
LIVE ON TAPE: VIDEO, LIVENESS AND THE IMMEDIATE

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The Immediacy of the Medium

Friday, 30 July 1965: Andy Warhol was an hour into audio taping his superstar Ondine when a large package arrived at the Factory. Warhol was attempting to capture Ondine non-stop for 24 hours so he could transcribe the tapes into a book that would record a day in the life of the Factory's most flamboyant star.¹ The box held a videotape recording system, one of the earliest designed for use outside of a television studio. Warhol's audio tapes contain one of the first responses to video, one made long before the use of video by artists would be codified as 'video art', and even before Nam June Paik bought his first Sony video recorder later that year.² As such, these tapes record a point of emergence of one medium from another as video began to coalesce from audio, film and television. These portable video systems would soon open up the field of television production to amateur and artist alike.

Paul Morrissey arrived at the Factory and gave Warhol the low-down on his new machine:

Morrissey: Are you excited about the new video camera?
Warhol: ... Sit down here on the couch and tell me about it please ...
Morrissey: [This is] the tape recorder, right? You ... aim ... this microphone at people. You aim the ... lens at the people.
Warhol: Oh.
Morrissey: And the picture goes onto the tape and then you [play] the tape ... just like you play back your tape recorder and the tape plays back through a television set.
Warhol: Oh, man, and you get a picture too?
Morrissey: Yes, immediately.
Warhol: Oh, wow.
Morrissey: So the sound ... [if it's not] adequate or the lighting is not good ...
Warhol: You could fix it immediately.³

¹ Eventually published as Andy Warhol, *A: A Novel*, New York: Grove Press, 1998.

² While Paik was long given as the origin point for video art in America, recent accounts have begun to acknowledge Warhol's important early contribution, and that it precedes Paik's. See: John Allan Farmer, *The New Frontier: Art*

and Television, 1960–65, Austin: Austin Museum of Art, 2000; Branden W. Joseph, 'Nothing Special: Andy Warhol and the Rise of Surveillance', *Ctrl Space: Rhetorics of Surveillance from Bentham to Big Brother* (eds. Thomas Y. Levin, Ursula Frohne and Peter Weibel), Cambridge, Mass.: ZKM/The MIT Press, 2002, pp.236–51; Michael Rush, *Video Art*, New York:

Thames and Hudson, 2003; Steven Watson, *Factory Made: Warhol and the Sixties*, New York: Pantheon Books, 2003.

³ A. Warhol, *A: A Novel*, *op. cit.*, p.56.

In his typically deadpan way, Warhol hit the nail on the head: ‘Oh, wow’. For Warhol the ‘Oh, wow’ of video was the fact that you got a picture immediately, that the moving image was represented in real time and instant replay. That little shock, of seeing what was being recorded at the very same instant that it was taking place, and then being able to change the picture afterwards, was an utterly new experience in 1965. Warhol was asked in an interview in *Tape Recording*, the magazine that sponsored his acquisition of the video equipment: ‘What do you see as the essential difference between film and videotape?’ He replied: ‘Immediate playback. When you make movies you have to wait and wait and wait.’⁴ To immediately see a moving picture with sync sound, to be able to monitor, record and replay one’s self and the world right away — this was video’s ‘Oh, wow’ when it was first introduced.

Throughout the history of early video art in America, artists repeatedly acknowledged the speed of video’s immediacy.⁵ Paik, who bought his equipment on 4 October 1965, also commented on this, writing: ‘In my videotaped electrovision ... you see your picture instantaneously.’⁶ With remarkable frequency the ‘instantaneity’ in Paik’s account crops up as ‘immediacy’ in further descriptions of video. Bruce Nauman, when asked what interested him about video, responded: ‘Well, initially, it was the immediacy of the medium.’⁷ Jud Yalkut, in an interview with Raindance Foundation members Ira Schneider and Frank Gillette, described the difference between television and film as ‘the immediacy of the television medium’.⁸ Gillette said in the same interview: ‘People see videotape and what they read in their skulls is “real” — it seems live, and has an unstored quality like the live immediacy of [...] the 7 o’clock news.’⁹ Lynda Benglis wrote: ‘Video was for me a way of presenting certain ideas that had occurred in film, but presenting these ideas in a more immediate, self-revealing way.’¹⁰ Dan Graham wrote: ‘Video is a present-time medium ... [It] feeds back indigenous data in the immediate, present-time environment.’¹¹ And recently Vito Acconci said: ‘The immediacy of video was the most startling thing. The first video I made tried to make use of that ... I could use video as a mirror.’¹²

This sentiment was also echoed in the mainstream press as portable video was making its debut for a broader public. Various home video systems had been in the works throughout the early 1960s. On 8 June 1965, the first portable system for public consumption reached the United States from Sony in Japan.¹³ A demonstration of the equipment by Akio Morita, Executive Vice

4 ‘Pop Goes the Videotape’, *Tape Recording*, September/October 1965, p.16.

5 The issue of whether this was true in contexts outside of America remains to be explored.

6 Nam June Paik, *Video ‘n’ Videology 1959–1973*, Syracuse: Everson Museum of Art, 1997, n.p.

7 Robert C. Morgan (ed.), *Bruce Nauman*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002, p.268.

8 Jud Yalkut, ‘Frank Gillette and Ira

Schneider, Parts I & II of an Interview’, *Radical Software*, vol.1 no.1, Spring 1970, p.9.

9 Frank Gillette, *ibid.*, p.10.

10 ‘Video’, *Art Rite*, no.7, 1974, p.12.

11 Dan Graham, *Video-Architecture-Television*, Nova Scotia: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1979, p.62.

12 Conversation with the artist, 20 June 2002. Acconci was describing his first video work, *Corrections* (1970), in

which he burned hairs off the back of his neck using the monitor as mirror to access a spot that he could not otherwise see.

13 The Norelco unit used by Warhol was extremely heavy and never intended for widespread public use. Gene Smith, ‘\$995 Home TV Tape Recorder to Be Introduced Here by Sony’, *The New York Times*, 9 June 1965, p.64.

President of Sony and Chairman of the Sony Corporation of America, shows how indelibly the immediate was inscribed on portable video from the start. A newspaper reporter was sent to cover the story of Sony's latest gadget. As the reporter arrived and was introduced to Morita, an assistant videotaped their interaction. Just as the tape was about to be played back, they could hear sirens and smoke was visible outside the office window. The Sony showroom across the street was on fire! Morita and his assistant grabbed the video equipment and ran downstairs, taping the entire scene — fire, fire-fighters, crowd and all. Returning upstairs, they continued the interview with the startled reporter who had watched all this unfold from the window above. Morita played back the just-captured footage of the fire, saying: 'Now I'm going to show you how to have instant replay.'¹⁴ The fire was still being extinguished while Morita replayed it for the reporter.

Another early public presentation of video also reiterated its immediacy, this time in a domestic setting. *Life* magazine ran a feature article on the new Sony equipment, accompanied by a large photograph of a prototypical suburban backyard with children playing in a swimming pool.¹⁵ Dad looks on from the sidelines while Mum operates the camera, the rather heavy-handed implication being that since it's so easy to use even Mum can do it. The video-recording deck sits on the bottom edge of the picture, looming large in the foreground, with the image of the children that Mum shoots visible on the monitor above it. While the image's message is perfectly clear, it is reinforced by the accompanying caption which reads: 'New home video recorder, made by Sony Corp., makes a movie at a swimming pool and instantly shows it on a TV screen.' Further down, the article recapitulates this. Underneath a title that reads 'Betting on Instant Playback', the author writes that with video 'the home moviemaker can see the results immediately, erasing and reshooting scenes on the spot'. Video could immediately playback sounds and images, creating an instant, moving memorial even while it lingered on in the present.

Immediacy also surfaced in art criticism. John S. Margolies's 'TV — The Next Medium' discusses video's 'participation, simultaneity [and] spontaneity'.¹⁶ While none of these qualities are particular to television or video, he also mentions, more specifically, how on video the image and sound can be 'changed immediately'.¹⁷ Video artist and art critic Douglas Davis, in his

14 Nick Lyons, *The Sony Vision*, New York: Crown Publishers 1976, pp.186–88; Gene Smith, 'Trial by Fire Tests New Sony TV Unit', *The New York Times*, 14 July 1966, p.49.

15 'A New Pastime with a Big Future: Tape-It-Yourself-TV', *Life*, 17 September 1965, pp.57–60.

16 John S. Margolies, 'TV – the Next Medium', *Art in America*, September–October 1969, p.50.

17 *Ibid.*

18 Douglas Davis, 'Video Obscura', *Artforum*, vol.10 no.8, April 1972, p.62.

19 Gregory Battcock, 'Explorations in

Video', *Art and Artists*, vol.7 no.11, February 1973, p.22. One of the best known formulations of the medium of video — although it came at the end of the history of early video — is Rosalind Krauss's claim: 'The medium of video is narcissism.' See Rosalind Krauss, 'Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism', as reproduced in the current volume.

20 Donald Judd, 'Specific Objects', *Complete Writings: 1959–1975*, Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1975, pp.181 and 187.

21 I follow Jonathan Crary in taking technologies as assemblages of both

material and discourse. He suggests that material does not drive discourse, but is coterminous with whatever possibilities emerge from particular material configurations. His work on the camera obscura is equally applicable to video when he writes that a given medium is discursive as much as material. A medium is as much 'an object about which something is said and at the same time an object that is used. It is a site at which a discursive formation intersects with material practices. [It] cannot be reduced either to a technological or a discursive object: it [i]s a complex social

essay 'Video Obscura', proposes that one of the most important distinguishing features of video is its 'immediacy' since 'no other medium allows [immediacy] to such an extent', but that it is this quality that is 'the most difficult to define'.¹⁸

Despite the difficulty that Davis proclaims, given the frequency of immediacy's occurrence in early descriptions of video, the term itself provides an answer to the problem of video as a medium. It says: 'Immediacy is the medium of video.' The question of the medium of video was raised repeatedly in the history of early video art. Gregory Battcock summed this up best when he wrote: 'Most of the activity in video, and the critical attention it attracts, has one principle goal: the very definition of video as a communicative (i.e. artistic) medium.'¹⁹ The drive toward medium specificity in the history of early video art was the flip side of the endless possibilities that had entered the art world on the heels of Minimalism and the readymade-redux strategies of the 1950s and early 60s. As Donald Judd wrote in his essay 'Specific Objects', art circa 1965 'opens to anything' and any 'new materials' can be used.²⁰ In light of the seemingly endless parade of things that were finding a home in art galleries, it was as if, by defining video, critical discourse could grasp at least one point of purchase in a seemingly unlimited artistic milieu. While not necessarily apparent in the midst of video's emergence, given an examination of the historical record it becomes clear that immediacy was the one distinguishing characteristic claimed more frequently for video than any other. It emerges as a discursive clue bubbling to the top of what was said about how video was used.²¹

There is a paradox in the references to video as immediate: why would a system for recording be described as if it were unmediated? This is explained by the way in which video became its own format, distinct from live television and related to film. Stanley Cavell describes the immediate not as the medium of video but as that of television in his essay 'The Fact of Television'.²² He understands medium as the definition given to a material support through continued social uses that produce particular types of affect.²³ While he follows Clement Greenberg, he is not caught up in the problems of taste that cause Greenberg to privilege high forms of art over low, or good works over bad. He is also not a technological determinist seeking essences that forever **define**

amalgam in which its existence as textual figure [i]s never separable from its machinic uses.' This implies that a thing is defined not by any inherent material qualities but by what is said about it or done with it, and that one can only confirm the nature of a given format in the persistence of both material and discourse. A format does not have an essence but rather a consensus over how it is used and understood, with consensus implying a kind of general, if contested, field rather than a single, monolithic, even if temporary, fundamental nature. This is in agreement with

Stanley Cavell's take on the medium; see *op. cit.*, pp.31-32. notes 22 and 23. Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1990, pp.30-31.

²² Stanley Cavell, 'The Fact of Television', *Themes Out of School: Effects and Causes*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984. He had first distinguished between television and film in his *The World Viewed*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979, p.26.

²³ S. Cavell, 'The Fact of Television',

how a given technology works.²⁴ Rather, he is interested in whether new works either continue given conventions or push toward new norms, producing new media and so new conditions of possibility. He takes the medium of television, like all media, as a temporary stabilisation of materials, techniques and selves. Cavell writes of television that it has concretised around particular ontological possibilities as 'a current of simultaneous event reception'.²⁵ By this he means an immediate way of monitoring events at the same time as they take place. Television is a tele-technology. Like the telegraph, telephone or radio, it is a machine used for the real-time representation of an event with an unlimited distance between the event and its reception. With the addition of images, television made real-time representation at a distance seem closer to hand than ever before.²⁶ The response to video as immediate was conditioned by the immediacy of live television. Whereas film may also make distant events seem present, the events it depicts are understood as past. Filmic images are caught up in what Roland Barthes called photography's 'that-has-been' effect.²⁷ Photography and film generate their affect by returning the dead to life. Live television, on the other hand, operates in the present tense. It says about what it shows: 'this-is-going-on'. Compared to film, it seems even more alive.²⁸

In the literature on video as a medium that preceded Cavell and Barthes, Davis and David Antin also make the distinction between live television's immediacy versus that of film. In the essay 'Time! Time! Time! The Context of Immediacy', Davis follows his earlier claim that immediacy in video is based on live television's 'sense of authentic presence'.²⁹ He further develops this in 'Filmgoing/Videogoing: Making Distinctions', writing that in film each diegetic step has been predetermined.³⁰ In live television, no matter how carefully scripted or composed the presentation, the threat of disaster lurks, waiting in the wings. Part of what captivates the audience is this possibility of failure, as they watch knowing that success depends on avoiding perceptible breakdown. Davis recalls the moon landing, shown live on television, and how the virtual event unfolded in the same time as the actual event, with no edited compression of time. It seemed as if 'anything could happen next' because on live television exactly how things would progress was unknown, both to the viewers and to the producers.³¹ Antin, in his essay 'Video: The Distinctive

24 It is debatable whether or not Greenberg was a technological determinist in his proscription of flatness as the historical outcome of modernist painting. See Thierry de Duve, *Clement Greenberg between the Lines*, Paris: Edition Dis Voir, 1996.

25 S. Cavell, 'The Fact of Television', *op. cit.*, p.252.

26 This is an important distinction because film can also operate in real time, meaning that the time of representation is identical to the time of the original event, even though cinematic representation takes place after the fact. With television both sound and image

could take place in real time at the same time as the event. Radar is the closest precedent and the context in which the term 'real time' was developed. See Paul N. Edwards, *The Closed World: Computers and the Politics of Discourse in Cold War America*, Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1996, ch.3.

27 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (trans. Richard Howard), New York: Hill and Wang, 1981, p.77.

28 Barthes's comments came at a time in the 1970s when they can be said to have been in reaction to television as much as to photography or film. They can

be read as a response to the new mode of televisuality that had supplemented the photographic with an insistent present tense.

29 Douglas Davis, 'Time! Time! Time! The Context of Immediacy', *The New Television: A Public/Private Art*, Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1977, p.79.

30 Douglas Davis, 'Filmgoing/Videogoing: Making Distinctions', *Video Culture: A Critical Investigation* (ed. John G. Hanhardt), Rochester: Visual Studies Workshop Press, 1986. Originally published in 1973 in the *American Film Institute Report*.

31 *Ibid.*, p.273. This theme was further

Features of the Medium', writes that in film, truth is always predicated on the past tense while on television truth seems more immediate because it seems to take place in the present.³² This is despite the fact that by the early 1960s live broadcasting was the exception rather than the rule of television — reserved for news, sports and the president. Yet by then the 'live' had been indelibly stamped on television-image production, continuing, as Antin writes, the 'illusion of immediacy' even when on tape.³³ He quotes a handbook on television production that says that by 1961: 'The live production on videotape, though delayed in reaching the home by a few hours or days, was generally accepted as actual live television by the average viewer.'³⁴ This illusion of immediacy, he goes on, further quoting the handbook, is defined by 'the feeling that what one sees on the TV screen is living and actual reality, at that very moment taking place'.³⁵

The confusion between real time and recorded time is borne out in the history of video's emergence as a medium distinct from television. This confusion had already been exploited in broadcast television with the introduction of magnetic-tape recording techniques in the 1940s. Before then all broadcasts had been live and had to be repeated across different time zones. Kinescopes, which were films made of live programmes, could be printed and distributed within hours of the original but they were neither instantaneous nor of good quality. By the early 1950s audio tape was adapted into videotape. 'Live' programming could be seen on the West Coast of America even when the event had taken place hours before on the East Coast, with no observable difference in quality between the two; thus the oxymoronic expression 'live on tape'.³⁶ Once videotape recording was introduced, it was used not only to delay broadcasts across time zones but throughout the broadcast day.³⁷ With 'video' (the shortened, colloquial version of the term for videotape-recording systems), television could move seamlessly between programmes that required live, local responses, such as the news, and those that had no need to be live. Television, as a format designed for live, real-time transmission, is saturated with the live presence of the things it puts on display. It is as if it were a window that tunnelled through to another place, opening directly onto the event shown. In this it is closer, both rhetorically and technically, to the present tense of

developed in Mary Anne Doane's 'Information, Crisis, Catastrophe' and Patricia Mellencamp's 'TV Time and Catastrophe, or Beyond the Pleasure Principle of Television', both in *Logics of Television: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (ed. Patricia Mellencamp), Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990.

32 David Antin, 'Video: The Distinctive Feature of the Medium', *Video Art*, Philadelphia: Falcon Press, 1975, pp.174–83; also published as 'Television: Video's Frightful Parent, Part I', *Artforum*, vol.14 no.4, December 1975, pp.36–45.

33 D. Antin, 'Video: The Distinctive Feature of the Medium', *op. cit.*, p.62.

34 *Ibid.*

35 *Ibid.*

36 This expression is also network shorthand for 'taped before a live studio audience'. Philip Auslander explores the ramifications of the relationship between live events and recorded events, noting that 'the live is actually an effect of mediatisation', and that the first use of the word live to refer to a performance only occurred after and in relation to the advent of tape recording. See Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, New York: Routledge, 1999, pp.50–54.

37 For more on the history of

videotape recording, see Roy Armes, *On Video*, New York: Routledge, 1988; Brian Winston, *Media, Technology and Society, a History: From the Telegraph to the Internet*, New York: Routledge, 1998; and Siegfried Zielinski, *Zur Geschichte Des Videorecorders*, Berlin: Wissenschaftsverlag, 1986.

theatre than to film. With magnetic-tape recording, television could move easily between the live and the not-live. As Cavell aptly notes, on television ‘there is no sensuous distinction between the live and the repeat or the replay’.³⁸ Additionally, even when on tape (and even when edited after the fact or originally shot on film), there is always somebody in the broadcast-television studio standing by, prepared to ‘go live’ if necessary.

Television generates its reality effect from always seeming to be live because it always opens onto the possibility of continuous live transmission.³⁹ Media historian Jane Feuer uses the term ‘liveness’ to describe this effect and it perfectly suits the ‘Oh, wow!’ of televisual immediacy: how it is that, even when not live, television seems live-like. Paradoxically, it was the intervention of video as a means of recording that produced ‘the live’ in live television, as liveness became an ideological as much as a technological limit condition. Video is indeed a record but, unlike film, it was seen as an instant record, and one that was, when it was introduced to artists, always already coded as live because of its use in broadcast television.⁴⁰ Rather than use video as a record, videotape had already been used to uphold the illusion of immediacy by closing the gap between live and recorded events.⁴¹ Moreover, unlike film, videotape requires no processing. And video gains a further dimension of liveness because, with a monitor, what is being taped can be seen at the very same moment that the taping is taking place, appearing as it will in replay. With video there does not need to be any difference between the time of the event and its reproduction. The time of the event, its recording and its replay are collapsed. Video’s immediacy, as it was repeatedly announced, came from this confusion between the live and the on-tape.

In their essay ‘Television, A World in Action’, Stephen Heath and Gillian Skirrow identify one of the major effects that televisual liveness produces for viewers. They write that the ‘immediacy’ of television (and they put ‘immediacy’ in quotation marks to acknowledge the distance it includes) functions to create an entirely different psychological connection to its viewers from other media; because of its liveness it is even more interpellative than film.⁴² They write: ‘The generalised fantasy of the television institution of the image is exactly that

38 S. Cavell, ‘The Fact of Television’, *op. cit.*, p.253. This overlooks the aging of recorded images, where dress and other markers give away the date of a particular image, but these types of distinction can be said to be meta- or supra-sensuous, and so beyond the scope of Cavell’s claim.

39 Raymond Williams calls the continuous transmission of broadcasting ‘flow’ and its development in commercial broadcasting ‘programmed flow’. As Williams acknowledges, this is not particular to television because it is also applicable to radio. See Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*, New York: Schocken Books, 1974, pp.86–96.

40 This would change to some extent

with the introduction of video cassettes and their widespread usage by the mid-1980s.

41 ‘Reality TV’ is only the latest symptom of this effect, and its origins go back to 1973 with the broadcast of *An American Family*. See Jeffery Ruoff, *An American Family: A Televised Life*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001.

42 Stephen Heath and Gillian Skirrow, ‘Television, a World in Action’, *Screen*, vol.18 no.2, 1977, p.54. The authors follow Louis Althusser’s exposition of interpellation in his ‘Ideology and State Apparatus (Notes Towards an Investigation)’, in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, New York: Monthly Review Press,

2001, p.85–126.

43 S. Heath and G. Skirrow, ‘Television, a World in Action’, *op. cit.*, p.54.

44 This had been noted before by Davis and Battcock, among others.

45 S. Heath and G. Skirrow, ‘Television, a World in Action’, *op. cit.*, p.56.

46 A larger history of the tension between immediacy and mediation in various technologies and especially in new media is tracked in Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1999.

it is direct, and direct for me.’⁴³ Television hails its subject through a seemingly personal, one-to-one connection established between the viewer and what is on view.⁴⁴ They continue: ‘Direct and for me. Television is the institution of an occupation: it occupies the viewer as the subject in a permanent arena of “communicationality” ... Little matter in this respect what is communicated, the crux is the creation and maintenance of the communicating situation. The subject of television is a citizen in a world of communication.’⁴⁵ Televisual immediacy, despite its mediation, seems to include viewers more than other media. It locks them in place as if they were called out to directly there and then, even when the event or person shown is miles away and days — or even years — in the past.

One of the primary concerns of early video art was to pry open video’s immediacy, to make the viewer feel its mediation.⁴⁶ In many early video works — of which I will discuss two key examples below — video’s immediacy is thickened until its intercession between selves as a means of communication becomes painfully apparent. Rather than act as a transparent mirror, in these works the video mirror screens the ways televisual immediacy mediates between the senders and receivers of information. By breaking immediacy down into im-mediacy, these works began to recognise how the conventions of televisual liveness produced a new set of limit conditions for the use of tele-technologies and the production of networked selves. They present a self that is live-like even as it is live on tape, re-presenting the self as a citizen in what was then still a strange new world of endlessly immediate information flow.

Outer and Inner Space

Warhol worked at the cusp of immediacy. His movie *Outer and Inner Space* made a first pass through the fields of liveness, moving from film to television and videotape recording. Made in the summer of 1965, it is a 16mm black-and-white film incorporating the video equipment that Warhol had received from Norelco. It shows Edie Sedgwick for half-an-hour as she becomes acclimatised — sort of — to the immediacy of video. She sits in front of a television set that replays her own image behind her. Warhol had just videotaped her and himself talking, shooting her close-up, in profile, looking to her left, her head entirely filling the screen. He then filmed her while the video played back as they continued their conversation, turning her in the other direction. Her videotaped image appears to be slightly larger than her actual head. It looks out across her filmed image, as though her televisual superego (or perhaps her id?) is speaking into and admonishing (or encouraging?) her filmed image’s ear. Her past self interpellates her present self. Because of the different speeds of the television scan and the film shutter, her television image is evanescently flickering, the scanning fingers of the cathode-ray gun are revealed as they draw and redraw her image thirty times as opposed to 24 frames per second. The difference between video and film is made visibly present by the technical differences in the two formats. Warhol



Andy Warhol, *Outer and Inner Space*, 1965. 16mm black-and-white film, sound, 33mins in double screen
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shot two reels of film and the final version is shown with both reels projected simultaneously, side-by-side, optimally with the first reel on the left and the second on the right. The final film is a quadruple portrait of Sedgwick told in alternating video/film/video/film.⁴⁷ As much as Warhol gives us a portrait of Sedgwick, he has produced a portrait of the emergence of video caught on film, reflecting the new mode of televisual liveness erupting into and rupturing the filmic. By filming Sedgwick's interaction with her video image, Warhol captures video's 'this-is-going-on' in film's 'that-has-been'. He shows the viewer Sedgwick's psychological adaptation to video's liveness through the secondary mediation of film at just the moment when the latter was being eclipsed by the former.

While the soundtrack is often inaudible due to both the quality of Warhol's equipment and the babble that frequently occurs when multiple voices are speaking at once, much of their conversation can still be understood. Sedgwick spends most of the first reel upset about having to sit in front of her technologically mediated self as it speaks from behind her. She never turns around to look at her video self, despite her discomfort. She is uncomfortable with her video self because its voice demands a response as it calls out from behind her. Instead, she can only respond to Warhol. Pinned between them, she is the object of the look (really the voice) of both her past self and Warhol as the off-screen stand-in for the viewer.⁴⁸ She is the heroine who braves the treacherous waters of liveness, not only of these looks but also of her past made strangely present. Describing her video self early on, she says: 'It sounds like a lot of bullshit — it does ... I'm going to wait and see how bored everyone else will get ... Isn't that sad. I'm so fragile ... it makes me so nervous to have to listen to it. It really is rotten ... it's so pathetic. I never dreamed I was so pathetic.'⁴⁹ Her video head is an uncanny reflection. The monitor has become a mirror gone wild. The sound of her voice, whispering in her ear from the just-past, profoundly disturbs her.

47 As in some of Warhol's other 1964 films, such as *Henry Geldzahler and Empire*, *Outer and Inner Space* is an extension of his *Screen Tests* (1963–66)

into longer form.

48 Here and throughout, I follow Kaja Silverman's distinction between the look and the gaze in cinema and camera-

based works: the look is constituted by a specific, embodied point-of-view; and the gaze by the general conditions of visibility. Kaja Silverman, *Male*

In the second reel she is still uncomfortable about hearing her just-past voice. 'I find the voice very disturbing!' she exclaims.⁵⁰ She reacts as though her video self has its eye (and voice) on her immediately, in the present, as she sits there, forced to listen to it carry on. Midway through the second reel she has an epiphany and realises why she's been so bothered. She says, referring to her video self: 'It's so funny listening to this rather than remembering ... and it's so real. I could just think it all over again and be right.'⁵¹ Her past self is immediately there, collapsed onto her present. The cinematic 'that-has-been', with its vestigial connection to history and memory, had been replaced by the televisual 'this-is-going-on', with its incessant presentencing. After her epiphany she becomes more comfortable and is able to play with the new possibilities inherent to this condition. Her video image fakes a sneeze and she jumps in response, startled because she has forgotten that she had done this. She asks Warhol if he could tell if it was real or not, and then, remembering what comes next, she responds with another fake sneeze. And then her video image sneezes again and her film image responds and so on, in a chain of fake sneezes, concluding when she responds to her video image's final sneeze with a ridiculous cough. Throughout this interaction, Sedgwick turns an involuntary bodily response into a game, her sneeze-chain turning an allergic response to her video self into a state of acclimatisation. Video has given her the ability to interact with herself in a way that was overwhelming at first, triggering a mnemonic game where she could eventually accept the past as immediately present, sneezing with herself as if she were making faces in an actual mirror. Sedgwick is only able to come to terms with her video image when she accepts its liveness, as if, unlike film, it were a mirror or a present event. She becomes acclimatised when she can play with her video self as if it were actually present.

While Sedgwick may become used to video's immediacy, in projecting both reels at the same time Warhol further collapses the time of the event so that her accommodation to televisual liveness takes place alongside the confusion this liveness engenders. The double-screen projection mitigates her acclimatisation to televisual liveness because the audience sees her simultaneously lost in its immediacy even as she comes to terms with it. Warhol helps the audience negotiate this confusion through the use of two zooms made while filming, one moving towards her, the other away from her. Stills from the film generally show her only in close-up, but for most of the film one of the two reels is zoomed out and held in a medium shot. The effect is like that of a magic trick simultaneously shown and revealed. While filming, Warhol zoomed out about halfway through the first reel, revealing the set-up of the shot so that Sedgwick can be seen from the waist up with the entire television set visible behind her in the middle of the frame. The second reel begins from the same zoomed-out, medium-shot position but

Subjectivity at the Margins, New York: Routledge, 1992, ch. 3.

49 Bill Jeffries (ed.), *From Stills to Motion and Back Again: Texts on Andy*

Warhol's Screen Tests and Outer and Inner Space, North Vancouver, British Columbia: Presentation House Gallery, 2003, p.28.

50 *Ibid.*, p.31.

51 *Ibid.*, p.34.

zooms back in to the original position approximately five minutes later. When double projected, the left side begins in close-up and the right side begins in the medium shot. After five minutes the right zooms in to close-up and holds there for about ten minutes, and then the left zooms out to the medium shot. It is only for those ten minutes that the audience is plunged into the disorienting scene of Sedgwick in alternating video and film, with no exterior spatial context beyond the boundaries of her multiplied head. The zoom generates a structural narrative for the audience, first giving them the set-up of the trick, then plunging them into the strange new world of video presence, then releasing them from it by returning to the set-up. Through the zoom the audience shares Sedgwick's confusion but is able to overcome the temporal collapse that keeps her trapped. They are brought into and out of the new inner space where the self confronts itself through televisual liveness. They are then able to sit back and watch with a deeper understanding of Sedgwick's experience of being confronted with video liveness and the confusion of being forced to face one's immediately displaced self.

Warhol further reinforces the liveness of video through the manipulation of both the image and audio during their replay. Throughout the filming, Gerard Malanga moved around in the background (not really visible on camera, except here and there) manipulating both video player and television set. Since Sedgwick never turns around and cannot see these manipulations, they are only there for the benefit of the audience.⁵² Malanga turns the vertical hold so that her image goes skipping up and down across the screen, rolling first slower and then faster, from top to bottom. He desaturates the image, freezing it by stopping the tape so that briefly only the faintest ghost of her television image is left. He stops and starts the tape so that the image becomes riddled with noise. With video, Warhol said in his *Tape Recording* interview, 'We like to take advantage of static', as in his silk screens, in which misalignment and maladjustments were a key part of his process.⁵³ Like Sedgwick's sneeze-chain, Warhol plays with video's liveness effect through Malanga, demonstrating for the audience the plasticity of the television image in a real-time manipulation that further reinforces the differences between television and film.

Throughout *Outer and Inner Space*, both Sedgwick and the audience know her taped image is not contemporaneous with her filmed image, and yet, despite her video image's being on tape, the film shows how the past is overcome by the present through video's liveness effect. At the very end of reel two, the videotape is turned off behind her and a static laced image of a cowboy film comes through from a television broadcast. The broadcast image erupts as a conclusion, as if to say the liveness of broadcast television is the cause of all this. Despite Sedgwick's seeming acclimatisation to all this liveness, her last words in the film stand as her final response to video: 'It's like being struck in the back of the head.' She then lies down and plays dead as the film ends.⁵⁴

Centers

There was an interregnum between Warhol's and Paik's video work in 1965 and the more widespread uptake of video by artists. This was because the portable video systems advertised in 1965 were not widely available until the end of the decade. At this time, many artists who had been working in film, inspired by Warhol and underground cinema, switched to video. Liveness flourished in the work of artists who can be loosely grouped under the heading of post-Minimalism. Post-Minimalism undertook a critique of the metaphysics of presence that still clung vestigially to Minimalism as a hold-over from modernist notions of the autonomy of art. Minimalism had made the presence of the viewer's body part of the work of art itself, but only in a generic way. Both the gestalt and phenomenological readings of Minimalism assumed a kind of ideal viewer and neutral viewing situation, whereby all viewers would supposedly have the same experience of the work. In post-Minimalism, the system of artist, object, viewer and viewing context was no longer taken for granted but was itself opened up and put on display. Process took over from presence; the work of art emerged at the intersection of art institutions and the body as an epistemological site. The liveness of video post-Minimalism became another means by which to critique the kind of modernist presence espoused by Greenberg and Michael Fried. The post-Minimalists used video against the autonomy of art and the viewing subject. They made works that opened onto both television and art as institutions, moving into the spaces between live and recorded time.⁵⁵

Of the many post-Minimalist videos to explore these issues, Vito Acconci's *Centers* points toward one way in which these issues were extended. Made in 1971, while Acconci was doing a residency at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, *Centers* is a single-channel, black-and-white videotape with no edits, which focuses on Acconci's head and shoulders. The artist faces the viewer, half visible and half hidden behind an extended arm whose finger points directly to the centre of the monitor and so out toward the viewer. Acconci has said of his first use of video, a year or so before: 'Video as a determinant of value: I need an action that can coincide with the feedback capacity ... I can sit in front of the monitor, stay concentrated on myself, have eyes in the back of my head, dwell on myself, see myself in the round.'⁵⁶ He could get at the monkey on his back—the closed-circuit video loop made parts of his body instantly accessible that were otherwise off limits. Video became an improved mirror—a hyper-mirror—that allowed the self to be examined from all angles and from every side. In *Centers*, the audience rather than the artist is reflected in the video monitor. Acconci has written of *Centers*: 'My attempt is

52 In one instance, Malanga turns up the volume, making Sedgwick cringe. This is the only time she is affected by his manipulations.

53 'Pop Goes the Videotape', *op. cit.*, p.18.

54 See B. Jeffries, *From Stills to Motion*

and *Back Again: Texts on Andy Warhol's Screen Tests and Outer and Inner Space*, *op. cit.*, p.39, in which the transcription records this line as 'struck in the back of the neck'.

55 For more on Greenberg, Fried and post-Minimalism's critique of presence,

see Pamela M. Lee, *Chronophobia: On Time in the Art of the 1960s*, Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2004, ch.1.

56 *Avalanche* ('Special Issue on Vito Acconci'), Fall 1972, p.24. Acconci is referring to his piece *Corrections*. See also note 12.



to keep my finger constantly in the centre of the screen. I keep narrowing my focus into my finger. The result[ing] TV image turns the activity around: a pointing away from myself, at an outside viewer ... I'm looking straight out by looking straight in.'⁵⁷ For 20 minutes Acconci keeps his hand aloft. It covers most of his face, quivering as he tries to keep it raised. As the tape begins, it covers his face up to and including his eyes, becoming a second face that

takes the place of his look. He is not the object of the look, as was Sedgwick, but the hyper-masculine subject, the father whose point commands obedience. In pointing through the television set he attempts to become pure look, his finger materialising the view from the monitor back out at the observer. This is a position uncommon for film, but quite common in live television, especially in the news and on talk shows, where talking heads speak to an observer who is absent or anonymous for them. Acconci sutures the observer into the image not through look, spoken word or cut but through body language. His emphatic gesture points like the person anchoring the news looks, fixing on the absent viewer who is addressed but who is neither there spatially nor temporally. This touch (hand substituting for eyes, eyes becoming hand) only reaches the observer at a distance. In pointing at the apparatus, he points out at the audience, his finger gesturing toward the centre of the camera eye, targeting—to use a word Acconci uses often—both machine and viewer.⁵⁸

Despite the fact that this observer is absent for Acconci, both in the moment of the event and forever after as it has been recorded, *Centers* connects to his viewers in the present tense, as Warhol connected Sedgwick with her recorded self in *Outer and Inner Space*. Acconci's gesture says, inescapably, 'this-is-going-on'—'I am pointing at you, now.' This is due in part to the fact that the viewer is conditioned by the direct look of the headshot in television as a condition of live news. In replicating the look of the direct address in television, *Centers* opens onto the ways in which 'phatic' communication works in television. Anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski developed the notion of phatic communication in everyday speech.⁵⁹ He writes that phatic communication consists of speech 'used in free, aimless social intercourse ... in which ties of union are created by a mere exchange of words'.⁶⁰ He describes the kind of interactions used to open conversation (such as 'hello', 'how are you', 'nice day today') as statements designed not to communicate meaning *per se* but to simply confirm that the possibility of

Vito Acconci,
Centers, 1971.
Black-and-white
video, sound, 22mins
43secs. Courtesy Video
Data Bank

communication exists. This extends to conversation in general, as it moves from topics of import back to gossip and to mutual ‘affirmations of some supremely obvious state of things’.⁶¹ The purpose of phatic communication is to open and keep open a social context for interaction. It is both a means of connection and a way to fill the silence as the connection is maintained. Phatic communication exists in broadcast television despite the fact that its connection only occurs in one direction. Live broadcast television has a variety of ways to cover over its uni-directionality and to keep the conversation going. News and talk shows have co-presenters and guests who chitchat amongst themselves, including viewers as if they were sitting with them and silently participating in their conversation. Live audiences are also used to heighten this effect — their murmurs and applause used so that viewers feel included, as if they were actually sitting in front of the event instead of a piece of furniture. Phatic communication allows television to provide company and comfort because the talking heads it presents seem to be there live, in viewers’ living rooms despite their distance. Because of televisual liveness, this carries over into not-live programming as well.

Pointing is the most interpellative of gesticulations. It is the primary phatic gesture, an aggressive imperative opening onto the now-ness of communication. Pointing says: ‘You! Pay attention to this thing! Here! Now!’⁶² Acconci’s gesture points toward the way in which the phatic is both opened and foreclosed in television. It heightens the non-reciprocity of the phatic contact that takes place between subjects on either side of the monitor’s reflection, calling attention to how he can touch the viewer but cannot be touched in return. Over the course of the video, his finger increasingly wavers as his arm becomes exhausted. His hand slips downward and his eyes become visible — his look makes contact with the viewer only through his body’s increasing exhaustion. The viewer cannot help but respond to these exertions as if they were taking place right there and then, watching as Acconci’s embodiment of the male look strains and breaks down. Toward the end of the video, he struggles visibly to keep his finger aloft, making little snorts and grunts of exertion as the tip of his finger increasingly shakes. Watching, the viewer is sympathetically exhausted from this exertion. The tape ends before his arm gives out; there is no catharsis or conclusion, implying that this point is still going on, even after the screen goes black.

57 *Castelli-Sonnabend Videotapes and Films*, vol.1, New York, 1974, n.p.

58 He was not, as Rosalind Krauss would have it, looking at himself, but rather at the centre of the camera lens. Krauss, writing in 1976, at the tail end of the quest for the medium of video, writes that narcissism was the medium of video. She extrapolates this from a reading of *Centers* whereby she takes Acconci’s point as directed at himself in the video monitor as mirror and not out at the viewer. As Anne Wagner has recently

written in response to Krauss, Acconci’s point is a rhetorical apostrophe, summoning both the absent viewer for Acconci and the absent artist for the viewer. He points not at himself, but at the viewer and so at televisual liveness. See R. Krauss, ‘Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism’, *op. cit.*, and Anne M. Wagner, ‘Performance, Video and the Rhetoric of Presence’, *October*, no.91, Winter 2000, pp.59–80.

59 Bronislaw Malinowski, ‘The Problem of Meaning in Primitive

Languages’, *The Meaning of Meaning* (ed. C.K. Ogden and I.A. Richards), New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1923, p.315.

60 *Ibid.*, p.313 and p.15.

61 *Ibid.*, p.313.

62 Wagner notes that this can also be taken as a reference to Uncle Sam, and I would add that it is in response to the Vietnam War as it was brought live and direct to people’s homes via television. See A. Wagner, ‘Performance, Video and the Rhetoric of Presence’, *op. cit.*, p.69.

At the centre of *Centers* is the blindness of the televisual eye, which prohibits any dialogical connection between sender and receiver. In film the direct address of the face into the eye of the camera is assiduously avoided because it only calls attention to the absence of the audience for the person on-screen. Because television is potentially live, however, this face-out becomes a significant formal strategy. As Acconci points at his viewers, in a virtual now, he accuses them, exhorting them to look at themselves and their own reflection in the video monitor, to think about the contradiction of responding to a past event as if it were present, and so to consider the kind of presence televisual immediacy produces. The work asks them to think about what it means to be confronted by an image's 'direct and for me' that is neither direct nor only for me. At the same time, it asks them to consider his position as the bearer of a pathetic televisual gesture, one whose phatic opening is both empathetic and full of pathos as he reaches out to touch someone whom he can feel and who feels him only in absentia.