



DOUG HALL AND SALLY JO FIFER

# **Illuminating Video**

**An Essential Guide to Video Art**

APERTURE/BAVC



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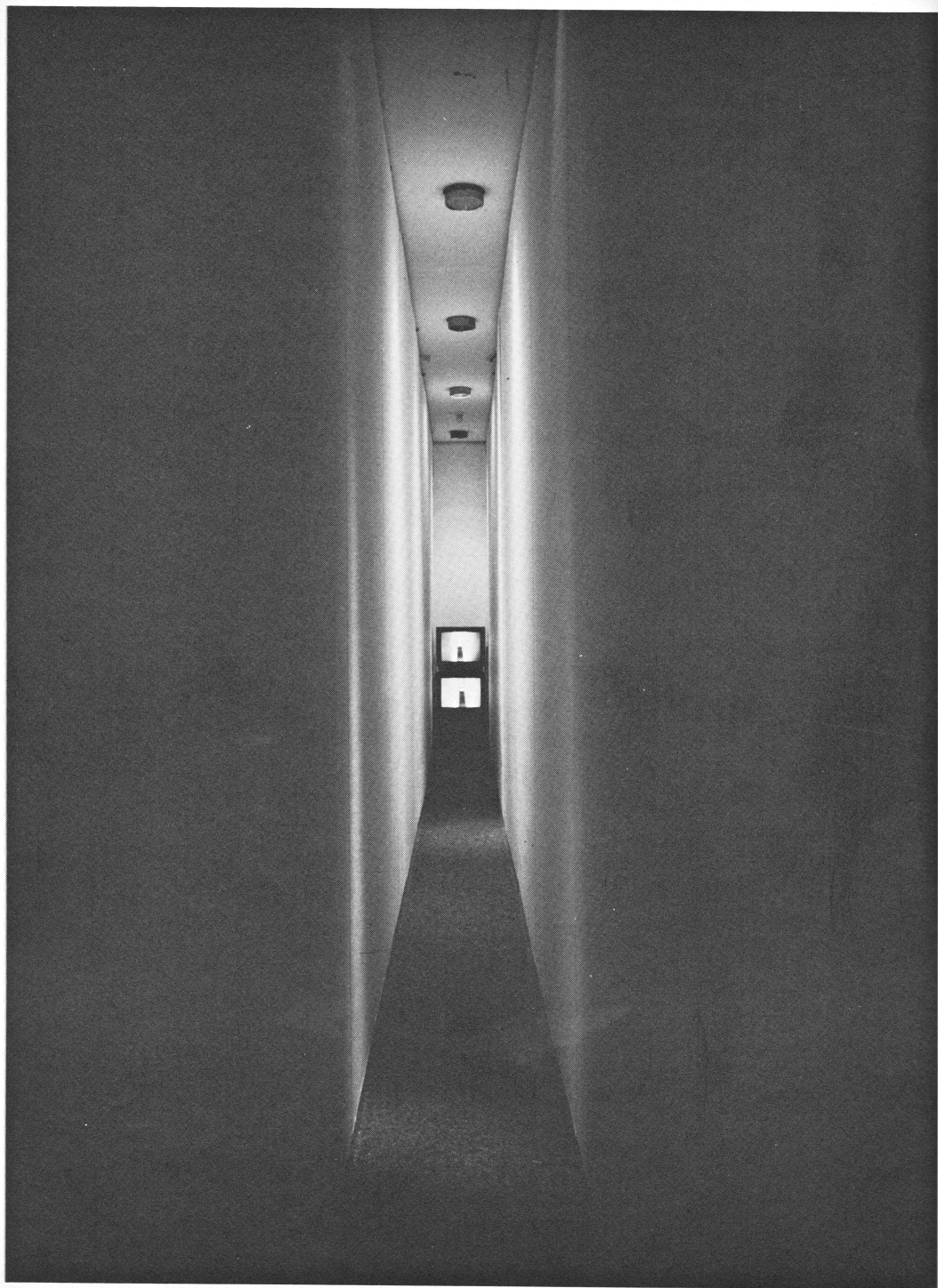
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Bruce Nauman, *Video Corridor*, 1968–70.



## Video Installation Art:

### The Body, the Image, and the Space-in-Between

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MARGARET MORSE

But our argument indicates that [learning] is a capacity which is innate in each man's mind, and that the organ by which he learns is like an eye which cannot be turned from darkness to light unless the whole body is turned.

Plato, "The Simile of the Cave"

#### Introduction

The following hypotheses on video installation art are speculative answers to fundamental questions that someone rather new to video installation as an art form would ask. The answers posed here were based on recent research and interviews with artists and were conceptualized with the tools of cinema and television theory rather than with those of the discourse of art history. The basic questions—What is a video installation? What are its means of expression? How do these differ from the media per se and from other arts? What kinds of installations are there? What effects on a visitor does the art form promote? What cultural function does or could this art form serve?—are questions I would never have cared enough to ask had I never experienced a video installation. Such an experience, for instance of Bruce Nauman's *Video Corridor* (1968–70)<sup>1</sup> can be stunning. To me it was as if I my body had come unglued from my own image, as if the ground of my orientation in space were pulled out from under me. Some installations jam habitual modes of sensorimotor experience, others operate at a more contemplative level, depending on the passage of images or conceptual fields through various dimensions, rather than on the passage of the body of a visitor through the installation. Yet, even then, the visitor is enclosed within an envelope of images, textures, and sounds.

We lack the vocabulary for kinesthetic "insights," for learning at the level of the body ego and its orientation in space. (Perhaps such learning principles might be considered "Deweyian," a "figuring within" as opposed to the "reading" of literature or the "imagining" of pictorial art.) These hypotheses attempt to articulate this kind of experience, in the preliminaries to a poetics of video installation art. Detailed description and interpretation of specific installations must reluctantly be left aside. The following sections address in turn: (1) the conditions of existence of the art form; (2) its plane of expression and different levels within that plane; (3) the disposition of bodies and images



in space; and (4) the temporal and experiential passage, reflections toward a metapsychology of video installation art.

### The Conditions of Existence of a Noncommodity Art Form

The designation *video installation* is not an accurate guide to what is undoubtedly the most complex art form in contemporary culture. However, the term does suggest much about this art form's conditions of existence: *Installation* *per se* suggests that an artist must actually come and install the elements, including electronic components in the case of video, in a designated space. Such an activity presumes the support of an entity to clear and hallow the ground to be occupied, i.e., most likely a museum, but sometimes also a gallery, an alternative, or even perhaps a commercial or public space. Thus, installation is a topsy-turvy art that depends for its very existence on the museum or like institutions, whereas for commodity arts such as painting, the museum serves as the pinnacle of validation in a longer history of display.

Furthermore, the process of installing suggests a temporary occupation of space, a bracketed existence enclosed by a matching process of breaking down the composition into its elements again and vacating the site. Thus, installation implies a kind of art that is ephemeral and never to be utterly severed from the subject, time, and place of its enunciation.

In contrast, an object that can be completely freed from the act of its production, such as a painting, becomes displaceable and freely exchangeable, that is, commodifiable. In addition, this severance from the process of enunciation is what ordinarily allows a magical origin or aura to be supplied to objects of art. It is the tie to process, to the action of a subject in a here and now, whether loose or tight, which works against the installation as a commodity and also suggests why it is so hard to document. While an installation can be diagrammed, photographed, videotaped, or described in language, its crucial element is ultimately missing from any such two-dimensional construction, that is, "the space-in-between," or the actual construction of a passage for bodies or figures in space and time. Indeed, I would argue, the part that collapses whenever the installation isn't installed is the art.<sup>2</sup>

The frame of an installation is then only apparently the actual room in which it is placed. This room is rather the *ground* over which a conceptual, figural, embodied, and temporalized space that is the installation breaks. Then, the material objects placed in space and the images on the monitor(s) are meaningful within the whole pattern of orientations and constraints on the passage of either the body of the visitor or of conceptual figures through various modes of manifestation—pictorial, sculptural, kinesthetic, aural, and linguistic.



Note that the artist vacates the scene in installation *per se*.<sup>3</sup> This allows the visitor rather than the artist to perform the piece. Indeed, she or he is *in* the piece as its experiential subject, not by identification, but in body. Thus, the installation is not a proscenium art. (Hence the choice of "visitor" over spectator or viewer.) It is not hard to see the relation of installation to other anticommodity art forms that emerged in the 1960s, such as conceptual art, performance, body art, earth works, and expanded forms of sculpture.<sup>4</sup>

But how does this noncommodity art survive? Sometimes an installation is commissioned by a museum, such as the Whitney Museum for its biennial, or by the Carnegie Museum in Pittsburgh, or the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston. In addition, like "single-channel" or narrative video, the form is generally dependent on corporate, civic, and charitable art subventions and the economic support of the artist in some other occupation. Provided an installation is site-independent and can be re-erected in various places, a museum-sponsored tour can also generate rentals for the artist/installer.<sup>5</sup>

Because of the nature of its economic support, some artists decry the growing "bureaucratization" of the art: that is, funding a piece requires not only formal requests to corporations, foundations, and commissions, but the generation of detailed plans, models, and prototypes: improvisation is reduced to a minimum. But, however detailed a video installation becomes in conception, there remains an element of uncertainty and risk at the level of the material execution and installation of its elements conceived by the artist, and an element of surprise in the actual bodily experience of the visitor. Indeed, I speculate that exploring the materialization of the conceptual through all the various modes available to our heavily mediated society is at the heart of the cultural function of video installation.

In that sense, the "video" in video installation stands for contemporary image-culture *per se*.<sup>6</sup> Then, each installation is an experiment in the redesign of the apparatus that represents our culture to itself: a new disposition of machines that project the imagination onto the world and that store, recirculate, and display images; and, a fresh orientation of the body in space and a reformulation of visual and kinesthetic experience.

While video installation as a form is not directly related to or dependent on the institution and apparatus of television, it is just as hard to imagine the art form as it is to imagine the contemporary world without television. Not only do we live surrounded by images, our built environment and even our natural world has largely passed through image-culture before rematerializing in three-dimensional space. Thus, though they completely overpower the art form in size and reach, television broadcasting, cable, and the videocassette as usually consumed are each but one kind of video installation that is reproduced over and over again in a field of open and otherwise unrealized possibilities.<sup>7</sup>



The materialization of other possible apparatuses allows us to imagine alternatives and thus provides the Archimedean points from which to criticize what we have come to take for granted.

The following section distinguishes video installation from proscenium arts such as theater and film, as well as from traditional painting and sculpture. Then, various modes and types of installation apparatuses are discussed, drawing on examples from various artists, emphasizing first spatial, then temporal dimensions.

### One Among the New Arts of Presentation

Explaining why the video installation is not theatrical or filmic does much to clarify other aspects, from its metapsychology to its modes of expression, which distinguish it from the other more illusionistic arts:

In the proscenium arts—and one can begin them with Plato's "Simile of the Cave"—the spectator is carefully divided from the field to be contemplated. The machinery that creates the vision of another world is largely hidden, allowing the immobilized spectator to sink into an impression of its reality with horror or delight but without danger from the world on view. The proscenium of the theater, and in its most ideal expression, the fourth wall, as well as the screen of film divide the here and now of the spectator from the elsewhere and elsewhen beyond with varying degrees of absoluteness. The frame of a painting likewise allows a painting not to be taken literally (as well as to be transportable and salable), and to allow a not here and not now to occupy the present. The visitor to an installation, on the other hand, is surrounded by a spatial here and now, enclosed within a construction that is grounded in actual (not illusionistic) space. (The title of the group installation exhibition and catalog *The Situated Image*,<sup>8</sup> emphasizes that aspect.)

Video installation can be seen as part of a larger shift in art forms toward "liveness" that began in earnest in the 1960s, in a field that included happenings, performance, conceptual art, body art, earth works and the larger category of installation art. If there are two planes of language,<sup>9</sup> a *here* and *now* in which we can speak and be present to each other, and an *elsewhere* and *elsewhen*, inhabited by people and things that are absent from the act of enunciation, then these new arts explore expression on the plane of presentation and of subjects in a here and now.

Art on the plane of presentation can be contrasted to art as representation, an evocation of absences that been the focus of artistic exploration since the Renaissance. Representation invokes things apart from us, using language as a window on another world. In Western art, that world came to be represented as realistically as possible, using a variety of techniques such as perspective in painting and photography. Other techniques developed to suppress the



here and now in which we inevitably receive representations, for instance, separation from the realm of reception by means of the aforementioned proscenium, frame, or screen. In photography and the cinema, the separation became absolute temporal and physical separation. Cinema spectators immobilized in darkness were like the prisoners in Plato's Cave, but they are not held in place by chains but by machines of desire, enjoying the impression of mastery over an imaginary world. We ordinarily think of fiction effect and illusionism in terms of these arts of representation.

While the cinematic machine or apparatus includes the cinema in which viewers sit and the projection room (not to mention the box office and the candy counter), "movies" are what appears on the screen, just as photographs and paintings are what is in frame. Attention to this other plane, the here and now of production and reception beyond the frame, became a rich object of theoretical investigation and a critique of representation in philosophy and in cultural and film studies—as well as in art—in the 1960s.<sup>10</sup>

It is hard to imagine at first how much this new ontological status—presence, or here and nowness of art with the receiver of art—changes the rules of art making and receiving. In fact, from the beginning there were many who refused the work on the presentational plane the status of art. For one thing, then art and everyday life can share the same place of language. What then does distinguish art from life? What happens when "experience" must substitute for "transcendence"? What does it mean to "participate" in art? At first, these questions may not have seemed complicated: a faith in perceiving things as they "really" are and a habit of confusing the present tense with reality and of equating experience with personal change common to the 1960s, may have been useful in exposing the fictions of there and then and in exploring the apparatuses of the past. But the disconcerting discovery of fictions and manipulations that inhabit the here and now is on ongoing project of video installation.<sup>11</sup>

The impetus behind the artistic exploration of this plane of presentation and discovering its rules and limits perhaps began with Utopian desires to change society via changes in consciousness.<sup>12</sup> But the impetus was also apparently ontological—a new and virtually unknown postwar world had yet to be explored, a world mythically first discovered for art in Tony Smith's car ride along a newly constructed New Jersey Turnpike at night. What Smith saw in the dark horizon beyond the freeway has become in the intervening period a landscape of suburbs, malls, and television in which everything, including the natural environment, is either enveloped by the low-intensity fictions of consumer culture or abandoned to decay. A subject in this everyday world is surrounded by images and a built environment that are, at times, hard to tell apart. Three-dimensional objects are no longer a prior reality to be represented, but rather seem to be blowups of a two-dimensional world. Two and



three dimensions interchange freely with each other in a derealizing process so hard to grasp that we turn to catchwords like *postmodernism* in desperation.<sup>13</sup>

The arts of presentation and, particularly, video installation are the privileged art forms for setting this mediated/built environment into play for purposes of reflection. Indeed, the underlying premise of the installation appears to be that the audiovisual experience supplemented kinesthetically can be a kind of learning not with the mind alone, but with the body itself.

While the new arts of presentation have been conceptualized as "theatrical,"<sup>14</sup> it is important to note the massive difference between the two worlds of a traditional theater, in which the audience receives the events on stage as happening safe in an "elsewhere," and a theater in which events happen on the same plane of here and now as the audience inhabits. It is as if the audience in this new kind of theater were free to cross the proscenium and wander about on stage, contemplating the actor's makeup and props, able to change point of view, to hear actor's asides, seeing both the process of creating an imaginary world and—more dimly than before—the represented world itself. But the difference can be even more radical, for in performance art, as opposed to traditional theater, the body of the performer and his or her experience in a here and now can be presented directly and discursively to an audience, which thereby becomes a you, a partner inhabiting the same world, possessing the capacity to influence as well as respond to events.

Even sculptural objects could participate in this plane of presentations in a here and now: minimal sculpture in the 1960s, as Michael Fried perceptively noted at the time, offered a sculptural object, not as a monument or memorial of some world or time, but as an ersatz person that confronted the viewer *in his or her own space*. Indeed, the work consisted not just of an object, but implicated the physical space around the object and the play of light in it. The minimal object also required a subject capable of realizing the work, responding to the changing light and positions of a here and now, so that each time a work is perceived it is a different one.

Even the inevitably more narrative "single-channel" video art is part of this move toward exploring the presentational plane. While structuralist film was largely engaged in a modernist exploration of the unique properties of the medium, narrative video has long been engaged in exploring what it means to narrate stories, how stories are told, what cultural function narrative serves, and so on, so that the plane of presentation is represented over stories in a "messier," multileveled form.<sup>15</sup>

Instead of offering simplicity, the presentational arts are hybrid and complex. For instance, even though the plane of expression of presentational arts is essentially the present, it is possible to explore physically more than one tense—reference to the past and future can coexist with the present, provided



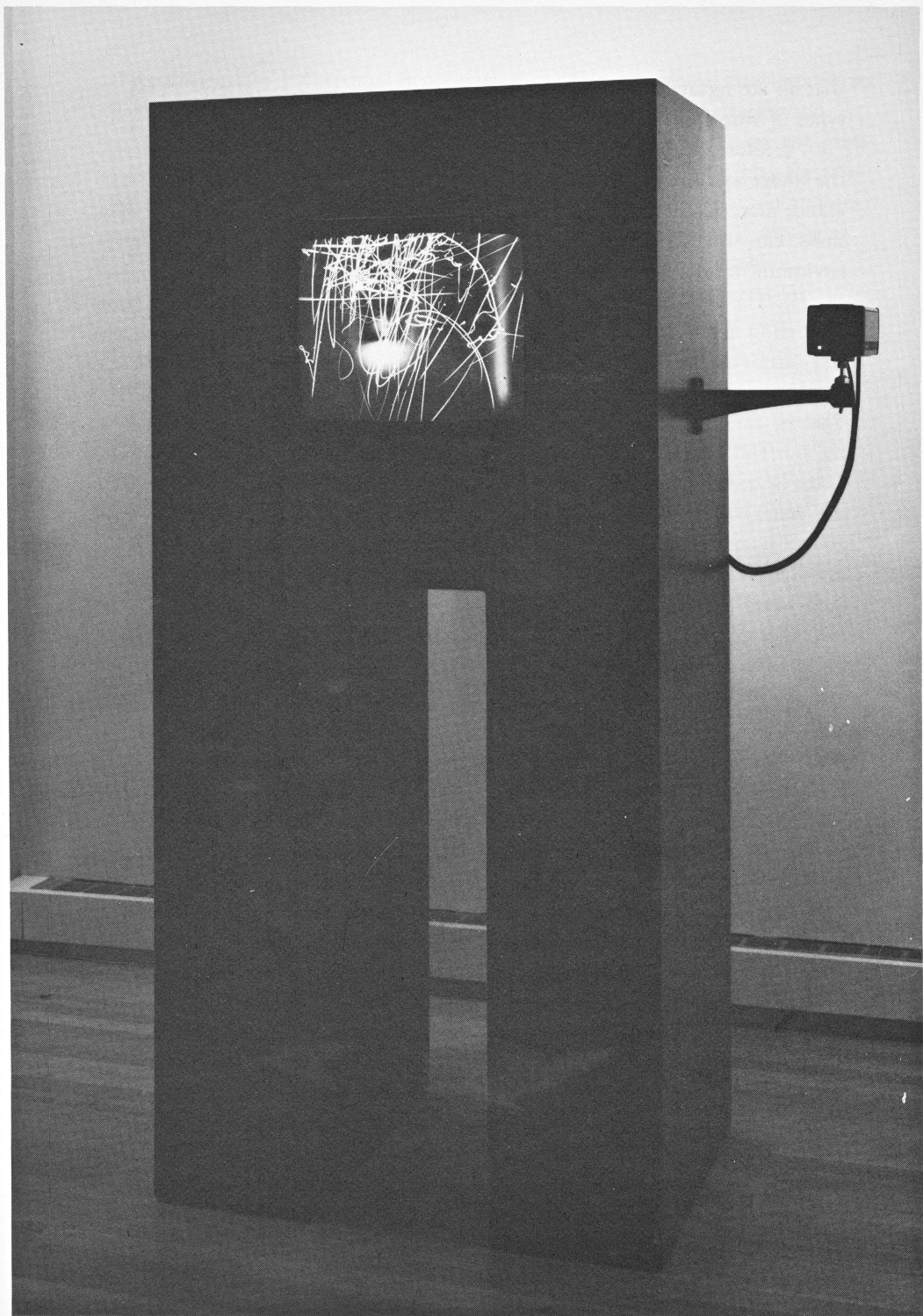
that all are figured and grounded in the experience of here and now. Two types of video installation art can be differentiated by tense:

1. Closed-circuit video plays with "presence." A "live" camera can relay the image and sound of visitors in charged positions in installation space to one or more monitors. Shifting back and forth between two and three dimensions, closed-circuit installation explores the fit between images and the built environment and the process of mediating identity and power.

2. The recorded-video art installation, can be compared to the spectator wandering about on a stage, in a bodily experience of conceptual propositions and imaginary worlds of memory and anticipation. A conceptual world is made manifest as literal objects and images set in physical relation to each other. That is, the technique for raising referent worlds to consciousness is not mimesis, but simulation. In general, the *mode* of enunciation in video installation in terms of speech act theory is *performative* or *declarative*.<sup>16</sup> That is, legitimated and contained by the boundaries of the art institution, a world is declared into existence. It need not match the world outside (i.e., be constative), nor does installation video command the visitor nor commit the artist nor merely express some state of mind.

One could further divide this field of installation work into the referent world(s) that symbols made literal evoke. Yet it seems seldom that these worlds are cleanly one thing or one tense—they are rather a copresence of multiple worlds, linked like stories (Mary Lucier's *Ohio at Giverny*, 1983), like sagas [Joan Jonas's, *Iceland Naples Express (Icelandic and Neopolitan Volcanic Sagas)*, 1985–88], like dreams (Rita Myers's *The Allure of the Concentric*, 1985) and obsessions (Ken Feingold's *The Lost Soul*, 1988) as condensations of public and private space (Muntadas's, *The Board Room*, 1987), or even as if they were a simile (Dieter Froese's *Eavesdrop*, 1989) or syllogism (Francesc Torres, *Belchite–South Bronx*, 1987–1988). In this sense, multiple channels distributed over multiple monitors are but another way of setting co-present worlds in relation to each other. And from the beginning, installation video has been a mixed medium: closed circuit with recorded video, slides, and photography.

Thus, what ultimately distinguishes the one type of installation from the other is less tense or medium than whether or not the visitor spatially enters two as well as three dimensions or remains in "real" space. The ultimate question that differentiates among the arts of presentation appears to be, who is the subject of the experience? Performance, even where it has installationlike sets, differs from installation, nonetheless, because the artist occupies the position of the subject within the installation world. Interactive work differs in yet another way, for room is made for the visitor to play with the parameters of a posited world, thus taking on a virtual role of "artist/installer" if not the role of artist as declarer and inventer of that world.<sup>17</sup> In a larger sense, all installa-



Mary Lucier, *Untitled Display System*, 1975/87.



tion art is interactive, since the visitor chooses a trajectory among all the possibilities. This trajectory is a variable narrative simultaneously embodied and constructed at the level of presentation.

### **The Play of Apparatuses: Passages in Two and Three Dimensions**

Television as a kind of primordial video apparatus already encloses the viewer within a virtual space of the monitor in several ways: light from the screen (as emphasized in the title of another group video installation *The Luminous Image*,) bathes surrounding space in shifting tones and colors.<sup>18</sup> In addition, what is on the television screen typically begins by presenting itself as if it were a here and now actually shared by viewer and media presenters and personalities. That is, television has developed a mode of presentation that envelops the viewer and presenter in a virtual space of an imaginary conversation. This "fiction of discourse" or of presence is furthered by the habitual and distracted way in which we receive television.

If, however, the television apparatus were a video art installation and not a part of a habitual home environment, then awareness of the charged position in space in front of the television set (that is, the position of a virtual subject of address) would be part of the experience of the visitor. Furthermore, one would be aware of the television set itself as a object, with a shape and position in (living room) space. One could walk around the "news" and note the backside of the "window on the world"—the annexation of our own three-dimensional world by the two-dimensional image would be obvious not only to our conscious minds but a part of our sensorimotor experience.<sup>19</sup>

The development of video installation as an art form and the discovery of its parameters can begin, as in John Hanhardt's work on Wolf Vostell and Nam June Paik, with the use of the television set itself as sculptural object. To become aware of its sculptural aspects, this object had to be freed from its context, as in Paik's displacement of the monitor into clothing for the (female) body (Charlotte Moorman's *TV Bra for Living Sculpture*, 1969) or as in his reorientation of television sets into *TV Clock* (1968–81),<sup>20</sup> in a literalization of the temporal order of television programming. The displacement of TV sets into a natural setting in *TV Garden* (1974–78), on which *Global Groove* (1973), tape compiled from all over the world was played, demonstrated an image world as natural and international environment. That is, our image-surround no longer represents a world apart; it is our world. The computer processing of images, in which Paik played a pioneering role, is another indication that images were now themselves our raw material, the natural world upon which we exercise our influence as subjects.

Rather than pretending to timelessness,<sup>21</sup> these early TV sculptures were subjected to the processes of mortality, in a literal kind of deconstruction, sub-

mitting the object to destruction, decay, and disappearance as in the performance of physical burial in Wolf Vostell's *TV Dé-collage* (1961). The performance of Ant Farm's *Media Burn* (1975) comes to mind as well. Mary Lucier's closed-circuit installation, *Untitled Display System* (1975/87), displaying on a monitor the "live" image from a camera burned and scarred by light, is another example of the machine made mortal.<sup>22</sup> The contrary process (to the death drive), of building sets into greater and greater unities, is exemplified in Paik's work, with his robot family, and continuing to such symbolic forms as *Video Flag X* (1985, in the collection of the Chase Manhattan Bank), *Video Flag Z* (1986, collection of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art), *Flag Y* (1986, collection of the Detroit Institute of Art), and *Get-Away Car* (1988, collection of the American Museum of the Moving Image).

The physical arrangement of television monitors into sculptural objects continues to be significant in installation video, though when an artist wishes to suppress the immediate reference to the primordial American video installation—the home TV set—that TVs and even video monitors inevitably bring to mind, then how to mask or distract the visitor from these connotations becomes a problem. Then, various housings and sculptural enclosures for monitors are part of a strategy for allowing other apparatuses to emerge.

Developing the parameters of video installation beyond the monitor image/object itself, video sculpture can present an act of inverting what is inside to the outside: for example, in Shigeo Kubota's video sculpture *Three Mountains* (1976–79),<sup>23</sup> it is as if the TV image of mountains were emptied out, its contents taking geometrical shape in the pyramids surrounding the monitors. These pyramids are, then, no longer imitations of mountains, but processed, so to speak, through our image culture and offered to us again as image ghosts and mental apparitions in three dimensions.

But the act of inversion is not limited to image culture per se: Ken Feinstein sees his installations as exteriorizations of his own interior, mental life. Alternatively, as I interpret an installation by Mary Lucier, *Asylum, A Romance* (1986), the symbolic map of our culture with its dated and inadequate oppositions and boundaries is made manifest and undermined as obsolete.<sup>24</sup>

The interiority of such exteriorized images becomes most obvious, least anchored in materiality in video projections, such as Peter Campus's *Mem* (1975).<sup>25</sup> There is no monitor, only the visitor's body and perceptual system in relation to an image projection system, an interrelationship embodied in ghostly images, nothing but light. In contrast, this projection of interiority can be given massive form, equivalent to the very walls around the visitor in Bill Viola's *Room for St. John of the Cross* (1983).<sup>26</sup> The saint's imagination is projected as the visitor's overwhelming subjective view of a risky flight over mountain peaks. (Meanwhile an exterior surface of calm contemplation is pre-



sented within the interior of a hut with a still video image of a snow-capped mountain.)

There are also different degrees to which installation work occupies three-dimensional space, e.g., the video wall, the kinetic painting, the relief, the sculpture, and the installation. Insofar as spatial positions outside the two-dimensional field are charged with meaning that is an essential aspect of the work, all these levels partake of the poetics of installation. The spectator thus enters a charged space-in-between, taking on an itinerary, a role in a set in which images move through different ontological levels with each shift in dimension, in a kinesthetic art, a body art, an image art that is rather an embodied conceptual art.

Once multiple monitors and multiple channels of video were used, other parameters for comparison and contrast came into play. In Ira Schneider's *Manhattan is an Island* (1974), for example, an informational topographic map was created from video recordings taken at various height levels (a boat, a helicopter) and locations (downtown, midtown, uptown) of Manhattan.<sup>27</sup> In *Time Zones (A Reality Simulation)*, (1980), Schneider attempted the same on a world scale, displaying a circle of twenty-four (recorded, but ideally simultaneous satellite) images, one from each zone. These pieces are technologically complex, but conceptually simple elaborations of the notion of place.

In their collaboration on temporality, *Wipe Cycle* (1969),<sup>28</sup> Frank Gillette and Ira Schneider used nine color monitors around which pretaped material, live broadcast television, and live closed-circuit television images from the entrance to the gallery were subjected to time delay and switching. Here the possibility for an image track to migrate from monitor to monitor was exploited, as well as a series of contrasts between three different types of "liveness" and time delay. In his own work, however, the serial contrasts Frank Gillette makes are not restricted to the same conceptual realm. For example, in *Quidditas*, a three-part installation from 1974-75,<sup>29</sup> images and ambient sound were collected in Cape Cod, Vermont, and New Hampshire, in a display that compared three different rates of "nature time." (Here, rather than establish equivalent series, the camera could establish rhythms counter to that of natural process.)

Beryl Korot's *Dachau* (1974) was the first video installation to systematically explore the juxtaposition of the material on monitors, in a process that could be compared to serial music, or, as Korot noted, to weaving.<sup>30</sup> The spatial disposition of four monitors recreates a kind of broken proscenium space; it is the play at the temporal level that makes the piece, as intended, "impossible to put on television" (Korot) and that forces a viewer to watch the images differently. The ascetic, black-and-white video images show a rather banal tour of the contemporary concentration camp in Dachau, the Holocaust an absence

like horror left unspoken. The monitors use architectural features in the image to create vertical and horizontal patterns. The images from two channels alternate across the monitors: a/b/a/b. However, the pattern is not true—there is a slight delay that puts every repetition across the visual field a little off. The whole reflects a complex relation to recording and memory, to images and what they do and don't convey.

I have come to think of this possibility for repetition, contrast, and migration of images across a shape as a poetic dimension of video installation; that is, it is a practice that deemphasizes the content of images in favor of such properties as line, color, and vectors of motion, with content of their own to convey. The choreography of these properties is another kinesthetic dimension of transformation.<sup>31</sup>

The transformation from monitor to monitor, from two to three dimensions and back again, is most visible when these ontological levels do not match and the conceptual is transformed in its passage through various material manifestations. Curt Royston's installations (such as *Room with Blinds*, 1987, or *Flat World*, 1987) are like large paintings folded over, creating such mismatches at an optical level: two and three dimensions intersect—but the information one gets by examining the three-dimensional painting/relief/sculptural objects up close contradicts the (false) perspectival image one gets from a distance or by viewing a video monitor. (Note that Royston's video image can potentially include a visitor within the "painting.")

Dieter Froese's installation *Eavesdrop* (1989) is an example of a transformation at the conceptual level, in a piece on the socioeconomic relations of art as an institution from the point of view of artists. One part of the installation makes an idiom, "eavesdropping," literal by dropping a live-video camera from the eaves of the museum where the piece is to be installed. The subjective display of rapidly encroaching ground on a monitor gives the notion a new kinesthetic dimension (of risk, of terror, and, potentially, of failure).

Several of Muntadas's pieces illustrate another kind of mismatching: that is, the conceptual realm of the installation is not contained within a gallery space, but spills over into public space. *The Board Room* shown in Barcelona at La Virreina, 1988, is an example. Or, in another piece, *haute CULTURE Part I* (Montpellier, France, 1983) a seesaw with a monitor at each end, tilted one way in a mall and the other way in a museum, makes an implicit comparison between them. In *Part II* (Santa Monica Mall, 1984) the difference between the two social-institutional spaces is virtually moot—one seesaw with monitors tilts slowly this way and that. These pieces suggest that an installation need not coincide with its container or exist in contiguous space; what unites an installation is the conceptual space that breaks unevenly over a spatial realm charged with social meaning. Another Muntadas technique, the evacuation of all the image material from the installation *Exposicion* (1985), leaving only the



shell or spatial frame, is yet another exposure of the mismatch of realms ordinarily so liquid in our commercial image culture that the seams are virtually invisible to us. Thus, we learn that ideas and dreams are not utterly interchangeable with images nor are either exchangeable with bodies and objects.

### **Experience in One or Four Dimensions**

If there is transcendence in the presentational arts, it must come not from elsewhere, nor in a controlled regression to a preconscious state via identification with the not-self as self. These arts address the wide-awake consciousness that we call experience. Such a realm is not immune from its own fictions and intensities, nor does it lack spirituality; play, ritual, and revolution are part of this plane of presence. Experience implies that a change has taken place in the visitor, that he or she has learned something. This learning is not a kind of knowing better . . . but, nevertheless . . . , nor is it knowing unleashed from the habitual realm of a body that never learns, but rather endlessly repeats. Rather, it exploits the capacities of the body itself and its senses to grasp the world visually, aurally, and kinesthetically. If the first kind of transcendence in the arts is the kind denigrated in Plato's "Simile of the Cave," the second kind of transcendence, while not a peripatetic philosophy in motion through the groves of academe itself, could be compared with the trajectory of a prisoner in motion from the darkness to light. (If it is possible to do so, I would prefer not to adopt Plato's idealism or his hierarchy of values along with his simile.) An installation without this intertwining of corporeal and conceptual transcendence would be nothing more than an exhibition, a site for learning knowledge always already known, transmitted by the authorities who know it—governments, corporations, schools, and other institutions of all kinds.

To describe the things we can learn from installation art requires each experience itself and its interpretation. These things are left to the detailed treatment they deserve in other venues; but, the range of subjects treated in installation art is easy to summarize as vast—from the spatial and temporal notions of identity, to the exploration of image culture, reaching from the technological sublime to institution of art itself, to mourning the loss of the natural world and the desire for the renewal of a spiritual dimension in material reality.

### **"You Had to Be There . . .": The Limits of Video Installation**

Beyond whatever failures there might be in specific installations that, for whatever reason, might offer visitors an experience of puzzlement or boredom rather than insight, there are limitations intrinsic to the art form. Perhaps the most intransigent problem is the relation of video installation to temporality, a sub-

ject left virtually unaddressed until now: As a spatial form, installation art might appear to have escaped the ghetto of time-based arts into the museum proper, leaving single-channel video art to fend for itself. Video installation, however, remains a form that unfolds in time—the time a visitor requires to complete a trajectory inspecting objects and monitors, the time a video track or a poetic juxtaposition of tracks requires to play out, or the time for a track to wander across a field of monitors, and, one might add, the time for reflection in the subject her- or himself, that is, for the experience of a transformation to occur.

Temporal unfolding is commonly organized within video installations in repeating cycles that allow a visitor to enter and leave at any point. (Some installations cycle a kind of narrative instead.) There is a contradiction between cyclic repetition in the art form and the transcendence of repetition through experience that is the desired result—yet at the level of each individual visitor this contradiction may be moot. A more practical problem with temporality has to do with the dominant mode of perceiving in museums and galleries. However long the cycle, at whatever rate the installation unfolds, this unfolding is incompatible with taking in visual objects all at once, in a matter of seconds. If, in response to this dominant mode, one were to reduce temporal unfolding to the barest minimum, what would happen then to the notion of experience or transcendence? This incommensurability of perceptual modes is, of course, related to the difference between the arts of presentation and the arts of representation, and the different planes of language that have come to cohabit in the museum.

In this light, the “museumization” of installation art can be evaluated in two diametrically opposed ways. In one way, installation art could be said to transform the nature of the museum itself, now a place fraught with problems related to the commodification of art and the penetration of corporations with economic agendas of their own into the command of the art world. Installation art in this setting reinvigorates all the spaces-in-between, so that the museum visitor becomes aware of the museum itself as a mega-installation, even to the point of self-critique: an installation full of spatial positions charged with power, full of fetish-objects transposable anywhere, a site that oils the fluid transpositions of concepts and commodity-objects between ontological realms.

On the other hand, installation art begins to partake in a long overdue recognition afforded to arts of presentation. In the process, installation art itself could become more commodifiable, a prestige art, and its practitioners a relatively closed elite. I personally see that there are intrinsic limits to the commodifiability of installation art that brake what some would see as its corruption as well as its acceptance. More problematic is the accessibility of the art form itself to a general public. “You had to be there . . .” to know what an installation is. Even then, until recently a general lack of discourse on



the arts of presentation has led to incomprehension or misunderstanding about the premises or goals of this art form as well.

Most recently, particularly in Europe, video installation has achieved a new plateau of display and recognition. There is yet another kind of temporal unfolding involved in this art form; its relative rarity means that its potentialities are discovered at a very slow rate. Thus, much remains to be explored in the art of experience.