1

Immediacy versus Memory:
Video Art in Relation to Television, Performance Art, and Home Video

Immediacy is the most often used term in descriptions of early video works. Many video artists have mentioned this characteristic in interviews to explain their preference for video as medium.[1] As video artist and scholar Stephen Partridge explains in "Video: Incorporeal, Incorporated" (2006), the virtual impossibility of editing with the early videotape recorder of the late 1960s drove artistic interest and experiment away from filmic conventions, such as montage, and toward the use of closed-circuit systems and instant playback. Accordingly, artists highlighted the new technology's intrinsic properties, such as immediacy, transmission, the "live," the closed-circuit, record-replay with time delay, feedback oddities, synthesizer manipulations, and synchronicity with sound. Some of these properties also mark video art in the new digital era, as Partridge underscores, but in particular synchronicity with sound does not. Sound is now recorded as a data stream separate from the image stream (in Hatfield 2006, 184). This chapter and the chapters that follow will establish that some of the characteristics of early video art can indeed still be observed in contemporary video art, but that some features changed significantly in the course of time, mainly as a direct result of new technological developments.

In comparisons of video with another medium, television is the one that figures most prominently. This is true in particular in essays that deal with video art from the pre-digital era, because the technology of analog video was in fact invented for the mass medium of television. Consequently,

Immediacy versus Memory

both could be defined as electronic media that can be transmitted directly or recorded on magnetic tape. This implies that immediacy was at first medium-specific for television, which was gradually introduced from the mid-1930s on. After the digitization of visual technologies, television and video became technically related more closely to photography and film. As this chapter will demonstrate, however, traces of their common roots can still be found in some contemporary video works.

If most authors stress video's technical similarities with analog television and its differences with film, video artist and scholar Chris Meigh-Andrews reminds us that we should not forget that in the early years of video many artists experimented with both video and film, and that they often did so in combination (2006, 81). Some of them recorded images on film and transferred the results to video, while others worked with video and transferred the results to film. Another common strategy was filming images off the television screen. Only gradually, toward the mid-1970s, did video art begin to forge a distinctive practice focusing on video's ability to provide instantaneous feedback. The frequently used notion of "instantaneousness" in this context has been put into perspective by new media theorist Sean Cubitt in his essay "Precepts for Digital Artwork," where he claims that "very, very fast is still not instantaneous," and that "the present should never be mistaken for its occupation by images of even the most recent past – the one twenty-fifth of a second required, for example, to build up an electron scan on a video monitor" (in Marchessault and Lord 2007, 308).

Regarding the perception of time in video art, video artist Davidson Gigliotti observed in the mid-1970s that when thinking of time in the everyday sense he is tempted to call it "real time." This notion, however, which is derived from computer terminology, is almost always used to mean an abstraction of everyday temporal experience. Real time occurs only when everyday temporal experience is translated into media (in Schneider and Korot 1976, 215–216). As a result, Gigliotti rightly decides to refer to real time only when he means mediated time – time as expressed in video. He considers real time to be a media model of everyday temporal experience. In addition, he introduces "compressed time" as a second media model of the subjective experience of memory, and a third mode of mediated time, which he calls "expanded time" and which he associates with subjective contemplation. The latter would be similar to the sort of time that we experience when viewing the sea or the stars above. What is "expanded" is our sense of the present moment. As an example he mentions the use of the video technique of delay

Video Art Theory

which has no programmatic beginning or end, no single point of focus, no narrative, and yet which engages a broad spectrum of our attention (216).

With regard to spectatorship, this chapter mainly concentrates on viewers' experiences of immediacy in video art and expectations based on watching television. Concerning the perception of video art as a new medium, in 1976 Robert Stearns – director of The Kitchen Center for Video – claimed that there is a sense of disorientation, due in part to the often highly personal nature of much video art, incongruous with the more familiar, formularized product of network television. Viewers experienced a sense of disturbance in particular in works that force themselves upon them by capitalizing not only on the personal but also on the repetitious and the self-reflexive. Stearns concludes that such works are often called boring because the artist, rather than seeking to manipulate the time he uses, points directly to it: by using time consciously, the artists intend to make the viewer conscious of it (in Schneider and Korot 1976, 160–161).

The central focus of this chapter pertains to insights provided by comparative research of video art – in relation to television, performance art, and home video – into video's complementary characteristics of immediacy and memorizing. This concern includes an inquiry of the consequences of explicit usage of immediacy or memorizing and references to these other media for the construction of meanings. The first section focuses on immediacy and continuous flow in video resulting from its being an electronic medium, in relation to television. In the second section I develop a connection between immediacy in video art and in performance art, putting the complex notion of "video performance" center-stage. Next, the third section discusses video's ability to record events to support our memory, while it also draws a comparison between documentary video artworks and home videos that document family life. The structure of the chapter's argument echoes the three essential areas for artistic use of video identified by art historian Wulf Herzogenrath in 1977: video as mirror (second section), video as documentary medium (third section) and video as electronic medium (first section) (in Davis 1977, 90). This chapter's theoretical framework relies on publications on video art, as well as on sources from several related disciplines: the first section in part draws on theories from television studies; in the second section I use art historical literature about performance art; and the last section relies on work by cultural theorists. But first I will address several

relevant issues for my argument in this chapter by way of two case studies, one from a relatively recent date, and a video artwork from the first generation.

Gillian Wearing's *Trauma* (2000) Juxtaposed to Joan Jonas's *Vertical Roll* (1972)

On a medium-sized monitor we hear a woman say from behind a mask: "It is not true that none of the mistakes in the world are made by psychiatrists who would never admit they were wrong." Next the voice informs us that a psychiatrist recommended her parents to send her to a boarding school, which happened to be a residential school for the maladjusted. There she became the target of bullying by the girls and the staff. This episode is one of the eight stories about traumatic experiences told by eight adults in British artist Gillian Wearing's video work *Trauma* (2000) (Figure 1.1). The speakers wear masks of children's faces to indicate the moment when the harrowing event took place.[2] Each video is presented on a monitor in the wall of a small room only suitable for private viewing. The close-up and central presentation of the speaker evoke associations with conventions of presentations on television.

Moreover, this video series reminds one of the history of video, specifically its use as a tool for documentation or remembrance and its application as a psychological device. Film theorist Michael Renov even defines a category within video as "video confessions." He relates this phenomenon to the organization of social life in Western society as identified by Michel Foucault in *The History of Sexuality* (1976). As Renov claims, our present society has become a singularly confessing society; in public contexts people are telling, with the greatest precision, whatever is most difficult to tell: "Western man has become a confessing animal" (Renov and Suderburg 1996, 80). Renov focuses on the therapy of self-examination in our confessional culture and the place we should give to video in this account, arguing for a uniquely charged linkage between "video" and "confession" in the current cultural environment. Based on Mimi White's *Tele-Advising: Therapeutic Discourse in American Television* (1992), Renov demonstrates how television programs not only borrow from psychological theory and clinical practice, but also construct new therapeutic relations, using the talk format of everyone confessing over and over again to everybody else: the camera has become

Video Art Theory

Figure 1.1   Gillian Wearing, *Trauma* (video still), 2000. Color video with sound, 30 minutes. © Gillian Wearing, courtesy Maureen Paley, London.

Figure 1.2   Joan Jonas, *Vertical Roll*, 1972. One-channel analog video, black-and-white, sound, 19:38 minutes. © Joan Jonas, courtesy Electronic Arts Intermix, New York.

the instrument of confession (81). Regarding the aesthetic domain, he relates this tendency to the age-old view of art as being capable of yielding "cathartic" effects for artists and audiences alike.

Moving from Wearing's *Trauma* to American artist Joan Jonas's video *Vertical Roll* (1972) involves not only bridging an interval of three decades, but also a change in socio-cultural context. How did Jonas, who belongs to the first generation of video artists, deal with the quite new medium of television at that time? Her *Vertical Roll* exaggerates the poor technological state of the electronic audio-visual medium of television in the early 1970s (Figure 1.2). The images shift bottom up over the screen, bounded by a black band – a disturbance familiar to television viewers, caused by disturbed simultaneity (de-synchronization) of receiver and sender frequency of the monitor. The video presents Jonas wearing an exotic theatrical dress, sometimes combined with a head mask. The staccato movements of the upward rolling images that present only fragments of

Immediacy versus Memory

Jonas's body and face prevent a clear view of the event. As an "extra layer" of the video Jonas enters the screen, resulting in the vertical bar becoming the background for Jonas's new performance in the foreground, which consists of her tapping the screen that presents the vertical roll with a silver spoon, although slightly out-of-synch (Kathy O'Dell in Hall and Fifer 1990, 146). For her representation of the woman's body - in line with the feminist art of the 1970s - Jonas uses characteristics of the electronic media of video and television, as well as aspects of the artistic medium of performance art related to time, such as tedious, repetitive actions, which renders this work a quite suitable case study for my argument throughout this chapter.

 Although *Trauma* and *Vertical Roll* are separated by a time span of three decades, both video works ask questions about how video deals with oppositions such as immediacy versus documentation/memory and the tension between public and private. Before addressing these opposite pairs, this chapter goes back to an important source of the videotape, the audiotape. Video is often discussed as a medium of moving images, but frequently – as underscored by the two case studies – sound figures prominently as a meaningful aspect of this medium as well.

Video Art Dealing with the Constant Movements of Audio-Visual Electronic Media, and the Immediacy and Socio-Cultural Aspects of Television

From television and audiotape to videotape: Dynamic images interwoven with sounds

More or less every historical overview of video art honors the Korean/American artist Nam June Paik as one of the founding fathers of this artistic medium. It is noteworthy that Paik started out as a musician who increasingly integrated electronic images in his electronic music performances. The emergence of video, then, does not just reflect a development from static to moving images. Developments in modern art, technological inventions in electronics and information transmission, and socio-cultural changes actually converge in this medium by the mid-1960s. After briefly introducing Paik's video works and preceding television works, this section discusses various technical roots of video as an electronic audio-visual medium and its development in order to provide

Video Art Theory

Figure 1.3 Nam June Paik, *TV Cello,* 1971. Video-television performance. © Ken Hakuta, courtesy Nam June Paik Estate.

insight into video's characteristic of immediacy and its application in the construction of meaning in several video artworks.

Nam June Paik's pioneering work in music Nam June Paik's *TV Cello* (1971) can be seen as the combined outcome of various important experiments he executed with music, audiotapes, broadcast images, television sets and video(tapes) (Figure 1.3). In this work, Paik transformed three stacked cathode-ray tubes (dismantled TV sets) into a "cello." When the cellist Charlotte Moorman played this "cello," she created a series of electronic sounds, transforming the TV sets into a musical instrument. The material displayed on the screens is based on closed-circuit recording of Moorman's performance, alternated with broadcast television feed.

The experiments that led to projects such as *TV Cello* date back to Paik's musical education in the late 1950s. Trained as a pianist, he studied history of music and art in Tokyo, and composition at the Freiburg Conservatory (Germany), where his interest in electronic music, magnetic audiotapes, and modern art was stimulated. Paik started to employ audiotape in the late 1950s as an attack on traditional musical instrumentation and compositional practices. He created audiotape recordings of himself, splicing together piano playing and screaming, bits of classical music, and sound effects. As a next step he introduced action into his

Immediacy versus Memory

audio work and, subsequently, experiments with TV sets and transformations of broadcast images. His explorations into the workings of television and the application of magnets to distort television images paralleled his manipulations of sound on pre-recorded audiotape (Hanhardt 2000, 24).

The focus of Paik's attacks gradually shifted from traditional music to television. This new medium greatly fascinated him, but he regretted that it discouraged the creativity of its users. His changed ambition led him to create, in 1963, interactive television projects such as *Point of Light*. In this work, when the viewer of a radio pulse generator hooked up to a TV set would turn the radio's volume dial, the point of light in the center of the screen would become either larger or smaller (Hanhardt 2000, 35). In *Participation TV*, created in the same year, the spectator had to make sounds into a microphone placed before a TV set, thus causing bursts of abstract imagery to appear on the screen (127).

In this same period, Paik, while living in Tokyo, started experimenting with the Sony Portapak, the first portable video camera, given to him by Nobuyuki Idei, an executive at Sony. Paik took his Portapak with him to New York, where he moved in 1964, and where on 4 October 1965 the first public presentation of his video work occurred (Hanhardt and Hakuta 2012, 20). In this presentation Paik still relied on additional technology which belonged to the realm of television production (Spielmann 2008 [2005], 77). Although it would take another four to five years before consumers could buy videotapes, the first professional videotape recorder (VTR) had become available to television stations already in 1956. Manipulation of the videotaped images was only possible after Paik, together with the electro-engineer Shuya Abe, built a video synthesizer in 1969 at the WGBH-TV studio in Boston. Influenced by the development of audio synthesizers, the video synthesizer was an image-processing device that enabled artists to add color to monochrome video images and to degrade and distort broadcast signals (Meigh-Andrews 2006, 115–116). In this respect it is ironic, according to art historian David Joselit, that only by distorting the broadcast signal the material nature of its medium is made to appear (2007, 11).

Technical roots of both television and video   As with many other media, scholars differ in their views on the origins of television and its next of kin, video. Because sound and image recording are interrelated in the audiovisual media, some authors discuss television as a further development of radio, and videotape as a follow-up of audiotape. Others refer back to even older media or processes of transmission of information in general.

Video Art Theory

Art critic David Antin, for instance, has argued that essentially television combines the photographic reproduction capacities of the camera, the motion capabilities of film, and the instantaneous transmission properties of the telephone (in Schneider and Korot 1976, 176).

According to new media theorist Jeremy Butler, television's predecessor and closest relative, in economic and technological terms, is radio – not film, literature, or theater (2007 [2002], 227). Economically, television networks replicated and often grew out of radio networks. Technologically, television broadcasting has always relied on much of the same equipment as radio broadcasting (microphones, transmitters, etc.). With these close ties to radio – a sound-only medium – it is almost inevitable that television's aesthetics would rely heavily on sound: the experience of watching television is equally an experience of listening to television. Likewise, film theorist Roy Armes, in his discussion of the basic characteristics of radio, stresses that radio has always been a speaker's medium, giving a key role to presenters, who link items and introduce records or outside broadcasts, and to storytellers who are able to devise ways of utilizing the essential intimacy of the medium so as to create a uniquely close link between the listener and an imaginary world (1988, 77). The central role of the stories told by the protagonists to the spectator in Gillian Wearing's video series *Trauma* reminds us of television's roots in radio.

In video art, one will find hardly any works that explicitly relate to radio, however. One of the interesting exceptions – aside from Paik's abovementioned *Point of Light* – is Mexican artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer's 2003 project *Frequency and Volume*. In this work, the shadows of the bodies of visitors cut into a projection beam, which is tuned into a radio frequency. By moving around in the beam of light, visitors were able to scan the frequency spectrum, with the size of their bodies determining the volume of the sound. Lozano-Hemmer notes that the system could tune into a variety of signals, including air traffic control, cell phones, police dispatches, and so on: "The piece investigates the contested radio space in the context of the increased surveillance of the body as an antenna" (quoted by Holly Willis in Ma and Suderburg 2012, 107). Some other experiments of artists with radio are discussed by Heidi Grundmann in "Radio Art" (1989) (in Druckrey 1999, 90-100).

As observed by film theorist John Belton in his essay "Looking through Video: the Psychology of Video and Film," the name "video" (literally "I see") suggests – especially in its contrast to "audio" ("I hear") and "radio" ("I emit beams") – an image technology that exists in a linearly evolving chain of other image technologies. Television and video would

traditionally have been misperceived – by the average viewer, at least – as outgrowths of film. The two technologies, however, evolved separately, rather than successively. Historians trace the genealogy of cinema back to photography, photochemistry, and the phenomenon of so-called persistence of vision. Belton concludes that video is an extension of the late nineteenth-century inventions of the phonograph, the wireless telegraph, and radio (in Renov and Suderburg 1996, 62–63). Butler also turns back to the late nineteenth century, but refers to the first experiments with creating and transmitting electronic images in Germany, such as Paul Nipkow's scanning system (2007 [2002], 257). The Russian scientist Boris Rosing was the first to develop an all-electronic system using the cathode ray tube (CRT), successfully transmitting an all-electronic picture by 1911. That video is considered an electronic picture next to the other electronic instruments at our disposal is particularly evident in Wolf Vostell's *Technological Happening Room* (1966). In a room this German artist, one of the founding fathers of European performance and television art, presented a large number of electronic instruments (television monitors, videotapes, telephones, radios, Xerox machines, record players, computers, an epidiascope, and a juke box) that were operated from a control desk. Visitors were bombarded by sounds and images from the networked media. Actions and reactions were recorded and played back to them, and in the course of the visit the relationship between object and subject became blurred: "passive" watching of images turned into "active" producing of images, thereby eliminating the gap between art and life.

Some authors, such as cultural critic Raymond Williams, have even searched for roots of the dynamic audio-visual media in the earlier nineteenth century, the era of the Industrial Revolution. Williams understood nineteenth-century systems of mobility and transfer in production and communication as responses within a phase of general social transformation. His 1974 *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* is considered a cornerstone of contemporary television criticism (e.g. by Butler 2007 [2002], 17). Especially the concept of "planned flow" that he coined to characterize television has been frequently applied by television scholars. If "flow" relates to the ongoing technical movements in television and video, Williams's definition of the term particularly deals with the sociocultural characteristics of television: "This phenomenon, of planned flow, is then perhaps the defining characteristic of broadcasting, simultaneously as a technology and as a cultural form" (Williams 1975 [1974], 86).

Video Art Theory

Technical characteristics of analog video and television and differences with film   In a review of *The Video Show* in London's Serpentine Gallery for *Art & Artists* magazine in 1975, British video artist David Hall discussed the particularities of the video medium in contrast to those of film. He emphasized the fact that a video signal is transferred as a magnetic tape-based invisible stream, which is very different from the series of seemingly separate frames on a filmstrip. Rather than as a series of separate instants, one can only consider videotape as flow. In video there is a continuous flow of light onto the photo-conductive signal plate which is scanned and transposed onto tape (quoted in Meigh-Andrews 2006, 42). The production of images as a continuous flow links video to television. In this respect, David Antin proclaimed, in 1976, that it is with television that one has to begin to consider video, because "if anything has defined the formal and technical properties of the video medium, it is the television industry" (quoted in Joselit 2007, 37). This observation also explains why Hall's description of video images does not differ so much from Marshall McLuhan's description of the dynamics of television images in *Understanding Media*: "the TV image is not a still shot. It is not photo in any sense, but a ceaselessly forming contour of things limned by the scanning finger" (1964, 272). McLuhan – being one of the earliest major figures to theorize television in general – even characterized this technology in his enthusiasm as "our most recent and spectacular electric extension of our central nervous system." According to Nam June Paik, however, in his 1969 note "Versatile Color TV Synthesizer," the new technology still lacked human aspects, which is why he sought to humanize the electronic medium (in Rosebush 1974).

More recently, and in a far more objective tone than McLuhan, media theorist Yvonne Spielmann accounted for the technical characteristics of transmission and presence that video has in common with television (2008 [2005], 3). Her explanation of analog video also stresses the dynamic process of the forming of images. In a simple technical assembly with a camera and a monitor, she expounds, information carried by light is registered by the cathode ray and translated into video signals that are transmitted to a screen radiating the electronic signal. In these two processes of registering and reproducing, the electronic signal, which contains the video information, is continuously written in scanlines. Spielmann notes that this movement from left to right and from above to below corresponds to the writing and reading process in Western cultures. The dynamic involved results in an ongoing process of disappearing and becoming: each frame is radically incomplete. If on a TV

screen we used to look at partial images, this persisted after the shift from analog to digital: a single pixel or dot of visual information is conveyed every four-hundred-thousandths of a second in an unbroken chain of electronic scanning. Video images on television screens and monitors, in other words, continue to be in the process of their own realization (50).

In his essay "Video, Flows and Real Time" (2008), sociologist and philosopher Maurizio Lazzarato relates video's main characteristic of electromagnetic waves to the videotape *Passing Drama* (1991) by Greek/German artist Angela Melitopoulos, which deals with a drama of migration in South-East Europe. The deliberately inserted technical disturbances in this work render the electronic flows in it clearly visible, turning them into an echo of the involuntary movement of the deterritorialized, migrant proletariat. Based on this case study, Lazzarato concludes that "weaving, dissolving, and re-weaving flows … is radical constructivism in politics as well as in the video image" (in Leighton 2008, 283, 285).

Television literally means "seeing from afar," spanning distances. This particular feature of electronic images, however, is at the expense of the quality of images in comparison to those of film, and although the quality of the electronic images has improved over the past decades, video and television continue to struggle with details and colors.[3] In *Video Art: An Anthology* (1976), various authors have addressed differences in quality in their comparison of video and film. Art critic Bruce Kurtz, for instance, emphasizes that film, with its twenty-four complete still frames per second, reflects an illusion of movement, while television, with its constantly changing configuration of dots of light, provides an illusion of stillness (in Schneider and Korot 1976, 235). Because of the poor resolution of the television image and the small size of the TV screen, David Antin suggests that most TV camera shots involve what would be considered close-ups in film (in Schneider and Korot 1976, 180).

Moreover, because it is hardly possible to engage the viewer's consciousness in details of television images, it became inevitable, according to video artist Ingrid Weigand, to speed up the action. For video artists, the image characteristics created certain conditions they could choose to exploit. Most video artists, for example, have rejected the use of fast image-pacing and developed the minimalized quality of the video image into an element of their aesthetic. In terms of their content, video artworks have tended to be simple, if not banal (in Schneider and Korot 1976, 281–282).

Video Art Theory

Spanning distances in video and television means that the visual component of the signal is designed to flow from one place to another. Chris Meigh-Andrews has described various forms of these flows in video art: from camera to transmitter to television receiver, or, in a closed-circuit system, from camera to video recorder to monitor, or directly from the camera to a monitor (2006, 233). If the camera is pointed directly at the monitor, this causes the picture signal to cycle in an endlessly repeating loop known as video feedback. In his essay "Space-time Dynamics in Video Feedback," scientist James Crutchfield provides a detailed study of the techniques and analysis of the physics behind the process of feedback. The camera converts the optical image on the monitor into an electronic signal, which is subsequently converted by the monitor into an image on its screen. Next, the image is electronically converted and again displayed on the monitor, and so on ad infinitum. The information thus flows in a single direction around the feedback loop (quoted in Meigh-Andrews 2006, 233). Numerous video artists, including Paik, have exploited the visual potential of video feedback.

Regarding television's characteristic of direct transmission, David Antin has argued that although by 1961 videotape recording had become commonplace (turning the true live production into a rarity limited largely to sports and special events), the live production on videotape that reached homes with a delay of a few hours or a few days was generally accepted as actual live television by the average viewer (in Schneider and Korot 1976, 177). As a result, the television audience did not only accept but even enjoyed a production error. This leniency on the part of the audience was caused by the increased feeling of spontaneity and immediacy created by minor crises. The industry wished, or felt obligated, to maintain the illusion of immediacy, which it defined as the feeling that what one sees on the television screen is living and actual reality, taking place at that very moment. The perfection of videotape made possible the careful manipulation and selective presentation of desirable "errors" and "minor crises" as marks of spontaneity, which became as equivocal in their implications, according to Antin, as the drips and blots of the Abstract Expressionist painters (in Schneider and Korot 1976, 177).

Alongside similar technical characteristics of transmission and recording of images, video and television also share the synchronicity of images and sound. Both Nam June Paik and Joan Jonas have experimented with synchronicity in the above-discussed video works, trying to realize various kinds of slightly asynchronous effects. In her essay "Bare Lives," art

Immediacy versus Memory

historian Pamela M. Lee analyzes the encounter of Jonas in *Vertical Roll* with parts of her body on a television screen in out-of-sync frequencies: the vertical roll itself and the asynchronicity of striking with a spoon or with two blocks of wood. According to Lee, Jonas instrumentalizes the temporal delay between signals for both a representational and a structural effect, making the viewer aware that television presents distorted views by definition (in Leighton 2008**,** 156).

With regard to the process of fading as described by Lee as both a technical quality of video and the subject of Jonas's video (the continuously appearing and disappearing body of the artist), it is interesting at this stage to bring in Sean Cubitt's more general contemplation in *Timeshift: On Video Culture* about the relationship between, on the one hand, the constantly fading images of video as well as the fast fading electro-magnetic tapes, and, on the other, the author's fading from the work and the viewer's becoming (1991, 142). Contrary to film, which in Cubitt's view offers the illusion of being, which is why it can offer such strong models for identification, in video the images of characters are always in the process of fading away. If in life people constantly approach completion and in film they appear to exist completely, in video it is as if they existed completely just a moment before but that that moment has gone and they are in the process of dissolving, of losing their "reality." Similarly, the presence of the author in the work involves a constant fading. Although the video image and the magnetic sound are physical homologues of the events before the camera and microphone, they are different from it, at first only a little, during the moment of taping, but progressively more and more as time goes on. The author fades globally from the tape; in each viewing he or she re-emerges in the interstices between images, like a ghost in the unseen control track. In video, the creative process may still give rise to metaphors of birth, but the viewing seems to be far more like watching a small death. This process is counterbalanced in a way by the viewer's steady becoming, addressed in the fading as a becoming. Thus, the on-screen fading images stimulate the viewer to replace what progressively absents itself from the images (Cubitt 1991, 143).

I would like to finish this discussion of the technical characteristics of analog video and television by drawing attention to some early collaborations between artists and television studios, which underscore that both parties were keen on tapping the potential of video as a new electronic medium. The facilities at Boston's public television station WGBH can

Video Art Theory

even be considered as an important early influence on the development of video art in the USA. In the early 1960s, this station in fact encouraged experimentation, with technical staff working alongside innovative producers and directors. For instance, American artist Peter Campus made his video work *Three Transitions* at WGBH-TV while being artist-in-residence, and in 1969 Paik and Abe built their video synthesizer at that facility (Meigh-Andrews 2006, 215). In Germany, filmmaker Gerry Schum made two television productions in cooperation with Sender Freies Berlin and SWF for which artists created special films: *Land Art* (1969) and *Identifications* (1970).

What motivated artists to cooperate with television studios, which most of them will have considered part of the capitalist mass consumption society they strongly rejected? Video artist Hermine Freed, in her essay "Where Do We Come From? Where Are We? Where Are We Going?" (1976), underlined that communication is the purpose of art, after all, and that television had become a far more relevant medium for communication than canvas. Adding that people's sense of time had radically altered since the 1950s (due to the large-scale development of air travel, space travel, telephones, computers, and television), Freed suggested that this changed awareness became crucial to the importance and meaning of video art. In particular television would have contributed to such changed awareness of time and space: more information could be transmitted simultaneously to more people in more places about more people in more places via television than through any medium previously known. Freed also mentioned the attraction of simultaneity: anyone who has been in a television control room where several camera shots from the studio and several channels from other studios, on and off the airwaves, are monitored at once understands that sense of simultaneity in real time which is unique to video (in Schneider and Korot 1976, 211–212).

An interesting project that backs up Freed's argument is *Send/Receive Satellite Network*, which was executed in September 1977 by Liza Bear, Keith Sonnier, Willoughby Sharp, and several other artists. For this two-day project the artists set up a two-way satellite link between New York and San Francisco. Using a CTS satellite co-owned by NASA and the Canadian government, artists on either side of the country were able to cooperate in real time. Dancers, for instance, responded to each other's movements from opposite sides of the country. The resulting program was broadcasted to viewers on Manhattan Cable's public access channel. The project centered on questions about the implications of simultaneity and instant exposure and response. According to art historian Rachel

Immediacy versus Memory

Figure 1.4   Keren Cytter, *Video Art Manual*, 2011. One-channel digital video, color, sound, 14 minutes. © Keren Cytter, courtesy of the artist and Pilar Corrias, London.

Wetzler, through *Send/Receive* the artists not only explored the artistic uses of satellite technologies and the nature of telecommunications as a medium, but they also began to articulate the political potential of artists' use of them.[4]

This section focused on the (early) debates about comparisons of television, video, and film as analog media. But one may wonder whether the arguments are still applicable after the digitization of these media. Some digital video works, such as Wearing's *Trauma*, ignore the shift from analog to digital because they deal with characteristics of television that were not influenced by digitization. Other recent video works, such as Israeli (and peripatetic) artist Keren Cytter's *Video Art Manual* (2011), apply the new possibilities of digital video, but also reflect on how digitization changed television (Figure 1.4). Television theorist John Ellis's essay "*Speed*, Film, and Television: Media Moving Apart" provides insights into how television has changed (1996, 107). This essay is part of the anthology *Big Picture, Small Screen: The Relations between Film and Television* (1996), edited by John Hill and Martin McLoone, in which the authors aim to demonstrate that in our digital age film and television are closer together than ever before. As such Ellis's argument serves as an interesting exception within this volume. In his view, the divergence of film and television is growing more marked with every new technological innovation. Both have profited from digital image technology, but each has used it differently. Cinema uses the new potential to make ever more realistic, yet impossible, images. Television uses it to make constantly changing collages of images. In doing so, television has

discovered a means of enhancing its particular social aesthetic. Thus, digital image manipulation allows television to combine images, while allowing cinema to continue to present a spectacle of reality (107).

Moreover, as Ellis argues, television has taken advantage of the "two-dimensional feel" of its screen, in comparison to that of cinema. By treating the television screen like a sheet of paper, by writing over images, by creating the feel of drawn images, and by presenting video images side by side or overlaid on each other, television exploits its graphic qualities rather than its photographic potential (108). As a result, television has found new uses for digital image technology, and this enhances its relationship with the present and the live (113). In this use of new graphics, television emphasizes again that it has no ambition of becoming cinema in the home. Television operates in a different way by being continuously available and providing a distinctive, speculative approach to events that are occurring at the same time as the TV broadcast is taking place. Different from entertainment cinema, television's fictions – from soaps and series dramas to made-for-television films – are entangled in a world of fact (116). In fact, Keren Cytter's *Video Art Manual* includes footage of television programs that confirm Ellis's collage-like characterization. The combination with fragments of staged actions evokes associations with zapping between television channels or surfing on the internet. This video deals with immediacy as an avalanche of actual information that can be misused through combining facts into scenarios that increase fear as means of power. In this work the concern is the fear of loss of electricity through solar activity. This observation invites closer examination of the socio-cultural aspects of television.

Socio-cultural aspects of television interrogated by video art

Video artworks do not only relate to television through common technical characteristics; some videos also respond to television as a socio-cultural medium. Artist Douglas Hall and new media theorist Sally Jo Fifer state in their introduction to the anthology *Illuminating Video* that before we can consider how video operates outside of the home, we need a better idea of what television means within the home (1990, 17). For a number of video artists, video is the language of television absorbed into the discourse of cultural critique: television turned against itself (19).

What could be called the language of television is open to changes. The television industry's cultural forms and genres, strategies, demographic models, and platforms of production and distribution have

Immediacy versus Memory

Figure 1.5   Martha Rosler, *Semiotics of the Kitchen*, 1975. One-channel analog video, black-and-white, sound, 6:9 minutes. © Martha Rosler, courtesy of the artist, and Electronic Arts Intermix, New York.

Figure 1.6   Johan Grimonprez, *Double Take*, 2009. One-channel digital film novel, black-and-white, sound, 80 minutes. © Johan Grimonprez, courtesy of the artist.

been subject to frequent revision and modification. However, what has endured through these modifications, as observed by new media theorist Kenneth Rogers, is the fundamental idea of content monopoly. Simply put, the source of television's power and capital is located in its capacity to monopolize control over content at every level of production and to force this content to travel through the bottleneck of its distribution apparatus. In equal measure, according to Rogers, the overwhelming tendency of alternative video practice has been content based, albeit in a counter-hegemonic way (in Ma and Suderburg 2012, 41).

One of the most powerful strategies of television is its direct addressing of the viewer. New media theorist Paddy Scannell describes this feature in *Radio, Television and Modern Life* as the "discovery" of audiences (2002 [1996], 12–13). Scannell explains that broadcasting learned that it must approximate to the norms of ordinary, everyday, mundane conversation.

Video Art Theory

In talk-as-conversation participants treat each other as particular persons, not as a collective. So, too, with broadcasting: the hearable and seeable effect of radio and television is that one experiences being addressed by it. In looking at the speaker in Wearing's *Trauma* one feels addressed by her as described by Scannell (Figure 1.1). As stressed by David Joselit in *Feedback: Television against Democracy*, unlike film projection of a large-scale image, the small television screen in particular tends toward the kind of dramatic intimacy epitomized by the close-up (2007, 19). Allied herewith is the television programming that privileges individual modes of identification, which is essential to a consumer ethos premised on the efficacy and pleasure attributed to individual acts of consumption.

The central positioning of the speaker was also an effect of the "aspect ratio" of the television screen. After World War II, the television frame stabilized at a size of four units wide by three units high – the same dimensions as those of movie screens at the time. This proportion is also called 1.33 (4:3 = 1.33:1), the standard-definition television's aspect ratio. Originally, the elongation of the film frame was realized as a response to the perceived threat of television in the postwar decade. Film producers reasoned that theatrical films must give viewers something they cannot get from television. Thus in the 1950s, film studios attempted a variety of technological lures, such as widescreens of 2.35:1 and 2.55:1. Most of today's films have a 1.85 aspect ratio, and, after remaining stable for decades, television's aspect ratio also shifted toward an aspect ratio of 1.78, normally identified as 16 to 9 (Butler 2007 [2002], 181–182). Regardless of these changes, the format continued to be horizontal. The horizontal format of television, film, and computer screens has become so familiar that one almost forgets that the traditional genres of portrait painting and portrait photography relied on vertical formats. The 2012 traveling exhibition of Gillian Wearing's video works and photographs, in which vertical portrait photographs (mainly masked self-portraits) and horizontal portrait videos were presented side by side, made visitors aware that media and conventions of format tend to be closely interconnected.[5]

Television does not only feature monologues of speakers addressing the viewer, however. It presents its audience with, in the words of Raymond Williams, a "planned flow," implying an experience of an almost seamless abutting of a variety of genres: news, commercials, sports, sitcoms, talk shows, and so on. These genres are quite similar in some respects when it comes to capturing and holding the audience's attention; but they also have their own recognizable conventions, as shown by Jeremy Butler in

his systematic analysis of the characteristics of, for instance, newscasts, sports programs, game shows, reality television, music television, and commercials (2007 [2002]).

The images on the TV sets featured in Paik's *TV Cello* could be referred to as "music television," but needless to say they hardly look like regular music programs on 1970s' television. The "special effects," such as distortion of the images and abrupt changes, precede our contemporary "video-clips" on music channels. Within the limited scope of this volume, it is not possible to delve into an analysis of music videos, some of which seem to challenge the boundary between entertainment and art.[6] Rather than being interested in formal results, Paik, as other artist-participants of the Fluxus group in the 1960s, strove for integration of art into daily life, aiming to enrich people's lives through stimulating their creativity. This intention evoked a critical response, in particular by the American artist Martha Rosler. In her essay "Video: Shedding the Utopian Moment" (1985), she argues that Paik did not analyze television messages or effects, nor did he provide a counter-discourse based on rational exchange or make its technology available to others. In her view, he merely provided an upscale symphony of the most pervasive cultural entity of everyday life, without giving any conceptual or other means of coming to grips with it in anything other than a symbolically displaced form (in Hall and Fifer 1990, 45–46).

Rosler's critical statement is relevant for an analysis of her own video *Semiotics of the Kitchen* (1975) (Figure 1.5). Cultural theorist Anja Osswald associates this work with the preference of female artists in the 1970s for the medium of video. She rejects the oft-mentioned argument that these female artists liked this medium because it was not charged with the tradition of "male" art history, unlike most other artistic media (2012, 587). According to Osswald, video was attractive because it was related to the mass medium of television, one that produced identities and fixed (sexually defined) power relations – a major focus in semiotic investigations – and therefore a most suitable medium for interrogating these dominant systems of representation (587). In *Semiotics of the Kitchen*, Rosler initially presents herself in the clichéd role of a housewife hosting a cooking program on television. Soon it appears that her attributes are organized and presented according to a pseudo-scientific ordering. In an ironic tone accompanied by increasingly aggressive gestures, she alphabetically presents a series of kitchen implements (apron, bowl, chopper, and so on) and demonstrates their functions briefly by moving them around in her hands. In this way, Rosler can be said to turn

these familiar kitchen-related objects into domestic weapons. In "For an Art against the Mythology of Everyday Life" (1979), she claimed to see video in general as allowing her "the opportunity to do work that falls into a natural dialectic with TV itself," adding that in this particular video: "a woman in a bare-bones kitchen demonstrating some hand tools and replacing their domesticated 'meaning' with a lexicon of rage and frustration is an antipodean Julia Child" (2004, 7). This Julia Child, a major TV personality in the US, presented the first TV show on cooking and brought French cuisine to American kitchens.

In "Video: Shedding the Utopian Moment," Rosler reflected on the various ways artists attempt to use the main vernacular and popular medium of television. She discerns two groups: a surrealist-inspired effort aimed at developing a new poetry from this everyday "language" of television, which has led to narcissistic, self-referential video art, positioning the private against the public (a category of video art that will be discussed in the next section), and a group of artists who were more interested in information than in poetry, who were hardly concerned with spiritual transcendence, and who instead espoused an interest in social transformation (in Hall and Fifer 1990, 32). It is evident that Rosler does not only prefer the latter category, but that as an artist she herself also belongs in it. If *Semiotics of the Kitchen* reflects on the "cliché-information" provided about housewives in cooking programs, the almost obsessive repetition of quite similar actions also calls forth repetitions used in commercials and certain television shows. Regarding the use of repetition on TV and in video art, Sean Cubitt has argued in *Timeshift: On Video Culture* that this has the effect of producing anxiety (1991, 94). The difference is, however, that "advertisers (or more properly speaking, media buyers) use repetition as a way of getting campaigns to stick in our minds"; artists, however, use repetition to reveal the paranoia lurking beneath this recycling of ads.

Only three years after Rosler's kitchen-video, American artist Dara Birnbaum attacked representations of women in popular television shows such as *Wonder Woman*, also making use of repetitions in an almost obsessive way. Like Rosler, Birnbaum analyzes the mechanisms of mediating in television, but she appropriated cuts from these shows and edited them, mainly speeding them up. Her 1978 video work *Technology/ Transformation: Wonder Woman* was one of the first edited video artworks. The term "transformation" seems to have a double meaning here, referring both to the new technology that enabled the editing of video and the woman's "makeover" into a TV show super-heroine. Artist and critic Michael Rush emphasized that Birnbaum exposed in this video work how

Immediacy versus Memory

in these kinds of television shows emotion is achieved through techniques and how manipulative this popular television imagery can be, engaging in this way the politics of television (2003, 27; 1999, 126).

Rosler's and Birnbaum's video works can be linked, in certain respects, to the postwar history of American television, as discussed in television theorist Lynn Spigel's study *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (1992). Rosler's and Birnbaum's videos date from three decades after the end of the war, but American television did not seem to have changed drastically in that period. What had changed was the dissemination of TV sets, which skyrocketed from about 0.2 per cent of American homes in 1946 to 85 per cent by 1959 (Hartley 1999, 90). As regards the role of women, Spigel argues that close-ups of beautiful women or scantily dressed bathing beauties emanated from the television screen, presenting themselves to male spectators, thus turning the TV set into the "other woman" in the home (1992, 120). Moreover, she concludes that the ideological harmony between technological utopias and housing utopias created a perfect nesting ground for television in the postwar years. Women's home magazines displayed television sets in living rooms with panoramic window views, and in 1948 *DuMont* advertised one of the first console models with the slogan "your new window on the world" (104–105).

Another television genre referred to in some video artworks is television news. David Hall imitated the format of television news in his videotape *This is a TV receiver* (1976). The videotape shows a well-known newsreader (Richard Baker) who describes the paradoxes of the real and imagined functions of the TV screen on which he appears. The next shot is a copy of the screen, followed by copies of copies, finally resulting in a serious degeneration of sound and image. Ultimately, only electronic snow is left, the raw material of any electronic medium. Hall clearly disrupted the viewers' expectations that were so powerfully shaped in the 1970s by broadcast television (Spielmann in Ma and Suderburg 2012, 138). Already in 1971 Hall, together with Scottish TV, produced his *TV Interruptions*, which consisted of short "interruptions" that appeared unannounced in between television programs, for instance presenting a tap that seemed to fill the TV set with water.

If Hall commented on the typical television phenomenon of the newsreader who had to emphasize the "liveness" of broadcast television in the 1970s, thirty years later the Dutch artist Arnout Mik critically reflected on the selection of visual reports of war in TV news shows in *Raw Footage* (2006). This two-channel video projection is a compilation of footage

from television journalists recording the Yugoslav Wars in Serbia, Croatia, and Bosnia. Mik bought this never-broadcast footage from Reuters. Without being informed about the source of the images, it is hard to tell whether one is watching a staged scene (as is true of most of Mik's other works) or not. The information that the unusual images of war were rejected by Reuters for that reason makes one aware of the prominent role of advance expectations, for instance when watching teams playfully filming each other in the midst of war (Spielmann in Ma and Suderburg 2012, 139–140). Mik's work reveals not only that daily life is part of war, but also that war becomes part of daily life, as reflected in particular in the shocking images of children playing with real weapons as toys.

It seems paradoxical that some studies stress the major role of television in private life at home, whereas others underscore its being a mass medium.[7] According to television scholar Allison Simmons, TV's intertwining of the traditional concepts of public and private partly explains the early enthusiasm about television: it involved the paradox that the private television viewing experience in one's living room was simultaneously a public event, shared with millions of others (in Davis and Simmons 1977, 7). The tension between TV's domestic role in private life and the collective experience of the outside world it offers has also been clearly present in television programs in general. Sitcoms, talk shows, commercials, cooking programs, and similar genres all come with the suggestion of the people on the screen being present in one's living room. Rosler's video *Semiotics of the Kitchen* underscores how much the image of housewives in their kitchen as a domain of private life is related to more general socio-cultural patterns.

Another aspect of the private-public tension of the medium of television is interrogated by Gillian Wearing in her video work *Trauma*, the preceding video work *Confess All on Video. Don't Worry, You Will Be In Disguise. Intrigued? Call Gillian . . .* (1994), and her recent video work *Secrets and Lies* (2009). It is not always easy to understand why people like to confess secrets or tell about traumas on TV, as this implies bringing issues of private life into the public domain. In 1994, Wearing, being especially interested in internal struggles of common people, invited people in an advertisement to contact her. The many responses surprised her and some of the confessions she used for a sequel, using the text of the ad as title. To transform the public museum visit into a domestic TV watching experience, she presented these three video series in small cabinets in the traveling exhibition of her work in 2012.

Immediacy versus Memory

Regarding the private-public paradox of television, it is interesting to address the use of the mask by Wearing in *Trauma* and Jonas in *Vertical Roll*. As cultural theorist René Berger submitted, the screen-mask plays a double role in primitive societies: it hides and it unveils. It can be considered as a screen between two worlds (the world of gods and the world of men); it is at once barrier and means of passage (in Davis and Simmons 1977, 217). Berger relates this function of the mask to the television screen: "... has not the television screen become for mass society the equivalent of what the mask was and is in primitive societies: an agent of mediation?" (218).

In addition to the tension between private and public that had to be bridged in television programs, the variety of genres had to be fused into a "planned flow": the format of sports programs, which should give the viewer the experience of sitting in the stands, differs from that of newscasts, commercials, and sitcoms. A closer look at the different genres demonstrates, however, that the differences between the genres are less evident and rather more complicated. Belgian artist Johan Grimonprez's *Double Take* (2009), which is often called a "film novel" rather than a video work, could be described as visual research into the manipulative strategies of various genres of television (Figure 1.6). His visual arguments confirm observations in recent publications of television scholars. Jeremy Butler, for instance, argues that the difference between newscasts and commercials is blurry (2007 [2002], 107). They both present evidence to the viewer that is designed to support an argument about, what he calls, "the historical world." In this regard, then, commercials could be considered "news" about products and services. He adds that television journalists would dispute this interpretation, asserting that anchors and reporters are not trying to sell the viewer anything. It could be argued, however, that to survive, a newscast must market its interpretation of the historical world as accurate and true. A newscast's vision of the world is sold directly through its promotional spots and indirectly through the arguments about the world that it expresses in its news reports. Cytter's *Video Art Manual* deals with this very characteristic, among other things. Grimonprez's visual research in *Double Take* goes even further, demonstrating similarities not only between news and commercials, but also between these and fiction programming.

Double Take contemplates, as does *Video Art Manual*, the role of media in the modern Western culture of distrust and fear: "Paranoia is turned into fear, and fear into a commodity" (Grimonprez in an interview with Mark Peranson 2011 [2009], 148). Grimonprez particularly investigates

Video Art Theory

the increasing influence of television on our understanding of current issues and recent history. He inserted stock footage from the period of the Cold War in *Double Take*, using the "space race" as a metaphor for the Cold War, and focused on clips from news shows which presented the "Kitchen Debate" between US vice-president Richard Nixon and Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev in 1959 in Moscow, which was the first televised summit meeting. The newly invented Ampex color videotape recorded the historical event in a model kitchen at the American National Exhibition. These flashes are regularly interrupted by commercials for Folger's coffee, presenting a couple quarreling in the kitchen about the quality of the coffee, mirroring on a micro level the political quarrel on the macro level. Grimonprez's in-depth research in archives produced several curious results that he interspersed among the footage. One example reads: "Paris, August 18, 1900: Russian engineer Konstantin Persky coins the word 'television' after transmitting the first image." The various items are interconnected by statements from the famous filmmaker Alfred Hitchcock, selected from the hundreds of one-minute television statements he presented between 1955 and 1962, such as: "Television is like the American toaster, you push the button, and the same thing pops up every time" and, announcing the interrupting commercials: "those crazy commercials are pure poetry … [and] keep you from getting too engrossed in the story." In a comment on *Double Take*, Grimonprez stressed that this work is not only about the role of television in the 1960s: "The mainstream media doesn't correspond to the actual state of the world. We forget so easily that what was going on in the '60s is what's going on now … " (in Peranson 2011 [2009], 148).

The diversity of genres on television, investigated by Grimonprez and many television scholars, seems to make television very different from cinema, but television scholar John Hartley, in his *Uses of Television*, recalls that in the 1930s and 1940s, before the dissemination of television, the cinema audience was treated in a way that is much closer to the way television eventually came to be watched than to how we now watch cinema (1999, 57–58). The shows were a hybrid mixture of newsreel, comedy, reelers (10 or 20 minutes) with a full-length B-movie on offer, as well as the main feature film. The visitors did not necessarily know what was on in advance, nor did they queue up for a particular start time. Instead, people would drop in at any time (like switching on the television to see what is on) and sit through a repertoire program until the point where they began watching was repeated, when they could either leave or see it again. Interestingly, the latter aspect is similar

to how museum audiences nowadays have to deal with video art in exhibitions (for more on this, see the next chapters). This practice turns video artworks also into "video flows," in which you can step in at any moment and leave again whenever you want to.

To mark the transition from a focus on the relationship between video and television to one on the link between video and performance art, the subject of the next section, it is useful here to mention the 2001 television performance by the Mexican artist Ximena Cuevas (discussed by Kathy High in Ma and Suderburg 2012, 57–61). Cuevas was invited on the popular Mexican television show called "La Tombola" (The Raffle). Toward the end of the show, she exclaimed to the host that she was bored with this so-called entertainment. She pulled out a small Sony camcorder from her bag and started speaking directly to the television public. Looking straight into the television camera lens, she pointed her small video camera directly at the broadcast audience. Next, she suggested to the viewers that rather than taking an interest in her life, they should take an interest in their own lives. This dare to the viewers presented a break from typical one-way broadcasting.

In sum, the close relationship between television and video causes viewers to recognize in video artworks similar effects of (suggested) immediate transmission, such as direct addressing as "conversation partner," a tension between private and public, low technical quality and disturbances, and constant movement of images. This close relationship, however, also enables critical reflection on television through exaggeration of similar features or their inversion (such as boredom rather than acceleration, or a-synchronicity instead of synchronicity), prompting viewers' awareness of "how television works," by suggesting that video art uses these characteristics in alternative ways. The video artworks discussed here appear to make viewers realize in particular that the experience of immediate presence is an experience of mediated presence, rather than an experience of directly presented reality, as television seems to try to suggest to us.

The Appeal of Immediacy: Video in Performance Art and Performance in Video Art

It is important to realize that the immediacy of electronic images preceded the electronically taped images (both in case of television and video). The importance of live programming, rather than recorded

Video Art Theory

Figure 1.7 Vito Acconci, *Centers*, 1971. One-channel analog video, black-and-white, sound, 22:28 minutes. © Vito Acconci c/o Pictoright Amsterdam 2014. Courtesy Electronic Arts Intermix, New York.

telecasts, carried over from radio, whose programmers preferred live broadcasts to electrical transcriptions or recordings on acetate disks (Butler 2007 [2002], 258–259). Production manuals, such as *The TV Program: Its Writing, Direction, and Production* (1951), offered advice such as that television "should make the most of its frequently described power of 'immediacy,' which is its ability to transport the audience to the site of events taking place elsewhere at the same moment" (in Spigel 1992, 138).

This section concentrates on video's oft-mentioned characteristics such as live monitoring, instant playback, and continuous real-time recording. The diversity of applications of the medium of video in performance art is at the center of the present section, varying from integrating video in the performance to replacing the live event by video recording. All these so-called "video performances" are perfectly suited for comparative research of performance art and video art intending to provide insight into their particular characteristic of immediacy and its application in the construction of meanings. Video has also been used for its ability to document and consequently to memorize, an ability which performance as an ephemeral medium lacks. This application of video will be discussed at the end of the section as a stepping stone to my discussion of documentary video and home video.

Video performance defined as the use of video in performances

In the early 1970s quite a few artists – such as Carolee Schneemann, Valie Export, and Joan Jonas – integrated video cameras and recordings in their performances. Here, the immediacy of the live artistic performance before an audience was combined with the immediacy of video camera recording. In his essay "Videoperformance" (1976), artist and

Immediacy versus Memory

curator Willoughby Sharp tackles the issue of the proper definition of the term "video performance," indicating that in the exhibition *Video Performance* on show in January 1974 at 112 Green Street Gallery in New York there was already confusion about the term among the invited artists (in Schneider and Korot 1976, 260). Vito Acconci argued that because of the nature of the show, its announcement as video performance, he wanted to combine video with something live, while Chris Burden created a work in which he could be seen only on the monitors. As Burden put it: "That is why it was a video performance … I wanted them to accept it as TV reality, because people automatically believe what they see on the screen." Sharp notes that Burden makes an important distinction here: it was a video performance because the piece was visible only on video (265). The next subsection will deal with video performance in the latter definition.

In *Avant-garde Performance: Live Events and Electronic Technologies* (2005) theater and performance theorist Günter Berghaus continues to use the term "video performance" for both categories. One of the categories Berghaus defines as a stage action confronted with an electronically mediated image of the same event, both exhibited simultaneously to the audience (2005, 184). In this category, two separate, but interconnected, discourses take place at the same time, enabled by the instant-relay property of the video camera. The monitor displays sequences of images that are an objective refraction or a distorted manipulation of the live performance. The discourse of the body is combined with the discourse of the electronic medium. The juxtaposition of the two information systems allows the audience to compare and critically assess the two simultaneous presentations of an organic body and its artificial image.

An exemplary work in this category of video performance, also mentioned by Berghaus, is Joan Jonas's *Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy* (1972), the performance in which she first used the Portapak camera she had bought in Japan in 1970. As was true of all her other video performances, each presentation was a work in progress and differed from the previous presentation, so it is hard to describe what *Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy* exactly looked like. On the basis of various descriptions of this performance we may conclude that it consisted, in general, of a video monitor and camera (closed-circuit video) that occupied the center of the space of the gallery, and a large video projection screen that was placed to the side. The movements of four performers, including Jonas, across the space were recorded and instantly projected on both the monitor and the screen. On a second monitor another video work by Jonas was

47

presented. Jonas choreographed her live action partly in reaction to the
projected images. Furthermore, a large mirror on wheels had been rolled
in front of the audience. Its function was described by curator Chrissie
Iles as "echoing the video imagery's juxtaposition of real and mediated
space," suggesting a parallel between video and the mirror: "Just as the
performers witness their actions live on the video screen, the audience
can see themselves in their reflection ... The real-time properties make
this parallel possible" (in Schmidt 2000, 157). In relation to this work
Jonas commented that video performance "offered the possibility of mul-
tiple simultaneous points of view. Performers and audience were both
inside and outside," adding that she was interested in "the discrepancies
between the performed activity and the constant duplicating, changing
and altering of information in the video" (in Schmidt 2000, 108). In an
interview with Joan Simon, Jonas explained that the title of the work was
based on her experience of video as magical, which led her to imagine her-
self as an electronic sorceress, naming this alter ego Organic Honey (28).

Jonas used the video camera and the recordings as participants in her per-
formances; some other artists used the video camera as an extension of
their body. An interesting example is American artist Dan Graham's *TV
Camera/Monitor Performance* (1970). For this video, Graham was lying on
a stage at eye-level of a seated audience. A TV monitor was positioned
to the rear of the audience, facing the middle of the stage. With his feet
facing the audience Graham rolled from one edge of the stage to the
other, holding a video camera constantly to his eye while pointing it at
the monitor image. As a result, the monitor displayed an image of itself as
seen by Graham and as continuously rotating. When the members of the
audience looked to the rear at the monitor they perceived Graham's sub-
jective view together with the audience that was positioned between the
camera and the monitor. The beholders, however, could never see their
own gaze directly, only the back of their own head among the frontal
gaze of others (Graham 2013 [1979], 2). Graham used the feedback sys-
tem of video in this and many other works as a sociopolitical device, an
instrument that is part of a system of control, but that can also be applied
to raise our awareness of the role of particular viewing positions. In his
"Essay on Video, Architecture and Television" (1979), Graham focuses
on video's characteristic of feedback, while stressing the difference with
the more detached media of film and television on the one hand and the
restricted qualities of the mirror on the other (as will be addressed in the
next subsection).

Immediacy versus Memory

Although the insertion of video recordings and video (or film) cameras in art performances has not been exceptional over the past four decades, far more often video (and 8/16mm film) replaced the public in what Günter Berghaus labeled the other category of video performances and in what Chris Burden defined as a video performance. What were the implications of this other role for video as a medium?

Video performance defined as substitute for a live event

Already in the early years of video as an artistic medium artists turned the camera onto themselves. The focus on their own body made this kind of video art differ from the works reflecting on the medium of television as discussed in the former section. David Antin notes that at first glance most artists' videos seem to be defined by the total absence of any features that define television, but this apparent lack of relation is in fact a very definite and predictable inverse relation (in Schneider and Korot 1976, 177). According to Antin, the most striking contrast with television is that it is commonplace to describe artists' videotapes as "boring" or "long." While this perceived quality would have little to do with the actual length of the tapes, it had everything to do with the attitude of the video artists (177). The performances that took place around the time just before the mid-1960s, in which the body of the artist played a central role and little happened, in particular preceded the look-alike video art. Consequently, to understand early video art in which artists put their body in the center of their work, it is necessary to consider briefly the performance art of the 1960s.

Art historian RoseLee Goldberg was one of the first scholars to investigate this art form profoundly. In 1979 she published *Performance: Live Art 1909 to the Present*, followed by a revised and expanded edition in 1988. In 1998 her new insights into the developments of performance art were published in *Performance: Live Art since the 60s*. With regard to the formative years of performance art, Goldberg states that in the early 1960s artists such as Carolee Schneemann, Yoko Ono, and Shigeko Kubota, among others, insisted on the body as the main locus of ideas about art (1998, 95). Provocative, disturbing, and elemental, their often nude performances in the artists' own lofts or alternative galleries were charged with meanings on both a visceral and intellectual level. On the one hand, viewers were transformed into voyeurs of the eroticism surrounding the performers. On the other, many viewers quickly understood the intended ironies of the various surprising and sometimes shocking gestures (95).

Video Art Theory

Acting before a public might evoke the impression that performance art was quite similar to theater, but Goldberg stresses that although one might call events such as the ones in the Judson Church in New York "new performance-art theater," they had nothing to do with even the most basic of theatrical concerns: there was no script, no text, no narrative, no director, and especially no actors. Instead, the focus was on movement, images, and time (64). Goldberg explains that the introduction of performance in art must be viewed against a background of a political and intellectual battle for cultural change in major cities across Europe, Japan, and the US. The performances were a response to a decade in which the traces of postwar trauma were slowly erased by expanding consumerism. These artists forced art into the domain of public confrontation (37).

As regards the wide availability of the Portapak hand-held video camera (since the late 1960s), Goldberg notes that performance artists such as Joan Jonas, Vito Acconci, and Bruce Nauman were interested in the immediacy of video, particularly the medium's real-time recording and immediate projection. Making a video or doing a performance involved similar, almost interchangeable processes (179–180). Moreover, Goldberg observed that artists such as Bruce Nauman and Paul McCarthy used video as a distancing device to record intensely private performances that were extremely strange and disturbing (180).

Even more than Goldberg, Berghaus stresses the relevance of immediacy in both performance art and new media in his *Avant-garde Performance* (2005). In a reflection on American artist Allan Kaprow's 1960s works, Berghaus summarizes the characteristics of "happenings" as identified by Kaprow in his 1966 *Assemblage, Environment and Happenings*: happenings are derived from life but are not exactly like it; the dividing line between them must be kept fluid; they must have much immediacy and physical presence; they do not work with a traditional dramaturgy of plot, dramatic development, or predetermined climaxes and endings; and the artist employs chance methods, which serve as basis for generating open-ended, life-like actions that make up the happening (2005, 87).

Next to the category of video performance, in which the use of video is integrated in a performance (as discussed in the previous subsection), Berghaus defines a category of video performance developed by artists who substituted the live events with electro-magnetic tapes. These performances had to be viewed on a video monitor (184).

American artist Vito Acconci's first videotape *Corrections* (1970) was commissioned for the first traveling video exhibition in America, called

Body Works. This video work is, in fact, strongly related to performances in which artists interact with video cameras and monitors before an audience. Acconci created *Corrections* by sitting in front of a TV monitor on which he could see what he was doing out of his sight. He repeatedly applied lighted kitchen matches to a small tuft of hair at the nape of his neck. The camera, mounted on a tripod, was pointed directly at the back of his head, so that the focal point, the burning clump of hair, was in the center of the screen. Explaining this work, he later wrote that he had searched for an action that could coincide with the feedback capacity: sitting in front of the monitor, having eyes in the back of his head (quoted by Sharp in Schneider and Korot 1976, 258).

Most of the recordings of performances specifically generated for the video camera, as Berghaus concludes, were processed, filtered, manipulated, and designed to establish an objectifying distance between performer and spectator (2005, 187). The physical reality of the body was turned into an electronic discourse that was specific to the video medium. Through the use of editing techniques the artist reworked the recorded material. The videotape became an autonomous creation in which the performance was subsumed without losing its intrinsically performative quality. Jonas's 1972 videotape *Vertical Roll*, introduced at the beginning of this chapter, perfectly fits this description. It is noteworthy that Jonas applied multiple uses of videotapes: the continuous tape of the closed-circuit, tape pre-recorded to be included in a performance, or videotape to stand on its own. She considered performances documented on tape as mere documents, in contrast to a performance recorded for a single channel video work that she "altered through special effects, change in camera angle, or working with and cutting back and forth with two cameras, inserting new material, parts cut out, and so on" (in Schmidt 2000, 106).

A more recent example of this category of video performance, which exploits the new options of digital video, is *Model 5* (1994–1996) by the Austrian duo Granular Synthesis (discussed by Spielmann in Ma and Suderburg 2012, 139). The duo's name refers to separating a video graphic recording into units of information and subsequently sampling and re-synthesizing them. In *Model 5* the previously recorded image and sound material of Japanese performer Akemi Takeya was broken down into its smallest elements and reassembled in another frequency. This causes the synchronicity and stability of the image and the sound to be dissolved: image and sound are separated, blurred, and perceived erratically as flickers. Surprisingly, this high-tech manipulation calls forth

Video Art Theory

Jonas's *Vertical Roll*, created more than twenty years earlier. In *Model 5*, however, the newly produced frequencies resulted in far more extreme deformations. The audience perceives the intervention as violent and painful because the artistic duo dissected the voice and portrait of Takeya. Her natural rhythm is eliminated and replaced by a mechanical rhythm in the sequence. In effect, a mathematical operation of digital analysis was applied to a video recording of Takeya's performance. Regarding works like these, Spielmann concludes that where the base video material stands for continuity in the performance, the digital editing of the live presentation is used to make us aware of the media level (139).

If this section might suggest that only artists produced what might be called video performances, a striking case from outside of the art world - the webcam recording by college student Jennifer Ringley of her daily life - proves that this is not always the case. Ringley started the recordings at a rate of one video still every three minutes in April 1996 and was online continuously (24/7) until she turned off the camera in 2003. Photography theorist and artist Victor Burgin reflects in "Jenni's Room: Exhibitionism and Solitude" on this phenomenon, which in newspapers was referred to as exhibitionism (2000, 80). Burgin claims that if one judges Ringley to be an exhibitionist one has done no more than acknowledge one's own voyeurism. He concludes that the camera seems to function as her companion, compensating for the absence of her mother as she just left the parental home. Burgin uses three metaphors for the video camera: from the perspective of the beholder of the JenniCam website, the camera is a window; from Ringley's position, her camera is either a mirror or an accompanying (maternal) eye (80, 87). Regarding the metaphor of the mirror, one should note that Ringley hardly looks at the lens as if it were a mirror. This is different from some early video art performances in which the lens of the camera is used as a mirror, prompting associations with narcissism rather than exhibitionism.

The immediate reflection of the mirror as metaphor for video   Video performances presented on a monitor, particularly the early ones, most often show the artist in close-up due to the small size of TV sets. Moreover, the artist is often focusing on the camera. These characteristics are applicable to both Jonas's *Vertical Roll* and Acconci's *Centers* (Figure 1.7). We are familiar in daily life with looking close-up into a mirror at ourselves. It is not surprising, therefore, that this kind of video has been compared to looking into a mirror.

Immediacy versus Memory

Rosalind Krauss has even observed a narcissist connotation in mirror-like videos in her groundbreaking 1976 essay on video art. This much criticized piece, entitled "Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism," was first published in the art magazine *October*, and two years later it appeared in a slightly revised form in Gregory Battcock's anthology *New Artists' Video* (1978, 43–64). Krauss develops her argument about early 1970s' video art on the basis of an analysis of Acconci's video performance *Centers* (1971). She starts her essay arguing that symmetry in paintings of the 1960s allowed the artist to point to the center of the canvas to invoke the internal structure of the picture-object. She continues to ask what it means to point to the center of a television screen. In *Centers* Acconci faced the camera during the whole time of the recording (22'28") while pointing straight ahead at his own image, and while trying to keep his finger focused on the center of it. According to Krauss, *Centers* typifies the structural characteristics of the video medium because it was made by Acconci using the video monitor as a mirror (1978, 44). Although Krauss confuses the camera for the monitor here, her statement holds to make sense:

> what we see is a sustained tautology: a line of sight that begins at Acconci's plane of vision and ends at the eyes of his projected double. In that image of self-regard is configured a narcissism so endemic to works of video that I find myself wanting to generalize it as *the* condition of the entire genre. Yet, what would it mean to say "the medium of video is narcissism?" [italics in original] (44).

Krauss concludes by saying that her statement describes a psychological rather than a physical condition. Contrary to common definitions of media such as painting, which focus on physical characteristics such as canvas and paint, defining video on the basis of its psychological condition would mean a shift in thinking about media. Krauss puts forward that in everyday speech the word "medium" is not related to physical characteristics; and that particularly in a (para)psychological sense it is related to telepathy, extrasensory perception, and communication with an afterlife (45). In particular she relates her view to psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud's transformation from "object-libido" into "ego-libido," which is Freud's specific condition of narcissism (54). After inserting a reference to psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan's mirroring stages and constantly renewed status of alienation, she characterizes narcissism as the unchanging condition of a perpetual frustration (55).

Video Art Theory

Specifically regarding the relationship with the mirror, Krauss observes that video, like the mirror and unlike other visual arts, is capable of recording and transmitting at the same time, producing instant feedback. As a result, the performing artist is centered between two devices that function as the opening and closing of a parenthesis. One is the camera and the other the monitor, which re-projects the performer's image with the immediacy of a mirror (45).

Krauss's qualification of Acconci's *Centers* as narcissistic, and even representative in this characteristic of many other video works, asks the question whether this video work could also be interpreted from other perspectives related to the medium. According to Michael Rush, Acconci's pointing arm and finger cannot only be interpreted as referring to himself; the artist also points directly at the viewer, drawing the viewer into the art process (2003, 11). Acconci commented on his visual statement that the TV image turns the activity around: "a pointing away from myself, at an outside viewer – I end up widening my focus on to passing viewers (I'm looking straight out by looking straight in)" (quoted in Rush 2003, 11). Anja Osswald characterized this shift described by Acconci as transformation of pointing at the self into pointing at the public (2003, 65). In this respect, curator Tanya Leighton emphasizes that Acconci points to video's immediacy and how the "now-ness of communication" is both opened and foreclosed in television (2008, 23). Acconci would have urged viewers to consider their own reflections within the paradoxical contradiction of televisual "now-ness."

David Joselit likewise claims that artists such as Acconci in particular stage the fundamental struggle in a media world over possessing one's own image as property. How may television function as a public realm and how can an image act politically in that arena? Thus, in contradiction to the claim of Krauss, Joselit concludes that in exploring the struggles around the possession of one's own image (which are as firmly rooted in politics and economics as they are in psychology), the self's appearance is not narcissistic, but rather the initial moment in constituting a genuine public. In other words, rather than narcissism, it is the public that is the medium of video (in Douglas and Eamon 2009, 117–118).

Anja Osswald critically analyzed Krauss's famous essay in her 2001 dissertation on video performances, published as *Sexy Lies in Videotapes: Künstlerische Selbstinszenierung im Video um 1970* [Artistic Self-staging in Video around 1970] (2003). Praising Krauss's essay as one of the earliest attempts to ground video art theoretically as well as aesthetically, Osswald

Immediacy versus Memory

criticizes it for neglecting an essential feature of video in the comparison of video with the mirror and the tautological circle of self-reflection (both splitting up and doubling the self) prompting the Narcissus metaphor. Unlike a regular mirror, the electronic mirror does not reflect images in a reversed way. As a result, the outside view plays a role, introducing the category of the viewing Other, rather than destroying the Other, as Krauss suggests in her argumentation (Osswald 2003, 64). This difference between video reflection and mirror reflection becomes crystal-clear in Joan Jonas's single-channel tape *Left Side Right Side* (1972). Jonas positioned herself between two cameras, one in front of her and the other behind her; she sat opposite both a monitor and a mirror placed side by side, so that her video reflection, which is "true," was paired with her reverse mirror image. During the opening sequence "this is my right eye ... this is my left eye" she is pointing at her eyes one by one; the video continues to present variations on that theme. Joselit notes that this ostensibly simple situation becomes dazzlingly complex through various shifts that reveal components of the apparatus to the viewer: the monitor, mirror, performance space, or all at once (2007, 160).

In her essay "He Saw Her Burning" Jonas reflected more in general on her regular use of the mirror (in Hall and Fifer 1990, 367). She recalled that she did her first performance piece in 1968, and from the beginning the mirror provided her with a metaphor for investigations, as well as with a device to alter space, to fragment it, and to reflect the audience that was included by this reflection. The Portapak video camera enabled her to add another reflection, and to relate to the audience through close-up on the live transmission of the closed-circuit video system. By doing so, the monitor was turned into an ongoing (mirrored) mirror, so to speak.

The fact that the video images are not a mirrored reality means, according to Osswald, that the electronic "mirror" is rather the reflection of the self-reflection (2003, 29–30). This is what artists such as Acconci and Jonas actually do in this kind of video work: use the metaphor of the mirror or shadow as visual expression of differentiation, while simultaneously touching on the problem of split identity. In her dissertation research, Osswald profoundly analyzed the 1970s' video performances by Acconci and Jonas, arguing that these works share the impersonal character of self-representation of the artists. Strengthened by the anonymous-technological nature of the medium and limited size of monitor images, the video recordings look quite neutral and have a quasi-documentary style. Moreover, the word "self-portrait" is hardly used in titles of video performances; Osswald tended to find rather more descriptive titles. Such

Video Art Theory

observations led her to the conclusion that these works reduce the artist to an empty container; what is presented is the rhetorical artificiality of self-images (splitting, doubling, self as other) or the paradox of "selfless self-images." The medium of video was thereby used as a reflective medium in a double sense: as reflective mirror and as reflective medium for self-reflection that includes the observer as Other. Furthermore, the technical character of the medium, its reproducibility, and not least its relationship with the mass medium of television, put video at a great distance from media that make individual styles possible (65).

Krauss and Osswald appear to agree on the suitability of the medium of video as a psychological tool, but they disagree on the assumed narcissist nature of videos in which artists present their own body. Regarding these different views, it is interesting to bring in Hermine Freed's opinion, from an essay written in the same year as that of Krauss. As Freed argues, video artists use their own body mainly for a pragmatic reason. Artists rely on their own body because they have the firmest control over themselves; it is easier to do something the way you want it done yourself than to try to explain what you want to have done to someone else. Moreover, artists are accustomed to working alone. When artists use their own image, it is more likely they do so because of their need to work alone than because of narcissism (in Schneider and Korot 1976, 212). This interpretation of Freed is corroborated by Osswald when she quotes Bruce Nauman's answer to Joan Simon's question in an interview in 1988 as to why he applied paint on his face as a mask in his filmed performance *Art Makeup* (1967–1968): "To present yourself is obviously part of being an artist. If you don't want people to see that self, you put on make-up . . . there is a kind of self-exposure that is threatening" (quoted in Osswald 2003, 31).

It is fair to say, however, that Krauss does not finish her essay by defining all video art as narcissism (1978, 57). At the very end the essay takes a positive shift by signaling three groups within the corpus of video art that run counter to her argument up to that point. The first category consists of tapes that exploit the medium in order to criticize it from within; the second group comprises tapes that represent an assault on the video system in order to break out of its psychological hold; and the third category involves installation forms of video, which use the medium as a subspecies of arts such as sculpture. Krauss's example of the first category is Richard Serra's *Boomerang*; she refers to the installation works by Peter Campus that involve the visitors as an example of the third category; and her example for the second category is Joan Jonas's *Vertical Roll*. Krauss observes in this work an enclosing of Jonas's body between two

Immediacy versus Memory

apparatuses, as she saw in Acconci's work, yet not as a narcissist relationship in this case (59). Thus, in the end, Krauss and Osswald agree that in the early 1970s video artists expressed a fascination for the similarity in terms of immediacy of mirrors and video recordings, and in particular for the complex relationship between the two, which made video an interesting medium for "self-reflection" for artists and viewers alike.

To bring this comparison of video and the mirror to a close, a brief contemplation on the use of video as "delayed mirror" seems appropriate. In particular Dan Graham has experimented in various ways with this phenomenon. As he noted, mirrors are designed to be seen frontally, whereas the video monitor's projected image of a spectator observing it depends on the spectator's relation to the position of the camera – not on his or her relation to the monitor. This means that a view of the beholder can be transmitted from the camera instantaneously or time-delayed over a distance to a monitor, which may be near or far removed from the beholder's (viewing) position (Graham 2013 [1979], 67). In his essay on feedback in video, Graham included an illustration of a scientific experiment from R.L. Gregory's *Eye and Brain* (1966). It shows a man making a drawing out of his own sight by looking at a monitor on which he sees his hand drawing with a delay of a few seconds. Graham added that when a perceiver views his behavior via videotape on a five- to eight-second delay, which is the limit of "short-term" memory or memory which is part of and influencing a person's (present) perception, this immediately influences his future intentions and behavior (69).

Graham's most famous work dealing with delayed feedback is *Present Continuous Past(s)* (1974). So far in this chapter we have discussed performances that were all executed by the artists themselves (or in the case of Granular Synthesis by a colleague). Already in the 1970s, however, some artists had the visitors perform. In *Present Continuous Past(s)* the artist himself is absent from the video performance and unknowingly the visitors become the performers. The work consists of a white room with mirrored walls on two adjacent sides. A monitor and camera are mounted on the third, mirror-less wall, while the partial fourth wall marks the room's entrance. As the viewers enter the room, they are at first struck by the multiple mirror images of themselves. The monitor appears to mirror the space, yet without the viewers' image. Suddenly they see themselves entering the room on the monitor. Thus they see themselves first in the mirror, after which, eight seconds later, they see the mirrored actions relayed on the monitor. The discrepancy between the video image and

Video Art Theory

the mirror image operates on several levels, according to Hermine Freed. The video image is a "normal" one, you see yourself as others see you, but in time delay you see yourself objectified, in the same relationship to yourself as to anyone else in the room (in Schneider and Korot 1976, 212).

The starting point of this section was that immediacy in performance art relates to the direct interaction of "self-other" in the relationship of performer-audience. When video recording and projection are inserted this interaction becomes more complicated, and this is even more the case with the addition of a mirror that forces the visitor to compare the perception of the physical presence of the artist with the mirrored image and directly recorded and projected images that may include themselves. Video performances produced without the presence of an audience offer possibilities for artists to experiment with the immediacy of closed-circuit and feedback, which may well be seen as video's mirroring qualities, even if the images are not presented mirror-wise. The use of technical disturbances thereby draws attention to video's mediating role. In both categories of video performances, however, video's immediacy contributes to the viewer's awareness of self-other perceptions.

Video as documentation of performances

The paradox of performance art is that artists stress the importance of its ephemeral nature in their choice of this medium, but are searching at the same time for ways to document the events. Several documenting film/video recordings have even replaced the original event in becoming the actual work of art, to be collected and exhibited in museums, whereas others continue to be kept in (the artist's or collector's) archives as part of the documentation of the performance.

Curator Douglas Fogle has addressed the dilemma of performance art's documentation in his anthology *The Last Picture Show: Artists Using Photography 1960–1982* (2003), but he limited his research to photographic documentation. Only briefly does he touch on the main difference between photo camera recording and film or video camera recording: the important characteristic of duration (which can be extreme) gets lost in photo documentation. Art critic Nancy Foote considers this aspect an advantage: photographs allow the artist to eliminate duration and this safeguards spectators from the possible monotony of a film or videotape of the actual event (in Fogle 2003 [1976], 27).

Nevertheless, many performance artists have preferred film or video documentation, if often in addition to photo and text documents.

Peggy Phelan, scholar in performance studies, emphasizes in *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* that performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance (1993, 146). She notes that the pressure of the reproductive economy is enormous: only rarely the "now" to which performances address their questions is valued. This is why, according to Phelan, the now is supplemented and buttressed by the documenting camera and the video archive. These recordings can only be a spur to memory, triggering some recollection to become manifest.

When considering the live event and its documentation, the issue of the selected perspective on the recorded event is equally important. This is a worthwhile topic of research in its own right because it is not always clear whether the presence of the public is part of the performance and should be recorded, or if the recording should only frame the performer. And should one add close-ups of the artist even if they are not visible for the visitors present? In the case of artists with strong views on the recordings of their performance, the decisions taken may shed light on their views on performance art and the role of film/video. Yet it is also true that many performance artists have been quite indifferent to the often accidental recordings of their work by visitors.

Another problematic aspect of the documentation of performances is briefly addressed by Nam June Paik in his "Input-time and Output-time," in which he argues that to counter the television entertainment or in order to preserve the purity of information or experience, some video artists refuse to edit or to change the time-structure of performances or happenstance. As he explains, they insist that input-time and output-time be equal. In real life, however, the relationship of input-time and output-time is much more complex. In some extreme situations or in dreams our whole life can be experienced as a flashback compressed into a split second, which means that certain input-time can be compressed or extended in output-time at will (in Schneider and Korot 1976, 98). Paik relates this to metamorphosis as a very function of our brain, which is, in computer terms, the central processing unit itself: "The painstaking process of editing is nothing but the simulation of this brain function" (98).

All varieties of documenting performances through video, however, seem to capitalize on video's recording function, as a way to save events

Video Art Theory

as memory for the future. These documents share this application with home videos that "help participants remember," as Sean Cubitt characterizes home video in *Videography*, a mnemonic function that video shares with family photography and that perhaps derives from it, turning video into a supplement to this older medium (1993, 5). This mnemonic power of video is the focus of the next section.

The Application of the Mnemonic Ability of Video and the Relationship with Activist-Videos and Home Video

A not yet discussed specific kind of video in which time plays a crucial role pertains to "video documentaries" and "home videos" that take advantage of video's suitability for registering and preserving events for the future. From the early 1970s, amateurs have made home videos of family life to remember special events and contribute to a history of the family, but video artists, too, created diary-like works or biographical documentaries. In the same period, political activists started to use video as a tool for recording and documenting their activism, and some of them propagated video recordings as educational material. Although artists participated in collectives such as Raindance Corporation, most of them hardly bothered about the difference between video artworks and vernacular documentary moving images.

Interestingly, three decades later, many visitors viewed the exhibition *Documenta* 11 (2002) as the culmination of a development in contemporary art in which the documentary form increasingly became the dominant artistic language, as evaluated by its curator Okwui Enwezor in "Documentary/Vérité" (2003) (in Lind and Steyerl 2008, 81). In this exhibition, however, Enwezor aimed to hybridize the documentary mode – defined as essentially concerned with the recording of dry facts – by joining it to the idea of *vérité* – a French word which encompasses a process of unraveling, questioning, probing, and diagnosing a search for truth (Enwezor and T.J. Demos in Lind and Steyerl 2008, 87, 109).

The next section intends to provide insights into video's mnemonic ability, through investigating some video artworks – in which the documentary is also hybridized in various ways – in relation to activist documentary videos and home videos.

Immediacy versus Memory

Video as social documentation and recording tool in activism

Critic and curator Deirdre Boyle demonstrates in "A Brief History of American Documentary Video" (in Hall and Fifer 1990) and *Subject to Change: Guerrilla Television Revisited* (1997) that at first there were few distinctions between video artists and activists: nearly everyone made documentary tapes. And in *Being and Time*, art historian Marc Mayer notes that the democratization of video as a medium in the 1970s was seen by many as the solution to social inequities of establishment misinformation (1996, 27). It would fragment oppressive master narratives and revolutionize the way in which oppressed groups and individuals told their own stories. Chris Meigh-Andrews, in *A History of Video Art*, characterized the emerging video art practice as ranging from political activism, such as by Raindance Corporation in the USA and TVX in the
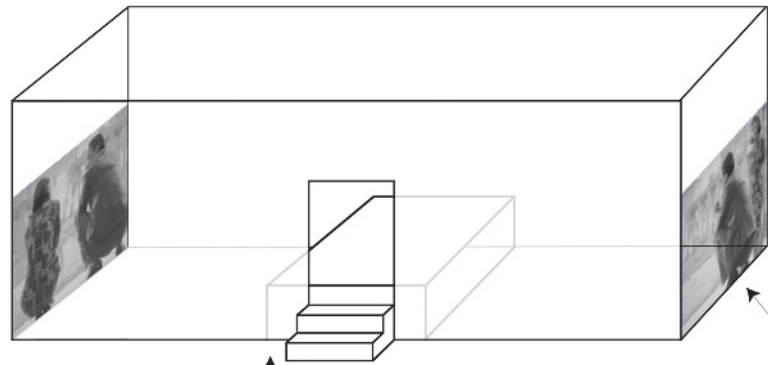
Figure 1.8   Simon Leung, *Squatting Project/Guangzhou*, 2008. Two-channel digital video installation (projections facing each other), color, sound, nine variations on two-minute segment of film *Center Stage*. © Simon Leung, courtesy of the artist.

UK, to works by performance-based artists (2006, 81). He describes the New York-based Raindance Corporation, founded in 1969, as a "movement" of American youngsters who were politically active and inspired by a desire for greater participation in the democratic process and a growing awareness of the power of cultural production. They increasingly viewed the accessible video and computer technology as major components in an arsenal of radical cultural tools. This kind of collective that included political theorists, artists, and activists grew as much out of a shared cultural imperative as from a pragmatic need to pool and share equipment (61).

Radical Software, a journal founded in 1970 by Raindance Corporation and edited by Paul Ryan, Ira Schneider, and Beryl Korot, was influential in creating a video counter-public sphere by opening up a discursive space in which strategies of direct response in video aesthetics, politics, and technology could be discussed collectively. Guerrilla video tactics outlined ways to mount run-and-gun strikes that would capture events that could provide a perspective not filtered through network monopolies (Rogers in Ma and Suderburg 2012, 39–40). Deirdre Boyle calls these initiatives the story of the first television generation's dream of remaking television and their frustrated attempts at democratizing the medium (1997, xvi).

In 1971, journalist Michael Shamberg, a member of Raindance Corporation, published *Guerrilla Television* in cooperation with his fellow-activists, in which they formulated their view on the medium-specific characteristics and preferable uses of video. It became the first book on video to be published in the US. As announced on the back cover, the book tells its readers how one can break the stranglehold of broadcast television on the American mind; the blurb also claims that information tools and tactics are more powerful means of social change than politics, and that the book informs us how low-cost portable videotape cameras, video cassettes, and cable television networks can be applied to develop a sense of media ecology and achieve "true democracy." This book of more than 100 pages consists of two parts: a set of ideological statements is followed by a detailed manual that includes theoretical reflections on video and television, as well as various technical details (mainly about video cameras) and practical instructions. Feedback in particular is stressed as an important prerequisite for the verification of experience, which is not provided by broadcast television (Shamberg 1971, part 1, 12).

Shamberg compares a broadcast television crew that goes to an event and stands above the crowd with going to an event with a Portapak and shooting in the crowd (part 2, 8). According to Meigh-Andrews, many

politically and socially motivated artists who began using video in the 1970s made what came to be called "street tapes" – direct documentation of ordinary people going about their day-to-day lives, often edited "in camera," using the pause control of the Portapak (2006, 64). As examples, he mentions Les Levine's *(Irish) Bum* (1965) and Frank Gillette's five-hour documentary on the street life of the hippy community. These documentaries use video's easy recording technology to prevent social events from being forgotten.

"Guerrilla Television," according to Shamberg, could contribute to an information infrastructure for "Media"-America, a grassroots network of indigenous media activity (1971, part 2, 9). He notes that at Raindance there was no notion of ownership of videotape footage. When people recorded videotapes these were filed together in what was called the "data bank." Everyone was free to make use of this data bank for his or her own edits. And elsewhere in the book Shamberg mentions that a videocassette distribution network is cheaper and more far-ranging than local cable systems (29).

In an essay about "video memories," cultural theorist Marita Sturken draws attention to the fact that for independent video makers the preservation of images and recording of history has been an underlying desire in the accumulation of videotapes. She refers to both Raindance and Videofreex as video collectives with an interest in compiling data banks of alternative images and accruing an alternative visual history to the nationalist history produced by broadcast television. Because concerns about preservation of the tapes themselves were deemed irrelevant, most of the early videotapes by the collectives failed to survive (in Renov and Suderburg 1996, 3).

Shamberg's *Guerrilla Television* can be considered a 1970s video activists' manifesto. One may wonder what a more recent equivalent of this manifesto could be. An interesting candidate is *The Electronic Disturbance*, written in 1994 by the Critical Art Ensemble, a collective of five artists with different backgrounds exploring the intersections between art, technology, radical politics, and critical theory. They state that communication and control functions of the elite are now fully cyberspatial, so cyberspace has become the only effective site of resistance:

> Since it is unlikely that scientific or techno-workers will generate a theory of electronic disturbance, artists-activists (as well as other concerned groups) have been left with the responsibility to help provide a critical

discourse on just what is at stake in the development of this new frontier. By appropriating the legitimized authority of artistic creation, and using it as a means to establish a public forum for speculation on a model of resistance within emerging techno-culture, the cultural producer can contribute to the perpetual fight against authoritarianism. (in Wardrip-Fruin and Montfort 2003, 788)

They add that postering, pamphleting, street theater, and public art were useful in the past, but people have left the streets; the public has become electronically engaged. The Critical Art Ensemble incites artists to take advantage of the fluidity of the electronic world through invention (788).

An exemplary video work by the Critical Art Ensemble is *Immolation* (2008), a five-minute loop video installation. It addresses the use of incendiary weapons on civilians after the *Geneva Convention* and the *Protocol on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Incendiary Weapons* of 1980. Two juxtaposed projections confront the damage done on a macro landscape level and on the (micro) cellular level of the body. For the latter part the artists "created" human tissue in a laboratory and used microscopy recordings. In addition, film footage of present and past wars that have used immolation against civilian targets is inserted. The goal is to provide a different way of imaging, viewing, and interpreting the human costs of these war crimes, in contrast to the barrage of media imagery to which we have become so desensitized.[8]

Video has also increasingly become part of artistic criticism in fields such as post-colonial theory. The Hong Kong born artist Simon Leung became particularly famous for his *Squatting Projects* (1994–2008) executed in various metropolitan cities. The multimedia projects included, among others, pasting posters and presenting videos showing squatting figures. *Squatting Project/Guangzhou* (2008) consisted of two video projections presenting nine variations on a two-minute segment from Stanley Kwan's 1992 movie *Center Stage*, in which the protagonists squat together and reflect on the multiple connotations of crouching (Figure 1.8). In these projects, Leung presents resistance through the performative act of squatting in specific spaces and places to highlight political or social restrictions on the use and occupation of space.[9] As in the case of the above-discussed activist-artists, Leung also publishes texts to underscore his arguments. In 2008, for instance, in his reply to a questionnaire by art magazine *October* as part of the public discourses on the invasion of Iraq, he expresses his preference for artworks that address

Immediacy versus Memory

> the power of the state as it intersects the psyche, ones which engage the correspondence between aesthetic/political/form/subject and the effects and affects of power. … they often interpolate representations of the mechanisms of power with signs of resistance; they often contemplate the vicissitudes of daily life held hostage by masculinist drives toward domination – some of them leading to war. (Leung 2008, 103)

Activists such as Raindance Corporation, Critical Art Ensemble, and Simon Leung use video images as visual arguments, aiming to stimulate the social-critical awareness of their public. In fact they use video as a witnessing and documenting medium, as a tool to serve collective memory, which is the focus of the next section.

Video art and collective memory

Sean Cubitt emphasizes in *Timeshift* that video is a process both of remembering and forgetting, but where television is designed to forget on an industrial scale, video is condemned to remember (1991, 106). Through video is recorded what has already been lost, the memory of absences that once motivated desire, or that can still promote anxious, guilty, or nostalgic emotions. Cubitt's reflection on memory and forgetting relates to the medium of video in general. When one searches for video artworks that specifically reflect on collective memory and amnesia, the first video that comes to mind is American artist Woody Vasulka's videotape *Art of Memory* (1987), probably one of the most oft-discussed video works in historical overviews of video art. In "The Politics of Video Memory: Electronic Erasures and Inscriptions," Marita Sturken argues that in this videotape particularly the role of video as a technology of memory is present: remembering, forgetting, and containing memories (in Renov and Suderburg 1996, 4). *Art of Memory* deals with the fluctuating cultural meanings of images that are coded "history." Vasulka used black-and-white photographic and filmic images of historical events of the twentieth century, such as the Spanish Civil War, the Russian Revolution, World War II, and the atomic bomb. Newsreel and documentary footage are changed into image-objects that appear to sit on a Southwestern desert landscape. They serve to de-contextualize the filmic images: one cannot read them as windows onto the world, but only as generic images of history. Having lost their individual meaning, the images of history have become a tangle of memories swallowed by the electronically

Video Art Theory

rendered desert landscape. Scratchy voices echo these images; one cannot understand them, but they can be interpreted, according to Sturken, as the voices of history (5).

Commenting on the same work, Yvonne Spielmann observes that by integrating historically precedent technology (photography and film) into the fluid movement of electronically processed landscape images, Vasulka makes the transformation of history into discourse visible on two levels (2008 [2005], 107). These are the historical distance of the media used and the storage function of older image and sound media. By presenting this stored information through the moving video images, the artist translates them back from being a container for memory into remembered history. What is more, the historicity of the technological progress is transferred into a dynamic discourse of criticism of the military-industrial context, which put technology on the course of destruction.

Regarding the various levels of memory that play a role in *Art of Memory*, film theorist Raymond Bellour observes at least four of them. The first level is the memory of war of the artist as a child. The next memory level is that of the grownup, who remembers the impact of war machines on him. The third one would be that of the character that Vasulka invokes as his alter-ego: the man with deeply etched features standing in the landscape, who is faced with his doppelgänger, made of pure webbing, through which electronic memory is suddenly, exemplarily, blended with the web of history. The fourth level of memory relates to the spectators, who must mentally return to the past apocalypse (in Renov and Suderburg 1996, 149–151).

The relationship between recording and erasing in video and in our memory runs explicitly or implicitly through many texts about the medium of video. Michael Shamberg, for instance, stressed in *Guerrilla Television* the characteristic of videotape as re-usable: "you simply record over it . . . " (1971, part 2, 22). In Chapter 3 video's ability successively to record, erase, and re-record will be discussed in more detail in juxtaposition with the medium of drawing.

A multilayered example of a more recent video work that deals with collective memory is French artist Pierre Huyghe's *The Third Memory* (1999). It consists of a two-channel projection on two juxtaposed screens and reflects on the film *Dog Day Afternoon* (Sidney Lumet, 1975). This film deals with the notorious attempted robbery of the Chase Manhattan Bank in Brooklyn three years earlier, on August 22, 1972. The robbery

was led by John "Sonny" Wojtowicz, who shortly after the release of the film publicly contested its accuracy in a letter. A copy of the letter is included in Huyghe's installation along with news clippings of the actual bank robbery. In *The Third Memory* Huyghe gives Wojtowicz the opportunity to tell his own story in relation to the robbery and its media coverage. The resulting staged and edited report is a few times interrupted on one of the screens by the fragment from *Dog Day Afternoon* on which he reflects, and it finishes with TV footage of the robbery.

In *The Place of Artists' Cinema*, film theorist Maeve Connolly provides an in-depth analysis of this video work (2009, 139). She notes that Wojtowicz's limited scope for explanation – also owing to Huyghe's editing – resulted in a juxtaposition of "original" film fragments and "re-enacted" scenes by Wojtowicz that look surprisingly similar, turning *The Third Memory* into a re-enactment of the original film shoot, rather than of the robbery. Huyghe himself noted that Wojtowicz shifts between "the memory of the fact and the memory of the fiction" (quoted in McDonough 2004, 107). Another interesting aspect of "collective cultural memory" is Wojtowicz's remark that he and his "troops" borrowed many of their tactics from the famous film *The Godfather* (released in the spring of 1972), which they watched in preparation for the robbery.

Huyghe's way of dealing with a historical event calls forth the debates on the nature of the documentary.[10] If for a long time the genre of documentary photography and film was acknowledged as truthful reportage with a social function, in the past few decades this status has increasingly been criticized. Specific discussions gave rise to the introduction of new terms, such as "post-documentary" by Martha Rosler and "documentary fiction" by Jacques Rancière. In "Documentary Fiction: Marker and the Fiction of Memory," Rancière, a scholar in aesthetics and politics, deals with the questions of "what is memory?" and "what is the documentary as a genre of fiction?" (2006 [2001], 157) Regarding Huyghe's *The Third Memory*, it is interesting that Rancière relates memory, documentary, and fiction through explaining the relationships he notes between memory and fiction, and between documentary film and fiction film. He defines memory as "an orderly collection, a certain arrangement of signs, traces, and monuments," while fiction involves, in his view, "using the means of art to construct a 'system' of represented actions, assembled forms, and internally coherent signs." This observation leads him to the conclusion that documentary film, in fact, does not need to differ very much from fiction regarding cutting a story into sequences, assembling shots into stories, joining and disjoining voices, bodies, sounds and

images, and manipulating time (158). He illustrates his points with reference to Chris Marker's documentary film *The Last Bolshevik* (1992), yet as a genre concept "documentary fiction" is also applicable to Huyghe's *The Third Memory*.

The combination of memory, documentary, and fiction also informs the concept of documentary fiction that is the outcome of art historian Sabine Eckmann's analysis, in *In the Aftermath of Trauma: Contemporary Video Installations* (2014). This publication is devoted to five video installations that explore individual and collective trauma caused by radical historical events, such as the 1947 division of India and Pakistan (in Amar Kanwar's *The Lightning Testimonies*, 2007) and the killing of Osama bin Laden (in Alfredo Jaar's, *May 1, 2011*, 2011). She explains that in these works a variety of methods is used in order to include in the regimes of the visible the elusiveness and improbability of memory in its relation to traumatic political events (2014, 7). As she stresses in particular, all installations employ both documentary materials and fictional content and strategies, aiming at, according to Eckmann, a Brechtian alienation effect that creates a discursive space for critical engagement (12).

Martha Rosler in "Post-Documentary, Post-Photography?" agrees that strict objectivity, a standard derived from journalistic ethics, is an inappropriate ideal for documentary, but she disapproves of artists who exploit this to turn to the alibi of personalization, sentiment, or disengagement (2004 [2001], 230). Significantly, Rosler underlines the importance of a continuous effort to defend documentary, arguing that we need it. One should find a balance between observing the situation of others and expressing one's own point of view, including some form of analytic framework identifying social courses and proposing remedies (240). Rosler's suggestions differ from Rancière's description of "documentary fiction," but her suggestion to reflect on societal issues and question their representations simultaneously is akin to Huyghe's take in *The Third Memory*. Likewise, the video work *Video Apathy* (2010) by British artist Toby Huddlestone, which deals with political activism and collective memory, appears to relate to Rosler's as well as Rancière's view on documentary, albeit in a different way. This video, which lasts seven-and-a-half minutes, presents a history of the last sixty years focusing on a range of protests, rebellions, and revolts against wars, political machinations, unemployment, and undesirable social structures. The work consists of historical images which flash by in a rhythm underscored by a rap-like voice-over, which explains the goals of the activists. Toward the end the question arises: for what do people fight and protest nowadays?

Immediacy versus Memory

Significantly, in the light of our discussion in the first section of this chapter that related video art to television, the voice-over concludes that reality television and social media have now taken the place of demonstrations and rebellions. Huddlestone observes a society of indifference, indecision, and powerlessness, and he reacted to that by organizing the political campaign *Apathy 2009*, which could be considered as an ironic performance artwork: a protest which addressed nobody and presented texts that showed excuses intended to justify not protesting. The event was documented and was added one year later to his historical overview *Video Apathy*. This last episode that seamlessly follows the historical highlights is, in fact, a self-constructed historical event (Langenbach 2013, 70).

According to Marita Sturken, electronic images have a continually shifting relationship to history. The television image is an image of immediacy, transmission, and continuity. This has led certain cultural critics to declare television to be the site of memory's demise. Fredric Jameson, for instance, has claimed that memory seems to play no role in television (1991, 70). In contrast, Sturken argues that the stakes in memory and history are ever present in electronic media; despite its paradoxical relationship to the preservation of memory, "television-video" is a primary site of history and cultural memory, where memories, both individual and collective, are produced and claimed (in Renov and Suderburg 1996, 2–3).

Home video as mnemonic device

Michael Shamberg advises his readers in *Guerrilla Television* to tape everyday ordinary events: eating, walking, sleeping, talking, making love (1971, part 2, 48). He adds that one should feel absolutely no compulsion to show these tapes to others, or even save them, because it is inherent in the economy of videotape that it is erasable. Shamberg stresses that this differs from film, because film costs money and time and compels people to "do something" when the camera is on. Thus home movies pick up on what is essentially abnormal or forced behavior (48).

In her essay about the politics of video memory, Marita Sturken emphasizes that since its invention, the camera has functioned centrally in the desire to remember, to recall the past, to make the absent present. Photographic, cinematic, and video images are the raw materials used to construct personal histories: events remembered because they were photographed, moments forgotten because no images were preserved, and not-recorded memories that work in tension with camera memories (in

Renov and Suderburg 1996, 1). The shift in use from 8 or 16mm film to video recording as the preferred medium for documenting performances (as discussed in the former section) paralleled the development in recordings of family life. After the introduction of the first relatively inexpensive portable Portapak camera, important events in family life (especially weddings) were recorded ever more frequently by video cameras, which made immediate presentation possible on the television screen. Art theorist William Kaizen, in "Live on Tape: Video, Liveness and the Immediate," describes an advertisement in *Life* magazine of September 1965 that shows a mother taking video images of her children, accompanied by the caption that "the new home video recorder, made by Sony Corp., makes a movie at a swimming pool and instantly shows it on a television screen" (in Leighton 2008, 260).

Some video artists have explicitly expressed awareness of the relationship between their medium and the home-made video. Vito Acconci, for instance, argued in his 1984 essay "Television, Furniture, and Sculpture: the Room with the American View" that art video might be placed as "a subcategory of home-made video or on a sliding scale somewhere between home-made video on the one side and regular broadcast television on the other side" (in Hall and Fifer 1990, 130). This categorization is quite surprising because most of Acconci's videos do not look like home video or television, although they deal with private life, and should rather be positioned as critically reflecting on both of them. Also, in contemporary art quite a few video works extend or parody consumer video's modes of interfacing with everyday life. These works can be related to the genres of home video that have emerged in the past few decades, such as video diaries, video letters, commemorations of holidays and other special occasions, and documents of natural disasters, accidents, and police brutality.

Media artist Christine Tamblyn describes in her essay "Qualifying the Quotidian: Artist's Video and the Production of Social Space" (1996) how ordinary people use the culture imposed on them by the technocratic elite, and she relates this to certain video art practices. She notes that video has become a primary tool in the production of social space. As a medium that is economically accessible and requires minimal technical skills to master, video is ideally suited as a vehicle for the close integration of art and life (in Renov and Suderburg 1996, 14–15). In the video artworks discussed by Tamblyn, video art and consumer video both serve as vehicles of cultural intervention. Examples include Lynn Hershman's electronic diary, records of vacations or other journeys in Chip Lord's

Immediacy versus Memory

Motorist (1989), and video used as a family album in Jeanine Mellinger's *In Those Days* (1988) and in Janice Tanaka's *Memories from the Department of Amnesia* (1989).

The latter is a virtual family album that reflects on the death of the mother of Japanese artist Tanaka. The artist juxtaposes "official" historical accounts with personal memories and anecdotes, combining still photographs, audio recording, and written inscriptions. In a detailed analysis of this work, Marita Sturken notes that for Tanaka the video form becomes an aid to bear witness and reclaim memories. Tanaka stated that in her childhood home "silence was the keeper of memories," and that her videotapes are a means of speaking through that silence (in Renov and Suderburg 1996, 8, 12). In this and other tapes discussed by Tamblyn and Sturken, memory is not seen as a depository of images to be excavated, but rather as an amorphous, ever-changing field of images. It is about acknowledging the impossibility of knowing what really happened, and a search for a means of telling about it.

Whereas Tanaka applied characteristics of the family album as home video genre, American artist Lynn Hershman created with *Electronic Diary* a video related to the genre of diary. It consists of three parts: *Confessions of a Chameleon* (1986), *Binge* (1987), and *First Person Plural* (1988). In the first part the artist describes how she was abused as a child and how in defense she constructed an imaginary personae for herself. The third part returns to her childhood abuse. As the second part most clearly uses technical aspects of the medium to underscore the contents, only *Binge* will be addressed here. This piece was recorded over a period of several months as she tried to lose forty-five pounds. Each day she set up the camera in her studio, addressing its fixed lens as one might address a therapist. She free-associated about her feelings toward her changing body. Throughout the tape Hershman employs special effects in an inventive manner to illustrate the ideas she broaches in her monologue: while talking about avoiding looking in mirrors, her image splits into two symmetrical halves; and a verbal allusion to physical distortion is counterpoised with a squeeze zoom that compresses her body into a thin column. When she states "we're taught to filter out our originality," an electronic filter applied to the image removes its color. And technical malfunctions during taping interrupt the depressed Hershman's confession of her own malfunction in losing only two pounds in six months. In this way, analogies are shown between abilities of the medium and events in reality portrayed by the medium (Tamblyn and James in Renov and Suderburg 1996, 20–21, 128).

Video Art Theory

In her essay "The Electronic Corpse: Notes for an Alternative Language of History and Amnesia," filmmaker and theorist Erika Suderburg discusses what Sean Cubitt calls "timeshifting," which is what makes video a revolutionary tool, as we throw off our passivity and reorganize received information ad infinitum to create our own programming (in Renov and Suderburg 1996, 103). Suderburg's most relevant case study is filmmaker Jean-Luc Godard and Anne-Marie Miéville's one-channel video work *Soft and Hard (Soft Talk on a Hard Subject between Two Friends)* (1985) (109–112). According to Suderburg, Godard was interested in video because he could control all the technical aspects of it simultaneously: shooting, lab work, and playback exist in one unit.

The tape shows Miéville arranging flowers, Godard on the phone needling a producer, Miéville at a film editing table, and then popping in videotapes of a soccer match. The domestic order of routine is perpetually infiltrated by the history of cinema through film stills. The main question deals with how one's personal image history is formed in the crosstalk between film history, the domestic refuge, televisual flow, the charting of a current historical news story, or the breakdown of these units in recollection (111). A hard question is where these "masses of objects" are laid to rest in a continuum that can include African famine and the American actress Lillian Gish. Their discussion then circles around the erasure of memory via television. Godard says he likes television because it does not show things. He can become lost in its free-flow fall and interrupt the flow with his own images. Miéville remarks: "television makes you think that it never shows things, but it never stops showing things and that is what showing things is" (112).

Tamblyn, Sturken, James, and Suderburg discuss in their essays in the volume *Resolutions 2* various ways in which artists react to amateur home video genres. In debates about the term "vernacular" scholars agree on the application of the term to the works of amateurs, but there is a lack of consensus as to whether the term includes works of professionals who create products for use in daily life, such as advertisements and educational and therapeutic tools. In his article "Wedding Video and Its Generation," cultural theorist James M. Moran discusses wedding videos as objects of cultural analysis. This genre of commercial event video falls, according to Moran, outside the typical lines of theoretical inquiry. As media, wedding videos are neither broadcast nor publicly exhibited. Their audiences are always local at the most micro demographic levels, yet cross all categories of ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and age. Adopting conventions from home

72

Immediacy versus Memory

movies, television broadcasts, still photography, and narrative filmmaking, the wedding video intersects several protocols of spectatorship and constructs new audience communities (Moran in Renov and Suderburg 1996, 360–361, 365).

Professional wedding videos do not seem to be an interesting target for video artists, contrary to the use of video as therapeutic tool by professional therapists. A good example is a video by the American artists Joe Gibbons and Tony Oursler: *Onourown* (1990). In this work the deployment of the medium as a therapeutic tool is satirized. The tape's premise is that the two protagonists – Gibbons and Oursler, playing marginalized artists – have been discharged from a psychiatric hospital due to budget cutbacks. To aid in their rehabilitation and adaptation to independent living, their therapist suggests keeping a video diary. Additionally the therapist has produced videotapes of mock counseling sessions that they are supposed to watch daily. These videotapes consist solely of the therapist's pat responses; the artists are supposed to "fill in the blanks" by talking back to their television set (Tamblyn in Renov and Suderburg 1996, 22–23).

Memory and psychology also play a role in theories about the medium of video, for instance in the use of the term "screen memories." Marita Sturken notes that images projected and transmitted on screens can be seen as "screen memories," which she relates to psychoanalysis (in Renov and Suderburg 1996, 1). According to Freud, a "screen memory" functions to hide painful memories that are too difficult for a subject to confront; the screen memory offers itself a substitute, while "screening out" the "real" memory. The introduction of editing tools in the course of the 1970s, and especially the digitization of the medium of video in the 1990s, increased the shift in video art from evoking real-time experiences to fragmented memory-like structures, as will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4, where also Freud's theory of "screen memory" will be related to Rodney Graham's video *Vexation Island*.

At the end of this section, I want to emphasize that it is not always immediately clear whether one is looking at a documentary, activist video, or video performance (the latter itself being a complicated category, as discussed in the former section). For instance, British artist Catherine Elwes presents herself in her video *With Child* (1983) during her pregnancy and reflects on the effects of it. Sean Cubitt discusses this video in *Timeshift: On Video Culture*, in which he investigates how video functions in both daily life and art and how it relates to the mass medium of television (1991, 131–132). Cubitt argues that Elwes works through

73

Video Art Theory

the more fragile dialectic of personal politics, particularly the strangeness which adults acquire around childbirth. He describes how the pregnant artist rehearses the activities and expressions of the child, while the child's toys, notoriously two stuffed monkeys, take on the adult roles of sexual activity. Cubitt emphasizes that pregnancy and childbirth are given a prominent position in ideologies of women's oppression: they guarantee the absolute difference of the woman, and tie her to the biology of her sex as the essence which she is preordained to fulfill. Elwes's tape pulls on many facets of pregnancy, the cultural meanings, the social status, to such an extent that the suggestion that this is only a "personal" piece would appear naïve if not actually ideologically limiting itself, according to Cubitt. Elwes's video is used by Cubitt to demonstrate that personal politics is a route through the interface of both the social and the individual. He relates Elwes's video to video documentaries, whereas Rose-Lee Goldberg emphasizes similarities with performance art (particularly performance art as part of new feminist criticism), such as cathartic self-analysis, endurance, visceral engagement with viewers, as well as the use of language, frequently as monologue (1998, 181).

In sum, my argument in the third section of this chapter has demonstrated in particular that the video works discussed either critically reflect on the medium's potential as a vehicle for memories or evoke awareness of the special power of video as an alternative tool of remembrance in social practice. This observation complements the results of my literary research and visual analysis approaches in the chapter's two previous sections, devoted to immediacy and comparative research of video art in relation to television and performance art. As I suggested, video artworks such as the ones discussed in the first section make viewers aware that the experience of immediate presence is an experience of mediated presence rather than an experience of directly presented reality, as television may seem to suggest to us. Moreover, the potential of video to mediate presence on the spot appears to be useful in performance art to support issues of self-other perception.

Technical developments have clearly influenced characteristics of video art, television, and video used in social practice. Still, intentional disturbance continues to play an important role in most of the video artworks discussed and its role is often emphasized in theoretical reflections on video art. Disturbances are either caused technically or evoked through contents or both: disturbance of immediacy, disturbance of memory, disturbance in expectations, or disturbance in interaction in

74

Immediacy versus Memory

order to increase the public's critical perception of audio-visual electronic mediation.

This chapter started with Gillian Wearing's video work *Trauma*. At the end of this chapter I conclude that the discussed strategy of immediacy used by television for directly addressing the viewer as conversation partner, as underscored by close-up and frontal presentation in the center of the screen, is also employed by Wearing. The HD-quality increases presentness, but the mask obstructs it, stressing the tension on television between private and public, as well as between exposing and obstructing views. The sections on video performances and video as tool in social practice make clear that *Trauma* is also related to the use of video as reflexive instrument in self-other relationships. Moreover, the work combines the suggestion of immediacy in addressing the viewer with the presentation of selective memory through the mask and story from the past. The importance of sound in this and other video works underscores that some video artworks are still in debt to video's roots in audiotape recording and in radio as the precursor of television. Sound strengthens real-time experiences and comes out of the image into the space of the public, which leads us to the various spatial characteristics of video art.

Notes

1 Some quotes (from Leighton 2008, 259): Andy Warhol: " . . . immediate playback. When you make movies you have to wait.."; Bruce Nauman: "Well, initially, it was the immediacy of the medium"; Frank Gillette: "People see videotape and what they read in their skulls is 'real' – it seems live, and has unstored quality like the immediacy of . . . the 7 o'clock news"; and Lynda Benglis: "Video was for me a way of presenting certain ideas that occurred in film, but presenting these ideas in a more immediate, self-revealing way"; Dan Graham: "Video is a present-time medium .. [it] feeds back indigenous data in the immediate, present-time environment"; Vito Acconci: "The immediacy of video was the most startling thing."

2 Gillian Wearing is quoted about the use of the masks in Krystof 2012, 13.

3 Chapter 3 will address color in video art more in-depth.

4 http://rhizome.org/editorial/2012/nov/29/sendreceive-liza-bear-and-willoughby-sharp-after-a/ (accessed December 3, 2013).

5 Chapter 3 elaborates on portrait videos.

6 For a historical overview of this genre, see, for instance, Bódy and Weibel 1987.

Video Art Theory

7 Nowadays television can also be watched outside the domestic spheres, e.g. on smart phones in public transport, but that does not change dramatically the private ambiance.

8 www.critical-art.net/Installations.html (accessed December 30, 2013).

9 Leung paraphrased by Pamela Kember. www.aaa.org.hk/Diaaalogue/Details/809 (accessed December 4, 2013).

10 For a brief overview of these debates, see Van Gelder and Westgeest 2011, Chapter 4 "Photography's Social Function: The Documentary Legacy."

References

Armes, Roy. 1988. *On Video*. London: Routledge.

Battcock, Gregory, ed. 1978. *New Artists' Video: A Critical Anthology*. New York, NY: E.P. Dutton & Co.

Berghaus, Günter. 2005. *Avant-garde Performance: Live Events and Electronic Technologies*. New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan.

Bódy, Veruschka, and Peter Weibel. 1987. *Clip, Klapp, Bum: Von der visuellen Musik zum Musikvideo*. Cologne: DuMont Buchverlag.

Boyle, Deirdre. 1997. *Subject to Change: Guerrilla Television Revisited*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Burgin, Victor. 2000. "Jenni's Room: Exhibitionism and Solitude." *Critical Inquiry*, 27 (1): 77–89.

Butler, Jeremy G. 2007 [2002]. *Television: Critical Methods and Applications*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.

Connolly, Maeve. 2009. *The Place of Artists' Cinema: Space, Site and Screen*. Bristol: Intellect Books, and Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Cubitt, Sean. 1991. *Timeshift: On Video Culture*. Oxford: Routledge.

Cubitt, Sean. 1993. *Videography: Video Media as Art and Culture*. Houndmills Basingstoke: MacMillan.

Davis, Douglas, and Allison Simmons, eds. 1977. *The New Television: A Public/Private Art*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Douglas, Stan, and Christopher Eamon, eds. 2009. *Art of Projection*. Ostfildern: HatjeCantzVerlag.

Druckrey, Timothy, ed. 1999. *Ars Electronica: Facing the Future*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Eckmann, Sabine. 2014. *In the Aftermath of Trauma: Contemporary Video Installations*. St. Louis, MO: Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum Washington University in St. Louis.

Ellis, John. 1996. "*Speed,* Film, and Television: Media Moving Apart." In *Big Picture, Small Screen: The Relations Between Film and Television*, edited by John Hill and Martin McLoone, 107–117. Luton: University of Luton Press.

Immediacy versus Memory

Fogle, Douglas, ed. 2003. *The Last Picture Show: Artists Using Photography, 1960–1982*. Minneapolis, MN: Walker Art Center.

Goldberg, RoseLee. 1998. *Performance: Live Art Since the 60s*. London: Thames & Hudson.

Graham, Dan. 2013 [1979]. *Video – Architecture – Television: Writings on Video and Video Works 1970–1978*. Zürich: Lars Müller Publishers.

Hall, Douglas, and Sally Jo Fifer, eds. 1990. *Illuminating Video*. New York, NY: Aperture Foundation.

Hanhardt, John G. 2000. *The Worlds of Nam June Paik*. New York, NY: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum.

Hanhardt, John G., and Ken Hakuta. 2012. *Nam June Paik: Global Visionary*. Washington: Smithsonian American Art Museum.

Hartley, John. 1999. *Uses of Television*. London: Routledge.

Hatfield, Jackie, ed. 2006. *Experimental Film and Video*. Eastleigh: John Libbey Publishing.

Jameson, Fredric. 1991. *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. London: Verso.

Joselit, David. 2007. *Feedback: Television against Democracy*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Krauss, Rosalind E. 1978 [1976]. "Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism." In *New Artists' Video*, edited by Gregory Battcock, 43–64. New York, NY: E.P. Dutton & Co.

Krystof, Doris, and Daniel F. Herrmann. 2012. *Gillian Wearing*. London: Whitechapel Gallery.

Langenbach, Tasja, ed. 2013. *Videonale 14*. Berlin: Distanz Verlag.

Leighton, Tanya, ed. 2008. *Art and the Moving Image: A Critical Reader*. London: Tate and Afterall.

Leung, Simon. 2008. "Questionnaire: Leung." *October*, 123: 102-104.

Lind, Maria, and Hito Steyerl, eds. 2008. *The Greenroom: Reconsidering the Documentary and Contemporary Art #1*. Berlin: Sternberg Press.

Ma, Ming-Yuen S., and Erika Suderburg, eds. 2012. *Resolutions 3: Global Networks of Video*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Marchessault, Janine, and Susan Lord, eds. 2007. *Fluid Screens/Expanded Cinema*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Mayer, Marc. 1996. *Being and Time: The Emergence of Video Projection*. Buffalo, NY: Albright-Knox Art Gallery.

McDonough, Tom. 2004. "No Ghost." *October*, 110: 107–130.

McLuhan, Marshall. 1964. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. New York, NY: The New American Library.

Meigh-Andrews, Chris. 2006. *A History of Video Art: The Development of Form and Function*. Oxford: Berg.

Osswald, Anja. 2003. *Sexy Lies in Videotapes: Künstlerische Selbstinszenierung im Video um 1970*. Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag.

Video Art Theory

Osswald, Anja. 2012. "Body Talk(s)." In *Stedelijk Collectie Reflecties*, edited by Jan van Adrichem and Adi Martis, 581–592. Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, and Rotterdam: nai010 publishers.

Peranson, Mark. 2011 [2009]. "If You Meet Your Double, You Should Kill Him: Johan Grimonprez on Double Take." *Cinema Scope*, 38 (Spring), 14–18. Reprinted in *'It's a Poor Sort of Memory That Only Works Backwards': On the Work of Johan Grimonprez*, edited by Benoit Detalle, 139–150. Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag.

Phelan, Peggy. 1993. *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*. London: Routledge.

Rancière, Jacques. 2006 [2001]. *Film Fables*. Translated by Emiliano Battista. Oxford: Berg Publishers.

Renov, Michael, and Erika Suderburg, eds. 1996. *Resolutions 2: Contemporary Video Practices*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Rosebush, Judson, ed. 1974. *Nam June Paik: Videa 'n' Videology, 1959–1973*. Syracuse, NY: Everson Museum of Art.

Rosler, Martha. 2004. *Decoys and Disruptions: Selected Writings 1975–2001*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Rush, Michael. 1999. *New Media in Late 20th-Century Art*. London: Thames & Hudson.

Rush, Michael. 2003. *Video Art*. London: Thames & Hudson.

Scannell, Paddy. 2002 [1996]. *Radio, Television and Modern Life: A Phenomenological Approach*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

Schmidt, Johann-Karl, ed. 2000. *Joan Jonas: Performances, Film, Installations 1968–2000*. Stuttgart: Hatje Cantz.

Schneider, Ira, and Beryl Korot, eds. 1976. *Video Art: An Anthology*. New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovitch.

Shamberg, Michael. 1971. *Guerrilla Television*. New York, NY: Henry Holt & Company.

Spielmann, Yvonne. 2008 [2005]. *Video: The Reflexive Medium*. Translated by Anja Welle and Stan Jones. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Spigel, Lynn. 1992. *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Van Gelder, Hilde, and Helen Westgeest. 2011. *Photography Theory in Historical Perspective: Case Studies from Contemporary Art*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing.

Wardrip-Fruin, Noah, and Nick Montfort, eds. 2003. *The New Media Reader*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Williams, Raymond. 1975 [1974]. *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*. New York, NY: Schocken Books.