

No. 2

JAIME DAVIDOVICH
*DR. VIDEOVICH:
ART, EDUCATION
AND EMANCIPA-
TORY POLITICS*

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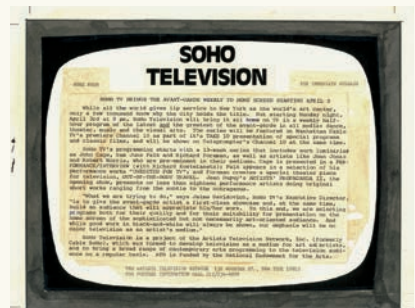
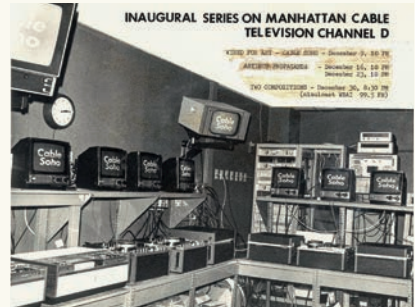
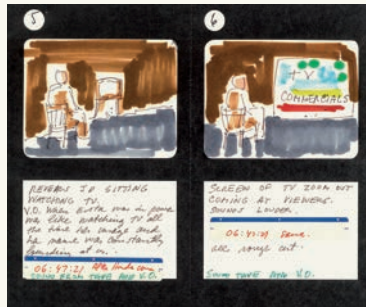
Works

Evita Storyboard, 1989 (vignettes #1, #2, #3, #4, #5, #6, #7, #8); *Dr. Videovich*, 1980; *Cable Soho*, 1976; *Soho Television Mock Up #2*, 1976; *Soho Television Mock Up*, 1976; *Tape Projects, Collage Adhesive*, 70s; *Tape Projects, Collage Adhesive*, 70s; *Warehouse Project: Taiwan, Collage Adhesive*, 1974; *Al gran pueblo argentino salud*, 1973; *Tape White Projects Waterproof, White Tape and Ligth Blue Scotch Tape and Tape Vinyl*; *The Live! Show Vignette, Jaime Davidovich The Live! Show and The Live! Show Set*, 1978–1984

Text by

Álvaro de los Ángeles

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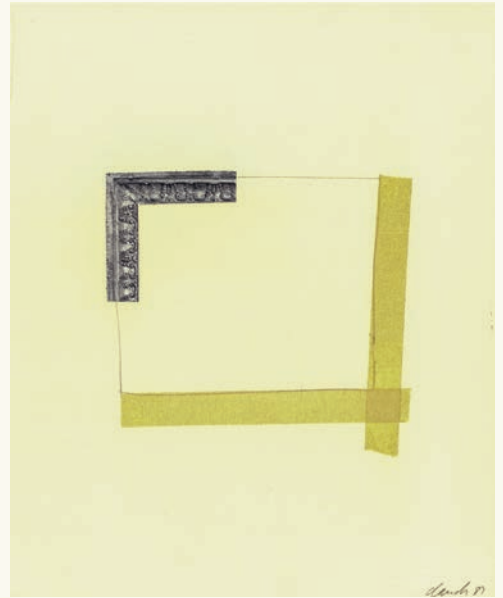


Evita Storyboard, 1989
 (vignettes #1, #2, #3, #4, #5, #6, #7, #8)

Dr. Videovich, 1980; Cable Soho, 1976;
 Soho Television Mock Up #2, 1976; Soho Television
 Mock Up, 1976



Collage Adhesive Tape Projects, 70s



*Collage Tape Projects, 70s;
Warehouse Project: Taiwan, 1974*

Álvaro de los Ángeles

DR. VIDEOVICH: ART, EDUCATION AND EMANCIPATORY POLITICS

In his essay *The Tenth Muse*, the art historian Herbert Read made a concise and insightful analysis of the reality of modern art in the 1950s, arguing that “the work of art is essentially a symbol and no longer a sign,” inasmuch as a sign can be understood while a symbol has to be explained. Later on, the symbol would hand over the baton to allegory, venturing further along the path of referential complexity between the represented object and the observer of said object, thus engendering more specialized pundits and a sophisticated evolution of visuality, although it would also induce a troublesome loss of social muscle and spread a blanket of suspicion over experimental art in the eyes of the wider public. In this new phase, it was of pressing urgency to know through extra-artistic means (“extra-photographic”, in the words of Johan Swinnen) what images and forms actually meant, because they might end up “mute, remaining in absolute silence” if they are put into circulation without a context, lacking in educational clarification and expressed in an excessively cryptic language.

Read’s irrefutable contribution to contemporary art was to show that artistic practice is always one step ahead of critical analysis and, it goes without saying, of art history, which are enlisted to certify changes that have already taken place but never to guide a real aesthetic transformation that they have created themselves. Given that the works made by certain artists after the Second World War started to look within themselves for what had collapsed in ruins outside, it is only logical to believe that, as Read presaged, a new language was required to describe new forms. Put another way, that the words said and written up until that point in time were unable to give a true,



AL GRAN PUEBLO ARGENTINO SALUD, 1973: #1. TAPE WHITE VINYL WATERPROOF, BRONZE



AL GRAN PUEBLO ARGENTINO SALUD, 1973: #2. TAPE WHITE AND LGB BLUE SCOTCH TAPE, VINYL, 1973



AL GRAN PUEBLO ARGENTINO SALUD, 1973: #3. TAPE VINYL, 1973

*Al gran pueblo argentino salud, 1973:
Tape White Vinyl Waterproof, White Tape and
Light Blue Scotch Tape and Tape vinyl*

and not even descriptive definition of the most challenging and innovative art, and so it was necessary to invent them. As such, it seems logical that the post-war vanguard flourished in the USA, and more specifically in New York, as it had been less devastated by the war—at least physically—than Europe. And it is at this juncture that Jaime Davidovich meets Herbert

Read, both literally and figuratively.

Personal history can never be extricated from collective history. When Davidovich travelled to the US for a congress in 1963, he had initially planned to stay just three weeks, but the coup that took place in Argentina reduced to pure future nostalgia what was just beginning to be implemented as an innovative reality in the country's art education. This fact completely overturned the artist's situation and he embraced New York as the place where he would adopt another self, and which he would never leave, except for a few brief sojourns in other US cities. The key question underpinning Davidovich's work, analysed with the perspective afforded by time, is the pedagogic and transformative component predicated on an evident educational vocation and which ties in with the mass media, that other pole for the diffusion of shared knowledge, though generally ill-fated thanks to the unbridled use of its built-in spectacular component. Television emerges as an object and as a tool, which is to say, as an artistic element that is intervened, and as an affective instrument for real change in the way of seeing and understanding the socio-political context within the reach of the majority. For Davidovich, this situation is merely the logical derivation of a series of actions that intertwines a particular desire for an encounter with the self and another more general desire that pursues an encounter with others. A weft with small tight knots whose main goal is to be made with new materials, in places outside the usual artistic context and with the ambition to reach a much wider audience.

Davidovich's output with duct tape is vast and open to manifold readings. In some video pieces, like *Blue, Red, Yellow* (1974), the TV screen is completely covered with monochrome horizontal

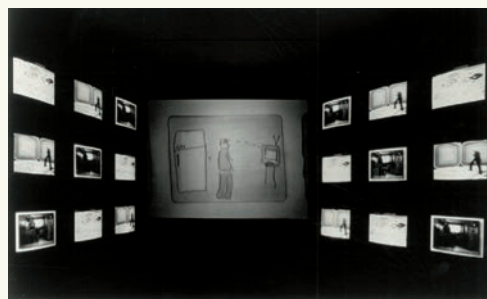
lines as it simply emits the typical white noise associated with non-transmission. This twofold quality of a television which is turned on but not tuned in to any channel asks us questions about the apparatus as a passive subject and, also, as a neutral object that can adopt different ideological stances. The use of the three primary colours (characteristic of colour addition) instead of the three colours generated by the video image (associated with subtractive light), together with the manual placement of the tape and its wonderfully imperfect result, means that this work can be viewed as a painterly action as much as video graphics. The use of tape as a complex material in its own right took on different guises. On TV screens, on large walls, as a curtain in the stairwell or in small pieces on paper or cardboard (which acted as sketches for later spatial interventions or as artworks in their own right), this material is used to cover surfaces or mask billboards. However, it does not aspire to annul what it is covering over, rather it strives to create another body that enables a reflection on what is covered and on what could possibly emerge after having covered the original, almost as if suggesting a *tabula rasa* from which one can imagine new ways of acting publically.

Adhesive tape gave way to magnetic tape, as the artist himself said, and from there it was just a logical step to television production, though far removed from what the artists of the time were doing. While some pieces combine the presence of both tapes, others respond to the canons of video art of the time (simple scenes, repeated gestures, basic camera movements, minimalism), with the difference that Davidovich remained true to the medium and did not use super-8 film, maintaining his belief in the format and in diffusion through video's native channels, instead of falling back on canonical spaces of art, as in the case of *Road* (1972), *Two Windows* (1975), *Surveillance* or *Interior* (1976) among others. There is also room for more overtly political pieces, for instance *La patria vacía* (1975) or *Evita* (1984), in which the artist reflects on Argentina's recent past and the traumas rooted in the country's oligarchic and/or dictatorial processes. The transition between the use of video

as a complete format and television as a universe in itself took place in the 1980s with *The Live!*

Show project.

The incipient technology of cable television channels meant, for Davidovich, the fusion between the use of a medium which includes the free creation proportioned by art and the amplified diffusion proper to the mass media. This proved the ideal territory to stage a return to pedagogy within his production through Dr. Videovich, an *alter ego* part TV psychoanalyst and part art broadcaster, which foreshadowed a lot of later practices developed by the use of Internet but which, above all else, poses the transcendental question of emancipation. If art is a medium able to transform society or at least our surrounding environs, it seems as if this transformation can only happen from the full consciousness of its free use, aimed at people who, at once, can only receive it and understand it equally freely. An emancipatory *quid pro quo*.



Jaime Davidovich

The Live! Show

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