

Video
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Eight Installati

by Barbara

The Museum of Modern Art

Distributed by Harry N. Abrams, Inc., New York

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Contents

Acknowledgments
Introduction by Samuel R. Delany
"Video Spaces" by Barbara London
Judith Barry/Brad Miskell

Stan Douglas

9

13

30

Teiji Furuhashi

Gary Hill

Chris Marker

Marcel Odenbach

Tony Oursler

Bill Viola

Photograph Credits
Bibliography

Bibliography

exchange

Acknowledgments

In recent years video has merged with such fields as architecture, sculpture, and performance to create a dynamic new art form: video installation. *Video Spaces: Eight Installations* is the first exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art to feature some of the world's most recognized innovators in this area.

The organization of this exhibition has been a stimulating and rewarding experience, enriched by the wit of the artists themselves. I would like to thank Judith Barry and Brad Miskell, Stan Douglas, Teiji Furuhashi, Gary Hill, Chris Marker, Marcel Odenbach, Tony Oursler, and Bill Viola, who have been involved in every phase of the project. Not only is their work visually and conceptually insightful but they are congenial collaborators as well.

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Peggy Gale, Mona Hatoum, Ralph Hocking, Mary Milton, Nam June Paik, Tom Wolf, and Henry Zemel.

A collegial team within the Museum has made Video Spaces possible. Sally Berger, working with the Video Program's committed group of interns, perceptively and efficiently oversaw myriad details, including the compilation of biographical material for the catalogue. Daniel Vecchitto and John L. Wielk helped secure funding for the exhibition. James S. Snyder and Eleni Cocordas coordinated complex logistics, and Jerome Neuner devised the innovative installation design, which was carried out by Peter Omlor and the exhibition production staff. Projectionist Charles Kalinowski capably quided us through the complex technical aspects of the individual installations. Nancy Henriksson of the Registrar's office oversaw shipping arrangements, and Elizabeth Tweedy Streibert brilliantly conceived the tour. I appreciate the assistance of Daniel Starr and Eumie Imm, of the Museum Library, and of Jessica Schwartz and Samantha Graham, who have enthusiastically publicized the exhibition.

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Introduction

by Samuel R. Delany

I began reading science fiction well back in elementary school, toward the start of the 1950s. An experience I connect with that early reading is a visit to The Museum of Modern art in the seventh or eighth grade. The piece in the Museum that struck me most forcefully as a child (a child who had been reading science fiction stories for a year or two) was Thomas Wilfred's Vertical Sequence, Op. 137 (1941), one of a series of works he called Lumia compositions.

Vertical Sequence stood in the middle of one of the side galleries—a small box, on one side of which was a translucent glass screen. On this surface, propelled by hidden mirrors, lenses, lights, and mechanical motors within the box, colors swirled, drifted, vanished, and reappeared in syrupy, attenuated slow motion. Vertical Sequence was the piece I and my classmates talked about after we left the Museum, the piece we urged all our friends to see. It wasn't quite a painting. It didn't hang on a wall. Though it stood free in the center of a room, it wasn't a sculpture: the part you paid attention to comprised images on a flat surface. For a long time Vertical Sequence had its own small, darkened gallery—like a contemporary installation. Although clearly the movement on the screen was created by mechanical means (if you put your ear against it, you could just make out the whirrr of rotors), rather than electronic circuitry, it seemed—at least to the child's eye-to have something to do with television, which had only recently become widely available.

Science fiction has always come to us in two forms. The first and more significant is the written form, which ranges from the swashbuckling adventures of "Doc" Smith and the semiliterate Colonel S. P. Meek, to the sophisticated and verbally rich work of Stanley G. Weinbaum,

Cordwainer Smith, Alfred Bester, Theodore Sturgeon, Joanna Russ, and Thomas M. Disch. Second is the visual form-commercial comics and films-in which any concern for clear observation of the world is lost to the overwhelming fear of placing any intellectual strain on the audience. From time to time the visual form does produce an interesting surface-for example, in comic-book illustrator Alex Raymond's Flash Gordon series, or in filmmaker George Lucas's Star Wars trilogy. What keeps this surface from amassing any substantial conceptual weight is its producers' fear of the audience's response should that surface ever display any identifiable ideas.

The popular notions connected with science fiction—the special effects of "sci fi"-come almost entirely from this second form. The worth and significance of the field come entirely from the first, even when the occasional reader, excited by ideas generated by the written form, applies them in interesting ways to some of the visual surfaces produced by the second. It is worth noting, then, that the young people who were excited by Vertical Sequence were science fiction readers, not viewers. (The real descendants of Wilfred's Lumia compositions are the "light shows" that accompanied rock concerts throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Though many of these are now computerizedand video has certainly made its inroads here as well-most of the effects, like those of Vertical Sequence, are still largely created using mechanical means.)

In John Varley's fine science fiction story *The Phantom Kansas* (1976), weather sculptors create marvelous weather "symphonies," using computers, dry ice, and explosions to create tornadoes, lightning bolts, and cloud formations that move back and forth across the sun over the course of a few hours or

even days. In this story of a murder victim brought back to life to seek out her killer, these meteorological progressions are the topic of much critical scrutiny. Thousands of people emerge from indoors to watch them, and experience them when they involve rain and wind. But from J. G. Ballard's The Cloud Sculptors of Corral-D (1968), in which pilots sheer away bits of cloud with the wings of their biplanes to create shapes in the sky, to Spider and Jean Robinson's Stardance (1977), in which a dance company performs its works in the zero gravity of a space station, science fiction has always seemed to have a fondness for images of new kinds of art.

Well before Varley, however, "theramins" and "color organs" had found their way into the language of science fiction, to whisper of the possibility of new art forms. The personal import of Wilford's piece to me—and, I suspect, to those other science fiction readers who were excited about it—was that in it one could sense a yearning to be looked at as a new art.

For many people video is the quintessential "new art," and there is a tendency to look at it with the slightly patronizing gaze reserved for the forever young. However, most of the artists represented in Video Spaces have been working in the medium for twenty years or more. All have developed rich vocabularies and intricately explored techniques. The newness here is in the event: the assemblage of the work of nine mature and proven artists.

Using video as a generic term for television, it is useful to remember the key Marshall McLuhan devised for understanding our reaction to what flickers and flashes across the tube: "Low resolution, high involvement." Video is ultimately more engaging than film because we are given so much less information. Even the color range is narrower, the hues more muted, than in a projected film. Before color, the range extended from pale to dark gray, without ever hitting a true black, a true white. When looking at a video monitor, your attention is tuned

way up out of necessity, so that nothing is missed.

In many homes the television set dominates the room it occupies, often droning from morning till night, in the same way that the computer—with its all-important monitor—dominates our workspaces. In the earlier days, video and computer artists were comfortable letting their technical apparatuses overwhelm the architectural spaces in which their work appeared, creating an analogue of our lives even as the images and form of that domination critiqued our experience of commercial television and computers.

But whereas the material technology is certainly there, in much of the video art today it is no longer the center of attention the way it once was. While there are still images on glass screens, other images hang in the air or sweep about the walls. And there has been a shift toward content, and content here includes memory and subjectivity, AIDS, and the transience of the body. The old-fashioned formalists we all tend to be in matters aesthetic must constantly develop new ways to talk about such art.

Video puts a particular spin on the perennial question of framing the image. The traditional picture frame doubtless began as a pastiche of, or ironic commentary on, the architectural window or cabinet door frame—to make a painting appear as a view through a window to the outdoors. With video art, that window comes away from the wall, to stand free within an architectural space. It can be suspended in the air, broken into multiple fragments, opened and closed. With the addition of simple mechanisms, it can move about. And when the image leaves the screen to become dispersed in the air, the framing question is again reconfigured.

For most viewers, a human body visible through the video "window" gives one the sense of looking in. (If we are not actually looking into an architectural interior, then we are looking in on a situation that may, indeed, have an outdoor setting.) This is especially true if the body is nude. Conversely, if we see an

animal through the video window, we sense that we are looking out. (Put clothes on the animal, however, such as we find on William Wegman's dogs, and once more we are looking in.) The fluidity of the image and sound, plus the mobility or absence of the frame itself, suggests shifting and mystical fata morganas, an imaginary architecture through whose flexing and flickering corridors, closets, and gardens the video experience moves us, as the video window changes and its images shift. But some aesthetic current of our lives always passes through conceptual houses, buildings, cities we can never see—invisible cities that can only be manifested, to whatever ghostly extent, by technology.

Beginning as an accommodation for art that erupted beyond the physical confines ordinarily associated with the picture frame and the pedestal, the video installation collapses the distinction between painting (images presented along a wall) and sculpture (images standing free of those walls and commanding space and air), between interior and exterior, present and future.

Paradoxically, science fiction is rarely about time. And it is almost never about space. It takes both as given, infinitely extendable categories, pictured as almost wholly under human control—and thus almost wholly unproblematic, even invisible. (It is often about what you can find in them—the specifics of history—but that is something else.) What science fiction often is about is scale, and it uses the infinite fields of time and space to reimagine the past as well as the future.¹

Two characteristics that video shares with much other contemporary art, especially installation art, are a lack of permanence—the "timelessness" that for so long has seemed essential to "serious" art—and movement—that motion in excess of the contained cycles and oscillations of the mobile, the sweep of movement and image that film, video, and certain large-scale mechanisms alone can

provide. When such motion enters the exhibition space, it excludes a certain concept of history as a static moment to be considered, in all its elements, like a dioramic re-creation. We're still learning what concept of history is freed into play by these mobile images. But even as we are learning how to read them, my suspicion is that underlying them is a concept of history far more complex than most of us are used to.

What is valuable about science fiction is not that it predicts new things (thus presumably giving the reader a running head start on the rest of us) but rather that it presents a range of possibilities (the vast majority of which never come about) that exercise and open up the imagination. Consequently, the new things that do appear—whether in art, technology, or in social patterns—are easier for such readers to fit into their existing world views. It gives us vivid, immediate, and luminous images of new or alternate possibilities—and invites us to describe, to assess, to judge, to reexamine, and to interrogate.

So, too, in their installations, the artists of *Video Spaces* use a great variety of technological and aesthetic underpinning, as well as acquired skills and knowledge, to make new images, and new experiences, and to pose new questions. Only an exploration sensitive to the discourse of the times can begin to fix their import—something that can only be suggested by criticism, something that can be experienced only by standing before, and moving about in, the works themselves.

Note

I tend to look at science fiction as a more linguistic phenomenon, as a way of making certain sentences make sense and decoding others that would otherwise be ambiguous. For example: "Her world exploded." Read as ordinary fiction, it is a metaphor for a female character's heightened emotional state. Read as science fiction, it could mean that the planet on which she lived blew up.

Video Spaces: Eight Installations

Video as an art form began in the mid-1960s, when portable video equipment became available in the consumer market. Until that time the medium had been restricted to well-lit television studios, with their heavy, two-inch video apparatus and teams of engineers. Not that users had an easy time with the Portapak. It consisted of a bulky recording deck, battery pack, and cumbersome camera, and the half-inch tape, stored on open reels, was awkward to operate. Still, artists found the Portapak affordable, and the ability to record in ambient light made the medium attractive. They recognized that video was wide open, with promising artistic potential. During the subsequent thirty years the field has expanded to include a variety of forms, most notably single-channel videotapes, video sculptures, and environmental installations. This introduction serves as a historical context for the artists in Video Spaces, and highlights their participation in the development of the medium.

In the early days, some artists adopted video as their primary vehicle, while others incorporated it into areas such as sculpture, dance, performance, and Con-



Charles Atlas and Merce Cunningham.

Blue Studio: Five Segments. 1975. Videotape.
Color. Silent. 15 min.

ceptual art. For example, in the droll videotape John Baldessari Reads Sol LeWitt (1972), Baldessari faces the camera and in a deadpan voice says, "I'd like to sing for you some of the sentences Sol LeWitt has written on Conceptual art." He begins off-key: "Conceptual artists are mystics rather than rationalists. They leap to conclusions that logic cannot reach." Then, to the tune of "Tea for Two," he continues: "Formal art is essentially rational." The barebones presentation and straightforward delivery suggest that the artist felt unconstrained by this new medium.

Richard Serra, already well known for his "process" sculpture, became involved with a group of sculptors and performance artists who were experimenting with video in the early 1970s. In Surprise Attack (1973), the sculptor's lower arms appear on the screen. He slams a lead ingot from hand to hand, declaiming a text taken from The Strategy of Conflict (1960) by sociologist Thomas C. Schelling. The rhythm of the words becomes more and more emphatic, matching the vehement thrust of Serra's hands. Video's black-and-white imagery, low resolution, and defined space are suited to examining this kind of simple action.

Dancers who worked with video developed specific forms of choreography for the "camera space"—the small area directly in front of the camera. Merce Cunningham, Trisha Brown, and Simone Forti defined the field of view of the monitor, in some cases putting tape on the floorand in effect, the video frame became a proscenium. The fact that dancers were able to see themselves "live" on a monitor also contributed to the emergence of new kinds of productions. In Blue Studio (1975), five Merce Cunninghams perform together as a "corps" in the same space without falling over each other-a dance that can exist only as video.

One of the few artists who has moved fluidly between video and other mediums is Bruce Nauman. Throughout his exten-

sive career Nauman has explored the traditional forms of drawing and sculpture, as well as the twentieth-century mediums of film, holography, video, and installation art. In Corridor Installation (1970), he constructed six passageways, three passable and three not. At the end of one cramped corridor were two stacked video monitors showing the empty corridor. As viewers advanced down the narrow space, their backs unexpectedly appeared on one of the screens—the "real time" image on the surveillance monitor contrasted sharply with the stasis of the other screen. The conflation of present and past is a theme that recurs in video in different guises.

The career of one of today's bestknown video artists, Nam June Paik, began with a doctored-up series of old television sets that he turned into sculpture. A few years later, in 1965, he obtained one of the first portable video cameras to reach New York. Paik, excited as a child with a new toy, took the camera into his studio, onto the street—in fact, nearly everywhere he went. His recordings, mischievous and exuberant, were showcased at a local artists' hangout, the Café à GoGo. In 1967 Paik's voracious appetite for everything current led him to focus on John Lindsay, then mayor of New York. Paik purloined several moments from a televised press conference in which the mayor said, "As soon as this is over, you may start recording." Viewers were able to lampoon the famous politician by sliding magnets across the top of the monitor, distorting his handsome features. It was early interactive video, for the sometimes playful radicalism of the 1960s.

Paik later converted the black-and-white footage into psychedelically colored videotapes using an "image processor" that he and Shuya Abe soldered together. Paik often assembled his tapes with the fast cutting style typical of television commercials, and in some works with multiple screens he did not coordinate the relationships between images on the various monitors. Here, influenced by the compositional ideas of John Cage,

Paik was seeking a serendipitous juxtaposition of images.

Technical factors initially made it difficult for museums to exhibit video. Reel-to-reel tape decks required someone to thread up, start, and rewind each tape. Video was first presented at The Museum of Modern Art in the 1968 exhibition The Machine as Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age. The show was mainly about kinetic art, but it included Paik and many other artists working in electronic mediums. Paik turned his Lindsay Tape of 1967 into an installation by rigging an endlessloop device. He set an open-reel, halfinch playback deck on the floor several feet away from a sewing machine bobbin and spool, and ran the spliced tape between them. This loop anticipated the videocassette.

The following year, TV as a Creative Medium, the first exhibition in the United States devoted exclusively to video art, was presented at the Howard Wise Gallery in New York. The show emphasized the machinery of video rather than its images. Paik presented several of his television sculptures, and Frank Gillette and Ira Schneider showed Wipe Cycle (1969), a work of nine monitors arranged in a grid. This early "video wall" combined both live and delayed coverage of the comings and goings in the gallery, intercut with commercial television programs. In keeping with the contemporaneous influence of Marshall McLuhan, the medium, not the content, was the message.

In the late 1960s, artists such as Woody and Steina Vasulka were seeing what they could coax out of video technology itself. The Vasulkas manipulated the video signal directly, bypassing the camera-recorded world. Their images were based on the wave form of the video signal, modulated by the sound component. Their loft, cluttered with video paraphernalia and secondhand computer components, became a gathering spot where friends showed their new videotapes. Before long, the crowds became too large, and the Vasulkas moved the screenings to the basement kitchen of the Mercer Art Center. When the building collapsed in



Nam June Paik. Global Groove. 1973. Videotape. Color. Stereo sound. 28 min.



Frank Gillette and Ira Schneider. Wipe Cycle. 1969. Video installation. Shown installed in TV as a Creative Medium, Howard Wise Gallery, New York, 1969. Collection of the artists



Shigeko Kubota, Video Curator, Anthology Film Archives, New York, at the Archives' first video program, 1976

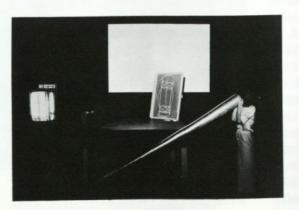
1973, the Electronic Kitchen moved to Soho, where it flowered as The Kitchen Center for Video, Music, and Dance. Climbing the dark stairway to this lively alternative space, visitors were never too sure what they might encounter: aggressive political activity, the first Women's Video Festival, or the latest breakthrough in video installation or performance art—or some amalgamation of them. Still today, with the proliferation of overlapping art forms, it can be difficult to categorize these artworks.

A number of artists were intrigued by the nature of video as a light-borne medium. Like film, video uses light directly to convey the image. Mary Lucier was inspired to treat this light as a physical material. In live performances at The Kitchen, Lucier aimed her camera at stationary lasers, burning pencil-thin lines into the camera tube. The burned-in traces appeared as scars in subsequent live camera shots of the audience. Bill Viola investigated the transient nature of the light-transmitted image. In *Decay Time* (1974), a strobe intermittently illuminated a dark room. Only for an instant did a camera positioned in the room have enough light to form a likeness of the viewer, which appeared as a life-size projection on the wall. An image was born, flashed before the viewer's eyes, then died in blackness. The representation endured only in the memory of the viewer.

At the Anthology Film Archives, another alternative space in New York, the video sculptor Shigeko Kubota organized a weekly forum where artists gathered to show their works-in-progress. During this formative time, many video works resembled sketches, in that they



Mary Lucier. Fire Writing/Video. Performance at The Kitchen, New York, 1975



Joan Jonas. Mirage. Performance at the Anthology Film Archives, New York, 1976

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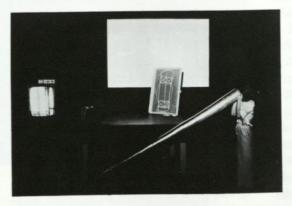
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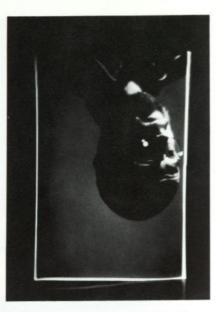
were stages of problem-solving and focused on single ideas. In one short videotape, Gary Hill gives words tangibility by showing a small speaker vibrating to his spoken text. In another study, abstract forms metamorphose into recognizable shapes as Hill recites a series of double entendres. Joan Jonas's work at this time involved the interaction between live performance and her recorded actions, shown simultaneously on several monitors on stage. Like many other artists, Jonas developed each project as three separate units—a performance, an installation, and a videotape for distribution.

The introduction of the 3/4-inch videocassette in the early 1970s made it feasible to exhibit and distribute video to a wide audience. Within a short time, a new museum position—video curator—came into being, when David Ross joined the staff of the Everson Museum of Art in Syracuse. With youthful enthusiasm, Ross promoted video as the art of today and of the future. This theme was echoed at an international exhibition in 1975. Organized by the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia, Video Art surveyed videotapes and video installations from North America, South America, Japan, and Europe. Many museums in North America and Europe subsequently initiated video exhibition programs, and a literature began to form around the work.2

In concert with these developments, artists advanced from the production of relatively simple works to projects that were thematically sophisticated. Two classic works raised issues that have remained central to video over the last twenty years. Present Continuous Past(s) (1974), an installation by Dan Graham, consisted of two adjacent rooms lined with mirrors. Viewers had endless opportunities to see themselves reflected "now," while simultaneously seeing on a monitor their actions of moments before. The video delay collapsed the past into the present, distorting the normal seriality of events. Space too, was rearranged, rendered discontinuous in this infinity box of mirrors. For aen (1974), Peter

Campus used a camera and projector to confront viewers with live images of their faces projected upside-down, directly onto a wall. In the darkened room, the enlarged, high-contrast images provoked viewers to interact with their "portraits." No matter how they turned their heads or changed their facial expressions, they were startled by the blunt, relentless portravals of themselves. The expressive possibilities of interactivity engendered other imaginative installations involving viewer response. However, today, in the intersecting fields of video and computers, evolving in the form of multimedia, interactivity is at a primitive level where little work has gone beyond button-pushing.

Video, like most human activities, has not escaped the embrace of politics. Participants in the women's movement, which began its current phase at roughly the same time as video, found the medium accessible. With no established bureaucracy or history, video allowed artists to find room and jump right in. On the West Coast, Judith Barry engaged in a theoretically informed feminism, interpreting femininity and masculinity as social constructs based upon race, class, and language. In Barry's Kaleidoscope (1979), a series of vignettes about "typical" family life, characters argue feminist theory. One amusing scene depicts a couple—ostensibly a woman and a man—in bed. Before long, viewers realize that these are two women leaning against pillows tacked to a wall, behind bed sheets hung on a clothes line. In a more damning attack on how women are portrayed in the mass media, Dara Birnbaum exposed some of the propaganda techniques of advertising. In P.M. Magazine (1982), she appropriated a frame from a familiar television commercial of a pretty secretary seated at a computer and blew it up into a larger-than-life wall panel. The computer-screen image was cut out of the panel and replaced by a real monitor showing female stereotypes in clips from commercials. One sequence featured a cute little girl eating an ice-cream cone, a future woman who, it was hoped, would grow up to a more expansive professional



Peter Campus. aen. 1974. Video installation. Shown installed at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1976–77. Collection of The Bohen Foundation, New York

world where good looks would not predominate over competence or other values.

The widespread creative activity was coupled with rapid advances in video technology. Nam June Paik's old "image processor" evolved into a sophisticated studio device known as the "Harry," later refined as the "Henry." Frame-accurate video editing became available on 3/4-inch tape machines. The glossier work that emerged found support from funding institutions and was frequently shown on public television. Many artists who followed this path later assumed careers in advertising, Hollywood, or with MTV. Other artists showed their work at museums and alternative galleries, and distributed their tapes through newly created, independent associations.

The division between these more-orless distinct camps was evident in *The*Luminous Image, an exhibition presented at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, in 1984. The show featured "new music" composer Brian Eno's Video: Paintings and Sculptures (1984), a relaxing installation for MTV fans seeking bliss. By contrast, Tony Oursler's assemblage L7-L5 (1984) explored the periphery of the rational world. In a space ringed by cardboard cutouts of skyscrapers, clips of children playing with "zap" guns, drawings of aliens, and futuristic stories acted out by lurid clay figurines were reflected off



Dara Birnbaum. *P.M. Magazine*. 1982. Mixed-media installation. Shown installed at the Hudson River Museum, Yonkers, New York, 1982. Collection of the artist

tinted water and through broken glass. The work demonstrated a common ground between science fiction, alien visitations, and children's fantasies. Al Robbins, in *Realities 1 to 10 in Electronic Prismings* (1984), focused on a low-tech aspect of video. Viewers had to stumble over cables and other electronic rubble to follow Robbins's daisy-chain of images. Starting with old footage of Cape Cod on a monitor, a camera captured this image and fed it to another monitor. This image in turn was captured by another camera, and so on, until the original recording faded away and became pure light.

One of the first exhibitions to open up a dialogue between still photography and the moving image of film and video was Passages de l'image at the Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, in 1990. The installation by Chris Marker, although featuring videotapes, had the directness and charm of a family photo album. For years, Marker has carried a camera in order to record his own experiences and the everyday challenges that ordinary people encounter. In Zapping Zone (1990), he filled dozens of monitors, arranged in an island in the center of the room, with personal recordings and computer-generated drawings. In Marcel Odenbach's installation, Die Einen den Anderen (One or the Other) (1987), images from German operawhich for Odenbach epitomized bourgeois culture and traditional mythologieswere framed in such a way that the viewer became a voyeur, peering through a doorway into the artist's quest for his own history.

In Japan, where craft has traditionally been emphasized over content, video artists have found support largely through commercial organizations. Spiral, a Tokyo complex that comprises a restaurant, gallery, and theater, as well as shops, is a trendy venue for contemporary art and video. In 1990 Spiral sponsored the performance pH by the group Dumb Type. pH orchestrated electronic equipment and performers in a parody of the regimentation of Japanese society. The set brought to mind the

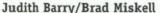
inside of a giant photocopier, with numerous projected images and large metal frames sweeping across the stage. If performers missed a beat, the frames hit them in the shins or on the head. Teiji Furuhashi, the leader of the group, represented an unfettered spirit by whizzing across the space on a skateboard. Dumb Type's work fluidly incorporates video, computers, dance, and theater. Their performances demonstrate how little remains of the boundaries between art disciplines in the late twentieth century.

The maturity that video as an art form had attained by the early 1990s was evident at the international survey exhibition Documenta IX, in Kassel, Germany, in 1992. Unlike Documenta VII (1977) or Documenta VIII (1984), the numerous video installations here were on an equal footing with painting and sculpture throughout the many pavilions. Video works by artists from Europe, North and South America, and Asia were shown, and included in the main building were installations by Stan Douglas, Gary Hill, Tony Oursler, and Bill Viola.

When the Portapak was introduced to the consumer market, it was impossible to predict to what extent video would be an effective means of artistic expression. Of the artists who explored the medium,

many found it crude and did not persist. Others persevered, though they could never have foreseen the technological advances that in time would enable them to do what they wanted. The novelty appealed to their pioneer spirit, and every enhancement in the camera or tape deck was an occasion for passionate debate and further discovery. Fueled by this energy, video exploded in many different directions. Artists searched for and found the forms most suited to the medium, often in combination with other disciplines. In the process they acquired a technical facility that allowed them to deal with content in sophisticated ways.

In recent years video installation and video sculpture have emerged as the most fertile forms of video art. By releasing the image from a single screen and embedding it in an environment, artists have extended their installations in time and space. The direct connection to another moment and an external location is unique to the video installation. Video Spaces: Eight Installations is an international selection of new projects by artists whose primary activity is in environmental video. Their work exhibits a distinctive visual vocabulary and style that exemplifies the current state of video.



A battered wood crate is ready for the garbage pickers. Bold black letters stenciled across its sides identify the crate as having belonged to the Ha®dCell Corporation. Spilling out through missing slats are abandoned computer monitors and keyboards, dusty disk drives, and other high-tech detritus. The contents are webbed together with a nervelike maze of assorted wires and tubing. The computer components and cards twitch and groan, and light flickers on the screens. It is like a cyborg made up of secondhand parts, or an entity from outer space that has just

crash-landed in a dumpster and is crawling out, not quite having gotten all of its pieces back together.

Cyborgs are usually thought of as biological beings modified for life in a non-Earth environment, their organs and appendages replaced by mechanical parts. They are represented as high-tech, sporting a shiny patina. Ha@dCell (1994), a rough-and-tumble assemblage antithetical to this conventional image, evokes a curious comparison with an astronaut. This "moonwalker" resembles a cyborg, in that it is a human being within a non-organic outer shell of engineered fabric and tub-



Judith Barry and Brad Miskell. HasdCell. 1994. Video installation. Shown installed in Crash: Nostalgia for the Absence of Cyberspace, Thread Waxing Space, New York, 1994. Produced by, and collection of, the artists

ing. Generally thought of as synonymous with leading-edge technology, the astronaut is actually awkward in its movements, even clumsy. Though the astronaut and its gear may be considered advanced today, in the near future it will look as obsolete as Judith Barry and Brad Miskell's computer components do now.

Like the cyborg, Ha@dCell also has fleshy parts. A fragile apparatus—a blue plastic sack that inflates and deflates like a lung—seems to have wriggled out onto the floor. A phallus expands and contracts through a hole in the wood container. These whimsical elements suggest that this is the dawn of the do-it-yourself Heath Kit era of creating living things.

Another kind of assemblage, Dr. Frankenstein's monster, is not at all amusing. In the early nineteenth century, author Mary Shelley was inspired by the work of contemporary scientists, who were then undertaking the first experiments on the human nervous system. In Shelley's story, when the monster comes to life, Dr. Frankenstein is so repulsed by its appearance that he flees the room in terror. Although Shelley refers to tight skin and watery yellow eyes, she is unable to convey what makes the monster so horrific. Yet, at a time when science had just begun tinkering with human biology, she clearly foresaw the fear aroused by what is now known as genetic engineering.

Modern culture has different ways of diminishing the apprehension resulting from biological experimentation and its consequences. Today, television programs present a benign Dr. Frankenstein's monster. Comically rendered, with bolts poking out of his head, he doesn't even frighten children. It is an image that mocks our forebodings, a figure appropriate to an age when people adjust their body parts as readily as they upgrade their computer software.

Disembodied messages and bits of computer code stream across Ha@dCell's computer screens, as if crossed-life forms were communicating with one another: "Mem-shift creates discomfort," "Text indicates viral presences but no antibodies," "I was barely twenty seconds old

when I was raped by my father's best friend, an SGI Iridium ^5 with a ferocious hard drive and ten cruel gigs of RAM." At times the text reads as an assemblage of random phrases; at others, as personal narratives. One interchange seems to be occurring between a group of saboteurs and the Ha@dCell Corporation, which is trying to recover stolen materials. This blurring of the mechanical and the human suggests that the computers in Ha®dCell have passed the "Turing test." (Initiated by the Boston Computer Museum, this test, named for mathematician Alan Turing, is held annually to determine whether a computer—a "thinking machine"—has progressed to the point where it is indistinguishable from the human brain. No machine has vet passed the Turing test as structured in Boston.)

Postwar American society, living under the threat of nuclear annihilation, was strongly ambivalent about the bounty of new technology. This attitude has changed in recent years, as the public has fallen in love with the personal computer. Ha@dCell's folksy "creature" promotes a sense of ease with technology while cautioning against the current inclination toward an all-out embrace.

Stan Douglas

Once upon a time, watching the evening news was a ritual. The entire family sat down together and looked at television while nibbling frozen dinners. Part of the networks' mandate was to deliver information and to instruct. Having begun their careers in radio, most television newscasters did not see themselves as performers. Edward R. Murrow, for example, believed he had a duty to educate the viewer. Then things changed.

Evening (1994), by Stan Douglas, considers American television of the late 1960s, when the networks became less concerned with the editorial content of their newscasts than with enhancing the stardom of their anchors. Douglas's installation is centered around WCSL, which is based on the station in Chicago that initi-

ated the concept of "happy news," and two other fictional stations in that city, WBMB and WAMQ. The stations are represented by three large video images projected onto individual screens mounted side by side on a long wall. Using archival clips, Douglas follows nine developing news stories from 1969 and 1970. The contemporary footage is in color, while the archival material projected behind the anchors is in black-and-white. The spare set design and rough edits are faithful to the production values of the time.

The news anchors, portrayed by actors, read material scripted by the artist. Beginning in unison with "Good evening, this is the evening news," they proceed with their separate reports. The anchors wear uniform happy faces, no matter how horrifying or inconsequential the events they are covering. Between reports on the trial of the Chicago Seven, the Vietnam War, and the investigation into the murder of local Black Panther Party leader Fred Hampton, the stations' directors cut between human-interest stories and bantering among the newscasters. This was "infotainment" before there was a word for it.

In front of each screen, an umbrella speaker directs the sound from the corresponding track downward. Standing under the WCSL speaker dome, it is easy to keep score politically: Abby Hoffman is a buffoon, Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., is a thief, and the heart transplant surgeon Dr. Christiaan Barnard is a savior. The trial of Lieutenant William L. Calley, Jr., charged in the My Lai massacre, is dismissed as just one of those stories from the 1960s that won't go away.

Moving into the sound space of other "stations," viewers may compare presentations of the same news feature. WBMB's approach to the Calley story is to emphasize the philosophical and public-relations problems that the massacre raised for the American military. In another issued addressed, Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm puts the controversial Black Panthers in perspective, noting that they are not the Communist menace J. Edgar Hoover believes them to be. For the most



Stan Douglas. *Hors-champs*. 1992. Video installation. Shown installed at the Art Gallery of York University, Toronto, 1992

part, WBMB maintains a more traditional, paternalistic tone, WCSL features "happy talk," and WAMQ falls somewhere between the two. However, all of them soften the coverage of disturbing news by removing the sharp edges.

When viewers stand back some distance from the screens and the speaker pods, the sound becomes indistinct. Key names and words—"J. Edgar Hoover," "radicals," "murderer"—merge in a polyphonic soundscape similar to concrete poetry. When viewed from this distance—both in time and space—the residue, a few vague memories and catchwords, is an appropriate distillation of the pablum that is presented as journalism on television.

Douglas's cool, analytical approach to the media is fundamental to his work. In Hors-champs (1992), several African-American musicians who reside in Europe are shown jamming, their recorded sessions projected on both sides of a large, freestanding screen. The installation focuses on the formality and elegance of the presentation rather than on the beat of the music. By taking the music out of its established context—the smoky night-club—Douglas suggests a new way of thinking about the soul of jazz.

This restraint also informs the way Douglas treats advertisers in *Evening*. He does not castigate them for their pernicious effect on the news—turning it

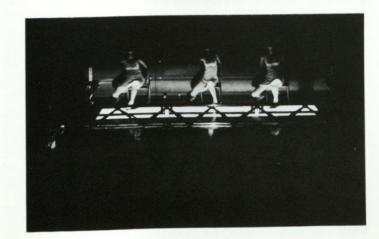
into a ratings game—but simply denotes commercial time slots with the words "PLACE AD HERE." This minimal statement puts the burden on the viewer to develop the thought. In this understated manner, Douglas expresses the civilized person's yearning for a humane and rational world.

Teiji Furuhashi

"Lover" is a common word, and lovers are a popular subject in art. As an image, a pair of lovers often suggests a castle of exclusion. With the sexual liberation of the last few decades, the word now has more to do with physical coupling than with the sublimity of "true love." AIDS has added a new dimension of wariness to this pairing.

The life-size dancers in Teiji
Furuhashi's Lovers (1994) are drained of life. Projected onto the black walls of a square room, the naked figures have a spectral quality. Their movements are simple and repetitive. Back and forth, they walk and run and move with animal grace. After a while, their actions become familiar, so that it is a surprise when two of the translucent bodies come together in a virtual embrace. These ostensible lovers—more overlapping than touching—are not physically entwined.

Unlike much contemporary Japanese art, Furuhashi's work has a political edge. With fellow members of Dumb Type, a



Dumb Type. pH. Performance at the Brooklyn Bridge Anchorage, New York, 1991

Kyoto-based performance group, he combines video, performance, music, printed matter, and installation to expand the expressive possibilities of art. Forthright and ironic, the group presents a spirited but ultimately somber view. Their acerbic work directs attention to a society—that of Japan—overloaded with information—yet seemingly relishing its technomania.

Dumb Type's work is beholden to Ankoku Butoh, which is a confrontational form of avant-garde dance in Japan. Meaning the "dance of utter darkness," Butoh dates back to the late 1950s, and is still quite popular. Its creator, Tatsumi Hijikata, searched for something authentic to be fashioned out of Japanese tradition. Thus, Butoh exposes the dark, hidden side that Hijikata felt had been submerged in a contemporary society influenced by European and American culture. Highlighting bad taste, the banal, and the embarrassing, Butoh creates images of a wasteland peopled by naked, spastic bodies whitened with rice powder. Like the grimacing ghosts found in Noh theater, Butoh exists in a netherworld between reality and illusion. While today Butoh has lost its relevance, Dumb Type's approach has become more pertinent in challenging the diminished humanity of the information age.

Lovers has a two-part soundscape. When the running figures stop and pause, the air is filled with whispered, indistinguishable phrases, as if a murmuring audience has clustered somewhere in the distance, their voices hushed in awe of the event they are witnessing. A series of metallic "tings" in the aural foreground resembles the bleeps of hospital diagnostic machines. The overall impression is one of tentativeness—possibly hopeful, but perhaps not.

In contrast to the ethereal sounds, words of admonition float across the black walls: "Love is everywhere," "Fear," "Don't fuck with me, fella, use your imagination," "Do not cross this line or jump over." The slowly revolving phrases strike with the power of graffiti, connecting the work to everyday life. At the same time, a gold vertical line, scaled to the human

body, moves toward a horizontal line approaching from the opposite direction. They merge briefly, to resemble the cross hairs of a weapon's sight. From facing walls, projections of the word "limit" stream toward each other, self-consciously couple, then separate. This echoes the movements of the two lovers, who at other times briefly overlap.

A touching moment of *Lovers* occurs when the installation is not crowded. One of the videotaped figures—Furuhashi—stops and seeks out a lone viewer. He pauses and faces this person with arms outstretched. The gesture is not a beckoning one; rather, the artist is assuming a beatific pose. He appears vulnerable and exposed. Then, as if on a precipice, he falls backward into the unknown, accepting his fate. In reaching out to a single viewer in a direct, personal manner, Furuhashi belies the notion that the human spirit must necessarily be overwhelmed by the juggernaut of technology.

Gary Hill

The first time Gary Hill arrived to install Inasmuch as It Is Always Already Taking Place (1990) at a museum, he brought close-ups of a body recorded on forty different video loops. He selected sixteen to play on individual rasters—monitors stripped of their outer casings. The rasters, ranging in size from the eyepiece of a camera to the dimensions of an adult rib cage, were set on a shelf recessed five feet into the wall, slightly below eye level. Hill ran each loop on a screen that matched the size of the particular section of the body recorded on the tape. As he positioned the monitors, moving them around with the objectivity of a window dresser, it seemed he was actually handling parts of a living body: a soft belly that rose and fell with each breath, a quadrant of a face with a peering eye like that of a bird warily watching an interloper.

The components of the body displayed in *Inasmuch*—Hill's own—are without any apparent distinction. Neither Adonis nor troll, neither fresh nor lined with age, the body, suits the endless loops,

suggesting that it exists outside of time, without past or future.

The arrangement of the rasters does not follow the organization of a human skeleton. Representations of Hill's ear and arched foot lie side by side; tucked modestly behind them is an image of his groin. Within this unassuming configuration, each raster invites meditation. For example, on one screen a rough thumb toys with the corner of a book page. In its repetition, the simple action of lifting and setting down the page functions like a close-up in a movie. Further, by concentrating the viewer's attention on such a rudimentary activity, the movement, as in a slow-motion replay, takes on the significance of an epic event.

On a torso-size screen, smooth, taut skin stretches over the ridges of bones that shape the human back. The image fills the frame, and the monitor, given its equivalent size, is perceived as part of the body: an enclosure, a vessel, no longer something that simply displays a picture. Raster and image exist as a unified object, as representation, as a living thing.

Long, nervelike black wires attached to each raster are bundled together like spinal chords. Snaked along the shelf, the bundles disappear from view at the back of the recess. Although unifying the system of monitors, this electrical network emphasizes that the body parts are presented as extremities, without a unifying torso. The hidden core to which the components of the body are attached serves as a metaphor for a human being's invisible, existential center: the soul.

Although none of its segments are "still," the installation has the quality of a still life. Typically, the objects in still-life paintings are drawn from everyday life—food and drink, musical instruments, a pipe and tobacco. Their placement appears arbitrary, and they do not communicate with each other. Often set out on a platform or table, the elements are positioned within arm's reach and appeal to all the senses, especially to touch and taste. *Inasmuch* has most in common with a *vanitas*, a category of still life in which the depicted objects are

meant to be reminders of the transience of life. In place of the usual skull and extinguished candle, *Inasmuch* depicts an animate being whose vulnerability underscores the mortality of flesh.

A textured composition of ambient sounds forms an integral part of the installation. For example, the sound of skin being scratched or a tongue clicking inside the mouth, though barely recognizable as such, is orchestrated with recordings of rippling water and softly spoken phrases. Within this uniform soundscape, the looping of the sound-track combines distinctive notes in a pulse that reinforces the living quality of the installation.

In Inasmuch Hill has reduced the requisites for "living" to visceral sounds and, more importantly, physical movement that has no end. However, the ceaseless activity is an illusion, in that each component exists only as a seamless loop of five to thirty seconds in duration. Creating such a loop—one that seems to go on for eternity—involves a bit of a trick: The videotaped image has to match exactly, in position and in movement, at two places on the tape. The segment between these two shots is cut, and the tape spliced into a loop without a discernible beginning or end. Otherwise, for example, if the thumb were to lift the page and then "jump" back to repeat the action, or if the torso should rise slightly and then abruptly rise again, the piece would become a sort of Sisyphean depiction of endlessly repeated activities.

Inasmuch recalls an age when art was thought to be an illusion, a trick played on the senses. Here, the images are not illusory, but time itself is hidden from the viewer, in the way that segments of time are made to appear limitless. In folding time back on itself, a seemingly simple concept, Hill has fashioned a creature whose humanness poses an existential challenge.

Chris Marker

Chris Marker arrived at a meeting in Paris out of breath, weighted down by heavy canvas satchels slung over his shoulders. These, he explained, contained VHS copies of his favorite classic films, such as Howard Hawks's Only Angels Have Wings (1939). He was sending these copies of tapes from his personal video library to cinema-starved friends in Bosnia the next day. Mischievously smiling, Marker noted that they were his own re-edited versions. Rid of what he considers to be tiresome second endings and extraneous scenes, the films are now the way he believes they should be.

This courteous gentleman seems to have creatively reworked his life the way he would edit a film. To begin with, the name of his elusive persona is an Americanized pseudonym. Chris Marker probably was born in 1921 in the outskirts of Paris. He remembers seeing his first movie, a silent one, at the age of seven. He joined the French Resistance in the middle of World War II, then became a paratrooper with the United States Air Force in Germany. He has perpetuated a shadowy existence, and photographs of him are strictly taboo. Always on the go, he easily slips in and out of places incognito, and quietly observes without attracting attention.

Marker's first artistic production dates from 1945, when he began a film on postwar Germany using André Bazin's 16mm film camera. Returning home, he discovered that the lens was broken and out of focus; he then put his film career on hold for nearly a decade. Marker began writing regularly for *L'Esprit*, a Marxistoriented Catholic journal, and for Bazin's *Cahiers du cinéma*, a vehicle for the emerging French New Wave. He tried his hand at a new journalistic form, producing a series of travelogues that combined impressionistic journalism with still photography, published by Editions du Seuil.

During the 1950s Marker was part of the Left Bank Movement, an informal group that included filmmakers Alain Resnais, Agnès Varda, and Georges Franju. He made a series of polemical documentaries with Resnais; Les Statues meurent aussi (1950), for example, criticizes the arrogation of African art by Western museums. Marker's sympathies have always been with ordinary people, whose lives he turns into history, as in his film Le Joli Mai (1962), in which he solicits the views of Parisians in the aftermath of the Algerian War.

Marker's most influential film, La Jetée (1962), reveals the artist's ambivalence toward the past. Set in the ruins of Paris after a hypothetical World War III, the film follows a survivor who is forced to time-travel into both the past and the future. Granted an option by his captors, the protagonist elects to reside in the past, only to realize that to do so is equivalent to choosing death.

The installation Silent Movie (1994–95) is a soaring tower of five oversize monitors stacked on top of one another, resembling a vertical filmstrip of five frames. The teetering structure is stabilized by guy-wires. Marker associates the overall shape with the visionary building proposed by Victor and Alexander Vesnin for the Moscow Bureau of the Leningrad newspaper Pravda in 1924, and therefore with the early spirit of the Russian Revolution. The black-and-white images on the screens look like clips from the silent-movie era; the subtitles appear genuine but are also fabrications, as are the film posters and glossy pinups tacked to adjacent walls. As viewers ponder the authenticity of the material, they are drawn into Marker's reverie on the past.

Marker used video and a computer to make this work, but he restricted the visual effects to those available to silent film directors. These stylistic elements — which include dissolves, superimpositions, irises, and subtitles—helped define the nascent art of cinema. For early cinematographers, such effects represented the leading edge of technology; today, they are charmingly anachronistic.

Marker is attracted to the challenge of working with a limited visual "palette." His reductivist approach is in keeping with his miniaturized recording and editing apparatus, which his production crew of one—himself—can handle. He brings the silent film up-to-date by juxtaposing his computer-controlled images on multiple screens. The composition is orchestrated in accordance with Lev Kuleshov's experiments in montage. This Russian filmmaker of the silent era showed that a neutral shot in a film edit is colored by the emotional cast of a contiguous shot.

Many consider the silent era to be the golden age of cinema. The medium had developed many expressive techniques—for instance, in the tonier films, the composition of the screen images was based on well-known paintings. In the early 1930s, many film artists reacted to the advancing technologies by opposing the introduction of sound and color film, because they feared these technical innovations would compromise the artistic integrity of the medium.

And indeed, with the introduction of sound and color a new kind of cinema evolved. However nostalgically bound to the "golden age" Marker is, he has not given up the present. Although the quality of the film image is superior, he appreciates the flexibility of video, and travels everywhere with a tiny Video-8 camera. He can shoot, see the material immediately, reshoot if necessary, then edit at home. Marker notes in a letter:

As happy as I am with the freedom that video gives me, I can't help feeling nostalgic when I encounter a 16mm frame of Sans soleil or AK—and so much more if I evoke true Technicolor, whose mastery has nothing to do with the false perfection of electronics. . . . So far, I haven't seen any high-def [high-definition video] that matches The Red Shoes. . . . That said, I wouldn't for anything in the world go back to 16mm shooting and editing. Such are the contradictions of the human soul.³

Marcel Odenbach

The installation Make a Fist in the Pocket (1994) displays seven monitors arranged in a row at eye level. Each monitor portrays a particular country—Germany, the United States, France, England, Italy, Czechoslovakia, and Mexico—with news

clips about how the established order dealt with its 1968 revolutionaries. Footage of shouting crowds and beatings is intercut with the famous sequence of the Third Reich's burning of books deemed unsuitable for the master race. In the center of the archival footage shown on each screen is an inset of a hand striking the keys of a typewriter. The staccato cadence of the typing recalls the sound effect that Movietone News used to give an urgent pulse to war dispatches in the 1940s.

A large color video projection occupies the opposite wall. For the most part it is a travelogue, shot with a hand-held camera, of Odenbach's recent journeys in Thailand. The huge, grainy images are sensual and current, in sharp contrast to the artist's composite memories of his youth, as shown on the seven monitors. The smaller, monochromatic images seem distant, as if events that have become history have a diminished reality. They are looped over and over, like a recurring bad dream.

In the conventionally "exotic" images of Thailand, topless prostitutes solicit customers on busy streets, while brightly robed monks chant their calming rhythms. At colorful shrines, the sound of coins dropped into metal vases reverberates like temple bells. Within this panorama, the "West" is present in the person of a naked Caucasian man being walked on, in a form of massage. Intercut with this sunny, languorous footage are disturbing clips of Germany: skinheads throwing stones at foreigners, and Asians and Africans framed in the windows of their burning homes. The Germany Odenbach presents is somber and violent, the polar opposite of warm, ostensibly harmonious Thailand. However, the scene of a Thai kick boxer watching CNN coverage of skinheads on a rampage suggests that Germany's internal affairs may manifest themselves globally in surprising ways.

Odenbach is ambivalent about his cultural history. On the one hand, he feels comfortable with the idealism of the 1960s, a time of clear objectives and identifiable programs that people could rally around. During that period, the

inhumanity of Hitler's Germany seemed to be a closed chapter in the country's history. In light of the recent unsettling events in Germany, however, the specter of the past has acquired an oppressive presence. The current revanchism has shocked many segments of the society, and left them uncertain how to react to the situation. The artist expresses this feeling in the installation's title: "To make a fist in the pocket," a common German expression for thwarted anger.

On the wall at the entrance to the installation is a quote from Ingeborg Bachman, an Austrian poet and activist who was influential in the 1960s. In bold letters the text reads: "I am writing with my burnt hand about the nature of fire." In this context, fire becomes emblematic of the organized violence in German history. That history and the artist's search for his place in it are Odenbach's subject matter.

Tony Oursler

At the doorway to System for Dramatic Feedback (1994) stands a calico entity, a misshapen video face projected onto its cloth head. Over and over again the little effigy cries, "Oh, no! Oh, no! Oh, no!" The voice is shrill and anxious, as if it were witnessing a harrowing event. The doll's emotional demeanor is poignant, and the state of alarm is archetypal. Viewers can empathize, and thereby experience the trauma. It is an in extremis situation, so powerful that it evokes nervous laughter among some spectators. Others simply step back and view the character as a carnival barker, warning them before they proceed.

Inside the installation, on the wall opposite the entrance, is a large black-and-white video projection of an audience. Young faces stare glazedly into the room, as movie trailer music plays softly. Munching popcorn and bathed in cinema's silvery glow, these characters are detached and neutral, waiting silently for something to happen. They are witnesses to the routines of Oursler's creations and to the activity of the viewers within this theatrical space.

Slightly off to one side is a mound of stuffed, life-size rag dolls. Stitched together out of Salvation Army hand-medowns, each of these homey characters is animated by a small video projection that defines one distinct action. At the top of the heap, a disembodied video hand comes down on the posterior of a bent-over male figure, hitting him with a loud smack. The hand comes down again and again, as if to signify that there is no escape from the memory of the experience. The resounding slap acts like a metronome, punctuating the effigy's piercing cry, and the murmurs of the surrounding figures. From behind the mound, a fat, naked female figure hesitantly lurches forward. She pauses, as if about to do something, then straightens up, only to fall down again. She is trapped in a single psychological state, a character in a rut. In the middle of the mound lies a male figure, a penis protruding from his unzipped pants. It becomes erect, then flaccid, larger and smaller, in an endless cycle without gratification.

At the bottom of Oursler's "mutation pile" lies an atrophied body with a gigantic head that looks as if it fell off a statue. Made of white cloth rather than marble, its distorted video face stares out in anguish from underneath the pile bearing down on it. The figure is androgynous, and, as with all of Oursler's rag dolls, the video projection is indistinct. This enhances the universality of the dolls' emotional states, stimulating the viewer's imagination that much more effectively. Oursler's dolls recall those psychologists give to children in order to allow them to reenact an event and play out their emotions, a therapeutic process through which a frightening experience becomes manageable.

In System for Dramatic Feedback, the dolls express their emotions as ritual acts that insinuate themselves into the viewers' fantasies. The sensation is somewhat like that of watching a popular television "cop" series. The archetypal situation shows the good policeman successfully, if violently, dealing with evil, thus assuaging the public's fears. Whereas standard-

ized television programs channel viewers through a narrow range of emotions, Oursler's effigies, lifelike and nonthreatening, beckon them into an open-ended world of the imagination, where the mind is freed to assemble its personal fictions.

Bill Viola

Bill Viola is an investigator of the world of illusion and its makeup. He feels close to the visionary William Blake, and identifies with this protean artist's metaphysical travails. The poetry of the Sufi mystic Jalaluddin Rumi is equally important to Viola. Rumi has the simplicity of someone who has realized his spiritual quest. He has "seen the light," to use a universal metaphor for enlightenment. Viola molds video images, carried by light, into luminous metaphors of his own.

In the center of Slowly Turning Narrative (1992) is a twelve-foot wall panel rapidly rotating on its vertical axis. One side is mirrored, the other is a film screen. Projected onto the revolving wall in black-and-white, an immense visage stares fixedly—a tired face, gazing inward.

Projected onto the same revolving wall from the opposite side of the room, a series of colored images—a carnival at night, children playing with fireworks,



Bill Viola. *The Passing*. 1991. Videotape. Black-and-white. Mono sound. 54 min.

and an empty suburban mall—are intercut with family scenes and pastoral land-scapes. The rotating wall, with the face projected on one side and what might be called mind-images on the other, presents an obvious duality: the surface reality of a person, and behind it, the interior experience. The overall impression is of a slowly turning mind absorbed with itself.

When the projection of the man's face falls onto the matte screen, it appears in a normal, almost photographic manner. However, when the other images are projected onto the screen, they are fringed with red, green, and blue, blurred like clouded thoughts. Only at one moment, when the broad surface of the wall is exactly perpendicular to the projection, does the scene briefly come into registration. It is as if a veil has been lifted and the vision has become clear. Viola is here referring to the mystic's task, which in spiritual practice is termed "polishing the mirror."

As the wall rotates and the mindimages fall onto the mirror, they break into shards of light and splatter onto the walls of the room. The mind has exploded. When the facial image is in turn projected onto the mirror, it also shatters and is strewn around the room. The fragments of the face and the fragments of the mind dematerialize. The distinction between outside appearance and inner reality has dissolved.

The work is like a diptych, with one of the panels—the mirror—adding an extra dimension. Viewers see themselves reflected in the glass as clear, still figures. They are frozen in a carnivalesque world of illusion, where the man's face and mind are a vortex of image fragments. His identity engulfs the viewer; their identities entwine. In this sea of ambiguity, the only certainties are that the wall will keep turning, and that the mirror will always come around again.

An important characteristic of Viola's installations is the existence of an ideal viewing location. Slowly Turning Narrative is unique in that the "best place" to stand is inaccessible. It is the pivot on which the wall rotates, at the center of the duality, the unmoving point. In the Tao, it is this point around which the universe revolves.

Notes

- Called the Paik-Abe Video Synthesizer, the device comprised two cameras, controlled by an electromagnet, that rescanned videotapes playing on monitors. Initially called the "wobbulator," this synthesizer assigned color to the gray scale of black-and-white videotapes and mixed up to seven video inputs.
- 2 The first museums were: in New York, the Whitney Museum and The Museum of Modern Art; on the West Coast the Long Beach Museum of Art and the Vancouver Art Gallery; in Minneapolis, the Walker Art Center; in Paris, the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris and the Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou; in Amsterdam, the Stedelijk
- Museum; and in Cologne, the Kölnischer Kunstverein. The programs have since expanded and are now too numerous to list here. For a chronology of early video activity in the United States, see Barbara London with Lorraine Zippay, "A Chronology of Video Activity in the United States: 1965–1980," Artforum 9 (September 1980): 42–45; and Circulating Video Library Catalog (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1983), pp. 41–48.
- 3 Letter from Chris Marker to the author, October
- 4 Bachman died in 1973—in a fire. Odenbach finds encouragement in the recent revival of her work in German universities.

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