

ABSTRACT VIDEO

The Moving Image in Contemporary Art

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ABSTRACT TRANSMISSIONS

Other Trajectories for Feminist Video

Siona Wilson

A scholarly consensus seems to have emerged that the Korean artist and composer Nam June Paik is the formative figure for our understanding of abstraction in video art. I don't contest this, as far as such narratives go. But the art-historical investment in linear, great-name histories leaves women artists in the margins when it comes to "origins" and establishing "genealogies." In contrast, the idea of the trajectory suggested in my title is intended to be more speculative; it marks the path of a projectile that is thrown across space and time and looked back upon from a later point. The trajectory, in this account, is provisional and tentative—one among several possibilities; it is the occasion for the exploration of an apparent contradiction: how can we reconcile feminism as a social critique, typically understood as a "materialist" mode of inquiry, with the question of abstraction, its apparent philosophical antithesis? Indeed applying the problematic of abstraction to feminist video practice might seem at the outset to be a rather eccentric trajectory, since debates about representation and identity—feminism's *social* address—have typically been at the forefront of established scholarly accounts. But I begin this essay with Paik because his work provides us with an entry point, a staging of the aforementioned contradiction, with his address to questions of abstraction alongside the imaging of female sexuality. If, as we will see, the Paik example seems to establish the relationship between sexual difference and video in terms of an opposition between femininity-as-representation and abstraction-as-form, how, then, do feminist-engaged video artists address and critically displace these terms?

Right from Paik's earliest beginnings in Germany, what we now group unproblem-

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