



Video Spaces

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VIDEO SPACES

Barbara London

Eight Video Installations at the Museum of Modern Art, New York

When portable video cameras and recorders reached the consumer market in the mid-1960s, artists suddenly had access to a medium that had been the exclusive domain of commercial broadcasters. The mavericks who gravitated towards video recognized a wide open area with promising artistic potential. Every enhancement in the camera or tape deck was an occasion for passionate debate and further discovery. Fueled by this energy, video exploded in many different directions. When video merged with such disciplines as architecture, sculpture, and performance, a dynamic new art form was created: the video installation.

In recent years video installation and video sculpture have emerged as the most fertile forms of video art. By releasing the image from a single screen and embedding it in an environment, artists have extended their installations in time and space. The works envelop the viewer, who moves around and through them. Engulfed by the assemblage of temporal parts, the process of looking is as much about the physical

experience as the composite memories that live on in the mind. The installations illustrate the dissolution of the seriality of time that characterizes the late twentieth century. The following installations were at view at the Museum of Modern Art from June 22 to September 12, 1995.

Description of Works

Judith Barry and Brad Miskell (New York). *HardCell*, 1994.

HardCell is like a cyborg made up of second-hand parts. It looks as if an entity from outer space has just crash-landed in a dumpster and is crawling out. Disembodied fragments of monologues and bits of computer code stream across its computer screens. This folksy creature promotes a comfortable feeling with technology, but at the same time it calls into question the current predilection for an all-out embrace. [As an artist and writer, Judith Barry has actively explored video and theory for twenty years. Her work has been shown extensively in North America. Brad Miskell is a New York artist and writer.]



Judith Barry and Brad Miskell, *HardCell*, 1994. Photo: Courtesy Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery, New York.

Stan Douglas, *Evening*, 1994. Photo: Courtesy of the artist and David Zwirner Gallery, New York.





Marcel Odenbach, *Eine Faust in der Tasche machen (Make a Fist in the Pocket)*, 1994. Photo: Courtesy Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid.



Tony Oursler, *System for Dramatic Feedback*, 1994. Photo: Courtesy Metro Pictures, New York.

Stan Douglas (Vancouver). *Evening*, 1994.

Evening considers American television of the late 1960s, when stations began to be less concerned with the editorial character of their newscasts than with enhancing the anchors' stardom. The installation centers around WCSL, in Chicago, which is based on the station that initiated the concept of "happy news," and two other fictional networks in that city. The stations are represented by three large video projections, side by side against a long wall. Using archival clips, Douglas follows nine developing news stories from 1969 and 1970. The newscasters, played by actors, read material scripted by the artist. The anchors begin in unison with "Good evening, this is the evening news," then proceed with their separate reports. They wear uniform happy faces, no matter how horrid or entertaining the events they cover. Between reports of the trial of the Chicago Seven, the Vietnam War, the investigation into the murder of local Black Panther Party leader Fred Hampton, the stations' directors cut between human-interest stories and bantering among the anchors. This is "infotainment," before there was a word for it. [Stan Douglas is an artist who lives in Vancouver. His work has been seen at the last Documenta, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, and in numerous one-person exhibitions in Canada.]

Teiji Furuhashi (Kyoto). *Lovers*, 1994.

Furuhashi's life-sized dancers in *Lovers* are drained of life. Projected onto the black walls of a square gallery, the naked figures have a specter-like quality. Their movements are simple; they gracefully walk and run. Their repetitive actions

become familiar. It is a surprise when two translucent bodies come together in a virtual embrace. This is more of an overlap than a touch. These ostensible lovers are not physically involved. [Teiji Furuhashi is a co-founder of Dumb Type, an internationally recognized arts collective based in Kyoto. The group takes an irreverent look at popular culture in Japan and society's rigid stratification. Dumb Type's work has an Orwellian approach to the physical world.]

Gary Hill (Seattle). *Inasmuch as It Is Always Taking Place*, 1990.

Inasmuch as It Is Always Taking Place at first glance resembles a still life. Set on a shelf recessed five feet into the wall are sixteen rasters, monitors stripped of their outer casing. Ranging in size from the eye piece of a camera to back-size, they show loops that are closeups of body parts—an eye, knees, or a soft belly. The rasters do not follow the organization of the skeleton: an image of an ear lays next to an arched foot, and tucked modestly behind that is a groin. Each raster is attached to nerve-like, long black wires that are gathered together as in a spinal column. None of the images are completely still. The raster and the image exist as object, as representation, as a living thing. [One-person exhibitions of Gary Hill's installations have been shown at the Hirshhorn Museum, Soho Guggenheim, Long Beach Museum of Art, and the Basel Kunsthalle, among other museums.]

Chris Marker (Paris). *Silent Movie*, 1995.

French artist Marker is a diarist who plays off memory. Blending fact and fiction, he works off multiple trains of

thought. *Silent Movie* is a soaring tower made up of five over-sized monitors stacked one on top of the other. Teetering, the structure is stabilized by guy wire. The black-and-white images on the monumental screens come from the silent movie era. Or are they the artist's reverie about the period? Marker is bound nostalgically to the "golden age" of silent film but will not give up the present. After thirty-five years as an evocative filmmaker, he now works exclusively with video and computers. [Chris Marker has inspired artists around the world for more than forty years. Such works as *La Jetée* and *Last Bolshevik* are internationally acclaimed as classic examples of experimental film and videomaking.]

Marcel Odenbach (Cologne). *Make a Fist in the Pocket*, 1994.

German artist Odenbach is involved with identity and vision. *Make a Fist in the Pocket* is based on an old German aphorism. It addresses the rage seething behind a calm public face. This compliant façade maintains order. Following the leader also fosters a preoccupation with stylish appearances. His installation explores the tensions caused by social ruptures. A quotation on the entrance wall is from Ingeborg Bachmann. This young Austrian writer, who died twenty years ago, was taken up by student radicals in late 1960s and now again in the 1990s. The artist looks back wistfully, frustrated by the lack of focus in the world today. [For more than fifteen years, Marcel Odenbach has exhibited his media work extensively in Europe and abroad. He has several major retrospectives in Europe this year.]

Tony Oursler (New York). *System for Dramatic Feedback*, 1994.

At the doorway to Oursler's *System for Dramatic Feedback* stands a howling effigy. Over and over it cries, "Oh, no! Oh, no! Oh, no!" The voice is anxious and shrill and pierces the space. A wall-sized, black-and-white video projection of an audience fills the wall opposite the entrance. Young faces stare glazedly into the room at a faraway screen. Slightly off to the side, Oursler's "mutation pile" sits on the floor. This mound of stuffed, Salvation Army hand-me-downs is given new life with video. His outlandish effigies emitting raw emotion are ciphers. Viewers can endow them with their own feelings, or chuckle and remain at a distance. The artist provides an enchanting opportunity to tap into what is so basic but unresolved at the human core. [Over the last fifteen years Tony Oursler has developed an original type of surreal, video narrative. His work was included in the last Documenta, and recently he has had major one-person shows in Frankfurt, London, Paris, and Salzburg.]

Bill Viola (Long Beach). *Slowly Turning Narrative*, 1992.

Viola is a formalist who has developed a distinctive vocabulary to investigate the most primal emotions common to us all. In the center of *Slowly Turning Narrative* is a twelve-foot wall, rapidly rotating on its axis. One side is mirrored, the other is matte. Projected onto the revolving wall in black-and-white an immense visage stares fixedly. It is the artist's tired face, gazing inwardly. From the opposite side of the room, a colored image is also projected onto the revolving wall. It is a disorienting pan-

orama of barking dogs, a house on fire, and seething crowds at night. These are inter-cut with family scenes and pastoral landscapes. The rotating wall with the face on one side and mind images on the other presents an obvious duality—the external surface reality of a person and behind it the hidden, internal experience. The overall impression

is a slowly turning mind absorbed with itself. [Following the Museum of Modern Art's retrospective "Bill Viola" in 1987, there have been shows of his work in Canada and Europe. He is one of the preeminent artists working today. His works were featured in the United States pavilion at the 1995 Venice Biennial.]

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