

THE ELECTRONIC HOKKADIM at the Corcoran Gallery of Art
June 12, 1971 and broadcast over station WTOP/TV.

Television is in its infancy.

Television is in its idiocy.

Television is asleep.

Television is a sleeping idiot infant giant.

At the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis, when we were aiming our atomic bombs at Russian cities, ready to push the button that would send them relentlessly on to their targets, and the Russians were aiming their bombs at us, ready to be fired and to destroy us, what was TV doing? The talk shows and the laugh shows were going on as if this were just another day to juke and wisecrack the usual TV fare.

Had the Russian ships, after halting at the challenge of our own, pressed on instead of turning back, those buttons would have been pressed, and you and I and just about everything alive and living in a city would have been burned, incinerated and destroyed to the accompaniment of the inane TV toothpaste, suntan oil, and other commercial still insulting our intelligence.

Can this sleeping idiot infant giant ever grow up to realize at the least some of its potentials? Even though the networks and the politicians and Madison Avenue want to keep it, like Peter Pan, a little boy, the natural pressure will be just too great to stop from becoming the giant it is destined to be. One good sign is that it is now starting to teach us some truths, despite all the obstacles in truth's way.

For instance, it is teaching us that violence is destructive. The Westerns, the murder mysteries, the spy stories hide the consequence of the violence that they feature, for that would detract from their entertainment value. But the newsclips from the war in Vietnam, the scenes of police and hardhats beating up defenseless students and hippies, the National Guard shooting down unarmed students, this sort of reporting on TV that makes us realize that destruction is the consequence of violence...

TV is so intimate that no matter what the guy on the TV screen says or does, we can tell from his facial expression, for the look in his eyes, his manner of speech and other tell-tale give-aways what he really means and intends... TV thank heavens does not lend itself well to propaganda, The truth becomes apparent much too readily. This is why politicians get so upset about TV, because when they are on the screen they show themselves as they are, and not what they want the viewer to think they are. They blame the reporters, the networks, everyone and every thing except where the blame lies. That is in the medium itself.

Perhaps these have been negative considerations. There is another, a positive aspect of the potential of TV. This is the opportunity of "constructive meditation". As our own life becomes ever more hectic and confusing, our need for quiet contemplation and spiritual calm becomes greater and more urgent than ever, yet at the same time the means to achieve this become fewer and less accessible. Technology has weakened the creditability of the house of worship, pollution has diluted the will to commune with nature, and TV itself has shattered what remains of the peace and quiet of the home.

This positive aspect of TV is made possible by the development of two video synchronizers, one by Nam June Paik. The other by Eric Siegel. Though quite different in operation and in principle, these two instruments make possible the presentation on the home TV screen of programs performed by artists wherein the shapes and colors on the screen are controlled and manipulated by the performer. Both of these instruments grew out of an exhibition I mounted at my Gallery just two years ago. The title was "TV as a Creative Medium". Here are some quotes from the catalogue.

Nam June Paik: "The real issue is how to humanize the electronic medium, which is progressing rapidly ---- too rapidly, I would suggest silent TV station. This is TV station for highbrows which transmits most of time only beautiful "mood art" -- or electronic Compoz to soothe every hysteric woman through air and calm down nervous tension of every business man."

Eric Siegel: "Art is sometimes called the 'transmission ecstasy' - Because TV is transmission with ecstatic potentials, I have chosen it as my means of expression. With the knowledge I have of the electronics of television, I have tried to show some other directions broadcasting can take.

Why cannot the viewer, after a trying day, sit down at his TV set and listen to music while watching the screen burst with beautiful color displays? These visual fantasies would relax you better than any tranquilizer and that the same time give your spirit a lift. Television works through your audio-visual senses into your mind and soul. Some day it will be worthy of you."

This is the first public showing over a commercial TV station of either of these devices. They hold great promise for the future. They will be a definite contribution to the humanization of TV.

This event, the Electronic Hokkadim of Doug Davis" is the first step in making TV into a useful servant of humanity, the sleeping giant idiot infant is becoming conscious of its own posers.

This is an historic occasion.

Howard Wise
6/11/71