PERFORMATIVE IMAGES

A PHILOSOPHY OF VIDEO ART TECHNOLOGY IN FRANCE

ANAÏS NONY

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For Reine

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Anaïs Nony

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Connected and separated at once, forward while turning back,
gliding into the future while standing awkwardly in the past,
the historian of the contemporary flails about and falters.
— Jane Blocker[1]

To weigh the future of future thoughts
requires some powerfully visionary thinking about
how the life of the mind can operate
in a moral context increasingly dangerous to its health.
— Toni Morrison[2]

Culture and technique cannot be complementary in a static position;
they may only become so through a cinematic process of tilting and inversion
under a regime whose appropriation to each issue is perhaps
the most important task that philosophy's effort could propose to attend to.
— Gilbert Simondon[3]

1   Blocker 2015, p. 4.
2   Morrison 2019, p. 116.
3   Simondon 2014, p. 329.

Introduction

Video: Between Technology and Performance

Abstract: In the introduction to this book, I engage video art and activist practices to understand how they confront and modulate the effects of image technologies on contemporary life. By means of the concept of the "performative image," I present a new regime of the image with the qualities of operation. I define the performative dimension of video technology as its capacity to act as an agent of reality. This introduction presents a methodology founded in performance studies and the philosophy of technology to show how video technologies are shaping psychic and social life due to the various operations they perform on cultural practices and historical realities.

Keywords: activism, art, installation, performance, technology, video

> *No longer the passive objects of traditional art history,*
> *artworks now figure as performative forces*
> *to which are attributed heightened capacities for action.*
> — Ina Blom[1]

> *Interpretation is first and foremost a form of making: that is, it depends*
> *on the willed intentional activity of the human mind,*
> *molding and forming the objects of its attention with care and study.*
> — Edward W. Said[2]

Video Practices of Knowledge and Technology

You are on the C train near Paris—the yellow line. You know you are going to a wealthy suburb because the train is here on time and there are still

[1] Blom 2016, p. 13.
[2] Said 1997, p. 164.

covers on the chairs and see-through windows to contemplate nature while you ride. You hold on to your train ticket and your professional invitation. You also have your self-written authorization explaining why you are on this trip. If some surveillance agent asks, you have a speech ready in your head. You can explain why it is an essential activity to go see Kitso Lynn Lelliott's video installations in Chamarande. It is March 2021, and the French government is prescribing what counts as an essential activity during the COVID-19 pandemic. You are on your way nevertheless, and an hour into the ride you arrive and walk the village-like streets. You enter the Domaine Départemental de Chamarande—a park with a seventeenth-century castle. A sign on the Orangerie cottage building and an open door invites you into a dark room. A woman sitting at her desk is expecting you and asks to scan your QR-code. You observe the space while she reminds you of the sanitary measures. The work is here: *Fungible Things* (2015), *My story no doubt is me/ Older than me* (2015), *I was her and she was me and those we might become* (2016), and *Untitled Sankofa 1* (2016). The space feels like an intimate retrospection of Lelliott's work. You start walking. You don't yet know where to go but the images floating in space are welcoming. The different components of Kitso Lynn Lelliott's work resemble a palimpsest where temporalities, geographies, languages, and bodily presences are assembled to immerse you, the viewer, in concomitant narratives about history, knowledge, and technology. The layers of screen dress-up the room to fashion the space with the transparent ghost-like figures that are often present in Lelliott's work. In Lelliot's videos, her body performs the reminiscent manifestation of history: exhibiting layers of experience in space and creating a suggestive afterlife in the aftermath of colonial times.

Lelliott's approach to video technology, by which I am most captivated, is in evidence in her figures. They inhabit the screens and the space in between screens, on the threshold of appearance and disappearance, simultaneously present and absent in the name of art. Carrying forward figures from the past, such as Alzire, servant at the court of Frederique Sophie Wilhelmine of Prussia or Margravine of Bayreuth, eldest daughter of the King of Prussia Frederick William I and sister of Frederick II of Prussia, Lelliott's video works reveal historical narratives in everyday gestures. In *I was her and she was me and those we might become*, Lelliott dresses and undresses herself, staging her body as both the form and the substance of the video performance, uncovering herself as if she was peeling away layers of identity that variably occupy the frame. Lelliott plays with images of herself and with the screen to create various modes of existence. The texture is created not only by the white cotton dress she often uses in her work, but also by the screen itself

which ambivalently disappears to be replaced by projections of floating particles, or by translucid structures where multiple versions of Lelliott can be seen. As a viewer, you both wander in space and wonder about Lelliott. Not simply because she is a dear friend, but because you get to see her for all the other people she could have been and might still become.

Lelliott's work gives space and time to an embodied wholeness: a myriad of presences that are no longer damned to be separated by the hegemonic system of knowledge imposed by imperial countries, such as France. Presented in Chamarande where a castle was built in 811 and became, in the sixteenth century, a lordly hotel for François Miron, *prévôt des marchands de Paris* and close friend of Henri IV, Lelliott's work reactivates the site where the installation is presented—a site where money, power, and sovereignty consumed other modalities of existence. In *Untitled Sankofa 1*, the screen and the viewer inhabit the space and belong to a common sky, which Lelliott achieves through her use of video technology. Closer to this screen-based installation, you feel a wholeness as if you have stepped into a world where other cosmologies are at play. And they are. The star-map of Nineveh, a 5,500-year-old Sumerian clay tablet that is the earliest known astronomical instrument, is reproduced and performs the skylines of celestial times in the space of the installation. The celestial planisphere, still the property of the British Museum in 2022, depicts the constellation and represents an instrument of calculation. As a viewer, you are immersed in the sky of January 3–4, 650 BC as seen over the old town of Nineveh in Mesopotamia. As you circulate within the space and discover the various modalities of seeing Lelliott's performative figures on screen, the universe of ancient technology encounters the multichannel video exhibition to produce an imaginary engulfment. Not quite a reversal and not so much an immersion, the engulfing quality of Lelliott's work creates a world out of worldly presences that perform a cultural critique of hegemonic time technology. The space engulfs you to tell a story concerned with fragments of history in search of wholeness. Lelliott's 2021 exhibition at Chamarande, made of sounds, cotton balls, wooden boxes, screens, and projections created a time outside of the pandemic, outside of the sovereignty of governance; a time where epistemologies of presence and absence could perform the other lives of the image.[3] As a viewer, you walk out of Lelliott's space in slow motion, in an attempt to attune yourself to the subtle and almost invisible variations of belonging to subversive practices of knowledge and technology.

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3   See Hayes and Gilburt 2020.
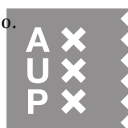
Performative Images of Video Technology

I begin with Lelliott's video installations because they illustrate the performative dimension of video technology: its capacity to offer alternative narratives about experience. Lelliott's work in particular demonstrates how the performative dimension of video images can activate the continuum of behaviour, practice, observation, and social advocacies that are central to the cultural critique of representational practices and technology. Lelliott's performative practice of making video through disappearance and dissolution is central to this book's argument: video technology performs images that act as agents of knowledge. In the memorably obsessive reflections that comprise Jacques Derrida's "Plato's Pharmacy," which highlights the ambivalent power of writing as remembrance and forgetting, this technology of knowledge constitutes the ineradicable paradox of language.[4] And, of course, at least in the myth of writing he refers to, Derrida highlights the techno-epistemological dimension of writing as a knowledge technology. Admittedly though, my concerns in *Performative Images* are not with the whole of this debate on knowledge and technology. Inevitably, perhaps, I have a somewhat narrower focus than this: namely, the technology of video, the infiltration of video images in contemporary societies, and the effects of video operations on both psychic and social life. What interests me about this technology (both analogue and digital) is above all its aesthetic capacity to signal a shift in the structuring and diffusion of knowledge where images perform operations intrinsic to the material intelligence of computation, capital, and governance.[5] Video is taken in this book as a distinctive new medium[6] that is both *a technical object* with various sets of usages and practices and *a historical reality*: meaning that video technology contains implicit information about societies.[7]

At one level, my central concern in *Performative Images* is with video or, rather, with the lived experience of video technology: the technological transition between analogue and digital moving-image technologies and their infiltration of our contemporary life. It seems to me that video, as a means of performing interactions in psychic and social contexts, questions when images *do* things to our brain, to our sense of belonging, and to our relation to past events and future narratives. At the core of this study is the

4   See Derrida 1981.
5   See Baranzoni 2017.
6   Jameson 1991, p. xv.
7   Simondon 2014, p. 29.

identification of a new regime of the image, which I have termed performative images, with the qualities of operation that define the performative dimension of video technology: its capacity to operate as an agent of reality. At stake are the types of implicit information video objects can produce, the kind of attention they require, and the mode of bodily disposition they depend upon. Video, understood as an agent, can be attributed a capacity to act on the message it transmits to the receiver and on the situation in which the images are perceived. I argue in the book that video technology modulates the socio-cultural zones of knowledge and of historical reality by implementing various operations (transduction, contestation, anticipation) within our contemporary environment. By performative images, I am referring to operations and utterances transmitted by video technology—both analogue and digital—that "put into effect the relation that they name."[8] The goal is not to discuss performance art *per se* but to address how the "interpellative power"[9] of speech is transformed into the pre-emptive power of video technology.[10] Contrary to language, which sustains the body by interpellating it, video technology captures the body through various time-based operations. It is a technology that solicits the body by the distribution of its image; it seizes its presence by the myriad of interfaces that perform around the body; and it transforms its data into a-significative units[11] that can be used against the body. In other words, the question of the performative dimension of the image is not only different from those of language (as acts and utterances), but video technology also requires the revaluation of critical tools to unpack the disruptive dimension of contemporary media technology.[12]

   At another level, I am convinced that it is urgent not to oppose analogue and digital technologies. Rather I see, in the decades-long genealogy of their evolution, an opportunity to interrogate how image objects operate relationships between cultural practices and historical realities. I take the object of video as my philosophical occasion, so to speak, to elaborate a sensibility for images with the quality of operation. Mental images are inhabited by image objects that *survive*, as Didi-Huberman would say, in the fragile and intermittent realm of the psychic mind.[13] An image object is an object with an afterglow effect; it belongs to the realm of fantasies and the

8   Butler 1993, p. 224.
9   Butler 1999, p. 2.
10   See Hansen 2015b; Massumi 2007.
11   Rouvroy cited in Rouvroy and Stiegler 2016, p. 8.
12   See Stiegler 2016.
13   See Didi-Huberman 2002.

often-hallucinatory dimension of thought.[14] This effect is best understood as intermittently enacting both *rémanence* (property of being remanent even when the actual cause is gone) and *permanence* (property of being enduring);[15] namely, modes of relating to past and present experiences. Much like the mind, video technology can produce not only projections of alternative reality in the present, but it can also create anticipation of a future reality by means of technological experimentation. By bringing different temporal realms into the synthesis of its object, video technology significantly challenges conceptions of time in relation to moving-image technology. Here, the technicity of the video object and its mode of existence creates forms of spatio-temporal expression that grant access to the performative movement taking place between experience and imagination as well as between cultural practices and historical realities. Technological supports, be they a writing pad (as seen in chapter 1) or the virtual presence of an object in video images (as seen in chapter 3), always indicate a modulation of reality by the presence of media objects. Such a presence has morphed into a *prégnance* (property of being a perceptive structure): that which imposes an image object to be constituted in the mental apparatus of the subject. This *prégnance* of the analogue-digital video image is what transforms the traditional mode of representation (as seen in painted images) and the programmatic quality of the technical realm (as seen in photography) into the operative realm that Vilém Flusser defines as modelling relations to the real.[16]

The book argues that the advent of portable video technology in the late 1960s and its almost complete infiltration into increasingly mediatized societies has shaped the structure and operation of bodily experience according to new sets of imagery principles. I position the study of video (as image and apparatus) to better address the impact of technology on memory, the spatial modulation of subjectivities, the importance of video technology in the context of the increased surveillance of racialized bodies, and the technology-driven dimensions of desire. The performative dimension of video is important to address because algorithms or, to paraphrase Luciana Parisi, "performing entities" that restructure modes of existence increasingly run the media-driven milieu we inhabit.[17] In the early twenty-first century,

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14   On the afterglow in relationship to technology, see Simondon's "L'effet de halo en matière technique" from 1960 in Simondon 2014, pp. 279–93.
15   Stiegler 1996, p. 166.
16   Flusser 1986, p. 333.
17   Parisi 2013, p. ix.

not only is video technology found everywhere in social environments, performing diverse realms of reality in our contemporary moment, but the automatic quality of video technology's operations calls into question notions of desire, politics, and social agency. Furthermore, the omnipresence of video objects (phones, GPSs, watches, tablets, computers, televisions, screen boards) in both private and public spheres of society is structuring the very conditions of knowledge transmission by escalating the digital divide between people through extended platforms of exchange.[18]

This book tackles the impact of technologies on social and psychic life by looking at selected video works produced over a fifty-year period. Because video technology is constantly developing towards greater complexity, its study demands the revaluation of the conceptual tools needed to unpack the aesthetic and historical conditions of its emergence and dissemination. I engage both performance studies and the philosophy of technique and technology to show that artworks not only contribute to the rethinking of media platforms and networks of knowledge distribution but also to show how artists anticipate the societal and psychic changes brought about by technology. The video works studied in this book promote *art as anticipation*: artists and activists display an eagerness to tackle the changes occurring in the various layers of society by reclaiming narratives to better address the events shaping their geopolitical landscapes. Art as anticipation is both a form of "confrontation," to cite a concept Denise Ferreira da Silva coined,[19] and a form of "modulation": an operational mode where reality is revealed and invented anew through alteration, intonation, cadence, and variation. Art as anticipation engages the viewer by *confronting* them with narratives that have the possibility of an "inflection"[20] and by modulating the viewer's perception to foster differential modes of belonging to knowledge transmission. What guided my impetus to work with these specific video works is their power to signify alternative stories about technology. They show that video's performative images create a field of technicity that reveals sets of interrogations concerning our relation to time, information, embodiment, and history.

In video technology, performativity reflects on the potential of the object to operate and develop other modes of engaging with reality. I build on cultural theorist José Esteban Muñoz's first use of performativity in video art in *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*.

18   Proctor 2010, p. 35.
19   See Ferreira da Silva 2015, p. 1.
20   Ibid.

Muñoz was a pioneer in bridging the disciplinary gap between media studies and performance studies by paying attention to identity politics outside of the dominant form of media. In Muñoz's book, artist Osa Hidalgo de la Riva introduces the potential of video to create alternative and utopian stories, as seen in her *Marginal Eyes* or *Mujeta Fantasy 1*. This video from 1996 is a utopian, though no less satirical, remake of sovereignty where Chicanas, Native women, and Black women have ascended to positions of power and taken over both scientific and political domains within the state of California. In de la Riva's video, a fictional Chicana archaeologist ironically discovers "the origins of Western culture in the form of a small red clay figurine that she unearths during a dig."[21] In a detailed account of the video's complexity, Muñoz points to its ability to distance itself from the dominant understanding of power, culture, and knowledge and to rewrite history so that "the minoritarian subject's eyes are no longer marginal."[22] The overall video performs a world that makes the utopian proposition that "it is through the transformative powers of queer sex and sexuality that a queer world is made" by relating to both private and public spheres (e.g., in the scene where the archaeologist rises to fame and in another where she is seen in the context of her queer relationship) and by ending with a sex scene where old footage from US sex-education material is played on TV.[23] Though my work does not claim to address the same set of political and cultural questions as Muñoz's work on queer studies, it relates to *Disidentifications* to the extent that video becomes a pivotal medium to address other modes of existence and relations to reality. As Muñoz points out, video's performative power "looks into the past to critique the present and helps imagine the future."[24]

This book takes part in the debate about the necessity of situating technique and image technologies in the production and circulation of epistemes by addressing the role of activists, artists, and theorists using video in anticipation of both the "technical" and the "digital" turns taking place in societies. The book understands video technology as producing images made of multi-layered transitions (technical, geopolitical, and social) spanning over several decades from the early 1970s to the present. I take video images as images of transition and transduction more than of transformation, and show how their performative dimension reveals the passage of the

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21   Muñoz 1999, p. 23.
22   Ibid.
23   Ibid.
24   Ibid., p. 25.

coming of a technological age. I am interested in telling a story centred on the performative encounter between technique and moving-image aesthetics (video art, video installation, spontaneous video recording, and documentary video-making) to reclaim a different philosophy of image technologies: one that is less concerned with speech and textuality, image and movement, and focuses instead on opaque programmed significance[25] and a-significant data.[26] I address the performative dimension of video images through museum curations, street protests, experimental research in universities, and technical training in cultural centres to reveal how image technology performs in society. Ultimately, the revaluation of video technology from the standpoint of performative images, as exemplified in installation art and activism, allows for the emergence of historiographical zones of knowledge at the threshold of both technical evolution and socio-cultural adaptation.

This study situates the aesthetic and political fields of video objects between the early 1970s and the early twenty-first century in France (mainly). I engage in the social, political, but also aesthetic alliances produced by video technology and pay attention to specific video experimentations to account for how moving images create relations in increasingly segregated and yet networked societies. The goal is to retrace a narrative concerning technique and technology that emerged out of the work of Jean-Christophe Averty, Judy Blum, Nicole Croiset, Mona Hatoum, Catherine Ikam, Thierry Kuntzel, Carol Roussopoulos, Zineb Sedira, and Nil Yalter. I also engage video groups such as Collectif Vidéo, Vidéo-Info, Vidéo Out, Vidéo oo, Les Cents Fleurs, VidéoDéba, Liaisons Nouvelles and women-only groups such as Inform'elles, Vidéa, M'Sam, Insoumuses, Vidéodieuses and Vidéoteuses. The corpus of artwork selected in this book is as much disparate in its forms as it is in its content. In situating the video art and activism that was presented in France between the 1970s and the 2020s, my goal is to offer alternative tools, away from a solely filmic approach to the image, to ground a performative moving-image understanding of postmodernism and its links to post-imperialism. By engaging a corpus of moving-image installations made by artists from various horizons, cultures, and nationalities, this book hopes to engage debates concerning the historical understanding of the relation between technology and aesthetics in post-independence France. I study multi-media installation works that were deployed in museum installations and art galleries but also videotapes made during street protests and
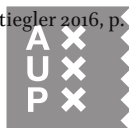
within institutions such as the university. I analyse videos' mode of display, distribution, and the proliferation of their usage to reveal the implications of video objects in shaping both psychic and collective life in a time of historical change and technological transition. By going back to some of the debates launched in the '70s regarding the relation between video, informatics, and technology, I show how video objects offer a privileged case through which to question how technical environments shape human reality. I pay equal attention to what is happening in the image, what is happening in the space where viewers watch these images, and which distributive networks give video an afterlife.

To explore the performative dimension of video technology, each chapter addresses the work of artists and activists to tackle the themes of memory, space, race, and desire. By doing so, the book retraces an aesthetic and theoretical journey in which I bring the reader into the room with the video objects to reveal how video technology perform various operations on contemporary life. This book is not interested in the long genealogy of video experimentations that happened in France, but looks precisely at certain historical, aesthetic, and technological encounters to reveal artistic emergences that have paved the way towards a critique of performance technology. I discuss critiques of history writing via memory technology (chapter 1), video spaces as modulating information (chapter 2), surveillance technology as linked to bodily segregation (chapter 3), and the technological environment as producing new desiring modalities (chapter 4). In focusing on how video produces different social alliances, I hope to engage the norms, forces, and operations that structure political and technological agendas in post-independence France. In the remaining part of this introduction, I engage the historical realities of technological innovations, the importance of video artists in anticipating and confronting historical realities via video technology, and the infiltration of the imaginary modes of connectivity and significations in a world where video images have become a driving force determining communication.

Performative Video Operations

Video objects have now become omnipresent in society, challenging categories of knowledge production, embodiment, and history making in new and fundamental ways. In the realm of media studies, questions about how media technology is changing daily life have been the subject of much debate in recent years. Cultural theorists have critiqued media as a technology that

catches users' attention in a frenzy of communicative systems;[27] they argue that such a flux of signs reveals the poverty of communication itself.[28] More recently, media theorists have moved beyond such critiques to engage with behavioural manipulation through technology in order to understand how media implements new modalities of governance.[29] Following media theorist Luciana Parisi, the algorithms central to the functioning of media devices are the central forces of cybernetics; they restructure modes of existence according to new sets of indeterminacy.[30] Video objects perform diverse tasks to interpret human interactions in terms of quantifiable data flows. For philosopher of law Antoinette Rouvroy, these data flows develop forms of "algorithmic governmentality" that control people according to a-semantic yet calculable signals.[31] The constant infiltration of screen-based objects into the various realms of sociality is not new. From the very beginning of the deployment of video recorders in the late 1960s, such objects have shaped the landscape of image making in multiple directions, revealing the power of such technology to reflect upon "the emergence of new social topologies."[32] These topological relations with media technologies (how one deals with the past, makes sense of the present, and projects into the future) intensified with the advent of portable moving-image technologies in the late 1960s. Many decades after the public commercialization of video technologies, anyone can attest to how deeply this medium has infiltrated both our collective and intimate environments.

Video technology was overwhelmingly used by women in feminist protest, workers' unions, queer movements as well as pro-immigrant and refugee movements, because it offered "novelty, autonomy, a total absence of norms, and the opportunity to be trained on the job."[33] However, leading male figures of French theory paid little to no attention to the aesthetic and political force of video experimentations.[34] Even when Jean-François Lyotard

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27   See Dean 2019; Lovink 2011; Stiegler 2016.

28   See Galloway, Thacker, and Wark 2013; Groys 2012.

29   See Väliaho 2014; Nony 2019.

30   Parisi 2013, p. ix.

31   See Rouvroy and Stiegler 2016, p. 22.

32   Blom 2016, p. 21.

33   Mignot-Lefebvre 1979, p. 92.

34   A few names are worth mentioning here: Régis Debray, who developed the concept of mediology in the 1990s to unpack the intermediary procedures that take place between the production of signs and events; Georges Didi-Huberman, who engaged the question of the spatialized image of the art installation, both practically and theoretically; Félix Guattari, who experimented with radio technologies and theoretically unpacked the challenges brought about by mass media communication; Guy Débord, who wrote a landmark book in 1967 tackling the

co-curated a multi-media exhibition on the concept of the immaterial at the Centre Pompidou in 1986, very little attention was given to video as providing critical tools to address the new material conditions brought about by our post-modern times. In the exhibition *Les Immatériaux*, each work of art was divided into different "zones" of aesthetic manifestation. Jean-Louis Boissier, who contributed to the video aspects of the exhibition recalls:

> Lyotard framed the exhibition with his texts and ideas, he reorganized and renamed much of what was already there and integrated the elements of the exhibition. In fact, he provided the overall narrative for the exhibition in his texts for the catalogue and the exhibition walls. He himself said that his only, but very decisive scenography, or dramaturgic idea, was the use of the soundtrack played via headphones, so that people would walk through the exhibition listening to spoken texts, different in the various zones of the exhibition space on the 5th floor of the Centre Pompidou—so to speak, "listening to Lyotard."

Though the preparations for the exhibition began in 1981, two years before Lyotard took part in the project, it is still remembered as the "listening to Lyotard" show.[35] At the time, Lyotard was faculty at Paris VIII with Gilles Deleuze, Yves Châtelet, Alain Badiou, Jacques Rancière and artists such as ORLAN, Jean-Louis Boissier, and Jean-Paul Fargier. Paris VIII, the so-called Centre Universitaire Expérimental de Vincennes, was created in Autumn 1968 and moved to Saint-Denis in 1980. From the beginning, this public university had a video studio run first by technicians and then, starting in 1973, by teachers and students. Video technology is taught at Vincennes, Jussieu, Nanterre, Paris I, and during more informal workshops hosted in Maisons de la culture and Maisons de la jeunesse.[36]

Despite the fact that video objects have played a central role in questioning the human-machine and culture-technique relations, video experimentations in France have been slow to receive scholarly attention. Scholars cherish French theorists such as Gilles Deleuze, Roland Barthes, Jean Baudrillard, Jacques Derrida, Jacques Rancière, and Jean-François Lyotard for their reflections on notions of mediation, spectatorship, and time as shaping our

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accumulation of spectacles as shaping our modern condition; Jacques Derrida, who wrote a short text on video artist Gary Hill and addressed how television manipulated and transmitted images that influence notions of democracy and history in his dialogue with Bernard Stiegler.

35   Hui and Broeckmann 2015, pp. 93–94.

36   Mignot-Lefebvre 1979, p. 91.

post-modern condition. Very much engaged by post-structuralist theorists, these thinkers were all involved, in one way or the other, in undoing (though some would say reproducing) the logocentric tendencies of Western critique. Yet, these critics did not have much to say about the technological experimentations developed by artists and activists using electronic images and video technology at that time. Unlike, for the most part, experimental films, such as the pioneering work of Chris Marker, Agnès Varda, and Jean-Luc Godard, French theorists barely mentioned the political and aesthetic experimentations taking place in Paris and in France more broadly. Despite the fact that video work (as image and as apparatus) has been at the forefront of cultural critique concerning broadcasting technology and television hegemony, on one hand, and the experimental modes of manifesting new ways of belonging to experiences within media-driven realities, on the other, most French theorists' reflections on media were grounded in the cinematic as defined by the filmic image, thus missing out on more than fifty years of electronic video experimentations that make visible performative images and operative modes of relating to technology.

Starting in the late 1960s with the invention of the Portapak camera, which could be carried and operated by one person, video became accessible as an image-making tool to give unrepresented communities, such as factory workers, refugees, and political activists, a media presence. The birth of the video movement in the late 1960s was thus due to affordable tape recorders that could be operated by one person. The emergence of this technical object, as in the case of the Portapak introduced in 1967, restructured the way in which moving images were made and thought on a massive scale. In France, videotape recorders were used to capture street and factory protests as well as to experiment with new means of information, revealing the political potential of video and broadcasting technology to record and relay events independent from mainstream media. At a time when multi-geopolitical struggles for cultural and economic independence were challenging the transcultural foundations of Europe and the United States, people documenting new modes of inventing community turned videos into objects of critical inquiry.

Complex experimentations with technologies facilitated debates on surveillance, cybernetics, biology, and social identity across the "electronic spectrum," to borrow the subtitle of *Radical Software*, "a grassroots sophisticated how-to" periodical that became a reference in the field of moving-image technology.[37] Video technology quickly became a mode of producing and

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37   London 2009, p. 199.

distributing information differently. Using video technology, Black History in the United States was writing itself out of centuries of oppression. The Civil Rights Movement was founded to end discriminatory laws and, thanks to portable cameras, footage of this revolutionary organizing documented speeches, protests, marches, and riots. In France, the video collective *Video Out* filmed formerly incarcerated author Jean Genet reading a text after the arrest on October 13, 1970, of Black Panther activist Angela Davis. Fearing that his intervention might be censored, Genet asked Swiss feminist and pioneer documentary filmmaker Carole Roussopoulos to accompany him on October 16, 1970, to the television studio of *L'invité du Dimanche*—a télévision programme that aired on the public television channel Office de Radiodiffusion Télévision Française (ORTF) on November 8. Encouraged by Genet in 1969, Roussopoulos was the first woman to buy a Portapak in France—the second person after Jean-Luc Godard. During the interview, Genet read an anti-racist pamphlet that criticized police violence in the United States.[38] As Genet predicted, his intervention was never aired. Roussopoulos's tape *Jean Genet parle d'Angela Davis* (8 min., 1970) became the first activist video produced in France. It also stands, as Ros Murray points out, as a "testament to video's opposition to television."[39]

As early as the 1970s in France, video became a tool for artists, activists, and citizen journalists to disrupt dominant epistemologies. The critical disruption of mainstream information, as seen in the work of Jean-Christophe Averty, who questions the political role of state television, became a central motive for video pioneers.[40] For artists such as Catherine Ikam, Nil Yalter, and Zineb Sedira, video was a means by which to reclaim forms of knowledge production at a time when the geopolitical landscape of post-WWII was infused by colonial trauma, the cold war, and the failed promise of economic stability. In the work of Ikam, Yalter, and Sedira, the object of video is deployed for both its imaging and spatial potential. The video object became a means through which to think about the broadcasted images

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38   During the first take, Genet addressed the audience by reading a text, which included these lines: "*Angela Davis est dans vos pattes. Tout est en place. Vos flics—qui ont déjà tiré sur un juge de façon à mieux tuer trois Noirs—, vos flics, votre administration, vos magistrats s'entraînent tous les jours et vos savants aussi, pour massacrer les Noirs. D'abord les Noirs. Tous. Ensuite, les Indiens qui ont survécu. Ensuite, les Chicanos. Ensuite, les radicaux blancs. Ensuite, je l'espère, les libéraux blancs. Ensuite, les Blancs. Ensuite, l'administration blanche. Ensuite, vous-mêmes. Alors le monde sera délivré. Il y restera après votre passage, le souvenir, la pensée et les idées d'Angela Davis et du Black Panther.*" http://www.film-documentaire.fr/4DACTION/w_fiche_film/31137_1.

39   Murray 2016, p. 6.

40   Averty 1982, p. 82.

of the real and to disrupt hegemonic forms of discourse. The goal was not simply to overthrow television's power but to reflect on it: to stage both the image and the apparatus that video is in order to use it for its potential to generate and invent new modalities for thinking about images in general and the form of thought such video technology provides.[41]

First and second-wave feminists engaged in video both as an image and as an apparatus and took video as a tool to question the intersection of race, class, and gender. Along with various other media in the early '70s that explored societal systems, video was quickly used to question how the structure of information shaped individual and collective knowledge in a society. Austrian video pioneer Valie Export started to use video as a way to critique societal norms. Very much aware of how broadcasting technology (such as television and radio) was linked to the distribution of mainstream ideology, and especially patriarchy, Export broadcast her piece *Facing a Family* on television in 1971. *Facing a Family* depicted a family having dinner while watching TV, thus offering a mirror to spectators in their respective living rooms performing the same activity. In France, Roussopoulos used the Portapak to give visibility to migrants, homosexuals, political activists, and sex workers. See for example Roussopoulos' *Prostituées de Lyon parlent*, 1975, or the 1973 *Enterrement of Mahmoud Al Hamchari*, where Roussopoulos filmed the burial of a leader of the Organization for the Liberation of Palestine in France who was killed as a result of a bomb attack in 1972.[42]

In the US, video and installation art pioneer Dara Birnbaum created *Technology/Transformation: Wonder Woman* between 1978 and 1979. She appropriated the figure of Wonder Woman to address the gender bias embedded in north American television series. A few years later, in 1981, multi-media pioneer Beverly Buchanan created *Marsh Ruins*, which captured the erosion of a temporal land-art sculpture she created in coastal Georgia. Among the many themes this work addresses, those of collective memory and the unmarked histories of enslaved people are central. As Alexxa Gotthardt reports: "*Marsh Ruins* (1981) [is] located in coastal Georgia near a commemorated site where Confederate poet Sidney Lanier penned his famous work 'Marshes of Glynn' (1878). To the east of Buchanan's work, as a wall label points out, is Saint Simons Island, where a group of Igbo people sold into slavery collectively drowned themselves in 1803. That

41   Dubois 2011, p. 109.
42   Roussopoulos made over one hundred and fifty documentaries and co-founded the Centre audiovisuel Simone de Beauvoir in 1982 with Delphine Seyrig and Ioana Wieder.

site, unlike Lanier's, has no historic marker."[43] By generating the erosion of her own art sculpture, Buchanan creates a site from which to activate the history of the land and of the people who acted on it. The artwork becomes a signifying trace of a place in time that allows for subversive knowledge of history to emerge.[44] In 1984, video pioneer and first African American animator Ayoka Chenzira created *Hair Piece: A Film for Nappy-Headed People*. This critical satire addressed self-image for African American women who live in a society dominated by racialized (white) female standards of beauty. In *Hair Piece: A Film for Nappy-Headed People*, Ayoka Chenzira used multimedia materials to create an alternative discourse on white-centred female beauty norms. By performing other modalities of identifying with dominant understandings of existence, her video creates, engenders, and constitutes the real, differently.

In France, video pioneer Thierry Kuntzel created his first video installation *La Desserte Blanche* in 1980, which portrayed a female figure performing tasks in an interior. In this twenty-two-minute-long colour video, later exhibited in a white neon-lit room for the exhibition *Les Immatériaux* at the Centre Pompidou in 1985, Kuntzel modulated lighting contrasts to whiten the image so much that the light erased the gestures and silhouette of the woman. The latter appears and disappears: finding herself matching the background like the other furniture or the fruit in the basket she often holds in her hands. In his notes, Kuntzel mentioned that the technician misspelled the title of the tape and wrote: "La décepte blanche."[45] The erroneous title is ironically accurate for a video that does not show a *desserte* (a tray) and portrays instead a female figure who is only perceptible as she disappears through contrasts of white light. This white light is made possible by the type of camera used: *la caméra paluche* (the handycam). This camera offered a mobility that created a new modality for investing spaces and moving between different milieux at various speeds, as seen in Roland Baladi's *Écrire Paris avec les rues de cette ville*, 1973, where the camera is installed on a motorbike which follows "a predetermined route according to the graphic design of the word Paris."[46] To shoot the video, the driver had to complete all five letters in under an hour in order to fit within the sixty-minute-long magnetic tape. Gradually, the letter

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43   See Gotthardt 2016.

44   Also in 1981, the Black Film Center/Archive was established at Indiana University, Bloomington, offering the first archival repository dedicated to films about and by African American people.

45   Kuntzel 2006, p. 344.

46   Belloir 1981, p. 24.

appears at the bottom of the screen. The high speed of images shot from the motorbike contrasts with the very low speed of the writing of the letters on the screen.

Also in 1980, multi-media pioneers Nil Yalter and Nicole Croiset created *Les Rituels* together: a video installation presented at the ARC, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris for an exhibition called *Espaces Libres.* In *Les Rituels*, Yalter and Croiset "communicate remotely via a closed video circuit connecting two scenic locations, each with a camera, a television set on the same floor and a VCR. Communication is essentially visual and is based on symbols of identity and difference between the sexes (masks and mirrors) conveyed by direct images from cameras and videotape recorders."[47] The images of their two bodies were transmitted via a television monitor, infiltrating their respective spaces or doubling their images via mirrors and camera angles. During the performance, Yalter and Croiset executed various rituals such as lighting a candle and separating marbles in two separate bowls between boys and girls. Video images captured Yalter and Croiset's bodies and movements. At times, the circular continuity of the visual exchange between the monitors, as well as the movement of the spectators in the space, created a form of wholeness. Depth of field as well as layers of movement added to the sensation of an exploded and yet networked presentation.

While significantly different in both form and content, *Les Rituels* and *La Desserte Blanche* created the appearance of simplicity (daily gestures and movements) while building an interconnected complexity between several relationships: appearance and disappearance; spatial inscription and visual segregation. In both instances, the video functions as an object of critical inquiry that moves away from a framework concerned with signs, expressions, and figures (as in painting, film, and photography) to question video-image operations on bodily presence and the technical modulations of space and time facilitated by the video medium. Video does not impose a visual regime like photography or film; it offers the modulation and movement in-between aesthetic regimes, revealing the operation of the *mise-en-mouvement*. In the case of the Kuntzel's as well as Yalter and Croiset's productions, the use of video demonstrates a "new attitude" towards moving-image making.[48] This attitude embraces the malleability of the medium; specifically its capacity to be used either as a recording instrument, as we see in the case of *La Desserte Blanche*, or as a medium that "restitutes

47 Ibid., p. 22.
48 Berger 1974, p. 10.

the image simultaneously of its capture," as we see in *Rituels*.[49] Not only can video relay and broadcast images in real time, but with the advent of synthesizer technology, video also has the capacity to generate a variety of visual and audio materials without camera or microphone input.

It is because of this performative dimension that political minorities have been leaders in video art; though they are mostly unrecognized innovators.[50] These examples speak to a specific dimension of video technology: its openness to other sets of indeterminacies, including decentring the gaze and embodying another point of view: one that can walk into different places and capture images from "the knee, the stomach, the elbow, the ear."[51] Because video recorders could be carried and operated by one person, almost anywhere, thanks to video recorders' sensitivity to infra-red light, they offered an autonomy that helped a wide array of people to engage with the medium. Now, with cameras attached to smartphones, video continues to operate in our hands and play with our fingers. All these developments deeply inform the making of video objects as tools to reclaim modes of expression and operations of communication where both the cultural and political foundation of techno-epistemologies can be interrogated anew. In other words, video images fulfil the need to independently document the political and economic struggles of the postmodern realities that mark the period from the early 1970s up to the present day.

Artists/activists as Image Technicians

To be a theorist of installations, and contemporary video installation in particular, is to work with rather ambiguous material.[52] No one really agrees on the contours and definitions of the installation as a contemporary form.[53] When one engages in installation, one deals with live-art, performance, happenings, and representation; and yet the notion of installation—the placing of objects and/or people to perform a certain function—is also meant to challenge these categories. Pioneer art critic Claire Bishop affirms that "it is possible to categorize works of installation by the type of experience they structure for the viewer"[54] and defines four types of

49   Van Assche 1990, p. 74.
50   See Herriman 2016.
51   Duguet 1982, p. 84.
52   See Blocker 2016.
53   See Albu 2016; Deutsche 1996; McTighe 2012; Rebentisch 2003; Suderburg 2000; Reiss 1999.
54   Bishop 2005, p. 10.

embodied subjects invited to physically enter the often "theatrical," "immersive" or "experimental"[55] space of the installation: a psychoanalytical subject, a phenomenological subject, a disintegrated subject, and a political subject.[56] This approach resides in the importance of the viewing subject as the operative factor in installation and considers installation as directed at a subjectivity and demanding its presence to complete the art form.[57]

In order to account for these kinds of practices, art historians often engage with archival materials gathered by a handful of witnesses (spectators, journalists, curators) to attest to the specific occurrence of the installation in its inherently ephemeral attributes. Photographic accounts, moving-image footage, and reviews are the usual material used to do art historiography. Because the installation is meant to produce an aesthetic experience that can only occur within distinct spatial and temporal constraints, it was often left to the art historian to weave together the pieces of a puzzle that were otherwise left unknown. Among the many terms often applied to talk about installation art—such as site-determined performance, site-oriented happenings, site-related representation—one can sense that the placing of objects and/or people in a situation is often the primary concern of this art form.[58] The rather ambiguous notion of installation is increasingly preceded by an attribute, as Miwon Kwon points out, that insists on the place rather than the viewer—as in "site-determined," "project-oriented," "site-related" installation.[59] The tendency to emphasize the site and the context of the project reflects an important shift in the making and understanding of installation art: the move away from the viewing subject as the main agent of the art piece in favour of the relationship between the site and the installation.

In this book, much attention is paid to video images and installation in particular because of their performative dimension. Video art, as image and installation, challenges the notion of a privileged space of seeing; it is not simply an object at the centre of the representation but a process that interrogates the condition of possibility of the visible and the audible. As such, video is conceived as both a "theoretical machine" and a "metacritical apparatus," which can produce its own thought process, to better engage the world of image and representation.[60] Because of the performative aspect of

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55   Ibid.
56   Ibid., pp. 6–11.
57   Reiss cited in Bishop 2005, p. 6.
58   Berger 1974, p. 8.
59   Kwon 2002, p. 1.
60   Dubois 2011, pp. 42–43.

video technology, video installation grants moving images a critical force to address newly engendered technologies of relation. I use video-installation art and activism—a critical stage in moving-image epistemologies—to further address the moving-image environment that is proliferating in the early twenty-first century. In video installations, images have their own temporality (speed, slowness but also relations to past and future events) and their own spatiality (size, scale, zoom but also relational geographies that fluctuate between proximity, intimacy, and foreign entities). As art historian Anne-Marie Duguet suggests, the medium of staging is central to video-installation art:

> The [video] image becomes a stage that can be travelled across and browsed, without resistance. The stage is everywhere. [...] Architectural image, stage to be explored, volume of representation, it is always a question of conferring time upon space, nuances to artificiality, resemblance to the informal, to increase the multidimensionality of a representation.[61]

Duguet highlights one central aspect of video art: video's capacity to be staged and thus to act as a mirror of society. In video installation, the exhibition of a particular system of presentation highlights the operational and relational rather than the representational dimension of video technology. Video is a medium of relation rather than representation to the extent that it puts in effect networks of ideas, ideologies, and exchanges at stake in and outside of the image. In the words of art historian Mathilde Roman: "The apparatus for exhibiting the animated image, be it a monitor, a screen or a simple ray of light, is conceived as creating aesthetic conditions to be explored."[62] The explorative mode of video installation makes time visible in space as much as it makes space sensitive to time. It is a relational technology where operations of time and operations in space can be staged and thus performed.

   Philippe Dubois suggested that video is not an object but *un état expérimental* (an experimental state).[63] To think about video, he suggests, one might want to stop seeing video as an image that belongs to other image categories.[64] Instead, Dubois' proposition centres video as a process of experimentation and a mode of thought. I build on both Duguet

61   Duguet 2011, p. 9.
62   Roman 2016, p. 5.
63   Dubois 2011, p. 8.
64   Ibid., p. 99.

and Dubois' work to emphasize the technicity of video processes and to interrogate the technical realm that informs such an experimental state/stage. I understand video as a technical object that is important precisely because its technical structure is malleable and open to experimentation. I take the media specificity of video technology as well as its historical reality, such as the making available of the Portapak in the late '60s and early '70s, as that which drives the aesthetic affordances of artworks such as Belloir's, Hatoum's, Kuntzel's, Sedira's, and Yalter's. By looking at video and video-art installation as both a stage and an experimental process, I question how artists open up, in the field of technicality, a new modality of engaging with operations such as recollection (chapter 1), modulation (chapter 2), capture (chapter 3), and desire (chapter 4). I do so to further question the media affordances of video technologies and to understand how video art and activism attempt to confront and modulate the effects of image technologies on contemporary life.

   In media studies much emphasis has been placed on the reflexive aspect of the video medium: or video's ability to reflect upon both itself and other media forms. Because video can echo preceding media forms such as music, sculpture, painting, text, film, and theatre, its aesthetics are concerned with a reflexive function. In the words of media theorist Yvonne Spielmann, video is a "reflexive medium," meaning that its operational constituency allows the medium to reflect upon itself and to interrogate its own process of expression.[65] The reflexive function of video art is embedded in its hybridity and intermediality: two characteristics that create openness in video technology to aesthetic change. In *Video: The Reflexive Medium*, Spielmann engages with a wide corpus of international artists such as Nam Junk Paik, Dara Birnbaum, Klaus vom Bruch, Peter Campus, Les Levines, Jean-François Guidon, Richard Sierra, Robert Cahen, Valie Export, and Joan Jonas, to name a few. Spielmann presents video as a field of investigation for media theory. Building on Spielmann's account, video has the capacity to produce forms that reflect upon their own medial components. This aspect of video is central to the critique of other media as seen in *Maso et Miso vont en bateau* by Nadja Ringart, Carole Roussopoulos, Delphine Seyrig, and Ioana Wieder from the all-women collective Les Insoumuses. In this work from 1976, often called a documentary, the women responded to a TV show they watched on December 30, 1975, in which Bernard Pivot interviewed Françoise Giroud, the Secrétaire d'Etat à la Condition Féminine. Because of the sexism of the Giroud's response, the collective wanted to reply. They built a satirical

commentary to highlight the *maso*chistic and *miso*gynistic tendencies (*Maso* and *Miso* from the title) of Giroud's vision. Their video is a reflexive medium to replay and comment on video-mediated content that is widely distributed by broadcasting technology, such as national TV. My research develops in close relation with Spielmann's work in an attempt to continue the discussion concerning video's potential to be a medium of reflection, while emphasizing what other specific artworks may add to this interrogation concerning the performative dimension of our audio-visual culture.

The performativity central to video art situates the artist as an 'image technician,' to borrow a term coined by Spielmann.[66] I understand the image technician as an artist of the image who uses materiality, space, time, and technics to shape the ground from which a critical approach to media objects can emerge. Such an image technician is busy working on the processual dimension of their object, bringing the latter to an increasing level of complexity and openness. In this context, the question is not so much the artistic value of an object but the emergence of a technique to interrogate the conditions of experience. Here, the artist is a technician to the extent that he or she deploys, through the work of the imagination, a new modality of engaging with both technique and culture. In the context of video objects, this technician is one who focuses on the relation between form and information to reveal the operational ground within a societal structure. This performative approach to video objects can be found in the work of video artist Catherine Ikam who created *Identité*, a video installation divided across three rooms and exhibited at the Centre Pompidou in 1980. In the first room, the spectator is missing on the screen despite the camera pointing at him. In the second room, the screen shows the spectator his own delayed image searching for its representation on screen. In the third room, the image of the spectator is scrutinized via nine monitors, each showing pieces of his face through different angles and at different scales. Reflecting on the disintegration of the face, its exploitation and distribution in cyberspace, this installation combined video art and cryptography to reveal the presence of a fragmented and magnified self through "separate input-output units."[67] Animated in real time by computer programmes, the face of the spectator enters what Nam Jun Paik called a "disintegration chamber" to produce a performative interrogation on the presence, disappearance, and making of the figure through electronic means.[68]

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66 Ibid., p. 73.
67 Paik 1995, p. 202.
68 Ibid.

Video installation art makes use of diverse technological settings that offer a stage from which the image can be experienced and explored by the user/spectator. One can walk on video projections, circle around a monitor in a museum installation, look at the screen, through the screen, and beneath the screen to explore other modalities of vision. Video is a performative medium that has the capacity to interrogate but also modulate the space and time in which it is displayed. I analyse how video is embedded in specific operations—from the pixelization of the image to its algorithmically produced materiality—and in specific settings to suggest that video objects are performative, because they can produce internal and external change within their environment. In video installation other modes of relating to the moving image are developed through the presentation of multi-screen environments. Whereas the cinema is an experience based on the concealment of the apparatus, where the body of the viewer is paused in a dream-like fashion, here, in video installations, the spectator participates in the work both spatially and temporally. Rather than being positioned, the viewing subject of video-installation art is constantly negotiating time and space according to relational media objects. Created in 1992 by Joan Jonas and set in Berlin, *Revolted by the Thought of Known Places* presents colourful video panels, monitors, and freestanding screens dividing the room. The screens create a relational architecture in the space, revealing an installation that invites the viewer into its constitutional components. The video object in Jonas' installation is performative to the extent that it plays a role in modulating the perception of the spectator who is both in and part of the space of vision. Spectators are invited to turn around, to flâne, to skip, to stand. They are encouraged to be in their body according to the way in which their body responds to the space. As art historian Claire Bishop points out: "Installation art [...] addresses the viewer directly as a literal presence in the space. Rather than imagining the viewer as a pair of disembodied eyes that survey the work from a distance, installation art presupposes an embodied viewer whose senses of touch, smell and sound are as important as their sense of vision."[69] This insistence on the embodied viewer is a fundamental characteristic of video installation. The visitor in the gallery—where most video installations are presented—is introduced to a spatio-temporal journey delivered by a *dispositif éléctronique* (electronic apparatus), where both the design and the mediality of the image are placed at the centre of the experience.[70]

69   Bishop 2005, p. 6.
70   Duguet 2001, p. 18.

Video installation no longer requires the audience to stand still in a pre-defined and fixed position; it allows the viewer to be in movement, therefore permitting a different experience of moving images than the ones offered or allowed by cinema. Video installation art is now open to more fluctuating and ambulatory perspectives. The ambulatory perspective of the audience refers to Anne Friedberg's book *Window Shopping* where a flâneur-type of viewership is theorized in relation to media proliferation. Friedberg argues that nineteenth-century visual experience anticipated the contemporary virtual mobility through time and space that is characteristic of postmodern cultural identity. In this book, I take a slightly different approach. Most of the artists discussed here are not interested in the screen as functioning as a window onto which viewers project themselves. Rather, they take the screen as a trace-surfacing device where the fleeting of light and the passing of time are the basis of a transductive, rather than representative, moving-image content. The enmeshment of different temporal dynamics constituted by moving bodies and images requires that we consider the viewer's experience from a different spatio-temporal framework. In this study, the video object is understood as producing video-time where temporalities are sensed in volume and where a specific modulation is produced in space. Video-time and what I call the volume image of video technologies become categories to question video objects as performing agents. This framework is made of the generative encounter between the video objects and the ambulatory displacement of a moving audience in the video installation. The volume of the video object modulates the space where the spectator experiences these different temporalities. In other words, video has as much to do with the modulation of time as it has with the activation of modes of spatial inhabitancy.

In her particularly insightful account of the screen in video installation art, art historian Kate Mondloch emphasizes what is certainly the most important element of this art form: namely, its capacity to spatialize time.[71] By "spatializing time" she refers to the video installation as placing time and its fluctuations at the centre of the art form. The space of the installation operates as a stage on which time is put on display via the video. Drawing on Daniel Birnbaum's account of how media inserts "spatial modes into the temporal dimension," Mondloch underlines the different temporal dynamics at stake in video installation art, where video installations present moving images to moving bodies in space.[72] Indeed, the coming together of both

71   Mondloch 2010, p. 41.
72   Ibid., p. 40.

moving images and moving bodies often presents "contradictory durational impulses."[73] Namely, the video presents time's fluctuations while also being presented to a moving audience that brings its own plural temporality. This durational plurality of both the video and the audience often creates the contradictory temporal dynamics that Mondloch places at the centre of the video installation experience.

The Discrete Imaginary

Recently, a theoretical turn has been taking place in media studies concerning the potential of video to create forms of temporal expression on its own. As a consequence of such technical autonomy, Ina Blom argues that "analogue video forged associations or alliances with other objects, perceptual systems, and subjectivities so as to expand or propagate the time-critical operations that are among its key features."[74] Time-critical situations are modes of engaging critically in the terms and practices grounded in the interrelations between culture and technology. Coined by media theorist Wolfgang Ernst, the time-critical aspect of a media object aims to develop an archaeological approach to the mediated image that consists of unravelling the interconnected layers of symptoms, signals, and information contained in culture.[75] For Ernst, culture is a function of knowledge (understood as both transfer and storage); and media within culture indicate different levels of temporality constitutive of a generative archive. By generative, Ernst means that the medium itself understands signals, which he defines as a "technoarchive" operating both at a technical (apparatus) and a symbolic (record) level.[76] In his account, media themselves become "archaeologists of knowledge," meaning that they are a depository of a generative archive that grants access to new configurations of technology and epistemology. Ernst offers a modality of inquiry that takes into consideration that which would have been left out of the discursive message by focusing on the function of the technology itself.

Temporal expressions have been at the forefront of both theoretical and historiographical discussions on the medium specificity of moving image objects in shaping modes of perception, recollection, and projection. Film

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73 Ibid.
74 Blom 2016, p. 16.
75 Ernst 2013, p. 27.
76 Ibid., p. 28.

scholars have long paid attention to the potential of cinema to, firstly, actualize an understanding of the psychic as an apparatus of image production and, secondly, highlight the cultural relevance of the moving image as a creative process of thought-making in its own right. This first approach was particularly important in France in the 1970s where film scholars such as Christian Metz and Jean-Louis Baudry created the apparatus theory. In this theory, representational cinema was understood as based on the concealment of the cinematic apparatus. Because the apparatus was hidden behind the spectator, it made one forget, according to Baudry, the material conditions that produce the filmic projection in the spectator's mind.[77] Through this concealment of the moving-image apparatus, the power of the cinema-effect unfolds to reveal a "more archaic mode of identification."[78] This apparatus was thus understood through an analogy to primordial scenes, as exemplified by Plato's allegory of the cave, to reveal the work of projected images and their layering functions in the psyche. Metz built on a Marxist reading of history to reveal "the other mirror that is the filmic screen."[79] Metz developed an understanding of cinema as a *technique de l'imaginaire* (technique of the imaginary) and took technique as that which is grounded in the historical time of capitalism and the societal reality of industrial civilization. Anchored in Freudo-Lacanian understandings of the psyche, Baudry and Metz engaged in cinema as an object permitting access to the effects of an ideological system or operation of thought where the relation of the spectator to the film is understood as an object-relation that is, according to Melanie Klein, a phantasmagorical relation based on an imaginary object. This meta-psychological approach to film was central in developing the first wave of feminist critiques of dominant cinema. Film scholar Constance Penley centred her critique on the problem of identification and highlighted the value of unpacking the work of the imaginary and its manipulation in the spectator's experience of watching films.[80] Penley saw in the English co-op filmmaking movement, and especially the work of Malcom LeGrice and Peter Gidal, a "political efficacy in offering a cinematic experience outside of and against the strategies and effects of dominant classical cinema."[81] More recently, research on temporality and spatiality has forced cinema and critical studies scholars to acknowledge what leading

77   Baudry 1974, p. 42.
78   Baudry 1976, pp. 119–20.
79   Metz 1986, p. 3.
80   Penley 1977, p. 3.
81   Ibid.

thoerist Kara Keeling calls "the black gaze," namely the regime of white truth at play in cinematic processes, understood as processes involved in the production and reproduction of social inequalities.[82]

The writings of philosopher Gilles Deleuze mark a second important moment in film studies where cinema was understood as a thought-making process in and of itself. In his two tomes on cinema, respectively dedicated to movement and time, and published in 1983 and 1985, Deleuze opened up a philosophical mode of engaging with cinematic images. Deleuze drew a parallel between the creative activity of cinema and that of philosophy by defining philosophy as a discipline that creates concepts and cinema as one that creates blocs of movement/duration (*durée*). Deleuze's concept of the time-image offered an important contribution to the theoretical understanding of time at play in modern cinema, revealing the dual flow of time which "simultaneously makes the present pass and preserves the past in itself" and grounds one time-image "in the past, the other in the present."[83] The time-image and the movement-image were central concepts to understanding cinema as a creative process similar to the process of philosophy.[84] The intersection between thinking and moving-image making has been at the core of recent publications from scholars invested in the power of moving images in shaping theoretical inputs. Mieke Bal's *Thinking in Film* carefully engages with the work of Finish artist Eija-Liisa Ahtila to reveal the political potential of video art. Deleuze first coined the term "society of control" in a conference hosted by the Fondation Européenne pour les Métiers de l'Image et du Son (FEMIS), a film school situated in Montmartre and founded in 1943. By means of the term "society of control," Deleuze developed a critique of communication that sees "information as exactly the system of control."[85] The concept of the "society of control" highlights the shift from a disciplinary society based on *milieux d'enfermement* (milieux of detention) such as the school, the prison, and the hospital, as analysed by Michel Foucault, to a society where individuals are in relation with one another through circuits of controlled movements. For Deleuze, information is communicated through a system of belief that dictates what one must believe, think, and how to behave as if one believes in such a system.[86] Deleuze uses the information highway, a cybernetic example *par excellence*,

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82 See Keeling 2007.
83 Deleuze 1989, p. 98.
84 See Bal 2013.
85 Deleuze 1990, p. 72.
86 Ibid.

to describe a society that facilitates exchange by imposing order through the regulation of its informational tracks. Here, the work of art, and cinema in particular, "has nothing to do with communication" unless it stands as an act of resistance.[87]

While the connection between cinema and philosophy has been crucial in installing film studies as a discipline worthy of academic research, the stakes of video images reside elsewhere in the constant movement between exploration and communication. As modes of critical inquiry, the video recorder and its computer-generated images become tools to further expand the relation between culture and technique. Video art brings together painting, literature, photography, music, and cinema in the synthesis of its references. In this sense, video is a "creative synthesis," to borrow the words of Gilbert Simondon; it engages in the synthesis of former modes of expression, and creates a new method of engaging with the real.[88] It challenges the central question of representation and figuration, becoming the precise place from which to revaluate the relation between culture and technique in contemporary society. Video sits between technology and performance, at the threshold of both adaptation and invention, changing at the speed of light and with a power to implement and shape socio-cultural practices of knowledge and technology. The rapid proliferation of video technologies in contemporary life, starting in the mid-twentieth century, is symptomatic of what Simondon names a *déphasage* (dephasing). This dephasing happens when a civilization is no longer in synch between the technical evolution and the socio-cultural adoption of new techniques.[89] Like any other technical object, video is in tension between technicity and socio-cultural symbols and reflects a technical transition that informs both cultural practices and historical realities. Video technology is made of technical transitions that capture social-historical tendencies, revealing how image technologies activate zones of socio-technical realities. In the content of this book on a philosophy of technology, societies are understood as a tendency that oscillates between cultural content and technical content where video is treated as a symptom of sociogenesis, evolving through a fifty-year period, that is nearly reaching saturation.

This theoretical inquiry into videography would not have been possible without the efforts of leading figures such as Raymond Bellour, Anne-Marie Duguet, and Bernard Stiegler, who explored the specificity of moving-image

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87   Ibid., p. 74.
88   Simondon 1989, p. 34.
89   Nony 2017, p. 129.

technology as a system defined according to codes, structures, and uncon-scious forces.[90] This system, understood from a linguistic, semiotic, and later psychoanalytic point of view is leading the reconceptualization of processes of video technology as an object of study. As exemplified by the work of Christian Metz,[91] when the image was conferred its own materiality it gained a significant theoretical power to address the nature of representational practices—one that Mulvey and hooks defined as ideological, patriarchal, and racist.[92] I build on theorists' critique of the cinematic apparatus to engage the ways in which video technology renews the conditions and operations of the image.[93] Video objects are not simply understood for their societal function or their artistic operation; they stand as objects whose technical structure offers endless possibilities for modification and relation. As such, video art is an object for the critical study of the informational trajectory of a society. This trajectory is an organizational principle that operates through the video object to shape different realms of psychic and collective reality.

While non-technical images, such as paintings, operate according to representational schemes and symbols, technically produced images, as seen in the discrete image of the video object, operate according to pro-grammes that model and thus modulate relational modes of belonging to the world. While one type of image engages the realm of interpretation and knowledge formation, the other integrates information for the sake of predicable projections. In other words, with the dissemination of the discrete-state machine in the infra layers of sociality, the cultural critique of image production and distribution is now compelled to address the unspoken agenda of such a strategic generalization of media usage in daily life. It is thus urgent to address what definition one can give to the notion of the image when technical structures are drastically changing traces, supplements, as well as modalities of projection. Traditional images are about the survival of a trace: the imprint of an emotion that can withstand the ravages of time. Technical images, and especially the discrete image, are about the imposition of a *prégnance* (property of being a perceptive structure), as opposed to a presence, that already assumes the quality of programmable structure and thus predictable signification.

In the realm of video, the process of discretization produces a gram-maticalization of the sensible: namely, the transformation of experience

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into discrete data. In a short text published in the English version of his
dialogue with Jacques Derrida, *Ecographies of television*, Bernard Stiegler
points to an event specific to the end of the twentieth century that changed
our relationship to movement:

> A great event […] is the appearance of the *analogico-digital image.* This
> image will have extreme consequences *for our intelligence of movement.* In
> fact, the analogico-digital image is the beginning of a *systematic discretiza-*
> *tion of movement* – that is to say, of a vast process of the *grammaticalization*
> *of the visible.* The analogico-digital image calls into question what André
> Bazin calls *the objectivity of the lens* [l'objectivité de l'objectif] in analogue
> photography, what Barthes also calls the *this was* [le ça a été] the noeme
> of the photo. The noeme of the photo is what in phenomenology would
> be called its intentionality.[94]

Stiegler's notion of the "analogico-digital image," which he also names
the discrete image, is crucial in identifying the changes provoked by the
emergence of the digital as the acceleration of the discretization of move-
ment. In mathematics and machine learning, *discretization* designates the
process through which a continuous function or model is transferred into
discrete attributes. The discretization of movement—the process through
which movement is decomposed into discrete features—goes together
with the grammaticalization of the visible; a vast and systemic process in
which the visible is decomposed into variables that can be analysed. The
discrete image produced by video objects is the latest phase of systemic
discretization. Such a conceptualization of the image engages the digital,
understood as a stage (as opposed to an autonomous moment), in the on-
going technogenesis of the human.[95]

The discrete image, according to Stiegler, is a technical synthesis. Such a
synthesis is artefactual, that is to say it is essentially open to the possibility,
even if accidental, of falsification.[96] At stake is the possibility of a discrete
image that keeps intact the belief value of its formal structure (photographic
images imply the *ça a été*) while falsifying the relation to the real conditions
of production of this same image. The rapid invasion of synthetic images,
namely, images produced by discrete-state machines, forces us to revaluate
Barthes' photographic paradigm of the *ça a été*. What is important here is the

94   Stiegler 2007, pp. 148–49.
95   Hansen 2006, p. 21.
96   Stiegler 1996, p. 169.

regime of truth that is reconfigured with the dissemination of programmable falsified images.[97] The discrete image is one that produces a new kind of fantasmagoria. It is no longer the presence of a trace that conveys that which has been into the present; it is the fantasy of a presence that is no longer attached to a past time. The manipulation of image-objects, namely images that function as supports for the production of mental images, is central to the questioning of a traditionally anchored regime of truth. The fantasy produced by the discrete image is the fantasy of an imaginary realm that no longer needs to render present a past in the form of traces. The computational quality of the discrete image creates its *pregnance* by simply admitting a separation between the embodied realm of the perceptual and the phantasmagoric dimension of the unreal. Discretization also takes place due to the fact that the synthetic image can be produced in the segregation of movement between that which is and that which has been, creating *un écart* (a leap) that is no longer the one of the embodied subjects found in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. For Merleau-Ponty, the absolute priority of the phenomenal body is what grants access to the possibility of a relation between an organism and its milieu. In the case of the relation between the subject and the discrete image, the milieu itself gets triggered by the possibility of a false referent or the presence of an absent one.

The synthetic image of video technology can create, invent, and perform reality. This characteristic distinguishes video from other technically produced images such as photography and cinema, whose conception of time is grounded in the technical presence of a past. Video, thus, produces technical operations that call for a new approach to time and space in relation to moving-image technology. I argue that the performance of video objects is central to the architectural modelling of psychic and collective individuals in society. By moving towards a conception of video technology as performative object, I have tried to situate video praxis as a medium through which to engage other modes of relating to reality. Specifically, I have questioned the performative dimension of video utterances where the function of the video object and the mobility of the spectator in space play a role in redefining our relation to the image object in our contemporary culture. Video objects define both the technical object of video, an electronic object that historically resides between analogue and digital technologies, and the image object that performs in the imaginary structure of our mind. The image object defines both the technical, psychic, and collective realms that shape mental images. We must struggle to comprehend then

that video technology, both analogue and digital, is now functioning as discrete structures. The image object is always inscribed in both historical and technical contexts that can no longer be separated as they mutually influence each other.

Discretization is not a distribution in the sense that Jacques Rancière refers to *le partage* (the distribution) of the sensible. The distribution of the sensible is both the sharing of a common experience and a modality of distributing exclusive parts.[98] It is this specific distribution of the sensible that gives shape to political experience: that shows who belongs or not to a certain space and time in common. Rancière's question of politics in relation to aesthetics is distinct from the denunciation of a certain aestheticization of the political realm. He urges us to think about the distribution of the sensible as a tool to question who takes part in the making of the common. The digital grammaticalization that I elaborate in this research has to do with the sequentialization of the sensible, its translation into mathematical formulas, and its reproduction as a feature of our contemporary experience. I do not pose the existence of an a priori common, nor do I engage in the question of *partage* or distribution. For me, Rancière's notion of *le prendre part* (the taking part) needs to be revaluated from the point of view of operations that pre-emptively dissect, in the texture of experience, the mere possibility of a common (see chapter 3). Capture and sequentialization, rather than distribution, allow us to pose the urgent question of the algorithmic control and impoverishment of the sensible. By grammaticalization of the sensible, I refer to the process that selects, in the synchronic flow of the sensible, discrete moments that can be extracted and thus reproduced. This process, in the age of the analogico-digital image—the discrete image as Stiegler puts it—is effectuated at the speed of light through electronic mediations. This process is exemplified by the use of video-image profiling. More often than not, video camera surveillance now deploys software so that the recording of the image can simultaneously be analysed and its data extracted according to predetermined patterns, such as the face of a person, or the colour of an object. The audio-visual perception at the core of the act of video recording is now doubled by an apparatus that grammatizes space and time for the sake of extracting data.

Finally, minding the image of the world, that is, making sense of the worldly experience as a moving-image experience, challenges notions of the real, the imaginary, and the imagination at play in-between. The "discrete" in relation to the "imaginary" functions like a double-edged sword: it is that which goes

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98 Rancière 2000, p. 12.

unnoticed and yet that which separates into distinguishable entities. The discrete imaginary defines the emergences of discrete structures that shape the becoming individual of both psychic and collective entities. Discretization stands as an attempt not to draw too much attention to the activity at stake. The discretization of our imaginary announces both the passing unnoticed of structures that shape psychic and collective capacities to produce and share knowledge, and the segregation of such an imaginary from other operations of sense making, such as sublimation and projection. Using the notion of the discrete imaginary, I have aimed to interrogate the infiltration of the imaginary modes of connectivity and signification in a world where video images are the driving force determining communication. The discretization of our psychic and collective imaginaries is the central operation of videography, where discrete-state machines not only operate in an increasingly synchronized manner for the sake of constant communication but also create platforms of a-signification.[99] The imaginary, or what I am now calling the discrete imaginary, refers to the changes deployed in the internal structures of our mind, in the relational modes of belonging to our bodies in space, as well as the codified structures now governing our capacities to produce and exchange knowledge. If cinema was, according to Metz, a "technique of the imaginary"[100] within the historical context of both capitalist and industrial societies, this book argues that video has morphed into a *performative technology* that operates on the psychic apparatus of individuals and the historical realities of societies.

Chapter Outline

With this performative approach to video technology in mind, the book's chapters investigate a range of theoretical problems, such as the structure of human memory, the spatial modulation of information, the pre-emptive power of surveillance technology, and the impact of the technological milieu in the emergence of desire. In the first chapter, which thinks in great detail about technological models of storage, processing, and information transmission, I discuss the work of Thierry Kuntzel. I argue that Kuntzel's video work provides alternatives to an entrenched theory of memory in relation to technology. I show how Kuntzel's notion of the videogram along with Bernard Stiegler's notion of the idiotext can be productively adapted to the task of addressing performative imagery in relation to memory in

99 Rouvroy and Stiegler 2016, p. 12.
100 Metz 1986, pp. 9–10.

the digital present. I discuss Kuntzel's video works as offering multidimensional modalities of writing with light and time. I examine the concept of the "volume image" to tackle the shift from a prosthetic to an aphaeretic understanding of memory in relation to video technology.

The second chapter, which involves space and modulation, considers the subversive images manifest in the work of Fiona Tan, Nil Yalter, and Zineb Sedira. In their respective works, these artists present video images as performing narratives that question the imperial gaze. In this chapter, I build on Gayatri Spivak's concept of the native informant and Chela Sandoval's notion of topography to argue that the performative image of video technology can be unruly in relation to the dominant structure of representation. Placing Tan, Yalter, and Sedira in conversation, I also ponder how performative technology as methodology, remembers or forgets history and undoes or scrolls through colonization and the coloniality of visual culture often transmitted by media technology.

In chapter 3, I revaluate the models of interpellation (Fanon, Althusser) from the point of view of Big Data ideology (Rouvroy) to consider the implementation of programmed life and "premature death" (Gilmore) in digital societies. The chapter engages debates in surveillance studies and questions the making of racialized bodies by telling the story of Thierry Kuntzel's work of art *Hiver, la mort de Robert Walser* presented at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1991, which focuses on the themes of terror and death but also eroticism and sexuality. In this chapter, I engage the pre-emptive models of data extraction to question the racialized technology of societies of incarceration and control. I argue that race in relation to technology is a problem of discerning the cause from the conditions of implementation of racist policies in societies. Kuntzel's piece usefully addresses the subjects of history that technology writes on and the wider consequences of technologically driven narratives of survival and resistance.

The last chapter foregrounds the presence of video technology in shaping the milieu where desire emerges. Desire is understood neither as an object to be possessed, nor as image to identify with. I interrogate the milieu we share with video technology to foreground an ecology of desiring, desired, and desirable relations to performative images. Moving beyond the psychological model applied to video and its aesthetics of narcissism, this chapter looks at both dispersive and penetrating video images. I do so by looking at the demolition of the last female jail in Paris portrayed in Nicole Croiset, Judy Blum, and Nil Yalter's collective work *La Roquette, prison de femmes* from 1974 and by comparatively approaching two video installations: Mona Hatoum's *Corps étranger* from 1994 and Thierry Kuntzel's *La Peau* from

2007. Dispersive and penetrating modes of video existence foreground the necessity to think about desire in relation to the milieu where images, objects, and subjects cohabit.

As a mirror reflection of the performative dimension of the video image, with which the book begins, the conclusion considers the increased discretization of imagination and engages the concomitant narratives about history, knowledge, and technology. I pay attention to video as a technology of the imaginary and formulate the concept of the "discrete imaginary" as an attempt to tackle the often pervasive if not addictive effects of dominant video technology on the informational structure of society.

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