There was something strange about the [Video Vintage](#) exhibit at the Paris Centre Pompidou (open till May 7 2012). The show covers the first twenty years of video art (1963-1983). The canon of this decisive period was already written when I was introduced to video art around 1985 at places like Montevideo, TimeBasedArts and the Stedelijk in Amsterdam: Paik, Levine, Godard, Valie Export, Ulay & Abramovic, Ant Farm, Bill Viola and so on. Later on, in 1989, I saw them again as part of the Montevideo collection, this time as editor of the video art magazine Mediamatic. The history of early video is specialty of the curator, [Christine van Assche](#), who has been working in the same video department since 1982, creating a collection of 1400 videos (a low number for our YouTube age of data abundance, but that's another issue).

I didn't mind seeing the works again. They are classics, after all. What was strange about the two large rooms on the fourth floor of Beaubourg wasn't the content but the retro exhibition design. The works were shown on individual television sets from the 1980s and 90s using furniture from 1950s and 60s living rooms. Visitors were sitting on comfortable sofas, which was a nice gesture and appreciated by the audience. This time no black boxes. But the original works were never screened this way. Most of the early video works were recorded performances. There was hardly any video editing

equipment to speak of and those that existed were either extremely expensive or purpose-built by the artists themselves (such as the Vasulkas). The works were shown in galleries and in museums, often using large video projectors (who were strangly absent in the Pompidou setup). Few works were produced for television or alternative TV initiatives. Video as a medium, in the hand of artists, activists and ordinary citizens was a technological response to the orchestrated scarcity and entertainment agit prop of the TV system. If only those video works were seen in the living room.