Recent work, while continuing to explore these important themes, also testifies to the way Lucier has embraced new technologies. *Forge* (2000) features the raging flames of a forge where hardened materials were being shaped into industrial goods, steel shelves perhaps. Exposing both the usefulness and the devastation of heat, Lucier uses the forge as the place to examine the complex relationship between humans and the natural elements. Using a digital technique called ‘nesting,’ in which one image is placed inside another (like the ‘picture in the picture’ on a television set), Lucier intensifies the flaming activity inside the forge by multiplying it in front of the viewers’ eyes.

In *Migration (Monarch)* (2000) an ageing monarch butterfly, which usually travels thousands of miles across North America to winter in Southern California or Mexico, is seen alighting on a human hand. It does not live very long, passing away after making this human contact. This digital video – along with the work of artists such as Michael Snow, Gary Hill, and Pipilotti Rist – was projected on a large screen in Times Square, New York.

Lucier has a conscience. Her lyrical narratives, sometimes painterly, sometimes enigmatic, are meant to inform. American critic Eleanor Heartney wrote of her work in 1993: ‘For the last twenty-five years Mary Lucier has been engaged in a study of the meaning and implications of our metaphors for landscape.... She has focused on the contradictions inherent in the pastoral ideal which underlie so much American art and literature.’

Lucier has much in common with a younger generation of video artists. She began as a still photographer as well as Performance artist. She also incorporated technological interventions in her work, as in her 1975 *Air Writing* and *Fire Writing*. Multiple video monitors, lasers, prerecorded audio texts and other elements contributed to energetic ‘techno-performances’ that reflected her profound and, as it turns out, enduring interest in air, fire, and earth.

*Michal Rovner*

One female artist who combines the technological savvy of video pioneer Steina Vasulka and the story-telling power of Beryl Korot with a singular vision that is at once political, personal, and sculptural is the Israeli artist Michal Rovner, whose single-channel tapes and large-scale installations represent the highest level of video practice at this time.

Michal Rovner (b. 1957, Israel), a photographer since the late 1970s, began using video in 1992 as an inspiration for her still photographs. Her first full-fledged video project, *Border* (1996), was filmed on the border between Israel and Lebanon during a time of war. Filmed with three hand-held cameras (hi-8, Digital Video, and Betacam), *Border* is a fictional narrative in which repetition, sliced dialogues, and surreal juxtapositions of texts and images result in a terrifying meditation on war and art.

Rovner films herself engaging in conversation with passers-by and, most dramatically, with a general in the Israeli army who keeps warning her ‘to stay in your own reality’ instead of trespassing into his. ‘How famous you’d become if I died while you were filming,’ he states in a characteristically challenging fashion. ‘This film will help you in your world, will get you where you want to go, but what will it do for me?’ As Rovner repeatedly asks him how her film will end – as if he were somehow
Installation

All of the artists discussed here use the installation format in their work. The elements of what we now call ‘installation’ have been present in Video art since the 1970s when Wolf Vostell and Nam June Paik used multiple monitors in their presentations of VHS tapes. Installation art, by its very nature, suggests interactivity. Installation artists create environments for viewers to enter literally, thus creating a physical participation with the work. This in turn expands the perceptual and optical impact of the work. Installations, whether in museums, galleries, storefronts, or on street walls, video walls, or any other possible surface, extend the experience of the moving image beyond not only the monitor, but also the darkened room. The possibilities of video installations were expanded as projection devices developed from the bulky tri-tri-camcorder to the trim, compact DVD projectors that can be placed anywhere.

Sam Taylor-Wood, Ugo Rondinone, Chris Cunningham, Inigo Manglano-Ovalle, and Doug Aitken are amongst several international artists for whom large-format multi-wall projections have made Video art an immersive experience. They are also representative of the contemporary artist for whom video is only one medium amongst many at their disposal.

Inigo Manglano-Ovalle

Born in Madrid in 1961, Inigo Manglano-Ovalle was raised in Bogota and Chicago. His installation work has involved human genetic research, automobiles, senescence deprivation tanks, car sound systems, firearms, and designer apartment buildings. His video installations, inspired by his interest in architecture, especially that of Ludwig van der Rohe, are characterized by a sleek minimalism. In *Le Baiser/The Kiss* (1996), filmed at Mies’s Farnsworth House, Plano, Illinois (completed 1950), thin polished steel poles and wire provide an imposing grid within which projection screens suspended like sheets on a very upscale clothesline. Viewers become immediately drawn into the lush color of a projected autumn scene: huge trees with bright yellow leaves, seen through the open expanse of a glass-enclosed structure, sway gently in the breeze. Manglano-Ovalle shoots with a wide-format digital video camera, then transfers tapes to DVD for projection. The digital video footage, viewable from both sides of the screen, full of color and movement, feel like another being in the room.

The all-glass exterior of Mies’s apartment house becomes a blank canvas upon which Manglano-Ovalle paints his scenario. A window washer in gray overalls and an orange hat works outside as an androgynous person in red inside the apartment. Gyrates to music coming in through headphones. Only separated by a sheet of glass neither character acknowledges the other. Their worlds, for a moment close together, are far apart. An eerie silence permeates the viewing room. Anticipating doom, cinema has trained the spectators to do when such bucolic scenes appear on a screen the viewers fear for the home’s thin occupant versus the robust workman. Nothing untoward happens, of course. In fact, nothing happens at all. If the laborer is trying to seduce the person in red with suggestive wiping movements, he gets no response.

For Manglano-Ovalle, as his other work shows, this separation virtually defines class distinctions in contemporary society. This polemic might be lost on viewers, however, because of the sheer beauty of the piece. His masterly use of the medium exposes how far Video art has come in terms of striking image.
Climate (2000) is an even cooler presentation of a mysterious narrative, or, in case, three narratives. Three unrelated characters, whose identities are spelled only in accompanying printed material (a surrogate birthmother, a futures analyst who predicts markets based on weather forecasts, and a gun fetishist) are filmed in another Mies building (Chicago's Lake Shore Drive Apartments, completed 1951 times, looking at Climate feels as if one is watching all the apartments in Hitchcock's Rear Window that did not have a murder occurring; mundane, sometimes inscrutable activities of anonymous city folk.

A droning, musical soundtrack fills the viewing space; unfamiliar words are barked in voice-over. Gradually the fractured narrative appears to have something to do with global interactivity: a gulf-stream shift that will raise the water temperature of the Atlantic, and by a complicated chain of events, will result in favorable e
omic changes in Indonesia, while causing an environmental disaster in Argentina. Manglano-Ovalle's text refers to a not too distant future, in which Australia ceased to exist and the Amazon region has become home to software conglomerates.

He also used 35-millimeter film transferred to a laserdisk for projection in 2001 installation, Alltagszeit (In Ordinary Time), which was filmed in the enormous glass central hall of the Mies-designed Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin (complete 1968). Manglano-Ovalle condensed a twelve-hour shoot into a sixteen-minute wall projection in which people are filmed entering and exiting the clean, spare space as the light changes dramatically from dawn to dusk. Inspired by Jacques Tati's film Play Time, in which a man becomes lost in the clean corridors of modernist buildings, Manglano-Ovalle's installation has the central character appearing and disappearing in the space as if he, too, were inseparable from the architecture around him.

The installation format does not allow for the neat ending of a feature film. Even Godard, who had an influence on both Manglano-Ovalle and Pierre Huyghe.
sometimes permits the comfort of a denouement. But not filmic installations. At most they offer impressions to those who pass through them.

In his installations, Manglano-Ovalle creates what might be called one-act video-plays that continue his exploration of the fate of humanity as seen through very specific communities. Filmic technologies are a part, but only a part, of these explorations. They exist to serve his ideas. In themselves they are not of great interest to the artist. ‘The idea is going to tell me what medium is appropriate,’ he told the author in 2001, ‘and the medium is going to be appropriate only because it’s appropriate, not because it is the medium.’

**William Kentridge**

South African artist William Kentridge (b. 1955) works with film and video to expose the tangled web of South African apartheid. Kentridge is a modernist poet whose chosen medium, the animated film (often shot on 16 millimeter and then transferred to video for projection), is a playing ground of repetitions, fragments (often Surrealist-inspired flights of fancy), and deeply romantic imaging.

Kentridge’s films derive from charcoal drawings; but how single drawings can unfold into such dizzy-making imagery is a sleight of hand worthy of an illusionist. Three of his films, *Felix in Exile: Geography of Memory* (1994), *History of the Main Complaint* (1996), and *Weighing...and Wanting* (1997), are disquieting meditations on the state of individuals and nameless groups caught in the grasp of hatred, paranoia, isolation, and senseless, brutal death.

Felix, an undistinguished, white, middle-aged man, naked and alone, paces aimlessly around a drab room, obsessively repeating meaningless actions. He shaves, and his image disappears in the mirror as the face of a handsome black woman appears. She looks through a telescope into Felix’s blank eyes; then she turns toward the stars, looking up to the sky for relief from the carnage she sees
on the streets of the East Rand, a mining area near Johannesburg. Her image, drawn on pieces of paper, falls like the pages of a calendar ripped away when the month is finished. Stars swirl to form a faucet, which spills water into Felix’s eyes. Eventually flooding his room in blue tinted liquid, and so on: images melting into one another, faces of poor miners staring at the viewer before some are murdered, with blades left in the chest, and abandoned.

Without any sense of the artist repeating himself, but only going deeper into the myths he is unearthing, History of the Main Complaint opens with another middle-aged man, large, fully dressed in striped suit and tie, lying unconscious in a hospital bed. Men with stethoscopes, first three, then ten, poke at him, trying to rouse him from a death-like sleep. He dreams of the trappings of his bureaucratic past: official stamps, telephones, adding machines. His innards, viewed through CAT scans, MRIs, and X-rays, consist of office detritus that gave him a sense of power once upon a time. He dreams of driving along a deserted road and seeing a black man being kicked and killed; he drives on.

Kentridge works in a stream of consciousness that allows impressions and momentary flashes to take form and then yield to new images, without any loss of momentum; indeed, quite the opposite; momentum builds with each frame.

Doug Aitken

Doug Aitken (b. 1968, United States), more than most filmic artists, desires – and has succeeded in creating – sweeping cinematic experiences in the context of video installations. His works, from monsoon (1995) to electric earth (1999), are so exquisitely filmed (he uses 35 millimeter and digital video) that it is difficult to tell the difference between them and studio films, although the content, of course, is not the same. 'In my installations I don’t see the narrative ending with the image on the screen,' he told publisher and critic Amanda Sharp. 'Narrative can exist on a physical level – as much through the flow of electricity as through an image.... I don’t wish to control and experience, nor do I want to make something that’s merely experience: I’d rather attempt to set up a system that brings a set of questions to the viewer. I like my work to provide nutrients.'

Despite the elegance of his images, Doug Aitken is a restless artist, eager to break down standard cinematic barriers and common ways of formulating narratives. 'I am fascinated by film, but I’m even more interested in breaking it apart. I think of the format itself and how limiting it has become, which is why I use multiple screens.... I want to expand the realm of perception. My working process is changing constantly. I’m never illustrating a story or following a script. I let circumstances inform me.'

Like a true post-medium artist, Aitken says of his work: 'I make forms of communications. I use mediums as they suit the concepts.' In common with some others in this chapter, Aitken shoots primarily on film and transfers to video for projection. 'A lot of my attraction to film is because of light. There is something less tangible about film, something more hidden in it.... By contrast, video is flat, revealing everything at once.'

Aitken, known, like Taylor-Wood, for both richly colored photographs and making surface installations, began making films and showing in galleries and alternative
spaces in the early 1990s. His film, *autumn* (1993), starred the now well-known actress Chloë Sevigny. Though he has shot films in many parts of the world – in Guyana for *monsoon*, in the Namib desert for *diamond sea* (1997), in Montserrat for *eraser* (1998), amongst other places – his work retains a strong American preoccupation with landscape as well as a very contemporary interest in personal identity and time. 'I am constantly piecing things together, finding fragments of information, splicing them, collaging them, montaging them to create a network of perceptions,' he has said. 'His very choice of words demonstrates his keen awareness of cinematic language and activities (especially editing) on contemporary art practices.

This 'splicing' and 'collaging' is most evident in *electric earth* (1999), a color film transferred to eight laserdisks for projection, that extends into four different 'rooms' created by scrims. With its late night shots of an African-American youth dancing solo down abandoned Los Angeles streets, *electric earth* becomes an elegy for a life lived in the shadows. 'I dance so fast I become what's around me,' the young man

![Image of a person dancing in a room]

says. 'I absorb the information. I eat it. It's the only "now" I get.' Aitken films him in front of a closed trophy store and then facing a towering Coca-Cola machine; in a parking lot, empty, apart from a silvery shopping cart; and in a bedroom, as he holds a remote control in front of a flickering TV set. Viewers move through the installation, confronting walls and corners where sharp, color images are projected. Aitken's poetic aspirations are captured beautifully in a shot of a tattered piece of fabric caught in the openings of a steel fence.

There is no passive way to experience *electric earth*. If viewers enter into it, the young man's nocturnal ramblings become a part of them. His image is projected on a"' the walls around them, spliced in with shots of streets and digital clocks announcing the time, and its passing. If he is in his small room, viewers feel claustrophobic; if he is walking down a dark quiet street, viewers feel scared: not because
Aitken has set up a narrative for viewers to follow. He has not. Rather he has created a kind of surveillance environment in which viewers are thrust into this man’s life without his knowing it.

The solitariness and confinement of *electric earth* pales in comparison with the utter desolation of *eraser*, filmed on the island of Montserrat after it was devastated by a volcano from 1996 to 1997. Totally void of life, the island is a ghostly reminder of nature’s dominance. Aitken moves his camera slowly through the now-desolate environment as if he were a time traveler discovering a long-lost civilization.

Aitken’s influences, especially Bruce Nauman – evident in works like *bad animal* (1996) and *these restless minds* (1998) – become less apparent with each new large-scale installation. He is inventing a singular body of work that, while rooted in the cinematic tradition of Eisenstein and more contemporary films with the grandeur of *Doctor Zhivago* and *Lawrence of Arabia*, takes personal video making and expands it into filmed environments that retain the complexities of Conceptual video.

‘Filmic’ art

As Video art matures, surpassing cinema on the digital highway, artists, as has been shown, are no longer concerned with preserving video’s unique characteristics. In the 1970s, video as a time-based art was favored for both its immediacy and its affordability. In fact, the lush images of 35-millimeter film were not only felt to be too expensive for most artists, they were also regarded with suspicion. They did not present life as it was. Video, by contrast, was filmed and could be presented in ‘real time.’ In those rebellious years of early Video art, such a notion was important.

Now the dense textures previously associated only with film are available by digital technologies.

*Eija-Liisa Ahtila*

Like Aitken and recently Manglano-Ovalle, Finnish artist Eija-Liisa Ahtila (b. 1958) shoots on film and transfers the footage to video for DVD projection. This technique results in a gray area that is neither film nor video, which is why the word ‘filmic’ has been adopted to cover these hybrids. Perhaps an even more accurate name would be ‘filmic digital art.’

Ahtila’s installation, *Consolation Service* (1999), is a twenty-three-minute, two-screen narrative projected side by side on the same white wall. What are usually quick ‘reaction shots’ (someone responding with a look or a short sentence) in cinema are here given their own screen, so, as the action takes place on one side, the other side shows close-ups of people’s faces, or of furniture, or anything else the director finds interesting. In Ahtila’s scenario a young couple is seen going to a therapist with their infant. They communicate poorly, fight loudly, and decide to divorce. They then go through the motions of a birthday party with friends, afterwards taking a walk across a frozen lake which cracks, claiming the lives of the husband and the friends. In the final scenes, the wife is at home with the baby and the husband appears in a post-death state. He bows several times then is gone, presumably forever.

Ahtila’s tale, which echoes in feeling the desperation of couples seen in work by Bergman or Godard, is told in rich colors and poetic asides. Shadows from candles...
Eija-Liisa Ahtila

345. In *The House* (2000), a three-screen projection, a woman living in isolation in the country begins to have mental and visual hallucinations. In time they take over her life and she becomes increasingly paranoid. Ahtila based her abstract narrative on conversations she had with women who had suffered some form of psychosis. The viewer’s attention passes from screen to screen as images of self-defense become more and more apparent. The split-screens echo the woman’s state of mind. The artist intends to disrupt the normal flow of cinematic logic, replacing it with an empathetic rather than rational appeal.
snow kicked up by puppies at play, flickering images of running horses on a television set – all add up to a very satisfying viewing experience. According to critic Ulrike Matzer, Consolation Service, 'like all of Ahtila's films, touches upon a fund shared human experience. The events could take place anywhere. They are both personally and universally applicable. She draws upon styles and effects from such conventional genres of film as the short feature, the commercial, the documentary, the music video, and the Hollywood fiction, weaving these elements together to form new worlds of images that defy clear categorization.'

Her Anne, Aki, and God (1998) is an elaborate installation with a theatrical setting: an empty bed, a reading lamp and five monitors arranged within a large wooden structure. Above is a large projection of two actors playing the role of 'God' in the melancholic narrative of a man, Aki, who is descending into the isolated darkness of schizophrenia and is unable to leave his apartment. Media curator Chrissie Lee writes of Anne, Aki, and God, 'Ahtila interweaves the charge of live performance with the fictional and documentary modes of filmmaking, into a multi-layered spatial narrative which deconstructs both the anguish of insanity and the thin line between imagination, hallucination, and reality.'

The House (2002) takes a similar theme. In much of her work Ahtila explores the plight of women who find themselves in very difficult situations resulting from not only harsh circumstances, but also mental illness. There is a lyrical beauty to the piece. Ahtila's brilliant colors and fanciful direction have the seductive feel of benign hallucination, even though we know the woman is suffering deeply.

Ahtila echoes the practices of early video artists in her three-part installation Me/We; Okay, Gray (1993), although the videos in this three-monitor installation were also originally shot on 35-millimeter film. Three television sets – two on wooden tables and one on the floor (with DVD players on chairs next to them) – show imaginary, black-and-white 'television commercials' concerning the sexes, radiation leaks and people feeling left out of the reality around them. Mimicking the style of television commercials, Ahtila portrays women in a variety of unflattering, if comic, situations. She does what several early video artists did: present one fully realized and intimate idea, a moment in a life, or a thought too personal and fleeting to be given much attention. That she does it with film is another indication that the same importance is no longer attached to certain mediums by media artists. Artists such as Ahtila suggest that Marshall McLuhan's dictum has not survived the test of time; the medium, it seems, is not the message, at least to these artists.
Matthew Barney

348 Field Dressing (orif'il) (1989)
Matthew Barney

Matthew Barney (b. 1967, United States), like many other artists in this category, can hardly be called a ‘video artist,’ as his work is far removed from the ‘pure’ practice of Video art. However, neither is he an ‘experimental film’ artist: he started in galleries and now shows in both galleries and cinemas. He shoots on video, then transfers to film for projection. His concerns certainly echo the performative videos addressed in Chapter 2, but the filmed scenarios of his masterwork to date, the Cremaster series, have such elaborate costumes (including prosthetic devices), scenery, visual effects, and animation that they comprise a personal filmic art unlike any other.

From his earliest video work, Scabaction (1988), in which Barney cuts his irritated skin with a razor and medicates the wound with substantial amounts of Vaseline and a gel pack, and Field Dressing (orifill) (1989), in which he scales the walls of his studio naked, Barney has been interested in male effort, bodily functions and fluids, and sexuality. With the Cremaster films,' dating from 1994 to the present, these themes became dramatized through a fantastical image machine of hybrid human/animal beings with exposed genitalia; underwater nymphs; majestic queen bees and a host of other characters inspired equally by Wagner, the American dance director Busby Berkeley, and the novelist Truman Capote, who wrote In Cold Blood (1964).

He has been filming the five-part series out of order since the early 1990s and releasing them as they are made. Hence, Cremaster 4 was shown in 1994, Cremaster 1 from 1995 to 1996, Cremaster 5 in 1997, Cremaster 2 in 1999, and Cremaster 3 in 2002. In this and other ways, Barney reflects the methods of experimental theater artist Robert Wilson, whose project, The Civil Wars, was also unveiled in five parts over several years in the 1980s. Like Wilson, Barney did not release his series in sequence, partly to emphasize the non-naturalistic nature of the enterprise. Barney shares Wilson’s phantasmagoric imagination: both populate their surreal scenarios with gods and goddesses, pop stars, and cultural icons. Barney has Harry Houdini, Gary Gilmore, Norman Mailer, The Queen of Chain, while Wilson uses Abraham Lincoln, Giuseppe Garibaldi, Robert E. Lee, and Hercules. However, where Wilson favors exotic birds and people on stilts, Barney prefers medical devices, prosthetic limbs, gooey fluids and the like. His worlds are a fetishist’s dream in which private body parts (the cremaster is the muscle in the male genitals to which the testicles are attached) assume center stage in exaggerated form in magnificently, if bizarrely, clad hybrid bodies. In Cremaster 4, for example, Barney himself (he stars in all his videos) is seen with orange hair, floppy ears, long, hoofed legs, and a sparkling white suit.

The Cremaster series cannot be viewed as different parts of the same ‘story’ as, say, the three parts of The Godfather films can. These Cremaster films are linked only by the central muscle of their title, suggesting a male-centered universe that dissolves under the power of strong female presences like The Queen of Chain in Cremaster 5 and the mysterious queen-bee type with the honey dripping from her nose in Cremaster 2. In each of these, Barney plays with sexual mores, sexual
identities (he acts a character called the Queen of Chain's 'Diva' in Cremaster 5) and a host of personal, abstracted themes honored by many contemporary artists. If references can be made for Barney's unique cosmology, they would include the art of Eva Hesse, Kiki Smith, and the films of Jack Smith — Flaming Creatures (1963) — Mike Kuchar, especially Sins of the Fleshapoids (1965), and Kenneth Anger — Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome (1966) and Invocation of My Demon Brother (1969).¹

Aleksander Sokurov

Russian artist Aleksander Sokurov (b. 1951) also stands out amongst artists who are extending the use of video into new and sophisticated terrain. Is he a film director, video artist, 'poet with a camera?' Known as a filmmaker in the tradition of the great Russian director Andrei Tarkovsky, Sokurov also makes art videos shown at video festivals, for instance, Mother and Son (1997). Whether personal interpretations of literary classics — Save and Protect (1989), based on Madame Bovary, and Whispering Pages (1993), loosely associated with Crime and Punishment — or simply personal meditations on life and death — The Second Circle (1990) and Mother and Son — Sokurov's films (some shot on 35-millimeter film, some on video) are characteristically dream-like and intensely beautiful. Is he a video artist? The answer hardly matters, though he did make cinematic history with his 2002 film, The Russian Ark, which is a single-shot, ninety-minute movie filmed with a digital video camera.

The New Wave of Women Artists

It is clear from many of these examples of media artists that Video art opened up vast new possibilities for women artists from many countries. Tracey Moffatt (b. 1960, Australia), for example, photographer, video artist, and filmmaker, suspends boundaries in her use of materials. In a single exhibition she can present a suite of photographs, a videotape, and a 35-millimeter film, all with considerable confidence. In both still and moving images, she spins tales derived from her fascination with the commonplace (roller derby races and surfers) and the aesthetic.

Remarkable in its compositional beauty and restraint is her Night Cries — A Rural Tragedy. Filmed in 1989 in 35 millimeter and transferred to laserdisk for projection, Night Cries is a seventeen-minute pastiche of fluid, painterly images that recount the interaction between a middle-aged daughter who feels trapped and her dying mother, whose life has been reduced to sleeping fitfully, eating, and making assisted trips to the outdoor lavatory. A palette of desert oranges, blues, and cloudy whites permeate the set of the sound stage where Moffatt has created a surreal vision of the Australian outback. In contrast to her photos, tight compositions in the midst of an expansive natural landscape, Night Cries is a moodscape that unabashedly announces its artifice. This controlled, staged environment reflects the daughter's claustraphobia and allows Moffatt maximal directorial control. In mostly silent rage, the daughter goes about her daily tasks of feeding her mother, wheeling her to the outside lavatory, and listening to her nocturnal squirmishes with encroaching death.

Both women are completely self-centered, and the viewers' sympathies shift from one to the other. At times the daughter seems neglectful, even cruel, though the mother has lost all affection, all sense of gratitude to her. Black-and-white scenes from a distant childhood inserted in the film are the only indication of a once real, if