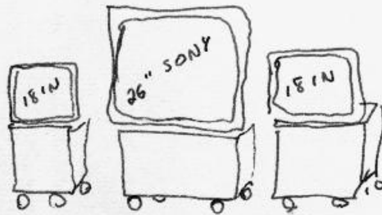
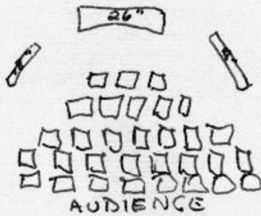
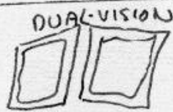
John Dorr. Study for a video screening room, ca. 1978. EZTV Video Collection, ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives, University of Southern California Libraries.







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"Out to See Video": EZTV's Queer Microcinema in West Hollywood

JULIA BRYAN-WILSON

"We do not go out to see video," wrote Douglas Davis in his 1977 account of the distinction between "filmgoing" and "videogoing."[1] According to Davis, the difference between film and video pivots on their divergent methods of circulation and reception. Spectators consume film as a collective "formal occasion" to be witnessed start-to-finish outside the home, while video offers a quasi-televisual "private occasion" that does not require a special cinematic environment.[2] Though Davis's false binary was being dismantled even as he was writing, venues for screening narrative, event-based video were in fact few in the late 1970s, and opportunities to "go out to see video" were hence scant.

This article takes up the unintentional double entendre in Davis's formulation, tracing the institutional history of an "out" queer space—EZTV, the earliest known video theater in the United States—that was founded in West Hollywood to host communal evenings of viewing that were akin to watching independent film and were meant to resist the more distracted, isolated brand of video-going pervasive in museums and galleries.[3] I situate this video theater within a shifting landscape of greater Los Angeles, extending David E. James's statement that "avant-garde cinemas take place" by considering the importance of location for EZTV's do-it-yourself video productions and screenings. As James continues, "Existing geographically as well as historically, they emerge from, occupy, and articulate specific spatialities."[4] In the case of EZTV, this "specific spatiality" was not only geographic but social—an "out" gathering space that included sharing skills, creating alternative representational practices, building communities, and fostering desire.

Along with the local roots of "expanded cinema" (first circulated by Gene Youngblood in a series of articles in the *Los Angeles Free Press*), Los Angeles also has a long history of queer underground film, from Kenneth Anger's influential work to the surge of gay male porn theaters in the 1970s.[5] EZTV emerged within these multiple milieus, but it took a divergent path, as it promoted independent video more or less regardless of its content, consolidated production and reception in one location, and welcomed amateurs and professionals alike. EZTV also never explicitly

labeled itself gay or queer, which is likely why the microcinema (later a crucial site for HIV/AIDS activism in Southern California) is not well-known within accounts of queer video.[6] Recounting the history of EZTV is not undertaken merely to add a new chapter to the story of expanded cinematic/alternative video practices but to suggest that this kind of collectively viewed video meant to operate as a queer mechanism of incorporation, forming and re-forming tentative and temporary publics, an incorporation that was in an oblique dialogue with the literal incorporation of West Hollywood and its consolidation and marketing as a gay-male "creative" city in the 1980s.

KGAY: Closed Circuit from West Hollywood

In 1978, queer artist and screenwriter John Dorr had an idea: to inaugurate a facility in West Hollywood dedicated to showing local, independent video—a space that would become a pioneering microcinema, one of the first of its kind (gay or straight).[7] He envisioned this site as "a production and marketing corps for independent video makers," as well as a screening room that would facilitate public viewings.[8] The screening room, however, was not typical for the feature-length works he envisioned showing. Preliminary sketches from Dorr's notebooks detail his first thoughts about how such a site might operate, given that portable video projection technologies were not yet commercially available—the tapes would be shown on small, bulky television monitors. Artists such as Peter Campus had been using cathode-ray tube projections in video installations in the early 1970s, but such equipment hit the market for a wider audience only in 1982.[9] In a drawing from his notebooks, Dorr outlines three separate arrangements of screens and spectators in a plan that accommodates diverse monitor sizes as well as expands to include variable audiences.

At the top, Dorr envisions monitors on wheels that can be moved around during the screening to provide a novel, flexible understanding of how feature-length videos could be viewed, moving them away from flickering images contained inside static furniture and instead utilizing the monitors themselves as roving agents that are activated during specific scenes. This malleability of screening systems was considered one innovative effect of video's adaptable technological apparatuses in the wake of Youngblood's notion of "expanded cinema."[10] On the bottom of this page, a proposal for a dual-monitor viewing system suggests that Dorr understood that the screens might rotate or shift in relationship not only to each other, but also to the pictures they displayed. Though projection in both film and video had been experimented with for over a decade as a way to reshape the screen/image/audience encounter—including such iconic

examples as Stan VanDerBeek's *Movie-Drome* (1963–1965) or Andy Warhol's Exploding Plastic Inevitable (1966–1967)—what Dorr proposed differs from these examples. Rather than phenomenological explorations or immersive environments that challenged linear filmic conventions, Dorr wanted to show narrative feature videos meant be viewed in their entirety.[11]

Dorr's proposed mobile configuration was, in 1978, a somewhat unconventional spatial proposal for viewing video. Museums that screened videos usually invited spectators to sit on benches in the middle of a gallery space or, more frequently, to stand while watching and leave when their attention waned.[12] Video was not commonly treated as a mobile unit or surrogate performer that could be shuffled around or choreographed during different points in the image flow; rather, it acted as a fixed sculpture carefully emplaced in relationship to other visual elements. Within a gallery context, the monitor's rectilinear face suggested its continuity with wall-based work—one more frame among others. Even when placed on a cart with casters, the equipment was usually tethered in place by its nest of cords, not steered around. By contrast, "each monitor can be moved around—*during* a scene," wrote Dorr on the drawing, and "rotate monitors during a scene," emphasizing that the screens would be set in motion rather than remain a bank of frozen hardware.

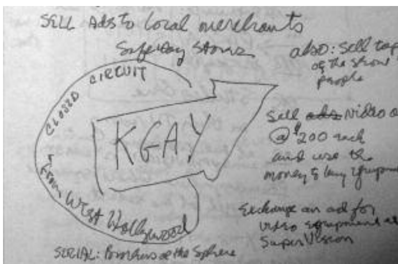
Present in Dorr's sketch is a desire to break from conventional understandings about how video should be seen—and what kinds of spectatorial communities it might foster. If, as is often asserted, "video is now a primary tool in the construction of social space," how might one unpack the different corporeal, political, and economic registers of this social space?[13] Portable video equipment had been available to artists since the 1960s—and marketed especially for artistic use, with an emphasis on the "mobility" and flexibility of production.[14] Artists' videos were integrated into museum shows almost immediately, sometimes featuring multiple monitors in sculptural arrangements (an aesthetic deployed most prominently by the so-called father of video art, Nam June Paik).[15] The configurations Dorr proposes, however, depart from those models: here the viewing space would enwrap the audience on three sides with a series of different size monitors on casters that, ideally, would be moved during a scene. Rather than walking by or around the screen as in a gallery space, the audience in Dorr's drawing sits in individual chairs (indicated by the grid of small squares). In an inversion of the usual dynamic, the monitors reposition themselves, while the audience is fixed. This is, in part, a cinematic or theatrical model rather than a video art one, with an audience clustered together and seated for a durational event rather than ambulating through a gallery installation that might include multiple monitors.

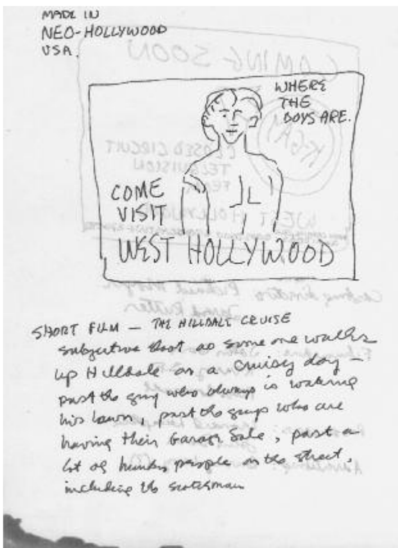
Dorr initially called this imagined space VideoVisions and doodled an accompanying logo featuring dual monitors from which a pair of eyes stare at the viewer: “VideoVisions wants you! Return the visual arts to the ARTISTS! Depose the Hollywood suck-pigs.” Dorr explicitly aligns his video screening space with the visual arts and as a direct counter to the hegemonic Hollywood film industry “suck-pigs,” a common trope in the West Coast countercultural video movement of the 1960s and 1970s.[16] A sketch from the same journals retools the crude VideoVisions logo into something more matter-of-factly queer—KGAY, a name that suggests a queer television channel or radio frequency, the letters emblazoned inside a blocky arrow and encircled by an accompanying slogan, “Closed Circuit from West Hollywood.” Dorr used the margins of the same page to brainstorm ways to make KGAY a financially viable enterprise, including “sell ads to local merchants,” “sell tapes of the shows to people,” and “exchange an ad for video equipment.” With his schedule for two nightly showings at fixed intervals and plans for intermissions, he clearly was eyeing the cinematic, if not theatrical, show-time traditions of Davis’s “formal occasions.”

Top: John Dorr. Notes on KGAY, ca. 1978. Detail. EZTV Video Collection, ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives, University of Southern California Libraries.

Center: John Dorr. Notes on *The Hilldale Cruise*, ca. 1978. EZTV Video Collection, ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives, University of Southern California Libraries.

Bottom: John Dorr. Artwork for an unrealized project “The Cruising Game,” ca. 1979. EZTV Video Collection, ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives, University of Southern California Libraries.





On another page, a further slogan appears: “Come Visit West Hollywood/Where the Boys Are.” Explicitly framing his project through the lens of queer space, Dorr here firmly locates his video microcinema in a particular location—West Hollywood, which was then just becoming what it is today, a Southern California site strongly associated with gay men. Dorr’s slogan includes a sketch of a man with tousled hair and chiseled chest muscles contained within the outline of a monitor, as if it is a screenshot of a televised ad. From the outset the center was meant to function both as a place to watch videos and a meeting point for gay male spectators, as Dorr invents a slogan that suggests not only media production but also imagines it as a neighborhood hub for queer cruising. Under this drawing, Dorr jotted down notes for a short film that takes cruising as its focal point. Called *The Hilldale Cruise*, the imagined piece would be a “subjective short as someone walks up Hilldale on a cruisy [*sic*] day, past the guy who always is watering his lawn, past the guys who are having their Garage Sale.” The short would capture the peripatetic wanderings of an unnamed protagonist as he has erotically charged chance encounters with the many gay men of a residential street in West Hollywood. When displayed for a largely queer audience who are also there to meet and mingle, the screening room would become the final stop of his “cruisy” tour. In the late 1970s, Dorr’s imaginative engine was fueled by the possibilities created when new technologies met

queer sociability, especially gay male sex. Dorr brainstormed plans for a game show featuring "hunky cruisers" called "The Cruising Game" (though the telephone number at the bottom of this drawing indicates that he was ready to start casting for the pilot, the project was never realized) and imagined a "video sex magazine exchange club" in which members would swap their homemade porn tapes.

As with the name "VideoVisions," Dorr's catchy moniker KGAY did not last—he eventually settled on EZTV, because it suggested "easy-to-make television," even though "TV" was a misleading shorthand, as EZTV was not in the end a broadcasting or televisual initiative.[17] In 1979, Dorr inaugurated screenings of independent videos at the West Hollywood Community Center and showed a range of locally produced media, including everything from fictional features to abstract formal experiments. This periodic colonization of a neighborhood space had its advantages and disadvantages. Though the community center had ample seating, the municipal nature of the building might limit the amount of sexually explicit material that could be shown. Ultimately, the screenings were such a success that Dorr realized he needed a permanent location, and, after inhabiting other sites, in 1983 he opened the full-time EZTV Video Center, expanding to a nearby strip mall on Santa Monica Boulevard, the main thoroughfare of West Hollywood, about a block west of La Cienega.

EZTV was widely considered "America's first video theater." *Variety* wrote, "EZTV has established itself as *the* showcase outlet for feature length independent productions shot entirely on tape."[18] Dorr elaborated, "We are perhaps the first full-time space to offer a public outlet for the new body of work made possible by the revolution in low-cost video production."[19] EZTV also rented equipment and provided editing assistance for any self-declared media-makers and encouraged every manner of independent production—they had a "policy of no policy."[20] From the outset, EZTV was run and operated by a core membership group of about twenty people, mostly gay men (as the early name KGAY indicates) but also including lesbians and a handful of straight men and women, as well as encompassing many other axes of diversity. People of color were central

Top: James Williams. Flyer for EZTV, 1983. EZTV Video Collection, ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives, University of Southern California Libraries.

Bottom: Storefront of EZTV Video Center, 8547 Santa Monica Boulevard, as seen in video footage of the unveiling of the West Hollywood sign, 1986. Still from video by Freeples. EZTV Video Collection, ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives, University of Southern California Libraries.

to every level of the organization, including James Williams (an openly gay African American photographer and video-maker who served as EZTV's first curator of wall art) and Robert Hernandez (an out Chicano video artist who was one of EZTV's early directors and a main funder).

Members of EZTV such as Tim Taylor were also at the forefront of confronting issues of physical ability and able-bodiedness. Taylor typed and painted with his feet due to childhood polio and made videos about disability. EZTV's largely queer membership was not necessarily by design or part of its stated agenda, as it never marketed itself as "a queer video space"—rather, it reflected the makeup of its immediate locale. By furnishing low-cost technical support and an active audience, it became a preeminent early laboratory for queer video. (Many of the tapes created in the first years of EZTV have not survived.)[21] However, a crucial aspect for its members was the fact that EZTV was not "identity based," as so many other independent art spaces were defining themselves in the late 1970s. Despite the heavy presence of queer artists, the microcinema's only self-definition was, according to one member, "the love of video and of artistic independence."[22]

"Who Needs Hollywood!"

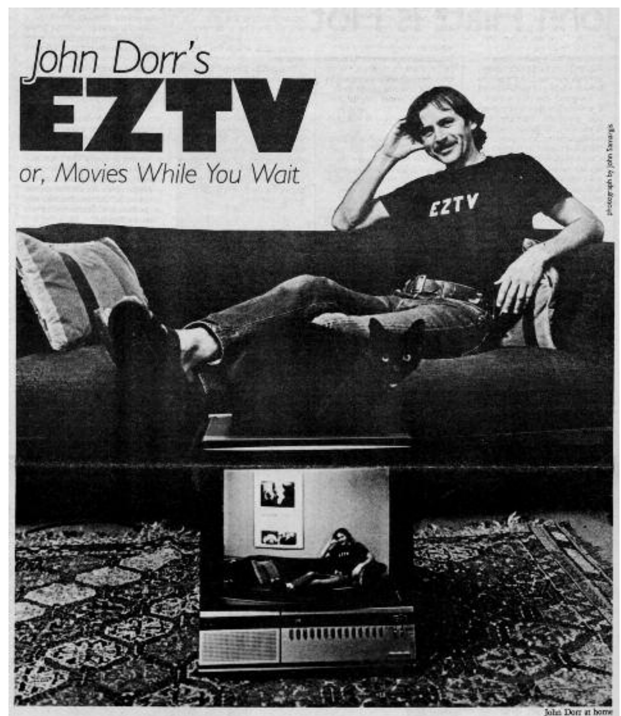
EZTV's dedicated storefront included a small gallery, postproduction facilities that included editing suites, a studio for shooting with enough room to build small sets, and a screening room that sat up to forty (later expanded to one hundred), with lightweight chairs clustered around three monitors in a close approximation to Dorr's original sketches. In the end, Dorr's fantasy sketch of an intimate video spectatorship with mobile monitors was only partially realized. Several monitors were present, but, succumbing to technical limitations, they were stationed on pedestals—one in the front and two on the side—rigged to show the same image at the same time to maximize visibility no matter the position of the chairs and to partially enfold the viewers. In defiance of the reigning museum/gallery model for watching video art (in which work is looped and viewers wander in at random and catch what they can), EZTV screenings usually followed defined event structures. Evening programs generally started with shorts, followed by a feature (as with a movie, tickets were sold, usually costing a few dollars). Beginning in 1984, an opening montage designed by Mark Shepard preceded the screenings, bracketing whatever was shown as an EZTV experience. In the montage, the EZTV logo floats atop a variety of backgrounds, spliced together with incongruous clips from EZTV productions, while fast-cutting clips highlight the process of video production (hands push editing deck buttons or slide video cassettes into receptive slots).

EZTV insisted that it resisted the atomized model of viewing

promoted by places such as the Long Beach Museum of Art, which was at that time the premiere institution for video art in the United States and was located some thirty miles south of West Hollywood.[23] Dorr and others in EZTV perceived the institutionalized "Long Beach model" as offering a limited, conservative view of the potential of video, because the museum space was best suited to short tapes that could be consumed by gallerygoers in a relatively brief amount of time, a method of viewership more aligned with looking at sculpture than watching a feature-length film.[24]

Far from opposing one another, however, EZTV and the Long Beach Museum can both be seen to partake of a postminimal rhetoric of video, in particular how it has been associated with the destabilization of a fixed, removed cinematic spectator. In her introduction to the exhibition *Into the Light*, on projected film and video in the 1960s and 1970s, Chrissie Ilses writes, "Building on Minimalism's phenomenological approach, the darkened gallery's space invites participation, movement, the sharing of multiple viewpoints, the dismantling of the single frontal screen, and an analytical, distanced form of viewer."[25] A photograph from a Los Angeles publication in 1982 shows the more casual, even quasi-domestic space that EZTV meant to promote, with Dorr pictured at home wearing an EZTV T-shirt lounging on a couch, with his cat on the video monitor on the ground (reflexively, the monitor shows a version of the photo in which it is depicted). This scene of staged coziness is meant to measure Dorr's desired distance from the "white cube" viewing experience.

Key to EZTV's viewing structure was the fact that the audience was gathered together for a set duration. By taking monitors out of the home and making the viewing collective, one "went out" to see EZTV's video and hence defied the prevailing wisdom about what happens to social relations when watching small screens. Jerry Mander's popular book from 1978, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television*, asserts, "Television encourages separation: people from community, people from each other, people from themselves, creating more buying units and discouraging organized opposition to the system. It creates surrogate community: itself."[26] For Dorr and others at EZTV, however, the group dynamic of attentive watchers and a common experience in front of the screen was crucial to their understanding that video brought people together to occupy shared space and create new



"John Dorr at home." Detail of page from the *Los Angeles Reader*, April 23, 1982. Article by Mitch Tuchman and photo by John Samargis.

spectatorial dynamics. Its screenings drew devoted audiences, which frequently consisted largely of other independent media-makers. One of EZTV's most important functions was actively cultivating and summoning into existence an ever-changing community of viewers by creating a feedback circuit in which the work that was shown influenced the work that was made on-site. Many of the tapes shown during EZTV screenings were produced in its facilities. The venue's rare combination of on-site editing and in-house screening made that feedback circuit at times very small, as work cycled quickly between the upstairs editing area and the downstairs theater area.

In its promotional materials, EZTV heralded a do-it-yourself approach to media-making that was meant to reject the high-gloss products of Hollywood, as in Nina Rota's documentary about Dorr titled *Who Needs Hollywood!* "All you need to make a movie is a video camera. John Dorr figured that out in 1979." A promotional postcard for the documentary features a photo from the *Los Angeles Times* of Dorr standing in front of the neon EZTV storefront sign with his camera pointing out at the audience as an implicit challenge to reject teams of editors, postproduction managers, and script-by-committee, embracing instead the scrappy ethos of single-camera work (EZTV rented out cameras at low cost). EZTV understood itself as expansive and pluralistic in its attempt to open up access to the video production process. However, as much as it dismissed Hollywood, it was also vitally physically adjacent to the culture industry in Hollywood and parasitically utilized some of its surplus resources. Film crews would come to EZTV after hours to make their own work and share skills. As one former member recalls, "some of Hollywood's most hard-working character actors as well as producers, writers, and directors made EZTV their affordable creative haven."[27] Dorr noted that "equipment came in miraculously," often through donation, as those involved in film production on all levels came to EZTV to make their own work after-hours.[28]

In many ways, EZTV picked up and fed off of the resources of Hollywood; its relationship to mainstream media was not strictly counter- or anti-institutional but rather oppositional in the way that so much oppositionality is really about symbiosis. Who needs Hollywood? They did: Hollywood had to exist, symbolically but also materially, with its overproduction of talent and skill, to enable the growth of something like EZTV, which drafted off Hollywood workers' excess time and cast-off equipment. Los Angeles is not just a company town with a monolithic movie culture and a singular art scene: its vastness and unruliness have made it an incubator for alternative modes of making that take advantage of proximity to the resources, publicity machines, labor, and rejects of mainstream media. Video-makers affiliated

with EZTV were able to mobilize the talents, expertise, and abilities of underemployed Hollywood editors, technicians, camera operators, and actors.

Featuring Features

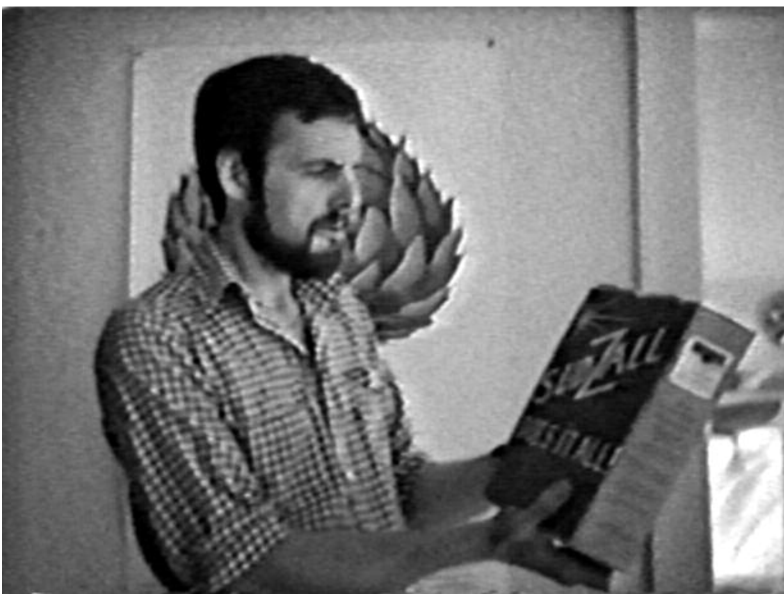
As one of the country's first screening venue dedicated solely to video, ETZV was heralded by the national and local press as at the forefront of experimental independent media.[29] What was experimental about their work, however, was not always strictly formal, as it was often patterned on the systems of representation found in industrial cinema. In *Who Needs Hollywood!* EZTV narrates itself as being in the business of "movies," an anomalous term for artists working with video in the late 1970s and 1980s, especially since so much contemporaneous video was explicitly constructed against the storytelling conventions of televisual culture and "movies."[30] By contrast, what Dorr championed, and what he himself made, was more overtly in dialogue with the gay plot-driven cinema of someone like John Waters (who also emerged in the 1970s), with his stylized, melodramatic thematizations of shock and schlock, than with video art. When interviewing Dorr in 1984, Rick Pamplin attempts to clarify the muddled terminology surrounding feature-length videos, saying, "I keep calling them films. Is there a term? Do you just call them video films?"[31] Dorr answered that he prefers the blanket term *movies*, which takes medium out of consideration and foregrounds the feature-length duration (it was more common to refer to work as "tapes" to maintain the discursive and technical distinctions between filmic and video practices).[32]

From the outset, works made and screened at EZTV had a relationship to the queer aesthetics of camp. Dorr, who had attended film school and worked in film production, never positioned himself as anti-film but rather believed in the promise of popularization that has accompanied video technology since its inception—what Martha Rosler calls its "utopian moment"—not as a new form of television but as a cheap surrogate or accessible sub-

Postcard announcement for Nina Rota, dir., *Who Needs Hollywood! The Story of Video Pioneer John Dorr and EZTV*, 2000.

stitute for film.[33] Part of what drew Dorr to found EZTV was the promise of creative freedom: he had been burned by "Hollywood's rejection of the queer subtext of his early scripts."[34] Dorr's first video, *Sudzall Does It All*, from 1979, premiered at the Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art (LAICA) but was formative to the EZTV identity and has been claimed by EZTV to be the first foray into feature-length narrative video by anyone, anywhere.[35] (However, Ed Bowes made his 120-minute black-and-white narrative video *Romance* in 1976.)[36] *Sudzall Does It All* was shot in two days using a borrowed black-and-white security camera from a bank where a friend of Dorr's was employed. Working with a script for a play he was in the midst of developing, Dorr realized he could easily tape the scenes using the camera, which was good for low-light situations such as moody interiors.

Finessing the limitations of this somewhat crude technology, Dorr recorded the video onto a Betamax deck in sequence, using the pause button to edit scenes. He created detailed storyboards for each scene, trying to minimize the cuts he made by filming in long stretches with continuous action, since each edit broke up the image considerably. Alex Donis notes that *Sudzall* was made with "no retakes. No sound dubbing. No postproduction."[37] Dorr estimated it cost about fifty dollars to make. The technology was raw, and the final product was explicitly vamped, with an arch, overacted tone and the claustrophobic feel of a staged theatrical production. An aspiring actress in the Los Angeles suburbs named Cordelia Coventry, played by Irene Roseen, dreams of playing Shakespeare but is sucked into fame by becoming the spokesperson for a toxic multipurpose cleanser, Sudzall. As with many independent Los Angeles film and video productions, in *Sudzall*, the celebrity industry itself takes a star turn: Cordelia's ambitions are often seen through Dorr's video-within-a-video device as what is on the television screen merges with the story. And the station identification that Dorr has created reflects his



notebooks: the fictional KGAY 83 West Hollywood. Appropriating the rhetoric of advertising, the cleaner is personified as menacing yet comical, one that encapsulates manipulative advertising and in the process exposes hollow consumerist promises.

Though the use of the aesthetic of surveillance technologies to comment on the ubiquity of corporate and state control is now commonplace, Dorr used an observation camera more for expediency's sake than for any ideological purpose. Nonetheless, a grainy look is integral to *Sudzall*'s aesthetic, with its somewhat dissolved surfaces and the sense that we are peering into private space. Even though it is not focused on a same-sex encounter, its camp elements, along with its burlesquing of standard heterosexual marriage, queer the movie.[38] Described in Dorr's script as "the perfect, typical, middle-American housewife," Cordelia is tensely positioned against her husband, who is irritated that the director of the Sudzall commercial interferes with her housewifely activities, such as grocery shopping.[39]

Running about ninety minutes, *Sudzall Does It All* was intentionally a feature whose ideal viewers would be gathered together as a provisional public. This narrative "video film" (to use Pamplin's phrase) emphasizes that EZTV members understood "movies" not only as distinct from much video art but from experimental cable-access television meant to be seen at home—it demanded incorporative, that is, collective, united, in-the-flesh viewing. Such "movies" were also categorically different from video art narratives such as Arthur Ginsberg's *The Continuing Story of Carel and Ferd* (1970–1975), which was originally meant to be seen in a museum or gallery setting. After *Sudzall*, Dorr bought some color cameras and more equipment and made several more features (until the business of running EZTV began to take most of his time), including his epic on Dorothy Parker and her bisexual husband Alan Campbell, *Dorothy and Alan at Norma Place*. *Dorothy and Alan* was the first movie shown at the

Opposite: John Dorr. *Sudzall Does It All*, 1979. Still from video. EZTV Video Collection, ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives, University of Southern California Libraries.

Below: John Dorr. *Sudzall Does It All*, 1979. Still from video. EZTV Video Collection, ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives, University of Southern California Libraries.

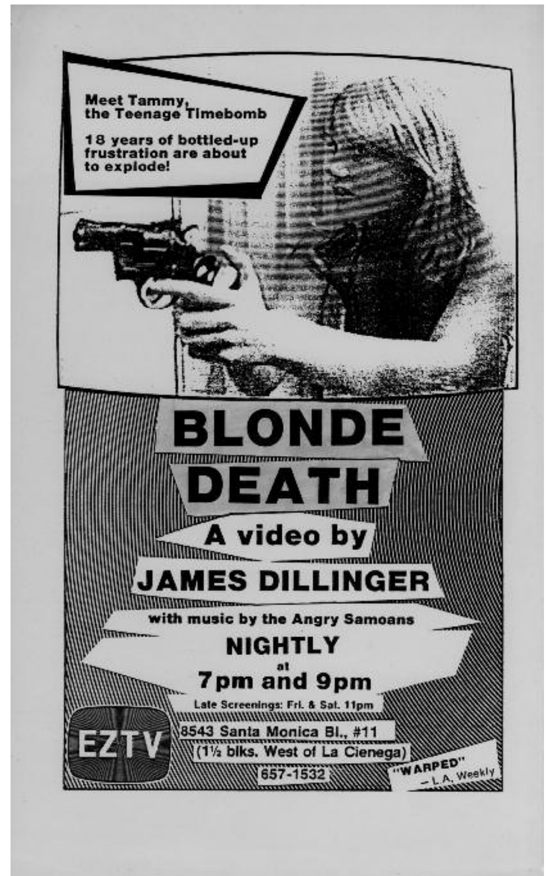
premiere of an early instantiation of EZTV in 1982, setting the tone for the centrality of queer feature narrative "video films." Dorr's depiction of Alan stands in sharp contrast to the most controversial mainstream cinematic depiction of queer life in the early 1980s, William Friedkin's *Cruising*, from 1980, about a serial killer who targets the gay leather scene. *Cruising* was protested during production and after its release by some in the queer community for its negative representations of gay life. Vito Russo, in *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies*, published in 1981, wrote that the film was perceived to be "potentially dangerous" in its depiction (and, in his view, possible incitement of) homophobic violence.[40]

But circulating "positive" representations in response to Hollywood's one-dimensional queer characters was of less concern to the audiences at EZTV than was delineating a social arena in which queer modes of collective viewing could absorb, invert, and transform conventions. Other tapes produced and screened at EZTV in its early years include James Dillinger's cult *Blonde Death*, an eighty-five-minute blistering satire shot on VHS from 1983, which featured bisexual Tammy, "the teenage time-bomb," on a rampage through Orange County and reportedly cost under 2,000 dollars to make. *Blonde Death*, a B-movie that, much like a Roger Corman production, knowingly embraced its status as "trash," was the first real hit to come out of EZTV: it played in EZTV's screening space for four months straight due to popular demand. Dillinger, the pseudonym of James Robert Baker, a well-known Los Angeles queer anarchist writer, set the rebellions of *Blonde Death* among the bland suburban homes of conservative southern California, trampling all moral codes with explicit brutality, angry misanthropy, a punk-rock soundtrack by the Angry Samoans (an LA-based band), suicides, and transgressive sexualities.

Yet, as much as they wanted to forget or eschew Hollywood, many of the artists affiliated with EZTV still used the form and structure of standard Hollywood genres. Narrative was a driving force from the outset of EZTV. In 1979, when he canvassed for tapes to screen at the community center, Dorr took out ads in local papers that explicitly called for narratives: "VIDEOMAKERS: Have you made narrative tapes on Beta, VHS, U-matic formats that you would like to have shown to the public? Contact John."[41] But by the time Dorr was making *Sudzall*, narrative had been demonized by many experimental film theorists, as well as excoriated as an extension of "the unconscious of patriarchal society" by feminist critic Laura Mulvey in her classic 1975 "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema."[42] Seen as tied to Hollywood film conventions as well as to dominant televisual ideologies, narrative was roundly dismissed by the likes of Youngblood, who

wrote, “Plot, story, and what commonly is known as ‘drama’ are the devices that enable the commercial entertainer to manipulate his audience.”[43] These critiques, however complicated by the fact that productions like *Blonde Death* were made by queer men outside the realm of the studio system, point to the fact that in the late 1970s narrative was understood by many as a politically conservative discourse of capitalistic control and subjugation, even as it was simultaneously marshaled by some at EZTV for queer ends. Ellis Hanson notes how the “heterocentric and exceedingly rigid structure of the look in Mulvey’s analysis—patriarchal masculinity leering at objectified femininity—writes homosexuality out of existence.”[44]

Not all members of EZTV, however, shared this recuperative investment in feature-length productions. Many core members produced shorts, including parodies of MTV (*Conan the Waitress*, by Mark Addy from 1984, in which a barbarian in an animal pelt wreaks havoc in a restaurant, set to Donna Summer’s “She Works Hard for the Money”), and poetic meditations (*Crushed Lilies*, by T. Jankowski from 1983, an experimental dreamscape where past and present melt together, including a nun fantasy). James Williams, the inaugural curator of the EZTV art gallery, created several abstract works, including *Chance Encounters*, shot on Betamax, from 1983, a trippy, formal exploration of color, rhythm, and sound made by filming the television through a kaleidoscope set to instrumental rock music. Here the flickering of the television, reduced to pattern and light, pulsates with energy to create an almost strobe-light effect. At a little less than six minutes long, the tape ends with a human hand reaching for the screen and a slow zoom to black, as if to bring us back to the realm of the corporeal. In his *Clear Canvas* from 1984, Williams slashes paper with a razor, then arranges his body into abstract shapes, silhouetting himself onto the riven surface, which is reminiscent of a Lucio Fontana canvas. Here figure, form, and screen come together in a phenomenological exploration of a black male body in space. This experimental short work has little in common with feature narratives like *Blonde Death* and *Sudzall Does It All* and demonstrates the relatively agnostic approach EZTV took to what came out of its facilities and what it screened: though Dorr had a preference for narrative features, EZTV was open to all forms, formats, and lengths. One faction might focus on science fiction



Flyer for James Dillinger, *Blonde Death*, 1983. EZTV Video Collection, ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives, University of Southern California Libraries.

while another focused on political documentaries about struggles for social justice in Latin America and elsewhere.

In the mid-1980s, EZTV premiered some of the first works of computer art; it also hosted programs diverse in scope that included evenings of live performances, poetry, parties, music, and a rotating cast of performers that included Lydia Lunch, Eric Bogosian, and Paul Reubens. Integral to the ethos of EZTV was a punk, do-it-yourself notion of seizing the means of production. Rather than killing their televisions, they preferred to "hijack" mass media operations.[45] Core members expressed a sense that they were affiliated with the fuck-you, anticapitalist, anticorporate ideologies of punk. "Being at EZTV is a lot like being in the (music group) Ramones. . . . We're really like punk rock was, and that's fine," Mike Masucci stated in 1987.[46] They hosted concerts by Black Flag and performances by Johanna Went. Though at its peak they operated out of a 17,000-square-foot, multistory facility, they maintained their scrappy, independent ethos, refusing to let art-world or film-industry monies sway their decisions, often refusing to apply for grants and instead pooling their resources to collectively purchase equipment off the shelf and "hot-rodding" or reengineering it to make it more sophisticated.[47]

Work also flowed in and out of the physical space of EZTV to other queer locations, taking advantage of a wider network of image-makers and viewers. Some short videos produced by EZTV played "at all the bars in West Hollywood."[48] For instance, Masucci's abstract *Standing Waves*, a video-graphics piece from 1983, which was meant to ironize but also celebrate the morphing forms of a lava lamp, first screened in a live "video–mixed media" event at EZTV and then immediately became a bar staple. *Standing Waves* was originally a hybrid video synthesizer performance, with Masucci creating and projecting the images in real time, accompanied by music. Masucci began to be paid to show his video graphics in gay clubs around town, akin to the

James Williams. *Clear Canvas*, 1984. Still from video. EZTV Video Collection, ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives, University of Southern California Libraries.

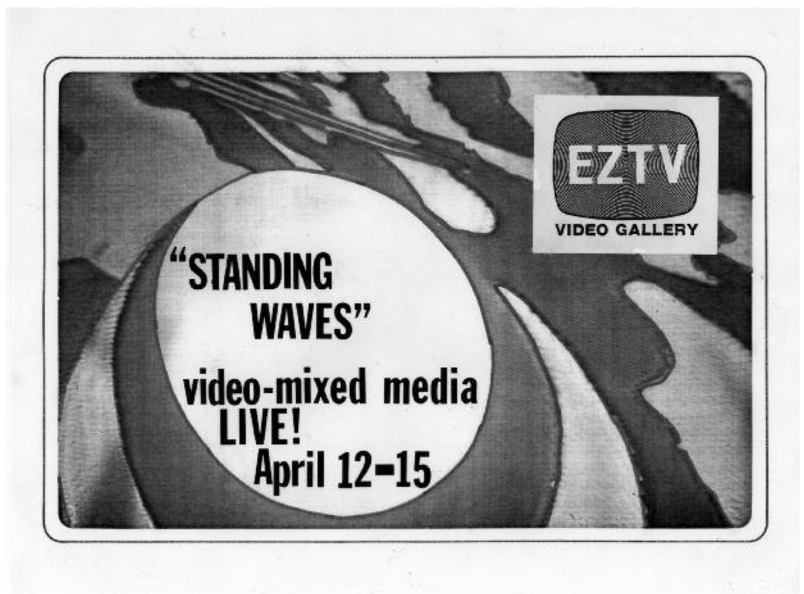
psychedelic light shows shown at rock concerts in the 1960s, and video recordings of his flowing, colorful vibrations were distributed to queer venues across the country.[49]

Much of this programming aimed for the register of the outré. As one commentator noted,

> EZTV's strong suit is its support of works that would never get a national endowment or a commercial producer. It's a place where the camp and the zany can find an audience. It's good to know that there are so many video makers out there eagerly pushing the envelope of creative bad taste.[50]

Bad taste, kitsch, camp, and other registers of the "low"—the work that came of out EZTV was sometimes celebrated, but also sometimes stigmatized, for its connection to queer lowness. Camp, as a conversion operation that transmutes the degraded into the adored, has long been affiliated with homosexual identity formation, gay sensibilities, and queer "modes of viewing," including in Susan Sontag's essay on the subject, "Notes on 'Camp.'"[51] And while kitsch as a "rear-guard" of culture has been influentially opposed to the "difficult" avant-garde by Clement Greenberg, queer subcultural practices are one site where this binary is frequently blurred, from the avant-garde kitsch of James Bidgood's *Pink Narcissus* of 1971 to Dillinger's *Blonde Death*.[52]

Nevertheless, the taint of the low in many of its registers shadowed EZTV, and their events were often overlooked in the mainstream press because "people thought we were just making porn, since so many members were gay."[53] To be fair, some did make porn. Located in close proximity to the porn capital of the United States (the San Fernando Valley region), EZTV was a place where budding porn producers learned to edit and duplicate tapes without fear of homophobic regulations. In his online memoirs, porn producer Thor Johnson (founder of Adam and Company, which focuses on uncircumcised porn, with a slogan "the uncuttest



Flyer for a live performance of Michael J. Masucci, *Standing Waves*, 1983. ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives, University of Southern California Libraries.

kind of all") recounts learning how to edit video in the early 1980s at EZTV with his "video fairy godfather John Dorr. . . . Since John himself was gay, he gave special attention and favors to young gay wanna-be producers, like me, becoming known as the Mother Teresa of independent video."[54] In many respects EZTV was a logical place for aspiring porn makers, given its focus on single-channel video that is not broadcast for a wider public and hence is not subject to state monitoring. In addition, the porn industry was an early adopter in the realm of video production, because, unlike film, video does not have to be sent out for processing (which is expensive, time-consuming, and subject to the lab's censorious hand).[55]

Video was also seen as having distinct erotic capacities, its own sensual feedback loops and instant gratifications. As Masucci wrote in an interview, "It's really like a new part of your body, an extension of your senses because it's so instantaneous."[56] This corporealization of video, and its subsequent effects on viewers, was theorized in Rosalind Krauss's influential text on video published in *October* in 1976. She posits that "most of the work produced over the very short span of video art's existence has used the human body as its central instrument."[57] Masucci's quotation, which turns the camera into a prosthetic device, also harks back to Marshall McLuhan's understanding of technical media as bodily augmentation and sense-expanding. "All media are extensions of some human facility—psychic or physical," McLuhan states in *The Medium Is the Massage*, accompanied by a close-up photograph of fingers to emphasize haptic qualities of touch.[58] As with its restaging of the feature format, this echoing of McLuhan signals how EZTV placed arguably conservative vocabularies in productive tension with queered practices.

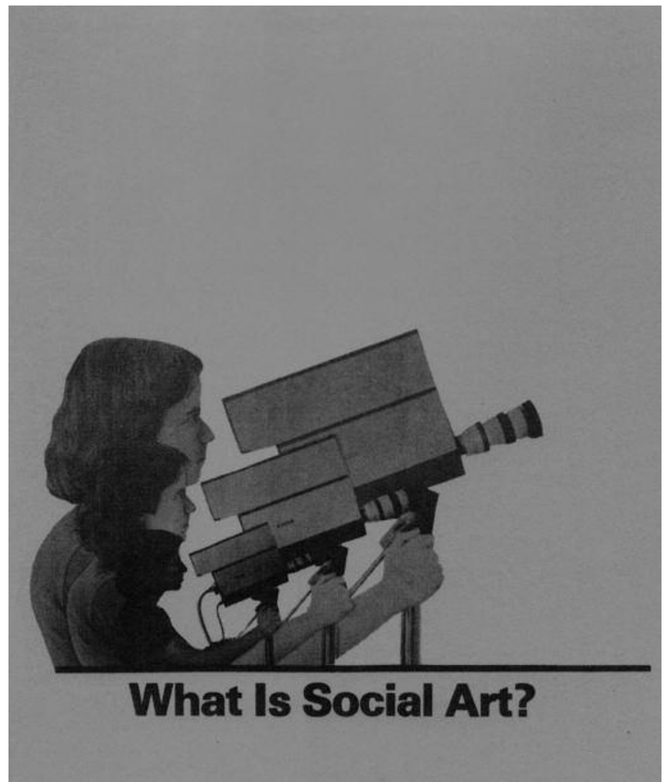
West Hollywood and the Queer Creative Class

EZTV sprang up within of the fertile soil of alternative art production in the Los Angeles area, including artist-run spaces and independent organizations like F-Space in Santa Ana (founded in 1970–1971), the Woman's Building (1973), LAICA (1973–1974), and Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibits (LACE, 1977). For many of these spaces, video was an important component of their mission, though EZTV was unique in its sole focus on video.[59] In addition, the late 1970s and early 1980s was a specific moment for the potential of video production as a tool of community organizing in southern California. As a cover for the brochure *What Is Social Art?* (1979) demonstrates, video was seen as a key to "social art"—an early forerunner to what people now call "social practice." In Kathleen Berg's collage for *What Is Social Art?* that titular question is implicitly answered by the graphic of three women of graduated sizes and shades nestled inside each other's

profiles pointing a video camera off the page. This brochure was produced for the Los Angeles Women's Video Center, a project launched in conjunction with the Woman's Building that offered classes and hands-on workshops about feminist video.[60]

Video was understood as particularly suited to collectivism, since the equipment is expensive and the technical knowledge to master it can be specialized; it thus facilitates group work and collaborative making.[61] By many accounts, to have made video in this moment was to have aligned oneself with a larger "community" of media- and art-makers. But what were the parameters of this "community," exactly? Rosler states that "video created a community, it resided within a community, and it moved to other communities, creating a new discontinuous 'imagined community.'"[62] Rosler cites Benedict Anderson regarding the role communications networks play in instilling a sense of belonging, and she grasps how video's "communities" were not necessarily bounded by location or neighborhood.[63] EZTV was in dialogue not only with its own "imagined communities" of independent production but was also situated within the actual area in which its facilities were located—that is to say, EZTV developed out of and fed back into its surrounding geography and had an impact on the economics and demographics of its physical site.

Since the 1950s, Los Angeles has been understood as a mecca for alternative lifestyles.[64] The Mattachine Society was founded there in 1950, and southern California became a major urban center for nascent queer visibility.[65] And in the 1960s, the gay communities of greater Los Angeles were becoming more visible and well organized. A group called PRIDE issued its first newsletter, the *Los Angeles Advocate*, in 1967 (the newsletter has since become *The Advocate*, the largest-circulation LGBTQ publication in the United States). Unlike earlier video collectives like TVTV who showed their work on cable access as a political means to counter corporate televisual structures, EZTV showed single-channel work to its own local community in intimate viewing environments.[66] Focused on bringing people to its physical location rather than transmitting images to a wider, more diffuse audience, EZTV insistently foregrounded place-making in its promotional materials and opening montage video, underscoring its loca-



Cover of *What Is Social Art?* 1979. Brochure produced by the Los Angeles Women's Video Center: Jerri Allyn, Nancy Angelo, Candace Compton, Annette Hunt. Collage by Kathleen Berg.

tion in West Hollywood. (An area of less than two square miles within Los Angeles, West Hollywood is bounded on the west by Beverly Hills and on the east by Hollywood.)

By the time Dorr conceived of EZTV, West Hollywood was being increasingly recognized as gay friendly. The first gay-pride parade, Gay Power/Christopher Street West, which began in 1970, initially began by marching annually through the streets of Hollywood but moved to West Hollywood in 1979 (the same year Dorr founded the EZTV screenings) due to the strong LGBTQ presence and growing recognition of its consolidation as a gay neighborhood.[67] As architectural historian Reyner Banham notes in his seminal 1971 text *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies*, so-called lifestyle "enclaves" such as West Hollywood have long been critical to the ecology of the city.[68] According to an influential study on "gay ghettos," West Hollywood was widely known as the epicenter for wealthy white gay male culture in California by the mid-1970s. Something like 78 percent of the gay services or businesses in LA were located in just 3 percent of the region, congregating around a few blocks of Santa Monica Boulevard (where EZTV was located).[69]

When Dorr started EZTV in 1979, West Hollywood was a neighborhood, but it incorporated as an independent city in 1984, becoming the first effectively branded "gay city in the United States."[70] With its coincidentally sexy "wink-wink" zip code ending in "sixty-nine"—90069—West Hollywood was sometimes referred to as "Boystown." The slogan "Come visit West Hollywood where the boys are," was not just an off-hand catchphrase dreamed up by Dorr; it was an active marketing strategy picked up by local merchants angling for a gay male clientele and their dollars.

Though artist-run collectives are sometimes scattered nomadic networks with members distributed far and wide, EZTV and others like them "take place" (in James's terms), and, when they do, these bricks-and-mortar locations are often economically implicated in the class- and race-based exclusionary processes of gentrification. Artist-run spaces impact the neighborhoods they are in, for better and sometimes for worse, sometimes driving up rents and creating zones of added real estate value. What Richard Florida calls the "creative class" is vaunted by some for its lubricating civic presence, but the socioeconomic inequalities and struggles for ownership that attend the encroachment of "creative enterprises" within cities and neighborhoods are far from neutral.[71] Redevelopment schemes to establish "artist zones" and—more recently—commercial "gay zones" of commerce are often explicitly about gentrification, but even without official efforts, artist-run spaces often act as early, transitional gentrifiers as they flock to areas with cheap rents.[72]

EZTV was but one part of a bigger groundswell of queer cultural life in West Hollywood in the early 1980s as it was branded simultaneously "the gay city" and "the creative city."[73] In 1984 (when it incorporated as a city), "gays and lesbians were estimated to constitute thirty to forty percent of West Hollywood's population," according to sociologist Benjamin Forest, who has theorized about how elements of this "narrative construction of a 'gay city'" are interconnected with notions of "creativity, aesthetic sensibility, an affinity with entertainment and consumption, progressiveness, responsibility, centrality, and maturity."[74] That is, the queerness of the town was strongly linked to its production and circulation of "creativity," infusing Pierre Bourdieu's understandings of the profound material privileges wrought by cultural capital with an implicit commodification of gay male taste.[75]

By 1984, West Hollywood was understood in the local press as having the potential to "become America's gay cultural center."[76] A swelling number of discos, bars, bathhouses, nightclubs, boutiques specializing in high-end menswear, and an influential shopping district for interior design made it a fashionable place for affluent gay white men to live. In the year that West Hollywood incorporated, the area consisted of about one-third elderly Jewish residents.[77] Some of these residents formed an unlikely but strategic alliance with white younger gay men to incorporate, primarily to protect rent control.[78] A photograph from a victory party of the West Hollywood Coalition for Economic Survival celebrating incorporation shows a majority of older residents, both male and female (the one visible black person in the room is the videographer). But following this incorporation, when wealthy gay white men moved to West Hollywood in droves, they began pushing out lower-income residents, including other seniors, immigrants from Russia and other places, and less well-off Jewish folk. The intense focus on gay commerce and marketing enterprises in West Hollywood acted as both official and unofficial gatekeeping framed by white privilege, an indication of the complex coarticulation of gayness, race, and creative businesses.[79]

Thus, while it is important to mark that EZTV was racially diverse, one should note that in some "creative" contexts there can be cultural value granted to such diversity, and when it becomes a municipal selling point it can have material, economic consequences. EZTV could not but be implicated in these dynamics, especially since it was at the forefront of branding West Hollywood as a distinctive creative location. EZTV's denizens loudly showcased their regional civic pride: in 1986 its members, spearheaded by Masucci, rigged up a "West Hollywood" sign on a small hillside that mimicked the iconic Hollywood landmark at a much more modest scale.[80] This four-feet-high by forty-feet-long homage to their newly minted city, mounted behind a parking

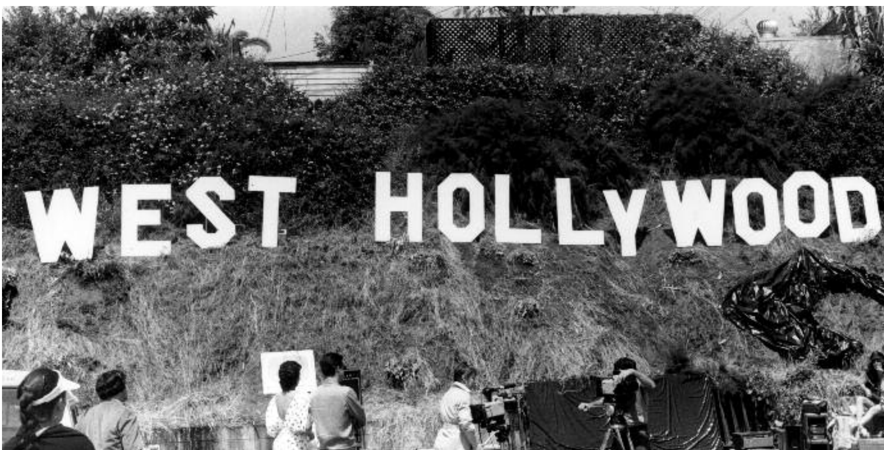
lot, was on the one hand a humorous prank. On the other hand, it claimed West Hollywood as a serious creative rival to the film industry of Hollywood, analogous to how it vaunted video as a smaller-but-better technology that was proving to be a major new player in the media landscape. Intended as a renegade, temporary installation, the West Hollywood sign was embraced as a local landmark; the mayor routinely posed for press photos in front of it.[81] EZTV and West Hollywood's identity as a "creative city" thus came to be closely aligned—an allegiance cemented when, in 1986, West Hollywood was proclaimed the "video capital of the world."[82]

Top: West Hollywood becomes its own city, November 1984. Photo by Mike Sergieff. Courtesy the Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection.

Bottom: The West Hollywood sign is unveiled outside EZTV, April 15, 1986. Sallie M. Fiske Papers and Photographs, ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives, University of Southern California Libraries.

Closed Circuits

Writing about the politics of address and divergent identities at queer film/video events, film historian Patricia White observes, "At screenings, multiple publics experience forms of collectivity that involve desire, identification, and dis-identification—forms as akin to a party as to a meeting or a demographic category."[83]



A monolithic understanding of the EZTV audience is impossible, as it shifted with every event or screening to form temporary, multiple publics. Along with the sited, bricks-and-mortar aspect of EZTV, its members also attempted to assemble an alternative distribution system in which a loose federation of (primarily gay) organizations around the country exchanged tapes of video work via the U.S. mail. In this way, they intended to bypass both the art world and the Hollywood film/media industry.[84] As with the mail artists of previous decades, this fragile claim to function outside the market was challenged by a dependence upon the public infrastructure of the postal service.[85]

EZTV nurtured an intimate queer event-space, as viewers and makers alike were incorporated into the "closed circuit" of viewing. In many of EZTV's promotional materials, such as the *Who Needs Hollywood!* postcard featuring an image of Dorr and an interview with Masucci in the *Los Angeles Times*, its members are pointing a camera at the audience, creating a loop of viewing that implicates the spectator. In some respects, this functions as a reminder that one went to EZTV—went "out"—as much to see as to be seen. Such representation also recalls the early slogan "closed circuit from West Hollywood," as *closed circuit* usually refers to surveillance technology. Metaphorically, the screening space is a "closed circuit" because it channels its audience into a tight, recursive circle of watching.

To quote Martha Gever, writing about LGBTQ film and video festivals, "Our identities are constituted as much in the event as in the images we watch."[86] Gever's argument stresses that video creates social relations in some respects regardless of content. The anthology *Queer TV: Theories, Histories, Politics* rethinks the space of reception within media history and theory, as editors Glyn Davis and Gary Needham propose going beyond analyzing plots and queer characters and instead interrogating how television is "designed, produced, distributed, and consumed in queer ways."[87] Television, they argue, drives specific models of viewership because of its consumption within the home, as its relay of images that stream into the ostensibly private sphere of the domestic are often discussed, critiqued, and enjoyed by families both biological and chosen. They ask, "Is there such a thing as a queer interaction with . . . television's hardware? . . . Is there something queer about flow, or the 'intimacy' associated with the small screen and its mode of address and consumption?"[88] When Dorr posed for the journalist's camera on his couch, he emphasized EZTV's relationship to domestic space as it is aligned with the comfort of the living room, thus carving out blurrier realms of the private and the familiar, in the sense that we know it but also that it creates familiars.

EZTV was from the outset a largely queer gathering space, and

its screenings potentially lubricated and facilitated cruising. Queer theorist Richard C. Cante's scholarship on the use of monitors in gay bars in West Hollywood examines how the spaces of queer life like bars and clubs integrate video technology, noting the signature role they play in what he calls "spaces of gay male desire."[89] "The video bar," he writes, "aspires to offer a solution to one of the key problems of singles bar patronage in general—how to be, or at least appear, *comfortable* while consciously having to endure functioning as a lone, intermittent object of countless evaluative gazes."[90] Monitors in bars are conducive to cruising because videos give you something to direct your gaze upon, thereby offering yourself up as a subject to be looked at. Though the environment of response and reception at EZTV was obviously quite different than at a bar, it is still fruitful to theorize how the vectors of spectating and desire might have been promoted in this small space among the intersecting and perhaps even clashing communities at EZTV, and how they might have prompted different sorts of gazes between viewers of all genders. EZTV was meant to be an immersive experience in which the videos and the audience had queerly close interactions, interactions not just with each other but with the multiple consoles as viewers looked across the room to see their fellow viewers watching, to attend to other bodies illuminated by flickering images. We need more complex understandings of how these diverse kinds of spectatorship function.

One model has been put forward by art historian Krauss. Her theorization about video turns on what she calls its "aesthetics of narcissism," a mode she claims is fundamental to its precepts (video is not so much a specific *medium* in her account as a psychic structure).[91] In her influential article, Krauss refers to single-channel video art made by U.S. artists such as Joan Jonas and Vito Acconci. For Krauss, Acconci's *Centers* (1971), which is at the core of her theorization, lays bare the primary mechanism of video as a technological tool for artists to narcissistically regard themselves. In Acconci's piece, he has set up a video camera and monitor and is pointing at the center of the screen—back at his own body, Krauss argues. This article is an important and lasting contribution to video criticism, but it has limitations: it does not account for a range of viewing practices and presumes a heteronormative viewing subject. Anne M. Wagner thoughtfully expands this argument to note that Acconci is also pointing out at the audience, thus raising the specter of the fraught public for video at this moment.[92] Videos circulate through other modalities of reception that alter how they are perceived, including, as at EZTV, in shared subcultural spaces.

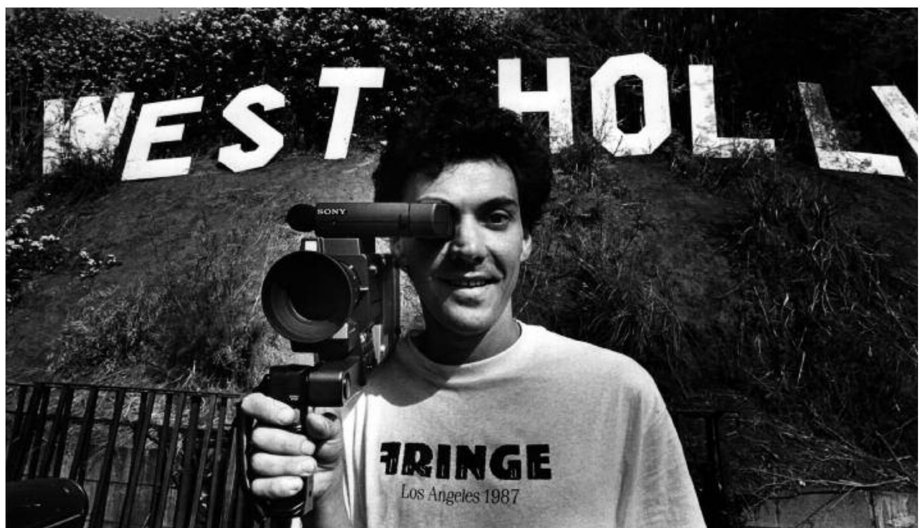
EZTV's internal queer dynamics were fed by and channeled back out into its local queer surroundings. Starting in the late

1980s, EZTV became a vital community site for AIDS activism and held frequent fund-raisers, poetry readings, and other events geared specifically toward HIV/AIDS organizing and awareness. EZTV artists made serious videos about alienation, loss, and grief. These escalated in number in response to the growing AIDS crisis. For a few years, EZTV was the designated location for AIDS Project LA, and ACT UP and Queer Nation, both organizations acutely aware of the visibility wrought by mass media interventions, also met there. As media theorist Alexandra Juhasz argues in her book *AIDS TV: Identity, Community, and Alternative Video*, many early AIDS activists turned to community media and low-cost video production as a way to educate and to agitate for policy change at both the local and national levels.[93] Increasingly, the videos made and performances mounted at EZTV by gay men and lesbians in the 1980s and early 1990s were geared toward awareness and intervention, including an early production of out actor Michael Kearns's *The Truth Is Bad Enough*.[94] Initially conceived as a centripetal alternative to Hollywood located in West Hollywood, EZTV thus became a centrifugal site morphing in its address and agenda.

Archives and Histories

The story of EZTV rejects the too-often-repeated and clichéd negative caricature of Los Angeles as a "placeless" city, somewhat unmappable or disorientingly decentered. EZTV instead created a literal gathering place, pockets of collaborative activity, and concrete networks of affinity.[95] EZTV also exploited the fissures and seams within the fractured and wildly unconsolidated media scene, one that included upstart television channels, rogue videographers, and guerrilla electronic interventions. EZTV's particular spatial setting places it firmly within the wider media landscape of southern California, which included alternative spaces such as LACE and the Woman's Building alongside and in dialogue with big-name movie studios.

This massively multiple media landscape is beginning to be



"Michael J. Masucci in EZTV parking lot, where employees put up their own 'West Hollywood' sign." *Los Angeles Times*, October 23, 1987. Photo by Larry Bessel. © 1987 *Los Angeles Times.* Reprinted with permission.

properly historicized, particularly in the wake of the Getty-sponsored *Pacific Standard Time* (*PST*) series of more than sixty exhibits related to Los Angeles art that was launched in 2011. EZTV was a part of a *PST* group show, Collaboration Labs, at the 18th Street Arts Center in Santa Monica, curated by Alex Donis. (I served as the art historical adviser for this show.) EZTV also appears briefly in the exhibition catalogue for a show about the Long Beach Museum of Art's video legacy, where Erika Suderburg mentions its proximity to the museum and refers to it as a "pioneering and scrappy community-based storefront media center and gallery."[96] To date the most comprehensive history of the rise of California video art was elaborated in the Getty exhibition California Video, curated by Glenn Phillips in 2008.[97] Invaluable as the show and its accompanying catalog are, California Video focused on the importance of institutions such as the Long Beach Museum and afforded not a single footnote or even parenthetical aside to EZTV.

One of the many possible reasons why EZTV was neglected is because of the frequently unpolished, kitschy, uncommercial nature of much of its output. Nina Rota, who made a documentary about the history of EZTV, speculates that it has been overlooked because it was "lowbrow, with someone making porn next to a documentary next to horror. EZTV would help anyone make anything."[98] Unlike a place such as Electronic Arts Intermix, which also had a postproduction facility (founded in 1971), EZTV was devoted to an often crass eclecticism and was not interested in aiming its products toward the video art network. "The idea of showing lots of things together is curatorially very poor or incorrect," Masucci stated in 1987 in the *Los Angeles Times*. "Virtually all the museums that show video are genre-oriented and show slices. We get criticized for too much diversity but we take our cue from television: programming as opposed to curating."[99] The taint of the lowbrow persists today: after I gave a lecture based on this research, an art historian suggested that perhaps EZTV was barely known today because "the work was just bad." These "aesthetically inferior" videos (to use B. Ruby Rich's term), whose very roughness makes them of interest to me, are for others beneath a critical radar that is still policing production values as well as (classed and gendered) notions of "quality."[100]

In addition, the somewhat orphan status of video within both film studies and art history means that idiosyncratic examples like EZTV do not easily fit within the standard academic canons. Feature-length, narrative video was not the gallery or museum norm, while at the same time EZTV stridently rejected big-budget, studio system aesthetics for affordable, collaboratively made media. In addition, in its early years it was marginalized by the taint of homophobia due to its primarily gay membership, and

yet it has never claimed for itself the mantle of an exclusively queer space. In some respects, then, EZTV positioned itself uneasily against three poles: the Hollywood big-budget film industry, the rarified world of museumified video art, and alternative spaces like the Woman's Building that were explicitly geared toward advocacy for an underserved population. Because it was none of those things, however, it has largely fallen through the cracks of the disciplinary formations of film/media history and art history (both of which unevenly claim video history as part of their proper terrain).

If surviving institutions are now being lionized for their early promotion of video, the story of experimental media told through a focus on EZTV is starkly different. In an interview, Masucci, one of the original core members, noted,

> The biggest problem of a truly alternative space . . . is that they have no advocates. They have no professional advocates retelling their story, which is why I say history is about the present. History is about those stories that a certain number of historians choose to tell.[101]

History is also about who lives to tell the story. A further reason EZTV has been slow to be acknowledged is that most of its members died of HIV/AIDS before they had the opportunity to begin to historicize themselves. As its members began falling ill, EZTV became a place for organizing efforts, memorial services, and candlelight vigils; it was always much more than simply a video production facility or screening room, functioning instead as a nimble space used by constantly shifting and reconstituting communities. Over the years it hosted Outfest as well as convenings of SIGGRAPH, the Special Interest Group on Graphics and Interactive Techniques (early innovators in computer art and digital media). EZTV's disregard for the borders between video art and movies was prescient, as the introduction of digital technologies has muddied the line between these previously distinct media.

Dorr, the founder of EZTV, died in 1993 of HIV/AIDS, and today few of its initial core members are still alive. A scaled-back EZTV moved to Santa Monica in 2000, seven years after the passing of Dorr, and it continues to operate as an active postproduction facility, with Masucci and Kate Johnson as its directors, who, in addition to their ongoing work, long struggled to preserve the legacy of EZTV, including early videos and other archival materials that were degrading. When I began this research, EZTV's early years were documented in scattered tapes and somewhat disorganized papers on-site at 18th Street Arts Center. Fortunately, the ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives at the University of Southern California Libraries, the largest repository

for queer historical material in the world, recently acquired some of the EZTV archive that had been languishing in cardboard boxes, including videos and ephemera, and began to conserve it. In the spring of 2014, David Frantz curated the exhibition EZTV: Video Transfer at the ONE Archives in West Hollywood, just a few blocks from EZTV's original location, highlighting its importance to the neighborhood and within the history of alternative queer video.

In the 1980s, EZTV existed within a dense and complex location, not least because of its place alongside, in the shadow of, and in relation to dominant Hollywood media culture and the burgeoning gay culture of West Hollywood. As David Joselit has written in his important *Feedback: Television Against Democracy*, if the broadcast network is a commodity, so too "the audience is a commodity," subject to systems of control and marketing.[102] The multiple commodifications that shape audiences are not limited to television, as artist-run spaces like EZTV bring in various viewerships whose variety can be prized, and packaged, by municipal rhetorics of an area's "creative mix." As a collective body, a storefront location, a hub of regional pride, and a cooperative steeped in independent production, it transformed a traditional cinematic experience into a queered space of social, political, and aesthetic exchange. In this regard, its refusal of the gallery and adoption of a more cinematic site was infused with a strong, if complicated, sense of community-building. Notably, it sought to promote gatherings of gay men around video just as video was privatizing and domesticating queer collective spectating in porn theaters.

EZTV grew during an era of rapidly developing video technologies and existed in a climate of heated, politicized discourses surrounding the representations of gays and lesbians in industrial media production; it talked back to those representations in diverse ways by multiplying them, ignoring them, perverting them, satirizing them, queering them. Working within a space that was relatively unadministered, the potential of EZTV lay not only in its often lowbrow, camp forms but in the social relations it made possible and the space of conversation, support, and desire it nurtured.

Notes

I first aired some preliminary ideas about EZTV in my short text for the *Collaboration Labs* exhibition catalogue, published in 2011. Alex Donis, Clayton Campbell, David Frantz, John Harwood, Matthew Hunter, Kate Johnson, Michael Masucci, and Ben Young provided invaluable assistance at various stages of my research, writing, and publishing process. I am grateful for the many insightful comments provided by audiences at the Society for Cinema and Media Studies (2011), Bard's Center for Curatorial Studies (2012), Yale University (2012), the University of British Columbia's Belkin Gallery (2012), UC Santa Cruz (2013), and the Courtauld Institute of Art (2014). Finally, my thanks to Mel Y. Chen, for vitally coexisting.

1. Douglas Davis, "Filmgoing/Videogoing: Making Distinctions," in *Artculture: Essays on the Post-Modern* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 80.

2. Davis, "Filmgoing/Videogoing," 84.

3. A note of disambiguation: a bit-torrent distribution group founded in 2005, also called EZTV, is unrelated to the EZTV founded in West Hollywood in 1979.

4. David E. James, *The Most Typical Avant-Garde: History and Geography of Minor Cinemas in Los Angeles* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), 16.

5. See the Los Angeles–heavy account in Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin, eds., *Queer Images: A History of Gay and Lesbian Film in America* (Oxford, UK: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006).

6. For a range of perspectives on queer video, see the anthology *Queer Looks: Perspectives on Lesbian and Gay Film and Video*, ed. Martha Gever, John Greyson, and Pratibha Parmar (London: Routledge, 1993).

7. Microcinema is here defined as a small screening site specially created to view videos, rather than a multipurpose space that only intermittently serves this function.

8. I am grateful to Michael Masucci and Kate Johnson for generously allowing me access to Dorr's notebooks, drawings, and screenplay drafts, as well as to EZTV tapes and news clippings.

9. A comprehensive look at film and video installation is found in Mattias Michalka, ed., *X-Screen: Film Installations and Actions in the 1960s and 1970s* (Cologne: Walter König, 2004).

10. Gene Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema* (New York: EP Dutton, 1970). For more on the phenomenological ramifications of video projection in the gallery, see Liz Kotz, "Video Projection: The Space Between Screens," in *Theory in Contemporary Art since 1985*, ed. Zoya Kocur and Simon Leung (London: Blackwell, 2004), 101–115. Kate Mondloch has provided a historical look at installation spaces in her *Screens: Viewing Media Installation Art* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

11. See Gloria Sutton, "Stan VanDerBeek's *Movie-Drome*: Networking the Subject," in *Future Cinema: The Cinematic Imaginary after Film*, ed. Jeffrey Shaw and Peter Weibel (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003); and Branden W. Joseph, "'My Mind Split Open': Andy Warhol's Exploding Plastic Inevitable," *Grey Room* 8 (Summer 2002): 80–107.

12. Corinna Kirsch discusses "sadistic" lack of benches in video-viewing galleries in her overview of early video exhibitions. Corinna Kirsch, "The Single-Channel Fallacy and Other Myths about Curating Video Art," *Artwrit* 7 (Summer 2011), http://www.artwrit.com/article/the-single-channel-fallacy/.

13. Christine Tamblyn, "Qualifying the Quotidian: Artist's Video and the Production of Social Space," in *Resolutions: Contemporary Video Practices*, ed.

Michael Renov and Erika Suderburg (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 14.

14. Nancy Buchanan and Catherine Taft, "Mobile Indeed: The Marketing of Video Art and Video Art as Marketing," in *Resolutions 3: Global Networks of Video*, ed. Erika Suderburg and Ming-Yuen S. Ma (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 18–35.

15. For a powerful critique of the masculinist canonization of Paik, see Martha Rosler, "Video: Shedding the Utopian Moment" (1986), in Martha Rosler, *Decoys and Disruptions: Selected Writings 1975–2001* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), esp. 72–74. This masculinism, for some, has been viewed as an extension of the Portapak's rhetorical construction as "a macho heterosexual apparatus." B. Ruby Rich, email to the author, February 2012.

16. For more on alternative California video collectives, see Deanne Pytlinski, "San Francisco Video Collectives and the Counterculture," in *West of Center: Art and the Countercultural Experiment in America, 1965–1977*, ed. Elissa Auther and Adam Lerner (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 56–73.

17. For instance, the cover headline of a local periodical about EZTV read, "An EZier Time for Video Artists," *Focus on Our Town*, 13 April 1984.

18. Lewis MacAdams, "EZTV," *California Magazine*, 1984; and Tom Girard, "EZTV Video Gallery Showcasing Indie Productions," *Variety*, 12 December 1983, 6.

19. Dorr, quoted on the EZTV Timeline created by Nina Rota, http://ninarota.com/eztv_timeline/eztv.html.

20. Steven Mikulan, "Film/Video," *L.A. Style* 5, no. 12 (May 1990).

21. Michael Masucci, email to the author, 20 June 2009.

22. Masucci, email.

23. David Ross was the influential curator of video art at the Long Beach Museum of Art, which became a laboratory for video exhibition. The early history of their video program is outlined in *Exchange and Evolution: Worldwide Video Long Beach 1974–1999*, ed. Kathy Rae Huffman and Nancy Buchanan (Long Beach, CA: Long Beach Museum of Art, 2011).

24. Mitch Tuchman, "John Dorr's EZTV, or Movies While You Wait," *Los Angeles Reader*, 23 April 1982, 16. See also Mitch Tuchman, "An Interview with John Dorr," *LAICA Journal*, Summer 1981, 66.

25. Chrissie Iles, "Between the Still and Moving Image," in *Into the Light: The Projected Image in American Art, 1964–77*, exh. cat. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2001), 33.

26. Jerry Mander, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television* (New York: Quill, 1978), 133.

27. Thor Johnson, "First Came EZTV . . . Then Adam and Company," *Thor Johnson's World* [blog], 25 March 2010, http://thorjohnsonsworld.blogspot.com/2010/03/first-came-eztvthen-adam-company.html.

28. See Phil Zarecki, *EZTV: A Definition*, a half-hour documentary shown in 1992 on the West Hollywood cable access channel.

29. See, for instance, Mitch Tuchman, "Easy Viewing," *American Film: Magazine of the Film and Television Arts* 8, no. 10 (September 1983).

30. Dara Birnbaum's oeuvre offers but one example with its appropriations, fragmentations, and intentional, feminist frustration of narrative resolution.

31. *Filmmakers Forum*, Rick Pamplin, host, Group W-TV, Los Angeles, 1984, http://vimeo.com/61926304.

32. For a brilliant exploration of the queer-theoretical and copyright implications of video as *tape* given its easy reproducibility, see Lucas Hilderbrand, *Inherent Vice: Bootleg Histories of Videotape and Copyright* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).

33. Rosler, "Video."

34. Alex Donis, "California Dreamin': Performance, Media Art, and History as Gossip," in *Collaboration Labs: Southern California Artists and the Artist Space Movement* (Santa Monica: 18th Street Arts Center, 2011), 43.

35. Nina Rota's postcard announcement for her EZTV documentary *Who Needs Hollywood!* calls it "probably the first feature length film on video." Dorr's bio on the EZTV website calls it "the first known video feature." See "John Dorr," n.d., http://www.eztvmedia.com/dorr.html.

36. Marita Sturken, "Television Fictions: An Interview with Ed Bowes," *Afterimage* 13, no. 10 (May 1986): 4–7.

37. Donis, "California Dreamin'," 43.

38. As Jerry Tartaglia commented in 1979, industrial Hollywood cinema during the Production Code era and avant-garde film alike have long relied on parodies both outlandish and muted of straight relationships to signal potential queerness to knowing audiences. Jerry Tartaglia, "The Gay Sensibility in American Avant Garde Film," *Millennium Film Journal* 4–5 (Summer/Fall 1979): 53–58.

39. John Dorr, shooting script for *Sudzall Does It All*, 1978–1979, ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives, University of Southern California Libraries.

40. Vito Russo, *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuals in the Movies* (New York: Harper and Row, 1981), 189.

41. Tuchman, "John Dorr's EZTV," 11.

42. Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (Autumn 1975): 6–18.

43. Gene Youngblood, "Art, Entertainment, Entropy," in *Expanded Cinema*, 59.

44. Ellis Hanson, ed., *Out Takes: Essays on Queer Theory and Film* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999,) 13.

45. Michael Masucci, interview by author, June 2009.

46. Don Snowden, "Masucci, in Good Standing, Makes Waves at EZTV," *Los Angeles Times*, 23 October 1987, pt. 6, p. 4.

47. Michael Masucci and Kate Johnson, interview by author, August 2010.

48. Masucci, interview.

49. Masucci and Johnson, interview.

50. Ellin Stein, *Video Movies Magazine*, n.d., quoted on the EZTV website, http://www.eztvmedia.com/PressQuotes.html.

51. Susan Sontag, "Notes on 'Camp,'" *Partisan Review* 31, no. 4 (Fall 1964): 515–530.

52. Clement Greenberg, "Avant Garde and Kitsch," *Partisan Review* 6 (Fall 1939): 34–49.

53. Masucci, interview.

54. Johnson, "First Came EZTV."

55. See Linda Williams on the explosion of porn capabilities due to video. Linda Williams, "Porn Studies: Proliferating Pornographies On/Scene–An Introduction," in *Porn Studies*, ed. Linda Williams (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 1–26.

56. Snowden, 4.

57. Rosalind Krauss, "Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism," *October* 1 (Spring 1976): 50–64.

58. Marshall McLuhan, *The Medium Is the Massage* (New York: Random House, 1967), 26.

59. In an article from 1987, EZTV, LACE, and the Long Beach Museum of Art are referred to as the only venues in the LA area that regularly showed video art. Terry Atkinson, "Videos: Art with No Place to Call Home," *Los Angeles Times*, 21 November 1987, 10.

60. For more on Woman's Building's video, see Alexandra Juhasz, "A Process

Archive: The Grand Circularity of Woman's Building Video," in *Doin' It in Public: Feminism and Art at the Woman's Building* (Los Angeles: Otis College of Art and Design, 2011), 97–103.

61. For activist video that deals with the HIV/AIDS crisis, see Catherine Saalfield, "On the Make: Activist Video Collectives," in *Queer Looks*, 21–37. For one historical take on video collectives and sharing resources, see Deirdre Boyle, *Subject to Change: Guerilla Television Revisited* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1997).

62. Martha Rosler, interview, in Glenn Phillips, ed., *California Video: Artists and Histories*, exh. cat. (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2008), 200.

63. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

64. Moira Rachel Kenney, *Mapping Gay L.A.: The Intersection of Place and Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001). Kenney's chapter "Inclusion and Exclusion in West Hollywood" has been particularly useful.

65. Lillian Faderman and Stuart Thomas, *Gay L.A.: A History of Sexual Outlaws, Power Politics, and Lipstick Lesbians* (New York: Basic Books, 2006).

66. See Boyle, *Subject to Change*.

67. For a history of the Christopher Street West Parade and the L.A. Gay Liberation Front, see Kenney, 166–174.

68. Reyner Banham, *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 99–142.

69. Martin Levine, "Gay Ghetto," in *Gay Men: The Sociology of Male Homosexuality*, ed. Martin Levine (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), 201.

70. Benjamin Forest, "West Hollywood as Symbol: The Significance of Place in the Construction of a Gay Identity," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 13, no. 2 (1995): 133–157.

71. Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community, and Everyday Life* (New York: Basic Books, 2002). For more on the "creative class" and gentrification, see David Lay, "Artists, Aestheticization, and the Field of Gentrification," *Urban Studies* 40, no. 12 (November 2003): 2,527–2,544.

72. Lay, "Artists, Aestheticization, and the Field of Gentrification."

73. Forest provides an in-depth look at the construction of West Hollywood as a "gay" city and how notions of creativity and aesthetics played a role in that construction. "The Creative City" is the current official West Hollywood logo, prominently positioned as the lead banner on the municipal website. See http://www.weho.org/.

74. Forest, 138, 151.

75. For more on the interface between queer place-making and gentrification, see essays in David Bell and Gill Valentine, eds., *Mapping Desire: Geographies of Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1995); and Mickey Lauria and Lawrence Knopp, "Toward an Analysis of the Role of Gay Communities in the Urban Renaissance," *Urban Geography* 6 (1985): 152–169. For more on the commodification of queer taste, see Rosemary Hennessy, "Queer Visibility in Commodity Culture," in *Social Postmodernism: Beyond Identity Politics*, ed. Linda Nicholson and Steven Seidman (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 142–183.

76. Dennis Colby, "Art Guerrero Wants to Be a City Father," *Edge*, 20 September 1984, quoted in Forest, 143.

77. Adam Moos, "The Grassroots in Action: Gays and Seniors Capture the Local State in West Hollywood California," in *The Power of Geography*, ed. Jennifer Wolch and Michael Dear (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 351–369.

78. Moos, "The Grassroots in Action."

79. See Jane Ward, "Producing Pride in West Hollywood: A Queer Cultural

Capital for Queers with Cultural Capital," *Sexualities* 6, no. 1 (February 2003): 65–94. Similarly, Moira Rachel Kenney cites a master's thesis by Eric Reyes in which men of color report that "West Hollywood is considered white." Kenney, 62.

80. In the video footage documenting the official unveiling of this sign, Dorr gives a brief speech about his hope that it will become "a monument to our new city." Freeples, *Unveiling West Hollywood Sign at EZTV*, 1986, in EZTV Video Collection, ONE Archives.

81. Paul Murillo, "Throwback to the Vintage West Hollywood Sign," *Wehoville*, 14 August 2013, http://www.wehoville.com/2013/08/14/west-hollywood-sign/.

82. Masucci and Johnson, interview.

83. Patricia White, introduction to "Queer Publicity: A Dossier on Lesbian and Gay Film Festivals," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 5, no. 1 (1999): 75.

84. Video Free Earth, founded in 1982 in Washington, DC, was a crucial sister space for EZTV, and the two organizations often swapped tapes for screenings. Masucci also recalls that there was, briefly, an EZTV branch in Dallas, Texas. Masucci and Johnson, interview.

85. For more on mailing tapes as a community network, see Hilderbrand, *Inherent Vice*.

86. Martha Gever, "The Names We Give Ourselves," in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, ed. Russell Ferguson et al. (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), 201.

87. Glyn Davis and Gary Needham, "Introduction: The Pleasures of the Tube," in *Queer TV: Theories, Histories, Politics*, ed. Glyn Davis and Gary Needham (London: Routledge, 2009), 3.

88. Davis and Needham, "Introduction," 4.

89. Richard C. Cante, "Pouring on the Past: Video Bars and the Emplacement of Gay Male Desire," in *Queer Frontiers: Millennial Geographies, Genders, and Generations*, ed. Joseph Allan Boone et al. (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), 137.

90. Cante, "Pouring on the Past," 144.

91. Krauss, 50–64.

92. Anne M. Wagner, "Video, Performance, and the Rhetoric of Presence," *October* 91 (Winter 2000): 59–80.

93. Alexandra Juhasz, *AIDS TV: Identity, Community, and Alternative Video* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996).

94. A clip of Kearns performing is included in *Who Needs Hollywood!* dir. Nina Rota, 2000, 27 min.

95. Fredric Jameson characterizes Los Angeles as the preeminent postmodern city in *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991).

96. Erika Suderberg, "Cold Luminescence and Western In(Sight): Dark Rooms and Wet Lawns," in *Exchange and Evolution*, 134.

97. Phillips, *California Video*.

98. Nina Rota, interview by author, 28 November 2012.

99. Snowden, 4.

100. B. Ruby Rich, "Collision, Catastrophe, Celebration: The Relationship between Gay and Lesbian Film Festivals and Their Publics," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 5, no. 1 (1999): 80.

101. Masucci and Johnson, interview.

102. David Joselit, *Feedback: Television Against Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 21.