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Proximity and Distance:
An Investigation on Interiority in Video Art

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A Thesis
In
The Department
of
Art History

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ABSTRACT

Proximity and Distance: An Investigation on Interiority in Video Art

Heather McDonald

This thesis examines how interiority is constructed in video art. Interiority is understood here to be an aspect of subjectivity that refers to self-reflection or self-regard. I argue that interiority is constructed as a psychological, spatial, and temporal phenomenon. The first chapter questions the theoretical links between narcissism and interiority and considers two videos in detail: Kate Craig's *Delicate Issue* (1979) and Rodrigue Jean's *La mémoire de l'eau* (1996). I look at how Craig and Jean construct interiority in their video practices as a psychological characteristic, and I draw on Sigmund Freud's theory of narcissism and Leo Bersani's views on interiority in my interpretation. Chapter Two addresses the notion of bodily space in video practice through a phenomenological perspective. In my analysis of Charlemagne Palestine's *Island Song* (1976) and Mona Hatoum's *So Much I Want to Say* (1983) in this chapter, I look at videographic space and bodily space through the lens of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's conception of space as something that one actively inhabits. In the third and final chapter of this thesis, I argue that interiority is informed by our conception of temporality. I examine the representation and manipulation of temporality in video by analyzing Gary Hill's *Why Do Things Get in a Muddle (Come on Petunia)* (1984) and Douglas Gordon's *24 Hour Psycho* (1993).

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Introduction: On Interiority in Video Art

At the heart of this inquiry is a rather simple question—How does video art speak to us about the self? In this thesis, I suggest that video speaks to us primarily through the concept of interiority. Interiority, as I refer to it here, implies a withdrawal from the external world. As we will see in the three chapters that follow, video art prompts us to consider how interiority is articulated through an individual video's form and content. This articulation of interiority has three distinctive characteristics. It is: first, psychological; second, spatial; and third, a temporal condition. Each chapter in the thesis addresses one of these elements. I discuss in detail two videos in each chapter. Each video is by a different artist.

The first chapter—which examines how video constructs interiority as a psychological state—focuses on the formation of the interior, psychic world in video art and how it is recognized as such. The analogy between the mirror and the camera frequently invoked by video artists leads us to examine the role of narcissism in psychologically-based interiority in video art. The second chapter involves a study of how video expresses a bodily apprehension of space. I map out the ways in which interiority in video is an explicit engagement with the space outside of oneself, supporting my argument by means of an analysis of two videos that envision spatiality beyond the paradigmatic metaphor of space as a container.¹ The third and final chapter considers how interiority is constructed through temporal processes inherent in the medium of video itself, such as the manipulation of duration and temporal order. The videos discussed in this chapter suggest a disruption of ordered and successive

¹ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 25-32.

representations of time. In other words, both the first and second chapters show how video art contributes to psychoanalytic and phenomenological discourses, while both the second and third chapters treat space and time not as objective conditions present in the videos but as conditions perceived by an embodied subject in a particular time and place.

A more peripheral but nonetheless important concern for this thesis is how subjectivity is constructed in video art through a discourse of essence and appearance. Spatial metaphors are often used to express the inadequacy of the surface, compared to the profundity of what is beneath. Hannah Arendt describes the entangled relation between semblance and authentic appearance in her book *The Life of the Mind*. Animals and humans alike are able to manipulate their own appearances for a variety of reasons, for example to deceive predators or entice a mate. But these appearances do not conceal an underlying truth, just as the chameleon's skin does not obscure a more real, truer version of itself. Our expectation of discovering an inner truth or reality by going beyond the surface is unfulfilled because of the absence of any clearly identifiable characteristics. Deceptive appearance revealed does not, according to Hannah Arendt, necessarily lead to the discovery of veridical appearance:

To uncover the "true" identity of an animal is not unlike the unmasking of the hypocrite. But what then appears under a deceptive surface is not an inside self, an authentic appearance, changeless and reliable in its thereness. The uncovering destroys a deception; it does not discover anything authentically appearing. An "inside self," if it exists at all, never appears to either the inner or the outward

sense, since none of the inner data possess stable, relatively permanent features which, being recognizable and identifiable, characterize individual appearance.²

Arendt's concern for the distinctions between essence and appearance stems from the philosophical issue of the hierarchy of Being over appearance.³ However, this characterization of the inner self as being devoid of fixed qualities may sound familiar and seem consistent with a poststructuralist version of the subject.

Contrary to the frequent devaluation of appearance, Arendt suggests that appearance has value in itself and should in fact be privileged over essence. The reversal of the traditional hierarchy has no deconstructive pretension because the hierarchy is maintained even though the values have shifted. Arendt, though, explains the notion that surface appearance is more valuable than essence with the example of a peacock, the feathers of which distinguish it from other animals, whereas its insides resemble those of many other animals.⁴ Of course, in Arendt's discussion there are many differences between Being and appearance on the one hand, and the inner, mental world and phenomenal world on the other, but we could imagine an analogy between the two. On the topic of the subject/object distinction, Arendt claims that "the worldliness of living things means that there is no subject that is not also an object and appears as such to somebody else, who guarantees its 'objective' reality."⁵ In a different context, Leo Bersani⁶ has proposed ideas about subjectivity that are similar to Arendt's notion of the combined subjectivity and objectivity of the self. From these perspectives, I suggest that video art shows us the indiscernible divide between subject and object, and by extension,

² Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1977), 39.

³ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 28-9.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁶ Leo Bersani, "Psychoanalysis and the Aesthetic Subject," *Critical Inquiry* 32 (Winter 2006): 167.

between interiority and exteriority. Following Arendt and Bersani, I propose in Chapter One that any formulation of the subject must account for the constitutive function of the object.

Although I speak of the medium of video throughout this thesis, the case studies that I discuss are all in analogue formats. Analogue systems were typically used by video artists working in the early decades of video art production (the 1960s to the 1980s), not only because of the cheaper cost of analogue equipment but also because of the emergence of analogue systems prior to digital systems. An analogue system is composed of an arrangement of magnetic particles on videotape that provide a continuous stream of information or an electrical signal that corresponds to the video image.⁷ The electrical signal produced in analogue systems is unstable (partly because of the way in which analogue systems carry their information), resulting in the degradation of the signal, and hence of the qualities of video's image and sound.⁸ Digital systems, on the other hand, use numbers for data input (a series of ones and zeros) and are more stable than analogue formats. One drawback to digital systems is that all data is reduced to either a one or a zero. Small fluctuations in the signal are unable to be accurately described by the code, limiting the type of information pictured and potentially the image itself. Since analogue systems are better suited to capture small fluctuations in the electrical signal, the video itself is more nuanced technically (and perhaps aesthetically) than video produced with a digital system, which must reduce data to the variables in a code. The differences in the appearance of the video, according to whether it is in analogue or digital format, may not always be visible to the viewer, but the blurriness of image, flatness of colour, and

⁷ William Fowler, "Keep Moving Images," <http://kmi.lux.org.uk/video/formats.htm> (accessed June 2, 2009).

⁸ Ibid.

immediacy common to analogue video have a pronounced effect for those with experience. From an archivist's or conservator's point of view, however, where preservation is a priority, the advantages of the digital format usually outweigh those of the analogue. A proper discussion of digital and analogue video art is better suited to a lengthier project than the one at hand. In any case, I have restricted my discussion in the chapters that follow to video art in analogue formats so as to maintain consistency in the analysis of the visual appearance of the videos used as case studies throughout the thesis.

The focus of this thesis is the representation of interiority and subjectivity in video, but it should be noted that writers have interpreted video in a variety of different ways. For instance, some theorists have discussed the physicality of the medium through an approach that focuses exclusively on the video apparatus itself. Frank Gillette,⁹ David Antin,¹⁰ Peggy Gale and Lisa Steele,¹¹ and Janine Marchessault¹² are among such theorists who have theorized the physical apparatus of video. David Antin, for example, argues that the technical and formal properties of video are determined by fundamental economic forces and fluctuations.¹³ The numerous formats and the apparatus itself are economically determined according to Antin, who points out that the large number of receiving devices dictates more viewers than producers of video. Antin puts it well: "The economic fact remains—transmission is more expensive than reception."¹⁴ The consequence of this according to Antin, is that those who are in control of the

⁹ Frank Gillette, *Frank Gillette Video: Process and Metaprocess*, ed. Jodson Rosenbush (Syracuse: Everson Museum of Art, 1973).

¹⁰ David Antin, "Video: The Distinctive Features of the Medium," in *Video Culture*, ed. John G. Hanhardt (New York: Visual Studies Workshop, 1986), 147-166.

¹¹ Peggy Gale and Lisa Steele, eds., *Video Re/view: The (Best) Source for Critical Writing on Canadian Artists' Video* (Toronto: Art Metropole and Vtape, 1996).

¹² Janine Marchessault, "Preface," in *Mirror Machine: Video and Identity*, ed. Janine Marchessault (Toronto: YYZ Books, 1995).

¹³ David Antin, op. cit., 150.

¹⁴ Antin, op. cit., 150.

transmission of video (or of broadcast television for that matter) have power over those who are only able to receive transmissions. Cubitt is another theorist who has theorized “video media,” in which he includes a broad range of practices from standard analogue systems to digital, computer-based imagery. Cubitt has argued that video cannot simply be defined by its technical make-up. Instead, video is a set of practices, relations, and possibilities around the use of video.¹⁵ This view can be contrasted with formalist conceptions of video that theorize the medium as essentially the transmission of sound and image via the magnetic arrangement of oxide particles. While Cubitt subscribes in some basic sense to a formalist methodology, and is willing to admit that at root video may be defined this way, he argues that this definition is essentially insufficient.¹⁶

In contrast to the view that video is about the set of practices and relations that coincide with the use of videotape, there is the position that video is objectively different from other art forms and that we should recognize this difference.¹⁷ All of these debates on the definition of video respond to the challenge posed by Rosalind Krauss in her essay “Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism.”¹⁸ In Krauss’s essay, she denounces formalist analysis in her unorthodox assertion that video should not be defined by its physical apparatus but by a psychological condition produced by its makers and viewers.¹⁹ Krauss proposes that video is narcissistic at its core. Her argument is based on the radical assertion that video art *is* the psychological condition of narcissism and that this is the cause a rift between video art and other artistic media. By radically defining video art as a

¹⁵ Sean Cubitt, *Timeshift: On Video Culture*, op. cit., 1.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ See Frank Gillette, *Frank Gillette Video: Process and Metaprocess*, ed. Jodson Rosenbush (Syracuse: Everson Museum of Art, 1973), 21.

¹⁸ Rosalind Krauss, “Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism,” *October* 1 (Spring, 1976): 50-64.

¹⁹ Ibid., 50.

psychological condition, Krauss reveals her concern for how video art produces subjectivity. She does not abandon a foundational theory (in other words a theory that names one attribute or condition as an underlying truth) but shifts the foundation from a formal one to a psychological one in order to better capture the experience of watching video art. This effort to formulate an analysis of video based on one's experience is one of the more important arguments she makes in this essay. The current project at hand is in large part a response to Krauss's cryptic but insightful essay.

The first and second chapters of this thesis are to a large extent an attempt to bridge the gulf between formal analysis and phenomenological concerns, just as Krauss has grounded her ideas on video art in both formal and phenomenological accounts of video. I consider the advantages of formalist readings of video and ask whether these pose a problem for a psychoanalytical reading. I also argue that formalist interpretation does not give a satisfactory account of the reception of art and the role that the communities of viewers and critics have in forming the meaning of a work of art. Instead, the connection Krauss sees between ethics and aesthetics is highlighted, especially in her formulation of a psychological model of video that binds the artist's subjectivity and his or her artistic intentions with the "object-state" of the medium.²⁰ In other words, Krauss suggests that the medium of video is charged with subjectivity. It is therefore not a neutral medium through which an artist's intentions pass. This link between ethics and aesthetics is relevant in a discussion of subjectivity and video because it underlines the importance of the relation between artist, viewer, and art object (or apparatus) as a network in the creation of meaning. Lastly, Krauss considers how a critique of formalism might illuminate our experience of viewing video art. Formalist debates in the 1960s

²⁰ Ibid., 52.

were heated, and Krauss's statement in 1976 with "Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism" surely was also a response to Michael Fried's pivotal essay "Art and Objecthood," written nine years earlier in 1967.

Throughout my discussion of interiority, however, there is a strong interest in formalist discourse. Formalist analysis of video art was a popular method of interpretation during video's coming of age in the 1960s and 1970s. Rosalind Krauss made a theoretical leap from a formalist aesthetic analysis to one based on the viewer's experience. It is precisely in the gap between the formalism of the 1960s and this phenomenological wave that I wish to situate my own interpretations of the videos selected here.

Chapter One of this thesis addresses the question of how video art presents us with a psychological description of interiority. Three theoretical views form the basis of the interpretations of the videos in this chapter: Sigmund Freud's theory of narcissism, Leo Bersani's view of interiority, and Rosalind Krauss's perspective on video. Representing an individual's withdrawal from the world into the mind, the notion of interiority that I develop in this chapter is not a retreat from physical reality, but an incorporation of it into an intersubjective exchange between subjects, objects, and things. I consider how Kate Craig's *Delicate Issue* (1979) and Rodrigue Jean's *La mémoire de l'eau* (1996) treat the metaphor of visual proximity as a way of communicating the psychological relation between the self and other. Craig's running commentary speaks of the necessity of physical distance for the production of desire, but all the while the lens of the camera closes in on a female body to the point of abstraction. Functioning as a trope for sensuality, desire, and boundaries, human skin is drawn into visual dialogue with the

lens of the camera. Skin becomes an analogy for the camera lens and, either accidentally or intentionally, when the lens comes into contact with the recorded body the viewer feels a sense of intrusion herself. The camera lens stands in for the “skin” of another body and acts as a conduit through which we project our own fantasies. Given that skin is used as a metaphor for surface and appearance, I will consider in this chapter how subjectivity is characterized in Craig’s video as a function of desire. Alternatively, in Jean’s video there is a mythological allusion to the Narcissus myth with the depiction of water and its reflective properties. Here, the analogies between water, mirrors, and the camera lens are emphasized by the inner turmoil the narrator faces.

Nicole Gingras has commented on Craig’s videos and has suggested that the theme of the mosaic runs throughout her oeuvre.²¹ Gingras points out that Craig’s *Delicate Issue* is about the relation between the recorded body and a body that looks. The fragmented details in *Delicate Issue* are brought into tension with the idea of the whole body. Influenced by the idea of the mosaic, Gingras describes Craig’s video as a collage, composed of different fragments that create “the shimmering effect characteristic of the video image.”²² Gingras points out that there is a curiosity to identify the limits of interiority and exteriority in Craig’s video, and that this is evident through the exploration of the fragment and the detail in *Delicate Issue*. While Gingras’s essay alludes to many important themes in Craig’s video, such as the treatment of the relation between the viewer and the recorded body, there are many questions that go unanswered in regards to how Craig’s video approaches interiority. For instance, why does interiority seem to be developed as a protective feature deployed by the recorded subject and why does it

²¹ Nicole Gingras, “The Movement of Things,” in *Kate Craig: Skin*, ed. Grant Arnold (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1998), 24-26.

²² *Ibid.*, 25.

function as a defence against the viewer who is characterized as an anonymous and hostile intruder?

Jean's *La mémoire de l'eau* typically seems to fall under the category of short film rather than video art, so it is not within the typical range of work selected for show in art galleries in museums. Few have written about Jean's *La mémoire de l'eau* at all and even fewer have written about this work in any depth. Much of the literature consists of brief and frequently superficial reviews in newspapers in magazines or biographical details about Jean. The inclusion of *La mémoire de l'eau* in this thesis is a contribution to scholarship on video in itself when one considers the limited amount of analysis that exists about this work. By considering how Jean's video is similar to other, more established and well-recognized video artists, such as Kate Craig and Gary Hill, I propose a reading of his work within an art historical context and outside of the film studies context in which he is usually stationed.

Whereas Chapter One addresses the issue of how interiority in video is psychological, Chapter Two consists of an investigation into the relationship between video art and interiority by examining the significance of spatiality in the medium. I propose that interiority is manifested through a bodily engagement with videographic space. Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological views on space and the body are of primary theoretical importance for my interpretations of the videos discussed in this chapter. The chapter consists of a detailed analysis of two videos, the first of which, by Charlemagne Palestine, is *Island Song* (1976) and the second of which is Mona Hatoum's *So Much I Want to Say* (1983). Both videos show a bodily engagement with space in which the latter is imagined not simply as a container but as something we activate and

create.²³ In this Merleau-Pontian characterization of space, lived experience precedes all our thoughts and theories about space.²⁴ The metaphor of the container, then, is replaced by the idea of a spatiality that is deployed by the body.

Palestine's *Island Song* is about the threat of enclosure and the desire to get outside oneself. Palestine takes a trip across St. Pierre, the small island off the east coast of Canada. With a video camera strapped to his chest, the artist directs the viewer's line of sight onto the road ahead of him as he rapidly passes the occasional person or car. The video is an expression of displacement, orientation, confinement, and escape, each in relation to the body, and the consequent futility of attempting to escape the self.

Antonio Guzman has commented on Palestine's video practice, identifying an element of spiritualism in it. Guzman suggests that Palestine's recurrent use of stuffed animals in his video, performance art, and sculpture is ritualistic.²⁵ Linking Palestine's use of soft, plush toys with the practices of artists such as Joseph Beuys and Jeff Koons who have also incorporated animals in their work, Guzman draws out connections with artists that are not typically associated with Palestine. The stuffed animals that Palestine uses throughout much of his sculpture, installation, and occasionally video work can be kitsch, but Guzman points out that Palestine's use of stuffed animals and toys is uniquely optimistic and nostalgic, as if he were attempting to regain a juvenile state of grace.²⁶ Although *Island Song* is one of the exceptions to the work that Guzman discusses—it does not incorporate toys and stuffed animals—one could argue that there is a similar

²³ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Space," chap. in *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith, 283-347 (London and New York: Routledge, 2002).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 164.

²⁵ Guzman, Antonio, et. al., *Sacred Bordello*, ed. Antonio Guzman (London and New York: Black Dog, 2003), 21.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 25.

attempt to regain a lost state of grace in this video as well. Unlike Guzman's interpretation of Palestine's work, my interpretation of *Island Song* does not give much consideration to any religious or spiritual aspect in Palestine's work. I argue that Palestine expresses a bodily apprehension of space where objects, such as the motorcycle he rides and the video camera he uses, are prosthetic.

The second video discussed in this chapter—Hatoum's *So Much I Want to Say*—also deals with the theme of confinement and escape, although in a much different way. Instead of travelling distances physically, the artist's performance is captured using slow-scan video, which transmits a signal over long distances (in this case from Vancouver to Vienna). The video consists of a series of still images that unfold on the screen every eight seconds. Struggling to free herself from someone's hold, Hatoum repeats the title of the video. The real space of the artist's body is juxtaposed to the virtuality of the physical distance the electronic signal crosses. Bodily space is enhanced by video technology that is specifically designed for long distance communication.

In my analyses of Hatoum's and Palestine's videos in this chapter, I examine how the bodily apprehension of space in video is made visible to the viewer thereby enhancing the notion of interiority. This involves the use of various formal techniques, for instance the blurring of the image or the positioning of the camera. These techniques work to create either a welcoming or an impenetrable space for the viewer. Proximity restricts the visibility of the interior realm and potentially leads to a tactile definition of interiority. There is also the question of whether there is a "correct" distance between self and other, and whether establishing one is worthwhile. Since the dynamic of transmission and reception by the public is different for video art than it is for other more conventional

media, interference and distraction are commonly experienced and are frequently underestimated as perceptual phenomena informing our experience of the work. Mona Hatoum's *So Much I Want to Say* and Charlemagne Palestine's *Island Song* are promising videos to look at in this regard because of the various perceptual techniques that they use in the formal elaboration of space.

Desa Philippi's essay "Do Not Touch"²⁷ and Guy Brett's "A Hatoum Chronology"²⁸ have each provided me with an overview of Hatoum's work as a whole. In Philippi's essay, she marks out the tendency in Hatoum's work to be concerned with mechanical repetition and the compulsion to repeat. The body is implied as a mechanical apparatus that supplies measurement and proportion.²⁹ Guy Brett's overview of Hatoum's work identifies the use of graphic space, or mathematically defined space in her large-scale installations since 1989.³⁰ He identifies the use of space in this manner as a recurrent theme in Hatoum's oeuvre. Philippi and Brett each identify key components to Hatoum's work that have helped me to situate *So Much I Want to Say* in regards to other works by Hatoum and to frame the video in terms of issues of space and the body.

From spatiality and interiority in the second chapter, I move to the issue of temporality and interiority in the third chapter. This final chapter approaches the related issue of duration in video art and how it informs interiority. By drawing on Reinhart Koselleck's notions of the "space of experience" and the "horizon of expectation" and Gilles Deleuze's notion of "indiscernibility," I consider how interiority is shaped by conceptions of temporality. In this section, simultaneity and repetition are two kinds of

²⁷ Desa Philippi, "Do Not Touch," in *Mona Hatoum*, 4-13 (Bristol: Arnolfini, 1993).

²⁸ Guy Brett, "A Hatoum Chronology," in *Mona Hatoum*, 14-28 (Bristol: Arnolfini, 1993).

²⁹ Desa Philippi, *op cit.*, 9.

³⁰ Guy Brett, *op.cit.*, 24.

temporal constructions in which I address how a temporal logic in video art may be integral to a reading of interiority. Each video in this chapter addresses the temporal issue of repetition and confronts feelings of disjunction with the self. Video art is frequently used as an example of a medium that has a direct relation to the passage of time. It takes time for a viewer to watch video art. There is, of course, a history of artists' experimentation with "real time" in video or with techniques that test the physical limits of the medium. Issues of preservation and obsolete video formats have been at the forefront of discussions on media art and still prove to be a challenge for institutions that house video art. Aside from the links that one could arguably make between the structural elements of video and its particular dependency on the passage of time, there is something intuitively important about the relation between video and issues of spatiality and temporality.

Gary Hill's *Why Do Things Get in a Muddle (Come on Petunia)* (1984) and Douglas Gordon's *24 Hour Psycho* (1999) are the two videos I discuss in the third chapter where I argue that video produces interiority as a temporal characteristic. Holger Broecker has discussed Gordon's *24 Hour Psycho* as a post-structuralist response to cinema.³¹ Focusing on the division between image and sound (or silence in the case of *24 Hour Psycho*), Broecker frames Gordon's video alongside *Feature Film*, Gordon's first feature-length film, in which Hitchcock's films are once again used as inspiration. Broecker's discussion of Gordon's work consists of an analysis that focuses largely on Gordon's concern for time and memory as well as his tendency to appropriate popular cinema. Phillip Monk has also written about Gordon's work although unlike Broecker's

³¹ Holger Broecker, "Cinema is Dead! Long Live Film! The Language of Video Images in the Work of Douglas Gordon," in *Superhumannatural*, 61-80 (Edinburgh, National Galleries of Scotland, 2006).

take on Gordon, Monk's interpretation of *24 Hour Psycho* is largely informed by psychoanalytic theory.³²

Gary Hill's videos have been discussed by Lynne Cooke as dispensing with daily conceptions of time in order to create an eternal present in the case of Hill's *Inasmuch* and in his more recent videos, such as *Between Cinema and a Hard Place* (1991) and *Tall Ships* (1992).³³ In her essay "Postscript: Re-embodiments of Alter-Space" Cooke argues that Hill produces work that explores the implications of electronic media for bodily experience. Cooke suggests that Hill's video work shows us that electronic media can provide open, techno-social spaces. According to Cooke, Hill's work presents us with a vision of embodiment that is positively influenced by technology and electronic media. Hill avoids a prescriptive answer to the troubles that lie in the difference between simulated and actual experience, and as a result his work presents us with the notion that new forms of social interaction and development can occur through video practice. Cooke's discussion of Hill's video practice focuses on issues of virtual embodiment and technology; whereas my discussion of Hill's video, *Why Do Things Get in a Muddle* (*Come on Petunia*) focuses on the issue of temporality in Hill's video and how interiority is produced through a concern with temporal order.

Chapter Three concludes with brief comments on Hal Foster's book *The Return of the Real* and its application to my discussion of duration and interiority. Foster's book is an important text for this study because of the temporal relation he defines between the neo-avant-garde and the historical avant-garde. He argues for a "parallactic" treatment of

³² Philip Monk, "The Split of the Unconscious: 24 Hour Psycho," chap. 1 in *Double Cross: The Hollywood Films of Douglas Gordon* (Toronto: The Power Plant and the Art Gallery of York University, 2003).

³³ Lynne Cooke, "Postscript: Re-embodiments in Alter-Space," in *Gary Hill*, ed. Robert C. Morgan, 135-148 (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2000).

history, which is to say that the relation of events in history must be framed from a double perspective so as to reveal the processes of “anticipated futures and reconstructed pasts.”³⁴ I consider how the emergence of video in the 1960s may be considered in terms of Foster’s view of history and how this view informs a discussion of interiority as a relational exchange between subjects, objects, and things.³⁵ Foster isolates two kinds of discourse that emphasize this understanding of the self based on the partial presence of the other: psychoanalytic discourse and anthropological discourse. Drawing on Jacques Lacan’s conception of the real, Foster argues that the “return of the real” in contemporary art is a return of the subject to art, but not necessarily a unitary, humanist subject. Foster then claims that, contrary to the Lacanian conception of art that aims to pacify the gaze, some contemporary art aims to access the real or replicate instances where the real might be exposed.

The daunting task of making an original contribution to the literature on video art is met with some deference on my part. I have benefited from much guidance and insight from not only other writers on video art but also from professors and peers who have conversed with me about the issues of concern in this thesis. It is my hope that this thesis provides readers with a valuable and persuasive analysis of the six videos studied and of video as an art form. It was not long ago when I first became captivated by video art. In my final year as an undergraduate, I enrolled in a course on video theory and history. Immersed in video art for four hours every week, I left the classroom each week in something of a daze but nonetheless happy as a clam. But it was not until I read Rosalind

³⁴ Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 207.

³⁵ For a distinction between these three terms (subject, object, thing) please see Bill Brown, “Thing Theory,” *Critical Inquiry* 28:1 (Autumn, 2001): 1-22.

Krauss's essay *Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism* that I realized there was indeed something remarkable about how some video art can draw the viewer into a magical world or conjure up feelings that seemed to be long forgotten. And while there are plenty of writers on video art nearly fifty years after its first inception, it is rare for an analysis of video art to examine interiority as not only a characteristic of subjectivity but as a process that is detectable in the formal techniques used by video artists. It is in this area that this thesis makes its contribution to the critical study of video art. Too often writers who attempt a post-structuralist analysis of video explain away or gloss over the formal elements of video that are valuable in viewer's experience of watching and the artist's experience in creating.³⁶

³⁶ My concern for the internal workings of the self poses at least a couple risky assumptions that are potentially problematic. First of all, what is to be said about an understanding of subjectivity that exists in an interior space? The spatial metaphor of the self as a container for the psyche is problematic chiefly because it disallows an account of modification, change, and permeability. We must also ask what conditions such an internal space is subject to. It could also be argued that I have privileged the interior psychic world over the material, real world in this thesis. To this I would reply that I give priority to interiority as an experience for the viewer in video art insofar as it is an intersubjective exchange that produces it. A second potential objection to my articulation of interiority as a psychological realm is that it presumes an individual, autonomous subject. This issue is less easy to address. The liberalist, autonomous subject is an easy target these days because of the wave of post-structuralist critiques of the last few decades. I propose that we consider what is worth preserving of the autonomous subject. But in order to see what this may be, we must turn to some examples of videos that prompt us to consider this very question.

Chapter 1: Reflection, Absorption, and the “I” in Video Art

But because the other, over there, remains irreducible, because he resists all interiorization, subjectification, idealization in a work of mourning, the ruse of narcissism never comes to an end. What one cannot see one can still attempt to reappropriate, to calculate the interest, the benefit, the usury.³⁷

The two videos that I discuss in this chapter are marked by an appeal to inwardness. By this I mean that each expresses introspection both in content and technique. In these videos, however, interiority is not simply the subject’s narcissistic preoccupation with itself as an individual apart from the outside world. Kate Craig’s *Delicate Issue* (1979) and Rodrigue Jean’s *La mémoire de l’eau* (1996) each show interiority as involvement between the boundaries of the self and the world. In other words, this involvement constitutes interiority through the subject’s engagement with the world.³⁸ It is perhaps unusual to think of interiority as a psychological state fundamentally shaped by a relation with the external world, but not unprecedented.³⁹ My hypothesis in this chapter is that each of the videos discussed presents us with a view of interiority that is understood as a psychological state informed by exteriority. By examining the content and formal techniques used in video, I hope to elucidate this hypothesis and shed light upon how video art contributes to discourse on subjectivity and in particular discourse on interiority.

Delicate Issue (see fig. 1) begins with an abstracted image, a shimmering and reflective field of light at close range. Upon closer examination we see a tuft of hair, as

³⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993), 70.

³⁸ Leo Bersani’s writing on relational subjectivity and interiority as a product of relational exchange has been highly influential for my interpretation of the two videos in this chapter. See Leo Bersani, “Psychoanalysis and the Aesthetic Subject,” *Critical Inquiry* (Winter 2006): 161-174.

³⁹ Here I allude to Gilles Deleuze’s concept of the fold, in which difference (such as the difference between inside and outside) is theorized as a continuity that is based on exchange with one another. See Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. Tom Conley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

light bounces off individual strands illuminating the picture. The sound of a heart beating on the soundtrack draws us in, the rhythmic pulse intimate and near. Scrolling across a naked body, the videographer stops and focuses the camera on various details: the inner ear, the thumbprint, the eyeball, and the nostril. But what one eventually recognizes as a nostril is at first recognized only as texture and shape. The delay in correctly identifying the subject of each frame urges the viewer to become aware of the visual details, the different textures of the skin in each frame, taut or folded, smooth or ridged. The focus of the camera routinely shifts to different locations on what we soon identify as a female body. Images are sometimes identified through deduction and sometimes not identified at all.

Confrontation between the viewer and the recorded subject in *Delicate Issue* paradoxically leads to an uncertainty of whom or what is confronted. A voiceover interrogates the viewer and directs the viewer's attention to the images on screen. The voice didactically addresses the viewer in the second person and asks a series of incisive questions: "How close can the camera be?" "How close do *I* want to be?" "How close do you want to be?" "How real to you want me to be?" The personal pronoun in this case is ambiguous. Is the woman pictured in the video the same woman who speaks? The voice persists in its questioning while the camera brushes against skin and the image shifts in and out of focus. In a gentle yet persistent voice the commentary continues, "The closer the subject, the clearer the intent. The closer the image, the clearer the idea, or does intimacy breed obscurity?" On one hand, visibility is enhanced by magnification, and on the other, visibility is restricted by a lack of visual context. The question posed in the commentary about whether intimacy breeds obscurity is answered by the indiscernibility

of the female body at close range. The difficulty of identifying objects at close range in *Delicate Issue* suggests that it is what the viewer cannot see that is of importance. The inability of the viewer to accurately identify and name each detail of the object on camera brings into question an external reality that is never fully appropriated or incorporated by the viewing subject.

In Craig's video, it is the artist herself on camera, her naked body the subject on view. Like many video artists in the 1970s who recorded themselves, *Delicate Issue* is representative of a tendency to videotape oneself as an investigative act, all the while establishing a direct relationship with the viewer. Here, we could think of Lisa Steele's diaristic, *Birthday Suit – with scars and defects* (1974), in which Steele recounts a personal story for each of the scars on her body. Or, we could think of Vito Acconci's *Undertone* (1972), in which Acconci sits at a table facing the viewer and recounts a fantasy about a girl under the table. In *Delicate Issue*, however, the face-to-face approach is denied in favour of a face-to-body approach. As a result, confrontation between the viewer and subject recorded remains but is de-personalized in Craig's video.

Vancouver Art Gallery curator Grant Arnold suggests that the female body in Craig's video—the object of the viewer's voyeuristic gaze—becomes de-erotised by the use of two formal techniques: the framing of the image in extreme close-up and the voiceover that confronts the viewer's desire to watch without detection.⁴⁰ Arnold identifies an oscillation between powerlessness and control for the viewer. The viewer's desire to objectify and sexualize the body is disrupted by the confrontational voiceover, yet the viewer is encouraged to look at and scrutinize the female body at length. But does the didactic commentary interrupt or prompt the viewer's voyeuristic gaze? What is the

⁴⁰ Grant Arnold, "Kate Craig: Skin," in *Kate Craig: Skin* (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1998), 11.

relation between what is said and what is shown in *Delicate Issue*? Arnold overlooks the interplay between the voice and the body in *Delicate Issue*. He assumes the speaker and the recorded body are one and the same person. One could, however, interpret the voiceover and body to be independent of each other; the difference in tone between the voiceover and the images gives us reason to believe that there is more than one subjectivity represented. I would suggest that there is a division between the interrogative voice and the body and that this points to the representation of more than one female subject, despite the fact that both voiceover and performance are conducted by the artist herself.

Curator and writer Nicole Gingras has commented on Craig's video and has noticed the split that occurs between the voiceover commentary and the body. She describes how Kate Craig "explores the relation, possible yet unbearable, between the image and the observer"⁴¹ through the separation of voice from body. The gap, however, between the textual commentary and representational image is not fully explained by Gingras. How does this technique of separation implicate the observer? Does the object begin to take on subjective qualities of its own? Finally, does the viewer become objectified in the process of viewing? Gingras also describes the effect of framing a shot at close distance: "the more extreme the framing of a shot, the more dynamic the experience of identifying, recognizing and naming what is being observed. When confronted with the illegible—meant here as difficult to read—the act of seeing often becomes more concrete and, for this reason, refers us to a body, our own."⁴² Gingras is right about the effects of the framing of the shots in Craig's video. The act of seeing is

⁴¹ Nicole Gingras, "The Movement of Things," in *Kate Craig: Skin* (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1998), 23.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 17.

dramatically altered by the proximity of the camera. The proximity of the camera thus draws our attention to the interiority of the viewer and the inability to accurately understand or identify the external reality outside of subjectivity.

The formation of interiority in Craig's video is not simply a process of the subject's own narcissistic preoccupation with itself. Rather, interiority is constructed as a process of exchange with the viewer, an involvement between the subject on screen and the subject viewing the screen. Interiority is constructed as relational process, and in many ways is antithetical to the idea of a narcissistic preoccupation with the self as independent from the world. This is not to say that Craig's video simply overlooks narcissism in its elaboration of subjectivity. In order to better understand how it moves beyond the notion of narcissistic interiority, we will consider the concept in more detail in the pages that follow. As we have begun to see, Craig's video constructs interiority in two ways: (1) by considering how visibility either allows or hinders an articulation of the self; and (2) by emphasizing the intrusiveness of the video apparatus.

We have already touched on the importance of the viewer's inability to identify certain images in Craig's video, but we must also ask what is constructed as *visible*. For instance, we could say that the images of skin are visible in Craig's video. After all, the video is composed exclusively of shots of the surface of a female body. But this doesn't seem entirely accurate when we consider how much time the viewer spends trying to figure out what exactly is pictured. Some parts of the body, such as the eye and the mouth, are easy to identify because we anticipate seeing them. We also see these details more easily because they are recorded in an easily identifiable way. Filmed in focus and at the center of the frame, these images are more visible to the viewer. Compared to shots

that are blurry and out of focus, the image of the vagina is recorded so as to allow the viewer to spend time looking. The viewer is confronted with his or her own pleasure or unease upon viewing the occasionally pornographic images in an art gallery setting. This seems to reinforce an eroticized gaze rather than to inhibit one.

Grant Arnold, as noted earlier, suggests that the video prevents a voyeuristic gaze through the use of commentary that confronts the objectifying gaze. In fact, the voyeuristic gaze in *Delicate Issue* is much more likely reinforced. This becomes apparent if we consider the filming technique during the sequence of images that show a vagina. The images are not blurry or obscured by any quick movement of the camera. They are stark and unyielding images. *Delicate Issue* presents the viewer with unrestricted visibility by extending the duration of image and the increasing the clarity of the picture. In doing so, *Delicate Issue* reinforces the viewer's voyeuristic gaze. Moreover, the placement of the image of the vagina in relation to the other visual details in the video suggests that parts of the body viewed in succession have little meaning without more visual context. In other words, Craig's video reinforces a voyeuristic gaze through filming techniques but deprives the viewer of the visual context to make sense of the images. Thus many of the images remain abstractions to the viewer's eye that consist only of surfaces, textures, and colours. The fragmented sequence of details disallows continuity between each frame, creating a disjointed representation of the body in *Delicate Issue*. This lack of continuity between each frame suggests an incomplete representation of the subject on camera. Interiority is therefore constructed as invisible to the viewer, something that must be filled in and imagined by the viewer. Voyeuristic pleasure thus remains for the viewer who imagines it.

The second means of the formation of subjectivity in Craig's video is the intrusiveness of the video apparatus. The camera operates as an obstacle between the viewer and the recorded subject. It both establishes and eliminates distance between the viewer and the recorded subject. Brushing against the skin of the recorded body, the camera intrudes on personal, bodily space. The physical boundary of the skin of the recorded subject is brought into contact with the camera, which mediates between viewer and recorded subject. Interiority is thus produced through the mediation of the camera; that is, the shifting distance between recorded subject and viewer draws our attention to the interiority of the recorded subject, the space where the camera cannot reach and the interiority of the viewer, who cannot distinguish and identify every detail of the body on camera. Not only does the video apparatus have a role of its own in *Delicate Issue*, but it also stands in for the viewer. The video apparatus's ultimate failure to represent the recorded body as a whole should not be regretted as it signifies the impossibility of an absolute appropriation of the other.

Over the last few pages I have argued that Craig's video presents us with a psychological view of interiority that is informed by a relation with an external world. An alternative position is that interiority necessarily excludes concern for what is external to the self, that interiority is essentially narcissistic. In order to better understand how the medium of video has been paired with the concepts of narcissism and interiority, I will discuss two short texts by Sigmund Freud and one text by Rosalind Krauss. The goal of these short explanations of narcissism is to clarify how the concept functions in a psychoanalytic context and how video and narcissism have been linked in art theory.

These aspects are important to consider because Craig's and Jean's videos respond to the concept of narcissism through the production of interiority.

Narcissism has been often associated with video art, but few texts on video have been as pivotal in establishing this connection as Rosalind Krauss's 1976 essay "Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism". In this essay, Krauss argues that video art *is* narcissism. She addresses the oppositional relation between form and content by pointing out that we are not accustomed to thinking of the medium itself as narcissistic. More often than not the video medium is identified as an "object-state," distinct from the artist and distinct from his or her intentions. But Krauss proposes that we can reconceive of video as a fluid dynamic between object and subject rather than simply as machinery. Krauss's approach is a dramatic and radical alternative to Greenbergian formalism, an approach that is further developed in her discussion of reflexivity and reflection.

Krauss defines "reflection" as a "move towards an external symmetry" and "reflexiveness" as "a strategy to achieve a radical asymmetry, from within."⁴³ The former can be understood as a fusion of object and subject, whereas the latter as a bifurcation of subject and object. For Krauss, reflection implies appropriation of the object and a move towards the dissolution of the traditional divide between subject and object. She suggests that reflexivity is a characteristic of Modernism that identifies the object so that the subject becomes visible. The object of video (the apparatus itself) does not factor into the definition of the self because the narcissistic self is all-consuming and, thus, appropriates the object in the process.

In Krauss's discussion of the psychoanalytic process between analysand and analyst, the narcissistic patient undergoes treatment with the aim of rediscovering the

⁴³ Ibid., 183.

“real time of his own history.”⁴⁴ A measure of success is whether the patient substitutes the “atemporality of repetition with the temporality of change.”⁴⁵ Similarly, there is a temporal quality to Krauss’s development of a definition of video. Temporality is repressed in video through the process of instant feedback. The difference between other arts and video, for Krauss, is the fact that the video artist’s subjectivity is limited to the historical and material independence of the object created. The repression of temporality and the distinct subject and object seem to allow for a shift in how the artist and the viewer experience the art.⁴⁶ Krauss’s argument about the narcissistic nature of video is insightful but not sufficient to explain important elements in either *Delicate Issue* or *La mémoire de l’eau*, for instance the direct address to the viewer in the spoken dialogue in each video. Therefore, I suggest that interiority in these videos is better understood as an involvement with the world outside the self rather than a narcissistic preoccupation with itself.

If we imagine a spectrum of possible types of interaction with the external world, a narcissistic interaction would be on one end of the spectrum, involving the least amount of concern for objects, people, and things outside of oneself. But is it possible to think of narcissism as relational? To address this question, I will look at Sigmund Freud’s theory of narcissism in his two essays directly on the subject, “On Narcissism: An Introduction”⁴⁷ and “Narcissism and Libido Theory.”⁴⁸ The psychoanalytic concept of

⁴⁴ Rosalind Krauss, “Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism,” *Video Culture*, ed. John G. Hanhardt (New York: Visual Studies Workshop, 1986), 186.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Sigmund Freud, “On Narcissism: An Introduction,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey, vol. XIV (London: Hogarth Press, 1963).

⁴⁸ Sigmund Freud, “The Libido Theory and Narcissism,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey, vol. XVI. 412-430. (London: Hogarth Press, 1963).

narcissism sheds light on the content and potentially the form of video, as we have seen by looking at Rosalind Krauss's notions on the relation between video and narcissism. Among Freud's many detractors are those who consider his theories to be at the very least irrelevant and at the very worst a crude system of sexist ideology. These views usually ignore the abundant creativity of his ideas and fail to properly historicize the texts. I will give a more generous reading of Freud's texts and leave an appropriate examination of these accusations for a lengthier version of this project. As we will soon see, Freud's conception of narcissism is important to an understanding of the psychological attributes of interiority in video art.

The clinical use of the term "narcissism" in Freudian psychoanalytic theory is somewhat different from our normal, everyday use of the term. Freud uses his libido theory to account for what he describes as the narcissistic attitude in his classic essay "On Narcissism: An Introduction." As the title of the essay implies, Freud gives an introduction to the concept of narcissism in psychoanalytic theory, while acknowledging the earlier use of the term in the work of German psychiatrist Paul Näcke (1851-1913) and British psychologist Havelock Ellis (1859-1939), both of whom used versions of the word to identify similar psychological concepts.⁴⁹ According to Freud, the narcissistic attitude typically entails the megalomaniacal, or the exaggeration of the power of one's mental thoughts or wishes.⁵⁰ The narcissistic attitude is caused by an operation performed by the libido "that has been withdrawn from the external world [and] has been directed to the ego and thus gives rise to an attitude which may be called narcissism." Thus,

⁴⁹ Sigmund Freud, "On Narcissism: An Introduction," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey, vol. XIV (London: Hogarth Press, Ltd. 1963), 73.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 75.

narcissism is defined by Freud as a withdrawal from the external world that results from the operation of the libido. But when we look into Freud's theory of the libido, there is evidence to suggest the libido performs a fundamentally relational interaction with the world.

One of Freud's most fundamental theories in his system of thought is the libido theory. Used to explain the narcissistic state for the affected individual, the libido is a sexual and psychic energy present in all individuals. In his essay "On Narcissism," Freud explains a division of the libido between "object-libido" and the "ego-libido," two complementary forms of the libido that may function to varying degrees in an individual, welling up at times in the individual or becoming unbalanced.⁵¹ In his essay "Libido Theory and Narcissism," Freud attempts to distinguish between egoism and narcissism. Egoism, he says, implies a preoccupation with the individual's own advantage while narcissism implies the individual's libidinal satisfaction in his own self.⁵² Narcissism, then, is libidinal satisfaction with one's own self along with a corresponding lack of desire for objects that normally provide libidinal satisfaction in non-narcissistic individuals.⁵³ Narcissism, as it is developed in Freud's thought, has little need for the object.⁵⁴ The difference between the narcissistic individual and the non-narcissistic individual is essentially between the presence of "ego-libido" over "object-libido." But this distinction is not always very clear or consistent, according to Freud.

The line between inside and outside becomes less clear at this point and narcissism appears to take on a meaning that is closer to my own conception of

⁵¹ Ibid., 84-85.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., 416.

⁵⁴ Sigmund Freud, "The Libido Theory and Narcissism," op. cit., 417.

interiority. Freud uses a peculiar zoological analogy to explain the fluid relation between ego-libido and object-libido in which the one can be transformed into the other and back again:

Think of those simplest living organisms [the amoebas] which consist of a little differentiated globule of protoplasmic substance. They put out protrusions known as pseudopodia, into which they cause the substance of their body to flow over. They are able, however, to withdraw the protrusions once more and form themselves again into a globule.⁵⁵

Here, Freud imaginatively explains the amorphous process of psychic transformation through the analogy of the amoeba. I have chosen this passage because of its resemblance to the fluidity between the object world and the inner psyche that is at the heart of interiority as I define it. In general, however, Freudian psychoanalysis offers a theory of the psyche that is primarily bound by a structural metaphor of depth. Layers of consciousness form the psyche (the Id lies mostly in the unconscious part of our psyche), while the Superego and Ego are partly unconscious but for the most part readily available to us in one way or another. Although Freud's psychoanalytic theory presents us with a view that clearly distinguishes between the subject and the outside world, his libidinal theory of narcissism suggests that object-libido and ego-libido are often in a state of relational exchange.

In more contemporary terms, narcissism is a neurotic personality disorder defined by the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* as consisting of "enduring pattern[s] of inner experience and behaviour" that bring a person into repeated conflicts

⁵⁵ Ibid., 416.

with his or her social environment.⁵⁶ My concern here is with the representation of an interior, psychic world in video art. In the videos that I have selected in this chapter, there are particularly strong affinities with a relational view of interiority that is equally informed by a psychologically-oriented view. So, there appears to be room for an understanding of narcissism not simply as a personality disorder confined to the autonomous individual but as a force that operates in conjunction with others.⁵⁷ Interiority may then not indicate a withdrawal from the world but an operation that reaches out into the phenomenological world to articulate itself. We have already seen how this is the case with Craig's *Delicate Issue*, so now let us turn to Jean's video to see how interiority is produced.

When watching Rodrigue Jean's *La mémoire de l'eau* (1996) (see fig. 2) viewers witness a grave confession. A man has drowned his male lover in a tub of water and is troubled by memories. The video begins with the image of a man submerging his hands in shallow water filled with particles. We then see only the back of a man's head. His face, gaze, and expression are hidden from view. A male voice recounts the thoughts and feelings that disturb him after his lover's death. He tells us that he once had memories of love and happiness between him and his partner but that it all changed once his partner became ill. And when feelings of bitterness and anger towards the narrator's lover became intolerable, he tells us, he murdered him. As the story unfolds, we hear more

⁵⁶ Encyclopedia of Mental Disorders, "Narcissistic Personality Disorder," <http://www.minddisorders.com/Kau-Nu/Narcissistic-personality-disorder.html> (accessed October 15, 2008).

⁵⁷ Harvey Vincent Giesbrecht has written a comprehensive account of the role that narcissism plays in Modern and Postmodern art in his dissertation, *Dialectical Narcissism in the Visual Art of Modernity*. (PhD diss. Concordia University, 2005) Giesbrecht develops narcissism as a productive societal drive. He further identifies this drive as one that functions in a dialectical formation of art. I follow his notion that narcissism can be extended beyond the traditional conception of it as a strictly personal characteristic confined to the individual.

about his unstable psychological state and his increased withdrawal from society. The impending climax of the video is suggested in the aftermath of the murder by what the narrator describes as the uncanny sensation of a distinct feeling that something covered him as he “became heavy with an extra skin.” Strikingly, it is neither the narrator’s guilt nor his sadness over his lost lover that prompts these perceptual and psychic changes. Paradoxically, it is his fear of his own mortality. The climax of the story occurs with a confession that he deliberately lies in his own excrement because it “makes [him] feel more alive.”

The events that unfold in the story are dramatic and captivating in themselves, but it is the formal techniques that reinforce and solidify the viewer’s feeling that he or she is entrusted with a secret. The narrator’s use of a soft tone of voice when he tells us the gritty details of the story is one such technique. The tone draws us in and holds our attention, creating an intimate connection between speaker and viewer. We are at once deemed worthy of the information imparted to us and complicit in the narrator’s act of murder. The viewer’s presence is a crucial element in Jean’s video, as if the viewer were participating in a private conversation with an old friend.

Interiority is developed as a relation with the external world as natural world. One particularly apparent example of this in Jean’s video is an episode in which the viewer sees only the back of a man’s head. The narrator speaks in the first person: “I now stand accused of the worst crime. I persist in saying it only happened because we lost track of real time”. The camera focuses at close range on the back of the head, while the man turns his head partially to the camera, although not enough to reveal his face, as if the viewer’s knowledge of the man’s face could incriminate the guilty speaker. Sounds of the

natural world begin to invade the soundtrack. Insect noises and the screech of an eagle punctuate the narrator's story, swelling in volume at the harrowing parts. The natural sounds are supplemented with natural imagery throughout the video. Images of caves, a rock face, and water are frequently superimposed onto the image of the man's head or hands. Infiltrating the soundtrack and the video, nature is a *memento mori*, a reminder of the impossibility of escaping death. The narrator's story is consistently interrupted by the representation of the natural world, a world that exists apart from his own personal drama but one that he must ultimately acknowledge.

The story is captivating, but the narrator tells the events in such a way as to create intimacy between the viewer and the storyteller. In the confessional narrative, the viewer is aggrandized in the role of "psychoanalyst". This dyadic relation is guaranteed simply by the viewer's presence. The analyst's role in the classic Freudian psychoanalytic process is one of neutrality so that the analysand may realize his own treatment.⁵⁸ Talk-therapy employs the authoritative role of the psychoanalyst in the treatment of the patient. The analysand projects what is necessary onto the analyst in order to work through the problems that brought him or her to treatment.⁵⁹ I will say more about this metaphor of the psychoanalyst and analysand once I have discussed some of the background to this video. For now, let us briefly consider how the connection between the viewer and narrator is a function of the stylistic devices used.

So far, we have seen how the psychoanalytic view of the subject constructs a primarily dyadic relation between the individual subject and the world of objects (despite the suggestion as to the potential it may hold for a slightly different reading in the

⁵⁸ Leo Bersani, "The Will to Know: Foucault, Proust, Psychoanalysis, Godard," op. cit.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

amoeba example). One complication, however, is that Freud's libidinal theory describes a movement between ego-libido and object-libido in the non-narcissistic individual (the amoeba analogy represents this movement). The psyche is also constructed as something similar yet not exactly identical to the mind. We often think of the psyche and its apparatus (the Id, Superego, and Ego) as residing in our head, but the body has also been theorized as a site of interiority.

Leo Bersani has theorized what he calls a "nonsubjective interiority".⁶⁰ He has argued that this kind of interiority is qualitatively shaped by the subject's relation with the outside world. Appealing to the sensible world in this manner is clearly a departure from the more traditional, oppositional view of subject-object relations. Bersani claims that nonsubjective interiority may reconcile the antagonistic relation between subject and object, precisely through continuity between the subject and the world best described as a "looping movement".⁶¹ The conception of interiority that I develop in this chapter and to a certain extent throughout this thesis is akin to Bersani's conception of the term insofar as it is understood to be relational and continuous with exteriority. Although, I am sympathetic to Bersani's Deleuzian articulation of interiority, I also feel that phenomenology and traditional psychoanalysis offer us valuable resources for interpretations of video art. What is there to say about the general move away from a formalist approach to art analysis and psychological approaches towards the art object as it concerns video art? Few theorists have made the connection between formalism and psychological communication better than Bersani. Bersani speaks of a "reconciliation of psychoanalysis both with the world as such and with the aesthetic subjectivity that

⁶⁰ Leo Bersani, "Psychoanalysis and the Aesthetic Subject," *op. cit.*, 171.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

eschews psychologically motivated communication and replaces such communication for families of form.⁶² Bersani has described the interiority of the main character in Pierre Michon's novel, *La Grande Beune* (1996): "far from refashioning the world into the structure of a psychic obsession, [he] is actually produced by the world. The narrator's subjectivity is an effect of external reality."⁶³ Bersani's call for "an indifference to personal identity"⁶⁴ as a method towards the ideal "trans-individual" does not implicate the psychological individualism endemic in Freud's theory of narcissism. Bersani proposes the trans-individual notion as a way out of the obligation to attribute personal identity or individual psychology as the origin of our reality.

So far, I have been arguing that interiority is brought about through a subjective exchange in video art. This has led me to discuss formalism in conjunction with psychoanalysis and, quite briefly so far, phenomenology. We have seen how formalist discourse was challenged by phenomenological currents in art criticism, as mentioned in the introduction. Now let us turn to *La mémoire de l'eau* to see how interiority is constructed as a psychological state through the content and techniques used in the video.

La mémoire de l'eau raises several themes about subjectivity, some of which implicate interiority. For instance in the very first scene of the video, particles of organic material circulate in the water where a man washes his hands—is it a sign of contamination? An incursion of natural life? We soon learn that this unusual image foreshadows the narrator's intense fear of death and defamiliarization with his own body. The alienation he feels from himself seems to be rooted in the fear of his own mortality. What is perhaps most interesting, however, is how narcissism is developed not just as a

⁶² Ibid., 168.

⁶³ Ibid., 167.

⁶⁴ Leo Bersani, "The Will to Know: Foucault, Proust, Psychoanalysis, Godard," op.cit.

personal characteristic of the narrator, but as a condition that implicates the viewer.⁶⁵

Narcissism is developed in video art not only as a psychological characteristic of an individual alone but as a quality specifically connected to the medium of video and as a state that is constructed through a relation with the world marked by introspection and inwardness.

The dissociation from the body that the narrator describes when he speaks of a second skin encompassing his body is reflected by a temporal dissociation. Early in the story, the narrator tells us of how he and his lover both “lost track of real time.” Later in the narrative, we hear how he “lost track of time.” To lose track of time is the inability to remain in control of one’s actions. It can be an excuse, a reason for faltering judgement. The story ends with the narrator’s expression of his last hope, which is to “become the shadow that without knowing I created.”

We can also see a disconnection between the types of images in *La mémoire de l’eau*, predominantly natural images, and the narrated text that is largely a personal reflection on events in the narrator’s life. The disjunction between image and text suggests a gap between mental life and the external world. Images of water, rock, shells, and other natural objects seem at first to be in stark contrast to the deeply personal narrative being told. But the videographic technique of layering images by superimposing one on another suggests an entanglement of the natural world with the inner, mental life. This happens in the image of the back of our protagonist’s head against a rock wall (see fig.2). This technique of layering one transparent image with another is meaningful when we take into consideration the types of images layered—images of natural materials and

objects. The natural imagery in Jean's video alludes to the presence of death in the narrative.

In this chapter, I have discussed the relation between these two videos and interiority as a psychological condition that is fundamentally relational. I have identified the qualitative function of narcissism in this elaboration of interiority as it works towards a formation of subjectivity. We have looked at Craig's video *Delicate Issue* and Jean's *La mémoire de l'eau* and seen instance of how a distinctly interior view of subjectivity has been constructed in text and image. I have thus been arguing that these two videos construct a view of interiority as a psychological state informed by exteriority, which includes other subjects, objects, and things in the world. Each video contributes to a departure from the idea of the subject as a self-contained individual. Interiority is thus constructed in these videos as relational and informed by objects and symbols that represent external reality.

Chapter 2: Orientation and Spatial Metaphor in Video

'I know where I am, but I do not feel as though I'm at the spot where I find myself.' To these dispossessed souls [schizophrenics], space seems to be a devouring force. Space pursues them, encircles them, digests them in a gigantic phagocytosis. It ends by replacing them. Then the body separates itself from thought, the individual breaks the boundary of his skin and occupies the other side of his senses.⁶⁶

It is easy to imagine a place where our thoughts take shape. We picture a space, usually inside our head, where all our memories, judgements, and evaluations are formed and entertained. One of the most pervasive metaphors used when speaking about subjectivity and space is the container metaphor. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson have examined the use of schematic metaphors like that of the container as tools we use to organize our experience of the world.⁶⁷ These tools, although useful at times, can also limit our comprehension and interpretation of events and experiences. A principal goal of this chapter is to see how video art may motivate an interpretation of interiority that stretches beyond the container metaphor.

In Chapter One, we looked at how the two video examined prompt us to consider interiority as a psychological state. We considered how interiority is articulated videographically, by looking at Kate Craig's *Delicate Issue* and Rodrigue Jean's *La mémoire de l'eau*. We then looked at the implications of a psychoanalytic conception of the self in video and examined how this view hinges upon the idea that we can uncover truths about ourselves if we look deep enough.⁶⁸ Moreover, we saw that video art

⁶⁶ Roger Caillois, "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia," trans. John Shepley, *October* 31 (Winter 1984): 16-32.

⁶⁷ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 25-32.

⁶⁸ Leo Bersani, "Psychoanalysis and the Aesthetic Subject," *Critical Inquiry*, 32 (Winter 2006): 161.

presents a special case for discourses of subjectivity, in particular those concerned with the notion of interiority.

In Chapter Two, we will continue to investigate how video art and interiority are linked by examining the significance of spatiality in video. The argument of this chapter can be put quite straightforwardly. I argue that interiority is manifested through a bodily engagement with videographic space. The chapter consists of my analyses of two videos. I will first look at *Island Song* (1976) (see fig. 3 and 4), by the American artist Charlemagne Palestine, and then I will examine *So Much I Want to Say* (1983) (see fig. 5 and 6), an early video from Mona Hatoum's oeuvre. Both videos manifest a bodily apprehension of space—space that is envisioned not simply as an empty container but as something we actively project ourselves through, something we “inhabit”.⁶⁹ In this Merleau-Pontian view of space, the physical body is the solitary point of reference to the world that precedes all our thoughts and theories about space.⁷⁰ The metaphor of the container, then, is replaced by spatiality that is actively deployed by the body.

Palestine's *Island Song* is an exploration of the properties and limitations of space with regard to the human body. The video deals with issues of confinement, displacement, orientation, and escape, each characterized by a relation to the body. *Island Song* is a video about the threat of enclosure and the desire to get outside oneself. The degree of success, however, of the body's deployment of space is never guaranteed. As we will see in Palestine's video, the capacity of the physical body to intervene with the world through sound and movement is limited. *Island Song* fundamentally expresses the

⁶⁹ Merleau-Ponty refutes the idea that the body is *in* space and suggests that it *inhabits* space in the chapter “Space” in *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 283-347.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

futility of attempting to escape the self in any meaningful way. The limits of body thus become analogous to the limits of container-space.

Island Song is an audio-visual record of a motorcycle ride around the perimeter of the island St. Pierre, off the coast of Newfoundland. With a video camera strapped to his chest, the artist directs the viewer's line of sight onto the road ahead of him. Beginning at one of the island's loading docks, Palestine revs the engine on the bike and starts his journey around the small island. Growling "Okay now...Okay" and "Gotta get outta here," the artist seems as if he might lash out at any moment. His unexpected, eccentric vocalizations play an integral part in the role of sound in this video. The artist's few words clearly express his will to escape. We naturally assume he wants to escape the island and suspect that his words might also imply an escape from his own thoughts and self. Increasing his speed as he travels along the road, the artist begins to chant. Upon reaching a pier near the end of the video, the artist focuses the camera on the ocean below as a steamship repeatedly blows its horn. Waves crash in the distance and the chanting comes to a stop. The camera turns downward to face the pebbled ground, and the video is over.

We will turn later to a discussion of sound in *Island Song*, but first let us consider how Palestine's positioning of the video camera expresses interiority through a bodily apprehension of space. Palestine aligns the camera at chest level rather than eye level, a decision that we can read as symbolic. By placing the camera on his torso, the artist suggests the primacy of the physical body over reason, which is traditionally associated with the eye. This is especially significant considering the frequency of association between the camera lens and the human eye in literature on video art and in video art

itself.⁷¹ By circumventing the analogy between eye and camera, the artist reinforces the agency of the body in the articulation of videographic space. The artist's decision to place the camera at chest level is not just a matter of practicality that leaves his hands free to steer the motorcycle, since he could have strapped the camera to the motorcycle or adopted a number of other alternatives. Strangely, the physicality of the body in *Island Song* is brought to our attention by the body's absence from the visual field. We sense the physicality of the artist's body through the proximity of the camera to his body rather than by actually seeing his body. In any case, Palestine suggests a bodily engagement with space rather than a strictly visual one. Interiority is haptically produced by means of the placement of the video camera.

What this means is that Palestine cedes control of the camera (and thus the precision of the video image) specifically by *not* looking through its lens. The skewed angle of the camera partially obscures the view of the road ahead at times so that the viewer does not have a direct line of vision. Bumps in the road jolt and shake the camera, disrupting the visual image and making it difficult to identify objects and things. As the vehicle increases speed, we become aware of the driver's vulnerability. The obscured line of sight combined with the occasional swerve of the bike to avoid a parked car or a pedestrian make the viewer feel like a passenger, aware of the possible risk of collision and ultimately unable to control the path of the vehicle.⁷² Videographic space in *Island Song* is thus cramped, skewed, unpredictable, and difficult to see.

But the difficulty of seeing what is represented is not only a product of the way the video is recorded; it is also a product of the medium of video itself. The video image

⁷¹ See Catherine Elwes, *Video Art: A Guided Tour* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2005), 50.

⁷² Private conversation with Kristina Huneault has helped me to think more clearly about the skewed perspective in *Island Song*.

in *Island Song* is similar to those in other art videos of the same era in that the black-and-white image is grainy, flat, and limited in tone to a range of dull grays. Sean Cubitt has described the effect of one of the inherent formal qualities of monochrome video: “Lacking a true black or even an approximation to cinema black, video images would always be restricted to a kind of statistical sampling and a rendition of its quotations from the world that was always distinguished from it by its lack of illusionistic power.”⁷³ But this lack of illusionism in video is not something to regret. Cubitt goes on to explain how monochrome video, in contrast to film and perspectival art, has a likeness to two-dimensional graphic art.⁷⁴ If video renounces illusionism because of its own low resolution and flat tones, it also opens itself up to graphic qualities. *Island Song* can and perhaps most often is interpreted in terms of its illusionistic visual cues. What we see in the video seems to directly represent an actual event in time. But Cubitt reminds us that the actual event and the recorded one are not the same at all. So what does *Island Song* describe? By looking closely at the formal elaboration of space, we can see how interiority is manifested not only through the positioning of the camera but through videographic space in its flat, graphic appearance. If we consider the positioning of the video camera in *Island Song* to have symbolic significance, and we view the flatness of the black-and-white video image not as a deficiency but as a meaningful quality in itself, then we must consider how these characteristics motivate an interpretation of the video as an expression of the limited capacity of the body to intervene in the world.

Spatial orientation and positioning are two conditions of embodiment that are discussed at length by Maurice Merleau-Ponty in his *Phenomenology of Perception*

⁷³ Sean Cubitt, “Grayscale Video and the Shift to Colour,” *Art Journal* 65:3 (Fall 2006): 51.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 52.

(1945). Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological theory of the body—the priority of the body that experiences the world—has on occasion been employed by feminists.⁷⁵ The value placed on lived experience and the physical body struck a chord with those feminists who believed in the value of an essential female experience. Merleau-Ponty's conception of space as something that the body actively inhabits is useful in my interpretation of Palestine's *Island Song* because it offers an alternative to thinking about subjectivity and, by extension, interiority as something to be contained. However, Merleau-Ponty's articulation of embodiment in this text has also been severely critiqued by many feminists, particularly because he writes about an anonymous, universal body.⁷⁶ These critics note the absence of specific differences that mark bodies and determine political meaning.⁷⁷ Proponents of this viewpoint often point out that each body is different, and yet the “typical” body just so happens to be consistently gendered male. Factors such as race and gender cannot be secondary to broader categories like “the human body.” Judith Butler is one feminist who has criticized Merleau-Ponty's conception of embodiment for being androcentric.⁷⁸ Butler argues that the body is meaningful only within discourse and that experience is constituted by historical and cultural practices. Consequently, the experience of the subject must not be a given because it is the knowledge of the world

⁷⁵ For excellent appropriations and feminist responses to Merleau-Ponty's ideas on the body see: Iris Marion Young, “Throwing Like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment Motility and Spatiality,” *Human Studies* 3 (1980): 137-156; and Iris Marion Young, “Throwing Like a Girl: Twenty Years Later,” in *Body and Flesh: A Philosophical Reader*, ed. Donn Welton (Cambridge and Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 286-290.

⁷⁶ For a feminist critique of this text, see Judith Butler, “Sexual Ideology and Phenomenological Description: A Feminist Critique of Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*,” in *The Thinking Muse: Feminism and Modern French Philosophy*, ed. Jeffner Allen and Iris Marion Young (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989).

⁷⁷ Ann V. Murphy, “Language in the Flesh: The Politics of Discourse in Merleau-Ponty, Levinas, and Irigaray,” in *Feminist Interpretations of Maurice Merleau-Ponty* (University Park: Penn. State University Press, 2006), 258; Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

⁷⁸ Butler, *op. cit.*

that shapes the subject's experience, a knowledge that is constituted by cultural and historical practice.⁷⁹ For Butler, new cultural possibilities lead to political emancipation, not an appeal to a primordial, "natural" body. Butler suggests that we should recognize that the prediscursive (or that which lies outside discourse) can only be understood in relation to or produced by discourse itself.⁸⁰ This is to say that we must acknowledge the relation between discourse and the prediscursive rather than consider them as being mutually exclusive. The prediscursive naturalizes certain traits or characteristics that are contingent on discourse. In any case, what is relevant for our purposes here is that when space is characterized as prediscursive, as it appears to be in *Island Song*, we must recognize that there are a set of potentially risky conceptual associations that usually follow, such as ahistoricity and a tendency to seem neutral.

So far, we have considered in *Island Song* the role of the positioning of the camera, the visual effects of its placement, and the significance of the monochrome palette. We have also looked at how the positioning of the camera and its visual effects has implications for phenomenology and feminism, by examining Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of the significance of positioning and placement of the body, and Judith Butler's response to him. Now, let us consider one of the most distinctive and memorable aspects of Palestine's video: the artist's unsettling and near maniacal persona. The persona is perplexing, to say the least, until we realize that we are witnessing a performance. If we look at how Palestine's video fits into a mode of performance, we

⁷⁹ Johanna Oksala, "Anarchic Bodies: Foucault and the Feminist Question of Experience," *Hypatia* 19:4 (Fall 2004): 99.

⁸⁰ Samuel Allen Chambers, "Untimely Agency: Having the Historical Sense to 'Bypass' Psychoanalytic Theory," in *Untimely Politics* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 144.

may begin to see another way that interiority is expressed through a bodily apprehension of space.

Many artists like Palestine, working with video in its early years, integrated some kind of performance into their work. Some artists used video as a way to document their performance art. This is the case, for instance, in Yoko Ono's *Cut Piece* (1965), where the audience was invited to cut away pieces of the artist's clothing as she sat on a stage. Other artists integrated video into their performance for aesthetic rather than practical reasons of documentation. Here, we could think of Charlotte Moorman's and Nam June Paik's collaboration in *TV Cello* (1971), where three television monitors composed the body of a fully functional cello played by Moorman, an avant-garde cellist. Each monitor displayed a different image: the first monitor recorded the direct feed of the immediate cello performance, the second displayed a video collage of other cellists, and the third displayed an intercepted broadcast television feed. Evidently, performance and video are two media that artists have found work particularly well together, and this pairing was almost standard practice in a genre of art production during the 1960s and 1970s.

In Palestine's *Island Song*, unlike Ono's or Moorman's performances, it is not immediately apparent to the viewer that we are witnessing a performance. In fact, there are a number of markers that seem to tell us that we are seeing a "real" event rather than a performance, because Palestine's video uses visual signs of realism. However, I contend that one way that *Island Song* employs a bodily apprehension of space is through performance.

In this regard, although I have discussed the visual elements of *Island Song* at some length, we also should consider the role that the video's sound plays in the

expression of inwardness in this video. As noted earlier, we never in fact see the artist, but we infer his presence through the sound of his voice. I should mention here that Palestine's artistic oeuvre also includes musical composition and performance. His vocal training in Jewish sacred music and the carillon, and his mentorship with Indian musician Pandit Pran Nath may not come as a surprise when one considers the central role that the human voice plays in *Island Song*.⁸¹ In this video, Palestine's voice resonates with the vibration of the motorcycle and harmonizes with the machine. The velocity and motion of the motorcycle become instruments with which he improvises musically. Chanting, Palestine's voice is influenced by the topography of the road—bumps and curves force modifications in the artist's voice. Motion is used as a metaphor for the expression of inward feelings of freedom and transformation—feelings reinforced by the artists' reiteration of the phrase "Gotta get outta here"—and as a means to achieve this change. Musical rhythm and sound are enhanced by the body's motility in *Island Song*, and thus enhance the video's expression of inwardness.

The common element in these observations about *Island Song* is the articulation of a prediscursive experience of the world. Movement, spatial positioning, and sound each implicate a preoccupation with perception. Palestine seems to locate bodily experience through these fundamental kinds of engagements with the world. There is little sign that Palestine's videos are engaged in an articulation of bodily experience that takes into account issues of gender and race as central to the formation of this bodily experience. Rather, the latter is experienced from within the ahistorical, phenomenal body postulated by Merleau-Ponty.

⁸¹ Brian Duguid, "Charlemagne Palestine Interview," *EST Magazine* (March/April 1996), <http://media.hyperreal.org/zines/est/intervs/palestin.html>. (accessed Nov. 10, 2008).

Palestine's operation of the video camera can also be read as an extension and amplification of the interiority of bodily motion and comportment. Palestine's use of the video camera reaches outside the conceptualization of space as a container simply through this extension and amplification. Elizabeth Grosz has discussed the notion of the prosthesis and its transformative effects on subjectivity at length in her essay "Prosthetic Objects." Grosz argues that a productive ambiguity exists in the meaning of prosthesis in its capacity for both generation and augmentation. The prosthesis confirms the physical arrangement of its host and it enables new configurations or possibilities for the living body.⁸² A prosthesis is normally understood to substitute for an absent part of the human body. This substitutive function typically enables "normal" functioning of the body.

But the prosthesis can also serve to enhance the body's function or appearance. And, in addition to these two functions, the prosthetic device has a third function—its transformative potential. Furthermore, Grosz proposes that we consider prostheses as enabling an "opening up of actions" as a symbol of possibility as opposed to lack.⁸³ She gets to this stage in her argument by first discussing two different ideas of prosthesis: the Freudian and the Bergsonian. In the Freudian view, our relation to objects is understood as an extension of the ego. According to this view, the ego is prosthetic in nature. The desire for control, to be more than human, is seen in our tendency towards acquisition (of tools, clothing, and technology, for instance). This drive to reach beyond our physical and intellectual capacities and to incorporate that which is outside of us inevitably results in a denaturalization of the self. On the other hand, the Bergsonian view of the prosthesis suggests that human intelligence is in fact prosthetic though the act of incorporating new

⁸² Elizabeth Grosz, "Prosthetic Objects," in *Time Travels: Feminism, Nature, Power* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

⁸³ Ibid.

information or material. But there is fundamentally a dual movement that takes place—not only does intelligence incorporate and change material (or objects), but objects themselves take on new qualities from intelligence. This co-relational movement perhaps interests Grosz the most and shapes her articulation of the prosthesis as not just substitutive or additive but transformative. We must also ask who or what benefits from this “opening up of action.” Whose body is implicated in this transformative potential?

In *Island Song*, Palestine’s inward sensibility and spatiality are amplified and extended through his activity with the camera and motorcycle. Both camera and motorcycle are prosthetics. Palestine’s adaptation of the motorcycle and camera is prosthetic in that it gives them a substitutive, additive and potentially transformative function in the video. Thus, a bodily apprehension of space is evident both in the performative elements of the video and in the use of objects around the artist as extensions of that bodily apprehension.

Moreover, we must consider how reaching out and adopting objects from the world could be seen as a hospitable gesture rather than an appropriative one. In the final moments, upon reaching the top of a cliff overlooking a vast ocean, Palestine turns his camera to the waves crashing onto the rocks in the distance. The final shot shows us the ground on which Palestine stands. We lose almost all visual perspective when the camera films a close-up of the flat, pebbled ground. The chanting and singing that Palestine has done throughout the video so far comes to a halt and there is silence for a moment before we hear the horn of a steamship. What are we to make of these final images and sounds? I would suggest that the viewer witnesses an appeal to the materiality of the world. Palestine shows us acknowledgement of the world on its own terms but also as an

extension of the self. When the steamship sounds its horn, it answers Palestine's song. In this final sequence, the viewer witnesses a conversation between the self and the world.

I have attempted to show how Palestine's *Island Song* offers a way of thinking about subjectivity through the bodily apprehension of space. This is evident in his desire to escape both himself and his geographical location (as we assume after hearing his repeated vocalizations) and in the impossibility of satisfying this desire, while space is characterized not simply as an empty container in which objects and things exist but as something into which we project ourselves. Unable to escape the most fundamental frame of reference of the body, the artist represents a search for liberation in the materiality of the world. In doing so, we witness a gesture of conviviality. The physical body is the solitary point of reference to the world that precedes all our thoughts and theories about space.⁸⁴ How is our conception of space contingent upon our view of the relation between the subject and the world? Palestine's video seems to point towards a desire for reconciliation between the world and the subject. When the world is considered to be hospitable rather than hostile to the self, the internal self no longer needs to be antagonistic to the material world.

Now let us turn to an early video by Mona Hatoum titled *So Much I Want to Say* (1983). This work was initially a performance transmitted using slow-scan television (SSTV), a closed circuit form of video scanning technology that transfers still images over long distance, although at a much slower rate than our standard broadcast television. Slow-scan video technology had success starting in the 1980s as a mode of

⁸⁴ Merleau-Ponty writes of how we are not in space but inhabit it in his *Phenomenology of Perception*. He identifies the difference between intellectualist, empiricist, and phenomenological accounts of space in his chapter "Space" in *Phenomenology of Perception*, op. cit., 283-347.

teleconferencing in business meetings and academic environments, as an aid for professionals in medical facilities, and as a mode of imaging for the U.S. space program when NASA required images from lunar and other planetary spacecraft.⁸⁵ Slow-scan video is a narrowband transmission, so it has a small transfer rate of data and is much less costly than wideband, or full-motion television.⁸⁶ The acceptance of slow-scan video in a wide variety of disciplines makes it an artistic medium ripe with associations.

Hatoum's video, like *Island Song*, manifests a bodily apprehension of space. In *So Much I Want to Say*, videographic space is flat, just as it is in *Island Song*, and this flatness is contradicted by the role of the artist's body in the performance involved in the work. The flatness of the image, especially the slow-scan video image with its minimal visual data, is accentuated by the artist's physical activation of space. Tension is thus created between the videographic space of the video, with its marked flatness, and the political charge of the real space deployed by the body.

The video transmission in *So Much I Want to Say* occurred between Vancouver and Vienna in 1983. The video that exists today documented this performance, and it is this video, more so than the performance, that is of particular interest for my purposes here. Close-up images reveal the artist's mouth and face obstructed by someone else's hands. Every eight seconds a new image appears with the data transmitted by slow scan. Starting from the top, the image is constructed on the screen, slowly rolling down to the bottom, while a female voiceover repeatedly says the phrase that is also the title of the video, "So much I want to say...." The video is a short five minutes that feels longer if

⁸⁵ G. Southworth, "Low-Cost Option: Slow-Scan Video," *Communications News* (Feb. 1984), http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0CMN/is_n2_v21/ai_532459/ (accessed 6 May, 2009).

⁸⁶ "Slow Scan Telemedicine," NASA website, http://ntrs.nasa.gov/archive/nasa/casi.ntrs.nasa.gov/20020091938_2002148656.pdf (accessed 6 May, 2009).

one expects a real-time video. Simple in many respects, it uses relatively little visual and audio data to produce rich content.

The technique of excessive repetition distinguishes this video stylistically from narrative-based video. What might normally be expressed in several minutes of dialogue is condensed into six repeated words. Rather than telling us a story about oppression, *So Much I Want to Say* expresses the effects of oppression in its compulsive repetition. The repetition at times makes it difficult to distinguish individual words, producing a disorienting auditory effect for the listener. When words are repeated, they begin to lose their meaning. In Hatoum's video, the act of saying the words ironically becomes an act of incapacitating the words. By saying the phrase, the act of speaking is both granted and immediately denied by the impossibility of accurately expressing oneself with the language and vocabulary at hand.

Although there is a rich subtext to the video, *So Much I Want to Say* also gives us plenty to think about on a literal level. The words quite literally tell us that there is more to be said: that the "I" who speaks wants to reveal more but is unable to do so. One reason for the restriction on speech is conveyed clearly in the video image of a woman who is gagged but who attempts to free herself from constraint. Physical restraint is perhaps the most obvious and least contentious forms of oppression. More insidious forms have taken centre stage in recent political theory, but physical oppression is still generally assumed to be a graver circumstance than a lack of freedom of speech. Physical safety is valued in any political theory that aims to be non-oppressive. Hatoum's video reminds us that our corporeal reality is our most immanent one and that our speech and thought are contingent upon our physical freedom.

The image of a woman's mouth covered by a man's hands immediately evokes issues of free speech and violence against women. By the time of the production of this video in 1983, the situations that second-wave feminists in the West had been struggling with—equality in the workplace, financial independence, and reproductive and abortion rights—had begun to change for the better. However, the progress that was being made for greater equality for women was not without contestation. The women's movement was the target of criticism that issues of gender were privileged over issues of race and that non-white women were marginalized twice over as a result.⁸⁷ The image in Hatoum's video of a woman struggling to remove the male hands that prevent her from speaking is in many ways about the political struggle for liberation from the real threats that patriarchy poses for women. But it is also about the struggle women face when they are excluded from the "sisterhood" of Western feminism.

My interpretation of Hatoum's video does not attempt to draw links between events in Hatoum's personal history and her artwork, as if one could adequately explain the other. Events in an artist's life are relied upon as interpretive devices far too often, as if traces of personal history could always be physically detected in the work itself. The tendency, for example, towards interpreting art based on an artist's national origin has been particularly relevant with regard to Hatoum's work. Chin-Tao Wu has pointed out the tendency to interpret Hatoum's work through her nationality as a Palestinian. I do, however, think that biographical details should not be avoided altogether. Rather, they should be included in an interpretation to give context, but not be assumed to be sufficient in themselves to decipher the artist herself or her work. In Hatoum's case, her work has frequently been interpreted as issue-based and connected to her Palestinian

⁸⁷ See bell hooks, *Ain'tia Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (Boston: South End Press, 1981).

heritage and her childhood growing up in Beirut. Hatoum travelled to Britain as a student in the mid-1970s and decided to stay in London in 1975 when civil war broke out in Lebanon. She studied at the Byam Shaw School of Art from 1975 to 1979 and then at the Slade School of Art from 1979 to 1981. Throughout the 1980s she was an artist in residence in Britain, the United States and Canada. Since then, Hatoum has become an established artist who has produced a significant body of work that ranges in theme and medium. But it is in her early work that we see signs of her concern with the body and with space, particularly in her video works.

In an interview with Michael Asher in 1996, Hatoum commented on how her work from the 1980s centered on themes of the body in contrast to the intellect:

I have always been dissatisfied with work that just appeals to your intellect and does not actually involve you in a physical way. For me, the embodiment of an artwork is within the physical realm; the body is the axis of our perceptions, so how can art afford not to take that as a starting point? We relate to the world through our senses. You first experience an artwork physically. I like the work to operate on both sensual and intellectual levels.⁸⁸

Hatoum alludes to methods commonly found in conceptualist art, which values the idea over materiality or experience. Conceptualists sought to undermine conventional spatial and visual aesthetics by using linguistic means. Widely criticized for being phallogocentric, Conceptualism has in the past decades been given a bad name because of its associations with the typically patriarchal values of language and ideas. However, in an interview with Michela Arfiero in 2006, Hatoum spoke of the influence on her work of

⁸⁸ Michael Archer, "Interview with Mona Hatoum," in *PressPlay: Conversations with Artists*, ed. Editors of Phaidon Press (London: Phaidon, 2005).

the conceptual artist Piero Manzoni and his idea of a collective zone of values in one of his manifestos:

I was impressed by a manifesto in which he was talking about the existence of a kind of collective zone of values that the artist can reach only through conscious immersion into him- or herself, arriving at this zone of universal values in order to be able to communicate with other people. I was very intrigued by the paradox of advocating a subjective investigation to arrive at an objective understanding of what is common to all.⁸⁹

It seems clear, therefore, that there is more to Hatoum's video than simply issues of free speech and the oppression of women. Not only has she identified the body as fundamental to aesthetic experience, but she has stressed the importance of making an attempt to locate a common experience that surpasses the notion of the individual and the isolated experience of a single person. The bodily apprehension of space is one that is shared between all of us. Hatoum's video, as noted above, engages with notions of the body and in particular with the experience of how a bodily reality can become disconnected from linguistic reality.

Perhaps most of all, however, interiority is expressed in *So Much I Want to Say* through the relation between Hatoum's body in the video performance and the specific video format chosen by the artist. As mentioned earlier, the slow-scan method allows for the transmission of images over very long distances (much longer than broadcast television, for instance). This is significant because the transmitted images display a woman's struggle to free herself from constraint. Hatoum cannot, of course, physically

⁸⁹ Michela Arfiero, "Measure the Distances: A Conversation with Mona Hatoum" *Sculpture* 25:9 (November 2006): 32.

transcend the place and time of her performance, but video technology allows her image and voice to travel. Technology is used as a way of extending and amplifying a message about the limited capacity of the body. Thus, the limits of the body are imaginatively transformed in *So Much I Want to Say*.

The epigraph at the beginning of this chapter was chosen for its vivid description of a breach of unity in the self. Space is personified in it as a threatening force with the power to disrupt order and dislodge the link between body and thought in the individual. In contrast to the notion of a bodily apprehension of space, this notion of the threat of space on the body is significant in my analysis of the two videos in this chapter. The threat of space and, by extension, the outside world, is an essential part of how interiority is constructed in Charlemagne Palestine's *Island Song* (1979) and Mona Hatoum's *So Much I Want to Say* (1983).

In the first part of this chapter, I showed how Palestine's *Island Song* offers a way of thinking about subjectivity through the lens of space. By looking at the stylistic techniques used in the video, I argued that Palestine expresses a bodily apprehension of space. This is evident, for instance, in his persona's desire to escape—to get outside of himself and his geographical location—and the impossibility of satisfying this desire. Unable to escape the most fundamental frame of reference—the body—a search for liberation in the materiality of the world is enacted by Palestine's persona.

Equally, in Hatoum's *So Much I Want to Say* the limited capacity of the body is expressed in the powerful image of physical restraint and struggle in the video. The flatness of videographic space is exaggerated by the video format for the work—slow-

scan video. The paralysis of movement represented in Hatoum's video seems to speak to the priority that we must give to the body and its engagement with space on its own terms. Interiority is characterized in this video as necessarily a part of a space shared, or contested, with others.

It has thus been my intention throughout this chapter to show how each video presents us with ways of envisioning spatiality that goes beyond the conception that we are in a space that contains us. A key question that has been at the center this inquiry is how our conception of space is contingent on our view of the relation between the subject and the world. Neither of the videos I have discussed represents the world as invariably hospitable, but each seems to point towards a desire towards reconciliation between the world and the subject.

Chapter 3: Chronovideo

Like the second chapter of this thesis, the third chapter takes a phenomenological view, this time of temporality in video. The principal question this chapter seeks to answer is how the content and structure of the two videos in question implicate interiority as a temporal characteristic. In order to answer this question, I will examine the technical and physical properties of the video apparatus in the spirit of formalism. Through a close study of two videos, we will see how interiority is manifested in temporal terms and how those terms in turn implicate interiority. It is not, however, without caution that I proceed. Virulent debate among art critics and artists has taught us that formalism at its worst is unreflectively dogmatic and reductive.⁹⁰ And so it is with due care that I investigate the formal attributes of video in the two case studies below. Following a detailed description and analysis of each video, I will draw on the theories of two thinkers with radically divergent backgrounds: Reinhart Koselleck, a German philosopher of history, and Gilles Deleuze, a French poststructuralist. Koselleck's phenomenological notions of the "space of experience" and "horizon of expectation" will help explain the significance of temporality in the viewer's experience of each video, while Deleuze's notion of the "time-image" will provide us with some insight into the formal attributes of video.

In the analysis and discussion that follow, the terms "temporality" and "time" are not considered synonyms. "Temporality" is used instead of "time" for two reasons: (a) to imply a subjective connotation, or a human perceiver, and, (b) to refer to more than one temporal mode. We frequently conceive of time as a priori, or as a natural, objective

⁹⁰ Here I refer to the criticism against Clement Greenberg's formalism by artists such as Donald Judd and Robert Morris. See two essays in *Art in Theory, 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Malden: Blackwell Pub., 2003): Donald Judd, "Specific Objects," 824-828, and Robert Morris, "Notes on Sculpture 1-3," 828-835.

phenomenon. This Kantian view of time has been refuted by philosophers who propose a phenomenological account of time. These are, most famously, Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty.⁹¹ My analysis of American artist Gary Hill's *Why Do Things Get in a Muddle (Come on Petunia)* (1984) (see fig. 7 and 8) and Scottish artist Douglas Gordon's *24 Hour Psycho* (1993) (see fig. 10, 11, and 12) show how the subjective qualities of temporality lead us to consider the significance of the role of the viewer in the work. The conception of temporality that I develop in this chapter is thus distanced from a teleological paradigm of history.

Each video uses aesthetic strategies that unsettle the notion of time as measured and successive. These strategies draw our attention to the tendency to naturalize chronological time and to assume that it stands independent from our perception of it in the world. The narratives in both Hill's and Gordon's videos involve videographic techniques that manipulate fundamental attributes of video, notably temporal order and duration. The effect of these manipulations is that each video makes us consider our definitions of time and how these shape our understanding of the works in question. As we will see in Hill's video, the temporal direction of events and dialogue is purposefully confused and tangled up. Terms like "forward" and "backward," that describe the direction or orientation of events, are rarely sufficient to properly describe what is going on. In Gordon's video there is another challenge to the convention of time as measured, successive, and progressive. Rather than focusing on problems of narrative order, however, Gordon's video manipulates the passage of time, restricting its flow.

⁹¹ David Couzens Hoy, *The Time of Our Lives: A Critical History of Temporality* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009), 1-39.

Let us begin with Gary Hill's *Why Do Things Get in a Muddle (Come on Petunia)* (1984). The video begins with a survey by camera of juvenile toys and objects laid out on a hexagonal table.⁹² The table is cluttered up with odds and ends, some of which include tea cups, figurines, a globe, and a toy snake. An instrumental version of "Row, Row, Row Your Boat" establishes a childhood theme, as the camera pans across the objects that resemble an uncanny *nature morte*. The focus of the camera soon turns from the objects to a woman dressed up as Alice from Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*. Alice is splayed out on the floor, with toys, books, and cards spread out around her. Her father sits at his desk, happily occupied with his newspaper until Alice inquisitively asks him, "Daddy, why do things get in a muddle?" The father patiently replies, "What do you mean?" Alice explains her question: "Well, people seem to spend time tidying things but they never seem to spend time muddling them. Things just seem to get in a muddle themselves, and then people have to tidy them up again." The dialogue continues in this vein. But as the two characters discuss the virtues of "tidiness" and the nature of "muddles," the camerawork becomes increasingly disorganized and confusing, as do the sounds of the words each character speaks.

As may be already gathered, the strange and theoretical subject of conversation between Alice and her father *is* essentially the tendency for things to become disorganized. In other words, it is a conversation about entropy, or the tendency towards chaos. There is a long history of the concept and its meaning in mathematics and science, and that meaning can vary slightly in different contexts. The meaning of entropy in the field of thermodynamics specifically refers to the dispersal of energy within a given

⁹² Gary Hill has explained the origin of the hexagonal table in friend and collaborator George Quasha's stained glass studio in an interview with Louis-Jose Lestocart. See "Surfing the Medium," in *Gary Hill*, ed. Robert C. Morgan (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2000), 236.

system. We may understand entropy in Hill's video in a similar, though broader sense. Despite the systematic method of conversation between Alice and her father, the formal aspects of the video, such as the way in which the images and sound are recorded, work against the rationality of the conversation. As we will see shortly, this distinction between the spoken text in the video and the way the video is constructed is temporally significant.

The dialogue in Hill's video is important to consider in this analysis because of the relevance of the content of the spoken text to the way the text is delivered videographically to the viewer. Resembling the Socratic method of philosophical questioning, the dialogue in *Muddle* consists of a question responded to in a way that allows the student to reach the answer through the process of questioning. It is ironic that the subject of the conversation—disorganization—is approached in such an organized manner. But the story is truly puzzling when we consider the way in which the conversation and events in the video are recorded. During the recording process, the actors gestured and spoke their lines in reverse with the help of a phonetic script (see fig. 9). The spoken words and the actions of the actors in *Muddle* are thus recorded in reverse and then played “in reverse,” (i.e., such that the actions and words unfold in the “correct” sequence), making the images and sounds run in the correct order but seem distorted. Therefore, the words that the viewer hears are recognizable but strangely unnatural. This temporal disjunction produces an uncanny effect in its double reversal.

However, the temporal order of Hill's video is complicated by more than just the fact that he first recorded the original image and sound in reverse and then reversed the direction of the tape, producing a forward-seeming video. The temporal order is further

complicated by interruptions at key moments, in which the video reverts to the backward order in which it was originally recorded. For example, while explaining an example of a muddle, Alice says to her father: “Here, on the end of this shelf...” The videotape changes direction at that moment and “shelf” is heard as “flesh” on the soundtrack, forming a surreal aural anagram. Moreover, the visual images are also interrupted by a periodic reversal in the videotape’s direction of play. These tricks and interruptions in soundtrack and image cause the viewer to question what she is seeing and whether the temporal order she witnesses is the same experienced by the actors and videographer.

Unlike the other videos that have been discussed in earlier chapters, the spoken text in *Muddle* was adapted from a book of essays by Gregory Bateson (1904-1980) called *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (1972).⁹³ Bateson was an anthropologist, semiotician, and linguist who coined the term “metalogue” to mean a conversation that mirrors the problem itself. Hill’s video faithfully follows Bateson’s idea of the metalogue in its form and content because it mirrors the idea of messiness and confusion in its production while consisting of a discussion about messiness and confusion. Hill’s video, however, is not only a visual equivalent to Bateson’s idea. Incorporating the signs and images from Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and its sequel *Through the Looking Glass*, the video consists of dialogue that borrows from both Carroll’s novels and Bateson’s essay. The style of Alice’s dress strongly resembles the one that Carroll’s Alice wears in the well-known stories. Other allusions to Carroll’s novel include a deck of cards spread out over the floor, invoking the book’s Royal Court of Cards ruled by the tyrannical Queen of Hearts. So, why does Hill introduce literary allusions into a work of video art? Perhaps because of the affinity between the symbol of the looking glass (or

⁹³ Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1972).

mirror) in Carroll's book and the video camera and the ways in which reversal is associated with both.

But before we get too buried in the themes of the text, I would like to consider the camerawork in *Muddle* to see how temporality is manifested as a characteristic of interiority in this video—attributes other, that is, than the problematization of time by means of both forward and backward playing of the video's actions and soundtrack. Let us now consider how the camera works to disrupt the flow of the narrative. One of the most distinctive and prominent features of Hill's video is how the camera moves as it films the actors. The methodical, question-and-response dialogue is recorded in a distracting and animated manner. Floating and circling above the actors, the camera's movement is disorienting and obtrusive. The movement of the camera thus demands the viewer's attention as a third character might do. From the first shot, the camera tilts and turns as it pans across the *nature morte*. Indeed, throughout the video, the unhinged camera communicates a feeling of disorientation. This loss of gravity and the resulting impression of an unhinged perspective contribute to the theme of temporal disorder by suggesting spatial disorientation. The floating camera renders the reversal of sound and image all the more incoherent. And the camera's buoyancy implies interiority as a dream-like and hypnotic state. All the while, the dialogue proceeds in its Socratic fashion. The father asks Alice: "But do your things get in a muddle if you don't touch them?" Alice responds, "No, but if you touch them or if anybody touches them they get in a muddle, and it's a worse muddle if it isn't me." She continues, "But Daddy, do you and I mean the same thing by tidy?" The awkward and stylized dialogue in *Muddle* is prescriptive due to

its heavy reliance on three literary texts. But this prescriptive aspect is tempered and further confused by the chaotic camerawork.

As one commentator has suggested, the camera plays a recuperative role in reorganizing the backwards sounds and images into the “correct” order.⁹⁴ In this way, text and camerawork represent two temporal modes that operate at odds with each other. This reconstitution is recognized by the viewer in the awkward and staggered gestures and the pronunciation of words. Even if the movement and dialogue are correct, it is obvious to the viewer that both the actions and the dialogue were recorded backwards.⁹⁵ In this regard, the camera draws attention to the video apparatus and its function in the creation of a temporal structure of its own. This temporal structure may have the initial appearance of being linear and successive, but as the viewer soon realizes it is anything but. This aesthetic technique of recording all the elements of the video in reverse is perhaps most indicative of the theme of temporal order and continuity since it directly asks us to question the causal link between the actions and the events in the video. By extension, we are encouraged to think of the features of video and how they restrict, interrupt, or reassemble the flow of time. Interiority is thus implied not only by the hypnotic movement of the camera, but also by a construction of time independent from the world.

As may have been gathered already, *Muddle* contains a more pronounced theme of language than the other videos I have discussed in this thesis. The theme of language plays a dominant role in most of Hill’s work, reflecting his strong interest in language and meaning. For instance, palindromes and anagrams are a device Hill uses in videos

⁹⁴ Arlindo Machado, “Why Do Language and Meaning Get in a Muddle?” in *Gary Hill*, ed. by Robert C. Morgan (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2000), 162.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

such as *URA ARU (the backside exists)* (1985-86). In *Why do Things Always Get in a Muddle (Come on Petunia)* the letters of the secondary title can be rearranged to spell “Once upon a time”. This anagram becomes apparent to the viewer when at the end of the video the letters are rearranged on screen to spell the words that traditionally start a fairy tale. Considering the theme of temporal reversal throughout the video, it is fitting that the video end with the words that typically begin a story. Hill’s concern with language is yet another way that the theme of narrative or temporal order is brought to the viewer’s attention. The arrangement and rearrangement of letters in *Muddle* is analogous to the arrangement and rearrangement of temporal order. Each draws the viewer’s attention to the malleability of language and of video, and thus to interiority and how it is determined by the arrangement of time. Without a temporal foundation to latch onto, “inside,” “outside,” “forwards,” and “backwards” are meaningless to the subject and to the viewer. Hill’s manipulation of temporality shows us that the construction of interiority in his video is utterly dependent on a specific arrangement and representation of time.

Another strategy that invokes interiority is the use of narrative in this video. Prior to this work, Hill had been almost exclusively concerned with working with the formal elements of video, as we can see in works such as *Soundings* (1979). *Soundings* is a video that involves an investigation into the translation of sound into image and image into sound. Experimenting with an audio speaker, Hill recorded the visual evidence of sound emitted from the speaker in small vibrations in the image. We could also think of Hill’s *Processual Video* (1980), exhibited at the “Video Viewpoint” series of conferences in 1980 at New York’s Museum of Modern Art. Hill narrated a script while his video played in the background. The video, minimal in appearance, consists of an image of a solid

white line on a black background and that slowly rotates on its axis. The line takes on associative meaning in conjunction with a narrative on form, recited by Hill, that alludes to places, such as snow-covered mountains, an airport, and a lake. *Muddle* was in fact Hill's first attempt at writing a screenplay for a video. The use of a familiar narrative in *Muddle* provides a more accessible way of engaging with the work than do the formal elements of his earlier work. Without a story to follow, the viewer can easily become lost in a slew of images and sounds. The narrative in *Muddle* operates as a hook for viewers, who only after becoming involved in the story find themselves considering the formal properties of video.

Each of the previously discussed aesthetic strategies in *Muddle* contributes to the articulation of a temporality that exceeds the notion of time as chronological, measured, predictable, and successive. Christine Ross has characterized video as a “practice that sought to investigate the *making* of time—the consideration of time as a material—through its exploration of extendedness, delay, boredom, banality, nonproductivity, and repetition.”⁹⁶ According to Ross, video practice has typically been divided between “defenders of extendedness or eventfulness”, in other words, defenders of duration or immediacy.⁹⁷ Hill's *Muddle* suggests to us that video has its own temporal structure, its own internal rhythm. There is a limited number of ways the order of events can be manipulated on videotape. The video apparatus and monitor and their various functions manifest a time in themselves. But this internal rhythm, however it is characterized, is also perceived by individuals who may have a temporal structure of their own, shaped by their experiences and expectations.

⁹⁶ Christine Ross, “The Temporalities of Video: Extendedness Revisited,” *Art Journal* 65, no. 3 (Fall 2006): 82.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 84.

Let us now turn to another example, *24 Hour Psycho*, to consider another way in which temporality is manipulated—and interiority thereby emphasized—in video art. As we will see, the video displaces time as measured and successive by extending the duration of the total work so that our perception of the events becomes skewed. Gordon's *24 Hour Psycho* was made a little over thirty years after Alfred Hitchcock's classic film *Psycho* (1960). It consists of a VHS copy of Hitchcock's film screened in slow motion and without sound over a period of twenty-four hours. As the title of the video hints, Gordon's video is Hitchcock's *Psycho* slowed down to a speed of two frames per second. Gordon "kidnaps" Hitchcock's film, as he refers to his technique,⁹⁸ and modifies one simple but crucial element to make an entirely different aesthetic experience. Gordon's video, presented as an installation, involves relatively few parts: a video cassette of Hitchcock's *Psycho*, a VCR with an adjustable speed setting, a video projector, a large, semi-transparent screen suspended from the ceiling, and a darkened room.⁹⁹

We have seen the kind of direct appropriation practiced in *24Hour Psycho* before in the work of photographer Sherrie Levine. Levine photographed reproductions of original photographs by Walker Evans and others from exhibition catalogues. For instance, Levine's *After Walker Evans: 2* (1981) (see fig. 13) is a photograph of a reproduction of a portrait of an Alabama sharecropper and his family during the Depression era in the United States.¹⁰⁰ But where in Levine's work the appropriation is a challenge to ideas of authorship, originality, and the photographer's role vis-à-vis the

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Holger Broecker, "Cinema is Dead! Long Live Film! The Language of Images in the Video Works of Douglas Gordon," in *Superhumannatural: Douglas Gordon* (Edinburgh: National Galleries of Scotland, 2006), 66.

¹⁰⁰ The Metropolitan Museum of Art. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/pcgn/ho_1995.266.2.htm. (accessed May 20, 2009).

photographer's subject, Gordon's appropriation is a means to an end. This is to say that the act of appropriation in itself is not the "point" of the work, as it is for Levine. I say this because the experience of watching Gordon's *24 Hour Psycho* is so different from watching Hitchcock's original film that the appropriation becomes secondary. Mimesis is of less importance than manipulation. Before I explain this point in more detail, however, I would like to consider some of the narrative details in Hitchcock's *Psycho*. As Philip Monk has pointed out in his interpretation of Gordon's video, we have much to glean from a reading of the video alongside Hitchcock's film.¹⁰¹ The following is a brief overview of Hitchcock's *Psycho*, which is too well-known to require more extended description than I provide here.

The original film has a running time of one hour and forty-nine minutes, and the storyline involves Marion Crane, an officeworker who is frustrated by her job and by the fact that her lover, Sam Loomis, cannot marry her because he owes too much in alimony. When entrusted by her employer to deposit \$40,000 in the bank, Marion spontaneously decides to run off with the money and start a new life with Sam. While driving to California to meet her lover, she stops at the Bates Motel for the night and meets the hotel manager, Norman Bates. Marion, worried about being followed by the police, signs for the room under an alias. Later that night, Marion overhears a fight Norman has with his mother over his mother's disapproval of pretty, young women. These events lead up to the suspenseful and famous scene in which Norman murders Marion in the shower. We are informed by a psychiatrist in the concluding scenes of the film that Norman's

¹⁰¹ Philip Monk, "The Split of the Unconscious: 24 Hour Psycho," in *Double-Cross: The Hollywood Films of Douglas Gordon* (Toronto: Powerplant Gallery and Art Gallery of York University, 2003).

madness stemmed from the dominating force of his dead mother, whom he had incorporated into himself as half of his split personality.

Gordon's video replaces the illusion of a measured and successive temporality with one that is artificially slow and extended, and that therefore calls more attention to itself than it does to the depicted events. For instance, the prolongation of the iconic scene from *Psycho*—the shower scene—produces a profoundly intense feeling of curiosity and horror. The original scene in Hitchcock's film is already well-known for its masterful creation of suspense and horror. When we see the same scene at the rate of two frames per second, the images take on a much more monumental quality. Viewers who have seen Hitchcock's *Psycho* know full well how it ends, making the slow-motion version of the shower scene all the more gruelling, as each shot takes leaves time for the viewer to scrutinize the smallest of visual details. But the delay also causes viewers frustration because the action of this and of all other scenes becomes so disjointed in its slowness that we can no longer follow the plot easily. Viewers need to recall the original plot of the film in order to piece together the images in Gordon's video. Indeed, in this regard it is crucial that Gordon used a famous film, since the viewer's familiarity with the narrative of the original only emphasizes the sense of confusion that results from Gordon slowing the film down. For viewers who have never seen Hitchcock's original film, Gordon's *Psycho* may be even more difficult to comprehend. When we finally recognize the image we are seeing, it is detached and decontextualized from the image that came before it. The artist's decision to reduce the speed of the images in the video results in an interrupted and discontinuous experience.

Another technique that Gordon deploys in *24 Hour Psycho* is the absence of sound. Phillip Monk has observed that the omission of the soundtrack to the film hints at the theme of repression in the original film.¹⁰² Even small details in Norman's character, such as his stutter, provide evidence to suggest his psychologically troubled state. But in Gordon's version, Norman's stutter is rendered inaudible. Moreover, Gordon's silent soundtrack takes on particular meaning in the infamous shower scene. We cannot hear the shrill screams of Marion Crane. Instead, the viewer is left to her own devices to fill in the soundtrack. The silence urges the viewer to withdraw from the immediate surroundings and either recall the original soundtrack or invent one of their own. Expectation and experience create a specifically temporal-based interiority.

In order to better understand how a temporal-based interiority is shaped by the viewer's experience and expectation, we now can turn to Reinhart Koselleck's preconditions for history. Koselleck discusses two historical categories he calls the *space of experience* and the *horizon of expectation*. For Koselleck, these mark the conditions of possibility for history. Further, the gap between experience and expectation is increasing largely because of the perceived acceleration of time in contemporary society. This perceived acceleration results in part from our ability to do things more efficiently and quickly than before, and is a result of rampant industrialization and capitalism.¹⁰³ The specialization of work has enabled society to work at a faster rate. The result is that there is increasing distance between our past and our future, according to Koselleck. Similarly, the gap between our memories (or experiences) and our hopes (or expectations) must be

¹⁰² Ibid., 70-72.

¹⁰³ Reinhart Koselleck, "'Space of Experience' and 'Horizon of Expectation': Two Historical Categories," in *Future's Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985), 284.

bridged more constantly in order for us to act and live.¹⁰⁴ Gordon's video is an exercise in our ability to move between our memories (of the storyline of the original film) and our expectations. This necessity of movement from recall to anticipation requires the viewer's attention and response.

The temporal structure of interiority in *24 Hour Psycho* may be further considered by looking at Gilles Deleuze's views on cinema. Deleuze writes of narrative cinema in two of his books: *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*,¹⁰⁵ and *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*.¹⁰⁶ In these he identifies the Second World War as an event that irreparably changed our understanding of time in film. Although my focus throughout this thesis has been exclusively on video art, I allude to Deleuze's texts on film for two reasons. The first is that the conceptual similarities between narrative cinema and narrative video provide us with good reason to consider film and video as cousins. Of course, many think little of the formal distinctions between the two. For many of us, going to a movie theatre to watch a film is not all that different from renting a video and watching it in the comfort of our homes. But video and film are two very different media with different formal properties. And to the initiated, the visual differences between the luminescence of the filmstrip and the flatness of analogue video are distinctive. This is all to say that while the formal differences between film and video are uncontroversial, there is nonetheless overlap between these media in their use of narrative.

The second reason I allude to the work of Deleuze is that his notion of the "time-image" (or the "crystal-image") provides the discussion of Hill's and Gordon's video

¹⁰⁴Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London: Athlone Press, 1986).

¹⁰⁶ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London: Athlone Press, 1989).

with some philosophical context. The time-image can be understood as a fusion of subjective recollection and a real, objective image in the present moment (in other words, a fusion of the virtual image and actual image). And it is in Deleuze's discussion of the "indiscernibility" between the virtual and the actual image that the notion of interiority and time is addressed. Deleuze writes of a particular attribute in neo-realist cinema: an attribute exemplified in the work of directors such as Federico Fellini and Michelangelo Antonioni. He calls this attribute the "indiscernibility" between the real and the imaginary.¹⁰⁷ In explaining Henri Bergson's major theses on time,¹⁰⁸ Deleuze interprets Bergson to mean not simply that duration is subjective and that this is what makes up our internal life, but that:

the only subjectivity is time, non-chronological time grasped in its foundation, and it is we who are internal to time, not the other way around. That we are in time looks a commonplace yet it is the highest paradox. Time is not the interior in us, but just the opposite, the interiority in which we are, in which we move, live and change.¹⁰⁹

In fact, to be internal to time, to suppose that we inhabit time, is to say that subjectivity is not unproblematically ours. Rather, subjectivity is a consequence of the nature of time.¹¹⁰

When we consider how to interpret Gordon's aesthetic decision to extend the optical narrative of Hollywood's *Psycho* over a period of 24 hours, one possibility is that it suggests to us that we, like the actors on the screen, are within time. The near

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 7.

¹⁰⁸ See Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1911); and Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, trans. F.L. Pogson (London: Allen & Unwin, 1910).

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 82.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

impossibility of viewing the entire twenty-four hours of the video in a gallery reminds us that we are bound by our own internal rhythms that dictate our needs for sleep and food.

In Hill's *Muddle*, a similar kind of temporal entrapment takes place. The characters move and speak against the flow of chronological time. If it isn't the optical element of the video that is moving backwards, it is the words each character speaks that move against the advance of time. Both the optical and the sonic elements of the video are so thoroughly mixed up that the viewer participates in the metalogue by trying to figure out which direction is forward and which direction is backward in the video. This might seem to suggest to the viewer that we are irredeemably caught up in the passing of time as a whirlpool: that our thoughts, actions, and feelings are contingent on our situation in time that *passes* (rather than chronological time, or time that can be divided into successive moments).

Koselleck draws attention to the fact that history has not always been thought of as forward-moving – i.e. as directed towards the future. The paradigmatic alternative to a progressive history is a history that repeats itself, a recurring history. In medieval temporality, for instance, time was envisioned not as moving on a straight trajectory from the past into the future, but as moving in a circular format, eventually returning to the point at which it had started. Koselleck historicizes the notion of historical time (in other words, the time that is presumed by History and that is distinct from natural time) and attempts to show how institutions, organizations, and other socio-political phenomena each have an internal temporal structure, a temporal rhythm of their own.¹¹¹ But above all, these temporal structures are bound by the concrete actions and thoughts of individuals within organizations and institutions.

¹¹¹ Ibid., xxii.

Koselleck's notion of the historicization of historical time returns us to the central concern of this chapter. I have suggested that both Gary Hill's *Muddle* and Douglas Gordon's *24 Hour Psycho* show us how the manipulation of duration in video has been instrumental in an articulation of an internal rhythm unique to the medium itself. Moreover, these videos show us how interiority is strictly a temporal phenomenon that is determined by the ways in which temporality is manifest in each video. And this internal temporality does not operate on its own, but in conjunction with the viewer's own patterns of expectation and experience. Koselleck's theories of history have been helpful in the articulation of this idea because of the focus he has given to the broad historical categories of experience and expectation, which he has argued are foundational for all possible histories. These historical categories are broad, general, and unavoidably subjective.

In conclusion, I allude to an idea that Hal Foster suggests in his "parallactic" treatment of history. He claims that the relation of events in history must be framed from a double perspective so as to reveal the process of "anticipated futures and reconstructed pasts."¹¹² Perhaps influenced by Koselleck's own theory of history, Foster also seems to suggest that the roles of hope and memory in the construction of history must be acknowledged. I have emphasized certain videographic strategies in Gordon's and Hill's work that present us with a picture of a temporality that is circular, at times regressive, and changeable. Each video prompts us to consider the meaning of such manipulation of temporal order and duration. This manipulation is a way of drawing our attention to the contingency of temporality, to the possibility of more than one time, and to the effect our

¹¹² Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 207.

own perception of the events has on the work itself. Most importantly, Hill's and Gordon's videos represent the contingency of temporality by using formal techniques that in turn construct temporality as interior and subjective.

Concluding Remarks

How does video speak to us? In my effort to answer this question, I have sketched out three ways we can think about how interiority presents itself. Following Rosalind Krauss, I have suggested that the recurrent theme of the inner self is intricately tied to the formal structure of the medium. In other words, formal properties enable the articulation of interiority as a phenomenon that goes beyond an individual and subjective account of interiority. I have defined interiority in video art as a threefold expression best captured in psychological, spatial, and temporal terms. Each chapter explored one of these three aspects of interiority.

In Chapter One, I showed how Rodrigue Jean's *La mémoire de l'eau* and Kate Craig's *Delicate Issue* present us with a psychological conception of interiority. Representing an individual's withdrawal from the world into the mind, the notion of interiority that I developed was one that was not simply a retreat from physical reality, but an incorporation of external reality. Drawing on Leo Bersani's suggestion that we can think of interiority in a more inclusive sense, I discussed this possibility as it applies to video in general and to the two works I selected for analysis in particular. Craig's and Jean's videos work as coalescences of an inner, psychic realm, and of an external world of physical objects, in similar but not identical ways. My concern in this first chapter was primarily with a definition of interiority as a psychic world and with an examination of its manipulation as such in the two videos. The groundwork was thus laid to show how interiority is broadly linked with a psychological conception of the subject.

In Chapter Two, I mapped out the ways in which video can show us an engagement with phenomenological space. I considered how subjectivity can inhabit an

“interior” space, and came to the conclusion that each of the two videos in the chapter presents videographic spatiality that exceeds the notion of space as a container. I explained how our definition of the self is shaped by our definition of space. Our understanding of videographic space is thus partly determined by our conception of the self as antagonistic to the material world. The common metaphor of space as a container is replaced by a new kind of spatiality that in turn informs my definition of interiority. The videos that I discussed in this second chapter, Mona Hatoum’s *So Much I Want to Say* and Charlemagne Palestine’s *Island Song*, manifest a bodily apprehension of space. This foundation in the physical human body, it was argued, was at times put to the test by the tension between the individual human body as the primary mode of engagement with video, and a formulation of subjectivity that exceeds the idea of the autonomous individual subject. By addressing issues of confinement, orientation, and escape, each video engages with the notion that bodily space is fundamental to aesthetic experience. Hatoum’s and Palestine’s videos address the issue of confinement and escape by working with the metaphors and analogies of videographic space. The goal of this chapter was to show how artists working with video have developed unique and often surprising ways of exploring issues of bodily space. And it is through this exploration of bodily space that interiority is shown to exceed its conceptualization as a spatial container.

Chapter Three addressed the question of how video presents interiority as a temporal phenomenon. By looking at Gary Hill’s *Why Do Things Get in a Muddle (Come on Petunia)* and Douglas Gordon’s *24 Hour Psycho*, we saw how artists working with video can construct a sense of interiority through the manipulation of temporal modes. We also saw how Gary Hill’s technique of recording elements of his video in reverse

draws our attention to the naturalization of temporal order. By extension, we are encouraged to think of the technical and formal features of video and how they may interact with, disrupt, or reinforce the flow of time. The goal of this chapter was to show how video communicates the notion of circular, regressive, or changeable temporality. How are we to interpret the meaning of my observations about the manipulation of temporal order and duration? One answer is to think of these as being characteristic of the contingency of temporality, and to consider the possibility of more than one temporality existing at once.

These brief summaries of each chapter in the thesis have yet to show the kinship between each section. There are a few pairings of concepts that are worthwhile to make. The first two chapters are inspired by two historically distinct lines of thought: psychoanalytic discourse and phenomenological discourse. Within the discipline of art history, these are two giants in the lay of the land, and they have had a significant impact on the way we speak and write about art. It has been my intention to show how these discourses shape our understanding of video art and why there is good reason to preserve them as points of departure for the analysis of it. These perspectives prompt an interpretation of video that speaks not only to the viewer's experience of watching video art, but to the artist's experience of creating it. An important similarity between the first two chapters is my response to the idea of an ahistorical, individual self that exists apart from the world around it. This is the same abstract and universal individual at the centre of these discourses has come under fire by theorists, such as Judith Butler and Michel Foucault, who refute the politically neutrality of the subject.

The second and third chapters also form a conceptual pair insofar as they address the issue of how space and time are worked out in video. These chapters do not treat space and time as ahistorical categories. Spatiality and temporality are not considered as objective qualities present in video, but as qualities that are necessarily perceived by a body. Video has frequently been discussed in conjunction with the rather general themes of space and time, and the result has been a kind of naturalization of video as a “temporal” medium, as if other media have less to contribute thematically or formally to notions of time. Still, however, there seems to be something intuitively important about the relation between video and issues of spatiality and temporality, aside from the history of widespread experimentation with “real time” in video or with techniques that test the physical limits and potential of the medium.

While I am convinced that the methods I have used to analyze and discuss each case study are valuable, it would be good at this point to consider what my own methodology may have obscured. On the topic of the history of rationality as applied to the human subject by itself, Foucault asks, “At what price can subjects speak the truth about themselves?”¹¹³ The answer for Foucault comes at the price of constituting the mad subject as absolute other, or the sick subject as absolute other. We could also ask at what price we use the discourses of psychoanalysis or phenomenology to speak about art. With these subject-centered discourses, the price may justifiably be the othering of the non-subject, the animal, or the thing. A lengthier and more complex version of this thesis could entertain these questions about the limits of a discussion of interiority and further pursue questions of both interiority and exteriority in video. The theoretical choices I

¹¹³ See Michel Foucault, “Structuralism and Post-Structuralism,” in *The Essential Foucault: Selections from the Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*, ed. Paul Rabinow and Nicolas Rose (New York: The New Press, 1994), 89.

have made in this thesis have enabled me to ask particular questions about video art, and it is equally true that these decisions have limited the answers at which I have arrived. Nonetheless, it is my hope that this thesis presents a strong case for why we should not yet dispose of formalist analysis in the interpretation of video art. This being said, there is likely much to learn from the anti-formalist impulses which lie outside other structuralist discourses of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

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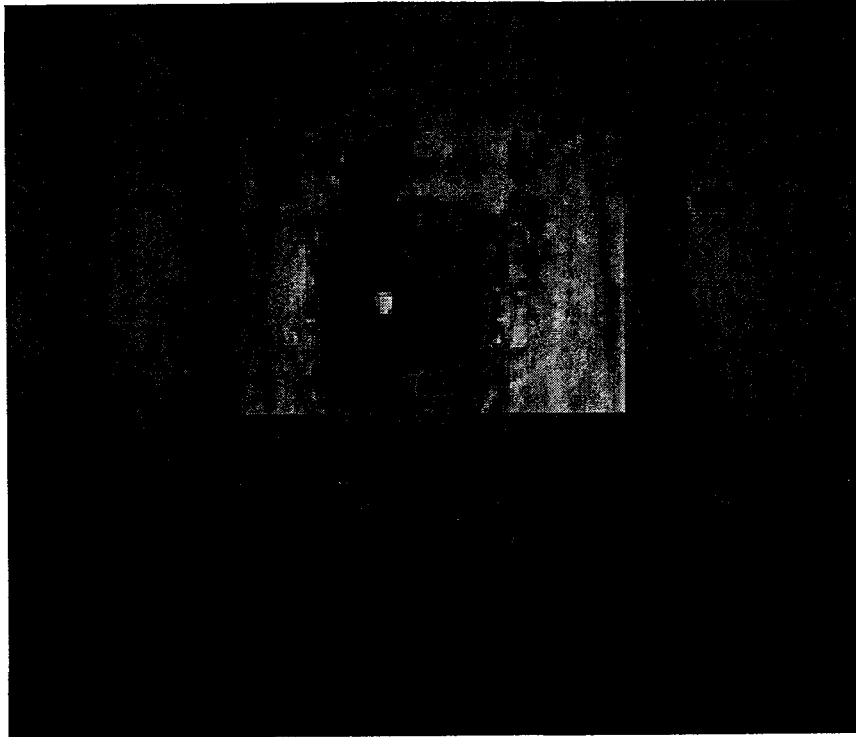


Figure 1

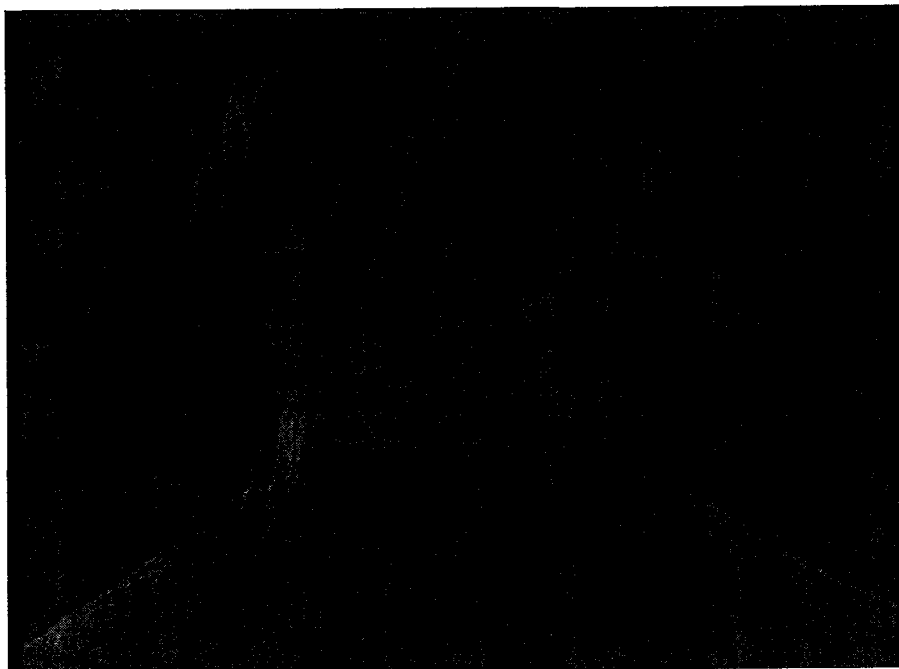


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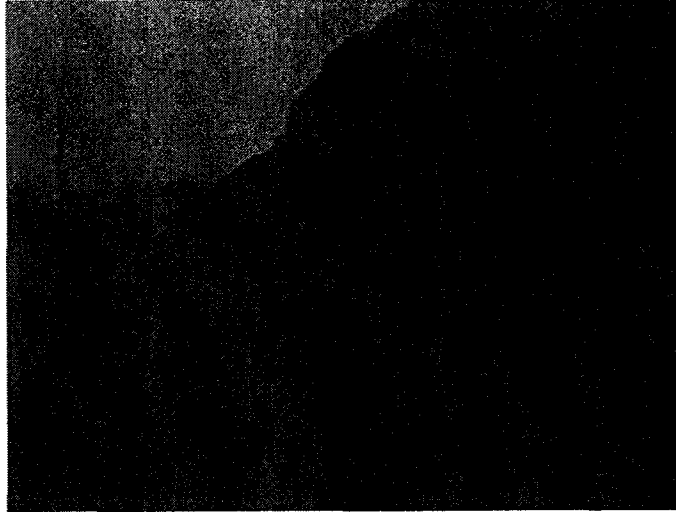


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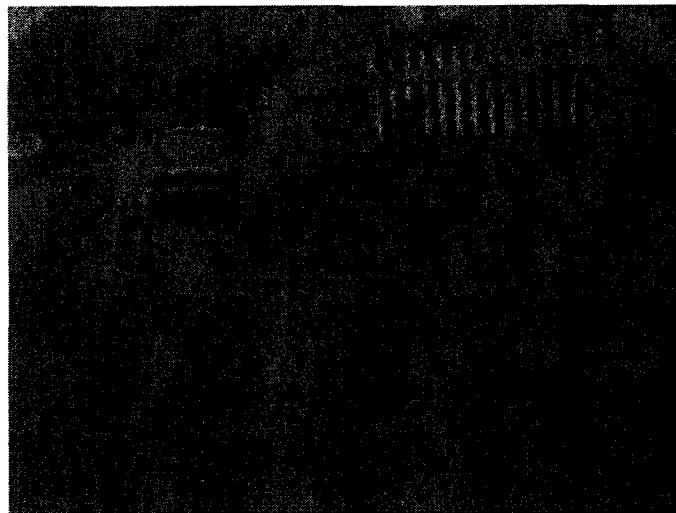


Figure 4



Figure 5

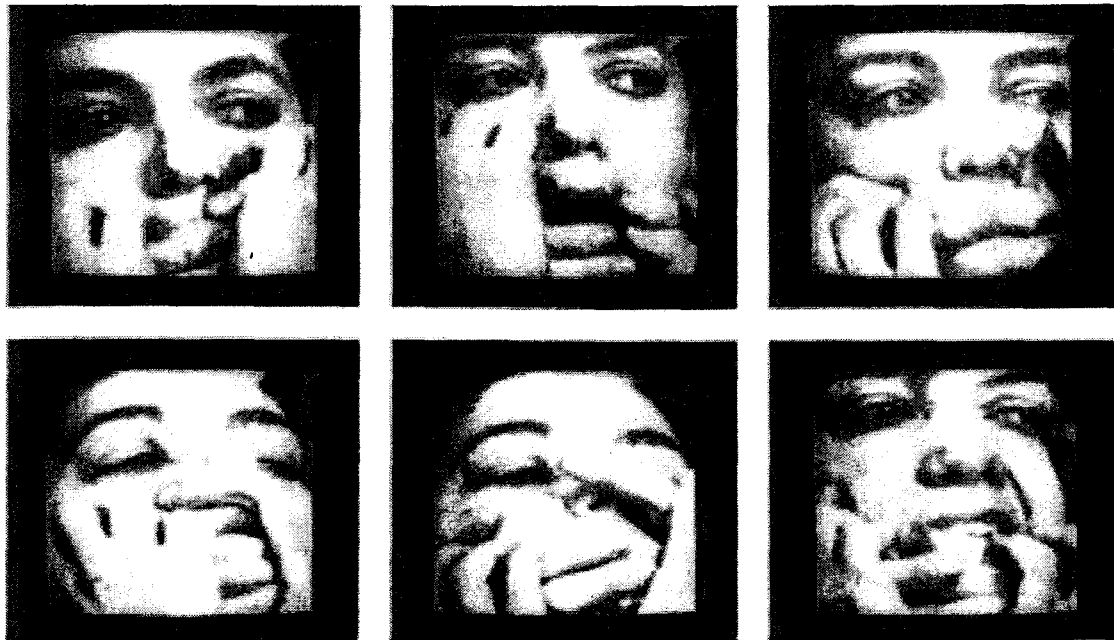


Figure 6



Figure 7

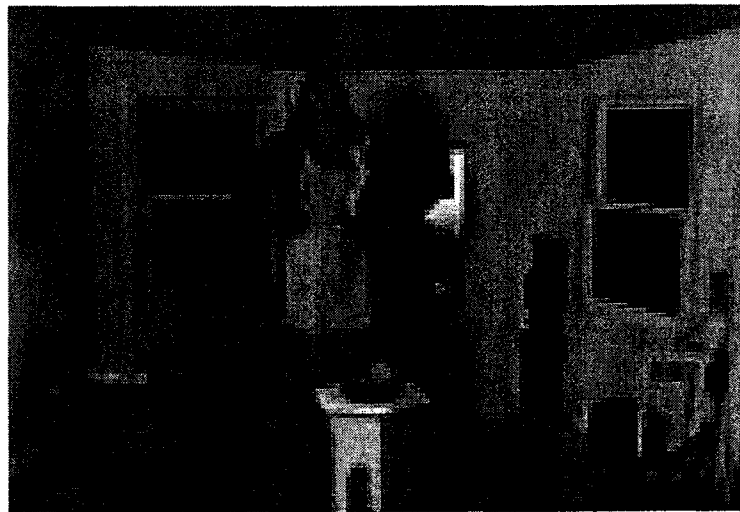


Figure 8

w ləpēp və täll ə chōōw ngithmūs
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 urthēgwōōt miāk zur tēll əth
 m urōhm ngitēg və dētsnī dnā
 ih ngiēb ngithmūs ās' oōē tāt̄h
 ēps' yēth taw urtām tnzūd

stī .yāōw tāt̄h nīpāh urvēn
 'lēur əth nī tāt̄h ~~zī~~ zī
 mē iā taw wūn t̄nwād

nāth/s'nēs dnā urdrō urōhm
 s' yēth dnā /zngith 'kiāsh nāk
 h nī ēlnō stī/oōē llē't iā

Figure 9



Figure 10



Figure 11

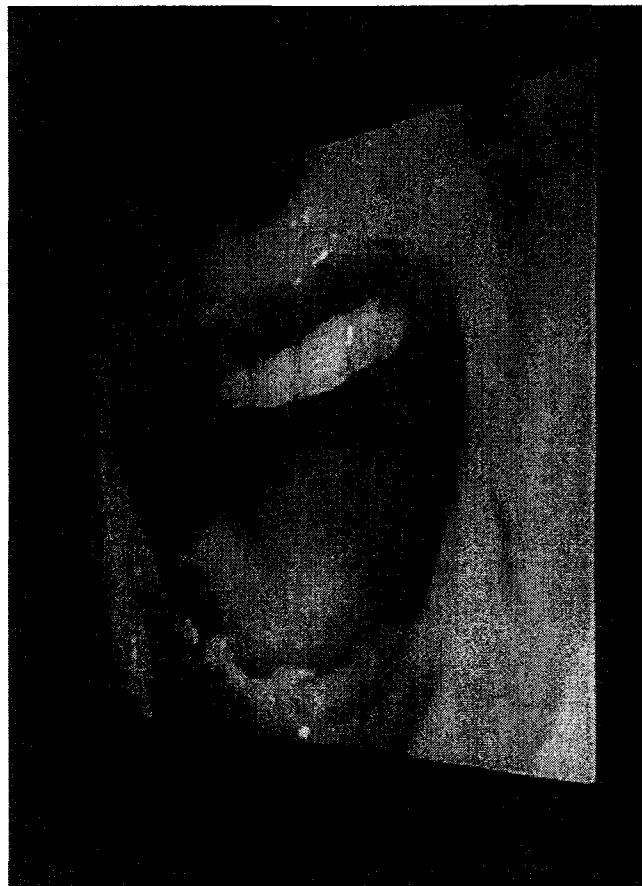


Figure 12

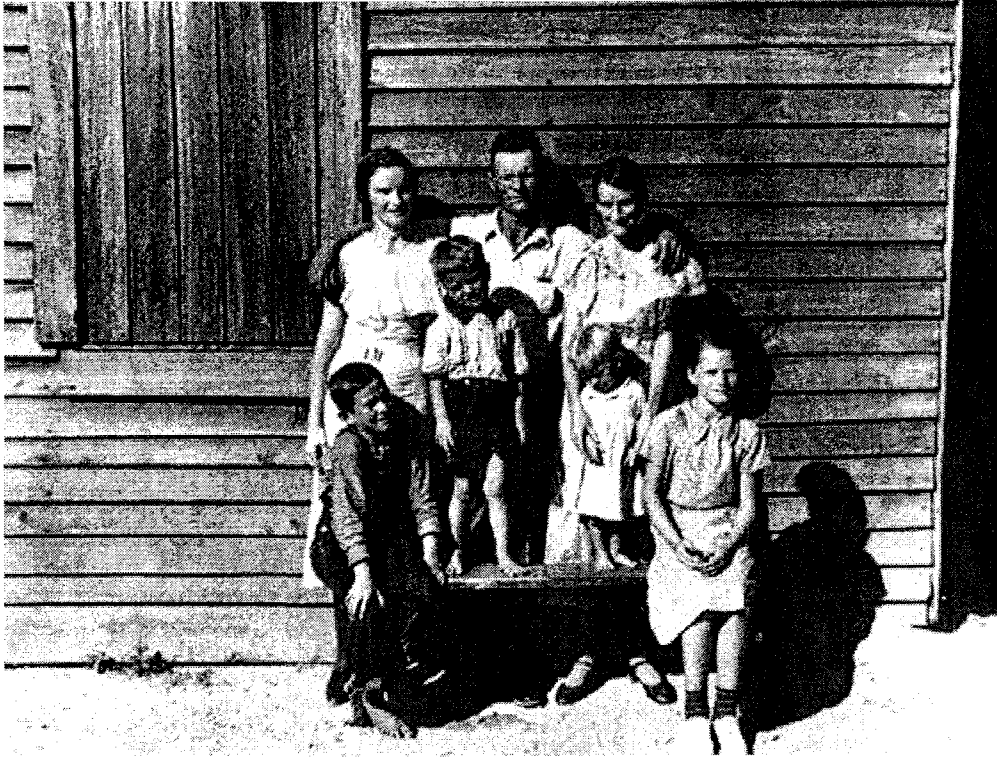


Figure 13