

# Studio Spaces

A number of recent exhibitions and artist projects have utilized the architecture of the television studio. How does this tendency relate to TV's shifting significance as a cultural form? *by Maeve Connolly*



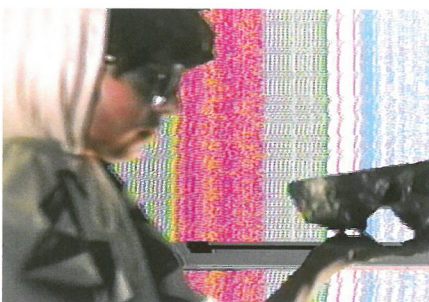
Olivia Plender  
*Open Forum*, 2008–ongoing, installation view as  
part of 'Rise Early, Be Industrious', MK Gallery,  
Milton Keynes, 2012

Courtesy: Olivia Plender, MK Gallery, Milton Keynes, photographs: Andy Keefe



Exactly 50 years have passed since Nam June Paik's influential 'Exposition of Music – Electronic Television'. Installed at Galerie Parnass in Wuppertal, and featuring numerous modified TV sets that displayed fragments of broadcasts, the exhibition was open only in the evenings, as German TV services were not available during the day. Paik's show signalled a new role for the gallery as a space in which the ordinary activity of watching television might be imagined differently. Six years later, the exhibition 'TV as a Creative Medium', at the Howard Wise Gallery in New York, also included several works by Paik, but the centrepiece was Frank Gillette and Ira Schneider's *Wipe Cycle* (1969), a bank of nine monitors that presented visitors with their own time-delayed images as well as pre-recorded broadcast material. *Wipe Cycle* was a direct influence on the alternative models of TV production and distribution favoured by activist groups such as Videofreex and TVTV in the early 1970s.<sup>1</sup>

These two exhibitions were among the first to address artists' engagement with TV as both object and medium, though New York's Museum of Modern Art proposed collaborations with US networks as early as the 1950s.<sup>2</sup> By the mid-1970s, the expansion of cable services in the US meant that smaller institutions such as the Long Beach Museum of Art could extend their exploration of video beyond the spaces of the gallery and produce their own programming for local TV.<sup>3</sup> Subsequent high-profile projects, such as Paik's *Good Morning, Mr. Orwell* (1984), a satellite broadcast on New Year's Day linking New York's WNET TV station with the Centre Pompidou, suggested a symbolic equivalence between the TV studio and gallery. Over the following decades, echoes of Paik's Utopian approach could be found in Pierre Huyghe's *Mobile TV* (1995–7), a temporary local channel transmitting interviews, documentation of art works and actions; 'CAC TV' (2004–07), a weekly series produced by the Contemporary Art Centre in Vilnius for broadcast in Lithuania; and Rirkrit Tiravanija's *Untitled 2005 (the air between the chain-link fence and the broken bicycle wheel)* (2005) at New York's Guggenheim Museum, featuring a



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## *In 'Auto Italia LIVE', television is no longer envisaged as culturally dominant.*

functioning transmitter, displayed in a vitrine, alongside various texts on US governmental regulation of television.

In recent years, as broadcast TV has been reconfigured and supplanted by newer technologies of distribution and reception, ranging from on-demand services to YouTube, television's historical claim to function as a 'public' cultural form – always highly contested – has become increasingly untenable. At the same time, however, artists appear increasingly drawn toward the TV studio. It may be that some retain an attachment to the space of the broadcast studio simply because of its historical association with the articulation of public discourse. However, a more complex exploration of the social, institutional and material architecture of the studio can be identified in a number of recent projects that seek to reconceptualize television's significance as a cultural form.

The architecture of the studio served as a reference, for example, in the exhibition design of 'Are You Ready for TV?' (2010–11) at MACBA in Barcelona, curated by Chus Martínez with the involvement of artists Dora García and Johan Grimmonprez. This was the most expansive of several recent TV-themed shows, encompassing experimental and critical strands of cultural television, as well as artists' projects from many contexts.<sup>4</sup> The studio was even more central to García's subsequent project *KLAU MICH: Radicalism in Society Meets Experiment on TV* (2012). Commissioned for DOCUMENTA(13) and realized over the exhibition's three-month duration, *KLAU MICH* was framed as an exploration of television and radicalism, drawing its title ('steal me') from a 1968 publication by German political radicals Rainer Langhans and Fritz Teufel. The programme comprised weekly discussions in an environment designed to resemble the set of a 1960s magazine-style talk show; public rehearsals were posted online and each show was also transmitted live on a local channel. The first installment focused on the ideas of R.D. Laing and the anti-psychiatry movement, as well as recounting events including the 1966 Destruction in Art Symposium and the following year's Dialectics of Liberation congress. Rather than promoting a specific mode of television production, García's project developed an open-ended exploration of the processes through which social radicalism is typically mediated and managed in popular culture.

Since 2010, London-based Auto Italia South East (Kate Cooper, Amanda Dennis and Richard John Jones) have also drawn upon the history of live television to produce 'Auto Italia LIVE', realized collaboratively with artists including Benedict Drew, Leslie Kulesh and Francesco Pedraglio. To date, four hour-long episodes have been produced as a series of webcasts, all performed in front of a studio audience, with simultaneous screenings at locations including the ICA, London, and the Palais de Tokyo, Paris. While the performers, crew and audience occupy relatively static positions in *KLAU MICH*, the Auto

Italia cameras are highly mobile, constantly revealing the presence of studio technicians and producers, as well as audience members. Loosely following a magazine-style format, and citing experimental traditions in British television as influences, the 'Auto Italia LIVE' shows often incorporate transitions between segments that seem purposefully attenuated in order to highlight the 'real-time' structure of the performance and webcast.

Several theorists have emphasized the importance of crisis and catastrophe in the production and articulation of television's liveness.<sup>5</sup> According to this logic, unforeseen events happening within or beyond the television studio actually serve to reinforce television's claim to authentic presence. The American art historian William Kaizen has noted that, even if television is routinely pre-recorded, it remains somehow 'live', because there is always 'somebody in the broadcast studio standing by, ready to "go live" if necessary'.<sup>6</sup> In the case of webcasts, however, there may not be a 'broadcast studio' in the traditional sense, other than the space shared by performers, crew and audience. Writing in 2000, when television was still widely regarded as a dominant cultural form, Philip Auslander proposed that the ubiquity of reproductions of performances (in the fields of music, theatre and sport) had led to a depreciation of live presence, with the result that perceptual experience of the live increasingly resembled the mediated.<sup>7</sup> In 'Auto Italia LIVE', however, TV is clearly no longer envisaged as culturally dominant, and the articulation of liveness through strategies of staging and presentation is premised on the self-conscious evocation of older and implicitly outmoded forms of broadcasting, rendered accessible by YouTube.

Elsewhere, artists are continuing to engage with the transmission infrastructure that preceded webcasting and social media. For example, the New York-based duo E.S.P. TV (Victoria Keddie and Scott Kiernan) produce an eponymous regular show featuring music, video art and performance for Manhattan Neighborhood Network, a public-access cable channel. Episodes are recorded in front of an audience with live green-screening and analogue video mixing, at venues such as Millennium Film Workshop in New York, General Public in Berlin and Pallas Projects in Dublin. Instead of being transmitted live, however, they are taped to VHS and edited into half-hour episodes for cablecast and (subsequent) online streaming. This approach signals a specific interest in obsolete technologies, linked to the fact that Keddie has a background in media archiving, with a role in preserving sound, film and video collections. E.S.P. TV also organize informal screening events, sometimes scheduled to coincide with the cablecasts in Manhattan, so they approach both production and transmission as events that can be used to create situations of shared viewing.

Some artists have also produced installation works in which the material architecture of the studio is valued for its historical



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association with public discourse in a specific cultural context. Olivia Plender's exhibition 'Rise Early, Be Industrious', presented last year at MK Gallery in Milton Keynes, was framed as an examination of changing attitudes towards mass education and featured a re-creation of a 1970s-style studio with sunken carpeted seating area. The artist described this space as an 'Open Forum', devised to function as a platform for discussion around television's current and past role in education. This forum was a specific allusion to the historical relationship between the Open University and Milton Keynes, and it suggests that the history of the BBC as a public service broadcaster remains symbolically significant in conceptualizing the public sphere and its formation in the British context.

Katya Sander's *Televised I: the Anchor, the I, and the Studio* (2006) also approached the studio as an ideal discursive space. For this multi-channel work, the Danish artist conducted interviews with news anchors in the studios of various Romanian television stations. Each interviewee is asked a series of questions, while seated at their news desk, and asked to direct their responses to the studio camera. Most of Sander's questions concern the performative aspects of presenting, focusing on issues such as the use (or

non-use) of the pronoun 'I' by news anchors, their attitudes toward the studio as a place and the importance of gesture in structuring the flow of news presentation. Rather than focusing on the studio as a material location, *Televised I* instead draws attention to the various processes, including language, gesture and institutional practices, which structure the production of television news as a form of public communication.

Television and radio studios function as settings in several recent installations by Gerard Byrne, beginning with *Subject* (2009). This multi-channel video work was shot on the 1960s campus of the University of Leeds in various locations, including the now slightly antiquated campus TV studio.<sup>8</sup> More recently, for the production of *A man and a woman make love* (2012), Byrne commissioned the Irish public service broadcaster RTÉ to create a short drama based upon the transcript of a conversation between a group of Surrealists – including André Breton and Jacques Prévert – that was published in 1928. Significantly, this material was then interspersed with behind-the-scenes footage, shot on a different format, depicting the camera operators at work on the studio floor and details of activity in the control booth. At other moments, the drama is shown playing on TV sets in pubs

and family homes, apparently unobserved. This might be read as a possible allusion to the end of older forms of supposedly 'passive' viewership, the economy of which has been radically altered by multi-platform distribution in the form of DVD box sets and on-demand services.

*In Camera* (2012), by New York-based artist Liz Magic Laser, is also shot in a professional broadcast environment, but in this instance the studio serves as a space in which to critique mediatized social interaction. Devised for Malmö Konsthall, and realized in collaboration with SVT Malmö, a local station run by the Swedish public service broadcaster, *In Camera* uses the structure of television news as the basis for an adaptation of Jean-Paul Sartre's 1944 play *Huis Clos* (No Exit). Sartre's characters, who are trapped in a room, are recast in roles associated with the news – an anchorman in the SVT studio, a reporter in a public square and an interviewee depicted in a former domestic space (now a museum) – in order to critique the three-way relationship between current events, news media and the public. The multi-screen installation comprises feeds from each of these characters (all speaking English), teleprompter footage of the script and a view of the control room at SVT Malmö where Laser, who plays the role of a minor character in Sartre's play, is visible alongside the crew. The performances of the three spatially dislocated actors were shot simultaneously in a single take, retaining the gaps and glitches resulting from the routing of communications through a satellite conference call with a three-second delay.

By highlighting the role of 'crisis' in the aesthetics of TV news, and staging an exploration of hyper-mediacy in a functioning broadcast studio, Laser appears to acknowledge television's continued significance, despite its loss of cultural dominance. Both Plender's discursive platforms and the 'Auto Italia LIVE' performances also draw upon the material and social architecture of the studio to stage temporary gatherings. Nonetheless, in many of these examples, both the studio and its audience seem somehow aligned with an earlier moment.

This is apparent in works by Luke Fowler and Elizabeth Price, both exhibited as part of the Turner Prize 2012 at Tate Britain, linked by the inclusion of archive material shot in the presence of studio audiences. Fowler's 90-minute film *All Divided Selves* (2011) examines the public persona and ideas of R.D. Laing, drawing heavily on archive sources depicting various discursive and therapeutic scenarios, involving interviewees, patient and colleagues. It includes several minutes from a 1985 interview with

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Jonas Reinhardt and Pod Blotz  
on E.S.P. TV, 2012,  
video stills

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Auto Italia South East, *Auto Italia LIVE: Double Dip Concession*, 2012, live broadcast from the ICA, London, as part of the exhibition 'Remote Control'

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Katya Sander  
*Televised I: The Anchor, the I, and Studio*,  
2006, DVD still



*Nam June Paik's 1963 Wuppertal exhibition  
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the Scottish psychiatrist on the long-running RTÉ programme *The Late Late Show*, in which he was accused of drunkenness by the host, only to be staunchly defended by members of the studio audience. In some respects, this heated exchange presents the talk show as a potentially significant site of genuine public debate. Yet as Fowler's exploration of 'divided selves' unfolds, the very notion of a coherent, rational subject, underpinning the formation of the public sphere in political and philosophical discourse, becomes increasingly questionable.

Finally, in Price's *The Woolworths Choir of 1979* (2012), the audience's presence in the studio is both evoked and withheld. This work is structured around The Shangri-Las' performance of their hit 'Out on the Streets' on the TV show *Shindig* in 1965, preceded by an exploration of the design and ornamentation of church seating (assigned to the choir) and followed by footage of a fire in a Woolworths furniture store. But the clapping that greeted the band, preserved in the clips that circulate on YouTube, is hardly audible in Price's film. *The Woolworths Choir of 1979* derives much of its expressive force from its attenuation

of something very familiar: the rhythm that binds verse to chorus.

So, even as Price erases the sounds of applause, through which the studio has historically been constructed as a quasi-public site, she generates a visceral sense of expectation by repeatedly delaying and withholding the phrase 'out on the streets'. Consequently, instead of relying upon the presence of the studio audience to evoke an earlier form of sociality, Price uses the familiar structure of a pop song to communicate the force of a desire for something that cannot be specified. Yet even if the studio audience persists only in the form of an absence, explicit allusions to the material, social and institutional architecture of broadcasting remain pervasive within varied artistic practices. The gallery continues to function as an important space in which the past and future significance of television can be considered, and perhaps re-imagined. ❖

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- 1 David Joselit, 'Tale of the Tape', *Artforum*, 2002, pp. 152–7
- 2 Lynn Spigel, *TV by Design: Modern Art and the Rise of Network Television*, 2008, p. 153
- 3 Gloria Sutton, 'Playback: Reconsidering the Long Beach Museum of Art as a Media Art Center', *Exchange and Evolution: Worldwide Video Long Beach 1974–1999*, ed. Kathy Rae Huffman, Long Beach Museum of Art, 2011, pp. 120–29
- 4 Other examples in Europe include 'Changing Channels: Art and Television 1963–87', MUMOK, Vienna (2010); 'Channel TV', a collaboration between Kunstverein Harburger Bahnhof, Hamburg; centre d'art cneai, Chatou, Paris; Halle für Kunst, Lüneburg (2010–11); and 'Remote Control', ICA, London (2012)
- 5 Mary Ann Doane, 'Information, Crisis, Catastrophe', *Logics of Television*, ed. Patricia Mellencamp, BFI and Indiana University Press, London and Bloomington, 1990, pp. 222–39; and John Thornton Caldwell, *Televisuality: Style, Crisis, and Authority in American Television*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, 1995
- 6 William Kaizen, 'Live on Tape: Video, Liveness and the Immediate', *Art and the Moving Image: A Critical Reader*, ed. Tanya Leighton, Tate Publishing in Association with Afterall Books, London, 2008, p. 264
- 7 Philip Auslander, 'Liveness, Mediatized Performance and Intermediality', *Degrés: Revue de synthèse à orientation sémiologique*, no. 101, Spring 2000, pp. 1–12
8. This studio also serves as the site for Céline Condorelli's project *Additional* (2013)

Nam June Paik  
'Exposition of Music – Electronic Television',  
1963, Galerie Parnass, Wuppertal