14. Video and Film Space

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The moving image always transforms the space it occupies. This transformative process has been a central tenet of film and video installations since their inception in the mid-1960s. From the early experiments of the sixties to the present widespread use of video projection, the spatial issues of video and film installation can be said to have evolved in three distinct phases. The first phase can broadly be termed the phenomenological, performative phase; the second, the sculptural phase; and the third, current phase, the cinematic. These remarks are limited to the first and third phases, and to the resonances between the two. Film and video installation is rarely discussed beyond the parameters of its own development, except at the point when it overlapped with performance during the seventies. Yet the distinct features of each stage of its maturation are inseparable from the wider context of the avant-garde contemporary art practice to which it belongs, and the issues of space that emerge are remarkably parallel.

The earliest video and film installations made from the mid- to late 1960s presented two different philosophical approaches to space, in what could be described as an overlap between the ending of one era and the beginning of another. Expanded cinema events echoed the dreamlike collage aesthetic of avant-garde sixties film in large-scale projected environments involving film and 35mm slide sequences. At the same time, an emerging body of video work with a rigorously conceptual approach to viewer participation and social space began to emerge, including installations such as Bruce Nauman's *Live/Taped Video Corridor* (1970) and video time-delay live feedback pieces such as Frank Gillette and Ira Schneider's *Wipe Cycle* and Les Levine's *Iris,* both made in 1969.

These two very different sensibilities epitomized the differences between the media of film and video. The expanded cinema events of the late sixties marked the final

gasp of abstract expressionism in moving-image-media terms. Large-scale film environments echoed the psychedelic sensibility of the sixties, with its mind-expanding light shows, as well as the earlier Zen and Beatnik culture of the fifties. Aldo Tambellini's *Black Zero* (1965), involving large-scale film and slide projection and sound, was one of the first "electromedia" environments. In 1969, John Cage and Ronald Nameth presented *HPSCHD*, a multimedia environment, at the University of Illinois Assembly Hall. Eight thousand slides and one hundred films were projected on eleven-hundred-foot-wide screens in a circle around the space above the viewers, while fifty-two loudspeakers transmitted the sound of seven amplified harpsichords around the auditorium.

These large projected film images transformed the space into a three-dimensional image, a kind of communal dream space, or metaphor of expanded consciousness. As Gene Youngblood remarked, "On the one hand, intermedia environments turn the participant inward upon himself, providing a matrix for psychic exploration, perceptual and sensorial awareness; on the other hand, technology has advanced to the point at which the whole earth itself becomes the 'content' of aesthetic activity. . . . Implicit in this trend is another facet of the Romantic Age. The new consciousness doesn't want to dream its fantasies, it wants to *live* them."[1]

These environmental spaces bore a direct relationship to the growing number of commercial experiments with large-scale projection, such as those presented at the World's Fair of 1964 in New York, which Bill Viola cites as an early influence on his large-scale projected installations. Such commercial environments similarly spectacularized the cinema viewing experience, moving large-scale projected images into a three-dimensional space within which the viewer could wander at will. This relationship to the large-scale panoramic moving image was first explored in early twentieth-century cinematic experiments with large-scale viewing, but its origins lie further back, in the German, French, English, and American experiments with large-scale circular panoramic paintings made during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

In contrast to film, the instant, real-time quality of the new video technology, whose wider uses since its appearance in the mid-sixties had included live television reporting of the Vietnam War and live feedback recordings of subjects in psychological experiments undertaken in academic departments, presented, for the first time, the possibility of observing human behavior as it occurred in real time. Live feedback became a central formal and spatial strategy in a large group of video installations produced using this new equipment. Their development was intimately connected with performance, conceptual art, and minimalism's radical shift of meaning from the object to the viewer in space. Dan Flavin's site-specific constructions were important for Bruce Nauman's phenomenological structures in both video and neon light, for example. And Dan Graham's close friend Robert Smithson's writings on the architecturally entropic properties of the mirrored space were an important influence on Graham's mirrored video environments.

These performative video installations of the late sixties and early seventies, involving smaller-scale, black-and-white video images, often in live feedback recordings

of the actions of the viewer or artist or both, marked a new, antispectacular, analytical experience of space. The reductive, monochrome representations of the viewer or artist's presence in space, mediated through real-time feedback, were framed either within the video monitor or, in the case of Peter Campus, by a medium-sized glass screen containing a black-and-white video projection of the viewer. In a climate in which the broad concept of the autonomous self was breaking down, the boundaries between public and private space, between the artist's studio and the gallery, and between artist, artwork, and viewer were all called into question. Space became the primary site for this inquiry, and, as such, the viewer's relationship with space became introspective.

The single most important influence on the defining of space in all the video installations produced by Peter Campus, Vito Acconci, Bruce Nauman, Dennis Oppenheim, and Dan Graham during the period 1968–1975 was that of phenomenology and psychological theory. The properties of the new video technology lent itself to this inquiry. As Les Levine remarked, "Art has always been communication in its most eloquent form. But until television, artists have created things to be communicated. . . . But television is neither neither an object nor a 'content.' Television is the art of communication itself. . . . The self-feeding, self-imaging, and environmental surveillance capabilities of closed-circuit television provide, for some artists, the means of engaging in a phenomenon of communication and perception in a truly empirical fashion similar to scientific investigation."[2]

In 1968, Les Levine predicted the preoccupation with psychological theory by artists working with video and performance in his observation that "machines that show the human organism itself as a working model . . . may eventually destroy the need for psychology as we know it."[3] As Gene Youngblood remarked, in the two closed-circuit "teledynamic systems" that Levine built in 1968 and 1969, *Iris* and *Contact: A Cybernetic Sculpture*, Levine's primary interest was in the psychological implications of the extension of the superego suggested by the mirroring closed-circuit televisual image of the viewer.

Bruce Nauman pushed this psychological inquiry much further in his performances and corridor structures of the late sixties, in which the artist and the viewer experienced claustrophobic, uncomfortable situations involving physical restriction and video surveillance. These video spaces were highly influenced by Nauman's study of phenomenology, behaviorism, and gestalt psychology. As Kate Linker has argued, Vito Acconci was also heavily influenced by psychological theory, in particular the writings of Ervin Goffman and Kurt Lewin's "field theory," in which human behavior is understood "in terms of the relationship of the individual to the structure and dynamics of its situation and surroundings."[4] Acconci's use of Lewin's arguments that human behavior can be tested by stress and exhaustion echoes Nauman's use of tension, discomfort, and aggression to test both the viewer's and the artist's own reactions in a given space. Dennis Oppenheim, a close friend of Acconci, had met Nauman in Aspen in 1970 and was producing similarly confrontational video performances and

installations. In the video installations by all three artists, space was made deliberately adversarial.

In Nauman's video installations made between 1968 and 1970, including *Live/Taped Video Corridor* and *Corridor Installation (Nick Wilder Installation)* (both 1970), this adversarial space is created physically, in constricting architectural corridors through which the viewer is encouraged to pass, tracked by hidden closed-circuit video surveillance cameras and watching their own movement in time-delay. The viewer's movement through space, both encouraged and observed by the presence of the video camera, is dictated by the artist, in the role of surrogate psychologist; as Paul Schimmel remarks, Nauman's relationship to the viewer is always instructional. The corridors operate as "environments of controlled response."[5] Nauman's performative structures create an unease similar to that experienced in Robert Morris's labyrinths, through which the viewer moves in routes that are both prescribed and deliberately disorientating. A similar withholding of space from the viewer through the refusal of direct movement through space occurred in Dan Flavin's fluorescent barrier pieces. The phenomenological experience of immersion (in light) and restriction (in space) led Robert Smithson to remark that Flavin "turns gallery space into gallery time,"[6] a concept not dissimilar to Peter Campus's description of the gallery, transformed through his video installations, as "durational space."

In Vito Acconci's video installation *Command Performance* (1974), the viewer is similarly positioned in the performative role previously occupied by the artist (Nauman, like Acconci, had, previous to his video corridors, used the video camera to record his own physical discomfort in physically and psychologically demanding durational performative pieces in his studio). But Acconci places the viewer in a theatrical rather than an architectural space (a difference underlined by the title of the piece), and their psychological discomfort is provoked through language rather than through physical constraint. The artist appears on a video monitor opposite the stool on which the viewer is invited to sit, engaging the viewer in an often sexually provocative confessional monologue and switching between active and passive roles. As Kate Linker argues, Acconci's interest in the power field of Lewin's theories and in issues of control, power, and domination is played out through testing the psychological boundaries of the viewer's personal space. Acconci's confrontation through the spoken monologue belies his roots in poetry and narrative, just as Nauman's testing of the viewer's physical boundaries reflects his interest in dance and movement.

A marked difference in the construction of space occurs in a related film installation by Dennis Oppenheim, *Echo* (1973). Four large black-and-white images of a hand slapping the wall are projected on film loops onto all four walls of a room. Each hand repeatedly slaps the wall loudly at different intervals, creating an aggressive rhythmic cacophony that evokes the stamping, jumping, bouncing movements of Nauman's performative videotapes or the relentless banging of a silver spoon and rhythmically rolling vertical hold in Joan Jonas's videotape *Vertical Roll* (1972). Oppenheim's piece confronts viewers by surrounding them with images and sound rather than with physical
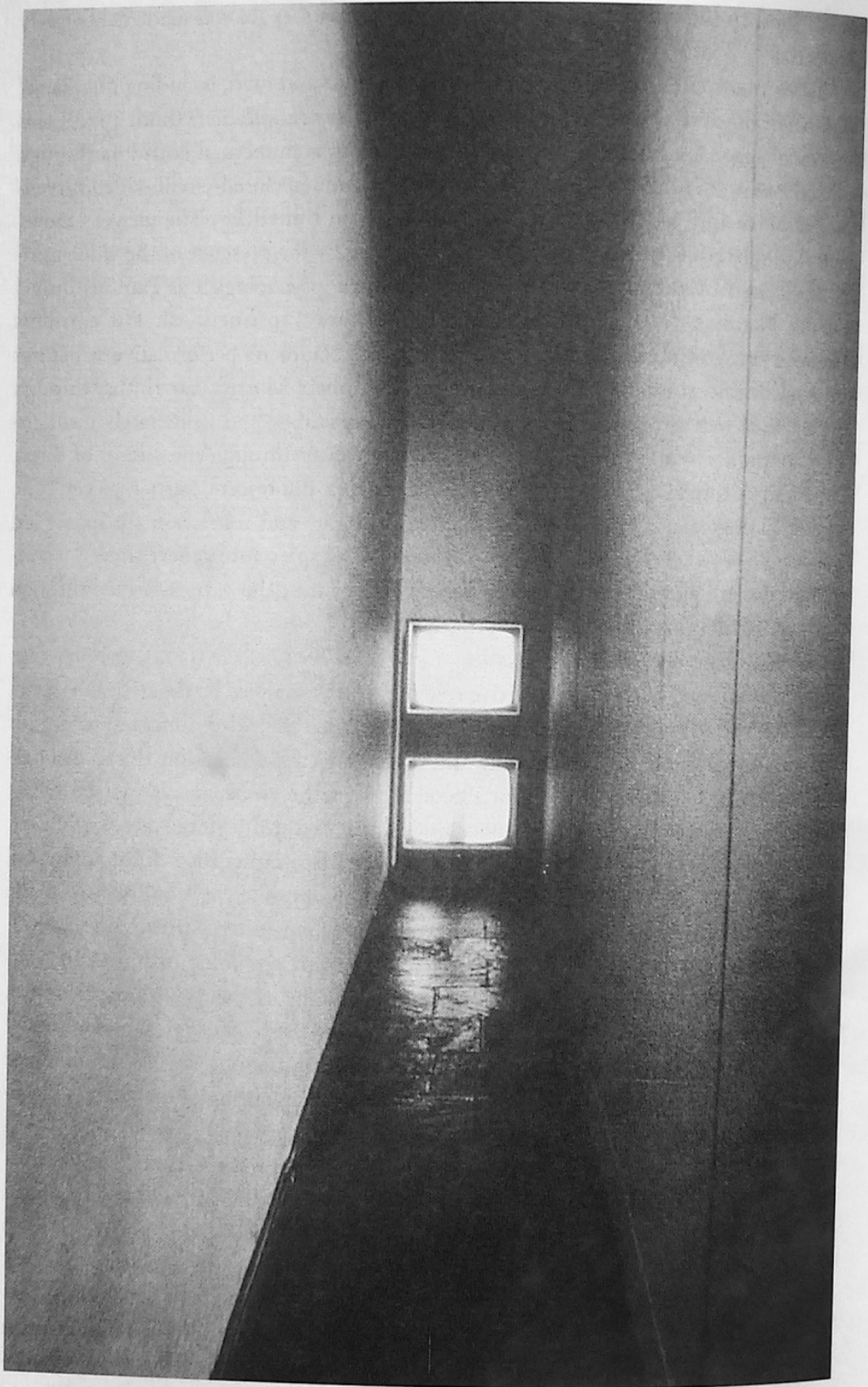
Figure 1. Bruce Nauman, *Live/Taped Video Corridor*, 1970.

walls. The artist's aggressive performative actions are abstracted into a single, filmic, close-up movement, magnified and multiplied to fill the space. The wall-sized film images anticipate the video projections of the nineties, in which the language of video and film have become conflated into a single cinematic aesthetic. The hands' relentless sound and movement both attract and repel the viewer into and out of the space, setting up a paradoxical psychological reaction.

A central tenet of the psychological investigation of the viewer in space in the installations of the seventies was the concept of mirroring. In Oppenheim's installation, film being incapable of transmitting images in real time, the mirroring occurs in the repetition of the hand on all four walls of the space, suggesting a metaphorical double reflection. In other, video, pieces, the mirror appeared either as a physical presence in space or as a metaphor, in the video camera and the real-time closed-circuit video image.

Deeply rooted in the long dialogue between painting and the mirror that, as Gregory Galligan has argued,[7] has existed since the sixteenth century, the use of the mirror by artists in the seventies in order to fracture and multiply space marks the collapse of the Cartesian paradigm of vision, which, as Jonathan Crary has argued, began with Cézanne's breaking down of the picture surface and the resultant merging of foreground and background.[8] The mirror in the seventies performative video space bears a direct relationship to experiments with the mirror in nineteenth-century realist painting, where, according to Galligan, the mirror "moved beyond its traditional role as mechanical tool to realize a self-portrait, and a metaphor for mimesis itself, and gained status as a sign of the essentially self-reflexive condition of *all* looking."[9]

Galligan, discussing Manet's self-portraits, cites the arguments of the psychologist James Gibson, by whom both Dan Graham and Peter Campus were strongly influenced during the seventies. According to Galligan, Gibson argued that "all vision was profoundly corporeal, and that the foreground of all visual perception is one's own body. Hence the continuous act of perceiving involves the co-perceiving of the self. Gibson replaced the passive model of the camera obscura with a principle of continuous movement by the viewer within an environment that the viewer occupies as a wholly self-conscious, embodied object amongst many others." As Galligan goes on to observe, "The success of visual perception depends on the perceiver maintaining a subliminal awareness of the self as object in the visual field."[10] This argument holds true both for the minimalist project, in particular the work of Donald Judd and Dan Flavin, and for the phenomenological video installations of the seventies. It can also be applied to certain more recent video installations, in particular the work of Gary Hill.

In an early video piece by the British artist David Hall,[11] the video camera and monitor operate as the mirror of Gibson's self-reflexive condition of looking in highly physical terms. Marshall McLuhan argued that television and video were not primarily visual media, but an extension of touch rather than of sight. Since the video image is low definition, the viewer fills in the spaces and completes the picture, which induces a more intense involvement with the screen. This tactility results in a kind of osmosis,

or what McLuhan described as a "tattooing" of technology directly onto the skin. David Hall engineered a reversal of this process through a radical experiment in which the viewer's image became imprinted directly onto the video screen.

Nam June Paik had already broken through the physical membrane between video monitor and external space in pieces such as *Magnet TV* (1965), in which the television image was distorted by applying a strong magnet to the *top* of the monitor. Hall took this a stage further in *Vidicon Inscriptions* (1975), by exposing the monitor's vidicon tube to strong artificial light via a closed-circuit video camera, triggered by a viewer's approach to the camera and monitor along a corridor. Filmed by the camera, in a process resembling flash photography, the viewer triggered a light to flash, causing his or her image to be burned directly onto the vidicon tube. The viewer appeared on the screen as a ghostly static image, layered over fading images of previous viewers. This fusion of the image with the technology, evoking Mary Lucier's *Dawn Burn*, made in the same year in New York, set in physical terms the mirror encounters of Campus's, Nauman's, and Graham's closed-circuit video pieces.

For both Campus and Graham, the use of the video camera as a perceptual tool to question the viewer's presence in space was inextricably linked to temporality. Campus described his concerns as being "durational space, and the accumulation of perspective . . . the retroflection of one's projected image and its accompanying sensations, and the balance and fusion of disparities whose unified origins cannot be perceived directly."[12] Campus's "accumulation of perspective" took place through the insertion of a screen into a darkened space. The fragmentation of time was achieved spatially, in a single real-time framework, through guiding the viewer's movement backward and forward in relation to the camera and screen. The placing of the camera and/or the screen at unexpected angles obliges the viewer to negotiate space more obliquely in order to discover his or her image. In some cases this spatial obliqueness introduces the shadow of the viewer as a third element, suggesting a filmic reference.

Campus's "durational space" correlates with Dan Graham's writing on video space: "Video is a present-time medium. Its image can be simultaneous with its perception by/of its audience. The space/time it presents is continuous, unbroken and congruent to that of real time, which is the shared time of its perceivers and their individual and collective real environments."[13] The additional spatial and temporal layers introduced by Graham's use of time delay were further multiplied by his use of mirrored walls, which render the space almost immaterial. The mirrored walls reflected and prioritized the viewer's body in real time, setting up a spatial and temporal juxtaposition with the fixed perspective on the video monitor alongside, replaying the viewer's image recorded a few seconds before. As Birgit Peltzer has argued, in these transparent environments "space is demonstrated to be less a function of sight than of movement; it is constituted through the body or, more precisely, the actions of a subject. . . . We thus return to an elementary topological precept: the deformability of perception. . . . It follows that space is less a thing than a force-field. As such, it comprises a temporal rather than a visual contiguity."[14]
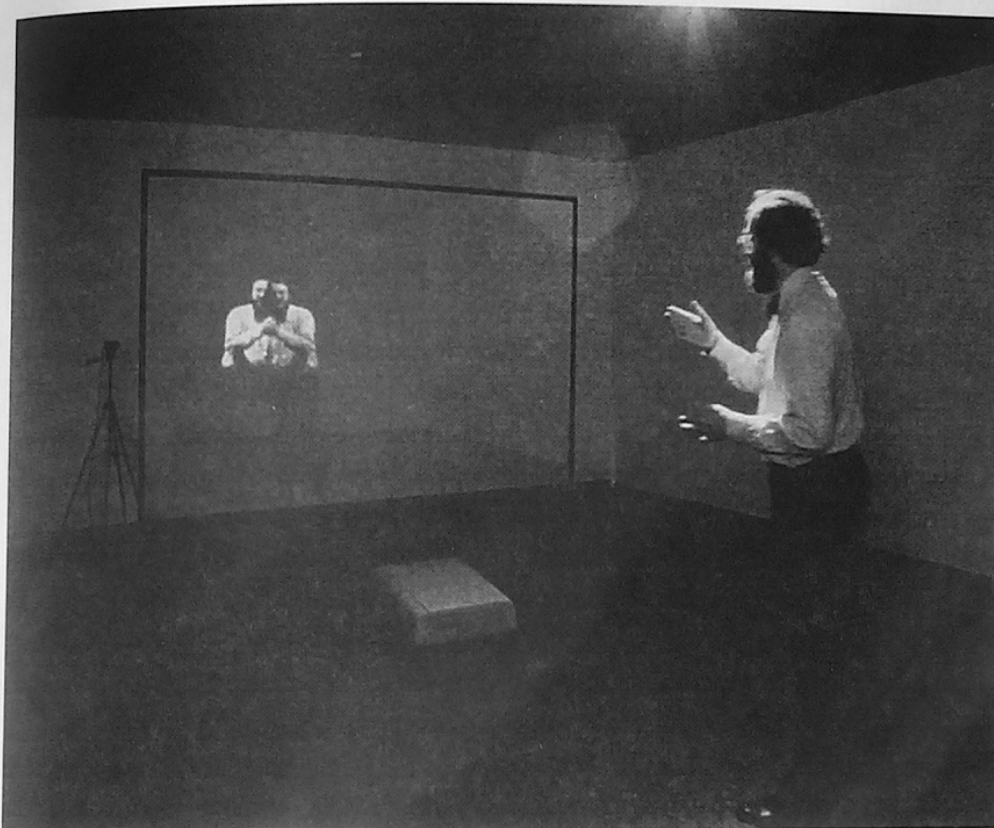
Figure 2. Peter Campus, *Interface*, 1972. Installation view at Cologne Kunstverein.

If a central strategy of all the video installations of the seventies involving a mirror, whether actual or metaphorical, was the fragmentation of the single temporal and spatial viewpoint, decentering also formed a central component of Joan Jonas's seminal video performances made during the early seventies, in which both the performance space and Jonas's own body were fragmented by the use of mirrors and the doubled video image. As Douglas Crimp observed, in Jonas's performances "there is no central self from which the work can be said to be generated or by which it can be received. Both the performer and spectator are shown to be de-centred, split."[15] As Christine Poggi has argued, in relation to Vito Acconci, the artist's critique of the self as an autonomous, centered subject produced a dichotomy between private and public space.[16] In the aggressive psychological disorientations evoked by Acconci, Nauman, and Oppenheim, this dichotomy was expressed in existential terms. The boundaries of the viewer, taking the place of the artist, were tested in solitary environments that provoked unease. In contrast to the isolation of the single person walking through Nauman's *Live/Taped Video Corridor* or sitting on Acconci's stool in *Command Performance,* the shared spaces of Jonas's video performances were inclusive and involved both viewers and performers in groups.

In Nauman's and Acconci's video environments, the viewer acted as a substitute for the artist's own performative presence, often encouraged to repeat in public an action that the artist had made previously in the private studio space. For example,

Nauman's *Performance Corridor* (1969) was originally a prop for his performative video *Walking with Contraposto*, shot in his studio in 1968. The corridor prop was represented as an artwork that the viewer was asked to enter. In *Live/Taped Video Corridor*, a video camera and monitors were added to a similar structure, making the viewer's sense of self-awareness and unease in the space more intense. Jonas, by contrast, performed live, often with several other artists and dancers. Simone Forti, Keith Sonnier, Charlemagne Palestine, Gordon Matta-Clark, Richard Serra, Susan Rothenberg, Julie Judd, and Jackie Winsor all participated in Jonas's performances, both indoors and outdoors. In her video performances, the self was not split between one action by the artist in the past and another by a viewer in the present, as in Nauman's and Acconci's work, but split simultaneously, between artist and other performers and, in two video performances, *Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy* and *Organic Honey's Vertical Roll*, between the artist and her alter ego, Organic Honey.

In all Jonas's video performances, live action took place alongside projected video and film images of taped performance action. This splitting of the image in space as a device to represent multiple time and space relates directly to Dan Graham's mirrored video environments. At one point during *Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy* Jonas, as Organic Honey, wearing a mask, feather headdress, pearls, and silk patterned robe, hit a mirror repeatedly until she broke her image. At the same moment, on the recorded video projection the audience saw a reflection of her face in the mirror without the mask. The split self was revealed by the inserting of mirror planes within a juxtaposition of real and recorded time and space.

There is a peculiar resonance between these pivotal works of the seventies and certain works by artists of a new generation working in the nineties using the projected film or video image, such as Gary Hill, Stan Douglas, Douglas Gordon, and Liisa Roberts. This resonance coalesces around the issue of space. In Gary Hill's *Tall Ships*, soft black-and-white projected video images of people appear on the walls of a long dark corridor, walking silently forward as the viewer approaches them. *Tall Ships* shares many of the properties of seventies video pieces: the viewer's uncertain movement through a disorienting space, instant feedback, psychological engagement, and a profound self-consciousness of one's physical and emotional reactions. But unlike the early, aggressive confrontational pieces, this installation is inclusive rather than existential. It creates another kind of confrontation: that of the self with a deeper level of consciousness, in which the specifics of one's own behavioral responses are overtaken by the awareness that "we are inseparable from this total space inhabited by other beings with whom we share the same field of possibilities. This is the field in which, ultimately, *we* are the actual medium of the piece."[17]

In the work of both Douglas Gordon and Liisa Roberts, by contrast, the image is contained within flat screens inserted as planes into a partially lit three-dimensional space. In Gordon's *Between Darkness and Light (after William Blake)* (1997), a site-specific commission for the Münster Sculptur Projekt, a large screen bisects the underground passage of a pedestrian subway. On each side, videotapes of two Hollywood

films are projected: *The Exorcist* (1973) on one and *The Song of Bernadette* (1943) on the other. Each film depicts the struggle between the opposing poles of good and evil, a recurrent theme in Gordon's work, and the imagery from both bleed into one another. The subway space functions as a metaphorical purgatory, in which the struggle is played out. It is not avant-garde film, but Hollywood, to which Gordon's video installation, cinematic in both content and format, refers. Unlike the utopian expanded film environments of the sixties, this installation appears democratic and pragmatic, operating somewhere between the living room, the cinema, and the street. In format, it echoes Michael Snow's film installation *Two Sides to Every Story* (1974), in which two 16mm film loops were projected onto both sides of an aluminum screen suspended in space. But the bleeding of Gordon's film images into one another appears to represent the collapse not only of the illusory wholeness of the film image, but also of the physical boundaries between the once opposite media of film and video.

In the installations of Liisa Roberts, constructed physical and conceptual spaces, of which film forms a central component, use the screen to suggest another, metaphorical space. In a reversal of the traditional cinematic experience, in which the viewer becomes absorbed by the image, Roberts reveals the viewing of the film to be a self-conscious act. In *Trap Door* (1996) this is achieved by a triangular sculptural construction of square screens, onto which three black-and-white images of women's hands moving in conversation, filmed in extreme slow motion, are back projected. The filmed hands echo the triadic communication on another, panoramic, screen opposite, in a slow circling black-and-white shot of a statue of the Three Graces, as though trying to reconstruct the image in another form. The perpetual attempt to reconstruct the image taking place on both screens prevents the viewer from entering either image fully. Roberts's use of space is both sculptural and conceptual. Although formally very different in structure, her installations bear some relationship to the phenomenological video constructions of the seventies, in her resituating of the viewer in order to question the structures underlying the organization of social space.
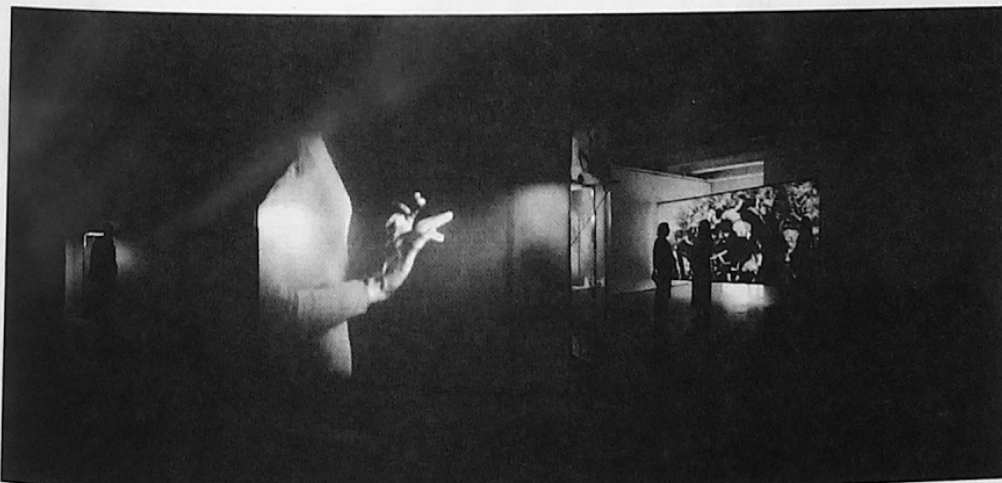

Figure 3. Liisa Roberts, *Trap Door,* 1996. Installation view at Documenta X.

While the utopianism of both the expanded cinema environments and the earliest experiments with video live-feed transmission of the sixties has metamorphosed into the interactive virtuality of Internet communication, the more pragmatic questions raised in the performative video structures of the seventies continue to exert a strong influence on a new generation of artists showing a rigorous concern with conceptual and spatial issues. As the languages of video and film have become increasingly conflated, the specific physical, perceptual, and spatial possibilities offered by both media in their original physical forms are being readdressed by a new generation of artists. As in the sixties and seventies, film and video space has become the location of a radical questioning of the future of both aesthetic and social space.

Notes

1. See Gene Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema* (New York: Dutton, 1970).

2. Les Levine, "Closed Circuit Television and Teledynamic Environments," in ibid., 337.

3. Ibid., 339.

4. Kate Linker, "On Language and Its Ruses: Poetry into Performance," in *Vito Acconci* (New York: Rizzoli, 1994), 18–63. Linker gives a thorough account of the importance of psychological writings for Acconci's work in performance and video.

5. Paul Schimmel, "Pay Attention," in *Bruce Nauman,* ed. Joan Simon (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1994), 77.

6. Robert Smithson, "Entropy and the New Monuments," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings,* ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 11.

7. Gregory Galligan, "The Self Pictured: Manet, the Mirror, and the Occupation of Realist Painting," *Art Bulletin* 8, no. 1 (March 1998): 139–48.

8. Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), 95–96.

9. Galligan, "The Self Pictured," 140.

10. Ibid.

11. David Hall made a number of important video installations in London during the mid-1970s and is a highly significant figure for the history of British video installation and single-channel videotape.

12. Peter Campus, "The Question," in *Art-Rite,* no. 7 (autumn 1974), 15.

13. Dan Graham, "Essay on Video, Architecture, and Television," in *Dan Graham: Video, Architecture, Television* (Halifax: Press of Nova Scotia College of Art and Design; New York: New York University Press, 1979), 62.

14. Birgit Peltzer, "Vision in Process," *October,* no. 10 (fall 1979): 107.

15. Douglas Crimp, introduction to *Joan Jonas, Scripts and Descriptions, 1968–1982,* exhibition catalog (Berkeley: University Art Museum; Eindhoven, Netherlands: Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, 1983), 8.

16. Christine Poggi, "Vito Acconci's Bad Dream of Domesticity," in *Not at Home: The Suppression of Domesticity in Modern Art and Architecture,* ed. Christopher Reed (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996), 237.

17. George Quasha in dialogue with Chuck Stein, "Tall Acts of Seeing," in *Tall Ships: Gary Hill's Projective Installations, No. 2* (Station Hill Arts, Barrytown, Ltd., New York: 1997), 24.