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The *Specials* programs focus on projects by artists and curators who have some kind of connection to the Museum's programming and the MACBA Collection. To complement the exhibition *Are You Ready for TV?*, Kenneth Goldsmith rescued ten works inspired by and taken from TV.

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Curated by Kenneth Goldsmith

Kenneth Goldsmith's writing has been called 'some of the most exhaustive and beautiful collage work yet produced in poetry' by Publishers Weekly. Goldsmith is the author of ten books of poetry, founding editor of the online archive UbuWeb (ubu.com), and the editor of *I'll Be Your Mirror: The Selected Andy Warhol Interviews*, which was the basis for an opera, 'Trans-Warhol,' that premiered in Geneva in March of 2007. An hour-long documentary on his work, *Sucking on Words*, premiered at the British Library in 2007. He teaches writing at The University of Pennsylvania, where he is a senior editor of PennSound, an online poetry archive. He was The Anschutz Distinguished Fellowship in American Studies at Princeton University in 2009-10 and received the Quartz Electronic Music Award in Paris in 2009. A book of critical essays, *Uncreative Writing*, is forthcoming from Columbia University Press, as is an anthology from Northwestern University Press co-edited with Craig Dworkin, *Against Expression: An Anthology of Conceptual Writing*.

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TV ON THE RADIO #1. Script

When television collides with audio arts, a new and disconcerting soundtrack emerges, one that can only have been a product of artists swiping, sampling, détournement, recycling, remixing, and mashing-up sources emanating from the television. This show rescues ten works, inspired by and taken from TV.

01. Script

O. Intro Bed Music

This is Kenneth Goldsmith and welcome to the Ràdio Web MACBA podcast, *TV On The Radio*, which accompanies the exhibition *Are You Ready for TV?* at MACBA in Barcelona, which runs from November 5th 2010 to April 25th 2011. In the museum's exhibition, you can see what happens when the aesthetic of visual artists collides with the world of television. The results are anything but what you'd expect to see on TV. Likewise, when television collides with audio arts, a new and disconcerting soundtrack emerges, one that can only have been a product of artists swiping, sampling, détournement, recycling, remixing, and mashing-up sources emanating from the television. There's a great history of audio works mashed up, inspired by and taken from TV and we'll be listening to ten of them here. Unlike the works in the exhibition, these more ephemeral gestures travel in different ways, often reinserting themselves back into mass culture by means of mechanical reproduction, spread widely and thinly across culture. In many cases, this type of distribution has impacted back upon popular culture itself, creating an historical echo chamber. With no museum needed to reframe these works as art, the mere displacement from one medium into another creates an ecosystem unique to the recorded artifact, distinctly different than that of the visual. These works live on, perpetuating themselves in popular culture via the internet, as well as in the form of LPs, cassette tapes, CDs and MP3s.

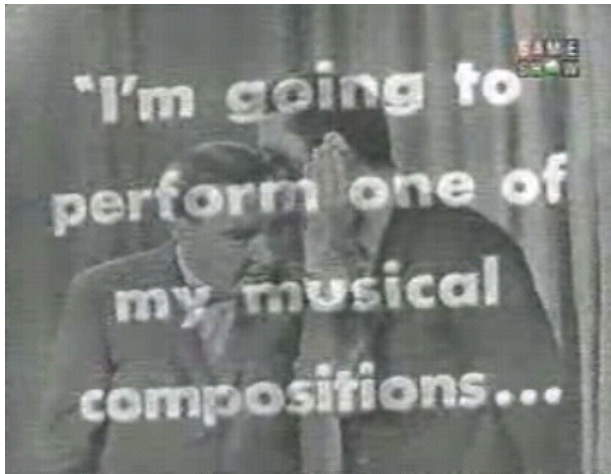
From the time that television infiltrated mainstream American culture, artists were quick to critique its hypnotic effect. In 1957, the advertising-man-turned-spoken-word-artist Ken Nordine recorded 'The Vidiot,' as part of his *Word Jazz* LP, which is a sketch of a patient in a therapists office, describing his addiction to TV, and saying he has become a vidiot. After the patient leaves the office, the therapist, stressed out after such a session himself turns on the TV to relax, enacting the contradiction that many still feel between the pleasure and entertainment of television and its obvious addictive qualities.

1. Ken Nordine 'The Vidiot' (excerpt) 1975

In 1960, John Cage made a television appearance on the popular game show *I've Got a Secret*, where in the guise of winning a contest, he sneaked in a performance of avant-garde music, which was broadcast to millions around the US, giving his music widespread exposure. In the clip, Cage appears in a suit and tie and his secret is that he's going to perform one of his musical compositions using a variety of unconventional instruments including a water pitcher, an iron pipe, a goose call, a bottle of wine, an electric mixer, a whistle, a watering can, ice cubes, two cymbals, a mechanical fish, a quail call, a rubber duck, a tape recorder, a vase of roses, a seltzer siphon, five radios, a bathtub and a grand piano. You can hear the audience titter with disbelief, wondering if it's all a big joke. And when Cage starts performing with great seriousness – spraying seltzer, turning on and off blenders, and playing the piano – the audience roars with laughter. In this cover action, Cage brings sound to television in ways it could never have been imagined.

2. John Cage 'Water Walk' from the TV show *I've Got a Secret* (excerpt, 1960)

We can think of Cage's television symphony as the musical equivalent to Nam June Paik's 1965 *Magnet TV*, where the artist placed a huge horseshoe magnet atop a black and white television, eloquently turning a space previously reserved for Jack Benny and Ed Sullivan into loopy, organic abstractions. The gesture



[John Cage appears on the TV show *I've Got a Secret* and performs his composition 'Water Walk,' 1960]

questioned the one-way flow of information: in Paik's version of TV, you could control what you saw: Spin the magnet and the image changes with it. Up to that point, television's mission was a delivery vehicle for entertainment and crystal clear communication. Yet a simple artist's gesture upended television in ways that both users and producers were unaware, opening up entirely new vocabularies for the medium while deconstructing myths of power, politics and distribution which were embedded – but hitherto invisible – in the technology. Paik's forays into sound are well documented with dozens of hours of musical compositions that were released on LP during his lifetime. One of the most infamous collaborations was with the avant-garde cellist, Charlotte Moorman, who was arrested in 1967, by two policemen during a performance of Paik's 'Opera Sextronique.' She was performing nude, as the score had dictated, before an audience of 200 invited guests. Although Mr. Paik was released from custody and not charged, Ms. Moorman was tried and convicted for partial nudity. Later, the sentence was suspended. Her TV cello was comprised of three plastic television sets stacked atop one another with strings attached to clear plastic neck. As the TVs weren't great resonators the way, say, that wood is, musically Moorman used the TV cello more as a percussive instrument than a conventional cello, slapping and banging the bow to create dull thuds and slaps, while images – often appropriated from television – played on the monitors, fusing sound, image, and performance. This is a clip from Paik's 1984 global television experiment, *Good Morning Mr. Orwell* and, interviewing Moorman, is none other than George Plimpton.

3. Charlotte Moorman plays the TV Cello (1984), interview and performance (excerpt)

While most of the world sat glued to the television watching the crew of Apollo 11 land on the moon, one artist German artist, Ferdinand Kriwet, who was in residency in the US at the time, kept his tape recorder running and continuously recorded the sound blaring from American TV during this momentous event. From hours of raw material, he stitched together a collage of thousands of newscasters' voices, media snippets, song samples, and advertisements into a 20 minute hörspiel entitled *Apollovision*. The language that he uncovers is revealing, filled with superlatives and heroism, yet subtended with the sort of nationalism and political bias that underlies all media events. The word 'moon' is repeated and looped incessantly, becoming a sort of minimalist mantra, a shorthand for the event. The sound feels typically of the period: it's monaural, staticy, with a lot of media echo; clearly it was all recorded off the TV. Kriwet was also a visual artist, concrete poet and filmmaker and he made a corresponding body of work about the moon landing, created in an identical manner in film, literary, and decoupage versions.

4. Ferdinand Kriwet *Apollovision* (1969), excerpt

Using an almost identical approach as Kriwet is the American sound artist Donald Swearingen who strings together snippets of late night television commercials – known as infomercials – into a 20-minute audio nightmare. He takes advertising pitches and cuts them up into ambiguous statements: 'Ask what you want' becomes 'Ask what you don't want.' Swearingen writes, 'The piece was created in 1990, but sounds like it could've been made yesterday and is made with all material taken directly from real television broadcasts – no fabrications, no substitutes – going directly to the heart of late night TV's message, eliminating the dead air-time and condensing the feverish text to its essence.' Anything you want: sex, money, self-esteem, God, a thin body, a full head of hair, property, beauty, an exciting lifestyle – just call 1-800 and it's yours.

5. Donald Swearingen 'Salvation at 1 AM' (1990), excerpt

In 1963, the Fluxus artist Robert Watts sat himself down in front of a television set with a tape recorder, where an interview was being screened, and decided to act as if the questions the broadcaster was asking were actually being directed at him. Instead of giving a lucid answer, Watts just started making random sounds: 'blah blah blah,' thereby muddying television's clear and transparent message. It's a gorgeous reversal of TV's one-way downstream method of communication. Although Watts sounds like a madman speaking to his TV, his *détournement* and critique of the limits of the medium are right on.



[Charlotte Moorman plays the TV Cello on Nam June Paik's television show, *Good Morning Mr. Orwell*, interviewed by George Pimpton and performance, 1984]

6. Robert Watts 'Interview' (1963)

Brian Joseph Davis is an artist whose primary medium is sound. In the tradition of fellow Torontonians John Oswald, Davis creates new works by recycling, remixing, or altering existing works. Among these are his self-descriptive project '10 Banned Albums Burned Then Played'; 'End User Licence Agreement,' an anticopyright piece in which a chorus sings the End User License Agreement as a Gregorian chant; 'Greatest Hit,' in which all the tracks on a given greatest-hits album are played on top of one another and crunched down into one single self-canceling chaotic track; and 'Yesterduh,' a misheard lyric piece in which passersby were asked to sing, from memory and with no practice, the Beatles' song 'Yesterday.'

Davis's script project 'Voice Over' comprises more than five thousand film tag lines – those short marketing slogans used to advertise commercial movies and broadcast as television ads – compiled by Davis and then performed by a professional voice-over artist. Organized by a series of constraints (e.g., numbers, gendered pronouns), each of the ten chapters adds up to an overarching fractured narrative, reminiscent of the nouveau roman.

7. Brian Joseph Davis, 'Voiceover', excerpt

In 1984, the composer Robert Ashley stated his reasons for wanting to make operas exclusively for television: 'I know a lot of people who watch television for five hours straight; I do it myself. Sometimes, I'll just sit down and watch television for five or six hours. The form of television, the thing that you're watching, has a lot of moment to moment variety. Or it doesn't. Also, you are able to impose variety on that form as a listener. But the experience is still the experience of watching television, you still watch television and listen to television for six hours. That's exactly what I'm trying to do in music, that's exactly the form I'm trying to make. [...] That is actually what I am trying to do in music. You know, if you go to a concert hall, to sit in those fucking chairs for more than an hour and a half is torture. Whereas with television, you watch it from bed with a remote control. So if people could get into bed and listen to my music, they would be very happy. The only way I've figured out to do that is to put it on TV. I wouldn't sit in a concert hall for six hours myself. My idea of my music is to jump in bed, with whatever you like to be in bed with, drinks and whatever, there's the music is coming out of the TV, and you watch it for six hours, or three hours. You can't do that in a concert hall or on records. You see, I don't know anybody who watches television for three minutes. People who watch television literally watch it for a long time, there's no such thing as a three-minute television watcher. You can do a half an hour without even taking a breath.'

The odd thing is that Ashley, unlike most of what we've been hearing, doesn't use either sounds recorded off of television nor does he transcribe television dialogue. All of the language is written by the composer and all of the music is original. Instead, he tries to get the ambience and the feeling of television – drifty, focus coming in and out, paying intermittent attention – in his compositions. There's also a sense of narrative and character development that could almost pass for a soap opera, but a chopped-up one, that would never have a chance of being aired on prime time. Here's an excerpt from his *Perfect Lives: An Opera for Television* and a section called 'The Bar (Differences)' from 1984.

8. Robert Ashley, 'Perfect Lives: An Opera for Television, The Bar (Differences)', 1984, excerpt.

In 1959, the poet Brion Gysin invented the cut-up. Here's how William S. Burroughs proposes it's done: 'The method is simple. Here is one way to do it. Take a page. Like this page. Now cut down the middle and across the middle. You have four sections: 1 2 3 4... one two three four. Now rearrange the sections placing section four with section one and section two with section three. And you have a new page. Sometimes it says much the same thing. Sometimes something quite different – cutting up political speeches is an interesting exercise – in any case you will find that it says some- thing and something quite definite.' Burroughs himself applied the cut-up technique not only to film but to radio, film and television. A piece, *Present Time Exercises*, recorded in 1971 uses Burroughs' own voice as a source, as well as the static sound of radio and



[Robert Ashley, 'Perfect Lives: An Opera for Television, The Bar (Differences)', 1984]

television broadcasts. To make this short piece, he spliced together tapes of source material and re-edited it into an audio version of a cut-up while he was living in the famous Beat Hotel in Paris. Since the idea of the cut-up is to obscure the idea of coherency, it's hard to tell which sources derive from where. In this jumbled landscape, television voices meld with radio and with the author's.

9. William S. Burroughs *Present Time Exercises* (1971)

In 1998, the American CBS news anchorman Dan Rather was quoted as saying, 'Editing can alter the original meaning and context, and computers can alter the image itself. The camera can also be manipulated. At the very least, it must be turned in one direction – only one direction at a time... Who chooses what direction to point the camera, and why?' The American-based Evolution Control Committee, consisting mainly of the composer Mark Gunderson, took Rather's words to heart and edited his words into a 5-minute powerhouse of a song called 'Rocked By Rape.' Driven by an AC-DC guitar sample, it presents the anchorman as giving us bad news and only bad news. It's a mind-numbing onslaught, which reveals how focused media reportage is on negative news – deaths and disasters – in order to retain viewership. The piece, which spread rapidly through the internet, was so popular that CBS issued a cease and desist on it to Gunderson, who responded that his composition was legal by virtue of parodic and fair use. There was a great outpouring of public support for Gunderson's position and the right for artists' to sample freely under the law that CBS dropped the charges, resulting in a great victory for free culture. This is an excerpt of 'Rocked by Rape,' by the Evolution Control Committee.

10. The Evolution Control Committee 'Rocked by Rape' (2002), excerpt.

This has been a Ràdio Web MACBA podcast, *TV on the Radio*, which accompanies the exhibition *Are You Ready for TV?* at MACBA in Barcelona, which runs from November 5th 2010 to April 25th 2011. I'm Kenneth Goldsmith. Thanks for listening.

02. Credits

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03. Licence

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