Mapping moving media: film and video

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Social Structures

Introduction: Framing the Medium

“Meaning is context-bound, but context is boundless.” This famous phrase by Jonathan Culler is still very apt if the word meaning is replaced with the word medium. Although it would be relevant to pair up the first part of the phrase with its reverse (“Context is medium-bound”) in order to consider the reciprocity of the relationship, there is no question that every medium is related to its context. As Culler explains, “there is no limit in principle to what might be included in a context, to what might be shown to be relevant to the object, event, text, speech act or medium in question. Therefore, context is not given but produced; what belongs in a context is determined by interpretative strategies; contexts are just as much an elucidation of events; and the meaning of a context is determined by events” (Culler 1988: xiv). In order to avoid the positivistic “giveness” which is often associated with the context idea, Culler proposes the term framing in place of context. As a verb, this term reminds us that framing is something we do, not something we find.

In this chapter, I will frame the media of film and video within the social field. I chose the social over many of the other general categories which constitute the context of film and video, such as the cultural, the historical and the political. The social relationships within which the two media will be framed cannot entirely be disentangled from these other aspects or categories. For the social sphere is closely tied to culture, history and politics, or rather, the social *is* cultural, historical and political. In addition, the concept of the social has many meanings and connotations. I will use it in a very broad sense to refer to interrelations (through interaction) between human subjects. The notion of the social is often used to refer to the public, as opposed to the private. This usage can be confusing when it comes to, for instance, familial relationships or close friendships, for these relationships are social structures which are often considered to belong

predominantly to the private domain. Therefore, I will not use the social as a synonym for the public in this chapter. However, the contrast between private and public (or between micro and macro levels of social organization) does play an important part in specifications of film and video vis-à-vis the social. It is impossible to frame the frame; no clear-cut impermeable limits can be drawn around the category of the social, nor does it have a stable, singular meaning. Therefore, the (social as a) frame should be understood as a focus for attention, not as an enclosed sphere.

Out of the boundless context of the two media, I have selected the social domain as a particularly relevant frame for film and video for several reasons. For a start, the concept of the medium in general induces an investigation of social relationships. A medium mediates. It is the medium in between. As such, it is not only related to its own (boundless) context; the medium also necessarily relates parts and positions within this context. In Chapter One, I discussed these positions as spatial and temporal ones. Media are in between moments in time and positions in space; they span temporal and/or spatial distances. However, if the medium is understood as "in between," the question should not only be in between *what, where* and *when,* but also in between *whom*?

The human subjects to who film and video relate have not remained undiscussed in the previous chapters. In fact, one of the main points of interest of this dissertation is the reciprocal relationship between the medium and the users of the medium (both the producers and viewers/readers of media objects). However, now that the social field is introduced as a central frame, a slight shift of focus occurs. Instead of studying the relationship between the medium and its users, the relationship that will be analyzed is the one between the medium on the one hand and the social relationships between its users on the other. In other words, the question changes from "how is the medium related to the human subjects who use it?" to "how is the medium related to the relationships between the human subjects who use it?" [70]

In addition to the fact that the concept of the medium in general necessitates attention to the social field, this field is especially important to an investigation of film and video. Firsty, video came into being in the same decade in which medium theory (as formulated by, most prominently, Marshall McLuhan) broached the idea that media produce social structures. Many early video practices relate to this dominant, influential idea. Notably, film is not absent from these activist and idealistic video discourses which deal with medium theory. Within the so-called guerilla videos, important stylistic devices were borrowed from the earlier *cinéma vérité* movement, with the aim of adapting social structures.

Secondly, the social field is a particularly relevant frame for the media of film and video because out of all the fields within which the two media operate, the social field points out most clearly the internal differentiation of the two media. Baker's model of

[70] In this regard, is not surprising that, in the U.S.A., early media studies arose from the discipline of sociology.

the medium itself being a field of – possibly opposing – possibilities and applications again proves to be very suitable here. Especially when the fields of film and video are framed by their operation within the social field, the specificity of the two media proves to be fraught with contradictions. The abilities and applications of both film and video in relation to social structures are manifold, and they seem to oppose one another.

On the one hand, video is often celebrated for its capacity to create communities and to serve individuals in establishing their social identity. On the other hand, the same medium is often described as anti-social. It is said, among other things, to produce narcissistic subjects who can relate to no one but themselves. Although film produces and blocks social relatedness in its own ways, a similar tension between the social and anti-social can be found within specifications and applications of this medium as well. The cinema has for instance been criticized for its isolating viewing conditions. Yet, like video, film has been applied in emancipatory projects which advocate social collaboration. The tension between socially productive and socially obstructive characteristics of film and video has led to both utopian and dystopian perspectives on each of the two media. Their medium-specific influence on social structures is believed either to uplift or to corrupt future societies.

Moreover, the opposition between the (supposedly) social and anti-social characteristics of film and video is closely interwoven with a contradiction between the more helpful, constructive capacities of the media on the one hand, and their violent effects on the other. The reason for this interwovenness is the fact that the production or obstruction of social relationships by the two media has an effect on human subjects; an effect which is consequently valued as either positive or negative. Most of the time, the production of social relationships by film and video is valued as a positive, peaceable act which helps the subjects in question. When, on the other hand, the two media are specified as technologies or structures which block social interaction, they are often described as aggressors which hurt their users. However, the correspondence between social-helpful and antisocial-hurtful does not hold true in every case. Some of the social structures which are sustained by film and video can function oppressively for specific subjects, whereas certain forms of isolation can be experienced positively as intimate and safe.

To make the matter even more complicated, all the utopian, dystopian, positive and negative specifications of the two media are, in turn, frequently produced under the influence of specific social contexts. Therefore, film and video are just as much structured by the social as is the social by the two media. In this chapter I aim to further analyze the intricate web of interwoven contradictions within the social fields of operation of film and video, as well as the interrelation between the two media and the social contexts in which and by which they are produced. Which technological and conventional aspects of film and video can account for the diverse ways in which the two media (are believed to) affect social structures? Which specifications of film and video have gained the upper hand in the last decades in his respect? What are the differences and similarities between the ways in which film and video (can) relate to the

social field? And finally; how do film and video relate to each other when it comes to their operation in the social field? By “zooming in” on some smaller social subfields in which the two media operate, such as the family, therapy and social activism, I will show how film and video have, among other things, displaced, ignored and imitated each other’s social functions. Close readings of intermedial artworks by Lynn Hershman and Sadie Benning will further expose how the two media specify and apply each other within the social field.

Before looking into film and video, however, it is first necessary to discuss how the concept of the medium in general can be related to social structures. The way in which this relationship has been defined (or ignored, or wished away) by scholars from various disciplines depends on the manner in which the particular medium is envisaged by these theorists in the first place. Ideas on what a medium is or does (or is supposed to be or do) are decisive to the way in which it is regarded in relation to the social field.

3.1 The Medium, the Media and the Social

Documentation and Production

From Egyptian hieroglyphic registrations of genealogical lineages carved into stone statues, to sound recordings of the South-West African Ovambo Group in the National Anthropological Archive, to a collection of black-and-white portrait photographs which aim to map the social groups in twentieth century Germany, to digital home videos of family get-togethers stored on the hard-disk of a personal computer – the documentation of social structures is age-old and wide-ranging. Because of the abundance of documentary practices aimed at mapping social groups and positions, the documentary function of media is the first thing that springs to mind when the relation between the medium and the social field is investigated. In spite of the many disparities within the vast field of documentation, the related practices of documenting, mapping, registering and recording social data have one thing in common; they aim at preserving the information they record for a relatively extended period of time. Because of this, the documentation of social structures goes hand in hand with a particular understanding of the medium. When it comes to documentary practices, greater emphasis is placed on the storing function of the medium (either self-reflexively or unconsciously) than on its transmitting capacities.

The result of this emphasis is that sole attention is paid to the social relationships between the people *within* the object of representation, that is, to the interrelations between the subjects depicted by, for instance, a photograph, a written text or a painting. The view of the medium as a storage facility sometimes goes hand in hand with the notion of the medium as an epistemological tool. By capturing social relationships, media products offer a chance to study the documented social structures. Thus, media are able to reveal and describe social formations.

A third important way in which the medium relates to the social, namely the fact that the medium *produces* social structures, often remains untheorized and unexplored in relation to documentary work. This doesn't mean that the documentation of social groups doesn't – in many cases – simultaneously produce them. In fact, capturing the members of a group in a written document, a photograph or a monument can have the performative effect of establishing the group. Moreover, the solidity of a medium's physical support can contribute to this performative effect; a group of names carved into a large marble monument grants this group a certain status as well as an air of perpetuity.

However, only when the medium is considered as a transmitter instead of a means of storage, can it more easily be envisaged as a tool which relates human subjects and subject positions both in and outside of the representation. As soon as the transmitting action of the medium is emphasized at the expense of its storing, collecting and capturing functions, the related capacities of media are quickly brought to the fore, because the process of transmitting compels consideration of the subjects who are involved in the process of using a medium. Unlike the verb to store, to transmit can be followed by the preposition *to*. Transmission involves transportation from one point in space and time to another one. When the medium is regarded as a device that transmits information between *a* and *b*, the question arises as to what or who takes up the positions between which the medium mediates. At those points at the edge of the in-between, a source or sender, and a receiver or addressee can be assumed to reside. The medium is then thought of as a communication technology which enables human beings to get in touch with each other. By enabling communication, the medium produces and sustains social networks which can range from the relationship between two people to a "global village" which includes billions of people. Within this view, the medium is not merely a tool with which to document social structures, but a device which produces those structures as well.

The distinction between storing and transmitting can be subtle, however. Even when media seem to transmit information instantaneously, for instance with the telephone or the Internet, they store this information as well. For transmittance always takes time, if only microseconds. In addition, media objects which are not associated with transmittance, such as the inscriptions of family names on a statue, communicate information nevertheless. So who are the recipients of this information? For whom were these lists of names carved in stone, in order to stay there forever? And (how) can the viewers or readers of such media objects relate to the monumentally represented subjects, or to the producer(s) of the statue, and how? Who made this object, what was his or her social position, and how did (s)he relate to the group of people who (s)he has captured in stone? Such questions concerning the relations between the triad of representing subject(s), represented subject(s) and viewing/reading subject(s) apply to all media objects, be they as transient as a radio signal or as solid as a marble tablet. Critical reflections on these positions and their social relatedness, however, often remain

reserved to the domain of media commonly known as communication technologies.[71] The ability of these media to connect people is highlighted because they can transmit information rapidly or instantaneously over large distances, more often than not in two ways – from sender to receiver and back again.

Moreover, a discussion of the concept of the medium as a communication technology which connects human beings remains more common within certain disciplines than it is in others. For some sociologists and medium theorists (e.g. Castells, Williams) the idea that a medium enables communication is so self-evident that they use the word "medium" interchangeably with "communication technology." Their main point of investigation is how media socialize human beings. Art historians, on the other hand, seldom describe media as technologies of communication. They rather think of them as materials, inscribed with or without a layer of conventions, which enable artistic expression. In addition, the embeddedness of the medium within the social field is incompatible with art-historian discourses that attach importance to the autonomy of art and the aesthetic field, and with that, the autonomy of the medium of art. These modernist ideals of autonomy and immanence still seep into contemporary reflections on the medium.

Even Rosalind Krauss, who distances herself so explicitly from modernist reflections on the medium in her reflections on the post-medium condition, has trouble shaking off the ideals of interiority and purity that she wishes to overthrow. In *A Voyage on The North Sea* (1999) Krauss uses the word *mediums* as the plural of *medium* in order to avoid confusion with *media*, which she reserves for "technologies of communication indicated by that latter term" (57). Although Krauss does not explain how *mediums* differ exactly from such technologies of communication, she uses the term to refer to what she also calls *aesthetic* media; media used within the domain of art as a support for artistic expression. For Krauss, the distinction between mediums of art and popular mass media is important, because she believes that when the two are leveled, art is reduced to "a system of pure equivalency by the homogenizing principle of commodification" (15). Within the international fashion of installation and intermedia work, Krauss decides, the aesthetic leeches out into the social field in general, and "art finds itself complicit with a globalization of the image in the service of capital" (56).

Although Krauss is well aware of the fact that the idea of an interior uncontaminated by an exterior (or a medium uncontaminated by its context) is no longer tenable after poststructuralist theory as well as postmodernist art, she still tries to save the domain of art from contamination by its social, capitalist context. Her condemnation of art practices which mix "high" and "low" media has rightly been critiqued as "a poststructuralist reformulation of Greenberg's modernist principles" (Lütticken 137-138). According to Sven Lütticken, the strict separation of the self-differentiating logic of

[71] The term "communication technologies" is mostly used to refer to electronic broadcast media and telecommunication media. It includes the telephone, telex, fax, radio, television, and video, as well as more recent computer-based technologies, such as the Internet, e-mail and social media.

artistic "mediums" from the homogenizing force of corporate "media" is our newest *Laocoon*. Only instead of defending the essential differences between the arts (Lessing, Greenberg), Krauss defends the barrier between art (including its mediums) and the rest of the world (including its media).

However, in spite of the fact that Krauss' argument can be criticized for its failure to carry through the poststructuralist ideas it seems to hinge on at first, the distinction between aesthetic "mediums" and the technologies of communication we call "media" is not entirely counterintuitive. The conventional function of traditional artistic media such as painting and sculpture clearly differs from popular mass media such as newspapers or television, the latter being associated with the communication of information, while the former serve aesthetic, artistic goals. To put it differently; some media operate almost exclusively within the field of art, while others tend to be applied within the realms of popular (commercial) culture, mass communication and the social field in general. It is therefore not remarkable in this respect that, unlike art historians, sociologists – who, needless to say, study the social field – focus mostly on the media operating predominantly within the general social field of everyday life when they investigate the relation between media and social forms. For them, the mass media – including the media *industry* – are crucial to our understanding of the social world.

The difference between aesthetic and corporate media is, however, conventional and diminishing, rather than rigid and essential. For, contrary to Krauss' wishes, many media operate within both artistic and non-artistic domains. Moreover, it should be questioned whether the acts Krauss tries to bar from her notion of *mediums* – channeling communication, operation within the social field – can ever be completely excluded from any medium. Even the "highest" aesthetic media are never entirely cut off from acts of communication within a social context. Some artworks highlight the act of communication more than others; the acts of enunciation and address can either be hidden or revealed. Yet, even a modernist painting which does not seem to address anything or anyone outside of its canvas "leeches out" into the social field as soon as it is shown in public. Whenever looked at, it transmits something to its viewers, if only – for instance – the color red. As soon as it is viewed it may affect the social relationships between its viewers, if only by inspiring discussion on its meaning or its message. Moreover, as soon as it is exposed as art in public it cannot escape the economic, ideological, and institutional forces that constitute the way in which a particular society deals with art.

The distinction between aesthetic and popular media, and the exclusion of technologies of communication from the concept of the medium, are especially unsuitable when it comes to the two media which are the subject of this study. Both film and video operate within artistic as well as more popular cultural realms. They are generally considered to be both mediums of art and as mediums of (mass) entertainment, news gathering and documentation. Although film is, as a rule, not thought of as a technology of communication, its ability to deliver (ideologically charged) messages to

an audience has been widely theorized and analyzed. Within the field of video, the capacity to enable communication is even more dominant than in the field of film. Thus, because videotapes are relatively easy to produce, send and play, video has functioned explicitly as a medium of communication in the form of the video letter. Moreover, unlike film, the electronic video medium offers the possibility of live two-way communication. This possibility is utilized in the case of video conferences. In the last decade, the so-called video conversation has become more and more common as video became part of contemporary Internet communication software such as Skype or FaceTime.

The Medium is the Master

Above, I claimed that media produce social relationships. This raises the issue of agency. Do media act on their own in this respect? Do they produce social structures without human interference? Most theorists would justifiably say not. Media are inanimate objects which only do things because they are produced and used by human subjects. They can be thought of as objects that enable the creation of certain social structures by human subjects, rather than as objects which produce these structures independently. Although they co-produce social bonds, their effect is believed to be under the control of human producers. Media are often thought of as potentially centralizing and controlling tools whose power is, in the end, in the hands of those who are in power – over the particular media as well as the people. Lev Manovich's view on the development of modern media and computers suggests that media are tools by which authorities wield power over the masses, simply because of the ability of media to spread or store information:

> We should not be surprised that both trajectories – the development of modern media and the development of computers – begin around the same time. Both media machines and computing machines were absolutely necessary for the functioning of modern mass societies. The ability to disseminate the same texts, images, and sounds to millions of citizens – thus assuring the same ideological beliefs – was as essential as the ability to keep track of their birth records, employment records, medical records, and police records. Photography, film, the offset printing press, radio and television made the former possible while computers made possible the latter. (22)[72]

The idea that the ability to record massive amounts of information on citizens enabled the rise of modern mass society suggests again that the documentation of information on social groups often (co-)produces them as well. In addition, Manovich's quote from

[72] Manovich does not define the computer as a medium here. In its initial stages, the computer was a computing machine; a giant calculator. After a while, the computer absorbed all analogue modern media (film, photography) and took over many of its functions and conventional cultural forms. In the age of new media, the computer can be understood as a meta-medium; it mediates media.

The Language of New Media points to another important issue. As Manovich suggests, modern media and the computer made modern mass society possible because of their abilities to store and transmit information in large quantities. It doesn't seem to matter whether the information was spread or stored in the form of images, sound or text, as long as the ideological messages reached many recipients and all relevant personal information on citizens was collected en masse. In this case, the effect of modern media and computers on society seems to depend on their efficiency and size as seemingly neutral vessels of information. While it is possible to argue that medium-specific features impose a certain logic onto social formations (consider, for instance, the parallel between the reproducibility of modern media and the "factory logic" of mass (re)production within industrial society), the possible influence of the "vessel" itself on the data it carries, or on structures within society, is not considered here.[73]

This leads to the question of where the influence of modern media on the rise of mass society should be located. Is it the content of the media – the sent and stored ideological messages or personal information – that enabled the rise of this particular form of society? Can the impact of modern media and computers on mass society rather be located in their function as potent data carriers; in their technical ability to spread and store information rapidly and effectively? Or should we pay more attention to the possible influence of medium-specific features on the development of social structures?

These questions not only concern the particular relationship between modern media and modern mass society. When it comes to the effect of media on social structures in general, the precise cause of this effect is under debate. A sociological perspective on media usually directs attention first of all to the influence of the *content* of media products. Sociologists are interested in media as communication technologies which are of influence in the process of socialization; the process whereby we learn and internalize the values, beliefs, and norms of our culture and, in so doing, develop a sense of self as well as a sense of social belonging. Next to social institutions such as the family and the school, or socializing influences such as peers, (mass) media are a powerful socializing agents in contemporary society, as they explicitly or implicitly communicate the norms that bind a social group (Croteau and Hoynes 2003).

However, as Croteau and Hoynes point out in *Media Society,* the sociological significance of media extends beyond the content of media messages. Media do not merely influence *what* individuals learn about their place in society, but also affect *how* they learn and how they interact with each other (Croteau and Hoynes 2003).[74] As soon as emphasis is put on

[73] Although Manovich does not discuss the influence of technical and conventional features of the medium on social structures in this particular paragraph, it is definitely not left out of consideration in his work. In *The Language of New Media*, the (reciprocal) relationship between the logic of particular media and the structure of specific social formations is an important subject. Moreover, although Manovich draws attention to the fact that the amount of information a medium is able to store or disseminate is of influence on the rise of modern mass society, he is not oblivious to the way in which the conventional and technical aspects of a medium determine the forms which mediated information takes. In fact, the re-mediation of medium-specific forms of representation are a main focus within Manovich's medium-theoretical work.

how instead of what media teach their audience, the influence of technological medium-specific characteristics on social circumstances is brought to the fore. For instance, when the influence of the televisual medium on the relationship between individual citizens and authority figures within a particular society was studied from a sociological perspective, sociologists investigated what people learn from police crime shows broadcast on television. What kinds of notions of authority figures such as the police are communicated by these programs?[75]

Although it can be argued that crime shows are by convention specific to the televisual medium, the primary point of investigation is the effect of the medial message on the audience. Sociologists have also reflected on the way in which television has changed the interaction between the public and political authorities. As the medium has enabled people to witness political debates without being physically present, it has affected how individuals participate in political life. Within this study, the content of the medium is not unimportant, yet most attention is paid to the effect of certain technological capabilities of television.

Compared to social studies, media studies tend to pay more attention to the influence of medium-specific characteristics than to the impact of mediated information when the effects of media on society are discussed. The idea that the specificity of a medium affects the social relationships between its users is carried to an extreme in media-theoretical discourses that not only ignore the impact of medial messages, but also abandon the idea that media are used intentionally by, for instance, state authorities, media companies, artists, or the average man in the street. Subsequently, all power is placed in the hands of the medium itself. In this view, the effects which a medium has on society are not shaped by the information it mediates, nor by the way it is applied by human subjects. Instead, a medium's social and political effects are explained as a direct result of its basic apparatus. This mode of thinking strongly contrasts with the idea of the medium as a transparent vessel. Instead of considering the technological or physical support of a medium as non-influential and transparent, the technological characteristics of a medium are regarded as the single source and origin of social structures. As James M. Moran states:

> This form of fixed causality [...], better known as "technological determinism," constitutes a transhistorical discourse proposing the belief that media technologies not only dictate aesthetics but organize and govern perception and behavior, acting as the sovereign determinant of social formations and human volition. (2)

[74] Note the pedagogical effect which Croteau and Hoynes attribute to media.

[75] Police crime shows seem to teach their audience that police officers should be respected. Viewers of these crime shows tend to adopt a tough law-and-order attitude supportive of authority figures such as the police – even when television police are clearly violating civil rights (Carlson 1985).

One of the most famous and influential media theorists who reasoned according to the logic of technological determinism was Marshall McLuhan. McLuhan argued that the technological forms in which people communicate entirely dominate the messages they communicate; hence his well-known sound-bite "the medium is the message." In the eyes of this Canadian theorist, the technological characteristics of media carry a certain logic which shapes the way human beings think, perceive, behave, and live together. Because of this, media create specific societies, worlds, or environments in which people are related in medium-specific ways.

According to McLuhan, (Western) man has resided primarily in an "optical world" for a very long time. This world was based entirely on the logic of the alphabet and the printed word; a logic that – in accordance with important material and mechanical characteristics of print – entailed concepts such as seriality, continuity, uniformity, and linearity. According to McLuhan, the logic of print created uniform societies in which people lived together in bead-like series; one individual after another, distinct yet connected. Following the work of French philosopher Alexis de Toqueville (1805-1859), McLuhan states that, for instance, French society was to a very large degree shaped by the printed text; the logic of the medium enabled the French Revolution. The printed word had homogenized the French nation, as "the typographic principles of uniformity, continuity, and linearity had overlaid the complexities of ancient feudal and oral society" (15). A quite different revolution was envisaged by McLuhan in his own time, namely a revolution sparked off by the arrival of electronic media. According to him, the immediacy and instantaneity of these media would turn the world into an "acoustic space"; a global village of simultaneous relationships.

McLuhan's media theory reached its peak of popularity in the 1960s. However, although his ideas are still well-known, his legacy has been severely criticized by many of the media scholars who succeeded him. Their main point of criticism of the McLuhanian discourse of technological determinism is that it leaves little room for human intention or agency. Cultural theorist and media scholar Ron Burnett outlines the problem as follows:

> Subjects, agents, the people who use new technologies are placed in the position of respondents, as if their discourse will *inevitably* be transcended by the technology. A rear guard is then fought with the technology. An effort is made to humanize the machine, although its history is, of course, the result of human intervention and creativity. What is at stake here is the degree to which the machine can be conceptualized as being in the control of humans. The *idea* that the machine is more powerful than the people who created it confers an even greater sense of strength onto the technology. (143)

An additional flaw Burnett points out in this line of thought is that the technology is transformed into an "autonomous vehicle with a set of formal concerns which are not derived from the pragmatic context into which the technology is placed" (1995: 143).

The Medium as Social Practice

The ideas of Raymond Williams – one of the most explicit debunkers of technological determinism – are in accordance with those of Burnett when it comes to the overvaluation of the power of technology. In *Marxism and Literature* (1977), he critically analyzes how, in McLuhan, "the medium is (metaphysically) the master" (159). Like Burnett, Williams disagrees with such view of the medium as a master which not only determines "the "content" of what is communicated, but also the social relationships within which the communication takes place" (159).[76] In line with Burnett's belief that media are incorporated into already existing patterns of use and thought, Williams looks at to the impact which culture and its social definitions (traditions, institutions, and formations) have on the medium. He maintains that a medium is itself an effect of the social environment wherein it was produced. Any new technique depends on society and is, at a given phase, defined by specific social relationships (Williams 163). He eventually defines the medium as *social practice*; as "work on a material for a specific purpose within necessary social conditions" (160).

With Williams' definition, the causal relationship that characterized McLuhan's thinking seems to be reversed. Instead of a relationship in which the medium determines society, society now shapes the medium. Society provides the determining context in which the medium is, as it were, carried out by its users. Williams does not elaborately explain his notion of the medium as social practice, yet his writings on language as a medium provide some explanation. Language can easily be envisaged as a social practice because it is such an important component of our everyday social life; it shapes all our social relationships and we (re)produce it every day in order to communicate with others. In the words of Williams, language, as a medium, is "a socially shared and reciprocal activity, always already embedded in active relationships, within which every move is an activation of what is already shared and reciprocal or may become so" (133).[77]

Williams' more general remark that the medium is a social practice can be understood in the same vein. Every medium is socially shared; it functions between people. It enables social relationships yet also depends on them too in order to exist. Like language, a medium is not simply there; it comes into being and stays there by being used in a more or less similar way over and over again. The idea that the medium is

[76] In *Marxism and Literature*, Williams also argues against the idea of the medium as a neutral, transparent organ and the medium as a solely artistic material.

[77] After Williams, the medium has been defined as social practice by many other scholars. Yet, when the medium is discussed as a "social practice," this doesn't always refer to Williams' idea that the medium comes into being within and through social relationships. For instance, according to Graeme Turner (2006), film can be examined as a social practice because it can tell us of the systems and values of society. In this case, the medium as social practice refers to the medium as an epistemological tool through which we can get to know society. Moreover, the medium is often defined as social practice when it comes to projects which explicitly aim at making deep inroads on social life, such as activist video projects which wish to empower marginalized social groups by providing them with video equipment. In this case, a medium practice works on the social practice instead of the other way around.

something which is “done” by and between human beings does, however, not mean that this act doesn’t have physical, material components. As mentioned above, Williams describes the medium as work on a material. The medium itself is acted on or carried out by its users, yet this activity shapes a material into a specific form. The medium of film, for instance, comes into being through many kinds of relationships between producers, actors, viewers, critics, and so forth – relationships which are, as a matter of fact, often just as much caused by film production – but filmmaking also involves a physical process in which the material of celluloid is transformed into flexible film reel. The fact that Williams formulates this process as work *on* a material rather than, for instance, work with or by a material, fits in with his opinion that technology itself is not an actor. Moreover, his definition of the medium as a practice, as work on a material for a specific purpose, rewrites the idea that media dominate their passive respondents. It restores human intention to the use of communications technologies.

Some refining remarks have to be made with regard to this causality, though. Williams’ theory involves the idea that social structures – including human intentional subjects – have an impact on media, both in the period of using media and in the process of inventing them. Williams and his followers have remarked that it is important to realize that society not only influences the destiny of a medium after the invention of a technology, but also prior to this moment. Williams has identified and rejected two forms of determinism in which the latter fact is ignored: mechanistic and symptomatic determinism. The first form of determinism is related to the McLuhanian discourse. It advances the claim that media are self-contained, isolated technologies distinct from their cultural environment, yet empowered internally to exercise social effectivity. The second strain, symptomatic determinism, at first sight seems to approach Williams’ theory. It adds the corrective to mechanistic determinism that, although communications technologies may be invented as discrete, external phenomena, they inevitably enter into the dominant mode of economic and social production, the institutions of which then act on and with the technology to determine its cultural effects (Moran 3). However, as Moran correctly notes:

> Although symptomatic causality advances on the mechanistic strain by denying autonomous effectivity outside of social formations, it disregards the way in which technologies have been shaped by institutions at their onset, casting media as a neutral base for a variety of cultural uses, whose positive or negative values will be wholly determined by the good and evil forces that shape them. (3)

Many other theorists who – like Williams and Moran – refute symptomatic determinism, underline Moran’s remark that technology is not a neutral base which was invented and developed independently of a social, cultural, and historical environment Jennifer Stack states in her study *Communications Technologies and Society* (1984) that it is impossible to generalize about “the technology” as the same physical object, identically

constituted, in different historical or social configurations. Slack regards any technology as a historical object, the constitution of which is a social, cultural process. Burnett (1995: 172) subscribes to this viewpoint when he argues against the understanding of a new technology as a "found object" which comes into being in a sphere devoid of subjectivity. Subjectivity is involved at all stages – in the process of inventing, using and understanding a technology – "and there are no peripheral moments when technology takes on a life of its own" (148).

All in all, these scholars share the belief that media do not suddenly come into existence. In the eyes of these theorists, media are intentionally developed because they are somehow conceivable or needed within specific social, historical situations. According to Williams, it is a characteristic of communications technologies that all were foreseen before their crucial components had even been discovered and refined (1974: 13).[78] Even if parts of the invention process depended on fortunate accidents, the discovery and refinement of technologies should be understood as purposeful; they are directed to central social needs and concrete cultural practices. This recalls Manovich's previously mentioned remark that we should not be surprised that the development of modern media and the development of computers began at around the same time. On the one hand, modern media and computers enabled the development of modern mass society. On the other hand, they were developed because they were urgently required by the already arising new society: "Both media machines and computing machines were absolutely necessary for the functioning of modern mass societies" (Manovich 22).

Manovich's remark confirms Williams' claim that the development of media originates in society, and not apart from it. Yet it also brings out the difficulty of establishing the cause and effect when it comes to the relationship between medium and society; they seem to both enable and need one another. Although Williams appears to establish society as the main cause of the medium, he recognizes reciprocity between them. In view of this, let me compare the use of the concept of medium by Williams and his followers with some other views on the concept.

It is remarkable that both Williams and adherents of his ideas see the term medium as interchangeable with the terms technology or communication technology. At first sight, this seems to be incompatible with some of the most important aspects of Williams' discourse; namely the emphasis on human intention in the development and use of media, the belief that a medium is a social practice, and the idea that a medium is determined by its social, cultural, and historical context. When Williams' conceptualization of the medium is compared to Krauss' definition of the medium as differential structure consisting of a technical support plus a set of conventions, Williams' theory seems to be in line with Krauss' ideas. Like Krauss, he beliefs a medium is in part produced by the

[78] As similar claim was made by André Bazin on the origin of cinema. For him, the cinema is an idealistic phenomenon. Even before technical inventions opened the way to its practical use, the concept that people had of the cinema already existed "so to speak, fully armed in their minds" (Bazin 1967: 17).

(conventional) way in which it is used, and that a medium's specificity depends on its social, cultural, and historical context. Moreover, both theorists claim that a medium is more than a bare, autonomous, physical or technological support. So how can Williams and his followers nevertheless refer to "medium" as "technology"?

An important difference between Krauss' medium theory and Williams' discourse, is that in the former, technology can be still be imagined as a bare neutral base, while in the latter, technology is always an historical, social, and cultural construct. For Krauss, technology only becomes a medium when conventions are added to a technological support when it is used and appropriated in a context. For Williams, however, technology itself is always already inscribed by and within such conventions. In his opinion, Krauss' definition would fall under the category of symptomatic determinism, as it stipulates that technology is a physical object which can exist untouched by a social, cultural, and historical environment. Technology as understood by Williams is comparable with the way Krauss defines the medium in that both are regarded as related to and intertwined with social, cultural, and historical context. The difference is that Krauss' medium can consist of two successive parts (first technology, then cultural and social conventions), while Williams' technology cannot be seen apart from, or anterior to, the cultural and social aspects by which it is shaped. Hence, Williams' technology is a "Kraussian" medium from the onset.

While closely following Williams in a study on the specificity of home video, James Moran adds to Williams' theory that a medium's technological base can be thought of as a set of discursive codes:

> [...] rather than identify a medium according to its ontological purity, predetermined effects, and material apparatus, we must instead rethink a medium's technological base as constituted in hybridity, as an effect of social and cultural determinations, and as a set of discursive codes to apprehend its historical rather than essential specificity. (16)

Moran's proposal to think of the medium as a set of discursive codes is similar to the opinion of art historian David Green mentioned in the introduction; namely his claim that "a medium is what we think it is" (2005: 23). Medium specificity can be understood as the result of medium *specification*, meaning that descriptions, perceptions, and interpretations of a medium – instead of its material, ontological essence – decide what a medium is. The importance of Moran's comment is that it proposes considering the technological base of a medium as a discursive construct. For even theorists who – like Rosalind Krauss – support the notion of medium specificity as a conventional structure produced through practice and in discourse, often still consider the material support of a medium as an autonomous object on which conventional applications or imaginary conceits about the medium are constructed.

When we see Krauss' definition of the medium in light of Williams' and Moran's

writings, it becomes clear that Krauss' theory once again does not manage to escape the Greenbergian discourse of an essential, pure specificity which she so desperately wants to overturn. For, at the basis of the medium, she still presumes a pure, uncultured, extra-discursive, material object. This object can be "dressed up" with conventions in order to be (re)invented as a medium.

However, although Williams' and Moran's contextualization of technology admirably overcomes essentialist and determinist notions of the medium, their ideas also raise the question of whether the material aspects of a medium can and should now be taken into consideration at all to grasp the effects of a medium. Williams has defined the medium as work on a material; but doesn't the material have an effect on the ones who work on it? Can the impact of the physical aspects of a technology still be taken into account at all, or should the medium now be understood as an immaterial, imaginary construct the effects of which are entirely in human hands and heads?

Convergence or Reciprocity

Some theorists who follow Williams' idea that technology is interrelated to its social context, would respond to these questions with the assertion that the impact of a medium's material properties on society cannot be taken into account. The reason for this is not so much the belief that technology is an entirely immaterial, imaginary construct, but the belief that technology can never exist apart from the way it is imagined or interpreted within its social context. Ron Burnett finds the idea of reciprocity or exchange between human society and the physical properties of a technology problematic because it would imply a separation of technology and society. And such separation is unacceptable when one adheres to the idea that "technology *per se* has no identity, no space within which "it" can play out a role without the process of interpretation attached to the exchange" (Burnett 148).

Therefore, according to Burnett, (media) machines cannot be separated from the social context within which they are anthropomorphized. The idea of reciprocity between society and medium relies on a distinction between the two, and therefore reinstates the ontological status of the machine. Moreover, for Burnett, reciprocity confers continuity on a situation which does not have to be framed by any sort of linkage – because there is no separateness. In a similar move, sociologist Manuel Castells has claimed that society cannot be said to determine technology, or technology to determine society, because "technology *is* society" (1996: 5).

An even more radical view on the intertwining of media and society was formulated by philosopher Jean Baudrillard, who is well known for his opinion that we now live in a hyperreal world. This hyperreality consists entirely of simulacra; empty signs that do not have referents in (a) reality, but which refer only to themselves. Within his system of simulacra, meaning and value are completely absent. This absence of meaning has consequences for the status of the medium. Without meaning, the information mediated by media is empty and superfluous. For Baudrillard, the contents or messages of media

have been neutralized. In line with McLuhan, he states that, in the postmodern era of simulation and simulacra, the medium has indeed become the message.

At first, Baudrillard still tries to imagine some separation between media and society, in which the (technological, material) form of the medium can still be applied as a tool with which to shape reality:

> [...] beyond this neutralization of all content, one could still expect to manipulate the medium in its form and to transform the real by using the impact of the medium as form. If all the content is wiped out, there is perhaps still a subversive, revolutionary use value of the medium as such. (82)[79]

However, the author soon concludes that the impact of the medium as form cannot be applied at all, for without a message, the medium implodes into the real:

> McLuhan's formula, the medium is the message, which is the key formula of the era of simulation [...], this very formula must be imagined at its limit where, after all the contents and messages have been volatilized in the medium, it is the medium itself that is volatilized as such. Fundamentally, it is still the message that lends credibility to the medium, that gives the medium its determined, distinct status as the intermediary of communication. Without a message, the medium also falls into the indefinite state characteristic of all our great systems of judgment and value. [...] *Finally, the medium is the message not only signifies the end of the message, but also the end of the medium.* There are no more media in the literal sense of the word (I'm speaking particularly of electronic mass media) – that is, of a mediating power between one reality and another, between one state of the real and another. Neither in content, nor in form. Strictly, this is what implosion signifies. The absorption of one pole into another, the short-circuiting between poles of every differential system of meaning, the erasure of distinct terms and oppositions, including that of the medium and of the real – thus the impossibility of any mediation, of any dialectical intervention between the two or from one to the other. It is useless to dream of revolution through content, useless to dream of a revelation through form, because the medium and the real are now in a single nebula whose truth is indecipherable. (82-83, emphasis added)

For Baudrillard, it is impossible to discuss the influence of media on their environment, because media are not simply located in their own hermetically sealed spaces, but

[79] The suggestion that the form of the medium might still be manipulated in order to use its impact on reality is interesting in comparison to McLuhan's theory. Whereas McLuhan's adagium "The medium is the message" goes hand in hand with the loss of human agency in his theory, Baudrillard still considers the possibility that human subjects are not entirely subjected to the medium (as or without message).

dispersed around us, in all forms of experience (Sandoz 2003). Hence, the reality we live in is invariably mediated. And as there is no longer an unmediated reality outside of our mediated world, the medium as mediator no longer exists. Not only is there nothing left to mediate (only empty, meaningless signs; simulacra), there is nothing real left to mediate *between* either. What is mediated is only what is simulated and vice versa. Those experiences in life that are explicitly presented as mediated Baudrillard classifies as simply of a higher order of simulation, one which simulates simulating in order to falsely suggest a real or an unmediated system outside of it (Sandoz 2003).[80]

With Baudrillard's claim that the medium has imploded, we seem to have reached the end of medium theory. How to proceed with a theoretical investigation of the relationship between the medium and the social from here? Should the relationship under investigation in this chapter rather be the one between *simulation* and the social? In spite of what Baudrillard claims, we still think of media as distinct categories. Even if we provisionally follow Baudrillard's opinion that media have ceased to exist because they no longer mediate, but only simulate, media are very much present in our simulated world as an idea (or simulacrum) which we believe to have a basis in reality. Even as purely imaginary objects, media have performative effects and shape our perception of the world. The mere idea that an object is, for instance, a film, influences what you see. It produces a horizon of expectations and creates meanings that – with or without a referent in reality – potentially affect our social, political and cultural circumstances in a very real way.

In addition, unlike Burnett and Baudrillard, other theorists (including myself) do insist on the necessity to discuss the effects of a medium's physical properties on their environment, in spite of the fact that the technological support of a medium at no time has a stable, ontological essence or autonomous status within its social, historical, and cultural context, and in spite of the possibility that media constitute a hyperreality and are therefore "in a single nebula" (Baudrillard 83) with the real. As Moran puts it, "to focus on historical relations and (cultural or social) context entirely at the expense of technology [as a physical object], would swing from one extreme pole [technological determinism] to another" (19). Moran's proposal to see a medium as a discursive construct does not mean that the material, physical base of a medium does not exist or have an effect on a medium's expressive possibilities. In his analyses, Moran still takes the materiality of video into account as a factor which both enables and limits the expressive possibilities of the medium. He argues that a medium's technology never exists outside of discourse; technology is always already invested with and formed by socially and culturally specific meaning. However, this doesn't rule out the fact that a medium's technology does exercise material constraints on media practice. Media are not materially transparent or neutral instruments with which every kind of artifact can be produced.

[80] Disneyland is a key example in this respect. "Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, when in fact Los Angeles and the America surrounding it are no longer real, but of the order of the hyperreal and of simulation" (Baudrillard 25).

For instance, when film is understood as an analogue medium with celluloid as its main support, it is reasonable to claim that it is impossible to show a live news item with film equipment. For analogue film technology which requires the processing of celluloid film stock does not allow for simultaneous recording and broadcasting. This material restriction of the medium is historically relative as both film technology and the specifications of film evolve. Nowadays, the medium film is no longer necessarily viewed as an analogue medium; many people regard digital film as film too. This digitalization of the medium oversteps the necessity of processing, and therefore, live broadcasting is a conceivable possibility of the cinematic medium today. However, at some distinct moment in history, not that long ago, in a specific cultural and social context, live broadcasting was a real physical impossibility for film technology.

Saying this does not mean that the discursive or contextual framing of that technology is denied, or that is depicted as an autonomous object. The material technological possibilities and impossibilities of a medium are forever involved in a process of change, change which is instigated by social needs and carried out by human subjects. Moreover, the meaning and importance attributed to certain technological possibilities or restrictions of a medium are conventional and thus historically, culturally and socially relative. As I will show later on, the technological ability of video to simultaneously record and produce images in a live feedback set-up has been interpreted in opposite ways by people with specific social concerns. Therefore, I would agree with Moran – a medium is both a material and a social product. A material and social product which, moreover, can produce material consequences within social fields. But how can the consequences of a medium's material properties on society be discussed without taking the imperatives of technological determinism into account?

Moran has pointed out that Williams' concept of "soft determination" can be of help here. As Moran explains, determination speaks to partial rather than total necessity, in that the materiality of technologies exerts pressures and limits, yet without guarantees (19-20). In Williams' own words:

> It does not predetermine human action in any unilateral sense, but it does make some courses of action more likely than others, if only because it makes some course of action more difficult than others, and also acknowledges that there are, at any one time, certain absolute, often material, limits to the range of human action. Determination also implies that humans learn from their historical experience in ways which create habits and thus inertia, and in ways which provide warnings against certain courses of action and thus make such actions less likely in the future. (Williams, in Garnham 1990: 6)

Moran does not suggest that the material, physical base of a medium does not exist or has no effect on a medium's expressive possibilities. In his analyses, he still takes the materiality of video in account as a factor which both enables and limits the expressive

possibilities of the medium. Yet, he argues that it never exists outside of discourse; it is always invested with and formed by social and culturally specific meaning.

In conclusion, I contend that human actions exert pressure on the development and design of material technologies, and the material aspects of media technologies in turn "softly" affect the possibilities and limits of human actions. Neither human subjects nor material technologies have full control over each other in this reciprocal relationship. When it comes to the relationship between social structures and media, the same reciprocity between a medium's materiality and (groups of) human subjects can be presumed. On the one hand, the interests of a certain social group can produce and define a medium, including its technological properties, according to specific social goals. On the other hand, the medium and its physical aspects may produce the form and the possibilities of a social group. The analyses of the relation between film, video and social structures that follow will therefore take reciprocity into account.

3.2 Video: Flow and Feedback

Antisocial Flow, Narcissistic Feedback

According to many media critics, we are surrounded by information today. There is no escape from the continuous stream of texts and images which surround us always and everywhere; media messages have become ubiquitous. The flood of information which is held to be typical of the postmodern era is mostly believed to be produced by electronic media. Of these media, the electronic medium of video is often theorized as the medium which is most symptomatic of postmodernism. Moreover, it is precisely this unremitting flow of (video) images, sounds and texts which is pointed out as a main cause for social entropy and the obstruction of intersubjective social relationships.

In *Simulacra and Simulations* (1995), Baudrillard discusses the commonly held opinion that information creates communication, and that communication consequently produces socialization. He points out that socialization is often measured by exposure to media messages. Anyone underexposed to media (and hence to information) is considered to be desocialized or virtually asocial. Baudrillard and many other postmodern media critics claim that subjects are not underexposed but rather overexposed to media messages in our postmodern era. One might expect that this abundance of information would create many cohesive social bonds, but according to the French theorist, the opposite is true. Rather, the incessant stream information in contemporary society leads to an implosion of the social.

Baudrillard explains this implosion as follows. Although we live in a world where there is more and more information, the media messages and images which surround us have less and less meaning. This wane of meaning can be attributed to the abundance of messages and information. Because there are so many media messages around us, they become an undifferentiated flux of meaningless images and signs without any

connection to the real. This why Baudrillard claims that the postmodern subject is surrounded by simulacra: empty signs which have no referent in reality and refer only to themselves; signs without referents.[81]

Previously, I discussed how this process of simulation affects the status of reality as well as the status of the medium. In addition, the loss of meaning through the flow of information affects the act of communication. When the content of communicated messages is empty or neutral, as the French author has it, there is no real communication. According to Baudrillard, we still perform the act of communication today, but it has become precisely that: a performance, a staged act. As a consequence, social relationships are canceled out, and distinct social formations are, in the words of the postmodern critic, “destructurated.” They all dissolve or implode into the undifferentiated masses.

> Thus information dissolves meaning and dissolves the social, in a sort of nebulous state dedicated not to a surplus of innovation, but, on the contrary, to total entropy. Thus the media are producers not of socialization, but of exactly the opposite, of the implosion of the social in the masses. And this is only the macroscopic extension of the implosion of meaning at the microscopic level of the sign. (Baudrillard 82)

Whereas Baudrillard discusses social entropy as the result of the flow of electronic media messages in general, Frederic Jameson attributes this “sign-flow which resists meaning” especially to the medium of video.[82] This critic of postmodernism first of all identifies an ongoing flux of superficial fragments within the televisual application of video. Broadcast television never stops, the contents of the screen are “streaming before us all day long without interruption (or where the interruptions – called commercials – are less intermissions than they are fleeting opportunities to visit the bathroom or throw a sandwich together)” (69). Jameson recognizes a similar flow in experimental video artworks. Although these artworks have a limited running time, they seem as never-ending as the unremitting stream of television images because of their uneventfulness and incomprehensibility.

For Jameson, the consequence of video’s flow is that the distance and separation

[81] While Baudrillard based his concept of the hyperreality mostly on the electronic mass media which prevailed in the 1980s, one of the most dominant electronic media in this decade – video – has been theorized in the opposite way. Christine Ross summarizes it well (and in concord with my discussion of video’s reality effect in Chapter One): “In the 1970s [and early 1980s] artists and critics stressed the importance of experimenting with the indexical quality of the video image, guaranteed by the medium’s simultaneous production and projection of images, because it enabled a unique relation of copresence (void of any delay) between the image and its referent” (86).

[82] The term flow is used by Jameson in order to refer to the signs which the medium of video is able to produce without intermission. However, the concept has also been used to indicate the processual character of video images; even those which seem not to change or move at all contain an invisible flow, namely the ceaseless flow of electrons scanning the image surface from left to right and top to bottom.

between viewer and medium disappears. First of all, because the stream of video information is so pervasive, "what used to be called "critical distance" has become obsolete" (69). The most obvious solutions to interrupting video's flow, namely simply turning off the television set or walking out of the museum room, do not create any critical distance either, for video images cannot be properly remembered once they are out of view. Jameson claims that video (unlike film) excludes memory; "nothing here haunts the mind or leaves its afterimages in the manner of the great moments of film" (70).

Secondly, the ceaseless flow of video can give rise to intolerable discomfort in its viewers. In the face of the ongoing cycles of serials and commercials, or the seemingly never-ending unchanging or unexciting images of video artworks, spectators can only experience unpleasant sensations such as panic or boredom. For Jameson, video "clamps" its spectator into place by means of its flow. He compares the medium's effect on the viewer with the old chair-like devices with clasps and belts that were supposedly used by the first photographers to keep their subjects immobile. Video's discomforting, excruciating flow freezes its spectators without actual physical restraint.[83] According to the author, "the helpless spectators of video time are then as immobilized and mechanically integrated and neutralized as the older photographic subjects, who became, for a time, part of the technology of the medium" (73). By turning its spectator into an object, video thus violently absorbs its viewer. In addition, Jameson argues, the authors of video works are dissolved along with the spectator. Naturally, without no subjects left to relate to, video has canceled out the possibility of intersubjective, social contact between its users.

Like Jameson, Rosalind Krauss recognizes a form of inclusion of the video viewer into the medium. According to Krauss, however, the spectator of video is not so much turned into an object by the medium; she is rather caught between two components of the video apparatus, where she is put into a narcissistic relationship with herself from which she cannot escape. In her seminal article "Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism" (1976), she explains that this narcissistic spell is in the first place caused by a technological set-up which is specific to video; a closed-circuit installation in which a camera records images of the viewing subject, which are then instantly fed back to this subject on a nearby monitor. On this screen, the viewer (who is also the object of representation, the performer, and often the producer) of the installation can look at herself looking at herself. Video functions as a mirror in this particular arrangement of live feedback in a closed circuit.

However, unlike the singular object of the mirror, the video apparatus consists of two components in the case of instant feedback. Anyone who stands in front of the camera as well as the joint monitor is, as it were, held captive between two technical devices. In

[83] The uneventfulness of video artworks has not been understood as an objectifying characteristic by all video critics and artists. Bill Viola for instance explained that he favored seemingly uneventful actions in his videos in order to increase the spectator's sensorial, attentional, and cognitive faculties, so that "one might liberate oneself from the habit of viewing objects as we see them" (277).

Krauss' words, "the body is [...] centered between two machines that are the opening and closing of a parenthesis" (1976: 52). Besides the limits imposed by the spatial set-up of the material machines on which the video medium is based, the viewer is also trapped in a temporal way. Because there is hardly any delay between the presence of the subject in front of the lens and the "now" of her image on the monitor, Krauss defines the situation of instant feedback as "the prison of a collapsed presence, that is, a present time which is completely severed from a sense of its own past" (53). Stuck in the present, in between machines, the viewing (or performing) subject is hardly able to detach herself from the instant feedback provided by the simultaneous reception and transmission of the video images; images of the self. The medium of video encapsulates the self with the self.

Especially in the early years of video's existence, artists have massively applied the medium's ability for instant feedback. First of all, artists such as Peter Weibel, Stan Douglas and Bruce Nauman produced installations in which visitors to the art gallery or museum were "closed in" by closed-circuit video formations. In 1973, for instance, Weibel created an installation with the telling title *Observation of the Observation* (1973), in which viewers would be enclosed in a circle of monitors with live feedback of themselves standing in the middle, looking at the monitors. Even more ubiquitous are the video artworks on tape in which artists position themselves within the loop of live video feedback. The medium offered performance artists the ability to record themselves while watching themselves on a monitor. Krauss bases her dismissal of video as a narcissistic practice on *Centers* (1972), a video performance by Vito Acconci in which he used the video monitor as a mirror while pointing directly at his own image for nearly 23 minutes:

> As we look at the artist sighting along his outstretched arm and forefinger towards the center of the screen we are watching, what we see is a sustained tautology: a line of sight that begins at Acconci's line of vision and ends at the eyes of his projected double. In that image of self-regard is configured a narcissism so endemic to works of video that I find myself wanting to generalize it as the condition of the entire genre. (52)

Such a generalization is accurate in the eyes of Krauss, because even outside of the instant feedback formation many artists seem to use video in order to encapsulate themselves with their own image in different ways. In *Air Time* (1973) Vito Acconci, for instance, addresses his own reflection when he sits in front of an actual mirror. Linda Benghlis has recorded her own face in profile in front of a video monitor which shows an earlier recording of her face, so that she is face to face with herself in *Now* (1973). Apart from a few videos that can be read as a form of critique on the narcissistic enclosure inherent in the medium, Krauss cannot discover self-reflexivity or any other positive,

valuable characteristic within these videos. According to her, video offers reflection in the most straightforward way; it reflects on a monitor what appears in front of its lens. This form of reflection is not critical or elucidating; it is reflection without reflexivity. The medium mirrors the artists who record themselves, but does not offer the difference between the represented subject and its representation which is indispensable in order to produce critical insights. The video image of the self may be understood as another, but this would be a classic (narcissist) mistake; it is really just a mirror image of the self. Within the space of video, there is only the self and its duplicate. The world and its conditions are bracketed out by the medium.

Krauss can be criticized for taking two parts from the field of video, and subsequently presenting these as constitutive, or representative, of the whole medium. As James Moran points out, Krauss first grounds the term video in a specific configuration of the medium (live feedback) which she represents as constitutive of the entire medium, including other technological parts and formations of the apparatus as well as its conventional aesthetics. Secondly, she conflates the medium of video with the genre of performance that appropriated it, thereby “reversing historical causality by suggesting that the properties of the video apparatus beg for solipsism, when Acconci, having already staged his narcissism in other venues, incorporated video into his repertoire upon realizing how well it could be adapted to suit his art” (Moran 10). Moreover, it is confusing that Krauss on the hand suggests that – as Moran notes – the technical apparatus of the video medium generates a narcissistic state, while she claims on the other hand that the psychological state of narcissism constitutes the medium. Therefore, it is difficult to distinguish whether narcissism should be understood as a property of the artists who work with video or of the medium itself.

In addition to these methodological objections, Krauss’ interpretation of video as narcissistic can be directly questioned. Although video is technically able to function as a mirror that splits the subject, Krauss views this ability in the narrow context of the apparatus and moment of live feedback. This context is narrow because the effect of live feedback depends on the larger field in which video operates. As David E. James argues, “the splitting of the subject and its imaginary configuration in the electronic mirror that was so important in early video may and should be negotiated […] in the total televisual environment – broadcast, interactive, cable, surveillance, medical, and so on, with which it is integrated” (124).

The fact that closed-circuit video formations are not only used in video art installations, but also in surveillance systems (CCTV) determines the way video art installations with live feedback are experienced by their (split) spectator. According to Krauss, the visitor to such installations will be so mesmerized by her own image on the monitor that she is hardly able to escape from the installation’s narcissistic grip. I would say, in contrast, that the many viewers who are familiar with the application of video as a surveillance medium will respond to such installations with the question “who is

watching me?"[84] For them, seeing their own image on a video monitor does not result in a private, enclosed sphere in which they are alone with themselves. Instead, it indicates the possibility that this privacy is being violated, that someone is watching them without their permission.

The expansion of the context in which live video feedback should be understood also has a temporal component. Many artistic recordings of instant feedback are displayed at a later time. In addition to this, Krauss does not pay attention the fact that when video artists use live feedback in order to record images of themselves, the resulting art tapes, which are presented only after the moment of taping them in a closed-circuit formation, do not show the set-up of monitor and camera at all. They just show images of the artist looking right into the camera, out of the monitor, at the viewer. So, although Vito Acconci has indeed pointed at his own image on a monitor when he produced *Centers,* this act is invisible to later spectators of the video artwork. Because of that, within the viewing situation, the forefinger of the artist is not visibly pointing at himself; it seems to address the spectator.

By focusing solely on the spatial and temporal context in which Acconci's video, as well as similar videos, were *produced*, Krauss remains unattentive to the relational dimension of the work which is so poignantly present at the moment and in the set-up of viewing. This blindness to the way Acconci's *Centers* relates to the spectator is all the more remarkable when the piece is regarded in light of Acconci's broader corpus of videos and video performances. In many of his works, Acconci explicitly addresses the spectator via the video monitor. In *Theme Song* (1973) the artist approaches the viewer in a seductive, sexual manner. While he is lying on the floor with his face close to the camera, he looks right into the recording device, at the spectator, and says things like "Why don't you come here with me? […] Look, my body comes around you. Come on, put your body next to mine. I need it, you need it." Unlike Acconci's attempt to create an intimate closeness with the viewer in *Theme Song,* he tried to keep his public at a distance in *Claim* (1971). During this three-hour video performance, Acconci sat in a basement while his image was seen on a monitor in the upstairs gallery. He behaves in a tense and violent way towards the camera, and threatens to kill anyone who tries to enter his space.

These videos do not disprove Krauss' claim that video encapsulates its users, that its apparatus forms an enclosed space in which the recorded subject is stuck. In *Claim,* Acconci clearly stakes out his territory with the help of video. Even in the case of *Theme Song,* he acknowledges that the apparatus of video forms a boundary. The fact that Acconci uses phrases such as "come here" and "come in" indicates that he differentiates between an inside and an outside of video. The artist himself is inside the space of the

[84] This question is mostly activated by viewers themselves (by their frame of reference, their ideas on video), yet some closed-circuit art video installations explicitly raise this question. Consider, for instance, the following title of a closed-circuit video installation by Bruce Nauman: *Video Surveillance Piece: Public Room, Private Room* (Nauman 1969-1970).

video apparatus he operates. He also acknowledges the boundary of the medium's interface when, in *Theme Song,* he remarks: "Of course I can't see your face. I have no idea what your face looks like. You could be anybody out there, but there's gotta be somebody watching me. Somebody who wants to come in close to me [...] Come on, I'm all alone [...]"

However, whereas Krauss theorizes video as a prison in which the recorded subject is entirely cut off from the world, Acconci understands the medium as a tool to realize an intimate space with permeable boundaries.[85] On the one hand, video can form an enclosed space in which one can be alone with oneself, act out, talk without restrictions, peer at one's mirror image, etc. Moreover, for Acconci and others, video can also be an intimate space in which one can be close to one or more other people who reside in the same space in front of the video camera – or in the case of live feedback, between the camera and the monitor. In some of his video performances, Acconci is joined in front of the lens by a woman (often this is partner Kathy Dillon), with whom he relates in a very physical manner. In *Contacts* (1971), a woman holds her hand above parts of his body. Acconci then tries to locate her hand without looking, using body heat.

On the other hand, even though Acconci relates to himself or to another person within an enclosed, intimate video space, his performances are oriented towards an audience. Often, this relationship to a viewer outside the video monitor is explicitly activated when the artist addresses her, even invites her to come into his video space. At other times this orientation is merely present because the videos are exhibited in galleries and musea. Either way, it would be a mistake to understand Acconci's work as entirely solipsistic and narcissistic. It is telling in this regard that the artist speaks of his video work as a practice that seeks to establish a "face-to-face relationship" between himself and the viewer via a monitor perceived as "a middle-ground, a depository for objects – an area where I, off-screen on one side, can hand things over to the viewer, off-screen on the other side" (Acconci in Schneider and Korot 8-9).[86]

The fact that video artworks relate to an audience even by the simple fact that they are shown in public art institutions such as galleries or musea is important to all the video artworks which, in the vein of Krauss' video theory, can easily be marked as narcissistic. The many artistic video diaries or extended uneventful video performances in which video artists record themselves for as long as the tape runs, were all produced with the aim of making artworks worthy of being shown in public. This aim, or authorial intention, has an important consequence for the temporal seclusion of the recorded subject.

Krauss argued that the subject within a live feedback loop is trapped in a collapsed present. But video artists who record their own image in such a feedback loop are not trapped in their present moment at all; they have a future audience in mind during the

[85] In an interview in *Afterimage* with Florence Gilbard, Acconci consistently addresses the video medium as an "embodiment of [...] intimate space" (1984: 9).

[86] Christine Ross has pointed out how important this remark by Acconci is in relation to Krauss' evaluation of his work and of video in general (2006: 86-87).

production of their tapes – why else record the fed-back images at all? They not only look at their "live" self-image on the monitor in order to see themselves, they also look at their self-image in order to see how future viewers will see them. The camera is often theorized as a stand-in for the absent future audience. In the case of live video feedback, however, it is the subject in front of the lens who should be understood as a stand-in for this spectator to come. Rather than an invitation to narcissism, the closed-circuit set-up offers subjects to do the opposite of narcissistic self-enclosure; to imagine themselves in the position of someone else. As a result, video artists in live closed-circuit set-ups do indeed look at themselves as others, yet this phrase does not – as Krauss has it – merely refer to Narcissus, who mistook his self-image for an other. Subjects in live feedback set-ups can view themselves from the position of another; the future viewer of the tape that is being recorded. In identifying with the other(s) who will see the image of the self, the subjects of live video feedback create a difference between themselves looking as other and their self-image. This opens the door to reflexivity.

Relational Immediacy, Social Flexibility

In both theoretical and artistic specifications of the video medium in relation to social structures, the encapsulation of the subject which Jameson and Krauss attribute to the medium is one of the dominant characteristics. However, like Acconci, many people who use video and/or reflect on it view this encapsulation as a positive, socially productive fact. The medium can draw boundaries around one person or a group of people in many ways. Yet the spatial and temporal enclosure which can be created by the medium tends to be permeable and provisional. Moreover, the enclosure is also understood as an intimate haven in which or from which the subject can safely relate to others. Hence, although video's propensity to encapsulate its users has been widely theorized as an ability which creates socially isolated narcissists, the same ability has been understood even more pervasively as a potential that enables social development and the formation of social relationships.

In addition, the video formation of live feedback that Krauss took as a model for video's narcissistic nature, can just as well serve as a model for more positive, even utopian perspectives on the medium in question. For in the closed-circuit formation, a few important socially employable qualities of the medium are highlighted. The medium's immediacy can be discerned within the structure of instant feedback, where images are simultaneously recorded and reproduced. This immediacy has been pointed out as one of the reasons why video can serve to sustain social bonds as well as enforce social change. For the immediate transmission of recorded images enables live communication as well as a rapid dissemination of beliefs. It can bring people close to one another in a temporal respect, as distances can be spanned in a split second by the electronic video signal.

The communicative potential of video becomes even more apparent when its immediacy is coupled with the impression of intimacy and privacy which video is able to create. The possibility to record video images of oneself without the presence of others

stimulates openness. It invites the exposure of personal details, visceral sensations and interior speech. The immediacy of the medium, however, offers a rapid dissolution of such an enclosed, private space between the camera and the subject in front of it, as the recorded images can be disseminated widely and instantly. This immediacy may seem to be at odds with the impression of privacy. However, they can be said to work together in one important respect: they facilitate "intrapsychic communication, abrogating the monadic isolation of the postmodern subject" (Tamblyn 13). For video invites you to speak your mind, and can subsequently transmit your mind to many others. Tamblyn, Burnett and Marchessault, among others, have emphasized that video often functions as an effective communication technology that creates useful interrelations and interactions (debates, exchange of experiences) between human subjects. It is remarkable that, for Tamblyn, video hasn't caused the isolation of the postmodern subject at all (Baudrillard, Jameson); it rather phases this isolation out.

A second characteristic of the live feedback set-up that has come to stand for the medium as a whole in discourses on video's socializing effects is that it offers many positions to its user. A person who produces a closed-circuit video and takes up the position in front of the camera and adjoined monitor is simultaneously the subject who operates the camera, the subject in front of the camera, the represented subject on the monitor, and the viewing subject. In other words, the user of such an installation is both the enunciating and enunciated subject, the sender and the receiver of the video images, both the recording and recorded subject, both viewing and viewed subject. Whereas the specific set-up of live feedback allows a single person to occupy all these positions at once, the medium in general offers its users the flexibility to choose and alternate between these positions.

Alternation between the positions of sender and receiver viewer doesn't necessarily involve a switch between positions in front or behind the camera, or in front or on screen. For, in addition to the video apparatuses of the (possibly closed-circuit) camera and the TV monitor, the VCR can be seen as a device that enables its users to become a producer and a viewer at the same time. Because of video's rewinding, forwarding and pausing functions, each video viewer can produce its own object by manipulating video time while watching. For this reason, Siegfried Zielinski has defined the video recorder an "audiovisual time machine" in his book *Audiovisions* (1999). He writes that the equipment made it possible for its users to intervene manipulatively in the time structures and processes that had been fixed centrally from the user's side. He attaches much social value to this possibility. In societies in which many people were restricted by rigid time regimes due to continual intensification of work processes, such an opportunity to intervene in time formed a pleasant relief from the feeling of being pressed for time – an empowering experience. The contrast with Jameson's view of video as a medium that smothers its viewers by its continual flow couldn't be higher.

In sum, the apparatus of video allows its users flexibility and agency. Users can alternate between viewing, recording, and being recorded. In addition, they can shape

the footage at many points during the production and viewing process. This flexibility, moreover, offers reflexivity; in some of the video practices I discuss below, combining and alternating between positions in front and behind the camera as well as the monitor serve as strategies in investigations into social identity. Together with video's immediacy and its typical form of (intimate) encapsulation, the flexibility and agency the medium offers to its users are key aspects in the way in which video operates within social structures, both on micro and on macro levels. In the following sections I will first investigate three domains – confession, therapy and testimony – in which video affects social relationships predominantly on a micro level. After that, I will investigate how video is used as a tool, weapon or counterspace in practices which aim to affect social structures on a macro level.

Confession, Therapy and Testimony

The intimacy to which Acconci and many others attribute the space in front of the video camera forms the basis for three closely related discourses that have become dominant within the field of video: confession, therapy and testimony. In each of these domains, human subjects expose personal information. They confess their secrets and crimes, work through and analyze their traumas and deepest emotions, and narrate painful memories. Video proliferates within each of the three fields. The medium is widely applied as a confessional apparatus, a therapeutic device, and a "witness to witnesses" when recording people who bear testimony. The medium seems to stimulate something which is crucial within these three domains, namely the willingness to open up and tell what is on one's mind.

This outburst of personal stories in front of the video camera not only leads to the question of how video encourages these exposures, but also brings up the issue of intersubjective relationships. Confessants tell their (shameful) truths to a confessor; a figure of authority who judges, punishes, consoles and grants absolution. Therapy is guided by a therapist, who asks questions, provides insights, analyzes the patient's narration and restores injured or incomplete subjectivities. Likewise, bearing testimony to serious facts is not carried out in a vacuum, but requires one or more interlocutors who join a witness in a so-called testimonial alliance; a bond of trust that safeguards the fact that the testimony is being heard and is taken seriously. What happens when video enters these scenes? How does it affect or enable the small yet essential social structures on which confession, therapy and testimony rely? What happens to the relationship between the speaking subject and their interlocutor, addressee or audience when people talk to the video camera?

Video Confession

In "Video Confessions" (1996) Michael Renov points out that the confessional discourse is prominent in contemporary video art. He distinguishes between two forms of video confession: first, the form in which the artist invites other people to confess in front of the

video camera, usually in the presence of the artist himself, and secondly, the form of video confession in which artists point the camera at themselves in order make confessions about their personal lives. Examples of the first form of video confession include Maxie Cohen's *Intimate Interviews: Sex in Less Than Two Minutes* (1984) in which six persons speak directly into the camera about their sex lives, and *Anger* (1986), in which people, as individuals, gangs, or couples, speak about the emotion resulting from what has hurt them (they have been slashed, raped, betrayed, and abused) and which has driven them to violent acts themselves. Another well-known example is Gillian Wearing's video series called *Confess All On Video. Don't Worry You Will Be in Disguise. Intrigued? Call Gillian* (1994). In response to an advertisement in *Time Out* magazine, masked people confess in front of Wearing's camera that they have, for instance, betrayed their girlfriend, stolen computer equipment from a school, or like to make obscene phone calls.

The second form of confession, which shows the artist as confessant, was developed by Lynn Hershman, Vanalyne Greene, Sadie Benning, Ilene Segalov, Susan Mogul, Skip Sweeney, George Kuchar and many others. While looking directly into the camera, or providing images of themselves with voice-overs, these artists tell of their most intimate struggles. In *Binge* (1987), Hershman tells of her eating disorder while we see her gaining and losing weight over time. Likewise, Vanalyne Green discusses her bulimia and complicated relationships with men in relation to her childhood with alcoholic parents in *Trick or Drink* (1985). Between 1988 and 1993, Sadie Benning created a series of videos with a PixelVision camera in which she narrates her thoughts, struggles and experiences as a gay teenager.

According to Renov, the videotaped autobiographical confessions draw more on video's specific technological abilities than the video confessions where artists record the confessions of others instead of their own. In order to point out that the latter form of confession is not unique to video, Renov refers to some of the experiments in direct cinema with the development of "camera confessions" in the documentary mode. In *Chronique d'un été* (Rouch and Morin 1961), for instance, the filmmakers – one with a background in sociology, the other in anthropology – self-reflexively investigate whether and if so how people can act normal and real in front of the lens. They film a group of young Parisians during some every-day activities, as well as during lively group discussions on contemporary subjects. Although the level of reality within the film is under discussion within the work itself, the filmed characters certainly seem to open up to the camera. One of the female individuals (Marceline), for instance, confesses that she could never sleep with a black man, another woman (Marilou) breaks down in tears when she acknowledges how depressed and isolated she really feels.

One of the filmmakers, Jean Rouch, later claimed that the camera functions like a psychoanalytic stimulant that lets people do things they wouldn't otherwise do. In an interview, Rouch explains how he discovered that the camera "was not a brake but let's say, to use an automobile term, an accelerator" (Rouch in Eaton, 51). Following this line of thought, we can conclude that the presence of any camera, video or film, would

stimulate confession. Because it represents a wide potential audience, the camera taps into the exhibitionist desires of those in front of the lens. However, as Rouch remarks, confessions in front of the camera are not always entirely exhibitionistic. According to him, the camera can be understood as both a window which is open to the outside, and a mirror. Without the live presence of an audience, and with the camera operator hidden silently behind the lens, confessions to the film camera miss a directly responding interlocutor. Therefore, they "backfire" at the confessing self.[87]

However, in the case of both filmed and videotaped confessions, the personal exposures by filmed subjects are very often truncated dialogues for as long as they are somehow directed, stimulated or set-up by film or video artists. According to Renov, a crucial break appears when the camera as confessional instrument is taken up by the confessant herself. Again, the camera has not uniquely been used as an autobiographical confessional tool within the field of video. Jonas Mekas, Maya Deren, Stan Brakhage and many others have produced films in a first-person diaristic style. Yet Renov claims that the medium of video has added something specific to the first-person camera confession. Video has increased the independency and the privacy of the confessant:

> [...] even Brakhage's hand-wrought signatures, etched into the emulsion itself, could not free the cineaste from a dependence on large-scale manufacturers who could discontinue stocks (even whole formats) if profit margins sagged. Then, too, there were the vagaries of the local lab to contend with. The development of the Sony portapak in the mid-1960s provided visual artists with a greater possibility for relative autonomy. [...] Indeed, the potential for the handcrafting so beloved by 16mm and 8mm enthusiasts has been lost in transition to electronic pixels. In exchange, the independent video maker or home consumer has been relieved of certain mediating contingencies – material and temporal – that separate shooting from viewing, production from exhibition. It is the systematic solipsism and "immediacy" of video [...] that suit it so well to the confessional impulse. No technician need see or hear the secrets confided to tape. None but the invited enter the loop of video confession. (1996: 84)

The fact that artists gain full control over their confessions by way of video does not mean that their tapes are not to be seen by others. As mentioned before, video artists who videotape themselves do have an audience in mind. They do not make diaries that remain locked on a nightstand. Artists who confess on video address an absent, imagined confessor-other, a virtual partner, an unknown future viewer. On the one hand, the video set-up encloses the confessant; no one has to enter the loop in order to record a confession. On the other hand, the video apparatus links the confessant to this future audience. This combination of complete temporal and spatial separation from an

[87] Renov correctly notes that "Rouch's insight brilliantly anticipates what the video apparatus (with the playback monitor mounted alongside the camera) realizes" (83).

audience, with the potentiality to be heard and seen in the future anyway is the ideal instigator of confessional monologues. In the words of Renov: “The virtual presence of a partner – the imagined other effectuated by the technology – turns out to be a more powerful facilitator of emotion than flesh-and-blood interlocutors. Camera operators, sound booms, cables, and clapper boards are hardly a boon to soul confession” (89).

Although the technology of video is theorized as an important reason for the ubiquity of video confessions, these technological characteristics of video do not entirely cause or determine the first-person confessional practices as carried out by video artists. The adoption of video as a confessional apparatus has equally been generated by the societies in which the medium exists. First of all, the medium has evolved into a world where the act of confession has become less and less exclusive. Everyone confesses to everyone else over and over again.[88] Secrets are no longer merely made available to professional confessors such as priests and therapists, they are conveyed to mass audiences through mass media such as magazines and television. It is impossible to say how those media, including video itself, are the cause or merely the vehicle of this social transformation.[89] In addition, the artistic video confession can, from a Western perspective, be viewed in a development which starts in the religious organization of medieval society and ends in today’s capitalist economy. As Renov explains, the first-person video confession is founded on religious transformations in the sixteenth century, but was ultimately born of late capitalism:

> From a crudely developmental perspective, one could say that first-person video confession has simply built on an evolutionary dynamic in which the public confession initially ordained by medieval church doctrine gave way to a private, one-on-one ritual. Then, in the sixteenth century, Protestantism eliminated the externalization of confession as a face-to-face ritual of reconciliation, fostering a kind of spiritual entrepreneurship. Video preserves and deepens that dynamic of privatization and entrepreneurship. Now, with the help of cameras, video makers can exhume their deepest fears and indiscretions all on their own, and then put their neuroses on display. In a sense, first-person video confession is uniquely suited to its moment. Born of late-stage capitalism, it endows therapeutic practice with exchange value. (88-89)

In the above, Renov defines the first-person video as a therapeutic practice. Merely telling their story to the camera helps the speaking subjects; they cure themselves by talking. This doesn’t require the presence of an interlocutor, or a therapist who analyzes

[88] This is the conclusion of Mimi White (1992), who examined American television programs.

[89] Although artistic video confession certainly relates to the explosion of confessions that can be witnessed on television, on the radio or in magazines, the confessional art videos which are under discussion here operate in a different domain. Although artworks do have an exchange value, they are often considered to be counterindustrial in comparison, for instance, to confessional TV shows, as they are usually produced at a low cost and have a limited audience.

the speaking subject. However, the medium of video as such offers the confessant a form of self-reflexivity because of its flexibility. Although this is not necessarily visible in the texts, the speaking subject can become a critical viewer and analyst of her own tape either during the production period or later on. In her *Electronic Diaries*, Lynn Hershman for instance responds to her own footage, which she watches between the sessions in front of the camera during the extended period of time in which she has recorded her tapes. She discusses her dissociation from her own body, which she also experiences when she watches herself on tape.

In addition, as I will show later on with the help of Hershman's *Electronic Diaries* as well as Sadie Benning's *It Wasn't Love* (1992), a level of (self)analysis is often obtained by the confessants in post-production. Through editing, voice-overs, inserts and video effects such as split screens and fade-outs, the artists organize, recreate, interpret, and analyze their own confessions. Hershman, in addition, applies the video-specific techniques of layering and chroma-keying. Whereas the term "layering" refers to several ways by which video images can be combined, for instance through transparency or inserts, chroma-keying specifically involves the replacement of one color within a video image with another video feed. The latter technique is best-known for its application in the "green-screen" room, which is widely applied in advanced modes of digital filmmaking. Today, this form of video layering has become invisible in its most professional digital forms. State-of-the-art computer software as well as the high definition of contemporary video formats have enabled video keying to evolve into a technique which has become indispensable to the creation of spectacular fictional film worlds by way of smooth and seamless, cinematic-looking images. However, unlike contemporary digital narrative feature films, video artworks often display the different layers of video keying. Especially when the technique of video keying was still in its infancy, it led to prominently visible layers. For Hershman, as for many other video artists, video keying and layering serve as rhetorical tools by which meanings can be produced, connections can be made, and relations can be visually analyzed.[90]

[90] Alongside the therapeutic analytical value of video keying, the political usefulness of medium-specific technique had been recognized by film and video artists. In their film essay *Ici et Ailleurs* (1976), Jean-Luc Godard and Anne-Marie Miéville, for instance, apply chroma-keying as a form of spatial montage. In the film, they critique film for being such a temporal medium: cinema is always one image after another, Godard complains in voice-over. How can this succession of images demonstrate meaningful, important political connections in the world? How can relationships between *ici* et *ailleurs,* or *here* and *elsewhere,* be understood when film images only show things in sequence? Godard and Miéville solve this shortcoming of the cinematic medium through video keying. By putting layers of images on top of each other, the stream of moving images is spatialized, Godard and Miéville suggest. As such, political and historical analyses as well as statements can be made. By placing images of Hitler on top of Golda Meir's portrait, or by keying Meir's portrait into images of female Palestinian warriors, the filmmakers produce comparisons and contrasts with a fierce political content. After *Ici et Ailleurs* Godard has frequently applied video in addition to, or as an improvement of film in less activist works. It is telling in this regard that in a relatively recent work the French director has told the history of cinema by way of video. In *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1998), video keying and layering function as the piece's core rhetorical tools in postulating and visualizing interrelations in film history. Interrelations, moreover, which film itself would not be able to expose.

Another form of therapeutic analysis and reflection is carried out when the confessors discuss their tapes with a selected audience. Hershman, for instance, showed her footage to close friends while she was working on her diaries. She discusses and processes their reactions in her tapes, thereby allowing her friends to take up the function of a responding substitute therapist. I will return to the work of Benning and Hershman in the last section of this chapter. In order to further analyze the relation of the medium of video to discourses of confession, therapy and testimony in works such as those of Hershman and Benning, it is first necessary to gain a more general overview of the application of video within the domains of therapy and testimony.

Video Therapy

As Hershman's example already indicated, the video medium can have therapeutic value when it is used in a self-reflexive way by one person. However, video's therapeutic effects become more apparent when the medium is, so to speak, shared by several people who interact with each other while recording or watching a video. In the 1980s, video therapy was rife. Therapists used the camera to film (group) therapy sessions, in order to discuss the material with the patients later on. The camera could also be handed over to the patient, who would then record images of problematic situations in everyday life, or speak to the camera in the absence of the therapist.[91] Again, this footage would serve as an object for analysis in later sessions. Today, the video camera is still often used by psychologists and pedagogues in family therapy. Dysfunctional families are placed under video surveillance in their homes, so that the therapist can gain insight in their problems. In addition, this video material can be used to show the family members, usually the parents, where they are going wrong. By rewinding, repeating and pausing the footage, the therapist or educationalist points out pitfalls, and then explains how the family members can improve their familial relationships.[92]

Video can also have a therapeutic effect when it is used between two subjects without the added mediation of a professional therapist. One of the videos that, according to Renov, established the paradigm of interpersonal video therapy is *The Continuing Story of Carel and Ferd* (Ginsberg 1975). Initially, videographer Arthur Ginsberg planned to catch the complicated relationship between a former porn actress (Carel) and a bi-sexual drug addict (Ferd) on tape himself, but the couple took the camera from him in order to videotape each other.[93] Carel and Ferd in turn operate the camera. They alternately pose

91 The application of video as a therapeutic device is addressed in *Onourown* (1990), a video documentary by Joe Gibbons and Tony Oursler. The documentary shows how two psychiatric patients are deinstitutionalized. After years of being cared for in the hospital, Tony and Joe are forced to leave due to budget cutbacks. They seek employment and live, for the first time in their lives, completely on their own. As part of their outpatient therapy they are asked to keep a video diary. See also: ‹www.eai.org›.

92 This form of video therapy is popular in TV shows which show how dysfunctional families are saved by the intervention of pedagogical experts.

93 Ginsberg was one of the members of the alternative video collective "Video Free America." Although he deals with a small social community in the *Continuing Story,* Ginsberg was concerned with the way in which the video medium could change American society in general.

and answer difficult questions. The lens of the camera puts a boundary between them which provides them with the distance they need in order to talk. They agree to become an object of scrutiny and observation, only because the camera turns and turns. They are each other's object of investigation. The camera creates an objectifying distance, yet it is used to observe the other in close-up. Carel and Ferd film each other at a close range, they peer over each other's skin with the camera and focus on small bodily details and gestures. The ability to enable intrapsychic communication, which Tamblyn attributed to video, seems to be exploited to the fullest here. Carel and Ferd do not only extract each other's deepest thoughts and feelings because the camera facilitates personal conversation; they seem to catch each other's lies and truths by using the camera as a so-called kino-eye. The lens reveals what the filmed subjects hide.

In Wendy Clarke's *One on One* series (1991-1994), the camera doesn't reveal because of its extraordinary optical capacities, but because it enables communication between human subjects who will never meet. Clarke, who is a video artist and a psychiatrist, organized her *One on One* project with the aim to bring inmates in contact with people from the outside through video. She coupled imprisoned criminals with members of an American church community, and consequently provided both parties with a video camera and a VCR. With this equipment, the inmate and the outsider would record and send video messages to each other, and view each other's messages in the privacy of their home or cell. Although Clarke assisted them with the technicalities of video production, she let the correspondence follow its course. The only pre-condition was that the prisoner and the outsider wouldn't meet in real life during or after their video correspondence. This precondition, in combination with some of the technical possibilities of the video medium, seems to be a perfect recipe for a therapeutic form of interaction between two subjects.

In one of the most famous correspondences from the *One on One* series called *Ken and Louise*, prisoner (Ken) and church member (Louise) rapidly establish a meaningful relationship through the interchange of videotapes. Although they have to get used to the camera at first, they soon start telling and showing things to each other which they have never exposed to anyone else before. Louise, who has a very cheerful appearance, for instance confesses that she actually feels very depressed and lonely. She shows a secret cuddly toy to Ken, analyzes her problematic relationships with men, and confesses that she finds Ken attractive. The tough-looking Ken talks about his vulnerable side and plays songs to Louise. Although Ken and Louise respond to each other's stories all the time, the most important therapeutic effect of the project seems to be that they can expose their own problems to someone who is open and vulnerable in return. Both Ken and Louse note how easily they can open up to someone who is absent at the time of recording, and whom they will never meet outside of Clarke's video project. The fact that the involved subjects will never be physically proximate to each other is vital to their sincerity and openness. In this case, the medium of video sustains therapeutic and

confessional interaction between people, because it allows for the exchange of intimate details while some form of physical distance can remain intact.

Video Testimony

The genre of testimony overlaps with the therapeutic domain. People who testify have usually witnessed crimes – crimes of which they sometimes were the victim. Testifying can be a way of coming to grips with the experienced wrongdoings. At times, giving testimony can even relieve trauma. One of the key characteristics of a traumatic experience is that it cannot be integrated into existing systems of signification or meaning schemes. Because of this, traumatic experiences are stored differently; they cannot be remembered at will, but are reenacted involuntarily.[94] When traumatized witnesses agree to testify, they have to put their trauma into words, into one or many stories. Because of this, the witness possibly enters into a process of working through the trauma.

Geoffrey Hartman has argued that testifying can be helpful to a witness, even if it doesn't solve trauma. In the 1980s, Hartman was an initiator of one of the most famous video testimony projects, the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale University. Since the well-known archive opened its doors, Hartman has published a number of articles in which he critically reflects upon the process of collecting testimonies. According to this American literary theorist, one of the core aspects of testimony is its communal dimension. Testimonies are dialogic; people who give testimony are guided by an interviewer who asks questions and, most importantly, listens carefully in order to emphasize that the person who tells the story is important, as well as the story he tells (Hartman 1995: 194). "The interview situation is social in that it recognizes the survivor and acknowledges what has been endured" says Hartman (1995: 195). In his view, "the interviewing process creates an ad hoc community, and whether or not telling the story relieves traumatic stress, that communal dimension is a comfort" (1995: 202). The small "communities of transmission" formed by those who collect testimonies help to alleviate the isolation of survivors/witnesses.

What is more, a pact is formed within the communities of transmission. The listener adopts the special responsibility of becoming a secondary witness to the memory of the testifying subject. The primary witness depends on the secondary witness to understand the significance of the memory, to extend it in time and space, and to make it public (Assmann 269). This brings us to another side of testimony. On the one hand, giving testimony usually concerns the possibly therapeutic act of narrating private, personal experiences within the intimate relationship of trust between witness and interviewer. On the other hand, the interviewers represent the larger community to which they will hand over the testimony. For testifying is also an act which is, in the end, oriented towards a larger, public domain. As Hartman points out; "Testimony has both a private dimension, which is confessional and spiritual, and a public aspect, which is political and judicial" (1995: 195).

[94] See also Van Alphen (2005: 168).

When testimonies are recorded by a video camera, as is the case with the Holocaust testimonies which are recorded by the Fortunoff archive, both the public and the private dimension of the testimony are affected by the presence of the medium.[95] As video is a medium that can store a lot of visual and auditory information at once, that can store and preserve this information relatively well, that allows easy replay, and can rapidly be disseminated, video is very much suited to disseminate testimonies to a wide public. In addition, testimonies may benefit from the reality effect the medium is able to create through some of its medium-specific conventional artifices. Such a reality effect may sustain a testimony's status as reliable evidence.

However, as Hartman claims, video can also produce an *un*reality effect. For viewers who are acquainted with the wide array of video manipulations and animations which are applied in so many of the contemporary (digital) videos by which we are surrounded on TV and the Internet, it becomes hard to look at video without suspecting manipulation. According to Hartman, especially young television addicts suffer from a fatal form of suspension, not a suspension of disbelief, but rather a suspension of belief, "which consist in looking at everything live as if it were a reality that could be manipulated" (2000: 4). The video testimonies that were collected by the Fortunoff archive counter this *un*reality effect by using as little artifice as possible; no editing, no dissolves, etc. In the end, such an unedited style is, of course, a reality-effect producing *device* as well. It is a suitable device in light of testimony, though, because other videomatic reality-effect producing devices, such as hand-held camera movements or poor lighting, might detract too much attention from the testifying subject and her story.

In addition, the private domain of testimony is potentially threatened when video enters the community of transmission, because video can produce what some call a cold gaze. The medium is often understood as aggressive, in the sense that it provides an unemotional, unengaged perspective of the subject in front of the lens. It is said to objectify whatever and whoever it captures on tape. For witnesses who are simultaneously victims of the facts they testify to, which is evident in the case of Holocaust survivors, such an objectification is especially problematic. Victims such as Holocaust survivors have been the object of an oppressive gaze which "intended to implant in them a permanent feeling of nakedness and vulnerability" (Hartman 2002: 96). The "imperturbable" video camera (Hartman's word) should not form a reenactment of this gaze .

According to Hartman, the minimal visuality that characterizes the Fortunoff video testimonies not only counters the possible unreality effect of video images, but also works against the cold and objectifying focus of the video camera. During the recording

[95] The genre of video testimony is also widely applied by Human Rights Organizations and other organizations which aim to address, expose, prosecute, and/or help to remember acts of injustice and crime. Today, such organizations sometimes use or create online video sharing sites on the Internet in order to reach a global audience for their collected testimonies. See for instance ‹www.engagemedia.org›; an online video sharing site focused on social justice and environmental issues in the Asia-Pacific.

process, the interviewers did not limit the time of the testimony or impose any conditions whatsoever. In addition, the camera's mobility, as well as its visual field, remains restricted to the face and gestures of one person speaking in a particular place, at a particular time. The words of the witnesses do not fade out, or into a cinematic simulacrum of the events being described. In addition, although excerpts of some testimonies have been made available on DVD and online, the archive only stores original recordings which are not edited or adjusted in post-production. Moreover, the testimonies are not freely delivered to the impersonal market forces of electronic recall and dissemination; the archive guards the spread and accessibility of the survivor statements. In sum, in the case of the Fortunoff video testimonies, the witness' autonomy is maximized, both during the recording of the testimony and in post-production.

Hartman contrasts this form of video testimony with cinematic documentaries which rely on testifying witnesses, such as Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985). In comparison to testimonial videos, films tends to apply more artifice. Lanzmann's documentary is heavily edited in postproduction; it combines the stories of the witnesses with shots of present day locations. Moreover, during the interviews, the director sometimes put witnesses in difficult situations in order to jog their memory as well as their emotions. When one of the survivors speaks without emotion of how he had to cut the hair of fellow inmates, Lanzmann prompts him to cut the hair of a fellow survivor in order to spur his emotions. Many critics have defined Lanzmann's persistent intrusions as a form of exploitation (Bell-Metereau 426). The reason for this exploitation may lie with an additional factor which possibly affects the autonomy of the witness: the fact that documentaries on celluloid are embedded in the impersonal, commercial film industry. The medium of video is not as strongly related to conventions of editing, and grants its producers with more industrial independence because of its inexpensiveness. Hence, video can more easily be used in a way that does not intrude into the testimony as it is told; it leaves the pace and space of the testimonial act intact.

When video is used in such a nonintrusive, yet attentive way, the medium is anything but cold, according to Hartman (2000:11). In fact, many scholars as well as witnesses stress that video "re-embodied" those who had been denied their human body image in the camps. It gave "the tortured person back his human form, which was snatched away from him" (Applefeld 92). In the eyes of Hartman, the medium of video has had a positive effect on the witness testimonies as collected by the Fortunoff archive. In addition, he claims that the positive effect might be reciprocal. Survivor videography has had a potential impact on the medium: within the specific context of Holocaust witness statements, the minimalistic style of the video testimonies has overturned the coldness of the medium, and has turned video's objectifying gaze into and embodying and subjectifying mode of looking.

In addition, it is important to realize that the simple, minimalistic style of the testimonial videos is not merely valuable for the witnesses. From a political and pedagogical perspective, the quality of the gaze which the videos produce is just as

important for the viewers as for the testifying subjects. Every viewer of a video testimony, in an ideal situation, becomes a part of the testimonial community. Like the interviewer who is present at the moment of recording, the viewer of the video is supposed to understand the significance of the testimony. Moreover, in a best-case scenario, the viewer adopts the responsibility of the testimonial alliance; namely to extend the narrated memory in time and space (if only by remembering it). If a spectator were to have a cold attitude of disbelief towards the witness they viewed on tape, some of the intended effects of the testimonies on their audience, such as "learning from the past" and "remembering forward," would surely be precluded. In a way, this would also concern the testifying subjects, who have an interest in the reception of their testimony.

Other potential problems which can block the viewers' ability to remember and learn from the horrors of the past are secondary traumatization and so-called compassion fatigue. When viewers, as secondary witnesses, overidentify with the primary witness who testifies, or when they are too heavily shocked by the suffering which is relayed in testimonies, they may not really be able to receive the stories; they will repress them instead. However, the pressure to respond to testimonies with empathy is enormous, and images and stories of human suffering are ubiquitous today. This may lead to a certain numbness; to an inability to feel compassion at all. Both over-identification and compassion fatigue indicate that empathy needs to be managed. The forms in which suffering is represented can play an important role in this respect. Hartman is of the opinion that, when it comes to the genre of survivor testimony, video is well suited to manage the empathy of the viewer. On the one hand, video testimonies reconnect the enormous event of the Holocaust with the concrete voice and face of an individual (Assmann 272). On the other hand, it doesn't overload the viewer with visual representations of the narrated story, as is sometimes the case in cinematic renderings of (Holocaust) testimonies. Video in its most minimalist form is able to relay terrible stories in a bearable, and therefore effective way.

Hartman's concern that explicit images of suffering may traumatize or numb the viewer is shared by theorists who focus on *films* that deal with the Holocaust. In *Haunted Images: Film, Ethics, Testimony and the Holocaust* (2008), Libby Saxton for instance wonders if "it is possible that images of atrocity might effectively shield us from the event itself," as she notes Slavoj Žižek's warning that "imaginary images of trauma can work to screen us from the Real rather than allowing us to approach it" (60). However, in spite of these concerns, film scholars do not necessarily share Hartman's belief that, in comparison to video, the cinema is less able to manage the viewer's empathy so that she can really receive what happened.

Siegfried Kracauer has argued that although films often present us with agitating visions, the audience is put at a distance via the camera's lens. This distance allows for a less distorted vision of a potentially disturbing reality. Therefore, Kracauer contends that the cinema "aims at transforming the agitated witness into a conscious observer" (58). In addition, Saxton argues that films of the Holocaust in particular play a vital role

in the process of seeking truthful ways of bearing witness (122). She does not so much underline Kracauer's belief that the apparatus of film creates a safe and reflective distance from horrific events; instead, she points out that films which deal with the Holocaust often use ellipses and blind spots as a strategy to refer to horrors without showing them explicitly. Through such strategies, films "dose" the empathy and shock to which they give rise. Like video, film is therefore able to tell horrible stories in a bearable manner. Yet films manage to do so in a different way than the video testimonies.

Video against Television, Video for Change

In addition to the confessional and testimonial genres discussed above, video is frequently used for activism. In a large number of activist projects and movements, the medium is posited as a space apart from the dominant social order, or as a tool which can be used in order to reflect on or re-create conventional social roles and structures. For many of these video practices, the term "alternative" does not quite express the overtone. They often have a militant character. Video is viewed as a counterspace, a space for resistance and action, or – when the metaphor of space is left behind – as a weapon. The medium it is not just used apart from, but *against* the ruling order.

Video was first used as a "counter-medium" in the United States, right after the invention of the Portapak. Artists, social activists, journalists, political groups, and alternative movements all embraced the versatile video camera as a way to bring about social change. The video camera was, however, not adopted in the first place as a weapon against dominant social conventions and structures. The aggressor which had to be opposed was the presumed cause of dominant social patterns: broadcast television. In contradistinction to Jameson's idea that broadcast television and video are one and the same medium, early video pioneers viewed popular television as video's evil other.

Commercial TV was seen as a vehicle for passivity and exclusivity. With its standardized program structures and aesthetically homogenized offerings, broadcast television was believed to inscribe stereotypes and conformist patterns of behavior into society. Throughout the U.S., video collectives were formed with the idea of producing an alternative form of television, called guerilla television. Groups with telling names such as Video Free America, People's Video Theater, Global Village, TVTV (Top Value Television), and Videofreex, first screened their guerilla tapes to a small "in-crowd" audience in galleries, lofts, and vans because the video signal could not yet be broadcast on television. However, after some technical and legal changes in the 1970s, the guerilla television groups could finally broadcast their footage on public television, and reach the masses.[96]

Under the influence of McLuhan's deterministic medium theory, these guerilla video

[96] In 1972, the U.S. federal mandate required local origination programming on cable and opened the wires to public access. In 1973, the stand-alone time-base corrector was introduced; a black box that stabilized helical scan tapes and made them broadcastable. Because of that, it was finally possible for small-format video to become a stable television production medium, which paved the way for guerrilla television (Boyle 229).

activist believed that in working against broadcast television (a.k.a. "beast television") by invading it with their new medium, they would (at least partially) restore the corrupting impact of commercial TV on society. In addition, guerilla television was very much shaped by McLuhan's ideas on television. According to the medium theorist, the medium of television itself did not create the passivity, uniformity and social homogenization the video guerillas attributed to commercial television. In *Understanding Media* (1964) McLuhan had claimed that in the electronic age of television, uniqueness and diversity can be fostered as never before. In addition, all the unique and diverse energies can be shared on a global scale, as the new electronic medium interrelated the local and the global. In the eyes of the video activists, this potential of the televisual medium had not yet been realized, as the medium was held back by conventional and commercial structures. This had to be countered by way of video, a medium with an even stronger propensity towards uniqueness and diversity, as well as interrelation on a large scale.

Because of the influence of McLuhan's ideas on these widespread video collectives, it is possible to conclude that, in the 1960s and 1970s, video was for a large part a product of medium theory, that is, of theoretical ideas on the nature and effect of media in general, and in particular of medium theory on another medium, television. For one of the most dominant applications of the new video technology was shaped by theoretical ideas on electronic media. And by gaining a specific field of application, with its own goals and conventions, the technology became a medium.

McLuhan's axiom that the "medium is the message" formed a starting point for the video collectives. In addition, McLuhan's emphasis on the logic and form of the medium can more specifically be recognized in the importance the video makers attached to the formal features and stylistic traits of their tapes. The video guerillas embraced the unpolished formal features of their video footage. The grittiness and lack of sharpness of the black-and-white images, as well as the real-time character of the unedited tapes, were all dictated by the technological characteristics – or in retrospect, the limitations – of the early video machines; yet this rawness was praised as an honest style in contrast with the quick, edited scenes of conventional television (Boyle 228).

Although the unpolished style of guerilla television videos was caused by technological necessity, its conscious acceptance and further elaboration was very much indebted to cinéma vérité. In addition to its unpolished style, the guerilla video collectives followed the vérité principle of participatory filmmaking. The video camera was taken into the crowd, in order to view events from within – not from the conventional lofty, "objective" viewpoint of TV cameras positioned to survey an event (Boyle 228). This relationship with cinéma vérité in particular, as well as with film in general, was all the more active because many of the video activists were trained in film and/or had worked within the field of cinéma vérité (Paul Goldsmith, Wendy Appel and Ira Schneider, amongst others). However, it is important to realize that although the work of video guerillas was clearly influenced by the medium of film, the collectives didn't set out to make or re-create film. Their target was television.

In addition to video's "raw" style, the video guerillas regarded the accessibility and mobility of the video medium as sources for social change. Unlike television's predilection for uniformity and conventionality, video's accessible and mobile technology was seen as an opportunity to give a voice to the many different kinds of people in society, and to reach a variety of specific audiences. For instance, in one of TVTV's most famous video documentaries titled *Lord of the Universe* (1974), a young American Guru (Prem Rawat) and his followers are portrayed by mingling camera men at a large public event at the Houston Astrodome called "Millennium '73." However, in addition to the followers, many other voices are heard by the Portapak-carrying documentary makers. Adherents of other belief systems appear in the video, such as a Hare Krishna follower and a born-again Christian who criticizes devotees for "following the devil." In addition, former followers are interviewed about their disillusionment with the Guru's teachings. The method of recording a multitude of opinions from a participatory position is not an exception in contemporary television programs. In the 1970's, however, this form of television making was new. Journalist Ron Powers therefore rightfully called *Lord of the Universe* "a peek into the future of television" (1974). The diversity of the filmed people, moreover, matched the variety of audiences which the documentary eventually managed to reach. The video was first broadcast on WNET, a local non-commercial educational television station. Later on, it reached a national audience when it appeared on 200 stations of national public television. In addition, the documentary was included in an exhibition on video art at the Whitney Museum of American art.

Guerilla collectives such as TVTV held the opinion that by "de-centralizing" television, video would broadcast as well as "narrow-cast" a democracy of ideas, opinions and cultural expressions – made both by and for the people – on cable television. These ideas, opinions and cultural expressions could so easily be mediated by video because of the light-weight video camera. As Lili Berko explains:

> The most revolutionary aspect of the porta-pak was its mobility. Through the porta-pak, television production was not locked into a studio and the confines of the codes of such a mediated experience. [...] Video soon became the vehicle through which the social world could be documented, the vehicle which would record the voices and the images of the Newark riots, or a Mardi Gras celebration; as such it proclaimed the public sphere to be its own. (Berko in Tamblyn 292)

As Berko's lines point out, McLuhan's message that the medium is the message wasn't completely taken to heart by the activist video makers. Although the basic characteristics of the medium were expected to make a lot of difference, the message – or content – of their videos was important to the guerilla activists too. Berko's remarks that the social world was *documented*, while the voices and images of the public sphere were *recorded* slightly understate the actions of the video guerilla's, though. As Deirdre Boyle explains (1997), the goal of street tapes was to create an "interactive information loop" with the

subjects they recorded. In order to contest the one-way communication model of network television, people who were filmed were usually given authority over the video material with regard to dissemination. In addition, some collectives, such as The People's Video Theater, would invite the people they interviewed that day back to their lofts in the evening, in order to watch and discuss the tapes. Video's specific possibility of feedback formed the conceptual and technological basis for these social practices. However, in contrast with the previously discussed video art performances by Acconci and others, the video collectives did not investigate feedback within the confines of an artist's studio or the art gallery. Instead, it was applied in the streets as a tool for communication, dialogue and reflection by anyone, with anyone.

The medium was furthermore used in interventions between opposing social groups. In New York City, it was applied in a process of solving conflicts between squatters and their indignant neighbors, or it was used to avert street violence between blacks and whites in Harlem. Video would serve as a mediating tool in these cases. The opinions of the parties involved in the conflict would be taped, after which each group had to watch the other's tapes. By creating some distance between conflicting groups, video enabled the different parties to talk and listen to each other without the explosive closeness of a face-to-face encounter.

In the course of a few decades, guerilla television has been absorbed by mainstream television.[97,98] As soon as the video guerillas gained terrain (in the form of air-time on TV), their style became more and more like commercial television. At the same time, popular television has adopted many of the stylistic traits of the guerilla videos. Participatory video reports (often with a slightly humorous undertone – also a hallmark of the guerillas) are not uncommon in contemporary television programs. The video guerilla's strong belief in the social possibilities of the medium are not so much present in most of these TV shows. This belief has, however, survived in another contemporary discourse; the discourse of community video. Throughout the world, projects are initiated by community workers, video makers, developmental aid bodies and political groups, in which video equipment is installed within small, marginal communities – ranging from groups of homeless children to decreasing tribes to besieged minorities. The donated cameras often come with instructions; handbooks are written in which the application of the camera as a tool for social change is explained.[99]

97 In addition, some media theorists have argued that guerilla television has evolved into video sharing sites on the Internet such as YouTube, albeit in a less critical and less collective way. See William Merrin's "Still Fighting the Beast: Guerrilla Television and the Limits of YouTube" (2012).

98 Although coherent guerilla video collectives have largely disappeared, new guerilla television groups sometimes reappear in times of conflict. Thus, during the 2011 riots in the U.K., a small guerilla group called Sangat TV reported as well as interfered in the riots. The reporters hunted down rioters in Birmingham, confronted police during running battles, and broadcast live footage of arrests on Sky TV. According to *The Guardian*, "this bizarre form of guerilla journalism has proved the most captivating coverage of the riots that have swept England. Sangat TV has prised viewers away from broadcasting goliaths such as the BBC and CNN – and Twitter is abuzz about it" (Halliday 2011: G2).

Ron Burnett rightly points out that one of the main assumptions of community video projects is empowerment. The common denominator of the involved communities is that they are either dominated or threatened by larger, more powerful social groups. Video is employed as a way to counter this domination and disempowerment. With a clear reference to the slogan "power to the people," community video projects often make use of the phrase "camera to the people." Comparable to the guerillas' view on video, the contemporary video projects regard video as an interactive, user-defined, "horizontal" medium which enables dialogue within and between communities, and which allegedly frees the people from the centralized, one-way, top-down flow pattern of conventional mass media. "Aside from the conventional bow to the hegemonic influences of mass media," Burnett remarks, "there is the key thought of liberation from control, the opening of hitherto closed spaces of experience, and the unveiling of different ways of thinking" (1996: 288). The resulting sense is "that people, once empowered in the use of the medium, will gain a new understanding of their own viewpoints on the world, if not their politics" (Burnett 288). In addition, the video medium can empower marginal groups by documenting their suffering. Video projects such as the global cooperation WITNESS project ("See it, film it, change it") and the Palestinian B'TSelem project arrange equipment, know-how and a network for oppressed people who suffer from violence. They are invited to shoot back at their perpetrator(s) with a video camera.

These video applications are characterized by a strong belief in the epistemological and pedagogical power of the medium. Video is in the first place used to document the (unjust or poor) social reality of the communities in question. Then, through the documents, the truth is revealed to the video viewers, who gain knowledge from the tapes. Both the communities themselves and other societies can learn from the video documents; they can gain insight into the situation of oppression and control. In addition to the epistemological and pedagogical effects of the video medium, it is remarkable that the medium-specific domains of confession, testimony, and therapy also reappear in the activist and utopian video projects. Video is used to offer individuals a chance to speak their minds, bear witness to crimes, and to heal subjects and their interrelations with others. However, unlike most of the video projects I discussed before (artists' diaries, couples' therapy, the Fortunoff video archive) video activists are less concerned with the benefit and well-being of one or a few individuals. Instead, they place most emphasis on the interests of the community. It is the entire community which has to be healed, strengthened, and emancipated through confession, testimony and the therapeutic effects of talking to and through the camera.

In the field of video, the utopian, idealistic expectations of video – which the video

[99] See, for instance *Video for Change: A Guide for Advocacy and Activism* (2005), edited by Sam Gregory, Gillian Caldwell, and others. This publication was produced within the scope of an activist video project called WITNESS.

guerillas of the 1970s have passed on to the abovementioned contemporary community projects – are dominant but not monopolistic. They form the other end of the views on video with which this section started: the definitions of video as an isolating, anti-social medium. Both poles represent extremes, and can be criticized for precisely that; for being too extreme. The critics of postmodernism push the matter quite far when they claim that the video user is cut off from the real world by the empty, meaningless video messages she continually receives, or that all video spectators are bored to death – or at least, turned into lifeless objects – by the ongoing flow of video footage. Today, video does function as a prominent communication medium which transports images across continents in a split second. Even if its flowing images are understood as objectifying simulacra, it cannot be denied that they have real – often material – social and political effects.

However, the medium is put in too bright a light if it is believed to automatically grant a voice, a personal perspective, and a "piece" of power, to all the different people who inhabit the "global village." It is not unlikely that video *can* have an empowering and emancipating effect on social groups when it offers people the opportunity to reflect on themselves and to communicate with others. However, this effect is not a natural, spontaneous outcome of video technology, it depends on many specific circumstances and applications. As Ron Burnett has rightly noted, the effects of video on communities are not homogeneous, and therefore not at all predictable (1995: 144-145).

However, instead of evaluating the accuracy of these specifications of video in relation to the social, it is more interesting to consider social explanations or causes for these particular specifications. The theories and practices which blame video for their corrupting effect on society, or which praise the medium for its ability to change social structures for the better, are all born of worries about or discontent with the present state of society, or contemporary developments within particular social formations. The negative evaluation of video by critics of postmodernism should be seen in light of their displeasure with postmodern society (and a simplistic view of postmodernism). The possibilities which video activists saw – and still see – in video can, for instance, be seen in light of their worries about a loss of social differentiation within large, hegemonic societies or the globalized world. In addition, in the 1970s, video was taken up as a revolutionary tool in a world which was already full of social revolutions and protests. In all of these cases, video can be said to have co-produced social developments (leading to postmodernism, globalization, revolutions, and so on), yet the theorizations and applications of the medium were *also* shaped by social developments which were already going on. Because of this possibly ongoing reversal of cause and effect, it is best to conclude that video and the social have produced each other over time.

3.3 Film: Private/Production

One of the most prominent social functions of the medium of film should probably be sought in conversations on film. Talking about film can function as a “social lubricant,” it enables us to get to know someone by exchanging thoughts about a subject which is familiar to almost anyone: narrative cinema. As Thomas Elsaesser (2000) puts it:

> When people meet for the first time, or get talking in the train or an airplane, then there’s a considerable chance that, at some point, the conversation will be about film. The popular mainstream film has become a kind of “lingua franca”, a common language besides English, which enables young – or not so young – people to communicate, share experiences, and get to know each other. By talking about film, we discover each other’s likes and dislikes, each other’s sense of humor, and particular outlook on life. Not least because someone’s reaction to a film is something personal, intimate even, and at the same time often tends to create a feeling of “belonging.” (9, author’s translation)

As Elsaesser points out, films are more than a leisure activity in which we look at a story of people who partake in entertaining, interesting or dangerous activities. Today, films have become “a space, a surrounding, a cultural frame of reference, and an experience shared by many” (Elsaesser 9, author’s translation). As cinema is a subject we can all relate to, films enable social bonding. Especially when people find out that they like or dislike the same kind of movies, films can provide them with a sense of “belonging,” as Elssaeser put it. Contemporary social media, moreover, have contributed to the construction and cohesiveness of the communities which audience of specific kinds of popular films can form. In addition to coincidental encounters in trains or airplanes, viewers can now purposely look each other up online. Especially young people are customary participants or visitors of online platforms, chat rooms and Facebook groups on films.

In addition to this social effect of popular mainstream cinema, it is important to note the socially binding effect of, frankly, unpopular or less popular films. For, besides a “lingua franca,” film also forms languages which are not known, understood, or appreciated by everyone. The “sense of belonging” which, according to Elsaesser, can be produced by conversations about popular mainstream films, might even be stronger when it comes to the social effect of more marginal cinematic genres or films. The less known or the less widely appreciated a specific genre, director, or film is, the stronger the feelings of solidarity and “belonging” amongst members of its audience. People immediately bond when they turn out to like the same kind of cult movies, unknown upcoming director, undervalued national cinema, obscure, ill-defined genre, or that one film that everyone should have seen but no one has ever heard of, except for those few people.

In the previous section, I discussed how video is often theorized as an alternative space in which subjects can freely experiment, perform and speak their mind – while being safely apart from and often in opposition to the ruling dominant social order. The space in question, however, mostly concerns the illusionistic, represented space of the video image. When it comes to film, the alternative space is quite often formed in front of the image, too; the space of the audience becomes the alternative space where one can freely speak one's mind, and freely depart from mainstream preferences. The act of simply liking certain cult movies or unknown genres can be a form resistance to the dominant (aesthetic as well as social) order. In one of the most militant, activist applications of cinema I will discuss below, the so-called Third Cinema, this idea of the viewing space as a space of resistance plays an especially important part.

First, however, I will turn to another film genre that has had an enormous impact on the production of a social order: the home movie. It goes without saying that this genre is incommensurable with Third Cinema in many respects, for it doesn't serve activist or emancipatory ideals in any way – quite the opposite, one might say; home movies have produced and sustained rather than opposed and attacked the dominant social order. However, besides their impact on social structures, Third Cinema and the home movie have one thing in common: both forms of film are particularly important in relation to video. Not only can the two genres bring some notable differences and similarities between film and video to light; both applications of the filmic medium have been largely succeeded or taken over by video. It is for this reason that my discussion of film's social effects (which are manifold) will focus most specifically on the genre of the home movie, as well as the activist Third Cinema movement. I will compare both of these applications of film to video practices. My discussion of the home movie's production of social structures starts with an effect that seems adverse to social bonding: isolation.

Reel Families

According the McLuhan, the "Reel World" is part of the Gutenberg Galaxy. Film is linked to the technology of print, he claims, because it is the business of both writer and filmmaker to transfer the reader and viewer from one world, his own, to another, the world created by typography and film. Whereas the viewer of video has been said to turn into an object because of the boring ongoing flow of its meaningless images (*dixit* Jameson), the novel reader and the film viewer sit in silent psychological solitude while they are mesmerized by the world produced by the book or film. Although I would say that this social and psychological isolation of the film viewer is also due to social and cultural conventions which dictate that films are viewed in silence, McLuhan rightly points out that this solitary viewing mode has been enforced by a technological factor as well. When sound was added to the silent moving images, the audience had to be quiet in order to understand the plot.

The idea that film isolates can also be found in theoretical reflections on the family, one of the smallest social structures in which film has played an important part. As

Patricia Zimmerman (1995: 145) wrote, amateur film married the nuclear family in the 1950s, after the standardization of 16mm during World War II. The photographic and mass-market press set out to market amateur film as a hobby. Moreover, magazines and instruction books accentuated the social functions of amateur filmmaking as a commodity for and within nuclear families (Zimmerman 113). However, the birth of the home movie was not only brought about by isolated marketing strategies. These strategies capitalized on capitalism. The economic boom within Western capitalist societies after the Second World War increased leisure time and disposable income. In addition, the nuclear family and the home became central, idealized social structures within post-war societies. The popularity of the home movie can be regarded as the outcome of these social developments. The operation of amateur film equipment formed a pleasurable and useful leisure time activity; while finding pleasure in acquiring proficient skills, the amateur filmmaker would simultaneously document his family for present and future generations.

However, this act of documentation was far from transparent or neutral. Although the home movie was born from its social context, the filmic genre in turn reinforced the ideology of the nuclear, patriarchal family that dominated this social context. In the words of Zimmerman "home movies preserved and evoked a residual social formation of families as important cultural and social agents through idealizing, indeed worshipping its cloistered interactions" (133). Besides their conventional focus on moments which show a family's togetherness, happiness and generational continuity – such as birthdays, weddings, vacations and family feasts – home movies can be said to frequently aggrandize the representation of the family through the application of professional film techniques.

These techniques mostly concern film style. As Zimmerman explains, the home movie is dominated and restricted by Hollywood's continuity style. Especially in its initial stages, the practice of amateur filmmaking within the domestic sphere was regarded as "a consumer practice zone for perfecting Hollywood pictorial composition and narrative techniques" (Zimmerman 145). Many directives for the production of home movies explained the visual grammar and story-telling logic of Hollywood to the public, counseled them in Hollywood-like special effects, and propagated the creation of a coherent story within each family film. Booklets and articles with titles such as *How To Make Good Movies* (Kodak circa 1950), "You Need a Plan for Your Movies" (American Photographer 1951) and "Tell a Story With Your Movie Camera" (*Parents Magazine* 1956) advocated pre-production research, planning and plotting in order to establish continuity and comprehension in home movies.

Later on, this idea of the home movie as a controlled narrative in which the family often staged tableaux, was challenged by adherents of more spontaneous, mobile mode of filmmaking. In the early 1960s, the tripod as well as the strict plots were often abandoned in favor of a more relaxed, participatory cinema in which the camera operator moved around with a hand-held camera. However, even this more spontaneous mode of

filmmaking was dominated by the Hollywood continuity style, in that the pursuit of comprehensible narrative organization was never completely given up. In addition, adherents of both the mobile and the more controlled form of home movie production pursued the same goal: to create the illusion of reality.

One of the main devices by which this reality effect in both types of home movies was created is the illusion of the so-called fourth wall. Whereas the genre of family photography is characterized by the convention that photographed subjects look into the lens, home movie conventions do not encourage such visual contact between filmed subjects, camera (man) and the future audience of the tape, nor do they endorse verbal exchanges between the people in front of and behind the camera. Although responses to the film camera can hardly be precluded, the genre conventions follow directives which prescribe a narrative style that, in the words of Zimmerman, idolize naturalism and surveillance (134): "Don't attract attention to yourself by asking a subject to do something" ("Ringlight Your Next Party Film," *Photography* 1954), "Don't encourage your subjects to look at the camera" ("Shooting Script for Christmas Time Home Movies," *Better Homes and Gardens* 1960), "They break the spell if they yell, wave, or stick out their tongues" ("We're in the Movies Now," *American Magazine* 1952). According to Zimmerman, the reality effect of home movies institutionalized the nuclear happy family as a natural construct. Moreover, as the father was the primary filmmaker, the home movie preserved the ideology of the patriarch in total control of the family (134).

In addition to the fact that the cinematic genre of the home movie sustained the ideology of the nuclear family in general, it can be said to have enhanced the togetherness of many separate nuclear families. Although the father was indeed the main operator of the film equipment, the genre conventions necessitated the co-operation of all family members. The more controlled, plotted mode of home-movie making required its subjects to submit themselves to the directions of the camera operator, or to act according to the predetermined plot. Moreover, family members could plan their scripted home movies together. The more mobile form of filmmaking also demanded something from its represented subjects; to act as if they were unaware of the camera's presence. Furthermore, the home movie was not only made together, but was also watched together with the family, and by the family alone. In sum, the preparation, the production, the post-production, and the reception of the home movie was a family activity that, like the formal characteristics of the movies themselves, sustained the togetherness of the family.

This performative effect of the home movie seems at odds with my initial assertion that home movies are related to the idea that the medium of film isolates its users. In the case of home movies, the medium seems to establish the opposite; it integrates individuals into a cohesive family structure. However, as Zimmerman explains, the isolating effect does not so much concern the relationship between individual family members, but between the family and its social context. Home movies may instigate and document family togetherness, but they reinforce the separation between the

private sphere of the family and the public sphere outside of the home. As an essentially private activity cloistered within the home, the home movie doesn't encourage community interaction. By glorifying the solitary activities of the private home, the genre presents the family as an autonomous unit without any connections to larger social structures.

Zimmerman laments this disconnection of the home movie from its social context because she believes that amateur filmmaking in general can have radical, critical potential. The genre of the home movie – with its predicates of togetherness and familialism – "colonized" the practice of amateur filmmaking in the 1950s, which was directed to the pristine suburban backyard (135). The practice of amateur film production was marginalized as a hobby to fill up leisure time and as a retreat from social and political participation (146). Zimmerman argues: "With the cultural definition of amateur film quarantined in the secluded and supposedly idyllic sphere of the nuclear family, its relationship to larger political issues was modified into a marketing ploy against declining sales by American manufacturers" (135).

The exclusion of the political, social and historical context from home movies can become poignantly visible in art films which add this context to home movies, for instance through voice-overs, written texts, or additional visual material. One of the best examples in this regard is the film *The Maelstrom* (1997) by Hungarian filmmaker Péter Forgács. In this film, Forgács has re-edited archival home movie material. Most of the found footage the filmmaker appropriates was originally produced in the 1940s by two different families. The first, primary source is the Dutch-Jewish family Peereboom, the second one is the family of Arthur Seyss-Inquart, who represented Hitler in The Netherlands during the Second World War. This major political and historical event, however, is completely invisible in the personal family clips of the two very disparate families. However, the story of the Second World War has been added to the home movie clips by Forgács, who uses voice-overs and written texts in order to explain how the families and their images are related to the unfolding of the Second World War in The Netherlands. This external information doesn't make the political context perceptible within the images, though. For, in spite of the fact that we learn that the Peerebooms are a Jewish family who suffer under the Nazi regime, their home movies do not show this repression in any way. The fact that even the grand history of the Second World War does not interfere at all with the cheerful, cozy atmosphere of the home footage, proves how strong the boundary between the family film and the family's social and political context really is. Even when the Peerebooms are packing to be deported to Auschwitz, the home movie manages to portray the situation as a domestic scene.[100,101]

Whereas Zimmerman finds fault with the genre of the home movie because its

[100] A similar tension between the private lives depicted by home movies and the historical, social, and political context in which they exist can for instance also be noted in *Private Century* (2010) by Jan Sikl, and *Y In Vyborg* (2006) by Pia Andell.

[101] See van Alphen (2011).

ideology of the nuclear family excludes the social and the political, many critics and artists have focused primarily on the aspects of the family itself that are excluded by the ideological character of the genre. As Michelle Citron has noted, the sides of family life that are not shown in home movies are often more interesting and significant than what *is* depicted. The conventions of the genre dictate the representation of cheerful and happy interactions between family members, while most familial relationships are also characterized by moments of friction. These problematic, tense aspects are usually left outside the frame. Filmmakers such as Alan Berliner, Michelle Citron, Morgan Dews, and Adrianne Finelli have tried to expose the repressive and silencing effects of home movies by re-editing personal home-movie material and/or mixing the material with explanatory texts. In *Must Read After My Death* (Dews 2007) and *Too Soon Too Late* (Finelli 2009), seemingly cheerful home movies are accompanied by either spoken or written diaristic texts produced by one of the central women in the movies. Whereas the film clips portray these women as happy mothers and wives, the diary fragments expose their unhappiness and depression. In *Daughter Rites* (1979), Citron shows the disconnection between herself and her mother through a montage of happy home movie material in which mother and daughter seem to run towards each other. However, at the end of the scene, they do not fall into the expected warm embrace. Instead, they miss each other, and continue their trajectory without meeting at all.

Films such as *Too Soon Too Late* and *Daughter Rites* can be seen as visual expressions of Zimmerman's ideological thesis. They show that home movies are integrally related to the ideology of the family, and should therefore not be understood as transparent documents of family life. However, Citron goes one step further, or perhaps even in an entirely different direction, when she tries to point out that the repressed is nevertheless visible in home movie material. This exposure does not entail the rearrangement of home movie footage; it is carried out through a close reading of film strips. In *Home Movies and Other Necessary Fictions* (1989) Citron analyzes a piece of family film in which she is around 7 years old and hugs her sister. Then, she gives her younger sister a kiss and laughs. The filmmaker points out that when the film fragment is frozen (the still is printed in the book), it becomes visible that this seemingly endearing gesture of one sibling to another is actually an aggressive act. The still film frames show how Citron pushes her tongue into her sister's mouth in a pretty obtrusive way. The unamused expression of the sister confirms that the kiss was indeed a ferocious intrusion. In addition, the smile on Citron's face after she has offended her sister is not innocent. The artist as a little girl laughs in a slightly sardonic way. Citron explains that this film fragment illustrates the incest of which she was a victim as a child. In the film images, we can see how she unconsciously imitates the actions of the uncle who abused her.

Citron's close reading does not merely reveal what is repressed within the home movie, it even reveals what is repressed or has remained unnoticed within her family. The artist and film theorist in question applies film as a medium by which hidden family secrets can be uncovered. This application of the medium as a tool through which

imperceptible facts are rendered noticeable can also be found in studies of family photography. In *Family Frames* (1997), Marianne Hirsch relates Benjamin's idea that photographs introduce us to the visual unconsciousness of family photographs. She investigates how family photographs not only reveal what the conventions of family photography repress, but also the aspects of family relationships which remain hidden and invisible in everyday domestic life.

Citron follows this idea of the technologically produced image as an epistemological tool that makes the invisible visible, yet she shows the advantages of film over photography. Like photography, film is able to produce still images. The frozen image can reveal details that cannot be perceived by the human eye alone. However, the succession of several images on a film strip can provide a better insight in the interaction between several family members. Whereas Hirsh mainly focuses on what she calls "interfamilial looks" when she analyzes family photographs, Citron can also analyze the minute bodily gestures by which humans respond to one another. Film offers the possibility to study small facial and physical movements both in real time, in slow motion, and in successive still images. These small gestures – which can hardly be perceived by the naked eye – often expose the possibly problematic nature of the relationship between family members.

Next to the fragment of the aggressive kiss, Citron analyzes a piece of family film in which her mother puts slides in the girl's hair. The young Citron shows discomfort, she recoils from her mother's hands. At first, the mother doesn't seem to notice that her daughter is inconvenienced and probably even hurt by what she is doing with the hair slides. While handling her daughter's hair, she is looking distractedly in another direction. As soon as the mother does notice her daughter's resistance, she persistently continues to shove the pins in the little girl's hair with a grim and a determined expression on her face. These small interactions seem insignificant when they unfold in real time in a couple of seconds. The scene of a mother who is trying to do the hair of a struggling daughter can easily be understood as an endearing moment in the life of a happy family. However, when the scene is slowed down or even studied per frame, the mother's attitude towards her daughter appears to be pretty insensitive. Her physical gestures and expressions show that she is not bothered by her daughter's discomfort at all.[102]

Even without additional information of an insider, a detailed examination of the short film fragment could lead one to suspect that Citron's mother might not have been

[102] Citron's method of scrutinizing home movies in order to discover repressed family facts is also applied by Benjamin Meade in his film *Vakvagany* (2002). However, Meade isn't analyzing his own family; he deals with found footage of an unknown Hungarian family. In addition, Meade has invited three well-known people to analyze the material with the goal of discovering the family secrets that may be hidden in this seemingly cheerful film material. Filmmaker Stan Brakhage, psychiatrist Roy Menninger and writer James Ellroy shed their light on the film images. Like Citron, they closely watch the physical gestures and interactions between the family members. Unlike Citron, they also pay attention to the formal characteristics of the images. Thus, the psychiatrist wonders why the naked baby is filmed so unbecomingly from below.

very attentive towards her children. Citron explains that it is indeed important to understand the small frictions which one can discover in a few seconds of home movie as subtle manifestations of general and persistent – yet most often covert – dysfunctions within the family. Citron's mother could not easily be recognized as a cold mother. However, the subtle insensitivity she displays in the short hair-slides scene is not an isolated incidence, it has characterized their entire relationship – and with that, Citron's life – in important ways. In relation to Citron's abusive past, her mother's insensitivity towards the physical signals of her child had grave consequences.

Citron's strategy of uncovering hidden family truths with film, within film, is especially interesting because it concerns the genre of the home movie. As Zimmerman has pointed out, the genre of the home movie is very much pervaded by the ideology of the happy, patriarchal, nuclear family. Because of this, home movies tend to hide and exclude all the aspects of the family that do not fit within the ideal. Citron, however, applies the genre as a way to discover what is repressed and invisible within the represented family. Thus, instead of using it as a tool for ideological repression, Citron deploys the home movie in the opposite way: as a tool for discovery and recovery. This doesn't merely *expose* the ideological nature or "falseness" of home movies. By showing that the home movie can do quite the opposite of covering up and excluding, Citron's strategy also *counters* the repressive effect of the genre's ideological character. As mentioned previously, Zimmerman argued that "home movies preserved and evoked a residual social formation of families as important cultural and social agents through idealizing, indeed worshipping its cloistered interactions." Citron, then, points out that precisely this focus on the family's cloistered interactions can turn the effect of the genre around; if the focus is sharp enough, idealizing and worshipping can become critical dissection.

From Family Film to Home Video

Another approach to the ideological character of home movies can be found in the theoretical writings of media scholar James M. Moran. Like Citron, he looks for moments in home movies in which the ideological conventions of the genre do not hold. However, instead of searching for manifestations of a family's repressed dark side within film clips, Moran advocates a focus on the personal and individual aspects of home movies. The author criticizes Zimmerman for her representation of the "home mode" as a form of amateur filmmaking corruptly domesticated by familial ideology. Although Moran does not disagree entirely with Zimmerman's claim that home mode practices and artifacts are for the most part the products and producers of patriarchal and capitalist values, he stresses that these values are not all-encompassing. He argues that the home mode has relative autonomy within the social order, not because the genre is a self-identical practice immune from its historical relations, "but because its cultural functions, depending on the communities that they serve, may or may not express dominant ideology" (56). While most home mode practices are structured by the ideologically charged genre conventions, each family is able to appropriate amateur

technology for idiosyncratic purposes unique to the aims of its members. Even within the boundaries of the generic field, with the nuclear family as the coordinating ideology, there is room for personal expression and individual deviations of the norm. In addition, in his *There's No Place Like Home Video* (2002) Moran opposes Zimmerman's ideology thesis by defining the genre of the home movie emphasizing that, besides its possible perpetuation of familial and capitalist ideologies, the genre has other, positive functions and effects.

At the most fundamental level, Moran argues, the home mode "provides an active mode of media production for representing everyday life" (60). This mode of representation is not transparent or naïve. It doesn't lack consciousness, nor does it – as Zimmerman has it – merely reflect false consciousness. For Moran, the home mode serves a set of ritual intentions negotiating personal conviction and its submersion into communal consensus (60). "Thus," the author explains, "a second function of home mode artifacts is to construct a liminal space in which practitioners may explore and negotiate the demands of their public, communal, and private, personal identities" (60). This understanding of the home mode as a space that relates the public social sphere with the private and personal is very much at odds with Zimmerman's idea that the home movie disables interaction between the domestic sphere and the social community, and hence isolates its practitioners.

In addition to the genre's inclination to enable the merging of personal and public identities, the home mode is shaped by the family's desire to merge past, present and future generations. Therefore, according to Moran, the third function of the home mode is to provide a material articulation of generational continuity over time. "Locating our position along this temporal continuum provides the home mode's fourth cultural function: it constructs an image of home as a cognitive and affective foundation situating our place in the world"(61). Alongside the fact that home movies construct our sense of place, they also chronicle our sense of history. The fifth function links the home mode to a long tradition of folklore and autobiography: it provides a narrative format for communicating family legends and personal stories (61).

In the 1980s, video supplanted celluloid as the dominant amateur motion picture medium. The home video quickly became the new home movie. Since the advent of this new medium, the abovementioned positive functions of the home mode have expanded and gained in force, while the influence of the ideology of the patriarchal nuclear family has declined. Moran argues that the expansion of the home mode's expressive possibilities for a large part can be explained by specific technological differences between the medium of film and that of video. Amateur film equipment generally consists of a camera that lacks sound recording, and holds relatively expensive reels of film which can only record for three minutes. The celluloid substrates, moreover, need high light levels in order to record sharp images, cannot be recycled, and need lab processing for proper exposure and development. The home video apparatus, on the other hand, typically consists of a camera with synchronous sound recording. The

relatively inexpensive videocassettes allow up to eight hours of shooting, may be recycled, operate in low light levels, and do not require lab processing. Videotapes can be viewed immediately after recording, and can easily be played back and copied at home (Moran 41). According to Moran, these basic differences precipitate differences of production and reception, which in turn “extend home video’s range of content and space for interpretation beyond the limitations of home movies” (41).

One of the most important differences between home movie and home video production is that home videos often include the downsides and boring aspects of (family) life which are absent from most home movies. This difference in content can be explained by technological disparities between video and film. As Moran points out, home movie production methods emphasize brevity, control and selection because of the limited length per reel. “Thus, rather than expose random moments of everyday life, which would require a much greater financial investment, home movie makers generally film only the highlighted moments of ritual events wherein participants could be posed and conventions controlled in advance” (Moran 41). A video camera, in contrast, may be left running on a tripod for hours, where it may ultimately be forgotten. Moreover, video’s sensitivity to low light levels allows the camera to be present at virtually all indoor family scenes. Therefore, moments of embarrassment, distress or defeat are less stringently excluded from home videos than they are from home movies.

In addition, video’s synchronous sound recording allows for on-camera narration. This allows the camera operator to interpret the scene while shooting, and invites interview-like conversations with subjects in front of the lens. Like the long running time of video, the medium’s synchronous sound relaxes some of the artificial conventions imposed by home movies. The subjects on view do not have to pose or pretend that they do not see the camera; they either freely interact with the camera operator or forget that they are being videotaped. Now that the amateur video camera has become a regular on-looker of family life, its presence often goes unnoticed. In sum, many of video’s technological features enable a representation of the family that is less censured and contrived than the depiction of the family by film. Because of this, “home video reveals that families have always been more complex and contradictory than home movies have generally portrayed them” (Moran 43).

When it comes to reception, one of the most important differences between home movies and home videos is that the latter are more frequently viewed by larger audiences than the former. Family films were generally viewed within the private sphere of the living room by family members only. Home videos, in contrast, are often shown or handed out to friends and acquaintances too. In addition, home videos are frequently released to the public domain, when they are broadcast on television – in programs such as *Funniest Home Videos* – or when they are shared online. This expansion of the home mode’s circle of reception can be understood as the result of the fact that, unlike film, video technology enables rapid playback and reproduction. Whereas film viewing was an event requiring preparation such as putting up a screen, installing a projector,

and darkening the room, videos can be viewed immediately with devices already installed in the home, such as a VCR, a DVD player, a TV or a PC. Therefore, showing a few home video clips to some friends or neighbors is not a big deal, it can be done in between times without much preparation. Moreover, in comparison to the celluloid reels used for the production of home movies, video footage – in all possible forms and formats – can easily be copied and spread.

This expansion of the audience elevates some of the isolating effect which Zimmerman attributed to the genre of the home movie. The family no longer sits in solitude in front of a screen in their own living room; they share their family footage with others. This sharing usually involves social interaction between the family members and the outsiders. The viewers who are not a part of the represented family are supposed to react to the clip, preferably with compliments or moved "oohs" and "aahs." In this respect, the video medium can again be said to satisfy the narcissist impulse of its users. If offers us the possibility of looking at our own families with pride in the privacy of our own home, but this pride and narcissistic self-love only grows when others express their admiration of the beautiful family on screen.

Zimmerman has argued that some home videos even need sentimental outbursts from the audience in order to *be* home videos. When the audience of a home video consists of a large group of strangers, as is the case when home videos enter the context of broadcast television, their responses are necessary to show that they acknowledge the images as *home* video. Without spectator interaction, the video would be reduced to disengaged, inconsequential surveillance (Zimmerman 144). Especially home videos which do not reveal the presence of a camera operator, for instance because they were recorded by a running camera on a tripod, run the risk of complying with a cold, disinterested mode of looking. This doesn't apply to home videos with on-camera narration. If the camera operator comments on his subjects while filming, his words form the first spectatorial response to the scene. Even hand held effects which are caused by the movements of the camera operator can in some cases be understood as such a first response.

The fact that this spectatorial response is necessary to save video material in the home mode from turning into disengaged surveillance video footage shows that – in spite of the fact that home videos are frequently shared with a wide audience – they can never be completely released from the family to the public without losing some of their familial character. The viewing context is of a determining influence on the status of home footage as *home* footage. Thus, the familial character of home movies and home videos not only depends on the fact that the people within the frame are related, it also depends on the fact that the viewers are related to the represented subjects. In the case of home movies, the latter relationship was automatic, as family films were as a rule only viewed by family members. When it comes home videos, the relationship between the represented subjects and the members of the audience is not always pre-established by consanguinity. Therefore, outsiders to the family have to show that they nevertheless

affectively relate to the people in the video.

Through explicit, overt reactions to home material, viewers not only sustain the narcissism of the family on view; they also connect themselves to this family. Making this connection is especially important when the represented family members have some form of (visual) access to the reactions of the audience. This is mostly the case when home videos are shown by the family members themselves, but also when they are broadcast on TV or when they are shared on Internet platforms that ask for the spectator's response. *Not* responding to the family videos which your Facebook friends post online is also a form of response, one that suggests that you are a distant, uninterested viewer. Showing, or posting a reaction, on the other hand, is a polite and reassuring gesture towards the family in question. It affirms that, as a viewer, you do not watch their private life in a disengaged, uninterested way, but that you care and feel for them as true family members would. In addition, showing a reaction to the home footage of others, even if it is only pretense, unburdens the viewer of uncomfortable feelings of embarrassment and alienation that quickly arise when one watches the private lives of others onscreen. By responding to the material, the viewer includes herself provisionally in the family, thus escaping the compromising position of silent voyeur. A familial viewing community, then, is both a prerequisite and a result of home videos.[103]

It is remarkable that when home movies are compared to home videos, many genre conventions that defined the family film can suddenly be understood as the outcome of technological factors. This doesn't completely rule out the presumed influence of the social context, including its dominant ideologies, on home movie practices. However, the genre's initial exclusive focus on the happy highlights within family life can no longer be interpreted as the representation of familial ideology alone. The exclusion of

[103] When home movies or home videos are integrated into other discursive forms such as (video) art or narrative cinema (think of for instance Forgács' and Citron's films), they run the risk of losing their familial character. Not only because they can now be considered as pieces of art or narrative films, but because they can no longer be watched in an overtly responsive way. The museum, art gallery and cinema discourage participatory spectatorship. In addition, when home movies or home videos have been turned into film or video art, the represented family is usually not present at the moment of viewing. This makes it difficult for viewers to express an (affective) relation to the subjects on view. When material in the home mode is watched by its spectators from a voyeuristic, distant viewing position, home movies and home videos can come to function like surveillance of the home. This is potentially problematic for filmmakers such as Citron and Forgács. In their films, they show subjects who are victims (of abuse or the Holocaust, respectively). To spy on them with a distant, objectifying look would aggravate their victimhood. However, the films of Citron and Forgács offer the viewer the possibility to relate to the subjects through identification. Citron's *Daughter Rites* enables ideopathic identification because, next to many specific and personal details, the film reflects on the relationship between parents and children in general ways as well. Most viewers can identify with the position of a child who tries to understand her parents because it is familiar to them. When it comes to Forgács work, Ernst van Alphen has convincingly argued that his films invite identification with the represented subjects through the combination of personal and historical time: "The clash between – not harmonious blending of – the personal time of home movies and the historical time of historicism, brings the situations in the home movies closer to us. Instead of sensing an uncomfortable alienation, as it occurs usually when we watch other people's home movies, we begin to identify with the people in the home movies. The personal time of the home movies becomes an anchor within the historicist framework with which it clashes" (2011: 103).

the less perfect, unhappy moments was just as much dictated by technical limitations of the filmic medium. Likewise, the isolation of the viewing situation was prompted by the cumbersome equipment which had to be installed in order to project home movies. The medium of video has exposed that these forms of exclusion and isolation can be diminished by technological changes.

These conclusions do, however, run the risk of falling into the "trap" of technological determinism. At this point, it might seem reasonable to conclude that if the technological specificities of video have expanded the expressive possibilities as well as the field of operation of the home movie, video's impact on the role of the family within society must be huge. Its technological inclination to show all of family life, including the fissures and fights, may have undermined the dominant ideology of the nuclear family. The operation of the home video within the field of other, publicly accessible media such as the television and the Internet may have partially relieved the private, secluded and disengaged character of family life. However, as Moran rightly notes, the revolutionary impact of video technology should not be overestimated:

> These differences between home movie and home video production and reception practices, determined in part by differences between substrate and apparatus, must be taken into account to understand how video may not necessarily transform the home mode (which implies technological determinism) but may increase opportunities for representing a greater range of social intentions less likely to emerge on celluloid. Therefore, rather than assume that video itself may "revolutionize" amateur practice because it changes conventional perceptions of domestic living [...], we more properly should conclude that the new medium is more likely to represent the fuller range of domestic ideologies already present in culture, well before the arrival of home video or even amateur photography itself. (43)

It cannot be denied though, that "the fuller range of domestic ideologies" which Moran mentions have gained force over the last couple of decades. The ideal of the nuclear family has lost terrain to the idea that a family doesn't necessarily consist of a father, a mother, and about two children (and a dog). Biological reproduction and child rearing are less central to the concept of the family today, and the importance of a blood tie between family members has decreased. Nowadays, we can choose our family. The idea of a so-called urban family which consists of close friends is, for instance, popular with many contemporary city dwellers.

Should video be understood as a medium that coincidentally yet perfectly fits in with these new domestic ideologies, as it offers its users many possibilities to represent these new social forms of family life which have themselves changed since the late 1960s? Or, as Moran also wonders, can we assume that video has had a hand in the transformation of domestic ideologies? Moran leaves his answer hanging when he

concludes that "a better proposition altogether would suggest that video has liberated the constraints of the photographic apparatus, pressuring home mode practitioners toward […] eliminations, patterned just as much by material and economic choices as by ideology" (43). Again, he mainly stresses how video has expanded the aspects of family life which the home mode can represent. However, I would say that while, or through, focusing on the representation of what is already in place within the social sphere, Moran overlooks the performative effect of these representations on their social context. Although the transformation of family ideals within society should certainly not be understood as the result of video technology alone, it is reasonable to suspect that video has supported these changes.

This performative effect of medium-specific family representation *is* emphasized in the functions which Moran has attributed to the home mode. He proclaims that the home mode represents everyday family life, and constructs a space in which we explore identities, and articulates generational continuity, and constructs an image of home, and locates our place in the world, and provides a narrative format for communicating personal family stories. These functions show that film and video in the home mode not only represent, but also construct during the process of representation. They construct many elements, such as identity, linked generations, images of home and a place in the world, which together sustain or even make a specific kind of family. In comparison to film, video has not only liberated representational constraints. It has also liberated constraints concerning the kinds of identities that can be explored, the images of home which can be produced, the place in the world which can be founded, and the narrative formats by which family stories can be told by the home footage itself as well as what it portrays. The expanded expressive possibilities video has introduced to the home mode have therefore not only affected how the family can be represented, but also how the family can be built.

Counter-cinema Counters Cinema

As for the field of video, film's field of application contains considerable strands of alternative practices and activist counter-movements. Just like activist videos, films produced within the alternative realm are aimed at social emancipation and empowerment. They act for the oppressed and the marginalized within society. However, some important differences can be pointed out between activist video and activist film. First of all, the metaphor of space is less applicable to films that deal with social identity and social change.

As explained previously, video is often described as a contained, secluded space. The space indicated when the medium is defined as an alternative or third space often, but not always, concerns the represented space; the space in front of the camera which is subsequently visible in the video image. Video artists and activists emphasized that the spatiotemporal separation between the represented space and the space of presentation in which the video is viewed by a wider audience offers represented subjects the safety and privacy to speak their mind and experiment with social roles. On

the contrary, in alternative and counter-cinemas the separation between the represented space and the viewing space is breached as much as possible. Activist filmmakers who are part of the so-called Third Cinema declare continuity between the film space onscreen and the space in which is shown. This viewing context is not limited to the boundaries in which the film is viewed by a participatory audience; it concerns a wide social context. The inside of the film is supposed to be continuous with its outside, because it deals with the real struggles of the poor and oppressed within their society.

The idea of video as a detached, private and secluded space can also be explained by the accessibility of the medium. As contradictory as this seems, the accessibility of the video medium grants video makers a substantial degree of control over the size of the social space of their video.[104] The spatial web of interrelations between the positions of subjects who are involved in, and related by, the production and reception of one video can have global-scale impact (think of an interactive video which is pushed to "go viral" on the Internet), yet it can also be limited to one human subject who functions as both the producer, the viewer, and the represented subject of the video. In order to make and watch a video, one doesn't have to leave the room. Yet, virtually the whole world population can be involved in the production and reception of a video. The limits of a video's social space are hardly limited by technical requirements or (lack of) capabilities of the medium.

This doesn't go for film. Making a film is more difficult and more expensive than the production of a video. The creation of a movie usually requires a variety of costly professional equipment, and – partially as a result of that – it depends on corporate action and professional teamwork. In addition, films often depend on distribution networks before they can reach their audience.[105] So, the social space of film cannot be limited to one person when it comes to the domain of production. In addition, the temporal distance which film requires between the moment of production and the

[104] The conventional understanding of the concept of space as a purely mathematical, geometrical category has been questioned by a group of influential social theorists (e.g. David Harvey, Edward Soja, Manuel Castells), of whom Henri Levebvre is the most important forerunner. This sociologist and philosopher has argued in his seminal book *The Production of Space* (1974) that space is first and foremost produced by social actions and relations: "(social) space is a (social) product" (26). The idea of social space has been related to media theory by Manuel Castells. In comparison to Levebvre, Castells places more emphasis on physical, material properties of social space: "space is a material product, in relation to other material products – including people – who engage in [historically] determined social relationships that provide space with a form, a function, and a social meaning" (1996: 41). In addition, he assumes that media can act as the material support of spaces. In *The Rise of the Network Society,* Castells describes how electronic media technologies constitute a network of electronic impulses which forms the support of a contemporary space which he calls "the space of flows." Alongside a material spatial network, this is also a social space, for the electronic media in question connect physically remote people as they allow them to communicate with each other. In conclusion, the communication network established by electronic media such as the Internet should be understood as a social network as well as a spatial one, and can therefore be called a social space. Here, I have combined Castell's notion of social space with the idea of a conventional viewing space (enforced by the material apparatus).

[105] This especially goes for analogue films. Television, as well as digitalization and the Internet have made the dissemination of films less complicated. However, these electronic forms of distribution do not always leave the image quality of the film images intact. In addition, films that have to be remunerated still depend on distribution companies or organizations.

moment of reception precludes the inclusion of a film's social space within its viewing space. Such inclusion is possible with video; in the situation of instant feedback, the viewing space in which the apparatus of video is situated potentially encloses the social space that is simultaneously produced. The closed circuit of live feedback necessarily includes the position of the viewing subject as a well as the represented subject, and can possibly contain the enunciating subject (artist/producer) of the installation as well. Although the social aspect of this set-up has been questioned because the subject positions are often occupied by one and the same person, they certainly do form a spatial web. They are separated in space yet related by the acts of looking and being looked at. Definitions of video as space – enclosed alternative space, counter-space, third space or action space – can, therefore, also be motivated by the possible coincidence of the conventionally and mechanically produced viewing space and social space which the medium produces in a closed-circuit set-up.[106]

Because of film's dependence on relatively large social groups of production, films can be said to have a social effect even prior to their completion. For, even before a film is shown to an audience – and thus before it has entered into the communication model of sender(s) and receiver(s) often applied to map out a medium's social web of interrelations – it starts to generate social relations between its producers. This idea of producing social cohesion through movie production can be discovered in some alternative film movements. The organization Women Make Movies, for instance, was established in 1972 with the idea of addressing the misrepresentation of women in the media. It funded – and still does so until today – projects by female filmmakers who make movies about women. However, in the 1970s, the emphasis was not only on the content of films. The organization set up programs in which women would collectively produce films. This collective social aspect of making a movie together was just as important as the educational aspects of the training programs and the content of the film that were made.

A similar importance is attached to the collectivity of production by the Third Cinema movement; the activist group of primarily Latin-American filmmakers which lived its heydays around 1970. In the manifesto *Towards a Third Cinema* (1969), filmmakers Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino explain that the revolutionary film making they have in mind already produces a collective during the production process. Third Cinema films aimed to document the daily reality of their nation's struggling people. Their films were shot on the streets, which demanded the support of the people in the street – both the ones inside and outside the frame of camera's viewfinder. This support was usually not lacking. As Solanas and Getino point out, Third Cinema films such as *La hora de los hornos* (Solanas and Getino 1968) were made in hostile circumstances with the support and collaboration of militants and cadres of the people. As a rule, Solanas points out,

[106] Definitions of video that use space as a metaphor for the medium are therefore partly motivated by another trope: as *pars pro toto*, the feedback set-up with its enclosed character has come to stand for the medium as a whole.

"vanguard layers and even masses participate collectively in the work of the film when they realize it is the continuity of their daily life" (1969: 8). Merely the production process of the films in some cases already inspired what the Third Cinema Activists aimed for: the rise and coherence of dominated social groups.

However, it would be a mistake to say that each film creates a social formation of film producers (thereby indicating all the people who contribute to a movie) from scratch. The production and distribution of many films depends on, and is shaped by, a social institution which is already firmly in place: the film industry. This industry consists of a network of film companies as well as film people such as actors, scriptwriters and directors. The downside of a blooming film industry is that, in addition to the networks and recourses, it also provides the social, political, cultural, and aesthetic conventions and creative limits which films have to respect. In most cases, films have to follow certain rules in order to be profitable; it is after all, a film *industry*.

Alternative and activist films that pursue social empowerment instead of profit often have to find, or create a network of "allies" who support the production and distribution of their film. In many countries, the need to pose a cinematic alternative to commercial cinema has led to the arrival of alternative funds and resources for the production of counter-films. Such funds and recourses often have the form of organizations, such as the aforementioned Women Make Movies, which support so-called independent film-making. The word "independent" is rather ironic in this regard; it refers to filmmakers' independence from the dominant, mainstream film industry, but at the same time, these filmmakers are not independent of the organizations that support their independence. In addition, the organizations are hardly independent or neutral themselves. They often represent a specific social group, a group by which they are supported. As a consequence, these organizations only support films which support the social group which supports the organization.

In light of the fact that the process of film funding, production and distribution is especially intricate for filmmakers who operate outside of the commercial mainstream, it is not surprising that theories and practices that deal with film as a medium of social emancipation pay a lot of attention to the aspects and modes of film production. In *An Accented Cinema* (2001) Hamid Naficy discusses what he sees as a group of stylistic traits shared by so-called accented films – films that function as the performance of the identity of individuals and communities which are situated within social interstices, as well as the interstices of the film industry (10). Alongside his primary attention to style, Naficy devotes one whole chapter to a discussion of different modes of funding, production, and distribution on which accented films depend because they cannot rely on the dominant, mainstream film industry.[107]

[107] I will not discuss all the production details which Naficy maps. An impression of the variety of such production modes can be provided by the following titles and subtitles from sections in this book: "Interstitial and Artisanal Mode of Production," "Postindustrial Production," "Coproduction," "Multisource Funding," "Distribution to Academic Institutions," to name but a few.

The specific appearance of accented cinema – in which Naficy includes the large body of cinematic works which deal with social identity – can be summed up as follows: it has a low-tech, often home-made quality, is mostly non-fictional and biographical, and is moreover characterized by narrative hybridity and a tactile optics. Accented films are frequently fragmented, multilingual, epistolary, and self-reflexive. In addition, accented movies are characterized by themes which are related to the social (dis)location and the (lost) identity of the filmmakers. Borders and border crossings, doubled and lost characters, journeys, airports, and suitcases, as well as intermedial relationships within the film, can all be understood as part of the accented style. The appearance of video in the films of a director whose work is discussed elsewhere in this dissertation – Atom Egoyan – is interpreted by Naficy as a marker of "accentedness." According to Naficy, instances of intermediality in film often express a concern with those who exist in between societies: interstitial, displaced subjects and diasporized communities.

Naficy's *Accented Cinema* points out an important aspect of accented films which can be seen as a core characteristic of counter-cinema in general. First of all, activist filmmakers work against oppression and domination. Although the accented films Naficy discusses are not the most polemical and militant ones in the field of counter-cinema, the author stresses that accented cinema "is a political cinema which stands opposed to authoritarianism and oppression" (30). However, as Naficy also makes clear, in addition to this opposition to disempowerment and social marginalization, accented cinema is positioned vis-à-vis dominant cinema. The accented style stands opposed to the unaccented style of Hollywood productions and other commercial mainstream films. The accented aesthetic of smallness and imperfection is not in accordance with the mainstream tradition, and the narrative strategies of accented films cross generic boundaries and undermine conventional cinematic realism. One of the progenitors of accented cinema, the Third Cinema group – which is, in fact, one of the most polemical and militant in the field – posits itself against mainstream cinema (First Cinema) in a similar manner. By way of a rough, unpolished "poor" style, Third Cinema wishes to differentiate itself from commercial cinema. In addition, its imperfect documentary style is aimed at social empowerment and revolution; the unfinished, unordered and violent works are made "with a camera in one hand and a rock in the other" (Getino and Solanas 5). The style of Third Cinema films is not merely an artistic fact but something which "the System finds indigestible" (Getino and Solanas 5).[108]

[108] Third Cinema also dissociates itself from "Second Cinema," the European, artistic "auteur cinema." These films – like Third Cinema films – reject Hollywood conventions, but they are centered on the individual expression of the auteur director. On the contrary, the Third Cinema movement produced films as a group, and moreover centered on the expression of the people's interests instead of the artistic ideas of one individual. Accented cinema, on the other hand, is engaged less with "the people" and "the masses" than with specific individuals, ethnicities, nationalities, and identities, and with the experience of deteritorialization itself. Therefore, accented films tell both private and social, public stories. In addition, Naficy claims that accented films not so much express as *perform* the identity of the author, which implies that the author should be taken into regard when accented films are analyzed.

The stylistic characteristics of counter-cinema are interesting in comparison to the counter-video movement that I discussed earlier on. The video guerillas similarly applied rough, unpolished style as a way to oppose oppression by the conventional ruling class. Moreover, the video guerillas worked against television. Engaged counter-cinema, however, fights battles within the arena of its own medium. Film is opposing film.

The Third Cinema can be related to video in two additional ways. Firstly, as Teshome Gabriel explains in “Third Cinema Updated” (2010), third cinema has evolved and branched out since it arose in the 1960s in relation to revolutionary struggles in the third world (most particularly in Latin America, but also in Africa and Asia). Because the communities that are constituted around Third Cinema have become less fixed and more heterogeneous, Third Cinema has become an increasingly creolized form in which the myths and stories of different cultures are integrated. Moreover, as Gabriel explains, “many of the narrative communities have become more media-savvy than they might have been at the outset of Third Cinema. They have become much more adept at adopting/adapting various media for their own uses” (par. 10). As a result, in contemporary Third Cinema (or rather; Third Cinema*s*), stories from both different cultural heritages *and* different media are mixed. One of the most important media which Third Cinema films have adopted is video. According to Gabriel, the video camera has become a vital tool in witnessing social injustice, police violence, and other forms of oppression. He even claims that “witnessing in the camera has become a sort of substitute for a Third Cinema style of filmmaking” (par. 27). It is in this different form (of video) that Third Cinema continues to serve as a guardian and witness for the under-represented and marginalized, according to Gabriel.

However, although Gabriel views the substitution of Third Cinema by video as a process of the last two decades, I would say that Third Cinema and video have always had affinity with each other – even though this affinity was not expressed within videos or Third Cinema films. The link between the video medium and the Third Cinema relies – paradoxically – on an aspect by which Third Cinema at first sight differentiates itself from video. I already mentioned that – quite unlike the specification of video as a secluded space – Third Cinema makers upheld the idea of continuity between the represented space and the space of presentation. The initiators of Third Cinema combated the passive, isolated and silent film-watching experience of commercial cinema. With their films, they wanted to spur heated discussions among members of the audience. The film show was defined as a meeting, an event, and an act. The film-as-act is only completed when the members of the audience participate in the discussion, the action plans, and finally the actions to which the films give rise. In that sense, the film spectators become producers of the film.[109]

[109] The co-productive role of the audience was also important to the so-called art “happenings” performed in the 1960s.

Moreover, the filmmakers presumed a level of identity between their viewers/co-producers and the represented subjects in their films. They made films of the people for the people. In addition, viewers of Third Cinema films were transformed by the fact that they had to take some risks to attend the film meetings. In the words of Getino and Solanas:

> Every comrade who attended […] showings did so with the full awareness that he was infringing the System's law and exposing his personal security to eventual repression. This person was no longer a spectator, on the contrary, from the moment he decided to attend the showing, by the moment he lined up on this side by taking risks and contributing his living experience to the meeting, he became an actor, a more important protagonist than those who appeared in the films. (7-8)

The viewer/producer/actor was not only supposed to participate during the film screening by contributing to the arguments, conclusions and plans which could be derived from the movie, but was also supposed to carry out the proposals for action. As Getino and Solanas explained to the audience of their film:

> The conclusions at which you may arrive as the real authors and protagonists of this history are important. […] But most important of all is the action that may arise from these conclusions […]. This is why the film stops here; it opens out to you so that you can continue it. (8)

Although the set-up of the Third Cinema film meetings does not resemble the set-up of closed-circuit video with live feedback at all, these forms of cinema and video are very similar in one important respect: the positions of viewer, producer, and subject of representation can all be occupied simultaneously by one and the same person. Therefore, this particular form of film accomplishes something usually believed to be specific to the medium of video.

3.4 Electronic Diaries, Cinematic Stories

3.4.1 Lynn Hershman's *Electronic Diary*

> *Right now I'm sitting here with no cameraman in the room. I'm totally alone. I would never, ever talk this way if somebody were here. It's almost as if, if somebody were in the room, it would ensure lying […] just like eating alone.*

In *Binge*, the second of three sections of Lynn Hershman's *Electronic Diary* (1985-1989),

Hershman looks into the camera, and tells us how she has frequent romances with "caloric strangers" since her husband left her. In the privacy of her home, Hershman confesses, she often binges on large amounts of food. As the quote above suggests, her video project is an attempt to tell the truth about her eating disorder. It is, moreover, also an attempt to tell the truth about one of the causes of her disorder; the fact that she has repressed her incestuous childhood – until the moment that she testifies on tape that she was abused. Next to the confessional and testimonial aspect of the *Electronic Diary*, Hershman's project also has a therapeutic goal. As the videomaker herself states repeatedly in the work: "It helps me to talk about it."

For the artist, the solitary nature of the recording situation spurs self-revelation and honesty. However, like so many other video works in which artists videotape themselves, the privacy of the recording set-up is known to be provisional. Within her *Electronic Diary*, Hershman often wonders about the feelings and impressions of her future audience, and she occasionally addresses the (imagined) spectator. "Are you watching me? Are you hearing me? Am I voicing things for you?," the artist wonders in *First Person Plural* (part three of the diary). In *Binge,* she remarks that it must be quite boring to listen to someone talking about their diet. "Who cares?," she wonders. Still, Hershman believes that someone will care enough to listen, for a moment later, she starts asking personal questions to the camera/viewer about some of the topics she has just revealed about herself: "When was the last time *you* had sex? Or, more interesting, when was the first time you ever had sex? How do you see yourself?"

These questions seem to imply that Hershman wishes to "even the score" with her spectators. Upon exposing her own secrets and desires, she urges the viewer to undertake a similar kind of self-exposure. Such a dialogue is, of course, impossible. Michael Renov has argued that this impossibility of actual interaction between the artist in front of the lens and a future spectator problematizes the therapeutic effect of the video discourse. There is no responding interlocutor who assists the subject in her search for self-analysis and self-healing. In addition, Krauss claimed that video merely reflects its (narcissistic) subjects, it mirrors them into symmetry. This reflection offers no opportunity for reflexiveness, which would require asymmetry; a fracturing into two different entities that elucidate each other insofar as their separateness is maintained (Krauss 1976: 56). Hershman overcomes these claims on the medium for the most part, as she manages to build in levels of reflexiveness with and within video.

Splitting, Cutting, Inserting

First of all, Hershman is split into two characters within the tape itself. The first character is filmed in close-up. She is the one who exposes intimate secrets and repressed trauma, as well as the one who addresses the viewer with personal questions. The close-up enforces the feeling of intimacy between the narrating subject and her audience. The second character shows the same Hershman, yet she is filmed from at a slightly less close range. Besides her face, we see a part of her upper body. As opposed to the

personal stories of the first persona, this character reflects on wider social issues. These issues are related to the personal details revealed by Hershman in close-up. The more distant subject discusses topics such as food, nutrition and hunger in relation to society and history, and reflects on the impact which domestic violence can have on society. These analytic expositions place Hershman's personal struggles in a social context. This procedure points toward an understanding of the self as a social construction. Moreover, it creates reflexivity within the video: the distant Hershman elucidates the problems of the Hershman in close-up by framing her personal story within the social structures – the family, American society – which are largely responsible for her problems.

Secondly, Hershman's tapes can be regarded as reflexive because they have been edited and manipulated after the story was recorded; the videos are characterized by an abundance of artifices such as split screens, dissolves, montage effects and distortion. This postproduction is already a form of self-analysis in which the artist becomes her own responding therapist. By editing the primary material, Hershman has already arranged her diaristic material in a fairly coherent, condense and meaningful way. Moreover, in the editing process, the artist has added images and video effects.

During Hershman's discussion of her difficult childhood, the image of her face is mixed, through video layering and keying, with images of a crying baby and prisoners in a concentration camp. While she mentions that the scars of her past are deep, light-hearted home video footage of a family alternates with moving war pictures. In another scene, a conventional home video shot of a little girl running on a lawn are cut through with images of street fights and suffering, hungry children in abandoned houses. In addition, the footage of the running girl is slowed down, which has the eerie affect that she seems to struggle against an invisible force. We never get to see the girl properly. Her body is turned away, and she doesn't look into the camera. In the end, she disappears behind a large dark hedge. The message of these formal devices and temporal as well as layered montages is clear: behind the surface of happy family life, a battle can take place. Hershman's childhood was like a warzone. She was deprived of safety, and struggled against violence. The montages and image manipulation can be seen as straightforward rhetorical techniques which enhance and clarify Hershman's painful narration for the spectator. But they can also be seen as artifices by which Hershman tries to clarify her story for herself and to herself.

The same can be argued for the film images shown in *First Person Plural*. Hershman's starts this section by recalling that, when she was small, there were episodes of violence in her family, during which she would hide in the attic. A few moments later, the artist remarks that "most people conceive of their life's story through some myth." For her, the story of Dracula has always had a special meaning. Hershman explains how she would hear his footsteps coming to her room when she was small, how she would be both repelled and excited by that. In light of the previous details on domestic violence in her childhood, these sentences seem to suggest that there was sexual abuse too. Dracula

“comes at night, when nobody is around,” the artist continues, upon which her discussion is interrupted by a whispering voice which repeatedly says “You’re not supposed to talk about, don’t talk about it.” Then, we see suspenseful film images of a cloaked Dracula who walks into a dark home, sneaks upstairs, and quietly enters one of the rooms. These film images help Hershman to expose something which she cannot tell. She is not supposed to talk about the incest, a soft inner voice tries to suppress the story, even if it is disguised by a myth. However, whereas talking about is still too difficult, Hershman is able to show what happened in a suggestive way: through ready-made film images.

In addition, the many video effects which the artist abundantly applies can be understood as therapeutic acts to expose the truth. Hershman’s discussion of her distorted view on her own abused body is accompanied by a distorted video image of her body. Moreover, in *Confessions of a Chameleon* (part two of *Electronic Diary*), Hershman confesses that she has been playing different personas throughout her life. She can switch between characters, but doesn’t know anymore which of her performed identities is really hers, or where she has lost her sense of self. She has adopted multiple personas, but now, she doesn’t seem to know who she is. Her authentic self (or at least her sense of an original singular self) got lost in the middle of layers of fat as well as layers of clothing from her different wardrobes (“for several people, in several sizes”). This unstable subjectivity is one of the main problems Hershman tries to come to terms with in her *Electronic Diary.* Unlike the childhood incest and the obviously related binge eating disorder, Hershman’s split personality returns as a theme throughout the three parts of the diary. Whenever she mentions how she plays multiple personae, the moving images mirror her story through split screens. The video medium replicates Hershman’s recorded image into many smaller images just as she multiplies herself into different versions in her daily life. These split screens can be interpreted as a visual representation of the verbal confession, yet can also be viewed as a therapeutic form of acknowledging or facing up to a problem, by way of video.

Moreover, another form of therapeutic reflection can be discovered in the tapes when Hershman suggest that the footage is being viewed between the recording sessions. In *First Person Plural,* she explains that she has shown some (already edited) footage on her childhood to some friends. She noted that they didn’t hear or see what she was trying to make clear with the Dracula movie. They understood the fact that she was battered, but didn’t pick up the reference to incest. Therefore, Hershman decides that she needs to talk more explicitly about the thing she is “not supposed to talk about.” The screen turns black, upon which the artist declares: “I was physically *and* sexually abused.” This brief and softly spoken utterance can still easily be overheard while viewing the video. However, for the artist, naming the sexual abuse outright appears to function as a talking cure. After the exposure, Herman remarks how helpful and necessary it is to talk about it.

The final level of reflexivity can be recognized in the fact that the artist has clearly

watched and edited her tapes in between the recording sessions. She responds, in the video, to her own previous recordings. She for instance tells us that she has trouble looking at herself, on video or in any other way. After having avoided mirrors and other reflections for years, she doesn't recognize herself anymore when she views herself on video. She remarks how she hates the close-ups of her face, but also suggests that by only shooting her face, she avoids looking at her body. However, at the moment that the artist self-critically remarks that all she ever shoots is herself from the neck up, several images of her entire body are inserted into (or unto) the image of her talking head. Thus, in post-production, Hershman breaks out of the habit of avoiding images of her own body. As the producer and the first viewer of the tape, she forces herself to look at her own body.

In order to show that the appearance of Hershman's whole body within the video is, however, not the end of her negative, unstable self-image, the video image of her body is replicated in several inserts. Moreover, the body turns away from the camera/viewer; it turns away in a corner. However, while her averted body appears on screen, Hershman addresses herself in voice-over with the encouraging words: "You don't have to be put in a corner." At this point, the artist has explicitly become her own interlocutor within the tape. Because of this, her *Electronic Diary* is both oriented towards a larger social viewing context, and a self-contained therapeutic interaction between the artist and her self-image(s).

Failed Confession, Successful Secret

However, in spite of all the levels of reflexivity discussed above, it is questionable if Hershman succeeds in her quest to help herself by revealing all the repressed and hidden details of her life on video. One of the main reasons for which she uses video is – as pointed out in the epigraph – that the medium offers her the possibility to be honest. Whereas the presence of a camera operator or anyone else would ensure lying, Hershman can tell the truth about her life in solitude to the inanimate video camera. Yet, being honest and truthful is problematic for Hershman, for several reasons. First of all, the artist always pretends; this is one of her main problems. This makes it difficult to tell the truth about herself. It is hardly possible to be honest and authentic as long as she doesn't really know how to be someone without a conscious, continuous roster of identities.

Secondly, Hershman problematizes the possibility of being truthful in her video diary by her following reflection on the society in which she believes she lives:

> I think that we've become a society of screens, of different layers that keep us from knowing the truth, as if the truth is almost unbearable and too much to deal with, just like our feelings. So we deal with things through replication, and through copying, through screens, through simulation, through facsimile, through fiction, and through faction. (Hershman, in *Binge*)

Hershman's analysis is reminiscent of Baudrillard's idea that we live in a world of simulation and simulacra. A situation that is, for him, indebted to electronic media such as video. Hershman, in addition, argues that the simulacra around us keep us away from something vital: the truth, the real. For Hershman, it is a problem to live in what she calls a "society of screens," in a society of layers that keep one from the truth. Under social pressure, Hershman has kept her truth, her traumatic childhood, hidden for years. She has, indeed, dealt with it through replication and copying; by playing different personas, she has replicated and copied her identity continuously.

Yet, splitting into replicas has not been a satisfactory coping mechanism for the artist. It has resulted in an eating disorder and a lack of a stable identity. She tries to cure both of these problems by finally exposing the truth about her past. However, Hershman tries to tell the truth in a video, which requires that she makes a screen image or replication of herself (or selves) once more. Again, she deals with things through replication. In addition, she splits herself into different personas within the video, in the alternation between the distant and close Hershman character, as well as within the frame of singular video images through manipulation such as inserts and split-screens. Hence, the multiplication of Hershman's self-image continues by and in video onto the level of the singular frame of the video monitor.

In sum, the alleged cure for Hershman's incapacity to know and tell the truth about herself, namely the private video recording, in the end reinforces her inauthenticity, and her lack of a sense of (one singular, true) self. As one of the main producers of "screens, replications and simulations" in the postmodern era of simulations and simulacra, the video medium is perhaps even a cause of the problems which Hershman now tries to solve with it. So, the harmful effect of a society of screens and simulacra, ensuring that we are kept from the truth, is supposed to be solved with its cause, video. In the case of Hershman, this doesn't have a healing effect: it merely replicates the problem of replication.

In Hershman's *Electronic Diary*, video is used as a tool for confession, (self-)therapy and testimony in intricate and medium-specific ways. However, the medium is not as uncritically embraced as in many of the practices and theories which use or reflect on the medium as a wonderful tool which is nothing but helpful in the domains in question. Hershman's video contains both the utopian and the dystopian perspectives on the social effects of the medium. Hershman adopts the medium with the hope that it can offer her the opportunity to be honest, yet her discourse is also permeated by the Baudrillardian opinion that the screen shields instead of shows the truth. Therefore, in the *Electronic Diary*, the acts of confession, therapy, and testimony fail because in Hershman's work, the video image is exposed as yet another simulacrum. The medium doesn't just produce an unreality *effect* (as Hartman has it); it produces images without a referent in reality (as Baudrillard would claim).Therefore, video cannot provide the truthfulness Hershman needs in order to free herself from the troubled process of hiding in replication and simulation, nor can it provide the truthfulness that confession,

therapy, and testimony need in order to be successful.

However, Hershman's video *is* successful in representing her secret. This doesn't mean that she manages to tell what she wasn't supposed to tell, for as was explained, the artist emphasized that she doesn't succeed in revealing the truth. However, she does manage to present her secret *as* a secret. In *Languages of the Unsayable,* Jacques Derrida wonders: "does something like the secret itself, properly speaking, ever exist?" (25)[110] A secret is something which cannot be told; if told, it is no longer a secret. It is something that cannot be told and which has to be denied at all times. However, how can it exist if it cannot be told? As Derrida puts it:

> There is a secret of denial and a denial of the secret. The secret as such, as secret, separates and already institutes a negativity; it is a negation that denies itself. It de-negates itself [...] This denial [*dénégation*] does not happen by accident; it is essential and originary. (1989: 25)

Leonard Lawler explains this *dénégation* as follows: in order to possess a secret, to have it *really*, I must tell it to myself:

> I must have a conceptual grasp of it; I have to frame a representation of the secret. [...] A trace of the secret must be formed, in which case, the secret is in principle shareable. If the secret must be necessarily shareable, it is always already shared. In other words, in order to frame the representation of the secret, I must negate the first negation, in which I promised not to tell the secret: I must tell the secret to myself as if I were someone else. I thereby make a second negation, a "de-negation," which means I must break the promise not to tell the secret. In order to keep the secret (or the promise), I must necessarily not keep the secret (I must violate the promise). (Lawler on Derrida 2011)

The closed-circuit video set-up offers Lynn Hershman the ability to possess her traumatic secret by telling it to herself as if she were someone else. At the same time, her video is released to a wider audience; she is not the only listener. Yet, her video keeps the secret as secret, for although saying her unspeakable secret out loud ("I was abused"), Hershman also keeps denying that she is capable of telling the truth, of even knowing the truth about anything, let alone herself. She is kept from the truth by screens and simulations, and can only deal with things through fiction, she asserts. In this way, the artist raises doubts as to the secret she is claiming to tell: there might not be a real secret at all. Hershman's secret is denied and told at the same time. It is negated ("I'm not supposed to talk about it") denegated (whispered to the self: "I was abused") and

[110] I thank Yasco Horsman for pointing out the relevance of Derrida's writings on the secret to me in this respect.

negated again ("but I do not know nor speak the truth about myself ever"). This leaves the existence of the secret undecided. And that is why Hershman's secret comes across as a secret, after all.

3.4.2 Sadie Benning's *It Wasn't Love*

Two teenage girls are standing in front of the video camera. While looking into the lens, they strike playful poses together. Between laughs and hugs, the two friends try to put on a bold face. They chew gum, arrogantly hold their chins up, and nod their heads in a macho way. With their arms folded before them, slightly leaning backwards, the girls seem to perform a rather masculine form of toughness. All the while, the song "You Go To My Head" is playing. With her warm tone of voice, Billie Holiday sings of how she is in the spell of a lover whose smile makes her temperature rise. At first, this old-fashioned romantic song on a "crazy romance" which "never can be" does not seem to fit the images of the two bold girls acting like tomboys. However, when the two young women start to dance in a sensual embrace it becomes clear that Holiday's lines on an intoxicating love affair are not entirely inappropriate in relation to the girls in view.

As the video proceeds, one of the girls turns out to be the narrator and producer of the video. Sadie Benning, the 19-year-old narrator of *It Wasn't Love* (1992), tells about a short-lived exciting affair she has had with a tough "bad girl." After the dancing scene, Benning points the camera at herself. When grainy black-and-white close-ups of her face fill the screen, Benning starts her story: "Yesterday night, I drove to Hollywood with this chick." The trip to Hollywood the "chick" had initiated gets Benning into a lot of trouble, for Benning's adventurous lover admits that they are driving in a stolen car. In addition, while driving, Benning's friend alters the plan. She proposes to go to Detroit instead, and to rob liquor stores on the way. Although the situation makes Benning feel tense, she also finds her friend's fearlessness very attractive: "I got nervous. She got sexy." The bold, daring way in which the friend lives her life fills Benning with longing and admiration: "Her life was my fantasy."

In addition to the fact that the girls are initially driving to Hollywood, the video relates to Hollywood movies in many other ways. As I will explain later on, Hollywood cinema functions as an important frame of reference for Benning, the narrator. However, on a formal level, *It Wasn't Love* does not imitate or resemble Hollywood films at all. This is most of all due to Benning's plain video equipment: a Fisher-Price toy camera which tapes video images on audio cassettes. The simple technology of this video camera dictates some of the most prominent formal characteristics of the video story. First of all, the black-and-white images are very grainy – the Fisher-Price camera in question doesn't go by the name of "PixelVision Camera" for nothing. Secondly, the absence of a zoom lens necessitates Benning pushing the camera near to her face when she needs to show detail. Christine Tamblyn defined the effect of these close-ups well when she

remarked that these close-ups achieve “an eerie fish-eyed sense of presence” (22). In addition, the length of the shots is limited by the camera’s weak batteries. As a result, the video hurls from one clip to the next at a pace that wouldn’t be out of place in popular music videos – no “boring” video art-like extendedness here. Moreover, because of the absence of a titler, Benning videotapes hand lettered signs when she wants to accompany the images and spoken words with written texts.

The amateuristic, home-made, rough low quality of the video is emphasized all the more by the fact that the video was quite literally home-made. The artist didn’t take her video camera with her when she went on the exciting road trip. Both the spoken and written texts, as well as the video images through which the story is told, were all recorded with the Fisher-Price video camera within Benning’s bedroom. Although Benning’s story involves the act of running away from home, the images by which Benning tells this story always have the private house as their background, and frequently show small objects which can be found in family dwellings. When the artist tells about driving or getting into the car, her story is accompanied by a shot out of the bedroom window which shows a car pulling out of the street, or by video images of a small toy car driving across a wooden floor.

Both the limitations of the video equipment, as well as the confinement of the video camera to the bedroom, are production constraints. As I will demonstrate, they produce meaning and have important performative effects. Most importantly, they create the type of space Acconci defines in opposition to Krauss’ idea of video as an anti-social, solipsistic, narcissistic medium. He describes video as an “intimate space with permeable boundaries.” In *It Wasn’t Love,* the space in front of the video camera is an intimate one in the sense that it is a private and closely personal space. This intimate space, then, is permeable because the video’s viewers are granted visual access and physical proximity to this space. In addition, the permeability lies in the fact that Benning investigates her identity in relation to the dominant social and cultural institution of Hollywood cinema.

The private and personal character of *It Wasn’t Love* depends in part on the fact that the video space coincides entirely with Benning’s teenage bedroom, an important private domain for adolescents. It functions as a retreat from the world in general, and from parental supervision in particular. As a space where teenagers can be alone with themselves or with close friends, the private bedroom has a vital function in the process of establishing one’s identity and becoming an independent adult. In Benning’s work, the video camera works in tandem with the function of the bedroom. Like the bedroom, the medium assists her in a trajectory towards independence and the formation of identity.

In front of the video camera, Benning is able to expose personal facts about her private life. To a certain extent, video is like a diary in which (and to which) the artist reveals her thoughts and confesses (secret) experiences and desires. Benning makes the diaristic function of the medium explicit when she addresses the camera with “dear diary.” However, the comparison between video and the diary fails to recognize one

important aspect of the video: it is shown in public art spaces and is distributed via the Video Data Bank in Chicago. This is why the boundaries of video's intimate space can be called permeable. When Benning addresses the camera or performs in front of it, she relates to a future audience. Moreover, the video can be said to haul in the viewer by its haptic image qualities. The poor, grainy quality of the footage invites the engaged mode of looking discussed in the previous chapter; a tactile mode of looking that involves all the senses and which rushes up the image surface. The spectator of *It Wasn't Love* is enabled to perceive Benning's discourse on gender and sexuality with her body.

No Diary, No Mirror

The comparison of the medium of video to a diary is not only unsuitable in order to express the relationship between the narrator and the audience. It is also potentially problematic for the artist/narrator herself. This is most noticeable precisely within the one scene in which Benning calls her video a diary. The two spoken words "dear diary" are simultaneously shown by printed curly letters on what presumably is the front of an actual paper diary. The letters are accompanied by a picture of a ponytailed little girl and surrounded by some printed hearts. After the utterance of "dear diary," upbeat music sets in, and Benning continues with the sentence "On the way she said [...] "I stole this car."" The ironic tension between the curly little girl on the diary and the thrilling revelation of Benning's friend point out why Benning cannot adopt the genre of the diary in a serious way. The diary has a sweet, girly connotation, while the girls in the story Benning is telling as well as the gender identities she is interested in are precisely not the stereotypical sweet, girly types.

The gender types in which Benning is interested are more fierce. This is noticeable when she admires the powerful attitude of her daring lesbian friend, as well as in the gender types she exhibits in front of the video camera. In *It Wasn't Love,* Benning dresses up as female vamps who seductively blow cigarette smoke while staring through the lens, or like masculine bad-looking bearded guys who show off their bold moves and tattooed arms in front of the camera. Although the clothes, wigs and make-up on these female and male characters slightly differs from one scene to the next, what these gender types have in common is that they can all be recognized as well-known popular images of forms of femininity or masculinity which put their sexuality on display by being seductive or showing off. Forms in which, moreover, sexuality is related to danger: both the femme fatale and the macho man are associated with violence and threat.

The familiarity of the stereotypes Benning performs can be explained by the fact that she often imitates famous, iconic film stars. Benning for instance resembles James Dean in shots where she looks pensively into the camera with her collar turned up or a cigarette in the corner of her mouth. When she dresses in a kimono and a platinum blonde wig, the artist is clearly impersonating Jean Harlow. The combination of sexuality and danger is especially prominent in these two film stars. Both of them acquired the status of sex symbol during their short lives. In addition, the image of the rebel is

inextricably bound up with Dean, while the assumed viciousness of Harlow's seductive sexuality was expressed by her nicknames; the actress was known as the "laughing vamp" and the "blonde bombshell."

Benning's performance of these stereotypical or iconic characters in front of the camera points out that the comparison of the video medium with the diary is not only problematic here, but also inadequate. In Benning's video, the medium fulfills diaristic functions, but it also offers possibilities absent from the diary. As Benning shows, it is possible to constantly change one's physical appearance in a video. The performances of dressing up and play acting so prominent in *It Wasn't Love* are, however, by convention not a part of the genre of the diary, nor are they technically possible within the most conventional physical form of the diary, the written book.

However, like the confessions confided to a diary, the role play Benning is carrying out in the video has a personal and private character. It can be recognized as an adolescent search for the right look or the proper image, for the appearance that best expresses the teenage identity-in-the-making. Such experiments with different looks tend to be carried out in private before the result is shown in public. Therefore, the idea of video as an intimate space certainly applies here. In *It Wasn't Love,* the space in front of the camera is a safe and private one in which the artist is engaged in the personal and precarious process of figuring out her identity.

Benning's experimentation with different personas in front of the video camera may be compared with the mirror. Christine Tamblyn has argued that the camera functions as a metamorphic mirror in *It Wasn't Love*, because it witnesses Benning's transformation from one character to the next (1996: 22). In addition, the video equipment is able to feed the image back to its subject: Sadie Benning. Moreover, video resembles a mirror in Benning's work because the act of dressing up which she performs in front of the camera is actually carried out in front of the mirror by teenagers who experiment with their looks.

However, as the diary, the mirror has its shortcomings when it is applied as a metaphor for the function of video in *It Wasn't Love*. The notion of the mirror does not automatically express the reflexivity video offers to the subjects using it. It runs the risk of portraying video in a "Kraussian" manner; as a narcissistic medium which simply reflects the subjects it records without opening up possibilities of critical self-analysis and/or (personal) change. In contrast to this, Benning's video is an outstanding example of video's potential with regard to critical analysis and change. However, this critical potential of the video medium functions in relation to another medium. In *It Wasn't Love*, the medium of film is both a target *of* and a tool *for* pungent reflections. In her video, Benning reflects both *with* film and *on* film.

In addition to the scenes in which the artist imitates famous Hollywood film stars, the Hollywood movie enters the video in the form of videotaped fragments from some classic movies that were all produced in the first half of the twentieth century. The video images which show or refer to film are alternated by and combined with spoken and

written words as well as fragments of popular music. The images, words and music clips function on different levels which gain and produce meaning in relation to one another. In the video, spoken and written words outline the story of the road trip. With her voice as well as hand-written text, Benning depicts her adventure concisely. In about a dozen short sentences, she explains how the road trip ran, what her friend said and how she behaved, and how Benning responded to all this. The words give a clear impression of the story's fabula. In addition, they provide an insight into the conflicting feelings of its internal narrator. Benning mentions how she "played it cool," but also got stressed out by the adventurous plans of her friend. Moreover, she expresses ambivalence about her attraction to the tough lesbian.

After Benning has told how her friend said "Go ahead, fall in love with me," the following hand-written phrases successively fill the screen: "Run away/Get lost/Love me/Scat/Tomboy/Forever/Faggot." In this stream of consciousness, the ideas of running away, loving a girl and being a tomboy forever are each followed by words which express aversion. On the one hand, this aversion can be attributed to the narrator and focalisor, Benning, who is still hesitant about her possible identity as a rebellious lesbian. On the other hand, the negative word "faggot" might also be said to represent a more general negative view on lesbian women within society at large – a view with which Benning has to come to terms. Benning's struggle with this broader social stance against homosexuality becomes more noticeable at a later point in the video, when the melodramatic lament song "Why Must I Be a Teenager in Love" (Dion and the Belmonts 1959) is followed by an up-beat music clip in which Prince sings: "I just can't believe/all the things people said/Controversy!"

The words and songs which depict Benning's road trip, as well as her struggle with the controversies of being a lesbian teenager in love, interact with the video images which show or refer to Hollywood film. On the one hand, the film references influence the meaning of Benning's words as well as the lyrics of the song she picks. On the other hand, as I will demonstrate later on, the spoken, written, printed and sung words have an effect on the Hollywood characters and clips which Benning shows in *It Wasn't Love*. The references to Hollywood provide the road trip of the two girls with a certain grandeur. They are not only driving to Hollywood, they are on a trip which, according to the narrator and focalizor, has the air of a glamorous and exciting classic film. For example, Benning audio-visually argues that her trip was like a film when, after the disclosure of her friend's criminal plans, she inserts a cinematic fragment of policemen shooting.

Towards the end of the video, it becomes clear that the girls didn't end up as fugitives robbing liquor stores. They didn't make it to Detroit, much less Hollywood, but made out in the parking lot of a fast-food restaurant instead. "Then it happened," Benning remarks, increasing the suspense, only to continue with an ironic conclusion: "She dropped me off at home." In sum, the trip turns out to have been a short, not too glamorous one. Yet, for Benning, the small and short experience was big and important, because it made her feel worldly and powerful. As she explains: "In that parking lot, I

felt like I had seen the whole world. She had this way of making me feel like I was the goddamn Nile River or something." The notion of Hollywood, with its connotations of glamour, dreams, fame, and excitement, helps Benning to express the realm of positive feelings which her short affair opened up to her.

Inside or Outside Hollywood

However, although Hollywood as a frame of reference brings out some of the positive effects of the affair on the artist/narrator, it also emphasizes the difficulty of her struggle in defining her identity as a lesbian woman. The scenes in which Benning is dressed up as film star-like characters confirm the search she expresses in words. They show that she is indeed experimenting with gender roles; she is trying them on one by one. However, the question which arises is: is Hollywood the place to go for lesbians looking for role models? The stereotypical characters of the vamp and the macho-man which Benning performs seem in line with her story, since the vamp and the macho-man represent a combination of sexuality and danger, and of sexuality *as* danger. This relationship between sexual attraction and seduction and danger is also an important theme in Benning's story, who feels attracted by the daredevilry of her self-confident and seductive friend.

Moreover, film stars such as James Dean and Jean Harlow seem all the more suitable to express forms of queerness, because in spite of the fact that they served as heterosexual sex symbols, they inconspicuously possessed androgynous traits which transgress the conventional distinctions between masculinity and femininity. The abundantly dressed-up and made-up Harlow could, at times, have the appearance of a transvestite. Especially in pictures which emphasize her somewhat sturdy facial bone structure and angularly shaped eyebrows, the laughing vamp looks like a drag queen. The androgyny which Harlow possessed was actually quite fashionable in the 1930s, and has been noted in other actresses of the decade too. Benning imitates some of them, such as Greto Garbo and Marlene Dietrich, as well. James Dean's slightly androgynous appearance has been understood as sign of bisexuality; the sexual orientation of the actor is still widely debated.

When it comes to the expression of a rebellious and tough form of lesbian, queer subjectivity the artist is investigating, the Hollywood icons which Benning imitates are the most suitable role models available within the Hollywood spectrum.[111] However, although they are the most suitable, they are still very poor role models. The fact that, in the 1990s, the Hollywood stars with whom a young lesbian teenager can best identify are decades-old heterosexual sex symbols who look slightly androgynous and might

[111] I am using the concept of queer in addition the word lesbian in order to emphasize that Benning is not merely investigating her homosexuality, but also a form of gender identity which transgresses the conventional forms of femininity and masculinity. Whereas the term lesbianism does not refer such a transgression of gender norms, the concept of queerness has (through a re-appropriation of the term in 1990s) come to refer not only to gay and lesbian subjectivities, but also to transgendered subjects (*Norton Anthology*, first ed., 2433).

have been gay, shows that homosexuality has not yet been included within the discourse of dominant mainstream cinema. Naturally, this exclusion of homosexuality from Hollywood points to the marginalization of gay men and women in a larger social context. Hollywood cinema is inextricably bound up with the American society in which Benning grew up. Mainstream movies, including the stars they bring forth, both express, determine, and perpetuate the prevalent values of the society in which they are produced. Therefore, in dealing with Hollywood, Benning's video deals with society at large as well.

In addition to the absence of openly gay film stars, Hollywood's exclusion of homosexuality is also visible in the fact that explicit love scenes between members of the same sex are hard to come by. Benning's video exposes this absence in a funny, tongue-in-cheek way. She shows that the part of her story which refers to criminal activities can well be expressed by available Hollywood imagery, such as policemen shooting, a crook turning in front of a prison camera, while sexual intimacy between women can only be shown by way of cinematic shots which portray other forms of physical proximity between women. In order to express sexual attraction between women, Benning resorts to clips from the classic thriller called *The Bad Seed* (LeRoy 1959). The "bad seed" in the title refers metonymically to its offspring; the film tells how housewife Christine starts to suspect that her sweet-looking adolescent daughter Rhoda is in fact a heartless killer. However, it is not surprising that film's title is explicitly shown in *It Wasn't Love*, because in the context of lesbian love, the title also seems to form a mocking rejection of the origin instead of the offspring of seed; the male sex.

After a shot of the title frame, Benning's video shows a scene from *The Bad Seed* in which Rhoda confesses her crimes to Christine. Apart from the sentences in which Rhoda asks her mother if she wants to play with her again, the dialogue between the two protagonists is omitted from *It Wasn't Love*. Thus, attention is drawn to the physical interaction between the adolescent girl and her mother. Rhoda tries to win the shocked Christine over by stroking her face and throwing herself into her mother's arms. Christine falls for these attempts at conciliation, upon which she protectively presses her daughter against her chest.

Benning's video camera not only changed the smooth film images into pixilated haptic ones which invite a sensual form of looking, it has also reframed them with a focus on these gestures of affection. For instance, whereas the film shows a large part of the room in which Christine and Rhoda hug each other, the two women fill the entire video frame when Rhoda's head rests on Christine breasts. The sensuality suggested by these videographic close-ups is confirmed as well as enhanced by the song accompanying the images. The lyrics of Prince's "I Wanna Be Your Lover" ("I wanna turn you on/ turn you out/ all night long/make you shout") leave little doubt as to the way in which the video invites its viewers to understand the intimate gestures between the girl and woman on screen. According to Benning, the film's bad girl is indeed what the artist calls a "bad girl," yet not in the sense predicated by the film (a heartless sociopath), but

in the sense proposed by the video (a tough lesbian).

Like Benning's imitation of heterosexual sex symbols in order to investigate lesbian subjectivity, the artist's re-framing of the film scene points out the marginalization of homosexuality within Hollywood representations, as well as within the larger social sphere to which Hollywood movies relate. As was the case with the imitated movie stars, the sampled movie scene at first sight does not seem to express queerness or homosexuality at all. The scene clearly does not depict two lovers. Even without the sound of the dialogue that would indicate kinship, Christine and Rhoda can easily be recognized as mother and daughter. If this scene from LeRoy's 1950s film is the most suitable fragment for Benning to express her infatuation, there is obviously no place for homosexuality in Hollywood representations.

No wonder that in *It Wasn't Love,* the artist and her friend do not make it to Hollywood. The short story of the road trip mirrors the more general reflection on Hollywood presentation in Benning's video piece. In addition, the formal characteristics of the video do not quite make it to Hollywood in terms of image quality and style. The video copies and imitates Hollywood movies in many ways, yet the quality of the medium as well as the way in which the footage is edited is very poor in comparison to the smooth continuity of the classic narrative films to which it refers. In comparison to these award-winning big budget films, *It Wasn't Love*, visibly made with a toy, looks amateurish and childlike. This distinction between the old smooth medium of film and the relatively young and rough medium of video is all the more emphasized by the fact that the films and film stars which are quoted by Benning are indeed old films and film stars of the old days. In contrast to this, in *It Wasn't Love,* the medium of video is clearly in the hands of a young woman, who operates it front as well as behind the camera, and who edits it in a fashion that resembles the style of contemporary popular music clips instead of classic narrative movies.

Old and Young

The discrepancy between film as an old, established medium and video as a young, flexible, rough medium is important because it is meaningful in relation to the video's themes of gender and (homo)sexuality. Throughout the video, the lesbian subjectivity Benning is trying to establish is repeatedly represented as "young." Firstly, the murderous Rhoda who is re-framed by Benning as a lesbian "bad girl" is obviously a child. Secondly, the two most prominent film stars which Benning imitates (Dean and Harlow) died young. Hence, they not only function as sex symbols but also as symbols of youth. In addition, due to his performance in *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955)*,* Dean is widely considered a symbol for misunderstood teenagers.

Thirdly, some songs that accompany the video images mention the teenager or the child. Dion DiMucci plaintively wonders why he must be a teenager in love in the quoted song. When a fragment of Prince's song "I Wanna Be Your Lover" is playing during the film fragment from *The Bad Seed,* the theme of youthfulness is also brought to the fore.

Benning has selected precisely the stanza from the song in which the pop star sings: “I get discouraged/Cause you treat me just like a child.” In the context of Benning’s video, the reproach uttered by Prince can be interpreted in two ways. It can be understood as a remark on Benning’s friend and lover, who takes the lead and has an attitude. However, the line “you treat me just like a child” can also be interpreted as a reproach to Hollywood as an industry in general, which excludes gayness. Moreover, as *It Wasn’t Love* shows, the Hollywood characters who *can* function as models for queers are immature, childlike characters.

Yet, in spite of the lines that express disapproval of being a teenager or being treated like a child, Benning also seems to embrace puerility. In the video, the notions of “tomboy” and “bad girl” are posited as important, positive models for Benning. This can be explained by the fact that these words transgress a conventional form of femininity. They refer to a boyish or rebellious girl, and as such, they stand in contrast to the stereotype of the sweet, girly woman. Therefore, the notions of tomboy or bad girl are suitable for women like the artist who cannot identify with the dominant stereotype of femininity. It is significant, though, that the two most common phrases by which slightly masculine, tough or daring women can be indicated are terms which simultaneously indicate immaturity.

However, it is not only in absence of terms such as “tom-*man*” or “bad *woman*” that Benning adopts these terms. The youthfulness to which “tomboy” and “bad girl” refer is fully expressed by the artist. Not only does she use a toy camera, she also tells her story by showing childish objects such as the toy car and the girl’s diary. Besides dressing up and acting like films stars, Benning occasionally dances in front of the camera or play-backs a song. All these performances have a playful character, they are reminiscent of the childlike pastime of “playing pretends.” Moreover, even the least naïve parts of the story are presented by way of images which refer to childhood. When the narrator, for instance, relates how she made out with her lover/friend in the parking lot, the story is accompanied by seemingly erotic images of a sucking mouth in close-up. This mouth as well as its content, however, turn out to belong to Benning herself, who is sucking on her thumb like a child.

Benning’s representation of adult matters such as a love affair, a road trip in a stolen car, and a sexual encounter in a parking lot by way of childish objects and images should not only be understood as an expression of the artist’s teenage angst, or as a representation of her position between childhood and adulthood. For besides this mimetic function of the toys and games, they have a performative effect. In *It Wasn’t Love,* youthfulness, childishness, and play function as strategies by which the artist attempts to overcome her marginal position within the dominant cultural representation as well as society at large. As a lesbian teenager who doesn’t want to conform to conventional gendered stereotypes, she is excluded, she is not taken seriously, and she is treated like a child. Yet she embraces precisely the non-serious and the lightheartedness of child’s play in order to oppose her exclusion from dominant social and cultural forms.

For it is by way of play that Benning inscribes herself into Hollywood. Or, to put it the other way around, she appropriates Hollywood and makes it her own. First of all, Benning's marginal position not only concerns Hollywood *representation*; she is also an outsider to Hollywood *production*. Toys offer her the opportunity to make her own movie nevertheless. Her shot of a toy car with her toy camera does not hide the fact that the objects in question are childlike attributes of little value. Nevertheless, the video images of the toy car, in combination with suspenseful music, are very similar to the extreme long shots in narrative films on road trips, which show a car driving through the landscape. In addition, Benning presents her story as a film because the notion of Hollywood, with its connotations of glamour, dreams, fame, and excitement, emphasizes the feelings of excitement and grandeur the artist experienced during the trip with her friend. In this respect, Hollywood film is appropriated for its positive connotations of glitter and glamour. The fact that the story of a love affair between two girls has never been told by Hollywood doesn't mean it cannot have, or borrow, Hollywood's air of magnificence.

The word "inscription" is more suitable than "appropriation" with regard to Benning's imitations of film celebrities. By dressing up like famous Hollywood icons, the artist puts herself in their shoes. By imagining herself in their position, Benning enters the domain of Hollywood, albeit imaginatively. In the privacy of her bedroom, through play, Benning can be any star she wants to be. Near the end of the video, the artist states: "We didn't need Hollywood. We *were* Hollywood. She was the most glamorous woman I'd ever met. And that made us both famous." This conclusion expresses the idea that young lesbian women do not need to be represented by Hollywood imagery in order to represent Hollywood images, including its stars, themselves. They can just *be* Hollywood – glamorous and dramatic – without being *in* Hollywood, be it a place or a discourse.

Moreover, instead of being oppressed by or forced into the gender types Hollywood dictates, Benning enters into Hollywood's stereotypical characters voluntarily. This makes her the one in charge, and moreover shows how gender can be played or changed at will. *It Wasn't Love* presents gender identity as flexible. This brings me back to my earlier statement that the discrepancy between film as an old, established medium and video as a young, flexible, rough medium is meaningful in relation to the video's themes of gender and (homo)sexuality. In *It Wasn't Love*, the characteristics of the two media reflect the way in which they represent gender. The old, established medium of film is ruled by inflexible, old-fashioned conventions when it comes to the representation of gender. The young and malleable medium of video represents gender as a form of play, open to a multitude of possibilities. The accessible, flexible medium functions as an alternative space in which possibly alternative subjectivities and identities can be tried out. In addition, unlike the smooth surface of film which keeps the passive film viewer at bay, video's haptic low-quality images invite the viewer to participate and fill in the blanks. This mirrors the way in which Benning fills in different forms of masculinity and femininity. It also brings out the politics of inclusion the video calls for, a politics that contrasts with the cinematic tradition of exclusion, concerning both the audience in

general as well as queer subjectivities in particular.

The word "inscription" is also applicable to Benning's performances as film stars in the sense of "re-writing." By playing several specific famous Hollywood icons, Benning changes the meaning of stars such as James Dean and Jean Harlow, who mostly stand for conventional masculinity or femininity as well as heterosexuality. The performances of the artist look amusingly contrived because they show a tomboy getting into the skin of conventional sex symbols. This not only brings out the "misfit" between Benning as a rebellious lesbian and the conventional Hollywood stereotypes she is trying out, it also brings out and enhances some of the queerness and androgyny which – as mentioned before – are already present in the Hollywood icons. After having seen how well Dean can be imitated by a girl, his soft feminine features can be recognized far more clearly. After Benning's boyish impersonation of Jean Harlow, the actress can never been seen again without somehow recognizing a young man underneath her layers of make-up. In sum, Benning not only stresses that the queerness which is excluded and covered up by Hollywood can be inscribed into it by way of play, but also that it is already there.

This also goes for the film clip Benning playfully includes in her video. The suggestion to read a scene between a mother and daughter from *The Bad Seed* as a lesbian encounter can be understood as a bold appropriation of Hollywood material. The artist inscribes gayness into the scene by presenting it in a new context as a representation of homosexuality. The effect, then, is slightly mocking and funny; we know that this scene from a classic movie is not representing lesbian sexuality at all, but Benning's video allows us to read it against the conventional grain. However, the re-presentation of the scene can also be interpreted as an indication that the film does secretly refer to homosexuality. In the vein of articles and documentaries which suggest that many covert yet intentional references to homosexuality can be found in classic Hollywood movies, Benning's video can be said to claim that the queer and the gay have always had a place in Hollywood. You just have to know how and where to look.

In addition to the fact that playfulness grants Benning the ability to appropriate and inscribe herself, and with that, a queer type of subjectivity into Hollywood, the aspects of puerility, lightheartedness, and non-seriousness related to her playfulness have one other important critical effect. The funny and playful character of the video stands in contrast with one of its serious revelations, namely the fact that explicit gay role models are absent from Hollywood discourses. The result is an ironic tension between the serious and the non-serious. In "Female Transgression" (1996) Laura Kipnis argues that Benning's irony signals an exit from some of the more constrictive aspects of an earlier feminist video politics, when the charge of "not feminist enough" or "not queer enough" rained down frequently. In contrast to this, Kipnis states, Benning's video issues a plaintive "fuck you" to any dictates of correctness and pleasure, whether social or sexual. Kipnis praises *It Wasn't Love* for its exuberant, energetic play, and for its generosity towards the audience. She remarks that "Benning's invitation to join her in

her room and party on the margins makes so much political video seem, by contrast, pinched and joyless" (341).

Although I agree with Kipnis that Benning's video stands out for its facetiousness, I contend that the irony within the video is not merely amusing. The effect of irony on the video's audience is far more complex. Indeed, Benning invites her audience to join her in her room. Although the viewer is drawn close by the haptic qualities, and Benning seems to address her audience when she looks into the lens while talking, her irony should not be understood as a generous invitation to the audience to laugh and party with the playfully mocking artist. As Sharon Willis (1997) has convincingly argued in an article on Tarantino's funny yet horrifying nouvelle violence films, an ironic combination of fun and grave matters can tweak our internal social censorship mechanisms. It can cause the sensation of "being caught with one's pants down." For when serious problems or crimes are ironically represented in a funny way, the viewer can find herself laughing when perhaps she shouldn't. Most frequently, this results in feelings of embarrassment and discomfort.

Because the imitations and citations of Hollywood film within *It Wasn't Love* are both playful and serious, both lighthearted and grave, both funny and painful, every response seems "off." As viewers, we supposedly shouldn't cry over the video, for the predominant tone of the video is a cheerful one. Yet the inclination to laugh also seems wrong. Benning's openness makes the matter even more precarious. We are invited into the private domain of her bedroom, where her fantasies secrets are confided to us. It would be harsh to betray this vulnerability and trust by laughing when one actually shouldn't. The discomfort which is caused by this uncertainty is an affect rather than an emotion. As physical urges and sensations such as laughter or abhorrence have to be rapidly deliberated and/or repressed while watching the video, the resulting self-conscious embarrassment and doubt can be experienced with the body. Willis would say that this affect of discomfort is the result of affective excess. The viewer gets embarrassed because she has to manage the many conflicting affects which are produced in her by the work.

The uncomfortable affective access is combined with the work's invitation to haptic looking. Because of this combination, it is reasonable to conclude that, in spite *and* because of the video's amusing qualities, looking at *It Wasn't Love* can be a pretty uncomfortable physical experience. This effect on the viewer is important in relation to the issues of gender and sexuality which are dealt with in the video. In addition to the fact that these issues concern the body, they are often related to physical discomfort and insecurity for subjects like Benning whose gender identity and sexual orientation hold a marginal position within a society and its dominant discourses. The viewer of *It Wasn't Love* can, to a certain extent, share the experience of the artist through the medium of film, the medium of video, and the trope of irony.