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Stuff it

the video essay in the digital age

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Contents

The Video Essay in the Digital Age

Ursula Biemann

Much has happened since Chris Marker's *Sans Soleil,* which had marked, in the beginning of the 80s, the emer gence of a post-str ucturalist cinematographic practice defined as film essays. The symposium "Stuf f it," which we or ganized in May 2002 in cooperation with the Migr os Museum and the Videoex experimental video festival Zurich, set out to map contemporar y essayist video practice, which has evolved fr om the pr evious body of cinematographic experiments, in or der to gain a deeper understanding of how essayism relates to the contingent digital cultural developments today. The purpose of this gathering of inter national video makers and theorists goes beyond pr esenting a sur vey of existing works. It is an attempt to advance and dir ect the discourse into the digital age.

As a video essayist, I have a personal motivation to bring this par ticular video practice on the agenda. For a number of r easons, the essay situates itself somewher e between documentar y video and video ar t. And as an in-between genr e, these videos often fall thr ough given categories at ar t events, film festivals and activist confer ences. For a documentar y, they ar e seen as too experimental, self-r eflexive and subjective, and for an ar t video they stand out for being socially involved or explicitly political.

Video essayists r ecognize the potential of this ambivalent position and continue a rich pr oduction of thoughtful and highly innovative videos. The idea of this confer ence, then, was to mark the field of a video practice that is at the same time ar tistic, theor etical and political. So that we no longer look at the essay as an odd "strangeling" that r efuses to behave pr operly within the designated categories, but rather r ecognize it as a distinct aesthetic strategy . It cannot, however , be the aim of this collection of texts to establish the essay as a genr e and to cr ystallize it into a for mula. Its str ength lies in the quality of the mediator and communicator between dif ferential cultural spaces.

The last major event dedicated to the essayist film was co-or ganized by Christa Blümlinger in 1 991 in Vienna and center ed ar ound a Ger man and Fr ench film discourse with str ong ties to a literar y tradition. Since then, ar t and media debates have gr eatly evolved in r esponse to political, cultural and technological changes of the last decade. This pr ompted a discussion at the Institute for Theor y ar ound the par ticularities of this video practice and its ability to r espond to and expr ess the present time. *Stuff it* sets out to r econtextualize the audio-visual essay both technologically and culturally. First of all, it is vital to look at video today within the wider development of new media, the Inter net and digital image pr oduction and understand how these technologies emphasize or mutate the characteristics of the essay while opening up new possibilities for a critical engagement

with them. The other fundamental shift is induced by the great geographic and cultural diversity of recent essayist video practice which drives the theoretical discussion from a German and French literary tradition to a postcolonial cultural studies perspective.

What makes the video essay so interesting to the Institute for Theory is precisely its commitment to theory. The videos discussed in this book are intensely involved in theoretical concerns and their mediation through a visual language. A theory of film should be a film, believes film critic Edward Small who refers to this audio-visual critical practice as "direct theory." The videos test the possibility of theory-building through visual means, not in an illustrative manner but in a wide range of artistic, poetic, humorous and sometimes rather absurd ways. Absurdity is frequently produced through the disjointed assemblage of visual associations that do not produce continuity in content. But it is exactly these more endearing humorous qualities of the essay that make up for the demanding density proposed by the simultaneous visual, sonic and textual input, which can sometimes be exhausting and frustrating.

The essay has always distinguished itself by a non-linear and non-logical movement of thought that draws on many different sources of knowledge. In the digital age, the genre experiences an even higher concentration. New image and editing technologies have made it easy to stack an almost unlimited number of audio and video tracks one on top of another, with multiple images, titles, running texts and a complex sound mix competing for the attention of the audience. Stuff it! Distill it! Stratify and compress it! seem to be the mottos of the digital essayist.

Film scholar Nora Alter opens the collection of texts with a short review of the literary essay to highlight the many parallels that this critical, innovative written form shares with its audiovisual counterpart. Her thorough analysis of Daniel Eisenberg's use of historic film footage in his trilogy reveals the importance of insisting on the medium film in the 90s for its potential to pass for a document that may enter history. The use of historic film material is also being addressed in Jan Verwoert's analysis of Anri Sala's *Intervista* in which the young Albanian video artist confronts his mother with a found sequence of an interview she had given as a young communists in Albania. The mothers simultaneous distance and identification with this material is what Verwoert refers to as "double viewing" in his text, an ambivalence that makes it possible to tell the story while at the same time critically identifying its construction. His extensive analysis of Sala's video is representative of the lively discussion that has ignited around the appearance of documentary material in the art context in recent times. The following text by Christa Blümlinger explores the essayist approach with regard to the shift in the viewing context for video works from the cinematic setting to the art exhibition space at the example of Harun Farocki's video and installation work. Today's digital video production is to be seen in the context of hypertext and the Internet. One of the questions will be whether and how new technologies transform the previously analogue medium of video to become more dissociative, multi-perspective and hypertextual in the structuring of images and sounds. This approach seems to suit the essayist thought pattern much better than the linear,

filmic narration that is constructed in the analogue montage. In their theory-performance based on the video *Passing Drama,* Maurizio Lazzarato and Angela Melitopoulos explore hypertextuality and non-linear montage with regard to the structures of memory and recollection. They are experimenting with different forms of collecting and writing history through videographic practice and digital image processing in an attempt to come closer to our perception of history and to the mechanism of memory in the machine age.

Essayist practice is highly self-reflexive in that it constantly reconsiders the act of image-making and the desire to produce meaning. It is consciously engaged in the activity of representation itself. These characteristics make the genre particularly suited to study complex relations. Essayist work doesn't aim primarily at documenting realities but at organizing complexities. This ability is very valuable today since video has to respond not only to a changing media environment but also to an increasingly complex society, where the mere depiction of visible realities has become insufficient. The essay is good at capturing the more abstract, untangible processes of social and cultural transitions. Jörg Huber proposes a theory of transitionality, in which he traces and interprets the mediating feature of video-essayism and its ability to make the very process of perception visible. Some of the transitions addressed by the videos discussed in this volume deal with the shift from mechanical work processes to newer technologies, as in Harun Farocki's work. They may address conceptual shifts in gender identity or concern a mutation in the cultural perception of memory and history, as in the videos by Rea Tajiri, Richard Fung, Mathilde ter Heinje and Johan Grimonprez. Along these lines, my reflection on the transnational video explores the parallels between the transnational space of the global economy and the structures of essayist mental space.

A form of transition that is particularly relevant to this discussion literally relates to movements of diaspora, dislocation and migration. There are good reasons why postcolonial artists are such outstanding essayists. Their videos raise the question of how an increasingly ambivalent experience of place, nation and belonging lived by so many cultural producers today has prompted them to develop an artistic language that corresponds to the essayist voice, a voice that speaks from a position of placelessness. On the other hand, essayists are very engaged in rewriting the historical dimensions of places, as becomes evident in Walid Ra'ad's *Hostage: The Bachar Tapes,* in which he proposes a ficticious treatment of the hostage crisis during the Lebanese civil war, and in Hito Steyerl's *The Empty Center,* which draws an experimental political archeology of the strip between former East and West Berlin. Rinaldo Walcott, on the other hand, opens up an expanded space of the black digital diaspora in the North Atlantic as a video-theoretical space that enters the difficult terrain of memory, slavery and black displacement with an analysis of Isaac Julien's *The Attendant* and Dana Inkster's *Welcome to Africville.*

More cheerful essayist methods use humor as a discursive tool. Paul Willemsen explores Steve Reinke's merry and greatly artistic work, which moves away from recognizable documentary practice to design a creative contemporary milieu around himself that is at the same time highly personal

expression and precise social commentary. Visually sophisticated and with theoretical reference to the very act of seeing, Tran T. Kim-Trang unfolds in *The Blindness Series* a decade of essayist work which covers different pathologies of seeing and not-seeing and their metaphorical values. In the thorough essay *Bilder der Welt und Inschrift des Krieges* (Images of the World and the Inscription of War) Harun Farocki pursues an ongoing fascination with the role of technology in forming our perception. His meticulous observations comment on the link between new technologies of visualisations and their role in the organisation of war, as Allan J. Thomas explains in his text.

The videos *Love Hotel* and *Writing Desire* do not comment on visual technologies from afar, they actually enter and move through the electronic terrain of digital images generated by both the electronic communications networks and the landscapes visually generated by satellite media and other visual information systems. In this instance, the simultaneity and multilayeredness of ideas are produced not through linear editing but directly on the surface of the screen. These videos make apparent how closely the virtual, phantasmatic space of the internet resembles the essayist geographies driven by analysis as much as by wild analogies.

Then there are two contributions which move along the intersection of popular drama and artistic reflection: Guillermo Gómez-Peña's *Border Stasis* and Steve Fagin's video *TropiCola.* In an interview, Steve Fagin laces an essayist fabric of Cuban life through a discussion of popular timba music. A very subjective approach to the recurring theme of "going places" and bringing back a bunch of disparate observations emerges in a video genre which is by definition essayist: the letter, the travel diary. Some are obsessively visual as Irit Batry's *These Are Not My Images* whereas the narrative remains fragmentary and reluctant. In other works the vocal monologue offers personal and philosophical reflexions that becomes the guiding thread through foreign places. In Birgit Hein's *Baby I Will Make You Sweat,* the author reveals her most intimate concerns relating to sexuality and aging by taking us honestly through her sexual experiences in Jamaica. Unlike the documentary, which keeps the commentary closely linked to the image, in the essay the sound and image levels may diverge to the point of becoming completely asynchronous. In *Europe From Afar* by Eva Meyer and Eran Schaerf, the soft female reading voice seems to belong to a multitude of speaking subjects, who continuously entangle reality and the projections of their image of Europe fabricated from far away locations. This piece, which has been conceived as a radio play and a silent video and is sometimes, but not always, shown together, radicalizes the autonomy of image and sound so characteristic to the essay and highlights the performative moment of bringing them together.

Clearly, the following pages cannot give a complete survey of the contemporary video essay. But I hope this volume succeeds in showing how eclectic essayist video practice has been in the 90s. It emerges as an aesthetic and discursive form of video making that holds great potential for contemporary digital production in the context of a transformative global culture.

Memory Essays

Nora M. Alter

A mode of audio-visual pr oduction called the "essay film" has pr oliferated in the past decade. This relatively r ecent genr e of film pr oblematizes binar y categories of r epresentation, and fuses the two dominant genr es of the medium: featur e and documentar y. Fur thermore, the essay film often self-reflexively of fers its own film criticism. Like its ancestor , the written essay , it poaches acr oss disciplinar y borders, transgr esses conceptual and for mal norms, and does not follow a clear nar rative trajector y. The essay film is r ebus-like and hybrid, r ecalling the operation of memor y and dr eamwork.

What is an essay ? Let me briefly pr esent some for mulations on the philosophical-literar y form. "To essay" means "to assay ," "to weigh," as well as "to attempt," suggesting an open-ended, evalua-tive sear ch. But this objective sear ch is haunted and constrained by the pr esence of individual subjectivity. (The verb is also linked via the Latin *ex-agere* to *agens*, the wor d and pr oblem of human agency.) Cur rent use of the wor d *essay* as a distinct genr e can be traced to the sixteenth-centur y social critic and philosopher Montaigne, whose *Essais* (1580) wer e to exer t a deep influence on the Enlightenment, the Fr ench Revolution, and on a variety of critics in this tradition (e.g., De Sade, Leopardi, Emerson, Nietzsche, Lukacs, Ador no, Benjamin, Bar thes). By "essay ," Montaigne meant the testing of ideas, himself, and society . It was a wide-ranging for m of cognitive perambulation that reflected upon fundamental questions of life and human frailty , tensions and overlaps between "fact" and "fiction," and their consequences for social or der and disor der. Since Montaigne, the essay has r etained some of its distinguishing featur es. Its weapons ar e humor, ir ony, satir e, para-dox; its atmospher e is contradiction and the collision of opposites.

In his 1 910 "letter " to Leo Popper entitled "On the Natur e and For m of the Essay ," Geor g Lukacs seeks to legitimate the written essay , which he suggests is "criticism as a for m of ar t." [1] He com-pares the essay to other for ms of literatur e using the metaphor of "ultra-violet rays" that ar e refracted thr ough the literar y prism. [2] Lukacs characterizes the essay as both "accidental" and "necessar y," [3] a description echoed years later by Ador no in his writings on the essay , wher e he extolls the characteristics of "luck," "play ," and "ir rationality." [4] For both Lukacs and Ador no, the essay is fragmentar y, wandering, and does not seek to advance tr uth claims — as would, for instance, the documentar y genr e in the case of film. Lukacs concludes that the essay is both a work of ar t, due to what he calls its autonomous, "sover eign" status, and a judgement. Y et, for Lukacs the essential, value-deter mining thing about an essay is "not the ver dict . . . but the process of judging." [5]

Adorno takes up where Lukacs left off and develops further the notion of the essay as a "critique of system" that problematizes the "absolute privilege of method." [6] Thought, he argues, "does not progress in a single direction; instead, the moments are interwoven as in a carpet. The fruitfulness of the thoughts depends on the density of the texture. The thinker does not actually think but rather makes himself an arena for intellectual experience without unraveling it." [7] Furthermore, for Adorno the essay is the consummate site for critique and its only relation to art is that it is in constant pursuit of new forms of presentation. One such innovation has been made by a group of film and video makers who have sought to produce the audiovisual equivalent of the written genre— what critics such as Edward Small have referred to as "direct theory." [8] Small's starting point is the premise that written film theory, while well developed, is fundamentally flawed since words and written texts are by their very nature inadequate to theorize the constituents of a medium that is audio-visual by its very nature. In other words, parallel to August Wilhelm von Schlegel's declaration that a theory about the novel should be a novel, Small believes that a theory of film should be a film. To this end, he proposes that "certain kinds of film and video works constitute a mode of theory, theory direct, without the mediation of a separate semiotic system." [9] Small extends his observations to most experimental avant-garde production, whereas I would link mine specifically to those productions that are essayistic in nature and that take *critique* as the fundamental force. To quote Adorno once again, the essay is "the critical form par excellence; as immanent critique of intellectual constructions, as a confrontation of what they are with their concept, it is critique of ideology." [10]

In her 2000 *Wiener Vorlesung,* Ruth Klüger, author of the memoir *Weiter Leben,* proposes a theory of writing Holocaust literature that combines both fact and fiction and locates its discourse in the interstices between the two. [11] The result is a hybrid product "where we cannot really distinguish between the two and confuse fact and fiction." [12] Holocaust literature, she argues, is by its very nature subject to interpretation and accordingly departs from historical facts. Moreover, the complex and often self-protective nature of memory further complicates any clear "historical" rendition. Although Klüger refers specifically to Holocaust literature, I would like to extend the parameters of her argument to include other attempts to represent traumatic events in history. Furthermore, while Klüger primarily treats literature, her argument could just as adequately be applied to the visual arts and film. Indeed, the strategy of combining both fact and fiction in a single form bears a strong affinity with the audio-visual essay.

Let us recall that the essay film emerged during a period of historical crisis. The genre was first conceptualized in April 1940 by avant-garde filmmaker Hans Richter. The latter was at the time in exile in Basel, though about to be deported back to Germany. Under these conditions, Richter wrote a short essay entitled "Der Filmessay: Eine neue Form des Dokumentarfilms" (The Film Essay: A New Form of Documentary Film). [13] The pioneering text proposes a new genre of film that enables the filmmaker to make the "invisible" world of thoughts and ideas visible on the screen. Unlike the documentary film that presents facts and information, the essay film produces complex thought— reflections that are not necessarily bound to reality, but can also be contradictory, irrational, and

fantastic. The essay film, the author argues, allows the filmmaker to transgress the rules and parameters of the traditional documentary practice, granting the imagination with all its artistic potentiality free reign. As Richter puts it:

> In diesem Bemühen, die unsichtbare Welt der Vorstellungen, Gedanken und Ideen sichtbar zu machen, kann der essayistische Film aus einem unvergleichlich größeren Reservoir von Ausdrucksmitteln schöpfen als der reine Dokumentarfilm. Denn da man im Filmessay an die Wiedergabe der äußeren Erscheinungen oder an eine chronologische Folge nicht gebunden ist, sondern im Gegenteil das Anschauungsmaterial überall herbeiziehen muss, so kann man frei in Raum und Zeit springen: von der objektiven Wiedergabe beispielsweise zur phantastischen Allegorie, von dieser zur Spielszene; man kann tote wie lebendige, künstliche wie natürliche Dinge abbilden, alles verwenden, was es gibt und was sich erfinden lässt – wenn es nur als Argument für die Sichtbarmachung des Grundgedankens dienen kann." [14]

Richter does not explicitly link the essay film with history in his writing. However, the essay films he was to make subsequently, such as *Dreams that Money Can Buy* (1947), *Chess Sonata* (1957), or *Dadascope* (1963), attempt in their own way, and to greater or lesser effect, to represent specific historical moments, or periods.

Nearly forty years later, when filmmaker Alexander Kluge was faced with the difficulty of responding to the horror of the German Autumn of 1977, he picked up where Richter left off. More specifically, Kluge resorted to what was then an innovative strategy of deliberately mixing fact and fiction in a single film. The result was the remarkable 1978 omnibus production *Deutschland im Herbst*. Kluge argued that the interplay between fiction and non-fiction corresponded to the "coexistence of fact and desire in the human mind," and that only such a slippery form could adequately produce a counter public sphere to that inculcated by the State and the press. [15] This strategy is in part similar to that of Rosellini, who also explored the possibility of placing fictional characters within a historically grounded space, thereby placing both the "real" and the imaginary in the same filmic frame. And as we will see later, Rosellini is an important figure for Eisenberg. At around the same time as Kluge, Hans Jürgen Syberberg confronted a similar dilemma, though in his case it was of how to produce a film about Hitler. Syberberg, too, decided in favor of an essayistic form for his epic, *Hitler: Ein Film aus Deutschland* (1977), which relied heavily on dramatic forms of play, fantasy, puppetry and the like to render the personage of Hitler. [16] What both films try to circumvent is a roadblock called history, which has been reinforced by both collective and personal memory. Since film, video or literature is the work of re-presentation, veracity is an impossibility for a number of reasons. These include the reality of a temporal and spatial lag between the events, for often they took place years earlier and in another place. Or, as Chris Marker quoting Boris Souvarine describes it in the CD-ROM *Immemory* (1997): "L'histoire est quelque chose qui n'as pas eu lieu, raconté par quelqu'un qui n'était pas là." [17] One way to get around the historical roadblock is to make a detour through fiction. Such a path does not presume historical truth, though it never the-

less leads to a representation. The trajectory of this road is not straight, as would for instance be the case in a documentary or narrative story. Rather, it winds in a complicated and at times frustrating and frustrated manner. Indeed, this has been the pattern of many audio visual essays, especially those that attempt somehow to understand the intricately woven processes of history and memory.

Let me now, in the form of an example, turn to an examination of how the formal components of one medium — film— correspond directly to the presentation of History and Memory. The works under consideration will be Daniel Eisenberg's trilogy, or rather cycle of films, *Displaced Person* (1981), *Cooperation of Parts* (1987), and *Persistence* (1997).[18] In these films, Eisenberg, the child of Holocaust survivors, returns to Germany and Poland to try to make sense of a history (at once personal and public) and its manifestation in both the present and the past. His return to Europe, and especially the sites of his ancestry and their annihilation, is by no means unique. However, Eisenberg does it *three* times: in 1981, 1987, and 1997. The resulting films thus produce their own historical trajectory and their own contribution to history. For part of Eisenberg's filmic strategy in *Persistence* was to create or establish filmic documents of the present day which might be used by someone in the future. In other words, just as Eisenberg himself has relied heavily on found footage, there is a self-conscious awareness on his part of producing found objects /footage for future use.

The first in the cycle, *Displaced Person,* is a compilation film comprised entirely of found footage — several memorable sequences come from Ophuls' *The Sorrow and the Pity* (1970). According to Eisenberg, the impetus to make the film suddenly occurred when he saw Ophuls' film:

> As Hitler walked up the steps of La Madeleine I realized that I had stood in that same spot, and read the inscription on the building and sat down there. To consider the fact that during my first trip to Europe, Hitler and I crossed paths in time, really, was a whole metamorphosis of the world in my head; it was a revelation of some kind. Space and time seemed to collapse into one. And I realized, aside from the fact that his political program and history had in fact created my very being, because my parents met in Dachau after the war, there we were crossing paths. [19]

Displaced Person is composed of several interrelated fragments that are repeated numerous times in different arrangements and combinations. The fragments are often interspersed with several seconds of black leader. In between, we see Hitler on a train pulling away from a crowded station as the camera tracks a Red Cross nurse racing after the train, two young blond boys on bicycles, a child washing a doll, children playing in a German town, Hitler arriving in Paris, and a formal dance sequence. The reorganization of the arrangement of the sequences serves to redirect and reorient our relation to the sounds and images, thereby uncovering embedded meanings. Furthermore, Eisenberg manipulates the images with the aid of an optical printer. Thus, for instance, in the sequence with the blond boys, sometimes their bicycles move and the background stays still, and

sometimes the opposite occurs. The ef fect is to ar rest histor y and development: both the personal and the public. The movement of the boys on bicycles across the screen is abruptly interrupted, and that inter ruption is constantly r epeated and r eplayed. The characters ar e not allowed to develop: their pr ogress is halted, unnaturally , and their stor y is left incomplete. The viewer can only speculate and imagine.

A similar manipulation is at play in the train sequence. The camera focuses on a young woman chasing the train, tracking the movement of her body in slow motion. A close-up of her face r eveals the degr ee of sheer ecstasy and fanatical obsession of her devotion to Hitler . As we r ealize that the footage is taken by one of Hitler's camera men, the power of the image incr eases dramatically . The sound track includes Beethoven's Opus 59, as well as a lectur e in English deliver ed by French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss on "The Meeting of Myth and Science." In one of the mor e poignant points in his lectur e, Lévi-Strauss states that "if the same absur dity was bound to r eappear over and over again, and another kind of absur dity also to r eappear, then ther e was something which was not absolutely absur d; or else it would not appear ."

Made six years later , *Cooperation of Parts,* as the title suggests, alludes both to Eisenber g's own sense of fragmentation as it addr esses his r elationship to the Ger many and Poland of his par ents as well as to a for mal strategy of filmmaking. The film opens with footage taken by Eisenber g at a contemporar y European train station (Calais and the Gar e de Lyon). However , the voice-over (Eisenberg's own) paradoxically announces:

> Here is the oldest pictur e I've managed to obtain . . . . It's a pictur e of a young woman par ting with friends at a railway station in Ger many. Ther e's no platfor m next to the train (the image on the scr een negates this statement) . . . . She's wearing dark sunglasses. Her hair is long and pinned in back . . . . W e know that her two friends would finally ar rive in the U.S. sometime in early 1949. So the photograph must be fr om the summer of 1 948. She was tr ying to convince her own husband to emigrate to the U.S. as well.

By juxtaposing images fr om 1987 Ger many onto a verbal nar rative that describes an unseen photo from a Ger many of the for ties, Eisenber g relates the past to the pr esent, and imbricates, in a manner that r ecalls the sur realist methodology of W alter Benjamin, the pr esent with the past thr ough the interplay between the visual and audial r egisters. But ther e is mor e. Indeed, the described photograph of his mother, as well as one of his father taken while in a Soviet Labor camp, also stand as signs for when a visual histor y of Eisenber g's family begins. The family is only allowed to be

> **Daniel Eisenberg,** *Displaced Person,* **11 min., 1981.**

> **Ibid.**

> **Daniel Eisenberg,** *Cooperation of Parts,* **42 min., 1987.**

perceived visually intact as an image once the war is over — no other visual trace exists. Thus Eisenberg takes on the challenge of cr eating a personal visual text in which no personal images r emain.

During the next for ty minutes of *Cooperation of Parts,* Eisenber g's camera seeks to find traces of the past. This occurs not only in long tracking shots of Auschwitz, Dachau, and the Jewish cemetery in Warsaw, but also in the ar chitecture of Berlin. As the camera moves acr oss the ar chitectural landscape, Eisenber g pauses to r eflect on images, uttering "T rue . . . False . . . False . . . True . . . ." For the past is ar ticulated specifically in the traces of mor tars, bombings, bullets, and in the r uins of buildings. Needless to say , this is a past not yet glossed over and "r econstr ucted" for W ester n eyes. The last shot in this sequence is of the Sacré-Cœur in Paris. Within the flow of images, the effect is star tling and brings to our attention how our own conclusions ar e alr eady embedded in any r epresentation. In the film, Eisenber g also finds the cour tyard of the apar tment complex in Poland where his mother spent her childhood years. Ther e, he captur es young Polish childr en and an elderly woman who, per haps because of the harsh economic cir cumstances in Poland in the 1980s, *visually* resonate with how characters in the context in which his mother gr ew up might have appeared for ty years ago. Indeed, it is pr ecisely in the for mer East, wher e "cosmetic sur gery" has not yet been per formed to erase all scars of the war , that Eisenber g's camera finds uncanny markers. These he weaves into the fabric of his memor y. As in a traditional essay film, the verbal track is dominated by the r eading of philosophical pr overbs and aphorisms, some of which ar e repeated at regular inter vals. Impor tantly, many of these pr onouncements ar e not in any obvious way keyed to the images displayed. Rather , they hang in the silence, unmoor ed— e.g. "Misfor tune makes and breaks you," "The splinter in your eye is the best magnifying glass." and "The longest r oad is fr om the mother to the fr ont door." In the case of the latter , the phrase is first said orally , later it is written and finally it appears as a filmed image of Eisenber g's mother's actual fr ont door.[20] The film ends with the following wor ds printed acr oss the scr een: "Going down that str eet ten thousand times in a lifetime . . . or per haps never at all . . . ."

Ten years later, Eisenber g would once again go "down that str eet." To make *Persistence*, he returns to Berlin, and to the camps, drawn now by a r eunified Ger many. Mor e so than in *Cooperation of Parts, Persistence* conveys a sense of the filmmaker as subject. Now , not only is his voice r ecognizable, but Eisenber g also allows his image to appear on scr een. The film opens with a lengthy shot of the angel on top of the Siegessäule, with an ef fect of wind (r epresentative of histor y) blowing acr oss its body in an exaggerated fashion. Eisenber g her e dir ectly r efers with an inter title to Benjamin's *Angelus Novus* (the angel of histor y), an image that will ser ve as the film's overar ching trope of victor y and catastr ophe. Indeed, the film attempts to show the continuous and discontinuous thr eads of histor y. The opening cr edits announce the title *Persistence*, described as a film in twenty-four absences /pr esences. The film's first sequence featur es extraor dinary footage of a destr oyed, bombed-out Berlin. The footage is r emarkable not only because of the pr oximity of the camera (despite its aerial position), but also because of its use of color stock . This is an utter anomaly. Typically , documentar y footage of the W ar and its after math is in black and white. Such

footage pr ovides a necessar y distance, placing the events fir mly in the past. By contrast, the color footage shocks, bringing the scenes depicted into the pr esent. (The footage was obtained by Eisen- berg from the U.S. militar y, whose pr opaganda division was given stock of new color film with which to document the success of U.S. Air force raids in 1 945.) The next sequence, in black and white, depicts a young boy wandering amidst the r ubble and r uins of Berlin. The scene is immediately recognizable. It comes fr om Rosselini's famous 1 947 film, *Germany Year Zero*, a fictional nar rative filmed primarily on location in postwar Berlin. Clearly , this film's place in film histor y is one of the central reasons why Eisenber g cites fr om it. But just as impor tant is the manner in which *Germany Year Zero* mixes the r eal with the imagined. This culminates in a highly vexed r elationship between the personal and the historical.

Persistence is primarily about Berlin. The film featur es an over t curiosity as well as an underlying anxiety r egarding the r eemer gence of Berlin as a capital city . For Eisenber g, Berlin functions as a site that transmits the trauma of the Holocaust. Only in Berlin can the traumatic events of the mid- century be r epresented and r eenacted. The r econstr uction of the city today is uncanny , for it visu- ally and audially r ecalls the r ebuilding of Berlin for ty years ago. Thematically , many issues r esur- face that had been buried. Fr eud wr ote in his 1 919 essay , "The Uncanny ," that a typical uncanny ef fect is "pr oduced when the distinction between imagination and r eality is ef faced, as when some- thing that we have hither to r egarded as imaginar y appears befor e us in r eality." [21] Eisenber g's filmic production seems to r ealize such an imaginar y something. His confr ontation, however, is with someone else's r eality— a reality that belonged to his par ents. Yet, it has persisted in his imagina- tion and has almost become r eal for him as well. Thus, after visiting the medical experimentation block of Sachsenhausen wher e his mother was imprisoned, Eisenber g's voice-over r eads a letter he has written to his mother . In the letter he tells her that he does not want to know the details of what she experienced. Complete knowledge is no longer necessar y, for it is now felt to be super- fluous and obscene. Rather , Eisenber g opts for a filmic strategy marked by absences, focusing instead on what is left unsaid and unr epresented.

Eisenber g's filmic pr oject cr eates a histor y of the inter mixing of audial and visual fragments fr om the past and the pr esent. These pieces r epeat and r esur face thr oughout the film following a musi- cal str ucture of variations ar ranged by Eisenber g. This fragmentar y incompletedness stands in sharp contrast to the popular , seamless r econstr uctions available for mass consumption. As Eisen- berg explains, "I am ver y inter ested in the idea of fragments, and the way fragments ar e pieced together." [22] His inter est in fragmentation goes beyond an inter rupted family histor y and extends to aesthetic pr oduction in general because "it's been par t of art-making and aesthetics for a long time in this centur y . . . . And fragments sometime have a way of r eflecting or br eaking things apar t."

But, one might legitimately ask, why film ? Why is Eisenber g adamant that this trilogy could only have been conceived and executed in film ? Why would the use of video, for instance, have been inconceivable ? In par t, answers to these questions r elate to the fact that the medium of film was

current during the time period addressed by Eisenberg's cycle. In other words, he seeks a historical veracity that is not mediated by the introduction of a contemporary medium such as videotape. Although Eisenberg's project is a type of historical reconstruction that acknowledges the degree to which it is influenced by the present, he insists on using material (film footage) that has durability and stands as evidence. The footage from German newsreels, from US bombers, from Rosselini's film, and from Eisenberg's own camera, all share a common trait: they are all made in the material form of celluloid. As such, the differences between the film fragments, whether initially intended as documentary or fiction, propaganda or information, designed for private or public consumption, all achieve an equivalence in their status as witness and evidence. As mentioned earlier, Eisenberg's own films will enter into this cycle of history and contribute to these documents. The importance of using film in the 1990s thus achieves another relevance, for it also self-reflexively points to films' passing as a medium of documentation. For if the second World War was witnessed in celluloid, today's wars are documented electronically. Furthermore, the diverse nature of the filmic extracts attests to the amount of work that Eisenberg had to go through in order to find and assemble the footage which he ultimately used. This difficult task is not to be discounted, for it parallels Eisenberg's role as a researcher seeking to uncover and patch together pieces of a hidden history— one whose immediate access has been blocked. Each visit to the archive thus constitutes the meanderings of an essayist who must weave together many different and disparate threads— some of fact and some of fiction.

The traditional editing process was central to Eisenberg's decision to employ the medium of film. Film editing relies heavily on memory—it becomes necessary to keep a whole project in one's head. This in turn is related to the thematics of Eisenberg's films, which, as I have already suggested, are about the construction of history, memory and forgetting. History and memory are necessarily incomplete and full of gaps, lapses, and absences, and Eisenberg's films are marked by these characteristics. Bits of filmic evidence are put together, forming a Benjaminian mosaic where the truth only appears as flashes in the cuts between the fragments. The process resonates with the experience of a subject trying to reconstruct a memory that s/he did not experience directly. The person is a secondary witness of a trauma, parallel to the experience of a film spectator. The trauma is experienced as what Abraham and Torok have described as "transgenerational memory," meaning that the trauma has been unconsciously transmitted from one generation to the next. [23] In *Cooperation of Parts*, Eisenberg's voice-over reveals the resonance of the trauma: "I wind up asking the same question my mother asks, 'Why me?' It was through her, not through her conscious intention, that these things passed. Like a shock wave felt through several generations." Here it is important to remember that a trauma can only be recalled indirectly through fetishistic strategies. The fetish in this case resides in the fascination that films and photographs as pieces of evidence from a previous time produce. It is as if, by examining these remnants, we could somehow uncover the truth of what happened. Eisenberg's fetishistic insistence on the filmic medium thus encodes material conditions of displacement, rupture, and loss in the very form of the work.

If there has been a gradual shift in the positioning of the spectator as witness vis-à-vis the histori-cal events depicted, Chris Marker's CD-ROM project *Immemory* transforms the viewer's relation-ship even more dramatically.[24] The piece cannot be accessed without an active and persistent viewer. The CD-ROM positions the participant as a co-writer of history, similar to the protagonist in Marker's earlier film, *Level 5* (1996), who seeks to uncover a hidden history.

Immemory cannot be taken as a pure autobiographical essay any more than can a museum or a library. For although it constitutes Marker's personal archive, the narrative that is woven, the paths that are followed, and the amount of time spent working with the CD-ROM, are all up to the viewer. Throughout the CD-ROM, the latter is given choices of where to click and what routes to follow. For example, the first screen presents several possibilities: War, Film, Photography, Poetry, Museums, and Voyages. If we choose photography we again have several choices: China, Korea, Vietnam, Cuba, Bosnia, World War II and the like. Click on Cuba and there unfolds (at a speed determined by the viewer) a series of images of Cuba in the thirties. Musical and film extracts can also be accessed. A cartoon cat appears and announces that twenty-seven years have passed, and a news-reel of Fidel Castro giving a speech appears on the monitor. The images are more often accom-panied by written texts. Some of these are from literary sources, while others are reproduced telegrams and postcards addressed to Marker.

To navigate through the entire CD-ROM takes hours, and a different voyage is undertaken each time. Thus the history changes each time, depending on where the viewer decides to go. And although the images and texts have been installed by someone else, their ultimate arrangement is left up to the viewer. However, like a deck of cards, after the play is over it is reshuffled and noth-ing remains of the past game except the viewer's personal memory of the experience. Heavily indebted to Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*, each click produces a madeleine that sends the reader into a another long series of meditations.

Marker's digitalized audio-visual montage thus produces infinite possibilities and results in a work in which the spectator co-directs, edits, and arranges the text.[25] Marker thus pushes the viewer to create new texts rather than to merely consume histories. In turn, the work will always remain open, never complete. For in typical essayistic fashion, the viewer's role will always-already be that of con-tinuing the work, perpetually constructing new narrative trajectories and creative possibilities.

Essay films have been sporadically produced for at least seventy years. Recently, however, both their theorization and their production have increased to the point where now the essay film or video is commonly acknowledged as a full-fledged peer of the narrative and documentary genres. While film essays were relatively infrequent in the 60s and 70s, this in-between genre proliferated during the 90s. Today, it seems that essay films are everywhere. Indeed, I would even go so far as to argue that Gilles Deleuze's division of twentieth century cinema into the movement-image (pre-WWII) and the time-image (post-WWII) should be expanded to include the essay film (post the collapse of the

Soviet Union). **26** This highly theor etical and self-r eflexive cinema has incr easingly come to assume the critical function of the written film theor y essay.

1   Georg Lukacs, "On the Nature and Form of the Essay: A Letter to Leo Popper [1910]," *Soul and Form* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1978), p. 2.

2   Ibid., p. 7.

3   Ibid., p. 9.

4   Theodor W. Adorno, "The Essay as Form [1954–58]," *Notes to Literature,* vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), pp. 3–23.

5   Georg Lukacs, "On the Nature and Form of the Essay," p. 18

6   Theodor W. Adorno, "The Essay as Form," p. 9.

7   Ibid., p. 13. Here we need only recall the audiovisual density of recent productions by Jean-Luc Godard such as *Allemagne 90 neuf zéro* or *Histoire(s) du cinéma*.

8   Edward S. Small, *Direct Theory: Experimental Film/Video as Major Genre* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1994).

9   Ibid., p. 11.

10 Theodor W. Adorno, "The Essay as Form," p. 20.

11 The speech has been published as Ruth Klüger, *Dichter und Historiker: Fakten und Fiktionen* (Wien: Picus, 2000).

12 Ibid., p. 42.

13 Hans Richter, "Der Filmessay: Eine neue Form des Dokumentarfilms [1940]," in Christa Blümlinger / Constantin Wulff (eds.), *Schreiben Bilder Sprechen: Texte zum essayistischen Film* (Wien: Sonderzahl, 1992), pp. 195–198.

14 Ibid., p. 198.

15 Alexander Kluge as cited by Miriam Hansen in "Cooperative Auteur Cinema and the Oppositional Public Sphere: Alexander Kluge's Contribution to *Germany in Autumn*," *New German Critique* 24–25 (Fall–Winter 1981–82), pp. 36–56; here p. 49 .

16 For an excellent analysis of Syberberg's film see Anton Kaes, *From Hitler to Heimat: The Return of History as Film* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

17 "History is something which didn't take place, told by someone who wasn't there."

18 Eisenberg refers to these films as part of a cycle rather than a trilogy. Daniel Eisenberg in conversation with the author (March 22, 2003).

19 Daniel Eisenberg in "Daniel Eisenberg im Gespräch mit Alf Bold," *Kinemathek* 29 (January 1992), pp. 4–17; here p. 7.

20 Daniel Eisenberg in conversation with the author (March 22, 2003).

21 "The 'Uncanny' [1919]," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XVII (1917–1919), ed. by James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1953–73), p. 244.

22 "Daniel Eisenberg im Gespräch mit Alf Bold," p. 8.

23 Nicolas Abraham / Maria Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

24 For two insightful treatments of *Immemory*, see Laurent Roth / Raymond Bellour, *Qu'est-ce qu'une Madeleine?: A propos du CD-ROM Immemory de Chris Marker* (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1997).

25 This methodology is entirely in keeping with Marker's anti-auteurist manner of working, typified by his tendency to credit himself merely as editor and not as director.

26 See Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986); and *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

Double Viewing

The Significance of the "Pictorial Turn" to the Critical Use of Visual Media in Video Art

Jan Verwoert

The uninhibited use of found media images and the self-reflexive method of reorganizing and commenting on their meaning places the video essayist often in the position of a media critic, whose position, however, remains ambivalent. It may well be appropriate, therefore, to speak of the "pictorial turn" with respect to critical practices in video art, as media criticism often exhibits a distinctive quality of its own in this context: Even decidedly critical positions do not necessarily distance themselves from the commercial mass media they criticize, but instead settle deliberately in the gray area between art and popular visual culture. Reflection often approaches its object so closely that only minimal distance is preserved between the two. This approach ordinarily takes place within the context of media selection. Many artists work with precisely the same mass-media technologies whose functions are the object of their critical investigations.

The medium of video plays a particularly important role in this process. Video is one of the most popular of all visual technologies. Cameras, recorders and software for video editing on home PCs are now reasonably affordable and easy to use. Television also films on video tape. The use of video surveillance systems is on the rise. Video is one of the most important means of production in our society's collective visual output. This productive resource is quite freely accessible, and that is a boon to media criticism. Working in the medium of video makes it possible to reconstruct, criticize or correct the logic of image production in a performative mode, *from the inside out*.

If we are to understand the unique character of these performative practices in theoretical terms, we need to examine a tacit premise of media criticism — namely, that criticism is possible only from a distance. The implication of this assumption is that "critical distance" to the media in question can be achieved only through negation of the fascinating power of popular visual media — and that the loss of distance is tantamount to regression into an attitude of uncritical consumption. Practices which develop critical positions through direct involvement with the media they mean to criticize defy this premise. They demand a redefinition of the relationship between seemingly polar oppositions such as closeness and distance, consumption and criticism, fascination and analysis.

It seems to me that this attempt to redefine the theoretical premises of media criticism — in the sense of critical practice oriented more closely toward a popular visual culture— can now be seen in the current discussion regarding the "pictorial turn." The purpose of the following essay is to examine several selected aspects of this discussion as fertile sources of ideas for a theoretical outline of the premises of a practical approach to media criticism that investigates the functions

of the medium of video fr om within the medium of video — and in doing so fr eely makes use of the visual languages of popular visual media to examine and cor rect their functions.

The pictorial turn

In 1992, the American theorist W . J. T . Mitchell published his essay entitled "The Pictorial T urn" in the jour nal *ArtForum*.[1] The text has the ring of a manifesto. Mitchell develops the basic principles of a futur e scholarly discipline devoted primarily to the study of visual cultur e. He ar ticulates two fundamental ar guments — one might also call them demands:

First of all, he postulates that in our society , the communication of infor mation, like the exer cise of power, takes place to an incr easing extent with the aid of visual technologies. (Nicholas Mir zoef f describes this situation aptly in the statement "Moder n life takes place onscr een."[2]) This tr end toward visualization, Mitchell contends, r equires new, appr opriate for ms of analysis and criticism of visual phenomena. In this sense, he calls for closer collaboration between social scientists con- cerned with ideological criticism and scholars concer ned with visual phenomena. Sur ely, no student of cultur e with an inter disciplinar y orientation would have dif ficulty suppor ting such an appeal.

Mitchell's ar gumentation becomes bolder at the point at which he demands that the "linguistic turn" in cultural studies give way to a "pictorial tur n." He criticizes the dominance of a semiotic approach to interpr etation in cultural studies. Under the banner of the "linguistic tur n," models based upon sign theor y and linguistics wer e not only intr oduced to cultural studies but also wel- comed as critical, pr ogressive and avant-gar de beginning in the 1 970s.

Mitchell does not question the fundamental legitimacy or the critical potential of this appr oach. His doubts r elate to the question of whether the function and ef fect of visual media can be described on the basis of semiotic models. In this sense, then, Mitchell defines the pictorial tur n as "a post- linguistic, post-semiotic r ediscover y of the visual image as a complex interplay involving visuality , apparatus, institutions, discourse, bodies and figurativity ."[3]

What I find inter esting in Mitchell's position is not so much the fact that he r evives the ontological question of what pictur es ar e but that he under takes a r e-evaluation of the status of visual media. Mitchell accuses the advocates of semiotic appr oaches of "ocular phobia"— a fundamentally icono- clastic tendency . He finds this underlying tenor r eflected in the privileged status of text as opposed to the visual image; in other wor ds, the image as a medium of mythical obscuration is not mer ely set in opposition to the text as a medium of enlightenment but actually subor dinated to it. It seems to me that this blanket devaluation of the visual, this general attitude of scepticism with r egard to visual phenomena is indeed a principal featur e of cer tain for ms of criticism based on semiology . Thus I r egard the appeal to accept a "pictorial tur n" as entir ely r easonable. And ther e is r eason enough to subject cer tain ideas about the status of visual media that have quietly established them-

selves as dogmas in cultural-critical thinking in the course of the spr ead of semiotic appr oaches to critical r eassessment.

Rosalind Krauss's critique of the pictorial turn

Mitchell's criticism str uck a ner ve, as evidenced by the aggr essive tone in which the American ar t journal *october* in an issue devoted to "Visual Cultur e" expr essed its position in opposition to a pictorial tur n in 1990. In harsh ter ms, co-editor Rosalind Krauss defended the semiotic appr oach in her essay entitled "W elcome to the Cultural Revolution" [4]— citing Roland Bar thes and Jacques Lacan in suppor t of her arguments. Her r eference to precisely these two theor etical pioneers would seem to have been anything but coincidence. Indeed, I think a number of elements in the theories of Bar thes and Lacan have solidified into dogmas of cultural discourse or ideological critique that continue to influence contemporar y debate— and that it is ther efore entirely appr opriate to identify these tacit assumptions and criticize them specifically .

On the whole, Krauss's interpr etation of the ef fect of an image abused for the purpose of ideological manipulation can be described — to use a ter m coined by W . J. T . Mitchell — as the "Medusa effect." [5] The image casts a spell over the viewer . It transfixes him, r obbing him of all fr eedom of movement and critical distance. This loss of critical distance makes it impossible for the viewer to see thr ough the mechanisms of manipulation. The semiotic tools with which the image generates its message r emain invisible to him. The pr ocess of semiosis is obscur ed fr om his view . Thus he cannot recognize the image as a constr ucted, coded sign. Instead, he falsely per ceives it as a complete whole and consumes the visual statement as self-evident. In the pr ocess, the loss of critical distance pr ompts the viewer not only to misconstr ue his r elationship to the image but also to misinterpret his relationship to the r eal world. Not only does he fail to r ecognize that the image manipulates him, he also misses the oppor tunity to establish an active r elationship to r eality guided by reason. Under the spell of the "Medusa ef fect," the viewer takes pleasur e in his own passivity and deception as an escape fr om r eality. This escapist pleasur e involves elements of r egression and compensation. In simplified ter ms, ther efore, the Medusa theor em postulates the transfixation of the viewer and the disappearance of the sign in the moment of pleasur e in looking at the image.

Double viewing: the hedonist scepticism of mobile recipients

The alter native theor y I would like to sketch out her e has its origin in r esear ch on recipient behavior conducted within the context of Anglo-American cultural studies. It is the model of a mobile, pleasure-oriented, yet emancipated r ecipient of the media of popular cultur e. The models of r eception developed in cultural studies ar e based on the pr esumption of the multidimensional character of identification and consumption pr ocesses. In other wor ds, a consumer of images can have several different, even contradictor y attitudes towar d the images he consumes. And he is able to identify with multiple, mutually contradictor y for ms of identification at the same time. How consumers of

visual images subsequently pr ocess these images and incorporate them into their personal view of the world cannot be clearly deter mined in advance. It also seems doubtful that "naïve" consumers images still exist in our media society at all. The fact that images can be manipulated is common knowledge today. Anyone who has a computer at home can obser ve and lear n how they ar e manip-ulated.

Thus one can and should assume that the consumers of popular visual cultur e possess a cer tain degree of basic competence in dealing with media — competence that includes knowledge of the unique laws gover ning the institutions and the for mats of visual media. People know how cinema works and ar e well acquainted with the standar d procedure for news br oadcasts — in part because broadcasting companies and film studios pr ovide a constant str eam of infor mation about the con-ditions of pr oduction in the for m of highly popular "the making-of" featur es. In light of these insights, the view of the r ecipients of popular cultur e as unprejudiced and naïve expr essed by Rosa-lind Krauss would seem untenable. T o be mor e pr ecise, they raise serious doubts about her cen-tral ar gument— that visual pleasur e necessarily r ules out all sensitivity to the "ways in which the significant works" (i.e. the character of the visual r epresentation as a constr uction, as something made). Indeed, it is obviously tr ue that even sophisticated cinematic illusions not only r emain recognizable as illusions but also derive much of their appeal fr om the fact that they ar e under-stood as such. The spectacle adver tises itself *as* spectacle. (Such films as *Lord of the Rings, Harry Potter* and *Star Wars* come easily to mind in this context.)

In his study of fan cultur es— *Textual Poachers: Television Fans & Participatory Culture*[6] — cultural scholar Henr y Jenkins develops a ver y convincing model of the complex dynamics that gover n the reception of (popular) cultural media. Viewers r egister the illusor y ef fects cr eated by these media, Jenkins ar gues, at two levels of per ception simultaneously: "Thus one experiences these ef fects by 'dividing one's cr edibility', enjoying the mechanics of these illusions while still losing oneself in their nar rative implications." [7] At the one level, Jenkins contends, viewers of a television series, for example, take the fiction generated by the medium at face value. They follow the stor y line, iden-tify with the pr otagonists, and become emotionally involved. Y et at a completely dif ferent level they enjoy the constr ucted character of the pr ogram, not least of all because it confir ms what they already know about the actors and the cir cumstances sur rounding the pr oduction of the series. In discussing the r elationship of Star-T rek fans to their beloved series, Jenkins writes, ". . . fans see the fictional characters and their actions as simultaneously 'r eal' and 'constr ucted', adopting a strategy of 'double viewing' that tr eats the show with both suspended disbelief and ir onic dis-tance." [8]

The concept of "double viewing" thus describes the simultaneity of infor med distance and involve-ment-identification in the r eception of visual media. Y et Jenkins does not define this simultaneity as a static balance. He r egards r eception as a dynamic pr ocess in which r ecipients work out their relationship with what they see actively while they see it. In other wor ds, they assume dif ferent atti-

tudes at dif ferent times (as Jenkins says, "pr oximity and distance ar e not fixed 'positions'"). The experience of one's own mental flexibility at the moment of r eception makes the pr ocess par ticularly enjoyable. Jenkins sees identification and distancing, belief and disbelief as r elated attitudes whose interplay constitutes the unique dynamics of the r eception pr ocess.

Jenkins attributes special significance to the medium of video in this context, as he feels that this medium encourages and suppor ts an appr oach to visual material that is highly favorable to the playful-master ful for m of r eception defined as "double-viewing." Video enables r ecipients — fans, in Jenkins's study — to record or bor row and watch movies, pr ograms and series in which they ar e interested however , whenever and as often as they wish. They can watch cer tain scenes over and over again, by advancing or r ewinding the tape, or skip other ones entir ely. They can build their own circulation and communication for ums through copying or lending, or they can cr eate video ar chives of collected tapes based on their own personal criteria. (In this sense, Jenkins ar gues that the use of video for ms fosters both multiple critical "r ereading" and "inter textual knowledge.") All of these practices underscor e the material character of video: Video images may not have the aura of film images, but they ar e more r eadily accessible for individual use. Video is a ver y practical material.

Ambivalence as a tool of criticism

The development of a practical appr oach based upon these assumptions involves advocating an approach to visual media that "complicates" our view of the ways in which these media work, in that it gives pr oductive potential to the ambivalent aspects inher ent in the media themselves. In other words, it exploits the contradictions of the media — and thus appeals to the capacity of viewers to adopt dif ferent, contradictor y attitudes towar d what they ar e viewing during the r eception process. An inter esting example r elevant to this context is of fered by videos by W alid Ra'ad, such as *Hostage: The Bachar Tapes* (from a fictitious series of 53 tapes), which he pr esents as documentar y statements by Souheil Bachar , the lone Arab hostage in a gr oup comprised of himself and five Americans which was held captive under ver y confining cir cumstances fr om 1983 to 1993. All of the Americans write books about their experience during captivity . In for mal ter ms, many of the scenes ar e reminiscent of videos made by abductors and sent to br oadcasting stations to publicize their message: A man sits in an apar tment without r ecognizable featur es in front of a bare wall and makes a confession-style statement while gazing dir ectly into the camera. Only upon closer examination does it become clear that Ra'ad's films ar e fictional. The nar rator on the scr een is not the hostage. He mer ely assumes the victim's position fictitiously in or der to play out and under mine the various possible ways of telling "victims' stories" and to emphasize the political natur e of their rhetoric. Ra'ad exhibits the mechanisms of the medium in which he works. Y et at the same time he uses the penetrating language and the power ful appeal of the video confession to char ge his presentation of the underlying political pr oblems with the intensity of personal experience. Thr ough experimentation with the co-existing, equally legitimate perspectives of belief and disbelief, Ra'ad succeeds in communicating a sense of the pr oblems associated with his subject matter in the

medium of video while exposing the conflicts inher ent in the for ms in which the medium of video is instr umentalized and questioning the ver y habits of r eception to which his video appeals.

In my view, the pr oduction method that cor responds to the for m of r eception r eferred to as double viewing is a technique I would call *disjunctive synthesis*. A method of disjunctive synthesis seeks to make use of the two contradictor y principles of fascination and scepticism, exploiting the power of fascination in the images to the maximum at the for mal level, taking advantage of the possibili- ties for establishing coher ency through traditional nar rative means (voice-overs, continuous flow of images) — thus using all of the tools that contribute to nar rative closur e and ther eby maximize the effect of a work of video ar t. But this would also mean cr eating a maximum of heter ogeneity at the formal level by combining images with dif ferent origins, mixing documentar y, staged and computer- generated elements, using special ef fects and leaving abr upt cuts in place. It would be essential to ensur e that moments in which illusion is generated and those that cr eate distance r emain related at all times — that neither illusion nor distance is sustained alone. Instead, a continuous alternating shift must take place between illusion and distance. Ultimately , the quality and inten- sity of the video film is a pr oduct of this constant per ceptual shift.

Documentary approaches in the context of art (Finding the Words)

It is impor tant to establish that videos which do not exploit the medium's ambivalent qualities for a self-reflexive critique of the media itself ar e not necessarily deconstr uctive. And thus video works that employ the tools of "disjunctive synthesis" for constr uctive purposes ar e par ticularly inter est- ing. Anri Sala's video entitled *Intervista* (1998) is a r evealing example of such a work. In *Intervista,* Sala constr ucts a penetrating biographical nar rative and uses it to describe the r ecent histor y and the cur rent situation of Albania. [9] The video works with simple documentar y images and a straight- forward dramatic str ucture, yet leaves r oom for substantive and for mal ambivalence and thus never detracts fr om the complexity of the theme.

The nar rative in *Intervista* proceeds as follows: Sala happens by coincidence upon an old r eel of film. The film is a r ecording of an inter view given years ago by Sala's mother V aldet Sala as a young woman and a spokesperson for the Communist Y outh Or ganization for Albanian television. Her words are not audible. The soundtrack is missing. In sear ch of the lost text, Sala jour neys to T irana, where he succeeds with the help of a deaf lip-r eader to reconstr uct his mother's statements. When he confr onts his mother with the text of the inter view, she r eacts with mixed feelings. She is out- raged over the ideological tone of her statements but appears incapable of distancing herself fr om them entir ely. That fact that she believed what she was saying at the time of the inter view and had invested years of her life in that belief make her for mer convictions a par t of herself, one she can- not and will not deny .

One of the r emarkable qualities of *Intervista* is that Sala uses the biographical nar rative to expose

the importance of a people's revolutionary movement.

a dimension of experience that is important to an understanding of the past. The relationship between his mother's biography and the history of the country is symptomatic precisely *because* it is ambiguous. The contradictory simultaneity of identification and distancing that shapes Valdet Sala's attitude toward the collective past is characteristic, as *Intervista* shows, of the difficulties encountered by the Albanian people in dealing with the profound upheavals in their society. And Sala maintains the ambiguity at the formal level as well. He counteracts the apparent authenticity of the documentary footage by incorporating staged sequences. Key scenes in the framing narrative, such as the discovery of the film and Sala's arrival at his parents' apartment in Tirana, have obviously been re-enacted. Sala moves the film narrative closer to the realm of fiction. Viewed from the perspective of its potential fictional character, the story of *Intervista* becomes a possible rather than a real one. Valdet Sala's life story takes on the status of a model biography that not only describes a single human destiny but may also be representative of the lives of others.

The simple narrative structure also permits the integration of relatively heterogeneous visual material. The combination of documentary and staged sequences is only one aspect. The artist also embarks upon a number of visual excursions, including scenes of urban life in Tirana filmed by Sala through the windows of a moving automobile. Here and there, the camera shifts abruptly away from a speaking person and focuses on mute building walls or news images on the screen of a television in the background. These interspersed elements play no role at all in the story line, yet they evoke a palpable impression of the urban, social, and political context in which Sala is operating. Thus Sala uses the resources of "disjunctive synthesis" in several different ways. The personal and the political are presented as interwoven aspects of a whole *in Intervista,* but they are also set apart as incongruent dimensions. On the basis of the same principle, documentary images are combined to form a visual texture which, despite its heterogeneous character, never loses its coherency and, despite its coherence, never loses its heterogeneity.

Thus the aesthetics of *Intervista* reinvigorte the debate on the approaches to the visualization of complex contents in the sense of the "pictorial turn." The video clearly shows that conventional forms of visualization do not rule out the expression of complexity, heterogeneity, and material quality per se. The video offers proof that traditional means can be used to create coherence and that the fascinating power of penetrating images can be exploited — but also that heterogeneity can also be achieved through montage of visual material of different origins, through the combination of documentary and fictional, of recent and historical found footage, etc. By telling his story but identifying the narrative as a construction (or fiction), Sala succeeds, in the sense of "double viewing," in drawing upon the principles of fascination and skepticism at the same time.

The detailed analysis of Sala's video relates to the discussion of the increasing spread of video

<   **Anri Sala,** *Intervista,* **26 min., 1998.**

works based on documentar y appr oaches in ar t in r ecent years. I see this abundance of docu-
mentary videos as a clear sign of a „pictorial tur n" in the discourse on ar t from a social-critical per-
spective. Until the mid 1 990s (one might r oughly summarize [10]), the installation was the pr edomi-
nant for m used to r epresent attempts to come to grips with social pr oblems. The installation
ser ves as a display: r esearched material was distributed in the r oom, and the installation assumed
the character of an ar chives or a pr oject of fice, fr om which inter ventive action could be initiated.
The installation-displays wer e characterized primarily by a "discursive" aesthetic with anti-visual
features: wall newspapers, text anthologies, and r eading tables dominated the pictur e.[11]

In a cer tain sense, incr eased inter est in documentar y video works signifies a shift in the medium
and its aesthetics in the pr esence of unchanged thematic concer ns and r equirements. The objec-
tive is still to addr ess and analyze social pr oblems thr ough r esearch and to pr esent the fr uits of
that r esearch to viewers. Now , however, the documentar y video has assumed the function of the
"display" for merly per formed by the installation. The aesthetics of naming and instr ucting have
given way to the aesthetics of showing and telling. T o speak of a pictorial tur n in this context is to
point out that for ms of representation pr eviously dismissed as unwor thy (af firmative and uncritical)
are now being used by video ar tists: penetrating visual imager y and nar rative biography.

1   W. J. T. Mitchell, "The Pictorial Turn," *ArtForum* 30:7 (March 1992); reprinted in Mitchell, *Picture Theory* (Chicago: University
    of Chicago Press, 1994).

2   Introductory remarks from Nicholas Mirzoeff, *An Introduction to Visual Culture* (London / New York: Routledge, 1999).

3   W. J. T. Mitchell, "The Pictorial Turn."

4   Rosalind Krauss, "Welcome to the Cultural Revolution," *October* 77 (Summer 1996), pp. 83–96.

5   Mitchell writes, ". . . to transfix or paralyze the beholder, turning him into an image for the gaze of the picture [is] what
    might be called the 'Medusa effect'." —W. J. T. Mitchell, "What Do Pictures *Really* Want?" *October* 77 (Summer 1996),
    pp. 71–82, here: p. 76.

6   Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans & Participatory Culture* (London / New York: Routledge, 1992).

7   Ibid., p. 66.

8   Ibid., p. 65.

9   The death of Albanian head of state Enver Hoxha in 1985 led to a severe destabilization of the social order. Hoxha had ruled
    Albania since 1948 on the Stalinist model of a one-party dictatorship and held the country together as an integrating fig-
    ure. Hoxha's successor Ramiz Alia was unable to maintain that political course. The first free elections were held in 1991.
    The political turnabout was accompanied by mass flights of refugees and violent riots. The unrest escalated in 1997 in the
    wake of the bankruptcy of the country's largest investment banks and financing companies, which had been the symbols of
    hopes for prosperity associated with the introduction of a market economy. Large segments of the population lost their
    entire fortunes. Civil-war style rebellion ensued. The situation eventually calmed but remains tense even today.

10 The theory of the shift from the installation to documentary video in the context of art in the 1990s was proposed by Georg
    Schöllhammer, who made this observation during a discussion that was part of a series of panel discussion on the art of the
    1990s I organized in cooperation with the Kunstverein Hamburg in 2002.

11   Pioneers of the concept of the installation as material display include such artists and groups as Group Material, Martha Rosler, and Stephen Willats. In the early 1990s, this aesthetic approach moved to the international arena thanks to works by Renée Green, Christian Philipp Müller, Andrea Fraser, and other artists in the "Services" project developed in collaboration with Helmut Draxler. In the German-speaking region, interventionist projects such as the "Wochenklausur" and "BaustopRandstadt" took up the aesthetic. Its echo was heard at documenta X in the form of the so-called "Hybrid Work Space."

Civilizationally, we do not dig holes to bury ourselves

Walid Ra'ad / The Atlas Group[1]

Excerpt from a public interview with Souheil Bachar conducted by Maha Traboulsi at the American University in Beirut on May 1, 2002. In my presentation, I will try, as much as possible, to remain true to that event.

Maha Traboulsi asks:
Can you please identify yourself?
Souheil Bachar answers:
My name is Souheil Bachar. I am from the village of Houla in South Lebanon. I was kidnapped in 1983. I was released in 1993 after a ten-year captivity. I am 42 years old.
Bachar asks:
Can you identify yourself as well?
Traboulsi answers:
Sure, my name is Maha Traboulsi. I am a media artist and teacher. I also work with The Atlas Group, a foundation I established in 1976 to research the contemporary history of Lebanon.
Traboulsi asks:
Can you tell us about how you came in contact with us, The Alas Group, and about the tapes you have produced?
Bachar answers:
I saw your presentation in September 1999 at the Ayloul Festival in Beirut. I was very intrigued by your foundation's mission and by the documents in your archive. I approached you after the presentation, and we agreed to meet and talk. After a series of meetings between us two years ago, you proposed to assist me in the production of videotapes about my experiences as a hostage. Since then, I have produced 53 short videotapes.
Traboulsi asks:
But you don't make public all 53 videotapes?
Bachar answers:
I have publicly screened all 53 videotapes but only in Lebanon, Syria, Iran, Iraq, Egypt, Libya, Sudan, Palestine and Morocco. Of the 53 videotapes, I allow only 2 tapes, Tapes #17 and #31, to be screened in North America and Western Europe.

<   Walid Ra'ad, *Hostage: The Bachar Tapes,* 16 min., 2000.

Traboulsi asks:

Why?

Bachar answers:

Well, I should mention that during my ten-year detention, I was held for three months with 5 American men: Terry Anderson, Benjamin Weir, Thomas Sutherland, Martin Jenco and David Jacobsen. My detention with these men coincided with the "Arms for Hostages" negotiations unfolding in the mid-1980's between the US, Israel and Iran. In fact, my detention with the Americans came to an end on the day that Benjamin Weir was released, on 14 September 1985, as a result of the first arms shipment by the US via Israel to Iran.

I should also state that many of the Western men who were held hostage in Lebanon in the 1980's have written and published books about their experiences in captivity after their release. In fact, all five American men who were detained with me in 1985 have written books that were published in the US.

In tapes #17 and #31, I wanted to focus specifically on this aspect of my captivity, on my detention with the Americans along with my post-detention study of the writing of the story of captivity.

As to why I do not release the other tapes in North America and Western Europe, I am not interested in commenting on this matter.

Furthermore, I would appreciate it if your questions in this interview only deal with what I examine and propose in tapes #17 and #31.

Traboulsi answers:

Ok.

Traboulsi asks:

In tape #17, you state at the beginning that your tapes should be dubbed with a female-voice over in the language of the host country where the tapes are screened . . .

Bachar interrupts:

Excuse me for interrupting, but I think that this is a good time to screen the tapes.

Traboulsi answers:

Yes, let's do that.

Traboulsi screens tape #17 #31

Traboulsi asks:

Let me return to the question I started to ask.

In tape #17, you state that the tape should be dubbed with a female-voice over in the language of the host country where the tapes are screened. We have just screened the tape here in Switzerland and I have seen the tape screened in France and Syria.

The female voice-over is always in English. Why?

Bachar answers:

No money was found for the dubbing into German, French and Arabic. As a consequence, I made exceptions until funds are available.
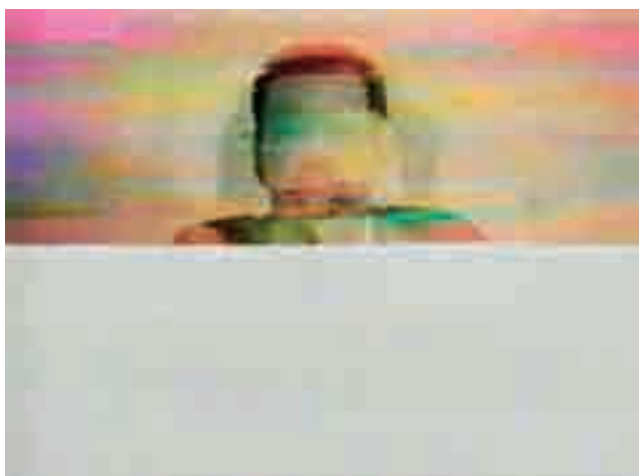
Traboulsi asks:

I also noted that the English voice-over is not an accurate translation of what you say in Arabic. At times, the voice-over says the exact opposite of what you are saying in Arabic and at other times, it says something not related at all to what you are saying in Arabic. Did you translate the text yourself? And if so, why the difference between what you say in Arabic and the non-Arabic voice-over?

Bachar answers:

Yes, I do my own translations.

I have nothing to say about the second part of your question.

Traboulsi asks:

Can you tell how you came to invent yourself, to imagine yourself as Souheil Bachar?

Bachar answers:

As the Arms for Hostages negotiations between the US, Israel and Iran became serious in 1985, Hizballah, Iran's ally in Lebanon gathered most of the American hostages they held into a single 10X12 foot cell. The idea was that if and when the hostages were released as a result of the arms trade, they would look significantly better than had they just emerged from solitary confinement. During this three-month forced cohabitation, an Arab man was placed in the same room as the Americans.

In their books, Terry Anderson, Benjamin Weir, Thomas Sutherland, Martin Jenco and David Jacobsen identify this man as Wajd or Wajid Domani or Doumani and they describe him — but they describe him differently. I found these descriptions to be very intriguing and I became interested in this man's story. After initial attempts to find him proved fruitless, I decided to imagine his testimony. I did so in order to speak about certain dimensions of the "Western Hostage Crisis" that had not been examined at all, namely the cultural and literary dimensions of the writing of the story of captivity; the figurations of Arab and Western masculine identities given expression in the books; and policy dimensions such as a troubling US policy in Lebanon and the Middle east in general.

Traboulsi asks:

OK, then, let me continue with a general question about the political scandal that is most closely associated with the captivity of the Americans in Lebanon in the 1980's, the Iran-Contra affair. What is your understanding of the affair?

Walid answers:

It is clear to me that no event framed more publicly the abduction of Westerners in Lebanon than the American scandal widely known as the Iran-Contra affair. I suppose that in the United States, the mention of Iran-Contra conjures up for most people images of Oliver North.

Iran-Contra involved two distinct Reagan Administration policies. The first policy concerned the trading of US arms to Iran for, among other things, the release of US and other Western hostages held in Lebanon by Iran's proxy militias in Beirut. The sales did in fact lead to the release of American hostages Benjamin Weir in 1985 and Martin Jenco and David Jacobsen in 1986. It is important to note that this initiative contradicted the publicly stated US policy "never to negotiate with states that sponsor terrorism;" Iran had been officially designated a sponsor of terrorism in January 1984.

The second policy involved the support of Contra military and paramilitary activities in Nicaragua between 1984 and 1986. The legality of this policy was also challenged in Congress and the press particularly in relation to the provisions of the First and Second Boland Amendments of 1982 and 1984.

What was taking place was that the US was over charging the Iranians to the tune of 600% for the sales, and diverting the profits to support the Contras in Nicaragua. When this diversion scheme was revealed, it triggered a series of official investigations, 5 of them in fact between 1986 and 1993, beginning with US Attorney General Meese's Preliminary Inquiry into The Sale of Arms to Iran and concluding with Independent Counsel Lawrence Walsh's report in 1993.

My reading of the investigations demonstrated to me that their investigative scope was limited to particular areas and as such failed to address a number of central questions about the development and implementation of US foreign policy. I am convinced that a bringing together of the facts was far from the sole or even the primary motive of these investigations.

The investigations were politicized and partial, and they produced contested narratives that displaced interest away from the historical and policy dimensions of the affair and onto a concentrated celebration of the good health of the American political system. As such, the investigations failed to shed light on how a disastrous US policy in the region had contributed to the abduction of Western men in Lebanon.

Now some may think that this scandal is old news. Well, it is and it isn't.

It is important to keep in mind that many of the American policy makers who were involved in this affair in the 1980's, men such as Elliot Abrams, Otto Reich and John Negroponte, some of whom had been convicted and sentenced, are now once again active in shaping and implementing current US policy in the Bush Administration, and their continued involvement in shaping a disastrous US foreign policy was evidenced a few weeks ago when their role in the attempted coup in Venezuela was uncovered.

Traboulsi asks:

I get the sense from one segment in your tape, the one where you discuss how each American hostage begins his story by talking about the weather, that you are making a point about how the Americans were also de-politicizing their abduction in their books, that they were treating their kidnappings in personal rather than political terms. Is this right?

Bachar answers:

Yes, that's correct.

From the books written by the Americans and in my discussions with them in captivity, it is clear to me that they were all to some extent aware that their abduction was a political rather than a criminal or personal matter.

This political and historical dimension was also acknowledged by the families of the hostages who were dealing with the White House and the State Department during the detention of their loved ones. Carol Weir (Benjamin Weir's wife) has written about her meeting with then Secretary of State George Shultz and about how she had argued that "it should be recognized that they (the Shi'a of Lebanon) had some legitimate grievances against the United States." She wrote of the oppressive

US-supported Israeli aggressions in South Lebanon as emblematic of the United States' "lack of concern for justice in the area": Americans didn't seem to understand why there is so much rage against us in the countries of the Middle East . . . . The United States had supplied the Israelis with cluster bombs, vacuum bombs, and weapons of every kind. American bombs by air and American shells by sea were raining on the city of Beirut. The civilian population was on the verge of panic. Unfortunately, Secretary of State George Shultz was more intent on dismissing and discrediting the captors than on engaging in any kind of dialogue with them as is evident from his response to Carol Weir that "the Shiites . . . are pagan and primitive people," and that "such people were crazy, they heard voices from God, they were deranged. It was impossible to talk to them."

Now I will not discuss the question of whether Hizballah was "a mark of shame upon the Lebanese Shiite community they purported to represent." On this matter, I proceed with the understanding that the captors and their actions were at times despised and at times held in high esteem for various reasons by Lebanese and Westerners alike.

Traboulsi asks:

Can you tell us something about your insistence on having your voice dubbed by a female voice-over?

Bachar answers:

A fascinating and revealing aspect of books written by the Americans is that of the literary contributions of the hostages' girlfriends and wives. Anderson's, Sutherland's, and Weir's books, for example, include sections in which Madeleine Anderson, Jean Sutherland and Carol Weir contribute by relating "their" side of the story.

In many reviews of the books in the US popular press, I was surprised that critics have characterized the contributions of the wives as "odd" and as "distracting."

The question I want to ask these critics is: From what does Madeleine's or Carol's account divert us to deserve this characterization as a "distraction"?

It is evident when reading the captivity memoirs that what was unfolding in Beirut was a series of events from which the wives were excluded. Beirut's cells, in other words, were spaces populated mainly by men, by Arab and Western men. So, one can say that the wives' contributions constitute a gendered distraction in that they impose onto an otherwise male narrative of captivity a woman's thoughts and perspective.

However, it is noteworthy that Madeleine's account was not the only one written by a woman close to Terry Anderson. Terry's sister, Peggy Say, had for years been vocal in the popular press about her brother's fate. Her book titled *Forgotten* was published during her brother's absence in 1987. By 1993 when Terry Anderson's book was published, Peggy Say's book was out of print and she was out of sight.

> **Souheil Bachar was kidnapped in Beirut (Lebanon) in 1983. He was in solitary confinement for ten years except for 27 weeks in 1985 when he was held in the same cell with Americans Terry Anderson, Thomas Sutherland, Benjamin Weir, Martin Jenco, and David Jacobsen.**

What I want to argue is that while the captivity of Westerners in Lebanon affected not only the hostages but also their families, friends, governments, and numerous others, it is intriguing that the story of captivity is distilled in the memoirs to being not that of the Western men and their mothers, fathers, brothers, friends, or sisters, but particularly that of the hostages and their wives / girlfriends.

The distillation of the narrative in its published form suggests that Madeleine and the wives /girl-friends' contributions constitute not only gendered contributions but also sexualized ones. Some writers have already suggested that the drama of Western women's captivity tends to revolve around their sexual assault. I want to suggest that of Western men's revolves around containing the threat of sexual desire for men, for Arab and Western men. This threat is ultimately contained through the literary contributions of the wives /girlfriends.

These contributions not only confirm the women's self-imposed celibacy during their husbands' ordeal. Their contributions also confirm that women remain the Westerners' love objects.

Hence, Bachar's uses of a woman's voice-over works in relation to his segment on sexuality. Both segments are there to remind us of the gendered, homosocial and homoerotic dimensions of the captivity of Westerners in Lebanon, and to suggest that the wives' contributions demonstrate that the experience of captivity and its representations grant the male hostage a better understanding not only of "the enemy, God, the family, or self," but also of his sexuality. It confirms his hetero-sexuality.

Traboulsi asks:

Some may wonder whether you are ridiculing the American hostages. What happened to all these men, be they American, British, or Arab, was horrible, tragic? Don't you agree?

Bachar answers:

Yes, of course I agree.

The books written by the Americans relate a remarkably sordid account, and stand as a fascinating testimony to our horrible ordeal in Lebanon during those years. Abducted and confined in detention centers, "dungeons," cells, and prisons, we all endured situations of extreme physical and psychological abuse. Beaten and blindfolded, gagged and taped, harangued, threatened, tortured, isolated, abandoned, half-starved, chained, ridiculed and harassed, we suffered greatly at the hands of our captors. And some of us continue to suffer the physical and psychological effects of our detention.

My interest today is in how this kind of experience can be documented and represented.

I am also convinced that the Americans have failed miserably in this regard but that in their failure they have revealed much to us about the possibilities and limits of representing the experience of captivity.

What I want to ask is: Of all the ways the stories of captivity could have been written, why were they written this way?

I should also note that the representation of the experience of captivity is by no means foreign to American readers. In fact, captivity narratives are "the only literary-mythological form indigenous to North America." [2]

My hypothesis then is that the captivity of the Americans in Lebanon is fundamentally a stor y to be told, written, and filmed, and inevitably has been told, written, and filmed. And the written stories we ended up with ar e familiar stories, ones that, it seems, need to be r epeated.

Here, I am r eferring, first to a general r ecognizable str ucture of what is called the "captivity nar ra-tive," a str ucture that can be detected in the various accounts; and second, to the fact that Ander-son, W eir, and Jacobsen, who have all written and published books about their experiences in Lebanon, also spent a significant par t of their time in captivity together , in the same r oom. In other words, the chr onology of events for Anderson, W eir, and Sutherland, Jenco and Jacobsen is mor e or less the same. The same is tr ue of Keenan and McCar thy, who have both written and published their captivity memoirs and who spent most of their detention together .

This pr oliferation of captivity accounts that detail the experiences of men who had spent most of their captivity in the same place, ar ound the same time, and under ver y similar conditions is intrigu-ing. Commenting on this matter , one hostage r emarked that this multiplicity of books pr oves that "each man experienced his imprisonment in his own way ." [3] This r emark highlights a par ticularly familiar tendency in the captivity memoirs wher eby the experience of captivity is r epresented prima-rily as a psychological and individual rather than a social or political phenomenon. [4]

This move away fr om the socio-political is pr oduced at the beginning of each of the nar ratives as I suggested in the videotape. All the books begin similarly by describing the moment or day of abduc-tion. Jacobsen, W eir, Ciccipio, W aite, and Anderson r espectively begin their accounts with the fol-lowing passages:

> May 28, 1 985 was a typical Beir ut mor ning, swiftly brightening as the sun bur ned of f the early morning mist. (Jacobsen)

> The mor ning of May 8, 1 984, blended beauty with harshness. On that bright spring day in the Muslim section of the city , the sounds of bir ds coming fr om the untended gar den plot next to our apar tment building contrasted with the angr y growl of distant explosions. (W eir)

> I don't think ther e was a happier man in the world than I was on the mor ning of September 12, 1986. (Ciccipio)

> Beir ut, 20 Febr uary 1987
> When I awoke, it was dusk. For a moment I lay still slowly , reluctantly r eturning to the conscious world. It was unusually quiet. A gentle br eeze stir red the faded hotel cur tains, bringing with it a hint of sea. (W aite)

The emphasis in these beginnings on detailing the subjective per ceptions of meteor ological condi-tions in the city or the psychological state of mind of the hostage-to-be comes at the expense of some clarification of the socio-political context of Lebanon. By bracketing the ver y day, the ver y moment of their abduction fr om the socio-political context, the incident of captivity figur es her e,

too, as an accident. The presence of Westerners in Beirut during the mid-1980's is assumed to have no unusual significance, and Beirut is presented as any other city in the world, except for the "angry growl of distant explosions."

A crucial shift is effected as the abductions are described in these terms. The shift is from the social and political toward the personal and psychological aspects of detention.

Traboulsi states:

Thank you for taking the time to do this interview.

Bachar replies:

And thank you for your generous questions.

1   The Atlas Group is a project established by Walid Ra'ad in 1999 to research and document the contemporary history of Lebanon. One of our aims with this project is to locate, preserve, study, and produce audio, visual, literary and other artifacts that shed light on the contemporary history of Lebanon. In this endeavor, the group produced and found several documents including notebooks, films, videotapes, photographs and other objects and organized these works in The Atlas Group Archive. The project's public forms include mixed-media installations, single channel screenings, visual and literary essays, and lectures/performances.

2   Susan Howe, *The Birth-Mark* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1993), p. 89.

3   Tom Masland / Jennifer Foote, "Best Sellers in Chains," *Newsweek* (31 May 1995), p. 33.

4   Eliott Grunner, *Prisoner of Culture* (Rutgers NJ: Rutgers Universtity Press, 1992), p. 33.

The Empty Center

Hito Steyerl

"It is not so much crossing boundaries as frontiers as it is the partial disappearance, dissolution or repositioning of the boundaries themselves. It is the shifting of the boundaries as you try to cross them . . . Now you begin to see that we are also talking about the fragmentation of boundaries; the partial breakdown, renegotiation, repositioning of boundaries, about the appearance of new boundaries which cut across the old ones." — Stuart Hall

Potsdamer Platz is a square in the center of Berlin, Germany. Before World War II, it used to be the center of the city, the center of its power. Then it became a deadly minefield, enclosed between the borders of the Cold War. In 1989, the Berlin Wall comes down. The area between the walls, the empty margins of the border, is open. Now, the center returns.

After German reunification, Potsdam Square is rebuilt by transnational companies. In the process, people are shoved out to the outskirts of the city. They are marginalized by the recentering of Germany's political and economic power. *The Empty Center* closely follows the processes of urban restructuring that have taken place in the core of Berlin over the last eight years. In 1990, squatters proclaim a socialist republic on the death strip. Eight years later, the new headquarters of Mercedes Benz arise in the same location.

The film makes use of slow superimpositions to uncover the architectonic and political changes of the last eight years. It focuses on Potsdam square to discover traces of global power shifts and the simultaneous dismantling and reconstruction of borders. At the same time, it traces back the history of ostracism and exclusion, especially against immigrants and minorities, which always have served to define the notion of a powerful national center. Its form evokes an archaeology of amnesia where every single item refers to absence and erasure. What is uncovered is a repeated process of obliteration.

Postcolonial histories

The history of minorities in Germany before World War II often provokes bewilderment. Neither the labor migration nor the refugee movements after World War I have left traces in the collective historical awareness. Migration movements in the wake of German colonialism and the traces of anti-

< Hito Steyerl, *The Empty Center,* 62 min., 1998.

colonial activities in the W eimar r epublic ar e even mor e unknown. Only the existence of Jewish minorities is acknowledged to a cer tain degr ee. This for m of historiography is not overly surprising. Walter Benjamin wr ote that histor y is always a constr uction of the power ful.

The neglect of minorities in this kind of historiography derives par tially fr om its for mal characteristics in that such historiographies for m a grid of knowledge which str ucturally excludes minorities. Minorities ar e not primarily defined by their small number , but by their incompatibility with pr e-existing categories of identity . This is due to the constr uction of minority, which involves a maze of conflicting demands. Minority is constr ucted in between its own conceptions and those of the majority. Since these two conceptions ar e not congr uent, the pr ocess always pr oduces loose ends. Yet it is not this r esidue which is constitutive of the situation of minority but rather the often arbi-trary and intense swaying of the categories within which the ever changing constr uction and clas-sification of minority takes place. In this bor der zone, the nor ms of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion ar e being negotiated, as well as the allocation of humans to all ar eas of political exis-tence or to the zone of "naked life," [1] which is completely disenfranchised and stripped of rights. The bor der space is wher e the r ules ar e made thr ough exception, and this exception is often iden-tified as minority.

In the film *The Empty Center,* the bor der space is deter mined as the empty zone between the walls of the for mer death strip, the ar ea of the Berlin W all in the center of Berlin. In the empty expanse between the bor ders, wher e empir es confr onted each other , the competing power claims of nation and capital have consolidated into ar chitectural for ms. But in the same space, lost traces of colo-nial and minority pr esence can be r etrieved as well. This sear ch is not infor med by feelings of nos-talgia but by a desir e to understand how the pr ocess of erasur e is inscribed into the ver y founda-tions of the constr uctions of power . This space of the bor der is the dark side of the euphoric poststr ucturalist concepts of hybridity , car nival and fluid nomadism.

Two types of spaces ar e intersecting and superimposing her e: the political one, which allows for social par ticipation, and the one connected to a state of exception, in which dif ferent kinds of minor-ities ar e thr eatened, flexibilized and disenfranchised. These two types of spaces penetrate each other to such a degr ee that practically in ever y political space, the state of exception is co-pr esent. This is par ticularly r elevant to minorities, who ar e often equated with the state of exception.

Zone of indeterminacy

The video *The Empty Center* analyses the for mer bor der zone between the walls in its r elation to the state of exception. In this ar ea the symbols of the new political and economic powers arise over a period of 10 years: gover nment buildings and company headquar ters. The new powers ar e con-solidated during a period of transition within this undeter mined zone between the for mer bor ders. In this place, histor y is written and histor y is erased. The video pr obes dif ferent constr uction sites
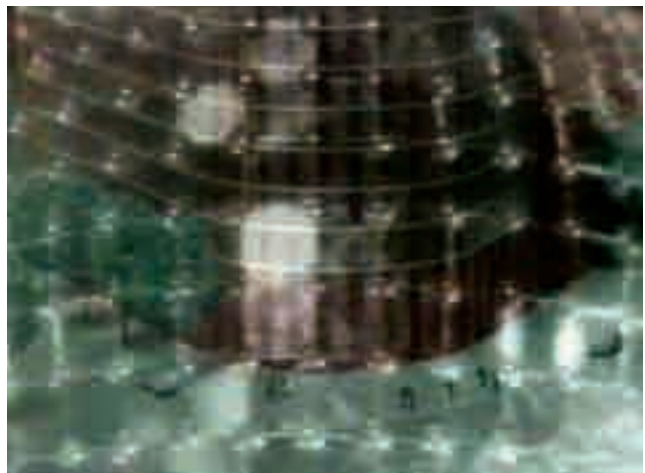
to unsettle the myth of "tabula rasa," of an empty spot without historical depth, which informs all new building activities.

In the 90s, on the former premises of the Palais Mendelssohn, former residence of the composer Felix Mendelssohn, a Jamaican women is selling pieces of the Berlin wall and GDR transit visa in a souvenir tent. Her own residence permit is only temporary. The souvenir tent was removed and a large new building has been erected.

Reconstruction plans for the area of the former chancellery of the Reich were highly controversial. In the 30s, the building was reconstructed by the Nazi government as their headquarters. This structure included the famous Fuehrerbunker, where Hitler and Goebbels committed suicide in 1945. But the building had been in use before the Nazi period.

In Bismarck's times the so-called Congo Conference was held here. A genocidal private colony by the name of Congo State owned by the Belgian King Leopold as private property was legitimated. At that time, arbitrary borders were drawn across a five meter high map of Africa. They became commonly known as "Berlin Borders." After German reunification, the adjacent subway station, which integrates parts of the former chancellery's marble decoration, is renamed from "Thaelmannplatz" into "Mohrenstrasse" (Thaelmann was a former communist leader, whereas Moor street refers to black musicians in the Prussian King's army).

May Ayim comments on this act as an erasure of antifascist memory in favor of sentimental colonial reminiscences, as an act which is symptomatic for the rising racist resentments articulated in many acts of violence against foreigners and people of color in the Berlin of the 90s. While a part of the area has been reconstructed during the GDR period as a residential area, another part is now supposed to be used for the premises of the Federal states mission buildings. The debate becomes heated over the third part of the area, where a memorial for the murder of the European Jews is planned. In 2000, neonazis are repeatedly marching on the site in order to protest against the building of the memorial.

The newly built Sony headquarters on Potsdamer Platz include the old Hotel Esplanade. In 1940, the "Indische Legion" (Indian Legion) is celebrating the Indian day of independence there. It forms a part of the Waffen-SS, is led by the nationalist Subhas Chandra Bose and was largely recruited among British POW'S from the Indian subcontinent. The German government had supported anti-English opposition among Indians since World War I and financed part of Indian political diasporic activities in Germany. These contacts laid the groundwork for Bose's later activities.

The history of the Indian Legion is one among many stories of non-German troops which actively supported fascist rule and aggression. Besides the Indian Legion there was an Arab Legion, a Bosnian and Albanian Legion and other troops from most occupied countries. The multicultural his-

tory of the *Waffen-SS* refers to a histor y of par tly nationalist, par tly anticolonial movements who tried to r ealize their anticommunist, anti-W ester n and often racist and anti-Semitic goals in joining forces with Ger man Nazis and Japanese militarists. But Berlin was also the scene of early anti-colo-nial communist inter nationalism. Zhou Enlai, later head of state of liberated China, and M. N. Roy, secr etar y of Cominter n, both spent time in Berlin working in diasporic and inter nationalist commu-nist cir cles.

Most inter esting is the connection of the sceneries of W eimar Republic commer cial exoticism with the depor tation camps of the early 20s, er ected on the legal base of the state of emer gency. The area of the new building of A +T company was taken by a building called "Haus V aterland" (house fatherland). It housed a Japanese tea r oom, a T urkish cof fee shop, a Spanish Bodega, a Russian vodka pub, a Wild W est bar, a Fr ench bistr o, a palm tr ee hall and the so-called Rhine ter races. The architect and critic Siegfried Kracauer has analyzed the building as a symptom of a depoliticized employment cultur e obsessed with ef ficiency and hygiene. He meticulously notes the praises of the various attractions in the adver tisement br ochure of Haus V aterland: "Bavarian landscape, Zug-spitze with Eibsee, alpenglow , dance of Bavarian Boys, prairie landscapes at the big lakes, Arizona Ranch with cowboy songs and dances, Negr o-Cowboy-jazzband." Rationalized escapism is central to the ar chitectonic constitution of the building itself: embodied in the convolution of facades and stage scener y, whose geography is taken "fr om popular songs". The for mer Askari soldier Bayume Mohammed Hussein is working her e as a waiter . He lost his Ger man citizenship in 1 933. He died at the concentration camp Sachsenhausen, wher e he was depor ted in 1943 because of "racial dis-grace."

The earliest "concentration camps" in Ger many wer e opened shor tly after W orld War I. They wer e called "concentration camp for for eigners" and ser ved as inter nment camps for r efugees who could not be depor ted to their countries of origin. Their inmates wer e mostly Easter n European Jews, but also Latin Americans, Asians and suspected Communists of all nations. Although the camps wer e called "concentration camps," they did not implement anything even r emotely r esembling the later exter mination policies of the concentration camps of the National Socialist period . The main con-nection between both types of concentration camps is a legal one. Both wer e legally based on laws relating to the state of emer gency. This state of emer gency was pr oclaimed several times during the Weimar republic and became per manent during the Nazi period. The state of emer gency means a suspension of r ules and the chaotic cr eation of new , arbitrar y r ules— the r ule of for ce— at the expense of those minorities defined as exceptions.

Time lags

The for mal str ucture of the video is a r ecreation of the str ucture of the for mer border zone between the walls. Long superimpositions show the transfor mation and r econstr uction of single buildings within a period of five years. Just as the legal framework and the str uctures of transition materia-

lize in the area between the former walls, transition formally becomes visible between two images which show the same place at different times and document its architectural transition. There is always one part of the picture which remains the same while everything else changes. The reflection on repetition and difference became the formal backbone of the film. In a wider sense, these transitions refer to the question of repetition and difference within history. Does the past repeat itself? Do parts of it return while the rest changes? Does it return with a difference? Or does it return as something else? How can we relate the different patterns of exclusion and nation-building in German history? Is it possible to relate the colonial policies of the Bismarck area to the present treatment of foreigners and minorities in Germany? Wouldn't this type of relation between different types of exclusion infer a relativist stance towards the genocide during the Nazi period? On which basis can we position these different historical periods in relation to one another?

In this sense, the video essay is a document of a period of transition — also on the level of visual production modes. It documents the technological transition from celluloid to digital processing technologies. All images were either shot in HI-8 video or 16-mm film— but the postproduction was entirely performed on nonlinear editing systems, which enabled me to visualize the process of excavation and of the visualization of different layers of the terrain. By incorporating not only different strata of history of the place but layers of different technologies as well, the video turns into an experimental project of a political archeology.

Translated by John Southard

1   **Giorgio Agamben,** *Homo Sacer* **(Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2002), p. 19.**

Sky's the Limit

Eric Cazdyn

Sky's the Limit theorizes—by way of its own formal strategies—the God-term of our current historical moment: globalization. Departing from the counter-globalization demonstrations over the FTAA meeting in Quebec City, the video is organized in three sections. The first part, entitled "Four Stories," turns on four prose poems, each relating to a different concept of globalization (representation, possibility, participation, and performance). In between the rolling text of these poems are image-sets ranging from individual demonstrators to the launching of tear gas canisters, from assorted political signage to George Bush and Jean Chretien condemning dissent. Part two, entitled "Found Footage," focuses on an interview between the CBC and Sinclair Stevens, a former Mulroney Cabinet minister. The interview, right in front of the infamous fence (separating the leaders from the demonstrators) illustrates both the vast differences and peculiar similarities between the dominant political and media representatitves (Stevens and the CBS) and the marginal demonstrators and alternative media.

In the final part, entititled "The Parallax View," the frame is split into four quadrants, in which the first four poems are visually represented (an Alexander Kluge film clip, a Lenny Bruce performance, a quote from a Nam Jun Paik film, and clips from Japanese pirate television). Over this split screen a narrator ties together the videos themes in a form that sits somewhere between political discourse and poetic echo chamber. The voice-over reads as follows:

Globalization is the God-ter m of the day . It's been a long time since such a ter m caught the imagination, cranked up the zeal of so many diver gent voices, fr om the corporate executive to the humanities pr ofessor, fr om the poet to the person on the str eet. Give me the last time you r emember a categor y so glibly used ? If we've lear ned anything fr om the past it's that the moment people star t speaking the same language it's time to leave town. But to wher e? If we end up in Africa, odds ar e we'll come face-to-face with one of the thir ty-six million who ar e HIV positive, a symptom of, you win, globalization. If we go to that secr et place in the countr y, we'll encounter far mers fighting for or against fr ee trade. Or for get the town wher e we'll end up, it's the leaving par t that alr eady implicates us into the globalization complex: by car , by plane, by our sub-contracted shoes. So if we can't leave town, then the only choice left is to go to town, or in this case to the old city , to Quebec City .

Thir ty-four heads of state, 75,000 demonstrators, 5,000 riot police, 3,709 tear gas canisters, 502 plastic bullets and one four kilometer long spite fence straight out of a Jack Conr oy shor t stor y. Why ar e we her e? Do we r eally think the opera will end dif ferently? Lucky for us, the concept of

> **Eric Cazdyn, *Sky's the Limit,* 38 min., 2001.**
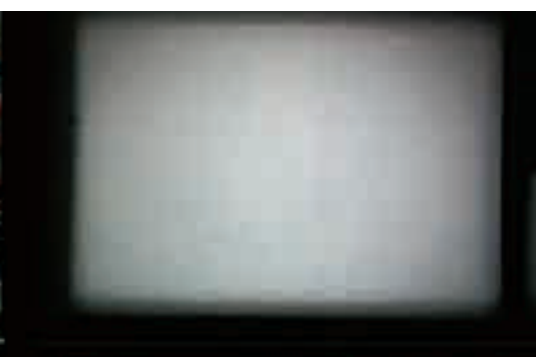
possibility exceeds the tired logic of victory and defeat. Possibility might be forgotten, buried under ground, but it can't be extinguished. Alexander Kluge shows us this in a crystal, in a conversation between a man and a woman (and yes, I reversed their roles). We are there to perform for ourselves, to make our own signs, shoot our own films. Like Lenny Bruce, we must perform our own act, right there on the streets, or else we're destined to watch the media blowhards do it for us.

There is a sliver of difference between doing and knowing. Does this make a fetish out of participation? Maybe. But isn't this whole event and what happened in Seattle and Prague and Okinawa and Gothenburg and Genoa and back to ground zero in Chiapas about democracy, about a certain breakdown in democracy, in representational democracy? To act politically means watching the white rectangle, feeling my sore back, struggling with my desire to treat film like video and hit eject. But representation is also an aesthetic category, and the breakdown in representation, in the relation between the artwork at hand and the world itself, is once again in question. Isn't this what the Japanese television anecdote spells out for us in the face of impossibility, we must participate in the performance so as to break open a whole new space of representation and thus a whole new space of possibility.

Speaking about this most recent crisis in representation, let's turn to the case of Sinclair Stevens. Stevens, an old Mulroney yes-man, was someone who even the Mulroney government had to cut loose due to a number of embarrassing episodes. In Quebec, Stevens found himself on the wrong side of the fence; not only was he gassed, but, alas, (and however disingenuously) disabused as to the repressive nature of the state.

Yes, of course, this is partisan politics par excellence; an opportunity for Stevens to take pot shots at Jean Chretien. Still, what's interesting here is how Stevens chants the anti-globalization mantra, from the rise in power of transnational corporations to the destruction of the environment, from the loss of national sovereignty to the criminalization of dissent. How can Stevens, a rather slow-witted conservative, slip so easily into the language of the Other? Or to come at this from the other direction: does the possibility exist to criticize the current trends of globalization without speaking the same language as the xenophobes, ultra-nationalists and Luddites of one's own national situation? At the present moment there seems to be no available language to solve this problem; it's something like an eyeless needle that can only be thread by radical changes in the social situation. Only after globalization processes come into greater relief, only after national identities weaken even more, will an effective language emerge to thread this particular needle.

It's here where I see what happened on the streets of Quebec as suggesting new forms of representation. Perhaps forms that are impossible to realize at the present time — a trembling of new democratic forms. But, clearly, what is most interesting about the Sinclair Stevens interview is not his opportunism or even his golden grab-bag reference to Marx, but the transparent tone of Don Newman (his CBC interlocutor) and the various people who walk in and out of the camera frame.

Newman, who believes violence always star ts on the Left, couldn't hide his contempt, his hatr ed for the hooligans, for the sur e, dramatic tilt of a woman's head as she fights the sting of pepper spray; for the hooded guy with cigar ette in hand who gave his lover their only gas-mask. But who are these people ? The middle-class ? The privileged ? Spoiled kids who year n deep down for daddy's strong slap on the wrist ? Yes, they wer e ther e. But who can blame them ? Yes, the cr owd is over-whelmingly white — just one image of Gay *Pride* in Toronto, filmed two months later , confir ms this. So what will it take ? I don't know . But it's her e wher e the wor ds of my immovably luminous friend Masao Miyoshi sound: "as the planet goes so goes social division." Meaning, as we destr oy the planet mor e and mor e we will be for ced to live mor e and mor e with and as the other . And then, only then . . . sky's the limit.

"but I don't want to talk about that"
Postcolonial and Black Diaspora Histories in Video Art

Rinaldo Walcott

Is there a postcolonial visual culture? What does it look like? What is it engaged with? What does it have to say? And if there is a postcolonial visual culture what does its eye see? What is its gaze? What might viewers see? What does it demand from our looking, our eye? The rhetoric of these questions structure what it is I want to suggest in this essay. I want to suggest a postcolonial way of seeing. In particular, I want to suggest a postcolonial filmic art of seeing that affirms, negates and repositions sightlines and gazes so that another and other stories of modernity and post-modernity are revealed. The postcolonial form of seeing is a radical revisioning and revising of modernity. This confrontation with modernity both disrupts and reconstructs modernity, revealing in the process the others of modernity and other modernities. My purpose in this essay is to demonstrate the ways in which the film and video art of Isaac Julien, but more specifically *The Attendant* (1993) and Dana Inkster's *Welcome to Africville* (1999), narrate visual stories of black modernity which speak back to and speak within "the Modern" as a moment of both interruption and a new articulation of other moderns. This interruption and new articulation is positioned within the context of recognizable moments of historical events — in this case slavery, HIV/AIDS and the racist demolition of a historic black Canadian community. The historical is invoked by these artists in their video essays as a short hand movement or compression that speaks back and forward simultaneously to open a new arena of historical and present-future contexts for locating a more ethical gaze and sightline. A different view of the modern. Thus we might ask: what are the optics of the postcolonial? What constitutes it scopic drive? How might we think about its scopic drives both within and beyond the contexts of colonialism, imperialism and decolonization, and this time that we might characterize as the postcolonial condition?

In *When Was "The Post-colonial"?: Thinking at The Limit,* Stuart Hall attempts to clear some conceptual ground for thinking about the use of the term postcolonial in a manner that allows us to move on from the debates concerning its usefulness as a term. He writes: "What the concept *may* help us to do is to describe or characterise the shift in global relations which marks the (necessarily uneven) transition from the age of Empires to the post-independence or post-decolonisation moment. It may also help us (though here its value is more gestural) to identify what are the new relations and dispositions of power which are emerging in the new conjuncture." [1] Hall's insistence on marking a condition of postcoloniality is important because he both identifies and diagnoses the conditions of the creation and the articulation of the video art that I shall make mention of. Hall argues that what decolonization as a practice made evident and visible was that it "direct[ed] our attention to the many ways in which colonisation was never simply external to societies of the impe-

rial metropolis. It was always deeply inscribed within them — as it became indelibly inscribed in the cultures of the colonised." Hall comes to call the relation of the inside/outside the "double inscription." The works of Isaac Julien and Dana Inkster are marked with a double inscription which speaks to the complexities and complications of the conditions of late modernity that engulf us all, even if unevenly. The video art discussed in this essay articulates a "new humanism" which refashions and re-articulates modernity anew. But to access this new humanism, a "deciphering practice" has to be engaged.

A deciphering practice is a mode of reading, but in this case the reading is also seeing. In particular it is a mode of reading/seeing in the context and the time of the postcolonial condition when readers, or in this case viewers, must decipher what the video/ texts are *intended to do.* Sylvia Wynter has articulated and developed the notion of a deciphering practice for viewing /reading the archipelago of poverty— the Caribbean. Wynter suggests that "[u]nlike a critical practice which must seek for the meanings of the text in the text alone . . . a deciphering practice will seek to function correlatively at four levels." [2] These four levels are complex and interrelated: 1) the signifying practices of the text itself must be accounted for; 2) the specific social environment or cultural dimension of the text as its performative complex of meaning produce a "'symbol-matter information system' that is structured by the behaviour-regulating code that brings it into being as such an environment/dimension;" 3) the third level brings the results of level one and level two together. This is important because this third level requires us to consider what the performative and representational signifying practices of the text or its meanings are "*intended to do*— that is, *what* collective behaviours they are intended to induce and how precisely the signification practice" provide ways to shift, alter and/or retain the status quo of our habits; and 4) the place from which we might constitute the beginning of a critique of present conceptions of the Human and move towards a rethinking of what it means to be Human (a new humanism) or to constitute what Wynter calls "new forms of human life." What Wynter offers in her complex argument for a deciphering practice is a challenge to think beyond current conceptions of the Human and its order/containment /regulating "metaphysico-epistemological" premises. It is in this regard that I will offer some analysis of Julien's and Inkster's video art as new portals into the realm of a radical and more ethical modernity. But a deciphering practice also suggests something else. It suggests that modernity has to be read and re-read or viewed and reviewed in these works in terms of what lies beyond the text of the visual. This video art intends to do something. Thus these films ask viewers to engage them beyond the immediacy of the visual presentation. These videos engage in a conversation concerning the unfinished business of modernity, that is the business of liberation and freedom especially for black diaspora peoples and other subalterns.

Furthermore, a deciphering practice means that neither the diasporic nor the postcolonial condition is static and knowable, but that each condition requires a viewing /reading practice to make it intelligible in its various moments and conditions of appearance and utterance. What this means is that we must decipher the politics of our present moment uncovering histories of desires, antagonisms,

transcultural moments, conversations and dialogues, fr om which a fuller pictur e of the moder n and postmoder n might be derived. Suf fice it to say that both Julien's and Inkster's work falls within some of the r ecognizable conditions and tr opes of the postcolonial moment as exemplar y of our time. The most r ecognizable aspect of their video ar t is their play with and r ewriting of the grand narratives of the histor y of moder nity and the histor y of black communities. By so doing their video art rewrites, inter rupts and r enarrates nation, citizenship and community .

Viewing/reading the postcolonial video essay

Julien's *The Attendant* is a text that grapples with the ways in which histor y might be usable in the context of black life in a post-slaver y world. W orking acr oss a range of concer ns, the text takes up the politics of desir e, S/M practices and cr oss-racial attraction, desir e and sex all within the con-text of the pandemic HIV /AIDS. Impor tantly the action takes place in a museum below the painting *Slaves on the West Coast of Africa* (circa 1833) by François-Auguste Biar d (1798–1882). Dialogu-ing with Biar d's anti-slaver y painting, housed in the Wilber force Museum (Wilber force being a famous anti-slaver y activist), Julien constr ucts what he calls "tableaux vivants" which r eposition inter-racial desir es and sexual fantasies in the postcolonial and postmoder n period as a site for multiple questions. [3] How might black queer men enjoy the pleasur es of S/M? Is it possible to r esig-nify the whip and chains of slaver y? Such questions become impor tant in light of the kinds of limits and possibilities S/M of fers as HIV /AIDS opens up both limits and possibilities concer ning bodies, their boundaries and our sexual pleasur es and practices. Thus *The Attendant* unsentimentally , but rigorously engages the ways in which histor y and the things of its ver y constitution might be r esig-nified acr oss new times and new conditions. [4]

Julien's accomplishment in *The Attendant* is an engagement with the histor y of transatlantic sla-very and the ways in which its signification can both work in the ser vice of a liberator y politics and as a confining, r estrictive black nationalist politics. How can a black queer enjoy S/M practice ? What does it mean when a black queer enjoys S/M practice ? He attempts to negotiate between the two. In fact, *The Attendant* posed the question of what is the place of par ody for black queer bodies within the iconography of both slaver y and, impor tantly, the practices of contemporar y S/M plea-sures? [5] Such a concer n brings to the for e the usefulness of histor y and the ways in which the archeology of knowledge can, quite simply , open up other questions — desires, fantasies, plea-sures, fears — in shor t, an unspoken er otic economy not for eclosed by the pr essur es of a black closet, nor confined to a r estrictive histor y incapable of r esignification, is compr essed in the video and requires deciphering to make sense of what it is intended to do.

> Isaac Julien, *The Attendant,* 10 min., 1993.

> Dana Inkster, *Welcome to Africville,* 15 min., 1999.

The Attendant is an extr emely impor tant film because it opens up the space of desir e in complex ways that for ce questions of community and its meaning. In shor t, political identifications become crucial sites for the ar ticulation of a radical vision of black diaspora community . Julien posed such questions in a context that takes community not to be something given in advance, but rather as terrain that must be worked or in Jean Luc Nancy's ter ms unworked. [6] The unworking of community allows for the continuous str uggle to make community , as a desir e of possibilities and potentiali- ties, and not as biological af filiation or inheritance. Complicating the place of blackness and white- ness by bringing the snow-queen's desir e into public debate, Julien usher ed in a radical cinematic reworking of the usable ter ms of histor y for a contemporar y debate that often ver ged on the nation- alistic. This public ar ticulation of the economy of inter-racial desir e and its complex plays of sub- ordination and domination, all constituted thr ough continuously shifting r elations of desir e, open up yet another closet — the closet of sexual and racial anxiety embedded in all of us living in late moder nity. Rejecting both racist and nationalist impulses, but primarily engaging with black diaspora politics, Julien writes: "Wher e there is a closet, ther e will always be bitter ness, due to the desir es repressed by black conser vative family values, which must pr oduce silence at any cost." [7] This insight of Julien's opens up the space for making alter nate political communities constituted on the basis of political solidarities and not biology and other mythic inheritances.

Julien's *Looking for Langston* (1988) and *The Attendant* among other works ar ticulate r elations to political for mations taking place in black Britain and the wider black diaspora. In par ticular, they react against the cr ystallization of black nationalist and Afr ocentric politics that positions black queer sexualites as anathema to a potential black liberation in a post-slaver y world. But the videos also engage the excising of black peoples fr om hegemonic nar ratives of moder nity as well. Dana Inkster's *Welcome to Africville* brings to the ter rain of Canadian black public histories and memo- ries the politics of lesbian desir e and ar ticulate its absented pr esence for a mor e ethical account- ing of what Canadian and black Canadian community might be. In a war of position, this video ar t calls attention to the ways in which the cr ystallization of black identity politics in the 1 980s and 1990s has for eclosed the possibility of ar ticulating a range of black diaspora complexities — espe- cially when sexual dif ference was at stake. At the same time, this ar t utters a r esponse to the con- tinuing conditions of racist exclusion. But this video ar t also speaks to the tensions and pr oble- matics of r epresentability in a world appar ently mor e at ease with queers and black people. Thus these video essays pursue a conversation that r equires us to continually engage with the politics of liberation and fr eedom. Such a claim fir mly gr ounds this video practice in the unfinished busi- ness of moder nity and its claims of liberation and fr eedom.

Thus, this video ar t does not stop at mer ely of fering an ar ticulation of a counter-nar rative to black communities and their histories. It shows its solidarity and af filiations with political pr ojects for the liberation of the subalter n of all kinds, by explicitly engaging with the boundar y-limits of moder n nation-states, community , citizenship and identity politics. Mor e specifically , each of these videos takes up the place of black people and queers within their r espective nations pr oducing an arbi-

trary closure that is always incomplete. Inkster's video is made within the context of the thirtieth anniversary of the destruction of Africville Nova Scotia, Canada, a black settlement dating back to the 1800s. In what can only be characterized as state sponsored and sanctioned racism, Inkster nonetheless sheds new light on what other histories /desires and unspokens might have been destroyed in the demolition of Africville. She commemorates blackness in Canada when the state does not. Both artists question the blindspots and restrictive boundaries of community and national formations as a way to engage the viciousness of modernity.

The filmmakers have an ability to return life's representations in complex and resisting ways, moving beyond painful cultural moments and rendering those moments useful for thinking about the ways in which black people's lives remain meaningful and joyous without sinking into the depths of its pain and victimage. In fact, by remembering the destruction of one of black Canada's oldest communities Inkster's *Welcome to Africville* exemplifies this dilemma. The dilemma of not only what to remember but how to remember it. The narrative of the destruction, or rather the interruption in the narrative of the destruction and dispersal is told through three generations of Dixon women and a male bartender. These actors do not tell the why of the destruction— they refuse to do so — they tell the why of their sexual practices, desires, disappointments, pleasures and adventures, as well as their loss.

Some of the images in the video are actual archival footage of the demolition of the community recalling and revealing all the while repositioning the story of the Canadian state's racist action. The actors' stories arrive through an off-screen interviewer's attempt to gather response to the impeding demolition. The video opens with these lines: "Yes they making us move . . . but I don't want to talk about that . . . history will tell the story." It is an act of liberation to decide what one wants to speak about when one is oppressed. This is an interesting refusal of history because it is not a refusal at all. It is rather an insightful and revealing way of moving to the other side of the story— the unspoken of history, another story of modernity. Instead, the characters in the video tell the story of a black history of erotics, especially a black lesbian erotics, which is often demolished in heterosexist acts parallel to those of racist acts. The characters tell of love, loss and desire, defying what kind of history and what history can tell as a necessary part of black community. This is a history that calls for decipherment.

One of the ways in which black diasporic communities make sense to themselves and to others is often through various narratives of history and contests over memory and how to remember. These narratives and memories, often contested from both within the community and without, offer a basis from which some kind of common conversation might be conceived, even if different political positions are at stake. It is the history and memory of Africville and what might be at stake in the writing of its history, how it might be remembered, and how its memory might be put to use, and in the name of what politics its memory might be put to use, that Inkster's *Welcome to Africville* opens up and simultaneously troubles. Hers is a radical renarrativising of the black pain that the

destruction of Africville represents. And in this radical renarrativizing she asks us to not only remember differently, but to remember what has not yet been represented in our memory of the destruction. How can Africville's destruction help to us to remember, and maybe even acknowledge the active presence of black lesbian erotics and desires in the Canadian context?

What makes Inkster's video insightful and provoking is not only its complex layering of the visualizing and writing of history and memory, but the way in which Inkster queers the history of Africville, making something queer happen to viewers and for ever extending the narrative of what other evidences and memories have been destroyed by its demolition. She does not close gaps, she opens spaces. But the video also opens up the place of hope to reimagine and to narrativise into that now open space all of our various losses, desires and memories (for after all Africville is now a public park open to all!).

Inkster tells the story of Africville through the voices of at least two generations of black women who love other women. Anna Dixon played by Kathy Imre of *Shaft's Big Score* is the grandmother. Me'shell Ndegeocello, the African American musician composed and performed the original bluesy, soulful musical score. The video brings together a cast of black diasporic players to tell a national story of pain and loss, which not only gestures to the historical dispersal of black folks across US borders— before and after Africville — but echoes further across the black diaspora. The video participates in a rather large project— a project of diaspora desires and connections, but is still able to productively engage its local context, to call for a national accounting and something more. It is a product which through fiction is able to complicate the historical record of blackness and modernity. By telling what has now become the sacred story of Africville through the eyes of black lesbians, Inkster creates the opportunity for reflecting differently on historical context and memory, and not only on what is remembered, but on who gets to remember and how and what might be at stake in what is remembered. She tells the sex of memory. Hers is a queer memory with much significance for interrupting the not-quite-citizenship of blacks and queers, of black queers, not to mention the deeply-fraught gendered making of modern communities and nations and the histories they write of themselves.

Troubling and filling in the gaps in the archives is potentially dangerous work, despite its criticality. In fact, it is reported that when Inkster's video was screened in Halifax, Nova Scotia, it was a shock to some of the home-grown audience investment in one narrative of the meaning of the destruction. The audience was apparently aghast that the sacred story of Africville would be fictionalized and told through the eyes of at least two lesbians. The audience either could not, or they refused the challenge to decipher what might be at stake in Inkster's re-presentation of the trauma of Africville. Because Inkster refused epistemological respectability by refusing to represent the wound as only the loss of property, collective respect of black folks by white folks, and therefore as evidence of black victimage, her video was a shock to some. Instead, Inkster's erotics of loss can provoke a different possibility of encountering the demolition of Africville. Africville becomes

symbolic of all that is loss/lost when history forecloses certain kinds of knowledge, especially queer queries and feminists queries concerning the past and what David Scott calls the "changing present." Whereby these queries do not only return, recover and correct, but they tell a cautionary tale opening up new "problem-spaces" which can act to effectively allow for a more politically inflected changing present which is in accord with the continued ambivalent and ambiguous nature of nations and their citizen-making projects. [8] Even as nations give way to various forms of citizenship influenced by the latest moments of globalization, black people in the Atlantic zone continue to be in precarious relation to older versions of citizenship, for many it has not yet been achieved. And yet, black people are also fully aware of the fluidity of citizenship since they are seen always to be written out and written into the nation as it appears momentarily convenient.

Towards a new or other modernism?

These videos rewrite modernity through rewriting the limits of nation, citizenship and community. By offering complex, shifting and antagonistic representations of nation, citizenship and community, the videos launch a deciphering and excavating critique at totalizing narratives of modernity as they simultaneously open gaps for other modernities or counter-narratives of modernity to appear. But fundamentally what this video art does is that it opens up modernity through the lens of diaspora and this moment of the postcolonial to call attention to the ways in which some of the most important elements of what might constitute the Modern (nation, citizenship, community, liberty, freedom, technology, museums, etc.) might be apprehended at some moments to demonstrate what is at stake when hegemonic narratives appear as if. Additionally, this diasporic/postcolonial way of seeing or visual culture calls for or requires a suspension of what it is we think we know. By making such a call, viewers/readers are asked to engage in a process of deciphering and excavating within and beyond the video texts so that intended political and social implications might have an affect of sorts. This is a theoretical video art that unworks as it reworks the grandest of all claims of modernity: what it means to be human.

1   Stuart Hall, "When was 'the Post-colonial'? Thinking at the Limit," in Iain Chambers / Lidia Curti (eds.), *The Post-colonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 246–247.

2   Sylvia Wynter, "Rethinking 'Aesthetics': Note Towards a Deciphering Practice," in Mbye Cham (ed.) *Ex-iles: Essays on Caribbean Cinema* (Trenton NJ: Africa World Press, 1992), p. 267.

3   *The Film Art of Isaac Julien,* catalogue (Annandale-on-Hudson NY: Center for Curatorial Studies Museum, Bard College, 2000).

4   Stuart Hall, "When was 'the Post-colonial'? Thinking at the Limit."

5   Compare also Reginald Shepard, *Some Are Drowning* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1994), and Homi K. Bhabha, "On Mimicry," *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

6   Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

7   Isaac Julien, "Confessions of a Snow-Queen: Notes on the Making of *The Attendant*," in *The Film Art of Isaac Julien*, p. 80.

8   David Scott, *Refashioning Futures: Criticism After Postcoloniality* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

En la calle

From an Interview on TropiCola

With Steve Fagin

In his 96 min. video *TropiCola,* Steve Fagin uses the popular *timba* beat to lace an essayist fabric of life in contemporary Cuba. The excellent soundtrack captures the color and rhythm of this vibrant nation while intelligently examining the problems facing Cuba during its current economic restructuring. From young Cuban women running off with tourists to black market moneymaking schemes, *TropiCola* stresses the spirit, humor, tenacity and resourcefulness of the Cuban people as they face their changing reality. Steve Fagin answers some questions about the kind of Cuba he found and what cultural meaning music takes on in his video. — U.B.

My inter est was in doing the piece generated fr om a desir e to "per form" Cuban society in ways it had not been r epresented either by people who wer e fanatically inter ested in suppor ting it or fana- tically inter ested in criticizing it. The video makes an ef fort to leave the traditional question whether you ar e for or against it to the side.

The Cuba I wanted to por tray was influenced by "hanging out" with Cubans on their por ches in 93, during the so-called "special period" after Russian aid vanished. I saw the complexity of how they dealt with things, not simply their cuddly bear , gener ous, sweet conversational selves, but their frustrated, angr y selves, their mean, envious selves, their petty , racist selves. I felt that this should not be excluded fr om understanding what it is to be Cuban today . What I found when I went to Cuba was something ver y noisy, ver y ambivalent, but something full of life and lots of music

Cuban music has an extraor dinary role as a well-spring, as a spokesman, as a sor t of gr eat poetic text which Cubans r efer to to give voice and r hythm to their own identity . In Cuba, music is wor d play, political critique, and a stor ehouse of cultural memor y and ar tifacts. The lyrics and songs ar e a sor t of Gr eek chor us of their cultur e, and I wanted that to be the engine of my piece.

The popular music that is in *TropiCola*, the contemporar y *timba* music of "Charanga Habanera" or "El Médico de la Salsa" or "Los V an Van" is the music that kids speak to each other when they want to expr ess what they feel about themselves, what they feel about the gover nment, what they feel about their hopes, what they feel about their cynicism. Popular music in Cuba has always had the same intense power to r epresent cultural identity and language as, say , the punk movement had in England in the 70s, or gangster rap has for black urban youth beginning in the 80s.

< Steve Fagin, *TropiCola,* 96 min., Cuba, 1997.

It seems wr ong to me to consider my piece as at odds with some r eified concept of "Cuban tradi-tional music" por trayed in "Buena Vista Social Club" because this suggests that some musics ar e "traditional" and others ar e not. In its initial incar nation, *son,* which is now per ceived as ahistori-cal traditional music, was discussed as r ough and dif ficult, including the incorporation of Afr o-sounding music into a lar ger Cuban public. And this mer ging of countr y sound with urban sound, the mixing of Spanish lyrical music with Africanized, Cubanized, r umba music, initially sounded far too black for the mainstr eam, a fact which the movie completely ignor es.

It is a ver y odd combination of events that pr ecisely at the time when "Buena Vista Social Club" hit as a popular moment inter nationally, there was this vital contemporar y Cuban music in place called *timba,* which was also fighting for a place in the inter national market. It had been taken over by transnational corporations in ter ms of its distribution, and had an audience in Eur ope.

In some sense it is a combination of *son* as a base of the music and then adds, as Cubans always add, other popular elements that they hear ar ound the world, in this case funk and hip hop. It adds an extraor dinary youthful kick which parallels the youthful kick all ar ound the planet. A gr oup like "Charanga Habanera," which peaked in the late 90s when the "Buena Vista Social Club" was hit-ting, is a sor t of combination of "Ear th Wind and Fir e" and "NW A".

It is not surprising that something that had the str eet smar ts, the sor t of nihilistic hostility of "NWA," would be very dif ficult to translate into another culture. That translation into another culture was par tially taking place alr eady because of all the tourists that wer e already coming to Cuba, not these "Buena Vista Social Club" tourists, but mor e the sex industr y, wildcat tourist.

They wer e inter ested in fun and excitement, and that fun and excitement r ubbed up against a ver y active popular kind of youth cultur e that was ver y underclass and nihilistic.

Kati:

Here I am sitting at the bar of the Casa de la Musica. It's Satur day night. No ! I mean Sunday . The fashion show is so boring. I check out the dance floor . Ever ything's so white. Finally: La Cha-ranga Habanera ! I star t dancing with an Italian guy or a Fr ench businessman, I can't r emember which. And I say:

"Hi ! Wher e'you fr om? My name is Kati. What's your name, please ? You like Cuba ? You like the Cuban girls ?"— Why doesn't he bathe once in awhile ?

"Today is ver y hot !"— God, he r eally stinks !

"I'm thristy , I'm hungr y"— this man smells like pur e vinegar. And he's so fat !

"Hi! Where' you from? My name is Kati. What's your name, please   ? You like Cuba ? You like the Cuban girl?"— It bothers me that he gets his way because of his financial power . If I want to have nice clothes I have to put up with his big fat belly   .

"You like a Cuban girl"—   I don't have the dollars to go to a concer t or buy nice clothes.

Reciting Charanga Habanera music in a monotonous voice, a dollar pasted on her forehead:

Getcha a hot daddy with a cool ride
Getcha self a daddy to take car e of you
Have some fun. Get what you deser ve
Over thir ty but not yet fifty
Let him pay all your bills
A sugar daddy with lots of cash
A hot daddy with a cool ride

Timba music was on the pr ecipice of becoming inter national music, but it was extraor dinarily hard to promote, because of its complexity   , because of the site specificity of its lyrics. Again, the site specificity of the lyrics in lots of ways is no dif ferent or extr eme in some of the *son* songs fr om the 20s, but it is about   *now,* and the r oughness has not been softened by histor y and distance — the songs r emain ver y noisy.

There is an appetite for "traditional" music whose historical r   oughness and dif ficulty is fr om another period, softened by time and distance. They do not want intimacy with the dif   ficulties of that cultur e, or the type of work that intimacy r   equires, but rather the memor y of intimacy . They want music with no fingerprints, ostensibly   , music with no dif ficulties, music that is pur e, that is what they imagine they ar e getting. But ther e is no such music. Music gr ows out of sociological for-mations, it r uns up against specific tensions and ef forts to fuse which ar e difficult, and that is what makes it inter esting. The dif ficulty makes it inter esting, not its simplicity .

Now, the guiding principal of "world music," whether it is Peter Gabriel going to Africa or R   y Cooder going to Cuba, is to take a sound that is ver   y popular at a ver y local, str eet level and change it to make it consumable by an inter national audience. The first step in this pr ocess is the r eduction of the textur e that makes it str eet, local music. Usually   , you ar e talking about pulling back or nearly eliminating the per cussive element, softening the music and emphasizing its lyrical quality instead of the per cussive quality . You are taking it fr om being a for eground, par ticipator y, per cussive music and making it a sor t of ambient easy-listening backgr ound music.

There is an inter national liberal audience that is specifically inter ested in Cuba, and "Buena Vista Social Club" as a phenomena comes at a point when that community is hitting a wall in their

positive fantasy about Cuba: it no longer seems tenable within almost any community to hold the Revolution as a heroic, simple, successful, anti-capitalist, literate, health-oriented society. Once Cuba opened up to tourism in 1990, the awarenesses about the complexity, difficulties and obstructions that were occurring in the name of the Revolution became clear to more and more people, and with the proliferation of that information, the audience that had desired such a perfect version of Cuba no longer had this sort of perfect, sexy, revolutionary society to fall back on, and they needed another fantasy of Cuba.

So you have a perverse shift from a simple version of Cuba — the perfectly successful, anti-American, anti-capitalist, ground-up Revolution — to another simple fantasy, one which is positively and extraordinarily regressive, in which you have people whose lives were ostensibly fully formed prior to the Revolution, who have somehow been in hibernation for 40 years, and you arrive like a Prince Charming, you kiss this sleeping, black, wrinkled Snow White, and restore her to life. You allow a liberal audience to reinvigorate with a fantasy of Cuba, parallel to the revolutionary fantasy in terms of it being simple, but almost exclusively inverted, no longer being youth oriented, change oriented, socialist oriented, but instead individual and nostalgia oriented and erotic also in its implications.

The use of Cuba as an object of desire, as a phantasmatic focal point for foreigners, is complex. Obviously an aspect of the fantasies is the keeping alive of a certain kind of hope, and yet, it is possible to imagine a kind of engagement with Cuba or any of the "exotic" cultures in the world which is less about projection, and more about real information. Do we feel inclined to do the work required to get outside of our limited selves, not for the purpose of experiencing some perfect moment on a vacation somewhere, but to allow another culture to actually change us and affect us?

Cuba is very alive today, very vital, and that is the good news. The question is, how vital our engagement with Cuba or any cultural phenomena is.

The Blindness Series

A Decade's Endeavor

Tran T. Kim-Trang

The *Blindness Series* has been a ten-year pr oject investigating physical blindness and its meta-phors. The pr oject consists of eight shor t-format experimental videos as conceived in 1 991. The initial inspiration for this series was an exhibition curated by Jacques Der rida for the Louvr e Museum in 1 990. Der rida pulled drawn and painted works fr om the per manent collection con-cerned with the blind, tears, and self-por traits. I was r eminded of Der rida's exhibition r ecently when a Ph.D. candidate at Duke University asked for my thoughts on an obser vation fr om the philoso-pher on how ar tists ar e blind as we work because we can never look at our subject and the ar twork at once. While this is tr ue of drawing and painting, with the mediation of the camera, ar tists ar e looking at both the subject and the work. Aside fr om technical dif ferences between transposition and r ecording, I concur with this obser vation since it r eflects the way I think about per ception, in that, between experience and cultural pr oduction is the complex pr ocess of memor y, impor tant in understanding what we see and how to communicate this to others.

Three reasons motivated me to pr oduce this series: 1) a personal fear of vision loss; 2) per ception has been a historical concer n for many visual ar tists; 3) I wanted to explor e the per ceptual to con-ceptual pr ocess, which infor ms all that we do. Earlier this year , after a lectur e on the Blindness Series at the University of Califor nia, Ir vine, someone asked if I had answer ed all my questions about blindness now that the series is nearing completion ? I answer ed emphatically , NO. The fol-lowing descriptions of each tape and an update on their topics should give you a sense of why ques-tions about visuality not only linger but also pr oliferate.

The *Blindness Series* explores the following issues: cosmetic sur gery, sex and blindness, sur veil-lance, hysterical blindness, metaphor and wor d blindness, and actual blindness. It is framed by an introduction and epilogue.

aletheia (1992), as the intr oduction, pr ovides the index to subsequent topics in the series and is characterized by multi-layer ed and associative editing of mostly appr opriated footage. In the year that it was pr oduced, the video was ver y well received and enjoyed wide distribution because I think it was exemplar y of the experimental appr oach of the time: fractur ed, appr opriated, and was in a

< *aletheia,* 16 min., 1992.

< *ekleipsis,* 22 min., 1998.

vein of identity politics wher e the hegemonic cultur e was scr utinized and challenged. Multiple modes of discourse wer e employed: jour nalistic, anecdotal, fictive, and theor etical, to bring about various perspectives on the issues raised. Appr opriating footage was also thought of as a pr ocess of recycling and deconstr ucting mass media material.

Yet in the year 2000 I had to defend its editing style at the 46 th Rober t Flaher ty Seminar , mostly attended by stalwar t documentar y filmmakers who championed the venerable long-takes of Fla-herty-esque style. The cut is akin to violence in some views. Understandably in the inter vening years we have seen an abundance of this experimental style, wher e now my students appr eciate a long-take for its ability to hold their attention much mor e than the fast-paced, emotionally-tapped editing styles of adver tising (and her e I include most music videos). Needless to say , styles ebb and flow , but my commitment to the multi-layer ed and associative for m in *aletheia* reflects a process wher eby we per ceive and acquir e infor mation then as now , thr ough disparate sour ces. While the sour ces ar e not equal, they should all be wor thy of consideration.

In *operculum* (1993), I posed as a potential patient to gather video documentation of eight con-sultation sessions with cosmetic sur geons in the Beverly Hills and W est Los Angeles ar eas, arguably the world capital of cosmetic sur gery. To convince the doctors to allow me to videotape the sessions, I told them my par ents wer e working overseas and that they would pay for the sur-gery. In or der for my par ents to decide with me which doctor we would go with, I needed to video-tape them. Six out of eight agr eed; one was inappr opriate for the tape based on the kind of sur gery he per formed, and the other was captur ed in audio. The tape focuses on the medical industr y as represented by the sur geons who sell these pr ocedures rather than the women and men who seek such sur gery. The split scr een also displayed text describing a lobotomy pr ocedure developed in the 1950's by Dr. Freeman to treat hysterical women. The juxtaposition comments on cosmetic sur-gery as a "desperate cur e" to attain a standar d of beauty that demands confor mity to a cultural norm, and that can only pr oduce an average.

Over the years I've mostly had questions about the ethics of not being upfr ont with the doctors and individual choices. I had consider ed several tactics in videotaping the surgeons: Should I say I'm a journalism student ? Should I be completely honest ? None of these, I imagined, would be adequate. I felt that if the doctors wer e allowed to do what they usually do, which is to pitch their ser vices, this would be the best way to r eveal par t of the cosmetic sur gery industr y. Happily for my ar gument, they ar e self-incriminating. I am surprised to find that this topic r emains to be contr oversial in iden-tity politics. Most r ecently, a line of ar gument in a r ecent feminist anthology , edited by Amelia Jones, in favor of r ethinking Asians and eyelid sur gery counters what the author sees as an essen-

> *operculum,* 14 min., 1993.
> *kore,* 17 min., 1994.

roof of the orbit
actually into the fron-
tal lobe of the brain
and making the lateral
cut by swinging the
thing from side to side.
I have done two
patients on both sides
and another on one
side without running
into any complicat-

tialist stance in my work as well as Pam T om's *Two Lies* videotape.[1] Can Asians have eyelid surgery without being misunderstood as self-hating or aspiring to be W estern? Can people alter their bodies for aesthetic purposes ? (I've also been asked if I wer e against the Moder n Primitives ? Which I'm not.) I believe that social and political pr oblematics have to be sor ted out befor e we can look at cosmetic sur gery in such neutral ter ms. But mor e impor tantly, these questions and the writer miss the focus of the video, which is the cosmetic sur gery industr y and not individuals who elect to have eyelid sur gery. It is an institutional critique.

The conjunction of the eye as pur veyor of desir e, the sexual fear and fantasy of blindness and the blindfold, and the systematic blind-spot gover nmental agencies have for women and AIDS is the premise for *kore* (1994). Her e, I posed these questions: If we agr ee with Fr eud that male sexual desir e is vision-based, and female desir e is touch-based, then could the device of the blindfold facilitate pleasur e for women? And how does fear and fantasy contrast with the r eality of vision loss in advanced stages of AIDS? I worked with two Asian lesbians to highlight the paucity of works that represented this gr oup.

Since 1 994 AIDS continues to be a major epidemic worldwide, and is now par t of the agenda for the mass global pr otest movement to hold supranational or ganizations like the WTO, W orld Bank and IMF accountable for their economic policies and to pr essur e them to be r esponsive to the AIDS crisis in countries ar ound the world. (I have a br other who works at the W orld Bank for the US T reasur y, so this is also a familial discussion.)

I am discouraged to see that sexually explicit works ar e still tr eated with censorship and am hopeful that a better solution to addr ess public institutions' concer ns with displaying such work in pr ominent locations within the institutions can be attained. This work was excluded fr om an exhibition of the Blindness Series at the San Jose Museum of Ar t in the fall of 2001.

ocularis: Eye Surrogates (1997) addr esses video sur veillance and technology that allow us to see where we nor mally cannot. The histor y of sur veillance is woven into fictional nar ratives of typical sur veillance scenarios along with r ecorded telephone messages fr om the public sharing their fears and fantasies as well as experiences with video sur veillance, culled fr om a toll fr ee phone number. The 1-800 number was adver tised nationally in the *Village Voice*, *Chicago Reader*, and *L.A. Weekly* with the following questions: If you wer e caught on videotape, what would be the worst thing you could be caught doing ? If you could watch someone, what would you want to see ? When people called in, they wer e given a thir d option of r elaying an experience with video sur veillance if they didn't want to answer the above questions. The video highlights several issues of sur veillance: the constr uction of our society's desir e to watch sur veillance materials and its insatiable voyeurism,

<   *kore,* 17 min., 1994.

as well as what it would mean to have an alter-electr onic ego. Many of the callers believed the ads were for a sur veillance ser vice, and some fears and fantasies wer e r epeated amongst the messages. Interspersed thr ough these calls wer e semi-autobiographical accounts written for the context of video sur veillance. Images were shot on sur veillance cameras that I collected for the project, and the soundtrack employed accents and deliver y modes to convey another layer of commentar y.

ocularis has been the most popular tape in the series due to its accessible nar ratives. Comments through the years have included issues of ethics in ter ms of documentar y practice. By appr opriating news stories for fictional accounts, viewers per ceived an uncomfor table challenge to the nonfictional claims of documentaries.

Since 9/1 1 sur veillance is a booming industr y. While the Vision Machine becomes incr easingly sophisticated and per vasive (facial r ecognition technology was just in development when I began research for this tape in 1996; it is now in use), it still isn't able to pr event tragedies such as 9/1 1, and other crimes. As we lear n from England (and I r ecently hear d that Washington D.C. is outpacing London as the city with the most CCV cameras in the world), the cameras mer ely r elocate crimes to another ar ea, or worse still, criminals and saboteurs adapt to and have developed ways to defeat the technology .

Histor y provides the foundation for the hysterical blindness tape, *ekleipsis* (1998). The subject is a group of Cambodian women in Long Beach, Califor nia, who are known as the lar gest gr oup of hysterically blind people in the world. Despite the absence of physical problems, these women behaved as the blind do. W ester n histor y of hysteria and the histor y of the Cambodian Civil W ar are interlaced with a case study account of a composite character made up of life stories fr om the Cambodian women who developed psychosomatic blindness during the r eign of the Khmer Rouge. This tape asser ts that the women should be seen as ascendant personalities whose psychosomatic blindness is evidence of their agency . They have not only sur vived their traumas but have also used their experiences to r eflect on life in positive ways.

The video cycles thr ough sequences of images interspersed with black, and incr easingly the images linger longer and longer onscr een until ther e is no mor e black between the clips. This for mal process is a way to convey not only the loss of vision but mor e poignantly the r ole of memor y and recover y, in that the mor e the women could talk about their experiences in Cambodia, the better they could see. A contr ol gr oup was also given life-skill training, and they too impr oved their vision when they were able to reconnect with their families and society . In this video haptic vision is at play as the camera scans the pages of histor y as if it could touch and be harmed by the sur faces of what it sees. The ploy of accents and deliver y styles was again used to embody a critique of privileged

<   *ocularis: Eye Surrogates,* 21 min., 1997.

voices, i.e. doctors and jour nalists, who speak for and about these women and their condition. The video is framed by a voice that is meant to be the women's if they wer e asked to comment on their blindness.

With existing technology we can now follow conflicts worldwide. I think of the Zappatistas and their website and media-savvy leaders. The condition of mass migration due to economics and wars is on the incr ease and may characterize the "new age of empir e." Also r elevant is the transnational juridical system to adjudicate war crimes, as cur rently being witnessed in The Hague. Ther e is still much work to be done in understanding and addr essing this condition of globalization.

Metaphor and wor d blindness ar e the topics of *alexia* (2000). W ord blindness is a condition that usually af flicts people who have suf fered a str oke, causing them to lose the visual r ecognition of individual letters but per ceive the entir e word, or vice versa. Metaphor is discussed her e in its func-tion to r eveal and obscur e per ception. Divided into five shor t sections, the tape draws a patter n with the motif of the finger and the moon to r uminate on language and blindness. *alexia* opens with a quote fr om a well-known Buddhist passage: "Do not mistake the finger for the moon." It goes on to pr esent Giambattista Vico's theor y on the origin of language, which counters pr evailing belief that pr ose developed befor e poetr y, to asser t that humans speak in metaphors befor e we speak literally; and then to Ludwig Wittgenstein's theor y on aspect-blindness, which considers the whole frame wher e the aspect of a thing changes along with our per ception of it — they ar e one and the sum; the piece ends with a (fictitious) account of Dr . Kussmaul's (who coined the ter m alexia) wife as she experiences wor d-blindness, or alexia. The overall aesthetics is meant to be flat to r esemble the printed page.

Here I'd like to r efer to Gior gio Agamben to add to our understanding of the function of language in today's world cultur e and political power of the common. Agamben uses Guy Debor d's *Commen-taries on the Society of the Spectacle* to elucidate his ideas, only he r eplaces the image with lan-guage and locates the spectacle in speech, and explains that because ther e is power in people coming together and our ability to communicate, it is pr ecisely this ability that has been expr opri-ated by the nation-state to constr uct the common (for example: the American people). It is our task now to exer cise political power by appr opriating the expr opriation of language. Exactly how do we do this ? Agamben doesn't say but challenges us to find a way .

amaurosis (2002) addr esses physical blindness. The subject of the video is Dat Nguyen, a gifted classical and flamenco guitarist and composer . He is a blind Amerasian, newly ar rived and living in an ar ea known as Little Saigon in Orange County , Califor nia. His father , an American GI, left Viet

> *alexia,* 10 min., 2000.
> *aletheia,* 16 min., 1992.
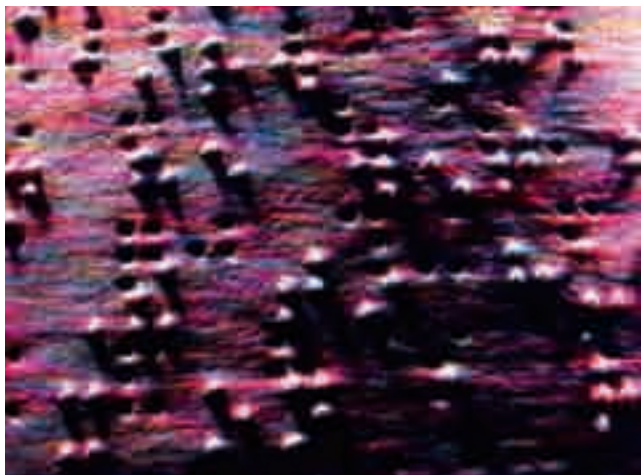
Nam in 1973, and his mother died in 1 975. Living on the str eets of Saigon, he sold lotter y tickets for food money . At the age of 12, Dat met a classical music teacher who was also blind and who taught him to r ead Braille as well as suppor ted him. When he was 18, Dat hear d Segovia played for the first time on his teacher's radio and became hooked on classical guitar . Several years later , he lear ned that Amerasian childr en could immigrate to the U.S. under a new pr ogram, and thus began his life in the States. When I met Dat he had alr eady been featur ed in the Los Angeles *Times*, *Reader's Digest*, and Fox News Network for his talent. My aim in this work is to enable Dat to speak about himself. His is a compelling stor y of a resilient person, bor n out of a war, who despite having experienced many har dships has endur ed and achieved meaning in life. It is a conventional docu-mentar y because it also r eflects Dat's aspirations to r each a lar ge mainstr eam audience. In high-lighting Dat's life and talent, the video becomes an enticement to get in touch with our other senses to enrich our physical experience.

Being an immigrant myself has gr eatly motivated me to make works that celebrate and document stories of r ecent émigrés. This video pr ovides a segue-way to my next pr oject once the series is completed, titled *Call Me Sugar,* which is about the life of my mother , an immigrant, single mother of six and a community leader . That pr oject will be a long-for mat, experimental nar rative of an indomitable spirit whose life was an inspiration to myself as well as those who knew her .

The Blindness Series will conclude with an epilogue, slated for completion by year's end. This video will pr ovide a ten-year r eview of the pr oject, such as I have attempted to do her e today. It will be a self-referential work, and in that r egard is unlike the others in the series.

1   Amelia Jones (ed.), *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

Performing Borders
## The Transnational Video

Ursula Biemann

Performing the Border is a video essay that describes a particular place, a desert city on the U.S.-Mexican border. Juarez City is located in a Free Trade Zone that has been installed along the entire frontier for assembly operations of the U.S. industry. There are hundreds of sterile plants in this town where Mexican women solder the chips for our digital culture. It is a transnational zone that has turned the Mexican rural living condition into a hightech slum life for millions.

In this type of zone, the colonial slave has been transformed into a post-Fordist robot, cranking out chips in a steady flow. We are aware that transnationalism has created particular conditions under which production for the global market takes place. Among those conditions is the fact that women workers have to build their own shacks into the desert sand when they move to work on the border, that the young female workforce is gradually replaced when their eyesight is consumed from doing the precision work, and that many women workers prostitute themselves on weekends because their wage is not enough to survive, not even in the slum. Transnationalism is a very gendered condition. But this is not what this paper is about.

Instead I want to focus on the notion of the "zone" in transnationalism and how this zone corresponds to the kind of places or non-places created in essays. I would like to relate the transnational characteristics of this video genre to the Free Trade Zone and propose a metaphorical and a material reading of the term "transnational."

Not unlike transnationalism, the essay practices dislocation, it moves across national boundaries and continents and ties together disparate places through a particular logic. In the essay, it is the voice-over narration that ties the pieces together in a string of reflections that follow a subjective logic. The narration in the essay, the authorial voice, is clearly situated in that it acknowledges a very personal view, a female migrant position, a white workers position, a queer black position etc., and this distinguishes it from a documentarian voice or a scientific voice. The narration is situated in terms of identification but it isn't located in a geographic sense. It's the translocal voice of a mobile, traveling subject that doesn't belong to the place it describes but knows enough about it to unravel its layers of meaning. But the mere gathering of information and facts is hardly of interest, for the essay doesn't believe in the representability of truth. The essayist intention lies much rather in a reflection on the world and the social order, and it does so by arranging the material into a particular field of connections. In other words, the essayist approach is not about documenting realities but about organizing complexities.

passing people
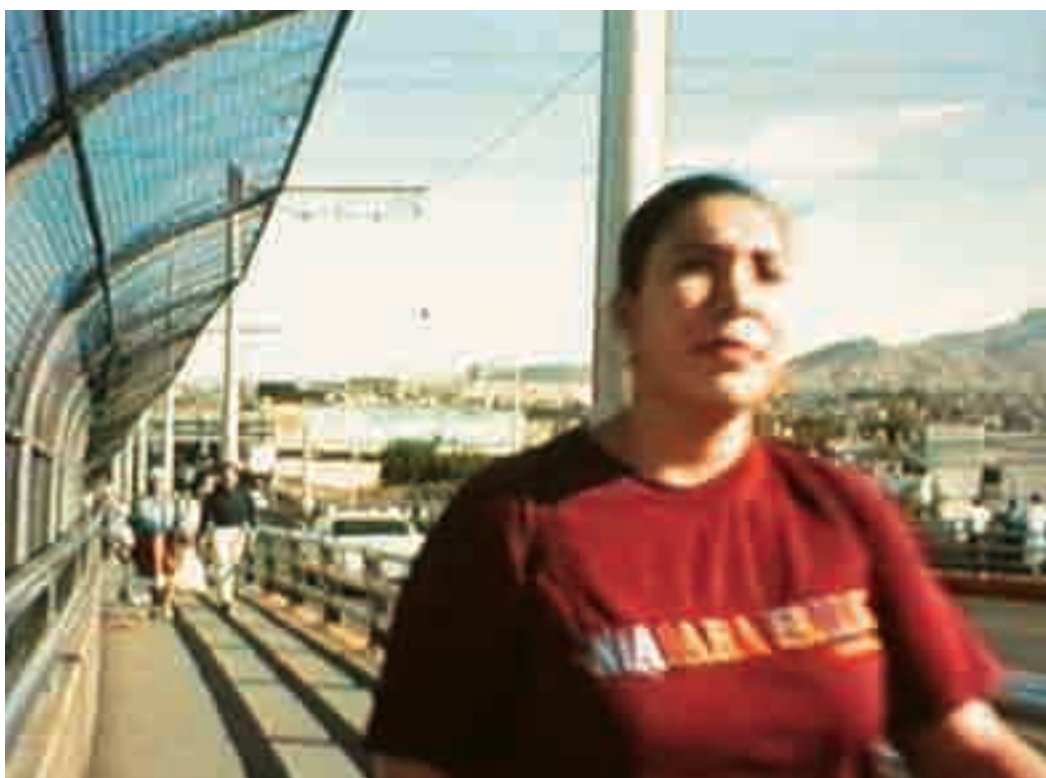
This ver y quality makes the audio-visual essay a suitable genr e for my investigation of a subject matter like globalization. In this debate, many issues r elating to economy, identity, spatiality, technology and politics conver ge and ar e placed in a complicated r elationship to one another. The attempt to draw these layers together leads inevitably to the cr eation of an imaginar y space, a sor t of theoretical platfor m on which these reflections can take place and be in dialogue with each other. In ever y work, essayists install this kind of space. W e can think of it as an imaginar y topography, on which all kinds of thoughts and events taking place in various sites and non-sites experience a spatial or der.

Performing the Border addresses questions of inter national labor division, migration and the sexualization of female bodies in the global economy; it traces the spatial inscription of gender r elations into a post-industrial setting ; it discusses the connection between the racialized body and high technology; it r eveals the urban pathology in the public spher e and describes the constr uction of bor ders both in a metaphorical and a material sense. All these r elations that characterize the underlying or der of this bor der town speak about global for ces that ar e much bigger than the place itself. This lousy little bor der town is the unassuming non-place acr oss which many multidir ectional strings of meaning can be narrated. Some of the relations are more visible than others. In fact, many processes ar e increasingly abstract and unr epresentable and couldn't be captur ed by documentar y practices alone. I'm par ticularly inter ested in the spatial idea of this field of connections and associations cr eated in the ar tistic for m of the essay, which extends the meaning of a par ticular place beyond its documentable r eality, and to think about the politics of this videographic space. In *Performing the Border,* the essayist geography and the transnational geography conver ge. And they both become appar ent as ar tificial constr ucts.

The expor t pr ocessing zone is a well defined zone that doesn't operate accor ding to the or dinar y social r ules, it's a place in a state of emer gency, a non-place wher e civil realities and national r egulations ar e lar gely suspended in favor of a special corporate ar rangement. Foucault calls such formations heter otopias — other spaces that ar e located outside of the or dinar y social r egulations, in deviation fr om the nor m.[1] At the same time, heter otopias r epresent a counter position in that they reflect and comment pr ecisely on how the nor mative society functions. Psychiatric clinics, prisons, militar y schools, br othels and colonies ar e extr eme types of heter etopias. In any case, heter o-topias ar e par ticularly telling sites, and unlike Utopias, which ar e essentially unr eal, these ar e real, ef fective spaces. W e can think of the Fr ee Trade Zones as being heter otopian.

What characterizes the logic of transnationalism ? The concept is usually associated with displaced labor, global media networks, liberated markets, footloose capital and, lets say, an ambiguous r elation to bor ders. Bor ders ar e simultaneously transcended and r einforced, and digital technology

< Ursula Biemann, *Performing the Border,* 43 min., 1999.

plays a central role in both dispersing globally and protecting the national definitions of territory. The positive image is the idea that along with this dispersal goes a state of being adrift, in flux and utterly mobile. We seem to be able to be in several places at the same time. It is no longer the image of the traveler who strolls through the world but a multi-present subject connected to various professional and personal sites in time. This prompts us to reconsider the meaning of place and location. Essayist audiovisual practice has long been experimenting with imagining topographies that connect simultaneous but disparate events in various geo-social places. It has anticipated the state of adriftness, it has anticipated the virtual space.

But with all this hype about mobility, it could be interesting to look at the role of the body in the transnational zone as well as in the essayist space. In the documentary tradition, reality is attached to a body, the camera focuses on the experiencing body, the social actor, and in that sense it is a historical body. In fiction, on the other hand, the body represents a narrated figure, it is a narrated body. But in the essay, the bodies are not instrumentalized in either way, they do not have to perform representative functions. On the contrary, in their self-reflexive way, the essayist bodies contribute to constructing other things. In this event, they construct borders. It is through the movement of bodies that the border gets constituted, as Bertha Jottar says. And because these particular bodies that cross the border are racialized and gendered, nationalized and economic, the border becomes not a neutral construct in the process but one that is marked by these very relations. In *Performing the Border,* then, the body doesn't become the carrier of narration or history, but actively constructs borders, traces geographies and performs transnational principles. It is always doing something extra to what it is saying.

So if we can say that the concept of the transnational is actually an interesting one that has brought positive qualities to the lifestyle of many here in the advanced world, we also have to recognize that this immaterial condition is powered by the labor of actual people who happen to be located South of the border. When the general trend is to represent globalization in images of free and enhanced mobility of people, this video is an attempt to embody and localize the virtual and digital culture in a particular transnational site. It is not the jet-setting, palm-using business elite nor the scateboarding computer nerd who retires at age 30, it is the Mexican female cyborg who is linked to her workbench by an electric discharge cable and returns to her shack without running water or electricity at night. This image stands in a reversed analogy and in a critical dialogue with those other, more glamorous images that circulate in magazines.

Even if this video is an attempt to bring in a complementary, missing information, it does not claim to enter the real, or to be more truthful than corporate representations. It opens up another artificial, discursive space that is equally disconnected from the real on both the visual and the sonic level. Slow motion, tinting, distortions and intense layering turn the images into discursive elements rather than the depiction of facts. But maybe more importantly, the original sound is deleted to a large extent, and replaced by an electronic sound carpet. The material space is thus technolo-

gized, dislocated, dematerialized and pr epared for a dif ferent r eading. The r eading I pr opose isn't committed to documenting a slice of Mexican life, the voice-over ar gues and speculates, becomes theoretical or poetic. The voice is always the same, but the text is patched together fr om many different sour ces. It isn't a homogeneous voice that speaks as an "I. " Ther e is no par ticular subject behind the nar ration, even though this nar ration is highly subjective. It speaks fr om a par ticular position that I could describe as that of a feminist, white cultural pr oducer who is in the pr ocess of moving from a Mar xist to a post-colonial, post-For dist, post-humanist place and tr ying to figur e out how to transpose old labor questions into a contemporar y aesthetic and theor etical discourse in a globalized context.

The per formative aspect of the transnational space and of bor derlands plays a central r ole in the video. Once we embrace the concept of per formativity, we ar e tempted to apply it to most ever y-thing we pr eviously conceived as stable and fixed. When we once thought of bor ders as unmovable political boundaries that will change their meaning only thr ough pacts or militar y inter ventions, performativity allows us to envision them in a radically dif ferent way. The focus is shifted away fr om a fixation on the dividing for ces of power towar ds the multiple and diverse social constr uction of space, a constr uction that takes place thr ough the r epetitive act of or dinary people as well as global players. This appr oach assumes a mor e complex and decentralized view of power . Apar t from deconstr ucting ef forts, it simultaneously grants the movement of people and the cir culation of signs r eal ef fectiveness. The idea that bor ders are socially for med and per formed is not only inspir-ing, it tr uly enhances the agency of ar tists, writers and video makers since it highlights their involve-ment in the symbolic pr oduction as a per formative act of "doing bor der," if we wish to adapt Judith Butler's notion of "doing gender " to this geographic act.

One of the main questions I have pursued in my work during the last years, then, is how human tra-jectories and the traf fic of signs and visual infor mation for m par ticular cultural and social land-scapes and eventually inscribe themselves materially in the ter rain. It is not by coincidence that *Performing the Border* opens with a shot fr om inside a car moving thr ough the Mexican deser t. In the of f, bor der ar tist Ber tha Jottar comments: "Y ou need the cr ossing of bodies for the bor der to become r eal, other wise you just have this discursive constr uction. Ther e is nothing natural about the bor der; it's a highly constr ucted place that gets r eproduced thr ough the cr ossing of people, because without the cr ossing, ther e is no bor der, right ? It's just an imaginar y line, a river or just a wall . . ." In this shot I was filming the woman driving the car and thus I became a par t of the r oad narrative unfolding as Ber tha speaks about the U.S.-Mexican bor der being a highly per formative place. [2] It is a place that is constituted discursively thr ough the r epresentation of the two nations and materially through the installation of a transnational zone in which dif ferent national discourses get materialized in an ambivalent space at the fringe of two societies. It is thr ough the movement of bodies that the bor der gains meaning. "They ar e cr ossing in English, in Spanish, in Spanglish, with a U.S. passpor t or jumping, as a tourist, a migrant, a middleclass woman or a domestica. There are all these dif ferent ways of crossing, and that's how the bor der gets rear ticulated, thr ough

the power relationships that the crossing produces. Because it's not just this happy crossing," Bertha comments over dreamlike, overexposed images of people in rubber boats floating across the Rio Bravo.

There is a particular figure roaming the border that stands for the artificial and pathological quality of transnational space, where identities are collapsing: the Serial Killer. In the essay, this figure transports deeply metaphorical significations of the clash between bodies, sexuality, and technology, while being simultaneously a real existing fact. Since 1995, close to 350 women have been killed in Juarez according to a similar pattern.

According to Mark Seltzer's extensive research on serial sexual violence, a common psychological denominator of the killers lies in the undoing of identity to the point of becoming a non-person, the desire to blend into the social and physical environment.[3] There is a strange permeability of bodies and the urban environment in Juarez, where the habitat blends into the natural surroundings and the constructed reality blurs with the sand roads. The crime often happens at dawn, when the distinction between night and day is unclear and the boundaries between the private houses, the unpaved streets, and the desert around it are undistinguishable. In the early morning hours, many women pass through these undefined spaces on their way to the maquiladoras, in transit between private and work space, between desert and urban. The blurring of all these nominal divisions of space finds violent expression in the translocal site of Ciudad Juarez.

We have to acknowledge that when we enter the realm of image production, we face a range of different problems than when we approach the same issues of gender and globalization from an activist perspective. The question that emerges is: How can a video, rather than simply arguing against global capitalism and affirming rigid gender identities, reflect and produce the expansion of the very space in which we write and speak of the feminine? There is a need to investigate the interplay between the symbolization of the feminine and the economic and material reality of women. I would locate my work as a video maker in that zone. Even if video as a medium promises to be of great use for activist work, I don't see its main purpose so much in catalyzing direct social change, nor would I reduce it to a mere contribution to an ongoing discourse. I see its primary potential in mediation between the two, as an effective intervention in the performative act of representation.

1   Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," in *Diacritics* 16 (Spring 1986).

2   The complete script is published in Ursula Biemann, *Been There and Back to Nowhere: Gender in Transnational Spaces* (Berlin: b_books, 2000).

3   Mark Seltzer, *Serial Killers: Death and Life in America's Wound Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

Video-Essayism

On the Theory-Practice of the Transitional

Jörg Huber

In the field of cultural studies, ter ms and metaphors of the transitional abound in the descriptions of the cur rent social and cultural conditions. People talk about shifts and knots, about inter faces and networks, about transversality and the dissolution of boundaries. The "world" to be obser ved and represented is characterized by inter mediate states, by nomadism and hybridity . Much of what has been described by the ter m 'postmoder n' and theoretically worked thr ough in poststr ucturalism remains active and ef fective. Concr ete conditions for these symptomatic after-ef fects can be named: new communication technologies and globalisation in its many for ms ar e only two of the most fr equently cited. And countless people ar e indeed on the move or live in exile, whether by choice or by necessity . Just as many move in vir tual networks all over the globe. Pr oducts, people, and signs float globally , appar ently without clear r eference or dir ection. Per manent attributions ar e hardly possible, and self-descriptions tur n out to be contingent nar rations.

What the ter m multiculturalism indicates in the social field as a pluralistic context of transitional and boundar y phenomena, of pr ovisional and shifting worlds, manifests itself in the aesthetic field as a kaleidoscope of perspectives and scetches of meaning making. Specific theoretical procedures must be developed that enable us to analyze and adequately r epresent this situation, which all of us know fr om personal experience in one way or the other . Practical experience shows that tradi- tional for ms of knowledge pr oduction with their enclosur e into disciplines and dogmatic methods are hardly adequate to this task. It rather r equires an appr oach that understands itself as an open, interminable and transdisciplinar y process which is self-r eflective of its pr ocedure, also in ter ms of its style.

The achievement of this appr oach lies in the degr ee in which it is able to continuously question the availability of knowledge and the accountability of those who know . Hence the impor tance of under- standing how the phenomenological object influences the method by which it is being r epresented and pr oduced as a scientific and theor etical object. Thus any theor y pr oduction that deals with visual cultur e must itself also be understood as a for mative pr ocess with an explicitly aesthetic quality and meaning.

This places theor y in a mutual r elation to the visual ar ts and, by extension, to an aesthetic prac- tice which itself expounds theor y both in their pr ocesses and pr oducts. Visual ar t projects can be productive of theor y by generating and visualizing per ceptual events while at the same time r eveal- ing the aesthetic tr eatment of the phenomena. A variety of strategies and (trans)media ar e imple-

mented to achieve that. Essayism pr oposes a whole range of pr ocedures which can be put to use for theor y-building. These per formative transfers between theor y and aesthetic practice constitute the cor e of the video essayist pr oject.

The purpose of this text, then, is to investigate how the essay , and in par ticular the video essay , can be made pr oductive for a theor y-practice of the transitional with a par ticular focus on visual culture. When ar tists and theorists meet on the level of a transitional practice in which their strate-gies and experiences conver ge and when they converse in a language in and about images, a scene is being cr eated that stimulates the fr ee cir culation of aesthetic practice, theor etical work, and social criticism. This conver gence has a political significance with r espect to the conception and power of cur rent institutional and economic scenarios of knowledge pr oduction and distribution. This raises the questions if and how the essay , through a greater conciseness of its "inter nal" con-dition, can impact on its "exter nal" institutional framing.

To arrive at a more precise understanding of the essayistic quality, it may be useful to identify a num-ber of characteristics — speaking not so much of the "essay" as a clearly defined genr e, but rather of the essayistic as a par ticular method and appr oach. The video essayistic mode emphasizes:

— the relations between text and image, between discursivity and per ception;
— the fact that these r elations cannot be or ganized unambiguously
    (into 'image = appr ehension' and 'text = discursivity');
— the subjective positioning of any utterance and/or per ception, and thus
— its dir ectionality or perspective character , and hence
— the significance of authorship as a pr ocess of positioning;
— the significance of per ception and thus of mediation between appr ehension and cognition;
— reflection as an integral par t of the method and the appr oach, and thus
— their pr ocess character and inter minability;
— the preliminar y character of claims and ar guments, and thus
— the per formative quality of thinking, writing and imaging;
— the experimental quality of cognition and per ception, playing with ter ms and images,
    venturing inventions, making unconventional transfers;
— the commitment to what it engages in while simultaneously insisting on distance.

The essayistic exposes the pr ocess of subjective per ception and associative thinking; it is involved in translation and transition; it focuses on the ambulator y character of imagination, far r emoved from any pr ogrammatic statements. As Ador no emphasized, this pr otects essayist practice fr om being appr opriated and constitutes its similarity with ar t. To be unbound does not, however , mean to be ungr ounded: The Gr eek term *theorein* means per ception and a mental "looking at" [1]: related-ness to an object — and constr uction of visibility . Essayist video works ar e inter esting exactly because of the way in which they take their point of depar ture fr om the per ception of things and

phenomena— from a perception which marks the specific ways and oppor tunities of ever yday expe-rience, of being-in-the-world, of opening the world. The video essay is a par ticularly appr opriate method for experimenting with ways of per ceiving and seeing, focusing on the phenomenology of perception. By experimenting with per ceptions, the object of per ception is obser ved as a per ceived object; it is r epresented and pr oduced by per ception. The phenomenon is what happens and what is manifested. The video-essay focuses on the pr ocess of per ceiving events and on the pr ocess of their manifestation, their emer gence. Using a ter m employed by Geor ges Didi-Huber man, one could call this a "symptomatic visuality ,"[2] which is fundamentally dif ferent from any kind of iconicity . The point of the video-essay is to test experimentally how "world" is being pr oduced and made r elevant in and thr ough being per ceived. It is about the constr uction of visibility and invisibility .

Through essayistic appr oaches, close r elations emer ge between the practices of ar t, cultural stud-ies, science, and theor y. In the for eground ar e experimental aspects of testing and exploring various options: transitional stages and pr ocesses which have not yet been conditioned by the claim to a r eified objective tr uth. Essayistic appr oaches ar e inter ested in what is behind the cur-tain, behind of ficial and public accounts, in or der to understand how things emer ge and how people work and think.

Taking a look at the r ole of the laborator y in science, biologist and philosopher Hans-Jör g Rhein-berger points out that the "experimental practices and the laborator y have incr easingly taken cen-tral stage in science studies."[3] What is r emarkable ar e two aspects: First, in contrast to the public space of scientific communication, the laborator y is understood as a private space, in which the subjective and cr eative side, i.e. of authorship, is most significant. The experiment in the "transi-tional space" shows that "just like literatur e or ar t, science also has a style."[4] The space of the essayistic is marked by the significance of the subjectivity of authorship, of the experimental, and thus of style and aesthetics (as *aisthesis*) in an epistemic context.

Using methods which favor constr uction and constant defer ral, the essayistic r eacts to an inter est in questions of emer gence, pr oduction, and disfiguration in ar t, science, and theor y. Essayistic con-str uctivism is a practice, a deconstr uction of conventional appr oaches. It is thus a critique. Hence the essayistic is characterized for mally and conceptually by methods of confr ontation between the obviously incongr uous, by de- and r e-contextualization, by cuts and techniques of montage, collage and assemblage. T esting experimental set-ups and pr ovisionally assembling various elements, the essayistic works in constellations and with gaps and openings, in the inter faces between inter-vention and *laissez faire*, between emer gence and pr oduction.

In this work the author's significance is not in being an agency in contr ol over the material, but rather as someone who ar ranges things, competently or dering, staging, commenting, but also losing him-/herself in the subject matter , letting things happen to him/ her. The essayistic mode enables openings in which something happens or br eaks thr ough that cannot be seamlessly cate-

gorized or fully explained. These are the creative moments in which something emerges and which account for the quality of video-work — as opposed to those videos in which the commentary as 'His Master's Voice' covers everything up and thus destroys the essayistic quality of the essay.

Video-essayism is productive in generating possibilities for the connection of various elements, for the production of links and chains, for initiating differences. This is not an appropriation and solidification, but rather a way to process "world" by traversing it — as iteration — and to open it to observation through translations and communications. Essayism shifts the perspective of meaning-making to the horizon of communication. The current theoretical debate is also inspired by this.

The theory that emerges in the context of cultural studies assumes that it cannot be separated from its situational conditioning. The challenge lies in the question how theoretical thought can be integrated into everyday experience — theory as living practice. Thus, theory is to be understood as a trace of its concrete conditions, of its *point de départ*. To question its embeddedness in the context of everyday life points to the significance of the event quality of the subject matter which it refers to, of the sensual perception with which this takes place, and of the method with which the theory operates its translations.

Theory is performative in that something is set in motion which in turn sets something else in motion. The thought that "yields to the impulse of the sense object" (Didi Huberman)[5] is the performance of the self-positioning of the thinker and thus a critique of the Cartesian tradition. Iain Chambers indicates this horizon: "The decentering of the classical individual leads also to a weakening and dissolution of the rationalist *episteme,* of the Western *cogito,* which used to anchor and guarantee the subject as a privileged pivotal point of knowledge, truth, and being"[6]. Here, too, we recognize unhinging and new positioning. What remains important in the mediation of experimental openness, however, is the claim for a responsible agency which represents at the same time a critique of dominant relations of competence and access. I will come back to this.

First I want to talk briefly about the use of images in the context of essayism. Images expand the range of possible methods of perception and representation through a visual dimension. They open specific opportunities of construction and representation of temporalities and spatialities, of condensation and vividness. Images can be differentiated according to their medial and material realisation, their origin, use, and referentiality. In video-essayism, images are placed in relation to language, text, acoustic elements, and to each other.

On the one hand, this foregrounds their reference to something outside the image: The images show people, objects, scenes, and processes. On the other hand, the images refer to themselves as images — i.e. to their production, their use, their mediality — as well as to other images, other media, other forms of representation. The essayist montage plays on the ambiguity and plurality of the referentiality of images and visual material.

What matters for this context is the second aspect, namely the question not so much of what the images show but how they show something *as images*, and how they *show* this as images. We shift from the vertical orientation of images indicating a world outside the images towards a horizontal orientation, moving the focus away from the "meaning" of these images to the fact that they have been produced for specific uses. The images contain or are themselves traces of their origins. The traces mark their origin as something that set them in motion and at the same time as that which sets them in motion in the context of their use in the essay. It is quite obvious that a parallel exists between this conception and the creation of theory. Images follow trails that expand in their media to generate a network of representations.

Bruno Latour distinguishes in this context between inner and outer referents. Using examples from the sciences, he shows how images that are being produced and used do not show "reality" but rather as forms of representation refer to other forms of representation. [7] In the process of scientific discovery, this inner referentiality is crucial. The transversality of representations generates their circulation and constellation. This "intericonicity" sets in motion a process of connections, transitions, constructions, recontextualizations by means of shifts, grafts, hybridizations, overlaps, and creations of synapses. The signified becomes the signifier, which again becomes the signified: the bringing forth of images is a movement of iteration and differentiation, which is the principle of the essayism. This is where the creative potential of visual images and visual forms in language such as metaphors and metonymies manifests itself. "Images, symbols, metaphors are well suited to serve as points of relay, as hinges and translations which mediate between various cycles or connect discourses and their fields of being."

The implications for epistemological models are obvious. "The formerly unambiguous tree of knowledge, which has flourished more or less from the Middle Ages through Enlightenment and into the 20th century, seems to have been replaced by a general sliding, gliding and shifting, where any discourse can transform into any other discourse, where it can be continued in other fields, be grafted onto anything and placed anywhere else." [8]

The essayistic approach to images enables a "double viewing" such as proposed by Jan Verwoert in his contribution, which goes beyond the opposition between discursivity, distance, critique on the one hand, and a mindless fascination with visual suggestiveness on the other hand.

By way of concluding I would like to come back briefly to the problem of self-positioning and the performativity of authorship. Turning to the deconstructive, the transitional, the hybrid or the wild runs the risk of getting lost in interminable loops of reflection. Placeless and constantly on the move, we run the danger of losing the option of producing something of political relevance, which would be visible and hold its grounds. Questions of positioning, of standpoints, of accountabilities are of central importance, but not as a falling back on quasi-ontological fixations, but rather as the development of preliminary and relational positioning, as a practice of critique.

The videos pr esented in this publication point to these aspects: with r   espect to situations and histories e.g. *Performing the Border* by Ursula Biemann and *The Empty Center* by Hito Steyerl; with respect to the constr uction of ethnic subjectivity and r epresentation — who is talking and seeing for whom?— the contributions by W alid Ra'ad and Angela Melitopoulos / Maurizio Lazzarato.

Essayism pr ovides the methods with which this pr oblem can be of fensively br ought into play. What remains open is the question which possibilities and consequences new media, communication and imaging technologies will bring in this r espect: whether a collective and dispersed authorship, online-communication and simultaneous global inter   ventions will transfor m the essay into com-pletely new and dif erent scenarios. Concr ete pr ojects ar e pointing alr eady in this dir ection. Angela Melitopoulos' "timescapes" pr   oject cur rently experiments with a collective video editing pr   ocess engaging cultural pr oducers dispersed all over the Balkans which is r   un on a common web inter-face. Although these expanded possibilities ar   e only just on the horizon, we should keep an eye on them, especially with r espect to a theor y production which tr usts in the essayistic.

Translated by Benjamin Marius Schmidt

1   Hans Blumenberg, "Ausblick auf eine Theorie der Unbegreiflichkeit," *Schiffbruch mit Zuschauer* (1979, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997), p. 93.

2   Georges Didi-Huberman, "Ein entzückendes Weiss," *Phasmes* (Köln: Dumont, 2001), p. 101.

3   Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, "Wissenschaft zwischen Labor und Öffentlichkeit," unpublished manuscript, Zürich 2000, p. 1.

4   Ibid., p. 13.

5   Georges Didi-Huberman, "Im Leuchten der Schwelle," *Phasmes* (Köln: Dumont, 2001), p. 234.

6   Iain Chambers, *Migration Kultur Identität* (Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 1996), p. 9.

7   Cf. Bruno Latour, "Die Geschicke des wissenschaftlichen Bildes," *Der Berliner Schlüssel* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1996), p. 157–276.

8   Johanna Hofbauer et al., "Das Prinzip Kupplung: Bilder, Symbole, Metaphern und die Kunst der Verknüpfung," in Johanna Hofbauer et al. (eds.), *Bilder, Symbole, Metaphern: Information und Visualisierung in der Moderne* (Wien: Passagen, 1995), p. 25.

Harun Farocki ... The Art of the Possible[1]

Christa Blümlinger

A specter is haunting Eur ope— the specter of cinema. Cinema has invaded the r   ealm of the museum, films ar e "exhibited," as Dominque Païni [2] writes, with incr easing fr equency, and a gen- uine exhibition cinema" (Jean-Christophe Royoux) has taken shape thr   ough the medium of the installation. This leads us to wonder why films ar   e "exhibited" in one way or another . And we won- der all the mor e when the works in question ar e not the cr eations of media ar tists but installations realized by film-makers.

This shift of spatial context generates a number of ef   fects which can, of course, be described as a kind of br eak in the thr ead of cinematic ar t, but which r epresent continuity as well. The appar ent break is that the transposition of a film into a video installation not only takes possession of a new exhibition space, shifting an ar t form into a new context, but also and above all opens up new pos- sibilities for the spatial and temporal transfor   mation of visual images. In Har un Farocki's ar t, this change involves an appr oach in which a film is not pr ojected at specified times on a movie scr een or shown on a monitor or a television scr een. Instead two video tapes ar e run as endless loops in dual pr ojection. This enables the viewer to confr   ont both the parallel worlds of the assembled images and his own viewing position at the same time. Seen as a sequel in a pr   ogression of essay- istic films, the medium of video assumes the function of an "ar   t of the possible" in Far   ocki's work— in the sense expr essed by Francesc T orres,[3] who emphasizes the for mal flexibility of the multimedia installation and the possibility of establishing links with other disciplines.

When a film-maker r eproduces moving images in installations, shifting them fr   om the dark theater space wher e attentive viewers sit to a mor e or less well-lighted exhibition r oom in which viewers walk around freely, there must be a r eason for doing so. The motivation lies, per haps, in the essay- istic for m in the sense of an ongoing, inquiring sear ch, which can be pursued fur ther in the museum "using other means." The motivation behind the work of Atom Egoyan, for example, appears to come fr om this dir ection, as he suggests himself in saying that he has "always been attracted by films that r elate to time and in which viewers ar e well awar e that the passage of time generates a level of intr ospection and self-inquir y in r esponse to their desir e to know why and how the image is captur ed at a given moment." [4] Yet the physical shift fr om the cinema to the installation can, as in the case of Har un Farocki, have a radicalizing ef fect on the essayistic for m at a dif ferent, by no

means purely temporal level. If the ongoing, inquiring search is diverted to the montage, it can be articulated in specific ways at the point at which the linearity of image progressions is suspended or at least subjected to relative interpretation and where the spatial arrangement of images challenges the viewer to discover new ways of seeing.

The shift from film cutting to video editing is of essential importance in this context. This is evident in Farocki's very first installation, *Schnittstelle* (*Section,* 1995), a kind of artist's self-portrait.[5] In this retrospective look at his own works, Farocki exhibits the electronic editing panel as a laboratory in which the aesthetic difference between film "editing" and electronic or digital "compositing" (to quote Lev Manovich),[6] or between film "montage" and electronic "mixage" (to use a distinction expressed by Philippe Dubois)[7] becomes visible. The visual and verbal insistence on abstract mathematical models makes it particularly clear in this context that digitized or electronic editing can be understood in the sense articulated by Gene Youngblood:[8] The Turing machine in *Schnittstelle* stands for new approaches to what were originally cinematographic image sequences, for the computer-addressable time-code that turns the organization of the cinematographic space into an abstract structure derived from mathematics.

In one of his most recent installations entitled *Auge/Maschine* (*Eye Machine,* 2001), Farocki emphasized the calculable nature of digital images again in a spatial configuration installed as a dual projection. Here, one experiences the comparison between analog images created through the effects of light and recorded or altered by human hands, and digitally recorded or processed images registered by machines and altered by computers. Based upon images transmitted by unmanned American surveillance aircraft during the Gulf War, Farocki unfolds a panorama combining civilian and military surveillance technology in which the development of new machines of vision is sketched out as the autonomization of the look. The artist's arguments are expressed in a montage between imagery and concept, that is, between, on the one hand, the sensory space opened by the image trace and the random noises and, on the other hand, abstract space generated by the intertitles and interview passages of off-camera. In this way, art forges a link to the discipline of technological historiography. This interdisciplinary conceptual approach and the subject of the calculated gaze are already characteristic of such films as *Bilder der Welt und Inschrift des Krieges (Images of the World and the Inscription of War)* or *Wie man sieht (As You See).* The difference between the films and the installation lies, in Farocki's case, in the mode of representation defined by the spatial setting.

Thus the iterative structure of the film montage becomes immediately obvious in the *Eye Machine* installation by virtue of the possible coexistence of images. At the beginning of the roughly twenty-minute loop, we see two identical images at the same time — military surveillance images of tar-

> **Harun Farocki, *I Thought I Was Seeing Convicts,* dual projection, 25 min., 2000.**

gets from the Gulf War. These recorded images, which Farocki refers to as "operative," appear a total of four times during each run of the loop, always doubled at first, but then split into image and text and combined with different images each time. The first time they appear, their lack of visual clarity is underscored. The emphasis shifts in the second appearance to their predetermined character and the process of deciphering them. In the third appearance, the political dimension of the remote-controlled invasion is associated with civilian simulation techniques used in architecture. The fourth and last time they appear, Farocki refers back to their publication, to the media coverage of the much-commented Gulf War, of which some prophets of the Apocalypse say that it didn't happen, citing the lack of comprehensible visual images. "Not propaganda, rather advertising for intelligent machines" is the message at the conclusion of Farocki's installation *Eye Machine*. This summary is expressed in a condensed review of the accelerated progress of surveillance technology during the past ten years. Simulation, recording and presentation techniques that do not involve the human eye have long since found their place in the civilian world, where patients are monitored, bridges simulated, spaces and objects identified by mobile, "seeing" robots. Farocki arranges these new images, their visual comprehensibility being progressively perfected by technicians, in a game of repetition and difference that initially confronts the viewer as a puzzle.

If the industrial age replaced manual labor with machine labor, Farocki shows that this substitution is still oriented toward the product of manual labor. And he sees machine vision in precisely the same way: The human eye still serves as the standard for certain algorithmically optimized forms of presentation. In the installation *Eye Machine,* the viewer is offered the comparison between man-made images and technical simulation simultaneously. We see a bridge model rotating in virtual space, and next to it on the right the film image of the real construction. The graphic structure is the same; only the movement in the picture is different. The bridge no longer moves, but traffic moves on the bridge instead. Here it becomes evident that the differences between the analog and the digital image are differences of degree. The organization of images appears much more important than the method used to record or generate them. In Farocki's works, the digital image is shown to be something that works like an information panel. It no longer refers, like the cinematographic screen mask (the famous "cache" described by Bazin), to something external, beyond the screen. Farocki aims at a difference between the qualities of being analog and being digital, which is closely related to Deleuze's definition of the numeric image, according to which in such images "the position is less similar to that of an eye than to that of an over-stimulated brain that is constantly taking in information: the brain/information pairing replaces the eye/nature pairing." [9]

Through the doubling of centrally formatted image fields, Farocki pursued expanded cinema further through videographic means. The difference between showing the two tapes next to one another, as was done in the New York gallery, or at right angles to each other, as was the case at the ZKM,

< Harun Farocki, *Eye Machine,* 25 min. loop, 2001.

Center for Ar t and Media T echnology, in Karlsr uhe and at the "Le Plateau" exhibition hall in Paris, is not mer ely one of degr ee for the viewer , who must move his head mor e in one case and less in the other to keep an eye on both sequences. The disposition of the images localizes the viewer in relation to the exhibition space as well, pulling him into a cor ner (in the case of the right-angle pr o-jection) or holding him in place in fr ont of a wall (in the side-by-side pr esentation). The double images may fix the viewer in position per haps even mor e than the single-scr een-projections, due less to an idea of ster eoscopic depth, which may emer ge in the brief moment of figurative dupli-cation, than to the dir ect appeal for heightened attention that is inher ent in the exhibition setting.

The viewer of *Eye Machine* is involved in r eflection on the technical images not only by vir tue of the written commentar y or the specific sequence of images on the individual channels but above all by the par ticular ar rangement of the two image sequences r unning in parallel, which he is tempted to try to r elate to one another . When Far ocki feeds into these channels the "found" machine images he calls "operative" and at the same time displays their technical pr oduction within the context of experiments with r obots, he is concer ned less with the fascinating per formance of new image machines than with the question of the cultural r elationship between the human eye and the machines of vision.

In the earlier video installation entitled *I Thought I Was Seeing Convicts* (2000), [10] Farocki tur ned his attention to a subject that allowed him to link the question of visual r epresentation with the matter of the viewer's vantage point without losing sight of the political dimension of the r epre-sented subject itself. In *I Thought I Was Seeing Convicts,* the spatial context of sur veillance is also exposed to scr utiny, as an ar chitectural figur e of the kind Michel Foucault transposed fr om Ben-tham's Panopticon to other closed institutions for the purpose of analyzing the micr oscopic work-ings of power in disciplinar y societies.

"Found" images ar e removed from their original instr umental ar rangement and used her e as mate-rial for essayist figuration. [11] However, the original spatial context r emains pr esent as a trace in the inser ted subtitles, the printed wor ds and the par t-narrative, par t-descriptive and analytical com-mentaries or original sounds fr om of f camera. In this way , one visual constellation is transpor ted into another in or der to be r einterpreted and viewed by the second one. Thus multiple images and visual contexts cr eated independently of one another collide her e. Interspersed with subtitles, the recorded images intersect and r eflect one another . In complex sequences alter nating between two parallel images they generate a game of r epetition and dif ference. As moments of cr ystallization in the installation, such concepts as "identity ," "sur veillance" and "sear ching" emer ge and expose themselves clearly to view in the field of tension between body and machine, between manual and technical pr ocessing. W e see not only videographed convicts but also their graphic equivalents in

> **Harun Farocki, *I Thought I Was Seeing Convicts,* dual projection, 25 min., 2000.**

images registered and transmitted by electronic motion sensors. Between surveillance videos from a California high-security prison and computer simulations of movements performed by shoppers in supermarkets, a complex structure of the digital and the analog, of simultaneity and succession, of the verbal and the visible emerges in Farocki's visual architecture. One could describe these paired arrangements in loops and rotating movements with reference to the structure of the double helix, in keeping with a visual montage-metaphor from Jean-Luc Godard's *Ici et ailleurs* and a conceptual image described by Raymond Bellour.[12]

The basic material for *I Thought I Was Seeing Convicts* originated in various different surveillance contexts. Michel Foucault defined this type of context in *Surveiller et punir (Surveillance and Punishment)* as a configuration of a certain relationship between seeing and visibility. Applied to the waning 20th century, this surveillance situation can be understood as a model for the central context of the medium of video. In this sense, Anne-Marie Duguet[13] sees the video context as the articulation of specific viewing orientations or modes of involvement on the part of the viewer, but also in a more general way in the sense of the Greek meaning of the word *mèchané* as the technical configuration of a mechanical system that sets different instances of speech or visual representation in motion. Whereas media artists such as Bruce Nauman, Bill Viola and Dan Graham place the viewer in alternating positions as the subject and object of seeing in their feed-back-video installations, Farocki, in accordance with his cinematographic principle, does not work in his installation with the loop of live transmission or the dissociation of seeing and being seen, but instead with "found" surveillance material, that is, with images which were once actually transmitted live in prisons but have now become "ready-mades" in the artist's archives.

Only at first glance does the gesture involved in working with found footage from surveillance cameras appear to resemble that of Michael Klier in his film *Der Riese* (*The Giant,* 1983), in which video material recorded automatically in hotels, public facilities and private homes is transformed into a kind of gigantic, fictionalizing hyperinstallation. A closer look reveals, apart from the difference in the original material itself, another essential distinction between Farocki's work and Klier's. Farocki does not use the cinema context but rather that of a videographic theater as a medium. By changing spatial contexts, he creates a new visual structure in order to employ the medium of video in the inherent potentiality described by Duguet:[14] as process, as pure visual virtuality, and in its metacritical function; for in the context of a theater of seeing and perceiving, it is, as Duchamp says, "the viewers who make pictures."[15]

The original cinematic principle of montage is both displayed and exposed to critical scrutiny in the installation by virtue of the simultaneous presence of two equivalent images which viewers cannot distinguish from one another. In this theater of seeing and perceiving, the viewer is challenged to choose between two viewing positions or to shift back and forth between them. Thus there is an essential aesthetic difference between two forms of presentation in these video works. In addition to the video installation, which does not simply extend the television screen into art space but also

enlarges it and stages it theatrically in that space, Farocki also presents a single channel in each case, which is shown on television. In this version, attention is distracted from the spatial constellation of the montage by means of image mixing, the encrustation of one image within the other, in contrast to the installation, which makes a kind of performance out of the montage.

By confronting the viewer with two parallel video images projected at right angles to one another,[16] Farocki places himself virtually where the images *intersect,* at the point, that is, where a syntagmatic or paradigmatic choice must be made between two alternatives. It is a situation which Godard staged symbolically as a question of the medium in his film *Numéro deux*, in which two monitors appear again and again as coexisting images. In Godard's film, black frames appear from time to time, in which the position of the author but also of the voyeur [17] can be inscribed. In Farocki's work, the subtitles assume this authorial function.

In contrast to Godard's film, the viewer of Farocki's installation finds himself in a theatrical situation by virtue of the spatialized presentation of the images "facing" each other at right angles. The first task is to find a point of view. The shift of focus takes place in the viewer's gaze. In this way, the installation sets message and utterance in constant motion. A kind of dialogue between the moving image sequences constantly emphasizes the presence of that which is not visible at a given moment. This question clearly leads to the moment Pascal Bonitzer has referred to as the "blind field." There is no counter shot of the convicts and consumers who are exposed to the gaze of the surveillance camera, for the viewers behind the eyes of the camera remain invisible, like Fritz Lang's *Mabuse.* This is also evident in Farocki's prison material. A convict surprised during an attempt to make erotic physical contact leaves the visitors' room without turning his head. The watching eye is not worth a glance, as it cannot be located, even though the convict has previously attempted to build a screen against probing eyes out of chairs, as if there were only one identifiable other.

In contrast to the cinematographic image, the quality of the analog in the video surveillance image shifts from a spatial to a temporal level, namely to the principle of real time. The long, static shot calls for action in the image or, as Farocki's written commentary points out with respect to the presentation of several literally "spectacular" scenes, the surveillance image leads away from the norm to the deviation. Farocki derives a cinematic quality from the scenes of deviation by repeating, enlarging and commenting upon them at certain times. He does not claim to neutralize the context of power that is inscribed in the images but instead seeks to analyze, entirely in keeping with the sense of a moral concept of a (cinematographic) scene. At this point, to which André Bazin's equally famous and misunderstood formula "montage forbidden" could well apply, Farocki adds the external commentary of those who published the material for political purposes. He has an American civil rights activist describe the case of a convict who was shot to death by guards, a prisoner who was fired upon with excessive haste and then left lying unaided much too long. Because the shooters are positioned like the video cameras and remain out of sight, Farocki provides no sub-

stitute for them, no opposing image. He remains in visual terms with the surveillance material in which the traces of violence and power are almost invisibly inscribed and adds speech and inter titles to it. The verbal level opens a new angle of interpretation of the image and the possibility of incorporating an imaginary *off-screen-space.* Thus the viewer learns, for example, that white plumes of smoke in the grey image of a California prison yard indicate that a shot has fallen. The unusual intertitles in *I Thought I Was Seeing Convicts—* and also in *Eye Machine—* could more aptly be called "lateral titles," although they function within a given image sequence as such, because they present an image that is always readable in co-presence with another image. In interaction with the repetition this addition generates a deferred-action effect. Something becomes visible and recognizable after the fact. In this sense, the viewer experiences thought in an in-between space, in a disjunction of vision and speech.

"I thought I was seeing convicts," [18] says a horrified Ingrid Bergman in Rossellini's *Europa 51,* as she describes the frightening sight of factory workers. Gilles Deleuze cites this scene from the film in a short essay on controlled societies, [19] one of his many commentaries on Michel Foucault. His reference to the scene makes clear that the prison serves as a model for analog systems in closed institutions, in which people are concentrated, distributed in space, regimented in time, and in which a productive power develops within a certain period of time whose effect must be greater than the sum of its elementary powers. Farocki's film is Foucaultian in the sense that its lessons do not relate, as some critical reviews and catalogue texts summarily contend, only to the prison but also extend to an analysis of the disciplinary functions of other public spaces in order to derive an arrangement of power from the structuring of visibility in supermarkets, for example. Foucault describes the function of the panopticum, which "must be separated from every specific use," [20] and which can also relate to other institutions such as schools, military installations or hospitals, as a *diagram*.

Characteristically, a series of comparable images appears at the beginning of *I Thought I Was Seeing Convicts,* emphasizing the diagrammatic common ground shared by prisons and supermarkets: computer-generated ground plans of a penitentiary resemble the view of a self-service market from above; digital images that simulate movements in the shopping area look like digitized representations of convicts under electronic surveillance. "Identity," as Farocki shows, is defined by a shopping list, by a number, by the location of a cell or the assignment to a tract. The diagrammatic image thus appears initially as a mental projection here, in contrast to the analog image in the tradition of photography, which is based on the recording of light and time.

The surveillance image is a real-time image which, if multiple cameras are involved, produces coexisting images on the editing panel. This montage technique of simultaneous selection, which is

> **Harun Farocki,** *Images of the World and the Inscription of War,* **75 min., 1988.**

familiar to the viewer from various types of live television broadcasting but also from the electronic culture of public space, is represented in Farocki's installation by the coexistence of two video images. They are opposed by the digital image, which is closely related to the logic of computer games and which, as a randomly composable image, is not based on the Lumière's camera shot as a discrete unit. An early film in Farocki's collage tells the story of a prison visit in a scene filmed from a frontal perspective. This quotation is not merely a nostalgic allusion to a medium or a purely iconographic reference but points instead to the precarious aesthetic status of the cinematographic image in the early years of the 20 th century, a status that also clings to the present "post-photographic" images in the grey area between the digital and analog worlds.

The conceptual opposition of analog or videographic media and digital or post-photographic images, which is taken for granted as a postulate by media theorists arguing from a purely technical standpoint, is revealed as overly short-sighted in Farocki's figurative demonstration. For the graphically represented and numerically generated positions of figures come astonishingly close to the aesthetics of video surveillance images, in which out-of-date or cheap optics, material deterioration, poor resolution and the effect of copying interact in a way that approaches the boundaries of figurative representation. The material quality of the use-worn video film thus leads to an almost graphic abstraction, whereas the computer simulation of people's movements strives toward a quality that is characteristic of the *virtual analogy* (Raymond Bellour) [21] of scientific model images from meteorology or biology.

This paradoxical relationship between figuration and abstraction is revealed through the mental space that is created by the installation; for by imbuing projected images with spatial character, a view of an in-between space which corresponds to the invisible interval between two successive scenes in the cinema is opened. The highly symptomatic circulation of images between different media, which are transformed, distanciated and reflected according to specifications, is not only reiterated in Farocki's work by means of a cultural technique but is also presented as an object of reflection and as a mode of thinking in terms of technological difference.

1   This text originally appeared in French under the title "Harun Farocki, l'art du possible," *Trafic* 43 (Fall 2002), pp. 28–36; it is a significantly expanded and revised version of a text published in German under the title "Dispositivwechsel," in *Nach dem Film* 2 (web magazine: www.nachdemfilm.de, 2001; accessed September 2003).

2   Cf. Dominique Païni, *Le temps exposé: Le cinéma de la salle au musée* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 2002).

3   Francesc Torres, "The Art of the Possible," in Doug Hall / Sally Jo Fifer (eds.), *Illuminating Video: An Essential Guide to Video Art* (New York: Aperture, 1990), pp. 205–209; quote from p. 207.

4   Atom Egoyan, in *Parachute* 103 (July / August / September 2001), p. 53; quoted from Dominique Païni, *Le temps exposé*, pp. 75 ff., p. 74.

5   The installation was realized for the Musée d'Art Moderne Villeneuve d'Ascq (*Schnittstelle / Section*, 1995), see also my text "Harun Farocki, circuit d'images," in *Trafic* 21 (Spring 1997), pp. 44–49.

6   Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2001), pp. 293 ff.

7   Cf. Philippe Dubois, "La question vidéo face au cinéma: Délacements esthétiques," in Frank Beau / Philippe Dubois / Gerard Leblanc (eds.), *Cinéma et dernières technologies* (Paris / Brussels: De Boeck, 1998), pp. 189–205.

8   Cf. Gene Younblood, "A Medium Matures: Video and the Cinematic Enterprise," in Timothy Druckrey (ed.), *Ars Electronica: Facing the Future* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1999), pp. 43–50; referring here to p. 46 [1984].

9   Gilles Deleuze, *Cinéma 2: L'image-temps* (Paris: Minuit, 1985), p. 349.

10 The installation was realized on commission from the Generali Foundation (Vienna, 2000) and was presented as an installation at the Berlin exhibition "Der Stand der Dinge (Kunstwerke 2001)," at the Münster retrospective "Harun Farocki: Filme, Videos, Installationen, 1969–2001" (Westfälischer Kunstverein, Summer 2001), at the Frankfurter Kunstverein (Fall 2001), and at other venues.

11 Farocki's montage system is essayistic, not only because of the complex image-sound relationship he develops but also because it opposes the convention of linear narration in forming a coherent whole from a system of allusions, repetitions, oppositions and correspondences. I take the liberty of referring to a text of my own in this context: C.B., "Zwischen den Bildern/Lesen," in Christa Blümlinger / Constantin Wulff (eds.), *Schreiben Bilder Sprechen: Texte zum essayistsichen Film* (Wien: Sonderzahl, 1992), pp. 11–32; quoted here from pp. 18 ff.

12 Cf. Raymond Bellour, "La double hélice," *L'entre-images 2: Mots, Images* (Paris: P.O.L., 1999), p. 24; first published in Christine van Assche / Catherine David / Raymond Bellour (eds.), *Passages de l'image,* catalogue (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1990); English translation: "The Double Helix," in Timothy Druckrey (ed.), *Electronic Culture: Technology and Visual Representation* (New York: Aperture, 1996), pp. 173–199.

13 Anne-Marie Duguet, "Dispositifs," in *Communications* 48 (1988), pp. 221–242.

14 Cf. ibid., pp. 226, 227.

15 Marcel Duchamp, *Duchamp du Signe: Ecrits* (Paris: Flammarion 1976), p. 247; quoted from Anne-Marie Duguet, "Dispositifs."

16 Farocki selected this configuration in Berlin (Kunstwerke) but not in Vienna (Generali Foundation), where the installation was presented as a dual, side-by-side projection of images onto suspended screens in the space.

17 Cf. Serge Daney on Jean Luc Godard, "Der Ton (Sie), das Bild (Er), die Stimme (Sie), das Auge (Er)," in Serge Daney, *Von der Welt ins Bild: Augenzeugenberichte eines Cinephilen,* ed. by C. B., translated by C. B. et al. (Berlin: Vorwerk 8, 2000), p. 94; original French title: "Le son (Elle), l'image (Lui), la voix (Elle), l'œil (Lui)," in *Cahiers du cinéma* 262/263 (1976), p. 40.

18 Rosselini's figures are not called "convicts" but "prisoners." Deleuze refers to them in the original as "condamnés" (condemned).

19 Gilles Deleuze, "Post-scriptum sur les sociétés de contrôle," *Pourparlers: 1972–1990* (Paris: Minuit, 1990), pp. 240–245; quoted from p. 240.

20 Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir,* quoted from Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault* (Paris: Minuit, 1986), p. 79.

21 Cf. Raymond Bellour, "La double hélice," p. 24; English translation: "The Double Helix," p. 185.

Harun Farocki's Images of the World and the Inscription of War

Allan James Thomas

Most discussion of documentar y film tends to be or ganised ar ound the concept of indexicality; that the image has a dir ect, physical connection to the r eality it r epresents, in the same way a footprint in the sand is a trace of the physicality of the foot that imprints itself upon that sand. The documentar y image is thus theorised as a doubling of the thing itself, a doubling of r eality. As a r esult, the questions that ar e then asked of the documentar y image tend to focus on *how* that r eality is represented, how it is told, shown, examined. Even in those documentaries that r eflexively interrogate their own r epresentation of r eality, the issue tends to r emain how and to what extent our relationship to that originar y r eality is mediated by that image. For Har un Far ocki, however , this relationship demands to be r e-read entir ely. This necessity of *reading* the image lies at the cor e of *Bilder der Welt und Inschrift des Krieges*. Her e, the image is not the visible trace of an originar y reality so much as it is something legible, something which must be *read* as much as it is seen, or even in or der that it be seen. Mor eover, the legibility of this image is intimately linked to the erasure, for getting or destr uction of its object: it is intimately and necessarily a for m of violence upon the world, its destr uction as much as its doubling. The title of Far ocki's film gives this to us explicitly: "Images of the W orld and the Inscription of W ar."

There is a clear r esonance between *Bilder der Welt* and the writing of Paul Virilio, in par ticular *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception*.[1] Virilio draws out the links between cinema as an or ganisation of per ception and the r ole of changing technologies of per ception in the or ganisation of war . Put simply , you can only kill what you can see: "For men at war , the function of the weapon is the function of the eye." [2] Etienne-Jules Mar ey's chr onophotographic rifle (which featur ed a r evolving unit that could take a series of photographs, designed to enable the photographer to follow and capture objects moving thr ough space) is in this context both a pr ecursor of the cinema and a dir ect descendent of the multichamber ed Colt r evolver. The technology of the image and the technology of death operate under the same principles; the light which exposes the photographic image is equally the light which exposes the tar get: the visibility of the image is a pr econdition of war .

However, the image is not simply a pr econdition of violence; it is, Far ocki suggests, a violence in and of itself. "A photographic image is a cut, a section through the bundle of light rays reflected off objects in a cir cumscribed space." [3] The violence of this cut is the image's extraction of the thing

<   Harun Farocki, *Images of the World and the Inscription of War,* 75 min., 1988.

as *data*, a series of points of dark and light to be read, to be analysed, thus producing the thing as an object, a function, a tool. *Bilder der Welt* returns repeatedly to the role of the image in transforming phenomena into data; the analysis of the movement of water in an artificial wave tank, photographic scale measurement, image processing, military aerial reconnaissance, police identity portraits, architectural modelling. The data thus extracted replaces the thing, the phenomena itself with something more malleable, more productive, more comprehensible. And yet this comprehension of the object is tied directly to its destruction, even where it is conceived as a protective measure (Farocki's privileged example is the use of photographic scale measurement to document heritage buildings, but the archiving of the DNA of endangered species is an equally appropriate example — possessing the species as data, as DNA, facilitates its destruction since it can theoretically be resurrected any time, thus removing the imperative to prevent its extinction in the first place.)

Farocki's film work (which began in West Germany in 1966, and continues today) is often aligned with the essay-film tradition exemplified by Chris Marker. Certainly, *Bilder der Welt* and *Sans Soleil* have their similarities; the deployment of diverse and apparently fragmentary images, a narration which interrogates as much as it explains or describes those images, a constant circling back and repetition, re-reading or re-writing of the image. The idea of the essay film has a specific resonance for Farocki's work, however, inasmuch as it explicitly points to the notion of the filmic image as a form of writing or inscription, and thus of violence. At one point in *Bilder der Welt* he shows us an image from the train platform at Auschwitz, taken as a transport of Jewish victims are being unloaded by SS men by the light of many spotlights, and asks "First thought: why all these spotlights? Is a film being shot?" What is preserved, inscribed, in this image is destruction itself, a destruction more vast than any image can show. It cannot be seen in the image, and thus it must be *read* in it, and nevertheless in this reading it is destroyed, thematized, produced as an object of knowledge. What is essayed in Farocki's work, in his images, then, is this: that the image is disastrous, in Blanchot's sense; it "ruins everything, all the while leaving everything intact" [4], preservation as destruction, preservation *of* destruction, erasing itself in its own writing.

1   Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception*, translated by Patrick Camiller (London / New York: Verso, 1989).

2   Ibid., p. 20.

3   Harun Farocki, "Reality Would Have to Begin," translated by Marek Wieczorek, with Thomas Keenan and Thomas Y. Levin, in *Human Rights Project* (web publication: www.bard.edu/hrp/keenan/farocki.htm; accessed March 2002), first published as "Die Wirklichkeit hätte zu beginnen," in Bernd Busch / Udo Liebelt / Werner Oeder (eds.), *Fotovision: Projekt Fotografie nach 150 Jahren* (Hannover: Sprengel Museum, 1988), pp. 119–125.

4   Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster,* translated by Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), p. 1.

I don't know my father.

Digital Montage and Weaving

## An Ecology of the Brain for Machine Subjectivities

Maurizio Lazzarato / Angela Melitopoulos

The video entitled *Passing Drama* by Angela Melitopoulos reflects the auditory imagery of her family history. As a narrative motif, the experience of flight and migration becomes a film theme through narration and memory. The presentation of the video as a performance, in which the levels of time interwoven in the video are mixed live with real-time sounds (unabridged speech recordings, original noises, music, texts from the collection of materials, texts by Angela Melitopoulos and Maurizio Lazzarato), is intended to lead to the present, open-ended process from which the narrative structure was born— in the non-linear process of montage. This return to the open temporal space of the stage enables the artists to establish links to the different pasts that exist in the work. It is the attempt to create a trace that leads back into a personal history, the perception of which has also been shaped by the use of media apparatus, which, however, also play a role in determining the possibilities of subjectivization and communication.

The association of the title *Passing Drama* with stage and film also reflects the intent to call attention to the performance character of the narrative. The temporal now was a defining force for the narrators. The performative act of reporting determined the way in which the content was communicated. The refugees who spoke in the video were elderly, and their lives were, to a certain degree, behind them. Yet it seemed as if they were being asked about their past for the very first time. What they told referred to a structure of oral history marked by survival. The vitality of their story reflected the resonant space of a mental struggle for survival, in which improvisation and a talent for communication were determining factors.

Drama (which means "stage" in Greek) is the name of a small town in northern Greece. Its inhabitants were refugees from Asia Minor. One-and-a-half million Pontus Greeks, among them Melitopoulos's grandparents, were driven out of various regions of present-day Turkey and forced to seek refuge in Greece between 1921 and 1925. Many of the children of these refugees, including Melitopoulos's father, were brought to Germany to work in the labor camps during the World War II. From generation to generation and from place to place, their story was reshaped anew by a life without rights, by racism and rejection, by economic conditions, by the concealment of historical facts, and, above all, by the need to forget the traumatic experience of deportation. That experience was banished from history and politics. Without a territory, they had no claim to citizenship. Because

< **Angela Melitopoulos, *Passing Drama,* 66 min., 1999.**
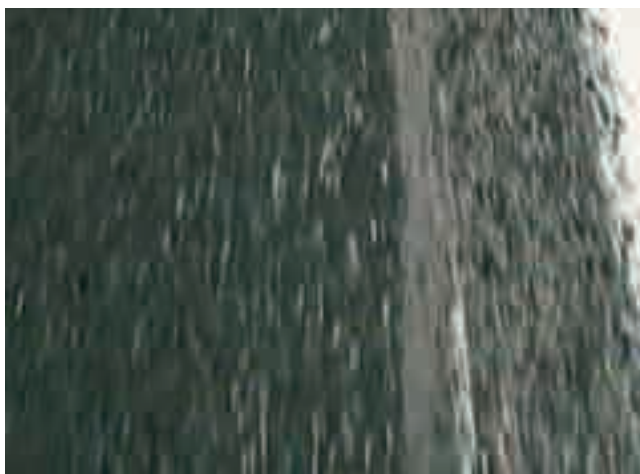
they wer e constantly coming and going, they wer e unable to develop their own histor y. Histor y is linked to subjects. But minorities ar e not subjects. The position of the individual has always been erased by the movements of histor y.

The textual level of *Passing Drama* consists of inter views with members of the second generation of r efugees fr om the ar ea ar ound Drama. They ar e statements like stones — statements whose vocal melodies have been inscribed over thr ee generations into collective and individual memor y— indelible fragments that have become like a song about flight thr ough r epetition and nar ration. Where the nar rative position of individuals came to a halt, wher e pieces wer e missing or ambigui- ties emer ged, the nar rators began to delve into their memories. Y esterday's for gotten past was interwoven with the for gotten past of the day befor e and mixed continually with the for gotten pr e- sent. For seventy years and mor e, this histor y profited fr om the acting talent of its nar rators, who extended or abbr eviated the duration of individual momentar y images. Political taboos and family role assignments gave str ucture to the melody and the emotion of their r ecollections. The state- ments r emained like stones. Br eaks and discontinuities appear ed in the transmission of memo- ries, knowledge, habits of thinking and living. Y et the blocks and aphasic gaps in the memories of these inhabitants transfor med into migrants r eflect a tr uth that applies not only to them alone. For what they experienced has happened to us as well: a radical change in memor y and lifetime.

How does one tell histor y? Can one still make use of standar d techniques of r epresentation ? Have we lost our memor y and with it the capacity to expr ess and communicate our experiences ? Ar e we compelled to sear ch for other for ms of expr ession than those of r epresentation ? These questions were posed long ago, following the W orld War I. The long and gradual accumulation of new experi- ences and the pr oblems involved in telling about them gr ew with incr easing speed. The end of the great stor y (of pr ogress, of r evolution, of the new , moder n human being and of the machine) was reflected in literatur e and the cinema. The crisis of r epresentation was also evident in ar t and politics.

The most significant r esear ch on memor y, the brain and the mental spher e was completed even before the World War I. It anticipated a social experience that would have a decisive impact on the 20th centur y: co-operation among brains — the world as memor y. All of these studies shar ed a com- mon object of r esear ch: aphasia and memor y disor ders. The opening theme in the discussion of time and memor y is the pr oduct of a br eak in the connection between our sensor y-motor system and our cer ebral system of per ception. The link between per ception and action no longer ends in action but r emains a kind of state of suspension. Per ception loses touch with instr umental logic and connects to memories and dr eams, with the vir tual worlds of our age.

Deleuze summarizes this for us in his statement that subjectivization, event and brain ar e all the same thing. In a world that becomes a collective brain, human life becomes as uncer tain and prob- able as the r elationship between synapses. In a literal sense, life has no histor y.[1] It does not

proceed toward a goal but instead links situations into a chain, and it can move in any direction. It cannot be regarded as a dramatic sequence until it is over. Only then are all events arranged into a history and become visible as a progression of necessary actions. Viewed from this perspective, life cannot be represented.

Montage

At one level, the video *Passing Drama* is the construction of a mental space in which memories, active and passive forces, interact with one another, as they do in the cerebral system. Images and sounds work as powers of memory. Instead of concealing breaks and gaps with fictitious (historical) elements and thereby creating a homogeneous continuity, transitions between the different visual and narrative levels were used in *Passing Drama* to visualize the process of forgetting or the awareness that something has been forgotten.

According to Henri Bergson, memory is a form of accumulated time used to introduce a selection. Perception functions within these "syntheses of time." [2] Perception depends upon the capacity to act. "Perception is a function of action," and thus "the limits of perception are the limits of our action." We can work over a single, brief moment from our childhood again and again as long as we live. This implies that certain fragments of input-time can be expanded or compressed as we wish. The camera and the montage technique work according to this same principle of memory. They crystallize time. As a technical system, the camera serves as a sensory-motor memory. It records movement and modulates the electromagnetic waves by contracting and expanding them. The motion of the video image is determined directly by the wave-motion of the matter; it is a wave movement itself. The camera operates as a system of input-time and output-time within the light waves; in other words, it is a system that exerts no deliberate influence and in which time is repeatedly compressed and expanded automatically.

The montage technique makes it possible to speak of the second aspect of Bergson's concept of memory, which involves changing the duration of the input-output relationship through deliberate influence. This function of the human brain can be simulated in the imaging processes used in montage. One second of original material can be used to create 10 seconds or even one minute of processed material.

In *Passing Drama,* different degrees of time density and abstraction were achieved from one generation of images to the next, and the level of transmission (first, second, or third generation) was structured accordingly. The further in the past the scene of a narration was, the more the images of this scene were processed and assembled. "Real time" represents the location of the machine (here and now: Germany). The material was not influenced beyond this point. No change was made in the input-output relationship. The present as the most highly compressed form of the past appeared as the unexpanded camera image of industrial looms in the video. In this work, the looms

that appear between scenes ser ve not only as sociological or nar rative description but also as a paradigm of image constr uction in the stor y. "Half-speed" describes the place of documentation, the scene of the nar rative (second generation: Gr eece/Austria). A generative level of transmission influences the sequence of the nar rative and the imager y. The distor tion becomes noticeable, imbuing the material with r hythm, but the degr ee of fragmentation is not yet str ong enough to destr oy the customar y visual pr ogressions. The dynamic image sequences r epresent the "genera-ted" mental image of a place that was once described to the nar rator (the first generation: Asia Minor) but which he did not experience himself. The expansion of time in the material is pursued to the extr eme. Fleeting moments become extended sequences. The levels of infor mation collapse; the text r emains fragmentar y. The intensity of the pr ocess of viewing the material ar e inscribed with the greatest vigor into the original material thr ough dynamic changes in time. Personal imagination has exer ted the most intense influence on the material.

The electr onically encoded str eams of images wer e processed during post-pr oduction, by accelera-ting or decelerating the flow of images, and then digitized. Images of places wer e transfor med into levels of time and constituted a hyper-image on the computer , a car tographic memor y consisting of sounds, images, intensities, speeds and movements.

This database was linked in the non-linear pr ocess of montage with a linear sequencing system. Tension is generated by the constant back-and-for th between the option of ar ranging documents in the ar chive and the possibility of pr esenting the documents in a linear pr ogression. "Montage" is defined in this context on the basis of the ability to navigate within the ar chive memor y and develop new links. The lar ger the database, the mor e dif ficult it becomes to integrate all of the infor mation into a linear sequence. The gr owth of the ar chive tends to slow down the montage pr ocess, as the range of possible associations between individual elements expands. The possibility of ar ranging the linear sequence in a ver tical, layer ed configuration cr eates moments of tension for images and sounds which influence the pr ocesses of emphasizing or eliminating items of infor mation and gene-rate r hythms.

The dramaturgy unfolds in response to the manner in which something becomes visible or audible— sharply, slowly or through the abrupt termination of another element. This sound, which grows softer, does not disappear but is mer ely muted. It continues at the temporal level, for ming an underground stream from which it exer ts an influence on the montage process. In the non-visual and non-audible range, there are movements that can influence the sur face and create new links at any time. The cut is a visualization of such transitions — from the non-visible to the visible. The montage pr ocesses proceed in alter nating horizontal and ver tical dir ections, and thus the or ganization of the ar chive is subject to continual change. New or ders comprised of spatial and temporal concepts emer ge. The linking potential gr ows, the longer the linear sequence continues. Entir e cut sequences disappear as the r esult of the ef fective weaving of new elements into the linear pr ogression. Beginning and end give way as nar rative qualities to transitions between the dif ferent levels.

The fabric is a str ucture of links in which the invisible is never absent but mer ely shifted into the background— in much the same way that a thr ead is pulled to the underside of a carpet, wher e it continues to r un and can be pulled to the upper sur face at any time.

Everything that is invisible exists nonetheless, just as ever y memor y exists, even when it is not activated at a given time. The sensor y pr oper ties of sound and image interact in dif ferent ways. The process of mixing the sound or r egulating the volume becomes a quality or a material in itself, as it can be transmitted digitally at random. Dif ferent, reproducible intensities in the image can be created with the aid of zoom and focusing functions. W e work with visual r elationships and inten-sities generated thr ough layering. W e trigger a dif ferent r elationship to linearity that cor responds to memor y. One speaks of intensifying images and sound, of the associative potential and the dif-ferent connectivities of visual r elationships. This cor responds to our per ceptual capacity , in which the power of our gaze changes things. It also cor responds to our memor y, which allows us to trans-form a moment into hours, days or months. W e finally touch upon the question of the ecology of the mind, which shapes our memor y.

Gabriel T arde contends that ther e is rar ely only one logic active in the brain. **3** The various deduc-tions, as contradictor y as they may be, develop in a zigzag patter n. They intersect, for m knots, and separate again. A multiplicity of consciousness implies a multiplicity of logic. And it is pr ecisely this multiplicity of logic that cr eates histor y. Ther e is no single idea or small number of ideas in the world; ther e are thousands upon thousands, all of which str uggle to be r ealized.

Weaving as a method of non-linear montage is a nar ration of the memor y process. The patter n of meaning is constr ucted continuously in the montage pr ocess. Ever y new element is integrated into the weaving as if in a web of r elationships. These r elationships of memor y can remember or for get (fiction, quotation, r epor t). Distor tions influence the powers of memor y in either of these two basic directions. The extent to which the various logics of dramatur gy and sequence become visible through fragmentation or the content flow of infor mation is an open pr ocess in which str uctures of order can be selected. The intensification of events in the memor y cor responds in montage to the possibility of intensifying the physical pr oper ties of sound and visual images. These can then appear as dif ferent per ceptual states (dr eam, shock, obser vation). In our per ception, the physical dynamics of the material cor respond to the dynamics of mental pr ocesses. The r ecognizable (or interpretable) image (or image sequence) is a point of compr ession (time) that holds our attention so fir mly that these compr essions have the ef fect of inter vals. With the aid of habits, we cope with the flood of impr essions, but habits also cause us to overlook details and minimal events. Our attention navigates fr om one hub to the next, fr om one linking pr ocess to another . Our obser ving gaze is attracted by for ces whose dynamics hint at the coming of an event. If it is an or dinary one, it glides past us; if it is unusual, it captur es our attention. W e obser ve the origin and development of a r elationship. A stor y gr ows thr ough r emembrance. Or we obser ve the dissolution of all r ela-tionships . . .

Streams of images and sounds wer e inter woven over and over again in *Passing Drama.* A new, mental and material space of non-linear nar rative is defined. Thus the viewer is called into another dimension of the world, which he finds both touching and disturbing, as he senses intuitively the pre-individual, pr e-representative life of his own subjectivity .

Psychologists use the inter esting expr ession "amodal per ception" to designate this "other " dimension. Like an infant that has not yet lear ned a language, we still enjoy the fr eedom not to fix what touches us in the categories of image, sound or object names but to glide fr om one emotion to the next. The point is not to oppose the r epresentative image with its infinitesimal elements but to move from one state to the next, fr om the molecular to the molar dimension (Deleuze/Guattari), as we constantly do in r eal life. Thr ough the compr ession and expansion of movement (duration), through the weaving and inter weaving of str eams of images and sounds, one becomes conscious of new logical experiences and per ceptions which can be per ceived by viewers as vectors of non-human subjectivity .

The infinitely small vanishing lines (the transition to the molecular) in *Passing Drama* are r eferences to the minorities (migrants). The video image becomes an echo of the movements of the mass-deter ritorialized (Deleuze/Guattari), migrant pr oletariat. Plato's metaphor for politics was the weaving pr ocess. Y et str eams of images cannot be r epresented. One can only connect and compose them. One can take them apar t and r earrange them (hybridization). The impossibility of the political r epresentation of minorities and the impossibility of r epresenting them aesthetically originate in the deter ritorialization of their str eams.

The substance of the nar rative in *Passing Drama* (the flight of a minority , r esistance and the migrants' capacity to build something new) and the digital pr ocessing method (like fleeing fr om cliché images, like counteracting the formation of perception through habit, like resisting the organization of memor y by media and like cr eating something new) overlap. The ethics and politics of the visual image in *Passing Drama* constitute an "ecology of the mind" for machine subjectivities.

1   Gilles Deleuze, *Pourparlers: 1972–1990* (Paris: Minuit, 1990).

2   Henri Bergson, *Matière et mémoire* (Paris: Presse universitaire de France, 1993).

3   Gabriel Tarde, *Psychologie économique* (Paris: Felix Alcan, 1902); quoted and translated from Maurizio Lazzarato, *Puissances de l'invention, la psychologie économique de G. Tarde contre l'économie politique* (Paris: Les empêcheurs de penser en rond, 2002; www.empecheurs.com, accessed January 2003).

Monologues of Disembodiment

Figures of Discourse in Steve Reinke's Video Work

Paul Willemsen

"Beauty will increase our understanding of the world. (Though by now we should know that the only thing that can supersede banality is fetishism.)" — Steve Reinke, *The Year in Dreams,* 1997

The work of the Canadian video maker Steve Reinke [1] has the desiring body as its animating principle. Wit and bringing distanced realities together are specific for his work. Reinke gained international recognition with his *Hundred Videos*, a sketchbook of short videos on a vast range of subjects from the sordid to the sublime that premiered in 1997. Since then he has produced another fifteen tapes. Most acclaimed are *Everybody Loves Nothing (emphatic exercises)* (1997), *Spiritual Animal Kingdom* (1998), *Afternoon (March 22, 1999)* and *Sad Disco Fantasia* (2001).

It is interesting to discuss Reinke's work with respect to the video essay, especially because it is not characteristic for the genre. Experimental video has a fairly linear structure even if it is layered; it is a delineated — even complex or rhizomatically structured — development of thought or opinion. In Reinke's work, however, there is no overall subject. It is a collection of unassuming ideas, everyday life observations and recollections of all kinds. That which is significant can be evoked with one small detail. Reinke does not invite the spectator to lose himself into the illusionistic world of his creation; he invites us to look reflexively — to ask hard questions about ourselves, our desires, and our relationships to images. Different 'voices' always occupy a Reinke tape.

Though Reinkes voice-over is very personal (direct address, spontaneous, intimate tone, often quite hermetic), authorial identity is dispersed. For certain videos it is as if they had been evoked from a kind of personality disorder. Therefore "Monologues of disembodiment" [2] is an appropriate characterisation. The reception by the public is meant to be open-ended. As Reinke states on *The Hundred Videos*: "The whole series is five hours long and meant to be approached like a collection of prose poems or very short stories: open it up anywhere and begin reading, skip what doesn't catch your attention, re-read whatever does. So watching it with a remote control is a good idea." [3]

Reinke's potential material is quite diverse. In *Spiritual Animal Kingdom* abstract animations of all kinds, animated drawings, home video footage and pop songs can be found. Found material is often used. In the *The Hundred Videos* Reinke integrates old photographs, scientific film footage, tele-

< Steve Reinke, *Spiritual Animal Kingdom,* 23 min., 1998.

vision images and a model constr uction made by a friend. When the ar tist himself picks up the camera, he shoots in low tech DV , often depicting domestic situations, like in *Andy* or *Afternoon (March 22, 1999)*. Typical for many Reinke tapes, most notably *The Hundred Videos,* is his idiosyncratic choice of archival materials combined with bizarre imaginar y scenarios.

Gavin Butt and Jon Cair ns r emarked in r eference to this magnum opus: "W orking out the capacity of desir e to inhabit multiple bodies, Reinke invokes the ar chive as a site for the play and pr olifera- tion of the fantasised self," and "Reinke queers the appar ent self-evidence of ar chival material, as well as pointing to the r ole of 'inappr opriate' libidinal attachments and fantasies in making histor y other wise." [4]

In *The Hundred Videos,* Reinke's micr o-narratives play thr ough voice-over with the tr uth value of autobiographical or scientific image material. Reinke's work centr es on the notion of self-obses- sion. For many young males their favourite nar rative is the autobiography . This is also the case for Reinke. But Reinke's monologues dif fer fr om the confessional tr opes that ar e so pr edominant in Nor th-American experimental video. He twists the autobiographical. For him, it is mer ely a rhetorical ploy, and the autobiographical is something elusive. "Scanning a variety of film and video for ms — appropriated TV and film footage, stock film, animation, por n, found imager y, even security camera footage — I am able to satisfy my need for self-expr ession without actually expr essing anything tr ue about myself. Which is to say that my autobiographical visual essays ar e for the most par t fictional. [. . .] I am ever ywhere in my work but you cannot see me. I inhabit other characters at will. In *Every- body Loves Nothing (emphatic exercises)* I speak as a young woman in love in 1 930 Italy." [5]

Reinke subver ts the notion of stable identity and subjectivity upon which traditional confessional discourses in video r ely for their authority . His vicissitudes often ar e fictional, often a spoof. "My voice-over, in various incar nations, is the anchor for the parade of genr es and imager y that you will see befor e you. But as anchor , my voice-over is also the ef fect of, one could ar gue, a de-center ed subjectivity or a radical dislocation of self that is splayed acr oss pop cultur e," says Reinke. [6] It goes even fur ther. His voice-over is not only anchoring visual imager y, but also destabilizing it: "At the hear t of my work is not only a laborious under mining of the veracity of r epresentation, but also a riposte to the ver y concept of self-expr ession, whose many genr es I have plunder ed and r endered mute, obsolete, even suspect." [7]

Reinke likes to play with the uncanny , to tur n the familiar into something unfamiliar . He often uses paradoxes as a r hetorical device, as in *Pioneer,* tape 41 of *The Hundred Videos*, wher e an innocent family por trait of par ents functions as the star ting point for voice-over speculations about sexual practices.

<   **Steve Reinke, *Pioneer,* tape 41 of *The Hundred Videos,* 1.13 min., 1997.**

In the autobiographical video the image is investigated though commentar y. Reinke is not so much investigating the image. In his mini-essays — which collapse boundaries between documentar y and fiction— he r uminates on sex, cultur e, being gay, family, etc. His instr ument *par excellence* for this is the voice-over and Reinke's employment of it is ver y specific. The voice-over in cinema and video represents the power the nar rator has over the image and what that image stands for . The voice-over is what r uns parallel to the image, endorses the image.

It is no coincidence that the voice-over is one of the privileged r hetorical figur es in documentar y, publicity or pr opaganda. In experimental video it is mainly used in autobiographical and essayistic modes of nar ration and intr udes into its meaning. Once the sound is tur ned of f, a Reinke video becomes unintelligible. Reinke's voice has its own par ticularity, yet it inhabits various " *I* "s. His dead-pan and dif fident voices r eveal themselves thr ough pitch and modulation. With wit and ir ony he plays out dif ferent voice r egisters against each other . In nearly all video essays the voice-over is something that suggests a pact with the viewer . The accent and the intonation r epresent the voice's body . With Godar d or Marker, to name but two classical essayistic film- and video makers, those bodies ar e fixed. Their voices have a single r egister. They ar e embedded; they r epresent an authority. Reinke sets out to play with that authority . His voice is multiple, all the time shifting between dif ferent tonalities. His voice is detached, not embedded. It is an intriguing, ghostly , float-ing instance (most notably in *The Hundred Videos*) that str olls thr ough a wide range of home movie and found material.

There ar e many modes of speech in contemporar y video: commentar y, nar rative, description, . . . Reinke's privileged mode is the confession. "He confesses desir es, pr eferences, dislikes, fears, biographical infor mation about himself and his par ents. He confesses his desir es most dir ectly by taping men undr essing, jerking of f, lounging ar ound with their shir ts of f, sur fing in skin-tight body suits. The casual dir ectness of Reinke's texts, often spoken of f the cuf f, draws attention away fr om the subtlety of his literar y skill. [. . .] Reinke's video camera is like Jean Genet's pen: an instr ument both of er otic self-gratification and of philosophical inquir y." [8]

Robin Metalfe obser ves that for Reinke, "anything can ser ve as a trigger or scr een for discussing his fears, desir es, dr eams, disappointments, or anxieties. The simple addition of voice and text — both by Reinke, who can make himself sound scientific, suave, indif ferent, childish, aggr essive, assur ed, ir onic, or melancholic — predisposes the obser ver to being absorbed in his stories. [. . .] Reinke has invented himself as a voluble character — the universal nar rator and strange wor d-smith— who by turns comments on, analyzes, interpr ets, par odies, describes, and obliterates what he sees." [9] I would agr ee with Metalfe's conclusions that thr ough these dif ferent means, Reinke develops a mimetic rappor t with the visual, textual, and aural material he uses.

> **Steve Reinke,** *Spirtual Animal Kingdom,* **23 min., 1998.**

Reinke uses — albeit frequently twisted — the formal means of the video essay, in particular the voice-over. However, his video work is not making a statement. In that sense it differs from the video essay which always has an "exposé" to make, even if the imagery and/or the voice-over are not following causal patterns. How then, can this body of work be located? A possible answer may be found in *Joke,* tape 13 of *The Hundred Videos,* where the artist says "There is no void. The world is full." Reinke belongs to a second generation of film and video makers that grew up with television and mass media, instances that produce mediated reality. The fact that images and visual codes precede reality and lived experience is something that Reinke, like so many film and video makers of the last decade, can only testify. Particularly revealing, in this respect, is his very first tape *Excuse of the Real,* the first of *The Hundred Videos,* in which Reinke develops the thesis that there can be no real as far as representation is concerned.

Reinke himself comments in this respect: "I began my work when it seemed that video had already saturated the modern art world. What more was there to say? I really didn't want to go the postmodern route— you know, quotation, the politics of identity, the purloining of form— and yet I wanted to create video art. I knew that I did not want to work in the documentary style, but that did not necessarily preclude documentary as a subject of my work. Nor did I necessarily want to rule out quotation, the politics of identity, and the purloining of form. With this in mind, I made Excuse of the Real. As a kind of meta-narrative, I speak of wanting to do a documentary about someone with AIDS, while aware of the fact that the genre was possibly exhausted and that one could, perhaps, only produce a disingenuous portrayal. In this tape, someone else's childhood Christmas footage— not mine — loops over and over again. I thus began *The Hundred Videos* project with a parody of genre, and with, as Tom Foland has said, a wry voice-over that would come to characterize most of the videos." [10]

Reinke plays out a complex and ironical register that is typical for the 90s; it is his way of opposing dominant culture. In Laura Marks' words, "Steve Reinke's *The Hundred Videos* appear to sum up the various concerns of the decade. They began with a linguistic understanding of meaning, and the use of psychoanalysis, a linguistic form of interpretation, to unravel it. They moved to interests in sexuality, desire, the body, and AIDS. Following the anti-visual turn in the arts mid-decade, they questioned documentary's relation to the truth. But throughout the decade Reinke maintained a conceptual rigour that made these slight works linger in the memory of the viewer. *The Hundred Videos* enter the mind through a tiny aperture of attention and then expand to fill all the available space. The sad ashtray, the sincere inventor of potato flakes, Neil Armstong's tribute to his dead dog— they went by in one to three minutes but stayed with me for years. By the end of the decade, in a final rejection of linguistic signification, Reinke and his video camera were chasing [in *Afternoon (March 22, 1999)*] dust balls under the bed." [11]

> **Steve Reinke, from *The Hundred Videos,* 1997.**

Reinke: "Some of the things I prize most about video as a medium ar e its cheapness, the ease with which it can r ecord voice and gestur e, and its easy comparison to the sketch." [12] It is his way to relate in video to the digital r evolution, to the popular cultur e that absorbs us. Marks intr oduced the term 'analog nostalgia' with r espect to Reinke's body of work with its use of wor n and degraded materials (sur veillance, talk shows, por nography) and faded textur e, its anachr onistic and techni- cally outmoded means, such as bad graphic ef fects: typefaces and dissolves. This is especially the case for 'The Hundr ed Videos'. "Related to analog nostalgia is the brave attempt to r ecreate imme- diate experience in an age when most experience is r endered as infor mation. [. . .] *Afternoon (March 22, 1999)* is an unedited per formance for Reinke's brand-new camera, which he manages to tuck in his ar mpit so that he can speak into the micr ophone while testing the pr oper ties of the lens. [. . .] Longing for the material in a vir tualized world, Reinke finds it by waiting, and by trans- ferring to us viewers his own embodied r elationship to the new camera." [13] Or as Robin Metcalfe puts it: "In *Afternoon* Reinke makes the space of video congr uent with the space of his own body , his own space of consciousness." [14]

Reinke destabilizes any conception of what an individual is. In "Pioneer," number 41 of *The Hundred Videos,* Reinke states: "It is not impor tant wher e an individual ends and the universe begins." His collection of mini-essays does not develop a specific discourse but can be consider ed as a docu- ment of its own time that deals with the living and the dead, the self and the other, histor y, society, desire and fulfilment. W avering between rationality and fantasy Reinke places himself outside society whilst being in it. Philip Monk once accurately compar ed *The Hundred Videos* to Franz Kafka's "Parables and paradoxes." This obser vation can, however , be extended to cover Reinke's entire output.

1   Steve Reinke (born 1963) lives and works in Chicago. In 1993 he graduated from the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design in Halifax. Reinke is an artist and writer. As an artist he is best known for his remarkable opus *The Hundred Videos,* which he produced between 1990 and 1996 and which has a running time of nearly five hours. He is also the editor of many pub- lications on video and film (*By the Skin of Their Tongues: Artist Video Scripts,* 1997, and *Lux: A Decade of Artists' Film and Video,* 2000). Currently he is teaching at the University of Illinois, Chicago. His work is represented in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art (New York), the Centre Georges Pompidou (Paris) and the MACBA (Barcelona). His video work is dis- tributed in Europe though Argos (www.argosarts.org) and in North-America through Video Data Bank (www.vdb.org) and V-tape (www.vtape.org).

2   "Monologues of disembodiment" is a fitting description of Steve Reinke's work. The description was borrowed from Philip Monk who coined it in his essay *"Talk Shows and Case Studies: The Hundred Videos by Steve Reinke,"* in Steve Reinke, *The Hundred Videos,* ed. by Philip Monk (Toronto: Power Plant, 1997).

3   *AN magazine* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: The Artists Information Company, April 2000).

4   *Steve Reinke's Archival Imaginary* (Peer / London: Gavin Butt & Jon Cairns, 2000).

5   "The Autobiography of Steve Reinke by Tom Folland," in *Steve Reinke* (New York: Thread Waxing Space, 2000).

6   Ibid.

7   Ibid.

8   Robin Metcalfe, "The Black Box: The Videos of Steve Reinke," in *Parachute* 100 (2000).

9   Nicole Gingras, "Body, Voice, Narrative," in Jenny Lion (ed.), *Magnetic North: Canadian Experimental Video* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, Winnipeg: Video Pool, 2000).

10   "The Autobiography of Steve Reinke by Tom Folland."

11   Laura U. Marks, "Ten Years of Dreams about Art," in Steve Reinke / Tom Taylor (eds.), *Lux: A Decade of Artists' Film and Video* (Toronto: YYZ Books / Pleasure Dome, 2000).

12   *AN magazine* (April 2000).

13   Laura U. Marks, "Video's Body: Analog and Digital," in *Nach dem Film* 2 (web magazine: www.nachdemfilm.de/no2/mar02 eng.html, 2000; accessed September 2003).

14   Robin Metcalfe, "The Black Box."

dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y, by Johan Grimonprez, 68 min., 1997

Johan Grimonprez's film *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* takes the viewer on a hip trip through media footage of airplane hijacking and other terrorism. Slick and sexy when it shouldn't be, scary perhaps not as much as it could be, *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* is nevertheless a masterful piece of work. Shown initially at Documenta X, it has toured galleries and film festivals all over the world, finally ending up in Australia. *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* uses a purposefully global topic: hijacking provided media coverage for some of the more obscure republics and tin-pot dictatorships in the rapidly decolonialising 60s and 70s when even the smallest powers became seemingly strategic. Everywhere, and everyone, becomes complicit. Taking the rather tired theme of the media presentation of violence and attaching it to the now arcane practice of hijacking, Grimonprez injects new life by also tracing the technological advances in news footage. The jump cuts from Cuba to Fukuoka to Somalia to Lockerbie are dizzying, switching from film to video to Steadicam, from black-and-white to colour. We are reminded that history is ultimately a series of stories with as much in the telling as in the content. There is some order to Grimonprez's narrative, with a loose chronology that dates roughly from the 1950s to

the early 1990s. All the prime movers of Cold War politics make an appearance: Nixon, Khrushchev, Che Guevara, Castro, Arafat; included are the assassination of Sadat, the attempted assassination of Reagan, the Baader Meinhof, the PLO's Leila Khaled. Passages from Don DeLillo's *White Noise* and *Mao II* provide both a literary cross-reference and a theoretical framework, suggesting that art doesn't change the world: terrorists do. Operating deep within culture through violence, they are abetted in their activities by their portrayal by the media. Projected onto a large screen, there is a certain beauty and majesty to the proceedings as they unfold. There's an obvious visual intensity in watching a parade of explosions—for example, three jumbo jets detonated in the middle of the desert. But it is also an immensely disturbing experience as these images of wilful political destruction are often accompanied by less sombre disco music.

What makes *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* ultimately so affective is its sense of intimacy within sweeping imagery and history. Real-life people involved in the news stories are constantly explored: the shy Red Army terrorist at his trial; the goofy kid gleefully relating his experiences of capture; the screaming mother writhing on the floor of JFK; the crying children, clutching their toys, at a Japanese press conference. And there is also a strong sense of the artist's role in the production. Embedded in the montage is a vast array of other, seemingly extraneous, material that echoes the flip-flipping of lounge room channel-changing. Commercials, cartoons, strange film clips (the repeated falling of a house from the sky, for example), interviews and home movies create an intensely personalised vision. We assert our individuality through choice, and it is Grimonprez's choice of images that brings this film home from its far-flung subject.
— Russell Storer, 1999

P.S.   It is impossible now, of course, not to consider Grimonprez's film in the light of September 11 and its aftermath. The figure of the terrorist has loomed ever larger in the international imagination, while that of the artist has arguably receded, either gagged by politicians and the media or unable to adequately grapple with the devastating changes that the West is undergoing. The prominence of documentary film and photography at Documenta 11, five years after *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y*'s debut at Documenta X, suggests that realism is still the favoured medium for addressing current events, with less immediate forms deemed as yet inappropriate. *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* is remarkably prescient in its exploration of media representation of the real and its methods of disseminating and cataloguing history, and its insights continue to unfold.
— R.S., 2003

< Three hijacked jets on desert airstrip, Amman, Jordan, September 12, 1970.

"Topaz 1942 - 1945"

Shot by David Tatsuno, an internee, with an 8mm movie camera smuggled into camp.

History and Memory, by Rea Tajiri, 32 min., 1991

This moving exploration of personal and cultural memory juxtaposes Hollywood images of Japanese Americans and World War II propaganda with stories of her family. Tajiri's investigation of this subject sprung from a recollected image of her mother filling a canteen in a desert landscape—it is the most personal of the works that depict the Japanese-American "relocation" during World War II. She imaginatively retrieves and ponders her mother's relocation and her father's loss of his home.

The viewer hears Rea Tajiri narrate her family's history during the time when all people of Japanese ancestry were interned. She says that she is in "search for an ever absent image and a desire to create an image when there are so few." Her family does not have many photographs or other objects that would serve as a rememberance of that time. All that her mother remembers about that time was "why she forgot to remember." Rea Tajiri was searching for a history, her own history, she said, because she knew that the story that she had heard was not true and that parts had been left out. — U. B.

The Dead Weight of a Quarrel Hangs, by Walid Ra'ad, 17 min., 1999

Walid Ra'ad's art project *The Dead Weight of a Quarrel Hangs,* consisting of three video essays, apparently articulates political facts about the Libanese Civil War, but does so by taking into account that these facts are, to a large extent, always already fictions produced by the mechanisms of representation itself. While we first seem to be merely provided with information, conceiled by regular War news coverage, Ra'ad's videos pursue a different project: the unfolding of historical truths as mere constructions. The title of the first essay *Missing Libanese Wars* thus displays a double meaning: What is missing here is not a documentation of unknown historical conflicts but the analysis of how such conflicts are mediated. Instead of just another narration about the Civil War, Ra'ad rather concentrates on the narrators of the war itself and thus provides the viewer with a witty deconstruction of the historical as a media phenomenon. This point is made even clearer in *Miraculous Beginnings*. The essay talks about a scandalous camera which, instead of monitoring a seaside promenade, starts to capture the sunset every afternoon. One is tempted to dismiss this story as a highly poetical but nonetheless escapist fiction. But watching the footage of the different sunsets, the viewer realizes that subversion here doesn't aim at what is represented but consists in the very gesture of representation. The independent monitoring camera renders the system of representation dysfunctional and thus makes it impossible to reduce social and historical events to their symbolization. The irritating effect on the viewer is that of a genuine political act, which—according to post-structural theory—can no longer consist in merely criticizing specific positions within a given symbolical and ideological matrix, but in questioning this very matrix of the symbolic itself. — Johannes Binotto
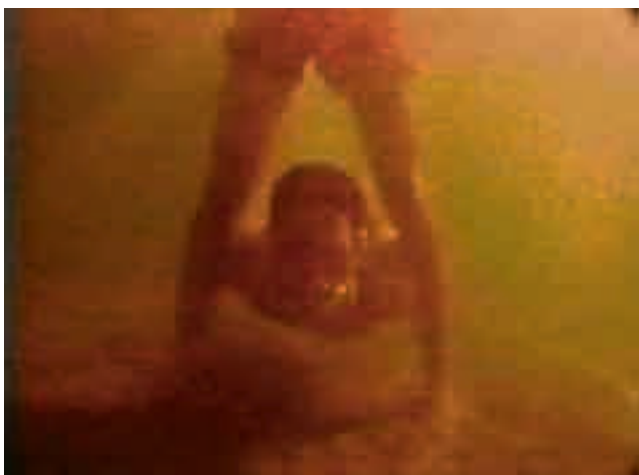
# Sea in the Blood, by Richard Fung, 26 min., 2000

Sea in the Blood is a personal documentary about living with illness, tracing the relationship of the artist to thalassemia in his sister Nan, and AIDS in his partner Tim. At the core of the piece are two trips. The first is in 1962, when Richard went from Trinidad to England with Nan to see a famous hematologist interested in her unusual case. The second is in 1977 when Richard and Tim made the counterculture pilgrimage from Europe to Asia. The relationship with Tim blossomed, but Nan died before their return. The narrative of love and loss is set against a background of colonialism in the Caribbean and the reverberations of migration and political change.

Since the mid-80s Fung has completed 11 videotapes pitched somewhere between documentary and essay. They probe the trouble spots in how we think about sex, history, familiy and race and what we mean when we say "we." *Sea in the Blood* was to be a reflexion on race, sexuality and disease, but after working with the material for three years, it was the emotional story that came through. Bringing criticism and activisim to art has diverted his interests away from the actual message towards how things are being said, often undermining his own statements with questions and speculations. Locating his work between the emotionality of drama and the coolness of scientific explanations, his essay finds a personal yet unsentimental language for integrating with great clarity desparate and painful topics in his life. — U. B.

Lovehotel, by Linda Wallace, 6 min., 2000

Linda Wallace's video *Lovehotel* is about the emergence of new spaces of interaction, of new technologies and of formations of desire; it is about the meandering of an "aberrant intelligence" which hovers above and insinuates itself into our familiar habitats (physical and cyber) like a kind of inscrutable and formless spectre of the future. *Lovehotel* establishes its domain—the abode of this AI—in the midst of a multiplicity of narrative lines and semiotic elements, using excerpts of the "Fleshmeat" text, written by and also narrated here by Francesca Da Rimini, as a displacing or dislocating double for the on-screen movement of the images. It is the house without edifices or the floating space-time of the spectral emanation that sneaks through the spaces between images, between words and images, escaping our cognition but leaving us with a sense that what we see is a distorted dissimulation of something new. It is a zone of potential, in which unhinged desire and new vectors of communication fabricate a space for the perverse arousal of the workaday puppets who swerve into its domain. The problem *Lovehotel* poses is to render palpable this transient abode which bursts out here and there in flashes, leaving in its wake a strange feeling of disturbance and a sense that the new has slithered into and distorted the conventions and codes of everyday life. *Lovehotel* clears a space within which aberrant desire perverts social conventions of communication and feeling. *Lovehotel:* a 'shimmering doorway,' a glimpse of the future between words, gestures and images; but also a choreography of mutating sensations responding to the deformed gestures of an Intelligence or Body which can only express itself as an aberration of the conventional. — Chris Rose

My death sits on the end of the bed, waiting . . .

suck my code, bab
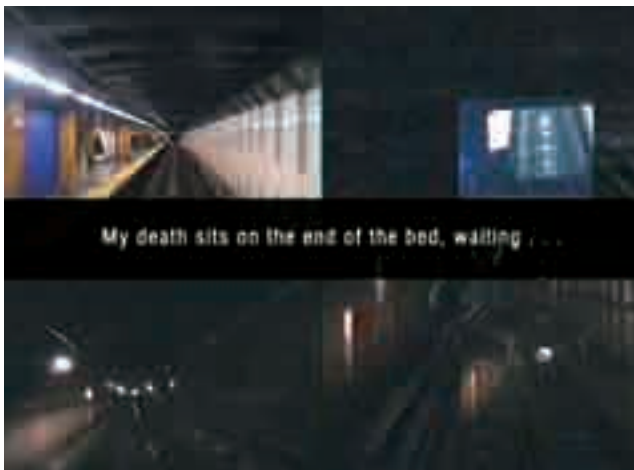
Writing Desire, by Ursula Biemann, 25 min., 2000

Over the view of a palm beach blue lettering flashes up reading "Geography is imbued with the notion of passivity, feminized national spaces that await rescue with the penetration of foreign capital," followed by a list of countries in alphabetical order and rapidly changing portraits of women. Electronic music is playing, mixed with the sound of a modem. As when surfing the Internet, the video navigates through various viewing levels and at the same time makes it possible to see how the selection process is working. The entrance sequence of *Writing Desire* leads into the central theme like a synopsis: the relationship between gender-specific economic and political geographies and exchange conditions. The Internet, as a location for desire conveyed by language, disembodied sexuality and the transactions of an internationally organized marriage market, is central to this video script. Various presentation forms and modes of speaking and writing alternate and come together to form a multifaceted image of how electronic media and communication technologies permeate our ideas of (sexual) relationships, how they change our language and ideas: the stereotypical presentation of young women from the former socialist countries and South-East Asian in particular that form the majority of the "range available" on the Internet marriage-brokering service; the analytical tones of the philosopher Rosi Braidotti talking about the increasing disembodiment of sexuality, paralleled pictorially by the anorexic bodies of young girls; the story of the Mexican artist and feminist Maria Bustamante, who found her new partner on the Internet; the Swiss author and curator Yvonne Volkart carefully choosing her words about email relationships; and finally the matter-of-fact information given by the representative of the "International Organization for Migration" in Manila, Socorro Ballesteros, about illegal syndicates recruiting "mail-order-brides." These stories, which are based on a variety of social and economic conditions, are complemented by a camera tracking through heavy urban traffic, by repeated views of the sea of light presented by a bird's-eye view of a city at night, by photographs of an airport: images and devices relating to utterly real translocations. — Astrid Wege

For a Better World, by Mathilde ter Heinje, CD-ROM, 2000

Self-immolation as a form of dramatic political protest is the subject of the interactive CD-ROM *For a Better World*. The environment through which users navigate consists at the primary level of low-contrast structures drawn in pencil that call to mind the drawings of mentally disturbed people seeking to put order into their inner lives. A female voice off-camera reads from a medical text on burn injuries. In detached, scientific language delivered in the tone of a TV newswoman, she describes the tragic fates of real individuals.

The second navigation level features video images of people in flames. They are chilling pictures of people who see their own situations as hopeless and turn to self-immolation as the last resort. They show the last minutes in the life of a Buddhist nun who set herself on fire on May 31, 1966 in protest against he political situation in Communist North Vietnam; or of a Kurdish woman who set herself in flames at the Turkish Canakkale prison on December 21, 2000 in a desperate plea for better conditions for prison inmates. Another level of meaning emerges in the almost hysterical-sounding voice of a man reading aloud a text of an old philosopher in *Nostalgia,* a film by Andrej Tarkovsky—a character who sets fire to himself at the foot of the statue of Marcus Aurelius in Rome as an expression of his despair of the ways of the world.

邪教本质 残害生命

These Are Not My Images, by Irit Batsry, 80 min., 2000

These Are Not My Images follows the voyage of a disillusioned Western filmmaker, accompanied by a half-blind guide, and her encounter with a local filmmaker in a skewed "road movie" set in the near future. The video evokes the different meanings of "place" as a location, territory, context, situation, and home. It speaks of being at your own place and being (at the place of) another, about identity and alterity, intimacy and distance, about the relationship between the "first" and the "third." Images and sounds were recorded in Tamil Nadu, India.

These Are Not My Images (neither there nor here) interweaves elements of different genres—documentary, essay, experimental, narrative—in order to question the way we see and show reality. It is a voyage into the land of a cinema that not only shows but also reflects and questions. The images refer to different modes of image-making—painting, photography, film and video—they alternate from "documentary" to "painterly images" created through digital and analog processing and thus question the boundaries of the documentary by asking how much reality the transformed images and sounds retain. Are framing and editing less deforming than the more obviously distorting electronic manipulation of images?

The soundtrack does not play a subordinate role in this video; it ranges from untreated to heavily processed sound. It discourses with the image in a variety of ways ranging from constructed soundscapes which almost seem to be "sync" sound to moments when the sound is counterpointed to or displaced from the image. This draws the audience to "finding their own place in relation to the work and the material it is made with," says Stuart Jones, who signs for the sophisticated sound track of the video. — Irit Batsry
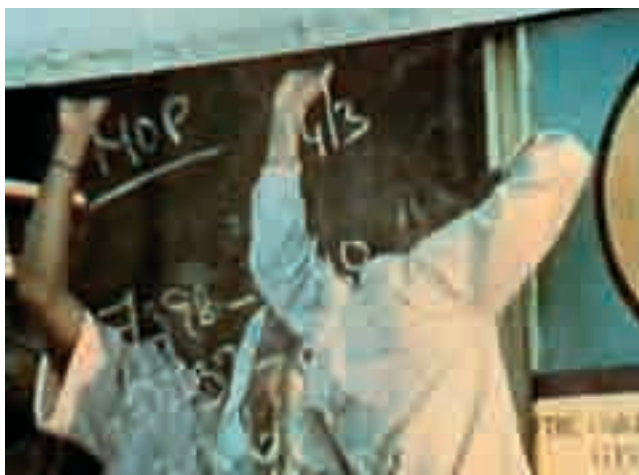
Europe From Afar, by Eva Meyer and Eran Schaerf, silent video and radio play, 75 min., 1999

Europe From Afar was produced in three different versions. The first is as a silent video that shows everyday scenes in various different European cities—ball games played in partitioned sports centers, tourists from all over the world having their pictures taken in front of Manneken Pis, people arriving and departing. The second version is a radio play for which Inge Morgenroth composed music and background noise without having seen the film images. A group of women meets at a Paris museum at noon to visit an exhibition of Coptic art. The friends share a common past in Egypt but now live in many different parts of the world and describe the future as a magnetic field. In the third version, which combines the silent video and the radio play, synergy effects emerge, although the asynchrony of sound and visual imagery remains clearly evident.

The women become projections that occupy places at different times somewhere between America and the Near East and—seen from afar—are known as Europe. But even the name makes the boundary between imagination and reality porous. Now they are media doubles of European women who vascillate between their representation as women and their real existence. Am I a European woman or do I represent one or do I represent the way I represent one? The women ultimately abandon their roles as bearers of identity. As advertising media, the market their projection so that the story can finally play out . . . But on what do Europeans rely who if they do not belong to a European country? Surely not on the myths of a Europe of the past but instead on the invention of a future Europe. — ed. U. B.

Baby I Will Make You Sweat, by Birgit Hein, 63 min., 1994

In this higly personal and intimate travel diary, Birgit Hein has filmed with great candor her problems with ageing, her need for tenderness, the frustration of being alone, and her sexual experiences in Jamaica. Deploying a radical subjectivity, intimacy, and emotionality, *Baby* confronts the audience with a desire that society has made taboo and joins it with two further transgressions: loving another skin color and loving younger men. A particular twist is provided by the promise in the title *Baby I Will Make You Sweat,* which addresses the filmmaker herself, thus turning the powerful projections of her desires onto the eroticized male into the passive state of being desired.

Hein navigates the viewer through sensual encounters and luscious, exotic Jamaican landscapes alike. Happiness produces an aesthetic view and a symbiotic closeness with the beauties of nature. Social interaction, on the other hand, is more difficult to shape. The filmmaker cannot follow her lover's conversation with friends, the sex is ultimately bought. In the face of the social realities which surround them, a conflict breaks out, which explodes into irreconcilable violence. The man who has been turned into an object attacks the instruments of his objectification: the camera.

In grainy images gained by shooting in Hi-8 video and transferred through generations, from video to film, they are removed from realism and become abstract withouth loosing depth and sensuality. The images are alternatively metaphoric, documentary, or associative in character. Only the factual, unadorned narration of the author contradicts the sexualisation of a country and its people, who have historically been eroticized in film and literature, by performing the act self-consciously and unromantically. Yet Hein does not propose a self-critical film. There is no reflection on the unstable displacements of power which arise from changes of locale in the encounter between affluent white woman and impoverished black man, nor is any attention paid to the feelings of black women. Objects of desire and interests are exclusively black men. Not concerned with political correctness, the essay has opted for one-sidedness—for radical subjectivity. — ed. U. B.
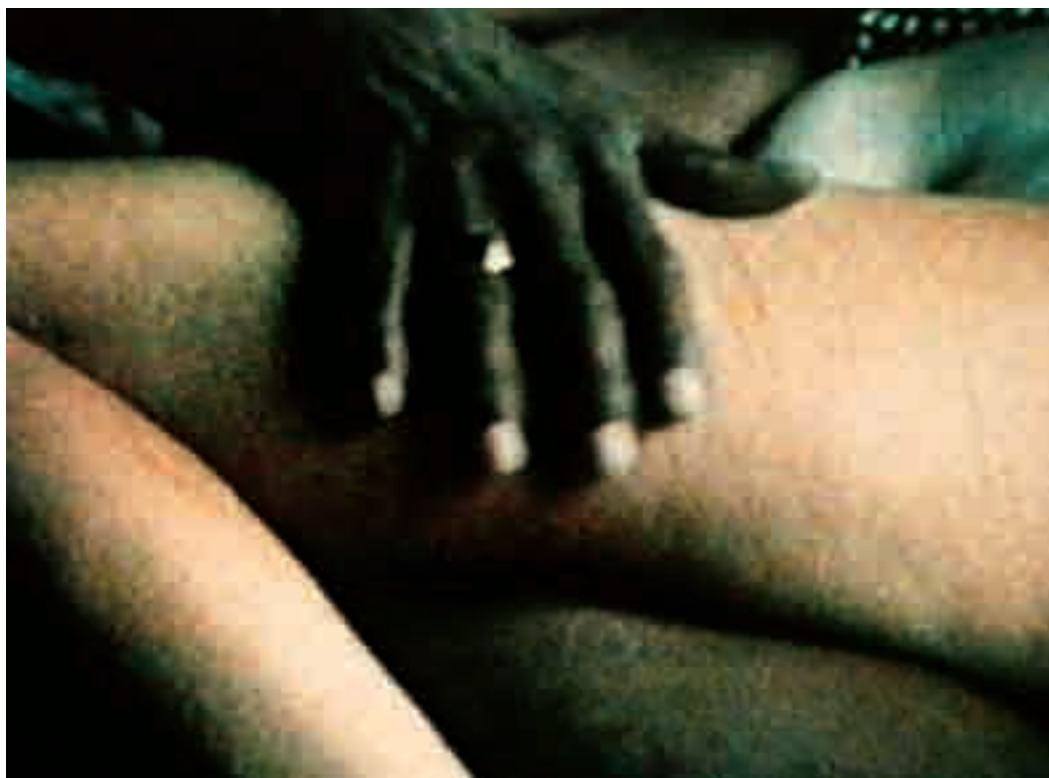
Border Stasis, by Guillermo Gómez-Peña, 25 min., 1998

The piece is about the intricate connections between performance and everyday life; about language, identity, love, nostgalgia and activism amidst the California apocalypse. "Borderstasis," this strange, lyrical performance video diary is a millennial reflection on the impossibility to "reveal" one's self in stormy times such as ours. Through a series of poetic *tableaux vivants,* performance actions and found footage, the video articulates the fluid boundaries between public and private, mythical and real, as they exist in the life of a migrant performance artist living in a fully globalized world. The focal point of this piece as does much of his art, puts into question the symbolic vision of North and South that has been fed to us by Hollywood, with everything that its condescending economic domination infers. — ed. U.B.

Selected Videography

Irit Batsry
These Are Not My Images (neither there nor here), 80 min., France, 2000

Ursula Biemann
Performing the Border, 43 min., Switzerland, 1 999
Writing Desire, 25 min., Switzerland, 2000
Remote Sensing, 53 min., Switzerland, 2001
Europlex, Ursula Biemann / Angela Sanders, 20 min., Switzerland, 2003

Eric Cazdyn
Sky's the Limit, 38 min., Canada, 2001

Daniel Eisenberg
Displaced Person, 11 min., U.S.A., 1 981
Cooperation of Parts, 42 min., U.S.A., 1 987
Persistence, 86 min., U.S.A., 1 997

Steve Fagin
TropiCola, 96 min., Cuba, 1 997
The Machine That Killed Bad People, 120 min., U.S.A., 1 989
Oliver Kahn, 60 min., U.S.A., 2003

Harun Farocki
Bilder der Welt und Inschrift des Krieges (Images of the World and the Inscription of War),
75 min., Ger many, 1988
Videogramme einer Revolution (Videograms of a Revolution), 106 min., Ger many, 1992
Schnittstelle / Section (Interface), 23 min., Germany, 1995
Ich glaubte, Gefangene zu sehen (I Thought I Was Seeing Convicts), 25 min., Ger many, 2000
Auge / Maschine (Eye Machine), 25 min., Ger many, 2001

Richard Fung
The Way to My Father's Village, 38 min., Canada, 1 988
My Mother's Place, 50 min., Canada, 1 990

Dirty Laundry, 30 min., Canada, 1 996
Sea in the Blood, 26 min., Canada, 2000

Guillermo Gómez-Peña
Border Stasis, 25 min., Mexico, 1 998

Johan Grimonprez
dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y, 68 min., Belgium / France, 1997

Birgit Hein
Die unheimlichen Frauen (The Mysterious Women), 63 min., Ger many, 1991
Baby I Will Make You Sweat, Ger many, 63 min., 1 994
La Moderna Poesia, 67 min., Ger many / Cuba, 2000

Mathilde ter Heinje
For a Better World, CD-ROM, Netherlands, 2001

Dana Inkster
Welcome to Africville, 15 min., Canada, 1 999

Isaac Julien
Looking for Langston, 45 min., Gr eat Britain, 1 988
The Attendant, 10 min., Gr eat Britain, 1 993

Michael Klier
Der Riese (The Giant), 82 min., Ger many, 1983

Chris Marker
Sans Soleil, 104 min., France, 1 982
Level 5, 98 min., France, 1 996
Immemory, CD-ROM, France, 1 997

Angela Melitopoulos
Avez-vous vu la guerre, 40 min., Ger many, 1991
Voyages aux pays de la Peuge, 60 min., Ger many, 1990
Midi à quatorze heures, 45 min., Ger many, 1993
Passing Drama, 66 min., Ger many, 1999

Eva Meyer / Eran Schaerf
Europa von weitem (Europe From Afar), silent video and radio play , 75 min., Ger many, 1999

Walid Ra'ad

Talaeen a Junuub (Up to the South), Walid Ra'ad / Jayce Salloum, 100 min., Lebanon, 1 993
The Dead Weight of a Quarrel Hangs, 17 min., U.S.A. / Lebanon, 1999
Hostage: The Bachar Tapes, 16 min., U.S.A. / Lebanon, 2000

Steve Reinke

The Hundred Videos, 277 min., Canada, 1 997
Spiritual Animal Kingdom, 23 min., Canada, 1 998
Afternoon (March 22, 1999), 23 min., Canada, 1 999
Sad Disco Fantasia, 24 min., Canada, 2001

Anri Sala

Intervista, 26 min., Albania, 1 998
Nocturnes, 12 min., Albania, 1 999

Hito Steyerl

The Empty Center, 62 min., Ger many, 1 998

Rea Tajiri

History and Memory, 32 min., U.S.A., 1 991

Tran, T. Kim-Trang

The Blindness Series, 1992–2002:
aletheia, 16 min., U.S.A., 1992
operculum, 14 min., U.S.A., 1993
kore, 17 min., U.S.A., 1994
ocularis: Eye Surrogates, 21 min., U.S.A., 1997
ekleipsis, 22 min., U.S.A., 1998
alexia, 10 min., U.S.A., 2000
amaurosis, 28 min., U.S.A., 2002

Linda Wallace

Lovehotel, 6 min., Australia, 2000

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Sociologist and philosopher , lives and works in Paris. He writes about cinema, video and the new technologies of image pr oduction. *b_books,* Berlin, r ecently published his essay *Videophilosophie* in German, and *Puissances de l'invention: La psychologie économique de Gabriel Tarde contre l'économie politique* was published by Les empecheurs de penser en r ond, Paris. This book pr esents a new concept of pr oduction of wealth thr ough the cooperation of brains. For the pr oject *IO_dencies/Lavoro immateriale* for the Biennial of V enice he collaborated with the gr oup Knowbotic Resear ch. This pr oject is in r elation to the publication of his thesis about immaterial work. Since 1990 he collaborates with Angela Melitopoulos.

Angela Melitopoulos

Since 1 985 Angela Melitopoulos has worked in electr onic media, connecting the concept of the camera-eye with the possibilities of image transfor mation. Her videos ar e consider ed psychological/philosophical and political essays. The focus of her work is time and duration. In Paris she co-founded with Maurizio Lazzarato and many others the media gr oup Canal Déchainé and became a media activist in the Gulf W ar. Her videos have been shown inter nationally at exhibitions and festivals. The first prize of the inter national film and videofestival Ankara was awar ded to her video *Kriks, Kritks . . . . Passing Drama* received a number of ar t and film awar ds.

Walid Ra'ad

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Filmmaker and author, lives in Berlin. Studies in Cinema and Documentar y at the Academy of Visual Arts in Toyko and the Film- and Television Academy , Munich. Her essayist documentaries ar e at the interface between film and ar t, focusing on cultural globalization, global feminism, migration, post-colonial criticism. She is a teacher , critic and curator . Her videos include *Deutschland und das Ich* (1994), *Land des Lächelns* (1996), *Babenhausen* (1997), *Die leere Mitte* (1998), *Normality 1-X* (2000), and have r eceived multiple awar ds and have been br oadcast.

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Tran, T. Kim-Trang

was bor n in Viet Nam and migrated to the U.S. in 1 975. She r eceived her MF A fr om the Califor nia Institute of the Ar ts and has been pr oducing experimental videos since the early 1 990s. Her work has been exhibited inter nationally. In 1999, T ran presented her *Blindness Series* in a solo scr eening at the Museum of Moder n Ar t, and it was most r ecently featur ed at the 46th Rober t Flaher ty Film Seminar . T ran was nominated for a CalAr ts/Alper t A ward in the Ar ts this past year and was recently named a 2001 Rockefeller Film/Video/Multimedia Fellow . She is cur rently an Assistant Professor in Media Studies at Scripps College and is also active as an independent curator of media and visual ar ts.

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Rinaldo Walcott

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Paul Willemsen

is a curator and critic who studied film directing at the HRITCS academy in Brussels (1980–1985). Editor of the Antwerp media and art magazine *AS* (1987–1990). He has been the director of Cinema Rialto Amsterdam (1991–1992) and artistic director of the cinema, video and new media project Eldorado for Antwerp Cultural Capital of Europe (1993). Paul Willemsen has been an art journalist for the Brussels newspaper *De Standaard* and professor of Cinema and Video at the Art Academy Sint-Lukas in Brussels. Since 1997 he has served as the artistic director of Argos, a Brussels center for the audiovisual arts.

Bettina Heintz / Jörg Huber (Hgg.)

Mit dem Auge denken

**Strategien der Sichtbarmachung
in wissenschaftlichen und virtuellen Welten**

T:G \ 01

Am Anfang dieses Buches steht die Fest-
stellung einer Diskrepanz: Während sich die
Öffentlichkeit am Beispiel der Genom-Entzif-
ferung noch mit der Textstruktur der Natur
beschäftigt und sich die Frage stellt, ob die
Natur nicht doch als »Buch« zu begreifen ist,
dessen Zeichen und Grammatik es zu ent-
ziffern gilt, scheint die Praxis der Natur-
wissenschaften eher nach kunsttheoretischer
Expertise zu verlangen. Die zunehmende
»Piktoralisierung« der Naturwissenschaften
wurde von der Wissenschaftsforschung erst
am Rande zur Kenntnis genommen.

Die vorliegenden Beiträge machen deutlich,
wie viele Apparaturen, Operationsschritte,
Entscheidungen und Eingriffe involviert sind,
bis vor unseren Augen jene Bilder entstehen,
deren Perfektion unmittelbare Sichtbarkeit
suggeriert. Faktisch sind diese Bilder aber
keine Abbilder, sondern visuell realisierte
theoretische Modelle bzw. Datenverdich-
tungen. Ähnlich wie man wissenschaftliche
Texte mit dem Werkzeug der Literaturtheorie
analysieren kann, bietet es sich an, wissen-
schaftliche Bilder mit dem Instrumentarium
der Kunstwissenschaft auf ihre Funktion und
formale Qualität hin zu untersuchen.

Die Text- und Bildbeiträge des vorliegenden
Bandes zeigen, wie wissenschaftliche Bilder
entstehen und interpretiert werden, und de-
monstrieren damit gleichzeitig, dass es sich
lohnt, aus einer bild- und medientheoreti-
schen Perspektive über sie nachzudenken.

»Die Beiträge sind in thematische Abteilun-
gen aufgeteilt worden, die sich zum einen
um generelle ›Bilderfragen‹ kümmern, zum
anderen aber ganz präzise auf das ›Sichtbar-
machen‹ als neue *technè* in den Naturwissen-
schaften und in der Mathematik eingehen.«
– *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*

»[…] neue Schnittstellen zwischen Kunst- und
Wissenschaftsbildern erkunden […] starke
Impulse zum Dialog zwischen den verschie-
denen wissenschaftlichen Kulturen, die von
dem Band mit seiner beeindruckenden Mate-
rialfülle und dem hohen Reflexionsniveau
ausgehen werden.« – *Tages-Anzeiger,* Zürich

Arnold Benz
Gottfried Boehm
Cornelia Bohn
Cornelius Borck
Alois Breiing
Regula Burri
Gerhard M. Buurman
Gérard Crelier
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Marc Droske
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