POINTS OF DEPARTURE - ORIGINS IN VIDEO

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Points of Departure: Origins in Video is a complex exhibition that crosses the boundaries of media as it presents the work of four artists—Peter Campus, Beryl Korot, Bruce Nauman, and William Wegman. I thank each of them, and guest curator Jacqueline Karin, for their assistance and involvement with this exhibition. Those who have helped to make this exhibition a reality include ICI Exhibitions Coordinator Lyn Freeman and former ICI staff members Donna Harkavy and Judy Gluck Steinberg, as well as others whose assistance has been invaluable: Stephano Basilico, Pat Caporaso, James Cohen, Nancy Hughes, Margaret Kelly, Laura Latman, Valerie McKenzie, Maureen Mahony, Juliette Myers, Count Panza di Biumo, Elizabeth Samoff, and Natasha Sigmund. I am grateful to William Judson, Curator of Film & Video at the Carnegie Museum of Art, for his thoughtful catalogue essay and for his steadfast enthusiasm for this project from its inception.

Once again, ICI’s staff has played a major role in insuring an exhibition’s growth from initial concept to three-dimensional reality. I am indebted to each of them—Judith Olch Richards, Lyn Freeman, Jack Coyle, Anne Longnecker, Mary LaVigne, Stephen Sollins, and Rebecca A. Moss—for their commitment.

I would also like to thank ICI’s Board of Trustees and the staff of the Carnegie Museum of Art—ICI’s Board for its support of each of our projects, and the Carnegie Museum of Art for hosting Points of Departure and co-sponsoring it with ICI.

Susan Sollins
Executive Director
INTRODUCTION

Points of Departure presents the work of four artists—Peter Campus, Beryl Korot, Bruce Nauman, and William Wegman—each of whom participated in video's early history and produced work which set the stage for much that followed in that medium. But this exhibit is unusual: it includes not only videotapes and video installations, but paintings, drawings, and photographs as well. For these four artists have chosen to work in more than one art form, translating their ideas from medium to medium. The viewer will see not only the works themselves but the works as evidence of persistence of vision, or of change, and as evidence of the willingness of these four artists to take risks in their work.

Today we tend to move through museums or galleries as if window shopping, just looking, hoping that no one will bother us with a polite "can I help you?" No, just looking. We take it all in, fast. We scan and move on. Points of Departure, however, does not lend itself to quick perusal. We must slow down—sit down in some cases, or at least get comfortable—while we watch TV-screen images that demand five if not twenty-five or more minutes of our attention. And then we must give some considered thought to the relationship between the video work and works in other media by the same artist.

The works gathered here show us where early investigations in video led these artists, how certain themes, ideas, and modes of expression reappeared later in different media—how video remained important for some of the artists, and how others left it behind. This exhibition offers us a rare opportunity: to see the point of departure and the arrival in one viewing.

Jacqueline Kain
The exhibition Points of Departure: Origins in Video juxtaposes works in different media by four artists who have made significant and early contributions to video as an art form, but whose careers have not been identified solely by their video activity. One could certainly base a consideration of this exhibition on the artists themselves, focusing on the ways particular aspects of their work—the paintings, photographs, and drawings, as well as the videotapes and video installations represented in the exhibition—have passed back and forth between media. One could focus in particular on the formative and insufficiently recognized role video has played in the development of the work of these four artists. One could also consider the historical aspects of this exhibition, since Points of Departure provides an all-too-rare opportunity to see seminal early works in video, especially the installations from the 1970s which are seldom reconstituted.

However, this essay will pursue a somewhat different consideration invited by the exhibition, the issue of medium—that is, the degree to which video might be thought of as a controlling matrix which defines the work done in this medium or, conversely, the degree to which video is a 'transparent' medium available to the artist in support of goals extrinsic to the medium itself.

Since its inception just over two decades ago, video has generally been considered as a separate arena of artistic activity, exhibited and written about apart from other media. One can find
headlines about ‘video art’ in publications that would never print such generic headlines about painting or sculpture. Critics, exhibiting institutions, and the ‘art market’ have all been uncertain how to approach video, perceiving it as alien and therefore (like all things different) suspect. Those who have worked in video have in fact often encouraged this isolation, either by emphasizing video's ideological independence, as for example in documentaries which challenge the ‘received’ cultural perspectives reflected in corporate broadcasting, or by using video in ways that intentionally subvert the ‘marketing’ or ‘collecting’ process in a manner similar to the ‘earthworks’ which coincided with the early years of video art. So in one way, the reasons for the separateness of video, reasons which are at the same time both obvious and complex, can be seen as a matter of strategic and ideological artistic response to cultural circumstances. But much of the perception of the ‘difference’ of video stems from the modernist critical context into which it was born. What follows in this essay is intended to address that critical context, and to suggest alternative strategies that better serve the video works themselves and more effectively integrate video into our understanding of works in other media.

Video’s use by individual artists began in the late 1960s at a moment when the medium of any work was seen as defining that work’s artistic and critical area of endeavor. In his 1965 essay, *Three American Painters*, for example, the critic Michael Fried summarized the prevailing views of modernist art by asserting that “the history of painting from Manet through Synthetic Cubism and Matisse may be characterized in terms of the gradual withdrawal of painting from the task of representing reality—or of reality from the power of painting to represent it—in favor of an increasing preoccupation with problems intrinsic to painting itself.” Today, we associate the notion that the fundamental task of working in any art form is to explore and define its own nature and parameters with the critic Clement Greenberg and others such as Fried, whom we identify under the rubric ‘modernist’.²

During the 1960s and '70s, no single ideology had a monopoly on the critical concern with medium. While Modernism is now sometimes taken to be an elitist and, hence, conservative, critical enterprise, it is important to recall that the political left also generated a critical theory grounded in notions of medium, albeit a critical process careful to distinguish itself from Greenberg et al. Filmmaker and theoretician Peter Gidal is one of the proponents of that theory, writing about film but incorporating into his work a concern with other art forms as well. Gidal
PETER CAMPUS

and others advocated a ‘Structural/Materialist’ approach to filmmaking, the goal of which was to ‘demystify’ the film process, avoiding the seductive illusions of traditional narrative cinema and inviting the viewer to decode meaning from the material manipulations of the film properties themselves. Not surprisingly, the emphasis on a filmmaking (and art making) that required the viewer to become engaged with the form and materials of the art work was grounded in issues of—medium.

This critical attitude was pervasive at the moment video art first appeared. In such an environment, critics understandably identified video in terms of what were perceived as its inherent characteristics. On the one hand, viewers and critics considered video in its documentary and social action manifestations of the 1960s and ’70s as an instrument of communication which could span the ‘global village’ with the voices of the disenfranchised (a continuing technologically objective still far from realized). On the other hand, and more closely related to the issues of the work in Points of Departure, critics and viewers also perceived video in its ‘artistic’ forms as an electronic system comprising its own unique electronic forms and imagery. A 1977 Art News article about artists working in video expresses this medium-dominated view.

Video is not film. Video is not conventional television, video is TV equipment doing what it does best. . . . Reducing TV to mere light levels, flowing electrons, blur and continuous change, artists have gradually narrowed down the areas that seem uniquely video. It is here that the best art takes place, our culture suggests. Not imitation film, but genuine video, not theatrical photographs, but live video.

In the 1960s, the article continues, “Nam June Paik toyed . . . with the actual wiring of his television sets; . . . [his] pieces often seem as if he’s twisting the dial, switching us from channel to channel . . . just like conventional TV.” But, we must ask, what in fact is the difference between the actions in which Paik ‘altered’ a piano (by extracting some of its components and attaching other erotic and kitsch objects) in a provocative Fluxus action of the early 1960s, and those in which he eviscerated a television set or magnetically warped and distorted its electronic image? Certainly, Paik’s early works in video consider the appearance and content of video/television images. Clearly, he is concerned with the ‘furniture’, the television object as it engages references to the ‘cultural’ material of this medium. But to what extent, finally, does the ‘altered’ piano differ from the ‘altered’ television set?
PETER CAMPUS

Both of these objects have undergone a similar process, toward similar objectives; there is comparatively little significance in the fact that one is a video object and the other is not. Put another way, one object has been subjected to a discourse in the context of music history and culture, and the other object to a discourse on popular culture—but it is the same discourse presented in different guises. In each of these cases, the act of alteration forces a reconsideration of what these cultural artifacts mean, what they signify of their culture. John Hanhardt commented in the catalogue of the seminal Nam June Paik exhibition at the Whitney Museum in 1982 that Paik's video sculpture “is emblematic of his entire creative output and central to our understanding of his contribution to contemporary art.” Paik's works in performance, musical composition, videotape, and sculpture all share specific forms and creative strategies. None of these media leads or precedes the others for Paik. Rather, as Hanhardt makes clear, there is for Paik “a cross-fertilization between media: a feature of a particular work will have begun earlier in another art form and will continue through various modifications into other pieces or subsequent reworkings of that project.”

The same case must be made for the four artists presented in this exhibition; their work in video and their work in other modes are inextricably intertwined. Indeed, one of the premises of the exhibition Points of Departure is precisely that these four artists pass back and forth between media, bringing forms and ideas generated in one medium—say, drawing or video—into another such as photography or painting. There the forms and concepts evolve further, perhaps passing again back into the other material modes. This process cannot be adequately understood in terms of medium-dominated, modernist critical perceptions.

One of the most important efforts to extricate video from modernist prescriptions of medium was an influential essay by Rosalind Krauss, first published in 1976. Krauss turned to psychology for a model with which to come to terms with the video works she was encountering as a critic, focusing her investigation on works which used the human body—often the artist's own—as the “central instrument.” Considering the tapes and installations of several artists, including Peter Campus and Bruce Nauman as well as Vito Acconci, Richard Serra, Joan Jonas, and Lynda Benglis, she described a configuration in which the body finds itself centered between camera and monitor, and hence “reflected” in the monitor as if in a mirror. Drawing on the psychoanalytic writings of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, she arrived at a model of narcissism.
BERYL KOROT

The mirror reflection of absolute feedback is a process of bracketing out the object. This is why it seems inappropriate to speak of a physical medium in relation to video. For the object (the electronic equipment and its capabilities) has become merely an appurtenance. And instead, video's real medium is a psychological situation, the very terms of which are to draw attention from an external object—the Other—and invest it in the Self. Therefore, it is not just any psychological condition one is speaking of. Rather it is the condition of someone who has, in Freud's words, 'abandoned the investment of objects with libido and transformed object-libido into ego-libido.' And that is the specific condition of narcissism. 12

Krauss's article, which is often cited or alluded to in writings on video, has been important for beginning to move past modernist attitudes toward video, making the artist rather than the medium the object of investigation. Her essay, however, is problematic. As Krauss herself acknowledged too briefly in her article, 13 she was writing about only one particular kind of video work, one particular configuration, which involved closed-circuit video systems in real time, and in which the artist (or a surrogate) was the primary object viewed. Since then, however, her use of the term 'narcissism' has been applied frequently and loosely as an intrinsic characteristic of video art in general, often with the inference that video artists are exceptionally egocentric and self-indulgent or that by matching in their video art a psychological model for an 'illness', they are themselves somehow unbalanced. It is unfortunate that Krauss's essay, which utilized a psychological model simply to describe one particular configuration of video activity, is open to such misrepresentation, since it constitutes an important rethinking of the critical approach to video.

But Krauss's essay also contains the basis for the next critical steps toward video. Even as she develops the model of narcissism, she excepts her examples from it. Of Peter Campus, for instance, she writes that the "narcissistic enclosure" of video becomes for him "part of a psychological strategy by which he is able to examine the general conditions of pictorialism in relation to its viewers...[and] reassert the facticity of the object against the grain of the narcissistic drive toward projection." 14 What is at issue, in other words, is the complex relationship between Self/Other as mediated by the art work. The "I" of the artist becomes a cultural "we" in our apperception of the work. When engaging psychological models, it is not simply the artist's identity which is at stake, it is our (individual, plural, cultural) identity. The condition of
BERYL KOROT

Etty's Rosette, 1985-86. Oil on canvas, 90 x 56 inches.
Campus's installations, Krauss recognized, "is to acknowledge as separate the two surfaces on which the image is held—the one the viewer's body, the other the wall—and to make them register as absolutely distinct." The wall surface "is understood as an absolute Other, as part of the world of objects external to the Self." 15

In a 1975 catalogue for an exhibition of his works, Campus described the experience of entering one of his installations:

The image of me grows out of my body—it comes from the side where I'm standing. I look down to see the image. I feel myself drawn through the wall, but there is a wall to stop me. Again my more primitive feelings overcome me and I step back. I compose myself in the abstractions... Around my head is a grey area, it is most unreal, belonging neither to myself nor to the surrounding void, belonging neither to my image, nor to the blackness that surrounds it. 16

What Campus describes is the tension, the delicate and uncomfortable balance between Self and Other in installations such as mem (1975). One can be either the viewer or the viewed, but the configuration of the work preempts the possibility of being both at once. This tension becomes the discourse of the work.

As Campus moved away from video toward photography, the presence of the artist/viewer, though less explicit, remained at issue in the head and head-like images he used. The large projected images of single heads and rocks, floating individually in defiance of gravity on the wall, still address the issue of presence in a way that harks back to Campus's video installations. While some of Campus's smaller printed photographs present stones within a visible surrounding, a context, the video viewer sees Campus's large projected heads and stones floating unexpectedly isolated on the wall, so that only the viewer's own experience of them provides context. The issues of identity—this thing/that thing, Self/Other—that were central to the video installations have been reconfigured in the photographic images. The moving images of the viewer in the closed-circuit video configuration are now the static and mysteriously lighted, projected photographic icons. Each was appropriate to the medium, and the change in medium constitutes a reconfiguration of the same discourse. 17
BRUCE NAUMAN

Campus's video installations project the viewer's body on the wall in a manner that calls attention to the presence of the image more than to the system that got it there. In Bruce Nauman's video installations such as Live/taped video corridor (1969), on the other hand, there is a greater sense of physical (as distinct from visual) presence of the space, the monitors, and indeed the viewer. The presence of the viewer's body provides the context for the 'text' of the work while, conversely, the work provides the context within which to reflect on the persona which the body represents.

The use—the invocation—of the body, and in particular the artist's own body, became a primary field of reference in the artistic enterprise of the mid-1960s, growing, one might claim, out of the physical, gestural process of painting by Jackson Pollock and other abstract expressionists beginning in the 1950s. The 'performance' aspect of Bruce Nauman's work of that period coincides with that of others such as Chris Burden and Vito Acconci in this country, and Joseph Beuys, Otto Muehl, and others abroad. A recent review of Bruce Nauman's drawings from the 1960s describes them as having "measured his surroundings in terms of his own body. Like Joseph Beuys, Nauman saw the living world as a field of experience in which the individual could measure his own physicality. The body, like language, was viewed as a codified system of signs, a jumble of signifiers interacting with other arbitrary signifiers." In retrospect, the review continues, it is possible to see Nauman "as a precursor of, and later participant in, the language-based revolution of conceptualism and poststructuralism that has dominated aesthetic theory since the mid-sixties."19

The notion of significatory, drawn from theories of language,20 suggests an analogy with maps. Whether an ancient map of the world, a navigational chart of the sea, or a modern road map, the relationship between any map and what it represents is always conceptual. Although a map is an object itself, it signifies something different, something other—a city, a geographical area, or a landscape rich with people and cultural intercourse. Like languages maps are sign systems, and their configurations convey their meanings. In the case of Nauman's work, there is a relationship between the body, the image-making process, and the use of language as means of significatory. These three means—body, image, language—are not identical but are engaged by Nauman in tandem with each other as vehicles of meaning. So language is a presence in Nauman's work not only as it is specifically used in drawings and prints, in sculpture, and in the spoken text of videotapes (Good Boy/Bad Boy, 1985). Language also functions as a model in his work for
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I Learned Helplessness from Rats, 1968. Hard-ground etching and drypoint printed in black on paper. 15⅝ x 17⅛ inches.
decoding the ways he uses other signifiers, including the body, drawings, video images, and constructed spaces.

At issue in Nauman's work is the fundamental role language plays in giving shape to our world, to human understanding, to our fabric of 'reality'. Whereas older conceptual, philosophical models posited a kind of core or essence of truth for every being (especially humans, but other entities as well, including language), more recent models posit that core as being process rather than essence. For Lacanian analysis, human identity is a process grounded in language. We 'are' the way we apply language to ourselves and the world around us; the apprehension of Self/world is inscribed in language. As the language changes, so does the apprehension, and vice versa.

Language is central in Beryl Korot's work as well, but the model is more cultural or historical than personal. Korot presents several different kinds of forms across the textured surface of her paintings. Some of these forms resemble elements (letters) of the alphabet of a language (Roman, Semitic, Cyrillic); others suggest the pictographs or ideographs that we associate with ancient cultures (cuneiform, ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs, Chinese). Still others are shapes or stick-like figures evocative of the human figure. Korot distributes all of these forms on a surface in which the threads of the canvas, which in some cases she has woven herself, and her painted, textural forms join to become the 'fabric' supporting the entire work. 21

The order of the linguistic analogies listed above suggests a retrogression through language systems (from the most modern and complex to the most basic) and thence back through 'his/herstory' (communally 'theirstory'). The making of the painting is thus a gesture that reaches back to a moment long past when a small group of people gathered together, talking and weaving—thel discourse becoming implicated (not written literally, but more deeply inscribed) in the forms of the fabric that they wove.

This is a moment, ancient but also potentially contemporary, when the human body itself in a kind of performance joins its ideographic counterparts in the woven fabric as a figuration of that discourse. I say "potentially contemporary" in the sense that, now as then, the body at one level stands for—signifies—being, Self. So, in these paintings, Korot brings the moment from the past full circle to the moment of the present, a moment when the individual and the group are
WILLIAM WEGMAN

Untitled (Cow with Extended Spots), 1977. Altered black-and-white photograph, 22 × 18¾ inches.
joined in one fabric, simultaneously singular and plural. The elusive figures in Korot's paintings imply something latent, as if something is present but not yet revealed, like an undeveloped photographic image. At the same time the paintings suggest something gone, a knowledge once visible but now erased, like a palimpsest, the residual trace of an image that remains, as when ancient parchment was scraped away to make the surface reusable. Thus the paintings, in this aspect as well, evoke a simultaneous sense of past and present.

Korot's video work might at first appear very different from her paintings, but in fact there are strong connections. In the four monitors of Dachau 1974 (1974), Korot has conceived a framework for addressing the concentration camp through the four directions of its perimeter—like the warp and woof of the handloom, the axes of a painting. As if looking at the patterns of an ancient fabric, we cannot directly see in the video image the events of the past; we must deduce them from the latent or remnant forms of the site. The basis of Dachau 1974 is not simply in the contemporary experience of traversing the actual site but also in the barely imaginable cultural history of the camp, the horror signified by the artifacts of that place. In Dachau 1974 structure and history converge, placing the individual simultaneously in the present and in the historical context.

One might assume that Korot began as a weaver who turned to painting and then, eventually, to video. In fact, the opposite is true. Korot began working with video in the early 1970s, both as an artist and as a writer and advocate of the medium. Her early video work such as Dachau 1974 inspired her to learn to weave, resulting in a crucial installation, Text and Commentary (1977, not included in this exhibition), that juxtaposed the 'snow' pattern of five monitors with five of her woven panels. Eventually the relationship of form and structure to meaning in her video and weaving, along with her growing interest in language and history, as represented in both video and weaving, led her to painting.

In language, words and ideographs are not identical with what they mean or represent; rather, words and ideographs signify that meaning. For Korot, the medium of video, like language, has certain properties that affect how meaning is signified. These properties include video's temporal arrangement of the material, as well as the elusiveness of the represented image in video's scan pattern, the gap between what is actually seen on the screen and what the video image's imperfect resolution refuses to reveal. These properties of video led her to pursue related issues in other media, notably weaving and painting. The objects one confronts in Korot's work may be
WILLIAM WEGMAN

superficially different from medium to medium, but the substance, the discourse, grounded in linguistic analogies related to history, culture, and Self, is essentially the same. Video is the instrument of one aspect of this discourse.

Language is also at issue in William Wegman's work. Often in his videotapes, either Wegman himself or a surrogate such as his dog Man Ray (now Ray Ray) or an anthropomorphic object is involved in acting out or self-description in what constitute quasi-narrative situations. The obvious association suggested by this use of video is with broadcast television—sit-coms, advertising, comic strips. In these videotapes Wegman often uses language as spoken dialogue in abbreviated, anecdotal narratives which, at one level, invoke and parody television as a cultural reference. On another level, Wegman's monologues approximate the kind of private confessions that might be made to a close friend or professional counselor, but Wegman presents them in an embarrassingly public fashion—leaving the viewer with the uncomfortable task of trying to sort out fact and fiction. Wegman's engagement of language at this narrative level is very different from Nauman's use of single declarative words and brief phrases, a language so spare and deprived of context that it approaches the iconic qualities of visual images. And Wegman's use of language is even further removed from Korin's engagement of underlying linguistic structures.

Narrative is based on relationships apprehended (arguably) in terms of language. In Wegman's videotapes it is not so much the dialogue that is significant but rather the understood narrative, the story and circumstances which become the frame of reference, the context within which we understand the video images. While drawings, photographs, and paintings are not time-based forms in the way video is, Wegman uses these forms too with an exceptional degree of narrative. His drawings tend to be not only casual but also anecdotal—implying a particular moment or situation in the mode of certain single-frame cartoons. His Polaroid images, as well, seem inscribed with this kind of potential narrative, a theatricality of situation that makes us wonder about the context—the sequence of circumstances—that leads to the existence of the image. And the paintings evoke the work of revered masters from the history of art—Delacroix or Turner, for example—within which unexpected specific objects or beings again, like the Polaroid photographs, raise questions of context. So the involvement of language in Wegman's work is more than just a matter of the dialogue in some of his videotapes. Language as a matrix of narrative provides an essential context for Wegman's images in all the various media he has employed.
Both Wegman and Nauman use the body (the artist's or a surrogate) to mediate between the artist and the idea, between the work and the viewer. For Nauman, the body or its parts function as an icon of identity, as an object or presence that contains an idea. For Wegman, however, the body (or its surrogate) represents aspects of Self within the more individualized and fleeting context of specific, though fragmentary, narrative. Wegman and Nauman likewise use language differently. Nauman's single or grouped words, or brief phrases, serve as linguistic assertions of a state of being—emblems of identity; for Wegman, language plays a more immediate and apparently personal, even anecdotal role. This is not to say that Nauman's work is ultimately any less personal than Wegman's, for that is certainly not the case. The difference is that they arrive at that personal frame of reference through different uses of the body and language.

There are obvious risks in reducing the work of these four artists to issues centering on signification—the use of body or language, for example. What tends to get lost in such a discussion is the extraordinary quality of the images themselves and, in some cases also, the aesthetic relationship of those images between media. In his drawings, for example, Nauman generates lines, builds them, with an insistent and almost obsessive repetition of gesture on the paper in a way that echoes the ritualized repetitions of task-like actions in his videotapes. And the eerie light of the primitive video projectors used by Campus in the early 1970s generated a particular kind of mysterious presence for the projected image, a quality which was central to the meaning of his work then and which has been reflected in his later projected photographic images as well. So to reduce the work of these four artists to functions of linguistic or bodily signification is of course both arbitrary and limiting.

Nevertheless, the important point to be made in this undertaking is that to focus on a particular medium as such, as has so often been done with regard to video, not only fails to account adequately for the range of work in that medium, but also cannot accommodate artists such as these four who work simultaneously or sequentially in different media. The point is that in the final analysis it is the artist's work which is at issue, not the medium per se; video is an equal partner with the other media as a vehicle of expression for these artists. Indeed, video has often had a primary role for them, generating new issues and directions in their work. In this sense, for Campus, Korot, Nauman, and Wegman, video has been a point of departure. □
NOTES

1 This exhibition developed from Planes of Memory, an exhibition of video works by Peter Campus, Beryl Korot, and Bruce Nauman, curated by Jacqueline Kain for the Long Beach Museum of Art in 1986.

2 We understand medium as something palpable, a physical means of addressing the senses, something separate in identity from the artist and giving form to, and transmitting, the force or effect intended by the artist. The concept is more complex than stated here, having roots in the mystical notion of medium as seer, and incorporating many aspects of shared cultural context on the part of the viewer or audience—the ‘consumer’ of the work. What, for example, is the medium of a silent dance? The body is the artist’s, but something shared or communal must exist in the process for us to invoke the notion of art. This issue is fraught with problematic areas, not the least of which is a material determinism. It is not my objective to pursue these issues here, but it is my hope that what follows succeeds in circumnavigating most of those problems.


5 It is not my intention here to add more bloodshed to the critical assault by the subsequent generation discrediting the modernist patrimony, particularly of Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried. The point in this essay is simply to suggest the critical context in which video was first considered. Recently, others have dealt with the larger issues of modernist heritage elsewhere, as for example in Howard Singerman, “In the Text,” A Forest of Signs (Los Angeles, CA: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1980), pp. 158–166.


7 Note the title of a significant exhibition catalogue essay of that period: David Antin, “Video: The Distinctive Features of the Medium,” Video Art (Philadelphia, PA: Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, 1975), pp. 57–72. (This article has been reprinted in Ira Schneider and Beryl Korot, eds., Video Art (New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1976) and in John G. Hanhardt, ed., Video Culture.) This was an important exhibition of both tapes and installations but, again, it was an example of video being exhibited as an isolated phenomenon. Antin’s discussion of video’s features, in fact, ranges far beyond orthodox Modernism, making extensive references to video’s position vis-à-vis television, for example.

8 Jonathan Price, “Video Art: A Medium Discovering Itself,” Art News 70 (January 1971), p. 41. 42. Despite its modernist orthodoxy, this article was exceptional for the mid-1970s in its substantial attention to video in a major art journal.

9 Ibid., p. 42.


11 Rosalind Krauss, “Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism,” October 1 (Spring 1976), pp. 50–64. This essay has been anthologized with slightly different illustrations in Gregory Battcock, ed., New Artists Video (New York, NY:...

12 Ibid., p. 57.

13 Ibid., p. 59.

14 Ibid., p. 64.

15 Ibid., p. 62.


17 It is interesting to consider why Campus abandoned video more than a decade ago to turn to photography. It may well be that the medium of video was a useful 'point of departure' from which to explore areas which then, for him, were better pursued in other modes, especially photography. But one is led to ask to what degree the extrinsic difficulties of working in video—lack of equipment for the artists to make video and for exhibitors to show it, lack of critical discourse integrating video into other areas of enterprise, difficulty of integrating video into the 'market' and museum process—have discouraged artists like Campus from working or continuing in video. Certainly there have been other cases in which these factors have been pivotal. Frank Gillette, for instance, was a major figure in the early days of video who has since articulated his frustration and anger at the extrinsic context of a medium he has long since abandoned. My point here is not to trace individual cases, but to argue for the need for a more concerted examination of video as a medium, not a medium in the modernist sense of definition according to a menu of properties, but rather medium in the sense of an arena of action continually redefined by the creative processes using it.

18 There are many connections to independent filmmaking in this invocation to the body as signifier. In this country Andy Warhol's films, Chelsea Girls and Vinyl, spring to mind, as does the extraordinary work of Jack Smith, best known for Flaming Creatures—but a seminal artist in many other ways. In Europe, the materializations of Otto Mühl and Gunter Brus of Vienna figured in the films of the extraordinary but little known Kurt Kren, who had returned to Vienna after his exile in Holland as a hidden Jew during the war. The Viennese filmmaker Valle Yoldi was herself also involved in 'body art' and the German Ute Lemper, who had studied with Beuys, made both performances and video. The point is that this phenomenon was much more pervasive than might be assumed by looking only at the 'galleried' art of the period. Much of the 'action' occurred in film and video.


20 A case can be made that the important early theoretical pursuit of the relationship between language and the way images convey meaning occurred in relationship to film and, thence, found its way into the other visual arts. For a synopsis of the relationships between linguistic theory and visual imagery, written at the same time as the beginnings of video art, see Peter Wollen, "The Semiology of the Cinema," Signs and Meaning in the Cinema (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1969), pp. 116-154.

21 There is an ideology inscribed in the overall scale of objects in Kren's works that recalls Soviet filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein's refusal to elevate one person above others, to insist on an equality of person in his films. This is very different from what might be perceived as the ideology of 'pattern' painting (which Kren's superficially recalls) in terms of the posture of the painted object vis-à-vis the viewer and the culture, i.e., the consumer implications of the postmodern invocation of a market-based decorative product.


23 Herein lies the central problem of popular representations of the Holocaust, which attempt to depict that historical process without understanding that the images cannot be what they represent—and in not understanding this, trivializing the subject.
CHECKLIST

Height precedes width; precedes depth

PETER CAMPUS

Three Transitions, 1973
Videotape
4:52 minutes, color

Set of Co-inclination, 1974
Videotape
13:24 minutes, color

R-G-B, 1974
Videotape
11:30 minutes, color

mcm, 1975
Video projection
Collection Thomas Wegner

Four Sided Tape, 1976
Videotape
3:20 minutes, color

East Ended Tape, 1976
Videotape
6:46 minutes, color

Third Tape, 1976
Videotape
5:06 minutes, color

Six Fragments, 1976
Videotape
5:07 minutes, color

Urnfield (man and hand), 1979
Black-and-white photograph
26 × 32 inches
Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

Lincolnville Ferry, 1982
Black-and-white silver print
16 × 20 inches
Collection Anne and Joel Ehrenkranz

Sisyphus, 1986
Black-and-white photograph
15 × 19¼ inches
Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

Small Island, 1986
Black-and-white photograph
29 × 38½ inches
Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

Transient, 1987
Photo projection
Courtesy Staatliches Museum Alteberg, Mönchengladbach, Germany

Gust, 1988
Black-and-white silver print
39 × 29½ inches
Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

Moment, 1988
Black-and-white photograph
39½ × 29½ inches
Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

Hothead, 1990
Computer drawing on paper
23¼ × 24¾ inches
Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

apparition, 1990
Computer drawing on paper
22¼ × 23½ inches
Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

BERYL KOROT

Dachau, 1974. 1974–75
Four-channel video installation
Courtesy the artist

Structural Diagram for Dachau
1974, 1975
Photostat
22 × 17¼ inches
Courtesy the artist
Anordnung, 1986
Oil on canvas
90 × 96 inches
Private collection

Eftys Rosen, 1985-86
Oil on canvas
90 × 96 inches
Collection Renee Levine and
Arnold Packer

A Girl, 1986
Oil on linen
90 × 94 inches
Courtesy the artist

Loose Translation, 1987
Oil on linen
78 × 103 inches
Courtesy the artist

BRUCE NAUMAN

Bouncing in the Corner, No. 2, 1968
Videotape
10 minutes (excerpt).
black and white

Revolving Upside Down, 1988
Videotape
10 minutes (excerpt).
black and white

Live Taped Video Corridor, 1988
Video installation
Collection Count Renzo di Bruno,
Milan, Italy

Bouncing in the Corner, No. 2
(Upset Down), 1969
Videotape
10 minutes (excerpt).
black and white

Lip Sync, 1969
Videotape
30 minutes (excerpt).
black and white

Floating Room, 1972
Charcoal on paper
23 × 29 inches
Collection Gail Fischmann,
St. Louis, Missouri

Untitiled, 1972
Pencil on paper
26 × 32 inches
Courtesy Leo, Castelli Gallery,
New York

Untitiled, 1972
Drypoint on paper
27.25 × 36 inches
Courtesy Castelli Graphics,
New York

Project for Corridor, Galerie
Museum, 1973
Pencil on paper
29.5 × 23 inches
Sonnenbrand Collection

No Corners (well lit corners)/
Street/Mount Meth. Vapor or
Sodium Lamps in/corners, 1982
Charcoal, pencil, and chalk
on paper
53.75 × 72.5 inches
Collection Mr. and Mrs. Ronald K.
Greenberg

Suspended Chair, 1985
Drypoint on paper
30.75 × 29 inches
Courtesy Castelli Graphics,
New York
Good Boy/Bad Boy, 1985
Two-channel video installation
Courtesy Donald Young Gallery, Chicago

I Learned Helplessness from Rats, 1988
Hard-ground etching and drypoint
printed in black on paper
15½ × 17½ inches
Courtesy Brooke Alexander
Editions, New York

Learned Helplessness in Rats, 1988
Hard-ground etching printed in black on paper
15½ × 17½ inches
Courtesy Brooke Alexander
Editions, New York

WILLIAM WEGMAN

William Wegman: Selected Works, 1970-78
Videotape
19:11 minutes, black and white and color

Flying Cat, 1972
Black-and-white photographs
Two panels
12½ × 11 inches each (image size)
Courtesy Holly Solomon Gallery, New York

Fooly, Saucy, Man Ray, 1973
Silver print on dry mount
Six panels
13½ × 10¾ inches each (image size)
Courtesy Holly Solomon Gallery, New York

Untitiled (Cow with Extended Spot), 1977
Altered black-and-white photograph
22 × 18½ inches
Courtesy Holly Solomon Gallery, New York

Tango, 1980-1981
Color Polaroid photograph
24 × 20 inches
Courtesy Holly Solomon Gallery, New York

Dag Baseball, 1986
Videotape
3:26 minutes, color

Caged Armadillo, 1987
Oil and acrylic on canvas
16 × 20 inches
Courtesy Holly Solomon Gallery, New York

Untitled, 1988
Polaroid Polacolor II photograph
Diptych, 24 × 20 inches each
© William Wegman, courtesy Pace/MacGill Gallery, New York

Biocentral, 1988
Polaroid Polacolor II photograph
24 × 20 inches
© William Wegman, courtesy Pace/MacGill Gallery, New York

Minking, 1988
Oil and acrylic on canvas
56 × 80¼ inches
Courtesy Holly Solomon Gallery, New York