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"But the certainty that everything has been already written nullifies or makes phantoms of us all."
- Jorge Luis Borges, 'The Library of Babel'

The Intimate Real

The terms 'intimacy' and 'real time' were peppered throughout early 1970's video art criticism. The restricted size of the television monitor compared with the cinematic screen or the limitless scale of the art object, the familiarity of the TV as a favourite piece of furniture in the home, and photographic optics which made the compressed space of the 'macro' close-up shot possible were conditions that contributed to this sense of intimacy in the video image. 'Real Time' was the term used to describe the unedited experiments with duration made by early video artists. This was often the result of limited access to editing. These duration experiments helped to define the art form and also speak about the experience of time in general. As Marita Sturken points out, "for many, real time was a defiant reaction to the fragmented, incomplete view of events offered by television." ¹ That the crude low-resolution new video technology could capture the paradoxical idea of 'real' time points out just how unreal lived experience had become in the image saturated world of cinema and television.

Thirty years later, we can see that intimacy and real time have become less dominant features in the video art landscape. Today we often see video art on the same scale as the cinematic image through video projection systems unavailable in the early 1970's. As well, access to editing systems has allowed artists to explore a range of approaches to duration. Artists now often co-opt and reinvent languages of image construction from cinema and television. Video as a technology; however, still retains the vestigial codes of its past. As John Belton puts it: "The video "look" has come to signify greater realism, immediacy, and presence. But it does so largely within a system of signification that includes the comparative "looks" of photography and the cinema as well." ² The terms real time and intimacy still need to be explored. Video art criticism today has had to take account of both the techniques and the psychological issues of alternative practice as it has developed historically.

In her 1976 essay *Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism*, Rosalind Krauss makes the argument that video art should not be defined by its' material techniques but by the psychological condition of narcissism that inflects so much of the early work done in the medium. The works considered in Krauss' essay were primarily works of unedited 'performances' recorded on video. This early work of Vito Acconci, Richard Serra, Nancy Holt, Lynda Benglis, Peter Campus and Joan Jonas contributed to the formal questions of how video was distinguished from other media such as painting, photography, and film. Video's ability to produce instantaneous images that the artist could both identify with and be at a distance from at the same time was a feature that was distinctly different from any other time-based image making technology. This characteristic promoted a narcissistic fascination with the image and a splitting of the ego not dissimilar to Lacan's conception of the mirror stage, the primal identification that the infant has with its mirror image which sets the conditions for our dependence on idealized images of ourselves. Lacan points out that our misrecognition of our own image, mirrored to us during our early cognitive development, plays the essential role in the formation of our ego. By being the medium par excellence of the transmittable present, video had become the tool of choice for investigating the issues of split subjectivity opened up by the theory of the mirror stage. ³ Krauss' nomination of narcissism as video's primary psychological state could be considered a parallel to Laura Mulvey's influential *Visual Pleasure and*

Narrative Cinema essay that posited narrative cinema's predominant psychological condition as voyeurism.

Krauss also asks us to contemplate an expanded definition of the word medium used in her dematerialized definition of video art. In the Aesthetics of Narcissism essay she points out how the term 'medium' can mean both the plural of the word media and also conversationally indicate an agent through which we communicate with the absent or displaced presences; a usage commonly associated with telepathy, extrasensory perception, and communication with the afterlife. Like video, the psychic 'medium' also works in 'real time' and with dedicated 'intimacy' in translating messages from 'the other' world. Video, in its uncanny ability to represent the present, also unleashes what is not present. Television, after all, brings the distant; the 'tele', to the present. Video and television open up new registers of technological presence. The splitting of the subject, like the splitting of the atom, releases new energies that reverberate through the history of video art.

The Aesthetics of Echo

As we consider video art now at the end of the 1990's, we can see that the 'Aesthetics of Narcissism' have waned. The predominant impulse to examine the narcissistic fascination with the video image has given way to a more complex and widely varied involvement with the medium. Video has passed from a concentration on the ontological questioning of its existence to a broader conversation about a range of psychological issues including identity, community, and subjectivity. The strength of festivals, distributors, and co-operatives dedicated to specific identity issues is an indication of how central psychological conditions are still in defining video art practices today. These psychological conditions have shifted and diversified as new practices evolve. The psychological space that I am interested in investigating could be described (in difference to Krauss) as an 'Aesthetics of Echo'. The figure of Echo, Narcissus' forlorn companion who is cursed into invisibility – only able to repeat what is said to her, is for me a figure of the repetition of those early gestures of video art in contemporary works. Echo is the dedicated lover of Narcissus just as strains of today's video art looks longingly to the innocence and directness of early video art's inauguration. The resounding gesture of this Aesthetics of Echo is the repetition, the remake, the postmodernist pastiche.

An Aesthetics of Echo also should consider, as a defining condition, the psychology of transference, that is the intersubjective play of desire between subjects that invariably occurs on the unconscious level in the psychoanalytic encounter and also plays itself out in the dynamics of performance. In this essay I will analyze how cinematic, philosophical, and artistic views of performance have created pockets of transference to carry forward invisible figures of influence in cultural work. These figures are often pinned to the idea of persona, identity and desire where the phenomena of the split ego (Freud's *Ichspaltung*) plays an important role.

My project is a ghost hunt that demonstrates the power of the video image to fragment and recombine identities. This power stems from the distinctive relation that the video image has to the self-present representation of time. The works I am discussing unfold historically like an exquisite corpse where the partial information is passed along through the subterranean channels of influence that have grown up around the video art world. The postmodern strategy of the remake is a particularly virulent form of this promiscuous influence, and one of the places particularly haunted by ghosts. My selection of works to discuss is by no means comprehensive or objective. My position in relation to these works has everything to do with luck and I think that it is only from my position that the work I am discussing could be linked. I don't think criticism could possibly work without admitting this.

Keep on Deconstructin'

The ghost hunt starts with a photograph. Appropriate if we remember those early photographers who captured auras, phantoms, and dead spirits through dubious double-exposed portraits. The double exposure is perhaps the first technological gesture that makes claims for the multiple truths or decentered identities that I am exorcising in this essay.

The photograph I am thinking about is of French Philosopher Jacques Derrida. It is a photograph I remember from New York. It was a joke gift to the director of the theory program I was studying at. In it, the debonair philosopher sits smoking in a restaurant booth. The photograph is conspicuously tilted, giving the impression that it is falling out of the frame. The hand-written inscription in the bottom right hand corner reads "Keep on Deconstructin', Love Jacques". It was a gesture Derrida may well have ironically appreciated. The gag revealed the potential of the slippage of Derrida's persona into that of the philosophical star that had allegedly made him so reluctant to have his photograph taken and circulated throughout his early career. It might be argued that his persona has already overtaken him, that his figure produced a plethora of effects beyond his name. 4 Perhaps he knows more than others that the circulation of images was going to stir up ghosts.

It is the troubled space of the image that Derrida has attempted to deconstruct numerous times in his work that is increasingly a dominant force in our mediated culture. The rise of the Hollywood "star" has demonstrated the profound potential for transference through the image and the persona. As Susan Buck-Morss points out, the cinematic screen provides an illusion of unity to the spectacular mass image and a focus for mass identification with the idealized persona. "The star was an article of mass consumption, whose multiplying image guaranteed the infinite reproduction of the same." 5 This force that works to sustain the institutions of celebrity, that so overwhelmingly engulfs us today in popular culture, is related to the forces of transference that bond us to the images of ourselves through the primordial process of the mirror stage.

It is through Derrida's image in that photograph, inauthentic as it is, and through his phantom presence as a philosopher, that I want to Keep on Deconstructin' the irony of the self-present image. Derrida is a figure – albeit a ghostly one – for my investigation because he is a philosopher who attempts to read images and texts beyond their obvious boundaries. In his tangles with Western metaphysics, Derrida has stirred up the ghosts of Western logocentrism by questioning the polarized construction of philosophical concepts within the history of Western thought. Derrida's surgical textual analysis has sought to tarry with the indefinable other, an other that defines its presence through the noticeable absences or gaps in the texts of Western thought. "The other" has found its image in Derrida's writing in the ghost, the phantom, the specter.

Derrida's work has evolved from philosophical objections to the metaphysics of presence. Derrida stresses that the founding concepts of philosophy – truth and presence – are self-contradictory. A deconstruction of these basic concepts examines how truth relies on untruth and presence is always a double-game with what is not present or what is already always present. A deconstructive reading of video through the term 'real time' would have to take account of the generative power of what is left out in the opposition of real and unreal time. That is, if it is posited that the real is captured in the present, and the unreal is that which is present through the remove of memory or fantasy, we would have to try to take account of what is real in the not-present or what is not recognized as real in the present. The ghost could be seen as a term that bridges this opposition, being both real as an experience, and unreal in its materiality.

Deconstruction demonstrates the paradoxical nature of all metaphysical speculation. For example; because consciousness is actually "self-consciousness," (i.e. a self and a consciousness) consciousness is always already divided, never simply present to itself. It is through the image and our self-consciousness of the image that we become entangled in the effects of the other. It is the technologies of the image, particularly the self-present mirroring effects of the technology of video, that acts as a leverage to a deconstruction of identity, so central to the psychological concerns of so much video art.

Shot through with ghosts

The photograph of Derrida – I discovered a few years later – turned out to be a still from a 1984 British film by Ken McMullen entitled *Ghost Dances*. A few years ago I met Ken McMullen and he talked about Derrida's appearance in the film. McMullen had asked Derrida not to just appear in the film but to actually play himself. Perhaps this was because McMullen wanted to underline the irony of the self-identical fictional image and to put the limits of identity and character into question. It was an irony Derrida very well understood. In one scene McMullen asked Derrida and a young French actress named Pascale Ogier to improvise a scene in Derrida's office where Ogier, playing a young student, comes to talk to the famous philosopher. McMullen said that in the shooting of this scene Derrida and Ogier fell in love. Derrida, recognizing the powerful effect of transference operating between the two subjects, improvised the line: "but you to are already shot through with ghosts of me." Was he referring to the narrative within the frame; the student in awe of a famous philosopher/teacher, or was he referring to the relationship between a nervous actress and the real Derrida? (if there could be anything as a real Derrida in that situation already inflected by so much fiction). Derrida understood the metanarrative of the work of the unconscious and was able to identify the paradoxical space created in a parallel world in which transference relationships could form. This 'ghost dance' – this unconscious intersubjective intertextuality – captures the indescribable dimensions of the relationship between subjects through the ghosts of transference.

Theme Song

The cinematic frame is crowded with presences other than the performative event. The soundtrack, with foley sound and music, is one of the most emphatic and influential of these supplemental presences. In the soundtrack the theme song is a special case. It has to try to capture a general topic or mood of the film and also serve to extend the presence of the film into the media through popular music. The theme song is very much like a slogan or advertising soundbit. It is usually an opportunity for the film to brand it's theme through the celebrity endorsement of the musician/star who performs the song. This slippery artistic form, driven by the dynamics of the celebrity persona, both part the text of the film and a publicity supplement, is the motif deconstructed by Vito Acconci in his seminal 1973 video "Theme Song". This tape is a prototypical example of major tendencies in early video art and also touches on some of the major themes of Acconci's early career. It is a single take, black-and-white video of a performance Acconci created for the video. The theme is of romance; an impossible romance between the performer Acconci and his audience.

In *Theme Song*, Acconci lies on his side, head towards the camera on the floor of a shabby domestic interior in a pose suggesting an imitate romantic encounter that has made it's way from the couch to the floor. We have Acconci, his voice and the accompaniment of popular songs that he plays on a tape deck off-screen. He talks to you, the audience, pleading with you to join him. He is trying to seduce you into doing the impossible; entering his world. All the while he is chain smoking and pleading. His relentless monologue is improvised by riffing on the lyrics of the recognizable pop songs. He picks out lines and modifies them into personal pleas. He filters the empty romanticism of these pop songs as he to translate the lyrics into an impossible seduction. He is trying to invest the empty speech of the pop song – a kind of speech that acknowledges a place of pure exchange empty of content, a pure gesture of recognition and branding in a marketplace – with as much sincere intimacy that he can achieve with his anonymous audience. His improvised monologue acknowledges the impossibility of the real relationship even as it looks for loopholes in the barriers between him and you. He tries to occupy the space of the theme song, a transitional motif in the Hollywood film, through a self-consciously futile disruption of the desire of the audience to identify with a greater theme.

In his early performance and video work Vito Acconci explored a range of imaginary relationships with his audience. Often his work involved the dynamics of conversations, attacks, or seductions that were mediated through the video camera. Acconci's work addressed the tension between intimacy and autonomy involved in the television address by unhinging the process of the viewer's

identification with the image. The technology of video, in Acconci's hand, is like a hall of mirrors; there are so many Acconci's that are reflected back to us. Theme Song is a part of a body of works where Acconci shifts the status of his character in relation to the audience as a way of examining dynamics of power between himself and the viewer. In his notes to Undertone (1973) he states "Build myself up: Viewer as believer". In Air Time (1973) its "Tear myself away: viewer as witness". Command Performance (1974) : "Give Myself Over: Viewer as Surrogate". His tapes are psychological studies of the interpersonal dynamics channeled through the video medium. Acconci's early video experiments that revolve around his powerful persona open up a Pandora's box of possibilities within the video art canon.

In his 1976 "10-Point Plan for Video" Acconci states: "In order to keep up my image, I should give up my person. I could be dead – and therefore have no recourse but this ghost of myself". Acconci exploits the split between the image and the persona in his video work. From tape to tape, as he shifts his status in relation to his audience, he is gauging how this split is reconciled by the audience's reaction. Acconci vows to keep up his image against his person. He is staking the fate of his ego in the video image as a way to leverage the problem of identity and bridge the impossible gap of the real. In Theme Song it is a masochistic commitment. The masochism sustains the dilemma of Acconci the performer who is both voyeur and exhibitionist to his audience. The fate of his ego in this process is to be both accentuated and distanced as it fluctuates between the private and public spheres. This tension plays out the paradox of the formation of identity that is always set in relation to a desire for another.

Acconci's provocation of seducing the audience unleashes the play of fantasies and ghosts. Acconci, who often wishes to provoke a strong transference reaction from his audience, succeeds magnificently in Theme Song. The tape tugs you into its convoluted logic. You find yourself interpellated into the romance of the piece, split between reality and fantasy. It has been an influential work and there are a number of artists who have taken up Acconci's mode of address. It has even inspired the complement of a remake.

Repetition is a Form of Change

The paradox of the remake is examined by Jorge Luis Borges in his short story "Pierre Menard, The Author of Don Quixote". As Borges describes in his metanarrative, the great and incomplete work of the fictional author Pierre Menard was his attempt to try to write "line for line and word for word" not a mechanical copy of Cervantes' Don Quixote, but 'the Don Quixote', a work created by Pierre Menard that would be in every way equivalent to the original. The fictional author's great achievement was to be to write (not transcribe) Don Quixote as a twentieth century writer. Borges, speaking as a self-consciously fictional critic, says that in reading Cervantes' original work we take it at face value, but to read the exact same lines by Pierre Menard brings completely new meaning to the words, of course considering that the historical context in which this Menard wrote was as a contemporary of James Joyce and Henry James.

The remake is a rarefied form of popular culture's general inclination to reproduce already existing cultural forms. The point of Borges' story is that every reproduction, no matter how exact, always has a different meaning. The remake is measured by its relation to the already made, the already always present. The remake, therefore, becomes a gauge for measuring the historical shifts of meaning that have taken place. The post-modern critique of originality and the role of the author parallels the rise of the remake as an avant-garde strategy.⁶ The remake allows us to bracket out the content of the art work and look at its distinguishing formal characteristics, in a way that is similar to Phenomenology's project of bracketing out the subjective aspects of experience, leaving only the phenomena that exists outside the subjective. The remake removes the subjective aspects of the work and leaves the non-subjective, the phenomenological, as a gauge of the residues of history.

Fresh Acconci

In their 1995 collaborative videotape *Fresh Acconci*, Californian artists Mike Kelley and Paul McCarthy undertook the Quixotic task of remaking the classic Vito Acconci videotapes: *Claim Excerpts* (1971), *Contacts* (1971), *Focal Points* (1971), *Pryings* (1971) and *Theme Song* (1973). This gesture, fully fortified by postmodern irony, maps a historical shift spanning practically the entire short history of video art. The 1970's of Acconci's early work was a time of scarce access to even crude video recorders (first widely available in 1968). The 1990's of *Fresh Acconci* is the world of the ubiquitous home video cameras and VCRs. Video has increasingly become a space of private investigation, not, as it would have been at in Acconci's time, purely a site of public broadcasting. Acconci's stake in taking up video and the force of the intimacy of his work has to be read historically to take account of the stridency of his confrontation. Kelley and McCarthy's remounting has a lot to say about how the relationship of desire and technology has evolved in that historical period.

McCarthy and Kelley have radically recoded Acconci's performance gestures. Although the performances in *Fresh Acconci* are delivered pretty much as "line for line and word for word" copies of Acconci's texts, they are no longer have the quality of being improvised. This gesture has a twist. Acconci was, as part of his improvisation in *Theme Song*, incorporating lines from popular songs playing in the background. In *Fresh Acconci*, Acconci's appropriation of those lines have now ironically been transformed into a canonical text. *Fresh Acconci* has not been created through a repetition of Acconci's methods; the 'freshness' of improvisation, but by straight-faced pastiche of Acconci's words. This gesture brackets out Acconci's persona and neutralizes the compelling presence of Acconci. It is a remaking that reduces Acconci to his texts at the expense of the added dimensions of the performance act. This accounts for the deadness to these performances.

The geographic shift is also provocative. Kelley and McCarthy have transplanted the downtown New York art scene of the 70's into the Hollywood hills, site of the soft core pornography industry. The work is infused with the iconography of pornography that has developed concurrently with the rise of cheap video and home video distribution. The tatty couch of Acconci's domestic interior has been replaced by the cool ubiquitous pornographic decor of a Californian mansion. Codes of wealth and sexual decadence intermingle in this Capitalist vernacular of desire. Replacing the compelling persona of Acconci are the vacant recanting of his improvisations by male and female models, whose naked bodies play out the cliché role of available desire and polymorphous perversity signified by the porn actor. The charismatic Acconci has no recourse but as a ghost in *Fresh Acconci*, as the blank, anonymous Hollywood Nymphs go through the motions with a strange obsessive, but not compulsive conviction.

Gone are the close ups. We are no longer 'in the face' of Acconci. The intimacy of the close up has been replaced by the distanced voyeurism of the medium shot. The cinematography is stylized in the manner of pornography. The camera marks the beginning and end of each section by moving in and out on each performance making us aware of the behind the scenes of the video. We knew that Acconci was shooting the video by himself. That increased our sense of intimacy knowing we were alone with him. But in *Fresh Acconci*, we're aware of the invisible mechanisms of the production machine. Part of our identification has to be with the camera person and crew, with the whole mechanism of video production.

The length of Acconci's original tapes were simply determined by the length of a video tape itself. The artist's intentions for the structure the tape was not a major concern and the end of the work was more of less arbitrary. But in *Fresh Acconci* we become aware of sequencing. The performances are long but they have a beginning, a middle and an end. We can perhaps even narrativize the juxtapositions of these performative gestures and the meaning of their repetition. For instance, it seems that the performances largely revolve around seeing and blindness. In *Pryings* one performer tries to pry open the eyelids of another. In *Contact* a blindfolded performer tries to divine what part of their body is being covered but not touched by another performers hand. In *Claim Excerpts* a blind folded performer tries to defend a part of the house by wildly swinging an iron pipe and threatening anyone who might hear them. Even in *Theme Song*, the performer is trying to seduce someone they

can't see. Blindness seems to be the link between these performances. This blindness, perhaps an allegory of the impossibility of real intersubjectivity through technology, is ironic in the context of the conscious use of the codes of visual display from pornography.

In a way Fresh Acconci shows how fresh the original Acconci was. The characteristics of 'real time' and 'intimacy' are hollow platitudes in this remake. Fresh Acconci demonstrates just how codified the gestures of desire and seduction have become in the marginal world of pornography. The compulsive narcissism of Acconci has been reduced to a faint but loaded echo in Kelley and McCarthy's remake.

Acconci opens the suture of our attachment to the cinematic image. Theme Song is a provocation to the desiring audience and a demonstration of the impossibility of desire; it perfectly describes the dilemma of desire that is captured in the cinematic form. Acconci holds open a promise that we will be able to completely enter into the picture, to follow our hearts, to join Vito Acconci who promises a perfect kind of love. In Fresh Acconci, this same gesture of perfect fulfillment is played out in the vernacular of soft core porn. This being the embodiment of the curdled promise of desire, codified by accessibility and denial. The gestures of porn: the setting, models, and mode of display in this work conflates Acconci's gestures with the world of pornography, measuring out the place of desire and transference through video's history. Acconci was working at a moment when video art was very fresh. Acconci did much to defamiliarize us to the solidified codes of television through the filter of performance and conceptual art. Fresh Acconci marks a moment in time when home video distribution has created new symbolic spaces for the recoding of the performance of desire. The gesture of identification has been played out against a wider palette of meaning from our contemporary historical viewpoint.

Lifeswop

One of the more interesting aspects that has distinguished performance art from the theatrical tradition has been the practices that blurs the distinction between life and art. There was a strong vein of British performance artists, such as Gilbert and George, Stuart Brisley, Jo Spence, who concentrated on these problems in the 1960's and 1970's. Stuart Brisley, who also made an appearance in Ghost Dances, was the head of the Studio Four program for expanded and Media Art at the Slade College in London in the 1980's when a student named William Easton was studying and formulating questions about life, art, and identity. In a work done at the Slade in his undergraduate career called LifeSwop, William exchanged lives with his friend Andrew for a month. The work was prepared through a careful study of the others personality, lifestyle, movement, handwriting, etc. In this undocumented performance they undertook to try and live the life of the other person to the best of their abilities. The experiment had some very disorienting effects for both subjects. At the end of the month when they had agreed to meet again for the first time since the performance began. William remembers having the spontaneous thought: "I wonder how William has been". They discovered that identity is a fragile thing.

In a piece done a few years later in Graduate School called "3 x 3", William Easton examined of his own identity and defined three distinctive personalities in himself. These distinctions became the basis for three fictional personas all of who pursued creative work of one kind. One was a performance artist, one was a filmmaker, and one was a Feminist art critic. Two were women and one was a man. Under the guise of their fictional characters, each pursued careers and started taking up public roles for their work. The piece, that lasted for several years, allowed William to use the mask of the character to pursue work that he would have never done of his own accord.

In 1992 I invited William Easton to lecture about his work at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design in Halifax. His work struck a chord with a student of mine at the time named Monique Moublow. Her work evolved from that encounter; taking permission from the British School of life

art performance opened up by William Easton as well as through revisiting the early performative and video work by artists like Acconci.

Joan and Stephen and Monique

In *Ghost Dances*, Freud's idea is evoked that when two people sleep together there is already at least six people in the bed. In Montreal artist Monique Moublow's work, the imaginary aspects sexual relationships and the lingering family romance appear both in the conscious fictions she creates and under the surface in her biographical sources for her work.

In her 1996 video tape *Joan and Steven*, the imaginary dimension of sexual relationships is activated by the invention of Moublow's imaginary boyfriend. In previous performance and video work Moublow had developed a number of fictional personalities. She developed a complex love/hate relationship with a fictional alter ego named Anne Russell through works such as the video *Liabilities*, a work structured as a series of letters and responses that Anne Russell is supposed to have sent Monique. Anne had been the name her mother had wanted to give Monique when she was born. Her father; however, prevailed in naming her after a character in a French film. In *Joan and Stephen* she self-consciously invents her imaginary lover Stephen in a gesture that, like Acconci in *Theme Song*, both acknowledges and denies the impossibility of the action.

Joan and Stephen is set in two locations. The framing story that appears at the beginning and the end of the tape shows a vignette of a family in a small suburban house. A child, sleeping upstairs, gets out of bed to spy through the open ducts on her parents making out in the kitchen below. The mother notices the girl and smiles at her as if inviting her into the sensuality of the family romance. This section, shot on black and white film uses the conventions of filmic narrative and could be read as a flashback sequence, although there isn't a direct narrative tie in to the next section. This section is called *Joan*. Is she the mother or the daughter? Is this fictional or is this a re-creation of a real moment in Moublow's life? These questions are left open.

The middle section switches to video. Suddenly we feel the effects of the intimacy of the 'video look' in contrast to the distanced third person point of view offered us in the film section. Using a hand-held camera to record herself, Monique rolls around and flops on a bed talking into the camera to her imaginary boyfriend Steven. In a series what seem like a diary entries or video letters that seem to have been shot over a period of time, Monique describes Steven to him as if she was conjuring him up: He's tall but not too tall, he has pubic hair, etc. She creates this portrait to convince him of his existence but also creates an image of him for us, the audience. Strangely, we are in the position of the audience and of Stephen. The means of address is personal and yet like Acconci, we the anonymous audience are implicated. Monique seems both convinced of Steven's existence and in the process of creating him at the same time. If this tape can be seen as a remake of Acconci it is not because of the text, it is a remaking of his process. Moublow confronts the camera with the same freshness as Acconci in *Theme Song*. The intimacy of the video equipment becomes a convincing medium to talk to her fictional characters.

Joan and Stephen is a work that hybridizes film and video art conventions but leaves the gaps for us to grapple with. Are we to suppose that Monique's inability to grasp her reality of her situation is caused by the incestuous home she might have grown up in? Does one story necessarily have to tell something of the other? Could it be that the film could be a fictional memory, conjured up in fantasy in the same way Monique's fictional boyfriend was? Is Monique's fantasy life a result of her former omnipotent point of view sanctified by her mother's acknowledgment of the child's position as a privileged viewer? The unresolved questions of the tape don't privilege one reading over another as no discernible frame of what is real is drawn.

Last Year at NSCAD

A character in the film *Ghost Dances* describes a ghost as a fragment of another person's unconscious that you have incorporated into your own unconscious. Your experience of the ghost as 'other'; as exterior, has to do with its position in your unconscious as unassimilated thought. Like the psychotic who can't distinguish between the register of the fantasy and the real, the ghost returns as a disturbing or haunting presence.

In the summer of 1999 I taught a video class called *Video Hybrids* at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design – where Vito Acconci once taught and where Monique Moumblow first did her work with fictional personalities. After I showed Monique Moumblow's videotape, two students each embarked on reinventing Joan and Steven. It was a curious feeling to watch these videotapes evolve especially since Monique Moumblow had also been a student in a class of mine a few years before. It was like watching an exquisite corpse unfold; a series of provocation's passed on from generation to generation; a promiscuous orgy of ghosts left roaming the school. The institution of learning seems to act as a repository for these the fragments of the unconscious before they are filtered and used again.

Thomas Doucette decided that he could become Stephen, Monique's imaginary boyfriend. With a video camera he carefully created plausible countershots of himself as Stephen in a set resembling Monique's bedroom. He then was able to seamlessly insert these shots into Monique's video creating the impression that he is in her bedroom reacting to her monologue. As Stephen he struggles to express the disappointment of his limited being as described by Monique. Doucette by inserting himself as the abused fictional Steven seems to be trying to claim the audience's sympathies. Doucette exploits the shot/countershot convention of combining fragmentary shots to create the realistic continuity of cinematic space as a way of bringing closure to the impossible fantasy of the fictional persona in Monique's tape. Doucette in his remake sacrifices the intimacy of Monique's mode of address to move the audience's point of view into the third person and to occupy it for himself what had formerly been, in Monique's tape, a more ambiguous point of view.

Goody B. Wiseman took up Monique's persona in the tapes *Dear Emily* and *Paul & Paulette: Episode One & Two*. A recurring theme in Goody's work is the insecurity of identity. Monique has become Goody B's fictional character, like a mask that she can put on. It's as if she has taken up Acconci's provocation from *Theme Song* and found a way to enter into Monique's world. In *Dear Emily*, Goody B. appropriates the motif of the video correspondence from Joan and Steven. But instead of being an imaginary correspondence with a fictional character she is masquerading as Monique to correspond with another artist and friend, Emily Vey Duke in a collaborative video letter project. The reference, now becomes an in-joke, a point of contact using video art as a vernacular language, but also perhaps an evocation of the idea that all relationships are tinged by the fictional and we need these masks to communicate intimately. The work is gossipy, as Goody B. relates stories about people they both know – but it is also a springboard for a coquettish self-portrait that drifts off into larger questions about identity.

In *Paul and Paulette*, Goody B. is again exploiting a correspondence between her and a friend in a style borrowed from Joan and Steven. In the tapes she pussyfoots around her responsibility in disclosing private stories that have entered the public sphere through Goody B's work. Here, instead of the purely speculative nature of Monique Moumblow's explorations, this work treads the edge of life as Goody B. struggles with negotiating an intimate relationship that has been exposed to the fictions of her art.

It was curious that neither of these students had seen or were directly influenced by Vito Acconci's work and yet I could feel the ghost of his presence as it had been filtered through video arts history.

All the World's a Mirror Stage

Real time and intimacy are still terms at play in contemporary video art although they have been reinscribed by contemporary practices. The texture of video is still coded as the immediate and real. The large scale disinvestment that has overtaken the authority of the photographic image in the digital age has not yet, it seems, consumed our belief in the sincerity of the video image. In fact the widespread use of video camcorder footage in legal and entertainment contexts suggests an entrenchment of video's role as witness to the real. The position of video technology as pop culture's wonder boy has been succeeded by digital technologies that are homogenizing the many different technical approaches to image making, often incorporating distinctive features of previous technologies in curious combinations (such as the 'cinelook' filters that can now give video the feel of film grain). The internet radically challenges the broadcast models of mass media image culture and has introduced new nuance to the terms real time and intimacy. It seems that video artists who work within the parameters of those terms today do not do it to define a psychology but as a loaded historical gesture.

The question of intimacy is, of course, not just a formal aspect of the technology of video but part of a whole set of psychological and social conditions that arise from that technologies use. Video art, having defined itself as a particular set of artistic practices, has created a sense of intimacy between members who situate themselves in that history. Video art is no longer an innocent play-thing of conceptual art. It has struggled to wean itself from the gallery and museum scene and developed its own community of co-operatives, festivals, academic programs, and independent production venues. It has also increasingly become the centre of a concerted discourse discussed under the name video art. The dynamics of influence, as I have tried to show in this essay, are perpetuated by these social networks. With the technically distinct relation to real time feedback in video the effects of transference are perpetuated slightly differently than through the mechanisms of other art forms. That is to say, video ghosts are different from cinema ghosts or painting ghosts.

As media art expands into a multitude of new genres and technologies, provocative sites for distinct new media forms are also developing. Although these art forms haven't yet emerged into discourse with the same clarity that video art did in the early 1970's, we can expect that new distinctive features such as 'agency' and 'immersion' will need to be thought of in terms of their psychological dynamics which will bring about new theoretical developments around the role and function of art in general.

As the internet embraces the type of personal experiments undertaken under the name of video art – although who knows if either the term video or art will continue to be operative in the future – and questions of on-line identity continue to stress the instability of identity formation, it seems that Narcissism and Echo will continue to figure the psychodynamics of this media art and all the world will be a mirror stage and all it's players mere reflections of a lost originality.

Notes

1 Marita Sturken, 'Paradox in the Evolution of an Art Form: Great Expectations and the Making of History', p 118.

2 John Belton, 'Looking Through Video: The Psychology of Video and Film', p. 67.

3 see Rosalind Krauss: 'Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism' and Stuart Marshall: "Video Art, the Imaginary and the Parole Vide "

4 to see how the effects of transference are strong around Derrida's presence see Alan Bass's The Double Game which discusses the strong transference reaction Derrida's translator had to the figure of Derrida. Also Derrida's essay Videor where he writes about his experience as a participant in Gary Hill's video Disturbance (among the jars). "One could say that my uncertainty [about video art]...has

been encouraged by the experience of the “video” simulacrum into which I have seen myself, modestly swept along for a little while now, ever since I had a chance to participate, or rather to figure, in *Disturbance* by Gary Hill.” p. 74, *Videor*

5 Susan Buck-Morss, “The Cinema Screen as Prosthesis of Perception: A Historical Account”, p. 52 – 53.

6 see Roland Barthes ‘The Death of an Author’ and Michel Foucault’s ‘What is an Author?’

Videography and Filmography

Ken McMullen, *Ghost Dances*, 1984, 100 mins.
Looseyard Production for Channel 4 and ZDF.

Donald Cammell & Nicholas Roeg, *Performance*, 1970, 102 mins. Warner Bros. Inc
A Goodtimes Enterprises production.

William Easton, *Lifeswop*, 198?, one month performance.

William Easton, *3 x 3*, 1989, 15 mins.

Vito Acconci, *Theme Song*, 1973, 33:15 mins. Distributed by Electronic Arts Intermix.

Mike Kelley and Paul McCarthy, *Fresh Acconci*, 1995, 44 mins.

Monique Moumblow, *Joan and Stephen*, 1996, 12 mins.

Goody B. Wiseman, *Dear Emily*, 1999, 30 mins.

Goody B. Wiseman, *Paul & Paulette: Episode One*, 1999, 7 mins.

Goody B. Wiseman, *Paul & Paulette: Episode Two*, 1999, 2 mins.

Thomas Doucette, *The Monique Tape*, 1999, 8 mins.

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The ideas in this essay were provoked by the screening of 'Theme Song', 'Joan and Stephen', and 'Fresh Acconci' at the Pleasure Dome in Toronto in November of 1996. That evening was curated by Steve Reinke.

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