

Radical indeed is the difference between an evolution whose continuous phases penetrate one another by a kind of internal growth, and an unfurling whose distinct parts are placed in juxtaposition to one another. The fan one spreads out might be opened with increasing rapidity, and even instantaneously; it would still display the same embroidery, prefigured on the silk. But a real evolution, if ever it is accelerated or retarded, is entirely modified within; its acceleration or retardation is precisely that internal modification. Its content and duration are one and the same.

– Henri Bergson

Pages 10-11
Rodney Graham
Installation view of *A Reverie*
Interrupted by the Police
35mm film transferred to D.V.D.
2003

Pages 12-13
Rodney Graham
Production still of *A Reverie*
Interrupted by the Police (detail)
35mm film transferred to D.V.D.
2003

A few years ago, reviewers of the 49th Venice Biennale universally registered dissatisfaction with the predominance of video installations on exhibit. The black box had usurped the white cube, and no one happily submitted to this inverted demand on their habits of perception. Thrilled in the medium's pioneer days so soon before, the audience was reduced, with its success, to shuffling boredom. The complaints reminded me of Jean-François Lyotard's comments more than twenty years ago on the "slackening" of experimental endeavour in the critical demand for return to various forms of artistic conservatism – even though some saw the spectacle value of video projection to be the ultimate form of regression. What sort of response was this weary intolerance of video that – even before criteria had been established for its critical assessment – dismissed its presentation?

What exactly were these reviewers, representing so many other grumbling viewers who voted with their feet, complaining about? The dismissive comments did not differentiate between the content, medium or presentation and, as such, expressed an immediate lack of criteria in dealing with this new artistic and curatorial phenomena. Or was it that the medium took the blame for incompetent curatorial presentation, for the failure of the curators to intelligently guide viewers from one work to another (or even from one type of practitioner to another), a strategy for which they would have considered themselves remiss in any other type of installation. It is not enough to simply supply a projector and a black hole; a curatorial rationale must also be provided and, in this instance, it was lacking. In light of no criteria of judgment being offered by critics, it was precisely curating that should have articulated the nature of the medium. A great opportunity was missed: there was no thinking of this new "object" of experience – no thinking *of, through, or with* the moving image.

Perhaps in the immediacy of response, we should gauge something of the problem of reception of this type of temporal art. For in works where time is of the essence, viewers gave little time to them. Viewers came and went, although not like the women of Eliot's poem talking of Michelangelo.' This torpid restlessness on the part of the viewer, who can enter and leave at any moment during the work but without experience of it all, expresses an inability – of what, image, work, presentation? – to capture attention. Does the temporality of video projection defeat the possibility of making sense – although conventional movies are comprehensible when we sit through them? Or is it a consequence of the simultaneous presentation of multiple works? Does the precinct of the black box draw a line of incommunicability between works of art? Do we suffer amnesia passing from one room to another, able only to understand discrete blocks of experience, unable to link more than one temporal event? Is M.T.V. to blame for our shortened attention spans? Or can we only make sense of images or objects in spatial but not temporal relations?

This is a problem for curators; for not only do we arrange individual objects and images in an exhibition, we direct the attention of viewers through the installation. Through the progressive arrangement and juxtaposition of artifacts, we presume to control the movements of the viewers and ultimately bring them to the disclosure of the "meaning" of the exhibition – which is never a predetermined thesis but derives from the display of objects and images themselves – although, realistically, we know we never totally direct the viewer. This process takes time traced through the movement of the viewer through space but is of another order than the temporality of projections. How then do we arrange spatial sequences of video projections and organize blocks of time for an audience's perception? Given the changes in artistic practice that have foregrounded video and film, it is no longer possible to segregate time-based work in separate programs in a space apart

from the exhibition. Thus, the example of film programmers will not help us: their curatorial practice is no less articulated; moreover, we are still talking about durational works that do not just succeed each other temporally – as they do in film programs – but coexist in the same exhibition space. Video projection demands that we organize time-images, not just wall-hung images or objects in space. Have we understood the implications of the change that video projections offer us? Obviously not, since we still think, as evidenced by curatorial practice, in spatial terms. We are oblivious to how substantial these changes are, since they are disguised in audience dismissal. We are unaware that we are witnessing a new species, not just genre, of work. The new concept of duration that thus derives must change our understanding of art and curating with it.

Let us examine some of these changes by way of an analogy. When Jackson Pollock transformed painting practice (and the nature of art with it) by abandoning easel for mural painting, the register of physical production was matched in the environmental character of the viewer's response. (Ultimately, this opened the experience of the work to a durational quality, as well.) When some artists abandoned single-channel video for video projection, the image was not merely enlarged (although the bad press video projection has received is partly due to many artists merely translating, not transforming, the image through the medium of projection). The switch from monitor to screen may be comparable to that of painting from easel to wall and, thus, would demand consequent changes in our perception, with this difference: if Pollock's was a spatial liberation, perhaps video projection is a temporal one.

When Pollock's practice opened art to a new, contextualizing spatiality, the conditions of *display* eventually revealed art's new determining constraints. The "white cube" – as Brian O'Doherty's 1976 series of *Artforum* articles labelled the gallery system – was shown to be an ideological framework that determined art production. Starting in the late sixties, many artists began to make their work from this understanding: witness the conceptual critiques of, for instance, Michael Asher, Daniel Buren or Marcel Broodthaers. Apart from its economic and ideological conditionings, the architectural space of the gallery itself was determinant, providing the geometric framework, for example, for the minimalist art shown within its four walls. A few years later, some of Mel Bochner's works, which were nothing but the measurements of the space superimposed on the gallery wall and floors, showed the framework of art production to be essentially spatial. (A geometricizing spatiality is the ideology of both representation and abstraction, providing the unspoken framework for its unproblematic production.²)

In contrast to the white cube, the black box is not spatially oriented or geometrically constructed; in the dark, we cannot find its corners. (If the white cube determined art production, does the black box determine reception?) If we inhabit its space bodily, it is according to another temporality than that manifested by the durational art of the 1960s and 1970s – even that of its film work, which, we should remember, was segregated from the rest of the period's production whenever it was displayed. For example, consider Michael Snow's *Wavelength* (1966–67), where space traditionally subtends time; duration is only the result of an optical-mechanical apparatus that configures its images through space – the arc of Snow's unbroken zoom measures off time through spatial progression. We never escape the basic cinematographic apparatus, the optics of which are based on Renaissance perspective, especially when it comes to material or structural film. Video projection, however, reveals itself to have no materiality to its medium that can be structurally articulated or represented to itself in a tautological display of its images' construction. The *medium* of video projection assumes another

shape or form. (The appearance of time-based work in this period, though, signals a crisis that was expressed across the whole range of art production in temporal – but not durational – terms. Michael Fried's instantaneous, "continuous and entire presentness" and Robert Smithson's entropic "null time" are two extremes of response to the new conditions that temporality opened up for the development of art.)

Returning to Venice, not just the temporal demands of the projections drew criticism; the situation of presentation itself, the black box, was seen to be part of the problem, as if it too became part of the medium, a perception – or prejudice – opposed to that of the white cube, which is still seen to be (relatively) transparent to its presentations. These assumptions speak to the bias toward spatiality in art, which only seems natural given that it is a visual medium. (It was only at the origins of modernity, however, with Lessing's *Laocoon* (1766),³ that visual art was allocated the spatial domain and literature the temporal realm.) The temporal and physical constraints of the Venetian black boxes were seen to be controlling – and were met with rebellion. Yet, who is to say that Renaissance perspective, the epitome of spatiality in visual representation, is freeing or controlling of the spectator? Renaissance perspective reduces the viewer to an abstraction; the culmination of perspective in the spatiality of the white cube contradictorily commands the body to disappear in that very viewpoint. Surprisingly, the gridless black box seemingly makes us too aware of our bodies, such that it is physical weariness as much as mental fatigue that makes viewers exit its enclosures.

What was the commonality among the disparity of works shown in Venice: video projections by renowned filmmakers and artists who reference film history; scripted scenarios, documentaries and conceptual constructions of real-time events; unedited real-time sequences and the rapid montage of music video? Generally, reviewers described these works by their contents alone. It would seem, then, that video projection is a porous medium, but no more so than film or video in terms of their content. The difference? In discussing video projection, critics displaced the medium to the transparent means of projection not, as in the case of film, to the corresponding means of production and assembly. This would seem to be a major confusion: making projection into a medium rather than a technical conveyance of the media of film or video. But perhaps this is how artists are using it, so that video projection would be a place for a convergence of content and concerns, but not the same type of convergence that the computer screen seems destined for. This new means would not be a manipulation of the product of recording but a manipulation of the product of projection: the viewer. Video projection would be something other than the degrading of film, as Jean-Luc Godard thinks of the electronic image.⁴ Whatever the source of image in video or film, video projection digitizes it, but this "degrading" of the image leads to other possibilities in the *reproduction* of film. Manipulation of the ready-made products or of the artificial codes of film could transform the space and time of viewing to the dimensions of the virtual. "Nothing is more destructive for the thinking and imagining of the virtual than equating it with the digital."⁵ The commonality of video projection is neither its universality as a conveyance of content nor its dissolution of medium specificity in the digitized image.

The seemingly open nature of the "medium" of video lends itself to a condition that it, nonetheless, still shares with film and video. The medium is not in the image but in its reception. (Here is an analogy to the persistence of vision in film: movement occurs not in the film material or apparatus but in the spectator.) The medium of video projection might be ... time itself.

In saying that time is the medium of projection, I do not want to make any

McLuhanistic pronouncements; the medium, actually, is not the message here. It is not a question of new media but a changed relation to time, no matter the medium. Perception has already collectively changed; this condition is only disguised by technique in individual arts. After all, the changed relations of space and time have been the foundation of science since the seventeenth century. Gilles Deleuze argues, though, that it was only with Henri Bergson at the turn of the last century that space was no longer considered to subtend time, but in the reversal of movement-time relations, "it is no longer time which is related to movement, it is the anomalies of movement which are dependent on time."⁶

Even though he rejected the analogy, Bergson's analyses of the movement-image were coincidental with the origins of film and explicitly exemplified by it. Unlike dance and music, where duration arises from performance, film, since the beginning of the last century, has been the only art form that incorporates duration within its artifactuality. How it occurs and how film represents time, though, differs. Contemporary practitioners of video projection benefit from the post-war cinema of the direct time-image that Deleuze contrasts to pre-war classical cinema's indirect representation of time.⁷ The latter proceeds from the combination of images (montage); the former issues from the image itself. (Currently, the tendencies of art and capitalist modes of image production are in opposition to one another: advertising and music video, for instance, regress to commodity time, whose segmentations and repetitions are spatially based. The installations in Venice did nothing to distinguish these directions.)

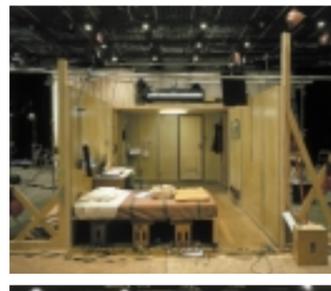
That artists' works derive from another history, namely film, is not a problem. Video projection depends to different degrees on film's resources, even at times on its direct products (for instance, when Douglas Gordon appropriates Hollywood film for his projections). At the same time, it can accomplish what cinema, because of its forms of presentation, cannot. Because of the profit constraints of its commercial venues and the conditioned expectations of its audiences, cinema experiments little with its formats and temporal structure.⁸ The physical change of context to the black box of the gallery prepares the audience to expect other forms of analyses film cannot perform itself.

For instance, to use an example from my own exhibition history of involvement with artists who use video projection, *Double-Cross: The Hollywood Films of Douglas Gordon*, on the one hand, could be looked at in terms of the noir themes implied by its title, which would be the simplest way to relate the exhibited works – *24-Hour Psycho* (1993), *through a looking glass* (1999) and *Feature Film* (1999).⁹ On the other hand, the double-crossing of the title also refers to the re-articulation of these themes through the formalism of the artist's appropriations, which seem to be mere repetitions but actually are surreptitious and duplicitous doublings. Gordon's foundational act of separation of sound and image foregrounds all the components of film – even with the deletion of sound, which necessarily accompanies slow motion – but through *projection* of a ready-made, not the *construction* of a new product. This technical procedure is not an analytical end in itself. Gordon's intervening act, which sometimes extends a film and sometimes cuts into it, opens a new *temporal* reality by means of that same, now self-differing, film. Through a manoeuvre that touches on nothing but the temporal flow of images, Gordon extends Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) to a twenty-four-hour duration that absorbs us in the psychotic unconscious of its doomed protagonist, where we ourselves are alternately victim and perpetrator, in a way completely other than Hitchcock's narrative representation, while being based strictly on it.

The re-temporalizing of the image that derives from a reworking of film's narrative structures is a strategy or investigation that Gordon shares with a number of



VIDEO STILLS FROM *THROUGH A LOOKING GLASS* (1999) BY DOUGLAS GORDON. COURTESY GAGOSIAN GALLERY (NEW YORK)



PRODUCTION STILLS OF *JOURNEY INTO FEAR* (2001) BY STAN DOUGLAS. COURTESY THE ARTIST AND DAVID ZWIRNER (NEW YORK)

other artists who make films that are video-projected in gallery settings. Thus, I might now link, in a virtual exhibition in these pages, Gordon's *through a looking glass* to Stan Douglas's *Journey into Fear* (2001) and Rodney Graham's *City Self/Country Self* (2000). Each of these artworks relies, directly or indirectly, on film's history, its authors, genres and techniques. But coming from a background more as conceptual artists than film auteurs, these artists manipulate narrative constructs but not as they exist in conventional film. They work against the transparency of narrative closure and the artificial temporality that corresponds to it only to produce temporal constructions that seemingly are even more artificial and unnatural. They further radicalize Godard's counter-statement that his films do have a beginning, middle and end but not necessarily in that order – as if in the case of these artists a work could, for instance, be only a middle that repeats by diverging, then returning to itself (Gordon), an ending that recoils Moebius-like through a deformation of time into its beginning again (Graham), or a reshuffling of a variety of alternative middles in recombinant fashion (Douglas). These anomalies are temporal conditions that can only exist within the virtual – but the virtual is not opposed to the real, as Deleuze always insists, only to the actual. (As the works are machines that produce these effects, virtuality resides in the viewer as a doubling and fulfilling of the time-image.) Extrapolating from Deleuze's observations, Brian Massumi writes – and we might substitute "time" for the "virtual" in his quotation, but they are already one and the same – "The virtual can perhaps best be imaged by superposing these deformational moments of repetition rather than sampling differences in form and content. Think of each image receding into its deformation, as if into a vanishing point of its own twisted versioning."¹⁰

Such virtual conditioning of time, being its medium so to speak, displaces the calculability of a spatially derived sense of time (normative time) and establishes another incalculable order for it. "This is the second aspect of time: it is no longer the interval as variable present, but the fundamentally open whole as the immensity of future and past. It is no longer time as succession of movements, and of their units, but time as simultaneism and simultaneity (for simultaneity, no less than succession, belongs to time; it is time as whole)."¹¹ That temporal effects are incalculable does not mean that these artists do not precisely construct their works toward them. They do, and this, in fact, is the whole of their works. The artists calculate the effects; we realize them. Yet we cannot visualize this whole apart from the experience of them, even though, in cases, we cannot experience the whole of some of them.

Such is the case for Stan Douglas's *Journey into Fear*, based not so much on the original Mercury Players 1942 film production but a 1975 Vancouver remake.¹² In Douglas's complex version, the plot never seems to progress as the changing dialogue continually reconfigures to the same scenes (the timeline branches at several points joining segments derived from Herman Melville's short novel *The Confidence Man* (1857) to that of the original screen source, Eric Ambler's novel). As the script notes state: "*Journey into Fear* is a film installation in which a picture track loops while its dialogue tracks are constantly changing. The timeline is broken in four positions to permit branching. At these junctures, a computer randomly chooses which one of five dialogue variations will be performed. Each time the picture track repeats a different combination of dialogue segments is heard until all permutations have been presented."¹³ With fifteen minutes of dialogue, the 625 permutations make the work an impossible-to-view 157 hours long.

In *City Self/Country Self*, Rodney Graham inserts himself into a nineteenth-century costume drama, playing two characters, a country clod and an urban fop, who encounter one another, seemingly within a clockwork universe that

montage stages. But the ordered (bourgeois?) rhythm of this encounter dissolves when Graham, the dandy, gives the boot to his own bumpkin behind in a midday meeting when time stands still. Nevertheless, in this timeless moment, the action of the kick repeats itself in slow motion through various shots. Then time restarts, but once the rustic picks up and dusts off his hat, all the preceding actions, or intertwined destinies, of the two characters recommence, since we now understand this temporal twisting to be the closed system of a loop.

Graham's invariant loop and Douglas's permutational one answer to the problem, or complaint, of unscheduled entry into a gallery video projection: any point is as good as any other for the work to commence its effects. But once we enter, we are caught in the devices of a calculating machine that deforms narrative time and the subjectivity of our experience at the same time.

For instance, Gordon's *through a looking glass*, which doubles Robert De Niro's "you talking to me?" scene from Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* (1976), belies opinion that his appropriations are mere repetitions. Mimicry is only a result of a misrecognition on the viewer's part that, if one attends the projection's divisions for only a few seconds, fails to account for the displacements confounding the work and ungrounding our viewing. We stand between two identical sequences of images that begin to deviate from one another based on a geometric progression: first by one frame, then two, then four, eight, sixteen, etc., until the delay between the two seventy-one-second sequences reaches 512, then reverses itself by the same progression to return to sync after about an hour, when it loops again. What starts as a pure mimicry between the two "characters" quickly becomes a conversation, as every line of dialogue begins to permutationally fill the gaps of the character's imaginary responses. This deviation does not just display the character's dissociated consciousness but plays the spectators, spooling them in and out throughout the duration of the loop. We are virtually split between two "mirrors," and between sound and image, which pursue two contrary arcs, one coiling inwardly and the other outwardly at the same time. But the calculation of deviation creates a temporal difference between the images, a repetition-in-difference that absorbs us in their unfolding and refolding. As I previously wrote:

Time between these images is twofold: that ever increasing deviation that the geometric progression unfurls, which has a logical, linear, and spatial basis; and that which unfolds and refolds in the virtual space between these "mirrors." The first, numeric, series, we know to be mechanical or quantitative in its abstract calculations; the second, temporal, series, we can only experience qualitatively – without measure. The first series constructs the work; the second envelops our experience of it. The first is dependent on the source film; the second is independent.¹⁴

The difference between series that construct the work and series that envelop our experience and create a work entirely different from, yet related to, their source is a condition that Gordon's work shares with that of Douglas and Graham. Unlike most film by artists in the past, which we call underground or experimental and which tended to be anti-mimetic, non-representational or non-narrative, artists like Douglas, Gordon and Graham base their projections on the forms or genres of narrative film. Whether based on classical Hollywood film or its derivatives, these artists' manipulation of narrative structures neither simply repeats their plot lines nor automatically replays their time sequences. While experimental film does not necessarily share Hollywood films' normative constitution of time, with its beginnings, middles and endings rearranged only by the punctuations of flashbacks, it nevertheless shares a belief in the temporal present – film never



FILM STILL FROM CITY SELF/COUNTRY SELF (2000) BY RODNEY GRAHAM. COURTESY THE ARTIST AND DONALD YOUNG GALLERY (CHICAGO)

L'Œuvre au noir : être commissaire d'images temporelles

Dans son essai, Philip Monk examine les problèmes associés à la présentation de vidéos et de films projetés en musées ou en galeries, et la transformation subséquente du cube blanc en boîte noire. Il s'intéresse particulièrement aux difficultés qui guettent les commissaires souhaitant réunir plusieurs projections dans un même espace d'exposition, en prenant comme exemples des artistes contemporains qui manipulent les constructions temporelles au sein de films narratifs, comme Stan Douglas, Douglas Gordon et Rodney Graham.

escapes the present, even through the device of the flashback. To deform the temporal present, one must rely exactly on the devices that string the sequences of presents together: narrative constructs that montage puts in place.¹⁵ The innovation, though seeming dependency, of these artists is that they make a type of experimental film from the resources of popular entertainment. Moreover, the deviation from temporal normativity is achieved only by the anomalous rearrangement of the elements derived from classical film, so that through the reordering of the duration that superintends film's signs and codes a new temporality emerges.

The site of this emergence is the black box. Furthermore, if artists manipulate the product or reorder the temporal codes of film, the end is to return its reception, which cannot be calculated beforehand, to the experience of the viewer. This is an altogether other temporal consciousness that film then unravels, where "content and duration are one and the same." Putting these three works together in exhibition would reveal this one and the same condition for the most interesting of video projections – formal constructions whose outcomes we cannot anticipate but must experience in their (our) duration.

Notes

The epigraph is taken from Henri Bergson, *The Creative Mind: An Introduction to Metaphysics* (New York: Citadel Press, 2002): 20.

¹ T. S. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," in *The Waste Land and Other Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1940).

² "Among the different lines which give shape to the history of art, there is a clear and unbroken line of development – a formal, constructivist, conceptual line – that has a distinct physiognomy of its own and is linked with transformations of space and the elements of geometric form: flat planes, deep space, proportion, regularity, symmetry, progression and the structuring of measured relations. The language of painting has slipped through the 'radiant node' of geometry, persistently transforming its invariant properties and restructuring them at new levels of abstraction. With greater or less explicitness, with more or less divergence of meaning and intention, Frank Stella, Don Judd, Robert Mangold and Sol LeWitt are as much geometrists as Piero, Leonardo or Fra Lippo Lippi, but their art comes from a differently directed mentality and from a different mode of thinking. Geometrization is a process which starts with tentative schemata and concepts drawn from Graeco-Roman antiquity and medieval scholastic traditions, proceeds to the highly mathematicized art of the Renaissance, and ends with the propositional and deductive logic that characterizes the more conceptual forms of recent art." Suzi Gablik, *Progress in Art* (New York: Rizzoli, 1977): 12–13.

³ Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Laocoon: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, trans. Edward Allen McCormick (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984).

⁴ See Colin MacCabe, *Godard: Images, Sounds, Politics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980).

⁵ Brian Massumi, *Parables of the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002): 137.

⁶ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986): ix.

⁷ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galatea (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

⁸ Obviously, I exclude experimental film from my comments; but art audience's knowledge of film generally is mainstream, experimental film being a segregated, still somewhat excluded, art practice.

⁹ See my book *Double-Cross: The Hollywood Films of Douglas Gordon* (Toronto: The Power Plant and Art Gallery of York University, 2003) which discusses all of Gordon's projections that are based on Hollywood films.

¹⁰ Massumi: 133.

¹¹ Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*: 46.

¹² This is also the excessive case for Gordon's *5 Year Drive-By* (1995) that extends John Ford's *The Searchers* (1956) to the five years of its narrative.

¹³ Stan Douglas and Michael Turner, in Stan Douglas, *Journey into Fear* (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2001): 26.

¹⁴ Philip Monk, *Double-Cross: The Hollywood Films of Douglas Gordon*: 138–39.

¹⁵ Each of these artists perverts montage: Gordon extends it, so that the slow-motion extension culminates in the still, as in *5 Year Drive-By*; Douglas makes montage into a near infinite, permutational throw of the dice, which never develops the story; Graham makes montage transform time in the moment of its twisted reversion, whereby a cut returns the ending to the beginning.