chapter 2

Video and the Conceptual Body

A Cross-Disciplinary Spirit

It is a commonly held belief that Jackson Pollock's work – dripping and pouring paint on to the canvas in the mid-20th century – and Hans Namuth's photographs and films of Pollock taken in his studio in 1950 helped place the body at the center of the work of art. For Namuth, watching Pollock paint was 'like a great drama...the flame of explosion when the paint hit the canvas; the dance-like movement; the eyes tormented before knowing where to strike next; the tension, then the explosion again.'[1] It is not surprising that Namuth had originally hoped to be a theater director.

American curator Paul Schimmel, who organized the highly influential exhibition, 'Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object, 1949–1979' for the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, states that 'Pollock's desire to maintain "contact" [Pollock's word] with the canvas essentially transformed the artist's role from that of a bystander outside of the canvas to that of an actor whose every actions were its subject.'[2]

Artists, of course, had always used their body to make their work, but after Pollock (and the Argentine-born Italian Lucio Fontana and the Japanese Shozo Shimamoto as well) the body itself was considered to be a material in art. When video became available, artists drawn to Performance and Conceptual art saw the camera as an intimate way both to study and expose the role of gesture in their art. Just as the body became a material in art in the 1960s, Performance has become a material in Video art in our day. In a certain sense, Performance has always held a special place in the visual arts. Is it not true that Manet's *Olympia* (1863), or Zurbarán's *Hercules* (1624) are 'performing' for their artists? Surely, *Viejos Comiendo Sopa (Old Men Eating Soup)* of 1819, are jesting for Goya's pleasure. More directly, Francis Bacon's *Head VI* (the shrieking Pope Innocent X of 1949) was inspired by the screaming nurse in Sergei Eisenstein's film *Battleship Potemkin* (1925).[3]

From the early 1970s to the present day there is a strong link between video and the body. It is central to the work of numerous artists, including Vito Acconci, Bruce Nauman, Joan Jonas, Robert Rauschenberg, Carolee Schneemann, Adrian Piper, Sophie Calle, Nam June Paik, VALIE EXPORT, Marina Abramovic and Ulay, Robert Wilson, Martha Rosler, Jürgen Klauke, Steve McQueen, Lucy Gunning, Tony Oursler, Paul McCarthy, Gary Hill, Klaus Rinke, Nayland Blake and Pipilotti Rist.

In the early days of Video art, three types of artist/practitioners emerged: those who used video to create

alternatives to television; activists drawn to the community and mass appeal of video technology; and artists who saw video as an extension of their artistic practice. In Darwinian terms the last group remained dominant and historically must be recognized as the precursors to contemporary Video art. The first two groups (with some exceptions of individual artists like Frank Gillette) found a home in cable community television, documentary video and film, leaving the art form in the hands of those whose interests and methods had been shaped by the history and profession of art. So instead of the 'public' possibilities of video dominating its growth as an art, what might be called intra-art issues began to dominate early on. They included ideas important to all artists of the mid-1960s and beyond: the dematerialized art object; time as a medium in art; use of industrial materials and technology in making art; the abandonment of traditional boundaries between painting and sculpture; the introduction of everyday objects into the work of art; the intermingling of several artistic disciplines, including painting, dance, sculpture, music, theater, photography, and video.

Even prior to Minimalism and Conceptualism, the dominant art 'isms' at the birth of Video art, the artists who best represented this new cross-disciplinary spirit were Robert Rauschenberg, whose influence (often unsung) on early Video art was
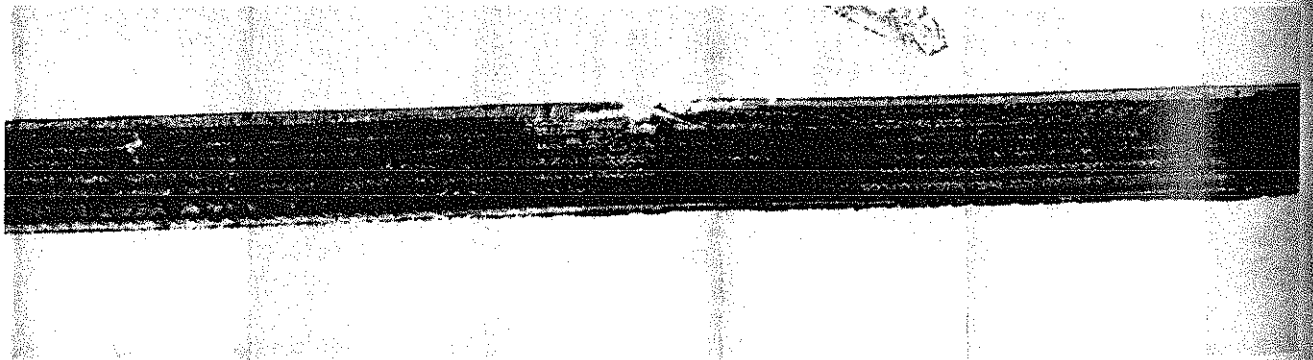
Robert Rauschenberg and John Cage
ABOVE
110 *Automobile Tire Print* (1953; detail)

Nam June Paik
OPPOSITE
111 Paik's earliest collaborator was Fluxist artist Charlotte Moorman. Together they created numerous performances with video and music that were seen as scandalous when Moorman appeared topless. This tape, *'Topless Cellist' Charlotte Moorman* (1995), was made in memory of Moorman, who died of cancer in 1991.

enormous, and musician John Cage. In 1953, Rauschenberg and Cage pasted twenty long strips of paper together and after Rauschenberg poured black paint into the grooves of the tires on Cage's Model A Ford, Cage drove his car over the paper. They mounted the 'print' on canvas, lengthened like a Japanese scroll, and called it *Automobile Tire Print*. In this bold work, the everyday, represented by tires and a car, intruded upon painting in a Performance act. The resulting work of art hung on a wall defying anyone to deny its place as a work of art. During the next decade Rauschenberg created numerous dance/theater projects with leading experimental choreographers, including Trisha Brown, Steve Paxton, Deborah Hay, Yvonne Rainer, Lucinda Childs and others. Though Rauschenberg made no single-channel videos, he, along with engineer Billy Klüver, mounted *Nine Evenings: Theater and Engineering* (1966) at the Sixty-Ninth Regiment Armory building in New York. It featured several electronically manipulated art objects as well as a video projection of infra-red images of volunteers in Rauschenberg's own performance during those evenings. Technology of all kinds was introduced with a bang, so to speak, into the creation and presentation of art.

Nam June Paik

ABOVE
112 *Zen for Head* (1962)

BELOW RIGHT
113 *Zen for Film* (1964)
Photo by Peter Moore © Estate
of Peter Moore/VAGA, New York/
DACS, London 2003

One year earlier than the Rauschenberg and Cage *Automobile Tire Print*, Cage composed *4'33"* a musical 'composition' consisting solely of instructions for the piano player to sit in front of the keyboard, and after opening the piano cover, remain seated for the duration of the piece (four minutes, thirty-three seconds) doing nothing. Listeners hear only what is in their environment (such as coughs, breathing, street noise), thus incorporating, in a radical manner, the everyday into a work of art. The everyday actually becomes the work of art according to the intention, or concept, of the artist (Cage).

In 1956, as a twenty-four-year-old Korean music student, Nam June Paik went to Germany to study with experimental composers, ending up working with Karlheinz Stockhausen in 1957 and John Cage in 1958 at the International Summer Courses for New Music in Darmstadt. Shortly afterwards Paik participated in the anti-art, anti-establishment performances of the international Fluxus movement. The group also introduced him to their experiments with film. Amongst his performances of this period was *Zen for Head* (1962), in which he dipped his head, hands and tie into black paint and crawled backwards down a lengthy strip of white paper, applying the paint as he went (echoing what Rauschenberg and Cage had done with their car tire). Paik called it his own interpretation of composer La Monte Young's *Composition 1960 #10 (to Bob Morris)*.

In 1964, Paik made *Zen for Film* (referred to as Fluxfilm No. 1), which consisted of nothing but clear film leader running through a projector. This film action, as it
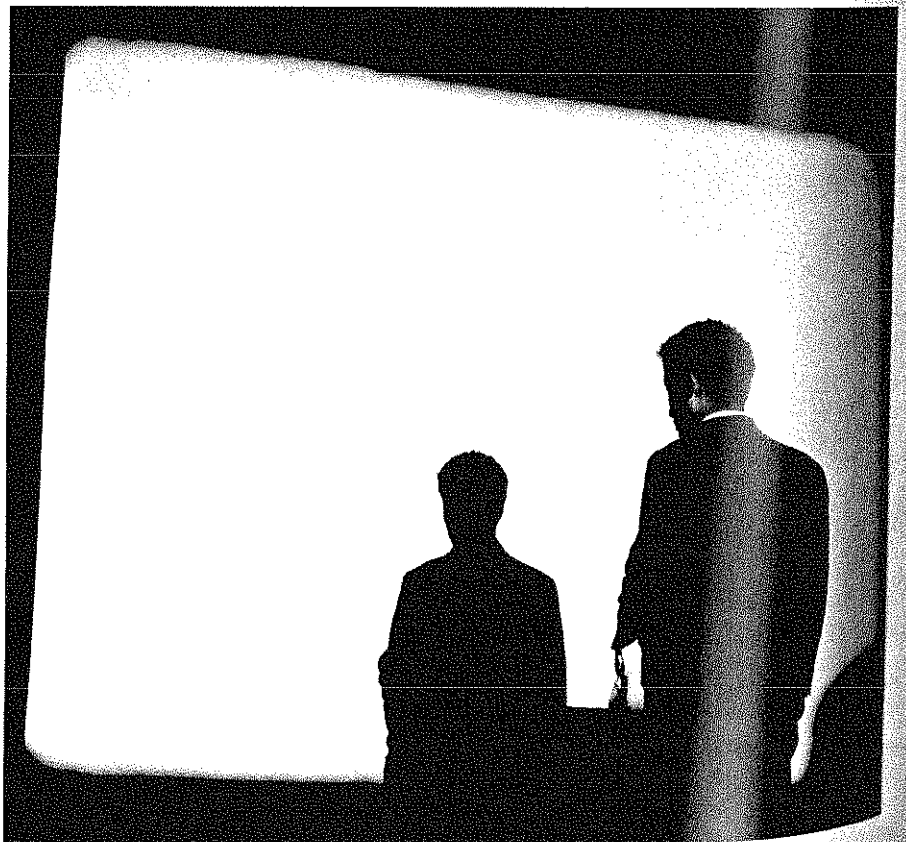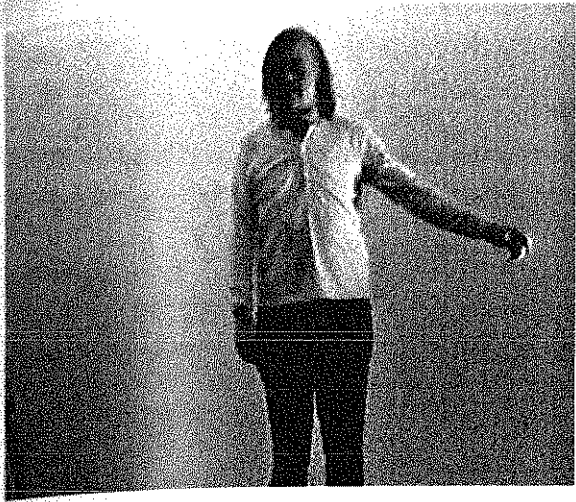
John Baldessari

ABOVE LEFT
114 Even when body art and
process art were in full swing,
John Baldessari, with his studied
awkwardness, brought his conceptual
humor to the pretenses he found
lurking in some 1970s art practices,
as in *I Am Making Art* (1971).

ABOVE RIGHT
115 *Folding Hat* (1970–71)

might be called, was made in the anti-art, anti-commercial atmosphere of Fluxus performances. Paik eliminated the film image completely, partly in jest, but mostly as an act of defiance against the highly aestheticized filmed image of even such experimental filmmakers as Stan Brakhage and Kenneth Anger. About forty Fluxfilms are on record, ranging from Dick Higgins's *Invocation of Canyons and Boulders for Stan Brakhage* (Fluxfilm No. 2, 1963) to Wolf Vostell's *Sun in Your Head* (Fluxfilm No. 23, 1963) to Paul Sharits's *Word Movie* (Fluxfilm No. 30, 1966). The Vostell film has particular significance for the history of Video art in that he used his 8-millimeter film camera to shoot videotaped material from television programs, thus displacing both the 'revered' film image (by focusing his camera on already videotaped material) and the 'direct' video image (by re-recording it with film). This type of subversion of social and artistic structures was a hallmark of Fluxus.[4]

It is clear, then, that prior to the arrival of the Sony Portapak in 1965 artists like Paik, Vostell and Yoko Ono had for several years been involved with European performative art associated with artists like George Maciunas, Joseph Beuys, Yves Klein, theater artist Tadeusz Kantor, as well as electronic musicians and experimental sound artists, all of whom stretched the traditional parameters of their art to include technology, everyday objects and sounds, as well as Performance. It is from these multifaceted beginnings that artists like Paik began, and then expanded, the art of video. What American curator and media historian John Hanhardt says of Paik is also true of Vostell, Ono, Higgins and other artists of this period: 'It is important that we examine Paik's treatment of video as a whole as opposed to developments achieved in one area...Paik always worked in many media and in a number of directions at once: videotapes, television projects, performances, installations, objects, writing.'[5]

The same might be said of some video pioneers such as Vito Acconci, John Baldessari, Richard Serra, Dennis Oppenheim (b. 1938) and Bruce Nauman, but others, like Peter Campus, Beryl Korot and Juan Downey, focused on video as their primary art rather than as a by-product of a larger art practice. Nonetheless, all of them made tapes that may be called 'performative,' in that they were based on the artist performing some action, either as a type of body sculpture or as a gesture associated with the body as a material for art.

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Conceptual Art

In Video art, Performance, as introduced into the art world by Allan Kaprow, Jim Dine and others, and Conceptualism, the increasingly dominant form of the late 1960s and 1970s, were united in a technology-based medium that afforded an immediacy and intimacy sought by artists of this time.

The aspect of Conceptual art that filtered most strongly into the practice of young artists was not the strict, manifesto-like notion heralded by Joseph Kosuth and Sol LeWitt that, in Kosuth's words, 'actual works of art are ideas...models (which are) a visual approximation of a particular object I have in mind.' Instead, what infiltrated art was Kosuth's idea that 'artistic practice locates itself directly in the signifying process and that the use of elements in an art proposition (be they objects, quotations, fragments, photographs, contexts, or whatever) functions not for aesthetic purposes...but rather as simply the constructive elements of a test of the cultural code.'[6] In other words, what is essential to the practice of art is the motivating idea possessed by the artist that questions existing codes or expressions, both in the world of art and in the culture at large. The centrality of 'the idea' led to a rapid increase in the use of varied materials from at least the 1980s onwards, so that anything from paint to pipe cleaners, cotton fibers to fiber optics could be used as a material for art. It is this reality that has led American art critic and philosopher Arthur Danto to proclaim the end of art as we have known it, by which he means that the story of art, of art as painting and sculpture, has come to a conclusion and a new story is being developed.[7]

Concept-based Performance appeared immediately in the work of Acconci, Serra, and Nauman, the last of whom, like Kosuth, was enamored of Ludwig Wittgenstein's linguistic philosophy. Wittgenstein, especially in his *Philosophical Investigations* (1953), liberated language from the strongholds imposed on it by the logical positivists by suggesting that all language is, in a sense, a game, by which he meant it has a context. Language, as an everyday practice, reflects various forms of life and is legitimized by these forms of life, even if one may not identify with this or that particular form. (For example, one may not believe that 'ethics,' or 'moral' behavior has any legitimacy in philosophical discourse, but, for Wittgenstein, it does, as a language, or as a 'language game' which some people play with great seriousness.) Wittgenstein's emphasis on everyday language was very attractive to Conceptual artists.

For Nauman, video was an extension of his sculpture. He 'performed' various activities in his studio in front of a camera, calling them 'representations.' He would assume varying everyday positions (sitting, walking, bending, squatting), thus creating living sculptures with his body. In *Black Balls* (1969) the artist applied black paint to his testicles in what can be seen as a prescient representation of sex and death. During the 1960s Nauman made about twenty-five videotapes consisting of repetitive, mundane movements that showed the influences of serial music by Terry Riley, Philip Glass, and Steve Reich. Nauman's interest in language as an activity that can be both revealing and concealing has endured to the present day. In the 1990s he created a series of installations with Performance artist Rinde Eckert that explored personal identity, language and communication: *Anthro/Socio (Rinde Facing Camera)* of 1991 and *Anthro/Socio (Rinde Spinning)* of 1992.
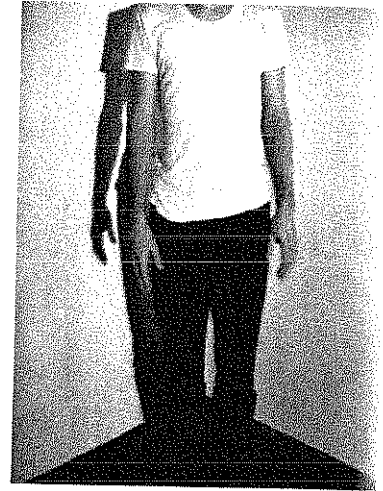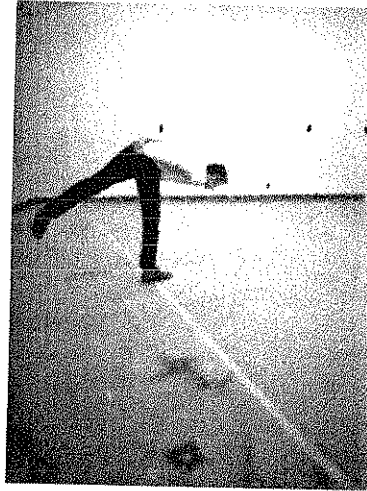
Bruce Nauman

125 Nauman's performative videos
are prime examples of artists'
attempts to record the intimate
relationship between their bodies
and their work. In Nauman's case,
he also used patterned movements,
learned from choreographer friends,
to create bodily sculptures. In *Slow
Angle Walk* (1968), in a homage to the
playwright Samuel Beckett, he makes
patterns in his studio that reflect the
inescapable and repetitive nature of
daily life. In so doing, he also reflects
art and life as unfolding processes.

126 *Bouncing In the Corner No. 1*
(1968)

Vito Acconci

127 *The Red Tapes* (1976) may be
considered Vito Acconci's video
masterwork. This three-part project
is an exploration of individual and
cultural identity through images of
the self and the American landscape.
Acconci, originally a poet, here
applies poetic texts and poetic
imagination to a video adventure that
moves stealthily from the individual
psyche (Acconci himself blindfolded)
to the collective psyche acted out
in a theatrical performance that
included artists like David Salle.

For Nauman, the 'process' of art making was just as important as the art that was made. In a series of tapes, inspired by the linguistically and existentially complex work of 20th-century playwright Samuel Beckett, Nauman 'performed' for the camera in his studio. In *Slow Angle Walk*, subtitled *Beckett Walk* (1968), he walked around his studio in a strained manner similar to patterns Beckett had written in plays like *Footfalls* (1975) and *Quad* (1982).
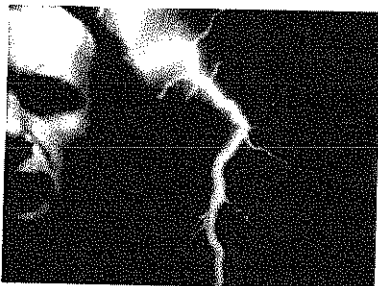
This preoccupation with the artistic process and the studio as the place for process was the theme of Nauman's installation *Mapping the Studio II with color shift, flip, flop, & flip/flop (Fat Chance John Cage)*, shown in 2002. Filmed in 2001 with a small digital camera and projected on seven walls with a running time of five hours and forty-five minutes, *Mapping the Studio* looks back to the artist's earliest videos in which he also turned on the camera and taped his movements for as long as the camera ran. In this case, however, the artist's body is largely absent, apart from an occasional lower leg caught as he exits the studio. Instead, the camera focuses on the life of the studio without the artist, the inanimate objects strewn about, or the cat moving stealthily through the space. It is a curious turnaround from an artist whose body was often so central to the making of his work. For Nauman, however, the process of art is not just making, but questioning. In this case he seems to be paying homage to the ever-questioning Cage, leaving his own body out of the equation to allow room for Cage's legacy to fill the space.

Process, language, and a certain defiance of earlier art practices informed the performative videos of Vito Acconci, who began as a writer and turned to Performance as a 'means of escaping from the page.' Acconci's work was marked by keen attention to language, a sense of humor and, often, irony. Acconci has an important place in the history of Video art because he brought his performances into the gallery (at the Reese Paley Gallery in New York and at other spaces with the avant-garde enthusiast Willoughby Sharp), as did others like Dennis Oppenheim. *Corrections* (1971), *Second Hand* (1971), and *Command Performance* (1974) were all performed in galleries, thus identifying Video art and Performance early on with the 'art world' as opposed to experimental theater or avant-garde film and video.
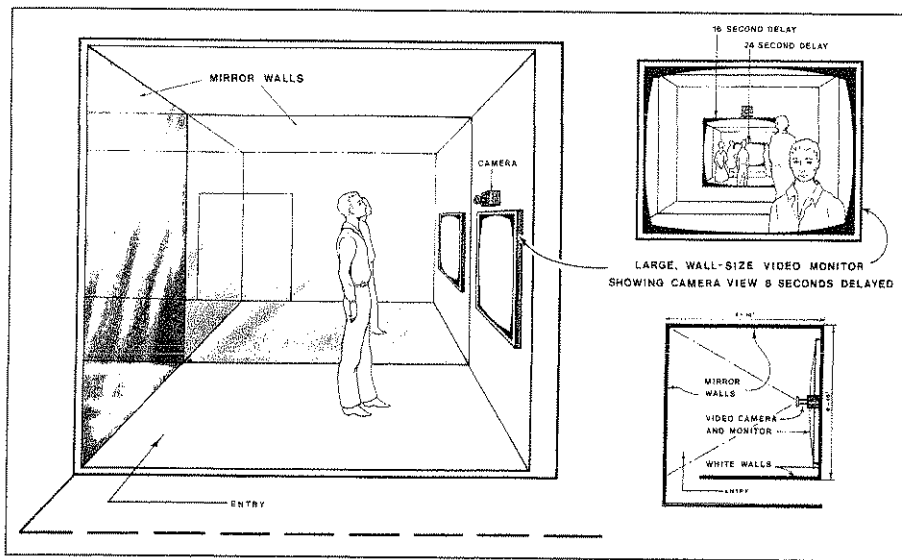
Video Art

Dan Graham

LEFT

133–33 In *Performance/Audience/Mirror* (1975) audience members at a public performance watching a mirrored wall as Dan Graham, at one point looking into the mirror himself, described their movements and at another point, facing the audience, talks about their movements again. This time his comments are delayed, however, because the audience has already seen their movements in the mirror. All of this is also videotaped, which, when viewed, becomes yet another layer of participation.

RIGHT

134 Dan Graham was among the first video artists to explore the conceptual framework of viewing and being viewed in video. Like other artists of his time, he was keenly aware of the processes he was engaging and had what has turned out to be an enduring interest in exposing the methods and the interactions inherent in video-making. To this day he is creating new environments for viewing video. In *Present Continuous Past(s)* (1974), viewers experience their own image on mirrors as well as on monitors, thus confounding perception of what is 'real' and what is not.

MIRROR WALLS

CAMERA

16 SECOND DELAY
24 SECOND DELAY

LARGE, WALL-SIZE VIDEO MONITOR
SHOWING CAMERA VIEW 8 SECONDS DELAYED

MIRROR WALLS

VIDEO CAMERA AND MONITOR

WHITE WALLS

ENTRY

The gallery space, in contrast to the private world of the studio, also encouraged interaction with an audience. For artist Dan Graham (b. 1942, United States), involving the viewer was (and is) central to his art practice. From 1970 to 1978 Graham made several video installations that placed viewers in the midst of an architectural environment of glass and mirrors, including *Present Continuous Past(s)* (1974) and *Performance/Audience/Mirror* (1975). What may at first have appeared as a rather basic self-conscious experience became for the audience a lesson in feedback, watching, self-analysis, and objectivity. In a sense, Graham was exposing some of the most basic tenets of the filmed image to an audience already in the rapture of television.

This 'serious playfulness' regarding perception has also been central to the work of Nauman and Michael Snow. Video technology afforded these artists the opportunity to question traditional notions of perception. Nauman's 1970 multi-screen film installation, *Spinning Spheres*, for example, features a steel ball turning vigorously on a glass plate in a white room. The images reflected on the ball are intended to destabilize the viewer's perspective as it becomes impossible to detect where the real walls of the space are.

Michael Snow has been toying with viewers' perceptions for more than forty years in films and performances like *Wavelength* and *Right Reader* from the 1960s. *Two Sides to Every Story* (1974) features a suspended aluminum screen, on both sides of which are projected images of a woman, engaging in various gestures, filmed from front and back. Viewers need to keep looking at both sides of the screen in order to appreciate what is happening, a rather dizzy-making task. In a sense, viewers themselves become performers in the artwork.

This incorporation of the viewer into the work of art, at least as co-conspirator, has been central to the practice of artists since Marcel Duchamp had viewers spinning parts of his sculptures in *Bicycle Wheel* (1913) and *Rotary Glass Plates (Precision Optics)* of 1920. He also experimented with perception in film – *Anemic*

Cinema (1925–26) – and in scores of sculptural constructions in his long career. This Duchampian interest in perception bending also surfaced in Conceptual art.

As American critic Lucy Lippard and, after her Peter Wollen, have emphasized, Conceptualism (and, by extension, Video art) emerged during a time of significant cultural upheaval characterized by Vietnam War protests, the rise of feminism and black power, and student revolts throughout western Europe and the United States. Peter Wollen writes: 'Conceptual artists too wanted to create a new kind of relationship between artist, gallery and public, a relationship that would challenge not only the commercial nature of the art world but also the idea of the viewer as passive consumer of sensations rather than thoughtful interlocutor. Text, photography and found objects were incorporated into artwork not simply because they were interesting new media...but because they offered specific ways of engaging the attention of the art public.'[8]

To this list video, especially in its performative aspects, could be added: through Performance, video artists expressly invited audiences to participate in the work of art, indeed required participation for the art to function at all. Peter Campus's closed-circuit video installations (fifteen in total made during the 1970s) involved the viewers in many ways, projecting their images on large screens and small, in shadows and upside down, as in his 1977 aen, in which a wall-mounted camera, flipped upside down, projected inverted heads and shoulders of visitors as they entered the gallery.

Performance assumed an essential role in the Video art of women artists, who, through the feminist movement, were now demanding a place at the art table long dominated by men, especially the men of 'heroic' and macho Abstract Expressionism. As in much of art history, women had simply been ignored.[9]

By the mid-1960s, however, women began fighting against the silence surrounding their life and work. Feminist outcries, though begun in the early part of the century and not fully felt until the 1970s, were evident in art in the 1960s, coinciding with other movements of liberation, including those of African Americans and gays and lesbians. The feminist influence upon video and Performance was substantial.

ar Campus

W LEFT
n Three Transitions (1973) Peter
us explores identity through the
ological tools available in video.
at appear to be magician's
, he appears and disappears,
himself into extinction, and
the features off his face. Illusion
ality compete in this seminal
of Video art.

W RIGHT
Vinter Journal (1997)

Martha Rosler

ABOVE
143 *How Do We Know What Home Looks Like?* (1993)

BELOW LEFT
144 Steeped in knowledge of semiotics, Rosler does not burden the viewer with words, but rather uses gestures in *Semiotics of the Kitchen* (1975) to express the frustration and claustrophobia of many a kitchen-bound housewife.

BELOW CENTRE
145 *Vital Statistics of a Citizen, Simply Obtained* (1977)

BELOW RIGHT
146 *Born To Be Sold: Martha Rosler Reads the Strange Case of Baby SM* (1989), and made with Paper Tiger Television, is a send-up of a true story in which a surrogate mother tries to reclaim the baby she had. The video (in which Rosler plays all the parts, including the baby) becomes an indictment of class and gender as the surrogate mother must yield to the demands of the middle-class father.

Photographer, video artist, and installation artist Martha Rosler is representative of the new feminism in art. Born in New York, Rosler created some of her most enduring work in Performance, video, and photography during her time in California as a student and, later, as a teacher. *Bringing the War Home* (1967–72) is a series of twenty photomontages that places images of Vietnam War victims (girls with missing limbs, mothers holding their dead children, wounded soldiers) in the midst of tranquil suburban American interiors cut from the pages of *Life* magazine. As art historian Alexander Alberro says of this series, 'She was, in effect, making concrete "the war abroad, the war at home" produced by the mass media that imported images of death from Vietnam into American homes every evening.'

Domesticity also played a role in *Semiotics of the Kitchen* (1975), a video in which the artist, dressed in an apron and with a deadpan facial expression, sends up television cookery shows and a woman's place in the kitchen, engaging in mannered gestures with a variety of cooking utensils. Like so much of her early work, *Semiotics* is striking both for its innocence and its sophistication. Rosler's photos and videos display a strong grasp of technique and youthful exuberance. In her 1977 Performance and, later, video, *Vital Statistics of a Citizen, Simply Obtained*, the artist submits to having every part of her nude body measured and recorded by two white-coated men as a 'chorus' of women stand to the side silently observing. 'This a work about how to think about yourself,' Rosler says in a voice-over on the videotape. The strategies of measuring spaces and gallery walls, as practiced by Minimalist artists, as well as the 'directions' given by Fluxus artists in their interactive performances, were here combined with a strong feminist consciousness that commented on the use and abuse of the female body in advertising and media.

The spareness of her scenarios in videos like *Semiotics of the Kitchen*, combined with a biting sense of humor, took some inspiration from the films of Jean-Luc Godard, whom Rosler met while an undergraduate at the University of California, San Diego. There she also encountered filmmaker Roberto Rossellini and several influential intellectuals, such as Marxist theorist Herbert Marcuse and the literary critics Jean-François Lyotard and Fredric Jameson. In Godard, the young Rosler found a model artist who resisted the commercialization of ideas while he dazzled with his command of striking images, sounds, and texts. 'My art is a communicative act, a form of an utterance, a way to open a conversation,' Rosler says. [10]

Another highly significant woman artist whose work reflected the primacy of Performance in the development of Video art is Joan Jonas (b. 1936, United States). Jonas has created a unique vocabulary of media art that seamlessly combines her
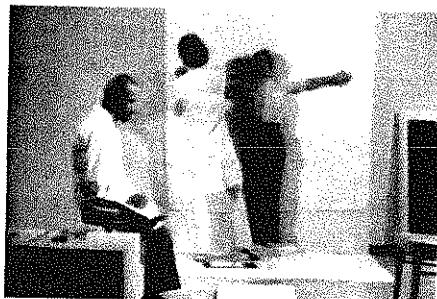
Joan Jonas
147 Joan Jonas's own body soon
became central to her work.
Influenced by dance (Yvonne Rainer,
Anne Halperin, Deborah Hay, each
of whom had worked with Merce
Cunningham and John Cage) and the
process art of Richard Serra, Gordon
Matta-Clark, and others, Jonas
equated the body with conceptual
experimentation early on in her career.
While manifestly dealing with the
physical properties of the mediums
of film and television, *Vertical Roll*
(1972) features close ups of the
artist's body in what amounts to
a loud proclamation of the body's
(especially the *female* body's)
presence in the work of art.

interests in feminism, ritual, mythology and sculpture. In her highly personal works (she still performs in many of them), her enduring practices in mixed-media art (dance, video, sculpture) surface in poetic tales of human struggle and endurance.

Jonas started using video in 1970 when she bought a Portapak on a visit to Japan. She was an admirer of experimental film (Russians Dziga Vertov and Sergei Eisenstein; Frenchman Jean Vigo; American Maya Deren) and considers her earliest video work a reflection of avant-garde film techniques, such as Vertov's out of synch images and sounds.

While participating in dance workshops with members of the legendary Judson Church group in New York (Trisha Brown, Deborah Hay, Steve Paxton and others), she used video and film early on in live performances, such as *Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy* (1974) and *Mirage* (1976). Her poetic, non-narrative presentations – complete with cones, masks, chalk drawings, taped images, and sounds – to this day express the artist's close connection to the earth and mythology. More recent large-scale multimedia performances have included *Volcano Saga* (1989) and *Sweeney Astray* (1994).

Video and Performance: The Vienna Connection

In the aftermath of World War II, two countries deeply involved with the destruction that occurred during the war became the breeding ground for radical new forms of Performance and media: Japan, which had attacked the United States at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, and Nazi-occupied Austria. The Gutai Group in Japan consisted of painters and performers who were involved with the materials of their art in a violent way. Prominent from 1954 to 1958, though they existed until 1972, Gutai artists shot at canvases with arrows tipped with paint or crashed through canvases with their own bodies in acts of rage against established art practices as well as cultural repressions. Their work was captured on film in *Gutai on Stage* (1957) and *Gutai Painting* (1960).

Even more radical were the *Wiener Aktionisten*, the Viennese Actionists, who had a profound influence on future generations of Performance and media artists not only in Austria, but throughout the world. The principal Actionists were Hermann Nitsch (b. 1938), Otto Muehl (b. 1925), Günter Brus (b. 1938) and Rudolph Schwarzkogler (1940–69). The films of Muehl and Kurt Kren (1929–98) inaugurated an extraordinary period of energy in the development of experimental film and then Video art.

These artists sought to outrage their viewers by engaging in performances that often involved blood and animal slaughter (Nitsch and Muehl), explicit sadistic sexual activity (Muehl) or sensational bodily performances (Brus, Schwarzkogler, and Muehl). In films like *Funèbre* (1966) and *Scheiss-Kerl* (Shit-Guy) of 1969, Muehl provided graphic descriptions of humans and animals drenched in blood and paint. Emerging in the center of Freudian psychoanalysis (Vienna) and influenced by

156 In *Action Pants: Genital Panic* (1969), VALIE EXPORT, who always used capitals for her name, walked up and down the aisles in a Munich artfilm house dressed in pants with the crotch cut out. She challenged the mainly male patrons to 'look at the real thing' instead of passively enjoying naked women on screen.

Antonin Artaud's Theater of Cruelty and the international Fluxus movement, the Actionists took Performance and media in dangerous new directions. They exalted 'destruction' as a key element in artistic and personal freedom (together they attended the 'Destruction in Art' symposium in London in 1966). As Austrian critic and curator Robert Fleck has observed: 'The Viennese Actionists believed that the body was an essence they could use.'[11]

Kurt Kren became the filmmaker of Actionism, making an original contribution to 1960s avant-garde film by his unique camera and editing work with the films of performances by Muehl and Brus. He subjects the body images of performances by Muehl and Brus to the structural fragmentation then dominant in experimental film. In the same way that the filmmakers Stan Brakhage and Bruce Conner (both Americans) had emphasized the 'materiality' of film (the tape itself acting like a canvas), so, too, the Actionists used their bodies as 'material.' It is here that the sensational body art of Muehl and Brus connected with Kren's interests in material film. His films with Muehl and Brus – *Mama und Papa* (1964), *Leda mit dem Schwan* (1964), *Selbstverstümmelung* (1965), and *Cosinus Alpha* (1966) – are classic examples of structuralist collage film. Working in the same vein of sexual liberation, but in a much more tame fashion, were the Americans Kenneth Anger with *Scorpio Rising* (1963) and Jack Smith with *Flaming Creatures* (1963).

Though not officially a member of the Viennese Actionist group, one young woman (whose feminist interests alone might have excluded her from the often misogynist Actionists) introduced new forms of media Performance with the video camera in the Vienna of the mid-1960s.

VALIE EXPORT

At age the age of twenty-eight, VALIE EXPORT (née Waltraud Lehner in 1940) proclaimed her presence in the Viennese art world. Eager to counter the perceived abusive tactics of the Actionists against women, she sought a new identity unlinked to her father's name (Lehner) or her former husband's name (Hollinger). She transformed herself from Waltraud into VALIE and took the bold step of appropriating the name of a popular cigarette brand, EXPORT, as her last name. From the start she used the upper-case spelling. By adopting the trade name she engaged in an act of provocation that would characterize future performances, especially *Action Pants: Genital Panic* (1969), during which she marched into an artfilm house in Munich, wearing pants with the crotch cut out. What was artistically unique about EXPORT was that, unlike the Actionists, or other early Performance artists like Allan Kaprow, Jim Dine and Robert Rauschenberg, EXPORT was not a painter first.

Her earliest art production were films and installations she referred to as 'expanded cinema' projects after the title of the influential book, *Expanded Cinema* (1970) by American critic Gene Youngblood, in which he describes cinematic art removed from the movie house: video, experimental film, installations, and mixed-media art.

Born in Linz, Austria, EXPORT arrived in Vienna at the height of 'Viennese Actionism.' It was in this environment that she developed her own brand of what she called Feminist Actionism. The male Viennese gang of four were often accused of misogynist practices, so, in a sense, EXPORT was actually responding to them as

Video Art

well as to other male-dominated practices. 'All my works are self-portraits,' she says, including her first Performance, her name change. For EXPORT that work was the 'perfect expression of my desire to export my inner ideas outside into the world.'

EXPORT relates the development of her early work to the International Style of art she encountered in the mid-1960s in an exhibition in Sweden, where she saw John Cage, Fluxus artist Dick Higgins, filmmakers Michael Snow and Hollis Frampton. While it may seem curious that she mentions only male artists, there was a paucity of female models at the time. She – along with a loose international consortium, including Carolee Schneemann, Adrian Piper, and Yoko Ono (United States), Ulrike Rosenbach (Germany), Friederike Pezold (Austria), and Lygia Clark (Brazil) – became the model for future generations, including many currently heralded artists such as Janine Antoni, Pipilotti Rist, Mona Hatoum, and Gillian Wearing.

What is striking about EXPORT, in addition to her longevity in what has been an often hostile art environment, is her extraordinary diversity. Though feminism was her springboard, her artistic investigations reveal her knowledge of psychoanalysis, literature (especially Gertrude Stein, Virginia Woolf, Samuel Beckett), and the history of art, expressed in a large collection of work in many media. Both her early photographic work predicted – and later video installations explored – her keen interest in conceptual relationships between city architecture and the body. With the eye of a Berenice Abbot, she photographed trains, street corners, edges of buildings, her own body on the ledge of a staircase or curved around the corner of a street, as if to assert the female self in an anonymous urban environment. Echoing the body sculptures of Robert Morris and others from the early 1960s, EXPORT takes the vocabulary of Minimalism and makes it resonate with personal as well as social meaning.

EXPORT committed herself to unmasking the politics of the female body in what can rightly be called Feminist Actions. In a 1972 manifesto she wrote:

VALIE EXPORT
159 *Body Tape* (1970)

The history of woman is the history of man, for man has determined the image of woman for men and women. The social and communicative media such as science and art, word and image, clothing and architecture, social intercourse and division of labor are created and controlled by men. The men have imposed their image of woman upon the media, they have shaped women according to these media patterns and women have shaped themselves the same way. If reality is a social construct and men are its engineers we are faced with a male reality.

This is why I demand, give the floor to women, so they can find themselves. In order to arrive at an image of woman determined by ourselves and thus a different depiction in the social function of women, we women must participate in the construction of reality through the media.

This will not be allowed to happen without resistance, therefore fighting will be necessary! If we women want to achieve our goals: social equality, self-determination, a new consciousness of women, we will have to express them in all areas of life. This struggle will have far-reaching consequences not only for ourselves, but also for men, children, the family, the churches; in a word, for the state, and will affect all aspects of life.

Woman must therefore avail herself of all media as a means of social struggle and social progress in order to free culture from male values. She will do this also in

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art. If men have succeeded for millennia in expressing their ideas of eroticism, sex, beauty, their mythology of power, strength and severity in sculptures, paintings, novels, films, plays, drawings, etc., thus influencing our consciousness, it is high time that we women use art as a means of expression to influence everybody's consciousness, to allow our ideas to enter the social construct of reality, in order to create a human reality. The question of what women can give to art and what art can give to women can be answered like this: transferring the specific situation of woman into the artistic context establishes signs and signals that are new artistic forms of expression that serve to change the historical understanding of women as well.[12]

If issues of identity are recognizable in all her early Performance work, EXPORT's film and video installations illustrate how she injected this concern into formal explorations of the mechanisms of cinema. Her 'expanded cinema' projects, most notably *Splitscreen: Solipsismus*, a ninety-second, 8-millimeter film from 1968, played with viewers' perceptions in a manner shared by, amongst others, Michael Snow – in films like *Right Reader* (1965) and *Wavelength* (1967). She started using video in 1968, creating early on what she called 'Videoinstallations' that often required viewer participation. In *Split Reality* (1970), her image appears on a TV monitor above an LP record player. The viewer is invited to play the record as EXPORT, wearing headphones, sings along to the record. But the sound of the spinning record is turned off so all that is heard is EXPORT singing a cappella, thus 'splitting' the reality for the viewer. *Touching, Body Poem* (1970) is a classic piece of Conceptual video. On four monitors stacked 2 × 2 in a grid are images of feet walking, shot from below so the
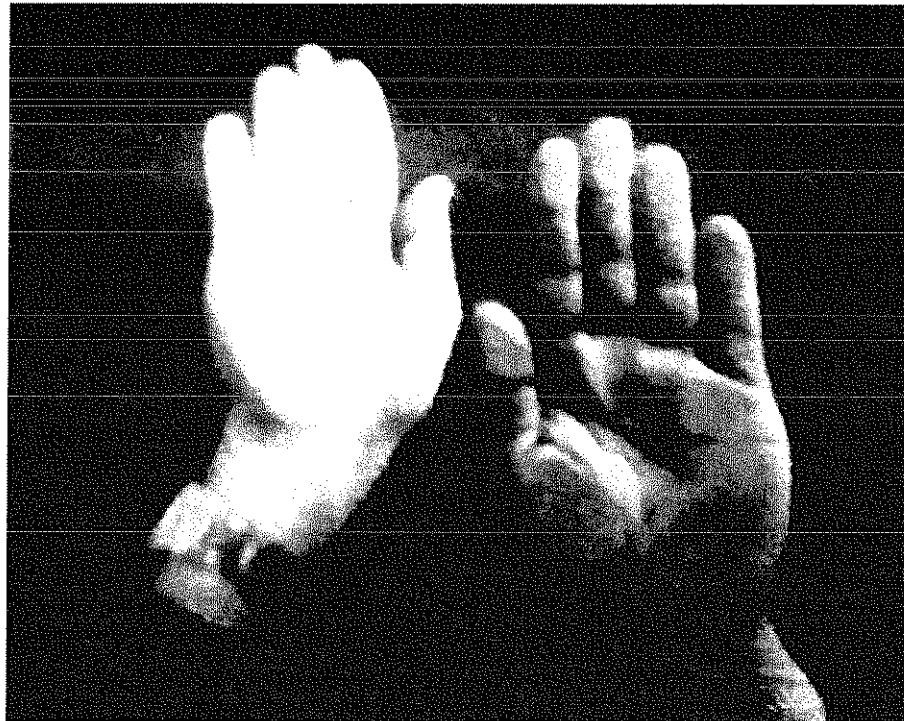
LIE EXPORT
Body Tape

viewer sees the bottom of the feet. In a similar Conceptual vein is *Body Tape* (1970), in which EXPORT engages in various gestures, including touching, boxing, tasting, and pushing. At the same time Vito Acconci was carrying out similar work in the United States, but with a much more ironic subtext.

EXPORT's *Autohypnosis* (1969/1973) is, by any measure, an elaborate interactive video installation that anticipated the interactive installations of the late 1980s and after. Four monitors, arranged in a circle, are electronically preset to play a tape of people applauding loudly. Visitors were invited to step on a diamond-shaped 'map' imprinted with words like 'self,' 'possession,' 'development,' 'love,' etc. Only by stepping in a prescribed manner can the visitor activate the sensors that trigger the monitors to play the enthusiastic applause. In other words, by conforming to a certain norm, people are rewarded.

EXPORT has continued to create elaborate video installations, from the *I (Beat [It])* (1980), in which a photo of the artist, naked with shackles on her arms and legs, floats in a shallow pool of black oil as three German Shepherd dogs bark on different video monitors, to her 1998 *The Un-ending –ique Melody of Chords*, a 25-monitor installation, each containing a pounding sewing machine turned on its side. In both cases women are tied (literally) to the orders of others.

Along with a handful of other women artists, EXPORT has brought a new, intensely female perspective to contemporary art, thus fulfilling the promise of her 1972 manifesto: 'So far art has been largely produced by men, and it has usually been men who dealt with the subjects of life, the problems of emotional life, and contributed only their statements, their answers, their solutions. Now we must articulate our statements and create new concepts that correspond to our sensitivity and our wishes.'

Though a few years behind the United States and Germany in the development of Video art, Austria had, by 1970, witnessed the growth of a substantial video community supported by galleries and alternative presentation venues. The 'Multi Media 1' exhibition was held in 1969 at the Galerie Junge Generation in Vienna, and several other galleries, including the Modern Art Gallery, the Vienna Galerie nächst St Stephan, the Kringinger Gallery and the Taxis Palais Gallery regularly presented Performance and Video art.[13]

Other important Austrian video artists, in addition to EXPORT, are Peter Weibel (b. 1945), with whom EXPORT collaborated for some years in performances and media works, Gottfried Bechtold, Ernst Caramelle, Richard Kriesche and the noted painter Arnulf Rainer (b. 1929), who made several Conceptual body tapes in the 1970s, including *Face Farces* (1973), *Confrontation with My Video Image* (1974), *Slow Motion* (1974), and *Mouth Pieces* (1974). Weibel's work has extended over four decades. Based in Performance, his early video works were called *Teleaktionen* (Teleactions), referring to the Actionists mixed with the then new video technology.

Video and Performance: An Enduring Practice

Performative video continues to this day as a vital component of Video art, in part because artists, many of whom have been trained in art schools in the 1980s and 1990s, echo work from the 1970s. One artist who bridges Viennese Video art of the 1960s and 1970s and current practices is Paul McCarthy (b. 1945, United States).
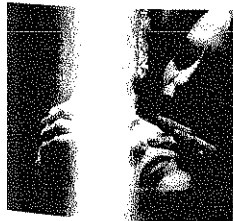
Mike Kelley and Paul McCarthy
OPPOSITE
162–67 Combining Performance art
and Grand Guignol, Paul McCarthy
and Mike Kelley offer an alternative
to the popular, bucolic children's story.
In their version, *Heidi*, from 1992,
Heidi and other characters act out
a scenario of abuse and control that
unveils the radical dysfunction that
can underlie seemingly normal family
relationships.

Paul McCarthy

Perhaps the best introduction to the work of this iconoclastic artist is his 1992 video collaboration with American artist Mike Kelley, a retelling of the story of the beloved Swiss maiden Heidi. Never one to leave an icon unsullied, McCarthy places her in the care of an abusive, anal-fixated grandfather who engages the girl in unnatural rituals. Entitled *Heidi, Midlife Crisis Trauma Center and Negative Media-Engram Abreaction Release*, the video is a prime example of McCarthy's career-long fixation with the underbelly of popular culture. In videos, media installations, sculptures, drawings and writings the artist has persistently debunked the false idealism he regards as rampant in Hollywood films, advertising, and folklore.

In performances and videos dating back to the early 1970s McCarthy has subjected his body (and his viewers' eyes) to acts of simulated self-mutilation, defecation, dismemberment, vomiting, suffocation, to name but a few actions. With names like *Meatcake*, *Hot Dog*, and *Heinz Ketchup Sauce*, his early performances featured the artist semi-dressed or naked ingesting excessive amounts of hamburger meat, hot dogs and condiments, the 'packaged goods' with which America is identified. In his hands mayonnaise, ketchup and mustard became body fluids indelicately splattered all over himself and the surrounding Performance area.

From this description alone, McCarthy's work would seem to have much in common with the Viennese Actionists, who, as discussed above, were known for politically and sexually brazen performances and films created in reaction to Nazism. They wanted their art to be sensational, not only in response to social repression, but also as an antidote to the high modernism embraced by museums. It would seem that McCarthy's work echoes a 1963 statement from Otto Muehl: 'I can imagine nothing significant where nothing is sacrificed, destroyed, dismembered, burnt, pierced, tormented, harassed, tortured, massacred, stabbed, destroyed, or annihilated.' Though McCarthy read about the Actionists in the late 1960s and does admit to being influenced by them, he separates himself from their bloody displays in one very important respect. 'My work isn't about the blood,' he says. 'It really is about the ketchup.'

Firmly based in the traditions of 1960s Performance art (he studied with ur-Performance artist Allan Kaprow in the early 1970s) and in the climate of Hollywood (he has lived in Los Angeles most of his adult life), McCarthy uses media and Performance as platforms for artistic ruminations on the excesses of American culture. In *Pig Man*, a Performance piece from 1980, he dons a pig mask, splatters himself with ketchup and, in a simulation of grotesque self-mutilation, slices a long hot dog placed between his legs. It is all too tempting to dwell on the gross manifestations in McCarthy's work, partly because they can be so sensational as to be hilarious (intentionally). However, underneath the muck lurks the soul of a serious and impassioned artist keenly aware of the sources of his work, from experimental film (Stan Brakhage, Bruce Connor, Andy Warhol) to post-Fluxus Performance art (Allan Kaprow) and Minimalism (Donald Judd).

'In 1966 I jumped out of a window as a homage to Yves Klein,' McCarthy says, recalling his first Performance and Klein's famous photograph of himself jumping off a roof. 'It was a pathetic jump,' he says of his own feeble attempt to re-enact a photo, which he never actually saw, but only heard about. There is something symbolic in

the fact that Klein's photo was a fake. The impresario had rephotographed collaged images of himself from other photos. In a sense, McCarthy has been reacting to the fakery of filmed images (especially of the Hollywood kind) ever since.

He was introduced to video technology while doing community service work in San Francisco before he moved to Los Angeles. Like other video artists of his generation, he became involved in community television while living in the Haight Ashbury district of San Francisco. He taught courses there in video making to community groups and started a public access television station. He also worked in a mental hospital, where he would videotape patient groups as part of a therapy process.

Since the early 1970s, McCarthy has used his own body as a place for social criticism, mutilating it, caressing it, humiliating it, exalting it, all in an atmosphere of humorous, if grotesque, mockery. As his work has proceeded from one-man shows with wigs, masks, and props to full-scale video installations like *Cultural Gothic* (1992), *Yaa Hoo Town, Saloon* (1996), and *Santa Chocolate Shop* (1997), both his materials (video, film, massive architectural constructions) and his subjects (household goods, family relationships, the unconscious) have expanded to suit his broad artistic ambitions.

It is the tension between the real world of pop culture and the intra-art world of artistic movements that has made McCarthy's work so appealing to younger artists and, at least lately, to critics and curators. For many years, until two important exhibitions organized by Paul Schimmel for the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art – the 1992 'Helter Skelter: L.A. Art in the 1990s' and the 1998 'Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object, 1949–1979' – McCarthy's work was little known outside Los Angeles in the United States. According to the American curator and Director of the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York, Lisa Phillips, McCarthy, and other American artists, such as John Baldessari, Joseph Kosuth, Dan Graham and Bruce Nauman, were heralded in Europe decades before Americans were aware of them.

European Performance-Based Video Artists

Performative video, especially amongst female artists, has been prominent in Europe since the late 1960s. Belgrade-born artist Marina Abramovic (b. 1946) worked for years in media and Performance with her partner Ulay and to this day creates compelling video installations that combine her dual interests in Performance and politics. *Balkan Baroque* (1997) is a three-screen installation about the turbulence in late 20th-century Central Europe. In this moving scenario Abramovic films her parents as representative of the elderly population who have suffered so much during protracted wars in Yugoslavia and herself as both an academic lecturer and a frantic sensual dancer.

Other prominent European Performance-based video artists include: British artist Gillian Wearing (b. 1963), best known for her installations – *I'd Like to Teach the World to Sing* (1996) and *Drunk* (1997–99) – and
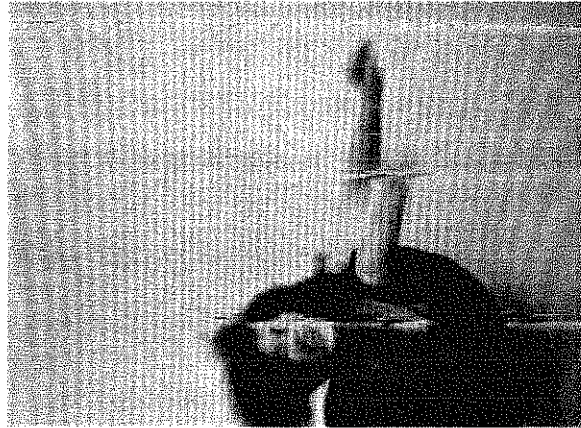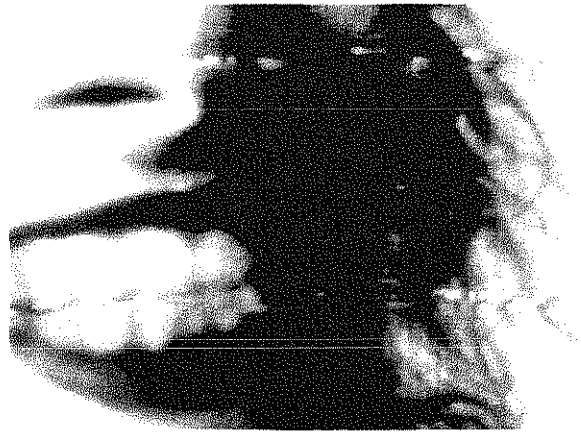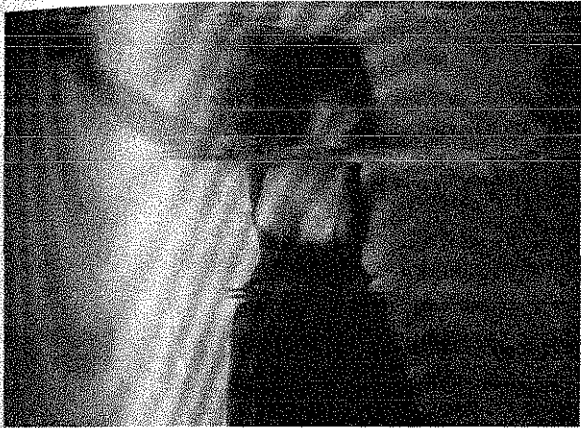
Marina Abramovic and Ulay
BELOW
169 As the body became a material in the making of art, endurance tests demonstrated how far artists were willing to go to proclaim the body as the focus of artistic struggle. For Marina Abramovic and Ulay, body and concept reached furious heights in *Performance Anthology (1975–80)* (1975–80) as the artists shouted and slapped each other while enacting the battle between the sexes with expressive gestures.

Pipilotti Rist

ABOVE

171–74 Like some of her female contemporaries, Rist is a clear descendant of pioneers such as Joan Jonas, VALIE EXPORT, and Marina Abramovic. *I'm Not the Girl Who Misses Much* (1986) is a speeded-up homage to Abramovic's *Freeing the Body* (1975), in which the artist danced to a drumbeat so furiously that she eventually collapsed. Rist, with her hair maniacally frizzed and wearing a dress that barely covers her, dances and sings the words of a John Lennon tune. As she moves faster and faster, helped by editing technology, she looks like a wind-up doll who has lost all sense of control as she tries to 'please' her audience.

Gillian Wearing

LEFT

170 *Homage to the Woman with the Bandaged Face* (1995)

her early performative work like *Dancing in Peckham* (1994); Susan Hiller (b. 1940, United States), who has lived and worked in London for many years, and is also known for her installations, such as *Wild Talents* (1997) and *Psi Girls* (1999); and Swiss artist Pipilotti Rist (b. 1962).

Rist, also a rock singer and leader of her own band, Les Reines Prochaines (The Next Queens), is often the leading performer in her video works, such as *I'm Not the Girl Who Misses Much* (1986), in which she gyrates in front of the camera while screeching the refrain from John Lennon's 'Happiness Is a Warm Gun.' This sometime pop-star in Europe is no stranger to audience adulation, but here she seems to resist it, wanting instead to expose the abuse women can suffer trying to satisfy the male gaze.

Her *Ever Is Over All* (1997), a title that suggests some kind of a Beckett endgame, is a game all right, but not to the death. It is a life-affirming, breezy feminist tract on the girl taking the city by storm, shattering (literally) the quiet passivity of an obsessively clean street in Zurich, where Rist lives. In this richly colored two-projector

Pipilotti Rist
RIGHT AND OPPOSITE
175–76 *Ever Is Over All* (1997)

installation, Rist juxtaposes the narrative of a smartly dressed young woman walking down the street holding a peculiar looking flower-tipped stick on one screen with fluidly filmed shots of a country garden on the other. The two videos, blending into one another across the corner of two walls, are only four minutes long, but Rist puts them on a continuously running loop that suggests a seamless repetition of the compelling (and funny) central image: the woman, in her blue chiffon dress and red shoes, suddenly wielding that strange looking flower, now revealed to be a metal club, and smashing car windows as she skips (in slow motion) down the street with a delighted grin on her face. A policeman is seen coming toward her from a distance, but as he approaches, it turns out that he is a she, and she walks on by, giving a 'go girl!' smile to our protagonist, who continues her rampage. Sweet harmonies, written and sung by Rist herself, emanate from the soundtrack, pierced with the occasional loud bursts of the metal thrust on to the car windows.

Hannah Wilke
181 *So Help Me Hannah* (1985)

Rist's strong sense of composition and sensitivity to color (blues, oranges, rich reds) are reminiscent of her fellow countryman, Jean-Luc Godard, whose affinity for painterly camera shots Rist clearly shares. Like a petty thief out of a Godard mock gangster movie, Rist's minor felon is undeniably appealing, but, unlike Godard's heroes, she's a woman. Rist possesses a subversive elegance; a well-controlled craftiness that is equally at home with humor as with biting political commentary.

Transgression is a time-honored practice in the history of art: Manet's *Olympia* (1863) and Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917), a urinal. In the history of Performance and media art, women artists especially have exercised a transgressive voice: Lynda Benglis photographing herself with a huge phallus between her legs for an *Artforum* advertisement in 1974; Carolee Schneemann pulling a scroll from her vagina in her 1975 performance, *Interior Scroll*.

Katarzyna Kozyra's work has been surrounded by controversy from the start. Her first public piece, *Pyramid of Animals* (1993), was a sculpture of four taxidermied animals (a horse, dog, cat, rooster) that had been killed for the project. In 1996 she exhibited photographs and a video portrait of herself posed like Manet's *Olympia*. Naked, bald and woefully thin, unlike Manet's voluptuous nude, and lying on a hospital gurney instead of a silk-sheeted bed, Kozyra is seen being treated with intravenous chemotherapy for Hodgkin's disease, which had been diagnosed in 1992. 'My illness was sucking me dry,' says the artist. 'I wasn't dying, but I wasn't getting better either. The most important part of the work was to record myself receiving my injection. This helped me create a distance from my illness.'

Katarzyna Kozyra likens herself to the woman in *Olympia* in other ways: she is defiant and aggressive. Her *Bathhouse* videos, though highly invasive, were intended not only to expose the differences in the behavior of men and women in vulnerable situations ('women take better care of themselves...men are constantly looking at each other') but also to make naked men the subject of the camera's gaze. 'Why not see what men are like without their protective layer...without all their status symbols, their designer suits, their cars?' she asks.

Phyllis Baldino
NEAR RIGHT
182 Phyllis Baldino creates wry, often poignant, installations that deal with everyday mishaps, failed communications, incongruities, and other failings of the human condition. Her off-beat sensibility is well expressed in *Color Without Color* (1999), which explores the condition of color blindness.

**Marie André**
FAR RIGHT
183 *Repetitions* (1985)

Video Art
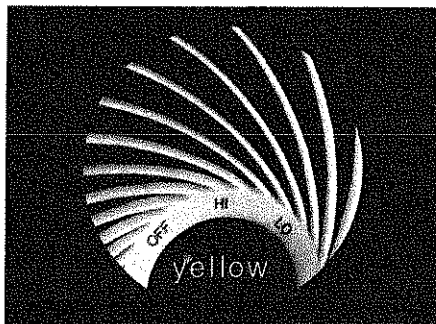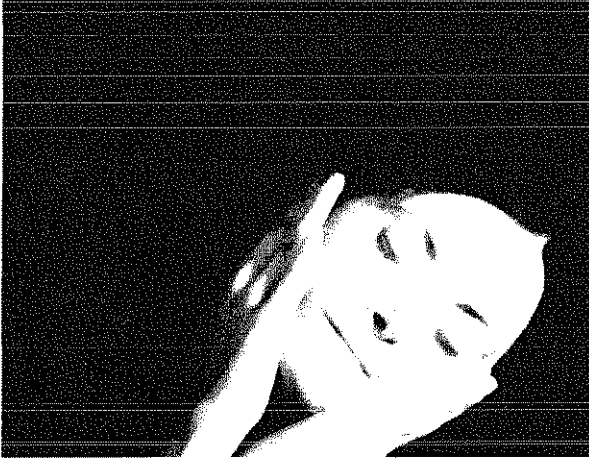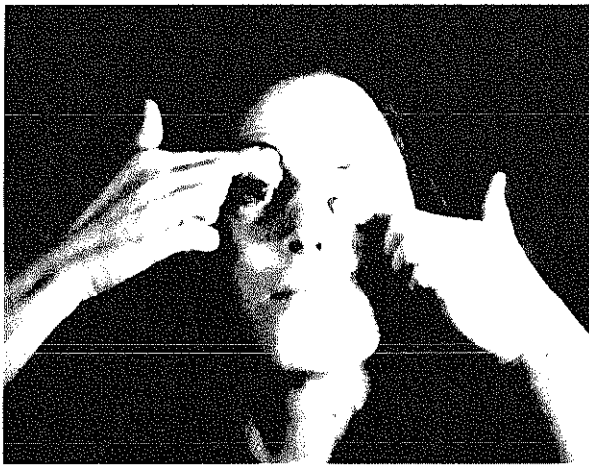
Hannah Wilke

184–88 This feminist critique, *Gestures* (1974), looks at first like a familiar television commercial for facial cream or other products. However, as Wilke's performance unfolds, her gestures become more violent as she attempts to erase her face in protest to the commercialization and abuse of the female body in the media.
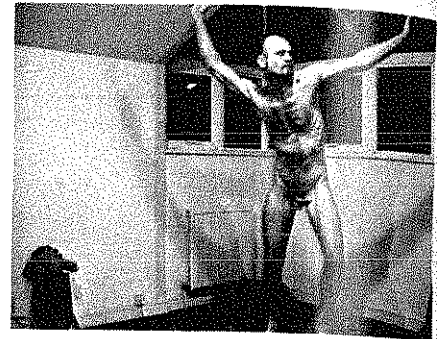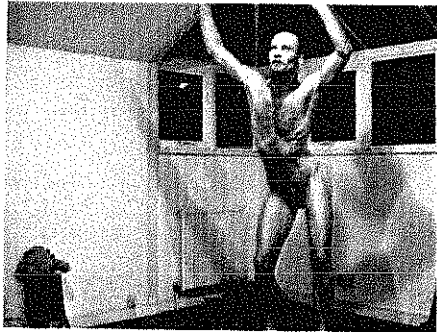
Sam Taylor-Wood

ABOVE

189–91 *Brontosaurus* (1995)

OPPOSITE

193–94 *Third Party* (1999) is a film installation shot with seven cameras and shown using seven projectors on four walls. Visitors feel immersed in this moving portrait gallery of largely disaffected people at a London cocktail party. A loud soundtrack of fragmented voices and rock music accompanies this ten-minute loop. In one fragment rock singer turned actress Marianne Faithfull sits alone sipping beer and chain-smoking.

Other international women artists whose video work is clearly performative in nature include: Estonian artist Ene-Liis Semper (b. 1969) and South African artist Minette Vari (b. 1968), both of whose work echoes Viennese Actionists, as well as the filmed performances of Ana Mendieta; Chantal Michel (b. 1968, Switzerland); Tracey Rose (b. 1974, South Africa), whose *Ciao Bella* (2001) is an elaborately costumed feminist send-up of the Last Supper; and American artists Cheryl Donegan (b. 1962), Sadie Benning (b. 1973), and Phyllis Baldino (b. 1956).

Sam Taylor-Wood (b. 1967, Great Britain) has created several tapes in which alienation amongst the young, loneliness, and the battle between the sexes are recurring themes in installations such as *Travesty of a Mockery* (1995), *Atlantic* (1997) and *Sustaining the Crisis* (1997). In *Brontosaurus* (1995) a nude man dances alone to frantic jungle music. Taylor-Wood slows down the balletic movements and introduces an adagio by Samuel Barber that is expressive of the pleasure of the moment. A pink stuffed animal in the foreground highlights the privacy of this dance, even as the viewer (or voyeur) peers into the scene. Facial gestures, sometimes violent, are the focus of *Hysteria* (1997) and the silent *Mute* (2001).

Peter Sarkisian

RIGHT

192 Peter Sarkisian's kinetic video installations place Minimalist art and Performance art in a contemporary psychological context. *Hover* (1999) is a white cube that suddenly becomes illuminated with moving images of a naked mother and child. They appear to be embracing, then trying to escape the cube as their movements are speeded up through editing. Sarkisian takes the innocence of a mother/child encounter and transforms it into a disturbing comment on the speed of contemporary life and the passing of time.
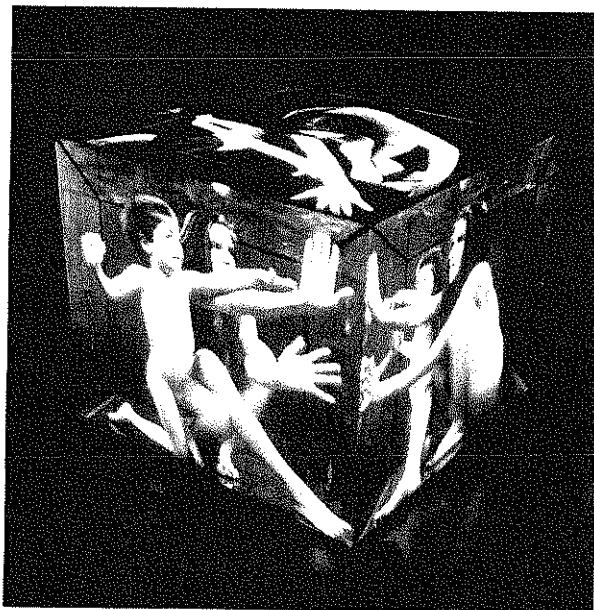
However, it would be wrong to suggest that women have cornered the performative Video art market. Plenty of men are making their mark in this field as well.

British artist Steve McQueen (b. 1966), awarded the coveted Turner Prize (1999), has been represented in exhibitions worldwide – Documenta X, the Johannesburg Biennale, the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, the Marian Goodman Gallery in New York, and the Museum of Modern Art in New York. His video installations (which are shot on both 16-millimeter film and video and usually projected on DVD) are presented as full floor-to-ceiling wall projections that give them a Cinemascope feeling, even though they are made economically.

A black artist, McQueen is repositioning the black male at the center of films that, to date, have always starred himself. In *Bear* (1993), two naked men are filmed in a boxing match that becomes an intimate *pas de deux*. *Deadpan* (1997) presents McQueen as the 'heroic' artist: he stands tall in his jeans and white T-shirt, booted feet planted firmly on the ground; eyes staring straight ahead, as the front wall of a cabin behind him separates from its structure, and comes crashing on top of him. His body remains erect as a glassless window opening spares him the crush of the cabin's weight. It is a fantastic image, repeated several times, from different angles. The tension is palpable, for if McQueen's figure were to move just slightly in any direction, the open window would not save him and he would be crushed. As it is, he remains unflinching, his stare inscrutable; perhaps a little sad, as if such a triumph were masking a deeper disturbance which he does not want to share with anyone.

Despite its brevity (it is only four minutes long), McQueen's film leaves the viewer reeling with associations. Is this self-assured man (McQueen) standing defiantly as 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' attempts to bury him? Has he literally captured a 'window of opportunity' and escaped the certain death his surroundings have predestined for him? The film, a remake of Buster Keaton's silent film, *Steamboat Bill Jr* (1928), is also an example of the widespread practice currently in use amongst young

Steve McQueen
RIGHT
199 *Deadpan* (1997)

artists of appropriating Hollywood movies as well as experimental films and vid
from the 1960s and 1970s. They share this practice with other artists, such as Ci
Sherman, Sherrie Levine, and the Ur-appropriator, Andy Warhol.

McQueen and Isaac Julien (b. 1960, Britain) are interested in reshaping image
the black male. Void of all previous associations of the black man as victim (Rod
King) or as gun-toting super-hero (Shaft) or jock extraordinaire (Michael Jord
McQueen's characters are powerful, living sculptures, enigmatic, erotic, and solita

Tony Oursler

There is no mistaking the video installations of American artist Tony Oursler. I
circus, part house of horrors, part evening news-type exposé, and part home mo
Oursler's videos, a unique blend of gothic humor and techno-wizardry, have m
him a popular participant at new media art exhibitions internationally.

Of the 'big three' American video installation artists who came of age in the 19
(Bill Viola, Gary Hill, and Tony Oursler), Oursler owes the least to books (wher
Viola is interested in eastern mystical writings and Hill in linguistic analysis).
sources are popular culture, especially television, and he is preoccupied by psyc
logical isolation. His highly theatrical imagination favors stage sets, immobile p
pets, sound scores of overlapping words, and filmed images of actors that he proje
on to all sorts of objects in his own ontological theater, to borrow a phrase fr
American playwright Richard Foreman, the master of macabre word play. Oursle
intentions may be serious, but his sensibility is definitely comic, another trait dis
guishing him from Viola and Hill. His early single-channel tapes expressed a youth
enthusiasm for simple objects (spoons, paper, crayons) that endures to the prese
Without concealing his economical means, including low-tech videography, Our:
in these tapes created off-beat scenarios that often addressed the vicissitudes of r
tionships between the sexes or the hegemony of television in popular culture, st
as in *The Loner* (1980), *Grand Mal* (1981), and *Spheres of Influence (Diamond)* (1985).

Oursler is best known for the array of projection surfaces he creates for
videos, especially his 'puppets,' for want of a better word, which are clothed st
figures with oval pillows for heads, on which Oursler projects the real talking head

Tony Oursler

200 *EVOL* (1984) is representative
of Oursler's fantastical theatrical
videos that use decidedly low-tech
and kitschy props, lighting and
mechanistic acting. In this tape
(EVOL is LOVE spelled backwards)
a lonely young man, played by artist
Mike Kelley, tries to understand why
he cannot find, or be successful in,
love. He sets up his own downfall
in this dark, appealing comedy.
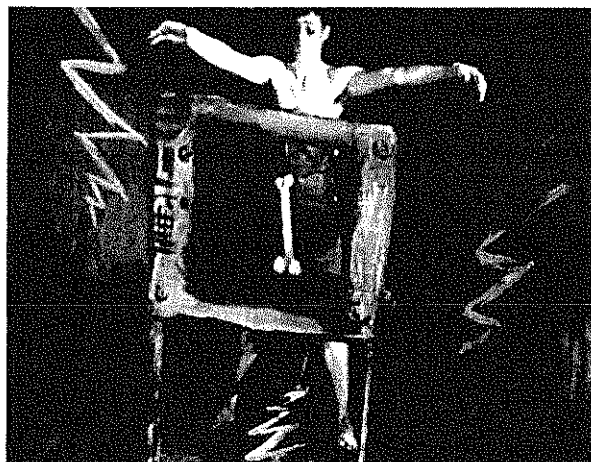
Video Art

an actor (frequently the performer Tracy Leipold). Oursler often has his 'characters' spitting various forms of venom at viewers, particularly in *The Watching* (1992) and the large installation *Judy* (1994), whose many parts are carefully scattered on the floor. Judy, a hapless woman diagnosed with multiple personality disorder (psychologically linked with childhood sexual abuse), is found lying under a tilted couch mouthing 'Hey, fuck you,' or 'Go to hell' to anyone who passes by. Her clothes are lying on the floor or on the trailer-park furniture Oursler has assembled for her. Emanating from a stand of artificial flowers is a punishing voice, presumably Judy's mother, constantly commanding 'No! No! No!' or 'Do it!'

Oursler's video environments are stage sets that incorporate many elements associated with theater and Performance. Within them he places his motionless puppet creatures, like 'Judy,' which are handmade by him, and consigns them to lives of terror and isolation, such as the little figure in *Insomnia* (1996), who is unable to sleep. And there is the little man in *MMPI (Red)* of 1996, trapped under a fallen chair, who seems resigned to his fate as he mumbles, 'Time is irrelevant,' and 'I'm fascinated by children,' and the man whose detached head is submerged in a Plexiglas waterbox. He forever holds his breath, for such is the nature of the video loop: an endless cycle of repeated images, never varying hour after hour. Oursler has found the perfect medium for his humanoid pets. With the flick of a switch, they say only what he wants them to say, and they never contradict him. Beneath all the artifice, Oursler gives voice to the mortified, the lonely, the abandoned. In real life, characters like this walk the streets with their heads down, mumbling to themselves. In his installations they are the star of the show, and viewers feel for them, deeply.

Representative of artists for whom video is only one amongst many modes of expression is the Performance-based American artist Nayland Blake (b. 1960), who is also an accomplished painter, photographer, sculptor and installation artist. His video *Starting Over* (2000) has him in a puffy white bunny outfit trying to do a two-step. The soundtrack features the highly reverberated noise of his size thirteen tap shoes,

which can hardly be lifted from the floor because of the nearly 400 pounds (181 kilos) descending on them. In addition to Blake's own 270 pounds (123 kilos), his costume was fitted with 146 pounds (66 kilos) of navy beans, equal to the weight of his lover, who can be heard calling directions on the soundtrack. Each command is like a death sentence – he can barely stand up, much less do a bunny hop, in this humorous meditation on the impossibility of constantly meeting another's demands.

The quirky, inventive spirit of contemporary performative Video art reinforces the influence of pioneer artist-performers such as Jim Dine, Claes Oldenburg, Allan Kaprow, Carolee Schneemann, Robert Rauschenberg, the electronic engineer Billy Klüver, Georges Mathieu, and Joseph Beuys.[14] Video is the enduring link between dance, Performance art, visual art, media art and installation. The cross-fertilization between art and technology, in the performances of Cunningham, Rauschenberg, et al., set the groundwork for contemporary multimedia performance.

The video artist who has been at the center of dance-based media art is Charles Atlas (b. 1949, United States). Atlas worked with Merce Cunningham as protégé and collaborator for more than thirteen years (from 1970 to 1983), during which time they directed more than twenty videos together and invented what Atlas calls 'mediadance.' Neither pure dance nor pure video or film, mediadance is perhaps best understood by what it isn't: it is not documentation of a dance nor a film about dance. It is dance conceived for the filmed image, dependent as much on camera work and editing as it is on choreography. Cunningham explained her own way of approaching a new work to Atlas in the following way: 'Ask yourself, "What are the possibilities of this situation?" Go as far as possible. Work with all the possibilities.'

The best example of mediadance remains one of Atlas's first works with Cunningham, *Blue Studio: Five Segments* (1975–76), named for the blue screen used in film technology that disappears in the editing room so that the director can insert whatever background is desired. In the final cut Cunningham appears to float through a galaxy of colors and sculpted forms designed solely by technology.

Atlas has created scores of videos, films, performances, and set and lighting designs for opera, theater, and dance. Amongst the highlights of his work are collaborations in film and video with such artists as Bill Irwin, Marina Abramović, Karole Armitage, Leigh Bowery, best known as a model for British painter Lucian Freud, and a collection of tapes made for the *Martha @ Mother* performances. They were organized by Martha Graham impersonator Richard Move at the former New York nightclub, Mother, in the 1990s.

Atlas's association with Belgrade-born artist Marina Abramović has yielded to date a number of daring videos and performances, including *Delusional* (1994), produced in Belgium and Germany, which featured a glass-enclosed set within which Abramović, wearing only a sheer plastic costume and black stiletto heels, at one point lets loose four hundred rats that were hidden under a rug. A meditation on death and decay in war-torn Bosnia, this theater piece followed the two artists' 1989 video, *SSS*, in which Abramović wore a Medusa-style headdress made of real snakes.

Atlas explored the humorous edges of human endurance with Leigh Bowery in several tapes made before the performer's death in 1994. In one, Bowery, decked out in garish drag, à la John Waters's star Divine, pierced his cheeks with large safety pins, to which he attached fake red lips and then struggled to mouth the words to

Charles Atlas

207–210 It was with Leigh Bowery, Lucian Freud's former model and a Performance artist, who died in 1994, that Charles Atlas found a theatrical soul mate. With him he celebrated artifice and the joy of unbounded performance. In *Mrs Peanut Visits New York* (1999), Bowery, dressed up in a drag version of the Planter's brand 'Mr Peanut,' struts through New York's meatpacking district, home to a wild combination of macho truckers and meatpackers as well as drag queens and hustlers. Atlas and Bowery make the city a stage set for their outrageous insistence that we are all costumed to one degree or another.

Aretha Franklin's 'Take a Look.' Touching and discomforting, the tape celebrates artifice as Atlas leaves unedited his own guffaws and comments from behind the camera, while Bowery, a study in vulnerability, performs close to the lens. Amongst Atlas's many influences are Warhol's films, especially *The Chelsea Girls* (1966), Hollywood romances from the 1930s and 1940s, and mainstream television. His devotion to the poetry found in both dance and popular culture have been evident from a brief sketch with actors and a cat performed in a downtown loft, *Little Strange* (1972), to a 15-channel video installation that filled a castle, *The Hanged One* (1997).

The pervasive emphasis on Performance in contemporary video is undeniable. The 2001 Venice Biennale, heralded by some, deplored by others, as 'the Video Biennale,' contained a plethora of video installations, most of them performative in nature. From the cinematic battle of the sexes, *Flex* (2000) by Chris Cunningham (b. 1970, Great Britain), to the meditative *Snow White* (2000) by Berni Seale (b. 1964, South Africa), to *Wall Piece* (2000) by video pioneer Gary Hill, in which the artist repeatedly and forcefully threw himself against a wall, Performance was the primary material in the videos. Performative influences will only grow stronger as artists of our era continue to concentrate on ideas more than materials. Materials are in service to ideas, which, as the next chapter reveals, makes materials, even video, secondary concerns in the practice of art.

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