

by an artist, once again artists' writings form the core of the volume. This is particularly important as, in my education as a curator and writer, it has always been the artist who has insisted upon expanding the range of the video discourse. It is precisely that insistence which makes this book so important and which reflects that level of intellectual ambition which is the promise of video's illuminating glow.

Introduction: Complexities of an Art Form

DOUG HALL AND SALLY JO FIFER

Illuminating Video is a collection of new essays by forty-two artists, critics, curators, and scholars about a complex visual form, video art. While on the surface this book is solely about video, the essays are not intended to quarantine video from discourses that involve all the arts. The intent of this book is, in fact, to disseminate information about video as an art form in the United States, while situating it in the context of current debates on contemporary art and culture.

A distinct quality of *Illuminating Video* is the inclusion of writings by the artists themselves. These take two forms. Several follow the traditional essay, and as such are indistinguishable from the more scholarly writings in the book. What differentiates most of them is that they represent personal and often idiosyncratic points of view (the voice of the artist), and establish a valuable counterpoint to the more scholarly writings. This difference is even more noticeable in the second group of artists' pieces in which the artists deviate from the traditional essay by employing visual and textual structures that more directly convey their ideas. In all cases, the artists' contributions have been integrated into the various chapters along side the writings of critics and scholars and offer the reader valuable first-hand insight into the artists' thoughts and creative process.

The contributors to *Illuminating Video* express a diversity of opinion that is a representation of the field's heterogeneity. The different voices comment indirectly on one another, highlighting areas of disagreement while simultaneously avoiding any attempt at constructing a linear history. In order to bring these voices together, we have divided the book into the following five sections:

1. **Histories** looks at the various narratives that provide video with its myths of origination and, at the same time, presents arguments that point to the problems involved in constructing such a history.
2. **Furniture/Sculpture/Architecture** considers the object—the television set and the video monitor—through which television and video are transmitted, relating it to sites of domesticity, to urban and suburban architecture, and to the art institutions where video is exhibited.
3. **Audience/Reception: Access/Control** investigates video as a vehicle of oppression and (mis)representation, while providing several scenarios for the viewer's response to the spectacle of image control.

4. **Syntax and Genre** looks at the structure of video and, to a lesser extent, of television, in terms of its own grammar and potential for narrative.
5. **Telling Stories**, the final section, concentrates on the works of artists who use video to convey the abstract and metaphysical. Through video's unique capabilities for image manipulation, they construct analogies to such human experiences as the perception of light and the patterning of memory.

Histories

Video's pedigree is anything but pure.¹ Conceived from a promiscuous mix of disciplines in the great optimism of post-World War II culture, its stock of early practitioners includes a jumble of musicians, poets, documentarians, sculptors, painters, dancers, and technology freaks. Its lineage can be traced to the discourses of art, science, linguistics, technology, mass media, and politics. Cutting across such diverse fields, early video displays a broad range of concerns, often linked by nothing more than the tools themselves. Nonetheless, the challenge of video's history has been taken on by the art world, though it might well have been claimed by social history or, for that matter, the history of science and technology. Art historians, however, face two obstacles to constructing a credible history of video: video's multiple origins and its explicitly anti-Establishment beginnings. These obstacles to historicization, either directly or by implication, are the focus of the essays in this section.

When art historians consider video's origins, they encounter the first obstacle: a wild plurality of styles for sorting and analysis. History is a process of selection. Art history, however, selects within the already isolated sphere of aesthetics. Traditionally, art historians have ignored social and political factors because they have been considered beyond their carefully delineated parameters. Video, as a product and process that represents many differently derived practices by numerous artists and social groups, resists this closed system.

Furthermore, video defies the art historical practice of ordering the field into a depoliticized hierarchy of stylistic categories. Over time, this hierarchy, when based on historical inclusion and exclusion, implicitly endows cultural value to certain works. Works of art perceived as valuable enough to be positioned in a historical niche then risk becoming neutralized as they are isolated from their social and political context and assigned new meaning in the historical process.

As with all the arts, the process of creating an art historical narrative for video is complex. It includes not only historians but also the art institutions—the museums in which cultural value is assigned to artworks and the universities where the historical process is made academic. A third part of this equation of legitimization is the interested public, which reaffirms the institutional

selection process. This public, complicit with art history, forms the art market and helps to generate the menu of "important" art from which the institutions, mediated by curators, critics, and scholars, select the works that are made available to the market in the first place. Since this closed system of historicization traditionally has been based on formal aesthetic criteria, it has been taxed by works of art that gain their meaning from the very thing which formalist art criticism strives to deny—the unruly social and political tangle that exists beyond the walls of art history. This, then, is the second obstacle for creating a coherent art history for video: anti-Establishment in its disregard for commodity values, video defies a depoliticized hierarchy, since it is socially engaged.

The problems in constructing video's historical narrative are further exacerbated by the impermanence of the materials from which video is made. Videotape rapidly disintegrates. As Marita Sturken points out, there is a problem when the historical record becomes a substitute for the work itself. Only a few tapes can be afforded the privilege of being revived and archived by the institutions. Countless tapes will be lost once they are omitted from institutional selection. The institutions' agenda for connoisseurship, therefore, must be differentiated from their agenda for historical preservation. Sometimes connoisseurship and preservation work in sync, so that tapes selected for archiving represent a broad history of early video. Many times, however, they do not. If the actual videotape no longer exists, the historical record remains frozen in time, making later evaluations of that work impossible. As a result, work lost in its own time has no chance of emerging for reevaluation in a later one. As Sturken points out, this may be one of the reasons that video is so conscious of its history.

For many artists, video's impermanence represents a denial of art as precious object. It also provides a medium for challenging art institutions because it is reproducible and because it deviates from art institutional agendas dedicated to the protection and display of unique artifacts. As Martha Rosler notes, video is not only reproducible, it also affords the viewer access to a two-way machine confusing the relationship between the maker and the consumer of art. Rosler takes this argument one step further. Tracing the nineteenth-century responses to technology, using photography as the primary example, Rosler examines the utopian assumptions that surround technology. Has video met the expectations held by early users about the impact of technology on society? Has technology changed the players ultimately in control of the production and the consumption of cultural activity?

Though the extent of the impact is questionable, the democratization of photography and video, their rapid and inexpensive reproducibility, idealized by early users, nonetheless challenges institutional power and privilege attached to public image making. Sturken notes that institutions can thwart

resistance to their power and privilege by incorporating video into their collections. They justify the acquisition of video by promoting its formalist qualities that, as previously described, displace its political messages.

Video's funding by and inclusion in the art world depend on establishing its uniqueness and aligning itself with art and away from TV. Sturken warns, however, that there is a danger in the conventional criticism that emphasizes video's formalist qualities. The plurality of intentions behind early work is ignored while works that conform to formalist interpretations are celebrated. More important, works that meet an institutional agenda for connoisseurship are preserved and become the focus of analysis in art history while other works are marginalized.

Three contributors examine the tension between video artists and institutions and, by extension, the problem of writing the history of video from an art historical vantage point. John G. Hanhardt tells us that early video artists wished to expose art as an "elitist and nonpublic discourse." Hanhardt constructs a historical context for the utopian objectives embedded in the practices of art making. On the other hand, Deirdre Boyle finds utopian roots in early video fertilized by the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Boyle describes portable video as a tool that political activists used to challenge authority in their attempt to gain access to mass media. It was also, as Kathy Huffman argues, an experimental tool for public television centers, which hoped to be alternatives to network TV. Though the artistic outcomes of these strategies were remarkably diverse, the videomakers shared radical intentions to subvert the power of institutions and their hegemony.

As more and more tapes disappear, their surfaces oxidizing with time, it is tempting to retreat from video's multiple histories and anti-Establishment beginnings to construct a narrative suitable for the needs of art history. By recording video's multiple histories and listening to artists, however, we will be more likely to stumble upon historical truths. In the process, another kind of knowledge about video art is gained: one that is responsible to its various lives, appreciative of its contradictions, and critical of the historical process that records video into public memory.

Furniture/Sculpture/Architecture

In this section, the television set (upon which we watch broadcast and cable transmissions) and the video monitor (used for viewing videotapes and for closed-circuit situations) are treated as physical objects with complex relations to the broader social order. Part of the intent of this section is to describe some of these cultural (or institutional) connections so that one can better understand how video influences our physical, perceptual, and psychological relationship to the world. Vito Acconci, Kathy O'Dell, and Dan Graham consider

television and video in terms of the family and the home. Graham, Chip Lord, and Dara Birnbaum take television and video into the (potentially) more alienating enclosures of public architecture. Finally, Margaret Morse and Frances Torres examine video in its most sculptural form, as installation within the art museum. In the course of negotiating these domains, we move from a notion of television as furniture to one in which video monitors and projections are incorporated by artists into large environments of sound and image.

To consider television as furniture is to confront ourselves sitting in our homes and watching television. Here we take for granted that spectacular events (assassinations, wars, hijackings, mass murders) as well as more benign ones (sporting events, soap operas, game shows) will come to us, through the appliance, while we sit, comfortable and detached, in the privacy of our living rooms. Much has been written about the role of television in our lives and the way it has distorted our sense of self and of the world. Theoretical discourses from spectatorship to textual analysis have been constructed to describe our relationship to television's (dis)continuous flow of information. Epithets such as "hyper-real" have been summoned to connote a world dominated by television, a world in which "real" experience is seen as simulated through mediated surrogates.

These thoughts, however, do not ordinarily occur to us when, sprawled on the Lazy Boy recliner, we bathe in the mesmerizing glow of the family TV. Consuming television in the familiar surroundings of the home does very little to encourage a critical dialogue with it. For this to happen, we must place TV outside of the normalcy of the domestic site. According to Acconci, it is this presence of the home, existing in television, that "strops us in our tracks" when we come upon a TV in nondomestic, public spaces. In other words, we always see home and family in television and especially when it's removed from its usual domestic environment. Before we can consider how video operates outside of the home, however, we need a better idea of what television means within the home. This is the concern of three of the authors in this section.

First, and most obviously, TV is a manufactured object—a piece of furniture. As Vito Acconci points out in his essay, a television is like the other furnishings in the home, except that for many of us, it is the most important one: the one we look at or stare into. And, we do not stare alone. We watch television at home as a collective experience, and many of the programs reinforce the family structure. As Dan Graham writes, "TV might be metaphorically visualized as a mirror in which the viewing family sees an idealized, ideologically distorted reflection of themselves represented in typical genres of TV: the situation comedy or the soap opera. Where TV represents typical American families, it symbolically represents an image of the American family to itself." Television is also the conduit through which the world at large enters the privacy of the home.

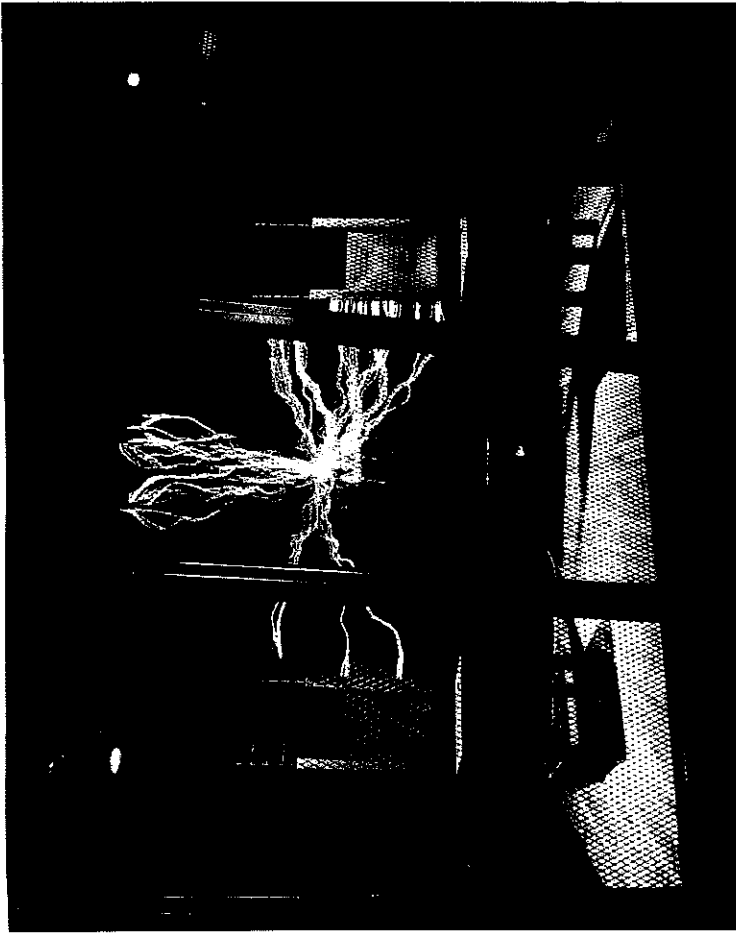


Fig. Hall, *The Terrible Uncertainty of the Thing Described*, 1987.

Trouble in the home is the focus of Kathy O'Dell's essay. Reflecting on the early performance video of Acconci, Graham, and Joan Jonas, her emphasis is on the psychodynamics of the home, which television as a system supports and helps to construct. For O'Dell, the home is important as the site where one first constructs the self. In the hands of many performance artists from the early 1970s, video became a symbolic mirror in which the self was fragmented, frozen, and disconnected. O'Dell contends that video, in this sense, is a tool that helps continue the process of reflection that begins in the earliest symbolic stage of human psychic development. Using a psychoanalytic method derived from Jacques Lacan, she perceives in video the potential to continue this "mirror stage," since it provides the possibility of reflecting back new imaginings or identities. The newly integrated identity, she argues, could be freed of gender and hierarchies derived from the patriarchy of the home, the original site of identity construction. It is, according to her, through video's metaphors of fragmentation and alienation that the original fictions of identity are exposed so that new ones can be constructed.

Outside of the home, there is another kind of architectural space—a public one that includes suburban malls, high-rise office buildings, airports, and

freeways. Several of the authors see parallels between these architectural expanses and the two-dimensional topographies of television. At first, this seems an unlikely analogy. Seeing the connection between architecture and television, however, can help one understand how artists use video to examine our physical and mental relationships to built and mediated space.

The postmodern architectural environment includes buildings of every imaginable style and design. From Greek revival to neotococo, the styles are often imposed one on top of the other, without consideration for the meaning of the individual parts. The result is an eclecticism in which buildings incorporate a pastiche of signs and referents whose exact meanings are nearly impossible to decode. This layering of information is similar to the collaging of images that takes place on television during an ordinary viewing day or even in the space of a few moments as we scan the channels with remote controllers.

Both television and architecture present us with walls of conflicting signs, with few clues on how to access their topographies nor suggestions about what to do once we get beyond the surface. We are involved in an experience of surfaces in which attempts to probe deeper yield only to more surfaces as impenetrable as the first. In fact, any endeavor to deduce meaning from these topographies—to dig beneath their seductive veneers—can cause a feeling of psychological displacement and a sense that our mental and physical spaces have become intermingled and confused. The result could be described as a state of walking somnambulism. It is caused by our sense that there is nothing there—beyond the surface—that we are nowhere and that television is, in effect, a two-dimensional shopping mall in which there is nothing to buy.

In his essay, Dan Graham shows how the codes and signs that are architecturally inscribed into urban and suburban life arbitrarily "reflect and direct the social order." The intent of his site-specific video installations is didactic: to return to the viewer a sense of psychological and perceptual control, even as one experiences the conflicting messages of built and mediated space. Graham does this by constructing works in public and semipublic spaces (such as the Citicorp atrium in New York City), which draw attention to our complex relationship to architecture and to its two-dimensional equivalent, television. As Nigel Coates says, "We learn to compensate, by adopting the vocabulary of contemporary experience. For many artists, video is the language of TV absorbed into the discourse of cultural esthetic. It is television turned against itself."

Through the work of Graham and other artists, video is a weapon in the battle against the tyranny of images.

When removed from the context of television commodities and placed within the museum, video takes on the status of art. The relationship between video and the art museum, however, has been an uneasy one. The reasons for this are complex; yet one explanation is to be found in their differing attitudes

toward time. With single-channel videotapes, there is a linear narrativity that requires that the visitor view the work from beginning to end. This time-based aspect of video clashes with the viewing time that one expects in a museum, which is more leisurely.

All institutional spaces such as banks, supermarkets, movie theaters, and art museums have their own set of temporal rules. When we enter one of those spaces, our expectations of how events will unfold, the amount of time they will take, the order in which they will occur, and the degree of control we will have over them are based on our experiences of similar spaces. When time flows differently than what we expect, we can become impatient and resistant to the temporal imposition.

The phenomenological time of the art museum could be described as self-guided. A visitor expects to control the time spent looking at individual artworks. Static arts such as painting, sculpture, and photography work comfortably in this climate. Video, on the other hand, has its own temporal agenda. This is one of the things that strikes us when we come upon a television or a monitor in an art museum, especially if seating has been arranged in front of it: video announces the presence of another kind of time, one that demands more focused attention. It is, in a most important sense, a viewing experience that is in conflict with the temporality of the museum.

Video installation has prospered partially because of its ability to be more responsive to the temporal demands of both video and the viewer. Since video installation is the incorporation of television or video monitors into complex sculptural and architectural configurations, it is a form that appears to comply with many of the rules that govern sculpture. These works seem to invite the visitor to engage them for a period of time that is determined by the viewer and not dictated by the internal time of the work itself. Hence, installations have been more readily integrated into the museum context than have single-channel tapes.

However, as Margaret Morse points out in her essay, video installation is a form whose strategies of time and uses of space lead the viewer to a kinesthetic experience that is of an order different from either looking at traditional sculpture or watching television. With video installation, we move among the images, sharing their space, becoming performers in the work. According to Morse, the art form is no longer just the images on the monitor, as it would be in single-channel works, but more important, it is their relation to the body of the visitor, which she terms the "space in between."

Audience/Reception: Access/Control

Television is a source of cultural hegemony and hierarchy, a reigning discourse in the shaping of world politics and in the writing of history. Disconnected

from broadcast feeds, however, television sets become monitors, and video cameras and recorders become potential tools of resistance—providing program alternatives to mainstream media.

That artists would be among the first to oppose television as an instrument of power is not surprising. As the contributors in the "Histories" section describe, a utopian impulse to explore the democratic possibilities of mass media or at least to comment on its Orwellian tendencies pervaded much of early video art. Video was an inevitable vehicle for artists of the New Left. "Its relationship to television, technology, and information, and its reproducibility, made it seem like the appropriately radical tool, with which to achieve their goals," says Marita Sturken. In this section "Audience/Reception: Access/Control," the authors look at television as a system of representation and discuss video art's role in establishing strategies for questioning its representational hegemony.

One of the more prevalent critiques of television focuses on the way television represents and perpetuates dominant ideologies. Television tends to compress the world into simplified equations in which everything is designated as either similar (dominant) or different (other). In this order, universality is ascribed to the dominant's characteristics whereas qualities that belong to the other are marginalized and objectified. The other does not represent but rather is represented. Thus, a hierarchy is encoded into the iconography and the ideologies of every soap, sitcom, and advertisement. This simulation of hierarchical social relationships fixes identities, mythologies, or stereotypes that preserve the interests of the class, gender, sexual preference, or race of the dominant.

In addition to imposing hierarchies that mirror already present structures of power in society, television also acts as a filter to exclude realities—realities that, more often than not, belong to the other. Critiquing representation not only involves countering the myths and stereotypes of (mis)representation but also including that which has been rejected by the dominant.

In her essay, Coco Fusco argues that current attempts at inclusion and diversity are not necessarily a guarantee against stereotyping and mythmaking. Fusco examines how defining and exploring culture as other can create still more artificial representations of ethnic minorities. She describes the term "other" as an art historical formality that "calls forth ontological processes of definition." Race, she says, is neither a formal category, nor ontological condition; rather, race is relative to other categories such as gender and class.

Martha Gever argues that the economy of video production can invite the other, in this case women, to interrogate the role of representation and to create works that inject a feminist perspective into social politics and history. She adds that women video artists have helped define terms, based on the feminist critique, that have become historically sanctioned and inseparable from the dominant discourses. Further, feminist strategies of intervention have been

widely adopted by video artists to challenge all forms of representation, not only those related to gender. One of these strategies is appropriation, a tactic in which images are isolated and recontextualized to expose the dominant myths encoded into mass media. As Gever demonstrates, in the hands of feminists, appropriation is a means of resistance because it displaces the prevailing fictions of gender, particularly those expressed through TV.

According to Judith Barry, who invokes Edward Said's lecture on cultural resistance, appropriation can work in two directions. Artists engage the vocabulary of television, its image codes and special effects, in order to pursue their aesthetic goals and to deconstruct television's vernacular. Conversely, TV consumes artists' innovations in order to satisfy the audience's insatiable desire for new and seductive imagery. Barry describes this spiral of interdependence as parasitic.

Dee Dee Halleck contends that this parasitic relationship makes video artists vulnerable to censorship, a particularly dark shadow that she sees cast over high-cost video productions. She argues that artists who must make their projects appear attractive to funding institutions have become dependent on the industry's prohibitively expensive tools. According to Halleck, "censorship begins with the very choice of subject and style at the grant application phase." She suggests that the increased availability of consumer video in conjunction with decentralized media activity, such as public access, allows artists to overcome some of the issues of censorship. For Halleck, working outside the main communication conduits permits more experimentation and open expression of diverse ideas.

Consumer technologies make it possible for people to become media literate as they shoot and edit their own programs. As people learn about media practices, they become less passive and more capable of countering its demagoguery. Lynn Hershman makes a case for interactive technology based on this prescription. She describes her attempts to empower audiences by supplanting passivity with participation. Interactive systems require viewers to react. As viewers become active participants instead of passive consumers, they are more able to counter being dominated by the myths of media.

Ann-Sargent Wooster, however, questions the current romance with interactivity and its promise of democratizing media. She argues that interactive video discs lull the viewer into even greater passivity. Viewers are tricked into believing that they are creating a new work instead of merely choosing from a limited number of options determined by the artist. As a result, viewers experience a false sense of power and freedom while becoming more susceptible to manipulation. Unaware of the facade of choice, viewers have no impetus to look beyond the artist's select menu for alternatives. As Wooster points out, if there are no real options, choosing is meaningless.

Taken together, these essays suggest that video art leads a double existence. On the one hand, it operates as a marginal and critical form in relation to dominant media by revealing methods of audience manipulation. On the other, video makes use of the very strategies it criticizes in order to capture and hold the attention of a viewer. Video both illustrates power and is a means to its resistance.

Syntax and Genre

The dominant approach of art criticism has concentrated on the formal aspects of an artwork's distinct properties. "Critics of this approach point out that limiting discussions of video to its distinct properties restricts the discourse of the medium to the limitations of modernist art theory," explains Marita Sturken in her essay for this book. In the section "Syntax and Genre," the authors take on the task of considering video in terms of its own phenomenology in attempts to move this formalist discourse beyond the restrictive (and purely aesthetic) perceptions of modernism.

The claim that an art medium has inherent properties demands that each art form be seen as distinct from all others and to possess qualities that are unique to it alone. For example, Clement Greenberg identified the inherent properties in painting as flatness, support, surface, color, and scale. To define analogous properties in video is considerably more difficult, but we could suggest the following possibilities: a glowing surface that is composed of bits of information on a (relatively small) phosphorous screen; a source of light looked into; a light emanating from a machine called a television; instantaneous transmission; an insanity that instills in the viewer an illusion of immediacy; and a temporality that is both informed by and a reaction against TV's use of time.

These medium-specific properties could also be described as the language through which a work constructs its meaning as art. Hence, the inherent properties are seen as equivalent to lexical parts such as words; the system of rules that govern and control the constituent properties is the grammar; and the manipulation of the constituent parts according to the governing rules of grammar constitutes the syntax.

The modernist account demands that critical emphasis be placed on a work's formal properties because it is through them that it makes its claim as a (good) work of art. This need to categorize and isolate artistic practices from one another and from any social context allows for an establishment of criteria by which critical judgments can be made.³

One of video's distinct qualities may very well be its ability to defy the boundaries that have been so carefully constructed by modernism. "Omnivorously, or even cannibalistically," writes Christine Tamblyn, "the video me-

dium seems to be capable of accommodating any synthetic aesthetic strategy, production method, or format that artists have managed to devise." By limiting itself to this refined purist account, modernist discourse seems to insist that some ineffable truth will emerge miraculously out of its own properties to reveal such essences as "presentness" and "grace."⁴

There is, however, widespread suspicion among contemporary artists and critics that the mechanisms through which meaning attaches and detaches itself to the stuff of art are more complex—mechanisms that include a process in which the artwork's properties interact with the very social matrix that modernism denies. This suspicion informs the essays in this section. Taken as a whole, they argue that the concept of distinct properties has been liberated from the restrictive connotations of its modernist involvement. They use a strategy that describes proclivities rather than legislates rules for determining acceptable aesthetic behavior. This method of description presents video as possessing certain qualities and propensities (which may or may not be unique to it), inclining video to behave in particular ways. This strategy provides the reader with a more complex and useful understanding of how the grammar of an artwork might behave. It could lead us back and forth between the form itself and the social context from which meaning was gathered and to which it must, eventually, be returned.

This could also easily be the description of Maureen Turim's essay, "The Cultural Logic of Video," in which she proposes a methodology that integrates a discussion of video's properties into a broader cultural discourse. As with the other authors in this section, she presents video as heterogeneous and frees it from the potential for pedagogy found in modernist (or, for that matter, postmodernist) theory. "A generation groomed on such theoretical mythologies is condemned perhaps to see the world in their terms," writes Turim.

The authors in this section do differ, however, in their definitions of what constitutes video's grammar and in their conception of how it becomes organized to form meaning. Turim is interested in examining the way in which video, through its apparatus, can alter our usual orientation to time and space. Our perception of this "temporal and spatial fluidity," she maintains, has the "potential to transform the very concept of history into one far more dynamic and more global than a linear series of events." Turim considers video's ability to handle time in a unique way as one of its essential properties. Her interest, though, is to employ the quality of the medium as a way to connect it to a larger social and political order.

For Norman M. Klein, history has been replaced by an audience memory partially constructed by television. He finds in the genres of television, such as sitcoms and game shows, a syntax with a specific vocabulary from which narratives are constructed. For him, the concern is not with the individual story lines of the various television programs (their literary narratives) but with a

metanarrative that he sees as derived from television's vocabulary of gestures, special effects, and editing rhythms. This larger narrativity is one that is constructed by the audience in the course of a day, a year, or even a lifetime. For Klein, history has become a mental theme park. He examines how the work of artists of such as Dara Birnbaum, Max Almy, Ilene Segalove, and Bruce and Norman Yonemoto appropriate the genres of television in order to expose their fictions and how these fictions are, in turn, involved in the process of creating audience memory.

Like Klein, Bruce Ferguson is interested in television genres. His focus, however, is on comedy and the career of Ernie Kovacs: how Kovacs managed to manipulate and expose the conventions of television production. As Ferguson points out, Kovacs not only created brilliant comedy, but just as important, his skits revealed the artifice of TV's codes and styles. By opening television's seams and interrupting its effortless flow, Kovacs provided his audience with some of the earliest, and most entertaining, strategies of opposition and resistance to television.

In the final essay for this section, Christine Tamblyn also considers genre, but from a feminist perspective. She focuses on the work of six women artists. As she points out, not all of them are directly involved in feminism, and yet they share a strategy. As Tamblyn states, the artists bring together the genres of portraiture and personal documentary, which they use as a basis for self-reflection while simultaneously presenting images of the world beyond them. In other words, they look out as a means to look in. Paradoxically, genres that are associated with the presentation of public experience become vehicles for revealing the private.

Although the essays in this section offer different perspectives, they are similar in that they share a methodology. Their approach is one in which both description and theoretical construction emerge from careful consideration of television's and video's distinctive properties.

Telling Stories

Surrounded by analysis and interpretation, we may become smothered by language, denied vision, oblivious to the rich possibilities of looking at video as an expression of both poetry and criticism. Referring to his writings, Sol Lewitt once warned: "These sentences comment on art, but are not art."⁵ Here, in *Illuminating Video*, Gary Hill echoes Lewitt: "There is something of every description which can only be a trap. Maybe it all moves proportionately thereby canceling out change and the estrangement of judgment." While this collection of writings is a testament to the necessity of critique, it will fail if, in the process, it threatens to destroy that which it studies. "[Y]our mind can't help but mince and suddenly you're beside yourself." It is in this section, "Telling

Stories," that the authors' words seem to echo the structure and feeling of video itself.

In Raymond Bellour's essay, "Video Writing," we understand his metaphor of the "pen-camera" as being similar to Douglas Davis's "[t]he camera is a pencil," as referred to in Mary Lucier's essay for this section. Both yield to an idea that is elegant in its simplicity: that video (or, more precisely the active camera of the videomaker) is involved in making marks (writing or drawing) in a basic desire to inscribe meaning. Bellour writes, "I believe that the profound discomfort that comes across us when we are face to face with one of these new images stems from the way they force us to reform, together, and to project into a still unlikely future the two oldest gestures of expression linked in the hand of man: the lines of a drawing and of the letter."

For Mary Lucier, as with Bellour, the concept of video as a conduit to human consciousness and memory is expressed through the metaphor of the mark. In the video installation *Dawn Burn* (1975-76), she describes how the repeated recordings of the rising sun "engrave a signature of decay onto the technological apparatus." The residue of this activity is a calligraphy that takes us to the source of vision by establishing an analogy between the iris of the eye and the lens of the camera. Whether the scar is the sun's trail burned into the phosphorous of the television tube or is an image etched into the memory, the result is the same: both "represent a kind of knowledge."

The mark also represents the passage of time in which the burn is only a residue. It is not, after all, the look of these disfiguring scars to which we respond. We are moved, instead, by an allusion to the poignancy of decay, the movement of light toward dark, and the mortality of vision. An equivalence between the technical apparatus of video and the human act of perception is expressed through video's descriptions of light and its synchronic recording of time. This is the meaning of the words "Light and Death," the title of Mary Lucier's essay. It is a theme that carries through into Bill Viola's "Video Black—The Mortality of the Image."

Viola writes, "[A thought] is more like a cloud than a rock, although its effects can be just as long lasting as a block of stone, and its aging subject to the similar processes of destructive erosion and constructive edification. Duration is the medium which makes thought possible, therefore duration is to consciousness as light is to the eye."

By equating duration, consciousness, and death to the phenomenology of video, Lucier and Viola stare a belief in video's ability to express meaning through its own qualities. Although stated in different ways by the various authors, this faith underlies "Telling Stories."

It is appropriate that Tony Oursler's essay, "Photopic," be the final word in this book. Not only does it add a pleasantly sinister edge to the discussion but, more important, it brings us full circle by returning to the home.

Like Accorci's television, Oursler's Utility sits in the den and is a mind machine that disintegrates the connection between body and intelligence. Accorci's TV, "a rehearsal for a time when human beings no longer have bodies," and Oursler's Utility, an inducement to schizophrenia, are both intimately related to a notion of video as a form that directly affects the consciousness. The difference is that Oursler adds an element of dread by depicting the Utility as parasitic and the cause of deep psychological rupture.

Some final thoughts about *Illuminating Video*. This book can be used as a map or conceptual core sample of the field; its intended purpose is to construct a base from which we can address the issues that are raised by video. After all, a primary function of criticism is to provide a vocabulary so that we can challenge our assumptions as viewers and nonviewers, curators and funders, and, most important, to make our appreciations of the art informed ones. What *Illuminating Video* does not purport to be, however, is a definitive history of the field. Indeed, a subtheme of this book is that no single history can (or should) be written and that to understand video one must consider its several origins as well as its diverging agendas, both social and aesthetic. Multiplicity is one of video's strengths and the source of much of its power. It is also video's location on the margins of official aesthetic acceptability that allows it to maintain a residence within the conscience of the art world.