of which access to the console of monitors of all sizes, color and black-and-white, was gained as if from a parapet. Interestingly, the receivers, instead of preserving a vertical vis-à-vis to the viewer, were toppled so that the images threw off light vertically rather than horizontally. In this aspect, perhaps Nam June Paik had managed to supercede the otherwise peurile Surrealism and bantering good humor that mark his earlier video chair sculptures and comic-book drawings.

—ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN