The supposed 'formalism' of much early British video in the 1970s was attacked as such by Stuart Marshall for a lack of social content in a much-reprinted *Screen* article (1985).[144] But the context of the period is easily forgotten. The virtual impossibility of video editing at the time locked artists into long-takes and real-time shooting and playback. Warhol had already opened this avenue in film. 'A nice end to a piece of work was having the tape simply wind off the spool,' comments Steve Littman, a second-generation video artist. 'It seemed only logical.'

The wider scene in the 1970s included Joseph Kosuth and Dan Graham placing fake advertisements in newspapers and on billboards, Gustav Metzger's auto-destructive art events,[145] Latham's burning of his SKOOB book towers, Richard Long's slight alterations of landscape, APG's infiltrations. Daniel Buren pasted stripes on the hoardings of the Métro, Joseph Beuys swept streets as an art action and lectured on art to a dead hare, and Gerry Schum pioneered artists' video through German TV, with new work by Gilbert and George, Barry Flanagan, Hamish Fulton and Richard Long.

Although TV transmission seemed a ready extension of this anti-gallery and anti-high art movement, which in hindsight was proleptically post-modern, video artists in the UK were disadvantaged compared to those in the USA, with its network of non-commercial 'public TV' stations, and those in Germany, with its regional TV structure. The national BBC and the commercial ITV networks were harder nuts to crack, and artists' access relied on independently minded producers such as Mark Kidel, Anna Ridley and Tom Corcoran. The video movement soon fractured into three blocs, sometimes allied but often antagonistic, much as the early film avant-gardes had been, and the question of access was a particular bone of contention.

One branch were willing to be known as 'video artists', and concentrated on the conditions of video as a mode of perception and production. A second grouping includes those making 'artists' video', as David Hall dubbed it, and was inspired by such artists as Bruce Nauman (USA) and Rebecca Horn (Germany), using video as a rejection of traditional media rather than as an unexplored primary medium. A third set of video-makers took up the cause of community art, on the Hopkins model, in the name of content rather than form.

The absence of a developed theory of video – in contrast to film – can perhaps be traced back to these splits, in which only one of the factions, namely the video artists, was concerned to develop a conceptual apparatus for video and electronic media. But their 'formalism' was alien to the broader type of artist and to the community groups, and this brought with it the rejection of theory as well, in favour of supposedly direct art or action. The results of this disabling lack continue to hold back critical debate and analysis of video and its digital descendants.

Marshall, who did attempt to articulate the problem in the early 1980s, had begun in the milieu of video art and installation, but ultimately turned to more conventional social documentary, mainly about gay politics. His early death in 1993 deprived the community of an active and respected video-maker and polemicist. In his reply to Marshall's attack, David Hall denied that he and others accused of 'formalism' were uncritical and latter-day modernists. The context of

early video art was shared with events-based and anti-object tendencies in the 1970s, and was at the time construed as an attack on high modernism and museum culture (just as the library book which Latham and his students chewed and bottled, and for which St Martin's Art School sacked him in 1966, was Greenberg's 'Art and Culture', no less).

Hall also dismisses the populist ideology of access and transparency, and the 'nebulous' notion of a broad 'moving-image culture'. Far from self-enclosed formalism, he claims that his early installations enlist the viewer's interaction 'with his/her image as collaborator rather than spectator'. He accepts that broadcast TV has already shaped or 'sited' the viewer's expectations of video art, but contests the process and language of that conditioning by exposing the specific properties of the medium. 'A conscious acknowledgement of the system's specificity here identified it as the producer of illusion which called to question dominant modes of representation.'

The recent spread of video installation into all spheres of art gallery exhibition contrasts with the 1970s when museums in the UK were less welcoming to video art, high modernist or not. An ambitious show at the Serpentine in 1975 was followed by a smaller one at the Tate in 1976, featuring Hall, Marshall and Tamara Krikorian. That same year BBC's *Arena* devoted a programme to the new art, and *Studio International* – a then leading journal to which Hall and Le Grice regularly contributed – published a special video issue. These remain the peaks of British video art in its first stage, although the video debate was to re-emerge with a new set of issues at the start of the 1980s.

The questions passed on by this generation to younger film-makers in the later 1970s were therefore various and divided. Gidal proposed the most extreme position in rigorously excluding the iconic image as representation. The highly iconic films of Dwoskin (and David Larcher) blended neo-structural film with an underground tradition which expanded vision through an erotics of the eye. Le Grice further compounded elements of both, but with the erotic structure neither suppressed (as by Gidal) nor celebrated (as by Dwoskin and Larcher) but rather sublimated into the metaphors of 'family romance' which underpin his structural return to narrative. Hall steps outside of these internalised and subjective scenarios to affirm temporality as measure and the iconic image as undeniable but transient. Tellingly, and unlike the structuralist tendency which treats the 'spectator' as an individual in a cinema, Hall's notion of 'the spectator' increasingly embraced the greatest passive audience of all, who are watching TV rather than avant-garde films.